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STRUCTURE AND STYLE:

AN APPROACH TO CHARACTERIZATION IN
NABOKOV'S ENGLISH NOVELS

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

SUZANN CLAIR OLSSON

1983

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ABSTRACT

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

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

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

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

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

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ABBREVIATIONS

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

Vladimir Nabokov was a teacher as well as a creative artist. His extensive non-fictional work up to "The Last Interview" with Robert Robinson reveals many of the attitudes he brought to literature. The posthumous publication of three volumes of his academic lectures, edited by Fredson Bowers, adds to his non-fictional writings by illustrating the approach he took to reading and analysing literary texts. This study seeks to apply Nabokov's views and critical approach to an examination of his literary practices, particularly his characterizations.

In my first chapter I suggest how Nabokov's attitudes to 'facts' and 'reality' in life are reflected in his approach to what he calls "the facts of fiction" (*LDQ*, p. 1). The critical distinctions he provides for analysing the "architectonics" (*SO*, p. 264) of authorial composition are then used in the following chapters to discuss his own literary practices. In Chapter Two Nabokov's self-conscious strategies are discussed in order to show how they contribute to a dialectic of forms and establish distinctions between impersonal and personal uses of language and between imitative and innovative styles. In Chapter Three I describe how his self-conscious acts of individual 're-creation' incorporate distinctions between impersonal and personal representations of 'reality' and between non-fictional re-construction and artistic re-creation.

The "architectonics" of Nabokov's work are seen to be integral to his characterizations. Throughout the English novels he dramatizes characters in the process of choosing styles to represent their conscious 'realities' to themselves and to others. In Part One I examine how the relationships which Nabokov establishes between his structural principles and his characters' stylizations disclose a descriptive framework for reading his novels. In Part Two I use this framework as

a basis for discussing the ways in which the relationships between structure and style in each of the English novels contribute to the factual and thematic effects of his characterizations.

The difference between this study and existing Nabokovian criticism arises mainly from my attempt to use his pedagogical approach as well as his views on art and life to examine characterization in his novels. The originality or merit of Nabokov's ideas does not concern me. Romantic scholars may suggest that Nabokov has some things in common with Wordsworth and Coleridge. Alternatively, post-structuralist critics may relate their own philosophical scepticism to Nabokov's preoccupation with paradox and his parodic undermining of absolutes. Such considerations and judgements form no part of this present study. Such references as are made to critical and philosophical positions other than Nabokov's are for the purpose of further elucidating Nabokov's techniques. In attempting to describe Nabokov's non-fictional writings and to apply them to an examination of his characterizations, I seek to "remain with [Nabokov] in [Nabokov's] world" (SO, p. 264).

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

NABOKOV'S "FACTS OF FICTION"

I just like composing riddles with elegant solutions.
V. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*

In considering Nabokov's English novels we are confronted with a recurrent riddle. On the one hand, our attention is drawn to the unreal, verbal status of his fictional worlds and creatures. On the other hand, he creates characters who seem to present analogies with people in life since they plunge the reader into realist considerations of motivation, deception, and human consciousness. Critics have shown continued interest in this paradoxical alliance of self-conscious artifice and realism. David Lodge, for instance, sees Nabokov as a transitional figure between modernism with its attempt to locate reality in the processes of consciousness,¹ and post-modernism which views the world as "resistant to the compulsive attempts of the human mind to interpret it."² Robert Alter describes Nabokov's work as a part of the post-modernist revival of the self-conscious tradition; descending from works such as *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy*, this tradition culminates in "a novel that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality."³ Other critics have taken a quasi-metaphysical view. Page Stegner, for instance, claims that by drawing attention to the mind's potential for artifice Nabokov reveals aesthetics to be a means of "creating in his art a subjective world that spirals out of the chronometric limitations of consciousness."⁴ Julia Bader, by contrast, sees the effect, not as an escape from the "prison

of time," but rather as the creation of self-contained and complete worlds.⁵ Still other critics have related the paradox more directly to characterization. H. Grabes, for example, argues that the central ambivalence of Nabokov's English novels arises out of the fact that they are all fictitious biographies; in them the problems inherent in the artistic portrayal of real lives are demonstrated and the relationship between life and art is investigated.⁶ In turn, Ellen Pifer suggests that Nabokov's presentation of reality through artifice is a serious epistemological enterprise which raises psychological, moral, and metaphysical issues so that "Art is, for Nabokov, a means of grappling with the nature of reality, not a retreat from it."⁷ This diversity of opinion prompts us to ask whether Nabokov himself organized his work upon theoretical and philosophical principles that might explicate the paradox at its heart.⁸ So often his own statements seem merely to heighten the paradox. When asked, for instance, how he reconciled the obvious pathos of Humbert Humbert with the allegation that he diminishes his characters "to the point where they become ciphers in a cosmic farce," Nabokov replied:

Humbert Humbert is a vain and cruel wretch who manages to appear "touching." That epithet, in its true tear-iridized sense, can only apply to my poor little girl. Besides, how can I "diminish" to the levels of ciphers, et cetera, characters that I have invented myself? One can "diminish" a biographee, but not an eidolon. (SO, p. 94)

Here Nabokov moves from realist remarks about his characters to a reminder that they are independent verbal illusions, and this is typical of the problems he raises. This present study attempts to trace Nabokov's own "elegant solutions" to these problems.

When we examine Nabokov's statements about art and life, we are confronted with apparently inconsistent attitudes to facts. He can say "all the worlds of writers are unreal" (LRL, p. 130), and yet also stress that in the teaching of literature, he "tried to give factual data only" (SO, p. 90). In the introduction to *Lectures on Don Quixote*, he seems to

challenge the existence of facts within life while accepting them within art: "Let us not try to reconcile the fiction of facts ["so called 'real life'"] with the facts of fiction" (*LDQ*, p.1). While continually questioning facts and objective reality in life, Nabokov claims to deal with the facts in his scholarly undertakings: in defending his account of the inconsistencies within Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, for instance, he asserts, "My facts are objective and irrefutable" (*SO*, p. 264). In the biography *Nikolai Gogol* he attacks "the utter stupidity of such terms as 'bare facts' and 'realism'" (*NG*, p. 122), yet at the end of the same work, when acknowledging his use of a portrait taken from Veresaiev's Russian biography of Gogol, he states, "Most of my facts are taken from the same convenient work" (*NG*, p. 156). Similar inconsistencies seem to occur when Nabokov discusses his own life. Nabokov's interview with George Feifer demonstrates the point. To the question, "What surprises you in life?" Nabokov replies, "Its complete unreality."⁹ Yet a little later on, Nabokov uses the term 'reality': "In modest reality I never won prizes in sports."¹⁰ Similarly, at the end of the interview Nabokov uses the word 'facts' in speaking of his own life: "The facts in my *Speak, Memory* and *Strong Opinions* as well as a collection of special notes should prevent a vicious mediocrity from distorting *my* life, *my* truth, *my* anecdotes."¹¹ As the Feifer interview illustrates, Nabokov's use of the words reality and unreality cannot be separated from the apparent contradictions in his attitudes to facts.

My initial purpose is to trace Nabokov's solutions to these apparent contradictions. In my opinion, Nabokov does not deny the details and data of man's experience, nor does he deny the established verbal convention of referring to such data as facts.¹² What he does is to challenge the differing status traditionally accorded to the facts of life and the facts of art.

First of all he questions definitive assumptions about man's perception of facts. He points out that the part and the whole are interdependent within any specific area of observation:

Bare facts do not exist in a state of nature, for they are never really quite bare: the white trace of a wrist watch, a curled piece of sticking plaster on a bruised heel, these cannot be discarded by the most ardent nudist. (*NG*, p. 121)

Here Nabokov's illustrations undermine the concept of *bare* facts, but this is not to deny the existence of facts. He is challenging the imprecise use of the term. In that facts are always selected and formulated by man, Nabokov attacks the "utter stupidity of such terms as 'bare facts' and 'realism'" (*NG*, p. 122). Even the most banal list of details is at the same time tintured by individual consciousness: "I doubt whether you can even give your telephone number without giving something of yourself" (*NG*, p. 122).

Nabokov alleges the existence of "the given world" (*SO*, p. 32) which man may observe and accumulate detailed information about.¹³ At the same time he draws attention to the paradox that man's awareness of Nature constitutes a co-existing but different 'reality':

While the brain still pulses one cannot escape *the paradox that man is intimately conscious of Nature because he is walled in himself and separated from her.* The human mind is a box with no tangible lid, sides or bottom, and still it is a box, and there is no earthly method of getting out of it and remaining in it at the same time.¹⁴ (My italics)

Here, I suggest, Nabokov distinguishes between the independent reality or "utter individuality of each thing,"¹⁵ and man's "conscious" reality which includes his awareness of things in "the given world."¹⁶ In this sense, facts are a product of man's activities as an observer and as an artificer. Man's 'known' facts about things in "the given world" are not only selected details, they are also conscious constructions, dependent on memory and imagination as well as on observation.¹⁷ Nabokov believes that "Whatever the mind grasps, it does so with the assistance of creative fancy" (*SO*, p. 154). Thus he states that "Reality and illusion are interwoven in the pattern of life" (*LDQ*, p. 17).¹⁸ Once the paradox of factual awareness

is recognized the apparent inconsistencies in Nabokov's use of the words reality and unreality disappear: man's facts are re-defined as a form of conscious or "imaginable knowledge"¹⁹ based on selective observations of the data of experience. In a discussion of Nabokov's views the term 'reality' is necessarily qualified because of the artifice of man's factual awareness.

Factual awareness is further qualified by individual experience, since even man's immediate perceptions of the given world are affected by levels of information which vary according to the perceiver:

All reality is comparative reality since any given reality, the window you see, the smells you perceive, the sounds you hear, are not only dependent on a crude give-and-take of the senses but also depend upon various levels of information. (*LL*, p. 146)

This notion is illustrated in *Strong Opinions*:

If we take a lily, for instance, or any other kind of natural object, a lily is more real to a naturalist than it is to an ordinary person. But it is still more real to a botanist. And yet another stage of reality is reached with that botanist who is a specialist in lilies. (*SO*, pp. 10-11)

Here Nabokov demonstrates that the paradox of factual awareness is not a denial of specialized knowledge. Although "all reality is comparative," Nabokov's examples reiterate the individual's ability to accumulate information about the independent 'reality' of things within "the given world." As Brian Boyd points out, for Nabokov, "Things exist in specificity; it is the accumulation of details that reveals the independence of one thing from another and from the mind."²⁰

Man's factual awareness is not only comparative, it is also subjective: "Reality is a very subjective affair. I can only define it as a kind of gradual accumulation of information; and as specialization" (*SO*, p. 10). However, Nabokov differentiates between a subjective accumulation of impersonal information and a personal response to experience. A lily is more real to a botanist than to an ordinary person in the

impersonal sense that the botanist's past experience has included a specialized study of the independent 'reality' of natural objects. At the same time the botanist's impersonal knowledge is part of an ongoing personal awareness that constitutes *his* "individual realit[y]" (*LL*, p. 253). Nabokov points out that three men, a city man, a botanist, and a local farmer, when walking through the same country landscape would each have a completely different personal awareness of the experience: "So here we have three different worlds—three men, ordinary men who have different *realities*" (*LL*, p. 253). Even so, in distinguishing man's capacity to acquire impersonal knowledge from his personal responses, Nabokov allows that factual awareness contributes to two orders of conscious constructs, individual scholarship and individual self-expression.

Conversely, Nabokov challenges the traditional status accorded to facts within man's systematized representations of "the given world." Nabokov considers that "the material of this world may be real enough (as far as reality goes) but does not exist at all as an accepted entirety: it is chaos" (*LL*, p. 2). He suggests,

Man at a certain stage of his development
invented arithmetic for the purely practical
purpose of obtaining some kind of human
order in a world which he knew to be ruled
by gods whom he could not prevent from
playing havoc with his sums whenever they
felt so inclined. (*LL*, p. 374)

In complementary fashion, man invented disciplines, from astrology to geology, in order to systematize individual observations of his world. Ironically, these very systems have generated a largely unquestioning faith in universally known and objective truths which are thought to make up "so-called 'real life'" (*LDQ*, p. 1). It is this widespread *belief* that Nabokov calls "the fiction of facts" (*LDQ*, p. 1). He points to the proclivity of mankind to see its own ordering and interpretations of the facts of life as objective:

What is this vaunted "real life," what are
these solid "facts"? One is suspicious of

them when one sees biologists stalking each other with loaded genes, or battling historians locked in each other's arms as they roll in the dust of centuries.
(LDQ, p. 1)

While on the one hand individual scholars disagree about the significance of facts, on the other hand society's impersonal representations of human experience obliterate the unique relationship of each individual to the data of existence. In this way false notions of "so-called 'real life'" are further promoted:

Whether or not his newspaper and a set of senses reduced to five are the main sources of the so-called "real life" of the so-called average man, one thing is fortunately certain: namely, that the average man himself is but a piece of fiction, a tissue of statistics.

The notion of "real life," then, is based on a system of generalities. . . . Or to put it the other way around . . . "real life" is the generalized epithet, the average emotion, the advertised multitude, the commonsensical world. (LDQ, p. 1)

In Nabokov's view a society's generalized 'truths' about everything from science to art are also comparative, and vary from age to age. He maintains, for instance, that "one of the characteristics of applied science is that yesterday's neutron or today's truth dies tomorrow" (SO, p. 45). And he points to the different assessments of *Madame Bovary* which have been made as time has passed:

Flaubert may have seemed realistic or naturalistic a hundred years ago to readers brought up on the writings of those sentimental ladies and gentlemen that Emma admired. But *realism, naturalism, are only comparative notions*. What a given generation feels as naturalism in a writer seems to an older generation to be an exaggeration of drab detail, and to a younger generation not enough drab detail.
(LL, pp. 146-47, my italics)

Nevertheless, Nabokov allows that in society factual awareness

contributes to two further distinct orders of conscious constructs: a depersonalized system of generalities; and collective versions of 'reality' embodying subjective beliefs.

Nabokov also suggests that man's factual awareness is essential to his imaginative creation of a fifth order of conscious constructs, the artificial worlds of art. However, he differentiates between man's so-called 'non-fictive' orders of conscious constructs and his creation of the details of an independent fictional world, "the facts of fiction" (*LDQ*, p. 1). He stresses that "Literature is invention. Fiction is fiction. To call a story a true story is an insult to both art and truth" (*LL*, p. 5). And he continually warns the reader against expecting literature to repeat society's versions of 'reality':

Let us not try and reconcile the fiction of facts with the facts of fiction. *Don Quixote* is a fairy tale, so is *Bleak House*, so is *Dead Souls*. *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenin* are supreme fairy tales. . . . A masterpiece of fiction is an original world and as such is not likely to fit the world of the reader. . . . There is no use, therefore, looking in these books for detailed factual representation of so-called "real life."
(*LDQ*, pp. 1-4)

Nabokov believes that the great writer is involved in an imaginative *re-creation* of facts: "A creative writer . . . must possess the inborn capacity not only of recombining but of re-creating the given world" (*SO*, p. 32).²¹ In this process of re-creation a writer draws on his individual awareness of the data of the given world in order to produce the new facts of an original fictional world. These "facts of fiction" are independent verbal illusions: "The truth is that great novels are great fairy tales" (*LL*, p. 2). Moreover, "all the worlds of writers are unreal" (*IRL*, p. 130). Great artists use a knowledge of the given world's data for the purposes of re-invention, whereas minor artists merely imitate society's conventional "fiction[s] of facts":

Time and space, the colors of the seasons, the movements of muscles and minds, all these are for writers of genius (as far as

we can guess and I trust we guess right)
 not traditional notions which may be borrowed
 from the circulating library of public truths
 but a series of unique surprises which master
 artists have learned to express in their own
 unique way. To minor authors is left the
 ornamentation of the common place: these do
 not bother about any reinventing of the world;
 they merely try to squeeze the best they can
 out of a given order of things, out of
 traditional patterns of fiction. (LL, p. 2)

Nevertheless, Nabokov allows that the major artist draws
 not only on his own subjective knowledge, but also on the
 impersonal system of generalities through which man formulates
 and orders the materials of "the given world":

Between certain generalities of fiction
 and certain generalities of life there is
 some correspondence. Take physical or
 mental pain, for instance, or dreams, or
 madness, or such things as kindness,
 mercy, justice—take these general
 elements of human life, and you must agree
 that it should be a profitable task to
 study the way they are transmuted into art
 by the masters of fiction.²² (LDQ, p. 4)

In teaching literature, therefore, Nabokov often makes use of
 man's system of generalities. His introduction to *Lectures on
 Don Quixote* provides an illustration of this practice:

Cervantes seems to know Spain as little as
 Gogol did central Russia. However, it is
 still Spain; and here is where the
 generalities of "real life" (in this case
 geography) may be applied to the
 generalities of a work of fiction. In a
 general way Don Quixote's adventures, in
 the first part, take place around the
 villages of Argamasilla and El Toboso in
 La Mancha, in the Castillian parched plain,
 and to the south in the mountains of the
 Morena range, Sierra Morena. I suggest
 that you look at these places on the map
 that I have drawn. (LDQ, p. 4)

However, he stresses "it is only as generalities that the so-
 called 'facts' of so-called 'real-life' are in contact with a
 work of fiction" (LDQ, p. 1).

And yet, whatever the correspondences between "the generalities of 'real life'" and a particular work, major art involves the creation of an independent fictional world. In Nabokov's view, the 'reality' of the "facts of fiction" arises exclusively from the particular fictional context in which they occur:

In a book, the reality of a person, or object, or circumstance depends exclusively on the world of that particular book. An original author always invents an original world, and if a character or an action fits into the pattern of that world, then we experience the pleasurable shock of artistic truth, no matter how unlikely the person or thing may seem if transferred into what book reviewers, poor hacks, call "real life."²³ (LL, p. 10)

He insists that fictional creatures have no *direct* counterpart among human individuals:

The girl Emma Bovary never existed: the book *Madame Bovary* shall exist forever and ever. A book lives longer than a girl. (LL, p. 125)

When questioned as to whether Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* had any original, Nabokov made a similar comment:

No. He's a man I devised, a man with an obsession, and I think many of my characters have sudden obsessions, different kinds of obsessions; but he never existed. *He did exist after I had written the book.* (SO, p. 16, my italics)

In other words, while acknowledging that his characterizations draw on certain general elements of human experience, Nabokov makes it clear he regards Humbert Humbert as a new invention, a part of an independent and original verbal world. This verbal world and its creatures then come to assume their own aesthetic reality for the audience.

The "facts of fiction," then, are the new or re-created data of an aesthetic reality. They are therefore to be distinguished from reconstructed facts about "the given world." They are, however, simultaneously part of those facts, a

subcategory of the imaginable facts of the 'real' world which I wish to distinguish by the phrase 'fictional facts.' Such a phrase, I suggest, both represents Nabokov's "facts of fiction" and acknowledges Nabokov's distinctions between the data of aesthetic realities and the 'facts' of so-called 'non-fictive' representations.

In summation, Nabokov challenges traditional notions of 'reality' by redefining the nature of facts within life and art. He notes that all man's conscious constructs, 'non-fictive' or fictive, combine knowledge and imagination. Facts, whether of life or art, are both real and unreal in that they enter into such constructs. In this way apparent inconsistencies pointed to earlier in his use of the words fact, reality, and unreality are apparent only and easily resolved.

Nabokov's teaching of literature reflects his philosophy about facts. Just as the data of non-fictive experience may be studied in order to accumulate impersonal information, so the reader should study the facts of an independent aesthetic reality. The reader's accumulation of information about a fictional world of necessity involves imagination: "since the master artist used his imagination in creating his book, it is natural and fair that the consumer of a book should use his imagination too" (*LL*, p. 4). But Nabokov distinguishes between two kinds of imagination employed by the reader, one of which is personal, the other impersonal:

First, there is the comparatively lowly kind which turns for support to the simple emotions and is of a definitely personal nature. . . . A situation in a book is intensely felt because it reminds us of something that happened to us or to someone we know or knew. Or, again, a reader treasures a book mainly because it evokes a country, a landscape, a mode of living which he nostalgically recalls as part of his own past. Or, and this is the worst thing a reader can do, he identifies himself with a character in the book. This lowly variety is not the kind of imagination I would like readers to use. (*LL*, p. 4)

For Nabokov "the authentic instrument to be used by the reader"

is "*impersonal imagination* and artistic delight" (LL, p. 4, my italics). Although he admits that complete objectivity is impossible, he argues that the reader may achieve an impersonal awareness of the author's specific fictional world:

To be quite objective in these matters is of course impossible. Everything that is worthwhile is to some extent subjective. . . . But what I mean is that the reader must know when and where to curb his imagination and this he does by trying to get clear the specific world that the author places at his disposal. We must see things and hear things, we must visualize the rooms, the clothes, the manners of an author's people. The color of Fanny Price's eyes in *Mansfield Park* and the furnishing of her cold little room are important. (LL, p. 4)

Nabokov's view that "in reading, one should notice and fondle details" (LL, p. 1) is further elaborated by his own approach to teaching literature: "In my academic days I endeavoured to provide students of literature with exact information about details, about such combinations of details as yield the sensual spark without which a book is dead" (LRL, p. xi). Sometimes, however, he goes beyond the data supplied by the author. In the lecture on Austen's *Mansfield Park*, for instance, he makes use of old calendars in order to give additional information about the ball:

The ball at Mansfield Park is held on Thursday the twenty-second of December, and if we look through our old calendars, we will see that only in 1808 could 22 December fall on Thursday.²⁴ (LL, p. 12)

Closely allied with Nabokov's attempt "to give factual data only" (SO, p. 90) is his insistence that this approach to literature does not involve interpretation. He contends that impersonal scholarship, such as that involved in providing exact information about the details of literary texts, deals with 'objective' facts. It is in these terms that Nabokov defends his commentary on Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* from the attack on it by Edmund Wilson:

My "most serious failure," according to Mr. Wilson, "is one of interpretation." Had he read my commentary with more attention he would have seen that I do not believe in *any* kind of "interpretation" so that his or my "interpretation" can be neither a failure nor a success. In other words, I do not believe in the old-fashioned, naïve, and musty method of human-interest criticism championed by Mr. Wilson that consists of removing the characters from an author's imaginary world to the imaginary, but generally far less plausible, world of the critic who then proceeds to examine these displaced characters as if they were "real people." (SO, p. 263)

Here Nabokov dissociates his impersonal scholarship from personal responses to fiction as mimesis. In examining what he calls "architectonics" he sees himself as concerned solely with objective facts and impersonal information about artistic composition:

I have also demonstrated the factual effect of Pushkin's characterizations as related to the structure of the poem. There are certain inconsistencies in his treatment of his hero which are especially evident, and in a way especially attractive, in the beginning of Canto Six. In a note to Six: XXVIII: 7, I stress the uncanny, dreamlike quality of Onegin's behavior just before and during the duel. *It is purely a question of architectonics—not of personal interpretation. My facts are objective and irrefutable. I remain with Pushkin in Pushkin's world.* I am not concerned with Onegin's being gentle or cruel, energetic or indolent, kind or unkind. . . . I am concerned only with Pushkin's overlooking, in the interest of the plot, that Onegin, who according to Pushkin is a punctilious 'homme du monde' and an experienced duelist, would hardly choose a servant for second or shoot to kill in the kind of humdrum affair where vanity is amply satisfied by sustaining one's adversary's fire without returning it. (SO, pp. 263-64, my italics)

In the preface to *Lectures on Russian Literature*, Fredson Bowers suggests that the "scientific yet artistic appreciation

of detail, characteristic of Nabokov himself as a writer, constitutes ultimately the heart of his teaching method" (*LRL*, p. xi). Nabokov's emphasis, in teaching, on "factual data only" has been generally recognized. It seems, though, to have distracted critical attention from the important processes of analysis through which he examines the "architectonics" of a particular fictional world. Most immediately, Nabokov draws attention to the inevitable though artificial separation of the part from the whole that is required when studying a literary text:

Literature must be taken and broken to bits, pulled apart, squashed—then its lovely reek will be smelt in the hollow of the palm, it will be munched and rolled upon the tongue with relish; then, and only then, its rare flavor will be appreciated at its true worth and the broken and crushed parts will again come together in your mind and disclose the beauty of a unity to which you have contributed something of your own blood. (*LRL*, p. 105)

He reiterates the same point more succinctly when he says, "the beauty of a book is more enjoyable if one understands its machinery, if one can take it apart" (*LL*, p. 13). In his lectures Nabokov examines the "machinery" through two distinct though interrelated kinds of analysis: the analysis of "the representation" or "the language that makes up the novel" and the analysis of "that which is represented" or "the fictive world it (language) unfolds."²⁵

Nabokov's analysis of stylistic strategies and techniques (the representation) describes what has traditionally been referred to as 'form'; his analysis of narrative processes (the unfolding of the fictive world) describes what has traditionally been referred to as 'content.' An illustration of these two interrelated analytical approaches occurs in Nabokov's discussion of a passage from Part Two, Chapter Two of Joyce's *Ulysses*:

Apart from the beautiful display of *the stream-of-thought technique* in this passage,

what should we mark? *Two facts*: (1) that Bloom has no interest in (and perhaps no knowledge of) this race whatsoever, and (2) that Bantam Lyons, a casual acquaintance, mistakes Bloom's remark for a tip concerning the horse Throwaway.²⁶ (LL, p. 312, my italics)

In this example Nabokov moves from a description of 'form' (the "technique" of representation) to a discussion of 'content' (how the passage contributes to the unfolding of the fictive world). At first sight his theoretical position seems to conflict with his teaching when he states, "I am averse to distinguishing content from form" (LL, p. 9). Here, as elsewhere, the apparent inconsistency between Nabokov's theory and practice is resolved by other statements made by him. In his theoretical discussion of the form of a story Nabokov equates form and content, while allowing distinctions between the two for the purposes of analysing the processes of authorial composition:

Form (structure and style) = Subject Matter:
the why and the how = the what. (LL, p. 113)

For Nabokov, therefore, there are no inconsistencies in moving from one topic to the other since 'form' and 'content' are interdependent aspects of the "machinery" or narrative processes of a literary text.

Nabokov explains 'form' as follows:

What do we mean when we speak of the form of a story? One thing is its structure, which means the development of a given story, why this or that line is followed; the choice of characters, the use that the author makes of his characters; their interplay, their various themes, the thematic lines and their intersection; the various moves of the story introduced by the author to produce this or that direct or indirect effect; the preparation of effects and impressions. In a word, we mean *the planned pattern of a work of art. This is structure.* (LL, p. 113, my italics)

Here Nabokov makes it clear that he regards structure as "the

planned pattern" of authorial composition that is discernible not only in the stylistic strategies of representation but also in the narrative processes of a text. As an aspect of form, then, an author's structuring of his work allows for analytical distinctions between the interdependent features of 'form' and 'content' in his representation of a fictive world. Consequently, structure can be analysed in order to disclose the writer's use of generic characteristics, literary conventions and 'formal' techniques; or it can be analysed in order to describe the writer's choice and arrangement of 'content' (plot, characters, events, interactions, themes).

Nabokov approaches style in the established critical sense of "how a speaker or writer says whatever it is he says."²⁷ In subdividing the processes of authorial composition into structure and style, Nabokov sees style as the individualizing aspect of form:

Another aspect of form is style, which means how does the structure work; it means the manner of the author, his mannerisms, various special tricks; and if his style is vivid what kind of imagery, of description, does he use, how does he proceed; and if he uses comparisons, how does he employ and vary the rhetorical devices of metaphor and simile and their combinations. The effect of style is the key to literature, a magic key to Dickens, Gogol, Flaubert, Tolstoy, to all great masters. (LL, p. 113)

In *Strong Opinions* Nabokov suggests that an artist reveals his 'identity as a writer' through style: "The writer's art is his real passport. His identity should be immediately recognized by a special pattern or unique coloration" (SO, p. 63). At the same time the structure/style distinction still provides a means for analysing the authorial machinery of 'form' and 'content' as well as authorial "identity."

Just as a writer's individual style exists against a background of other styles, so his structured composition of an original fictional world has its place amidst a background of other 'worlds.' These include not only literary worlds but also what Nabokov defines as man's impersonal and personal

representations of "so-called 'real life.'" In his teaching Nabokov often provides additional information about the composition of a particular work by placing it against a background of other verbal 'worlds.' In *Lectures on Don Quixote*, for example, he discusses how the stylistic techniques of Cervantes' dialogue and landscape relate to "the evolution of literary forms and devices" (*LDQ*, p. 31). He also associates Cervantes' choice of a "droll adventurer for a hero" with the picaresque novel where 'heroes' are expected to be rogues, and he points out, "It is significant that by making such a selection the author slyly sheds any dangerous responsibility for his hero's social-religious-political background since the tramp, the adventurer, the madman is fundamentally asocial and irresponsible" (*LDQ*, p. 11).²⁸ And, as we saw earlier, he applies the generalities of geography (the map of Spain) to the generalities of Cervantes' Spanish settings. Even though Nabokov relates features of the 'form' and 'content' in *Don Quixote* to other 'worlds,' he does not thereby reduce Cervantes' novel to a mere reflection of 'other worlds.' Rather the novel is viewed as belonging within a particular literary development. Nabokov's approach, therefore, demonstrates how we can gain additional information about a specific writer's methods by examining the ways in which "the planned pattern[s]" of his 'form' and 'content' assimilate to or diverge from other established verbal worlds, 'real' or invented.

Nabokov's approach to teaching literature thus illustrates his view that a reader may employ "impersonal imagination" in studying the architectonics of a writer's work. More particularly, his subdivision of form into structure and style provides a means for analysing the processes of authorial composition, while allowing that a reader may draw on other areas of information to explicate further a writer's methods. I shall now examine the architectonics of Nabokov's own fiction in terms of these definitions of structure and style,²⁹ seeking to show how the theoretical principles that emerge from the patterns of his work relate to his characterizations.

CHAPTER 1: NOTES

¹ David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 45.

² Lodge, pp. 225-26.

³ Robert Alter, *Partial Magic* (Berkeley and London: Univ. of California Press, 1975), pp. x-xi.

⁴ Page Stegner, *Escape into Aesthetics* (New York: Dial Press, 1966), p. 50.

⁵ Julia Bader, *Crystal Land* (Berkeley and London: Univ. of California Press, 1972), Chapter 1.

⁶ H. Grabes, *Fictitious Biographies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), pp. viii-ix.

⁷ Ellen Pifer, *Nabokov and the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), p. 13. The moral and metaphysical issues raised by Nabokov's art, particularly *Ada*, are also explored in detail by Dr Brian Boyd of Auckland University, N.Z., in a manuscript being prepared for publication entitled "Nabokov and Human Consciousness." (Dr Boyd has generously given me a copy of this manuscript.)

⁸ The critical studies already referred to above vary in the extent to which they draw on Nabokov's own statements. David Lodge, for instance, does not discuss Nabokov's own opinions. By contrast Ellen Pifer quotes widely from Nabokov's interviews and his autobiography, *Speak Memory*.

⁹ George Feifer, "Vladimir Nabokov: an interview." *Saturday Review*, 27 Nov. 1976, p. 22.

¹⁰ Feifer, p. 22.

¹¹ Feifer, p. 26.

¹² I use the term 'fact' in the dictionary definition of "Something that has really occurred or is the case; hence a datum of experience, as dist. from conclusions," *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Vol. 1, 3rd ed., 1965), p. 667.

¹³ In discussing man's ability to accumulate specialized information Nabokov makes it clear that he does not believe man can arrive at any definitive or absolute knowledge about the 'reality' of things in the world:

You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak to reality; but you never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable. You can know more and more about one thing but you can never know everything about one thing: its hopeless. (SO, p. 11)

Commenting on this view, Brian Boyd suggests that for Nabokov "Reality is elusive not because it is doubtful whether it exists outside the mind, but because it exists out there so resolutely, so much beyond man's modes of perception and explanation in its endlessly detailed complexity, so real in even its minutest parts," in "Nabokov's Philosophical Word," *Southern Review*, 14 (Nov. 1981), 261.

¹⁴ V. Nabokov, "The Book of the Day: Prof. Woodbridge in an Essay on Nature Postulates the Reality of the World," *New York Sun*, 10 Dec. 1940, p. 15.

¹⁵ Boyd, p. 260.

¹⁶ For Nabokov man's factual awareness of "the given world" involves all 'worlds,' whether 'real' as in Nature or invented as in Art, which are 'known' by man as part of "the universe embraced by consciousness" (SM, p. 218). It is in the sense of man's consciousness of the data of experience that I use Nabokov's phrase "the given world" throughout this study. Because 'facts' are conscious constructs I also use the phrase 'factual awareness' to describe man's perceptions of "the given world," rather than the phrase 'awareness of facts' which suggests a separation of 'facts' from awareness.

¹⁷ Nabokov regards memory as a form of conscious artifice involving factual awareness and imagination: "The act of retention is the act of artistic selection, artistic blending, artistic recombination of actual events" (SO, p. 186). Conversely, he regards imagination as a form of memory: "I would say that imagination is a form of memory. . . . An image depends on the power of association, and association is supplied and prompted by memory" (SO, p. 78).

¹⁸ Lucy Maddox describes how Nabokov's characters demonstrate a comparable artifice in representing their awareness of the data of their fictional worlds: "Memory and imagination work together to rearrange and recombine the actual into patterns and shapes that are more satisfying than the fragmentary shapes of the given world," *Nabokov's Novels in English* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 6.

¹⁹ Nabokov, *New York Sun*, p. 15.

²⁰ Boyd, p. 261.

²¹ See also Chapter 3.

²² Nabokov's reworking of "certain generalities of life" in his own fiction is discussed in Chapter 3.

²³ The importance of distinctions provided by context for Nabokov are discussed in Chapter 3.

²⁴ In *Strong Opinions* Nabokov describes how he expected his students to acquire exact information about details of a literary text, not only from the text itself but also, when called for, from other branches of knowledge:

When studying Kafka's famous story, my students had to know exactly what kind of insect Gregor turned into (it was a domed beetle, not the flat cockroach of sloppy translators) and they had to be able to describe exactly the arrangement of the rooms, with the position of doors and furniture, in the Samsa family's flat. They had to know the map of Dublin for *Ulysses*. I believe in stressing the specific detail. (*SO*, p. 55)

²⁵ David Packman, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Structure of Literary Desire* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1982), p. 2. Packman elaborates a distinction "between the representation and that which is represented, between the language that makes up the novel and the fictive world it unfolds" by taking up Jean Ricardou's proposal that two dimensions, the literal and the referential, are operative in any literary text:

While the literal dimension corresponds to the operation of the discourse itself, the referential dimension corresponds to that which is represented in the discourse. (P. 2)

²⁶ This quotation also demonstrates how Nabokov regards information drawn from combinations of details as "facts."

²⁷ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, [1957] fourth ed. 1981), p. 190.

²⁸ M.H. Abrams in his discussion of "*picaresque narrative*" states:

"Picaro" is Spanish for "rogue," and the subject of typical story is the escapades of an insouciant rascal who lives by his wits, and shows little if any alteration of character through the long succession of his adventures; picaresque fiction is realistic in manner, *episodic* in structure (as opposed to the sustained development of a single *Plot*), and usually satiric in aim. (P. 119)

²⁹ Literary glossaries reveal a lack of any precisely accepted use of the terms form and structure. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams makes the point that "a critic's definition of form varies according to his particular premises and orientation." He later adds, "Many *New Critics* of our time prefer the word *structure*, which they use interchangeably with

form, and which they regard as primarily an equilibrium, or an interaction, or an ironic and paradoxical tension of diverse words and images in a stable totality of 'meanings'" (p. 67). Thrall, Hibbard and Holman, in *A Handbook to Literature* (New York: Odyssey Press [1936] revised ed. 1960), give definitions of form and of structure that provide no clear differentiation between the two: form is described as "a term used in CRITICISM to designate the organization of the elements of a work of art in relation to its total EFFECT" (p. 206); structure is defined as "the planned framework of a piece of literature." Neither of these two glossaries describes style as an aspect of form. By contrast Nabokov's analytical separation of form into structure and style, together with his definitions of these two aspects of form, provides clear, useful distinctions and is used throughout this study.

CHAPTER TWO

STRUCTURE AND STYLE

One of the functions of all my novels is to prove that the novel in general does not exist. The book I make is a subjective and specific affair.

V. Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*

Nabokov continually stresses the individuality and specificity of literary works. When asked, "Is Nabokov precursor of the French New Novel?" his reaction is to challenge the generalized concepts we have of novels:

Answer: The French New Novel does not really exist apart from a little heap of dust and fluff in a fouled pigeonhole. . . . I just don't know what an "anti-novel" is specifically. Every original novel is "anti-" because it does not resemble the genre or kind of its predecessor.¹ (*SO*, p. 173)

For Nabokov, style is a key to original art. He reiterates this point throughout his critical writings from *Nikolai Gogol* to his most recently published *Lectures on Don Quixote*. In *Lectures on Literature*, for instance, he describes style as "the manner of the author, his special intonations, his vocabulary, and that special something which when confronted with a passage makes a reader cry out that's by Austen, not by Dickens" (*LL*, p. 16).² At the same time an innovative style also involves a reworking of generic characteristics and literary forms, so that Nabokov's resistance to generalized categories is not a denial of established forms. Rather he suggests the way in which the conventional and the unexpected contribute to a dialectic of forms which a master artist evolves into an individual style.

The idea of fiction as a dialectic of literary forms was formulated in the nineteen-twenties as a basic tenet of Russian Formalism, which sought to encompass a diachronic dimension of literature within a synchronic framework.³ Eichenbaum argued that works of literature belong to a specific order or species which is not generated from facts belonging to other orders outside it, and so cannot be reduced to such facts.⁴ While accepting the notion that extra-literary factors condition the genesis of literary works, Eichenbaum insisted that the fundamental conditioner of any work is the literary tradition itself. Bypassing 'realist' aspects of lineal descent and influence such as psychology, biography, or sociology, he concentrated solely on the form of the fiction. The individual text was regarded as a simultaneous preservation and breaking of tradition. Furthermore, as Shklovsky pointed out, literary evolution arises not only from the creation of an individual work, but also, and more recognizably perhaps, from a wider reaction against forms that have become established movements in literature--the realist novel, for example, or romantic poetry. Shklovsky argued:

Ultimately the artist's reaction to the tyranny of fictional convention is a parodic one. He will 'lay bare' the conventional techniques by exaggerating them. . . . Defamiliarization applied to art itself results in an exposure of literary devices. Thus *art in general and fiction in particular can be seen as a dialectic of defamiliarisation* in which new techniques of representation ultimately generate counter techniques which expose them to ridicule. And this dialectic is a centre of the history of fictions.⁵ (My italics)

In the Russian Formalists' view every individual style is evolved through a dialectic of forms. At the same time the innovatory aspects of form in a particular work do not necessarily involve the parodic reaction against established techniques which Shklovsky describes. Jane Austen, for example, evolves her individual style within the conventions of the realist novel. However, a parodic writer such as Sterne defamiliarizes art itself by exposing conventional techniques

in the process of evolving his individual style.

Nabokov's structuring of his work is a development of the parodic reaction to established styles. His fiction demonstrates that the creative act is both part of a literary tradition and a self-conscious progression from previous styles. His novels consequently undermine the concept of the novel as a fixed or stable form, and hence his comment that "one of the functions of all my novels is to prove that the novel in general does not exist" (*SO*, p. 115). In Nabokov's parodistic novels critical analysis becomes an explicit component of literary creation, and the result is a body of work which simultaneously reincorporates and defamiliarizes literary devices.⁶ Moreover, as David Packman points out, "a reflexive Nabokovian text lays bare not just the activity of writing, but the activity of reading as well."⁷ Both the critic and the common reader are challenged: "If the reader has to work in his turn—so much the better. Art is difficult" (*SO*, p. 115). This present analysis examines the structural strategies of defamiliarization in Nabokov's work.

To start with Nabokov's use of the novel form. David Lodge divides the genre into four broad categories: the realist novel, the non-fiction novel, the fabulation, and the problematic novel.⁸ The final category, the problematic novel, for which Nabokov's *Pale Fire* provides Lodge's example, is defined as "the novel about itself or the novel which exploits more than one of the previous modes without fully committing itself to any."⁹ Robert Alter sees Nabokov's structural strategies as a revival of the self-conscious tradition resulting in a parodistic novel "that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice."¹⁰ As both these descriptions suggest, Nabokov's novels draw attention to and rework established generic characteristics of fiction and non-fiction from realist modes such as biographies to fabulations such as political allegories. V., the invented narrator of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, claims to be working within a 'non-fictive' mode in compiling a biography of his half-brother, Sebastian Knight.¹¹ Nabokov exploits the characteristics of biography and novel by establishing a divide between the 'non-fictive' impersonal scholarship that V. sees

himself as engaged in and V.'s actual attitudes and statements. The reader gradually realizes that V.'s supposed biography is rather an account of his own personal responses to the details of Sebastian's art and life. Ultimately V.'s subjective reconstruction of his 'research' is shown to reveal V., the fictional compiler of the book, rather than his subject, Sebastian.¹² In this 'parodistic' type of novel, attention is drawn to the formal contrivance inherent in non-fiction and fiction alike.¹³ As Julia Bader points out, Nabokov's novels parody both modes: "in *Sebastian Knight* the fictional autobiography; in *Invitation to a Beheading* the academic/victim novel; in *Pale Fire* critical exegesis; in *Bend Sinister* political allegory; in *Lolita* the erotic memoir; in *Ada* the family chronicle."¹⁴ To Bader's list may now be added *Transparent Things* (the non-fiction novel) and *Look at the Harlequins!* (the literary autobiography).

The same dialectic is evident in Nabokov's use of literary devices. Of course any figurative use of language involves an essential defamiliarization of accepted usage, unless such figures have hardened into "dying metaphors" or clichés.¹⁵ I am not claiming, therefore, that defamiliarization is a unique property of Nabokov's writing; rather, I seek to outline the particular and dominant strategies employed by Nabokov. One such strategy is his use of puns. Jessie Lokrantz divides Nabokov's puns into five categories: Allusive, Connective, Thematic, Ironic and Ornamental.¹⁶ These she traces in some depth, calculating their incidence in the six English novels up to and including *Ada*. A few examples will serve to show how, in Lokrantz's words, Nabokov's puns unite several levels of thought which are "deliberate and often central to the ideas being expressed."¹⁷ As Lokrantz points out, proper names often contain puns. Mr Goodman (*RLSK*), for instance, is an immoral opportunist; his name stands in ironic contrast to his attitudes. In *Ada* Aqua has difficulty in distinguishing between "a time-piece and a piece of time" (*A*, p. 26), a play on words that ties in with the novel's thematic concern with time. Literary allusions are also compressed into puns: the reference in *Ada* to Aqua's sanatorium as "bleakhouse horsepittle" (*A*, p. 29) is

a compound pun. A literary source (Dickens' title together with his character Jo's determination to avoid "horsepittle") is fused with a parodic dig at Freudian psychiatric institutions.

In addition to puns, Nabokov employs a number of devices where, through an alteration to conventional locutions, conventional perception is challenged. These devices range from the simple transferred epithet to animism. *Lolita*, after a meeting with Quilty, sits "with one hand dreaming in her print-flowered lap" (*L*, p. 200). When Adam Krug returns home after the death of his wife the inanimate objects of his world greet him: "He entered the elevator which greeted him with the small sound he knew, half stamp, half shiver, and its features lit up" (*BS*, p. 29). Often this personification of inanimate objects is taken to unexpected extremes: "A latticed gallery looked across its garlanded shoulder into the garden and turned sharply toward the drive" (*A*, p. 40).

Another major strategy in Nabokov's novels is the parodic use of allusions. In *Lolita* Nabokov's first-person narrator, Humbert Humbert is a self-conscious stylist. As Humbert recalls re-reading Charlotte's "confession" of love for him, he confesses to his own realization of the legitimized physical access to *Lolita* that marriage to Charlotte would afford him: "Suddenly, gentlemen of the jury, I felt a Dostoevskian grin dawning (through the very grimace that twisted my lips) like a distant and terrible sun" (*L*, pp. 69-70). The parodic incorporation of literary allusions continues as Humbert Humbert self-consciously quotes a line of poetry that celebrates the parental bond he intends to abuse: "'To hold thee lightly on a gentle knee and print on thy soft cheek a parent's kiss. . . .' Well-read Humbert!" (*L*, p. 70).

In like manner, Nabokov parodically incorporates the convention of alluding to other art forms when describing events, characters or scenes in a novel. In *Ada* Dan Veen's death is a grotesque enactment of a Bosch painting:

Dan has died an odd Boschean death. He thought a fantastic rodent sort of rode him out of the house. They found him too late, he expired in Nikulin's clinic, raving about that detail of the picture. . . . The picture is now preserved in

the Vienna Academy of Art. (A, p. 343)

Alternatively, in *Bend Sinister*, Nabokov plays upon elements of stagecraft. At the interview between Krug and Paduk a 'make-up artist' is invoked to transform the initial description of Paduk:

In a word, he was a little too repulsive to be credible, and so let us ring the bell (held by a bronze eagle) and have him beautified by a mortician. Now the skin is thoroughly cleansed and has assumed a smooth marchpane colour. A glossy wig with auburn and blond tresses artistically intermixed covers his head. Pink paint has dealt with the unseemly scar. (BS, pp. 123-24)

In the versions of the interview between Krug and Paduk, the intrusion of first the guards, and then Nabokov with stage directions for the two main actors culminates in a parodic inversion of the drama analogy:

The seedy tyrant or the president of the State, or the dictator, or whoever he was—the man Paduk in a word, the Toad in another—did hand my favourite character a mysterious batch of neatly typed pages. The actor playing the recipient should be taught not to look at his hand while he takes the papers *very slowly* (keeping those lateral lower-jaw muscles in movement, please) but to stare straight at the giver: in short, look at the giver first, *then* lower your eyes to the gift. But both were clumsy and cross men, and the experts in the cardiarium exchanged solemn nods at a certain point (when the milk was upset), and they, too, were not acting. (BS, pp. 130-31)

Here Nabokov's authorial intrusions simultaneously defamiliarize his own use of literary devices and assert the 'aesthetic reality' of his fictional world.

Ultimately Nabokov's self-conscious strategies can be seen as direct or indirect authorial intrusions which call attention to an individual style as the key to creativity. As Adam Krug in *Bend Sinister* proceeds towards physical as well as mental disintegration, Nabokov intervenes directly in the text reminding us that both the self-conscious artifice and the

realism of his fictional world are a product of authorial style:

I knew that the immortality I had conferred on the poor fellow [Krug] was a slippery sophism, a play upon words. But the very last lap of his life had been happy and it had been proven to him that death was but a question of style. (*BS*, p. 200)

Here also Nabokov suggests that a movement from one state of awareness to another is, like the shift from novelistic realism to self-conscious artifice, a stylistic change. By defamiliarizing conventional literary devices, he exposes the power of existing styles to mould perception. In *Ada* Van discovers Dan's collection of Forbidden Masterpieces, one of which depicts two misbehaving nudes, a boy and a girl; later, while sunbathing with Ada, Van 'perceives' the scene through a "stylistic transition" back to the painting:

Anyway (this may be purely a stylistic transition), he felt himself transferred into that forbidden masterpiece one afternoon . . . (*A*, p. 113)

Throughout his work, then, Nabokov sets up a dichotomy between *his* style and conventional style that draws attention to the activity of writing. This parallels the more generalized defamiliarization he achieves through the parodic reworking of generic characteristics.

Similarly, Nabokov draws attention to the activity of reading, forcing the reader to question traditional expectations about the novel and its relationship to "so-called 'real-life'" (*LDQ*, p. 1). The reader's expectations here are based on his experience of established modes, which tend to be dominated by the conventions of 'realism' in non-fiction and in realist novels. Most obviously, the strategies of direct and indirect authorial intrusions jolt the reader back to an awareness that the fictional world is an independent, imaginative illusion made out of words. At the same time, Nabokov subtly parodies the reader's necessary involvement in the fictional world. In the interview chapter of *Bend Sinister*, Paduk is first described as being in a physical position in relation to the reader:

Paduk, clothed from carbuncle to bunion
 in field grey, stood with his hands behind
 his back and *his back to the reader*.
 (BS, p. 123, my italics)

Nabokov also plays upon the convention of the direct address to the reader. Traditionally this device has been used in two main ways: to affirm the 'reality' of a narrator and his fictional 'history'; and to acknowledge the relationship of author and reader to the processes of composition. An extended example of Nabokov's parodic reworking of the convention occurs in *Lolita*, where it is integral to his characterization of his first-person narrator. Humbert Humbert's apparently self-conscious addresses to the reader are plays through which he seeks to disguise and transform his own nature by simulating moral, emotional and artistic sensitivities. His efforts to manipulate the reader culminate in the plea that the artistic immortality he has conferred upon Lolita negates his murder of Quilty:

And do not pity C.Q. One had to choose
 between him and H.H., and one wanted H.H.
 to exist at least a couple of months
 longer, so as to have him make you live
 in the minds of later generations.
 (L, p. 315)

As a re-reader of his own narrative Humbert would dismiss the crime against Quilty. His stylistic ability to induce other readers to do the same thing is parodically mirrored in John Ray's 'editorial' preface which makes only one brief reference to the murder of Quilty. Alternatively, in *Pnin* the unnamed narrator's use of direct address to strengthen the illusion of impersonal biographical reconstruction is called into question by his recourse to omniscient narration and stream-of-consciousness techniques to depict his subject, Pnin. In *Transparent Things* the direct addresses to the reader draw attention to and explicate 'authorial' choices and processes that are finally thwarted by Hugh Person's failure to heed the warning of "his main 'umbral companion'":

Person was conscious of something or somebody

warning him that he should leave Witt there and then for Verona, Florence, Rome, Taormina, if Stresa was out. He did not heed his shadow, and fundamentally he may have been right. We thought that he had in him a few years of animal pleasure; we were ready to waft that girl into his bed, but after all it was for him to decide, for him to die, if he wished. (*TT*, p. 101)

Nabokov defamiliarizes the direct address to the reader, then, by using the convention in unexpected ways.

The parodic reworking of motifs drawn from older literature is another strategy which can reverse readers' expectations of the plot. Among the instances of this device traced by Carl R. Proffer in *Lolita*,¹⁸ is the *Carmen* motif. As Proffer points out, the reader might be misled by the *Carmen* allusions into expecting the final confrontation between Humbert and Lolita to result in her death.¹⁹ Instead Nabokov parodies both the traditional use of classical 'stories' for 'universalizing' a particular narrative, and the literary riddle-solving that is its result. He does this by incorporating and then reversing the traditional story:

Carmencita, lui demandais-je . . . 'One last word,' I said in my horrible careful English, 'are you quite sure that—well, not tomorrow, but—well—some day, any day, you will not come to live with me? I will create a brand new God and thank him with piercing cries, if you give me that microscopic hope' (to that effect).

'No,' she said smiling, 'no.'

'It would have made all the difference,' said Humbert Humbert.

Then I pulled out my automatic—I mean, this is the kind of fool thing a reader might suppose I did. It never even occurred to me to do it. (*L*, p. 278)

Another form of reversal occurs in *Lolita* where the John Ray preface with its psychoanalytic and social commentary parodies the type of art that supplies a moral message.²⁰ At the same time Nabokov exploits the tendency of some readers to confuse art and life. The information which Ray, his invented editor, includes about the fate of the characters after the

novel (Humbert's death, then Lolita's: "Mrs 'Richard F. Schiller' died in childbed, giving birth to a still born girl" [L, p. 6]) makes a double-edged point. It allows the reader vicarious satisfaction in that it confirms and describes these deaths, and it poses an easily resolved puzzle by referring to Lolita as "Mrs 'Richard F. Schiller.'" However, the very sense of satisfaction this engenders in the reader demonstrates that few of us are entirely immune from the impulse to regard characters as part of a continuing temporal world rather than the fictional one which is completed when the novel ends.

As we have seen, Nabokov challenges non-fictive as well as literary conventions that may condition the reader's response. Many of the reader's expectations arise out of conventions for ordering and representing life that he has acquired through his social and cultural milieu and which, he can be fairly confident, will be present in the literature he reads.²¹ As George Levine points out, E.H. Gombrich's examination of the relationship between society and art in *Art and Illusion* reveals "the way in which artistic creation and audience perception are controlled by conventions for the representation of reality within art and society."²² Thus, argues Levine, even the literary method which purports to imitate life directly "reflects both inherited conventions and a way of looking at the world, a metaphysic as it were."²³ Levine suggests that one of society's conventions is to regard ordinary people as more real than heroes.²⁴ Significantly, the protagonist of a novel, whatever his status or qualities, tends to be referred to as a hero. Even such a sophisticated critic as Gabriel Josipovici uses this convention to describe the protagonists of Nabokov's novels, and he terms "anti-hero" those characters who "present us with a hideous parody of everything for which the hero stands."²⁵ Josipovici goes on to describe Alex Rex in *Laughter in the Dark* as anti-hero to Albinus and then states that, "Clare Quilty is the anti-hero of *Lolita*, the parody of Humbert."²⁶ The implication of such remarks is that the weak, ineffectual Albinus is the "hero" of *Laughter in the Dark*, and that Humbert Humbert, whom Nabokov describes as "a vain and cruel wretch" (SO, p. 94), is the "hero" of *Lolita*. If the

convention is to be used at all then both these characters can only be described as anti-heroes. However, my own view is that Nabokov leads the reader to question any conventional labels, with their associated and inbuilt attitudes, that are applied to either art or life. In *Lolita*, published in 1955, Nabokov creates a sexual deviant, obsessed with little girls. American public mores of that time decreed that such a fictional figure was abhorrent: a Humbert Humbert could not be explicable as a hero or even as a consciousness that might be understood, but only as a mentally sick and irrational being needing to be either restrained or imprisoned. These public mores are parodically reflected in John Ray, Nabokov's invented editor. At the same time, Nabokov takes up the notion of a mentally sick and irrational being and explodes it by creating in Humbert Humbert a highly rational and self-conscious figure, learned and lyrical, persuasive and plausible, whose very processes of deceptive justification and stylistic manipulation defeat any conventional categorizing of the abnormal. Thus Nabokov's strategies cause the reader not only to question conventional labels (literary or social or both), but also to re-examine widely accepted social explanations for extraordinary experiences and behaviour. These conventional stereotypes are another example of verbal categories and formulations, which Nabokov defamiliarizes by indicating their status as the unacknowledged 'fictions' of "so-called 'real life.'"

George Levine also suggests that just as society perpetrates conventions for the representation of life, so particular eras tend to develop certain world views or a metaphysic.²⁷ The formal contrivance of such period beliefs emerges from Nabokov's work. In *Pale Fire*, for instance, Nabokov defamiliarizes Augustan and Romantic metaphysics by parodically incorporating them into John Shade's autobiographical poem. The Augustans viewed the world as the embodiment of a divine order, as a planned and authored universe, the patterns of which would be fully revealed in an afterlife. Romantics stressed human experience, attributing spiritual significance to individual, imaginative responses. John Shade uses the forms and beliefs of these two literary

periods to evolve his own twentieth-century vision: "Man's life as commentary to an abstruse/Unfinished poem" (*PF*, p. 57). Shade describes how he witnessed a glimpse of afterlife in an image of a white fountain which came to him as he was recovering from a heart attack. He attempts to substantiate his 'revelation' by pursuing a newspaper report of a Mrs. Z. who claims also to have had a vision of afterlife in the form of a white fountain. The significance Shade attaches to both visions is finally destroyed when in conversation with the reporter, Jim Coates, Shade learns that, while the article is a largely accurate account of Mrs Z.'s experience,

'There's one misprint—not that it matters much:
Mountain, not *fountain*. The majestic touch.'
 (*PF*, p. 53)

Through the oblique allusions to Pope's *Essay on Man* (11.283-94) and Shelley's "Mont Blanc," Nabokov suggests the formal contrivance of all metaphysics, a recognition of which underlies Shade's twentieth-century dilemma of uncertainty: "Life Everlasting—based on a misprint!" (*PF*, p. 53). Shade is left with a vague apprehension of literary forms, "the contrapuntal theme," "not text, but texture," "a web of sense" (*PF*, p. 53), that continue to suggest an indefinable authorial pattern. While Nabokov establishes a conflict in content (opposing world views), Shade's attempt to substantiate a vision of afterlife reveals a conflict in form (the misprint). Nabokov thus demonstrates how content depends on form. An allied technique is employed in *Ada*. Nabokov has Van Veen describe an anachronistic world, Antiterra.²⁸ For Van, Anti-Terra stands in opposition to a more conventional world called Terra, a world which simulates mankind's representations of "so-called 'real-life'" with its historical and geographical data and time schemes. The formal contrivance of both the novel's 'worlds' is reiterated when Van parodies Terra in his first novel, *Letters from Terra*.

As we have seen, then, Nabokov's strategies rework the established conventions of non-fiction and fiction alike: he draws the two modes into a dialectic of forms that "lays bare

not just the activity of writing, but the activity of reading as well."²⁹ The parody, puns, games, false clues and reversals by which he achieves defamiliarization are not merely frivolous wit, not merely word play to assert intellectual superiority. In Ellen Pifer's opinion, Nabokov's art is a serious epistemological enterprise: "Art is, for Nabokov, a means of grappling with the nature of reality, not a retreat from it."³⁰ David Packman argues that "Although Nabokov's novels seem less interested in 'serious thematics' than in play itself, the literary games they construct are quite serious indeed."³¹ In Packman's view, "Nabokov rehearses the textualization of a reality we are constantly in the process of constituting and deciphering."³² G.M. Hyde suggests that since Nabokov's work "entails the deformation of habitually accepted 'reality' his novels are formally strange and ingenious."³³ For Hyde, moreover, Nabokov's "deformations" have a serious, even moral, purport: "the end of Nabokov's art is to make us see more clearly what is really there, and this could be described quite properly as a moral end."³⁴ Whether or not we agree with either the approaches or the conclusions of the above critics, all three affirm the 'seriousness' of Nabokov's reflexive methods. In terms of structure, the self-conscious artifice of Nabokov's work is both parodic and purposeful, since as Robert Alter points out,

One of the characteristic reflexes of the self-conscious novel is to flaunt 'naïve' narrative devices, rescuing their usability by exposing their contrivance, working them into a highly patterned narration which reminds us that all representations of reality are necessarily stylizations.³⁵

On the one hand, Nabokov draws attention to the "architectonics" or machinery with which he evolves his own individual style. On the other hand, the reader is led to confront his acceptance of the formal conventions which define, order and mediate his perception of aesthetic and other orders of conscious realities.

