Grief in Russian Émigrés' Exilic Short Fiction: Bunin, Nabokov and Gazdanov

Justine Shu-Ting Kao
Department of English, Tamkang University
No.151, Yingzhuan Rd., Tamsui Dist.,
New Taipei City 251301, Taiwan (R.O.C.)
Email: kiwitreesky@yahoo.com

Abstract:

This essay focuses on the short fiction of three Russian émigré writers—Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin (1870-1953), Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) and Gaito Gazdanov (1903-1971)—with the purpose of tracing not only their lives, but also a psychological/inner experience of exile evident within their writing techniques as related to time and space. Bunin, an exponent of the older generation of the first wave of Russian émigré writers, expressed profound emotions of nostalgia in his exilic short fiction by employing the techniques of "double exposure" and "diachronic topography," harkening back to pre-revolutionary landscapes. Nabokov, a representative of the younger generation of Russian first-wave émigré writers as well as an all-encompassing writer of the second wave of Russian emigration, underpinned by his obsession with his childhood memories of butterflies as symbols of love and beauty, intertwined cosmic synchronization with stories of a protagonist in exile. Gazdanov, another representative of the younger generation of Russian first-wave emigration, had his protagonists disengage from the horror of the past, yet replicated feelings of suffering within their inner world and contemporary circumstances. Though Nabokov and Gazdanov, as younger voices from the first generation of Russian emigration, delved into a new world of literature and absorbed more writing techniques from literary movements of contemporary Europe, they continued to explore themes of grief and suffering in exile, much like the older generation of Russian first-wave émigré writers did.

Keywords: Bunin, Nabokov, Gazdanov, exile, grief, Russian first-wave émigré writers

Introduction

As David Bethea and Siggy Frank duly note in "Exile and Russian Literature," the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia[1] produced a large scale of exilic literature. One type pertains to Russian émigré writers who were forced to leave their native country, while the other refers to writers who stayed in their homeland but were silenced by the Soviet government. The Russian émigré writers, establishing their settlements abroad, arrived within the first wave of Russian emigration. The older generation

in this period—including Bunin, Khodasevich, and N. A. Teffi—upheld the traditions of Russian literature, regarding themselves as "the keepers of an authentic Russian tradition and culture" (Bethea and Frank 2011, 199); their self-awareness of being authentic Russian writers paralleled the mission of those Russian writers who stayed in Russia and devoted themselves to preserving Russian literary tradition. The younger writers within the first wave of Russian emigration such as Berberova, Nabokov and Gazdonov steered a course between Russian tradition and new schools of thought present in both art and literature (200). Though the overview by Bethea and Frank provides valuable insights, I believe Russian émigré writers in this period, whether their works were traditional or steered toward a new literary path, unanimously evoked profound philosophical questions about our existence.

The literary world of émigré writers typically demonstrates a profound sense of grief and loss. Some writers, having recognized the impossibility of returning to their homelands, are preoccupied by their longing for a return to their homelands, while others remain emotionally disengaged from the past. The two emotions—nostalgia and detachment—are present within exilic fiction, along with complicated writing techniques related to time and space. As such, this essay focuses on the exilic short fiction of the three pre-eminent figures of the first wave of Russian émigré writers—Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin (1870-1953), an exponent of the older generation of the first wave of Russian émigré writers; Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977), a representative of the younger generation of the first wave of Russian émigré writers as well as an all-encompassing writer of the second wave of Russian emigration; and Gaito Gazdanov (1903-1971), another representative of the younger generation of the first wave of Russian émigré writers—with the purpose of tracing not only their lives, but also a psychological/inner experience of exile in their writing techniques related to time and space.

Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin: spiritual resurrection through delineating prerevolutionary landscapes

Ivan Alekseyevich Bunin (1870-1953) began to establish his status as a reputed Russian realist in his early life: he was a loyal reader following the tradition of Russian literature, as well as a poet, short story writer, novelist, and essayist. Bunin's first short story "Derevensky Eskiz"/"Деревенский эскиз" ['Country Sketch'] was published in 1891, and his first short story collection На край света и другие рассказы [*To the Edge of the World and Other Stories*] was published in 1897. In 1894, Bunin met Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, whom he admired as "a demigod" (Tolstoy and Chekhov influenced Bunin most). Before his life of emigration in Europe, he had already published a great number of poems, essays, short stories, and novels. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 pushed Bunin to "rise to literary prominence" "in the midst of wracking, violent change in Russia" (Hettlinger 2007, xiii). He fled with Vera Nikolaevna Muromtseva to Kiev, Odessa, and Constantinople (xiii). He continued writing, with the theme of nostalgia permeating much of his work.[2]

After the 1917 Revolution, Bunin lived his life as an émigré. His literary works written during this long period can be seen as a sea change from a voice advocating an anti-Bolshevik regime (during 1920s and 1930s) to a soul seeking spiritual tranquility. In 1920, Bunin and Vera traveled to France and settled in Paris and villas "in or near Grasse in the Alpes Maritimes" (Heywood 2007). He encouraged himself with a specific mission that he believed would overcome the difficulty that confronted the émigrés. On 16 February 1924, Bunin delivered the speech "Missiia russkoi emigratsii" ('The Mission of the Russian Emigration') in Paris: "We are émigrés—the word 'émigrer' suits us better than anything else. In our overwhelming majority we are not exiles, but precisely émigrés, that is to say people who have voluntarily left their homeland" (translated and quoted in Davidson 2021, 78).

Pamela Davidson perceives that Bunin "frames the mission of the Russian diaspora in the context of the prophetic tradition, saturating his speech with biblical images" (2021, 79) in order to "assume the authoritative voice of the biblical prophet" (79) and "rebut the messianic readings of the Russian Revolution" (79). In 1933 Bunin became the first Russian writer awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the highest honor for the Russian émigré writers who supported the idea of the collapse of Bolshevism.

