When Sasha Sokolov made his literary debut in 1976 with *A School for Fools*, it was inevitable that critics would seek sources of influence for a work so startlingly idiosyncratic for the recent Russian tradition. And certainly *A School for Fools*, with its literary epigraphs and hundreds of literary allusions and citations, appears a ripe target for influence hunters. Its extremely convoluted narrative structure, however, with its total abnegation of conventional realistic plot, linear time and causality, necessarily led critics to seek influences outside the Soviet literary sphere. Likewise, the novel's intense lyricality and its almost total lack of such "local politics" baggage as travels with so much contemporary Russian literature pointed to external influence. So radically does *A School for Fools* violate the traditions of Soviet literature that one scholar has suggested that it "may be considered a passionate outcry against the norms and practices of socialist realism, and, ultimately, against the

1. Fred Moody ("Madness and the Pattern of Freedom in Sasha Sokolov's *A School for Fools*," *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, No. 16 (1979), note 6, p. 32) in reference to one Pushkin allusion, notes:

   This allusion is one of many to Pushkin, and one of hundreds to such writers as Gogol, Leonardo, Homer, Avvakum, Esenin, Verne, Voznesensky, Hemingway, Radishchev, Lugavoi, Gorky, Fofonov, Lermontov, Belaev, Tolstoi, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Lenin, Poe, Oleinikov, Nekrasov, and Garcia-Lorca. There are also numerous snatches from children's songs, folk tales, revolutionary songs, official documents, Soviet newspapers, movies, histories, and so on. The importance that allusion plays in characterizing the narrator and enabling the reader to gauge the degree of his madness cannot be overemphasized: the question should be gone into in great detail.

   To this list Alexandra H. Karriker ("Double Vision: Sasha Sokolov's *School for Fools*," *World Literature Today*, 53, No. 4 [Autumn 1979], 610-14) adds the names of Shakespeare, Olesha, Bely and Kawabata, as well as the byliny, The Bible and classical myth.
political system which introduces, develops, and nourishes them."²

One critical focus on A School for Fools has been its rejection of all conventional notions of time. It is, after all, the schizophrenic narrator's inability to understand time—along with his "selective memory" which cannot distinguish actual memories from imaginative interpolations on them—which motivates the novel's bizarre narrative. In this area, critics have noted resemblances to that associative dream logic, divorced from chronolinear time and causality, which marks Surrealism.³ Closer to home, similarities in theme and form to the works of Vladimir Nabokov have been noted, particularly to Nabokov's rebellion against strict rationality and conventional notions of time and their narrative implications. While speculation about these similarities was fed by Nabokov's now-famous praise of A School for Fools, the possibility of influence largely was removed when Sokolov denied having read more than a single unremembered page of Nabokov's before writing School.⁴

But perhaps we need not look even so far afield as Nabokov for a potential source of influence on A School for Fools. Perhaps Sokolov's literary trouble with time paradoxically evolved from within Soviet literature where time notoriously always moves forward along a realistic linear plane. When A School for Fool's narrator makes the startling assertion that time moves not as we suppose it should, but in reverse, backwards, he is only repeating


⁴. D. Barton Johnson, "Vladimir Nabokov and Sasha Sokolov," The Nabokovian, No. 15 (Fall 1985), p. 30. Sokolov's claim to have read merely the opening page of a Nabokov novel before writing School curiously echoes his response to Moody's suggestion of ties between School and the work of Yasunari Kawabata. After noting parallels between the two, Moody adds, "All of this suggests that the affinities shared by Sokolov and Kawabata deserve further study, but such an undertaking should be begun with the idea in mind that Sokolov claims to have read only the opening pages of Snow Country, and that he included the passage from that book in his novel because it is 'stupid.' He says he has read no other Kawabata works." Moody, "Madness and the Pattern of Freedom," note 2, pp. 30-31.