

Title: "Abdication! One third of the alphabet!": Night Dreams in Nabokov's *Pnin*
Author: Rusina Volkova

Abstract:

Nabokov often insisted that he and his work were far from politics. Nevertheless, there are numerous examples of political allusions in his writings. *Pnin* is one of the clear challenges to the myth of Nabokov's political indifference. The fourth chapter of the novel starts with Viktor's dream about the abdication of a King, who at the same time is his father. At the end of the novel the sequel to this dream is experienced by Pnin himself (G. Barabtarlo, *Phantom of Fact*, 1989, p. 149). Why did the author need these episodes in the novel? First of all, they seem to reflect Nabokov's personal history (as noted by some researchers), because the act of abdication of the Grand Duke Mikhail, in whose favor the last Russian Tsar vacated his throne in 1917, was written by Nabokov's father in cooperation with Baron Nolde. Vladimir Nabokov at the time was not much older than the fictional boy Victor. The abdication of the Tsar was preceded by several murders of his close counselors and ministers, including the Minister of Education N. Bogolepov, who was killed by the expelled student Petr Karpovich. Therefore, Professor Pnin perceived the sound of a ruptured tire as a beginning of possible student riots. We can recall persistent rumors that Vladimir Nabokov's father was an illegitimate son of Tsar Alexander II, so the father's role in the destruction of the Russian monarchy could be interpreted by some as an uprising of an illegitimate heir against a legitimate dynasty. The abdication of the last Russian tsar also echoes the abdication of Egyptian King Farouk I in 1952, when Victor visited Pnin. Since Farouk's numerous love affairs and illegitimate children received broad coverage in the American press, which could well inspire Victor's painful dream about the king. Also, in *Pnin* Nabokov plays on several meanings of the word "abdication."