

**Artistic Revisions in the Works of Vladimir Nabokov**

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**Abstract**

Vladimir Nabokov, throughout a literary career spanning six decades, five countries, three languages, two continents and two calendars, was an inveterate reviser, constantly changing, translating and altering his own works. Indeed, Nabokov himself acknowledged that ‘even the dream I describe to my wife across the breakfast table is only a first draft’ (*SO*, xv). The very process of writing was, for Nabokov, inextricably linked with the act of revision. In his memoirs, for example, Nabokov compares his father’s handwritten texts, which were produced in ‘slanted, beautifully sleek, unbelievably regular hand, almost free of corrections’, against his ‘own mousy hand and messy drafts [...] the massacrous revisions and rewritings, and new revisions, of the very lines in which I am taking two hours to describe a two-minute run of his flawless handwriting’ (*SM*, 139).

This thesis will examine the deliberate, visible revisions, which Nabokov leaves purposefully within his fiction. The first category of revision, developmental revision, represents the evolutionary arc of central thematic matter within the author’s work. Secondly, fictional revisions are those implemented within the individual narratives of Nabokov’s texts, which are assigned as the work of Nabokov’s author-characters. Transtextual revision is carried out across texts and languages, creating links between individual works. Finally, extratextual revision, which is implemented to the individual text from an external vantage point, leads to the destabilisation of individual texts as a result of Nabokov’s authorial intrusions. Taken together, these deliberately visible revisions destabilise the autonomy of individual texts, causing them to become

incomplete. This results in a cohesive, self-reflexive oeuvre, within which all component parts can be seen together. This results in a dynamic model of oeuvre construction, which leads to the formation of what will be termed a 'supertext', that is a fully connected oeuvre, which has only its own self as reference.

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### **Notes on Transliteration and Translation**

The Library of Congress system of transliteration without diacritical marks is used throughout this thesis. Where there are common Anglicised spellings of Russian names (for example, Cincinnatus instead of Tsintsinnat and Dostoevsky instead of Dostoevsky), they are used for the sake of readability.

All English translations of Vladimir Nabokov's Russian works are Nabokov's own.

**Abbreviations of Works by Vladimir Nabokov**

<i>Ada</i>	<i>Ada</i> (London: Penguin, 1969).
<i>Ann Lolita</i>	<i>The Annotated Lolita</i> (London: Penguin, 2000).
<i>Stories</i>	<i>Collected Stories</i> (London: Penguin, 2010).
<i>Dar</i>	<i>Dar</i> (Moscow: Kharkov Folio, 1997).
<i>Despair</i>	<i>Despair</i> (London: Penguin, 2010).
<i>Eye</i>	<i>The Eye</i> (London: Penguin, 1992).
<i>EO</i>	<i>Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse by Aleksander Pushkin</i> , trans. Vladimir Nabokov (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).
<i>Gift</i>	<i>The Gift</i> (London: Penguin, 2010).
<i>Glory</i>	<i>Glory</i> (London: Penguin, 2006).
<i>IB</i>	<i>Invitation to a Beheading</i> (London: Penguin, 1963).
<i>IT</i>	<i>Istreblenie tiranov: Izbrannaia proza</i> (Minsk: Mastatskaia literature, 1989).
<i>KQK</i>	<i>King, Queen, Knave</i> (London: Panther, 1970).
<i>Lilit'</i>	<i>Poems and Problems</i> (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1972).
<i>LL</i>	<i>Lectures on Literature</i> , ed. Fredson Bowers (London: Harcourt, 1980)
<i>Lolita</i>	<i>Lolita</i> (London: Corgi, 1973).
<i>LATH!</i>	<i>Look at the Harlequins!</i> (London: Penguin, 1975).
<i>Morn</i>	<i>Tragediia gospodina morna: P'esy. Lekstii o drame</i> , ed. Andrei Babikov (St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2008).

<i>Otchaianie</i>	<i>Otchaianie</i> (St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2012).
<i>PF</i>	<i>Pale Fire</i> (London: Penguin, 2011).
<i>PNK</i>	<i>Priglasenie na kazn'</i> (Moscow; Izdatel'stvo pressa, 1994).
<i>PP</i>	<i>Poems and Problems</i> (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1972).
<i>RLSK</i>	<i>The Real Life of Sebastian Knight</i> (London: Editions Poetry, 1945).
<i>SM</i>	<i>Speak Memory: An Autobiography Revisited</i> (London: Penguin, 2000).
<i>SO</i>	<i>Strong Opinions</i> (New York: Vintage, 1990).
<i>TOOL</i>	<i>The Original of Laura (Dying is Fun): A Novel in Fragments</i> (London: Penguin, 2009).
<i>Volshebnik</i>	<i>Volshebnik</i> (St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2012).

## Introduction

Vladimir Nabokov, throughout a literary career spanning six decades, five countries, three languages, two continents and two calendars, was an inveterate reviser, constantly changing, translating and otherwise altering his own works. Indeed, Nabokov himself acknowledged that ‘even the dream I describe to my wife across the breakfast table is only a first draft’ (*SO*, xv). The very process of writing was, for Nabokov, inextricably linked with the act of revision. In his memoirs, for example, Nabokov compares his father’s handwritten texts, which were produced in ‘slanted, beautifully sleek, unbelievably regular hand, almost free of corrections’, against his ‘own mousy hand and messy drafts [...] the massacrous revisions and rewritings, and new revisions, of the very lines in which I am taking two hours to describe a two-minute run of his flawless handwriting’ (*SM*, 139). In the manuscript for *Speak, Memory* this passage was itself the product of numerous deletions, erasures and additions, which the author implemented while engaged with its primary literary creation. In short, these can be seen as the completely necessary revisions through which Nabokov created a perfect description of his process of writing and revision. Appendix 1 shows the multiple deletions, erasures, annotations and strike throughs that formed the basis of Nabokov’s creative process.<sup>1</sup> These types of revision in Nabokov’s manuscripts and typescripts are, outside of the archival collections of the author’s work, largely inaccessible (and thus invisible) to his readership. Moreover, the author never intended them to be part of the reading process, as his disgust at the very idea of sharing his drafts

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<sup>1</sup> New York, New York Public Library, MS *Speak, Memory. Changes. Index Cards*. 21.

indicates, an act he likens to 'passing around samples of one's sputum' (*SO*, 4). Despite his general wish to keep revisions hidden from public view, many of Nabokov's fictional works flaunt their seemingly imperfect and unfinished natures in a deliberate fashion. This thesis, therefore, focuses on revisions as a deliberately visible artistic device of Nabokov's fiction and seeks to construct a conceptual framework within which the revisions that Nabokov makes to his works, and the impact that they have on his oeuvre, can be understood.

Revision pervades and shapes the entirety of Nabokov's fictional, textual worlds. Apart from the continuous deliberate revision of manuscripts before the publication of a work, Nabokov also revises wider themes and recurring motifs within his work, including the theme of the exiled king and the scandalous thematic matter of *Lolita*, paedophilia. Furthermore, a number of revisions are implemented during the process of translation. Characters names are Anglicised and Americanised in translation, for example, Magda Peters becomes Margot Peters and Robert Gorn becomes Axel Rex in *Laughter in the Dark*, the English translation of *Kamera obskura*. Nabokov's autobiography is another example of his practice of constant revision, as it undergoes two distinct processes of translation, with the author adding and refining sections along the way. Originally published in English as *Conclusive Evidence: A Memoir* in 1951, the work underwent significant revisions when Nabokov translated it into Russian as *Drugie berega*, which was published in 1954. A number of these revisions were then incorporated into the final published version of Nabokov's autobiography, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*, which was published in 1967. However, it is important to note that Nabokov's intentions to revise his autobiography did not end with this third volume. Upon returning to

Europe for a retirement of full-time writing, he convened with family members who righted several wrongs of memory, which the author had presented in the 1967 version of his autobiography, itself revised twice over.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Nabokov began revising his work again, for the proposed work, *Speak On, Memory*, which was left unfinished at the time of his death in 1977.<sup>3</sup>

Nabokov's processes of revision have the effect of throwing textual worlds into flux; creating texts which are open and join with the others from their specific corpus they, lead to a body of work which refers endlessly to itself. This thesis examines the different forms and functions of revisions in Nabokov's work and posits that, by considering revision as a both an invisible and deliberately visible device of Nabokov's fiction, this study builds upon the textual criticism which has previously been undertaken with regard to Nabokov's texts and modes of writing. Furthermore, it goes beyond this scholarship by identifying the discernible ways in which Nabokov revises his works and oeuvre. Instead of focusing simply on tracking or highlighting revisions, or identifying those instances where the author alters an image, character or plot in translation, this thesis argues that Nabokov uses different tracks of self-conscious and deliberately visible revisions to create links between individual, initially autonomous texts, in order to create a cohesive, self-reflexive body of work, or what could be called a 'supertext'. This cohesive textual entity is formed as a result of the destabilisation of individual texts caused by Nabokov's

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Grayson notes that some chapters of the autobiography, having appeared as autonomous essays prior to being utilised by Nabokov for his life writing, undergo a further round of revision. For example, 'Mademoiselle O', which was originally written on French, appears in its fourth public incarnation in *Speak, Memory* (Jane Grayson, *Nabokov Translated: A Comparison of Nabokov's Russian and English Prose* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 140).

<sup>3</sup> Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992), p. 147 - 148.



revisions. When taken together, these individual texts form an expansive web of sense, through which the reader is able to see and access all of Nabokov's works simultaneously. Furthermore, this thesis seeks to identify the specific types of revision that Nabokov utilises in order to create his individual texts as well as the resulting cohesive oeuvre, which is synchronously created when the author's multiple modes of revision come together. It examines the effect that each strand of revision has on the text it is a part of, as well as its contribution towards the construction of the author's self-reflexive 'supertext'. Furthermore, it considers the implications this has for how Nabokov's works are authored, read and constructed by negotiations between author and reader. Finally, this thesis examines the resulting textual form of the cohesive oeuvre and the implications that this has for Nabokov's works, as well as literary studies in a wider sense. It could certainly be argued that there are other artists, literary or otherwise, whose similar desire to create a cohesive body of work, leads to the creation of a 'supertext'. A similarly connected oeuvre can be seen in the work of, for example, James Joyce, who uses the semi-autobiographical character of Stephen Dedalus in various forms throughout his short yet impactful oeuvre to explore central themes of his art. Joyce uses this character in various iterations to explore ideas related to, for example, national identity and exile, and, as Stephen advances in life and stature, so do the understandings and representations of the thematic material. This creates a tightly-wound and self-referential body of work, which could conceivably be termed a 'supertext'. Similarly, the auteur David Lynch could be said to create a 'supertext' with his use of transmedia storytelling. His oeuvre of work also contains recurrent characters and themes, which are used across modes and autonomous series

and films to complete otherwise fragmented narratives. This results in a highly networked and connected oeuvre, or a supertext. However, while Joyce's 'supertext' could be said to be created through strategic use of recurrent characters and themes and Lynch's through sophisticated and subtle use of the transmedia form of storytelling, Nabokov's "supertext is uniquely brought into existence by a complex and sophisticated network of visible revisions, which are implemented not simply to develop and improve his fiction, but as actual devices of his fiction.

Thus, revision in this study is approached as a device through which Nabokov creates several versions of each of his texts via a complex matrix of readings that the author invites through the very processes of revision that he implements in his works. This invitation causes the original texts, from which the subsequent revised texts are generated, to be altered yet not negated. For example, in terms of works that are visibly revised, which is the primary focus of this thesis, while Nabokov's oeuvre is constituted of seventeen full-length works of prose fiction, there are twenty-eight distinct works when the translations from Russian to English are included (and English to Russian in the case of *Lolita*). This number then increases to thirty-one when the autobiographical works are included. Furthermore, Nabokov tangibly and deliberately revises elements of certain key works again and again, making visible the process and results. For example, the character and thematic material which form *Lolita* appears throughout his oeuvre, thus increasing exponentially the number of versions of *Lolita* herself. In each version, however, the originals stand alongside the subsequent, revised versions of the character of *Lolita*, contributing to Nabokov's expansive, revisionary corpus; while the subsequent versions of his

work, whether a treatment of the central thematic material of *Lolita* or the character of Lolita, for instance, have an effect on the way both predecessor and successor are read. Revision, therefore, has the dual effect of destabilising Nabokov's individual works as well as his corpus overall, creating works and, by extension, a body of work that is purposefully incomplete. This thesis furthermore examines the specific processes of revision that Nabokov uses and examines their relationships, both with each other, the texts that they are attached to, and the multiple resultant readings, authorial figures and versions of the text they produce. In this way, Nabokov's texts, and their multiple variants, join together to create a 'supertext' that is at all times self-reflexive and, within which, all components are connected and interlinked. The resultant textual form is a fully cohesive oeuvre, or 'supertext', which is constituted of every part of Nabokov's corpus at all times: akin to a Möbius strip, it refers endlessly to itself.

The 'supertext' is, therefore, a reading of an oeuvre in which the reader is able to access and see all component parts of the oeuvre at once. Thematic and other links become fluidly and implicitly connected to one another without the requirement of explicit authorial self-reference. As a result, it could be argued that the 'supertext' transcends the oeuvre itself, as it creates an immediate visual representation of the oeuvre's textual form. This concept of the supertext thus differs from the natural, chronological development of, for example, thematic matter that can be observed in most, if not all, authors' corpuses. While it could be reasonably expected that any author, whose career spanned the length of Nabokov's own, would develop certain central principles of his work, the supertext does not, and cannot, represent this linear approach

to artistic design and development. The supertext is a non-temporally linear reading of an oeuvre and, as such, does not utilise incremental development and exploration of central matter in its construction. Instead, while it could certainly be argued that Nabokov treats and approaches certain aspects of his work in different ways throughout his oeuvre, it would be simplistic to claim that Nabokov was writing one and the same work throughout his career. The supertext assimilates all of the approaches the author takes to certain key material and constructs a highly connected and cohesive narrative matrix through which all parts of his works can be seen and understood at once. This is made possible by the consistency and integrity present in Nabokov's work, and also by the retrospective patterning and organisation done by the author. This thesis therefore argues that revision in Nabokov's work is a complex, multi-faceted concept, which operates at multiple levels of both the narrative and the text via the pluralistic and self-referential reading processes it invites.

To begin with, at the most basic level, a fundamental distinction must be drawn between invisible and visible revisions. While invisible revision can be characterised as a process of rewriting the text that the author undertakes, usually at manuscript level, which ordinarily remains concealed from the reader, visible revisions are the traces left deliberately behind to be discovered and used by the reader in the process of reading, and re-reading, the text. Invisible revisions are made at manuscript level and are finalised in the period of time prior to the text's publication. As such, they are intrinsic to the fabric of the text and are an integral part of the creative process of writing literary texts. Invisible revision may result in the production of multiple manuscripts, which are created as a by-product of the processes of editing, altering and gilding that result in a

finished text. In the critical literature thus far, invisible revisions have been traced in several studies, in particular in relation to Nabokov's unpublished works. For example, Jane Grayson, having examined the manuscripts of Nabokov's *Dar*, held at the Library of Congress, identifies a 'projected continuation' of the project into *Dar II*, in which Fyodor loses Zina.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Brian Boyd writes that this particular manuscript allows a 'rare glance at Nabokov's creative processes, at all the continuities, disruptions, redirections, and reappropriations normally disguised by the self-containedness and the apparent inevitability of the finished works'.<sup>5</sup> This process of revision made within the unfinished manuscript of *Dar II* focuses on Nabokov's modes of textual construction and, in this way, it could be said to have some parallels with those undertaken by Nabokov's contemporaries in Soviet Russia. Hermann Ermolaev notes that Soviet authors gained a 'modicum of independence' during the Khrushchev era when the policies surrounding censorship were relaxed for the first time since the Revolution.<sup>6</sup> During this period, the governmental 'censorial attitude' was relaxed, and as a result, the role of the editor was increased.<sup>7</sup> In practical terms, this meant that some writers were allowed to edit their own works in preparation for publication.<sup>8</sup> Some writers took this opportunity to reinstate sections of earlier works that had previously been cut, or to remove edits that had been enforced on to their novels during earlier periods of censorship. These revisionary processes amount to self-censorship

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<sup>4</sup> See Jane Grayson, 'Washington's Gift: Materials Pertaining to Nabokov's Gift in the Library of Congress', *Nabokov Studies*, 1 (1994), 21 - 67.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Hermann Ermolaev, 'Censorship in 1953 - 1964 The Unstable Thaw' in *Censorship in Soviet Literature* (Maryland: Rowman & Littleman, 1997), pp. 141 - 179, 179.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 145.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 146.

and perform a necessary function in the preparation of works for publication.

While Nabokov's invisible revisions seek to create the illusion of immediate and perfect texts, they do have some connections to the editorial revisions

undertaken as a condition of publication by his peers in the Soviet Union.

Nabokov was outspokenly disdainful of policies of censorship and was open about his rejection of an offer to return to Russia.<sup>9</sup> However, while the

motivating factors for his invisible revisions are vastly different from those of his contemporaries, both parties alter their works in such a way as to conceal the original version against which the revisions are made. As such, Dmitri

Likhachev argues for a compositional focus to literary criticism in his seminal

work, *Tekstologiya*. This textological approach, first introduced in 1928 by Boris

Tomashevskii, takes a highly pragmatic and somewhat philological approach to textual criticism. It assumes that the text is an autonomous 'monument', which is written, edited and set by an author.<sup>10</sup> This allows for the foregrounding of the

aesthetic qualities of the text and focuses on the networks of decisions, as well

as the corresponding results they have on the text, which are made by authors

as they write. While Ermolaev considers the ways in which authors edited their works in preparation for publication under the Soviet regime, Likhachev is

concerned with the ways in which authors perform editorial roles while creating their works at a compositional level. In this way, Likhachev's approach, coming

before the completion of the artistic work, also has an affinity with Nabokov's

invisible revisions, which are implemented at manuscript level. Ermolaev's

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<sup>9</sup> Nabokov referred to the 'agent from Bolshevik Russia' who met with him in Berlin as 'my wretched seducer' and was disdainful of the offer made to write freely 'on any of the many themes Soviet Russia bountifully allows a writer to use' (*SO*, 98).

<sup>10</sup> Dmitri Likhachev, 'Issledovanie teksta v odnom spiske', *Tekstologiya* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1983), 150 - 174, p. 152.

notion of self-censorship, also undertaken at manuscript level, have practical motivating factors, while Likhachev's are related much more closely to artistic creation rather than retrospective editing and preparation for publication.

Maxim Shrayer has traced Nabokov's invisible revisions to his short stories, by comparing the different manuscript drafts against their published versions, in order to show the ways in which Nabokov develops his works across and between drafts, while shaping them into a perfected, finished public product.<sup>11</sup> Shrayer uses Nabokov's own differentiation between 'vostorg' and 'vdokhnovenie' to draw a distinction between the two tracks of writing, the initial inspiration phase and the subsequent, more developmental stage (*LL*, 1980, 377 - 378).<sup>12</sup> Shrayer moreover hypothesises that the changes Nabokov implements between drafts and translations represents 'a discrete, post-inspirational stage of editing and revising', identifying two distinct areas in which Nabokov implements these revisions, the first of which is in the language and style of his stories.<sup>13</sup> This distinct area of implementation extends to the 'syntax and composition' of the story and is most generally realised by Nabokov finding the 'perfect ordering of words' for his subsequent drafts.<sup>14</sup> The second specific area which Shrayer identifies as a discrete stage of revision in Nabokov's works is in the drastic alteration of 'the meaning of the story', concluding that 'once a first draft of a story has been penned down, the rest of the work – linguistic revision and merciless cutting – was aimed at achieving an absolute perfection

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<sup>11</sup> See Maxim D. Shrayer, *The World of Nabokov's Stories* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> The year in brackets refers to the year of the work's initial publication. Hereafter, the year of publication for each of Vladimir Nabokov's works will be given within the first in-text citation.

<sup>13</sup> Maxim D. Shrayer, 'Beyond Rapture and Recapture' in *Russian Review*, 58 / 4 (1999), 548 - 564, p. 550.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 554; p. 555.

of verbal art'.<sup>15</sup>

Nabokov's constant impulse to revise together with his dislike of sharing his revisions makes him a thoroughly 'Modernist literary artist' in the sense that Hannah Sullivan describes in her recent study of Modernist writers and revision.<sup>16</sup> Sullivan notes that Modernists had a tendency to compose multiple drafts of their works, many of which differed greatly from the eventual published versions. She argues that 'writers in the Modernist period revised more than their predecessors in several senses: more frequently, at more points in the lifespan of the text, more structurally and experimentally (rather than through lexical substitution alone), and more self-consciously, often leaving traces of the revision in the final product'.<sup>17</sup> Sullivan suggests that this element of literary production grew in prominence in the Modernist era in direct relation to the development of a more economical printing process.<sup>18</sup> Her idea, that this urge, which results in 'multiple reseeing and endless revision' in the works of such prominent Modernist writers as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Henry James, is also easily applicable to Nabokov.<sup>19</sup> In particular, the Modernist reaction against the Romantics 'disdain for second thoughts' can be seen in Nabokov's insistence on the slow and careful processes of revision which underlie the creation of his works. Moreover, in addition to the paradigm between Romantic and Modernist authorial functions, there is also within Nabokov's fiction an irresolvable tension between Modernist and Postmodernist elements. Brian McHale writes that the Modernist author, despite the experimental, and often

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 551; p. 563.

<sup>16</sup> Hannah Sullivan, *The Work of Revision* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 267.



challenging, unsatisfactory nature of his fiction, retains an authorial role that supports his control over the text by 'invisibly exercising his freedom to create worlds'.<sup>20</sup> The postmodernist author, on the other hand, makes visible this freedom to invisibly create and foregrounds himself in his work. This self-reflexive impulse creates the problem of fictional remove, as 'the artist represented in the act of creation or destruction is himself inevitably a fiction'.<sup>21</sup> However, this is only a temporary setback in the quest for authorial supremacy, as 'the *real* artist always occupies an ontological level superior to that of his projected fictional self, and [is] therefore doubly superior to the fictional world'.<sup>22</sup> While postmodern authors regain the control they lose by placing fictional selves into their works through their twice (or more) removed real selves, the *real* Nabokov is skillfully and obsessively concealed behind the multiple authorial roles generated by revision's readings. Nabokov makes a transition from Modernist fiction to Postmodernist fiction in his mid-American period bookended by the celebrated *Lolita* and the sprawling *Ada*. While Humbert belongs 'to the tradition of radically unreliable modernist narrators', who are posited within the text in relation to a decentred, albeit present, author, Kinbote extends upon Humbert's unreliability to create a higher level of epistemological uncertainty.<sup>23</sup> In this way, *Pale Fire* tests the limits of Modernism and acts as a transitional text in Nabokov's move towards Postmodernism. It suggests the subsequent progression towards absolute uncertainty, which is characteristic in his proceeding works, most notably *Ada*. Therefore, Nabokov's works of this period possess a certain fluidity and movement between the characteristics of

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<sup>20</sup> Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

each period.

Moreover, perhaps the most interesting and pertinent part of Sullivan's work is the conclusion she draws that revision is primarily a Modern concern, noting that the majority of recent developments in both digital media and publication processes causes a dearth (and, even, the death) of revision. She claims that 'by "writing over" yesterday's words with today's, we are destroying yesterday's version; when we write in Microsoft Word we write in a continual textual present'.<sup>24</sup> Sullivan sees this action of textual destruction as resulting in a new landscape of literary creation, one that does not explicitly include or involve revision in any sense. Primarily, it seems that revision, if it exists at all, becomes an invisible and untraceable process; a process which may indeed have been welcomed by Nabokov, who believed that, although revision is an integral part of the creative process, revisions themselves should remain concealed. Even when Nabokov conceded and allowed a number of his manuscripts to be archived in the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress for tax reasons, Nabokov held back most parts of the manuscripts of his two canonised texts, *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, he additionally erased certain notes, while self-consciously leaving traces of these erasures deliberately visible. This process has immediate parallels with Derrida's utilisation of Heidegger's concept of 'sous rature'.<sup>26</sup> While Nabokov places certain words, phrases or passages under erasure, they are retained within the text and

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<sup>24</sup> Sullivan, *Work of Revision*, p. 268.

<sup>25</sup> Boyd, *The American Years*, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1997), p. 60.

represent something that is both 'inadequate yet necessary'.<sup>27</sup> Appendix 2

shows a circled note, originally written in pencil, in which the text of the note has been rubbed out.<sup>28</sup> However, the circling remains, along with a faint trace of the text and a question mark. This ghostly note could have been completely erased, removed from the collection of manuscripts or, indeed, destroyed entirely. The erasure, however, presents a process and result of Nabokov's revision, in which the original (here, the note) is altered in some way, but not completely effaced by the act of revision it has undergone.<sup>29</sup> This results in a version of the original, which is informed by the revision (here, erasure) that it yields to. This creates a neat parallel for another category of revision, developmental revision, which can be uncovered and made visible by close and careful reading of Nabokov's texts. This type of revision represents the development of Nabokov as an artist, as well as the material that is central to his oeuvre. Developmental revision is neither invisible nor a deliberately visible device of fiction, and thus represents a category of revision which exists between the parameters set for the purpose of this thesis. It fundamentally represents an essential part of Nabokov's creative processes and it is neither foregrounded to, nor concealed from, the reader. It represents the evolutionary progression of certain central facets of Nabokov's work and can be traced across works.

The contension between Nabokov's practice of constant revision and his

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<sup>27</sup> Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> New York, New York Public Library, Album 10, p. 34 (verso): Posviashchenie k *Tragediia Gospodina Morna*.

<sup>29</sup> This process corresponds directly to Derrida's notion of erasure, in which the cancelled portion remains, altered yet present, within the text. Linda Hutcheon argues in favour of this process, by stating that 'the past as referent is not bracketed or effaced [...] it is incorporated and modified, given new and different life and meaning' (Linda Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 24).

impulse to conceal and reveal the actual revisions he makes to his works, as signs of imperfection, also shapes the other functions of self-conscious revisions in Nabokov's work. The concept of visible revision is particularly pertinent to Nabokov's works as the author repeatedly uses multiple processes of revision within his individual works, which he invites his readers to discover. These types of revision leave deliberate, visible traces within his texts. Deliberately visible revisions can be divided into three distinct categories, the fictional, the transtextual and the extratextual. Firstly, fictional revisions are primarily devices of the inner fictive world. They are implemented within the text at narrative level and are assigned by Nabokov as the work of an author-character.<sup>30</sup> The primary function of the fictional revision category is to highlight the unreliability of Nabokov's author-character figures, who use revision as a mode of gaining control of the fictional world of which they are part, a process that inevitably fails. For example, when Hermann Karlovich revises his description of his mother at the beginning of *Otchaianie*, the original description of her remains within the text alongside the corrected, accurate account as a reminder of the inconsistency which marks his narrative. As a sign of artistic imperfection, Nabokov leaves Hermann's revision in the text, undermining the author-character's claim to narrative control. The fictional revisions visible within

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<sup>30</sup> Hermann's unreliable narration creates fiction that is, in its essence, metafictional. This self-conscious form, first characterised by William Gass as a genre 'in which forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed' (William Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1970), p. 25), while Brian McHale defines it as having the feature of textual 'nesting or embedding, as in a set of Chinese boxes or Russian babushka dolls' (Brian McHale, 'Chinese Box Worlds' in *Postmodernist Fiction* (London, Routledge, 1987) 112 -132, p. 112). In conjunction with this, Robert Alter argues that this heightened awareness of fiction as fiction is further exacerbated by 'Nabokov's intensified awareness ... of artifice and literary history [which] has translated itself into an oeuvre of an abundance and variety scarcely equalled among self-conscious novelists' (Robert Alter, 'Nabokov's Game of worlds' in *Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 180 - 217, p. 181).

his novels seem then to reinforce Nabokov's authority over the entire text.

The second category of visible revision is traceable between and across Nabokov's texts and will be referred to as transtextual revision. This type of revision is distinguishable from the organic, artistic development of a theme in Nabokov's work by its function as a deliberately visible device, which retrospectively suggests an overall plan for artistic revision. Additionally, transtextual revisions are deliberate devices of Nabokov's fiction, left visibly and purposefully within texts, through which seminal incarnations of elements of his texts are subsequently referred to. While, for example, the character of Lolita has several predecessors in Russian language texts, their connection to the tragic heroine of Nabokov's scandalous 1955 text is made stronger and more vivid in their translations into English. In this way, Nabokov uses transtextual revisions both to connect his early Russian language output more tightly to his later English language works, which, in turn, allows him to 'cultivate the role of the haughty writer in the public persona of VN'.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, these subsequent revisions allow the author to emphasise the importance of central themes to his corpus, which lead to the creation of *Lolita* as a major, focal text of his oeuvre. The importance of *Lolita* is further enhanced when Nabokov continues to implement transtextual revisions to the *Lolita* theme in subsequent texts, such as *Look at the Harlequins!* and *The Original of Laura*. These subsequent revisions, therefore, act as self-reflexive markers which point back to Nabokov's most famous literary achievement.

Finally, the third category of revision, which will be termed extratextual revision, takes the form of authorial intrusions into completed, individual texts

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<sup>31</sup> Siggy Frank, *Nabokov's Theatrical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 190.

from outwith the internal, fictional worlds of those texts. Nabokov uses this track of revision, which is impressed onto the text from an external vantage point, to comment on his individual literary texts using, for example, forewords or interviews, in order to correct and align the reading(s) of those texts.<sup>32</sup> These intrusions usually appear (often several years) after the publication of the text that is being revised. For example, Nabokov comments in an interview from his collection, *Strong Opinions*, that Kinbote committed suicide after *Pale Fire*'s textual end. This 'authorial trespassing', as Michael Wood has termed these types of authorial interventions, affects subsequent readings of *Pale Fire* and intrudes authorially onto the reading that is generated in conjunction with it.<sup>33</sup>

Nabokov's fictional, transtextual and extratextual, revisions rely on different levels of readings in order to become visible.<sup>34</sup> While the formation of these reading functions are underpinned by reader response theory, they focus on the conception of the reading that is produced by a reader, real or hypothesised, rather than the figure responsible for its production. This approach emphasises process rather than the agent of that process, as these readings are produced in conjunction with the reading and authorial roles. Firstly, surface readings, which result from immersion in the fictional world, elucidate fictional revisions. The author-character creates a baseline narrative, which is constantly being revised. A surface reading identifies these revisions

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<sup>32</sup> While the external point from which revision is implemented appears to be at odds with Derrida's assertion that 'there is nothing outside text' (il n'y a pas de hors-texte), the textual form of the 'supertext', which forms as a result of extratextual revision, in fact supports this notion of textuality. As individual texts are detabillised and join together to form a fully connected body of work, Derrida's assertion holds true for the 'supertext'.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Wood, *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p. 186.

and thus creates a version of the text which acknowledges and utilises them.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, in this reading process, the text is constructed contemporaneously with its reading. The second reading process, re-reading is one that is undertaken with a full knowledge of all of Nabokov's works.<sup>36</sup> As a result, this enables non-chronological links and connections to be made between Nabokov's texts. This process of re-reading is shaped by an implicit awareness not only of the complex and manifold reading processes which operate within the text, but also of the rest of the texts in Nabokov's oeuvre, a knowledge and understanding of which are essential for the creation of the fullest form of the text. In this way, the specific properties of transtextual revisions can only be recognised through the process of re-reading. This ideal reading, and its creation of an ideal text, is (while in reality, never attained) informed by deep, intimate knowledge of the individual text as well as the rest of Nabokov's work. It is through this process that the individual ideal texts of, for example, *Lolita*, become inexorably linked to both the texts that precede and succeed the novel. Through re-reading, *Lolita* can potentially become a fuller and more reflexive text, which is located at a pivotal and central point within Nabokov's corpus. By planting references to *Lolita* in subsequent works, Nabokov posits his most notorious novel as the major work in his corpus, which is intrinsically connected

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<sup>35</sup> Rabinowitz's idea of the 'authorial audience' (Peter J. Rabinowitz, 'Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences', *Critical Inquiry*, 4 / 1 (1977), 121 - 141, p. 126), which is referred to with some variations as the 'implied reader' by Iser (Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns in Communication from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 14) and the 'model reader' by Eco (Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 3), forms the basis of this reading process. It can most simply be identified as that audience which is tacitly referred to as receiving the text by the text itself.

<sup>36</sup> Barthes conception of the reader as a 'producer' (Roland Barthes, *S / Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 4) and Booth's idea of the reader as 'co-producer' (Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 429) underlie the concept of surface reading.

to the rest of the textual components of his oeuvre.

The most complex reading process, authorial reading, is required to recognise the extratextual revisions that Nabokov implements to his works.<sup>37</sup> Extratextual revisions are the author's playful response to his readers, all of whom, according to Nabokov himself, seem to constantly fall short of attaining the status of the ideal reader (for Nabokov, the re-reader), that is a reader whose reading coincides neatly with Nabokov's own and is based on an intimate knowledge of all of Nabokov's work. In his 'Good Readers and Good Writers', Nabokov explores this relationship between author and reader by presenting thus a synchronous relationship between author and reader, each of whom has equally important corresponding roles:

The writer is the first man to map [the world] out and to name the natural objects it contains. Those berries are edible. That speckled creature that bolted across my path might be tamed. That lake between those trees will be called Lake Opal or, more artistically, Dishwater Lake. That mist is a mountain – and that mountain must be conquered. Up a trackless slope climbs the master artist, and at the top, on a windy ridge, whom do you think he meets? The panting and happy reader, and then they spontaneously embrace and are linked forever if the book lasts forever (LL, 3).

With extratextual revisions, Nabokov intrudes upon his earlier texts externally from the lofty vantage point of his post-*Lolita* success, via what his biographer, Brian Boyd, terms his 'public prose'.<sup>38</sup> It is argued here that these intrusions not only invite a specific reading of the text, but that they aim to create a complex interrelated entity, that is, a web of sense, of all of Nabokov's works. This authorial reading, which the reader can only ever intuit and approximate,

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<sup>37</sup> Underpinning this conception of reading is a modification of Wayne C. Booth's 'career-author', or, rather, what Booth later termed the 'implied super-author' (Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 431; Edward Bloom, Wayne Booth and Wolfgang Iser, 'In Defence of Authors and Readers', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 11 / 1 (1977), 5 - 25, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> Boyd, *American Years*, p. 601.



creates a perception of the text not only as an individual reading experience but as an integral part of a larger, cohesive body of work, that is, the 'supertext'. It relies on an easy and extensive knowledge of both Nabokov's individual texts and the ways in which they relate to each other and, as such, utilises a cumulative understanding of the author's works.

Overall, these reading processes have a cumulative effect, which firstly undermine author-characters in order to reinforce Nabokov's authorial control, retrospectively creating design and pattern where there was none and seek to control readings in an attempt to generate the ideal reading (re-reading) in which all referents belong to Nabokov and his works. This creates a dual phenomenon of revision. Firstly, Nabokov's texts, individually, are affected and altered by each track of deliberate and visible revision, for example, the process of fictional revision undermines the author-character in order to reinforce Nabokov's authorial role on (and in) the text. Secondly, the three specific and distinct tracks of revision (fictional, transtextual and extratextual) have an aggregative affect on each text, altering them in different ways all at once. This causes the texts to become open and unstable, which leads them to join together to form the 'supertext', that is, a fully cohesive and connected body of work made up of Nabokov's individual texts. In this way, then, revision operates at both a microlevel and a macrolevel in Nabokov's works, altering the individual text at microlevel and the 'supertext' at macrolevel. In conjunction with this, the different types of revision also demand and indeed generate, specific, corresponding readings (respectively, surface reading, re-reading and authorial reading) and have an impact on the creation and perception of an ultimately omnipotent authorial persona, which underpins each reading, and the

perception of both the individual text and the 'supertext'.

There is a danger, however, to this approach in that the literary critic loses focus on the object of study, Nabokov and his works. That art and artifice is at the heart of Nabokov's works has been a commonplace of Nabokov studies since Khodasevich characterised the author's work thus in 1937.<sup>39</sup> This extends to Nabokov's construction of himself as an omniscient author figure. Eric Naiman examines Nabokov's overpowering desire for absolute authorial control and characterises the author as being 'famously focused on the control of every word in a highly organised aesthetic structure'.<sup>40</sup> Naiman considers the dangers of scholars following or bending to the rules of reading set out by Nabokov when appraising his texts and identifies an essential tension which is omnipresent in Nabokov's works: 'the excitement of getting Nabokov right is shadowed by an interpretative panic that is part of the preprogrammed experience of mastering and being mastered by his texts'.<sup>41</sup> Referring to the quiz Nabokov lays out in 'Good Readers and Good Writers', Naiman examines the 'certain uneasiness' felt by the reader of Nabokov upon getting the answers right and responding to a 'pedagogic desire' to please the author.<sup>42</sup> Naiman further identifies the tension created from the 'fear of being a bad reader, of not measuring up to the master's high expectations' as 'a characteristic feature of Nabokov Studies'.<sup>43</sup> Positing that the question that guides many readings of his works is, 'Have I met the Master's expectations?', Naiman stresses the

<sup>39</sup> Vladislav Khodasevich, 'On Sirin', *Vozrozhdenie*, in Norman Page, ed., *Nabokov: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1982), pp. 61 - 64, p. 61.

<sup>40</sup> Eric Naiman, 'Hermophobia (On Sexual Orientation and Reading Nabokov)', *Representations*, 101 / 1 (2008), 116 - 143, p. 117.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

importance of not following ‘the roadmap charted by Nabokov’s texts’.<sup>44</sup>

However, this is at odds with the anxiety that ‘Nabokov’s oeuvre works incessantly to produce’ and which seeks to control readings of his works both individually and as a whole.<sup>45</sup> This is caused by readers who are anxious not to be fooled, and thus ‘Nabokov’s work obsessively figures the rapport between author and reader’, the latter of whom tends to fear being fooled like so many of Nabokov’s pathetic characters (Luzhin, Albinus, Pnin, to name but a few).<sup>46</sup>

Naiman identifies Nabokov’s unusually strong desire for authorial control, which is surprisingly often accommodated by some critics. Citing the example of the commemorative edition of *TriQuarterly* commissioned to celebrate the author’s seventieth birthday, which allowed Nabokov to respond to each of the articles written about him and his works, Naiman writes that ‘this gesture of the author speaking after his critics is a temporal inversion of the usual order of things, but it is entirely in keeping with Nabokov’s effort to inscribe good and bad readers into his texts, to preempt their posteriority, so that the author, not the commentator, always has the last word’.<sup>47</sup> This model of authorial control is particularly relevant to Nabokov’s conceptions of revision, particularly the most self-conscious, visibly deliberate forms, transtextual and extratextual revision. Naiman notes that ‘Nabokov’s strangeness entails an aura of anxiety, of often disquieting supervision, of being observed, even stalked by the author’.<sup>48</sup> This is enacted by Nabokov, ‘who fused the roles of critic, teacher, and artist so as to set intoxicating and terrifying standards for those who propose to write about

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 120; p.123.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p.130.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 131.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

him'.<sup>49</sup> However, it is essential, both to this study and Nabokov Studies more generally, to approach Nabokov's texts with an impartial, critical approach. Nabokov is a deliberately elusive author, who simultaneously reveals and conceals facts and insights about himself and his works, in order to perform literary sleight of hand. This study seeks to peel back the layers of deception and projection in order to identify the prevailing processes of revision through which Nabokov creates a self-reflexive oeuvre, and examine the corresponding reading, writing and textual roles demanded of them.

A great amount of Nabokov scholarship has focused on the multifarious aspects of authorship present in Nabokov's works. Alexander Dolinin examines the authorial roles that Nabokov constructed for himself at different stages (and, indeed, languages) in his career and posits that there is a 'jocular split' between Nabokov and Sirin, first identified in Nabokov's memoir, *Conclusive Evidence*. Dolinin characterises this process by noting that Nabokov shed 'the created persona and public image of the writer Sirin. His coming to America was hence not a continuation of the European exile, a mere geographical transference, but, so to say, the expatriation of the second order'.<sup>50</sup> Dolinin refers to Nabokov's own expressions of pain and loss at losing his 'infinitely rich and docile Russian tongue' (SO, 15) and argues that, in response to this, Nabokov made great efforts to present his Russian works as juvenilia, 'presenting his earlier writings as inferior "outlines" or "dress rehearsals" for his English masterpieces'.<sup>51</sup> He maintains the 'artistic inferiority' of his Russian works, Dolinin argues, and constantly compares his early works unfavourably against his more recent,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 135.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander Dolinin, 'Nabokov as a Russian Writer' in Julian W. Connolly (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 49 - 64, p. 50.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

English language output.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the 'natural idiom' of Russian is replaced in English, whether in translations or original works, with highly-patterned wordplay, which overall creates an increasingly reflexive and playful oeuvre. In this way, Nabokov's dismissal of Sirin and his subsequent creation of 'an omnipotent and omniscient Master who condescendingly albeit fondly reviewed and revised his flawed albeit talented juvenilia' encourages a number of aspects of Nabokov's works which require his revisionary practices and processes.<sup>53</sup> Dolinin examines the replacement of the loaded Russian name, Porokhovshchikov, who represents a quasi-Nabokovian figure in *Korol', dama, valet*, with the anagrammatic and much more self-referential Vivian Badlook and Blavdak Vinimori in the English translation, *King, Queen, Knave*. Furthermore, he parodies and caricatures any references to Russian literature in his works in order to downplay both his Russian identity (he was, by this time, after all, 'As American as April in Arizona' (*SO*, 98)) and origins.<sup>54</sup> In this way, Nabokov suppresses his 'vital literary origins' and creates distance between his incarnation as Nabokov and his previous identity as Sirin.<sup>55</sup> Dolinin continues by arguing that Nabokov's celebrated English is, in fact, 'semi-foreign', a quality which encouraged his linguistic play, as well as the revisions that he undertook to his Russian texts in order to smooth their transitions to English in translation.<sup>56</sup>

Conversely to Dolinin, Neil Cornwell argues that, while there are clear distinctions between Nabokov's authorial identities in the two main languages in

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

which he wrote, he ultimately reconciles these in order to become the English author, Nabokov. He characterises the author's Russian career as V. Sirin as 'meteoric' and his 'second and, in world terms, rather more explosive career' in English as Vladimir Nabokov, arguing that, ultimately, these stages are negotiated and bridged.<sup>57</sup> Cornwell notes that Nabokov had unusually good English and stresses the author's trilingualism, noting that he read French and Russian (and not English) literature at Cambridge after fleeing Revolutionary Russia.<sup>58</sup> He then focuses on Nabokov's career and output of the thirties, distinguishing his works by the three languages that he was, at the time, working in. This situation, brought about by 'the intervention of history', created distinct offshoots in Nabokov's works.<sup>59</sup> Firstly, he produced in Russian his own masterpiece of Russian literature, *Dar*, wrote *Lolita's* precursor, *Volshebnik*, and began (but did not finish) *Solus Rex*. In French he wrote 'Mademoiselle O', an essay with a French subject (his French governess) and Russian setting, and 'Pouchkine ou le vrai et le vraisemblable', an essay commemorating the centenary of Pushkin's death. Here, while the language Nabokov uses is French, the subject is Russian. Finally, Nabokov produced *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* in English during this period. This novel, with Russian and English characters, set primarily in France, deals with linguistic, spatial and temporal flux and represents a turning point in Nabokov's corpus, as the first full length work in the language the author would become most celebrated for writing in. In this way, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is a 'key transitional text', which brings together all of Nabokov's influences and subject matter of the

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<sup>57</sup> Neil Cornwell, 'From Sirin to Nabokov: the transition to English' in *The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov*, ed. by Connolly, pp. 151 - 169, p. 151.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

thirties and points forwards to his most critically praised works, *Lolita* (foreshadowed in both *Dar* and *Volshebnik*) and *Pale Fire* (with origins in the unfinished *Solus Rex* and *Dar*).<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Cornwell also notes that Nabokov undertook two translations during this period, which laid the groundwork for the translation project he would undertake following *Lolita*. The texts that he translates, *Kamera obskura* and *Otchaianie*, result in major reworkings and create a blueprint for the disparity between his theories and practices of both translation and self-translation. Using this breadth of literary work and production that he undertook in the thirties, Nabokov is able to construct an authorial identity for himself in English, in which he cherry picks from his multiple, pre-existing authorial roles in order to create Vladimir Nabokov, and leave V. Sirin behind. However, Cornwell concludes that, while Sirin is replaced with Nabokov, the thirties represent a transitionary point for an author whose two distinct careers would 'ultimately rejoin as one'.<sup>61</sup>

These critics initially share common ground, but Cornwell argues for a reconciliation of Nabokov's authorial selves after the thirties, while Dolinin asserts that these personas remained distinct throughout Nabokov's career. Dolinin's work seemingly counters the notion of a self-reflexive body of work, which leads to his creation of a fully linked and connected oeuvre as a mature author, while Cornwell's seems to support it. However, there are distinctions to be made between both critics and the current study. This thesis will argue that Nabokov uses both of the categorisations set out by Dolinin in order to create a distinct, aloof persona of the master author, Nabokov. However, crucially, this thesis moves one step beyond Dolinin's conception of Nabokov's authorship

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 153.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 166.

and argues that he utilises both the authorial identity of the Russian writer, V. Sirin, and that of the English author Vladimir Nabokov, to supercede both and oversee the construction of a cohesive oeuvre, which leads, ultimately, to the construction of the 'supertext'. This study will use Dolinin's identification of Nabokov's dual processes of authorial construction and ties them to his use of two, distinct writing languages. However, this thesis will consider the means through which Nabokov creates, and then revises, not only his works, but his authorial personas. It is concerned with the way that Nabokov uses revision to construct individual texts, an oeuvre, a 'supertext' and, ultimately, the corresponding omnipotent author who oversees it all. This concept is explored by Sergey Davydov in his essay on *Despair*. Davydov notes that, 'for Nabokov the only real number is one' and draws parallels between Nabokov's construction of Sirin and his characterisation of the mad and murderous Hermann.<sup>62</sup> This notion of the author God is picked up by Julian Connolly, who, also in conjunction with *Despair*, characterises the authorial figure that Nabokov purports to be as a 'God-Nabokov', who oversees all parts of the text at once.<sup>63</sup> This thesis will use these conceptions of Nabokov as an omnipotent author to argue that Nabokov creates a fully cohesive oeuvre, the 'supertext', as well as the corresponding God-like authorial figure who maintains control over the entire connected corpus.

