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In the note to Chapter Six, Stanzas XXIX and XXX (pp. 43-51), Nabokov devotes eight pages to considerations about the style of duelling established during the period between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, and about the four duels Pushkin himself experienced. It is clear to us that in Nabokov's view this sequence in which the full account of the duel between Onegin and Lenski is detailed constitutes the climactic point of *Eugene Onegin*, and, adding to that, this emphasis on the significance of that scene is derived from Nabokov's own adherence to the theme of duelling. Nabokov's idea about the fictional duel predicating—as a prolepsis, as a kind of flash-forward, or (borrowing Nabokov's favourite phrase) as one of “the future recollection[s]”—the actual one which would bring Pushkin's death in future, when considered as a secondary thought, could not be called to be eccentric. Nevertheless, that interpretation is so much emphasised that its treatment seems to be somewhat out of balance. For example, if the reader expects that general topics such as the duel theme in nineteenth-century Russian literature might be taken into account, that expectation will never be satisfied.

If we roughly define the establishment of the Russian aristocratic culture and its westernisation as phenomena chiefly witnessed after the seventeenth century and sustained well into the mid-nineteenth century, that historical moment would coincide with the formative period during which full-blown conventionalisation of duels was steadily proceeding. When put into this context, duelling cannot be simply interpreted as an imprudent means of solving problems concerning insults and ill-treatments one feels to suffer; a range of multi-faceted factors—political, divine, or social creeds, personal histories, senses of pride based upon venerable ancestries, and so force—provided backgrounds for a reverence for the code of duel as a hereditary privilege.

At least, with the mere purpose of preserving one's honour inextricably commingled with his family's honour and on the condition that the duellist must be a member of nobility, a duel can be a socially acceptable act. In spite of the danger of losing lives on both sides, duels were generally ceremonial, and as such, necessitated developing a highly sophisticated (and, judging from the surface characteristics, even theatrical) style. Probably the most regrettable thing within this culture was a cowardly rejection of the challenge made by one's adversary, and the disgrace and notoriety caused by cowardice must be avoided. We can understand a duel in which one's life is staked as the ultimate form of gambling (one of customary conventions aristocratic society in general was fascinated by). A reckless venturing momentarily brings forth a complete metamorphosis of the mundane tedium and indolence, frozen into scenes full of dramatic tension and trepidation, and realises the idea of the sublime, one of the two paradigmatic aesthetic values.

We could analyse a duel as a social practice, for example, from the viewpoint of cultural anthropology, in which case mental and metaphysical as well as social and symbolical meanings of a duel might emerge as analytical issues. In reference to history, especially to literary history, a duel is important because of its being a representation of the mentality of the contemporary intellectual class. By a psychoanalytic approach the pleasurable sensations accompanying duels could be interpreted in the aspect of Eros and Thanatos, and made the basis for a genealogical survey of nineteenth-century Russian literature from Pushkin to Lermontov. Comparing duel scenes depicted by Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, and Chekhov with that in *Eugene Onegin* can be thought to be a further possibility. Instead of directing his attention to those alternatives, however, Nabokov dared to foreground his lifelong interest in his commentary.

Nabokov's personal interest to a duel as a theme or a motif was evident as early as in his short story, "An Affair of Honor," which first appeared under the title "Podlets" ("The Cur") around 1927, and was included in his first collection *Vozvrashchenie Chorba* (*The Return of Chorb*) in 1930. In this story "the romantic theme whose decline started with Chekhov's magnificent novella *Single Combat* (1891)" is displaced into Berlin in 1926, a cultural environment to the utmost removed from the Russian aristocratic society of Chekhov's day, but we can detect no trace of melancholy which came from loss of homeland. For Nabokov, the custom of duelling was not the object of nostalgic recollection. The fact that he himself felt ineradicably attracted to that tradition was the internal evidence or incarnated proof of lineage and inheritance. In this meaning, the duel scene of *Eugene Onegin* and Pushkin's destiny which was terminated by the fatal duel were not things of past Nabokov could easily objectify or distantiate. It remains that we must reexamine the importance of duel theme in Nabokov's works with reference to *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (1967) as well as novels including *The Real Life of Sebastian of Knight* (1941) and *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969, 1970).

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