

The Theatricalization of Reality and Metatheatre of Nabokov the Playwright

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Abstract:

This article addresses Vladimir Nabokov's conception of theatricality in relation to drama as a literary form and a stage performance. The research diagnoses Nabokov's understanding of theatricality and its realization in the main Nabokov's plays. The study focuses on Nabokov's special methods of emphasizing the content, expressing the author's presence, and ironizing towards aesthetic and ethical phenomena. The literary devices of the theatricalization of reality and 'theatre within the theatre', among others, have been studied in the plays *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn* (1924), *The Man from the USSR* (1926), *The Event* (1938), and *The Waltz Invention* (1938). These dramatic works include the whole range of the attributes of the theatricalized reality and metatheatre: sporadically appearing scenes of an 'internal' play, duality of characters and performance of several roles by the same hero, characters' attempts to foretell the course of action, direct the play, or correct the 'acting' of the other heroes, the use of theatrical attributes and others.

Keywords: Nabokov, Drama, Theatricalization, Metatheatre, Duality.

1. Introduction

Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) had a special understanding of living nature, which he considered theatrical by implication. In the writer's opinion, it inheres affectation, virtuosity, and artistry. Nabokov saw bright manifestations of this artistry in the mystery of mimicry, which he had always been captivated and fascinated by. In his novel *Speak, Memory*, a literary mini-research is dedicated to the problem of mimicry as the theatricalization of life. With details, observed in the 'living life', Nabokov broke with one of Darwin's main postulates, proclaiming that 'Natural selection' [...] could not explain the miraculous coincidence of imitative aspects and imitative behavior, nor could one appeal to the theory of 'the struggle for life' when a protective device was carried to a point of mimetic subtlety, exuberance, and luxury far in excess of a predator's power of appreciation. (Nabokov, 1966/1989, p. 125)

The artistry of wildlife was studied by Nabokov (1966/1989) in the example of a butterfly: "When a butterfly has to look like a leaf, not only are all the details of a leaf beautifully rendered but markings mimicking grub-bored holes are generously thrown in" (p. 125).

Vladimir Nabokov's unique attitude to reality is one of the subjects of Vladimir Alexandrov's study (1991), which insists that Nabokov's idea of 'natural' and 'artificial' presumes the perception of nature, reality, as a creation of a 'supreme consciousness'. This makes it the creator's product, the work of art, while the actual artist is seen as God's rival. Moreover, some 'natural creations' are brought to such perfection that they go beyond the principles of the mere struggle for survival in the environment. Alexandrov (1991) precisely noticed that Nabokov "completely redefines the terms nature and artifice into synonyms for each other" (p. 17). That is why Nabokov's understanding of artificiality differed from the conventional one, as he saw art in nature itself. Nabokov (1966/1989) said, "I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception" (p. 125).

Apparently, Vladimir Nabokov borrowed his view of wildlife as theatrical from Nikolai Evreinov (1879-1953) (Alexandrov, 1991, p. 227). Evreinov also found elements of the theatricalization in nature, watching butterflies that pretended

to be a spot on the tree trunk, and drew an analogy between God and a human, with the attempts of the latter to become the ultimate authority in the theatre. Nabokov expanded these attempts from the theatre up to the artistic work in general. Evreinov rejected realistic theatre, insisting on the absolute artificiality of the stage performance, which was close to Nabokov's views. According to some findings, in Berlin of 1925, Nabokov played the role of Evreinov in the amateur trial on his play *The Chief Thing* (1921) and asserted his hero's idea that happiness could be reached only if life was turned into the theatre (Tolstoy, 1990, p. 22).

Alexandrov's observations on Nabokov's vision of the theatricalization and artificiality of life require further development. Alexandrov claims that in Nabokov's works the act of the theatricalization of life (according to Evreinov) hardly resonates at all, but the plays *The Man from the USSR*, *The Event* and *The Waltz Invention*, which containing the elements of 'theatre within the theatre' and doll-like characters, are examples of the theatricalization of reality in Nabokov's drama.

Dmitri Babich (1999) wrote a paper on the problem of the theatricalization of reality in Nabokov's novelistic works. Babich expresses the opinion that theatricalization is immanent to the whole of Nabokov's creative work, and it is justified. He mentions about *Invitation to Beheading* (1935) and the other works of Nabokov, remarking that "here we deal with transferred into book pages 'theatre within the theatre' or 'metatheatre', the fundamental nature of which is that the part of actors on the stage play the role of spectators of the other, 'inner', stage performance"¹ (Babich, 1999, p. 143).

