classical mythology in contemporary literature (see, e.g., his comments on Joyce's *Ulysses* [LL 288]), he was not averse to drawing on elements of myth and folklore to create the elaborate, synthetic constructs for which he is now known. The Daedalus-Icarus tale would have appealed to him because of its treatment of a father's love for his son and its central image of the dramatic, untimely death of the child. Future research may reveal additional permutations of this theme.  

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14. For example, distant echoes of the theme can be found in *The Gift*, in the section of chapter 5 that depicts Fyodor walking through the Grunewald. This seminal passage touches on two of the basic concerns discussed earlier: the importance of the father-son bond (here, Fyodor and his father, as well as Yasha Chernyshevskii and his father), and the untimely death of a son (here, Yasha's suicide). Prefacing the passage is an odd detail—the description of the site where a small airplane had crashed because of the errors of an "overexuberant" pilot who had lost control of his joystick. This suggestion of an unfortunate, modern-day Icarus is followed up later in the passage by another image from the Icarus story—the power of the warm sun. This time, however, the heat of the sun produces a rather different effect. The narrator writes of sunbathing: "The sun bore down. The sun licked me all over with its big, smooth tongue. I gradually felt that I was becoming moltenly transparent, that I was permeated with flame and existed only insofar as it did. As a book is translated into an exotic idiom, so was I translated into sun" (*Gift* 333). He concludes the episode with the comment, "One might dissolve completely that way" (*Gift* 334). As I have argued elsewhere, the sun in this scene represents the workings of creative consciousness: See Connolly, *Nabokov's Early Fiction*, 211-13. When one evaluates this experience in light of Icarus's experience, one realizes that Nabokov may be doing something here that he does constantly in his work: He rewrites and refashions prior texts to create his own artistic fabric. Icarus died because he flew too close to the sun. Fyodor also feels himself on the point of dissolution in the Grunewald scene. At the last minute he pulls back, however, and rather than being absorbed into a higher creative force, he is able to come away from his exposure to this force with a new spirit of autonomous inspiration. Death is abolished; in its place are transcendence and transfiguration.
a brief, seven-page story, though; not a novel, as he initially intended—it was promptly rejected by the New Yorker.

Véra Nabokov’s disapproval, the New Yorker’s rejection, and critics’ puzzlement notwithstanding, “Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster” is in many ways a remarkable story—a unique imaginative foray into the fusing mental processes of two brothers joined together at birth. As this chapter will show, the origins of the story can be traced back to the “Double Mistress” episode in The Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Adventures of Martinus Scriblerus, a satire brought forth by the combined efforts of John Arbuthnot, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, John Gay, Thomas Parnell, and Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, during their off-and-on activity in the so-called Scriblerus Club in 1714–27.3 By contrasting Nabokov’s treatment of the “double monster” theme with that of his eighteenth-century predecessors, one can gain a crucial insight into the imagery and structure of Nabokov’s “Scenes.”

Nabokov’s story opens with Dr. Fricke “stroking” with a “dreamy smile of scientific delectation” the “fleshy cartilaginous band uniting” the twin brothers, Lloyd and Floyd, and asking whether they could recall “the very first time” either or both of them “realized the peculiarity of [their] condition and destiny” (Stories 608). Floyd, the first-person narrator of the story, says nothing at the time, but the doctor’s question prompts him to remember his and Lloyd’s “monstrous infancy” and childhood “atop a fertile hill above the Black Sea on [their] grandfather’s farm near Karaz” (Stories 608). The word “monstrous” refers, perhaps, not so much to the children’s physical shape as to the manner-of-fact cruelty that surrounds them on that farm. The boys’ mother is raped by a stranger in a “roadside orchard” and dies shortly after giving birth to them. Their “dusky” aunts take care of the orphaned twins with “ghoulish zest,” and as soon as Lloyd and Floyd are old enough to attend to insipid instructions shouted at them from crowds of leering spectators, their grandfather Ahem starts exhibiting them for money. A “worried crook” named Novus marries one of the aunts, not because he loves her—no one bothers about such fine feelings atop this “fertile hill”—but to gain access to the profitable “double monster.” Floyd’s narrative ends (and so does his and Lloyd’s childhood) on the day that he and Lloyd try to escape from their covetous relatives and are intercepted by their “uncle” Novus, who kidnaps the twins to start touring them around the country. We do not know how and why Lloyd and Floyd end up in the hands of Dr. Fricke, but his relationship with them recalls some of the abuse that they experienced with Ahem and Novus. The main difference is that, whereas the relatives exploited the children for money, Dr. Fricke is excited (a feeling, in his case, akin to sexual excitement) by having in his possession a rare specimen, a natural subject for scientific monographs.

