

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

STRUCTURE AND STYLE:

AN APPROACH TO CHARACTERIZATION IN
NABOKOV'S ENGLISH NOVELS

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH AT
MASSEY UNIVERSITY

SUZANN CLAIR OLSSON

1983

Top copy

Massey University Library. Thesis Copyright Form

Title of thesis: Structure and Style: An Approach to Characterization in Nabokov's English Novels

- (1) (a) I give permission for my thesis to be made available to readers in the Massey University Library under conditions determined by the Librarian.
- (b) ~~I do not wish my thesis to be made available to readers without my written consent for _____ months.~~
- (2) (a) ~~I agree that my thesis, or a copy, may be sent to another institution under conditions determined by the Librarian.~~
- (b) I do not wish my thesis, or a copy, to be sent to another institution without my written consent for 12 months.
- (3) (a) I agree that my thesis may be copied for Library use.
- (b) ~~I do not wish my thesis to be copied for Library use for _____ months.~~

Signed S. C. Olsson

Date 24/3/86

The copyright of this thesis belongs to the author. Readers must sign their name in the space below to show that they recognise this. They are asked to add their permanent address.

NAME AND ADDRESS

DATE

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

ABSTRACT

Nabokov was both teacher and artist, and this study examines his own views about writing and reading, as contained in his published lectures and interviews, in order to approach his literary practices in the English novels. For the purposes of analysing the "architectonics" of a text, Nabokov distinguishes between two aspects of form: style ("the manner of the author") and structure ("the planned pattern of a work," which includes both formal properties--conventions, techniques, genre--and the arrangement of content--story development, the "choice" and "interplay" of characters). Part One of this thesis examines this distinction and its consequences in order to explain the principles which underlie the self-conscious strategies of Nabokov's writing. The paradoxical alliance of artifice and realism in what he calls "the facts of fiction" are related to his attitudes towards 'facts' and 'reality' in life (Chapter One); the methods of his style, in their contribution towards a continuing dialectic of forms, involve distinctions between imitative and innovative styles, and between impersonal and personal representations (Chapter Two); his fiction embraces a variety of human discourse, from scholarly research to art, and plays upon the distinctions between non-fictive re-construction and artistic re-creation (Chapter Three). Throughout the English novels, characters are dramatized in a process of choosing styles which may or may not conform to Nabokov's structural design but which represent the "other selves" of personality. Nabokov's structuring of the novels provides a critical perspective on these stylizations.

The descriptive framework outlined in Part One is the basis for an account in Part Two of the particular relationships which are established between structure and style in each of the English novels. Nabokov's main approach is to present a narrative through first-person narrators working within

non-fictive conventions of representation. This format is used in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Invitation of a Beheading*, *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, *Invitation of a Beheading* and *Look at the Harlequins!* In *Bend Sinister* and *Transparent Things*, however, Nabokov presents the narrative through omniscient and intrusive authorial figures. Chapters Four and Five examine the differing narrative structures of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Bend Sinister*. In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* Nabokov establishes a conflict between the conventions of biography and V.'s stylizations; this conflict suggests how V. functions as an imitative novelist, identifying with an idealized portrait of artistic sensibility. *Bend Sinister* brings together an outer triune of author, work of art and reader with an inner triune of world, totalitarian state and individual in order to explore the analogies between an artistic "theatre of the mind" and self-representation; in particular, Nabokov's design reveals how Krug's incomplete self-characterization contributes to his downfall. Nabokov's structural exploration of "individual reality" in *Invitation of a Beheading* (Chapter Six) also draws attention to the way his narrator's 'biographical' portrait of Pnin is a form of artistic impersonation; the narrator, together with Jack Cockerell, is part of a "troika" of personalities, the "radix" of which is the individual style of Timofey Pnin. Chapter Seven analyses the way the differing narrative structures of *Pale Fire* and *Transparent Things* play parodically with the interrelationships and distinctions between artistic and non-fictive representations. Finally, Chapter Eight offers some suggestions about the ways in which Nabokov's structuring of the three memoirs--*Lolita*, *Invitation of a Beheading*, and *Look at the Harlequins!*--elaborates his concern with memory as the basis of "individual reality."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr E.W. Slinn of Massey University and Dr J. Lamb of Auckland University for their generous advice and continuing assistance throughout the various stages of my research and writing.

I am grateful to the members of the English Department at Massey University who have given me encouragement, and to the many other people who have provided me with practical help and support.

I would also like to thank Dr B. Boyd of Auckland University for providing me with a copy of his manuscript, "Nabokov and Human Consciousness."

Finally, I wish to express my particular appreciation to Mrs E.V. Oram for the exacting care and effort she has put into the typing of this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
ABBREVIATIONS	vii
INTRODUCTION	viii
PART ONE	
	1
CHAPTER 1	2
NABOKOV'S "FACTS OF FICTION"	
NOTES	19
CHAPTER 2	23
STRUCTURE AND STYLE	
NOTES	41
CHAPTER 3	46
ARTISTIC RE-CREATION	
NOTES	70
PART TWO	
	76
CHAPTER 4	77
THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF	
<i>THE REAL LIFE OF SEBASTIAN KNIGHT</i>	
NOTES	105
CHAPTER 5	107
THE STRUCTURAL LEVELS OF	
<i>BEND SINISTER</i>	
NOTES	147
CHAPTER 6	148
THE ROLE OF THE NARRATOR IN	
<i>PNIN</i>	
NOTES	182
CHAPTER 7	185
<i>PALE FIRE</i> AND <i>TRANSPARENT THINGS</i> :	
ANALOGIES AND DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN	
ART AND LIFE	
NOTES	233

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTD)

	PAGE
CHAPTER 8	
STRUCTURE IN THE MEMOIRS: <i>LOLITA, ADA AND LOOK AT THE HARLEQUINS!</i>	238
NOTES	273
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	279

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used when citing Nabokov's works:

<i>TG</i>	:	<i>The Gift</i>
<i>RLSK</i>	:	<i>The Real Life of Sebastian Knight</i>
<i>BS</i>	:	<i>Bend Sinister</i>
<i>L</i>	:	<i>Lolita</i>
<i>P</i>	:	<i>Pnin</i>
<i>PF</i>	:	<i>Pale Fire</i>
<i>A</i>	:	<i>Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle</i>
<i>TT</i>	:	<i>Transparent Things</i>
<i>LATH</i>	:	<i>Look at the Harlequins!</i>
<i>SM</i>	:	<i>Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited</i>
<i>NG</i>	:	<i>Nikolai Gogol</i>
<i>LL</i>	:	<i>Lectures on Literature</i>
<i>LRL</i>	:	<i>Lectures on Russian Literature</i>
<i>LDQ</i>	:	<i>Lectures on Don Quixote</i>
<i>SO</i>	:	<i>Strong Opinions</i>

The editions used for these works are given in the bibliography.