The term metatheatre was introduced by Lionel Abel in 1963 meaning "theatre which is centred around theatre and therefore 'speaks' about itself, 'represents' itself" (Pavis, 1999, p. 210). Patrice Pavis's dictionary (1999) clarifies that "this phenomenon does not necessarily involve an autonomous play contained within another, as in the 'play within the play'. All that is required is that the presented reality appears to be one that is already theatrical" (p. 210). The form of metatheatre or 'theatre within the theatre' appeared in the 16th century and was related to a baroque worldview in which, according to William Shakespeare, "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players" (1623/2000, II.vii.138-139), and life, as per Pedro

Calderón de la Barca, “is a dream” (1635/2004). Theatricalization is opposed to naturalism, which strives for elimination of all the traces of conventions. On the contrary, theatricalization uncovers conventions and devices, which in the metatheatre reduplicate themselves due to the inner play and, owing to this doubled theatricalization, the external level acquires the status of enhanced reality: the illusion of illusion becomes reality. Meanwhile, ‘theatre within theatre’ “continues to be too closely tied to a thematic study of life as a stage” (Pavis, 1999, p. 210).

Nabokov, with his conception of the theatricalization of life and intentional uncovering of theatrical devices and stage conventions in use, came into contradiction with himself. Nabokov (1984a) enunciated well-known statements in which he considered the mixture of actors and audience in the theatre inappropriate; the same was the case for the violation of the convention of the Fourth Wall (p. 316-317). In the meantime, the author was constantly unveiling his own creations, like a magician revealing the hidden mechanics after showing successful tricks. It is relevant to speak here about the eternal battle of two theatrical conceptions, according to which “a spectator should forget that he is in the theatre—a spectator should always feel that he is in the theatre”² (Lotman, 2005, p. 605). Where did Nabokov take his own lead from? From the perspective of the writer’s views expressed in his lectures on theatre (Nabokov, 1984a, 1984d), as well as the content of his plays, it is possible to note that Nabokov pursued a difficult artistic aim: to immerse the audience into the inimitable world of art, fiction, to force spectators to solve the tasks of psychological, symbolic, allusive and game lines. Adding to that, laughing at the entire seriousness of the course of action, Nabokov wanted to show his audience masterly devices that helped him to construct the play.

Vladislav Khodasevich (1937/2000) was one of the first critics who noticed the tendency to uncovering the devices in Nabokov’s texts. He said that the writer, as an illusionist, “having astonished the audience, right there shows a laboratory of his miracles”³ (p. 222). Nabokov’s artistic devices, according to Khodasevich, “hopscoching between characters, execute the great work: saw, cut, nail, daub, in full view of the audience building and dismantling the decorations in which the play is performed”⁴ (Khodasevich, 1937/2000, p. 222). Nabokov awarded his heroes with the same desire for disclosure, and they act as if they are aware of their artificiality. Moreover, they often try and assert and at the same time claim their authorship in a novel or a play, and attempt trying to stage-manage or prompt the course of action for other characters. They can point out the lack of quality of the performed episode to themselves or to another character, correct cues, distribute roles, and comment on the course of a play.

Savely Senderovich and Yelena Shvarts (2000) mentioned the theatricalization of Nabokov’s artistic world, which contains “such strange events as transformation of one character into another, extortion for acting, circus acts, fragmentation of decorations, author’s intrusion, and others”⁵ (p. 30). Along with this, according to Senderovich & Shvarts, deformation is unknown in Nabokov’s world. That is because the reality, in which all these events are considered to be normal, is named the theatre. The scholars are not describing a realistic theatre, but a circus, commedia dell’arte, a puppet theatre, Petrushka theatre and a show-booth integrated into “a unified culture of theatricality without boundaries”⁶ (Senderovich & Shvarts, 2000, p. 31).

There is an opinion that, owing to the introduction of the inner play or its elements into the actual play, the sense of reality in the main action is intensified. This was the subject of Lotman’s study (2005), who examined the structure of the ‘text within the text’ model, stating that “the double coding of certain parts of the text, which is equaled to artistic convention, results in that the primary layer of the text is perceived as the ‘real’ one”⁷ (p. 432).

