

Title: Reading as Challenge: On Textological Problems and Literary Commentary to Nabokov's *The Gift*

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In his "Note on the Translation of 'Father's Butterflies'" Dmitri Nabokov addresses the problem of much-needed expertise that has risen in deciphering Nabokov's unpublished papers: "Five initial sheets were typed by Véra Nabokov many years ago on our old Russian-language Adler, through whose ribbons many Nabokov works had passed. *The remaining, handwritten material is not altogether legible. In many places the text proved impervious even to the most expert eyes* <Emphasis added>. The problem was eventually resolved [analyzing] the illegible portions with the help of the Library's sophisticated equipment, in a way that allowed one to peek under the refractory palimpsest's edges, and to identify with considerable confidence what was on the layers beneath." (*Nabokov's Butterflies: Unpublished and Uncollected writings*, ed. by Boyd, Pyle, Nabokov. Beacon Press, 2000: 199). Parts of the archival materials in the Vladimir Nabokov papers at the Library of Congress, especially those pertaining to *The Gift* (1935-1937), pose numerous puzzles to the researcher who will need, quoting D. Nabokov, to "tug a remaining weed from the densest thickets." By briefly outlining the textological riddles and demonstrating examples of my analysis of *The Gift* manuscript, I will argue that a thorough, scrupulous examination of this document enhances our understanding of how a creative genius functions and helps to illuminate some of the densest parts of already known work. My talk will include a description of the archival state of Nabokov's collection based on deciphering the illegible elements and categorization of the invariants and stylistic choices that Nabokov turned down. I will also suggest some basic principles of literary commentary and structure for a future variorum edition of Nabokov's *The Gift*.