MEMORY IN NABOKOV'S *ADA*

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English at Massey University

SUZANN CLAIR CHERRINGTON

1976

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr. E.W. Slinn for his interest and guidance and Mrs. Margaret Brogden for typing this thesis.

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".[1] 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.

CHAPTER I

TIME AND MEMORY

Ada purports to be the post-humous publication of Van Veen's memoirs, reconstructed and written in his nineties. Van's personal theory of 'reality' governs the structure and content of his work, and forms a basis for interpreting the novel. For Van, the "only reality we know"[1] is the interaction of man's present awareness with his subjective impressions of past experience which are retained by memory. Van regards time as the medium of this process. Thus perceptual time and memory are seen by Van as the inter-dependent facets of consciousness which make up man's awareness of himself and his world. The complete statement of Van's theory occurs in Part IV of the novel - Van's thoughts and notes towards a paper on The Texture of Time.

Van defines his topic as

> Pure Time, Perceptual Time, Tangible Time, Time free of content, context, and running commentary - this is my time and theme (p.422).

Van's discussion in Part IV of Ada forms two main sections: the justifications for his treatment of time as the medium of consciousness, and an attempt to define the essence of this time in terms of conscious processes. This chapter will trace the development of Van's thought through each section, and show that his reunion with Ada after a seventeen-year separation forms a turning point in his theorizing. The resulting modification of Van's statements on Time and Memory forms the philosophical basis for the writing of the novel.

Man's existence is comprised of physical and intellectual, concrete and abstract, experience. Time, however, is traditionally thought of in terms of man's concrete existence. As a physical organism, man follows an irreversible course from birth to death, which, transferred into a conception of time becomes the chronal sequence of Past, Present and Future. But implicit in this equating of physical and conscious experience, is the reduction of man's total existence to deterministic, physical laws.

Van first attacks the admissibility of the future as Time, since the future forms no part of actual, conscious experience. As he drives to Mont Roux and his meeting with Ada, he debates with an imaginary heckler, who argues that the "absolute necessity" (p.419) of forthcoming death supports the status of

Scan this barcode to loan

Fisher Pickup

Remove after: Fri 02 Oct 2015

Not yet on loan to you

Scan barcode above to borrow

Potter, David James

BONUS+ Loans:

> Are for 21 days

> Can be renewed for another 21 days, as long as someone else has not requested it

> Are fined at standard University of Sydney Library rates if lost or overdue

> Can be returned to any University of

> MUST BE RETURNED WITH THIS SLIP

Memory in Nabokov's Ada : a thesis

813.54 NAB Che

10023185359masy

Pickup at: Fisher

future as Time. Van, however points out the error in aligning unconsciousness with death:

> Refuting the determinist's statement more elegantly: unconsciousness, far from awaiting us, with flyback and noose, somewhere ahead, envelops both the Past and the Present from all conceivable sides, being a character not of Time itself but of organic decline natural to all things whether conscious of Time or not (p.419).

This distinction between matter and consciousness lays the foundation for Van's treatment of Time as a characteristic of mind. While matter is subject to deterministic laws, Time cannot be explained by such laws. As a concept, Time is an abstraction formed by consciousness in an attempt to encompass its own experience. That such abstractions can only be made by mind, suggests that time itself is a dimension of consciousness. Furthermore mind images are not interchangeable with the experience on which they are based:

> That I know others die is irrelevant to the case. I also know that you, and probably, I, were born, but that does not <u>prove</u> we went through the chronal phase called the Past: my Present, my brief span of consciousness tells me I did, not the silent thunder of the infinite unconsciousness proper to my birth fifty-two years and 195 days ago (p.419).

The past exists only as an artifice of memory, which is examinable within the perceptual span of the present. Consciousness is itself dependent on memory. The awareness of oneself and one's world only

becomes distinguishable from unconsciousness when the individual is capable of recollection. Van, for example, puts the start of his own retentive consciousness at seven months, so that his existence as a self-aware being is less than, and cannot be equated with, his existence as a physical being. Indeed, the very operations of memory differ from the chronological sequence of physical laws:

> In the same sense of individual, perceptual time, I can put my Past in reverse gear, enjoy this moment of recollection as I did the horn of abundance whose stucco pineapple just missed my head, and postulate that next moment a cosmic or corporeal cataclysm might not kill me but plunge me into a permanent state of stupor, of a type sensationally new to science, thus depriving natural dissolution of any logical or chronal sense (pp.419-20).

Without conscious awareness, natural being and dissolution lose any meaning, since they are known only through subjective levels of perception. These levels are retained as memory-images and may be manipulated by imagination (as in the example quoted above) to construct a hypothetical future, but such a future does not have the status of Time, since it forms no part of experienced existence. It remains no more than a postulation of present consciousness.

In Van's view, all experience, concrete or abstract, is known only through subjective perception, which forms the two

interacting panels of Past and Present within the mind:

> ...this reasoning takes care of the much less interesting (albeit important, important) Universal Time ('we had a thumping time chopping heads') also known as Objective Time (really woven most coarsely of private times), the history, in a word, of humanity and humor, and that Kind of thing (p.420).

Van supports this treatment of Time as the medium of consciousness by reference to Augustine (the first philosopher to consider time in this way) and Henri Bergson (on whose theories of Time Van lectures).[2] "Aurelius Augustinus"[3], as Van calls him, writing in the fifth century, provided an embryonic basis for Bergson's early treatment of time as Duration (a term used by Van throughout the novel). Augustine confessed his inability to define time, but felt it was connected with the operations of consciousness and particularly of memory. "But the gist of the solution he suggests is that <u>time is subjective</u>: time is in the human mind, which expects, considers, and remembers"[4] [my italics]. Subjective time is time as a characteristic of mind. Bergson's concept of Duration expanded upon the actual operations of consciousness. Bergson stated that:

> Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present states from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then on the contrary it would no longer endure. Nor need it forget its former states; it is enough that in recalling these states, it does not set them alongside one another, but forms both the past and present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the notes of a tune, melting so to speak, into one another.[5]

The theory of Augustine and of Bergson forms the background to Van's own attempt to examine perceptual time as a facet of subjective experience:

> My purpose in writing my Texture of Time, a difficult, delectable and blessed work, a work which I am about to place on the dawning desk of the still-absent reader, is to purify my own notion of Time. I wish to examine the essence of Time, not its lapse, for I do not believe that its essence can be reduced to its lapse. I wish to caress Time (p.420).

Perceptual Time is not formed through the direct contact with external 'reality'. As a characteristic of mind, the essence of time can only be felt through the reaction of consciousness to its own operation. Van realises that there is an essential difference between the subjective perception of Space and that of Time:

> One can be a lover of Space and its possibilities: take, for example, the smoothness and sword-swish of speed; the aquiline glory of ruling velocity; the joy cry of the curve; and one can be an amateur of Time, an epicure of duration. I delight sensually in Time, in its stuff and spread, in the fall of its folds, in the very impalpability of its grayish gauze, in the coolness of its continuum. I wish to do something about it; to indulge in a simulacrum of possession (p.420).

Time, for Van, is not an element of spatial activity or matter. As the medium of the mind Time consists of "phantomic phases" (p.433) which allow only a "simulacrum of possession". While the essence of Time is embedded in duration, Time is itself "motionless" (p.422), and cannot be understood in terms of its lapse. Van claims that:

> the Time I am concerned with is only the Time stopped by me and closely attended to by my tense-willed mind. Thus it would be idle and evil to drag in 'passing' time (p.423).

Van draws a distinction between duration as the conscious interpenetration of past and present, and the motionless medium within which this process takes place. At the same time Van's intention to become "an epicure of duration" through an act of attention (the "tense-willed mind") in order to arrive at the essence of Time, underlines the fact that he regards time, like duration, as qualitative. Thus he attempts to define Time by analogy with other forms of qualitative experience:

> 'Maybe the only thing that hints at a sense of Time is rhythm; not the recurrent beats of the rhythm but the gap between black beats: the Tender Interval. The regular throb itself merely brings back the miserable idea of measurement, but in between, something like true Time lurks. How can I extract it from its soft hollow?...A hollow did I say? A dim pit? But that is only Space, the comedy villain, returning by the back door with the pendulum he peddles while I grope for the meaning of Time (p.421).

In attempting to define the texture of Time, Van recognizes the difference between the perception of time and the verbal communication of this experience. Language is twice removed from perception. The subjective perception of experience forms an impression which is retained by memory and manipulated through imagination into an abstract label. This label is not interchangeable with the perception itself. Thus Van's crucial contribution to Augustine's and Bergson's thought is that "Time is a fluid medium for the culture of metaphors" (p.240). As the medium of consciousness, time is a facet of the qualitative processes of the mind which formulate the impressions of subjective experience into language. While the written word is a concrete representation of an object that can be known by one or more of the senses or of a qualitative experience, the process is metaphoric since it invests an abstract term and an experienced perception with shared properties. Thus spatial analogies should refer to

the perception of space, and are inadequate when used to express the essence of time. On this basis Van attacks the popular and the scientific treatments of Time. He believes that the popular fallacy arises from

> ...an immemorial habit of speech. We regard Time as a kind of stream...running invariably through our chronological landscapes. We are so used to liquefying every lap of life, that we end up being unable to speak of Time without speaking of physical motion (p.423).

Van sees the confusion of quantitative and qualitative experience as stemming from familiar physical phenomena, such as the body's innate awareness of its functioning, or the movement of the hands of a clock. This is not a deliberate misconstruction but an ingrained habit of imprecise thinking.

The scientific treatment of Time presupposes as established fact an objective world, with which language forms a direct (rather than a metaphoric) correlation. One of its major concerns is to obliterate the intrusion of perceiving consciousness in the descriptions of this world.[6] For Van, the scientific fallacy is typified by "the space-time of relativist literature" (p.424). Relativists add time to the three traditional dimensions of space. In his A.B.C. of Relativity Russell argues that detracters of relativity "... imagine that the new theory proves everything in the physical

world to be relative, whereas, on the contrary, it is wholly concerned to exclude what is relative and arrive at a statement of physical law that shall in no way depend on the observer".[7] The relativist concern is with events. Experience is reduced to the action of matter, and time becomes a quantity, the fourth dimension of space that is used in measuring events. Van argues that there is no such thing as objective measurement of either Time or Space:

> Movement of matter merely spans an extension of some other palpable matter, against which it is measured, but tells us nothing about the actual structure of unpalpable Time. Similarly, a graduated tape, even of infinite length, is not Space itself... (p.424).

Thus Van maintains that the physical laws of relativity are based on "the flaw inherent in mathematics which parades as truth" (p.426). Any "knowledge" results from subjective perception. Formulations in language or in numerical symbol can therefore never purport to be objective truth. They are no more than the communicated images of consciousness. Because of this, Van dismisses as "fishy formula" (p.426) the law of velocity and pokes fun at the inference that a glactonaut and his domestic animals would return home younger from a tour of space, "juvenilified by romp suits,..." (p.426). By increasing or decreasing the movement of "travelling clocks" (p.426), one in no way alters perceptual time which is dependent on

individual consciousness. Similarly, the relativist's denial of simultaneity does not take into account the operations of consciousness. Van points out that "Perceived events can be regarded as simultaneous when they belong to the same span of attention; in the same way (insidious simile, unremovable obstacle!) as one can visually possess a unit of space - say, a vermillion ring with a frontal view of a toy car within its white kernel, forbidding the lane into which, however I turned with a furious coup de volant." (p.426). Van's entire trip to Mont Roux is a simultaneous combination of manual, visual and intellectual responses to perception.

Denis Fowler criticizes this dismissal of relativity in Ada as a flaw in Nabokov's writing:

> Unfortunately for Nabokov, he can no more dismiss the theory of relativity by calling Einstein 'Engelwein' than the Inquisition could preserve the Ptolemaic Universe by the burning of Bruno: the interchange between matter and energy that takes place as a body's speed approaches that of light is no more subject to an amateur's insults than is the thump of Newton's apple; it is a fact provable any and everyday in hundreds of laboratories and their cyclotrons, and no one, no matter how purely he wants to perceive time, can "sweep away' relativity. It is not a 'fishy formula'; it is illogical but true.[7]

Fowler is here confusing the views of a character with that of his author. Part IV of Ada is Van's personal perception of "reality" and an integral part of his characterization within the novel. Fowler also fails to place the dismissal of

relativity in the context of the whole section, in which Van's views are modified to encompass his physical existence. Fowler goes on to say that "Nabokov's gesture...is useful to the reader. It shows how powerfully Nabokov desires to dismiss from his world everything that is esthetically inadmissable."[9] But this is the tendency of Van's personality throughout the first half of his life, not of Nabokov's. Even here Van is not denying the possibility of objective reality. He simply stresses that human knowledge is embedded in subjective levels of consciousness. Van's perceptual time is the medium of these processes.

In the second part of his discussion, Van examines time in relation to the operations of consciousness and of memory in particular. "Augustine's bishopric" (p.426) provides a starting point. Augustine outlined three times: "a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future. The present of things past is memory; the present of things present is sight; and the present of things future is expectation."[10] This is Bergson's and Van's concept of duration, a composite of memory and imagination (Augustine's 'expectation') within the brief span of present awareness. Van begins by examining the Past which is retained only as an artifice within the memory:

> The Past is changeless, intangible, and 'never-to-be-revisited'—terms that do not fit this or that section of space which I see,.. (p.427).

While one may rehandle an object, or re-enact an identical activity, the knowledge of so doing forms part of present perception, not part of the "never-to-be-revisited" original perception. Subsequent perception is shaped by the Past which is memory. Thus Van's Perceptual Time is continually influenced by a constant process of individual metamorphosis: the "accumulation of sensa" (p.427) which is the Past. As an artifice of memory within dynamic consciousness, the Past can never be reduplicated. A common mistake is to "build models of the past and then use them spatiologically to reify and measure time" (p.427). Van cites the example of an old town, Zembre, which was gradually being lost among new buildings. In an attempt at preservation, an exact replica of the old Zembre was reconstructed across the Minder river directly opposite the modern town. However, precisely because time is not simply the fourth quantity of any point in space, but the medium of consciousness, the 'modern' material model of the old Zembre can never correspond with the past which is a mental artifice, and dependent on individual memory:

> In other words...by making a model of the old town in one's mind (and on the Minder) all we do is spatialize it (or actually drag it out of its own element onto the shore of Space. Thus the term 'one century' does <u>not</u> correspond in any sense to the hundred feet of steel bridge between modern and model towns, and <u>that</u> is what we wished to prove and have now proven. (pp.427-8).

The Past is a "constant accumulation of images" (p.428) which can be selected at random. It "ceases to mean the orderly alternation of linked events that it does in the large theoretical sense" for memory does not follow a chronological sequence. Its images can be added to, manipulated, or forgotten. These images reveal nothing of the texture of Time into which they are woven unless, as Van points out, it could be established that the colouration of recollected objects could be used to differentiate between the stages or the dates at which the images were formed. Any attempt to establish such proof is hampered, however, by the associational function of memory and by the emotional factors influencing the selection and strength of the memory:

> The main difficulty I hasten to explain, consists in the experimenter not being able to use the same object at different times (say the Dutch stove with its little blue sailing boats in the nursery of Ardis Manor in 1884 and 1888) because of the two or more impressions borrowing from one another and forming a compound image in the mind; but if different objects are to be chosen (say the faces of two memorable coachmen: Ben Wright, 1884, and Trofem Farhukov, 1888), it is impossible, insofar as my own research goes, to avoid the intrusion not only of different characteristics but of different emotional circumstances, that do not allow the objects to be considered essentially equal before, so to speak, their being exposed to the Action of Time (pp.428-9).

For example, Van's memories of Ada form a greater part of his consciousness than do his memories of Lucette, or of the years

of separation from Ada. This is because of the greater emotional intensity of his contacts with Ada. Perception is thus shaped by association and by emotion which are adjuncts of memory.

Perception and memory are interdependent but not identical. This is seen by comparing the present with the immediate past. Perception within a span of present awareness combines succession and simultaneity. Van gives the example of memory recording a sound image, the strokes of a clock, while he was simultaneously occupied in driving so as to avoid hitting school children. The link of succession is strong in the immediate replaying of this sound image, but the "time span" of the memory-image is not identical with that of the original perception. Memory condenses the perception. The reviewing of the clock strokes takes less physical time than in the actual sequence:

> ...it is this mysterious 'less' which is a special characteristic of the still fresh Past into which the Present slipped during that instant inspection of shadow sounds. The 'less' indicates that the Past is in no need of clocks and the succession of its events is not clocktime, but something more in keeping with the authentic rhythm of Time (p.430).

By comparing perceptual time with past time as it forms part of memory Van fashions a second analogy for the essence of Time. Previously Van had described time in terms of

rhythm as "the gray gap between black beats: the Tender Interval" (p.421). Van now combines this impression of Time with his view of memory. As perceptual Time becomes past time its texture is partially obliterated by a selected accumulation of images. Selection is a process of forgetting by means of which memory discards the greater bulk of perception. Thus the images of memory can be seen to form the beats that embar past time. In terms of memory, Van's "Tender Interval" is the gray gauze between recollected events. Van believes that this is illustrated by the recollection of a series of related events made memorable by their emotional reverberations. He gives a personal example of three lectures he delivered on Bergson's Time which were made vivid by the lecturer's misadventures. For his first lecture on Past Time he was late. For his second on the Present his request for five seconds silence was punctuated by the snores of an audience member. At his last lecture, "the Future ('Sham Time')" (p.430), his secreted tape recorder, the device for delivering his lectures, broke down, whereupon he simulated a heart attack and was carried out. While the three lectures were separated by five day intervals, they alone are retained in Van's memory. Although the Past is intangible, Van argues that these unremembered dim intervals between the memory images have the 'feel' of time's texture:

> Because of its situation among dead things, that dim continuum cannot be as sensually groped for, tasted, harkened to, as Veen's Hollow between rhythmic beats; but it shares with it one remarkable indicium: the immobility of perceptual Time (p.431).

