"The Incomplete Text and the Ardent Core":

The Role of Unfulfilment in the Work of Vladimir Nabokov.

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ABSTRACT

Three related elements of Nabokov's art are introduced at the beginning of the study: Nabokov's monist philosophy and the self-contained structures of his art, the necessity of the co-operation of the reader to bring the 'objective existence'of the novel into being and lastly the development of the consciousness as the measure of his characters in relation to the master consciousness Nabokov. All three of these elements are shown to depend on a law of unfulfilment operating in his work, which always seeks to match one mode with its provisional opposite. The abstract basis of this idea is then explained in terms of Nabokov's use of mirror images which (it is shown) educates the reader by teaching him what not to do before he can fully experience Nabokov's deeper structures. The three-fold mirror basis of his work (the artist - the work - the reader) is next related to the tripartite Hegelian method of philosophy. Hegel's ideas are shown to be explainable in mirror terms and the accordance between both writers is demonstrated. The unfulfilling theme is identified with the antithetic phase of the syllogism. These Hegelian and mirror insights are then applied to two novels: The Gift and The Real Life of Sebastian Knight. The conclusion seeks to define the experience of the reader's apprehension of Nabokov's art using the Hegelian vocabulary that has been developed. This study demonstrates that Nabokov evolved an informal yet developed metaphysic which must be understood as an avenue to the meaning of his art. The three-fold Hegelian formula, arrived at through the discovery of the role of unfulfilment in his work, provides the Nabokov reader with an indispensable key to the solution of Nabokov's "riddles with elegant solutions".

The method of transliteration of Russian in the text is that employed by V. Nabokov in his commentary to Eugene Onegin. Surnames however have been left in their accustomed form (e.g. Bely). All unacknowledged translations are the author's.

PART ONE

I

The Nabokovian exegete who finds himself confronted by his subject's riddles can take wry comfort from these lines from Alexander Pope (the favourite writer of the poet of Pale Fire, John Shade) in Essay on Man: "Expatiate free o'er all this scene of man, / a mighty maze! but not without a plan." In establishing if not a plan then some substantial guidelines towards a satisfactory reading of Nabokov's work, this study begins on the understanding of three main elements in relation to his art. These elements can be arranged in a form of syllogistic development as also it will be shown that Nabokov's mode of thought is inherently syllogistic. It is at first necessary to realise that Nabokov has described himself as "an indivisible monist".(1) As such, his works are constructed in order to embody a complete, organized unity, indeed he acknowledged that he wrote to prove the objective existence of the novel.(2) This unity is achieved by a sustained effort of mimesis that gives the impression that the individual work is an entirely self-sufficient structure bound by interrelated pattern and motif. Nabokov maintains this unified aspect to his work by creating relations between the discrete works themselves thus forming an absolute configuration of "system within system" to quote again from Essay on Man.

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(1) V. Nabokov. Strong Opinions (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973) p.85 and p.124.

(2) "The book I make is a specific affair ... I work long on a body of words until it grants me complete possession and pleasure." Ibid, p.115.

The second element to bear in mind is that in a real sense the "objective reality" of his art depends on the reader. We are reminded in Ada that the fabrication is attendant upon "the eyesight of the readers".(3) It has been recorded that the chess genius Alekhine would become enraged because of the tragic situation that "the perfect, inevitable structure of his game" could be rendered "flawed, imperfect, dishonest even"(4) because his essential co-worker, the other player, often did not have a vision equal to his own. Nabokov, if not enraged, is certainly ruefully aware of the situation: in Ada the reader is ironically dubbed a "roseau pensant"(5) after Pascal, although not always bending to the authorial breeze. "Please reader" we are exhorted in Lolita, "do not skip these essential pages. Imagine me, I do not exist if you do not imagine me."(6) Nabokov operated in the understanding that the arrangements of art depend on spontaneous acts of recognition on the part of the reader, who must be accepted into the author's party in order to participate in the experience. Ernst Gombrich characterises this situation in Art and Illusion (1959) where he observes: "the illusions of art presuppose recognition; to repeat the phrase from Philostratus, 'no one can understand the painted horse or bull unless he knows what such creatures are like'."(7) It is one of the fascinations of Nabokov's correspondence with Edmund Wilson that neither had the "eyesight"to appreciate the

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(3) V. Nabokov. Ada (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969) p.72.

(4) H. C. Schonberg. Grandmasters of Chess (Glasgow: Collins, 1975) p.159.

(5) See notes to pages 60 and 84. Penguin edition 1970.

(6) V. Nabokov. The Annotated Lolita ed. and ann. A. Appel (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970) p.131.

(7) E. H. Gombrich. Art and Illusion (London: Phaidon, 1960) P.221.

other's special landscape and thus their clash was inevitable.

The third element concerns Nabokov's estimation of the range of human consciousness at its most acute, happy and healthy (as characterised by himself). He felt that, although checked by its "inability to cope with its own essence"[8], the consciousness is capable of almost unbounded range and power and if acute enough can bring one to the brink of revelation about the nature of the physical world. Nabokov suggests that consciousness itself is a species of recognition of significant patterns offered by physical reality. The idea of consciousness as progressive rediscovery is behind his account of the development of the senses in Chapter Fifteen of Speak Memory. In the novel The Gift, the "gift of sight"[9] has been donated by the "Person Unknown"[10] who has also stage-managed the physical scenery. We are also told in the novel that the "rules of harmony" are always revealed to "observant men"[11] and this implies that the pulse of consciousness recapitulates in some fashion the nature of the physical world.

The consciousness is the 'middleman'[12] in Nabokov's work and also the means to approach his self-sufficient structures. The "objective existence" of his art can be appreciated as Fyodor also reads 'physical reality' by coming to understand the nature of

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(8) Interview with George Feifer. Telegraph Sunday Magazine, 1977.

(9) V. Nabokov. The Gift (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1963) p.15.

(10) Ibid, p.311.

(11) Ibid, p.191.

(12) Ibid, p.15.

one's reactions to it. In Nabokov's understanding the workings of consciousness are both an activity and a metaphysic and this is involved (indeed implicit) in his monist philosophy. Consciousness of course does not exist "without a possessive epithet"[13] and the crux of this study depends on the charting of the relationship between the master consciousness of Nabokov himself and the confining consciousness of his characters. One means to approach Nabokov would be to arrange a selection of passages from his work in significant juxtaposition. Two such passages would include his comment from the letters to Edmund Wilson: "my theory is that the Devil has always a chink in his armour"[14]; and from the novel Transparent Things (1972): "How dreadful it would be if the very awareness of your being aware of reality's dream-like nature was also a dream, a built-in hallucination. One should bear in mind however that there is no mirage without a vanishing point just as there is no lake without a closed circle of reliable land."[15] Both of these axiomatic parables indicate that there is a determinable nexus in his art, a point (to employ an image from The Gift) where Nabokov's parallel lines meet.

One chink in Nabokov's armour, the inevitable meeting of parallel lines, is the certainty that the creator cannot live along with his creations. "Le Grand Néant" evoked in Canto Three of

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(13) "Life does not exist without a possessive epithet. Lenin's life differs from say, James Joyce's as much as a handful of gravel does from a blue diamond, although both men were exiles in Switzerland and both wrote a vast number of words." Strong Opinions, pp.118-119.

(14) S. Karlinsky ed. The Nabokov-Wilson Letters (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1979) p.165.

(15) V. Nabokov. Transparent Things (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973) p.93.

Pale Fire is inevitable and alas in Nabokov's case has now occurred. One recalls the lines from his Paris Poem (1943): "Death is distant yet (after tomorrow / I'll think everything through); but now and then / one's heart starts clamoring: Author! Author! / He is not in the house gentlemen."(16) There is implicit in Nabokov's work, and he himself comments on Pushkin "well knowing" it also, the realisation of "the triple formula of human existence: irrevocability, unrealizability, inevitability."(17) Thus Nabokov is paradoxically engaged in simultaneously demonstrating the heights of human experience along with emphasizing a firm boundary or limit to experience.

It is instructive that Nabokov particularly mentions Pushkin as understanding these themes; indeed of all writers he stands supreme in Nabokov's "private universe". Andrew Field has observed that in his poem "Night Journey" (1931) Nabokov even adopted the persona of Pushkin as a spokesman to berate his fellow poets of the emigration for his understanding of their failures.(18) Nabokov paid tribute to Pushkin in his four-volume translation of Eugene Onegin. It is a tribute because it is an acknowledgement that Pushkin succeeded in making an "objective existence" out of his verse novel and thus Nabokov's translation is a lesson in how he sets about interpreting a given reality. That is why in the end result the whole work

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(16) V. Nabokov. Poems and Problems (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1972) p.121.

(17) The Gift, p.99.

(18) A. Field. Nabokov: His Life in Art (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967) pp.85-90.

probably tells us more about Nabokov then Pushkin.

It will be found that a number of Pushkin pieces act as models for approbation and as springboards for further thought in Nabokov's own work. One of these is found in Pushkin's short prose piece: A Journey to Arzrum (1836). In The Gift Fyodor, in the process of seeking inspiration for a new work at first skips through A Journey to Arzrum. However on a more careful appreciation of the work, he realises that it represents "the purest sound from Pushkin's tuning fork" and promotes a "divine stab"[19] of feeling on the part of the careful reader. It is no coincidence that the work is mentioned in the context of seeking inspiration for the work represents Pushkin's object lesson in literary inspiration. In the foreword to the work Pushkin explains how he was annoyed by a French commentator who assumed that he had participated in an expedition to the Caucasus in order to find in "tant des hauts faits dont il a été témoin ... le sujet d'un poème."[20] Pushkin goes on to comment that the search for inspiration:

> "has always seemed to me a ludicrous and absurd fancy: inspiration will not be sought; it must itself find the poet. To join in a war in order to sing of great deeds to come would seem to me on the one hand altogether eccentric and on the other hand quite indecent."[21]

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(19) The Gift, p.97.

(20) "Predislovie": A. S. Pushkin. Puteshestvie V Arzrum VO vremya Poxoda 1829 Goda.

(21) Translation G. Hyde who should be credited for first pointing to the link between 'Podvig' and Journey to Arzrum. See Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist (London: Marion Boyars, 1977) p.23.

Nabokov's novel Podvig 1932 (translated as Glory in 1971) acknowledges Pushkin's scorn of gratuitous "great deeds" (podvigi) in Journey to Arzrum. In the foreword to his novel Nabokov comments: "the book's ... working title (later discarded in favour of the pithier Pogvig, "gallant feat", "high deed") was Romanticheskiy Vek, "romantic times" which I had chosen partly because I had had enough of hearing Western journalists call our era "materialistic", "practical", "utilitarian" etc, but mainly because the purpose of my novel, my only one with a purpose, lay in stressing the thrill and glamour that my young expatriate finds in the most ordinary pleasures ..."(22)

Pushkin's prose piece exemplifies the manner in which inspiration should come to the writer by his limpid delicate pictures of presented life that form the satisfying "linkages" of object and word that Fyodor finds lacking in his own "mechanical" poems. Pushkin's words go to form the "silent, intense, / mimetic pattern of perfect sense" (23) that Nabokov sees as the object of literary art. Indeed Fyodor repeats Pushkin's words as a form of prayer: "And how it called how it prompted him, the sentence about the Terek ('In faith the river was awesome!') or - even more fitly, more intimately - about the Tartar women: 'They were sitting on horseback, swathed in yashmaks: all one could see were their eyes and the heels of their shoes.'"(24)

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(22) V. Nabokov. Glory (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971) p.X.

(23) "The Poem" (1944). Poems and Problems, p.157.

(24) The Gift, p.97.

All this is interesting but the antithetic bite in the piece which brings the work even closer to Nabokov's themes comes from the description in the middle of Journey to Arzrum of how quite accidentally Pushkin ran into the ox-cart carrying the body of his friend Griboedov, the dramatist, back home after he had been murdered by a mob in Tehran. This grim 'momento mori' undercuts the lyric impulse in the piece and strengthens its appeal for we have the Nabokovian idea of the artist as a tight-rope walker over an omnipresent abyss. In his commentary to Eugene Onegin, Nabokov quotes from "the sick blind" poet Küchelbecker whom he considered "a first-rate genius" in a work entitled 'Destiny of Russian Poets' (1845): "thrown into a black prison, / killed by the frost of hopeless banishment; / or else the hand of some vile lady's man / impells a bullet at their sacred brow / or the deaf rabble rises in revolt - / and him the rabble will to pieces tear". Nabokov adds the terse gloss to the poem: "The bullet killed Pushkin, the rabble murdered Griboedov."(25)

Pushkin's Journey to Arzrum where style attempts an equivalent to the beauty of physical nature and where also the writer dwells on the grim fate of Griboedov leads to Nabokov's two English poems that provide the texts for the title of this thesis. Pushkin is appropriate because in a simplistic sense one poem expresses release and the other espouses limitation. This theme of contradiction is emphasized by the fact that both poems - 'The Room' (1950) and

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(25) V. Nabokov. trans. and ann. Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse by Aleksandr Pushkin (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) II, pp.446-447. For Nabokov's commentary on a Journey to Arzrum see II, p.90, III, p.283.

'Restoration' (1952)[26] are written in rhymed iambic tetrameter. This verse form, as Nabokov has commented, holds in Russian "a rich concentrated meaning with a lofty melody" yet which in English "swings between the twin extremes of stylized primitivity and ornate burlesque".[27] Thus squeezed by a jogging beat and a short line these poems have a freakish concentration of meaning that derives from serious subjects undercut by a metre associated with light verse and the mock-heroic. It is instructive to examine the themes of these poems, which are normally shrouded by a dense mimetic cloak in Nabokov's work but which here seem to metaphorically gasp for life in an inhospitable context.

The title of the poem 'Restoration' refers to the central conceit of the piece which compares the poet's task to that of the picture restorer who rubs away the bogus smudgy picture to reveal "the jewel" of the original work underneath. 'Restoration' is a seemingly straightforward manifesto of gnoseological[28] intent: the poet announces that he will "turn inside out, pry open, probe / all matter everything you see". The subject of his investigation is "physical matter" and the tool is human consciousness "everything you see". The impediment to this quest is only the human sense of contingent weakness: "to think that any fool may tear / by chance the web of when and where" and it is implied that the sense of limitation is an illusion to be overcome. We are also told that the

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(26) Poems and Problems, pp.164-165, 167-168.

(27) "Notes on Prosody". Eugene Onegin III, p.497.

(28) Gnoseological: of or relating to the philosophic theory of knowledge, concerning the metaphysical boundary of knowledge (Websters). Nabokov seemed to be addicted to the use of this word. See for example Nabokov-Wilson Letters, p.31, p.56.

poet expects to be fulfilled in his quest by a species of quiet revelation as when one suddenly hits on how to levitate. The poem concentrates on the idea that there is another existent reality - "the true the ardent core" - the general lineaments of which he sees hinted at in the provisional landscape that confronts him. Thus a commonplace apple masks the "snowball" that is revealed if it is dextrously peeled; similarly a masterly landscape exists behind the "sooty curtain" of the indifferent picture.

Nabokov has provided an analogue to this poem in his fascination with a "remarkable fence" that is described in his autobiography, in the novel The Gift and in a short story. In Speak Memory he refers to

> "a paling the boards of which had been brought from some other place where they had been used apparently as the enclosure for an itinerant circus. Animals had been painted on it by a versatile barker; but whoever had removed the boards, and then knocked them together again must have been blind or insane, for now the fence showed only disjointed parts of animals."(29)

The Gift develops on this image:

> "life's promise of a life to come had been kept with respect to the fence, but the rupture of earthly images on it destroyed the earthly value of immortality; at night however little could be made of it, while the exaggerated

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(29) V. Nabokov. Speak Memory (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, rev. ed. 1967) p.22.

> shadows of the leaves (nearby there was a streetlight)
> lay on the boards quite logically in perfect order -
> this served as a kind of compensation, the more so since
> it was impossible to transfer them to another place,
> with the boards having broken up and mixed the pattern:
> so they could only be transferred in toto together with
> the whole night."(30)

Nabokov suggests in this context that there had been formerly a complete ordered picture (in this case of a procession of circus animals) and it would be possible to work back to this by patiently rearranging the displaced pieces. However this is not necessary because a similar impression of order can be gained by training one's consciousness on the boards in the context of its present relation with the shadows of the tree leaves and thereby gaining a parallel sense of cohesive arrangement. This process thus suggests that in Nabokov's understanding there is a "core" of order present in 'physical reality' but it is a subjective understanding that runs through matter as it is revealed to the consciousness. If one returns to the poem, the poet cites "the skyline and its saddest tree" as an example of the "matter" that he will "unrobe" and this emphasizes the sense of particular relations between objects that recapitulate general "laws of harmony" as also do the tree leaves and the disjointed fence.

The poem 'Restoration' suggests the paradox that the end of a

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(30) The Gift, p.170.

quest is achieved by concentrating on the mode of operation. When describing a "poet who can strip / a William Tell or Golden Pip / in one uninterrupted peel" Nabokov evokes his favourite image of the spiral that would form of the apple's skin if it were peeled in such a way. In Speak Memory he observed the link between the spiral and philosophical questions:

> "the spiral is a spiritualised circle. In the spiral form the circle, uncoiled, unwound, had ceased to be vicious. It had been set free. I thought this up when I was a schoolboy, and I also discovered that Hegel's triadic series ... expressed merely the essential spirality of all things in their relation to time. Twirl follows twirls and every synthesis is the thesis of the next series ..."(31)

If the poem 'Restoration' celebrates the spiral development of the consciousness as it progresses through perceiving the fluid relations between things that in turn suggest new combinations then the poem 'The Room' is concerned with the "vicious circle". The first four stanzas of the poem describe how a "dying poet" takes a room in "a dead hotel" that is especially desolate: "not tears, not terror, but a blend / of anonymity and doom, / it seemed that room, to condescend / to imitate a normal room". The middle passage of the poem reveals the narrator who takes the same room and finds written on the wall the line "alone, unknown, unloved, I die". The narrator attempts to find out the identity of the former occupant

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(31) Speak Memory, p.275.

and author of the words but fails and is forced to hypothesize his situation. He wonders if the unknown one had been driven to despair by the presence of a mediocre painting on the wall: "A red eruption which / tried to be maples in the fall / Artistically in the style of Mr. Churchill at his best". The reference to bad art brings a swerve in the narration and doubt is expressed over the story of the 'dying poet' as imagined: "perhaps my text is incomplete / a poet's death is after all, / a question of technique, a neat / enjambment, a melodic fall". The narrator considers that a poet always makes an accomplished neat exit[32] and accordingly makes a satisfying rounding off himself:

"And here a life had come apart
in darkness and the room had grown
a ghostly thorax, with a heart
unknown, unloved - but not alone."

At first glance then, this poem appears to be a parable of the solace of art, the incomplete exit of the unknown poet is consummated and compensated for by the following artist. That there is a second interpretation becomes evident if one considers why the poem is titled the'Room' and not "the dying poet" or "completion". The initial stanzas give the impression of the "dying poet" awake in bed at night in a room which "let in the darkness where / rain glistened

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(32) Thus confirming the fraudulence of this apparent persona for we know of the messy ends of both Pushkin and Griboedov. Also Nabokov shows Gogol at his death being tormented by a "couple of diabolically energetic physicians". See Nikolai Gogol (New York: New Directions, 1959).

and a shop sign bled ... whenever some automobile / subliminally slit the night / the walls and ceiling would reveal / a wheeling skeleton of light". The present narrator is introduced as a "similar striped cageling" (i.e. also awake at night in bed) and we are told that he finds the pencilled inscription that initiates all this speculation when he "groped for the lamp". The existence of the "dying poet" thus comes to the narrator after he has tried to sleep for a while and then switched the light back on in defeat. The apprehension of this as well as the hint that the pencilled line has "a false quotation air" brings the suspicion that the whole episode is the nocturnal invention of a man harassed by insomnia and oppressed by a desolate hotel room.

'The Room' can thus be considered to have three protagonists: "the dying poet" and the following poet who seeks to bring the former's demise to a comforting aesthetic solution, and the third, sleepless poet who has invented the two former characters. The first interpretation of the poem depends on a satisfying parable sealed by a neat "melodic fall". The second interpretation shows that a poet's life cannot always be run according to "technique" for he also is subject to mortal privation, in this case of insomnia. 'The Room' therefore is a lesson in the inutility of art for the apparently harmonious construct is in fact a mental ditty reflecting the predicament of an insomniac.

Insomnia could be characterised as a condition where the sufferer is the prisoner of his thoughts. Certainly the circularity of the poem reflects the sleepless condition of the composer. It is instructive that the poem as a whole derives its effect from the

ironic vision of art being conceived as a palliative for sleeplessness. This is illustrative of Nabokov's general interest in the themes of human weakness and finitude. The one description that links all three characters of 'The Room' are the lines: "a similar striped cageling, I". Nabokov was obviously struck by Lawrence Sterne's story of the starling in the cage in Sentimental Journey (1768). This bird only knows the words "I cannot get out, I cannot get out" and this seals its fate for it is passed from owner to owner because of the novelty of its utterance. Nabokov refers to the story in Humbert Humbert's ballad to the vanished Lolita: "I talk in a daze, I walk in a maze, / I cannot get out said the starling".(33) Nabokov believed that the idea for Lolita was "prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes, who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: the sketch showed the bars of the poor creature's cage".(34) A number of Nabokov's characters similarly consider the physical world to be a disguised prison. John Shade in Pale Fire observes "... we are most artistically caged"(35) and a disturbed character in the short story Signs and Symbols (1948) "wanted to ... tear a hole in his world and escape".(36)

Nabokov gave a striking image of his conception of the tragic

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(33) The Annotated Lolita, p.257.

(34) 'On a book Entitled Lolita', Ibid. p.313.

(35) V. Nabokov. Pale Fire (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1962) p.37.

(36) 'Signs and Symbols' 1948 rpr. Nabokov's Dozen (Harmondsworth: Penguin) p.54.

limitation of human life in his portrait of his governess in Chapter Five[37] of Speak Memory. At the close of the description of Mademoiselle 'O' he describes how he had through "a fluke move in life" once more met the governess years after the revolution had separated them. After an unsatisfactory meeting with the "pathetic old lady" the author

> "happened to be walking along the lake (Leman) in the cold misty night. At one spot a lone light dimly diluted the darkness and transformed the mist into a visible drizzle. "il pleut toujours en Suisse" was one of those casual comments which, formerly, had made Mademoiselle weep. Below, a wide ripple, almost a wave, and something vaguely white attracted my eye. As I came quite close to the lapping water, I saw what it was - an aged swan, a large, uncouth, dodo-like creature, making ridiculous efforts to hoist himself into a moored boat. He could not do it. The heavy impotent flapping of his wings, their slippery sound against the rocking splashing boat, the gluey glistening of the dark swell where it caught the light - all seemed for a moment laden with ... (a) ... strange significance ... but although I soon forgot that dismal night, it was, oddly enough, that night, that compound image - shudder and swan and swell - which first came to my mind when a couple of years later I learned that Mademoiselle had died."[38]

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(37) This chapter initiated the series of reminiscences that went to form Speak Memory. It was separately published as "Mademoiselle O".

(38) Speak Memory, pp.116-117.

Nabokov concludes his account by wondering if there is not something missing from his "fiction" of Mademoiselle, something indicated by her very sense of being untranslatable to any other physical context, of her having no "soul" of neatly portable identity. Nabokov catches himself wondering "whether, during the years I knew her, I had not kept utterly missing something in her that was far more she, than her chins or her ways, or even her French - something perhaps akin to that last glimpse of her, to the radiant deceit she had used in order to have me depart pleased with my own kindness, or to that swan whose agony was so much closer to artistic truth than a drooping dancer's pale arms ..."(39)

Another instance of Nabokov's understanding that there is a link between "artistic truth" and the struggling of a personality within a limited human context is found in his short story - "A Russian Beauty' (1934). Here he describes the life of a young Russian woman from girlhood in Russia to exile in Germany. The narrative follows the fashionable quirks and follies that interest the young woman, the ebb and flow of her social life - in general the humdrum patterings of a rather small existence. The story is narrated as a retrospective account from the moment when at a weekend matchmaking party she (now aged 30 and still unengaged) hesitates before accepting an offer of marriage from "an athletic widower, author of books on hunting". The moment of her hesitation passes, she accepts the offer and the story concludes on the laconic Chekhovian note that she died in childbirth the next summer. Nabokov provides in place of a postscript the

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(39) Ibid, p.117.

comment:

> "That's all. Of course there may be some sort of sequel but it's not known to me. In such cases instead of getting bogged down in guesswork, I repeat the words of the merry king in my favourite fairy tale. Which arrow flies for ever? the arrow that hits its mark."(40)

This concluding axiom reveals some of Nabokov's attitude to the confines of human existence in relation to art. It is finite and limited - the arrow will hit something yet it flies for ever because its trajectory and impact have formed an unrepeatable individual pattern.(41) It flies for ever also because one can never get to the bottom of things in regard to an individual existence. Nabokov "missed" something about Mademoiselle'O', the woman in a short story had one night when she was deciding whether to marry in which something unfathomable was taking place inside her. In the poem 'Fame' Nabokov ends with the lines "one day while disrupting the strata of sense / and descending deep down to my wellspring / I saw mirrored besides my own self and the world, / something else, something else, something else."(42)

At the back of Nabokov's art then are the twin main concerns: the apprehension of inevitable mortality and the spontaneous exercize

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(40) 'A Russian Beauty': A Russian Beauty and other stories (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973) p.8.

(41) In this lies Nabokov's objection to his conception of Freudian analysis, for him life is "real ... not interchangeable, not tokens of something else." Ada, p.363.

(42) 'Fame': Poems and Problems, p.113.

of a powerful consciousness playing on physical reality. The poem 'The Room' is an indication of the former concern in that sleeplessness seems indicative of a failing fight against the inevitable death of the organism. The horror of sleepless nights is a recurrent theme in his work, thus in Ada Van Veen "made the mistake of night in 1920 of calculating the maximal number of ... (his heart's) ... remaining beats (allowing for another half century) and now the preposterous hurry of the countdown irritated him and increased the rate at which he could hear himself dying". 'Restoration' is a statement of faith in the potency of a sufficiently intense consciousness which brings the "gifts that reward" the poet Fyodor in The Gift(43) and in the short story "Happiness" (1925) where a destitute emigré finds himself "ideally happy" because he allows his untrammelled consciousness to play upon his initially unpromising yet ultimately rewarding surroundings.

It is probable that another Pushkinian model, a lyric of 1829 - "Whether I wander along noisy streets" - possessed particular interest to Nabokov because it dealt with the problem of human transitoriness within the eternal, harmonious context of the physical world. In the eight-stanza poem Pushkin wonders at the possible manner of his death and expresses his perplexity at the continuation of the world without him:

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(43) The epigraph to The Gift, taken from an actual Russian textbook seems to sum up these themes: "An oak is a tree. A rose is a flower. A deer is an animal. A sparrow is a bird. Russia is our fatherland. Death is inevitable." P. Smirnovsky. A Textbook of Russian Grammar.

"As I gaze upon a solitary oak,
I muse: the patriarch of the woods
Will outlive my forgotten age,
As it outlived my father's age."

The poem concludes with an image of (his), the poet's tomb:

"And at the entrance to the grave
May young life play,
And indifferent nature
shine with everlasting beauty."(44)

This poem is mentioned a number of times in Nabokov's work. In Ultima Thule (1940) - Chapter One of an unfinished novel - the main character, an artist named Sineusov, having just found out the death of his wife hurries

"out of the sanitorium, not walking but sort of stamping even dancing with pain (life having got jammed in the door like a finger) alone on that winding road among the exaggeratedly scaly pines and the prickly shields of agaves, in a green armoured world that quickly drew in its feet so as not to catch my disease. Ah yes - everything around me kept warily, attentively silent, and only when I looked at something did that something give a start and begin ostentatiously to move, rustle or buzz, pretending not to notice me. "Indifferent nature," says Pushkin. Nonsense! A continuous shying-away would be a more accurate description."(45)

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(44) Prose translation by W. Arndt.

(45) 'Ultima Thule': A Russian Beauty and other stories, p.151.

The narrator quibbles with Pushkin's exact identification of nature's stance towards man's inbuilt "disease" but substantially he is in agreement. Although the novel was never completed, we know that Sineusov attempts to cure his "vertigo of the soul" occasioned by his wife's death by reconciling himself with physical nature through the medium of his art. "A pathetic act" Nabokov tells us "which does not let him triumph over death even in the world of free fancy".(46) The short story 'A Busy Man' (1931) also uses the Pushkinian lyric. This story concerns a man who interprets a certain dream fatidically and comes to believe that it portends his death on his thirty-third birthday. The tale follows the convulsive attempts of the fellow to forestall this fate and he becomes fascinated by Pushkin's poem. The poem initially appears amongst his thoughts as he anxiously attempts to imagine his own possible demise - "I'm roaming say, through noisy streets - aha, that's Pushkin trying to imagine his way of death:

In combat, wanderings or waves,

Or will it be the nearbye valley ..."

etc. but mark - he began with 'combat' which means he did have some presentiment. Superstition may be masked wisdom."(47)

The narrator identifies with Pushkin's own predilection for finding fatidic dates but the ironic twist of the story comes from the realisation that the narrator has in fact dreamt of someone

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(46) 'Foreword', Ibid. p.147.

(47) 'A Busy Man': Details of a Sunset (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976) p.167.

else's death: that of his unobtrusive next-door neighbour whom he has barely noticed. Thus the separation between "mortal consciousness" and "indifferent nature" remains because the next-door neighbour is as distant from the narrator's anxious consciousness as are Sineusov's "agaves".(48) It takes a careful reading to realise that this is the true sense of the story for the narrator also experiences a form of death (in fact a drunken swoon) as punishment for the limitation of his consciousness. In missing the true "gist of things" he embodies John Shade's accusation that "we die every day; oblivion thrives".(49)

Pushkin's poem reappears in Nabokov's Pnin (1957). In this novel Pnin gives his 'Elementary Russian Class' a language lesson consisting of arbitrary phrases within which appear the first lines of the poem: "Mama, telefon! Brozhu li ya vdol' ulits shumnih ot Vladivostoka do Vashingtona 5000 mil'". Pnin relates the poem to his class and "rippling with mute mirth" points out how carefully Pushkin dated the lyric (December 26th, 1829, 3.03 p.m.), hoping by this enumeration to somehow catch a future echo of his own "anniversary".

"'But' exclaimed Pnin in triumph, 'he died on a quite,

quite, different day! he died on -' The chair back

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(48) "the prickly shields of the agaves" mentioned in this context by Nabokov in 'Ultima Thule' may be a reference to a line in 'Sorrento Photographs' by Vladislav Khodasevich: "and through the prickly agaves" ("i ckvozb koliuchie agavi"). In this poem Khodasevich merges the memory of a Petersburg funeral with his present Mediterranean landscape. Sobranie Stikhov ed. N. Berberova. (Munich: 1961) p.152.

(49) Pale Fire, p.52.

against which Pnin was vigorously leaning emitted an ominous crack and the class resolved a pardonable tension in loud young laughter."(50)

The "ominous crack" is a warning of Pnin's own insecurity. He is insecure because we know that the narrator who insists on calling Pnin his "old friend" is in fact a threatening, inimical figure related to the Professor Cockerell who cruelly imitates Pnin's mannerisms. As a "galley slave" of the "master thumb"(51) Nabokov himself, Pnin is apparently as mortal and limited as Sineusov or the character in 'A Busy Man'. Indeed we see an indifferent fate hanging over him when the Pushkin poem is again invoked:

"V boyu li, v stranstvii, v volnah? In fight, in travel, or in waves? Or on the Waindell campus? Gently champing his dentures which retained a sticky layer of cottage cheese, Pnin went up the slippery library steps."(52)

However at the close of the novel we find Pnin escaping from the narrator: "then the little sedan boldly swung past the front

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(50) V. Nabokov. Pnin (London: Heinemann, 1957, rpr. 1969) pp.67-68.

(51) "my characters are galley slaves". Strong Opinions, p.95. Kinbote quotes from Franklin Lane's Letters (an actual author, an actual book); he wrote a fragment on the eve of his death: "And if I had passed into that other land, whom would I have sought? ... Aristotle! - Ah there would be a man to talk with! What satisfaction to see him take, like reins from between his fingers, the long ribbon of a man's life and trace it through the mystifying maze of all the wonderful adventure ... The crooked made straight. The Daedelian plan simplified by a look from above - smeared out as it were by the splotch of some master thumb that made the whole involuted boggling thing one beautiful straight line." Pale Fire, p.261.

(52) Pnin. pp.73-74.

truck and, free at last, spurted up the shining road, which one could make out narrowing to a thread of gold in the soft mist where hill after hill made beauty of distance and where there was simply no saying what miracle might happen"(53) The "miracle" that may have occurred with Pnin's escape is in part related to the "something else" that exists in the figure of the Mademoiselle, something that survives both the author's pity and his 'fictive urge' to make an explainable rounded character. Only we know that Nabokov has invented Pnin whereas the Mademoiselle had a biographical reality, thus in Pnin Nabokov is trying to re-establish his sensation of having created something and then found that an elusive essence defies his urge to fix. In one sense then Nabokov's art is concerned with failure: he appears to us to have written in order to prove that a human life can be identified, delimited and concluded and that "indifferent nature" can similarly be described standing "outside of" any human "disease" yet he admits that there is "something else, something else, something else."

Nabokov's "something else" is an elusive, involuntary apprehension of things, a sudden modulation and reassembly of the pattern of things in the mind. It seems to be Nabokov's understanding of the authentic artistic experience. In Ada Van Veen's 'Mascodagama' tricks are "akin to artistic revelation in the sense utterly unknown to the innocents of critical appraisal" in that they "are self-imposed, extravagantly difficult, seemingly absurd tasks ... (where) V.V. sought to express something, which until expressed had only a twilight being (or even none at all - nothing but the illusion of

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(53) Ibid, p.191.

the backward shadow of its imminent expression ... a standing of metaphor on its head".(54)

There is something involuntary about Nabokov's idea of art, he probably would not disagree with Rilke's comment that "art can proceed only from a purely anonymous centre".(55) Nabokov sees the artist as having "an unknown force in his mind that has suggested a combination of images"(56); he has similarly noted that literary art is concerned with "the combination of images that yield a sensual spark".(57) He has distinguished art from an emotional experience and instead emphasized that it depends on a form of cerebral twist of apprehension: "true art is never simple being always an elaborate magical deception".(58) He further observes (with an eye to his critics) that art is magically deceptive even when "it seems to fit in well with the author's temperament, ideas, biography and so forth".(59) This is a warning to exegetes who may fall for an initial biographical reading of his work (allied to the erroneous initial reading of the poem 'The Room') for art in Nabokov's sense may not operate so much to "fit in" with the author but instead takes life "in spite of" him.

When Nabokov announces that true art is always magically

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(54) Ada, pp.184-185.

(55) R. M. Rilke. Wartime Letters trans. M. H. Norton (New York: Norton, 1964) p.175.

(56) Strong Opinions, p.40.

(57) Ibid, p.157.

(58) Eugene Onegin, III, p.498.

(59) Ibid, p.498.

deceitful he holds in mind that the best example of this deceit is found in animal camouflage and mimicry: "Deception is practised even more beautifully by that other V.N: Visible Nature. A useful purpose is assigned by science to animal mimicry, protective patterns and shapes, yet their refinement transcends the crude purpose of mere survival".(60) We can advance a step further when we find Nabokov observing in Speak Memory that: "it occurs to me that the closest reproduction of the mind's birth obtainable is the stab of wonder that accompanies the precise moment when, gazing at a tangle of twigs and leaves, one suddenly realises that what had seemed a natural component of that tangle is a marvelously disguised insect or bird".(61) Thus art in Nabokov's sense (by analogy with the tangle of nature that suddenly becomes clear to the mind) is also engaged in the process of reproducing the authentic "stab" of the mind's birth.

If one considers what happens when the observer gazes upon Nabokov's "tangle of twigs and leaves" and then sees the "marvelously disguised" creature, the mind at first accepts a given generalized picture - an accepted pattern - and then a sudden modulation or flip-over occurs and the second and more engaging pattern emerges. John Shade in Canto Four of Pale Fire observes that "if my private universe scans right, / so does the verse of galaxies divine / which I suspect is an iambic line." Nabokov's idea of the iambic line, that also may be co-extensive with his "private universe", is that it has

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(60) Strong Opinions, p.153.

(61) Speak Memory, p.298.

an evident pattern of beat but in the most developed verse there is employed a "counter-point" or scudded modulation that cuts against the regular beat of the iamb. Nabokov (following Bely's research) found that one could draw an internal diagram of the poem - by linking up the scuds or modulations, the greater the poet, the more involved the diagram. He thus also provides a pointer to his own interpreters who can gain access to his work by concentrating on this emphasis on an involuntary back-beat or modulation that leads to the "inside picture".

II

In the 1940's Nabokov took the unusual step of describing the outline of a planned work to his friend Edmund Wilson. The work he described was of "a new type of autobiography" - a scientific attempt to unravel and trace back all the tangled threads of one's personality - and the provisional title is - "The Person in Question".(1) Five years before this Nabokov had used as provisional title of the novel that became Bend Sinister (1947), the phrase - "the Person from Porlock". The titles and other references in Nabokov's work(2) evidently refer to "the person on business from Porlock" mentioned in the famous explanatory note that Coleridge appended to his poem "Kubla Khan". Coleridge tells how he fell into sleep in the middle of reading an account of the building of the Khan's palace at "Xamdu" in Purchas his Pilgrimage. In his sleep Coleridge had "the most vivid confidence that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines: if that indeed could be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions".(3) Coleridge hastily began to write down his impressions on waking. This activity was halted and the visions dispelled beyond recall by the chance visit of the 'Person from Porlock'.

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(1) S. Karlinsky. ed. The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, p.188.

(2) Humbert Humbert finds a clue to Quilty's appearance in a motel register in the name "A. Person. Porlock. England." Annotated Lolita, p.252. There is the librarian Porlock in the short story 'The Vane Sisters'. (Nabokov's Dozen).

(3) Passage from 1816 edition quoted by John L. Lowes. The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination (New York: Mifflin, 1927, rpr. 1964) p.324.

It is clear in what manner Coleridge's story is applicable to Nabokov's novel Bend Sinister. Coleridge's account implies a number of different states that are bridged in different fashions: there is the mode of Purchas's account that gives way to Coleridge's dream, this is followed by his effort to capture the dream and this gives way to the exigencies of the 'person from Porlock's' visit. Similarly in Bend Sinister the philosopher Krug inhabits his own reflective benign world that is impinged on by the shock of his wife's death and then also by pressure from the advent of a new totalitarian state. Krug is forced to progress through into each new mode of experience until he is released from the increasingly intolerable succession of nightmare experiences by returning "unto the bosom of his maker", an "anthropomorphic deity" impersonated by Nabokov. The author reveals himself as the bounding circle[4] around the subsidiary spheres of the novel by appearing at the close of the account: "and I stretched myself and got up from among the chaos of written and unwritten pages, to investigate the sudden twang that something had made in striking the wire netting of the window".[5] The author gets up to gaze at the moth that clings to the netting, it in turn is a representative of another order of reality existing beyond the author (the eternal indifferent Pushkinian nature) and Nabokov's gaze then falls beyond the window onto the puddle glinting in the road that has been his representative

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(4) Krug means 'circle' in Russian.

