

Title: Cockney Ballad, Voronezh Lilt: Vladimir Nabokov's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"  
Author: Stanislav Shvabrin, University of California, Los Angeles

Nabokov's 1921 version of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" by John Keats (1819, 1820) presents this iconic poetic utterance in the guise of an adaptation, one that exemplifies an approach to the task of rendering Keats's poem in Russian that is pronouncedly different not only from Leonid Andruson's 1911 translation of the ballad, but also from the method employed by Nabokov himself in his version of Byron's "Sun of the Sleepless!" (the two translated texts were included in Nabokov's *Gornii put'* verse collection of 1923).

"La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is a peculiar amalgamation of signature images and diction drawn from an array of sources as disparate as the English balladic tradition, the French courtier-poet Alan Chartier, Chaucer, Dante, Malory, Shakespeare and Spencer, to mention a few. Does Nabokov's version of the ballad, in itself rich in evocations of Aleksandr Blok, Aleksei Kol'tsov, Nikolai Nekrasov and Afanasii Fet, amount to an attempt to recreate in Russian its English model's evocative potential? What position does Nabokov take in the argument surrounding the ballad's equivocal textual history? How does this text inform our notion of Nabokov the poet, writer and translator?

Nabokov's "Akh, chto muchit tebia, goremyka" ("La Belle Dame Sans Merci") rewards the attention it is given. The proposed paper will seek to enrich our knowledge of this remarkable piece of Nabokov's juvenilia by means of a presentation of the facts relating to its genesis and an interpretation of its dialogue with the two literary traditions it bridges.