At the same time, I suggest, Nabokov's self-conscious structuring of his work establishes the formal principles underlying his characterizations. Most immediately, his

characters throughout the English novels are dramatized through their choosing styles with which to represent a self or a personality to themselves and to others. In this sense their acts of self-characterization are part of a dialectic of forms which draws attention to imitative and innovative styles. Consequently Nabokov's fictional creatures also require the reader to participate in a critical attitude towards the formal contrivance of their activities. Characters who engage in imitative or scripted role-playing are seen to deny their potential for individual expression. In *Bend Sinister* Paduk's choice of scripted forms is apparent in both his non-verbal and verbal activities: he models the style of his dress on a cartoon-strip figure, Etermon; and he acts as a public figure-head and mouthpiece for Ekwilist political propaganda. Similarly, in *Ada* Marina's flamboyance involves a constant re-enactment of stereotyped theatrical roles from passionate mistress to fond mother. In a personal as well as a professional sphere Marina acts as the third person of other peoples' styles; hence she is "a dummy in human disguise," "a stereotype or a tear-sheet" (A, p. 199).

By contrast Nabokov's 'individualists' present an innovative reworking of established forms. Throughout *Bend Sinister*, Adam Krug resists the state's attempts to script him in a public role supportive of Ekwilist doctrines and power. As a philosopher Krug's intellectual independence is described as a process of "creative destruction" (BS, p. 146) which challenges systematized beliefs: "for long summer years and with enormous success he had delicately taken apart the systems of others" (BS, p. 145). In *Pnin*, Timofey is "a delicate imported article" (P, p. 10) who, as a teacher of Russian in America, combines genuine scholarship with an irrepressible personal individuality. One of the major ironies of the novel is the academic world's ultimate rejection of Pnin's qualities. Blorengé, the Professor of French, refuses to take Pnin into his department once he learns Pnin can both speak and read French. Nor does the university attach any importance to an individual style. Pnin's one mentor, Professor Hagen points out despairingly:

"That is the tragedy! Who, for example, wants *him*"—he pointed to radiant Pnin—"who wants his personality? Nobody! They will reject Timofey's wonderful personality without a quaver. The world wants a machine, not a Timofey." (*P*, p. 135)

But here, as throughout his fiction, Nabokov reiterates the potential for an individual style, despite the forces which would reduce personality to imitative role-playing.

In complementary fashion, Nabokov creates an "identity as a writer" (*SO*, p. 63) for his main characters.³⁶ In all but three of the English novels the main characters are either acknowledged artists or engaged in 'biographical' reconstructions so that their writings are part of distinctive formal traditions (fiction and non-fiction). In the three exceptions, *Bend Sinister*, *Pnin* and *Transparent Things*, the narrators are peripheral figures in the narrative action (the intrusive author in *Bend Sinister*, the unnamed narrator of *Pnin*, and Mr R. who is both the invented author and a minor character who is an author in *Transparent Things*). Yet even in these three novels the major characters are involved in problems of writing: Adam Krug is a writer of philosophy; Pnin is a foreigner coping with using English in his lectures on Russian language and literature; Hugh Person works for a publishing firm and is the proof-reader of Mr R.'s novels. Nabokov's acknowledged artists simulate his own situation among words. His autobiographers simulate man's subjective awareness of the data of personal experience. His scholars simulate man's attempts to acquire and order knowledge within impersonal disciplines. As writers, all are governed by the formal conventions of their particular projects.

It follows that the relationship Nabokov establishes between structure and style provides a critical perspective on his characters' activities as writers. Most immediately, Nabokov's artists achieve an innovative style within acknowledged literary traditions. In *Pale Fire* John Shade's poem parodically reworks the conventions of Augustan and Romantic literature while evolving an individual style. Moreover, the self-conscious artifice of Shade's methods draws attention to his

transformation of autobiographical data; his style reflects his artistic identity.

An individual style is also appropriate for non-fictional structures that are self-expressive, such as memoirs or autobiography. These modes are comparable to the ongoing acts of self-characterization described earlier. They are non-fictional structures in the sense that they are bound to a description of the writer's personal experiences. At the same time they may rework both literary and non-literary conventions in order to express the writer's "individual reality." In *Ada*, Van and Ada engage in "the mutual correction of common memories" (A, p. 88). However, as Ada points out, "if people remembered the same they would not be different people" (A, p. 97). The ninety-year old Van combines a passion for refining his own subjective memories with an awareness of the formal contrivance of his task. In his memoirs, he parodically reworks established forms in order to evolve an individual style that is a self-conscious expression of his ongoing personal identity.

By contrast an impersonal manner is required for scholarly writings such as biography and literary exegesis where the writer is communicating information about a subject other than himself.³⁷ In other words, such writing should be devoid of the informant's creative or self-expressive style and should imitate the established conventions of his elected discipline. However, those of Nabokov's first-person narrators who claim to be working within scholarly disciplines nevertheless engage in personal stylizations. They employ artistic techniques and put forward personal views. Hence their methods conflict with the stylistic requirements of their projects. As we saw, the unnamed narrator of *Invitation of a Small Warrior* uses omniscient narration and stream-of-consciousness techniques while claiming to be engaged in biographical reconstruction. Alternatively, in *Pale Fire* Charles Kinbote reproduces the structural format of literary exegesis as a frame for his personal views and fantasies. Even though these narrators function as mouthpieces for the data of Nabokov's fictional worlds, they are unreliable narrators whose styles reveal unwitting reflections of their personal identity.

A more detailed examination of Nabokov's use of structure

and style in his characterizations is carried out in Part Two of this study. Here, however, one final example may serve to illustrate how Nabokov's characterizations are part of a dialectic of forms. In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* Sebastian Knight's art, which manifests the development of an individual and self-conscious literary style, is placed within V.'s biography, which abandons an impersonal manner and so conflicts with the biographical norm. In opposite ways, therefore, Sebastian Knight's art and V.'s 'biography' are part of a formal dialectic which distinguishes the stylistic awareness and practices of the two characters as writers.

In this chapter my concern has been to describe Nabokov's structural strategies and to show how the self-conscious artifice of his work establishes the formal principles underlying his characterizations. I have suggested that Nabokov uses structure to provide a critical perspective on the styles which dramatize his characters' awareness of verbal conventions as well as their personal manner, and it is in this sense of the self-conscious use of style that Nabokov's characterizations are an imaginative extension of his own activities as a writer.

At the same time, Nabokov's presence in his fictions is partial, his style is an expression of his artistic identity only, whereas his characters, whatever their self-consciousness as stylists, are fully dramatized as the creatures of his fictional worlds. Nabokov maintains that "In a book, the reality of a person or object, or circumstance depends exclusively on the world of that particular book" (*LL*, p. 10). Within a particular fictional context or world, there is no form without content and no content without form. Humbert Humbert, for example, is a master stylist who displays a critical and self-conscious awareness of literary form which he exploits in order to camouflage and transform the narrative content within his account of his life. Nabokov's characterization of Humbert is not just a dramatization of Humbert's formal identity or style as a writer; it consists of a complex interdependence of form and content that is part of the novel's total structural design. And such an inter-relationship is found in all the English novels. This chapter

emphasized aspects of the 'form' in this process. My next chapter will emphasize aspects of the 'content.'

CHAPTER 2: NOTES

¹ Nabokov makes a similar comment when asked "What is your opinion of the 'anti-novel' in France?":

I am not interested in groups, movements, schools of writing and so forth. I am interested only in the individual artist. This 'anti-novel' does not really exist; but there does exist one great French writer, Robbe-Grillet; his work is grotesquely imitated by a number of banal scribblers whom a phony label assists commercially. (SO, p. 4)

² Nabokov further explains this view of style as the distinctive manner of the author in a later lecture:

Style is not a tool, it is not a method, it is not a choice of words alone. Being much more than all this, style constitutes an intrinsic component or characteristic of the author's personality. Thus when we speak of style we mean an individual artist's peculiar nature, and the way it expresses itself in his artistic output. (LL, pp. 59-60)

³ It is not my concern to establish a possible influence of Russian Formalism on Nabokov, but rather to apply the concept of defamiliarization to his work.

⁴ My comments on Russian Formalism are indebted to the following main sources: T. Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1977); L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis (eds.), *Russian Formalist Criticism* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965); R. Scholes, "The Contributions of Formalism and Structuralism to the Theory of Fiction," in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 6 (Winter, 1973), pp. 134-51; R. Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1974) which incorporates material from Scholes's article above into its fourth chapter; J. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

⁵ Scholes (1973), p. 141.

⁶ Ellen Pifer in *Nabokov and the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980) refers to the Russian Formalists' concept of defamiliarization when describing Nabokov's fiction:

What Shklovsky identifies as the process of *ostranenie*, commonly translated

'defamiliarization,' operates within Nabokov's fiction as a psychological and epistemological principle. Artifice, rather than oppose life, is deployed by Nabokov to renew the reader's perception of reality—by estranging that perception from habitual formulations. (P. 25)

⁷ David Packman, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Structure of Literary Desire* (Columbia & London: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1982), p. 3.

⁸ David Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads and other Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 22.

⁹ Lodge, p. 22.

¹⁰ Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley & London: Univ. of California Press, 1975), pp. x-xi.

¹¹ Nabokov's use of established genres and verbal conventions that distinguish between non-fiction and fiction is further discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter 3. Here, however, a brief selection from Nabokov's own 'non-fictional' and aesthetic writings may serve to illustrate the distinctions he affirms between impersonal representation, subjective interpretation, and artistic re-creation of biographical data. "Abram Gannibal" (in Nabokov's scholarly edition of *Eugene Onegin*, Vol. 3, pp. 378-477) provides a comprehensive demonstration of Nabokov's documented biographical research into and impersonal account of Pushkin's ancestor, Gannibal, who is referred to in Pushkin's verses. Nabokov's scholarship illustrates one of his practices for providing additional information about the details of a literary text; he provides an impersonal representation of this information within the non-fictional genre of literary exegesis. The same detailed historical research on Nabokov's part forms the basis for his creation of Fyodor's biography of Chernyshevski in Chapter 4 of Nabokov's Russian novel, *The Gift*. In *The Gift*, however, Nabokov presents the reader with an invented fictional character, Fyodor, who is engaged, not only in a documented, impersonal exercise in scholarly research, but also in an interpretative account of the biographical details and the writings of Chernyshevski. Whereas "Abram Gannibal" is part of Nabokov's impersonal, 'non-fictional' explication of Pushkin's text, Chapter 4 of *The Gift* illustrates Nabokov's fusion of biographical research and art, of scholarship and imaginative re-creation: within the fictional context of an independent aesthetic world Nabokov's invented character Fyodor presents an interpretative biographical portrait of Chernyshevski. While Fyodor's biography simulates a subjective interpretation of data within the novel's world, Nabokov's characterization of Fyodor includes an artistic re-creation of non-fictional biographical details of Chernyshevski's life as part of an imaginative, aesthetic reality. Within his

non-fictive writings, the careful distinctions Nabokov maintains between impersonal scholarship and subjective interpretations of data are shown again in footnote 37 to this chapter.

¹² Nabokov's characterizations in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* are examined in detail in Part Two, Chapter 4 of this study.

¹³ Robert Alter, in *Partial Magic*, states:
The parodistic novel, exploding the absurdities of previous literary conventions as it unfolds, effects a kind of dialectical refinement and correction of lying, edging us toward the perception of certain truths about the manipulation of language, about character, about human nature, perhaps even about the social world we inhabit. (P. 158)

¹⁴ Julia Bader, *Crystal Land: Artifice in Nabokov's English Novels* (Berkeley & London: Univ. of California Press, 1972), p. 10.

¹⁵ George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," in *The Orwell Reader: Fiction, Essays and Reportage by George Orwell*, introduced by Richard H. Rovere (1933; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956), p. 337.

¹⁶ Jessie Lokrantz, *The Underside of the Weave* (Sweden: Rotobekman, 1973), p. 45 ff. The examples to which I refer are all discussed in Lokrantz's work.

¹⁷ Lokrantz, p. 10.

¹⁸ Carl R. Proffer, *Keys to Lolita* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968), Chapter 1.

¹⁹ Proffer, pp. 45-53.

²⁰ The John Ray preface to *Lolita* is analysed in detail in Chapter 8 of this study.

²¹ See also Chapter 3.

²² George Levine, "Realism Reconsidered," in *The Theory of the Novel*, ed. John Halperin (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 236.

²³ Levine, p. 236.

²⁴ Levine, p. 236.

²⁵ Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 218.

²⁶ Josipovici, p. 219.

²⁷ Levine, p. 236.

²⁸ In *Strong Opinions* Nabokov states, "Antiterra happens to be an anachronistic world in regard to Terra—that's all there is to it" (p. 122).

²⁹ Packman, p. 3.

³⁰ Pifer, p. 19. Pifer's view was also referred to at the beginning of Chapter 1 of this study.

³¹ Packman, p. 8.

³² Packman, p. 18.

³³ G.M. Hyde, *Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist* (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), p. 18. Like Pifer, Hyde also applies the Russian formalists' concept of defamiliarization to Nabokov's work.

³⁴ Hyde, p. 18.

³⁵ Alter, p. 30.

³⁶ See also Tony Tanner, *City of Words* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), Introduction. Tanner argues that a concern with stylistic freedom has become a major preoccupation of American fiction, 1950-70, and he suggests that the situation of characters among things in such works "is a reflection or projection of the author's sense of his own situation among words" (p. 18). In his discussion of *Pale Fire*, Tanner claims that Nabokov confronts his characters, not so much with things, but with lexical playgrounds within which they rise or fall according to their facilities with language. However, Tanner does not go on to acknowledge that the works of Nabokov's invented writers are qualified by the distinctive formal traditions within which they write. Tanner's views imply, therefore, a value system based on verbal mastery which, if pursued, could suggest that a character such as Charles Kinbote would be a great artist and ignore the total complexity of Kinbote's characterization.

³⁷ In Nabokov's own scholarly works he confronts the problems of impersonal reconstruction by taking pains to indicate movements from his presentation of data to his own personal interpretations of such data. Throughout *Nikolai Gogol*, for instance, Nabokov qualifies certain of his descriptions with comments such as the following: "I think it is more reasonable to forget . . ." (p. 9); "These connections are a little too easy and thus probably false" (p. 15); "but probably we should be nearer the truth if we merely said . . ." (p. 19); and so on. More specifically, at the end of *Nikolai Gogol* Nabokov makes a careful distinction between his biographical source materials and his personal interpretations of such data:

The picture [of Gogol] is the one described in the text and is reproduced from Veressaiev's delightful biography of Gogol (1933, in Russian). *Most of my facts are*

taken from the same convenient work—
 for instance, Gogol's long letter to
 his mother and such things. *The*
deductions are my own. (NG, p. 156,
 my italics)

This scrupulous differentiation between impersonal scholarship and personal conjecture is similarly suggested when Nabokov comments on the possibilities of literary biographies:

They are great fun to write, generally
 less fun to read. Sometimes the thing
 becomes a kind of double paper chase: first,
 the biographer pursues his quarry through
 letters and diaries, and across the bogs of
 conjecture, and then a rival authority
 pursues the muddy biographer. (SO, p. 67)

CHAPTER THREE

ARTISTIC RE-CREATION

The art of writing is a very futile business if it does not imply first of all the art of seeing the world as the potentiality of fiction.

V. Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*

Criticism has long accepted that the formal methods of a literary work should be examined, but any comparable analysis of content has been regarded as a much more problematic issue, at least among autonomy orientated Anglo-American theorists. Since content is always a form-dependent illusion, literature it would seem can only properly be analysed as form. Thus Ellen Pifer in seeking to redress the balance between Nabokov's reputation as a brilliant stylist and "some essential matters concerning his fiction's *content*" seems forced to state that "such an arbitrary distinction between form and content is, I admit, a rather clumsy and certainly outmoded approach."¹

This present study follows Nabokov's approach to the issue. As we saw in Chapter 1, he treats content as the details of an independent aesthetic reality: "the facts of fiction" must be studied in order "to get clear the specific world the author places at his [the reader's] disposal" (*LL*, p. 4).² At the same time, Nabokov equates content and form, while allowing analytical distinctions between the two in order to examine the architectonics of a literary work and the processes of authorial composition.

For the particular purpose of analysing the processes of authorial composition, Nabokov distinguishes two aspects of form, structure and style. In my previous chapter we saw how an examination of structure discloses the strategies of a

writer's individual style. For Nabokov, an examination of structure also reveals how a writer's choice and arrangement of content contributes to his creation of an independent aesthetic reality.³ In his lecture on *Mansfield Park*, for example, Nabokov shows that Austen's use of the play *Lovers' Vows* helps to disclose the "true relations" between the novel's characters:

Now comes the distribution of the parts.
Artistic fate is arranging things so that
the true relations between the novel's
characters are going to be revealed
through the relations of the characters
in the play. (*LL*, p. 35)

Moreover, additional information about a writer's work can be provided by examining "its links with other worlds, other branches of knowledge" (*LL*, p. 1). When discussing the works of Chekov and Gorki, for instance, Nabokov contends that the fictional creatures of Chekov's art are built upon a detailed study of character in life:

What interested him [Chekov] was that it
was true to life, true to the character
of the man as a character and not as a
symbol. (*LRL*, p. 249)

By contrast, Nabokov suggests that the structures of Gorki's "didactic art" reflect the unacknowledged fictions of the Soviet state and so make "a character the medium of a lesson" or a "socialistic truth" (*LRL*, p. 249).⁴ My initial concern in this chapter is to examine Nabokov's structuring of content, drawing on information provided by his own statements about art and life. I will then describe how the relationships he establishes between structure and style relate to his characterizations.

Nabokov insists that knowledge as well as imagination is essential to the creation of an aesthetic reality.⁵ Here we have a starting point for examining the choice and arrangement of content in his fiction. More specifically, Nabokov maintains that art necessitates a detailed knowledge of other worlds, particularly "the given world":

A creative writer must study carefully the works of his rivals, including the Almighty. He must possess the inborn capacity not only of recombining but of re-creating the given world. In order to do this adequately, avoiding duplication of labor, the artist should *know* the given world. Imagination without knowledge leads no farther than the back yard of primitive art, the child's scrawl on the fence, and the crank's message in the market place. (SO, p. 32)

Even though the writer's memory and imagination are integral to his activities, the re-creation of "authentic worlds" (SO, p. 118) requires careful, individual study. Nabokov stresses that "the artist should *know* the given world" for himself. Without an exacting individual awareness, the writer is only aware of "an average reality":

To be sure, there is an average reality, perceived by all of us, but that is not true reality: it is only the reality of general ideas, conventional forms of humdrummery, current editorials. . . . Average reality begins to rot and stink as soon as the act of individual creation ceases to animate a subjectively perceived texture. (SO, p. 118)

In Nabokov's opinion, the uniqueness of an artist's subjective awareness is the basis for his imaginative re-creation of an original and independent fictional world:

The art of writing is a very futile business if it does not imply first of all the art of seeing the world as the potentiality of fiction. The material of this world may be real enough (as far as reality goes) but it does not exist at all as an accepted entirety: it is chaos, and to this chaos the author says "go!" allowing the world to flicker and to fuse. It is now recombined in its very atoms, not merely in its visible and superficial parts. The writer is the first man to map it and to name the natural objects it contains. Those berries are edible. That speckled creature that bolted across my path might be tamed. That lake between those trees will be called Lake Opal or, more artistically, Dishwater Lake. That mist is a mountain—and that mountain must be conquered. (LL, p. 2)

Moreover, in imaginatively recombining and re-creating his own "individual world[s]" (*LL*, p. 253), the writer sheds the "public truths" and "traditional notions" (*LL*, p. 2) that embody the beliefs and values of the age in which he lives:

The real writer, the fellow who sends planets spinning and models a man asleep and eagerly tampers with the sleeper's rib, that kind of author has no given values at his disposal: he must create them for himself.⁶ (*LL*, p. 2)

A brief summation of Nabokov's theoretical views emerges from his account of art as positional:

In a sense, all poetry is positional: to try to express one's position in regard to the universe embraced by consciousness, is an immemorial urge. The arms of consciousness reach out and grope, and the longer they are the better. Tentacles, not wings, are Apollo's natural members. (*SM*, p. 218)

Here Nabokov reiterates the principle that knowledge is the essential basis, "Apollo's natural members," for art. The subjectivity of the artist's knowledge, "one's position in regard to the universe embraced by consciousness," is the source of his individual contribution. The more detailed and wide-ranging his subjective knowledge, "the arms of consciousness," the greater is his capacity for imaginative re-creation.⁷ At the same time, Nabokov sees man not just as a conscious but as a self-conscious being.⁸ For him, therefore, "the art of seeing the world as the potentiality of fiction" involves a critical awareness of the nature of not only his own 'reality' but also the 'realities' of others, "the works of his rivals" (*SO*, p. 32), from science to art.⁹

As we saw in Chapter 1, Nabokov's philosophical views about facts and reality provide a rationale for his theory of art as an act of individual re-creation. "Philosophically," he says, "I am an indivisible monist" (*SO*, p. 85). As such, he draws attention to the independent reality of each thing, from a man to an amoeba, while maintaining that both "mind" and

"matter" are imaginable facts within human consciousness. Nabokov thus opposes the Cartesian split between mind and matter that is present in so much epistemological thinking:

Monism, which implies a oneness of basic reality, is seen to be divisible when, say, "mind" sneakily splits away from "matter" in the reasoning of a muddled monist or half-hearted materialist.¹⁰ (*SO*, p. 124)

In Nabokov's opinion, "a oneness of basic reality" describes the interdependence of fact and fancy in all man's conscious constructs from science to art. At the same time he stresses that "Every monistic philosophy must somehow avoid . . . the old pitfall of that dualism which separates the ego from the non-ego."¹¹ As a self-declared monist, he believes that the physical, mental and emotional experiences of life are "indivisible" from individual consciousness.¹² In this sense, a monistic state of being encompasses all man's 'realities' from impersonal scholarship to the versions of "so-called 'real life'" that constitute a society's "average reality." For Nabokov, however, man's "only real, authentic worlds" are those which express the "individual realities" (*LL*, p. 253) of this monistic being. As we have seen, in life this "individual reality" is "the act of individual creation" which "animate[s] a subjectively perceived texture" (*SO*, p. 118). In art it is an act of re-creation through which a writer recombines his knowledge of various 'realities' with a "brew of individual fancy" (*SO*, p. 26). Hence Nabokov says, "From my point of view, any outstanding work of art is a fantasy insofar as it reflects the unique world of a unique individual" (*LL*, p. 252).

In Nabokov's novels, 'individual re-creation' involves a self-conscious structuring of content that is elaborated in his own statements about his work. Most immediately, his theoretical principle that "the artist should *know* the given world" for himself is complemented by his practices. In 1964, for instance, when questioned about his continued residency in Switzerland, Nabokov describes how the known world provides a basis for his fictional landscape:

My wife and I are very fond of Montreux,

the scenery of which I needed for *Pale Fire*, and still need for another book.¹³
(*SO*, p. 49)

Similarly, Nabokov reworks information acquired from specialized study such as his entomological research. At the same time, he pointedly distinguishes between the non-fictional context of his impersonal scholarly writings and the aesthetic context of his fictions. He clarifies this distinction when asked to discuss the possible influence of his activities as entomologist and as novelist on each other:

In itself, an aurelian's passion is not a particularly unusual sickness; but it stands outside the limits of a novelist's world, and I can prove this by the fact that whenever I allude to butterflies in my novels, no matter how diligently I rework the stuff, it remains pale and false and does not really express what I want it to express—what, indeed, it can only express in the special scientific terms of my entomological papers. The butterfly that lives forever in its O.D. ("original description") in a scientific journal dies a messy death in the fumes of the arty gush. (*SO*, p. 136)

The research Nabokov incorporates in his novels is in fact drawn from a range of scholarly disciplines. In *Ada*, for instance, the "Texture of Time" section alludes to the writings of philosophers from Augustine to Bergson and Whitehead. He also draws on biographical information, himself comparing the research that went into his non-fictional biography, *Nikolai Gogol*, with the even more detailed scholarship of the Chernyshevski biography which forms Chapter 8 of his Russian novel, *The Gift*:

He [Gogol] would have . . . denounced as vicious the innocent, and rather superficial, little sketch of his life that I produced twenty-five years ago. Much more successful, because based on longer and deeper research, was the life of Chernyshevski (in my novel *The Gift*). . . . What Chernyshevski would have thought of it is another question—but at least the plain truth of documents is on my side. (*SO*, p. 156)

In the context of *The Gift*, however, the Chernyshevski biography contributes to Nabokov's characterization of his invented biographer, Fydor, by providing an illustration of Fydor's scholarly writings.

Nabokov puts the preparation of his characters' 'scholarly writings' on the same plane as his creation of 'artistic works' for his invented artists. When asked, for instance, to comment on the controversy surrounding the Chernyshevski biography in *The Gift*, Nabokov refers to the views of Koncheyev, another character in the novel, before going on to juxtapose this aesthetic re-creation of biography with the composition of John Shade's poem in *Pale Fire*:

Everything that can be profitably said about Count Godunov-Cherdyntsev's biography of Chernyshevski has been said by Koncheyev in *The Gift*. I can only add that I devoted as much honest labor to the task of gathering the material for the Chernyshevski chapter as I did to the composing of Shade's poem in *Pale Fire*.¹⁴ (SO, p. 65)

Although Nabokov's structuring of content may involve the composition of either scholarly or artistic works, the reality of these re-creations then "depends exclusively on the world of that particular book" (LL, p. 10). As part of a fictional world the 'works' contribute to characterization.

At an autobiographical level, Nabokov admits to giving away personal details of his own life to his characters. Again, however, he insists that these autobiographical materials become absorbed into the aesthetic world. He is not to be equated with his fictional creatures: "I am very careful to keep my characters beyond the limits of my own identity" (SO, p. 14). One extended example illustrates Nabokov's distinctions between autobiographical representation and the recombination of autobiographical materials within an aesthetic context. In the volume entitled *Nabokov's Dozen*, two of the essays, "Mademoiselle O" and "First Love," describe personal recollections which later appear in slightly altered versions as Chapters 5 and 9 of *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*. By contrast, the material of "Mademoiselle O,"

particularly the incident about the hearing appliance which the old governess pretends to be able to work in order to please her former pupil, is reworked as part of a fiction in the first chapter of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, where V. takes a hearing aid to Sebastian's former governess. In Chapter 5 of *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov makes specific mention of this example when describing his activities as a "fictionist":

I have often noticed that after I had bestowed on the characters of my novels some treasured item of my past, it would pine away in the artificial world where I had so abruptly placed it. Although it lingered on in my mind, its personal warmth, its retrospective appeal had gone and, presently, it became more closely identified with my novel than with my former self, where it had seemed safe from the intrusion of the artist. Houses have crumbled in my memory as soundlessly as they did in the mute films of yore, and *the portrait of my old French governess, whom I once lent to a boy in one of my books, is fading fast, now that it is engulfed in the description of a childhood entirely unrelated to my own. The man in me revolts against the fictionist, and here is my desperate attempt to save what is left of poor Mademoiselle.* (SM, p. 95, my italics)

In his essays and autobiography his personal recollections of actual events, places, and people retain the context of their "original description" (SO, p. 136). In his novels such recollections, like his reworking of his impersonal research, become the details of an "artificial world."

For Nabokov, artistic re-creation also requires knowledge of society's "system of generalities" (LDQ, p. 1). In Chapter 1, I described how he made use of the map of Spain when lecturing on *Don Quixote*: "here is where the generalities of 'real life' (in this case geography) may be applied to the generalities of a work of fiction" (LDQ, p. 4). In his novels these "generalities of 'real life'" are reworked to form the generalities of an aesthetic reality. For example, just as Cervantes' setting in *Don Quixote* "is still Spain" (LDQ, p. 4),

so Nabokov's location for *Lolita* is still America; at the same time the generalities of Nabokov's fictional landscape are part of his depiction of a unique America. In discussing the problems of writing *Lolita*, Nabokov describes how a knowledge of "average 'reality'" is essential to underpin individual fancy:

I lacked the necessary information—that was my initial difficulty. I did not know any American 12-year-old girls, and I did not know America; I had to invent America and *Lolita*. It had taken me some forty years to invent Russia and Western Europe, and now I was faced by a similar task, with a lesser amount of time at my disposal. *The obtaining of such local ingredients as would allow me to inject average "reality" into the brew of individual fancy* proved, at fifty, a much more difficult process than it had been in the Europe of my youth. (SO, p. 26, my italics)

Similarly, Nabokov employs the recurrent features of physical, emotional and mental experiences, the "general elements of human life" (LDQ, p. 4). Such knowledge is impersonal in the sense that it does not draw on either specific or individual experiences.¹⁵ Of *Lolita*, for instance, Nabokov says,

It was my most difficult book—the book that treated of a theme which was so distant, so remote, from my own emotional life that it gave me a special pleasure to use my combinational talent to make it real. (SO, p. 15)

He also draws on the "general ideas" and versions of life found in society,¹⁶ while at the same time making it clear that he does not reinforce such views:

By inclination and intent I avoid squandering my art on the illustrated catalogues of solemn notions and serious opinions; and I dislike their pervasive presence in the works of others.¹⁷ (SO, p. 147)

Instead, society's "traditional notions" and "public truths"

(*LL*, p. 2) are 'placed' in his work as the unacknowledged fictions of "average reality." They have no didactic purpose outside the aesthetic context of a novel's particular world. Like Nabokov's personal recollections, society's "truths" and mores "are given away to characters" (*SO*, p. 12), thereby contributing to his characterizations: "What ideas can be traced in my novels belong to my creatures therein and may be deliberately flawed" (*SO*, p. 147). For example, when questioned about *his* strong "sense of the immorality of the relationship between Humbert Humbert and Lolita" in *Lolita*, Nabokov says,

No, it is not *my* sense of the immorality of the Humbert Humbert-Lolita relationship that is strong; it is Humbert's sense. *He* cares, I do not. *I* do not give a damn for public morals, in America or elsewhere.¹⁸ (*SO*, p. 93)

We saw in the preceding chapter that Nabokov reworks established forms and stylistic devices (the generalities of language) in the process of evolving his individual style; equally he reworks not only the general elements but also the conventional notions and beliefs of society's "average reality" ("the generalities of 'real life'") in the process of "re-creating" his own unique, artificial worlds.

Nabokov's approach to art as an act of re-creation is integral to his methods of characterization. While he continually acknowledges the aesthetic status of his "facts of fiction," those same "facts of fiction" function for his characters as a realistic, 'non-fictive' world. Within this context, Nabokov's 'fictional facts' make up the data of his characters' existence. This data includes everything from settings and events to details of characters' identities. In *Pale Fire*, for example, the details that depict John Shade's physical uncouthness or Charles Kinbote's homosexual tendencies are all part of the substance of the characters' existence. It is through such details that Nabokov reworks "the general elements of human life," and thus simulates the conditions of human existence.

Through this simulation Nabokov recombines the processes

of consciousness that make up "human reality" (*LL*, p. 253) by dramatizing them in his characterizations. As we have seen, all forms of realities "are given away to characters." Hence the "Texture of Time" section in *Ada* depicts Van Veen using impersonal scholarship and personal interpretation in a 'non-fictive' reconstruction of the world, while Van's first novel, *Letters from Terra*, illustrates his artistic re-creation of 'facts' in making an independent 'fiction.' In this sense Nabokov's characterizations provide a metaphoric depiction of men relating in all their various ways to the ordinary data of human experience.

It can also be said that in dramatizing his characters' subjectivities and their responses to the 'facts' of their existence, Nabokov imaginatively re-creates the "individual reality" of human identity. Ellen Pifer suggests that "Plausibility of character is connected to the author's vision of reality and the logic of his methods in rendering that reality."¹⁹ It then follows that Nabokov's depiction of identity is connected to his philosophical monism. As we saw earlier in this chapter, he believes "a oneness of basic reality" constitutes an interdependence of "mind" and "matter" within human consciousness: the specific and general 'facts' of existence are indivisible components of the knowledge and fancies that make up man's awareness of himself and his world. In addition, Nabokov stresses that all "human realit[ies]" are 'known' through the subjectivity and artifice of individual consciousness. His characterizations re-create this process. What he sees as the 'facts' of human existence and the individual's subjective contributions to these 'facts' are recombined within his fictional identities. In *Bend Sinister*, for example, the "individual reality" of Ember's identity is shown in everything from his scholarship to his physical fussiness, from his emotional responsiveness to his parodic rejection of the Ekwilist state's ideological versions of *Hamlet*. In one sense, Nabokov's characterizations are an imaginative extension of his own "position in regard to the universe embraced by consciousness" (*SM*, p. 218). He points out, however, that his fictional creatures do not reflect his

own personality; they are rather to be seen as "serial selves." When questioned about critics who pour over his works seeking clues to his personality, he comments,

People underestimate the power of my
imagination and my capacity for evolving
serial selves in my writing. (*SO*, p. 24)

At this point I wish to distinguish three interrelated aspects of Nabokov's "serial selves": the given 'facts' of a character's experience; the blend of knowledge and imagination that makes up a character's inner awareness of these 'facts'; a character's representations of himself and his world.²⁰ The first two of these aspects suggest components of identity which a character, when engaged in the third aspect of representing himself, may attempt to deny or ignore. In *Ada* the ninety-year-old Van Veen parodically acknowledges the organic decline that is part of his "individual reality." By contrast, his father, Demon Veen, attempts to transform the 'facts' of physical ageing by dyeing his hair progressively blacker, whitening his teeth, and taking younger and younger mistresses. In Nabokov's fictions, a failure on the part of his characters to represent the 'facts' of personal identity by ignoring any of the components of monistic existence, whether physical, emotional, or mental, generally leads to absurdity, frustration, or in some cases self-destruction. Adam Krug formulates a personal identity in *Bend Sinister* by equating his capacity for independent thought with public invulnerability; this act of self-characterization eventually contributes to his downfall because it fails to consider his emotional bonds with his son, David. Even though Krug expresses his own version of 'reality,' he ignores certain 'facts' of his existence.

Alternatively, characters may suppress or avoid personal views. In these terms, Paduk functions as a mechanized mouth-piece for Ekwillist propaganda; Gradus acts as an "automatic man" (*PF*, p. 219); Charles Kinbote, for all his glorious fantasies, looks to other people to author his life: in metaphysics he clings to a notion of Divine Providence, while in life he seeks out Shade in the hope that a famous poet will

impose an authorial pattern on an 'exiled king's' personal 'history.' In recombining both personal subjectivity and the 'facts' of existence, Van Veen's memoirs capture the full "tang" of his individuality. But the tendency of many characters, as Nabokov portrays them, is to 'represent' partial selves by suppressing aspects of their "individual reality."

When engaged in 'factual,' impersonal representations of experience, characters can still be seen to enact their self-conceptions. When editing Shade's poem, "Pale Fire," Kinbote sees himself as a scholar. With content, as with style, however, Nabokov's structural distinctions between different orders of conscious constructs establish the principles which govern his characters' representations.²¹ Consequently, the relationship between these principles and a character's representations provides a critical perspective on his self-conception. As we have seen, scholarship involves an impersonal representation of information within established disciplines of research. In *Ada*, Ada's work as a natural scientist conforms to these principles, thereby illustrating the individual scholarship that is one aspect of her identity. Often, however, Nabokov's 'scholars' transgress against the principles of their projects. Under the pretext of explicating Shade's poetic allusions, Kinbote presents a fantasized autobiography of his own life; this failure to sustain distinctions between impersonal and personal 'information' thus undermines his stance as a scholar.

Similarly, characters enact self-conceptions in their personal representations of existence. As we have seen, these representations may express either an "individual reality" or an "average reality." Both involve a 'non-fictive' reconstruction of data. But whereas the former expresses a unique subjectivity, the latter reiterates other peoples' versions of 'reality.' In these terms, Adam Krug's refusal to become an intellectual figurehead of the Ekwilist state reflects his philosophical independence and his view of himself as "invulnerable." By contrast Paduk's stance as a political figurehead involves an unquestioning acceptance of "average reality," Ekwilist 'philosophy' and values. Even Humbert

Humbert, for all his stylistic individuality, reiterates the collective values of public morality.

Finally, Nabokov's structural distinctions between a 'non-fictional' reconstruction and an artistic re-creation of data suggest how characters may confuse 'life' and art when representing personal experience. To return to a previous example, John Shade's poem acknowledges his artistic re-creation of autobiographical materials, whereas Kinbote's unacknowledged transformation of himself as Charles the Beloved suggests a confusion of 'life' and art that undermines his self-conception as an exiled King. Ironically, Kinbote believes that the materials of his personal history will become "true" if Shade uses them in a poem: "Once transmuted by you into poetry, the stuff will be true, and the people will come alive" (*PF*, p. 170). A variation of this confusion of 'life' and art occurs in *Look at the Harlequins!* where Vadim claims that his sense of rational existence arises solely from his artistic re-creation of himself: "Only the writing of fiction, the endless re-creation of my fluid self could keep me more or less sane" (*LATH*, p. 82). In a different example, Humbert Humbert deliberately seeks an artistic justification for the physical murder of Quilty by turning the notes for his trial into a work of art that will immortalize Lolita. On the one hand, then, Nabokov's self-conscious structuring of his fictional worlds provides a critical perspective on the self-conceptions which his characters enact in their representations of 'reality.' On the other hand, his characters' self-consciousness, or lack of it, is revealed through the ways in which they acknowledge or fail to acknowledge distinctions between orders of conscious constructs, from science to art. It is in this sense of the self-conscious representation of data that Nabokov's characterizations are an imaginative extension of his own "position in regard to the universe embraced by consciousness."

Throughout this chapter I have examined Nabokov's structuring of 'content.' In my previous chapter I discussed the 'forms' Nabokov recombines in evolving his individual style. This analytical separation of 'form' and 'content' in conjunction with Nabokov's statements discloses the theoretical principles

of his art. At the same time form and content are inter-dependent in "the planned pattern of a literary work" (*LL*, p. 113). The alliance of artifice and realism in Nabokov's novels simultaneously exposes the formal contrivance of all representations of 'reality' and reincorporates the conventions that govern the stylistic representation of different orders of 'conscious realities.' Nabokov's structural principles of form and of content complement one another, providing a further critical perspective on his characters' stylizations.²² As we have seen, an imitative style that reworks the conventions of established disciplines is appropriate to impersonal representation. An innovative style is appropriate to representations of "individual realities" and to the artistic re-creation of an original aesthetic reality. Both imitative and innovative styles of 'non-fictive' representation are bound to the reconstruction of given data within the context of its "original description," whereas original art reworks the conventions of fiction and non-fiction alike in the process of re-creating the details of an independent, artificial world.

Accordingly, the architectonics of Nabokov's structure and style provide a framework for his characterizations. Nabokov says, "Structure is the preparation of effects and impressions" (*LL*, p. 113). Through his structuring of fictional worlds and identities, he establishes the principles of 'form' and 'content' that govern his characters' representations of 'reality.' He points out, however, that "style means how does the structure work" (*LL*, p. 113). He dramatizes characters in an ongoing process of choosing styles which may not necessarily conform to the structural principles of his form and content, but which depict aspects of their personalities. As we have seen, a character formulates a personality, not just in his direct acts of self-characterization, but in all his dramatized activities from non-verbal to verbal and from scholarly to artistic stylizations. At the same time Nabokov's structuring of his fictional worlds reveals how the stylizations of personality may not represent accurately the different orders of conscious constructs that make up a character's "individual reality." Even though his 'characters' styles' determine how

the structure works, his structure prepares for the specific effects of style by providing a critical perspective on the characters' representations of themselves and their world. To refer back to a previous example: in *Bend Sinister* the relationship between structure and the style of Paduk's dress and verbal statements reveal how he formulates an imitative personality that is a denial of his "individual reality." In the same novel Krug's individual style reflects his subjectivity but ignores certain 'facts' about his personal situation. In entirely different ways the styles of the two characters' personalities ignore certain structured, built-in components of their identities.

What I am suggesting is that the relationship Nabokov establishes between structure and style allows for analytical distinctions between the "individual reality" of a character's identity and the stylizations of his personality. In "The Other Self" Martin Price describes comparable distinctions in life between human identity and personality.²³ Price argues that in life human identity is compounded of the subjective impressions of our own body and the stream of images, feelings, ideas and fantasies that make up our mental processes. Self-representation or the movement from "immersion to reflection, from inside to outside, from subject to object" describes the formulation of "the other self" which we term personality.²⁴ Nabokov re-creates this process in his characterizations. His structuring of his fictional worlds combines the 'facts' and 'laws' of his characters' existence with the blend of knowledge and imagination that makes up the "individual reality" of conscious identity.²⁵ The styles he gives to characters dramatize their representations of the 'other selves' of personality. In this way the relationship Nabokov establishes between structure and style simulates the relationship between human identity and personality.

Accordingly, Nabokov's work requires the reader to combine an accumulation of information about his fictive world with a critical attitude towards his characters' stylizations. As we saw, Demon Veen's stylistic imitations of an ever more youthful appearance conflict with the 'facts' of his physical age.

Furthermore, the artifice and subjectivity of consciousness contain the potential for illusion and deception that has a counterpart in the stylistic artifice of a character's representation of either a private or a public personality. Kinbote formulates a 'portrait' of himself as Charles the Beloved. Humbert Humbert projects a deceptive public mask which he privately acknowledges as false but which he cultivates in order to further his inner desires by concealing them from others. In either case Nabokov's structuring of 'form' and 'content' provides a critical perspective on his characters' personalities which in Kinbote's case suggests his distortion of 'facts' and in Humbert's case reveals his hypocrisy.

In Nabokov's structured worlds, even though a character's personality may not represent his "individual reality," he can finally neither transform nor negate his identity through style. Humbert Humbert's self-conscious individual style in conjunction with the principles and 'facts' of his narrative expose a repeated and calculated brutality that undermines his stylistic claims to emotional sensitivity and moral apotheosis. In the same novel Charlotte Haze's imitative style nevertheless embodies a haunting pathos; in modelling her personality on the popular myths of women's periodicals, Charlotte not only suppresses her individuality but also falls in love with the 'romantic' figure of Humbert who despises and dupes her. The point is that while Humbert's narrative style is artistically creative and Charlotte's personal style is imitative, the architectonics of the novel reveal elements of a paradoxical but persistent "individual reality" which both Humbert and Charlotte attempt to deny through the stylizations of personality. By contrast the individual style of Pnin's personality or of the nonagenarian Van Veen's memoirs represents an inner awareness of an "individual reality." Throughout the English novels, then, the relationships Nabokov establishes between structure and style simultaneously produce the specific effects of his characterizations and explore the nature of "individual reality."

To sum up: the structural framework of Nabokov's characterizations simulates the conditions of human identity.²⁶

The alliance of artifice and realism throughout the English novels re-creates the blends of imaginative artifice and subjective knowledge that, in Nabokov's view, make up the inner awareness or "individual reality" of identity in "so-called 'real life.'" The structural principles of his 'form' and 'content' provide a critical perspective on the comparable blends of artifice and 'knowledge' in his characters' representations of 'reality.' The particular relationship he establishes between structure and a character's style reveal how the stylizations of personality may or may not express the "individual reality" of a character's identity.

I propose now to trace briefly some references to identity and personality in Nabokov's novels, since these references suggest how the paradoxical alliance of artifice and realism dramatized in his characterizations explores the nature of "individual reality."

In the first of the English novels, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, the artifice of self-conceptions are seen by the dying man in Sebastian Knight's last novel as "the close fitting dream of one's own personality" (*RLSK*, p. 150). In V.'s 'biography' of Sebastian the stylistic role-playing inherent in representing personality is suggested by Sebastian's ineffectual attempts to imitate the behaviour of his university peers while a student at Cambridge: "trying to out England England, and never succeeding" (*RLSK*, p. 38). Sebastian's style achieves an alien oddity rather than enabling him to reduplicate an 'English' personality. Eventually he recognizes and accepts the subjective inclinations of his inner awareness: "He stopped enjoying what he thought he ought to enjoy and serenely turned to what really concerned him" (*RLSK*, p. 39). Yet even during the English experience the ineffectiveness of Sebastian's stylistic imitations suggests the very individuality he seeks to suppress. Knight explores "individual reality" in his third novel, *Invitation to a Beheading*, through the character of a first-person narrator engaged in reconstructing his past. Looking back to his experiences as a foreigner in England, the narrator suggests that his memories as they are reworked within an ongoing present seem to embody a core of 'identity':

The blind man's dog near Harrods or a pavement-artist's coloured chalks; brown leaves in a New Forest ride or a tin bath hanging outside on the black brick wall of a slum; a picture in *Punch* or a purple passage in *Hamlet*, all went to form a definite harmony, where I, too, had the shadow of a place. My memory of the London of my youth is the memory of endless vague wanderings, of a sun-dazzled window suddenly piercing the blue morning mist or of beautiful black wires with suspended raindrops running along them. I seem to pass with intangible steps across ghostly lawns and through dancing-halls full of the whine of Hawaiian music and down dear drab little streets with pretty names, until I come to a certain warm hollow where something very like the selfest of my own self sits huddled up in the darkness. (*RLSK*, p. 58)

Here the "selfest of my own self" suggests the paradoxical alliance of subjective knowledge and imaginative artifice that makes up the "individual reality" of identity. Even so the narrator's awareness of the textures of himself and his world reveals the contribution of his 'identity' to the data of his experience. As we have seen, Nabokov believes "the act of individual creation" which "animate[s] a subjectively perceived texture" constitutes the only authentic human reality: "Paradoxically the only real, authentic worlds are, of course, those that seem unusual" (*SO*, p. 118).

In the second English novel, *Bend Sinister*, Adam Krug muses on the elusive 'identity' of his son; he recognizes the paradox that individual consciousness is both ineffable and the only authentic human reality:

A little creature, formed in some mysterious fashion . . . formed by a fusion which is, at the same time, a matter of choice and a matter of chance and a matter of pure enchantment; thus formed and then permitted to accumulate trillions of its own mysteries; the whole suffused by consciousness, which is the only real thing in the world and the greatest mystery of all. (*BS*, p. 156)

Nevertheless Nabokov's characterizations show how

personality consists of stylistic outlines which may express the contributions of individual consciousness to the data of existence. In *Bend Sinister* the relationship between style and "individual reality" is suggested by the image of the puddle with which the novel begins:

An oblong puddle inset in the coarse asphalt; like a fancy footprint filled to the brim with quicksilver; like a spatulate hole through which you can see the nether sky. (*BS*, p. 13)

Here Nabokov's image provides a metaphoric analogy with his characterizations, for the puddle (identity) is discernible against the background (structure) of coarse asphalt (fictional world), its particular oblong outline constituting a style (personality) which encloses the whole, "quicksilver" (conscious 'reality'). The creative potential of individual consciousness to animate "a subjectively perceived texture" is suggested by "a spatulate hole through which you can see the nether sky," which transforms the world about it into subjectively shaped refractions of its own individuality. The comparable potential of consciousness to express an "individual reality" through a distinctive style (personality) is suggested by the oblong outline, "like a fancy footprint" inset in the texture (structure) of "coarse asphalt" (fictional world).

In a foreword to *Bend Sinister* written in 1963, sixteen years after the book was first published, Nabokov himself draws attention to the connections between the puddle image and his characterizations:

The plot starts to breed in the bright broth of a rain puddle. The puddle is observed by Krug from a window of the hospital where his wife is dying. The oblong pool, shaped like a cell that is about to divide, reappears sub-thematically throughout the novel, . . . The puddle thus kindled and rekindled in Krug's mind remains linked up with the image of his wife not only because he had contemplated the inset sunset from her deathbedside, but also because this little puddle vaguely evokes in him my link with him: a rent in his world leading to another world

of tenderness, brightness and beauty.
(*BS*, p. 8)

The rent in Krug's world may be seen as the potential of consciousness to represent an "individual reality" and it is demonstrated in the power of the author who uses stylistic strategies first to invent Krug and then to rescue him from the horrors of his fictional existence. Krug himself is depicted as having vague intimations that he is the product of an author's style. Moreover, just as the puddle evokes in Krug the individual image of his wife (and finally his son) which separates off from his own world, so in the sense of his relationship with an author, the "cell" finally divides in two when the stylistic artifice is complete, the act of writing at an end, and the author and his fictional creature have become independent "realities." This process is, of course, depicted directly at the end of the novel.

Nabokov's characterization of Adam Krug is of particular interest because of the analytical distinctions it calls for between identity and personality. Within the structured world of *Bend Sinister*, Nabokov's dramatization of Krug's personality illustrates how an individual style may not fully represent identity. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Krug's individual style reflects his subjectivity and his intellectual independence but fails to incorporate certain aspects of his identity such as his emotional bonds with his son; the "other self" of Krug's personality is partial or incomplete. Instead, the relationship Nabokov establishes between structure and style depicts the "individual reality" of Krug's identity.

Perhaps the most succinct expression of Nabokov's concern with questions about "individual reality" occurs in the penultimate English novel, *Transparent Things*. Throughout the book Nabokov's invented author, Mr R. includes the reader in an attempt to penetrate beyond apparently illusory surfaces to some core of 'reality' as it is embodied in the character of Hugh Person. Hugh is shown at one stage in the novel involved in a parodic attempt to 'characterize' a pencil. The difference between man and pencil is shown to reside in consciousness. Hugh may animate the pencil only through the

artifice of his consciousness. Conversely, Hugh's perception of the pencil is part of his consciousness, a facet of his own "individual reality." Moreover, Mr R.'s account of the animation of "a subjectively perceived texture" illustrates man's stylistic potential to represent this process. Later the novel comes to a directly stated acceptance of the artifice of "individual reality":

Human life can be compared to a person dancing in a variety of forms around his own self: thus the vegetables of our first picture book encircled a boy in his dream —green cucumber, blue eggplant, red beet, Potato *père*, Potato *fils*, a girly asparagus, and, oh, many more, their spinning *ronde* going faster and faster and gradually forming a transparent ring of banded colors around a dead person or a planet.
(*TT*, Pp. 95-96)

The illusory forms of "individual reality" only stop with the cessation of conscious reflections, when the stylistic outlines of a transparent ring are complete, the book or character at an end, and the 'author' or 'person' is no longer engaged in the process of placing an imprint of 'identity' on the texture of experience. Here we have an echo of "the close fitting dream of one's personality" (*RLSK*, p. 150) and the puddle imagery of *Bend Sinister*.

The paradox of "a transparent ring" is immediately followed by the corollary of a dreamed 'reality':

Another thing we are not supposed to do is to explain the inexplicable. Men have learned to live with a black burden, a huge aching hump: the supposition that 'reality' may be only a 'dream.'
(*TT*, p. 96)

In Nabokov's opinion the notion of absolute or fixed human 'reality' is an illusion; man's "imaginable knowledge" of himself and his world, even that which is based on direct perception, involves the artifice of individual consciousness.²⁷ This recognition, however, has implications for man's self-consciousness:

How much more dreadful it would be if
the very awareness of your being aware
of reality's dreamlike nature were also
a dream, a built-in hallucination!
(*TT*, p. 96)

Is even an awareness of the artifice of "human reality" an illusion? The answer Nabokov presents in this novel is a reworking of the puddle image:

One should bear in mind, however, that
there is no mirage without a vanishing
point, just as there is no lake without
a closed circle of reliable land.
(*TT*, p. 96)

An awareness of the artifice of 'conscious reality' may indeed be a further illusion, "a built-in hallucination," but this does not destroy the contribution of personal stylizations since someone has to assign a boundary: "there is no mirage without a vanishing point." Even though consciousness is "the greatest mystery of all" (*BS*, p. 156), the 'reality' of consciousness is demonstrated by the stylistic imprints man imposes on the texture of human existence. Moreover, a style that represents an awareness of the physical, emotional and intellectual elements of individual existence outlines the boundaries of 'identity' against the background and context of other stylizations. The "dream" of personality thus produced does not explain the inexplicable; it expresses the inexplicable by embodying the stylistic outlines of individual consciousness, for "there is no lake without a closed circle of reliable land."

In Part One I have traced the way in which Nabokov's structural principles inform his re-creation of 'worlds' and 'people.' The resulting framework is the basis for my discussion of his characterizations in Part Two. His main approach in the English novels is to present a narrative which describes the world of a particular work through first-person narrators working with non-fictive verbal conventions. This format constitutes the approach of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Pnin*, *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, *Ada* and *Look at the Harlequins!*. In *Bend Sinister* and *Transparent Things*, however, Nabokov presents the narrative through omniscient and intrusive

authorial figures who comment on the nature and processes of aesthetic reality, while depicting characters who are engaged in representing the "other selves" of personality within "the given world" of the novel. In Part Two, therefore, I will examine how the relationship Nabokov establishes between structure and style contributes to his characterizations in these two narrative approaches as they are found in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Bend Sinister*. I will also discuss in some detail the "architectonics" of *Invitation of a Beheading*. My discussion of the remaining English novels will be more selective: I will examine how both *Pale Fire* and *Invitation of a Beheading* juxtapose the conventions of art and life in ways which explore the structures of literature and personal consciousness; and in my last chapter I will suggest how Nabokov's "architectonics" in the three memoirs, *Lolita*, *Invitation of a Beheading* and *Look at the Harlequins!*, explore memory as the basis of "individual reality."

CHAPTER 3: NOTES

¹ Ellen Pifer, *Nabokov and the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), p. 2.

² In *Lectures on Literature*, for example, Nabokov stresses that a work of art is a new and independent world:

We should always remember that the work of art is invariably the creation of a new world, so that the first thing we should do is to study that new world as closely as possible, approaching it as something brand new, having no obvious connection with the worlds we already know. When this new world has been closely studied, then and only then let us examine its links with other worlds, other branches of knowledge. (*LL*, p. 1)

In Part One, however, my concern is not with a particular text or "new world," but rather with the structural principles of Nabokov's art as they provide a framework for a detailed examination of characterization in his English novels in Part Two.

³ Nabokov's definition of structure was discussed in Chapter 1. The editor of Nabokov's *Lectures on Literature*, Fredson Bowers, also provides Nabokov's note on structure in the Jane Austen folder:

Structure is "the composition of a book, a development of events, one event causing another, a transition from one theme to another, the cunning way characters are brought in, or a new complex of action is started, or the various themes are linked up or used to move the novel forward." (*LL*, p. 16)

⁴ Nabokov always insists that "Literature is invention. Fiction is fiction. To call a story a true story is an insult to both art and truth" (*LL*, p. 5). Nevertheless, he examines the different areas of 'knowledge' in order to describe the varying analogies between a particular work of art and life. In this sense, he suggests, Chekov's characters are "true to life" while Gorki's characters are symbols of a "socialistic truth" (*LRL*, p. 249). A deft statement of Nabokov's view of the structural analogies between art and life follows on from his story of the Neanderthal boy who came running out from the tall grass crying "wolf, wolf" when there was no wolf behind him:

Between the wolf in the tall grass and the wolf in the tall story there is a shimmering go-between. That go-between, that prism, is the art of literature. (*LL*, p. 5)

⁵ Throughout this chapter I use the word 'knowledge' in the Nabokovian sense, discussed in Chapter 1, of conscious or "imaginable knowledge." As we saw, Nabokov's view that "whatever the mind grasps, it does so with the assistance of creative fancy" (*SO*, p. 154) is not a denial of man's ability to accumulate information about himself and his world; it is a description of the way in which knowledge, even that based on direct perception, is dependent on memory. For Nabokov memory is a subjective conscious artifice involving fact and fancy. It is in this sense that Nabokov refers to man's factual awareness as "imaginable knowledge" (*New York Sun* [10 December, 1940], p. 15).

⁶ Nabokov makes a similar comment when contrasting conventional notions of a "modern world" with the writer's re-creation of a "real modern world":

The accepted notion of a "modern world" continuously flowing around us belongs to the same type of abstraction as say, the "quaternary period" of paleontology. What I feel to be the real modern world is the world the artist creates, his own mirage, which becomes a new *mir* ("world" in Russian) by the very act of his shedding as it were, the age he lives in. (*SO*, p. 112)

⁷ Immediately following these statements Nabokov uses an anagram of his name in order to suggest the relationship between his scientifically detailed observations of "the given world" and his subjective re-creation of an imaginative world:

Vivian Bloodmark, a philosophical friend of mine, in later years, used to say that while the scientist sees everything that happens in one point of space, the poet feels everything that happens in one point of time. (*SM*, p. 218)

He goes on to describe the poet's art as a form of "cosmic synchronization" and points out that in order to "evolve any wealth of 'cosmic synchronization' . . . a poet must have the capacity of thinking of several things at the same time" (*SM*, p. 218).

⁸ When Nabokov was asked what distinguishes man from the ape he describes man's self-consciousness:

Being aware of being aware of being. In other words, if I not only know that I *am* but also know that I know it, then I belong to the human species. All the rest follows—the glory of thought, poetry, a vision of the universe. (*SO*, p. 142)

⁹ In *Speak Memory*, Nabokov suggests that self-consciousness was integral to the awareness which shaped his first poem; in describing the simultaneous registering of a variety of details during a boyhood walk, he says, "and all the while I was richly,

serenely aware of my own manifold awareness" (*SM*, p. 219).

¹⁰ In *Nabokov and the Novel*, Ellen Pifer points out that Nabokov's explanation of his monism "challenges the 'half-hearted materialist' who conceives a split between consciousness and the allegedly real world of objective fact" (p. 31). To Pifer's statement I would add that because Nabokov challenges any split between mind and matter "in the reasoning of a muddled monist" as well as a "half-hearted materialist," he also implicitly acknowledges that any philosophy from idealism to materialism may be monistic so long as it retains a "oneness of basic reality." In his review of Professor Woodbridge's "Essay on Nature," for example, Nabokov points out how Woodbridge attempts to sustain a monistic philosophy: "His [Woodbridge's] major assumption is . . . that man being within nature, there cannot be any independent explanation of what we do and the world we do it in." For Nabokov, Woodbridge's essay evades the central paradox that man's awareness of the 'reality' of Nature constitutes a co-existing but separate reality. Consequently Woodbridge risks slipping into the old dualism which splits mind from matter: "Prof. Woodbridge finds the world so real and analyses this reality with such masterful vigor that the question of whether our knowledge of the world is real, too, has no time to interest the fascinated reader" (*New York Sun*, p. 15). In commenting on this same review Brian Boyd states: "Summarizing with keen approval Frederick Woodbridge's major assumption in *An Essay on Nature*, Nabokov declares that 'man being within nature, there cannot be any independent explanation of what we do and the world in which we do it'" ("Nabokov's Philosophical World," *Southern Review*, 14 [Nov. 1981], 298). My own view is that although Nabokov appreciates Woodbridge's vigour and "refreshing common sense," he also suggests that Woodbridge is in danger of being a "muddled monist." Brian Boyd makes the point that, for Nabokov, "Things exist in specificity; it is the accumulation of details that reveals the independence of one thing from another and from the mind" (p. 261).