The essence of Time, "Pure Time, Perceptual Time, Tangible Time" (p.422), is to be found in the present. Because the individual is in a constant state of "trivial metamorphosis" (p.431), at the very moment of perception the present is becoming the Past. Something of the texture of time can be felt in the deliberate application of the tense-willed mind to the melting of the present into the past:

> This act of attention is what I called last year the 'Deliberate Present' to distinguish it from its more general form termed (by Clay in 1882) the 'Spacious Present'. <u>The conscious construction of one, and the familiar current of the other give us three or four seconds of what can be felt as nowness. This nowness is the only reality we know</u> it follows the colored nothingness of the no-longer and precedes the absolute nothingness of the future. Thus, in a quite literal sense, we may say that conscious human life lasts only one moment, for at any moment of deliberate attention to our own flow of consciousness we cannot know if that moment will be followed by another. (pp.431-32) [my italics].

These moments of "conscious human life", which Van sees as "the only reality we know", are a composite of Past and Present awareness:

> Our modest Present is, then, the time span that we are directly and actually aware of, with the lingering freshness of the Past still perceived as part of the newness (p.432).

Van's "nowness" is synonymous with Bergson's duration. Conscious awareness is dependent on recollection. The "true Present, which is an instant of zero duration" (p.432), can never actually be enjoyed. "Reality" is, therefore, made up of perceptual time and memory:

> Since the Present is but an imaginary point without an awareness of the immediate past, it is necessary to define this awareness. Not for the first time will Space intrude if I say that what we are aware of as 'present' is the constant building up of the Past, its smoothly and relentlessly rising level. How meager! How magic! (p.432).

Perceptual time and memory are the interdependent facets of conscious existence. But consciousness is itself embedded in matter. The apparent paradox of man's existence is that he is both a sentient being and a physical organism. In pin pointing subjective levels as the only means of knowing 'reality', Van has shown 'objective' facts to be no more than individual perception. In establishing Perceptual Time as the medium of consciousness, Van has also revealed man's ability to transcend deterministic, chronological patterns. But in doing so, Van has separated conscious being from physical being, paralleling in his

"philosophical prose" (p.443) the tendency of his first fifty years of life to transform ugly physical facts into artifice, and to see his personal being and his love for Ada in terms of purely imaginative existence. The 1922 reunion brings some modifications to Van's theorizing and is a climax of the novel. While duration remains the "only reality we know", Van comes to admit that levels of consciousness form memory-images of both imaginative and physical being. Perceptual time is a characteristic of consciousness; chronological time is a characteristic of matter. Thus clock-time or scientific time may form valid metaphors for man's physical existence.

Throughout the first half of his discussion Van referred to "Space, the Imposter" (p.423). As he drives into Mont Roux after an absence of seventeen years (the period of his separation from Ada), Van once more faces "two rocky ruin-crowned hills" (p.433) that he vividly remembered. The remembered image is not, however, an exact representation of the present perception, because memory "likes the <u>otsebyatina</u> ('what one contributes oneself')" (p.433). The discrepancy between the image and the present perception is now corrected "and the act of artistic correction enhances the pang of the Present" (p.433). The discrepancy is additional proof of the dynamic, accumulative nature of duration. At the same time the actual perception arises out of conscious contact with space. On this level,

Perceptual Time and Space meet. Van writes that:

> The sharpest feeling of nowness, in visual terms, is the deliberate possession of a segment of Space collected by the eye. This is Time's only contact with Space, but it has a far-reaching reverberation. To be eternal the Present must depend on a conscious spanning of an infinite expansure. Then and only then is the Present equatable with Timeless Space. I have been wounded in my duel with the Imposter (p.433).

The Imposter, Space, is not an element of Perceptual Time. But the perception itself is dependent on Space. In the larger context of total existence, man is on one level a physical being. While imagination is capable of transcending the chronological sequence of spatial existence, consciousness is itself embodied within physical being. The two are not interchangeable. They are interdependent. Van only comes to reconcile this duality after the reunion with Ada.

Van spends the night preceding the meeting at his Villa in Sorciere, and continues to work on his Texture of Time:

> The utilitarian impulse behind this task was to keep him from brooding on the ordeal of happiness awaiting him 150 kilometers west (p.434).

This "happiness" is envisaged because of Van's postulation of a hypothetical future based on his memories of Ada. As in the Past, Van does not take into account his own or Ada's physical being which has not remained unaltered over the seventeen years

of separation. Once Van reaches the Three Swans, the scene of the 1905 reunion, he is constantly made aware of physical changes. Lucien the hall porter does not recognize Van at first and then remarks "that Monsieur was certainly not 'deperishing'" (p.434). A new manager is in charge of the hotel. Extensive renovations have been made. A small modern elevator now replaces the "luxurious affair of yore - an ascentive hall of mirrors - whose famous operator (white whiskers, eight languages) had become a button" (p.435). In Van's old room only a bureau and the view from the balcony remain the same. Even the latter differs from that "dismal day in October, 1905, after parting with Ada" (p.436). Yet despite these reminders of physical change, Van expects his meeting with Ada to be an exact reduplication of the past.

Van and Adas' initial contact takes the form of a telephone call. In adult life Van has never previously spoken to Ada by telephone and the sound of her voice across the wires preserves for him the essence of his vocal cords, the timbre of their past:

> That telephone voice, by resurrecting the past and linking it up with the present,...formed the centerpiece in his deepest perception of tangible time, the glittering 'now' that was the only reality of Time's texture (p.437).

But Van's imagined "ordeal of happiness" has neglected the fact that man is both a sentient and an organic entity so that

"After the glory of the summit there came the difficult descent" (p.437). His reaction to the physical reality of an Ada who had "changed in contour as well as color" (p.437), who makes lavish use of cosmetics and dyes her hair, and who uses hip-padding to disguise her "now buxom pelvis", is one of rejection. His senses remain unstirred, he talks trivialities. Previously constraint "used to be soon drowned in sexual desire, leaving life to pick up by and by. Now they were on their own" (p.438).

An incident at dinner shows that Van and Ada still share the same intellectual rapport and sense of humour. When an adjacent diner mistakes "annas" (pineapple juice) for bananas, the reaction from Van and Ada is simultaneous:

> Young Van smiled back at young Ada. Oddly, that little exchange at the next table acted as a kind of delicious release (p.438).

Yet this is not enough for Van to overcome immediately his reaction to Ada's physical appearance. Ironically, he has indulged in a type of imaginative determinism by creating a sham future which he has separated from organic sequence and decline. In rejecting Ada, Van retains the split between his imaginative and physical being. Alone in his room he recognizes the poignancy of the situation:

> Had they lived together those seventeen wretched years they would have been spared the shock and the humiliation, their aging would have been a gradual adjustment, as imperceptible as Time itself (p.439).

Van has continually claimed that the future has no status as time because it forms no part of human experience. However, the denial of future as time applied to all levels of being and the very unexpectedness of Ada's physical 'reality' reinforces this. While memory may transcend the deterministic sequence of physical laws, consciousness is embodied in a physical organism and the imaginative manipulation of memory can not transcend the process of organic decline. Van sees that the "outrage of age" (p.439) has little to do with personal identity which is the conscious awareness at one's self and one's world. Physical being is only the outward embodiment of personal identity which is made up of moments of duration, the interplay of perceptual time and memory. This is recognised with the mutual acceptance by Van and Ada of their continuing need for and delight in one another. During the latter part of their life together Van's memoirs are an attempt to capture the "tang" of his individual identity by recording moments of his personal duration. However that the memory-images of duration are now recognized to include both physical and imaginative existence is shown in Van's final recapitulation of his thoughts on Time:

> Physiologically the sense of Time is a sense of continuous becoming, and if 'becoming' has a voice, the latter might be, not unnaturally, a steady vibration, but for Log's sake, let us not confuse Time with Tinnitus, and the seashell hum of duration with the throb of our blood. Philosophically, on the other hand, Time is but memory in the making. In every individual life there goes on from cradle to deathbed the gradual shaping of that backbone of consciousness, which is the Time of the strong. 'To be' means to know one 'has been'. 'Not to be' implies the only 'new' kind of (sham) time; the future I dismiss it. Life, love, libraries, have no future (p.440).

Physiologically, time follows a sequence of organic growth and decline. It may be felt in the actual functioning of the body in the movement from "cradle to deathbed". As an attribute of matter it may be described as "brain ripple, breathing, the drum in my temple" (p.421) which were the analogies previously rejected by Van. Now Van admits that memory-images provide the metaphors for the two forms of time that make up man's total existence: time as a characteristic of the body, and time as a characteristic of the mind.

Philosophically, time, as the medium of consciousness, is "but memory in the making". Within memory, perceptual time is retained as the gray gaps or unrecollected hollows between memory-images. The "true present" can never be felt as it is "an instant of zero duration" (p.432), and present perception

is itself shaped by memory. Thus duration or conscious awareness is best described as the interpenetration of perceptual time and memory, which in Van's final formulation includes both physiological and psychological time: "'To be' means to know one 'has been'" (p.440). Memory "is the backbone of consciousness" encompassing in its images the total existence of individual being. Unlike so many of Nabokov's characters who are destroyed by their attempt to live on a purely imaginative level of being (Albinus, Humbert Humbert, Krug, Kinbote) Van achieves a balance between physical and imaginative existence.

In summation, Van's arguments support his belief in the potential of dynamic consciousness to transcend the chronological sequences of physical being and thus to overcome "the ardis of time" (p.146). In this sense he has separated Time from Space with which it is popularly equated. After his reacceptance of Ada he says to her

> All that matters just now is that I have given new life to Time by cutting off Siamese Space and the false future (p.443).

Van's dismissal of the future supports his contention that man's awareness of his total existence (physiological and philosophical) is a personal subjective apprehension. It is dependent on the individual consciousness which records, examines and reshapes its own experience as an artifice based on the interpenetration of time and memory. Duration is "the only reality we know", and this personal view of "reality" which Van formulates at fifty-two provides the philosophical basis on which, at ninety, he constructs his memoirs.

CHAPTER I: NOTES

1. Nabokov, V., Ada, p.431.

2. Van refers to other philosophers who have regarded time as subjective as, for example, Minkowski (p.425), and S. Alexander (p.425). Augustine and Bergson are, however, the only two he refers to in any detail throughout Part IV of the novel.

3. "Aurelius Augustinus" (p.421) is a pun on the meaning of Aurelius as the young or pupa of a butterfly. Thus Augustine provides the embryonic basis for Bergson's thought.

4. Russell, B. History of Western Philosophy (quoting from Augustine's Confessions Bk XI, Chap.XXVIII) p.353.

5. Bergson, H., Time and Free Will, p.100.

6. Van is attacking the scientific thought of the turn of the century typified by philosophers such as Bertrand Russell. Scientists such as Sir Bernard Lovel have since admitted the importance of consciousness.

7. Russell, B., The A.B.C. of Relativity, p.16.

8. Fowler, D., Reading Nabokov, p.200.

9. ibid., p.200.

10. Russell, B., History of Western Philosophy (quoting Augustine's Confessions, Bk.XI, Chap.XX), p.352.

CHAPTER II

MEMORY AND THE FICTIONAL WORLD OF *ADA*

The philosophical framework of *Ada* determines the total cosmology of the novel. The apparent split between objective and subjective 'reality' which arises out of the dual nature of man as a physical and a sentient being is presented throughout *Ada* as the opposition of the two worlds of Terra and Antiterra. In Part V of the novel, which constitutes the prologue to the conception and writing of his memoirs, Van reconciles the apparent duality by recognizing that both physical and imaginative experience form the materials for memory. This reconciliation follows from his acceptance, in Part IV of the novel, that both physiological and philosophical time are memory-images which represent man's physical and conscious existence. It will be argued that the geographical worlds of Terra and Antiterra which make up the total cosmology of the novel are metaphors for the materials which provide the total world of memory-images.

While Terra and Antiterra are both presented within the novel as subjective levels, some initial simplifications will make the distinctions between the two realms clearer. Terra is the "objective" view of the world, Antiterra is the imaginative or "subjective" view. In philosophy, the division between body and mind developed into the opposition of materialism and idealism. On the one hand, Galileo and his successors denied the reality of anything that was not measurable, that is of subjective quality and its associated values which are embodied in culture or civilization. At the other extreme, philosophers of the Berkeley School denied the existence of matter and regarded mind as the only area of reality. Terra and Antiterra are reflections of these two opposing attitudes.

Terra is the world of "objective" fact, the world of quantity and activity rather than quality. It is the rational world of historical and geographical fact, of chronological and spatial measurement, and of physical growth and decline.

Antiterra is the "subjective" world, the qualitative, irrational world of imagination, which negates time in the chronological sense[1] and measurement in the geographical and historical sense. It veers towards solipsism (Van's "Desdemonia") in its tendency to deny any reality outside the individual consciousness.

In the later half of the nineteenth century, which forms

the setting for the first half of Ada, the intellectual revolutions of the period channelled the objective-subjective opposition into two major movements; rationalism (as exampled by Darwen and Marx) and romanticism[2] (as exampled by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and poets such as Byron). Against this background Van starts with the crucial insight that both objective and subjective reality, Terra and Antiterra, are states of mind, subjective perceptions of the world which are conceptualized through the manipulation of memory-images. In Part I of the novel Ada accuses Van of believing in Terra:

> [Ada] 'Spies from Terra? You believe in the existence of Terra? Oh you do! You accept it. I know you! '
>
> [Van] 'I accept it as a state of mind. That's not quite the same thing ' (p.209).

However, the young Van is of the romantic school and he verges on solipsism in his personal rejection of Terra. His literary associations are continually with romantic sources, with Flaubert, Tolstoy, Chateaubriand and, as Bader points out, "particularly with Byron, whose physical prowess is reflected in Van's Mascodagma stunt and byronka or 'open shirt', and whose sexual fantasies are literalized in Van's amours".[3] While Van continually depicts Terra as a state of mind, his rejection of it as an inferior "reality" is reflected by his attempts to discredit objective referents such as historical, geographical and social facts, in the descriptions of his personal world,

Antiterra. Thus, throughout the first fifty years of his life, Van retains an objective-subjective split within his levels of consciousness. This is seen in the first Terra-Antiterra description, with its parodic rejection of Terra. In setting Terra, "the L disaster...which had the singular effect of both causing and cursing the notion of 'Terra'" (p.20), alongside Antiterra, the "great anti-L years of reactionary delusion" (p.20), Van implies the inferiority of the former:

> For, indeed, none can deny the presence of something highly ludicrous in the very configurations that were purported to represent a varicolored map of Terra. Ved' ('it is, isn't it') sidesplitting to imagine that 'Russia' instead of being a quaint synonym of Estoy, the American province extending from the Arctic no longer vicious Circle to the United States proper, was on Terra the name of a country, transferred as if by some sleight of <u>land</u> across the ha-ha of a doubled ocean to the opposite hemisphere where it sprawled over all of today's Tartary, from Kurland to Kuriles! But (even more absurdly), if, in Terrestrial spatial terms, the Amerussia of Abraham Milton was split into its components, with tangible water and ice separating the political, rather than poetical, notions of 'America' and 'Russia', a more complicated and even more preposterous discrepancy arose in regard to time—not only because the history of each part of the amalgam did not quite match the history of each counterpart in its discrete condition, but because a gap of up to a hundred years one way or another existed between the two earths; a gap marked by a bizarre confusion of directional signs at the cross roads of passing time with not <u>all</u> the no-longers of one world corresponding to the not-yets of the other (pp.20-21).

Parody is a way of writing that incorporates a well known manner or style while at the same time demonstrating its freedom from that style. Van transfers this technique to the description of Terra and Antiterra in order to substantiate his personal belief in the inferiority of Terra. The difference between the two is seen as the separation between "political, rather than poetical, notions of 'America' and 'Russia'". This political-poetical distinction suggests that both are states of mind. Van points out the limitations of the former 'political' view when it attempts to portray historical fact. Subjective impressions vary with individuals and the placing of those individuals so that, for Van, any historical survey is simply a personal interpretation. The same set of supposed facts might produce a very different pattern in the mind of a Russian historian from that in the mind of an American historian with the result that "the history of each part of the amalgam did not quite match the history of each counterpart in its discrete condition". Furthermore, even if one part is taken, schools of thought cause divisions when examining "objective" facts or discoveries, "with not <u>all</u> the no-longers of one world corresponding to the not yets of the other."

In terms of the romanticist-rationalist opposition, the believers in Antiterran, 'poetical' existence "rejected Terra as a fad or fantom" (p.21), while those who believed in Terra, Van's "deranged minds", accepted the 'political' world of facts "in support and token of their own irrationality" (p.21). Philosophers were similarly divided in their attitudes to subjectivity. The materialists rejected Van's claim that concrete and imaginative 'reality' are both states of mind:

> There were those who maintained that the discrepancies and 'false overlappings" between the two worlds were too numerous, and too deeply woven into the skein of successive events, not to taint with trite fancy the theory of essential sameness; (p.21).

Thus materialists dismissed as 'trite fancy' or illusion the "theory of essential sameness" which viewed the two worlds of Terra and Antiterra as levels of conscious awareness. For them, the imaginative levels of the mind were irrational and had no bearing on the fixed chronological succession of 'objective' existen e. The "discrepancies" and what they saw as the "false overlappings" between the two spheres were taken to substantiate their claims that materialism was the only true 'reality'.

On the other hand the idealists, with whom the young Van aligns his personal attitude, saw the discrepancies between

the two worlds as proof that imaginative existence constitutes reality:

> ...and there were those who retorted that the dissimilarities only confirmed the live organic reality pertaining to the other world; that a perfect likeness would rather suggest a specular, and hence speculatory, phenomenon; and that two chess games with identical openings and identical end moves might ramify in an infinite number of variations, on one board and in two brains, at any middle stage of their irrevocably converging development (p.21).