(5) V. Nabokov. Bend Sinister (Harmondsworth: Penguin, rev.ed. 1964) p.200.

within the fabric of the novel of a "world of lightness and beauty" beyond Krug's circles.(6)

Bend Sinister therefore may suggest that the author can be identified with the 'person from Porlock', thus emphasizing that a narrator is the breaker of the threads of a story as well as the creator of them. However there are two possible interpretations of Coleridge's story as there are also two for Nabokov's novel. Coleridge may have found that he was unable to give full justice to the imaginative challenge of the dream. His fragment of recall reflected all that he could muster; therefore it was necessary to invent the visit of the 'person from Porlock' in order to explain the disjointed poem. This situation may also be applicable to Bend Sinister because it may have been necessary for Krug to invent the Nabokovian deity in order to palliate the intolerable potential for harm in the individual human situation. Nabokov suggests that the main theme of Bend Sinister is "the beating of Krug's loving heart, the torture of an intense tenderness" and that "it is for the sake of the pages about David and his father that the book was written and should be read".(7) Thus the main theme of the novel has a parallel with Nabokov's own experience of bringing up a son in late 1930's Germany.

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(6) "The plot starts to breed in the bright broth of a rain puddle. The puddle is observed by Krug from a window of the hospital where his wife is dying. The oblong pool shaped like a cell that is about to divide reappears subthematically throughout the novel ... this little puddle vaguely evokes in him my link with him: a rent in his world leading to another world of brightness and beauty." Foreword. Bend Sinister (1963 ed.).

(7) Ibid.

Nabokov describes in Speak Memory how his accidental and unstable residence in that country and at that particular time (his wife, it should be noted, was Jewish) intensified his habit of "thinking of my love for a person ... (and) measuring the consciousness of my love against such unimaginable and incalculable things as the behaviour of nebulae (whose very remoteness seems a form of insanity) ... the helplessness, the cold, the sickening involutions and interpenetrations of space and time".(8) This mode of thought about his family also dramatises the basic crisis of mortality: "the utter degradation, ridicule and horror of having developed an infinity of sensation and thought within a finite existence".(9) One mode of overcoming the "absurdity" of this situation is found in charting the means by which his child's developing consciousness comes to terms with the presented world. Nabokov distinguished between the tranquil voluptuous child's consciousness and the form of "obsessive" consciousness as exemplified by "that maniacal glint in a housewife's scheming eye as it roves over the food in a grocery or about the morgue in a butcher's shop".(10) He thus finds a parallel with the predicament of "infinite thought" within a "finite existence" in the division within human consciousness itself between a relaxed and open apprehension and the narrow directed one.

Bend Sinister also reflects this finding and it can be revealed

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(8) V. Nabokov. Speak Memory, p.296.

(9) Ibid, p.297.

(10) Ibid, p.298.

by examining the role of Shakespeare's Hamlet in the novel. There is an implied analogue between the situation in Hamlet and Krug's predicament in Bend Sinister. In Chapter Seven of Nabokov's novel Krug and Ember (a translator) describe a series of grotesque and fanciful interpretations of Hamlet that they have encountered. They then turn to Ember's version of the play which may be preferable to the previous attempts. This translation of the play is a more or less conventional rendering of Shakespeare into a slightly scrambled Russian (akin to the Zemblan of Pale Fire), except for one important change. The normal Russian translation of Hamlet's "to be or not to be" is "bit' ili ne bit'"; however Ember's line reads "ubit' il' ne ubit'", meaning "to kill or not to kill". Bend Sinister's version of Hamlet's famous question is therefore: shall he kill Claudius or not?(11) Nabokov suggests that the debate whether to do murder is also synonymous with the question of suicide: for both are a form of self-immolation.(12) Hamlet being forced by increasingly provocative events to destroy Claudius suggests in Nabokov's mind the death of true discrete consciousness and the advent of a contingent wilful mental strategy that destroys the 'real life' of the former consciousness. "Conscience" in Hamlet's soliloquy is thus read as "consciousness" by Nabokov and the ironic truth that "consciousness makes cowards of us all" is the main theme that he derives from Hamlet.

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(11) There is also provided a French version of the lines that supports this idea: "L'egorgerai - je ou non? Voici le vrai problème."

(12) This is suggested when Humbert and Quilty tussle and merge in Lolita: "I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us." Annotated Lolita, p.301.

Coleridge's story thus provides a model for examining various modes of looking at experience. The dream motif also introduces a teleological development for there cannot be a dream without a dreamer, and oneiric reality scrambles known existent reality. The 'Person from Porlock' parable embodies the involuntary element that Nabokov distinguishes in dreams whereby one thought initiates and progresses into another. Nabokov has noted the "steady progression"(13) of dream states where the observer does not participate in the events that are unfolded. The dream condition in this sense resembles Nabokov's conception of the situation of the housewife at the meat counter in that she is spurred by involuntary regressive impulses. Nabokov views the dream state as a debased lowly condition ("at best the dreamer wears semi-opaque blinkers at worst he is an imbecile"(14)) although art can learn from the compression of reality by the dream, thus Fyodor in The Gift quotes the poet Koncheyev in declaring his intention some day "to produce prose in which "thought and music are conjoined as are the folds of life in sleep".(15) The artist can also learn from the sealed condition of the dream (Van Veen notes that dreams, like games, have only intrinsic meanings). Fyodor observes that within the dream "everything "is infinitely free and complex but clotting like blood upon waking".(16)

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(13) Speak Memory, p.33.

(14) Ada, p.363.

(15) V. Nabokov. The Gift, p.73.

(16) Ibid, pp.142-143.

Nabokov referred to the 'Person from Porlock' in connection with his autobiography[17] in the sense of the 'person' coming from the outside and disrupting a series of dream-illusions. Nabokov saw his own intensified sense of self as triumphing over generalized ideas about life. He felt that his special universe snapped collective 'dreams' about the general mode in which humans have to relate to the world. This feeling is behind his oft-repeated overturning of Aristotle's well-known syllogism about men and mortality. John Shade inverts the argument in this manner: "other men die; but I am not another; therefore I'll not die". Similarly in 'Ultima Thule' we have: "I'll call your attention to the following curious catch: any man is mortal ; you are a man; therefore, it is also possible that you are not mortal. Why? Because a specified man (you or I) for that very reason ceases to be any man."[18] Thus in Nabokov's mode of thought, if one cultivates a special sense of one's identity this counteracts general ideas about reality.

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(17) It is difficult to believe that Nabokov did not read John Livingstone Lowes's book Road to Xanadu at this time. Borges had done so and was evidently influenced. See "The Dream of Coleridge" Other Inquisitions (1937-1952). Lowes followed up Coleridge's assertion that he had "read almost everything" by showing that almost every word in 'The Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan' had a parallel life in the many source books that Coleridge had absorbed, yet he had succeeded in producing extraordinary and individual poems out of this host of borrowed words. Nabokov parodies the method in Chapter Twelve of Bend Sinister in the form of "a famous American poem" made up out of lines culled from Moby Dick. We have seen Khodasevich's and Pushkin's words appearing in the text of 'Ultima Thule'. Similarly the description of the old swan in regard to Mademoiselle O gains range from the parallel existence of Baudelaire's poem "Le Cygne", where the swan has affinities with Nabokov's bird: "comme les exilés, ridicule et sublime, / Et rongé d'un désir sans trêve!".

(18) Canto Two, Pale Fire. 'Ultima Thule'. A Russian Beauty and Other Stories, p.176.

Nabokov considered his individuality to have been fixed by the special circumstances of his childhood and youth. He observed that the children of his generation in Russia seemed to have been given very much more as a kind of compensation for all that was to be displaced by the Revolution. More in the sense of emotional and intellectual wealth rather than the lost material inheritance that some see as being the cause of Nabokov's chagrin with the Soviets. The first version of his autobiography was published under the title Conclusive Evidence (1951): conclusive evidence of having existed, particularly in the cradle of 1900-1917 with which period the bulk of the work is concerned despite intending to cover the period up to 1941.

There is a catch however if Nabokov does rest such importance on the past. In terms of the 'person from Porlock' account the 'person' may also be part of the dream frame of the story. This can also be applied to his attitude to the past for he has acknowledged that he considers memory and imagination to be linked[19] and that the past "is a constant accumulation of images ... the act of retention (of which) is the act of art, artistic selection, artistic blending, artistic recombination of actual events".[20] Thus the "conclusive evidence" of a life is conveyed by the process of art which is in turn a species of displacement and dream condensation,

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(19) "I would say that imagination is a form of memory". Strong Opinions, p.78. Nabokov here echoes Vico: "for imagination is nothing other than extended or compounded memory". Axiom 211. The New Science of Giambattista Vico trans. T. Bergin, M. Fisch (New York: Cornell U.P. 1948), p.67.

(20) Strong Opinions, p.186.

perhaps heightened in Nabokov's case by the exile's "predilection" (as identified by Alexandr Herzen) "for the recurring rhythm, for the repetition of motif".(21) Nabokov observed that he suspected that"Van Veen ... novelized in his indulgent old age many images of his youth". In 'Ultima Thule' Sineusov wonders whether his dead wife now considers that their past life was "a dream that was taken too seriously".(22) It is significant that the same passage alludes to Vladislav Khodasevich's 'Sorrentinskie Fotografi'; a poem which demonstrates that "memory is capricious",(23) and the poet cannot hold a 'steady' image of his former life in Russia because it has become permeated by the impressions of exile.

The idea that his special sense of the past counteracts the banal 'dream' of the present and that this sense is itself a species of dream brings a vision of Nabokov's work that corresponds to an Arabian Nights-like 'regressus ad infinitum'. This idea combined with the conception of the experience of his work as being only comprised of a fleeting immersion and release in a sensory contiguity of image: a shock of arrangement suggests the conception of Nabokov as a 'fabulist', a fabricator of exquisite models of reality that fit into each other like the magic box mentioned at the close of Nikolai Gogol (1944) which is always found to be empty when opened by the confident critic. This study suggests that this is a simple

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(21) A. Herzen. My Past and Thoughts, transl. C. Garnett (London: Chatto, 1968) Vol.I, p.xlvi.

(22) A Russian Beauty and Other Stories, p.154.

(23) V. Khodasevich. Sobranie Stikhov, p.156.

'thetic' view of his work, it "fits in"too well with his apparent biography and thus in Nabokov's definition eludes a true picture of his art. Nor, however should one fall the other way and wholly embrace such a view of his work as Nabokov has ironically anticipated: "one day a reappraiser will come and declare that, far from being a frivolous fire-bird, I was a rigid moralist kicking sin, cuffing stupidity, ridiculing the vulgar and cruel'.(24)

The means toward a substantial view of Nabokov's work is suggested by his use of 'revelation'. There recurs in his art a situation of impending revelation that is often built up to and then laid aside or diverted at the last moment. The 'fabulist' view would see this confirming Nabokov's persona as magician who snatches away the illusion at the last moment thus concentrating on the moment of suspense as does Borges (who is correctly placed in this tradition), who commented that: "the immanence of a revelation that is not yet produced is perhaps the aesthetic reality".(25) However the careful reader in Nabokov's case determines that he does not simply leave the reader in a buzz of apprehension (although this is part of the experience) for Nabokov goes on to show that revelation is still there to be discovered but has been missed along the way.

The anxious artist Sineusov in 'Ultima Thule' consults a man

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(24) Strong Opinions, p.193.

(25) J. L. Borges. 'The Wall and the Books'. Other Inquisitions 1937-1952 trans. R. Simms (Austin: University of Texas P., 1975) p.5.

who has apparently been struck by absolute knowledge about the nature of things. He is denied a frank revelation in turn lest it fells him by strength of his amazement. However the sage acknowledges that within their conversation can be found "only two or three words but in them flashed a fringe of absolute insight".(26) Similarly in The Real Life of Sebastian Knight (1941) one of Sebastian's books follows the thoughts of a dying man and we wait for words of revelation from him at the moment of expiration that will illuminate the nature of life and on receiving which "you and I, and everyone in the world will slap himself on the forehead: what fools we have been!". But a momentary hiatus in the narration allows the man to slip away into death and we miss what might have been given. The narrator then suggests that if one "turns the pages of Sebastian's masterpiece ... the 'absolute solution' is there, somewhere, concealed in some passage ... read too hastily, or that is intertwined with other words whose familiar guise deceived me. I don't know any other book that gives one this special sensation and perhaps this was the author's special intention".(27) The reader's enlightenment in Nabokov's work is likewise afforded by the 'text' of his ideas rather than in an evident prize of revelation. There is a Russian writer's maxim: 'that which takes pains to write is read with ease', which evokes the appropriate sense of a struggle with mode that must come before the ease of a felicitous end result.

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(26) A Russian Beauty and Other Stories, p.181.

(27) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.157.

Quite apart from a contemplation of the end effect of Nabokov's art, some criticism does not even come to understand the basic narrational structure of Nabokov's novels. This is particularly true of his last two novels: Transparent Things (1972) and Look at the Harlequins (1974). The former novel has been discussed without regard to the "structural knot" of the story and indeed Nabokov has been forced to explain the basic elements of the work in interview.(28) Similarly Look at the Harlequins has been read without regard to the individual voice of the novel and thus presents what is a deliberately flawed version of reality as an involuntary weakening of Nabokov's view of his own life.(29)

Look at the Harlequins announces itself to be "a memoir" of the life of a famous writer (Vadim N...) and hopes to derive "much of its value from its being a catalogue raisonné of the roots and origins and amusing birth canals of many images in ... (the author's) ... Russian and ... English fiction".(30) The story is being narrated from the 1970's and looks back fifty years over the writer's life. The spur for writing the book has been the near fatal illness of the narrator in which he had become suspended in a misty dimension of reality which anticipates his experience of death. The novel thus is largely concerned with furthering John Shade's speculations on mortality: "a wrench, a rift - that's all one can foresee. / Maybe one finds le grand néant; maybe / again one spirals from the tuber's eye."(31)

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(28) See Strong Opinions, p.194.

(29) See Chapters 9 and 10. G. Hyde. Vladimir Nabokov. America's Russian Novelist.

(30) V. Nabokov. Look at the Harlequins, p.8.

(31) Canto Three. Pale Fire.

Nabokov is, as we have seen, committed to onward development and there is an implied (though limited) spiral after the narrator's voice is extinguished at the close of the novel "(mumbling comfortably, dropping off, mumble dying away -")."[32] The author disappears at the end as if into sleep, and as sleep presupposes waking, there is also an implied parallel consciousness alongside that of the narrator in Nabokov's book. This presence is revealed by the narrator's "dream feeling that my life was the non-identical twin, a parody, an inferior variant of another man's life, somewhere on this or another earth. A demon, I felt, was forcing me to impersonate that other man, that other writer who was and would always be incomparably greater, healthier, and crueler than your obedient servant".[33]

We receive clues to the identity of this parallel personality from other characters in the book who consistently confuse the narrator with this other being. One person thinks that Vadim N. looks like "McNab, an actor".[34] More evident parallels come from Vadim being mistaken for the author of Kamera Obskura and Mary (Vadim's novels are Camera Lucida and Tamara). Also someone else

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(32) Look at the Harlequins, p.253.

(33) Ibid, p.89.

(34) Lolita pins a picture from a "slick magazine" on her wall and draws "a jocose arrow to the haggard lover's face and put in block letters: HH". Annotated Lolita, p.71. Nabokov was amused to find that the crowd surged forward at the premiere of Kubrick's 'Lolita' mistaking Nabokov for Hitchcock. 'Baron K' a famous writer in Transparent Things, "felt more and more a creeping resemblance to the cinema star Reubenson who once played old gangsters in Florida-staged films", p.30.

thinks that Vadim has a "celebrated father, member of the First Duma, noted (in contrast to fiery Kerenski) for his English sangfroid and absence of gesticulation."(35) This 'other being' is firmly identified with the "anthropomorphic deity" impersonated by Nabokov when it is revealed that Vadim is relieved of his paralyzed condition by a shaft of light from the venetian blinds of his hospital window: "Along a slanting ray like this / I slipped out of paralysis".(36) This evokes the 'other being' of Bend Sinister who slides towards the tormented Krug "along an inclined beam of pale light - causing instantaneous madness".(37)

Vadim N.'s novels appear as condensed, conflated versions of Nabokovian ones: Vadim's novel The Dare combines the Dar of Nabokov's last Russian novel with the 'exploit' of Martin in Glory; his novel Dr Olga Repnin merges the name of Pnin's unpleasant wife with that of Russia's first social-realist painter. This anagrammatic merging of Nabokov's novels into Vadim's versions suggests the punning condensation that Nabokov equates with dreaming.(38) Similarly Vadim's idea that he has lesser talent than 'the other being' evokes Nabokov's idea that dreams are not a highly evolved mode because they merge "the unimportant with the

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(35) See Chapter 9, Speak Memory.

(36) Look at the Harlequins, p.250.

(37) Bend Sinister, p.193.

(38) See for example Sineusov's wife's dream-death state, p.153 Russian Beauty.

portentous" and reflect "mental mediocrity and bumble".(39) Nabokov commented in Speak Memory that when the dead appear to him in dreams they "sit apart frowning at the floor, as if death were a dark taint, a shameful family secret. It is certainly not then - not in dreams - but when one is wide awake, at moments of robust joy and achievement on the highest terrace of consciousness that mortality has a chance to peer beyond its own limits ...".(40)

Nabokov deliberately provides in Look at the Harlequins a bumbling, weak version of his life (thus even the natural world is pale and undifferentiated, butterflies are dismissed as just 'nettleflies' and all trees come to resemble auracarias). Beside this, readers "in the know" can discern a stronger, healthier Nabokov on a 'higher terrace' to the flat world of the novel. This seems to be a mere quibble however as even the 'deity' of the narrator is inevitably bound for "thorough dissolution". And indeed Nabokov's vision of Vadim surrounded by medical apparati in Lecouchant Hospital is a prophetic anticipation of his own demise surrounded by similar hospital "paraphernalia" as described by his son Dmitri.(41)

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(39) Ada, p.363.
An original work of literature next to its bad translation could be a fair analogue of Nabokov's view of the states of waking and dreaming. A translator in Look at the Harlequins renders Keats's first lines from Book I of Endymion as "a pretty bauble always gladdens us"!

(40) Speak Memory, p.50.

(41) Dmitri Nabokov. 'Father's Room'. Encounter Vol. LIII, No.4. October 1979.

Why then should Nabokov be intent on showing a weak version of his life as opposed to the stronger original? One view could be that Nabokov, anticipating his "finite existence", has used boundless imagination in order to spin out versions of himself in order to delay the end rather as the path of Zeno's arrow of time can be continually divided so that time is infinitely extended. This may be suggested in Pale Fire where after announcing his intention to meet and fight the "foul, the inadmissable abyss" (death) John Shade "stands before the window and ... pare(s) / (his) fingernails and vaguely is aware of certain flinching likenesses: the thumb, / our grocer's son; the index, lean and glum / college astronomer Starover Blue; / The middle fellow a tall priest I knew; / the feminine fourth finger, an old flirt; / And little pinky clinging to her skirt".(42) Shade attempts to maintain a stable universe by a process of finding corollaries to the real model, an act of constant replacement in order to stem linear progression. This could be applicable to the situation in Look at the Harlequins where Nabokov may be producing versions of himself as described in Arthur Schnitzler's Flight into Darkness:

> "at all moments of death of any nature, one lives over again his past life with a rapidity inconceivable to others. This remembered life must also have a last moment, and so on, and hence, dying is itself eternity; and hence, in accordance with the theory of limits, one may approach death but never reach it."(43)

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(42) Pale Fire, pp.39-40.

(43) Quoted in C. Sagan. Broca's Brain: The Romance of Science (London: Hodder, 1979) p.310.

This idea has a Borges-like appeal but is unsound mathematically[44] and does not account for Nabokov presenting a deliberately weakened and inferior form of his life. It is based on a binary and circular view of exactly matching models and this is not in accord with Nabokov's predeliction for the spiral and the tripartite movement. The reality of Look at the Harlequins will not in itself lead onto another because it is a self-relating dream-world. That Nabokov is not concerned with eternal recurrence is confirmed by an early unpublished play - Death (1923) - which sheds light on the situation in Look at the Harlequins. In this play a character appears who is "the echo of the mortal thoughts" of an earlier (now deceased) character. Andrew Field summed up the idea of the play as suggesting that "death is but the artistic re-use and exploitation of one's earthly life, and the richer one's life has been, the more satisfying and prolonged will death's dramatisation of the past be. Sooner or later, however, the play must cease, and one's past memories will hurtle over the abyss into nothingness".[45]

The narrator of Look at the Harlequins has a "nervous complaint that borders insanity"[46] which manifests itself in a spatial and directional disarrangement in which he becomes confused and disoriented, not knowing the meaning of left and right in relation to himself. This resembles the disorientation of "Looking Glass House" in Carroll's Alice Through the Looking Glass (1871). Also

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(44) See Sagan. Ibid, p.310.

(45) A. Field. Nabokov: His Life in Art, p.75.

(46) Look at the Harlequins, p.5.

Vadim's "dream-feeling" of his existence that also corresponds to another "bound sequence of numbered dreams"[47] belonging to someone else recalls Alice's confused complaint at the end of Through the Looking Glass: "he was part of my dream, of course, - but I was part of his dream".[48] Nabokov provides his own version of Carroll's Looking Glass[49] (although Carroll and the mirror-image are important and will be returned to), this is revealed in Look at the Harlequins when a character discomforts Vadim by confusing Nabokov's Kamera Obskura with his own Camera Lucida.

The mention of these two optical instruments advances a step in the understanding of Nabokov's presentation of the real and the false model. They should be understood in the context of Nabokov's general assumption of the importance of optical reality. Thus in Look at the Harlequins during Vadim's period of collapse only his "dispensable" senses operated and he had to wait for "mind and eye" to finally co-ordinate at which point "(with) ... a bellow of joy ... reality entered".[50] The eye itself is a recurrent image in Nabokov's work. The obvious example of this is his 1930 novel Soglyadatai (the spy or watcher) which he translated in his English version as The Eye (and which he imagined to indicate a literal eye on the end of a long pliant stalk). Many of his characters can be

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(47) Ibid, p.174.

(48) L. Carroll. The Annotated Alice ed. M. Gardner. (Penguin: Harmondsworth, rev. ed. 1970) p.344.

(49) Nabokov literally exchanges his version of Carroll's mirror, thus in Ada Van recalls receiving "Alice in the camera obscura for (his) ... eighth birthday". Ada, p.547.

(50) Look at the Harlequins, p.250.

reduced to a naked Emersonian eye for instance, in The Gift, the short story "Terror" and the Poem 'Oculus'. Along with this ocular emphasis comes a commensurate interest in the distortions of vision, the refraction of light and the error of parallax.

The camera obscura is based on the principle known for hundreds of years by which it can be found that a hole in the wall of a darkened room can form an image of the world outside on the wall opposite the hole. The image cast is upside down and reversed and in the 16th Century made clearer by replacing the simple hole with a lens. In most illustrations of the use of the camera obscura, the observer stands inside the darkened chamber where the image is projected. This device was often used for astronomical purposes and later on as a means to give perspective to a landscape for the use of painters. Daniele Barbato wrote a treatise on the instrument emphasizing its use for the appreciation of 'panoramas'. Da Vinci believed that the human eye was a miniature camera obscura.

Isaac Newton's experiments on the nature of light in which he initially allowed a narrow beam of light to issue through the "closed shutts"(51) of his windowed room resemble a primitive camera obscura but these researches led him on to the principle of refracting light and the development of his telescope in which most commentators see the origin of the camera lucida. The device itself was patented in 1807 and consisted of a small prism mounted in

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(51) M. Roberts and E. Thomas. Newton and the Origin of Colours (London: G. Bell, 1934) p.72.

front of the observer's eye and used in full daylight. This special prism allowed an image to appear to fall upon a sheet of paper thus enabling the object on which the eye-piece is trained to be drawn. The principle on which the camera lucida is based is the refraction of light.

The nature of these instruments lends them to metaphoric use and we find in Chapter Three of Biographia Literaria (1817) that Coleridge thought that some forms of literature promoted a dazed and dreamy state of mind: "the whole material and machinery of the doze is supplied ab extra by a sort of mental camera obscura ... which pro tempore fixes, reflects and transmits the moving phantasms ...". On the other hand John Ruskin seized on the cold oblique qualities of the camera lucida when he ironically noted in Praeterita (1885-9): "I must also express continually, as I think back on it, more and more wonder that ever anybody had affection for me. I thought they might as well have got fond of a camera lucida."

Nabokov first made figurative use of these instruments in Kamera Obskura (1933, translated Laughter in the Dark, 1938) a novel which as the emigre writer Mikhail Osorgin noted, brought Nabokov into the first rank of contemporary novelists. The meaning of the title is made clear if one realises that the observer of the camera obscura stands within the darkened chamber. The novel is constructed to parody many of the conventions of the cinema[52] and the story

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(52) See D. Stuart. 'Laughter in the Dark: Dimensions of Parody'. Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes ed. A. Appel, C. Newman (London: Weidenfeld, 1971) pp.72-95.

follows the disastrous consequences of one Albinus's abandonment of a stable and secure life for the exigencies of an affair with a young but cruel mistress (who begins life in the novel as a cinema usherette). Thus initially, the most evident analogue with the camera obscura in the novel is the cinema.(53) Indeed Albinus first glimpses Margot (his mistress) in the "velvety darkness" of the cinema which he has casually entered and several glimpsed snippets of film reveal the basic elements of the story as it will develop: "a girl was receding among tumbled furniture before a masked man with a gun" and "a car ... spinning down a smooth road with hairpin turns between cliff and abyss".(54) The latter image prefigures the car crash in which Albinus is blinded (and thus cast into his own Camera Obscura) and the former scene is a foreview of the close of the novel where Albinus ("masked" by his blindness) is also cast into a dark chamber - his unfaithful mistress's flat, the remembered dimensions of which he tries to reassemble in order to trap and kill her. However, because Albinus has allowed the cinema conventions of the affair to blind him to other modes of reality (Khodasevich noted that the novel exemplified the 'love is blind' axiom), he fails to trap her and instead is killed himself.

This novel then, follows Albinus' punishment for blindness. The camera obscura is in one sense a paradigm of the consciousness.

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(53) Fox Talbot evolved the photographic camera out of the camera obscura. In relation to the photographic image we have the word play: "Kimera - Chimera - Camera". Ada, p.402.

(54) V. Nabokov. Laughter in the Dark (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1961) pp.13-15.

Albinus has made himself too specialized and this becomes evident when he is cast into his own literal camera obscura and with the image supplied only by memory. He tries to recall "a landscape in which he had once lived, he could not name a single plant except oaks and roses, not a single bird save sparrows and crows, and even these were more akin to heraldry than nature".(55) His situation is dramatised as he is pictured unsteadily "rocking ... among the syringa bushes"(56) of an unperceived landscape. Nabokov uses the camera obscura in this novel as a model for the manner in which consciousness filters and squeezes reality; however it is by contrast with the camera lucida that his analogous use of these devices becomes fully developed.

Nabokov's interest in the two instruments relates to their structure and operation. In the Camera Obscura the image comes through the aperture and is cast directly onto the surface before the observer thus Constable noted of the instrument: "its art pleases by reminding not by deceiving";(57) the image is a reminder of the arrangement of reality. The Camera Lucida though presents an image to the observer through a prism which 'appears' to fall on the paper. The image of the Camera Obscura then is a 'real' one whereas the Camera Lucida is a 'virtual' one, one that exists

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(55) Laughter in the Dark, p.165.
Had Albinus been more knowledgeable about natural life, he would have realised that the oriole's call that he hears when blind is in fact mimicked by Axel Rex, who derives pleasure from tormenting the feeble senses of the crippled Albinus.

(56) Laughter in the Dark, p.170.

(57) Quoted by E. Gombrich. Art and Illusion, p.33.

in effect but not in fact. Nabokov mentioned the Camera Lucida in Speak Memory where he noted that constant peering into the "bright well of a microscope" in turn generated certain "camera lucida methods of literary composition".(58) His linking of the microscope with camera lucida brings to mind Fyodor's father's advice in The Gift. His father (a noted entomologist) warned that:

> "when closely - no matter how closely - observing events in nature we must, in the very process of observation, beware of letting our reason - that garrulous dragoman who always runs ahead - prompt us with explanations which then begin imperceptibly to influence the very course of observation and distort it: thus the shadow of the instrument falls upon the truth."(59)

Fyodor's father is of the 19th Century inductivist tradition which constantly struggled with the basic paradox of their mode of observation. Their stance was undermined by the fact that one had to ask certain questions of the natural world that presented them and these questions in turn determined the answers. Nabokov's portrayal of the two camerasthus relates to the struggle between the desire for an 'open' scan of the arrangement of reality that conflicts with the inevitable distortion of the fallibly interpretive senses. Kinbote is an example of the 'lucida' approach as he secretly views the Shade house through his binoculars where Kimbote

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(58) Speak Memory, p.92.

(59) The Gift, p.313.

was "deprived ... of a clear view of ... (the poet's) ... face"[60] but attempted to discern the progress of the Zembla-inspired poem from the poet's hunched shoulders and the tapping of his slippered feet.

The Gift provides an example of both modes, when Fyodor strolls through the Grunewald, an area of parkland in Berlin which itself acts as a lesson in how the arrangement of the natural world acts as a centre of orientation within the formal human ordering of the City. Fyodor at first responds to the 'gifts' of reality by approaching them in free creative response as in Coleridge's dream where words form 'parallel correspondence' with things, but he lapses into a one-sided vision when he begins to sunbathe. At this point his "hard I of identity" which reflects things 'as they are' is "dissolved" by the sun and this former self becomes a "pallid copy" of a "magnified bronze" of his sun-oriented self.[61] Similarly he swims in a lake, and again he lets certain senses 'run ahead' of him and a distinct picture is eclipsed:

> "its warm opacity enveloped him, sparks of sunshine danced before his eyes. He swam for a long time, half an hour, five hours, twenty-four, a week, another ..."[62]

Fyodor's balanced picture is restored by a meeting with the poet Koncheyev (clad in a dark suit), who disapproves of Fyodor's

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(60) Pale Fire, pp.88-89.

(61) The Gift, p.316.

(62) Ibid, p.319.

naked state: "it seems to me that any mental work must be completely impossible for you in such a denuded state ... thought likes curtains and the camera obscura".(63) Koncheyev's appearance proves to be an invented one on the part of Fyodor but it acts as a corrective in that his own imagination provides an image that 'reminds' him of a balance of consciousness. Look at the Harlequins provides a further version of the relation between obscura and lucida. Nabokov's own Camera Obscura is suggested to be a more developed novel than that manifested by the lesser talent of Vadim in Camera Lucida. Vadim manifests the extreme form of lucida-like interpretation of events: "a flayed consciousness" revealing itself by a sort of "optical spasm" where thoughts and images run ahead of a more balanced apprehension of reality. Another state of consciousness is suggested in the book: where a character urges the cultivation of harlequin moments where reality respires with genuine donnés (Coleridge's words as things and vice versa): "trees are harlequins, words are harlequins ... put two things together and you get triple harlequins ... invent the world, invent reality".(64) Vadim never really achieves harlequin moments and the title thus points the reader on to the "real being" - Nabokov - beyond the threshing unhappy Vadim. The reader is pointed away from the unnatural clarity of camera lucida to the dark glass of Nabokov's own camera obscura.(65) The next task is thus to examine Nabokov's background and life in regard to the themes that have been discussed.

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(63) Ibid, p.320.

(64) Look at the Harlequins, p.9.

(65) The Pauline announcement seems appropriate to the Nabokovian context: "Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate."

III

Nadezhda Mandel'stam, who coincidentally, lived in Morskaya St. in St.Petersburg where Nabokov was born, gave the opinion that Nabokov was "deprived of the chance of coming to maturity"[1] by the divestment of the country of his childhood. Her view that his personal development was somehow balked by this happening has a parallel in the critical temptation of seeing all his work as a reflection of the blow of the revolution and the subsequent life of exile.[2] Certainly his work reflects the situation of how an intense internal life can be shattered by an arbitrary outside force yet the historical analogue is a weak one, a 'banal' one in Nabokov's conception, because it is evident that the events of the revolution only arrived to confirm conclusions that Nabokov had already reached.

The evidence for this is found in Nabokov's autobiography Speak Memory where he gives a detailed account of his mental development whilst apparently skating over a disarmingly lyric evocation of pre-revolutionary life. This work is often casually ransacked by critics on the hunt for autobiographical equivalents to fictional scenes and for Nabokov's general statements (useful as they are) on art, time, and memory. However the work can yield much more than this. As in his novels, Nabokov the memoirist arranges the evidence to suit his pattern of thought. At the end

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(1) Nadezhda Mandel'stam. Hope Abandoned: A Memoir trans. M. Hayward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) p.211.

(2) See G. Steiner. "Extraterritorial". Nabokov: Criticism, reminiscences, translations and tributes ed. A. Appel, C. Newman, pp.119-127.

of a chapter on his education, Nabokov ironically acknowledged his discomfort on finding that two of his tutors had dimensions to their lives of which he was unaware: "I experienced a queer shock; it was as if life had impinged upon my creative rights by wriggling on beyond the subjective limits ... set by childhood memories that I thought I had signed and sealed".(3) Nabokov may use his 'creative rights' in order to rearrange the past but meaning is always accessible (but difficult) in his work; Nabokov is never like the dishonest detective story writer who brings in a murderer at the end who has never been mentioned in the text.(4) In Pale Fire Kinbote tries to determine from where Shade derived the Shakespearian title 'Pale Fire'. Kinbote observes: "my readers must make their own research. All I have with me is a tiny vest pocket edition of Timon of Athens - in Zemblan." Kinbote's own index tells the reader that the notes to line 962 of Shade's poem are linked to those of lines 39/40 where indeed one finds a Zemblan version of the 'pale fire' speech in Timon of Athens.(5)

The first passage that suggests that Nabokov learned and grew

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(3) Speak Memory, p.93. Similarly Nabokov is willing to pay tribute to a famous cartoonist of the forties and fifties in the middle of a description of pre-Revolutionary life (last paragraph, Section 2, Chapter Eleven); also "Sigismond Lejoyeux" inflated "a huge custard coloured balloon" in the background of a dimly remembered scene of one of Nabokov's tutors "crouching on his knees ... in front of my young beautiful and dumbfounded mother". Speak Memory, p.156.

(4) See an essay that points to Nabokov being in one sense like Onegin's Uncle - "of most honest principles". William Rowe - 'The Honesty of Nabokovian Deception". A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov ed. C. Proffer (Anne Arbor: Ardis, 1974) pp.171-182.

(5) Act IV. Scene 3. Lines 440-449.

to recognise fundamental patterns early in life is found in Chapter Three of Speak Memory. Here he describes his Grandfather (the ex-minister of Justice) staying with the Nabokov family at Nice in 1903 and suffering from what was probably senile dementia. In Nabokov's account the old man abused the nobility on the Promenade des Anglais and at one point escaped his attendants and "wandered about, denouncing with King Lear-like vehemence, his children to grinning strangers until he was captured in a wild rocky place."(6) Nabokov tellingly combines an image of his discovery of the potential "amazing pain" that can be derived from seemingly innocuous substances (in this case coloured molten wax) with the figure of the mad grandfather:

> "I had been engaged in transforming dripping sticks of the stuff into gluey, marvelously smelling, scarlet and blue and bronze coloured blobs. The next moment I was bellowing on the floor and my mother had hurried to the rescue, and ... nearby my grandfather in a wheelchair was thumping the resounding flags with his cane."(7)

Nabokov's grandfather was later taken back to Russia and because his mind would only become more settled if he thought that he was in the Riviera, his room was arranged with imported Mediterranean flowers and duplicated furniture and an adjoining house wall was painted a brilliant white. Thus his grandfather's madness was matched and overcome by an act of calculated deceit on the part of

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(6) Speak Memory, p.58.

(7) Ibid, pp.58-59.

his 'rational' helpers. The old man's madness perhaps revealed to Nabokov that the human apprehension of reality is quite reversable and can be flipped over like a coin to show an opposite face to the previously 'reasonable' arrangement of things. Nabokov demonstrates this unexpected reversal of reality when he recalls "running up to his (the grandfather's) chair to show him a pretty pebble which he slowly examined and then slowly put into his mouth."(8)

The family context to these scenes is also important. The old man and his derangement exists within the harmonious and tender Nabokov family circle, he even 'denounces' his children and it is significant that Nabokov records that his grandfather died in his "illusory Riviera ... on March 28th, 1904, exactly eighteen years day for day before my father."(9) The grandfather's affliction is thus a kind of preparation for the equally cruel reversal of reality of his own father's assassination by mistake.(10) The image of the Grandfather is a lesson in the "innate strangeness of human life"(11) (The Gift) in which man's intellect and consciousness seems all

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(8) Ibid, p.59.

(9) Ibid, p.59.

(10) On "a certain night in 1922 at a public lecture in Berlin, ... my father shielded the lecturer (his old friend Milyukov) from the bullets of two Russian Fascists and, while vigorously knocking down one of the assassins, was fatally shot by the other". Speak Memory, p.193.

(11) Another incident that confirmed the instability of life at this time was the sudden exit of his nurse "lovely Miss Norcott (who) was asked to leave at once, one night at Abbazia. She embraced me in the morning twilight of the nursery, pale-mackintoshed and weeping like a Babylonian willow and that day I remained inconsolable". Speak Memory, p.87.

powerful yet is undermined by the absurdity of its inevitable physical dissolution.

The demented Grandfather within the otherwise reasonable family also dramatised the potentiality of sudden madness within the world of calmly ordered thoughts. In the short story 'Vzhas' ('Terror', 1927) Nabokov described such a happening. After a bout of insomnia and with his head brimming with incidental thoughts the narrator:

> "... came out onto the street ... (and) ... suddenly saw the world such as it really <u>is</u> ... on that terrible day when, ... I stepped out into the centre of an incidental city and saw houses, trees, automobiles, people, my mind abruptly refused to accept them as "houses", "trees", and so forth - as something connected with ordinary human life. My line of communication with the world snapped, I was on my own and the world was on its own and that world was devoid of sense. I saw the actual essence of all things."(12)

Similarly in the story 'Ultima Thule' the character Falter is plunged into a state of consciousness where "the essence of things" has been unexpectedly revealed to him.(13) This state is similar to

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(12) V. Nabokov. 'Terror' <u>Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories</u> (London: Weidenfeld, 1975) p.119.