Bunin did not leave France as World War II began in Europe. He stayed in Grasse, though his friends arranged 'Nansen passports' for him and his family to escape as it appeared evident that Nazi Germany was going to occupy France (Heywood 2007). As the world was ravaged by starvation, anxiety, and poverty, Bunin continued writing a number of stories that were eventually published in New York in 1943 as the collection *Tyomnyie alleyi*/Тёмные аллеи [*Dark Avenues* or *Dark Alleys*] (Heywood 2007).

Bunin's attitude toward the Bolshevik regime started to change in 1940s. As France gained its liberation from the control of the Nazis, the Russian émigré community confronted a split among its members. Bunin was tortured by fear of losing his literary status and resented the rise of fascism. His withdrawal from the émigré association in the fall of 1947 resulted in his breaking off of friendships with his old émigré friends, including a fifty-year-old friendship with Boris Zaitsev, as the latter believed Bunin supported the Soviet sympathizers (Bethea 1984, 15). Perhaps Bunin's motivation was, as he said in his letter to Zaitsev, to look for a tranquil place alien to all 'союзов' ('associations') and 'политиканств' ('political intrigues') (Bunin 1980, 173), as he had perceived the collapse of the émigré association. Though "a vehemently anti-Soviet Russian exile" (Shrayer 1998, 341) of the 1920s and 1930s, Bunin changed his attitude toward Soviet Russia in the 1940s. However, Bunin did not return to Russia, nor did he become a Russian communist. Unable to return home, Bunin desperately created his lost Russia in his literary world, delineating the pre-revolutionary landscapes

and projecting his wish of homecoming onto the familiar "images," "the driving force behind most of his narratives" (Hettlinger 2007, xviii). On the other hand, as an author, Bunin sought a world of peace and tranquility. As James B. Woodward notes in *Ivan Bunin*, Bunin is "distinguished from his contemporaries by his apparent immunity to both the literary and the political pressures of his time and by the persistence with which he steered his completely solitary course of development" (1980, ix).

Bunin's turn toward a solitary world with spiritual tranquility is reflected in *Dark Avenues*—a collection of short stories. *Dark Avenues*, wherein Bunin deals with the themes of exile and the evanescence of life and love, exemplifies Bunin's profound affection for pre-revolutionary landscapes. There are two exile situations in the stories of *Dark Avenues*: the first is the situation of being forced to leave one's home or country, and the second is one's affection being repressed by superior pressures. Bunin's protagonists are involved in dark, clandestine, erotic liaisons: "intense joy and fulfillment" (Hettlinger 2007, xviii) liberate them from the exterior circumstances, but love is evanescent. For those in exile, evanescence of pleasure ends in "the ultimate separation or death" (Slobin 2013, 85). Bunin constructed lost places in fiction so as to evoke memories and "preserve moments of happiness against the relentless, forward march of time" (Hettlinger 2007, xviii). This construction is an engagement in a "'reflective nostalgia,' in Boym's words, 'a strategy of survival, a way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming'" (qtd. in Brintlinger 2014, 38).[3] In addition, to extend the present time and space to the erased ones, Bunin applies the device of Khodasevich's "double exposure" (Slobin 2013, 74) to *Dark Avenues*—superimposing the past upon the present so as to enhance the tensions of diachronic topography.

Bunin's "Kholodnaya osen"/"Холодная осень" ['Cold Fall' or 'A Cold Autumn'], written in 1944, published in the newspaper "Poslednie novosti"/"Последние новости" ['Latest News'] in 1945, and collected in the second edition of *Dark Avenues* in 1946, concerns the heroine's (also the narrator's) peaceful life in a country estate with her parents, the loss of her fiancé, and her thirty years of exile in Europe. In "Time, History, and Fairy Tale in Ivan Bunin's 'A Cold Autumn,'" Boris Briker investigates the story in terms of personal time, historical time, and fairy-tale time. Personal time refers to the heroine's stable life with her parents and fiancé on the country estate. She is circumscribed in a safe domestic terrain, "limited to movements from room to room, from interior to porch, or from interior to garden" (1998, 128). Historical time—the history of the Russian Civil War and World Wars I and II—"conflicts with" personal time as it "imposes its order upon personal time" (132). In the story, historical time starts to interrupt the heroine's personal time, forcing her to postpone her wedding. Furthermore, it deprives the heroine of her love and happiness when her fiancé is killed in the war, and after his death, the heroine "submits herself completely to the maelstrom

of history" (134) in the life of exile. Though she survives the wars, her inner world is crushed in the life of exile. Finally, the fairy-tale time reverses the situation: "when the heroine recalls her past, personal time again dominates history" (134). It is the fairy-tale time that renders her "freedom from historical time" (134). At the end of the story, the heroine, in the "circular structure of imaginary travel" (135), undergoes an imaginary trip back to the past: a peaceful domestic space where she was living with her parents and engaged to her fiancé. Though in the life of exile the heroine survives the wars, the thirty years of exile is nothing more than a series of suffering episodes as she is forced to get accustomed to a new environment—the same situation in which the protagonists in Bunin's "V Parizhe"/"В Париже" ['In Paris'] struggle, just as in Slobin's remark that the life of an exile is "a conscious gesture of 'accommodation' to foreign culture" (86). The personal life of the heroine in "Kholodnaya osen" ['A Cold Autumn'] is once engulfed by the historical time, yet it is resurrected as the heroine in her reminiscence is convinced that her happiness will never be erased from her memories.

