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# Invitation To A Beheading

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## REILLY DULCE

*The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* HMH  
 A major reexamination of the novelist Vladimir Nabokov as "literary gamesman," this book systematically shows that behind his ironic manipulation of narrative and his puzzle-like treatment of detail there lies an aesthetic rooted in his intuition of a transcendent realm and in his consequent redefinition of "nature" and "artifice" as synonyms. Beginning with Nabokov's discursive writings, Vladimir Alexandrov finds his world view centered on the experience of epiphany--characterized by a sudden fusion of varied sensory data and memories, a feeling of timelessness, and an intuition of immortality--which grants the true artist intimations of an "otherworld." Readings of *The Defense*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, *The Gift*, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Lolita*, and *Pale Fire* reveal the epiphanic experience to be a touchstone for the characters' metaphysical insightfulness, moral makeup, and aesthetic sensibility, and to be a structural model for how the narratives themselves

are fashioned and for the nature of the reader's involvement with the text. In his conclusion, Alexandrov outlines several of Nabokov's possible intellectual and artistic debts to the brilliant and variegated culture that flourished in Russia on the eve of the Revolution. Nabokov emerges as less alienated from Russian culture than most of his emigre readers believed, and as less "modernist" than many of his Western readers still imagine. "Alexandrov's work is distinctive in that it applies an 'otherworld' hypothesis as a consistent context to Nabokov's novels. The approach is obviously a fruitful one. Alexandrov is innovative in rooting Nabokov's ethics and aesthetics in the otherworldly and contributes greatly to Nabokov studies by examining certain key terms such as 'commonsense,' 'nature,' and 'artifice.' In general Alexandrov's study leads to a much clearer understanding of Nabokov's metaphysics."--D. Barton Johnson, University of California, Santa Barbara Originally published in 1991. The Princeton Legacy Library uses the latest print-on-

demand technology to again make available previously out-of-print books from the distinguished backlist of Princeton University Press. These editions preserve the original texts of these important books while presenting them in durable paperback and hardcover editions. The goal of the Princeton Legacy Library is to vastly increase access to the rich scholarly heritage found in the thousands of books published by Princeton University Press since its founding in 1905. Cloud, Castle, Lake Routledge  
 Our history is littered with heads. Over the centuries, they have decorated our churches, festooned our city walls and filled our museums; they have been props for artists and specimens for laboratory scientists, trophies for soldiers and items of barter. Today, as videos of decapitations circulate online and cryonicists promise that our heads may one day live on without our bodies, the severed head is as contentious and compelling as ever. From shrunken heads to trophies of war; from memento mori to Damien Hirst's *With Dead Head*; from grave-robbing

phrenologists to enterprising scientists, Larson explores the bizarre, often gruesome and confounding history of the severed head. Its story is our story.

Invitation to a Beheading  
Vintage

The foundational text for the acclaimed international best seller *Reading Lolita in Tehran* "Empathetic, incisive. . . . A sweeping overview of Nabokov's major works. . . . Graceful [and] discerning."—Kirkus Reviews The ruler of a totalitarian state seeks validation from a former schoolmate, now the nation's foremost thinker, in order to access a cultural cache alien to his regime. A literary critic provides commentary on an unfinished poem that both foretells the poet's death and announces the critic's secret identity as the king of a lost country. The greatest of Vladimir Nabokov's enchanters—Humbert—is lost within the antithesis of a fairy story, in which *Lolita* does not hold the key to his past but rather imprisons him within the knowledge of his distance from that past. In this precursor to her international best seller *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Azar Nafisi deftly explores

the worlds apparently lost to Nabokov's characters, their portals of access to those worlds, and how other worlds hold a mirror to Nabokov's experiences of physical, linguistic, and recollective exile. Written before Nafisi left the Islamic Republic of Iran, and now published in English for the first time and with a new introduction by the author, this book evokes the reader's quintessential journey of discovery and reveals what caused Nabokov to distinctively shape and reshape that journey for the author.

