



Vladimir Nabokov : The Russian Years

By Brian Boyd

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This first major critical biography of Vladimir Nabokov, one of the greatest of twentieth-century writers, finally allows us full access to the dramatic details of his life and the depths of his art. An intensely private man, Nabokov was uprooted first by the Russian Revolution and then by World War II. Transformed into a permanent wanderer, he did not achieve fame until late in life, with the success of *Lolita*. In this first of two volumes, Brian Boyd vividly describes the liberal milieu of the aristocratic Nabokovs, their escape from Russia, Nabokov's education at Cambridge, and the murder of his father in Berlin. Boyd then turns to the years that Nabokov spent, impoverished, in Germany and France, until the coming of Hitler forced him to flee, with wife and son, to the United States. This volume stands on its own as a fascinating exploration of Nabokov's Russian years and Russian worlds, prerevolutionary and émigré.

In the course of his ten years' work on the biography, Boyd traveled along Nabokov's trail everywhere from Yalta to Palo Alto. The only scholar to have had free access to the Nabokov archives in Montreux and the Library of Congress, he also interviewed at length Nabokov's family and scores of his friends and associates.

For the general reader, Boyd offers an introduction to Nabokov the man, his works, and his world. For the specialist, he provides a basis for all future research on Nabokov's life and art, as he dates and describes the composition of all Nabokov's works, published and unpublished.

Boyd investigates Nabokov's relation to and his independence from his time, examines the special structures of his mind and thought, and explains the relations between his philosophy and his innovations of literary strategy and style. At the same time he provides succinct introductions to all the fiction, dramas, memoirs, and major verse; presents detailed analyses of the major books that break new ground for the scholar, while providing easy paths into the works for other readers; and shows the relationship between Nabokov's life and the themes and subjects of his art.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

These intimate, magisterial, prodigiously researched biographies illuminate the contours of the great author's mind with sensuous precision. Photos.

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From Library Journal

This is the first volume of a detailed critical biography of the Russian-born author of *Lolita* (LJ 8/58) and *Pale Fire* (LJ 5/15/62). Boyd's analysis of Nabokov's works is bracing, but his summary of the man's life is sometimes infelicitous: "His heart and mind set on love and verse, young Vladimir Nabokov had neither eyes nor ears for the smoke and rumble of history." We last see Nabokov, clearly alive to history by now, fleeing France with his wife and son just ahead of Nazi troops; a second volume, *The American Years*, is to follow. Boyd's biography supersedes Andrew Field's *VN* (LJ 9/1/86), which Boyd and others have criticized as inaccurate. Recommended for collections of modern literature.

- *Grove Koger, Boise P.L., Id.*

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Review

One of *Choice's Outstanding Academic Titles for 1991*

"Mr. Boyd has a remarkable gift for drawing life and literature together. . . . [What he does] in this impressive biography reveals to us a Nabokov who has been far too little known. . . . As a biography [Boyd's] book can hardly be surpassed. It is a definitive life of the man and a superbly documented chronicle of his time."--

Sergei Davydov, *The New York Times Book Review*

"A terrific biography: intelligent, compulsively readable, indispensable. Brian Boyd brings to his work a passionate scholarship comparable to that in Nabokov's own encyclopedic edition of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. You just can't do better than that."--**Michael Dirada, *the Washington Post Book World***

"To the short list of outstanding literary biographies in our time there must now be added another remarkable achievement. . . . Brian Boyd had a great story to tell, and he has told it superbly."--**Hilton Kramer, *The Wall Street Journal***

"Boyd has many qualities which mark him as Nabokov's natural biographer."--**Jane Grayson, *The Times Literary Supplement***

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