Idealists believed that the discrepancies between all individual perceptions of the external world "only confirmed the live organic reality pertaining to the other world" of the mind, and they argued that exact reduplications of material objects or events within the mind would simply suggest a reflected, and therefore illusory, phenomenon. The chess board analogy pointed out that, even if two people were to follow the same physical course in life, the same events "might ramify in an infinite number of variations" within their two brains. Idealists, therefore, claimed that reality was to be located in the pictures and processes of the mind itself.

The chess board analogy is ironically relevant to the course of Van's and Ada's lives. As siblings they are the physical remnants of a converging family line, and they come together in an unproductive physical union. At the same time their distinctive individualities are expressed through their personal states of mind which, although different, form their

enduring means of contact with one another. While the young Van and Ada regard their lives as an Antiterran existence, their union represents a physical as well as an imaginative interaction. Similarly, on the intellectual level Van as the "abstract scholar" (p.61) and Ada as the "naturalist" (p.61) follow a converging course of activity which reaches a synthesis when Van's Philosophy and Ada's Science are seen as levels of consciousness, and in that sense essentially the same. One does not negate the other, rather they interact. This ultimate synthesis which arises from seeing that objective and subjective 'reality' are both subjective levels of memory, is still only a theory, rather than a belief, during the first fifty years of Van's life, however. This is underlined in an exchange on Ada's twelfth birthday which is commented on from the "nonagenarian" (p.451) standpoint from which the book is written. Ada is described as wearing a 'lolita' on her birthday,

> ...a rather long, but very airy and ample black skirt, with red poppies or peonies, 'deficient in botanical reality', as she grandly expressed it, not yet knowing that reality and natural science are synonymous in the terms of this, and only this, dream. (Nor did you, wise Van. Her note.) (p.65).

At ninety Van sees 'reality' as a personal dream made up of memory-images which encompass both physical and imaginative, scientific and abstract impressions. The young Van, however, retains an objective-subjective split within the levels of his mind. Nevertheless, he sees the Terran intellectual revelations of the eighteen-sixties as resulting in the disorganization of consciousness:

> Revelation can be more perilous than Revolution. Sick minds identified the notion of a Terra planet with that of another world and this "Other World" got confused not only with the "Next World" but with the Real World in us and beyond us (p.23).

For Van, the Real World can only be the world of conscious awareness. By disregarding the interplay of mind and imagination in formulating their view, materialists create "another world", an objective Terra independent of human consciousness. On this basis they envisage a materialistic future of "Terra the Fair" (p.22), some transferring this concept to social progress and reform, some patterning their belief in an afterlife on such a vision. Aqua, who in her student days had participated "in some Social Improvement project"(p.24), provides Van's specific example:

> Poor Aqua, whose fancies were apt to fall for all the fangles of cranks and Christians, envisaged vividly a minor hymnist's paradise, a future America of alabaster buildings one hundred stories high, resembling a beautiful furniture store crammed with tall white-washed wardrobes and shorter fridges; (p.23).

Aqua's personal vision also suggests the Christian interpretation of Terra which extended to a reduplication of the objective world in after-life, and in such ways attempted to accomodate the scientific 'revelations' of the nineteenth century within their religious beliefs. This heavenly "Terra the Fair" is for Van simply a further denial of conscious experience. The young Van's personal, romantic belief in imaginative existence is contrasted with the Terran forms as he sees them:

> Our enchanters, our demons, are noble iridescent creatures with translucent talons and mightily beating wings; but in the eighteen-sixties the New Believers urged one to imagine a sphere where our splendid friends had been utterly degraded, had become nothing but vicious monsters, disgusting devils, with the black scrota of carnivora and the fangs of serpents, revilers and tormenters of female souls; while on the opposite side of the cosmic lane a rainbow mist of angelic spirits, inhabitants of sweet Terra, restored all the stalest but still potent myths of old creeds, with rearrangement for melodeon of all the cacophonies of all the divinities and divines ever spawned in the marshes of this our sufficient world.
>
> Sufficient for your purpose, Van, entendons-nous. (Note in the margin.) (p.23).

The "New Believers" can be seen as the Evolutionists who explain all life forms in terms of successive physical development from matter, thus denying the potential of imagination to negate succession. The old believers or "not yets" fall back on religious myths and creeds which Van rejects as "merely the

dust and mirages of the communal mind" (p.75). For him, this is a denial of present imaginative experience because it represents an unthinking acceptance of patterns formulated in the "never-to-be revisited" past. These patterns were a valid embodiment of values or qualitative existence within previous generations and civilizations. But, as suggested in the Minder River duplication of the township Zembre (discussed in Chapter I), human life is a dynamic, ongoing process and one century does not correspond to the next. Attempts to preserve unity of cultural patterns are, therefore, a denial of present accumulative, imaginative existence which must seek its own embodiments of qualitative experience or value. Van, of course, is equally mistaken in attempting to find a temporal embodiment of qualitative experience in purely imaginative existence, Antiterra. By his denial of Terran levels within his personality Van retains an objective-subjective split within consciousness itself. The plot of Ada is the pitting of thesis (Terra) against antithesis (Antiterra) and the growth to synthesis culminating in Van's recognition of their interdependence as the materials of memory.

Critics tend to miss the significance of the Terra-Antiterra interplay within the novel. Lokrantz says that "The artisitic recreating of existing worlds and creation of imaginary worlds blend more and more and by Ada become a whole new world".[4] She fails to identify this process as the juxtaposition of Terra and Antiterra which, as levels of perception based on physical and imaginative existence, form the composite world of memory. The "whole new world" Lokrantz describes is the total fictional world of Ada which forms a metaphor for memory.

Fowler is utterly defeated by what he terms the "ever-ever land" of Ada. "The science fiction aspect of the world-as-Antiterra is sustained only insofar as it will lend itself to Nabokov's fantasizing: it bears approximately the same resemblance to our world that a donnishly annotated Jules Verne novel does".[5] For him, neither Ada nor Antiterra provide any relevant commentary on the real world in the way that (he believes) the artificial worlds of Nabokov's previous novels do. Incredibly Fowler sees Van's parodies of Terra as Nabokov's "revenge on public history, common and communal fact. At long last, Nabokov has been able to set things right. Antiterra is, after all, his world, and it is an improved version of ours".[6] Fowler tends to criticize the whole world of the novel in terms of Antiterra. He writes that "The world of Antiterra...is nothing less than a complete heart's desire construction. It is,

simply, the happily-ever-after portion of Nabokov's life long attempt to create out of his art a fairytale, and the only villain that survives in it is time itself."[7] But in the novel Antiterra as a solipsistic imaginative existence negates time. Terra is the time based world. Both share an "essential sameness" when seen as levels of consciousness, both are the interdependent materials of memory. Antiterra, as an attempt to concentrate on imaginative 'reality' discredits and deliberately confuses objective' points of reference. As Nabokov himself says "Antiterra happens to be an anachronistic world in regard to Terra—that's all there is to it".[8]

Bader suggests the interdependence of the two worlds with her statement that "Terra and Antiterra are distorted reflections of each other and of the real world".[9] Bader recognizes that for Nabokov "'Reality' only exists in our perceptions and self realizations"[10] but she fails to see that Terra and Antiterra are presented in the novel as subjective levels of consciousness which together make up the 'real world' of memory and which represent man's total individual existence. Thus she sees the apposition of Terra and Antiterra as a division rather than an interaction. She writes that "Most of <u>Ada</u> takes place on Anti-Terra, an imaginary time-space, while Terra is described as either

philosophical hypothesis or an insane projection....The novel's cosmology and geography lay with various 'realized' ideas about the imagination, though we are ultimately reminded that we have been reading a fictional work which dissolves into the world of Terra."[11] But Terran 'reality', while it may be parodied by Van, constantly intrudes throughout the book. This is the basis of the plot which will be examined more fully in Chapter III of this essay. Here it is sufficient to show that there is a recognition of Terran reality throughout the novel, and that Van gradually comes to accept Terra as a personal subjective level. This becomes evident by juxtaposing an extract from Part I with what Bader sees as a final dissolution into Terra in Part V. During the 1884 summer at Ardis Van sleeps under the stars:

> In this our dry report on Van Veen's early, too early love, for Ada Veen, there is neither reason, nor room for metaphysical digression. Yet, let it be observed (just while the lucifers fly and throb, and an owl hoots—also most rhythmically—in the nearby park) that Van, who at the time had still not tasted the Terror of Terra—vaguely attributing it, when analyzing his dear unforgettable Aqua's torments, to pernicious fads and popular fantasies—even then, at fourteen, recognized that the old myths, which willed into helpful being a whirl of worlds (no matter how silly and mystical) and situated them within the gray matter of the star-suffused heavens, contained, perhaps, a glowworm of strange truth. His nights in the hammock...were now haunted not so much by the agony of his desire for Ada, as by that meaningless space overhead, underhead, everywhere, the demon counterpart of divine time, tingling about him and through him, as it was to retingle—with a little more meaning fortunately—in the last night's of a life, which I do not regret, my love (p.62, my italics).

While young Van attempts to see himself on a purely Antiterran level, Terran 'reality' is constantly described and recognized —at least within other people. Terra continually intrudes in Van's descriptions of his own life for, as Fowler plaintively notes, "...Antiterran 'facts' are casually rearranged or ignored when inconvenient, airplanes and telephones are there when needed".[12] Parts II to IV of the novel show the gradual impingement of Terra on Van's consciousness with the deaths of Marina, Lucette and Demon, and Van's initial rejection of the physically changed Ada. In Part V of the novel this culminates in the direct admittance of Terra within Van's personal consciousness:

> Our world <u>was</u>, in fact, mid-twentieth century. Terra convalesced after enduring the rack and stake, the bullies and beasts that Germany inevitably generates when fulfilling her dreams of glory. Russian peasants and poets had not been transported to Estotiland,[13] and the Barren Grounds, ages ago—they were dying at this very moment, in the slave camps of Tartary. Even the governor of France was not Charlie Chose, the suave nephew of Lord Goal[14]; but a bad-tempered French French general. (p.456).

This is not a recognition of an objective world as distinct from a subjective one. Nor is it, as Bader argues, simply a reminder of the novel as a fiction. It is rather Van's

admittance of Terra as a subjective level within his own consciousness. This is confirmed by Van and Ada's objection to the 'historical facts' (fully outlined p.454) of the Victor Vitry film version of Van's Letters from Terra:

> They found the historical background absurdly far fetched and considered starting legal proceedings against Vitry—not for having stolen the L.F.T. idea, but for having distorted Terrestrial politics as obtained by Van with such diligence and skill from extra-sensorial sources and manic dreams (pp.454-5).

What they are objecting to is not a distortion of "objective facts" but to the distortion of Van's subjective perceptions of Terra, Van's "state of mind" which is the only "reality" his Letters from Terra embody.

In Part V, Van does not reject Antiterra. For the first time we have his fully stated awareness of the interdependence of Terran and Antiterran patterns of memory in his conscious contacts with Ada. It is in Part V that Van realizes that qualitative values are dependent on temporal activity, and have always been so. This is indicated in Van's description of the last years of his life with Ada which are made up of both physical and imaginative experience - as they have always been:

> Their life together responded antiphonally to their first summer in 1884. She never refused to help him achieve the more and more precious, because less and less frequent gratification of a fully shared sunset. He saw reflected in her everything that his fierce spirit sought in life (p.449).

"Veen's Time" (p.453) is now extended to include not only "Bergson's Duration" (p.453) but also "Whitehead's Bright Fringe" (p.453), for Van's juxtaposition of Terra and Antiterra parallels Whitehead's treatment of "reality". Whitehead, like Van, refuted the objective-subjective split by focusing on conscious process and "pointing out that in the elementary case of a man looking at a rose, there are not two spheres - the mind of man (or subjective sphere) and the primary qualities of the rose (objective sphere) - but a unity: namely the man-seeing-a-rose".[15] In Science and Philosophy Whitehead labels the two apparently opposing spheres the World and Activity and the World of Value. These worlds he argues, are synonymous with the concepts of mortality and immortality. "They require each other, and together constitute the concrete Universe. Either world considered by itself is an abstraction. For this reason, any adequate description of one World includes characterizations derived from the other, in order to exhibit the concrete Universe in its relation to either of its two aspects. These worlds are major examples of perspectives of the Universe."[16] As perspectives of the Universe, Activity

and Value are abstractions arising out of the reaction of man's consciousness to life in that Universe, and are interdependent facets of his total identity. Moreover, Whitehead argues, this identity as the interplay of Activity which is temporal and mortal and of Value which is timeless and immortal, forms a unity within the total existence of man's life rather than in any imagined afterlife. Whitehead states that "the two worlds of Value and of Action are bound together in the life of the Universe, so that the immortal factor of Values enters into the active creation of temporal fact".[17] Thus Whitehead arrives at a synthesis of basic reality within the conscious existence of life. This is very similar to Nabokov's own stated claim that he is an "indivisible monist". When asked to explain this concept Nabokov did so in terms of its opposites:

> Monism, which implies a oneness of basic reality, is seen to be divisible when, say "mend" sneakily splits away from "matter" in the reasoning of a muddled monist or half-hearted materialist.[18]

It has already been shown how the young Van retains an "objective-subjective split" between levels of consciousness. Yet in his imagined speech to Ada's ex-lover, the dying Rack, Van deliberately aligns his viewpoint with that of monism:

> The mind of man, by nature a monist, cannot accept <u>two</u> nothings, he knows there has been one nothing, his biological inexistence in the infinite past, for his memory is utterly blank, and <u>that</u> nothingness, being, as it were, past, is not too hard to endure. But a second nothingness—which perhaps might not be so hard to bear either—is logically unacceptable (p.249).

This is the thinking of a "muddled monist" indeed. For in his personal assertion of Antiterran validity Van has commited a similar error to those believers in a heavenly "Terra the Fair" who Van dismissed as "deranged minds". He has erected a concept of life after death patterned on purely imaginative existence. This is not monism, but a further denial of his own active organic existence in terms of an afterlife.

By contrast, Van's attitude to death in Part V of the novel is a synthesis of physical and imaginative existence with no afterlife. He describes death as having three facets: "the relinquishing forever all one's memories"; "the hideous physical pain"; and "the featureless pseudo-future, blank and black, an everlasting nonlastingness, the crowning paradox of ouf boxed brain's eschatologies! " (pp.457-8).

This is monism or a "oneness of basic reality" applied to death. But the ninety year old Van is also a monist now in regard to life. He combines Bergson's emphasis on Memory with Whitehead's view of the interdependence within life of Activity and Value, Mortality and Immortality (Terra and Antiterra). In a description of his contacts with Ada (occurring in Part I but, as the final sentences show, written towards the end of his life and inserted in Part I) Van captures and acknowledges the unity of life within memory:

> ...the rapture of her identity, placed under the microscope of reality (which is the only reality) shows a complex system of those subtle bridges which the senses traverse—laughing, embraced, throwing flowers in the air—between membrane and brain, and which always was and is a form of memory, even at the moment of its perception. I am weak. I write badly. I may die tonight. My magic carpet no longer skims over crown canopies and gaping nestlings, and her rarest orchids. Insert (p.174).

Memory is made up of physical and imaginative impressions and both these levels continually interact to influence present perception. The dual nature of man is fused within conscious awareness.

The synthesis of Terra and Antiterra as subjective impressions which form the interacting materials of memory is found in the final labelling of Van and Ada's total world. The words "Nirvana, Nevada, Vaniada" (p.456) head the last chapter of the novel. "Nirvana", incorporating Van's name, is a Buddhist theological term for "the extinction of individual existence and absorption into the supreme spirit, or the extinction of all desires and passions and attainment of perfect beatitude".[19] Brewer[20] points out that this state is believed to be attainable within life. It corresponds to Van's poetical Antiterran states of mind and his attempts during the first fifty years of his life to see his contacts with Ada on the purely imaginative level.

"Nevada", incorporating Ada's name, is a combination of political "notions of 'America' and Russia" (p.21) or Terran "reality". Nevada is a mining state of America. The Neva is one of the most important Russian rivers. Geographically, as the outlet for Lake Ladoga "it forms part of the Whitesea Baltic water (q.v.) and the Volga-Baltic way".[21] Thus "Nevada" incorporates the major facets of Terran "reality".

The young Van's imaginative "reality" is solipsistic. Yet Ada forms the object of his love and passion outside his own consciousness. His recognition of his identity is therefore an implicit undercutting of his solipsistic stance in the first half of the novel. In the same way the young Ada also believes she exists on Antiterra, but her recognition of Van undercuts this. In addition, her youthful remedy for "betrayals" with lovers other than Van is "Destroy and forget". As an eradication of memory, this is an attempt to negate her own past identity.

Both Terra and Antiterra achieve synthesis for Van and Ada in "Vaniada" which is the total world of memory. Both are finally seen as interdependent subjective levels of consciousness which together form the materials of memory. Memory in turn, is an expression of total identity within each individual, thus Van and Ada term their personal world of "joint memory" (p.456) as "Vaniada".

In summation, the Terra and Antiterra apposition parallels the physical and imaginative experience of man which is known through subjective impressions retained as memory. In this sense Terra and Antiterra reflect the materials of memory. As states of mind, they make up the bridges between membrane and brain which constitute "reality" and "which always was and is a form of memory, even at the moment of perception" (p.174). While "detail is all" (p.60), time and consciousness (present and past, Terra and Antiterra) are synthesized within total existence. The many become one in the world of individual memory. Thus the fictional world of the novel is a metaphor for the conscious world of memory, and both are an artifice.

CHAPTER II: NOTES

1. See Chapter I this discussion.

2. "Romanticism" is used throughout this discussion in the sense that it represents an emphasis on imaginative, subjective experience.

3. Bader, J., Crystal Land, p.125.

4. Lokrantz, J., The Underside of the Weave, p. 94.

5. Fowler, D., Reading Nabokov, p.182.

6. ibid., p.194.

7. ibid., p.182.

8. Nabokov, V., Strong Opinions, p.122.

9. Bader, J. Crystal Land, p.129.

10. ibid., p.129.

11. ibid., pp.129-30.