(13) V. Nabokov. 'Ultima Thule' <u>A Russian Beauty and Other Stories</u>, p.168. A similar condition is also described in <u>Look at the Harlequins</u>, p.16.

that of Roquentin in Sartre's Nausea (1938) who finds that "things have broken free of their names ... I am in the midst of Things, which cannot be given names".(14) The character in 'Terror' drops back into the accepted world when he learns that his meek kind girlfriend is dying, Nabokov notes that only his mother would successfully attend to his Grandfather, also it was only she who could bring the expanding "Einsteinian" world of Nabokov's childhood delirium back to a "Newtonian norm".(15)

Another means by which Nabokov's attitude to the revolution could be that of a subsequent "syncopal kick that ... (he)... would not have missed for worlds"(16) is found in his passion for butterfly hunting that he developed from the age of seven onwards. The idea of madness existing within an unsuspecting environment, of an internal force that can utterly change the apparent fabric of reality is carried forward in this passion for insects (he referred to it as his "demon"). Dr. Krolik the archetypal lepidopterist is described in Ada: "knickerbockered, panama-hatted, lusting for

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(14) J. P. Sartre. Nausea trans. R. Baldick. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) p.180. Nabokov acknowledges that there is a link between Sartre's depiction of "an absurd amorphous ... world" and his own, but Nabokov's version of this reality predates Sartre's by twelve years, also Nabokov believed that Sartre had not the talent to make it plausible. See 'Sartre's First Try'. Strong Opinions, pp.228-230. Also Strong Opinions, p.173.

(15) Speak Memory, p.37.

(16) Speak Memory, p.250.

his babochka (Russian for lepidopteron). A passion, a sickness".(17) As a child Nabokov records how his "obsession" drove him "with shame and self-disgust" to abandon a schoolfriend in order to go butterfly hunting alone.(18) In the poem 'Discovery' (1943) he seriously announces: "poems that take a thousand years to die / but ape the immortality of this / red label on a little butterfly".(19) This desire to catch butterflies obviously changes or dramatises his relation to 'average reality':

> "In March 1918, a bow-legged Bolshevik sentry attempted to arrest me for signalling (with my net, he said) to a British warship. In the summer of 1929, every time I walked through a village in the Eastern Pyrenees, and happened to look back, I would see in my wake the villagers frozen in the various attitudes my passage had caught them in, as if I were Sodom and they Lot's wife. A decade later, in the Maritime Alps, I once noticed the grass undulate in a serpentine way behind me because a fat rural policeman was wriggling after me on his belly ..."(20)

Nabokov associated the intensified sense of self in relation to the search for butterflies with his early life in his parent's

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(17) Ada, pp.403-404. Perhaps Nabokov's definitive picture of a lepidopteral madman is found in the character Pilgram in the short story 'The Aurelian'. Nabokov's Dozen, pp.75-89.

(18) Speak Memory, p.127.

(19) 'Discovery'. Poems and Problems, p.156.

(20) Speak Memory, p.131.

country estate at Vyra in the province of St. Petersburg. In interview, when asked about the duration of memory Nabokov commented:

> "the freshness of the flowers being arranged by the under-gardener in the cool drawing room of our country house, as I was running downstairs with my butterfly net on a summer day half a century ago: that kind of thing is absolutely permanent, immortal, it can never change, no matter how many times I farm it out to my characters, it is always there with me; there's the red sand, the white garden bench, the black fir trees, everything, a permanent possession. I think it's all a matter of love: the more you love a memory the stronger and stranger it is."(21)

Nabokov spent by far the greater part of his youth in St. Petersburg(22) (the summers at Vyra were short and on five occasions the family went to summer watering places in Europe), yet the greatest portion of his narrative is set in the country estate. Indeed Nabokov placed his first sense of developed

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(21) Strong Opinions, p.12.

(22) The Nabokov family followed the peculiarly Russian drama of disarrangement caused by the aristocratic habit of spending the rigorous winters in a town mansion and in early summer moving to a country house. In his verse novel Eugene Onegin (1833), Pushkin describes how "reanimated nature" wakes the frigid city "and you indulgent reader in your imported calash / forsake the indefatigable city" and go to seek the fields and "transparent woods" where nature again resplends after its bondage to the sleep of winter. (Eugene Onegin, Vol I, p.253). St. Petersburg was thus in a social and cultural sense, a winter city. Vadim does not recognise it in its summer guise when he revisits it in Look at the Harlequins.

consciousness there, "the birth of sentient life", a moment in August 1903 when he was first aware of walking with his mother and father down the avenue of oaklings which became the main "artery" of his childhood. Vyra actually belonged to his mother, Elena's, side of the family, and came to the Nabokovs as part of her dowry on marriage to Vladimir Dmitrievich. Nabokov remembered her bending down to kiss the earth on each return after a winter sojourn in St. Petersburg. She is clearly associated with Vyra and it is instructive that virtually the only description of his father in the country comes in the extraordinary example of style-arresting reality when Nabokov describes how the peasants would ritually toss his father in the air. His imperturbable father, sprawlingly suspended against the blue sky contrasts with Nabokov's mother whose fondest pursuit is to grub for mushrooms in the woods. Unlike her husband, who was preoccupied with the political realities of trying to establish a liberal-democratic future for the troubled pre-revolutionary Russia of the time, she "cherished her own past" and encouraged on her son's part the formation of a mental continuum as a precaution against the literal divestment of their surroundings.

> "Vot zapomniu (now remember)" she would say in conspiratorial tones as she drew my attention to this or that loved thing in Vyra - a lark ascending the curds-and-whey sky of a dull spring day, heat lightning taking pictures of a distant line of trees in the night."(23)

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(23) Speak Memory, p.40.

Nabokov consistently shows his mother occupying a private world apart from the quotidian realities. Outside events conspire to rupture this misty personal dimension, and Nabokov describes the scene when she hears of her husband's assassination:

> "I happened to be reading to her Blok's verse on Italy - had just got to the end of the little poem about Florence which Blok compares to the delicate smoky bloom of an iris, and she was saying over her knitting, "Yes, yes, Florence does look like a 'dimnly iris', how true! I remember -" when the phone rang."(24)

The phone inevitably rings despite her dreamy apprehension of the world and Nabokov's autobiography also records his own 'inevitable' evolution out of childhood. Thus in 1915 Nabokov provides a typically economical image of the paralysis of one of his mother's dogs that crawls about the parquet flooring like a 'cul de jatte' that can be viewed as a signature also of the relinquishment of spontaneous childhood.(25) Nabokov presents the idea that the burgeoning of

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(24) Speak Memory, p.49.

(25) 1915 in Nabokov's autobiography brings a widening description of St. Petersburg and a commensurate development of his father's character. If his mother could be characterized by her warm religiosity, his father exhibited a respectful scepticism, for her interest in the other-worldly Blok he would substitute a fondness for William James or Conan Doyle (whom he knew personally). The Rukavishnikovs are characterized by the sensitive outré Uncle Ruka but the Nabokovs appear as government men, administrators, lawyers. Nabokov's parents between them demonstrated two extremes relating to the natural world: his father took the position of a natural scientist (he was an entomologist), whereas she cultivated the aesthetic effect of the visual world. Nabokov père studies the stranger aspects of life in criminology whilst his wife had recourse to belief in pre-cognition and other [illegible] of consciousness.

consciousness and its revelation of an inner and outer world, the first flashes of poetic inspiration and the onset of sexual identity are all linked. In Chapter Four of Speak Memory we are given the desciption of an out-of-the-way water closet in the Vyra mansion:

> "a sumptuous but gloomy affair with some fine panelwork and a tasseled rope of red velvet, which, when pulled, produced a beautifully modulated, discreetly muffled gurgle and gulp. From that corner of the house one can see Hesperus and hear the nightingales, and it was there that, later, I used to compose my youthful verse, dedicated to unembraced beauties, and morosely survey ... (myself) ... in a dimly illuminated mirror."(26)

The water closet scene is reinvoked in a number of novels (Mary, Glory, The Gift), readapted for Luzhin in The Defence and reappears and becomes a generalised motif in Part I of Ada where the "borbyrigmic rumbling" of the entire plumbing system in Ardis Hall signals the themes of literary and sexual release. The adolescent in the old rumbling toilet neatly combines the preoccupations of self-consciousness, sex and lyric afflatus and prepares the reader for the initial rapture and subsequent demise of his first romance. Nabokov's initial meeting with the 'Tamara' of the autobiography takes place in the physical and emotional scenery of his beloved Vyra (she lived on a neighbouring estate). He describes the happenings as pure and passionate events on the same level of intense

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(26) Speak Memory, p.85. Note that the image of Nabokov himself is "dimly illuminated" as in the camera obscura.

life as the natural world in which the young couple wandered, thus "the ancient limes crowding close to the house drown mnemosyne's monologue with their creaking and heaving in the restless night".(27)

In the closing paragraph of a previous chapter (Ten) Nabokov describes "one particular sunset: "The whole thing was like some prodigious ovation in terms of colour and form! It was dying however and everything else was darkening too; but just above the horizon ... the eye found a vista that only a fool could mistake for the spare parts of this or another sunset ... (it) ... had the peculiar neatness of something seen through the wrong end of the telescope ... remote but perfect in every detail ... my marvelous tomorrow ready to be delivered to,me".(28) This description that "only a fool" could see as simply a cloud-scape in fact provides an authorial fore-glimpse of 'Tamara' in the "concolorous" punning mix-up of the sounds of her name in "marvelous tomorrow". (Her name in turn is "concolorous" with her real one.) The interest of this, besides demonstrating how Nabokov provides clues for the "researching reader",(29) lies in the identification of a pattern of events in Nabokov's association with 'Tamara', thus the clouds demonstrate "a peculiar neatness ... perfect in every detail ... faultlessly shaped".(30)

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(27) Speak Memory, p.233.

(28) Speak Memory, p.213.

(29) William Rowe notes links between these two chapters in his already cited essay "The Honesty of Nabokovian Deception".

(30) Speak Memory, p.213.

This pattern is revealed when the coming of winter (1915-1916) caused the respective families to return to the Capital and the romance was resumed in a different setting. Deprived of their "sylvan security" in grim, treeless St. Petersburg, Nabokov describes the "odd sense of hopelessness" that casts a blight on the relationship. In this passage, influenced by the characteristic literary view of the place, he evokes the visual effect of the stylized and formidable city:

> "When museums and movie houses failed us and the night was young, we were reduced to exploring the wilderness of the world's most gaunt and enigmatic city ... as we crossed the vast squares, various architectural phantoms arose with a silent suddenness right before us. We felt a cold thrill, generally associated not with height but with depth - with an abyss opening at one's feet."(31)

This winter in the city forms a "flaw" in the relationship making pale the ensuing summer which though replete with assignations and promises of "eternal love" yields little emotional warmth and limp poetry on Nabokov's part. These poems (published privately at the time) reveal "the same ominous flaw, the banal hollow note, and glib suggestion that (their) love was doomed since it could not recapture the miracle of its initial moments".(32) Nabokov denounces this sensation of the 'doomed' quality of intense love as banal yet in almost every novel that he wrote relationships are associated

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(31) Ibid, p.237.

(32) Ibid, p.238.

with deceit (Fyodor of The Gift, and Shade of Pale Fire, Nabokov's 'spokesmen' in his art, are alone "blessed with faithful loves").

The eponymous heroine of Ada is the summation of Nabokov's linking of sex with inevitable illusory torment, Van refers to her as "obmanshchitsa", Russian for deceiver, and similarly 'ada' is the word for hell in the genitive case, thus 'iz ada' means 'out of hell'.(33) After parting with his autobiographical 'Tamara' Nabokov plunged in to the Blok-like pursuit of "one changeful girl" through a number of affairs (it is hinted that he had been deceitful in the winter of 1915-1916) and cites a last accidental meeting with Tamara in 1917 which recapitulates the disparity between turbulent inner life and banal external reality; he describes how he was in a "state of acute embarrassment ... crushing regret, ... (whilst) ... she (was) consuming a bar of chocolate, methodically breaking off hard bits of the stuff and talking of the office where she worked".(34)

The 'Tamara' story provides a model for Nabokov's major theme of the contrast between live, fluid and personal duration and the existence of sealed irrevocable, historical time. Once leaving Vyra the backcloth of the romance is the convention of the movie house or the historical bric a brac of all the many museums in St. Petersburg to which the couple turn for refuge until forced out again by the

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(33) 'Obmanshchitsa' Ada, p.562. Marina signs her suicide letter "teper' iz ada", (now (I am) out of hell).

(34) Speak Memory, p.241.

"attendants" into the "stylised snowscape"[35] of the literary image of the city. Thus the inevitable peak of emotional intensity in the relationship and the means by which the background of the city highlighted the 'flaw' in their union seemed to provide an inevitable lesson in the "innate strangeness of human life". The advent of the Revolution which disturbed Nabokov's residence in Russia accordingly seems only a "trite deus ex machina" for he has already learned the "triple formula of human existence: irrevocability, unrealizability, inevitability".[36] The 'Tamara' episode seems an evident prototype of Nabokov's predeliction for the strong and weak version of the same process, for his compulsion to produce an inadequate pair or flawed twinning, thus the transplanted romance in St. Petersburg has the heart taken out of it, it is a parody of the relationship in the Vyra context.

In his first novel - Mary (1926) - Nabokov used his autobiographical experience with 'Tamara' and indeed admits in his Foreword to the English translation that the novel demonstrates "the beginner's well-known propensity for obtruding upon his own privacy by introducing himself ... into his first novel". He added that the character Mary in the novel is "a twin sister of my Tamara" and concludes that the novel is the "result of getting rid

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(35) "and then out again into the cold, into some lane of green gates and green lions with rings in their jaws, into the stylised snowscape of the "Art World", Mir Iskusstva- Dobuzhinski, Alexandre Benois - so dear to me in those days." Speak Memory, p.236.

(36) The Gift, p.99, and Speak Memory, p.229.

of oneself before getting on to better things".(37) The novel concerns itself with the life of one Ganin, a Russian exile in a foreign city who discovers that the wife so eagerly expected in a week's time by one of the lodgers in his guest house is the same Mary of an adolescent romance. Ganin spends the week in rapturous mnemonic replay of the events in the romance (these correspond to the Tamara episode), and resolves to intercept Mary on her arrival. Yet, having run through the events of the romance and prompted by the appearance of some roof-tilers performing a balletic sequence of gestures as they work high over the city, Ganin assigns Mary to "the house of ghosts" and takes a train to a distant destination.

In Mary the "lucid languor" of the fictional version of the events of the 1915 romance is broken by the device (and Nabokov notes in his Foreword that it is a device), of having Ganin fight with a leering lout at one of his trysting places. This prefigures and introduces the actual hiatus of the inevitable winter return to St. Petersburg. The nature of the effect of the transplantation to the city emerges more clearly in the novel (the events are three times nearer to the novel-writer at this time than to that of the memoirist of Speak Memory). Ganin notes that the winter in the city after the hot-house summer is a "mysterious prevision" of his future parting from Russia. Mary seems "subtly different" in the city and the lovers are also shown touring restlessly round St. Petersburg hiding out in museums and cinemas. As in the autobiography "happiness

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(37) 'Introduction'. Mary (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971).

is over" and an unreal parodising dimension enters the relationship.

The novel Mary introduces a further parallel to this development by showing Ganin actually reliving the memory of his romance ("the happiest four days in my life") and then re-emerging into the city and realizing that the romance is now a "ghost", thus mimicking the actual events of the autobiography. The city is the point of intersection in both accounts, the city in exile recapitulates the function of St. Petersburg in 1915-1916, both give check to an exalted state, replace one type of dream with another. It seems vital therefore in examining the nature and function of Nabokov's strong and weak models of reality to determine the role of the city in his art and ideas.(38)

Ganin on first learning of Mary's imminent arrival plunges into the night-time streets of the city and seems to find there that the physical reality of the city is a reversible mode, it is both the product of builders and advertising men yet on the other hand it is an open lesson in creative consciousness, a demonstration of manifest undirected donnés - gifts to the apprehension:

> "... occasionally braying like a stag, a motorcar would dash by or something would happen which no one walking in a city ever notices: a star faster than thought and with less sound than a tear would fall. Gaudier, gayer than the stars were the letters of fire ... above a black

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(38) Bearing in mind Nabokov's warning parable in Mr. Goodman's 'concoction' in The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, which attempted to depict Sebastian in the context of post-war London, Andrew Field in his biography of Nabokov (Nabokov: His Life in Part, 1977) similarly produced an attempt to describe the effect of St. Petersburg on Nabokov which resulted in his subject condemning it as a "dreadful macedoine".

roof ... 'Can it be possible?' said the letters in a discreet neon whisper, then the night would sweep them away at a single velvet stroke. Again they would creep across the sky: 'Can - it -'. And darkness descended again. But the words insistently lit up once more and finally, instead of disappearing at once, they stayed alight for a whole five minutes as had been arranged between the advertising agency and the manufacturer. But then who could tell what it really is that flickers up there in the dark above the houses - the luminous name of a product or the glow of human thought."(39)

In the opening chapter of The Gift, Fyodor similarly walks through the Berlin streets and the buildings seem to 'swarm' into an accepted pattern before his eyes, this description shows the city to be 'plastic' to the shaping consciousness of Fyodor, who has distinguished a "law of composition" for the "average" kind of Berlin street and thus forces his understanding onto physical reality. There is thus something involuntary about his view of the city:

> "On Tannenberg Street ... the rhythmic swarming had not yet established itself, and yielding to that counterpoint ... they would begin to gather according to the proper pattern: the greengrocery with a glance

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(39) Mary, p.26.

> over its shoulder, would cross the street, so as to be at first seven and then three doors away from the pharmacy - in somewhat the same way as the jumbled letters find their places in a film commercial; and at the end there is always one that does a kind of flip, and then hastily assumes its position (a comic character the inevitable Jack the Sack among the recruits)"(40)

Emerson, whose writing Nabokov admired so much,(41) saw the city as a foil to consciousness in that everything was "surface" in the city thus as in a geometrical puzzle one can construct what shapes one fancies: the city, he wrote "is made up of finites: short sharp mathematical lines ... it is full of varieties, of successions, of contrivances."(42) As a planned city St. Petersburg also provided an exemplary series of abstract shapes for the mind to play over. Andrei Bely in his novel Petersburg (1916/1922) noted that his character Appollon Ableukhov "for hours on end, would lapse into unthinking contemplation of pyramids, triangles, parallelipeds, cubes and trapezoids".(43) Zinaida Gippius, the symbolist poet and critic, also saw the city as drawing in involvement on the part of the observer by virtue of the geometricity of its appearance

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(40) The Gift, p.13.

(41) See Strong Opinions, p.64.

(42) Journals. quoted in M. and L. White The Intellectual Versus the City (New York: Mentor, 1964) p.36.

(43) Andrei Bely. Petersburg. Trans. and ed. R. Maguire, J. Malmstad (Hassocks: Harvester, 1978) p.11.

('Petersburg' 1909). The Marquis de Custine visiting St. Petersburg in 1839 noted in his Journals that the outline of the city was like that of a "line traced by the unsteady hand of a child drawing some mathematical figure" (44) and the city rose up like a mirage from the "quivering ... line" of the marshes between the sky and the sea.

In Nikolai Gogol Nabokov commented that St. Petersburg "acquired a reputation for strangeness" by "passing as it were through Gogol's temperament". According to Nabokov, Gogol worked on his image of the city until it provided a form of "physiological symbolism" where everything came to relate to Gogol's state of mind. Thus when Gogol described "passersby (who) talked to themselves and 'gesticulated in undertone'" Nabokov observed that it was in fact "Gogol, and Gogol alone, (who) spoke to himself as he walked, but the monologue was echoed and multiplied by the shadows of his mind". (45) Pushkin had presented a precursory view of St. Petersburg just previous to the advent of Gogol in his poem 'The Bronze Horseman' (1825). The poem opens with the solitary Peter the Great brooding on the empty banks of the Neva and the development of the city appears to rise as a direct summons to his will. The completed city seems, in Nabokov's words, to "have something wrong with it" and the poem describes how one of the first of the "wretched heroes"

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(44) A. de Custine. Journey for our Time: The Journals of the Marquis de Custine Trans. and ed. P. Kohlev. (London: Barker, 1951) p.48.

(45) Nikolai Gogol, p.10.

of Russian literature is driven mad by the odd appearance of the place.

Gogol's story of 'The Overcoat' (1841) summed up for Nabokov the 'strange city' theme[46] and he considered the story "the apotheosis" of Gogol's art. The account concerns a miserable Government clerk who, with a sudden and uncharacteristic effort of will, decides to order a new overcoat. The whole tenor of his life becomes determined by the anticipation of owning this garment but on the first night of his wearing it he is robbed of it on a city street. The clerk dies of grief and his ghost begins to haunt St. Petersburg. Nabokov observed that one needs a "kind of mental somersault" to appreciate the overall effect of the story.[47] This somersault of apprehension entails rejecting an objective view of the clerk's life and instead viewing his whole existence as reflecting solely the desire to own the overcoat (i.e. he existed only in terms of wanting it) and thus, after his death, his ghost is the mental after-life of his one desperate desire to possess it.

Nabokov recognised the impetus of single-mindedness as the characteristic Gogolian theme and he observes in his study of the writer: "after reading Gogol one's eyes may become gogolized and one is apt to see bits of his world in the most unexpected places. I

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(46) 'Nevsky Prospekt' (1835) is the other great 'strange city' story of Gogol. In it Gogol suggests that the streaming thoroughfare of the Nevsky Prospect is akin to the swirling and jostling of thoughts within one's head.

(47) This 'somersault' is like the sudden 'catching on' that the reader must make in order to understand the logic of The Eye: See Foreword, 1965 ed.

have visited many countries, and something like Akaky Akakievich's overcoat has been the passionate dream of this or that chance acquaintance who never has heard about Gogol."(48) At about the time that he was composing his commentary on Gogol, Nabokov described a character "of somewhat clerical appearance"(Nabokov is here hinting at the link with Akaky Akakievich) to Edmund Wilson:

> "A little man, with mild watery eyes ... very quiet, untalkative, small false teeth. Blurts out some obvious question ... in a ventriloquist's voice and then is dismally silent again. Profession, secretary of several clubs. Batchelor. (He) ... led me to the Lincoln monument. And then suddenly the miracle happened: stopped abruptly, stared at a flagpole. Eyes ablaze, nostrils a-quiver, awfully excited ... you see his passion was flagpoles and the new one he had just acquired for his backyard was 75 ft. tall ... The little man was bright and alive for at least half an hour. And then the next day I noticed him tingle a moment when I happened to mention Poland and Poles."(49)

This whimsical(50) anecdote reveals the important characteristics of the Gogol and the 'strange city' consciousness, for Nabokov's

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(48) Nikolai Gogol, p.144.

(49) The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, pp.87-88.

(50) "Isn't all art whimsical, from Shakespeare to Joyce?" Nabokov. Ibid, p.330.

"little man" the world literally exists only for flagpoles as Akaky Akakievich's world also only contains 'the overcoat'. These two characters therefore could be said to have put their own thoughts and desires on the same footing as physical reality: the world becomes literally just a context in which one (for instance) finds flagpoles. Their preoccupations go to prove that "thought exists too"[51] as expressed by another writer who adopted a "gogolised"view of the consciousness - Andrei Bely. Nabokov was enthusiastically involved in Bely's ideas about metrics[52](Bely launched these ideas with an analysis of style in Gogol), enjoyed his novels, and fell under the influence of the Symbolist school in general in the period 1915-1921.[53] Bely's ideas about the consciousness are highly complicated (and perhaps confused) but there is one aspect of them which provides a last link in the

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(51) Andrei Bely. Petersburg, p.35.

(52) In Nabokov's 'Notes on Prosody' (appended to Eugene Onegin) he acknowledged that "when I was a boy I was greatly fascinated by Belij's admirable work" (Vol. III, p.459) and to Edmund Wilson he characterised Bely's treatise on metrics (Simvolism, 1910) as "probably the greatest work on verse in any language". (Letters, p.78).

(53) Nabokov informed Wilson: "the 'decline' of Russian literature in 1905-1917 is a Soviet invention. Blok, Bely, Bunin and others wrote their best stuff in those days. And never was poetry so popular - not even in Pushkin's days. I am a product of the period, I was bred in that atmosphere". (Letters, p.220). In Speak Memory his early attempts at verse-making coincided with the advent of "a new school that were in the act of ripping up the old rhythmns" (p.220). In The Gift Fyodor announces "my mind in those days accepted ecstatically, gratefully, completely, without critical carpings, all of the five poets whose names begin with 'B'". (p.76) These poets would be Blok, Bely, Bunin, Balmont, Briusov. Among critics only Simon Karlinsky seems to have noticed that "for all his tremendous originality and undoubted individuality, (Nabokov) frequently draws on some of the significant procedures of the Russian Symbolist and post-Symbolist poetry." ('Introduction'. Letters, p.21).

evidence needed to establish just what Nabokov meant by his double version of things, one expressing integrality, the other, a flawed but necessary copy of the same reality.

Bely's ideas about the consciousness and the self sprang from the experience of a childhood illness (like Nabokov's understanding of the parallel existences of an "expanding Einsteinian universe" and a "Newtonian norm" deriving from a similar childhood sickness).(54) Bely describes in his third novel Kotik Letaev (1922) how in his delirium he would slip out of the reasonable world of family and names for things and into a similar world to that of Roquentin or Falter where "things" had no nomenclatorial reality but were just expanding and contracting essences. This experience of illness also gave the impression of a mingling of physical boundaries where the body could not distinguish where it ended and the outside world began (an experience also described in Nabokov's short story 'Torpid Smoke' (1935)). Bely learned from this experience in so far as he saw that 'life' as we know it is simply the contingent truce existing between the sense of fluid subjective relation to things and on the other hand a rationalized ordering of reality.(55)

Bely saw that both modes if stretched and extended enough could begin to approach each other, thus a strict rationalist constantly

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(54) See Speak Memory, PP.36-39. The Gift, pp.27-29.

(55) Nabokov sees Gogol's work as similarly showing a world that balances between "dream-fluidity" on one hand and a "mass of trifles" on the other. (Nikolai Gogol, p.105).

dividing and classifying a certain reality can come to manipulate that reality until it resembles the flux of the subjective relation to things. In his novel Silver Dove (1909-1910) he advances the idea that towns and cities are the creation of an agricultural people who have learned the lessons of coping with nature too well. Their rational anticipation of events which helped them to cope with and control natural forces leaves a sensation of arbitrary unconnected ramification in the urban context. Bely's main character Daryalsky (who is killed in one sense because of his lack of perspective on things) after a long spell in the country, finds it hard to focus on the phenomena in the town; he is simply confronted by a two dimensional surface with "some black blotches on the grey surface"(56) and his focus has to jump to discern the three dimensional people that they represent.

Bely's novel Petersburg more fully amplifies the mental landscape that is sketched out in Silver Dove (both novels were intended to be part of a trilogy). Nabokov has commented on the novel that "it is a splendid fantasy"(57) and this, like his comment on Hamlet that it is the "wild dream of a neurotic scholar"(58) connotes his feeling that both works are luxurious and capricious developments on an initial abstract idea. In fact both works are linked in that Bely's

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(56) Andrei Bely. The Silver Dove trans. G. Reavey. (New York: Grove Press, 1974) p.402.

(57) Strong Opinions, p.85.

(58) Nikolai Gogol, p.140.

picture of the consciousness in the novel could be described by the Player King's words "our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own".(59) Bely coined the term 'cerebral play' ('mozgovaya igra') to describe how the thoughts of his characters exist as entities, jumble about, and in turn engender new thoughts in an inevitable acceleration of relatedness.

Bely shows that the city of St. Petersburg is animated by 'cerebral play', thus stone griffins, caryatids and Peter's bronze statue all have their own life touched off by the purposeless mental agitation of the inhabitants of the place. The importance of this in regard to Nabokov is that Bely presents 'cerebral play' as being linked to the action of the literary imagination. Thus in a low sense the characters of Petersburg are part of the cerebral play of Bely as is the existence of the story in the mind of the reader.(60)

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(59) Act III, Scene II, lines 225-6.

(60) "This shadow arose by chance in the consciousness of Senator Ableukhov and acquired its ephemeral being there. But the consciousness of Apollon Ableukhov is a shadowy consciousness because he too is the possessor of an ephemeral being and the fruit of the author's fancy: unnecessary, idle cerebral play". Petersburg, p.35.

IV

Nabokov's reference to Coleridge's 'Person from Porlock' account introduced the idea that he was interested in portraying a situation where a number of different modes are presented and have to be identified and evaluated. Thus we must consider whether the 'Person' who interrupts is a "trite deus ex machina" or a necessary and satisfying part of the parable; whether Coleridge's 'dream' is a bogus transcription of a drugged trance or a viable picture of the working of the artistic imagination. This account must also be evaluated by its relation with the poem that it is meant to explain. This led to Nabokov's interest in portraying some modes that are weaker, or that have less integrity than others, for instance as in the difference between the "higher terrace" of waking consciousness and the "bumble" of dreams. A complication arises when one realises that a stronger mode is somehow dependent on this weaker one, thus art must borrow some of its devices from the tricks of the dreaming self, similarly the artist feeds off the very limitations of the consciousness of his characters. Nabokov's biography provided the image of the intense integral world of Vyra being usurped by the contingencies of St. Petersburg. His involvement with the work of writers like Gogol and Bely provided the idea that the city represented an aesthetically linked tumbling and re-ordering of reality. Ganin in Mary and Fyodor in The Gift represent the occasional surrender of the consciousness to this mode. We have seen how Nabokov, in a partly involuntary, partly planned sense has been preoccupied by the relation of his 'camera obscura' of vital, integral vision and the 'camera lucida' of a flawed, manqué (yet necessary) mode.

In order to make sense of this in terms of reading Nabokov we must briefly identify just what condition of the imagination Nabokov is trying to describe in his 'lucida' mode. In Speak Memory he describes "certain praedormitory visions" that he distinguishes from "the bright mental image ... conjured up by the wingstroke of the will". Nabokov's hypnagogic images represent "a one-sided conversation going on in an adjacent section of my mind ... a neutral detached anonymous voice which I catch saying words of no importance to me whatsoever ... the slow steady development of (these) visions ... pass before my eyes. They come and go without the drowsy observer's participation. They are often grotesque. I am pestered by roguish profiles, by some coarse-featured and florid dwarf with a swelling nostril or ear ...".(1)

The sense of a "swelling" image is close to Bely's character Daryalsky's idea that "blotches ... were not blotches but real three dimensional objects".(2) In The Gift Nabokov acknowledges the Belian expanding image. Fyodor hears "the peck" of a Belian "key"(3) at the door of his lodging house. This suggests that the tapping and the probing of a key to find the lock expands itself into the image of a live beak prying at the door. The imagination in this sense, like Nabokov's hypnagogia, acts in a "neutral" involuntary manner. In Invitation to a Beheading (1935),

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(1) V. Nabokov. Speak Memory, pp.33-34.

(2) A. Bely. Silver Dove, p.402.

(3) V. Nabokov. The Gift, p.152.

Cincinnatus, a prisoner in a bare room, found that "the tiny blobs of ... glossy paint and their round little shadows" formed inevitable "patterns".(4) Dudkin (in Petersburg) Bely's version of Pushkin's wretched character Eugene in 'The Bronze Horseman', makes out staring Mongolian faces that expand and recede in the stained patches of the bare walls of his room. Bely notes that the artist "really should" dismantle the images that picture the spread of "cerebral play" because of the potency of the involuntary powers of the imagination.(5) Ruskin, in his well-known description of a temporary spell of madness, observed: "it was more wonderful yet to find the madness made up of things so dreadful, out of things so trivial ... my fate for all its futurity, seemed continually to turn on the humour of dark personages who were materially nothing but the stains of damp on the ceiling".(6)

The mutation of a formless blotch into a recognizable shape is one of the first and most basic steps of the artistic imagination. As part of a general prohibitory injunction against imaginatively seductive pastimes (which included chess), the Gautama Buddha forbade the game of 'lac' where creatures are invoked from the haphazard splashes of die on walls.(7) While noting that Da Vinci

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(4) V. Nabokov. Invitation to a Beheading (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1960) p.113.

(5) A. Bely. Petersburg, p.35.

(6) Letter 23 June 1878. rpr. Ruskin Today ed. and ann. K. Clark. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) p.75.

(7) H. J. R. Murray. History of Chess (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913) cites the prohibition of the game of "dipping the hand with the fingers stretched out in lac, or red dye, or flour water, and striking the wet hand on the ground, or on a wall calling out "What shall it be?" and showing the form required - elephants, horses, etc".

created pictures out of the damp spots that formed on walls of his room, Ernst Gombrich defined this compulsion as part of the basic artistic "will-to-form".(8) Indeed he illustrates this instinctive 'projection' of form onto a seemingly neutral shape by pointing to a "strange book" by Alexander Cozens (A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape, 1785). Cozens, Gombrich observes, "advocates a method which he calls 'blotting' - the use of accidental inkblots for the suggestion of landscape motif".(9) Although Cozens received a good deal of ridicule for this method at the time, he showed considerable "psychological understanding of what is involved by the invention of forms",(10) and Gombrich describes how his method leads on to the familiar Rorschach ink-blot tests of this century.

Gombrich further notes that the basic "will-to-form" should be better dubbed "the-will-to-make-conform" for the shapes are assimilated according to patterns that are held already in the mind. Cozen's 'blotting' methods make more sense if one realises that the general idea of what constitutes a picturesque landscape was already in the minds of his audience and thus they only needed an arbitrary given shape to release the necessary creative, shaping, powers. If we return to the Nabokovian context, his hypnagogic visions are "one-sided" because they are involuntarily shaped and may be linked

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(8) E. Gombrich. Art and Illusion, p.64.

(9) E. Gombrich. Art and Illusion, p.155.

(10) Ibid, p.156.

to 'blotting' because as Andre Maurois has pointed out, hypnagogic and dream illusions may be formed from the amorphous shapes generated by the pressure of the sleeper's closed eyelids.(11)

Nabokov gives a clear example of the 'will-to-form' in Despair (1936). He describes his main character Hermann progressing through a small German town priding himself on being "observant as usual". He enters the square and observes the usual statue of a German princeling noting: "the bronze horse rearing and using its tail for a prop, like a woodpecker, and if the Duke riding it had stretched out his arm with more energy, the whole monument in the murky evening light might have passed for that of Peter the Great in the town that he founded". Having registered this impression he turns his attention to the inhabitants of the square but his initial comparison of the ordinary statue with that of the Bronze Horseman has taken on its own life. Thus when he turns back to the statue he observes: "the snake writhing under that hind hoof, that legend in Latin, that jackboot with the black star of a spur". Hermann reads the reality that his initial comparison has suggested. In this case Hermann manages to restore the image back to a German princeling by realising that - "it was just my fancy borrowing off

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(11) "It is true that during sleep our eyes are closed, but the pressure of the lids excites the optic nerves and the sleeper see phosphenes ... these coloured spots with their mobile shapes delineate the objects of which our dream will be made up. This is so true that I have on the basis of this observation, devised a method for getting to sleep. I focus my attention upon the phosphenes (and) try to interpret them just as you identify an image in an ink blot". Andre Maurois. Illusions (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p.15.

Tsar Peter"[12] yet his downfall in the novel comes through his one-sided "will-to-form".

The 'lucida' aspect can thus be seen as a 'projected' reality in Nabokov's understanding. It is artistic forming but not fully translated into a developed mode. The depiction of dreams, dream-states, misty consciousness, blurred and inadequate lives demonstrate a field where there are powerful imaginative forces at work but there is no coherent mediate direction to them. One can now bring in the "third Protagonist the Reader",[13] who was initially invoked at the beginning of the study. We have established that Nabokov is well aware of his own finite existence and of his powerful consciousness, he has resolved these into a 'necessary' third movement by teaching the reader to carry forward Nabokov's 'real life' after the original author's 'dissolution'. The strong and the weak model, as demonstrated by Nabokov's "real life" and Vadim's weak life in Look at the Harlequins, is a lesson in the art of focussing on the part of Nabokov who teaches the reader to see a "magically disguised" bird in an initially unpromising bush. A character in Look at the Harlequins observes "put two things together and you get a third Harlequin",[14] the third Harlequin is the necessary Reader within whose "eyesight"[15] Nabokov's art unfolds.

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(12) V. Nabokov. Despair (London: Panther, rpr. 1969) p.74.

(13) V. Nabokov. Eugene Onegin Vol II, p.268. "Who is the third who walks always beside you" (from Part Five of Eliot's The Wasteland 1922) may be an appropriate epigraph to Nabokov's relations with the reader.

(14) V. Nabokov. Look at the Harlquins, p.9.

(15) V. Nabokov. Ada, p.72.

The function of the weak model of things in Nabokov's schema is that it is an anticipatory parable for the embryo consciousness of the reader. He is first shown a 'one-sided' pattern that demonstrates his own involuntary interpretive urge and the second pattern emerges only after he has mastered the true double pulse of apprehension.

Nabokov provided an image that defines his idea of the reader in Fyodor's description of a grasshopper in The Gift: "thus a forest grasshopper (starting his little motor but never able to get it going: tsig - tsig - tsig - and breaks off) having jumped and landed immediately readjusts the position of his body by turning in such a way as to make the direction of his dark stripes coincide with those of the fallen needles (or their shadows)".(16) Similarly the reader on 'landing' in Nabokov's world must learn to orient himself not to his understanding of the arrangement of stripes but that of the forest maker Nabokov.

It would be possible to arrive at the role of the reader from Nabokov's preference for the triple movement. If one is given the initial two Harlequins: the author and the work, then the "potentially dissolvable" author must find synthesis in the third Harlequin, the mind of the reader through the means of his art. However this is not necessary for Nabokov provides a clear model for the role of the reader in his use of mirror imagery. Ernst Gombrich has pointed out

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(16) V. Nabokov. The Gift, p.313.

the generally unrecognized illusion that the mirror image represents. In Art and Illusion he recommends that one should stand before the bathroom mirror clouded with steam:

> "It is a fascinating exercize in illusionist representation to trace one's own head on the surface of the mirror and to clear the area enclosed by the outline. For only when we have actually done this do we realise how small the image is which gives us the illusion of seeing ourselves 'face to face'. To be exact it must be precisely half the size of our head ... the geometrical proof of this fact ... basically ... is simple: since the mirror will always appear to be halfway between me and my reflection, the size on its surface will be one half its apparent size. But however cogently this fact can be demonstrated with the help of similar triangles, the assertion is usually met with frank incredulity. And despite all geometry, I too, would stubbornly contend that I really see my head (natural size) when I shave and that the size on the mirror surface is the phantom ...". (17)

The image in the mirror is a projected image, involuntarily cast by the brain which juggles with its knowledge of the laws of perspective in order to provide the eye with what it seeks. If we translate this to the idea of Nabokov's art as a mirror held up to nature then we can see that what happens on the surface of the mirror belongs to the lucida dimension because it is a projected reality

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(17) E. Gombrich. Art and Illusion, p.5.