Jacqueline Hamrit presents an authorial figure who is at once present

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<sup>62</sup> Sergey Davydov, 'Despair', in Vladimir E. Alexandrov, *The Garland Companion to Nabokov* (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 88 – 99, p. 96.

<sup>63</sup> Julian Connolly, 'The function of literary allusion in Nabokov's *Despair*', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 26 / 3 (1982), 302 – 313, p. 303.



and absent within the text in an examination of Nabokov's prefaces.<sup>64</sup> The scope of her study is tightly focused as she considers the problematic figure of the author with regard to the prologues and epilogues attached to *Lolita*, *Bend Sinister* and *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*. Using Genette's typology of prefaces from *Thresholds*, Hamrit defines a preface, for the purpose of her study, as any liminary text, which is written by the author about the text it is attached to.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, she refers to 'Outwork', in which Derrida considers the problem the preface poses for the text itself, and which results in both the text and the preface becoming conjoined to form the 'unceasing preface'.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, both conceptions are concerned with the question of the author and the role that this figure plays within the text, the preface and the resulting textual form in which both components are subsumed. Hamrit uses this question to argue that Nabokov uses his prefaces to create a fluid role for the author, whose presence is, as a result, constantly in flux.

Hamrit examines the three focus prefaces through the lense of Blanchot's and Derrida's conceptions of the self-effacing and receding author, and the resultant struggle between this figure and his readers, and argues that, as an author, Nabokov is constantly appearing and disappearing within his texts. This idea of the author is one which, Hamrit notes, has immediate

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<sup>64</sup> Three articles have previously focused on Nabokov's prefaces. Firstly, Charles Nicol's 'Necessary Instruction or Fatal Fatuity: Nabokov's Introductions and *Bend Sinister*' (in *Nabokov Studies*, 1994 / 1, pp. 11 - 17) identifies the main characteristics of Nabokov's prefaces, while Corinne Scheiner's 'In Place of a Preface: Reading Chapter One of Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark* as a foreword to the English Translation' (in *Proceedings of the International Vladimir Nabokov Symposium 2002*) considers the role of the preface in conjunction with Nabokov's self-translations. Finally, Marilyn Edelstein's 'Before the Beginning: Nabokov and the Rhetoric of the Preface' (in *Narrative Beginnings: Theories and Practices*, ed. Brian Richardson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009)) discusses *Lolita*'s paratexts.

<sup>65</sup> Jacqueline Hamrit, *Authorship in Nabokov's Prefaces* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> See Jacques Derrida, 'Outwork, prefacing', in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981), 1 - 60, 43.

parallels with Siggy Frank, who argues in *Nabokov's Theatrical Imagination* that 'Nabokov [...] recedes into the background and dissolves into his art'.<sup>67</sup> Hamrit here argues for a figure of the author who is neither omnipresent nor absent. She argues that, in the role of the receding author, Nabokov ex-appropriates the text by intruding upon it in his prefaces (or appropriating the text) before removing himself again (or expropriating the text). This process allows the author to simultaneously affirm and deny his own mastery by appearing and receding from his work. This is an interesting and pertinent proposition as, despite Nabokov's many assertions of authorial control, as an author commenting on his own work, he is, in essence, nothing if not facetious. Moreover, his desire to control his work is often met with an unusual level of facilitation from critics who are guided in their own desire to meet 'the Master's expectations'.<sup>68</sup>

Focusing on these specific prefaces, Hamrit convincingly argues that Nabokov engages in an elaborate game of hide and seek with his readers. She posits that the author utilises three distinct relationships with his readers, his texts and, eventually, himself as the subject of his own autobiography, in order to appear within the text before receding. In all of these exchanges, Nabokov as the receding author encounters an otherness, which he incorporates, so that in all of its variants it may speak to his readers both within his own self and the text.<sup>69</sup> Hamrit's proposition that the reader plays an essential role in this conception of authorship neatly reflects Blanchot's conception of the 'singular reciprocity' of author and reader, who create each other, the former by writing

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<sup>67</sup> Siggy Frank, *Nabokov's Theatrical Imagination*, p. 194.

<sup>68</sup> Eric Naiman, 'Hermophobia', p. 120.

<sup>69</sup> Hamrit, *Authorship in Nabokov's Prefaces*, p. 92.

and the latter by reading the text (25).<sup>70</sup> This does not, however, facilitate the fully harmonious and co-operative relationship that it may suggest, and that Nabokov himself wrote of in 'Good Readers and Good Writers'. When Nabokov engages with his first readers of *Lolita*, whom Hamrit characterises as the 'interpretive community' of publishers who would not publish the novel due to its subject matter, he does so to right their misunderstanding, or rather misreading, of the book.<sup>71</sup> This leads directly to the writing of the epilogue to *Lolita*, 'On a Book Entitled *Lolita*'. In it, Nabokov defends his work against charges of pornography, indecency and immorality, a function he had assumed John Ray Jr.'s fictional foreword would originally serve. Hamrit argues that, by latterly bookending his work with fictional and factual prefaces, Nabokov opposes both John Ray Jr., as the fictional author, and himself, as the author of *Lolita*, Nabokov creates a situation in which *Lolita* cannot be read without its prefaces. In this way, the author who wrote *Lolita* reappears within the newly expanded text, and promptly retreats after imparting an elegant defence of his work. This results in the boundaries between fiction and reality losing their distinction, and the author receding into the text of *Lolita*.

This authorial function is evident again in Nabokov's relationship with his text. Using *Bend Sinister* as her example, Hamrit argues that Nabokov uses the introduction to position himself as an authorial presence in opposition to the text itself. By re-reading his text in order to write its introduction, Nabokov identifies and then foregrounds central images, themes and points. In this introduction, Nabokov highlights the importance of the puddle motif to the central theme of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>71</sup> Stanley Fish, 'Introduction, or How I Stopped Worrying', in *Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 14.

*Bend Sinister*, that of 'the beating of Krug's loving heart'.<sup>72</sup> This lends a 'surrealist dimension' to the text, which becomes infused with 'the reverie Nabokov indulges in when he rereads his text'.<sup>73</sup> His repeated references to the variants of the motif generate an authorial memory of the text, which 'resembles a pictorial inlay'.<sup>74</sup> While with 'On a Book Entitled *Lolita*' Nabokov bookends his text with prefaces, here his introduction faces the text head-on, commenting on it and directing subsequent readings, at which point the author recedes again. The receding authorial figure is, therefore, a continual process in Nabokov's oeuvre, and it is one which continues when the author encounters himself as the subject of his autobiography. Nabokov uses the introduction to *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* to address any lapses or errors of memory that resulted in changes being made in this third iteration of his autobiography. While this is a functional element of Nabokov's authorial role, this process also allows him to develop self-awareness and face himself in his autobiography's introduction.<sup>75</sup> Nabokov, therefore, as autobiographer, posits himself in the text before retreating from it entirely, and continues the 'endless apparition-retreat movement' which pervades his oeuvre.<sup>76</sup>

Revision as a traceable feature of Nabokov's work has been examined in a number of studies. While looking at different aspects of revisions in various works by Nabokov, all of these studies focus on revisions as part of Nabokov's artistic maturation. In other words, thus far scholars have concentrated on revisions as an organic process, an integral part of his development towards

<sup>72</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, 'Introduction', *Bend Sinister* (London: Penguin, 1964), pp. 5 - 11, 7.

<sup>73</sup> Hamrit, *Authorship in Nabokov's Prefaces*, p. 55.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

artistic perfection. The most extensive study of Nabokov's deliberate and visible revisions is Jane Grayson's seminal *Nabokov Translated*, which links Nabokov's interest in revision with his linguistic switch mid-career. The frequent references to Grayson's study not only testify to its status as an almost comprehensive guide to the most important alterations, additions and deletions that Nabokov makes when translating his individual texts, but also indicates the importance of the topic of revision for different branches of Nabokov studies. The majority of the works examined in this study are naturally Nabokov's Russian language novels, which were translated into English. Grayson, however, also includes chapters on Nabokov's autobiography, which was translated from English into Russian and then back into English again. Grayson argues that Nabokov's revisions affect three distinct areas, style, characterisation and structure, which stress above all the artifice of the newly translated work. This creates a translated work that distances the reader clearly from the fictional world.<sup>77</sup>

Grayson notes Nabokov's curious place in the Russian, English and American literary traditions, writing that he 'is the only outstanding émigré writer to have done what the jealous guardians of the Russian Literary tradition so much feared'.<sup>78</sup> This fear, of course, is the switch from Russian to English as the primary language of his literary output. Grayson notes that this outstanding achievement is a result not only of his trilingual upbringing, literary education at Cambridge and his voracious reading habits since childhood in all three languages, but also his 'attitudes to his art'.<sup>79</sup> His long-held beliefs, which pre-

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<sup>77</sup> See Grayson, *Nabokov Translated*, p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

date his necessary emigration from Russia by the best part of two decades, maintain that artistic identity is not primarily tied to national identity. In an interview with Alfred Appel Nabokov notes that 'the writer's art is his real passport' (SO, 63). Grayson goes on to note that 'in turning to English Nabokov has not divorced himself entirely from his Russian past' and continues by noting that the translations he undertook both from Russian to English and English to Russian 'constitute a living link between his writing in Russian and his writing in English'.<sup>80</sup> Developing this point, Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, writes that Nabokov should be seen as one of the most distinctive twentieth century examples of category once widespread and now almost extinct: the bilingual, or in Nabokov's case, the trilingual writer'.<sup>81</sup> She continues by noting that the revisions and corrections that Nabokov implements to the drafts of his translations are 'more like re-working than [...] translating'.<sup>82</sup> She goes on to suggest that, rather than constituting translations of original Russian texts, the works that are translated into English undertaken by Nabokov, through their extensive revisions, actually constitute replacements for the Russian originals.<sup>83</sup> Grayson does not make this crucial distinction, writing instead that, while the translations are not 'faithful reproductions', Nabokov is undoubtedly 'a compulsive reviser and when translating his own work he frequently takes the opportunity to incorporate substantial modifications and reworkings'.<sup>84</sup>

Grayson continues on this track by tying the revisions that Nabokov makes in translations to his creative processes. While Beaujour believes this link

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, 'Bilingualism' in Vladimir E. Alexandrov (ed.), *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 37 - 43, p. 37.

<sup>82</sup> Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, 'Translation and Self-Translation' in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. by Alexandrov, pp. 714 - 724, p. 720.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 720.

<sup>84</sup> Grayson, *Nabokov Translated*, p. 3.

causes the translations to replace the earlier, unrevised text, Grayson argues that Nabokov's 'revisions are of primary importance to a student of his creative development'.<sup>85</sup> The changes which Nabokov introduces are many and varied, but the most striking development is towards increased stylisation, the increasing deployment of artifice. The 'controlling hand of the author is more openly revealed, the reader is continually reminded that the action and the characters are but products of the imagination'.<sup>86</sup> In this way, Nabokov's translations of the 1930s are 'adaptations', which do not adhere to Nabokov's later blueprint of literal translation.<sup>87</sup> Grayson notes that the sequence of translation was random and unlikely to be significant. She suggests that Nabokov chose what to translate based on how much he thought the text would appeal to American readers, however, 'the effect of this random order of publication has, however, been to present the English reading public with a distorted image of Nabokov's development as an artist'.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, it is probable that this non-linear view of Nabokov's oeuvre had an effect on his playful references to earlier works in his late English output. At this point, Nabokov's (or, indeed, Sirin's) juvenile works (for example, *Mashen'ka* and *Korol', dama, valet*) were being published in English with covers that proclaimed their creator the author of, for example, *Lolita*, which had, in fact, been written many decades after the Russian originals which now appeared in new guises. Grayson refers to this phenomenon as creating a situation where 'the corpus of Nabokov's Russian novels is dismembered in English translation'.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 3 - 4.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

Discussing Nabokov's later theories of translation, which he stipulates and applies rigidly when translating others' works (for example, his highly literal translation of Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin*) and ignores when translating his own, Grayson writes that 'where the author and the translator are one and the same person, the requirements of 'faithfulness to the original' no longer apply'.<sup>90</sup> However, while Nabokov did not produce literal translations of his early Russian works, she adds that 'it is equally the case that Nabokov never entirely abandons his principles of literalism'.<sup>91</sup> While Grayson pays great attention to the specific changes, revisions and alterations that Nabokov makes in his works, particularly the major reworkings, she also examines the more subtle, but equally important, changes which Nabokov implements to his autobiographies and novels. The major reworkings feature significant shifts in the style, structure and characterisation of the novels *Korol', dama, valet*, *Kamera obskura* and *Otchaianie*, and create an overall pattern in which 'the structure is tightened, there is added humour and added verbal effects, more imagery and vivid detail, and more sexual allusion'.<sup>92</sup> The minor reworkings, in contrast, contain few structural changes, with the most notable occurrence being in the Russian *Lolita*, which has a deletion of the second police scare that Lolita and Humbert encounter. Similarly, the revisions to characterisation are limited to finishing, clarifying touches in the Russian *Lolita* and *Glory*, while there is generally elaborated, and sometimes added, stylistic imagery in all of the minor reworkings. This process, as Beaujour notes, is closer to an artist working on the manuscript of an original work with a view to final publication

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. 119.



than a translation or self-translation.<sup>93</sup>

Another area of Nabokov's deliberately visible revisions, which has received a great deal of critical attention, is the development and recurrences of certain central themes, motifs and characters in Nabokov's works. Brian Boyd has been publishing in 'unhurried increments' annotations, forenotes, afternotes and a list of 'verbal and thematic motifs' from *Ada* on *Ada Online*, a website devoted to creating a fully hyperlinked, explicative version of the novel.<sup>94</sup> This resource, akin to Grayson's work, focuses primarily on the visible, developmental revisions Nabokov implements to his works and gathers together the most notable instances of the recurrences and developments of motifs, characters and thematic material. Studies of this kind lay a stable and reliable groundwork for this thesis' examination of Nabokov's non-deliberate invisible revisions and deliberate, visible revisions, as they present tracked and collated data, which facilitate the identification and evaluation of the theoretical and conceptual processes of revision that Nabokov undertakes, as well as their effect on how his individual texts and oeuvre are read and received. Another such study is Julian Connolly's *A Reader's Guide to Nabokov's Lolita*, the second chapter of which traces the development of the character and novel of *Lolita*. Connolly shows that the development of *Lolita*'s masterly prose form, from a short story ('Skazka', 1926), to a poem (*Lilit*, 1929), onwards to a novella (*Volshebnik*, 1936), to, finally, a novel (*Lolita*). Tracking the evolving narrative approaches, Connolly stresses that the differences between the texts are of far greater significance than the similarities. In *Lolita*'s precursors 'the child's function is to serve as the agent of the narrator's own torment; she is not given

<sup>93</sup> Beaujour, 'Translation and Self - Translation', p. 720.

<sup>94</sup> Brian Boyd, *Ada Online*, <http://www.ada.auckland.ac.nz> [accessed on 12th January, 2015].

a distinctive personality or individualised identity'.<sup>95</sup> Conversely, in *Lolita*, 'the emotional core of the novel lies in the depiction of a young girl's vulnerability and of the pain that is inflicted upon her by a callous and self-centred adult', while 'the emotional richness of the novel stems from the fact that Dolly does have an internal life, with desires and fears that are distinctly her own, even though they are generally ignored by Humbert'.<sup>96</sup>

Precursors to *Lolita* have been found throughout Nabokov's work. Anthony Burgess, in a review of the *Laughter in the Dark* notes the 'occasional grace [and] faint flue on a female spine', and Kingsley Amis notes in his 1959 review of *Lolita* in *The Spectator* that she is 'clearly discernible' in the Colette chapter of *Speak, Memory*. Nabokov notes himself that *Lolita* has been compared to Mariette in *Bend Sinister*, Emmie in *Priglasenie na kazn'* and Colette in *Speak, Memory* and believes this to be 'ludicrous'.<sup>97</sup> He refutes any links in these works to *Lolita* and dissuades any pursuit of her predecessors. It is, however, problematic to take cues for critical study from the writers of the very works that are being studied. Moreover, Nabokov makes a link between Magda of *Kamera Obskura* and *Lolita* directly before stating the ridiculousness of the notion that *Lolita* has precursors in his work. These two statements are clearly at odds, and the importance of the proliferating *Lolita* character demands study of her development. Several critics have addressed the intertextual nature of *Lolita* and traced the character's revision and development in literary history, and Connolly devotes a chapter of his work to the developmental nature of the *Lolita*

<sup>95</sup> Julian Connolly, *A Reader's Guide to Nabokov's Lolita* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), p. 11.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p.11.

<sup>97</sup> Alfred Appel Jr. and Vladimir Nabokov, 'An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov', *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 8 / 2 (1967), 127 - 152, p. 145.

character. Despite Connolly's extensive and scrupulous research he does not address the question of the significance of these revisions.<sup>98</sup> The fact remains that the coquettish *Lolita* character, half child, half femme-fatale, recurs in different hues and shades, throughout Nabokov's oeuvre. Moreover, her sources are not entirely confined to Nabokov's oeuvre. As Connolly himself notes, there are intertextual references to a number of works and writers, including Poe, Pushkin and Dostoevsky.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, Neil Cornwell identifies some of *Lolita*'s intertextual pre-cursors in 'Intimations of Lo: Sirens, Joyce and Nabokov's *Lolita*'. Tellingly, however, he ends the first section of his essay by saying 'no doubt further pre-shades, or presentiments, of the *Lolita* theme from within Nabokov's pre-*Lolita* writings may be – or indeed have already been – advanced'.<sup>100</sup>

These processes of visible revisions are given a different focus by Zoran Kuzmanovich, who examines the labyrinth of significant motifs and images in Nabokov's works. Furthermore, he assigns meaning to these recurrent features and notes that they indicate certain patterns, plot points and other developments to the texts of which they are part of. Kuzmanovich writes that this feature of his works has 'resulted in Nabokov's readers becoming

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<sup>98</sup> Some examples of critics who have discussed *Lolita*'s intertextual origins are: Dostoevsky (Katherine Tiernan O'Connor, 'Rereading *Lolita*, Reconsidering Nabokov's Relationship with Dostoevsky', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 33 / 1 (1989), 64 – 77); Pushkin (Priscilla Meyer, 'Nabokov's *Lolita* and Pushkin's *Onegin* - McAdam, McEve and McFate', in George Gibian and Stephen Parker (eds.), *The Achievements of Vladimir Nabokov* (Ithaca: Cornell Center for International Studies, 1984), 179 - 211; Priscilla Meyer, 'Teaching *Lolita* Through Pushkin's *Onegin*', in Galya Diment and Zoran Kuzmanovich (eds.), *Approaches to Teaching Nabokov's 'Lolita'* (New York: Modern Language Association, 2008), 94 – 100; Julian Connolly, *A Reader's Guide to Nabokov's Lolita* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 8 – 17; D. Barton Johnson, "'L'inconnue de la Seine" and Nabokov's Naiads', *Comparative Literature*, 44 / 3 (1992), 225 – 248); Folktales (Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, 'Fantasy, Folklore and Finite Numbers in Nabokov's "A Nursery Tale"', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 43 / 3 (1999), 511 - 529.).

<sup>99</sup> Connolly, *Reader's Guide*, p. 20.

<sup>100</sup> Neil Cornwell, 'Intimations of Lo: Sirens, Joyce and Nabokov's *Lolita*', <http://www.libraries.psu.edu/nabokov/cornwell.htm> [accessed on 21/12/2012]

detectives cracking his code and venturing into his seemingly impenetrable labyrinth'.<sup>101</sup> Kuzmanovich argues that these repeating, recurring thematic concerns are linked to Nabokov himself intrinsically and 'link, across his works, a set of migrating, overlapping, and evolving themes that at once lead to and spring from *Speak, Memory*, with its infinitely recyclable past testifying to the longing that makes Nabokov's art both necessary and possible'.<sup>102</sup> Here, Kuzmanovich identifies Nabokov's sources as originating from his autobiographical writing. However, that is not to say that Nabokov's literary works are autobiographical. On the contrary, these sources undertake a journey of transfiguration before ending as elements of the author's fiction in their final designation in art. Kuzmanovich selects a limited number of these elements and creates a concurrency of their appearances, and notes the corresponding significance of their use. For example, he locates the use of the rainbow as an image in *Dar*, *Speak, Memory* and *Lolita* and identifies their subsequent appearances as signifying 'portents (or memories) of some blissful revelation'.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, cuckoos appear in the same three texts, and signify 'memory as a sharp, long, parasitic, consuming and destructive tool'.<sup>104</sup> Kuzmanovich himself notes the limitations of his study and sees it, rather than as a conclusive concurrency of developmental imagery in Nabokov's works, as 'an invitation for serious readers of Nabokov's work to study an intriguing set of his "givens" from a more diverse set of starting points'.<sup>105</sup> To fill the gap, which this invitation indicates, is the purpose of this thesis.

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<sup>101</sup> Zoran Kuzmanovich, "'Just as it was, or perhaps a little more perfect": Notes on Nabokov's Sources', *Nabokov Studies*, 7 (2003), 13 - 32, p. 14.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

Similarly, Gennady Barabtarlo, too, traces successive variants and treatments of thematic matter in Nabokov's oeuvre. Barabtarlo argues that once the reader crosses the threshold into the realm of re-reading (in the strictly Nabokovian sense), he is able to identify 'higher planes of narrative strategies' and to 'make out the subtle recurrence of images and situations which weaves, at a proper remove from the scene and action, thematic grids'.<sup>106</sup> This creates a thematic closed circuit within the 'temporal and spatial conditions' of Nabokov's fiction.<sup>107</sup> By using the, at the time, unpublished manuscript of *Tragediia Gospodina Morna* (which has received further critical attention since), which had been published in part in *Zvezda*, Barabtarlo illustrates that certain thematic strands 'were formed astonishingly early and ran a surprisingly long and stable course' and remain relatively unchanged throughout Nabokov's oeuvre. Amongst these thematic strains, however, are other repeated aspects of Nabokov's work (motifs, characters, places) as noted by Grayson, Connolly, and Kuzmanovich, which are significant not only to the oeuvre and the student of Nabokov's creative development, but to the individual texts of which they are part. As Nabokov's corpus progresses, these repeating themes, altered only by language (Russian is replaced with English and, in the case of the Russian *Lolita*, English with Russian) and style 'lose much of their discreteness and gradually become entangled into a larger system, first engaging thematic links between adjacent works, then transmitting them to groups of books, and lastly seeing the entire complex of Nabokov's lifetime's work in two languages as an expanse of fiction divided into lots but irrigated by one furrow system of major

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<sup>106</sup> Gennady Barabtarlo, 'Nabokov's Trinity (On the movement of Nabokov's themes)' in Julian W. Connolly, ed. *Nabokov and his Fiction: New Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 109 - 138, p. 109.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, p. 110.

themes'.<sup>108</sup> Barabtarlo goes on to assert that, at a certain point in Nabokov's fiction, the 'thematic grids' tighten, and, as a result, 'their intricacy becomes more meaningful as Nabokov's art gains strength'.<sup>109</sup> At this point, it becomes possible to identify three thematic planes, 'backstitched' with thematic matter, which Barabtarlo believes are present in all of Nabokov's works: the 'artistic' (or 'outer'), the 'psychological (or 'inner') and the 'metaphysical (or 'other')'.<sup>110</sup> The artistic and psychological combine harmoniously in *Lolita*, where the hyper real, created, outer world (a brilliant and vivid reflection of mid-twentieth century America) is juxtaposed with the brief but no less heartwrenching insights the reader is given into Dolores Haze's psychological state. In *Pale Fire*, all three join in their happiest combination, with the shaded but no less real depiction of mid-twentieth century American campus life combining with John Shade's expression of anguish and loss for his Hazel Shade and the beautiful result of the mergence of poem, commentary and index to create something much more than the sum of its parts. Barabtarlo uses *Tragediia Gospodine Morna*, which, at the time of writing, remained unpublished, to illustrate the surprisingly early occurrence of one of Nabokov's major themes, the exiled king. While Barabtarlo uses the theme to illustrate the interweaving of the three planes, which are integral to Nabokov's work, his article provides a useful basis for the first chapter of this thesis, which examines the developmental ways in which Nabokov revises works, and focuses on this same theme. However, while Barabtarlo's focus is the combination of the three thematic planes, which occur within this theme, the current study will examine the theme itself. This thesis

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 112.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

posits that this thematic matter is both integral to Nabokov's work and allows for a deeper examination of Nabokov's actual creative processes, which utilise revision as an essential part of the creative impetus.

Susan Elizabeth Sweeney has made the first clear attempt to sketch out the function and processes of Nabokov's deliberately visible revisions, exploring the narrative strategy of incompleteness by examining the lack of finite endings in Nabokov's work and their relationship to revision. Sweeney examines specifically the unfinished nature of Nabokov's works, both individually and as a whole, and takes as a starting point the controversy around the publication of *The Original of Laura*. Arguments over the moral legitimacy of the unauthorised publication have developed along two lines; some critics and literary reviewers saw the publication as an opportunity to examine Nabokov's creative processes of writing, while others declared the publication itself immoral and cautioned that revealing Nabokov's unfinished work to readers would damage his reputation posthumously.<sup>111</sup> Sweeney takes issue with both points of view, arguing that they are based on the erroneous assumption that both Nabokov's individual works as well as his overall corpus are 'perfectly complete'.<sup>112</sup> Instead, Sweeney contends that the unfinished, self-reflexive nature of Nabokov's work is an overriding 'theme and strategy' of both *The Original of Laura* and his corpus, which reflects Nabokov's conviction that 'knowledge [is] a process that

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<sup>111</sup> For example, David Lodge argues that value of *The Original of Laura* is that it gives insight into Nabokov's workshop (David Lodge, 'Shored Against His Ruins', *Literary Review*, December 2009), while Arthur Philips argues that its publication harms Nabokov's standing as a great literary artist (Arthur Philips, 'The Master's Sputum: Unfinished Nabokov Novel Now Open to Examination', *Paste*, 20th November 2009).

<sup>112</sup> Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, "'Almost Completed but Only Partly Corrected': Enacting Revision in Nabokov", in Mitsuyoshi Numano and Tadashi Wakashima (eds), *Revising Nabokov* (Kyoto: The Nabokov Society of Japan, 2010), pp. 109-114, p.109.

is necessarily tentative, exploratory and unfinished'.<sup>113</sup> Although Sweeney views Nabokov's individual texts as being 'carefully planned, elegantly expressed, and exquisitely realised', she points to the inherent incompleteness of Nabokov's work as 'he often presents [his works] as undergoing revision even at the moment of completion'. In this sense, then, 'textual perfection is always specious'.<sup>114</sup> This intrinsically open process of writing has direct implications for the reading process, inviting readers to 'project' themselves 'past the end, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle'.<sup>115</sup> In highlighting and foregrounding the imperfections, as well as the unfinished nature of the text, Nabokov stresses above all else its indeterminacy. Each Nabokovian text is an "almost completed" draft that becomes a book only as it is read'.<sup>116</sup> In this way, incompleteness is an essential function of the revisions that Nabokov implements to his works at all levels of the text. As a result, endings are never textual dead ends, and instead link the individual text to both its precursors and successors. Furthermore, almost all of Nabokov's individual texts end in a manner that questions the existence and authority of the text and the narrator(s) that the reader has just read. However, although Sweeney presents valuable insights into the nature of revision and Nabokov's work, she does not develop her argument in detail. This thesis will take her preliminary work and develop it in order to present a more extensive examination of Nabokov's processes of revision.

While a great deal of invisible revisions have been identified and examined by the existing literature, this study aims to examine the role of

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p. 109; p.113

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p.111.

<sup>115</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.8.

<sup>116</sup> Sweeney, 'Enacting Revision in Nabokov', p. 113.



deliberately visible revisions within Nabokov's works. This study will identify the role of these self-conscious revisions and examine their function as a deliberate device of Nabokov's fiction. Although some visible revisions have been identified previously by Nabokov scholars such as Barabtarlo, Grayson and Dolinin, they have not been examined as self-conscious revisions which Nabokov intended to be recognised as such by his readers. The aim of this thesis is to identify the individual tracks of deliberately visible revisions, the corresponding authorial functions they require and the readings that they invite and generate. Therefore, this thesis will develop the existing research by considering the consequences that these tracks of revision have on the ways in which Nabokov's individual texts are read and received. Furthermore, this study proposes that these deliberately visible revisions, when taken together, contribute to the formation of a self-reflexive and cohesive oeuvre, that is, the 'supertext', at the point where texts become destabilised and, subsequently, open as a cumulative result of Nabokov's revisionary processes.

This thesis is divided into four chapters, which will each address a specific category of Nabokov's revision. The first chapter, 'Nabokov's Developmental Revisions', examines the role of revision as an intrinsic component of Nabokov's creative processes. This chapter focuses on revisions that are not part of an overall deliberate design and can only be traced in retrospect. In particular this chapter uses a specific theme of Nabokov's work, the exiled kings, and maps its permutations from its first appearance in the drama *Tragediia Gospodina Morna* towards the final appearance in *Pale Fire*. The constant revisions this theme undergoes in the interim, including its appearance in, for example, 'Solus Rex', 'Ultima Thule' and *Lolita*, reveal how the

developmental arc of Nabokov's work evolves, improves and develops over time, continents and languages, into a text that bears traces of renewal and continuity in Nabokov's fiction. This chapter examines the close connection between revision and authorial control on the practical level of Nabokov's writing process. While towards the end of his career, Nabokov would try to suggest the existence of an overall design that shapes and frames all individual parts of his work, this chapter shows that Nabokov's claim is at odds with his practice as a writer. Nabokov was not naturally able to foresee that the Romantic exiled king Morn would, after many revisions, become the equally tragic but far more colourful, malevolent and mad exiled king, Kinbote. These revisions of the exiled king theme, while visible, are not part of the deliberate artistic design of the works Nabokov authorised for publication, but are instead an integral part of Nabokov's creative process.

The second chapter, 'Revision in Nabokov's Fictional Worlds', focuses on revision as a device within Nabokov's fiction. Fictional revisions are carried out by Nabokov's writer-protagonists within their own narratives. Enacted by these 'galley slaves' (*SO*, 27), fictional revisions are clearly visible to the reader and are used by the author-character in an attempt to gain control over the texts they themselves are part of, a process which is, ultimately, unsuccessful. Fictional revision as a device in Nabokov's fiction takes the following forms; writing itself, textual commentary and textual interjection. The author-characters who revise in these ways are, most often, themselves writers or artists, or, if they are not, aspire to be so. The author-character's narration becomes increasingly unreliable and duplicitous and the multiple narrative strands they create become riddled with contradictory deletions, erasures and additions. This

process creates multiple, synchronous readings which contribute to the text's formation and reinforces the authorial role as belonging, ultimately, to Nabokov and not the author-character. Therefore, Nabokov's author-characters are, unable to fully achieve their objective and meet their textual ends as characters within someone else's (that is, Nabokov's) text.

The third chapter examines the transtextual revisions that Nabokov implements within his oeuvre. This chapter takes *Lolita* as its focus text and posits that, as Nabokov's most famous text, it occupies a central position within his oeuvre. Using transtextual revision, Nabokov develops the novel's notorious theme of paedophilia throughout his earlier works (often in Russian) into *Lolita*, after which point he revises it in his later, English language texts. This is a deliberately visible form of revision, which Nabokov highlights and makes visible in order to direct the reader back to his most famous text. This chapter seeks to identify the chronological development of the *Lolita* theme in Nabokov's fiction, which is contrasted with the subsequent revisions to the theme that act as self-reflexive markers following the publication of *Lolita* in the US (1958) and the UK (1959) publications. Furthermore, this chapter will examine how Nabokov uses this scandalous text to create an authorial persona, that of the great author who produced the masterpiece of *Lolita*. This thematic development and revision invites readers to appreciate *Lolita*, in conjunction with the multiple texts that precede and proceed it, and contributes to the formation of the ideal text of *Lolita*, alongside the ideal author, Nabokov, both of which (and whom) are created by the non-linear reading processes that construct *Lolita*.

The final chapter, 'Nabokov's Extratextual Revisions', examines the revisions made to texts that Nabokov carries out via external sources. These

revisions require the most complex reading process, authorial reading, in order to become visible. They are implemented outwith the original text, which has the effect of negating the distinct boundaries between texts, causing them to join together and form a self-reflexive body of work. Specifically, this chapter will consider the effects that the forewords to Nabokov's translations of his Russian novels have on both the texts that they are attached to as well as his corpus overall. In addition, this chapter looks at the authorised collection of interviews, letters to editors and articles that constitute *Strong Opinions* and considers the ways in which they are used to revise Nabokov's individual texts externally, thus revising how they are read after their initial publication and reception. Nabokov uses these elements of his work as opportunities to intrude upon both his texts, which subverts the autonomy of both the original and subsequent works. This causes them to be read in collaboration with the revisions that have been impressed onto the sources external to the original text. In this way, extratextual revisions alter Nabokov's individual works through reading, which causes them to lose their autonomy and join together in the 'supertext'. Furthermore, it allows Nabokov to create and revise his own ideal authorial persona, which corresponds to his fully self-referential corpus.

Nabokov's self-conscious, deliberately visible revisions create a complex matrix of reading processes through which multiple versions of the same text are created, which, ultimately, creates a completely self-referential oeuvre. This synchronous process is a direct result of the author's quest for textual perfection and artistic control. Ultimately, these revisions have a cumulative effect, which facilitates a process through which Nabokov's oeuvre to join together to form a cohesive and conjoined work, that allows, via specific readings, itself to be

accessed and viewed all at once, much like a painting. In the processes of perfecting his art through his distinct processes of revision, Nabokov engages with the very nature, production and reception of the fiction that he is writing, calling into question the, often complex and disharmonious, relationships between authors, readers and texts. This nature of artistic perfection appears not to be an intentional by-product of Nabokov's obsession with textual perfection, but rather the conscious, creative and intelligent design of the God-like author figure that Nabokov himself constructs. This creates a corpus within which all component parts are impressed upon each other and which negates traditional textual boundaries, the work of an author who himself declared that 'I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another (*SM*, 1967, 139).

## **Chapter 1: Nabokov's Developmental Revisions**

Revision is an intrinsic part of the creative process for Vladimir Nabokov. Unlike Nabokov's other categories of visible revisions, which Nabokov utilises as self-conscious artistic devices in his fiction, his developmental revisions, although ultimately equally deliberate, have a different function and are not intended to be part of the actual reading process. They are, however, an integral part of Nabokov's actual writing process, which produces not only individual works but an oeuvre of work, which is built around common themes and artistic concerns. Through these developmental revisions, Nabokov refines and perfects the recurring themes and artistic concerns of his work, which will eventually become the building blocks of his oeuvre. In this way, they represent a progressive arc within Nabokov's corpus, which shows both the ways that Nabokov matures as an artist as well as the artistic progression of his work. It is therefore crucial to examine this track of revision as developmental revisions represent the natural, unconscious evolution of a central theme through a period of work that spans decades, languages and geographical locations.

Nabokov's developmental revisions differ from both the invisible revisions contained within his manuscripts and his later practice of deliberately placing visible revisions within his texts as devices of fiction. Hidden from the reader's view, invisible revisions are implemented by Nabokov throughout the creation of an individual work and occur at various points between the completion of the first draft and the final, published text. Conversely, Nabokov's deliberate, visible revisions are not only evident to his readers, but, in fact, highlighted and foregrounded within the text by Nabokov himself. The developmental revisions

Nabokov makes, which are the focus of this chapter, are positioned somewhere between these two poles. Nabokov implements developmental revisions during the process of creating his texts and they become visible only through detailed and meticulous comparison of his works, and previous or subsequent published versions of texts. Neither hidden from public view in a manuscript, nor highlighted in self-referential terms within a text or texts, they are deliberate decisions about textual choices in Nabokov's creative process, and do not belong to the deliberate, purposefully visible artistic design of the work Nabokov authorised for publication. As such, these developmental revisions are intended to improve and polish his work. If they are not hidden from public view then they are simply not highlighted, and do not belong to the deliberate, purposefully visible artistic design of the work Nabokov authorised for publication. This chapter examines a specific practice of developmental revision in Nabokov's art. Nabokov's revision of a theme, that is, the continuous rewriting and developing of a recurring motif, is a form of revision which does not fit neatly into either of the two categories of invisible or visible translations. This practice of revision is both visible in Nabokov's corpus as an evolutionary aspect of his work, while appearing not to have been placed in full view deliberately by Nabokov. This chapter traces the theme of the exiled king from its early conception in a manuscript that was not published during the author's lifetime (*Tragediia Gospodina Morna*) to its ultimate designation in the novel *Pale Fire*. The revision this theme undergoes in Nabokov's work is only partly visible (in the published texts leading up to *Pale Fire*) and is evidently not part of an overall deliberate or patterned design. As such, these developmental revisions give an important insight into the ways Nabokov not only revisits time and again

the same theme, but also his artistic practice of controlling and shaping his art, which itself reveals the close relationship between revision, as a broad concept, and authorial control in Nabokov's thinking and writing.

### Vladimir Nabokov: Romantic Author and Inveterate Reviser

Nabokov's invisible revisions, and the implicit notion of textual control they entail, correspond with the Romantic conception of authorship, which underlie the author's general ideas and pronouncements on literature and art, and therefore oppose the notion of developmental revision. Nabokov's narrator, V, of *The Real life of Sebastian Knight* notes that the half-brother author, whose biography he seeks to construct, was 'that rare type of writer who knows that nothing ought to remain except for the perfect achievement' (*RLSK*, 1941, 32). This view of 'the author as originator and genius, as fully intentional, fully sentient source of the literary text, as authority for and limitation on the "proliferating" meanings of the text' was one that Nabokov both identified with and worked tirelessly to present to his readership.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, it is clearly at odds with Modernist conceptions of authorship, which decentre the author while retaining his figure as the originating point of the text, and the effaced and absent Postmodernist authorial presence.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, Nabokov's Romantic authorial aims clash strongly with the decidedly Modern and, latterly, Postmodern qualities of works (which, themselves, are often dueling). Adapting

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<sup>117</sup> Andrew Bennett, 'The Romantic Author' in *The Author* (London: Routledge, 2004), 55 - 71, p. 56.

Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 171; Christopher Butler, *Modernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 56.



Aleksander Pushkin's notions of '*vostorg* and *vdokhnovenie*, which can be translated as "rapture" and "recapture", Nabokov distinguished between two distinct concepts of creation (LL, 1980, 378 - 379).<sup>119</sup> Nabokov writes that 'the pure flame of *vostorg* [...] has no conscious purpose in view', which is tempered 'when the time is right and the writer settles down to the actual composing of his book' (LL, 378 - 379). At this point, the writer relies on 'the second serene and steady kind of inspiration, *vdokhnovenie*, the trusted mate who helps to recapture and reconstruct the world' (LL, 379). This results in the foregrounding of a 'two-tiered model of the creative experience', one which involves the initial burst of inspiration (Pushkin's *vostorg* and Nabokov's "rapture") followed by a subsequent compositionary process (Pushkin's *vdokhnovenie* or Nabokov's "recapture").<sup>120</sup> It is the cool, distanced look on the former experience of rapture, which positions it close to the practice of revision. Indeed, Nabokov explicitly states that 'Fiery *vostorg* has accomplished his task and cool *vdokhnovenie* puts on her glasses' (LL, 379), which suggests a literal process of looking again at existing material and ultimately leads to the revision of a textual element initially conceived in a moment of blissful inspiration, which was outside the control of the author. Indeed, there is ample evidence of Nabokov's stuttering approach to textual construction in the manuscripts held at the Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

The fundamentally imperfect drafts, which are the result of the process of invisible revision, are the ugly but necessary precondition to produce a perfect work of art. Unlike his father who was able to produce beautiful and accurate

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<sup>120</sup> Maxim D. Shrayar, *The World of Nabokov's Stories* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), p. 548.

fair copies, Nabokov relied upon endless rewrites, erasure, deletions and strike throughs in order to produce his works (*SM*, 139). This process was one that the author sought to hide from his readership and one which led to a careful, deliberate practice of literary creation which moves towards an ever more perfect version of itself. The writing of *Priglasenie na kazn'* is another example where invisible revision became a central feature of the creative process. In an interview given many years after its publication, Nabokov recalls the 'wonderful excitement and sustained inspiration', during which his ordinarily methodical approach to writing was disrupted by a jolt of inspiration that resulted in *Priglasenie na kazn'* being written in two weeks (*SO*, 1973, 92). However, the author fails to mention the two year period which followed, during which he redrafted and edited his first draft into the final text. This is a process, which Hannah Sullivan characterises as being firmly rooted in the Modern tradition.<sup>121</sup> While the initial inspiration and writing of *Priglasenie na kazn'* is singled out in Nabokov's description as non-standard in comparison to his other works, archival material still testifies to the long and laborious revisions that took place subsequently.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, while Nabokov admits to, and deliberately exposes, this technique of revision as an integral part of his creative process, he simultaneously has no desire to share the imperfections of different drafts with a public audience. This sentiment is expressed for instance in the foreword to his translation of *Evgenii Onegin*: 'an artist should ruthlessly destroy his manuscripts after publications, lest they mislead mediocrities into thinking that it is possible to unravel the mysteries of genius by studying cancelled readings. In

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<sup>121</sup> Sullivan, *The Work of Revision*, p. 63. Sullivan attributes the careful and lengthy editing processes of the Modernists to a widespread ease of access to the printing press, which was hitherto impossible for literary artists.

<sup>122</sup> See Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 408 - 409.

art, purpose and plan are nothing: only the result counts' (*EO*, 1964, 1: 15).

While Nabokov backtracked on this stance by handing over some of his manuscripts to public archives, he steadily refused to reveal his draft works for publication throughout his career and, furthermore, refused interviewers access to his inner sanctum of writing.<sup>123</sup> He notes that 'the interviewer wishes to visit me. He wishes to see my pencil poised above the page' (*SO*, xv), a desire that Nabokov never yielded to. Shroyer writes that Nabokov 'professed the neo-Romantic notion of a sweep of inspiration, and composed the first drafts [...] in an exalted state of creative bliss', an approach that the author was evidently fully dedicated to presenting publicly.<sup>124</sup>

Shroyer proposes that the invisible revisions Nabokov made should 'be placed outside the two-tiered domain of inspiration as the laborious and sometimes protracted period of making sober and deliberate stylistic, and, in some instances, structural decisions'.<sup>125</sup> This has been the focus of those critical works thus far, which have focused on Nabokov's revisions, including Shroyer's own. The most notable work in this context is Jane Grayson's *Nabokov Translated*, which is the first and only full-length study to consider Nabokov's revisions. Grayson focuses on the visible revisions that are implemented by Nabokov when translating his own work and tracks the changes that are made to the works in question through all of their iterations in Russian and English. While these revisions in translation will be the focus of the fourth and final chapter of this thesis, it is worth noting their general trends here.

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<sup>123</sup> Nabokov donated a number of manuscripts to the Library of Congress in order to receive a tax relief on his earnings from *Lolita*. This concession allowed him to retire from teaching at Cornell and retire to Europe, where he undertook full-time writing for the first time in his career. See Boyd, *American Years*, p. 367.

<sup>124</sup> Shroyer, *World of Nabokov's Stories*, p. 549.

<sup>125</sup> Shroyer, *World of Nabokov's Stories*, p. 549 - 550.

Grayson identifies several factors in the works she terms 'major reworkings' (*Kamera obscura* / *Laughter in the Dark*, *Otchaianie*, / *Despair*, *Korol', dama, valet* / *King, Queen, Knave* and *Sogliadatai* / *The Eye*), which are crucial to understanding Nabokov's revisions to his translations. Firstly, she disproves Carl Proffer's notion that there is an important relationship between distance in time between the original work and the translated text, highlighting the remove of only six years between *Laughter in the Dark's* Russian original and the translated English text.<sup>126</sup> Proffer relies on Nabokov's statement in the foreword to *Invitation to a Beheading* that 'the urge to emend grows in proportion to the length of time separating the model from the mimic'.<sup>127</sup> However, Nabokov's wilfully misleading proclamations on his works seek to conceal, at times, obvious, information about his works. Secondly, she notes that chronology is not useful in predicting the extent to which a work is revised in translation. For example, Nabokov's first prose work, *Mashen'ka*, is revised considerably less than his second, *Korol', dama, valet*. Furthermore, it would appear that neither overall structural nor artistic quality is a determining factor in the extent to which Nabokov revises a work. Grayson identifies two elements that all four 'major reworkings' share; their Berlin setting and their cold, detached tone, and she reveals that all four works in translation share an increasingly explicit and detailed representation of sexual themes and more vivid characterisation.<sup>128</sup>

It is crucial to note that Nabokov does not conceal these revisions and, indeed, draws attention to some of them using the forewords to his translations, as well as his interviews, while simultaneously concealing those revisions that

<sup>126</sup> Grayson, *Nabokov Translated*, p. 23.

