

Apart from Laclos, what other writers have influenced you?

I learned a lot from the short novels of Dostoevsky, who was a giant. And from Tolstoy, and above all, from Heinrich von Kleist, whose stories I recommend to everybody. I've learned a lot from Thomas Mann, above all DOKTOR FAUSTUS. Also from FELIX KRULL; I think some of the best pages ever written on sex are in FELIX KRULL. There are people who don't take this book very seriously because the hero is a con man instead of an artist or an industrialist, but I consider it one of Mann's most profound works. I've also learned a lot from picaresque novels like EL LAZARILLO DE TORMES, one of the best books ever written. I admire how dramatically, with what brevity and conciseness it explains things. I don't care about style but I'm very anxious to express in a personal way precisely what I want to say. Cervantes had a great influence on me, in my adolescence. And Stendhal also has been a key writer for me. And of course Balzac. And Shakespeare. He is everybody's master.

What do you think of Vladimir Nabokov, a writer from the east like you, who triumphed in America like you; a man who, like you, changed languages as an adult?

When you read Thomas Mann or Lazarillo de Tormes, or Kleist, you find that they only mention the significant facts. Nabokov writes about insignificant things as well as the relevant ones, and he becomes self-indulgent. He has no sense of economy. I believe that his literary theory was wrong, that idea of the writer as artist. I don't think that "my style, my personality, etc." are so important, nor that they are what define me as an artist. For me art is truth. I think that the official experts on culture are the enemies of culture; Cervantes and Stendhal, in their day, were considered bad writers by the experts. The reason is that the specialists in culture are interested in culture, the art experts are interested in art. But art is not interested in art; art is interested in life.

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