



by Michael Maar  
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## Solus Rex: The Beautiful and Baleful World of Vladimir Nabokov

*Solus Rex. Die schöne böse Welt des  
Vladimir Nabokov*

### review

There are literary critics whose output, however slight, demands attention. Michael Maar is one such. His fame was established when, in 2005, he published *The Two Lolitas*. This expanded thesis, which he developed from an original essay, made the controversial yet plausible claim that Vladimir Nabokov may have suffered from 'cryptoamnesia' when writing *Lolita*. In 1916 a short story with the same title appeared by an author called Heinz von Eschwege writing under the pseudonym Heinz von Lichberg. Did Nabokov know of the tale? Maar assesses the striking similarities between both the stories and the authors. His arguments are skilfully put, his evidence cleverly constructed. Yet some may feel that the verdict is still open, that the case he makes is still greater than the sum of its parts.

Be that as it may, having tackled the two *Lolitas*, Maar has now moved on to make Nabokov himself the subject of his investigations. Although essentially a monograph – the book runs to 192 pages, fifty of which constitute the endnotes and bibliography – *Solus Rex* is a welcome addition to the ever-growing critical canon on the Russian genius. This is not least the case in Germany itself, where biographical and critical works on Nabokov have been thin on the ground.

Maar is a master literary sleuth: he discovers hitherto hidden sources

and quotations as well as informative references. He is at his best when uncovering those small, seemingly irrelevant details which demonstrate how closely aligned the life was to the work. Moreover he shows how one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century was able to depict both the beauty and the inscrutability of the world, as if it were ruled by a malign force rather than a benign god. Among the gems is the story of how, in spite of having lived in Berlin for fifteen years, Nabokov liked to put about the highly questionable claim that he never mastered the German language. He also liked to compare the Germans to hyenas who should be chloroformed.

Maar is a clear and engaging writer and this scholarly book is a fascinating page-turner. If it does no more than bring the reader back to the original texts themselves, it will have amply fulfilled its brief.

## press quotes

*'Seductive...brilliantly written.'* – *Neue Zürcher Zeitung, on Warum Nabokov Harry Potter gemocht hätte*

## about the author

**Michael Maar** born in 1960, has taught at Stanford University and is a member of the illustrious German Academy for Language and Literature, founded in 1949 in the Paulskirche, Frankfurt am Main, on Goethe's 200th birthday. Highly regarded as a critic and essayist, and the German expert on Vladimir Nabokov, this awardwinning writer now lives in Berlin.

### Previous works include:

*Geister und Kunst. Neuigkeiten aus dem Zauberberg* (1995, Carl Hanser Verlag); *Das Blaubartzimmer. Thomas Mann und die Schuld* (2000, Suhrkamp Verlag); *Warum Nabakov Harry Potter gemocht hätte* (2002, Berlin Verlag); *Die Glühbirne der Ertusker* (2003, DuMont Verlag); *Lolita und der deutsche Leutnant* (2005, Suhrkamp Verlag)

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