<sup>127</sup> Carl Proffer, 'A New Deck for Nabokov's Knives', *TriQuarterly*, 17 (1970), 293 - 309, p. 299.

<sup>128</sup> Grayson, *Nabokov Translated*, p.25; p. 89.

were an integral part of the original text's construction.<sup>129</sup> For example, while Nabokov chides the 'evil-minded' reader who sees in *Lolita* a revised version of Emmie in *Priglasenie na kazn'*, he draws attention to the multiple revisions implemented in translating and improving, for example, *Korol'*, *dama*, *valet* when translating it into *King, Queen, Knave* (*IB*, 1959, 9; *KQK*, 1968, 8). Although in this way Nabokov emphasises the imperfections of his drafts inherent to his halting and hesitant writing process, as well as the general polishing that his texts undergo in translation, often at great temporal remove from the original published text, he actually reinforces one, single facet of his oeuvre – the conception of the Romantic author that stands behind it. By concealing these revisions at the stage of manuscript completion, Nabokov attempts to present his works to the reader as being immediately and infinitely perfect, results not of an intricate process of revision but, instead, one of flawless and immediate inspiration.

However, the effect of these invisible revisions does not begin and end with Nabokov's impressing the concept of Romantic authorship onto his oeuvre. As well as revising his individual texts in preparation for publication, he revisits central themes, motifs, characters and places in his fiction, improving upon their initial representations in their revisions. This process is much looser and is termed developmental revision in this study. It represents a progressive arc within Nabokov's oeuvre and it is neither part of the track of Romantic, invisible revisions, nor the visible revisions, which function as deliberate devices of Nabokov's fiction. These developmental revisions to Nabokov's works cause a

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<sup>129</sup> The function of these revisions will be examined fully in Chapter 4: Nabokov's Extratextual Revisions.

continuous artistic development to take place across his oeuvre, a process that it is explicitly and concretely opposed to the artistic ideal at the heart of Romantic authorship.

### The Exiled King Theme: A Case Study

This chapter is a case study of the developmental revisions that Nabokov implements to the exiled king theme in his work as its focus. The exiled king is a recurring figure throughout Nabokov's works, in both concrete and metaphorical terms. The exiled king character appears for the first time in Nabokov's first full-length work, *Tragediia Gospodina Morna*, and undergoes a progressive process of revision into 'Solus Rex', 'Ultima Thule' and *Lolita* before appearing finally as Charles Kinbote in *Pale Fire*. The character is always a lone, royal male, exiled from his homeland and is presented in tandem with certain thematic material, such as exile, loss and loneliness. Therefore, the exiled king becomes a metaphor for the alienated poet and the madman removed from reality throughout Nabokov's work. The theme (as well as the character) finds its most developed actualisation in *Pale Fire*, in which the mad narrator, Charles Kinbote, relays the tale of his exile from the fantastical world of Zembla using the vehicle of John Shade's eponymous poem. This theme recurs throughout Nabokov's fiction leading up to *Pale Fire* and is revised by Nabokov in a non-deliberate fashion. Gennady Barabtarlo identifies the theme as being central to Nabokov's oeuvre and notes that it runs a long and steady course throughout

it.<sup>130</sup> In fact, Nabokov's engagement with this theme precedes even his first use of the prose form.

This recurrent thematic matter, that of the deposed king living in exile, has obvious biographical parallels to Nabokov himself, the first born male of an aristocratic Russian family, who was forced to flee his homeland by the revolution and never returned, spending the rest of his life in Western Europe and the USA, an experience which clearly shaped the creation of his characters, specifically the exiled king characters. Although all exiled king characters are clearly marked as fictional and, as such, are naturally removed from Nabokov, they nevertheless share a certain number of specific qualities with their creator. Like Nabokov, most are writers within the fictional world they inhabit (what will be termed 'author-characters' in this study). Morn, for instance, admits he would have liked to be a poet; Kinbote is a scholar, writer and annotator, and Sineusov is an artist. Moreover, a great number of these exiled king characters share Nabokov's Russian, or at least European, background, for example, Fyodor, the Russian émigré author-character alleged to have written 'Solus Rex' and 'Ultima Thule', and Humbert Humbert, who claims to be a 'salad of racial genes' (*Lolita*, 1955, 11). Although the revisions that Nabokov implements to this theme are, strictly speaking, visible in the long line of published works that focus on the exiled king, it is argued that they are not intended to be perceived as part of the actual reading experience of each individual work. The various plays, short stories and novels sharing this theme remain discrete, separate works, which are not deliberately connected through the theme of the exiled king. These developmental revisions can therefore be used to trace Nabokov's artistic

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<sup>130</sup> See Barabtarlo, 'Nabokov's Trinity', 109 - 138.

development across almost his entire body of work in two languages and across several decades and are, moreover, crucial to understanding Nabokov's development as an artist, as well as his manner of writing, editing and completing his works.

Nabokov's conception of the exiled king theme is borne of his own permanent exile from Russia. The theme of exile itself in modern cultural criticism and literary theory is sprawling and extensive. Edward Said defined exile as 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted'.<sup>131</sup> He goes on to assert that 'true exile is a condition of terminal loss'.<sup>132</sup> These definitions are particularly useful for this study as they are less focused on the concrete expulsion from a defined geographical space, but instead touch on the psychological implications of exile as a condition. The criteria for this study define the exiled king theme as being concerned with the forced expulsion of a royal character. Moreover, in the discussion that follows it will be shown that, in most cases, Nabokov is primarily interested in the theme of exile as a conceptual issue even when it is tied to a concrete physical place. The majority of Nabokov's characters are exiled physically from imaginary, but no less real, lands. Their lack of a home or belonging to any particular place allows them to stand outside of communities and is used as an indicator of the aloofness and creative superior talents which separate them from lackaday concerns. In this way, David Bethea and Siggy Frank argue that exile is not just a negative experience, but what could be 'a condition of disruption and

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<sup>131</sup> Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile' in *Reflections on Exile* (London: Granta, 2000), 173 - 186, p. 173.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, p. 173.



fragmentation', a version which is actively embraced by Nabokov.<sup>133</sup> Despite his personal experience of exile, Nabokov, like many other artists, views exile as 'an opportunity, an enabling condition which grants him an elevated position', as Bethea and Frank argue.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, Nabokov notes in an interview that 'the type of artist who is always in exile even though he may never have left the ancestral hall of the paternal parish is a well-known biographical figure with whom I feel some affinity' (*SO*, 117). In this sense, Nabokov presents exile as a conceptual state, which is intrinsically linked to the artistic condition. Moreover, he follows this statement by adding, 'in a straighter sense, exile means to an artist only one thing – the banning of books' (*SO*, 117). Nabokov here sets up a clear distinction between the abstract mental condition of exile and the practical, everyday effect that it has for an artist and his works. In doing so, he generalises the experience and lessens the blow of the reality, one which he knew all too well. Furthermore, Stephen Blackwell writes that 'an exile is always outside the boundary, outside the place of origination and creation, outside the source, and this location may provide, ultimately, a rather liberating perspective'.<sup>135</sup> It is this position which allows Nabokov's English language output to distill 'the concrete experience of exile into meta-fictional and metaphysical concerns'.<sup>136</sup>

Barabtarlo additionally notes in his essay that the character identified here as the exiled king is one which is 'endowed with nobility of lineage and heart and all of the distinctive traits that come with this happy combination

<sup>133</sup> David Bethea and Siggy Frank, 'Exile and Russian Literature' in Evgeny Dobrenko and Marina Balina, *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Russian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 195 - 214, p. 196.

<sup>134</sup> Bethea and Frank, 'Exile and Russian Literature', p. 206.

<sup>135</sup> Stephen H. Blackwell, 'Boundaries of Art in Nabokov's *The Gift*: Reading as Transcendence' in *Slavic Review*, 58 / 3 (1999), 600 - 625, p. 606.

<sup>136</sup> Bethea and Frank, 'Exile and Russian Literature', p. 207.

brightened by the presence of a strong mind. Each of these positive qualities, however, has a shadow counterpart, with a latent tendency to take over under a special condition of intense passion, usually erotic'.<sup>137</sup> All instances of the exiled king theme which will be examined in this chapter are linked to young men who are engaged in literary or artistic creation. They set out as agents in their own fictional universes, but none can match Nabokov's control over the text. While Nabokov assigns himself a Romantic authorial role, his author-characters struggle to control or harness their abilities; that is, if they possess natural talent in the first place. Many fail, but even those that are able to undertake creative work wrestle with that very process Nabokov does not deign to reveal – hard work. This chapter seeks to expose that very process in Nabokov's work, by examining Nabokov's revision of the exiled king theme throughout his oeuvre and, finally, into the terminal text of *Pale Fire*.

### *Pale Fire*: A Terminal Text

The following section will discuss the specific developmental revisions this theme undergoes in its various permutations, including the exiled king in *Tragediia Gospodina Morna*, 'Solus Rex' and 'Ultima Thule' (and, by extension, *Dar*), and *Lolita*. It is important to note that the majority of Nabokov's texts deal with exile in some way, however, the focus in this chapter is on the theme of the exiled king. While, for example, Nabokov's first novel, *Mashen'ka*, features the exile Ganin and his last novel, *Look at the Harlequins!* centres around the curiously biographical Vadim Vadimovich, neither have a royal lineage or

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<sup>137</sup> Barabtarlo, 'Nabokov's Trinity', p. 111.

heritage. The exiled king theme is most fully realised and conceptualised in *Pale Fire*, where it is focused through Charles Kinbote. *Pale Fire* will be examined first in order to identify the essential qualities of the exiled king theme that are revised in the works that precede it. Kinbote appropriates John Shade's poem as a mean of telling his own story of the deposed king of Zembla. Via this appropriation, Kinbote, the commentator and narrator of *Pale Fire*, manifests an extensive influence on Shade's poem, and all else that he touches. Not only does he bring about his own personal ruin, he also ruins John Shade's final poem with his commentary and wilful appropriation of it as the vehicle for the means of expressing his own story, while ultimately causing Shade's wrongful death. Kinbote possesses a certain talent, but is certainly no equal to Shade. He is, moreover, mentally disturbed. He exploits Shade's tolerance, and steals the manuscript of his newly completed poem, *Pale Fire* and finally abandons all social conventions and embarks upon a second exile in order to map his own narrative onto Shade's poem.<sup>138</sup> He is deeply deceitful, gaining access to *Pale Fire* from Shade's grieving widow, who one of his detractors suggests signed the papers which handed the poem over the Kinbote 'in some peculiar kind of red ink' (*PF*, 1962, 14). His act is one of artistic thievery on a grand scale; he subverts the honesty and beauty of Shade's content and impresses the story of his own reign and escape into exile upon the superior poem. It is at the same time knowing and ignorant, and reveals Kinbote to be a man, mad to his core, obsessed with locating the fantastical land of his reign, Zembla, somewhere within Shade's poem.

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<sup>138</sup> Blackwell, 'Reading as Transcendence', p. 606.

Kinbote's madness and its link to the exiled king theme in *Pale Fire* has received a great deal of critical attention. John Haegert notes that Kinbote is an 'incurable pederast and lunatic' and a 'narcissist and madman' who is afflicted with 'invulnerable egotism and megalomania', whereas David Galef writes that he is 'a boringly tenacious pedant'.<sup>139</sup> Brian Boyd, too, notes Kinbote's condition of 'mad egocentricity [and] preposterous unreliability'.<sup>140</sup> The liberation the character experiences in being suddenly located outside of his native space suggests to him a freedom without responsibility and consequence. This 'liberating perspective' that Blackwell writes about becomes a condition without any boundaries to reign in his most fantastical notions and his mind becomes skewed. The tragic experience of exile then lies at the heart of his madness which involves him splitting into different identities. As a result, the Charles Kinbote / Charles Xavier / Charles the Great / Botkin characters become intertwined and confused. In the course of *Pale Fire* he is a king, a scholar (his Zemblan disguise), an exile, a madman and an artist (after a fashion). Furthermore, Maaja A. Stewart writes that Nabokov's approach to creating Kinbote is born not of a desire to present the 'character as a representation of a fixed and preserved entity' but instead as a 'cluster of motifs', which shift endlessly throughout the text.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>139</sup> John Haegert, 'The Author as Reader as Nabokov: Text and Pretext in *Pale Fire*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 26 / 4 (1984), 405 - 24, p. 405, p. 415; David Galef, 'The Self-Annihilating Artists of *Pale Fire*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 31 / 4 (1985), 421 - 37, p. 427.

<sup>140</sup> Brian Boyd, *The American Years*, p. 426.

<sup>141</sup> Maaja A. Stewart, 'Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and Boswell's Johnson', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 30 / 2 (1988), 230 - 245, p. 242; Boris Tomashevskii, 'Thematics' in *Russian*

Another notable element of the exiled king theme is its close association with homosexuality. Kinbote, the definitive exiled king, is, despite his marriage to Queen Blenda, sexually attracted only to men. Frank Kermode notes that Kinbote's homosexuality is 'a metaphor for the artist's minority view of the world' and it certainly contributes to Kinbote's alienation and friendless state in New Wye, a conservative college town.<sup>142</sup> Kinbote's first and only true love, Oleg, 'a regular faunlet' dies prematurely leaving him completely alone (*PF*, 105). While he marries Disa, the union is for appearance only and he is unable to consummate their marriage on the wedding night. Indeed, he notes that the page who serves him on his coronation day is far more alluring to him than Disa could ever be. Kinbote's homosexuality in *Pale Fire*, while explicitly evident, is, like many other aspects of his character, latent and only revealed by the mad narrator unintentionally or in the throes of excitement in telling his Zemblan tale. In the character of Kinbote, homosexual desire comes to stand for social ostracisation, artistic infertility, and narcissism (through the desire to love the same rather than the other). Indeed, his friendship with John Shade is, in fact, carried by his obsession and Shade's pity for him, rather than genuine friendship. Kinbote in all his manifestations and identities remains completely and tragically alone, a truly exiled king removed from the various academic, artistic and national communities which surround him.

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*Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Leman and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 61 - 95, p. 90.

<sup>142</sup> Frank Kermode, 'Zemblances', *New Statesman*, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1962, 668 - 676, p. 669.

*Tragediia Gospodina Morna: Heraldng the Exiled King Theme*

The exiled king theme features for the first time in *Tragediia Gospodina Morna*, a play that is strongly influenced by Romanticism, Russian Symbolism and Shakespeare.<sup>143</sup> It was first presented to a private reading and was subsequently never performed.<sup>144</sup> As such, it 'occupies an indeterminate position, somewhere between a closet drama and a play intended for performance'.<sup>145</sup> It remained unpublished until 2008, when it appeared in the Russian original and was translated into English in 2012. Brian Boyd writes that 'for Nabokov writing for the stage was like playing chess without his king', and even the writer himself characterised his abilities as 'a poet in prose'.<sup>146</sup>

*Tragediia Gospodina Morna* was written in the year that followed Nabokov's father's death in miserable conditions in Prague. This was a time of great upheaval in the writer's life, having prematurely taken his place as the new head of the Nabokov family. Moreover, the figure of Morn, the reluctant king, could also be seen as a metaphorical representation of its author's own ill-preparedness in taking his father's place at the helm of the exiled Nabokov family. At the time of his father's death, Nabokov was a final year undergraduate at Cambridge and, in his diary entry following the event of Vladimir Dmitrievich's death, it is clear that he was still very much the head of the family: 'The night before he had been so happy, so kind. He laughed, he fought with me when I began to demonstrate a boxing clinch ... Father helped me put my trousers

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<sup>143</sup> Siggy Frank, 'Exile in Theatre/Theatre in Exile: Nabokov's Early Plays, *Tragediia Gospodina Morna* and *Chelovek iz SSSR*', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 85 / 4 (2007), 629 - 657, p. 631; Brian Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 222.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, p. 635.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, p. 635.

<sup>146</sup> Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 442 and p. 218.

under the press, and drew them out, turning the screws, and said, laughing, "That must hurt them".<sup>147</sup> Vladimir Dmitrievich's unnaturally early death clearly shook the young Nabokov to his core. The exiled king character had not appeared before this point in Nabokov's prose or poetry and it would appear that the shock and trauma caused by his father's death caused Nabokov to introduce this character as a way of making sense of this situation. At the same time, he had also begun his courtship of Véra Slonim, after serially failing to meet her up until his twenty fourth year. Véra remained in Berlin during the harsh winter Nabokov spent writing *Tragediia Gospodina Morna* in Prague. He dallied with the poet Maria Tsvetaeva while there, but returned to Berlin (and Véra) the day after finishing the play.<sup>148</sup> Both his separation from the woman he would later marry and his appointment to the place left vacant by his father's murder are certainly reflected in the play. Morn's struggle with both his physical and mental exile, as well as his reluctant kingship reflect Nabokov's own conflicted state of mind. Therefore the exiled king theme and the masked king of *Tragediia Gospodina Morna* have significant biographical relevance for Nabokov.<sup>149</sup> Written in 1923 - 24, it is the first of Nabokov's works to showcase a concrete manifestation of the exiled king theme in the figure of Morn, the ruler of an imaginary country, rather than later more metaphorical interpretations of this theme (for example, the chess king, Luzhin, or Fyodor, the young, fatherless writer posted on the brink of greatness). At the beginning of the play, the king, Morn, rules anonymously over a fictional and fantastical land to which he has brought peace, following a bloody revolution. He loses a duel and,

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<sup>147</sup> Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 192.

<sup>148</sup> Boyd, *The Russian Years*, p. 219.

<sup>149</sup> See Barabtarlo, 'Nabokov's Trinity', p.113.

balking at the agreed fate of suicide, retreats to the coast with his mistress, Midia, and confidant, Edmin. The country falls into revolution again and peace is only brought about inadvertently by Ganus, Midia's husband, through the failed assassination of Morn. The public, thinking erroneously that the king went into exile for love, demand his reinstatement to the throne and peace once again reigns.

Throughout the play Morn is posited close to poetic creation, stating for instance, his latent creative urges: 'когда бы же был королем, то стал бы поэтом' (*Morn*, 2008, 278). This wistful, burgeoning creative identity is juxtaposed against that of Inostranets, who 'claims the whole world of the drama as his poetic invention and dream'.<sup>150</sup> Conversely, 'during most of the play, Morn remains outside the borders of his kingdom' and is unable to fully engage with creation, despite this latent desire (and, possibly, talent) to do so.<sup>151</sup> He, like Kinbote, cannot engage fully with the creative act and ends his textual life as the title character in Nabokov's play. At the heart of Morn's cowardice is his deceitful nature, which is conjured most effectively in Kinbote, four decades later and in a different language, and it affects Morn's experience of exile in two, quite different ways. The first, already discussed, is when his deceitfulness combines with cowardice and he lies about his motivations for avoiding death following his duel with Ganus. This causes Morn to actually become exiled, which ends with him reverting to his original fate and about to take his own life at the end of the play. However, even earlier, deceit has dominated his entire existence. As soon as Morn begins his rule as the masked king, he avoids truth and this embrace of deceit as the defining feature of his

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<sup>150</sup> Frank, *Nabokov's Theatrical Imagination*, p. 109.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, p.109.



rule leads him further and further from his true path. However, unlike Kinbote who enters into a similar journey, Morn does appear to gain self-knowledge, dispelling the deceit of his own existence. Despite Kinbote's similar fate, he remains at the textual end of *Pale Fire* oblivious to the madness that has precipitated the theft and willfully incorrect annotation of Shade's poem, musing over the inevitability of 'a bigger, more respectable, more competent Gradus' and dreaming of the 'distant northern land' of Zembla.<sup>152</sup>

Gennady Barabtarlo's uses *Tragediia Gospodina Morna* to illustrate the ways in which certain thematic 'strains were formed astonishingly early and ran a surprisingly long and stable course' throughout Nabokov's fiction.<sup>153</sup> In this work, the theme of the exiled king is concerned with imitation, deceit and masquerade. Morn, the masked king who can walk unrecognised among his subjects, is deceived by Ganus (who himself is disguised by Ella upon returning from exile). He then disguises himself to run away, and is revealed to his subjects only when he is reinstated to the throne. However, the dropping of his mask to reveal his true identity as king causes him to see the falsehood upon which he has based his life and status thus far. Whereas he states the lack of care that characterises his approach to his kingship in Act III ('беспечностью я правил' (*Morn*, 212)), this shifts at the end of the play and carelessness is replaced with deception: 'обманом правил я' (*Morn*, 277). This revelation causes him to request his aide's pistol and the play ends with him about to commit suicide and exit the world of lies that he has created.

<sup>152</sup> Robert Alter, 'Autobiography as Alchemy in *Pale Fire*, *Cycnos*, 10 / 1 (1993), 6 - 13, p. 12.

<sup>153</sup> Barabtarlo, 'Nabokov's Trinity', p. 109.

Brian Boyd writes that *Tragediia Gospodina Morna* 'aims unmistakably at Shakespeare'.<sup>154</sup> It could be more specifically argued, however, that it aims to emulate Hamlet's mode of the tragedy of inaction. Barabtarlo notes that the real tragedy of the play is that Morn is a 'noble coward'.<sup>155</sup> Morn's inability to undertake the hand that fate has dealt him leads him to go into exile under the pretence of his love for Midia and to be subsequently reinstated to the throne. Whereas Charles Kinbote later engages with the process of art via appropriation and thievery, Morn does so through masks and mimesis. At the start of the play he merely conceals his true self, but by the point of his reinstatement to the throne he is mimicking a heroic king, exiled by his love for Midia. It is only by exercising his agency by committing suicide that Morn engages with creation 'which transforms him finally into the real king'.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, at the point of his suicide, the mysterious Inostranets, who has dreamt the plot of the play, awakens and exits the dream world, leaving a gap which Morn fills. At this point he is referred to as 'Король' instead of 'Морн', and, demanding Edmin's gun in order to exit the artificial world of the play, he escapes his exile by crossing 'the border into his own kingdom', one, crucially, of his own creation and which exists outwith the parameters of the play he has just been part of.<sup>157</sup> His agency is not as rampant as Kinbote's, but that is not to say that Morn does not engage with the process of creating art. His engagement with creation, as well as his creative talent, is latent and is not seen concretely in *Tragediia Gospodina Morna*. He brings peace to his kingdom twice within the play's time period, firstly by disguise and totalitarian methods

<sup>154</sup> Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 222.

<sup>155</sup> Barabtarlo, 'Nabokov's Trinity', p. 129.

<sup>156</sup> Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 224.

<sup>157</sup> Frank, *Nabokov's Theatrical Imagination*, p. 109.

(Ganus and his fellow rebels are sent to labour camps) and secondly by the accidental misinterpretation of his cowardly actions. This creation of peace is ultimately obtained through the creation of a fiction, akin to the writing of fiction. Thomas Karshan observes that, in doing so, Morn has 'aestheticised the world, restoring order by turning it into a fairy tale or a play'.<sup>158</sup> This process has its limitations and these are laid bare at the end of the play when he exits the play for something more real.

While several scholars have noted parallels between *Hamlet* and *Tragediia Gospodina Morna*, this early work's relationship with *Pale Fire* could be more accurately compared to the relation between *Richard II* and its successor *Hamlet*. However, Morn is not mad in the way that Kinbote clearly is, nor in the sense of *Richard II*. Ironically, at the point in the play where he rejects the falsehoods and deceit upon which he has built his life and rule, voices which belong to his audience of subjects declare his madness: 'его глаза безумиемсияют!' (*Morn*, 276). However, Morn is not mad, but simply a coward who finally finds the resolve to live a morally correct life, even if that entails its very end. As in *Pale Fire*, the exiled king theme is inextricably linked to madness. While Morn as a character is not mad in a way that is directly comparable to Kinbote, his evident cowardice prevents him from being true to himself and leads to his violent death by his own hand. Siggy Frank notes that the setting of the play is a 'dualistic world, where the enchantment of dreams, poetry and nostalgia is set in opposition to a violent and historical reality'.<sup>159</sup> Although the king's actual period of exile does not occur until Act III, he himself

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<sup>158</sup> Thomas Karshan, *Nabokov and the Art of Play* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 74.

<sup>159</sup> Frank, *Nabokov's Theatrical Imagination*, p. 101.

notes that he has ruled as an exiled version of his true self. After failing to go through with his suicide, he confesses to Edmin that he has been an ineffective and ill-qualified ruler, and, moreover, notes the significance of his royal robes being arranged and righted by Edmin, before his coronation: 'мантия сползала все, и сзади ты поправлял' (*Morn*, 212). His masked reign has been inauthentic and the ill-fitting mantle serves to show how ill-fitted Morn was for the role of king.

The homosexuality component of the exiled king theme, which is so prevalent in *Pale Fire*, is notably absent in *Tragediia Gospodina Morna*. Morn has an affair with Midia, Ganus' wife and uses her love for him as an excuse to escape death. While Morn is, evidently, not homosexual, he, too, is unable to exist in state where he is anything other than completely alone, much like Kinbote. None of his relationships are genuine or involve Morn giving anything of himself to another person, apart from Edmin's devotion to him. Morn's playacting has resulted in different identities anticipating Kinbote's later splitting into different characters. Additionally, Morn approaches nobility in the final scene of the play, when he is addressed by his royal title and not his family name (*Morn*, 215). Furthermore, the internal author, Inostranets, whom Morn encounters in the play's final scene, wakes up in his own reality, thus exiting the play he has just dreamt. At the point at which he truly becomes a king, Morn is confronted with the falsehood of his nobility and, moreover, the deception of his own existence. However, again his fleeting nobility is cut through with cowardice as, after replacing Inostranets and taking over his creationary role, Morn demands Edmin's

pistol and exits the room, the play ending with him still visible through glass balcony doors.<sup>160</sup> He therefore ends the play in a slightly better moral position than he began it, aware of his shortcomings, deceptions and cowardice, and about to take the necessary action to right them – but, crucially, and in keeping with his character throughout, having not pulled the trigger. Edmin ends the play as devoted as ever, distraught by his master's impending death, addressing him using the first-person possessive, 'мой король [emphasis mine]' (*Morn*, 215). In this way, Morn is a solitary figure, unable to forge bonds with men or women that are not superficial or based on falsehoods. Furthermore, the parallel, dual realities of the King and Morn are revised in *Pale Fire*, in which they feature as a far more complex and nuanced device. The King / Morn duality pales in comparison with Kinbote's multiple identities and this terminal text of the exiled king theme is enriched by this fuller engagement with co-existing, incongruous realities.

### *Solus Rex: The Last, Unfinished Russian Text*

Following *Tragediia Gospodina Morna*, the exiled king theme recurs again within the developmental arc of revision in *Solus Rex*, Nabokov's final, unfinished novel in Russian. This work was planned as a sequel to *Dar* and constituted the chapters of a fictional novel written by Fyodor,

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<sup>160</sup> Despite his seeming resolve, it is important to note that Morn does not actually kill himself within the parameters of the play, which ends with him holding Edmin's gun while standing on the balcony.

who had lost Zina in a car accident.<sup>161</sup> This work was never completed nor published in Russian, but the two full chapters were translated into English as 'Solus Rex' and 'Ultima Thule' and included in the collection of short stories, *A Russian Beauty*. Nabokov completed the initial work on this project in Paris as he desperately sought work overseas in order to elude National Socialism's advancement across Western Europe, and was written at a unique point in Nabokov's career, when he was writing in all three of his fluent languages. Brian Boyd suggests that *Solus Rex* was borne out of Nabokov's 'retrospective dread' that his recent affair would cause the end of his marriage.<sup>162</sup> The relationship presented in the two chapters, 'Ultima Thule' and 'Solus Rex', depict loving, heterosexual relationships, which have been destroyed or are about to be destroyed through tragic deaths. Whilst Nabokov's regret for his philandering and his retrospective fear of losing both his wife and son are evident throughout his work of this period, other factors of remorse and loss were surely at play. This unique period of writing in the full complement of his languages was a highly productive time in Nabokov's career, which saw the distillation of a number of features of his subsequently completed oeuvre. However, the fact that he was maximising his chances of employment by writing in English and French as well as the Russian language in which he served his literary apprenticeship must only have served to highlight to the imminence of the loss of the Russian language from his artistic life. Alexander Dolinin counters Boyd's argument (and, in

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<sup>161</sup> See Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 520; Grayson, 'Washington's Gift', pp. 27 - 30; Alexander Dolinin, *Istinnaiia zhizn' pisatel'ia Sirina: raboti o Nabokove* (St: Petersburg: Akademichiskii proekt, 2004), p. 278 - 298.

<sup>162</sup> Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 517.

fact, Nabokov's own assertion in the foreword to the English translation) that *Solus Rex* was an autonomous work, by using the manuscript materials of *Dar II* to argue that *Solus Rex* was, in fact, intended as a fictional intertext to *Dar*'s sequel.<sup>163</sup> Dolinin refers to the parallels between the planned death of Fyodor's wife, Zina, and the death of Queen Belinda, as well as the subsequent despondency of Fyodor and Sineusov, who lose themselves in the realm of art following the death of their beloved wives. Structurally and developmentally, it seems far more plausible that Nabokov would have been preparing a structurally complex sequel to *Dar* and, given the recurrence and extension of the themes of death and loss, as well as the fictional intertext which was to be foregrounded in his English novels culminating in *Pale Fire*.

Furthermore, viewing *Solus Rex* as a part of *Dar II* allows for clearer development of the exiled king theme. In this text the exiled king character is constituted by a composite of three individual characters. Firstly, the K of the epic poem, 'Ultima Thule', whose story Sineusov is illustrating, is a royal king like Morn and, moreover, foreshadows Kinbote's initial. Secondly, there is Sineusov, who, despite his relative ordinariness, has a family name which echoes Sineus, the name of one of three Scandinavian princes who were the first rulers of Kievan Russia, which thus suggests a royal lineage.<sup>164</sup> Finally, in the manuscript of *Dar II*, Nabokov notes that he is considering making Fyodor a 'prince'.<sup>165</sup> These elements of the exiled king theme tie to Kinbote, who, like

<sup>163</sup> See Dolinin, *Istinnaiia zhizn' pisatel'ia Sirina*, p. 281.

<sup>164</sup> Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 519.

<sup>165</sup> See Grayson, 'Washington's Gift', pp. 21 - 67.

Sineusov, is also ignorant of the thievery of his art. Sineusov works daily on illustrations, the commission of which has long since been cancelled. At first, he does them to fill the crushing hole left by his dead wife but increasingly he works on them in order to create Queen Belinda, who comes to take the place of his wife. He steals her from K in order to fill the void left behind by his wife, who has died of tuberculosis of the throat, taking with her to the grave their unborn child, and forces his way into the king's fantastical world. Like Morn, he deceitfully steals another woman away from her husband, but his intentions are at least more understandable than the masked king's. However, as Nabokov notes in his introduction to the English translation, this 'pathetic act [...] does not let him triumph over death even in the world of free fancy' as Queen Belinda's death was planned for the third chapter of *Solus Rex*.<sup>166</sup> Written at a time when Nabokov was composing in all three of the languages of which had a native command, the exiled king theme in *Solus Rex* becomes more complex than in its first incarnation in *Tragediia Gospodina Morna*. Furthermore, the time of writing *Solus Rex* coincided with another period of great uncertainty and impending change for Nabokov, his wife and his son, which manifests itself in the textual fabric of *Solus Rex*. In addition to his dalliances with Irina Guadanini, Nabokov was also trying to find employment in the UK or US in order to escape war-torn mainland Europe.<sup>167</sup> As a result, his work of that time becomes pervaded by both linguistic and geographical uncertainty.

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<sup>166</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, 'Foreword', *A Russian Beauty* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1973), p. 172.

<sup>167</sup> Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 433 - 434.



Sineusov, its main character, is commissioned to illustrate the epic poem 'Ultima Thule' by a mysterious, unidentified poet. Written in a Nordic language which bears resemblance to the Russo-Nordic qualities of Zemblan, it is described as 'a melancholy and remote island' to Sineusov by its mysterious commissioner (*Stories*, 1973, 588). Despite the linguistic confusion caused by the poet and Sineusov's common language of French, which the poet has no more than a rudimentary grasp of, the poet is pleased with Sineusov's preliminary sketches. However, he disappears before the commission is complete and Sineusov is left adrift with an unfinished work. As Sineusov's sorrow at the loss of his wife and unborn child grows and begins to overwhelm him, he becomes more and more involved with the unreal, fantastical world of 'Ultima Thule', so much so that he continues with the commission even after it has become clear that he will receive no payment for his work. Ultima Thule (the Latin name for Greenland, while Iceland is referred to as Thule) is his only refuge and it is, moreover, a refuge that he can only access through the portal of his art. He obsesses over creating Queen Belinda as way of recreating his dead wife and actually crosses into the fantastical world of art, the realm of Ultima Thule. This transference is reflected in a letter Sineusov writes to his dead wife, in which he tells her of the metaphorical 'island born in the desolate, grey sea of my heartache for you, now attracted me as the home of my least expressible thoughts' (*Stories*, 591). Crucially, given that Sineusov is a painter, he is crossing a border into fantasy in which his only means of expression is the purely visual mode of illustration. At the point where he crosses into

the realm of Ultima Thule, he merges with K in his quest to replace his dead wife with Queen Belinda. At this point in the story, he is described as the 'no longer independent artist Dmitri Nikolaevich Sineusov' (*Stories*, 609). In this case, sorrow has caused his ability to express himself verbally to break down completely and precipitated and facilitated his passage, whereas Kinbote's entry into the fantastical world of Zembla is borne of his madness. The exiled king theme has, then, in *Solus Rex* become concerned with finding refuge in art, and is an artistic manifestation of Nabokov's own, very real, quest at the time of its writing to find a haven for his family by using his ability to create literary art.

The story of 'Ultima Thule' also becomes concerned with mimesis and transformation, as Sineusov merges with K in order to transform himself from a widower back into a husband.<sup>168</sup> Sineusov finds a neat parallel with the royal king in the proposed second chapter, 'Solus Rex', whom the reader meets on the day of his wife's impending death. Sineusov has already reached a state of isolation being left behind in life, after his wife has passed on in death. The royal king of 'Solus Rex' is, unbeknownst to him, about to endure the same experience, but also faces the very real threat of exile due to the political instability of his kingdom. This interest in shifting identities would be rewritten again in Nabokov's next published novel, his first in English, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, and to some extent they they might reflect his own concerns about the anticipated transformation of himself from V. Sirin,

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<sup>168</sup> Sineusov uses his illustrations to escape into the refuge of art in his quest for his wife - which is thwarted even by Falter. However, even art cannot shield him from the cruelty of life, as Queen Belinda was to be killed off later in the unfinished novel (possibly to mirror Zina's death in a calamitous accident in *Dar II*)

the eminent writer of the first wave emigration, into Nabokov the English (or American, for that matter) writer, starting again after serving a fulsome literary apprenticeship in the Russian language for over two decades. Therefore, here, again, the exiled king theme contains a biographical relevance and application for Nabokov himself. Nabokov would revisit and rewrite the instability of identities in *Pale Fire* where the protagonists multiple, different identities at the same time reinforce and undermine each other.

Moreover, *Solus Rex* contains direct and indirect themes which would subsequently be revised in *Pale Fire*; the metaphysical connection with death, the wrongful assassination and a mythical Northern land with a fictional language are all themes of the unfinished text which would be reworked into *Pale Fire*. Sineusov engages with creation, as Kinbote also does, by writing to his wife, trying desperately to reach her and, crucially, receive a response from beyond the grave. This is an entirely unsuccessful venture and, as this becomes ever more apparent, Sineusov begins to lose himself more ever more deeply into the fantastical, unknown and, ultimately, unknowable land of Ultima Thule. In the same way that Kinbote's commentary becomes increasingly concerned with the fantastical narrative of Zembla as it proceeds, Sineusov, too, strengthens his ties with the artistic, created world. Nabokov writes that, 'the widower becomes so engrossed in Thule that it starts to develop his own reality'.<sup>169</sup> However, as Nabokov notes, Sineusov's resurrection of his wife by projecting her onto Queen Belinda

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<sup>169</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *Russian Beauty*, p. 38.

is doomed, as she was to die in the next, albeit unwritten, chapter. This process has parallels in Kinbote's projection of the self he shed in order to enter into the exile that would save him from Zembla's anti-royalists onto Shade's poem. Sineusov's approach to creation is similar to Kinbote's own, in which he appropriates someone else's work and utilises it for his own purposes, in this case, to cope with the grief of losing his wife and unborn child. This single-minded approach to creation has, once again, disastrous consequences. Furthermore, in this way, Nabokov undermines the harmonious end that Fyodor of *Dar* meets with Zina. Unique amongst Nabokov's novels, *Dar* features a character who is a writer without being deluded regarding his own talents and abilities. While Fyodor is strictly speaking not an exiled king character, and so will not be discussed here in detail, it would however appear that even he (and Zina, who was to be killed of in a freak accident) were unable to escape the disastrous consequences of creating art that affect so many other characters in Nabokov's oeuvre.<sup>170</sup>

Another prominent element in Nabokov's representation of the exiled king theme is madness and its subtle manifestation in 'Ultima Thule' is revised to become a blatant, obvious form of insanity in Kinbote. It becomes an increasingly evident component of Sineusov's character, who allows himself to be subsumed by the fictional world of Ultima Thule in a quest to reach his dead wife in the afterworld. However, despite Sineusov's weakening grip on reality and his escape into the world of creation, madness is most explicitly evident in his old Mathematics tutor,

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<sup>170</sup> Fyodor and Zina's engagement with reading, writing and text will be examined in the following chapter.

Falter. After meeting with Falter, Sineusov character becomes fractured even further, specifically taking on some of the mental distress of a man who, upon learning the secret of the universe, has gone completely, irreversibly mad. Sineusov, driven by his desire to make contact with his wife and his desperation for confirmation that they will have the opportunity to meet again in the afterworld, meets Falter. However, in his desperation he is unable to decipher the riddles Falter delivers as answers to his questions and leaves despondent. However, despite his madness, Falter has actually given Sineusov the answers that he sought, but driven to extremes by his grief he misses the significance of Falter's assertion that 'one can believe in the poetry of a wildflower or the power of money' (his wife enjoyed, above all other things, 'poetry, wildflowers and foreign currency') (*Stories*, 572). In this way, Sineusov merges with yet another character and, through sorrow, takes on Falter's madness.

Therefore, Sineusov anticipates two subsequent revisions of his character, firstly in a probable projection of a future Fyodor, who, despite ending *Dar* as successfully as any character in Nabokov's prose, upon losing his ideal reader and partner, Zina, would be unlikely to maintain such balance, based on the disastrous effects suffered by his counterparts elsewhere in Nabokov's corpus, and secondly in the protagonist of *Lolita*. Humbert, too, is not strictly mad, and can be classified more readily as a paedophile, pervert, murderer and narcissist. Humbert certainly has all of these characteristics, the result, he proposes, of the fracture caused by his first love's premature death. While it is impossible to know what Humbert's development from puberty

to adulthood would have been if Annabel had not died of typhus, it is unlikely that he would be doing anything other than shifting blame for his actions from himself by suggesting that the trauma caused by Annabel's death created the monstrous Humbert presented in the novel. However, his desire to break Annabel's 'spell by incarnating her in another' suggests a deep-rooted and, more importantly, irresolvable split in his psyche, regardless of its source (*Lolita*, 17). It is certainly curious that Humbert and Van Veen can be said to have a closer kinship than either does with Kinbote, whose madness is more closely linked with characters from Nabokov's Russian language works. Of course, neither Van Veen nor Humbert is a truly a royal exiled king, displaying more abstract and latent connections to kingship. The exiled king, Kinbote, and his madness is unique and unparalleled within Nabokov's fiction, and shows a rare combination of a characteristics, which themselves are specific to his creator's oeuvre.

In summary, the exiled king theme in 'Solus Rex' and 'Ultima Thule' is itself a first revision of the kingship of *Tragediia Gospodina Morna* and, at the same time, provides a rich source of material, which forms the basis of Kinbote's mad and colourful commentary within *Pale Fire*. Moreover, it introduces a central motif of *Pale Fire*, that of artistic appropriation. Moreover, the 'Ultima Thule' chapter of *Solus Rex* creates a tangible precursor for the fictional land of Zembla in *Pale Fire*, and, as such, creates a direct link between the English and Russian realms of Nabokov's fiction. Ultimately, this unfinished work clearly exhibits the

ways in which Nabokov revises and combines multiple elements of his earlier works in order to create *Pale Fire*.

### *Lolita*: Nabokov's First Canonised Text

This exiled king recurs again in *Lolita*, this time in a metaphorical permutation. As discussed, Humbert is not of royal lineage but obtains the status of the exiled king by becoming infatuated with a time and place in the past. He differs from other characters who are loosely linked to the theme of the exiled king (such as the chess king Luzhin) by making explicit reference to a principedom by the sea' (*Lolita*, 11) where he tries to find his lost love, Annabel Leigh. Only when he 'breaks [Annabel's] spell by incarnating her in another' does Humbert obtain passage from the memory that has haunted him since his boyhood (*Lolita*, 11). In *Lolita* any form of linguistic uncertainty observed in Nabokov's early Russian works has been replaced with an assured literary grasp of English, which Nabokov uses to invent the suburban and rural America he encountered on the butterfly hunting trips during which much of *Lolita* was composed.<sup>171</sup> However, behind the shiny facade of 'white-frame' houses and 'green-and-pink Ramsdale', lies another version of the geographical uncertainty which is featured so prominently in Nabokov's final, unfinished Russian novel (*Lolita*, 38 - 39). Humbert, technically an emigré and not an exile, expresses his disdain for the curiosities of 1950s American culture so beloved of his nymphet travelling companion (the

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<sup>171</sup> Brian Boyd, *American Years*, p. 217.

soda stand in suburban drugstores is a particularly odd concept for Humbert), and these seem to reflect Nabokov's own response to an alien land. He wrote that 'it had taken me some forty years to invent Russian and Western Europe, and now I was faced with the task of inventing America'.<sup>172</sup> Brian Boyd notes that, while the America of *Lolita* is 'not written in the flat manner of conventional realism', it is nonetheless an evocative representation.<sup>173</sup>

Therefore, in the case of *Lolita*, it is not the impending loss of Russia and the 'untrammelled, rich and infinitely docile Russian tongue' which runs through the exiled king theme, but rather the aftermath of these undoubtedly traumatic experiences (*SO*, 93). Here, yet again, the theme of the exiled king is concerned with loss as well as the impetus for creation, and this is nowhere more present than in Humbert's unrelenting quest to recreate his lost 'Riviera love' (*Lolita*, 13). Humbert's single-minded obsession is what constitutes him as an exiled king and the thematic matter is therefore deeply engaged with fantasy and reality, creation and projection. Throughout his life in Europe, Humbert is haunted by the ghost of Annabel and his inability to master his singular obsession with little girls means that he is unable to engage fully with the flesh and blood world. His one, short attempt at marriage ends in disillusion and latterly violence and deception, and he reverts to the fantastical world of nymphets. The fantasy remains just that, apart from a brief sojourn with a French prostitute, until he arrives in America and fate delivers him to meet Dolores Haze, a not-quite-blank canvas upon which

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<sup>172</sup> Nabokov, 'On a Book Entitled *Lolita*', in *Lolita* (London: Corgi, 1973), pp. 328 - 335, p. 239.

<sup>173</sup> Boyd, *American Years*, p. 246



the 'obsessive dream of Lolita which captured the actual child and took her away' can be projected.<sup>174</sup> By this point, Humbert has created a fantasy far larger and more fulsome than his relationship with Annabel ever was, and he is able to 'break her spell by incarnating her in another' (*Lolita*, 17). Of course, this second incarnation is purely the result of Humbert projecting his fantasy, developed over three decades, onto an innocent child. Brian Boyd notes that even 'Humbert thinks Lolita irredeemably vulgar and trite, endowed with nymphet magic and grace thanks to his discerning eye but otherwise without special interest'.<sup>175</sup> Humbert's hyper-active engagement with creation is what ultimately leads to his own destruction, which transforms him into a real-life Solus Rex at the novel's end.

By the time of Humbert's arrest, he has destroyed not only Lolita's childhood, but her inner life as well. He has caused her mother's death, murdered the man who took his place as her perverted lover and exploited many other characters in order to gain his own ends. The 'irretrievability of the past' not only causes death and destruction within the text of *Lolita*, but its impetus to create in order to fill the void left behind by Annabel also causes the original memory to be effaced.<sup>176</sup> The engagement with creation and the consequent projection of his fantasy onto Dolores Haze robs Humbert of the only true happiness he seems to have ever experienced (although this is pejorative, as Humbert is highly duplicitous and hardly lays his life bare to the reader), and, moreover,

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<sup>174</sup> Wood, *The Magician's Doubts*, p. 108.

<sup>175</sup> Boyd, *American Years*, p. 235 - 6.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, p. 238.

suggests that the reality (Annabel) was embellished out of recognition by Humbert's creative imagination into the fantasy (*Lolita*). Exile becomes an essential condition for Humbert and it is borne out of an obsessive need to transform Annabel into a new creation.

At this point in Nabokov's oeuvre, then, the exiled king theme becomes almost completely concerned with creation. This has parallels with Nabokov's own artistic condition at the time. The earlier concerns of his family's safety and passage to a land without persecution had been replaced with lecturing on literature at Cornell and researching lepidoptery at Harvard, both of which financially supported his dedication to writing. He notes in 'On a book entitled *Lolita*' that 'the first little throb ... [and] ... the initial shiver of ' of *Lolita* was felt in Paris in 1939 or early in 1940, and the fact that he had not committed her to paper until almost a decade later must have been serious cause for concern. This suggests that Humbert's relentless need to create and project his fantasy onto an innocent child mirrors Nabokov's own need to set once and for all the 'beautiful puzzle' of *Lolita*.<sup>177</sup> However, unlike Humbert he had no memory from which to work and so he had to 'build a number of North American sets' for his 1955 masterpiece (*SO*, 20).