¹¹ Nabokov, *New York Sun*, p. 15.

¹² Nabokov's monism is not to be equated with idealism; he insists that literal perception is integral to all man's factual awareness. In his review of Woodbridge's "Essay on Nature," he accepts the suppositions "that philosophers are essentially diurnal creatures (no matter how late into the night their inkpots and spectacles glitter) and that space would not be space if color and outline were not primarily perceived" (*New York Sun*, p. 15). Moreover, he frequently dissociates his views from those of Plato. In an interview with Alfred Appel, Jr, Nabokov says "I am afraid to get mixed up with Plato, whom I do not care for" (*SO*, p. 69). When Appel then states that *Pale Fire* "appears to some readers to be in part a gloss of Plato's myth of the cave" and asks Nabokov to comment on the possibility that his "work suggests a conscious Platonism," Nabokov rejects the suggestion:

As I have said I am not particularly fond of Plato, nor would I survive very long

under his Germanic regime of militarism and music. I do not think that this cave business has anything to do with my Shade and Shadows. (SO, p. 70)

¹³ In *Pale Fire* the scenery of Switzerland is described as part of Charles the Beloved's escape route from Zembla. The other book referred to here by Nabokov, in which the scenery of Switzerland is employed, is *Transparent Things*.

¹⁴ Nabokov also 'gives' a poem to Fydor in *The Gift*: "probably my favorite Russian poem is one that I happened to give to my main character in that novel" (SO, p. 14).

¹⁵ See also Chapter 1.

¹⁶ Nabokov regards the "ideas" of society as the conventional 'truths' of a particular era:

By "ideas" I meant of course general ideas, the big, sincere ideas . . . which, in the inevitable long run, amount to bloated topicalities stranded like dead whales. (SO, p. 121)

¹⁷ In Nabokov's view major art does not seriously support the conventional beliefs of society because its very individuality challenges any unquestioning acceptance of social "truths." He refuses, therefore, to see art as a contribution to society:

A work of art has no importance whatever to society. It is only important to the individual, and only the individual reader is important to me. I don't give a damn for the group, the community, the masses, and so forth. (SO, p. 33)

His constant challenges to the view that art should embody the conventional beliefs of a society are elaborated in the following statement:

The middlebrow or the upper Philistine cannot get rid of the furtive feeling that a book, to be great, must deal in great ideas. Oh, I know the type, the dreary type! He likes a good yarn spiced with social comment; he likes to recognize his own thoughts and throes in those of the author; he wants at least one of the characters to be the author's stooge. If American, he has a dash of Marxist blood, and if British, he is acutely and ridiculously class-conscious; he finds it so much easier to write about ideas than about words; he does not realize that perhaps the reason he does not find general ideas in a particular writer is that the particular ideas of that writer have not yet become general. (SO, p. 41)

¹⁸ Even though Nabokov rejects any interest in public morals, his work embodies what he sees as individually held values. He continually attacks hypocrisy, fraudulence, cruelty and stupidity, to the point that he says,

I believe that one day a reappraiser
will come and declare that, far from
having been a frivolous firebird, I
was a rigid moralist kicking sin,
cuffing stupidity, ridiculing the
vulgar and cruel—and assigning
sovereign power to tenderness, talent,
and pride. (*SO*, p. 193)

¹⁹ Pifer, p. 10.

²⁰ As was shown in my previous chapter, characters' representations of 'reality' are content-based but form-dependent. Here I am concerned with the content-based aspects of Nabokov's characterizations.

²¹ In Chapter 1 I outlined Nabokov's distinctions between man's reconstruction of four 'non-fictive' orders of conscious realities. I also suggested that Nabokov regards art as the imaginative re-creation of a fifth level of conscious constructs, that makes up an independent 'aesthetic reality.'

²² Robert Alter in *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley and London: Univ. of California Press, 1975) points out that "Nabokov's parodistic novels" remind the reader that "all representations of reality are necessarily stylizations" (p. 30). Alter's view was discussed briefly in Chapter 2. In this chapter I use Alter's term "stylizations," rather than refer only to style, because the term suggests representations that are content-based as well as form-dependent.

²³ Martin Price, "The Other Self: Thoughts about Character in the Novel," in *Imagined Worlds*, eds. Maynard Mack and Ian McGregor (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 284.

²⁴ Price, p. 284.

²⁵ Ellen Pifer makes the point that Nabokov's characters are not autonomous: "they are ruled by the author's literary version of universal laws. Outside the realm of fiction, these laws are subject to debate. They are not objectively true, but subjectively convincing" (pp. 10-11).

²⁶ David Packman in *Vladimir Nabokov: The Structure of Literary Desire* (London: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1982) suggests that "Nabokov rehearses the textualization of a reality we are constantly in the process of constituting and deciphering" (p. 18). I have suggested that Nabokov dramatizes this process in his characterizations.

²⁷ See also Chapter 1. Nabokov's view that all man's conscious 'realities' from science to art blend knowledge and imagination undermines traditional distinctions between

so-called 'objective' disciplines and the acknowledged fictions of art. This is not to suggest that Nabokov denies distinctions between different orders of conscious constructs from science to art. But his concern is to break down the exclusiveness of such distinctions. He constantly draws attention to the ways in which all 'knowledge' combines fact and fancy. Therefore he attacks the notion that man's accumulation of knowledge in any field can result in universal or absolute 'truths.' When asked, for instance, to suggest the place of literature in a world in which "science has begun to plumb the most profound mysteries of existence," Nabokov suggests that the greater man's knowledge the more he is, or should be, aware of the limitations of his subjective awareness:

In point of fact, the greater one's science, the deeper the sense of mystery. Moreover, I don't believe that any science today has pierced any mystery. We, as newspaper readers, are inclined to call "science" the cleverness of an electrician or a psychiatrist's mumbo jumbo. This, at best, is applied science, and one of the characteristics of applied science is that yesterday's neutron or today's truth dies tomorrow. But even in a better sense of "science"—as the study of visible and palpable nature, or the poetry of pure mathematics and pure philosophy—the situation remains as hopeless as ever. We shall never know the origin of life, or the meaning of life, or the nature of space and time, or the nature of nature, or the nature of thought. (SO, pp. 44-45)

PART TWO

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF *THE REAL LIFE OF SEBASTIAN KNIGHT*

The structural composition of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* epitomizes Nabokov's use of formal conventions in order to provide a critical perspective on the activities of a first-person narrator. The novel is cast as the documented biography of an artist, Sebastian Knight, compiled and written after Knight's death by his half-brother, V. The biographical genre immediately simulates a 'non-fictive' context for V.'s narrative and prescribes the functional norms of his activities. Since biographical narrative "is dictated by factual rather than fictional events,"¹ the biographer's task involves historical research and scholarship. The language of reconstruction must provide, in turn, a non-fictive communication of accumulated knowledge about the subject's past life. Even when the biographer is able to relate personal contacts with his subject, the codes and methods of his undertaking require that he function as an observer and an informant who reports such incidents rather than expresses his subjective responses to them. Within the framework of V.'s biography of his half-brother, the opposing conventions of creative writing are represented in Sebastian Knight's art. While literature incorporates knowledge, it uses language to realize imaginative aesthetic worlds. Built into the use of literary conventions are the implicit admission of the fictiveness and of the stylistic artifice of the work's realized illusions. Thus the overall structure of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, as the biography of an artist, involves an internal juxtaposition of non-fictive conventions and aesthetic conventions which distinguish between the lexical worlds of life and of art. For the would-be biographer, V., the task is to maintain these

distinctions while presenting a non-fictive account of Knight's life which would include information about Knight's literary output.

Within the generic framework of biography, V.'s materials consist of the 'factual' details of Sebastian Knight's life, other people's reported versions of Knight's life and art, and Knight's literary works. Both the details of Knight's life and others' versions of that life constitute a non-fictive source of information, although the latter involves the subjectivity of the particular memoirist. Neither of these non-fictive levels, however, provides a direct, personal expression of Knight's individuality. V. destroys Sebastian Knight's love letters and presents only a letter to a publisher and a brief quotation from Sebastian's final letter to V., so that, since Knight himself is dead, the subject's personal statements do not provide a possible source for biographical reconstruction. From the outset, then, the functional norms of V.'s undertaking in conjunction with his non-fictive source materials preclude an authentic realization of Knight's personality since the 'real' Sebastian survives only in others' memories.²

At the level of fictive materials, Sebastian Knight's literary works are similarly not an expression of his 'real' life, but complete and observable aesthetic worlds which exist independently of the author's person. As imaginative products of consciousness, however, Sebastian's art embodies his 'identity as a writer' and the methods and developments of Knight's art constitute a valid field for non-fictive description and critical analysis. While V. provides such description, his analysis of Knight's methods exposes the limitations of his critical awareness. In turn V.'s application of the works to life reveals his confusion of art and life as well as his unwitting failure to comply with the functional norms of his scholarly undertaking. And since Knight's art is not only a focal centre, but a source for V.'s biographical research and reconstruction of life, a careful consideration of Knight's work may form the basis for examining V.'s activities.

V. makes mention of two of Knight's letters, the one to a

publisher which V. quotes in full and the one that precedes V.'s journey to Knight's place of death. The letter to the publisher serves an important dual function in that it provides Knight's own non-fictive statements of his aesthetic principles and so validates V.'s later descriptions of Knight's work. As a prerequisite to the publication of the first novel, *The Prismatic Bezel*, Sebastian Knight had been asked to modify a "comic and cruel skit" (p. 45) upon a renowned contemporary author and critic. Knight's refusal, as stated in his letter, is a rejection both of artistic conformity and conventional attitudes. From the first sentence of the letter Sebastian questions popular beliefs (the cliché of the 'budding author') and popular idols (the famous author, X). Knight suggests that contemporary literary fame is an indication of imitative, rather than original, art, and claims that the writers of such serious, but second-rate, works,

pamper the taste of the worst category of the reading public—not those who revel in detective yarns, bless their pure souls—but those who buy the worst banalities because they have been shaken up in a modern way with a dash of Freud or "stream of consciousness" or whatnot—and incidentally do not and never will understand that the pretty cynics of today are Marie Corelli's nieces and old Mrs Grundy's nephews. (P. 46)

The coupling of discredited nineteenth-century arbiters of popular taste (Marie Corelli and Mrs Grundy)³ with twentieth-century influences and attitudes deftly undermines an unthinking acceptance of contemporary social values. At the same time, Knight implicitly questions twentieth-century literary hierarchies by suggesting that the detective story is a purer form of acknowledged artifice than the 'serious' novel of ideas. The artist's activity, argues Sebastian, is neither subject to nor a reflection of social expectations and attitudes, so that he reasserts that "even if there were such a thing as a 'literary career' and I were disqualified merely for riding my own horse, still I would refuse to change one single word in what I have written" (p. 46). This coupling of artistic

independence with a precise and personal choice of language is complemented by Knight's belief that authentic art is based on the exacting observation of existing details rather than generalized attitudes. Knight, for instance, defends his satiric portrait of X on the grounds that it is a carefully studied portrait of the stylizations of a particular personality. That the satiric reworking of knowledge based on observation completes an artistic exposure of hypocrisy is made clear by Knight: "There are in fact not many things in life comparable to the delight of satire, and when I imagine the humbug's face as he reads (and read he shall) that particular passage and knows as well as we do that it is the truth, then delight reaches its sweetest climax" (p. 47). Knight, then, not only attacks imitative second-rate art but hypocrisy and false pretensions in life, together with the social attitudes that sustain them: "What is this masonic bond of triteness—or indeed tritheism? Down with these shoddy gods!" (p. 46).

The correlation between the aesthetic preoccupations of Knight's letter and V.'s remarks prefatory to the description of Knight's first two novels is immediate and establishes V.'s reliability as a literary informant. V. outlines Knight's concern to expose unthinking and imitative fictions—"dead things shamming life" (p. 76)--and describes Knight's use of parody to draw attention to the literary tricks perpetrated by 'serious' contemporary works--"here, at the readable stage, the shamming began" (p. 76). However, while the validity of V.'s descriptions of Knight's work is thus confirmed, his scholarship is revealed to be accidental. He fails to see that Knight's letter provides direct evidence of Knight's aesthetic beliefs. Instead, he claims that his main point in quoting the letter, "apart from its own value as showing Sebastian in that bright boyish mood" (p. 47), is to excuse the inadequacies of V.'s own account of his first meeting with Sebastian's other biographer and former secretary, Goodman.

In the early novels Sebastian Knight explores and exploits literary artifice. His work defamiliarizes stylistic tricks in the parodic evolution of a personal style:

By putting to the *ad absurdum* test this or that literary manner and then dismissing them one after the other, he deduced his own manner and fully exploited it in his next book *Success*. (P. 79)

These parodic methods are particularized by V.'s descriptions of the works. In the first novel, *The Prismatic Bezel*, Sebastian redeploys the generic characteristics of the detective story. The traditional pattern of a mystery (the crime) to be solved by penetrating appearances in order to arrive at a 'reality' (the murderer) is reintegrated into an exploration of imaginative illusions (the fiction) which attempts to probe lexical surfaces in order to expose literary devices. Sebastian's methods become his subject. The stylistic artifice of narrative forms is revealed in the example V. gives:

Then also different kinds of styles are satirized in the course of the book as well as the problem of blending direct speech with narration and description which an elegant pen solves by finding as many variations of 'he said' as may be found in the dictionary between 'acceded' and 'yelped'. (P. 77)

In turn, the narrative details provided by V. illustrate Knight's parodic exposure of stock devices for creating place, time and character. Initially the stability of place is established through the cinematic technique of achieving a 'realistic' central focus by moving from a detailed description of an external setting to an isolated group of twelve people in a boarding house. This stability is then destroyed by changing the background. The boarding house becomes a country house, then reverts to its original setting, and so on. The 'reality' of place is thus shown to be an authorial construction. The exposure of the illusory nature of place is paralleled in the authorial manipulation of time: "The idea of time, which was made to look comic (detective losing his way . . . stranded somewhere in the night), now seems to curl up and fall asleep" (p. 78). As well, Knight parodically deploys synecdochical tricks for rapidly delineating characters--"The local police officer . . . is described solely in terms of boots" (p. 77)--

and draws attention to the way in which popular attitudes condition reader expectations of characters: "The detective, a shifty fellow, drops his h's, and this is meant to look as if it were meant to look quaint; for it is not a parody of the Sherlock Holmes vogue but a parody of the modern reaction from it" (p. 78). The detective story ploy of pursuing false and true clues about the possible suspects is transformed into an elaborate network of connections between the twelve lodgers: "The old lady in No. 3 turns out to be the mother of the violinist in No. 11. The novelist occupying the front bedroom is really the husband of the young lady in the third floor back" (p. 78), and so on. Finally the dénouement is achieved through the reappearance of the murder victim from beneath the disguise of a loitering caller, Nosebag: "'You see,' says Mr Abeson with a self-deprecating smile, 'one dislikes being murdered'" (p. 79). Thus the crime itself is revealed to be an authorial illusion while the characters are exposed as fictional puppets which can be transformed, disposed of, and reanimated, according to authorial design. Knight's subject is finally the nature of aesthetic reality.

Of the first novel V. suggests that Knight's "habit of metamorphosis" (p. 79) is explained by the fact that "the heroes of the book are what can be loosely called 'methods of composition'" (p. 79), and he goes on to argue that by both revealing and reusing traditional devices Sebastian produces "the landscape as I intend you to see it" (p. 79). While the evidence supports V.'s description of Knight's methods, V. himself fails to recognize the significance of the relationship between form and content that makes Knight's methods his subject. Instead V. attributes emotional qualities to Knight's work by asserting that Knight's parody is a means to attaining "the highest region of serious emotion" (p. 76) so that "the characters shine forth with a real and human significance" (p. 78). In this instance, V.'s claims do not accord with his descriptions of the particular. The metamorphoses of place, time, and character stress Knight's authorial activities at the expense of sustaining the illusions of aesthetic reality, while the knowledge Knight reworks in his text is not that of

psychological or emotional 'realism,' but of stylistic artifice. His characterizations are based on the observation of the stylistic tricks of personality in life and literature and he parodically exposes the externalized projections and habits that simulate identity. Portrayed in this way, character is interchangeable since it consists of repeatable tricks or illusions at the same time as it parodies the uncritical use or acceptance of such imitative devices and roles. At this stage in his work, Knight seems preoccupied with a critical depiction of the artifice of personality rather than with serious emotion. By contrast, V.'s critical limitations are suggested by his implicit dismissal of Knight's exploration of literary devices: "But all this obscure fun is, I repeat, only the author's springboard" (p. 77). More significantly perhaps, V.'s propensity to naturalize the work by attaching "a real and human significance" (p. 78) to the characters, prefigures his attempts to equate Knight's art with his life.

Knight's second novel, *Success*, takes up the stratagems of narrative content and plot. The 'crime' of the first book becomes the contrivance of an accidental romantic encounter between Q., a commercial traveller, and Anne, a conjurer's assistant, "with whom he will be happy ever after" (p. 80). After casting this meeting as the climax of a fairy-tale, Knight then makes it a pivot, not for a continuing narrative, but for the construction of an imagined past, thereby combining fantasy and romance traditions. Within this generic framework, the structuring of the novel draws on fictional and non-fictional modes of 'realism' by combining the ploys of the detective story with the methods of historical research in a parodic exercise which draws attention to the author's devices:

With scientific precision in the classification, examination, and rejection of an immense amount of data (the accumulation of which is rendered possible by the fundamental assumption that an author is able to discover anything he may want to know about his characters, such capacity being limited only by the manner and purpose of his selection in so far as it ought to be not a haphazard jumble of worthless details but a definite and methodical quest), Sebastian Knight

devotes the three hundred pages of *Success* to one of the most complicated researches that has ever been attempted by a writer.
(Pp. 79-80)

In the ways described above, Knight's imaginative 'research' into the background preceding his lovers' meeting reveals the analogies between the fictive subterfuges of narrative plausibility and the imposed order of non-fictive historical reconstruction. In both cases the organization of details from the 'past' into a causal pattern that provides answers to questions about a particular event is suggested to be an authorial trick. Thus in *Success* the concern of Knight's first novel with the artifice of literary modes is extended to a questioning of the ways in which man orders the details of life as well as of art into plausible fictions.

While V. gives an informative description of Knight's techniques, which is supported by quotations from *Success*, he again attempts to naturalize the work by claiming that it deals "mainly with the methods of human fate" (p. 79). Implicit in V.'s statement is the admittance of an innate and discernible human order that contrasts with Knight's exploration of the artificial nature of imposed order which is encapsulated in the concept of causality. Once more V. fails to discern the relationship between form and content in Knight's work. Instead he relates the methods or "workings" of *Success* to "its artifices" (pp. 80-81), and goes on to suggest that certain parts of the novel's 'content' reflect Knight's personal life. This latter tendency is illustrated by V.'s selection of a lengthy passage from *Success* which he states captures "the emotional side" of Knight's art and is "so strangely connected with Sebastian's inner life at the time of the completing of the last chapters" (p. 82). In the passage selected by V., William, Anne's first fiancé, takes her home and then muses on their relationship as he returns to his lodgings:

She is warm and she is pretty, he mused,
and I love her, and it's all no good, no
good, because we are dying. I cannot bear
that backward glide into the past. That
last kiss is already dead and *The Woman in*

White [a film they had been to see that night] is stone dead, and the policeman who passed is dead too, and even the door is as dead as its nail. And that last thought is already a dead thing by now. Coates (the doctor) is right when he says that my heart is too small for my size. (P. 82)

V. ignores the parodic overtones of the passage and uses the excerpt to reinforce his own association of the novel with Knight's life. *Success* was completed by Knight in April 1927, and in the immediately preceding chapter of the 'biography' V. has described how Knight learnt in the summer of 1926 that he was suffering from Lehmann's disease, a form of angina pectoris that had killed his mother. V.'s implication is that Willie dramatizes Sebastian's inner emotional reaction to the physical condition which he discovered towards the end of his relationship with Clare Bishop and while he was completing the last chapters of the novel. In this way V. uses Knight's fictions to personalize the details of Knight's life.

Little information is given by V. about the three short stories which follow *Success* apart from a brief discussion of the character of Mr Siller in "The Back of the Moon." Nevertheless, V.'s comments suggest a confusion of art and life which is epitomized by his enthusiastic response to the 'realism' of Mr Siller:

It is as though a certain idea steadily growing through two books has now burst into *real physical existence*, and so Mr Siller makes his bow, with every detail of habit and manner, *palpable and unique*. (P. 86, my italics)

Ironically, V.'s quotations from the story, in support of the detailed, "palpable" realism of Mr Siller, illustrate the way in which figurative devices are used to establish the illusion of the character as an observable entity:

. . . the Adam's apple 'moving like the bulging shape of an arrased eavesdropper'
 . . . the big strong nose, 'whose form made one wonder whether he had not lost

his hump somewhere'; the little black tie
and the old umbrella ('a duck in deep
mourning'). (P. 86)

The quotations from the actual story, then, suggest V.'s critical limitations since he responds to the 'realism' of Mr Siller and ignores the crafted artifice of Knight's imagery.

In the next novel, *Lost Property*, Knight moves from presenting character through stylistic devices which realize external details and starts to explore the artifice of individual consciousness. People are now depicted as "animated mysteries" (p. 90). From a point of qualified authorial omniscience Knight attempts to dramatize the mysteries of individuality by creating a first-person narrator whose physical features are undefined and whose occupation is incidental in that he is only briefly indicated to be a writer/businessman whose love letter is discovered among the debris of an aeroplane crash. Knight's characterization is achieved by presenting the narrator's first-person account of selected scenes from his past which trace an uneven progression from childhood (the duel) to late adolescence (the period in England and the visit to Roquebrune) to maturity (exile and adult love). The narrator's childhood memories of the day on which his father was killed in a duel suggest the way in which consciousness retains a selective and subjective mixture of the intellectual, physical and emotional elements of the individual's experience:

Next morning at school, I made a bad mess of the geometrical problem which in our slang we termed "Pythagoras' Pants". The morning was so dark that the lights were turned on in the classroom and this always gave me a nasty buzzing in the head. I came home about half past three in the afternoon with that sticky sense of uncleanness which I always brought back from school and which was now enhanced by ticklish underclothes. My father's orderly was sobbing in the hall. (P. 12)

Moreover, the narrator recognizes that the subjectivity and artifice of consciousness contain the potential for deception. He provides a wry self-dramatization of his own past which illustrates the emotional basis of "individual reality" while

it exposes the illusions perpetrated through consciousness. His account of his pilgrimage to Roquebrune, where thirteen years earlier his mother had died, depicts an emotionally engendered imposition of imaginative illustrations on a neutral and unconnected scene. The 'vision' he has of his mother is undermined when some months later he discovers from his mother's cousin that she had died at "the other Roquebrune, the one in Var" (p. 17).

Through the persona of the narrator, Knight also suggests that the stylizations of personality may be a response to, but do not necessarily represent, inner awareness. In reconstructing his life as a student at Cambridge the narrator gives a self-conscious account of his activities: the inner shyness which resulted in outer awkwardness and ill-matched attempts to conform stylistically with the appearance of his contemporaries; the acute observation coupled with conscious associations that so often resulted in irrelevant and uncalled for confidences; the social avoidance of others together with a compensating response to an adopted country. At the same time the narrator feels that his inner awareness of his past selves seems to embody an indefinable core of 'identity':

I seem to pass with intangible steps across
ghostly lawns and through dancing-halls . . .
until I come to a certain warm hollow where
something very like the selfest of my own
self sits huddled up in the darkness. (P. 58)

Within the narrator's 'present,' "individual reality" is seen to be a state of consciousness that combines physical, emotional and imaginative awareness in a monistic 'oneness.'⁴ By itself, physical love, for instance, is not seen as an expression of individuality since it involves only man's sexual experience: "Physical love is but another way of saying the same thing and not a special sexophone note, which once heard is echoed in every other region of the soul" (p. 87). The narrator presents the paradox that for man the only 'authentic reality' is individual consciousness which blends the personal elements of existence in an inimitable and irrepeatable 'oneness': "All things belong to the same order of things, for

such is the oneness of human perception, the oneness of individuality, the oneness of matter, whatever matter may be. The only real number is one, the rest are mere repetition" (p. 87). The narrator's stated views are dramatized in the misdirected love letter which is retrieved after an aeroplane crash. The writer of the letter admits to his previous sweetheart that he is in love with another woman. Although he is miserable, his new love constitutes a total involvement of his individuality, as he makes clear: "It would be absurd of me to try to persuade you that you were the pure love, and that this other is but a comedy of the flesh. All is flesh and all is purity" (p. 94). His continuing feelings for the woman addressed in the letter now involve a partial rather than a complete relationship: "One may have a thousand friends, but only one love-mate" (p. 94). The writer feels he must terminate the former relationship since he claims that, "There is only one real number: One. And love, apparently, is the best exponent of this singularity" (p. 94). In conjunction, then, the narrator's views and the love letter suggest that emotion reveals that the physical and imaginative elements of conscious experience are part of a monistic whole. In turn, monistic involvement that is illustrated in the love relationship constitutes an authentic manifestation of individuality. Thus, through the invented 'life' of a first-person narrator, Sebastian Knight explores "individual reality."

V.'s approach to *Lost Property* exemplifies his critical limitations and his fusion of Knight's art and life. V. terms *Lost Property* Knight's "most autobiographical work" (p. 6), because it contains events that are known to have occurred in Knight's life. V. does not comment on the way in which Knight transforms biographical materials by incorporating them within the dramatized consciousness of a fictional character. Indeed, V. never discusses literary devices in the novel and so scarcely seems to recognize the role of Knight's first-person narrator. Instead V. scatters the excerpts from *Lost Property* throughout his own reconstructions of Knight's life in order to suggest Knight's personal responses to events. After V. describes the death of Sebastian's and his own father in a duel, for instance,

he introduces the duel excerpt from *Lost Property* with the words, "In *Lost Property* Sebastian gives his own impressions of that lugubrious January day" (p. 12). In similar fashion, V. quotes from the Roquebrune incident in *Lost Property* directly after an account of Sebastian's infrequent contacts with Virginia Knight, his mother. In turn, descriptions of the Cambridge period in the novel are not attributed to a fictional character but are subtly suggested to be Knight's personal statements about his own life: "'I was,' writes Sebastian in *Lost Property*, 'so shy that I always managed somehow to commit the fault I was most anxious to avoid'" (pp. 56-57). In his continual use of quotations from *Lost Property* to explicate and animate the details of Knight's life, V. exhibits an equally shallow understanding of Knight's artistic activities and of his own non-fictive functions. Even when V. treats Knight's novel as a work of fiction he speculates upon its relationship to Knight's life. These critical practices are exemplified by his discussion of the love letter. V. proposes a critical absurdity, for instance, when he suggests that, "If we abstract from this fictitious letter everything that is personal to its supposed author, I believe that there is much in it that may have been felt by Sebastian, or even written by him, to Clare" (pp. 94-95). V.'s propensity for personal speculation is further revealed by his statement that, "His [Knight's] hero's letter may possibly have been a kind of code in which he expressed a few truths about his relations with Clare" (p. 95). V.'s inability to pursue a literary critical approach to the novel is epitomized by his baffled responses to Knight's parodic methods:

The light of personal truth is hard to perceive in the shimmer of an imaginary nature, but what is still harder to understand is the amazing fact that a man writing of things which he really felt at the time of writing, could have had the power to create simultaneously—and out of the very things which distressed his mind—a fictitious and faintly absurd character.
(P. 95)

Not only does V. assume that the art reflects Knight's personal experience and feelings, he also sees no contradictions in his

own use of the novel to explicate the life. In turn, he completely fails to perceive Knight's thematic exploration of "individual reality."

Sebastian Knight's final novel, *The Doubtful Asphodel*, is the culmination of his thematic preoccupation with the paradoxes of individuality. The title suggests the interrelated facets of the book: the overt concern with death; the parodic exposure of the emotional source of man's fictions of immortality; and the narcissistic attempt to appraise the mystery of personal being.⁵ In this novel Knight isolates his main character from public activities and roles by dramatizing him in the process of dying: "The theme of the book is simple: a man is dying: you feel him sinking throughout the book; his thought and his memories pervade the whole with greater or lesser distinction" (p. 146). V.'s descriptive account of the narrative traces the man's progression through thought and memories to an awareness of the nature of his own consciousness. None of the outward features or behaviour of the man are described. The only 'realities' are the images of people and scenes within the man's mind. Even when the man thinks of himself—"at moments, his personality grows conscious of itself" (p. 147)—he considers images of self in terms of the lost opportunities of the past. The imminence of personal death then leads to the mind's review of "ideas about death" (p. 148), all of which are rejected as future possibilities. The resurgence followed by the ebb of physical pain removes the impulse for imaginative projections: "Now he was left so exhausted that he failed to be interested in death" (p. 149). Instead the man envisages his life as a knot which may be untied by a critical consciousness: "The eye undoes it, while clumsy fingers bleed" (p. 149). His critical contemplation leads him to recognize the lexical order which man imposes upon the subjectively known materials of conscious existence: "And not only himself, everything would be unravelled—everything that he might imagine in our childish terms of space and time, both being riddles invented by man as riddles, and thus coming back to us: the boomerangs of nonsense" (p. 149). Not absolutes or 'truths,' then, but the stylistic artifice of conscious reality is seen by the dying man to be

illustrated in the fusion of perception and landscape into personal verbal worlds: "Thus the traveller spells out the landscape and its sense is disclosed, and likewise, the intricate pattern of human life turns out to be monogrammatic, now quite clear to the inner eye disentangling the interwoven letters" (p. 150). Now the dying man sees that within the course of life the individual's identification with the stylizations of personality precludes the critical observation of his own artifice:

And the word, the meaning which appears is astounding in its simplicity: the greatest surprise being perhaps that in the course of one's earthly existence, with one's brain encompassed by an iron ring, by the close-fitting dream of one's own personality—one had not made by chance that simple mental jerk, which would have set free imprisoned thought and granted it great understanding. (P. 150)

Through the vision of a fictional character, then, Knight undermines the possibility of formulating absolutes about either self or world. At the same time, by isolating his main character from earthly concerns with the 'truth,' Knight suggests that a self-conscious observation of the artifice of consciousness is the basis for an authentic expression of individual reality as is exemplified in the vision of the dying man: "Remodelled and re-combined, the world yielded its sense to the soul as naturally as both breathed" (p. 150).

V. describes the form and content of Knight's last novel without recognizing the relationship between the two. Since V. focuses on the content of the novel he responds to the book as a narrative quest for answers that thwarts its own articulation of final truths by the death of the main character. Thus V. fails to recognize Knight's parodic defamiliarization of man's lexical formulations and clings to a belief that truths are somewhere concealed in the word: "I sometimes feel when I turn the pages of Sebastian's masterpiece that the 'absolute solution' is there, somewhere, concealed in some passage I have read too hastily, or that it is intertwined with other words whose familiar guise deceived me" (p. 151). Ironically, V.'s

preoccupation with "the word" as a means of arriving at an "absolute solution" is in direct opposition to the critical awareness of language as a stylistic artifice that is encapsulated by Knight's title, *The Doubtful Asphodel*. Philologically, the word asphodel, like the mystery of individuality, cannot be defined accurately, since "no satisfactory derivation of the word is suggested" and the word itself has become corrupted through usage: "The English word 'daffodil' is a perversion of 'asphodel,' formerly written 'affodil.' The *d* may come from the French fleur d'affodille. It is no part of the word philologically."⁶

Sebastian Knight's self-conscious stylistic strategies involve a critical incorporation of previously existing forms and worlds as the basis for his own artistic creations. Knight continually re-examines the possibilities of language, from his early concern with stylistic tricks and literary modes as evidenced in *The Prismatic Bezel*, to his parodic questioning of lexical 'absolutes' about self and world which is initiated in *Success*, dramatized in *Lost Property*, and proposed in his uncompleted project for a fictional biography based on the factual materials of a living person, Mr H.. In a comparable fashion, Knight uses personal 'knowledge' to explore stylizations, from the external projections of observable personalities in life and in art of the first two novels, to the biographically based memories that are recombined in *Lost Property*, to the processes of consciousness that are isolated in *The Doubtful Asphodel*. The critical combination of form and content within Knight's characterizations presents metaphoric dramatizations of man in relation to 'reality' while it explores the way in which "individual reality" may be expressed in the stylistic artifice of personal representations of self and of world. Consequently, Knight's art constitutes an imaginative and self-conscious re-creation of the previously existing worlds of both life and art. Thus, while the methods and details of Knight's literary works manifest his 'identity as a writer,' they provide no expression of his personality or of "the real man behind the author" (p. 95).

Sebastian Knight's self-conscious literary practices

provide a complete antithesis to the distorted practices of V.'s methods within the non-fictive conventions of biography. V.'s inability to sustain distinctions between art and life, when he moves from describing to discussing Sebastian's art, is coupled with a lack of self-critical awareness in respect to the methods of his own verbal reconstructions of the details of Knight's life. From the outset V.'s presentation of his materials conflicts with the structural conventions of biography. In place of impersonal reconstruction, V.'s work takes the form of a first-person narrative which persistently approaches the manner of a dramatic monologue since it records V.'s own experiences during his obsessive quest for a knowledge of the 'real' Sebastian Knight. And just as with Knight's art, while V. reports the details of Knight's life, he adds his own personal responses to his data. V., for instance, imparts numerous facts about his subject, from Knight's birth on December 31, 1899, to his death in 1936, but although these details describe the course and the context of Knight's life they do not animate that life. V.'s discovery of the old Russian lady's meteorological record of the day on which Sebastian was born demonstrates the problems for the would-be biographer of a factual account which is devoid of the subjective experiences of either the subject or the original recorder. On consulting the old lady's diary V. writes that "Therefore I am able to state that the morning of Sebastian's birth was a fine windless one, with twelve degrees (Réaumur) below zero . . . this is all, however, that the good lady found worth setting down" (p. 5). V.'s solution is to animate the dry facts of context by reproducing his own version of the 'delights' of such a winter's day: "the pure luxury of a cloudless sky designed not to warm the flesh, but solely to please the eye; the sheen of sledge-cuts on the hard-beaten snow" (p. 5). V., however, shows no awareness that either the form or the practices of his biographical reconstructions conflict with the functional norms of scholarship.

In apparent contrast to his handling of accumulated facts, V. announces his distrust of indirect source materials by describing the pitfalls inherent in gathering evidence about

the life from other people's recollections of Sebastian:

Don't be too certain of learning the past
from the lips of the present. Beware of the
most honest broker. Remember that what you
are told is really threefold: shaped by the
teller, reshaped by the listener, concealed
from both by the dead man of the tale.
(P. 44)

V.'s method for admitting the possible bias of his informants while dissociating himself from a further subjective reshaping of their statements is to repeat everything he is or has been told about Sebastian, from his own mother's description of the young Sebastian's meeting with Virginia Knight to Nina Lecerf's account of the adult Sebastian's 'tedious' infatuation for her. By including negative as well as positive versions of Sebastian, V. establishes for himself an air of apparent impartiality, which he attempts to reinforce by contrasting his own methods with those of his rival, Goodman, who, V. claims, "never quotes anything that may clash with the main idea of his fallacious work" (p. 55). Yet while V. dismisses Goodman's biography, he is incapable of recognizing that he repeats certain of Goodman's practices. Where Goodman, for instance, quotes a passage from *The Doubtful Asphodel* to suggest Knight's feelings of alienation towards Russia, V. counters with a quotation from *Lost Property* to support his own predetermined view of Knight's "real affection for the country where he had been born and bred" (p. 24). In comparable fashion, V.'s personal views of Sebastian impinge upon his description of his informants to suggest the superficial nature of his impartial approach to indirect sources. Sympathetic accounts of Sebastian provided by people such as V.'s mother, Sheldon, and Helen Pratt, are reinforced by V.'s praise of the teller. Of Knight's Cambridge friend, for instance, V. claims that not only was he "a prominent scholar" (p. 37) but also "the finest and gentlest soul imaginable" (p. 39). By contrast V.'s essential discrediting of the teller extends from Sebastian's old Swiss governess, to Knight's former secretary, Goodman, to Knight's last love, Nina Lecerf. V.'s treatment of Nina Lecerf illustrates the process. V. repeats everything Nina tells him,

such as her statement that "He [Knight] was the kind of man, you know, who thinks all modern books are trashy, and all modern young people fools, merely because he is much too preoccupied with his own sensations and ideas to understand those of others" (p. 133). At the same time V. implicitly condemns Nina, and dismisses her views, by discrediting her intelligence and her artistic sensitivity: "Books meant nothing to a woman of her kind; her own life seems to her to contain the thrills of a hundred novels. Had she been condemned to spend a whole day shut up in a library, she would have been found dead about noon" (p. 146). Thus V. manipulates the effects of his 'impartial' reports by his subjective depictions of the informants.

V.'s main ploy for validating his own views and testimony is by reference to his position as Sebastian's half-brother. However, the tenuous nature of their relationship is evidenced in V.'s description of his past contacts with Sebastian. As children, the six year age difference mitigates against shared activities and V.'s accounts of the time mainly describe his persistent attempts to keep up with and to make Sebastian pay attention to him, even to the point of dropping spittle from the banisters while watching Sebastian below "as a wistful and vain attempt to make him notice my existence" (p. 14). Following the exile from Russia, the adolescent V. sees Sebastian only twice, the second time at the funeral of V.'s mother where V. finds the attempt to converse with Sebastian embarrassing. V. is struck by Sebastian's foreign appearance, the English "limp self-conscious" (p. 27) handshake, and he prefers to remain in Paris rather than accept Sebastian's offer to join him in England. As an adult V. also sees Sebastian only twice. An accidental meeting in 1924 elicits in V. a feeling of emotional rejection that "having arrived in Paris he [Knight] had not communicated with me" (p. 60). In similar fashion, Sebastian's behaviour together with his abrupt termination of an arranged meeting in 1929 confirms V.'s suspicion that "he was madly anxious to get rid of me" (p. 91). That the bonds between V. and Sebastian arise out of kinship and duty rather than any close knowledge of, or friendship with, one another is

illustrated both by Sebastian's final letter which, he tells V., "turned towards you, as a shy guest in a strange house will talk at unusual length to the near relative with whom he came to the party" (pp. 156-57), and by V.'s sceptical and tardy response to that letter--"Sebastian was very high-strung and nervous and had always been inclined to undue pessimism when his health was impaired" (p. 157).

Ironically, it is Sebastian's death which, for V., transforms the tenuous relationship of kinship and instigates a biographical quest for "the real life of Sebastian Knight" which becomes V.'s all consuming obsession:

Two months had elapsed after Sebastian's death when this book was started. Well do I know how much he would have hated my waxing sentimental, but still I cannot help saying that my life-long affection for him, which somehow or other had always been crushed and thwarted, now leapt into new being with such a blaze of emotional strength—that all my other affairs were turned into flickering silhouettes.
(P. 28)

It is also apparent that V.'s emotional involvement in his task arises from his knowledge of and delight in Sebastian's art rather than from any past intimacy with his brother: "now when the possibility of any sort of communication between us was barred by the strange habit of human death, I regretted desperately never having told Sebastian how much I delighted in his books. As it is I find myself helplessly wondering whether he had been aware I had ever read them" (p. 28).⁷ As Knight's would-be biographer, V.'s delight in Knight's art is combined with his idealization of the artist rather than with any direct knowledge of the man. The results are mixed. V., in contrast to his rival, Goodman, recognizes the independent originality of the artist. Donald Morton suggests that, "Quite apart from his dislike of Goodman, V. scorns the idea of historicism because it focuses on common qualities and refuses to recognize the unique."⁸ But just as in the practice of imposing Knight's art on his life, V. fails to recognize any analogies between Goodman's methods and his own. While V.

rejects Goodman's sociological picture of Knight as a tragic figure whose soul is alienated and finally shattered by the cruelties of the post-war world, V. himself imposes a popular fiction of the artist as a superior or heroic figure upon Knight's personal life. V., for instance, describes Knight's alienation from his world as the result of a superior artistic sensibility: "it was simply his becoming aware that the rhythm of his inner being was so much richer than that of other souls" (p. 56). Like Goodman then, though employing a different approach, V. imposes a popular stereotype of the artist upon Knight's life.

Coupled with V.'s lack of self-critical assessment of his own practices, is his growing conviction that the genetic bond makes him capable of "soldering the fragments" (p. 28) of his biographical research through an "inner knowledge" of Sebastian: "Inner knowledge? Yes, this was a thing I possessed, I felt it in every nerve. And the more I pondered on it, the more I perceived that I had yet another tool in my hand; when I imagined actions of his that I heard of only after his death, I knew for certain that in such and such a case I should have acted just as he had" (p. 28). Alternatively V. speculates that had Knight taken the same 'be-a-writer' course as V., Knight, because of his artistic originality, would have failed in the endeavour as V. had done: "he would have turned out an incalculably more hopeless pupil than I" (p. 30). Thus, although V. acknowledges a stylistic difference between the brilliance of Knight's writing and his own prose, he claims to share a comparable artistic sensitivity to that which he finds evinced in Knight's fiction:

When in Sebastian's books I find some detail of mood or impression which makes me remember at once, say, a certain effect of lighting in a definite place which we two had noticed, unknown to one another, then I feel that in spite of the toe of his talent being beyond my reach we did possess certain psychological affinities which will help me out. (P. 30)

V.'s identification with an artistic sensibility he extracts from Knight's art and imposes on Knight's life, is

conjoined with his own attempts to relive Sebastian's adult experiences. He visits Cambridge and Knight's London flat, and he makes contact with all Knight's known companions from Sheldon to Clare Bishop. In turn, he becomes obsessed with finding Sebastian's last love: "She is the missing link in his evolution, and I must obtain her—it's a scientific necessity" (p. 99). V.'s determination to 'obtain' Nina is, however, a symptom of the belief, evidenced throughout his quest, that he can re-experience Knight's personal life. V.'s conviction, that by repeating the factual experiences of Knight's life he will realize the 'real' Sebastian, leads him to dismiss the illusory qualities of his quest:

though I sometimes cannot help believing that it had gradually grown into a dream, that quest, using the pattern of reality for the weaving of its own fancies, I am forced to recognize that I was being led right, and that in striving to render Sebastian's life I must now follow the same rhythmical interlacements. (P. 113)

Ironically, the imaginative illusions that dominate V.'s biographical practices imitate the patterns and the literary techniques of Sebastian Knight's art. Charles Nicol claims that *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* "is not a biography but the presentation of methods by which to write a biography; each of the methods used is mirrored by one of Sebastian's novels."⁹ But in both structural and narrative terms the reverse of Nicol's view describes V.'s activities. V.'s methods contradict the functional norms of his biographical undertaking in that they adopt the surface patterns of Sebastian's novels. And since Knight's novels precede V.'s 'biography,' V.'s methods mirror Knight's aesthetic creations. The critical perspective embodied in the structuring of V.'s narrative reveals the way in which V. unwittingly enacts the patterns of Knight's novels in his quest for the 'real life,' while V.'s imposition of Knight's art on the biographical facts provides a parodic realization of Knight's uncompleted project for a fictional biography of a Mr H.. In addition, to complete the transformation of life into art V., at times, blatantly adopts the techniques of artistic conventions, as is seen, for

example, in the theatrical images which surround his dramatized version of Sebastian's first adolescent love:

He was sixteen and so was she. The lights go out, the curtain rises and a Russian summer landscape is disclosed; . . . Sebastian, his close-cropped head hatless, his loose silk blouse now clinging to his shoulder-blades, now to his chest according to whether he bends or leans back, is lustily rowing in a boat painted a shiny green. A girl is sitting at the helm, but we shall let her remain achromatic: a mere outline, a white shape not filled in with colour by the artist.
(Pp. 113-14)

Within the non-fictive conventions of V.'s biographical undertaking, his identification with the illusions of Knight's art exposes a lack of self-critical awareness in respect to his activities as Knight's biographer that is in direct opposition to the self-conscious methods of Knight's literary oeuvre. The result is that not only Knight's art but V.'s 'biography' realize the imaginative illusions of artistic creations.

Whatever the distorted practices of V.'s biographical activities, he is involved simultaneously in the ongoing present of his own individual consciousness and personality. Within the non-fictive context of V.'s personal reality, however, his descriptions of his own activities reveal that just as he uses Knight's art to animate the details of Knight's life, so V.'s personal identification with Knight's art results in his imposing Knight's images on his own representations of reality. V.'s account of tracking down the elusive Nina Lecerf, for instance, becomes dotted with characters, incidents and images from Knight's fiction. The hotel manager in Blauberg is said to end his refusal to give V. a list of past clients with the irrelevant comment that, "In the hotel round the corner a Swiss couple committed suicide in 1929" (p. 102), a statement which seems to be an imitation of an incident from *The Doubtful Asphodel*: "Professor Nussbaum, a Swiss scientist, shoots his young mistress and himself dead in a hotel room at half past three in the morning" (p. 147). V.'s account of Silberman, the

ex-"plain clothes" detective who is said to provide V. with a list of possible suspects in the hunt for Sebastian's last love, reworks the narrative pattern of *The Prismatic Bezel* and the character of Mr Siller from "The Back of the Moon." Finally, the scenes from *The Doubtful Asphodel* described in the following passage are echoed intermittently as V. traces his list of suspects:

We follow the gentle old chess player Schwarz, who sits down on a chair in a room in a house, to teach an orphan boy the moves of the knight; we meet the fat Bohemian woman with that grey streak showing in the fast colour of her cheaply dyed hair. . . . The lovely tall prima donna steps in her haste into a puddle, and her silver shoes are ruined. An old man sobs and is soothed by a soft-lipped girl in mourning.
(P. 147)

In V.'s account of his personal experiences in the quest for Nina, he is admitted at Helene Grinstein's to a house of mourning by the orphaned son of the dead man, while a woman sits with "a tear-drop on her wrist" and Helene is a girl with "soft eyes" (p. 111). At Paul Rechnoy's V. is greeted by a man holding a black knight, a piece from a game in progress which is being observed by a small boy who is "kneeling on the floor" (p. 118). V.'s description of Lydia Bohemsky is of "a fat elderly woman with waved bright orange hair, purplish jowls and some dark fluff over her painted lip" (p. 127), while, at Nina's country house, the arrival of the singer, Helene von Graun, is recounted as "A woman had scrambled out of the car right into a puddle" (p. 142). Thus the images of Knight's art seem to mould V.'s perceptions within the ongoing present of his personal 'reality.'

At certain points V. acknowledges that his biographical function requires that he suppress his own subjective or personal views, but he persists in the naïve claim that because he has not discussed his own circumstances (job, finance, living abode) during the account of his quest, he has sustained the role of a critically astute and impersonal informant:

As the reader may have noticed, I have tried to put into this book as little of my own

self as possible. I have tried not to allude (though a hint now and then might have made the background of my research somewhat clearer) to the circumstances of my life. (P. 117)

The irony of V.'s claim is that not only does he impose Knight's art upon the biographical facts, he also negates progressively his own individuality by identifying himself with an idealized popular fiction of the artist, while particularizing this fiction in the artistic sensibility that he extracts from Knight's works. In turn, by using the patterns of Knight's past and of his fiction V. exchanges his own personality for an imitative art of self characterization within an ongoing present of his own life.

The imitative nature of V.'s personal stylizations are prefigured in his account of the experiences which surround his nightmarish trip to St Damier. V. records that Sebastian's direct appeal for V.'s presence was put aside because V. had "not the smallest inkling of his heart trouble" (p. 157). At the same time Sebastian's letter triggers in V. a dream which revolves around the left or sinister hand of Sebastian and suggests the perversions or maimed possibilities for writers who might attempt to imitate Knight's art:

Suddenly I noticed that he wore a black glove on his left hand, and that the fingers of that hand did not move, and that he never used it—I was afraid horribly, squeamishly, to the point of nausea, that he might inadvertently touch me with it, for I understood now that it was a sham thing attached to the wrist—that he had been operated upon, or had had some dreadful accident. (P. 158)

Despite V.'s revulsion he pursues the course of the numerous little hands that emerge with the removal of the black glove from the "sham thing" while Sebastian himself vanishes. Still within the dream, V.'s knowledge of Knight's art becomes fused with the appeal of Sebastian's letter to produce a version of *The Doubtful Asphodel* in which V. has a sense of time and life running out—"grain trickling out of a punctured bag at my feet" (p. 159)--and a conviction that Sebastian has an important

message to hand on to V.--"an unfailing intent to solve for me a monstrous riddle" (p. 159). With the arrival of Starov's telegram some days later announcing Sebastian's imminent death, V. unwittingly imposes the visions of the dream, which suggest an imitative, though distorted version of *The Doubtful Asphodel*, on his conscious assessments of the situation: "His [Knight's] last book, my recent dream, the mysteriousness of his letter--all made me firmly believe that some extraordinary revelation would come from his lips" (p. 164).

V.'s conscious negation of his own individuality is initiated during the trip to St Damier. On the train V. is repelled by the physical. He recoils from the touch of a red-eyed soldier: "a horrible tingle remained in my hand, because it had touched his sleeve" (p. 164). He longs to eradicate his travelling companions: "There was, in particular, one old fool whose skinny neck I longed to wring—ferociously" (pp. 164-65). And he is sickened by the crudities of his own physical existence: "I felt sticky all over and excruciatingly unshaven. I think if my bristly cheek had come into contact with satin, I should have fainted" (p. 165). All the while he bemoans his lost opportunities for past contacts with Sebastian. But that such contacts are envisaged as rarified meetings of artistic sensibility is suggested by V.'s desire to refine himself out of physical existence before confronting Sebastian: "I longed to wash the coarse world away and appear in a cold aura of purity before Sebastian" (p. 164). Tellingly, it is V.'s failure to take into account practical considerations (money, the letter with Sebastian's address, the traffic and weather conditions) that hampers the achievement of what is, finally, an unattainable goal since Sebastian is already dead when V. sets out.

At St Damier, V. acts out a version of the Roquebrune incident from *Lost Property*. His emotional response to a mistaken identity renders Sebastian's possible message and physical person irrelevant as V. attributes "the best link imaginable" (p. 171) to the wrong source. And, unlike the narrator of *Lost Property*, V., when told he has been watching near the wrong deathbed, does not acknowledge the illusions

perpetrated by his own consciousness. Instead he formulates an emotionally engendered belief in interchangeable "souls" that is directly opposed to the parodic exploration of artifice and individuality in Knight's work: "Whatever his [Sebastian's] secret was, I have learnt one secret too, and namely: that the soul is but a manner of being—not a constant state—that any soul may be yours, if you find and follow its undulations" (p. 172). The trip to St Damier, Sebastian's death, and V.'s tenet of interchangeable souls initiates and concludes a circular account, not of Sebastian Knight's 'real' life, but of V.'s obsessive pursuit of a chimera. Not only does V. identify with an idealized artistic sensibility that he extracts from Knight's art, he also attempts to realize this imitative identity in his 'biography' of Knight and in his re-enactment of the patterns of Knight's life.

When, at the start of the 'biography,' V. first announces his blood relationship with Sebastian, he remarks that *The Tragedy of Sebastian Knight* makes no mention of a second marriage, "so that to readers of Goodman's book I am bound to appear non-existent—a bogus relative, a garrulous impostor" (p. 6). The final pages of V.'s 'biography' reveal that, within the non-fictive context of both his verbal and his personal activities, he has become 'non-existent' in that he functions as a scripted actor vocalizing and performing a part that he believes mistakenly to represent Sebastian Knight: "Thus—I am Sebastian Knight. I feel as if I were impersonating him on a lighted stage, with the people he knew coming and going" (p. 172). As in a stage play, V. is impersonating a fictional character through conscious imitation that is manifested in the stylistic artifice of personality so that, like the main character in *The Doubtful Asphodel*, "he is the book" (p. 147), while the other people, who "moved round Sebastian—round me who am acting Sebastian" (p. 172) assume for V. a comparable theatricality. And, finally, since V.'s impersonation of Sebastian is an imitative stylization, his complete identification with the part he is playing suggests the 'death' of his own personality:

The hero remains, for, try as I may, I cannot get out of my part: Sebastian's mask clings to my face, the likeness will not be washed off. I am Sebastian or Sebastian is I, or perhaps we both are someone whom neither of us knows. (P. 173)

In presenting *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* as a biography of an artist, Nabokov incorporates an internal juxtaposition of aesthetic and non-fictive conventions. Within Nabokov's structural design, Sebastian Knight's self-conscious literary practices simultaneously draw attention to the formal contrivance of his stylizations and explore the artifice of "individual reality." Through the reworking of established forms Knight evolves an individual style that reflects his 'identity as a writer.' By contrast V.'s practices conflict with the non-fictive conventions of his biographical project. Instead of providing an impersonal description of Knight's life, V. fuses Knight's art with biographical data about Knight and extracts a fictional character. As a would-be biographer V. functions as an imitative novelist. At a personal level, V. reanimates his idealized fiction of Knight through imitative activities so that, not only Sebastian Knight, but V. himself becomes "someone whom neither of us knows" (p. 173). Ironically, V.'s 'biographical' representations dramatize an imitative art of characterization that is parodically exposed in Knight's literary works.

CHAPTER 4: NOTES

¹ J. Bader, *Crystal Land* (London: University of California Press, 1972), p. 6.

² Writing after the death of the Russian poet, Hodasevich, Nabokov himself contrasts the illusory quality of others' memories of the man with the enduring "reality" of the poet's works:

Well, so it goes, yet another plane of life has been slightly displaced, yet another habit—the habit (one's own) of (another person's) existence—has been broken. There is no consolation, if one starts to encourage the sense of loss by one's private recollections of a brief, brittle, human image that melts like a hailstone on a window sill. Let us turn to the poems. (SO, p. 227)

³ Marie Corelli and Mrs Grundy provide a historical and a fictional representative of nineteenth-century social values:

Corelli, Marie (pseudonym of Mary Mackay) (1855–1924), English writer who achieved great popularity by her melodramatic expression of moral fervour (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1970], VI, 493);

Grundy, Mrs, an imaginary English character who typifies the control of the conventional "proprieties" of society over conduct, the tyrannical pressure of the opinion of neighbours on the acts of others (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1970], X, 973).

⁴ See also Chapter 3.

⁵ The asphodel is associated through artistic tradition with death, the narcissus, and immortality:

In Greek legend the asphodel is the most famous of the plants connected with the dead and the underworld. . . . The asphodel of the poets is often a narcissus (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, [1970], II, 618);

By the poets made an immortal flower, and said to cover the Elysian mead (*The Oxford English Dictionary* [1933, rpt. 1961], p. 495).

⁶ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (1910), p. 769.

⁷ V.'s lack of self-critical assessment realizes an unwitting irony in the light of his attempt to discredit Nina Lecerf through claiming "I am quite sure that Sebastian never

alluded to his work in her presence: it would have been like discussing sundials with a bat" (p. 146).

⁸ Donald Morton, *Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1974), p. 45.

⁹ Charles Nicol, "The Mirrors of Sebastian Knight," in *Nabokov: the Man and his Work*, ed. L.S. Dembo (London: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1961), p. 94.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STRUCTURAL LEVELS OF *BEND SINISTER*

In *Bend Sinister* Nabokov incorporates the act of critical analysis as an explicit, as well as integral, component of the novel's verbal world. Through self-conscious authorial intrusions within an omniscient narrative, Nabokov draws attention to the processes and nature of aesthetic reality while he depicts characters who are engaged in non-fictive modes of representation within the 'real' world of the novel. At both the structural levels thus realized, a fusion of the generic characteristics of the novel and of drama delineates a "theatre of the mind."¹ At the level of self-conscious art, an acknowledged triune of author, art work and reader effects a scripted stage show in the mind of the reader as audience. This 'outer' triune is complemented by the novel's 'inner' triune of 'real world,' state, and characters. Within the simulated non-fictive context of the characters' activities, omniscient narration posits the 'observable' details of world, state, and dramatized personalities, while it provides a justification for qualified stream of consciousness techniques which depict the main character, Adam Krug's personal "theatre of the mind." Nabokov's structural alliance of self-conscious artifice and realism reveals the analogies between the strategies of his aesthetic 'theatre' and all stylizations. At the same time, in juxtaposing his 'outer' and 'inner' triunes, he reworks conventions that distinguish between artistic re-creation and non-fictive reconstruction. Consequently his structuring of the novel incorporates a critical perspective not only to the composition of aesthetic reality, but also to the styles which dramatize public and private representations of "other selves"

within the non-fictive 'theatre' of the characters' "individual realities."