Bunin's "Tchisty ponedelnik"/"Чистый Понедельник" ['Pure Monday' or 'Cleansing Monday'], written in 1944 and collected in *Dark Avenues*, concerns a young healthy wealthy couple who always have pleasant time—going to the theaters, enjoying dinner and lunch in restaurants and taverns, and at the request of the heroine, visiting the local cemeteries and monasteries, until the heroine decides to become a nun devoting herself to religious work in Marfo-Mariinskaya Abbey. As the title indicates, the heroine has been religious and spiritual in her inner world, though before becoming a nun she does not completely renounce earthly pleasures; as the narrator notices, her religiosity is repressed in her "enigmatic, languid" (Bunin 2007, 351) temperance. 'Cleansing Monday' demonstrates the obvious contrast between the silent, reclusive monasteries and cemeteries and the flashy theaters and taverns. Readers can sense the contrast between the old and the new in the city of Moscow. Brintlinger in "Fiction as Mapmaking: Moscow Ivan Bunin's Russian Memory Palace" notices that Bunin deliberately selected Moscow as an ideal city map to relocate the famous buildings that had been destroyed by the Soviet government. Through the couple's visits to the city (around the year of 1914) which mix the past with the present—"the silent, exotic east and shallow, materialistic west" (Brintlinger 2014, 49)—Bunin moved in time and space to "create a diachronic topographical map of Russian culture" (37). To evoke the spiritual element of the past, Bunin built "a geography of absence to restore those buildings" (60) that were destroyed "and to superimpose the complex cultural history of Russia upon the cityscape" (60). His mapping of the lost buildings in 'Cleansing Monday' was not merely an expression of nostalgia for him or his émigré compatriots, but it was also a way of staving off "Russia's imminent demise" (38). The heroine's final decision to renounce all earthly desires and devote herself to religious life results from her determination to

resurrect the spirit of the Old Church Slavonic. Bunin's idea of resurrection refers to spiritual resurrection, which has been ignored in the modernized age of the world—or worse, the age of exile. In the endless circle of changes, with evanescent love and life, only through the inner mind, which holds ideas of simplicity and selflessness, can one's mind remain at peace. Though the cathedrals and monasteries were bombed, the images and their spiritual significance are preserved in memories. Moreover, Bunin's sense of resurrection is associated with Buddhist ideas of renunciation of earthly attachments and withdrawal to nirvana (Connolly 1981, 15-16). Just as the Muscovites who sought the resurrection of the old religious spirit as is shown in the Three-Handed Mother of God (Brintlinger 2014, 56), Bunin's émigré readers sensed homecoming in his mapping of the lost buildings that evoke spiritual enlightenment.

Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov: "cosmic synchronization" or a unified state of cosmos

Nabokov's oeuvre consists of sixty-five stories, most of which were written in Russian and published after Nabokov had already left his tranquil life of childhood and youth in Saint Petersburg and at the country estate of Vyra. His first story "Nezhit" ['The Wood-Sprite'] (1921)—concerning a wood-sprite's recounting of his own exile from Russia—was composed in Russian when he was an undergraduate at Trinity College, Cambridge. His last story "Lance" (1952) was written in English and published in *The New Yorker* when he was teaching at Cornell (Meyer 2006, 119). Nabokov's life of exile began as his family sought shelter in Western Europe (after the withdrawal of the German Army in November 1918 and the victory of the Red Army of Soviet Russia in early 1919) [4], and he never went back to Russia, though he finally settled in Switzerland. In 1922, Nabokov completed his studies at Cambridge and moved to Berlin, in the hope of escaping the disasters accompanying the Russian Revolution that affected a great number of aristocratic families. Nabokov settled in Berlin as a Russian émigré writer within the émigré community, but the increasing anti-Semitic environment in that city at the time of the rise of the Nazi Party stoked the fear of totalitarianism within the émigré poet-writer. In 1937, Nabokov moved to Paris. In 1940, Nabokov fled with his family again as Nazi Germany invaded France. In the United States, he settled in Manhattan, joined the staff of Wellesley College in 1941, and worked as an entomologist at the American Museum of Natural History; he was also a lepidopterist at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. In 1948, he began to teach Russian and European literature at Cornell University. His lifelong interest in butterflies inspired him to write numerous stories in Berlin and the novel *Lolita* (1955) in America. Upon returning to Europe, he continued his childhood predilection for butterfly collection, seeking the footprints of the heavenly creature in the Alps, Corsica, and Sicily, until he passed away in Montreux on the 2nd of July 1977.

Nabokov's overseas drifting life provides him with a wealth of literary themes, but the real cornerstone of his literature comes from his childhood and adolescence in Russia, centering on his obsession with butterflies.[5] His literary works published during his life of emigration can be classified into two types: one exposes feelings of grief, fear of espionage, and a sense of loss, while the other serves as a remedy for those sufferings. His story "Signs and Symbols"[6] (1948), featuring a protagonist diagnosed with "referential mania" who imagines "that everything happening around him is a veiled reference to his personality and existence" (Nabokov 1996, 599), explores the suffering and distortion experienced by people in exile. The idea of "referential mania" in the story is inspired by Nabokov's synesthesia (Martin)—the mind's automatic association of things that seem unrelated to each other. The protagonist imagines that all things in his surroundings that previously seemed unrelated to him are actually interconnected with his existence; the viewer of objects is the nucleus of all objects: "Clouds in the staring sky transmit to one another, by means of slow signs, incredibly detailed information regarding him" (Nabokov 1996, 599). Many of Nabokov's protagonists—expatriates or maniacs in general—are referential mania patients, and their madness "where everything refers to self is a danger that Nabokov's art persistently alerts us to" (Meyer 2006, 134).