Humbert comes from a relatively wealthy European family and, in the time period of the novel, he is an émigré living in the USA, French by nationality and, ethnically, a veritable 'salad of racial genes' (*Lolita*, 11). Despite his displacement from the country of his birth, his kingship is not obtained by his lineage but through his inhabitation of a strange,

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<sup>177</sup> Nabokov, 'On a Book Entitled *Lolita*', p. 330.

fantastical world of memory, which was created by a thwarted sexual experience in the summer of 1923. When Humbert is unable to consummate his youthful relationship with Annabel Leigh, he becomes locked in a thwarted reality in which he strives to recreate his attraction towards his childhood sweetheart in order to complete his unfulfilled destiny. At the start of the novel, Humbert refers in the memoir part of the novel to his 'princedom by the sea', attributing Lolita's subsequent existence to her predecessor (*Lolita*, 11). Of course, when Humbert was involved in a relationship with Annabel he, too, was a child and the crucial moment which he is trying belatedly to possess was initially consensual. However, it could be argued that his sexual desire becomes fixed at the time of Annabel's death and he only desires pre-pubescent female children. Like Morn, Humbert adopts a mask, but this does not free him of his condition and instead it simply allows him to, as Morn does, move freely among his subjects. He tells his projected reader that he married Valeria as 'it occurred to me that regular hours, home-cooked meals, all the conventions of marriage, the prophylactic routine of its bedroom activities ... might help me' (*Lolita*, 27). However, the mask slips almost immediately, as he chose Valeria for 'the imitation she gave of a little girl' (*Lolita*, 28). When her imitative act falls and her true, adult female self is exposed, Humbert's mask is also effaced and he pursues his nymphet fantasies again, which results in his finding Dolores Haze and projecting his fantasy onto her.

However, Humbert finds that, despite Lolita surpassing her predecessor, he is incapable of recapturing the conditions in which he

became exiled forever to his 'Riviera love' (*Lolita*, 42). When he is thwarted from possessing Annabel, the setting is vivid and poetic, with 'the violet shadow of some red rocks forming a kind of cave' (*Lolita*, 176). However, when Humbert tries to recreate the scene three decades later with his reincarnated Annabel, 'the fog was like a wet blanket, and the sand was gritty and clammy, and Lo was all gooseflesh and grit, and for the first time in my life I had as much desire for her as a manatee' (*Lolita*, 176). Therefore, despite his mastery in creating and projecting the fantasy of Lolita, his new-found 'kingdom' is a place of exile itself, as he finds that it is impossible to relive his memory of Annabel, which he enjoyed in a 'princedom', and change the outcome. No matter how many times he possesses Lolita, he cannot ever possess Annabel, who is lost forever to him now. In this passage Humbert goes on to speak of his 'liberation' from Annabel, which occurred much earlier in the novel, at the point where he sees Lolita for the first time – 'at the moment, in point of fact, when Annabel Haze, alias Dolores Lee, alias Loleeta, had appeared to me, golden brown, kneeling, looking up, on that shoddy veranda, in a kind of fictitious, dishonest, but eminently satisfactory seaside arrangement (although there was nothing but a second-rate lake in the neighbourhood)' (*Lolita*, 176). This liberation, as the preceding passage about his attempt to have intercourse on a beach with Lolita shows, is false, as Humbert falls deeper into the exile of his own memories and creations to the point where he effaces the original of Lolita and all that remains of Annabel is an ever-fading memory of a blurry photograph (*Lolita*, 15). At this point, Humbert enters into temporal disjuncture – the

past is no longer a viable option as the memory he has based the fantasy of *Lolita* on has become effaced, and the present cannot offer a satisfactory version of the projection of this fantasy. Its unknowable nature causes Humbert to drive forward to the inevitable, tragic end of *Lolita*. He extends his reign over Dolores Haze and the fantasy of *Lolita* for as long as he possibly can, and ends the novel truly inhabiting the 'Solus Rex' position, standing alone on a hilltop, waiting to be arrested.

Like Morn and Sineusov, Humbert does not display the homosexual tendencies of Kinbote. In the immediate context of the time of writing, one could posit a connection between illicit or illegal sexual practices, but it would be wrong to assert that Nabokov revises Humbert's serial rape of a little girl with Kinbote's harmless infatuation with other men. More importantly, however, the theme of homosexuality, which would recur in *Pale Fire* in revised form, features briefly, but by no means insignificantly, in *Lolita*. Humbert's acquaintance, Gaston Godin (G. G. to Humbert's H. H) is a homosexual paedophile who sends a 'grave young lad' to meet Humbert when he arrives in Beardsley (*Lolita*, 185). Humbert tacitly recognises a fellow pederast in Godin, who does not seem to return the favour. Humbert notes, 'had he discovered *mes gots* and *Lolita*'s status, it would have interested him only insofar as throwing some light on the simplicity of my attitude towards him, which attitude was as free of polite strain as it was of ribald allusions; for despite his colourless mind and dim memory, he was perhaps aware that I knew more about him than the burghers of Beardsley did' (*Lolita*, 190).

The main activity that Humbert and Godin share is chess, two lone men defending their lone chess kings, exiled by their unacceptable desires.

*Lolita* represents the last instance of the exiled king theme in Nabokov's work before its designation in *Pale Fire*. While it is a full representation of the theme, its greatest realisation is reserved for *Pale Fire*. While *Lolita* engages with the theme through Humbert, his projection of the fantasy child onto Lolita refocuses this text onto another aspect of Nabokov's oeuvre, which will be examined more fully in the third chapter of this thesis. The developmental revisions that Nabokov undertakes to the exiled king theme result in a wonderfully complex work, which has endless layers of mystique and meaning. While Nabokov attempted to impress the idea of himself as a Romantic, God-like author who controlled all aspects of his work, it has been shown by the numerous revisions and iterations of the exiled king theme that this conception of himself is at odds with Nabokov's actual practice of creating this central aspect of his texts and oeuvre. Nabokov revisits certain central thematic matter, motifs and characters throughout his works and revises the way in which they are expressed until he perfects their expression in a subsequent text. He revised the exiled king theme over four decades before refining the theme's presentation sufficiently to form an integral part of *Pale Fire*'s textual fabric. In this way, it can be argued that the tension created by Nabokov's constant concealing and revealing of revisionary facts has at its roots the artist's desire to hide that he is, as all other author's are, fallible. His works were not, as he would have the reader believe, initially and absolutely perfect, but instead

they underwent a network of revisions, the result of which is the production of polished and accomplished texts.

**Chapter 2: Nabokov's Fictional Revisions**

Revision is an encompassing feature of Nabokov's works and one which manifests itself in multiple tracks, forms and networks within his self-reflexive oeuvre. This chapter examines the function of revisions undertaken by Nabokov's author-characters within the fictional worlds and texts they are part of. These fictional revisions are a deliberately visible form of revision, which operate within the individual narrative structures of Nabokov's fictional worlds. They are presented to the reader using a variety of techniques and are integral to the artistic structures of Nabokov's individual texts. Fictional revisions are used by the author-character figures in their attempts to gain control over the texts they find themselves a part of. These texts, with their revisions laid bare, create a sense of immediacy supposedly granting the reader direct access to the narrators' texts or manuscripts. At the same time, these author-characters inadvertently foreground through the revisions they make and therefore reveal their own fallibilities, undermining any control they might have had over the text. This creates fiction which is engaged with its very nature and the texts that result are purposefully self-conscious.<sup>178</sup> This effect is uncovered by the surface reading that fictional revisions elicit. This reading function assimilates the fictional revisions that are experienced in the linear chronology of a first reading and uses them to project a version of the text in which all versions of the revised matter are presented alongside one another. The device of the unreliable narrator therefore allows the reader to experience both versions simultaneously and incorporate them into the version of the text that is produced. The narrators'

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<sup>178</sup> Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, p. 25.



fictional revisions inevitably remain a visible part of the final text and are reflected in numerous inconsistencies, which render the text itself ultimately imperfect. This creates a disjuncture within the text, as the aims of the author-character and Nabokov intersect and, ultimately, clash. This, in turn, creates a situation in which the narrative (or, most often, multiple narratives) created by the author-character are destabilised by Nabokov who decides not to realise the revisions in the final version of the text, but instead leaves them as visible signs to mark the narrators' narratives as first, incomplete drafts.<sup>179</sup> Nabokov, therefore, undermines the seeming autonomy of the author-character as a creative force within the text, marking their narratives as a mere part of a wider fictional universe, which is created and controlled by Nabokov himself.

Fictional revisions are undertaken by author-characters within Nabokov's fiction, who operate either as autonomous writers of their own texts or as editors who intrude upon and alter others' works. As writers, narrators re-read their own texts or parts thereof and rewrite them, leaving exposed the sort of double vision that accompanies the narratives of Nabokov's unreliable narrators. The editors read and re-read other writers' work and suggest revisions by leaving traces of themselves in the text, for instance, Zina's comments on Fyodor's text in *Dar* or Ada's textual interjections. The fictional revisions impressed upon the original texts-within-the-text created by Nabokov's author-characters, or altered by his editors, have a distinct effect on the narratives and texts that they are part of, delineating the reading process that creates them. While some of these editors engage somewhat playfully with the works created by other writers,

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<sup>179</sup> In this way, Nabokov's author-characters are his metafictional agents, carrying out his bidding within the narrative structures of his texts.

others interact with them in ways that create 'radical uncertainties' within the text.<sup>180</sup> For example, Zina is a loving and cooperative presence within Fyodor's text, however, V is a much less benevolent presence on the works of his half-brother, Sebastian Knight. Overall, fictional revisions focus attention onto the effects that the acts of reading and re-reading have on the texts that they are part of. By engaging with the process of reading and re-reading writers become their own critics and reading audiences, while editors enter into the revision process by using source material written by another author-character. This ordinarily leads to the editors becoming part of the writing process, while appropriating others' works as the basis of their own creations.

This chapter will examine the following author-characters, all of whom are writers of their own works; Hermann Karlovich of *Otchaianie*, Cincinnatus C. of *Priglasenie na kazn'*, Humbert Humbert of *Lolita* and Van Veen of *Ada*. Moreover, it will consider the following characters in their function as editors of works produced by author-characters within the texts of which they are a part of: Zina Mertz of *Dar*, V of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, Charles Kinbote of *Pale Fire* and Ada Veen of *Ada*.

#### Hermann Karlovich: *Otchaianie*'s writer, reader and reviser

interjection. These revisions are all enacted during his process of writing his text, which, through a surface reading, is read simultaneously with its creation, firstly by the reader and latterly by Hermann himself. Hermann's interjection at the end of the first sentence of the novel clearly suggests his unreliability as a

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<sup>180</sup> Butler, *Postmodernism*, p. 173.

narrator. In this instance, he begins his novel, then interjects and revises what he has just written thus: 'Если бы я не был совершенно уверен в своей писательской силе, в чудной своей способности выражать с предельным изяществом и живостью – Так, примерно, я полагал начать свою повесть' (*Otchaianie*, 1934, 7). Here, Hermann's fallibility, regardless of the haughty demeanour he projects from this point on, is made evident in one short passage.

Despite his pretensions, and protestations, of greatness, 'Hermann now and then betrays his utter lack of understanding, judgment, imagination, originality and talent'.<sup>181</sup> He consistently revises the image of himself which he presents meticulously and painstakingly, undermining that very thing that he strives to show the reader – that he is an artist capable of producing a seamless, perfect work of art. Just after his interjection to his own opening sentence, he confesses that the depiction he has just given of his parents as cultured members of high society was a lie. Dolinin's assertion that 'from under the mask of a self-proclaimed genius there slowly appears the deformed mug of a malicious buffoon, a mad impostor and imitator whose gaudy pretentious style lacks alleged originality and inventiveness' begins to ring true, despite the fact that, thus far, not even two pages of this novel have been completed.<sup>182</sup>

Hermann follows his confession by noting that, while he could have deleted the first, duplicitous, description, he decided to leave it within the text to showcase and justify his propensity to lie: 'Я мог бы, конечно, похерить выдуманную историю с веером, но я нарочно оставляю ее, как образец одной из главных моих черт: легкой, вдохновенной лживости' (*Otchaianie*, 8). Even

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<sup>181</sup> Dolinin, 'The Caning of Modernist Profaners', *Cycnos*, 12 (1995), 1 - 11, p. 7

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p.7

when he highlights the offending sentences as incorrect they remain in existence and inform the reading experience of *Otchaianie*. This recurs again later in the text, when Hermann notices his own likeness with Raskolnikov. Finding it too uncomfortable he interjects and attempts to cancel the similarity with negation: 'Нет. Не то. Отставить' (*Otchaianie*, 184). Therefore, rather than deleting the offending part of the text, Herman adds additional comments which only draw attention to the initial version, thus undermining his own authority in the process.

Another way in which Hermann revises his text apart from through self-commentary, erasure and textual interjection is in his creation of his double, Felix. Much like that other HH two decades later, Hermann projects a fantasy onto an innocent and vulnerable man he finds napping in a ditch while walking in the countryside, who does not, of course, resemble Hermann at all.<sup>183</sup> Siggie Frank notes that the initial and subsequent meetings between Hermann and Felix 'lack credibility', and it is entirely possible that Hermann not only projects his own image onto a real man, but actually makes up the original upon which his idealised self-image is projected.<sup>184</sup> Regardless of Felix's doubtful status as an autonomous character, he is presented by Hermann in such a way that is impossible to see his real identity (if, indeed, it does exist), although it is clearly not synchronous with Hermann's. In this way, Felix becomes a device of

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<sup>183</sup> Hermann's given and patronymic names, Hermann Karlovich, are used in *Otchaianie*, and he is only referred to with his double-barrelled, aspirated pseudonym by Nabokov in an interview many years later. This type of authorial intrusion will be examined in the final chapter of this thesis. However, it is worth noting that the H. H. initial occurs multiple times in Nabokov's oeuvre, firstly here (if that information is only given retrospectively), again in *Lolita* with Humbert Humbert and in Nabokov's final, unauthorised draft of *The Original of Laura* with Hubert Hubert. Nabokov's revision and reusing of elements of his characters are of vital importance to this study, too, and the multiple effects they have are discussed in the previous and following chapters.

<sup>184</sup> Frank, *Nabokov's Theatrical Imagination*, pp. 148 - 9.

Hermann's text, a textual construct of the author-character. Upon his second meeting with Felix, Hermann becomes aware of the fallibility of his created double, but chooses not to admit his error and instead revises in order to maintain the soothing facade. Felix as Hermann's double figure reflects Hermann's urge to create and but also exposes his limited creative talent. If Hermann's true identity appears form behind his projected mask of genius, then it can also be argued that 'Hermann's impulse for immortality, an impulse possessed by all men, is intensified by the artistic longings within him'.<sup>185</sup> In this way, Felix is the first artwork that Hermann creates via revision, while the text which is read concurrently with the process of its being written is the second. The failure of the former is what causes Hermann to hyperbolically 'emphasises the artistry of his crime', which, ironically draws attention to the comprehensive failure of both.<sup>186</sup>

Hermann additionally implements direct revisions by reading the manuscript of his work in progress. He firstly undertakes a surface reading and then a re-reading of his work-in-progress in the final chapter of the novel, thus discovering the error in the design of his crime. The perfect murder of Felix that Hermann planned is undermined by Hermann carelessly forgetting to remove Felix's stick, with its identifying name, from his car before leaving the crime scene. Fictional revisions that are enacted by reading are sophisticated and complex, and are implemented not simply by reading, but also via re-reading (an action that the ideal narrative audience is invited to match) an action Nabokov constantly praised and encouraged in both his students and among

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<sup>185</sup> Dolinin, 'Caning of Modernist Profaners', p.7; Claire Rosenfield, 'Despair and the Lust for Immortality', *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 8 / 2 (1967), 174 - 192, p. 178.

<sup>186</sup> Rosenfield, 'Lust for Immortality', p. 74.

his own readership (*LL*, 3).<sup>187</sup> When Hermann reads over what he has written near the conclusion of *Otchaianie*, he, again much like Humbert, plays over the events which constitute the text thus far, only this time he recognises his fatal mistake. This is a crucial turning point in *Otchaianie*, as it represents the point at which Nabokov intervenes with Hermann's narrative in order to undermine his author-character's authorial control. Hermann's escalating madness curiously appears to prevent him from revising his error within his text once he reads his account of Felix's murder and realises that he left behind incontrovertible evidence of Felix's identity. It could be argued, as Siggy Frank does, that Felix simply does not exist and that Hermann has, by the point of the murder, fully departed from his sanity (if ever he possessed it) and is incarcerated in a mental hospital where he creates his entire work in his mind.<sup>188</sup> This reading of *Otchaianie* yields a situation in which Hermann cannot revise his text to clean up his error, as it is the only evidence that Felix actually exists in a world that is rapidly disintegrating around him. Conversely, it could also be argued that Hermann does not revise the error directly, but uses its discovery to enter into a second narrative spiral, the memoir (which itself descends into a diary form).<sup>189</sup> In this way, Hermann continues to seek refuge in art, changing track when he realises he has committed a fatal error in the first iteration and attempting to create, this time, the perfect artwork that failed him previously. At this point, Hermann is able to control only the most basic function of writing, that of putting words onto a page. However, even that breaks down, firstly with his use of the diary form and finally with the fictional address that is added to *Otchaianie's*

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<sup>187</sup> See Nabokov, 'Good Readers and Good Writers', p. 3.

<sup>188</sup> Frank, *Nabokov's Theatrical Imagination*, p. 151.

<sup>189</sup> The converse of this model is later produced in *Lolita*, in which Humbert's diary is an integral and pivotal part of the overall text.

English language translation, *Despair*. An extra paragraph is added to the conclusion of *Despair*, which sees Hermann attempt to revise the disintegrating fictional reality he finds himself in by addressing the crowd he believes to have gathered below his window thus: 'Frenchmen! This is a rehearsal. Hold those policemen ... Attention! I want a clean getaway. That's all. Thank you. I'm coming out now' (*Despair*, 163). In this later version of *Otchaianie* (and it is the most altered of all of Nabokov's translations, barring *Kamera obskura*), Hermann is even more desperate and dedicated to revising his creative work. After his first fictional world proves to be unsatisfactory, he attempts to create another, which proves to be even less under his control. However, in either reading of the text, Nabokov's controlling hand is felt. If Felix is entirely Hermann's creation, then Nabokov undermines his author-character's authorial control by having Hermann allow Felix's stick to remain in the manuscript as a proof of sorts of his facetious existence. If Felix is a character who does not resemble Hermann, but has Hermann's self-image impressed onto him by his creator, Nabokov directs Hermann to revise not through deletion or erasure, but simply by starting to write again. Both arguments, crucially, involve revising in the form of textual asides, interjections and self-commentary, but at the most crucial point of the novel, when revision would be most welcomed by the author-character, it is notably absent. In both iterations, the text that Hermann has written, either mentally or actually, is too flawed to be saved by revision and writing is the only option open to Hermann in order to progress. Therefore, the facetious control that Hermann has over his texts yields completely and is superseded by the authorial presence and control of Nabokov himself, in the overseeing role of the author of *Otchaianie*.

Clare Rosenfield writes that the ambiguous ending scenario 'enables the reader to finish the novel to his own taste'.<sup>190</sup> She continues that 'the author of *Despair* does strive to make his reader a "reader-writer", in a sense, a double'.<sup>191</sup> It is certainly true that the reader is involved in the process of the authoring of the text by reading it contemporaneously with its production, and, while the reader is perhaps duped by Hermann's early unreliability, this feature of Hermann's deceptive revision can, after several encounters, be anticipated. Wladimir Troubetzkoy writes that 'as many times as he can, Hermann Karlovich makes the reader believe in the illusion rather than in reality, then he shows us that we have been fooled (cf. the first pages of his narrative, when he lies constantly and enjoys confessing it)'.<sup>192</sup> Indeed, it is precisely the recurrence of this aspect of Hermann's narration that allows the reader to identify his gleefully unreliable nature, which thus undermines the validity of the narration as a whole. Once the reader comes to expect to be fooled, he can no longer be tricked by Hermann and, correspondingly, move closer to the ideal author, Nabokov, and away from the deeply flawed author-character Hermann. Furthermore, Hermann addresses parts of his narrative to an émigré writer to whom his manuscript was sent for editing and publication, suggesting playfully, of course, Nabokov himself. This element of the text posits Nabokov, or a murky pseudo-Nabokov at least, in an editorial role. As editor of the text, this Nabokov figure allows the multiple revisions to remain entirely visible within the text. This further undermines the authority of Hermann as author-character and, moreover, highlights the control of the editorial figure behind the publication of

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<sup>190</sup> Rosenfield, 'Lust for Immortality', p. 174.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, p. 174.

<sup>192</sup> Wladimir Troubetzkoy, 'Vladimir Nabokov's *Despair*: The Reader as "April's Fool"', *Cycnos*, 12 / 2 (2008), 1 - 24, p.1.



the text. Julian Connolly writes that 'the deep tragedy of Hermann Karlovich is that, until the end, he does not give up the hope of becoming a creator, while he is destructive, a mere creature of the God-Nabokov'.<sup>193</sup> Ultimately, the desire to be a creator is precisely what foregrounds Hermann's fallibility and undermines his ability and position as the creator of the text, *Otchaianie*, while simultaneously reinforcing Nabokov as its one, true author.

### Cincinnatus C. Cincinnatus: Revising the impossible prison world of

#### *Priglasenie na kazn'*

*Priglasenie na kazn'* presents an inverted model of fictional revision, which presents reading as the precursor of writing. Whereas in *Otchaianie* reading is a form of fictional revision for Hermann, in which he revises the text he has just written, for Cincinnatus, the prisoner protagonist of *Priglasenie na kazn'*, it is the first step towards writing which, from the very start, acts as a peculiar form of revision, the attempt to revise the fictional world the protagonist is a part of. Cincinnatus reads to revise the reality of the tyrannical prison world in which he is imprisoned. It is only when reading provides an unsatisfactory result that he turns to writing to implement revisions into the situation within which he finds himself trapped. Overall, revision has a more successful outcome for Cincinnatus than it does for Hermann, as the reader bids farewell to the former at the point of escape, rather than arrest. *Priglasenie na kazn'* is unique to the Nabokov oeuvre in that it was, as alleged by the author, created in a fortnight 'of wonderful excitement and sustained inspiration', during which Nabokov's

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<sup>193</sup> Connolly, 'Function of literary allusion', p. 305.

ordinarily methodical approach to writing was disrupted by this jolt of inspiration (*SO*, 92).<sup>194</sup> Boyd argues that, despite Nabokov's assertion that his writing was not informed by politics, the oppressive prison setting of *Priglasenie na kazn'* seems somehow unthinkable without the very real background of Goebbels' dissemination of Nazi culture in Germany and the tightening vice of Stalin's censorship in the USSR against which it was written in a furious fortnight.<sup>195</sup> It would be accurate to characterise Nabokov's self-identified and self-professed position as an aesthete as being generally over-stated by the author himself. For example, he famously proclaimed in the afterword to *Lolita* that 'I am neither a reader nor a writer of didactic fiction' and took great pains to maintain this position publicly.<sup>196</sup> However, it is also impossible to overstate the extent to which external factors, such as exile and emigration, had on Nabokov's life and works. For example, while it is impossible to project an alternative life and career path for the author, it is certainly likely that Nabokov would not have written professionally in English had the Bolsheviks and Nazis not forced his expulsion from Europe. It is, moreover, problematic to take Nabokov at his word, especially when that word has been meticulously crafted in one of his tightly controlled interviews.<sup>197</sup> However, the totalitarian reality-in-inverted-commas (the only kind that exists, according to Nabokov) in which *Priglasenie na kazn'* is set, and which imprisons Cincinnatus in a world which sentences him to death for his perceived differences, more readily represents the self-

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<sup>194</sup> However, as discussed in the previous chapter, it must be noted that Nabokov took another two years to redraft the text before its publication, which brings the overall period of its completion into line with the majority of his other works.

<sup>195</sup> Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 410.

<sup>196</sup> Nabokov, 'On a Book Entitled *Lolita*', p. 332.

<sup>197</sup> This makes reference to Nabokov's practice of conducting interviews in writing over several drafts, the final of which he would authorise for publication. The significance of this aspect of Nabokov's work will be discussed fully in Chapter 4.

imposed parameters which oppose the writer as he writes than the social and political difficulties the author, Vladimir Nabokov, experienced when writing the text (*SO*, 131). Undoubtedly, the means and manner of writing have combined uniquely to create this curious novel. As D. Barton Johnson writes, *Priglasenie na kazn'* is 'the most structurally stark and artifice-saturated of Nabokov's works [which shows] a compression of stylistic virtuosity and theme that might have been etiolated by a more leisurely mode of writing'.<sup>198</sup>

Johnson identifies two opposing worlds in *Priglasenie na kazn'*, one of 'opacity', the other of 'transparency'.<sup>199</sup> These qualities create an irresolvable tension that facilitates Cincinnatus' engagement with writing and revision. Cincinnatus, a frail and gentle teacher of disabled children, is imprisoned unjustly then abused and deceived by those around him. Despite this, or, rather, precisely because of this, he retains the depth of character and personality which led to his being charged with the crime of 'gnostical turpitude' ('гносологическая гнусность' (*PNK*, 1936, 87) and imprisoned. His charge is never elucidated and his subsequent death sentence is whispered, as is the custom in the dystopian state of the setting of *Priglasenie na kazn'*; however, it is the perceived difference of his peculiarity ('некоторую свою особость' (*PNK*, 23)) which makes him a writer and causes his persecution at the same time. Indeed, the prison guidelines include the following directive, designed to smother originality of thought: 'тотчас сам пресекал ночные сны, могущие быть по содержанию своему несовместимыми с положением и званием узника' (*PNK*, 39).

<sup>198</sup> D. Barton Johnson, 'The Two Worlds of Invitation to a Beheading' in *World's in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985), pp. 157 - 169, p. 157.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, p. 158.

However, this writerly quality is, at least to begin with, latent, and Cincinnatus does not engage with the writing act until the eighth of twenty chapters. In contrast to Hermann in *Otchaianie*, Cincinnatus must read before he can write, and it is, in fact, a lack of reading material that causes him to begin writing. When he becomes a writer (by creating one of the multiple narratological layers of Nabokov's novel), the passive function of reading is replaced by the active role of writing. Furthermore, the reading and writing tracks of revision are much more closely linked than in *Otchaianie*. Cincinnatus attempts to use reading as a method of escape from the prison world he inhabits, but finds it an inadequate alternative, as claustrophobic and labyrinthine as the world he is attempting to exit: 'Цинциннат раскрыл книжку и углубился в нее, то есть все перечитывал первую фразу' (*PNK*, 61). It is an altogether unsatisfactory process, guided, as he is by narrators and authors, as he strives for autonomy and control. In this way, he is unable to fully revise his textual circumstances by engaging with the process of reading. It is precisely the opaque and unyielding world of the prison that drives Cincinnatus to write in order to make sense of his incomprehensible circumstances. Cincinnatus' engagement with writing follows a process of creative negotiation not only with the world around him, but also with the narrator who, initially at least, imparts that world to the reader. In turn, the process through which Cincinnatus revises his circumstances begins with his engagement with writing. As a novel, *Priglasenie na kazn'* is the scene of a battle for authorial control between the unnamed omniscient narrator and Cincinnatus, the novel's protagonist who becomes an author-character. At the beginning of the novel, Cincinnatus engages with the narrative through textual interjection. This occurs

for the very first time in the first chapter, when Cincinnatus briefly addresses the reader in parenthesis: ('я просто не могу тебе объяснить какого ужасного дня') (*PNK*, 22). On the following page, Cincinnatus becomes aware of his own fictionality and notes the painstaking methods through which he has been created ('и я ведь сработан так тщательно' (*PNK*, 23)). However, at this point of the process he is incapable of affecting it in any way. As he becomes more aware of the created world in which he is situated, his conception of it becomes increasingly complex and he begins to identify patterns and signs that point to its un-reality, noting, for example, that the sprawling polyhedron ('широкий многоугольник' (*PNK*, 55)), which is formed by the interconnected corridors of the prison.

The unnamed narrator continues to have the final word and retains control of the text in the first three chapters, and audaciously speaks directly to the narrated subject at the end of the second chapter, noting that Cincinnatus' 'criminal exercise' (*IB*, 29) has revitalised him ('Цинциннат, тебя освежило преступное твое упражнение' (*PNK*, 29)). Moreover, when Cincinnatus tries to engage with writing the results are muddled and unclear. For example, even the simple task of writing a letter becomes complicated for Cincinnatus. He writes a letter, rips it up and then tries to reconstitute it from the individual pieces. At this stage in the text, Cincinnatus has not yet identified himself as a creator of words and worlds, unlike the narrator, and the results are correspondingly flawed. Cincinnatus' attempts to take control from the narrator at this point are weak and ineffective but they are crucial to his development as a writer. At this early stage, he cannot comprehend the world around him and the persecution that he faces, and he attempts to affect it in any way that he

can. At the end of the third chapter, he becomes aware of his difference and truly starts on the path to writing. He is taken out of his cell to a vantage point upstairs where his status as creator is revealed, when his eyes make ‘illegal excursions’ (*IB*, 38) (‘его глаза совершали беззаконнейшие прогулки’ (*PNK*, 36)), by noticing things in the opaque world that none of his peers are aware of. However, it is not until he has exhausted the prison’s reading material that Cincinnatus first puts pencil to paper and moves from being a reader of fiction to a writer of fiction. His first attempts at writing are disjointed and characterised by ellipses, but in them he addresses the intolerable nature of his imprisonment, noting, for instance, the agony of not knowing whether he will be able to complete the project he wishes to begin: ‘но как мне приступить к писанию когда, знаю, успею ли, а в том-то и мучение’ (*PNK*, 41). Cincinnatus’ concern that he may not have time to complete his work almost causes him not to write at all and plagues him for the duration of his writing. However, the completeness of his work is never the overriding goal of the actual writing process, although this becomes apparent to him only at the very end of the novel, when being led away to his execution, he makes a crucial discovery: ‘вдруг понял, что, в сущности, все уже дописано’ (*PNK*, 134).

Writing for Cincinnatus is a way of revising the intolerable present tense in which he finds himself trapped. It is moreover a way for him to activate and verify his own existence in a world that is curiously and eerily fictional. In engaging more and more with writing as a means of revising his powerlessness and gaining a degree of control over his situation, Cincinnatus becomes a writer and gains narrative control from the original, unidentified narrator as the novel progresses. This happens explicitly for the first time after Cincinnatus looks at

the drawings Emmie has given him, depicting an escape from the prison-world. The third person narrative depicts Cincinnatus viewing Emmie's crude depiction of his supposed escape, then making repeated use of the first person plural pronoun, until he is interrupted by the librarian, who guides Cincinnatus back to the task of requesting books (*PNK*, 40 - 42). While it is impossible to make a clear distinction between the narrator's and Cincinnatus's voice, it is the duality of the narrative voice which marks Cincinnatus's first active contribution to the narrative. The effect that this has on him is immediately apparent and when he writes again it is in much more fluid prose than his stilted first attempt.

This struggle for narrative control begins in earnest in the eighth chapter, which, save for its first paragraph, is authored solely by Cincinnatus in lucid, flowing prose. The narrator is forced into the role Cincinnatus occupied at the beginning of the novel, providing only one parenthetical textual interjection at the end of the chapter: ' (Тут, к сожалению, погас в камере свет, – он тушился Родионом ровно в десять)' (*PNK*, 134). This narrative shift occurs again at the start of the thirteenth chapter, when the narrator concedes the fictionality of the world Cincinnatus inhabits: 'Я вполне готов допустить, что и они – обман, но так в них верю сейчас, что их заражаю истиной' (*PNK*, 91). Following this, Cincinnatus takes control of the narrative and speaks of his despair in the first person. Despite the shift back to the original narrator, Cincinnatus has more control of the narrative from this point on than even he is aware of. He writes of his envy for poets ('Зависть к поетам' (*PNK*, 125)), explaining it thus: 'Как хорошо, должно быть, пронестись по странице и прямо со страницы, где остается бежать только тень, – сняться – и в синеву' (*PNK*, 125). Yet this is precisely what he does two chapters later at the

end of the novel, requesting the materials he requires to write. The fictionality of the world which he inhabits becomes more and more clear to him as he is driven to the execution site and sees the streets lined with bit players from his life, which indicates that he is only a figurative author. Once there, the other Cincinnatus, the writer, fully emerges at this point and refuses to play the part assigned to him. This Cincinnatus dispenses with his other self and gets up from the execution block, heading towards an external unknown place: 'в ту сторону, где, судя по голосам, стояли существа, подобные ему' (*PNK*, 142).

*Priglasenie na kazn'* is a novel of inaction, as very little actually happens and the main event, the execution of the title, does not occur fully within the novel's textual parameters. The reader reads this inaction alongside Cincinnatus' process of writing, and the consequent revisions that are implemented to his writing. Cincinnatus revises not simply through writing but *by* engaging with writing at all, as he revises his fate and exercises some control over it by writing. Moreover, he is, in a sense, reading the prison world that he is incarcerated within while he writes it, as the very process of writing is the one that allows him to understand and give meaning to his situation. He fills his textual world with accounts of the misery he suffers in the fictional world he finds himself part of. However, as he creates a physical record of his oppression and suffering through writing, he also creates a record of his reading, or experiencing, of that existence. This engagement with writing, in turn, allows Cincinnatus to eventually transcend his textual prison and gain passage from the narrative to another, unknown place. Each of the chapters he writes corresponds to one day lived, and the length of his life corresponds directly with



the length of his pencil. Cincinnatus' revision in *Priglasenie na kazn'* makes evident the processes of writing and the status of the writer. It is the crudest example of this form of writing in Nabokov's oeuvre, as its artifice is closest to the surface. The reader then is invited to read the text Cincinnatus is the in the very process of writing at the same time. At the beginning of the novel there is a clear instance of narrative control, which exists beyond Cincinnatus. When meeting with the director of the prison in which he is incarcerated for the first time, Cincinnatus has a double reply to the director's introduction. The first response ('Любезность. Вы. Очень. (Это еще нужно расставить.)' (*PNK*, 18)), is contrasted against a second, synchronous acknowledgement (Вы очень любезны – сказал, прочистив горло, какой-то добавочный Цинциннат' (*PNK*, 18)). The latter is clearly revised after the manuscript has been read. Here, revision leaves a clear and discernible trace in the text, which allows the reader to identify the revision as an integral process within the novel even before a finalised text has been created. This doubling then reverts the novel to its manuscript state, thus creating a reading which is complicit with the process of both writing and writing's subsequent revision. This is a phenomenon that Nabokov would revisit in *Ada*, and is similar to the projection of the novel that Fyodor plans to write at the end of Nabokov's final Russian novel, *Dar*, both of which will be discussed fully within this chapter. Unlike in *Otchaianie*, where reading and writing are seen and performed as separate processes, in *Priglasenie na kazn'*, the two processes occur simultaneously at certain points, and are dependent on one another.

Humbert Humbert: Revising *Lolita*

The notoriously unreliable narrator of *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert, is yet another example of a character in Nabokov's work who both engages with the creative act through writing and revises some part of his life in the narrative that he creates. In Humbert's case, this pattern becomes more complex than in previous texts, but, like his predecessors, Humbert is both narrator and writer of the book *Lolita*. In addition, revision is a distinctive element of the memoir he writes. Firstly, the memoir is written by Humbert, who then gives it to 'his lawyer and good friend, Clarence Choate Clark, Esq.' (*Lolita*, 5), who, upon Humbert's instruction, passes it to John Ray, Jr., Ph.D for editing in preparation for publication after his client's death in prison. The text that is ultimately read has an unresolvable paradox of reliability, as it has passed through several layers of authorial and editorial function. For example, in Chapter Twenty-six of Part One of *Lolita*, Humbert's narrative breaks down as he is distraught at having lost Lolita to Quilty. This chapter, which is only eight short sentences long, creates a temporal disjuncture, as it places the writer of the text in full view of the reader, while transporting the reader forwards to the time of the text's being written. Furthermore, it ends with an instruction from Humbert, which is not followed in the final text: 'Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita. Repeat until page is full, printer' (*Lolita*, 115). This example explicitly shows that the text has passed through an editorial layer, which has vetoed Humbert's instruction. This adds another layer of unreliability to the multiple, intertwining unreliable narrative strands which are created by Humbert. Antony R. Moore explores precisely this aspect of *Lolita* and foregrounds the 'deviant details' (for example,

date misalignments, non-concurrent memories, deletions and omissions).<sup>200</sup>

These features of *Lolita* have been discussed by critics from the very beginning and have been attributed to 'bad memory' and 'messy time-keeping' on the author's, rather than the narrator's, part, or have been explained away as 'entirely the products of [Humbert's] imagination'.<sup>201</sup> Whereas earlier critics have neglected these discrepancies, Moore turns his attention specifically to them and splits Humbert's memoir into two distinct narrative structures: 'one the historical product of Humbert's obsession with paedophilia, the other the current process of his development as a writer'.<sup>202</sup> He argues that each narrative, although individually attributable to Humbert, has a different narrator; each narrator originates from Humbert and is 'simultaneously present in the memoir, although each has a different interest in Dolores as his subject'.<sup>203</sup> Moore's argument is useful here, in that he clarifies Humbert's position within *Lolita* as both a character and an author-character, or narrator. Within the two narratives that Moore identifies, there are three strands of revision which are worked neatly into the narrative, via the actual writing of those narratives, by Humbert. The first strand is concerned with Annabel, who is revised into a fantasy figure, while the real girl is effaced entirely. This leads to the second strand of revision,

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<sup>200</sup> Antony R. Moore, 'How Unreliable is Humbert in *Lolita*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 25 / 1 (2001), 71 - 80, p. 72.

<sup>201</sup> Carl Proffer, *Keys to Lolita* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1968), attributes the discordances to Humbert's 'bad memory' and 'messy time keeping'. Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) and Christina Tekiner, 'Time in *Lolita*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 25 (1979), 463 - 469 posit that *Lolita* is a realistic novel until the final nine chapters from which are 'entirely the product of [Humbert's] imagination'. Brian Boyd 'Even Homais Nods: Nabokov's Fallibility, or, How to Revise *Lolita*', *Nabokov Studies*, 2 (1995), 62 - 86, dismisses these arguments in as nothing other than Nabokov's own oversights, while Julian Connolly "'Nature's Reality" or Humbert's "Fancy"?: Scenes of Reunion and Murder in *Lolita*', *Nabokov Studies*, 2 (1995), 41 - 61, sides with Tekiner's reality break hypothesis while maintaining that Quilty's murder actually happens.

<sup>202</sup> Moore, 'How Unreliable is Humbert?', p. 72.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73.

in which the fantasy figure created using the memory of Annabel is projected onto Dolores Haze. The third strand is concerned with the ways in which Humbert revises the truth of his abhorrent crimes (kidnap, rape, abuse) to make them more palatable for himself and the readers he appeals to throughout his manuscript. While these tracks are primarily linked to creation and writing, the reading track is not entirely absent from this novel and is intertwined with the three revisionary strands of the writing track. Humbert's reading of Annabel through the distance of time informs not only the first strand, but the two that are actually concerned with another little girl. As Humbert himself writes, 'there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child' (*Lolita*, 11). All three strands of revision intertwine with both the narrative of Humbert's historical development as a paedophile and the narrative of Humbert as the writer, in captivity, of the memoir which makes up the textual bulk of *Lolita*. The first strand he contributes is the strand dealing with Annabel, the original of Lolita, which is projected onto the real child Dolores. This strand pervades both narratives and is the impetus for their existence. It permeates the beginning, middle and end of *Lolita*, and, without Annabel, there is no Lolita, nor *Lolita*.

The Annabel strand is introduced in third paragraph of the novel's first chapter. It immediately becomes apparent that, despite this novel entitled *Lolita* being about a child upon whom the fantasy of the Lolita character is projected onto, it is causally brought into being by another girl, with a different name, from a different time. Indeed the projection would never have been created unless Annabel had existed in the first instance. However, even Annabel, the 'precursor' who precipitates Humbert's obsession and perversion and the

subsequent memoir which forms *Lolita*, is revised (*Lolita*, 11). In an attempt to recapture and revise the ending of the vital moment when he and Annabel are discovered on the beach, he takes Lolita to the seaside. He finds the experience oddly and unexpectedly unsatisfactory and only then realises that Lolita has eclipsed Annabel. He writes, 'my real liberation had occurred much earlier: at the moment, in point of fact, when Annabel Haze, alias Dolores Lee, alias Loleeta, had appeared to me, golden and brown, kneeling, looking up, on that shoddy veranda, in a kind of fictitious, dishonest, but eminently satisfactory seaside arrangement' (*Lolita*, 176). At the point of this realisation, Humbert becomes his own reader and sees for himself the significance and causality of his actions. Indeed, Annabel's name is mixed up with Dolores' and she is revised completely from a real girl into a fantasy, which is then projected onto a real child, destroying her life. Even Lolita herself is revised, and, after she escapes with Quilty, Humbert acquires a companion called Rita, child-like in stature but an adult experienced in Humbert's ways.

Humbert revises Annabel not just in the fantasy of her which is foisted upon Dolores, but even in the story of their brief encounter, which is thrown out of temporal alignment. At the beginning of the novel, Humbert sets out the story of his meeting Annabel and their thwarted attempt to consummate their childish passion. In it Humbert recalls a group photograph, which he lost many years earlier, which includes Annabel. He recalls that Annabel's 'bare shoulders and the parting in her hair were about all that could be identified' (*Lolita*, 15). The parenthetical caveat which follows directly afterwards, '(as I remember that picture)' indicates that photo is twice removed from the text, filtered through Humbert's memory, which can only be assumed to be as deceptive as the rest

of him (*Lolita*, 15). He goes on to identify 'the sunny blur into which her lost loveliness graded' (*Lolita*, 15). This, of course, could be attributed to an over-exposure to sunlight at the point of taking the photograph. However, Nabokov's works are complex, dexterous creations which cannot, and should not, be taken at face value and, at the very least analogously, Annabel's queer facelessness can be attributed to the exhaustive projections of the fantasy of Lolita which Humbert has created from his memory of Annabel. Furthermore, this fantasy creation not only effaces the real girl both from memory and whatever subjective reality she is part of, but similarly removes the real child upon which the fantasy is projected from her own subjective reality several times over. In this way, Lolita leads a transient and rootless existence after her mother's death, from the point where she is removed from summer camp by Humbert until her untimely death in Gray Star, Alaska.

The temporally discordant telling of Humbert's relationship with Annabel further supports this argument as it exhibits the ways in which Humbert has broken down the real version of events and reconstituted them, first in his mind and then in his memoir. The account concludes the story of his time with Annabel thus: 'I have reserved for the conclusion of my "Annabel" phase the account of our unsuccessful first tryst' (*Lolita*, 16). This allows Humbert to end his Annabel strand (or 'phase') on an unsuccessful, longing note in order to aid his later justification of his projection of the fantasy of her onto Dolores, and, moreover, to elicit the reader's sympathy in doing so (*Lolita*, 16). It is important to note, however, that their 'first tryst' is temporally discordant to the telling of the story of Humbert's time with Annabel, as they had a second, dissatisfying and unfulfilled tryst, which Humbert alludes to as creating his intense longing to

sexually possess little girls (*Lolita*, 16). The disjuncture created by re-ordering the events is essential for the appeal to the reader that follows. In it, Humbert's language is evocative and seductive, for example: 'the haze of the stars, the tingle, the flame, the honeydew, and the ache remained with me, and that little girl with her seaside limbs and ardent tongue haunted me ever since – until at last, twenty-four years later, I broke her spell by incarnating her in another' (*Lolita*, 17). In doing this, Humbert attempts to soften his terrible crimes and invites the reader to be duped into becoming complicit with what is about to happen (in terms of the sequence of his telling of the story) to an innocent and quite helpless girl.

Once Humbert has successfully projected the fantasy of Lolita onto the real-life child Dolores (for that is all that we know to be true of her name), he embarks upon another, distinct process of revision (*Lolita*, 5). This involves him revising the painful truth (that is, that he marries the mother of a girl, planning to drug and sexually abuse the child, and, upon her mother's death, kidnaps her and repeatedly rapes her on a two year, cross-country-and-back-again trip) of what he is doing and replacing it with a more palatable, if completely unrepresentative, version. This projection by Humbert, and the subsequent revision that it necessitates, begins when Humbert first sees Lolita sunbathing in her mother's backyard. This sequence of events is highly contrived, with the initial destination of the McCoo household being destroyed by fire the previous night, and the controlling hand of McFate (that is, the omnipotent author, Nabokov) becomes clearly visible. The fictionality of the event is enhanced ('there came a sudden burst of greenery [...] a blue sea-wave swelled under my heart [...] from a mat in a pool of sun [...] there was my Riviera love' (*Lolita*, 42))

and facilitates Humbert's creation of Lolita in the projection of his fantasy onto Humbert's prospective landlady's daughter. From this point on (until Humbert loses Lolita to Quilty) Humbert attempts to legitimise his desires, going so far as to marry her mother to gain access to her. Instead of stating this truth, he speaks of love and tenderness and makes her complicit in (and even responsible for) his crimes in order to capture and maintain the reader's sympathy and support. However, the surface reading, which is produced via an immersion in the text, has by this point produced a text in which multiple discordancies are evident. As a result, the reader that Humbert appeals to is his own ideal self, as no other reader or reading could possibly absolve him of blame. This is evident when Humbert brings himself to orgasm as Lolita plays with and eats an apple while sitting on his knee. Despite the obvious signs that the child has noticed the physical changes and effects of his masturbation ('with a sudden shrill note in her voice ... she wriggled, and squirmed'), Humbert maintains 'Blessed be the Lord, she had noticed nothing!' (*Lolita*, 64 - 65). Furthermore, when he finally has sexual intercourse with Lolita he claims that 'it was she who seduced me', despite the very obvious evidence to the contrary (*Lolita*, 139). While Humbert may hope that his fictional revisions create a reading of the text in which he successfully conceals his crimes, a surface reading instead shows him to be utterly untrustworthy. In actuality, Humbert's process in this strand of fictional revision progresses from nullifying the knowledge that he is doing something wrong, and that he is irreparably affecting an innocent child's life, to the far more serious and harmful switching responsibility onto his victim. Humbert's narrative, for example, by telling the reader that she seduced him, makes Lolita complicit in his crimes via the writing



track of revision, forcing her to be his partner, a seductress rather than the powerless victim she most obviously is.