It is hard to assume that Nabokov intended to add a ‘realistic flavor’ to his works. Nevertheless, this approach is justified, but with some reservations. Creating a double-world or multi-world in his works, Nabokov built layers of reality vertically, where at the highest level there is the author and a sophisticated reader, guessing and learning. At the second, lower level, the character plays the role of the author, evaluates and directs the ‘work’ of the other heroes. At the lowest level, heroes cannot evaluate their actions as play performers because the play appears to be the reality for them. With such a text structure, the emphasis lies on the motif of game and a parodic, theatricalized meaning of the work.

2. Methods and Materials

The research focuses on Vladimir Nabokov’s conception of theatricality, which in the author’s aesthetics is mainly represented by means of the theatricalization of reality and ‘theatre within the theatre’. Despite being one of the aesthetic and philosophical fundamentals of Nabokov’s creative work, his conception of theatricality has not been completely studied yet. In monographs and articles, dedicated to his novelistic works, there are records about Nabokov’s ‘theatre within the theatre’, but these observations have not grown into a comprehensive study of Nabokov’s dramatic oeuvre. The theatricalization of artistic reality in Nabokov’s prose was mentioned by Alexandrov (1991), Babich (1999), Senderovich & Shvarts (2000), Toker (2001) and others. The problem of the theatricalization of reality in some of Nabokov’s dramatic works was studied by Frank (2012). However, yet again, Frank’s primary focus was on Nabokov’s novels and short stories.

The aim of this paper is to study theoretical principles, with the help of which Nabokov developed the theatricalization of reality, conveyed his views, and realized a number of the other artistic purposes in his dramatic works. Nabokov’s dramaturgy is taken as a significant initial part, which contains the essential artistic devices and principles of mature Nabokov the novelist. The method of a functional formalist text analysis is employed as the primary tool accompanied by the elements of psychoanalytic and comparative approaches with references to the corresponding historical, philosophical and literary context. Nabokov’s dramatic oeuvre, including such artistically elaborated plays as *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn*, *The Man from the USSR*, *The Event*, and *The Waltz Invention*, serve as the material of the research.

3. ‘Theatre within the Theatre’ in Nabokov’s Plays

The metatheatrical devices are absent from Nabokov’s early plays. The only exception is the content-related element in the play *The Grand-dad* (1923). In the story of *Passerby*, the scaffold is similitized to the stage and the whole narration about the unaccomplished execution—to an individual play within the main play. Afterwards, the interrupted scene of this marginal play is fulfilled with deviations (exchange in roles between the executioner and the victim) in the ‘real’ play.

3.1. The Tragedy of Mr. Morn:

The Tragedy of Mr. Morn lacks a developed ‘play within the play’. However, metatheatre is realized through allusions to the other well-known plays—Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1604), *King Lear* (1606) and Pushkin’s “little tragedies” (1830) (Karshan, 2013, p. 13-15). Some theatrical elements found in the dialogues and stage properties also serve this purpose. For instance, *Ganus*, a convict-escapee, before the reception at his wife’s *Midia* house, paints his face as Shakespeare’s *Othello* in order not to be recognized and caught. *Ella*, daughter of *Tremens* the rioter, helps him to put on make-up: “You see, I study at a theatre school, / I have paints and pomades here in seven / different colours... I’ll smear your face in such / a

way that God himself, on Judgement Day, / won't recognize you!" (Nabokov, 1924/2013, p. 13-14). Ella introduces Ganus as an acquaintance and an actor who has not removed his face-paint after theatrical performance. She also gives Ganus another attribute of the theatricalization of life—a wig (Nabokov, 1924/2013, p. 16).

Ella's father, Tremens, a gloomy nunciate of death, prophetically denounces one of the climactic scenes of the play (Ganus's attempt against his rival, runaway Morn), "I dreamt that the King was being strangled / by a colossal negro..." (Nabokov, 1924/2013, p. 14). Later Tremens calls King an actor, meanwhile Ganus names Ella, who helped him to put on face-paint, as Desdemona. Generally, Othello is tragically and comically referenced at various points played here and there throughout the entire Tragedy. After the revealing of her relations with Morn and the first fight between her husband and her lover, Midia shouts at Ganus, "Take this pillow, smother me!" (Nabokov, 1924/2013, p. 47). There is an impression that the characters are aware of their acting, and they, not satisfied with the course of the play created by Nabokov, constantly refer to another classic—Shakespeare, in this particular case.

