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Enchantment and Coincidence: A Comparative Study of *Don*
Quixote and *Pale Fire*

by

Scott C. Hurley

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York

2001

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Enchantment and Coincidence: A Comparative Study of *Don Quixote* and *Pale Fire*

by
Scott Hurley

Adviser: David Richter

The dissertation posits a direct relationship between Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, despite Nabokov's famous antipathy to the earlier work (*Lectures on Don Quixote*). The main field of comparison involves the two protagonists, Quixote and Charles Kinbote, the madmen who create themselves anew out of their reading as heroic, literary figures. It argues that their project is ontological; they try to write themselves into the world of literature as literature. Kinbote's commentary and Quixote's actions, each undertaken in response to literary works (John Shade's poem "Pale Fire"; the tales of chivalry in Quixote's library) are performances meant to delineate new selves, but they are also meant to create new subjects for literature. Quixote performs for his sage chronicler (who may be directing his actions), certain that he is being inscribed into a work of literature. Kinbote's reading of "Pale Fire" intends to transform the poem from a disinterested autobiographical piece into the epic of King Charles of Zembla, his chosen identity.

These novels are more than just vehicles for the stories of their protagonists; their narrative landscapes seem to devolve straight from their mental states. In *Pale Fire*, Kinbote's version of the poem struggles with the original for narrative ascendancy. This struggle mimics that between Quixote's version of the events unfolding in *Don Quixote* and the version of his unexpected narrator, Cide Hamete Benengali. The novels are born from the fissure in contradictory narratives. Each character, clinging fast to an ideal version is at war with the empirical "reality" of the world given by his author. The dissertation focuses on the palimpsestic quality of these novels; the narrative versions of Cide and Quixote are written on top of each other, mimicking the clash between the knight of the imagination and the world of sensual things. Such is precisely the case with the competing versions of "Pale Fire," the poet's and the commentator's (both poem and commentary are closely examined); and with Kinbote's fantastic Zembla and its mundane original, New Wye. In *Don Quixote* the inherent double nature of narrative is likened to enchantment, in *Pale Fire* to coincidence.

The final chapter of the dissertation brings the comparison into an historical context, arguing that the "narrative as palimpsest" style of the *Quixote* is the

defining characteristic of the modern novel. This chapter looks at the tradition of the novel in English from the Eighteenth Century through Beckett and, of course, Nabokov. *Pale Fire* is characterized as a tribute at the end of a tradition to what began it. Emulating Cervantes, Nabokov attests to that fissure between narrative and the "story" narrative is meant to convey which defines *Don Quixote* and the genre it invented.

Acknowledgements

Recognition and thanks to those people who nurtured the central idea of this dissertation with their time and their fine minds: Diana Wilson, Bruce Kawin, Angus Fletcher. I am particularly indebted to Michael Preston and David Richter who took on the responsibility of directing the project at different stages and under unique circumstances.

It is a delight to have the chance to publicly acknowledge the generosity, the kindness and the intellectual curiosity of my parents, Bruce and Joan Hurley; without these attributes none of this would have come to be. The determination and intelligence of my sister, Dr. Leslie J. Hurley, has been a great inspiration to me. I owe my greatest debt to my wife Karen who won the doctoral stakes in a runaway. If I have contributed anything to her it has been aid in acquiring an extraordinary level of one of the greatest of human qualities: patience.

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The image offered us by reading the poem now becomes really our own. It takes root in us. It has been given us by another, but we begin to have the impression that we could have created it, that we should have created it. It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses.

--Gaston Bachelard
(from *The Poetics of
Space*, translated by
Maria Jolas)

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Introduction

An essay interested in parallels between *Pale Fire* and *Don Quixote* must acknowledge two essential works of criticism. The first is Robert Alter's excellent *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: Univ. Of California Press, 1975). The second is, not surprisingly, Nabokov's less excellent *Lectures on Don Quixote* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983). The latter is not quite the "academic spoof" Stephen Gilman declares it to be (*The Novel According to Cervantes*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989, 14); yet it might be said that as a Cervantes critic, Nabokov is a terrific novelist. Unlike Alter, unlike every Cervantist (including the handful who have chosen to respond to him) Nabokov refuses to grant *Don Quixote* the status of a truly "serious" work. He sees it as a chaotic book, little more than a vehicle for essentially stock picaresque adventures patched together willy-nilly. It is "crude and coarse," filled with the most abhorrent violence. Worse, it's not even funny.

He is willing to allow Cervantes a certain qualified genius based on his creation of the character Don Quixote. Unfortunately, Nabokov's conception of the same character

follows a well-worn path (Turgenyev and Unamuno are only two famous predecessors); it is little more than a reductive conflation of Quixote with Christ. Though he does not go to Unamuno's lengths ("Our Lord Don Quixote")¹, in Nabokov's lectures, Quixote is either a kind of disembodied intellect or a very uncomplicated scape goat, a mere target for the brutality of what the critic determines to be abnormally brutal times--and of a pretty crude author.

Such thinking leads Nabokov to a far worse error (one many people make), the separation of Don Quixote from his book:

We are confronted by an interesting phenomenon: a literary hero losing gradually contact with the book that bore him; leaving his father land, leaving his creator's desk and roaming space after roaming Spain. In result, Don Quixote is greater today than he was in Cervantes' womb...We do not laugh at him any longer. His blazon is pity, his banner is beauty. He stands for everything that is gentle forlorn, pure, unselfish and gallant. The parody has become a paragon (*Lectures on Don Quixote*, 112).

I would suggest that the worst thing parody can do is become paragon. This sort of reading makes Quixote nothing more than the cardboard cut-out knight he aspires to be, a literary automaton. Such simplification of the character is

¹

As he refers to him in "Don Quixote Today," from *Tragic Sense of Life*, trans. J.E. Crawford Flitch, New York: Dover, 1954.

symptomatic of a larger simplification of the book; Nabokov's Quixote is not much different from the character almost everyone knows, from a book they have not needed to read. In such a view the author who got lucky and happened to invent an immortal character really is ironically close to the accidental "step-father" (Nabokov's comment about wombs notwithstanding) Cervantes pretends to be in his prologue to the first part of *Don Quixote*.

Nabokov takes great pains in his introductory lecture to distinguish between Shakespeare, that intricate, universally humanizing artist, and this Spanish author who happened to die on the same day (though in different calendars); yet he assesses Cervantes much as Shakespeare himself was assessed prior to the 18th Century, as the wildly imaginative but undisciplined savant. He is tone deaf to Cervantes' style of parody.² His view in general is

2

One example should suffice. Nabokov complains at some length about Cervantes' personal inability (and the 17th Century's general inability) to describe a living landscape (*Lectures on Don Quixote*, 32-34). He cites the description of the morning on which Quixote has his battle with the Knight of the Mirrors (II: 14) as an example, never considering that the over-blown, formulaic language ("the willows distilled sweet manna, the fountains laughed, the brooks babbled, the woods rejoiced, and the meadows arrayed themselves in all their glory at her coming") might be intended to parody the absurd courtly dialogue the pretend knights conduct "as if...they were not going to break each other's heads" (II:12:487). It also functions as an obvious parodic antithesis to the close description of Tome Cecial's hideous

antithetical to the one given at the end of Leo Spitzer's "Linguistic Perspectivism in the *Quijote*" (in *Linguistics and Literary History*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1948. Nabokov seems not to have read this essay.). Spitzer maintains that where Cervantes seems to nod he is really spinning an intricate web of narrative, and that all the novel's metafictional and self-conscious linguistic practices, far from fragmenting the novel--a la modernist works by authors like Joyce, Woolf and Gide--actually unify *Don Quixote* and allow the presence of Cervantes to shine through. He "stands at the other pole from that modern dissolution of the personality of the author" (Spitzer, 72), creating himself as the author by ostensibly submerging his identity (in Cide Hamete or the prologuist or the Morisco translator), among other techniques. In a summation whose hyperbole seems to have no ironic intent, Spitzer calls Cervantes, as author, the "all-embracing creative self, Naturelike, Godlike, almighty, all-wise, all-good--and benign" (Spitzer, 73).

For all Spitzer's encomiums remind one of Nabokov's own

false nose immediately following it. (These passages, and all succeeding citations from the *Quijote*, come from the Ormsby translation revised by Jones and Douglas in the Norton *Don Quixote*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1981. When quoting directly from this work, I will cite Book, chapter and page number, as above).

views on an author's relationship to her novel (He saw himself as the autocratic ruler of the text and his characters as "galley slaves" [*Strong Opinions*, New York: Vintage International, 1983, 95]), Nabokov's Cervantes, though granted with a playwright's instinct for dialogue, is a bumbling novelist feeling his way along, not bothering to re-read completed parts of his work for the sake of continuity.³ Again, behind this is a reluctance to assume that Cervantes' seemingly incoherent plot might be carefully planned, that his unorthodox narrative practices might be well-considered experiments deliberating over, or emblemizing, central themes in the book (such as the transformation of self or the agency of a literary

3

Explaining narrative anomalies such as the changing name of Sancho Panza's wife, Spitzer is inclined to give rather elaborate reasons consonant with his essential premise. On the subject of names, Spitzer declares that a linguistic analysis "can carry us further toward the center, allowing us to catch a glimpse of the general attitude of the creator of the novel toward his character" and that there is "a relationship between [Cervantes'] linguistic ambivalence and his general perspectivism" (Spitzer, 50). Nabokov on the other hand just puts the matter down to Cervantes' carelessness. For his part Cervantes never pretends such anomalies do not exist; he often draws attention to them. About the controversy surrounding Sancho's wife's name, for example, he has Sancho declare that it is evidence of Cide Hamete's faults as a narrator. Both Spitzer and Nabokov may be right. While it may well have been an oversight, it also jibes with the kind of linguistic sophistication Spitzer delineates; Cervantes acknowledgement suggests that even mistakes are part of the plan.

imagination in understanding life). In other words, Nabokov refuses to allow that Cervantes might be an author very much like Nabokov. To suggest that he, Nabokov, is a writer in the Cervantic tradition would of course be heresy.

II

There can be no real critical consensus on a work like *Don Quixote*. What has made it vital for all these years is its openness to interpretation. Forgetting for a moment that such critical freedom may be the very thing *Don Quixote* is about, we could note that each age creates its own *Quixote* (though even this line of thinking has itself become something of a cliché). It always looks foolish to claim the advantage of contemporaneity. Yet "our" reading of the novel, the "postmodern" reading (if it is indeed ours), at least partially constructed as a reaction to previous readings, acknowledges a multiplicity of views. With its hundreds of characters, its great range of philosophical inquiry and its many narrative layers, *Don Quixote* must be called a multiple book. There is no stable view offered, no "unbroken reality" (Spitzer, 57), just a series of heterogeneous perspectives of the world in constant tension with each other.

The same thing is true about the criticism of *Don Quixote* itself. This vast body, widely divergent and often

contradictory, should discourage anyone from claiming there can be a definitive understanding of the novel. Such a thing would indeed be quixotic. Nabokov errs in this regard⁴, but Alter does not. He limits his scope to the novel's self-consciousness, or essentially, to Cervantes' multiform use of literature and to language's dual role as creator and describer of reality--not just for Quixote, but for almost all the novel's characters. The book is filled with self-creators, with "imitations drawing attention to themselves as imitations" (Alter, 11), a collection of inventors who position themselves within the artifice according to the conventions of the literature they read, commenting in turn on the esthetic quality of the invented selves of others. Not surprisingly, Alter concludes that literary criticism is a foundational element of the self-conscious novel. In other words, the thing exists as literature because it acts like

⁴

It is important to remind the reader that Nabokov's lectures were published posthumously. Fredson Bowers' editing is beyond reproach; but I question the wisdom of the whole project. During his life Nabokov would not allow anything of his to be published that had not been first very carefully corrected and evaluated. While he intended someday to publish the material collected posthumously as *Lectures on Literature* and *Lectures on Russian Literature* (though it is not at all certain he would have approved of these versions), there is nothing to indicate a desire to publish the Quixote material, lectures he did not want to give in the first place on a book he disliked. *Lectures on Don Quixote* is vastly inferior to his other lectures and they have, I believe, damaged his reputation as critic.

literature; it is aware of itself proceeding along the conventional lines of literature. By so doing it can snap these lines, gaining new generic ground by intentionally purveying, and thus probing literature. Clearly the *Quixote* is the start of all this, at least in that amorphous genre, the novel; it has the extraordinary distinction of being the most important single work initiating a genre while also being perhaps the greatest departure from it, the novel that exposes the machinery by overtaxing its generic conventions.

Then perhaps this is not so extraordinary. Jose Ortega y Gasset (*Meditations on Quixote*, trans. Evelyn Rugg and Diego Marin. New York: Norton, 1961), echoing Dr. Johnson and others, maintains that the first great example of a new genre contains within it the fullness of possibility for the entire genre. Of course any work at the beginning of a genre has great freedom in trying to set the rules; this *must* entail a certain amount of probing. The new always threatens to be a parody of itself, to parody its "newness."

Regardless, Alter's project is consonant with Ortega's dictum while it seems to respond to a challenge the latter makes in his *Meditations*, that critics should uncover the ways that the *Quixote* is imbedded in every novel having succeeded it, as all epics carry around Homer in their bones. For Alter there is some amount of self-consciousness

in all novels because it was there at the beginning. Self-consciousness can be found in all genres, but perhaps it has found its greatest freedom in the novel. Novels have always used the method of telling as an essential part of the telling. While he does not try to cover all novels, Alter looks at a number of famous works, suggesting that the influence of the *Quixote* is spread farther than his heterogeneous sample.

Alter's primary concern, then, is to define *Don Quixote* in generic terms, to trace the influence of its self-consciousness on the genre of the novel by examining those works which seem particularly close to its spirit of experimentation. Among these is *Pale Fire*. He makes few statements about direct parallels between the two works, yet he sees *Pale Fire* following *Don Quixote* in the way its main character manipulates reality with language; like *Don Quixote* it asks us "to ponder how the mind uses words to structure reality, to consider the deep trouble as well as the delights we make for ourselves through the stirring verbal realities we construct" (Alter, 186). Analyzing Nabokov's novel in these terms, he concludes, generically, that "the self-conscious novel tends to polarize the inherent tension between fiction and reality, then to make our perception shuttle between them" (Alter, 193). Thus

within each novel is enacted the same sort of fictional dialectic occurring between the books themselves and their readers. Both Kinbote and Quixote conflate their own private fictions with events in the "real" world, just as Cervantes and Nabokov let the real into their artifices by constantly reminding us just how artificial they are. Alter declares that the creation of the Zemblan language amounts to much the same thing as Don Quixote's renaming himself, his horse, or Aldonza Lorenzo (Alter, 193). Again, it is all a matter of how words stand for things; distortion in language can amount to a new creation in the right kind of mind, the kind that attaches to the new *name* a new *thing*, a new reality. The manipulation of language to such ends is as basic a tool of the self-conscious novel as literary criticism.

III

If Alter's project is to anatomize the self-conscious genre within the novel (he does not entirely convince me that the whole genre is self-conscious), mine is to explore the way in which the *Quixote* is deeply ingrained in *Pale Fire*. While it is enough for Alter to recognize the fundamental role of literary criticism or self-creation or multiplicity in the sub-genre, I need to show specifically how they function in these two novels. An oversimplification might help. Alter is primarily concerned with

a generalized understanding of the methods Cervantes and Nabokov use to write their novels. My study is far more circumscribed. It looks at the protagonists of the works as creators of the worlds they inhabit.

This essay will not claim that *Pale Fire* is a retelling of the Quixote story; it is too fanciful to equate New Wye and Wordsmith University with the plains of Montiel, yet Kinbote's construction of a new persona, his pursuing validation of that persona in art and his confusing reality with fantasy and writing with action are all hallmarks of the way Don Quixote encounters *his* world. At the base of the quixotic paradigm is a loosening of identity by madness; such loosening opens a space for self-creation. But neither he nor Kinbote is able entirely to dispel the original identity. The personae we readers meet are palimpsests; the ghost-images of Botkin and Quixano remain visible, altering our perception, making us realize they are multiple creatures.

Their strategies for controlling the ghost of the original self are quite similar. In each case the new identity, though a grand delusion, is an impossibly rigid construction void of any really human traits. They create automatons, characters from fables. Not surprisingly, they must in turn modify their perceivable landscapes to produce

suitably artificial environs for these personae. Quixote transforms the environment as he encounters it while Kinbote does so after the fact, as he sits writing in his cabin in Cedarn; but their method of remaking reality is otherwise quite similar. Quixote sees giants in windmills, Kinbote sees traitors in college professors; each uses what comes to hand, turning everyday objects into icons. Think of Orthodox Christian icons. The signifiers become sacred because of what they signify, granting them a multiple, paradoxical status, part object, part essence. Similarly, Kinbote's professors and Quixote's windmills are both their apparent selves *and* their ideal counterparts at the same time.

John Shade's assertion, at the end of "Pale Fire," that the universe must be organized along the same lines by which his poem is organized--a vast, artistic cosmos--resonates with a basic Platonic idea that objects of this world are connected to matching, divine essences. This is a way to think of Quixote's and Kinbote's versions of the events, objects and people within their milieus. They are representatives of the events, objects and people comprising their fantasies, connected to their counterparts in Kinbote's or Quixote's perception. More simply put, each character reads his world as an element of the story he is telling himself. They do not need to overcome the

contradictory evidence inherent in these objects (in windmills, professors); they merely need to see that behind, or within, the windmill is a giant, within the professor is a traitor. Needless to say, to them the giant and the traitor are more "true" than the windmill or the professor.

Thus Kinbote's and Quixote's apprehension of their worlds follows the pattern of their self-creation. We suspect that deep within them they are aware of their originating identities. This creates interesting problems. Kinbote rather conspicuously lets Botkin hover around the edges of his story as though the latter had to be shown to be a discrete character in order for Kinbote's story to work. Quixote attempts to solve the dilemma by projecting his awareness of the originating identity onto his own creation, Dulcinea, who is both the peasant Aldonza Lorenzo and the impossible story book queen. This seems to work until Sancho manages to enchant her; then it becomes fairly clear that the anxiety associated with her subsequent disenchantment is a form of Quixote's own crisis of identity. The queen who once was a peasant stands for the hidalgo who became a knight. Kinbote is the professor who became a king, and the connection between the two personae is exactly that between New Wye and Zembla; one has not supplanted the other, one *is* the other, disguised, existing

on a different plane of perception to which only Kinbote has access. On this level Kinbote's commentary is not the irrelevant scholium it otherwise is; it is the accurate assessment of the "Pale Fire" that Kinbote reads, a poem that is indeed about the king of Zembla. Similarly, Quixote generally sees the world as a chivalric adventure merely disguised as everyday life; quite early in the novel he stops deluding himself that things look different from what they are. What takes over is a desire to look under the appearances of things to his "reality," the perception conditioned by the conventions of the literature to which he is beholden--and to which only he has access.

Quixote and Kinbote conceive of their visions as privileged possessions, yet each character desires to disseminate it by having himself written about. From the start they see writing as the great method to validate their ideals. They are readers now reading their lives instead of books; to have someone else turn the life into literature is to complete the circle. Kinbote knows his tale to be merely a chaotic mass of desire without Shade's intervention. Shade himself puts a great deal of stock in the "organizing stamp" of poetry, a process by which inchoate ideas are made coherent in art; it is even more necessary to Kinbote. Without Shade's poem the king simply does not exist. It is

the last barrier keeping Kinbote from disappearing into the total anonymity of his insanity. Quixote, on the other hand, knows that the moment he decided to become a knight he must have attracted a chronicler of his deeds. Knights do not exist without these sage chroniclers. And Quixote naturally expects that his sage's version of his adventures will perfectly match his own ideal version.

Deploring the real, Kinbote and Quixote attempt to live the ideal versions they have invented. Their madness seems to make all of this possible, as if their inability to distinguish between what really occurs and what they imagine to be occurring did indeed change their ontological position. Holding fast to perhaps their most reliable instinct--the instinct to read--they comprehend their loss of mental faculties as a release into a different state of existence, across the border into literature. Surely this is the only escape from their insanity. Wanting to be characters, they are characters. We are meant to feel some disturbance as we realize that we read them only after they have made such a decision, as though they were right all along. I would not claim that they come into existence as literary artifacts in novels by Nabokov and Cervantes because they *wanted* to. But their desire to exist as artifacts in the work of John Shade or a nameless sage

speaks in a strange way of the relationship between authors and readers, reminding us that our attention, our reading, is an active agent: We bring them to "life" because we read, whether what we read is something by Cide Hamete or Cervantes, by John Shade or Nabokov.

IV

Before continuing it is necessary to define some things. I would not like to take on Ortega's challenge of tracing *Don Quixote* through the novels that followed it. Some have tried to do a more encompassing and approximate job than Alter, notably Harry Levin ("The Quixotic Principle: Cervantes and Other Novelists," in *The Interpretation of Narrative: Theory and Practice*, Ed. Morton W. Bloomfield. Cambridge Ma.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970). But trying to isolate the quixotic in every novel obviously requires diluting it so much as to make it meaningless. I alluded above to the evolution of critical reception of the novel. Any characteristic able to survive intact such widely varied, more or less "canonical" interpretations--Quixote as the buffoon, Quixote as enlightened rationalist, Quixote as Christ, Quixote as doomed Romantic, Quixote as Victorian moralist, Quixote as Jamesian pragmatist, Quixote as everyman hero, Quixote as psycho-sexual basket case, etc.--would need be very abstract indeed. Original writers such

as Swift, Fielding, Sterne, Smollett, Flaubert, Melville, Fitzgerald, Salinger have produced novels, or characters, easily labelled "quixotic," yet they did so in unique ways, or they maintained that status despite them.

Still, I would contend that each of the mentioned authors (with the exception of Sterne) adheres to a fairly programmatic "quixotesque" in his work (even if he was not in fact setting out to write a novel in the *Quixote* tradition). For the purpose of this study it is necessary to distinguish between those aspects we readily call *quixotic* and the more specific terms with which I will compare *Don Quixote* and *Pale Fire*. To the former belong idealism; the submerging of identity; obsessiveness; a world view based on rigid conventions and romantic ideology; a basic antipathy to modern contrivances. Perhaps there are more, but as I have said, the *quixotic* has become a rather abstract concept.

Nabokovian quixotism, found to a large extent also in *Lolita*⁵, is by contrast almost purely literary. *Pale Fire's*

⁵

Two essays I know of, with curiously mirroring titles, specifically address the Cervantic influences on *Lolita*: Michael Wood's "Invisible Works: Cervantes Reads Nabokov and Borges" (*Cervantes and the Modernists: The Question of Influence*, Ed. Edwin Williamson. London: Tamesis, 1994) and Catherine Kuncz's "'Crude and Cruel': Nabokov Reading Cervantes" (*Cervantes*, 13 [1993]). Neither is completely satisfying. There is need for a full treatment.

Charles Kinbote is merely "quixotic" in his desire to become the king of Zembla or, even, in his desire to be memorialized in Shade's poem; but in the way he attempts to bend reality to fit his view, he reflects the very essence of Quixote's project of transformation. I call this "literary self-inscription," the desire to write oneself into a literary form, to turn one's life into literature. This begins with Quixote who, in the words of E.C. Riley, "is trying to turn life into art while it is yet being lived."⁶ As Riley points out, this is madness (the more sane thing to do for someone so infatuated with his reading is to pick up a pen and imitate the writing), and madness is the condition by which such self-inscription seems possible to the protagonist in each novel; more, it is the foundational element of his identity. We do not learn Quixote's "real" name until after he regains his sanity at the very end of Part Two. The anonymity out of which the madman seems almost miraculously created on the first page of Part One underscores that his madness is his most individuating characteristic. Without it there is no Quixote.

Before I begin conducting a catalogue of quixotisms in

⁶

Cervantes's Theory of the Novel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962--
-hereafter known as Riley, 1962-- 37).

Kinbote I would note one of Nabokov's sentiments I strongly endorse: The true measure of a work's value is the extent to which it departs from rather than conforms to what came before it. *Pale Fire* is a unique book, a highly experimental novel; no one should call it unoriginal. Yet though Nabokov claimed there was no authentic tradition but the "tradition of talent," there is validity to Ortega's argument. Perhaps *Don Quixote* is so deeply ingrained in the genre that it sprouts in areas ostensibly inhospitable to it. If Alter's book proves anything it is that the quixotic tradition is so flexible as to accommodate endless variations; it is a liberating paradigm, not a limiting one. I believe that Nabokov the experimental novelist says this to us quite clearly, above the protests of the pedantic critic with the same name.

V

These are the areas in which I see distinct, foundational similarities between Quixote and Kinbote:

The Creation of a New Identity--Quixote and Kinbote submerge their original identities in favor of more glamorous ones. Quixano becomes Quixote, Botkin becomes Kinbote (the similarity in the names "Quixote" and "Kinbote" seems too obvious to require comment, yet the obvious is sometimes

overlooked). If this latter pairing is somewhat problematic, still it seems to be the case that Kinbote *believes*--or would like us to believe--he is Botkin (I will discuss this in a later chapter). In both cases the new identity is a simple rearrangement of the original, a multiple, palimpsest identity, incorporating both. These multiple identities represent the Kinbotic or Quixotic world view, a double creation in which fantasy does not so much replace the "real" as collide with it. It is worth mentioning that Kinbote's delusion of being the exiled king of Zembla is no less far-fetched than Quixote's delusion of being the knight errant. Indeed, they share almost precisely the same outdated nostalgia; Kinbote's ideal of the cosmopolitan scholar-king is as anachronistic in 1962 as Quixote's knight is in 1605.

Insanity--In each character insanity is the driving factor behind self-fashioning. Both are obviously delusional, maintaining a single, intricately developed, grand personality. Their madness is a two-edged sword. While it isolates them from their original selves and from the normal discourse of their literary environment, it is what allows them to cross boundaries from the real into the imaginary. Each character's malady, purported to be organic, is not

completely ambiguous. Quixote would have been classified in the early Seventeenth Century as a choleric dominated by a "dry" humor, easily susceptible to delusions; the first narrator's assertion that from reading too many books of knight errantry his brain had "shrivelled" up (I:1) has a grotesque, comical intent, yet we cannot mistake the physicality of it. Such a description is moreover almost a perfect, naive description of cerebral sclerosis. I will argue in the chapter on Kinbote that on the interpretive plane of *Pale Fire* readers are meant to discover that this is the root cause of his insanity. Both characters quite clearly weaken through the course of the work, and I believe we are meant to accept their deaths as the inevitable result of their disease. Riley notes that Quixote's death would have seemed less "tacked on" to readers of his time than it does to us, his brief fever clashing with the cool humors of his eventual, melancholiac's decline to cause a quick death.⁷

⁷ "Growing caution, signs of loss of confidence and depression are symptoms of the gradual cooling of his hot, dry passions, which ends in cold melancholy. His condition is further aggravated by neglect of proper food and rest. The logical culmination of the process [to the early 17th Century reader] is death, which follows his quarten fever, heavy sleep and final, brief return to sanity" (Riley, *Don Quixote*. London, Allen and Unwin, 1986--hereafter known as Riley, 1986--107).

Allegoric Drive--Quixote and Kinbote see themselves basically as allegoric figures at the center of a tale characterized by a distinct dichotomy of good and evil. There is no middle ground for either of them. Quixote's malevolent and beneficent enchanter serve the same function as Kinbote's Shadows and Karlists. Both characters create allegoric subcharacters reflecting the workings of their minds. Many critics, such as Riley and Ruth El Saffar, have discussed Quixote as an "author" of his own life. The "quixotification" of Sancho can be viewed as a creation of sorts by Quixote, but the best example is his conjuration of Dulcinea as the ideal of feminine beauty and grace. But Quixote really transforms his entire environment into a quasi-allegorical landscape, characters included. Readers of the novel are aware of Quixote's misapprehensions, but he is not. Such transformations are similar to Kinbote's transformations of characters from New Wye into figures in his Zemblan fantasy. The greatest allegorical figures for Kinbote are Gradus and the "real" person, John Shade, who is much like a cross between the beneficent sage whom Quixote believes is controlling his life and an enchanted Dulcinea.

The Heroic Quest--Related to his allegorical creation of

self is the heroic purpose motivating each character. Don Quixote repeatedly says that he wants to return the world to the benefices of the Golden Age by reinstating the order of chivalry to daily life. Kinbote is determined to make the world see the triumph of the Zemblan king with its repudiation of the revolution. In each case the quest only masks the real desire for recognition and escape from unappetizing or painful lives (able only to make assumptions about these lives, we can yet be pretty sure they are not as desirable as the ones meant to replace them).

Literary perception--Kinbote's madness is not openly declared to result from reading too much--as is the case with Quixote--but clearly reading plays a great role in it. His tale itself, masquerading as a critical document, is ostensibly a *reading* of "Pale Fire." As with Quixote reading conditions Kinbote's perception of the world. Each character tries to change the world he lives in into literature. Quixote's world is a series of adventures of errantry while Kinbote's is that of a fantastic political thriller. More important, each character determines that a literary document will be the validation of the new identity he has adopted. Quixote senses from the moment he ventures out that he must be the subject of a romance *in order to exist*.

Literature is an ontological determinant for both characters rather than an epistemological subject. Kinbote's chosen existence is wrapped up in Shade's poem as much as Quixote's is in Cide's history. The poem Kinbote thought he was engendering in Shade--the one whose title would have been "Solus Rex"--corresponds exactly to the book of errantry Quixote thought he was inspiring.

To the insane, language may have powers beyond those of a mere vehicle to broach abstract concepts. Inextricably bound to perceptions of their lives are the words they use to delineate their environments; in a sense Kinbote and Quixote make themselves out of their words. To them language has the properties of magic--it is able to manipulate reality through invisible means. Kinbote's calling Shade an old enchanter and equating his own writing to "blue" or Goetic magic reveal such a faith beyond their surface facetiousness. "Pale Fire" is an incantation; it can actually change reality. Obviously Don Quixote bases his entire philosophy on the existence of enchantment; and enchanter, even his nemesis Freston, are always writers.

The central conflicts of *Pale Fire* and Part Two of *Don Quixote* result from the characters' disappointment in the way they are represented (Kinbote is not represented, of course, but he is convinced to the end that "Pale Fire" is

secretly about him, which amounts to the same thing). Kinbote is forced to tell his story in his notes--Quixote is forced to go out and live up to his fame. Both characters declare that only poets should tell their stories and both are openly hostile to such representation in novelistic form. This is the basis of literary self-inscription, the determination of characters to be characters, and the suggestion that such a desire is in fact behind their existence as fictional characters. *Pale Fire* and *Don Quixote* can be read as the stories of people determined to have someone tell stories about them. Of course neither gets anything like the story he desires.

VI

Our protagonists' madness makes them stand apart from the other characters, and the ensuing narratives appear to us almost as landscapes of the madmen's imaginations, as versions of reality (by inversion) rather than as isolated inventions--in other words, as exactly what madness is. Reading these novels, one feels that Quixote's or Kinbote's mental state somehow takes a hand in generating their very plots. Kinbote peppers his story with outrageous coincidences and resemblances, a self-conscious technique of his own meant to illuminate the extent of his control over that story. Yet there are all those "real" coincidences and

resemblances running through *Pale Fire* that Kinbote knows nothing about. And *Don Quixote* begins to take on more and more of the image of a romance of errantry the more Quixote convinces himself that he is a knight.

If the novels are indeed something like landscapes of the minds of the protagonists, reflections as much as projections, that would imply that Kinbote and Quixote have a high degree of autonomy. But it is a strange sort of autonomy; the world Don Quixote encounters in Part II has been quixotified, to be sure, but it is nothing like the world he *thought* he was creating. Most of Part Two finds him retreating from his earlier enthusiasms because they have been co-opted by all those mini-quixotes, the characters who have read the first part and want to take a hand in authoring the second part.⁸ Both characters, while ostensibly having controlling subjectivities, do not seem to have very much control. We feel a tension between what they try to effect and how they are affected. In the end it only makes us more aware of their status as puppets.

This is quite palpable for Don Quixote who has to

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Ruth El Saffar's *Distance and Control in Don Quixote: A Study in Narrative Technique* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1975) is the best investigation of this phenomenon. I will discuss her work in the main section of the Quixote chapter.

contend not only with a "lying" Moorish historian (who seems intent on using his story to create the genre of the novel despite him), but with an enchanter from the real world, Avellenada, the writer of the spurious continuation. How brilliantly Cervantes works his own tormenter into his novel; we identify author with character even more strongly than we were willing to before, not least of all because Don Quixote himself uses the opportunity to denounce Avellenada and Cide (Cervantes' chosen stand-in), conflating them as tormenters of the same stripe.

Echoing Spitzer and Riley, Alter contends that such attempts by Cervantes to draw attention to his own presence (more obvious examples include his *Galatea* being one of the books at the book inquisition; the Captive's account of one "Saavedra," a man of great adventure being with him as a prisoner; and the fact that the briefcase containing the tale of the "Ill-advised Curiosity" and left at Quixote's "magic inn" belongs to him)⁹ are really a declaration of his "proprietaryship over the fictional world he creates" (Alter, 17). I think this is correct, but not unproblematic since Cervantes ostensibly takes just as many steps to distance

⁹

The briefcase contains the manuscript to "Rinconete y Cortadillo," one of the *Exemplary Novels* he would publish eight years after *Don Quixote*, Part One.

himself from the text as author. The creation of Cide and the other narrators creates great ambiguity about the function of narration by weakening its standard monolithic foundation; paradoxically, because it seems so much like a narrative "stunt" to us, we are more inclined to dwell on Cervantes' status as controller, as "proprietor." Yet Cervantes understands that the reader should be allowed to see the strings of the puppet, but the hands of the puppet master should remain hidden.¹⁰

The Nabokov "presence" infiltrates *Pale Fire* in almost the same way Cervantes haunts Part One of *Don Quixote*. Readers will not miss the reference to *Lolita* (disguised as a hurricane) in John Shade's poem¹¹; those familiar with the

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I use Spitzer's metaphor of the puppeteer (Spitzer, 70) both to support his contention that Cervantes' creation of Cide is a method for drawing attention to himself as creator, and to temper his assertion that "the hero is Cervantes, the artist himself...the almighty overlord." I have the hindsight of changes in narrative approach that have occurred in the fifty years since that article was first published. Compared to the unceremonious "appearances" by authors even in fairly mainstream novels (eg. Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* or Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions*), Cervantes' intrusions on the text are hardly intrusive at all; they seem subtle devices.

¹¹

(ll.678-79) Shade may be referring to the novel intentionally, with "Hurricane Lolita" ironically signifying both the controversy it aroused and its strong sales. This seems unlikely. Shade writes that it was a "year of Tempests." The unorthodox capitalization strikes me as a purely Nabokovian device meant to remind us of Shakespeare's play. Shade could be thought of as *Pale Fire's* Prospero, the

works will also respond to the "rightness" of Professor Pnin's making it into the novel. We left him at the end of his own novel leaving town and out of a job; in New Wye he has found his way to the chairmanship of the "bloated Russian department." Less obviously, Pnin's *only* hovering around the fringes of *Pale Fire* (he is discussed on a few occasions and once "spotted" in the reading room of the library) marks his literary escape from the tormenting narrator of his own book, a different Nabokov stand-in whom Pnin refers to as a "dreadful inventor."¹²

Many readers will recall the dream shared by Pnin and his ex-wife's son, Victor Wind, in Chapter Four of *Pnin*. As

enchanter/writer/controller, the author's quasi-resembler, enunciating the desire to create plays and novels, and partially embodying the method, without letting us forget who *his* creator is.

¹²

This is a very subtle connection between the two novels. Pnin is Kinbote's opposite in almost every conceivable way. He has no illusions about himself or the success he should have. He is practical, clumsy, put upon. In the matter of literary self-inscription he is also Kinbote's opposite. While Kinbote determines to have his fantasy recorded in literature as his legacy, Pnin does everything he can to avoid his narrator, as though the latter were trying to steal his soul. When *Pnin's* narrator does eventually step-in to the action we are left with the feeling that Pnin may be entirely right about him. More dislocation follows; if *this* is true, then perhaps *nothing* the dreadful inventor writes about Pnin is true. The "real" Pnin may be less the lovable butt of so many jokes and more the "farcical pedant," the "humorless martinet" bewilderingly described in *Pale Fire*.

has been pointed out (even by Nabokov: *Strong Opinions*, 84), this dream is an almost perfect prototype to Kinbote's fantasy, with Pnin as the romantically cloaked mystery figure, the hunted king waiting for a motorboat to take him away from his lost country. We don't imagine that Pnin dreamed up Kinbote--we are reminded that they were both created by the same author.

Instead of writing themselves into their texts, Cervantes and Nabokov only suggests their presence in *Don Quixote* and *Pale Fire*. This self-conscious innuendo, being constructed out of literary reference, is thus consonant with the mental landscapes each character has created. Quixote and Kinbote adapt their worlds to conform to their literary understanding; in a sense the self-consciousness of their authors is part of that landscape, of their own self-consciousness. It is as if the pseudo-communication between author and character had been initiated by the character.

VII

There are many similarities between the novels besides the madness and desire for literary transformation of the main characters. They will enter the discussion in this essay, though, because they seem to be set in motion by the state of the main characters. I tend to lean towards the opinion that the reason why Nabokov's novel follows the

Quixote--in creating multiple narrative frames; in expressing itself in the form of "found" documents and pseudo-critical apparatus; in using a fairly transparent parody as a basis for novelistic exploration; in using thematic elements like repetition, imitation, transformation; in its form of self-consciousness (as outlined above); in its giving primacy to the creative power of language over the descriptive; in its pure experimentation--is because he realized, as Cervantes did, that this was the best way to tell a story about such a character, to let the force of his predicament and obsession, acting something like a black hole's hyper-gravity, bend the story in what might end up being fairly predictable ways after all.

Then again, I have my doubts. It is a little too interesting that after trashing *Don Quixote* in 1951¹³ Nabokov published so Quixotesque a novel as *Pale Fire* in 1962 (with *Lolita* coming along the way).¹⁴ If some recent

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Though we must remember just how small the forum was: one class of freshmen.

¹⁴

A more expansive study than this one might be able to declare the period from about 1953 to 1962, which saw the writing of his best novels in English (*Lolita*, *Invitation of a Beheading* and *Pale Fire*), as Nabokov's Cervantic period. *Pale Fire*, the most fantastic of his works, comes closest to the *Quixote* by pushing the idea of the artistic mind reconstructing itself and its environment in esthetic terms.

critics have been able to discern connections between Nabokov and Cervantes (eg. Robert Alter and Michael Wood), and any number have been able to read in Cervantes the sort of authorial qualities (high discipline and experimentiveness, self-referentiality, allusiveness, metafictionality, narrative intricacy, etc.) universally associated with Nabokov, why wasn't he?

Nabokov always eschewed speaking about influences, but he was not against recognizing some of them (with subtlety of course) in his novels. I believe that Kinbote's cerebral sclerosis, while being important to the plot and our understanding of his character, is also a discreet nod towards Quixote's "shrivelled up" brain. Gerald Emerald, *Pale Fire's* young professor, the wearer of the green jacket, almost certainly refers to Diego de Miranda, *el caballero de gaban verde* in *Don Quixote*. These similarities as well as the obvious resemblance in the names chosen for Quixote's and Kinbote's new identities lead me to conclude that Nabokov did indeed have *Don Quixote* in mind.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION TO *PALE FIRE*

The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction
Robs the vast sea; the moon's an arrant thief,
And her pale fire she snatches from the sun;
The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
The moon into salt tears; the earth's a thief,
That feeds and breeds by a composture stolen
From the gen'ral excrement; each thing's a thief.

(*Timon of Athens*; IV, iii: 436-442)

Introduction

Pale Fire is not a critical *terra incognita*. Perhaps it is so popular a subject of study because it parodies criticism so broadly. This is a paradox but not a complicated one. People can often better describe their neighbor's faults than their own; and critics have a knack for seeing the ways a text like *Pale Fire* castigates theoretical approaches they do not happen to hold without noticing the case to be made against their own. Yet *Pale*

Fire is genuinely adaptive to many interpretations. Perhaps without realizing it (though something tells me he certainly did), Nabokov wrote what is a critical "sure hit" because it explores and questions the very practice eternally dissecting it, a practice eternally attracted to self-dissection.

I have found that those critics who approach *Pale Fire* with their theoretical lenses already firmly in place tend not to read the novel all that well. Nabokov was a designer of difficult, complex games; those who try to make it conform, *a priori*, to single interpretive paradigms (particularly Freudian or Marxist) are set up to lose it from the outset. This is not to say that one must follow all of Nabokov's rules; however, flexibility and close reading are essential strategies. Early criticism of *Pale Fire* tended to be exegetical. Many critics (Mary McCarthy, Page Stegner, Nina Berberova, Andrew Field) attempted to unravel layers of meaning towards an essential understanding of a basic text; we might call it the "ur-*Pale Fire*." Correct or not, it has been pretty well delineated over the years. Later critics, realizing the big discoveries had been made, tended towards more general theoretical interpretations. Some have been unfortunate; some have been quite brilliant. But as is the case with any deeply enigmatic and complex

text, the more general criticism of *Pale Fire* has been unavoidably circumscribed; and as is also the case, items in contradiction to the theoretical packaging are somehow left out.

The very latest round of criticism has circulated the idea that *Pale Fire* is essentially an essay in ambiguity. Those issues so important to an earlier generation--whether Kinbote is really a Russian called Botkin, whether Shade is perhaps the author of both poem and commentary, whether there are "real" ghosts influencing the poem and commentary--have been determined to be beyond the point. Kinbote may or may not be Botkin; indeed, he may or may not be Charles the Beloved. To look too closely is to tamper with the work's main intention, which is to emblemize what much contemporary criticism trumpets so loudly: "postmodern indeterminacy," the idea that stories are merely collections of language acts in which truth is irrelevant. Kinbote's unholy exegesis of Shade's poem stands as proof that the exegetical method entire is outdated and inappropriate. All being fiction, no strand is closer to a "true," intended meaning than any other.

It seems one is expected to chose: unravel *Pale Fire*, look for its subtext, or smile along with it as it explodes canonical critical methods. Obviously I do not find either

course wholly satisfying. Merely to conduct an exegesis is to blind oneself to what *Pale Fire* may have to say about the critical process beyond its surface layer of parody (aimed perhaps as much at the perpetrator of the four-volume translation and commentary of *Eugene Onegin* as any one); yet to refuse to engage in exegesis out of allegiance to a critical tenet is to ignore everything Nabokov ever said about criticism and reading. To have a full appreciation of this rich work one must be prepared to interpret, yet one must account for the bigger picture. The novel demands to be read on two planes, the exegetical and the abstract, but they should not be kept separate. Matters of topical exegesis should be directed to an abstract interpretation of the work, which in turn should inform exegetical procedures. While topical exegesis might indeed lead one to conclude that much of the novel is ambiguous, ambiguity may itself have thematic significance; it may be an aspect of larger, more integrated meaning.

Beyond question is that *Pale Fire* investigates the very process of reading literature; while it certainly indicts the sort of critical over-indulgence that can turn a primary text into little more than a reflection of the critic, it raises very difficult questions about how such a loss of composure can occur in the first place. Nabokov's insane

critic, Charles Kinbote, so breaches the line between himself and his text that he construes it to be not just an image from the mirror; he sees it as his protector, as the redeemer of his disintegrating identity. As the near-epic of Charles the Beloved of Zembla, it would authenticate what he has decided to become. Kinbote's insanity is transformative: Reading means self-enactment and writing is the creation of worlds.

Of course Kinbote does not read the same "Pale Fire" that we read. *His* "Pale Fire" really is the story of the king of Zembla-- not because the poem actually addresses such an issue, but *because* Kinbote reads it that way. The final entry to his commentary recalls his re-reading the poem (after his bitterly disappointing first reading) and liking it more when expecting less; we understand the extent to which Kinbote's madness has adjusted his reading to suit its own purposes. In that moment the novel is born.

His commentary intends to transform *our* skeptical reading into one that will accommodate *his* revelation; he wants to make his reading ours. We must be willing to venture into the subliminal to find such inspiration, but Kinbote assures us it is there, "when you once make the plunge and compel yourself to open your eyes in the limpid

depths under its confused surface (p.14)."¹⁵ The deeper we "plunge" the more we suspect that Kinbote's assertion has some validity. Once we read his commentary (and remember, he suggests that we read it before, during and after we read the poem), we can never read "Pale Fire" the same way again. Its surface is always rippled by Kinbote's stone. We begin to notice connections that do seem to be more than serendipitous, or to put it more accurately, we begin to suspect that serendipity is actually a fictive device. "Pale Fire" and Kinbote's commentary to it make us realize that no piece of literature exists outside some kind of context, even if we believe strongly that it should, or even if we provide our own entirely manufactured contexts. Poem and commentary are joined at the hip; they must be considered together. Like it or not, Kinbote is the filter through which we see Shade; "Pale Fire" is indeed "interested" in the King Charles question, because we ourselves cannot help providing the interest.

This is what *Pale Fire* is about, the subjectivity of

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All quotations come from *Pale Fire* (New York: Putnam, 1962). Note that some subsequent editions (eg. The Wideview/Perigee paperback [1980] and the Vintage International paperback [1989]) have the same pagination. When quoting from the poem "Pale Fire" I will do so by line number; when quoting from the Foreword, the Commentary or the Index, I will do so by page number, as above.

reading, the subjectivity of writing. Getting "involved" in a book does not really mean getting lost in it as the old cliché would hold; it means making the book conform to one's reading, finding it along the path one constructs. *Pale Fire* is the story of the world's worst reader since Don Quixote. Yet his manipulation of the text should prompt the self-conscious reader to recognize that Kinbote is just us taken to the extreme. Where our reading is merely subjective, Kinbote's is solipsist, until every article is a satellite rotating around himself. On one hand *Pale Fire* is utterly fantastic, on the other it feels frighteningly true--this is exactly what would become of a "normal" reading translated by the mind of a hopeless paranoiac. When at the end Kinbote seems to be unable to control his story any longer and is perhaps finally aware that none of it is true, he does not come back to his senses as Quixote does on his death bed. He goes the other way, out of contact with all reality, into an area in which he is nothing anymore but disembodied, chaotic literary material ("I shall continue to exist. I may assume other disguises, other forms, but I shall try to exist" [p.300]). This is not just a metafictional game. There are two ways to be cured of paranoia. You can either stop hearing the voices saying that you are in danger, or you can lose the concept of what "you" is. Perhaps it is possible to

get "lost" in a book after all. At the end of "Pale Fire" Kinbote seems simply to fade out of existence into near incoherence (as Gogol's madman disappears into complete incoherence in "Diary of a Madman")¹⁶; he has lost hold of the Charles identity and the Kinbote identity, even of the pre-Kinbote identity.

A person's subjective view of the world, though it can lead to insanity if too extreme, is the thing that keeps us sane; it is the measure of individuality. Shade's art depends on such subjectivity. His poem is a celebration of the self; and it suggests that his poetry in general is merely a palpable, external manifestation of his world view. I say "merely" because where a poet's perception of observable phenomena is traditionally thought of as being in service to his poetry, in Shade's case the poetry is little more than emblematic of the perception; ostensibly positioned by the poet as a form of communication with the higher powers of the universe, "Pale Fire" is really an example of a poet communicating with himself.

Kinbote and Shade, like most artists, use what they encounter as raw material for their creations. What separates them is that Shade has the distance of self-

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See Lucy Maddox's chapter on *Pale Fire* in *Nabokov's Novels in English* (Athens, Ga.: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1983) for a discussion of parallels between the two works.

consciousness; he is aware of what he is doing, if not quite able to produce what he would like. Kinbote really believes the story he is telling himself; he is too mesmerized to see how transparent his transformations really are.

In many of Nabokov's novels the artistic act is a form of individuation, but it can also be alienating. Kinbote's writing is almost prototypically alienated. Its ultimate goal is to reconcile the competing personae in his diseased mind, but it entails a complete re-ordering of the real; the price for failing in this project is alienation from everything, even from the adopted persona on which he risks everything. This seems to be the central dilemma in *The Defense and Despair* at least, perhaps in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. What separates *Pale Fire* from those novels is its formal innovation. While the others are more or less conventional novels about characters who attribute ontological significance to their own particular artistic projects, *Pale Fire* is the project, the multiplied text controlled by a character trying to merge with a text. What particularly interests me is that what Kinbote would like to achieve in his "real" life we offer freely by reading the book. Our attention merges the two artistic documents into a unified whole. Somehow Nabokov has written the rare book in which the reader's participation takes on the quality of an

active agent in the plot. In us, rather than in Shade, Kinbote finds his way into the existence he seems to crave: that of a character in a work of literature.