However, even within this Lolita strand of revision, the third and final strand of revision, that is, of Humbert's perception of his crime, is foreshadowed. In this final strand, Humbert revises the second strand which is an account of his time with Lolita, re-examining, re-telling and, in some ways, revising it. This is achieved by writing, or, more specifically, re-writing, which comes as a result of his reflection upon the initial narrative that he has produced. Of course, this process of reflection is entered into, at least partially, by Humbert for his own titillation and enjoyment. There is no doubt that he derives pleasure from reading a detailed account of his actions over the period of time he spent with Lolita, and while he is willing to admit his wrongdoing overall (particularly when, awaiting arrest, he listens to 'the melody of children' and concedes that 'the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord'), he is equally willing to confess the relentlessly beastly side of his nature. After introducing the reader to the misery he felt after losing Lolita, he counters it by revealing that, despite his grief, his insatiable sexual desire for female children has not been diminished: 'I would be a knave to say, and the reader a fool to believe, that the shock of losing Lolita cured me of pederosis. My accursed nature could not change, no matter how my love for her did ... One essential vision in me had withered: never did I dwell now on possibilities of bliss with a little maiden ... never did my fancy sink its fangs into Lolita's sisters ... *That was all over, for the time being at least*' (*Lolita*, 271).

That Humbert is a dishonest, facetious and completely, utterly unreliable narrator is the only stable truth of *Lolita*.<sup>204</sup> However, it is this inherent quality to the text that facilitates fictional revision as a device within it. The text and narratives are both characterised by an absolute lack of a stable original, in any aspect of the work. Just as Annabel is never presented accurately, as the single photograph that Humbert has of her has been lost and her face has been effaced from his memory, the real girl upon which the fantasy derived from Annabel is projected onto is similarly obscured. Furthermore, Humbert endlessly conceals the truth of his life with or without Lolita. There are some facts which can be deduced from cryptic clues and wordgames, for example, Humbert's age can be deduced towards the end of the novel when he reveals that Rita 'was twice Lolita's age and three quarters of mine' (*Lolita*, 271). Others, however, are either facetious or purposefully concealed. The ultimate unknowability of Humbert is the result of his own ideal reading of the text he is creating being assigned to his own projected reading self. This reader is able to enjoy Humbert's wordgames, while implicitly understanding them, and does not feel irked by the details or information that is denied, as this material purposefully conceals unpleasant truths. This is shown by Humbert's appeals to the reader throughout his manuscript. While Humbert begins by addressing readers as 'ladies and gentleman of the jury', 'learned readers' and 'my reader', he eventually abandons this and states that, 'had I come before myself, I would have given Humbert at least thirty-five years for rape, and dismissed the rest of the charges' (*Lolita*, 325). In doing so, Humbert confirms that no possible reading of his work could be convinced of his innocence, regardless of the

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<sup>204</sup> This aspect of *Lolita* is a commonplace of Nabokov Studies and has been noted since its earliest reviews and criticism.

fictional revisions he implements. However there are at least a few instances where he acknowledges the magnitude of his crime and, while he knows that he would not act differently given the chance over, he accepts the incorrect nature of his actions. Prior to actually losing Lolita to Quilty, Humbert notes at the end of the third chapter of Part Two, “I catch myself thinking today that our long journey had only defiled with a sinuous trail of slime the lovely, trustful, dreamy, enormous country that by then, in retrospect, was no more to us than a collection of dog-eared maps, ruined tour books, old tires, and her sobs in the night – every night, every night – the moment I feigned sleep’ (*Lolita*, 185). His knowing admittance of guilt here is expanded upon after he loses Lolita, when glib untruths such as ‘it was she who seduced me’ are replaced with ‘I loved you. I was a pentapod monster, but I loved you. I was despicable and brutal, and turpid, and everything, *mais je t’aimais, je t’aimais!* And there were times when I knew how you felt, and it was hell to know it, my little one. Lolita girl, brave Dolly Schiller’ (*Lolita*, 185). However, the inherent instability of *Lolita* makes it impossible to identify the true intention to these instances. It is as likely that Humbert is attempting to absolve himself of blame by showing remorse as it is he is expressing true guilt and regret at his actions. However, when they are coupled with the lurid and florid details of events that are recounted and re-told, it becomes clear that Humbert derives some enjoyment from the process. While Humbert remembers seeing his unwitting child companion looking in the mirror with ‘an expression of helplessness so perfect that it seemed to grade into one of rather comfortable inanity just because this was the very limit of justice and frustration’, this seeming sensitivity and sympathy of sorts is immediately countered by him referring to the ‘depths of calculated carnality’ which

prevented him 'from falling at her dear feet and dissolving in human tears' (*Lolita*, 299).

Finally, Humbert revises the first telling of the *Lolita* strand of the story of *Lolita* by claiming to love her, feeling remorse, and actually goes as far as to claim that his murder of Quilty is to avenge the wrong done to her by the man who stole her. However, this is clearly not entirely truthful. Quilty is guilty of duping *Lolita* into performing sexual acts in exchange for helping her escape Humbert's clutches when she was a teenager, but Humbert kidnapped and repeatedly raped her when she was still a child. Quilty allows *Lolita* to leave his ranch voluntarily after she refuses to appear in the pornographic movies that he is making, but Humbert never allows her to do anything that does not suit his ends. When Humbert goes to Pavor Manor to murder Quilty, their resemblances are subtly portrayed. Quilty is said to have 'black hairs on the backs of his pudgy hands' (compare this with Humbert's 'aging ape paw') (*Lolita*, 314). When Quilty tries to take Humbert's gun from him, they roll around on the floor 'like two huge, helpless children', each man stunted in his development by his perverted desires (*Lolita*, 314). Both Roth and Megerle have argued that Quilty's crime is worse than Humbert's, however, it seems that this scene is a significant equaliser for both characters. Humbert kills Quilty, but the account of the murder is so farcical that it seems plausible that the result could have been reversed, if not, of course, for Nabokov's relentlessly controlling hand.<sup>205</sup> In this way, Humbert's revisions are always fallible as Nabokov makes them completely visible to the reader. These deliberate fictional revisions delineate the reading

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<sup>205</sup> See Phyllis Roth, 'In Search of Aesthetic Bliss', *College Literature*, 2 / 1 (1975), 28 - 49; Brenda Megerle, 'The Tantalisation of *Lolita*', *Studies in the Novel*, 1 / 3 (1979), 338 - 348.

process of *Lolita* and consequently serve to undermine Humbert's authorial control over his memoir and *Lolita* (and Lolita) overall.

*Dar*: Nabokov's first editor, Zina Mertz

Nabokov's final Russian novel, *Dar*, is his longest in any language and is certainly the most complex text within his Russian oeuvre. Fyodor Gudonov-Cherdyntsev, its author-character, follows a process of artistic development throughout its constituent five chapters and ends the novel by describing the great Russian novel he will write, which has the same plot as the novel by Nabokov that the reader has just read, *Dar*. However, despite his engagement with writing and artistic creation, he is not the focus of this study of revision within the fictional world. Instead, attention turns to Zina, Fyodor's girlfriend, who provides a focus for his creative work upon their meeting approximately halfway through the novel. While musing over the destinations of his poetry, Fyodor has the following realisation: 'достоверно узнал он про судьбу только одного экземпляра: его купила два года тому назад Зина Мерц' (*Dar*, 1938, 160). However at this point, Fyodor does not yet know that Zina keeps clippings about him and owns his poetry collection. This is revealed only several pages later, which results in a narrative shift. This is caused by Zina's collaborative presence in this sentence, which belongs to the projected work which is synchronous with *Dar*. She revises this moment of revelation in *Dar* through her collusion with Fyodor in the later text, which runs parallel to *Dar* itself. However, it is not simply Zina's readership which has this effect. Despite the fact that she has been a reader of Fyodor's poetry and has followed his

public, artistic life since their first two years prior to the time period of *Dar*, she does not elicit the focus in Fyodor's work purely by becoming an explicit audience. She instead revises his artistic output actively, by collaborating with him, not just by allowing him to see the future work through her eyes, but also by seeing it herself and providing a commentary to it. At the end of the novel, following Fyodor's synopsis of the work he plans to write, she states her confidence in both his plan and his abilities to carry it out thus: 'Я думаю, ты будешь таким писателем, какого еще не было, и Россия будет прямо изнывать по тебе' (*Dar*, 380). When Fyodor first enters into a relationship with Zina, he notes that she is often late to meet him and tends to choose a different path from the one he takes. This 'path' is symbolic of Zina's own creative track, her own autonomous impulse towards creation and, in this way, she takes an active creative role in the production of Fyodor's texts by creating ideal readings of them (*Dar*, 182).<sup>206</sup> Throughout his engagement with reading, Zina is able to engage with creation and become a 'shaping artistic force' both within *Dar* itself and for Fyodor (*Dar*, 182). Blackwell argues that Zina's role as Fyodor's figured (or ideal) reader enables the text of *Dar* to be filtered to the reader of the novel 'through Zina's perspective as a creative partner, as a loving participant in the artistic process'.<sup>207</sup> He continues by noting that 'a fundamental fact must shape our understanding of the novel: not only is Zina its ideal reader, but her voice as reader is woven into the text's fabric'.<sup>208</sup> While Fyodor authors his own artistic ideas, they are shaped by Zina. By the time the novel's end is reached textually, he has still not authored his own text but has refined his plan to write his own

<sup>206</sup> Stephen Blackwell, *Zina's Paradox: The Figured Reader in Nabokov's Gift* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 45.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

great Russian novel. Therefore, *Dar* 'is told from the perspective of an artistic consciousness in the process of perceiving the world and giving utterance to those perceptions in creative form'.<sup>209</sup> The artistic consciousness that Blackwell refers to here is not a singular consciousness but a melding of Fyodor's and Zina's individual consciousnesses, and it is this entity which provides the projected promise of the future novel that Fyodor intends to write at the end of *Dar*.

Multiple shifts of narrative perspective occur in *Dar* and those which happen during the opening pages of *Dar*, which deal with Fyodor's early biography alongside his poems, indicate, according to Blackwell, one of seven individual perspectives. The most relevant for the current discussion is what he terms 'that of [*Dar*'s] reading to Zina, after initial composition'.<sup>210</sup> In the following example, Zina's perspective and presence are felt (and has been highlighted for ease) in parenthesis when Fyodor's narrative is interrupted by her briefly: 'мой отец, не терпя этнографии, случайно привозил из своих басноловных путешествий ... Опять что-то испортилось, и доносится фамиллярно-фальшивый голосок рецензента (может быть, даже женского пола)' (*Dar*, 18 - 19). Given that this occurs a mere thirteen pages into a novel in which the protagonist meets Zina over two hundred pages later, her presence is a discontinuous but omnipresent force in *Dar*. Here, her presence indicates that both reading versions of *Dar* are running contemporaneously at this time: the ideal reading of *Dar* is running concurrently with the figured reading that Zina has undertaken, which involves her reading the projected novel that Fyodor

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

describes to her at the end of *Dar*, and which, as Alexander Dolinin terms it, is 'isomorphic' to *Dar*.<sup>211</sup>

Zina's presence is felt in two ways. She appears here as a foreshadowing of what is to come in the novel from her meeting with Fyodor in Chapter Three onwards, and she collaborates with Fyodor in revising *Dar* into the projected *Dar*-like novel that occurs after the textual end of *Dar*. When Fyodor later states his burgeoning awareness of the future, the suggestion that Fyodor will essentially write the text that is being read once it completes itself is made: 'это странно, я как будто помню свой будущие вещи, хотя даже не знаю, о чем будут они' (*Dar*, 381). The effect that this process has on the internal fictional world is to create a re-reading of *Dar*, which is informed by both revisionary tracks. However, whereas Zina is first Fyodor's reader and then his collaborator, creating a ideal reading of an entirely autonomous text upon the completion of *Dar*, outwith the fictional world the effect is to create a surface reading of Fyodor's proposed novel, which projects an additional textual, revisionary loop onto (or, indeed, over) *Dar*.

Blackwell argues that, as Fyodor's first reader, Zina's reading has a significant influence on the final version of *Dar*. However, this argument is refuted by Eric Naiman, who argues that Blackwell overstates Zina's influence on Fyodor and that the partial control that Zina exhibits is a fallacy. According to Naiman, when the figured readers of Blackwell's study 'achieve even greater intimacy with the text, we don't re-create it or enter into a rapport with it from our own perspective as real individuals, we read as Nabokov would want us to.'<sup>212</sup>

<sup>211</sup> Alexander Dolinin, 'The Gift', in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. by Alexandrov, pp. 135-169, p. 147.

<sup>212</sup> Eric Naiman, *Nabokov, Perversely* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), p.177.



Therefore, despite Zina's involvement with the creation of Fyodor's text, she cannot ever fully control or create. Naiman believes that Blackwell does his 'utmost to depict Nabokov's relation to his readers in reassuring terms' and sees Nabokov's desire to impress his authorial status onto his works as deeply troubling. He takes issue with Fyodor's similarity to his creator and adds that, unlike other author-characters 'he is not given a sinister twist as elsewhere in Nabokov's fiction'.<sup>213</sup> Naiman furthermore argues that, in the final pages of *Dar*, Nabokov 'dispenses with the reader altogether'.<sup>214</sup> However, he acknowledges that Nabokov's real reader 'shares this moment of the central character's luxuriation in his creator's pride', which does not acknowledge the fact that several layers of reading occur at once in *Dar* (and in Nabokov's work more generally).<sup>215</sup> Naiman's criticisms become difficult here and, while Blackwell's arguments contain some legitimate gaps (for example, his interpretation of the role of the figured reader grants Zina greater autonomy than a co-producing role would allow and, as such, appears forced at several, crucial points), it would appear that he goes too far in reducing Zina to a mere textual pawn.<sup>216</sup> Her reading role in *Dar* is a subtle and complex negotiation of the world that surrounds her, and to reduce it to one of two poles, 'contributor or an appreciative echo' represent an oversimplification of the role of reading in both *Dar* and in Nabokov's oeuvre more generally. Naiman's asks 'if [Zina] is a stand-in for Nabokov's readers, how empowered should we feel?'<sup>217</sup> Zina enters willingly into the realm of creation (via collaboration) and, while it is true that she

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid, p. 162.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, p. 163.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, p. 176.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p. 176.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid, p. 164.

has no direct autonomy and control over Fyodor's writing, neither is she a mere passive reader of Fyodor's work. Zina is invited into the creative realm by Fyodor but cannot pass into it alone. In creating this relationship between Zina and Fyodor, Nabokov highlights the distinction between the omnipotent author, who oversees the text in its entirety, and the surface reading, which is aware of all tracks of fictional revision implemented at narrative level only in *Dar*, as well as the author-character and both the readings and projected readings which allow Fyodor to create. In this context, Pekka Tammi argues that Fyodor fails to become the author of his own text, as his text, which is closely synchronous to *Dar*, occurs outside the textual parameters of *Dar* itself, thus highlighting the impossibility of becoming extrinsic to oneself.<sup>218</sup> In this way, Nabokov highlights the limitations of Fyodor's control over his text, yielding as it does to Zina within the fictional world, which foregrounds the limited power of the author-character, whether in the form of writer or editor. This aspect of Nabokov's fiction would be revisited in a number of subsequent works.

#### Revising biography: *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*

*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is not the biography of Sebastian Knight which the reader might expect from the title, but instead a chronicle of Sebastian's half-brother, V's, process of researching and writing that suggests biography. Before moving to a discussion of V's appropriation of Sebastian's work, it is necessary to consider first the various arguments made for authorship in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. There are four main standpoints in the

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<sup>218</sup> See Pekka Tammi, *Problems of Nabokov's Poetics: A Narratological Analysis* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedakatemia, 1985).

authorship debate, the first of which holds Sebastian to be the sole author of the text who creates everything within its textual parameters, including V.<sup>219</sup> In contrast, the second inverts this model and maintains that V is the one true author of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, including his creation of Sebastian. The third argument states that Sebastian and V are autonomous figures and that V writes his own autobiography instead of Sebastian's biography. Finally, the fourth argument maintains V's and Sebastian's autonomy while holding that Sebastian influences V and his biography in some way from the afterlife.

These conflicting standpoints bring to mind the complex arguments (and the corresponding about turns) which also characterise the authorship debate over *Pale Fire* and it seems that the switch to English accelerated Nabokov's move towards playing with notions of authority in his texts.<sup>220</sup> However, in order to consider V's appropriation and subsequent revision of Sebastian's works, it is most productive to work with the third model, with one distinction: the resulting text is neither biography nor autobiography, just as the figure whose face is obscured with Sebastian's mask at the end of the novel is 'someone whom

<sup>219</sup> There are three main schools of thought regarding authorship in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. The first holds Sebastian to be the only author, responsible for creating his oeuvre, V and V's biography. For details of this argument, see Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967) and Dabney Stuart, *Nabokov: The Dimensions of Parody* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). The second argument proposes the opposite, that V is the one, true author and is responsible for Sebastian, Sebastian's oeuvre and his own biography. For an example of this argument, see K. A. Bruffee, 'Form and Meaning in Nabokov's *Real Life of Sebastian Knight*: An Example of Elegiac Romance', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 34 / 2 (1973), 180 - 190. A variant of this reading offers the suggestion that Sebastian and V are distinct entities, and that V's biography becomes an autobiography as he either usurps or subsumes Sebastian's identity. For examples of this variant, see Charles Nicol, 'The Mirrors of Sebastian Knight' in L. S. Dembo, ed., *Nabokov: The Man and His Work* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 85 - 94, and H. Grabes, *Fictitious Biographies: Vladimir Nabokov's English Novels* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977). The third and final proposition suggests that Sebastian and V are distinct figures, and that V is under Sebastian's covert control from the otherworld. For examples of this argument, see Vladimir Alexandrov, *Nabokov's Otherworld* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Susan Fromberg, 'The Unwritten Chapters in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*', *Modern Fiction Studies* 13 (1967), 426 - 42; William Woodin Rowe, *Nabokov's Spectral Dimension* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981).

<sup>220</sup> Brian Boyd, *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 32.

neither of us knows' (*RLSK*, 181). Both of these phenomena come about as a direct result of revision, by way of V's appropriation of Sebastian's texts. In this way, V, as narrator, sees both himself and Sebastian as ideal authors, he of Sebastian's biography and Sebastian of his own fiction. As V loses his grip on both his task and reality, he begins to revise Sebastian's fiction and life into a happier biography than the 'real life' of the title would allow. In doing so, he appropriates his half-brothers' work and edits it into a shape that fits his fantasy of their brotherly love and closeness.

V makes references to some of Sebastian's works in the opening chapters of the novel, but does not begin the process of appropriation until the ninth chapter. In the previous chapter, he recounts an awkward meeting he had with Sebastian and Clare in Paris. The discomfort of the memory he accesses to write this account, and Clare's refusal to speak with him which follows, causes him to abandon his quest to write a truthful and accurate account of Sebastian's life. The reason for this is the fact that he does not know anything of Sebastian's life and, moreover, none of Sebastian's friends and acquaintances know anything of V. Chapter nine is where V's account of Sebastian's life slips into fiction, precipitated by mention of Sebastian's first work, *The Prismatic Bezel*. This chapter is characterised by florid dialogues between Sebastian and Claire which V could not possibly have witnessed. The final paragraph morphs into the present tense and shows Sebastian lying on the floor of his study with Claire at his side. Through a discussion of Sebastian's fiction, V has entered into a world of fictionality from which there is no return, and is pulled further and further away from his task, until he finds himself, having fully merged with his half-brother, wearing Goodman's curious mask at the end of the novel. In the

next chapter, the tenth, V offers a synopsis of *The Prismatic Bezel* which uses, as he puts it, 'the fashionable trick of grouping a medley of people in a limited space (an hotel, an island, a street)' (*RLSK*, 75). This is, of course, precisely what V does with Sebastian's works in the text that he is writing, and, in line with the title of Sebastian's first work, V refracts his half-brother's oeuvre through the surface of his own will for creation.

V's appropriation and revision of Sebastian's work, occurs fully after his encounter with Silberman, who is analogous with Siller in Sebastian's short story 'The Back of the Moon'. V notes that his notebook, given to him by Silberman, is well-filled now, and I shall have a new set of pages clipped in when these are completed' (*RLSK*, 118). At this point, V's passage into fiction becomes complete, as the real world has yielded nothing that he wants for his work on Sebastian. In order to obtain material that reflects his desires for his work, he is left with no other option than to create that material himself. Therefore, as a result of him embracing fiction in this way, he populates the pages of his autobiography with characters from Sebastian's fiction. This occurs in much the same way as Sebastian's *The Prismatic Bezel* gathers fictional characters together in a 'limited space' (*RLSK*, 137). Therefore, when V comes to examine the end of Sebastian's life, as much a mystery to him as any other part of his half-brother's existence, his transference into fiction is sealed. He revises the matter of his half-brother's final work, *The Doubtful Asphodel*, and fashions it into the final third of the novel. The eighteenth chapter is comprised of V's musings on this work while he reads it, convinced that 'the "absolute solution" is there, somewhere, concealed in some passage I have read too hastily' (*RLSK*, 159). This statement belies the fact that V has missed the

'absolute solution' of his own work: not only did he not know his half-brother at all, but that all men live an entirely subjective experience that is unknowable to outsiders. Thus, no matter the subject's 'real', inner and outer life, he cannot write an account of it for this very reason. This truth is much too painful for V and he soldiers on from this point until the end of the novel, appropriating the texts he discusses, revising it into his own work. The novel's penultimate chapter features a dream sequence which facilitates V's use of *The Doubtful Asphodel*'s subject of the dying man to explore and imagine the unknown of Sebastian's own death. When V emerges from the dream, he does so into a present tense in which Sebastian is alive, if only just, and V has received a telegram telling him of Sebastian's imminent death. The farcical final chapter recounts V's experience of mistaking an Englishman for his half-brother, who has already passed away by the time that V arrives. During the time that V spends at the bedside of the man he believes to be Sebastian, he considers the regrets he had for being 'silly, sullen, and shy' during time spent with him (RLSK, 182). However, even these admissions, as truthful as anything V writes, are countered by a strong tilt towards revision. When V plans what he will do when Sebastian awakes, he thinks of 'all these books that I knew as well as if I had written them myself' (RLSK, 179). He has, in a sense, authored these texts, not in the way that proponents of the single author theory of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* would have it, but instead he has authored versions of them by appropriating and revising them, and using them as the textual fabric of his own narrative. V has earlier quoted a critic who wrote of *The Doubtful Asphodel*, 'it was a rather unpleasant experience for the reader, to sit beside a death-bed and never be quite sure whether the author was the doctor or the patient'

(*RLSK*, 161). However, in V's version of *The Doubtful Asphodel*, there is a similar discordance, as the author (Sebastian) is the patient, while V is the actual author. It is this final revision which precipitates Sebastian and V's mergence into 'someone whom neither of us knows' (*RLSK*, 182). Charles Nicol writes in 'The Mirrors of Sebastian Knight' that 'through his total immersion in [*The Doubtful Asphodel*], he [V] has become its author'.<sup>221</sup> By appropriating not only this work, but others, too, V has destabilised the distinction between fiction and reality, which leads to the theatrical ending in which V wears his brother's mask and feels 'as if I were impersonating him on a lighted stage' in front of an audience of characters derived from both Sebastian's life and works (*RLSK*, 181). V, having created his own work from reading his half-brother's works, merges with Sebastian and together they constitute an ideal authorial figure, which has created both Sebastian's oeuvre as well as the narrative about that work, which has just been read. However, the shifting realities of V's fictional world indicate a higher power at play. Nabokov undermines the power of the author-character V and his ghostly counterpart, Sebastian, as well as the texts they write, which are shown clearly to be simply another part of one of his masterly text worlds, and so reinforces his own ideal authorial position onto the text.

Interestingly, Shlomith Rimmon-Keenan observes that 'there are, in short, multiple levels of transference at work in this work of fiction'.<sup>222</sup> These levels interact to create a surface reading of the text, which incorporates the fictional revisions V implements to Sebastian's works, life and loves and tracks

<sup>221</sup> Charles Nicol, 'The Mirrors of Sebastian Knight', p. 93.

<sup>222</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Keenan, 'Problems of Voice in Nabokov's *Real Life of Sebastian Knight*', in Phyllis A. Roth, ed., *Critical Essays on Vladimir Nabokov* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984), pp. 109 - 29, p. 111.

the mergence of the brothers' identities. This leads to the identification of another authorial level, which is responsible for the dual identity of the brothers at the end of the novel, which undermines any reading of the text as being authored by either or both of the brothers. This reinforces the presence of a greater authorial force behind the text and erodes the authorial control that Sebastian has tried to take in his role as an editor, appropriating his half-brother's works. In this work, Nabokov continues to undermine his author-character in an attempt to secure authorial control for himself.

'The moon's an arrant thief'<sup>223</sup>: Editing John Shade's poem

Charles Kinbote, Nabokov's most famous literary thief, first appeared in a letter Nabokov wrote in 1957, and the work in which he features was written during the period that Nabokov was engaged with writing a commentary to his own translation of Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin*.<sup>224</sup> Kinbote's fictional revisions to the poem, 'Pale Fire', are not impressed onto the textual fabric of the work itself, but actually produce a far more extensive commentary as he edits Shade's poem for publication. Using all of these devices, Kinbote, in his role as the author-character, revises John Shade's poem to reflect his own tale of Zembla, the product of his madness, as well as his own narrative, which becomes increasingly disjointed and erratic as the novel progresses.

The first instance of revision in *Pale Fire*'s commentary comes via an interjection, which ends the commentary's second paragraph. After imparting a

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<sup>223</sup> William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, VI. III, 435 - 6, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, intr. Antony Burgess and Germaine Greer (Glasgow: Collins, 1994), 986 - 1016, p. 1011.

<sup>224</sup> Boyd, *American Years*, p. 226.



brief history of 'Pale Fire' and describing its form, Kinbote adds, 'There is a very loud amusement park right in front of my present lodgings' (*PF*, 11). This interjection, made by Kinbote to his own narrative, immediately removes the reader from the narrative of the creation of the poem, 'Pale Fire' and creates distance between narrator and reader. It quickly becomes apparent that, not only was the poem written and completed by someone other than the narrator prior to the writing of this foreword (that much has been made clear thus far by Kinbote), but that the orderliness of its method and place of composition has been replaced with a narrative move which is far-removed. It furthermore stresses the temporal shift that has taken place. The first-time, real reader of *Pale Fire* may expect to read a novel, then after a few paragraphs expect a poem, but *Pale Fire* is a far more complex and shifting entity altogether. While reading the component parts of the novel (foreword, poem, commentary and index) several other narrative frames are introduced. The reader, leaving behind conventional genre expectations, regardless of categorisation, reads Kinbote's account of the process of Shade's creation of his poem alongside Kinbote's creation of his commentary of the poem. Furthermore, Kinbote's own Zembla narrative is introduced, tentatively at first, and it soon overtakes the other components, at least superficially. All of these processes of revision are instigated by Kinbote's desperate struggle for authorial control in *Pale Fire*, a process that is never fully realised by Kinbote. This creates an intricate battle for authorial control in the text as Kinbote tries to gain control over the text he finds himself a part of.

The battle for authorial control is never more prominent or complex in Nabokov's oeuvre than it is in *Pale Fire*. The veritable battleground which is

played out in the text is mirrored in the critical literature. Various theories of authorship have been expounded in Nabokov criticism, usually claiming one or both of Shade and Kinbote as being the text's primary author(s). The most recent development in respect to *Pale Fire*'s authorship is Boyd's assertion that the ghost of Hazel Shade is the primary author, exerting control on both Shade's and Kinbote's narratives from beyond the grave.<sup>225</sup> Gerard de Vries writes that 'Pale Fire tells three stories (Shade's life, Kinbote's adventures and the pursuit by Gradus, the revolutionary who must murder Kinbote) which have many motifs, themes and images in common'.<sup>226</sup> It is important to consider the relevance of Hazel Shade's story, told (regardless of its true authorship) via her father's poem, as it can be seen to be analagous with Nabokov's author-characters' struggles for textual control. Another proponent of the Hazel authorship argument, David Galef, writes that 'since the world remains alienating and unchangeable, she tries to create a world of her own'.<sup>227</sup> This is much the same process as that undertaken by any of the author-characters examined thus far. Hazel becomes interested in Aunt Maud's ghost, and lays elaborate tests and traps, however it soon becomes apparent to her parents and others that she is the instigator (creator) rather than the observer (the critic) of the phenomenon that she claims to be investigating. Jane Dean, the mother of the boy who unwittingly instigates Hazel's suicide, calls it 'an outward extension or expulsion of insanity' (*PF*, 49). Galef concurs thus: 'where creation ceases to have any relevance to outward reality, it borders on madness. When

<sup>225</sup> See Brian Boyd, *Magic of Artistic Discovery*, p. 127 - 172.

<sup>226</sup> Gerard de Vries, 'Nabokov's *Pale Fire*: Its structure and the last works of J. S. Bach', *Cycnos*, 24 / 1 (2008), 1 - 29, p. 11.

<sup>227</sup> Galef, 'The Self-Annihilating Artists of *Pale Fire*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 31 / 4 (1985), 421 - 437, p. 424.

art loses the vital connection to a world outside the artist, it becomes bound up with death. Art and obsession can become dangerously, fatally mixed'.<sup>228</sup>

Hazel's madness is expounded by her crushing disillusionment and, despite her attempts to create, detailed within Shade's poem and also in Boyd's and Galef's arguments, she is somewhat limited as her creation comes filtered through another work, that of her father, John Shade. This creates a microcosmic foreshadowing of the role that the author-character, Kinbote, plays within the text of *Pale Fire* by implementing his fictional revisions to the poem using his editorial role.

Kinbote's role as editor in *Pale Fire* allows him to implement more extensive fictional revision than any of his predecessors and successors. Pekka Tammi highlights this point by noting that 'Kinbote is ... granted considerable imaginative control in the novel ... in his capacity as the editor it is only he who can order the network of textual correlations between the commentary and Shade's poem'.<sup>229</sup> Accordingly, Galef compares Kinbote to the ghostly Hazel Shade, against whom 'Charles Kinbote is a far grander artist, and a work of art in his own right'.<sup>230</sup> While Kinbote engages with creation by revising Shade's work in an editorial role, there are limits to his agency. It becomes ever more apparent as his revisions to the poem become increasingly expansive, and, moreover, removed from 'Pale Fire' itself, that there is another controlling force behind the author-character.

In his notes to lines 120-121, Kinbote writes, 'I have already alluded in the course of these notes to the adventures of Charles Xavier, last King of Zembla,

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid, p. 427.

<sup>229</sup> Pekka Tammi, 'Shadows of Differences: *Pale Fire* and Foucault's *Pendulum*', *Cycnos*, 12 / 2 (2008), 1 - 32, p. 8.

<sup>230</sup> Galef, 'Self-Annihilating Artists', p. 426.

and to the keen interest my friend took in the many stories I told him about that king' (*PF*, 150). This statement marks the exit from Shade's poem and the beginning of Kinbote's account of Zembla. Kinbote begins by using the third person to talk about himself as the King of Zembla and continues until Shade's poem is overtaken by his tellings of Zembla. His paranoia over his friendship, or lack thereof, with Shade is conjoined with the fraught tale of Charles Xavier's exile from Zembla. In fact, from this point in the commentary until line 957, Kinbote revises Shade's poem to tell the story of the deposed king of Zembla. This component of *Pale Fire* joins with the action contained within Shade's poem for several moments, and lines, before Shade's death. At this point, the real author, Shade, is essentially deposed and replaced by the author-character, Kinbote. Following Shade's death, Kinbote proclaims 'I was holding all of Zembla pressed to my heart' (*PF*, 227). Here, Zembla functions as a symbol of appropriated art and this sensation is nothing other than the projection of the fantasy of Zembla onto an unwitting textual entity. At this point, Kinbote's status as an appropriator and reviser is confirmed. The disjuncture created between the poem Shade completes the previous evening and Kinbote's tale of the deposed Zemblan king and the assassin Gradus creates a surface reading in which the multiple strands of revision, which Kinbote impresses onto Shade's poem, come together to create a complex and highly nuanced text. Much like Humbert in *Lolita*, Kinbote forces Shade's poem to fit the parameters of his fantasy and, furthermore, enforces his own authorial presence onto 'Pale Fire' once he realises that his story of Zembla has not been written by the poem's real author. Indeed, it may also be the case that his tales were not even read by Shade, who befriends Kinbote out of pity alone.

Converse to his claim that 'without my notes Shade's text simply has no human reality at all', Kinbote's version of the poem 'Pale Fire', which is expressed via his commentary, deviates further and further from the human warmth and sadness expressed by the poem's real creator, and does not, as Kinbote purports it to do, elucidate the original text through the commentary (*PF*, 23). His commentary is 'deranged poetry' to Shade's reflective expression of a life, which warps Shade's poem to reflect himself and his own fantasy.<sup>231</sup>

In keeping with the fantastical nature of his revisions, Galef argues that Kinbote creates Gradus to engineer the end of his creation. Gradus allows for the mergence of all of *Pale Fire's* narratives. However the very creative impetus that has allowed him to revise and impress his own story onto the poem brings about Kinbote's end, and his 'fantasy world eventually encloses him, leaving him in darkness'.<sup>232</sup> The escape that Kinbote was searching for through this exercise, presumably an escape from madness and not from Gradus the gunman, is denied him and he meets instead a narrative dead end. The transcendence he strives for through art is never fully achieved and he ends the text the same way he began – as the character in someone else's, namely Nabokov's, text.

This surface reading presents a similar conclusion at the textual end of *Pale Fire*. The splitting and re-convergence of the narratives in the text, which are caused by Kinbote's fictional revisions, make it impossible to conceive of this work originating from any other author than Nabokov. Robert Alter writes that, 'as a writer so absolutely committed to the autonomy of the imagination, Nabokov was acutely conscious of the ways in which the imagination could

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, p. 331.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, p. 326.

distort the world, envelop a person in a solipsistic bubble, impair the capacity for authentic intimate connection with other people'.<sup>233</sup> He foregrounds these dangers of fiction and imposes their limitations on the author-character, Kinbote, (and, for that matter, on those other possible authors, John and Hazel Shade). The limitations of the impossible worlds Kinbote creates, and the negotiations of the fictional revisions he implements, undermine his role as a creator in the editorial role that he enforces onto Shade's poem. This has the dual effect of reinforcing Nabokov's position in a superior authorial role, from which he oversees the entirety of the creation of *Pale Fire*.

#### Ada: Fictional revision as textual negotiation

Finally, Ada Veen, lover and half sister of Van Veen, functions firstly as an editor and collaborator of her half-brother's text. Unlike Kinbote, her editing is welcomed and sanctioned by Van who makes her comments and interjections visible within the text. Nabokov started *Ada* as he finished *Evgenii Onegin* and, while commentary exists in this text as in *Pale Fire* before it, its characteristics are much less urgent, and much more reflective, than that of its predecessor, which was written contemporaneously with the author's translation and extensive commentary of Pushkin's work. Like Zina, Ada collaborates with the production of a text, however her effect is more explicitly identifiable within it due to her contributions, in the form of notes and parentheses, being left clearly in view of the reader. *Ada* takes the form of an 'unfinished manuscript penned by Van and glossed by Ada at the end of their long lives', spent both together

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<sup>233</sup> Alter, 'Autobiography as Alchemy', p. 12.

and apart and, in this way, Ada's interjections work at two levels.<sup>234</sup> They contribute to the multiple narrative levels of *Ada* and additionally cause the novel to revert to manuscript form. Many of Ada's parenthetical textual interjections involve her addressing Van, with a corresponding response from either Van, which is detailed by a separate narrative voice, or from her later self. This example, from the first and longest section of the novel, is an example of unprojection and the effect that it has is to destabilise the fictional world:

(Van, I trust your taste and your talent but are we quite sure we should keep reverting so zestfully to that wicked world in which he after all may have existed only oneirologically, Van? Marginal jotting in Ada's 1965 hand; crossed out lightly in her latest wavering one) (*Ada*, 1967, 156).

There are three components to this interjection: the original note, written in the margin and not in parenthesis in the text, the erasure that Ada has performed several decades after first interjecting, and the inclusion of both of these interjection forms in parenthesis within the body of the text. To deal first with the initial interjection, it makes clear that *Ada* is not a simplistically, single-authored or single-narrated text, as there are three levels of narrative present within it. Ada speaks to Van via her marginal note, and Van receives it at a projected point after its writing and before its reading in the text. The erasure that Ada performs after the interjection's writing and receiving allows the cancelled section to remain within the text. The final component is the presentation of the interjection and its erasure by Van at a later point in the text that is read as he works on the completion of (but does not complete) the manuscript. The two levels of narrative created by Ada and Van's narrative threads duel and intertwine, revealing to the reader the multiplicity of voices within the text. *Ada* is

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<sup>234</sup> Dana Dragunoiu, 'Vladimir Nabokov's *Ada*: Art, Deception and Ethics', *Contemporary Literature*, 46 / 92 (2005), 311 - 339, p. 311.

a thoroughly complex text, in which, as Brian Boyd notes, 'everything intertwines, and on Nabokov's own terms'.<sup>235</sup> In this way, the fictional revisions implemented by the author-character, Ada, onto Van's text create an intricate interaction between the text's author-character and its editor.

Prior to Ada, fictional revision has generally precipitated a reading in which the story and the text are completed for the author-characters (whether in the form of writer or editor) by the reading process. Here, in Nabokov's most difficult and complex work, the novel takes on the guise of an original manuscript. The inclusion of the revisions to Van's manuscript, made first by Ada and then, later, by Van, delineate the form of *Ada*. These revisions, while implemented by Ada and latterly authorised by Van to remain within the final text, occur in the real-time of reading, destabilising the text and undermining its origination from one, stable authorial point. Ada takes the role of editor to Van's writer in the novel that bears her name, but even Van edits her comments, permitting them to remain in his final version of his text. Instead of deleting her comments entirely or incorporating them seamlessly into the textual fabric of the work, he foregrounds them by retaining them within his narrative and, furthermore, by commenting on her comments. In this way, Ada's revisions lead to the revelation of multiple writing and editing roles within the text. The text is written by Van and edited by Ada, and this collaboration produces allows her to contribute to the writing of a text through collaboration (albeit in a secondary role). Van deliberately allows these revisions to be visible in the published text, which he permits to pass into the world of publication. While Ada intrudes upon the text with her textual interjections and comments, Van ultimately remains in

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<sup>235</sup> Brian Boyd, 'Ada', in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. by Alexandrov, p. 37.



control of the text, as he does not incorporate the comments that Ada makes in such a way as to make them become invisible, but instead allows them to remain in plain sight within the completed text that they co-author. In doing this, Van uses Ada's collaborative input to show his own control over the manuscript text. He allows her comments, firstly, to be made and, secondly, to be seen instead of striking them from the record. In this way, the process of fictional revision, and its negotiation, in *Ada* provides a useful model for Nabokov's own approach to visible revision. He makes certain deliberate revisions to his works visible, which seemingly creates a paradoxical situation. Nabokov, in his quest for a perfect text foregrounds its very imperfections and makes revision visible. However, these visible revisions create a reading of the text that is more complex and fuller than would have been possible without the text's visible revisions. As *Ada* becomes increasingly complex with each layer of revision from Ada's and Van's subsequent comments, so, too, is Van identified as the ultimate author of the text, while Ada remains the editor. When this process is applied to Nabokov's work, the author's presence is felt more and more strongly without the need for the use of an authorial voice or authorial intrusions within the text.

In all of the works examined in this chapter, Nabokov uses the fictional revisions implemented by his author-characters (whether in writing or editing roles) to impress his own presence onto the text. These fictional revisions, when read, appear to be written in real-time, as they are visible within the texts of which they are a part. This creates a temporal disjuncture within the text, as the process of it being read is delineated. This results in the reader being sent back and forth within the text (most notably, in *Pale Fire*) in order to piece together

the narrative strands which form the text. This, in turn, leads to the creation of impossible textual worlds, which are ultimately subsumed by the larger textual entity crafted by their creator, Nabokov, who uses them as an opportunity to impress and then reinforce his authorial identity on his texts, and as a result, the exposure of fictional revisions marks the reading of texts that are in the process of being created. Furthermore, these readings are informed by all of the narrative strands of the text, which are ultimately assigned to a higher authorial power. In this way, fictional revisions represent a microcosm of the effect that Nabokov's endless revisions to his individual texts, across decades, languages and continents, have on his corpus. This undermines the writers and editors who take on author-character roles and, moreover, identifies Nabokov as the omnipotent author who is truly in control of the text. In using fictional revision as a deliberately visible device in his fiction, Nabokov thus ensures his all-seeing and all-knowing authorial presence and control over his texts, reinforcing the image of the God-like authorial figure, which Nabokov attempts to fashion for himself using fictional revisions, onto the entirety of his self-reflexive oeuvre.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Connolly, 'Function of literary allusion', p. 305.

### Chapter 3: The Transtextual Revisions of the *Lolita* Theme

‘*Lolita* is famous, not I’, Nabokov declared playfully in 1967 in an interview with Herbert Gold for *The Paris Review* (SO, 107). *Lolita* is Nabokov’s signature work, both as a literary masterpiece within his oeuvre and as a cultural product. Through the story of the continued abuse of a young girl by an older man, who marries the girl’s mother in order to prey upon her, Nabokov concentrates, crystallises and combines pivotal metafictional and metaphysical concerns of his wider work. As a twentieth-century cultural artefact, *Lolita*, with its notorious theme of paedophilia, has become synonymous with Nabokov and his work. This chapter will examine Nabokov’s transtextual revisions of *Lolita* in relation to these two different functions of the novel. Taken together, the different revisions Nabokov undertakes can be seen as a two-fold process, the first part of which is the organic and artistic development of a theme (similar to the one observed in the development of *Pale Fire*), which Nabokov repeatedly revisits and reworks. What could be termed études of the *Lolita* theme culminate eventually in the creation of one of Nabokov’s most complex and challenging novels.<sup>237</sup> While this pattern of revision is similar to the developmental arc of the exiled king theme into the seminal work of *Pale Fire*, it has two important distinctions. While the developmental revisions of the exiled king theme leading up to *Pale Fire*, represent a form of artistic development of both theme and author, it does not occur again after *Pale Fire*. Therefore, developmental revision does not undergo retrospective patterning and design from Nabokov and is left within his oeuvre,

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<sup>237</sup> This has been examined in depth in Chapter 1, which focused on the developmental revisions to the exiled king theme as a means of illustrating Nabokov’s creative processes, as well as a developmental arc within his oeuvre.

either consciously or unconsciously, as an example of his organic, artistic development of a central theme. Transtextual revision presents, in the first instance prior to the publication of *Lolita*, a similar developmental arc, however, there appears to be a greater urgency in the continuous revisions of the *Lolita* theme into *Lolita*. The theme occurs more steadily throughout Nabokov's oeuvre, arising six times prior to *Lolita*. In contrast, the exiled king theme occurs only three times over the period of almost forty years prior to *Pale Fire*. Furthermore, variations of the theme can be seen throughout Nabokov's works. For example, the sexualised young girl and older man dynamic is present in both *Kamera obskura* (Albinus and Magda) and *Bend Sinister* (Krug and Mariette), however, the parameters of age are moved slightly to accommodate plots points and, therefore, the paedophilic subject matter that is so crucial to the *Lolita* theme is erased.

Following the publication of *Lolita*, a second process of transtextual revision can be observed which differs greatly in terms of function and nature from the process of revision leading towards *Lolita*. Nabokov continues to revise the theme in his work, but, at this point, uses the very act of revision as a deliberately visible device to develop the playful self-referentiality of his work, which originates from and evolves around *Lolita*. These comments act as nudges or, in their more insistent iterations, directives for re-reading, as they direct the current reading back to *Lolita*, within which the original referent can be found. This also has the effect of impressing a pattern onto the primary, developmental process of revision of *Lolita* and the *Lolita* theme after the fact. The development of *Lolita* appears only in retrospect as a clear and linear progression towards Nabokov's most complex novel. Nabokov could not, of

course, foresee that recurring details, themes and characters in his work, which are in the process of constant revision, would eventually be combined to create his most famous character and novel. The transtextual revisions that lead to *Lolita* feed into this seminal work from a variety of sources within Nabokov's oeuvre and explain, at least in part, the psychological and artistic complexity, as well as the great depth, of the novel. Furthermore, it is in the self-reflexive revisions to the theme, which follow the publication of *Lolita*, that Nabokov attempts to suggest a level of authorial control, which encompasses both the post-*Lolita* referents as well as his initial reworkings. However, the continued revisions to the theme following the publication of *Lolita* have a vastly different quality, function and role within Nabokov's oeuvre, and become an integral part of Nabokov's self-reflexive games. When Nabokov develops the *Lolita* theme firstly from 'Skazka' to 'Lilit' and then onwards into his first canonised text, the effect is linear and developmental. However, when he revises *Lolita* in, for example, *Look at the Harlequins!*, the self-referential markers that the author makes completely visible invite a reading of the text that directs the reader back to *Lolita*. While revision is part of the creative process that leads up to *Lolita*, it has, for Nabokov at least, a negative connotation within the author's fictional worlds, operating as a marker of artistic imperfection and a lack of authorial control. However, by flaunting the continued revision of the *Lolita* theme after *Lolita*'s canonisation, Nabokov paradoxically uses revision not only to claim the theme as his own, but to retrospectively pattern his oeuvre in order to create literary persona. Thus, in doing so, he asserts *Lolita*'s position both within his own oeuvre and world literature.

