The fictions of B. Sirin, it is becoming clear, perform the same function as those of Konrad Korzeniowski: to reveal to us the exotic and ambiguous realities behind our dull apprehension of our Western world, by applying to that world the insights of the Slavic exile and the artist. Korzeniowski, of course, became better known as Joseph Conrad when he began writing for an English audience. Sirin is the name under which Vladimir Nabokov published his Russian writings; he also changes persona for his English works, adopting his proper patronymic. Both writers create fictions in which the aesthetic strategies are in themselves a revelation of the author's philosophical vision. But Nabokov, writing in a later age, in which Conrad's apocalyptic fears have become fact, goes beyond Conrad's multiple views of fictional reality. In Nabokov's works the mirrors of reality are so distorted that their surfaces disintegrate, revealing the ambiguities not only in our traditional apprehension of metaphysical reality, but also in the moral structure of that reality.

Nabokov expresses these ambiguities through the conflicting images of reality projected by the narrators and characters in his novels. The typical Nabokov protagonist attempts to escape from these revelations about "reality" by substituting for them a subjective, solipsistic world: a world which ultimately breaks down before the onslaught of a more concrete reality, often that of the intrusive author himself. The violent conclusion of many of Nabokov's fictions is the inevitable result. On the other hand, no reconciliation or transcendence is actually effected by this arbitrary cutting of the knot, and the ambiguous vision remains at the end. This view of Nabokov's works is the controlling motive behind the selections in a recent and valuable critical anthology.*

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* L. S. Dembo., ed., Nabokov: The Man and His Work (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968). Included is a bibliography of the author's works, and a checklist of books and essays, "Nabokov Criticism in English." It was originally the Spring, 1967, issue of Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, to which were added articles on Sebastian Knight and Pnin.
on Nabokov's writings edited by Professor L. S. Dembo. There is a progression of opinions on the major themes in Nabokov's fictions: the relations between the fictions of art and reality; alienation and exile; the nature and functions of the parody-elements and of the typical structures; the symbolism of the Double; the possibility of a final synthesis, and its nature: tragic or comic. As in Nabokov's own work, there are few unquestionable conclusions in these essays; they do, however, convey not only the broad range but the essential unity of form and significance in Nabokov's work.

Alfred Appel, in the interview with Nabokov, deals with many of the literary and philosophical topics taken up later in this volume. Though Appel's questions are often searching, the author's answers are as frequently ambiguous. He does deny the critics' contention that his writings have been influenced by such authors as Borges and Kafka, and by the tradition of nineteenth-century Russian fiction, and he offers some apocryphal criticism of Joyce's work. At the same time, he admits once more to being in the shadow of Pushkin, whose "blood runs through the veins of modern Russian literature," and he reveals his admiration for the "infinite talent" of Borges' and Robbe-Grillet's fictions. Nabokov gives Appel rather a hard time on another favorite subject, the theme of the literary Double, finally stating flatly that "there are no real doubles in my novels." He does admit, however, that Felix in Despair is really a "false double" of the protagonist. When Nabokov reveals that for him "imagination is a form of memory; ... both memory and imagination are a negation of time," he is hinting not so much about his exile in itself as about the power — and the desire — of the artistic imagination to escape the limitations of ordinary reality; his memories of the past are an important instrument of this escape. The closing question is about Nabokov's own favourite fiction, and his answer is typical: he has most "affection" for Lolita, most "esteem" for Приглашение на казнь. He is referring to what is known in English as Invitation to a Beheading, but in its original Russian version, thus confirming his earlier statement that he now writes in English as a "wistful standby for Russian — I still feel the pangs of that substitution." And this is despite the fact that (as he says) he was "an English child," and that his education was mainly in English, and completed at Oxford. Despite Nabokov's bad temper and his impatience, this interview is perhaps the most revealing of those available to the student of his work.

In the introductory essay, Professor Dembo traces the subjective universe of Nabokov's heroes through his major fictions, in an attempt to show that they are all formed by the same vision and similar techniques. He describes the typical protagonist as a sensitive indivi-