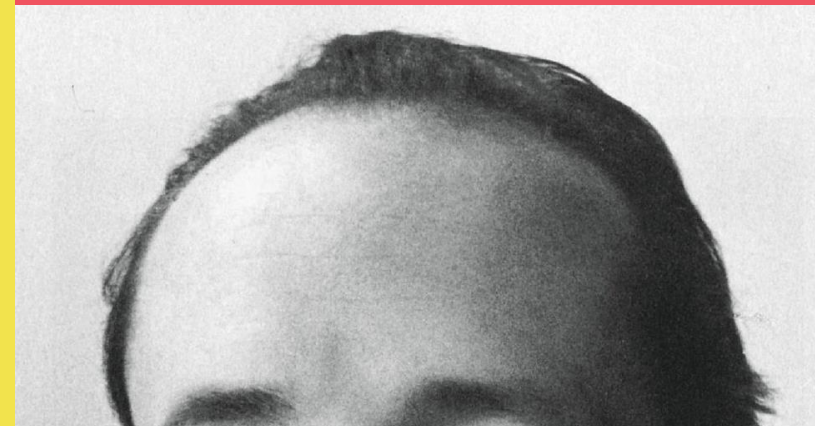


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Despair

“On top of all this I
present a fine case of
colored hearing. Perhaps
‘hearing’ is not quite
accurate, since the color
sensation seems to be
produced by the very act
of my orally forming a
given letter while I
imagine its outline.”
—Vladimir Nabokov



VLADIMIR NABOKOV



“Hermann and Humbert are alike only in the sense that two dragons painted by the same artist at different periods of his life resemble each other. Both are neurotic scoundrels, yet there is a green lane in Paradise where Humbert is permitted to wander at dusk once a year; but Hell shall never parole Hermann.”

“Adjacent tints do not merge, and diphthongs do not have special colors of their own, unless represented by a single character in some other language.”

—Vladimir Nabokov

In *Lolita* (1955) Humbert Humbert, a literary scholar, has harbored a long-time obsession with young girls, or “nymphets.” He suggests that this was caused by the premature death of a childhood sweetheart, Annabel Leigh—the character was inspired by Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “Annabel Lee.” After an unsuccessful marriage and a brief period in a mental hospital after a breakdown, Humbert moves to the small New England town of Ramsdale to write. He rents a room in the house of Charlotte Haze, a widow. Humbert also meets her 12-year-old daughter, Dolores with whom he immediately becomes infatuated, partly due to her uncanny resemblance to Annabel; he privately nicknames her “Lolita.”