The final paragraphs of *Bend Sinister* posit a critical frame to the novel which, on the one hand, reminds the reader that, for the author and for himself, the work of art is simply one completed act within a range of multifarious and continuing activities such as mothing, and which, on the other hand, defines the novel as a self-contained fictional world resulting from the author's specific activity of setting words on paper, words which have been realized in the mind of the reader during the reading process. Within this critical framework the lexical nature of the fictional world is reaffirmed by drawing attention to the work as a typescript. Amidst the female characters of *Bend Sinister* there is no mention of an Isabella, so that the bracketed direction, which occurs in a description of Krug at the University meeting, stands as an instruction from author to typist, a progression from the "chaos of written and rewritten pages" (p. 200) that encapsulates the mechanics of producing the book:

He [Krug] wore a badly creased dark suit and a bow tie, always the same, hyssop violet with (*pure white in the type, here Isabella*) inter-neural macules and a crippled left hindwing.
(P. 48, my italics)

Nabokov's self-conscious use of stylistic devices reminds the reader that not only the book but the book's characters are the author's personal continuation of established literary conventions. The description of Maximov, for instance, includes a critical comment that acknowledges the authorial use of figurative language: "His shiny pink face was clean-shaven like that of an actor (old-fashioned simile)" (p. 79). A parodic exposure of stock devices for delineating characters occurs during the drive to the University as the Professor of French Literature, Beuret, addresses Krug:

'Eez eet zee verity,' said Beuret, suddenly shifting to English, which he knew Krug understood, and speaking it like a Frenchman in an English book, 'eez eet zee verity

zat, as I have been informed by zee reliably sources, zee disposed *chef* of the state has been captured together with a couple of other blokes (when the author gets bored by the process—or forgets) somewhere in the hills—and shot? But no, I ziss cannot credit—eet eez too horrible' (when the author remembers again). (P. 41)

In the above example, the use of clichéd conventions for depicting foreigners is comically suggested to be sustained by authorial concentration as well as by authorial choice. That the author can reduce peripheral characters to a single word is demonstrated by referring to certain members of the University meeting in terms of their subjects rather than their names or personal characteristics: "Economics, Divinity, and Modern History stood talking near one of the heavily draped windows" (p. 44). Equally, the major characters are shown to be the author's verbal illusions so that, in the formal sense, Krug is no more than "a slippery sophism, a play upon words" (p. 200). At the same time, Nabokov draws attention to the paradoxical co-existence of his characters as words and as aesthetic realities, as is seen, for example, in one of the versions of the Paduk/Krug interview which revolves around Paduk's attempt to have Krug condone the state speech for the proposed reopening of the 'new' University:

The seedy tyrant or the president of the State, or the dictator, or whoever he was —the man Paduk in a word, the Toad in another—did hand my favourite character a mysterious batch of neatly typed pages.
(P. 130)

Here the lexical status of Paduk and of Krug is coupled with the assertion of defined and definite action. While the characters of fiction are shown to be the author's verbal constructions they exist as aesthetic realities within the fictional world of the novel.²

The self-conscious methods which draw attention to authorial artifice are coupled with techniques that strengthen the illusions of the fictional world within the critical perspective provided by the 'outer' triune. Nabokov parodically

reworks the address to the reader to include both author and reader as witnesses to the 'reality' of his characters. One of the more condensed examples of this occurs as Krug attempts to allay the head nurse's fears for his safety in the light of his intention to return home on the night of his wife's death:

'I have,' he said, 'a pass.' And, opening his wallet, he went so far as to unfold the paper in question with trembling fingers. He had thick (let me see) clumsy (there) fingers which always trembled slightly. The inside of his cheeks was methodically sucked in and smacked ever so slightly when he was in the act of unfolding something. Krug—for it was he—showed her the blurred paper. He was a huge tired man with a stoop.

'But it might not help,' she whined, 'a stray bullet might hit you.'

(You see the good woman thought that bullets were still *flukhtung* about in the night, meteoric remnants of the firing that had long ceased.) (P. 16)

The description of Krug as an observable being is strengthened by the authorial pause to examine and point out Krug's fingers to the reader. The reaffirmation of Krug's person, "for it was he," reinforces the illusion of a visual presence and is repeated later in the same chapter as Krug enacts a seemingly surrealistic journey across the bridge to his home: "Krug—for it was still he—walked on" (p. 22). Finally, the bracketed address to the reader admits the 'outer' truism at the same time as it posits a parodic intimation of possible naturalistic responses to the characters of the fictional world, in this instance an explanation of the nurse's behaviour which anticipates the reader's tendencies either to seek or to supply such explanations.

Nabokov's intrusive techniques affirm the conscious, as well as the observable, individuality of the characters. During the meeting between Krug and Ember, for example, the 'reality' of the two characters is reinforced by presenting their thoughts and conversation in apparent competition with the author's descriptive intentions and function:

Krug, semi-intentionally, keeps out of reach. He is a difficult person. Describe the bedroom. Allude to Ember's bright brown eyes. Hot punch and a touch of fever. His strong shining blue-veined nose and the bracelet of his hairy wrist. Say something. Ask about David. Relate the horror of those rehearsals.

'David is also laid up with a cold [*ist auk beterkeltet*] but that is not why we had to come back [*zueruk*]. What [*shto bish*] were you saying about those rehearsals [*repetitia*]?'

Ember gratefully adopts the subject selected. He might have asked: 'why then?' He will learn the reason a little later. Vaguely he perceives emotional dangers in that dim region. So he prefers to talk shop. Last chance of describing the bedroom.

Too late. Ember gushes. (Pp.95-96)

Through this parodic treatment of traditional 'eye-of-God' methods, Nabokov simulates an independent, observable world while his position as the 'omniscient' creator of that world allows him to move from external details (Ember's "hairy wrist") to Ember's conscious thoughts ("Ask about David. Relate the horror of those rehearsals"). The process is paralleled by the enunciated but unacted possibilities for the character ("He might have asked: 'why then?'") and for the author ("Describe the bedroom"). Both, however, conform to an authorial design ("He will learn the reason a little later") despite the interruption to the author's immediate descriptive task which posits Ember's apparent independence ("Too late. Ember gushes").

While the parodic use of established literary conventions embodies a critical perspective within the work, Nabokov simultaneously plays upon the reader's position to reinforce all aspects of the characters' 'reality.' In the midst of the apparently hallucinatory version of the Paduk/Krug interview, for instance, Paduk's physical presence is asserted by referring to the reader:

Paduk, clothed from carbuncle to bunion in field grey, stood with his hands behind his back and his back to the reader. (P. 123)

Similarly, the philosophical musings of Krug's consciousness in Chapter 14 take the form of a delivered lecture, a device

which strengthens the presence of Krug and his thoughts, while it includes the reader as an audience to both: "And now, ladies and gentlemen, we come to the problem of death" (p. 147), Krug 'states' to an implied addressee. Even the elements of Krug's dream in Chapter 5 are treated as details of an observed phenomenon which the author uses in order to discuss the processes by which dreams may return one to a former existence: "But is it really as crude as all that? Who is behind the timid producers?" (p. 60). These rhetorical questions suppose an audience to Krug's dream. The reader is both an implicit extension of the literary work and a critical witness to the aesthetic reality of the author's fictional world.

While Nabokov's self-conscious methods reiterate the paradoxical co-existence of the novel's world as verbal artifice and as aesthetic reality, the omniscient techniques of the narrative present a comparable co-existence of the 'facts' and of the public and personal versions of these facts which depict the unacknowledged artifice of conscious constructs. At the 'factual' level Nabokov presents the details of an observable world: Krug as the centre of the Argus-eyed room at the University meeting, for instance, or the buff wall with its sequence of engravings above Ember's bed. Authorial omniscience is extended to incorporate the characters' subjective views of these details, from the comments on Krug by his colleagues to Ember's personal responses to the numbered letters on one of the engravings--"Ember highly treasures this scholium" (p. 95). In turn, generalized versions of facts which constitute public 'realities' co-exist and contrast with individual 'reality.' Krug's influential public reputation as a philosopher, for instance, is shown to be very different from Krug's personal sense of his identity as a writer:

When writers in foreign countries were called his disciples he never could find in their writings anything remotely akin to the style or temper of thought which, without his sanction, critics had assigned to him, so that he finally began regarding himself (robust rude Krug) as an illusion or rather as a shareholder in an illusion which was highly appreciated by a great number of cultured people (with a generous

sprinkling of semi-cultured ones). It was much the same thing as is liable to happen in novels when the author and his yes-characters assert that the hero is a 'great artist' or a 'great poet' without, however, bringing any proofs (reproductions of his paintings, samples of his poetry); indeed, taking care *not* to bring such proofs since any sample would be sure to fall short of the reader's expectations and fancy. (P. 145)

The double exposure effected by the analogy between Krug's reputation and novelistic ploys for depicting 'great' figures draws attention to authorial techniques of characterization in order to display the artifice of public versions of Krug as a philosopher, while the omniscient narrative parodically depicts the discrepancies between public and personal versions of Krug's 'identity as a writer' within the non-fictive context of the characters' world.

The functioning of the mind in *Bend Sinister* is depicted as a theatrical performance that parallels the playwright's production of visual illusions and the writer's realization of verbal illusions within the mind of the reader as audience. Nabokov's fusion of novelistic omniscience with the generic characteristics of drama provides the images, not only for the outer triune or 'mind theatre,' but for different states of mind within the non-fictive context of the characters' existence. An authored state of mind, which is analogous to the reader's position, is exemplified by Krug's dream in Chapter 5. Most immediately, the dream involves an extended pun on the word ball and so dramatizes differing images prompted by a single word within the mind. The 'dream producers' of Krug's sleeping theatre intermingle re-enacted scenes from Krug's schooldays ("Pass the ball, Adamka!") with visions of his wife, Olga, after a ball ("She doffs her diamond tiara before her mirror" [p. 62]), to the point where both come together and Olga is revealed as a "curtained something" (p. 75) who performs before a watching audience of boys. The surrealistic horror of the dream-scene paradoxically illustrates aspects of Krug's "individual reality": the memories of school and of wife represent the mind's factual knowledge, Krug's

thoughts and fears suggest the mind's subjective ordering of experience, while the artifice of the mind is disclosed through the combination of imagination and subjective knowledge within the scenes of nightmare. That the authored state of Krug's mind during sleep culminates in a stage show complete with an audience, who will "observe and take down in writing" (p. 76) the details of the performance, provides a parodic analogy with the author's imaginative reworking of knowledge into lexical worlds which have the power to trigger a scripted theatre of the mind in the reader.

Comparable 'theatres of the mind' are shown to be realized during Krug's responses to the data of his diurnal experience. A condensed example of this process occurs as Krug attempts to assess the reasons for his university colleagues' dislike of him. While any precise details of his past dealings with his colleagues elude him, Krug's mind throws up an unbidden vision which suggests his past insensitivity to a youthful Paduk:

To each, or about each, of his colleagues he
had said at one time or other, something . . .
something impossible to recall in this or that
case and difficult to define in general terms
—some careless bright and harsh trifle that
had grazed a stretch of raw flesh. Unchallenged
and unsought, a plump pale pimply adolescent
entered a dim classroom and looked at Adam who
looked away. (P. 49)

In turn, the reader's critical awareness of the mind's artifice is increased by being drawn into Krug's conscious transformation of the details of his ongoing present. During the Krug/Paduk meeting, for instance, the reader is not only witness to the details of a depicted scene but is implicitly included in Krug's imaginative reconstruction of these details. Following the description of Paduk's physical appearance (the observable 'reality') comes a parodic portrayal of the mind's ability to transform the 'facts,' a proceeding which in this particular example is described as a mortician's skills:

In a word, he [Paduk] was a little too repulsive
to be credible, and so let us ring the bell
(held by a bronze eagle) and have him beautified
by a mortician. Now the skin is thoroughly

cleansed and has assumed a smooth marchpane colour. A glossy wig with auburn and blond tresses artistically intermixed covers his head. Pink paint has dealt with the unseemly scar. Indeed, it would be an admirable face, were we able to close his eyes for him. But no matter what pressure we exert upon the lids, they snap open again. I [Krug] never noticed his eyes, or else his eyes have changed. (Pp. 123-24)

Conversely, Nabokov deploys the devices of stage production to contrast Krug's individual mind 'theatre' with the scripted artifice of Paduk's activities. The details of Paduk's constantly monitored study during the interview establish a theatrical set for a drama to be played out between Krug and Paduk, while Paduk's guards and monitors attempt to assure the scripted development of that drama, to the point where, no longer content with notes and telephone messages from an audience position, they intrude upon the stage in an attempt to reassert an authorial control of the scene. And although Paduk's consciousness is never directly dramatized, his personality is represented through scripted role-playing that defines him here, as throughout the novel, as the third person of other peoples' fictions:

Paduk leaned back in his chair and tapped his nose with the rubber end of his six-faceted pencil. . . . It is not a difficult part but still the actor must be careful not to overdo what Graaf somewhere calls 'villainous deliberation.' (Pp. 127-28)

Towards the end of the novel Paduk's role-playing is explicitly confirmed. After his theatrical disguise as a fellow prisoner is penetrated by Krug, Paduk leaves Krug's cell to the sound of the prison governor's voice "telling the Toad what a dandy actor he was, what a swell performance, what a treat" (p. 192). Ironically, in both the interview and throughout the novel, Paduk's principal aim is to mould a recognized original thinker, Krug, into a scripted intellectual figurehead who will reinforce Paduk's own scripted enactment of a political figurehead.

In a parodic culmination to the interview chapter, Nabokov

plays upon the drama analogy in order to reassert the individuality of his characters. Immediately after the declaration that Paduk "did hand my favourite character a mysterious batch of neatly typed pages" (p. 130) comes a producer's directions to the cast followed by a reinstatement of the reality of the characters:

The actor playing the recipient should be taught not to look at his hand while he takes the papers *very slowly* (keeping those lateral lower-jaw muscles in movement, please) but to stare straight at the giver: in short, look at the giver first, *then* lower your eyes to the gift. But both were clumsy and cross men, and the experts in the cardiarium exchanged solemn nods at a certain point (when the milk was upset), and they, too, were not acting. (Pp. 130-31)

Here Nabokov also suggests differences between the stylizations of personality and aspects of a character's "individual reality." In antithetical ways, neither Krug's nor Paduk's personalities acknowledge fully their "individual realities": in identifying himself with his intellectual independence throughout the interview, Krug fails to admit the physical and political aspects that contribute to his ongoing "individual reality"; and, for all Paduk's political role-playing, he cannot negate the comparable clumsiness and crossness that are part of his "individual reality."

While Nabokov's structural levels provide a critical perspective on his characters' stylizations, the "planned pattern" of his narrative draws attention to the relationship between private and public existence in *Bend Sinister*. At the most obvious level this relationship is dramatized in the gradually escalating struggle between Krug, who is depicted as the major representative of individuality (but who is also, however reluctantly, a member of the state) and Paduk who acts as the head of state power and doctrines (but who is also, however he might attempt to deny it, an individual). Less obviously, Nabokov's patterning of his narrative explores the relationships between "individual realities" and the stylistic versions of themselves and their world, whether private or

public, that characters formulate and act upon.

Most immediately Nabokov's overall structuring of the narrative reveals certain relationships between private and public events which both describe and effect the "individual reality" of Adam Krug. The basic story line (fable) presents the inexorable, and finally destructive, encroachments of Paduk's totalitarian regime on Krug's life. The plot (sujet) patterns the narrative content into two complementary halves.³ In other words, the novel is structured to establish correspondences between each of the chapters in the first half of the book and each in the second half, and the parallels thus achieved provide a critical perspective both on the events and on the personalities of the two major characters, Krug (the individual) and Paduk (the state). In Chapter 1 Olga's death (and Claudina's subsequent defection as Krug's housekeeper) creates the need for a surrogate replacement in Krug's private existence, a role adopted in Chapter 10 by an agent of the state, Mariette, for whom Krug feels not only vague irritation but also flashes of imaginative concern (was she "an adopted child?" [p. 139]) and an increasingly sexual interest. Thus the two chapters reveal related needs which allow a penetration by the state into Krug's private existence. The surrealistic, hallucinatory atmosphere of Krug's drunken journey across the bridge (Chapter 2), which is impeded and rendered absurd by Krug's dealings with the officers of the state (the soldiers), is complemented by Krug's interview with the head of state, Paduk, the purpose of which is to control and script Krug's intellectual, as opposed to his physical, presence. Krug's disregard for the state's power as a force in his personal existence is reflected in his comic transformation of the interview into a theatre of the absurd (Chapter 11). Chapters 3 and 12 both depict remnants from Krug's past as they continue to exist within a changed and changing present: Krug's flat, his child, his translator Ember, his fame, on the one hand, and Krug's notes and research on the other, all of which become targets for the state's attempts to manipulate Krug. Fittingly, then, both chapters include overtures of seduction by state spies: in Chapter 3 the appeal is to Krug's intellectual

standing when Dr Alexander, while transporting Krug to the university meeting, says, "I understand, Professor, that you are going to be our saviour tonight. The fate of our Alma Mater lies in good hands" (p. 40); Chapter 12 presents the more blatant sexual lure of Mariette "standing in the tub, sinuously soaping her back" and the mirror reflections of "a brown armpit and a poppling pale nipple" (p. 139). Chapter 4 depicts Krug's public standing as a leading and independent thinker in a university whose other members adapt their intellectual ideals and practices in order to survive within the Ekwilist state, while Chapter 13 describes the state's philosophy for the control of all its members through the Ekwilist propaganda pamphlets which start appearing in Krug's mailbox. In Chapter 5 Krug's dream suggests the relationship between the origins of Ekwilism, with its enforced brotherhood that negates individuality, and the personality of the schoolboy Paduk who becomes the leader of the Ekwilist state, while the parallel Chapter 14 depicts Krug's philosophical approach as a form of "creative destruction" (p. 146) which, in taking apart the systems of others, constitutes an obvious threat to the institutionalized doctrines of power. The threat to Krug from the enclosing forces of society as they may effect his son, David, is implicit in the succeeding pairing. Chapter 6 centres on Krug's visit to the Lakes where Maximov tries to convince Krug he should flee the country for David's sake, and culminates in Krug's distracted consternation when he temporarily loses David: "'I want my little boy,' said Krug (another Krug, horribly handicapped by a spasm in the throat and a pounding heart)" (p. 93). By contrast Chapter 15 suggests Krug's tacit recognition of state power as it details Krug's visit to Quist to arrange an escape that must include David even if Krug has to carry him over the border. Quist himself refers back to the day at the Lakes to reveal his own continuing, but unrecognised, role as a state spy in both chapters: "'One day,' murmured Quist, 'you were not able to carry him a couple of miles to the railway station'" (p. 154). Ironically, in seeking to save his child, Krug unwittingly reveals the emotional bond that will destroy them both. Chapter 7 examines ways in which men re-

enact and distort existing works of art through reading, translation, interpretation or performance, and ends with the arrest of Krug's translator, Ember. The companion Chapter 16 posits the mystery of consciousness through Krug's awareness of David and his renewed ability to write which becomes channelled by Mariette into sexual arousal. Physical fulfilment is thwarted by Krug's arrest and the grotesque enactment of established fictions, the 'brotherhood' of the state embodied in the description of Hustav's collective murder and the Cinderella story played by Mariette, contrasts the imaginative, intellectual games of Krug and Ember in Chapter 7 with the brutal and scripted enactment of fictions illustrated in the behaviour of Paduk's minions. Krug's feeling (Chapter 8) that the arrests of Maximov and Ember are part of a conscious nightmare, which he has somehow created, precede the arrival of soldiers at his flat to remove his one remaining friend, Hedron. The actual nightmare perpetrated by the state (Chapter 17) separates Krug from the one remaining object of his love, his son, and can only reproduce the living David through the celluloid medium of a horror film, *A Night Party*. Finally Krug's directed and reversed scenes of a then unknown but imagined young Olga inextricably linked with a hawk moth she carries are part of a letter to the dead written by a man attempting to dull the pain of consciousness through the oblivion of drink (Chapter 9). The whole chapter forms contrasting parallels with the state-directed 'reality' which is exhibited in the scenes of Chapter 18, the re-run disc of Krug's dialogue with the walnut cabinet, Paduk's theatricals in Krug's cell, and the stage-managed confrontation scene in which Krug is shown to escape the pain of rational awareness, and ultimately of existence, through madness. The last paragraphs of the novel join the fictional world, in which Krug is united with his beloved dead wife and son, with the world of the creator and the reader through the moth at the author's window, a moth which Nabokov presents as both an image and an announcement of the completion of his characterizations: "And as Olga's rosy soul, emblemized already in an earlier chapter (Nine), bombinates in the damp dark at the bright window of

my room, comfortably Krug returns unto the bosom of his maker" (p. 11, 1963 preface to *Bend Sinister*).

While the story (fable) of *Bend Sinister* traces a lineal progression of events, the plot (sujet) structures the narrative in a way which reveals, not only an escalating struggle between individual and state, but also that Krug's personal versions of reality contribute to his destruction because he fails to recognize either his emotional or his political situation within the ongoing present of events. In the 1963 preface to *Bend Sinister* Nabokov describes the title of the novel as "an attempt to suggest an outline broken by refraction, a distortion in the mirror of being, a wrong turn taken by life, a sinistral and sinister world" (p. 5). For Krug the particular context of his ongoing existence is the sinister world of Paduk's totalitarian state, while the wrong turn taken by life is a personal state of sinistral continuance which is effected by Krug after Olga's death. Nevertheless, the relationships Nabokov establishes between the 'facts' of Krug's existence and Krug's versions of reality explore the emotional centre of individuality so that, as Nabokov points out in the preface, "The main theme of *Bend Sinister*, then, is the beating of Krug's loving heart" (p. 7).

The novel starts and ends with death, Olga's on the one hand, David's and Krug's on the other, and both the concept of and the means to cope with death as it constitutes a separation from loved ones becomes a major preoccupation of Krug's days. At the start of *Bend Sinister* the impact of Olga's death is to produce a crisis of identity for Krug facing him with the necessity of re-examining and rebuilding the suddenly changed facts of his "individual reality." The strength of the emotional bond between Krug and Olga seems to have been neglected in critical discussions of the novel. Yet references to or images of Olga recur in every chapter of the book with the fitting exception of the chapter devoted to samples of Ekwilist propaganda, and the Krug/Paduk interview in which Olga features only as a supposedly insignificant appendage of Krug: "He [Paduk] had learned with sorrow of Krug's bereavement" (p. 127). That the course of events which lead to Krug's destruction stem from Olga's death and Krug's resulting representations of

reality is implied in the 1963 preface in which Nabokov states, "The plot starts to breed in the bright broth of a rain puddle. The puddle is observed by Krug from a window of the hospital where his wife is dying" (p. 8). The inset reflection of the scene observed by Krug provides an expression of his personal emotional experience through a reworking of the convention of pathetic fallacy which dramatizes the device as an activity of Krug's mind, an activity, which, moreover, like the circumscribed outline of the puddle in relation to the natural scene, provides a reflection of Krug's individuality.⁴ The observed scene then, becomes a stylistic representation of the relationship with Olga and its dissolution, while the activity itself attempts to ward off direct admissions by Krug about his awareness of Olga's approaching death. The two houses Krug focuses on are aligned with the inset reflection of a tree which bears the scars of a stouter severed limb: "You have dropped something, this is yours, creamy house in the sunshine beyond" (p. 13). Similarly the two leaves suddenly floating on the surface of the puddle lead on to a view of one of the two poplars: "Their immobility (the leaves) is in contrast with the spasmodic ruffling of the inset reflection—for the visible emotion of a tree is the mass of its leaves, and there remain hardly more than thirty-seven or so here and there on one side of the tree" (p. 14). The partnership of Krug and Olga suggested in the pairings, the visible emotion of the tree as the mass of its leaves, and Krug's estimate of thirty-seven remaining leaves (Olga's age at the time of her death is later mentioned by Ember to be "her thirty-seven resplendent years" [pp. 35-36]) dramatize Krug's emotional response as distinct from his flat statement of the facts:

The operation has not been successful and
my wife will die. (P. 14)

Significantly this is the one and only direct admission of facts concerning Olga's present situation that Krug makes. Instead the course of Olga's death is reflected in Krug's perceptions of the two juxtaposed houses, the one with its shopworn cake exterior and mouthlike window emblematic of Krug himself, "Ope

as my dentist in my milk-tooth days used to say" (p. 14), and the other associated with Olga, golden in the sunset but fading, like the scenes Olga had once tried to capture on canvas, "painting a sunset that would never stay . . . leaving only a clutter of the purplish remnants of the day, piled up anyhow —ruins, junk" (p. 14). The subsequent light in the window of the other house (Olga's) takes up the brightness of the black and white puddle which now resembles "an achromatic copy of the painting previously seen" (p. 15). In the first house (Krug's) there is still "a last glow in the window to which the stairs of the day still lead. But it is all up, and if the lights were turned on they would kill what remains of the outside day" (p. 15). Although Krug avoids a direct account of Olga's death, his perceptions from the inside of the window looking out register the gradual obliteration of the external scene as an image of his internalized emotional experience. The day turns to auburn grey, the puddle takes on the traditional colour of mourning, mauve, which in turn, recalls the purplish remnants of Olga's activities, and Krug is finally isolated in his position by Olga's bedside: "They have turned on the lights in the house I am in, and the view in the window has died" (p. 15). Krug's version of the scene, then, depicts both the theatre of his mind and his emotionally based attempts to circumnavigate the pain of any direct, conscious admission of Olga's death.

Krug's representations of himself and his world reveal an unreconciled split between intellect and the subjective experiences of his ongoing existence such as Olga's death. Krug's limited awareness that emotion is a centre which joins intellectual and physical experience, is epitomized by his conscious assessment of his own activities when, on leaving the hospital, he is racked by uncontrollable sobs. As during Olga's death, Krug separates the physical experience from his intellectual observations:

He was sorry now he had yielded to that temptation for he could not stop yielding and the throbbing man in him was soaked. As usual he discriminated between the throbbing one and the one that looked on: looked on with concern, with sympathy, with

a sigh, or with bland surprise. This was
the last stronghold of the dualism he abhorred.
(P. 17)

Yet while Krug abhors this apparent dualism, he unwittingly promotes a split between mind and body by divorcing his analytical perceptions of his own behaviour from his emotional participation in life. The faculty of rational awareness is seen by Krug as "the stranger quietly watching the torrents of local grief from an abstract bank" (p. 17). This "stranger" critically registers not only "local grief," but all Krug's stylizations from his public to his intimate, marital behaviour:

He has listened to me with raised eyebrows
when I said things which I had no business
to say. In every mask I tried on, there
were slits for his eyes. Even at the very
moment when I was rocked by the convulsion
men value most. My saviour. My witness.
(P. 17)

That Krug finally identifies himself with his analytical awareness is suggested by the processes through which intellect becomes the redeeming proof of his individuality: "My saviour. My witness." On the one hand Krug represents the analytical and creative intellect in contrast to Paduk and his agents who, like the soldiers on the bridge, for instance, qualify for Krug's category of imbeciles: "All those who *are* because they do not think, thus refuting Cartesianism" (p. 21). On the other hand, Krug's equation of his intellectual independence with a personal invulnerability blinds him to both the personal and public 'realities' of his ongoing existence and so contributes to his destruction.

At the start of the novel Krug attempts to consciously avoid the personal 'realities' of his ongoing present, which require admitting Olga's death and rebuilding an existence without her (it is David who finally, through uncomprehendingly, verbalizes Olga's death in Chapter 12 of the novel). For Krug the "wrong turn taken by life" leaves him circling back to memories of the past, while the continuing present assumes the absurd configurations of a nightmare which, though rendered

comic, is not alleviated by alcohol. Krug's attempt to negate the continuing present is suggested during his journey across the bridge after leaving the hospital. Stopped by the soldiers and asked to read his pass which is being held upside down by one of them, Krug quips, "Inversion does not trouble me but I need my glasses" (pp. 18-19). The ensuing search of Krug's person produces "an empty flask which quite recently had contained a pint of brandy" (p. 19) and Krug's glasses which he inadvertently steps on. The alcohol-induced dulling of awareness and the restriction of physical vision prefigure the course of Krug's consciousness. As Krug proceeds across the bridge his desire to stop time and to return to the past is triggered and formulated during the physical contact of his hand with the parapet of the bridge:

I had never touched this particular knob before and shall never find it again. This moment of conscious contact holds a drop of solace. The emergency brake of time. Whatever the present moment is, I have stopped it. Too late. In the course of our, let me see, twelve, twelve and three months, years of life together, I ought to have immobilized by this simple method millions of moments; paying perhaps terrific fines, but stopping the train. (P. 22)

Now the initial inversion of Krug's pass and the broken glasses parallel elements of the action. Gaining the farther side of the bridge Krug is sent back to his starting point, a reversal which effects an apparent loss of personal identity in that the soldiers no longer recognize Krug and their leader is now named Gurk, Krug's name inverted and applied to someone else.⁵ That Krug's personal desire to reverse time blinds him to the dangers of a continuing present is suggested during his final crossing of the bridge. Krug fails to consider that his association of trains with loved ones, which stems from the death of his parents in a railway accident (p. 119), has any possible connection with his vision of his companion, the grocer, as an encircling railway engine so that, while the image prompts a reminder of his son, David, it is dismissed by Krug as a "Parody of a child—*my* child" (p. 26). Julia Bader

suggests that perhaps the whole affair is Krug's dream,⁶ but she overlooks the way in which the omniscient methods of the narrative juxtapose the course of Krug's physical journey with the patterns of a mind which attempts to escape present grief through alcohol and through circling back to the past. Later that same night a sober Krug admits only his physical state, not his mental or emotional reactions after Olga's death, when he tells Ember on the telephone of his condition: "I'm afraid I was drunk. I broke my glasses" (p. 37). Krug's conscious avoidance of aspects of an ongoing present together with the circling back to memories of the past continues throughout the first half of the novel until the intoxicated inversions of Chapter 2 culminate in Chapter 9 with Krug's imaginative inversion of reconstructed scenes of Olga and the hawk moth in the "Fragments from a letter addressed to a dead woman in heaven by her husband in his cups" (p. 119).

Krug's personal 'sinistral' continuance is revealed in his distorted perceptions of the 'realities' of his non-fictive context. The inversions of Chapter 2 grade into the metamorphoses of Chapter 3. To Krug, inanimate objects assume human characteristics. Arriving home from the hospital, Krug encounters "the inscrutable stare" (p. 29) of an inoperable lift. In his apartment the figures in the Last Supper painting "stayed aloof" (p. 30), Krug's hat "no longer feeling at home, fell off the peg" (p. 30) and a rubber ball "was asleep on the floor" (p. 30). In contrast to the painting, Krug's supper pre-emptes the properties of a vigil: "A plate of cold tongue garnished with cucumber slices and the painted cheek of a cheese were quietly expecting him" (p. 30). In turn, inanimate objects shield Krug from the living, for when the feared question comes from David about his mother, Krug reflects that, "At least a merciful door was between him and me" (p. 33). Later that night, a reluctantly sober Krug--"he regretted not having refilled his flask" (p. 38)--has similarly distorted perceptions during the drive to the university meeting. The world outside Krug's flat takes on for him an artificial life that seems to be in direct contrast to the puppets that people it, so that the whole journey has the effect of a conjurer's

trick from the moment "the officially sanctioned car obtained by the magician in our midst drew up at the curb which it grazed with a purposeful tyre" (p. 39), throughout the drive across town--"Town of dreams, a changing dream, O you, stone changeling" (p. 41)--to the splitting of Krug's fellow passenger into "two newborn homunculi now drying on the paleolithic pavement" (p. 42).

Krug's mental inversions of time together with his distorted perceptions are an unwitting manifestation of his loving heart in that they evidence a grief which he tries to separate from his analytical consciousness. At the same time, the activities of Krug's colleagues at the meeting reiterate Krug's position as an independent thinker. While Krug's university associates also attempt to use conscious reconstructions to separate themselves from the emotional impact of events, they differ from Krug in that they employ established verbal explanations to achieve such detachment. Reactions against the current political situation, epitomized by the absent Rufel (Political Science) and by student demonstrations, are defused by reproducing generalized fictions. Rufel has been "apparently arrested. For his own safety" (p. 44), and the student protests are reduced by Drama to the play-acting of misplaced obstinacy. Alternatively any considerations of the possible atrocities of the new regime, the execution and imprisonment of previous political leaders, for instance, is diverted into an academic discussion of the inability of applied history to ward off present and future events. In turn, Krug's philosophical writings operate not as a stimulus to independent thought in this academic gathering but as further established fictions to reiterate, "Pure Krugism" (p. 46), while Krug's public reputation, in comparable fashion, is regarded as a possible means to survival, "Adam Krug will you save us?" (p. 50). Ironically, the consensus of the meeting that "the capacity to reason, and act accordingly, proved more beneficial than scepticism and submission would have been" (p. 47) is exposed as sophistry since, in contrast to Krug, all the other members of the assembled group bow to what they see as personal or practical necessity and sign the government

manifesto, thereby condoning state control and censorship of the university. Krug alone refuses to support the unacknowledged fictions of either the university gathering or the state.

The dream scenes of Chapter 5 provide a critical perspective to Krug's equation of intellectual with personal independence. The subconscious theatre of Krug's sleeping mind juxtaposes an analysis of Ekwilism and its origins with scenes from Krug's schooldays. The interweaving of a historical consideration of Ekwilism with the images of Krug's experienced past reveals, not only Krug's intellectual dismissal of all forms of prescriptive power, but his belief that the machinations of a political party can do him no more harm than the ineffectual attempts of his teachers to punish him for his youthful refusal to join school clubs. However, that the dream becomes a nightmare when Krug's beloved Olga is exposed to the eyes of a public audience of schoolboys suggests that Krug's "loving heart" undermines his stance of intellectual independence and renders him vulnerable to the emotional experiences of his ongoing existence.

The 'nightmare' which reiterates Krug's emotional bonds contrasts with his conscious versions of himself. Upon waking at the Lakes in a room he has shared with David at Maximov's house, Krug does not relate the vision of his dream to his ongoing emotional involvement with his son. Instead, he continues to define himself in terms of an ideal of freedom, which he equates with an invulnerability that he believes has been manifested in the personal as well as public activities of his past. Krug's past disregard for the feelings of others, from his bullying of Paduk at school to his intellectual callousness and lack of concern for the fears of his university colleagues, seems to be enlarged by his present feelings of antagonism towards the "sweet saintliness" of Anna, Maximov's wife--"he kept avoiding her brave kind eyes to which he felt he could not live up" (p. 85). At the personal level, Krug's awareness of his own behaviour reinforces his belief that he is immune to the emotional overtures of other members of his society. Similarly, Krug's conviction that his public fame

and international standing (which are as much a product of other people's fictions as of Krug's intellectual independence) endow him with a political immunity, leads him to ignore the changing conditions of his public membership of society. When Maximov attempts to warn Krug of the increasing dangers of resistance to Paduk's rule, Krug reverts to the conditions of the past in order to support his sense of personal invulnerability:

He [Paduk] will go on licking my hand in the dark. I am invulnerable. . . . Nothing can happen to Krug the Rock. The two or three fat nations . . . from which my Toad craves recognition, loans, and whatever else a bullet-riddled country may want to obtain from a sleek neighbour—these nations will simply ignore him and his government, if he . . . molests me. (Pp. 81-82)

By contrast, Maximov's response indicates Krug's blindness to the realities of the present context: "Your conception of practical politics is romantic and childish, and altogether false" (p. 82). In particular, Maximov pin-points Krug's emotional bonds with David as the link which makes Krug susceptible to the power of the state: "'You are not alone! You have a child'" (p. 83). Yet neither the subconscious vision of his dream nor the direct warning from Maximov cause Krug to re-examine the past fictions which he continues to act upon, or to adapt these fictions to the changing conditions of the present. The opposition of dream and waking state reveals the incomplete nature of Krug's awareness. Even when David is threatened directly, first by the physical danger of the car which nearly knocks him down, then by his apparent abduction, Krug fails to relate his own strong emotional responses to his fixed belief in a personal invulnerability.

Krug's incomplete awareness of self and his reversion to his past versions of reality are coupled with the lethargy he exhibits towards present events, which include the disappearance of Maximov and Anna. On the return to the city, for instance, Krug plays intellectual games with Ember, manipulating the aesthetic details of *Hamlet* in parodic versions of the state's

prescriptive interpretation of *Hamlet* as a "tragedy of the masses" (p. 97), but he is scarcely able to register the accumulating threats of his non-fictive context:

Krug had recently lost his wife. A new political order had stunned the city. Two people he was fond of had been spirited away and perhaps executed. But the room was warm and quiet and Ember was deep in *Hamlet*. And Krug marvelled at the strangeness of the day. (Pp. 106-07)

This refusal to consider the facts is highlighted by Krug's absurdly comic rejection of Hustav's gun as Ember is arrested: "I do not believe in pistols" (p. 111). The following day, confronted by a rubber overshoe and a bloodstained cuff on the sidewalk, Krug is immediately reminded of Ember, but he dismisses these, along with other factual details, by regarding them as the illusions of a personal dream: "This is becoming a nuisance. I must awake. The victims of my nightmares are increasing in numbers too fast" (p. 115). Nor does Krug consider that the events pivot around his own person, though the arrest of his one remaining friend, Hedron, immediately follows. Instead Krug seeks to obliterate present events in the intoxicated inversion of scenes from the past through which he attempts to refute Olga's death and his existence without her.

Within the ongoing present of the first half of *Bend Sinister* the dream scenes of Chapter 5 provide a critical perspective, not only to Krug's incomplete versions of reality, but also to Paduk's scripted role playing. While the two men's personalities are antithetical, both pursue a personal invulnerability that has its origins in past activities. As a schoolboy Paduk's plumpness, his pasty face and "agglutinate palm" (p. 63) cause him to be the victim of physical bullying. His equally unappealing intellectual qualities are seen in his complete lack of humour and in "an irritating trick of calling his classmates by anagrams of their names" out of a conviction, which underlies his adult advocacy of interchangeable identities, that "all men consist of the same twenty-five letters variously mixed" (p. 64). Nor does Paduk recognize

the limitations of this view when his padograph, a birthday present from his father which exactly reduplicates Paduk's style of handwriting, is used by Krug and Schimpffer to precipitate him into an unlooked for assignation with a school-master's wife which culminates in Paduk's ignominious flight. And while Paduk's physical and intellectual qualities cause him to be bullied and tricked, his personality somehow earns him the nickname of toad and results in peer rejection: "Paduk, in spite of his oddities was dull, commonplace and insufferably mean" (p. 64). A new headmaster's insistence that all boys join clubs, however, leads to a reversal of Paduk's misfortunes. He founds "the party of the Average Man" (p. 69), a fraternity of freaks and misfits which includes the stuttering Schamm, the director of Paduk's final, public confrontation with Krug. Paduk's party not only subsumes personal traits by normalizing them in a club which is devoted to the mediocrity of group conformity, it also promotes collective fictions of brotherhood in order to support its attempts to negate individuality. The absurdly scripted nature of Paduk's group extends from the physical to the intellectual practices of its members. Paduk's adoption of the details of dress of a cartoon strip character, Mr Etermon, for instance, is coupled with the group's unthinking appropriation of Skotoma's theory of Ekwilism as the basis for a rudimentary but evolving movement towards enforced equality.⁷ The imitative and uncritical nature of Paduk's incipient political force is epitomized by its allegiance to a student terrorist's poem which extols Skotoma because he

. . . taught us to worship the Common Man,
and showed us that no tree
can exist without a forest,
no musician without an orchestra,
no wave without an ocean,
and no life without death. (P. 72)

That this poem is sung by the boys to the tune of a current ditty and later becomes an Ekwilist classic reflects Paduk's distorted trivialization of the poem, of its object Skotoma who "had viewed what he called 'the petty bourgeois' with the

wrath of orthodox anarchism" (p. 73), and of its originator, the assassin, Emerald. That the poem itself also lacks both originality and logic since it is composed of truisms that work in reverse points to Paduk's unthinkingly imitative acceptance of existing fictions. The 'stage-managed' scenes of Krug's dream suggest, then, that Paduk's scripted role as a political figurehead has its origins in Paduk's schoolboy attempts to suppress his "individual reality" by representing a personality made up of imitative stylizations.

Paduk's political practices are also moulded by the past. That Paduk's Party of the Average Man capitalizes on and finds support from a change in the power structures of his schoolboy world anticipates his leadership of a 'conventional' revolution which pre-empt's the authority of the state. That the padograph, which is banned by parliament during Paduk's school-days, is resurrected as a symbol of Ekwilist power, suggests the way in which Paduk's political leadership promotes the mechanized reduplication of scripted and interchangeable personalities: "the padograph subsisted as an Ekwilist symbol, as a proof of the fact that a mechanical device can reproduce personality, and that Quality is merely distribution aspect of Quantity" (pp. 65-66). Fittingly, the only direct manifestation of the adult Paduk in the first half of the novel is his voice relayed by the mechanics of sound equipment through a village radio at the Lakes. That Paduk's speech is abruptly terminated after a series of cackles suggests that the state's machines, like the early padograph, have definite limitations. More significantly, the mechanical reduplication of Paduk's voice is reinforced by the content of his speech which reproduces Ekwilist doctrines that are a distorted regurgitation of the fictions of Paduk's past:

Your groping individualities will become interchangeable and, instead of crouching in the prison cell of an illegal ego, the naked soul will be in contact with that of every other man in this land; nay, more: each of you will be able to make his abode in the elastic inner self of any other citizen, and to flutter from one to another, until you know not whether you are Peter

or John, so closely locked will you be
in the embrace of the State, so gladly
will you be krum karum— (P. 88)

These state fictions, for which Paduk is the mouthpiece, are directed towards the eradication of individuality, the mechanization of humanity that denies the unique subjectivity and the distinctive intellectual, emotional and physical aspects of "individual reality" in order to achieve a collective invulnerability.

In the second half of *Bend Sinister* the differences between Krug's individual but incomplete versions of himself and Paduk's scripted personality are enacted in the escalating struggle between Krug and the state which culminates in the destruction of both Krug's actual person and the state's hopes to use Krug to support its political dogma. While Krug now makes some practical moves, he still fails to bring a critical perspective to bear on his personal situation. In an ineffectual effort to suppress his grief he removes all material reminders of Olga's presence from the flat, "but she refused to be forgotten" (p. 119). He also unwittingly admits a state-spy, Mariette, into his home because "David liked her, so she might do after all" (p. 120). Yet despite the continual emotional basis of his actions Krug remains blind to his emotional vulnerability. At the first direct adult contact with Paduk, Krug is not only openly contemptuous of the state's ideology, he is also unperturbed by any threat to himself. When Paduk says, "All we want of you is that little part where the handle is," Krug responds with the assertion, "There is none" (p. 126). That both men act in terms of personal but antithetical ideals of freedom is made clear during Krug's plea to Paduk to be left alone:

'I am not the least interested in your government. What I resent is your attempt to make me interested in it. Leave me alone.'
"Alone" is the vilest word in the language. Nobody is alone. When a cell in an organism says "leave me alone," the result is cancer.' (P. 127)

Ironically, precisely because of his emotional bonds, Krug is

not alone, while Paduk and the agents of his state are irrevocably isolated from meaningful emotional contacts with one another in a multiplying cancer of self-imposed brutality that masquerades as brotherhood.

Just as Krug is blind to his personal vulnerability so he ignores the state's desire to use his position as a public figure: "He still believed that so long as he kept lying low nothing could happen to him" (p. 131). In like manner, he tries to refute the public knowledge of Olga's death which is transmitted to David by his friend Billy:

'But you knew it *was* a stupid remark?'
 'I guess so.'
 'Because even *if* she were dead she would
 not be dead for you or me.' (P. 138)

Finally, without analysing the implications of his own awareness, Krug dimly recognizes that an apparent stasis in his intellectual activities stems from his emotional involvement with others: "Had there been no friends to worry about and no child to hold against his cheek and heart, he might have devoted the twilight to some quiet research" (pp. 131-32). Moreover, he links this 'stasis' with Olga's death: "A dismal feeling grew upon him: he was empty, he would never write another book, he was too old to blend and rebuild the world which had crashed when she died" (pp. 134-35).

However limited Krug's awareness, however he attempts to consciously separate his intellectual activities from his emotional participation in life, his character continually exhibits the humanizing centre of individuality, "a loving heart." By comparison, Paduk appears only as the constantly guarded figurehead for a collective enterprise of political power. The impersonal nature of Paduk's position is epitomized by the state's absurd care for Paduk's physical as opposed to his emotional existence, and is signified through the experts who, at a distance, monitor the "amplified beatings" (p. 123) of Paduk's heart which gives the illusion of being separated from its owner. The imposed controls over Paduk's bodily functions are repeated in a behavioural sense by the scripted nature of his personality. In contrast to Krug, then, Paduk

is a human machine shown to exist in a state of submerged individuality that is suggested in the description of his eyes:

They were those of a fish in a neglected aquarium, muddy meaningless eyes, and moreover the poor man was in a state of morbid embarrassment at being in the same room with big heavy Adam Krug. (P. 124)

At an intellectual level the differences between Paduk and Krug are critically described by the methods and message of their respective 'philosophies.' The Ekwilist propaganda Krug receives in the mail specifically defines the four freedoms of the citizen--"1. freedom of speech, 2. freedom of the press, 3. freedom of meetings, and 4. freedom of possessions" (p. 140) --before going on to outline the operation of these freedoms in Paduk's country, as contrasted with foreign capitalist systems, through a process of verbal manipulation which establishes an apparently irrefutable case out of completely nonsensical principles. In respect to freedom of the press, for example, government control is equated with freedom:

Our newspapers are published by governmental and public organizations and are absolutely independent of individual, private and commercial interests. Independence, in its turn, is synonymous with freedom. This is obvious. (P. 141)

Similarly the proofs that foreign countries lack the four freedoms of Ekwilist government are based on totally absurd premises:

The constitutions of other countries also mention various 'freedoms.' In reality, however, these 'freedoms' are extremely restricted. A shortage of paper limits freedom of the press; unheated halls do not encourage free gatherings; and under the pretext of regulating traffic the police break up demonstrations and processions. (P. 141)

The sophistry of Ekwilist arguments produces a system of supposed 'truths' which justify Ekwilist practices and constitute a credo for the complete submission of the individual

to state control. By contrast, Krug's philosophical approach takes apart the unacknowledged fictions of others' systems and questions the possibility of absolute truths. Paradoxically, Krug's methods of "creative destruction" involve an analysis of existing fictions which culminates in verbal truisms: "the result generally is a cold little heap of truisms fished out of the artificial lake into which they had been put especially for the purpose" (p. 146). However, Krug's activities suggest that the value of the individual's questioning of existing versions of 'reality' lies, not in ever reaching absolutes, but in the activity of questioning itself insofar as it is an attempt at creative and critical thinking which, at the same time, exposes the artifice of man's verbal ordering of knowledge. Both in their methods and in their results, then, Krug and the state are diametrically opposed. Krug uses the critical tools of reason to suggest the impossibility of absolute truths while Ekwilism indulges in sophistry to enforce a credo of state control. Krug expresses his intellectual independence, while the state illogically lays claims to freedoms which enforce a denial of individual thought and expression which is exemplified by the personality of Paduk, the state's figurehead.

In practice the methods of Ekwilist rule produce a theatre of the absurd by establishing a scripted universe which both denies and is destructive to the individuality of the state's members. The patterns of Ekwilist rule are suggested during Krug's visit to Quist. Venturing out into Paduk's universe Krug is immediately confronted with the state's nonsensical ordering of citizens in the form of the absurd new rules for using the public transport system. In the state's 'world' shopkeepers are Ekwilist agents in disguise, so that Krug's first practical attempt to arrange an escape for David and himself leads to an unwitting revelation of the strength of his love for David. That Quist, recognizing that he has discovered Krug's vulnerable point, directs Krug on a short cut to the end of a circular journey suggests the results of Ekwilist control. The next morning the only clue to the camouflaged exit of Krug's state-directed trip is "a soiled nine of spades"

(p. 155), a popular symbol of death which prefigures the state's treatment of David while it triggers in Krug his personal image of death: "with a pang of desire he visualized a railway platform" (p. 155).⁸ Yet neither Krug's dealings with the Ekwilist state nor the images of death alert him to the immediate danger of his situation. Instead, watching David play an actual game of trains Krug thinks only of the uniqueness of individual consciousness which he considers to be "the only real thing in the world and the greatest mystery of all" (p. 156).

Krug's arrest confronts him directly with the realities of Ekwilist rule. The brutal and unthinking practices of the state are now revealed directly. The mindless animality of Krug's arresting officers is manifested in all their activities from the unnecessary physical manhandling of Krug and David to the furtive forays of Mariette's and Mac's incongruous re-enactment of the Cinderella story: "the young policeman cupped a perspiring paw under the girl's grateful thighs, put another around her ribs and lightly lifted her heavenwards. One of her slippers fell off" (p. 169). The complete suppression of emotional feelings on the part of Paduk's agents is exemplified by Linda's report of the murder of Hustav, her former and quickly replaced fiancé, since her main concern during the killing, quite apart from the mess and the uncouth sounds Hustav makes in dying, is that she will be late for an appointment with her dentist. Faced with the undisguised brutality of the state's agents, Krug, by contrast, acts in terms of his emotional bonds rather than his philosophical principles, so that he sees an immediate public submission to Ekwilist doctrine as the means of ensuring David's safety. For the first time in the novel Krug attempts to analyse the ongoing realities of both his political and his emotional situation, a process which Nabokov involves author and reader in:

Now let us figure it out, let us look at it squarely. They had found the handle. On the night of the twenty-first, Adam Krug was arrested. This was unexpected since he had not thought they would find the handle. In fact, he had hardly known there was any handle at all. Let us proceed logically. They will not harm the child. On the contrary, it is

their most valued asset. Let us not
 imagine things, let us stick to pure
 reason. (P. 170)

But just as "pure reason" is nullified through the sophistry
 of Ekwilist philosophy, so reason is subverted by Ekwilist
 practices.

Most immediately, the Ekwilist suppression of any
 intellectual independence turns the state's world into a
 dim-brained arena for group behaviour. As Krug is taken into
 the controlled world of the prison, the guards assume the
 animal-like dimensions of a hallucinatory humanity:

There a swarm of guards, some wearing gas
 masks (which in profile bore a striking
 resemblance to greatly magnified ant heads),
 clambered upon the footboards and other
 accessible parts of the car; two or three
 even grunted their way up to the roof.
 Numerous hands, several of which were
 heavily gloved, tugged at torpid recurved
 Krug (still in the larval stage) and pulled
 him out. (P. 174)

Within the state's prison, Krug, the thinker, is driven by a
 desire for action--"I demand immediate action" (p. 175)--which
 is meaninglessly thwarted by bureaucratic processes to the
 point where Krug admits his powerlessness in a state-managed
 theatre of the absurd: "You had better hurry. The nightmare
 may get out of control" (p. 177). Time, which seems of little
 relevance to the prison officials, suddenly becomes of immense
 importance to the emotionally tortured Krug: "Four years
 elapsed. Then disjointed parts of a century. Odds and ends
 of torn time. Say, twenty-two years in all" (p. 177). But
 space takes on the properties of stage sets--"Unnumbered scene
 (belonging to the last acts, anyway): the spacious waiting room
 of a fashionable prison" (p. 178). Within this theatre of the
 absurd the actor playing the part of David is rejected by Krug
 as the wrong child, while the puppets of officialdom strive
 illogically to have Krug accept the false illusions of their
 own idiocy:

Kol was still hoping against hope—
 'Are you *quite* sure,' he kept asking Krug,

'are you quite sure this little fellow is not your son? Philosophers are absent-minded you know. The light in this room is not very grand—' (P. 179)

In the state's arena of scripted behaviour the course of events which centre around Krug is dictated by both the deliberate and unwitting workings of Ekwilist theory in experiments which condone brutality in the name of brotherhood --the introduction of an 'orphan' child within a group of inmates from an Institute for Abnormal Children in order to promote "the community spirit (positive)" as opposed to "individual whims (negative)" (p. 182). The illogicality of the state's attempt to seek equality through an assertion of "the 'gang' spirit" (p. 182) in the abnormal is also a horrific extension of Paduk's schoolboy efforts to submerge his fraternity of misfits and freaks in the Party of the Average Man. That the experiments lead to serious injury and/or the destruction of the 'orphan' when introduced to the group-- "Deaths were of course unavoidable" (p. 183)--is a direct proof of the state's eradication of the individual through the acting out of its unacknowledged fictions. That the particular experiment which involves David manifests the "dim-brained brutality that thwarts its own purpose" (p. 7) by destroying its "most valued asset" (p. 170) is an unlooked for enactment of Paduk's theory of interchangeable identities. In the face of this disaster the state's grotesque reaction is to reproduce David's personality through the mechanized medium of film, *A Night Lawn Party*, while the physical shell of David's body is arranged in a grossly misdirected tableau which attempts to disguise the fact of David's death:

The murdered child had a crimson and gold turban around *its* head; *its* face was skilfully painted and powdered; a mauve blanket, exquisitely smooth, came up to *its* chin. What looked like a fluffy piebald toy dog was prettily placed at the foot of the bed. (P. 187, my italics.)

Even after the mistaken killing of David, the confusion of identities together with the dim-brained mechanization of humanity is a continuing feature of Paduk's universe. Crystalen,

for instance, calls the staff of the Institute together to inform them that they will be court martialled for killing "the only son of Professor Krug, celebrated philosopher, *President of the University, Vice-President of the Academy of Medicine* (p. 187, my italics). Similarly the disembodied voice of the state issuing from the walnut cabinet offers Krug a funeral and the execution of the culprits as recompense for the killing of "your little Arvid" (p. 189). And just as the state manifests its presence via the walnut cabinet so it converts human experience into disembodied sounds that can be replayed at will. Thus the re-run disc transforms the scene of Mariette, for instance, "bleeding gently" (p. 189) in her prison cell, into depersonalized sound effects: "They heard a drop of blood fall upon the floor" (p. 191).

Yet despite the powers and processes of Ekwilism, *Bend Sinister* ends with a triumphant reassertion of individuality. In Krug's last private confrontation with Paduk in the prison cell he penetrates finally the artifice of state disguises and rejects any submission to Paduk's fictions in words that return to his schooldays: "'Go to hell, you filthy Toad,' said Krug wearily" (p. 192). And just as the uncontrolled dream sequence of Krug's schooldays reveals his emotional bonds, so the pathos of the tragic but transcendent dream theatre of Krug's reunion with his loved ones provides subconscious images that express the centre of Krug's individuality, his loving heart:

But swoon or slumber, he lost consciousness before he could properly grapple with his grief. All he felt was a slow sinking, a concentration of darkness and tenderness, a gradual growth of sweet warmth. His head and Olga's head, cheek to cheek, two heads held together by a pair of small experimenting hands which stretched up from a dim bed, were (or was--for the two heads formed one) going down, down, down towards a third point, towards a silently laughing face. There was a soft chuckle just as his and her lips reached the child's cool brow and hot cheek, but the descent did not stop there and Krug continued to sink into the heart-rending softness, into the black dazzling depths of a belated but—never mind—eternal caress. (Pp. 192-93)

Within Paduk's regime without reason Krug's personal loss of sanity becomes an effective defense against Paduk's lack of humanity, since it removes Krug from the pain and the patterns of conscious emotional experience and renders his individuality inviolate. The intellectual and physical remnants that are all that is left of Krug are released to thwart the machinations of the state. In the final public confrontation between Krug and Paduk, Krug penetrates and inverts the arranged staging of the state's carefully scripted major production. Dressed in white pyjamas--"He could not be made to put on any clothes" (p. 194)--bareheaded and barefooted, Krug appears before the audience like a hospital inmate rather than an intellectual figurehead. Called upon to save his fellows from physical extinction (as opposed to the earlier plea for intellectual survival of the university) Krug, in his only public address to the waiting crowd, far from supporting Ekwilism, views the state's production as a meaningless play-acting of childish fictions:

'You silly people,' he said, wiping his nose with his hand, 'what on earth are you afraid of? What does it all matter? Ridiculous! Same as those infantile pleasures—Olga and the boy taking part in some silly theatricals, she getting drowned, he losing his life or something in a railway accident. What on earth does it matter?' (P. 196)

The direct assertion of individuality announced through individual choice is taken up by Krug's translator, Ember, in a tragicomic defiance of the state's brutality:

'I am ready to die . . . But there is one thing I refuse to endure any longer, *c'est la tragédie des cabinets*, it is killing me. As you know, I have a most queasy stomach, and they lead me into an enseamed draught, an inferno of filth, once a day for a minute. *C'est atroce*. I prefer to be shot straightaway.' (P. 198)

Ironically, the state's attempt to reduplicate Krug within the scripted roles of their public production is overturned by Krug's re-enactment of the past in a 'repeated sequence' from his school-days which returns scene and reader to the initial

problems of self-characterization underlying the conflict between Krug and Paduk's regime. At the same time, the reader is reminded of the analogies between the fictions which constitute both Krug's and Paduk's stylizations and the artifice of the novel's aesthetic world in which death is a stylistic illusion: "it had been proven to him [Krug] that death was but a question of style" (p. 200).

Conversely, the acknowledged properties of aesthetic reality complete Nabokov's thematic exploration of individuality by presenting a critical perspective to the modes of conscious reconstruction which underlie the characters' stylizations within the simulated non-fictive context of their existence. Earlier in this chapter I outlined the way in which Nabokov's self-conscious methods draw attention to three aspects of the literary work: the mechanical reduplication of the text as a typescript; the stylistic manipulation of language which involves knowledge as well as artifice; and the novel as a stylistic "play upon words" which produces the aesthetic reality of a fictional world and characters. These three aspects of artistic re-creation are paralleled within the non-fictive context of the novel's 'real' world by the stylizations which delineate the intellectual features of three characters' public roles: Paduk as the political figure-head of the state is engaged in the mechanical reduplication of Ekwilist doctrine; Ember as Krug's translator is involved in a scholarly, impersonal use of language; and as a philosopher Krug exemplifies the processes of independent thought which underlie creativity. That both Krug and Paduk equate their intellectual activities with their personalities results in incomplete and distorted versions of self and world. Ember, by contrast, treats his translations as an impersonal means of representing independent reality (Krug's philosophical works), and he does not identify himself with his scholarly practices. In *Bend Sinister* both the analogies and the distinctions between the properties of the literary text and the possible modes of non-fictive representation provide a critical insight into the characters' dramatized stylizations.