What impelled Nabokov to include the elements of 'theatre within the theatre' in *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn*? On the one hand, it was the pursuance of irony, as in the scene of Midia's walkoff. Nabokov, ironizing on the matter of melodramatic traditions, together with his hero, put the following words into the mouth of reserved Morn: "According to the rules of separation, / you must still throw over your shoulder the phrase: / 'I curse the day...'" (Nabokov, 1924/2013, p. 103). On the other hand, Nabokov demonstrated the artificiality of reality and a mysterious state with its inhabitants that are all created by king Morn. Shakespearian motives enhance the illiveness of this state. Therefore, Nabokov's understanding of *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and some other renowned plays as "dream-tragedies" (1984d, p. 327) may be referred to his own *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn*.

3.2. The Man from the USSR:

Regarding the Man from the USSR, Brian Boyd (1990) says that "here Nabokov revitalizes the tradition of the play-within-the-play through his film-within-the-play" (p. 265). Indeed, Nabokov's tendency towards the theatricalization of reality, as well as his far from indifferent attitude to the cinema, are reflected in this drama. For the first time, 'play within the play' reveals its nature in a small Oshivenski's underground restaurant. The pub looks like nothing else but stage decorations. Acutely feeling the artificial nature of a small restaurant, Kuznetsoff tells to the owner of the facility that "[a]ll these props are no use" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 41). During the meeting with Taubendorf, Kuznetsoff assumes that he himself underfulfills the role of the red, who has been face-painted as a White Guard: "You'd probably like to see me wearing an operetta sword and gold braid" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 44). Kuznetsoff himself plays two roles: of a 'false' socialist-revolutionary and a 'real white'. The political game is carried into the personal life of a hero, who intentionally performs the role of actress Marianna's lover in a vulgar way for the purpose of protecting his real love, wife Olga Pavlovna, from danger, taking into account his occupation. For his own wife, Kuznetsoff plays a cold and indifferent husband. This role is performed by Kuznetsoff with greater acting skills than the role of a visiting heartbreaker. Such a misbalance is explained by his extremely tender feelings towards Olga Pavlovna and his fear for her destiny. According to Babikov (2008), "starting from *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn*, [...] theatre within the theatre in Nabokov's works becomes one of the means of the effect of theatrical duality"⁸ (p. 35-36). This effect is used in its

entirety in *The Man from the USSR*, in which each character plays two or more roles.

Taubendorf is one of those multiple-role heroes, as he himself admits: "At night I'm a waiter here, and during the day I'm a film extra. Right now they are shooting an idiotic picture about Russia" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 45). His private life also couldn't go without ambiguity. He is Kuznetsoff's friend and, on the other hand, hopelessly in love with his wife. Taubendorf, as some other characters of Nabokov's plays, messes about with the face-paint throughout the entire development of the action: either he has not washed it off or it has to be put on again. During the filming, Taubendorf meets Kuznetsoff and says, "In the meantime I can get my makeup on" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 93), which can be interpreted ambiguously. Taubendorf will make himself up in order to go to the USSR with Kuznetsoff and, on the contrary, —to participate as a background emigrant artist in the film about communists. Later he appears "with a false beard and a Russian peasant shirt and cap" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 95). Heroine Marianna Sergeevna Tal' personifies the platitude of pretence, human imitation, and primitive acting. From the perspective of the realization of 'theatre within the theatre', she represents the most elaborated image, not deprived of parody and the author's laughter. Marianna plays several roles at once. Her first role is a successful talented film actress. In fact, according to the play, Marianna is a cheap mediocre actress, who is easy in her morals. Her second role appears in the film about "the Russian Revolution", as it is named in the play (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 68). Marianna claims that her "part is the most demanding one in the whole film", and continues, "The part of a Communist woman. Abominably difficult part" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 54). She says, "I've got the most demanding part—the whole film hangs on me" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 65). The third role is the role of Kuznetsoff's fatal mistress. But her acting is so bad that the actress completely discloses herself to the reader and the other heroes.