Moreover, our expectation of finding a novel between the covers of Nabokov's book greatly contributes to its novelistic unity. I realize this sounds tautological. On the face of things there seems to be little connection between poem and commentary. Part of the fun of reading this book comes from watching Kinbote twist the very roots of logic to employ a chance word in the poem to introduce some part of the king's story. He steals Shade's very words and forces them into an alien context, masking them or making doubles of them. Yet there are many more or less esoteric connections between poem and commentary that Kinbote could not have faked, such as his citing (without realizing it) the passage in his Zemblan translation of *Timon of Athens* containing Shade's title. Knowing that the words come from Shakespeare, Kinbote reckons that his luck would be a "statistical monster" if his copy of the play had contained any lines construable as "pale fire." That he has already cited the very passage indicates that there is more than a statistical monster at work. It is a modernist *deus ex machina*. The audience is encouraged to remember that both characters have been authored, as it is reminded by Shade's

remark about "Hurricane Lolita" that this author has a name. These connections run throughout the course of the novel; the Shakespearean "pale fire" contretemps, though it serves other thematic purposes, gets us looking for more. Words, phrases, plot occurrences, characters--all coincidental connections beyond the many conspicuous coincidences (such as the creation of Queen Disa out of Shade's description of his wife Sybil) Kinbote *invents* in order to give his story a patina of the mysterious or otherworldly.¹⁷

One example of a Nabokovian coincidence (as opposed to one manufactured by Kinbote) might suffice to give an idea of the novel's multiplicity. Just before the end of his poem Shade writes that his "brain is drained," that those images stored in his mind but not actually used in "Pale Fire" will be lost and detached like a "brown ament" lying "dry on the cement" (ll.964-66). Nabokov was a great one for dictionaries. When we look in Webster's we find that "ament" has two meanings. The first is a cluster of leaves often called a catkin (we might recall that Gradus the regicide

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Such coincidences have been the focus of exegetical criticism of the novel from the beginning. Two essays (of many) that collate these reflections particularly well are the *Pale Fire* chapters of books by D. Barton Johnson (*Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov*, Ann Arbor, Mi.: 1985) and Vladimir Alexandrov (*Nabokov's Otherworld*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991).

makes glass Cartesian imps to be sold during "Catkin week" [p.151]). "Ament" also denotes an insane or weak minded person. This second definition invariably brings Kinbote before our eyes; he is something left over in the poem drying on the cement, the leaf detached from the tree by insanity. But this is not Shade's meaning; his is limited to the word's first designation. In the second we find a trace of Nabokov himself.

Words are powerful things in his fictional worlds. Looking up the word, seeing Kinbote lurking in the second meaning, in the under layer, we realize, again, that we readers are not just observers; our involvement completes the circuit of meaning. Kinbote says that without a sense keenly attuned to coincidence there is no point in reading poetry or literature of any kind. It is the way that art works. In *Pale Fire* coincidence is often an extra-textual pact between author and reader. We are intended to see that there is a vital, esthetic connection between poem and commentary despite the surface appearance that they have nothing to do with each other.

II

Pale Fire is a distorting mirror reflecting multiple realities originating from similar circumstance. I do not pretend this is a new observation; the idea is entrenched

but no less true for it. Glass, particularly spectrally refracting crystal, is ubiquitous in Nabokov's opus as a metaphor for the multiplicity of planes of existence and for the subjective interpretations of uncertain events extending beyond predictable limits; *Pale Fire* takes the mirror/glass metaphor to its extreme. I offer the palimpsest as an equally fitting metaphor for *Pale Fire*. The novel is about writing. Kinbote's and Shade's writing shine through each other's at every step. Using radically different methods, they are doing essentially the same thing, making artistic monuments out of their conception of life, confronting the uncertainty of existence with testaments created out of their own identity, translating themselves into "versions" of the way they perceive the world.

Their versions are written on top of each other. One tends to read *Pale Fire* from left cover to right, but it is extremely receptive to other readings. If we consider its multiple nature we see that there is no reason not to read it any which way. There is reason to see that everything really happens at once, in defiance of Kinbote's determined attempt to control our reading of the novel with his fraudulent time line linking Shade's composition of the poem to the approach of the murderer Gradus.

Let us examine the opening of Shade's poem ("I was the

shadow of the waxwing slain/ By the false azure in the window pane") and Kinbote's exegesis of it in the Commentary.

Few readers follow Kinbote's recommendation of reading the Commentary before attacking the poem; yet knowing from the Foreword of the poet's premature and violent death, one must feel the tingle of foreboding implicit in these lines. Kinbote does not. To the improbable reader, the one who traditionally flips back and forth between the poem and its commentary, this is the first indication that the exegesis is out of tune with the poem. What strikes the Nabokovian reader (who is, after all, a re-reader) is the convergence in the poem's first four lines of so many of the major themes of the greater work, the novel *Pale Fire*: the conflict between reality and the reflected image; the possibility of life transcending death; the essential urge to create allegoric identities; the dispersal of that identity into the corporeal and the spiritual (the "shadow" and the "ashen fluff"), with all its axiomatic complexities; the violence to which living bodies are subject; the transcendence of the spirit.

When the re-reader ventures (again) into the poem armed with at least partial recognition of these themes she is taking part in one of Nabokov's greater recurring themes,

the nature of timelessness. Everything is at once; the Commentary, far from being the direct result of the poem is a sort of rival for the reader's attention, a combatant, or at times an accessory. Kinbote "kills off" Shade in the final entry of his commentary, but Shade has already been dead since the Foreword; and once we realize that his only authentic existence is as a concept derived from words on a page, he lives most fully as we read the poem, his voice reinvigorated any time we return to it, particularly when Kinbote's entirely irrelevant comments prompt us to recall what certain lines really "meant." It might be said that the Commentary exists only because Shade is dead; and though his "plot" compels us to consider Shade's poem as some sort of artifact, "Pale Fire" is constantly present in Kinbote's exegesis because of such contradictions. In the clash of two realities both exist at once, just as Shade's words are (re-)printed side by side with Kinbote's commentary to them. The reader's understanding of *Pale Fire* is a kind of conflagration of the contradictory and the reminiscent, a perpetual dialectic with Shade and Kinbote serving as thesis and antithesis.

Shade's window, the one that mimics the sky and destroys the waxwing, has the quality of both mirror and palimpsest. "Uncurtaining the night, I'd let dark glass/

Hang all the furniture above the grass" (11.7-8). Such unsettling juxtapositioning is the method of *Pale Fire*. Within his world Shade thinks he is in control, and it is evident that the poet here is evoking the artistic process. His poems, mirroring his internal life, also superimpose it on the outside world. Art is the process through which Shade weaves himself into the fabric of his world--it is the "night [that] unites the viewer and the view" (1.18). He is unable, however, to see the viewer who spies on him--perhaps even as he writes this line--Kinbote, his panting admirer. But we see him and realize that the two way mirror of the night is not just Shade's model for his own art; it represents *Pale Fire* itself. It is the glass that reveals to the reader both worlds at once, Kinbote's and Shade's, wildly interposing one upon the other. Yet the window only reflects the image of the viewer stuck within its confines--it is a place of deception.

So much of the matter of "Pale Fire" has its analog in the Commentary; the twin of Shade's window is Charles the Beloved's "really fantastic mirror" by Sudarg of Bokay into which Fleur de Fyler peers during her three day cohabitation with the young king:

She turned about before it: a secret device of reflection gathered an infinite number of nudes in its depths, garlands of girls in graceful and sorrowful groups, diminishing in the limpid

distance, or breaking into individual nymphs, some of whom, she murmured, must resemble her ancestors when they were young--little peasant *garlien* combing their hair in shallow water as far as the eye could reach, and then the wistful mermaid from and old tale, and then nothing (pp.111-12).

The mirror is a palimpsest reflecting so deeply that it transcends, imaginatively, the boundaries of the temporal and the real into ancestry, into fairytale (and eventually into nothing).¹⁸ *Pale Fire* is such a mirror; all is at once, the surface and the depth, the multiple and the single. No matter where we dip into the novel all of it is reflected, or at least refracted in our memory, in our dipping. The "secret device of reflection" in the mirror of *Pale Fire* is the reader's imagination.

III

The main intention of this paper is to explore connections between *Pale Fire* and *Don Quixote*; these connections center around the two madmen, the knight and the critic. But it is important to understand the other protagonist of *Pale Fire*, John Shade. My analysis of Nabokov's novel will begin with this character. In many ways Kinbote is Shade taken to the extreme. We come to both of

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For an excellent assessment of this looking glass, see Alter.

them through the words they write, words chosen and arranged like brushstrokes. We are meant to find their images in these words and thereby realize the potent creative agency of words on a page.

Shade too practices a more sane kind of literary self-inscription. His "Pale Fire" attempts to sum up his life by documenting that life's great ambition: to uncover the mysteries of what is beyond it. It has the aura of a theodicy for all its metaphysics being tendentious and rather immature. Nabokov seems to want to position Shade in a kind of poetic line of patrimony beginning with Milton and including Pope and Wordsworth (with all its erudite allusions, *Pale Fire*, the novel, is in part a continued elegy to English poetry).¹⁹ Formally, "Pale Fire" most resembles Pope, but thematically it has more in common with Wordsworth; it comes to its metaphysical conclusions by scrutinizing the self, in particular the poet's relationship with nature. Nature is seen not necessarily as a great model of order, rationality and balance (as is the case in *The Essay on Man*); nature is a great artist, just as it is a great work of art. It generates the human urge to poetry by

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See Gerard De Vries' "Fanning the Poet's Fire: Some Remarks on Nabokov's *Pale Fire*." (*Russian Literature Quarterly* 24 [Spring 1992]: 74-90). It uncovers many of the allusions to English poetry.

spell-binding the poet. As is the case in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, we are meant to feel in "Pale Fire" that nature is active and creative.

Since we have no way of access to the "real" Shade other than Kinbote's suspect account, "Pale Fire" also takes on an aura of something more than a mere autobiography. Being all that is left of him, it becomes in a sense the poet himself--as the work of any author becomes identified with the person, as the person, particularly after he or she has died (This is exhibited in the way we call *The Prelude*, "Wordsworth." There is something deeper in effect than mere convenience.). By killing off his imaginary poet, Nabokov underscores this idea. Shade goes from being the creator to the creation, almost as though he had written himself into a different existence. Of course this is partly his intention even before he "dies." "Pale Fire" is meant to be a summation of sorts. It does not sum up the works of the poet--the poems--but some essential desire *behind* the urge to poetry in the man; this desire begins long before the ability to turn thoughts into poems appears. In this sense "Pale Fire" is the history of Shade's attempt to communicate with the guiding essence of the universe. His poetry is only a secondary matter; it is not the method of communication. That Shade writes poems, that he turns observation into

image and communicates with other humans, is only analogic to the kind of communication he tries to make (conveyed in his desire to understand the afterlife) with whatever higher intelligence runs his world. "Pale Fire," then, is a history of a man's attempt to mark his place in the universe. Knowing that his poem will live after he dies (whenever that might be), Shade seems to position it as a monument; he wants "Pale Fire" to be the repository, as well as the image of his desire.

IV

Again, this desire to estheticize oneself, to "write oneself in," is fundamental to many Nabokov protagonists; certainly it is true for Kinbote. His commentary aspires to a similar aura; though the poem is far more tenuously connected to his identity, he depends on "Pale Fire" all the more to be an incarnation of himself, the text of his transformation. Transformation is one of the key thematic ingredients of the fairytale. The closer we look at Kinbote's story the more apparent it is that this is what he is trying to write. The outrageous coincidences; the multiple resemblers; the patent dichotomies of concupiscence and revulsion, gallantry and treachery, art and philistinism; the figure of the hero in isolation resisting a shadowy world of evil; even the trope of the disguised

royal--these are conspicuous fairytale elements. Never mind the fact that Kinbote is pretending that these things are part of "real" life; the "real" has nothing to do at all with his story. He would argue that it maintains an *artistic* reality higher than mundane "reality"; such an idea explains why his story is so consciously artificial. Like a fairytale, it might have to be artificial to distill those real anxieties concerning his madness and deteriorating identity responsible for creating it.

Kinbote does something not too dissimilar to Shade. He takes the raw material of "real" life and filters it through the literary imagination, transforming professors of literature into fantastic spies, transforming the black cat living in the house he rents for the semester into a court seductress. But where the poet celebrates the inherent universal qualities of even the most mundane objects, Kinbote would hide the fact that his vision is manufactured out of everyday reality. The everyday is the source of pain that must be attacked with fantasy. That his fantasy is so literary indicates that his intentions are thoroughly planned and executed.

Thus the way to understand *Pale Fire* is to explore the way its two protagonists write their lives. It would seem, on the face of the fictional apparatus, that one life

(Shade's) is sanctioned while the other's (Kinbote's) is meant to be seen as a complete fabrication. But the closer we look the muddier the picture becomes. Shade's treatment of his life, overtly, even self-consciously, honest and unsparing, has a high degree of artificiality. It hints at reservoirs of truth to which he would block access. And looking through the more transparent elements of Kinbote's fantasy, one encounters a disturbingly real portrayal of madness and despair. Where Shade's empiric analysis is made to serve a very abstract, Platonic ideal, Kinbote's gaudy inventions begin to acquire the banal, almost clinical predictability of the classic paranoiac.

What makes *Pale Fire* so interesting is not merely that its two first person narrative components are so complex. It is the fact that they are thrown together under the same cover and forced to accommodate each other, to struggle one against the other. In a sense the novel is a battleground; the prize of victory is the reader's engagement and empathy. More than any novel since *Don Quixote* (whose narrative battle--between Quixote's and Cide's versions of events--it mimics), *Pale Fire* draws that reader into the fray, as a participant and not just an observer.

CHAPTER 3:THE POEM

Introduction

"Pale Fire" is a poem about writing poems. It covers the life of John Shade, starting not with the poet's birth, exactly, but with the birth of the poet in him, conceived by his fascination with the natural world. John Shade is something of an empiric rationalist as a poet. Observing gives way to emulating nature's creative faculties with the written word. Poetry is among other things a way for him to mark his place in nature; it is both a tribute and a form of communication. Likewise, it is an act of individuation: While it cannot exist without the self as filter of the outside world's stimuli, it completes a circle by defining what that self will be. This idea can be mapped in "Pale Fire." Manifesting the poet's desire for self-memorialization, it invites the reader to identify it with his life. Shade says at the end that it is time to "put back Shade's "Poems" on their shelf" (l.984), as though his poems were the life and "Pale Fire" its summation (not

incidentally, it implies that the poet has found his "place" in the universe--as if it were a vast library).

His reported death minutes after completing the poem should underscore this idea in the reader's mind. Further, Kinbote's unorthodox commentary on "Pale Fire," makes us realize that "Pale Fire" is all we can be sure truly represents the poet, and we are more willing to see it as that summation of Shade's existence; a matter of circumstance in the novel's plot reifies Shade's hypothetical position. To paraphrase Auden on the death of Yeats, Shade *becomes* his poem. In general this is what it means to read. To varying degrees we associate the words written by the person with the person, as the person. As we try to extricate "Pale Fire" from the clutches of Kinbote's controlling reading, we need to try to discern what the poem means to Shade. We might conclude that for him too it is a reading of his own life.

Shade calls his poem "Pale Fire" for two fundamental reasons. First, because he is as an observer and copier; like Timon's moon, he steals the fire of his work from the sun of nature. In a paradigm reminiscent of the Elizabethan concept of the great chain of being (an idea that stretches all the way back to Plato), and of Pope's application of it in the *Essay on Man*, Shade sees himself as a conduit for a

higher intelligence. Where Pope's god is a rationalist and his universe is a hierarchy based on reason, Shade's universe is artistic. This means that observation of nature is an esthetic experience much like the artist's study of precursors, and that the creation of art, while emulating nature, is itself a quasi-natural act.

And so writing poetry is a double gesture, a communication with the universe and an act of individuating himself in that universe. It divides to connect (to mangle Pope's scissors in *The Rape of the Lock*). For an atheist like Shade such an idea fulfills spiritual needs. His esthetic replaces religion and poems are part of the greater system.

Yet they are personal acts as well. They communicate by emulating; paradoxically, this entails a turning inward. The second reason for calling the poem "Pale Fire": as a likeness of the poet's greater life, (and any life is uncontainable by words), the poem is merely a reflecting moon. In accord with the Timonian paradigm poets reflect light, defining themselves in doing so; they mark their place, in orbit, by doing so. Shade wants "Pale Fire" to reflect the wonder of nature, to be a form of communication with the universe; to do so it must also examine the self. But ultimately it devolves into a celebration of self that

tends to close off such communication. Seeking objective truths concerning the nature of the afterlife, it never goes beyond the subjective; it conceives of an esthetic system that binds his life.

Shade opens his poem with the image of the waxwing, identifying himself with it as a way to discuss the limits of his search for the afterlife (among other reasons). He knows that as a mortal there are things he cannot understand, windows he can only crash against until he dies and will be able to "live on" and transcend them. Yet there may be a significance to the image beyond what Shade intends. The beginning of poetry really goes back to the beginning of personal identity, to the time when one can conceive of oneself as being different from the environment. Observation leads to discernment. With Shade observation remains the criterion of judgement throughout his life. While he dwells on the wonders of deception in natural mimicry, he never considers that his entire world may be a deception (the "false azure"). He believes too much in what he sees, subjecting everything in his life to a kind of tyranny of the eye. The worst symptom of this is his judging his daughter, Hazel, in very little other than what Michael Wood calls the "currency" of "good looks" (*The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction*, Princeton:

Princeton Univ. Press, 1994, 194).

Everything is received as it is observed, and his own mind, rather than being only a filter of information, is allowed to be the arbiter of truth. Stuck within the confines of his self, he demands the afterlife to be full of all the things of *this* life; he wants to take his possessions with him when he goes. Greatest among them is his perception of the world and his ability to translate it into poetry. This personal quiddity, what he calls the "Shade impress," is meant to show through all his work as a watermark shows through paper held up to the light (the watermark is an image Nabokov returns to many times throughout his work as a metaphor for this very thing). What is conceived of as an emulation is a self-reflexive gesture. "Windows" are really mirrors, deceptions, metaphysical walls upon which one is broken.

Shade's poem is often considered to be a litany of his author's own philosophy. Though Nabokov might cite passages of it to describe his own likes and dislikes in interviews²⁰, I think it is a mistake to think that Shade is simply a mouthpiece. There are some critics²¹ who hold that

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See *Strong Opinions*, 18.

²¹

For example, Douglas Fowler (*Reading Nabokov*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974, 14).

Nabokov had favorite characters espousing the author's esthetic philosophy, characters essentially infallible. Shade is thought of as the notable example (when the list of "infallibles" includes characters like Humbert Humbert and Van Veen, the idea is shown to be precarious--see Fowler, 14). But Shade is not Nabokov; we are meant to see that something is lacking in the invented poet. His devotion to understanding the afterlife strikes one in its blindness to some of the things of this life. His absurd acceptance of the poltergeistic phenomena after his Aunt Maud's death (pp.164-67) as an "outward extension" of Hazel's neuroses is certainly suspect. Assigning great importance to his own quest to discern the outlines of the otherworld, he trivializes the possibly authentic communication of his dead daughter and his wife, Sybil. As strong as his grief may be after Hazel's death, he is still unwilling to attempt to understand her. Shoshanna Knapp ("Hazel Ablaze: Literary License in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*," in *Essays In Literature*, Spring 87, 14:1) points out that he accepts and promotes a particular version of her suicide without questioning how inappropriate a response it would be to a passing slight; he does not wish to look for other reasons. She becomes the material of poetry, an artistic opportunity to express something about himself.

Canto One

After the opening image of the waxwing and the reflecting window, Shade gives us (l.21) the tracks of a pheasant moving from left to right on a road in the snow like ciphers on a blank page. The suggestion is that to the mind newly attuned to it, nature is a vast text in code. Fervently apprehending his visible surroundings, he tries to read it:

All colors made me happy: even gray.
My eyes were such that literally they
Took photographs. Whenever I'd permit,
Or, with a silent shiver, order it,
Whatever in my field of vision dwelt--
An indoor scene, hickory leaves, the svelte
Stilettoes of a frozen stillicide--
Was printed on my eyelids' nether side
Where it would tarry for an hour or two,
And while it lasted all I had to do
Was close my eyes to reproduce the leaves,
Or indoor scene, or trophies of the eaves
(ll.29-40).

In pre-imaginative observation are the first steps toward art, which does not "tarry for an hour or two," but lasts "forever," monumentalizing the momentary, while perhaps sacrificing the momentary. It is no mistake that Shade uses the term "printed"; he is himself the white page on which nature writes, before he will ever write anything himself.

In his book on Gogol (*Nikolai Gogol*, New York: New Directions, 1944, 59) Nabokov rather blandly inserts the following in a disinterested paragraph:

I shall have occasion to speak in quite a different book of a lunatic who constantly felt that all parts of the landscape and movements of inanimate objects were a complex code of allusions to his own being, so that the whole universe seemed to him to be conversing about him by means of signs.

The "book" became a story and was published in December of 1948 in the *New Yorker* as "Signs and Symbols." The young man who suffers from what Nabokov calls "referential mania" is in a sanatorium and has attempted suicide more than once (at the story's end it is hinted that he may finally have succeeded). About such "rare cases" as the young man's the story's narrator writes:

He must be always on his guard and devote every minute and module of his life to the decoding of the undulation of things...The silhouettes of his blood corpuscles, magnified a million times, flit over vast plains; and still farther, great mountains of unbearable stolidity and height sum up in terms of granite and groaning firs the ultimate truth of his being.²²

There is a shadow of the violent compulsion of this nameless character behind young Shade's experimentation with perception, but the latter is able to shut off the current. Still, there is the contention in Shade's words that nature "imprints" itself on the perceiver, that the interaction is not entirely voluntary or controllable. Of course in his

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The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995, 596.

later "spells," those episodes of ubiquity in space and time Shade experiences almost every day one winter (described in terms quite similar to the ones in the passage from "Signs and Symbols"), control is removed. Though he lacks the other's terror, Shade does feel the helplessness of the character from the story in the grip of some great power.²³

What separates Shade from the character in "Signs and Symbols" (and from Kinbote) is that the sensation of being "imprinted" becomes the raw material of his art rather than the foundation of paranoia. In his essay "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" Nabokov writes the following:

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This concordance of natural and physical phenomena in some kind of grand scheme perceptible only to one of his main characters is a theme common in Nabokov. It is the foundation stone of such critical ventures as Rowe's *Nabokov's Spectral Dimension* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1981), about the communicative influence of spirits in the works, and Nabokov's *Otherworld* by Vladimir Alexandrov (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press). This device has its precursors. Cf. Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," and Roderick Usher's belief in the "sentience of all vegetable things": "But in his disordered fancy, the idea had assumed a more daring character, and trespassed, under certain conditions, upon the kingdom of inorganization." Connections have been made between Poe and Nabokov, but this story in particular, with its doubles and its overt or hidden themes of decay, insanity, resemblance and incest seems particularly germane to the later writer. Kinbote, who generally projects images of his own psyche onto the screen of the natural world, experiences something akin to this phenomenon when he has the unread "Pale Fire" in his hands: "I found myself enriched with an indescribable amazement as if informed that fireflies were making decodable signals on behalf of stranded spirits, or that a bat was writing a legible tale of torture in the bruised and branded sky" (p.298).

Lunatics are lunatics just because they have thoroughly and recklessly dismembered a familiar world but have not the power--or have lost the power--to create a new one as harmonious as the old. The artist on the other hand disconnects what he chooses and while doing so he is aware that something within him is aware of the final result²⁴

While this idea may be ludicrous in a clinical sense, it tells us much about Nabokov's esthetic. Esthetic control is tantamount to existential control. Compare this to something from *Pale Fire's* foreword, Kinbote watching Shade observe a distant lake from a terrace:

I am looking at him. I am witnessing a unique physiological phenomenon: John Shade perceiving and transforming the world, taking it in and taking it apart, re-combining its elements in the very process of storing them up so as to produce at some unspecified date an organic miracle, a fusion of image and music, a line of verse (p.27).

His choice of terms like "physiological phenomenon" and "organic miracle" indicate that for Kinbote the creation of poetry is far more than an intellectual exercise. The fusion of "image and music" can be thought of as the fusion of individual intellect and environment--the creation of a self, a basically natural act.

It is an idea common in Nabokov's works that the creation of art is more than tangentially related to madness. Shade seems anything but mad, yet there is an

²⁴*Lectures on Literature*. Ed. Fredson Bowers. New York: Harvest, 1980, 77).

irrationality just over the border in his art kept in check by his being aware of the awareness of "the final result." Kinbote lacks such awareness. Falling somewhere between Shade and the character in "Signs and Symbols," he can create a world, but its culture and landscape are too extravagant to be contained. As his commentary progresses Kinbote's control becomes more and more transparent, until he slides completely into madness.

II

Instead of succumbing to nihilism, the young Shade feels even more bound to nature (and consequently less free) the further he moves from conventional notions of God. The knowledge and acceptance of his incarceration is the force that drives his imagination to feed upon the particular, specific details of his "cage":

My picture book was at an early age
The painted parchment papering our cage:
Mauve rings around the moon; blood orange sun;
Twinned Iris; and that rare phenomenon
The iridule--when, beautiful and strange,
In a bright sky above a mountain range
One opal cloudlet in an oval form
Reflects the rainbow of a thunderstorm
Which in a distant valley has been staged--
For we are most artistically caged
(11.105-114).

I quote the whole passage for more than one reason. First, it shows Shade's happy acceptance of subordination to an inspiring natural environment. We are still in the province

of the eye here, but visual observation begins to broach the unseen. The ornaments of nature display something of the palimpsestic imagination; the iridule hints at the possibility of transcendence for the perceptive viewer who can see the reflections of other valleys (or worlds) in the phenomena of this one. It is a marker both of presence and distance. There is doubling in this passage--the double rainbow²⁵ called the "twin iris"--and there is near doubling, in the words themselves, namely the "opal"/"oval" reflection. In these twins there is the feeling not just of concord, but of communication, that the continuum of eye, cloud, rainbow, distant valley is planned, not merely received; there must be something else at the end of it, or behind the scene setting the angles of refraction for the various mirrors of cloud vapor and rain droplets, of the

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The rainbow can be considered one of Nabokov's less used but definitive symbols of transcendence. Note this passage from *Invitation of a Beheading*, the theory of the artist Lake, a mouthpiece for much of the Nabokov esthetic: "The order of the solar spectrum is not a closed circle but a spiral of tints from cadmium red and oranges through a strontian yellow and a pale paradisal green to cobalt blues and violets, at which the sequence does not grade into red again but passes into another spiral, which starts with a kind of lavender gray and goes onto Cinderella shades transcending human perception." We might remember that Noah's rainbow, the symbol of Yahweh's promise to send no more floods upon the Earth (Genesis, 9:13-16), is, like Shade's iridule, seen reflected in a cloud. Surely this is not serendipitous. Shade seems to be positing something along the lines of a covenant revealed in esthetic terms, of creators who appear only in the reflections of things.

cornea itself.

Perhaps all is staged, the setting and the looking. Of course *Shade* ostensibly writes these lines. We are left with the central question of whether Shade believes his art to be autonomous and merely influenced by his observation of the natural world, or whether he is (and believes himself to be) some kind of conduit for a higher being that gives him his images. Or a third option; does Shade promulgate the idea that his poetic course has been set by someone else merely because it is comforting? The passage's reference to the sun and moon, perhaps the most salient thematic images of the novel, further complicates the issue. Is Shade alluding to the source of the poem's title and thus highlighting an important passage? Or is Nabokov speaking through his creation, using what Shade perceives to be the possessions of his poetry as icons indicating his control over the poet? As we ask these questions, we become aware how the novel prompts us to read in layers.

Nature may be called a cage, but to Shade time is the real trap. "Outstare the stars. Infinite foretime and/ Infinite aftertime: above your head/ they close like giant wings, and you are dead" (ll.122-124). Notice the similarity to the opening sentence of *Speak, Memory* (New York: Putnam, 1966): "The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense

tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness" (*Speak, Memory*, 19).²⁶ The butterfly wings of Shade's lines are these two eternities of darkness that surround the abyss of living existence. The realm of breathing life seems almost an aberration of time compared to the eternity that surrounds it.

In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov explores his personal understanding of time, memory and consciousness. These are themes highly important to *Pale Fire* as they are to all the writer's works; but the extent to which ideas in *Speak, Memory* should be applied to the novel as author-sanctioned philosophy is a matter for debate. Vladimir Alexandrov (*Nabokov's Otherworld*) contends that in *Speak, Memory's* descriptions of Nabokov's seeming to step out of linear time during the composition of youthful poetry are to be found the tenets necessary to understanding his novels. Here is Nabokov on his first attempts at poetry:

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This passage is perhaps not without irony; elsewhere Nabokov asserts that "commonsense" is art's great enemy ("The Art of Literature and Commonsense"). Nabokov's image of the brevity of life reminds me of two others that evoke the twin darknesses of before and after. The first is King Alfred's aphorism of the swallow flying through a bright house at dusk; the second is Pozzo's last line in *Waiting for Godot*: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more."

The kind of poem I produced in those days was hardly anything more than a sign I made of being alive, of passing, or hoping to pass, through intense human emotions. It was a phenomenon of orientation rather than of art, thus comparable to stripes of paint on a roadside rock or to a pillared heap of stones marking a mountain

trail(*Speak, Memory*, 217).²⁷

He does not quite say to what his poetry enacts its "orientation," but considering his metaphor of the trail marker (and the fact that his initial desire to create poetry was conceived while observing the after effects of a thunderstorm--rainbow and all) one can assume he refers to nature. The poetic moment, a simultaneous urge of reflection and creation, is a kind of positioning of oneself in the landscape. Such engagement with space is facilitated only by the total collapse of time:

But then, 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

27

Nabokov's metaphors do admittedly mark a trail to the later *Pale Fire*. That pile of stones in the novel is called a *steinmann*; King Charles sees one signaling the way of his escape across the Bera range, and when Kinbote discusses suicide and hints at the strong attraction it has for him, he writes:

When the soul adores Him Who guides it through mortal life, when it distinguishes His sign at every turn of the trail, painted on the boulder and notched in the fir trunk, when every page of the book of one's personal fate bears his watermark, how can one doubt that He will also preserve us through eternity? (p.222).

out and grope, and the longer they are the better....the poet feels everything that happens in one point of time (*Speak, Memory*, 218).

Earlier in his memoir Nabokov makes the point that the beginning of consciousness (and thus identity) is signalled by the recognition of time (*Speak Memory*, 21). In youth time may seem a wonderful thing; later it is the prison to which consciousness sentences us. But during the act of creation time recedes, leaving the mind free; paradoxically, in its most intense state, consciousness actually dissolves time awareness. Everyday perception also recedes until there is a loosening of the boundaries between the self and its position in both time and space:

So little did ordinary measures of existence mean in that state that I would not have been surprised to come out of its tunnel right into the park of Versailles, or the Tiergarten, or Sequoia National Forest; and inversely, when the old trance occurs nowadays, I am quite prepared to find myself, when I awaken from it high up in a certain tree, above the dappled bench of my boyhood, my belly pressed against a thick, comfortable branch and one arm hanging down among the leaves upon which the shadows of other leaves move (*Speak, Memory*, 223).

Speak, Memory contains some of Nabokov's most beautiful prose, and this is a fine example. But it is almost impossible to accept these words as anything other than metaphor. The foundation of Alexandrov's argument seems to be that Nabokov really managed to escape time, the "spherical" prison, through episodes of hyper-consciousness.

The idea is that Nabokov writing intends primarily to promulgate his beliefs about the "otherworld," and that his very style is an emblem of a sophisticated universal system in which all human activity is somehow programmatically connected to a higher intelligence, a higher existence only apparent in such liminal moments.²⁸

I do not think we can know what Nabokov's metaphysics really were--certainly not from his novels. Most of the characters who actually believe in the kind of system that Alexandrov posits (it is a common trait in the author's works) either have more than one screw loose or some fundamental personal reasons for finding comfort in such an idea. And there is no system offered in any of the novels, except perhaps in *Ada*, and it is impossible to believe that *Terra* (being the twin world to *Antiterra*, the one that seems to stand for our world) is anything other than a parody of a metaphysical conception. Nabokov is no Blake or Swedenborg or Yeats; there is no system, only intimations. (Indeed, "Cosmic synchronization"--Nabokov's term in *Speak, Memory* for this feeling of timelessness--has more to do with

28

The seed of Alexandrov's thesis is to be found in Vera Nabokov's introductory comments in Russian to a posthumous collection of her husband's Russian poems (1979). In them she apparently contends that *potustoronnost* ("afterlife" or "otherworld") was Nabokov's primary theme.

Wordsworth's "spots of time" than with any other literary antecedent I can think of. There is much Wordsworthian about Shade's pull toward nature, his solitude, his elaborating a metaphysic out of close scrutiny of the natural world.)²⁹

Those critics (Alexandrov is not the only one) who turn their gazes to metaphysics as a sort of passkey to understanding the writer's works do so to promulgate an essential "seriousness" about him and to lock out the accusation that Nabokov is little more than a maker of exquisite games. To do so they must take Nabokov's metaliterary practices to task. They contend, in Alexandrov's words, that the metaliterary is only "camouflage for, and a model of, the metaphysical" (Alexandrov, 18).

If the elements in his work normally considered metaliterary--patterning; authorial intervention; the use of

29

Lucy Maddox (*Nabokov's Novels in English*) has noted some parallels to Wordsworth in *Pale Fire*, as has Priscilla Meyer (*Find What the Sailor has Hidden*, Middletown, Co.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1988), though these parallels tend to be single items of scenery. A full study needs to be done in this direction. Philip Sicker has written a very interesting article (marred somewhat by over-simple Freudian connections) called "*Pale Fire and Lyrical Ballads: The Dynamics of a Collaboration*" (*Papers in Literature and Language*, 28: 1992); he sees Kinbote's manipulation of Shade's poem in a light similar to Coleridge's and Wordsworth's famous collaboration. He makes some strong points about similarities between "*Pale Fire*" and *The Prelude*, but the article mainly deals with Coleridge.

doubles, anagrams and literary allusions; the appearance of characters in more than one book; "techniques" from other media (the cinema in *Laughter in the Dark* and *Ada*, the cartoon in *Invitation to a Beheading*, the chess problem in *The Defense*³⁰, the travelogue and a multitude of other "found" objects in *Lolita*)--in other words everything Humbert Humbert would label the workings of "McFate"--are meant by Nabokov to be the specific landmarks of a metaphysical system, why don't we get the system? His memoir suggests that Nabokov believed the universe to be driven by some kind of benevolent order more akin to a rationalist esthetic than the dictates of Einsteinian physics or Darwinian instinct. At moments of extreme consciousness one may feel its presence, perhaps, but he never claims the thing is knowable, quite the reverse.

Describing his mother's views on the afterlife, he writes,

Her intense and pure religiousness took the form of her having equal faith in the existence of another world and in the impossibility of comprehending it in terms of earthly life. All one could do was to glimpse, amid the haze and the chimeras, something real ahead, just as persons endowed with an unusual persistence of diurnal cerebration are able to perceive in their deepest

30

As opposed to the chess game. See the chapter on chess problems in D. Barton Johnson's *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov* for a brilliant assessment.

sleep, somewhere beyond the throes of an entangled and inept nightmare, the ordered reality of the waking hour (*Speak, Memory*, 39).

It has a matching passage eleven pages later; the discussion of dreams is picked up again (the metaphor becoming referent), a strong indication that Nabokov wants us to connect the two in our reading. This time he discusses himself:

Whenever in dreams I see the dead, they always appear silent, bothered, strangely depressed, quite unlike their dear, bright selves. I am aware of them, without any astonishment, in surroundings they never visited during their earthly existence, in the house of some friend of mine they never knew. They sit apart, frowning at the floor, as if death were a dark taint, a shameful family secret. It is certainly not then--not in dreams--but when one is wide awake, at moments of robust joy and achievement, on the highest terrace of consciousness, that mortality has a chance to peer beyond its own limits, from the mast, from the past and its castle tower. And although nothing much can be seen through the mist, there is somehow the blissful feeling that one is looking in the right direction (*Speak, Memory*, 50).³¹

There may be the bliss of some confidence, but certainly nothing is clear beyond the mist.

Alexandrov suggests that Nabokov's metaliterary devices

³¹

A long quotation, but so much of Nabokov's writing depends on a cumulative affect. In *Speak Memory* single thematic strands are strung through sections or entire chapters. Sometimes ellipses can cut the strand. I wanted to include the illustration of the beloved dead in dreams, that Nabokov lends, in slightly altered form, to Shade's poem (ll.589-96).

are an "imitation of the fundamental principle he discerned in nature," (Alexandrov, 46) that is, of the peculiarly natural kind of artifice observable in phenomena like mimicry. Artist and scientist, Nabokov obviously relished the paradox of nature's indulging in artifice. But Alexandrov would have it that his entire literary method is constructed on such a paradox. Thus when Nabokov uses metafictional elements in his work, he is actually being a realist (perhaps even a naturalist), because nature is a metafictionalist!

No, the Nabokov fictive world is his own invention and is only tangentially related to our own.³² Yes, Nabokov characters are often striving to understand the afterlife and the method of their world, to come to some kind of "metaphysical" understanding--John Shade is a perfect example--but we must not confuse creature with creator. At the end of the chain of being in a Nabokov novel is the author himself; the system is of his own making not that of some amorphous, unnamed entity in whom he may or may not have believed. The "ultimate truth" (to use Kinbote's term)

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As Dale E. Petersen writes, "his choice was always to spoil the illusion of lifelike narrative so that the reader would become conscious of the true chasm between lived experience and imagined activity ("Nabokov's Invitation: Literature as Execution" in *Vladimir Nabokov: Modern Critical Views*. [ed. Bloom]. NY: Chelsea House, 1987, 97).

behind the surface metaphysical searches Nabokov characters undertake is that they are characters in a novel. This truth is revealed to Adam Krug at the end of *Bend Sinister*, to Cincinnatus C. at the end of *Invitation to a Beheading*; and it seems to be behind Kinbote's very strange final note to his commentary. The novels are highly artificial because they are self-conscious works of art about people who see life as art. As is clear in the quote from "Art and the Literature of Commonsense," the creation of art is inherently self-conscious. It fools itself when it strives for realism; artificiality is one of its defining features. To wrap up this idea in a sophisticated, quasi-realist package is to miss the basic point about the works. Indeed, in the Nabokov novel the metaphysical is camouflage for the metafictional.

I make this distinction to underscore the "reality" behind Shade's quest: His search for the otherworld is really a search for his author, though he does not know it. Nabokov gives his characters traits consistent with his own, and he lends them much of his artistic philosophy, but decidedly, he does not give them a world like his own. The "world" of *Pale Fire* is the novel itself. Any authentic metaphysical philosophy must recognize just who the creator is.

III

During the swoons he experiences every afternoon one winter Shade feels himself in all places at once ("One ear in Italy, one eye in Spain"), and existing freely beyond the limits of time. One might be reminded of Ishmael, the Platonic dreamer, sitting high in the crow's nest of the Pequod, realizing that immortality is nothing more (or less) than ubiquity in time; it is not an escape, but an ultimate presence. Here Shade feels himself deeply present in everything, in all of time (There were dull throbs in my Triassic; green\ Optical spots in Upper Pleistocene,\ An icy shiver down my Age of Stone [ll. 153-55]), in all of space; and this by definition requires an absence in *something*, in his quotidian existence. He is in the world and the world is in him. Behind all of this is a peculiar solipsist anthropomorphism: The universe is a human body, the body a universe, as in the myth of Adam Kaedmon that Joyce used to such lengths in *Finnegans Wake*. In Shade's case there seems to be a loosening of the physical strictures of mortality, at least a temporary one, but we notice there is no escape from the self; it takes on proportions made no less grand by the comic compression, "all tomorrows in my funnybone" (ll. 147-156). Indeed his personal identity infiltrates all matter, all perception.

Canto Two

Announcing that it is his sixty-first birthday, Shade pulls us from "demented youth" into the time of the poem's writing; in doing so he basically declares his dominion over "Pale Fire" and over the self he has been trying to become. He has successfully transformed himself into an artist. Over the next six stanzas Shade muses on the nature of death, immortality and enlightenment while paring his fingernails. The echo of Stephen Dedalus' famous statement from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is unmistakable: "The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."³³ Stephen's comments tend to be read as a negation of the self in artistic creation, when he means just the opposite. His contention is that art begins with an almost primordial cry, entirely centered on the emotional state of the self (this

³³

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York: Penguin, 1964, 215). In an interview with Alfred Appel Jr., Nabokov called this an "unpleasant coincidence" (*Strong Opinions*, 71).

equates to the lyrical in poetry); as art becomes more complicated the self becomes even more essential to creation: "when the artist prolongs and broods upon himself as the centre of an epical event....The narrative is no longer personal. The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself" (*Portrait*, 214-15). Drama, the ultimate literary form, witnesses the total imbuelement of the creative vitality into the characters so that they become esthetic acts themselves; "The personality of the artist, at first a cry or a cadence or a mood and then a fluid and lambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalises itself, so to speak" (*ibid*). Hardly a removal, this is a totality of identity in which the art is so much a product of the artist (who is everywhere, within, behind, beyond, above) that the difference is no longer distinguishable.³⁴

Stephen mentions the old English ballad "Turpin Hero" to support his contention that the identity of the artist is manifested into the work and into its characters; he notes that it starts in the first person but ends in the third.

³⁴

For Stephen, the budding artist, this idea of course has great importance; if the work of art lives as the identity of the artist, then cannot the life of the artist be art? A *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and, for that matter, *Finnegans Wake* sets out to prove this idea. The book itself is the portrait, is the artist.

Portrait works just the opposite way, starting in the third and ending in the first person (though its very beginning chronicles in its nursery rhyme way a gesture of literary identification, of baby Stephen as "baby tuckoo"). This asserts, perhaps, that the venture itself has been an act of self-absorption; the Stephen who ends the novel is ready to begin as artist because he has assimilated all the previous versions of himself into a single identity, reified by the shift in point of view. The esthetic object has become subject. Of course Kinbote's narrative about King Charles also begins in the third person but shifts to the first the moment the king parachutes safely into Baltimore. The theme of perceiving the self as self is enormously important in Joyce and Nabokov. "Pale Fire" is not unlike *Portrait* in its chronicling the drive to create. At this point in the poem (remember, it is loosely following the contours of Shade's life as a poet), we can feel the turn inward and the recognition that art is made out of the self. Shade's poem, like Stephen's narrative, and more importantly, like Kinbote's commentary is an attempt to reach the self--albeit a chosen self--by making a version of it as a literary document.

II

Hazel's suicide is the central event of "Pale Fire" (it

even comes squarely at the halfway point of the poem's 999 lines) and of Shade's life. He closes his mind entirely to the possibility of her existing in an afterlife that is interactive in any way with his own world, almost as though he were over-protecting his daughter in death the way he did during her life.³⁵ Whatever the cause, a subject that was of primary, almost obsessive interest when his was the possible spirit of transcendence becomes very much the object of sardonic humor or denial when it belongs to Hazel.

Michael Wood writes, "There is a large element of bathos in Shade's poem, an overwrought shallowness where he seems to be aiming for depth....Hazel's suicide almost appears to be something that happens to him rather than to her" (Wood, 193). Shoshanna Knapp comments that Shade pays little attention to her apparent intellectual gifts ("The prizes won\ In French and History, no doubt, were fun" [ll.305-6]), stressing her ugliness instead. As Wood maintains, Shade and Sybil are unable to extricate their affections from the prevailing climate of personal value, a climate entirely formed by sexuality and sexual

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Hazel was a full twenty-two years old when the Shades insisted she be chaperoned while conducting her investigations into paranormal activity in the old barn (p.187). And she was twenty-three when going on a (fateful) blind date caused her parents to wonder "Are we quite sure she's acting right?" (l.548).

attractiveness; despite Sybil's protestations ("Good looks are not that indispensable" [11.324-5]) good looks really are the "only currency [they] recognize" (Wood, 194). This renders them unable to see Hazel's suicide as the "grossly disproportionate response to a passing slight" (Knapp, 106) that it really is. To think Hazel drowned herself that foggy March night because a young man begged out of a blind date, to think even that it was only the camel's last straw, keeps them from seeking more disturbing reasons for her suicide; and it allows the apparatus of pity that was really their only contact with the woman to remain standing, to support and contain all their thoughts about her.³⁶

36

The title of Wood's chapter on *Pale Fire* is "The Demons of our Pity." It comes from Shade's memories of his daughter:

And still
Old Pan would call from every painted hill,
And still the demons of our pity spoke.
(11.325-28).

It is an excellent reading of the novel, questioning the condition of pity and concluding that it is an essentially destructive force in *Pale Fire*. Pity is the only way Shade can reach his daughter in life and it may be partially responsible for her death. This issue of destructive pity is often central to Nabokov's novels, from Humbert's self-serving pity for Lolita, which gets muddled up with his more genuine remorse, to Van and Ada's chimeric pity for Lucette, to the Pnin narrator's transparent pose of pity for his subject ("my poor Pnin"). These deceptions are meant to be seen as such. And thus they alert us, hopefully, to the fact that there should be a more appropriate emotion at work, empathy. In another context Shade himself tells Kinbote, so we are to believe, that the "password" is pity, the foundation of moral behavior (p.225). (In the *Essay on Man*, Pope insists that charity should fill that role.)

It amounts to the creation of a Hazel "myth" informed by Shade's own world view. Faulting nature itself for creating her image too much out of his own physical shortcomings, Shade can see only those of Hazel's properties traceable to himself. His entire philosophy rests on the physical apparatus of observation (though he is not exactly a materialism); why should he judge Hazel in any other terms? There is a great artificiality in his treatment of her, as evidenced by the highly novelistic device of synchronizing the events of Hazel's death with his and Sybil's evening of television in the poem. Intentionally or not, Shade is rendering *her* artificial; she becomes an element of his poetry. By extension her death is a literary device, or as Nabokov writes in another context (in the introduction to the Time\Life version of *Bend Sinister* [New York, 1964]) "a question of style."

Perhaps there is a more fundamental recognition at work, one that crosses the boundary between Shade and Kinbote, that time equals death. Both render their moments of greatest trauma with highly artificial literary devices³⁷; their synchronizations attempt an elaborate reining in or fencing of death, as though they could control

³⁷

I am referring to Kinbote's commentary-long synchronization of Gradus' arrival and Shade's writing of "Pale Fire."

it through esthetic means. I will discuss this phenomenon in more depth later; for now what is important is that Shade's technique continues to objectify his daughter in death as he did during her life. As David Walker writes (concerning a different part of the poem), Shade may believe that "the only intelligent response to human pain is an aesthetic one."³⁸ Of course the result is the same; Hazel is as much an esthetic opportunity as a daughter; his artistic rendering controls her-- as her death keeps her frozen in memory--as an almost allegoric figure.³⁹

There is something distinctly ocular in the entire Hazel section; in the parental branch of the synchronic segment initiated by line 404's "[And here time forked]," the Shades are watching television. Sybil's hand plays "Network roulette" (l.465) and their gaze lights on nothing for very long. There are any number of ready artistic reasons that Shade aligns the images of the television with

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David Walker, "'The Viewer and the View': Chance and Choice in *Pale Fire*" (*Studies in American Fiction*, 4 [1976], 207).

³⁹

He refers to one particular memory involving the three members of his family in purely esthetic terms: "a triptych or a three-act play\ In which portrayed events forever stay" (ll.381-2). It is curious that he should invoke a play, as drama is the one non-static literary form; on stage events cannot "forever stay." Perhaps he has in mind not a tableau, but a constant repetition.

the suicide of his daughter: because the randomness of the television's images run a revealing counterpoint to the instability of Hazel's mind; because of the irony inherent in the idea that Sybil's "ruby ring made life and laid the law" (l.471) over the television while they are powerless to stop the corresponding event⁴⁰; because the conflation of fading life with the dwindling "pinhead of light" dying in "black/ Infinity" (473-4) after the television is switched off is just too patent an image for the poet to resist. But there are Nabokov's motives to contend with. I suspect that he has Shade use the television to underscore the artificiality of his vision and indict him for judging his daughter too much with his eye. While "real" events are playing themselves out he is reduced to the most banal form of vision--passive viewing of T.V.'s random, meaningless parade--quite a punishment indeed.

Poetic vision is of course a metaphorical term, but Nabokov may be telling us that such a thing exists in more concrete terms, that the artistic vision can lead to a tyranny of the eye; and perhaps an artist's greatest gifts, the things that distinguish one from ordinary mortals, may

40

There is further ironic meaning in the words "made life." One of the programs they watch for a moment that night is a "kind of travelog" spotlighting Nice, "Which we had visited in thirty-three, \ Nine months before her birth" (ll.434-35).

be those which alienate or even destroy others. This does not mean that Shade doesn't love his daughter.