#### **Nabokov at Cornell**

Beacon Press

A rich compilation of the previously uncollected Russian and English prose and interviews of one of the twentieth century's greatest writers, edited by Nabokov experts Brian Boyd and Anastasia Tolstoy. "I think like a genius, I write like a distinguished author, and I speak like a child": so Vladimir Nabokov famously wrote in the introduction to his volume of selected prose, *Strong Opinions*. Think, Write, Speak follows up where that volume left off, with a rich compilation of his uncollected prose and interviews, from a 1921

essay about Cambridge to two final interviews in 1977. The chronological order allows us to watch the Cambridge student and the fledgling Berlin reviewer and poet turn into the acclaimed Paris émigré novelist whose stature brought him to teach in America, where his international success exploded with *Lolita* and propelled him back to Europe. Whether his subject is Proust or Pushkin, the sport of boxing or the privileges of democracy, Nabokov's supreme individuality, his keen wit, and his alertness to the details of life illuminate the page. Nabokov Princeton University Press From award-winning literary scholar Robert Alter, a masterful exploration of how Nabokov used artifice to evoke the dilemmas, pain, and exaltation of the human condition Admirers and detractors of Vladimir Nabokov have viewed him as an ingenious contriver of literary games, teasing and even outsmarting his readers through his self-reflexive artifice and the many codes and puzzles he devises in his fiction. Nabokov himself spoke a number of times about reality as a term that always has to be put in

scare quotes. Consequently, many critics and readers have thought of him as a writer uninterested in the world outside literature. Robert Alter shows how Nabokov was passionately concerned with the real world and its complexities, from love and loss to exile, freedom, and the impact of contemporary politics on our lives. In these illuminating and exquisitely written essays, Alter spans the breadth of Nabokov's writings, from his memoir, lectures, and short stories to major novels such as *Lolita*. He demonstrates how the self-reflexivity of Nabokov's fiction becomes a vehicle for expressing very real concerns. What emerges is a portrait of a brilliant stylist who is at once serious and playful, who cared deeply about human relationships and the burden of loss, and who was acutely sensitive to the ways political ideologies can distort human values. Offering timeless insights into literature's most fabulous artificer, Nabokov and the Real World makes an elegant and compelling case for Nabokov's relevance today. *Selected Letters*,

#### 1940–1977 Spectra

The novel is the story of Dreyer, a wealthy and boisterous proprietor of a men's clothing emporium store. Ruddy, self-satisfied, and thoroughly masculine, he is perfectly repugnant to his exquisite but cold middle-class wife Martha. Attracted to his money but repelled by his oblivious passion, she longs for their nephew instead, the myopic Franz. Newly arrived in Berlin, Franz soon repays his uncle's condescension in his aunt's bed.

#### Nabokov's Fifth Arc

Vintage

"Wonderful, compulsively readable, delicious" personal correspondences, spanning decades in the life and literary career of the author of *Lolita* (The Washington Post Book World). An icon of twentieth-century literature, Vladimir Nabokov was a novelist, poet, and playwright, whose personal life was a fascinating story in itself. This collection of more than four hundred letters chronicles the author's career, recording his struggles in the publishing world, the battles over *Lolita*, and his relationship with his wife, among other subjects, and gives a surprising look at the

personality behind the creator of such classics as *Pale Fire* and *Pnin*. "Dip in anywhere, and delight follows." —John Updike Severed Princeton University Press

THERE have appeared lately a whole series of descriptions of the dreadful catastrophe which has overtaken the Republic of the Southern Cross. They are strikingly various, and give many details of a manifestly fantastic and improbable character. Evidently the writers of these descriptions have lent a too ready ear to the narratives of the survivors from Star City (Zvezdny), the inhabitants of which, as is common knowledge, were all stricken with a psychical distemper. For that reason we consider it opportune to give an account here of all the reliable evidence which we have as yet of this tragedy of the Southern Pole. The Republic of the Southern Cross came into being some forty years ago, as a development from three hundred steel works established in the Southern Polar regions. In a circular note sent to each and every Government of the whole world, the new state expressed its pretensions to all lands, whether

mainland or island, within the limits of the Antarctic circle, as also all parts of these lands stretching beyond the line. It announced its readiness to purchase from the various other states affected the lands which they considered to be under their special protectorate. The pretensions of the new Republic did not meet with any opposition on the part of the fifteen great powers of the world. Debateable points concerning certain islands lying entirely outside the Polar circle, but closely related to the Southern Polar state were settled by special treaties. On the fulfilment of the various formalities the Republic of the Southern Cross was received into the family of world states, and its representatives were recognised by all Governments. The chief city of the Republic, having the name of Zvezdny, was situated at the actual Pole itself. At that imaginary point where the earth's axis passes and all earthly meridians become one, stood the Town Hall, and the roof with its pointed towers looked upon the nadir of the heavens. The streets of the town extended along meridians