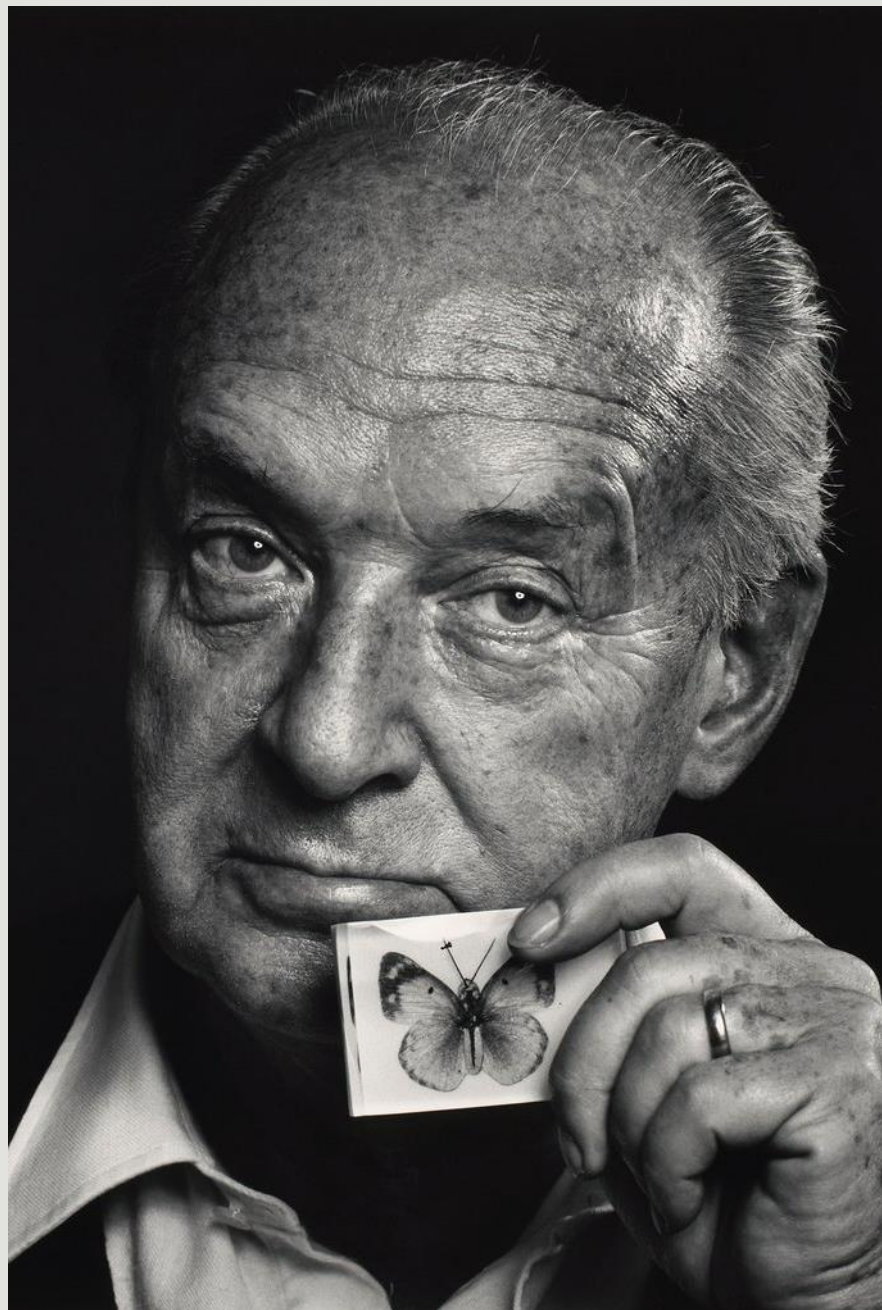
Despair: Chapters 1-2



Expressionism refers to a movement that flourished in the first twenty-five years of the twentieth century, not only in the literary arts but in dance and painting as well. The expressionists lived and worked in Berlin, which is of course Hermann's city too. The expressionist artist or writer undertakes to express a personal vision—usually a troubled or tensely emotional vision—of human life and human society. This is done by exaggerating and distorting what, according to the norms of artistic realism, are objective features of the world, and by embodying violent extremes of mood and feeling. The flexible possibilities of the medium made the motion picture an important vehicle of German expressionism. *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* is a 1922 German Expressionist horror film, directed by F.W. Murnau. The film, shot in 1921 and released in 1922, was an unauthorized adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, with names and other details changed because the studio could not obtain the rights to the novel. Stoker's heirs sued over the adaptation, and a court ruling ordered that all copies of the film be destroyed. However, one print of *Nosferatu* survived, and the film came to be regarded as an influential masterpiece of cinema.

Nabokov uses the Foreword to encourage certain kinds of readings and discourage others. He makes a special point of rejecting one possible influence on his writing by scorning any links between him and the German Expressionists. Is this more subtle misdirection on Nabokov's part?

Review chapters one through five looking for specific examples of expressionist influence. Write down the page numbers and be prepared to share your examples with the class.



Despair: Chapter Five

There are many entertaining
conversations throughout the
book, and the final scene with
Felix in the wintry woods is of
course great fun...

Works Cited

Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Heinle & Heinle, 1999. Print.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Despair*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1966. Print.

