A Magical Helper: Evgeny Belodubrovsky

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A Magical Helper

Jane Grayson's magnificent celebration of Nabokov's centennial in Cambridge concluded with a banquet in hall at Trinity College, under the calves of Henry VIII. In high spirits, several of us who had met at it couldn't bear to part and went off to a pub, where my husband Bill and I found ourselves across the table from Zhenya. As it was, of course, also
Pushkin's bi-centennial, I was about to give a talk on «The Bronze Horseman» at Bristol. The talk hinged on Pushkin's knowledge of a French story that had been published in a Petersburg journal, «La Revue étrangère», but I had not been able to verify his having read the story from more than internal evidence. As Zhenya was so welcoming, open and infinitely knowledgeable, I told him of my plight. Without batting an eye, he replied «Oh yes, Pushkin had the entire run of that journal. And the pages of the issues that appeared during his lifetime were all cut». This impossible dream of a scholar, wherein the arcane, precise, perfectly relevant and incontrovertible evidence is suddenly, unexpectedly placed before one, borders on the supernatural. Zhenya became the genial, kind Mr. Silberman of Sebastian Knight for me and over the years of our friendship has magically brought about more such personalized transcendent experiences.

(Перевод Марии Белодубровской)