In response to the disgusting acting of Marianna, who represents herself as a heartbreaker ("When I get tired of a lover I drop him like a wilted flower") and asks why Kuznetsoff is constantly silent, he wittily reacts, "Forgot my lines" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 72). This phrase combines irony about Marianna's acting and Kuznetsoff's laughter at himself for being her lover. Marianna's roles mix together on several occasions. For example, simultaneously playing a talented actress with a bright future and a fatal beautiful woman in love, Marianna tells Kuznetsoff: "I'll give up the stage. I'll forget about my talent. I'll go with you" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 98). Later, when Kuznetsoff breaks up with her and rejects such an "alluring proposal", the little actress, realizing her loss, makes a self-revealing statement: "It was playacting. I was just doing a part" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 99). But again, driven by habit, she throws a melodramatic cliché, "I know you'll write anyway, but I'll tear up your letters" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 100). The debunking of fake Marianna's talent occurs immediately after the first show of the film. This film has been produced with Marianna's part in it throughout the whole play: "I saw myself on the screen. It was monstrous" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 106).

A schematic character named the Assistant Director appears in the play for the effect of authenticity of the film set. He is also used as a means of the realization of the author's laughter. Nabokov's irony on the Russian revolution (despite Nabokov's negation of political engagement in his works) goes through the image of the Assistant Director in accord with the author's disapproval of "folk theatre", against which he argued in the lecture *Playwriting* (Nabokov, 1984a, p. 316-317). Assistant Director commands: "People, you're in Russia! In a square! There's an uprising going on! First Group waves their flags! Second Group runs left from the barricade!

Third Group moves forward!" (Nabokov, 1926/1984c, p. 96). This abstract reveals Nabokov's non-acceptance of mass artwork production, which, according to Nabokov, could be created only individually—by a personality, not by a group. The parody on platitudes within art, in particular—in the theatre and cinematograph, is embodied in *The Man from the USSR* through the theatricalization of reality. Primitiveness, the 'unnaturalness' of films, the vulgar perception and superficial demonstration of reality (revolution in Russia), naïve acting (the role of a communist), and massive involvement are in contradiction with Nabokov's aesthetic worldview. The 'internal' play, or a film set, drawn into the main action of *The Man from the USSR*, conceptually complies with the model of dramatic performance characterized in Nabokov's lecture *Playwriting* (1984a), in which it is called a "dreadful farce" (p. 317).

3.3. The Event:

In the Event, metatheatre is embodied in a full measure. Nikolai Anastas'ev (2002) noticed that "The Event is 'theatre within the theatre', if you like—self-disclosure of the theatre, and even more—of life and people"⁹ (p. 116). The elements of 'play within the play' start revealing themselves in the second act. Lyubov', going beyond the limits of her role as Troshcheykin's wife, evaluates the acting of her maidservant Marfa, saying that the latter is "[a]cting the part of a silly harridan" (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 174). Right there her mother, Antonina Pavlovna Opayashin, mentions that "all of this would make a terrific play", and later tries to compose a screenplay to this play:

It could be transferred to the stage with hardly any changes, only a little condensing. The first act would be a morning, such as we had today... Of course, I would replace Ryovshin by some other, less trivial messenger. For example, a comic, red-nosed policeman or a lawyer with a speech impediment. Or else some femme fatale whom Barbashin had abandoned long ago. It could be whipped up with no trouble at all. And then it would start to develop. (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 175-176)

Lyubov', fascinated by her mother's screenplay, concludes in Nikolai Gogol's (1809-1852) manner, "In a word: 'Gentlemen, Gogol's Inspector General has arrived in our town'" (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 176). She asks about the further course of action and pries whether "there [will] be any shooting". Opayashin does not quiet down and makes up a preface to her play: "Perhaps he will commit suicide at your feet" (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 176). In the third act, Lyubov' says to her mother a Pushkinian phrase: "I shall send the nurse with a note in French. I'll fly to him. I'll leave my husband. I'll..." (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 239). And then concludes that this is "a draft for the third act". Thus, Lyubov' and Opayashin, crossing the limits of their roles in a dramatic comedy about Troshcheykin's deadly fear, go to a higher level—the level of authorship—and claim the roles of creators in regard to the other heroes of the play. With the help of his own little 'co-authors' Nabokov insinuates the denouement of his artwork, forcing Lyubov' to quote Barbashin's words prophetically (reference to Chekhov's postulate modified and enriched with Nabokov's irony): "Chekhov said that if there is a rifle on the wall in the first act of the play, it was sure to be fired in the last, but Leonid Victorovich used to say it was bound to misfire" (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 176).