The *Lolita* Theme and Paedophilia

*Lolita* has a number of external literary precursors and subtexts, which serve as intertextual sources for this seminal text. Nabokov revises these works and uses them for his own purposes within *Lolita*. It is therefore essential to consider the intertextual relationships present in this work in order to examine the ways in which Nabokov uses them as a starting point for the revisions he implements to his oeuvre through *Lolita* in order to construct a literary persona and legacy. Indeed, Julian Connolly notes Carl Proffer's identification of over sixty authors and works to whom Nabokov makes 'casual allusions' in *Lolita*, for example, Shakespeare, Proust and Poe.<sup>238</sup> While these references flash by in the novel, there are several that contribute significantly to the generation of meaning and context for *Lolita*. Connolly identifies 'Nabokov's intricate use of literary and cultural subtexts' as one of the most interesting aspects of *Lolita*.<sup>239</sup> Firstly, Nabokov refers to two works in particular with the form that *Lolita* takes. Humbert's confessional memoir has important parallels in the confessional monologues of Dostoevsky, most prominently *Zapiski iz podpol'ia* and *Krotkaia*.<sup>240</sup> In both works the narrator addresses his narrative directly to an invisible reading audience, from whom he expects to receive judgement. This causes the narrative to be shaped by the narrator's projected ideas of the invisible reading audience's expectations. In both of these texts, as well as in *Lolita*, this leads to a fluid movement in the narrative 'between postures of

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<sup>238</sup> Connolly, *Reader's Guide*, p. 18.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

supplication and defiance, self-accusation and self-defense'.<sup>241</sup> This is a defining characteristic of Humbert, who addresses both the 'sensitive gentlewomen of the jury' (*Lolita*, 90) and 'frigid gentlewomen of the jury' (*Lolita*, 88). Furthermore, these repeated references to jurors and jury have an important parallel in *Krotkaia*, in which the narrator addresses an imagined jury, inviting its judgement while simultaneously rebuking it, as he wrestles with his role in his wife's suicide. This blind justification of his own position and responsibility has an obvious parallel in Humbert's assertion to his own imagined jury that 'You may jeer at me, and threaten to clear the court, but until I am gagged and half-throttled, I will shout my poor truth' (*Lolita*, 278).

The connection between *Lolita* and *Krotkaia* is far stronger than the correlation in form. Both texts deal with a relationship between a young girl and a much older man. The age difference between the narrator of *Krotkaia* and his young wife is the same as that between Humbert and Lolita, however, the pawnbroker is forty-one and his young wife sixteen when their relationship begins, and Humbert thirty-seven and Lolita twelve when Humbert first encounters her on the lawn of her mother's house in Beardsley. However, while each couple has an age difference of twenty-five years, it must be noted that the pawnbroker's meek wife is legally capable of marrying and conducting a relationship when he meets her, while Lolita, as a twelve year-old child, is not. Therefore, the relationship in *Krotkaia* can rightfully be characterised, as it is by the narrator, as a thrilling encounter between a young girl of legal age and an older man. However, the relationship at the heart of *Lolita*, despite Humbert's best efforts to legitimise it, remains paedophilic.

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

Paedophilia features in two other works by Dostoevsky, *Prestupleniye i nakazaniye* and *Besy*. The theme is less prevalent in the former, in which Arkady Svidrigailov recounts the story of a young girl who committed suicide after he sexually abused her. *Besy*, however, has an entire chapter dedicated to the theme, which was censored in the original publication and was only published in 1922, fifty years after its initial publication. In this chapter, Nikolai Stavrogin reflects on a confessional text he has written about the young girl who, again, committed suicide after he sexually abused her. Here, the girl is closer to Lolita's age than in *Krotkaia*. Nabokov was aware of the parallels in the thematic material of his and Dostoevsky's work and has Humbert note 'a Dostoevskian grin dawning' (*Lolita*, 70) when he realises that he could gain unfettered access to the child by marrying Charlotte Haze. The paedophilia theme is also found in works by Poe, whom, as Alfred Appel Jr. notes, Nabokov makes more explicit references to in *Lolita* than any other author (*Ann. Lolita*, 1970, 330). Firstly, Humbert draws parallels between his relationship with Lolita and Poe's with his cousin and wife, Virginia Clem, noting that 'Virginia was not quite fourteen when Harry Edgar possessed her' (*Lolita*, 43). However, distinctions can still be made between the two couples. Poe was twenty-seven when he married Virginia, who was fourteen. Furthermore, their marriage was consensual and it is thought that it was not immediately consummated. On the contrary, Humbert kidnaps Lolita when she is twelve and he is thirty-seven, and sexually abuses her for two years until she escapes to Quilty.

Nabokov also has Humbert make reference to Poe and his works in his narrative. Firstly, he fuses their names together to form the pseudonym 'Dr. Edgar H. Humbert', which he uses at the Enchanted Hunters hotel (*Lolita*, 118).



Secondly, and more integral to the text, he makes repeated use of Poe's poem 'Annabel Lee'. This poem, which focuses on the obsession of a dead lover, 'becomes the very foundation on which Humbert would construct his own narrative about his obsession for young girls.'<sup>242</sup> The use of *Annabel Lee* allows for a poetic crystallisation of Humbert's infatuation with his childhood love, the thinly veiled Annabel Leigh, and its subsequent projection onto Lolita. Like Poe's Annabel Lee, Humbert's Annabel died prematurely and before they were able to consummate their relationship. Moreover, the spiritual element of Poe's poem features in Humbert's description of their relationship, in which 'the spiritual and physical had been blended in us with a perfection [...] Long after her death I felt her thoughts floating through mine. Long before we met we had had the same dreams' (*Lolita*, 14). This supernatural connection and the gaping loss that it leaves behind for Humbert is an essential component which contributes to the enchantment Humbert feels when he 'broke her spell by incarnating her in another' (*Lolita*, 15). This central element of the *Lolita* theme, therefore, takes Poe as its originating point and assimilates it into the subtly complex *Lolita* theme.

A number of other works and authors operate as subtexts to *Lolita*.

Priscilla Meyer has argued that Nabokov reworks certain elements of *Evgenii Onegin*, which he translated, into *Lolita*.<sup>243</sup> Additionally, Pushkin's *Rusalka* can be seen as an important sub-text for *Lolita*. This unfinished play was an early preoccupation of Nabokov's, as he completed this text in the late 1930s as part

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>243</sup> See Priscilla Meyer, 'Teaching Lolita Through Pushkin's Onegin', in Galya Diment and Zoran Kuzmanovich (eds.), *Approaches to Teaching Nabokov's 'Lolita'* (New York: Modern Language Association, 2008), 94 - 100, and Priscilla Meyer, 'Nabokov's *Lolita* and Pushkin's *Onegin* - McAdam, McEve and McFate', in George Gibian and Stephen Parker (eds.), *The Achievements of Vladimir Nabokov* (Ithaca: Cornell Center for International Studies, 1984), 179 - 211.

of his work on the sequel to *Dar*.<sup>244</sup> The rusalka in Slavic folklore is a water nymph variably believed to be formed from the spirits of stillborn or unbaptised babies or women who died young and tragically.<sup>245</sup> These creatures are thought to enchant unsuspecting men, causing them to enter into water, where the rusalka will cause the men to drown by pulling them to the riverbed.<sup>246</sup> This element of enchantment pervades *Lolita*, in which Humbert takes Lolita to the Enchanted Hunters hotel and characterises his rape of her as an ‘enchanted journey’ (*Lolita*, 86). In addition, several critics have noted subtexts of the Sleeping Beauty in *Lolita*, particularly in the opposing depictions of Lolita and her mother, Charlotte.<sup>247</sup> However, this fairytale quality of *Lolita* develops throughout the works which lead up to it and appears more explicitly in earlier works, for example, ‘Skazka’, than in *Lolita* itself.

Against the evidence of these literary predecessors, and despite the clear intertextual links that *Lolita* has to them, Nabokov claims the theme of paedophilia for himself. His drive to seize it is clearly shown by his desire to give himself etymological credit for the term ‘nymphet’.<sup>248</sup> In an interview given in French to *L’Express* in 1959, Nabokov maintains that, while Ronsard uses a close French relative, *nymphette*, in a sonnet, the variation of sense and meaning, which results in the creation of his seminal, nymphet, Lolita, causes a

<sup>244</sup> Boyd, *Russian Years*, p. 516.

<sup>245</sup> See Connolly, *Reader’s Guide*, p. 21.

<sup>246</sup> Galya Diment, ‘Plays’, in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. by Alexandrov, pp. 586 - 599, p. 597.

<sup>247</sup> See Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, ‘The Enchanter and the Beauties of Sleeping’ in Gavriel Shapiro (ed.), *Nabokov at Cornell* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 30 - 45; Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, ‘“Ballet Attitudes”: Nabokov’s *Lolita* and Petipa’s *The Sleeping Beauty*’ in Lisa Zunshine, ed., *Nabokov at the Limits: Redrawing Critical Boundaries* (New York: Garland, 1999), 111 - 26; Steven Swann Jones, ‘The Enchanted Hunters: Nabokov’s Use of Folk Characterisation in *Lolita*, *Western Folklore*, 39 / 4 (1980), 269 - 283.

<sup>248</sup> Humbert notes that Dante, Petrarch and Poe all had vastly younger child-brides at the start of *Lolita*. Maurice Couturier trans., ‘The Good Mr. Nabokov’ in *L’Express*, 5th November 1959.

significant enough shift for its creation to be reasonably credited to him.<sup>249</sup>

However, Maurice Couturier argues that Nabokov did not give sufficient credit to those precursors who used the term in literary works before *Lolita*. He writes that 'Nabokov did not invent the word, he simply revived it', noting that the Larousse *Dictionnaire étymologique* traces the word to the fifteenth century and the *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* identifies its first usage as occurring in 1512.<sup>250</sup> However, these references relate to the version used by Ronsard, which refers to a magical, bewitching creature, whereas Nabokov's nymphet juxtaposes this etherealness against a real-life, flesh-and-blood girl. Couturier takes issue with Nabokov's claims for ownership of the term, and quotes the sonnet as evidence that the term was used prior to 1955's *Lolita*, however, Couturier also translated the L'Express interview from French into English. It is therefore impossible that he was unaware of Nabokov's qualification of the difference between his *nymphet* and Ronsard's *nymphette*. Moreover, Couturier does not address fully the significance of the difference between what each signifier represents and this constitutes a major flaw in his argument. It is undeniable that Nabokov draws on various elements and aspects of literature in order to create not just the nymphet character, but numerous other aspects of his fiction. However, his advancement of everything he 'snatches from the sun' is far from 'pale and ineffectual' and, belongs to the long tradition of literary appropriation and thievery, both of which have existed for as long as literary art itself.<sup>251</sup> It seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that Nabokov's *nymphet* is a significant enough development of *nymphette* to be

<sup>249</sup> See Maurice Couturier, 'Nymph-Hunting' in *Nabokov's Eros and the Poetics of Desire* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 159 - 194, p. 159.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, p. 159.

<sup>251</sup> William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, VI. III.

defined on her own terms, a fact supported by definitions of *nymphette* in current French dictionaries, which refer and defer to Nabokov's conception.<sup>252</sup> This is moreover, significant in terms of Nabokov's moral stance towards *Lolita*. While the author attempts to absolve himself of the burden of passing judgement on Humbert's unspeakable crimes, he simultaneously aligns himself with the beating heart of his most famous text's subject matter. In this way, Nabokov not only courts controversy, but plays with the scandalised image of *Lolita* and Lolita, making his authorial identity synonymous with that element of his work.

Paedophilia is an essential component of *Lolita*, driving both Humbert and the plot to their inevitable, destructive conclusions. The novel presents a deplorable paedophile as its anti-hero and narrator. Humbert almost immediately alludes to Annabel Leigh as his first love in the distant past 'in a principedom by the sea' (*Lolita*, 11). He continues by reflecting on his paedophilia, trying to justify it by mentioning other notable males (Dante, Poe) who had very young female partners. In this, he makes an important distinction between his own condition and those men who, when 'given a group photograph of schoolgirls or Girl Scouts and asked to point out the comeliest one will not necessarily choose the nymphet among them' (*Lolita*, 19). He clarifies that nymphets possess 'certain mysterious characteristics, the fey grace, the elusive, shifty, soul-shattering, insidious charm' which separates them from "cute", or even "sweet" and "attractive", ordinary, plumpish, formless, cold-skinned, essentially human little girls' (*Lolita*, 19). The allure that Lolita holds for Humbert is that she is at once a child, brattish and temperamental, a vulnerable

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid, p. 160.

girl on the cusp of adolescence, a young, sexually attractive and active nymphet. His taste for girl-children focusses on their most child-like characteristics. Any qualities that are physically and sexually alluring about Lolita are introduced to the text via the skewed vision of Humbert's paedophilic gaze, as the reality is that she is a child. Despite the dalliances she has with other children her own age, she is unaware of adult sexuality and remains, essentially, a child, particularly in her appearance. Humbert confesses that he lusts after the 'downy limb' of a child he sees rollerskating in a park and is attracted to Valeria by 'the imitation she gave of a little girl', finding her repellent when 'down turned to prickles on a shaved shin' (*Lolita*, 19; 28). Moreover, it is Lolita's most childish features that are most alluring to him (for example her 'monkeyish feet' and the scratches like tiny dotted lines of coagulated rubies' that cover her arms after particularly boisterous play), and he is, in fact, repelled by her mimetic attempts at womanly appearance (for example, 'the dead end of her face with its strange flush and freshly made-up lips') (*Lolita*, 54; 117; 215). By the point that Humbert's time with Lolita is nearing its end, he begins to see the development of physical attributes that he does not enjoy (she appears 'thinner and taller', her skin loses its 'tender bloom' until her appearance is eventually 'pale and polluted') and which are characteristic of her burgeoning physical and sexual maturity (*Lolita*, 284). Although her beauty and attractiveness (to Humbert, they are her nymphet qualities) are, at this point, dimming with age, Lolita is, as will be demonstrated in the following analysis of her predecessors and successors, undoubtedly the most radiant, bewitching and ethereal of all of Nabokov's nymphet characters. She is at once child-like

yet sexually alluring, delicate yet somehow robust enough for Humbert's insatiable desires, innocent and yet mature beyond her age.

However, Humbert's attraction to Dolores is not simply paedophilic but creates a quasi-incestuous situation. Indeed, Humbert notes that 'Lolita, with an incestuous thrill, I had grown to regard as *my child*' (*Lolita*, 85). This quasi-incestuous relationship is compounded by Lolita's use of 'dad' at times of anger and fear (*Lolita*, 180). She corroborates his story in order to defend herself, in some small way, against his tyranny and also as that last line of defence against the only evil that she fears more than Humbert himself – the sterile, institutional world of an orphanage that he threatens her with. Lolita is entirely Humbert's creation and does not actually exist outwith Humbert's fantasy. This fantasy, and its subsequent projection, effaces a real-life girl, erasing first her identity, then her childhood and finally her life. Indeed, the real child is as obscure as the narration of events itself. The addition of incest to the overarching paedophilia theme in *Lolita* is a crucial element of the theme's development into (and out of) this text. It signifies the narcissistic ego of Humbert Humbert, whose aggrandising self-love is such that his paedophilic urges are augmented and enhanced by the inclusion of a familial link with his victim. His desire to possess the magical creature of the nymphet is extended, when he discovers Dolores Haze, to a desire to occupy not only the role of her father, but to procreate with her: 'with patience and luck I might have her produce eventually a nymphet with my blood in her exquisite veins, a Lolita the Second, who would be eight or nine around 1960' (*Lolita*, 183). While the plot development of marrying Dolores' mother to get to her is an intertextual nod to Dostoevsky, there is a far more complex thematic development underlying the

novel.<sup>253</sup> By marrying Charlotte in order to gain unfettered access to her daughter, Humbert not only aims to possess the purity of a child, but to project his love for his own self on that pure and beautiful object. This extension allows Humbert not only to create Lolita from a devastating loss, warped memory and innocent girl, but to be aware of his own role as the creator of that very, and beautiful, thing. In this way, Humbert becomes a metafictional artist, and his work, Lolita herself and the memoir narrative of Nabokov's *Lolita*, too, takes on a metafictional quality.

Dolores appears to be, in some way, enamoured by Humbert, at least before he kidnaps and rapes her repeatedly. Her father is dead and her mother is distant and cold towards her. As a result, she develops an interest in her mother's new lodger, stealing bacon from his breakfast plate and leaving notes on his breakfast tray. However, all of this information is filtered through Humbert and this element of *Lolita* grows more skewed as the novel progresses. In this way, the reader is given very little information about Humbert, except what he sanctions. This ranges from him as an 'exceptionally handsome male' to the pathetic 'my aging ape eyes' (*Lolita*, 27; 42). The information that he gives the reader, in contrast, here depicts Lolita as having femme fatale qualities, and represents her as a desirable, sexualised young girl, whereas, at this point in time, she is a child unaware of her sexuality. For example, before leaving for camp, she returns to embrace him and, according to Humbert, she is not a virgin by the time Humbert possesses her for the first time. However, her previous experiences with Charlie and Barbara at Camp Q are borne of a burgeoning sexuality and, as Humbert himself notes, 'she was not quite

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<sup>253</sup> As discussed earlier, the paedophilia theme appears in both *Besny* and *Prestuplenie i nakazanie*.

prepared for certain discrepancies between a kid's life and mine' (*Lolita*, 141). Moreover, her engagement with Humbert can also be discounted as collusion, as he is living within her family setting and will soon become her stepfather. However, this does not sanction Humbert's actions. The increased attraction he feels towards Dolores when he thinks of her as his stepdaughter point to nothing more than his narcissism. The love that he expresses for her is, in fact, self-love, as the thrill that he feels towards her after identifying her as his child is, in actuality, derived from him identifying part of himself in her. Humbert's narcissism causes him to identify himself as a special being, entitled to rights outside social convention and consensus. David Andrews states that 'the author's most persistent theme concerns the necessity of balancing inner and outer uniqueness. Talented individuals like Humbert become so enamoured of their own uniqueness that they fail to respect the infinite uniqueness beyond themselves. This failure culminates in violence, waste and despair'.<sup>254</sup> While Humbert does not, and cannot, know that his desire to create and to possess Dolores sexually will lead to such a tragic ending, he cannot fail to know that he is committing a crime that would have a severe and long-reaching effect on the child.

### The *Lolita* Theme and Morality

Much critical debate has been devoted to defining Nabokov as either aesthete or moralist, particularly in conjunction with this work.<sup>255</sup> David Andrews writes

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<sup>254</sup> David Andrews, *Aestheticism, Nabokov and Lolita* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1999), pp. 5 - 6.

<sup>255</sup> Some examples of early criticism which examined Nabokov's ethics and morality are: Page Stegner, *Escape into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967); Ellen Pifer, *Nabokov and the Novel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).



that early Nabokov scholarship tended to characterise Nabokov as either aesthete or moralist, but never both.<sup>256</sup> However these reductionist views have been reconsidered in the intervening years and been combined into more complex interpretations of Nabokov and his work. For example, Leland de la Durantay's recent study negotiates the paradox of 'conceiving of a work as at once sincere and contrived' and concludes that this paradox is an essential tension in Nabokov's work that must be negotiated.<sup>257</sup> Certainly, Nabokov is a writer concerned with aesthetic matters, as shown by his interest in the beauty and richness of language as well as the metafictional games of his work, while he seems to maintain a certain distance from moral matters. Furthermore, Wood notes that 'Moral questions, like epistemological ones, are put to work in his fiction. Nabokov doesn't write about them; he writes them'.<sup>258</sup> It is this unarticulated dynamic that makes moral, ethical matters an implicit concern in his works and which invites the the reader of *Lolita* to make complex moral judgements. This is encouraged by the distance Nabokov creates between himself, the overseeing author, and Humbert, as the unreliable narrator, as he effaces himself from the site of morality. This simultaneously allows Nabokov to develop the *Lolita* theme into the seminal text of his wider work, by creating a text from the highly contentious story told by Humbert. Indeed, Nabokov initially considered seeking publication under a pseudonym in order to distance himself more clearly from the subject matter of his most famous work. Similarly, John Ray Jr.'s fictional foreword also performs this function, by removing the author from the text by a further step. Moreover, this foreword refers to another

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<sup>256</sup> See Andrews, *Aestheticism*, p. 5.

<sup>257</sup> Leland de la Durantaye, *Style is Matter: The Moral Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 194.

<sup>258</sup> Wood, *The Magician's Doubts*, p. 32.

intermediary reader, Clarence Choate Clarke, Esq., who has passed the manuscript to Ray Jr. for processing and editing. While these steps are an intrinsic part of the artistic structure of *Lolita*, they furthermore serve to distance Nabokov himself from the story of the novel. However, they proved insufficient and, as a result, the author elected to add a postscript to the text upon its publication in UK and US publication.

The epilogue to *Lolita*, 'On a Book Entitled *Lolita*', was written by Nabokov in 1956 and appeared in the 1959 edition of the novel published by Weidenfield and Nicolson. An elegant defence of the novel against charges of pornography, indecency and general immorality, it posits that a work of such artistic brevity should not need, nor be expected, to engage with moral judgement or education.<sup>259</sup> He states that he is 'neither a reader nor a writer of didactic fiction and, despite John Ray's assertion, *Lolita* has no moral in tow'.<sup>260</sup> Nabokov uses this essay to create further distance between himself and the novel's subject matter by discussing the initial inspiration for the novel, which he states was a newspaper report of 'an ape in the Jardin des Plantes who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: this sketch showed the bars of the poor creatures cage'.<sup>261</sup> By detailing the corresponding story of the creative impetus for *Lolita*, Nabokov foregrounds its fictionality and, furthermore, tacitly places the onus of moral judgement on the reader. By sanctifying the problematic subject matter of the novel, Nabokov absolves himself of the responsibility of providing a moral judgement within the text. Moreover, the use of the *Lolita* theme, and

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<sup>259</sup> Boyd, *American Years*, p. 300.

<sup>260</sup> Nabokov, 'On a Book Entitled *Lolita*', p. 332.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, p. 328.

specifically the use of paedophilia as an essential component of the theme, throughout Nabokov's oeuvre operates as device which heightens the artifice of Nabokov's work. Booth writes that works of art require 'rhetorical heightening' in order to avoid 'mild, undifferentiated reactions'.<sup>262</sup> Therefore, the *Lolita* theme's components of paedophilia, incest and sexual subjugation of a minor create an extreme response in the reader that unequivocally evokes the required pity in any reading of *Lolita*. This pity is evoked via an estrangement of the base story from the quite considerable artifice that surrounds it.<sup>263</sup> Furthermore, Trevor McNeely writes that the subject of paedophilia 'is deliberately chosen as being, of all human activities the most universally despised, in its nature the most inexcusably and uncompromisingly vile, beyond all dispute or discussion evil. By choosing paedophilia as his subject, then, Nabokov is setting himself the ultimate challenge as a stylist'.<sup>264</sup> The tension created between the florid and beautiful stylistic features of Nabokov's prose and the harrowing subject matter of *Lolita* contributes to the estrangement of the plot from the fabric of the text, and this contributes to the generation of pity when *Lolita* is read. In this way, Nabokov uses an almost impossible subject matter with aplomb.

Paedophilia, central to the *Lolita* theme, and Nabokov's work more generally, has occurred steadily throughout literary works over the last two centuries. In particular, recent studies of the theme of paedophilia in Victorian literature have revealed the widespread treatment of the theme, both latent and active, in English literature of that period, including J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*,

<sup>262</sup> Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 110.

<sup>263</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Art as Device' in *Theory of Prose* (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 2 - 14, p.6.

<sup>264</sup> Trevor McNeely, 'Lo' and Behold: Solving the *Lolita* Riddle', *Studies in the Novel*, 21 / 8 (1989), 182-199, p. 187.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (which, it should be noted, Nabokov translated into Russian in 1923), and Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*.<sup>265</sup> While paedophilia as thematic matter in literature has a run a steady course, certainly since the Victorian era, acknowledgement and representations of it remained distinctly absent in the world of art until the mid-to-late twentieth century. Sarah Goode notes that 'up until the 1970s, popular awareness of child sexual abuse was all but non-existent. Similarly, until the 1990s, the word 'paedophile' was almost unknown outside the medical profession: it was an obscure technical term describing a condition most people had never even imagined'.<sup>266</sup> However, in the intervening years, sexual abuse of children by adults has become a more widespread topic in everyday life and culture. This lack of cultural discourse on the topic of paedophilia certainly contributed to the shock and immediate censorship that surrounded the publication of *Lolita*.

### The Making of *Lolita*: The Development of the *Lolita* Theme

Nabokov utilises an extensive back catalogue of material in creating *Lolita* and continuously develops the numerous themes and motifs, including for example, the paradigm of the femme fatale and the innocent, childlike victim, and the physical torture and torment of a weak person, which are essential features of this pivotal text. However, while these themes are undoubtedly developed into *Lolita*, there is a clearly visible linear development in his work with regards to

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<sup>265</sup> James Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992); Fiona McCulloch, *The Fictional Role of Childhood in Victorian and Early-Twentieth Century Children's Literature* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004).

<sup>266</sup> Sarah D. Goode, *Paedophiles in Society: Reflecting on Sexuality, Abuse and Hope* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 2.

the theme of paedophilia, incest and the sexual subjugation of a young girl by a much older man. This specific theme is used again and again throughout Nabokov's oeuvre up to *Lolita* and previous iterations are artistically developed into this text. The theme runs a steady course throughout Nabokov's works, pre-dating even his first engagement with the prose form he would come to master. It is most notably found in *Lolita*, which endured an initially harsh critical reception as a result of its controversial subject matter. The text's eponymous character is variably one of the most scandalous, scandalised, misunderstood and misrepresented characters in the canon. Contemporary criticism received her as either 'a sacrificial lamb' or 'a nasty thirteen year old' who is 'selfish, hard, vulgar and foul-tempered'.<sup>267</sup> As a consequence of Humbert's fictional revisions via his multiple narrative strands, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, attempt to make Lolita complicit in his crimes, the character was perceived as either a virgin or a whore. The theme of paedophilia, however, had appeared several times in Nabokov's corpus prior to the publication of *Lolita*. Several critics have noted or examined the theme's occurrence via the Lolita-esque characters in Nabokov's earlier, usually Russian, texts.

However, none have considered the effects of the revisions Nabokov implements in a trajectory towards his most famous character, nor identified the pattern of her continued revision even after the completion and subsequent publication of *Lolita*. Julian Connolly has identified the theme in several early texts by Nabokov, including 'Lilit', 'Skazka', and *Volshebnik*. He traces the development of both the novel itself and its character, showing the theme's

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<sup>267</sup> Dorothy Parker, 'Sex – without the asterisks', *Esquire*, 1958, 103 - 105, p. 103; Thomas Molnar, 'Matter-of-Fact Confession of a Non-Penitent', *Chronicles of Culture*, 2 (1978), 11 - 13, p. 12.

progression of form, from poem ('Lilit') to short story ('Skazka') to novella (*Volshebnik*) to, finally, novel (*Lolita*). Tracking the evolving narrative approaches, Connolly stresses that the differences between the texts are of far greater significance than the similarities. In the precursors to *Lolita* the figure of the child operates to mirror the despair and misery of the narrator and, as a result, the character of the child that is presented lacks substance.<sup>268</sup>

Conversely, in *Lolita*, 'the emotional core of the novel lies in the depiction of a young girl's vulnerability and of the pain that is inflicted upon her by a callous and self-centred adult', while 'the emotional richness of the novel stems from the fact that Dolly does have an internal life, with a desires and fears that are distinctly her own, even though they are generally ignored by Humbert'.<sup>269</sup>

Therefore, this theme is an essential component in *Lolita*, which is fully realised by the long and steady developmental treatment it receives prior to its writing.

A tension is created in Nabokov's extratextual responses to critics, such as Anthony Burgess and Kingsley Amis, who identify proto-*Lolita* characters in other works from his oeuvre. Nabokov refutes any links in this works to *Lolita* and dissuades any pursuit of this kind. Here, Nabokov's extratextual comments on his texts, the full effect of which will be examined fully in the next chapter, belie his desire for authorial control. Moreover, he often makes links between his own characters, texts and topics before explicitly refuting their existence. Despite Nabokov's protestations at an extratextual level, the thematic matter of paedophilia occurs in the very earliest of Nabokov's works, occurring long before Nabokov's first use of prose. This effect is furthermore complicated by the necessary switch from Russian to English that Nabokov made halfway

<sup>268</sup> Connolly, *Reader's Guide*, p. 11.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, p.11.

through his writing career. All of these elements combine to form a progressive development of the *Lolita* theme through transtextual revision. Despite the evolution of Nabokov's work structurally, linguistically and stylistically, the essential properties of the theme's treatment remain the same in English as they were first set out in Russian. The clear directionality of the thematic matter that Nabokov revises is consistently maintained towards *Lolita*, regardless of language, point of origin within the corpus and temporal disjuncture caused by the translation of *Lolita* into Russian.

The *Lolita* theme in the text that bears its name combines incest with paedophilia in order to clearly present Humbert as a narcissistic paedophile who monstrously destroys a young girl's life. Prior to the publication of *Lolita*, paedophilia recurs tangibly four times, appearing for the first time in 'Skazka' (1926). Erwin, the protagonist who makes a pact with the devil, initially sends women he sees on his daily business to an imaginary harem where he can enjoy them, free from his crippling shyness. The plot of 'Skazka' is obviously and unavoidably more compact and less developed than a full-length novel like *Lolita*. However, this short work uses not only paedophilia but, in addition, the inter-related notion of enchantment by nymphets which is such an integral part of *Lolita*. This enchantment is cast upon 'certain bewitched travellers' by little girls whose 'true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is demoniac)' (*Lolita*, 18). While nothing suggests that the majority of the women Erwin desires are particularly young or conform to the childhood model which Humbert measures potential nymphets against, Erwin's two-fold downfall is a young girl, who is described as having 'слишком блестящие глаза', and the first and last

addition, described firstly in childlike terms and latterly in more womanly terms (*IT*, 407).

The crucial candidates are, however, Erwin's first, twelfth and thirteenth selections, the twelfth girl causing him to lose his harem. She is, in fact, a child, and she seemingly lures Erwin into selecting her, as he does so without realising that she takes his count to an even number. Erwin notes that there is something 'странно' about her and she is described thus: She is described as 'едва-едва поводя бедрами' (*IT*, 407). To use later-Nabokovian language, she enchants him, and in this way she is the earliest precursor to *Lolita*. In the later text, Humbert proposes both the age parameters and differences for nymphets and their partners, as well as their supernatural, enchanting nature (*Lolita*, 18 - 19). In the split second that the girl in 'Skazka' appears in the narrative, her nymphic nature is hinted at. Indeed, although Erwin does not consciously give an instruction for her to be added to his harem, she is included (*IT*, 407). She is at once an innocent child ('лет четырнадцати', *IT*, 407) and a seductive, if youthful, girl who entices Erwin. The style of the prose changes in this description; the first dense paragraph in a story is characterised by dialogic exchanges and internal monologue. Crucially, this girl is walking with a much older man and wears a dress similar to the one *Lolita* wears both when Humbert masturbates while she plays with an apple and when he collects her from summer camp. Erwin's enchantment with the proto-*Lolita* girl leads him on a desperate search for a thirteenth girl, whom he realises is, in fact, the first girl after he selects her. Midnight strikes and he has now, under the enchanted influence of the twelfth girl, selected an even number of girls. Eric Naiman notes that 'Erwin's story belongs to a larger fundamental narrative on which Nabokov



drew throughout his career: the plight of a man both stimulated and undone by his interest in what he sees or reads'.<sup>270</sup> This element of Nabokov's work is furthermore inextricably linked to the author's use of paedophilia as thematic material. In 'Skazka' the young girl who causes Erwin's downfall enchants him with her alluring beauty, but absent are the explicit references to demonic possession that are made in later works with the paedophilia theme, particularly in 'Lilit'. It is in this way that the enchantment aspect of the *Lolita* theme is introduced to Nabokov's work.

Enchantment functions in 'Skazka' as the operative device which both seals Erwin's pact with the devil and prevents it from coming to fruition. In this case, innocence prevails and paedophilia remains an unfulfilled desire.

However, two years later Nabokov wrote the poem 'Lilit', a focused poem of a fallen soldier who mistakenly believes he has gone to heaven. The Lilit', or Lilith, of the title is a figure in Talmudic mythology who is thought to be Adam's first wife, the precursor of Eve, who refused subservience. She is represented in Nabokov's poem firstly as an ethereal beauty and latterly as a demon.<sup>271</sup>

However, the most significant and most specifically Nabokovian element is her youth and the memory that it recalls, which is a feature purely belonging to Nabokovian 'Lilit'. Upon seeing 'Lilit' the soldier recalls an occasion where he hid behind a tree to watch the miller's daughter emerging naked from the river (*PP*, 71). It could be argued that 'Lilit' induces this memory (real or imagined) or that she has taken a child-like physical form in order to attract the dead man.

Either way, she is referred to after the memory when the dead man approaches her as 'моей Лилит' and, in the English translation, as a 'child' who is 'lacking

<sup>270</sup> Naiman, *Nabokov Perversely*, p. 2.

<sup>271</sup> 'Lilit' also bears a striking resemblance to Pushkin's *Rusalka*.

... [in] ... shame', while assuredly leading him to a 'греческий диван мохнатый' (*PP*, 71). The soldier begins to have sexual intercourse with her, but at the point of ejaculation she removes herself from the act. The scene transforms and the man ejaculates in front of a group of 'мерзко блеющие дети' (*PP*, 71).

As Julian Connolly has pointed out the 'overall arc' of the poem's plot is the same as that of *Lolita*.<sup>272</sup> Paedophilia as a central theme in the poem fully introduces the ideas of enchantment and seduction on the part of the female child, which were only hinted at in 'Skazka' (and which become a focus in *Lolita*), to Nabokov's oeuvre, a notion which hereafter becomes a mainstay in Nabokov's works. It also dually represents the notion of childish sexual experimentation and expression in addition to thwarted childhood love, which became the source of Humbert's enchanted 'kingdom by the sea' (*Lolita*, 176). In addition, a moral judgement of a sort is passed, although this is implicit and not facilitated in the way that it is in *Lolita*. The soldier has died on the battlefield and is sent to hell, where he is then duped and humiliated by a demon. This is, presumably, punishment for deeds committed in his earthly life, although they are not revealed and this judgement is, at best, partial, relying on the reader sharing the text's underlying Western Christian ideology. This moral standpoint does not feature in such an explicit way in *Lolita*, in which Humbert's unquenchable lust for nymphets is first presented by the overarching narrator himself as a deviant yet uncontrollable desire, and later as a refraction of true love. Furthermore, Nabokov includes his anti-didactic stance in the afterword he added to *Lolita* to create further distance between himself and his controversial work. 'Lilit' is, like 'Skazka', a far earlier text (and one which takes a different

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<sup>272</sup> Connolly, *Reader's Guide*, p. 10.

form) than *Lolita*, and its representation of paedophilia at least infers a moral judgement, whereas *Lolita* invites such a judgement from the reader. 'Lilit' also completely lacks the incest element which is present in *Lolita* and is only hinted at in 'Skazka'.

While Nabokov discouraged parallels between Emmie, the jailer's daughter in *Priglasenie na kazn'*, and the character of Lolita, the *Lolita* theme has a distinct, if fleeting, presence in this text. Emmie is conventionally child-like in her appearance and her slight, slim body with its delicate 'ballerina calves' (*IB*, 64) ('балеринные икрами', *PNK*, 31). However, most significantly, when Cincinnatus first encounters Emmie, she is dressed in a gingham dress, eating red candy and playing with a ball, which makes a tapping sound (similar to the 'plop' of Lolita's apple). This foreshadows two crucial scenes from *Lolita*. The first episode begins with Humbert stealing away an apple that Lolita is playing with while bringing himself to orgasm with Lolita on his lap. She is described as wearing 'a pretty print dress that I had seen on her once before, ample in the skirt, tight in the bodice, short-sleeved, pink, checkered with darker pink.' (*Lolita*, 62). She is playing with an apple, which Humbert steals in order to lure her to him. The apple is described as being 'beautiful, banal [and] Eden-red' (*Lolita*, 61). The biblical allusions are clear and once Lolita has regained and bitten into the apple it is described as 'disfigured' (*Lolita*, 661) and, as Humbert orgasms it becomes 'abolished' (*Lolita*, 63). This is the first mutual sexual encounter of any kind between Lolita and Humbert, and the apple that she plays with represents her engagement in Humbert's *Lolita* fantasy. Moreover, it signifies the inevitable and unstoppable descent into destruction that the fantasy will cause. The apple motif recurs again in conjunction with a gingham dress later in the novel, when

Humbert collects Lolita from Camp Q after Charlotte's death. Lolita wears 'her brightest gingham, with a pattern of little red apples' (*Lolita*, 61). Here the apple ceases to be a physical entity and becomes integral to the fabric of the character of Lolita.

Additionally, Cincinnatus is not a sexual predator and is, in fact, as much of a victim as Lolita. However, his unwitting dismissal of Emmie's burgeoning sexuality directs her towards a man whose predatory instincts are not as benign as Cincinnatus'. Immediately after their separation, when she has led him to the governor's dinner table instead of helping him escape, her vulnerability is foregrounded as she is groped under the dinner table by M'sieur Pierre. Unlike Cincinnatus, M'sieur Pierre is a man, not a child-like character, and is far more dangerous to the child. Without the counter-balance provided by Cincinnatus, her sexuality becomes dangerous and she finds herself unable to control it. Cincinnatus too becomes more vulnerable at this point, and is soon taken to his death. In this way, Cincinnatus acts a mirror of sorts for Emmie, however, as the artificial world of the prison disintegrates, Cincinnatus exits it for another world, while Emmie is left behind in the collapsing house of cards. She ends *Priglasenie na kazn'* trapped within the text's artificial world, unable to escape or transcend it in the way that Cincinnatus does.

The incest element of 'Skazka' occurs again in *Dar*. Fyodor, the text's narrator-writer, learns that his girlfriend's step-father has thought up a plot of his own which he would like to develop into a novel. He tells Fyodor of it thus: 'старый пес, – но еще в соку, с огнем, с жаждой счастья, – знакомится с вдовицей, а у нее дочка, совсем еще девочка, – знаете, когда еще ничего не формилось, а уже ходит так, что с ума сойти. Бледненькая, легонькая,

под глазами синева, – и конечно на старого хрыча не смотрит' (*Dar*, 193).

Of course, it transpires that this plot is not purely rooted in Shchyogolev's imagination but it is firmly a desire that he harboured when Zina was a child. Moreover, it, like the plot of *Lolita*, has intertextual roots in Dostoevsky's *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* and *Besy* and, in this way, the theme performs here the function of situating *Dar* in the Russian literary context that it both parodies and pays homage to. In terms of the development of the *Lolita* theme, *Dar* resumes the theme of sexual attraction on the part of an older man to a female child, but it additionally introduces the element of quasi-incestuousness which marks *Lolita*. Whereas here Shchyogolev's attitude lacks the obsessive focus and drive of his counterpart, Humbert, in *Lolita*, who pursues first his girl-child and then the man, Quilty, who took her away from him. Indeed, he informs Quilty that one of the reasons that his foe must die by his hand is that he denied Humbert 'marriage in a mountain state ... [and] ... a litter of Lolitas' (*Lolita*, 316). The notion of enchantment which is present in both 'Skazka' and 'Lilit' is noticeably absent in the after-the-fact telling of the story in *Dar*. Moreover, the incestuous element of Shchyogolev's story is a seemingly practical consideration, and, unlike Humbert, it does not add or detract from the pleasure he notes. Therefore, the *Lolita* theme in *Dar* is not integral to that text and Shchyogolev's proposed work serves as a parallel for the text that Fyodor ends *Dar* with the intention of writing. It is clear that Shchyogolev will never actually write his tale, whereas Fyodor, with the loving support of Zina, seems set to pass into the world of autonomous creation.

*Volshebnik*, which was written in Paris while Nabokov tried to secure passage to the USA for his family, is arguably the clearest precursor to *Lolita*.

Moreover, it is the last of Nabokov's texts to use the *Lolita* theme in the developmental arc. Specifically, it uses Shchyogolev's plot and combines it with the enchantment components of 'Lilit' and 'Skazka', and furthermore incorporates the incest element of the theme that is so prominent in *Lolita*. It is the clearest precursor to *Lolita* in Nabokov's oeuvre, and one that Nabokov himself acknowledged as showcasing 'the first little throb of Lolita'.<sup>273</sup> It is the most direct precursor to *Lolita*, and while the treatment is more rudimentary and the prose less florid than Nabokov's canonised text, it presents an interesting use of paedophilia and incest as the main thematic matter of a literary work. Like Lolita, the unnamed girl in *Volshebnik* is physically slight and has a distinctly child-like appearance. The narrator notes the delicate incurvation of her back, as well as her gluteal muscles: 'выгиб узкой спины, и упругость двух кругленьких мышц пониже' (*Volshebnik*, 1985, 31)). This clearly foreshadows Humbert's note about Lolita, which he records in his diary: 'the incurvation of her spine, and the swellings of her tense narrow nates' (*Lolita*, 141). However, despite this text being the most obvious link to *Lolita* within Nabokov's oeuvre, and the very obvious correlations between the physical make up of the characters, the differences between both character and text are more notable than their numerous similarities. The unnamed girl lacks Lolita's glow and resembles her successors most closely at the point at which Humbert states he does not recognise his nymphet, who has grown 'thinner and taller', and whose cheeks have become 'hollowed' by the bland food at Camp Q (*Lolita*, 117). Furthermore, the girl's sickly mother, while being presented as a far more wan and two-dimensional character than the colourful and brash

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<sup>273</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, 'On a Book Entitled Lolita', p. 328.

Charlotte Haze, anticipates Dolores' mother, who meets a similarly premature end in *Lolita*. Indeed, she seems to appear in a negative version when compared with her more colourful and vivid English language counterpart.

Finally, the gingham dress first seen in *Priglasenie na kazn'*, and used so pertinently in *Lolita*, occurs again in *Volshebnik*, with the protagonist noting the way that the checks become distorted when the girl moves her limbs: 'как именно натягивались клетки платья ... когда она поднимала руку' (*Volshebnik*, 31). This foreshadows Humbert's 'diminutive one-sided romances' with unknown, unwitting girls, one of whom he remembers specifically as a 'perfect little beauty in a tartan frock, [who] with a clatter put her heavily armed foot near me upon the bench to dip her slim bare arms into me and righten the strap of her roller skate' (*Lolita*, 23). Here, in conjunction with one of *Lolita*'s 'handmaids and girl-pages' (*Lolita*, 12), the oft-repeated gingham morphs into the more robust, interwoven check of tartan, but the essential elements remain the same; the child is unaware of the lust she elicits from the adult male, a lust which is greatly enhanced by her most child-like qualities and dress. However, it is ultimately the differences between the use of the theme in *Volshebnik* and *Lolita* which are most significant. The consequences of the themes of paedophilia and incest are as disastrous in *Volshebnik* as they are in *Lolita*, but in a much more straightforward way, due to the simplified plot, structure and narrative technique of the novella. When the girl awakens to find her stepfather masturbating over her, she remains physically, if not emotionally, unsullied and unhurt. Her stepfather, on the other hand, is driven to his death by her screams and the subsequent commotion that they cause. He runs out of the hotel and under the wheels of a truck, submitting willingly and happily to his fate: 'так ero,

забирай под себя, рвякай хрупь' (*Volshebnik*, 96). Unlike Humbert, who tries to justify his desires, this character is aware of the moral and societal wrong of his taste for female children and the theme is therefore presented in *Volshebnik* in less morally ambiguous and interpretative terms.

Furthermore, incest is an important component part of the *Lolita* theme in *Volshebnik*. The protagonist's attraction to the girl is somewhat increased when he discovers that she has a sickly mother, through whom, he imagines, he can gain access to her. He eventually becomes her stepfather, but, unlike Humbert, this is a purely functional step, which he takes in order to secure a position in her life. Whereas Humbert derives actual pleasure from becoming a father figure in Lolita's life, enjoying 'an incestuous thrill' when he thinks of Lolita as his stepdaughter, the main character of *Volshebnik* finds playing the role of stepfather simply a practical consideration, which does not enhance his attraction to her (*Lolita*, 86). This use of the *Lolita* theme is notable not just in terms of its clear combination of paedophilia with incest, but its use of both together as the central thematic concern of the novel. This novella is amongst Nabokov's last works in Russian and was written at a point in time when he was trying to secure work in the English speaking world. Therefore, it plays a crucial role in informing the English language output through which he gained international recognition and acclaim. Finally, and most crucially, it is Nabokov's last use of the theme before writing *Lolita*. However, while the *Lolita* theme recurs within Nabokov's work from his very earliest use of prose, it is not fully realised until the writing of *Lolita*. In this work Nabokov selectively combines earlier versions of the *Lolita* theme from his Russian works to create the shocking subject matter he has only touched on in its more radical form. *Lolita*, therefore, is the



culmination of some highly specific themes and preoccupations in Nabokov's work, which originate in his Russian period and are carried through into his English period. The development of this thematic matter, much like the exiled king theme examined in Chapter One, is a non-deliberate form of revision carried out on a developmental trajectory which leads the reader towards *Lolita*. In this way, the reader of *Lolita* and Nabokov's previous work is able to identify Nabokov's interest in, and exploration of, this theme and, as a result, is able to retrospectively observe Nabokov's creative workshop. This clearly defined aspect of the author's fiction, moreover, leads him to play with the *Lolita* theme in subsequent works, planting self-referential markers which direct the reader backwards towards *Lolita*.