(it exists in effect but not in fact). Nabokov (once more working in threes) is not content with an object and its reflection, he is also interested in a third dimension - behind the glass. In Despair Franz sees his version of everyday reality (which is in itself a mirror illusion as we shall see) as being similar to "words written on glass, (beyond which) lay darkness, a darkness into which one ought not to peer".(18) John Shade, who has more perspective as a "spy on beauty"(19) than Franz can penetrate the darkness as the first stanza of his poem reveals:

"I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure in the window pane;
I was the smudge of ashen fluff - and I
lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky.
And from the inside too, I'd duplicate
myself, my lamp, an apple on a plate:
Uncurtaining the night. I'd let dark glass
Hand all the furniture above the grass
And how delightful when a fall of snow
Covered my glimpse of lawn and reached up so
As to make chair and bed exactly stand
Upon that snow, out in that crystal land."(20)

The shadow of the bird should have warned it of its approach

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(18) Despair, p.155.

(19) "now I shall spy on beauty as none has / Spied on it yet ..." Pale Fire, p.64.

(20) Ibid, p.33.

to the sky-reflecting window and as the bird hit the window its shadow would have been projected onto the inside of the room. Shade identifies himself with the 'shadow' of the bird and accordingly we receive an image from "inside" the mirror that has killed the waxwing. Shade uses his sitting room window as a reverse mirror that suspends the images of his own room onto the garden outside. The first stanza of the poem in fact reveals the key to the question of the primary integrity of Kinbote or Shade. Shade is looking back from "the darkness" into which Franz of Despair dare not peer. Shade's mirror reflects the "inside" of his own house and also conveys an image of the garden outside, a garden where Kinbote is lurking with his "binoculars" trying to look back in. He however, like the waxwing,(21) receives a false image from the glass because in trying to determine the progress of Shade's poem from the poet's movements he can only view Shade "where a kindly mirror refected for me his hunched shoulders".(22) Kinbote is here relying on an illusion, a

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(21) There are in fact two species of Waxwing in America. One, The Cedar Waxwing (Bombycilla cedrorum), an unobtrusive bird with a quiet voice, the other The Bohemian Waxwing (Bombycilla garrulus) an evident loud bird (an old name for it being 'the Bohemian chatterer'). Both birds are superficially similar like a mirror reflection and it is evident that Kinbote has seized on the Bohemian Waxwing as Shade's bird at the beginning of his commentary whilst the real "Bombycilla Shadei" (See p.100) is more likely to be the Cedar Waxwing, given Shade's fondness for trees. Kinbote is shown to be an inadequate naturalist when he fails to understand Shade's lepidopteral references (See p.172). Another false twinning of birds occurs in the confusion between the European robin and the American robin a "suburban imposter ... with untidy dull-red livery". p.73.

(22) Pale Fire, p.89. We are told that Zemblan is "the tongue of the mirror". p.242.

projection of his own brain which confirms the inauthenticity of his account.

John Shade as a developed spokesman for Nabokov can pass through the mirror-illusion and view the world through the "dark glass" in the opposite direction. This brings to mind Carroll's Alice Through the Looking Glass[23] where Alice at first wants to "see a little peep" (Franz's 'peep' echoes this) into Looking Glass House where everything "may be quite different". Alice's wishes are transformed into action when she announces: "let's pretend the glass has gone all soft like gauze so that we can get through. Why, it's turning into a sort of mist now. I declare! It'll be easy enough to get through ... and certainly the glass was beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist".[24] Alice's favourite words in Carroll's book are "let's pretend" and this magic phrase, as a token of her creative strength, works as an open sesame to a new imaginatively ordered world. Nabokov similarly allows those with imaginative strength (like Shade) or those in a dream state to step

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(23) Nabokov translated Alice Through the Looking Glass in 1923 (Anya b strane Chudes). See Simon Karlinsky "Anya in Wonderland: Nabokov's Russified Lewis Carroll" in Nabokov: Criticism, reminiscences, translations and tributes ed. A. Appel, C. Newman (London, 1970) pp.310-316. References to to Carroll have become commonplace in Nabokov criticism. The first one being probably Denis de Rougement "Lolita or Scandal" Love Declared - Essays on the myths of love (New York: Pantheon, 1963) pp.48-54. Useful essays on Carroll and the mirror motif are: Charles Nicol "The mirrors of Sebastian Knight". Nabokov: The Man and his Work ed. L. S. Dembo (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967) pp.85-95. William W. Rowe "Pnin's Uncanny Looking Glass" A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov ed. C. Proffer (Anne Arbor: Ardis, 1974) pp.182-193. G. M. Hyde. Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist (London, 1977) pp.87-94 et passim.

(24) Lewis Carroll. The Annotated Alice ed. and ann. M. Gardner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, rev.ed. 1970) pp.181-184.

into the other side of the mirror.

At the close of Alice Through the Looking Glass (as also in Alice in Wonderland) the whole story is revealed to be a dream on the part of Alice.(25) Vadim in Look at the Harlequins briefly leaves his established existence which is a mirror image, - the "non-identical twin ..." of a "real being" - in a form of trance or dream-state and like Alice, or Wells's Mr. Plattner(26) goes "skimming" into another dimension. Vadim later characterises his experience of "this other dimension" as "madness" and a "flash of delight ... rich and shattering ..."(27) however he is unable to fully understand the experience. On waking Vadim struggles to regain his accepted identity and tries to remember his name "I felt it began with an N ... yes I definitely felt my family name began with an N ..."(28) This parallels Alice's puzzlement in Through the Looking Glass: "and now who am I? I will remember ... L, I know it begins with L!"(29)

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(25) Although in Through the Looking Glass Alice may be part of the Red King's dream, who has slept throughout the story. Nabokov mentions "the twinned dream theme" in regard to Ulysses and Anna Karenina (Strong Opinions, pp.128-129). Pnin and Victor have a 'twinned dream' in Chapter Four of Pnin.

(26) H. G. Wells uses the inversion theme in 'The Plattner Story' where a character is catapaulted into another dimension and returns as a mirror inversion of himself. This story has significant links with Nabokov's Look at the Harlequins and Transparent Things. Nabokov admired Wells's fiction (See Strong Opinions, pp. 139, 127, 103-104).

(27) V. Nabokov. Look at the Harlequins, p.240.

(28) Ibid, p.248.

(29) L. Carroll. The Annotated Alice, p.226.

In a similar manner we are shown Pnin being given a glimpse of the 'darkness' beyond the mirror surface of his life at a moment in the novel when he is suffering from a childhood illness in which as in the case of Nabokov and Bely familiar shapes became the "breeding places of evil delusions".(30) In his delirium, Pnin finds in the design of a lacquered bed screen where there appears "an old man hunched up on a bench and a squirrel holding a reddish object in its front paws" and in the interlocking pattern of rhododendron and oak leaves of the background wallpaper in his room, the sensation that a key to the pattern is hidden by an "evil designer" somewhere in these presented arrangements. For a brief moment the flat plane of Pnin's vision (the mirror surface) is altered and he is enabled to see "in depth" as in the case of "the reflection of an inside object in a window-pane with the outside scenery perceived through the same glass".(31) This glimpse should have revealed to Pnin that his life has been fantastically textured by another observer behind the glass, thus the bed screen gives a preview(32) of him slumped in the Park at Whitchurch having missed the Cremona bus. Also the squirrel is a leitmotif throughout the novel, a thematic index that is unrealized on Pnin's part, thus he feels that another squirrel is "without the least sign of gratitude" after he gives it a drink at a water-fountain, yet the tribe as a

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(30) V. Nabokov. Pnin, p.23.

(31) Ibid, p.24.

(32) In the same manner that Albinus receives a foreglimpse of his story in the glimpses of film action in Laughter in the Dark.

whole express their gratitude by indicating by their frequent appearances, the patterning of Pnin's life.(33)

Pnin is given a second chance to pass through the mirror-plane of his existence in the novel when he dreams in Chapter Four of finding "himself, fantastically cloaked, fleeing through great pools of ink under a cloud barred moon from a chimerical palace ... and then pacing a desolate sand ... (waiting) ... for some mysterious deliverance to arrive in a throbbing boat from beyond the hopeless sea".(34) Pnin thus dreams of the future reflected world of Kinbote in Pale Fire (Kinbote similarly escapes from a palace in an exotic outfit and is taken off in a "powerful motor boat"). One recalls that Pnin actually appears in Pale Fire in the library at Wordsmith, in "a circular room where a baldheaded suntanned professor in a Hawaiian shirt sat at a round table reading with an ironic expression on his face a Russian book".(35) His dream indicates another double view as do "the inside objects in a window pane" projected onto "the outside scenery perceived through the same glass". Pnin is given a glimpse of the creative context of his life yet he misses the "melting moment ... the sensation of holding at last the key he

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(33) The dormouse in Alice, as Martin Gardner observed, is a squirrel-like animal; for Pnin, squirrels and Carroll see: Charles Nichol, 'Pnin's History', Novel, Spring, 1971; W. R. Rowe 'Pnin's Uncanny Looking Glass', Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov.

(34) Pnin, pp.109-110. Victor also dreams of a similar "Solus Rex" (p.86) in the novel, which looks back to Nabokov's trial run for the Zemblan scenery of Pale Fire in 'Solus Rex' (1940) rpr. in Russian Beauty and Other Stories.

(35) Pale Fire, p.282.

had sought" and the pattern becomes "confused" once more.(36)

In Ada Van Veen hears reports of another planet - Terra - from the dreams of his patients. This Terra is the "real"model for Antiterra which is an inverted mirror version of the real world.(37) Lewis Carroll is frequently referred to in the work(38) and his favourite theme of inversion is acknowledged when Ada playfully inverts Pasternak's novel Dr. Zhivago into Les Amours du Docteur Mertvago (exchanging the Russian root Zhizn' - life for smert' - death), Van Veen drily speculates: "playing croquet with you ... should be rather like using flamingoes and hedgehogs."(39) The Carroll analogue reveals the status of Van's reminiscences for we are told in the text that his past "may only have existed oneirologically", Nabokov has also hinted in interview that Van Veen has invented his memoirs.(40) Van Veen's account of "Ada's adventures in Adaland" can be thus equated with Carroll's description of Alice's "oneirological" adventures in Wonderland and Looking Glass House. Nabokov has commented of Carroll's work that "if read very carefully it will be seen to imply, by humorous juxtaposition, the presence of a quite

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(36) Pnin, p.24.

(37) Van Veen refers to the "distortive glass of our distorted glebe", p.18.

(38) See: "Ada's Adventures in Adaland" (p.568), Carroll's book is transposed into "Palace in Wonderland" (p.53) and "Alice in the Camera Obscura" (p.547), a "Neverlander" and a "dodo" linked on p.350. Lucette and Ada pose like a Dodgson photograph "avid lovely young faces ... doleful and wistful" (p.362). It should be noted that 'Ada' is one of the Liddell sisters mentioned in Alice Through the Looking Glass.

(39) Ada, p.53.

(40) Strong Opinions, p.121.

solid, and rather sentimental world, behind the semi-detached dream".(41) By implication of Van Veen's absorption in the mode of the Alice Adventures "the very careful reader" in Ada (the book is studded with references to "the attentive reader" or "modest rereader") can also come to the conclusion that there is a more stable reality behind the unpleasant caprices of Van's memoirs.

Carroll and the mirror theme provides, as George Steiner has observed, "one of the keys"(42) to Nabokov's work and certainly helps make sense of the 'discrete' arrangements of individual novels.(43) It also defines the position of the reader in relation to his art. We have seen how John Shade can penetrate the glass of the mirror and arrange his own images on its surface, he achieves mastery over the mirror illusion by virtue of being a creative artist. Fyodor in The Gift is also a controller of the mirror image not a victim to it as are the characters in The Eye and King Queen Knave. Fyodor finds a parallel "kindred pleasure" which he relates to his sense of accomplishment after completing his poems when he sees "a blindingly white parallelogram of sky being unloaded from a van - a dresser with a mirror across which, ... passed a flawlessly clear reflection of boughs sliding and swaying not arboreally but with a human vacillation produced by the nature of those who were carrying this sky, these boughs, this gliding façade".(44)

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(41) Ibid, p.184.

(42) George Steiner. 'Extraterritorial'. Nabokov: Criticism, reminiscences, translations and tributes, p.122.

(43) See Appendix to Part One: 'Looking Glass Themes' in Lolita, King Queen Knave and The Eye.

(44) V. Nabokov. The Gift, p.14.

The ideal position of the Nabokovian reader - "the follow artist"[45] - can be worked out from the presented schema. He should not stand between Nabokov and the mirror-surface of his art because looking into the mirror he will be seeing a projective inverted image. That is why in Despair Hermann smugly announces "a damned good fool I have made of someone. Who is he? Gentle reader, look at yourself in the mirror".[46] The slipshod reader will find his own face in the mirror if he projects his own mental expectations and Hermann who mistakes a poor image of himself as a real twin (thus falling for a self-supplied mirror image) and stands as his own example of a "foolish" reader. It is evident that the reader in order to avoid the mirror distortion (after all Nabokov is not trying to 'trick' his audience[47]) must emulate John Shade and step through the glass. That is why this account of one of Carroll's children who helped inspire Alice Through the Looking Glass provides appropriate advice for the reader of Nabokov:

> "Charles Dodgson ... called me to him saying ..."would you like to see something puzzling?" We followed him ... into a room full of furniture with a tall mirror standing across one corner. "Now," he said, giving me an orange, "first tell me which hand you have got that in." "The right," I said. "Now" he said, "go and stand before that

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(45) "I write mainly for artists, fellow artists and follow artists". Strong Opinions, p.41.

(46) V. Nabokov. Despair, p.33.

(47) Interview, Swiss Broadcast, 1971. Questioner: "Do you make a point of puzzling people and playing games with the reader?" Nabokov: "What a bore that would be!" Strong Opinions, p.184. Instead Nabokov has said that he creates riddles with elegant solutions" quoted Times Literary Supplement (16 May 1975, No. 3,819) p.526.

> glass and tell me which hand the little girl you see there has got it in." After some perplexed contemplation, I said, "The left hand." "Exactly," he said "and how do you explain that?" I couldn't explain it, but seeing some solution was expected, I ventured, "If I was on the other side of the glass, wouldn't the orange still be in my right hand?" ... "Well done, little Alice," he said. "The best answer I've had yet."(48)

The reader of Nabokov's art must also, like John Shade, cross the threshold of the image so as to restore the orange to the right hand by looking back along the image towards the model Nabokov, thus making "the whole involuted boggling thing one beautiful straight line".(49) The reader is prepared for his imaginative leap by the means of the anticipatory introduction to the possible distortions of the interpretive mind which initially make a salutary "fool" of the reader before going on to better things. The art of reading Nabokov rests on a mutual testing of responses between author and reader whereby the reader alternates between distinguishing the nature of nature (the natural world in this case synthesized by Nabokov) and the nature of his reactions to nature

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(48) The Annotated Alice, p.180.

(49) Pale Fire, p.261.

until briefly the two modes step in time together and that is the 'superhigh level'[50] of his art.

Nabokov encoded his idea of the artist and his relation to the given world and the future reader in an early short story which he characterised as being despite "its simple appearance ... one of my trickiest pieces".[51] This short story, 'A Guide to Berlin' (1925) affects to be a simple description of the mundane phenomena of city life which although uninteresting to the contemporary inhabitants may prove fascinating and exotic to observers from a future period. The narrator gives a lively description of a Berlin streetcar (and with remarkable prescience predicts that it will have vanished in twenty years) and then observes that:

> "some eccentric Berlin writer in the twenties of the twenty-first century, wishing to portray our time, will go to a museum of technological history and locate a hundred year old streetcar, yellow, uncouth ... then he will go home and compile a description of Berlin streets in bygone days. Everything, every trifle will be valuable and meaningful: the advertisement over the window, the peculiar jolting motion ... everything will be enobled by age. I

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(50) "At this superhigh level of art, literature is of course not concerned with pitying the underdog or cursing the upper dog. It appeals to that secret depth of the human soul where the shadows of other worlds pass like the shadows of nameless and soundless ships". Nikolai Gogol, p.149.

(51) D. Barton Johnson provides a detailed analysis of the 'tricks' of the piece in "Nabokov as Man of Letters: The Alphabetic Motif in his Work". Modern Fiction Studies. XXV (Autumn 1979) pp.427-438.

think that here lies the sense of literary creation: to portray ordinary objects as they will be reflected in the kindly mirrors of future times ..."(52)

We are given a further glimpse of the 'mirror' of the future in a description of the fish house in the Berlin zoo where the observer is likened to "Captain Nemo gazing out of his submarine at the sea creatures undulating among the ruins of Atlantis".(53)

The final scene in the piece is set in a Berlin pub and the reader's full attention is needed in order to follow the exact scene as depicted. The narrator and his companion (who is receiving the account) are seated in a bar-room which is connected by a passageway to another smaller room "part of the publican's humble little apartment". From the narrator's position at the bar he can see into this room where he first notices a couch and then a mirror on the far wall. In this mirror is reflected a "table with a checked table cloth", this actually stands before the couch and mirror (but slightly offset) yet it initially springs to the eye as it is reflected in the oblique plane of the mirror because the observer from the bar only sees it in profile thus he describes the image of the table "toppling" from the mirror image into the real object that he can discern from the side. At this table a small child is receiving soup from the publican's wife.

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(52) 'Guide to Berlin' rpr. Details of a Sunset and Other Stories (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976) p.94.

(53) Ibid, p.96.

The narrator's companion asks him what he sees down there and the answer takes up the last paragraph of the story:

> "There, under the mirror, the child sits alone ... he is now looking our way. From there he can see the inside of the tavern - the green island of the billiard table, the ivory ball he is forbidden to touch, the metallic gloss of the bar ... He has long since grown used to this scene and is not dismayed by its proximity. Yet there is one thing I know. Whatever happens to him in life, he will always remember the picture he saw every day of his childhood from the little room where he was fed his soup. He will remember the billiard table and the ... blue gray cigar smoke, and the din of voices, and my empty right sleeve and scarred face ..." "I can't understand what you see down there, says my friend turning back towards me." What indeed! How can I demonstrate to him that I have glimpsed somebody's future recollection."(54)

The disarming last sentence of the piece in fact plays down the narrator's achievement for the "future recollection" of the boy will not include the point of view of the bar from the mirror-end of his room but from his mid-point position at the table. The "future" image will be that of the "follow-artist" (like the "eccentric

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(54) Op. Cit. p.98.

Berlin writer") who peers like Captain Nemo through the glass back to the artist's reconstruction of reality.

The reader of 'A Guide to Berlin' is given the same chance as Pnin in his brief spell of altered consciousness, the chance to see in depth as when one aligns "the inside objects of a window pane" onto the "outside scenery perceived through the same glass."(55) This ability to discover Nabokov's laws of perspective and inversion entails a complementary act of double focussing on the part of the reader, he must give up a "one-sided" view and look through the mirror illusion back to the "outside scenery" - Nabokov. The "curious thing" that is the grin of the Cheshire cat in Alice in Wonderland is in fact a double projection: "the grin without a cat"(56) is projected onto the background surface of the tree branches. A former pupil of Nabokov at Cornell has given a reminiscence of Nabokov as Teacher:

> "I want you to copy this down exactly as I draw it," Vladimir Nabokov instructed us after explaining that he was going to diagram the themes of Bleak House. He turned to the blackboard, picked up a piece of chalk, and scrawled "the theme of inheritances" in a weird arching loop. "The theme of generations" dipped and rose and dipped in an undulating line. "The theme of social consciousness" wiggled crazily toward the other lines then veered sharply away.

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(55) Pnin, p.24.

(56) The Annotated Alice, pp.89-91.

> Nabokov turned from the blackboard and peered over the rim of his glasses, parodying a professorial twinkle. "I want you to be sure to copy this exactly as I draw it." ... finally he drew the last "theme" in a neat dipping curve, a half moon on its side, "the theme of art" and we suddenly realised he had drawn a cat's face, the last line its wry smile ..."(57)

The minor analogue whereby Nabokov teaches the reader to project the varying themes in his work until they achieve a superimposed(58) image of the smiling cat's face of art leads to one final point in relation to the overall effect of Nabokov's art. Although we are given the sense of "depth" with the superimposed image the image still exists effectively on a flat two-dimensional plane (the mind provides the Nabokov-supplied perspective). There is thus a parallel between the presentation of Nabokov's art and that of a painting. Nabokov has said of himself "I think I was born a painter - really! ... up to my fourteenth year, perhaps, I used to spend most of the day drawing and painting and I was

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(57) Ross Wetzsteon. 'Nabokov as Teacher'. Nabokov: Criticism, reminiscences, translations and tributes, pp.240-241.

(58) Nabokov acknowledges the superimposition theme in 'Paris Poem' (1943). "No better joy would I choose than to fold / (life's) magic carpet in such a fashion / as to make the design of today coincide / with the past, with a former pattern". Poems and Problems, p.123.

supposed to become a painter in due time".(59) Nabokov likened Gogol's art to the "scaling of insects" where the surface of the creature gives off an irridescent effect because of the positioning and refraction of countless tiny points of colour.(60) This brings to mind the impressionist technique in painting, Gombrich's account of this style has bearing on the Nabokovian context:

> "It is the point of impressionist painting that the direction of the brushstroke is no longer an aid to the reading of forms. It is without any support from structure that the beholder must mobilize his memory of the visible world and project it into the mosaic of strokes and dabs on the canvas before him. It is here, therefore, that the principle of guided projection reaches its climax. The image, it might be said, has no anchorage left on the canvas - it is only 'conjured up' in our minds. The willing beholder responds to the artist's suggestion because he enjoys the transformation that occurs in front of his eyes. It was in this enjoyment that a new function of art emerged gradually and all but unnoticed during (this) period ... The artist gives the

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(59) Strong Opinions, p.17. Young Victor in Pnin has a painter's eye. Nabokov's two main invented painters are 'Ardalion' of Despair and 'Romanov' of The Gift. In Speak Memory he characterises his relation to the 'World of Art' movement (Mir Iskusstva) through the influence of Dobuzhinski and Benois. D. Barton Johnson has produced a very important essay on the relation between Nabokov's use of colour and language: "Synesthesia, Polychromatism and Nabokov". Russian Literature Triquarterly, 1972, No.3, pp.3[illegible]-395.

(60) Nikolai Gogol, p.56.

> beholder increasingly 'more to do', he draws him into his magic circle of creation and allows him to experience something of the thrill of 'making' which had once been the privilege of the artist."(61)

Gombrich points out that the impressionist school existed at a crisis point in the development of the ideas about the nature of art. He shows that they existed in a paradoxical midpoint between conflicting ideas about what happens when one looks at a painting. On one hand they relied on what Ruskin had termed "the innocence of the eye",(62) the idea that the painter clears away all preconceptions about the appearance of visual phenomena and simply records what is presented; on the other hand the impressionists had to rely for their effects on the inevitable "vocabulary" of artistic conventions that had come to represent reality. Gombrich allies this conflicting situation with a similar crisis in the world of science at the time, when the inductivist school discovered that "the shadow of the instrument" inevitably clouds the truth, that one cannot take a neutral position towards a given reality because there is always a hypothetical bias.

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(61) E. Gombrich. Art and Illusion, p.169. Gombrich earlier points out: "works of art are not mirrors, but they share with mirrors that elusive magic of transformation", p.5.

(62) "The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the innocence of the eye; that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify, - as a blind man would see them if suddenly gifted with sight". John Ruskin. The Elements of Drawing (1857, rpr. 1971, New York: Dover Press) p.27.

We have noted that the contrasting modes of the camera obscura and camera lucida in Nabokov's work perhaps relate to the 'innocent eye' of induction and the preconceptions of the deductionist. Nabokov like the impressionists is dependent on both modes in order to make his fictions work. This is why he sometimes adopts the persona of a performer because there is an analogue between the author and (say) a tightrope artist, both are in one sense performing in order to demonstrate the 'impossibility' of what they achieve. Nabokov may have provided a lasting image of his own self as artist in his description of Van Veen's 'Mascodagama' tricks in Ada. Van Veen maintains a single straining moment of achievement (he is dancing on his hands and with a mock head enclosing his uplifted feet) before the canvas rips and the performer and his creation 'come apart'. Nabokov's novel Invitation to a Beheading also closes amidst the groaning and cracking of collapsed stage scenery.

P A R T T W O

I

Three elements were advanced at the opening of Part One of this study: Nabokov's monist philosophy and the sense of a unified whole in his work, the necessary copula of the reader's senses and Nabokov's insistence on consciousness at its highest pitch dramatised by its inevitable dissolution. These elements form a reversible syllogistic formula[1] that can be abstractly schematised in terms of the mirror construction of his work. The fallible senses of the reader are educated by the unfulfilling themes in Nabokov's art in order that he can provisionally abandon 'everyday consciousness' and in Gombrich's words "be drawn into the magic circle of art". This understanding has been arrived at by following the unfulfilling and the nugatory in Nabokov's work, the missed beat and the line of weakness that leads to a strong position. It provides us with an abstract schema of orientation like the parable of Fyodor's grasshopper. The second part of this study undertakes to describe the 'experience' and 'meaning' of this arrangement.

The method by which one gains an experiental insight on Nabokov's art is found in concentrating on his "style of thought",[2] particularly as it relates to the work of G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel's influence comes about in a direct and indirect manner in regard to Nabokov. In an indirect sense Hegelian thought permeated

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(1) Thesis: life is defined by the nothingness it comes out of; antithesis: the reader 'dies' by submitting his mentality to the vision of the author; synthesis: the reader makes the work live by recognizing that it in turn recapitulates the swirl of being and nothingness.

(2) As M. Merleau-Ponty has characterized Phenomenology as a "manner or style of thinking" established by its precedents: Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzche. Phenomenology of Perception (London: R.K.P., 1962) p.viii.

Russian culture in the 19th Century (Nikolai Berdyaev noted that Hegel "was believed in"),[3] an influence that remained to make itself felt in the Symbolist era of Russian letters, a period which could claim Nabokov as its "product" as he himself acknowledged. Hegel's thought was so established in Russia that his work was taught as part of the school curriculum and Nabokov became acquainted with the Logic (from the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences, 1817, rev. 1830) as a "schoolboy".[4] It seems that Nabokov made a further study of Hegel's work in the period 1935-1937 while preparing the Chernyshevsky biography that makes up Chapter Four of The Gift.[5]

There has been surprisingly little critical recognition of Nabokov's link with Hegel. The only substantial piece to date has been Carol T. Williams's essay "Nabokov's Dialectical Structure".[6] This short but valuable essay takes a definition of Hegel's 'dialectic' from the Science of Logic and shows how Nabokov has evolved an "informal philosophy" that illustrates the working out

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(3) N. Berdyaev. The Russian Idea trans. R. French (London: Centenary Press, 1947) pp.72-74. See also V. Zenkovsky. A History of Russian Philosophy (London: R.K.P., 1953) Chapters VIII and IX.

(4) V. Nabokov. Speak Memory, p.275.

(5) 'Introduction' S. Karlinsky. The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, p.12.

(6) Carol T. Williams. "Nabokov's Dialectical Structure". Nabokov: The Man and his Work ed. L. S. Dembo. (Madison, London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967) pp.165-182. Charles Mitchell in "Mythic Seriousness in Lolita", Texas Studies in Literature and Language, v (Autumn 1963), pp.329-343 tentatively suggested that Lolita followed a Hegelian mutation process. Charles Nichol pointed to the syllogistic elements in The Real Life of Sebastian Knight. "The Mirrors of Sebastian Knight". L. S. Dembo, Ibid, pp.85-94. George Cummings drew attention to Nabokov's "hegelian spirals" in Lolita in "Nabokov's Russian Lolita" Slavic and East European Journal, Vol 21, No. 3, (Fall 1971).

of the 'dialectic' through the opposing and resolving interaction of the characters in his novels. Williams's conclusions depart from the position of this study when she insists that Hegel did not understand the inexorability of his system and could not put a stop to the endless cycles of progress, similarly Nabokov is presented as being trapped in a situation of creation and recreation (like a character in Invitation to a Beheading, he cannot "bring the words to bay"). This is the idea of a recurring cycle like Arthur Schnitzler's repeating death sequence mentioned in Part One, indeed Hegel dubbed this idea fallacious "bad infinity".

Williams makes an excellent point however in indicating the aesthetic element implicit in Hegel's thought; she further notes that Hegel's explicators would make creditable Nabokov critics. Hegel seems to be speaking for Nabokov's readers in the Phenomenology of Mind (1807) when he indicates the "reward" which "comes after a chequered and devious course of development, and after much struggle and effort."(7) Hegel has undoubtedly proved to be a great influence over a wide range of artistic activity,(8) perhaps not so much in his lectures on Aesthetics (collected after his death) but as Croce observed in what is "hidden" in his philosophy.(9) One commentator has shown that Hegel's work must be approached as

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(7) G. W. F. Hegel. The Phenomenology of Mind trans. J. Baillie. (London: George Allen, 1931) p.76.

(8) Andre Breton observed that "Hegel tackled all the problems which arise in the field of poetry and art at the present time, and he has solved a large proportion of them with unparalleled lucidity" quoted: A Dictionary of Surrealism (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974) p.85.

(9) B. Croce. Ce qui est Vivant et ce qui est Mort de la Philosophie de Hegel (Paris: Giard, 1910) pp.105-106.

a work of art: "it must be studied with absolute approfondissement as one must study every note, chord and transition in a great musical work, where form and content are inseparable".(10) An interesting coincidence of expression is found in J. Findlay's Foreword to a collection of Hegel's writings. He refers to Hegel's "iridescent conclusions" and again to "the subtle iridescent poise"(11) of his ideas whilst Nabokov, commenting on a parody of his style in a Festschrift in celebration of his work notes that the parody is "more exquisitely iridized"(12) than his own version would be.

In interview Nabokov has announced himself to be an "indivisible monist", explaining the qualifying adjective by pointing out that monism is "divisible when say, "mind" sneakily splits away from "matter" in the reasoning of a muddled monist or half-hearted materialist".(13) Nabokov thus distinguishes between a genuine form of monism and a false one, a characteristic inadequate pairing or false twinning. In The Gift Fyodor identifies this weak monism with "Hegel's traducers",(14) the radical critics of the 1860's who provided "the hearty Russian Hegelianism (that is) now past ... (these) ... moulders of opinion were incapable of understanding Hegel's vital truth: a truth that was not stagnant, like shallow

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(10) J. N. Findlay. Hegel: A Re-examination, (London: George Allen, 1958) p.148.

(11) 'Foreword'. Hegel: The Essential Writings ed. F. G. Weiss (New York: Harper, 1974) pp. x and xii.

(12) V. Nabokov. Strong Opinions, p.291 commenting on Peter Lubin's "Kickshaws and Motley". Nabokov: Criticism, reminiscences, translations and tributes, pp.187-208.

(13) Strong Opinions, p.124.

(14) The Gift, p.201.

water, but flowed like blood, through the very process of cognition".(15) Bend Sinister provides a further example where the "Krugism"(16) of the philosopher Krug which depends on a vital sense of paradox is contrasted with the flat philosophy of 'Ekwilism', a parody of Hegelian philosophy which seeks for 'balance' in all things. Ekwilism was originally invented by the "misty" and benign philosopher Skotoma ("an enfant terrible of the '60's") but has been turned into "a violent and virulent political doctrine",(17) in the same manner that Hegel's philosophy has been so adapted by both the left and the right in the 'real' political world of this century. Nabokov provided almost a mirror distortion in the false twinning of monism when he describes intellectuals in the early nineteenth century Russia "mixing heady cocktails of Hegel and Schlegel".(18) Hegel carries a "vital truth", however Nabokov characterised the idealist Schlegel as "well meaning" (like Skotoma) but "hardly readable".(19)

The contrast between strong and weak monism is carried to a considerable degree of elaboration in Nabokov's work. This is

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(15) Ibid, p.233.

(16) Bend Sinister, p.46.

(17) Ibid, pp.70-71. It is perhaps not a coincidence that there was a philosopher W. T. Krug a rival to Hegel who challenged Hegel to deduce 'only his pen' by means of the dialectic. Hegel replied: "one could perhaps give him hope that his pen would have the glory of being deduced ... (as if) ... there were nothing more important to comprehend". Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.221.

(18) V. Nabokov. Nikolai Gogol, p.65.

(19) Eugene Onegin, Vol.III, p.35. Hegel himself attacked Schlegel for insisting on a simplified intuitive sense of the dialectic. See Phenomenology of Mind p.80 and I. Soll An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) p.131.

demonstrated in 'Ultima Thule' where we are told that the character Falter achieves some sort of intellectual revelation about the true nature of the world. In the foreword to the piece (it formed part of an unfinished novel), Nabokov observed that he had forgotten whether he intended Falter to be a "quack" or a "true seer". However the reader can discover which of these Falter is when Falter acknowledges that he had "accidentally solved"the riddle of the universe"."[20] This apparently chance comment refers to the title of the major work of the popular 'monist' philosopher Ernst Haeckel: The Riddle of the Universe (1899). In this work Haeckel challenged anthropomorphic religion and dualist thought in general and sought to substitute a grand "monist method" that would provide "a magnificent cosmological perspective (that) gives us the proper standard and broad outlook which we need in the solution of the vast enigmas that surround us".[21]

Haeckel's work, to Nabokov's mind, fails in its 'broad outlook' by sharing in Chernyshevsky the Russian materialist thinker's "fatal flaw"[22] of talking abstractly about material things without.

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(20) 'Ultima Thule'. A Russian Beauty and Other Stories, p.163. This phrase is placed in inverted commas in Nabokov's text as is the Hegelian term "world consciousness" in Bend Sinister (p.71) used by Skotoma (Williams has also noted this). Falter is the German word for butterfly and Skotoma has the Russian root skot - cattle or beast. Thus the weak monists are allied to the natural world which as Hegel noted is mere 'externality', to be invested and appropriated by mind. Philosophy of Nature trans.A. V. Miller 1970, repr. Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.239.

(21) Ernst Haeckel. The Riddle of the Universe Trans. J. McCabe (London: Watts, 1929) p.12.

(22) The Gift, p.207.

'knowing' them deeply. Thus Chernyshevsky is described in The Gift as having a "muscular mind" but with weak "eyes like a mole and blind white hands". He tries to manipulate the physical world according to what he considers are fundamental notions but is "back-kicked by his own dialectic" and the resulting confusion shrouds his work with "a hint of quackery".(23) Haeckel similarly in The Riddle of the Universe lumps together entomology, consciousness, the movements of the planets and the 'Romance of the Virgin Mary' (to name a few elements of the heterogeneous jumbling) in his quest for a "general" solution to the mysteries of the world.

Hegel on the other hand can be characterized by his blend of "factual knowledge and conceptual skill". J. N. Findlay emphasized the extent of Hegel's research that led up to the general conclusions: "the owl of Minerva only wings its interpretative flight - to modify one of Hegel's most famous statements - when all the common-or-garden spade-work has been completed".(24) Hegel himself anticipated Chernyshevsky and Haeckel in the Introduction to The Logic: "we may often find a doctrine which has mastered merely certain abstract propositions or formulae, such as "in the Absolute all is one", "subject and object are identical" - and only repeating the same thing when it comes to particulars ...

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(23) Ibid, p.208.

(24) J. Findlay. Hegel: A Re-examination, p.75.

experience (however) is the real author of growth and advance in philosophy".(25) Hegel suggests that one can state universal truths but they are meaningless unless one takes "a chequered and devious course of development" to get to them: knowledge must always be qualified by experience. This is the 'vital truth' that Nabokov recognized in Hegel's concept of development. Nabokov defined Hegel's idea of progress to Edmund Wilson: "Hegel's triad ... is really the idea of a circle, to give a rough example: you come back (synthesis) to your starting point (thesis) after visiting the antipodes (antithesis) with the accumulated impressions of the globe enlarging your initial conception of your home town".(26)

Nabokov's explanation recapitulates his subject's even more pithy definition: "the absolute idea may in this respect be compared to an old man who utters the same creed as the child, but for whom it is pregnant with the significance of a lifetime".(27) Nabokov enlarged on his idea of the nature of Hegelian thought in a description of a chess problem in Speak Memory:

> "It was meant for the delectation of the very expert solver. The unsophisticated might miss the point of the problem entirely, and discover its fairly simple "thetic"

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(25) G. W. F. Hegel. The Logic from the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences trans. W. Wallace (1892) repr. Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.31.

(26) The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, p.32.

(27) G. W. F. Hegel. Logic repr. Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.187.

> solution without having passed through the pleasurable torments prepared for the sophisticated one ... (who) ... having passed through the "antithetic" inferno ... would reach the simple key move ... as somebody on a wild goose chase might go from Albany to New York by way of Vancouver, Eurasia and the Azores. The pleasant experience of the roundabout route ... would amply reward him for the misery of the deceit, and after that, his arrival at the simple key move would provide him with a "synthesis" of poignant artistic delight."(28)

The false monist thus solves only the "simple thetic solution" to philosophical problems and does not follow the genuine experiental route. Nabokov provides another example of this kind of philosopher in the figure of Herman Busch in The Gift whose "metaphysics" disappoint Fyodor because of the combination of "bizarre solecisms" and "obscurity of meaning". He announces to Fyodor that he is planning to write a novel(29) in which his main character, a physicist, realises that:

> "the universe is but the final fraction of one, I think, central atom, of those it consists of. It's not easy to understand but if you understand this, you will understand everything ... the whole is equal

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(28) V. Nabokov. Speak Memory, pp.291-292.

(29) The Gift, p.70. Busch is here an example himself of the false twinning theme in the novel for Fyodor is also "planning" a novel.

> to the smallest part of the whole, the sum of the parts is equal to one part of the sum. This is the secret of the world, the formula of absolute infinity ..."(30)

Busch evokes a Haeckel-like ecstatic, flawed and grandiose scheme. The 'real' philosopher provided a similar announcement in his 1906 address to the "league to propagate monism": "a vast, uniform, uninterrupted and eternal process of development obtains throughout all nature; and ... all natural phenomena without exception, from the motions of the heavenly bodies and the fall of a rolling stone to the growth of plants and the consciousness of men obey one and the same great law of causation; that all may be referred to the mechanics of atoms".(31)

The flawed monist, missing the essential dialectical 'antithesis', finds himself in the situation of the 'uroboros', the vicious circle. Herman Busch observes that after discovering the "secret of the world ... the human personality can no longer go on walking and talking".(32) In the Philosophy of Spirit (the third section of the Encyclopaedia), Hegel comments that insanity and mental disturbance is linked to a "one-sided domination of some particularity of 'self-feeling'",(33) that is, the consciousness exists in a

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(30) The Gift, p.201.