She was my darling: difficult, morose--
But still my darling. You remember those
Almost unruffled evenings when we played
Mah-jongg, or she tried on your furs, which
made
Her almost fetching; and the mirror smiled,
The lights were merciful, the shadows mild.
(1.357-61)

But even moments of tenderness are framed by the judgement of her appearance. This passage also includes the three iconic elements associated with the death of the waxwing, the mirror, the light and the shadow. Is Shade allegorizing Hazel as the dead bird? Or is it simply that these three images, being the pillars of his investigation into the existence of the afterlife--and of his art itself--have buttressed every corner of his thought? If this is the case, then it constitutes the ultimate condemnation of Shade's position to his daughter; the very ideas upon which he has founded his life have judged Hazel and found her to be wanting. Again, while Shade may consciously offer these terms at this time to facilitate Hazel's identification with his waxwing, surely Nabokov wants the reader to recognize Shade's objectifying gaze.

Canto Three

Canto Three's IPH (Institute of Preparation for the

Hereafter), with its reincarnationists, creationists, and mythologists lecturing on proper spirit protocol, is meant to represent an absurd reflection of the serious study Shade had been trying to make of the afterlife. It takes many players to make a farce, and this is basically the point behind its inclusion in "Pale Fire." Any attempt to coordinate so many versions of a quality as mysterious as the afterlife into a single "objective" reality is doomed to absurdity.⁴¹ Nabokov informs us with broad strokes that even secularists cannot resist the thrill of dogma. Of course the letters of the institute together are homophonic of what is not only one of our language's simplest words, but its finest synthesis of the conflicting urges of hope and doubt (the two great hallmarks of any rational approach to the supernatural, and the constant themes of "Pale Fire"): "if." The panesoteric gobbledygook preached at IPH results from a form of metaphysical automatism that disables both hope and doubt; its central principle of conformity removes all individuality from the afterlife. Shade evokes the dogma at this moment of the poem to rebel against it; he cannot bear

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Here at the turn of the century, when every other film out of Hollywood seems to be about angels (without even the smallest white cloud of irony to be seen against the blue) and the "spirituality" industry is booming, the joke poked at IPH is perhaps more biting (and depressing) than it was in 1962.

the loss of what is arguably our most personal possession--memory ("I'm ready to become a flowerlet/ Or a fat fly, but never, to forget" [ll.523-524]).

His memory is the only place Hazel exists for him, and it is a closed room. He rejects the possibility of her spirit contacting them:

I knew there would be nothing; no self-styled
Spirit would touch a keyboard of dried wood
To rap out her pet name; no phantom would
Rise gracefully to welcome you and me
In the dark garden near the shagbark tree
(ll.645-652).⁴²

He quotes Goethe's question from the "Erlkonig" and answers it in explaining why he does not (like Sybil) hear Hazel's ghost in the wild March wind: "Who rides so late in the night and the wind?/ It is the writer's grief." (ll. 662-663). Like the father in the poem, he is blind to anything but the phenomena of this world, inserting the credible into the space of doubt others reserve for the supernatural. And instead of seeing his dead child Shade sees only himself and

⁴²

In a nice reversal Shade acts the part of ghost, at least in Kinbote's commentary, with Hazel as the haunted. On the night of her investigations in the old barn she returns to the dark garden of her home: "She stopped and let forth a howl of terror: a system of dark and pale patches coagulating into a phantastic figure had risen from the garden bench which the porchlight just reached" (p.190). It is the poet worried and waiting for her return. This is one of the myriad strands running from commentary to poem; one must decide whether Kinbote self consciously creates the connection or whether he is prompted by some higher order (eg. Hazel's spirit).

his grief. The window is a mirror.

II

If IPH is an indication of the impossibility of human subjects having an objective understanding of the nature of the afterlife, then Shade's reaction against it embraces the supremacy of the subjective. His heart attack at the Crashaw Club returns a measure of objectivity. Describing his state while lying in a death-like trance, he writes:

I can't tell you how
I knew--but I did know that I had crossed
The border. Everything I loved was lost
But no aorta could report regret
(11.698-701).

Personal possessions happily disappear, even personality; The heart is just a muscle, and now as in his childhood, "A sun of rubber was convulsed and set;/ And blood-black nothingness began to spin" (11.702-703). The sublime blackness has returned, but this time a white fountain emerges from its depths:

I realized, of course, that it was made
Not of our atoms; that the sense behind
The scene was not our sense. In life, the mind
Of any man is quick to recognize
Natural shams, and then before his eyes
The reed becomes a bird, the knobby twig
An inchworm, and the cobra head, a big
Wickedly folded moth. But in the case
Of my white fountain what it did replace
Perceptually was something that, I felt,
Could be grasped only by whoever dwelt
In the strange world where I was a mere
stray (11.708-719).

At this point good Nabokovians scurry to their *Speak, Memory* for a particular, memorable quote. While describing his attraction to lepidopteretic mimicry, whose "phenomena showed an artistic perfection usually associated with man wrought things" (*Speak, Memory*, 124), Nabokov writes,

"Natural selection," in the Darwinian sense, could not explain the miraculous coincidence of imitative aspect and imitative behavior, nor could one appeal to the theory of "the struggle for life" when a protective device was carried to a point of mimetic subtlety, exuberance, and luxury far in excess of a predator's power of appreciation. I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception
(*Speak, Memory*, 125).

Shade, looking for the "sense behind the scene," feels the aptness of the mimicry metaphor, yet he apprehends his fountain in utilitarian terms, not in artistic terms. Only when he has run off to speak to a woman who also saw a white fountain, to prove that "Our fountain was a signpost and a mark/ Objectively enduring in the dark" (ll.763-764), does he awaken to the deception. She had been misquoted; the fountain was really a mountain.

Life Everlasting--based on a misprint!
I mused as I drove homeward: take the hint,
And stop investigating my abyss?
But all at once it dawned on me that this
Was the real point, the contrapuntal theme;
Just this: not text, but texture; not the
dream
But topsy-turvical coincidence,
Not flimsy nonsense, but a web of sense.

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.
(11.803-815)

Understanding the afterlife lies not in the false sodalities
of suggestive hallucination but in the artifice of the
everyday, in the nexus of strange coincidence and seemingly
random events.

Perhaps his view of the fountain is a metaphor seen
from the other side. Perhaps like King Charles' passage from
the palace to the royal theater, his heart attack has
ushered him into some old lumber room; the fountain is a
prop waiting to be used in another scene or simply
forgotten, a symbol of nothing other than the theatricality
of existence, the fact that our lives are stage-managed. I
suspect the fountain is just a Wordsworthian feint⁴³ to

43

It may be tenuous, but it strikes me that here Shade is as
close as he comes to the metaphysical Wordsworth,
particularly of stanza 9 of the *Intimation* ode:

...Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Falling from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day...

cover up the significance of the mountain, the real symbol of communication. After all, white mountains do resonate strikingly throughout Shade's poetry. The woman he visits tells him how much she loved his "poem in the *Blue Review*\ That one about *Mon Blon*" (ll.782-3). Kinbote quotes a line from "Mont Blanc" in his commentary (p.258) noticing its thematic link to the woman's vision, not noticing the obvious link to Shelley. Another poem, "The Mountain View," (printed entire in Kinbote's entry on page 115) makes the titular mountain a symbolic landmark to convey the sense of ocular communication with nature as well as the desire (common to Shade's art and metaphysic) to capture its essence and reformulate it artistically. Further, early in *Canto Three*, Shade writes of the "snowy form" of a mountain, "so far, so fair,\ That one could only fetch a sigh, as if\ It might assist assimilation" (ll.511-14). These white mountains against the blue (sky, "amorous gauze," even the *Blue Review*) are a far more potent vehicle than Shade's fountain for communication between some higher universal intelligence and the poet. If so, the white mountain symbolizes Shade's continually looking in the wrong direction and seeking the answers in himself as creator rather than creation.

The mountain misunderstanding has its double in

Kinbote's commentary. When he tries to probe Shade about the latter's poetic subject matter the previous evening, all Shade offers is a gruff "mountains" (p.259). Kinbote assumes they refer to his Bera range and the fabulous escape of the king; carrying the mistake from anecdote to exegesis, he uses the single word "Mountain" from Shade's account of the mountain/fountain mix-up as an opportunity to relate the incidents of that escape. This is how the connections between poem and commentary often work; the most substantial principles of Kinbote's identity are founded on the most insubstantial of notions from the poem, on "flimsy nonsense." A misunderstanding of language concerning a mountain in the poem has its reflection in Kinbote's very notion of himself--his is a mistake of ontology, the mountain a cornerstone of his very identity. It is two versions of the same mistake, really. From his version Shade learns, or purports to learn, an entire philosophy of broken threads, of coincidences, of near misses rather than causes; from *his* mistake, Kinbote learns nothing, but from the concatenation of the two, the reader discerns a connection that crosses the border between the "real" and the imagined, seeing Shade's philosophy in action. The poet's fountain is mimicking a mountain, but he does not realize it; the commentator's misinterpretation mimics that mimicking, but

he does not realize it. Each believes he has seen through a mistake, but neither possesses the view the way he thinks he does; that would require an autonomy they simply do not have.

If there is indeed a correlated pattern at work, Shade tends to miss it. He can hardly be held accountable for the multiple reflections between his poem and his commentator's fantasy; but Shade tends to miss even the patterns of his own life. It is ironic that the event which prompts him to the philosophy of patterning is itself a misapprehension, the mountain mistaken for a fountain, the decoy mistaken for the meaning. This artificiality really gets to the heart of what Nabokovian patterning is, a rich design of deception.

III

And Shade is deceived. His conclusion that there is some involute abode in which a throng of beings exist, "playing a game of worlds," hiding his car keys or "killing a Balkan king" (ll.820-29) is very silly. This kind of picayune immanence is what Pope, his sylphs in tow, has so much fun with in "The Rape of the Lock"; it is inconceivable that a straight shooting neo-Popian could really take such an idea seriously. It is plainly absurd to think that Nabokov validates it, that Shade is indeed having an authentic metaphysical revelation. Surely, even for all the

talk of Nabokov's "otherworld," we are not going to believe in a paradise of ebon fauns and white fountains.

The revelation that Shade is flirting with, but that he keeps always at bay, is that his world is a figment of the imagination, a fictional creation. Its "accidents and possibilities" are indeed "ornaments"; they are the intricate details of an artifice whose essence is the coordination of coincidence, of reflection, of repetition, much like the "picture" of a painting by Seurat (or by Chuck Close, for that matter) does not exist without the eye's coordinating its points of color. Mimicry works under this principle, too. The brain of a predator, accustomed to coordinating discrete elements into a unified visual field, is fooled by the eyespot posing as an eye, by the wing's green adapting the leaf's green. Shade, the great oculidolator, sees the surface but misses the significance. His world is not a playing field for strange gods but an artistic creation. Rather than the metaliterary being "camouflage" for the metaphysical, in Shade's case (and throughout Nabokov's works), the exact opposite is true; a false metaphysical paradigm camouflages the reality that all is artifice. The "world" of the novel is a novel; the "otherworld" is the author himself.

Canto Four

In *Canto Four* he will come close to equating the working of the universe with the mechanisms of poetry, but his assertion comes from the inside out; it is less concerned with the beyond than with his own eminence. In his art Shade is the ultimate authority who "guides the phrase/ Toward faint daylight through the inky maze" (ll.851-852). His poetry is a universe composed of (and contained by) the self. Thus when Shade promises to speak of evil as none has, he gives us a list of pet peeves (jazz and swimming pools, and music at the supermarket [ll.923-930]). When he promises to speak of despair as none has, it turns out to be caused by his inability to get a smooth shave on his Adam's apple (ll.901-906). The entire canto is a celebration of Shade's physicality and of the mechanics necessary to the writing of poetry. Again, all of existence is reduced to the observable. Perhaps this is why his metaphysic is such a failure; beyond that which he can imagine in the concrete terms of association Shade is lost. The unexplainable is incomprehensible. His daughter must be as she was, confined within his memory; there is no possibility of transcendence beyond those terms. The supernatural must have an image: the fountain, a being: the players of worlds; it must be anchored by the reality of his experience, made, like his

poetry, from aspects of himself.

The self is split between imagination and physical being; poetry is its reconciler:

I once overheard
Myself awakening while half of me
Still slept in bed. I tore my spirit free,
And caught up with myself--upon the lawn
Where clover leaves cupped the topaz of dawn,
And where Shade stood in nightshirt and one
shoe.
And then I realized that *this* half too
Was fast asleep; both laughed and I awoke
Safe in my bed as day its eggshell broke,
And robins walked and stopped, and on the damp
Gemmaed turf a brown shoe lay! My secret stamp,
The Shade impress, the mystery inborn.
Mirages, miracles, midsummer morn.
(ll.874-886)

This "episode" recalls and balances Shade's image of perception at the opening of the poem, the distribution of the furniture of his inside world on the lawn of his night window.⁴⁴ Put them together (as waking puts together the disparate dream selves) and we can see the duality of the poetic experience. Its inception entails a breaking away of the self, not just from the hum of everyday, undirected cognition, but also from the inspirational model. As Nabokov contends in his passages from *Speak, Memory*, poetic creation aims for an isolation of the self from nature, from the very

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And from the inside, too, I'd duplicate\ Myself, my lamp, an apple on a plate:\ Uncurtaining the night, I'd let dark glass\ Hang all the furniture above the grass (ll. 5-8).

thing one is writing about. And finally one is detached even from one's self; it is a momentary venture into liminality (the very property Kinbote recognizes as a source of unique ontological power in the poet). While the creative self agonizes over the phrase (this agony of poetic creation results from the attempt to translate an atemporal "truth" into a sequential gesture), the quotidian self goes about the business of an automaton, "soaping a third time one leg" (l.844). And while the line of poetry, the product of the process, signals a return to normal life, it always evokes to the shift away from the self and from the environment. Perhaps like all reconciliations it retains the characteristics of separation.

For this reason I favor the metaphor of palimpsest in understanding *Pale Fire*. Regarding "Pale Fire," it signifies the multiplicity of the poet, the showing through of the man in the poem, the use of the life in the creation of the poetry--the recognition of the poetics inherent in life. Perhaps (we never know for sure), Shade concludes that his life is a poetic incident. If he does, there is no evidence that he is really willing to relinquish autonomy. He believes in the secret Shade impress and would no doubt be appalled to know that he is a creation, his poetry the performance of a prompter (his rhetoric about the "players

of worlds" notwithstanding); what is made is made from his interaction with the world and the understanding it prompts. He suspects that the universe may work in artistic terms, but this is only because he sees it as the macrocosmic equivalent of his own world.

II

Among the statements of his philosophy Shade throws in a prescient *non-sequitur*: "*Man's life as commentary to abstruse\ Unfinished poem. Note for further use.*" (ll.939-40). The obvious ramifications for *Pale Fire* as a whole have led more than one critic to conclude that Kinbote must be an invention of Shade's. It is certainly one of a multitude of what Nabokov calls "fatidic" connections existing between poem and commentary. It would seem that Shade is simply signalling to himself in one poem what the subject of his next one will be.⁴⁵ But the reason he keeps it here in "Pale

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Reminiscent of Nabokov's *non-sequitur* concerning the story "Signs and Symbols" in the middle of his book about Gogol. It also evokes the strange interjection in Kinbote's last note: "Well, folks, I guess many in this fine hall are as hungry and thirsty as me, and I'd better stop, folks, right here" (p.300), which seems to be a scripted piece of "extemporization," as though Kinbote's manuscript was to double as part of a speech (the suspect grammar and homey apostrophe make one suspect, as long as we're creating scenarios, that from Cedarn, Utana, Kinbote might be

Fire" is because it illuminates his central tenet of the multiple person, of the dichotomy inherent in the poetic act. The life of a poet exists in an endlessly reflecting relationship with the poetry, becoming a commentary to the poetry as the poem reflects the life. A poem, once written, takes on its own life; the life that inspired it becomes its commentary--the lives of poets, the undefinable, unfathomable, multitudinous lives, are assimilated into the dim workings of footnotes to their poems. The poems become the people. There is something far more powerful at work than synecdoche when we call *Leaves of Grass* "Whitman" or *The Prelude* "Wordsworth"; yet neither of these great explicators of the self can even begin to be approximated by his work. Shade writes about writing so we'll see that writing is his life. Yet one reads it too. Trying to understand one's life is liking trying to write the commentary to a complex poem.

This is why *Canto Four* is a turning back to the self. Shade's face is the icon of poetic engagement; indeed it is the very world:

And while the safety blade with scrape and

intending to address a dinner at IPH, "situated most picturesquely in a southwestern state that must remain anonymous here" [p. 223]). Incidentally, Nabokov used to write such "off-the-cuff" remarks and introductions into copies of his books used at public readings.

scream
Travels across the country of my cheek,
Cars on the highway pass, and up the steep
Incline big trucks around my jawbone creep,
And now a silent liner docks, and now
Sunglassers tour Beirut, and now I plough
Old Zembla's fields where my gray stubble
grows
And slaves make hay between my mouth and nose.
(11.931-38)

This passage is quite similar to one Kinbote writes about the nights he lay in terror waiting for assassins from Zembla to penetrate the Goldsworth mansion (I will address this in the next chapter). It also should remind us of the feeling of ubiquity in space Shade relates about his childhood swoons. This seems to be the apotheosis of the idea; he has found a way in art to return to that experience. Art is the cure for mortality.

At the same time he wants to make sure that what may be his last testament is stamped irrevocably with his presence. And "Pale Fire" is indeed all that is left of Shade other than the testimony of his unreliable editor. The novel proves what Shade has been hinting, that the perception of being is the province of art, that life is indeed poetry, that poetry itself constitutes the furthest reaches of what we may be. He has become his poem.

At the very least poetry is a form of transcendence, perhaps even a model of the way the universe works.

I feel I understand

Existence, or at least a minute part
Of my existence, only through my art,
In terms of combinational delight;
And if my private universe scans right,
So does the verse of galaxies divine
Which I suspect is an iambic line.
(ll.971-977)

But note the contradiction; the method of transcendence is one that constantly returns to the self. The world is ordered by the conditions of art because *his* world is so ordered, because *he* perceives it to be. Teleologic communication is a deception, the eyespot posing as the eye; at heart it is no more than aggrandized communication with the self. Believing that it is flying into a new universe, the waxwing is destroyed by the mirror, the reflection of his own world masquerading as something more.

Shade's method embodies subjectivity, and as I have tried to show, his subjectivity is most likely to grade into solipsism at times when he believes himself to be objective (as is precisely the case with Kinbote). The intimations of artistic completeness that Shade has gleaned from the universe and emulated in his own work are, in their turn, the conclusive evidence that the universe works artistically and correctly. It is a tautology, but what metaphysical perception is not?

This is why he calls the poem "Pale Fire." Shade sees himself as Timon's moon, stealing light from the sun of the

"players of worlds" to kindle one of his own; he sees his artistic life as a microcosm of the artistic universe, a borrowed luminescence. He reverses Timon's pessimistic model of a multiplicity of thieves and makes it a model of beneficence, of art kindly given and infinitely reflected, and of "fantastically planned/ Richly rhymed life" (ll.969-970). We who read that life see a multiplicity of irony, not just in the thieving interplay between the poem and the commentary (between Kinbote and Shade). The poem is the pale fire of the life; despite what Shade pretends, he is the moon to his own sun.

CHAPTER 4: THE COMMENTARY

Introduction

While Kinbote determines not to let his scholium take on the "monstrous semblance of a novel," Shade's poetry seems always poised to grade into prose. We are likely to praise the "poetic" quality of Kinbote's commentary, but we tend to read this prosiness in "Pale Fire" as a shortcoming of Shade's author⁴⁶. Perhaps using his weaknesses to

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For an example, see Douglas Fowler's *Reading Nabokov* (100). He calls "Pale Fire" a "tour-de-force rather than a first-rate piece of verse," maintaining that the couplet is unsuitable to Nabokov's style. Here is Nabokov on the subject: "I would be inclined to define a good poem of any length as a concentrate of good prose with or without the addition of recurrent rhythm and rhyme" (*Strong Opinions*, 44).

advantage, Nabokov gives his created poet a form that seems a closed shop, its couplets and cantos measured, articulated toward its own center. Shade's poetry never achieves the "freedom" of Kinbote's prose, but the two reach toward one another across formal boundaries becoming at times almost indistinguishable; we never doubt they come from the same author. If this too is a fault, still it is in keeping with Nabokov's thematic intent, since as much as anything else, *Pale Fire* is about the intangible organizing stamp of art, about the similarities inherent in multiple, dispersed moments of consciousness.

But what of the overall unity of *Pale Fire*? Critical reaction to the relationship of the two "voices" can run extreme. John Haegert, who makes the apt comment that *Pale Fire* may be "overstood" rather than understood, writes that "there is virtually no connection between poetry and commentary" ("The Author as Reader as Nabokov: Text and Pretext in *Pale Fire*, in *Texas Studies In Literature and Language*, 26:4, 410); rather, the novel "mocks the need to organize anomalies into wholes" (ibid, 422). Martine Hennard ("Playing a Game of Worlds in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*" in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 40: 2 [Summer, 1994]), who sees the novel "as both an anticipation and a biting satire of deconstructive critical strategy--whereby 'misreading'

becomes the criterion of any interpretive act," contends that Kinbote is the "indispensable intermediary between creation and reception as regards Shade's work" (Hennard, 307). I think both critics are of the same party, that is they seem to support the same conclusion about the validity of the novel's ambiguity, though they take different paths in getting to it. While Alexandrov posits that "Kinbote's entire exegetic endeavor is a variant of Shade's world view (Alexandrov, 200), June Perry Levine ("Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*: 'The Method of Composition' as Hero" in *International Fiction Review*, 5 [1978]) contends that "the random interplay of [Shade's and Kinbote's] lives exemplifies non-deterministic interdependency in the universe" (Levine, 108). While I'm not entirely sure what this means, I do know that the relationship between Kinbote and Shade is either random, dialogic, dialectic, deterministic or non-existent, depending on the theoretical stance of the critic. I would suggest there is a hint of the character of their relationship in one of the "variants" to "Pale Fire."

Three of the entries under *Variants* in the index are parenthetically tagged "(K's contribution)." It seems pretty

clear that Kinbote is their author.⁴⁷ Even buried deep in pages many readers might not approach, the imaginary editor's contradictory urges are at play. On one hand much of the facade of his story depends on the acceptance of particularly these variants as authentic. Without them there is no connection whatever between the poem and his fantasy. On another hand is the pedantic scholiast's desire for the truth, even at the cost of slipping the mask from his face. If I may be allowed a *third* hand, borrowed from the reader perhaps, there is Kinbote's fundamental need for recognition not just as a scholar but as a creator himself. Kinbote's "Pale Fire" is a collaboration; he wants credit for his input. Understanding this character requires an acceptance of such contradictions as a starting point. Kinbote is the haughty scholar, the hapless creator and the desperate contriver at once; if facilitating one requires exposing another, so be it.

The first variant, attached to his second note (to line 12), is so transparent ("Ah, I must not forget to say something\ That my friend told me of a certain king") that Kinbote feels the need to confess to his authorship in a

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Though nothing can be said definitively. It is possible that by writing "K's Contribution" Kinbote just means that the subject was something directly attributable to Kinbote's speech, but the three variants in question seem to be written as though by a clumsier poet than Shade.

later note; yet he feels no compunction about letting it stand as the introduction and (hence) *only* connection to the tale of King Charles. The artificial variant I find meaningful is attached to his note to line 70:

There are events, strange happenings, that
strike
The mind as emblematic. They are like
Lost similes adrift without a string,
Attached to nothing. Thus that northern king,
Whose desperate escape from prison was
Brought off successfully only because
Some forty of his followers that night
Impersonated him and aped his flight--

(The penultimate couplet in particular supports Kinbote's later contention that he is a "miserable rhymster.") There is indeed something "emblematic" going on here. Line 70 in Shade's poem is the conclusion of an aside about a mockingbird who perches on his television antenna "retelling all the programs she had heard" (ll.64). Kinbote, forging the variant and imitating Shade's poetic voice, is a kind of literary analog of the mockingbird; and the variant he creates here is *about* imitation, about invented followers endlessly "aping" their king's flight. The subject of the variant *imitates*, in its way, the momentary subject of Shade's poem. The endless reflections of these imitations is a bit dizzying, but it is foundational--this nexus of imitation creates a new reality of association, of the kind of self-conscious artificiality paramount to Kinbote's

writing and to his ultimate project of assimilating the King Charles story with Shade's poem.

The other four lines of Kinbote's variant tell the tale. The connections between Shade and Kinbote are "events, strange happenings that strike\ the mind as emblematic. They are like\ Lost similes adrift without a string,\ Attached to nothing." If anything can be said to attach them, it is the perception of the reader (a perception to some extent choreographed by the writer), the "emblematic" consciousness having to construct meaning out of metaphoric pairings.⁴⁸ A simile attached to nothing is of course a paradox. Any metaphorical construction is multiple; but it is also dialectic, and the synthesizing agent that makes a simile work is the reader's imagination. Nabokov draws our attention to this agent, to the "string," by positing a simile attached to nothing. (Of course the image is itself a simile: the strange happenings are *like* similes. Metonyms are layered one upon another as Kinbote's voice is upon Shade's).

Shade and Kinbote meet in the reader's perception, in

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The collating of disparate ideas, the tenor and vehicle of a metaphor, into a single object by the reader is microcosmic of the larger alignment in consciousness between author and reader. Metaphors, particularly complex ones, disrupt the way we can be hypnotized by a narrative voice. They make us recall that we are reading, that the process is reactive, perhaps creative.

the work we do to make sense of the strange happenings. Their points of contact have the character of similes: Shade is the tenor and Kinbote the peculiar vehicle (O my Shade's a red, red Kinbote)--or perhaps the roles are reversed: The poem is the more cogent illustration of Kinbote's ineffable wildness. Either way, the "lost simile" is the perfect sobriquet for Kinbote, the extension that never really finds connection. He interlards his story with outrageous resemblances in the hope of counterfeiting an artistic authenticity--that is, a metaphorical authenticity--where plausibility has already been abandoned. I think it fruitful to think about Shade and Kinbote as tenor and vehicle, even if the bridge between them is never in fact completed. After all, similes do not find their effect for long in patent connections; cliches have no metaphorical value. The requisite character of the true simile is strangeness, the chaotic pairing of the seemingly inharmonic.

Some connections have to be worked at. Perhaps the single most important task that self-aware characters have to work at throughout Nabokov's long opus is the distinguishing, clarifying and accommodating of tenor and vehicle to create a unified understanding of existence itself. Shade calls this the "contrapuntal theme." More simply put, the typical Nabokov protagonist sees himself in

an essentially metaphorical relationship with the universe (the character from "Signs and Symbols" is the extreme example); he reads his life as though it had been written, as though its incidents followed a stylistic blueprint. To gather and unravel the meaning of the incidents of one's life is like interpreting a poem from its collection of metaphors. *Pale Fire* differs from the other works in that its reader faces the same dilemma. Masquerading as poem and interpretation, *Pale Fire* feels even more like a vast metaphorical construction. I agree with Alexandrov (Alexandrov, 200); Kinbote's exegesis runs parallel to Shade's project. Each character is marking his place in the universe. The problem is that they see in the same text (the poem "Pale Fire") the method for achieving their different aims.

II

Again, Kinbote's skewed vision of "Pale Fire" reminds us that reading entails active participation, that a poem does not exist except in the minds of its readers. But Kinbote thinks there can be only one reading; he would dictate the form ours should take. Whether or not Kinbote is really an obscure scholar called Botkin or the king of Zembla (or whether such a person is even supposed to exist), the most important persona Kinbote assumes may be that of

the "Reader" of "Pale Fire." Determined to interpose himself between Shade and his audience, Kinbote wants his reading of the poem to be the only one, to be the objective truth.

The great bulk of his story is a lead-in, a stupendous holding of breath anticipating that moment when he will read the epic Shade has written about Charles the Beloved. That we feel such tension even though we know the poem is not what he hopes it will be is an indication of Nabokov's novelistic powers. Kinbote is able to overcome his first shock of disappointment because he has already determined to possess the poem at any cost. Doing so requires that he destroy any rivals to his interpretation. In this Nabokov's parody of critical behavior is particularly biting; less apparent is just how easily we do in fact get caught up in the Kinbote reading. Even if we do so with a great deal of skepticism, or simply because we are accustomed to being led by the narrator's voice, we find ourselves acceding to Kinbote's wish to be the poem's filter; our desire for the story validates, at least to some extent, his assuming that position of the "true" reader.

Kinbote's reading is so influential because it is creative. Every reader is subject to a certain amount of identification with literary figures or situations (this is

one of the lures Nabokov expressly cautioned his students to resist). Kinbote takes this to insane extremes; he has irremediably lost that sense of discreteness between self and text which keeps us readers rather than participators. I am not suggesting that just because he misreads "Pale Fire" Kinbote somehow becomes a character in the poem. But his misreading of the poem is his primary function as a character in *Pale Fire*, the novel by Vladimir Nabokov (as the novel progresses the closer he seems to come to perceiving this truth). As discreteness between his self (which is always an assumed self, a mask) and his reading disappears, so too does the difference between reading and writing. His writing is in this sense the apotheosis of his reading. Shade's poem is the manifestation of his observation of nature refracted by the lens of his mind; Kinbote's commentary is the experience of reading manifested by dementia to be a declaration of identity. Like Shade's writing, Kinbote's reading is a method of positioning himself in the universe.

One of the characteristic gestures of his storytelling is Kinbote's allowing the revelation of his "true" identity to leak into his commentary slowly, anticipating the more radical change in point of view from the third person to the first that occurs when the king parachutes to America

(p.247). Though like Shade we guess what Kinbote's "ultimate truth" is long before he wants us to, we also witness a conscious attempt on his part slowly to meld the two figures. This operation is analogous to Kinbote's identifying himself with the text. He begins, or tries to begin, as the detached critic. As his commentary builds momentum it becomes a rival to "Pale Fire"; then, critical distance thoroughly dispatched, Kinbote feels himself one with the poem. He holds it close to him (literally and figuratively), enlightened, invigorated; the "ultimate truth" of the poem is *his* truth, his protection against the world (and though he never states it as such), against his madness. "He" becomes "I"; Kinbote's interpretation of "Pale Fire" becomes "Pale Fire" in his mind.

III

We must concentrate our attention on Kinbote as writer because to him the Commentary is more than just documentary evidence of his invented tale; it is the translation of his identity into a different, more authentic mode of existence. And Shade is more to him than just a recorder of his fantasy, or as Lucy Maddox writes, a "scop" to sing Charles the Beloved's epic. She continues that for Kinbote, "the poet must inspirit the heroes of the tale through his art

before they can have an objective existence" (Maddox, 18). I would contend that such inspiriting through art *is* the objective existence Kinbote seeks. Shade is more than a scop; his "beloved old conjurer" has magical powers of transformation, because Kinbote's madness has changed the definition of existence. In his mind at least he can cross the boundary from life to text.⁴⁹

I have commented on the mirror of Sudarg of Bokay. I find another of the book's mirrors more emblematic of Kinbote, the reflecting puddle the king sees in the mountains early in the morning following his escape from the palace (p.143). Not realizing yet that a group of supporters dressed like him were running around the countryside to distract the revolutionaries, he cannot understand why his reflection in this pool will not follow his movements, or why it is not where it should be in the first place (the

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There must be some degree of textuality to all paranoid delusions concerning famous people. The insane person who thinks he is Napoleon, say, does so purely on the basis of what he has read or heard about that figure. Glossed over are rudimentary problems that a sane person would naturally feel--for instance that Napoleon is known to be dead for quite some time--because the Napoleon of the imagination (based on text) is eternal. The subject believes he is what has been *written* or *said* about Napoleon, something always in the present. This seems to me a way of understanding Kinbote's project, though he works it from the inside out, establishing his chosen identity first and then "forging" the documents, confirming the identity by textualizing it.

disguised royalist is on a ledge above him). The reflection that won't conform to reality--the "false" king in the pool walking away from the true false king--stands perfectly for the loss of Kinbote's sanity. It represents the desire of the insane man to make himself the image he sees in the mirror, to assimilate himself with the double. Kinbote's commentary to "Pale Fire" is an attempt to make him one with the image that his madness has created as protection against itself; he is trying to make himself one with the text he reviews, trying to turn his life into literature. I call this literary self-inscription. By the time he writes his commentary the man in the mirror has conformed to Kinbote's expectations because Kinbote has gone over the edge of insanity.

Kinbote's Brain

I have been asserting that Kinbote's desire for transformation and his creation of the King Charles story result from his madness. This seems self-evident. But the nature of this madness has not drawn much critical attention. I will venture awhile into the exegetical level for this reason.

Kinbote suffers from increasingly debilitating

migraines.⁵⁰ In his commentary to line 62 he recalls how he feared for his life "almost nightly" during the spring of his acquaintance with Shade. He claims that the imagined shadows of Zemblan assassins were particularly potent on those "masquerading spring nights with the sounds of new life in the trees cruelly mimicking the cracklings of old death in my brain" (p.96). We accept the peculiar image as the rhetoric of paranoia until compounding the metaphor of "old death crackling" in his brain with an innocuous comment he makes more than 150 pages later.

Kinbote and Shade patronize the same physician whom Kinbote has given the name "Dr. Ahlert." This doctor is the person who revives Shade after his collapse at the Crashaw Club. About him Kinbote writes: "Incidentally: the reader should not take too seriously or too literally the passage about the *alert* doctor (an alert doctor, who as I well know once confused neuralgia with cerebral sclerosis)" (p.250-- *italics added*). The pieces of this puzzle are widely scattered. It is never directly stated that Dr. Ahlert was the one who revived Shade; it is implied by the repetition of the adjective. Only when one realizes retrospectively

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In one entry he even writes "migraine worse again today" as though he were keeping a log of his pain and had somehow mistakenly transcribed part of it into his scholium.

that the alert doctor must be this person mentioned seventy pages earlier (p.181), the doctor whom Kinbote visits, does the parenthetical comment bear closer attention.⁵¹

Kinbote certainly shows the symptoms of neuralgia; it is more likely that he has convinced himself that this is the extent of his own medical complaints than that he has heard about some other sufferer being "misdiagnosed" by his own doctor. We may permit ourselves to presume that Dr. Ahlert has diagnosed him, Kinbote, with cerebral sclerosis.⁵²

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It has been pointed out by more than one critic that Nabokov often drops the heaviest revelations into parentheses (D. Barton Johnson [*Worlds in Regression*] points out that in *Ada*, for example, the facts of Van's and Ada's parentage are revealed within a parentheses [Johnson, pg. 77, in a chapter endnote]).

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We might have presumed it anyway, simply because Kinbote mentions the disease, but it is worth noting the care with which Nabokov validates the assumption by arranging the evidence that it is Kinbote's doctor he criticizes on page 250. Yet only one other critic I have read has even examined the possibility of Kinbote's being so inflicted. That critic is Alexandrov who determines that the episode simply underscores the novel's inherent ambiguity. Kinbote might be mentally impaired, he might not (Alexandrov, 190).

This might be the reason that this little nugget has remained buried: If Kinbote's madness is a symptom of an entirely organic malady, then it indicates that Nabokov's "plan" is intricate indeed. The idea that the novel is amorphously ambiguous becomes less tenuous. More importantly (and this would have been very important to Nabokov), it severely handicaps psychoanalytical readings of *Pale Fire* (such as those of Phyllis Roth ["The Psychology of the Double in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*" in *Essays in Literature*, 2, 1974] and David Galef ["The Self-Annihilating Artists of *Pale Fire*" in *Twentieth Century Literature*, 31: 4, Winter, 85]).

Kinbote follows a pattern of revealing exactly the information he would like to conceal for the sake of some seemingly irrelevant morsel of information. We are made aware of the lucid fragment of his mind hinting at the reality of the situation, slipping it past the censors of his delusion in the very speeches it makes to support itself. His brain is deteriorating. It is rapidly becoming lifeless tissue; and he must know that the condition is both irreversible and fatal. Worse, he can quite obviously feel his degeneration: The "nights that are destroying my brain" (p.123) is not the hyperbole of neuralgia and paranoia; it is his reality.

Knowing this, Kinbote's note to line 62--beginning with the sentences "Often, almost nightly, throughout the spring of 1959, I had feared for my life. Solitude is the playfield of Satan. I cannot describe the depths of my loneliness and distress"--takes on new meaning. The very idea of his pursuit by the regicidal Shadows seems to percolate out of anxiety about his disease and his authentic fear for his life. Indeed, this is the foundational anxiety to which his entire project may be traced. His loneliness and alienation from his setting ("The Goldsworth castle became particularly solitary after that turning point at dusk which resembles so much the nightfall of the mind" [p.96]) clearly run parallel

to his realization that madness is separating his mind from his identity. But there is the deeper realization that his madness is itself just a symptom of the disease killing him. We cannot come to conclusions about this character on the interpretive plane without realizing that his fear of death, while it may entwine with his occasional recognitions of madness, is a separate thing. The character Gradus, for instance, is a monster hatched out of this fear of death; Gradus has very little to do with Kinbote's anxiety about madness.

II

One of the wonderful things about Nabokovian metaphors is how they can have multiple significance even within the context of their roles as metaphor. Here for instance is a line we have already recognized from the same page as the above:

I suppose it was then, on those masquerading
spring nights with the sounds of new life in
the trees cruelly mimicking the cracklings
of old death in my brain, I suppose it was
then that I got used to consulting the windows
of my neighbor's house for a gleam of comfort.

Kinbote's physical condition adds a new layer of meaning. Old death crackles, not just in the sounds of a spring night compelling him to imagine assassins at the door--it crackles in grotesque imitation of the tissue hardening in his brain. The spring night masquerades, blustering as though it were

winter, denoting Kinbote's own masquerade as the king of Zembla, also denoting the masquerade by which he dresses his authentic mortal fears in the costume of the regicidal Shadows. This fantasy fear "mimics" the real thing as the sounds of the night mimic those voices in his mind telling him the truth about his situation. The metaphors complement both layers of reality, expanding the limits of what is already a multiplied gesture even further afield.

We might assume that it was during those spring nights of 1959 when Kinbote first realized that he was both losing his mind and dying. Thus Shade's window represents more than just comfort from loneliness; those sleepless nights must have witnessed the hatching, one might even say the writing, of the story Kinbote would feed Shade. While we are on the subject, it is interesting to note the parallel of Kinbote up all night in the spring working on *his* story, and of Shade up nights in the summer writing the poem Kinbote thought he had engendered. Only now can we realize the full significance of Shade's magic window; its doubled metaphorical meaning--as the place of art and of death--is quadrupled in its being exactly the same symbol for Kinbote. "Uncurtaining" the night, the poet reveals his commentator on the other side of the glass, "consulting" the window, longing for transformation.

Still suffering spring insomnia, and hearing the approach of assassins in distant traffic, Kinbote's thoughts embrace suicide:

at times I thought that only by self-destruction could I hope to cheat the relentlessly advancing assassins who were in me, in my eardrums, in my pulse, in my skull, rather than on that constant highway looping up over me and around my heart as I dozed off (p.97).

Here the metaphor (it is a clever one, conveying the semi-oneiric state in which the borders between self and the environment seem to disappear upon drifting off to sleep, the highway entering the confines of the newly expanded, perhaps limitless self) proves to be quite transparent. Kinbote hints that the killer is literally in his skull, in the brain that is decaying with such rapidity that a task easily accomplished in June (the drawing of a map of the palace for Shade) is impossible in October due to lack of energy and "excruciating headaches" (p.107). But the hint is only effective for those prepared for it. Otherwise the image passes, filed away in its other context, the metaphor of an overactive imagination, not one under assault.

Going back into his commentary, one notices just how many times Kinbote refers to brains, metaphorically and otherwise. The first, from the Foreword, is one we have encountered before; Kinbote contemplates Shade staring out

at a distant lake: "Here he is, I would say to myself, that is his head, containing a brain of a different brand than that of the synthetic jellies preserved in the skulls around him" (p.27). This case is rather interesting because a little further down, he writes "I am witnessing a unique *physiological* phenomenon: John Shade perceiving and transforming the world,...re-combining its elements so as to produce at some unspecified date an *organic* miracle" (italics added). The reference to Shade's brain alone is remarkable. We may put down such peculiarities to his idiosyncratic style, but the second quote shows how seriously he takes the matter. Obsessed with his own condition, he attributes to Shade's brain a status far greater than that of mere receptacle of the mind. It is a kind of manufacturing plant, generating perception into art. In Kinbote's view this process is life-giving. The organic illness requires an organic miracle. Regardless, we should note the ascendancy of the brain as the mark of distinction among lesser mortals. The brain is the arbiter of individuality.

Note also how Kinbote distinguishes King Charles from his creation Gradus, the mechanical man, who is defined by his utter lack of individuality: "How much happier the wide awake indolents, the monarchs among men, the rich monstrous

brains deriving intense enjoyment and rapturous pangs from the balustrade of a terrace at nightfall" (p.232). It is a difference of only two letters, but not an insignificant one; Kinbote does not write "*their* rich monstrous brains," but "*the* rich...etc.," with "monstrous brains" being synecdochal for monarchs among men. It is the brain again that is the true measure of difference between Kinbote and Gradus--the brain as seat of an individuality that is in essence monstrous, as unique things must be to generic things.⁵³ The passage that follows is an intense reverie of visual memory, of the sunset viewed at the king's beloved summer retreat called Boscobel (this scene with Kinbote

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Robert Alter alludes to this in his chapter on Nabokov in *Partial Magic*: "The whole Commentary is manifestly the work of a rich monstrous brain anxiously pursuing the memory of a cherished past through the verbal evocation of its concrete details." (Alter, 210). One of the central individuating functions of the brain is the perception of concrete details and their suffusion into memory. Kinbote would no doubt argue that observation and memory translated into expression is the essence of being. To the Graduses of the world this idea is monstrous because it refutes the notion that social or psychological ills can be assuaged by abstract, general strategies.

But then the word "monstrous" is double edged. The monstrous brain may be the unique one, but it recalls a moment in Shade's poems that refers to the "monsters in [Aunt Maud's] brain" (l.208) who retain their usual significance as relentlessly destructive agents. These monsters are the disease that is destroying Aunt Maud's individuality, making her (as the monsters of Kinbote's brain are making him) an organism, deteriorating and detached from that which gives meaning to its functions.

looking over water at sunset, though it comes 200 pages after the Foreword, intends an alignment of himself with Shade). The brain contemplates, the brain remembers, the brain makes sense of visual stimuli--without the brain there is no observance, only formless information unperceived. The brain is the self.

The Shadows, like "hoodlums who itch to torture the invulnerable gentleman whose testimony clapped them in prison for life," are nothing more than the thirst for revenge "slowly destroying their brutish brains" (pp.149-50). This passage faintly echoes another, later in the book, in which Kinbote tells us about the belief held by many Zembla theologians:

that even the most demented mind still contains within its diseased mass a sane basic particle that survives death and suddenly expands, bursts out as it were, in peals of healthy and triumphant laughter when the world of timorous fools and trim blockheads has fallen away far behind (p.237).

In each there is the idea of transcendence or invulnerability. Though the Shadows and hoodlums are left in the prison cell of their obsessions, the victim of dementia will burst out of his into health. The laughing, invulnerable subject overcomes human viciousness and the insidiousness of disease alike, hinting that for Kinbote there is little difference between the two. As in the note to line 62 we see that the Shadows are essentially his

disease personified. They are monsters of his condition. His weighing the balance of their minds or intuiting an image of revenge destroying their brains is perfectly consonant with their status as projections of the reality Kinbote would rather avoid facing. Note in the passage from page 237 that the "demented mind" is constructed, almost tangibly, as "diseased mass." He does not reach for any of an infinite number of more abstract metaphors that might synthesize with the concept of "mind," implying that a direct correlation between mind and brain exists. This late in the novel there can be no doubt that Kinbote is addressing his own hopes of transcending insanity at death, or that he is convinced his malady is organic.

III

Brains seem to be viewed with equal portions of loathing and admiration. Beneath his surface panic and disgust there also seems to exist a recognition that disease is what makes Kinbote Kinbote (rather than, say, Botkin). The degeneration of cerebral sclerosis lies at the source of all his imaginative undertakings; perhaps the disease itself is the "dazzling Zembla burning in [his] brain" (p.80). When Kinbote talks about his rich "monstrous" brain, we can sense a deep ambivalence. His disease may be destroying him, but it is also likely responsible for the heightened sense

awareness, for his almost painfully rich attention to detail and his ability to create from it. In one sense he is like the young man in "Signs and Symbols," his perception a hot-wired accessory to paranoia, his madness transforming the environment into satellites of his ego--yet, too, he is, as Shade implies, a fellow poet, the author of a "brilliant invention." In these qualities he is indeed close to Shade. These characters share the quality of being "invaded" by their perception; in Kinbote's case, as in Shade's (unlike the character from "Signs and Symbols"), we get to see what they make of it. Perhaps part of the reason Kinbote rages so much at death is that he has only begun to live.

However we judge Kinbote, the issue of the origin of his madness is crucial to drawing conclusions on the exegetical plane. The foundational elements of his story--the reflections between New Wye and Zembla; the doubled nature of the fantasy; the dichotomies of good and evil, shadow and light; even the figure of Gradus as the angel of death--these seem quite a bit less haphazard or ambiguous when we read Kinbote as a character who knows he is carrying around his killer in his skull. And they mirror this complex dichotomy of mind and brain. His desire for transformation is really a quite primitive desire to continue living. We can understand more about his assuming the disguise: He

flees into the Charles character not so much because his old existence might have been drab, but because it is untenable. The originating figure is about to die; the King always cheats death, is always one step ahead of his pursuers. And even if Charles must die sometime he will at least live on in the precincts of art, in Shade's poem. "Pale Fire" is a refuge for Kinbote; it is what the character from "Signs and Symbols" lacks, a structure to organize and placate the intense but chaotic missives of his paranoia.

In a larger context, beyond the exegetical, we can understand a little more about the relationship of Kinbote's commentary to Shade's poem. Its parasitism is correlative to the disease eating away at Kinbote's mind. The parasite distorts the discourse; it pulls the original off its course, out of orbit, so to speak, into a new path. The parasite creates disguised, deformed doubles; it is itself a double.

Prof. Botkin

Like his commentary, Kinbote's persona is formed by a series of layers, psychological masks he invites us (sometimes inadvertently) to look under. He intends his writing to necessitate and justify his unveiling as a king parading as a scholar. Of course that mask is so transparent

that the average reader will not even bother with it. The next layer to go is the royal mask. We know by the end that Kinbote's identification with the Zemblan king is completely delusional. We are not even sure if there is such a place as Zembla, that "distant northern land" whose hazy coast comes into focus only through Kinbote's imaginative lens.⁵⁴

Thus the third mask seems rather opaque and invites chaos into our understanding of Kinbote. It is difficult to determine the identity of a storyteller when our only access to him is a story whose plot, characters, and setting disappear when exposed to scrutiny. What Nina Berberova says about the symbolic and realistic levels of *Pale Fire* is relevant:

There is in *Pale Fire* a structural surprise: the symbolic level, the fantastic, the poetic, lies on its surface and is obvious, while the factual, the realistic is only slightly hinted at, and may be approached

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Nabokov reacted strongly against a suggestion made by his publisher that a compendium of the Zemblan characters be included at the beginning of the novel to aid the reader. This is number four of a long list of reasons against such a move: "Nobody knows, nobody should know--even Kinbote hardly knows--if Zembla really exists" (cited from a letter to Walter Minton by Vera Nabokov in Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991, 463). It is not insignificant that "distant northern land," the last words of the book, and the single definition of Zembla in the Index are lifted, as Gerald De Vries has pointed out ("Fanning the Poet's Fire: Some Remarks on Nabokov's *Pale Fire*"), from "The Rape of the Lock" (Canto II, l.154).

as a riddle.⁵⁵

The fantastic is what is apparent in *Kinbote*; the rest seems to fade into the same mist of uncertainty in which *Zembla* is shrouded. Here again the critic must make a choice. Those who read *Pale Fire* as an essay in postmodern ambiguity tend to take Berberova's symbolic level as the novel's ultimate reality; it is unattached to a "factual" level. Any hint that the poetic is affiliated to anything but itself is, by definition, a "red herring." Looking beneath the *Kinbote* mask to an originating identity, any identity, is to fall into Nabokov's trap. The great majority of critics, however, have searched within the text for the "real" *Kinbote*. Right from the start (see Mary McCarthy's groundbreaking article in *Encounter* 19, the year the novel was published) favor has smiled upon "an American scholar of Russian descent" called Botkin (p.306).

I find D. Barton Johnson's chapter on *Pale Fire* (*Worlds in Regression*) to contain the most thorough examination of the issue. Johnson supports the idea that *Kinbote* is Botkin, pointing out that the index entry accorded him

(Botkin, V., American scholar of Russian descent,

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From "The Mechanics of *Pale Fire*" (*Triquarterly*, 17, Winter 1970: 147-48). This is highly perceptive of the novel's structure, though it leads the author to some speculations about the hidden reality of the novel that are a bit odd.

894; king-bot, maggot of extinct fly that once bred in mammoths and is thought to have hastened their phylogenetic end, 247; bottekin-maker, 71; bot, plop, and boteliy, big-bellied [Russ.]; botkin or bodkin, a Danish stiletto.)

seems more intent on indicating the anagrammatic flexibility of all things Botkin ("king-bot," "bottekin," "bodkin") than on offering any indication about the person. Nothing in the entry refers to the "real" Botkin. On only one occasion is he mentioned directly in the Commentary (in the note to line 172 of the poem, keyed, curiously, to the words "books and people"). Yet this does not find its way into the Index.