In the third act, Lyubov' tries herself in directing the scene. When maidservant Marfa announces to Lyubov' that she wants to turn in her resignation because she is scared to stay in the Troshcheykins house, Lyubov' blames Marfa for bad acting: "That wasn't a very good performance", she evaluates. Then she teaches her maid good acting: "I'll show you how it ought to be done. 'Have mercy on me... I am a feeble, sickly old woman... I'm all in a funk... The Evil One is on the loose

here...' That is the way. A very common part, actually" (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 219). When Marfa mentions the nature of relations of a goodwife and Ryovshin, Lyubov' again corrects her acting: "Oh no—not like that at all: more tremolo, more indignation. Something about Jezebel", she continues, "A healer, not a doctor. No, I'm definitely not pleased with your acting. I was going to recommend you for the part of a cantankerous biddy, but now I see I can't" (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 219, 220). Thus, Nabokov, by means of Lyubov's image, who directs the staging of a bad play, emphasizes the humorous nature of the state of fear and the collapse of relations in the artist's house. On the other hand, the theatricalization highlights the groundlessness of the family's worries about the main 'event'—their fear of Barbashin, a former Lyubov's fiancé. It is reported that Barbashin has promised to accomplish his act of revenge, has been heard to be released from the prison, but ultimately, he never appears in the play.

Troshcheykin, participating in the 'theatre within the theatre', which was created by his wife and mother-in-law and developed in his comedy directed by his own fear-addled brain, thinks of face-painting before his presumable departure-escape as he has "a beard and a wig left over from our theatre group" (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 185). Face-paint, a beard and a wig are repeatedly used by Nabokov for the purpose of the theatricalization of events depicted in various plays. Face-paint is directly used not only by Troshcheykin, but also by Ganus and Kliyan (instead of face-paint, he has a fake beard and glasses) from *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn* and by Taubendorf from *The Man from the USSR*. Salvator Waltz from *The Waltz Invention* is given a mask.

Troshcheykin's last hope, detective Barboshin (a schematic twin of Barbashin, who does not appear in the play) is described in the author's stage direction as "a detective with a Dostoyevskian flawed soul" having "a tragic actor's head, with long grayish-red hair" (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 240). Having entered Troshcheykin's house, Barboshin commences his tragic role, incessantly contemplating and addressing the family members a la Dostoyevsky's heroes—pathetically and vehemently. Later he is just about to start a story in the style of a narrative tradition of the 19th century, "I was born into a poor family, and my first conscious recollection is—", but the speech is rudely stopped (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 257).

In the Event, there are several heroes claiming the role of a stage director. There is, for instance, Famous Writer invited to Opayashin's name-day. He tries to direct the play in which he stands as a secondary character: "Halt. You've lost the floor. Next", and continues, "Maestro Kuprikov has the floor" (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 207). Famous Writer evaluates not only Opayashin's literary skills, but also the performance of Uncle Paul and artist Kuprikov, "Fine... bravo" (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 208). Moreover, he assumes the role of a panel chair permitting the other characters to have a word or interrupting them or asking if there are those wishing to speak out (Nabokov, 1938/1984b, p. 209-212). Later Nabokov used this form of a farce panel session in the play *The Waltz Invention*.

Consequently, *The Event* is the play in which several heroes enter the level of the authorship and try stage direct the action. Perhaps, that is because they are all somehow related to the arts. Lyubov' is the artist's wife, whilst Opayashin is "a literary mother". The Famous Writer cannot stop creating because he is a writer, even more—a renowned one. Every artist, regardless of the level of their creative achievements, strives for creation, recreation of reality, competition with the play's author in a manner such that the latter competes with the creator of the world. Meanwhile, by means of revealing stage devices, Nabokov attains a comedic nature of the play intertwined with the drama of Troshcheykin's life.

