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MEMORY IN NABOKOV'S ADA

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## INTRODUCTION

Artifice is a major preoccupation in Nabokov's English novels. Parody of literary genres and stances, parody of the reader's expectations, and authorial intrusions by narrator figures constantly remind the reader that Nabokov's novels are self-contained, fictional worlds. While the reader is confronted with a threefold awareness of fictional levels (characters acting out roles in the artificial world of a novel created by the author) Julia Bader points out that "it is not that the action of characters 'stand for' or 'represent' the writing of a novel or the figure of the artist, but that certain descriptions of experience, character, or emotion illustrate and approximate artistic creation".<sup>1</sup>

In Ada this process focuses on an examination of memory, which forms the basis of human identity. The novel suggests that everyone is an artificer since man's awareness of himself and his world is dependent on the subjective impressions of his experience which are retained by memory. Through the personal memoirs of Van Veen, the novel illustrates the operations of memory as it constitutes the basis of all human consciousness. Imagination is seen as a form of memory, the unifying patterning power of mind that manipulates the impressions retained by memory to create man's private and projected fictions.

As author and "self-researcher", Van Veen unites the three fictional levels of character, art work, and author. Van's quest for identity embodies an examination of conscious human identity, which Van sees as an interaction of memory and imagination and this interaction is revealed by his own ordering of artifice within the literary form of his memoirs.

In Chapter I of this thesis it will be shown that Van's examination of the texture of Time in Part IV of the novel provides a statement of the relationship between Time and Memory that forms the philosophical basis for the writing of his memoirs. Man as a sentient being is entrapped within a physical body which follows an irreversible course of organic decline. While Van establishes that memory may transcend the laws of chronological sequence, he is, on the physical level of being, still bound by these laws.

Chapter II will examine the novel's treatment of the apparent conflict between objective and subjective 'reality' which arises out of the dual nature of man as a physical and imaginative being and which is represented in Ada as the opposition of Terra and Antiterra. Van's personal denial of physical, 'objective' existence will be shown to dissolve when both physical and imaginative experience are seen to make up the materials of the memory's subjective impressions. Memory is

the basis of conscious awareness which synthesizes the split between body and mind. It will be argued that the geographical worlds of Terra and Antiterra which form the **total** cosmology of novel are metaphors for the materials which provide the total world of memory-images.

Van's view of 'reality' as a formulation of individual memory governs the method and construction of Ada. Chapter III of this essay will show that the facets of the novel's structure reflect the operation of memory, and the emotional basis of memory's selections.

Memory-images, which make up man's awareness of himself and his world, are ordered and unified by imagination. Individual identity is revealed in the style of man's personal fictions, and consequently Chapter IV will discuss style as the means of characterization in Ada.

Van's belief in the potential of dynamic conscious awareness to transcend physiological time is coupled with his belief in man's potential to create new forms through the imaginative use of memory. My concluding remarks will suggest that in Ada Nabokov substantiates a personal belief in artistic creation as the enduring and immortal embodiment of imaginative being within time-bound human existence.

INTRODUCTION : NOTES

1. Bader, J., Crystal Land, p.3.