(31) Quoted in J. Passmore. A Hundred Years of Philosophy. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) p.43.

(32) The Gift, p.201.

(33) As summed up by J. Findlay. Hegel: A Re-examination, p.295.

non-mediate world, which does not throw up a block to the drive of the consciousness; it is a 'one-sided' mirror illusion alike, Findlay notes, to "dream-content". Nabokov may be describing this state in his 1926 short story 'Terror' and in Falter's "unfathomable sensation" in 'Ultima Thule' for both stories, Nabokov observes, share "shades of thought"[34] with Sartre's depiction of the "amorphous" world of Roquentin in Nausea.

Roquentin is described by Sartre as existing in a world where "things have broken free of their names";[35] Hegel, in describing 'one-sided' madness, links it to the sensation of trying "to think without words".[36] Nabokov criticized Sartre's novel on the same grounds as the weak monists. He thought that Sartre's description of Roquentin's state of mind "remains on a purely mental level ... when an author inflicts his idle and arbitrary philosophic fancy on a helpless person whom he has invented for that purpose, a lot of talent is needed to have the trick work".[37] Sartre, to Nabokov's mind, did not have Hegel's kind of "knowledge

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(34) 'Foreword', 'Terror', Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories, p.112.

(35) J. P. Sartre. Nausea, p.180.

(36) See Findlay, p.304.

(37) Strong Opinions, p.230.

... comprehensiveness and wit",[38] qualities, that by implication, Nabokov instead possessed.

The simple 'thetic' monists are summed up by Hegel in the Logic when he condemned early philosophers like the Eleatics and Heraclitus who shared Hegel's axiomatic truths but arrived at them by a mirroring process without 'dialectic' in which "mediation (is) not made by anything external but by a reflection into itself, (which delivers) that immediacy which is universality, the self complacency of thought which is so much at home with itself that it feels an innate indifference to descend to particulars".[39] Nabokov provides an appropriate image of this 'immediate' mirroring of thought in Despair, he evokes the moment:

> "when a slow leaf fell there would flutter up to meet it, out of the water's shadowy depths, its unavoidable double. Their meeting was soundless. The leaf came twirling down, and twirling up there would rise towards it, eagerly, its exact, beautiful, lethal reflection."[40]

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(38) Qualities Paul Feyerabend sees Hegel's followers as also lacking: "Consolations for the Specialist". Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge ed. Lakatos and Musgrave. (Cambridge University Press, 1970) p.209. Ivan Soll also saw Sartre as succumbing to "bad infinity" in his interpretation of Hegel. An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics, pp.14-15. Nabokov further attacks Sartre in the Afterword to his Russian version of Lolita, calling him a "pet of western petty bourgeoisie" "Postskriptum k RusskomuIzdaniyu" (Anne Arbor: Ardis, 1976) p.298.

(39) G. W. F. Hegel. Logic repr. Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.31.

(40) V. Nabokov. Despair, p.68.

In the same novel we are told that "theft is the best compliment that one can possibly pay a thing" (41) and the complement of assimilation is the prime function of Nabokov's portrayal of weak monism. Nabokov conforms to the insight in Phenomenology of Mind that "self-consciousness is Desire"(42) and that it "requires a mortal enemy to destroy ... in mortal combat".(43) Inadequate monism is a flawed copy of Nabokov's own ideas and it must be thoroughly assimilated and denounced so that his own representation may triumph. There is however a "back-kick" to this in Hegelian terms because, as the master-servant passage in the Phenomenology of Mind indicates, the servant or subsidiary self-consciousness perhaps comes out as strong as or stronger than the apparently triumphing one from the dialectical duel. Nabokov seems to be aware of this when denouncing a book of criticism on his work on the same grounds as the failures of the weak monists (he even re-used the phrase "fatal flaw" employed against Chernishevsky in The Gift) and finally ruefully admitting that the critic "will be read, he will be quoted, he will be filed in great libraries, next to my arbors and mists".(44)

Hegel describes the self-consciousness's necessary struggle

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(41) V. Nabokov. Ibid, p.85.

(42) Phenomenology of Mind, p.225.

(43) Soll. Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics, p.19.

(44) Strong Opinions, p.307. Nabokov criticized W. Rowe's book Nabokov's Deceptive World for tampering with the "discrete organism" of particular works by detecting"spurious symbols" within them; that is Rowe does not follow the dialectical path of interpretation but instead jumps in haphazardly.

with another self-consciousness in terms of seeking its "reflection" in the mirror of the other self.(45) His commentator Findlay notes that "mirroring and remirroring is the essence of Hegel".(46) Hegel's use of mirror imagery depends on an important point made at the close of Part A ('the Consciousness' section) of Phenomenology of Spirit. He represents the initial 'thetic' idea of the undetermined (undeveloped) consciousness playing on the presented natural world and realising that there are obviously certain abstract laws which govern the swarming of "appearances".(47) The undeterminate consciousness has the impression that this abstract world of "pure conception",(48) the "determinateness within", exists behind a "curtain" of appearances. Hegel suggests that the consciousness seeks to determine the abstract world by penetrating this "curtain" by a John Shade-like super-imposition of images:

> "Raised above (simple) perception, consciousness reveals itself united and bound up with the super-sensible world through the mediating agency of the realm of appearance, through which it gazes into this background that lies behind appearance. The two extremes, the one that of the pure inner region, the other that of the inner being gazing into this pure inner region are now merged together; and as they have disappeared qua extremes, the middle

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(45) Phenomenology of Mind, p.226.

(46) Hegel: A Re-examination, p.147.

(47) Phenomenology of Mind, p.195.

(48) Ibid. p.197.

> term, the mediating agency, qua something other than these extremes, has also vanished. This curtain (of appearances), therefore, hanging before the inner world is withdrawn, and we have here the inner being (consciousness) gazing into the inner realm - the vision of the undistinguished selfsame reality."(49)

Hegel observes that the moment that the consciousness performs this double act of perceiving the world of appearance and the inner world of laws that govern it, it becomes 'self-consciousness'. It is as if consciousness must earn its self-determination by the effort of conceptually pushing beyond the initial 'curtain' and into the Looking Glass World. Indeed Hegel calls his 'inner world' - 'the Inverted World',(50) a queer upside-down medium of thought, "where black is here, white" and "sweet is ... sour".(51) However this is not the end of the process for, as with the Nabokov reader, the 'self-consciousness' must turn itself round in its next stage of education and look back towards the realm of appearance or illusion.

This second stage of development (one must realise that these are amongst the most difficult passages in Hegel's work) can be summed up in the following fashion. The initial 'thetic'

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(49) Ibid, p.212.

(50) Ibid, p.203.

(51) Ibid, p.204.

consciousness having thought that behind the 'curtain' of appearances there exists a pure dimension of notional law and having conceptually reached out to apprehend this pure realm, finds that it also is a provisional illusion. In fact a 'ghost' of any ultimate reality for having got to the inner world, the consciousness, in order to take into itself any abstract truth, must in turn be mediate through contingent forms. Hegel notes in this passage that"Life should always feel the pulse of life". He further observes that the consciousness must turn back to the world of burgeoning forms to relearn, restudy and reapprehend that 'appearance' of reality that it at first took to be a mere 'curtain' and this unleashes a new process of 'superimposition'. Thus also the reader of Nabokov at first divines 'rules of composition' behind the mimetic arrangements of the outer skin of the novel but having reached through into the 'inner realm' he does not find, as expected, the puppeteer behind the stage-scenery but at a "mirror's remove away".(52) Indeed Fyodor condemns his early works because they give the effect of "the puppeteer's colossal hand appear(ing) ... for an instant among the creatures".(53) Nabokov's "absolute solution", like Hegel's, consists of making "stiff-necked consciousness" (Hegel's description) go through the whole process all over again for it is only with two such "movings ahead" and swirling around of

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(52) Nabokov observes that an "objective" viewpoint on a character of one of his novels is still only a "one-mirror-removed" viewpoint. Strong Opinions, p.123.

(53) The Gift, p.18.

thought that brings the third Harlequin of synthesis where Nabokov's mask can fit the reader's face.(54)

Hegel carries his mirror-imagery forward in the section that follows the 'Inverted World' in Phenomenology of Mind. In this next section (Part B 'Self-Consciousness') Hegel demonstrates that "self-consciousness achieves satisfaction only in another self-consciousness" and this relation is resolved into the bond between a dominant and subsidiary one. Findlay explains this in mirror terms: "another self is, in short, the only adequate mirror of my self-consciousness".(55) Another commentator amended this analysis in order to catch Hegel's more subtle meaning, and rather sees the self-consciousness seeking an oblique line of escape: "what self-consciousness seeks in the hall of mirrors is not an accurate image of itself to contemplate but a flawed pane whose destructability affords an escape route to independence".(56) The flaw in the pane allows a refracted beam of light to escape. Hegel discussed this parallel of the "slanting ray" and "inclined beam" of Look at the Harlequins and Bend Sinister in the Phenomenology:

> "... if the examination of knowledge, which we represent as a medium makes us acquainted with the law of its refraction, it is likewise useless to

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(54) Nabokov described an artist's ideal audience as "a room filled with people wearing his own mask". Strong Opinions, P.18.

(55) Hegel: A Re-examination, p.96.

(56) I. Soll. Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics, p.17.

> eliminate this refraction from the result. For knowledge is not the divergence of the ray, but the ray itself by which the truth comes in contact with us; and if this be removed, the bare direction of the empty place would alone be indicated."(57)

Both Hegel and Nabokov are involved in mirroring because they share an interest in describing general laws of the consciousness and both provide their own single experiental route that takes one through the education and development of the consciousness.(58) Therefore it is appropriate that each appeal to "mirroring and remirroring" as an analogue for universal patterns and to the "oblique ray" as the path of truth through these mirror images. The individual path also suggests that the two writers are not involved in eternal recurrence as Mary McCarthy suggested that Pale Fire demonstrates "each plane or level in its shadow box

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(57) Phenomenology of Mind, p.132.

(58) Nabokov's implied route is based on the richness of consciousness deriving from the special circumstances of his childhood and youth which fix his perspective forever, thus in a 1919 poem he greets the "inevitable day" of his future artistic triumph and discerns "the far-off crests of future works, amidst the shadows of my soul". "I Still Keep Mute". Poems and Problems, p.23. Findlay observes that Hegel assumes a "single route" through the Phenomenology "in which there are absolutely no arbitrary steps, nor the smallest possibility of deviation" (p.85). He also comments that the absolute is revealed only to certain "individual human beings to whose being it is essential to be so revealed and shown" (p.348). Similarly there is an emphasis in Ada on "the unprecedented and unrepeatable event in the continuum of life" prompted by "prodigious individual awareness" (pp.70-71). Both writers would appeal to mirrors also because they think in images: "I don't think in any languages I think in images". Strong Opinions, p.14. "The mind makes ... images of objects long before it makes notions of them". Logic, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.19.

proves to be a false bottom; there is an infinite perspective regression, for the book is a book of mirrors".(59) McCarthy is wrong because even a hall of mirrors can be arranged so that the reflections are reciprocal but not infinitely reflecting. Similarly Frederick Weiss in his Introduction to Hegel: The Essential Writings observed that:

> "a true whole is constituted of parts each of which and in varying degrees "mirrors" that whole negatively; each is a microcosm, but not literally, i.e., we do not have here the box-within-box thesis. Rather, the whole is "there" by implication, in the sense that any attempt that is made to grasp fully the being of any part leads in the process to the whole which is the truth."(60)

The "process" that leads to the "truth" in Nabokov and Hegel's work is revealed in the triplicity of the 'dialectic".(61) One must be careful however to distinguish between the general and

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(59) M. McCarthy. "Vladimir Nabokov's 'Pale Fire'" Encounter xix (1962) p.72. See Appendix to Part One for reciprocality of mirror reflection in Nabokov's King Queen Knave. Rather than McCarthy's combination of mirrors both Nabokov and Hegel would prefer the 'anamorphic' picture which presents a meaningless blur when viewed straight on but becomes a clear image when seen from an acute angle. Some anamorphic images are straightened out by being viewed in a mirror. This is described in Invitation to a Beheading in the absurd "nonnons" which are made 'sensible' by a mirror (p.123).

(60) 'Introduction' Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.7.

(61) As also for Andre Breton: "Wherever the Hegelian dialectic does not function, there is no thought, no hope of truth for me". A Dictionary of Surrealism, p.54.

particular sense of this term. In the general sense it is the description of the overall working through of development, in the more specific sense it is the term for the second stage of the triadic thought process. The reader can be described as embodying this second antithetical stage after the initial thesis of the author's ideas, thus the task of the reader is dialectical in that he provides "doubtful thought"[62] that brings on progress. Hegel's 'dialectic' has been best summed up by Ivan Soll:

> "The famous dialectic consists in examining the understanding's pairs of putatively opposed categories and showing that these categories, ordinarily thought to be mutually exclusive, really involve each other. They are one-sided abstractions from a concrete whole to which each belongs."[63]

Nabokov is in accordance with this understanding of the 'dialectic' when he notes in "An Evening of Russian Poetry": "not only rainbows, every line is bent, / and skulls and seeds and all good worlds are round ...",[64] thus emphasizing that every half-circle involves a full one, the skull death is implicit in the seed, life. As in Chapter One of Speak Memory when he notes how absurd it seems to fear the nothingness of death more than the

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(62) Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.89.

(63) I. Soll. Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics, p.134. Hegel himself says "by Dialectic is meant the indwelling tendency outwards by which the one-sidedness and limitation of the predicates of the Understanding is seen in its true light." Logic, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.95.

(64) "Evening of Russian Poetry", Poems and Problems, p.158.

"reverse nothingness" of the state of non-being before one's birth. In Despair he observed the predilection for 'one-sided' apprehension in the likes of Felix the tramp who sat "resting on a neighbouring bench, drawing with his stick, from left to right and from right to left the earthen rainbows drawn by every man with a stick".(65) The fabricated "earthen rainbow" contrasts with the celestial one which betokens by its bending an imaginatively full circle.

Nabokov saw three stages in the general 'dialectic' as did Hegel and imagined them as ascending as a form of spiral:

> "If we consider the simplest spiral, three stages may be distinguished in it, corresponding to those of the triad: we can call "thetic" the small curve or arc that initiates the convolution centrally; "antithetic" the larger arc that faces the first in the process of continuing it; and "synthetic" the still ampler arc

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(65) Despair, p.70. The eye (itself a circle) gives to the rainbow its implied other half, thus healing one-sidedness. Nabokov elsewhere speaks of forming "rainbows that play" in his "magic crystal" and these rainbows are in turn "reflections" of his spectacles (that prismatically bend light): thus Nabokov-provided rainbows are his own anthropomorphic deity's pointer to the 'bending' that can form a "good round world". 'Postskriptum k Russkomu Izdaniyu'. Lolita: perevel c angliĭskogo Avtor, p.299.

that continues the second while following the first along the outer side."(66)

Triplicity is the key note of Nabokov and Hegel's thinking(67) and the use of syllogism is its logical expression; Findlay observed that Hegel "did not hesitate to make any and every object syllogistic"(68) and something similar can be said for Nabokov. Charles Nichol has observed that his novel The Real Life of Sebastian Knight comprises a series of "interlocking syllogisms which may proceed in reverse as well as forward order",(69)

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(66) Speak Memory, p.275. Hegel does not apparently refer to spirals in his work although Findlay referred to his "dialectical spirals" (p.71). However one can see how Nabokov evolved the above interpretation from Hegel's images of superimposed circles in The Logic: "The single circle, because it is a real totality, bursts through the limits imposed by its special medium, and gives rise to a wider circle. The whole of the philosophy in this way resembles a circle of circles ..." Logic, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.33.

(67) As a brief indication of a very much larger phenomenon it is worth pointing out the prevalence of threefold thinking. George Steiner noted "when it is analyzing complex structures, thought seems to favour triads. This is true of myths of golden, silver and iron ages, of Hegelian logic, of Comte's patterns of history, of the physics of quarks." After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) p.253. Giambattista Vico pointed out that the "Greeks were accustomed to express the superlative by the number three, as the French now say très for 'very'." The New Science, p.149 (see also p.212). Edgar Wind demonstrated how the prevalance of the triad in Neo-platonic thought whereby "the unity of Venus is unfolded in the trinity of the Graces" is part of a line of succession that leads from Plato's Parmenides to "the notorious triads of Hegel." Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) p.192. Nabokov himself alludes to the neoplatonic graces in Ada when describing "the complex system" of the "senses" interacting: "laughing, embraced, throwing flowers into the air" (p.221).

(68) Hegel: A Re-examination, p.239.

(69) C. Nichol. 'The mirrors of Sebastian Knight', Nabokov: The Man and his Work, p.86.

similarly Hegel's system has been described as "a gigantic triad of syllogisms".(70) Hegel was cavalier with the traditional format of the syllogism and adapted it to his own ends, Nabokov also rearranges its familiar form although the basic characteristic of the two premises and the conclusion that follows their involvement and interaction remains recognisable.

As we have seen in Pale Fire and 'Ultima Thule' Nabokov interferes with the standard Aristotelian syllogism on mortality (which goes: All men are mortal, Aristotle is a man, therefore Aristotle is mortal) by showing that the second premise does not accord with the first because an 'individual' case challenges a general one, Aristotle is not 'any' man, therefore the conclusion may be invalid. However Nabokov more often evokes the syllogism to demonstrate a subtle evolution of artistic thought. The Real Life of Sebastian Knight provides a clear example:

> "I know that the common pebble you find in your fist after having thrust your arm shoulder deep into water, where a jewel seemed to gleam on pale sand, is really the coveted gem though it looks like a pebble as it dries in the sun of everyday."(71)

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(70) Findlay. Hegel: A Re-examination, p.238.

(71) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.178. Compare this with R. W. Emerson's poem "Each and All" where the narrator takes away a shell enamelled by the sea but leaving its "beauty on the shore". Emerson was beholden to Kantian idealism to whose system Fichte's terms: thesis, antithesis and synthesis were originally applied.

Here, the initially abstract thesis of the pebble that looks like a "gem" when under water is countered by the antithetic disappointment of its dulled appearance when removed from that element. This is in turn overthrown by the realization that the pebble still is a "gem" because one's 'everyday' senses have not grasped its real beauty. Thus in the synthetic movement, imagination restores the lustre to the pebble that was initially bestowed by the physical medium of the water.(72)

Nabokov provided a less iridescent example in his commentary to Eugene Onegin. Pushkin describes someone playing the "Panpipes" (Chapter Two, Stanza Twenty-two) and Nabokov glosses this:

> "Poets begin with this Arcadian instrument, graduate to the lyre or lute, and end by relying on the free reeds of their own vocal chords - which closes the circle with a Hegelian clasp."(73)

In this example the logic follows a conventional pattern of Hegelian returning: the stringed instruments bring about an antithetic phase making the poet's music something 'other' than himself before the natural human voice returns to the 'breath' of the initial instrument. In Ada we are presented with a syllogism borrowing from the natural world:

> "It was the newly described, fantastically rare

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(72) "Individual ... imagination" is defined as "third sight" in Ada, p.252.

(73) Eugene Onegin, Vol II, p.275.

> vanessian, Nymphalis danaus Nab., orange brown, with black-and-white foretips, mimicking, as its discoverer Professor Nabonidus of Babylon College, Nebraska, realized, not the Monarch butterfly directly, but the Monarch through the Viceroy, one of the Monarch's best known imitators."(74)

The first two movements come from the known fact that the inedible Monarch butterfly is mimicked in colouring by the edible Viceroy which belongs to a different family of butterflies - the Nymphalids. The third butterfly is taxonomically identified as being a Nymphalid but of a different tribe - the Vanessids, this is an indication of its fictive role for the Vanessids have a particular place in Nabokov's work.(75) The taxonomic context (Nabokov being "versed in taxonomic Latin" as one of his poems announces)(76) provides a reversible syllogism: Danaus plexippus, Liminitis archippus, Nymphalis danaus. The generic name of the Monarch is made into the specific name of the

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(74) Ada, p.158.

(75) The Red Admiral which is praised by John Shade (Canto Two, lines 269-271) appears at the end of the novel as token of his imminent death (p.290). Nabokov notes the "repulsive symbolism" of seeing a child tie a Red Admiral to a thread (Speak Memory, p.305). The life cycle of the Camberwell Beauty, another Vanessid, parallels the life of Nabokov's romance with Tamara (Ibid, pp.231 and 239). The Vanessids are, as one authority notes, "brilliantly marked butterflies with a powerful flight" and yet have a cunning camouflage of the under-wing and are thus named from the Latin, Vanesco: to pass away, or disappear. The Viceroy may still have a dialectical role for A. Klots has noted it is still evolving its imitation of the Monarch. Vie et moeurs des Papillons (Paris, Horizons, 1957), p.122.

(76) 'A Discovery' (1943) Poems and Problems, p.153.

invented butterfly which closes the circle "with a Hegelian clasp". This syllogism has a further dimension when one views it as a royal process. The thetic Monarch is imitated by the antithetic Viceroy (half-king) and the meaning of the species name 'danaus' of the third butterfly becomes apparent when one finds out that Danaus was the son of King Belus, founder of Babylon. Thus Nymphalis danaus is the literal son or foundling of Professor Nabonidus of "Babylon College".

"All thought is uncomfortable"[77] we are told in Nabokov's story 'Lance' (1952), and the syllogism embodies thought's struggle with its own mode. Nabokov gave an inadvertent definition of the function of the syllogism when he observed to Edmund Wilson: "Du choc des opinions jaillit la verité".[78] He also noted that "young thought" finds especial difficulty with advance through paradox, he described in 'Spring in Fialta' (1938): "A pantless infant of the male sex ... trying to carry three oranges at once, but continuously dropping the variable third until he fell himself",[79] this could describe the pitfalls of false synthesis on the part of unseasoned thought. However once grasped, triplicity is an easeful medium, Nabokov pointed out that he had lost an early aptitude for figures: "today I cannot multiply 13 by 17 without pencil and paper; I can add them up, though, in a trice, the teeth of the three fitting in

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(77) 'Lance' Nabokov's Dozen, p.160.

(78) The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, p.36.

(79) 'Spring in Fialta' Nabokov's Dozen, p.8.

neatly".(80) A description of a character can also fall easily into a syllogistic pattern, John Shade is described in Pale Fire:

> "His misshapen body, that gray mop of abundant hair, the yellow nails of his pudgy fingers, the bags under his lustreless eyes, were only intelligible if regarded as the waste products eliminated from his intrinsic self by the same forces of perfection which purified and chiseled his verse. He was his own cancellation."(81)

Shade has an in-built resolution (his "cancellation") that synthesizes his negative physical self as Hegel also observes that physical nature should be "used up".(82) Nabokov gives a syllogism at work in a different context in Laughter in the Dark:

> "Uncle alone in the house with the children said he'd dress up to amuse them. After a long wait, as he did not appear, they went down and saw a masked man putting the table silver into a bag. 'Oh Uncle,' they cried in delight. 'Yes, isn't my make-up good?' said Uncle, taking his mask off. Thus goes the Hegelian syllogism of humour. Thesis: Uncle made himself up as a burglar (a laugh for the children); antithesis: it was a burglar (a laugh for the reader); synthesis: it still was Uncle (fooling the reader)."(83)

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(80) Speak Memory, p.123.

(81) Pale Fire, p.26.

(82) See Findlay. Hegel: A Re-examination, p.287.

(83) Laughter in the Dark, p.92.

Humour is thus syllogistic to Nabokov because it involves a flat first stage which gives rise to an expected response (because an audience always wants more than what it is given), this exaggerated response is overthrown when the audience realise that they are doing all the work and life is as simple as it is at first taken to be. A further example is found in The Gift when Fyodor reacts to a chance German who brushes against him in a Berlin tram:

> "staring fixedly at the sitter, reading his features, he instantly concentrated on him all his sinful hatred (for this poor pitiful expiring nation) and knew precisely why he hated him: for that low forehead, for those pale eyes ... for a love of fences, rows, mediocrity ... for someone else's live cat, pierced through with wire as revenge on a neighbour, and the wire cleverly twisted at one end ... thus he threaded the points of his biased indictment, looking at the man who sat opposite him - until the latter took a copy of Vasiliev's newspaper from his pocket and coughed unconcernedly with a Russian intonation."(84)

Fyodor has made the mechanical assumption of reacting to the concept of an 'average man' (that is why his hatred is "sinful") and life has its "sly" and simple Hegelian revenge on him by providing a Russian as target for his uncontrollable thoughts: "a miracle" that subsequently delights Fyodor. This interaction

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(84) The Gift, p.83.

between an elastic and rigid situation accords with Henri Bergson's sense of the comic. He felt that one laughs at "automatism"[85] in life, the sense that "something mechanical is encrusted on the living".[86] Bergson's idea of humour is inherently syllogistic (Michael Biddiss has noted the similarity of his system to that of Hegel)[87] and he uses a quote from Pascal in Laughter (1900) that follows a threefold path: "two faces that are alike although neither of them excites laughter by itself, makes us laugh when together, on account of their likeness".[88] Bergson argues that repetition or close simulation brings an idea of automatism, thus two premises contending against each other bring a resolution through laughter. Bergson illustrates his idea of the mechanical in humour in the following fashion:

> "A man, running along the street, stumbles and falls; the passers-by burst out laughing. They would not laugh at him, I imagine, could they suppose that the whim had suddenly seized him to sit down on the ground. They laugh because his sitting down is involuntary. Consequently, it is not his sudden change of attitude that raises a laugh, but rather the involuntary element in this change, his clumsiness in fact. Perhaps there

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(85) H. Bergson. 'Laughter' Comedy ed. W. Sypher (New York: Doubleday, 1956) p.30.

(86) Ibid, p.84.

(87) M. Biddiss. The Age of the Masses. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) p.88. Nabokov has listed Bergson as one of his favourite writers. Strong Opinions, p.43. Bergsonian 'duration' is discussed in Ada, pp.376-377. G. Hyde in Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist has anticipated this study by finding links between Bergson and Nabokov (see p.159 et passim).

(88) 'Laughter', p.82.

> was a stone in the road. He should have altered his pace or avoided the obstacle. Instead of that through lack of elasticity, through absentmindedness and a kind of physical obstinacy, as a result in fact, of rigidity or of momentum, the muscles continued to perform the same movement when the circumstances of the case called for something else."(89)

Nabokov also sees the impetus or momentum of bodily movements as comic. He notes this principle at work particularly during telephone conversations where the mind is following the speech on the instrument and the body goes its own involuntary way. In The Gift Mrs. Chernyshevsky's eyes "wander here and there" when she is on the 'phone and her fingers keep "pinching a fold in her skirt".(90) In The Defence a man's "restless hands fidget with something on the desk" and "the foot in its leather shoe (swung) regularly back and forth".(91) The humour with Nabokov's depiction of involuntary actions derives from the ignorance of the subject contrasting with the intent consciousness of the observer. Charlotte Haze in Lolita exhibits "the national grimace of feminine resignation (eyes rolling up, mouth drooping sideways". Also Lolita develops "more than one conventional mannerism such as the polite adolescent

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(89) Op. Cit., p.66.

(90) The Gift, p.137. Mrs. Chernyshevsky also runs through a syllogism while obtaining the number: "with a special rhythm in her pronunciation of the figures - as if 48 was the thesis and 31 the antithesis - adding in the shape of synthesis: Ja wohl".

(91) The Defence, p.32.

way of showing one is literally "doubled up" with laughter by inclining one's head ...".(92) The syllogism in these cases goes: thesis: average opinion sees people as remarkable unrepeatable individuals; antithesis: sharp observation reveals their behaviour to be often automatic and doll-like; synthesis: the mastery of the author's skill of depiction brings them back into the realm of vital individuality.

The "syllogism of humour" can be present as the basic structure of a novel as in Nabokov's 'dark comedy' Despair. The story plays on two contrasting types of consciousness: the 'average reality' of common persons and that of the 'artistic' Hermann who despises the former type for he considers himself to be aware of a higher, more developed version of life. Hermann finds a tramp in whom he sees a startling resemblance to himself and weaves an elaborate plot to kill the tramp, dress him in his (Hermann's) clothes and collect insurance money off his supposedly widowed wife. The syllogism develops: thesis, the police are to be despised because they follow a simple thetic trail whilst Hermann pursues "the theoretical thrill"(93) of an artistic logic; antithesis, Hermann is rigid and limited in that he is locked into his internal vision of things and forgets simple thetic clues; synthesis, the police find these clues and he is discovered: this brings the despair of the title. One of the basic mistakes that Hermann makes

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(92) The Annotated Lolita, pp.78 and 189.

(93) Humbert Humbert follows a "theoretical thrill" in taking Lolita to the seaside in order to revive a version of his childhood Riviera romance. Op. Cit., p.169.

is that he leaves the tramp's stick behind at the scene of the crime, early in the novel his wife offers a forewarning of this:

> "We discovered one day that to her the term 'mystic' was somehow dimly connected with 'mist' and 'mistake' and 'stick', but that she had not the least idea what a mystic really was."(94)

Hermann sneers at his wife yet her comment provides the humble thetic grounding of the clue "missed-stick" and this is ignored by Hermann. The lesson is that one must advance along all three steps of the triad of development otherwise one brings on the "lethal reflection" of the leaf and its shadow. This is the mistake of the weak monists in general - they omit the dialectical phase and prematurely fuse thesis with synthesis. The conversation between Sineusov and Falter in 'Ultima Thule' fails, we are told, through "lack of an interlocutor".(95) Wherever Nabokov mentions a twinned impulse without a resolving third, there is an implied lack. Thus in The Gift a cuckoo is heard making the two stroke of inadequacy: "a cuckoo began to call in a copse, listlessly almost questioningly: the sound swelled like a cupule, and again like a cupule, unable to find a solution".(96) Similarly in the same novel: "the night gleamed wetly black, with two toned (the Berlin imagination did not stretch to any more) illuminated lights".(97)

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(94) Despair, p.33. This was first noted by Carl Proffer. "From Otchaianie to Despair", Slavic Review, (June 1968) p.259.

(95) 'Ultima Thule'. Russian Beauty and Other Stories, p.175.

(96) The Gift, p.79.

(97) Ibid, p.303.

Nabokov uses the "two-tone" signal of inadequacy in the short story "The Vane Sisters" (1959). The narrator of the piece discounts the psychic preoccupations of a woman acquaintance (Cynthia) who believes that her dead sister's (Sybil's) spirit surrounded her in a constant aura of discreet presence. On the day that Cynthia in turn died the narrator walks in the thawing snow of a winter morning - "part jewel, part mud" and stops to watch "a family of icicles drip-dripping from the eaves of a frame house". He finds the "rhythm ... as teasing as a coin trick" and looks closer to determine the nature of the effect and discovers the drop and the shadow of the drop falling down the icicle, but to him: "this twinned twinkle was delightful but not completely satisfying".(98) It is not satisfying because this twin element does not provide the resolution of a third and this is provided at the close of the story when the reader (acting on a hint from a chance comment in the story) decodes an acrostic message in the final paragraph which reads: "icicle - Sybil, rhythm - Cynthia".(99)

The novel Invitation to a Beheading reverses this process and provides a triple pattern that demonstrates that pairing is inadequate. Cincinnatus lives in a nightmare country where the emphasis is on doubles and doubling, he is the only opaque being in

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(98) 'The Vane Sisters'. Nabokov's Quartet (London: Panther, 1969) p.85.

(99) Ibid, p.107. The narrator at one point in the story describes how Cynthia was "a perverse amateur of ... illicitly connected words" and he tries to "recollect that novel or short story (by some contemporary writer, I believe) in which, unknown to its author, the first letters of the words in its last paragraph formed, as deciphered by Cynthia, a message from his dead mother", pp.98-99.

a medium of mirroring and transparency. Indeed he is accused of the "obscure" crime of "gnostical turpitude", that is he knows more than is good for the surrounding society and is accordingly condemned to death. At the beginning of his life in this spectral country he is puzzled by the ornamental gardens near his house that date back to a period before the present regime. In these gardens "for no reason, the willows weep into three brooks and the brooks into three cascades, each with its own small rainbow ...".(100) The disavowal of reason to the appearance of the gardens should be interpreted in the Looking Glass World of the novel in the opposite sense: there is a definite reason, and that is to show the ideal presence of a third movement over and above the persistent doubling of his surroundings. The rainbows also are tokens, by virtue of their bending of a "good round world". The example of the gardens is part of a series of advances that enable Cincinnatus to step out of the collapsing scenery of a particular mode of consciousness and make his way "in that direction where ... stood beings akin to him".(101)

Nabokov also saw his life developing in syllogistic terms: "a coloured spiral in a small ball of glass, this is how I see my own life".(102) He applies a "thetic arc" to the years in Russia, antithetic to those in European exile and synthetic in his adoptive

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(100) Invitation to a Beheading, p.24.

(101) Ibid, p.208.

(102) Speak Memory, p.275.

America. However as Part I of this study suggested, there is an initial syllogism derived from his life in Russia. The years 1915/1916 with the first summer with Tamara, the modulation of St. Petersburg and the second blighted summer, provide thetic and antithetic moments, the synthetic element being provided by his physical exile (which confirms the inevitability of general loss) and his life as an artist (which heals that loss).

This discovery of youthful bliss, its crushing, and its resurrection and annealing through art forms a tripartite watermark in Nabokov's art. Thus in Ada (in many respect "the big playground" and 'catch-all' for his themes) we are shown the un-blighted bloom of Van and Ada's romance in the first summer at Ardis Hall (1884). There then follows a period of hiatus while Van goes to Chose College and the story continues in the second summer at Ardis (1888) in which Ada is no longer in her "nymphet years" and their relationship is clouded by the presence of Herr Rack and Percy de Pré. The bitter simalcrum of their happier initial year provides a series of reversible thetic and antithetic alternatives: Eden - need, Arcadia - Acrasia, rose - sore.(103) A benign reality that metamorphoses into a blighted one brings a reconciliatory aesthetic mode in Nabokov, and Van accordingly leaves Ada to go and compose his 'Letters from Terra', on philosophical and psychological themes.

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(103) The theme of reversible words is introduced by the Russian Scrabble game 'Flavita' in Part One of Ada (pp.224-228). Eden (p.479), "The three of them formed a pretty Arcadian combination" (Ada, Lucette, Van, p.204), Spenser's Faerie Queene witch "Enchantress Acrasia" appears p.418. "Miraculous art that merges the sore and the rose" (p.185).

In Lolita also, Humbert Humbert's year-long initial "twisted teleological" journey with Lolita across America gives way to her enforced schooling in Beardsley School where she meets Humbert's "fate-mate" Quilty and Humbert's suspicions initiate the second summer journey. This trip is tainted by the 'protean' presence of Quilty and ends in Lolita'a disappearance. We are provided with a "thoughtful Hegelian synthesis linking up two dead women" when Humbert's car "with ... three big bounces" rides "up a grassy slope, among surprised cows" (104) after he has murdered Quilty. In Lolita (as in Ada), the narrator is inadequate and partial yet is vindicated by his involvement in the overall dialectic of the novel where appetites and desires that are crushed and despoiled on one level (mediate physical plane) are resurrected on another (the plane of art) which provides "teleological" recognition of the harmony of inevitable development.

The syllogistic basis to Nabokov's life and work emphasizes a development that stresses a constant linkage of events. Poincaré has defined the syllogism as reasoning by recurrence (105) and Nabokov, like Hegel, follows a "logic of derivation". (106) This

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(104) Williams is mistaken in 'Nabokov's Dialectical Structure' in seeing the synthesis in terms of dead Dolly Schiller and nymphet Lolita. Humbert is obviously referring to dead Charlotte Haze (the fatal car rides up onto the slope of the lawn) and Lolita as a young nymphet (now dead as the story is being told) who points out "cows on that hillside" from the car at the start of Humbert's involvement with her (p.114).

(105) The syllogism is "process by proof of recurrence". H. Poincaré. Science and Hypothesis 1905 repr. (New York: Dover, 1952) p.9.

(106) Introduction. Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.13.

method attempts to show that nothing is accidental, not the "adventitious congeries of existence"[107] in Hegel's phrase, but rather that everything is mediate and material for 'mind'. Hegel observes in The Logic "the stages in the evolution of the Idea ... seem to follow each other by accident, and to present merely a number of different and unconnected principles ... but it is not so. For these thousands of years the same Architect has directed the work: and that Architect is the one living Mind".[108] The syllogism expresses the innate rhythm of 'mind' interacting with 'Nature' and as such the syllogism provides the appropriate medium for the artist. The poet John Shade chooses a syllogistic path when "the real point" of life dawns on him in Pale Fire:

> "..... This
> Was the real point, the contrapuntal theme;
> Just this: not text, but texture; not the dream
> but topsy-turvical coincidence,
> Not flimsy nonsense, but a web of sense.
> Yes! It sufficed that I in life could find
> Some kind of link-and-bobolink, some kind
> of correlated pattern in the game.
> Plexed artistry ....."[109]

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(107) Logic, Ibid, p.163.

(108) Ibid, p.32.

(109) Pale Fire, pp.62-63. The contrapuntal technique is one of "adding one melody to another ... by opposition" (Chambers), thus Shade initiates dialectic. "Link-and-bobolink" indicates that Nature can serve as a medium or 'middle term' for his search as also the bobolink's song was rendered in verse in the well-known poem by William Cullen Bryant (The Fountain and Other Poems 1842) thus merging text and texture. Bryant's poem achieves what Nabokov would consider the supreme accolade, by being referred to as a guide to what the bobolink's song actually sounds like in Audobon's Birds of America (1937 ed.).

II

In the Introduction to the Phenomenology of Mind, Hegel announces his intention to "undertake the exposition of knowledge as a phenomenon".(1) In order to allow his method to succeed, the reader of the Phenomenology (and of the rest of Hegel's work) must provisionally accept Hegel's descriptive method. David Lamb observes of a particular passage in The Phenomenology (on the "perceiving consciousness"): "if we are to be true to Hegel's ... method, we must therefore adopt the posture of one who gives an account of our perception of the world according to this assumption".(2) Another commentator, Ivan Soll, also recognizes the necessity for provisional acceptance of mode and dubs it Hegel's "heuristic"(3) method, where the author can be understood to say: "Imagine for a moment that we can represent the state of things in such a fashion, then see how the argument proves its own integrity".

Ernst Gombrich extends a parallel of this philosophic method to a description of the relation between the work of art and its audience, where the perceiver takes on a "readiness ... fitting the percept at least provisionally into an imaginary sequence to which we become keyed to attend".(4) Nabokov's novel The Gift is

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(1) G. W. F. Hegel. The Phenomenology of Mind, p.135.

(2) D. Lamb. Language and Perception in Hegel and Wittgenstein (Trowbridge: Avebury, 1979) p.53.

(3) I. Soll. An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics, p.55.