#### Playing with *Lolita*: Subsequent Revisions to the *Lolita* Theme

While there is a clear and linear development of this central thematic matter towards *Lolita*, the transtextual revisions which are implemented to the theme after the publication of *Lolita* follow a different pattern. In the two fiction works which utilise the paedophilia theme (*Look at the Harlequins* and *The Original of Laura*), references to it, and subsequently to *Lolita*, are more playful and whimsical.<sup>274</sup> In this way, the use of the theme after *Lolita* operates as a self-reflexive device which directs the reader back to what would become, after further revision, a central piece of Nabokov's oeuvre. Nabokov encountered great difficulty in publishing *Lolita* and even considered publishing it under a

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<sup>274</sup> While *Ada* engages with a number of the elements of *Lolita* (for example, both Ada and Lucette are sexualised young girls and incestuous relationships), it does not specifically use the theme of paedophilia, as Van and Ada (and, to some extent, Lucette) are peers. Therefore, *Ada* will not be considered as an example of Nabokov's transtextual revisions.

pseudonym, for fear that it would affect his teaching career in the US.<sup>275</sup> After failing to secure publication for his manuscript in the US, Nabokov finally allowed *Lolita* to be published by Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press, which primarily published pornographic texts. As a result of this, the novel was neither reviewed nor advertised in the press. However, this changed at the beginning of 1956, when Graham Greene selected it as one of his three best books of 1955. This did not ease the UK and US publication of *Lolita* immediately, but began a public dialogue about the book, much of which criticised its controversial subject matter heavily. The book was subsequently banned in the UK and, a year later in 1956, in France. While this was disappointing for Nabokov, the scandal and hype created by the censorship of *Lolita* led ultimately to unprecedented interest in the novel. However, although the book was banned in France, it could be legally brought into the UK and US, contingent upon its being successfully smuggled out of France. This led to, most notably, 1500 copies selling out almost immediately from a bookshop in Ithaca.<sup>276</sup> It seemed that the French, UK and US governments could do nothing to suppress the demand for *Lolita* and, after fighting to uphold the ban for two years, it was lifted in France in January 1958.<sup>277</sup> When the novel was finally published by G. P. Putnam and Sons in 1958 in the US and Weidenfield and Nicholson in 1959 in the UK, it became an instant bestseller, and was only toppled from this position by Boris Pasternak's politically (and not morally) scandalous *Dr. Zhivago*.<sup>278</sup> Through the publication of *Lolita*, Nabokov gained a public profile, which required interviews and photo

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<sup>275</sup> See Boyd, *American Years*, p. 254.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid, p. 314.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, p. 394.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, p. 381.

shoots, and led to a film deal with Stanley Kubrick.<sup>279</sup> This not only created a public persona of the author Nabokov, but allowed him to develop his public image through repeated exposure and invitations to present himself publicly. In this way, *Lolita* became culturally disseminated alongside the figure of her creator, and made the transition from high art to popular culture. The effects of this cultural influence can still be observed today, in Japanese Lolita fashion, Vietnamese Lolita cakes and the Lolicon niche of Manga comics. In most of these instances, the figure of Lolita is misapprehended and reduced to a sexualised and seductive young girl. While this is a completely inaccurate representation of the child Humbert's kidnaps and abuses, it is an image that Nabokov toyed with in the works that follow *Lolita*, using the public knowledge and misunderstanding of his pivotal work as an opportunity to capitalise on its fame in order to, ultimately, posit it as a central component of his oeuvre. In doing so, he arranges his other works around *Lolita* and retrospectively creates order and focus on this work. Moreover, he is able to construct a public image and an authorial identity that is irrevocably tied to his most famous and scandalised work, which utilises and plays with public perceptions of both the novel and the man behind it. Therefore, by using *Lolita* in this way, Nabokov established himself as a major writer of American literature. This generated great interest in Nabokov's later works and also secured him a contract to translate his earlier Russian language works, the revenue from which, coupled with the financial success of *Lolita*, ultimately enabled him to retire from his post at Cornell in order to write full-time on the banks of Lake Montreux until his

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<sup>279</sup> Although Nabokov is credited as the screenwriter of Kubrick's film of *Lolita*, and while a manuscript of his script is now publicly available, the script that was used was not actually written by Nabokov.

death in 1977. The notorious publication history and subsequent iconic status that *Lolita* attained allowed Nabokov to create works in which the very act of revising the *Lolita* theme can be observed by his readers. These revisions are not just conspiratorial winks to readers in the know, like John Shade's mention of 'Hurricane Lolita' in 1958 (*Pale Fire*, 49), but aim to change the reader's perception of the extent of Nabokov's overall control over the creation of his individual works as well as his overall oeuvre.

Nabokov's final authorised text, *Look at the Harlequins!*, the title of which states a central premise of play and invention. Its meaning is explained thus by the Baroness Bredow, the grand-aunt of the Vadim Vadimovich N., Nabokov's self-parodying narrator, who, as young boy, asks for clarification of her obtuse term, 'Look at the Harlequins!': 'Trees are harlequins, words are harlequins. So are situations and sums. Put two things together – jokes, images – and you get a triple harlequin. Come on! Play! Invent the world! Invent reality!' (*LATH!*, 1974, 13). Brian Boyd notes that the narrator is 'a parody of his maker, Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, or of popular misconceptions of Nabokov the man and the artist'.<sup>280</sup> In this text, Nabokov parodies not only autobiography, by having Vadim produce a fictional autobiography of his life and works, but also his own autobiography, by planting multiple parallels between his own life and works and the fictional set of his narrator. Moreover, he draws a link to his first English language text, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, which presents a parodic biography of the title character by his half-brother.

The *Lolita* theme is presented in *Look at the Harlequins!* as a playful, self-referential nod to Nabokov's most famous text. A string of young girls who

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid, p. 623.

evoke Lolita appear throughout, from Dolly Von Borg to the eventual 'you' Vadim marries. Beginning with Dolly, Nabokov presents characters who are clearly evocative of their predecessor, Lolita. Dolly has 'white-socked, blue-sneakered feet' and 'a freckled nose' (*LATH!*, 67), all of which have echoes of Lolita herself. However, Dolly has 'flaxen hair' while Lolita's is auburn (*LATH!*, 126). The difference in hair colour indicates that in this instance Nabokov, capitalising on the increased popularity of his heroine in the Kubrick film, is playing with the film version of *Lolita* who, played by Sue Lyon, has light blonde hair. Vadim first encounters Dolly when she is eleven years old, but does not enter into a sexual relationship until she is twenty-four. Additionally, Bel, Vadim's daughter to his second wife, bears an uncanny resemblance to Lolita with her 'very black lashes' (*LATH*, 168). However, again, her 'pale-grey iris' bears closer resemblance to her celluloid incarnation than to Lolita's hazel eyes, and it appears possible that Nabokov is now playing with multiple versions of Lolita. Upon discovering his daughter's beauty after a separation, Vadim chastises himself for 'self-plagiarism' as he realises that he has given some of her finer physical qualities to earlier characters in his oeuvre (*LATH!*, 169). Thus, Nabokov here makes fun of the close real-life connection readers have established between the author and his creations. Following her mother's death, Bel and Vadim travel from motel to motel, tracing the cross-country road trip of Humbert and Lolita. However, although Vadim finds Bel sexually alluring, he does not molest her as Humbert does to Lolita. Indeed, he enters into a third marriage to distract himself from her, a clear inversion of Humbert's intentions when he marries Charlotte Haze. Finally, the 'you' whose name is never revealed shares not only Bel's birthday, but Lolita's, too. She replaces Bel, but

not until she (and, of course Bel) is twenty-seven. While Vadim is attracted to all of these female characters while they are underage, he does not engage in paedophilic sexual activity with them, and avoids an incestuous relationship with his daughter by marrying an adult woman as a distraction. Here the *Lolita* theme is somewhat subverted; while Vadim certainly displays paedophilic desires, he does not act on them. His paedophilic urges, unlike Humbert's, remain latent, as do his incestuous desires for his own daughter.

Unlike Humbert, who creates a memoir out of his paedophilia and his subsequent encompassing, disastrous relationship with Lolita, Vadim creates fiction from the desires that he has but does not act upon. While Humbert's memoir passes through several editorial stages before publication as he, as well as Lolita, is dead, Vadim archives both fame and fortune for his version of *Lolita*, entitled *A Kingdom by the Sea*. This fictional text, 'a wish fulfillment fantasy in which the hero makes a ten-year old girl his concubine' also has the happy ending that Humbert so craves but is denied.<sup>281</sup> The character and his concubine find mutual love when she turns eighteen and live out the rest of their lives consensually and happily. This fictional text within the text presents a revised and parodied version of Nabokov's text, *Lolita*, adding a happy ending where the story of sexual abuse of a minor concludes in the characters' eventual equal love for one another. *Look at the Harlequins!* not only refers to the *Lolita* theme in a playful and self-reflexive manner, but also identifies the work of *Lolita* as a central and pivotal component of Nabokov's oeuvre. For both Nabokov and Vadim, it is the work that brings them fame and critical acclaim. Moreover, Vadim's parodic version of *Lolita*, *A Kingdom by the Sea*, is posited

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid, p. 624.

closer to the end of his oeuvre than Nabokov's, thus indicating the developmental arc of the *Lolita* theme that Nabokov uses to create Lolita (character) and *Lolita* (text) more clearly in fiction. This self-referential text, in which, as Richard Poirier writes, 'Nabokov and his works hover on the margins of the text, so to speak, as a static reality against which Vadim is to be measured', presents a playful representation of Nabokov's oeuvre that posits both *Lolita* and its creator as major literary entities.<sup>282</sup>

*The Original of Laura*, Nabokov's unfinished final work, was published posthumously in fragments by Nabokov's son, Dmitri. Nabokov left strict instructions to his wife in his will that *The Original of Laura* should be burned if he died, as he did, before finishing it. Véra was unable to carry out her husband's wishes and, after her death, left the burden to their son Dmitri, who, after allowing sections of the work to be published, gave permission for the entire manuscript to be produced in book form in 2009. This work was never authorised by Nabokov for publication. In fact he expressly prohibited it to be published in its unfinished form. Therefore, it is not possible to determine which sections, if any, would and would not have appeared in the final text had Nabokov lived to complete it. However, it does display, at manuscript level at least, a preoccupation with this central theme of Nabokov's oeuvre, paedophilia, even if that had been changed or diluted in the final version. It uses, for example, the quasi-incestuous paedophilic relationship that is such a notable feature of *Lolita*, and which is also used in *Dar*, *Volshebnik*, *Ada* and *Look at the Harlequins!*. As a child, Flora, the 'Laura' of the title, was targeted by her mother's boyfriend, Hubert H. Hubert. This man, the reader learns, lost his own

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<sup>282</sup> Richard Poirier, 'Review: Look at the Harlequins!', *New York Times*, 13th October 1974, 32 - 35, p. 32.

daughter, Daisy, in a tragic accident at the age of twelve (the beginnings of the nymphet stage, according to Humbert) and seeks to replace her with Flora and the reader learns that he 'seldom' molested Daisy (*TOOL*, 2009, 72). This information is revealed when Flora is bedridden with fever and Hubert attempts the same 'moves' on her, 'plunging his hand under the bedclothes' (*TOOL*, 73). Panic ensues and Flora's mother returns, who chides her daughter for upsetting Hubert. Although on the surface comedic, the scene is essentially dark, particularly with its references to the canonised text that precedes it in writing by two decades and publication by five. Hubert, already in name a clear reference to Nabokov's most famous narrator Humbert, works as a pale parody of his evil predecessor. He lacks Humbert's manipulative malevolence, but still shares with his predecessors the intent to derive sexual pleasure from an innocent child. However, the pattern of accessing a child via a relationship with her mother exists in this work, as it does in both *Dar*, *Volshebnik* and, most notoriously of course, *Lolita*. However, the bumbling Hubert Hubert lacks the predatory instincts of Humbert and his comedic form is far removed from his predecessor's imposing physical form. In this way, therefore, it is possible to say that Nabokov is playing with this figure. Like *Dar*, the full story is not presented as it is in *Lolita*, but, unlike *Dar*, this work is fragmentary and unauthorised by Nabokov, and is moreover playfully engaged with the material in order to refer readings back to *Lolita*. It is therefore impossible to know if this specific section would have been included in the final, published text by Nabokov. However, from the long and steady course that this thematic material has run through Nabokov's oeuvre, it is possible to conclude that it is not only an overriding artistic concern of his work, but a central theme through which



Nabokov creates his own ideal authorial persona. Moreover, the transtextual revisions that Nabokov implements after *Lolita* exhibit playful and referential approach to the *Lolita* theme, as opposed to the developmental arc, which proceeds in a less focused manner.

Moreover, the projection of Annabel Leigh onto Lolita is parodied in *The Original of Laura*, as Flora's much older husband, Philip Wild, is initially attracted to her due to her resemblance to his past love, Aurora Lee. Furthermore, this echoes Humbert's wordplay in *Lolita* when he refers to 'Annabel Haze, alias Dolores Lee, alias Loleeta' (*Lolita*, 176). While Flora is married to a much older man, she has, unlike Lolita, entered into that relationship willingly. Flora first appears to the reader as a drunk young women at a party, whose delicate 'bare insteps were as white as her young shoulders'.<sup>283</sup> She has a 'frail, docile frame when turned over by hand revealed new marvels – the mobile omoplates of a child being tubbed, the incurvation of a ballerina's spine, narrow nates of an ambiguous irresistible charm' (*TOOL*, 7). In addition, there is clear reference to *Lolita* in the description of Flora having intercourse with her husband. Flora mimics the child-like Lolita when she engages in the sexual act with her husband. Lolita is described thus by Humbert: 'There she would be, a typical kid picking her nose while engrossed in the lighter sections of a newspaper, as indifferent to my ecstasy as if it were something she had sat upon, a shoe, a doll, the handle of a tennis racket, and was too indolent to remove' (*Lolita*, 174). Similarly, when Flora is engaged in sex with Philip she sits 'in the fauteuil of his flesh with her back to him. The procedure – a few bounces over very small humps – meant nothing to her. She

looked at the snow-scape at the footboard of the bed [...] and he holding her in front of him like a child being given a sleighride down a short slope by a kind stranger, he saw her back, her hip[s] between his hands' (*TOOL*, 200 - 201). Conversely, at the age of fourteen, Flora shows a much more adult, empowered attitude to sex, treating the loss of her virginity as 'a duty she had resolved to perform rather than a casual pleasure she was now learning to taste.'<sup>284</sup> Lolita, on the other hand, was able to hand over her own virginity to a boy roughly her own age (Charlie, the son of the owner of Camp Q). Arguments of her seduction (or not) of Humbert aside, it is evident that Lolita does not fully comprehend the extent to which Humbert is an adult male and to which she, correspondingly, is a female child. Humbert tells the reader that 'while eager to impress me with the world of tough kids, she was not quite prepared for certain discrepancies between a kid's life and mine' (*Lolita*, 97).

Both Flora and *The Original of Laura* are tied irrevocably to *Lolita*. While *Lolita* is in some ways the result of an extended revision of major themes and recurring motifs in Nabokov's work, in *Look at the Harlequins!* and *The Original of Laura* Nabokov reduces *Lolita* as a source text to the themes of paedophilia and incest. In other words, Nabokov parodies less the actual novel in *The Original of Laura* and *Look at the Harlequins!*, but its popular reception as a sexually explicit piece of literature, brushing on the pornographic. In this way, his subsequent revisions are parodic and play with both the text of *Lolita* and its popular reception. Through the self-conscious transtextual revisions of the theme in his later work, Nabokov does not so much expose his limited artistic capability but actually lays claim to the work as a literary and a cultural product.

Nabokov's sense of ownership of the *Lolita* theme informs his subsequent revisions in *The Original of Laura* and *Look at the Harlequins!*. These deliberately visible, transtextual revisions rely on the notorious status that *Lolita* has in literary history as a shocking, censored and ultimately canonised text, and through this reliance contribute to recognition of *Lolita*'s canonical status. In this way the importance of *Lolita* within Nabokov's work and the notorious status within the wider canon of Western literature, which *Lolita* attained almost immediately, is affirmed.

### **Chapter 4: Nabokov's Extratextual Revisions**

Nabokov's deliberately visible revisions take several forms, which have a cumulative effect on the ways that his individual works and oeuvre are read. This chapter examines the final role of a specific type of revision, extratextual revision, which Nabokov applies to his works after they have been published. These extratextual revisions appear in later translations as well as in forewords and interviews in which Nabokov refers to and interprets his existing texts, inviting specific readings of published works. Wood highlights Nabokov's authorial intrusions, which allude to the sense of infringement that accompanies the author revisiting completed, published and, above all, authorised texts. For instance, in 1967, five years after *Pale Fire's* publication, Nabokov stated in an interview with Alfred Appel, Jr. that following the completion of his commentary, Kinbote committed suicide (SO, 74). Nabokov here extends his authorial omnipotence beyond the text, which itself does not contain any explicit proof of Kinbote's impending suicide. A rather crude example of authorial intervention, Nabokov's comment on Kinbote's fictional afterlife is also a playful continuation of the central metafictional concerns of the novel, including textual control, appropriation and possession.<sup>285</sup> Ultimately, the same concerns shape Nabokov's more subtle brand of extratextual revisions which take place in his English translations of earlier Russian works and the forewords to these translations. Many of Nabokov's early Russian novels, including *Korol', dama, valet*, *Kamera obskura* and *Otchaianie*, are reworked extensively in English translation, a fact Nabokov draws attention to in the added forewords. Rather

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<sup>285</sup> These qualities are cited by Brian McHale, who, in his discussion of Nabokov's transition from Modern to Postmodern fiction, argues that *Pale Fire* is a novel of epistemological and ontological uncertainty (McHale, 'From Modernist to Postmodernist Fiction', p.19).

than hiding his revisions as potential markers of his artistic imperfection, Nabokov flaunts the revisions of his works by creating close connections between texts. A consequence of this is the impression that Nabokov's texts remain incomplete, which Susan Elizabeth Sweeney argues creates an 'unfinished state', which she characterises as a conscious aim of Nabokov's work, and not an accidental by-product of his search for textual perfection and authorial control.<sup>286</sup>

While these perfectly imperfect works might be interpreted as the result of a distinct loss of authorial control, this impression is balanced by creating and foregrounding the omnipotent authorial persona in forewords and a collection of interviews, *Strong Opinions*. As devices of extratextual revision, the forewords and interviews strengthen, and indeed extend, Nabokov's ability, already observed in the previous chapter, to direct his readers to certain works in his corpus. Moreover, as Jacqueline Hamrit argues, they allow the author to simultaneously appear and disappear within his works, a process she refers to as the ex-appropriation of the text.<sup>287</sup> This process causes the characteristic incomplete and cyclical nature of Nabokov's 'supertext' to take shape, a feature which is facilitated by the authorial reading that extratextual revision generates. Nabokov's references to, and intrusions into, his other works, which take place outwith the original text, create a reading of the text that is fluid and mobile. This authorial reading allows the entirety of Nabokov's oeuvre to be accessed at once and represents a plural reading process, in which Nabokov's corpus becomes synchronous, connected and cohesive. Moreover, simultaneously with the opening of texts, which allows for connections to be made across works,

<sup>286</sup> Sweeney, 'Enacting Revision in Nabokov', p. 113.

<sup>287</sup> Hamrit, 'Authorship in Nabokov's Prefaces', p. 7.

extratextual revision creates a closed circuit of reference, within which everything refers to Nabokov and his works. This chapter examines the author's specific strategies of extratextual revision, through which Nabokov attempts to create a self-reflexive, apparently self-sufficient body of works, which continuously feeds from itself and is moreover able to renew itself without drawing upon external sources.

### Gained in Translation: Nabokov's Translations and Forewords

While Nabokov did not embark upon the major project of translating his Russian works into English until the late 1950s he had always intended to translate the Russian component of his oeuvre, even while he was writing in Russian. Indeed, following the disappointing translation of *Kamera obskura* (1932 - 3) by Winifred Roy in 1936 he began with his own translation of *Otchaianie* into English, which was published as *Despair* in 1937. A year later he also revisited *Kamera obscura* and offered his own translation as *Laughter in the Dark*, which was published in 1938. This second version of *Kamera obskura* was later described by Nabokov as being 'stylistically clumsy' (SO, 65), and it surely gave him both cause and opportunity to reflect upon the process of translating from Russian to English. Following the unprecedented commercial success of *Lolita*, Nabokov suddenly had a rapt, English-speaking audience comprised of both scholars and a non-specialist reading public, who were also interested in other works from the 'author of *Lolita*' (a byline that appeared frequently on the covers of his translated works).

The English versions of Nabokov's early works are altered through the complex process of translation which Nabokov undertook in collaboration with an approved literary translator (in many cases, his son, Dmitri), whose multiple manuscripts he would edit. Nabokov himself notes in the foreword to *Invitation to a Beheading*, the prudent and formal improvements that a mature author is tempted to make to his earlier works while translating them (*IB*, 7). Nabokov would, however, not observe this pattern in all of his translations; following *Invitation to a Beheading*, other English translations by Nabokov would make major revisions to the original texts. These alterations are more notable in some places than in others and have been analysed in detail in Jane Grayson's seminal study. Grayson tracks and collates Nabokov's most notable additions, deletions and alterations in translations and concludes that his revisions alter the style, characterisation and structure of his novels, all of which, as a result, amplifies the artifice of the translated novels, an aspect that is in keeping with Nabokov's original output at the time. Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour goes so far as to argue that Nabokov's process of translating his own works can in some cases be more strictly categorised as re-working than translation. This chapter suggests that, even from a purely practical point of view, Nabokov intended these English versions of his early works to function as full replacements for the Russian originals. The translations were undertaken between 1959 and 1971 during the height of the Cold War and, although Nabokov made some of his works available in samizdat editions for clandestine literary circulation in the Soviet Union, he would not have expected his early works to be read widely in Russia or in Russian. With his English translations Nabokov revises, restores and replaces his old texts for a new readership. Without the forewords, the

revisions to his works in translation would have been invisible, at least to the English-speaking readership at which they were targeted. Yet Nabokov chooses to highlight and discuss them in his forewords, or what Dale E. Peterson has called Nabokov's 'literary vestibules', which precede the translated texts. It could be argued, therefore, that Nabokov uses these forewords to establish a connection between the Russian and English parts of his work. Revisions act as a bridge between the two distinct bodies of work, which are divided by time, language and place of writing, bringing to the fore the themes and topics which unite rather than separate the Russian and the English works. This allowed Nabokov to introduce his Russian works to his English language readership. Beyond this immediate, practical function, the revisions also create a cohesive overall oeuvre, that is, the 'supertext', in which the continuity of themes and topics creates a self-reflexive, self-sufficient context for individual works. An important role in this is played by Nabokov himself who uses the forewords to create an authorial persona for himself, one which is not entirely Russian, nor completely English, and neither still the sum of both of these parts, which he would continue to develop in *Strong Opinions*. The success and publicity of *Lolita* allowed Nabokov to revise his own authorial identity and to dedicate his creative resources to producing an improved and idealised version of himself for public presentation. This presented the author with the opportunity to create a masterful authorial persona to match his masterpiece work. The forewords, then, constitute a living link of sorts between the defunct authorial identity of V. Sirin and the masterful author, Nabokov, which leads to their subsumption into the omnipotent persona of the God-like author of the 'supertext'.



Jane Grayson's *Nabokov Translated* is the first and primary work which collates and analyses Nabokov's multiple revisions to his works in translations. Grayson categorises Nabokov's translations following two distinct tracks; major reworkings, that is, the works that undergo substantial revisions in terms of style, structure and characterisation, and minor reworkings, which undergo notable but less pervasive changes in these areas. Grayson identifies a number of effects that these translations have. All of the revisions that Nabokov implements in translation present rounder and more complete versions of the original text, while simultaneously foregrounding the artifice. Grayson writes that they work to 'give life, colour, and movement, but at the same time they stylise that life, they freeze and fix the images for the visual and auditive delight of the reader'.<sup>288</sup> This leads to the structure of the translated works becoming 'more tightly knit and dynamic, but at the same time the mechanism of the plot is more openly exposed; the style becomes more brilliant, but more brittle, more self-conscious; the characters are more brightly-coloured, but more the puppets of their creator'.<sup>289</sup> The fictionality of the text becomes a more prominent feature of the translated works and, while both author and reader play important roles in the text, their engagement with the fabric of the text is lessened. Grayson writes that 'the author can emend, elaborate, and improve his earlier work, but he cannot recapture the original creative impulse'.<sup>290</sup> The translated works have a more tightly woven plot and structure, supported by more vivid characterisation and thematic concerns which reflect the prevailing features of Nabokov's mid - to - late English language works. Both the major and the minor reworkings are

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<sup>288</sup> Grayson, *Nabokov Translated*, p. 9.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, p. 215.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

most notable not for what they change or delete, but in the specific additions that Nabokov makes to them when translating from Russian to English.

Although some of Nabokov's works undergo considerable revisions in translation, Grayson notes that 'the changes which Nabokov makes to his novels – however extensive – are nevertheless in keeping with the original design'.<sup>291</sup> Therefore, while Nabokov certainly earns the title of inveterate reviser, he does not deviate from the overriding artistic concerns and patterns of his works more generally when translating his early Russian novels.

Moreover, this pattern of revision begins early in Nabokov's career, with his translation of *Kamera obscura* as *Laughter in the Dark*. Translated in 1938, *Laughter in the Dark* displays a number of features which would come to characterise the translations produced by Nabokov in the sixties and seventies. Nabokov's translation of *Kamera obskura*, therefore, shows an early tendency to control reading process through revision. While this translation does not have a foreword through which Nabokov intrudes upon this and other texts, it does show the general pattern of revision through translation, which Nabokov would implement when the fame *Lolita* brought allowed him the opportunity to translate the rest of his back catalogue. For example, *Korol', dama, valet*, Nabokov's second Russian novel, was translated into English in 1968 and contains similar patterns and design of translation as this much earlier translation. Likewise, the second version of *Despair*, published in 1966, displays similar patterns of revision in translation as *Laughter in the Dark*. Despite *King, Queen, Knave* and *Despair* being translated three decades after *Laughter in the Dark*, it can be seen that Nabokov's approach to translating these works shared a certain

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

process, which was not altered across decades and continents. Grayson highlights Carl Proffer's mistaken belief that the most important factor in determining the extent to which a work is revised in translation by Nabokov is the distance in time from the writing of the original to when the translation is undertaken. This is succinctly disproven by the existence of *Laughter in the Dark*. Nabokov retains a certain number of features of Roy's translations, for example, the fifth chapter is split into two chapters in both Roy's and Nabokov's translations. However, he also splits Chapter Thirty-six into two distinct chapters, thus increasing the number of chapters in *Laughter in the Dark* to thirty-nine, from Roy's thirty-eight and the Russian original's chapter count of thirty-seven. While Roy revised certain aspects of *Camera Obscura*, the revisions put into place by Nabokov are more radical in nature. The structure of *Kamera obscura* is overall retained in *Camera Obscura*, while Nabokov implements a number of structural changes in *Laughter in the Dark*. The fairytale element of the novel is highlighted by the removal of 'concrete details of times and places', which emphasises the unreality of the plot and setting.<sup>292</sup> In keeping with this, the characterisation becomes less forgiving, as Nabokov presents his 'galley slaves' in a 'noticeably less sympathetic' manner.<sup>293</sup> Axel Rex is a more vulgar, caricatured version of Robert Gorn, while Albinus and Margot are presented as being less physically attractive. Moreover, the limitations of their personalities and personal abilities are more easily and frequently exposed. Overall, the characters are presented in a more vivid and hyperreal manner, which is in stark contrast to the fairytale setting they inhabit. Grayson notes that 'in stylising his characters [VN] shifts his point of view',

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

which results in them being viewed 'from a greater distance and with greater detachment'. Andrew Field calls this technique 'softening' and it leads, overall, to a refocalisation of the text.<sup>294</sup>

The same patterns can be observed in *Otchaianie*, which, like *Kamera obskura*, has two English translations. Unlike *Kamera obscura*, however, both translations of *Otchaianie* were undertaken by Nabokov himself and their titles did not change the original. Both versions of *Despair* bear a closer relation to the original Russian text than *Camera Obscura* and *Laughter in the Dark* do to *Kamera obskura*. Grayson notes that, while there is greater similarity between all three texts, the translations are far more creative, imaginative and sensitive than Roy's *Camera Obscura*, as a result of their being prepared directly by the original author, Nabokov. While Carl Proffer identifies multiple examples of linguistic maturity in the final translation of *Despair*, Grayson argues that a number of the examples Proffer uses are actually present in the first English version.<sup>295</sup> Thus, it is possible to see that Nabokov made linguistic improvements to the text much closer to the creation and publication of the original.

While there are a few cuts in both versions of *Despair*, of the greatest significance are 'the additions which affect characterisation, structure and style'. Unlike *Kamera obskura*, Nabokov did not outsource the translation of *Otchaianie* and undertook both translations himself (both of which have the same name, *Despair*, unlike the triple incarnation *Kamera obskura*). The first, produced in 1937, is refined almost three decades later, when the author

<sup>294</sup> Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art*, p. 61.

<sup>295</sup> See Proffer, 'New Deck for Nabokov's Knives', pp. 296 - 300; Grayson, *Nabokov Translated*, pp. 98 - 99.

reworked the translation in 1966. This second translation was produced as the fifth of eight works to be translated by Nabokov. Moreover, by this point in his career, Nabokov's ideal authorial image as the masterful author of *Lolita* had been cemented following the critical and commercial success of both *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*. At this point, interest in any work that bore Nabokov's name was fierce, which created a new market eagerly waiting for translations of his earlier works. In the first translation of *Otchaianie*, Hermann is presented with more flourish and more details of his insanity are given. This is extended in the second version of the English text, which furthers the aims of the first. Hermann's insanity is much clearer in this translation, as are his sexual obsessions. Moreover, as Hermann is the author-character who actually implements these descriptions, the literary style of *Despair* shifts. Grayson writes that 'Hermann's wayward and pretentious literary style is also enriched by word play', which causes names to become comedic and punning.<sup>296</sup> For example, Dostoevsky is referred to as Dusty, Turgenev becomes 'Turgy' and Felix is bestowed a comedic family name and a hometown, Wohlfahrt and Zwickau (*Despair*, 199; 213; 275). Structurally, too, the second English version of the text makes increased references to Felix's stick, the latent marker of Hermann's fatal flaw, which are themselves more numerate and prominent in the first translation. In addition, there are several extra references to the car and greater detail of the crime itself. While useful for tightening the plot and structure of the novel in translation, these devices do not intrinsically alter the original structure of the novel.

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<sup>296</sup> Grayson, *Nabokov Translated*, p. 81.

Nabokov additionally revises *Otchaianie* stylistically in order to tie it through translation to his original English language output of the time. Published four years after the intricate *Pale Fire* and three years before the highly complex *Ada*, the subverted Künstlerroman of *Otchaianie* is updated stylistically in English. *Despair* meditates on the nature of art, originality and the consequences of artistic imperfection. The novel's protagonist, Hermann Karlovich, states that 'every work of art is a deception' and his 'self-created artifice', with which he tries to make his 'world book-shaped', is pitted against Nabokov's masterly command of the form, which ultimately supersedes Hermann's attempts (*Despair*, 27). In this foreword, Nabokov notes that *Despair* 'has no social comment to make, no message to bring with its teeth' (*Despair*, viii). Gleb argues that Nabokov's 'artificiality is deliberate, a part of his artistic credo, which he has on more than one occasion formulated in the prefaces to his works in English [whereas] he had earlier put it into the mouths of his fictional characters'.<sup>297</sup>

In both translations of *Despair*, particularly the second version, Nabokov elaborates (as he does in *Laughter in the Dark*) the already rich imagery and style, and presents recurrent motifs in thematic groups. The most prominent theme, that of illusion, is presented with greater variety and range. In keeping with Nabokov's writing in English at the time of the second translation, alliteration and assonance become more prominent and frequent. While the erotic content becomes more prominent in both versions, a feature of all of Nabokov's translations from this period, Grayson argues that this could be due

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<sup>297</sup> Gleb Struve, 'Notes on Nabokov as a Russian Writer', *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, 8 / 2 (1967), 153 - 164, p. 157.

to the censoring of the original Russian texts, which thus characterises these alterations as restorations rather than additions.<sup>298</sup> Most notable are the additions which deal with Hermann's dissociation from his body, through which he is able to remove himself from the physical present of having sex with his wife and instead observe himself performing the act. As Grayson argues, as a result of Nabokov undertaking the translation himself, the changes implemented to *Otchaianie* in translation are less extensive than those which can be seen in *Kamera obskura*. Moreover, the dramatic monologue form of *Otchaianie* does not offer such wide possibility for change as the third person narration of *Kamera obskura*.

As previously stated, these deliberate revisions, which would have remained invisible to most of Nabokov's English-speaking readers, are self-consciously made visible by Nabokov in the foreword which prefaces the second translation of *Otchaianie*. He refers explicitly to his revisions by giving a history of the translation process of *Despair* and stating that 'for the present edition I have done more than revamp my thirty-year-old translation: I have revised *Otchaianie* itself' (*Despair*, viii). He continues by referring to those 'lucky students' who would be able to compare all three novels and notice 'the addition of an important passage which had been stupidly omitted in more timid times' (*Despair*, viii). While this supports Grayson's assumption that Nabokov's original Russian text may have been censored, it also foregrounds the alterations brought about by revision in the resultant, current, text. He hints at both changes and continuities in the 1966 translation when he notes that 'I know how pleased and excited I would have been in 1935 had I been able to foreread this

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<sup>298</sup> Grayson, *Nabokov Translated*, p. 113 - 116.

1965 version' (*Despair*, viii). In doing this, Nabokov establishes a close link between the two works while also stressing their differences. Although he recognises the linguistic boundaries that separate his original work in Russian from this second translation into English, Nabokov hints at a certain continuity in his authorial identity which spans both his incarnations as the Russian author, Sirin and the American writer, Nabokov.

*Despair* additionally contains extended external links and references to *Lolita*, which had been published in the UK and USA a decade prior to the publication of Nabokov's translation of *Despair*. These references create deliberate and visible revisions to the perception and reading of *Despair*. By, for example, drawing parallels between his more recent 'pentapod monster', Humbert Humbert, and his newly revisited Hermann, Nabokov notes that he is 'unable to foresee and to fend inevitable attempts to find in the alembics of *Despair* something of the rhetorical venom that I injected into the narrator's tone in a much later novel' (*Despair*, ix). That 'much later' novel is, of course, *Lolita* and here Nabokov details the differences between his two 'monsters' rather than highlighting their similarities (*Despair*, ix). While he ultimately foregrounds their differences rather than their similarities, the connection between the two characters and the texts of which they are part of is made. Regardless of strategy, however, by linking this earlier work to *Lolita*, and more pertinently, the afterglow of critical and commercial success that Nabokov and his canonised text both bathed in at the time of writing the foreword, Nabokov attaches *Lolita* inextricably to *Despair*. This tightens the construction of singular oeuvre in English by retrospectively impressing patterns onto the early Russian work, now read in English by Nabokov's best readers in America. These extratextual



revisions give the impression of order and cohesion throughout Nabokov's work, when in fact it progresses in a rather more normal creative arc than Nabokov himself would like to admit.

Another translation that Grayson identifies as undergoing a major reworking is *The Eye* (*Sogliadatai*). This novella was translated by Nabokov in conjunction with his son Dmitri and it was serialised in *Playboy*. However, while this can still be categorised as a major reworking, the revisions made to *The Eye* are much more streamlined in comparison to those implemented in either translation of *Laughter in the Dark* or *Despair*. The structure undergoes minor changes, most of which relate to the actual formatting of the structure. The English version, for instance, does away with chapter breaks altogether and, as a result, the narrative is tightened and becomes slicker and more cohesive in its textual movement.<sup>299</sup> Akin to *Despair*, Smurov's character is filled out and he becomes a much broader representation than in *Sogliadatai*. Furthermore, a great number of sexual references are added to *The Eye*, which allows the sexual tension between Smurov and Vanya to build, and Smurov's resultant sexual frustration to grow. Additionally, as with *Despair*, the narration is from the first-person perspective of an unstable character. This aspect of *Despair* leads to the fictional literary style of the author-character being altered somewhat, as Hermann's madness is made more evident within the text. However, where Hermann is mad, Smurov is muted and depressive and so the fictional style of *The Eye* is not altered to such a great extent. Moreover, this fundamental characteristic of the main protagonist of *Sogliadatai* / *The Eye* allows Nabokov's presence to be felt more strongly in the translated work, an effect he uses, as

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

Grayson points out, to widen 'the critical distance between readers and characters'.<sup>300</sup> This is an important element of Nabokov's construction of a coherent corpus of work and it is one that he refers to explicitly in the foreword attached to the novella. In it, he emphasises his unique literary heritage and ties its importance to his work. Nabokov refers to 'the falsely permanent air' felt by 'the émigré writer and his émigré readers', which has been replaced with the 'non-Russian readers' by the time of the foreword's writing (*The Eye*, vi). Furthermore, Nabokov makes reference to both the émigré quarterly (*Sovremennye zapiski*) and publishing house (*Slovo*) which serialised and published *Zashchita Luzhina*. By presenting this Russian-émigré literary context for himself then cutting it off completely from the present tense within which he writes, Nabokov both connects his works using the current English translation and undermines its Russian past. Moreover, he posits himself in the lofty position of the great author, Nabokov, who has not only overseen two bodies of work in distinct languages, but aggregated them in one of his three fluent languages.

The final work that Grayson identifies as a major reworking is *King, Queen, Knave*, the English translation of *Korol', dama, valet*. Despite it having less than ten major additions or deletions, the work qualifies as a major reworking on the basis of its increased literary allusion, fuller characterisation and stylistic shifts. Translated after *Despair* in 1968, the structural changes implemented by Nabokov cause several literary allusions to become more prominent. For example, Nabokov makes reference to *Madame Bovary*, a text which he taught on his European Literature course at Cornell, throughout *King,*

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

*Queen, Knave*. In doing so, Nabokov is further underlining his newly created authorial identity as the great author, VN. Additionally, there are several additional authorial intrusions planted in the translated text, for instance when a veiled Nabokov and his wife drop in for a dance, which serves to reinforce this omnipotent authorial status once again. Moreover, Nabokov adds a passage at the end of the novel in which he has Franz reflect on the plot to kill Dreyer, while noting that he was now ‘as a very old and very sick man [he would be] guilty of worse sins than avunculicide’ (*KQK*, 138). Similarly to Nabokov’s comment on Kinbote’s fate following the close of the novel, this revision works like an authorial intrusion in the original Russian text by hinting at the turns that Franz’s life has taken subsequently. The effects created by these allusions and authorial interferences are in keeping with the aims of Nabokov’s original creative output of the same period and posit him as a superior authorial entity, whose control and presence extends over the entire text. Moreover, this effect extends into the cohesive English language oeuvre that Nabokov pieces together, translation by translation.

In addition, Nabokov also revises the characterisation of the main characters in *King, Queen, Knave*, which results in ‘better drawn’ biographies and relationships that are more fulsome and shown in greater depth.<sup>301</sup> Furthermore, minor characters become more prominent. Finer details are clarified and brought into greater focus, for example Martha’s weak heart is given more references and Dreyer’s dread of water and boats is given earlier and greater justification.<sup>302</sup> Style, too, is enhanced as ‘Nabokov’s customary

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, pp. 92 - 95.

ornamental devices' become more evident in the English translation.<sup>303</sup> The text, in keeping with Nabokov's English language work of the period, becomes more alliterative.<sup>304</sup> Imagery surrounding the main characters is increased, with Martha gaining approximately a dozen new images, Dreyer more than twenty and Franz nearly thirty.<sup>305</sup> This imagery contributes, overall, to a fuller, tighter and more coherent text. Grayson writes that, overall, 'logical flaws are corrected, and pointers to the development of the plot are added', and adds that the mechanical features of the plot are both 'corrected and adjusted' and 'exposed', with the transition in the final chapter being smoothed out.<sup>306</sup>

Nabokov could have left these deliberate revisions invisible within the text, undetectable to his new, monolingual audience. However, as with the foreword to *Despair* he chooses, once again, to highlight them, in a foreword. Although he refrains from detailing the revisions to the text so as not to 'spoil the pleasure of future collators' (*KQK*, 8), he notes his disappointment with the original, which 'sagged considerably and states explicitly that he 'foresaw having to make a number of revisions affecting the actual text of a forty-year-old novel which I had not reread ever since its proofs had been corrected by an author twice younger than the reviser' (*KQK*, 8). The making visible of these deliberate revisions for his new English readership, which are intrinsic to the text is highly significant for both *Korol', dama, valet* and *King, Queen, Knave*. While Nabokov uses transtextual revision to playfully direct readings of subsequent texts back to his most famous work, extratextual references to the work also tie his earlier works and translations to this text. Nabokov notes that

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid, pp. 92 - 95.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, pp. 92 - 95.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, p. 96.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

the plot of *King, Queen, Knave* is 'not unfamiliar' and that 'those two worthies, Balzac and Dreiser will accuse me of gross parody but I swear I had not read their preposterous stuff at the time, and even now do not quite know what they are talking about under their cypresses. Even Charlotte Humbert's husband was not quite innocent either' (*KQK*, 9). This comment in the foreword has two main effects on the text. Firstly, the reference to *Lolita* retrospectively impresses design, pattern and intent onto Nabokov's oeuvre, a feature of Nabokov's transtextual revisions, which he addresses here, extratextually. This works to position Nabokov not only at the helm of the newly-Englished oeuvre that he is creating from the vantage point of the success of *Lolita*, but also above other authors considered, if not by Nabokov himself, as great writers. Secondly, it facilitates a discussion of Nabokov's work alongside Joyce's 'monologue intérieur' and concedes 'amiable imitations' of Flaubert and Tolstoy (*KQK*, 9). This takes the aims of Nabokov with regards to transtextual revision one step further and allows the author to vie for position within the literary canon. It could be argued that this is a result of the critical success of *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*, both of which had been published for several years at the time of writing this foreword.

Overall, it can be seen that the major reworkings and their forewords share a number of points. Characterisation, style and structure undergo significant alterations in all four texts, which results in a sharpened textual focus. The forewords function to underline the transitions from Russian to English and to posit the revised English works as existing within a newly cohesive oeuvre in English. Furthermore, in the forewords to translations completed in the sixties, Nabokov begins to create the authorial persona of the

great author of the masterpiece, *Lolita*. This element of his extratextual revisions works in tandem with the transtextual revisions he implements to *Lolita* in the works which follow his most famous novel and is furthermore extended in his forewords of the late sixties and seventies, in which he begins to exhibit a process of literary jostling for position among other great and canonised authors. These patterns are similarly evident in the minor reworkings, which Grayson identifies as being closer to the literal model identified by Nabokov himself as being the best approach to translation (an approach he clearly ignores when translating his own works).<sup>307</sup> Nabokov stresses the literalness of the translations in all but two of the forewords attached to the translated texts. However, Grayson argues that, while the extent of the minor reworkings differ from the major reworkings, some of the same patterns of revision from the major reworkings can be seen, albeit on a much smaller scale. Grayson notes that 'while it is true that the translations adhere very closely to the originals, it is not true that Nabokov succeeds in suppressing completely the creative urge'.<sup>308</sup> Therefore, while the minor reworkings have far less extensive revisions than the major reworkings, they are not untouched by Nabokov's processes of revision. *Priglasenie na kazn'*, translated as *Invitation to a Beheading*, was the first of Nabokov's translations to be produced after the success and scandal of *Lolita* and is the first to be prefaced with a foreword. Grayson notes that *Invitation to a Beheading* loses some alliterative imagery in translation, which runs contrary to each of Nabokov's other Russian to English translations. This quality of the text is made clearly visible by Nabokov, who begins the foreword by discussing

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid, pp. 116 - 118.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, p. 120.

issues of clumsy alliteration, consonance and assonance that prevented him from giving neither the Russian original nor the English translation his first choice of title. He makes clear that neither '*Priglasenie na otsechenie golovoï*' nor '*Invitation to an Execution*' satisfies his ear in Russian or English (IB, 7). By highlighting this linguistic point, Nabokov stresses the dual importance of both capital punishment and the consequential severing of the head from the rest of the body to the novel. In doing so, he transfers the significance of capital punishment, that is, the act through which Cincinnatus is allowed passage into the world of art, in the Russian title, *Priglasenie na kazn'* to the cleaner *Invitation to a Beheading*. The importance of the loss of the head is, moreover, reinforced in both titles and emphasises Cincinnatus' move from being a rational and victimised human to his awakening as a creative artist who is able to escape the fate of decapitation which has been enforced upon him by the totalitarian state, which allows him passage into an unknown world of artists and creators at the end of the text.