To alleviate suffering, Nabokov experiments with cosmic synchronization. In "Nabokov's Cosmic Synchronization and 'Something Else,'" J. B. Sisson notes that "cosmic synchronization" that Nabokov's protagonists experience "corresponds roughly to the secular and spontaneous ecstasy of universal oneness" (1994, 155). Nabokov's cosmic synchronization is a state of expanded consciousness that transcends time and space into a unified cosmos, wherein death is not ending, but a part of the cosmos. For Nabokov's protagonists, the mind can seek the experience of cosmic synchronization in trivial or "unpoetic" events, or even in something seemingly meaningless; through this experience, the mind "not only sees everything in the universe but expands physically through all space and time" (158). Further, Sisson classifies Nabokov's cosmic synchronization into three types. The first is the application of "the catalogue of remote activity" to "form the unlimited 'transparent organism' of cosmic synchronization" (159). Jungle imagery provides an ideal exploratory locale for seeking out "an exit from 'the prison of time'" (161). Nabokov's "Pil'gram" ['The Aurelian'] (1931), "Sovershenstvo" ['Perfection'] (1932), and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941), his first English-language novel, exemplify the first type. The second type evoking cosmic synchronization is the device of juxtaposing contrasting (conflicting) "alternative realities" (164). It depends on the vision of "a dual identity, of superimposed time settings" (165) on a simple or trivial object to find "some hint of a 'nameless bliss'" through the effect of "multiplicity and simultaneity of cosmic synchronization" (165). "Terra Incognita" ['Terra incognita'] (1931), *Pale Fire* (1962), and "Restoration" (1952) are representative

of the second type. The last type, Sisson mentions, denotes "transformations performed by a conjuror" (167). Under this conjuror's performance of illusion, objects undergo metamorphoses or transformations, and though they are "mysteriously conjoined" with other objects in the process of combination, they still "remain discrete" (167). "An Evening of Russian Poetry" (1945) and *Solus Rex* (1942) serve as typical examples of the third type. Through subjective consciousness for seeking higher consciousness (universal oneness) in combinations or patterns of objects, usually among trivial events, as mentioned in *Speak Memory*, Nabokov and his protagonists center "the process of cosmic synchronization permanently in the specific objects of mundane love, in the perceived world" (171):

> Whenever I start thinking of my love for a person, I am in the habit of immediately drawing radii from my love—from my heart, from the tender nucleus of a personal matter—to monstrously remote points of the universe [...] I have to have all space and all time participate in my emotion, in my mortal love, so that the edge of its mortality is taken off, thus helping me to fight the utter degradation [...]. (Nabokov 1989, 296-297)

As Sisson points out, Nabokov's process of cosmic synchronization for love corresponds to Nabokov's chess problem theory which assumes the transfer of an existing world into the secular world (1994, 176). For Nabokov, this existent world represents memories of his childhood in pre-Revolutionary Russia—a tranquil time and space with butterflies that he repeatedly visits through the structure of cosmic synchronicity in his literary world.

Nabokov's cosmic synchronization, associated with a feeling of timelessness and freedom, can be compared to Khodasevich's "double exposure," as both emphasize blurred boundaries. Greta N. Slobin in "Double Exposure in Exile Writing: Khodasevich, Teffi, Bunin, Nabokov" notes the device of Khodasevich's "double exposure" indispensable in Russian émigré writing.

> The brilliant device of "double exposure" would become indispensable in contemporary prose, where it was used to situate the exile in history, revealing hidden relations between memory of the past and the actual present. This device prompted recollections of Russian cities of the exiles' past as experienced in the European metropolitan centers, enabling writers to reflect on the inherent tensions of the diasporic condition, with its dual consciousness of place and time. (Slobin 2013, 74)

Nabokov himself applies "double exposure" as well. In the short stories that Nabokov wrote during 1920s and 1930s, Berlin is "automatically transposed into the 'distant' Petersburg or Moscow" (Slobin 87). Yet this superimposition of the past cityscape on the present modern city does not provide a "restorative nostalgia" (90)—a yearning for a return to Russia. Instead, it offers a new

enclave that replaces the Russian enclaves "clung to" by Nabokov's compatriots (86). Like Bunin, Nabokov had a clear realization of the impossibility of returning to the physical space of his childhood Russia (pre-revolutionary Russia); yet he stood in sharp contrast to those émigré community writers who resisted living the real life in European cities (86). To simulate the past time and space, Nabokov created "an evolving typology of memory" (89) in the present space and time; one of his characters in *Дар* [*The Gift*] "developed a new yearning for Russia that was less physical than before" (Nabokov 1963, 215). In other words, Nabokov's fictional world seeks an expansion to a *new space* that alleviates the sense of "alienation" that "stems not from Paris or Berlin, but from the internalized memory of the beloved native city, which has no counterpart in its irrevocable transformation in historical reality" (Slobin 2013, 91).

Indeed, critics have observed Nabokov's creation of fictional space and time. In "Mapping Narrative Space in Nabokov's Short Fiction," Maxim D. Shrayer discusses Nabokov's simulation of real space through the construction of "three-dimensional space on an atomistic scale" (1997, 625) in a short story, and his use of mystic codes in "an entire narrative" that "serves as a guide to its own space" (625). Shrayer notes that Nabokov employs the mapping device of the cartographer to create the effect of the three-dimensional space in the short stories—"Rozhdestvo"/"Рождество" ['Christmas'] (1925), "Pis'mo v Rossiiu"/"Письмо в Россию" ['A Letter that Never Reached Russia'] (1925), and "Obida"/"Обида" ['A Bad Day'] (1931). Nabokov opts for objects in nature in order to enhance the perspective of "a vertical movement or a downward/upward direction" (626). Space in real life through the effect of three-dimensionality can be superimposed on the fictional space, thus making the narrative space in the short story seem more real.