At the basic level of typescript, the art object can be

exactly reproduced just as Paduk's padograph reproduces his style of handwriting. That the state attempts to impose the same assembly-line methods on its citizens represents a by-passing of ongoing individual styles in favour of a mechanical reduplication of personalities. One of the state's aims, for instance, is to distribute publicity photographs of Krug and Paduk side by side as the intellectual and political figure-heads of Ekwilist government who have been captured as reduplicable typescripts:

And the one great thinker in the country
would appear in scarlet robes (click) beside
the chief and symbol of the State (click,
click, click, click, click, click) and
proclaim in a thundering voice that the
State was bigger and wiser than any mortal
could be. (P. 131)

The corollary of the state's reduplication of style is its attempt to have all its citizens conform to the scripted and interchangeable identities that are dictated by its unacknowledged fictions of equality. In other words, the state endeavours to transform the expressions of individual consciousness into imitative enactments of its own beliefs. The known possibilities for typescripts become the misapplied methods for promoting a political control that is destructive of both art and individuality. The state's version of *Hamlet*, for instance, as a "tragedy of the masses" (p. 97) reduces the play to a distorted reflection of Ekwilist theory. In similar fashion Paduk's attempts to mould his physical appearance on Etermon (a cartoon strip, so already a caricature of humanity), and to adapt Skotoma's writings to support the desired products of Ekwilist policies, do not result in any exact reduplications of either personality or philosophy, but only in distorted imitations which deny any individual style. The state's goal of interchangeable citizens in order to arrive at the espoused brotherhood of equality, produces human machines which, as in Paduk's case, give the illusion of stock characters by suppressing individual styles. The padograph stands as an apt symbol for the Ekwilist enterprise since it results in stylistic reproductions of personality which, as Krug and Schimpffer

demonstrate through their schoolboy trick on Paduk, can be manipulated by any controlling agent. The modes of consciousness which shape the methods of Ekwilist rule, then, complement a philosophy of life which denies the subjectively known, distinctive physical, emotional and imaginative features of "individual reality." The scripted role-playing demanded by the state realizes a theatre of the absurd peopled by dim-brained, brutal, mechanised puppets, a process which is exemplified in the personality of the state's political figure-head, Paduk.

In contrast to the mechanical reduplication of scripted personalities perpetrated by Ekwilist rule, Ember's task of translation illustrates a process of stylistic imitation which is dependent on subjective knowledge and exacting scholarship. For Ember the verbal nature of the text enables it to be translated into another language in a way that will represent the original "play upon words." Ember's task, then, is one of verbal imitation which harnesses his intellectual skills and knowledge in the impersonal disciplines of scholarship:

This process entailed a prodigious amount of labour, for the necessity of which no real reason could be given. It was as if someone, having seen a certain oak tree (further called Individual T) growing in a certain land and casting its own unique shadow on the green and brown ground, had proceeded to erect in his garden a prodigiously intricate piece of machinery which in itself was as unlike that or any other tree as the translator's inspiration and language were unlike those of the original author, but which, by means of ingenious combinations of parts, light effects, breeze-engendering engines, would, when completed, cast a shadow exactly similar to that of Individual T. (P. 107)

Far from approaching a text as a reduplicable typescript or distorting its content to accord with any personal fictions, Ember recognizes the unique stylistic artifice of an independent 'reality,' and he strives through his own intellectual activities and knowledge to translate the original text exactly. The image of the "Individual T" describes an original work

while it suggests the scholarship essential to an art of verbal translation which can reconstruct the stylistic outlines of an individual creation. However, Ember's labour of verbal imitation remains distinct from his personality since the imitative modes of his scholarship are not transferred to his personal stylistic expressions of self. Ember's own intellectual independence, for instance, is revealed in his complaints about the state's distortion of *Hamlet* and in the verbal games he enters into with Krug which imaginatively parody the state's reduction of *Hamlet* to a political treatise. His emotional nature is shown in his sensitivity to Krug's grief and in his tearful outburst at the news of Maximov's disappearance. In turn, Ember's physical fastidiousness is illustrated at the time of his arrest by his insistence that he needs a bath before getting dressed. While the impersonal modes of Ember's scholarship translate the properties and uniqueness of others' creations, his scholarship is one feature of a personal identity that he reveals in the individual style of his personality.

In a way that parallels Nabokov's creation of the aesthetic reality of *Bend Sinister*, Krug's philosophical mode of 'creative destruction' exposes the artifice of established representations of reality in the process of expressing original thought. Krug, however, is not only a philosopher but a character within the non-fictive context of the novel's 'real' world. As a character his idealization of creative thought is coupled with a separation of self-conscious analysis from emotional participation in life, which causes him to equate his intellectual independence with his personal situation. As we have seen, Krug's belief in his own invulnerability arises from an intellectual independence which rejects the art of imitation that is also essential to a knowledgeable version of self and world. Krug, for instance, questions Ember's scholarly translations as well as the state's imitative fictions, because he sees both as forms of limited and authored submission:

The greatest masterpiece of imitation presupposed a voluntary limitation of thought, in submission to another man's genius.

Could this suicidal limitation and submission be compensated by the miracle of adaptive tactics, by the thousand devices of shadography, by the keen pleasure that the weaver of words and their witness experienced at every new wile in the warp, or was it, taken all in all, but an exaggerated and spiritualized replica of Paduk's writing machine? (P. 107)

By identifying with his philosophical independence, Krug perpetrates an unwitting split between mind and body that becomes a form of "creative destruction" when acted upon within the ongoing present of the novel's world.

To recapitulate: Nabokov's self-conscious structuring of *Bend Sinister* draws attention to the stylistic outlines of aesthetic reality as a reworking of literary conventions that depends on knowledge as well as artifice. The techniques of the omniscient narrative dramatize the way in which non-fictive reconstructions similarly involve stylistic artifice and a knowledge of the data and context of individual existence. But whereas the outer triune of author, artwork and reader realizes an imaginative theatre of the mind, the inner triune of 'real' world, state and characters presents a metaphoric dramatization of life that explores the relationship between the stylizations of personality and the subjectively known physical, emotional, and intellectual features of individual existence. In the non-fictive context of the characters' activities the state's suppression of the imaginative and emotional elements of existence is a denial of both the specific and general features of individuality that results in the brutalized and unthinking mechanisation of its citizens. Alternatively, Krug's independent or 'creative' versions of self dismiss the ongoing realities of his personal situation and so contribute to his destruction. Ember too, of course, is finally destroyed by the state but his characterization suggests that none of the stylizations man may engage in, from reduplication, to translation, to creation, need preclude the continuing personal expression of an "individual reality" through style, and it is Ember who, in opposition to the scripted role-playing of the state, is the final spokesman for individual choice. Throughout *Bend Sinister*, then, the

paradoxical alliance of artifice and realism Nabokov achieves through the structural design of the novel simultaneously prepares for the specific effects of his characters' stylizations and explores the relationship between personality and "individual reality."

CHAPTER 5: NOTES

¹ J. Bader, *Crystal Land* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 96.

² See also Chapter 1.

³ Robert Scholes, "The Contribution of Formalism and Structuralism to the Theory of Fiction" in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 6, No 2 (Winter, 1973), points out that the Russian Formalists first made a distinction between story (fable) and plot (sujet): "The story is the raw materials of the narrative, that is, the events in their chronological sequence. The plot is the narrative as it is actually shaped" (p. 138).

⁴ See also Chapter 3.

⁵ L.L. Lee, "Nabokov's Political Dream" in *Nabokov: the Man and his Work*, ed. L.S. Dembo (London: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1967), suggests the way in which public 'identity' is a political fiction by pointing to the way in which Krug and his companion gain the guard's acceptance: "Finally he [Krug] and another man also held up, sign one another's passes—a nice irony, for the two prisoners create one another as persons, through written words, and so escape" (p. 96).

⁶ Bader, p. 104.

⁷ L.L. Lee suggests the authorial irony underlying Skotoma's name: "The name of old Skotoma, the senile 'philosopher' of Ekwilism, is a direct transliteration of the Modern Greek Skotoma, that is 'murder' or 'killing'" (p. 104).

⁸ Krug's association of death with railway trains stems from the death of his parents in a railway accident and recurs in various forms throughout the novel: pp. 22, 26, 62, 89, 119, 155, 156, 196.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ROLE OF THE NARRATOR IN *PNIN*

For the most part critical discussions of *Pnin* have not explored the complexities inherent in Nabokov's structuring of the novel. Julia Bader hints at, but does not pursue, interconnected levels arising out of a possible distinction between the author and the narrator.¹ Similarly, while Stegner and Grabes are both concerned to establish the structural unity of the novel in opposition to the view that it "might be only a series of random sketches,"² they pay cursory attention to the patterns they disclose. Grabes, who provides some valuable description of the narrator's strategies, details examples of the continued shifts from a necessarily restricted vision to a position of omniscience but argues simply that "since the narrator employs two different voices, the reader is able to experience from his vantage-point both Pnin 'from outside' (from the viewpoint of his surrounding world) as well as the surrounding world from Pnin's point of view (i.e. Pnin 'from inside') and may thus form his own judgement."³ Many of the structural complexities of the novel are disregarded because the narrator is implicitly equated with Nabokov.⁴ Yet *Pnin* involves similar problems to *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* in that it dramatizes a first-person narrator creating a fictional character from 'biographical' materials. Discrepancies between the conventions of biographical reconstruction and the narrator's stylistic strategies are seen by Grabes as an admissible expansion of point of view. Alternatively Bader, who recognizes the narrator's fictional re-creation of Pnin, does little more than relate this process to a central narrative movement which traces "the flight of a

character from his author."⁵ Indeed, Nabokov's design has been rendered largely incidental because of a critical preoccupation with interpretation of the major character of the novel. Pnin is discussed variously as the alien and the individual, "the eternal victim" whose exile is "magnificent,"⁶ "an unquestionably comic character" whose refuge from suffering is "the beauty of Russian lore and literature, the aesthetics of art,"⁷ "a clown whom the reader is prepared to take seriously,"⁸ a character who in manifesting "discrete identity" is "literally the 'life' of the novel" in contrast to those who would author him.⁹ My aim in devoting a separate chapter to *Pnin* is not to quarrel with interpretations such as these, but rather to suggest the way in which the "architectonics" of Nabokov's novels contribute to his characterizations. For this purpose *Pnin* provides a striking example since critical discussions of the novel have largely neglected any extended consideration of the novel's structural design.

Most immediately, the structural design of *Pnin* repeats many of the basic patterns of *Bend Sinister*. Like *Bend Sinister*, *Pnin* revolves around its major character; indeed, Grabes suggests that "everything depicted is necessary for the characterization of Pnin."¹⁰ Furthermore, emotion is a central feature of Pnin's characterization: "In psychological terms Pnin is alive because he has strong feelings."¹¹ And just as Krug's involvement is with a dead wife and a living son, the beating of Pnin's "loving heart" is revealed primarily in his relationship with his ex-wife, Liza Wind, and his would-be adopted son, Victor. In *Pnin*, however, the absence of acknowledged artifice, the 'episodic' development of the narrative, and the tragicomic depiction of the main character, all effect a deceptive simplicity and an anecdotal tone which seems to stand in direct contrast to the interconnected levels of *Bend Sinister*. Despite Nabokov's avowal of a preconceived plan for *Pnin*,¹² the structural complexities of the novel have been disregarded. Yet, as with *Bend Sinister*, the interrelated levels of *Pnin* are established through an intrusive 'author.' Moreover, *Pnin* involves a convolution of this authorial role that goes back to *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*: the

narrator is Timofey Pnin's would-be biographer within the simulated non-fictive context of the novel's world. Like V., therefore, the narrator of *Pnin* is governed by non-fictive, biographical conventions which denote his function as a scholarly observer and impersonal informant, rather than as a creative artist. At the same time, Nabokov's "architectonics" produce interrelated levels of representation that require the reader to maintain a critical attitude to the narrator's stylizations, particularly his supposedly 'biographical' depiction of Pnin.

The narrator's biographical sources are of three kinds: the details he has accumulated about Pnin's life which include Pnin's letter of proposal to Liza; the narrator's direct but sporadic meetings with Pnin from 1911 to the novel's present; the indirect and personal evidence of others' versions of Pnin from the Winds to Jack Cockerell. The narrator acknowledges these 'sources' in order to establish the basis for his biographical project. At the same time, he suggests that his own Russian upbringing and New World exile give him a specialized insight into Pnin's personality. When acknowledging his 'sources' in the final chapter, the narrator also suggests that his specialized 'knowledge' of Pnin enables him to clearly assess other peoples' versions of Pnin. Despite this apparent discernment, he continually repeats information about Pnin that he has gained from unreliable sources, such as Eric Wind or Jack Cockerell.¹³ Although he rejects Cockerell's obsessive mimicry of Pnin, for instance, Cockerell's party-piece impersonations alluded to in the last chapter (pp. 156, 157, 160) provide the basis for many of the narrator's main comic scenes of Pnin in the New World; and Cockerell's comments about Pnin even emerge in the narrator's description of the early morning which culminates in a last sighting of Pnin in Waindell:

A tall leafless poplar, as brown as a broom, rose on my right, and its long morning shadow crossing to the oppositeside of the street reached there a crenulated, cream-coloured house which, according to Cockerell, had been thought by my predecessor to be the Turkish

Consulate on account of crowds of fez wearers
he had seen, entering. (P. 159)

The narrator's 'sources,' then, combine biographical data with his own and others' personal versions of Pnin, so that what is apparently biographical reconstruction demands a critical assessment of the informants' personalities, and, more particularly, of the narrator's use of his often unreliable evidence.

As in so many of Nabokov's novels the final chapter in *Pnin* circles back to the first, to juxtapose the narrator's acknowledgement of his biographical sources and purpose with his stylistic strategies. The first sentence of the book adopts an appropriately impersonal, descriptive approach to introduce Pnin as an observable presence within a moving railway coach. In the second sentence, this impersonal tone shifts to a humorous description of Pnin's physical characteristics which reflects the subjective responses of an actual observer who is yet to be named:

Ideally bald, sun-tanned, and clean-shaven,
he (Pnin) *began rather impressively* with
that great brown dome of his, tortoise-shell
glasses (masking an *infantile absence* of
eyebrows), *apish* upper lip, thick neck, and
strong-man torso in a tightish tweedish
coat, but *ended somewhat disappointingly*, in
a pair of spindly legs (now flannelled and
crossed) and frail-looking, almost feminine
feet. (P. 7, my italics)

However, the entire account of Pnin's journey to Cremona is not based on direct observation, but is the narrator's imaginative version of a story about Pnin, probably based on Jack Cockerell's account of the same incident. This becomes clear by the end of the second paragraph when the narrator admits the absence of any direct observer of Pnin's journey:

Thus he might have appeared to a fellow
passenger; but except for a soldier asleep
at one end and two women absorbed in a baby
at the other, Pnin had the coach to himself.
(Pp. 7-8)

Grabes, in his discussion of this opening scene, points out that the writer's stance here is one of "the omniscient—because self-creating—narrator."¹⁴ Thus immediately the narrator's methods conflict with the conventions of biographical reconstruction. The implicit acknowledgement of the reader which follows--"Now a secret must be imparted. Professor Pnin was on the wrong train" (p. 8)--instead of admitting to a fictional mode of representation, attempts to fuse the writer's and the reader's perspective of Pnin, "our friend" (p. 8), into a mutual consideration of Pnin's situation and personality arising out of the narrator's purportedly factual representation--"How should we diagnose his sad case?" (p. 11). In other words literary omniscience is used to create the illusion of direct observation and the reader is slyly inveigled into accepting this illusion by being involved and included in the writer's attempt to analyse Pnin's behaviour. In this way the narrator prepares the reader to accept the more obviously fictional, stream-of-consciousness techniques which admit the reader to Pnin's mind after his seizure in the park.¹⁵ The fatigue which detaches Pnin "as it were, from reality" (p. 17) provides an excuse for the introduction of imagined scenes from Pnin's childhood which are superimposed upon the present. Moreover this description of Pnin's inner awareness during his seizure is strengthened by treating Pnin's 'experience,' just as formerly in the train, as a case for diagnosis--was it indigestion or a disease? The narrator intrudes to imply his presence as one who shares both Pnin's outer and inner worlds in a continuance of his disguised omniscience: "My friend wondered, and I wonder, too" (p. 17).

The discrepancies between the scholarly conventions of biography and the narrator's formal techniques establish a critical perspective on his reworking of biographical information. Most immediately, of course, the reader is confronted continually with dates, names, facts, and incidents, all of which transmit biographical information: the date of Pnin's birthday, the fact of his escape from Russia, the degrees obtained in Prague, the fifteen years in Paris, Pnin's migration to the United States, Pnin's own "autobiographical titbits" (p. 10) such as his two-week detention on Ellis Island, his

appointment to Waindell, the text used for his teaching, the names of students enrolled in Pnin's Russian language courses for the Fall semester of 1950, and so on. This bombardment of data distracts attention from the narrator's use of his information. His ploy of using snippets of factual detail to authenticate an illusion of biographical reconstruction is constant, however, and is typified in the first chapter of the novel by the listing of the supposed contents of Pnin's wallet as part of the representation of Pnin's fears about misplacing the manuscript of his Cremona lecture:

He carried in the inside pocket of his present coat a precious wallet with two ten-dollar bills, *the newspaper clipping of a letter he had written, with my help, to the New York Times in 1945 anent the Yalta Conference, and his certificate of naturalization.* (P. 14, my italics)

Here the narrator combines possible with known belongings, while using the newspaper clipping to suggest his friendship with Pnin. At the same time he uses these objects to authenticate a 'non-fictive' description which, at both the literal level of Pnin's wallet and the psychological level of Pnin's fears, is a product of artistic 'omniscience' rather than direct observation. In the light of these strategies, the authorial omniscience and imaginative re-creation of details, the narrator's frequent reiteration of a non-fictive function is either a deliberate attempt at deception or an indication of his limited critical awareness of his own practices. His later fleeting reference to himself as "a littérateur" (p. 38) encapsulates his actual strategies since he brings to his biographical undertaking the techniques of creative writing.

By inventing a narrator who both recombines and imaginatively re-creates biographical materials, Nabokov integrates the structural elements of the novel into a complex unity. Grabes recognizes an immediate structural unity supplied through the narrator. Within the framed context of an established reality the narrator's biographical task is based, Grabes states, on fragmentary evidence, "the sum of everything an outside observer has managed to find out."¹⁶ At this

immediate level, then, the narrator unites the facts he has accumulated about Pnin with personal accounts of Pnin (both his own and others'). Grabes claims that the episodic nature of the narrative is therefore a direct reflection of its source materials, so that "we have, at least technically, solved the problem of unity in relation to total form."¹⁷ Fragmentation aligned with a consistent subject authenticates an aura of biographical reconstruction. As we have already seen, further cohesion is supplied to the anecdotal format by the continued intrusions of the narrator's voice together with the three main ploys underlying his artistic re-creation of data: the 'placing' and development of often tangential biographical details; a similar imaginative recombination of data; and tropes or images which are central to the narrator's portrait of Pnin. Examples of the first of these ploys, the 'placing' of biographical details, are numerous, but here a few instances will suffice to illustrate its function in simulating a spurious sense of biographical reconstruction. In Chapter 1 the grammar book Pnin uses for his Russian classes at Waindell is said to have been brought out "by the Head of a Slavic Department in a far greater college than Waindell—a venerable fraud whose Russian was a joke but who would generously lend his dignified name to the products of anonymous drudgery" (p. 9); in Chapter 2 Pnin is described translating from "Professor Oliver Bradstreet Mann's *Elementary Russian* (actually written from beginning to end by two frail drudges, John and Olga Krotki, both dead today)" (p. 33); and, finally, in Chapter 6 a remark of "the late Olga Krotki" (p. 124) provides the narrator with support for a digression on the apparent duplication of observable personalities. Miller, a youthful member of Waindell's German department who transcribes Pnin's Russian lectures into English in Chapter 1, reappears briefly in connection with Office R (Chap. 3, p. 57) and finally features as one of the guests said to be invited but unable to attend Pnin's housewarming party in Chapter 6. Conversely, the indirect presence of Professor Chateau—said in Chapter 2 to have helped Pnin with his migratory voyage to the United States in 1940, and Pnin's correspondent in letters discussing the Wind's practices of

Group Psychotherapy (p. 43)¹⁸--prepares the ground for Chateau's direct appearance in Chapter 5 as one of the group of Russian intellectuals gathered at the Pines. Even at this factual level, however, the biographical authenticity simulated through the narrator's familiarity with names, dates, places and incidents is fleetingly undermined. L.L. Lee picks up the narrator's "mistake" in assigning the name "Robert Karlovich Horn" (p. 149) both to the steward of his Aunt's estate, who with the narrator formed part of an audience to Pnin's 1916 venture in theatricals, and to the expectant father at the railway baggage office in 1950 who finally provides Pnin with the means of reaching Cremona by truck--"Just tell them Bob Horn sent you" (p. 22).¹⁹

At a more obviously fictional level, the narrator repeats a similar imaginative interweaving of factual detail and omniscience in linked sequential descriptions which reinforce a sense of unity. In Chapter 1, for instance, Pnin is said to be reading a paper by Betty Bliss on "Dostoyevsky and Gestalt Psychology" (p. 14), in Chapter 2 Pnin reads a Turgenev poem with Betty and toys with the idea of her as the companion of his future senility (p. 36), and finally in Chapter 6 Pnin invites Betty to his party whereupon she supposedly recalls "Turgenev's prose poem about roses" (p. 123) and, later, at the party acts out the role of a practical, efficient helpmate. In such ways the narrator achieves a unifying artistic organization of narrative that, at the same time, sustains the illusion of fragmented biographical reconstruction. Pnin's own story of his enforced confinement on Ellis Island (p. 10) in Chapter 1, for instance, provides a biographical foil which is capitalized on by the narrator's comic artistry in a later scene (Chapter 2) which depicts Eric Wind's supposed resolution that he and the Pnins enter America together:

Dr Wind resolutely walked up to the Pnins and identified himself--'because all three of us must enter the land of liberty with pure hearts.' And after a bathetic sojourn on Ellis Island, Timofey and Liza parted. (P. 42)

The narrator's imaginative reworking of biographical details reaches its most obviously artistic level in the third of his verbal ploys, the development of tropes or images. In Chapter 4 the paralleled images of independence and flight which link Victor's and Pnin's 'dreams' are an artistic device to suggest the bonds between Pnin "the water-father" (p. 46) and his would-be-adopted son, Victor; the fictional dream scenes imaginatively rework Pnin's exile from his native land and Victor's rejection of and by his natural father, Eric Wind "the land father" (p. 46). A more extended example of this process is embodied in the recurrent allusions to squirrels. The developing pattern of squirrel imagery is linked to two possible sources: the postcard of the grey squirrel, augmented with Pnin's derivation of the word, which initiates the correspondence with Victor; and Pnin's scholarly explanation at his party that Cinderella's slippers were of squirrel fur rather than glass, but that *verre* had come to replace the less evocative *vair*, "an obvious case of the survival of the fittest among words" (p. 132).²⁰ From these 'sources' perhaps, the narrator manufactures continual associations between Pnin and squirrels. Pnin is likened to a squirrel in the library:

And many good young people considered it a treat and an honour to see Pnin pull out a catalogue drawer from the comprehensive bosom of a card cabinet and take it, like a big nut, to a secluded corner and there make a quiet mental meal of it. (P. 64)

The supposed scene on the screen by Pnin's boyhood sick-bed of "an old man hunched up on a bench, and a squirrel holding a reddish object in his front paws" (p. 20) is juxtaposed with Pnin's situation in the park recovering from his seizure: "A grey squirrel sitting on comfortable haunches on the ground before him was sampling a peach stone" (p. 21). Similarly, the narrator's imaginative portrayal of Liza's crass demands on Pnin during her fleeting visit to Waindell is juxtaposed with his imaginative creation of the equally contemptuous demands of a squirrel in the park after Liza's departure (p. 49). Finally the narrator presents as fact his 1911 glimpse of

objects in Timofey's school room which include "a stuffed squirrel" (p. 148). The narrator's account of this 1911 visit during which he had his first introduction to Timofey is flatly denied by Pnin during a meeting between the two men in Paris during the twenties:

He denied everything. He said he vaguely recalled my grand-aunt but had never met me. He said that his marks in algebra had always been poor and that, anyway, his father never displayed him to patients. . . . He repeated that we had never seen each other before. (P. 150)

The narrator's three main ploys come together in this final example: the factual report of the meeting in Paris; the imaginative re-creation of the details of Pnin's 1911 schoolroom which the factual report refers back to; and, whatever the veracity of the 1911 meeting, the motif of the squirrel which it includes.

The narrator's methods, then, result in two narrative levels: the first recombines biographical information about Pnin; the second is the product of the narrator's artistic re-creation of such materials. As Pnin's would-be biographer, the narrator is the mouthpiece for a given world of which he is part. Consequently, his undertaking (like Ember's in *Bend Sinister*) requires a process of scholarly imitation or impersonal verbal translation. But although the narrator reworks biographical materials, we have seen how he artistically re-creates such data. Ironically, the narrator's 'creativity' is a form of imitative art in that his portrait of Pnin is an imaginative version of an observed personality, and so is arrived at through a process of stylistic imitation that has a parodic counterpart in Jack Cockerell's mimicry (another form of imitative art). Unrecognized by the narrator, two Pnins emerge: the narrator's tragicomic clown, and the Pnin who consistently rejects all attempts by others to script his individuality and who resists and literally flees from his supposed friend and would-be author, the narrator, within the world of the novel. Even though the narrator's imitative art

reworks the stylistic outlines of Pnin's personality, the 'real' Pnin eludes him. I suggest that the narrator does not elude the reader, however, since his personal consciousness is revealed through his verbal activities. Nabokov combines the narrative levels of the novel in a complex and unified design that is centred in his subtle dramatization of the narrator.

In *Pnin* the apparently complicating factor in the dramatized depiction of the narrator is that, unlike Nabokov's other first-person narrators, he is engaged in an indirect rather than a direct process of self-characterization. While V., for instance, is similarly engaged in a 'biographical' undertaking, he records the personal activities and responses that reveal his obsessive quest to become Sebastian Knight. By contrast the narrator of *Pnin* is a shadowy presence in the narrative and, until the final chapter of the novel, he maintains a stance of parodic detachment to the experiences that he re-creates. Even though he implies that his own experiences qualify him to be Pnin's biographer, he seldom depicts his own participation in the events he describes. His probable presence at the Pines, for instance, is suppressed in his account of the gathering.²¹ Nevertheless, like all Nabokov's first-person narrators from V. to Vadim, the narrator of *Pnin* is engaged in a supposedly 'non-fictive,' biographical account of the world of which he is a part. Although he seldom presents himself as an observable personality in that world, his personal consciousness is dramatized by his analysis and interpretation of both his biographical materials and his own activities.

At the mid-point of the lineal sequence of *Pnin*, Chapter 4 provides a critical perspective on the narrator's conceptions about "individual reality." In contrast to the rest of the book, Chapter 4 takes Victor rather than Pnin as its main subject. Victor, as his name suggests, represents an unquenchable individuality which is demonstrated in both his artistic and personal stylizations. Yet although the narrator acknowledges Victor's artistic genius, he relates Victor's intellectual independence solely to an artistic sphere. Even though the narrator uses Victor's personality as a foil to the scripted

roles perpetrated by Eric and Liza Wind, he explains Victor's behaviour as a reflection of his artistic identity: "Genius is non-conformity" (p. 74). More significantly, the narrator associates Victor's artistic genius with an emotional detachment from other people. Despite the evidence he provides of Victor's emotional responsiveness to his mother (and subsequently, to Pnin), the narrator equates Victor's rejection of Liza's intellectual views with an absence of feeling for others. In his conscious summation of the fourteen-year-old Victor, he states, "I do not think he loved anybody" (p. 72). Nor does the narrator consider that Victor's stylistic "non-conformity" together with his preoccupation with observation and knowledge reflects a personal as well as an artistic individuality. A corollary is that the narrator never consciously connects Victor's individuality with the personalities of men who are not artists, but who, unlike Victor's physical parents, combine scholarship and a rejection of any scripted role-playing in their personal stylizations. Instead he describes the personality traits of all three as social handicaps. Thus he claims that Lake is kept on at St Barts, not because of his admitted scholarship, but only "because it was fashionable to have at least one distinguished freak on the staff" (p. 80). Conversely, Pnin is eventually replaced by the narrator at Waindell because the "delicate imported article" (p. 10), whose personality combines scholarship with an individual style, is not seen by the university as a viable commercial proposition. That such personal traits are seen by the narrator as social handicaps is made explicit in his depiction of Victor's behaviour in bus queues:

Because of a streak of dreaminess and gentle abstraction in his nature, Victor in any queue was always at its very end. He had long since grown used to this handicap, as one grows used to weak sight or a limp. (P. 85)

The narrator's comments in Chapter 4 suggest his limited understanding of an individual style within anything but an

artistic sphere. Furthermore, he does not recognize how the mental, emotional and physical features of experience all contribute to a monistic conscious reality.²² And he implicitly rejects the notion that "individual realities" may be reflected in individual styles of personality by treating such personality traits as comic absurdities.

Similarly, the narrator fails to recognize the patterns of individuality which are reflected in his imitative art. His limited awareness is strikingly evidenced in his treatment of the paralleled dream sequences that he creates for Victor and Pnin. Most immediately the narrator uses Victor's dream replacement of his actual father with "the King, his more plausible father" (p. 70) to introduce Victor's relationship with Pnin. Despite the fact that Victor's ability to discern the facades and frauds of the adult population at St Barts is described in the same chapter, Victor's acceptance of and emotional response to Pnin is portrayed by the narrator as a romanticized adolescent extension of a dream which links Pnin with "Bulgarian kings or Mediterranean princes" (p. 73). In other words, the narrator never considers that both the dream father king and the "water father" Pnin reflect patterns of individuality which attract Victor. Similarly, at the end of Chapter 4, the sleeping Pnin's flight "from a chimerical palace" (p. 91) is explained by the narrator as "one of those dreams that still haunt Russian fugitives" (p. 91). Yet unwittingly in both Victor's and Pnin's dreams the narrator has provided images of the individual's flight from a scripting power. In Victor's dream, the king accepts exile rather than abdication, while Pnin's dream reflects a choice of exile rather than Bolshevik rule. Nor does the narrator see that the narrative of the dreams forms an analogy with both Victor's and Pnin's personal resistance to the scripted roles and expectations of society's institutionalized fictions from psychiatry to academia. Moreover, the dream images not only rework the narrative pattern of Pnin's past, the flight from Russia, they reflect his present and anticipate his later behaviour. Pnin's bag abandoned to Witchurch Station

bureaucracy prefigures his abandonment of Waindell once the narrator gains control of Pnin's university employment. Pnin's words to Hagen when he learns of the narrator's pending position, "I will never work under him" (p. 142), are an emotionally based assertion of individuality which is enacted in a physical flight from a would-be scripting power that leaves the narrator hurt and baffled, a thwarted 'author' of Pnin's life.

Finally, the narrator seems unaware that his discussion of Victor's approach to artistic re-creation provides an ironic perspective on his own approach to the role of 'biographical' observer and informant. In terms of scholarship, Victor, whose "eye was his supreme organ" (p. 78), is linked not only with Pnin's disinterested approach to language and literature but also with the scientific disciplines represented by Dr Pavel Pnin, the eye specialist who, in 1911, the narrator blandly states, removed "a speck of coal dust that entered my left eye" (p. 46). More particularly as an artist, Victor is associated with scholarly research and observation, the products of a personal curiosity that is reinforced under the tutelage of Lake, the scholar of art itself. The narrator's biographical project requires comparable research and exacting observation. In contrast to Victor's art, however, the narrator's task demands a scholarly, impersonal representation of his non-fictive data. Yet his actual practices parallel the imaginative re-creations of Victor's acknowledged art. The narrator's apparent blindness to his own practices is highlighted in his discussions of art. Although he recapitulates Lake's theory of the interaction of imaginative artifice and exacting observation as the basis of all art, "This mimetic and integrative process Lake called the necessary 'naturalization' of man made things" (p. 80), he never connects Lake's theory to the artistic re-creation of biographical data he attempts in his own writing. Similarly, while he describes Victor's artistic approach to the given world as "the sort of theft Victor was contemplating" (p. 81), he never consciously considers his portrait of Pnin to be a similarly planned theft.

Thus, just as the narrator fails to see that individuality includes a resistance to being scripted by other people's versions of life, so he fails to recognize that his attempts to pre-empt personal authorship of Pnin's personality constitute a theft which denies Pnin's "individual reality" while purporting to represent it. Meeting with Pnin in Paris some years after Pnin's marriage to Lisa the narrator is astounded, therefore, when Pnin suddenly intrudes on his conversation with Dr Barkan to announce, "Now, don't believe a word he says, Georgiy Aramovich. He makes up everything. He once invented that we were schoolmates in Russia and cribbed at examinations. He is a dreadful inventor'" (pp. 154-55). The incident, which reinforces the sense of the narrator's honesty as a reporter, also suggests the limitations of his conscious assessments of the observed, since he is not able to recognize Pnin's attack as the resistance of the individual to the scripting power of other people's fictions. Consequently, he cannot understand either Pnin's denial of episodes from the past (p. 150), or Pnin's refusal to work under him (p. 142, p. 156). The narrator's baffled responses to Pnin's behaviour are an index, then, to his limited understanding of individuality and of his own activities. Unlike Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*, the narrator of *Pnin* never comes to view his would-be authorship of Pnin's "individual reality" as an insupportable theft.²³

In contrast to the narrator's limited awareness, Nabokov's structuring of the narrative provides an extended exploration of "individual reality." On either side of Chapter 4, the chapters in which Pnin is the main subject form two complementary halves. At the immediate level of the narrative, the incidents, which the narrator presents as a lineal series of fragmented anecdotes about Pnin, provide parallel reflections of Pnin's "individual reality" that culminate in his flight from the narrator's desire to 'author' him in Waindell. In Chapter 1 Pnin sets out on a journey to the Cremona Women's Club meeting which, despite mishaps, he reaches, and during that meeting he experiences a 'seizure' which leads to scenes from the past being transposed on the present. Similarly in Chapter 5, Pnin's erratic but successful progress to the gathering at the Pines

culminates in another 'seizure' during which visions from the past, which centre around his boyhood love for Mira, mould and mingle with his present perceptions. Both the 'seizure' at Cremona and that at the Pines simulate the "individual reality" of personal consciousness. Chapters 2 and 6 suggest how Pnin's "loving heart" makes him both responsive and vulnerable to the behaviour of others. In Chapter 2, Pnin's private life, his acceptance in the Clements' household, his new dentures, the tentative relationship with Betty Bliss, all revolve around an emotional centre of "individual reality" that is epitomized by Pnin's enduring love for Liza. That Pnin's emotions affect all aspects of his "individual reality" is suggested when, after Liza rejects his love yet again, Pnin cries out, "I haf nofing" (p. 51). Similarly, in Chapter 6, Pnin is left confronting the emotional centre of his "individual reality" when his growing security in the public world of Waindell (which encompasses his plans for his job and for buying his new-found home in Todd Avenue) is shattered by the university's rejection of him. In Chapter 3, the past rooms, that have formed a context to Pnin's "individual reality," are juxtaposed with his present room in the Clements' house. The threat to his present situation is made explicit when the abrupt return of the Clements' daughter, Isabel, necessitates that Pnin vacate her old room and move on to another location. In Chapter 7, the narrator's account of scenes which chart the context of his past meetings with Pnin culminates in his replacement of Pnin in the academic milieu at Waindell and results in Pnin once more moving on. Nabokov's structuring of the narrative about Pnin, then, explores the interdependent aspects and emotional centre of "individual reality."

At the same time, Nabokov's paired chapters incorporate a thematic exploration of the relationship between the ongoing "individual realities" of conscious experience and the three conscious processes of knowledge, logic, and memory. In Chapters 1 and 5 Nabokov suggests how man's factual information is comparative rather than absolute because knowledge is always part of the ongoing subjective awareness of individual consciousness.²⁴ In Chapter 1 Pnin's journey to Cremona illustrates this. Pnin's inveterate hoarding of factual

information is coupled with his personal pleasure in studying such information: he "was inordinately fond of everything in the line of timetables, maps, catalogues . . . and took especial pride in puzzling out schedules for himself" (p. 8). That Pnin's knowledge is not absolute but comparative, however, is demonstrated by his allegiance to an out-of-date timetable which results in a discrepancy between his planned organization of time and a subsequent bureaucratic rearrangement of public transport which determines Pnin's actual situation:

'I was thinking I gained twelve minutes,
and now I have lost nearly two whole hours,'
said Pnin bitterly. (P. 15)

Just as the trials of Pnin's journey are a parodic reflection of the changing conditions and comparative nature of individual knowledge, so Pnin's personal stylistic choices reflect his knowledge of and responses to society's changing mores. The long underwear and the 'modesty' of Pnin's deportment in the staid European period prior to the 1940s when "to reveal a glimpse of that white underwear by pulling up a trouser leg too high would have seemed to Pnin as indecent as showing himself to ladies minus collar and tie" (p. 7) contrast with the enthusiastic choices of Pnin's New World conduct: "Nowadays, at fifty-two, he was crazy about sunbathing, wore sports shirts and slacks, and when crossing his legs would carefully, deliberately, brazenly display a tremendous stretch of bare shin" (p. 7). Both Pnin's past and present behaviour illustrate the subjective and comparative aspects of individual awareness. A corollary is that the stylizations of personality reflect an interpenetration of past and present experience within the individual's consciousness. At Waindell Pnin's robot-like presentation in English of his painfully written lectures--"He preferred reading his lectures, his gaze glued to his text, in a slow monotonous baritone" (p. 13)--are as much a stylistic reflection of the relationship of his past to his present experience as are the exuberant digressions which directly recount the past from the perspective of the present:

He was beloved not for any essential ability

but for those unforgettable digressions of his, when he would remove his glasses to beam at the past while massaging the lenses of the present. Nostalgic excursions in broken English. Autobiographical titbits. (P. 10)

In analogous fashion the narrator's techniques of 'biographical' reconstruction simulate the ongoing conditions of "individual reality." At the formal level the use of flash-backs are a literary convention which fuse two time schemes, enabling the narrator to maintain the impetus and tension of an ongoing narrative--"Professor Pnin was on the wrong train" (p. 8)--while juxtaposing Pnin's ongoing and past behaviour. Less obviously, the narrator's versions of Pnin reflect his own subjective knowledge (his portrait of Pnin draws upon the narrator's comparable Russian upbringing and experiences and his New World exile). Finally, his imaginative stream-of-consciousness techniques simulate the comparative nature and subjectivity of Pnin's inner awareness. The interpenetration of past and present within individual consciousness is dramatized, for instance, by Pnin's 'seizure' and its aftermath, the vision of his parents and past friends which becomes momentarily intertwined with his awareness of the Cremona audience:

Murdered, forgotten, unrevenged, incorrupt, immortal, many old friends were scattered throughout the dim hall among more recent people, such as Miss Clyde, who had modestly regained a front seat. (P. 23)

In Chapter 5 Nabokov further explores subjective awareness. As in Chapter 1, the erratic course of Pnin's journey confounds the schematized 'absolutes' of his geographical directions. Once at the Pines he is not an alien, but is one of a group of Russian intellectuals. Moreover, the narrator's affiliations with this group, his personal knowledge of Pnin's location, hosts and friends, form the basis for his depiction and intimated sharing of Pnin's experience: "This was the first time Pnin was coming to the Pines *but I had been there before*" (pp. 97-98, my italics). An explicit illustration of

subjectivity, however, is initiated through Pnin's first conversation. On Pnin's arrival Bolotov, who is re-reading *Anna Karenina* mentions an apparent confusion of time by characters at the start of the novel. Pnin immediately supplies the correct factual information: "The action of the novel starts in the beginning of 1872, namely on Friday, February the twenty-third by the New Style" (p. 102). At dinner that evening, Pnin returns to the subject to describe the discrepancies between measured time and subjectively experienced time as a literary dramatization of "relativity":

Pnin automatically resumed an earlier conversation.

'You will notice,' he said, 'that there is a significant difference between Lyovin's spiritual time and Vronski's physical one. In mid book, Lyovin and Kitty lag behind Vronski and Anna by a whole year. When, on a Sunday evening in May 1876, Anna throws herself under that freight train, she has existed more than four years since the beginning of the novel, but in the case of the Lyovins, during the same period, 1872 to 1876, hardly three years have elapsed. It is the best example of relativity in literature that is known to me.' (P. 108)

Lyovin's "spiritual time" denotes a subjective individual awareness of the four years during which the muted tenor of his marriage to Kitty is seldom disturbed. By contrast Vronski's "physical time" captures the desperate intensity which Anna's subjectivity endows on every moment of her life with Vronski to the point where, discarded by him, physical existence becomes insupportable for her. In a psychological sense, time is shown to be 'relative' to both the subjectivity and the situation of the individual, since the differences in the relationships between the two comparable couples produce Lyovin's "spiritual" and Anna's "physical" awareness of time.

At the Pines, different experiences of the past are also shown to result in qualities and values which differentiate between groups as well as between individuals. Despite the genetic and emotional bonds of the Old World Russians and their New World children, for instance, they form two distinct and

disparate groups:

Some parents brought their offspring with them—healthy, tall, indolent, difficult American children of college age, with no sense of Nature, and no Russian, and no interest whatsoever in the niceties of their parents' backgrounds and pasts. They seemed to live at the Pines on a physical and mental plane entirely different from that of their parents: now and then passing from their own level to ours through a kind of interdimensional shimmer; responding curtly to a well-meaning Russian joke or anxious piece of advice, and then fading away again; keeping always aloof (so that one felt one had engendered a brood of elves), and preferring any Onkwedo store product, any sort of canned goods to the marvellous Russian foods provided by the Kukolnikov household at loud, long dinners on the screened porch.²⁵ (Pp. 98-99)

The final scenes of Chapter 5 return from the subjectivities which underlie group dynamics to a depiction of individual consciousness. After the croquet match in which Pnin exhibits the skills of his physical past,²⁶ Roza Supolyanski precipitates him back to an emotional past by referring to her cousins, Grisha and Mira Belochken. Pnin's personal memories of Mira are coupled with the subsequent knowledge, which he has attempted to blot from consciousness, of her death in a Nazi concentration camp. As in Chapter 1 Pnin experiences a 'seizure' and in its aftermath the past intermingles with his awareness of the present. The group gathering for tea on the porch at the Pines fuses with Pnin's vision of his own and Mira's father playing chess while an eighteen year old Pnin waits in the darkness of the garden for Mira's coming. At the same time Pnin is aware of Mira's history and the fact of Mira's death. As at the Cremona meeting, a "democracy of ghosts" (p. 113) survives in Pnin's consciousness through a blend of subjective knowledge and artifice that makes up Pnin's ongoing "individual reality."

In Chapters 2 and 6 Nabokov suggests how man's capacity for reason and logical assessment relate to his "individual reality," or what Joan Clements calls "the world of the mind"

(p. 50). The thematic concerns of the two chapters are parodically announced through Laurence Clements' course in E.O.S. at Waindell, which "had opened and would close with the phrase destined to be over-quoted one day: The evolution of sense is, in a sense, the evolution of nonsense" (p. 27). Both Clements' statement and Nabokov's characterizations suggest the way in which the capacity of intellect for the rational application of knowledge is regulated by man's subjectivity. Although logic is a conscious process, it does not determine the nature or course of "individual reality." In Chapter 2, Pnin's life with the Clements dramatizes an interplay of knowledge and emotion within individual responses that has little relationship to the capacity for reason or logical assessments. In the Clements' household, Pnin is a disruptive presence. Yet Joan admonishes, cares for and comforts Pnin despite the fact that "he was more of a poltergeist than a lodger" (p. 33), while the interaction of Pnin and Laurence *"led insensibly to a tender mutual concord between the two men,* both of whom were really at ease only in the warm world of natural scholarship" (p. 34, my italics). Subjective involvement overrides rather than negates rational analysis, although both co-exist in consciousness. At their house party the Clements are aware of Pnin's incongruity. At the same time, they try to shield him from the reflected absurdity of Cockerell's mimicry. Later when Liza exclaims on seeing the Clements' aquarelle that "They must be terrible people," Pnin similarly demonstrates that emotional involvement with others has little to do with taste or reason: "'No,'" said Pnin, "'they are my friends'" (p. 45). The irrationality of "individual reality," however, is most clearly demonstrated in Pnin's love for Liza. After Liza's American reunion with Eric Wind in 1940, Pnin, in a letter to Chateau, refutes the evolving science of psychiatric rationalizations by reference to the emotional centre of "individual reality": "Is sorrow not, one asks, the only thing in the world people really possess?" (p. 43). In the continuing narrative of Chapter 2, Pnin can logically assess the potentialities of an admiring Betty Bliss as the possible companion of a "serene senility," but "his

heart belonged to another woman" (p. 36). And although Liza once more disperses Pnin's joy and hope on her visit to Waindell, his feelings still preclude any logical response to a rational assessment of her behaviour and personality: "To hold her, to keep her—just as she was—with her cruelty, with her vulgarity, with her blinding blue eyes, with her miserable poetry, with her fat feet, with her impure, dry, sordid, infantile soul" (p. 48).²⁷ After Liza's departure when Joan tries to cheer Pnin up by showing him an American cartoon, Pnin tries to invoke logic to reject the picture before him, only to be met with Joan's rebuke: "Really, you are not playing fair, Timofey. You know perfectly well you agree with Lore that *the world of the mind is based on a compromise with logic*" (p. 50, my italics). The comic pathos of Pnin's final cry "I haf nothing" (p. 51) provides an ironic reflection of the emotional centre of "individual reality," "the only thing that people really possess," which necessitates the mind's constant compromise with logic.

In the companion Chapter 6 the irrationalities perpetrated and condoned by the people who control the institutionalized world of reason, the Waindell University, directly dramatize Laurence's view that "the evolution of sense is, in a sense, the evolution of nonsense" (p. 27). The absurdity of assisting the mechanical and indiscriminate accumulation of materials rather than scholarly analysis and research is epitomized by the Starrs' grant to record post-war folksongs in East Germany and by the ten thousand dollars given the Professor of Anthropology to chart physiological behaviour, rather than primitive culture, in a study of "the eating habits of Cuban fishermen and palm climbers" (p. 116). The academic respectability endowed on evolving layers of interpretative speculation is similarly revealed by the funding of von Flaternfel's undertaking to compile a bibliography of materials "devoted in recent years to a critical appraisal of the influence of Nietzsche's disciples on Modern Thought" (p. 116). Finally, economic aid is shown to promote the evolution of nonsense through the scripted enactments in futility which are perpetrated by psychiatric tests that reveal nothing other than

the psychiatrist's enduring absurdity:

And, last but not least, the bestowal of a particularly generous grant was allowing the renowned Waindell psychiatrist, Dr Rudolph Aura, to apply to ten thousand elementary school pupils the so-called Fingerbowl Test, in which the child is asked to dip his index in cups of coloured fluids whereupon the proportion between length of digit and wetted part is measured and plotted in all kinds of fascinating graphs. (P. 116)

Comparable counterparts to these Swiftian-like projectors are described among the administrative and teaching levels of the university, the most notable example being the Professor of French:

Two interesting characteristics distinguished Leonard Blorengé, Chairman of French Literature and Language: he disliked literature and he had no French. (P. 117)

Ironically, the university's "compromise with logic" renders Blorengé's flaunted ineptitude in his subject irrelevant when placed alongside his skills as a financial entrepreneur--he is "a highly esteemed money-getter" (p. 117). Furthermore the totally imitative undertakings which Blorengé channels his acquired funds into, the reduplication of a French village on a hill near Waindell, provide a parodic demonstration of a triumph of quantitative accumulation over intellectual development. Within this world of subjective and institutionalized compromises with reason Pnin's genuine scholarship and his distinctive personality are both stumbling blocks when Pnin's departing mentor, Hagen, seeks to secure Pnin's continued employment in the university. Blorengé, whose fraudulent scholarship is typified by a plagiarized course on Great Frenchmen, rejects Pnin because Pnin can read French as well as speak it: "Then we can't use him at all. As you know, we believe only in speech records and other mechanical devices. No books are allowed" (p. 119). On the other hand the guides which determine the decisions of the Chairman of English, Jack Cockerell, are his own subjective responses to people, he

"disapproved of everything Hagen did, considered Pnin a joke, and was, in fact, unofficially haggling for the services of a prominent Anglo-Russian writer" (p. 117).²⁸ Blorenge's and Cockerell's reactions qualify logic in the university's choices since subjective self-rationalizations determine their behaviour. Moreover, the two men's fraudulent enactment of their academic roles and responsibilities is in direct contrast to Pnin's devoted scholarship and unscripted individuality, yet, paradoxically, the 'world of reason' sustains the former, not the latter. At Pnin's party, Hagen's suggestion that the only solution to the academic morass is to eliminate the lecture room is met by Margaret Thayer's objection that the personality of the lecturer must count for something. Hagen's reply suggests that the university supports conventional role players in preference to an individual style of personality:

'It does not!' shouted Hagen. 'That is the tragedy! Who, for example, wants *him*' —he pointed to radiant Pnin—'who wants his personality? Nobody! They will reject Timofey's wonderful personality without a quaver. The world wants a machine, not a Timofey.' (P. 135)

That the university is prepared to pay for everything from mechanized research to mechanized role playing, but can reject genuine scholarship and individuality, epitomizes the irrationality of public values in an institution which is supposedly devoted to the intellectual pursuit of individual scholarship and evolving knowledge. Paradoxically, while Pnin's hopes of tenure and his plans to buy the Todd Avenue house are based on a rational assessment of his circumstances, his actual chances are determined by the illogical choices of the university's human agencies. Conversely, the logical possibility of remaining at Waindell under the narrator contrasts with Pnin's apparently illogical rejection of the idea. For Pnin, however, a denial of his emotional feelings would require a compromise with his own individuality. As in Chapter 2, Pnin is seemingly left with nothing, no job, no home. Yet, like Victor's aquamarine bowl, Pnin's "individual

reality" remains intact.

In the final paired chapters of the Pnin narrative, Chapters 3 and 7, Nabokov explores the relationship between memory and "individual reality." On the one hand memory is the process by which an individual records and retains knowledge within the ongoing present of conscious existence. On the other hand memory is not merely a mechanical recorder of information, but a repository of the individual's relationship to the past; hence it operates not only as a basis of knowledge but as a selective and subjective source of "individual reality." Chapter 3 opens with a discussion of memory that establishes a frame for the narrator's depiction of Pnin within the present. At the same time, the narrator's comments provide unwitting reflections of his own inner awareness. Pnin's past is described as "an accumulation of consecutive rooms in his memory" but, since the narrator acknowledges that memory ignores "all space-time distinctions," he likens the world of memory to a "furniture shop" beyond which, he claims, *"nobody really loves anybody"* (p. 52, my italics). Similarly, the narrator's portrait of Pnin's personality embodies a subjective response which is elicited by the narrator's personal past: as Pnin dresses to set out on his day in the consecutive rooms of the present the narrator comments, "It warmed my heart, the Russian-intelligentski way he had of getting into his overcoat" (p. 54). The contribution of the narrator's memories to his observations is paralleled in his dramatized depiction of the relationship of Pnin's memories to his behaviour. As Pnin sets out from the Clements' house he recalls an urgent request from the college library to return a book on Soviet literature for another borrower. In implicit contrast, however, to the narrator's view that "nobody really loves anybody," Pnin's memories shape his sympathetic identification with the needs of another scholar which, despite his own desires, lead him to return the book:

For a moment he struggled with himself;
he still needed the volume, but kindly
Pnin sympathized too much with the
passionate clamour of another (unknown)
scholar not to go back for the stout
heavy tome.²⁹ (Pp. 54-55)

The selective contributions of memory to "individual reality" are also illustrated in the narrator's depiction of Pnin. Although Pnin does not remember that it is his birthday (February 3rd in the Julian Calendar is February 15th in the New World), his scholarly preoccupation with Russian literature involves an exact retention of dates. He writes on the "grey-board" for the benefit of his class "December, 26, 1829 . . . 3.03 p.m. St. Petersburg" (p. 56), the date and the time recorded by Pushkin as marking the composition of a poem concerned with intimations of death that the poet was constantly looking for. Pnin's delight in announcing the actual but different day of Pushkin's death (February 29, 1837) is thwarted by the ominous cracking of his chair, but both the details and his delight persist among the subjectively selected data retained through memory.

Conversely, Pnin rejects 'corruptions' of his personal memories. Pnin's brief visit to Office R, a room he had once "lovingly Pninized" (p. 57), reflects his abandonment of interest in the place following the unlooked for advent of Dr Bodo von Flaternfels--"thenceforth, so far as Pnin was concerned, Office R had gone to seed" (p. 58). Again, in the faculty club dining room Pnin's subdued warfare with the Komarovs arises out of his own selective and subjective awareness of the past: "Only another Russian could understand the reactionary and Sovietophile blend presented by the pseudo-colourful Komarovs" (p. 59). Ironically, comparable problems with English usage that reflect a shared past and distinguish Pnin and Komarov as New World aliens, are the direct sparring ground for the two men's differences:

It would be hard to say, without applying some very special tests, which of them, Pnin or Komarov, spoke the worse English; probably Pnin; but for reasons of age, general education, and a slightly longer stage of American citizenship, he found it possible to correct Komarov's frequent English interpolations, and Komarov resented this even more than he did Pnin's *antikvarniy liberalism*. (P. 60)

Although comparable experiences can produce comparable stylistic reflections of the retained past, consciousness consists of a personal blend of selective memories which melds past and present into an "individual reality." This "individual reality" is parodically reflected in Pnin's reactions to *Hamlet*. At the library Pnin reads a scholarly work on Russian myths. A description of the Green week festivities in which maidens and floral wreaths float down the Volga, stirs in Pnin's mind literary allusions that he finally connects with Ophelia's death in *Hamlet*. But even as Pnin debates with himself how to check the parallels between Russian folk customs and Shakespeare's play, Pnin's planned undertaking is coloured by his past memories of the play:

Whenever you were reduced to look up
something in the English version, you
never found this or that beautiful, noble,
sonorous line that you remembered all your
life from Kroneberg's text in Vengerov's
splendid edition. Sad! (P. 66)

The 'originals' of Pnin's memory are parodically distinguished from the originals of literature to suggest the way in which memory is not a logically governed source of knowledge, but is a personal activity, a conscious process that is part of an individual's ongoing awareness and responses. Later that same night at the Starrs' movie programme, "humourless Pnin remained indifferent" (p. 67) to Chaplin's New World comedy of which he has neither prior knowledge nor experience. The contrived propaganda of the Russian documentary film which follows leaves him equally unmoved since, in this case, Pnin's memories cause him to reject the ideological bias of the film. By contrast Pnin responds with sudden tears to the unexpected view of a Russian wildwood he has known as a boy. The undefiled natural scene leads him to relive in his mind his original experiences of walking through those woods to where "the road emerged into the romantic, free, beloved radiance of a great field unmowed by time" (p. 68), a field of the mind which depicts Pnin's "individual reality." Throughout Chapter 3 Pnin's personal memories are shown to be the basis of an ongoing "individual

reality" which is reflected in the stylizations of his personality.

The companion Chapter 7 dramatizes the subjective and selective processes of the narrator's memory. For the first time the narrator abandons his artistic strategies and gives a direct account of his participation in the novel's world. The narrator's resumé of his biographical source materials consists principally of a series of scenes which chart his remembered contacts with Pnin up to and including his arrival at Waindell and Pnin's departure the following morning. The narrator's comments suggest his unwillingness to admit that his memories are part of his own "individual reality." He implicitly separates his personal past from his ongoing present. For example, the coal dust lodged in his eye which necessitated the 1911 visit to Dr Pavel Pnin is not viewed as a selected detail of the past which persists in individual consciousness. Instead the narrator ponders only the separate spatial location of the dust within the present: "I wonder where that speck is now? The dull, mad fact is that it *does* exist somewhere" (p. 147). Nevertheless, the interpenetration of the narrator's personal past and present is unwittingly reflected in his description of the furniture of Pnin's 1911 schoolroom. His unrecognized, though brief, mistakes in English usage together with his comparison of Pnin's monoplane with his own suggest how his personal past still emerges in his present stylizations:

. . . through the open door of the schoolroom
I could see a map of Russia on the wall, books
on a shelf, a stuffed squirrel, and a toy
monoplane with linen wings and a rubber motor.
*I had a similar one but twice bigger, bought
in Biarritz. After one had wound up the
propeller for some time, the rubber would
change its manner of twist and develop
fascinating thick whorls which predicted the
end of its tether.* (P. 148, my italics)

Conversely, the narrator denies the unique 'reality' of a specific object, place, or setting. He assumes, for example, that comparable settings retained by memory are interchangeable. Consequently he argues that because of his familiarity with apartments similar to the Pnin residence, he "unconsciously

retained a picture of the Pnin flat that probably corresponds to reality" (p. 147). Furthermore, he ignores the imaginative artifice of his memories of either places or people. Although he implicitly allows that memories may fade, he does not question his own power to reproduce an accurate description of Timofey and his father:

Do I really remember his crew cut, his puffy pale face, his red ears? Yes, distinctly. I even remember the way he imperceptibly removed his shoulder from under the proud paternal hand, while the proud paternal voice was saying: 'This boy has just got a Five Plus (A+) in the Algebra examination.' (P. 148)

Similarly the narrator fails to recognize that his later subjective knowledge of and responses to the adult Timofey may produce imaginative associations rather than exact recall of the young Timofey. The narrator claims that in Pavel Pnin's waiting room in 1911 he witnessed a briefly enacted drama of a cuckolded husband (pp. 146-47). His association of this role with Timofey is made clear in his account of the 1918 theatricals at his aunt's estate to which he was a reluctant audience. Despite the narrator's comment that he took only a "minuscule interest" (p. 149) in Pnin's existence at that time, he nevertheless credits Pnin with the role of the betrayed husband. When, during the next meeting of the two in Paris during the early twenties, the narrator attempts to demonstrate what he sees as "the unusual lucidity and strength of my memory" (p. 150) by describing the previous contacts, Pnin completely denies the 1911 encounter and claims that "he had only acted the part of Christine's father" (p. 150) in the 1918 play. Yet, as always, the narrator questions neither the accuracy nor the imaginative associations of his own representations. Instead, he attributes Pnin's response to Pnin's suppression of personal past--"noticing how reluctant he was to recognize his own past, I switched to another, less personal, topic" (p. 150). Ironically, the narrator's associations of Pnin with betrayed husbands describe the role both he and Eric Wind impose upon Pnin in adult life. Furthermore the suppression of personal

past that the narrator attributes to Pnin is reflected in his own personality both in the private and the public arenas of his life.