Michael Wood details one of the problems with seeing Kinbote as Botkin: "if Kinbote is Botkin, he must have rewritten every mention of himself throughout the text, where he is regularly addressed as 'Charles', 'Kinbote', or 'Dr. Kinbote'" (Wood, 178). He continues, "the idea of Professor Pardon's asking someone called Botkin if his name is an anagram of Botkin makes the hair stand on end" (ibid). Yet there is no reason to suspect (if we are going to give serious consideration to the issue) that *everything* about his story is a sham. It is generally posited that this Botkin is a familiar figure on campus. But why can't Botkin really be the visiting scholar Kinbote purports to be? It would explain his rental of the Goldsworth house for the semester; it would accommodate Kinbote's feeling of

isolation, his account of introductions, of unfamiliarity with the New Wye weather, with its social structure, etc. There is danger in trying to fill in too many of the unknown blanks, but isn't it plausible that Wordsmith was to receive a visiting professor that semester called Botkin? If he showed up calling himself Kinbote, some eyebrows might be raised, but this would be judged only a mild eccentricity in the expert on surnames; he might even be seen to be making some point about the flexibility of names, of what we take to be the concrete "reality" of our identity (this seems to me the only explanation consistent with Professor Pardon's question in the first place).

Here is another blurry figure from the Index:

Marrowsky, a, a rudimentary spoonerism, from the name of a Russian diplomat of the early 19th century, Count Komarovski, famous at foreign courts for mispronouncing his own name--Makarovski, Macaronski, Skomorovski, etc.

There is no page number attached to this entry because neither the spoonerism nor the Count appears in the Commentary. One should pay close attention to the things Kinbote smuggles into his index; to my knowledge no critic has yet made this seemingly obvious association: Kinbote is positing himself as a latter day Komarovski, an outsider manipulating his own identity, not changing it entirely, but rearranging its parts to create a multiple persona. This has

nothing to do with the submerged king taking a name apposite to his disguise (Kinbote--supposedly meaning "king killer" in Zemblan); it alludes to a different self, to a Botkin pretending to be Kinbote.

A spoonerism is a simple rearrangement rather than a creation *ex nihilo*, the weird twin of the rational composition that means something to us. The spooneristic reversal maintains something of the original character--it makes no sense at all if the original cannot be recognized in it--and while it is usually comic, it has a slightly disturbing quality, like a wrong turn down a street that reminds us of our own. If Botkin has become Kinbote, we may want to think of the latter in these terms, as the wrong turn, the twin, the disturbing echo. If we know nothing definite about Botkin, I think we should assume that he is entirely recognizable in Kinbote. The game Count Komarovski plays for the amusement of others reflects in miniature the serious disposition of Kinbote's identity: He is both characters. One is reminded of the denouement of *I Pagliacci* where Canio finds that he is somehow *both* his tragic self and his comic double Pagliaccio. Perhaps madness is a kind of spoonerism of the mind.

Michael Wood offers a sensible approach to the subject:

I'd like to believe that all this is a lure:
Botkin is not Kinbote, he is a mere weird

verbal cousin, an accidental 'resembler', just one of those alphabetical things. But there is too much activity around the name for that, too much ado about a character who is scarcely there. Botkin is the static in Kinbote's story, the buzz and hum of repression, the self Kinbote has buried (Wood, 178).

But, he continues, Kinbote "has buried Botkin pretty successfully." He is there not as the "man behind the mask," but as a reminder that "Kinbote's self is invented, precarious; that it has a past or a double" (ibid). Wood is correct; there is too much of Botkin around to ignore, yet there is little textual authority for any kind of definitive statement about him.⁵⁶ I have suggested that we think of Shade and Kinbote's relationship in metaphorical terms, as tenor and vehicle. So too Botkin/Kinbote; their relationship may be entirely artificial, a construction of the "combinatorial delight" of this novel. As in a metaphor, success depends on the mind that filters information and

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I do not offer the following as proof one way or the other (as Brian Boyd does in his interesting but flawed reading of *Pale Fire*). Boyd cites the following note Nabokov made in his 1962 diary in anticipation of statements for interviews: "I wonder if any reader will notice the following details: 1.) that the nasty commentator is not an ex-king and not even Dr. Kinbote, but Prof. Vseslav Botkin, a Russian and a madman" (Boyd, 709). Now Nabokov was known to be less than forthcoming in interviews, and, of course, this bit of intervention never actually made it into an interview. Even if it had, might not the author have been making a conjecture about whether any of his readers had fallen into a trap he had deliberately set?

creates associations from them. Botkin is Kinbote's analog, his inverted self, his metonym. We may have to supply much of the metonymical meaning with our attention as readers, but that does not make the relationship meaningless. The novel posits many relationships between characters (or between characters and things, animals, documents, etc.) simply by manipulating the context by which we perceive them so that some hint of similarity may show through.

Shade's metaphysic suggests that nothing is random. Even the most insignificant thing--a bicycle track, a leaf on the sidewalk, a butterfly--plays some part in an enormous general plan. Again, I suggest that such an idea is at heart literary, amounting to the reading of one's life as though it were text; the significance of the leaf or the butterfly is really a metonymic significance, complex and obscure (*Man's life as commentary to abstruse/ Unfinished poem*). And Shade concludes that the universe works on the same principles of organization by which poetry functions. Kinbote's perception is also highly literary. He creates himself as he ostensibly responds to a text, jumbling reading and storytelling together. His insanity compels him to see implanted significance in the contingencies of life, but unlike the young man in "Signs and Symbols," for example, Kinbote thinks he knows what the voices are saying;

he has given order to the sinister communications by thinking up a fantastic tale with himself as the main character. To return to Nabokov's idea from "The Art of Literature and Commonsense": Kinbote has "dismembered" his world--as does the artist and the madman--and we are watching him try to put it back as something completely new, as a work of art.

In Kinbote's scheme of things Botkin is a literary device; he is a part of the artifice, a reflection, a totem of the mysterious. Even within the confines of the tale there is no such person as Charles Kinbote; the identity of the primary narrator, the consciousness of most of the novel's discourse, is entirely enigmatic. All we know of him is what can be gleaned by interpreting the method by which he constructs his story. Like Shade, Kinbote is infatuated with the portent of coincidence, with the idea of resemblance being a manifestation of a coherent plan of life. Botkin is his mysterious resembler, the anagrammatic analog who actually gives his story coherence rather than denies it.

The postmodern suggestion is that Nabokov "sets" us up to discover Kinbote's "true" identity as a way to draw us into the fiction, and force us (if we are at all self-conscious about reading) to implicate ourselves as "mini-

Kinbotes" imposing our own reality on the text. This may well be. But Kinbote might be a self-conscious author as well. He could be the perpetrator of what we thought was the Nabokov project, the displacement of a character into the double. As Hermann Hermann creates his own double out of his misapprehension of another character's appearance in *Despair*, Kinbote creates his own double out of seemingly subliminal suggestions. Now this seems to fly in the face of my contention about the basic transparency of Kinbote's maneuvers. Does he have enough guile to *fake* the Botkin connection? There is no definite answer, but whether he believes himself to be Botkin or not, the presence of this character as the disturbing echo of what Kinbote might really be (or of what he might *have been* if he were not insane) reminds us not just that Kinbote's character is invented (as Wood rightfully declares), or that he has a double, but that Kinbote *himself* is a double character. He has divided himself in any number of dichotomies: writer and reader, actor and commentator, critic and author, protagonist and storyteller, king and subject. As an element of *his* fiction (even if he may be the only true thing about it), Botkin signifies the major split in Kinbote--between the "real" person, the pre-Kinbotic self, and the artificial character in his delusion. He is an emblem of the artifice,

a Komarovski mistaken for Marrowsky. Along the way he comes to symbolize, perhaps even for Kinbote, the novel's dialogic nature. Nothing stands alone in *Pale Fire*; everything must be considered in relation to its ressembler. As Kinbote's creation Botkin would embody his idea that multiplicity is a fundamental component of art; thus Botkin would not be a red herring as much as an objective correlative. Correspondingly, Botkin represents transformation and perhaps even transcendence. It would follow then that whether he is Botkin or not, Kinbote needs us to suspect he is.

Secondary Characters

Kinbote directs the reader's attention to the variants to Shade's poem as the "home" the poet has given his king. Whether he is really Botkin or not, Kinbote sees himself as a kind of variation of that obscure scholar. Indeed, variation is not just a literary method for Kinbote, but a condition of being. It manifests itself in the characters of his fantasy. Many of them are "real" people, that is, characters from Shade and Kinbote's academic milieu (the New Wye layer), transplanted into figures in the fantasy. Johnson calls them "transubstantiations." Obviously criticism has looked into this phenomenon, but not far

beyond simple identifications, or the "what." In examining Kinbote as author, I am primarily interested in the "why."

The most obvious translation is Gerald Emerald, the young professor of English. His counterpart is the traitor Izumrudov, who, like Gerald Emerald, wears a green jacket and is described as being unnecessarily, even ostentatiously heterosexual. In the fantasy Izumrudov's actions (tipping off Gradus about the King's whereabouts) are those of just another in a long line of Zemblan traitors. Kinbote's description of him in the Index as a "person who makes advances, and then betrays a noble and naive heart, telling foul stories about his victim and pursuing him with brutal practical jokes" seems grossly inappropriate--even in Kinbote's topsy-turvy kingdom it would be hard to believe that the ruling monarch would be subject to such things--and alludes to something more personal. He calls Emerald a "foul-minded young pup" with a penchant for playing practical jokes as revenge for Kinbote's rejection of Emerald's advances (p.98). Quite clearly Emerald's attributes have been layered into Izumrudov⁵⁷ (in Kinbote's

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Ever the explicator of surnames, Kinbote explains that Izumrudov's name "sounded rather Russian but actually meant 'of the Umruds,' an Eskimo tribe sometimes seen paddling their umyaks (hide bound boats) on the emerald waters of our northern shores" (p.255). One need not know the language to suspect, correctly, that "izumrud" is Russian for emerald,

Gradus fantasy, Emerald imitates Izumrudov's treachery by leading the way to Kinbote, literally, giving Gradus a lift to the Goldsworth house [p.284]).

This is an easy one. Still, this revelation (we might call it fictional metafictionality--Kinbote's own brand of self-consciousness) shows us, through the agency of the fantasy world, what Kinbote would hide in the "real" world: not just that his tale is an invention, but that a character he can dismiss so grandly on many occasions (Emerald) proves to be the source (when incarnated as Izumrudov) of genuine anguish. Kinbote's homosexuality is clearly isolating, socially and psychically; in the "real" world, American academia of the '50s, he fears to the point of paranoia the damning complaint from a student or a colleague that would bring to light what had been allowed to remain in the dark. The constrictions of the closet in the "real" world are real, a source of constant anxiety. No doubt they are inversely responsible for the exuberant openness homosexuality is accorded in Zembla. The apparent rejection of Kinbote's overtures by Emerald in New Wye are translated into Izumrudov's political betrayal in Zembla. To Kinbote this wound also engenders fear, and we understand why Emerald's well-intentioned gesture of inserting a note

"Izumrudov" meaning "from Emerald."

reading "you have h.....s real bad, chum" into his pocket is deemed by Kinbote, who reads "hallucinations" in the dots rather than "halitosis," to be a vicious act: "It is so easy for a cruel person to make the victim of his ingenuity believe that he has persecution mania" (pp.97-98). It is a rich paranoia indeed that sees *induced* paranoia as a method of persecution, but as hypochondriacs can sometimes truly be ill, paranoiacs can have reason to fear. Kinbote's mishap with Emerald might easily be a source for authentic persecution; it certainly underscores Kinbote's already powerful feelings of isolation and shame. His transforming Emerald into Izumrudov, the agent of destruction, opens a vista into the psyche he would rather keep hidden.

II

On the other side of the coin is the promiscuous adolescent and musical prodigy Gordon Krummholz translated from the young professor of Music, Misha Gordon. Gordon Krummholz is an idealized faunlet. His abbreviated attire changes several time during the short scene in which he guides Gradus around a Swiss villa (pp.197-202), as though Kinbote cannot decide whether black bathing trunks, white tennis shorts or a "leopard spotted loincloth" convey the right note of delectation. Once he is even described as being "wreathed about the loins with ivy," and this compiled

with his "lovely bestial face" completes a building image of mythical Greek desire (Gordon is also referred to as Narcissus). Practically fellating a water spigot, or alluding to a night spent on a collapsible mattress in the villa's grotto with Charles the Beloved the year before, Gordon is a bald erotic fantasy for his creator.

We naturally assume that Kinbote designs the character out of his "real-life" attraction for Misha Gordon, embellishing the vision with overtones from Petronius and casting over it all the quality of ethereal vagueness just right for a sexual fantasy.⁵⁸ But this one is not so easy. While the music professor may be present, mark well the Narcissus reference. Fifteen-year-old Gordon bears a strong resemblance to the thirteen-year-old prince Charles who explores the hidden underground passage out of the palace with his playmate Oleg (pp.117-35). They are both dark, strong, bold lads heavy with sexual potency. Gradus, hearing Gordon at the piano as he enters Villa Libitina⁵⁹, reaches

58

One might interpret that there was no traumatic scene with married Misha Gordon as there seems to have been with Gerald Emerald. This would account for the dreamy, positive quality of the fantasy. The desired object's being out of reach is often the best stimulant.

59

Libitina, as Kinbote tells us, is a Roman goddess of the underworld. There is much about the "underworld" in that scene concerning the underground passage; it would seem that Kinbote or his creator is hinting at some kind of connection

for his gun thinking he may have surprised the king, a "gifted hymnist." Besides a musical gift Gordon and the king share a devotion to sunbathing and a conspicuous tin ear to American slang (Gordon: "You have not seen anything yet" [p.200]; Kinbote: "You are telling me" [p.196]). Gordon lying by the pool may be nothing more than the narcissistic longings of his creator, a figment created out of a fantasy, the fantasy of self Kinbote has constructed. Thus you might say that Gordon is a kind of objective correlative to the theme of transformation rife throughout the novel, particularly in this episode--not unlike Lavender's *ombriones*, the lewd photographs (about which Gradus purports to make his call) that "combined exquisite beauty with highly indecent subject matter--nudities blending with fig trees, oversize ardors, softly shaded hindercheeks, and also a dapple of female charms" (p.197). This is a very apt analog of Kinbote's art and its blending of disparate objects into not-quite-assimilated wholes, of its exquisite beauty, its quasi-Ovidian transformations. Again, there is something of the "real" world here in the fantasy, but it has been almost unrecognizably estheticized.

III

in the two scenes.

Then there is the case of Fleur de Fyler. Kinbote tells us that after the death of Queen Blenda Prince Charles was implored to give up homosexuality and take a wife before becoming king. After a staged planchette session in which the newly dead queen (Charles had been fearing the appearance of her ghost) spells out the words "Charles take take cherish love flower flower flower" (p.109) he is sequestered for three days in a room of the palace with Fleur, daughter to the late queen's lady-in-waiting (who has bribed the guard and set up the seances). In an earlier entry, concerning the morning of Blenda's death, Fleur and her sister Fifalda are described in the following manner: "and there were the two girls, side by side, thin-legged, in shimmering wraps, their kitten noses pink, their eyes green and sleepy, their earrings catching and loosing the fire of the sun" (p.105). In his account of the king's three-day habitation with Fleur she becomes more cat-like; she sleeps "curled up" at the center of an enormous pillow. Distracted from the coronation speech he is trying to compose, the king

would sweep her out of his chair, his eyes still on his writing pad, and stretching herself she would move over to the window seat and its dusty sunbeam; but after a while she tried to cuddle up to him, and he had to push away her burrowing dark curly head with one hand while writing with the other or detach one by one her little pink claws from his sleeve or sash (p.111).

Only after these passages, and the one already commented on in which Fleur contemplates herself in Sudarg of Bokay's fantastic mirror, does Kinbote describe her again as "pretty yet not repellant (as some cats are less repugnant than others to the good-natured dog told to endure the bitter effluvium of an alien genus)" (p.112).

This seems just another in a long line of Kinbote's glib metaphorical constructions until we remember there is another cat in Kinbote's life, the black house pet he inherited with the Goldworth mansion: "It was a likeable little creature but after a while its movements began to grate on my nerves and I farmed it out to Mrs. Finley, the cleaning woman" (p.84). A more positive connection cannot be made until Kinbote describes an incident that illustrates his apprehensions about the shadows of the lonely dark house.

One night the black cat, which a few minutes before I had seen rippling down into the basement...suddenly reappeared on the threshold of the music room, in the middle of my insomnia and a Wagner record, arching its back and sporting a neck bow of white silk which it could certainly never have put on all by itself (p.97).

Now after Fleur has been "farmed out" to Mrs. de Fyler in the pre-coronation palace (after objections are made about her pedigree), she does not appear until twenty-two years worth of commentary have passed, "still wearing pearls in

her raven hair and the traditional white mantilla" (p.212).

Again, it is only the re-reader who will be able to follow the trail over more than a hundred pages, and it is hard work; but one can see (the white mantilla and the white ribbon tying up the loose ends) that Fleur is a fantasy version of the Goldsworth's cat.⁶⁰ Why is this significant? Well it is one thing for an author like Kinbote to embellish his story with fantastic metaphor; likening a character to a cat has a tinge of the fantastic (this is not the only fairytalish association concerning Fleur--remember, at the second "deepest" level of her multiple reflection in Sudarg's mirror she is likened to a wistful mermaid in an old tale. Likewise, it is rumored that her breasts and feet served as models for the society poet and sculptor Arnor's statue entitled *Lilith Calling Back Adam*⁶¹, after he had gone "about with a porcelain cup and Cinderella's slipper for months" [p.108])). But when one realizes that the vision

⁶⁰

One of Nabokov's comments from *Lectures on Literature* (77) concerning *Bleak House* might make this cat business seem less far fetched. He mentions Krook's "horrible cat" and notes that "old Smallweed...with his green eyes and sharp claws, is not only a brother-in-law of Krook's but also a kind of human representative of Krook's cat." This is the kind of thing Nabokov loved in Dickens, and it is not surprising that having noticed a device he used it himself.

⁶¹

Nearly everything in Zembla is imagined in the mirror; in Hebrew mythology it is Lilith who leaves Adam.

intertwines with a particular cat, a different picture emerges. Kinbote is again using the raw material of the "real world," and again what is most conspicuous is the note of desperation. The incident with the ribbon and the cat quite apparently occurs early in that terrifying spring, before his gardener moved in and assuaged some of Kinbote's fright, when, he reports, "almost nightly...I had feared for my life" (p.95).

This black cat then is very much an emblem (as it is in the Hallowe'en world) of Kinbote's terror. His creating Fleur from it runs parallel to his attempt to destroy his fear through the fantasy. Kinbote has a symbolic imagination, and Fleur is constructed of symbols.⁶² She embodies the multiform female image in the male gaze. He may be entirely immune to her "charms" (in "gazer's" language), but Kinbote conspires in the process of symbolic objectification implicit in such imagining. He constructs a fantastic (if static) image and then undercuts it: Fleur has no power over the homosexual king. Yet she also seems to

⁶²

She is the inspiration for another of Arnor's creations, this time a poem, the *miragarl*, or "mirage girl" (the name conjures the mirror as well), the fantasy image of "a dream king in the sandy wastes of time" (p.108). About her walk it is said that "the swing and play of those slim haunches was something intensely artistic, something Arab girls were taught in special schools by special Parisian panders who were afterwards strangled" (ibid).

signify a deep uneasiness about art. Kinbote is trying desperately to have his life immortalized in the poetry of John Shade; this character (Fleur) whose entire being is artistically codified (from mirror to statue to poem to fairytale), but who is herself entirely unartistic, may perhaps be a figure of his doubts about success.

So Fleur turns out to be a strange mix of the fantastic and the mundane. The mermaid is also the family cat. But even the mundane is not without its symbolic significance; that cat tells us something about Kinbote. He tries to compensate for the lack of control defining his "real" life by controlling, defining and categorizing the characters in his tale who seem more like creatures in a menagerie. We notice again that Kinbote creates by adaptation; he twists reality into fantasy without changing its essential nature, a la Count Komarovski. We see the "real" through the invention, in the invention. He can farm out the cat, he can resist the charms of Fleur, he can turn it all into the game of parody--but beneath the artifice is a hint of what he cannot control.

IV

While Kinbote has no trouble finding descriptions for the adolescent men he so relishes, the women in his imagined past seem to blend into one. Disa, Charles' eventual queen,

with her black hair, pale skin, and boyish figure, could be a double of Fleur. They, in turn, seem to be copied from the picture Shade paints of Sybil in his poem, a picture Kinbote calls "idealized and stylized" as it conforms more, he presumes, to a younger version of the woman than the one Kinbote knew.⁶³ Rather than gloss over this resemblance, or avoid it entirely, Kinbote basks in it: "I trust the reader appreciates the strangeness of this, because if he does not, there is no sense in writing poems, or notes to poems, or anything at all" (p.207). It sounds like a bluff; the experienced con-artist does not try to ignore the extraordinary coincidence that brings gullibility and craft together but marvels at its "strangeness," making both fate and his victim accomplices. But at least in part Kinbote

63

Shade makes the point twice, in the lines of the poem in question (261-67), that Sybil has not changed ("your profile has not changed"; "you have kept it all"), a sort of rejoinder to Kinbote before the fact. Kinbote counters with the condescending, "the fact remains that sixty-year-old Shade is lending here a well-conserved coeval the ethereal and eternal aspect she retains, or should retain, in his kind, noble heart" (p.207). A minor battle, but an interesting reminder that the question of subjectivity is always of paramount importance in the novel. In another context Shade says "Different people see different similarities and similar differences" (p.265). Both perspectives, while being antithetical, could be equally true. In Kinbote's Shade reminds one of Pierre Bonnard who painted a long-marriage-worth of nudes using his wife Marthe as the model. She appears always as the young woman she was in 1900, even in the canvas Bonnard was working on when she died in 1942.

wants the reader to see through his subterfuge.

Obviously not every "transubstantiation" serves the same purpose or takes the same form. The part of Gordon Krummholz that comes from Misha Gordon is no more than something borrowed from a sexual fantasy. Izumrudov, on the other hand, is Gerald Emerald, trauma and all. To suit the architectonics of his tale Disa needs a precursor, so Kinbote creates Fleur out of what comes to hand, the Goldsworth family cat and an assortment of sexist, quasi-fairytale props from his imagination. Disa is different; if Fleur is designed only to be dismissed, Disa, though just as vapid, is supposed to be a monument. Kinbote calls our attention to her resemblance to Sybil because he desires to incorporate some of the emotion with which Shade tributes his wife in "Pale Fire" into his own story.⁶⁴ He would have us think that he too is capable of emotional love. Of course Kinbote is entirely incapable of emotional love; within the confines of his own story the king is never capable of anything more than promiscuous sexuality--in New Wye he is lightning quick to a sense of betrayal, but never to love. Despite his claims ("these heart-rending dreams transformed

⁶⁴

Though Shade's encomiums to his wife tend to resolve themselves into little more than admiration for her gestures.

the drab prose of his feelings for her into strong and strange poetry" [p.209]) Disa is less the subject of guilt-inspired love than an opportunity for exploring his own psyche.

Kinbote says that his dreams about her always recall the moment he first told her he did not love her, by the side of a lake at an Italian resort:

one cloudless evening with the mountains of the far shore swimming in a sunset haze and the lake all peach syrup regularly rippled with pale blue, and the captions of a newspaper spread flat on the foul bottom near the stone bank perfectly readable through the shallow diaphanous filth (p.210).

The paper is legible, but notice that Kinbote does not tell us what the captions say, rather we are struck by the image of the submerged message and the intervening filth. On the same page Kinbote notes that his dreams about her are "amorous," but "what carnal aura there was in them came not from her but from those with whom he had betrayed her...and even so the sexual scum remained somewhere far above the sunken treasure." Filth, sexual scum; our attention is drawn to what interferes with getting at some true, deeply submerged emotion. All versions of his dream are characterized by what eludes the grasp, by sunken

treasures.⁶⁵

At the moment Charles tells Disa that he does not love her, "she [sinks] down on the lawn in an impossible posture" (ibid) reminding the re-reader (but not Kinbote) of Shade dead on the grass from Jack Grey's bullet at the end of the Commentary (p.295), or of the dead waxwing a stylized Shade "picks up from the turf" at its beginning (p.73).⁶⁶ The King tries to take back his revelation, "but the shock had fatally starred the mirror" (p.210), again recalling the waxwing and its window become a mirror by the optical tricks of sun and blue sky.

Within the dream itself Disa is unable to communicate her deep grief to him because they are in the presence of some other person awaiting her domestic commands. One of them is a "workman with a ladder...nodding his head and looking up as he carried it in his arms to the broken

⁶⁵

Analogous to this and to the teasing, frustrating quality of the dream, the king tells Disa where the crown jewels are hidden--this is a running enigma in *Pale Fire*--without telling the reader.

⁶⁶

Recalling that Shade draws (perhaps unwittingly) an analogy between the waxwing and Hazel, we might discern a parallel between her and Disa. They are both props in the respective esthetic paradigms of Shade and Kinbote. Indeed, Kinbote's "use" of Disa seems intended more to emulate Shade's emotional writing about his daughter than about Sybil. As both writers draw so much attention to the sexual status of their subjects, we might almost think of them as the bizarre "sacrificial virgins" of these paradigms.

window" (p.211). Accompanying the feeling of futility in trying to fix what cannot be fixed is the shadow of Gradus, the ultimate worker, assigned to re-pane a broken window at the palace after the revolution (p.252).⁶⁷ Gradus is always associated with glass of some sort, but it seems particularly noteworthy here that he is also thought to be "more or less responsible for the remarkably ugly red-and-amber windows in the great public lavatory at rowdy but colorful Kalixhaven where the sailors are" (p.151).⁶⁸ The

⁶⁷

Presumably this errand took Gradus to the room the King would be removed to after being "accused of using a fop's hand mirror and the sun's cooperative rays to flash signals from his lofty casement." Kinbote describes the only window in his new room as being once a "glorious dreamway of stained glass, with a firebird and a dazzled huntsman, but a football had recently shattered the fabulous forest scene and now its new ordinary pane was barred from the outside" (p.121). The magic firebird is a composite creature (half-woman, half-bird) who helps a prince (the tsar-to-be) defeat a tyrant. It is a mythic double of the waxwing, Shade's figure of death and transcendence. It is the two Soviet agents, Niagrin and Andronnikov, who smash the window, destroying a dazzling Russian myth, replacing it with plain glass.

⁶⁸

Kalixhaven is within miles of Blawick, the jumping off place, with its pier and restaurant, for the Rippleston Caves, whence the King makes his final escape in a motorboat from Zembla. The reference to sailors evokes this restaurant "where many years earlier he had lunched incognito with two amusing, very amusing sailors" (p.145). That he is familiar enough with the "great public lavatory" in Kalixhaven to remember the windows so well gives us some insight into his incognito activities; that Gradus is in some way associated with the King's sexual adventures is quite interesting, as is the proximity of his ugly windows to the Rippleston sea caves, named for the window maker of genius ("who embodied

Gradus\window reflection does not end here: In their interview before his suicide Gradus remembers (or so Kinbote tells us) that the king waved to him once from his tower as he came to remove a window from one of the palace hothouses (p.293). Presumably this is one of the "rare Rippleson" panes he had been sent earlier to "check" for the new government (p.252).

Kinbote writes "in his dreams [Disa's] image was infected with the memory of that confession [his admission that he does not love her] as with some disease or the secret after effects of a surgical operation too intimate to be mentioned" (p.210). In another of the dream duties, the requirements of etiquette that keep Disa from being able to express her feelings to the king, she is "discussing hospital cots with the head nurse" (p.211). The seemingly casual reference to being infected with some disease is not casual at all; again, the state of Kinbote's health seeps into every corner of his story. The longing to explain something to her, to enact his dream-love, is a mask for far more disturbing emotions and fears. His confessions affect his dreams as though he were diseased; Disa discusses cots

the dapple and ringle play and other circular reflections on blue-green seawater in his extraordinary stained glass windows for the palace" [p.312]). This is the sort of contrast, though much more obliquely achieved, inherent in the overt Sudarg of Bokay\Jakob Gradus mirroring.

with the head nurse as though visiting him at *his* sickbed, perhaps the one he fears will be his last.

"Through the everyday plainness of the talk,...he, the groaning dreamer perceived the disarray of her soul and was aware that an odious, undeserved, humiliating disaster had befallen her" (p.211). His words about her, about the purity of love that can only be reached in a dream state, bespeak a deep seated sense of dislocation, of frailty in the remaining, fading particles of his sanity. The odious, undeserved and humiliating disaster rippling beneath the surface of the everyday resonates far more with the perceived degeneration of his mind than it does with Disa's unrequited love for an altogether unlovable character like Charles the Beloved.

Is this then a charade? Is Kinbote talking about himself consciously? I don't think so; that is, it is somehow conspicuous without being conscious. What occurs here is different from his patching Gordon Krummholz together out of character traits already given to the King. Disa represents that which Kinbote would like to suppress. The metaphors he uses to describe their enmity seem to have been filched from the source of his own trauma: the submerged message, the hidden treasure, the waxwing posture, the Gradus workman, the shame of disease and the hospital

setting. Suggesting death, madness, escape or repression of identity, they are private symbols, the metaphors that come to hand for the dream creator when he needs to mimic the dream. Disa is not a stand-in or a double; she is a collection of his anxieties packaged to look like something else.

The characteristic obstruction in his dream is conducted by one, and only one, person coming between them⁶⁹ until the dream shifts. One person becomes a multitude:

the large audience⁷⁰ before him separated him

69

It seems relevant to note that in the *OED*, one of the uses for the term "bodkin" (there is no "botkin," but remember that Kinbote spells his "danish stiletto" with a "t," instructing the reader to "note the correct spelling" [p.220]) is to label just such a third person, wedged in where there is room only for two. For instance, Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* rides "bodkin" in a carriage, turning the noun into an adverb. Critics have seized upon this definition, using it to underscore Botkin/Kinbote's position between Shade's poem and the reader, as well as his attempt to alienate John from Sybil in that reader's attention. I would suggest that in the Disa dream episode the ever present third person is riding bodkin between Kinbote's fantasy identity and his real one; between health and disease; between acceptance and the repression that is producing all kinds of monsters--never mind that it is another case in which Botkin, or what we might call the "botkin principle" is hanging around the fringes.

70

The large audience, the setting that one may presume is an auditorium, links this episode, ever so subtly to another strange moment at the very end of Kinbote's commentary. In his final note the mask of his discourse seems to slip for a moment: "Well, folks, I guess many in this fine hall are as hungry and thirsty as me, and I'd better stop, folks, right here" (p.300). It is a fragmentary moment, a glimpse from

from the door, and the notes reaching him through a succession of hands said that she was not available; that she was inaugurating a fire; that she had married an American businessman; that she had become a character in a novel; that she was dead (p.211-12).

It is not possible to attach significance to every image; I am not prepared to make anything out of her inaugurating a fire or marrying an American businessman, though the irrational eeriness of the first sets a nice dream contrast with the matter-of-fact second. Sometimes a fire is just a fire. The measures of separation between Kinbote and Disa increase in counterpoint to the distance opening up between the Kinbote identity, the insane self, and the sane original. In his dream, or rather in his details of the *created* dream, Kinbote is undertaking an encoded conversation between the two, with what he perceives to be his ontological reality as subject. Here Disa is his stand-in (almost a decoy, the way she is supposed to be a political decoy for the homosexual king); the last two conjectures relate to his own fears: that she was dead, that

the normal course of affairs into something entirely different. The final entry in the commentary is notable for its feeling of narrative dislocation beyond Kinbote's slipping into a prepared speech; this is the note in which he contemplates his future, including the incarnations in which he might continue to exist, presumably after his dismissal from *Pale Fire*. The Disa segment has a similar aura, as though the dream, while gathering around it meaningful images from the text at large, were a window out of it.

she had become a character in a novel. Kinbote's approaching death is always present in his mind, tinging the outlines of his discourse. And, perhaps, his madness is the method by which he comes to realize, as Adam Krug does in *Bend Sinister*, that he *is* a character in a novel. On a more practical level, death and novelistic characterization, in dream symbology, represent the penultimate and ultimate barriers to Kinbote's identity. They are symptoms of his realization of insanity, the outposts indicating just how far away from himself he has wandered.

Kinbote shrouds his invented dream in mystery, hinting that somehow it will authenticate him. He implies that the unreal quality of this love is actually the most real thing about him. In a paradox he understands perfectly well, the noumenal is the most real; it shows him to be a three-dimensional character capable of something *besides* the other qualities he takes such pains to purvey (aestheticism, intelligence, pride, bravery). He wants to show us that he is capable of love, even if he has to go into the dream to get it.

Another paradox: what Kinbote says about his dreams is true; "they were purer than his life" (p.210). They give us the unfiltered Kinbote. There is a hint of this in the King's last glimpse of Disa, caught while walking away from

her villa:

suddenly a fragile bridge was suspended
between waking indifference and dream-love.
But she moved, and he saw it was not she at
all but only poor Fleur de Fyler collecting
the documents left among the tea things
(p.214).

Resemblance is a fragile bridge between dream and reality,
between imagination and fact. One invention is mistaken for
another; Disa and Fleur are conflated in our minds as they
are in Kinbote's fantasy. But where he sees a kind of
teleological extension beyond the limits of fantasy in his
imaginative duplication, we see mere repetition. The window
of his mind has indeed been starred, a profusion of
fragments diminishing and scattering the figments of his
imagination rather than enhancing them. The cohesion he
craves degenerates into incoherence. We are reminded of
Sudarg's fantastic mirror, its multiple images giving way
eventually to nothing.

V

These transplantations of characters from New Wye into
his Zemblan fantasy give us a look into the machinery of a
literary creation. Kinbote is trying very hard to be the
author of his new identity. Like any fledgling author he
uses what comes to hand. Certainly it is a slap-dash, Wizard
of Oz-style dream--an aging poet's wife becomes a beautiful
young queen and drab academics are fabulous traitors and

romantic kings--but Kinbote may not care; he revels in the parallels between Disa and Sybil like someone who realizes that both are fictional, that that is the whole point.

Kinbote knows his tale is highly artificial--the more artifice the better. It is peopled by fairytale characters; its hallmarks are repetition, coincidence, outrageousness. It supports dichotomies of daring bravery or despicable cowardice, patriotism or treason, brilliant enlightenment or tyrannical repression without offering anything in between. It is as unlike "life" as possible without totally stretching the bars of reason. Yet the fact that all these dichotomies are melding into single entities in Kinbote's mind somehow brings him closer to us, the readers of *Pale Fire*. Having re-arranged the real (or in Nabokov's phrase "thoroughly and recklessly dismembered a familiar world"), he resembles the hapless author who can bring characters to life but cannot then control them. He is left to "read" his world, his life, as we do. And it is not as clear as it seems that Kinbote simply embraces all as real. At times he seems to view everything, including the ostensibly "real" world, as a fiction. It and his narrative are entangled beyond his ability to distinguish them.

Gradus

The most important character in Kinbote's menagerie is Gradus the regicide. He too is transplanted from "real" life, but Gradus is constructed to replace his model, the homicidal maniac Jack Grey, and thereby deny that such a person ever existed. The whole of Kinbote's story rests on this question of identity. Without Gradus there is no justification for Kinbote's interference in Shade's poem; there is no plot against the king. Indeed, without Gradus, there is no Kinbote.

Kinbote tries to make Gradus the opposite of himself in every way. Gradus is the lover of Soviet Russia, an "ultra-unionized" peddler of cheap socialist documents, a petty henchman carrying out the rudimentary orders of more intelligent leaders. When Gradus does try to elevate himself above the status of pawn he is completely incompetent (as in the case of his trying to shoot the tennis ace Julius Steinmann, and missing twice in Uncle Vanyan frustration⁷¹

⁷¹

This is a good example of the Kinbotic method of creation. The episode is a precursor to Shade's final scene, in which (Kinbote maintains), Gradus aiming at Kinbote was "missing...every time, the incorrigible bungler" (p.294). Both times he is disarmed by a male nurse. Again, we witness Kinbote forcing what to him must be a kind of esoteric significance by creating a double in his fantasy of what occurs irrevocably in the "real" world. The pattern would help prove his point that Gradus is not actually Jack Grey, while alluding to fate taking a hand in the proceedings.

[ibid])). Morally, he is a clock-work man whose single philosophical response is an automatic hatred for everything beyond his comprehension: "He worshiped general ideas and did so with pedantic aplomb. The generality was godly, the specific diabolical" (p.152). The individuality of perception is impossible and evil. Physically, Gradus is repulsive; his short, crooked body is meant to be contrasted with the King's athletic frame. While the King revels in his sexual escapades, Gradus, after another bungled attempt (this time at self-castration), has been neutered (p.253).

Gradus and his ideologue brethren are the monsters of the brain, not the monstrous brains watching the sunset over the lake. Gradus' conception of the value of words is based on utility alone; he reads to find out the news or to kill time or to digest propaganda. Writing directed any other purpose must be deceitful. such deceitful words are the very material of Kinbote's existence; his life is an extension of

Julius Steinmann himself has a symbolic double, the pile of stones (called a *steinmann*) with a red woolen cap on it, signifying to Kinbote on his trek through the Bera range that he is being trailed by an impersonator, a benign double (Steinmann himself) whose reflection in a pool of water the King mistakes for his own (p.184). This eerie episode in turn can stand as a signifier of Kinbote\Charles' ontological dislocation, his doubled self. Thus even the smallest details, the throwaways, can contain within them many layers of significance, entailing both what Kinbote manufactures and what the attentive reader may piece together despite them.

the esthetic impulse to let words be worlds.

We have seen that those other literary "transubstantiations," Emerald, Fleur, Disa, Gordon were occasions for the expression of much of Kinbote's anxieties. In analyzing the reasons for his creation of Gradus we may come to the same conclusion, but Gradus is much more than that; he is the apotheosis of anxiety, a creature born directly from Kinbote's fears, a collection of all his hatreds and terrors. Gradus is everything that torments his precarious mind brought to life--an agent, not an occasion. Of course Gradus is no more believable than any of Kinbote's other characters. His inventions tend to be stock figures: the ingenue seducer, the icy queen, the delectable faunlet, the heartless traitor, the seedy killer. Characters are objects of scenery meant at most to reflect a psychological situation, the emotional state of the primary character.

II

In his study *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), Angus Fletcher writes that the dispersal of a protagonist's psychological traits among secondary characters is a foundational element of allegory. These secondary characters exist not as complicated figures in their own right, but as fragments of the allegory's central figure materialized into static

agents easily controlled by their author.⁷² Secondary allegorical characters are not only complements to the protagonist, they are expressions of his psychology:

In this sense the subcharacters, the most numerous agents of an allegory, may be generated by the main protagonists, and the finest hero will then be the one who most naturally seems to generate subcharacters--aspects of himself--who become the means by which he is revealed, facet by facet (Fletcher, 36).

I am not introducing the allegorical drive of Nabokov's writing *per se*. Again, the "author" I have in mind is Kinbote. Fletcher's model is useful for understanding the way Kinbote conceives of King Charles and the secondary characters of his fantasy. Quite obviously Charles is meant to be a great allegorical figure. The tale Kinbote tells is really only satisfying as an allegory, even in his own mind. Accordingly, his protagonist is a generator of subcharacters who are only very slightly veiled aspects of his own personality. Fletcher writes, "by splitting off these chips

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Fletcher gives, among many possible examples, that of Talus in Book V of *The Faerie Queene*. He is an agent of violence for Artegall, so that the latter does not have to "dirty his hands in the violence of law enforcement" (Fletcher, 38). Such violence would complicate the allegorical conception of Artegall; "the poet can control Talus far better than he could control fits of rage and savage vengefulness in his titular hero" (ibid).

of composite character, the author is able to treat them as pure, isolated, personified ideas, and they lend themselves better, as a result, to the overall aim of system and consistency" (Fletcher, 38). We have witnessed this already in the secondary characters so far discussed; they are treated not as organic entities but as one-dimensional embodiments of elements of the king's personality, expressions of his controlling passions. Thus Disa embodies the king's capacity for contrition and empathy, even for a strange, nonsexual tenderness. Emerald/Izumrudov is a figure of the king's disdain for breakers of trust, of the vulnerability inherent in his open soul. Gordon is an expression of his great sexual passion and his independence in bucking convention. Fleur is an expression of his unassailability. In each case the reader easily sees through Kinbote's subterfuge, but the system is certainly there running tandem with Kinbote's aim of making Charles a quasi-legendary figure larger than the lives around him.

Fletcher notes that asceticism and anxiety are fertile grounds for the allegorical imagination (Fletcher, 36). We think of Kinbote come to his end in his rented cabin out in the wilds of Utana, fearful for his life and unable to move. He is like Saint Anthony dreaming up monsters, allegorical expressions of his crisis of faith. Kinbote constructs his

entire story and the philosophy that supports it out of such a crisis. The loosening of his mind, the disintegration of his powers and the reliability of his perception, these are the conditions under which the white and black definitions of the allegory are desirable. His anxiety is his *daemon*, the obsessive force impelling his tale, creating the world around him--not the "real" world, but its obscure twin, the one Kinbote inhabits. The allegoric figure acts as one in the grips of such a *daemon*, of a single overwhelming drive (Fletcher, 39).

Kinbote's conception of himself as the king makes him both the author and the main character of his particular allegory--he sets the rules while strictly adhering to them. This is why there seems to be such rigidity in his commentary. The attention labored on the figure Charles the Beloved in his story is enormously isolating and constricting. Flight is his predominant action, but he never seems to move. In this *Gradus* the automaton is very much his double. There is little development in either character, simply an implied iconic significance right from the start. But when the king lands at the end of his parachute in America and becomes Kinbote, the story changes; he becomes more human, the subject of more authentic emotion and psychological anxiety. But even then we are still attuned to

a double nature. There was never any doubt that Kinbote was writing about himself all along, yet the vertiginousness of the subject merging with the speaker underscores how discomfoting Kinbote's allegorical structure really is, as though the *daemon* had come to life.

I will not attempt to summarize all Fletcher writes about this complicated subject. But I would call attention to the idea that the *daemon* is a liminal entity, a boundary crosser. The *daemon* acts as intermediary between one world and the next. In mythology the daemonic figure is often part god, part human, able to move freely between realms; it is the guiding voice one hears. Though obsession is a static condition, its source is beyond the immediate; the *daemon* is otherworldly. The issue of daemonic agency is quite potent in *Pale Fire*. Kinbote's faith in the power of John Shade's words is essentially a belief in such agency, in a magic that can translate him (the him that only exists in the mirage of insanity) into a different realm. Shade too is at least half-convinced that art has these sort of transcendent properties beyond just intellectual engagement or esthetic delight. His philosophy even wonders whether there is such daemonic agency in everyday existence--there are the players of worlds, those household gods, promoting pawns (presumably to queens, though in this novel it is hard to resist

thinking they are made kings) hiding keys, taking part in everything.

As the king's relentless pursuer (his Clare Quilty), Gradus is the primary daemonic agent of Kinbote's allegoric construction. Fletcher characterizes the robot as being probably the best example of the allegoric agent because it is active while being unchanging (Fletcher, 55). This is the perfect description of Gradus, the clockwork man, a moral as well as spiritual automaton, or, as Kinbote writes, a "dummy pursuing another dummy" (p.278). He is the moving static quality. Besides Kinbote/Charles he is the single character connecting mythical Zembla to real New Wye. In more thematic terms (as I have pointed out) Gradus is the linchpin to Kinbote's story. Without the bullet lodged in Shade's heart but intended for Kinbote, without the regicidal attempt, his story does not exist. Gradus fills the peculiar double role of being the destroyer of the story and its most powerful advocate. He looms much larger than all of Kinbote's other inventions because he has his place both in the real world and in the imagined world; he is both an ostensibly real person as he is a literary device, a true daemon. In this sense Gradus *is* the story; as the figure of death he is truly, in Kinbote's reading, the main character, the main thematic device and antagonist of Shade's poem. Though he

criticizes Shade for indulging in synchronization in "Pale Fire" (he calls it a technique that "has been already worked to death by Flaubert and Joyce" [p.196]), Kinbote synchronizes Gradus' movements toward Shade with the latter's work on the poem. He feels no compunction about this because it is necessary for him to portray the approach as an irresistible, fate-powered juggernaut that will bring death to Shade when the poem is completed.

In this passage Gradus is described as an ersatz Angel of Death:

somehow the eye of the mind sees him and the muscles of the mind feel him, as always streaking across the sky with black traveling bag in one hand and loosely folded umbrella in the other⁷³, in a sustained glide high over sea and land. The force propelling him is the magic action of Shade's poem itself, the very mechanism and sweep of verse, the powerful iambic motor. Never before has the advance of fate received such a sensuous form (p.136).

Kinbote fancifully places power over his movements in the hands of Shade, almost as if the poet could avoid his own death by simply not writing this poem. Of course Kinbote is really reserving control over Gradus for himself. Never has the advance of fate received such a sensuous form--in other words, never has a writer done what *I* am doing, never has such an allegoric subject been so sensually manipulated into

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There is a bit of Mary Poppins too in this Angel of Death.

writing. Gradus is as much a cause of celebration for Kinbote's powers of creation as he is a harbinger of doom.

There is one famous passage very early in Kinbote's commentary concerning the synchronization of Gradus' movements with the writing of the poem. Though often quoted it deserves another look:

We shall accompany Gradus in constant thought, as he makes his way from dim distant Zembla to green Appalachia, through the entire length of the poem, following the road of its rhythm, riding past in a rhyme, skidding around the corner of a run-on, breathing with the caesura, swinging down to the foot of the page from line to line as from branch to branch, hiding between two words...reappearing on the horizon of a new canto, steadily marching nearer in iambic motion, crossing streets, moving up with the escalator of the pentameter, stepping off, boarding a new train of thought, entering the hall of a hotel, putting out the bedlight, while Shade blots out a word, and falling asleep as the poet lays down his pen for the night (p.78).

Gradus' flight is a flight of fantasy, a game. While he pretends to invest his good *daemon* (Shade) with power over the evil one, it is Kinbote, not the poet, who drives the motor. Gradus is *his* literary conception⁷⁴, the image of a literary mind determined to find a literary cure for its

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David Packman, in his *Vladimir Nabokov: The Structures of Literary Desire* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1982), makes a similar point: "Gradus is no flesh-and-blood creature but rather a literary mechanism, a device for motivating the action" (Packman, 85).

malady.

In a larger context Gradus is a stand-in for the reading eye moving along the text, pursuing it, partaking in it. An insanely sympathetic reader adrift from of his own personality might indeed be able to ride up the "escalator of pentameter." In this sense Gradus really is an allegorical representation of Kinbote himself; he embodies the reading experience entire--his arrival signalling the end of the work. He is the death of the poem⁷⁵ as much as he is the killer of the poet (his daemonic agency is quite versatile). But as Kinbote writes, Gradus is also about to meet "a reflection that will shatter him." Whether or not

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Packman makes this point about the entire novel, that Gradus comes more into focus toward the end of the Commentary because "the novel comes closer and closer to its end, its death. The reader progresses in his project of apprehending the world of the novel" (Packman, 87). This is a little further than I would like to go. Packman is developing the Todorovian view (*Introduction to Poetics*) about a reader's suppression of a text in reading it and a critic's "blocking" a text to "uncover" it, and applying it to *Pale Fire*. Again, I would like to keep Nabokov and Kinbote separate in these matters. While Gradus' approach may have such ramifications for the apprehension of the novel at large (though I do not really see them--Gradus is a symbol in Kinbote's perception, as he is entirely his invention. He signals the coming end of Kinbote's life in the greater novel, the stopping of his voice. Gradus makes a strange stand-in for the reader of *Pale Fire*'s desire for completion, because that would signal the reader's succumbing to Kinbote's invented view of the literary world), I am trying to make the point that as Kinbote's invention Gradus is confined to the poem, his agency existing only on that plane.

one believes Kinbote's version of why Gradus/Grey kills himself ("not in a feeble splutter of the clockwork, but in a gesture of humanoid despair" [p. 299]) with the safety razor that has been appearing throughout the course of the Commentary like a talisman, in Kinbote's world Gradus is in turn "killed" by the finish of the poem.

Shade, wanting his readers to feel the helplessness of lines that do not cross, frames Hazel's suicide in a time scheme running parallel with the lives of her parents. Kinbote synchronizes Gradus' movements to the creation of the poem as though wishing to contain what he represents. Seeking consolation in artifice, both characters very consciously harden their anxieties into literary structures to control them. This desire is found in a number of Nabokovian narrators, including V. from *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, Hermann from *Despair* and Humbert from *Lolita*. Kinbote's enveloping Gradus in the arms of the poem is also another step in the overall project of envisioning him as an allegorical figure, as a mere literary design.