from the Town Hall and these meridians were intersected by other streets in concentric circles. The height of all the buildings was the same, as was also their external appearance. There were no windows in the walls, as all the houses were lit by electricity and the streets were lighted by electricity. Because of the severity of the climate, an impenetrable and opaque roof had been built over the town, with powerful ventilators for a constant change of air. These localities of the globe have but one day in six months, and one long night also of six months, but the streets of Zvezdny were always lighted by a bright and even light. In the same way in all seasons of the year the temperature of the streets was kept at one and the same height. According to the last census the population of Zvezdny had reached two and a half millions. The whole of the remaining population of the Republic, numbering fifty millions, were concentrated in the neighbourhood of the ports and factories. These other points were also marked by the settlement of millions of people in towns which in external

characteristics were reminiscent of Zvezdny. Thanks to a clever application of electric power, the entrance to the local havens remained open all the year round. Overhead electric railways connected the most populated parts of the Republic, and every day tens of thousands of people and millions of kilogrammes of material passed along these roads from one town to another. The interior of the country remained uninhabited. Travellers looking out of the train window saw before them only monotonous wildernesses, white in winter, and overgrown with wretched grass during the three months of summer. Wild animals had long since been destroyed, and for human beings there was no means of sustenance. The more remarkable was the hustling life of the ports and industrial centres. In order to give some understanding of the life, it is perhaps enough to say that of late years about seven-tenths of the whole of the world's output of metal has come from the State mines of the Republic.

*Pnin* Henry Holt and Company  
In this collection of interviews, articles, and

editorials, Nabokov ranges over his life, art, education, politics, literature, movies, and modern times, among other subjects. Strong Opinions offers his trenchant, witty, and always engaging views on everything from the Russian Revolution to the correct pronunciation of Lolita.

**Letters to Véra** Vintage Vladimir Nabokov, bilingual writer of dazzling masterpieces, is a phenomenon that both resists and requires contextualization. This book challenges the myth of Nabokov as a sole genius who worked in isolation from his surroundings, as it seeks to anchor his work firmly within the historical, cultural, intellectual and political contexts of the turbulent twentieth century. Vladimir Nabokov in Context maps the ever-changing sites, people, cultures and ideologies of his itinerant life which shaped the production and reception of his work. Concise and lively essays by leading scholars reveal a complex relationship of mutual influence between Nabokov's work and his environment. Appealing to a wide community of literary scholars this timely companion to

Nabokov's writing offers new insights and approaches to one of the most important, and yet most elusive writers of modern literature.

*Nabokov's Otherworld* Random House Written in Berlin in 1934, *Invitation to a Beheading* contains all the surprise, excitement and magical intensity of a work created in two brief weeks of sustained inspiration. It takes us into the fantastic prison-world of Cincinnatus, a man condemned to death and spending his last days in prison not quite knowing when the end will come. Nabokov described the book as 'a violin in a void. The worldling will deem it a trick. Old men will hurriedly turn from it to regional romances and the lives of public figures ... The evil-minded will perceive in little Emmie a sister of little Lolita ... But I know a few readers who will jump up, ruffling their hair'.

Vladimir Nabokov in Context Vintage In *City of Saints and Madmen*, Jeff VanderMeer has reinvented the literature of the fantastic. You hold in your hands an invitation to a place unlike any you've ever visited—an invitation delivered by one of our

most audacious and astonishing literary magicians. City of elegance and squalor. Of religious fervor and wanton lusts. And everywhere, on the walls of courtyards and churches, an incandescent fungus of mysterious and ominous origin. In Ambergris, a would-be suitor discovers that a sunlit street can become a killing ground in the blink of an eye. An artist receives an invitation to a beheading—and finds himself enchanted. And a patient in a mental institution is convinced he's made up a city called Ambergris, imagined its every last detail, and that he's really from a place called Chicago.... By turns sensuous and terrifying, filled with exotica and eroticism, this interwoven collection of stories, histories, and "eyewitness" reports invokes a universe within a puzzlebox where you can lose—and find—yourself again. From the Trade Paperback edition. Nabokov and the Novel Cambridge University Press In an unnamed dream country, the young man Cincinnatus C. is condemned to death by beheading for "gnostical