The narrator's suppression not only of his past but also of the emotional centre of his "individual reality" is revealed in his relationships with Liza and Pnin during the Paris era. Despite the narrator's intellectual scorn for Liza's artistic pretensions he uses her poems as an excuse to initiate a physical affair that culminates in Liza's attempted suicide. A fortnight later Liza hands the narrator Pnin's letter of proposal in a last bid to obtain some form of emotional response from him:

'I want a last piece of advice from you,'
said Liza in what the French call a 'white'
voice. 'This is an offer of marriage that
I have received. I shall wait till midnight.
If I don't hear from you, I shall accept it.'
(Pp. 152-53)

The narrator's self-seeking use and critical rejection of Liza's claims to commitment on his part are in direct contrast to Pnin's letter of proposal (p. 153) which expresses the all embracing tolerance of Pnin's love for Liza. The narrator's 'indifference' to other people's feelings is further reflected in his parodic depiction of Liza's suicide attempt (p. 152) and her subsequent reaction to Pnin's proposal:

Pnin wrote her a tremendous love letter—
now safe in a private collection—and she
read it with tears of self-pity while
recovering from a pharmacopoeial attempt
at suicide because of a rather silly
affair with a littérateur who is now—
But no matter. Five analysts, intimate
friends of hers, all said: 'Pnin—and a
baby at once.' (P. 38)

Nor does the narrator conceive that his past behaviour has any bearing on his relationship with others in an ongoing present. On meeting the Pnins in Paris several years after their marriage, the narrator, while still intolerant of Liza, sees no barrier towards pursuing a friendship with Pnin even though Liza reveals

that Pnin is now completely informed about the narrator's 'betrayals' of the past:

Liza informed me—with her usual crude candour—that she had 'told Timofey everything'; that he was 'a saint' and had 'pardoned' me. Fortunately, she did not often accompany him to later receptions where I had the pleasure of sitting next to him, or opposite him, in the company of dear friends. (P. 154)

Furthermore, the narrator's inability to recall meetings with Pnin in the New World suggests that his reiterated claims of friendship with Pnin are a distorted version of the relationship rather than part of a mutual and continuing concord. Despite intermittent encounters in the New World the narrator's "only vivid recollection" (p. 155) of Pnin is during a New York bus ride in 1952 after a programme both men had attended commemorating the hundredth anniversary of Gogol's death.

The final pages of *Pnin* reiterate the selective suppressions of the narrator's consciousness. In contrast to Chapter 3 where the narrator coyly plays with the fact that the day described is Pnin's birthday, he fails to recognize that his first public lecture in Waindell on the day of Pnin's departure is once again Pnin's birthday, "Tuesday, February fifteenth" (p. 156). And, just as in Paris, the narrator sees no incongruity in suggesting that Pnin assist him at Waindell. Faced with Pnin's letter of curt dismissal and his obvious desire to avoid a meeting at Waindell, the narrator's inability to understand Pnin is reflected in his response: "His answer surprised and hurt me" (p. 156). Consequently the narrator sees no parallels between Pnin's refusal to work with him and Pnin's reaction to Komarov's attempt to 'author' Pnin by painting him into the faculty club mural of ghostly presences from the past:

Although Komarov belonged to another political faction than Pnin, the patriotic artist had seen Pnin's dismissal an anti-Russian gesture and had started to delete a sulky Napoleon that stood between young, plumpish (now gaunt) Blorenge and young, moustached (now shaven)

Hagen, in order to paint in Pnin; and there was the scene between Pnin and President Poore at lunch—an enraged, spluttering Pnin losing all control over what English he had, pointing a shaking forefinger at the preliminary outlines of a ghostly muzhik on the wall, and shouting that he would sue the college if his face appeared above that blouse. (P. 157)

Even though the narrator recounts Cockerell's comic re-enactment of the incident he cannot see that, like both Cockerell and Komarov, he too may be engaged in transforming Pnin into a figment of his own artistry.

Nevertheless, Nabokov's structuring of *Pnin* draws attention to the narrator's continued confusion of art and life. At the mid point of the narrator's 'biography' his conscious assessments of Victor confuse Victor's 'identity as an artist' and Victor's individuality. Throughout the surrounding halves of the narrative the narrator similarly confuses his own parodic versions of Pnin with Pnin's individuality. And, as we saw, the narrator's stylistic strategies and imaginative re-creation of data conflict with his biographical project. Consequently his assumption of the role of biographer involves a further confusion of art and life, while his stylistic practices constitute an unacknowledged, and perhaps unwitting, attempt to pre-empt the "individual realities" of the people he describes.

Similarly, the narrator confuses exact observation and biographical research with personal memories and versions of Pnin. In Chapter 6 he gives a comic account of how Pnin, "not a very observant man in everyday life" (p. 124), confuses certain American colleagues, so that while Pnin believes he has asked Professor Thomas Wynn, Head of the Ornithology Department, to his party, he has actually invited Wynn's "Pninian Twin" (p. 125), the Professor of Anthropology, Tristram W. Thomas. The narrator suggests that such confusions arise from a lack of exacting observation. In commenting on the apparent occurrence of 'twin personalities,' he describes how both Pnin and himself have been seen by others as interchangeable personalities:

I know, indeed, of a case of triplets at a comparatively small college where, according to its sharp-eyed president, Frank Reade, the radix of the troika was, absurdly enough myself; and I recall the late Olga Krotki once telling me that among the fifty or so faculty members at a Wartime Intensive Language School . . . there were as many as six Pnins, beside the genuine and, to me, unique article. (P. 124)

Here the narrator implies that, even though "sharp-eyed" observers are capable of absurd confusions, his own specialized knowledge exempts him from errors in observing, and therefore describing, the "unique article." Again, however, Nabokov's structuring of *Pnin* suggests the narrator's inability to distinguish between impersonal observation and personal versions of Pnin. The last words of the novel circle back to the first chapter to juxtapose Cockerell's account of the Cremona incident with the narrator's very different version of the same incident. Like Cockerell's party-pieces, the narrator's imitative art reworks, not scholarly observation and research, but personal memories and versions of Pnin. Moreover, the narrator's imitative stylizations suggest how he denies his own potential to evolve an individual style in his artistic portrait of Pnin.

In summation, Nabokov's "architectonics" contribute to his characterization of the narrator by providing a critical perspective on the narrator's stylizations. Unrecognized by the narrator, he is indeed part of a "troika" of personalities, "the radix" of which is the individual style of Pnin. At the end of the novel Pnin's other would-be author, Cockerell, and the narrator are left together with their imitative versions of Pnin while Pnin himself, together with the stray dog he has rescued from Todd Avenue, escape along the unscripted road of life "where there was simply no saying what miracle might happen" (p. 160). And, although the narrator is increasingly disenchanted with Cockerell's imitations, he is blind to his own participation in the "troika." Confronted with Cockerell's endless impersonations of Pnin at the end of the novel, the narrator does ponder the implications of Cockerell's performance:

Finally, the whole thing grew to be such a

bore that I fell to wondering if by some poetical vengeance this Pnin business had not become with Cockerell the kind of fatal obsession which substitutes its own victim for that of the initial ridicule. (P. 158)

Yet he does not wonder about his own comparable "obsession" with Pnin. Nor does he recognize that he is engaged in a more subtle impersonation of Pnin. On the surface he seems to stand in direct contrast to his portrait of Pnin. Whereas he dramatizes the interpenetration of past and present in Pnin's mind and behaviour, he consciously suppresses his own personal past. Whereas he depicts Pnin's "loving heart," he detaches himself from emotional involvements. And while he describes how Pnin consistently rejects authorship, he reveals how his own reputation as "a prominent Anglo-Russian writer" (p. 117) gains him a position re-enacting this public role of *littérateur* at Waindell. However, I suggest that, like Cockerell, the narrator has reached a point where he can only represent an "individual reality" vicariously through his parodic impersonation of Pnin. Significantly perhaps, he is the only one of Nabokov's first-person narrators to have no name, not even an initial.

CHAPTER 6: NOTES

¹ J. Bader, *Crystal Land* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), p. 84.

² Page Stegner, *Escape into Aesthetics* (New York: Dial Press, 1966), p. 97.

³ H. Grabes, *Fictitious Biographies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), p. 51.

⁴ Lucy Maddox in *Nabokov's Novels in English* (London: Croom Helm, 1983) suggests that certain "similarities" between Nabokov's life and his invented narrator's history "do not lead us to conclude, as some readers have done that the narrator *is* Vladimir Nabokov" (p. 89). As we saw in Chapter 3, Nabokov admits to giving away autobiographical details to characters, but he also stresses that he is not to be equated with his characters: "I am very careful to keep my characters beyond the limits of my own identity" (*SO*, p. 14). Moreover, whatever the "similarities" between Nabokov and the narrator, the reader does not conclude that the narrator who, for instance, seduces and abandons Liza in Paris, is Vladimir Nabokov.

⁵ Bader, p. 84.

⁶ L.L. Lee, *Vladimir Nabokov* (Boston, Mass: Twayne Publishers, 1976), pp. 128-31.

⁷ Stegner, pp. 90-101.

⁸ Grabes, p. 46.

⁹ Bader, p. 94.

¹⁰ Grabes, p. 50.

¹¹ Bader, p. 88.

¹² In an interview with Nabokov, Alfred Appel, Jr. refers to the publishing history of *Pnin*:

Four of its seven chapters were published in the *New Yorker* over a considerable period (1953-57), but the all important last chapter, in which the narrator takes control, is only in the book. I'd be most interested to know if the design of *Pnin* was complete while the separate sections were being published, or

whether your full sense of its possibilities occurred later.

Nabokov's reply is unequivocal:

Yes, the design of *Pnin* was complete in my mind when I composed the first chapter which, I believe, in this case was actually the first of the seven I physically set down on paper. (*SQ*, p. 84)

¹³ Lucy Maddox points out, "Two of his [the narrator's] sources of information about Pnin are clearly unreliable—Eric Wind, the psychiatrist for whom Liza left Pnin, and Jack Cockerell, who sees Pnin as a buffoon, the campus character who lends himself well to comic imitation" (p. 88).

¹⁴ Grabes, pp. 48-49.

¹⁵ Grabes ultimately accepts the stream-of-consciousness techniques as an admissible method of biography, arguing that "even thus stepping over the limit might be regarded as a legitimate way of solving the problem that naturally arises in a biography if the subject's inner world is presented—and as a rule the reader is quite willing to accept such liberties" (p. 48). Such a view bypasses the structural distinctions of the text and implicitly equates the narrator with his author, Nabokov. The narrator, however, is not merely a convention or a mouthpiece for Nabokov's created world, he is also a fictional character.

¹⁶ Grabes, p. 47.

¹⁷ Grabes, p. 47.

¹⁸ The narrator's apparent access to Pnin's correspondence with Chateau during the 1930s may arise out of his own contact with Chateau in France during 1935 (p. 104), or it may be a fiction formulated from the evidence of Pnin's letter of proposal to Liza which specifies an instance of Chateau's scholarly refutation of psychotherapeutic theories (p. 153).

¹⁹ Lee, p. 127.

²⁰ W.W. Rowe, in *Nabokov and Others: Patterns in Russian Literature* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1979), points out that the surname of Pnin's boyhood sweetheart, Mira Belochkin refers to squirrels: "'squirrel' is belka in Russian" (p. 128). This may be another possible source of the narrator's association of Pnin with squirrels.

²¹ Lucy Maddox in enumerating the "similarities" between Nabokov and his narrator states, "both are named Vladimir Vladimirovich, and both are amateur lepidopterists" (p. 89). She bases this statement on the conversation at the Pines between Chateau and Pnin, where Chateau, on seeing "a score of small butterflies," remarks "'Pity Vladimir Vladimirovich is not here. . . . He would have told us all about these enchanting insects'" (*P*, p. 107). My own view is that the

narrator as reporter of the scene is a peripheral presence at the Pines. I take Chateau's reference to Vladimir Vladimirovich as an example of the way Nabokov frequently inserts his own name into his novels. I suggest that the narrator of *Pnin* is never named.

²² Nabokov's monism is discussed in Chapter 3 above.

²³ In *Lolita* Humbert Humbert, when hearing children at play, recognizes that he has deprived Lolita's "voice from that concord" (*L*, p. 306).

²⁴ See also Chapters 1 and 3.

²⁵ An interesting contrast exists between the group distinctions of the Old World Russians and their children, and the relationship of Pnin and Victor, who respond to one another, not in terms of group dynamics, but as individuals.

²⁶ In Chapter 4 Pnin tells Victor, "I was a champion of croquet" (p. 88).

²⁷ The direct criticism of Liza is the narrator's, since he uses qualified stream-of-consciousness techniques.

²⁸ The "prominent Anglo-Russian writer" (p. 117) whose services Cockerell is haggling for is, of course, the narrator.

²⁹ Through a mistake in requesting Volume 18, rather than the next issue Volume 19, Pnin himself is the 'unknown' scholar as he finds out when he visits the library (p. 62).

CHAPTER SEVEN

PALE FIRE AND TRANSPARENT THINGS: ANALOGIES AND DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN ART AND LIFE

Pale Fire and *Transparent Things* exemplify the differing narrative approaches of Nabokov's first two English novels. Just as the life and work of Sebastian Knight constitute a focus for V.'s self-revealing 'biography' of his half-brother in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, so in *Pale Fire* John Shade's autobiographical poem provides a basis for the critical commentary of Charles Kinbote whose sycophantic responses to the poet, like V.'s to Sebastian Knight, combine with his solipsistic attempt to transform his personal existence through Shade's art. In *Bend Sinister* and *Transparent Things* Nabokov employs a different approach. Each novel is presented as the acknowledged artifice of an 'omniscient' author, a peripheral if intrusive figure who involves the reader in the processes of authorial composition, while dramatizing characters engaged in non-fictive modes of representation. Rather than consider the narrative approaches of *Pale Fire* and *Transparent Things* in any detail, therefore, I propose to concentrate my discussion on the ways in which Nabokov's structuring of these two novels contributes to his characterizations.

Nabokov's structuring of *Pale Fire* reworks the conventions of fiction and non-fiction in a unique experiment with the form of the novel. He himself points out that "The form of *Pale Fire* is specifically, if not generically, new" (SO, p. 75). He evolves this "new" form by combining the generic characteristics of poetry and of literary exegesis in a novel which challenges traditional expectations of verbal genres while it reuses established conventions of art and of scholarship to portray the consciousness of the two major characters, Shade and

Kinbote. Most immediately, Nabokov's structural design juxtaposes Shade's self-conscious art and Kinbote's supposed 'scholarship.' And while poem and commentary reflect the differing awarenesses of their respective writers, in combination they dramatize the relationship between artist, art work and reader. Nabokov exploits this relationship in two ways. Most obviously, Kinbote's commentary affords the basis for Nabokov's parodic exposure of critical exegesis that confuses art and life by attempting to explicate the art work by reference either to the poet's or the commentator's life.¹ At the same time, Kinbote's use of 'biographical' information establishes him as a mouthpiece for the novel's world. Within the simulated non-fictive context of this world, the conventions of impersonal scholarship provide a critical perspective on Kinbote's representation of biographical as well as aesthetic 'realities.' As a commentary on Shade's poem, then, Kinbote's supposedly non-fictive representations of art and life contrast with Shade's artistic re-creation of literary and autobiographical materials. Thus Nabokov's structural design explores the analogies and the distinctions between literary and non-fictive modes of representation by dramatizing them in his two invented writers' stylizations.

Shade's poem is the centrepiece of Nabokov's novel. The Augustan form and the autobiographical content of the poem are fused into a first-person monologue that produces a self-conscious exploration of stylistic strategies. The aesthetic worlds of previous writers are juxtaposed with Shade's past experiences and fused in the ongoing present of the poem into philosophical musings which continually return Shade to the nature of human existence. On the one hand, Shade reuses the forms and beliefs of previous literature to evolve his own twentieth-century vision. On the other hand, he reworks the details of his own life into a metaphoric dramatization of man in relation to the data of existence. While the poem plays with literary allusions ranging from Shakespeare to Joyce, Shade's extended reincorporation of Pope's *Essay on Man* into a poem of autobiographical experience that echoes Wordsworth's *Prelude* brings together Augustan and Romantic metaphysics, and

balances the Augustan preoccupation with reason and abstraction against the Romantic concern with imaginative response.²

Pope's position in the *Essay on Man* is that the poet's work can provide a paradigm for universal experience by using a knowledge of the actual to abstract an order that displays the ways of God to man. The acceptance of the world as planned by God allows a resolution of earthly suffering and death through the concept of an afterlife or Heaven. By contrast, the Romantic approach to immortality attributes primary significance to the poet's personal responses to the world. Spiritual significance is located in the operations of consciousness and provides intimations of survival after death. Yet in their different ways both Augustan and Romantic views do not distinguish between factual and imaginative versions of existence. Shade "in the framehouse between Goldsworth and Wordsmith" (ll. 48-49) stands apart by parodically opposing Augustan and Romantic metaphysics. The diachronic perspective of his philosophical endeavours to reconcile life with its eventual termination suggests that all such attempts are fictional illusions. The synchronic perspective provided in Shade's personal knowledge of existence distinguishes between the data of his experience and his subjective versions of existence. In the sense that Shade has not created the data of his "given world," he is authored. In the sense that he consciously reconstructs such data in subjective versions of his life he is also an author. Finally, Shade's juxtaposition of a diachronic and a synchronic perspective suggests that, since all man's versions of existence are stylizations, life is a lexical "game of worlds" (l. 819).

Similarly, Shade's structural division of the poem into four cantos together with his use of heroic couplets rework the organization and form of Pope's four epistles, thereby acknowledging the comparable artifice of his own undertaking. In Canto One the abstract canvas of Pope's Epistle One, "Of the Nature and State of Man with Respect to the Universe," is parodically explored by Shade's analytical account of his personal relationship to the data of experience. The first lines of Shade's poem reverse Romantic idealizations of poetic

consciousness by suggesting the destructive power of artistic imagination which does not represent the 'realities' of nature, but rather, as Bader points out, creates a new reality, the work of art.³ Most immediately, however, Shade explores the paradox that even man's direct perceptions of nature constitute a co-existing but separate 'conscious reality' which blends knowledge and imaginative artifice.⁴ First Shade suggests how direct perception provides the materials of consciousness:

All colors made me happy: even gray.
My eyes were such that literally they
Took photographs. (ll. 29-31)

Just as consciousness artificially reproduces such perceptions, so it interweaves past and present knowledge in ongoing individual awareness. The poet's awareness of the passage of time through his relationship to nature, his own failing sight and the young shagbark "now stout and rough" (l. 54), is complemented by his knowledge of man-made changes, the removal of Hazel's swing, the revamped wing of Shade's house, and the technological advances evidenced by "the new TV" (l. 70). Thus within ongoing 'conscious reality' a certain factual permanence is provided through individual memory. However, memory involves imaginative artifice as well as factual information. Shade wryly acknowledges that his few known facts about his parents evoke "a thousand parents" (l. 74) within his consciousness. Moreover, these few known facts about his parents contrast with his personal memories of his Aunt Maud, and with the stylistic reflections of her personality that remain in her old room: "Its trivia create / A still life in her style" (ll. 91-92).

Confronted with deaths of parent figures in his life, Shade, unlike Pope, reverses Augustan metaphysics which seek to immortalize the dead: "My God died young" (l. 99). And, unlike the Romantics, Shade's boyhood experiences reinforce a sense of confinement within nature: "How fully I felt nature glued to me" (l. 102). Whereas Wordsworth views life as a progressive loss of the "intimations of immortality" he perceives in the young child's relation to nature, the young

Shade experiences only the imprisoning artifice of his perceptions of nature, "the painted parchment" (l. 106), which suggests his conscious separation from the independent 'realities' of nature: "For we are most artistically caged" (l. 114). Again, in contrast either to Pope's view that human deformities are part of God's plan, or to Wordsworth's view that the child has a special affinity with nature, Shade suggests how his personal uncouthness restricts his boyhood participation in physical activities. The progression from the opening lines of the Canto to "I was the shadow of the waxwing slain / By feigned remoteness in the windowpane" (ll. 131-32) initiates Shade's description of his physical isolation from others--"I was a cloutish freak" (l. 132). At the same time, his conscious acceptance of his uncouthness is evident in the words, "But really envied nothing" (l. 136). Finally, in a parodic reversal of Wordsworthian imagery, Shade's perception of a man-made clockwork toy, "A tin wheelbarrow pushed by a tin boy" (l. 144), precedes a swoon during which an imaginative dream world provides alluring, but corrupting visions of the boy's relationship to space and time within a state that itself seems a physical intimation of death.

The Wordsworthian opening of Canto Two elaborates Shade's personal preoccupation with immortality. In opposition to Wordsworth's images of the "celestial light" adhering to childhood, Shade recalls the youth's baffled feelings of ignorance and of human conspiracy:

There was a time in my demented youth
When somehow I suspected that the truth
About survival after death was known
To every human being: I alone
Knew nothing, and a great conspiracy
Of books and people hid the truth from me.
(ll. 168-72)

Shade's resolve to explore the mystery of death takes up the subject of Pope's Epistle Two, "Of the Nature and State of Man with Respect to Himself as an Individual," but in place of Pope's generalizing abstractions, Shade's poem focuses on his individual experience, the nature of love and death in his own life. Maud Shade's stroke provides no order or pattern for

understanding since, as Shade reflects, death remains outside the temporal perspective of his own experience:

A syllogism: *other men die; but I
Am not another; therefore I'll not die.*
Space is a swarming in the eyes; and time,
A singing in the ears. In this hive I'm
Locked up. (ll. 213-17)

For Shade, therefore, the Wordsworthian notion of pre-existence is envisaged only as a state in which the absurdities of human existence might have been registered. Alternatively, human attempts to construct figments of a hereafter denote for Shade a failure of imagination, "a domestic ghost" (l. 230). And just as Shade rejects the Augustan belief in a divine order so he is unable to accept poetic imagination as a key to spiritual significance. For him, death poses an opposite problem to the previous literary movements:

How ludicrous these efforts to translate
Into one's private tongue a public fate!
(ll. 231-32)

Thus he articulates a twentieth-century vision of lexical chaos, "*Life is a message scribbled in the dark*" (l. 235). All that survives are the stylistic outlines of man's verbal re-creations: "Dead is the mandible, alive the song" (l. 244).

It follows that whereas Pope sees the ends of Providence in man's imperfections--"see some strange comfort every state attend"⁵--Shade sees no divine plan, but only man's efforts to order or pattern the chaotic data of conscious experience. Shade's personal reconciliation of body and mind as a boy is paralleled by the fusion of the beastly and the beautiful that he sees represented in the union which is achieved through his love for Sybil. But for Shade, unlike the Romantics, there seems to be no plan at work in nature, since his union with the beautiful Sybil produces a daughter, Hazel, who inherits not only Shade's intellectual abilities but also his physical uncouthness. Shade recognizes that it is not nature but his love for his daughter that makes him accept her imperfections:

She was my darling: difficult, morose—

But still my darling. (ll. 357-58)

Shade also sees the pain Hazel experiences from her many social defeats and he believes that it is Hazel's persistent longing for a social acceptance, despite her natural characteristics, that precipitates the human tragedy of her suicide: "I think she always nursed a small mad hope" (l. 383). Shade's account of the night of Hazel's death opposes imaginative with factual experiences to present the way in which nature may contribute to the destruction of an individual. The inclusion of the line from Pope, "See the blind beggar dance, the cripple sing" (l. 419), in Shade's poem stands in ironic juxtaposition to the unspoken despair of Hazel's suicide. The forking of time, which separates Hazel's ride towards death from the illusory scenes of the television her parents watch, is brought together only by the patrol car which Shade would transform into another film scene--"Retake, retake" (l. 487). But just as imaginative experience cannot reverse factual events, so, for Hazel, nature provides no panacea but merely accepts her as the victim of its own processes:

A blurry shape stepped off the reedy bank
 Into a crackling, gulping swamp, and sank.
 (ll. 499-500)

In Canto Three of "Pale Fire," Pope's third Epistle, "Of the Nature and State of Man with Respect to Society," constitutes a backdrop to Shade's reactions to society's 'non-fictive,' secular attempts to confront death. His engagement to lecture at the Institute of Preparation for the Hereafter causes him to examine his personal fear of death. He recognizes that temporal existence involves a constant lineal abandonment of actual experience:

For we die every day; oblivion thrives
 Not on dry thighbones but on blood-ripe lives,
 (ll. 519-20)

Since memory is the only means by which man sustains a sense of personal continuity Shade's fear of death is defined in terms of a possible loss of consciousness:

I'm ready to become a floweret
 Or a fat fly, but never, to forget.
 (ll. 523-24)

By contrast the I.P.H. transfers the patterns of temporal existence to its preparation for the new and timeless state it envisages. The society's absurdities are encapsulated in its concerns: "How not to panic when you're made a ghost" (l. 553), for instance, or "Precautions to be taken in the case / Of freak reincarnation" (ll. 560-61). Moreover, while the I.P.H. recognizes a possible disarrangement of temporal "schedules of sentiment" (l. 569), its domestic conception of afterlife is represented by its advice to the twice-married widower. Shade's rejection of prescription--"But who can teach the thoughts we should roll-call" (l. 597)--returns him to his observation of death, the essential isolation of the individual from other people, which is apparent not only in the deaths of Maud or Hazel Shade, but in all human deaths:

Nor can one help the exile, the old man
 Dying in a motel . . .
 (ll. 609-10)

Society's 'non-fictive' attempts to explicate death, like those of literature, do not provide Shade with any 'knowledge' of an afterlife, but only with verbal images which he reworks in order to describe his ongoing personal responses to Hazel's death:

Who rides so late in the night and the wind?
 It is the writer's grief. It is the wild
 March wind. It is the father with his child.⁶
 (ll. 662-64)

Conversely, Shade's personal image of eternity is not reinforced by the experience of other individuals within society. Shade's vision during a heart attack of a tall white fountain echoes Pope's introductory image of the poetical world he creates in the *Essay on Man*: "I am here only opening the *fountains*, and clearing the passage."⁷ Shade's account of his attempt to verify his vision through Mrs Z. juxtaposes Pope's fountain with Shelley's "Mont Blanc," an allusion that

is made specific in Mrs Z.'s "idiotic" social chat with the poet, "I loved your poem in the *Blue Review*. / That one about *Mon Blon*" (ll. 783-84). The typographical error which has initiated Shade's visit together with the personality of Mrs Z. forces him to confront the illusory significance he has attached to his vision: "Life Everlasting—based on a misprint!" (l. 803). This recognition returns him once more to the data of life. He abandons the search for final answers and attempts instead to discern patterns within the textures of his temporal existence. Shade suggests that, in terms of the non-fictive data of life, he is the product of an unknown author or authors, "Playing a game of worlds" (l. 819) over which he has no control. In applying the art metaphor to the "texture" of existence, however, he depicts himself as a reader who can perceive "a web of sense" (l. 810) in the game:

Yes! It sufficed that I in life could find
Some kind of link-and-bobolink, some kind
Of correlated pattern in the game,
Plexed artistry, and something of the same
Pleasure in it as they who played it found.
(ll. 811-15)

The injunction of Pope's fourth Epistle, "And all our knowledge is, / Ourselves to know,"⁸ is parodically explored in Shade's autobiographical portrait of himself as an artist. The Romantic aspiration of the first lines of Canto Four is undermined by his description of poetic consciousness as "this wonderful machine" (l. 839). Similarly, Shade parodies Neo-classical and Romantic descriptions of their differing authorial "methods." In contrast to either Pope's or Wordsworth's views of poetic inspiration, Shade describes his art as a product of both the unsought and the consciously sought word (ll. 869-72). Thus he rejects established versions of the Muse. Instead, he suggests how the 'authored' dream worlds of sleep which imaginatively recombine his diurnal experiences provide a parodic analogy with his own conscious blending of subjective knowledge and individual fancy in his art. At the same time, Shade points out, the subjective knowledge that he re-creates in "Pale Fire," from the processes of his artistic composition to his physical experiences of shaving, eating, and drinking,

all revolve around the emotional centre of his "individual reality." This emotional centre is reflected in Shade's love for Sybil:

And all the time, and all the time, my love,
 You too are there, beneath the word, above
 The syllable, to underscore and stress
 The vital rhythm. (ll. 949-51)

Shade's account of his own artistic re-creation of experience, leads him to reconsider the textures of life. To the extent that man is the product of an unknown author or authors, man's representations of 'reality' rework his knowledge of a "given world" in a continuing narrative of which he has no precognition. Shade sums up this ongoing process in the lines,

*Man's life as commentary to abstruse
 Unfinished poem.* (ll. 939-40)

Within this 'authored' narrative, however, man's personal stylizations may express his distinctive "individual realities." In arriving at a title for his poem, Shade illustrates how human creativity is both a parasitic activity and a proof of an individual contribution to the data of existing worlds, 'real' or invented:

(But *this* transparent thingum does require
 Some moondrop title. Help me, Will! *Pale Fire.*)
 (ll. 961-62)

Furthermore, Shade's autobiographical poem suggests the analogies between art and life. Within the non-fictive context of life, Shade may express a comparable subjective contribution to the facts of conscious existence through the individual style of his personality. Consequently Shade feels that he understands at least a part of his existence, "only through my art / In terms of combinational delight" (ll. 970-71).

In the final stanzas of "Pale Fire," Shade also suggests how subjective knowledge and imaginative artifice are inter-dependent in his non-fictive as well as his artistic constructs. Although there are no absolutes in life, Shade says he retains

a reasonable certainty about Hazel's continued existence. Similarly, knowledge and imagination combine in Shade's expectations of a forthcoming day: ". . . I am reasonably sure that I / Shall wake at six tomorrow" (ll. 979-80). At the same time, Shade distinguishes between factual and imaginative experiences. The last lines of the poem contrast with the last stanzas of Canto One. The clockwork toy, which precipitated the imaginative "intimations of immortality" that Shade tried to pursue as an adult, is now replaced by Shade's re-creation of the data of direct perception in a personal expression about the yet unfinished poem of his life:

Some neighbor's gardener, I guess—goes by
Trundling an empty barrow up the lane.
(ll. 998-99)

The "architectonics" of Shade's poem and of Kinbote's commentary are equally important. Whereas in the poem Nabokov's structural strategies depict the self-conscious art of Shade—"by far the greatest of invented poets" (SO, p. 59)--in the accompanying commentary they expose the unacknowledged solipsism of Nabokov's "invented commentator" (SO, p. 18).⁹ In contrast to Shade, Kinbote's project is governed by the non-fictive conventions of literary scholarship; he divides his exegesis according to an established format of Foreword, Commentary and Index. However, the progressive development from foreword to index reflects Kinbote's replacement of scholarly information with solipsistic fantasies. Most immediately, the foreword becomes an account of Kinbote's experiences in New Wye and after, while his inversion of scholarly formats is prefigured in his suggestions to the reader:

Although those notes, in conformity with custom, come after the poem, the reader is advised to consult them first and then study the poem with their help, rereading them of course as he goes through its text, and perhaps, after having done with the poem, consulting them a third time so as to complete the picture. (P. 25, my italics)

In complementary fashion, Kinbote's fusion and confusion of art

and life and his view of his own central position in relation to both, is made explicit in the final statement of the foreword:

Let me state that without my notes Shade's text simply has no human reality at all since the human reality of such a poem as his (being too skittish and reticent for an autobiographical work), with the omission of many pithy lines carelessly rejected by him, has to depend entirely on the reality of its author and his surroundings, attachments and so forth, a reality that only my notes can provide. To this statement my dear poet would probably not have subscribed, but, for better or worse, it is the commentator who has the last word. (P. 25, my italics)

This conflict between the conventions which govern Kinbote's scholarly project and his actual stylizations is continually illustrated throughout the commentary. In his role as biographical informant, for instance, Kinbote at times uses the device of recorded conversation in order to portray himself as a Boswell to Shade's Johnson.¹⁰ Moreover, when the scene moves beyond Kinbote's experience, he has no hesitation in creating the dialogue and stage directions of an invented drama script, "The Haunted Barn" (p. 152). Conversely, his 'scholarly translation' of Shade's poem recombines aesthetic and biographical materials in a 'history' of Zembla which purports to be the disguised Kinbote's autobiography. Finally Kinbote's stylizations reflect his obsession to establish his Zemblan fantasy as the source of Shade's "Pale Fire."

The index captures and completes Kinbote's transformation of both "facts of fiction" and biographical data into a solipsistic fantasy. In the index Kinbote presents himself directly as Charles the beloved: the listing for K reads "see Charles II and Kinbote" (p. 241). That both names represent Kinbote is reflected by the way in which the Zemblan characters are referred to, not through their relationship with Charles as in the commentary, but through their relationship to Kinbote: "Alfin, King," for example, is "K's father" (p. 239), William Campbell "K's tutor" (p. 240), and "Conmal, Duke of Aros" is recorded as "K's uncle" (p. 240). The explanatory note at the

beginning of the index reflects Kinbote's transformation of an "apparatus criticus into the monstrous semblance of a novel" (p. 71); the main 'biographical' personages of the commentary, two of whom do not feature in Shade's poem (Grey and Kinbote), are now explicitly termed characters:

The italicized numerals refer to the lines in the poem and the comments thereon. *The capital letters G, K, S (which see) stand for the three main characters in this work.* (P. 239, my italics)

In addition, the index suggests how the three main biographical subjects in Kinbote's commentary, Jack Grey, Kinbote and Shade, have become the stock characters of a melodrama: Gradus, the assassin; Charles, the beloved king; Shade, the hero poet who, like the Zemblan poet Romulus Arnor, "perishes in the clash between two figments" (p. 236).

Similarly, the index reflects the way in which Kinbote's solipsistic fantasies replace biographical information about Shade. Shade, his daughter Hazel, and Sybil, who is cursorily dismissed with the entry "Shade, Sybil, S's wife, passim" (p. 246), are the only New Wye inhabitants to be listed. Where references to Shade's academic contemporaries occur, Kinbote draws attention to the fact that such people do not merit an individual listing, but are only peripheral figures in *Kinbote's* life. The entry for Kinbote includes the following examples:

—his contempt for Prof. H (not in the Index), 377;
—his final rupture with E (not in the Index), 894;
—he and Shade shaking with mirth over titbits in a college text book by Prof. C (not in the Index), 929. (Pp. 242-43)

The four listings which apparently refer to existing figures outside Zembla are either incognitos or 'known' through books: Botkin, V. is Kinbote's New Wye incognito; Flatman, Thomas is an English poet apparently invented by Kinbote; Lane, Franklin Knight is an American statesman who wrote the little known book of letters Kinbote reads in his Cedarn cabin;¹¹ and Marcel, as Kinbote himself points out, is Proust's "not always plausible central character" (p. 244). All other listings of either

people or places refer to the society and geographical settings of Zembla while the word Zembla is the final entry in the index.¹² Thus the index completes the solipsistic developments of Kinbote's fantasies.¹³

Nabokov's structural design not only draws attention to the differences between Shade's artistic and Kinbote's 'non-fictive' use of the conventions of art and life, but also juxtaposes the reasoned development and exhibited scholarship of Shade's art with the contradictions and flawed scholarship of Kinbote's exegesis. Kinbote's immediate categorization on first reading the poem as "an autobiographical, eminently Appalachian, rather old-fashioned narrative in a neo-Popean prosodic style" (p. 233) is contradicted in the foreword by his claim that the poem is "too skittish and reticent for an autobiographical work" (p. 25). Often he destroys his own analysis of Shade's images by the addition of irrelevant personal 'insights' into the people described: although he analyses the pun incorporated in the doctor's response to Shade's claim that he was dead during a heart-attack--"'Not quite; just half a shade,' he said" (l. 728)--Kinbote volunteers an irrelevant, personal objection: "Knowing the particular medical man who treated my friend at the time, I venture to add that he is far too stodgy to have displayed any such wit" (p. 200). Conversely, while Kinbote continually makes claims for the importance of biographical information, he dismisses the hunt for source materials when it suits him: of lines 747-48 which refer to "a story in a magazine about Mrs Z.," for instance, Kinbote states, "Anybody having access to a good library could, no doubt, easily trace that story to its source and find the name of that lady; but such humdrum potterings are beneath true scholarship" (p. 202).¹⁴

The inadequacies of Kinbote's critical scholarship are particularly evident in his approach to Shade's use of personal and literary allusions. Despite either Kinbote's academic background--he is "the author of a remarkable book of surnames" (p. 210)--or his acknowledgement of Harley's information that Shade's father had a bird named for him "Bombycilla shadei" (p. 82), Kinbote fails to recognize the play Shade makes on

waxwing until the compilations of the index force it to his attention:

Waxwings, birds of the genus Bombycilla,
1-4, 131, 1000; Bombycilla shadei, 71;
interesting association belatedly
realized. (P. 247)

Comparable limitations are evident in Kinbote's approach to Shade's use of literary allusions. Although Kinbote points out that the title of Shade's essays, "The Untamed / Seahorse" (ll. 671-72), is a reference to Browning's "My Last Duchess," he fails to comment on Shade's parodic reversal of "taming a seahorse," which in Browning's poem reflects the Duke of Ferrara's attempts to control life by transforming his wife into an art object. Instead Kinbote denounces Shade's practice of using literary allusions for titles:

See it and condemn the fashionable device
of entitling a collection of essays or a
volume of poetry—or a long poem, alas—
with a phrase lifted from the more or less
celebrated poetical work of the past.
Such titles possess a specious glamor
acceptable maybe in the names of vintage
wines and plump courtesans but only
degrading in regard to the talent that
substitutes the easy allusiveness of
literacy for original fancy and shifts onto
a bust's shoulders the responsibility for
ornateness since anybody can flip through
A Midsummer-Night's Dream or *Romeo and
Juliet*, or, perhaps, the *Sonnets* and take
his pick. (P. 189)

Ironically, not only does the name of Kinbote's 'kingdom,' Zembla, derive from Pope but Kinbote's 'history' of Zembla echoes Shakespeare's historical-political plays.¹⁵ Furthermore, Kinbote's 'creation' of the three main characters of his commentary, provides an unwitting illustration of the comic insight of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*--"The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact" (Act V, sc i, 11. 7-8). Finally in his search for the title of Shade's poem Kinbote unwittingly refers to the correct Shakespearean source, *Timon of Athens*.¹⁶ At the same time, his inability to

recognize this source illustrates his mistranslations of both 'real' and invented worlds. Absurdly, he 'acknowledges' such mistranslations by 'giving them away' to his fictional uncle, Conmal (p. 66).

Kinbote also attempts to alter the documentation of "Pale Fire." The role of scholarly informant demands that Kinbote's editorial comments be scrupulously imitative and controlled by the existing text of the poem. However, in the foreword he claims that one line of Shade's poem remained to be written, "(namely verse 1000) which would have been identical to line 1" (p. 14). In the commentary he discusses l. 1000 as if it were indeed part of the poem. This addition typifies Kinbote's negation of punctuation and meaning. Line 999 ends with a full stop, while the whole of the final stanza dramatizes Shade's view of life as a commentary to an unfinished poem.¹⁷

Kinbote's tampering with the text is not confined to 'Shadean' additions, however. Kinbote's obsession is to establish his influence on poet and poem by proving that his 'history' of Zembla constitutes Shade's major source material, yet the only evidence he can produce of any possible relationship is Shade's one use of the Popean word, "Zembla" (l. 937), and the draft variants. Most immediately these drafts, regardless of their authorship, are not part of Shade's completed poem. In the foreword Kinbote describes Shade's practice of destroying all drafts but claims Shade had delayed destruction of twelve. In the commentary Kinbote admits that the primary reflections of his Zembla are to be found not in the poem but in the drafts: "Here and there I discovered in it and especially, especially in the invaluable variants, echoes and spangles of my mind" (p. 233). In the very next paragraph he adds, "Mrs Shade will not remember having been shown by her husband who 'showed her everything' one or two of the precious variants" (p. 233). But it is the index entry under variants that strengthens the implication that they are Kinbote's creations. Not twelve, but seventeen draft versions are listed. Of these, the three that most directly repeat the Zemblan narrative are actually attributed to Kinbote:

. . . the Zemblan king's escape (K's contribution, 8 lines), 70; the Edda (K's contribution, 1 line), 79; . . . children finding a secret passage (K's contribution, 4 lines), 130.¹⁸ (P. 247)

Two other variants are accompanied by the bracketed statement "(possible allusion to K)." Both are totally opposed to the anti-Popean vision of Shade's poem. The first (l. 231, commentary, p. 134) extols an afterlife which reconciles the pains of earthly existence and particularly of deranged minds who resort to suicide.¹⁹ The second (l. 417, commentary, p. 161) echoes Kinbote's personal problem with the loud music outside his Cedarn motel room—"I fled upstairs at the first quawk of jazz." It then adds a further line of Pope to Shade's one line quotation, "The sot a hero, lunatic a king" which epitomizes Kinbote's Zemblan vision. And in contrast to Shade's statement that Pope's first line, "See the blind beggar dance, the cripple sing," has "the vulgar ring / Of its preposterous age" (ll. 420-21), Kinbote describes the two lines from Pope as a reflection of society's indifference to physical and mental deformities—"Smack of their heartless age" (p. 161).

The other variants all similarly evidence Kinbote's contributions and suggest his inability to understand either the methods or the statements of Shade's poem. In contrast to Shade's subtle play on the association of his name with waxwings, Kinbote produces a variant to line 275 which attempts to dismiss Shade's description in the poem of his marriage to Sybil, and, at the same time, represents a near miss in terms of both association and pun:

I like my name: Shade, *Ombre*, almost 'man'
In Spanish . . .
One regrets that the poet did not pursue
this theme—and spare his reader the
embarrassing intimacies that follow. (Pp. 139-40)

Alternatively, in a variant to lines 90-93 Kinbote reverses the images through which Shade describes the continuing evidence of Maud Shade's personality.²⁰ Shade's picture of the "trivia" of Maud's room as "A still life in her style" (l. 92) is changed by Kinbote into images of death:

In the draft instead of the final text:

..... her room
 We've kept intact. Her trivia for us
Retrace her style: the leaf sarcophagus
(A Luna's dead and shriveled-up cocoon).
 (P. 93, my italics)

The sarcophagus is a stone coffin "so called because it was made of stone which, according to Pliny, consumed the flesh in a few weeks,"²¹ while Shade's account of Maud's verse book opened "at the Index (Moon, Moonrise, Moor, Moral)" (ll. 94-95), becomes Kinbote's image of the dead remains of a moth.

Perhaps the most revealing variant, which shows Kinbote's additions to Pope as well as to Shade's poem, is a variant to Canto Four designated in Kinbote's index "parody of Pope, 895-899" (p. 247). The actual lines of Shade's poem parodically describe his co-existent awareness of his physical as well as his intellectual activities while shaving. Kinbote's commentary is as follows:

Instead of these facile and revolting lines,
 the draft gives:

895 I have a certain liking, I admit,
 For Parody, that last resort of wit;
 'In nature's strife when fortitude prevails
 The victim falters and the victor fails.'
 899 Yes, reader, Pope. (P. 211)

As usual Kinbote reacts against Shade's undercutting of any romanticized view of the artist. Kinbote's rejection of the actual lines of the poem suggests his failure to understand parody. In his response to the 'Romantic' opening of Canto Four, Kinbote complains that Shade does not fulfil the promise of the first lines: "Instead of the wild poetry promised here. we get a jest or two, a bit of satire . . ." (p. 207). In his variant, therefore, Kinbote attempts to dismiss Shade's methods as well as those of Pope by inventing Shade's view of Popean parody as "that last resort of wit." Nabokov himself points out Kinbote's authorship of the variant. When in an interview Nabokov was asked the unwary question "Why in *Pale Fire* do you call parody the 'last resort of wit'?" his answer makes it clear that the words are Kinbote's and are a reflection of Kinbote's character: "It is Kinbote speaking. There are people

whom parody upsets" (SO, p. 77). The illustrative 'quotation' from Pope within the variant is similarly Kinbote's contribution. While it imitates Pope's style it is not from the *Essay on Man*, but rather echoes lines from Pope's "The Dying Christian to his Soul": Kinbote's words "In nature's strife" are taken from Pope's "Cease, fond Nature, cease thy strife" (l. 5), while the final lines of Pope's poem, "O grave! Where is thy Victory? / O Death, where is thy sting?" are a possible source both for Kinbote's line, "The victim falters and the victor fails," and for Kinbote's reiterated view, the "anti-Darwinian aphorism: The one who kills is *always* his victim's inferior" (p. 185). Together the two lines of 'quotation' in the variant are not parodic, but are a contradictory acclamation of fortitude. At the same time the lines stand as a synopsis of Kinbote's version of the events which result in Shade's death. The last line of the variant, "Yes, reader, Pope," employs the technique, never used by Shade in his poem but frequently evidenced in Kinbote's commentary, of directly addressing the reader. That Kinbote attempts to attribute the supposed 'quotation' within the variant to Pope indicates the directly fraudulent nature of the 'scholarship' with which he attempts to disguise his own imitative production of all the variants.

The first-person autobiographical mode and data of John Shade's poem constitute a rationale for Kinbote's inclusion of biographical information throughout his commentary. As I suggested earlier, Kinbote functions as an informant about Shade's life and the non-fictive world of the novel of which both men are part. However, like V. in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, Kinbote's practices go well beyond providing biographical information about Shade. Unrecognized by Kinbote, his first-person accounts of his New Wye contacts with Shade not only establish the differences between the two men but also present Kinbote's unwitting revelation of his own character.

Despite Kinbote's sense of personal identification with Shade, the poet, the two men manifest antithetical personalities. From their appearance, to the food they eat, to their sexual activities the two men are physical opposites. Ellen Pifer

points out the way in which Shade and Kinbote are emotional opposites also.²² From Shade's love for Sybil, to his unselfish response to Kinbote's outburst of tears on the telephone (p. 203) and his final attempt to pull Kinbote away from the line of Jack Grey's fire (p. 231), Shade's life demonstrates concern and feeling for other people. By contrast Kinbote is an embodiment of self-love. He exploits Shade's weakness for alcohol even though he knows it may be physically harmful to the poet; he longs for Shade to have another heart attack so that he can act the role of the poet's healer; and when Shade is actually shot Kinbote's first and main concern is not for Shade's person but for hiding and securing the manuscript of Shade's poem for himself. Ellen Pifer neatly sums up Kinbote's self-love and solipsism when she states that "The man who narcissistically perceives others only as reflections of himself is bound to prove indifferent to their fate as unique beings."²³

The differences between Shade and Kinbote are forcefully reflected in their mental attitudes. Shade delights in his own observations of the natural world whereas Kinbote is primarily interested in "Tom-peeping" (*SO*, p. 79).²⁴ Shade's interest in the natural world is complemented by the desire for exact information which is an aspect of his friendship with Hentzner: "Delighting as he did in the right word, he esteemed Hentzner for knowing 'the names of things'" (p. 148). However, when Shade attempts to share such knowledge with Kinbote the latter is merely frustrated since he is,

. . . considerably more interested in discussing with him [Shade] literature and life than in being told that the 'diana' (presumably a flower) occurs in New Wye together with the 'atlantis' (presumably another flower), and things of that sort. (P. 136)

The two men also reveal very different attitudes to literature. As with the natural world, Shade is concerned to study the textual details of the art work and totally rejects symbol hunting, on the one hand, and realist-based value judgements on the other: "When I hear a critic speaking of an author's sincerity I know that either the critic or author is

a fool" (p. 126). Kinbote's stated agreement with this view masks a contrary approach. Apart from the continuing evidence of the commentary itself, Kinbote's lack of concern for scholarly information and exactitude is hinted at in his references to the Head of the Russian Department, Professor Pnin, which are accompanied by the remark that "happily, Prof. Botkin, who taught in another department, was not subordinated to that grotesque 'perfectionist'" (p. 125).²⁵ That Kinbote's concern is not with gaining an increased knowledge of either non-fictional or aesthetic realities, but rather with the power of art to transform his own personal existence is suggested during a reported conversation in which Kinbote offers Shade the story of Zembla to use in "Pale Fire":

'That's all very well, Charles. But there are just two questions. How can you know that all this intimate stuff about your rather appalling king is true? And if true, how can one hope to print such things about people who, presumably, are still alive?'

'My dear John,' I replied gently and urgently, 'do not worry about trifles. Once transmuted by you into poetry, the stuff *will* be true, and the people *will* come alive.' (P. 170)

In my view, Kinbote's confusion of art and life is related to his attitudes to language. Robert Alter points out, "The Goldsworths, whose house Kinbote is renting, are perceived by their tenant as an 'alphabetic family.'" ²⁶ My suggestion is that, although Kinbote 'knows' the shapes of words, he does not regard language as a 'scientific' or precise medium for non-fictional representations of existing 'realities.' As we have seen, he cannot understand Shade's exacting concern to know "the right word" or "the names of things," but would prefer to discuss generalities of "life and literature" (p. 148). Nor does he follow Shade's resistance to imprecise or generalized uses of words which often embody the speaker's prejudices; instead he wants to understand Shade's "artistic objection to 'colored'" (p. 173). And he scoffs uneasily at Judge Goldsworth's domestic index until, after he takes Shade on a

tour of inspection, Shade's "robust hilarity dissipated the atmosphere of *damnum infectum* in which [Kinbote] was supposed to live" (p. 70).

Kinbote's mental attitudes underlie his inability to use language to represent his own "individual reality." The imitative stylizations of his personality reflect his desire to be authored by others. In metaphysics, he clings to the unacknowledged fictions of established religion. Whereas Shade rejects the doctrine of original sin--"Personally, I am with the old snuff-takers: *l'homme est né bon*"--and formulates a personal morality for life, Kinbote accepts the doctrine of Divine Will and a Judgement Day so that he is tormented by his own feelings of guilt. In life, Kinbote's private fear of insanity is temporarily overcome by Shade's 'authorship.' Shade's objection that an old man who thinks himself God and starts redirecting trains is not a "loony" as Mrs H. claims, but "a fellow poet," is immediately taken up by Kinbote who tells Mrs H. that "We all are, in a sense, poets, Madam" (p. 188). Finally, of course, Kinbote's desire to be authored underlies his obsession with both Shade and Shade's poem.²⁷

In seeking to prove that he has provided Shade with the supposed materials for "Pale Fire" Kinbote turns his personal 'autobiography' into the purported history of Zembla. Even in this Kinbote imitates other people's fictions. His 'history of Zembla' recombines the images of previous literature from Shakespearean drama to stock elements of political intrigue to John Shade's poem. Paradoxically his imitative stylizations suggest the very features of his personal existence that he seeks to transform through art and through his relationship with a contemporary artist, John Shade.

At the outset of his 'history' Kinbote shows that, in contrast to Shade, he does not understand the way artistic worlds re-create materials from other worlds, 'real' or invented. In the Zemblan palace he describes the artist Eystein's insertion of a decoration "which was really made of the material elsewhere imitated by art" as an "essential flaw" in Eystein's talent (p. 106). That he immediately goes on to describe the independent aesthetic reality of art is ironic

in terms of his desire for a poet who will make his existence "true" and the people "come alive" (p. 170) by reworking the materials of his 'history' of Zembla:

. . . 'reality' is neither the subject nor the object of true art which creates its own special reality having nothing to do with the average 'reality' perceived by the communal eye. (P. 106)

Conversely, Kinbote shows no awareness that his 'history' reworks previous art and incorporates a Popean metaphysic in a Shakespearean political canvas. A further irony is that Kinbote's Zemblan characterizations do not simply replace the 'real' with imitative fictions but, unrecognized by Kinbote, they reveal his personal attempts to deny the features of his "individual reality." Most immediately, Kinbote's assassin, Gradus, is a fictional embodiment of physicality. Kinbote's narrative rids Gradus of heterosexual desires (p. 199), and also of spiritual or moral considerations: "Spiritually he did not exist. Morally he was a dummy pursuing another dummy" (p. 218). He is described as an "automatic man" (p. 219) who in bringing death to king or poet is like the clockwork toy that precipitated Shade's boyhood intimations of immortality: "Mere springs and coils produced the inward movements of our clockwork man" (p. 123). In addition Kinbote states that "our half-man was also half-mad" (p. 219). In other words, Gradus reflects the physical and mental features that Kinbote wishes to deny in his own life. Similarly, Gradus's lack of conscience suggests Kinbote's desire to free himself from the tormenting guilts which impinge upon his solipsism through an act of physical destruction.

Opposed to Gradus is Charles the Beloved, the scholar-king born the same year as Gradus, 1915. On the one hand, Charles is a homosexual who is pressured into a heterosexual marriage which is neither physically consummated nor emotionally unified. On the other hand, he is a hero who escapes a network of political intrigue with the help of loyal supporters who are adept at acting out impersonations of the king. Moreover Charles and the 'marriage' are Kinbote's reworked version not only of his own homosexuality, but of the way in which Shade's poem

describes his marriage to Sybil. At the outset the two couples are juxtaposed: "John Shade and Sybil Swallow (see note to line 247) were married in 1919, exactly three decades before King Charles wed Disa, Duchess of Payn" (p. 139). Sybil and Disa are both twenty-one when they marry. And Kinbote claims that even though Sybil was twice Disa's age when "Pale Fire" was written, "Disa at thirty, when last seen in September 1958, bore a singular resemblance not, of course, to Mrs Shade as she was when I met her, but to the idealized and stylized picture painted by the poet in those lines of *Pale Fire*" (p. 164). Like Sybil, Disa loves her husband, despite the king's betrayals and his direct avowal that "he did not love her" (p. 167). Kinbote can only depict any love or remorse towards Disa by the king through the "dreaming self" (p. 166) of Charles. And although the sleeping Charles echoes the emotions of Shade's artistic portrait in "Pale Fire" of his love for Sybil, the king's "heartrending dreams" fade throughout the day to glancing reflections "not affecting at all his attitude towards the real Disa" (p. 166). Charles, like his perpetrator Kinbote, lacks any emotional feeling for others. Both Charles and Gradus, then, suggest aspects of Kinbote's personality.

Finally, the activities of Gradus in the glass business where he "started as a maker of Cartesian devils" (p. 122) suggest Kinbote's attempts throughout his "autobiographical" history of Zembla to sustain a Cartesian split between the intellectual qualities depicted in Charles and the physicality of Gradus. Kinbote's constant rejection of the character of Gradus throughout his narrative and his idealization of the intellectual Charles once more indicate his desire to transform the components of his "individual reality." That Charles is depicted as king, scholar, hero, impersonator, but not poet, and that Gradus is only a clockwork man, finally suggests Kinbote's personal need to be authored by other artists. With the death of Shade, Kinbote is left without his poet. He can and does rework the data of Shade's poem, but he cannot continue his imitative stylizations in an ongoing present without an author and a script.

The 'real-life' tragedy of Shade who is killed by Jack Grey

in mistake for Judge Goldsworth not only provides the narrative climax for Kinbote's Zemblan history, it also precipitates the paradoxical tragedy of a man who formulates constant incognitos for himself in order to disguise his "individual reality," but who finally commits suicide because he cannot continue to exist other than as a scripted personality. In the last paragraph of his commentary Kinbote writes, "My notes and self are petering out" (p. 235), and then, "My work is finished. My poet is dead" (p. 236).

Within life Kinbote is left with only one continuing author to turn to:

God will help me, I trust, to rid myself of
any desire to follow the example of two
other characters in this work. I shall
continue to exist. (P. 236)

For Kinbote, however, "God" is the author of a non-fictive world that Kinbote can never accept. He turns back to the two people whom he has always vaguely recognized mirror certain aspects of himself, Hazel Shade and Jack Grey/Gradus, both of whom have destroyed their ongoing "individual realities" through suicide. Kinbote finally follows their example. Moreover, even in approaching suicide, he attempts to transform his actions. He aligns himself not with the insanity of Jack Grey, nor with the emotional despair of Hazel, but with his own index version of Hazel's death:

Shade, Hazel, S's daughter, 1934-1957;
deserves great respect, having preferred
the beauty of death to the ugliness of
life. (P. 245)

To sum up: Nabokov's structural design establishes a critical perspective on the stylizations of his "invented poet[s] and "invented commentator" (*SO*, p. 59). This perspective draws attention to the way in which the opening lines of Shade's poem, "I was the shadow of the waxwing slain / By the false azure in the windowpane" (ll. 1-2), acknowledge the destructive potential of man's conscious constructs, while initiating Shade's parodic exploration of the blend of subjective knowledge and imaginative artifice in all man's representations of existence,

literary and non-fictional. Shade's self-conscious art describes how his search for final answers about life and death develops into a concern for the textures of conscious existence that incorporates Shade's distinctions between imaginative and factual experiences. At the same time Shade's art evolves an individual style which expresses his 'identity as a writer.' And complementing Shade's artistic stylizations, the biographical picture of him we gain from the commentary suggests how, in life, his personality reflects a comparable "individual reality." By contrast, Kinbote's description of Gradus, the automatic man--"In the vicinity of Lex he lost his way among steep tortuous lanes" (p. 157)--suggests the confusion of art and life that is reflected throughout his commentary. The critical perspective Nabokov builds into the "architectonics" of the novel reveals how Kinbote's personal but imitative stylizations attempt to suppress not only the independent reality of Shade's poem, but also Kinbote's "individual reality." "The miracle of a few written signs" (p. 227) which can express an individual contribution to the data of existence, in Kinbote's representations become a destructive rather than a creative force, which, as we have seen, contribute to his eventual suicide.

Nabokov's structuring of his penultimate English novel, *Invitation to a Beheading*, combines a self-conscious commentary on the relationship between an author, his main character, and his reader with a parodic reworking of the conventions of the "non-fiction novel." In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams describes the "nonfiction novel" as follows:

A recent offshoot of the historical novel is the form that one of its innovators, Truman Capote, named the *nonfiction novel*. This form uses a variety of novelistic techniques to render recent historical events, and is based not only on historical records, but often on personal interviews with the chief agents. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) and Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* (1979) are instances of this mode, sometimes called also the "new journalism"; both these books offer a detailed study of the life, personality, and actions of murderers, based

on a sustained series of prison interviews with the protagonists themselves.²⁸

In *Transparent Things*, published in 1972, Nabokov reworks this "nonfiction" form by having Mr R., an intrusive author, who is also a character in his own omniscient narrative, describe the 'history' and personality of his former proof-reader, Hugh Person, a man "tried twice for throttling an American girl" (*TT*, p. 100). This delightfully parodic narrative structure is complemented by an authorial commentary which invites the reader to consider the processes of consciousness involved in everything from the artistic re-creation of 'history,' to Hugh Person's personality, to the reader's relationship to the novel's specific world. At the same time, in drawing attention to the analogies and the distinctions between novelistic realism and non-fictive representations of "so-called 'real life,'" Nabokov challenges anti-empirical efforts to attach 'truths' to man's experience of either fictive or dream worlds, the sort of efforts made by literary movements in revolt against realism such as expressionism and symbolism, or, at the level of non-fictive representation, by the psychiatric analysis of 'subconscious' experiences such as dreams.