Nabokov additionally makes several references to the Russian predecessor of the new English text, using the phrase 'Russian original' twice (IB, 7). Here, the revisions, however minor to the text, begin to be unravelled and made visible to the reader. Nabokov goes on to state a case for all of the translations of his own Russian works, one which is at odds with his preferences for the literal, literary translation. He writes that 'If someday I make a dictionary of definitions wanting single words to head them, a cherished entry will be "To abridge, expand or otherwise alter or cause to be altered, for the sake of belated improvements, one's own writing in translation"' (IB, 8). This statement sets out Nabokov's blueprint for translating his own works, which

allows the author, at significant temporal remove from the original creation, to tease out and gild the essence of the text in a new and, in Nabokov's eyes, improved version of the text.

However, while this is in many ways a manifesto for auto-translation, Nabokov displays some of the characteristics of his later forewords in this earliest version. He lists twenty-one writers he has been likened to in this foreword, although his term, 'harmless missiles' suggest an author who is not yet jaded by public and critical opinion (*IB*, 8). However, his playful deceptiveness is clearly on display, as he notes that, of that number, two are his own creations, Sebastian Knight and Pierre Delalande. This reference to authors of Nabokov's own creation is, moreover, significant as this foreword prefaces the first translated text of a project through which Nabokov would create, ultimately, a fully cohesive oeuvre in English. The deliberate extratextual revisions he makes to all of the translated texts through his forewords, coupled with the deliberate revisions to the texts themselves which he makes visible by identifying them in the forewords, contribute to the construction of the great author, VN, a process begun with his transtextual revisions to the *Lolita* theme. This is compounded by his ex-appropriation of the text, through which he impresses his own authorial self onto and into the text, before receding from it.<sup>309</sup> In this way, Nabokov 'dissolves into his art', becoming an integral, component part of the fabric of his works.<sup>310</sup>

Similarly, the translation of *Dar* into *The Gift* in 1963 follows the patterns of translation observed in the previous works; mechanistic tightening, fuller

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<sup>309</sup> Hamrit, 'Authorship in Nabokov's Prefaces', p. 7.

<sup>310</sup> Frank, 'Nabokov's Theatrical Imagination', p. 194.



characterisation and enhanced style. Nabokov's makes reference to the place of *Dar's* writing in its foreword, noting that he 'did not have the knack of recreating Berlin and its colony of expatriates as radically and ruthlessly as I have done in regard to certain environments in my later, English, novels' (*Gift*, 7). Here Nabokov makes reference to the Russian original of *The Gift*, while emphasising his masterful invention of America in *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*. Indeed, Nabokov even elaborated upon this point in an interview, noting that 'my old worlds – Russian, British, German, French – are just as fantastic and personal as my new one is' (*Gift*, 7). This reference to his creation of place connects his oeuvre by designating the same ability and pattern in his early Russian work, the original of which is not accessible to the reading audience that the forewords directs in reading. Nabokov furthermore discusses the distinctly Russian characteristics of the novel in the final two paragraphs of the foreword. He writes that the novel's heroine 'is not Zina, but Russian Literature' and notes the shifting literary references from chapter to chapter (*Gift*, 7). Thus, Nabokov clarifies some of the numerate references to Russian literary art and artists, which would not be so easily accessible or readily known amongst his new readership as it would have been among the émigré readership of his Russian language novels. Moreover, he explicitly refers to the difficulty he, his son and Michael Scammell faced in translating a text with 'so many Russian muses' (*Gift*, 8). A tension is created by the repeated references to the Russian qualities of a novel that is, in conjunction with the foreword, being read in English. This is an irresolvable tension of Nabokov's English oeuvre, in which works in the English language represent Russian subjects, places and literary traditions. This creates a jarring effect best shown by the unusually

developmental end to the foreword: 'The epigraph is not a fabrication. The epilogic poem mimics an Onegin stanza' (*Gift*, 8). By ending on a thoroughly un-English note, Nabokov highlights the Russian qualities of the work and stresses its indebtedness to the Russian literary tradition, going right back to the father of Russian literature, Pushkin and his famous novel in verse, *Evgenii Onegin*, often thought to be untranslatable. At the time Nabokov was working on his own literal, verbatim translation of the poem into English, which seemed to confirm this notion. This creates a certain fluidity and cohesion within this newly created English oeuvre, as the Russian origins of the newly-fashioned English texts are foregrounded and their influence is felt upon the text.

Furthermore, in the foreword to *Glory*, the translation of *Podvig*, Nabokov draws parallels between *Glory* and both *Pale Fire* and *Ada*. He additionally aligns *Glory* with the later English novels which play extensively with narrative shifts, for example, *Pale Fire* and *Ada*. In his discussion of Martin and the fugal theme, Nabokov switches from first to third person narration to discuss his choice of both the original title and the title in translation, thus creating distance and adding weight to his justifications. Additionally, when he reverts back to the first person greater attention is drawn to the topic of that narration, which is Martin's lack of artistic talent. He acknowledges that it would have been easier to bestow this gift upon him and discusses the difficulty of preventing 'him from finding in art – not an "escape" (which is only a cleaner cell on a quieter floor), but relief from the itch of being!' (*Glory*, x). The author also addresses 'wise readers' who he hopes will 'refrain from flipping through his autobiography *Speak, Memory* in quest of duplicate items or kindred scenery' (*Glory*, xi). This is, of course, facetious, as while Nabokov does not wish the reader to search for

the author in his fiction, he has no issue with directing the reader to his non-fiction prose in order to reinforce his own position as omnipotent author. The effect here is to point the reader in the direction of a text, the premise of which assumes Nabokov's successful authorial rendering. Nabokov does two things here: Firstly, he ensures that the reader assigns all creative genius and mastery of form to him, the omnipotent author. Secondly, he attempts to align this text with later texts, which had, by the time of writing the foreword, been received as exemplary specimens of the form. In this way, Nabokov is able to connect both the Russian and English parts of his oeuvre for a reading audience that had no knowledge of Russian language. This results in his projection of himself as an ideal author, who is able to oversee all parts of his oeuvre at once. Through this he invites his readers to revisit and re-read earlier works sharing a perception of his work, in which all parts of his oeuvre, whether fiction or non-fiction, can be viewed and accessed at once, allowing for an 'authorial' reading experience, approximating the author's intimate and detailed knowledge of his own oeuvre. In this way, individual texts are read not separately but as integral parts of a larger entity which has been created through an intricate web of self-reflexive revisions and authorial intrusions. By attaching forewords to his translated texts, which comment not only upon the translations themselves, but other components, themes and elements of his oeuvre, Nabokov breaches the textual world and creates a circular referent within a self-sufficient 'supertext'.

Recapturing Texts: Nabokov's *Strong Opinions*

Nabokov uses the forewords to his English language translations of his Russian works to comment upon both the original and translated texts in order to affect the subsequent readings that are generated of both. This reaffirms his position as the great and ideal author, Nabokov, and leads to the construction of a new and cohesive oeuvre in English. Whereas the translations are concerned with making visible the process of the great author who reserves the right to improve his own work in translation (irrespective of what he believes with regards to translating others' works), the 'public prose' of *Strong Opinions* is more concerned with revising this newly constructed oeuvre.<sup>311</sup> Therefore, both the translated texts and the forewords that preface them connect the distinct Russian and English components of Nabokov's works and create a cohesive oeuvre, which is then refined and perfected through extratextual revisions implemented from within the interviews included in *Strong Opinions*. This represents the final step in Nabokov's revisionary process, which leads to a dynamic model of oeuvre construction, in which time, language and even the author become fluid.

*Strong Opinions*, an authorised collection of interviews, letters to editors and articles spanning four decades of Nabokov's career, was published in 1973, four years before the author's death. It came about, as Galya Diment notes, largely by circumstance. Nabokov left Putnam in 1967 as he was unsatisfied with their promotional approach to his work, signing an eleven book deal with

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<sup>311</sup> Boyd, *American Years*, p. 601.

McGraw-Hill.<sup>312</sup> By the end of the contract in 1972, he had published only ten books, and cherry-picking from numerous interviews, letters and articles to produce *Strong Opinions* provided the easiest option to satisfy the remaining requirement. The text itself is predictably prefaced with an instructive foreword, which Nabokov begins 'I think like a genius, I write like a distinguished author and I speak like a child' (*SO*, 54). Interviews constitute more than half the text and were conducted in a controlled, staged manner. Nabokov stipulated that journalists submitted their questions in advance and reproduced his written answers verbatim. If changes were made in the subsequent publication, they first had to be approved by the author. Nabokov uses these interviews in three distinct ways. Firstly, he comments on individual works in order to highlight their central importance to his oeuvre and to use them as an aggregator of influence for the rest of the component parts of his oeuvre. This allows him to revise his newly formed oeuvre in English and to create stronger links between pivotal texts and the rest of his works. Secondly, he revises his own authorial image by simultaneously showing his European origins and undermining them, in order to create sufficient distance between V. Sirin, early English Vladimir Nabokov and the great author of the masterpiece, *Lolita*, which he has since become known. Finally, he revises the interviews themselves even further by including three fake interviews in the collection, which serve to highlight the thoroughly artificial process through which his real interviews are conducted. In doing so, Nabokov intrudes upon both his individual works and oeuvre, which has a dual effect. It firstly destabilises the individual text and again encourages the formation of a fully Nabokovian oeuvre, while directing the way in which that oeuvre is read. In

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<sup>312</sup> Galya Diment, 'Strong Opinions' in *Garland Companion to Nabokov*, ed. By Alexandrov, 685 – 696, p. 686.

this way extratextual revision has a distinctly cohesive effect, as it works to pull together an entire body of work into one complete and self-reflexive entity.

Nabokov makes extratextual revisions by commenting on his works in interviews and drawing parallels and symmetries between them and the pivotal works in his oeuvre, primarily *Lolita*, but also his second canonised text, *Pale Fire*. Unsurprisingly, many of the interviews in *Strong Opinions* contain questions about *Lolita*, particularly those conducted closest to its US and UK publication. As previously discussed, public interest in the man who created the scandalous and scandalised text was particularly high at the point of publication of *Lolita*. However, this interest is not reciprocated in Nabokov's willingness to discuss his first canonised text. Indeed, he refuses to comment on *Lolita* in the first interview he includes in the collection, which is itself pieced together from notes on various interviews which took place at the *Lolita* film premiere in New York in 1962. Nabokov explains that 'I said everything I wanted to say about the book in the Afterword appended to its American and British edition' (SO, 6). However, only one month later, Nabokov discussed *Lolita* extensively in an interview with the BBC. In it, he notes that neither Lolita nor Humbert had finite real-life precursors, and that for Lolita this remained true after the novel's textual end. However, he concedes that Humbert 'did exist after I had written the book', through the nature of his monstrosity (SO, 16). This extratextual revision to the text of *Lolita* allows Nabokov to show the ways in which his fictional monster has, in a sense, gained a life after the publication of the novel. Moreover, Humbert's fictional existence, has given life to Nabokov, allowing him to gain such privileges as retirement to full time writing, financial stability and of course, fame. By commenting on Humbert's fluid fictional nature, Nabokov assigns him,

and, more importantly, the text of which he is a part, an essential role in the creation of his oeuvre. In many ways, everything related to Nabokov always returns to a process that allows for the formation of a singular body of work and a corresponding ideal authorial figure.

In a similar vein, Nabokov addressed the ending of *Lolita* in an interview with Alfred Appel Jr. In response to a question which suggested Nabokov's authorial intrusion at the end of the novel (akin to the appearance of the author-character at the end of *Priglasenie na kazn'*) Nabokov denied that this had been an intended effect. Rather he tried 'to convey a constriction of the narrator's sick heart, a warning spasm' (SO, 73). By clarifying this point for Appel, Nabokov stipulates a categorical, authoritative reading of his own text, determining the singularity of Humbert's voice. This retrospective explication gives a coherent function to Humbert's narrative in *Lolita* and removes the possibility of more ambiguous and complex interpretations.

In the same interview Nabokov made his even more intrusive statement that Kinbote committed suicide, followed by the parenthetical assertion: '(and he certainly did after putting the last touches to his edition of the poem)'. Here, Kinbote, like Humbert before him, is given a life (and death) beyond the pages of the novel of which he is part. Nabokov here claims absolute control over the novel, its characters and their fate, affirming his own position, once again, as the omnipotent author-God in a fictional universe, which now extends well beyond the pages of his novels. The same extension of the fictional world beyond their printed existence, can be seen in Nabokov's playful, cryptic continuation of the quest for the Zemblan crown jewels, which is started in *Pale Fire*, at the end of the same interview. Within the text, the quest for their location

causes the reader to refer to the index, which, in turn, refers back to the original reference. However, the repetition of this quest directs the reader back to the original game and, in this way, Nabokov extends his control over both the text and its readings. Through playful remarks in his interviews, Nabokov revises his oeuvre by creating an endless loop of self-referents within the wider textual space he commands in both his fiction and his apparent non-fiction texts. This retrospectively impresses cohesion, pattern and plan onto his works, which reinforces once more his absolute textual and authorial control.

In addition to extratextually revising his individual canonised texts in order to impress their design and influence onto the rest of the component parts of his oeuvre, Nabokov continues to revise and develop his ideal authorial persona through these interviews. For example, through the continued transtextual revisions after the publication of *Lolita*, Nabokov creates the image of himself as the canonical eminent author of Russian and American literature. He places great importance on the distinctions between the different aspects and eras of his career and simultaneously draws links between the current persona and, for example, his Russian and European incarnation as V. Sirin. One way in which Nabokov does this is to highlight and stress his complex and multifarious national and linguistic identities, and he achieves this by addressing his separate writing languages in his interviews. While the author uses the forewords to the translations of his Russian works to connect both the Russian originals and the newly translated versions to his later, more famous works (particularly *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*), he makes a case for the intermingling of his three languages in his interviews. In an interview with *Life* in 1964 he is asked to assess his three languages in terms of their beauty, answering that 'my head



says English, my heart, Russian, my ear, French' (SO, 49). In a later interview for *The New York Times Book Review*, he discusses his trilingualism in relation to not only his Russian to English translations but also his process of editing the French translation of both his Russian and English works. In foregrounding and reinforcing his three fluent languages, he also implicitly states his knowledge of the literatures of those languages, thus depicting himself in his ideal authorial role. By stating that he is 'trilingual, in the proper sense of writing, and not only speaking, three languages' (SO, 49), he emphasises not only his considerable abilities but his breadth of knowledge of the literatures and cultures of these languages. In this way, he not only stresses his unique position as a multi-national writer, a Russian who holds an American passport, but also presents an increasingly lofty authorial version of himself, which is external to his individual works and corpus. Nabokov lays bare the constituent parts of his authorial creation, which has a direct link to the foreword's function of making visible the revisions he makes to his works in translation. Nabokov shows, by stressing his complicated journey to becoming the ideal author figure, the multiple influences and origins of the persona, and identifies, moreover, the distance between all of those constituent parts and his current masterful incarnation.

This effect is compounded when the author addresses Russian literature and other notable Russian writers to write implicitly about his own genius. In a translation of his original obituary of Khodasevich in *Strong Opinions*, Nabokov favourably assesses the poet's 'authentic art' (SO, 223). Of course, it could be argued that Nabokov was simply returning a favour, as Khodasevich was his earliest, and most supportive critic, and the first to identify what is arguably the

main thematic thread of Nabokov's work. At the same time, however, Nabokov uses Khodasevich in this republication of his earlier work to further contextualise his own position within the émigré literary tradition, aligning himself as the master of prose with Khodasevich, the 'greatest Russian poet of our time' (SO, 223). The idea that 'genius does not save one in Russia; in exile, however, one is saved by genius alone' (SO, 224), applies of course equally to himself. By republishing this obituary he also seems to take up the thread of an earlier discussion of genius in an interview with *The Sunday Times* (chronologically succeeding but within the structure of the book preceding the obituary) as well as the famous opening to the collection's foreword, where Nabokov professes his own genius as a thinker. In addition, in *The Sunday Times* interview Nabokov makes a distinction between genius and 'the thinner term, talant, talent, not genius' in conjunction with primarily Russian writers (SO, 138). Through these references, Nabokov creates a more focused and marginal literary identity for himself, not simply that of the acclaimed writer of *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*, or even the exiled writer who grew up a 'perfectly normal trilingual child' (SO, 17), but the ideal authorial figure of Nabokov, who oversees an entire literary body of work in both Russian and English.

Nabokov develops this strand of the extratextual revision of his authorial identity by further addressing the national identity he acquired five years after the necessity of removing his Jewish wife and child from Europe in 1940. In an interview for an American television channel Nabokov responds to a question about great American writers by stating that 'seldom more than two or three really first-rate writers exist simultaneously in a given generation. I think that Salinger and Updike are by far the finest [American] artists in recent years' (SO,

57). Nabokov might be implicitly reserving the third vacant place for himself in this triptych of American literary greatness. Nabokov uses this comparison to position himself at the helm of his newly-formed English language, but, in many ways, quintessentially, American oeuvre. This process of literary contextualisation continues when Nabokov addresses his European origins directly, via a direct engagement with Joyce, to whom several comparisons had already been made. He claims that, despite his admiration for his Irish contemporary, he read *Ulysses* 'at a time when I was definitely formed as a writer and immune to any literary influence' (SO, 68). This statement is facetious in many ways; Nabokov was an admirer of Joyce's *Ulysses*, if not *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or *Finnegans' Wake*, and moved in the similar social circles in Paris as the Irish author did. Indeed, he gave a reading of his work in Paris in 1937, which Joyce attended. By creating a distance between himself and this other, great, European author, Nabokov contributes to the standalone mythmaking of his idealised authorial persona.

Nabokov's final strategy of extratextual revision is to revise the interviews themselves. Of *Strong Opinions*' twenty-two interviews, only nineteen had been published prior to the collections' publication. The three remaining interviews are curiously listed as having anonymous origins, for which Nabokov blames his memory. Diment posits that they are 'a Nabokovian hoax, on par with his listing of non-existent writers and experts in introductions to his English translations of Russian novels', offering the lexical and syntactical similarities between the anonymous interviewers' questions, as well as the bizarre and rude tone of

some of the questions, as evidence.<sup>313</sup> Nabokov, of course, delighted in this sort of playful reflexivity, which could conceivably be listed as the sole reason for the proposed hoax. However, the blatant artificiality of these interviews has a compounding effect on the real interviews by highlighting the extent to which they, too, are expertly crafted by the great author, Nabokov. When the anonymous interviews are compared with Nabokov's previously published interviews, it becomes clear that, in the latter, Nabokov tried to 'assume the total control as he did in the imaginary ones'.<sup>314</sup> One way in which Nabokov does this is to add a short foreword to preface each of the twenty-two interviews collected in *Strong Opinions*, which include, at the very least, the interviewer's name, the date of the interview and the resultant publication details. However, several explicate the process through which the interview went for publication, both in the original format and subsequently in *Strong Opinions*. In the introduction to the 1962 interview for the BBC, for instance, Nabokov writes that the text which was subsequently published from the broadcast 'teems with inaccuracies' (SO, 9). Having mislaid the cards his answers were written on, he writes that he 'tried to weed out [errors] ten years later but was forced to strike out a few sentences here and there when memory refused to restore the sense flawed by deflective or properly mended speech' (SO, 9). Here, Nabokov makes visible revisions that could have easily remained invisible and, furthermore, makes explicit his authorial control over the interview, a process that would ordinarily be the result of a negotiation between interviewer and interviewee. Conversely, he omits a few pages of his 1964 interview for *Playboy* in order to reflect the original publication, which was affected by the interviewer, Adrian Toffler, allegedly

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<sup>313</sup> Diment, 'Strong Opinions', pp. 686 - 687.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, p. 687.

losing two pages of the typescript on the return journey from Montreux. Overall, these intrusions and comments create a process of reading similar to that of *Ada*, which reconstitutes the manuscript from the novel form. However, here, Nabokov facilitates a reading that creates a version of the interview that spans across time, space and even forms of publication and, above all, asserts his dominant position once again as the ideal authorial figure in control of every aspect of his oeuvre.

This process, however, reveals an odd contradiction in Nabokov's practices and gives rise to questions about his authorial intentions in collating these interviews. On one occasion he omits errors that he cannot reconcile from memory; on another he does not add sections that he possesses which were originally omitted purely by journalistic error. It seems that Nabokov is interested in upholding authorial autonomy (his or others') only as far as it faithfully represents his work. This is supported elsewhere, when he writes that despite his answers to Israel Shenker's questions for *The New York Times Book Review* being reproduced with accuracy, 'their presentation would have been perfect had they not been interspersed with unnecessary embellishment (chitchat about living writers, for instance)' (SO, 181). Elsewhere he admits to abridging, selecting or stylising typescripts to get rid of 'misprints and other flaws' (SO, 177). In fact, Nabokov alters these interviews in order to streamline the extratextual revisions which extend his ideal authorial role to that of interviewer, interviewee and a projected reading through which he would be able to access all possible parts and functions of literary and authorial creation at once. Nabokov continues to extratextually revise his works in this way by including his instructions to the interviewer alongside the interview itself in *Strong Opinions*.

The first of these notes is added as a post scriptum to the *Life* magazine interview (1964), which instructs the interviewer to publish the typed answers ‘accurately and completely: verbatim, if quoted; in a faithful version, if not’ (SO, 50). In the second, which is tacked onto the beginning of the 1968 interview for *The New York Times Book Review*, he asks that Martin Esslin, the interviewer, ‘have my answers appear in *The New York Times Book Review* the way they are prepared here ... (Except that you may want to interrupt the longer answers by several inserted questions)’ (SO, 108). A similar note appears alongside the 1969 interview for *The Sunday Times*, albeit with a much drier tone, a result, presumably, of ‘the editorial liberties that periodicals in other countries had been taking with material [Nabokov] had supplied’ (SO, 135). Furthermore, Nabokov notes in two interviews that additional questions were submitted after the initial submission, asterisking the additions in the first instance and noting them in the introduction in the second (SO, 93; 120). In doing so, Nabokov foregrounds the artificial nature of the interview process he insisted upon and, furthermore, asserts his authorial dominance over the entire process of conducting, constructing and directing readings of the interview. By exposing his revisions, Nabokov takes control of the whole interview process.

The multiple, intertwining strategies of extratextual revision implemented by Nabokov using *Strong Opinions* highlight the thoroughly artificial nature of his interview process. The interviews and articles and, moreover, their instructional introductory sections inform the reader of the nature of the construction and projection of the interview or article that is about to be read. These extratextual revisions further the aims of those transtextual revisions implemented by the forewords to the English language translations, which make visible the revisions

that Nabokov made to his texts when transferring them from Russian to English. This informs the reading of the English language text and simultaneously joins the Russian and English texts together, causing them to become a unified textual entity, while creating distance between them and positing the English language translation as a replacement for the Russian text, which Nabokov could reasonably expect would not be read in Russian or in Russia at the time he undertook the translations. Furthermore, the forewords that he attaches to the English translations of his Russian works function to identify and bring out the essence of what was always there in the original text, but was, perhaps, not fully realised in the first, juvenile version of the text. In this way, the forewords smooth the linguistic transitions of the works, as well as the improvements made to them in translation. By making the imperfections of the original texts deliberately visible to readers who, on the whole, would be unable to read the original texts, Nabokov makes inextricable links between both (and, in the case of *Kamera obskura* and *Otchaianie*, all three) versions of the text. The extratextual revisions that Nabokov implements to his translations using the forewords that are attached to them make connections between the Russian and subsequent English versions and sends the reader back and forth between the dual identities of the text, as well as the author who produced them. In this way, Nabokov uses extratextual revision not simply to flaunt the imperfections of his original Russian texts, but to recalibrate it in order that the correct, pre-existing qualities be properly identified and appreciated. This creates a fluid and mobile reading process, that of authorial reading, which is able to make connections between multiple works at once.

Nabokov's use of these deliberate, visible, extratextual revisions affects the reception and readings of his individual texts. When Nabokov comments upon his works from the extratextual sources of his forewords or interviews, he destabilises their textual autonomy and causes them to become open to revisions after the point of their publication. In doing so, Nabokov attempts to reinforce his omnipotent, God-like, authorial presence on his works, both individually and as a whole, by impressing extratextual revisions onto his works in full visibility of his reader. This process is one which Sweeney argues an integral aim and strategy of Nabokov's work, which expresses his opinion (strong, of course) that the pursuit of knowledge is a process that can never be fully achieved.<sup>315</sup> In this way, textual completion becomes an impossibility for the Nabokovian, text and textual instability become a much more prominent feature of Nabokov's works. Nabokov's urges to perfect his texts drive him to revise them in multiple ways. As previously noted and discussed, his manuscripts show that he revised obsessively prior to publication, while engaged with writing his individual texts, a process which is foregrounded by the author, who stated that 'my pencils outlast their erasers' (*SM*, 138). In doing so, Nabokov presents his own idealised and omnipresent authorial image to his readers. This is at odds with the desire that Nabokov notes interviewers had 'to see my pencil poised above the page, my painted lampshade, my bookshelves, my old white borzoi asleep at my feet' (*SO*, xv). While Nabokov did not want to reveal his writing modes and habits to journalists, he was, seemingly, more than happy to do so in his 'public prose'.<sup>316</sup> It would appear, then, that his secrecy was not the result of his desire to protect his creative processes from the prying

<sup>315</sup> Sweeney, 'Enacting Revision in Nabokov', p. 111.

<sup>316</sup> Boyd, *American Years*, p. 601.



eyes of the public, but to protect the reception of these processes, and, moreover, the works that they create, from filtering through the unknown variable of an intermediary writer. Nabokov's desire to perfect and control his works, as well as their reception, brings about a playful, self-reflexive body of work that refers to itself endlessly. This effect is brought about largely through Nabokov's extratextual revisions, which are used to alter the ways in which the component parts of his oeuvre are read and received following their publication and authorisation. As a form of authorial intrusion, these extratextual revision destabilise the individual textual worlds they refer to, causing them to become incomplete after the point of their completion and publication. This incompleteness is integral to the formation of a fully cohesive oeuvre, or a 'supertext', the work of the God-like authorial figure, Nabokov, within which all textual referents are Nabokov's own.

## **Conclusion**

Revision is a permanent state for Nabokov's works. Revisions manifest themselves in various permutations and combinations and have distinct effects on the creation and the reception of Nabokov's individual texts, as well as his oeuvre overall. Nabokov implements revision at all levels of the text, from the level of narrative upwards to the extratextual level, through which he comments externally on texts that have already been completed and passed into the realm of publication. Nabokov is truly an inveterate reviser, who affects all parts of his works with the invisible and deliberately visible, self-conscious revisions he continuously makes.<sup>317</sup> Taken together, these processes create a complex matrix of revisions, which underpin the author's entire body of work and which, once they become evident, irrevocably alter the way in which his corpus is read.

The first chapter of this thesis, 'Nabokov's Developmental Revisions', has considered the developmental revisions that Nabokov implements throughout his oeuvre. By examining the organic evolutionary arc of the exiled king theme, it is possible to identify the ways in which Nabokov revised and progressed his treatment of material central to his works unconsciously over several decades in order to create the most perfect iteration of this essential thematic matter of his corpus. Identification of these developmental revisions, which are not part of a deliberate attempt on Nabokov's part to shape and form his oeuvre, gives a unique insight into the author's actual processes of literary creation, which creates a fundamental tension in the author's corpus. By attempting to conceal these intrinsic, developmental revisions that lie at the heart of his fiction,

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<sup>317</sup> Connolly, *Nabokov's Early Fiction*, p. 17.

Nabokov lays bare the desire he has to deny his authorial fallibility. By tracking his developmental revisions, it is possible to see that Nabokov's quest for authorial perfection is not the result of divine authorial inspiration but, instead, dependent on his perseverance as an artist. Moreover, it is the first instance in which it is clear to see that the author desired to present an authorial image that differs from that which can be identified from his practices of writing. By examining the differences between what Nabokov says about his works and what he actually does, it is possible to understand his burgeoning intention and desire to construct and create a public image. This happens contemporaneously with some of the revisions implemented to the central thematic matter of the exiled king, many of which become closely intertwined with his later, deliberately visible forms of revision.

Chapter Two, 'Revision in Nabokov's Fictional Worlds', has discussed one of the deliberately visible forms of revision used by Nabokov, that is, revision within Nabokov's invented worlds as a device of fiction. These fictional revisions occur notably early in Nabokov's oeuvre and appear long before the retrospective patterning and design, which the author impresses onto his oeuvre using transtextual and extratextual revision. When taken alongside Nabokov's invisible revisions, this self-conscious device of his fiction shows that revision more generally is a central preoccupation and element associated with Nabokov's work. Fictional revision is implemented at narrative level by author-characters, who revise the narratives that they themselves write within Nabokov's texts. When Nabokov's author-characters revise their works, they create cracks in the surface of the text, laying bare its inconsistencies. These revisions by fictional characters create the sense of a real-time reading of the

text, which is often being created contemporaneously with its being read. In this way, they create a reading that projects forwards and backwards in the text to remedy or otherwise make sense of the revised portion. For example, when Hermann Karlovich realises the fatal flaw in the design of his crime, the reader follows him in the quest for Felix's errant stick, which will ultimately give Hermann away. As a result, Hermann's control as author of the text is ultimately undermined and he has to concede to a higher authorial figure, that of Nabokov, who is present above the various fictional revisions contained within his narration.

In connection with the omnipotent authorial figure, which begins to emerge in Chapter Two, the third chapter of this thesis, 'The Transtextual Revisions of the *Lolita* Theme', has examined the transtextual revisions that Nabokov implemented to his works following the fame and critical success of *Lolita*. Focusing on *Lolita*'s shocking and controversial theme of paedophilia, it examined two strands of transtextual revision in regard to Nabokov's first canonised text, firstly considering the ways in which Nabokov revises this theme on a developmental arc throughout the texts that precede *Lolita* and then, secondly, the ways in which he self-reflexively plays and toys with this thematic matter after the publication and critical and commercial success of his seminal text. The public attention that *Lolita* received, largely on account of its scandalous subject matter, had a two-fold effect. Firstly, it foisted a great deal of fame, attention and opportunity onto Nabokov himself, and created a well-known public figure of the author. Secondly, it gave life to a reductionist version of the text as a pornographic fantasy of seductive under-age girls and older men in popular perception, which turned *Lolita* into a product of popular culture

beyond its status as a piece of literary art. This process both allowed and encouraged Nabokov to play with the public images that he and his most famous text received, which he would continue to do in a deliberate fashion in his subsequent, late English works. Through this Nabokov invites his readers to at least approximate his ideal reading process, re-reading. Through repeated reading, readers are able to assess and identify the importance of the transtextual references to *Lolita* which are planted in subsequent works, while retrospectively impressing design and pattern onto the works which precede it. As such, Nabokov lays the first foundation for the fully cohesive oeuvre he would fully develop later, by creating revisionary loops as result of the re-reading process, which directs the reader forwards and backwards through Nabokov's corpus.

This process of creating a cohesive oeuvre alongside a corresponding powerful authorial persona is extended even further by Nabokov using the final process of his revisionary set, extratextual revision, which has been examined in the final chapter of this thesis. These extratextual revisions are realised in the intrusions that Nabokov makes into the completed and published texts of his oeuvre from external sources such as interviews and forewords. This form of revision, like fictional and transtextual revision, is visible and deliberate. However, unlike, for example, transtextual revision, Nabokov uses this form of revision to elucidate rather than conceal certain imperfections of his works. While this, on the surface at least, seems contradictory to Nabokov's usual strategies of creating textual cohesion through authorial control, it has the effect of creating a revised oeuvre of work in English. Using the forewords to his English language translations of his early Russian works, Nabokov makes

visible the flaws present in the earlier published versions in order to create a unified authorial persona, which incorporates the juvenile author, V. Sirin, who first created them, and the mature and masterful author, Nabokov, who noted the need for a single verb to describe his desire for the process through which bilingual authors could improve their own works in translation. Using these forewords, Nabokov not only creates a fully connected oeuvre in English for the reading audience he gained as a result of the fame *Lolita* brought him, but continues to refine his own authorial image. This process is extended by the 'public prose' of *Strong Opinions*, through which the author continues to comment on his newly formed oeuvre, making links between his works and his omniscient status as its ultimate creator.<sup>318</sup> This causes Nabokov's individual works to become purposefully incomplete, which, in turn, allows them to become part of a larger cohesive oeuvre. In this way, Nabokov continues to revise his oeuvre, forming a 'supertext', as well as revising his authorial persona until the very end of his literary career. This process is, furthermore, the result of Nabokov's direct response to the failed ideal reading, that is, a reading that does not follow the dictum of re-reading generated by transtextual revision. Nabokov here works with and against an essential paradox: the scandal that surrounded *Lolita* made him famous enough to have the opportunity to impress extratextual revisions onto his works (by translating his early Russian works and giving interviews), but that same fame brought about the misunderstanding of both the text's essential thematic matter and of the author himself. Nabokov both uses these miscomprehensions to create the 'supertext' by using the opportunities for extratextual revisions that they facilitate, while simultaneously

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<sup>318</sup> Boyd, *American Years*, p. 601.

fighting against them. Therefore, Nabokov's intrusions can be felt upon his texts as he attempts to direct readings that do not follow his blueprint for ideal reading, that is, re-reading. This process ultimately generates the most complex and involved reading process of all the different tracks of deliberately visible revision, authorial reading. Following this type of reading, the reader is able to access all parts of Nabokov's individual works at the same time, which elucidates the complex and sophisticated network of references and connections which makes up the textual fabric of Nabokov's individual works, oeuvre and, ultimately, 'supertext'.

Revision, both as a concept and as artistic practice, is closely linked to questions of authorial control in Nabokov's thinking and writing. Irrespective of their different effects on the reader, and the subsequent readings that are generated, each of the different types of revision that Nabokov makes to his works in manuscripts, published versions, translations, and in later comments, share the imprint of his authorial control. Although the revisiting of earlier texts and the wish to improve or polish them is a common trait of Nabokov's work, which he has in common with most accomplished writers, the extent of control he tries to exert over both his individual works and his total oeuvre as a cohesive masterpiece through continuous revisions is both significant and unusual. While neither, for example, Nabokov's textual revisions at manuscript level nor the revision of themes (the *Lolita* theme or the exiled king theme) over several decades of artistic growth and development are remarkable in themselves, when taken together they become highly significant. As such, Nabokov's complex methods of creating a cohesive oeuvre, and the subsequent suggestion of his own omnipotent control over the 'supertext' that he constructs,

marks him as a writer who tries to test the limits of the author's control over the fictional and textual universe he creates.

The full extent of Nabokov's authorial control is revealed gradually in the increasingly complex reading processes which he invites and stipulates. The initial surface reading, that is, a singular, real-time reading of the text facilitates the detection of all obvious forms of revisions, including the device of fictional revision. However, a transtextual reading relies on a more detailed knowledge of Nabokov's canonised texts, *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*, and opens up the more complex forms of revisions Nabokov undertakes across published individual texts. Finally, an authorial reading is based on a full and extensive knowledge of Nabokov's entire corpus, and allows the reader to identify and appreciate the most complex revisions across all of Nabokov's published texts, which create a whole artistic oeuvre out of Nabokov's individual works. Each of these reading processes undermines the self-contained nature of Nabokov's individual texts, which, as a result, become integral component parts of a larger entity of the self-reflexive, non-temporally sequential, and distinctly Nabokovian, oeuvre. Through the same reading process, the increasingly powerful authorial persona of the omnipotent, God-like author figure, whose omnipresence and omniscience is felt throughout Nabokov's works, becomes evident. This authorial presence is the counterpart of the newly formed 'supertext', which connects all parts of Nabokov's individual texts together, creating a version of his oeuvre in which everything is coherent, cohesive and connected.

The 'supertext' is an ideal textual entity, which is created through the constant revisions that Nabokov implements to his works. It is comprised of all of Nabokov's work at once, which invites a synchronous re-visioning of



Nabokov's works, in which all component parts can be viewed, or accessed, together. It represents an idealised version of Nabokov's oeuvre within which all of the individual texts lose their self-contained autonomy and are fused together to create one, self-reflexive body of work. These retrospective and retroactive references to earlier texts undermine the impression of a chronological, linear, uncontrolled development of, for example, a central theme. In this way, Nabokov creates the impression of a synchronised oeuvre in which everything is deliberate and connected.

In his autobiography, Nabokov wrote 'I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another. Let visitors trip' (*SM*, 198). This apparent cancellation of linear time that the author professes in conjunction with his processes of literary creation is similar to the effect Nabokov would like his readers to experience when re-reading his works:

When we read a book for the first time the very process of laboriously moving our eyes from left to right, line after line, page after page, this complicated physical work upon the book, the very process of learning in terms of space and time what the book is about, this stands between us and our artistic appreciation. When we look at a painting we do not have to move our eyes in a special even if, as in a book, the picture contains elements of depth and development (*LL*, 3).

Akin to a painting, the 'supertext' allows the reader, theoretically, at least, to appreciate Nabokov's individual works as integral parts of a coherent, larger work. Therefore, works he reinterprets or appropriates transform what must have initially been an unconscious development over which the author had no control, into a purposefully creative construct, which seems to be the result of an intricately controlled creative process. This impression of overall control is deepened by the playful, self-reflexive references to future works (for example,

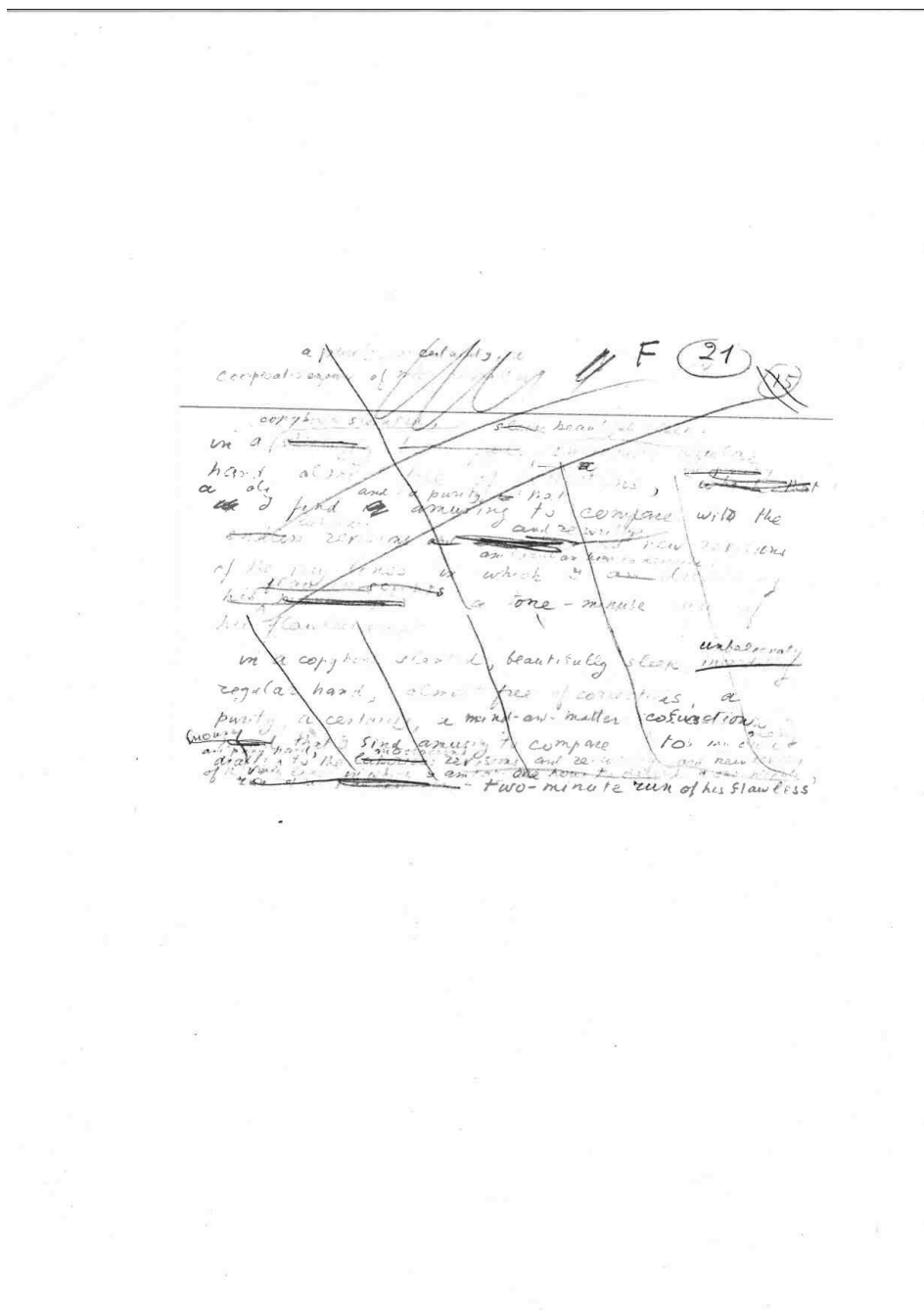
*Transparent Things* is noted in *Pale Fire* and *Kinbote* is foreshadowed in *Invitation of a Beheading*, which are subsequently developed and thus further evoke the impression of an overall God-like plan of creation, which Nabokov has been in control of from the very beginning of his literary career. Everything becomes a deliberate part of the intelligent design of the omniscient author, who exerts complete control over both his fictional world and his entire literary universe.

The 'supertext' is, of course, an idealised projected textual form of readings, texts, oeuvre and the corresponding author, which cannot intrinsically be measured or otherwise set in a concrete form. Instead, it offers a conceptual understanding of the results of all of Nabokov's processes of revision taken together, and identifies a theoretical framework, which may be used and applied by literary scholars more generally to other artists, texts and oeuvres which share some or all of the characteristics of Nabokov's self-reflexive corpus. The interaction of surface reading, re-reading and authorial reading, as well as the authorial origins of each model of reading, creates a dynamic model of text and oeuvre construction, ultimately leading to the formation of the highly complex 'supertext', which is constituted of all parts of Nabokov's oeuvre at once. Fundamentally, this impresses the illusion of deliberate and intelligent design onto the works of an artist whose artistic revisions are left to reverberate endlessly in the hermetically sealed chamber of Nabokov's own creation. Revision, therefore, lies at the heart of Nabokov's self-reflexive and self-contained fictional universe, ultimately creating another pictorial effect, similar to the one Nabokov wanted his readers to experience at the end of his books: 'I think what I would welcome at the close of a book of mine is a sensation of its world receding in the distance and stopping somewhere there, suspended afar

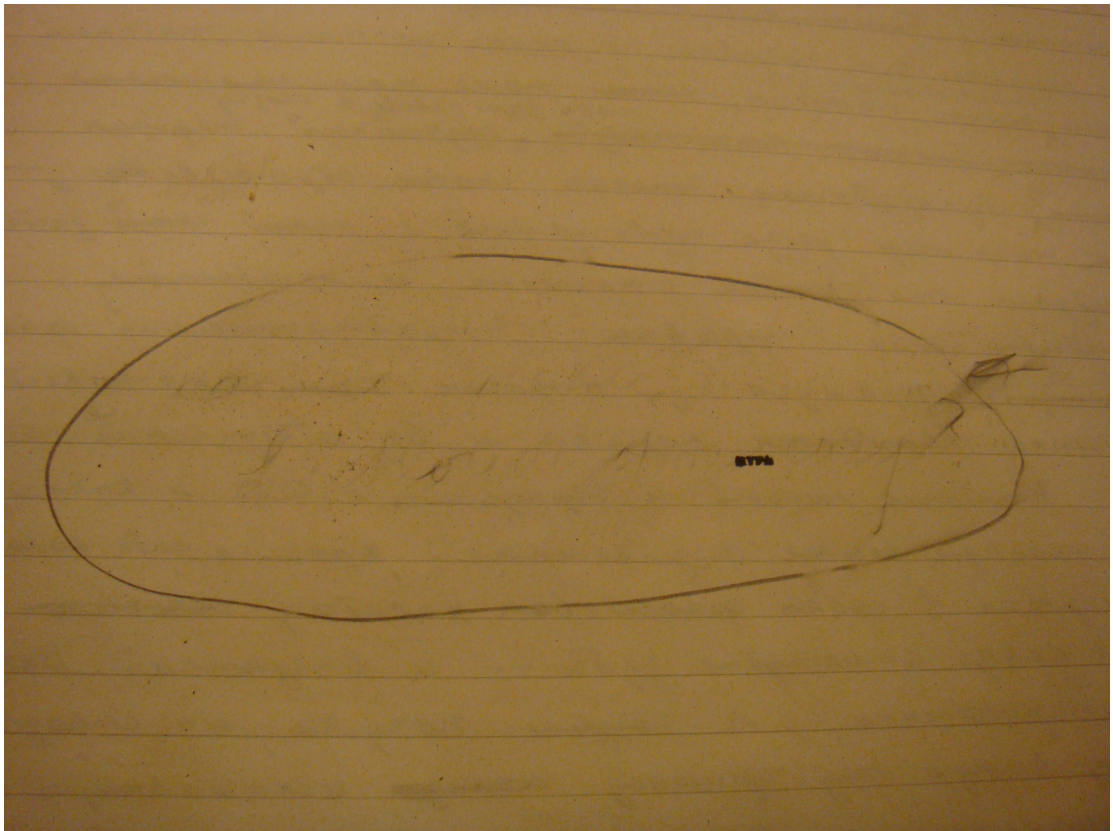
like a picture in a picture: *The Artist's Studio* by Van Bock' (SO, 72 - 3).

## Appendices

## Appendix 1:



**Appendix 2:**



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