turpitude," an imaginary crime that defies definition. Cincinnatus spends his last days in an absurd jail, where he is visited by chimerical jailers, an executioner who masquerades as a fellow prisoner, and by his in-laws, who lug their furniture with them into his cell. When Cincinnatus is led out to be executed, he simply wills his executioners out of existence: they disappear, along with the whole world they inhabit.

*Invitation to a Beheading*  
Vintage

The annotated text of this modern classic. It assiduously illuminates the extravagant wordplay and the frequent literary allusions, parodies, and cross-references. Edited with a preface, introduction and notes by Alfred Appel, Jr.

**Glory** Vintage

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*The Annotated Lolita*

Princeton University Press  
Like Kafka's *The Castle*, *Invitation to a Beheading* embodies a vision of a bizarre and irrational world. In an unnamed dream country, the young man Cincinnatus C. is condemned to death by beheading for "gnostical turpitude," an imaginary crime that defies definition. Cincinnatus

spends his last days in an absurd jail, where he is visited by chimerical jailers, an executioner who masquerades as a fellow prisoner, and by his in-laws, who lug their furniture with them into his cell. When Cincinnatus is led out to be executed, he simply wills his executioners out of existence: they disappear, along with the whole world they inhabit.

*Pale Fire* Northwestern University Press  
First publication of an index-card diary in which Nabokov recorded sixty-four dreams and subsequent daytime episodes, allowing the reader a glimpse of his innermost life.

*Ada, or Ardor* Vintage  
Winner of the 2012 Man Booker Prize Winner of the 2012 Costa Book of the Year Award The sequel to Hilary Mantel's 2009 Man Booker Prize winner and New York Times bestseller, *Wolf Hall* delves into the heart of Tudor history with the downfall of Anne Boleyn. Though he battled for seven years to marry her, Henry is disenchanted with Anne Boleyn. She has failed to give him a son and her sharp intelligence and audacious will alienate his old friends and the noble families of

England. When the discarded Katherine dies in exile from the court, Anne stands starkly exposed, the focus of gossip and malice. At a word from Henry, Thomas Cromwell is ready to bring her down. Over three terrifying weeks, Anne is ensnared in a web of conspiracy, while the demure Jane Seymour stands waiting her turn for the poisoned wedding ring. But Anne and her powerful family will not yield without a ferocious struggle. Hilary Mantel's *Bring Up the Bodies* follows the dramatic trial of the queen and her suitors for adultery and treason. To defeat the Boleyns, Cromwell must ally with his natural enemies, the papist aristocracy. What price will he pay for Anne's head? *Bring Up the Bodies* is one of The New York Times' 10 Best Books of 2012, one of Publishers Weekly's Top 10 Best Books of 2012 and one of The Washington Post's 10 Best Books of 2012

**Invitation to a**

**Beheading** Vintage

*Glory* is the wryly ironic story of Martin Edelweiss, a twenty-two-year-old Russian émigré of no account, who is in love with a girl who refuses to marry him. Convinced

that his life is about to be wasted and hoping to impress his love, he embarks on a "perilous, daredevil project"--an illegal attempt to re-enter the Soviet Union, from which he and his mother had fled in 1919. He succeeds--but at a terrible cost.

*The Republic of the Southern Cross and other Stories* Vintage  
Vladimir Nabokov described the literature course he taught at

Cornell as "a kind of detective investigation of the mystery of literary structures." Leona Toker here pursues a similar investigation of the enigmatic structures of Nabokov's own fiction. According to Toker, most previous critics stressed either Nabokov's concern with form or the humanistic side of his works, but rarely if ever the two together. In sensitive and revealing

readings of ten novels, Toker demonstrates that the need to reconcile the human element with aesthetic or metaphysical pursuits is a constant theme of Nabokov's and that the tension between technique and content is itself a key to his fiction. Written with verve and precision, Toker's book begins with *Invitation to a Beheading* and follows the circular pattern that is one of her subject's own favored devices.