Nabokov's creation of a unified cosmos is evident in three texts—'A Guide to Berlin,' 'The Return of Chorb,' and 'Perfection.' In "Putevoditel' po Berlinu"/"Путеводитель по Берлину" ['A Guide to Berlin'] (1925), there are two sets of virtual space and time: one involves a world of darkness, whereas the other recreates a world interpreting the world as good. Shrayer indicates a hellish world: the clandestine code that Nabokov employs in 'A Guide to Berlin' is the parodic Dantesque code from *The Divine Comedy* (636). While the chapter "The Pipes" describing "open infernal bowels of the earth and boys crawling through these bowels" (631) and the chapter "Work" containing "parodic allusions to the torments" (631) allude to Dante's Hell, the chapter "Eden" situated in a famous zoo in Berlin parodies Paradise with "a strong dose of irony" (631). With the allusion mentioned above, the city of Berlin is viewed as a banality, hellish scene or burlesque Paradise. However, the narrator/guide in 'A Guide to Berlin,' as Shrayer believes, perceives an alternative space through the effect of the "mirrors of time" (635): as the narrator in the pub looks at the pub through

a boy's eyes, what he sees is not only the interior space of the pub, but also the future memories of the boy. This associative mapping of the surroundings in the memories of the boy during the chapter "The Pub" might lead to the guide's or the boy's construction of time and space of cosmic synchronization, helping them find relief from a hellish atmosphere and transfer to a blissful unified state.

Nabokov's story "Vozvrashchenie Chorba"/"Возвращение Чорба" ['The Return of Chorb'] (written in Russian under Nabokov's pen name Vladimir Sirin in Berlin in 1925) concerns a young Russian émigré's travel "in reverse through all the spots" (Nabokov 1996, 148) that he and his newly-wed wife visited during their honeymoon. Chorb's wife has died from electric shock by touching a live wire on an electric pole. At the end of the travel in reverse, Chorb hires a prostitute to stand in for his deceased wife. This story centers on two themes: artistic creation through cosmic synchronization and the collapse of a poetic world within a real world.

In the description of his past life with his wife, wherein imagination coexists with reality, Chorb removes ugliness of reality so as to immortalize her image. Chorb's travel in reverse corresponds to his experience of cosmic synchronization for perpetuating this mundane love: "He thought that if he managed to gather all the little things they had noticed together—if he re-created thus the near past—her image would grow immortal and replace her forever" (Nabokov 1996, 149). Every object that he revisits is endowed with its "dual identity" of "superimposed time settings" (Sisson 1994, 165) as it reminds him of the images or activities of the deceased.

Chorb's reminiscence reinterprets death and loss as something poetic. His narrative is teeming with the prefiguration of her death. The vision of the scenery of "the profile of a cliff" and its surroundings during the Switzerland trip is "a kind of fatidic prefiguration" (Nabokov 1996, 148). As he walks with his bride along the boulevard, he senses "somewhat violety smell of the dead leaves strewing the sidewalk" (150). Furthermore, as she attempts to catch the wrapping-paper-like leaves with a spade, a workman contemplates her "as light as a dead leaf, dancing about with that little spade in her raised hand" (151). On the day of their wedding, the parents of the bride prepare the bed on which runs "a Gothic inscription" "WE ARE TOGETHER UNTO THE TOMB" (150). Those images and events that involve the fatidic prefiguration of death are deliberately juxtaposed in the narrative structure through the process of cosmic synchronization. Chorb's purpose is to immortalize death not as a fading away, but as part of a unified world.

However, Nabokov exposes cruelty: the impossibility of perpetuating artistic creation in a real world. Indeed, the name of the protagonist implies a struggle for hope in exile.[7] In 'The Return of Chorb,' the narrator's mission is a reprieve from grief through artistic creation. His simulation of the image of his wife is compared to the mythology of Orpheus's journey through the Underworld: both

stories end in the disappearance of the images of their wives. Chorb wakes up from his dream only to "discover the terrifying discrepancy between his wife's perfect image fresh in his memory" and "a blemished live simulacrum" of a prostitute (188). This ending reveals Nabokov's grief over the collapse of artistic creation; perfect images created through cosmic synchronization vanish in the real world, for they exist only in dreams or imagination.

Nabokov's protagonists' experience of cosmic synchronization enables them to encapsulate those events and images significant to them into their private space—dreams or consciousness. Nabokov's "Sovershenstvo" ['Perfection'] (1932), originally written in Russian, published in *Poslednie Novosti* [*Latest News*] in 1932, and later translated into English as one of the collected stories in 1974's *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories*, tells a story about a Russian émigré who drowns and dies as he rushes into the water to rescue his pupil. The death of the protagonist in 'Perfection' at the end of the story implies a perfect state of the protagonist's private world. The last moment of the story, as Robert Grossmith mentions, is the perfect moment wherein "Ivanov attains that perfection for which he has striven throughout his life, that ideal of direct contact with the world" (1993, 78). As he is dying, Ivanov feels his heart "straining unbearably" (Nabokov 1996, 346) and hears the perfect sound of the piano—"a rapid something" that "passed through him, a flash of fingers rippling over piano keys" (346)—though he hears only an indistinct part of it every time he feels heart pains. Despite Ivanov being a lonely and impoverished émigré living in a world where people in general ignore or do not appreciate his power of imagination, he still imagines the world to be a lovely and beautiful place: "he had a passionate desire to experience everything, to attain and touch everything, to let the dappled voices, the bird calls, filter through his being and to enter for a moment into a passerby's soul" (340). Though his pupil shows disinterest or no epiphanic response to his teachings, he still perceives a perfect mind in the child. His capability of seeing beauty in dull or vulgar people and objects is not a phenomenon of self-deception; instead, it is because of "Ivanov's mental state" that "resembles what Nabokov named 'cosmic synchronization'"—the capability of merging "memories, premonitions of future recollection, and sense perceptions" (Balestrini 2002, 348). In his geography teaching, all of the maps that Ivanov shows to David are perfect, as each of them contains two lines. One is the line of the landscape of the ancient world in history. The other is an imaginary world revealed through the device of Khodasevich's "double exposure" (Slobin 2013, 75) that can be encapsulated into the center of Ivanov's "private life" (Shrayer 1997, 637) as "various images of happiness" that Ivanov stores up (Nabokov 1996, 340). A great number of maps "are stored inside his memory" (Shrayer 1997, 637), and this depository of the knowledge of the maps in his memory enables him to travel "via memory routes" (638) to any place in his mental map that is

significant to his private life in his recollected map. Another map that enters his consciousness is Ivanov's heart pain. Ivanov feels heart pain as he sees those landscapes (e.g., a boat on a seascape) or touches the water at the beach; heart pain is a fatidic prefiguration of his approaching death at the seaside. Ivanov's heart pain makes "a spatial transition" "from the map of an aching heart to a recollected map" (639) in his consciousness; "the actual seascape" "yields the map of his heart pain in Ivanov's consciousness and later connects it to a similar map of a seaside resort that rests in Ivanov's memory" (639). At the last moment, Ivanov drowns with his heart contracted, a situation that connects Ivanov's being with the private map that rests within his own memory, and thus makes him hear a perfect piano sound in a state of perfect consciousness.