Gradus bumbles along the trail of the King, repeating his flight. Like Charles he is an iconic figure, a sterile outsider, a puppet to his own obsessions. Kinbote, grasping at the romantic ideals of the one while embodying the grotesque reality of the other, is the point of contact

between these imaginary figures. Gradus' automatism is Kinbote's own decay of function and of memory; Gradus' politics and worship of the general idea is Kinbote's loss of discernment; Gradus' heartlessness is his disappearing emotions; Gradus' facelessness is the absorption of Kinbote's identity into the void of his disease. If we think about Botkin for a moment we can see Gradus as the counterbalance of the Kinbotic side of his psyche. He is the disease that has taken up position to cancel those beautiful lakeside sunsets and all the other images of Botkin's royal delusion, the "gradual decay" that Kinbote has equated with the very passing of time.⁷⁶

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Here is Kinbote's entry keyed to Shade's words "gradual decay":

Spacetime itself is decay; Gradus is flying west; he has reached gray-blue Copenhagen (see note to line 181). After tomorrow (July 7) he will proceed to Paris. He has sped through this verse and is gone--presently to darken our pages again [p.163].

This passage, with its peculiar shifts in tense (from the present to the past perfect to the future, back to the present and into the infinitive of an implied future--given its thematic context, we might say into the *infinite*), is one to make the novice English speaker's head spin. Here the very presentation of the words and the sentences conveys the principle itself. "Spacetime" is decaying; Gradus (the figure of death) is destroying time. The instability of tense approximates this dislocation, drawing our attention to the fact that there is nothing here *but* language. But it is not just this that points to the idea of timelessness. The very notion of "tomorrow" is dislocating in a printed document. There is only ever one day out of every year in which "tomorrow" will be July 7th; and July 7, 1959, the specific day Kinbote has in mind, will never again be

Repetition

I have been writing primarily about the way the ostensible "real" world of *Pale Fire* works its way into Kinbote's fantasy. More could be said about some of the architectonics of the fantasy itself. There are even more resemblers and reflecting surfaces within the Zemblan fiction than there are between Zembla and New Wye. And there are certainly other reflections between the campus and the kingdom. These doubles and coincidences are part of Kinbote's overall plan to estheticize his story as much as possible. By making it artificial he is, paradoxically, trying to make it live. Again, Kinbote seems to be looking for more than a mere record of his fantasy. It needs to be a work of art.

Resemblance and coincidence are parts of the more general literary technique of repetition. Something E.K. Brown wrote about *A Passage to India* in his book *Rhythm in*

"tomorrow." Indeed, even the innocent looking "(see note to line 181)," since we are pausing already, might make us reflect on how Kinbote constantly interrupts the flow of his narrative "time" by directing us to other entries concerned with other moments in time. One of the effects of such phenomena is to destroy traditional narrative time, thereby making us aware that we are attempting to instill it in the Commentary as we read, by reading. Further complicating matters is the fact that Line 181 is keyed to the word (you guessed it) "Today,"--July 5, 1959, July 6 having vanished between "today" and "tomorrow" as though we were flying west, over the Pacific, across the International Dateline.

the Novel is relevant:

To express what is both an order and a mystery, rhythmic processes, repetitions with intricate variation, are the most appropriate of idioms. Repetition is the strongest assurance an author can give of order.⁷⁷

Obviously this is relevant to Kinbote's commentary as well. Coincidence and resemblance--repetitions with variation--are used as thematic devices to give his tale exactly the qualities Brown states, order and mystery. As I have said, plausibility is not a quality to which Kinbote aspires. He seeks the mysterious as it smacks of the otherworld, of an esoteric and organizing genius to his life. The urges are almost contradictory. Kinbote wants this stamp of otherworldliness on his story, yet he also wants to be seen as the one holding the reins.

One of the things distinguishing him from every other one of Nabokov's protagonists is that Kinbote has no authentic memory, an interesting tactic from the greatest writer on memory since Proust. We might be tempted to assume that some of Kinbote's memories are borrowed from those belonging to his source identity (Botkin or otherwise), but looking through the fantasy for sources of trauma belonging

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Quoted from *Telling it Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film* (Denver: University Press of Colorado, 1989) by Bruce Kavin, 64.

to the pre-Kinbote personality will reveal nothing. Kinbote seems to take his lack of authentic memory as license to let his imagination roam wild. But if we consider the ostensible role of memory, particularly in Nabokov's works, we might discern another reason. In Nabokov memory always asserts timelessness. In their most intense reveries of memory his protagonists feel themselves slipping out of time, or better said, time seems to lose its relevance. They do not really achieve a repetition of the experience in the memory; such a thing is impossible.⁷⁸ What they generally experience is a meeting of moments, so that the memory and the time of remembering it are layered one on top of the other. In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov likens this to a Persian rug folded so that corresponding figures of the pattern separated by distance are meaningfully juxtaposed (*Speak, Memory*, 139). Dismissed is the intervening time between the subject moments, as though two discrete realities occupied the same theoretical space.

Bereft of authentic memory, Kinbote occasionally creates memories mimicking this layering. Most notable is when Charles sees the gleaming keyhole that brings back his

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Cf. Kawin: "Attempting to repeat an experience in memory makes accurate re-experience impossible. We have to remember something less than real; to remember without the 'suffering of being,' we have to falsify" (Kawin, 29).

memory of exploring with his playmate Oleg the secret passage out of the Zemblan castle (p.123). All at once 30 years disappear and a memory he did not even realize was a memory is recalled entire, a perfect example of the Proustian involuntary memory. This is reified by the King's proceeding to re-live that memory, to repeat his steps, literally, following the passage to eventual freedom. The past is made present with the result that the intervening years disappear. What Bruce Kavin writes in *Telling it Again and Again* about *A la recherche de temps perdu* is relevant:

while the repetitive power of involuntary memory in one sense releases Marcel in time, it also gives that time its true value, and makes life in profane time the key to life in sacred time (Kavin, 93).

Kavin uses the term "sacred time" because he is making a comparison between Proustian repetition and repetition found in the myths of primitive religions as outlined in Mircea Eliade's *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. He also writes, "Proust founds a religion of time whose basic rite is transcendent repetition; in a sophisticated context, he rediscovers the Myth of the Eternal Return" (Kavin, 92).

If primitive ontology is perhaps not that applicable to Kinbote's venture, the term "sacred time" echoes meaningfully. Kinbote is trying to ascribe a certain sacred character to his work; his desire to turn King Charles into

a legend is essentially mythmaking. Part of the project is to pull the King out of "profane time" through repetition. Kinbote is almost mimicking the process of memory immediately available to Nabokov's other protagonists who have been given memories. He does this not just with episodes that directly involve memory (like this one with Oleg in the castle), but through his general use of repetition. Where those other characters (like Shade) find their "sacred time" in their memories (in Nabokov this occurs both in voluntary and involuntary memory), Kinbote must seek it in his *invention* itself. He uses "repetition with infinite variation" to mimic that quality of timelessness. In general, then, such repetition has the quality of transcendence Kawin ascribes to Proust.

We need look no further than this episode of the King's escape from the palace for more examples. It is itself a repetition, but other esoteric repetitions hover around it. The secret passage was supposedly built by the King's grandfather, Thurgus III, to facilitate his affair with the actress, Iris Acht, whose dressing room was its destination. When the prince and Oleg come to the end of the passage, they hear behind this door the sounds of a scene being rehearsed in which a "Gutnish fisherman" threatens to kill his lover (p.127). Thirty years later, the king's friend and

confidant, Odon O'Donnell, a royalist agent disguised as a revolutionary (he is Oleg's half-brother)⁷⁹, is to act in a play called *The Merman* (revived after not being performed for three decades) on the night the King uses the tunnel to escape. After coming out in the Royal Theater Charles finds Odon dressed in "the Sunday attire of Gutnish fishermen, and his fist still clutched the cardboard knife with which he had just dispatched his sweetheart" (p.134). From the index we learn that in 1888 Iris Acht was murdered in that dressing room by a fellow actor, a young Gothlander, in a fit of jealousy.

We might call this the *Merman* theme; it steps inconspicuously around the more important action and could easily go unnoticed. In this case coincidence carries the reader from art into "real-life," drawing ostensibly discrete moments in time together in repetition. The result

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In this episode, Odon is a kind of repetition of Oleg, but he is also the middle figure in a triumvirate of half-brothers paralleling the Shade-Kinbote-Gradus (or the Botkin-Kinbote-Gradus) grouping. He is the connection between Oleg, who having died young exists in Kinbote's memory as an idealized image of adolescent male beauty, and Nodo, the epileptic cheater at cards and prominent Shadow, whom Kinbote calls in his index a "despicable traitor." As a shape shifter, he partially embodies Oleg's ethereality as well as Nodo's grotesque evil; he is a liminal character who moves in both worlds (a purely Zemblan daemon), the perfect guide through the underworld.

is something like a mythical composite creature, a merman outside of time. The King repeats his passage beneath Zembla as though led by Oleg's spirit (seeing along the way the eerie talisman of Oleg's undisturbed, 30-year-old footprint). He comes upon the same play. He escapes. We suspect that for Kinbote such repetition is analogous to transcendence or a necessary condition for it; perhaps repetition is transcendence. The play is a totem of Kinbote's, his secret stamp indicating overtly that style (repetition) and theme (escape and transcendence) are at work together. Odon and Oleg (mermen half in one world, half in another) are both daemonic agents offering translation into a different realm; but their resemblance, a repetition with variation, seems to be the origin of their agency.

Another thought from Kawin:

It may be that repetition represents the key to a higher reality...or to a heightened awareness of common reality. The repeated cosmogony, which for primitive man rebegins the creation and places him outside profane time, has its poetic variant in the mantra, where the repeated chanting of a religiously significant verbal formula charms the mind into a perception of a reality that is beyond language or material--just as a phrase in literature can, if it is repeated enough, take on a presence greater than that of ordinary language, a power not approached by the poetry of novelty (Kawin, 107).

I am not talking about mantras or literary repetitions (like Lear's "Never, never, never, never, never"). But Kinbote's

thematic repetitions, his coincidences and resemblances, are directed exactly towards a place outside of profane time. They are part of a style keen to control its discourse, and they are pretty transparent machinations aimed at giving his fantasy a veneer of literary structure; but they also have the character of incantations. His is a highly self-conscious and formulaic literary attempt to make a connection to a state "beyond language or material."

II

Of course the ultimate literary resemblance Kinbote is trying to achieve is between his commentary and Shade's poem. The poem Kinbote reads is not the poem we read, though they contain precisely the same words (we might call this Pierre Menard's law). We do not have to accept that Kinbote sincerely believes "Pale Fire" is about his king to see this. Kinbote's insanity reinforces our awareness that every reading is unique because it is constructed from a unique mind. The final objective truth about any complex work of art is that it exists simultaneously in countless manifestations depending on individual readings; it is governed by contingencies of subjectivity. Kinbote may be lucid enough to try to control our reading of the poem and to make at least the circumstance of his own seem plausible. Yet his madness has obviously interfered with his ability to

attach referent and signifier in ways predicated on the intentions of the author. It has freed his mind to create its own metaphorical significance in what it reads. To Kinbote "Pale Fire" is the metaphorical vehicle of the epic of Charles II; the fact that it does not appear to be so on the surface is irrelevant. As Kinbote asserts in his foreword, the true meaning of the poem is beneath the surface, on the "underside of the weave" (p.17).

In keeping with the traits of the paranoid delusion, Kinbote knows that it has been given to him alone to see the resemblance between poem and fantasy. Thus he is the possessor of the poem, its "beholder and only begetter" (ibid). And so without the Commentary, "Shade's text simply has no human reality at all" (p.28), meaning that without the notes, Shade's poem is just the topical piece of autobiography it appears to be, a vehicle disconnected from its tenor. His job in the Commentary is to establish this connection. And to whatever extent he achieves this he is making the Commentary an esoteric ressembler of the poem.

Conclusion

Of course "Pale Fire" has its own power on Kinbote. He reports experiencing the following sensations when he had held Shade's finished but unread copy of "Pale Fire":

I found myself enriched with an indescribable amazement as if informed that fireflies were making decodable signals on behalf of stranded spirits, or that a bat was writing a legible tale of torture in the bruised and branded sky (p.289).

The simple existence of "Pale Fire" makes Kinbote aware of the world as a tale to be translated, one rich with unknown possibility. We are reminded of the language of the pheasant's feet written onto the white pages of the snowy road toward the opening of "Pale Fire." Shade and Kinbote seem to have come full circle. Both writers see their world as a reflection of some deeper truth or a text to be explicated. Shade's poem and Kinbote's commentary are never closer, thematically, than in their both seeing art, and specifically "Pale Fire," as the way to plumb the depths towards the hidden meaning. That tale of torture is certainly Kinbote's own, and we begin to believe, as D.L. MacDonald puts it ("18th Century Optimism as Metafiction in *Pale Fire*" in *The Nabokovian*, Spring, 1985), that "When Kinbote looks up at his evening sky, what he sees is a page of print, from the inside."

The transcendent nature of resemblance is foundational to Shade's perspective and to Kinbote's, even if it is expressed in each very differently. Coincidences are not accidents; they are portals to some higher meaning. Thus the Timonian paradigm is as profound to Kinbote as it is to

Shade. Defying appearances, he positions his tale as the sun to Shade's moon ("One can hardly doubt that the sunset glow of the story acted as a catalytic agent upon the very process of the sustained creative effervescence that enabled Shade to produce a 1,000-line poem in three weeks" [p.81]), yet he can also cast himself as the thieving, or at least borrowing, moon:

I have reread, not without pleasure, my comments to his lines, and in many cases have caught myself borrowing a kind of opalescent light from my poet's fiery orb, and unconsciously aping the prose style of his own critical essays (ibid).

In a poem seemingly devoid of his contributions Kinbote has to look for them himself, and perhaps create what *should* be there. I have written that it is in the gap between Kinbote's first reading and his second that his commentary, and hence *Pale Fire*, is born.

What was that dim distant music, those vestiges of color in the air? Here and there I discovered in it and especially, especially in the invaluable variants, echoes and spangles of my mind, a long ripplewake of my glory
(p.297).

That "dim distant music," those vestiges of color in the air remind us, are meant to remind us, of Kinbote's merry-go-round, the one he thought had been disturbing him from its amusement park in Cedarn (in the Foreword he calls it "that carrousel inside and outside my head" [p.28]). By this point in the novel--p.297--the carrousel has become an almost

self-conscious, private symbol of Kinbote's encroaching insanity (he eventually admits that it was a radio he was hearing; there was no amusement park). We are tempted to infer that the commentator sees his own insanity as the sun; it is the originator not of Shade's poem but of Kinbote's reading of it. And of course it is his madness that allows him to see in "Pale Fire" just as abundant a field of possibility after reading the poem as he discerned before. Kinbote has in some sense validated this reading of Shade's poem by inscribing it in his commentary. His perspective is his commentary, which is not an explanation of the poem as much as it is a version of it, brightly painted, spinning around endlessly to the repeating music of the carrousel.

II

Having asserted by the long route that Kinbote's commentary is in essence a wild, subjective "version" of Shade's poem, I will admit again: Most readers' initial impression is that the notes have nothing at all to do with "Pale Fire." They break the first rule of criticism, to facilitate the primary text. In a sense the notes are in competition with the poem for the reader's attention. This competition is played out on nearly every page when Kinbote's notes follow a word or words from "Pale Fire" to which they are keyed; there is certainly a kind of narrative

flow, but it exists despite this chosen structure that is ostensibly extrinsic to such flow. Thus I return to the model of the palimpsest. Kinbote's words are written over the words of Shade's poem. They exist at the same literary moment. Our response to them is a feeling of dislocation; prompted by the disguise of the critical apparatus, we want them to coincide, for the notes to be subordinate to the poem.⁸⁰ If they are to be integrated we must do it ourselves, taking the palimpsest as our starting point.

III

My next chapter will dive straight into *Don Quixote*. The ways in which I see Kinbote as a revisitation of the mad knight will I hope be crystalized by examining the original.

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With this question of subordination, we might borrow grammatical terms. To the extent that we expect the commentary to be subordinate to the poem--that is subordinate as one clause is to another in a sentence, its observations a logical critical response to the primary text (existing only as response), and thus wholly dependent on the primary text--we are expecting it to be hypotactic. But Kinbote's notes are paratactic; they follow no reliable hierarchy of response or subordination, no matter what Kinbote pretends. (An example: attached to Shade's word "often" is a field of discourse about Kinbote's fears for his life completely unrelated to it except that it begins with the word "often" [p.95].) There is great interpretive value in such a contiguous, basically esoteric relationship, because the reader's response to it is not overtly directed by Nabokov who has placed these two texts together without comment. See Robert Alter's discussion of hypotactic and paratactic metonymy in the Bible in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981, 26). It is directed by the ideas of Herbert Schneidau's book *Sacred Discontent*.

For now I might just draw a very general comparison. In the way Kinbote believes he is the sole possessor of the "truth" behind Shade's "Pale Fire," he is taking the essential Quixotic position. After his delusional first sally Quixote ceases to deny that the objects of his world appear differently to other characters than they do to him. In other words, that Sancho sees flocks of sheep or a barber's basin where he sees warring armies or a magic helmet troubles Quixote not at all. Quixote knows that it has been given to him to see the "truth" of these objects beneath their deceptive appearance. They have been disguised by enchanters bent on tormenting him. It is a bit reductive but nonetheless helpful to say that his entire quest boils down to freeing the essential, ideal nature of his world from the grips of such degraded appearances, to make the world see the armies and the helmet.

Out of this similarity crop so many of the other resemblances between Kinbote and Quixote: their breaking the world down into bald dichotomies of good and evil, their tendency towards allegory, their belief in the power of written words. They are both intent on making the world see the ideal truth beneath the surface of empiric reality; we catch them in the process of transforming their world to suit the story they are telling themselves. That Quixote

does it during "real" time and within the confines of someone else's narrative (Cide Hamete Benengali's), and that Kinbote does it in his own narrative, is really the only difference between them. Even so, Kinbote's transformation of the characters from his "real" setting into the figures of his Zemblan fantasy--a quasi-transformation, really, in which they are *doubled* rather than replaced--mimics Quixote's about as closely as one could hope.

CHAPTER 5: *DON QUIXOTE*

Having *Kinbote* and *Pale Fire* fresh in our minds, we will now look at *Don Quixote*. One of the richest books in all of literature, it is constantly challenging the countless critical assessments it has accrued over centuries; *Don Quixote* today seems more like a library of books than a single entity. A study like this can only hope to represent one circumscribed version. It is for this reason that I saved it for the end, and because, to establish *Kinbote* as a modern *Quixote*, it is best to discern the "kinbotic" in *Don Quixote*.

Literary Criticism: The Verisimilar vs. The Imaginative

I will begin by returning to one of Robert Alter's points, that literary criticism is a foundational component of the self-conscious novel (he calls it an "essential moment in the act of imagination" in the genre [Alter, 12-13]). Literary criticism is woven into the *Quixote* right

from the start; the protagonist's utter lack of critical perspective is what begins the plot rolling. As Richard Predmore (*The World of Don Quixote*, Cambridge, MA, 1967, 10) notes, the literary criticism practised by other, seemingly authoritative characters in the novel, such as the Priest or the Canon, constantly reverts to the question of realism; their inflexibility is the opposite pole to Quixote's fantastic lack of discernment. The Canon's diatribe toward the end of Part One (Chapter 49) is the summation of the never relenting idea that the quality of a fiction is directly dependent upon its standard of verisimilitude. Nabokov accepts unquestioningly this speech as the Gospel according to Cervantes, going so far as to say that the Canon is the author's stand-in (*Lectures on Don Quixote*, 55).

Don Quixote has almost always been praised as a realistic book. This is a bit puzzling. Cervantes certainly flirts with realism; to avoid commenting in some way on realism would be unthinkable in a book about a man who imagines he is living in a world constructed by some of the most fantastic books ever written. But realism is just one of many literary methods Cervantes brings under scrutiny; he does this by using it, by pretending that *Don Quixote* is a realistic account of a man gone mad in modern Spain. Realism

is given a bad shake as early as the episode of Don Quixote's fight with the Biscayan (I:9) when the narrative is frozen and transformed into an illustration and its narrative voice is changed. Yet I would say that Cervantes does away with any serious contention by realism about ten pages later. Quixote and Sancho sit down for the night with some goatherds who attend his wounds and offer him a meal (I: 11). Not long after he gives his famous speech about the Golden Age, news comes in of the death of Grisostomo and about his funeral the next day. The book's first "mini-quixote," Grisostomo attempts to alter an unhappy reality with literature, namely the soporific verse created to win over the beauty Marcela. Following her lead he has assumed the guise of a shepherd, replete with all the behavioral cliches he could crib out of pastoral poetry. The idealist quest always requires a transformation of identity. This episode initiates the series of fantastic adventures of this kind involving self-disguise and an idealistic escape into a simplified landscape bereft of any of the reality in such things as sheep tending (Nabokov reminds us that even the job of shepherding can be stressful, and that sheep stink! - *Lectures on Don Quixote*, 30) that culminates in the stories of Dorotea and Cardenio and the Captive and the magistrate, and in that spell of outrageous coincidences at the roadside

inn. At this moment--the plain contrast between the tired, restrained, real shepherds and the shepherds of the imagination as its reification--the book quite palpably announces a shift from its quasi-realistic beginning into something more fantastic.⁸¹ One might almost think that Quixote's absurdly idealistic speech acts as a reagent upon the course of events. Arthur Ephron makes the point (*Don Quixote and the Dulcineated World*, Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1971, 12) that with all the preposterous romantic happenstance, Don Quixote is hardly the alienated figure we often suppose him to be; rather he is quite at home in this world.

Staunch in his opinion that Cervantes truly believes in the virtues of verisimilitude, Nabokov regards this drifting into the fantastic as misdirected and probably unintended. He never considers that Cervantes might want to push the

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In his Book *Cervantes's Theory of the Novel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962--hereafter known as Riley, 1962), E.C. Riley describes pastoral as a genre the late 16th Century reader would recognize as highly self-conscious, a genre "that knows it is telling a tale." Thus Cervantes' shift into quasi-pastoral in the Marcela episode might have been read as a kind of announcement of a general movement from the ostensibly realistic into a more fantastic mode. At the very least, Cervantes wants to play the realistic against the fantastic. The self-declared pastoralists contrasting with the real goatherds, contrasting in their turn with the delusional, transformed Quixote, notify us that all is in flux, genres and discourse in competition even as they abet each other.

artificiality of the situations Quixote finds himself in and thereby suggest that the literary landscape is tuning itself to Quixote's method. The situations of Cardenio and Dorotea, if not derived out of the books of errantry Quixote reads, are no less contrived than they; it is no surprise that both characters are nearly as familiar with them as is Quixote.⁸² They see themselves leading lives very much like literature; their stories of the highest ecstasies, the profoundest griefs and the blackest betrayals are as conventional as the worst melodramatic literature of their time or ours. Cervantes wants us to see just how much their lives are directed by such literature.

Their highly artificial perceptions are rewarded when Don Fernando and Luscinda happen to stop at the famous inn (I:36). Let us shift our attention there, where all stories are happily resolved by that great literary contriver, coincidence. It is joked that Quixote relieves Princess Micomicona's distress by beheading her giant in his dream (he really destroys some wineskins in his sleep). Such is the symbolic manifestation of reality; I believe we are

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Note the subtle measure of their quixotism and of their virtual interchangeability: both Cardenio and Dorotea compare the betrayals visited on them to those of Ganelon and of Vellido. The former, from the story of Roland, is particularly close to Quixote's heart (I:27;28).

meant to infer that Dorotea's adoption of the quixotic method, and more so, the adoption of Quixote himself (in the project of saving the poor soul lost to insanity) is what really redeems her loss. Without her playing the role of Princess Micomicona, she would never have been reconciled with Don Fernando. In this sense Quixote proves himself her chivalric champion by bringing her into his sphere of literary influence.⁸³

While Quixote sleeps, action ceases, to be replaced by storytelling. The story of the "Ill-advised Curiosity," a misplaced tale of morality (here we are coaxed to another inference, that the briefcase in which it was found was left behind by Cervantes himself), becomes the center of attention (I:33-36). The patrons of the inn offer it the concentration they would any genuine character who came into their midst, underscoring the idea that for these figures,

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Kristen Brookes ("Readers, Authors and Characters in *Don Quijote*" in *Cervantes* 12 [1992], 75) writes (concerning characters such as Dorotea) "like Don Quijote, they cross the border between reality and fiction and enter into the fantastic Quixotic world, allowing themselves to be transformed into characters in his novel. Thus, at first, Don Quijote has the power to be not only his own author, but also the creator and author of other characters." This is the other side of the coin to Ruth El Saffar's argument about the secondary readers in the Quixote who attempt to become authors of that character's life (I will discuss this a little further on), an argument to which Brookes' position owes much.

stories are scarcely distinguishable from life. It also underscores the artificiality of their own stories (and those to come); the tale of Lotario, Camila and Anselmo, ("the Ill-advised Curiosity") contrived as it is, is no less absurd than the stories of the Captive or the magistrate or Dorotea. Its patent artificiality, its moral stance, its instruction are all consonant with a world view most of the characters in the inn maintain. This view, conditioned by their reading, has each of them conducting life as if it were a story. That the text itself is "taken over" by this lifeless, rigid fable is symbolic of their quixotic automatism.

The intended effect of all this artificiality is that we readers are reminded that someone is bringing stories to life by writing it all. It is very much Cervantes' inn. Even if we do not know for certain that it was he who left behind the manuscript, its existence draws attention to the act of writing in the face of all those who present their stories orally. Following on its heels, Quixote's disquisition on arms and letters (I:37-38) explores the relative value of the life of action and the life of contemplation; it comes at a curious time, after the "Ill-advised Curiosity" and before the Captive's tale. One gets the feeling it is a response to the former that introduces the latter. Not

coincidentally, both tales represent Cervantes in some way. The author of the first appears as a secondary character in the second. We realize that Quixote's speech is really an investigation of the competing urges of an author, his author, who also happened to be a veteran of Lepanto.

Cervantes is both arms and letters. He is, as Alter asserts, claiming his proprietorship over the Quixote material, but he is also drawing attention to the artifice involved. The self-conscious hand holds up the writing as it points to the writer. Though Quixote gives the palm to arms as the greater calling, these self-conscious ploys tell us that Cervantes thinks otherwise. The pen controls all, the story and the perception of stories. Quixote's calling is the issue of his reading, and it is the author who creates worlds while the soldier sits in his cell. Quixote, commenting almost extra-textually on his author's passions, is never closer to him than at the moment of his speech on arms and letters; not coincidentally, the text rarely ventures so far into artificiality than here in the inn; it as though all these stories strung together were somehow constructing a ghostly outline of the author. At one point, with the Captive recognizing his brother and the intercessions of coincidence seeming to go beyond the limits of shame, Quixote just stands back and watches, "without

uttering a word, and attributing the whole to the fantasies of knight-errantry" (I:42:339). He is correct. One of the hallmarks of the errant's life is the ever-present sage guiding his movements while writing his story; Quixote knows a *deus ex machina* when he sees one.

II

All this is related to the critical debate running throughout the book. In *Don Quixote* literary criticism is usually a standard of inflexibility against which the imaginative mind finds itself pitted. Quixote, championing the reader's right to be transported by fiction, argues with the Canon as though he were a prisoner in the dock (he has been temporarily let out of his makeshift cage) towards the end of Part One (I:47-48). This scene reminds us, as does the famous inquisition of the books (I:6), that criticism is far more than mere intellectual curiosity. In the earlier episode the priest, consigning books to the flame or withholding capital punishment (he decrees in one case that a book may be spared but not read), betrays his quixotic predilection for attributing to them human qualities. Criticism is not a mere epistemological discourse; it is a form of moral, even ontological classification.

It is a paradox, but verisimilitude is actually a great

antidote to readerly quixotism--to getting carried so far away by a story as to cross the boundaries between the real and the written. Only very immature readers think they were "there" because the story was so "real." Quixote does not read this way, even if some of the other characters do. He may be willing to trade his niece and housekeeper to have a go at Ganelon (I:1), but not because Ganelon is life-like; he wants a life that has Ganelons in it. Quixote responds to this literature because it is fantastic. It fires his imagination to a point where he can no longer distinguish between it and the truth, but it is reality that must conform to imagination, rather than the reverse. Intense realism reinforces the artificiality of a work of art if only by making the reader or viewer repeatedly assess its status. Parenthetically, This may be why totalitarian states always require realistic art (the Canon has more than a touch of the fascist about him); it controls by dazzling the unsophisticated, by appearing sophisticated to the middle-brow and by defining to the sophisticated just how narrow are the limits of the permissible. In *Don Quixote* the subject of literary criticism never strays too far from such issues of control.

Yet Quixote and Kinbote too are extremely pedantic and rigid characters. They try to assert unprecedented control

over their environments through a force of will conditioned by an esthetic view of the world. It would be logical to see the extent to which they have *abandoned* criticism as the measure of their agency; yet each seems to need to work within some sort of critical framework (Kinbote's very identity, or pseudo-identity, depends on his status as critic). Standing against the Canon in *Don Quixote* are all those characters who truly believe in a life that can be like literature, in stories that can be models for life. Much of the plot is an acting out of the debate; in a sense the book is born out of the dialectic of the detached, analytical reader paradoxically demanding verisimilitude and the imaginative reader demanding a fantasy. Obviously each side is compromised by rigidity of some kind. In the inn at least, Cervantes seems to be siding with the imaginative reader; yet the brush of his parody paints all.

The Multiple Text

Like *Pale Fire*, *Don Quixote* is a collection of texts. Stories are assembled, compared, commented upon by multiple narrators, multiple voices. I will not attempt to cover what criticism has said about the novel's narrative multiplicity. What is most important is the text's being unsettled. Cide Hamete Benengali, the ostensible "true" narrator, claims

total ownership of the Quixote legend at the end of the second part. But we readers can perceive his distance from the text⁸⁴ in the number of mistakes he makes in understanding the psychology of his main character when he tries to penetrate it, or in his lack of access at other times (as in his leaving it to the reader to decide what really happened to Don Quixote in the Cave of Montesinos [II:24]).

This feeling of distance and multiplicity is there right from the beginning of Part One, in the prologuist's claim that he is the "step-father" and not the father of Quixote. Most reader accept these as the words of an undisguised Cervantes, but John Weiger (*In the Margins of Cervantes*, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1988) makes a strong argument for the prologuist's being a "fictive character" (Weiger, 2) whom we should distinguish from the author. The prologuist would seem to be the "first" narrator as well, the one who carries us up to the battle with the Biscayan before acceding to Cide. We do not know where this narrator gets his information; but as evidenced

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Here we might want to substitute the word "discourse" for text; we are supposed to accept the existence, even if we question it, of a kind of "ur" Quixote story. Cide's is only one of any number of other Quixote narratives allegedly "out there."

by his being unaware even of the name of the hidalgo who decides to become a knight, he knows less than Cide does. As Weiger points out, despite his being there at the "birth" of Quixote, this narrator apparently believes Quixote is a real knight (Weiger, 28). He is certain that there must be more information about so famous a knight when *his* information is cut off during the above mentioned battle (I:9).

To Weiger this narrator's method informs us from the start that the narrative is "the product of a reader's having read and subsequently--more accurately, consequently--having created this text in his function as reader" (Weiger, 3). This, I argued in the last chapter, is the foundational element of Kinbote's self-perception and self-presentation in writing in *Pale Fire*. I have been maintaining, of course, that Kinbote is very much like Quixote himself, but when we compare the former's foreword to the Prologue and first section of *Don Quixote* we see a number of similarities. They are both about watching in some fashion. Kinbote, lamenting that the summer foliage handicaps his spying on Shade, is like the Cervantes narrator, figuratively descending on Quixote's village, just watching him become the knight, as though not privileged to

the knowledge of his origin.⁸⁵ While Kinbote's foreword reveals a writer who obviously wants to control our perception of his subject, it fails by being so unorthodox; violating accepted critical distance concerning the poem, he actually puts more distance between himself and the poet. This is just the sort of distance the prologuist creates with his self-consciously bumbling around the protocol of his prologue.⁸⁶ He is indeed the step-father because he refuses to take full possession of the text. Both Kinbote and the prologuist/narrator try to draw lines around their subjects but they cannot contain them. Failing, their ventures become highly artificial reflections of the process of presenting stories. They are readers creating texts but doing so uncomfortably, almost by the seat of their pants.

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This first narrator, too, "walks" into the action (when he searches for more Quixote material) becoming a minor character in the discourse, a distinctly Kinbotic trait.

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Here Weiger's point about separating Cervantes from the prologuist seems most germane. The Cervantes we accept as the genius overseeing the entirety of *Don Quixote* (Spitzer's all-powerful creator-god) could not possibly be this schlemiel unable even to conduct a proper introduction. We can understand why he becomes overwhelmed by the material and submits control to Cide and the hired Morisco translator. Cervantes is the one controlling the parody by controlling him. El Saffar does not see the prologuist as a fictive entity, but she writes that Cervantes consciously tries to "make clear the reader's independence from him; he also wishes to make the work he is introducing appear to be free from his control" (El Saffar, 33).

II

In the *Quixote* we are not allowed to forget for long that there is more than one voice speaking or writing. Though the first narrator seems to disappear, he makes just enough marginal comments (lauding the veracity of Cide or deliberating over his possible kinship to one of the teamsters at an inn) for us to remember that we are reading someone else's reading. When it comes time for the tale of the "Ill-advised Curiosity," we see just how many layers there can be. The priest, reading aloud the story to the multitude of characters gathered at the inn, also reads to Cide, to the translator, to the first narrator, and finally, as though refined by a multi-layered filter, to us.⁸⁷ The novel is full of story-tellers and commentators; they listen to each other's stories, critique them, tell different versions of their own. The inn seems to be a

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It is somehow fitting that Don Quixote is the only character not read to, he being asleep and cutting off the head of Princess Micomicona's giant in his dreams (I've always fancied this a vague subliminal protest by our imaginative reader aimed at the tediousness of the inset story--or at his being excluded from attention). We are reminded that storytelling is powerful not only to him. Our multiple awareness is further complicated by Cide's later claiming he inserted the story to relieve the monotony of writing about Quixote. Considering the hints that the manuscript belonged to Cervantes himself, it would seem that after inserting his story, Cide consciously gives credit (or blame) to someone (whom we know to be Cervantes) Cide must think he made up!

narrative headquarters where the listeners and narrators meet and the loose ends of the multiple stories are tied up (Stephen Gilman likens the whole series of "adventures" in the Sierra Morena to a play with multiple characters and plot-lines, resolved with the highly theatrical convention of bringing all the principles together at the end [Gilman, 156])).

While *Pale Fire* has only Kinbote's and Shade's narratives competing with each other, the dynamic is very similar. These narratives meet on any number of planes. I would not suggest that there is a static, predictable narrative correlation between the novels; there are times when Kinbote's analysis of Shade's poem seems like Cide's presentation of Quixote's life⁸⁸, when Shade's position as author seems like Cide's, when (as I have mentioned) Kinbote seems more like the strange first narrator. What is most important is that Nabokov seems very much like

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Such similarity extends to the way these characters inevitably believe they possess their subjects in some way. In his farewell in the book's final paragraphs, Cide declares that Don Quixote was created for him alone, that he and the imaginary knight are one. Kinbote insists at the end of his foreword that "without my notes, Shade's text simply has no human reality." (*Pale Fire*, 28). Cide hangs up his pen after reporting Quixote's passing, symbolizing their "oneness," equating the death of the protagonist with that of the narrative voice. Likewise, in his last entry Kinbote writes, "My notes and self are petering out...My work is finished. My poet is dead" (*Pale Fire*, 300).

Cervantes in being behind it all, in making the narrative unstable and multiple, its constituent parts conjoined by storytelling and criticism, by the "literization" of the real, by artifice.

Quixote's "Version"

Again, in both novels narrative multiplicity seems to be projected out of the protagonist's minds. As madmen, they are multiple people. Quixote is Quixano, is both; Kinbote is Botkin and Charles the Beloved, is all three. Discussing the multiplicity of *Don Quixote's* narrative voices in his article "Three Versions of *Don Quixote*" (*Modern Language Review* 68 [1973]--hereafter referred to as Riley, 1973) E.C. Riley draws attention to a "version" running parallel to the narrative we encounter devolving from Cide, to Quixote's own version, the fantastic account of the "real" events the character creates in his imagination, where windmills are indeed giants and flocks of sheep armies. As Riley points out, we get a glimpse of what this version would read like the morning Quixote ventures out for the first time. He conjectures on how this event is being written by the sage assigned to chronicle his new life (I:2). Riley proposes that at this moment Quixote is actually creating Cide, rather than the other

way around. There certainly seems to be justification; within four paragraphs there is the sentence "some writers declare that the first adventure he met with was that of the Puerto Lapice, while others say it was that of the windmills" (I:2:31).⁸⁹ Its proximity suggests that the text is responding to Quixote--he imagined himself being written about, and here is the evidence that he *has* been written about prior to the first narrator's contribution.

Riley posits that the sort of internal romantic discourse Quixote actually expresses here is what must be occurring to him throughout. Perhaps the self-conscious oratory of many of his speeches indicates that he is constantly performing for a scribe, almost giving dictation (Riley, 1973, 814). Regardless, the point should be stressed; Quixote is conducting a narrative in his head as he goes, a narrative in which he is the main character. It is complicated by his needing constantly to interpolate events in the "real" world into those of his fantasy. There is never a genuinely easy fit, yet somehow Quixote manages to strike a balance in Part One. Such icons as the barber's basin, Rocinante and, of course, Dulcinea underscore the

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Even this complication has a complication. Unless I have missed it in many readings, there is no "adventure of the Puerto Lapice." Perhaps it exists only in those other traditions besides Cide's.

fact that for Quixote, everything has a double nature--the "real" is constantly in conflict with the fantastic. Instead of avoiding such problems, Quixote embraces them, discussing them lucidly. Rocinante is both hack and steed; Mambrino's helmet seems a barber's basin to the uninitiated, because how else could it be transported around the country if it were not so disguised? As for Dulcinea...well, it would be foolish to try to assess Don Quixote's relationship to her in one sentence. But at no time does Quixote deny that he has created Dulcinea out of the raw material of Aldonza Lorenzo expressly for the purpose of authenticating his position. As Cide will not allow us to forget the deluded hidalgo beneath the knight's armor, Quixote himself never seems to be unaware that his world is in a perpetual state of transformation. I would suspect that Don Quixote is pretty much aware of the existence of Alonso Quixano--it might be for the best that none of the characters so bent on reclaiming this character actually mentions him (there is no "Professor Pardon"). Facilitating the real into the imaginary is the central quixotic device (in a sense it is truly his quest, the necessary preliminary to his announced intention to return the world to the Golden Age); and transformation seems not to be merely the means to the ends that Quixote is trying

to effect, but his existential condition.

Such is the case for Kinbote, whose Zemblan characters are so often doubles of those in "real" life. To him *both* parts are equally real; they are versions of each other. Madness, which tells him that "Pale Fire" is a version of *his* Zemblan epic--the "Solus Rex" of his mind--also tells him that Izumrudov and Gerald Emerald exist at the same time. They are not competitors, but twins, two versions of a presumed original. Kinbote and Quixote are adapters of reality, but they go a step further by not wholly denying the model from which they create their worlds. Rather, their creations incorporate the "real" and become doubled. To use the image I have been pursuing, they are makers of palimpsests. Quixote's "version" (Riley's "third version") is the upper layer of the palimpsest. He has no qualms about letting the original show through. As Cervantes always confronts and assimilates into his text what Nabokov and others have condemned as mistakes (the muddling of Sancho Panza's wife's name, the disappearance and reappearance of Dapple, the impossibility of the time continuum from Part One to Part Two, etc.), Don Quixote himself welcomes seemingly contradictory evidence by incorporating it into his "version."

II

And anyway, he can explain away anomalies as the work of enchantment. Riley reminds us (Riley, 1973, 809) that for Don Quixote enchantment means exactly the opposite of what we would call enchantment; it is the transformation of the idealistic into the prosaic, the changing of giants into windmills, armies into sheep. When we think superficially of Quixote, we assume that enchantment is what he relies on to transform his world into fantasy, but this is not the case at all. Quixote's imagination has established his reality; what would interfere with it, the empirical reality of the senses, that is enchantment. It unsettles by reporting accurately, and thus threatens what Quixote has created.

Bryant Creel's article "Theoretical Implications in Don Quijote's Idea of Enchantment" (Cervantes, 12 [1992]) goes into depth about this subject. Creel holds that Quixote is essentially rejecting Enlightenment empiric approaches to knowledge in favor of the Platonic ideal that the mind can "remake reality," that the world of ideas is merely disguised by the phenomenal world to which it is connected (Creel, 27). Quixote is not blind to the phenomenal--he sees it as what must be "risen above" (Creel, 28). While this Quixote is uncomfortably close to the "impossible dreamer" we have all come to revile, there

is a great deal to Creel's contention that for Quixote truth is "a function of an epistemological and ethical freedom from the claims of the sensuous or material" (Creel, 27). Perhaps the quest is not to prove the impossible (or to go ahead and dream it anyway), but to stretch the boundaries of the possible beyond what empirical observation has determined is logical. In Creel's analysis Don Quixote is engaged in an epic epistemological struggle against the world as we see it; empirical facts are the enchanters: "The realities he has perceived have been transformed into illusions, into elements of the mundane reality that everyone else sees" (Creel, 33).

I do not completely agree with another of Creel's assertions, that Quixote's campaign is a moral one. I believe that, as is true for Kinbote, Quixote's madness has loosened the boundaries between the real and the imagined. His insistence to those who would see for themselves whether Dulcinea is the world's most beautiful woman-- "without seeing her ye must believe, confess, affirm, swear and defend it" (I:4:42)--should be read (for all it echoes Christ's remonstrance of Thomas)⁹⁰ more as an assertion of his new found freedom from the general constraints of

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"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20: 29).

rationation than as a philosophical ideology aimed at discrediting empiricism. And it seems unlikely that Quixote is really fighting Plato's battle (or Aristotle's: Creel draws parallels between Quixote's method and the Aristotelian/Thomistic contention that sensory details are merely phantoms until made intelligible by the mind [Creel, 32]); what he is doing is forcing the world, when he can, to fit into his pre-conception, into a paradigm wholly constructed out of his reading.

In Riley's estimation, Quixote sees the world through eyes attached to a medieval mind and believes "the symbols of a transcendent order of divine truth [are] built into the world we inhabit." He continues:

In taking up chivalry, Don Quixote is reverting to a code designed to bridge the gap between the visible world and this transcendent order...he wants to renovate the degenerated world where appearances no longer respond to the hidden reality--to abolish the discrepancy between the actual and the potential (Riley 1986, 54).

Both critics hold that Quixote is undertaking an intentional transformation. I believe this to be correct, but it is difficult to attach his motivation to entrenched, monolithic systems beyond the fictive worlds of his books. Quixote, the polymath, could probably speak with great lucidity about the medieval symbolic code and about Platonic metaphysics, whereas he cannot do so about his

books of chivalry. We should not divorce Quixote's determined attempt to live in a world under a different ontological jurisdiction from the source of his insanity. His desire to transform the "things" of the world into props of his fantasy is literary; it is the urge of the writer to turn his world into a story, instilling symbolic value into the mundane so that it will be meaningful and beautiful--so that it will seem authored.

This man gone insane by reading too many books is attempting to turn his life into a book. At the very least he perceives the events occurring to him in a narrative of his own; indeed, it is the only way they make any sense to him. Riley's idea about the "third version"⁹¹ is sound; Don Quixote must be telling himself a story within his mind all the while he is having his adventures. The great source of tension in Part Two will develop from his finding out that he has indeed been inscribed in an epic of knight errantry.

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It should be stated what Riley's other two "versions" are. The first is Cide Hamete Benengali's version. The critic notes that this is not the one we read. What we read is an interpretation and translation of Cide's version. And since he is subject to errors of judgement, we should not conclude that it is the definitive version; rather, it is simply the most complete version. The second version is Avellaneda's spurious continuation. Because Cervantes incorporates it into the workings of Part Two, it is not isolated, but plays a part in Quixote's behavior and in the outcome of Cide's version. In *Don Quixote*, it is the real story of a false Quixote, and as such it cannot be said not to exist.

Quixote's relationship to Cide is almost exactly the same as Kinbote's is to Shade; in their minds both protagonists have "contracted" a scribe/sage to record their glorious lives. Both have put an enormous faith in the sage's transcendental powers. Stranger still, the story Quixote tells himself, his "version," is ostensibly someone else's narrative (that there is a "sort of" sage called Cide means that the book must be responding to his mind, following its contours of madness). In this he is very much like Kinbote who tries to validate *his* story by pretending that John Shade is the real author.

More than one thing is happening at a time. Kinbote and Quixote may *know* somehow that they are not who they claim to be, but they have determined that what is necessary to fulfill their desires for transformation is to be written about, to become the center of a literary work rather than just a reader.. Certainly this is tautological (be written about as though you were a hero and you will become a hero because you've been written about), but that does not seem to trouble them; their insanity has created a logic system founded on the tautology.

III

The Don Quixote of Part Two, finding that his quest to become the protagonist of a work of errantry has been

fulfilled, also occupies Kinbote's place: the "document" is suspect, perhaps corrupt. He realizes (even without having to read it) that Cide's version is nothing like his own. His author has declared autonomy and written the story in his own fashion (we must remember, while pursuing this comparison, that Kinbote does indeed seem to believe that "Pale Fire" is about him). The way this revelation affects Quixote's performance as himself in Part Two will be discussed a little further down. For now, looking at the events in Part One from Quixote's perspective, we would have to conclude that his "version" is exactly comparable to Kinbote's Commentary. It is the personal, imaginative, subjective version of events unfolding in the "real" world, the literary version occurring in the mind of the protagonist (the one in which he is a protagonist).

Part Two of *Don Quixote* also resembles Kinbote's commentary in witnessing the destruction of the ideal. Neither character can fully maintain the pretense any longer. This comes about from opposite means. While Kinbote loses his grip on the Charles persona at the end of the Commentary because his crumbling mind can no longer support the manifold inconsistencies in his story, Don Quixote loses his identity because he has been successful in having himself turned into a literary figure. His *raison d'être*

had been the construction of an identity; when that identity is canonized, Quixote has nowhere to go. Transformation was the state of his existence. In Part Two he has nothing anymore to transform himself into and is without purpose. And he has opened a narrative space too quickly filled by other characters.

As Riley notes, Quixote's "versioning" seems very much like an author setting the course of the book in which he appears (Riley, 1973, 814). Many of the readers he encounters in Part Two want to perform the same trick. He loses his identity primarily because everyone else (Sanson Carrasco, the Duke and Duchess, Don Antonio, etc.) dictates to him what it should be. This is not strictly limited to Part Two, of course; In Part One, characters like the Priest and the Barber, abetted by Dorotea and the others at the inn, also try to direct Quixote's life as though it were a play. They do not have the benefit of having read a first part, yet like those characters in Part Two, they construct plays dependent on Quixote's mania.

The basic premise of Ruth El Saffar's book (*Distance and Control in Don Quixote*) is that where Cervantes establishes distance between himself and his invention by creating Cide and the first narrator, or by exteriorizing "his problems as author, making them the subject of his

work" (El Saffar, 35) in the prologue, those would-be authors trying to administrate Quixote's life become entangled because of their lack of distance: "every character-author in the novel becomes a character at the point at which he lost the sense of distance which held him apart from the work he was producing" (El Saffar, 136).⁹² We watch Carrasco and the Duchess become subject to Quixote's compulsion because they lose control over the fiction they try to create (El Saffar, 90-94). They are versionists like him, but without the idealism. Within the borders of the fiction, quixotism in Part Two is no longer a subjective appraisal of reality conducted towards an ontological purpose; it has become the objective truth.

The Palimpsest Identity

To crystallize this similarity between Kinbote and Quixote before moving on: Both characters conduct a dual existence. Their madness does not enact a total transformation away from their original selves. The key to Kinbote and Quixote is that they comprise *both* versions of themselves at the same time. The interaction of selves,

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We could say the same thing with a slight alteration about Quixote; the moment at which Alonso Quixano loses the distance between himself as *reader* and what he reads, he becomes the *character* Don Quixote.

like the appearance of layers of print in a palimpsest is the source of the identity we encounter as readers. Don Quixote feels the tension of the real world; his character is defined by the way he interpolates the real into his fantasy. So too Kinbote.

The significance of Riley's observation about the third version is that it shows Quixote to be "writing" his adventures even as he is being written about; in a larger sense he is writing himself as he goes. I have asserted in the last chapter that this is the essence of Kinbote's character. Yet, again, both seek their authentication in the writing of *someone else*. These stand-in authors (the anonymous sage and John Shade) are so thoroughly misunderstood by Kinbote and Quixote as to be reduced almost to mere masks. (It is interesting to note, parenthetically, that the distance between the sage enchanter Quixote thought he would attract and the one he ends up with [Cide] is mimicked by the palpable gap between the John Shade Kinbote describes--the best friend and intimate confidant--and the very different person we come to know from his poem). Regardless, these novels catch their characters in the act of making their own fictions using the writing of someone else. They are both literary creatures; no matter how fully formed they pretend to be,

it is apparent that they are endlessly in a state of *becoming* rather than being.

