

A Reply to Professor Koyama's Comment on My Paper

Akiko Nakata

Thank you very much for your generous, valuable comment on my paper.

It is not easy to decide which came earlier to Nabokov's mind, to use a name of Moore in *Transparent Things* (TT) or to make these two philosophers, Wittgenstein and Moore, prevail in it as characters' names and a place name as the setting for various scenes, but my imagination is rather of the latter.

I think that Nabokov planned to use the two philosophers as a kind of hub of some subtexts, images, and motifs. Let me explain that by the case of Amilcar that appears in a sentence in Chapter 26, "The little spitz dog is asleep on the back seat of an Amilcar being driven by the kennelman's wife back to Trux" (101), for example.

First, Amilcar is the brand name of French sports cars that were very popular before WWII.

Second, "the lady with the little dog" (99) in an Amilcar reminds the readers of a famous story entitled "The Lady with a Little Dog" (1889) by Anton Chekov, one of the authors whom Nabokov admired and lectured on at Cornell, and in addition, of "Spring in Fialta" (1936), Nabokovian version of the story.

Third, Amilcar is a Carthaginian military commander who is the protagonist of *Salammbô* (1862), a historical novel by Gustave Flaubert, who is also highly esteemed and lectured on by Nabokov. Amilcar's /Hamilcar's son, Hannibal, can be considered associated with Hugh's climbing of the Alps and his father's agonized clambering over huge blocks in his nightmare. By the meaning of his name, "Grace of Baal,"—Baal is a god of fire and patron deity of Carthage—Hannibal is also related to the theme of fire in the novella.

Finally--the list could be longer, though—Hannibal is Gannibal in Russian, and Abram Gannibal is Alexandre Pushkin's great-grandfather, on whom Nabokov wrote an essay. Pushkin is the greatest Russian poet and Nabokov translated and annotated his masterpiece, *Evgeny Onegin* (1833).

This is the way Amilcar centers some subtexts on various fields and levels of the work. I think that every name in TT is given such function, to some degree, by the author.

The sentence in which Amilcar appears is very simple, but the long sentence followed by the obscure joke is complex, and we could find various images and subtexts entangled in it. I tried to disentangle them to see what are hidden there, but I could see only very little.

G. E. Moore seems really inconspicuous to the eyes of general readers like me, who do not know well the history of analytic philosophy in the early 20th century that Professor Koyama kindly explained. Moore is rarely discussed these days. This symposium is supported by a Kaken grant, and until last year I was the only researcher who was supported for a project whose major theme is concerning Moore. This year I found the other Kaken supported project on Moore—just two in all. In contrast, more than 60 projects on Wittgenstein have been granted by Kaken. In average, three books, academic or non-academic, on Wittgenstein are published in Japan every year, but publications on Moore are very rare. Some months ago, Professor Koyama kindly suggested to me a possibility that certain Cambridge students around Nabokov might have told him about Moore, but it was not easy for me to imagine that until I happened to read two articles written on brightly shining young Moore. Then I remembered a student called “Nesbit,” who could be related to the Apostles, and added a paragraph on him, compensating my ignorance.

I also learned that we could miss something important when we do not have the exact whole picture. I read how Wittgenstein was respected at Cornell University in his biographies: For example, when he appeared in a hall and was introduced as the speaker, the students in the audience gasped as if Plato had been introduced (Monk 558). However, I was not aware of the fact that in the 1950s Cornell was the center of Wittgenstein studies mostly because of his visit, until Professor Koyama mentioned it. Probably Nabokov saw piled books by Wittgenstein at bookshops on campus and perhaps he read articles on the great visiting philosopher in the college bulletin. I think it is most possible that Nabokov heard the name of Wittgenstein in the early 1950s at Cornell, and read *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and/or *Philosophical Investigations* (PI) after the interview given in 1966. He knew a little about the relationship between Wittgenstein and Moore, as well as Moore’s paradox, from PI and the biographies by Norman Malcolm and Georg Henrik von Wright published in 1958. Malcolm described how Wittgenstein could be self-centered—or rather philosophy-centered for him—when

he was with Moore: In a meeting of philosophers, Wittgenstein talked on at least for two hours arguing back against Moore, without allowing him to talk or answer (Malcolm 33); Wittgenstein was not willing to leave Moore after 90 minutes of philosophical discussion though he knew that Moore had suffered a stroke and was advised by the doctor to avoid excitement and fatigue (Ibid. 67). As Nabokov answered to the interviewer that he had no contact with the faculty of philosophy at Cornell, I think that probably he had no opportunity to talk with Malcolm about Wittgenstein.

Another possibility how Nabokov became interested in Wittgenstein and Moore could be found in related to Bertrand Russell. In *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969), a novel written before TT, is a character called Professor Rattner, who seems to model Bertrand Russell. Professor Rattner rarely appears in person and he is only referred to several times. His nephew, Bernard Rattner, is a close friend of the protagonist, Van Veen, at high school, and finally Van is elected to the Rattner Chair of Philosophy in the University of Kingston (*Ada*, 506). Nabokov's interest in Russell seems rather complicated. He was critical of Russell as activist, for the philosopher was against the Vietnam War, which meant to Nabokov that he should be classified with "the Reds" (*Strong Opinions*, 98).

Finally, I would like to add a note to "the scoutmaster." The earlier version of my paper included a passage regarding the scoutmaster as Wittgenstein:

In the summer vacation, Wittgenstein went from Otterthal to Manchester to visit William Eccles:

When he [Wittgenstein] went to Manchester, both Eccles and his wife were surprised at the great change in him. They . . . found in the place of the immaculately dressed young man, the 'favourite of the ladies' they had known before the war, a rather shabby figure dressed in what appeared to them to be a Boy Scout uniform. (Monk 231)

Now, we could assume the reason the leader of the group is called both scoutmaster and teacher. . . .

The citation is from Monk's biography published more than ten years after Nabokov's

death so that I deleted it from the final version of my paper. However, according to Professor Koyama, Wittgenstein's dressing like a boy scout uniform was well known among the people who knew him. Then it might be possible for Nabokov to hear about it somewhere.

Many thanks for reading this long, rambling reply.

Malcolm, Norman. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*. Oxford UP, 1958.

Monk, Ray. *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*. Vintage, 1991.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Strong Opinions*. McGraw-Hill, 1973.

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