

and penetrating bathroom-related observations. The “no place” we inhabit, might be a uniquely utopian one, as one contributor, Christopher Phelps, writes, and yet it is also a very worldly one with all the universal aspects of the human comedy.

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Bathroom revelations

I was very interested to read your article on academic exile (“Home away from home”, Features, 26 June), not least because this is an experience I am familiar with, having held academic positions in England, the Netherlands and Scotland over the past 24 years.

The article reminded me of that delightful comedy of academic manners that is *Pnin* (1957) by Vladimir Nabokov, an early campus novel whose protagonist, Pnin, is an émigré who teaches Russian literature in an obscure American college.

Pnin loves his new country to the point that he “becomes” an American, and yet he cannot but be baffled by American bathtubs, that to him appear to have been “made for dwarfs by a nation of giants”.

To this day I am still bewildered by British “two taps sinks” myself. Maybe there is a Pnin in any of us, in the manner in which we make our way through academia in a foreign land, often beleaguered by tragicomic difficulties