If Chorb in 'The Return of Chorb' immortalizes the images of his deceased wife in his memory, Ivanov in 'Perfection' perpetuates his own image in the future memory of his pupil. In addition, David here can be compared to the boy in the chapter "The Pub" of 'A Guide to Berlin': just as the tour guide sees the future memory of the boy in the pub via the effect of mirror image (Johnson 1979, 353-361), so Ivanov sees and fulfills his image in the future memory of David. The story 'Perfection' begins with a proleptic view: "Ivanov foresaw he would often appear in David's dreams, thirty or forty years hence: human dreams do not easily forget old grudges" (Nabokov, 1996, 338). His heart pain that recuperates is a fatidic prefiguration that abuts "a transcendent realm" (Alexandrov 1994, 41).[8] 'Perfection' ends with the fulfillment of Ivanov's prefiguration.

Bunin and Nabokov

Nabokov's literary creativity shows the connection between Russian literary tradition and European modernism. His early poems and short stories exhibit some features of Ivan Bunin, whom the young writer admired as his mentor. It was through Nabokov's father that Bunin began to know Nabokov (Shrayer 1998, 343). Nabokov began writing to Bunin in 1921; in the first letter along with a number of poems sent to Bunin on March 18, 1921, Nabokov expressed "the pathos of admiration and gratitude" (343). Through letter correspondence and reviews of works, Nabokov constructed a friendship with Bunin in the 1920s and early 1930s, although they did not actually meet until the early 1930s. Bunin was interested in Nabokov's works and gave the young Russian émigré encouragement. Regarding Bunin as his mentor, Nabokov pursued "in short fiction the tradition which Čechov had established" and "Bunin enriched and perfected in the 1910s-1920s" (354). Yet Nabokov also had "innovations" "both in structure and in metaphysical thematics" (354). Bunin appreciated Nabokov's novel *Mašen'ka*/*Машенька* [*Mary*] (1926) most as it reflects "the most Buninesque" attributes (351). Nabokov's "Obida"/"Обида" ['A Bad Day'] (1931) is also less

Nabokovian as it "shows connections with a series of Bunin's stories, mostly dating back to the 1890s-1900s" (355). Nabokov's 'Christmas' (1925) is also one of the finest short stories "from the 1920s-early 1930s" that "reveal[s] a continuous dialogue with Bunin" (358). Nabokov's "Rozhdestvo"/"Рождество" ['Christmas'] (1925) and Bunin's "Snezhny Byk"/"Снежный бык" ['Snow Bull'] (1911) "focus on fatherly love" (359), yet Nabokov's 'Christmas' offers his protagonist "a different means of dealing with his pain" (359) through "an otherworldly metaphor" (359) that cannot be found in Bunin's 'Snow Bull.' Nabokov's "Pil'gram" ['The Aurelian'] (1931) resembles Bunin's "Gospodin iz San Frantsisco"/"Господин из Сан-Франциско" ['The Gentleman from San Francisco'] (1915) and follows "Bunin's favorite narrative recipe of placing the death of the main character at the closure" (363), but Bunin uses death to emphasize the end of violence or tragedy while Nabokov's use of death as narrative closure in 'The Aurelian' and 'Perfection' reverberates with the experience of "entering the otherworld" (364).

The year 1933 marks the beginning of the decline of the Bunin-Nabokov friendship. Several reasons explain this decline. One results from Bunin's feeling stressed as a Nobel laureate (Shrayer 1998, 365-367). The other reason is Nabokov's "covert modernism." Until the early 1930s, Bunin had been tolerant of Nabokov's "covert modernism," yet in the late 1930s Bunin became irritated by Nabokov's modernism. While Nabokov negotiated "Russian classical tradition with modernist trends, both Russian and European" (376), Bunin thoroughly resented the modernist ethos, though he might have been unaware of his "covert modernism" (384-386). For Bunin, Nabokov was a "greenhorn who pulled out a pistol and killed all the older writers with one shot" (reported by Lev Ljubimov, qtd. in Shrayer 1998, 373). In 1943, Bunin published *Dark Avenues*, a collection of short stories in which he polemicized with modernism and defended Russian literary tradition while making a dialogue with Nabokov's short stories as an argument against modernism (Shrayer 1998, 374-388). This eventual rift in their relationship reveals that Bunin misunderstood Nabokov. Throughout his life, Nabokov kept alive the Russian literary tradition, integrating a characteristically Russian sense of exile or homelessness into different forms of aesthetics.[9]

Gaito Gazdanov: exilic irony and apocalyptic disappearance

Born into a middle-class Russified family of Ossetian origin in St. Petersburg in 1903, Gaito Gazdanov (1903-1971) had a different childhood from the noble family lifestyles of Bunin and Nabokov. Though he was not an aristocrat affected by the Soviet Communist Revolution, he still participated in the army of the Whites in the Russian Civil War.[10] As the Whites lost and evacuated, Gazdanov started his life of exile by traveling from Crimea to Turkey and Bulgaria, and finally settling

in France in 1923. During his homeless life of exile, he was a writer, regularly publishing in émigré journals. "Leaving him enough free time to continue to be a writer" (Dienes 1996, 24), he worked as a nighttime taxi driver for almost twenty-five years, until 1953, when he accepted a position with Radio Liberty in Munich, where he worked until his death in 1971.

