Pushkin's 1820 Ruslan and Liudmila is commonly held as the watershed piece of both Pushkin's own oeuvre and his era, as discussed, for example, in Tynianov's critical article "The Archaists and Pushkin." Tynianov regards the poema as the dividing line between Russian Classicism and Romanticism and says the piece marks Pushkin's crossing over from small to large forms. One of the central debates surrounding the poema in its time was the question of its "rod," which in the context meant "genre" but can also mean "gender" in Russian. This paper suggests that Nabokov's Invitation to a Beheading plays with the question of "rod" from Ruslan and Liudmila, which results in Invitation to a Beheading itself reproducing Ruslan and Liudmila's critical cacophony.

Although some scholars have identified certain connections between Nabokov's Invitation to a Beheading and Pushkin's Ruslan and Liudmila, the interplay of the two pieces remains relatively unexplored. This paper details the intimate connections between the novel and the poema in two ways. First, Cincinnatus C.'s life in prison will be read as a partial re-writing of the fabula of Ruslan and Liudmila; the title characters of Pushkin's poema find new life in the "doubled" Cincinnatus, who is both the hero and the damsel in distress. Second, the two works are read as comparable in terms of their formal contraventions and "errors," so to speak; both pieces are coups against the literary establishments of their times. In both content and form, Invitation to a Beheading is "akin" to Ruslan and Liudmila.