“Fricke” is, of course, a loaded surname. Because of its overtones of freakishness, it is a development (or, rather, a “prefigurement,” as it opens the story) of the theme of mental as opposed to physical monstrosity—that is, the dangerous emotional deficiency that allows the anonymous rapists, Ahems, Novuses, and Frickes to objectify and exploit other human beings. “Dr. Fricke” is also a perfunctory jab at Dr. Freud. Finally, it is an allusion to a freakish brainchild of the British Age of Reason—Dr. Martinus Scriblerus—a virtuoso who falls in love with and marries a pair of Siamese twins exhibited at a London raree-show.

It is likely that Nabokov discovered Martinus Scriblerus in the late 1940s. From 1943 to 1948, Nabokov was lecturing three days a week at Wellesley College, where he became friendly with Charles Kerby-Miller, an eighteenth-century scholar who was working on his monumental edition of Martinus Scriblerus (eighty-three pages of The Memoirs proper, more than three hundred pages of commentary). At the time, Nabokov’s own research interests drew him to the eighteenth-century literature: Such authors as Pope, Swift, Richardson, Stern, Radcliffe, and Lewis were on his reading list as he began scouring stacks of “seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Russian, French, and English literature in the libraries of Cornell, Harvard, and New York City, ready to seize on the smallest phrase that might recall or elucidate Pushkin.”4 Massive exposure to eighteenth-century literature and his predilection for “aberrations in general, both physical and psychological” accounted for his interest in the material with which Kerby-Miller was working.5 Kerby-Miller’s book was published in 1948; Nabokov’s “Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster,” written in October 1950, echoes both the “Double Mistress” episode of The Memoirs and Kerby-Miller’s accompanying commentary.


4. Boyd, American Years, 337.

In his commentary, Kerby-Miller documents the history of the Scriblerus Club and tracks down hundreds of allusions to ancient myths, works of classical philosophy, and the eighteenth-century literary and political scene contained in *The Memoirs*. He tells the history of Arbuthnot, Pope, Swift, Gay, Parnell, and Harley's getting together in 1714 and deciding to ridicule bad taste in learning and the arts (leaving it to themselves to judge what constituted good and bad taste) by publishing the errors and pretensions of the fictional philosopher Martinus Scriblerus. *The Memoirs' first eight chapters deal with Martinus's education and transformation into a Critic—that is, someone who “converts every Trifle into a serious thing, either in the way of Life, or in Learning.”7 The second part of *The Memoirs* lists his exploits in philosophy and physics and prepares the ground for the Scriblerians' grand scheme—to publish a number of books presumably written or edited by Martinus and to claim that he was the actual author of several existing works. (One of these was Richard Bentley's 1732 edition of Milton's *Paradise Lost*; Bentley, a prominent classical scholar, was one of the Scriblerians' favorite objects of ridicule). The purpose of such hoax was to obscure the already dubious line between authentic and spurious publications until the reading public became bewildered. Thus gullible people could be trapped into accepting absurdities... while the critical and wary would learn to scan every new production in the learned and literary world that seemed in any way ridiculous with a skeptical eye, ready to charge it with being another work by the mysterious Scriblerus.7

(Nabokov—the perpetrator of literary hoaxes and the inventor of Vivian Calmbrood and Vasily Shishkov—must have found such a plan deeply congenial.)

