
While there is no dearth of attempts to interpret this remarkable example of Nabokov’s creative dialogue with the Soviet literature and mass culture of his day (“…the first time Nabokov… ever translated any work by a Soviet author in a spirit of homage rather than scorn” [Brian Boyd]), little is known about the circumstances surrounding his coming into contact with Okudzhava’s works. In what medium did Nabokov encounter one of Okudzhava’s most famous and enduring poetic utterances? What was the writer’s overall impression of Okudzhava’s writings available to him? Was Nabokov’s engagement with Okudzhava limited to his reading and translating of the poem he knew as “Sentimental’nyi romans,” the poem a tantalizing and equivocal echo of which he was to introduce into the text of Ada?

The proposed paper will seek to shed additional light on Nabokov’s encounter with Okudzhava by establishing a number of facts about this event as well as by undertaking a reconstruction of Nabokov’s reaction to the various aspects of the creative output and fame of the preeminent Soviet “bard.”