

Minor response to  
"softest of tongues"  
by vladimir nabokov  
essay sample



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## **Minor response to “ Softest of Tongues” by Vladimir Nabokov Essay Sample**

Change is an inevitable part of our lives and sometimes accepting that change can be difficult. In the poem “ Softest of Tongue” poet Vladimir Nabokov expresses the burden of accepting change and saying goodbye to the past. Nabokov writes of a character that goes through the process of change, by identifying the problem, accepting the decision for change and then starting a new beginning. However the character starts to have difficulties in letting go of his past and this interferes with his decision. This character brings on the all too familiar problem that everyone experiences whilst dealing with change.

There is always a catalyst for change. The speaker of the poem begins by listing specific things that cause unhappiness and thus a need for change. The line “ novels interrupted by the din of the tunnels” depict how the persona strives to appreciate literature but the “ dim of the tunnels” or their surroundings always seem to interfere. The “ drab designs that habit seldom sees” illustrate the busy lifestyle that the persona might lead and as a result, cause them to lose their appreciation for the arts. The mention of the “ thumbless glove” expresses how un-useful or meaningless everything in their life has become. These are all the catalysts for the change that is about to occur. The speaker uses these examples amongst others, to communicate to the reader their desperate need for change.

To cope with change one must learn to accept it. The speaker of the poem then says “ prash-chai” or “ goodbye” to those burdens, however this is

expressed with a tone of denial. The word goodbye “cheats the lips and leaves them parted”, indicating how the person feels “cheated” or unconfident about his decision for change and feels a sense of regret. The act of leaving the lips parted means there is still something to say or a feeling of resentment. The speaker goes on to say “so that’s that, you say under your breath”. The notion of talking “under your breath” or in a soft voice often means uncertainty. At this point the person is having difficulty with accepting change and is beginning to feel resentment and uncertainty towards it. In the lines “wave your hand, and then your handkerchief, and then your hat” the person once again shows difficulty in accepting change. The repeated attempts of saying goodbye, shows the speaker is having problems with accepting the decision to leave. In order to deal with change one must learn to accept it. We watch the character in the poem struggle to accept the decision or change that they have chosen. But once there is acceptance, closure follows and with it a start of a new beginning.

With the acceptance of change follows a new beginning. Nabokov shows how the persona comes to terms with the change in the lines “to all these things I’ve said the fatal word”. The word “fatal” or deadly means an absolute end; the speaker uses this word to indicate his final goodbye. The persona also realizes the positive outcomes by referring to the change as “[hearing] its echoes by posterity acclaimed”. The word “posterity” refers to the future and by making this decision there will be “acclaim” or good that will come as a result of it. The speaker then finds closure by saying “just here we part, softest of tongues, my true one, all my own...”. The “softest of tongues” represents the speaker’s true feelings and motives and “parts” with all his

regrets and insecurities. By saying "all my own" refers to the persona's full acceptance of the change and shows that they are completely confident in their "own" decision. The speaker follows this acceptance of change with the line "start of a new clumsy tools of stone". The phrase "tools of stone" refers to the primitive man and their use of stone as "clumsy tools". This is to show how the persona is starting a new beginning, one that shows a promising future similar to the cave man and its evolution to present man.

Since it is human nature to change, poet Vladimir Nabokov writes the poem *Softest of Tongues* to express the universal burden of accepting change and saying goodbye to the past. The poem brings us through one's journey of overcoming the difficulties of change, moving on and starting a new beginning; a process that everyone can relate to.