Chapter 14 of *The Memoirs* shows Martinus taking a break from his studies and finding himself by the site of a raree-show featuring the pygmy "Negro Prince"; the Man-Tiger; the majestic lion; the spotted leopard; and two "Bohemian sisters, whose common parts of generation had so closely allied them, that Nature seemed to have conspired with Fortune, that their lives should run in an eternal parallel"—or, plainly speaking, the sisters share a single body from the waist down.8 Martinus falls in love with one of the twins, named Lindamira, who eventually agrees to elope with her learned admirer and marry him. Her sister, Indamora, however, is also in love with Martinus and jealous of Lindamira's marital bliss. She takes part in the intrigue orchestrated by the disgruntled freak-show owner (who does not want to lose his profitable double monster to the moronic philosopher) and marries the pigmy Prince.9 The question of which of the husbands can lay a legitimate claim to Indamora—Lindamira's organ (or organs, as no one knows whether there are two or just one) of procreation has to be decided by the court. After the first round of the legal battle (involving a hilarious exchange between Dr. Leatherhead and Dr. Pennyfeather, respectively the pigmy Prince's and Martinus's attorneys), the court decides that Martinus and his rival should "cohabit with [their] wives, and... lie in bed each on the side of his own wife." The court urges both husbands to consider that they are "under a stricter Tye than common Brothers-in-law, [and hopes] that being, as it were, joint Proprietors of one common Tenement, [they] will so behave as good fellow lodgers ought to do."10 Such a sentence pleases neither party; Martinus appeals, and after further legal peregrinations, a superior legal body—a "Commission of Delegates"—dissolves both marriages, as "proceeding upon a natural, as well as legal Absurdity."11 Martinus is heartbroken, and the sisters are returned to the triumphant show owner.

The "Double Mistress" episode was probably added to the manuscript of *The Memoirs* during the first revival of Scriblerian club in 1716-18, when Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot got together to see whether the adventures of their hero could be turned into a publishable manuscript. Most of the extant "Double Mistress" fragments are in Arbuthnot's handwriting, with revisions and additions by Pope. As Kerby-Miller points out, there seems to have been

7. Ibid., 39-30.
8. Ibid., 143, 146.
9. The names Martin, Lindamira, and Indamora go back to a series of plays by John Dryden. *Sir Martin Mar-All* (1670) was a popular farce based in Italian commedia dell'arte and full of tricks and disguises, with the comic star of the Duke's Company, James Nokes, playing the fumbling title character. The 1670 heroic play *The Conquest of Granada* features a sexually aggressive Lyndaraxa, who goads the hot-tempered Abdala to start a revolt against his own brother, the King of Granada. Finally, Indamira is the virtuous bride of the irrationally jealous Aureng-Zebe, an Indian Muslim prince in Dryden's 1675 tragedy *Aureng-Zebe*. For more on these plays, see James Anderson Winn, John Dryden and His World (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985).
11. Ibid., 163.

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“something like a regular division of labor” between the two, “Arbuthnot sketching out ideas and Pope completing them into finished pieces.” In fact, this pattern of collaboration might be one of the reasons that the book was not published until much later. Pope could not always find time to edit the material, even though Arbuthnot was brimming with ideas. The Memoirs finally appeared in print in 1741 as part of The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope, under the subtitle “Tracts of Martinus Scriblerus and other Miscellaneous Pieces.” The “Double Mistress” chapters were dropped as too “vulgar” from the 1751 edition that came out after Pope’s death and was prepared by his friend Bishop William Warburton. In the 1797 edition, supervised by Joseph Warton, the chapters were restored, and their humor was characterized as “exquisite” in the preface to the volume. In 1824, the Victorian editors damned the “Double Mistress” episode once more, returning to the mutilated 1751 version of the text, and it was not until 1948 that The Memoirs was published in its entirety.

