

Nabokov

RUSS 268/ENGL 268 - Prof. Julia Chadaga
Tues/Thurs 10:00-11:40 – HUM 216

“A colored spiral in a small ball of glass,
this his how I see my life.”



There is a risk in studying Vladimir Nabokov, as those who have can attest. At first, you find he is an author who understands the simple pleasures of the novel. He crafts wondrously strange stories—often detective stories—in language often so arresting you may find yourself wanting to read passages aloud to passers-by. Then, you may discover within the novel little hints, here and there, of a hidden structure of motifs. The hints are in the synaesthetic colors of sound, in the patterns on the wings of butterflies, in the tremble of first love, in shadows and reflections, in the etymologies of words. Soon the reader has become a detective as well, linking the recurring motifs, finding clues are everywhere. By then it is too late. The risk in studying Nabokov is that you may not see the world the same way again.

Nabokov's life is itself remarkable. He was born into Russian nobility, but fled with his family to Europe after the 1917 Revolution. His father took a bullet intended for another. After his education in England, he moved to Berlin, and then to Paris, where advancing German troops triggered another flight, this time to the United States. He was not only an accomplished poet, novelist, and translator, but also a lepidopterist (he first classified the endangered Minnesota butterflies shown on this poster). Nabokov found and conveyed both the precision of poetry and the excitement of discovery in his art, scientific work, and life.

In this course, we will read a representative selection of both his Russian (in translation) and English language novels, including *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*, two of the finest novels of the 20th century.