12. Fowler, D. Reading Nabokov, p.185.

13. Estotitland: "An imaginary tract of land near the Arctic Circle in North America, said to have been discovered by John Scalve, a Pole. It is mentioned and shown in Peter Heylin's Microcosmos (1622)", Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, p.383.

14. The allusion is to General de Gaulle.

15. Tomlin, E.W.F., The Western Philosophers: an introduction, p.279.

16. Whitehead, A.N., Science and Philosophy, p.87.

17. ibid., p.90.

18. Nabokov, V., Strong Opinions, p.124.

19. O.E.D., Vol.VII, p.160.

20. Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, p.760.

21. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1970 edition, Vol.16, p.313.

CHAPTER III

MEMORY AND STRUCTURE

Van Veen's view of 'reality' as the formulations of subjective memory-images underlies the method and construction of *Ada*. His belief in human awareness as an interaction of memory and imagination is paralleled and illustrated by his own ordering of artifice within the literary form of his memoirs. In the same way as the cosmology of *Ada* forms the metaphors for the materials of memory, so the components of the novel's structure dramatize the operations of memory and the emotional basis of memory-selections as they are revealed in Van Veen's individual experience and activities. In this chapter the structure of *Ada* will be analysed; the genre of the novel, the textual surface, the content and the plot will be shown to dramatize memory in operation. Finally, it will be argued that the overall structure of the novel, the relationship of the parts to the whole, further parallels the functioning of memory.

The genre of Ada encompasses the different fictional planes of memory-images within time-bound human existence. As first indicated by its full title, Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle, the novel is a composite of memoir, love story and family "history", and thus it incorporates the conscious levels of imaginative, emotional and physical experience. These levels are set in the context of total existence and this plan is actually outlined by Van in the stated design for his Texture of Time:

> "My aim was to compose a kind of novella in the form of a treatise on the Texture of Time, an investigation of its veily substance, with illustrative metaphors gradually increasing, very gradually building up a logical love story, going from past to present, blossoming as a concrete story, and just as gradually reversing analogies and disintegrating again into bland abstraction (p.443).

Time is both a physiological and a psychological aspect of man's existence in the movement from birth to death.[1] Thus the individual's awareness of existence is made up of memory-impressions drawn from physical and imaginative experience and selected on the basis of personal emotional preference. Within the overall context of his memoirs Van's own life forms the "illustrative metaphors" for an examination of human identity and, thus, his story incorporates the fictional levels of memory which are paralleled by the three genres making up the composite form of Ada.

On the "organic" stratum of family chronicle the novel commences with an abstraction, a spherical family tree made up of names and dates which trace Van's physical descent. The Prince Zemski—PrincessTemnosiniy union radiates out with the descendants of their marriage and then tapers to final convergence with the siblings, Van and Ada, and their half-sister Lucette. Lucette's death is recorded "[1876-1901]", and Ada's formal marriage to Vinelander and her union with Van are both physically unproductive. Finally, the family chronicle embodied as levels of consciousness within its last living remnants, Van and Ada, trails off into the abstraction of death as the succeeding Editorial comment makes clear:

> With the exception of Mr and Mrs Ronald Oranger, a few incidental figures, and some non-American citizens, all the persons mentioned by name in this book are dead
>
> [Ed] (p.8).

Mr and Mrs Ronald Oranger are, in fact, Van's editor and Van's typist, Violet Knox—"now Mrs Ronald Oranger. Ed." (p.451) —who feature as characters in Part V of the novel. Part V, like the family tree at the beginning of the novel tapers off into a publisher's "blurb" which is possibly Oranger's composition:

> One can even surmise that if our time-racked, flat-lying couple ever intended to die they would die, as it were <u>into</u> the finished book, into Eden or Hades, into the prose of the book or the poetry of its blurb (p.460).

Whether the writer of this is Oranger or Van himself, the physical course of Van's life which finally disintegrates "again into bland abstraction" (p.443) is paralleled by his imaginative ordering of artifice in the overall structure of his book. and both these levels are formulated from memory-images. While the family tree and the final publisher's synopsis of the book are abstractions which reflect the "featureless pseudo-future" (pp.457-8) of death, they also form the outermost panels of the novel. As such they are complementary abstractions which are analogous to the unknown or "infinite unconsciousness" (p.419) of the periods before birth and after death. In this sense they set the personal life story of Van and Ada within the total context of time-bound human existence.

Family tree becomes family chronicle within the imaginative world of Van Veen's memories, and remembered images make up the fictional artifice which constitutes Van's awareness of his own identity. Any formulation of self, however, is only possible once the individual is capable of recollection. As Van says in Part Four:

> My first recollection goes back to mid-July, 1870, my seventh month of life (with most people, of course, retentive consciousness starts somewhat later, at three or four years of age)....The 195 days preceding that event being indistinguishable from infinite unconsciousness, are not to be included in perceptual time, so that, insofar as my mind and my pride of mind are concerned, I am to-day (mid-July, 1922) quite exactly fifty-two,... (p.419).

Van is here pointing out that physical being and memory are not simultaneous. While memory-images can be seen as the fictional levels which retain all aspects of man's existence, memory is distinct from man's organic reality. Since memory is not interchangeable with the physical course of an individual's life, it follows that memory-images may validily incorporate man's ancestral past as it forms an aspect of his imaginative existence. Thus in Van Veen's personal memoirs the unexperienced organic reality of his family tree forms an integral aspect of his imaginative experience and sets his personal identity in the fictional framework of a family chronicle.

Finally, the three interwoven genres of Ada suggest that emotion is the individualizing factor of human existence. Van's personal past revolves around his love for Ada, "Ada as Ardor", and consists of an interaction of physical and imaginative experience which arises out of Van's personal, emotional choices. These emotional preferences furnish the "illustrative metaphors" of Van's personality which, assembled in his memoirs, build up "a logical love story, going from

past to present, blossoming as a concrete story" (p.443). In this sense the composite genre of Ada forms an analogy for the fictional planes of memory-images which draw on the physical and the imaginative and which are selected on the basis of individual emotional response.

While the genre of Ada suggests the interplay of fictional levels retained as memory, the textual surface of the novel provides continual reminders of the immediate functioning of memory as the interaction of past and present within the "nowness" of Duration.[2] Van's recollections are dependent on just such an interplay while, at the same time, this interpenetration of memory and present conscious awareness is paralleled in Van's ordering of artifice as he proceeds with the written record of his memoirs. The textual surface of Ada is formed out of Van's personal experience of Duration and this is constantly emphasized in passages such as the following:

> At ninety-four he liked retracing that first amorous summer not as a dream he had just had but as a recapitulation of consciousness to sustain him in the small gray hours between shallow sleep and the first pill of the day. Take over, dear, for a little while. Pill, pillow, billow, billions. Go on from here, Ada please (p.60).

Through techniques as the above, the reader is continually reminded of the ninety-year-old Van as "a crotchety gray old

word man" (p.98) reworking his past within his present experience of duration. In this way the surface of the novel dramatizes the immediate operation of Van Veen's memory.

Furthermore, the novel examines the action of the present on memory-images. Van recognizes both the out of focus perspective of the past and its artistic reshaping within the present:

> When we remember our former selves, there is always that little figure with its long shadow stopping like an uncertain belated visitor on a lighted threshold at the far end of an impeccably narrowing corridor. Ada saw herself there as a wonder-eyed waif with a bedraggled nosegay; Van saw himself as a nasty young satyr with clumsy hooves and an ambiguous flue pipe. 'But I was only twelve', Ada would cry when some indelicate detail was brought up. "I was in my fifteenth year", sadly said Van (p.89).

The "detail is all" (p.60) says Ada, but these details are retained as the artifice of memory-images which are reconstructed in the present by the imaginative ordering of the individual consciousness. This process is particularly true in the case of Van's memoirs. While both the young people have kept diaries (p.79), at the time of writing Ada, "in what Van called their dot-dot-dotage" (p.88), Van has destroyed his completely, while Ada has retained only a few botanical and entomological entries. These, together with a few letters and Van's philosophical writings, are the

only surviving records from the past. For the most part Van and Ada have to rely "on oral tradition, and the mutual correction of common memories" (p.88). Again, the reader is reminded that the textual surface of the novel is made up of Van's "nonagenarian" (p.451) experience of duration. While Van acknowledges the action of the present on the past, he attempts to substantiate the truth of his details through statements which emphasize the sifting and correction of memories:

> Calendar dates were debated, sequences sifted and shifted, sentimental notes compared, hesitations and resolutions passionately analyzed (p.88).

As the above quotation suggests, one way in which Van tries to establish the truth of his detail is by attaching his artistic selections from the past to the fixed points of actual dates. These dates form a chronological sequence running throughout the book and matched by Van and Ada's advancing ages.[3] But dates are simply abstractions until vivified in individual consciousness, and consciousness, once capable of recollection, is personal identity. The very discrepancies between Van and Ada's memories dramatize personal identity and at the same time add to the realism of the fiction by disclosing details of the same events as seen by two minds.[4]

This technique is applied to Van's reconstruction of the past and the present. For example, Ada rejects Van's "mind picture" of his initial glimpse of her during the 1884 summer at Ardis:

> She wore a white frock with a black jacket and there was a white bow in her long hair. He never saw that dress again and when he mentioned it in retrospective evocation she invariably retorted that he must have dreamt it, she never had one like that, never could have put on a dark blazer on such a hot day, but he stuck to his initial image of her to the last (p.36).[5]

As applied to the reshaping action of the present, the technique can be observed in a discussion between Van and Ada which also pinpoints memory as personal identity. The discussion arises out of Van's description of the first full sexual contact between the children (the night of the "Burning Barn" which Van and Ada pass in the library). Van's penis is likened to the Nile being explored by Ada's fingertips. Van records that after achieving climax the young Van quips "Well, now the Nile is settled stop Speke" (p.97). Past circles to present as Ada interrupts to disagree with this account:

> (I wonder, Van, <u>why</u> you are doing your best to transform our poetical and unique past into a dirty farce? Honestly, Van! Oh, I <u>am</u> honest, that's how it went. I wasn't sure of my ground, hence the sauciness and the simper. Ah, <u>parlez pour vous</u>: <u>I</u>, dear, can affirm that

> these fingertips up your Africa and to the edge of the world came considerably later when I knew the itinerary by heart. Sorry no—if people remembered the same they would not be different people*. That's-how-it-went. But we are not 'different'. Think and dream are the same in French. Think of the douceur, Van! Oh, I am thinking of it, of course, I am—it was all douceur, my child, my rhyme. That's better, said Ada) (p.97, *my italics).

As the above excerpt suggests, Van portrays memory as an artifice which makes up the individual's total awareness of existence and thus he sees "think and dream" as synonymous terms for the subjective impressions of the mind. While mutual memories link Van and Ada in a bond of shared emotion, the differences between the details of their personal dreams indicate their separate characters and in this way the portrayal of duration dramatizes memory as individual identity. Moreover the action of the present on the past together with the constant accumulation of memory-sensa as the present itself becomes past, indicates the ever-changing dynamic nature of personal awareness. Thus at the end of the chapter describing the night of the Burning Barn Van writes:

> Summer 1960? Crowded hotel somewhere between Ex and Ardez?
>
> Ought to begin dating every page of the manuscript. Should be kinder to my unknown dreamers (p.99).

Van's "unknown dreamers" are the readers of his memoirs, and so this statement includes the reader's reaction in terms of the

philosophical framework of the novel. It also serves as a further reminder that the textual surface of the book is made up of the conscious experience of Van's last ten years of life, and acknowledges that within those ten years, Van's memory, as the basis of his personality, is, as it has always been, the dynamic accumulations of his individual awareness.

To recapitulate, the textual surface of Ada parallels the interaction of past with a present already becoming past in the mind of man. Thus the novel dramatizes the immediate functioning of memory as a process of duration. Duration, in turn, makes up the awareness of personal identity, and is composed of subjective impressions which are retained by memory and unified by imagination.

The juxtaposition of the overall functioning of memory, suggested by the composite genre of Ada, and its immediate functioning within duration provides a basis for the discussion of the content of the novel as it supports and expands the depiction of memory as personal identity and shows that memory-images are selected through personal emotional preference.

The opening sentence of Ada, "All happy families are more or less dissimilar, all unhappy ones are more or less alike" (p.9) aside from parodying Tolstoy and the

"mistranslations of Russian classics" (p.463), is an antithetical aphorism pointing to the connections within family lines. Such connections only have imaginative reality in the consciousness of the living descendants so that similarities and dissimilarities are the formulations of the individual's memories in respect to his own awareness of self. Thus Van's own personality is the determining factor in the memories of his family and the incidents selected from his ancestral past are those which provide parallels to his own experience. For example, the first anecdote of the book centers round Van's maternal grandmother, Daria Durmanov:

> Dolly has inherited her mother's beauty and temper but also an older ancestral strain of whimsical, and not seldom deplorable, taste, well reflected, for instance, in the names she gave her daughters: Aqua and Marina (p.9, my italics).

Dolly's taste, or lack of it, forms a preview to or connection with similar "lapses" on the part of Van and Ada. Both whimsical and deplorable taste, for example, is implied by Van as he and Ada examine Kim's photographs of the summers at Ardis:

> ...and taking advantage of their looking at the album in bed (which we now think lacked taste) odd Ada used the reading loupe on live Van, something she had done many times as a scientifically curious and artistically depraved child in that year of grace here depicted (p.315).[6]

Memory encompasses not only anecdotes but also dates and objects from the past which relate to personal identity. This is shown in the children's discovery of Marina's entymological diary which becomes for them "a regular little melodrama acted out by the ghosts of dead flowers" (p.12). Around brief entries such as the one made on the day of Van's birth ("compliquaria compliquata var. aquamarina, Ex, 15.I.70.")[7] the children artistically reassemble the past:

> 'I deduce,' said the boy, 'three main facts: that not yet married Marina and her married sister hibernated in my lieu de naissance; that Marina had her own Dr Krolik, pour ainsi dire; and that the orchids came from Demon who preferred to stay by the sea, his dark-blue great-grandmother (p.13).

Thus Van's memory selects and draws into its own individuality details of the past that show affinities with or allude to his own identity. This is confirmed by Van, for example, in the expansion of the "dark-blue" allusion in the quotation immediately above:

> Re the "dark-blue" allusion, left hanging: A former viceroy of Estoy, Prince Ivan Temnosiniy, father of the children's great-great-grandmother, Princess Sofia Zemski (1755-1809), and a direct descendant of the Yaroslav rulers of pre-Tartar times, had a millennium-old name that meant in Russian "dark-blue". While happening to be immune to the sumptuous thrills of genealogic awareness, and indifferent to the fact that oafs attribute both the aloofness and the fervor to snobbishness, Van could not help feeling esthetically moved by the velvet background he was always able to distinguish as a comforting, omnipresent summer sky through the black foliage of the family tree (p.14).

As suggested by the above quotations from Chapter I, Van's memory selects the items from his family past which connect with his own personality. The content of the succeeding chapters, in so far as it includes incidents from Van's family background, provides the points of similarity and of dissimilarity which distill Van and Ada's individualities.

Marina and Demon's affair (and the related duping of Aqua) ending with the d'Onsky duel is a preview of Van and Ada's affair, the duping of Lucette, Van's "betrayal" by Ada and the ensuing duel with Captain Tapper. The differences point to the different individualities involved. Demon and Marina's union is a Terran affair. As such it is physically productive resulting in Van and Ada. Demon's duel with Marina's lover ends in D'Onsky being wounded by Demon. Demon's apparently sterile marriage[8] to Aqua is an attempt to find a surrogate and, according to Marina's account must have been

influenced by an "incestuous" (p.22) pleasure, the possession of "flesh (une chair) that was both that of his wife and that of his mistress, the blended and brightened charms of twin peris, an Aquamarina both single and double, a mirage in an emirate, a germinate gem, an orgy of epithelial alliterations" (p.22). For her part, Marina, pregnant with Ada, accepts Demon's first cousin Dan as a physical substitute and goes on to produce "Another daughter, this time Dan's very own" (p.11), Lucette. Marina and Demon's affair results in physical actualities, scars and souls. Demon's marriage to Aqua is unproductive as it represents an imaginative substitute, "a mirage in an emirate", and it ends in Aqua's suicide.

While Marina and Demon's affair to some extent parallels Van's love for Ada, the dissimilarities between the two unions suggest Van's personal attempt to live on a purely Antiterran level of consciousness. For example, Van and Ada's affair and Ada's formal marriage to Vinelander are both physically unproductive. After Van's "betrayal" Ada's lovers, Percy de Prey and Phillip Rack, are killed not by Van but by the "comically exaggerated zeal Fate was to display in leading him on and then muscling in to become an over-cooperative agent" (p.238). Percy dies at war, and Rack in hospital, while Van fights a duel with "an incidental clown" (p.243), Captain Tapper, a

man who is completely unknown to both Van and Ada. Van is wounded while Tapper walks away unharmed. Van spends a short period in hospital, then (in contrast to Demon) he accepts a purely physical surrogate, Cordula de Prey:

> 'Reckless Cordula', observed reckless Cordula cheerfully; 'this will probably mean another abortion—encore un petit enfantome, as my poor aunt's maid used to wail every time it happened to her' (p.255).

Cordula, during the "medicinal month" that follows, "resolutely avoided seeing her latest lover" (p.255) and is physically faithful to Van. Ironically, in view of his Antiterran stance, the period is both imaginatively and physically productive for Van. Cordula's very lack of conversation or imagination, the "sweet banality of their little menage" (p.257), results in the "child bearing" (p.256) of Van's first book. At the same time Van impregnates Cordula, "When in early September Van Veen left Manhattan for Lute, she was pregnant" (p.257)—an abortive attempt no doubt. As the unfortunate Lucette is to find out, Van, unlike Demon, will not accept a repetition of "incestuous" pleasure with his half-sister, whose physicality (like Aqua's) fits her for the role of an Ada substitute: "she tasted exactly as Ada at Ardis" (p.367). Van rejects Lucette's offers. On both the Antiterran and Terran levels of Van's love for Ada there can be no replacement:

> 'I love her, not you, and I simply refuse to complicate matters by entering into yet another incestuous relationship' (p.367).