Gazdanov was classified as part of the younger generation of the first wave of Russian émigré writers, yet he did not acquire as much fame as Nabokov. Laszlo Dienes in "Gaito Gazdanov: Russian Émigré Literature at Harvard" analyzes the reasons. Unlike Nabokov, who switched to English, Gazdanov insisted on "creat[ing] in the language that was 'in one's blood'" (Dienes 1996, 23), resulting in his works being inaccessible to Western European readers. Another reason is that Russian émigré works were "banned" (26) or "unmentionable" (26) in the Soviet Union until the era of Gorbachev's *glasnost* Russia during the years of 1988-1990 (29). Gazdanov's literary works started to appear in Russia after 1988, yet he still did not acquire fame due to inappropriate publications in minor journals (29) and the collapse of the publishing industry (31). In the post-Soviet era, Gazdanov's works were rediscovered in notable journals such as *Druzhba Narodov* ['Friendship of Peoples'] and *Drugie berega* ['Other Shores'] (31). Bryan Karetnyk, editor and translator of *The Beggar and Other Stories*, identified the 1930s and 1960s as the golden age of Gazdanov's short-story writing.

Gazdanov, as a younger generation of Russian first-wave émigré writers, holds the synthesis of various cultural features. Nikolay Nikolaev and Svetlana Dulova in "Novels by Gaito Gazdanov and Mental Changes in Literary Consciousness of Russian First-Wave Émigré Writers of the 20th Century" investigate Gazdanov's existentialism and modernism: his writing technique shares affinities with existentialist writers such as Albert Camus and James Joyce (2019, 167). Gazdanov's sense of exile is not caused by historical changes, but by his inner sense of existence itself.[11] Though Gazdanov embraces a mood different from the prevailing mood in "the older generation of Russian first-wave émigré writers," which is "longing for the past" (166), his philosophical exploration of death and fate keeps alive the distinctive tone of Russian literary tradition.

In his fictitious space, Gazdanov creates the effect of exilic irony that emphasizes the horror of existence. Gazdonov's narrator initially holds an attitude of disengagement, ignoring changes within the external world. Later, an alter ego of the narrator observes an irony in the internal experiences of the narrator: his narrator sneers at the destinies of himself or others (a taxi driver, an upper-class passenger, or anyone from low social milieu) as he juxtaposes life with existential exile and perceives the city/cityscape as an inner space that will eventually exile the self.

The movement in the city, for Gazdanov's narrator, is movement in a fragmented condition, and its terminal is apocalyptic disappearance—death. Yulia Pushkarevskaya Naughton in "'Diaphanous

Irony:' Ironic Masquerade and Breakdown in Vladimir Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and Gaito Gazdanov's *Night Roads*" perceives Gazdanov's *Nochnye dorogi*/*Ночные дороги* [*Night Roads*] (1952) as a best illustration for the writer's mobile metaphysical space. The narrator in *Night Roads* recreates his home through imagined spaces while driving through the city of Paris; his purpose is to achieve "the sense of presence in the world" (Naughton 2014a, 482) through "change and movement" (482)—his *objet petit a* in Lacanian terms (481)—that "constitutes both the narrator's internal life and his metaphysical relationship with the world" (482). In the constant motion of driving a taxi, the narrator believes he has created his "internal journey" (481) that serves as a replacement for the exilic (external) movement, or "an antidote" (479) for "his absent home" (479), avoiding "surrender[ing] to immobility" (482) that signals "spiritual death" (482). However, Gazdanov's narrative, an autobiographical text that reflects the experience of the émigré writer's twenty-five years of driving taxis, eventually lapses into melancholy (479) and returns to the exilic condition and "the post-ironic landscape" (487), which is "bleak and unrelenting" (487). The city is no longer connected with a world that can offset the past horror, but "functions as a metaphor for the fragmentation and dislocation of subjectivity" (Naughton 2014b, 247), mirroring "the narrator's own subjectivity" (247) in an exilic condition, as the narrator has "no physical or cognitive control over time/space" (251).

The dichotomy of the past and the present disappears as an ironic gesture intervenes. This is also seen in Gazdanov's stories. In his story "Sčast'e" ['Happiness'] (1932), collected in *The Beggar and Other Stories*, the protagonist, Henri Dorin, optimistically sees the world as a synthesis of happiness until he perceives reality when he loses his sight. In contrast to his son, André, who holds a pessimistic attitude toward life, Henri believes he has a happy life, as he is now a wealthy businessman owning several factories and has a nice family with an intelligent son and a beautiful second wife, even though at a young age he experienced war and the loss of his first wife. He always encourages his son to look on the bright side of life (Gazdanov 2018, 72). However, Henri's feeling of happiness is tempered by disillusionment; as he reacts to the "dismal" exterior world with an optimistic attitude, he is ignorant of (or chooses to ignore) the betrayal of his second wife and forgets his sadness over the loss of his first wife and his fear during wartime life. His idealized world faces its challenges as he becomes blind. His sense of hearing others' presence/motion in the house becomes so sharp that he starts to notice things that he did not perceive before. His house is now no longer a home of happiness but is "saturated with alarming and sorrowful things" (94). Blindness forces him to focus on his internal experiences, which in turn makes him recognize reality. Similar to *Night Roads*, a world of happiness in 'Happiness' lapses into melancholy in an ironic shift. Another story in *The Beggar and Other Stories*, "Niščij" ['The Beggar'] (1962), relates how a capitalist, tired of his

pampered existence, adopts a life of poverty on the streets of Paris, simply for freedom and the renunciation of all tedious obligations. Gustave Verdier longs for freedom through disengagement from the past, yet the past still permeates his memories.