The last five and the first three chapters of *Transparent Things* constitute a circular frame for the characterizations of the novel.³⁰ The main narrative event within this frame occurs in the last pages of the novel, the death of a man during a fire in a Swiss hotel. The last lines of *Transparent Things* which, as in *Bend Sinister*, describe the death of the main character, circle back to the opening lines of the novel, the invented author's selection of this "person" to be the subject of a nonfiction novel: "Here's the person I want. Hullo, person! Doesn't hear me" (p. 7). Before proceeding with a 'historical' re-creation of events, however, the author suggests how, at the start of the novel, for both author and reader the lineal progression towards the descriptions of the main character's death and the end of the novel, parallels the lineal progression of temporal existence in which "the future is but a figure of speech, a specter of thought" (p. 7).

In an implicit warning to the reader, the authorial voice

suggests that, "Perhaps if the future existed, concretely and individually . . . the past would not be so seductive" (p. 7).³¹ The recognition that within a continuing present the reader shares the same potential for an individual reconstruction of data as the author of a "nonfiction novel" is initiated by the textual change from the authorial "I" to the first-person plural:

When *we* concentrate on a material object, whatever its situation, the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into the history of that object. Novices must learn to skim over matter if they want matter to stay at the exact level of the moment. Transparent things through which the past shines. (P. 7)

Throughout the novel transparency is used as a metaphor for the "nowness" of consciousness. At the same time "transparent things" provides an image which suggests the relationship between consciousness and the data of ongoing perception. To the perceiving consciousness all natural and man-made objects, from "a hillside stone" (p. 7) to the "artificial matter" (p. 8) of this novel, have a "veneer of immediate reality":

A thin veneer of immediate reality is spread over natural and artificial matter, and whoever wishes to remain in the now, with the now, on the now, should please not break its tension film. (Pp. 7-8)

As we saw in Part One of this study, Nabokov suggests that in order to study an object in any world, natural or artificial, an observer must use "impersonal imagination" and distinguish the independent reality of the observed object or "transparent thing" from his own personal "imaginary, but generally far less plausible, world" (*SO*, p. 263). At the beginning of *Transparent Things*, I suggest, the reader is instructed to remain with the "nowness" of observing the fictive world. In this way, what Charles Kinbote refers to as "The miracle of a few written signs" (*PF*, p. 227) unfolds "the specific world that the author places at his [the reader's] disposal" (*LL*, p. 4). The ideal reader, then, must "stay at the exact level of the moment" in

order to observe, "Transparent things through which the past shines" (p. 7). The authorial voice describes the alternative:

Otherwise the inexperienced miracle-
worker will find himself no longer
walking on water but descending upright
among staring fish. More in a moment.
(P. 8)

At this point, I will attempt to clarify the way in which Nabokov's structural strategies play upon the analogies between different but co-existing states of consciousness. The reader enters the fictional world by a mental manoeuvre to a different state of consciousness that, at the same time, does not negate his ongoing personal world or "individual reality." Similarly the author composes his fictional world through a mental manoeuvre to a different state of consciousness that does not negate his ongoing "individual reality." Nabokov presents us with a further twist to these analogies between reader and author. The invented author of Nabokov's "nonfiction novel" is also a minor character who, like many of the novel's characters, 'dies' in the course of the narrative. In this sense his mental manoeuvre to a different state of consciousness does not negate either his commentary on or 'identity' within the fictional world; rather he also becomes one of the possible "ghosts" or observers who "will keep intruding upon the plot" (*SO*, p. 196).³²

At the same time Nabokov's structuring of the novel reworks the distinctions between artistic and non-fictive representations. R.'s commentary describes an ongoing process of composition that involves the artistic strategies of omniscient narration and qualified stream-of-consciousness techniques. However, R. is a narrator who is engaged in rendering historical events that have occurred in the simulated non-fictive context of a world in which he is, or has been, a member; consequently, to reconstruct his 'history' R. must involve himself in "the ooze of the past" (*SO*, p. 195). In *Strong Opinions* Nabokov describes R.'s acts of "sinking into . . . history" as "a falling through the present's 'tension film'" which constitutes "the structural knot of the story"

(*SO*, p. 194). Furthermore, the structural distinctions between R.'s ongoing artistic techniques and his 'non-fictive history' are incorporated into the juxtaposed tenses of the commentary and the narrative: as H. Grabes points out, "A change of tense separates the narrator's remarks from the rest of the story: the narrative appears in the traditional past tense, whereas the comments are in the present tense."³³

Comparable distinctions between R.'s 'identity as a writer' and his personality within the novel's world are reflected in his style. In R.'s ongoing commentary, his authorial voice is consistently correct. Within R.'s representation of himself as a personality who is also an artist in the novel's world, the stylistic surfaces of R.'s verbalizations fluctuate. Nabokov points out that as an American writer of German extraction Mr R. "writes English more correctly than he speaks it. In conversation R. has an annoying habit of introducing here and there the automatic 'you know' of the German émigré, and more painfully yet, of misusing, garbling, or padding the commonest American cliché" (*SO*, p. 195). Whenever R. depicts himself as a character within the narrative his conversational idiosyncrasies accompany him into the text: "My liver you know was holding something against me" (p. 35) he tells Hugh when they first meet "in the flesh" (p. 34). At the same time, R.'s spoken utterances often reflect the inventive artifice of his books:

The streak of nasty inventiveness so conspicuous in his writings also appeared in the prepared parts of his speech, as when he said, as he did now, that far from 'looking fit' he felt more and more a creeping resemblance to the cinema star Reubenson who once played old gangsters in Florida-staged films; but no such actor existed. (P. 35)

In order to portray himself as a character R. realizes the structural knot of the story by reconstructing the past within the ongoing present of his stylizations. His authorial voice using the present tense introduces a synopsis of his own history with the words, "This part of our translucing is pretty boring,

yet we must complete our report" (p. 37). R. is depicted as "a sentimental lecher" (p. 37) whose fourth and final failed marriage is distinguished by the obsession which he develops for his stepdaughter, Julia Moore. Within R.'s personal past Hugh Person has been a subsidiary and fleeting presence:

In the midst of all this, our Person, in his discreet little way (though actually he was half an inch taller than big R.), had happened to nibble, too, at the corner of the crowded canvas. (P. 37)

Hugh Person's contact with R.'s 'history' is through his position as R.'s proof-reader and through his having on his one night with Julia "embraced a great writer's sweetheart" (p. 40). Since R. is this 'great writer,' his history includes a list of past publications, one of which, *Figures in a Golden Window*, said to be "the best of our author's novels" (p. 37), contains a scene in which the narrator's daughter "sets her new dollhouse on fire and the whole villa burns down" (p. 31). This novel assumes a comparable function to R. in the narrative: Hugh guides it into publication; it initiates his conversation with Armande on their first meeting; Armande approaches the book as another of those "surrealistic novels of the poetic sort" (p. 31) whereas Hugh terms it "all rather symbolic" (p. 31); and it represents the first example of fire that recurrently features throughout the narrative. That the author of *Figures in a Golden Window* is concerned not with surrealism, nor with symbols, private or public, but with a form of 'historical,' though artistic re-creation, however, is suggested in R.'s second meeting "in the flesh" with Hugh Person. At this meeting R. defends and describes his artistic re-creation of biographical personages, "too recognizable people," by arguing that any rewriting to disguise such characters "was tantamount to destroying the living prototype" (p. 73). R.'s concern with art as a metaphoric re-creation of life is summed up in the title of his novel *Tralatitons*, which he refuses to give up, explaining that it "is a perfectly respectable synonym of the word 'metaphor'" (p. 73).

R., however, like "Adam von Librikov" (p. 78) in his

Tralatitons, is only a minor and peripheral participant in the narrative of *Transparent Things*.³⁴ The structural knot of the story is more fully illustrated in the characterization of Hugh Person. The structural organization of the narrative divides the characterization of Hugh Person into three distinct parts. As already described, the last five chapters of the novel which culminate in Hugh's death circle back to and are initiated by the first three chapters in which R. selects his "person" and describes his arrival at the scene of his impending death, the Ascot Hotel. The authorial commentary in Chapter 1 is followed by the transition from person to Hugh Person in Chapter 2, a character who now has a name, memory and emotions:

As the person, Hugh Person . . . extricated his angular bulk from the taxi . . . his eyes went up . . . to check the aspect of the Ascot Hotel (Ascot!) against an eight-year-old recollection, one fifth of his life, engrained by grief. (P. 9)

Nevertheless, in this first paragraph, the forty-year old Hugh is still little more than "a specter of thought" in the narrative. This is reinforced by the momentary use of the present tense as Hugh pays off the taxi driver--"Person pays alert driver" (p. 9). That he is a name rather than a personality as yet is parodically suggested by the way no-one remembers him. Thus, while scene and situation are established, the main "object" in that scene lacks definition. He is a named "transparent thing." However, he only assumes 'life' through the imaginative artifice of his author's stylizations. To prove this point, R. demonstrates his power by endowing the objects of Hugh's hotel room with a complementary surface animation during Hugh's visit to the bathroom:

Upon leaving that ignoble lavatory, Hugh gently closed the door after him but like a stupid pet it whined and immediately followed him into the room. Let us now illustrate our difficulties. (P. 11)

In Chapter 3 the juxtaposition of Hugh and the 'inanimate' pencil which he discovers wedged behind the drawer of a desk

"illustrates" the authorial "difficulties." R. proceeds to 'animate' both pencil and person through his stylizations. He acknowledges, however, that the difference between pencil and person resides in consciousness. Either R. or Hugh may 'characterize' the pencil through the artifice of consciousness; in this sense the 'history' of the pencil conforms to the structural knot of the story. At the same time, the pencil itself remains an independent and elusive 'reality':

Thus the entire little drama, from crystalized carbon and felled pine to this humble implement, to this transparent thing, unfolds in a twinkle. Alas, the solid pencil itself as fingered briefly by Hugh Person still somehow eludes us! But *he* won't, oh no.
(Pp. 13-14)

Like Adam Krug's 'theatre of the mind' in *Bend Sinister*, R.'s "entire little drama" of the pencil illustrates the relationship between the data of perception and consciousness that "unfolds in a twinkle" an individual awareness of "this transparent thing," which man may represent in his stylizations, just as R. has represented it in the novel. Although "the solid pencil . . . somehow eludes us," R. suggests that Hugh Person will not elude us because Hugh's inner awareness is reflected in his stylizations. In reconstructing Hugh's history, then, R. will characterize Hugh by re-creating the relationship between the data of Hugh's life and the stylizations of his personality in a nonfiction novel which draws attention to the 'theatres' of consciousness through its very title, *Transparent Things*.

R. now begins the major "part of our translucing" (p. 37) by dramatizing the relationship between Hugh Person's history and Hugh Person's personality. Most immediately R. announces at the beginning of Chapter 4 that Hugh's visit to the Ascot hotel was the last of four trips to Switzerland. The previous three trips provide the points of a chronological sequence within Hugh's history. Chapters 4 to 7 revolve around Hugh's first visit to Switzerland with his recently widowed father. In these chapters, the young Hugh constantly responds to the data of his existence as if they were the signs or symbols of an imaginative world; his personality reflects his inner desire

to split mind and body. At the hotel he dislikes having to sleep in close proximity to his father because "He hated this common grave of sleep" (p. 15). He is annoyed by his father's increasing difficulties in manipulating material objects precisely because he shares a similar inability to control matter: "Hugh had inherited some of that clumsiness; its present exaggeration annoyed him as a repetitious parody" (p. 16). Finally, Hugh is frightened by his personal proclivity to somnambulism. As a boy he had begged to be locked in his bedroom because he "did not care 'to behave like a ghost'" (p. 25). In Switzerland, after his sexual initiation at twenty-two, a fear of consequent sleep-walking causes him to remain awake in the armchair of his hotel room until dawn.

Hugh's attempts to separate mind from matter include an implicit suppression of emotional bonds. At school he finds the easiest course is to acquiesce in cruel remarks about his father. On his father's death he is aware of "a number of recollected unkindnesses" but uppermost is the sense of relief when he finds that by having his father's body cremated in Switzerland he is able "to get rid of the dreadful object practically at once" (p. 21). The only appreciable effect of Person Senior's death for Hugh is that it provides him with independent economic means with which, most immediately, he visits a prostitute and effects a physical transition from "virgin" (p. 20). Finally, Hugh's conscious suppression of the physical and emotional features of his existence is coupled with an imaginative preoccupation with symbolic interpretations of the actual; he "had always been harrowed by coincident symbols" (p. 19).

In Chapter 8 which provides a resumé of the ten years between Hugh's first and second visits to Switzerland, Hugh's imaginative preoccupations continue. His only three published pieces of writing all reflect his concern with "coincident symbols: his poem juxtaposes "suspension dots . . ." and a spatial metaphor, "The sun was setting / a heavenly example to the lake . . ." (p. 27); his letter to the *London Times* describes Anacreon choked by "wine's skeleton" and Alyokhin "killed in Spain by a dead bull" (p. 27); and his association

with "a notorious fraud, the late symbolist Atman" (pp. 27-28) is reflected in the symbolist interpretations of his editorial footnotes. His "greatest achievement" is to have his name become a symbol for the pen he promotes, "The Person Pen" (p. 28). And, finally, he takes up the occupation of ghost-writer and proof-reader of other people's fictions, a job which initiates his contact with the author, Mr R..

In the second phase of the history, Chapters 9 to 17, Hugh's personality undergoes a change. Hugh is given a new awareness of life through love, and emotion brings about an admission of the physical as well as the imaginative features of existence in Hugh's stylizations. As Hugh travels through Switzerland towards an actual meeting with R. he is confronted with another character, a "new, irresistible person" (p. 31), Armande, who assumes a far greater attraction for him than his previously longed for meeting with 'a great writer': "It was indeed all sham and waxworks as compared to the reality of Armande" (p. 35). The change in Hugh's personality is parodically suggested by comparison with a previous affair he has had. In the description of Hugh's past affair with R.'s stepdaughter, Julia Moore, a fire in a theatre leads the two to return to Hugh's flat. However, Julia has had an intimate relationship with the previous occupant of Hugh's flat, the now dead Jimmy Major; as a consequence, Hugh assumes for her the ghostly presence of her past lover and the affair does not continue. In Witt, however, the author states "A lot of construction work was going on" (p. 40). For Hugh, Armande is being given a personal past, a dead father who has produced an avante garde "transparent house" (p. 45), a physically abundant mother, and a collection of photo albums which record Armande's physical development from birth right up until the time of Hugh's visit. And in implicit competition with the authorial voice of the novel's first lines, Armande initiates a continuing relationship by calling Hugh on the telephone, "You Person?" and endowing him with her own choice of name, "Percy" (pp. 46-47). The turning point Armande represents in Hugh's 'history' is suggested by the imposition of a scene from Mr R.'s 'famous novella,' *Three Tenses*, on Hugh's meeting with Julia

and Armande at a sidewalk cafe which juxtaposes the interpenetration of past and present dramatized by both the meeting and Hugh's consciousness, with the author's knowledge of what is to come in Hugh's history:

Julia and he (*alias* Alice and the narrator) formed a pact of the past, an impalpable pact directed against reality as represented by the voluble street corner, with its swish-passing automobiles, and trees, and strangers. The B. of the trio was Busy Witt, while the main stranger—and this touched off another thrill—was his sweetheart of the morrow, Armande, and Armande was as little aware of the future (which the author, of course, knew in every detail) as she was of the past that Hugh now retasted with his brown-dusted milk. (P. 51)

In order to pursue a relationship with Armande, Hugh first confronts the physical 'world' of matter in the form of Armande's mountain which, because of love, he manages "to scale" after several ill-fated attempts:

Our Person was obstinate and monstrously in love. A fairy-tale element seemed to imbue with its Gothic rose water all attempts to scale the battlements of her Dragon. Next week he made it and thereafter established himself as less of a nuisance. (P. 55)

Not only does Hugh's love lead him to conquer a mountain, he also precipitates "the minor miracle" in Armande when her practical, unemotional approach to physical love-making is momentarily transformed by "A shiver of tenderness" (p. 59). On her return to Villa Nastia Armande confirms the union by announcing to her mother, "I've brought my fiancé" (p. 59).

The change in Hugh's personality is reflected in his approach to sleep and played out through the three tenses of Chapter 16. Hugh's one physical success of the past was his invention of "the Person Stroke" in tennis. This stroke, though unbeatable, is also ineffectual since it "never won him a match" (p. 61), but Hugh uses it as a centre piece in the fantasies through which he induces sleep. With his marriage to Armande, Hugh abandons his conscious reworking of "the

Person Stroke" into a fantasy. He now experiences "dream anguish," distinguished in particular by erotic scenes which have no connection with his conscious realities: "Those oneiric torments had nothing to do, either directly or in a 'symbolic' sense, with anything he had experienced in conscious life" (p. 63). This refutation of symbolist interpretations of dreams by pointing to the separation between conscious realities and the dream worlds of sleep is illustrated by the difference between Hugh's personal fantasies to induce sleep and his sleeping dreams over which he has no control. That Hugh now regards these sleeping dreams as fictions 'written' by someone else is suggested by Hugh's awakening from avalanche nightmares "when their imagery turned into the movement of verbal colluvia in the valleys of Toss and Thurn" (p. 64).³⁵ The third tense of the chapter, the future, describes Hugh's personal rejection of any symbolic interpretation of the relationship between his sleeping worlds and his "individual reality." After Armande's death Hugh stolidly resists Freudian attempts to connect his personality with either his dreams or his sleeping actions: "'I shall vomit,' said Hugh, 'if you persist in pestering me with all that odious rot'" (p. 65).

The importance of love in overcoming Hugh's stylistic attempts to split mind from body is underlined by the first and last lines of Chapter 17 which complete the second phase of Hugh's characterization: "We shall now discuss love" (p. 66) . . . "we must end now our discussion of love" (p. 71). Hugh and Armande are personality opposites who, nevertheless, show how love may overcome apparent splits between the mental and physical features of "individual reality." Hugh's "conscious attempts" to find ways to express his love to the "dry-souled, essentially unhappy" (p. 66) Armande fail whereas "something he said by chance" (p. 66) finds a response. Furthermore, Hugh's love for Armande, like Phin's for Liza Wind, reveals that emotional responses have little to do with the mind's potential for rational assessments--"He loved her in spite of her unlovableness" (p. 67). And he accepts all her traits "as absurd clues in a clever puzzle" (p. 67).

In contrast to Hugh's unselfish personality, Armande's

solipsistic approach to reality is reflected in her attitude to her carefully planned parties--she "saw her guests as the extremities of her own personality" (p. 67)--in her attempts to centre all physical histories on herself, and in the imposition of her personal whims on Hugh. The last of these, Armande's "whims," are illustrated by her response to a television newsreel of a fire which she and Hugh view during their honeymoon. In the escape from their Stressa hotel room that Armande insists on rehearsing, Hugh is cast in a supporting role to hold an electric torch and help Armande who abandons him without a qualm when his physical ineptitude causes him to bungle his part. Conversely, the one physical act for which Armande requires a partner is transformed at her direction into a social stage scene, making love at tea-time "to the steady accompaniment of casual smalltalk, with both performers decently clothed" (p. 69), or, on rarer occasions, in bed, with Armande chatting on the telephone. The excitement Armande cannot completely conceal from Hugh during these bizarre performances is initiated by "the contrast between the fictitious and the factual" (p. 70), but, as in Witt, both are fused by the "dazed ecstasy" (p. 70) of emotional response. Thus while Hugh is unselfish and Armande completely "self-centred" (p. 67), so that their marriage seems incongruous to observers, both of them achieve a fusion of "the fictitious and the factual," through love. Thus both of them dramatize the authorial discussion of love as the centre of "individual reality."

Chapters 18 to 20 juxtapose Hugh and Mr R. as two characters who are brought together, not by emotional bonds, but through their interdependent occupations as author and proof-reader. In contrast to the first phase of Hugh's 'history' when he tried to suppress the physical features of his "individual reality," Hugh's personal fusion of "the fictitious and the factual" is coupled with his changed attitude to would-be authors of his existence and to their fictions. Meeting with Mr R. in the flesh for the second time on a third visit to Switzerland Hugh argues against the artist's incorporation of recognizable people in *Tralatitons* and irreverently suggests that the tongue tends to replace the metaphoric analogies between

art and life suggested by R.'s title with meaningless, though musical, phrases:

Hugh made bold to remark that the tongue
tended to substitute an 'l' for the second
of the three 't's'.
'The tongue of ignorance,' shouted Mr R.
(P. 74)

Back in New York checking the proofs of *Tralatitons*, Hugh questions all aspects of R.'s text. Just as he checks the work for "the defects of the type" (p. 77), so he 'checks' R.'s images against his own individual experience to wonder "how did a 'balanic plum' look" (p. 78). And just as he is "not so sure he entirely approved of R.'s luxuriant and bastard style," so he recognizes his own attempts to relate R.'s art to R.'s life: "He also caught himself trying to establish on the strength of fictional data at what age, in what circumstances, the writer had begun to debauch Julia" (p. 78). In other words, Hugh now distinguishes between his personal awareness and other people's fictions.

Ironically, it is to be other people who attempt to impose their unacknowledged fictions on the 'authored' actions of Hugh's sleep. The opposition of Hugh's conscious motivations and his 'authored' role in murdering Armande is suggested by the way in which he carefully slips into bed in the dark so as not to disturb the sleeping Armande. Perhaps to induce sleep, he continues to mentally scan the proofs of Mr R.'s fictions. Once asleep, however, Hugh's hands become the tools of a force outside his control as he carries out "the horrible automatic act" (p. 83). At the same time, the dream he has of a fire from which he attempts to save a chance bedmate, Guilia Romeo, who becomes "a silly Julia" to Hugh's "Mr Romeo" (p. 84), bears the recurrent imprint of Mr R.'s fiction. The automatic and authored nature of Hugh's sleeping activities is juxtaposed with society's 'symbolic' attempts to interpret Hugh's dream world activities. Thanatology tries to attribute motivations to the physical methods of Hugh's automatic act, while psychiatry refuses to accept that dreams are no more than "anagrams of diurnal reality" (p. 83). Because the prison psychologist can

attach no symbolic significance to Hugh's account, he dismisses the dream as Hugh's own conscious fabrication: "This is a bravura piece and not a patient's dream, Person. I shall have to report you" (p. 84).

By contrast, certain analogies between Hugh Person and Mr R., as individuals within the novel's world, are reflected in Mr R.'s letter to Phil, his editor, which Phil notes is "Received on the day of the writer's death. File under Repos-R." (p. 86). The use of the French source for repose, "repos," draws attention to the word to suggest that R.'s death is not a cessation of "individual reality" but is, like Hugh's sleeping state, a temporary automatic act despite the way in which it is viewed from the confines of temporal existence.³⁶ In his letter Mr R.'s resistance to would-be authors of his "individual reality" is instanced by his attempts to thwart Tamworth's plans to "boswell the dead man just as he had bossed very well the living one" (p. 85). At the same time, R.'s acceptance of physical facts is shown by his discussion of the botched operation which he recognizes will terminate his life. The persistence of a personal emotional centre in the midst of R.'s rational assessments is reflected in his reference to Julia:

The only child I have ever loved is the ravishing, silly, treacherous little Julia Moore. Every cent and centime I possess as well as all literary remains that can be twisted out of Tamworth's clutches must go to her. (P. 86)

In contrast to Tamworth's attempts to 'possess' R.'s remains, R. acknowledges that the interdependent working relationships he has in life (author and secretary, author and proof-reader), do not involve 'ownership' or control of other people's existence. This is seen first in R.'s regrets that Hugh will not oversee his last publication and, second, by R.'s plea for more information about Hugh during the eight years which have intervened since Armande's death. R.'s personal preoccupation with the relationship between life and death ends the letter, while his actual death completes the third phase of the narrative history.

The final group of five chapters are a continuation of the first three chapters. As in the first chapters the now dead R. is only an intrusive authorial presence in Hugh's world. Having built up a history for his major character in the intervening chapters, R. now brings the ongoing present of Hugh's narrative towards a completion. Hugh's fourth visit to Switzerland is a further attempt to fuse "the fictitious and the factual" through his continuing love for Armande. Since the dream images Hugh experiences of Armande are always set against a Swiss background, he now revisits the scenes of their past in an emotional attempt to unite the two: "The desideratum was a moment of contact with her essential image in exactly remembered surroundings" (p. 97).

Chapters 22 and 23 dramatize the personal interpenetration of past and present that makes up Hugh's "individual reality." The shoes which Hugh buys for his mountaineering remind him of the blisters caused by a similar pair which were acquired "eight years ago" (p. 88), and they produce similar results when he relives the efforts of the past: "As then the pressure of the shoecap upon his right foot had soon scraped off a round of skin at the joint of the third toe, resulting in a red eye burning there through every threadbare thought" (p. 92). The changes in the Swiss landscape are, like the new shoes, additional details which co-exist with the remembered past as part of Hugh's "individual reality": the old white dog which Hugh recognizes has become even older; a new road and houses have been built in Witt; Villa Nastia is "now painted a celestial blue" and "all its windows were shuttered" (p. 90). Similarly, the physical act of mountaineering is also an imaginative re-enactment of Hugh's past experience of panting in Armande's "merciless wake" (p. 92). And despite his dislike of insects, Hugh, when confronted with a white butterfly, resists "the impulse to crush it under a blind boot" (p. 93) and tries to help it just as eight years before he had not consciously killed Armande but rather, in an "anagram of diurnal reality" (p. 83), sought to rescue a chance bedmate. The co-existence of past and ongoing experiences that make up Hugh's "individual reality" is parodically summed up by the

quotation from *Tralatitions* which follows a description of the raindrops Hugh feels on his bald spot: "Raining in Wittenberg, but not in Wittgenstein" (p. 94).

At the mid-point of the final five chapters, the authorial voice of Chapter 24 interrupts the narrative to discuss certain analogies and distinctions between art and life. Although R. uses the techniques of artistic re-creation, he is writing a nonfiction novel. He points out, therefore, that "direct interference in a person's life does not enter our scope of activity" (p. 95). Nor does R.'s reconstruction of Hugh's history reveal that man's destiny is "a chain of predeterminate links" (p. 95). R.'s artistic imagination is qualified by his subject. While he can re-create Hugh Person's history, he cannot prescribe the course of Hugh's existence. At the same time, R.'s characterization of Hugh suggests how in life as in art "individual reality" consists of a blend of subjective knowledge and imagination that is reflected in personal stylizations. R. argues, therefore, that, "Human life can be compared to a person dancing in a variety of forms around his own self" (p. 95). Conversely, in both life and art these forms may provide the stylistic outlines of an "individual reality," "forming a transparent ring of banded colors around a dead person or a planet" (pp. 95-96). At the same time, R. suggests that even our awareness of the artifice of conscious realities may be an imaginative illusion:

How much more dreadful it would be if
the very awareness of your being aware
of reality's dreamlike nature were also
a dream, a built-in hallucination!
(P. 96)

R. points out, however, that whether or not the conscious realities of life as well as art are illusions, an individual style reflects an individual contribution since someone has to be there to assign a boundary:

One should bear in mind, however, that
there is no mirage without a vanishing
point, just as there is no lake without
a closed circle of reliable land.²⁰
(P. 96)

The closing remarks of Chapter 24 take up the preoccupation with death that runs throughout *Transparent Things*. A statement written in Hugh's diary by a fellow inmate of a mental hospital, points out that the ideas we have about death are always part of an imaginative and temporal perspective:

It is generally assumed that if man were to establish the fact of survival after death, he would also solve, or be on the way to solving, the riddle of Being. Alas, the two problems do not necessarily overlap or blend. (P. 96)

By drawing attention to the analogies between all man's conscious constructs, fiction and non-fiction, R. undermines any conventional acceptance of 'facts' to show the need for quotation marks in the use of such terms as "reality" and "dream." The remainder of the novel goes on to suggest that since death can only be imaginatively conceived of in life, then death may be analogous to a movement from one state of consciousness to another, a mental manoeuvre that we make every time we read a novel and temporarily suppress our co-existing "individual reality" in order to enter the specific world an author places at our disposal.

In approaching the imaginative depiction of death which ends the novel, the last two chapters of *Transparent Things* continue to illustrate the combination of imaginative artifice and knowledge inherent in all man's stylizations. In the Ascot Hotel, while trying to regain the factual settings of the past, Hugh is engaged in conversation by Monsieur Wilde who describes a magazine article about a man who had murdered his wife eight years before:

Well, that murderer had been given life eight years ago (Person was given it, in an older sense, eight years ago, too, but squandered, squandered all of it in a sick dream!) and now, suddenly, he was set free, because, you see, he had been an exemplary prisoner. (P. 99)

The play on the opposed connotations of "given life" juxtaposes creativity and confinement. Wilde, however, is concerned only

with the "appalling" way "crime was pampered nowadays" (p. 100). He indicates the need for stricter law enforcement: "*Eh bien*, on a higher (or lower) level the situation is similar. Had the bilingualist ever considered the problems of prisons?" (p. 100). Hugh's reply effects a parodic reversal of the conventional fictions which inform Wilde's attitudes to corrective measures. Announcing himself to be a murderer "tried twice for throttling an American girl (now Lady X)" (p. 100),³⁷ Hugh claims that the purpose of prisons is neither to cure nor to punish but "to prevent a killer from killing again" (p. 100). If, on the one hand, the murderer consciously chooses to kill he is beyond correction. If, on the other hand, he is an automatic agent within a dream state, he is seen by society as insane and expected to conform to society's versions of insanity: "My only chance to remain sane was by appearing subnormal" (p. 100). Yet neither actual prison nor other people's versions of Hugh's personality or behaviour can alter Hugh's "individual reality":

'I am sadly happy to say, sadly proud, too, that neither the guards (some of them humane and witty) nor the Freudian inquisitors (all of them fools or frauds) broke or otherwise changed the sad person I am.' (P. 101)

In *Bend Sinister* Adam Krug has a continually self-conscious perspective on his own life: "The stranger quietly watching the torrents of local grief from an abstract bank" (*BS*, p. 17). In *Transparent Things* Hugh Person has a comparable analytical awareness:

All his life, we are glad to note, our Person had experienced the curious sensation . . . of there existing behind him—at his shoulder, as it were—a larger, incredibly wiser, calmer and stronger *stranger*, morally better than he. This was, in fact, his main 'umbral companion' (a clownish critic had taken R. to task for that epithet) and had he been without that transparent shadow, we would not have bothered to speak about our dear Person. (P. 101, my italics)

Although Hugh's 'conscience' or "transparent shadow" describes the self-conscious perspective of his personality, he does not,

like Adam Krug, identify his capacity for intellectual analysis with his "individual reality." Nor does he follow the promptings of reason which seem to warn him against staying in Witt to pursue his emotional longing for contact with Armande: "He did not heed his shadow, and fundamentally he may have been right" (p. 101).

Furthermore, while R. can re-create Hugh's history in a nonfiction novel, he cannot control or alter Hugh's personal choices. Just as Hugh's personality reflects an individuality that questions the unacknowledged fictions of society, so also his history resists an observer's artistic designs. Despite the imaginative possibilities either R. or the reader may envisage for Hugh he chooses to remain in Witt, a decision which, ironically, leads to his death in the world of the novel:

We thought that he had in him a few years of animal pleasure; we were ready to waft that girl into his bed, but after all it was for him to decide, for him to die if he wished. (P. 101)

In the final chapter the approaching separation of author and reader from the novel's world is reflected in the verb tenses of R.'s description of the hotel restaurant and its occupants: "And there was to be, or would have been (the folds of tenses are badly disarranged in regard to the building under examination) quite a nice little stream of Germans in the second, and cheaper, half of August" (p. 103). At the same time, R.'s description subtly plays upon the interpenetration of past and ongoing present in the reader's awareness of the fictional world: in the restaurant the homely girl who has replaced the younger of the two waiters, and the patch on the remaining waiter's eye are reminders of a briefly mentioned "farcical fight" (p. 98) the previous night. A comparable interpenetration of past and present with an imagined future ('known,' of course, to R. both as a writer of 'history' and as a dead person) is illustrated in Hugh's view of the hotel bedroom where he hopes to renew his past contact with Armande:

The room was exactly as he wanted it or had wanted it (tangled tenses again!) for her

visit. The bed in its south-western corner stood neatly caparisoned, and the maid who would or might knock in a little while to open it was not or would not be let in—if ins and outs, doors and beds still endured. (P. 103)

Despite Hugh's desire to fuse "the fictitious and the factual" (p. 70), he does not confuse art and life, as he did in the first phase of his history, by viewing the objects in his hotel room as "coincident symbols" (p. 19). For Hugh, the green figurine of a girl skier in the box next to his bed is an independent art object which does not 'symbolize' Armande, but rather provides an analogy with his personal images of Armande. Similarly, R. warns the reader not to confuse the characters of his nonfiction novel with the reader's personal images of life. That the author at the completion of the novel joins the reader as an observer only of *Transparent Things* and must like the reader avoid the proclivity of novices to impose further imaginative re-creations on the novel's world is suggested as Hugh's history nears its end:

Person, *this* person, was on the imagined brink of imagined bliss when Armande's footfalls approached—striking out both 'imagined' in the proof's margin (never too wide for corrections and queries!). (P. 105)

Like the completed novel, the moment of completion for Hugh is not a temporal fusion with Armande but a fusion of known and imagined experience that renders him a transparent thing: "Its ultimate vision was the incandescence of a book or a box grown completely transparent or hollow" (p. 107). Finally, R.'s ultimate authorial vision of death elaborates his own as well as Hugh's death as characters to suggest that death is not a cessation of "individual reality," but is simply another "state of being":

This is, I believe, *it*: not the crude anguish of physical death but the incomparable pangs of the mysterious mental maneuver needed to pass from one state of being to another. (P. 107)

To sum up: Nabokov's structural design in *Transparent Things* involves the reader in a critical consideration of the analogies and distinctions between art and life that Nabokov explores through his characterizations. In the last line of Nabokov's parodic "nonfiction novel," the character R. greets the newly dead Hugh with the words, "Easy, you know, does it, son" (p. 107). As we have seen, the last line circles back to the first line of the novel, R.'s selection of Hugh Person to be the main character in his artistic re-creation of recent historical events. This circular framework of the narrative reminds us of R.'s authorial activities and their completion. In his role as an invented author, R. reflects Nabokov's own mental manoeuvres from life into the imaginative sphere of artistic re-creation and back to life, thereby illustrating Nabokov's distinctions between his 'identity as a writer' and his personality. But since R. is Nabokov's invented author he does not, like Nabokov at the end of the novel, return to the ongoing temporal sphere of life. Instead, like Hugh and all the other fictional characters who have 'died' in the course of the novel, R. returns to the sphere of ghostly observers who intrude upon the plot. In the sense of a ghostly observer, however, R.'s situation suggests certain analogies with the reader's relationship to the novel's world. To enter the novel's world the reader makes a mental manoeuvre from one state of consciousness to another, but his 'ghostly' or peripheral presence as an observer of that world does not negate his ongoing "individual reality." In analogous fashion, the dream images and actions Hugh Person participates in when asleep co-exist with but are not a reflection of his "individual reality." Nabokov's characterizations draw attention to the analogies and distinctions between life and art, while illustrating how the movement from non-fictive to imaginative worlds is a mental manoeuvre from one state of consciousness to another that does not negate a person's "individual reality." And since, within life, death is only 'known' as an imaginative construction, Nabokov's 'nonfiction novel' also illustrates how the movement from life to death may be a mental manoeuvre that ends our temporal physical existence, but does not obliterate

our "individual realities."

CHAPTER 7: NOTES

¹ Lucy Maddox, in *Nabokov's Novels in English* (London: Croom Helm, 1983) suggests also that, "Kinbote's mad commentary on the poem is, in part, a deliciously comic parody of the kind of scholarly project that Nabokov himself undertook in his edition of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*" (p. 15).

² The allusions in Shade's poem, particularly the allusions to Pope, Wordsworth, and Shakespeare, were first pointed out by Mary McCarthy in "Vladimir Nabokov's 'Pale Fire,'" *Encounter*, 19 (Oct. 1962), pp. 71-84. In examining these allusions I do not pretend to be providing new information about the poem, "Pale Fire." Rather, I am concerned to show how Shade's parodic incorporation of allusions to the Augustans and Romantics contributes to his self-conscious art and to his individual vision of "Man's life as commentary to abstruse / Unfinished poem" (ll. 939-40).

³ See J. Bader, *Crystal Land* (London: Univ. of California Press, 1972): "The artistic process of transformation does not end in death, but in the birth of another object: 'I was the smudge of ashen fluff—and I / Lived on, flew on in the reflected sky'" (p. 41).

⁴ See also Chapter 1 of this study.

⁵ Alexander Pope, "Essay on Man," II. 271, in *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. William K. Wimsatt, Jr., 12th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951), p. 145. All subsequent references to Pope's poetry will be to this edition of his works.

⁶ In the commentary Kinbote correctly identifies l. 662 of "Pale Fire" as an allusion to a "poem by Goethe" (p. 188).

⁷ Pope, "Essay on Man: the Design," p. 128.

⁸ Pope, "Essay on Man," IV. 398, p. 167.

⁹ Throughout my discussion of *Pale Fire* I follow Nabokov's discussions of the novel in treating John Shade and Charles Kinbote as separate characters within the fictional world. A number of critics have suggested, however, either that John Shade and his poem are Charles Kinbote's invention or that Kinbote and his commentary are Shade's invention. David Packman in *The Structure of Literary Desire* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1982) gives some examples of this critical equation of Shade and Kinbote: "Page Stegner suggests that a

deranged Kinbote is the source of the novel's world. . . . Stegner proposes that perhaps Kinbote wrote the poem attributed to Shade" (p. 69); "Field displaces Stegner's unsatisfactory reading of the text with another: Shade is proposed as the source of the novel's world" (p. 70); "Like Field, Bader proposes Shade as the controlling author who will thus account for the text" (p. 71). Packman suggests that such readings either "ignore[s] the text's specificity" (p. 70) or are "an evasion of the problems it [the text] poses" (p. 71). In my view, such readings disregard Nabokov's "architectonics" as well as the specificity of his characters. Perhaps, as Nabokov's self-conscious artist, John Shade says, "Resemblances are the shadows of differences" (*PF*, p. 208).

¹⁰ Lucy Maddox states:

In fact, the nature of the Kinbote-Shade relationship strongly suggests that Nabokov intentionally modelled it on the Boswell-Johnson relationship: in both cases the insecure and unsettled younger man attaches himself to the older, established literary figure, not only looking to him for direction but eventually seeing in him the agent of the disciple's own fame and even immortality. (P. 31)

¹¹ Brian Boyd in "Nabokov and Human Consciousness" (manuscript) points out that in Kinbote's commentary (*PF*, pp. 205-06, Penguin ed.), "Nabokov has quoted faithfully from *The Letters of Franklin K. Lane, Personal and Political*, ed. A.W. Lane and L.H. Wall (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), p. 464" (pp. 152-53).

¹² Mary McCarthy describes how the word Zembla comes from a literary and a geographical source:

The word Zembla can be found in Pope's *Essay on Man* (Epistle 2, V); there it signifies the fabulous extreme north, the Hyperborean land of the polar star. . . . To leave Pope momentarily and return to Zembla, there is an actual Nova Zembla, a group of islands in the Arctic Ocean, north of Archangel. The name is derived from the Russian Novaya Zemlya, which means "new land." Or *terre neuve*, Newfoundland, the New World. (P. 74)

¹³ Lucy Maddox gives a succinct account of the way Kinbote solipsizes Zembla:

As for the land of Zembla itself, Kinbote has not created it ex nihilo; the geography of *Pale Fire* includes a real Zembla with a real king who was deposed by revolution shortly after Kinbote's arrival in New Wye, and whose fate is a matter of speculation. The form of the private fantasy is therefore largely determined

by a chance concatenation of public events. (P. 21)

¹⁴ That Kinbote's superior dismissal of such source material is rather an attempt to disguise his own sense of limitations is suggested in the foreword when he lets it slip that Sybil's failure to supply him with biographical data includes her lack of any reply to Kinbote's letter from Cedarn "listing some of my most desperate queries, such as the real name of 'Jim Coates' etc" (p. 17). Jim Coates is, of course, the reporter in Shade's poem who wrote up the story of Mrs Z.

¹⁵ See also Robert Alter, *Partial Magic* (California: Univ. of California Press, 1975). In Chapter 6 Alter examines Shade's use of Pope, and Kinbote's debts to Shakespeare. Alter argues "that not only is the novel built upon the reversed images of two different kinds of poet but the two figures repeatedly allude to two antithetical English poets, and through them to the two opposite poles of English poetry" (p. 201).

¹⁶ Mary McCarthy states, "The source of 'pale fire' is *Timon of Athens*, Act IV, Scene 3, Timon speaking to the thieves" (p. 82).

¹⁷ In *Strong Opinions* Nabokov points out that "of course 'lane' is the last word of Shade's poem" (p. 73).

¹⁸ Lucy Maddox also points to Kinbote's authorship of these four variants: "At least four of those valuable 'pithy' variants, Kinbote confesses in the index, are his own contributions" (p. 20).

¹⁹ In *Strong Opinions* Nabokov makes it clear that Kinbote himself commits suicide "after putting the last touches to his edition of the poem" (p. 74).

²⁰ Kinbote's inability to discern the way in which the "trivia" of Maud's room provide stylistic outlines of her personality is shown in the note which immediately follows the variant. He relates how Shade shows him Maud's scrapbook which includes two clippings from the magazine *Life*. The first is an advertisement in the issue of May 10, 1937, for the Talon Trouser Fastener; the second from March 28, 1949 advertises Hanes Fig Leaf Briefs, and both present Joycean puns. Kinbote sees no connection between Maud's selections and Joyce's *Ulysses* or the character of Blazes Boylan. Instead he sees the clippings as "involuntarily ludicrous or grotesque" and concludes his note with a moral invective against "devils whom Satan commissions to make disgusting mischief in sacrosanct places" (pp. 93-94).

²¹ *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, revised by Ivor H. Evans, Centenary ed. (London: Cassell, 1932), p. 963.

²² Ellen Pifer, *Nabokov and the Novel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), Chap. 5.

²³ Pifer, p. 111.

²⁴ Ellen Pifer notes the "ironies" which "often arise . . . from the ostentatious, but unconvincing display of dignity with which Kinbote embellishes his most scurrilous activities as peeping Tom and woman-hater" (pp. 114-15).

²⁵ In the Foreword Kinbote states that after Shade's death he was forced to leave New Wye and "the writing of the commentary had to be postponed until I could find a new incognito in quieter surroundings" (p. 16). This suggests that the name Charles Kinbote is his Cedarn "incognito" while the name V. Botkin has been his New Wye "incognito."

²⁶ Alter, p. 194.

²⁷ Lucy Maddox suggests, "Kinbote's belief in the literally life-giving and life-sustaining power of art is a function of a need to establish a satisfying version of his own identity" (p. 18).

²⁸ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (London & New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981), p. 121.

²⁹ Nabokov points to Mr R. as the authorial voice of the novel in *Strong Opinions*, pp. 195-96.

³⁰ Lucy Maddox claims, "The opening and closing lines of the book—addressed to Hugh, whose death in a hotel fire is described in the final paragraph—are continuous. . . . What comes in between is a commentary, in the form of a series of marginal annotations and emendations, on the last eighteen years of Hugh's life" (p. 134).

³¹ Paul S. Bruss, "The Problem of Text: Nabokov's Last Two Novels" in *Nabokov's Fifth Arc: Nabokov and Others on his Life's Work*, states:

Recognizing that the past is particularly seductive because the future enjoys "no such reality . . . as the pictured past and the perceived present possess" (p. 1), the narrator suggests that most people, in the process of perceiving an object (person, place, or thing), "involuntarily [sink] into the history [the text] of that object." (Pp. 298-99)

³² W.W. Rowe, in *Nabokov and Others: Patterns in Russian Literature* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1979), gives a succinct account of these 'ghostly observers' in his Chapter 13. Rowe notes "that readers tend to attribute first person references to the author" but that "such words (I, me, my, we, us, our) are sometimes not authorial but ghostly" (p. 176). I suggest, however, because Rowe does not discuss *Transparent Things* as a form of the nonfiction novel he does not recognize that not just the ghostly observers intrude upon the past but also the ongoing process of authorial composition involves a sinking

into the past to re-create Hugh Person's history. Paul S. Bruss in "The Problem of the Text" in *Nabokov's Fifth Arc*, similarly disregards Nabokov's parodic reworking of the nonfiction novel so that although he recognizes the narrator's warning to the reader not to sink into the past, he states, "It is striking that the narrator of *Transparent Things* himself seems to fall into the trap he foreswears" (p. 300).

³³ H. Grabes, *Fictitious Biographies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), p. 100.

³⁴ Lucy Maddox points out that just as Nabokov "appears anagrammatically as Adam Von Librikov in R.'s *Tralatitons*" so also "Hugh's third trip to Europe is made, 'at his firm's request, to look up Mr R. and another American writer, also residing in Switzerland' (p. 68). Hullo, Mr Nabokov" (p. 133).

³⁵ Hugh's recognition that the avalanche nightmares are lexical or scripted worlds, "verbal colluvia in the valleys of Toss and Thurn" (p. 64), incorporates parodic overtones, not only of personal waking, but of the Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress) literary movement in late eighteenth-century Germany which sought to portray great personal emotional and spiritual struggles through the lexical worlds of art.

³⁶ The *O.E.D.* lists the French *repos* as the source of the word repose which it defines as "Temporary rest or cessation from activity in order to refresh or restore the physical or mental powers; esp. the rest given by sleep" (*O.E.D.*, Vol. VIII, p. 476).

³⁷ The reference to Hugh's "victim" as Lady X underlines R.'s role as the invented author of Hugh's history since Lady X is Julia and Armande is another of R.'s fictional versions of Julia: Wilde, for instance, is described as "using an expression Armande had got from Julia (now Lady X)" (p. 99).

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE MEMOIRS:

LOLITA, ADA, AND LOOK AT THE HARLEQUINS!

In examining how the "architectonics" of Nabokov's English novels contribute to his characterizations, I have described some of the main features of Nabokov's structural designs in each of the works discussed: the differing narrative approaches of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Bend Sinister*; the structured examination of "individual reality" in *Invitation to a Beheading*; and the parodic exploration of analogies and distinctions between art and life in *Pale Fire* and *Transparent Things*. In the three remaining English novels, *Lolita*, *Ada*, and *Look at the Harlequins!*, Nabokov reworks the conventions of memoirs; each of his first-person narrators is engaged in direct acts of self-characterization within the context of each novel's world. Because of the complexity and allusiveness of all the memoirs, my purpose in this final chapter is only to give a brief and selective account of some of the structural features in these novels. I will first examine how Nabokov's structuring of *Ada* reflects his preoccupation with memory. I will then offer some tentative suggestions about the relationship Nabokov establishes between structure and his narrators' stylizations in *Lolita* and in *Look at the Harlequins!*

Nabokov's structuring of *Ada* draws attention to the functioning of memory in Van Veen's narrative. Most immediately, the full title of the novel, *Ada or Ador: A Family Chronicle* recombines the conventions of biography, love story and history, while acknowledging Ada as the emotional centre of Van Veen's memoirs.¹ The narrative is prefaced by two complementary abstractions, a family tree leading to two remaining members,

"Ivan (Van) [1870-]" and "Adelaida (Ada) [1872-]", and an editorial note which announces the death of "all the persons mentioned by name in this book" with the exception of Mr and Mrs Ronald Oranger, Van's editor and his typist, Violet Knox, "now Mrs Ronald Oranger, Ed." (p. 451).² The editorial presence at the beginning of the book circles back to the last pages of Part Five which mimic the abstractions of a publisher's dust jacket. Part Five, in turn, encompasses a physiological time span which incorporates the conception of Van's memoirs in 1957, the writing process itself interlaced with details of Van's and Ada's concurrent activities, and, finally, the proof corrections and alterations of 1967. That Part Five is "the true introduction" (p. 445) to Van's memoirs is reinforced by the recurrent references throughout the book to Van as "a crotchety old wordman" (p. 98). Thus the circular framework of *Ada* draws attention to the functioning of memory, the ongoing interpenetration of past and present within individual consciousness or the "nowness" which Van claims is "the only reality we know" (p. 431).³

The narrative selections of Van's history illustrate the emotional basis of memory implicit in the first part of the title *Ada or Ardor*: each part of Van's memoirs concerns his experiences with Ada and his attempts to find some comparable experience when apart from her. In Part Two, for example, during a period of separation from Ada, Van describes his adventures in the "floramors" as 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).⁴ Alternatively, the emotional selectivity of individual memory is reflected by the way in which the period from 1905 to 1922 during which Ada nurses Vineland and Van takes up the Rattner Chair of Philosophy at Kingston is dismissed by Van in a few sentences. And while the narrative focus of Van's memoirs suggests the emotional basis of memory's selections, the distribution of narrative space within the parts of the book reflects the cumulative effects of experienced time within memory. Well over half the memoirs are devoted to the Ardis experiences of

Van's youth in Part One, while the subsequent parts decrease to a mere sixteen page record of the thirty-five years encompassed in Part Five. In Van's "Texture of Time" he claims that a 'quickening' process occurs as he grows older:

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 upon one's not being attentive to Time. (P. 423)

Although Ada remains as the emotional pivot of Van's memories, the apparent lack of balance in the narrative space devoted to Van's youth as compared with his later life suggests the "quickening" that results from the accumulation of experiences; and, perhaps, as Van implies, it also depicts an increasing absorption in intellectual as well as physical activities.

One of the criticisms levelled at *Ada* is that it lacks a structured narrative development. D. Fowler, for instance, claims that "Novelistic structure has been replaced by tenuously related tableau."⁵ J. Bader maintains that "the elements of Nabokov's novels remain discrete mosaics" and argues that "instead of contributing to the fleshing out of character or subject, the details often form unrelated blocks in the airy buildings of the novels."⁶ The "tableaux" methods of narrative in *Ada*, however, reflect the operation of memory. In his own autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov describes "memory's luminous disc as so many magic-lantern projections" (*SM*, p. 154). In Part Five of *Ada*, Van and Ada suggest this slide projector imagery when referring to their remembered past: "Eighty years quickly passed—a matter of changing a slide in a magic lantern" (p. 458). With Ada's help the ninety-year-old Van reworks these "magic lantern" slides of memory into a structured narrative account of "passionate, hopeless, rapturous sunset love" (*SO*, p. 91).

Similarly, Van's account of historical events is part of a structured narrative development. The "tableaux" of *Ada* chart a "War of the Worlds" (p. 22) which dissolves into "a history of Terra [that] turns out to be a caricatured but

essentially accurate summary of the history of our own familiar planet in the twentieth century."⁷ Critical debates about interpreting the cosmology of *Ada* have tended to neglect the ways in which the "worlds" of the novel contribute to narrative developments. Nabokov says *Ada* is "mostly set in a dream America" (*SO*, p. 116). His invented narrator, Van Veen refers to "two earths" (p. 21), Antiterra which is the world of Van's personal memories,⁸ and Terra which Van parodies in his "*Letters from Terra*, 'a philosophical novel'" (p. 265). When asked about Van's "two earths," Nabokov says, "Antiterra happens to be an anachronistic world in regard to Terra—that's all there is to it" (*SO*, p. 122). In what Nabokov refers to as "Mr Appel's . . . brilliant essay '*Ada* Described'" (*SO*, pp. 285-86), Appel sums up Van Veen's depiction of *Ada*'s cosmology:

Most of *Ada* is set in an antiworld . . . where the entire universe has been re-imagined, including Space-Time. God is called "Log" in *Ada*, and the universe consists of two sibling planets, "Antiterra" (or "Demonia") on which the action is set, and "Terra" the subject of endless debate.⁹

"Antiterra . . . in regard to Terra," then, is Van's reconstruction of "a dream America" which disrupts our traditional, historical correlations of measured time, events and geographical locations. Robert Alter states, "From a terrestrial viewpoint . . . historical periods as well as cultural boundaries have been hybridized."¹⁰ It is this "terrestrial viewpoint" that Van dissociates himself from in his discussions of Terra:

Sick minds identified the notion of a Terra planet with 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 in us and beyond us" is the 'world' of individual consciousness, Antiterra and its imaginative extension, Demonia. By contrast, he sees Terra as "another world" divorced from the subjective awareness and imagination of individual consciousness, a supposedly 'objective' and

depersonalized world which is a negation of "individual reality." Furthermore, Van suggests, the notion of Terra spawns a "Next World" or afterlife which is an extension of Terra. Robert Alter comments, "Terra the Fair, by the way, is a supposedly celestial place believed in mainly by the deranged on Antiterra."¹¹ And Appel points out that "when in her madness Aqua Veen envisages 'a minor hymnist's paradise,' her delusions depict life in our modern cities."¹²

In my view, the Antiterra-Terra division in *Ada* reflects the opposition of Van Veen's "individual reality" to conventional versions of "so-called 'real life'" (*LDQ*, p. 1) that make up what Nabokov calls "average reality." At the same time, Van's self-consciousness in regard to the nature of his own and others' 'world histories' is made explicit in Part Five of his memoirs. In commenting on the popular response to Vitry's distorted film version of *Letters from Terra*, Van acknowledges that both Antiterra and Terra are subjective versions of the 'facts' of conscious existence, although Antiterra is Van's individual re-creation of his "position in regard to the universe embraced by consciousness" (*SM*, p. 218), whereas, for Van, Terra is a conventional account of "this 'Other World'" (p. 23) of twentieth-century history that he associates with other peoples' imitative stylizations:

From the tremendous correspondence that piled up on Van's desk during a few years of world fame, one gathered that thousands of more or less unbalanced people believed (so striking was the visual impact of the Vitry-Veen film) in the secret Government-concealed identity of Terra and Antiterra. Demonian reality dwindled to a casual illusion. Actually, we had passed through all that. Politicians, dubbed Old Felt and Uncle Joe in forgotten comics, had really existed. Tropical countries meant, not only Wild Nature Reserves but famine, and death, and ignorance, and shamans, and agents from distant Atomsk. Our world *was*, in fact, mid-twentieth-century. Terra convalesced after enduring the rack and the stake, the bullies and beast that Germany inevitably generates when fulfilling her dreams of glory. Russian peasants and poets had not been transported to Estotiland, 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, but a bad-tempered French general.¹³ (Pp. 455-56)

At the same time, in reconstructing his personal past the ninety-year-old Van portrays his former attempts to separate the "Real World" of his individual fancies from his subjective knowledge of the 'facts' of physical existence. At an autobiographical level, the young Van's personality reflects his unacknowledged splitting of mind and body. In Ardis, Van associates his passionate love for Ada with the 'worlds' of other artists that he reworks in his personal version of Antiterra.¹⁴ However, the love that Van delights in with Ada also involves the physical aspect of Van's individuality with its attendant pains, a 'world' that Van associates with the imitative stylizations of Terra that are the subject of his scientific and philosophical research. When Nabokov was asked, "Do you distinguish between Van the artist and Van the scientist?" he suggests how both Van's artistic and his impersonal representations of his research about Terra challenge the systematized conventional beliefs other people impose upon the data of conscious existence:

Objective, or at least one-mirror-removed, opinions of Van's efforts are stated quite clearly in the case of his *Letters from Terra* and two or three other compositions of his. I—or whoever impersonates me—is obviously on Van's side in the account of his anti-Vienna lecture on dreams.
(SO, p. 123)

Nevertheless, to the young Van, Terran versions of 'reality' are based on "a system of generalities" that has no relation to his Antiterranean love for and delight in Ada.

Conversely, the 'objective' information that Van sees recombined in Terran scientific representations of 'reality' supports a depersonalized materialism that is a denial of the ongoing contributions of his individual fancy to conscious existence:

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 tormentors 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. (P. 23)

Consequently, in rejecting the "Other World" of Terra, the young Van formulates a solipsistic anti-world that reflects his individual fancies, but attempts to deny the physical facts and pains of ongoing conscious existence that Van sees as associated with Terran versions of 'reality.' Although Van's Antiterranean "enchanters" and "demons" are always the continuing source of his individual contributions to the data of his existence, the "tableaux" of his memoirs plot the young Van's progression towards a reconciliation of the imaginative with the physical aspects of his "individual reality," a reconciliation which is finally achieved because of his love for Ada. The "discrete mosaics" of the novel, then, recombine the slides and data of personal memories with a self-conscious art of characterization by the nonagenarian Van who has achieved a synthesis of mind and body, and of individual fancy and subjective knowledge.¹⁵

Since Van's memoirs are written from a point of self-conscious synthesis, each of the parts of *Ada* simultaneously admits the imaginative and physical aspects of conscious existence Van connects with the sibling planets of Antiterra and Terra, and uses a conflict between two 'worlds' to provide a critical perspective on Van's former selves. In re-creating their Antiterranean world of Ardis, Van and Ada use a conventional chronological framework to provide a sequence of fixed points for their memories: "Calendar dates were debated, sequences sifted and shifted" (p. 88). Within this framework, however, the young Van will only acknowledge the 'reality' of his

personal Antiterra. Yet while in 1884 Van "had still not tasted the Terror of Terra" (p. 62), he is aware of Terra's force on others, on Aqua, for instance, who is destroyed by the discrepancy between her "individual reality" and Terran versions of 'reality.' And despite the Byronic and solipsistic images Van imposes on his relationship with Ada, he is shown to be involved constantly with research about Terra. In 1887, for example, Van works under Tyomkin on an essay entitled "Terra: Eremitic Reality or Collective Dream?" (p. 144). In 1888 Van is reading "Rattner on Terra" (p. 180) while Ada visits a doctor to see if she is pregnant. Ironically, after Ada's sexual betrayals, Van attempts to resolve the pain of his solipsistic Antiterra through physical action: "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 to maim for life, two men" (p. 238).