Quixote's fear of malevolent enchanters runs parallel to Kinbote's fear of the Shadeans in New Wye or the Shadows in Zembla. Each group would destroy the ideal with the prosaic; they would turn giants into windmills. The Shadeans would have it that "Pale Fire" is only the dull, autobiographical poem it seems to be; they would make Kinbote Botkin and drain the idealistic fantasy for the all too real (if obscured) life. *Within* the fantasy, the Shadows would turn Zembla into a land of proletarians by destroying the imaginative and the individual for the general and abstract. Gradus, replacing the firebird dreamscape with an empty panes of glass, is the perfect symbol of the enchantment of the imaginative into the prosaic; more than that, as an agent (symbolic and otherwise) of death and the common denominator, he is really the very figure of the malevolent quixotic *encantadore* in *Pale Fire*.

Kinbote and Quixote carry the real within them, within the fantasy as the standard against which they set that fantasy. Kinbote's changing Emerald into Izumrudov, Sybil into Disa, even the Goldsworth's cat into Fleur, is an attempt to assimilate the real, to turn it into part of the

fantasy and control it. Because such an attempt is never fully successful, all of Kinbote's creations have a double nature. They are like Mambrino's helmet in Don Quixote's explanation; they may seem like barber's basins, but they are not. In fact, their seeming to be barber's basins is conclusive evidence that they are Mambrino's helmets. Only an enchanted article could be so prosaic, or, in other words, so enchanted. Again we see the tautological loops involved in the Quixotic/Kinbotic reasoning. Kinbote camouflages his appropriating Sybil's characteristics to create Disa by proclaiming such a coincidence to be the object and liberty of true poetry; Quixote turns a barber's basin into an enchanted helmet, a peasant girl into Dulcinea. Neither of them pretends he is not enacting such transformations; they celebrate them because they are basically literary acts, part of the process of turning life into literature by making the exigencies of the everyday poetic. Coincidence is enchantment, is poetry.

It is notable that each character specifically demands a poet to write about him. Don Quixote's dismay at being inscribed by a historian⁹³ reminds us of Kinbote's announced

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See Weiger, 125, 128 on Quixote's resistance to a novelistic treatment and his desire for a poetic one. I will discuss Quixote's specific distinction between historians and poets (II:3) a little further down.

(if laughable) reluctance to turn his own writing into the "monstrous semblance of a novel." Considering his evident gift for writing, the question why Kinbote demands a poetic treatment of his theme is not really answered satisfactorily. Yet he undeniably does: "I pressed upon [Shade], with a drunkard's wild generosity, all I was helpless myself to put into verse" (*Pale Fire*, p.80). Only a great poem will do. Like Quixote, Kinbote has a distinct hierarchy of literature; perhaps the novel (in Quixote's case it is the *historia*) is the poem *enchanted*, the prosaic version of the ideal that is willful, ungainly, uncontrollable. A history containing all the gritty, humiliating details Don Quixote knows to have occurred would signal a destruction of his ideal. Without the benefit of having read Ian Watt, Quixote would probably suspect that *novels* are written about broken down hidalgos while knights errant can be the subjects only of epic poems (or the kind of prose that aspires to epic poetry). A novel of Kinbote's lost Zembla might be about as bad as the pot-boiler movie ("Escape from Zembla") he toys with creating in the last entry of his commentary. More seriously, Kinbote (and Quixote, for that matter) may be tuned into one of the premises of this paper (I will go into depth in the next chapter), that the defining feature of the

novelistic discourse is uncertainty. The novelistic narrative can never reach the ideal story to which it aspires; it is the "monstrous semblance" of the epic poetic discourse. Kinbote and Quixote want no part of it.

The Allegoric Imagination

Of course poems too may be mundane or grotesque. Perhaps it would be better to distinguish the Quixote/Kinbote understanding (and its inherent antipathy) of the novel from what really stands opposite to it, the allegory. Quixote's project closely resembles Kinbote's in the way he tries to make himself an essentially allegorical figure. Quixote's model, the heroic, virtuous knight, is perhaps more entrenched, and thus more broadly parodic, but they both seem to follow the same program. They create allegorical ideals and then go about trying to live them.

In the previous chapter I discussed Kinbote's creation of subcharacters meant to be reflecting mirrors of the King Charles persona. The same can be said about Don Quixote. We see it quite clearly and in a rather primitive state in his first adventures, when he turns an innkeeper into a castellan, prostitutes into ladies-in-waiting, the innkeeper's daughter into a princess. These characters do not have anything more than momentary value for his own

persona, but they demonstrate the same method he uses for his more important creations. One way of looking at Quixote's denial of sensuous evidence in favor of ideal truths is to consider the way he transforms the real into the allegorical. I have said that I believe his motives to be more artistic than philosophical. The world Quixote is creating is a pseudo-allegory. It is not a true allegory because it does not clearly present a definitive, didactic goal; yet it is as rigid in its method as the most traditional allegorical construction.⁹⁴ The characters Quixote creates (whether out of ostensibly real figures or completely out of his imagination) tend to be mere functions: abettors or opponents, damsels or knights and enchanters. They exist for no other reason than that his own characteristics, the traits of the central allegorical figure, might have an opportunity to be set into play. They lay the stage for Quixote's performance of himself.

Like so many characters from Nabokov, Quixote sees the world only through the prism of his constructed self; he reduces the rest of humanity into props or mirrors. Mostly the results are comical, but the episode with the boy Andres, one of Quixote's first adventures(I:4), is there to

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Though a book like Fletcher's *Allegory* must make us question whether there is such a thing as a "traditional" allegory.

remind us of the dangers of such a position. For Quixote Andres is less a person being unfairly beaten than an opportunity for the knight to succor the weak. Blinded by his knightly paradigm, he cannot see the obvious, "real world" conclusion to his interference, that Andres will be worse off than he was (such a conclusion simply does not exist as a possibility for him). The other "people" of Quixote's fantasy are likewise merely opportunities for his persona to be exposed. The willingness of so many of the characters to adopt roles which play into Quixote's mania should not cloud the issue. To Don Quixote there is no such person as Dorotea; there is only Princess Micomicona. That Dorotea may be just as contrived as the distressed damsel she pretends to be (or that the "usurpation of her kingdom" is merely metaphoric of her real world problem) is a conclusion that we readers may reach; Quixote cannot.

Dulcinea, Quixote's greatest invention, is the most extreme case of his allegory making. The epitome of beauty, grace and charm, Dulcinea is entirely without human quality. A projection of his desire for self-transformation, she stands for the perfection that he is trying to achieve for himself. Quixote never forgets that Dulcinea is modelled on someone called Aldonza Lorenzo; indeed the fact that she was someone else may be her most

important quality. Likewise she is the kind of daemonic agent Fletcher describes in his study of allegory, an intermediary between Quixote and the ideal plane, the world of his private version. Arthur Ephron closely examines Quixote's use of the Dulcinea character in his *Don Quixote and the Dulcineated World*. I do not agree with all of his conclusions, but he is correct in asserting that the worship of Dulcinea entails an entire system of living based on rigidity and automatism. Idealistic systems are usually so defined. Quixote's project, after all, is to reduce life to the certainties of an incredibly rigid literature. He seeks the automatism of allegory ingrained in his tales of errantry. Dulcinea is the embodiment of that desire; drained of all humanity, reduced to the shallowest trope, she would be his escort out of life and into artifice. As such, she represents (for him and for us) the struggle between Quixote's ideal and a constantly intruding reality. The mock "war" the knight conducts with his lady alludes to the serious battle Quixote conducts against the real.

II

Now, to say that *Don Quixote* is about a conflict between fantasy and reality is not exactly a critical revolution. Obviously such a fissure is at the very heart

of the book. But it is important to remember that as a constant source of tension it is constantly changing. Don Quixote's confidence in his ability to obscure reality with his fantasy fluctuates throughout. Early in Part One one feels that he is simply following the script of his reading, whether in adapting old ballads and substituting his own name for Lancelot or in responding to questions with direct quotations from one of his books. Weiger notes that after these books have been burned Quixote stops claiming to be characters about whom he has read (Weiger 62); perhaps the priest's *auto da fe* removes the burden of having to mimic, allowing Quixote to create a self. Still, throughout the course of Part One, there is a distinct feeling that even Don Quixote sees himself as a work in progress.

The greatest example is his playing the role of madman in the Sierra Morena, ostensibly for the purpose of making Dulcinea accept his penitential love for her (I:25-26). There is more than an indication that Quixote is inspired by the equally frivolous madness of Cardenio whom he has just met. Then again, it might just be incumbent on a knight to go through a period of frenzy over some misunderstanding with his lady. Opting to emulate Amadis' less physically taxing insanity over Orlando's fury, he

never seems more lucid than in this mad scene. It is almost as if we are allowed to look into the mechanics of his mania, perhaps prompting us to ascertain (along with Mark Van Doren and Harold Bloom⁹⁵, among others) that Quixote is simply playing at the madman turned knight. I find this too simple an answer; Quixote is multiple, complicated. At other times his insanity is undeniable; here in the mountains, explaining that Dulcinea has been created out of necessity as befitting a knight to have a lady ("For all I want with Dulcinea del Toboso, she is just as good as the most exalted princess on earth." [I:25:184]), he seems canny and sane. Perhaps he realizes with John Shade that imitation can be a form of creation. To imitate Amadis in madness, no matter how knowingly, might mean to assimilate a little of his literary magic.

My theory is that Quixote is testing the boundaries of his success in self-fashioning. With the introduction of such characters as the improbable shepherds Grisostomo and Marcela; of Cardenio the madman sacrificing life for a romantic ideal; even of Gines de Pasamont the refugee from the picaresque, writing his life as he is living it (never mind Princess Micomicona), Don Quixote may sense that the

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See Van Doren's *Don Quixote's Professions* (New York, 1958) or Bloom's chapter on *Don Quixote* ("Cervantes: The Play of the World" in *The Western Canon* (New York, 1994).

world is indeed metamorphosing into the fantasy he had wanted it to be. We read these characters as mirrors of Quixote; perhaps he does too. Looking at them he sees into his own transformation. Cocky about his success, he might be pushing the limits of the fantasy by trying to make Dulcinea appear. She who is the allegorical embodiment of all things "knight errant" is also the method for calling his own bluff. If she responds to him through the letter he sends with Sancho, he has essentially conjured her by "pretending" to go mad; this means that the world must really be mad--not surprisingly, he need not be mad anymore. If she does not respond, then he might as well continue to be mad, suffering the pains of Amadis or Orlando in earnest. The entire Quixotic venture is encapsulated in this little episode.

He may be just sane enough to realize that his more genuine madness has allowed him to cross boundaries, to affect his fictional landscape. I have suggested that the book seems to alter itself under Quixote's influence. I see this as something like literary inertia; Quixote's madness (or, if not madness, his literary determination) has influenced the book: It has brought in extra authors; it has expanded the book's type and number of discourses; it has taken a swerve from the set realism of a simple parody

towards the fantastic; it has supplied him with subcharacters cut out of his cloth. Perhaps Quixote realizes this from his vantage point and he plays the madman in order to further influence the literary landscape. The attempt to make Dulcinea appear is a bid to enchant reality into reifying his ideal, the self-conscious gesture of someone trying to alter his life.

Taking our supposition another step, we will conclude that Quixote himself is responsible for Dulcinea's enchantment. By trying to force the ideal into reality, he compels Sancho to invent an alternate Dulcinea. I would avoid reducing Quixote and Sancho to the "types" they have accrued over nearly four hundred years of criticism (the former as the disembodied intellect, the latter as the earthy grotesque). Still, when he is not falling into imaginative fancy about his island, Sancho is in many ways an agent of the real for Quixote. He depends on Sancho as ballast for his own idealism to help him navigate through the world. And he thrives on Sancho's gullibility. The evident quixotification of his squire⁹⁶ must be a constant reminder for Quixote of his powers to enchant the world.

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Though it is a problematic occurrence--there are myriad parts of Quixote's idealism that Sancho never manages to adopt, as there are aspects of Sancho's idealism that Quixote would never promulgate.

Sancho's initial resistance to most of Quixote's ideals stands in well for the challenges Quixote faces in actualizing that ideal.⁹⁷

In a rather general way then Sancho represents the real to Quixote. Sending this ambassador of the real to Dulcinea, Quixote must be taking this into account, especially considering his particularly lucid frame of mind in the Sierra Morena. He must intend that Sancho do *something* to mediate between his desire to make Dulcinea appear and his fear that she will not. In other words, he must really want Sancho to enchant Dulcinea.

Why does he go through all these machinations? We might look no further than the ideal that the knight must constantly challenge himself. If such challenges extend beyond the merely physical or spiritual, or even mental, and into the ontological, then all the better. Quixote is not nearly as static a character as he is often made out to be. Going through the madness of Amadis and claiming it is a test of Dulcinea's constancy, he is really testing himself (one of the central tenets of errantry would have to be that, as all individual behavior bears the burden of

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Likewise, Sancho's eventual acceptance of many of Quixote's principles, translated into his own method of understanding them, is another "version" of the quixotic discourse, making Sancho a sort of enchanted Quixote.

being a symbolic representation of knighthood, any test, of any kind, must really be a test of knighthood itself, of the identity the subject has chosen to adopt). The reality of her existence must be a kind of litmus test of the authenticity of his own persona. As such, it is entirely fitting that he take it on.

But he would rather not take it on himself. Sancho is his ace in the hole; he is a go-between, a *daemon* to help Quixote adapt his ideal to the real world. Sancho's invented tale of seeing Dulcinea and giving her Quixote's message (I:31) is the beginning of the process of her enchantment (a mirror pre-cursor to the long process of disenchanting her that will loom so large in Part Two). Though Sancho seems later to forget the story he told Quixote, his report, and more importantly his description of Dulcinea, reminds us of the country girl in El Toboso whom Sancho will later pretend is Dulcinea enchanted (II:10). Perhaps, back in I:31, because he is not seeing "Dulcinea" with his own eyes, Quixote easily dismisses Sancho's grotesque assertions.⁹⁸ From the account of

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I believe it is for a different reason. In the Sierra Morena, Quixote's confidence can easily parry the thrust at his ideal that a warts-and-all Dulcinea presents. Early in Part Two, when he journeys to El Toboso to see her, confidence in his ideal has been badly shaken by the revelation that a book has in fact been published with him as its protagonist.

Dulcinea winnowing two bushels of wheat in her yard through the discourse on her height and smell, Quixote counters each of Sancho's inventions with aplomb ("Discreet Lady!"). We can see clearly the quixotic method; he turns the "real" into the fantastic, assimilating Sancho's story and making it part of his own romantic discourse, or part of his "version." What never happened now seems to have happened twice, in the different versions of Sancho and Quixote. As seemingly every event in the novel is doubled, so is this wholly imaginary one.⁹⁹

This is all slightly vertiginous; we have a madman lucidly imitating the activities of a different kind of madness in the hope of authenticating his original delusion.¹⁰⁰ We also have Quixote, bursting with confidence,

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The episode itself is exactly reversed (which is a kind of doubling) in II:10-11, when Sancho pretends the three country girls from El Toboso are Dulcinea in all her splendor and her maids. Though we get few details, Sancho's ideal version of Dulcinea, the incomparable beauty (if slightly unorthodox, with her mole and its nine inch long hairs) clashes with the reality seen by Don Quixote who for once cannot see beyond the evidence of the senses.

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Herein lies another pre-cursor to *Pale Fire*. Don Quixote playing the knight as madman is a lot like King Charles of Zembla donning a false beard and an assumed name to teach literature. Kinbote comments that "I who have not shaved now for a year, resemble my disguised king (*Pale Fire*, p.76)." Thus part of the delusion of the madman scholar is that the king he pretends to be *pretends* to be a scholar resembling the madman. In both cases the emphasis on imitation is unmistakable, but so is a note of

beginning the process of weakening its foundation by trying to actualize what should remain in the distance of his imagination. He enchants Dulcinea himself by demanding she appear (because a Dulcinea who "appears," who is subject to empiric observation, would have to be enchanted); he actually undermines the delusion on which his "legitimate" madness rests.

Though the conflict will take a dark turn in Part Two, even in Part One the tension between the real and the imagined is ever-present in Quixote's psyche. Like Kinbote, he can only maintain his identity to the extent that he is able to assimilate the "real" into his fantasy. Nothing embodies this better than his self-contradicting approach to Dulcinea: he invents an allegory to be worshipped from a distance and then demands she materialize. His constant fear (and constant excuse when things seem to be other than he would like them to be) is that the scales will tip too far towards the real, away from the ideal. This is enchantment, and enchantment is for him both the challenge of his unseen enemies and a perverse kind of protection against contradictory evidence.

plausibility, as though such imitations were the authentic condition of the divided personality.

The Uses of Enchantment

It can also create a space for him within reality to exercise his imagination and continue to create himself. At the end of Part One he is brought back to his village in a cage on an oxcart by his "friends" the priest and the barber. Convinced that all is the work of enchantment, Don Quixote feels powerless to resist; he awaits the intercession of a benevolent sage. This is when he has his discussion with the Canon on the merits of his favorite books. In the course of this discussion he describes the kind of welcome knights errant receive in castles during their adventures (I:50:388). Of course this treatment is largely apportioned to him (down to the damsels come to remove his armor and lead him to dinner) in the castle of the Duke and Duchess in Part Two (II:31). Quixote of course is a little incredulous in the later episode and shies away from too many ministrations; they obviously cause him a good deal of anxiety. He will tell Sancho upon their leaving the nobles that he felt trapped, deprived of his freedom by their hospitality (II:63). Thus Quixote in a real cage in Part One feels more free *imagining* this sort of splendor than he will feel actually receiving it (he has no way of knowing it is all an elaborate joke). One must conclude that even the actualization of the most positive

images of his fantasy is enchantment for Don Quixote.

The Quixote of Part Two is a far more cautious and less enthusiastic incarnation than the Quixote of Part One; while the episode with the Duke and Duchess might serve as a measure of how far he has digressed from his original self, it also underscores the fundamental truth that Quixote's imagination is always the final arbiter of his comfort in the world. In Part One he is delighted to make new worlds out of the "real" world, molding it with his imagination. Part Two presents him with a book chronicling what he has done, what he has made. Not surprisingly, he feels a loss of control. The quixotic method is a transformation of things as they occur. He does not expect the world to present itself to him already transformed. He can do nothing with that. He feels caged, robbed of his autonomy; in a broad sense much of Part Two is an enchanted version of Part One.

It seems that Quixote's captivity as much as the Canon's position is responsible for the imaginative defense of his beloved books. The alleged enchantment of the cart does not disturb his ability to imagine in the slightest; he incorporates it into the process of his self-creation.¹⁰¹

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Quixote's imagination expands to its furthest reaches in the Cave of Montesinos, at a time when he has intentionally restricted the movement of his body (and, accordingly, of

Quixote depends on the opposition of enchanter, the opposition of the real against his fantasy, as much as he or any knight depends on his pseudo-war with his lady. Dulcinea whom he calls his perpetual foe, is, in a sense, a perpetual motion machine for his fantasy. So too is enchantment, at least in Part One.

Part Two: The Imaginary Knight Made Real

In Part Two everything changes. Enchantment no longer fits easily into Quixote's definition of it. Though it does not change its characteristics overtly, it is no longer the tool to facilitate his fantasy. The ultimate enchantment in *Don Quixote* may be the way the book conforms to his desire for self-inscription. The condition comes to a head at the beginning of Part Two, but it starts much earlier. I have alluded to Mambrino's helmet a number of times, it being as good a symbol of Quixote's manipulation of his environment as anything else. When Sancho declares that he can no longer stand Quixote's insisting that things (namely the barber's basin) are not as they quite evidently appear to

sense perception) even more than it was restricted in his cage.

be, Quixote responds:

Is it possible that all this time you have been going about with me you have never found out that all things concerning knights-errant seem to be illusions and nonsense and ravings and to be done topsy-turvy? And not because it is really so, but because there is always a swarm of enchanters around us who change and alter everything with us and turn things as they please, and according as they are disposed to aid or destroy us. Thus what seems to you a barber's basin seems to me Mambrino's helmet, and to another it will seem something else. And rare foresight it was in the sage who is on my side to make what is really and truly Mambrino's helmet seem a basin to everybody, for since it is held in such estimation, all the world would pursue me to rob me of it (I:25:179-80).

This passage illuminates Bryant Creel's argument about Quixote's epistemological understanding of enchantment. Quixote is basically saying that there exists a true thing, a Platonic essence, or *noumenon*, and then there are any number of phenomenal manifestations disguising that essence. Thus any one might see anything in what is "truly" the helmet of Mambrino. It has been given only to Quixote to be aware of this noumenal identity. Convinced he has access to the objective truth, he eschews subjective approaches. He does not simply distrust empiric evidence; he sees even the mistakes that empiric observation causes as part of a great conspiracy. Thus his protective enchanters disguise the helmet as a basin.

Remembering that sages are authors, that writing is

enchantment, we can read the sage's disguising a helmet in a basin as an act along the lines of an author's instilling symbolic significance in an object in the text--a cross, say, or a dagger, a handkerchief, a mouse. I have in this essay been trying to make Mambrino's helmet a kind of talisman of Quixote's doubled perception of the world, of his idealistic transformation of the real; obviously I am implying that Quixote, too, sees it as that. A Quixote trying to turn his life into literature reads his life as though it were a piece of writing. His approach to deciphering all the objects of his environment, the signs left by his sage, is exactly the same one he employed to interpret his more arcane books of chivalry. Like John Shade's fountain, Quixote's helmet (or his windmills, his cave, his icon, his lion) is perceived as a device of symbolic communication from an author, something to be read and interpreted. In the last chapter, I observed that this seemed to be one of the central traits of many Nabokov protagonists, including his invented poet.

We can see how such a strategy is in accord with Quixote's overall project, but more than that, it symbolizes that project. As he has been "given" to see the helmet in the basin, so too he has been given to see the life enhancing properties of his books of errantry, to see

the vital necessity of returning the world to the Golden Age--to see the truth of his system. Don Quixote's great struggle is to make a world blinkered by multiple subjectivities see the objective truth. This is exactly Kinbote's project in relation to "Pale Fire." His struggle is to make the world see the monadic, objective "truth" it has been given to him alone to discern behind the poem.

Don Fernando's poll, deciding that the basin is indeed a magic helmet (I:45), is a metaphor for the extent to which Quixote has been successful in his project. None of the characters who votes "yea" really believes the basin is a helmet, but that is hardly the point. In their eagerness to go along with the joke, they confirm Quixote's insistence; and this is exactly the method by which our protagonist "quixotifies" the world. All those laughing at Quixote become like him by manipulating reality for the sake of their own enjoyment. The derision he brings upon himself is the conveyer of his message and the promulgator of his method.¹⁰² In other words, Mambrino's helmet is disenchanted. Yet without his knowing it, Quixote is giving over his discourse to the mockers. In a paradox he does not

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This is basically the point Unamuno makes, in a pretty dour religious vein, in the final essay in *Tragic Sense of Life*. Unamuno's Quixote is an imitation of Christ as the man of sorrows, redeeming the world by suffering humiliation.

see, his subjective position (which he takes to be the objective truth despite the evidence of the senses) is slowly being made into the objective reality--or at least into the narrative reality.

The last sentence in the passage I quoted above is particularly appropriate. Instead of Mambrino's helmet, we might substitute the vision that gives Don Quixote his identity. In Part Two this indeed is "held in such high estimation" that "all the world" pursues him to rob him of it. Cide Hamete has been the main pursuer. Or, perhaps, Cide has merely tracked Quixote down to be pursued by his readers. It is they who dominate the action of Part Two, setting Quixote's course when they can because they have read him. Regardless, the quixotic discourse, his "version," has moved out of his head, to be possessed now by anyone who has read or heard a reading of Cide's book.¹⁰³

Trepidation creeps up on Quixote in Part Two only after his immediate excitement at finding he has been written about. The news that Cide Hamete is a Moor and a historian leads Quixote to suspect that the published

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We might remember Riley's point in his essay "Three Versions of *Don Quixote*": The version we read, that of the unnamed first narrator, is a translation and re-working of Cide's version. Though we know what these secondary characters have read, their reading is in fact different from ours.

version of his life might not measure up to the version he had conducted in his mind.¹⁰⁴ It is no doubt for this reason that Quixote never desires to read the book so many are buzzing about--though it might also be argued that with the adoption of his new identity he has ceased being Quixano the reader in favor of Quixote the man of action. Most apparent is his wariness of Cide. There will be no more speeches about his beneficent sage dictating the course of his actions. This is best exemplified in two contrasting episodes concerning naming. We know how important names are to Quixote (he spent eight days coming up with a good name for himself and four days on Rocinante's). Both he and Kinbote see an almost incantatory power in names.¹⁰⁵

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Quixote's sense of dislocation at the beginning of Part Two corresponds curiously to that of the reader asked to accept that in a few weeks the account of Quixote's exploits has been written, published, translated, disseminated, and read by untold thousands of people. As Cervantes could have set the continuation at any time, we must assume that he intended such an effect. This particular enigma would be less baffling to Quixote who knows that enchanter's can manipulate space and time; it could only confirm what is already apparent, that Cide is such an enchanter. The metafictional device indicates that Cervantes is positioning himself as an enchanter of the novel and of our reading experience.

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See Spitzer on the importance of names in *Don Quixote*. By "incantatory power" I mean that both characters believe that names can be transformative. Both alter their names in only a minor fashion (assuming Kinbote is Botkin) to take on a new persona, but the persona cannot be developed without the name. With all Kinbote's talk of Goetic magic and Quixote's

In Part One, when Sancho calls him Knight of the Mournful Countenance (I:19), Quixote takes it as a sign that his fate is being directed by a beneficent writer/sage. In Part Two's episode with the lion (II:17), Quixote explains away his most rash adventure as an attempt to purge evil enchantment, saying, "The enchanters may be able to rob me of good fortune, but not of fortitude and courage" (II:17:517). We do not really know what he is talking about; it seems quite a stretch that this feat is directed specifically at the recent enchantment of Dulcinea; it has more of the character of an abstract protest against his general condition. He conspicuously changes his name *himself* this time. I read this as an assertion of autonomy aimed directly at Cide. Whereas in Part One he generally insists that he is trying to oppose enchantment as rationally as he can, here he commits a

belief in enchantment, it is not too much to think they see an almost supernatural significance in names. When written words are assigned the transformative power they are in each character's schema, this does not seem so far-fetched. The imposed correspondence between a thing and the name assigned it must resonate with the correspondence Quixote distinguishes between his ideal truths and the way they are manifested in the perceivable world. Such must also be the case in Kinbote's bifurcated paradigm. The changing of a name (Botkin to Kinbote, New Wye to Zembla, Quixano to Quixote), signifying for the madman his being excluded from the symbolic associations between words and things that sane minds accept unquestioningly, must also allude to a world where things cannot be made to match with themselves anymore.

completely irrational act, taking possession of it by inscribing it himself into the new identity of the Knight of the Lions.

Quixote's problem with having a historian record his deeds goes beyond the issue of exactitude. It is not because Cide's minute details are unflattering that Quixote disdains their being recorded, but rather because they are untrue. What happened in the observable world is not what happened in Don Quixote's world. He knows very well what happened. He fought several giants that were turned into windmills by an enchanter; he was wooed by a beautiful princess in a castle; he came upon a battle between armies that were turned into vast flocks of sheep; he was even fooled by some fulling mills bereft of any enchantment at all. He "created" the sage to record his deeds as a way to reify his conception of the world. A poet can do this, not a historian. Quixote needs the truth of the poet to countermand the evidence of the senses. A version recording the beatings and the blanketings, the innkeepers, thieves and prostitutes, would only reify the enchantment and not his ideal vision--it is itself enchantment. Right from the start of Part Two Quixote realizes that his sage is really an evil enchanter who turns everything into the falsehood of the merely evidentiary; the *historia* is a corruption,

the enchantment of what occurred on the ideal plane.

II

The news Sanson Carrasco brings about his existence in print reawakens Quixote's consciousness from the slumber in which Part One left it¹⁰⁶, presenting a defining moment for it, forcing him to look at the nature of his existence, and to formulate his ideas on artistic representation. There can be little doubt that the two are inextricably entwined in his mind.¹⁰⁷ Hearing that Cide has included an inset story of his own ("The Ill-advised Curiosity"), Quixote upbraids him for straying from his assigned task "when there was so much to write about" in his life (II:3:442-- his comment reminds one of Kinbote's criticism of Shade for devoting too much ink to the Hazel story "to the detriment of certain other richer and rarer matters ousted by it"

¹⁰⁶

Cervantes makes sure that a new character breaks this news to Quixote. Sanson is the first and most persistent of the readers of Part One who will try to alter Quixote's life in Part Two. He seems to be conjured out of the first part, a creature of Cide's enchantment. He steers Quixote's course of distrusting the account of his adventures; indeed, almost before the standard pleasantries have been exchanged, the three of them, Sanson, Quixote and Sancho, are critiquing the book only one of them has read (we can suppress for a moment the dislocating feeling of their critiquing, by extension, the book they are appearing in).

¹⁰⁷

When Quixote asks with a little trepidation if the author intends to write a second part, for instance, one can sense that he is really asking if he shall be given leave to continue existing.

[*Pale Fire*, p.164]). He likens Cide to the painter

Orbaneja:

When they asked him what he was painting, he answered "Whatever it turns out to be." Sometimes he would paint a rooster in such a way, and so unrealistic, that he had to write alongside of it in capital letters, "This is a rooster." So it will be with my history, which will require a commentary to make it intelligible (II:3:441).

Quixote seems to be turning about-face in the running esthetic argument on the value of verisimilitude, calling instead for a truthful likeness in art, something as close to duplication as possible. It is understandable that he feels this way if he is as shaken by the news of his actually being written into a tale of knight errantry as I have suggested. Having thought that he controlled his own fiction, he is disturbed to find himself the subject rather than the author. This would entail a reassessment of his position. Yet I do not think the position is really all that different.

Again, there is little in art more self-consciously artificial than the pursuit of verisimilitude. As Ortega (*Meditations on the Quixote*) maintains, reality cannot enter art in anything but a "combative" way¹⁰⁸, drawing

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Ortega, 144: "I do not believe that reality can enter into art in any way other than by making an active and combative element out of its own inertia and desolation."

attention to itself. Though he may not be making such a claim overtly, it is certainly possible that what really makes Quixote uneasy about the art of someone like Orbaneja is that it is too *much* like life, not too little. The piece that is "whatever it turns out to be" sounds exactly like life; it is messy, ill-formed, indeterminate. If Quixote is against anything, it is these qualities. The realistic art he seems to be invoking is measured, planned, reliable (See Riley, [1973], 816). That is what he has desired in his life. His entire project of self-inscription is no doubt based on his fear of the chaotic, of "whatever turns out." If we recall back to his speech with the Canon, we will remember that Quixote's vision of writing is fantastic, but not chaotic. Fantasy is a great coordinator. Quixote's approach may seem indeterminate at times because he makes himself as he goes, but his method is always organized by his reading. It is the role of the errant to wander afield guided only by his duty; but that duty is strictly prescribed. His books of errantry are the template used to design his version of life on the random events occurring to him. His expressions here on painting are directed by his fear of the chaotic. Quixote sees art as that which will organize his life and tie up all the ends (the same is true for Kinbote). The urge to make one's life into a piece

of art is the urge to control, to design rather than leave it open to random occurrence.

The beneficent sage he conjures that first morning is a supreme designer; Cide Hamete Benengali is a splatterer. We always talk about how modern *Don Quixote* is. The idea of a character or characters critiquing the book they appear in (or a reasonable facsimile) is modern enough. But Quixote goes further; he criticizes the way his author lets the "real" invade the artifice, never realizing that his opinions are tearing ever greater holes in it.

Again, like Kinbote, Quixote lets us see into the workings of his mind, into his intention to make his life an artistic act. Alter writes that the self-conscious novel is always built on a foundation of literary criticism. It would seem that the Kinbotic/Quixotic desire for literary self-inscription is similarly founded, but the criticism undercuts the fantasy. Drawing attention to their chosen artistic milieus with critique, Quixote and Kinbote also draw attention to their project of re-making themselves. They show their hands by showing their uncertainty, even as the dislocation they feel from their authors becomes a new foundation for new edifices in that identity. Kinbote and the Quixote of Part Two define themselves to a great extent in the way they are not included or correctly represented

in "Pale Fire" and *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha* (or whatever it is Cide called his book) respectively. In so criticizing their milieu, they might strike us as self-conscious authors of their own lives. They strive for a kind of self-determination, but their status as readers never leaves them; they read their lives as they write them (Kinbote in his commentary, Quixote in his mind). What is self-conscious literature if not the literature that reads itself, that takes its own reading into consideration as a subject for its writing?

Getting back to Orbaneja, I am struck by Quixote's analysis of what we have come to call modernist art so long before the Twentieth Century, when painting often aspired to evoke an essence (if not a practice) of "whatever it turns out to be." He also seems to predict the self-conscious urge in modernist and postmodern art, the playful analyses of representation exemplified by such works as Magritte's drawing of a pipe captioned "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*." Orbaneja's "This is a Rooster" is of the same genre, if not quite intentionally; they both call attention to the implicit suspension of a viewer's realistic scrutiny and to his willing acceptance of symbolic representations as artistic truth. Magritte's drawing does proffer features of a *conventionally* accurate representation of a pipe;

Orbaneja's painting looks nothing like Quixote's artistic standard of a rooster, but that is irrelevant. Both of them compel a viewer to realize that a drawing is not a pipe, a painting is not a rooster, no matter how intense the verisimilitude. Any work of figurative art obliges the viewer to enter some kind of symbolic contract with it.

Quixote merely wants his art to be overtly symbolic and artificial. The imaginary knight of 1615 would doubtless prefer the mature El Greco (only one year in the grave) to the young Velazquez (a few years from coming into his genius) for all he condemns Orbaneja's rooster.¹⁰⁹ He wants a tale that will make him self-evidently a knight. Knights do not experience the blows of mule drivers and practical jokers, just as roosters are not inchoate daubs of paint. His existence in the past months has been a course of crowing "I am Don Quixote." His sage was supposed to make it true, not offer the text of a character proclaiming himself Don Quixote (a rooster forced to

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In a footnote to his chapter on realism in poetry from *Meditations on the Quixote*, Ortega offers an eloquent assessment of the paradoxes at work in verisimilitude: The intention of realism becomes still more obvious in painting. Raphael and Michelangelo paint the forms of things. The form is always ideal--an image of memory or a construction of ours. Velazquez seeks the impression of things. The impression is formless and stresses the material--satin, velvet, linen, wood, organic protoplasm--of which things are made (Ortega, 145).

declare itself a rooster). He fears Cide's representation because, like Orbaneja's painting, it contains its own negation; it questions itself by drawing attention to the basic element of its creation. There is too much Quixano reality in the Quixote fantasy.

We can see that in Don Quixote's struggle against the real the most important field of battle is the very book in which his deeds are recorded. Filching an idea from Aristotle's *Poetics* (Section 9) he says:

The poet may describe or sing things, not as they were, but as they ought to have been, while the historian has to write them down, not as they ought to have been, but as they were, without adding or subtracting from the truth.

(II:3:440)

Many people would agree with the idea that the historical recording of a life is limited only to events as they occurred, while the poetic might be open to any number of versions. Historians know better of course. And despite his words, even for Quixote the exact reverse is true. In his scheme the poetic would be compelled to follow the course he has already lain in his imagination; "as they ought to have been" connotes a single reality unwaveringly attached to his ideal. The historical, because it strays from his program and is subject to the historian's perspective, could be almost anything. Mambrino's helmet again: Don Quixote believes he has access to the objective truth; his

version is the one true version despite all contradictory evidence of the senses. The helmet is only subjectively a basin, no matter how many people see it as such. Cide's historical interpretation of the events occurring to and around Don Quixote is likewise subjective and thus false, no matter how accurate it seems in the real world. Only art, only poetry can convey truth. We think of art, its making and its reception, as being subjective; indeed, this may be the only criterion we would dare attach to that term in these dangerous times. For people like Quixote and Kinbote, art is the only objective thing in a totally subjective world. Shade's poetic representation of the story Kinbote has been telling him (and himself) would be for Kinbote a truth higher than any mere cataloguing of empiric facts. It would be the life he has invented, free of the contingencies of the "real."

We are dealing with an endless series of paradoxes. Decrying a clumsy painter, Quixote is really exposing the dangers of an art that is too much like life, not too little. Claiming that the historian is bound unwaveringly to the facts, Quixote is suggesting that a historical perspective is untruthful and subjective. And striving to turn his subjective appraisal of the world into an objective, if ideal (objective because ideal) reality, Quixote finds that upon effecting such a change he is

subject to the competing subjectivities of characters like Sanson and the Duke and Duchess, even of his narrator, Cide Hamete Benengali. Having brought his vision to life, he finds that it is no longer his.

When Quixote wakens to realize that he has been documented by a lying Moorish historian, he is a bit like Kinbote stealing away from the hysteria after John Shade's murder to read "Pale Fire." Both were so sure of what they had been concocting in the alembic of someone else's poetry. Both are disappointed. By narrating his story, Kinbote directs our perception of what his response to the poem was. We have to see through the words of his commentary for the picture of his delusion and manipulations to cohere. We witness Quixote's disaffection in "narrative time," even as we ourselves question the "truthfulness" of Cide's account of it. Our identification with Quixote can run very deep; if he suspects that his narrator has been lying about him, we might begin to wonder ourselves. There are many times when Cide seems out of touch with even the version of Quixote he may have created.¹¹⁰ Of course the end of such questioning might be

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See Howard Mancing, "Cide Hamete Benengali vs. Miguel de Cervantes: The Metafictional Dialectic of *Don Quixote*," *Cervantes* 1 (1981). He writes, "In Part II there are at least ten times when the increasingly unreliable historian either lies, makes conflicting and inconsistent statements,

our own madness (this is the sort of thing that drove Alonso Quixano crazy in the first place). We know that Quixote is a totally unreliable source of "truth"; but then we only know this because his narrator tells us so. If we give him the benefit of the doubt, we have nothing to believe in and all is reduced to mere storytelling (in other words, to what it *really* is). This is the essence of self-consciousness, of course, but that does not really help us to make any sense of it. *Don Quixote* and *Pale Fire* are about characters who want to be written about, yet all the while they are afraid of being misrepresented. Quixote is written about, and Kinbote *thinks* he is. Quixote is certain that he has been misrepresented; Kinbote, ignored, has to represent himself.

III

Where Kinbote must go out and create himself in words after reading "Pale Fire," Quixote has to go and find out if he really is the knight everyone has been talking about. I interpret his well-described melancholy in Part Two as a symptom of a crisis of identity. If, in a very small nutshell, Part One is about a character storming the countryside declaring that he is Don Quixote; Part Two is

or clearly misjudges his characters," then lists them in full (Mancing, 1981, 70-73). Riley and El Saffar also write in detail about Cide's narrative inconsistencies.

about a man being told he is Don Quixote. Beneath the bragging about his fame there is a palpable element of uncertainty; Quixote spends much of the second book trying to live up to his reputation. It is no mistake that his first adventure takes him to El Toboso. Ostensibly he is responding to Dulcinea's letter demanding an audience; likewise he wants to get her blessing before proceeding with further quests. In a subliminal sense, both reasons are valid; his determination to see Dulcinea seems to originate in a desire to prove his own existence. She will be the test of what everyone is saying about him.

In the lucid districts of his mind Quixote knows there never was a Dulcinea (he implies as much on more than one occasion). But then he also knew he was not a knight. His understanding of the world and the delicate balance he has constructed between it and his conception of self is greatly disturbed when he wakes up to find he actually is a knight (the indisputable proof for Quixote is the book everyone is reading--in the quixotic world, books do not lie. We must accept that he believes himself to be an authentic knight whether we see him as one or not). Anything is possible; the world must indeed be subject to enchantment. The great test of his delusion has always been Dulcinea. If he finds the Dulcinea of his imagination in El Toboso, then it must not have been a delusion.

This seems to be why Quixote approaches the village with such trepidation and indecision. He tells Sancho that they must hurry so as not to get there at night, then the next day he deliberately waits so that he can arrive after dusk (II:8). As in Part One's mad scene in the Sierra Morena, he sends Sancho to solve the problem of Dulcinea's existence, delegating his authority to what I earlier called his ambassador of the real. And again we can only assume that he wants Dulcinea to be enchanted. Perhaps he realizes this is the only way she can truly exist; an enchanted Dulcinea could stand as the perfect symbol (as a lady should for a knight--we can see how right Quixote is in seeing in her state the condition of his own existence) of what has happened to Don Quixote himself. His ideal has been enchanted into the quasi-realistic adventures of a poor mad hidalgo bumbling his way around Spain. Equally, her enchantment looks forward, setting the tone for the rest of Part Two, the problematic nature of her identity reflecting that of Quixote's. It is not all bad news. An enchanted Dulcinea is at least an existing Dulcinea; assuming the reality of her existence is a test of his identity, Quixote can at least continue being a knight. Part Two's perpetual quest to disenchant Dulcinea clearly signifies Quixote's attempt to regain the autonomy of his "version," to possess control over the identity that has

been dispersed into the "real" world, into the hands of his readers.

The Enigmas of Part Two

As usual, the condition of Quixote's psyche is distilled into the fictional landscape. Part One had given him items easy to translate into the objects of his fantasy; much of Part Two presents itself as an enigma to be solved. The populace seems to go about in costume (they did in Part One, but in Part Two there is more emphasis placed on performance). Immediately upon leaving Toboso Quixote runs into a troupe of actors dressed as knights¹¹¹, devils, kings and clowns; he encounters a knight enchanted to look like Sanson Carrasco who would claim all of Quixote's victories for his own; he watches (and destroys) a puppet show run by his old adversary Gines de Pasamonte in disguise; he happens upon the wedding of Camacho, tricked out of his bride by Basilio's elaborate subterfuge.

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Helena Percas de Ponseti (*Cervantes, the Writer and Painter of Don Quixote*, Columbia, MO: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1988) suggests that the knight who is on board the cart when it first passes into the novel but who has disappeared when Quixote contemplates attacking them (he cannot, because there is no knight for him to fight) may be Sanson Carrasco hitching a ride with the actors and fleeing so that he can meet Quixote and Sancho in the next episode on his own terms (Percas de Ponseti, 24).

Those adventures which are not based on some kind of performance but are otherwise enigmatic include Quixote's confrontation with the lion and his famous adventure in the Cave of Montesinos. In the former the desire to prove himself drifts into irrationally; in the latter he is intent (literally) on getting to the bottom of a mystery (of Montesinos and the others) having obvious parallels to his own plight. In Part Two we readers are given less access to the "real" situation behind Quixote's perception of the world than we received in Part One.¹¹² We find ourselves naturally identifying with Quixote more because we uncover events with him, even if the reality behind a deceptive appearance might eventually be revealed to us and not to him (as is the case with the identity of Maese Pedro). Coming closer to seeing the world through Quixote's eyes, we might pause to wonder if it is not the reader who undergoes "quixotification." The literary landscape is now far more mysterious because Quixote himself has begun to trust it less. Walter Reed (*An Exemplary History of the Novel: The Quixotic versus the Picaresque*, Chicago: Univ.

¹¹²

For instance, Cide Hamete cannot come to any conclusion about the veracity of Quixote's vision in the Cave of Montesinos, as though the narrative eye cannot follow to such depths. He leaves it up to the reader to decide. See Riley (1986, 150) who maintains that we begin to have less access to the truth behind the events as early as the episode with the army of sheep in Part One (I:28).

of Chicago Press, 1981, 84) pithily sums up Quixote's changing situation from Part One to Part Two: "he goes from man reading to man being read." While this is true on the surface, within Quixote's psyche, the opposite is taking place. The "man reading" stopped existing very early in Part One to be replaced by someone writing his life out of the raw materials of the environment he encounters. Part Two's emphasis on disguise, on acting, on submerged identities and enigmas reflects Quixote's new position; he unravels the environment, reading it as though it were text. We come along with him, encountering these mysteries not necessarily because we are becoming more like him, but because he is becoming more like us, a reader of the *Quixote*.

A good example of his distrust of his literary landscape can be found in Part Two's enchanted mill on a stream (II:29). Quixote does not mistake it for a giant (it cries out for comparison with the windmills of Part One); he sees it as a mill. This does not make it any less enchanted.¹¹³ On the contrary, its normal appearance seems to be the sole indication that it *is* enchanted; the source

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Quixote is sure that there is someone trapped within this enchanted mill in need of rescuing. The significance on the symbolic level to his beleaguered identity seems self-evident.

and variety of its enchantment is hidden, but not questioned. Not surprisingly, Quixote fails in this adventure. More important is that he has stopped translating plain objects into fantastic creatures. He does not need to. The everyday has fallen under the jurisdiction of his suspicions; it now hides a menacing enchantment against which he feels not just oppressed but powerless: "God help us; this world is all machinations and schemes at cross purposes with one another. I can do no more" (2:29:590).

The Quixote of Part One knew his landscape perfectly because he was inventing it as he went. In Part Two he is uncertain because it no longer belongs to his delusion; rather his delusion belongs to it. Events now play themselves out like adventures from *Don Quixote*, and Quixote himself is often relegated to the role of mere observer in Part Two.¹¹⁴ The duality (albeit a general one)

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Mancing (*The Chivalric World of Don Quijote: Style Structure and Narrative Technique*, Columbia, MO: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1982) argues that the decline in Quixote's involvement in events actually begins in Part One. Thinking about the adventures in the inn towards its end, it is hard to disagree. But then there is almost no action in those chapters (I:33-45) until the debate about the barber's basin turns into a melee involving the Holy Brotherhood. Up until that time, for a hundred pages or so, there is nothing but the telling of stories, the captive's tale, Fernando's story, The judge's story, "The Ill-advised Curiosity," etc.

I have suggested in response to the assessment by Walter Reed, links *Quixote* to *Pale Fire*; the first section gives us the writer, the second the reader. In Part One Quixote controls the action by translating the world into his narrative, creating his life as a text mirroring the ideal (poetic) story in his mind. John Shade's words are appropriate: "*Man's life as commentary to abstruse\ Unfinished poem.*" His actions are undeniably formulated by his reading; but they are a kind of writing too. The character who was tempted to finish the dangling story of Don Belianis chooses instead to invent the story of himself. In Part Two he is more like a Kinbote analyzing his accomplishments and testing his identity. If in Part One he turns the landscape into writing, in Part Two he reads the landscape, not without mystification and some apprehension. Quixote may not share the destructive paranoia of our character from "Signs and Symbols," but he is similar in really feeling he is the center of everything rather than just *pretending* to be as he did in Part One. Quixote, lucid about everything not having to do with his *idee fixe*, lucid even about that on occasion, must experience a frightening dislocation when he sees his world responding to that *idee fixe*. It is the lucid Quixote, the one who doubts, coming into play more in the second part.

II

Don Quixote may be a bildungsroman in reverse; it begins with a character formed in the blink of an eye, but as it progresses, he seems to move further and further from himself towards an unformed state. By the time he reaches his final battle on the beach of Barcelona his defeat is a foregone conclusion; he had stopped being a knight long before. In Barcelona he is reduced to the role of the bewildered rustic observing an urban landscape that moves far too quickly for him. The sign attached to his back for a joke, "This is Don Quixote" (II:62)¹¹⁵, is deeply ironic because this is of course *nothing* like the Don Quixote we have come to know or expect.

This incident offers in miniature the crisis of Part Two. Compare this Don Quixote to the one of the first part boldly asserting "I know who I am, and I know that I may be...all the twelve Peers of France and even all the Nine Worthies" (I:5:46). The natural conclusion we reach is that in Part Two Quixote is masquerading as himself, and it is far more difficult being Quixote than it was being the Nine Worthies. He seems to recognize this masquerade too; It is no doubt behind his desire to recreate himself as a figure

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Nabokov, concentrating on his vision of Quixote the sufferer, notes the similarity to Christ's being made to wear his sign ("King of the Jews") as he is paraded through Jerusalem.

from pastoral after he has lost his knighthood for a year, a desire to which he lends a vigor that has been virtually absent from him since the very early stages of Part One.

