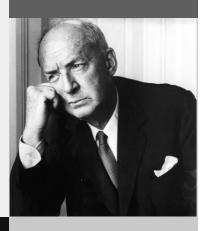
Despair

"I can readily imagine what Pushkin might have said to his trembling paraphrasts; but I also know how pleased and excited I would have been in 1935 had I been able to foreread this 1965 version. The ecstatic love of a young writer for the old writer he will be someday is ambition in its most laudable form. This love is not reciprocated by the older man..."

—Vladimir Nabokov



Mr. Querino | Postmodernism Spring 2015



"The spirit of parody always goes along with genuine poetry."

—Vladimir Nabokov

Name	Date
ESSENTIAL (	QUESTIONS
Who was Vladimir Nabokov?	
Poe, but he also claimed in his r Poe's influence on Nabokov's we	v freely admitted to a boyhood enthusiasm for Edgar Allan maturity to have set aside "Edgar Poe" as a faded favorite. ork, however, seems much more pronounced than the ere do we see traces of Poe's writing in <i>Despair?</i>
What is German Expressionism Nabokov when he was writing De	? How might this artistic movement have influenced espair?
How does Nabokov's writing and	ticipate the transition from modernism to postmodernism?
What is structural irony (or drawn Nabokov sustain structural iron	matic irony as it is sometimes referred to)? How does y throughout the novel?

WHAT'S IN A NAME?
In the fall of 1965, Robert Hughes met with Vladimir Nabokov to tape an interview for the Television 13 Educational Program in New York. At their initial meetings, Nabokov read from prepared cards, and part of that first interview is given below.
Question: There is occasionally confusion about the pronunciation of your last name. How does one pronounce it correctly?
It is indeed a tricky name. It is often misspelt, because the eye tends to regard the "a" of the first syllable as a misprint and then tries to restore the symmetrical sequence by triplicating the "o"—filling up the row of circles, so to speak, as in a game of crosses and naughts. Nobow-cough. How ugly, how wrong. Every author whose name is fairly often mentioned in periodicals develops a bird-watcher's or caterpillar-picker's knack when scanning an article. But in my case I always get caught by the word "nobody" when capitalized at the beginning of a sentence. As to pronunciation, Frenchmen of course say Nabokoff, with the accent on the last syllable. Englishmen say Nabokov, accent on the first, and Italians say Nabokov, accent in the middle, as Russians also do. Na-bo-kov. A heavy open "o" as in "Knickerbocker." My New England ear is not offended by the long elegant middle "o" of Nabokov as delivered in American academies. The awful "Na-bah-kov" is a despicable gutterism. Well, you can make your choice now. Incidentally, the first name is pronounced Vladeemer—rhyming with "redeemer"—not Vladimir rhyming with Faddimere (a place in England, I think).
Working with members of your group, practice pronouncing "Vladimir Nabokov" with the different accents listed above. Does the author ever actually reveal how to say his name? If so, please spell it out phonetically below. Why does Nabokov take so long to answer a seemingly simple question?

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS
Stream of consciousness was a phrase used by William James in his <i>Principles of Psychology</i> (1890) to describe the unbroken flow of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings in the waking mind; it has since been adopted to describe a narrative method in modern fiction. As it has been refined since the 1920s, stream of consciousness is the name applied specifically to a mode of narration that undertakes to reproduce, without a narrator's intervention, the ful spectrum and continuous flow of a character's mental process, in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations. The best way to understand this process is to attempt it yourself. Tak ten minutes and write a brief narrative using stream of consciousness. Describe everything that runs through your mind in these ten minutes. Even though you are describing you own thoughts and visions, your writing can be in the first or third person. Stream of consciousness should encompass all of your thoughts, however random, but the scattered images should form a unified narrative. Unless you can prove you are insane, which Joseph Heller warns us is quite difficult, your thoughts inevitably lead to some logical conclusion or resolution.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## VOCABULARY

These words which appear in *Despair* have been identified as words or derivatives of words that have appeared on past SAT tests. The vocabulary words are listed here in the order in which they appear in the novel.

- I. <u>Sonorous</u> adjective imposingly deep and full; capable of producing a deep or ringing sound.
- 2. <u>Solecism</u> noun a grammatical mistake in speech or writing.
- 3. <u>Laudable</u> adjective deserving praise and commendation.
- 4. <u>Sheepish</u> adjective showing embarrassment from shame or a lack of self-confidence.
- 5. <u>Irrevocable</u> *adjective* not able to be changed, reversed, or recovered; final.
- 6. <u>Languid</u> *adjective* displaying or having a disinclination for physical exertion or effort; slow and relaxed.
- 7. <u>Billow</u> *verb* fill with air and swell outward.
- 8. <u>Digression</u> noun a temporary departure from the main subject in speech or writing.
- 9. <u>Fastidious</u> adjective very attentive to and concerned about accuracy and detail.
- 10. <u>Prig</u> noun a self-righteously moralistic person who behaves as if superior to others.
- II. <u>Sanguine</u> noun a blood-red color.
- 12. <u>Decrepit</u> adjective elderly and infirm; worn out or ruined
- 13. <u>Brooding</u> *adjective* showing deep unhappiness of thought; appearing darkly menacing.
- 14. <u>Askance</u> adverb with an attitude or look of suspicion or disapproval.
- 15. <u>Loath</u> *adjective* reluctant; unwilling.
- 16. <u>Fallacious</u> adjective based on a mistaken belief.
- 17. <u>Mercurial</u> adjective subject to sudden or unpredictable changes of mood.
- 18. <u>Mar</u> *verb* impair the appearance of; disfigure.
- 19. <u>Bourgeois</u> adjective of or characteristic of the middle class, typically with reference to its perceived materialistic values or conventional attitudes.
- 20. <u>Loathe</u> verb feel intense dislike or disgust for.
- 21. <u>Ghastly</u> adjective causing great horror or fear; frightful or macabre.
- 22. <u>Portend</u> *verb* be a sign or warning that something, especially something momentous or calamitous, is likely to happen.
- 23. <u>Exquisite</u> adjective extremely beautiful and, typically, delicate.
- 24. <u>Aberration</u> *noun* a departure from what is normal, usual, or expected, typically one that is unwelcome.
- 25. <u>Despair</u> noun the complete loss or absence of hope.

## WEEK TWO GROUP WORK

Prepare a brief presentation for the rest of the class (including the students who read We Have Always Lived in the Castle) explaining the postmodern aspects of Vladimir Nabokov's work. You should have at least one visual aid and each member of the group should take part in the discussion. Your presentation, including time for questions and answers, should be about five minutes in length. Here are some ideas for you to consider:

- Ambiguity/Closure Why does Hermann fail to explain to readers exactly who Orlovius is earlier in the novel? What about the ending of the novel... what happens? Was this whole novel an April fool's day joke on us?
- **Fiction/Real World** Despite being a mostly playful, comedic novel about murder, could this book have a serious message? Why might the book have been banned in the Soviet Union?
- Unreliable Narrator What parts of Hermann Karlovich's story can we trust?
- Antihero How is Hermann Karlovich different from traditional protagonists?
- **Deconstruction** How does the structure of the novel intentionally work against itself to deconstruct the crime/detective genre?
- **Doppelgänger** Are Hermann and Felix doubles? How does Nabokov show the postmodern practice of pastiche in *Despair*?
- **Metafiction** How does Vladimir Nabokov self-consciously and systematically draw attention to *Despair* as an artifact by writing about the process of writing?