**Title:** Nabokov's Shadow-Line: "Shadow" in Nabokov's Aesthetics and in *The Gift* 

**Author:** Kira Rose, Princeton University

Commentators have yet to attend to *Nabokov's* attention to shadows. Nabokov's education in shadow was considerable, including his artistic training as a child, augmented by his familiarity with Leonardo da Vinci's writings on the subject. Frequent mention of specific shadows and metaphors concerning them permeate Nabokov's writings. We glimpse shadows' insistent invocation as well as their consistent linkage with the acuity of perception and with presence rather than with absence in works ranging from *Invitation to a Beheading* and *Pnin* to *Ada* and *Pale Fire*. The writers Nabokov admires and lectures on, including Dickens, Proust and Gogol, also attend to the interplay of light and shadow.

Nabokov's enumeration of snippets from rejected notecards for *Pale Fire* in *Strong Opinions* corroborates this preoccupation: "We think not in words but in shadows of words. James Joyce's mistake in those otherwise marvelous mental soliloquies of his consists in that he gives too much verbal body to thoughts." Here Nabokov uses "shadows" as markers of the particular and recalls his assertion elsewhere that he thinks in images. This, along with Nabokov's obsession with the detail, suggests that for Nabokov, "shadows of words" are thought's illumined images, whereas instances in Joyce's "verbal body" dim thought-imagery. Nabokov destabilizes the light-shadow dichotomy, re-conceptualizing shadows as rich, unadulterated pictures resident and uniformly illuminated in the mind.

This paper argues that shadow within Nabokov's aesthetics must be confronted as a conceptual and linguistic marker of the particularity of his visual perception at work. The first half of this paper broaches Nabokov's treatment of shadows as images for visual activity. I then turn to examples in *The Gift* that demonstrate how Nabokov's vision has his conceptualization of "shadow" at its center.