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**Title:** Rethinking the Émigré *Künstlerroman*: The Case of Nabokov’s *Gift*

**Abstract:** This paper introduces, within the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of literature (*The Rules of Art*), the concept/ canon of theinterwarRussian émigré *Künstlerroman*. In the field of diasporic Russian literature, at least six émigré writers of differentgenerations produced ten coming-of-age novels featuring *homo artistocraticus et artisticus*. So many attempts within one narrative format are a clear sign of competition for a symbolic prize: the unofficial title of “the voice of Russia.” The winner of such a designation was, seemingly, Ivan Bunin, the author of *The* *Life of Arsen’ev*. His 1933 Nobel Prize for Literature, which was considered a significant break-through for Russian literature, reinforced the prestige of the *Künstlerroman* -- along with, of course, Bunin’s own literary reputation.

Yet, in the long run, Vladimir Nabokov's *Gift* was by far the best-selling and most thoroughly analyzed of the ten émigré *Künstlerromans*. What then was it that Nabokov did to garner this public and scholarly attention? Thanks to his astutely strategized approach to literature, he realized that persisting in the nostalgic portrayal of the *homo aristocraticus et artisticus* as the cream of the cream of “old Russia” was becoming the genre’s dead end. He reoriented the narrative towards describing the diasporic sector of Russian literature and, especially, the protagonist’s projects assuring his success. More succinctly, *The Gift* surprisingly reads as a textbook of the sociology of literature *avant la lettre*.