Kerby-Miller painstakingly researched the story of the real twins behind the “Double Mistress” chapters, Helena and Judith, exhibited in London in 1708. The six-year-old girls were advertised in handbills as “one of the greatest Wonders in Nature that ever was seen, being Born with their Backs fastned to each other, and [with] the Passages of their Bodies both one way.” These children were said to be “very Handsome and Lusty, and Talk three different languages.” Swift wrote to one of his friends in 1708 that the “sight of two girls joined together at the back . . . causes a great many speculations; and raises abundance of questions in divinity, law, and physic.” Later, in their “Double Mistress” chapter, the Scriblerians would revisit some of these “speculations” and “questions” to make fun of metaphysical discourses of the day.

The parallels between Nabokov’s “Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster” and the “Double Mistress” episode (including Kerby-Miller’s historical commentary) run on several levels, including the details of the twins’ appearance and the plot. The boys’ “sire” is anonymous, but rumor mentions a “Hungarian peddler” (Stories 608); “Helena and Judith were born in Szony, in Hungary.” Lloyd and Floyd speak three languages: Turkish, English, and their unspecied mother-tongue (Stories 612). Helena and Judith “speak three different languages . . . Hungarian or High Dutch, Low Dutch, and French; and

[are] learning English.” Lloyd and Floyd are “healthy” and “handsome,” with “well formed rubbery arms and legs” (Stories 609); Helena and Judith are “very handsome, very well shaped in all parts, and [have] beautiful faces.” Nabokov’s twins’ real names, “full of corvine aspirations” (Stories 609) have to be changed to glisty and mutually echoing “Lloyd” and “Floyd”; Helena’s and Judith’s names emerge in The Memoirs as the dramatic soundalikes “Lindamira” and “Indamora.” Both sets of twins (Nabokov’s and the Scriblerians’) try to flee their captivity—Lloyd and Floyd by sneaking to the beach; Lindamira and Indamora by escaping through the window and getting married. Both fail.

A crucial difference between the two narratives concerns the level of emotional and intellectual self-realization of the respective “double monsters.” The Scriblerians were not interested in exploring the nuances of their “double mistress’s” thoughts and feelings. They turned to the grotesque figure of Indamira—Lindamora to ridicule zealous natural philosophers, antiquarians, litterateurs, critics, free-thinkers, and—if some space was left over—lawyers. By presenting the philosopher as a passionate lover and jealous husband, Arbuthnot and company tapped into a gold vein of ridicule—bawdy jokes with metaphysical twists. The fact that Martinus’s enamorata has “a few Heads, Legs, [and] Arms extraordinary” only added to the fun. Although Nabokov borrowed some of the Scriblerians’ details, he used them to a very different end: “Scenes” is an attempt to describe a highly unusual mental state by telling a story from the point of view of the “double monster” himself rather than from that of a leering and uncomprehending observer. Consider the following haunting passage:

When, for example, one of us was about to stoop to possess himself of a pretty daisy and the other, at exactly the same moment, was on the point of stretching up to pluck a ripe fig, individual success depended upon whose movement happened to conform to the current ictus of our current and continuous rhythm, whereupon, with a very brief chorealike shiver, the interrupted gesture of one twin would be swallowed and dissolved in the enriched ripple of the other’s completed action. I say “enriched” because the ghost of the unpicked flower somehow seemed to be also there, pulsating between the fingers that closed upon the fruit. (Stories 611)

12. Ibid., 61.
13. Ibid., 295.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 294.
16. Ibid., 296.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 359.
Situated well into the story, this description prompts us to reread the childhood parts of "Scenes" from a very different perspective. If, as Nabokov suggests, every completed action of the children presents a compromise between Lloyd's and Floyd's respective volitions, and each interrupted gesture is never canceled altogether but still "enriches" implicitly the one that has been carried, then Floyd's childhood memories and perceptions should also be considered a product of two competing and compromising mentalities—in spite of Floyd's consistent attempts to represent Lloyd's mental processes as separate and markedly inferior to his own. Unable to comprehend his cognitive limits and dependencies, Floyd emerges as yet another unreliable narrator in Hermanns's gallery of Hermanns, Humbers, and Kinbotes.

