

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

In his otherwise favorable review of my *Nabokov's 'Ada': The Place of Consciousness* (*Slavic Review*, Summer 1986, pp. 410-411), W. W. Rowe calls my attack on his *Nabokov's Spectral Dimension* "unworthy" of me. He reproaches me for comparing his book to his earlier *Nabokov's Deceptive World*, "a much less successful" work. Nabokov himself attacked *Nabokov's Deceptive World* in a memorable article in the *New York Review of Books*. He is dead now and cannot comment on Rowe's more recent book, but his widow lives on. Though her observation that Nabokov's main theme was the beyond (*potustoronnost'*) inspired Rowe to write *Nabokov's Spectral Dimension* and, Rowe seems to think, licensed his methods, she writes to me that Rowe's latest Nabokov book deserves all that I say against it. Others with their fingers very much on the pulse of Nabokov scholarship can comment that my criticisms are "devastating—and precisely to the point." Rowe replied to Nabokov's attack on his earlier book—regarded by others as crushing and unanswerable—unshaken in his confidence. Now he appears to have changed his mind about that book. When will he see that *Nabokov's Spectral Dimension* too is not only "much less successful" than he thinks but provides almost no evidence and argument except its own self-confirming circularity?

Rowe impugns me for not taking stock of his "extensive, patterned evidence" on *King, Queen, Knave* and *Lolita*. I did explode his "evidence" on *Ada*, the subject of my book, showing it to consist of unfounded assertion, ignorance, and distortion of elementary facts of the novel's plot, suppression of explicit contrary evidence, violation of the psychology of the characters, and a knowledge of the novel insufficient for him to see much more plausible and valuable alternative explanations. It took three times as many pages as Rowe's "argument" to disclose all its many absurdities, and there was neither space nor need to expose the comparable ineptitudes in his comments on *Lolita* and *King, Queen, Knave* at greater length than I took. Rowe seems not to realize that assertions supported by circular reasoning and an eagerness to look for "confirming" evidence coupled with an avoidance of all the available contrary evidence do not constitute proof of anything. One can "prove" that "all swans are white" by totting up all the confirming instances one wants—white swans, even brown sparrows or for that matter green trees are compatible in logic with the proposition—but unless one is prepared to look at a black swan the whole effort is worthless.

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PROFESSOR ROWE REPLIES:

I continue to find Boyd's attitude "unworthy" of him, but I admit that my conviction is diminishing.

Andrew Field (Vladimir Nabokov's biographer, as Boyd is soon to be) recently alleged that "Nabokov set up an elaborate charade mechanism designed to have me produce a falsified life" (*The Washington Post Book World*, 8 February 1987, p. 14). In my opinion, Nabokov's wife and son are attempting to continue control of the Nabokov image. This is, of course, their privilege, and Boyd's perceptive reverence seems to have won him even more support than Field himself once enjoyed.

As currently sanctioned shaper of Nabokov interpretation, Brian Boyd presumes to know the One Truth. Any variation is blasphemy. There are, however, numerous ways to approach a literary giant like Nabokov, not all of which require his or his family's seal of approval to be valid. In the published opinion of Carl Proffer (Boyd's publisher, and