

Panelist: Lyndsay Miller, University of Nottingham

Title: "Revision in Nabokov's Fictional Worlds"

Vladimir Nabokov, throughout a career spanning six decades, five countries, three languages, two continents and two calendars, was an 'incorrigible reviser', constantly changing, translating and revising his own works.ⁱ The author noted that 'even the dream I describe to my wife across the breakfast table is only a first draft'.ⁱⁱ His tendency towards revision has multifarious modes (translation, rewriting, autobiography) and affects numerous aspects of his fiction (characters, place, themes). This paper examines revision as a device employed by Nabokov within his texts, which is enacted by his 'galley slaves' within the often complex and multi-layered fictional worlds created by the author.ⁱⁱⁱ Using *Otchaianie* as its focus text, it considers the ways in which Hermann Karlovich utilises revision to attempt to gain control over the text he is part of. Hermann implements revision to his narratives via two tracks, writing and reading, and uses several devices (self-commentary, erasure, textual interjection, textual commentary) to do so. This process of revision is completely transparent and results in the text itself being constructed by the reader contemporaneously with the reading process. In this way, the reader becomes a 'co-producer' of the text with Nabokov.^{iv} This collusion between reader and author creates an idealised version of both, as well as of the text, which has been destabilised completely by the revisions implemented by its author-character.

Nabokov, by implementing revision as a device within his fiction, destabilises the autonomy of both his individual works and oeuvre. His author-characters, of which Hermann is only one, wrestle for control of texts they themselves are part of. This causes the Nabokovian text to open up and become incomplete after the point of its completion, joining with other texts in Nabokov's oeuvre, which ultimately creates a self-reflexive corpus, referring endlessly to its own circular limits.^v

ⁱ Julian Connolly, *Nabokov's Early Fiction: Patterns of Self and Other* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.17.

ⁱⁱ Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974), p. 73.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, p. 27.

^{iv} Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 4.

^v Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p.250