(4) E. H. Gombrich. "Illusion and Art". Illusion in Nature and Art ed. R. L. Gregory, E. H. Gombrich (London: Duckworth, 1973) p.238. He characterizes a "heuristic" mode of approaching art on p.232 of the same essay. Gombrich himself discusses Hegelianism in his In Search of Cultural History (1969) which traces the relationship between Hegelian thought and art theory.

a working example of this method of provisionally 'giving' a framework to work on for we follow in the account an artist casting about for veins of artistic development working towards the conception of exactly the novel that we have in our hands. The finished novel is the 'given' ideal and Fyodor undertakes a heuristic search towards that ideal. We thus have the trick of superimposition in The Gift for the text follows a search for fulfilment yet also stands as a complete example of the 'ideal' as Hegel's 'absolute' is at once groped for in The Phenomenology yet arrived at in truth on every page.

It is no coincidence that The Gift corresponds particularly closely to Hegelian themes for as Simon Karlinsky pointed out,(5) Nabokov undertook a detailed study of the philosopher while researching the novel. The original title - Dar - gives the sense as in English of 'present' as well as the idea of gift as 'innate talent'. Vladimir Dahl's "unconventionally magnanimous lexicon" (as described in Ada)(6) defines 'dar' as expressing an "action and object" of giving as well as an offering "from a humble to a higher" station. This last aspect of the word accords most with the meaning of the title, for the novel is, as Nabokov indicates in the Foreword, a homage to Russian literature. Also it accords with the description of the development of Fyodor's abilities as he ascends towards the kind of art that the completed novel exemplifies.

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(5) S. Karlinsky. 'Introduction', The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, p.12.

(6) V. Nabokov, Ada, p.225. Vladimir Dahl's Tolkoviy Slovar' Velikorusskogo Yazika (Moscow and St.P., 1912) is also described in Speak Memory, p.265.

It seems likely that the title The Gift echoes the first lines of a Pushkin lyric known by its date (May 26th 1828) and first lines: "Dar naprasnïy, dar sluchaynïy" ("Vain gift, chance gift"). The poem is an expression of perplexity where the narrator has been given the gift of life, consciousness, intellectual passion, all called "from nothing" and seemingly to no purpose. He describes the paradoxical appearance of existence as "monotonous ... and stormy". This poem acts as an implied question at the onset of the novel: asking whether the artist can subdue the weight of material existence and tame its themes. Fyodor sometimes accords with the pessimism of Pushkin's poem: "all this was nonsense, the shadows of nonsense, presumptuous dreams. I am simply a poor young Russian selling the surplus from a gentleman's upringing while scribbling verses in my spare time, that's the total of my little immortality".(7) However the last paragraph of the novel actually "mimics" the assured final stanzas of Chapter Eight of Eugene Onegin: "Onegin from his knees will rise - but his creator strolls away ... the shadows of my world extend beyond the skyline of the page, blue as tomorrow's morning haze - nor does this terminate the phrase".(8)

Fyodor's "gift" is variously described as an "illegal treasure" and as a "burden within him",(9) it is also something provided by

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(7) V. Nabokov. The Gift, p.158.

(8) Ibid, p.346.

(9) Ibid, pp.82 and 95.

the memory of the physical landscape of Russia. Thus at the beginning of Chapter One, Fyodor begins to conceive the first outline of a poem: "thank you my land for your most precious ... and maddest gift, my thanks are due".(10) This evolves into the completed poem at the close of the chapter:

"Thank you, my land; for your remotest
Most cruel mist, my thanks are due.
By you possessed, by you unnoticed,
Unto myself I speak of you.
And in these talks between somnambules
My inmost being hardly knows
If it's my demency that rambles
Or your own melody that grows."(11)

This poem describes the 'gift' of his native land (supplied by memory) as evolving an independent "melody" with Fyodor's "inner being", a phenomenon that he cannot distinguish from his own imaginative development - his "demency". This interaction between an outside donnée and an internal impulse mirrors the larger framework of the novel where Fyodor's consciousness is mingled with a more developed "Person Unknown" introduced at the outset: "somebody within him, on his behalf, independently from him, had absorbed all this, recorded it, and filed it away".(12) This

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(10) Ibid, p.35.

(11) Op. Cit., p.60.

(12) Ibid, pp.311 and 12.

"somebody" can be seen as a version of Fyodor (be it Nabokov, or the "old man" Fyodor pregnant with viatic truth, or the 'educated' reader) who has travelled round the globe, as in Nabokov's description of the Hegelian path, and who has returned with "enlarged conceptions" back to the "home town".

Given this framework, all things progress towards substantiation in the novel. The account opens with a description of a Berlin street"lined with lindens of medium size, with hanging droplets of rain distributed among the intricate black twigs according to the future arrangements of the leaves (tomorrow each drop will contain a green pupil)".(13) In this three-fold sequence (raindrop - bud - leaf) each event is a seed within the following one as the independent modes of developing consciousness lead into each other in Phenomenology of Mind. Similarly Fyodor discerns a universal "law of composition" of city streets as the houses perform a "rhythmic swarming",(14) adjusting and assembling themselves before settling into the final arrangement.

When composing a biography of his explorer-naturalist father, Fyodor thinks that "at times I feel that somewhere it has already been written by me, that it is here, hiding in this inky jungle, that I have only to free it part by part from the darkness and the parts will fall together of themselves ...".(15) Also composing

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(13) Op. Cit., p.12. Hegel compared the development of the Phenomenology to the analogous evolution of a plant from bud to blossom (p.68).

(14) Ibid, pp.12-13.

(15) Op. Cit., p.135.

poems is likened to the "wanderings of my thought which ... found the door in a thousand leading into the noisy night of the garden".(16) Artistic composition is thus a species of recollection: "it's queer I seem to remember my future works, although I don't even know what they will be about. I'll recall them completely and write them".(17) This existence of an ideal condition points to the denial of the "bad infinity" of Williams's and McCarthy's conception of Nabokov, it holds out hope as Hegel's work also points to "a way out of the flybottle.(18) This hope makes the task of creating (as well as reading) worthwhile, as Fyodor realises when composing a chess problem:

> "If he had not been certain (as he also was in the case of literary creation) that the realization of the scheme already existed in some other world, from which he transferred it into this one, then the complex and prolonged work on the board would have been an intolerable burden to the mind, since it would have to concede, together with the possibility of its realisation, the possibility of its impossibility."(19)

The process of transference is accomplished in The Gift by the provisional adoption of varying literary modes. Fyodor moves from

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(16) Ibid, p.148.

(17) Ibid, p.186.

(18) D. Lamb linked Hegel and Wittgenstein in the common quest "to show the way out of the flybottle" (Wittgenstein's words). Language and Perception in Hegel and Wittgenstein, p.ix.

(19) The Gift, p.165.

his book of poems to the planned biography of his father, this then leads to the Chernyshevsky biography which in turn prepares him for the "dense life"[20] of his future novel. These literary models provisionally hold their own in the story until their failings become apparent and they collapse into themselves leading on to the next cycle rather as Hegel's "shapes of consciousness" in The Phenomenology of Mind "turn up and bow out".[21] The literary allusions in Nabokov novels often are in accord with the themes of the individual works (for instance Poe in Lolita and Chateaubriand in Ada) and he alludes to Mallarmé in The Gift. Fyodor strolling in the Grunewald woods finds "his senses sharpened by the unrestricted heat ... (and) ... tantalized by the possibility of sylvan encounters, mythical abductions. Le sanglot dont j'étais encore ivre ...".[22] The quote comes from Mallarmé's poem 'L'Après-midi d'un Faune' (1865), a piece which also reflects the urge towards substantiation where a limpid and gradually revealed narrative describes how a satyr nearly captures two nymphs but they slip from his grasp ("cette proie, à jamais ingrate, se délivre / Sans pitié du sanglot dont j'étais encore ivre") and the satyr, although

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(20) Ibid, p.344.

(21) As described by Lamb, Language and Perception in Hegel and Wittgenstein, p.87.

(22) The Gift, p.317.

exhausted by failure, resolves to attempt to satisfy his "craving" ("avide") once more.(23)

Fyodor reflects Mallarmé's main theme of the difficulty and imminent failure of language in the face of experience. He concentrates his effort to forge a poetry of true equivalence not "ready made linkages" which betray "the expression, the living connection between my divine excitement and my human world, (so that) ... everything expired in a fatal gust of words, whereas I continued to rotate epithets and adjust rhymes without noticing the split, the debasement and the betrayal".(24) Hegel's preoccupations also are a reflection of the difficulty of building up a cohering system which is not betrayed by a split or seam. He showed in the Logic that thought has a "craving"(25) for an "inward life" yet must create this from the limited sources of "immediate consciousness" and the "inductions" that follow from it. Hegel's idea of the apparent

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(23) Mallarmé defined Symbolist poetry as "a series of decipherments" whereby a work delivered "little by little" a "state of spirit" (C. Chadwick, Symbolism (London: Methuen, 1971) p.1.). Mallarmé's description of art has more than an incidental equivalence to Fyodor's aesthetic for Chadwick describes Mallarmé's debt to Hegel (p.35). Much of the imagery of the poem 'L'Après-midi d'un Faune' plays on the alternation between sun and shade as does The Gift, where Fyodor's country park in Russia "stood poised in an equilibrium of sun and shadow which formed ... a uniquely characteristic harmony" (p.81); a sensation that is recalled when Zina and he are striped by "ashen light" and dark shadow that "undulated over her and continued obliquely over him" (p.176); Fyodor must recapture this condition in his art where "the shadows of my world extend beyond the skyline of the page" (p.346). Mallarmé's poem also explains Nabokov's curious poem "Lilith" (1928) in that Nabokov is providing an equivalent to the French poem.

(24) The Gift, p.148.

(25) G. W. F. Hegel. The Logic. Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.30.

undigestibility of immediate reality is reflected in The Gift in the image of life as a carpet which has an evident coarse pattern which is on the inner side but is exhibited in reverse, whereas the true coherent texture forms the pattern on the other side. Fyodor, after a funeral, sits in a Berlin park in "a troubled and confused state of mind" which confirms the un-mediate coarseness of physical life:

> "everything was incomprehensible from the sky to that yellow tram rumbling along the clear track of the Hohenzollerndamm ... but gradually his annoyance with himself passed and with a kind of relief - as if the responsibility of his soul belonged not to him but to someone who knew what it meant - he felt that all this skein of random thoughts, like everything else as well - the seams and sleaziness of the spring day, the ruffle of the air, the coarse, variously intercrossing threads of confused sounds - was but the reverse side of a magnificent fabric, on the front of which there gradually formed and became alive images that were invisible to him."(26)

The immediate coarse aspect of physical reality, that "bloomin' buzzin' confusion" as William James called it,(27) is a "riddle and a problem"(28) to Hegel also. Nature's endless cycles of

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(26) The Gift, p.298.

(27) Thomas Kuhn showed that this 'confusion' is overcome by "training". Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1962) p.112.

(28) G. W. F. Hegel. Philosophy of Nature, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.199.

transformation provide only a "finite teleology" and the observer in the Hegelian schema must "use Nature for own advantage, to wear her out, to wear her down, in short, to annihilate her".(29) Fyodor also holds this determination to challenge the immediate physical world:

> "Nature was seeing double when she created us (oh, this accursed pairing which is impossible to escape: horse - cow, cat - dog, rat - mouse, flea - bug), that symmetry in the structure of live bodies is a consequence of the rotation of worlds (a top that spins for sufficiently long will begin, perhaps, to live, grow and multiply), and that in our straining towards asymmetry, towards inequality, I can detect a howl for genuine freedom, an urge to break out of the circle."(30)

Fyodor thus recapitulates Hegel's determination to "compel this Proteus to cease its transformations".(31) He seeks to overcome Nature's insistent pairing (Linnaeus and his bi-nomial nomenclature

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(29) Op. Cit., p.200.

(30) The Gift, p.325.

(31) Philosophy of Nature, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.199.

is a target for both writers)[32] by penetrating "the play, the sparkle, the thick, green grease-paint of the foliage ... for there really is something, there is something".[33]

In order to reach this 'something' it is necessary to adopt Hegel's idea of producing imaginary schemas for interpreting the world, allowing them to develop and then collapse as their contradictions become apparent. The observer learns from the demise of these provisional "shapes of consciousness" and initiates more developed ones and thus builds real progression. Hegel notes: "to mediate is to take something as a beginning and to go onwards to a second thing; so that the existence of this second thing depends on our having reached it from something else contradistinguished from it".[34] The Gift adopts this method and we are initially introduced to Fyodor's poems, a practical joker

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(32) The Linnaean example is the "corpse of a system to Hegel (Phenomenology, p.69). Nabokov describes how the classificatory approach to Nature only describes a circle: "Linnaeus described a common species of butterfly, adding the laconic note 'in pratis Westmanniae". Time passes, and in the laudable pursuit of accuracy, new investigators name the various Southern and Alpine races of this common species so that soon there is not a spot left in Europe where one finds the nominal race and not a local subspecies. Where is the type, the model, the original? Then, at last, a grave entomologist discusses in a detailed paper the whole complex of named races and accepts as the representative of the typical one the almost 200-year-old faded Scandinavian specimen collected by Linnaeus; and this identification sets everything right." The Eye (London: Panther, 1968) p.60.

(33) The Gift, p.311. Nabokov observes in Nikolai Gogol: "all reality is a mask" (p.148).

(34) G. W. F. Hegel. The Logic, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.30.

informs Fyodor that an adulatory review has appeared of this work and he mentally anticipates what the reviewer might say but while doing so realises the linguistic shortcomings of the book and views it as "enclosed within itself, delimited and concluded".(35) Fyodor's planned biography of his father also shapes his attitude to the natural world and literature, this is also abandoned because of the contradictions between his research method and the intimacy of his subject (also he does not know the manner of his father's death and this prohibits synthesis). The Chernyshevsky biography is also viewed as "firing practice" and can be seen as a "parody ... lapsing into mannerism",(36) the flight from the abstract criticism of the biography finally brings Fyodor up to the planned "dense life" of a novel.

Concurrent with the ascending spiral of "shapes of consciousness" in The Gift is the development of a critical imaginative faculty that stands back from Fyodor's completed works (Nabokov's "third-sight" of tempered imagination is the equivalent of Hegel's 'Reason'). Hegel recommends that one can evolve a coherent grip on Nature by "standing back from natural objects, leaving them as they are and adjusting ourselves to them".(37) Fyodor gives an example of this detached mode in The Gift:

> "You look at a person and you see him as clearly as if he were fashioned of glass and you were the glass

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(35) The Gift, p.59.

(36) Op.Cit., p.321.

(37) Philosophy of Nature, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.202.

blower, while at the same time without in the least impinging on that clarity you notice some trifle on the side - such as the similarity of the telephone receiver's shadow to a huge slightly crushed ant, and (all this simultaneously) the convergence is joined by a third thought - the memory of a sunny evening at a Russian small railway station; i.e. the images have no rational connection with the conversation you are carrying on while your mind runs around the outside of your own words and along the inside of those of your interlocutor."(38)

The "interlocutor" which is external physical reality provides the vocabulary of this sequence, which develops as the observer stands back and allows the mind to mirror objects (in Hegel's words) as they are - "free in their own peculiar vital activity". Fyodor continues in this passage to illustrate how "all the trash of life ... by means of a momentary alchemical distillation - the 'royal experiment' - is turned into something valuable and eternal". Fyodor's comments share some of the terminology of Hegel's section on "observation as a process of Reason" in the Phenomenology of Mind where he describes "the joy of universal appropriation" of the consciousness in the physical world. Thus Fyodor's "royal experiment" echoes Hegel's description of consciousness as: "it

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(38) The Gift, p.158.

plants the symbol of its sovereignty on the heights and in the depths of reality".(39)

Fyodor's demonstration of the "royal experiment" on the "trash of life" shows that he sees the process as an exercize in finding a verbal equivalent, or corollary to the physical world that is somehow 'given' by "running outside" one's immediate self and taking the dictate from the objects themselves. Now Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind can be viewed as a refutation of Kant's view that one cannot know "things-in-themselves", he acknowledges that this is the main theme in the 'Introduction' to the work by pointing out that if "knowledge is the instrument by which to get possession of Absolute Reality, the suggestion immediately occurs that the application of an instrument to anything does not leave it as it is for itself, put rather entails in the process, and has in view, a moulding and alteration of it".(40) Hegel mentions this metaphor of a tool that if applied to reality changes it, as an example of Kant's thinking and then asks us to lay this conception provisionally aside and see if one can follow an alternative heuristic path by which the mode of his account is at one with the subject (one recognizes the subject in the account rather than through it). Therefore Hegel's task is one and the same as Fyodor's: to find a seamless state of equivalence through language.

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(39) Phenomenology of Spirit, p.281.

(40) Ibid, p.131. Soll and Findlay particularly explicate Hegel in terms of an answer to Kantian limitations on knowledge.

It can be considered that Hegel's great interest to the literary artist comes from his understanding that "there had taken place a gradual alienation between language and the immediacies of the material world".(41) His philosophy can be thus seen to demonstrate that "if we want to understand the nature of things we must understand language".(42) This idea can be followed in The Gift, where Fyodor takes up and discards a series of verbal models, working his way to identification with the very account that describes his progress. Fyodor's development follows a progressive attempt to rid his language of the "rigidity" which accompanies the empirical model of language as tool. He learns to criticize his early poems for forgetting "relationships and connections between objects ... in spite of everything my words go wide of the mark, or else slay both the pard and the hart with the exploding bullet of an 'accurate' epithet ...".(43) The image of the pard and the hart is an equivalent to the Kantian idea that the hunter and the hunted are both slain by the tool of language and never the twain shall meet.

Fyodor abandons his poems with their "mechanical transitions" and turns to Pushkin for inspiration:

"he fed on Pushkin, inhaled Pushkin (the reader of

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(41) As expressed by George Steiner: Tolstoy or Dostoevsky (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) p.53.

(42) C. Lamb. Language and Perception in Hegel and Wittgenstein, p.24. See also Soll: "the nature of language ... mirrors the nature of thought". An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics, p.92.

(43) The Gift, p.25.

Pushkin has the capacity of his lungs enlarged). He studies the accuracy of the words and the absolute purity of their conjunction ..."(44)

Pushkin's language is an example of accurate but harmonious "linkage" and we are given an example of literal equivalence when Fyodor's father quotes:

"the most beautiful not only of Pushkin's lines but of all verses ever written in the world: "Tut Apollon - ideal, tam Niobeya - pechal" (Here is Apollo - ideal, there is Niobe - grief) and the russet wing and mother-of-pearl of a Niobe fritillary flashed over the scabiosas of the riverside meadow where during the first days of June, there occurred sparsely the small Black Apollo."(45)

Fyodor's planned biography of his father emerges from "strengthening the muscles" of his language through the renewal of acquaintance with Pushkin, however this work is abandoned also because of the realisation of "a too swift movement of thought which in turn dissolved into nothingness ... I am so much afraid I might dirty it with a flashy phrase or wear it out in the course of transfer onto paper".(46) Fyodor becomes experienced enough to anticipate the failures of expression and turns to an antithetic or critical phase when he decides to write a biography of Chernyshevsky after seeing an example of his writing:

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(44) Ibid, p.98.

(45) Ibid, p.98. In the Russian version, the description of the butterflies follows more closely the Pushkinian rhyme and metre.

(46) Op.Cit., p.135.

"Fyodor ... read it over with interest. The drolly circumstantial style, the meticulously inserted adverbs, the passion for semicolons, the bogging down of thought in midsentence and the clumsy attempts to extricate it ... the drubbing-in, rubbing-in tone of each word, the knight-moves of sense in the trivial commentary of his minutest actions, the viscid ineptitude of these actions ... the seriousness, the limpness, the honesty, the poverty ... he was so amazed and tickled by the fact that an author with such a mental and verbal style was considered to have influenced the literary destiny of Russia."(47)

The biography of Chernyshevsky allows Fyodor an appropriate means to develop his language but because the work is so dialectically "one-sided", there is an imbalance in the language. Koncheyev criticizes Fyodor for being "automatic" in his transitions "you are pursuing your own advantage, and taking the course you find easier".(48) Fyodor also realizes these faults and resolves that "they won't be in my next book".

Fyodor's biography of Chernyshevsky is not simply a "mass execution"(49) of the ideas of this nineteenth century

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(47) Op.Cit., p.187.

(48) Ibid, p.322.

(49) A conventional autobiographical novel only results in the "mass execution of good acquaintances", Ibid, p.344.

"grobianistic"[50] philosopher, but instead shows how a species of truth resides in every "shape of consciousness". The work begins with a demonstration of how Fyodor has a firm grip of the biographical and literary threads of Chernyshevsky's life: "I have tamed his themes, they have become accustomed to my pen; with a smile I let them go: in the course of development they merely describe a circle, like a boomerang or a falcon, in order to end by returning to my hand".[51] Some of the attacks on Chernyshevsky's thinking have been described in the failings of the weak monists, who although they nominally share Nabokov's philosophical position, allow an irrevocable gap to appear between mind and matter, form and content. A gap that can be understood in terms of a failure in language and therefore of conception.

Much of Fyodor's criticism is accordingly of Chernyshevsky's language. He notes that the philosopher "saw everything in the nominative" and could not see why Derzhavin described "a pike with a blue fin" (thereby creating a word-picture of the fish in profile) and not simply "a blue-finned pike".[52] Fyodor's conclusion is that "this pleiade of radical critics (of the 1860's) wrote with their feet".[53] This inattention to the particularities of language brought about a "terrible abstraction" in Chernyshevsky's case for although he insisted that a "tangible object ... acts much more strongly than the abstract conception of it", he was absolutely at a loss when confronted by the physical world:

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(50) Op.Cit., p.201.

(51) Ibid, p.226.

(52) Ibid, pp.228-229.

(53) Ibid, p.247.

> "Chernyshevsky did not know the difference between a plough and the wooden soha; he confused beer with Madeira; he was unable to name a single wild flower except the wild rose ... there lurks a secret retribution in the fact that he who had constructed his philosophy on a basis of knowing the world was now placed naked and alone (in exile), amidst ... the strangely luxuriant and still incompletely described nature of northeast Siberia: an elemental, mythological punishment which had not been taken into account by his human judges."(54)

Chernyshevsky's suffering at the hands of the physical world brought him to a mode of truth by another route than developed intellection and its expression. He bypassed the physical expression of the 'nature of things' through his clogged language but embodied a form of truth by the integrity of his existence itself. Hegel allowed that "every living being is a syllogism"(55) and Fyodor also recognised that the philosopher, although he was returned "a negative hundredfold"(56) by life, managed to express a form of synthesis. Chernyshevsky undertook to show in his novel What Is To Be Done (1863) that "calculation is the foundation of every action", and that the 'ego' naturally takes a rational path towards human and public good in general. Despite the wretched

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(54) Op.Cit., p.232.

(55) G. W. F. Hegel. The Logic, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.171.

(56) The Gift, p.208.

circumstances of exile, an unhappy marriage and the crushing revelation that his son had completely turned away from his ideas, Chernyshevsky clung to his beliefs, desperately trying to fit each new slap in the face by life in terms of a rational schema. He remained true to his own lights, stuck to the substance of his ideas and stubbornly following his own logic to the end. In this fashion he expressed the harmony of Hegelian truth which insists on "the unspeakably important condition that in order to accept and believe any fact, we must be in contact with it; or, in more exact terms, that we must find the fact united and combined with the certainty of our own selves".(57)

In the long run then, Chernyshevsky evidenced the profound accordance that is the condition of Hegelian truth. That he triumphed in his own way is confirmed by the sonnet that forms a 'hegelian clasp' that links the beginning and the close of the biography. The first part of the sonnet (which is given at the end of the biography) observes: "... your high deed prevailed and did ignite / Your dry work with the poetry of Good". This invokes the "high deed" of Pushkin's Journey to Arzrum, mentioned in Part One of this Study ('high deed' is rendered as 'podvig' in the original Russian text), where inspiration cannot be sought but is instead revealed by mode. The final lines of the sonnet (which are quoted at the beginning of the biography) suggest "In vain historians pry and probe / ... Truth bends her head to fingers curved cupwise; /

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(57) G. W. F. Hegel. The Logic, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.25.

... (and) Examines something she is holding there / Concealed by her own shoulder from our eyes".(58) The poem suggests that an empirical or common sense account cannot make sense of Chernyshevsky's life but a dialectical path can provide an equivalent curve to Truth's hand "curled cupwise". The curve is the dialectal bending of the syllogism, thus we are told in the biography that Hegel's "tempting triad" indicates the "hump of truth".(59)

The Chernyshevsky biography demonstrates how the themes of the philosopher's life can be shown to "swell like a pea" so that the elements of one sequence form a key to the next stage of development. It is not surprising then that 'keys' as such perform a thematic role in the overall structure of the novel. At the opening of the novel Fyodor takes up residence in a new rented room (moving addresses betokens a new stage of literary development in the novel)(60) and locks himself in so that he can peruse his new book of poems. After doing so, he receives his first inkling of their limitation but breaks off his study in order to go off to meet someone. Before he leaves the room he reminds himself to take his keys, accordingly "he located a clinking handful, weighty and reassuring".(61) Fyodor returns, disappointed because a practical joker had deceived him about a

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(58) The Gift, pp.203 and 285.

(59) Ibid, p.233, the narrator of 'A Guide to Berlin' exults in the sight of a tortoise's domed shell: "ah that dome, that ageless, well-rubbed, dull bronze, that splendid burden of time". Details of a Sunset and Other Stories, p.96.

(60) The keys to Fyodor's Tannenberg St. room are the keys to Pushkin's work as that address is defined as Pushkin Avenue (p.141) whereas his move to Agamemnonstrasse is a shift to "Gogol Street". There is a reference also to "the peck of a key" that indicates "the prose-rhythm of Bely" (p.152).

(61) The Gift, p.35.

review of his poems and finds that he has taken with him the keys of his old room instead of the new one (an index of his allegiance to a worn-out literary model). He is forced to wait outside until "a woman in a Karakul jacket" happens to leave the house and he slips inside the open door. In his room, he finds "the glistening keys" lying next to "the white book"[62] of his poems. It seems that his assurance that his keys were "weighty and reassuring" in his coat pocket was of the same order as his confidence that his poems reflected the "integrity and reliability" of his poetic talent. Now the experience of being locked out of the house indicates that his assurance about his poems as with his keys might be misplaced, and he comes to view the book as "delimited and concluded".[63]

Fyodor is described as moving into a new house (the Shchyogolev's) in Chapter Two, this introduces his involvement with Zina, the step-daughter of his landlady. Her appearance has already been linked with the call of Pushkinian inspiration[64] and she is literally key figure for the "woman in the Karakul" jacket that let Fyodor into the house when he forgot his keys is an acquaintance of hers and is subsequently recognized as representing one of Fate's efforts to prematurely link Fyodor and Zina together. When the

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(62) Ibid, pp.58-59.

(63) Op.Cit., p.59.

(64) In the midst of composing a poem which adopts the Pushkinian imagery that he has absorbed, we find Zina Mertz's name encoded in the language: "What shall I call you? Half-mnemosyne? There's a half-shimmer in your surname too." (p.152).

couple first agree to meet in secret Zina stands at the door "with the keys looped on her finger ... softly clinking (them) ...".[65] It is a moment when Fyodor "suddenly felt ... the strangeness of life ... as if a corner of it had been turned back for an instant and he had glimpsed its unusual lining". The thematic appearance of the keys is the unnoticed impulse for this start of recognition on the part of Fyodor. In the final chapter he has his keys, clothes and money stolen (an event predicted by Koncheyev)[66] and has to walk home clad only in a swimming costume, an action that could represent his making a clean break from the Chernyshevskian themes after Koncheyev's criticisms. The following day Schyogolev père and mère leave on holiday and Fyodor is locked out the house (as his former keys have "gone forever") and he waits to meet Zina who has the only keys to the house and to whom he adumbrates the themes of the future novel as they walk back. The novel ends with the keys about to come out of Zina's handbag and the couple on the point of entering the house.

The role of 'keys' in The Gift reveal that there is a basic pattern (a grammar) to Fyodor's world as the squirrels also demonstrate in Pnin's case; besides being a thematic index they also point to the way that the physical world orients itself towards a "higher terrace" of reality.[67] Keys are twice described as

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(65) The Gift, p.175.

(66) "There's a proverb: Freehanded Russian, light-fingered Prussian", Ibid, p.320.

(67) In this case The Gift conforms to Sartre's conviction that the "techniques of the novel refer us back to a metaphysical system". See Steiner. Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, p.211.

"clinking" and Fyodor has the feeling that "our days here are only pocket money, farthings clinking in the dark, and that somewhere is stocked the real wealth".(68) Chernyshevsky cannot understand the need for thought to be keyed into the physical realm before it evolves as a complete synthesized entity. We are shown that as Chernyshevsky equated genius with simple common sense and thus:

> "If Pushkin were a genius, he argued perplexedly, then how should one interpret the profusion of corrections in his drafts? ... it should have flowed effortlessly since common sense speaks its mind immediately for it knows what it wants to say. Moreover as a person ridiculously alien to artistic creation, he supposed that 'polishing' took place on paper while the 'real work' - i.e. the task of forming the 'general plan' - occurred 'in the mind'."(69)

Chernyshevsky, in Fyodor's view, did not recognize the dialectical phase of struggle with model and went straight for mind mirroring its result on paper. Nabokov himself however described how his own work "exists deep in my mind and needs paper to wriggle out into the physical zone ... I have rewritten - often several times - every word that I have ever published. My pencils outlast their erasers".(70) The completed product only appears through the "inferno of corrections" as the philosopher also "wears ... down" Nature in order to reach

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(68) The Gift, p.158.

(69) Op.Cit., p.244.

(70) Strong Opinions, p.4.

spirit which Hegel observes even "the very stones cry out"[71] for. At the end of the novel Fyodor resolves to "shuffle, twist, mix, rechew and rebelch everything, add such spices of my own and impregnate things so much with myself that nothing remains of the autobiography but dust - the kind of dust of course which makes the most orange of skies".[72]

An example of how Fyodor might transsubstantiate the physical world into the 'dust' of art is found exemplified in the depiction of the poet Koncheyev in The Gift. A thetic view of his representation is provided by Nina Berberova in her autobiography The Italics are Mine (1969). Berberova was at one time married to the emigré poet and critic Vladislav Khodasevich (1886-1939) and observes in a biographical sketch of Nabokov: "My recollections of V. V. N. are colored by my immense admiration for him; the reader has to accept them as from one who was present at least once at a conversation between Godunov-Cherdyntsev (Fyodor) and Koncheyev".[73] She thus intimates that Nabokov directly provides a portrait of Khodasevich in Koncheyev as she also identifies the critic Adamovich in the character Christopher Mortus in the same novel.[74]

The 'real' case is more developed than this. Koncheyev is

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(71) G. W. F. Hegel. The Philosophy of Nature, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.10.

(72) The Gift, p.345.

(73) N. Berberova, The Italics Are Mine Trans. P. Radley (London: Longmans, 1969) p.566. Nabokov criticizes some aspects of her somewhat arch reminiscences in Strong Opinions (pp.290-291).

(74) Op.Cit., p.532.

described in The Gift as a "lonely unpleasant myopic man"(75) whose personality is vindicated by his great poetic talent, this possibly conforms to a general picture of Khodasevich who has been described as "a bitter man, wrought of irony and metallic-like genius".(76) There are two conversations between Fyodor and Koncheyev. In the first one, the two poets exchange a few remarks and each depart and the reported conversation is revealed to have evolved in Fyodor's imagination: "Whose business is it that actually we parted at the very first street corner, and that I have been reciting a self-teaching handbook of literary inspiration".(77) The second meeting is described in the last chapter and also turns out to be an imaginary discourse with Fyodor addressing an incidental German who resembles Koncheyev. Thus Koncheyev's presence in the novel is at two removes (Nabokov's and Fyodor's) and his presence can be regarded as inspirational at a distance which is the true nature of Nabokov and Khodasevich's relations. Nabokov observed to Andrew Field "we only talked about routine trifles"(78) as also in The Gift imaginary conversation is preferable to "real conversation ... (which is) ... the debris of small words".(79)

The existence of the 'real' Khodasevich is acknowledged in The Gift when the objects in Yasha Chernyshevsky's room are seen to continue their own life after he has shot himself, these include

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(75) The Gift, p.36.

(76) As described by Nabokov himself, Speak Memory, p.285.

(77) The Gift, p.78.

(78) A. Field. Nabokov: His Life in Part, p.219.

(79) The Gift, p.325.

"the volume of Annenski's poems The Cypress Chest and that of Khodasevich's The Heavy Lyre"(80) (in the original Russian text the books of poetry are mentioned without the author's name, as entities to be recognized by an informed audience as if the man is represented by the book as also Koncheyev is the spiritualized version of Khodasevich's physical self). Koncheyev is not Khodasevich but a "rechewed" expression of Nabokov's relations with that poet. Khodasevich's name has the root work "Khod": motion, travel or progress, whereas the name Koncheyev derives from "konchit'": to end or finish. Thus the 'real' poet has become the physical means to an artistic end as also Fyodor remarks that "butterflies express the divine meaning"(81) of a particular landscape by wriggling into the "physical zone" through larval interaction with the topography and plant life until being released in free flight. The analogue is not gratuitous for Nabokov provides a coded salute to Khodasevich's art in a lepidopteral reference in Chapter Two:

> "my father discovered the true nature of the corneal formation appearing beneath the abdomen of impregnated females of Parnassians, and explained how her mate, working with a pair of spatulate appendages, places and moulds on her a chastity belt of his own manufacture, shaped differently in every species of this genus, being sometimes a little boat, sometimes a helical shell, sometimes - as in the case of the

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(80) Ibid, p.52.

(81) Ibid, p.130.

exceptionally rare dark-cinder grey orpheus Godunov - a replica of a tiny lyre."(82)

This description can be explicated in the following manner. The Parnassians are a Family of butterflies normally found in mountain areas, accordingly they are described after Parnassus, the mountain sacred to the Muses and Apollo(83) (the European Parnassians are sometimes called Apollos(84)). This particular butterfly Parnassius orpheus God. is therefore evidently linked to the poetic realm and it is further shown to form with its 'spatulate appendages' curving formations - a boat, a helix, a lyre which all point by their shared curvature to the Hegelian "hump of truth". One of Khodasevich's most well-known poems called

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(82) Op.Cit., p.110.

(83) This may identify Khodasevich through Koncheyev as one of the Muses of Fyodor as Zina is the other. We are told that Zina met Fyodor on a "cinder-grey" bench (p.298); she is generally associated with the colour grey in the novel "the colour of shadows and of tree trunks" (p.170); the trunks are of lime trees, a tree with which she is particularly associated (Frazer notes that lime trees are sacred to women in Slavonic mythology in The Golden Bough). One recalls that we hear the first echo of Zina's name in the words "Half-Mnemosyne", Mnemosyne was the mother of the Muses, so Zina shares the position of Muse with the other "half" Koncheyev. One of the Muses was Thalia, this rhymes with the generic name for the lime tree: "Tilia". Nabokov returns full circle in Speak Memory when he describes searching for Parnassius mnemosyne an actual butterfly when he is on the brink of discovering his sexual awareness (p.210). A. Salehar has also noted several of these themes: A Book of Things, p.77.

(84) An Apollo butterfly appears as sign of authorial presence in Transparent Things where Hugh Person is hopelessly trying to relive the past by revisiting a certain landscape: "He noticed a large white butterfly drop outspread on a stone. Its papery wings (were) blotched with black and maculated with faded crimson ... Hugh disliked insects ... nevertheless (in) a mood of unusual kindliness ... he stooped over the creature but with a great shuffle and rustle it evaded his handkerchief ... and vigorously sailed away" (p.90).

'Ballada' (1921) describes the poet sitting in a miserable room and evoking the Muse in order to transcend that ugly reality: "I am speaking in verse, I am crooning / to myself as I sway in a swoon / ... and a great heavy lyre is from nowhere / handed me ...". The final stanza reveals "Orpheus standing alone" instead of the poet crouched under a naked light-bulb (Nabokov in his translation changed the title to 'Orpheus').(85) The imaginary butterfly thus expresses the basic elements of Khodasevich as artist: his great example to the "Russian Parnassus" that Nabokov felt was sinking "in darkness"(86) and the reference to his key poem Ballada which itself shows transcendence of physical self to a "higher terrace". Fyodor wants to display "precisely this insect" as a frontispiece to his biography of his father.

The Gift ends with Fyodor planning a new novel and strolling away, the final tone is elegiac but low key as Hegelian synthesis is also low key. One has almost the feeling of being fooled at the end of Phenomenology of Mind as also at the close of The Gift. The surprise is that there is no surprise - simply a sense of accordance and recognition. Hegel stressed in the Preface to the Phenomenology

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(85) Nabokov's translation appears in Triquarterly No. 27 (Spring 1973) pp.69-70. See also his memoir "On Khodasevich" in the same issue (pp.83-87).

(86) Nabokov describes the emigre poetry in Paris as "And the Russian Parnassus in darkness sinks / ... echoes of an illiterate lyre here wander / (in) ... a tongue half-Russin and half-forgotten". 'Paris Poem' (1943). Poems and Problems, p.119. A further curious twist in the mix of art and reality is revealed in Khodasevich's notes to his poems. He observes of 'Ballada' that he began writing it whilst "staying at the Schyogolevs", the same name as Zina's parents. Sobranie Stikhov, p.219.

that "the real subject-matter is not exhausted in its purpose, but in working the matter out; nor is the mere result attained the concrete whole itself, but the result along with the process of arriving at it".(87)

Fyodor observes in the final chapter of the novel "the unfortunate image of a 'road' to which the human mind has become accustomed (life as a kind of journey) is a stupid illusion; we are not going anywhere, we are sitting at home".(88) Both Hegel and Nabokov reject the pilgrimage as the mode of truth and instead insist on the familiar world as revealed to our "stay-at-home" senses". Findlay has characterized Hegel's philosophy as a "thinking return to the unthinking habits of ordinary consciousness"(89) and Nabokov provided a corollary to this by defining poetry as "the mysteries of the irrational as perceived through rational words".(90)

The Gift is set in a familiar urban locale and there is no astounding or fantastic plot involving external characters. There is only what passes in Fyodor's mind and in the final pages of the novel as an example of what he has learnt he offhandedly describes the feeling that familiar things can look "unfamiliar - very queer ... You

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(87) G. W. F. Hegel. Phenomenology of Mind, p.69.

(88) The Gift, p.294.

(89) Hegel: A Re-examination, p.67.

(90) Nikolai Gogol, p.55.

know, like taking a simple word, say "ceiling" and seeing it as "sealing" or sea-ling" until it becomes completely strange and feral, something like "ice-ling" or "inglice". I think that some day that will happen to the whole of life".(91)

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(91) The Gift, p.330.

