

BotNS Nabokov connection

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 25 Nov 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3607>

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Jerry Friedman — 25 Nov 2002, 18:40

Here's a paragraph from Chapter 2 of *Invitation to a Beheading*, by Vladimir Nabokov, translated from Russian by Dmitri Nabokov (his son) in collaboration with the author. Only one sentence is relevant as far as I can tell, but I'm including the whole thing so no one feels deprived of context. In a bizarre totalitarian state, Cincinnatus C. has been condemned to death for (thread-convergence alert) gnostic turpitude, i.e., being an individual.

"He was not angry at the informers, but the latter multiplied and, as they matured, became frightening. Cincinnatus, who seemed pitch-black to them, as though he had been cut out of a cord-size block of night, opaque Cincinnatus would turn this way and that, trying to catch the rays, trying with desperate haste to stand in such a way as to seem translucent. Those around him understood each other at the first word, since they had no words that would end in an unexpected way, perhaps in some archaic letter, an upsilamba, becoming a bird or a catapult with wondrous consequences. In the dusty little museum on Second Boulevard, where they used to take him as a child, and where he himself would later take his charges, there was a collection of rare, marvelous objects, but all the townsmen except Cincinnatus found them just as limited and transparent as they did each other. *That which does not have a name does not exist.* Unfortunately everything had a name."

Reminds me of the Ascians and Severian's comment that one could often predict the ends of Foila's sentences from their beginnings (not that I could do that).

Also, according to D. Barton Johnson in *Worlds in Regression*, the upsilamba (sic) translates the name of an archaic Cyrillic letter, the "izhits" (if I remember correctly). It looked like a curvy V or a stylized bird (see the last letter at <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/ocslavonic.htm>). An "upsilamba" would presumably look something like a Y, and thus like a stylized bird or child's "catapult" (which we Americans call a slingshot). This play with letter shapes reminds me of a serpent in the last letter but one and a sword in the last.

Jerry Friedman