Doubles

As he loses the quixotic essence, it is dispersed among the secondary characters. Part Two is filled with enchanted doubles seemingly created out of Quixote's psyche. The first is Carrasco dressed as the Knight of the Mirrors (II:13-15). It is important to remember that he does not just resemble Quixote--he is not *just* a mirror. The story he makes up in order to goad Quixote into fighting concerns his having *already* defeated Don Quixote in battle. Quixote, perhaps caught up in all this masquerading (they have just left the cart with the troupe of actors), first pretends that he himself is merely a friend of the "real" Don Quixote before identifying himself and declaring that the Knight of the Mirrors must be mistaken. Though first suspecting the knight is lying, once he defeats him, Quixote refuses to accept Tome Cecial's plain testimony that it is Carrasco in disguise, saying (to Carrasco):

You must also confess and believe that the knight you vanquished was not and could not be Don Quixote of La Mancha, but someone else in his likeness, just as I confess and believe that you, though you seem to be the Bachelor Sanson

Carrasco, are not so, but some other resembling him. (II:15:501)

Carrasco's imaginary double is accepted by Quixote unquestioningly, irrationally. This might be because to really see Carrasco would be to admit that his friend must have evil intentions. Perhaps it is because Quixote does not want to taint a gratifying victory by admitting that he--using all the required courtly procedure--vanquished someone who was not actually a knight. But since the acceptance of a double for Sanson requires a belief in a double of his own, we might look to it as a reason.

The recent episode involving the enchantment of Dulcinea (he tells the Knight of the Mirrors on the evening they meet that it has happened within the past ten hours) has seriously jeopardized his sense of identity; "Don Quixote" is not his anymore. Why shouldn't there be a double running around claiming to be he? Sanson's idea for drawing him into a fight is indeed inspired; it plays directly to Quixote's gathering fear, as though the double were bred out of his very anxiety. Quixote accepts the story as he accepts the victory, a victory over an illusion, over a knight disguised as his friend. It is a blow against the forces lining up to rob him of his identity (he does not realize how right he is, of course; that is exactly what Sanson is trying to do on the "real"

rather than on the imaginary plane of the proceedings)--
against enchantment itself.

The Carrasco episode contains three Quixote doubles: the Knight of the Mirrors, whose costume literally reflects Quixote (his existence as the only other knight errant left in the world does so more figuratively); the false "Don Quixote" of Carrasco's story, whose reality Quixote accepts unquestioningly; and Carrasco himself, whose desire to interact with a book (*Don Quixote*, Part One) as something more than a reader fulfills the quixotic paradigm. Curiously, each of these doubles can be said to exist on a different literary plane: The Knight of the Mirrors is Quixote's double on the plane of his fantasy; the invented Quixote exists on the level of Carrasco's deception (and hence on Cide's narrative plane, a story within a story). And Carrasco's standing as a Quixote double is a conclusion we readers reach above or beyond Cide's discourse; as such we would say that it is on Cervantes' plane.

II

The next character he comes upon is Don Diego de Miranda, the perfect upper middle-class Spanish hidalgo, whom Quixote styles the "Knight of the Green Jacket." Much has been made of Don Diego by critics, particularly of his status as a reflection of the man Quixote could have been had he not gone mad (See, for example, Weiger, 77). I find

this idea problematic, primarily because Don Diego is so much Quixote's intellectual inferior. He is self-absorbed and gaudy, a philistine about poetry. Percas de Ponseti calls him a living metaphor exemplifying external form in place of inner style (Percas de Ponseti, 53). Quixote may be mad about reputation, but his knightly vanity has nothing to do with Don Diego's proto-bourgeois self-assertion. Still they are about the same age, and Quixote treats this other man of La Mancha very cautiously¹¹⁶ and courteously, even bragging a bit himself about his literary reputation. One almost feels that Quixote is engaging an estimable opponent of some kind.

In the midst of his time with *el caballero de gaban verde* Quixote has his adventure with the lion, dismissively suggesting Diego stick to his hooded falcon and ferret when he tries to talk Quixote out of his rashness. I have put forward that his compulsion to face the lion is an assertion of his identity against Cide Hamete, whom he has by now come to recognize as a malevolent enchanter. We might recall that on more than one occasion in Part One Don

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In his discussion with the Canon in Part One, Quixote declares the Canon's contempt of books of errantry to be heresy. Don Diego, who shares the Canon's opinion exactly, is rebuked in only the mildest fashion.

Quixote is referred to as a lion in a cage.¹¹⁷ No doubt he does. His move toward the lion may be a symbolic gesture towards the knight (the identity he has chosen--the Manchegan Lion) and away from the hidalgo (as represented by the conspicuous Don Diego). It is not impossible that Quixote *does* see in Don Diego something of his sane self and regrets aspects of his old life even as he rejects them. He might very well discern in Don Diego the way of enchantment, the enchantment of bourgeois inertia, comfortable living and lack of intellectual curiosity. Using Riley's model, we might say that Don Diego is an *enchanted* Don Quixote, an inconsequential man of the "real" world notable only for the color of his cloak. Lacking Quixote's great defining feature, imagination, he is obscured by the ornaments of his station; Quixote transcends his shoddy appearance with the individuality his contemporary lacks.¹¹⁸ Acting rashly, declaring himself the

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Shut in his cage by the Priest and the others (I:46), Don Quixote is referred to by the voice of enchantment (belonging to the barber) as the "raging Manchegan Lion." In I:49 the Canon blames Quixote's books of chivalry for bringing him to a pass where he is "shut up in a cage and carried on an oxcart as one would carry a lion" (I:49:383). He suggests reading instead about real-life heroic deeds; one of many he mentions is the exploit of Don Manuel de Leon who fetched a lady's glove from the cage of a lion.

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In this episode Don Quixote's physical appearance is described in more detail than at any other time in the novel, excepting the first chapter, as though the reader

Knight of the Lions, Quixote may be defying his sage as he "exorcises" what he takes to be one of his enchanted representatives. If Don Diego is a double of some kind (perhaps he is an allegorical figure of the tactile world sprung out of Quixote's anxiety), he resembles that which might most threaten Don Quixote's conception of himself: inertia.

II

There are any number of other quasi-doubles of Quixote in Part Two.¹¹⁹ Following Angus Fletcher's analysis (*Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*--see the previous chapter), it could be said that Quixote is like the allegorical main character whose personality is diffused to numerous subcharacters in the work. Each of these quasi-doubles embodies one of Quixote's many character traits. There is the self-proclaimed follower of Polydor Vergil and Ovid who guides Quixote and Sancho to the Cave of Montesinos (II:22-24). His eccentric catalogue of "historical" firsts reflects Quixote's inability to distinguish between the mythological and the historical. Gines de Pasamonte reflects Quixote's willingness to wear a

were being encouraged to contrast him with Don Diego whose appearance is described in still more detail.

¹¹⁹

See Alter (22-25) for his assessment of doubles in *Don Quixote*.

mask and his perseverance in self-creation.

But an eccentric catalogue of our own will only take us so far. Perhaps it is most accurate to say that because Don Quixote's personality has so many facets, he is bound to mirror the personalities of most among the hundreds of two-dimensional characters he encounters. Some characters resist engaging in the quixotic discourse, to be sure, but they tend to seem bizarre or pedantic. It is natural that the rest would gravitate around him like satellites. This fact points out some problems with applying the allegorical model to Quixote. One of the defining features of allegorical figures is their *lack* of depth. They cannot be too complicated and retain any of the intended allegorical impact. This is why aspects of their personality that might be problematic to the allegory are dispatched to subcharacters, as Fletcher explains (Fletcher, 35-38). Quixote is really a deeply complex character *disguising* himself as a two dimensional allegorical construct; the main character of the version occurring in his head, *his* Don Quixote, is much closer to allegorical simplicity than the obtuse, clever, insane, endearing, brittle, tormented, eloquent, addled person about whom Cide Hamete Benengali writes. As is the case with Kibote, a complex person with the replete psychological profile we expect from a character in a novel conceives of himself as a cardboard

cut-out hero barely transcending the limits of fairytale representation.

It is really Quixote's allegorical conception of himself that is most threatened by Cide. Unaware of those doubles who mirror his real traits, concentrating instead on those who threaten his ideal, Quixote is also unaware that his quarrel with Cide is actually a struggle between literary genres. Quixote is "writing" an allegorical epic of the warrior knight while Cide is writing a novel. Lukacs' theory of the Novel replacing Epic might be playing itself out; for all Quixote knows or cares, though, his Platonic ideal, his allegory, is being destroyed by a history mired in reality. These competing genres, novel and romance, may be the most important resemblers in *Don Quixote*. There is no pure representative of either, of course. Quixote's "version" (beyond the single paragraph he shares with us), while mimicking the books he has read, must be so improvised as to be even more incomprehensible than they. Nor does Cide think he is writing a novel. As far as he knows, he is producing a truthful history. It is Cervantes who creates the novel by setting in competition the pseudo-romance with the pseudo-history. Quixote, living in a palimpsest, is aware of the competing genres, of both "versions." This might be the special dispensation of his madness; the less able he is to keep the two levels

separate, the more complex he becomes. He has created the conflict himself by losing sight of the distinction between reality and literature and must now exist where there is no distinction. The novel *Don Quixote* completely supports his madness; indeed, it is his madness brought to life. Again, this is also the case in *Pale Fire*; the main character's madness seems to infect the fictional discourse. In the clash between the real and the imagined, the novel is created. Kinbote's madness, which sees everything layered and reflected into doubles, is typified by the halved novel; the "real" poem and the fantastic commentary perfectly mimic the doubled world Kinbote experiences.

IV

Echoing Quixote's loss of control over his identity within the confines of the novel is that which occurs to Cervantes outside of it in the spurious continuation by Avellenada. I have noted before what a brilliant stroke it is by Cervantes to include it in his authentic continuation. It is notable that in the *Quixote* Avellenada's version is always treated as just that, a version. From Part Two's Prologue through to Quixote's condemnation of Avellenada close to the end, it is considered to be something like an authentic version of the *wrong* Don Quixote rather than a sort of *persona non grata* in book form. It may be illegitimate, but having been

written, its existence as a history is not subject to question. I call this a brilliant stroke because the introduction of a false Quixote in a competing document fits so perfectly with the atmosphere of Part Two. Whatever we might think of Avellenada's work (I have not read any more than a long passage), in Cervantes' *Don Quixote* it is a poor book, unoriginal, unredeemable. As such it is really an enchanted double of Cide's better version, just as the false Quixote¹²⁰ is Quixote's enchanted double. We should recall Sanson Carrasco's fabrication about the Knight of the Mirror's defeating what Don Quixote concluded was an imposter several hundred pages earlier. This is probably why Quixote does not seem all that shocked to find out that he has a double. Still he never questions the validity of the impossible. The fact that the false Quixote has been inscribed into a text seems to confirm it for him; he cannot question the existence of anything so manifested.

It is curious that Quixote judges Avellenada to be like the painter Orbaneja, using the same brush he used to tar Cide, the painting that has to declare itself a rooster (II:71). Avellenada is just another Cide, someone come to

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He is "proven" to exist when our Quixote runs into a character from Avellenada's book, Don Alvaro Tarfe, who renders his judgement on who is the *better* Quixote (II:72--see Riley [1973], 813).

steal away his ideal conception. A "real" double, that is, a "real" false Quixote (compared to Carrasco's *fake* false Quixote--I am aware of how confusing this all is, bear with me) must be the final wedge between Don Quixote and the identity he had so happily created way back in Part One. The false Quixote really seems to be a monster sprung out of this separation, out of the real Quixote's distress, like those ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw* which may be nothing more than the narrative manifestations of the governess' psychic trauma. The bonus here ("the turn of the screw") is that Cervantes had nothing to do with it.

Yet surely Part Two of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* would be poorer if there had not been an Avellanada. To vandalize Voltaire's aphorism about God: If Avellanada had not existed, Cervantes would have had to invent him. Most curious, and most pleasing, is the completion of the circle. All the principles somehow find themselves duplicated in an enchanted version of themselves: Dulcinea in Sancho's rank country wench; Don Quixote in Avellanada's version of him; Cide in Avellanada. Even Cervantes' Part Two of *Don Quixote* has an enchanted double in Avellanada's continuation.¹²¹ Tempting as it is to assign to Avellanada

¹²¹

It is particularly fitting in this book--though it is more than a book now--in this discourse, where books are judged by mystified readers and vengeful inquisitors alike to have

the role of Cervantes' enchanted double, Cervantes forestalls this by assimilating his tormentor into the text. He is not the Aragonese author about whom little is known; in Cervantes Avellenada, the worst of the enchanters, has been demoted to just a character who does not appear. In this sense Cervantes *did* invent him, turning the real into an ornament of his elaborate fantasy--just as his greatest invention, Don Quixote, does.

The Separated Self

Their insane perspectives make Kinbote and Quixote double characters. The bifurcation of original identity and adopted persona is reflected in such aspects as plot and characterization, in the very format of the novels they inhabit.¹²² I have been maintaining that their literary milieus seem to be modelled on the minds of the protagonists. Without the division between Kinbote and

properties transcending the inanimate, that Part Two, the book itself, should have a double, that it too should be subject to enchantment.

¹²²

The two parts of *Don Quixote* were separated by more than ten years. They have assimilated each other, so to speak; one always considers them together. But Cervantes makes us attend to the gap between them, not only with the protocol of prologues and Bookseller's statements existing in Part Two, but with the bizarre time continuum between parts. This gap corresponds in a very general way with that between "Pale Fire" and Kinbote's commentary to it in Nabokov's novel.

Botkin (or some other anonymous, original identity), there could really be no Zembla and New Wye. The Zembla of Kinbote's imagination is a complex stew of fantasy, myth, literature and political naivete, but to a great extent it is the imaginative, ideal version of plain old New Wye. They are doubles because Kinbote has separated the Botkin and the King Charles principles, according them each a home, a layer of reality. Our seeing through his tactic grants us vision into a psyche that irremediably confuses the real and the imaginary. For us as for him, Zembla and New Wye are the same place. Living two lives at once, he naturally peoples his illusion with doubles and resemblers.

If we apply to *Pale Fire* the paradigm I have been investigating in *Don Quixote* (Riley's model of enchantment as the real enforced upon the ideal), we would call New Wye an *enchanted Zembla*. The mythic country is the eccentrically Platonic ideal of what must be a single reality. New Wye in turn is that ideal subverted, reduced to its empiric parts. This is true for all the dualities we find in Nabokov's novel: Gerald Emerald is an enchanted Izumrudov, the drab, best-seller-reading teacher¹²³ of Freshman English substituting for the dashing traitor.

¹²³

As such Gerald Emerald in his green blazer is more than just a coincidental echo of the equally uninspiring Knight of the Green Jacket, Don Diego de Miranda.

Sybil is an enchanted Disa; the Goldsworth cat an enchanted Fleur; the list could go on.

There is no Zemblan representative of John Shade, but the description Kinbote gives of his poet in the Foreword may remind us of something:

His whole being constituted a mask. John Shade's physical appearance was so little in keeping with the harmonies hiving in the man, that one felt inclined to dismiss it as a coarse disguise or passing fashion; for if the fashions of the Romantic Age subtilized a poet's manliness by baring his attractive neck, pruning his profile and reflecting a mountain lake in his oval gaze, present-day bards, owing perhaps to better opportunities of aging, look like gorillas or vultures. My sublime neighbor's face had something about it that might have appealed to the eye, had it only been leonine or only Iroquoian; but unfortunately, by combining the two it merely reminded one of a fleshy Hogarthian tippler of indeterminate sex. His misshapen body, that gray mop of abundant hair, the yellow nails of his pudgy fingers, the bags under his lusterless eyes, were only intelligible if regarded as the waste products eliminated from his intrinsic self by the same forces of perfection which purified and chiseled his verse. He was his own cancellation (p.26).

The Byronic manliness captured in a locket cameo, the Hogarthian ugliness, the subtilization of the ideal essence into a grotesque image--all this is somehow very quixotic. John Shade is dressed up to be a double creature, the sublime trapped inside the ugly, yet transcending it somehow by connecting with an artistic ideal. He is an enchanted Dulcinea, Kinbote's unreachable object of romantic desire, his Platonic ideal love and

personification of the sublime.¹²⁴ And as Dulcinea is for Don Quixote, Shade is a psychic reflection of Kinbote's own image of himself. Obviously Shade's role in Kinbote's scheme is not limited to such a symbolic accumulation; Shade has more in common with the Quixotic sage recorder, as I have said. He is Kinbote's conjurer, the writer as enchanter who can make his delusion real by making it a work of art. Yet Shade's dual nature (he might have seemed to be the only character in *Pale Fire* not dichotomized) helps to underscore Kinbote's basically quixotic apprehension of the world. Having separated from, but not divorced, his original self, he creates a world of conflicting halves.

Unwittingly, Kinbote has also created an enchanted double of himself in Gradus, the unthinking follower of

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Curiously, Quixote's famous uncertainty about Dulcinea ("God knows whether there is any Dulcinea or not in the world or whether she is imaginary or not imaginary" [II:32:606]) could easily be applied to the dubious question of whether Kinbote or Shade is the "real" author of the poem and commentary in *Pale Fire*. If Kinbote is the ur-author, if he invented Shade, we might see the connection to Quixote and Dulcinea very plainly. But we need not make fruitless speculations. Within their literary milieus there is a real Aldonza Lorenzo and a quixotic Dulcinea, a real John shade and a Shade that is wholly Kinbote's invention. The former wrote "*Pale Fire*," a poem we know to be empty of reference to Kinbote; the latter was Kinbote's devoted friend and defender, his bard--the writer of *Kinbote's "Pale Fire*," (the "Solus Rex" of his imagination), the poem that is about him.

party dogma. The paradigm in which the individuality of the Charles principle resists the anonymity of Gradus again imitates Quixote's paradigm of the enchanted Dulcinea. Both indicate the tension in the psyche of the subject between the idealistic imagination and the evidence of the senses, the empiric world with its humiliations and death. We could keep creating lists, cross-referencing the novels. Surely there is more than a coincidental parallel between the imaginary queens Disa and Dulcinea (even in their names). In his Cave of Montesinos dream, Quixote cannot help his lady, coming up short of change when she asks him for a loan (II:23). We know about Kinbote's inability to help the dream Disa. In *his* dream, Dulcinea, retaining her state of enchantment, reflects Quixote's own psychic turmoil about his identity; I have argued that Disa is a collection of Kinbote's own anxieties about disease and death. They are both allegorical re-configurations borrowed from real-life (from Sybil Shade and Aldonza Lorenzo), love objects devoid of sexual interest--nightmares and perpetual enemies, but foundations upon which to build edifices of emotion (or at least emotionality) in their fantasy worlds.

Kinbote would hold that "Pale Fire," far from being devoid of his Zemblan tale is really, and merely, an enchanted version of it. This is important in understanding Kinbote's very reason for conducting his commentary.

Quixote attests that Mambrino's helmet appears to be a barber's basin to those whom it has not been given to see the truth; Kinbote attests that "Pale Fire" really is a poem about the lost king of Zembla.¹²⁵ His commentary attempts to close the gap, to make his readers see the real poem masquerading as an uninterested piece of autobiography, to see the helmet in the basin. As readers we must contend with two poems called "Pale Fire"-- Shade's and Kinbote's. The full experience of the novel lies in our mediating between these conflicting versions and finding a third way, just as we must find the third way between the knight's idealistic version and Cide's empiric testimony in *Don Quixote*.

II

The double existence then is the single truth for Quixote and Kinbote. It must be; how else are they to sustain their fantasies in the more lucid moments to which each is subject? Kinbote must keep Botkin hanging around the fringes as a secondary character. If he does not, he is likely to realize that he *is* Botkin, and the whole fragile

¹²⁵

I suggested in the last chapter that this is probably the strongest similarity between the two characters, just as it is the foundational characteristic of their personalities. Each believes that only he has access to a higher truth, an essence that has been disguised in a degraded, corporeal form.

construction will collapse, leaving nothing but the reality of his degeneration and impending death. Quixote's case is slightly different. We accompany him as he moves through his world (by the time we come to Kinbote, on the other hand, he has already ordered his world as well as he can and relates all in the past tense), allowing us to see him transform it as he goes. His double vision is a bit more solid than Kinbote's, and of course it is more spontaneous.

Readers have pondered his behavior at Maese Pedro's puppet show (II:26) since the book was published. How could he be so lucid about the performance as to correct the young narrator about the existence of bells in minarets and then, thinking that an army of Moors is really pursuing Don Gaiferos and Melisendra, smash the whole set to pieces the next moment? Alter suggests that he "polarizes within himself opposing attitudes toward fictions which most of us hold in suspension," that such "consciousness darts from pole to pole" (Alter, 14). Citing Johann Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* ("the contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid"), Riley proposes that Quixote is like a child at play, capable of engaging fully in the game, believing, while knowing it is false (Riley [1986], 54). I would contend that Quixote's action is entirely consistent with the quixotic double vision. The thought that criticizes has nothing to do with the thought that propels him into

action. The desire to apprehend a correct performance does not disappear simply because Quixote enters that performance. I would not say that he polarizes the two urges, as that connotates a conscious relationship. They simply have nothing to do with each other at this moment. Quixote's personality contains both, just as he sees a world divided into a double reality (though the two concepts are not in competition with each other as is usually the case).

Cervantes cleverly evokes this double reality by juxtaposing what we hear with what Quixote hears. We can only "hear" the voice of the boy narrating the puppet show. Obviously Quixote hears it too, based on his correction of the story. But when it comes to the description of the chase, Cervantes (or Cide) gives us this: "Don Quixote...hearing such a din, thought it was time to aid the fugitives, and up he stood (II:26:573)." We never heard the din. Quixote hears it just as loudly as he hears the boy's voice (he quite possibly heard the bells ringing too until he realized they did not belong there). He hears both, responding to one when it offends one sensibility, responding to the other when it offends another.¹²⁶ He does

¹²⁶

Thinking about Quixote's separate responses to the narrator's voice and to the action he perceives unfolding before him might lead us to remember that Quixote is very

not lose one for the other; he experiences both, just as he experiences both a windmill and a giant, a helmet and a barber's basin, and in the larger scheme of things, the adventures of a knight errant and the mishaps of a deluded man in contemporary Spain.

Only in the double vision of the madman is it possible that a life could become a work of art, or that a work of art could contain the essence of life in any other than metaphorical terms. As is the case with Kinbote, occasional lucidity always threatens to make the vision singular; this would be the destruction of the ideal.¹²⁷ Both characters employ elaborate defenses to keep singularity at bay. As I have stated, the real threat for Quixote in Part Two is

likely always hearing some kind of voice narrating in his mind the events in the life of the knight he believes himself to be.

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A Quixote, or a Kinbote, totally insane would be without interest as a novel's protagonist; insanity must be tempered by lucidity. Quixote is always showing some signs of both. We catch both characters in the process of trying to realize their ideals, the sane and insane principles in conflict. Yet each novel ends with the double vision reverting into the single. The death of Quixote occurs before Quixano dies, when he wakes from his fever and realizes that he is not a knight anymore; having turned towards sanity, he is dead as a character and might just as well die in the flesh (the return of Quixano represents the ultimate, unassailable enchantment of Quixote). Kinbote goes the other way. At the end of his novel he is about to slip completely into insanity; whether he commits suicide or not, he is lost to us as a character. The Botkin principle does not overcome the Charles principle; both slip into nothingness.

that his being monumentalized as a knight errant will rob him of an identity founded on opposition and transformation. In a sense "becoming" Don Quixote is the worst thing that can happen to him. The disenchantment of Dulcinea in Part Two gives him purpose, a new direction towards the old *raison d'être*, the assertion of an identity. It basically substitutes for Part One's quest (already realized in Part Two) of making the world accept this knight called Don Quixote.

After Quixote's challenge of the disinterested lion, Diego de Miranda comes to the following unspoken assessment of Don Quixote (Cide does not mind occasionally entering a character's thoughts): "He was a man of good sense who had gone mad and a madman on the verge of rationality" (II:17:517). This seems to be the consensus among all characters. On the border between rationality and madness, Quixote might be either at anytime; indeed, though they are ostensibly opposite qualities, Don Quixote often seems to be both mad and rational at the same moment. This essay has tried to show that such is the essence of quixotism; this double quality pervades all parts of his life and his fantasy as well. It is there in the name he gives himself which looks forward to the knight he is trying to become and backward to the hidalgo he was, there in his greatest creation, Dulcinea, whose very existence he questions (in

the castle of the Duke and Duchess) as he fervently believes in the absurd conditions of her disenchantment.

The liminality Don Diego recognizes (Ortega calls it Quixote's "frontier nature" [Ortega, 136]) is not limited to the state of his mind; Quixote's double nature has him perpetually testing the borders between reality and fiction. Don Quixote desires to become the subject of an epic. He becomes the subject of a novel. Kinbote, desiring to become the subject of a poem becomes the subject of a novel. One gets the feeling that their authors respond to their desires (albeit in unpredictable ways) because Quixote and Kinbote are so responsive to the idea of being authored. In what has by now become a famous question with a more famous answer, Borges writes:

Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the *Quixote* and Hamlet a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious.¹²⁸

Whether we do or not, I would suggest that Kinbote and Quixote are exactly the sort to feel such disturbance. Their involvement with literature and their madness compel them towards Borges' suggestion as the foundation of their

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From "Partial Magic in the *Quixote*" in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*. Ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964, 196). Quixote is, of course, not a reader of the *Quixote*.

identity.

The novel is the most psychological of all the literary genres. The self-conscious literary tendencies of both Nabokov and Cervantes are methods of exploring the psychology of these literate madman. The experiments with narrative are emblems of the way Quixote's and Kinbote's minds work, as though we readers had entered the discourses inside their heads. Quixote suspects that a sage is writing about him. We get to read that writing. Kinbote believes a poet is writing about him. We get to read the poem. That the work of the sage and of the poet does not match with the expectations of the protagonists does not matter all that much; the very fact that these narratives exist tells us that Nabokov and Cervantes are sending us inside the mental discourse of those protagonists. The tension between the stories they wanted told and the ones that actually are told represents the tension the characters feel between their madness and what remains of their more lucid selves. The novels' experimentiveness reflects the instability of their protagonists' originating identity, their self-consciousness ascending out of Quixote's and Kinbote's literary urges. Again, it might be best to think of the characters themselves as self-conscious authors of their own lives, though they see themselves as author, character and reader.

The transformation Kinbote is seeking goes beyond the largely imaginary figure of King Charles of Zembla. He seeks to gain control over the vagaries of a life which disease is about to render incoherent by turning it into a reading. We are not so sure if there is a root cause for Quixote's madness. Perhaps his brain really did shrivel up; yet there is certainly no reason to doubt his madness. Judging by the enjoyment he gets in so many of his adventures, at least in Part One, we might conclude that being Don Quixote acting is just more fun than being Alonso Quixano reading. If Kinbote is trying to turn his life into a reading, Quixote is trying to bring his reading to life.

The books they appear in (*Don Quixote* and *Pale Fire* by, respectively, Cervantes and Nabokov, as opposed to *Don Quixote* by Cide Hamete Benengali or by an unnamed enchanter and "Pale Fire" by John Shade) explore their minds as they are emblems of them. Nabokov and Cervantes delve deep into the psyche as good novelists should, bringing up stories. We have all found ourselves at some point conducting narratives of our own lives to ourselves; this is a way of making sense of a life to which we understandably attach such monumental importance. We want our lives to at least cast the impression of being coherent, if not planned. We tell ourselves the story of our self every day as a way to shut out the suspicion that all is chaos. This is certainly

what John Shade's poem is about, as every autobiographical work is to some extent. Kinbote and Quixote do not differ much from us except that, having lost the handle of reason, the stories they tell of themselves, to themselves, are only tangentially attached to reality. They are more firmly attached to other stories, to the world of literature. And once set into motion, they are beyond their control; they become different, coincidental selves, enchanted doubles authored by people, Cervantes and Nabokov, about whom they could never have dreamed.

CHAPTER 6: THE CERVANTIC NARRATIVE PARADIGM

Introduction

There can be little doubt that Nabokov had *Don Quixote* in mind when he wrote *Pale Fire*. But so what? Nabokov constantly used famous literature as "raw material"; a reference might serve a simple "in-joke" (*Lolita* is full of them), or an entire novel might be

written as though out of the template of another work (*Ada* has this relationship with *Anna Karenina*, as though it were the Anti-Terran version of Tolstoy's novel). The difference in *Pale Fire* is that the Cervantic ghost is almost silent. There is no joke, no self-conscious call to the reader to see how clever the author can be (Gerald Emerald and Kinbote's disease are very faint trail markers). The *Quixote* is fundamental to *Pale Fire* but not conspicuous in it.

I believe this has to do with the genre itself. Cervantes has been credited with inventing the novel; there can be little dispute that his influence on the form has been greater than that of any other writer to our own time--a time, many have concluded, witnessed to the "death of the novel." I am not ready to close the coffin yet, but the past fifty years has been a time of great flux in the genre. If the novel can be said to have died, the "cause of death" would have to be self-examination to a point where the conventions of the genre have become its subject matter. The *mise en abyme* is no longer the tool but the project. At the moment of this writing, postmodernism, the latest and most self-dissecting movement in the novel, seems about ready to die with the century that gave it birth.

Where the genre will go next is anybody's guess. There

is some evidence of moribundity. More people write novels today than at any other time, but there is not an authentic avant-garde; our best novelists seem content to revisit the form's sub-genres in a winking self-consciousness. They are writing quasi-historical novels, quasi-mysteries, quasi-gothics. They do so as if announcing they know one cannot write *within* the conventions anymore without also announcing they know the conventions have been debunked by analysis. All this announcing is rather stultifying. Awareness of self-awareness produces awkward art. No wonder the fictionalized memoir has become the form *du jour*; it is easier to embellish something "real" than to pretend to pretend to invent a fiction.¹²⁹

Pale Fire, the ultimate "mirror-novel," has been credited with influencing postmodernism, yet it is not really a postmodern novel. With Nabokov one gets the feeling that he is writing "in" the genre--from within the modernist culture--even as he stretches its conventions or parodies them. There is certainly the quality of a game to his novels, but the game has rules set by the genre itself,

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As long as I am making pronouncements: A similar strangulation by self-consciousness is happening in many of the other arts, particularly the visual arts (painting, sculpture, film; figurative, representational, abstract, "conceptual") and art music.

whereas many novels it influenced tend to discard all rules in favor of a less consequential if more overt aura of game playing. As steeped as he was in the tradition of the novel, it would be no wonder if Nabokov saw himself as writing at the end of it; indeed, it might be surprising if he did not. I suspect this is the reason why *Pale Fire* is so much like *Don Quixote*. At the end of the tradition he returns to its beginning, to present again the story of the madman turning his reading into living, creating himself out of the text he reads.

Pale Fire is less a modern version of *Don Quixote*, then, than a kind of recapitulation of the genre of the novel, a recapitulation (as emulation) of what began it. I am trying to suggest a fairly simple model of *Don Quixote* and *Pale Fire* standing like bookends at the beginning and the end of the novelistic tradition. Cervantes may not have known he was initiating a new form; Nabokov may have wished to deny (at least publicly) that the form he was writing in was so influenced by an author he did not particularly like. Yet the former most definitely established a tradition to which the latter may have been the last great exponent. In *Pale Fire* Nabokov recapitulates the Cervantic revolution in narrative structure--a revolution without which Nabokov's novels could not have come to be. And while

it is too much to say that the novel officially ceased to be in 1962, the subsequent history of the novel has shown us that somewhere around there, the Cervantic narrative mode ceased to be the standard for novelistic practice. *Pale Fire* may prove itself to be as much a beginning to the next spiral, but here I am concerned with the way it rounds out the Cervantic tradition.

The Cervantic Tradition

First I had better say what I take that tradition to be. Diverse Cases have been made for ways that Cervantes invented the novel: He employed realism as a workable technique; he wrote a heroic adventure about a common man; he gave us a character's full psychological profile; he wove together the threads of many other established genres; he drew the reader's attention to his role as author; he catered directly to a middle class audience newly made accessible by the advent of printing. All true, or relatively true. To my eyes, Cervantes' great invention was the novelistic narrator. Giving us Cide Hamete Benengali, the first truly unreliable narrator, he created a discourse between author and reader based on uncertainty. This discourse did not exist in such a way before *Don Quixote*, but it has been at the heart of the novel ever since.

Cide begins as a bald parody of the conventional narrator of romance fictions; by Part Two he becomes a more complex figure, a kind of anti-narrator, a parody not just of that limited genre, but of larger, more established conventions. In his inconsistencies, and in the fullness of character to which inconsistency is only a contributor, Cide is the anti-type of the contemporaneous narrator, the conventional narrator, who in turn exemplifies the type of the Homeric narrator.

The Homeric narrator is an anonymous conduit for divine revelation. Until Cervantes this was the general model for narrators. Readers had no reason to offer too much scrutiny to their narratives because their position in relation to the story was never in question. They were accepted as repositories of the story. Certainly there are some exceptions, and obviously the rules are different for first-person narratives like *The Satyricon* or *Lazarillo de Tormes*; but a disembodied Homeric narrator would be absurd in the first-person. Yet even in such first-person narratives readers likewise had no reason to question the narrators' sincerity; they were "writing" their own lives, after all. The first narrator in the *Quixote* is a figure of the convention that Homer established. But at that famous moment when the manuscript is cut off during the battle

with the Biscayan everything changes. The narrator stops being the authority and repository of the story. He is conspicuously recast as just another reader seeking the story--as one of us. While some authority is reestablished in Cide, it is dubious from the start; a Moor, he is of a race "known" to be liars. The numerous layers of remove--the first narrator's inability to read the manuscript, the necessity of the interpreter, etc.--strengthen the contrast between Cide and the Homeric narrator who is immediate and present, uncoverable by language difference or change of place. By the end of the novel we are questioning even what slight authority Cide had achieved because he is at once deaf to the subtleties of the story and too possessive of it. He is in turns over-laudatory of his subject, over-suspicious, over-credulous, over-severe. He has lapses and he takes liberties (for example, "The Ill-advised Curiosity"). It is also apparent from the beginning that there are traditions of the Quixote story other than Cide's.

I have been arguing that Cide's problematic position to his narrative mimics Quixote's lack of correct distance to his reading. Cide's obsessiveness feels like an extension of Quixote's mania. Cervantes' narrative strategy seems inspired; this indeed may be the most "correct" way

of telling the story about the madman who loses his sense of discreteness to the books he reads and in turn tries to transform his life into a book. And Cide's narrative fallibility keeps reminding us that Don Quixote is writing a narrative of his own by acting. Every action is a literary gesture, a piece of the life he is writing. Thus, again, the *Quixote* is a clash between competing narratives, Quixote's and Cide's. There is no winner. Where Quixote elides the facts, Cide misses the meaning of the events occurring in the plot; neither has access to the "true" story.

Thus is foregrounded a disjunction between what we would call the "real story" and a narrator's representation or version of it. Quixote is living a version, Cide is writing a different version. As readers we must confront this disunity. The Homeric paradigm no longer attains; the narrator, no longer inseparable from the truth, is a method of access to the "real story" only and not the repository. That access can only be partial, and there is no telling how corrupt it might be. An obvious Platonic paradigm displays itself: There is a pure, "essential" story, and there is the corrupt version of it we locate in a narrative. Before Cervantes we never needed to question the narrative about the essential story, what we might call,

for lack of a better term, the "ur-story." We do not wonder if the Homeric narrator is telling us what is not true. His invocation of the gods and the muses at the beginning tells us the poem is fundamentally a divine emanation; there is no question that the poem and the ur-story are one and the same. Thus readers have never had the need of such a concept as the ur-story.

But from the clash of corrupt versions between Cide and Quixote we realize that we are indeed looking for a "true" version, and that, obviously, it is not available. This expectation of disunity, this paradigm of the ur-story and the narrative is what makes the novel the genre it is. Cervantes seems to sense this and apply the Platonic distinction I am suggesting to the plot. Quixote, by trying to turn his life into literature, is pursuing an ideal at the expense of reality. The perceptible world holds no command of truth; it is merely the visible representative of a disguised essence. In the way that he seeks the essential truth *beneath* things, Quixote is trying to discern the ur-story of himself; of course this means that despite the pretence of living up to the "script" that his sage enchanter has written for him, Quixote is really writing himself an ur-story.

Cide reports the facts only. It is worth noting that

in most of Quixote's mishaps Cide only tells what happened on the empirical plane, leaving Quixote to tell us (in dialogue, bounced off his sounding board Sancho Panza) what it was he, Quixote, believes to have occurred. Cervantes keeps the two viewpoints separate and rarely allots Cide the ascendancy that the reader almost naturally grants him (unconsciously) because his story is more "believable." Thus Cide's empiricism is continually placed against Quixote's idealistic essentialism. And while we tend to believe Cide, we also know that *Don Quixote* is more than a book about a man who keeps getting knocked off his horse. It is because of this disjunction between what Cide reports and what Quixote lives in his mind that we keep returning to the book. It is a dialogue in which the reader is a mediator, and it has been at the very basis of novelistic narrative technique ever since, not because characters are always at war with their narrators, but because, from *Don Quixote* onward, the narrative is to be viewed, must be viewed, as something different from the ur-story.

The schism between narrative and ur-story has been a liberating paradigm for most great novelists. Narrative is no longer simply a descriptive function; it is a generative function, a space in which to create literature rather than merely a vehicle for doing so--a Cave of Montesinos. Each

novelist will do something different with the uneasy relationship between the narrative and the ur-story. Many unimaginative or conventional ones will see it as a burden, but they find themselves addressing the dislocation no less than those freed by it. The length to which even the most conventional novelists strive to make their narrative plausible is evidence of this. This is not the case with first-person narratives only; there is a rather rigid plausibility factor in third person narratives as well. We expect even unidentifiable third-person narrators not to be entirely omniscient. The Homeric narrator might have access to the minds of Ajax and Achilles and Zeus and Athena all at the one time, but we, perhaps unconsciously, find that kind of thing jarring in a novel. Much of this has to do with the fact that we cling to the idea of a single voice telling us the story even when there is no single identity attached to it. This has not changed since the time of pre-Cervantic literature. What has changed is that we do not want that single voice to have all the answers. It is inappropriate, alien to our literary desire. We expect the narrative to be no more than a version of a "true story" that we really have no need to look for. Versionists cannot pretend to know it all. I submit that Cervantes starts all this with *Don Quixote*.

If Cide's irregularities as a narrator are an extension of the quixotic view of the world, then the origin of this phenomenon must lie in Quixote himself. It is Quixote's relationship to the "real" that actually typifies the narrative dichotomy. Cide may be a literary representative of the real, but he is not the ultimate enemy. To Quixote facts are enchantment, the observable world is an illusion. His dislocation with that world, with "reality," embodies the disunity between the ur-story and the narrative that will become the hallmark of novelistic narrative style. Quixote, roaming Spain, converting the real into the elements of his delusion, narrating the tale of himself--making himself a literary artifact in place of a human being--is the very figure of the Cervantic revolution that will result in the modern novel.

Because the novelistic discourse mimics the discourse of insanity, the only thing left to do it seems is conclude that the novel is created out of a madman's perception of the world. Novelistic narrative is a manipulation of things as they really happened, an alteration conforming to an individual perspective. (In this paradigm we readers agree to accept, on the imaginative level, that the events depicted in the novel exist somewhere in a pure state, that there is a truth behind the version of the action we read.

This is something different from the extra-textual conclusions we allow ourselves to reach concerning authorial intention. I am not talking about messages or strategies or author-sanctioned plot scenarios; any narrative *qua* narrative is a version of an assumed ur-story that is only one aspect of the larger world of the piece of literature.)

Each of us views the world subjectively; it cannot be said authoritatively that one's version is more correct than that of someone else. But the madman's very identity is tangled up with his subjective vision. We measure madness by the distance between one's conception of the world and what we take to be the current standard of normality. In a sense that is also what we do when we read novels. But we are judging the narrator's conception of a story to which we have no other access; we are held captive to the narrator's voice, but we are free to try to "hear" through it. This freedom is a necessity in much of modern fiction because the art is somewhere in between what is written and what the writing is meant to depict. As we try to go beneath the surface of the narrative we realize that what we are trying to get to is some essential, monadic truth. Objectively, we know that this too is a mere phantom, the invention of the author whom we read, but in

reading we enter into a contract to accept this indivisible truth as we scrutinize what is written.

Ironically, the sort of reading I am talking about is exactly what Don Quixote is incapable of. He is the reader of Homeric narratives taken to the absolute extreme, unable to maintain distance from the text, accepting all it represents without question. In his debate with the Canon about the merits of romance fiction Quixote takes the part of readers everywhere who want to lose themselves in what they read. He insists that a thing which meets with universal approbation, which creates so much pleasure in all who read it, cannot be untrue. We readers now prefer untruth. We read looking for what is not true. This is not to say that Quixote fully represents the pre-Cervantic reader. But he is that reader made extreme by insanity. In a figurative sense *Don Quixote* creates a new genre by calling to task the old reader. Cide Hamete Benengali styles himself the old author (all knowing, possessive, irremovable), but he is really the new narrator, the novelistic narrator--fallible, remote, personal. The *Quixote*, posing as a conglomeration of old genres, is the figurehead for the new: the modern novel.

II

In the contract between readers and novels, readers

agree to accept the narrative voice. We are suspicious of it, but in our attention we grant it an existence that mimics the Homeric narrator's omnipotence. To simplify matters we might say that we simply agree to listen; but this involves playing along with the narrative. In order to get to the story we have to accept the narrator's presentation of it even as we hold it up to scrutiny. Again, our scrutiny makes us aware of our doubled position towards the narrator, making us further aware that we are seeking a "true" story beneath what the narrator is telling us. This contract is basically a discourse between narrator and reader; the novel as a genre depends on this discourse and is defined by it. Certainly there is nothing like it in any other genre. Many plays use narrators to move the action along (*Our Town*, *The Glass Menagerie*, or, a contemporary example, *Wit*, come immediately to mind) or to allow us the kind of access into the minds of a character that the soliloquy used to bestow. While this has become a homogeneous dramatic technique, it began as an experiment derived from novels.

We might think for a moment of the novelistic narrator's relationship to the "story" itself. The narrator is basically a reader of the story as are we, but the first reader. Before presenting her version of the events to us

she had to consider what they were. She has to "read" the story. Even those narrators we do not consider to be "unreliable"--say the narrator of Dickens' novella *A Christmas Carol*, to choose one at random, that anonymous voice of authority guaranteeing us that Marley was dead, that the events of that Christmas Eve occurred as reported (whether Scrooge was dreaming or not)--are seen to be relating a story, ordering it, perhaps transforming it. These narrators become personalized as far as they can by fulfilling this function. And, again, whether or not we are suspicious of them, the contract we engage with them makes them our allies, until we feel as though we are uncovering the story together, almost as fellow readers.

Yet when we agree to join them, we must realize that we are accepting a paradigmatic construction. The narrator's tale is a version of the ur-story, and that version is itself part of a larger scheme, a *manner* of thinking. Talented novelists give us narrators whose versions of the story hint at their larger position in relation to "things" in general. One can tell much about the life beyond the story simply in the way the story is told. Thus when we agree to walk a ways with a narrator of a novel we enter into an entire system with the story as the apparatus for entry.

This brings us back to Don Quixote. No one in the history of world literature is more a slave to paradigmatic thinking than he. In "real life" there are no more hopelessly paradigmatic thinkers than the insane. We think of their disease as resulting from an inability to escape from arbitrary, incorrect, but not necessarily incoherent paradigms (if we are more gracious we might allow that they are merely detached from our paradigm). None of this may be true; there is certainly no homogeneity about the "insane." As a group designation that term is meaningless; there are multitudes of mental abnormalities having little to do with each other, sharing in common only the fact that we define them at *this time* as abnormalities. Nevertheless, for the purpose of literary criticism, I think it is acceptable to draw parallels between madness and the inability to escape from paradigmatic thinking. By extension it is arguable that the paradigmatic position narrators take to the raw material of their narratives, to the ur-story, is analogous to the paradigmatic perspective the insane have of the "real" world. Quixote is that madman, the insane reader who sees books as real and tries to make the real conform to a narrative circling around his obsession.

The novelistic narrator is someone so obsessed with a story that he cannot contain his understanding of it. The

creation of each individual novel is in a sense the product of a narrator's not being able to control his obsession, of his having to manifest it in words, to bring it to life. Again, this is the quixotic paradigm. The reader brings the reading to life--not as "life" itself, but as a parallel function, a double. Quixano becomes his double, Quixote, just as Quixote's version of his life is a vague double of Cide's more reliable version of it, as Cide's version is a flawed double of what the text assures us exists, the extant Quixote legend.¹³⁰

The ready symbol of this activity is the mirror. Quixote's version reflects what is really occurring; Cide's reflects Quixote's, etc. I prefer the image of the palimpsest. To Quixote the ideal is written *under* the perceivable events of the "real world." He sees those events, but the significance is elsewhere. He is reading a story of his own to which reality is only a mask, a top layer. The world may see a barber's basin, but Quixote reads beneath the writing of the world to see (and relate) the story of Mambrino's helmet. So too we should see

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This gets even more complicated. In a sense there are really two Quixotes: the perfectly sane one conversant in so many topics, the one who can maintain proper critical distance to his reading on subjects other than tales of knights errant; and the one who loses himself completely in them.

Quixote's version as being the writing *beneath* Cide's version of the story of the mad hidalgo. A full appreciation of *Don Quixote*, a novel by Cervantes, depends on our ability to read more than one layer at a time. We must read both stories as though they occur at the *same* time, layers rather than mirrors.

We can carry this image into the genre at large. The narrative is the top layer of writing in the palimpsest. Whether we like it or not, Cervantes has trained us to read through this narrative to try to get at the "true story." I put these words "true" and "real" in quotation marks to heighten this sense of a contract between the reader and the book. We know that the reality of the work is purely a figment of the author's imagination; but within the world of the novel it is the "truth." As readers we must judge the length to which the narrator's version of the novel's events correspond to that truth. As novelists explored the great freedom created in a paradigm where narrative is separable from the "story," we readers found ourselves having to measure the gap between the two elements as though the ur-story were indeed a quantifiable element. And so Cervantes created the novel by creating and foregrounding the narrative as palimpsest.

III

What follows the *Quixote* deserves a look--albeit a mightily circumscribed look. Before returning to *Pale Fire*, I would like to discuss the way the Cervantic narrative paradigm has influenced the novel in English. I will look briefly at some milestones in the tradition, working towards Nabokov. Presented with the Cervantic paradigm some authors find freedom in the schism between the narrative and the story. Others distrust it. The issue of plausibility enters into the novelistic discourse right from the start. Now Cide is certainly not a plausible narrator, nor is there anything plausible about the fictive circumstances surrounding the Cide "manuscript." Yet Cervantes' influence can be measured in the desire of authors to make their narrators as plausible as possible. This was rarely an issue in pre-Cervantic literature.

Newly aware that narrators may not be faultless media for the "true" story, readers naturally find themselves questioning narrators' positions. How do they come to know the facts? What are their interests, their prejudices, their partialities? The advent of the first-person narrative as a truly fictive form seems to result directly out of the Cervantic fissure. Those authors who would rather not explore their new freedom too deeply gravitate toward straight-forward, un-problematic first-person

narratives as the best way to return to the pre-Cervantic condition. If the first-person narrator has sound credentials we readers are less likely to question the story she relates, less likely to try reading the lower layer of the palimpsest. Other authors embrace the freedom, seeing in the dislocation between version and ur-story a vast area for expression. Two foundational works in the English novel, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels*, exemplify the two poles. The novels share many similar features of plot and theme; Swift's *Gulliver* is at least partially a parody of Defoe's novel.

Defoe and Swift

At the beginning of his narrative *Robinson Crusoe* casts himself as a modern prodigal son chastened of his heedless yearnings by a suffering more in line with Job. He has sinned and he knows it; by "coming clean," Crusoe establishes his credentials for reliability. We need not judge him since he is clearly able to judge himself. At least that's the idea. One is also struck by the meticulousness of the narrative. Seemingly no detail is uncatalogued. We learn about his cave, his barley, his goats, his money, his garden--perhaps more than we wanted to know. This rigor is another strut in the edifice of

plausibility. The volume of his recall makes him seem more reliable. His journal reinforces this reliability, which is to say that it offers us a credible solution to how he could have remembered all of this in the first place. It brings an immediacy to his authority and a quickness to the story. It reports the facts without being occluded or fortified by narrativistic rhetoric, by dilation or transition.

Yet despite the precision of his narrative, Crusoe never really describes anything in a fashion meant to convey an image. We know *about* his island but we do not see it very clearly. Indeed, we might say that we only know Crusoe's image of the island as a locus of his shifting mental state. It changes from the threatening wilderness to his estate and his kingdom as Crusoe burgeons from frightened castaway into the "lord of the manor." We know Crusoe's barley and corn, but not the flora of the island because Crusoe's environment does not exist separately from his perception of it in his mind. Treated at first as a kind of dark continent, a mysterious, dangerous space, by the end of his narrative, the island has been colonized by Crusoe's assumptions. It is an objective correlative of Crusoe's shifting self, but it is also a kind of stand-in for the story in our Cervantic paradigm. As Crusoe

colonizes his island, his narrative tries to colonize the ur-story of the shipwrecked man. He sets himself up as the confessional diarist and reporter of minutiae to close the gap between narrative and story with believability. If we are not careful we can find ourselves believing his absurd creation of the prodigal son come good, of the benign dispenser of justice to the savages, of the self-sufficient supplicant to the Almighty, of the Englishman maintaining perfect sobriety (with a few negligible bumps along the way) after twenty-six years in isolation.