Inevitably, both "Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster" and the "Double Mistress" episode grapple with the theme of mental versus physical monstrosity. The Scriblerians portray the poor double Lindamira—Indamora as merely pathetic in her amorous inclinations and reserve the full force of their sarcasm for the formidable intellectual freaks. Physically unexceptionable Martinus and Mrs. Leatherhead and Pennyfeather are the true monsters of the piece. Something very similar happens in Nabokov's "Scenes." Deformed Lloyd and Floyd are contrasted with a throng of able-bodied emotional freaks—their "ghoulish" relatives and keepers, who compete for the exclusive right to exploit the brothers. The only person who likes the boys and pities them without ulterior motives is a "hysterical" cook on their grandfather's farm—a "mustachioed woman" who one day declares "with an atrocious oath that she would, then and there, slice [them] free by means of a shiny knife" (Stories 612) that she suddenly carries. Of course, she is instantly "overpowered" (Stories 612) by Ahem and Novus and thus contributes to the realignment of the characters along the lines of physical and mental deformity. Situated in the context of freak-show lore, the "mustachioed woman" brings to mind the staple feature of such shows: the bearded lady. Thus, as something of a physiological curiosity herself, the mustachioed woman "likes" Lloyd and Floyd; she sides with them in their own, "hysterical" way and is predictably "overpowered"—just as Lloyd and Floyd always are—by the superior physical force of the true monsters, Ahem and Novus.

Dr. Fricke occupies an important place in the hierarchy of monstrosity in "Scenes," and his reaction to the twins is reminiscent of the behavior of the freakish title character of the Scriblerian satire. Fricke's "dreamy smile of scientific delectation"—his obvious sensual pleasure at having the "monster" at his full scholarly disposal—hark back to the Scriblerians' making fun of the "passion" with which learned men treat their objects of study, living creatures and artifacts alike. When Martinus first sees his "charming Monster," the authors marvel at "how violent, how transporting must that passion prove, where not only the Fire of Youth, but the unquenchable Curiosity of a Philosopher, pitch'd upon the same object!" Kerby-Miller notes that the "passion of the virtuosi for monsters and abnormalities was frequently ridiculed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. However, in translating that passion into actual amorousness... the Scriblerians opened up an entirely original vein of humor." Two hundred years later, Nabokov built on the Scriblerians' bawdy conflation of amorous and scientific passion to create his Freud-informed figure of a *passionate* scientist, Dr. Fricke.

By uncovering Dr. Fricke's connection to the Scriblerians' Martinus, we can understand better the closing paragraph of "Scenes" and connect it to the opening episode of the story. At the end of his narrative, Floyd daydreams about "some adventurous stranger" stepping "onto the shore from his boat in the bay" and experiencing "a thrill of ancient enchantment [on finding] himself confronted by a gentle mythological monster in a landscape of cypress and white stones" (Stories 614; emphasis added). The imagined "adventurous stranger" worships Lloyd and Floyd and sheds "sweet tears" (Stories 614) over them—a seemingly appealing alternative to "that worried crook," uncle Novus, who greets the brothers on the shore, treats them roughly, and kidnaps them. Curiously, the gentle stranger envisioned by Floyd also bears a strong resemblance to Martinus, the tireless admirer of everything strange and "ancient," moved to worship his "charming Monster" of a mistress. The two characters...
who frame the narrative—Dr. Fricke and the adventurous stranger—are really
the same figure of a freakish naturalist drawn to "monsters."

The realization that Nabokov's story has a circular structure suggestively
complements its traditional readings. Gennady Barabtalo has argued per-
suasively that "Scenes" remains "a brightly picturesque piece of an absent
whole, sporting magically seamless transitions whose interlinked chain is left
dangling at the end." If, as proposed here, the final episode in fact foreshad-
ows the opening one—through its portrayal of a Martinus-like figure of a
learned enthusiast—the story turns out to be more tightly structured that is
generally thought. Thus, by providing a Scriblerian context for Nabokov's text,
one gains a new understanding of the formal framing of "Scènes" along with
uncovering its hidden genealogy.