While the comparison of the two affairs indicates the different personalities involved, the very connections reinforce the contention that Van's memory selects those family incidents which relate to his personal experience, and this, the novel suggests, is the way memory operates.

For the same reason Aqua's life forms part of the content of the novel in foreshadowing the conflict within Van to reconcile his subjective levels of consciousness. Aqua is torn between her awareness of physical and imaginative existence. Her inability to accept both as the inter-dependent levels of consciousness is diagnosed as "an 'extreme form of mystical mania combined with existalienation (otherwise plain madness)" (p.24). Van terms this Aqua's "War of the Worlds" (p.22),[9] thus depicting it as a forerunner to his own battle with an "objective-subjective split" within his consciousness. While Aqua's conflict leads to suicide, Van in later life achieves a self-aware synthesis of memory-impressions. Yet despite the dissimilarities, Aqua's experience anticipates Van's through the overiding concern of both with processes of the mind. Thus, after the inclusion

of Aqua's suicide note, Van writes:

> "And I often think it would have been so much more plausible, esthetically, ecstatically, Estotially speaking—if she were really my mother (p.30).

To recapitulate, the ancestral content of the novel is a representation of the way in which memory selects from personally unexperienced events those details which relate to the individual's own experience and identity.

The content of Van's individual past within the novel dramatises further facets of memory and, in particular, suggests that emotion links Terran and Antiterran levels of consciousness and determines the personal selection of memories.

Van's memories of Ada, for example, form a greater part of his consciousness because of the emotional intensity of his contacts with her. While the young Van attempts to place Ada in a purely Antiterran world (a more subtle form of Humbert Humbert's attempt to transform Lolita into an art object) love, by its very nature, involves both imaginative and physical experience. Thus Van's love for Ada can be seen to embody the apparent duality within him, and his memories of her consist of Terran and Antiterran impressions that together represent his total identity. This is acknowledged by Van in his own outline of the content of his memoirs:

> When in the middle of the twentieth century, Van started to reconstruct his past, he soon noticed that such details of his infancy as really mattered (for the special purpose the reconstruction pursued) could best be treated, could not seldom be only treated, when reappearing at various later stages of his boyhood and youth, as sudden juxtapositions that revived the part while vivifying the whole. This is why his first love has precedence here over his first bad hurt or bad dream (p.31).

Van's "first bad hurt" represents purely physical experience, his first "bad dream" imaginative experience. By contrast his love for Ada represents an interaction of both levels which, as memory-images, revive "the part while vivifying the whole".

This involvement of the dual facets of personality embodied in Van's love for Ada is substantiated by contrast with his previous emotional contacts. At thirteen Van develops a passionate, purely illusory love for the schoolgirl daughter of Mrs Tapirov who runs an art shop: "He never spoke to her. He loved her madly. It must have lasted one term" (p.32). This love is an artifice; its limitations are suggested by the artificial roses in Mrs Tapirov's shop. Van satisfies himself that these roses are imitations, noticing that their appeal is solely to the eye rather than the touch. On a subsequent visit to the shop he fingers a rose

> ...and was cheated of the sterile texture his finger-tips had expected when cool life kissed them with pouting lips. "My daughter", said Mrs Tapirov, who saw his surprise, "always puts a bunch of real ones among the fake pour attraper le client. You drew the joker" (p.31).

The incident highlights the lack of physical experience in this early imaginative love. By the same token a purely physical love lacks the imaginative levels of Van's experiences with Ada. This is illustrated by Van's school-boy experiments with the young helper in the corner shop:

> "He knew she was nothing but a fubsy pig-pink whorelet and would elbow her face away when she attempted to kiss him after he had finished and was checking with one quick hand, as he had seen Cheshire do, if his wallet was still in his hip pocket;... (p.32).

Furthermore, while the young Van attempts to see his love for Ada in Antiterran terms, the ninety-year old Van's comments continually reveal this attitude as a youthful self-deception. After the account of the children's first full sexual contact in the library, for example, Van as author shows that his love for Ada was and is a composite of physical and imaginative experience:

> Tenderness rounds out true triumph, gentleness lubricates genuine liberation: emotions that are not diagnostic of glory or passion in dreams. One half of the fantastic joy Van was to taste from now on (forever he hoped) owed its force to the certainty that he could lavish on Ada, openly and at leisure, all the puerile petting that social shame, male selfishness, and moral apprehension had prevented him from evisaging before (p.99).

While the individual content of Van's memoirs reveals an interaction of the physical and the imaginative impressions which represent Van's total experience, the fact that the dominant memories of his life focus on his love for Ada indicates that memory-images are selected on the basis of personally felt emotional intensity. Thus the content of each section of the novel revolves around Van's meetings with Ada and his attempts to find traces of Ada in the other contacts of his life. Part I describes the summers of 1884 and 1888 at Ardis together "with two brief interludes of intolerable bliss (in August, 1885 and June, 1886) and a couple of chance meetings ('through a grille of rain')" (p.128). Part 2, after Van's"betrayal" and his separation from Ada, begins with Ada's letters juxtaposed with Van's philosophical writing arising out of Part I. Van's adventures in the "floramors" (the fifteen year old Eric's Villa Venus: an Organised Dream" made a reality by his grandfather after Eric's untimely death) are simply an attempt to recapture his life with Ada:

> How I used to seek with what tenacious anguish,
> traces and tokens of my unforgettable love in all
> the brothels of the world (p.85).

Van succumbs to the seventh of Ada's letters brought to him by Lucette: "Lucette turned out to be, against all reason and will the impeccable paranymph" (p.265). The reunion with Ada, however, is shattered by Demon who induces Van to allow Ada the "natural" right of children through a marriage with Vinelander. Following this, Lucette becomes the rejected, and eventually self destroyed, reminder of Ada throughout much of Part 3 of the novel. On board the Tobakoff with Lucette, Van prefers the illusory cinematic glimpse of Ada in her performance of Don Juan's Last Fling to the actual reality of her half-sister, Lucette. He rejects Lucette's attempts to drag him away from the film:

> "Oh how awful! It was bound to happen. That's she! Let's go, please let's go. You must not see her debasing herself. She's terribly made up, every gesture is childish and wrong—"
>
> "Just another minute" said Van.
>
> Terrible? Wrong? She was absolutely perfect, and strange, and poignantly familiar. By some stroke of art, by some enchantment of chance, the few brief scenes she was given formed a perfect compendium of her 1884 and 1888 and 1892 looks" (p.385).

After Lucette's death, in an unposted letter to Ada (dug up in 1928) Van reveals his continuing preoccupation with such traces of Ada:

> ...back in the States, I started upon a singular quest. In Manhattan, in Kingston, in Ladore, in dozens of other towns, I kept pursuing the picture which I had not [badly discolored] on the boat, from cinema to cinema, every time discovering a new item of glorious torture, a new convulsion of beauty in your performance....And to think, Spanish orange-tip, that all in all your magic gambol lasted but eleven minutes of stopwatch time in patches of two- or three- minute scenes! (p.393).

The next reunion in 1905 (following Marina's death in 1900 and Demon's in 1905) "constituted the highest ridge of their twenty-one-year old love: its complicated, dangerous, ineffably radiant coming of age" (p.408), but the discovery of Vinelander's advanced state of tuberculosis severs this union. The period from 1905 to 1922, during which Ada nurses Vinelander and Van takes the Rattner Chair of Philosophy at Kingston, is dismissed in a few brief sentences (only the dominant emotional experiences of life are retained as memories). Part IV describes July 13th, 14th and 15th, 1922, from the moment Van receives Ada's cable for an "Exploratory interview" (p.418) following Vinelander's death to Van's final acceptance of her. Part V records Van and Ada's subsequent life together and their activities from 1922 to Van's corrections to the master-copy of his memoirs on his ninety-seventh birthday in 1967.

The content of each section of Ada (far from being

unrelated scenes of "hectic fornification" punctuated by "assorted duels and deaths" and "authorial didactics"[10] as one critic has argued)represents the most important and complete experiences of Van Veen's life, a linked unfolding of his memories that dramatise his personal identity. Thus the recreation of Van's personal past dramatizes the emotional basis of his memory-selections.

However the frequent compression of "years of narrational time into a single sentence"[11] and the apparently uneven distribution of the bulk of this time to Van's youth as compared with his old age destroys the versimiltude of Ada for Fowler. But Nabokov's methods reveal the emotional selection of memories and, as a corollary of selection, they show memory as a process of forgetting. "Our brain is not an ideal organ for constant retrospection"[12] writes Nabokov in Strong Opinions. This illustrated in Ada by the description of the codes used by the children in their letters to one another, culminating in a code based on Rembrand's "Memorie" and Marvell's "The Garden". This final code becomes increasingly difficult to use since it is retained only by memory:

> Security demanded that they should not possess the poems in print or script for consultation and however marvellous their power of retention was, errors were bound to increase (p.129).

Furthermore the apparent lack of balance in the narrational time alloted to Van's youth as compared with that alloted to his later life can be seen to reflect the "quickening" of time with age and the parallel increase in the accumulations of memory. Van writes in his Texture of Time that

> ...at fifty years of age, one year seems to pass faster because it is a smaller fraction of my increased stock of existence and also because I am less often bored than I was in childhood between dull game and duller book. But that 'quickening' depends precisely on one's not being attentive to Time (p.423).

Memory forms the bars enframing the dull gray pits of time or Veen's Hollows.[13] The accumulative nature of memory[14] increases the stock of impressions so that in later life Van is less aware of time and more aware of his memory-images. This "quickening" process is captured by the allocation of "narrational time", and thus the balance of content in Ada suggests the accumulative nature of memory.[15]

Just as the brain selects and forgets its subjective impressions, so it manipulates and adds to its memories. "Memory likes the otsebyatina ('what one contributes oneself');" (p.433), writes Van in his Texture of Time.[16] While Van works with Ada to preserve the truth of detail in his autobiography, he recognizes that imagination is an integral component of his memories:

> Hammock and honey: eighty years later he could still recall with the young pang of the original joy his falling in love with Ada. Memory met imagination half-way in the hammock of his boyhood dreams (p.59).[17]

Nabokov himself, writing of the mixture of autobiographical and imaginative content in his work, states

> I would say that imagination is a form of memory. Down, Plato, down, good dog. An image depends on the power of association, and association is supplied and prompted by memory.[18]

This power of memory to provide the materials for imagination is revealed in Van's picture of Ada after the 1888 "betrayal":

> He could swear he did not look back, could not—by any optical chance, or in any prism—have seen her physically as he walked away; and yet, with dreadful distinction, he retained forever a composite picture of her standing where he left her. The picture—which penetrated him, through an eye in the back of his head, through his vitreous spinal canal, and could never be lived down, never—consisted of a selection and blend of such random images and expressions of hers that had affected him with a pang of intolerable remorse at various moments in the past (pp.234-35).

Van's memories of Ada form a "lethal entity" (p.235), an imaginative ordering of memory-impressions which forms a "definite picture that he knew he had never seen in reality" (pp.235-36) and, at the same time, seems to be "more real than any actual memory" (p.236). Thus the novel continually portrays imagination as a form of memory.

Memory is also affected by the accumulation of its "sensa". After Ada's experiences in the library with Van's "Africa" previous memories become altered and added to. Drongo, for example, is no longer seen as a sick horse, and the behaviour of "Mr Nymphobottomus" (p.95) is refashioned through Ada's experiences with Van:

> His method of contact, she said, '<u>puisqu'on aborde ce theme-la</u>, and I'm certainly <u>not</u> making offensive comparisons', was to insist, with maniacal force, that he help her to reach for something...and what a relief it was, for everybody concerned, when in the course of that fraudulent ascension her poor little bottom made it <u>at last</u> to the crackling snow of his shirtfront, and he dropped her, and buttoned his dinner jacket. And she remembered—
>
> 'Stupidly exaggerated', commented Van 'Also, I suppose, artificially recolored in the lamplight of later events as revealed still later' (pp.90-91).

The accumulations of memory not only recolour subsequent events; subsequent events can themselved be used to refashion painful incidents from the past—for example, this process takes place during the 1892 reunion at the Manhattan flat. On the morning of Demon's arrival with the news of Dan's death and the resulting separation of the two lovers, Van walks happily into the parlour where Demon awaits him:

> Thither he padded, humming tunelessly, looking forward to another day of increasing happiness (with yet another uncomfortable little edge smoothed away, another raw kink in the past so refashioned as to fit into the new pattern of radiance) (p.342, my italics).

At the same time the novel points out that those emotionally intense experiences, which form the dominant retentions of memory and thus reveal personal identity, can be refashioned but (like personality) can never be completely obliterated. This is recognised by Van during a dash to a Venus Villa, immediately prior to his American trip of 1905:

> Rocking along softly, his slippered foot on a footrest, his arm in an armloop, he recalled his first railway journey to Ardis and tried—what he sometimes advised a patient doing in order to exercise the 'muscles of consciousness'—namely putting oneself back not merely into the frame of mind that had preceded a radical change in one's life, but into a state of complete ignorance regarding that change. He knew it could not be done, that not the achievement, but the obstinate attempt was possible, because he would not have remembered the preface to Ada had not life turned the next page, causing now its radiant text to flash through all the tenses of his mind. He wondered if he would remember the present commonplace trip (pp.369-70).

In summation, the content of Ada establishes memory as "the backbone of consciousness"[19] and of personal identity. The related facets of memory in operation are dramatized by the personal experience of Van Veen.

However, one of the frequent criticisms levelled at Ada concerns the content as it affects the overall structure and balance of the novel. Fowler writes that "Novelistic structure in Ada has been replaced by a succession of tenuously related tableaux".[20] Even Bader feels that "the elements of Nabokov's novels remain discrete mosaics" and that "Instead of contributing to the fleshing out of a character or subject, the details often form unrelated blocks in the airy buildings of the novels".[21] These views, however, ignore the way the content is based on the processes of memory. In addition the "tableaux" or "mosaic" method of the structure is itself a further dramatization of the functioning of memory.

In his own autobiography, Speak, Memory, Nabokov introduces Chapter 8 with the words "I am going to show a few slides".[22] The "magic lantern sequence that follows"[23] ranges over the 1906 to 1911 "tutorial era"[24] of Nabokov's youth culminating in the description of the final tutor, Lenski, and his "awful idea of showing, on alternate Sundays, Educational Magic-Lantern Projections at our St Petersburg home".[25] The juxtaposition of the "objective" capturing of past time by a mechanical device (Lenski's slides) and Nabokov's own personal memories is paralleled in Ada apposition of Kim's photos of the 1884 and 1888 summers at Ardis with Van and Ada's memories

of the same period : "That ape has vulgarized our own mind-pictures" (p.320) says Van. Kim's photos are meaningless, static, 'objective' reproductions. Van's "mind-pictures" are the dynamic, living 'reality' of memory-images examined within present duration. The similarities lie in the slide-like method of memory. In Speak, Memory, Nabokov states that the images of his tutors "appear within memory's luminous disc as so many magic lantern projections".[26] In Ada, Van specifically aligns memory with Kim's photographic techniques:

> Remembrance, like Rembrandt, is dark but festive. Remembered ones dress up for the occasion and sit still. Memory is a photo—studio de luxe on an infinite Fifth Power Avenue" (p.84).

In his Texture of Time Van shows that any conceptualization of time is memory,[27] "and here we are back in Space. Note the frames, the receptacles" (p.423). Finally, in Part V of the novel, Van and Ada directly repeat Nabokov's slide projector imagery when speaking of their memories: "Eighty years quickly passed—a matter of changing a slide in a magic lantern" (p.458). Thus the structure of Ada reflects the methods of memory and the slides of Ada are not "discrete mosaics" or "unrelated tableaux", but a direct representation of memory.

Moreover the "tableaux" of Ada are linked together by the plot which describes the conflict of levels of consciousness throughout the personal record of Van Veen's "War of the Worlds". Fowler sees little conflict in Ada[28] and argues that "Van simply has too little to do, nothing to learn and no need to change".[29] However, a brief outline of the plot of the novel shows that it is a record of constant change and of the progression towards a self-conscious synthesis of the fictional levels within Van Veen's memory. As a young man, Van's self-deception is to see his life and love for Ada in solipsistic Antiterran terms. While in 1884, Van "had still not tasted the Terror of Terra" and does not admit it as a level within his own experience, he is still aware of Terra's 'reality' for others[30] and is shown in contact with it himself. In 1887, for example, he works under Tyomkin on an essay entitled "Terra: Ermetic Reality or Collective Dream?" (p.144). In 1888, Van is shown reading "Rattner on Terra" (p.180) while Ada visits a doctor to see if she is pregnant. Ada's physical betrayal would have no meaning for Van if he could truly sustain a solipsistic Antiterran stance. But just as Ada preaches "Destroy and forget" (p.14) in regards to disturbing reminders from the past, so Van "felt that for him to survive on this terrible Antiterra, in the multicolored and evil world into which he was born he had to

destroy, or at least maim for life, two men" (p.238). Ironically Van attempts through physical activity to resolve the personal pain of his self-professed Antiterran world. This continual conflict between Terran and Antiterran levels of consciousness continues. After his duel, Van writes to Bernard Rattner ("nephew of the great Rattner") from his Lakeview hospital bed asserting that "Your uncle has most honest standards...but I am going to demolish him soon (p.251). One of the indications of change in Van, brought about by the gradual impingement of Terran "reality" is shown in his abandonment of Antiterran geography. From Part 2 on, not only dates but places become the fixed points on which Van hangs his artistic selections of memory. Telephones, ships and airplanes exist and connect Terran routes. Ada's letters come from Terran parts of America (Los Angeles, California, Arizona, pp.261-63). Van works at Kingston University, Mayne in the Department of Terrapy and writes his own Letters from Terra. The 1892 reunion with Ada takes place in Manhattan. A final, but still unrecognised by Van, impingement of Terra is Van's submission to Demon's Terran code of morality. In a letter to Ada he accepts the necessity to part from her:

> Do what he tells you. His logic souns preposterous, presupposing sic a vague kind of "Victorian" era, as they have on Terra according to "my mad " ? , but in a paroxysm of illegible I suddenly realized he was right. Yes, right, here and there, not neither here, nor there, as most things are (p.350).

