

Title: Faith, Doubt, and Deception: Nabokov's Translations of *Slovo o polku Igoreve*
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The debate over the authenticity of the *Slovo o polku Igoreve* has had a tendency to go around in circles. While historians attack each other's methodology, neither side is convinced or even enlightened in the process. Aleksandr Zimin's challenge to the status quo in 1963 resulted in the brutal character assassination of a previously esteemed historian. Roman Jakobson not only contested Zimin's every claim, but he silenced this lone heretic, thereby effectively putting an end to a debate that is in fact far from over. A new voice needs to be heard. My paper proposes that of a translator, and one uniquely suited for the task: Vladimir Nabokov. In his translation work on the *Slovo*, which yielded two strikingly different versions, Nabokov leaves telling traces of his journey from faith toward doubt about the work's authenticity. This paper examines the stylistic, structural, and semantic differences between Nabokov's two translations and interprets their significance. Furthermore, the paper argues that Nabokov's work on the *Slovo* translation informed the conception and composition of his novel *Pale Fire*. Nabokov's engagement with the debates around the *Slovo*, spurred by the ambiguity of its origins and the tension regarding its authenticity, gave rise to a novel that concerns authenticity as such. Through the character of Kinbote, who longs for his chronicle of Zembla to be elevated into poetry, *Pale Fire* thematizes the desire for an epic of one's own that underlies the unshakable faith of so many in the authenticity of the *Slovo*. The longing for a national epic demands that bards sing historical deeds so that a chain of events marking a people's existence may become indelibly inscribed in history and consciousness. Nabokov structures the *Slovo* commentary as a fiction—the creation of a distant fantasy land: Kievan Rus/Zembla. But here, as translator, it is not his fiction he is conveying, but that of countless others who want to believe.