



The Tragedy of Mister Morn

By Vladimir Nabokov

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For the first time in English, Vladimir Nabokov's earliest major work, written when he was only twenty-four: his only full-length play, introduced by Thomas Karshan and beautifully translated by Karshan and Anastasia Tolstoy.

The Tragedy of Mister Morn was written in the winter of 1923–1924, when Nabokov was completely unknown. The five-act play—the story of an incognito king whose love for the wife of a banished revolutionary brings on the chaos the king has fought to prevent—was never published in Nabokov's lifetime and lay in manuscript until it appeared in a Russian literary journal in 1997. It is an astonishingly precocious work, in exquisite verse, touching for the first time on what would become this great writer's major themes: intense sexual desire and jealousy, the elusiveness of happiness, the power of the imagination, and the eternal battle between truth and fantasy. The play is Nabokov's major response to the Russian Revolution, which he had lived through, but it approaches the events of 1917 above all through the prism of Shakespearean tragedy.

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Editorial Review

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Nabokov is a master, his place in the pantheon assured. This play, discovered among his papers and first published in Russia in 1997, is considered his first major work, as the translators explain in their cogent introduction, as it contains in nascent form his principal themes. It is a tragedy that owes a debt to Shakespeare, which the nimble, readable translation makes explicit with its use of loose iambic pentameter. The work contains swerving turns of phrase and ringing contrasts that hint at the glorious writing of the mature Nabokov: “. . . An ant . . . / Funny, he runs like a man amidst a fire . . .” This is a work of juvenilia that will attract the specialist and the completist. The speeches often curdle into speechifying, and the work is wildly uneven. The elements are simple enough: a nameless kingdom, a quartet of love stories, nihilistic revolutionaries. But the story of revolt for revolt’s sake is powerful, and the play’s strength is how it dramatizes this excruciating truth. --Michael Autrey

Review

The variety, force and richness of Nabokov's perceptions have not even the palest rival in modern fiction. To read him in full flight is to experience stimulation that is at once intellectual, imaginative and aesthetic, the nearest thing to pure sensual pleasure that prose can offer -- Martin Amis He did us all an honour by electing to use, and transform, our language -- Anthony Burgess The power of the imagination is not apt soon to find another champion of such vigour -- John Updike

About the Author

Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) was born in St Petersburg. He wrote his first literary works in Russian, but rose to international prominence as a masterly prose stylist for the novels he composed in English, most famously, *Lolita*. Between 1923 and 1940 he published novels, short stories, plays, poems and translations and established himself as one of the most outstanding Russian emigre writers.

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