III

An analysis of The Gift showed that the major theme of the novel led to Fyodor's understanding that "the other world surrounds us always",(1) that a condition of synthesis could be developed by standing one's ground in a given life and not, as Pushkin also demonstrated, in setting out on a pilgrimage after the truth. The Gift stressed that the special conditions of an individual life in a particular setting provide sufficient material to form the irradiated "dust" of absolute synthesis. The novel further showed that language must evolve to form a level of expression that can provide an adequate corollary to sensory reality and by establishing this parallel linguistic model one can then advance towards the experience of 'knowing' a given material object, as Hegel also strove to prove that the 'objective' sense of things could be delivered by language in contradiction to Kant's doubts about the possibility of doing so. Fyodor's confident summons to the reader in the final chapter: "Give me your hand, dear reader, and let's go into the forest together"(2) indicates his arrival at the understanding that the absolute is simply one's method of apprehension.(3)

There is a paradox in this understanding however, that is expressed in Hegel's key term 'Aufheben' which means development,

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(1) Vladimir Nabokov. The Gift, p.294.

(2) Ibid, p.313.

(3) "Hegel's absolute is the actual method of doing philosophy." D. Lamb. Language and Perception in the Philosophy of Hegel and Wittgenstein, p.100.

preservation and throwing over or displacement, thus Fyodor's words must also follow the possibility that reality can become 'unreal'. His understanding that words can be "completely strange and feral"[4] reflects the quirks of sensory reality which may appear at a stroke: "utterly incomprehensible, like words in a forgotten language, or the parts of a dismantled engine".[5]

The Gift can be seen to demonstrate the progressive evolution of a series of linguistic versions of reality and this roughly corresponds to the concerns of Part A of the Phenomenology of Mind. Part A develops into the "still wider compass"[6] of Part B by dealing with the self-consciousness as the next novel after The Gift - The Real Life of Sebastian Knight - also explores the necessity of one self-consciousness to define its being by interaction with another self-consciousness. Fyodor is shown at the end of The Gift determining to be concerned with "my life, my professional passions and cares"[7] and Nabokov's next novel (and his first English one) accordingly furthers this concern with the self.

Merleau-Ponty defined the Hegelian idea as "that formula which sums up some unique manner of behaviour towards others ... a certain

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(4) The Gift, p.330.
(5) Ibid, p.336.
(6) G. W. F. Hegel. The Phenomenology of Mind, p.213.
(7) The Gift, p.344.

way of patterning the world".(8) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight follows Merleau-Ponty's idea of "patterning" by showing how a "total intention" (again, his words) is conveyed in a unique manner through the apparently indifferent details in the text. The novel concerns the story of the brother of a well-known writer, who, although he admired his works, was restrained from anything but very brief relations with him in life. The experience of arriving too late at his dying brother's bedside spurs the narrator to explore his brother's life and art in the hope of finding some key ("the absolute solution") to the meaning of life.

The novel thus describes a search or quest, the "plausible trail"(9) as the narrator (V.) defines it, to the 'truth' about things. However, as The Gift demonstrates, the deliberate search for truth, as also with Humbert Humbert's pursuit of the "fiend's spore" in Lolita (indicated by clues "no detective could discover"),(10) is illusory and the seeker is only confronted by "his own mug in the mirror" as in Despair. The understanding that discovery of self is the only goal of deliberate search is however half of the truth in Real Life of Sebastian Knight for the

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(8) M. Merleau-Ponty. Phenomenology of Perception, p.xviii.

(9) V. Nabokov. The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.139.

(10) V. Nabokov. The Annotated Lolita, p.251.

narrator's search also implies a trail that he himself leaves.(11) Thus there are two trails, V.'s and Sebastian Knight's, and this logically brings a third resolving movement in the reader's apprehension of both paths. V. comes out with the clue to this situation when he notes of Sebastian: "two modes of his life question each other and the answer is his life itself, and that is the nearest one ever can approach a human truth".(12)

V. never gives a clear physical portrait of his dead brother, and he is often described only in terms of his surface mannerisms (his English undergraduate affectations for instance). He is also often shown with his back to the narrator as in a childhood episode when V. attempts to spit on his head from the top of some railings in an effort to be noticed but Sebastian remains "still

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(11) A passage in Robert Musil's Man Without Qualities illustrates this aspect of a man's passage through life: "In front, face and hands look out of it; the sensations and strivings run along ahead of it; and no one doubts that what we do there is always reasonable or at least impassioned. That is, circumstances external to us demand our actions of us in such a way that is comprehensible to everyone; or if, involved in passion, we do something incomprehensible, that, after all, is also something with a way and a nature of its own. But however completely understandable and self-contained it all seems, it is accompanied by an obscure feeling that it is merely half the story. There is something the matter with the equilibrium, and man advances in order not to sway like a tightrope walker. And as he advances through life, leaving behind him what he has lived through, a wall is formed by what is still to be lived and what has been lived, and in the end his path resembles that of a worm in the wood, which can twist any way it likes, even turning backwards, but always leaves an empty space behind it." Vol. I (London: Pan, 1979) p.216.

(12) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.128.

not turning ... in regard to me".[13] In V.'s last meeting with Sebastian he approaches him from the rear noting "the back of Sebastian's glossy dark head"[14] and it seems in their ensuing conversation that his brother's face retains a "downcast" aspect for his features are not adequately described. When, at one point, V. sets out to describe Sebastian he evokes a painting of him by his friend Roy Carswell, however this portrait proves to depict him in terms of something else:

> "(The) ... eyes and the face itself are painted in such a manner as to convey the impression that they are mirrored Narcissus-like in clear water - with a very slight ripple on the hollow cheek, owing to the presence of a water-spider which has just stopped and is floating backward. A withered leaf has settled on the reflected brow, which is creased as that of a man peering intently. The crumpled dark hair over it is partly suffused by another ripple, but one strand on the temple has caught a glint of human sunshine ... the general background is a mysterious blueness with a delicate trellis of twigs in one corner. Thus Sebastian peers into the pool of himself."[15]

It is evident that the portrait may well be simply that of a pool with chance objects floating on the surface and V. has been

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(13) Op.Cit, p.15.

(14) Ibid, p.67.

(15) Ibid, pp.111-112.

forced to construct a surrogate arrangement in order to compensate for his obscured view of Sebastian's actual face. Being thus hidden, Sebastian's face resembles that of the dead that Nabokov describes in his autobiography. He shows the bodies of the dead lying in state but with "funeral lilies conceal(ing) the face of whoever lies there";(16) also he notes of the dead: "they sit apart, frowning at the floor as if death were ... a shameful family secret".(17) This inability of the outsider to look the dead in the face invokes the myth of Orpheus and Euridice (we have already met the lyre-playing Orpheus in Khodasevich's poem 'Ballada'). The story of Orpheus seems an overlooked basic myth at the back of Nabokov's work and is especially apparent in regard to The Real Life of Sebastian Knight.

Nabokov refers to the myth in his poem 'At Sunset' (1935) which describes the poet sitting on a bench at sunset and being reminded of a similar situation during an adolescent romance. By evoking the memory, the poet metaphorically raises up the shade of the now dead former lover and he requests:

"As then, in those former days,
Smile and avert your face,
If to souls of those long dead
It is given sometimes to return."(18)

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(16) V. Nabokov. Speak Memory, p.32.

(17) Ibid, p.50.

(18) 'At Sunset'. Poems and Problems, p.87.

In The Gift, Fyodor dreams of the return of his Father, his features slowly become clearer but at the critical moment of confrontation, the dream collapses and Fyodor wakes back into the 'real' world. It seems that the father figure may be Nabokov's version of Euridice for in the poem 'Evening at a Vacant Lot' ("in memory of V.D.N.", 1932) the poet describes his sense of being "self-lost", unable to "distill" the assorted trash before him on a vacant lot until he "recognizes" the far-off figure of a man walking his dog outlined against the setting sun as a spirit or representative of his father and this brings an elegiac resolution or justification to "the weedy flowers and ... deformed tin can(s)".(19) Indeed Nabokov's development as an artist really begins after the death of his father in 1922 as if corresponding to the Orphic idea that art is a palliative for mortal loss as expressed in the last paragraph of Lolita.(20)

Plato characterises Orpheus as a weak character in The Symposium, he compares him unfavourably with Alcestis who gave up everything in order to join her beloved in the Underworld. Orpheus took the half-measure of "contriving" to lull the Gods with his music so that he could enter Hades alive. Plato therefore saw that

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(19) 'Evening at a Vacant Lot'. Poems and Problems, pp.69-73.

(20) See also Elegy I of Rilke's Duino Elegies: "... that once in mourning for Linos / the first daring music pierced through". Edgar Wind links Linos with Orpheus (p.20). Rilke is one of Yasha Chernyshevsky's favourite poets in The Gift (p.40). Fyodor is recognized by Alexander Chernyshevsky as his son's returned ghost. He points at a "healed-over scrape" on Fyodor's temple "'Was haben Sie da?' he asked with a grimace of pain ... he had recognized right away, he said, a recent suicide." (p.93).

Orpheus could only view a shade or spectre of his wife and not the integral being of Euridice. The myth of Orpheus thus corresponds to the situation of the artist in Nabokov's work;[21] he has his back turned to an intense reality somewhere behind him and must seek for clues and indications of the nature of that reality as it is reflected in the mundane arrangements before him. The artist only recapitulates the sense that something is going on "outside our blindness". Orpheus's glance back at Euridice which sunders his literal connection with her yet creates his artistic determination to recreate her image can be represented by the act of inspiration in the analogous Nabokovian situation.

The critic and novelist Maurice Blanchot viewed the myth of Orpheus in the Underworld as illuminating the essential nature of

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(21) It also appealed to the Symbolist movement in general. Mallarmé described his dream of a single great book - "the orphic explanation of the world" in a letter to Verlaine (see Encounter Vol. LI, No. 8, October 1978, p.100). Orpheus was musician to the Argonauts and Bely called his poetic circle by that name. A. Linforth in The Arts of Orpheus (University of California Press, 1941) saw the essence of Orphism in a unified body of men bound together by their shared knowledge of hermetic insights. Martin Rice in Valery Briusov and the Rise of Russian Symbolism (Anne Arbor: Ardis, 1975) quotes Blok's comment that the poet must be a "theurgist of secret knowledge" (p.98). The reality of The Real Life of Sebastian Knight could accord with Baudelaire's comment "Ce monde-ci, dictionnare hiéroglyphique". Briusov wrote a poem, "Orpheus and Euridice" (1904), which mentions the "asphodel" as the flower of the underworld in Greek mythology, which explains the title of Sebastian's last book. Rilke's 'Sonnets to Orpheus' (1923) which involve a description of a rippling pool of water like Sebastian's portrait, are described as the summit of Symbolist art by Maurice Bowra in The Heritage of Symbolism (London: Macmillan, 1943) p.90.

literary experience and further noted that "the possibility of death" itself is "symbolic of artistic experience".(22) Sebastian Knight's situation accords with this insight for his "acute sense of mortality"(23) seems to have dictated his masterpiece The Doubtful Asphodel. Nabokov provided a twist to these concerns (indeed a reversal of them) by posing the question what if death interferes with life? The Real Life of Sebastian Knight suggests that Euridice might manipulate the imagery of the Orphic Hymns by correspondingly demonstrating how Sebastian may intervene and indeed dictate V.'s quest. The Latin tag 'Et in Arcadia Ego' (I (death) am also in Arkady) may prove an appropriate epigraph to the novel.(24) It has been noted of the Orphic Hymns that "Orpheus interwove the mysteries of his doctrines with the texture of his fables and covered them with a poetic veil, in order that anyone reading his hymns would think them to contain nothing but the sheerest tales and trifles".(25) This might also describe the composition of Nabokov's novel for we are told: "Beware of the most honest broker. Remember that what you are told is really threefold: shaped by the teller, reshaped by the listener, concealed from both by the dead man of the tale".(26)

Edgar Wind pointed out that the "secret doctrine of numbers"

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(22) Maurice Blanchot. L'Espace littéraire (1955) quoted by S. Lawall, Critics of Consciousness: The Existential Structures of Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) p.242.

(23) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.98.

(24) See Appendix to Part Two: "Et in Arcadia Ego and Pale Fire".

(25) Edgar Wind. Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance, p.18.

(26) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.49.

derived from Orphic theology[27] and the use of numbers also reveal a doctrine at work under the surface of The Real Life of Sebastian Knight. V. tells us that Sebastian Knight "died at the very beginning of 1936, and as I look at this figure I cannot help thinking that there is an occult resemblance between a man and the date of his death. Sebastian Knight d. 1936 ... This date to me seems the reflection of that name in a pool of rippling water. There is something about the curves of the last three numerals that recalls the sinuous outlines of Sebastian's personality".[28] It is not surprising that V. recognizes an expression of Sebastian's personality in these numbers for they recur throughout the novel. He is born at the beginning of the century so Sebastian is 36 when he dies. V. is shown room number 36 when seeking him in St. Damier hospital. Dr. Starov's phone number - Jasmin 61 - 93 - can be unravelled to form the year of Sebastian's death. Sebastian's address is 36 Oak Park Gardens. V. sees the numerals as reflected in a pool of water, this is reminiscent of Sebastian's portrait, this gives the impression that the apparently random arrangement of things might form a previously unperceived immanent order.

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(27) Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance, p.37.

(28) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.172. Both Charles Nichol and Anthony Olcott discover similar patterns in Nabokov's novel in regard to numerals and other findings later in the section, their observations on physical details and coincidences necessarily coincide to a certain extent with the present study. See C. Nichol "The Mirrors of Sebastian Knight", Nabokov: The Man and his Work, and A. Olcott "The Author's Special Intention: A Study of the Real Life of Sebastian Knight", A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov.

Before describing further the means by which Sebastian reveals his presence in V.'s quest, it is first necessary to understand why Sebastian must find synthesis from behind the grave. The answer is that he has not sufficiently developed a mediate mode in regard to the physical world, he had not tamed its themes in life. The representation of a purely physical realm is taken up by women in the novel, or more exactly women dramatise (and are the measure of) the possible relations between one's consciousness and reality. Accordingly Sebastian's relations with women are the index to his stages of development. Sebastian and V. share the same father but have different mothers. Sebastian's mother a "restless, reckless being" left the family in 1904 when he was still young and reappeared briefly in 1908 to visit him and then returned to her restless travels only to die in a French pension in the following year.

V. describes Sebastian's mother as leaving her "husband and child as suddenly as a rain-drop starts to slide tipwards down a syringa leaf. That upward jerk of the forsaken leaf, which had been heavy with its bright burden, must have caused my father fierce pain".(29) The impetus and self-necessity of the water drop rolling down the leaf expresses the circular nature of the physical

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(29) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.9. Sebastian's father's life follows an inexorable syllogistic sequence. He marries his troublesome, harmful first wife; she deserts him and he enters the temporary respite of an antithetic phase in happy union with a second wife. But the thetic element returns when an inconsequential fellow carelessly talks disrespectfully about his first wife. An obscure sense of honour brings his Father to a duel with the gossip and he is killed.

world with which Sebastian's mother is in complete accordance. She is a fitful, capricious physical being with no hint of self-transcendence. Nabokov used the image of the water drop on the leaf in Speak Memory. He observed that what "touched off" his first poem was the sight of: "a raindrop shining in parasitic luxury on a cordate leaf (which) caused its tip to dip, and what looked like a globule of quicksilver performed a sudden glissando down the center vein, and then, having shed its bright load, the relieved leaf unbent".(30) This intense self-relating movement forms an immediate "patter of rhymes" as Nabokov's response to the phenomenon.

Sebastian's mother is then, an example of indifferent self-absorbed nature and Sebastian is fascinated by her memory for he only consciously glimpsed her once in the brief meeting in 1908 (her pre-1904 presence is only dimly apprehended by him). It is evident that Sebastian's seemingly inexplicable desertion of the safe happy relationship with Clare Bishop is a sign that he has not allayed his fascination with the memory of his mother. Clare Bishop represents a being with a 'soul' unlike Sebastian's mother, at the end of the novel she is shown returning to the Underworld, and she in fact fosters Sebastian's art (he wrote two thirds of his work when with her). Clare's allies in the book, other

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(30) Speak Memory, p.217. The image reappears in Pale Fire when, just before Shade's death, a butterfly is seen "sporting in an ecstasy of frivolous haste around a laurel shrub, every now and then perching on a lacquered leaf and sliding down its grooved middle" (p.290). Nabokov's initial poem is reproduced in Poems and Problems - 'The Rain has Flown'.

examples of transcendant beings, are V.'s own mother (Sebastian also refers to her as 'maman') and Larissa the wife of the Futurist poet Alexis Pan - "perfectly plain and elderly and violently in love with her freak of a husband".(31)

V.'s main quest in the novel is to discover the "dark woman" who "smashed" Sebastian's life. The progressive discovery of the characteristics of this woman - Nina Rechnoi - demonstrate that Sebastian was still engaged in working out his development in the physical realm, for Nina recapitulates the characteristics of his mysterious mother. Nina's name (from her first marriage) - Rechnoi - indicates her link with a rolling water drop image of Sebastian's mother for it means riverine or fluvial in Russian. Pahl Pahlich Rechnoi described as an example of one of his wife's typical quirks the habit "of raising hell in hotels when she thought that the maid had stolen her small change which she afterwards found in the bathroom".(32) Sebastian's mother in her sudden visit in 1908 recounts "a pointless and irrelevant story about a Polish woman who had attempted to steal her vanity-bag in the dining-car".(33) The "whimsical wanton" Nina flits restlessly around the continent: "somebody saw her in Rome, and somebody saw her in Sweden".(34) Likewise Sebastian's "restless mother "was an inveterate traveller, always on the move".(35)

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(31) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.29.

(32) Ibid, pp.136-137.

(33) Ibid, p.10.

(34) Ibid, p.136.

(35) Ibid, p.10.

Sebastian's involvement with Nina demonstrates that he has not fully learned the lessons of life, he is repeating his father's error of judgement. V. also nearly follows in Sebastian's footsteps by also falling for Nina but is rescued by the indication of a "Knightian" clue to her duplicity.(36) There is an early indication of the dead-end that she represents when V. noticed the "egg-shell blue" of the notepaper of her letters to Sebastian. The first paragraph of the book refers to the limited apprehension of a lady diarist (that literary method is described as "a poor method of self-preservation") called "Olga Olegovna Orlova - an egg-like alliteration" notes V. The egg image has the same self-consistency as the water drop (the egg appears in Orphic theology) and indicates the doomed un-transcendant nature of the woman that is described. Another of her type is the old French governess who hopelessly mangles the past by her sentimental memories, V. notices "her misty old eyes ... the dead lustre of her false teeth".(37) Nina similarly cannot go beyond her own narrow consciousness: "had she been condemned to spend a whole day shut

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(36) Nina announced that "once upon a time ... I kissed a man just because he could write his name upside down" (p.160), this alerts Sebastian subconsciously for he had been told that Uncle Black in Pahl Rechnoi's apartment was "an all-round genius" and could "write his name upside down in his native hand" (p.135). Uncle Black appears as Schwarz (p.164) in Sebastian's The Doubtful Asphodel and is thus sent to warn Sebastian.

(37) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.21. Both women are related to those described in Nabokov's story 'Conversation Piece, 1945' who "belonged to book clubs, bridge clubs, babble clubs and to the great cold sorority of inevitable death". Nabokov's Dozen, p.103.

up in a library, she would have been found dead about noon"[38] notes V. She is also described flitting "bat-like", a "clumsy mimic of a swallow",[39] the swallow of course being a token of Philomela's ability to metamorphose, unlike Nina.

Sebastian illustrates his own mistake in continuing his fascination with the kind of reality that his mother represents in a quoted anecdote from his autobiographical work Lost Property. He describes how when travelling in Provence he comes across the town of Roquebrun where he remembers his mother had died and seeks out the pension called 'Les Violettes':

> "I sat down on a blue bench under a great eucalyptus, its bark half-stripped away, as it seems to be always the case with these trees. Then I tried to see the pink house and the tree and the whole complexion of the place as my mother had seen it ... Gradually I worked myself into such a state that for a moment the pink and green began to shimmer and float as if seen through a veil of mist. My mother, a dim slight figure in a large hat, went slowly up the steps which seemed to dissolve into water ... Some months later in London I happened to meet a cousin of hers. A turn

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(38) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.163.

(39) Ibid, p.163. Nina shares certain characteristics with the woman that forms the main subject of Nabokov's short story 'Spring in Fialta" (1938), she is also called Nina. Her facial expression at one point is described: "something like a bat passed swiftly over her face". Nabokov's Dozen, p.27.

> of the conversation led me to mention that I had visited the place where she had died. "Oh," he said, "but it was the other Roquebrun, the one in the Var.""[40]

Sebastian thus predicts in the image of his mother, "dissolv(ing) in water", his own portrait by Roy Carswell that serves as inspiration to V. He also anticipates V.'s mistake as he sits in the wrong man's sickroom at the close of the novel. This failure on the part of Sebastian to imagine the proper context of his mother's death also brings the suspicion that he is not fully accomplished as an artist. V. quotes a critic commenting on him after his death: "Poor Knight! he really had two periods, the first - a dull man writing broken English, the second - a broken man writing dull English".[41] Sebastian's novels seem weak versions of Nabokovian ones, for instance his novel Success is about Fate's methods of uniting two people which comprises only a sub-theme in regard to Fyodor and Zina in The Gift. Mr. Goodman, his biographer, may not be completely wrong in identifying his subject's "listless ... pose" as being an imitation of Proust's demeanour.[42]

Despite his actual limitations Sebastian still possesses "an

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(40) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.18.

(41) Ibid, p.7.

(42) Ibid, p.109.

inner being ... so much richer than that of other souls",(43) therefore he may triumph in some other fashion. V. compares his effort to comprehend his brother's actions to a tennis match between two brothers: "their strokes were totally different, and one of the two was far, far better than the other; but the general rhythm of their motions ... was exactly the same".(44) The question of which of the two, Sebastian or V., is the stronger personality is not obvious in the novel, in one sense V. is all-powerful for he has the same licence to manipulate the account of Sebastian's life as Mr. Goodman. In this sense The Real Life of Sebastian Knight describes the battle between two identities, one of which has left the stage but leaves its "mask behind in terms of Sebastian's art.

The battle between Sebastian and V. resolves itself in the familiar Nabokovian interchange between strong and weak modes. We have determined in Part One of this study that the weak movement exists as a necessary channel through to the truth. It unleashes elementary perceptual notions that warn the reader how not to respond as in the Hegelian dictum that one can only proceed to the truth by finding something in opposition to it. Accordingly we can note that V. proceeds by telling provisional lies about experience, by making hypothetical guesses in order to get to a given situation. However Sebastian's truth may have evolved on the inside track because he has left a blueprint, or a series of 'tendencies'(45)

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(43) Op.Cit., p.63.

(44) Ibid, p.32.

(45) J. Findlay describes Hegel's language as "exploring tendencies". Hegel: A Re-examination, p.25.

in his art that secretly fuel V.'s hypothetical notions. At the end of the novel V. suddenly realises that the "absolute solution" is there to be recognized but does not understand how this has been effected. The 'how' is Sebastian's real artistic achievement.

The means by which Sebastian proves his "master thumb" on V.'s search comes from the understanding that his novels and stories are "methods of composition". They are notes in the margin of an unfinished text(46) and that is why they are described as "bright masks ... leading towards ... a certain imminent goal".(47) The text is to be supplied by the literal quest of the Orphic traveller V. This interpretation is confirmed when V. finds some photographs in Sebastian's desk and discovers that Sebastian advertised for an anonymous man to send in a series of photographs of himself so that he could write a "fictitious biography" around them. The description of the kind of man that Sebastian was seeking - "plain, steady ... bachelor" - fits the obvious characteristics of V. We are told that this work was never written "but possibly he was still contemplating doing so in the last year of his life".(48) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight as a whole could correspond to that "fictitious biography".

V. starts his enquiry in a sober and judicial manner, thus he

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(46) See Pale Fire, "Man's life as commentary to abstruse / Unfinished poem" (p.67). Alexander Chernyshevsky feels that "I ... have lived only in the margin of a book I have never been able to read", The Gift, p.295.

(47) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.98.

(48) Ibid, p.38.

picks himself up for nearly falling for Sebastian's Roquebrun mistake when trying to imagine Sebastian at work in his flat. However, his grip on the search becomes less sure as he begins to realise that "my quest had developed its own ... logic ... using the pattern of reality for the weaving of its own fancies".(49) The moment when Sebastian's logic most markedly takes over V.'s quest occurs when he takes the train back from the town of Blauberg after failing to find the clues to Nina Rechnoi's existence. On this train V. meets the ex-policeman Mr. Silbermann who attempts to dissuade V. from the search: "You can't see de odder side of de moon. Please donnt search de woman".(50) This helpful little man's gutteral exclamation identifies him with the Mr. Siller who appears in Sebastian's short story 'The Back of the Moon'. We know that this story contains the description of a "delightful character in it - the meek little man waiting for a train who helped three miserable travellers in three different ways".(51) The three travellers can be seen in the "teller", the "listener", and the "dead man of the tale" noted earlier. Silbermann helps V. find Nina, is Sebastian's own recruit from his art and thus helps the story along and also should help the reader to identify Sebastian's involvement in the story.

Sebastian's last novel The Doubtful Asphodel includes a short description of events occurring on the periphery of a dying man's

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(49) Op.Cit., p.128.

(50) Ibid, p.123.

(51) Ibid, p.97. Mr. Silbermann also gives V. the book in which he writes down the story of his quest.

awareness of his last hours:

> "We follow the gentle old chess player Schwarz, who sits down on a chair in a room in a house, to teach an orphan boy the moves of the knight; we meet the fat Bohemian woman with that grey streak showing in the fast colour of her cheaply dyed hair; we listen to a pale wretch noisily denouncing the policy of oppression to an attentive plainclothes man in an ill-famed public-house. The lovely prima donna steps in her haste into a puddle, and her silver shoes are ruined. An old man sobs and is comforted by a soft-lipped girl in mourning. Professor Nussbaum, a Swiss scientist, shoots his young mistress and himself dead in a hotel room ..."(52)

These descriptions form a shorthand of the episodes in V.'s quest. Sebastian notes in his novel "They come and go these and other people ... living as long as the way they follow is lit, and are engulfed in turn by the waves of the dominant theme". The chess player Schwarz corresponds to the figure of Uncle Black who quietly entertains a small boy in Pahl Pahlich Rechnoi's apartment. The "fat Bohemian woman with that grey streak" combines the description of the "fat elderly Lidia Bohemsky" whom V. immediately rules out of the 'dark woman' stakes, and the silent Russian with "a queer grey streak" in his hair who inadvertently helps trap the

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(52) Op.Cit., p.164.

dissembling Nina Rechnoi. Rechnoi himself resembles the portrait of the "pale wretch" (note the wretch - Rech clue) as he complains to V. about the oppressive behaviour of his wife. He suspects that V. might be a policeman and indeed V. is using the information of Mr. Silbermann whom we are told used to be "plain-clothes. Understand?" The other portraits in Sebastian's blueprint of reality also correspond to characters in the narrative. Helen Von Graun is the ballerina, she dirties her feet in a puddle at Nina Lecerf (Rechnoi's) house. The sobbing old man is seen at Helen Grinstein's house and the hotel clerk at Blauberg mentions a "Swiss couple" committing suicide.

This complete plan of events goes unrecognized by V. whose eyes are set on the idea of the 'absolute solution', not realising that it is being presented to him all the time. As we have noted, Sebastian's presence is first asserted on a train journey and his complete investiture of V.'s actions whereby his mask "clings" to V.'s face also seems to come about during V.'s nightmarish train journey back to Paris on his way to Sebastian's bedside. As the death of Sebastian acts as the very beginning of V.'s quest but is described last, then Sebastian's presence thus makes itself felt during V.'s actual composition of the text. At the beginning of the novel V. examines Sebastian's room and notices a "small old oil-painting, a little cracked (muddy road, rainbow, beautiful puddles)"[53] and observes that Sebastian would have viewed this

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(53) Op.Cit., p.34.

painting when he first awoke in the morning. Whilst on the train after a nightmarish journey, dawn breaks and V. notices "a road (that) drew out and glided for a minute along the train, and just before it turned away a man on a bicycle wobbled among snow and slush and puddles".(54) This image is an indication that V. has woken into a Knightian picture: the rainbow in the first picture indicates the backlit radiance of his presence in the view from the train.

V. ends his book with the realization that "any soul may be yours" through an empathic intimate approach (Hegel's insight that "in every calling ... the great thing is to pursue it with understanding"(55)) - because the "soul is a manner of being ... (and one can) ... find and follow its undulations".(56) He doesn't fully realise though how he came to this conclusion but this is indicated by the characters who are pictured ending the play of events. "The bald little prompter shut(ting) his book" is Mr. Siller/ Silbermann and the "conjuror waiting in the wings" refers to the laconic conjuror in Sebastian's novel Success. Sebastian has in fact donated the insights of the novel.

The end of the novel brings a paradoxical sense of truth for we never really get a clear picture of Sebastian although his presence is indubitably everywhere. By the end of the account we are not sure who is dictating the text, Sebastian or V., and it is almost

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(54) Op.Cit., p.184.

(55) G. W. F. Hegel. The Logic, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.93.

(56) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.192.

impossible to realise that the story itself rearranges the literal quest so that when V. arrives at Sebastian's supposed death bed in the novel, he has in reality already been there. Nabokov's key comment that deep truth only arrives through the contradiction of "two modes ... question(ing) each other" accords with Hegel's conclusion that "the infinite objects of metaphysics ... are nests of contradictions".(57)

If then, a Nabokov novel embodies all the contradictions of given life it in fact therefore provides itself with an identity in Hegelian terms for a consciousness becomes its own object by perceiving the antinomies in things. His art makes itself an object (a "specific affair" he has noted in interview), and to be specific it must have a self-conscious identity coming about through the combination of knowledge and experience. Viewed as such the Nabokov novel is a complete portrait of its author. Sebastian notes "the man is the book".(58)

In Speak Memory Nabokov described a "typographical portrait of Tolstoy. Like the tail of the mouse on a certain page in Alice in Wonderland, it was wholly composed of printed matter. A complete Tolstoy story ("Master and Man") had gone to make the author's bearded face".(59) Maurice Blanchot regarded the "author" as

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(57) See I. Soll. An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics, p.122.

(58) The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.164.

(59) Speak Memory, p.154.

"not the man who wrote the book but the implied being who gradually assumes form as the work is created. The text itself depicts this "author" just as a photograph would depict the historical author".(60) Nabokov took as the great lesson of Hegel the realization that knowledge of something-in-itself and of the noumenal self are both nothing more than self-identity. Hegel observed "the absolute mind while it is self-centered identity, is always also identity returning and ever returned into itself".(61) When one interviewer questioned Nabokov on the repetitions in his work, he replied "artistic originality has its own self to copy".(62) He was also once asked about the meaning of life and the questioner received "a blurry reproduction of Tolstoy's photographed face".(63) The picture is blurred because it probably is the typographical portrait which illustrates that immanent self-identity in the text of life is the nearest we can approach a human truth.

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(60) Quoted, S. Lawall; Critics of Consciousness, p.267.

(61) G. W. F. Hegel, Philosophy of Mind, Hegel: The Essential Writings, p.317.

(62) Strong Opinions, p.95.

(63) Ibid, p.176.

PART THREE

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight demonstrated how the "specific affair" of the novel provides a mirror to that "other V.N. - Visible Nature",(1) and thus provides an equivalent experience to the feeling that Nabokov has described as analogous to that of art - "the stab of wonder that accompanies the precise moment when, gazing at a tangle of twigs and leaves, one suddenly realises that what had seemed a natural component of that tangle is a marvelously disguised insect or bird".(2) The reader recognises in the "tangle" of The Real Life of Sebastian Knight the 'mask' of Sebastian, or Sebastian as he stands as representative of Nabokov. The experience that Nabokov tries to produce in the reader is an act of informed accordance and recognition, an intuitional but educated sense of agreement. This is similar to the reader's response to Hegel for the philosopher, by seeking "to undertake the exposition of knowledge as a phenomenon",(3) provides an objectified (phenomenal) account of the idea of the development of knowledge and the reader (or participant) follows the "undulations"(4) of this process until Hegel's 'mask' clings to his own face.

If Nabokov's art can be seen to coincide with Hegel's ideas in some measure then both are linked in a resistance to any concern

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(1) V. Nabokov. Strong Opinions, p.153.

(2) V. Nabokov. Speak Memory, p.298. Nabokov has described art as exhibiting "the masked performer (that) melts into Nature's background". Strong Opinions, p.153.

(3) G. W. F. Hegel. The Phenomenology of Mind, p.135.

(4) V. Nabokov. The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, p.192.

about broadly humanistic matters. Nabokov's art is not concerned with "pitying the underdog or cursing the upper-dog"[5] but instead deals with the situation of embodying its own self. Vladislav Khodasevich's early comment on Nabokov still holds: "the life of the artist and the life of a device ... this is Sirin's theme".[6] The business of Nabokov's art concerns itself with producing experiental parables that accord with the artist's situation. As such the key-note of his work is the idea of "proximities"; he is intent on describing states of awareness and being that may be congruent to others. In the face of this kind of art the reader must work to discover the schema - for there is an informal one as we have seen (Hegel observed that "truth is always revealed in the form of a system")[7] - that leads to the bridging or recognition of different modes. There is an overall "plot-line" to Nabokov's work (as Ivan Soll has also identified it in Hegel's work)[8] and the Nabokov reader learns to recognize it by educating his own responses. Andrew Field described such a reader as becoming "able to understand Nabokov only to the degree that he is able to approach him ...".[9] Looked at in such a way, the reader "earns" his access to the gnostic text - Nabokov - by recognizing the laws of composition.[10]

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(5) V. Nabokov. Nikolai Gogol, p.149.

(6) Vladislav Khodasevich. 'On Sirin' repr. Triquarterly (Winter 1970)pp.96-101.

(7) Phenomenology of Mind, p.85.

(8) "The story is allowed but a single plot-line", I. Soll. An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics, p.4.

(9) A. Field. 'The Defenseless Luzhin', On Contemporary Literature, ed. R. Kostelanetz (New York: Avon, 1969) p.473.

(10) See Valéry's comment "the laws of a work constitute its true object" quoted in Edmund Wilson's Axël's Castle (London: Fontana, 1961) p.67

A Nabokov piece that can stand as a basic illustration of his method is found in the short story 'Recruiting' (1935). The account opens with the description of an elderly emigré trudging through a Berlin park. We are provided with a condensed explanation of his dreary, sad past life and this interweaves with the present impression of his indigence and decay. At length, as if resigning to the force of the narrational explanation of his life he comes to a halt and "... pointed out a bench to himself with his cane, and slowly, not yielding to the force of gravity, until the last instant, (he) sat down in surrender".(11) The story next reveals that the man may be experiencing "an almost indecent joy of unknown origin" that infects him despite his wretched circumstances. It then becomes apparent that this "fit of happiness" is somehow linked to a "man with the local Russian paper ... (sitting) ... on the same ... sunwarmed ... indifferent bench".(12) The narrator attempts to describe this man but (here the conventional narrative collapses) it is revealed that "a self-portrait is seldom successful".

It then becomes clear that all the details of the elderly man have been summoned by a combination of imagination and deduction, all sparked off by his evident suitability for a casual appearance in an untenanted corner of a chapter of an (until now) unfinished novel. The incidental man provides the right material to finish

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(11) V. Nabokov. 'Recruiting', Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories, p.105.

(12) Ibid, p.107.

off the work. He is thus described as a 'recruit' spotted by the artist's 'representative', his public self, in the park.

The narrator is delighted with the old man because he is so "capacious" and fulfils his literary needs. By drawing him into his art, the narrator has "infected the stranger with the blazing creative happiness that sends a chill over the artist's skin". The unwitting stranger seemingly acknowledges the transaction between them by "taking off his fedora, as if not in order to refresh his head but with the precise intention of greeting my thoughts ... (then) ... slowly turned his head ... and glanced at my emigré paper, at my face which was made up to look like that of a reader"(13) before turning back and leaving the park. This story describes the act of imaginative appropriation, an impersonal travelling to the human and finite to gain material for "distillation".(14) The dominant emotion is a fierce but restrained avidity - a 'pale fire'. The "representative" of the artist travels to the "indifference" of the public park (where the lime-leaves "anoint" the heads of both parties) in order to bring back the required material to the commensurate inutile "indifference" of the work of art.

The parallel case of Hegel confirms this impersonality, for Jacques Derrida has commented that Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind "is in no way concerned with something which could be called man",

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(13) Op.Cit., p.109.

(14) As Fyodor "distills" the "trash of life": The Gift, p.158.

the idea of looking at Hegel in an "anthropological" light is a "misinterpretation" he argues. Instead Derrida stressed that Hegel was concerned with "a science of the experience of the consciousness, a science of the structures of the phenomenality of the mind in reference to itself".(15)

In his essay (whilst reconsidering "the order of Hegelian discourse which still holds together by many threads the language of our time") Derrida concentrates on Hegel's key term 'Aufhebung' and provides the equivalent French term - "relève". He defines the sense of both words as: "to take over, in the sense that to 'take-over' means at once to displace, to elevate, to replace and to promote in one and the same movement".(16) Derrida advances by the use of this term to the vital insight that "consciousness is the Aufhebung of the soul or of man", and indeed this provides the understanding that the structures described in The Logic and The Phenomenology of Mind are those structures "of what has taken over man. Man remains there in his relève". Derrida reaches the metaphysical point that man is necessarily a "neighbour of being", he is a state of standing-in for things, a proximity to truth. It could be said that according to this view man is an object as exemplified by consciousness.

Derrida provides here a useful vocabulary for a description of Nabokov's view of art and the situation of the artist. His

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(15) Jacques Derrida. 'The Ends of Man', Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol.XXX (1969-1970) p.37.

(16) Ibid, p.41, Derrida uses the nounal form of the term 'Aufheben' mentioned in Part Two, Section Three, of this study.

ideas about art accord with Hegel's sense of neighbouring and concomitant modes, his definition of the proper direction of art in Nikolai Gogol also hints at the Hegelian yoking of seemingly disparate entities that mysteriously involve each other in contradistinction: "at this superhigh level of art, literature ... appeals to that secret depth of the human soul where the shadows of other worlds pass like the shadows of nameless and soundless ships".(17) Nabokov also strongly objected to any 'approchement' of art with the human sciences, because he thought that general ideas about human behaviour had not the validity of 'specificity' and thus could not provide the level of equivalence that backs onto truth. To have truth one must accord with a single 'plot-line' in Nabokov's (and Hegel's) schema and general theories rely on a fudge of multiplicity in Nabokov's view.(18) Specificity is self-relation and Nabokov's art is his own 'relève', it takes over and stands in for him, promoting as an object his relations with 'reality'.

(17 Nikolai Gogol, p.149.