This "preposterous" logic is accepted by Van, although he himself continues to be unaware that in bowing to Demon's morality he has accepted Terra as a level of consciousness which has the power to influence his life and actions. Van remains self-deceived:

> He wondered what really kept him alive on terrible Antiterra, with Terra a myth and all art a game,... (p.356).

Antiterra or imaginative "reality" becomes "a game". Terra seems "bent on mechanizing his mind" (p.354). The members of his immediate family are destroyed by Terra:

> Three elements, fire, water, and air destroyed, in that sequence, Marina, Lucette, and Demon (p.354).

The death of Ada and Van's parents seems to remove the final obstacles to their 1905 reunion but once more Terra intrudes in the form of Vinelander's terminal illness. Seventeen years later (1922) it is, ironically, Van's reaction to Ada's physical reality that causes his first rejection of her. Final reunion brings self-awareness, and the record of their life together from 1922 to 1967 is a direct admittance of Terra and Antiterra as interdependent levels within the final synthesis of "Vaniada".

Thus the personal account of Van's life shows the progression and gradual change from a Byronic and solipsistic stance, to the reconciliation of the "objective-subjective split" by coming to accept physical and imaginative experience as synthesized within the interacting fictional levels of memory.

The synthesis of the levels of existence within memory is analogous to Van's use of his "mind-pictures" or "tableaux" which make up the components of Ada and act as the "sudden juxtapositions that revived the part while vivifying the whole" (p.31). This interdependence of the parts and the whole is repeated in the overall structure of Ada. At the same time the relationship of the parts of the novel to the whole suggests the constant circling of memory between the past and a present already becoming past. In the first place, the structure of the book is circular and demands a rereading process from the reader. As Van himself points out "The modest narrator has to remind the rereader of this,..." (p.21, my italics). This rereading process is built into each separate section of Ada, and each part forms overlapping circles with the whole.

On the level of the novel as a fiction, it has already been pointed out that the publisher's blurb at the end of the book, repeated on the dust jacket of the Penguin edition, is the usual starting point for the reader, and this leads into the family tree and Part I of the novel. Thus the end of the book circles back to the beginning.

On the level of memory, the textual surface of all the parts is made up of moments of recorded duration, a constant circling between past and present within memory. Part V represents the point of Van's most immediate past. While it illustrates the synthesis achieved by Van[31] it also depicts the conception of Ada, the writing process itself interlaced with other details of Van and Ada's activities, and it ends with the proof-corrections and alterations which are being made to the master copy of Van's memoirs. Thus Part V contains all the individual parts of the novel from its conception in 1957 to the corrections of 1967, and it circles back to the beginning of the book. As Van himself points out, Part V is the true prologue to his memoirs:

> This Part Five is not meant as an epilogue, it is the true introduction of my ninety-seven percent true, and three percent likely, Ada or Ardor, a family chronicle (p.445).

Part V is itself circular the last pages recalling the opening page as both form the last recorded account of one day in Van's life, the final point of the immediate present. Chap I (Part V) opens in the winter of 1967 at the caste in Ex ("le crestal d'Ex" (p.445)) with Van's accouncement

> I, Van Veen, salute you, life, Ada Veen, Dr Lagosse, Stepan Nootkin, Violet Knox, Ronald Oranger. Today is my ninety-seventh birthday,... (p.445).

In the final chapter of Part V the last glimpse we have of Van and Ada shows them making alterations and corrections to the mastercopy of their book "bound in purple calf for Van's ninety-seventh birthday" (p.460). They are, of course, in "Their recently built castle in Ex...inset in a crystal winter" (p.460). Ex encompasses the physical level of Van's memoirs, for it is here at his birthplace that Van apparently dies "into the finished book", into "the poetry of its blurb" (p.460). Thus the novel completes a geographical and a physical circle. The former suggests the circling processes of memory within duration, the latter parallels the physical course of the individual within time bound human existence. The structure of Ada, therefore, reveals an interdependence of the parts to the whole and this, in turn, parallels the interaction of levels of experience retained by the individual as the memory-images which embody his personal identity.

Within this chapter memory has been aligned with personality. Chapter IV will examine personal identity as it is revealed in the style of memory's artifices and go on to discuss style as a valid means of characterization.

CHAPTER III: NOTES

1. See Chapter I above.

2. See Chapter I above.

3. In 1884, for example, Ada is twelve, Van fourteen, in 1888 Ada is sixteen, Van eighteen and so on. Specific incidents are even more carefully dated. For example, Van sets sail on the Tobakoff on June 3rd, 1901. The next day, "June 4, 1901, in the Atlantic" (p.375), he finds Lucette to be on board, and that night Lucette commits suicide.

4. This is, also, a dramatization of Van's chessboard analogy, which is discussed in Chapter 2 above.

5. This example also illustrates the role of imagination in relation to memory which is discussed later in this chapter.

6. A further example of "whimsical" taste that epitomizes Van and Ada's youthful romanticism is shown by their reaction to the floor show at the Franco-Estonion restaurant they visit with Lucette in 1892:

> "Presently, the long sobs of the violins began to affect and almost choke Van and Ada: a juvenile conditioning of romantic appeal, which at once moment forced tearful Ada to go and 'powder her nose' while Van stood up with a spasmodic sob, which he cursed he could not control " (p.323).

7. The 15.I.70 as the date of Van's birth can be arrived at by comparing this entry with paragraph 2, p.419.

8. There is a suggestion that Aqua may have produced a still born child (p.26). This would parallel Van's effort with Cordula discussed later in this chapter.

9. The "War of the Worlds" is also an allusion to a book of the same title by H.G. Wells.

10. Fowler, Denis, Reading Nabokov, p.177.

11. Ibid., p.282.

12. Nabokov, V. Strong Opinions, p.186.

13. See Chapter I above.

14. See Chapter I above.

15. The expansion of memories is illustrated by Van's multiplication (within his memory) of the number of letters sent to him by Ada during the period between 1888 and 1892. See especially paragraph 2, p.265.

16. See also Chapter I above.

17. The account of the "Shottal Tree" incident, pp.77-78 of Ada, provides an extended example of the interplay of memory and imagination in the reconstruction of the past.

18. Nabokov, V., Strong Opinions, p.78.

19. See Chapter I above.

20. Fowler, D., Reading Nabokov, p.191.

21. Bader, J., Crystal Land, pp.139-140.

22. Nabokov, V., Speak, Memory, p.153.

23. Ibid., p.155.

24. Ibid., p.153.

25. Ibid., p.162.

26. Ibid., p.154.

27. See Chapter I above.

28. Fowler claims that "...Ada is almost without conflict. It is naked Nabokoviana", p.188.

29. Ibid., p.189.

30. See Chapter 2 above.

31. See Chapter 2 above.

CHAPTER IV

MEMORY, IMAGINATION AND STYLE

Throughout this discussion, Van's term "memory-images" (p.430) has been applied to what are more correctly the "accumulation of sensa" or the subjective impressions which are retained by memory on the basis of emotional preference. The ordering of these impressions is the function of imagination. In Ada Nabokov shows that imagination manipulates and unifies the sensa retained by memory to form images and patterns which make up the individual's fictions of himself and of his world. Furthermore the novel reveals that the same interaction of memory and imagination takes place in the fashioning of a work of art.

Personal use of imagination is revealed in the style of the individual's artifices. Imagination may function creatively to fashion the original patterns of personal, dynamic consciousness, or it may operate mechanically by accepting and reproducing established patterns. In the latter case the individual is reduced to a puppet, the third person of other people's fictions. Marina, for example, is described as "a dummy in

human disguise" (p.199), since she lacks "that third sight (individual, magically detailed imagination) which many otherwise ordinary and conformant people may also possess, but without which memory (even that of a profound 'thinker' or technician of genius) is, let us face it, a stereotype or a tear-sheet" (p.199).

The mechanical patterning of memory takes various forms. Terrans, for example, deny their own memory-impressions of imaginative being and pattern their conscious awareness on the physical laws of chronological sequence. In this, they become the third person of nature's artifices. Kim's photography, which is the use of a mechanical device to record a physical representation of past experience, provides the artistic equivalent. Van rejects Kim's photos of the Ardis idyll as an art form:

> Art my foute. This is the hearse of ars, a toilet roll of the Carte du Tendre! I'm sorry you showed it to me. That ape has vulgarized our mind pictures (p.320).

At the other extreme Antiterrans deny the memory of their physical being. Mlle. Lariviere is an 'artist' who loses touch with physical realities. After a more knowledgeable Ada has teasingly rejected as "all bluff and nun's nonsense" (p.67) her bewildered governess's attempt to instruct her on menstruation,

> Mlle Lariviere, who was a remarkably stupid person (in spite or perhaps because of her propensity for novelizing), mentally passed in review her own experience and wondered for a few dreadful minutes if perhaps, while she had indulged in the arts, the progress of science had not changed that of nature (p.67).

Mlle Lariviere's La Rivere de Diamants is rejected as a "fairy tale" by Van and Ada because it "lacked 'realism' within its own terms" (p.73).

Similarly, other people's pasts are other people's fictions, so that the mechanical patterning of memory also applies to any reproduction of the previous products of a creative imagination. For example Aqua's vision of "Terra the Fair" as "a minor hymnist's paradise, a future America of alabaster buildings" (p.23) is a combination of other people's fictions which have developed into widely accepted religious and social myths. By the same token Van's youthful Byronic stance or Ada's alignment of their love with that of Chateaubriand's "siblings" are both examples of a mechanical reproduction of past fictions. As such they negate the creative use of imagination by Van and Ada in the ordering of their memories.

This chapter will first examine Van Veen's search for a personal stylistic freedom by which to express his individuality, and then go on to show how the major characters in Ada are defined by their imaginative use of memory as it is reflected in the style of their individual artifices.

Van's attempt to capture the tang of his individual being by recording his personal experience of duration in the writing of his memoirs is a search for stylistic freedom within a verbal art medium. He conceives of his memoirs as a "playground for a match between Inspiration and Design" (p.452). The inspiration arises out of Van's physical and intellectual experiences which have been retained by his memory as subjective impressions. The design is the imaginative patterning of these impressions into Van's personal or his projected fictions.

As a ten-year-old boy, Van is first introduced to abstract art by "Mr. Plunkett, a reformed card-sharper" (p.137), who is a personal friend and guide to Demon:

> To Van he was even more fascinating than King Wing.[1] Gruff but kindly Mr Plunkett could not resist exploiting that fascination (we all like to be liked) by introducing Van to the tricks of an art become pure and abstract, and therefore genuine (p.137).

It is in these lessons of art for art's sake rather than for materialistic gain that Van first learns an art that is a combination of memory and manipulation:

> Mr Plunkett believed only in slight-of-hand; secret pockets were useful (but could be turned inside out and against you). Most essential was the 'feel' of a card, the delicacy of its palming and digitation, the false shuffle, deck-sweeping, pack-roofing, prefabrication of deals, and above all a finger agility that practice could metamorphose into veritable vanishing acts or, conversely, into the materialization of a

> joker or the transformation of two pairs into four kings. One absolute requisite, if using privately an additional deck, was memorizing discards when hands were not pre-arranged. For a couple of months Van practiced card tricks, then turned to other recreations. He was an apprentice who learned fast, and kept his labeled phials in a cool place (p.138).

Mr Plunkett's art is a combination of memory and physical, rather than imaginative, manipulation, but it leads to one of Van's first insights into the role of the artist. Sixteen years later in a card game at Chose, Van and two Frenchmen are being cheated by a fourth player, Dick, who needs the money to pay his numerous debts. Dick is described as "a man of many mirrors" (p.138), because he uses a number of small reflecting surfaces to bring about his tricks. Van challenges Dick with Mr Plunkett:

> 'I say, Dick, ever met a gambler in the States called Plunkett? Bald gray chap when I knew him'.
>
> 'Plunkett? Plunkett? Must have been before my time. Was he the one who turned priest or something. Why?'
>
> 'One of my father's pal. Great artist.'
>
> 'Artist?'
>
> 'Yes, artist. I'm an artist. I suppose <u>you</u> think you're an artist. Many people do.'
>
> 'What on earth is an artist?'
>
> 'An underground observatory', replied Van promptly (p.139).

True art relies on memory rather than mechanical devices to produce its conjuring tricks as Van goes on to prove by roundly

defeating the unfortunate Dick. Even more important, as Van comes to realize, is that the creative use of memory-sensa by imagination can produce completely new styles of artifice. The young Van's personal art form is a physical reversal of gravity, King Wing's hand-walking art. At ninety, Van sees that this reversal of usual order or style in his Mascodagina performances prefigures his later creative manipulation of memory through imagination:

> The essence of the satisfaction belonged rather to the same order as the one he later derived from self-imposed tasks, extravagantly difficult seemingly absurd tasks when V.V. sought to express something, which until expressed had only a twilight being (or even none at all —nothing but the illusion of the backward shadow of its imminent expression). It was Ada's castle of cards. It was standing the metaphor on its head not for the sake of the tricks difficulty, but in order to perceive an ascending waterfall or a sunrise in reverse: a triumph in a sense, over the ardis of time. Thus the rapture young Mascodagina derives from overcoming gravity was akin to that of artistic revelation in the sense utterly unknown to the innocents of critical appraisal, the social-scene commentators, the moralists, the idea-mongers and so forth. Van on the stage was performing organically what his figures of speech were to perform later in life —acrobatic wonders that had never been expected from them and which frightened children (pp.146-7, my italics).

Van's belief in the potentialities of imagination to create new artifices influences his attitude to language itself. He is "secretly nauseated" by Ada's discussions of her dramatic career because her acting relies on other people's fictions and use of language:

> For him the written word existed only in its abstract purity, in its unrepeatable appeal to an equally ideal mind. It belonged solely to its creator and could not be spoken or enacted by a mime (as Ada insisted) without letting the deadly stab of anothers mind destroy the artist in the very lair of his art. A written play was intrinsically superior to the best performance of it, even if directed by the author himself. Otherwise Van agreed with Ada that the talking screen was certainly preferable to live theater for the simple reason that with the former a director could attain, and maintain, his own standards of perfection throughout an unlimited number of performances (p.334).

Thus Van sees the use of language as a direct reflection of imaginative petterning embodying the properties and nuances which are consciously assigned to the words by the individual user. At ninety this view underlies his attitude to "sham" forms of literary art:

> More fiercely than ever he execrated all sham art, from the crude banalities of junk sculpture to the italicized passages meant by a pretentious novelist to convey his fellow hero's cloudbursts (p.451).

Since Van believes that the individual creates the unique expressions of his personal awareness in his ordering of language, he dismisses as shams the attempts at stream-of-consciousness writing which purports to express the functioning of other peoples unordered mind-images. For a similar reason, he attacks Freudian psychoanalysis with its tendency to negate the individual and explain his behaviour in terms of established patterns:

> He had even less patience than before with the 'Sig' (Signy - M.D. - MD) School of Psychiatry. Its founder's epoch-making confession ('In my student days I became a deflowerer because I failed to pass my botany examination') he prefixed, as an epigraph, to one of his last papers (1959) entitled The Farce of Group Therapy in Sexual Maladjustment,... (p.451).

Any use of language is a reflection of unique being. At ninety Van applies this insight to his own philosophical and psychiatric papers and realizes that these writings are not objective discourses, but simply exercises in literary style:

> it suddenly occured to our old polemicist that all his published works—even the extremely abtruse and specialized Suicide and Sanity (1912), Compitalia (1921), and When an Alienist Cannot Sleep (1932), to cite only a few—were not epistemic tasks set to himself by a savant, but buoyant and bellicose exercises in literary style (p.452).

Since literary style is a reflection of self Van perceives that it must incorporate all facets of experience in order to become a valid embodiment of total personality. Thus Van's memoirs are commenced from the point of a self-aware synthesis of the fictional levels of his memory. His physical being and its inevitable decline is now accepted: "At ninety, he still danced on his hands—in a recurrent dream" (p.448). His "libertinism" is now recognised but is seen as being held in check by his love for Ada, until Van's inevitable organic decline saps the potential for performance. Finally Van discerns that his intellectual activities have always revolved around the

abstract operations of the mind: "Van had a passion for the insane as some have for arachnids or orchids" (p.266). Van now sees that it is through imaginative intellectual activity that he can create new stylistic forms to express his own individual being:

> I do not know why I should have devoted so much attention to the hoary hours and sagging apparatus of the venerable Veen. Rakes never reform. They burn, sputter a few last green sparks, and go out. Far greater importance must be attached by the self-researcher and his faithful companion to the unbelievable intellectual surge, to the creative explosion, that occurred in the brain of this strange, friendless, rather repulsive nonagenarian... (p.451).

While Van and Ada attempt to preserve the utmost truth of detail in the writing of Van's memoirs,[2] it is the patterning of these details that must reveal Van's dynamic individual existence. Memory retains the impressions of the "never-to-be-revisited past" of each individual, which Van portrays in his descriptions of the two picnics at Ardis. After the 1884 picnic Ada bursts the tyre of Van's bicycle and is forced to travel on Van's knee in the carriage:

> It was the children's first bodily contact and both were embarassed. She settled down with her back to Van, resettled as the carriage jerked, and wriggled some more, arranging her ample pine-smelling skirt, which seemed to envelope him airily, for all the world like a barber's sheet. In a trance of awkward delight he held her by the hips. Hot gouts of sun moved fast across her zebra stripes and the backs of her bare arms and seemed to continue their journey through the tunnel of his own frame (p.72).

Four years later at the picnic for Ada's sixteenth birthday the situation is apparently duplicated, but this time with Lucette on Van's knee:

> Her ember-bright hair flew into his face and smelt of a past summer. Family smell; yes, coincidence: a set of coincidences slightly displaced; the artistry of asymmetry....Lucette's compact bottom and cool thighs seemed to sink deeper and deeper in the quicksand of the dream-like, dream-rephrased, legend-distorted past (p.221).

