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Title: Dead Souls in Nabokov's Pnin

Abstract:

Nabokov always denied that he was influenced by Gogol. However, it was immediately after the wide commemoration of 100th Anniversary of Gogol's death by Russian emigrants all over the world – from New York to China when Nabokov started his novel Pnin and even used this event as narrator's memory of accidental meeting with Prof. Pnin in New York: "We had come from our respective colleges to participate in a literary and artistic programme before a large emigrant audience in downtown New York on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of a great writer's death" (Pnin, Chapter 7, part 5). Nabokov inhabited his novel with Russian "dead souls". Some of them were ghosts from Pnin's former life, like his parents, Baltic aunt, former girl Mira Belochkina; some were murdered people as Tsar's Privy Counselor, liberal father of Ivan Bednyashkin, etc. Russian tradition of religion philosophy started from A.T.Bolotov, who served as a translator and secretary in the office of N.A. Korf, Nabokov's paternal great-great-grandfather, till the philosophers of Russian white emigration like I.A. Ilyin, also mentioned in novel. Nabokov ironically rephrases Orthodox Creed, and let the souls of the dead "formed committees and these, in continuous session, attended to the destinies of the quick" (chapter 5, part 5). At the same time, the "dead souls" not only refers to physically dead persons, this is also Nabokov's metaphor for lack of spirituality among Pnin's colleagues. And only one alive "soul" belongs to Prof. Pnin, who tried to protect his personality by detachment from the emigrants' societies as well as from academician circles: "One of the main characteristics of life is discreteness. ..Man exists only insofar as he is separated from his surroundings." (Chapter 1, part 2). In Pnin Nabokov opposed "dead souls" to souls of the dead.