

Title: Mne malo: Plato's "due measure" in Nabokov's *The Gift*
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Scholarship on Plato's presence in Nabokov focuses on similarities between the Platonic doctrine of Forms and Nabokov's Otherworld. Such readings draw attention to the imperfections of the material world vis-à-vis the ideal (Davydov), the perfect and complete nature of the transcendent (Johnson), and Nabokov's attempts to bridge the gap between the two (Blackwell).

This paper examines a different connection with Plato: Nabokov's preoccupation with measure. Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, the hero of *The Gift*, is preoccupied with finding the right fit between the things he wants to express and the ways he knows to express them. His concern begins as a problem of poetic composition, but as the novel progresses, Fyodor finds that the search for "the right fit" underlies his every conscious act from artistic creation to his choice of lodgings, and from his romantic attachments to his shoes. At every turn, Fyodor finds that his failures and disappointments result from having neglected some aspect of his surroundings, or his view of them, or the conjunction of those two in his thought or in his words. The most striking of these failures is Zina's reply to his declaration of love: "mne malo, it is too small for me."

This paper examines Fyodor's preoccupation with "the right fit" against an unlikely background: Plato's *Statesman*. In that late dialogue, the Eleatic stranger digresses on measurement and "the due measure." That digression, itself out of place, leaves the problem of measure at an impasse, just as the locked door at the end of *The Gift* leaves the novel open.

Bibliography

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