From Part Two on not only dates but places become the fixed points to which Van's memories are attached. Telephones, ships and aeroplanes now connect conventional Terran locations. Ada's letters came from America. Van works at Kingston University, Mayne, in the Department of Terra and writes his own "Letters from Terra." The 1892 reunion with Ada in Manhattan ends with Van accepting Demon's conventional codes of morality (a morality that prevails in Terra) and leaving Ada. Consequently, when Ada marries Vineland, Antiterranean 'reality' becomes a game to Van, while "Terra seems bent on mechanizing his mind" (p. 354). During the same period the physical forces Van associates with Terra destroy the members of his immediate family: "Three elements, fire, water and air destroyed, in that sequence, Marina, Lucette, and Demon" (p. 354). And though the deaths of Marina and Demon seem to remove obstacles to Van and Ada's relationship, physical 'facts' intrude once more in the form of Vineland's terminal illness. Seventeen years later in 1922 it is Van's reaction to Ada's changed physical appearance that causes him initially to reject her. Love effects the reconciliation of physical with imaginative images so that Van comes to recognize that the 'facts' of Terra and the imaginative delights of Antiterra are interdependent aspects of his

"individual reality." The narrative of *Ada* is structured to depict the styles of Van's former selves as well as to plot Van's growth towards a self-conscious acknowledgement of the ongoing and interdependent aspects of physical and imaginative experience that make up conscious existence.

Alternatively, Van's history depicts how genetic 'inheritance' of either physical or imaginative personality traits are, nevertheless, part of a unique "individual reality." The setting of Van's memoirs within a family chronicle juxtaposes Van's ancestral and personal past to disclose the individual differences of members within a historically and physically defined group. The opening sentence of *Ada*, "All happy families are more or less dissimilar; all unhappy ones are more or less alike" (p. 9) is an antithetical aphorism which parodically reverses "the dubious generalization which begins Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (pub. 1875-77): 'All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.'"¹⁶ In *Ada* analogous biological and behavioural traits within family lines define differences through similarities. Within the perspective of a family chronicle, for instance, Van discerns "an older ancestral strain of whimsical, and not seldom deplorable, taste" (p. 9). The recurrent manifestations of this ancestral strain, however, take widely differing forms: in Van's maternal grandmother it is "well reflected, for instance, in the names she gave her daughters: Aqua and Marina" (p. 9); Ada's behaviour while she and Van examine Kim's pornographic photos of the Ardis idyll is seen to evidence a comparable lapse, "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" (p. 315). The examples which point to analogous traits also describe the differences between the individuals concerned.

At the more immediate parental level, Marina's and Demon's affair (and the duping of Aqua) which ends with the D'Onsky duel seems to parallel Van's and Ada's affair, the duping of Lucette, Van's betrayal by Ada and the ensuing duel with Captain Tapper. But in both the physical and imaginative aspects the similarities reveal the differences between the two relationships. Demon's and Marina's union is a materialist, 'Terran' affair.

It is physically productive resulting in Van and Ada. Demon's duel with Marina's lover ends in D'Onsky being wounded. Demon's subsequent marriage to Aqua is a form of surface reduplication which Marina claims must have been influenced by "incestuous" pleasure (p. 122), 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 by Demon a second time (Ada), accepts Demon's first cousin Dan as a physical replacement and goes on to produce "Another daughter, this time Dan's very own" (p. 11), Lucette. Marina's and Demon's affair results in physical scars and children. Demon's marriage to Aqua ends with Aqua's suicide.

The analogies between the two generations expose the differences. Most immediately both Van's and Ada's 'Antiterranean' relationship and Ada's marriage to Vineland are physically unproductive. After Ada's sexual betrayals of Van, her 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,¹⁷ while Van fights a duel with "an incidental clown" (p. 243), Captain Tapper, a man who is previously unknown to Van and Ada. Van is wounded while Tapper walks away unharmed. After a short stay in hospital Van replaces Ada temporarily with a physically distinctive surrogate, Cordula de Prey. And later, unlike Demon, Van will not accept an imitative reflection of incestuous pleasure with his and Ada's half-sister, Lucette, even though "she tasted exactly as Ada at Ardis" (p. 367). By setting his memoirs within the ancestral perspective of a family chronicle Van shows how apparently similar personality traits and experiences reflect the individual differences between genetically linked members of a family.

Van and Ada themselves reveal the differences between two individuals who share the same genetic parentage and who have an intimate physical, emotional and imaginative relationship with one another throughout their lives. Even at an

informational level, while they work together to verify dates and details of their shared past, the discrepancies in accounts that still occur disclose the different and subjective way in which details of the same event are retained by two minds. Van, for instance, maintains that the children's first full sexual exploration took place in the library at Ardis on the night of the burning barn and he describes how, after Ada's fingertrips induce climax, the young Van quips "Well, now the Nile is settled stop Speke" (p. 97), but Ada interrupts to disagree with Van's personal version of events:

I wonder, Van, *why* you are doing your best to transform our poetical and unique past into a dirty farce? Honestly, Van! Oh, I *am* honest, that's how it went. I wasn't sure of my ground, hence the sauciness and the simper. *Ah, parlez pour vous*: I, dear, can affirm that those famous fingertrips 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. (P. 97)

Ada's final retraction acknowledges that memory is not an exact factual record but rather the source of an ongoing "individual reality."

In "Texture of Time," Van points out that "Memory likes the *otsebyatina* ('what one contributes oneself')" (p. 433). This personal contribution encompasses a selective blend of subjective knowledge and imagination within individual consciousness. Van's picture of Ada after the 1888 "betrayal," for instance, when he walks away from her without looking back, illustrates how individual fancy makes a personal contribution to the subjective knowledge of memory:

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 describes his 1888 vision of Ada as a "lethal entity" (p. 235), a picture which he had never witnessed but which seems "more real than any actual memory" (p. 236). Since Van's picture comprises an imaginative association of known details, imagination is shown to be a form of memory.¹⁸ Conversely, both subjectivity and imagination are a source of Van's personal contribution to the data of his conscious existence.

As we have seen, Nabokov's structural design in *Ada* reveals how the materials and operations of memory are the basis of an ongoing "individual reality." As a result, Nabokov's structuring of the novel establishes a critical perspective on his characters' stylizations that explores the relationship between memory and personality. Most immediately, Van Veen conceives of his memoirs as "a playground for a match between Inspiration and Design" (p. 452). Van's "inspiration" in writing his memoirs is an ongoing inner awareness that has an emotional centre in his love for Ada: "He saw reflected in her everything that his fastidious and fierce spirit sought in life" (p. 449). Van's "design" consists of the stylizations of his personality. In reconstructing his past with Ada, Van suggests how his "former selves" (p. 89) were concerned with creative contributions to the data of his existence. From "Mr Plunkett, a reformed card sharper" (p. 137), young Van first learns to use memory to create the magical illusions of card tricks. From King Wing he learns an analogous art of "hand-walking" which achieves a physical reversal of gravity. These two activities prefigure Van's artistic attempts to re-create an "individual reality" through his stylizations: "It was the standing of a metaphor on its head not for the sake of the trick's 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 the young Mascodagama derived from overcoming gravity was akin to that of artistic revelation" (p. 146).

At the same time, young Van's creativity is coupled with

his rejection of all forms of personal authorship. He is, for instance, "secretly nauseated" (p. 334) by Ada's acting career because he believes it makes her merely a vehicle for other people's art. And even though in his own career he works with the established conventions of academic scholarship, he rejects any imitative representations of the data of his personal existence and takes a 'solipsistic' attitude to 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 another's mind destroy the artist in the very lair of his art. (P. 334)

By contrast, the nonagenarian Van uses language as a referential as well as a creative medium for representing the physical as well as the emotional and imaginative aspects of his "individual reality." His physical body and its decay within an ongoing present are now parodically acknowledged: "At ninety, he still danced on his hands—in a recurrent dream" (p. 448). He no longer imaginatively transforms but rather describes his sexual responses, including the inevitable organic decline which saps his potential for sexual performance. Nor does Van now see sexual activity with others as a betrayal of his relationship with Ada but merely as a continuing aspect of his individuality which co-exists with his emotional and imaginative responses to existence. Finally, Van realizes that the academic 'revelations' of his past intellectual publications are primarily personal exercises in literary style which posit no absolutes or truths but are rather a reflection of his "individual reality":

It suddenly occurred to our old polemicist that all his published works—even the extremely abstruse 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)

In his memoirs, then, Van combines knowledge and imagination, memories and style in a self-conscious art of characterization that reflects his ongoing inner awareness.

Most immediately, in setting out to express his individuality through writing his memoirs, Van searches for a stylistic approach that will reflect his self-consciousness. Within the ongoing present of writing, Van employs parody to recombine his awareness of his own and others' stylizations with a critical depiction of his "former selves" (p. 89). Tony Tanner suggests that there is "a special value in parody as a way of writing which liberates itself from the style it seems to be emulating."¹⁹ In the Ardis section of the book Van uses parody to juxtapose an artistic tradition, which shapes Van's Antiterranean stances, with Van's and Ada's individuality. Van's description of an arrangement for a secret meeting, for instance, distinguishes the young people's romanticized sense of their own activities from their physical actuality and purpose: "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 precious. She stood scratching one raised knee. They agreed to go for a walk before lunch and find a secluded place" (pp. 102-03).²⁰ Alternatively, the ninety-year-old Van's depiction of the emotional and the physical pains of existence constitutes a parodic undermining of young Van's solipsistic rejection of all but personal authorship. Van's farewell letter to Ada in Part Three, for instance, after he has bowed to Demon's 'morality' is both an emotional and a parodic reflection of his belief that any personal acceptance either of other people's versions of 'reality' or of conventional Terran codes of behaviour is destructive to his and Ada's individuality:

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. Goodbye, girl. (P. 350)

As we saw, at the end of Part Four Van achieves a self-conscious synthesis of the imaginative and the physical features of existence that he has previously attempted to split by opposing his Antiterrran "dream America" to conventional Terran versions of 'reality.' And in Part Five, Van recognizes that all his representations of 'reality' are "exercises in literary style" (p. 452). At ninety, Van combines a passion for refining all aspects of his personal past with an awareness of the formal contrivance of his stylizations. In his memoirs, he parodically reworks established forms in order to evolve an individual style that will express his ongoing "individual reality." In the last pages of *Ada* an ailing Van acknowledges that even when physical pain makes him indifferent to either his virtues or his vices, he is still concerned with a personal style:

Rather humiliating that physical pain makes one supremely indifferent to such moral issues as Lucette's fate, and rather amusing, if that is the right word, to constate that one bothers about problems of style even at those atrocious moments. (P. 459)

The juxtaposition of Van and Ada throughout the novel suggests how, even "as lovers *and* siblings" (p. 456) their distinctive identities are reflected in their personal stylizations. In Part One Van describes his response to Ada's preoccupations as "the abstract scholar's envy which a naturalist's immediate knowledge sometimes provokes" (p. 61). Although Ada, in contrast to Van, is concerned with a detailed and specific knowledge of the natural world, her activities still involve imaginative powers of association. As a child at Ardis, for instance, her paintings reveal a personal manipulation of botanical details: "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). Whereas Van's fascination with imaginative abstractions is reflected in his superiority at chess, Ada's comparable but distinctive ability to recombine

given forms is epitomized in her superiority at "Flavita" (p. 174), a form of scrabble in which she becomes "transformed into a sort of graceful computing machine . . . 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).

However, despite Ada's concern with natural science, she attempts to negate certain details of her past, though in different ways to those of Van. After the two children have analysed Marina's revealing Swiss album Van decides they must bury or burn it but Ada suggests they must also erase it from memory: "'Right,' answered Ada. 'Destroy and forget'" (p. 14). Later, during the 1888 summer at Ardis, Ada is troubled by the memory of her physical infidelities: "She was on bad terms with memory" (p. 152). When Van learns of her "betrayals" through Blanche's letter, Ada attempts to handle the information in the same way as Marina's album: "'Destroy and forget it,' said Ada" (p. 229). Coupled with this attempt to eradicate uncomfortable patches of personal past is Ada's imaginative rearrangement of details of the past which, like the botanical patterns of her paintings, produce possible rather than actual versions of the facts:

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)

Nevertheless, Ada fails to acknowledge any creative or personal contribution in her activities. In her acting career, for instance, she maintains that she is solely a translator whose performance is not concerned with developing a character, but, instead, is focused "exclusively on the subjective unique poetry of the author" (p. 335). Because she denies the artistry of her own "individual reality" she feels secure when acting in a good play: "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 a board of censors, I feel secure, with only a breathing blackness before

me (instead of our Fourth-Wall Time)" (p. 335). And in 'real' life, as on the stage, the young Ada negates aspects of her own individuality: just as she never challenges Van's Antiterranean versions of their relationship so she accepts Van's deference to Demon's morality which directs her to marry Vineland. In similar fashion she welcomes "the alberghian atmosphere" of the 1905 and 1922 reunions at the Three Swans "as a frame, as a form, something supporting and guarding life, otherwise unprovided on Desdemonia, where artists are the only gods" (p. 408).²¹ Ironically, it is the knowledge of Vineland's terminal illness that results in Ada pursuing a personal design in her life, while it is Van's art that causes him at first to reject the physically changed style of Ada when she initiates their reunion seventeen years later. Their mutual love effects a recognition of the interdependence of the physical and imaginative aspects of each other's individuality. Ada continues to pursue her scientific research but now recognizes the contributions of her individual scholarship. Van now acknowledges that his abstract philosophy produces artistic exercises in literary style. The two combine their distinctive talents in the co-authorship of "*Information and Form*" (p. 452), before going on to debate and refine their personal memories, which Van re-creates by using established forms to evolve an individual style.

Nabokov's structural design in *Ada* provides the same critical perspective on his other characters' stylizations. Lucette, for example, attempts to reduplicate Ada's personal style--"She's a wonderful imitatrix, by the way" (p. 311), Van tells Ada. Because Lucette loves Van, she draws on her memories, not to refine her own subjective awareness, but to imitate Ada's personality. Lucette's negation of her individuality is suggested when, at dinner with Van on board the Tobakoff, she describes her sense of personal being as an unsubstantial illusion: "'I'm like Dolores--when she says she's 'only a picture painted on air''" (p. 365). Lucette's physical act of suicide completes the negation of her "individual reality" that she has enacted in her stylizations.²² Demon, on the other hand, is unable to reconcile memory with the physical changes of an ongoing present. At the family reunion

when, after sixteen years, he confronts Marina, he is unable to relate his love for her past beauty to the course, middle-aged woman he sees 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). Demon uses stylistic artifice to disguise his own physical ageing, dyeing his hair progressively blacker, whitening his teeth, and taking younger and younger mistresses. In other words, Demon tries to reduplicate his former appearance. Marina engages in a different form of imitation by acting out stereotyped roles such as "the hackneyed part of a fond mother" (p. 55). Alternatively, when confronted with parallels between film scripts and her own life, Marina "always tended to discount, out of sheer self-preservation, the considerable more *solzhnīe* patterns out of her own past" (p. 159). Marina's negation of her own individuality is reflected by the way in which she reduces her memories to trite film scripts: at the family reunion she is not troubled by memories of her past love for Demon and its physical results, but rather views the affair and the tragedy of Aqua's involvement as "a stale melodrama" (p. 199). Marina's suppression of any personal contribution in her stylizations renders her a celluloid figure, "a dummy in human disguise" who lacks "*third sight* (individual, magically detailed imagination)" (p. 199).

In *Ada* Nabokov's structural design draws attention to the way in which the nonagenarian Van combines a critical awareness of forms with a self-conscious artistic re-creation of the "magic lantern" slides of memory. In *Lolita* and *Look at the Harlequins!*, by contrast, the stylistic strategies of the first-person narrators as they rework the materials of memory produce 'hypertrophied' worlds which attempt to disguise rather than to acknowledge each narrator's "individual reality." In *Lolita*, for instance, Hyde points out that "the charlatan [Humbert] passes off his delusions as art and his wonderfully sick soul as creative sensibility,"²³ while in *Harlequins* Vadim equates all aspects of his life with artistic illusions. Nabokov's structuring of both these novels provides a critical perspective

on his first-person narrators' stylizations.

The last four paragraphs of *Lolita* circle back to the editor's preface to provide an encompassing framework. This framework pinpoints the disparate structural features of Humbert's narrative and, at the same time, juxtaposes the narrator's assessments of his stylizations--"This then is my story. I have re-read it" (p. 306)--with those of another reader, John Ray, Jr., a character who shares not only Humbert's actual and re-created 'worlds' but also Humbert's sense of morality. Most immediately, the frame establishes the factual co-ordinates of Humbert's journal: from behind the bars of society's prison, Humbert Humbert, at the instigation of his lawyer, Clarence Choate Esq., has produced an autobiographical 'history' originally intended for use during his trial for the murder of Clare Quilty. Yet even in the frame it is apparent that Humbert's "story" is primarily an artistic account of his relationship with Lolita rather than of the murder of Quilty. Humbert's reason for the deferred publication of his 'defense' --"In mid-composition, however, I realized that I could not parade living Lolita" (p. 307)--together with "the remoteness of tone at the end" (*SO*, p. 73) is completed by the editorial preface which announces the death of Humbert on November 16th 1952 and of Lolita six weeks later--"Mrs 'Richard F. Schiller' died in childbed, giving birth to a stillborn girl, on Christmas Day 1952" (p. 6). In comparable fashion to *Ada*, the frame of *Lolita* thus limits the physiological time span of Humbert's narrative to the period of his personal existence.

In addition, the period of imprisonment that encompasses the ongoing present of Humbert's verbal reconstructions, is distinguished from the past experiences he describes. The two time spans involve an unadmitted discrepancy which intimates Humbert's disregard of Quilty. On the last page of his journal Humbert claims to have started writing "fifty-six days ago" (p. 307) which in conjunction with the date of his death, November 16th, means his journal must have been started by September 22nd, yet the morning on which Humbert drives to his last meeting with Lolita is "September 22" (p. 265). The detailed indications of time during the ensuing two days which

culminate in the murder of Quilty on September 24th is thus tacitly denied in Humbert's designation of authorial time.²⁴ In comparable fashion Humbert's judgement of the factual details of his story recognizes only the physical crime against Lolita: "Had I come before myself, I would have given Humbert at least thirty-five years for rape, and dismissed the rest of the charges" (p. 307). The paradoxical 'morality' of Humbert's judgement is complemented by his attempt to justify Quilty's death in terms of his own creative sensibility, while his final claim to have immortalized Lolita, and of course himself, in the "refuge of art" (p. 307) contradicts the non-fictive conventions of "these notes" Humbert sets out to use "*in toto* at [his] trial" (p. 307).

The conflicting features of Humbert's final statements are reaffirmed in the preface. The immediate announcement of the title of Humbert's memoirs, "*Lolita*," superimposes Lolita's name on Humbert's personal story, while, as Appel points out, the subtitle "*or the Confessions of a White Widowed Male*" (p. 5) combines the titles of psychiatric case histories with those of "the titillating confessional novel"²⁵ to mirror Humbert's fusion of life and art. Yet, echoing the manner of Defoe's preface to *Moll Flanders*, Ray goes on to assert and defend the non-fictive context and conventions of Humbert's journal. Ray points to the necessity to conceal the "true" names, the heroine's first name excepted, and further implies the 'historical realism' of the work by providing some additional facts concerning "the destinies of 'real' people beyond the 'true' story" (p. 6).²⁶ Alternatively, Ray invokes modern literary conventions to affirm the non-fictive authenticity of *Lolita*: the lack of obscene language in Humbert's journal is opposed to conditioned expectations of four letter words in banal novels, while the scenes which might disturb a "paradoxical prude's comfort" are claimed to be "the most strictly functional ones" (p. 6). Yet, like Humbert, Ray admits of no contradiction in labelling *Lolita* both a "case history" and a novel or "work of art" (p. 7). Ray is beguiled by the fusion of art and life through which Humbert mounts the subtle defense of his moral, emotional and imaginative sensitivity:

"A desperate honesty that throbs through his confession does not absolve him from sins of diabolical cunning. . . . But how magically his singing violin can conjure up a tendresse, a compassion for Lolita that makes us entranced with the book while abhorring its author!" (p. 7). Ironically, Humbert's "diabolical cunning" has manipulated Ray as a reader not only into accepting Humbert's dismissal of Quilty (Ray mentions "H.H.'s crime" only once in the preface) but also into reiterating the book's "ethical impact" (p. 7) as its most important feature. Ray's judgements confirm Humbert's artistry in that he sees *Lolita* as "a tragic tale tending unswervingly to nothing less than a moral apotheosis" (p. 6).²⁷

The structural framework of *Lolita*, then, reflects a contradiction between Humbert's non-fictive project and his artistic transformation of evidence, between Humbert's "case history" and his "work of art" (p. 7). At the biographical level, Humbert's journal is an elaborate attempt to divert attention from his disregard of "all laws of humanity" (p. 304), the brutal and artful use of others which is neither controlled nor confined by Humbert's sense of the "immorality" of his relationship with Lolita. Furthermore, Humbert's stylistic devices are artistic ploys to establish sympathy for his own "sick soul" by transforming brutality and murder into a tragic love story.

The conflict between the structural components of Humbert's memoirs stems from his use of style to superimpose artistically constructed masks on the details of his past. Humbert's artistic transformation of biographical data is epitomized in the first chapter. Rather than describing Lolita, the first line, "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul" (p. 9), subsumes Lolita's existence into Humbert's artistically presented claim to a personal and moral sensitivity: on the one hand, Humbert endows light imagery on the imaginative and physical aspects of his life in order to portray mind as illumination and lust as passionate fire; on the other hand, the cumulative effect of the possessive pronouns links his mind and body to a moral and spiritual acknowledgement. Humbert's succeeding separation of Lolita's

name into syllables, "Lo-lee-ta. . . . Lo.Lee.Ta." (p. 9), however, far from establishing Humbert's love for Lolita, provides an inadvertent reminder that his memoirs are stylizations, a play upon words. The factual aspects of Humbert's sexual relationship with a twelve-year-old "girl-child"--"She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock" (p. 9)--is subtly overshadowed by Humbert's apparent tenderness--"But in my arms she was always Lolita" (p. 9).²⁸ Humbert's ploys to transform his own actions into a story of tragic love, while subsuming Lolita's individuality, are typified by his introduction of a precursor to Lolita: "there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child" (p. 9). Even the process of representing facts through verbal artifice is admitted and then nullified by the parodic detachment of Humbert's apparent self-consciousness: "You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style" (p. 9). Finally, the image with which the chapter ends endows Humbert's "trial" with allusive overtones of martyrdom: "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury. . . . Look at this tangle of thorns" (p. 9). Ironically, the narrative which follows reveals that neither Humbert's conscious artistry nor his moral awareness halt him in the pursuit of the personal desires which result in the brutality of his actions towards both Lolita and Quilty.

Like the rhetoric of Humbert's prose, the stylizations of his personality within the narrative reveal his recurrent public and private uses of style to transform or to disguise his world and himself. At the same time, the division of the narrative into two parts separates Humbert's vanity in the power of his personal artistry from his growing fears of exposure and his loss of 'artistic' control over others. In Part One Humbert deploys public masks (which range from his use of his own physical appearance to his marriage with Charlotte) in order to pursue a solipsized neurosis which he imposes, at first imaginatively, but finally literally, on Lolita by physically and emotionally isolating her from others. In so doing, Humbert shatters the illusions about his own person that he has traded upon and promoted in Lolita: "She had entered my

world, umber and black Humberland, with rash curiosity; she surveyed it with a shrug of amused distaste; and it seemed to me now that she was ready to turn away from it with something akin to plain repulsion" (p. 164). In Part Two Humbert's vanity in respect to his ability to manipulate others through arts of deception is eroded by the people and world outside himself. Now fear of discovery rather than self-congratulation dominates in his assessments of his public masks: at Beardsley, for instance, he says, "I used to review the concluded day by checking my own image as it prowled rather than passed before the mind's red eye" (p. 186). And unable to control Lolita's responses through his personal masks or to gain her love through his actions, Humbert resorts to spying, induced fears, threats, and bribes to sustain Lolita's 'isolation.' Humbert's anxiety that the money with which he bribes Lolita to gain her sexual cooperation will provide her with the means to escape him, leads him to substitute payments for permission to participate in her school's theatrical programme at which, ironically, she learns to act well enough to deceive Humbert and rejoin the agent of her escape, Quilty. Humbert's final murder of Quilty is not only a complete negation of his solipsistic certainties, it also shatters once and for all his public masks and results in his literal isolation in prison.

Nevertheless, through a written 'defense,' he attempts once more to assume a public mask by using literary devices to dissociate himself within the ongoing present from his 'former selves,' and to camouflage the facts of his past through style. Yet even one brief example illustrates the contradictions which provide a critical perspective to Humbert's 'non-fictive' reconstructions. Humbert claims that Exhibit number Two, the diary that records the days in June leading to his marriage and Charlotte's death is reproduced "by courtesy of a photographic memory" (p. 40). At the same time, he invokes artistic responsibility and moral sensitivity to dissociate himself from the outlines of his former selves:

And now take down the following important remark: the artist in me has been given the upper hand over the gentleman. It is with

a great effort of will that in this memoir I have managed to tune my style to the tone of the journal that I kept when Mrs Haze was to me but an obstacle. That journal of mine is no more; but I have considered it my artistic duty to preserve its intonations no matter how false and brutal they may seem to me now. (P. 71)

Paradoxically, in the very next paragraph Humbert also seeks to reiterate the non-fictive conventions of his memoirs by disclaiming his artistry--"But I am no poet. I am only a very conscientious recorder" (p. 71).

Even though Humbert's depiction of his 'former selves' reveals his constant use of stylistic masks, the history of Humbert's relationships with women reflects the individual behind the masks by describing the physical and emotional as well as the imaginative aspects of Humbert's past. Annabel and Humbert are youthful contemporaries who engage in exploratory sexual adventures, the physical possibilities of which are circumscribed first by the adult world and then by Annabel's subsequent death. Years later an adult Humbert formulates a romanticized picture of his boyhood passion for Annabel in order to excuse and to transform a sexual obsession for young girls which is not the consequence of any physical peculiarity --"Humbert was perfectly capable of intercourse with Eve, but it was Lilith he longed for" (p. 20). And, as in his youth, Humbert is aware of society's moral prohibitions which prevent the open pursuit of his desires--"My world was split. . . . One moment I was ashamed and frightened, another recklessly optimistic" (p. 18).

Humbert's 'moral' awareness, however, results only in attempts to conceal his "individual reality" from the outside world. His marriage to Valeria, for instance, involves no reciprocation of her love. Initially it is both a ploy to assume conventional respectability and a response to Valeria's artifice, her stylistic imitation of a little girl. He rapidly regards her as a "stock character" (p. 27) whose primary purpose is to sustain his domestic ease. When Valeria announces her intention to disrupt Humbert's personal 'world' by leaving him for another man, Humbert is consumed with a

self-centred, suffocating fury: "matters of legal and illegal conjunction were for me alone to decide, and here she was, Valeria, the comedy wife, brazenly preparing to dispose in her own way of my comfort and fate" (p. 28). Humbert's resolve to punish Valeria physically is only thwarted by the presence and stature of her lover, Maximovich. In his memoirs his artistic "little revenge" is his grotesque caricature of Valeria and her second husband earning a living in America by crawling about on all fours in the course of a year long experiment to determine "human and racial reactions to a diet of bananas and dates" (pp. 30-31).

Similarly, Humbert's second marriage coldly exploits Charlotte's love for him in order to engineer an easier access to Lolita. The brutal tones of Humbert's self-revealing diary depict Charlotte as another comedy wife and finally contribute to the destruction of her illusions and her life. And after the period with Lolita, Humbert's final relationship with Rita reiterates his self-centred exploitation of others as well as his capacity to find sexual satisfaction with an adult woman --"Two years of monstrous indulgence had left me with certain habits of lust. . . . This is how Rita enters the picture" (p. 255). Humbert's description of Rita as an admirable and compassionate, though unintelligent, companion underlines his own heartless use of her: during their second year together, for instance, when he takes a position at Cantrip College, he hides his association with her from public view--"Rita whom I preferred not to display vegetated--somewhat indecorously, I am afraid--in a roadside inn where I visited her twice a week" (pp. 258-59). Humbert's final cruelty is his comic abandonment of Rita "with a note of tender advice which I taped to her navel--otherwise she might not have found it" (p. 265).

The history of Humbert's relationships with women provides a self-revealing background which reinforces the brutality of his behaviour with the twelve-year-old Lolita. In his memoirs Humbert attempts to transform his past into a tragic love story by employing an armoury of stylistic devices which range from a network of historical and literary devices to parodies of himself and others. Yet the content as opposed to the stylistic

artifice of Humbert's narrative, reveals the same ruthless and self-centred treatment of Lolita that is evidenced in his relationships with adult women. He inflicts physical pain on her, he abruptly confronts her with her mother's death and her own helpless isolation, he promotes mental fears of reprisal should she reveal their activities, and all the while he ignores "her sobs in the night—every night, every night—the moment I feigned sleep" (p. 173). In his dealings with Lolita, "the beastly and the beautiful" (p. 134) never merge. Even as he prostrates himself before her with protestations of selfless tenderness and love, physical desire reasserts itself and is pursued to its conclusion: "all at once, ironically, horribly, lust would swell again . . . and the next moment the tenderness and the azure—all would be shattered" (p. 284). As Lolita becomes his "ageing mistress" (p. 188), Humbert alternates with cold calculation between plans to get rid of her and plans to marry her in order to produce eventually for his delectation "a Lolita the Second" (p. 172). Humbert's egocentric treatment of Lolita involves a physical, mental, and emotional brutality that defines his own individuality. Moreover, the history of Humbert's past relationships with Lolita and with adult women undermine the 'purified' and selfless love he claims to feel for the pregnant Lolita at their last meeting and after. Her age and state nullifies Humbert's temptation and he feels desire neither for sex with her nor for revenge on her husband, Dick. Similarly, his invitation to Lolita to come away with him is an ambiguous gesture in the light of his self-confessed dreams of some future "litter of Lolitas" (p. 298). And neither his 'love' for Lolita nor his 'moral' awareness divert him from a personal revenge which is enacted in the drawn out brutality of his murder of Quilty. Nabokov's structural design in *Lolita* provides a critical perspective on Humbert's stylizations which draws attention to the individual behind the artistic masks.

In *Strong Opinions* Nabokov makes it clear that "Humbert Humbert is a vain and cruel wretch who manages to appear 'touching'" (SO, p. 94). The effectiveness of Humbert's stylizations arises out of his ability to manufacture an

emotional sensitivity that is totally alien to his character. In both his life and his written memoirs his calculated acts of deception trade on the emotional feelings and expectations of others and, so too, of the reader. In life Humbert's deployment of a synthesized emotion to manipulate others is typified by his behaviour following Charlotte's death. Before the growing audience at the scene of Charlotte's accident Humbert gives a masterful performance: "The widower, a man of exceptional self-control, neither wept nor raved. He staggered a bit, that he did" (p. 98). After a drunken but sound night's sleep Humbert invents a previous love affair with Charlotte to implant with the Farlows the notion of his physical parenthood of Lolita. Later that day, when John Farlow unwittingly threatens Humbert's moves to keep Lolita away from the funeral, Humbert enacts the role of distraught father: "I broke down. I pleaded with John to let things remain as they were. I said I could not bear to have the child all around me, sobbing, clinging to me" (p. 100). Finally, as the distraught widower, Humbert gleefully takes up Beale's offer to pay for Charlotte's funeral: "With a drunken sob of gratitude, I accepted it" (p. 102).

Similarly, synthesized emotion is at the centre of Humbert's ploys to manipulate the readers of his journal. On the one hand, Humbert presents himself as the doomed victim of an enduring love. On the other hand, while he continually analyses his crimes against Lolita, he uses a constantly avowed remorse to suggest his emotional and moral sensitivity. This apparent 'remorse' does not prevent him turning Quilty into a symbolic scapegoat and Humbert the 'hero' who kills him: as Ellen Pifer says of those critics who seriously reiterate Humbert's symbols, "Specific reality is boiled down to 'synthetic jam'; and the murder is dubiously regarded as both necessary and laudable."²⁹

H. Grabes points out that "In Humbert Humbert, then, we encounter a conscious narrator who is very much aware of the effect his method of presentation has on the reader."³⁰ The methods of Humbert's memoirs, however, draw not only on stylistic artifice but on a knowledge of human values and emotions in order to create a fictional, but "touching" Humbert.

Ironically, it is Humbert's vanity in his own artistry that undermines his stylistic "masks."³¹ After the apparent "moral apotheosis" in which Humbert remorsefully acknowledges his destruction of Lolita's childhood freedoms, for instance, he invents two lines of poetry³² which subtly argue that any necessity for retribution is an inevitable consequence of artistic sensibility:

The moral sense in mortals is the duty
We have to pay on mortal sense of beauty³³
(P. 281)

And Humbert's overriding vanity is to believe that he can manipulate his readers in order to dismiss both the narrative content and the non-fictional conventions of his history. Thus in the final pages of *Lolita* he reduces the crime against Lolita's individual freedom to the mere physical act of rape, he dismisses Quilty's murder, and he directly asserts the claims of his own artistry as superior to those of Quilty's existence -- "And do not pity C.Q. One had to choose between him and H.H., and one wanted H.H. to exist at least a couple of months longer, so as to have him make you live in the minds of later generations" (p. 307). Nevertheless, the critical perspective Nabokov establishes through the structural design of *Lolita* discloses the "diabolical cunning" with which Humbert attempts to transform himself from murderer to artist and from a vain and cruel wretch to a sensitive and "touching" human being.

Most obviously, Nabokov's structuring of the third memoir, *Look at the Harlequins!* involves a re-creation of his own artistic output,³⁴ that parodically exposes critical attempts to confuse his art with his life, by dramatizing a comparable confusion of art and life in the memoirs of his invented artist, Vadim.³⁵ Vadim's literary autobiography prescribes the non-fictional genre of a personal history which includes Vadim's literary achievements. Within this history, however, Vadim regards the details of his artistic works and his life as interchangeable.³⁶ In contrast to Humbert Humbert and to Van Veen who both, albeit in entirely different ways, recognize the distinctions between art and life, Vadim parallels the status of his literary creations and his personal existence by

regarding them as comparable illusory worlds.³⁷ Within the structural framework of a literary autobiography, Vadim equates the shadows of art with the substance of life. Consequently, Vadim's stylizations conflict with the non-fictive conventions of literary autobiography. On the one hand, then, Nabokov's structural design establishes a critical perspective on Vadim's depiction of his ongoing "individual reality." On the other hand, Nabokov parodically reworks the analogies between the artistic and 'non-fictive' conventions of realism to explore the way in which memory remains as a continuing basis of Vadim's "individual reality" whatever the context or conventions he acknowledges in his stylizations.

The only discernible frame to *Harlequins* is a list of "other books by the narrator" comprising six Russian and six English works from *Tamara* (1925) to *Ardi's* (1970).³⁸ The book that follows repeats the structural elements of the frame to suggest the analogies between the representations of art and of life. Most immediately Vadim's memoirs chart a carefully declared time span from 1922 to July 1970. In turn the structural divisions of the narrative into chapters and parts combine two forms of numbered sequence: the chapters constitute selected scenes from the past and these are organised by the parts into blocks that demarcate separate 'stories' or phases of Vadim's life. Thus, just as the narrator's literary works constitute a list of different aesthetic worlds which are linked in a lineal sequence as the creative products of Vadim's individual consciousness, so his memoirs are a linked sequence of stages in Vadim's life which describe his ongoing "individual reality."

Within the framework of a literary autobiography, Vadim's stylizations reveal the way in which he recognizes only the analogies and not the distinctions between his art and his life. Vadim approaches his autobiography as a "*catalogue raisonné*" (p. 13) of the origins of his art and continually reiterates examples which treat the details of his aesthetic and actual 'worlds' as interchangeable. Moreover, Vadim states that his memoirs are not "a pedestrian history" but "the mirages of romantic and literary matters" (p. 72). This

equation of his art and his life reflects his belief that his "individual reality" is a mirage. Moreover, the methods of Vadim's memoirs accord his personal life a comparable status to the characterizations of his novels, so that his memoirs return to the frame to constitute a further 'novel' by the narrator. These methods are also self-defining because they reveal Vadim's equation of life and of art as interrelated illusory states. The frame in conjunction with the stylistic strategies of Vadim's memoirs suggest how he represents the phases of his life, like the list of his literary publications, through a numbered lineal sequence of imaginative 'worlds' in which the movement from one part to another, like the reading of any of his books, is merely a mental manoeuvre.

From the outset Vadim establishes an illusory context for his personal life by regarding it as an authorial invention. At the beginning of *Harlequins* Vadim describes his past as a lexical plot, "a clumsy conspiracy" perpetrated by an inept main plotter who "unwittingly wove a web, in which a set of reciprocal blunders on my part caused me to get involved and fulfill the destiny that was the only aim of the plot" (p. 9).³⁹ This treatment of the context and course of his life as an authorial artifice is complemented by Vadim's view of reality as a personal manipulation of illusions retained by memory. As a youth his propensity for day-dreaming is extended to his perceptions of the data of ongoing experience when a grand-aunt asserts that things, situations, words and sums are "harlequins" or illusory figments of consciousness, and she challenges him to, "Play! Invent the world! Invent reality!" (p. 13). From this point, Vadim ignores the specificity and independent 'reality' of the observable data of conscious existence, so that even his account of the past incident with his grand-aunt is a conscious invention for which memory supplies imaginable details: "I invented my grand-aunt in honor of my first daydreams, and now, down the marble steps of memory's front porch, here she slowly comes, sideways, sideways, the poor lame lady, touching each step edge with the rubber tip of her black cane" (p. 13). Consequently, Vadim regards language as a man-made invention for formulating his conscious

illusions: Vadim claims "we think in images, not in words," but adds that "the images we think in are, of course, verbal" (p. 102). His elaboration of this philosophy of consciousness completes his personal equation of all 'realities' with authorial artifice: "We do not usually think in words, since most of life is mimodrama, but we certainly do imagine words when we need them, just as we imagine everything else capable of being perceived in this, or even in a still more unlikely, world" (p. 102).

Since Vadim's philosophy proposes that both the physical and mental aspects of conscious existence (the 'non-fictive' and the 'fictive') are equally illusory, he feels that the only evidence of "individual reality" is through his artistic stylizations. Thus his sense of personal identity is only sustained through artistic artifice, "only the writing of fiction, the endless re-creation of my fluid self could keep me more or less sane" (p. 82). However, even in the public arena in which he establishes a reputation as an artist, he is continually being confused with another author, so that he is forced to confront the logical extension of his philosophy, the possibility that all his stylizations may be the product of another man's imagination, in which case both his life and his art may be "an inferior variant of another man's life, somewhere on this or another earth" (p. 76). Vadim's sanity is further threatened by what he terms a personal "dementia." His recognition that he cannot mentally effect a physical reversal of direction undermines his certainty that all realities are imaginative illusions since it suggests distinctive rather than parallel worlds which co-exist and are retained within memory.

Vadim's consistent attempts to treat all levels of human 'reality' as parallel forms of mental activity are epitomized in his emotional relationships. His treatment of the emotional centre of individuality as an imaginative dream state or mirage supports his philosophy that existence is the product of authorial artifice and renders the physical aspects of his life comparable illusions.⁴⁰ In his first love poem to Iris he writes, "While the dreaming is good . . . do not torment us by

waking us up or telling us too much" (p. 26). By prefacing each of his proposals with a statement of his "dementia" he invites his future wives, in accepting him, to unite themselves with his illusory worlds. Moreover, he sees his marriages as furnishing him with further materials for artistic re-creation: he sees Iris, for instance, as a ballerina, "a dim diamond with all the facets of talent ready to blaze" once she is jointed by the "marble thighed athlete" (p. 49) who will realize her artistry. His subsequent statement that, "We thought I had been chosen for that part but we were mistaken" (p. 49), renders even Iris's murder by Starov an authorial invention which is paralleled in Vadim's fictions, the writing of Iris into his memoirs as well as into his novel, *Ardis*.

In each of Vadim's three marriages his physical expressions of love disintegrate as the artistic re-creations of himself and world proceed. At the physical level, Vadim's "infrequent love-making" (p. 106) with increasingly abstracted Annette, who continually forgets Vadim's books, results in an unplanned pregnancy. Later, Vadim's marriage to Louise is an attempt to incorporate his emotional relationship with Bel into a conventional fiction which leads to a physical separation from Bel and an eventual divorce from Louise. Ironically, when the supposed mirages of his physical and emotional relationships are threatened he suffers bouts of insanity, as when Annette and Bel leave with Ninel while Dolly von Borg turns into a "live monster" (p. 117). Alternatively, when the lexical setting Vadim creates for Bel after Annette's death, "weighing and reweighing every paragraph of the house, every parenthesis of its furniture" (p. 129), is first questioned by the school authorities Vadim, having not yet formulated the solution of Louise, feels engulfed in "a nightmare that I had had or would have in some other existence, some other bound sequence of numbered dreams" (p. 138). Thus Vadim does not achieve any synthesis of the imaginative and the physical aspects of his conscious existence in his emotional relationships with others. And when his personal "mirages" are threatened he views his own loss of authorial control as bouts of insanity or nightmares. Yet whatever the illusory status Vadim attributes to his

conscious experiences, memory remains a continuing basis for his stylizations, and, since his artistic re-creations and his memoirs recognize no distinctions between art and life, both reflect the stylistic outlines of his "individual reality."

My final suggestion is that the structural components of *Harlequins* together with Vadim's stylizations explore the possibility that memory remains the continuing basis of "individual reality" not only in the conscious re-creations or illusory worlds of Vadim's earthly existence but in other possible, hence imaginative, states of conscious being. Most immediately, the time span of Vadim's autobiography extends from 1922 to 1970 and Vadim makes comments on his memoirs within the boundaries of this time span: "Nowadays (1970), when my British passport has been superseded by a no less potent American one, I still treasure that 1922 photo" (p. 47). In terms of this time span, however, the writing of *Harlequins* is a physical impossibility. At the end of Part Six Vadim has just completed the writing of *Ardis* (1970) and his memoirs conclude three weeks later with a discussion arising out of the *Ardis* material. That the writing of Vadim's memoirs occurs from a non-physiological state of consciousness within which both psychological and lineal time are retained and continued by memory is subtly suggested by a combination of factors. Midway through his memoirs Vadim refers to the time of actual writing as 1974: "If Bel is alive today, she is thirty-two—exactly your age at the moment of writing (February 15, 1974)" (p. 133). On the surface this would indicate Vadim's autobiography to have been written during the period from 1970 to 1974, but that the statement is addressed to his last love also supports the possibility that Vadim is writing from a new sphere of conscious existence since, while he regards all his loves as harlequins, he terms only his last love immortal: "Look at the harlequins, everybody look—Iris, Annette, Bel, Louise, and you, you, my ultimate and immortal one!" (p. 101). The structural divisions, that demarcate the phases of Vadim's history, posit the same possibility by suggesting that he dies in 1970. Vadim claims that Part Five of his memoirs constitutes "This penultimate part of LATH" (p. 157). That Part Six, therefore, describes the end

of Vadim's physical or 'earthly' existence is reinforced when in describing his heart attack he says, "What used to happen so often in thought, *now had happened for keeps*: I could not turn" (p. 185, my italics). In other words, Vadim admits to a cessation of physical activities that describes earthly death. At the beginning of Part Seven, Vadim's "old" rule, that "The I of the book / Cannot die in the book" (p. 187), parodically juxtaposes the artistic and non-fictive 'worlds' of Vadim's existence: at the aesthetic level Vadim does not die into the book because he is Nabokov's invented creature and the novel is not yet completed by Nabokov; within the simulated non-fictive context of the novel's world, however, Vadim may have died (like Mr R. in the created world of *Transparent Things*). Thus both as Nabokov's invented author and as a first-person narrator within the novel's world, it may be argued that Vadim writes his personal memoirs from a 'non-temporal' state of consciousness within which memory is the basis of Vadim's ongoing individuality.⁴¹

In terms of Vadim's narrative, Part Seven is a plausible account of a physical state of "paresis" in which Vadim's mental activities continue. At the same time, it is a separate, though interrelated, "autobiography" (p. 195), since it describes a complete conscious re-creation of his personal past made possible through memory and the power of association which is a form of memory. Thus while Part Seven is a plausible continuance of Vadim's earthly existence, in combination with the structural components of *Harlequins* Part Seven repeats the patterns of Vadim's personal earthly reality to suggest that the movement from life to death is a mental manoeuvre to a new state of conscious being within which memory provides a continuum and an ongoing record of individuality:

I had some sense of duration and direction—
two things which a beloved creature seeking
to help a poor madman with the whitest of
lies, affirmed, in a later world, were quite
separate phases of a single phenomenon. (P. 191)

Moreover, that memory provides the ongoing basis of Vadim's stylizations is suggested by the final scene in which he once

more prefaces his proposal to his "immortal" love with the discussion of a scene from *Ardis* which reflects his personal "dementia," and re-invents his last harlequin as part of his illusory worlds.

A resistance to the idea that physical death involves a termination of individuality recurs throughout Nabokov's work. In *Pale Fire*, for instance, John Shade rejects the equation of death and dissolution of consciousness with the words, "I'm ready to become a floweret / Or a fat fly, but never, to forget" (PF, p. 44). In *Transparent Things* Nabokov uses the ability of consciousness to move between the distinctive but analogous "worlds" of art and of life to suggest that the movement from life to death involves a comparable mental manoeuvre from one state of consciousness to another. In *Look at the Harlequins!* Nabokov brings together the structural components of the novel and the characterization of Vadim to show that whatever the context admitted to by consciousness, memory remains as the individual basis for the ongoing stylizations of personality. The structural components further extend the dramatized depiction of memory to suggest that death is a different but interrelated state of consciousness within which memory provides a continuum of "individual reality."

CHAPTER 8: NOTES

¹ Nabokov himself indicated the central importance of love in *Ada*. When asked in 1966 how he was progressing with his novel, *The Texture of Time*, Nabokov replied:

. . . my *Texture of Time*, now almost half-ready, is only the central rose-web of a much ampler and richer novel, entitled *Ada*, about passionate, hopeless, rapturous sunset love, with swallows darting beyond the stained window and that radiant shiver. . . . (*SO*, p. 91)

² Lucy Maddox, in *Nabokov's Novels in English* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), suggests why there are no death dates recorded for Van and Ada on the family tree: "They [Van and Ada] create themselves in creating the book, and when they die they, being themselves matters of style, die into the book, so that the family tree has no death dates for either of them" (p. 117).

³ Nancy Ann Zeller, "The Spiral of Time in *Ada*," in *A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov*, Ed. Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1974), states, "the whole idea of memory (voluntary or involuntary) as being able to overcome time and death by fusing past to present underlies every novel that Nabokov has written" (p. 281).

⁴ Nabokov says that in his own *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* he "was mainly concerned with being faithful to the patterns of [his] past," whereas he suspected that in *Ada*, "Van Veen, having less control over his imagination than [Nabokov], novelized in his indulgent old age many images of his youth" (*SO*, p. 121). Van's prodigious adventures in the "floramors" are perhaps an example of the way he novelizes "many images of his youth."

⁵ Douglas Fowler, *Reading Nabokov* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1974), p. 191.

⁶ Julia Bader, *Crystal Land* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), pp. 139-40.

⁷ Maddox, p. 112.

⁸ Jeffrey Leonard, "In place of lost time: *Ada*" in *Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes*, Ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), suggests, "Antiterra is a remembered land, an imagined land; here space is less malicious than on Terra" (p. 139).

⁹ Alfred Appel, Jr., "Ada Described" in *Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes*, Ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 165.

¹⁰ Robert Alter, "Ada, or the Perils of Paradise" in *Vladimir Nabokov: His Life, His Work, His World*, Ed. Peter Quennell (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), p. 107.

¹¹ Alter, p. 107.

¹² Appel, p. 165.

¹³ Julia Bader suggests, "Terra and Anti-Terra are distorted reflections of each other and of the 'real' world" (p. 129). Alternatively, Brian Boyd, "Nabokov and Human Consciousness" (manuscript), points out, "The novel's world, hitherto accepted as Antiterra, as comically distant, proves to have been our own world, with its Roosevelt (Old Felt) and Stalin (Uncle Joe), its Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, even its de Gaulle. This disturbing collapse of the book's world insists on the fact of evil and suffering in the world we know" (pp. 344-45).

¹⁴ Ellen Pifer, "Heaven, Hell, and the Realm of Art: *Ada's* Dark Paradise" in her *Nabokov and the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), carries out a detailed examination of the allusions Van Veen reworks in his Antiterra, Chapter 7.

¹⁵ Van Veen's 'self-conscious synthesis' does not mitigate against his personal vices. Nabokov calls Van a "charming villain" (*SO*, p. 143). And when asked about apparent similarities between "the rhythm and tone of *Speak, Memory*" and Van Veen's memoirs, Nabokov says:

The more gifted and talkative one's characters are, the greater the chances of their resembling the author in tone or tint of mind. It is a familiar embarrassment that I face with very faint qualms, particularly since I am not really aware of any special similarities—just as one is not aware of sharing mannerisms with a detestable kinsman. I loathe Van Veen. (*SO*, p. 120)

Similarly, Nabokov rejects as absurd the suggestion that "[his] fictional character, bitchy and lewd Ada, is, [he] quote[s], 'in a dimension or two, Nabokov's wife'" (*SO*, p. 146). In the narrative of *Ada*, Van Veen's cruelty, for example, is shown in his blinding of Kim, the prying kitchen boy, who uses the photographs he takes of the 1884 summer at Ardis Hall to blackmail Ada. And in the final pages of Van's memoirs, both Van and Ada admit responsibility for contributing to Lucette's suicide:

'Oh, Van, oh Van, we did not love her enough. *That's* whom you should have married . . . and then everything would have been all right—I would have stayed with you both in Ardis Hall, and instead

of that happiness, handed out gratis,
instead of all that we *teased* her to
death! (A, p. 459)

¹⁶ Carl R. Proffer, "Ada as Wonderland: A Glossary of Allusions to Russian Literature" in *A Book of Things about Vladimir Nabokov*, Ed. Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1974), p. 251. In *Strong Opinions* Nabokov points out, "The opening sentences of *Ada* inaugurate a series of blasts directed throughout the book at translators of unprotected masterpieces who betray their authors by 'transfigurations' based on ignorance and self-assertiveness" (SO, p. 123).

¹⁷ Proffer suggests that Phillip Rack's surname, "*Rak* . . . meaning 'cancer'" (p. 262), denotes the cause of his death.

¹⁸ Nabokov in *Strong Opinions*, writing of the mixture of knowledge and imagination in his work, states directly his view of the interdependence of memory and imagination: "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" (SO, p. 78).

¹⁹ Tony Tanner, *City of Words* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1971), p. 58.

²⁰ Appel describes how "Ada is a kind of museum in more ways than one. As the family chronicle to end all such chronicles, it is also a museum of the novel, and it employs parody to rehearse its own history" (p. 161). After tracing through this parodic survey of "the Novel's Evolution" in Part 1 of *Ada*, Appel suggests, "Having leisurely rehearsed the novel's past, Nabokov then points to its future, and the book in hand, by doing some bravura handstands of his own. The opening chapters of Part Two successively offer an assemblage of letters; a physics fiction within a physics fiction that is the entire novel; a fantastic parody; a classroom lecture; and a description of photographs" (p. 173).

²¹ Ada's allusion here to Van's Demonia as "Desdemonia" (p. 408) suggests how Van the artist, like Othello, may also have the power to destroy Ada's individuality.

²² By pointing to the way Lucette's imitative style involves a suppression of her own individuality, I do not mean to deny either the tragedy of Lucette's suicide or Van's and Ada's contribution to Lucette's death. In "*Ada Described*," Appel points out:

Van may call himself "a romantic character" (p. 193), but Nabokov undermines our hero's estimation of himself. Van is hardly a "homme fatal," and as presented in *Ada*, the unfettered self is not always a joy to behold; the ego is seen as the monster it often is, calmly and coldly transfixed by an anti-Freudian writer who offers no redeeming causation. In addition to the

artist's suffering, we witness the suffering he causes others, something the *Bildungsroman* has never stressed. Thus Ada and Van contribute to Lucette's self-destruction, and her suicide movingly records the high price their freedom exacts. (P. 181)

²³ G.M. Hyde, *Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist* (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), p. 102.

²⁴ Christina Tekiner, "Time in *Lolita*" in *MFS*, 25, 3 (Autumn 1979), points out this discrepancy in chronology. In contrast to my reading of the novel, however, Tekiner argues:

On the morning of September 22, 1952, that is on the day Humbert received *Lolita's* and John Farlow's letters, Humbert did not set off at once for Coalmont to murder Richard Schiller, he did not meet with *Lolita*, he did not subsequently return to Ramsdale, and he did not kill Clare Quilty. Rather, he began to write *Lolita* in a "psychopathic ward" (p. 310). To reiterate: If the chronology is correct then it implies that the events which Humbert claims had occurred prior to September 22 have some basis in the "reality" of his life, but the events which he tells us occurred after September 22 are his fabrication. (Pp. 465-66)

²⁵ Alfred Appel, Jr., ed., *Vladimir Nabokov: The Annotated Lolita* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 321.

²⁶ Nabokov's parody of conventional realism and readers' expectations is a recognized aspect of Ray's editorial preface which is acknowledged but not discussed in this chapter.

²⁷ Lucy Maddox argues that such "readings of the novel are not so much wrong as over Ray as an "unreflecting moralist" (p. 68) whose opposite in the novel is Clare Quilty, "an amoral aesthete" (p. 69), and suggests that in contrast to both these characters, Humbert's "agonized examination of his own motives and his own style" (p. 71) does lead, though not unswervingly, to "a moral apotheosis." My own view is that the critical perspective Nabokov establishes through his structuring of the novel reveals Humbert's "diabolical cunning" in trying to convince readers of his journal of his artistic, emotional and moral sensitivities.

²⁸ When it was suggested to Nabokov that "In Hollywood and New York . . . relationships are frequent between men of forty and girls very little older than *Lolita*," he makes it clear that

Lolita's situation is very different from that of Hollywood starlets:

Cases of men in their forties marrying girls in their teens or early twenties have no bearing on Lolita whatever. Humbert was fond of "little girls"—not simply "young girls." Nymphets are girl-children and not starlets and "sex kittens." Lolita was twelve, not eighteen, when Humbert met her. You may remember that by the time she is fourteen, he refers to her as his "aging mistress." (*SO*, p. 93)

²⁹ Ellen Pifer, *Nabokov and the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), p. 107.

³⁰ H. Grabes, *Fictitious Biographies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), p. 34.

³¹ The idea of stylistic masks is introduced in the Foreword where John Ray, Jr., acknowledges that Humbert Humbert is a pseudonym:

Its [the memoir's] author's bizarre cognomen is his own invention; and, of course, this mask—through which two hypnotic eyes seem to glow—had to remain unlifted in accordance with its wearer's wish. (*L*, p. 5)

³² Appel in *The Annotated Lolita* points out that, while Humbert prefixes these lines of poetry with the statement "to quote an old poet," the old poet "is invented" (p. 431).

³³ Lucy Maddox examines how Humbert Humbert continually looks to "his own literary genealogy to find those like-minded precursors whose analogous situations might enlighten or instruct or, more important, justify him" (p. 72). Maddox quotes passages "from Proust, Keats, and Poe ("The Poetic Principle")" that show how "these three dissimilar writers all suggest that the ultimate source of aesthetic pleasure is located outside the boundaries of mortal experience" (p. 77). In particular, Maddox's discussion of the analogies between Poe's essay, "The Poetic Principle" and Humbert's language when speaking of his "own response to the beautiful" (p. 73) may also suggest a source for the argument Humbert puts forth in his two lines of invented poetry.

³⁴ Lucy Maddox states:

Look at the Harlequins! is the fictitious autobiography of Vadim Vadimovich N., a pompous, fastidious, intermittently lecherous and usually obtuse novelist whose curriculum vitae looks enough like that of another V.V.N. [Nabokov] to tempt the unwary to suspect that the novel may be an oblique, satiric self-portrait. (P. 144)

³⁵ Maddox suggests, "John Shade, Nabokov's sanest artist; knew that even the most visionary and enchanting of imagined worlds could allure only by offering a replica of ordinary, sublunary life. . . . The artist must be able to live in one world while he creates another, and to recognize the treacherousness of the created world of words" (p. 143)

³⁶ H. Grables in *Fictitious Biographies* provides a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which, throughout *Look at the Harlequins!*, Nabokov satirizes "the naïve expectation of a unity between author and work" (p. 129).

³⁷ Maddox argues, "Nabokov's madmen--Kinbote, Humbert (for part of his book), and the narrator of *Look at the Harlequins!* (for part of his book)--are mad precisely because the siren song they hear in the dream of art has lured them away from the world of 'blessed matter,' as Humbert puts it, and of mortal, vulnerable, human beings (pp. 143-44). In my own comments on *Lolita* I suggested that Humbert's confusion of art and life was a deliberate attempt to deceive his readers and to justify his own existence.

³⁸ Vadim writes six Russian and six English novels and his 'autobiography' whereas Nabokov, of course, has produced nine Russian and eight English novels, an autobiography, short stories, plays, poems, scholarly and non-fictive writings. Richard Patterson, in "Nabokov's *Look at the Harlequins!*: Endless Re-creation of the Self," *RLT* 14 (1976), 84-89 examines some of the parallels between Nabokov's career and that of his invented artist, Vadim. Lucy Maddox describes the similarities between Nabokov's biographical history and Vadim's 'life,' but also points out the "important differences" (p. 144).

³⁹ Paul S. Bruss, "The Problem of Text: Nabokov's Last Two Novels" in *Nabokov's Fifth Arc: Nabokov and Others on His Life's Work*, Ed. J.E. Rivers and Charles Nicol (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1982), points out:

The passage alludes to a "main plotter," who, as opposed to Vadim himself, initiates certain actions that resemble "a clumsy conspiracy," of whose existence even the plotter himself is unaware. Despite all their complex posturing in full view of each other, apparently neither Vadim nor the "main plotter" possess an authoritative text of experience to which he is committed. (P. 304)

⁴⁰ Maddox suggests "Vadim also uses his art to defend himself against truths he does not want to recognize and emotions he is afraid of succumbing to" (p. 152).

⁴¹ W.W. Rowe, in *Nabokov and Others: Patterns in Russian Literature* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1979) states "Look at the Harlequins! may be deemed a refined culmination of Nabokovian hints at alternative realities" (p. 173).

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