Conclusion

Bunin, Nabokov, and Gazdanov stand out as fine examples of émigré writers as they astutely perceive the horrible condition of exile. Bunin's literary works during his thirty-three years of emigration life in France continue the sense of evanescence and incorporate this sense into the motif of exile. Grief for historical change is conspicuous in Bunin's exile characters. In the work of Nabokov, the recurring theme of "referential mania" and the plot of thugs persecuting the artist-victims reflect Nabokov's recollection of the death of his father and the sense of phobia in his life of emigration. In Gazdanov's stories, the memory of the past haunts people as a nightmarish presence, though they strive to emotionally disengage themselves from that past.

In the world of fiction, the three Russian émigré writers seek exits from the horrible world of exilic space. Bunin's protagonists liberate themselves from the exterior world by plunging into their memories of the past, resisting the forward march of historical time. Some of his protagonists locate the images of cathedrals and monasteries in their memories and renounce their earthly attachments as they recognize that love and life are evanescent. Nabokov's protagonists, capable of cosmic synchronization, perceive the universal oneness in trivial or dull events. Memory and imagination bring his protagonists back to an existent world that is not alien to them: a world that corresponds to Nabokov's childhood in pre-Revolutionary Russia, a tranquil time and space with butterflies. Gazdonov's sense of exile is a sort of "existential thriller" (Pinkham 2014) that befalls not only the émigrés, but everyone. To avoid feelings of suffering, his characters disengage from the exilic/external/changeable world.

However, their characters cannot transcend the horror of reality. Bunin's nostalgia for the past—a yearning for beauty and love in a lost world—is often intertwined with death, which eventually leads to a sense of profound loss and disillusionment. Though their idea of cosmic synchronization reinterprets death as a part of a unified, idealized world, Nabokov's characters still possess a sense of loss and disillusionment. Gazdanov's protagonists, who disengage themselves from the exterior changeable world, nevertheless withdraw inwardly into their inner space where they cannot be protectively cocooned from any emotions of melancholy, for their past lives still encroach on their inner worlds/memories.

Endnotes:

1. The "Red Terror" of the Bolshevik regime during the civil war that followed the February and October Revolutions of 1917 pushed a great number of Russian citizens to its adjacent territories, bringing about a macabre scene of exilic space during the age of human relocation. The number of migrants may have ranged from 800,000 to 2,000,000, comprising people from all classes of society (Karetnyk 2017, xiv).
2. Bunin's sense of nostalgia was influenced not only by his sense of exile after the Russian Revolution, but also by his youth, when he witnessed the decline and eventual collapse of the Bunin clan. Bunin was born into a family of gentry in Voronezh province, but he did not experience the prosperity of the Bunins. In his day, the Russian landed gentry in general was facing its downfall due to the policy of "the emancipation of the serfs in 1861" and "the growing industrialization of Russia" (Colin 1955, 158). Economic instability confronted the Bunin family: Bunin's father continued to squander his life until he reached utter ruin.
3. Bunin's "mnemonic project" (41) in *Dark Avenues* recalls Nabokov's "The Visit to the Museum" (1939), but how it differs from Nabokov's space is that Bunin's country estates/cities are based on real places or a place in Bunin's memories that carries with it a specific spiritual significance to which the protagonists long to attach themselves. Unlike Nabokov who connects *this world* to *the otherworld* of cosmic synchronization, Bunin searches for what has existed in *this world* and through memory constructs what has erased, seeking relief from suffering loss.
4. Nabokov was forced into exile due to the establishment of the Bolshevik regime in Russia and later the Nazis in Germany. His father was killed in Berlin on 28 March 1922 while protecting his friend Pavel Milyukov, a liberal politician and publisher, from assassination. The death of his father became a nightmare in Nabokov's life. Later, he escaped the Nazis as he feared his Jewish wife Véra Slonim and their son would be persecuted.
5. For further reading, see Brian Boyd's *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*.
6. The story "Signs and Symbols" was written in English and first published under the title "Symbols and Signs" in *The New Yorker* on May 15, 1948. When republished, it was reverted to its original title "Signs and Symbols" in *Nabokov's Dozen* (1958). Since childhood, Nabokov was trilingual—Russian, French, and English. Most of the literary works he created in Europe were written in Russian. In America, he primarily wrote in English, and some of his early works were translated into English.
7. His name implies associations with the Devil/Satan roaming in darkness, the angel Cherub/Cherubim guarding the gate of Eden (the guardian of knowledge), and the Jewish exiles from Babylon. In "Decoding Vladimir Nabokov's 'The Return of Chorb,'" Shrayer decodes the name of Chorb in Russian and English (Shrayer 1997, 181). "Чорб" is linked with "чёрт," "the Devil/Satan" (181). In addition, as Чорб sounds similar to the English "cherub," it is possible that it "refers to an angel of a high order found in the earliest books of the Old Testament" (184), and the angels here are cherub and cherubim, who "symbolize God's highest potencies, sovereignty, and goodness" (184), and were "created prior to the Garden of Eden and served as a model used by God in the creation of man" (184). The return of Chorb parallels "the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylonian captivity" (185), since

Cherub carries "a keen sense of uprootedness" (185), referring "either to the leader of the group of Jews who returned to Israel" (185), "or to an unknown place in Babylon where these people came from" (185).

8. Vladimir E. Alexandrov notes that "[Nabokov] is remarkably successful in demonstrating how both he and his characters are trapped in fatidic webs that abut a transcendent realm" (1994, 41).
9. For further reading, see Brian Boyd's "Nabokov's Transition from Russian to English: Repudiation or Evolution?"
10. In contrast to Bunin and Nabokov, Gazdanov left his country not because of anti-Soviet sentiment. He joined the White Army, not due to anti-Bolshevism, but simply out of curiosity (Pinkham 2014). The war led him to a life of exile as he became one of more than 150,000 refugees. (Pinkham 2014).
11. Gazdanov declared that Russian émigré literature did not exist (Bethea and Frank 2011, 201; Pinkham 2014).

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