3.4. The Waltz Invention:

The following words by Babich (1999), referred to Nabokov's novel *Invitation to Beheading*, can also be applied to the author's longing for the theatricalization embodied in his play *The Waltz Invention*:

The play within the play' has a very careless stage director, what highlights its irreality [emphasis added] in the view of the 'watching' actors and us—the audience sitting in a theatre [...]. In a seemingly faultlessly operating evil machine, something is always going wrong: stage decorations are not removed on time when scenes change, or actors are out of sync with each other, or stage-props fail¹⁰. (146)

In his paper, Babich (1999) examines the theatricalization of evil in Nabokov's works, by thoroughly analyzing the novel *Invitation to Beheading*, which contains the same artistic devices as the play *The Waltz Invention*. The similarity of these works is found not just in the creation of reality, which is unreal¹¹, malicious, constantly breaking, and sometimes even absurd, but in the content-related sphere directed at revealing a horrible bureaucratic and political machine, which annihilates consciousness and free human thinking.

While reading *The Waltz Invention*, there is an impression that the stage director falls short of actors and distributes several roles to the same person. Schematic characters, the collection of generals, who are named similarly and, consequently, appear to be almost undistinguishable, perform two or more roles. Confusion of names, the doll-like nature of heroes brought up to maximum, present difficulties in the analysis of the play, which embodies the conception of 'theatre within the theatre' and even more— 'theatre of the absurd'.

Almost all the actions of military heroes in *The Waltz Invention* are comic, their movements are angular as if they do not know how to act on the stage and have badly learnt their roles. However, some of these 'absurd' heroes try to direct the play. Waltz considers himself a stage director until the moment of revelation in the denouement of the play. In fact, from the very beginning to the very end, absolute power belongs to Viola Trance¹², who is, according to the author's remark, "a reporter and Waltz's factotum; [...] a smart woman of 30 in black masculine dress Shakespearean-masquerade style" (Nabokov, 1938/1966, p. 3). The main principle of hers is "[I] get everybody keeps his opinion, and let us play" (Nabokov, 1938/1966, p. 30). She is constantly repeating these words. However, everyone plays his own game. Trance dictates the course of action to the military generals, Minister, Colonel and Waltz. As a result, everything happens according to Trance's instructions. As in the novel *Invitation to Beheading*, the theatricalization of action conduces the understanding of obvious sequence of events as unreal. This is one of the devices of Nabokov's dream-seeing reality. Essentially, everything that happens in the play is a dream of insane Waltz, who de facto has been waiting in a line in the Minister's reception room. As in the dream, reality in the play is slanted; the same faces can act as different people, reshuffle, and go beyond control of the one, who actually sees this dream.

4. Conclusion

Summing up what has been discussed, the theatricalization of life, inherent to the whole of Nabokov's creative work, is first significantly manifested in his plays that are taken as an important starting point of Nabokov the novelist. In *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn*, there are elements of the 'theatre within the theatre', while *The Man from the USSR*, *The Event*, and *The Waltz Invention* contain all the main components of the metatheatre. These are sporadically emerging scenes of an 'internal' play, duality of characters and the performance of several roles by the same hero, characters' attempts to foretell the course of action, direct it

and manage the 'acting' of the other heroes, personages using theatrical elements and decorations. In *The Waltz Invention*, the theatricalized reality of the play is brought up to such a grotesque level that 'a play within the play' transforms into 'the theatre of the absurd'.

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- further translated from Russian by the author; the original citations are provided in endnotes. – O. B.).
2. “[з]ритель должен забыть, что он в театре, – зритель должен постоянно чувствовать, что он в театре”.
 3. “поразив зрителя, тут же показывает лабораторию своих чудес”.
 4. “снуга между персонажами, производят огромную работу: пилят, режут, приколачивают, малюют, на глазах у зрителя ставя и разбирая те декорации, в которых разыгрывается пьеса”.
 5. “происходят такие странные события, как превращение одного персонажа в другой, принуждение к исполнению роли, цирковые акты, распадение декораций и вмешательство автора и т. п.”
 6. “единую культуру театральности без берегов”.
 7. “двойная закодированность определенных участков текста, отождествляемая с художественной условностью, приводит к тому, что основное пространство текста воспринимается как ‘реальное’”.
 8. “начиная с “Трагедии господина Морна”, [...] театр в театре становится у Набокова одним из способов создания эффекта театральности двойственности”.
 9. “Событие” – это ‘театр в театре’, если угодно – саморазоблачение театра, а еще больше – жизни и людей”.
 10. “У ‘пьесы в пьесе’ очень небрежный режиссер, и это подчеркивает ее *ирреальность* [emphasis added] и в глазах ‘наблюдающих’ актеров, и в глазах нас, сидящих в зале [...] зрителей. В безукоризненно вроде бы действующей машине зла всегда что-то ломается: то не успеют убрать старые декорации, то несинхронно сработают актеры, то реквизит подведет”.
 11. *Irreality* is a term used in Nabokov studies along with *otherworld* (Alexandrov, 1991), *double-world* (Grishakova, 2006), *dream reality* (Frank, 2012) and others.
 12. In the original Russian version of the play, *Trance* is named as *Сон (Dream – in precise translation into English)* and belongs to the masculine gender.