One surprising payoff of situating Nabokov's story next to The Memoirs
concerns the word "Scenes" in the story's title. It has never received any crit-
ical attention, perhaps because it was automatically perceived as a half-hearted
authorial admission of the somewhat disjointed nature of the narrative. Once
one questions this traditional reading, however, the word "Scenes" emerges as
a sign of a cinematic rethinking of conventions of the raree-show and points
toward the story's alignment with Nabokov's other pointedly "cinematic"
narratives, such as "The Assistant Producer" (Stories) and Laughter in the Dark.

Vladislav Khodasevich noted once that the "style of life" depicted in the
Laughter in the Dark is "permeated and poisoned" with the motif of cinema. With
certain provisos, this insight also applies to "Scenes." Floyd's beatific
vision of a worshiping stranger on the beach points to a sad lopsidedness of
Floyd's self-conceptualization: Used to being exhibited and gazed at, he can-
not imagine a relationship in which he is not an observed object. Fatal to him
seems to gauge his happiness as directly contingent on the personality and
reaction of his audience. There are "bad," cruel, insensitive observers who
make him miserable (nearly everybody on the farm), and there are "good"
observers, such as the fictitious tear-eyed connoisseur of ancient wonders
who greets the brothers after their escape (incidentally, one is again reminded
of Martinus, into whose loving embrace Lindamira-Indamora falls on fleeing
the prison of the raree-show). It is difficult to say whether Floyd himself

is aware of the terrible irony of his situation—that is, of the fact that the
unappealing Dr. Fricke is the earthly embodiment of Floyd's imagined "good"
observer. Most likely, this realization eludes him. In fact, one of the peculiar
effects of the story is that, even as Nabokov subtly comments on the dangers
of Floyd's willing self-commodification, he draws his readers into the same
vicious circle that entraps his hero. At the end of "Scenes," we sigh together
with Floyd and wish for a kind, appreciative, admiring stranger borne by the
tide and naively envision him as a positive alternative to dreadful uncle Novus
lying in wait on the shore.

The word "Scenes" in the story's title thus refers to Floyd's reimagining his
and Lloyd's childhood as a series of bright cinematic vignettes or sequences—
doctor sequence; the scene of the rape; the first encounter with a normal
child; the shiny-knife sequence; the scene of escape; the adventurous-stranger
sequence (the stranger is played by the same actor who impersonates Dr.
Fricke, sans the Freudian eyeglasses, balding pate, and disciplined beard).
Hence, the specific "movie" lingo and the "script-like" style of some of the
descriptions, such as this one:

[The] ardent faces [of our audience] still pursue me in my nightmares, for
they come whenever my dream producer needs supers. I see again the
gigantic bronze-faced shepherd in multicolored rags, the soldiers from
Karaz, the one-eyed hunchbacked Armenian tailor (a monster in his own
right), the giggling girls, the sighing old women, the children, the young
people in Western clothes—burning eyes, white teeth, black gaping mouths.
(Stories 612)

Nabokov recasts the Scriblerian raree-show in a modern cinematic mold and
focuses on the deforming effects that the ruthless objectification of the "exhibit-
hed" human beings has on their psychology. Floyd's tortured narcissism is
revealed in his failure to envision any relationship other than that between the
observer and the observed and in his attempts to ignore or obliterate the men-
tal presence of his brother. Like Scriblerians before him, Nabokov explores
nuances of human fascination with "monsters." Going further than his eig-
teenth-century predecessors, he enunciates the price paid for this fascination
by those in the limelight.

23. Vladislav Khodasevich, as quoted in David M. Bethea, "Nabokov and Khodasevich," in
Alexandrov, Garland Companion, 457.