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Nabokov's Love for the Russian Language

Chapter 13 is about Nabokov's time at the University of Cambridge and his reunion with his brothers. In 1919, the reunited family of Nabokov flies to Western Europe. In Europe, they settle briefly in London, and Nabokov and Sergey, his younger brother, begin attending Cambridge University. Although Nabokov is physically present in England, his thoughts, mind, and spirit are back in Russia. It is entirely impossible for him to adapt to the life in England. He does not spend much time in Cambridge because his three younger siblings together with his parents relocate to Berlin. Nabokov is a Russian living in Cambridge but prefers using the Russian language although he is interested in the English language.

Nabokov is sick with nostalgia for Russia. He misses his homeland and finds it more fascinating in all aspects than the foreign land. He discovers that it is only in his youthful stage that he favored the English language to Russian. Although currently residing in England, he works enthusiastically in an attempt of defining himself as a Russian writer. His education is entirely in English, but Nabokov finds nothing interesting about this language.

Pound and Eliot are making their reputations during this time, and Nabokov also seems to be interested in poetry, but he insists that he is directing all of his energies into "trying to become a Russian writer instead of an English writer" (Nabokov 261). A lot has changed in Cambridge in comparison with his first experience in this place. During the period from 1919 to 1922, only

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minor, fragmentary experiences in Cambridge distract Nabokov from his childhood and youth memories. The truth is that although his life is based in England, he entirely admires his homeland Russia. He longs for that day when he will be back in his native country and thinks that it will be an interesting experience.

At Cambridge, Nabokov recalls developing interest in politics but later shifts his attention to literature. Perhaps, this might be due to the reason that in order to make a good politician in England, mastery of the English language is a requirement. One day, as he is walking in one of the streets at Cambridge, he comes across a Russian work, a four volume copy of Dahl's *Interpretative Dictionary of the Living Russian Language*. He makes sure he reads at least ten pages per day jotting important points that he considers as the most interesting. This indicates Nabokov's keen interest in his native language. Perhaps, it is the reason behind his passion towards the Russian language. His greatest fear is the fear of corrupting or losing the only thing he has salvaged from Russia, which is the Russian language. This fear is much greater than that of not being able to take his English prose to the best level.

After seventeen good years, Nabokov returns to Cambridge during the time of Sebastian Knight and makes futile attempts to reposition himself as an English writer (Nabokov 273). He recalls his bitter encounter as a team player of Cambridge University. Nobody understood his language. This made him feel an outcast in this English team. He never made an attempt of visiting the university library or even locating it in order to borrow books or study. He found the English language less impressive, and this is why he had that bad behavior of skipping most of his lectures. In his football team where he played the role of goalkeeping, he recalls how he could relax in the posts his thoughts totally not in the football match. The reason is that he never liked interacting in English language, the language that his teammates used.

Works Cited

Nabokov, Vladimir V. *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*. New York: Putnam, 1966.

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