ENDNOTES

1. “[м]ы здесь имеем дело с перенесенным на страницы книги ‘театром в театре’, или ‘метатеатром’, сущность которого состоит в том, что часть актеров на сцене играет роль зрителей другого, ‘внутреннего’ спектакля” (here and

پوخته :

ئەم توێژینە وەهە، لیکۆلینە وەهە که له تیگە یشتنی فلادیمیر نابوکوف بۆ دراما و بابەتی پە یووست بە شانتۆگەری وەکوو فۆرمیکێ ئە دەبی و ئەدای سەر شانتۆ، له ریگای شیکردنە وەو تیگە یشتنی نووسەر و چۆنییتی ئەو تیگە یشتنە له داراماکانی نابوکوف روون دەکریتە وە. بۆ ئەم مەبەستە چەند نمونە یەك له داراماکانی نووسەر وەکو :

تراژیدیای خاتو مۆرۆن (1924)، پیاویکی خەلکی یەکییتی سوڤییت (1926)، روداوێکە (1938) و داهینانی و لتز (1938)، شی دەکرینە وە.

ئامرازەکانی دراماتیزەکردنی راستی و (شانتۆ لە ناو شانتۆ) که نووسەر بە کار یاندینیت بۆ چەختکردنە وە له ناوەرۆکی دەق و سەلماندنی دەنگی خودی نووسەر تیا یاندو رهخنە گرتن له چەندین دیاردە ی ئیتیکی و جوانگە رایی لیکردا و نە وە. ئەم دەقانە ی نووسەر هەموو چەمکەکانی دراما کردنی ریالییتی و میتا دراما پیشان دە دەن، بۆ نمونە پیشاندانی (درامای ناو دراما)، فرە کەسایە تی، ئە نجامدانی چەندین رۆل له لایەن کاراکتەری سەرەکی ناو دراما، هەروەها هەولەکانی کارەکتەرە که بۆ پیشبینی کردنی روداوێکانی نیو دراما و ئاراستە کردنە وە ی نواندنی ئەکتەرەکانی دیکە ی ناو شانتۆ که هتد.

کی ورد: نابوکوف، دراما، شانتۆ، میتا شانتۆ، دروستکراو، دووفاقی.

الملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث دراسة مفهوم المسرحية لدى فلاديمير نابوكوف فيما يتعلق بالدراما كشكل أدبي وكأداء مسرحي. كما تعرض الدراسة المفهوم المميز لنابوكوف في التأكيد على المحتوى، التعبير عن وجود المؤلف، ومحاولة التقرب من الظواهر الجمالية والأخلاقية. فيما يتعلق بالأسلوب المسرحي، فقد تم دراسة الوسائل الأدبية لمسرحية الواقع و "المسرح ضمن المسرح" في مسرحيات مأساة السيد مورن (1924)، الرجل الذي من الاتحاد السوفييتي (1926)، الحدث (1938)، و اختراع الفالتس (1938). هذه الأعمال الدرامية شملت جميع سمات الواقع المسرحي والميتامسرح، حيث تظهر بشكل متقطع اشارات المسرحية "الضمنية" كأزدواجية الشخصيات، أداء عدة أدوار من قبل نفس البطل، محاولات الأبطال لتنبؤ مسار العمل وتوجيه المسرحية، تصحيح "التمثيل" لشخصيات أخرى، استخدام السمات المسرحية و اشارات اخرى.

الكلمات الدالة: نابوكوف، دراما، مسرحية، ميتامسرح، التصنع، الازدواجية.