

Title: About Utility Pipes, Streetcars, and Other Important Matters: Nostalgia and the Poetics of Estrangement in Vladimir Nabokov's *Guide to Berlin*

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In the short story "A Guide to Berlin" Vladimir Nabokov focuses on time, memory and their relations to art. He invents a first person narrator who is, not by coincidence, an émigré artist who uses aesthetic therapy to cope with his longing for home. The narrator is aware of the evanescence of things because of his nostalgia for a lost time and home. He estranges himself from the present moments of time, and looks at them from a future perspective. It is through this unique point of view that he is able to preserve these moments from the flow of time. However, when he imagines moments in the future simultaneously he remembers moments from his past – therefore the narrator inscribes his nostalgia of the past to the future. This aesthetical perception of time in the text is conveyed through the devices of a mirror and a pipe (as a monocle) which help him to connect the future and the past. These images of refraction, vision and reflection of time will be the focus of this paper.

I will also examine the role of nostalgia and its influence on the narrator's perception of time. Time is not linear in Nabokov's story—present moments function as a mirror in which the past and the future meet. I will refer to Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution* to demonstrate how the different phases of time coexist in what Bergson himself describes as a 'fan'.

References

Boym, Svetlana *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.

Bergson, L. Henri *Creative Evolution*, New York: Modern Library/Random House, 1947.