Van attempts to approximate the past contact with Ada in his present contact with Lucette: "it was that other picnic he relived and it was Ada's soft haunches which he now held as if she were present in duplicate, in two different colour prints" (p.222).

The artistry of asymmetry is not enough, however. Each individual is in a process of constant change and the past, which is only memory, can never be relived. Van recognizes that "no furtive fiction" can compete with his personal, individual contacts with Ada:

> A twinge in his kneecap also came to the rescue, and honest Van chided himself for having attempted to use a little pauper instead of the princess in the fairy tale (p.223).

Just as memory retains the individual's unrepeatable past experiences, so Van believes that the literary expression of that experience should achieve a stylistic freedom from previous art in order to portray the unique identity of its creator. Parody

is the major means by which Van portrays his freedom from previous literary fictions. Van parodies both that physical and that intellectual behaviour which has arisen from the unthinking acceptance of previous fictions. Thus the description of his initial "undercover dealings" (p.80) with Ada show both his conformity and his individuality:

> He could not say afterwards, when discussing with her that rather pathetic nastiness, whether he really feared that his avourine (as Blanche was to refer later, in her bastard French, to Ada) might react with an outburst of real or well-feigned resentment to a stark display of desire, or whether a glum cunning approach was dictated to him by considerations of pity and decency towards a chaste child, whose charm was too compelling not to be tasted in secret and too sacred to be openly violated; but something went wrong—that much was clear. The vague commonplaces of vague modesty so dreadfully in vogue eighty years ago, the unsufferable banalities of shy wooing buried in old romances as arch as Arcady, those moods, those modes, lurked no doubt behind the hush of his ambuscades, and that of her toleration (p.80).

In the same way Van's use of language to express his feelings for Ada during their first full sexual contact on the Night of the Burning Barn is parodied:

> For the first time in their love story, the blessing, the genius of lyrical speech descended upon the rough lad, he murmured and moaned, kissing her face with voluble tenderness, crying out in three languages—the three greatest in all the world—pet words upon which a dictionary of secret diminutives was to be based and go through many revisions till the definitive edition of 1967 (p.98).

The discussion of the plot of Ada in Chapter 3 of this essay traced the gradual impingement of Terran 'reality' on Van's consciousness. Concurrent with this process of change is the parodying of Van's stances that would deny Terra. For example, despite his constant negating of his physical experience, Van is shown to be very concerned with his physical appearance as he awaits the meeting with Ada and Vinelander in 1905:

> He felt hot and uncomfortable in silk shirt and gray flannels—one of his older suits because it happened to make him look slimmer;...Did his glasses and short mustache really make him look younger, as polite whores affirmed? (p.399).

In particular, the Antiterran stance of Van's youth is parodied by the way the style of his activities fashions itself on the Romantic writers. Bader points out that "Striking and exaggerated plot movements are often used as reflections and comic literalizations of conventional absurdities of phrasing or characterization".[3] Van's duel, for example, is depicted as "the king of single combat described by most Russian novelists and by practically all Russian novelists of gentle birth" (p.245). His hypothetical imaginative patterning of the duel is compared to "those helpful hobbies which polio patients, lunatics, and convicts are taught by generous institutions, by enlightened administrators, by ingenious psychiatrists—such as bookbinding, or putting blue beads into the

orbits of dolls made by other criminals, cripples and madmen" (p.243).

For the ninety-year-old Van writing his memoirs, parody is the stylistic means by which he shows the young Van as being trapped in previous fictions and, at the same time, distinct from them. Tanner points out that there is "a special value in parody as a way of writing which liberates itself from the style it seems to be emulating".[4] Throughout Part I of the novel Van and Ada are portrayed as distinct from past fictions, as, for example, in the description of their arrangements for a secret meeting:

> They had one moment to plan things, it was all, historically speaking at the dawn of the novel which was still in the hands of parsonage ladies and French academicians, so such moments were previous. She stood scratching one raised knee They agreed to go for a walk before lunch and find a secluded place (pp.102-3).

In Part 2 of the novel Van's pseudonym, Voltemand,[5] suggests the opposition of his personal Antiterran stance with his attempt to use language as an objective medium separate from his subjective bias. Ironically, the result is that Ada's letters to Van during the period "breathed, writhed, lived; Van's Letters from Terra, 'a philosophical

novel', showed no sign of life whatsoever" (p.265). This lifelessness is the inevitable consequence of Van's attempt to separate his writing from his memory-images:

> Poor Van! In his struggle to keep the writer of the letters from Terra strictly separate from the image of Ada, he gilt and carmined Theresa until she became a paragon of banality (p.267).

Van's tacit acceptance of 'objective' mediums culminates in his bowing to Demon's Terran code of morality and once more parting from Ada. By so doing he becomes the third person of another person's fiction, and, as his farewell letter to Ada indicates, actually begins to see himself as the subject of another man's painting:

> You see, girl, how it is and must be. In the last window we shared we both saw a man painting [us?] but your second-floor level of vision probably prevented you seeing that he wore what looked like a butcher's apron, badly smeared. Good-bye, girl (p.350).

The parody of Van's writings, his university post and activities continues throughout Part III. Even in Part IV Van does not realize the implications of his insight that 'reality' is dependent upon the subjectivity of memory. Only in Part V of the novel, when Van recognizes that memory retains the subjective impressions of his experience which are then unified and ordered by imagination and projected or communicated through language, is he able to consciously seek

and attain the stylistic freedom that expresses his individual identity. And Part V, as previously discussed, provides the prologue to the writing of his memoirs. Within these memoirs Van characterizes not only himself, but also the people who impinge on his personal world through the style of their individual artifices.

In Part I of the novel Van defines the difference between himself and Ada as "the abstract scholar's envy with the naturalist's immediate knowledge..." (p.61). As a naturalist, Ada is controlled by the reality she attempts to reproduce factually, and she carries this over into the patterning of her abstract artifices. As a child at Ardis, for instance, her paintings are based on the manipulation and reproduction of factual details:

> On those relentlessly hot July afternoons, Ada liked to sit on a cool piano stool of ivoried wood at a white-oilcloth'd table in the sunny music room, her favourite botanical atlas open before her, and copy out in color on creamy paper some singular flower. She might choose, for instance, an insect-mimicking orchid which she would proceed to enlarge with remarkable skill. Or else she combined one species with another (unrecorded but possible), introducing odd little changes and twists that seemed almost morbid in so young a girl so nakedly dressed (p.81).

In the same way Ada's "shadow-and-shine" games are based on the outlining of natural patterns rather than on the invention of her own. Thus she remains a player not a creator, and this seeking after established forms affects her attitude to language:

> Pedantic Ada once said that the looking up of words in a lexican for any other needs than those of expression—be it instruction or art—lay somewhere between the ornamental assortment of flowers (which could be, she conceded, mildly romantic in a maidenly head-cocking way) and making collage pictures of disparate butterfly wings (which was always vulgar and often criminal). Per contra, she suggested to Van that verbal circuses, 'performing words', 'poodle-doodles', and so forth, might be redeemable by the quality of the brain work required for the creation of a great logograph or inspired pun and should not preclude the help of a dictionary, gruff or complacent.
>
> 'That was why she admitted 'Flavita' (p.174).

'Flavita' Van tells us, is a form of Scrabble. It is the manipulation of letters to form recognized words as compared with Van's personal manipulation of words to form images. Van, who is "a first rate chess player" cannot understand Ada's inability to create imaginative patterns and this in chess raise "the standard of her, so to speak, damsel-errant game above that of a young lady in an old novel... (p.176). The difference between Ada's performance at chess and her ability at Scrabble indicates the style of her inventive powers. She has little skill at imaginative creation which manipulates abstractions, but with the concrete forms of letters she is a genius at rearrangement. Van describes the difference as that between a conjurer and a computer:

> Ada did manage now, and then, to conjure up a combinational sacrifice, offering, say, her queen—with a subtle win after two or three moves if the piece were taken; but she saw only one side of the question, preferring to ignore, in the queer lassitude of clogged cogitation, the obvious counter combination that would lead inevitably to her defeat if the grand sacrifice were not accepted. On the Scrabble board, however, this same wild and weak Ada was transformed into a sort of graceful computing machine, endowed, moreover, with phenomenal luck, and would greatly surpass baffled Van in acumen, foresight and exploitation of chance, when shaping appetizing long words from the most unpromising scraps and collops (p.176).

Ada's style is a negation of her own imaginative powers. This is further reflected in her attitude to her personal memories. She attempts to erase the uncomfortable images of the past. After the two children have examined Marina's Swiss album Van decides they must burn or bury it. "Right answered Ada 'Destroy and forget'" (p.14). The difference is that while Van destroys the object, he retains the memory of it and later includes it in his memoirs. Ada on the other hand wishes to destroy both the object and the memory. During the 1888 summer at Ardis Ada is troubled by the knowledge of her physical infidelities: "She was on bad terms with memory" (p.152). When Van learns of her activities through Blanche's letter, she attempts to handle it in the same way as Marina's album, as if by destroying the object she can erase the memory: "Destroy and forget it", said Ada (p.229).

By contrast, Van cannot forget the past. After he has left Ada and is staying in the Manhattan apartment, Cordula inadvertently produces an old school album which Van remembers to include a photo and jingle of Ada's:

> It did not matter, it did not matter. Destroy and forget. But a butterfly on the Park, an orchid in a shop window, would revive everything with a dazzling inward shock of despair (p.256).

Ada not only attempts to eradicate but also to distort deliberately the details of her past:

> She (Ada) had, hadn't she, a way of always smoothing out the folds of the past - making the flutist impotent (except with his wife) and allowing the gentleman farmer only one embrace, with a premature eyakulyatsiya, one of those hideous Russian loan-words? (p.310).

Ada shows as little interest in Van's adventures when he is apart from her. At the 1898 reunion she "had made up her mind to transcend his and her sensual sins: the adjective being a near synonym of 'senseless' and 'soulless'; (p.340). In so doing, Ada denies her own experience in the formulation of her personal world.

The combination of Ada's attitude to artifice and to personal memory results in her easy acceptance of other people's fictions in the imaginative patterning of her life. She accepts, without the questions that trouble Van, his

Antiterran stance and their personal "Desdemona". She is happy to see their love story as part of a romantic tradition of love myths and legends. She rejects Kim's photos of the Ardis idyll, but takes up the imaginative patterning of their love as it has been formulated by the Ardis populace:

> She had never realized, she said again and again (as if intent to retain the past from the matter-of-fact triviality of Kim's album), that their first summer in the orchards and orchidariums of Ardis had become a sacred and secret creed, throughout the countryside (p.322).

This adoption of other people's fictions is most fully stated by Ada in her attitude to her acting career:

> I seem to have always felt, for example, that acting should be focued not on 'characters' not on 'types' of something or other, not on the fokus-pokus of a social theme, but exclusively on the subjective unique poetry of the author, because playwrights, as the greatest among them has shown, are closer to poets than novelists. In 'real' life we are creatures of chance in an absolute void—unless we be artists ourselves, naturally; but in a good play I feel authored, I feel passed by the board of censors, I feel secure, with only a breathing blackness before me (instead of our Fourth-Wall Time),.. (p.335).

Ada herself has not the ability to formulate imaginative patterns of Time. In her factual reproductions Time is a dimension of Space. She cannot form metaphors for Time as the medium of consciousness. At the 1922 reunion, Ada says

> We can know the time, we can know a time. We can never know Time. Our senses are simply not meant to perceive it. It is like—— (p.445).

In her personal style Ada seeks established frames and forms. For example, she welcomes the 'albergghian atmosphere' of the Three Swans, the scene of the 1905 and 1922 reunions, "as a frame, as a form, something supporting and guarding life, otherwise unprovinced on Desdemonia, where artists are the only gods" (p.408).

The title of Van and Ada's joint publication Information and Form, which comes out just before the commencement of Van's memoirs, provides a concise summation of the differences in their individual style of artifices. Van is the artist who manipulates memory to produce imaginative creations or forms. Ada is the naturalist who can assemble information or given forms but who cannot create imaginative patterns of her own personal existence.

The third of the younger Veens, Lucette, attempts to reduplicate the styles of Van and Ada. "She's a wonderful imitatrix, by the way" (p.311), Van tells Ada. This is all Lucette achieves. She subsumes her own individuality and becomes the third person of Van's and Ada's fictions. Lucette's imitative style is disclosed in the 1888 art lesson with Ada:

> In the meantime Lucette kept insisting that the easiest way to drawer a flower was to place a sheet of transparent paper over the picture (in the present case a red-bearded pogonia, with indecent details of structure, a plant peculiar to the Ladoga bogs) and trace the outline of the thing in colored inks (p.229).

This mechanical copying is evident in Lucette's physical and intellectual activities. After Van's demonstration of his King Wing agility at the 1884 picnic Lucette demands to be taught the same skill but can only do so with Van's support:

> Van gripped her by the ankles while she slowly progressed on her little red palms, sometimes falling with a grunt on her face or pausing to nibble a daisy (p.76).

Similarly, on the intellectual level, Lucette is unable to rearrange even set forms in the Scrabble games:

> As to ambitions, incompetent and temperamental Lucette, she had to be, even at twelve, discreetly advised by Van... (p.176).

Aqua's "little fetus, a fish of rubber, that she had produced in her bath" (p.27) is rejected by Ada when presented to her by Dan on her twelfth birthday: "'You tell him to take a pair of tongs and carry the whole business back to the surgical dump'" (p.71) Ada says. Lucette, however, (Like Aqua before her) accepts the substitute:

> Lucette had abandoned her skipping rope to squat on the brink of the brook and float a fetus-sized rubber doll (p.115).

This imprisonment within other's fictions is actualized during the 1888 summer when Van and Ada think up a number of ways to rid themselves of "Lucette, the shadow" (p.468). They leave "the angry captive firmly attached to a willow trunk" (p.115); they entrap her in "the liquid prison of a bath; and they bribe her with the prize of Van's book of poetry if she can memorize eight lines of poetry.

By 1892 Lucette is studying "the History of Art" (p.287) and once more immersing herself in past fictions. Her attempts to create her own identity focus on the personal physical contacts she hopes to forge with Van, but in her meetings with him she remains a pale imitation of Ada:

> 'I knew it was hopeless', she said, looking away. 'I did my best. I imitated all her shtuchki (little stunts). I'm a better actress than she but that's not enough I know (p.304).

At dinner with Van before the fatal journey on the Tobakoff, Lucette describes her sense of personal identity to him:

> 'I'm like Dolores—when she says she's 'only a picture painted on air'.'
>
> 'Never could finish that novel—much too pretentious.'
>
> 'Pretentious but true. It's exactly my sense of existing—a fragment, a wisp of color' (p.365).

Lucette remains without an outline of personal identity because of her inability to break away from other people's fictions and create her own personal style.

By contrast Demon forges a certain individual style. However, while he rejects previous imaginative fictions, he seeks unique, personal embodiments purely within physical appearance. This becomes clear in his musings on artifice which follow on from his perception of Dan's odd "Boschean death" (p.343). Demon is aware that "art and science meet in an insect, in a thrush, in a thistle of that ducal bosquet" (p.343). He sees a similar interaction within man's imaginative artifices, so that, for instance, he rejects the attempts to trace symbols in a Boschean painting which embodies a scientifically incorrect detail, the wrong side of a butterfly's wing:

> I mean I don't give a hoot for the esoteric meeting, for the myth behind the moth, for the masterpiece-baiter who makes Bosch express some Bosch of his time, I'm allergic to allegory and am quite sure he was just enjoying himself by crossbreeding casual fancies just for the fun of the contour and color,.. (p.344).

Nevertheless, while Demon accepts the manipulation of detail as the artist's prerogative, he believes the work itself must be studied from the basis of his own sensory reactions to its surface appearance, rather than as the embodiment of the artist's unique imaginative design:

> and what we have to study, as I was telling your cousins, is the joy of the eye, the feel and taste of the woman-sized strawberry that you embrace with him, or the exquisite surprise of an unusual orifice (p.344).

This appreciation of art for its surface appearance is paralleled in Demon's own style of artifice which concentrates on the ordering and the manipulation of outward appearances. Within his own life Demon attempts to triumph over "the ardis" of time, not by the creation of original imaginative forms, but by attempting to disguise his physical decline. Van notices in 1886 that "Demon had dyed his hair a blacker black" (p.143). Two years later, at the family reunion "His hair was dyed a raven black, his teeth were hound-white" (p.186). In a similar way he acts emotion when he thinks it is called for in outward appearance:

> His tear glands were facile in action when no real sorrow made him control himself (p.187).

While Demon does not erase the impressions of his memory and is aware of "that special concussion of constant detail that plagued his children" (p.187), he is unable to reconcile his memories with changed physical appearance. Faced after sixteen years with Marina, his former mistress, he cannot relate his former love for her beauty with the coarse middle-aged woman before him:

> It aggrieved him—that complete collapse of the past, the dispersal of its itinerant court and music makers, the logical impossibility to relate the dubious reality of the present to the unquestionable one of remembrance (p.198).

It is Ada's freshness that Demon lingers over as he makes his farewells. By 1892 Demon's penchant for younger mistresses coupled with his attentions to Ada cause him to be referred to as a 'younger' edition of Van:

> The bizarre enthusiast had developed the same tendernesse for her (Ada) as he had always had for Van. Its new expression in regard to Ada looked sufficiently fervid to make watchful fools suspect that old Demon 'slept with his niece' (actually, he was getting more and more occupied with Spanish girls who were getting more and more youthful every year until the end of the century, when he was sixty, with hair dyed a midnight blue, his flame had become a difficult nymphet of ten). So little did the world realize the real state of affairs that even Cordula Tobak, born de Prey, and Grace Wellington, born Erminin, spoke of Demon Veen, with his fashionable goatee and frilled shirtfront, as 'Van's successor' (p.308).