(18) As well as ideas that have a general application to reality (Marx and Freud for instance), Nabokov also does not care for a theory that involves a multiplicity of observers, thus he rejects "Einstein's slick formulae" (Strong Opinions, p.116) and also dislikes cubism (Strong Opinions, p.18, and Pale Fire, p.67). The individual perspective is his only mode of truth: "It is silly to seek a basic law, even sillier to find it. Some mean spirited little man decides that the whole course of humanity can be explained in terms of insidiously revolving signs of the zodiac, or as the struggle between an empty and a stuffed belly; he hires a punctilious philistine to act as Clio's clerk, and begins a wholesale trade in epochs and masses; and then woe to the private individuum, ... luckily no such laws exist: a toothache will cost a battle, a drizzle cancel an insurrection ... and all in vain were the efforts of that crabbed bourgeois in Victorian checkered trousers, author of Das Kapital, the fruit of insomnia and migraine." The Eye, p.36.

Roland Barthes, discussing the work of Robbe-Grillet, observed "What do things mean, what does the world mean? All literature is this question ...".(19) He continues to show that art in its ambiguity never directly answers the question. Nabokov also faces these concerns of signification and approaches them by stressing that first of all the right sort of questions must be asked, this is the basis of his use of the obscura and lucida tropes. The answer is provided within the terms of the correctly posited question. Nabokov's ultimate question is his own sense of self. Derrida points to the solution to this question by showing that "man is what is relative to his end ... the transcendental end can appear to itself and enfold before itself only in the condition of mortality, of relation to finitude as the origin of ideality".(20) Nabokov's end, in the double sense of the word, is also accomplished by the spiral of development and unfulfilment interacting in profound accordance with each other, art and 'reality', self and awareness of self, life and death.

Nabokov insists on truth being arrived at by the agency of something contradistinguished to it. The impetus of apparent unfulfilment leads to the strong position as the coarse weave of the underside of a carpet is the basis to the developed patterns on the upper side. Nabokov left a poem that records his own realization of the implications of this idea:

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(19) Roland Barthes. 'Robbe-Grillet Today', On Contemporary Literature, p.516.

(20) Jacques Derrida. 'The Ends of Man', p.44.

"What happened overnight to memory?
It must have snowed: such stillness! Of no use
Was to my soul the study of Oblivion:
That problem has been solved in sleep.
A simple, elegant solution.
(Now what have I been bothering about
So many years?) One does not see much need
In getting up: there's neither bed nor body."

'What Happened Overnight' (1938)[21]

One should note that "in sleep" in the original Russian of the poem ("vo sne") is as well rendered and understood as "in a dream".[22] The poem asserts that sleeping or dreaming has solved the problem of "oblivion" (Shade's "foul ... abyss", the terror of disintegration). It has accomplished a revelation in a "simple and elegant" manner which somehow circumvents "memory". Nabokov's use of "memory" here stands for the unblinking consciousness that provides evidence of his unique being and rages against its inevitable dissolution. Memory by being linked to "imagination"[23] and "perception"[24] produces his art which is a "palliative"[25] for the existence of

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(21) Poems and Problems, p.91.

(22) It is rendered as "in a dream" in P. Radley's translations of Berberova's The Italics are Mine, where Nabokov's poem is cited, p.322.

(23) "I would say that imagination is a form of memory". Strong Opinions, p.78.

(24) The present perceptual moment is "the constant building up of the Past, its smoothly and relentlessly rising level". Ada, p.551. Gombrich supplements this when he notes: "logically memory is involved in almost all perception" "Illusion and Art", p.220.

(25) Cf last paragraph of Lolita.

death. However the experience (or realisation of the significance of the experience) of sleeping and dreaming which scrambles or makes an anagram of diurnal reality shows that there is an antinomic force within his own being independent from willed self. Art is a quite separate 'dream' that combines the forces of intellect and imagination in an attempt to forestall finitude. The actual dream of the poet however shows that art merely confirms a unity unrecognized in the self, actual sleep and the dream state prove that his own being partakes in a universal mode of reversability: sleep is natural counterpart of waking as life is the natural counterpart of death.(26) The conventional language of self (arbitrary and anxious signifiers) like "bed and body" is therefore not needed and "oblivion" is not a threat.

Nabokov provided a further poem from the same period which confirms these ideas and also reads like a series of notes to his own self, these are the last three stanzas:

"I admit that the night has been ciphered right well
but in place of the stars I put letters,
and I've read in myself how the self to transcend -
and I must not be overexplicit.

Trusting not to the enticements of the thoroughfare
or such dreams as the ages have hallowed,
I prefer to stay godless, with fetterless soul
in a world that is swarming with godheads.

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(26) And death in turn may just be another "state of being". See Transparent Things, p.104.

But one day while disrupting the strata of sense
and descending deep down to my wellspring
I saw mirrored, besides my own self and the world,
Something else, something else, something else."

'Fame' (1942)(27)

This poem again provides the two distinct separate revelations that derive from the given life that everyone possesses (the self in regard to the world). These two modes are firstly that of art which responds to the "cypher" of the physical world by creating an alternative cypher of 'letters', and secondly that of the "transcendence of self" by recognizing "something else" deep in the self. The "something else" is the understanding that one's being reproduces the essential laws of the phenomenological world (the world of matched opposites) and this confirms Hegel's contention that the ultimate 'absolute solution' is deep 'self-identity'. Nabokov is thus suggesting that art and metaphysics take independent paths but meet on common ground. The narrator of the poem announces that with such combined knowledge he is "really remarkably happy" but counsels "reticence" to himself in case he spills to the "child" reader an "old man's" truth before he has experienced it.

Whatever the integrity of Nabokov's own felt truths and whatever one might think about these metaphysical notions, Nabokov's art rests as a "neighbour" to them. His art must be judged by its

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(27) Poems and Problems, pp.111-112.

accordance not with the truth itself but in its facility of relève, of taking over in place of it. Art's "cypher" is in itself contradistinguished from Nabokov's self (the entire world of Ada, for instance, is a "negative hundredfold" of Nabokov's own view of life) and this is why he has described his art as a "torture" to compose.(28) In the long run it should be regarded as a self-cancelling projection or hypothesis for the reader to apprehend and for the satisfaction of Nabokov's own sense of aesthetic accordance. As the work of art is its own being it is also its own doubt. Derrida's idea of deconstruction is apparent here and recognized by Nabokov long before L'Ecriture et la différence (1967). In The Gift each new version of linguistic reality offers a shape of things and then acts as its own negation and collapses itself. Blok's poem 'The Artist' (1913) may have introduced this idea to Nabokov, in the poem Blok describes how "as something new is thrusting toward birth ... creative reason strikes like a thunderbolt / and masters it, and kills it".(29)

As a hypothetical projection or heuristic model, Nabokov's art is that of provisional lie-telling. Roland Barthes observed: "What God, Valéry once said, would take as his motto: "I deceive"? Literature would be such a God, perhaps it will one day be possible

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(28) Strong Opinions, p.46.

(29) Trans. by Adrienne Rich. One also recalls Miguel de Unamuno's quip: "the supreme triumph of reason is to cast doubt on its own validity". The emigré critic Vladimir Weidlé commented that the 'despair' of Nabokov's novel of that name is the "despair of the creator incapable of believing in his creation". A Complection of Russian Literature, ed. A. Field, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) p.240.

to describe all literature as the art of deception".(30) Nabokov has observed in interview:

> "Do you know how poetry started? I always think that it started when a cave boy came running back into the cave, through the tall grass, shouting as he ran, "Wolf, wolf", and there was no wolf. His baboon-like parents gave him a hiding, no doubt, but poetry had been born - the tall story had been born in the tall grass."(31)

Michel Foucalt once described modern thought as being "permeated by the idea of thinking the unthinkable". Nabokov stands as an example of Foucault's definition by "impossibly" reproducing the doubts and ambiguities of his own sense of self in his art, which in turn must be read as an examination of the self of both reader and author.(32) The Orphic traveller the reader progresses through

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(30) 'Robbe-Grillet Today', On Contemporary Literature, p.517. Picasso's epigram is appropriate here: "Art is the lie that makes us realize the truth".

(31) Strong Opinions, p.11. Indeed Karl Popper views the start of fully developed language as arising from a similar situation: "What is the most characteristic of the human language is the possibility of story telling ... I suggest that the moment when language became human was very closely related to the moment when a man invented a story or myth in order to excuse a mistake he had made - perhaps in giving a danger signal when there was no occasion for it". "Replies to My Critics", The Philosophy of Karl Popper, ed. Schilpp (La Salle, Illinois, 1974) pp.112-113.

(32) The Russian critic George Adamovich expressed the sense of Nabokov's 'impossibility' when, after finding that Nabokov had tricked him by writing a poem under another name which Adamovich lavishly praised although he invariably criticized Nabokov's work, he generously admitted that Nabokov "was a sufficiently skilful parodist to mimic genius". See 'Valery Shishkov', Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories.

Nabokov's labyrinth, doubling back on himself until he learns from his mistakes. In this sense Nabokov's work appears like the Sphinx which in Bacon's description lay "in ambush for travellers ... and propounded to them certain dark and perplexing riddles which she was thought to have obtained from the Muses".(33) Existing as such a great challenge to the questioning mind Nabokov's "riddles with elegant solutions"(34) have provoked an intense response on the part of contemporary American writers. This marked interest in fact formed the first impulse to undertake this study. Why a character in Updike's novel Bech: A Book "when asked who was America's best living writer ... said Nabokov".(35) Why, on the question of achievement Norman Mailer could not "really look Nabokov in the eye".(36) Why Tony Tanner took a quote from Nabokov as title for a work on post-war American literature and introduced his subject with a study of Pale Fire and Lolita.(37)

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(33) Francis Bacon. 'Prologue: The Sphinx', rpr. Great Essays in Science, ed. M. Gardner (New York: Washington Press, 1970) p.xvii.

(34) His own description of his art. Strong Opinions, p.16.

(35) John Updike. Bech: A Book (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) p.16.

(36) Norman Mailer. The Prisoner of Sex (London: Sphere, 1972) p.6.

(37) Tanner took his title from Pale Fire: "In the vicinity of Lex, he lost his way among steep tortuous lanes". Other writers that have expressly acknowledged their admiration for Nabokov are: John Barth (his own 'Funhouse' reads as a Nabokovian metaphor, see Strong Opinions, p.313), he cites Nabokov as exemplary model in 'The Literature of Exhaustion', New Society, May 16th, 1968; Herbert Gold and Hortense Calisher both provide expression of their admiration in Nabokov: Criticism, reminiscences, translations and tributes; also even William Burroughs works an extended quote from Pale Fire into the text of his novel Exterminator (New York: Viking, 1974) pp.160-161.

Nabokov's particular appeal to a certain generation of writers perhaps reflects the implications of Hegel's belief that the most developed forms of philosophy emerge only at the close of a particular cycle of development. He issued a famous description of this in the Preface to the Philosophy of Right:

> "When philosphy paints its grey in grey, then has a shape of life grown old. By philosophy's grey in grey it cannot be rejuvenated but only understood. The Owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk."(38)

As a supremely developed practitioner of the art of the novel and by helping to turn the novel's attention to itself (by linking, as we have seen, a metaphysic with an aesthetic), Nabokov in accordance with Hegel's conception may represent the ending of the shape of the novel as it has been formerly recognized. It is instructive that he chose, at the outset of a career that was to so dominate the scene, the pen-name Sirin - a fantastic bird of Slavic mythology and also the common Russian name for the 'Snowy Owl'. An appropriate bird to spread its wing over what may have been the final grand developments of a literary form grown old.

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(38) G. W. F. Hegel. The Philosophy of Right, trans. T. Knox. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) p.13.

A P P E N D I X T O P A R T O N E

Appendix to Part One: 'Looking Glass' Themes in Lolita, King Queen Knave and The Eye

Nabokov often presents the mirror world as a nightmarish dimension of obsessive consciousness. In Lolita Quilty's Pavor Manor ('pavor' in Latin means the trembling or quaking caused by fear or excitement) is a house full of "ample and deep mirrors".(1) Entering the house is equivalent to entering a looking glass world, we are told that it is like stepping into "a fairy tale".(2) Certainly Humbert Humbert's "trickling bullets"(3) and the grotesque reactions of his victim seem to take place in a "looking glass world ... with a special refraction of its own"(4) as Nabokov has described Gogol's landscape. Indeed the initial confrontation between Humbert and Quilty recapitulates that between Alice and the Caterpillar in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Both Quilty and The Caterpillar affect to ignore their visitor: Quilty "did not notice ... or else dismissed" Humbert as an "illusion",(5) The Caterpillar initially "takes not the smallest notice"(6) of Alice. The Caterpillar, when he finally acknowledges Alice's presence languidly asks "Who are You?",(7) similarly Quilty ("with his eyes fixing on a point to the Northeast" of Humbert's head) also

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(1) V. Nabokov. The Annotated Lolita, p.296.
(2) Ibid, p.296.
(3) Ibid, p.299.
(4) V. Nabokov. Nikolai Gogol, p.41.
(5) The Annotated Lolita, p.296.
(6) Lewis Carroll. The Annotated Alice, p.66.
(7) Ibid, p.67.

asks: "Now who are you?".[8]

The point of the reference to Carroll's Caterpillar in relation to Quilty seems to be to stress that Quilty already exists in the mirror-world and Humbert Humbert advances into it to meet catastrophically his "sembable ... (and) ... frère",[9] the classic confrontation with the double. Previously Quilty has always appeared masked either as the grey "Proteus of the highway"[10] or in a literal mask when as if in a "drug-provoked dream" Humbert confronts "a man holding before his face the mask of Jutting chin, a grotesque sleuth in the funnies".[11]. Also when Humbert spots Quilty at the swimming pool (in Champion Colo) he merges with the background "as he leaned against a tree where a multitude of dappled Priaps shivered".[12] However by finally confronting Quilty and "doing the horrible thing"[13] to him Humbert like

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(8) The Annotated Lolita, p.297. A hotel clerk mimics "the elenctic tones of Lewis Carroll's Caterpillar" in The Real Life of Sebastian Knight (p.115). Humbert and Quilty's colloquy further resembles that between Alice and The Caterpillar in that Alice recites a parody of a cautionary poem ('You are old Father William') to The Caterpillar and Humbert similarly recites a parody of Eliot's 'Ash Wednesday' in the form of a cautionary poem to Quilty.

(9) Baudelaire's invocation in 'Fleurs du Mal' (1857): "Hypocrite lecteur, - mon sembable, - mon frère!" is echoed in Humbert's similar address: "Reader! Bruder!" (p.264). Quilty physically resembles Humbert and indeed he acts as the true "reflection" (p.239) of Humbert's deep but concealed evil.

(10) Ibid, p.229.

(11) Ibid, p.219.

(12) Ibid, p.239.

(13) Ibid, p.305.

William Wilson in Poe's story of the double, destroys himself: "in my death see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself".(14) After killing Quilty, Humbert drives away on the wrong side of the road ("that queer mirror side")(15) to imprisonment and death.

Nabokov describes a room in Lolita where there is "a double bed, a mirror, a double bed in the mirror",(16) this sums up the mirror basis to the plot of his second novel King Queen Knave (1928). In this novel the impressionable young Franz is lured into a plot to kill his employer by this man's wife - Martha, who has seduced Franz. In the description of Franz's room, the bed that unites Martha and him is shown reflecting in a dressing table mirror.(17) We follow Martha and Franz's schemes as they are represented in this initial mirror image, thus their murder plot can be said to "breed in the mirror surface" (as Nabokov similarly observes of the plot of Bend Sinister that breeds in the reflection of a "quicksilver ... puddle").(18) Franz's entire experience in the novel appears to be a mirror illusion for he departs from reality as he leaves

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(14) Edgar Allan Poe. 'William Wilson', Selected Writings, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) p.178.

(15) The Annotated Lolita, p.308. Nabokov noted of Lolita: "She was the composition of a beautiful puzzle - its composition and solution at the same time, since one is a mirror view of the other, depending on the way you look". Strong Opinions, p.20.

(16) The Annotated Lolita, p.121.

(17) King Queen Knave, (London: Panther, 1968) p.80.

(18) Bend Sinister, pp.8 and 13.

his quiet country town to go to the city, the train "carry(ing) him off on an unknown journey".(19) When he arrives in Berlin he breaks his spectacles and initially goes about in a swimming mist, thus it can be said that his own vision is corrected and taken over by the characters in the novel. Indeed the entire arrangement of the account can be seen as a series of mirrors, each reciprocally embracing their own image of Franz.

As we have seen, Martha supplies the bed reflection that sets the plot rolling and Franz initially dreams of her when he "wanders" in a "mirrored hall ... (in which) ... Franz opened a door, and saw Martha standing near the bed".(20) However her husband Dreyer also has the power to manipulate reflections. We see him at one point reading "Die Toten Seelen by a Russian author"(21) which is the German translation of Dead Souls, thus he has connection with a Gogolian looking glass world. Dreyer has a fascination with mannequins and robots; he seeks to find a perfect mechanical counterpart to the human figure which also confirms his facility of reflection or mirroring. The fact that Dreyer survives Martha's mirror murder plot indicates that he holds a stronger 'image' than she.

Yet another mirror reflecting character in the novel is more developed yet than both Dreyer and Martha, this is Franz's mysterious

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(19) King, Queen, Knave, p.11.

(20) Ibid, p.63.

(21) Ibid, p.41.

landlord - old Enricht. At the close of the novel just before Martha's death he emerges from his room: "you no longer exist Franz Bubendorf" he said drily".(22) Enricht shows that he is a creative ectype in the novel who can encompass the physical phenomena but not the overall creator of the account: "He was quite content with his life in general, grey old Enricht ... especially since the day he discovered that he had the remarkable gift of transforming himself into all kinds of creatures - a horse, a hog, or a six-year-old girl in a sailor cap. For actually (but this of course was a secret) he was the famed illusionist and conjuror Menetek-El-Pharsin".(23) We are given proof of Enricht's power when Franz glimpses him demonstrating his power over the mirror by inverting himself in front of it:

> "Old Enricht clad only in his nightshirt, was standing on all fours with his wrinkled and hoary rear toward a brilliant cheval glass. Bending low his congested face, fringed with white hair ... he was peering back through the archway of his bare thighs at the reflection ...".(24)

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(22) Op.Cit., p.175.

(23) Ibid, p.81. "Menetek-El-Pharsin" is obviously a conflation of the mysterious words that appear on King Belshazzar's palace wall in 'Daniel' Chapter 5. Daniel interprets the words thus: "Mene, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; Tekel, you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting; Parsin, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians". The reference emphasizes the 'masterthumb' of the creator in the novel and predicts Franz and Martha's demise. Enricht also plays on the German 'richtig' meaning 'right', 'proper' or 'true'.

(24) Ibid, p.72.

The mirror that encompasses Martha, Franz and Enricht is that of the creator of the story and he also appears at the very close of the novel as if demonstrating an overall mastery of the various reflections. Franz at one point notices two people and views them with hatred and envy. He objects to their tranquillity and diffidence (his image reflects in their self-absorption):

> "The foreign girl in the blue dress danced with a remarkably handsome man in an old-fashioned dinner jacket. Franz had long since noticed this couple, they had appeared to him in fleeting glimpses, like a recurrent dream image or a subtle leitmotif - now at the beach, now in a café, now on the promenade. Sometimes the man carried a butterfly net. The girl had a delicately painted mouth and tender gray-blue eyes, and her fiancé or husband, slender, balding, contemptuous of everything on earth but her, was looking at her with pride ... the music stopped. They walked past him. They were speaking loudly. They were speaking a totally incomprehensible language."(25)

The happy integral world of Nabokov and his wife (or this novel's version of them) appears just as Martha is dying. Once she finally expires, the reciprocal arrangement cracks and Franz is left with his own image and the novel implies that he succumbs to madness for at the last we hear from his room "what sounded like several revellers all talking together, and roaring with laughter,

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(25) Op.Cit., p.193. They are also pictured on pp.176-177.

and interrupting one another, and roaring again in a frenzy of young mirth".(26) The novel suggests that Franz has such a dull Gradus-like consciousness, it cannot exist in-and-for-itself but as reflected by someone else. At one point in the novel Dreyer, while waiting for an aspirin to "dissolve" his headache, notes that aspirin derives from "sperare, speculum, spiegel".(27) This is the Latin for 'to look for' or 'search out' and 'mirror' and also 'spiegel' is German for 'mirror'. Thus perhaps Franz's infirmity of consciousness - his 'head-pain' can only be healed by the temporary alleviation of mirror-suspension.

The Eye also provides a character who is trapped in a "hell of mirrors". Nabokov comments in his introduction to the work that "only the reader who catches on at once will achieve genuine satisfaction from The Eye".(28) The story follows the life of a morbidly sensitive young emigré who apparently kills himself after a humiliating experience and finds himself in an echoing insubstantial projection of his sense of self where he feels that "in respect to myself I am an observer".(29) The point of the story is that Smurov has come to understand that identity is simply a reflection of one's surroundings - he is at least aware of it unlike Franz and this is why Nabokov notes "the forces of imagination which are the forces of good remain steadfastly on Smurov's side".(30)

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(26) Op.Cit., p.205.

(27) Ibid, p.180.

(28) 'Foreword', The Eye, p.10.

(29) Ibid, p.60.

(30) Ibid, p.10.

The reader should 'catch on' that Smurov's botched suicide allows him to break his subjectivity and dispassionately view how he "exists" only in "the thousands of mirrors that reflect" him. A "population of phantoms"(31) resembling him exists in the multiform concepts other people have of him. Before his suicide he attempts to find a definitive image of himself but was "too exposed to thought, wide-eyed and outside of himself"(32) and just before his muffed suicide attempt he catches a glimpse of how bleak an objective self-image might be: "A wretched, shivering, vulgar little man in a bowler hat ... that is the glimpse I caught of myself in the mirror".(33) So henceforth Smurov contents himself with offering varying versions of himself to different characters thus encouraging the increase of the "population of phantoms" mirroring him.

Smurov finds satisfaction from this because as he holds an objective understanding that he exists only in the eyes of others he accordingly feels that "the world, try as it may, cannot insult me, I am invulnerable".(34) He is 'one-up' on the "smug cruel

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(31) Op.Cit., p.105.

(32) Ibid, p.32. In response to his search for meaning the world presented a "pitiless" and "quicksilver gloss" (p.14).

(33) Ibid, p.26.

(34) Ibid, p.106. Smurov offers a version of himself to Vanya as a cruel White officer "stringing up people left and right" (p.61); to Uncle Pasha he is Vanya's true suitor (p.69); to Weinstock he is a "double or triple agent" and a "Don Juan" (p.78); to Roman Bogdanovich he is a "thief" and a scoundrel (p.88).

people" who are not aware of the world's "absurdity".(35) The mirror motif in these three novels thus conveys the tense self-obsessed worlds of Nabokov's characters and also underlines his characters' belief in the paradox as expressed by Friedrich Nietzsche: "Heraclitus will always be right in this, that being is an empty fiction. The 'apparent' world is the only one: the 'real' world has only been lyingly added".(36)

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(35) Op.Cit., p.27.

(36) F. Nietzsche. Twilight of the Idols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) p.36.

APPENDIX TO PART TWO

Appendix to Part Two: 'Et in Arcadia Ego' and Pale Fire and Ada

At one point in his correspondence with Nabokov, Edmund Wilson asked him what he had meant by the Latin phrase 'Et in Arcadia Ego' (he had probably seen it in Nabokov's draft commentaries on Pushkin). Wilson speculates that it means "I too once lived in (or was born in) Arcadia"[1] and cites a Schiller poem in evidence. In reply, Nabokov corrected Wilson's interpretation noting the meaning of the phrase as "I (Death) (exist) even in Arcady" and citing as his reference to this an "excellent essay in Erwin Panofsky's The Meaning of the Visual Arts (1955)".[2] Nabokov had obviously come across Panofsky's essay in his research for the four volume translation and commentary to Pushkin's Eugene Onegin. The Latin phrase itself and the context of Nabokov's discovery of its meaning provides a useful key to the two works which follow and are related to his monumental work on Pushkin - Pale Fire and Ada. Also in a general sense the phrase relates to Nabokov's understanding of the necessary dialectical tension between two contrasting modes.

Panofsky's essay is called 'Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition'. He demonstrates in this work how the specific phrase first appeared inscribed on a tomb in a picture by the painter Guercino (1621-23).

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(1) The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, p.319.

(2) Ibid, p.320. Nabokov slightly garbles Panofsky's title which should read "Meaning in the Visual Arts", Nabokov's mistake emphasizes Panofsky's hermeneutic function.

The correct meaning of the phrase is conveyed in the picture by the fact that two shepherds are portrayed as being suddenly startled by an evident 'momento mori' image. Panofsky further shows that the proper grammatical meaning of the "elliptical phrase" can only be in the present tense: "Even in Arcady there am I"[3] and not in the sense of "I too once lived in Arcady". However he continues to show that this latter interpretation took over from the original one through the medium of Poussin's adaption of Guercino's picture. Poussin portrayed pensive shepherds gathered round a tomb and implicitly mourning a departed fellow shepherd, thus the mood is elegiac not dramatic. Poussin's interpretation led to a general interpretation of the phrase as referring to the difference between the strains of modern life and the vanished idyll of bucolic peace, Schiller's poem (which Wilson invoked) reflected this sentiment.

Nabokov must have researched the Panofsky essay in response to the themes of Pushkin's verse-novel which were described in his commentary as covering "a sweep of Arcadian country".[4] Panofsky also describes the development of the Arcadian theme in his essay. He described how Virgil adapted Theocritus's Idylls[5] into the scenery of his Eclogues and portrayed the Arcadian region as one

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(3) Erwin Panofsky. 'Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition', Meaning in the Visual Arts (New York: Doubleday, 1955) p.307.

(4) Eugene Onegin, Vol. I, p.7.

(5) Andrei Bely's novel Silver Dove reflects the Arcadian theme in an ironic sense. Daryalsky quotes Theocritus and holds an Arcadian vision of the "blessed Eden-like life" (p.132) of the countryside. However Death is there in the shape of secret cult that finally destroys him.

of "happy bliss" yet which harboured a "discrepancy" between "the supernatural perfection of an imaginary environment and the natural limitations of human life as it is".(6) The characteristic of the Arcadian scene became defined as a pervasive sense of "dissonance" derived from the mixture of human suffering in a perfect landscape.

In his commentary to Eugene Onegin Nabokov developed his ideas about Arcadia in two main threads. Firstly, he saw that the original "dissonance" idea was only retained by the French Arcadian tradition in poetry,(7) whereas the English tradition (except for glimpses in Shakespeare) lost the antithetic element and merely reflected a "generalised" series of "sterile ... and arbitrary symbols". Nabokov characterizes the theme as depicting:

> "a bucolic space time within which refined shepherds and shepherdesses tend immaculate flocks amid indestructible meadow flowers and make sterile love in shady bosquets near murmuring rills."(8)

Secondly, Nabokov thought that the rise of Romantic preoccupations could be viewed in terms of Death's restoration to Arcadia: "the moon - tomb - ghost theme that was, in a sense, the logical result of Death's presence in Arcadia, ... (forms) ... the cornerstone of Goethe's Romanticism".(9) Nabokov confirmed this idea of the

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(6) "Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition", p.300.

(7) French writers like Bertin, Parny, Houdar de la Motte. See Eugene Onegin, Vol. II, pp.186, 416, 461.

(8) Eugene Onegin, Vol. II, p.322.

(9) Ibid, Vol. III, p.152.

development of literature by the usurpation of existing forms by noting that the Romantic theme of the "addition of strangeness to beauty" simply rearranged the conventional Arcadian scene: "the retired knight is a necromancer; the moon rises over Arcadia in a new part of the ruined sky".(10)

It can be seen that the story of Pale Fire, the novel that followed and evolved out of Nabokov's work on Pushkin, follows the Romantic appropriation of the established Arcadian scene. We know that John Shade is a Pope scholar and indeed his poem follows a Popeian metre. His personality and ideas could follow from that era (which Nabokov shows in Eugene Onegin to have provided the finishing touches to Arcadian theme(11)), indeed in appearance he is like a "fleshy Hogarthian tippler".(12) Kinbote arrives as the 'et ... ego' in this Arcadia of Shade's established and ordered world and proceeds to inject his own extreme symbology into it.(13) He finally reverses the ordered Shadeian universe where man interacts with nature (in "the great chain that draws all to agree": Essay on Man) and replaces reason with his own daemonic 'ego'.

Kinbote alludes to the specific Latin phrase when describing Gradus's fateful progress towards the meeting with Shade:

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(10) Op.Cit., Vol. III, p.34.

(11) In the example of poets like Thompson and Cowper.

(12) Pale Fire, p.26.

(13) As in his evocation of Mr. Lavender's villa and garden which is Arcadian to a certain degree (it is described as "rustic" and "among ... protective trees", p.202) through which Gradus progresses like Death. However Kinbote himself is associated with "sterile" themes and thus Lavender's house is called 'Libitina' which is the roman goddess of the dead.

> "Gradus, alias Degré, had flown from Copenhagen to Paris, thus completing the second lap of his sinister journey! Even in Arcady am I, says Death in the tombal scripture."(14)

Thus Kinbote means by 'Arcady' the world outside Zembla. He also applies it to America in general when he speaks of escaping "from Zembla to this Arcady".(15) There is also a specific sense of the town of 'New Wye' where Wordsmith College is located for Kinbote calls it "my new Arcady".(16) When reminiscing about his (supposed) walks with Shade he recalls "trudging along again as in the old days with John, in the woods of Arcady under a salmon sky".(17) This is the clue to the fact that Gradus is not the only 'et ... ego' in Arcadia for if Arcadia is New Wye then he doesn't reach it until the end of the book, thus Kinbote himself is a threatening presence in Arcadia. Sybil Shade calls him:

> "an elephantine tick; a king-sized botfly; a macaco worm; the monstrous parasite of a genius."(18)

It thus becomes obvious that Kinbote has transplanted himself from one Arcadia (Zembla is that region with its "painted skies", streams, mountains and friendly shepherds) to another - Shade's bucolic retreat in New Wye. However once one has solved this

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(14) Pale Fire, p.174.

(15) Ibid, p.295.

(16) Ibid, p.249.

(17) Ibid, p.259.

(18) Ibid, p.138.

problem, it is only the second step in the inevitably three-fold Nabokovian arrangement. There must be a third Harlequin other than Shade and Kinbote, a narrational 'et ... ego' in both the descriptions of Zembla and New Wye. The answer to this is found in the Index where we find described the mysterious figure of:

> "Botkin, V., American scholar of Russian descent, 894; king-bot, maggot of extinct fly that once bred in mammoths and is thought to have hastened their phylogenetic end, 247; bottekin-maker, 71; bot, plop, and botelïy, big bellied (Russ.); botkin or bodkin, a Danish stiletto."(19)

This is not a disguised description of Kinbote (he appears separately in the Index) and the description is not something gratuitous for Nabokov has emphasized that in the language and terms that he uses "my purpose is not to be facetiously flashy or grotesquely obscure but to express what I feel and think with the utmost truthfulness and perception".(20) Botkin thus has a deliberate presence in the work. It is obvious that he is a fellow member of the Wordsmith College, he makes an appearance in Kinbote's commentary (unacknowledged by the Index) with a personal parenthetic comment that seems unlikely to have come from Kinbote himself: "speaking of the Head of the bloated Russian Department,

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(19) Pale Fire, p.306. D. Barton Johnson in "The Index of Refraction in Nabokov's Pale Fire" (Russian Literature Triquarterly, No. 16, 1979, pp.33-49) also calls attention to the figure of Botkin.

(20) Strong Opinions, p.179.

Prof. Pnin, a regular martinet in regard to his underlings (happily, Prof. Botkin, who taught in another department, was not subordinated to that grotesque 'perfectionist')".[21] A further indication that Botkin has a hand in the description of Kinbote's account lies in the detailed references to the "song of Igor's Campaign" a Russian 12th Century epic.[22] Botkin may be the third 'ego' of the book who artistically cages (to adapt Shade's words) both Kinbote and Shade in the Arcadia of the account.

The 'Et in Arcadia Ego' theme as it derives from Nabokov's commentary to Eugene Onegin thus shows that there is an internal 'parasite' of change within every presented scenario.[23] Nabokov also reached this idea through the actual experience of translating Pushkin. He observes in a poem "On Translating 'Eugene Onegin'" (1955): "I travelled down your (Pushkin's) secret stem, / And reached the root and fed upon it".[24] This relation of translation to the Arcadian theme has a link in the form of François-René de Chateaubriand. Chateaubriand's literal translation of Paradise Lost - Le Paradis

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(21) Pale Fire, p.155.

(22) Ibid, p.246. This links through to Nabokov himself for he translated the work in 1960 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1960).

(23) This is demonstrated in Pale Fire by the means of the Zemblan translation of Shakespeare's lines in Timon of Athens (Act IV, Scene 3). The Zemblan version replaces the Shakespearian idea of a circular world where "each thing's a thief" by a poem that makes a syllogistic sequence: "The Sun is a thief: She lures the Sea / and robs it. The Moon is a thief: / he steals his silvery light from the Sun. / The Sun is a thief: it dissolves the Moon." (pp.79-80). The sequence runs: 'sun' met by its antithesis 'moon' which is in turn "dissolved" by a triumphant 'sun'. This indicates that the 'pale fire' of Selene Kinbote is triumphed over by his reverse: Botkin.

(24) Poems and Problems, p.175.

Perdu (1836) - greatly interested Pushkin when he was thinking of the possibilities of a modern epic. It also is interesting to Nabokov because Chateaubriand anticipated and vindicated Nabokov's own attempt at an exactly and painstakingly literal translation of Pushkin himself.(25) Furthermore, in his own creative work Chateaubriand expressed the Romantic investiture of the Arcadian motif.

When landing in America Kinbote implicitly compares himself to Chateaubriand arriving in America when he observes "that vortex of yellow and maroon butterflies that so pleased Chateaubriand on his arrival in America".(26) He is referred to in context with the description of the natural world as also Pushkin queries what "author has more knowledge / of nature than Chateaubriand"(27) in Eugene Onegin. Chateaubriand specialized in providing scenes of beauty along with a reminder of decay. Mario Praz views him as a founder of the themes of "Beauty and Death (which were) ... looked upon as sisters by the Romantics".(28) Praz quotes a passage from Les Natchez (1826) where a young woman is pictured holding in her hand a skull: "les beaux cheveux de la jeune fille ombrageaient en tombant le front chauve de la mort".(29)

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(25) George Steiner particularly comments on Chateaubriand's translation method in After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation, pp.316-318 et passim.

(26) Pale Fire, p.247.

(27) Eugene Onegin, Vol. I, p.187.

(28) Mario Praz. The Romantic Agony (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) p.31.

(29) Ibid, p.172. "The dear bizarre Aunt Maude" in Pale Fire has a "human skull" in her room (p.36).

The dominant themes of Ada follow on from Nabokov's preoccupation with the Romantic ideas of the nineteenth century that he had encountered in the research on Pushkin. Chateaubriand is an obvious example of this: in a sense (following his link with physical nature) the scenery of Ardis Hall is a Chateaubriandesque setting. Ardis is referred to as "Bryant's Château"(30) and also as "Bryant's timbered hill".(31) Physical nature is also specifically linked to Chateaubriand, thus we are presented with a "rare oak" called "Quercus ruslan Chat." and also the "female of Chateaubriand's mosquito", a "diabolical" insect.(32)

Van and Ada's relationship mimics that of "the story about a pair of romantic siblings"(33) in Chateaubriand's Atala and René (1802). Ada sometimes calls Van "her cher, trop cher René"(34) and he in turn when displeased with her looks upon her as "no longer René's sister, not even his half-sister".(35) Chateaubriand's story is set in a lush Florida setting where the self-absorption of the natural world contrasts with the mental sufferings of Atala and René. The story of Ada also follows the idea of an innocent setting

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(30) Ada, p.205.

(31) Ibid, p.215. 'Oaks' are linked to Chateaubriand through their connection with the parody of a Chateaubriand lyric that runs through Part One of Ada (the verse ends - "et la grand chêne), it is from Romance à Hélène (1805). Ardis Hall is linked to Combourg Hall, Chateaubriand's family home described in his Memoires (1848).

(32) Ibid, pp.398 and 106.

(33) Ibid, p.133.

(34) Ibid, p.131.

(35) Ibid, p.199.

that is perturbed by human pain. The initial image of Van, Ada and Lucette as children suggests "a pretty Arcadian combination",(36) however Van's malaise dictates that "all (who) ... come into close contact with him ... were bound to know anguish and calamity".(37) Van in this sense is the 'et ... ego' who destroys the Arcadian peace: Lucette kills herself and Van and Ada have to leave Ardis Hall and separate.

Chateaubriand's example is close to the 'Et in Arcadia Ego' idea because both appeal to a positioning by contrast. Mario Praz noted that Chateaubriand combined an "idyllic background ... (and) ... turbid and sensual subject matter".(38) In the original Arcadian theme of literature Death's implied presence causes an inevitable dissonance in human life even if it is conducted in ideal circumstances. This is why René observes in Atala and René: "in every country the natural song of man is sad, even when it sings of happiness".(39) Death's presence in Arcadia is also a direct dictate for moral ordering of life as Humbert Humbert recognizes:

> "The moral sense in mortals is the duty
> We have to pay on mortal sense of beauty."(40)

As a postscript to the Arcadian theme Nabokov's novel

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(36) Op.Cit., p.204.

(37) Ibid, p.20.

(38) The Romantic Agony, p.112.

(39) François-René de Chateaubriand. Atala and René transl. W. J. Cobb (New York: Signet, 1962) p.107.

(40) The Annotated Lolita, p.285.

Transparent Things is set in Switzerland which is implicitly Arcadian for Humbert Humbert refers to the "toy-bright Swiss villages and exhaustively lauded Alps" that he contrasts with "the lyrical, epic, tragic but never Arcadian American wilds".(41) The novel concerns itself with the presence of Death overlooking the narrative and indeed the story is narrated by a 'ghost' who can transcend the "surface film" of life. The clue to the identity of this ghost-narrator is found in the mention of 'Mr. R.' a writer but "not one of first rank"(42) who has died before the action of the novel takes place. In his first novel: Figures in a Golden Window there appears a "dollhouse on fire" and the book cover represents "the silhouette of human panic in the blazing windows of a villa".(43) It is evident that he is the 'et ... ego' in the narrative (like Sebastian Knight) who predicts and then describes the hero Hugh Person's death in a hotel fire.

—— As Hugh Person perishes the ghost-narrator appears to help him over the threshold of death and reassures him saying: "easy, you know, does it, son".(44)

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(41) Op.Cit., p.170.

(42) Transparent Things, p.24.

(43) Ibid, p.28.

(44) Mr. R. addresses Hugh Person in life as 'son' (p.31) and also a barman is similarly addressed: "same stuff, son" (p.32).

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