While Van accepts Demon's idiosyncrasies as the physical expression of Demon's personal identity, he can not justify the fact that Demon falls back on a Terran code of morality in order to persuade Van to part from Ada and to allow her marriage to Vinelander. Thus, after Demon's death, when Ada accuses Van of never having loved his father, he replies

> Oh, I did and do—tenderly, reverently, understandingly, because after all that minor poetry of the flesh is something not unfamiliar to me. But as far as we are concerned, I mean you and I, he was buried on the same day as our uncle Dan (p.410).

For Van, Demon's imaginative identity is destroyed when, despite the previous rejection of religious and social myths, Demon seeks to force a past embodiment of values on his children. By falling back on the established design of a past moral code Demon reveals his own mechanical use of imagination which, in turn, reduces him to the third person of other people's fictions.

Dan Veen is a pale copy of Demon. In his youth he wears "a monocle in a gay-dog copy of his cousin," (p.121). The notes to Ada point out that the Durak of his name is "'fool' in Russian" (p.463). His life is described as a "mixture of the ready-made and the grotesque," (p.341). As a young man he becomes a Manhattan art dealer even though "He did not have —initially at least—any particular liking for paintings" (p.10). His attitude to art develops into a mundane form of criticism rather than artistic appreciation. This is shown in her personal art collections:

> "The collection of Uncle Dan's Oriental Erotica prints turned out to be artistically second-rate and inept calisthentically. In the most hilarious, and expensive, picture, a Mongolian woman with an inane

> oval face surmounted by a hideous hair-do was shown communicating sexually with six rather plump, blank-faced gymnasts in what looked like a display window jammed with screens, potted plants, silks, paper fans and crockery. Three of the males, contorted in attitudes of intricate discomfort, were using simultaneously three of the harlot's main orfices, two older clients were treated by her manually, and the sixth, a dwarf, had to be contented with her deformed foot. Six other voluptuaries were sodomizing her immediate partners, and one more had got stuck in her armpit. Uncle Dan, having patiently disentangled all these limbs and belly folds directly or indirectly connected with the absolutely calm lady (still retaining somehow parts of her robes), had pencilled a note that gave the price of the picture and identified it as: 'Geisha with 13 lovers' Van located, however, a fifteenth navel thrown in by the generous artist but impossible to account for anatomically (pp.110-11).

Dan avoids literature as depressing, and also his own library, "not caring to run into the ghost of his father who had died there of a stroke" (p.38). He manages to decipher foreign art catalogues with the aid of "dwarf dictionaries for the undemanding tourist". Like Lucette Dan is physically and imaginatively the third person of other people's fictions, but unlike Lucette he is unable to recognize his own lack of personal style and identity. At Ada's sixteenth birthday picnic, he is delighted by his contact with a nearby collation of shepherds who "thought, he thought, he was a shepherd too" (p.216). Dan's death is a grotesque enactment

of a Bosch painting "now preserved in the Vienna Academy of Art" (p.343) according to Demon. Thus Dan is characterized by his very lack of personal style and identity.

Marina is another such dummy:

> As an actress, she had none of that breathtaking quality that makes the skill of mimicry seem, at least while the show lasts, worth even more than the price of such footlights as insomnia, fancy, arrogant art; (pp.14-15).

Like Demon she attempts to disguise the physical processes of ageing and has a series of young men as lovers. Unlike Demon, however, she continually plays stereotyped roles:

> Marina...took some professional pleasure in playing the hackneyed part of a fond mother, proud of her daughter's charm and humor, and herself charmingly and humorously lenient toward their brash circumstantiality: (p.55).

Within the film world despite, or perhaps because of her mediocrity, Marina as a vechile of other people's fictions is "marvelous in her world of shadows!" (p.337).

Marina's attitude to artifice is paralleled by her attitude to memory. Even when confronted with parallels of her own life in film scripts, Marina "tended to discount, out of sheer self-preservation, the considerably more solzhme patterns out of her own past" (p.159).

At the family reunion, Marina is not troubled by memories of her past love for Demon and its results:

> Somewhere, further back, much further back, safely transformed by her screen - corrupted mind into a stale melodrama was her three-year long period of hectically spaced love-meetings with Demon, A Torrid Affair (the title of her only cinema hit), passion in palaces, the palms and larches, his Utter Devotion, his impossible temper, separations, reconciliations, Blue Trains, tears, treachery, terror, an insane sister's threats, helpless, no doubt, but leaving their tiger-marks on the drapery of dreams, especially when dampness and dark affect one with fever. And the shadow of retribution on the back wall (with ridiculous legal innuendos). All this was mere scenery, easily packed, labeled 'Hell' and freighted away; (pp.199-200).

Throughout her life Marina remains a celluloid figure, a "dummy in human disguise."

Characterization in Ada dramatizes Van's belief in 'reality' as a subjectivity whose individual outlines can be discerned in the style of man's artifices. Imagination may function mechanically to reproduce past fictions, or it may manipulate personal memory-impressions to create an authentic style of artifice which reflects a dynamic individual identity.

CHAPTER IV: NOTES

1. King Wing (p.68) actually succeeds Mr Plunkett in Van's life, if not in the sequential placement within his memoirs. King Wing is Demon's writing master who in 1822, two years after the advent of Mr Plunkett, teaches Van to walk on his hands.

2. See Chapter 3 above.

3. Bader, J., Crystal Land, p.128.

4. Tanner, Tony, City of Words, p.58.

5. Voltemand is the ambassador between the two countries of Norway and Denmark in Hamlet.

CONCLUSION

IDENTITY AND FREEDOM IN RELATION TO ARTIFICE

Throughout Nabokov's work the quest for a means of establishing individual identity is interwoven with the themes of artifice, solipsism, imprisonment, and the duality of man's nature. These thematic stands interact to posit constantly the question of freedom within a life which is time-bound. While memory and imagination may transcend the chronological, natural laws and, in this sense, represent the immortal within man's experience, the paradox remains that man's consciousness is embodied in a physical, mortal organism. In his earlier novels, Nabokov presents characters who attempt to establish their freedom by manipulating artifice to create their own identities. Smurov, for example, in The Eye seeks to transcend a solipsistic self-awareness by gathering together the refractions of his identity which he finds in the impressions others have of him but, in doing so, he remains only the third person of other people's fictions. Cincinnatus in

Invitation to a Beheading is trapped by his solipsistic consciousness, but sees himself as literally and figuratively imprisoned by the patterns and pressures of the external world so that for him (as for Aqua in Ada) death is the only escape. With V in The Real Life of Sebastian Knight we have a character ostensibly searching for his dead half-brother's personality in the writings he has left, but in actuality increasingly identifying himself with the artifice to the point of relinquishing his own personal identity. This inability to balance the physical and the imaginative spheres of man's nature is further reflected in a series of characters who, like the young Van, seek the freedom of a fully realized identity by recognizing only their own imaginative existence. Albinus, Krug and Humbert Humbert are, therefore, self-defeating and ultimately self-destructive since they refuse to admit the paradox of man's duality. While Kinbote in Pale Fire enacts a similar role to V, Nabokov, through the character of John Shade, directly links the question of total identity with mortality and immortality to suggest, not a resolution, but rather an acceptance of the larger paradox arising out of man's duality coupled with an enjoyment of the game of patterning existence for its own sake:

> Yes! It sufficed that I in life could find
> Some kind of link-and-boblink, some kind
> Of correlated pattern in the game,
> Plexed artistry, and something of the same
> Pleasure in it as they who played it found.[1]

Ultimately, as Ada will be shown to illustrate, it is through this manipulation of artifice that Nabokov suggests man can capture and immortalize his own identity.

In his autobiography, Speak, Memory, written directly before Ada,[2] Nabokov begins his first chapter with a statement of the human condition as he sees it:

> The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness.[3]

Nabokov goes on to state his refusal to accept these boundaries of time and directly links imagination with immortality when he says

> Nature expects a full-grown man to accept the two black voids, fore and aft, as stolidly as he accepts the extraordinary visions in between. Imagination, the supreme delight of the immortal and the immature, should be limited. In order to enjoy life, we should not enjoy it too much.
> I rebel against this state of affairs.[4]

Ada, I would suggest, is a dramatization of this rebellion. Through the characterization and activities of Van Veen, Nabokov reveals man's potential for freedom or immortality,

both on the level of personality and on the analogous level of the created artifices arising out of personal identity.

In Chapter I of this discussion it was shown that, although existence is described as the movement "from cradle to deathbed" (p.440), at the same time Van Veen outlines his view of the potential of consciousness to transcend physiological time and asserts his belief in man's ability to create new forms (including his own identity) through the imaginative ordering of his memory-images. The process by which Van (unlike Albinus or Humbert Humbert) comes to recognize that these memory-images encompass and synthesize the dual nature of man was outlined in Chapter 2; Chapter 3 traced the interaction of these fictional levels of memory as they are paralleled by the structure of the book and established that memory in Ada is equated with personal identity. Finally, Chapter 4 discussed the style of the individual's artifices as a means of characterization. Since memory in Ada is personal identity, then it is through the imaginative manipulation of personal memory-images that man may either find freedom in the creation of new forms, including the self, or, lacking "third sight (individual magically detailed imagination)" (p.199), man may remain like Marina "a dummyin human disguise" (p.199) and in terms of imaginative artifice "a stereotype or a tear-sheet" (p.199).

Throughout his life, Van Veen's personal search for the freedom of individual identity touches on all the areas of his existence. His youthful Mascodagma stunts are a short-lived attempt to overcome physical laws by physical means. In the emotional sphere Van's incestuous relationship with Ada represents a personal freedom from the established codes of morality. Yet even after the children's first full sexual contact Van realizes that this moral 'deviation' does not represent an immortalizing freedom:

"Had it <u>really</u> happened? Are we really free?" (p.100).

On one level Van and Ada's incestuous love exhibits a rejection of previous moral fictions and, in this sense, it represents an expression of their distinctive individualities. Since man is both a physical and a sentient organism, however, he has the ability to express his personal identity in intellectual activity also. While Van sees Demon's "crimes" (p.186) as a physical manifestation of personality, he goes on to draw a parallel with artistic activity, arguing that

> No accursed generalizer, with a half-penny mind and dry-fig heart, would be able to explain (and this is my sweetest revenge for all the detractions my life-work has met with) the individual vagaries evolved in those and similar matters. No art and no genius would exist without such vagaries, and this is a final pronouncement, damning all clowns and clods (p.186).

In other words, Van suggests that in order to establish his unique identity or his freedom from previous modes of thought and behaviour, man must create new forms and patterns by drawing on the duel but interacting fictional planes of his personal memories. Furthermore, while man may exhibit "vagaries" of personal behaviour within his mortal existence (Demon's crimes), if he can create new forms of artifice he is capable of transcending the time-bound limits of his personal existence by producing a temporal but enduring embodiment of his personality in the work of art. Since Van believes that all awareness is personal subjective impression, ordered and manipulated by the individual imagination,[5] his search for identity within the literary medium of his memoirs is a quest for freedom from previous subjective fictions. Within the three spheres of Van's experience, the physical as exampled by his Mascodagma performance, the emotional as represented by his incestuous love, and the intellectual embodied in the work of art which is Ada, he achieves "a triumph, in a sense, over the ardis of time" (p.146, my italics), but the physical and the emotional are also dependent on and bound to the time-limits of his mortality. Only the work of art can survive physical death so that, ultimately,

personal immortality is itself an artifice. This is more than a revival of the Renaissance concept of immortalizing the beloved. Here the beloved is the self, and immortality is dependent on capturing the unique patterns of the total personal identity (physical, emotional and intellectual) in an artifice which provides a proof of individual personality by exhibiting its freedom from previously established forms.

At fourteen Van sees death as a final end: "You lose your immortality when you lose your memory" (p.458). At ninety, writing his memoirs, he still describes death as "the wrench of relinquishing forever all one's memories" (p.457), but he now realizes that as immortality is ultimately an artifice, then the question of freedom in relation to personal death becomes irrelevant. Thus he argues that

> Actually the question of mortal precedence has now hardly any importance I mean, the hero and heroine should get so close to each other by the time the horror begins, so <u>organically</u> close, that they overlap, intergrade, interache, and even if Vaniada's end is described in the epilogue we, writers and readers should be unable to make out (myopic, myopic) who exactly survives, Dava or Vada, Anda or Vanda (p.457).

Unlike Humbert Humbert who attempts to use the immortality of art as a palliative for his personal guilt at having attempted to destroy the individuality of Lolita, Van Veen accepts the duality of his own nature and revels in the artifice as the

means to an enduring embodiment of his personal identity. Thus the dual nature of man is fully recognized and dramatized in Ada. As a physical being Van's consciousness is shown to be imprisoned within the cycle of organic existence, and thus the last chapter of the novel circles back to the start of the book and the indirect statement of Van's and Ada's deaths.[6] As a creative being Van fades into "the prose of the book or the poetry of its blurb" (p.460). On the level of artifice his physical death does not result in the loss of his personal identity to the temporal world, for the imaginative patterning of his memories remains immortalized within the work of art and forms part of the continuing experience of its readers.

Ultimately, of course, Van, Ada, the novel itself, have never been anything other than the artifice of the author, Nabokov. However, Nabokov, I suggest, has used his characters as metaphors to discuss and dramatize his rebellion against "the two black voids, fore and aft",[7] the limits of time-bound existence. Ada embodies the view that the work of art as a reflection of total individual identity is both a proof of freedom within life, and on a larger scale a means to immortality.

CONCLUSION: NOTES

1. Nabokov, V., *Pale Fire*, p.53, ll.806-15.

2. While *Speak, Memory* was originally published under the title *Conclusive Evidence* in 1947, the final expanded and revised autobiography was first published as *Speak, Memory* in 1960.

3. Nabokov, V., *Speak, Memory*, p.19.

4. *Ibid.*, p.20.

5. See Chapter 1 and 4 above.

6. See Chapter 3 above.

7. Nabokov, V., *Speak, Memory*, p.20.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography is not exhaustive, it lists only those writings to which reference is made in the text, or which I have made use of in other ways. It is divided into four sections which list the works by Nabokov, the critical commentaries on Nabokov's writing, the background philosophical references used in this thesis, and other works made use of.

Text used: Nabokov, Vladimir. Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle. Penguin Books Ltd., England, (1969) 1970.

SECTION I

WORKS BY VLADIMIR NABOKOV

Novels

Mary. Penguin Books Ltd., England, (1926) 1970.

The Eye. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, (1930) 1966.

The Defence. Panther Books Ltd., St. Albans, (1930) 1967.

Novels

Glory. Penguin Books Ltd., England, (1932) 1971.

Laughter in the Dark. Penguin Books Ltd., England, (1933) 1969.

Invitation to a Beheading. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, (1935) 1973.

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight. Penguin Books Ltd., (1941) 1971.

Bend Sinister. Penguin Books Ltd., England, (1947) 1974.

Lolita. Corgi Books Ltd., London (1955) 1973.

Pnin. Penguin Books Ltd., London, (1957) 1971.

Pale Fire. Penguin Books Ltd., London, (1962) 1973.

Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle. Penguin Books Ltd., England, (1969) 1970.

Transparent Things. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1973.

Look at the Harlequins. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1975.

Poetry

Poems. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1961.

Autobiography

Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1967.

Essays

Strong Opinions. McGraw Hill Book Co., New York, 1973.

SECTION II

CRITICAL WORKS ON THE WRITINGS OF NABOKOV

Appel, Alfred Jr. and Newman, Charles (eds). Nabokov: criticisms, reminiscences, translations and tributes. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1971.

Appel, Alfred Jr. Nabokov's Dark Cinema. O.U.P., New York, 1974.

Bader, Julia. Crystal Land: Artifice in Nabokov's English Novels. University of California Press, London, 1972.

Dembo, L.S. (ed.). Nabokov: the Man and his Work. Univ. of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1967.

Feild, Andrew. Nabokov: His Life in Art. Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1967.

Fowler, Douglas. Reading Nabokov. Cornell U.P., Ithaca, 1974.

Josipovici, Gabriel. The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction. Macmillan Press Ltd., Great Britain, 1971.

Lokrantz, Jessie Thomas. The Underside of the Weave: Some Stylistic Devices used by Vladimir Nabokov. Rotobeckman, Sweden, 1973.

Moynahan, Julian. Vladimir Nabokov. Pamphlets of American Writers, No.96, Univ. of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1971.

Proffer, Carl R. Keys to Lolita. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, London, 1968.

Stegner, Page. Escape into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov. Dial Press, New York, 1966.

Tanner, Tony. City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970. Jonathan Cape Ltd., London, 1971.

SECTION III

BACKGROUND PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS

Alexander, Ian W. Bergson: Philosopher of Reflection. Bowes and Bowes Pub. Ltd., London, 1957.

Alexander, S. Space, Time and Deity (Vol.II). Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1966.

Bergson, Henri. The Creative Mind (trans. by Mabelle L. Andison). Greenwood Press, Connecticut (1946) 1971.

Bergson, Henri. Matter and Memory. George Allen & Unwen, Ltd., London, (1911) 1913.

Bergson, Henri. Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness. George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, (1910) 1971.

Flew, Anthony. An Introduction to Western Philosophy. Thames & Hudson, London, 1971.

Hanna, Thomas (ed.) The Bergsonian Heritage. Columbia Univ. Press, New York, 1962.

Lindsay, A.D. The Philosophy of Bergson. J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., London, 1911.

Lovell, Bernard. Our Present Knowledge of the Universe Manchester U.P., Manchester, 1967.

Russell, Bertrand. The ABC of Relativity. (revised edition, Felix Pirani ed.), George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London (1925) 1958.

Russell, Bertand. History of Western Philosophy. George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London (1946) 1971.

Tomlin, E.W.F. The Western Philosophers: an introduction. Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., London, (1950) 1968.

Whitehead, Alfred North. Science and Philosophy. Litlefield, Adams & Co., New Jersey, (1948) 1964.

SECTION IV

OTHER WORKS

Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable. Centenary Edition, Cassell, London, (19870) 1974.

Feinberg, Leonard. Introduction to Satire. Iowa State U.P., Iowa, 1967.