We tend to read *Robinson Crusoe* today as a rather transparent piece of boosterism in the cause of eighteenth-century European colonization.¹³¹ At least I do. Post-colonialist criticism has taught us to look for ways that colonizers maintain hegemony by controlling intellectual discourses with their certainty in the rightness of their position of authority, and by setting up a symbolic code favoring that hegemony. This is all quite apparent in

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Outwitting Barbary Pirates, trading in slaves (the boy Xury who had helped him gain his freedom) and skins, setting himself up as a Brazilian tobacco farmer, Crusoe is the perfect figure of the European colonist, even *before* his shipwreck. Finding himself ill on his threatening island (before he fully takes possession of it in his mind), Crusoe fixes himself a remedy mixed of tobacco and rum. It cures him, a symbolic distillation that not even the most heavy-handed post-colonial polemicist would imbibe today.

Robinson Crusoe. Is Defoe supporting the colonialism or parodying it? For our purposes, it really does not matter. Defoe understands that to make Crusoe's crusade viable he must be believable as a narrator. In other words, he must be seen to be in full possession of the story; the gap between his version and the ur-story must be made as small as possible.

In few other novels is narrative plausibility made to carry such weight. It is for this reason primarily that *Robinson Crusoe* is often considered to be the first modern English novel. The depth of detail, the overtures to realism, the power of the single controlling subjectivity--all are undeniably typical of certain types of novelistic discourse, yet also (perhaps first) in support of a highly polemical discourse. To make his "argument" Defoe needs a narrator reminiscent of the omnipotent Homeric narrator, but he must make allowances for the Cervantic paradigm. Readers will no longer accept a narrator who takes his position of authority for granted. Crusoe is the new voice of narrative authority derived out of moral and empirical plausibility.

Gulliver is exactly the opposite. Where Crusoe forces us to accept his sincerity, Gulliver stretches our willingness to bestow credibility. He is in many ways a

parody of Crusoe. His pedantically pacing off the width of the royal ovens in Brobdignag is only one of many burlesques of Crusoe's pointless exactitude. Where Crusoe really sees nothing of the exotic locale, Gulliver sees too much. Crusoe stolidly maintains his sense of himself throughout the most absurd trials (it is worth noting that the sailor Selkirk, the real-life castaway on whose story *Robinson Crusoe* is assumed to be based, was found to be nearly mad and seriously bereft of his native language after a mere four years of isolation). The guiding factor of Gulliver's personality is that he *becomes* one of the inhabitants of the nations he visits to the point of adopting their most absurd conventions. Where Crusoe imprints himself on the environment, Gulliver is imprinted. We never know if there is a "real" Gulliver; from the time of his apprenticeship to Master Bates he is a mirror of those to whom he is exposed. The not very subtle name of his master reminds us that Gulliver is essentially a comic subject, the chameleon as Bergsonian automaton, continually trying on ever more outlandish guises.

Gulliver is the perfect vehicle for satire not because he is an overtly rigid comic figure, but because he is blind to his rigidity. He sees and he catalogues, but he does not understand anything. In this regard Gulliver is

very much like *Crusoe*; it is the cornerstone of the parody. But beneath *Crusoe's* narrative there is not the vast satirical apparatus we find in *Gulliver's Travels*. Gulliver does not see the shadow of Swift's commentary on Walpole's Government or on France or on the Royal Society or on England's policy toward Ireland beneath his own narrative. But we do, or we are supposed to. Gulliver's narrative is eminently transparent. In a sense, so is *Crusoe's*, but in *Robinson Crusoe* we are really not supposed to see through the tale of English pluck and grit to the sorry colonialist allegory--we come to recognize it ourselves. In *Gulliver's Travels* we must see all the layers to get the full story because these layers are what are being exposed.

In these two novels we have two very different narrative strategies, yet both are related to the Cervantic paradigm. Defoe positions his narrator very close to the ur-story; he is in full possession of it, a latter day Homeric narrator controlling his life without a moment's doubt. *Crusoe's* island only exists as a mirror for his personality; so too his narrative--the unfolding of a self never in doubt about its tale of transgression and redemption, of hard work and fortitude. Gulliver has something of this possessiveness about his story. He never doubts that he saw what he reports; yet at turns pedantic

or gullible, self-assured, idealistic, or slightly crazy, Gulliver gives us reason to doubt his command of himself (even if we are not in touch with the satirical level of the work). The concept of an ur-story to *Gulliver's Travels* is almost irrelevant; and though we do not search for the "true story," we understand from the start that there is no area of reliability. Not even taking into account the fantastic nature of the adventures, the narrative is rife with doubt, and it divides itself into layers of meaning which undercut any kind of narrative monumentality to which it obviously does not aspire anyway.

Both novels are part of the tradition of *Don Quixote* to the extent that they are interested in the individual mind in conflict with a new or a trying existence. They are studies in psychology, in the subjective apprehension of reality that involves a transformation of the self as it recasts its milieu to suit its subjective qualities. Yet *Robinson Crusoe* actively avoids exploiting that gap between narrative and story that *Don Quixote* created. It closes the gap in the only way the new paradigm seems to allow: the plausible first person narrative. *Gulliver's Travels* is *Robinson Crusoe* with the believability removed. Gulliver's story is more like the narrative you might get from someone who had really been stranded on an island for 26 years, a

complex, contradictory, delusional tale. Gulliver's reliability is compromised almost as much as is the plausibility of his adventures. In the gap created between his narrative and some ur-story that we cannot bother looking for is the true legacy of Cervantes, a vast field of possibility.

The history of the novel in English might be divided, with a great deal of snipping and squeezing, into these two camps: the Defoeian and the Swiftian. The latter is more naturally considered in accord with Cervantes, yet both owe their origins to the Cervantic paradigm either as reactions against it or as continuations of it.

Richardson and Fielding

One can see the division in a pair of immediate heirs, Richardson and Fielding. Richardson is a follower of Defoe. There is the minute, controlling subjectivity. Characters organize their lives by writing about them--in the form of letters. In *Clarissa* Richardson greatly diminishes the volume of those interregnum authorial comments which so interrupt the flow of *Pamela* (the dependence on Pamela's journal makes it very similar to *Crusoe*); and though its

scope of character viewpoints is much wider, its didactic purpose is equally solid. The epistolary form lends itself to didacticism, but it can also provide contradiction and complication. There is little of that in Richardson. We are never in doubt about what is going on. Our characters do not really try to occlude the story; they relate it freely and give their justification for the parts they take. We never doubt Pamela's or Clarissa's sincerity or their moral position. The same is true for all other characters--we have no need to look under Lovelace's "narrative" for motive (he announces quite early that he has it in for the "race" of women). In Richardson the multiple viewpoints really amount to a construction of a jigsaw puzzle--the final image, Richardson's moral, is never in doubt. As in *Robinson Crusoe*, the real issue is one of plausibility; we get a little glimpse of the story from a character who was herself *plausibly* in position to receive it. Eschewing the epistolary novel's potential for exploring the gap between narrative and story, Richardson uses the form to close the gap completely. He makes the author disappear because the author is superfluous; the discourse is discharged to characters who speak directly for him.

In Fielding the author occupies the prime position. The chapter introductions in *Tom Jones* draw attention to

Fielding as an author writing; it is the pose of the Homeric narrator with a difference. He is not omniscient, and neither is he really in command, or so it seems. He refers to other art forms, most notably the "pen of Hogarth," in attempting to describe characters or in abrogating the necessity for doing so. He builds analogic edifices for the novel--*Tom Jones* as an Epicurean feast for example--as though to help him in his task of telling this story. As in Cervantes there is a feeling that the author is working in a new form that yet seeks in old forms the means of getting started. The Cervantic influence is quite evident in other ways, most notably in the presence of this "author-type" who wants to control his story but worries about how to do so (this is lifted straight from Cervantes' first prologue). Plausibility in reportage is not an issue at all in *Tom Jones*, yet there is a palpable literary plausibility to which it aspires. The Fielding narrator may call attention to himself as the master of his tale in numerous ways, but the pose of the experienced artificer working in a new form is consistent. We never allow ourselves to go searching for the "true" story beneath the narrative version because it is always part of the Fielding narrator's pose that he is making the story up. He is not writing as another Cide but as a Cervantes immanent in his

own creation.

Fielding's approach is very much a reaction against Richardson. He attacks the latter's attempt to make such outrageous events (and the plot of *Clarissa* is far more absurd than that of *Tom Jones*) plausible--true events dedicated to paper by real people. Yet he does not really exploit the flexibility of the Cervantic paradigm even though he obviously senses what it is. Fielding's self-consciousness conflates narrative and story in ways that Cervantes does not. The gap is closed in *Tom Jones* not because of an attempt at plausibility but because the story is shown to be little more than a device. Fielding may share with us the difficulties a modern author must overcome (for instance that the nearest thing to a *deus ex machina* a modern author can use is a ghost), yet he never implies that the story exists as anything but his own invention, as anything, really, but an opportunity to practice his new art or to exercise his wit.

Richardson's subsuming the author and Fielding's foregrounding the author are opposing reactions to the Cervantic paradigm. The former, like Defoe, tries to bridge the gap between narrative and story by turning narrative over to those incorruptible sources of evidence, the journal and the private letter (they are incorruptible only

to the extent that they are "found" documents not written as novelistic narratives, whether or not they have narrativistic tendencies). The latter, indulging the self-consciousness of the Cervantic paradigm, actually subsumes the narrator. An author present in his work also compromises the gap because the illusion of the narrator in disjunction with the story he is supposed to be reporting is invalidated.

Mary Shelley and Emily Bronte

In the first half of the nineteenth century some authors began exploring a relatively new novelistic paradigm: the narrative conducted by a character not involved, or involved to a limited extent, in the action of the work. Two very interesting novels in this style are Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Each depends on multiple layers of narrative with one guiding voice serving as a kind of collator. At the plot's core in each work is an almost ineffable darkness: the well-known Faustian desire to create life in *Frankenstein*, the unholy union of the human passions of desire and revenge in *Wuthering Heights*. Both are studies in the psychology of one man. Victor Frankenstein tells his own story; Heathcliff does not. Yet Frankenstein's story is

filtered by his less audacious double, Robert Walton, the polar explorer. He may have one foot in the Frankenstein camp, but Walton is a logical, levelheaded man; he is the reader's representative. The formula is almost precisely that of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

Frankenstein is the marvelous wanderer offering a cautionary tale; Walton is the party guest who learns the quality of gravity. The story of the forbidden creation is an active agent largely responsible for Walton's giving up his quest. We are meant to see Walton as a sort of fellow traveller in the novel. He tells the story as though *working toward* it, attempting to understand it as his readers are receiving it (it is important that Walton does not know the full story or its outcome when he begins relating it in his letters to his sister). In this regard Frankenstein's tale is for Walton what the mysteries of generating life were for Frankenstein.

Frankenstein's seeing the world as a vast secret to be divined is analogous to the Cervantic narrative paradigm. Frankenstein seeks to put into practice what exists as an essence, just as Cide, or any post-Cervantic narrator, seeks to turn a putatively "real" event into words. As it is with Milton's Satan or P.B. Shelley's Prometheus, Frankenstein's sin is a sin against station. The sordidness

involved in his tinkering with life (we never get to learn anything about *how* it is done, only that it is a very unwholesome practice) is meant to be a clear mockery of the beautiful processes of nature. Indeed, it is Frankenstein's alleged love for beauty (a true romantic, he) which makes him turn his back on the ugly creation in one of the book's less believable (if thematically consistent) passages. It is hard to accept that Frankenstein would spend so many months at his self-reportedly disgusting work only to abandon it flatly at the precise moment it comes to its desired conclusion. Shouldn't it have been apparent all along, even before it opened its yellow eye, that the creature was ugly? We must conclude that it is the dislocation between the ideal and the actualization of it in any form that is so repulsive. In this sense Frankenstein is quixotic indeed. Yet he turns out to be a conventional Prometheus after all. The rest of the novel finds him trying either to return life to "normal" or to enact a very normal, human vengeance on the creature that has destroyed his life. Beginning as a revolutionary, Frankenstein ends up a reactionary, militating against the monster of his science--by extension, against what had been his guiding principle, the boundlessness of the human imagination. The scientist becomes a moralist.

For its obvious Romantic themes Shelley's novel is critical of Romanticism's tendency to idealization. The abhorrence Frankenstein feels for the creature reflects the rigidity of certain parts of the Romanticist esthetic, yet the creature develops into a strange sort of idealistic agent himself, the savage genius bred on wilderness, isolation and *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. He becomes the *naif* scientist determined to understand the world to which he has been abandoned while Frankenstein turns into the vengeful incubus. They exchange places but grow together as each heads north following the same ideal of mutual destruction. At first the Creature is a totem of Frankenstein's unnatural desires; along the way he becomes an ersatz Adam; by the end he is a kind of surrogate for nature, an avenging St. Michael casting Frankenstein, who styles *himself* a chastened Adam, out of the precincts of humankind.

It is critical that there should be a listener to all this. Note that Frankenstein's virtual last act is the correction of Walton's manuscript. Giving birth to the creature amounts to a birthing of the self as the subject of the Frankenstein "story," the re-visited cautionary tale of the Ancient Mariner. Frankenstein ends up a figure far larger than life (Walton's favorite epithet for him is

"noble creature") allegorized for being too human--the modern Prometheus. It is only Walton's layer of remove that can achieve this. The story Frankenstein tells rather matter-of-factly is nothing but a delusion until it is validated by Walton's witnessing and further propagating it as a horrific tale. Walton, the sympathetic ear, the reader's surrogate, creates the allegory with his attention. It is fitting that Walton turns around short of his quest of the North Pole. The lesson of Frankenstein is that there are some places people should not go. (It is even more fitting that the creature should be the one to reach it--we can assume he makes good on his word to go there and immolate himself). Walton is the figure of rationality confronting the wilds of the ends of the earth as well as the wildness in Frankenstein's story. As such he represents the Cervantic wedge between the narrative and the story. He is our mediator, the channel through which the horror can be relayed so that we can appreciate it as horror rather than the mere fantastic.

Nelly Dean in *Wuthering Heights* serves the same function, but she is more than just an auditor. Nelly is an active agent in the lives of the Earnshaws and Lintons. She is the constant observer, the only one who seems cognizant of the extent to which events repeat themselves in so many

ways over the generations. *Wuthering Heights* has more narrative layers than *Frankenstein* and is generally a more complex work. Nelly is not the only witness/narrator. There is also the enigmatic figure Lockwood who is actually relating the narrative we read. Any pretence of plausibility is dispensed with. We must simply accept that Lockwood could hear and record pages and pages of Nelly's discourse in one evening before falling sick for such a period that he can only vaguely remember it weeks later. This is only a minor stretch compared to the total recall of events and dialogue Nelly maintains despite the distance of decades, or the fact that she was herself a child when the earliest scenes occurred. She relates verbatim the observances of numerous other characters, even down to imitating the Yorkshire accent of Joseph, the helping hand, as imitated by other characters twenty years earlier.

But Bronte is not trying for plausibility. Nelly is another conduit for the story, a medium. A steadying force in both households, she stabilizes some of the wildness of the story; she makes what should be unspeakably horrible the entertainment of a couple of evenings. She also weaves a multitude of strands--the stories of Cathy I, Heathcliff, Edgar, Isabella, Cathy II, Linton, Hareton--into a single narrative. It is inconceivable that any of these characters

could coolly tell his or her own story the way Victor Frankenstein relates his to Walton. This is not the situation of the Ancient Mariner and his cautionary tale, but of people caught for the length of their lives in the grip of violent emotion.

As we come to appreciate the extent of Nelly's agency in the events themselves, we realize that this is *her* story, her spoken novel, constructed out of the raw material of the events she witnessed. Her relationship to Lockwood is exactly that of a narrator to a reader. Bronte underscores this by having Lockwood offer his impressions of the remaining principal characters before we are even introduced to Nelly. He is hopelessly incorrect, seeing Heathcliff as the kind of maundering poseur Lockwood is himself. Lockwood is a caricature of poor readers of novels determined to identify with the main character. Bye and bye he proves himself a caricature of the typical novelistic narrator. He has a story of his own, but we are not interested in it. He surrenders narrative jurisdiction to Nelly: About two thirds of the way through he tells us that he is now in full possession of the story but that he will continue it in Nelly's style "slightly condensed." The idea of his being able to imitate her style is absurd; what really occurs is that Lockwood vanishes except for a brief

appearance at the end. We readers no longer witness the performance of a performance; we get the performance from the source, the melding of Lockwood's story with Nelly's signifying the accord constructed between authors and readers in the reading of novels. At this moment we also see the extent to which Nelly is constructing the story from her materials. She reminds us of Walton in that she can explore the very edges of humanity (not represented by the arctic wilds but by the implicit savagery always lurking beneath the actions of the protagonists) and bring back a rational, humane account of it. The caricature of the reader disappears as soon as we realize that we are indeed reading the novel for the story, desiring the conclusion of Heathcliff's tale. In this sense Lockwood does not really blend with Nelly, but with us; the reader becomes Lockwood.

Lockwood's original distance from the story exactly parallels our own; his mistaken first impressions of the people at the Heights imitates our initial disequilibrium upon entering their lives *in medias res*. His continued presence as auditor parallels our position to the story. It is something bitterly compelling, yet we do not want to get too close to it. As stable a force as she is Nelly is too much within the story to remind us, as Lockwood's existence

does, that this spectacle of the Earnshaws and Lintons is of animals in a cage tearing each other apart.

At the bottom of all this is Heathcliff, the arranger of most of the dire occurrences, the stage manager of the plot. The "story" of *Wuthering Heights*, that to which Nelly's narrative is trying to find a way of access, is Heathcliff's mind and heart. It is another study in psychology, but a very clinical one, because all we can really see is Heathcliff's behavior. We cannot come to a full understanding of someone who wishes to destroy his entire world because of an unsuccessful affair, and the idea that the passions of love, hatred and desire for revenge could be so strong and co-existent is fairly terrifying, if not quite beyond belief. There is far deeper horror at the heart of *Wuthering Heights* than at the heart of *Frankenstein*--notwithstanding that the first is conventionally thought of as the ultimate novel of romantic love and the second is the world's most famous horror story. Heathcliff is to a great extent a closed book, even though his personality is reflected to varying degrees of intensity in the characters surrounding him; each, abjectly under the power of someone else, acts precisely in the same way Heathcliff does--by being cruel in turn to the person under *his or her* power.

Though she has spent her entire life in the cage, Nelly is not one of the animals. It is necessary that she tell the story of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* as it is necessary that Marlow tell the story of Kurtz and "the horror" in *Heart of Darkness*. Such horror must be stabilized before it can be approached; in its raw state it is ineffable, and thus reported by the principals it would be incoherent (Frankenstein's narrative seems rather cold precisely because it is so coherent). Both Shelley and Bronte realize that to write about human horrors one must employ a measure of objectivity and a safe haven. Nelly Dean and Walton are certainly not objective in their sympathies, but they are outside the center of the story. The novel as a genre, with its inherent dislocation between the story and the narrative, is the perfect vehicle for such explorations into human psychology. Both authors use the Cervantic paradigm--the gap--to its full thematic potential. Their narrators are singed, but not burned. Their measure of distance from the story is what allows them the objectivity to tell it. In these two novels we can fully see how the novelistic narrator is the reader's daemon, an intermediary between us and the story to which we desire access.

Hawthorne

A different kind of access is allowed by the narrator of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. In his introductory chapter, "The Custom House," Hawthorne establishes this narrator as a close double of himself. This entity writing in the first person is obviously meant to be identified as "Nathaniel Hawthorne," yet it is a Hawthorne in costume--at turns the flippant caricaturist; the cynical political commentator; the outsider in his hometown of Salem; the brooding artist *manque*, affrighted by ghosts of the past and writer's block. It is Hawthorne and not Hawthorne, an imitation of the author as character in the tradition of Swift and Sterne. The difference is that the "character" disappears as soon as the action of the novel begins; he only continues to be recognizable in the qualities of his discourse. As do Shelley and Bronte, Hawthorne discerns the benefits of narrative distance. *The Scarlet Letter* can only be told by a narrator able to judge the automatisms of the past from the perspective of a present rigid in other ways. Establishing himself as a judge overseeing the action of the story in his possession, the narrator reminds us of Hawthorne's forebear, Hathorne, who oversaw the Salem Witch Trials. This is a position of freedom as well as power; it allows the author the

liberties of the cautionary tale. There is much of the fable in *The Scarlet Letter*: The characters tend to be rather patent stereotypes (the wronged saint, the wild child, the self-consuming angel of vengeance, the pestilent religious hypocrite), and we feel that unfolding before us is less an account of real, or even believable, events than a kind of puritan passion play whose conclusion and moral significance are unleavened by doubt or plausibility.

Of course there is a thick psychological layer to *The Scarlet Letter*. The narrator's continued reference (in this introductory chapter) to death and decay; to the presence of ghosts; and, most originally, to the recent exhumation of the remains of his predecessor (a predecessor both in his post at the custom house and in his possession of the story of Hester Prynne) all evince to some extent Hawthorne's attempt to get at the psychological truth of the story--and of his family's past. This is storytelling as a digging through, and there is far more in the digging than in the treasure chest (or in the corpse), which really offers little to the fund of knowledge about human nature. By drawing such attention to himself as the writer of the ensuing novel, the Hawthorne narrator directs us not to the story but to its telling.

The Cervantic paradigm is part of the role. Hawthorne

sets himself up as a channel for the story (which has perhaps found him more than he has found it). His mind is its custom house, and, in a sense, the dead assessor who first researched Hester's story has been exhumed as Hawthorne. Their joint venture is to allow passage to a story wholly formed. This narrator even goes so far as to imagine that the book he is trying to write is before him complete, page after page--he merely lacks the insight necessary to transcribe it. All of this must be taken with a grain of salt. Much of the posing (as the medium or as the tortured artist) is done for a laugh. But Hawthorne is a peculiar artist; he seems very modern in the way he parodies the kind of romantic author he describes in "The Custom House," yet he truly is that author. The past haunting him is the literary past. Hawthorne writes more like a Romantic Gothic novelist of the previous generation masquerading as a "modern" than like a modern pretending to be a Romantic. Yet his self-consciousness always problematizes such assessments.

The important factor for this discussion is that in Hawthorne the distance between story and narration is immense. The story of the antique red letter is an occasion for the style of this highly self-conscious narrator. It is the distant past, and he must embrace a symbolic style in

order to approach it. As Hester's letter is initially an emblem of her shame and ultimately an emblem of her superior moral position as humanitarian and confessor, the story itself is for the narrator an emblem of the storyteller's art. Plausibility is not a particularly large issue any more. The story about finding the letter and the assessor's account of Hester Prynne can seem superfluous--after all, the narrator never makes any secret of the fact that there are only a dozen or so pages of the "facts," or that beyond these bare bones the story is entirely his invention--yet there is a very good reason for the device. The story must originate outside of the author's mind, even if that is where it is shaped. Without that core of transcendent truth about the tale such idiosyncratic telling would seem like someone playing catch with his own ideas; it needs to be a form of communication. The formality of the found document allows Hawthorne to turn it all into an allegory, to create symbols and allegories connected to essential truths. In this sense Hawthorne follows the rules of the paradigm to the letter, perhaps as no other author does, including Cervantes: The reader's desire for the "true" story and her willingness to accept that an ur-story exists in the moldy, imaginary documents from the vast attic of the custom house gives the author

carte blanche to tell it in what manner he wishes.

This narrator's difficulty in telling the story aligns him close to his readers. He is in pursuit of the story as are we, trying to conjure it out of the moonbeams on the wall and the ember glowing in the grate. Yes, it is a patented Romantic pose, but it also alludes to the narrator's position relative to the tale as an empathic agent (for us and for the story itself). The Hawthorne narrator tells us how "real" life begins to grade into unreality as soon as he finds his access to the story. It is very curious. Finding his narrative "voice" makes him fade away into a "citizen of somewhere else," no longer a definable entity. He drops away all together as the story proper begins, like a medium taken over by the personality of the desired spirit. Beginning as another reader, the narrator disappears into his text as author when he finds his proper method of telling his story. Yet we remain aware that his is only a version of a "true" series of events unchangeable yet unknowable but by such intervention.

More from the Nineteenth Century: Dickens, Thackeray

It is against my better critical judgement to lump so many disparate works together, but I am discussing a very general pattern. In the great century of the novel, the

Nineteenth Century, the Cervantic paradigm is the standard for novelistic narrative. Whether authors strive for the sort of quasi-realistic plausibility of forebears like Richardson and Defoe, or for something more self-conscious like Fielding or Swift, or whether, like the authors I have just discussed, they try for something rather different, there is always the sense of divergence between the story and the narrative. In the Nineteenth Century we feel that the gap is trying to be closed by the narrative. Narrators are doing their level best to get at the story in a truthful fashion, to recount all events in a way so that the reader can honestly assess them. Plausibility never ceases to be an issue.

It is hard to accept the unholy felicity of recall David Copperfield expresses in his "autobiography," for example. Yet we are willing to suspend our disbelief because we are getting the story, because it is the best way for us to approach it. We expect Dickens to go through the required formalities to make it as plausible as possible (he does, brilliantly): David remembers some things better than others; he is constantly living the experience of remembering rather than just remembering (in the way he draws attention to the details of color and sensation peculiar to long term memory). David is a

memorialist; he strikes one as being so haunted by his past that he just might be able to recall things so clearly. Though we are always a little wary that perhaps the novelist (David) is merely "remembering" his past as a novel, Dickens takes some pains in dissuading us from that conclusion. David's trials are severe, but they are not unusually dramatic; there are few epiphanic or melodramatic "scenes," things we might expect from a "stage" novelist making up his life.

As is usually the case in Dickens, the gap between story and narrative is closed as much as it can be. Unreliable narrators run contrary to both his esthetic and didactic intentions. Yet the fact that he takes such pains in *David Copperfield* to achieve a narrativistic plausibility indicates the strength of the Cervantic paradigm. Sophisticated readers of the Nineteenth Century do not want narrator/gods controlling the action; they want the story and they want to know how the narrator came to receive it. Opposite to Dickens in this regard is Thackeray who writes as a latter-day Fielding. His novels without heroes are self-conscious to a degree not quite as pervasive as it is in Fielding, but they are marked by a similar improvisational air. Thackeray draws our attention to the trials of creativity, but he does not really fool

with his stories very much. The Thackeray "voice" generally appears at the beginning of chapters in *Vanity Fair*, then it fades and the "story" takes over. For all his talk about puppets out of their box, Thackeray subscribes to the paradigm; the story is there somewhere, complete, loaded with didactic import. It is just a question of the way he is going to tell it. The narrator is someone called Thackeray who is just as far from his "story" as any more conventional narrator. We do not doubt that the story is fully formed because of its moral.

In the Nineteenth Century the novel really becomes comfortable with the paradigm; it is the space in which the novelistic discourse is allowed to grow, indeed in which it must grow, because novels exist because of narrative and narratives are by definition versions of something rather than the thing itself. But only in the Nineteenth Century does that really become the necessary starting point rather than an opponent to be wrestled with, as it seems to be with someone like Defoe. By the Twentieth Century the paradigm has become worn. The movement by Modernism is away from stories and into narrative. The gap between the two becomes severe, to the extent that narrative and story threaten to become utterly detached.

Modernism: James, Ford, Woolf, Faulkner, Joyce

The modernist story has been told often. While it is not true that Modernism is a total retreat into the subjective (there are very strong currents flowing towards objectivity in the poetry of Eliot and Pound, for instance, and in the prose of Stein), the advent of the subjective in novelistic narrative is undeniable. Before the great stream-of-consciousness novels we associate with Woolf and Joyce and Faulkner there was Henry James. In James's novella *The Turn of the Screw* we find it impossible to get a bearing on the "true" story. We never know if the ghosts are real or merely the figment of the narrator's imagination, spectres of what the Nineteenth Century was so fond of terming "hysteria." The narrative itself is multi-layered. One can easily forget that this is not the governess speaking to us directly but an anonymous party guest relating the story of someone else, an acquaintance who once knew the person in question. The story is itself a performance, a ghost story for the amusement of a weekend. All the confusion and narrative distance is quite reminiscent of *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*; it too is an inquiry into human psychology, but in those novels the "what" was never in question; the events of the plot, the story, are well known. It is the "why" that narrators

(and readers) are trying to get at. In *The Turn of the Screw* the "why" could be one of two things, depending on the true nature of the "what": If the children are indeed being haunted, it is because of the unhappy deaths of the servants themselves--the crisis of their coming to take the children to their deaths, as described by the governess, is real and uncomplicated; if she is imagining it all, then that too is pretty clear-cut--infatuated with and rejected by the children's guardian, overwhelmed by her tasks, losing grip on her sanity, she invents the ghosts in order to compensate for her failure.

But we do not know the answer. The distance between narrator and story is so great that we cannot access the truth through the narrative. We must piece it together ourselves--a narrative murder mystery. We are likely to conclude that the children were indeed haunted, but by the governess, just as she is haunted by her super-sensitivity (whether to paranormal activity or to her disturbed imagination might be irrelevant). She is the ghost of the story, haunting the children in it, haunting the listeners and the man who tells the story. And her narrative has a kind of ghostly relationship to "traditional" storytelling; it resembles stories we have become accustomed to, but it is a mirage of nineteenth-century narrative. What

James's narrative aspires to is not the "true story" but the unknown. The narrative is thus entirely subjective.

Narrative in early Modernism draws attention to the narrating voice and to the narrator's credibility in telling the tale. Beneath the story we still feel that some truth occurred, some monadic, essential story. In the *Turn of the Screw* we have to accept that we may never know what it is, still, we know that *something* did happen. We can feel secure in believing that the boy in the governess's care did in fact die. What has changed from the great novels of the Nineteenth Century is that narrative and story might now be at loggerheads; the one is not meant to facilitate the other, it is meant to be a subject for scrutiny itself. It may obscure rather than illuminate.

No novel does this more cunningly than Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*. At first blush it seems a rather conventional story, conventionally told. Dowell, our narrator, tells us he is something of a fool, and we have no reason to doubt him. His subjective voice is so powerful, however, that we have no way of avoiding his approach to the "story," a story of whose truth he is blissfully ignorant for nine years. The narrative feels more like a "work in progress" than that of most novels, the attempt by a dim-witted narrator (with a nice prose style) to make sense out

of his eventual revelation. The result is a highly complex jumbling of "traditional" narrative time. Unsure of where to start the story or how to continue it properly, Dowell seems to write whichever part comes into his head. This confusion in time is really a layering which makes everything appear to have happened at once; and this perfectly mimics Dowell's revelation at the moment of his wife's suicide, when the twelve years of their marriage is shown in one blow to have been an utter, multi-tiered lie. At such moments an entire past suddenly becomes present. The life he thought he had been living never existed. The result is that Dowell has to reconstruct his life, or, basically, read anew what he observed but did not witness. His writing of "the saddest story" runs parallel to this reading. The work does not come fully formed; he realizes things at the end of his writing about which he held an "incorrect" view earlier on. Of course at the end he is still nowhere near total understanding.

Ford is often labelled a literary "impressionist." *The Good Soldier* is, of course, really a parody of whatever kind of writing that is supposed to be. Dowell is the impressionist; he even talks about seeing the past as a canvas of paint blobs whose picture he cannot make out (this is Ford winking at his audience). But the novel does ask a

very difficult question about perception: How does one really get to the bottom of appearances? Dowell is bamboozled by some not particularly bright sparks (handicapped as he is, he strikes one as the smartest of the set) because he is unable to see at all beneath the surface of things. As a narrator he struggles between the superficial impression and its deeper significance. Appearance and meaning are constantly in disjunction, and his narrative is thrown into confusion because he can never achieve his goal of unifying the two. We tend to read *The Good Soldier* for the plot--for the story of Florence and Ashburnham's affair--but somewhere along the way we realize that we are falling into a trap; to read in such a fashion is to become Dowell. Ford is telling us that perception and reality are irreconcilable. The one may be the version of the other, but it is only the version that we can have. By the end of the novel we conclude that Florence's and Leonora's and Ashburnham's individual versions of life are no less wide of the mark of reality than Dowell's for all that they may have been "in" on the central events of the plot (Ashburnham's suicide alludes to a romantic idealism far more detached from reality than Dowell's impressionism).

Ford plays the Cervantic paradigm for all it is worth, using the reading audience's desire for the "real" story as

a crowbar to lever apart the two components, narrative and story. Modernism does just this. Ford continues the Jamesian project of exploring the subjective mind apprehending the world. Other authors take the project further. Stream-of-consciousness as employed by Woolf, Joyce and Faulkner (among others) is a venture further into the subconscious mind. In Woolf's *The Waves* we are given a series of narratives by six friends over the course of their lives, from childhood into middle age. The scene is set by prose-poetic, inter-chapter writing taking us forth on the course of a day (morning to evening) along a foreshore where symbolic waves (representing the six) roll in. What we gather of the events of the plot is given to us in the characters' narrative streams. In order to fully experience the narratives we must understand something of the events themselves. Our desire to get at these events and understand them mimics the same desire felt by the six. They relive their lives by trying to understand them. We experience their pasts in the attempt. This is certainly not the full experience of reading *The Waves*; but this is its crux. In the novel characters lament the difficulty of interpreting one's life while living it. We are equally at sea because we experience it with them.

Again, life is very much like a reading; but to the

extent that so much stream-of-consciousness purports to be mimetic of the process of thinking, it is even more so. Some of the less artistic stream-of-consciousness writers thought they were narrowing the gap between narrative and story by employing the technique. The formula is a little bit complicated. Stream-of-consciousness evolves out of Modernism's foregrounding of the subjective in narrative. The idea that such writing is mimetic of the way minds actually work adds a veneer of reality to it all, as if we are getting specimens of mind direct, without any layer of interpretation (that is literary interpretation, the rendering of concepts into literary matter, words, phrases, tropes, etc.). In other words, in *Dowell* we get a narrator who is reading and writing his life. We feel beneath his writing the immediacy of someone who has only just understood it and wants to tell what he is thinking as soon as possible. But he takes the time necessary to formulate the idea; we could call this necessary time the rhetorical gap. In stream-of-consciousness there is no rhetorical gap; we get the ideas raw, as they occur, unformed and dilatory. We even wonder if we should call these speaking minds narrators; narrative surely implies intention and some amount of rhetorical design. But we perceive the author's design in writing in this fashion. It seems from our

perspective a highly artificial literary device, and of course it was then. Those authors who use stream-of-consciousness only as a mimesis of thought are hardly read anymore.

Joyce, Faulkner and Woolf use it within the confines of the Cervantic paradigm. Beneath the diverse narrative streams in *The Sound and the Fury* there is a story we are meant to apprehend as best we can. Many pieces are missing. This novel is rather like *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* in the way narrative surrounds and mirrors but never directly tackles a mysterious, unnameable horror. We do not quite grasp what it is, or whether Quentin's imagined incest with Caddy has any basis. Though his self-lashing about it ends in suicide, we know that his suffering over the loss of his sister is nothing like the suffering of his severely retarded brother Benjy. Beginning with Benjy's narrative stream, the novel thrusts us without a lifeline into its most interpretatively difficult part. The sections get easier to understand as they go along, until we have no more trouble deciphering what the "story" is beneath it. By the time we get to Jason's section, however, story seems less important than subjective interpretation. At bottom is Caddy; she is central to each brother's narrative, the prime locus of attention, but she does not tell her own story. She

is the silence beneath all the verbiage of these narratives. In this sense Caddy is the "ur-story." What she did or did not do is less important than the obsession with her that is paralyzing her brothers, each in his way.

Faulkner is critiquing the reader's expectation (an expectation formed by the Cervantic paradigm) while getting mileage out of it. The reader reads for the story, barely distinguishing the outlines of some objective reality beneath the highly subjective narratives. But at the bottom is nothing, just Shakespeare's sound and fury. Paramount is the individual perception--none of the brothers has a woman for a sister but an icon of his own creation. *The Sound and the Fury* still works within the paradigm though it takes it apart for the purpose of inspection. The same can be said of *As I Lay Dying*, though I find *Absalom, Absalom* to be more of a return to the Nineteenth Century in the elaborate quality of its plot. In Quentin's and Shreve's obsession with the Sutpen story we find again Nelly Dean or Walton; they are channels for the story. That they do not plausibly witness it themselves (or a first hand assessment of it) matters little. Indeed, there is so much plot to the Sutpen story that we are not overly surprised that they should be so obsessed. In its gothic story *Absalom, Absalom* seems less modern to me than *The Sound and the Fury*.

Ulysses is very rightly thought of as the *ne plus ultra* of modernist fiction. Like the other modernist authors I have been discussing, Joyce uses the Cervantic paradigm while expanding towards the new. Leopold Bloom's stream-of-consciousness seems irrefutably an experiment in realism, but it is just one of multiple experiments in narrative technique. Out of this experimentation one thing is clear; the "how" of the story is definitely more important now than the "what" of the story. But story is not lost, on the contrary. The "story" of *Ulysses* is sometimes camouflaged by the protean narratives, but the two elements are meant to be working in concert. The narrative is still trying to reach the story; indeed, *Ulysses* incorporates a superabundance of story. The pseudo-heroic tale of a very common man privileges even the most minute aspects of Bloom's life as worthy of story. Bloom's day is the thread binding the diverse methods employed to tell it; we are always keeping our eye on the plot as we work through the more challenging sections. The Odysseus schema will help to a very limited degree, yet its presence as a strand in the skein also admits of the Cervantic paradigm, as though Bloom's life were the narrative reaching back towards a more ideal, eternal story, that of the returning warrior. We should not lose sight of Joyce's parody, yet the mythic connection has

some potency.

In each chapter there are numerous layers of significance. In the "Oxen of the Sun" we read through much difficult (and not always deft) literary parody towards the story and towards the "hook," the purported gestation of the English Language. The two under-layers do not always facilitate each other smoothly, and those of us reading for the plot can be frustrated. We have been waiting so long for Stephen and Bloom to meet; when they finally do, we cannot even be sure what occurs! Of course that's the point. Aware of the reader's expectation, Joyce blocks our approach to the story with his expedition into the history of the language, an ironic comment on the disunity inherent between ideal stories and the vehicle by which they are apprehended. The size of the gap between narrative and story changes with each chapter. At times it can be very small indeed. What Hugh Kenner calls the "Joyce Voice"¹³² (one of numerous writing voices that are not part of the shifting parade of rhetorical styles), the extremely compact voice that helps move scenes along seems devoid of any style. There to facilitate the plot, it is very close to the story. When we consider just how wide the gap can be at times, we can

¹³²

Joyce's Voices (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

appreciate the extent to which Joyce tried to make his book a universal testament of the novelistic process; it is the summation of what occurred in narrative to that point and beyond. Yet it never really quits the paradigm; it expands it while weakening it in a strange way. With so many layers of significance, a reader may wonder if any of them is really meant to be all that important. Reading only for the story is absurdly limiting, but then so is reading only for the myth or for the realistic portrayal of the subconscious or for the historical representation of Dublin. It is the untangling of all the threads connecting the diverse chapters, the solving of all those puzzles, that gives the work its cohesion; it is the reading experience itself that *Ulysses* is about.

Like the other modernist works I have discussed, *Ulysses* problematizes the traditional roles of narrative and story to which Cervantes gave birth. These novels depend on the gap between them; indeed, their creative matter seems to emanate from it. Yet they seem also to want to dismantle the paradigm by taking the significance out of story. Story becomes the servant to narrative, a kind of empty punch line. We try to look under Dowell's narrative, or Quentin Compson's, for the meaningful story, the tale of the modern Prometheus. But it is not there. There is only confusion or

darkness. The meaning has been given to the way things are told, to narrative itself. The Odysseus thread in *Ulysses* perfectly summarizes this. It is simply there, an enigmatic guest, one of many, at an elaborate party. And the revolutionary change brought about by Joyce's novel is not that the common man is thrust into the epic position (*Don Quixote* did that long ago), but that the epic loses its position of prominence. The mythic story, the eternal, essential story is finished; it has become merely the occasion for narrative experimentation as narratives once were merely vehicles carrying these stories from their Platonic keeps to listening ears. Joyce incorporates the Odysseus material to parody the old forms and its pretensions to eternal themes, to highlight the shift in the paradigm.

Yet undoubtedly in Modernism the paradigm remains. The natural progression for postmodernism is that the story be subsumed completely by narrative. That did not quite happen. We should be able to speak about postmodernism with some authority; it seems to be over, but it is difficult to say what it was really about, if indeed there was such a thing as postmodernism existing beyond the endlessly contradicting, endlessly obscure theoretical manifestos allegedly delineating it. If there can be a guiding

principle to postmodernism concerning the Cervantic paradigm, then it is not altogether different from Modernism's. The gap between narrative and story remains, but the idea that the former is meant to facilitate the latter is a subject for parody. This does not necessarily complicate the relationship; indeed, if anything it simplifies it. Where Joyce problematizes, postmodernism jokes. The story does not disappear; there is plenty of story, but there is never any doubt that story and narrative are but rhetorical gestures, motions that need to be gone through for the sake of the genre.

Beckett

Before turning to Nabokov, I will look at another author positioned, like him, between Modernism and postmodernism: Samuel Beckett. Beckett seems particularly aware of the Cervantic paradigm and its decay in Modernism. His trilogy (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*) has been thought of as Beckett's farewell to the novel; in it he seems to be outlining its destruction as a form. The novels become increasingly less "novelistic": *Molloy* drifts about aimlessly, pursuing any number of meaningless quests that turn into nothing. In the second half of this novel Moran sets out to find *Molloy* but seems to *become* him instead,

grinding to a halt in a similar fashion. *Malone Dies* takes place on the protagonist's deathbed as he tells himself unconcluded stories that may or may not be his memories. In *The Unnamable* narrative position is lost with nomination; the unnamable speaks from a jar, never telling a story but endlessly complaining about having to tell. Looking at these novels from the perspective of Modernism we see that narrative comes to the fore over story.

These narrators are parodies of traditional novelistic narrators. Molloy wants to tell a story that makes some kind of sense, but he cannot. He implies that he has been involved in a secret organization (the one to which Moran also belongs), but we never learn anything about it. His story (and Moran's after him) is a sinking into the self away from the "world," from the milieu of stories. Molloy fills the gaps in his narrative that should belong to story with words, narrative acts unattached to any occurrence. His approach makes a mockery of systemization; his is a systematical mind gone wrong, unable to break out of the programmatic loops once existing to enlighten or modify something. In Beckett or at least in these novels, the *something* is gone, and what is left is just the narrative voice talking on forever. These voices are compelled to tell stories but the stories do not exist.

Molloy is an excellent observer--he may forget the big things, but he has an eye for details, a novelist's approach that is forever confounded by his inability to attach meaning to anything. If his narrative goes nowhere, it celebrates that there is nowhere to go. In *The Unnamable* there is no story, nothing at the bottom of the discourse; all that remains is the speaking voice. The unnamable may be the bottom itself, an ur-consciousness from which stories had heretofore progressed to the mind of Samuel Beckett. The unnamable laments all the time Beckett spent on his other characters (on the Molloys, Watts, Belacquas, Morans) when this voice was always there, beneath them. The paradigm is complex; if the unnamable is the essence from which all stories proceed, then he is pre-story, pre-narrative. More than incidentally, we have an answer to the riddle of the secret society of Molloy and Moran--it is composed of the creations of Samuel Beckett, and it is scattering into fragments.

The Unnamable is not unreadable, but it has so few of the conventions of novels; there is no plot, no characterization, no setting (other than the character's jar). There is hardly even a shift in tense. In a concordance of the novel the word "I" would outdistance all others exponentially; Beckett seems to be telling us that

the self is the origin of all stories. This fits snugly with the modernist exaltation of subjectivity; and as in much of Modernism Beckettian subjectivity is a trap, a jar from which escape is impossible. *The Unnamable*, that last step in the retreat into the subjective, represents the slowing down to stasis of the self, the shedding of the accidentals for the fundamentals.

Yet we find it hard to believe that the unnamable is the place where stories really begin. This voice seems to have nothing to do with ur-stories; it is the ultimate step, then, in the disintegration of the Cervantic paradigm, the narrative voice talking on, detached from story and left to drift. It is tempting to see in all this Beckett himself shifting his attention away from novels to the speaking voices of the theater, but even his plays have more plot than *The Unnamable*. To the extent that the unnamable is the source of Beckett's creativity (derived out of anxiety, intelligence, sensation, etc.) it is an essence. As such, we would have to say that it does not evince the destruction of the Cervantic paradigm by the subsuming of story by narrative; rather, story and narrative become the same thing: they meet. The speaking voice is the story, the essence. It is only right that story would *almost* entirely disappear as narrative *almost* disappears in the utter

monotony of voice.

It is an accepted theory about Beckett that he was trying to write *non-writing*, not pared-down writing or unrhetorical writing (his work is neither), but cognition that has nothing to do with the conventions of writing. As the unnamable signs off, promising to go on despite being unable to go on, we are meant to assume that his "going on" occurs in a pre-language, pre-writing state reminiscent of Wittgenstein's resolution to pass over in silence what cannot be verbalized. But non-writing cannot be written and written voices cannot be stilled in any way other than by closing the book. To this degree Beckett's work is still very much what it purports to destroy. In it the Cervantic paradigm exists, but it is meant not too.

Nabokov

Nabokov occupies the same historic moment as Beckett but he takes a very different approach to narrative. His narrators are just as controlling as Beckett's, but there is far less doubt in their voices. They see themselves as artists; life is their medium. The Cervantic paradigm is still present, and as it is in the work of other modernists, the gap between story and narrative is great. Yet the Nabokov narrator is reminiscent of the Homeric narrator--

with a little Zeus thrown in; that artistic life is understood (mistakenly) to be his own creation. He tells his own story, but that story is only analogous to what we assume to be the "true" story lurking somewhere deep beneath it. In other words, the Nabokov narrator likes to fudge the details, to make the crooked path of life a little more straight, a little more artistic.

There is similarity between Van Veen's approach to the story of his "life" (Ada) and that of the governess from *The Turn of the Screw*. They remember things the way they wanted them to be, and we readers cannot access what might have been the truth. Van's life is not constructed to be a statement defending a delusion (as is the case with the governess); his narrative is meant to be a Tolstoyan epic, a great family chronicle as well as the history of an affair. And this is really the secret to the Nabokov narrator in general: He reads his life (the way I have been insisting narrators do in many of the books so far discussed) and then he rewrites it as a novel. A comparison will help. Dowell in *The Good Soldier* is not writing a novel; he is trying to tell the story of his life in the most transparent way he can. He may have rather juvenile, quasi-esthetic ideas about that life (that it is the "saddest story," for instance), but he is not consciously creating a literary document as

such. Ford writes the novel. Van Veen, on the other hand, *is* writing a novel, and so is Hermann from *Despair*, and Humbert Humbert; they may not be novelists by profession, but their approach to memory is exactly that of the author of a novel while their presentation of the stories of their lives is that of a *narrator*. Their narratives are self-conscious because they are self-reflexive, as though written by authors who played at being characters in their own works of fiction.

This all gets quite complicated, particularly because running through each of the novels is this idea that perhaps everything is being controlled by a greater consciousness outside the boundaries of the novel itself. This consciousness is of course Vladimir Nabokov's. There are hints in nearly every novel that their author is somehow present in them, manifested as an anagrammatic double (Baron Klim Avidov in *Ada*, Vivian Darkbloom in *Lolita*) or as a figure of the real person (the absent butterfly expert Vladimir Vladimirovich in *Pnin*). These sightings do not really amount to much. As reminders of the author's identity they are directed at the reader, hints that we should give close scrutiny to the narrator's story because there may be portions of meaning to which he has not been privileged.

Nabokov's famous use of the double is relevant here. In

an interview Nabokov said that he found the subject of the *doppelganger* in literature a "frightful bore" (*Strong Opinions*, 83), adding "There are no 'real' doubles in my novels."¹³³ This is more true than it seems; there are not "pure" doubles in his novels, but resemblers. The plot of *Despair* revolves around this distinction. Hermann Hermann thinks he has committed the perfect crime, murdering a man (Felix) whom he takes to be his double to collect on his own insurance. No one is fooled. By the end of his narrative we come to realize that Hermann is quite mad; Felix looks nothing like him. Hermann himself ridicules the sort of author (Dostoevsky is a particular target) who uses the double as a trope for rudimentary psychological investigations, yet he himself falls neatly into this trap as his narrative becomes, even to him, the final remaining gesture of his own identity. His plan having failed, he looks on his story as the legacy to the genius he believes he possesses. As such Felix is not a double of some component of Hermann's psychology; he is a figure of Hermann's (impossible) desire to control his world by reducing it to a reflection of himself. Terminal solipsists, Nabokov narrators cannot conceive of a world or reality that

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See Ellen Pifer's chapter on *Pale Fire* in her *Nabokov and the Novel* (Cambridge Ma.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980).

is not an extension of their own cognition.

In Nabokov the self can be a trap but it is also a vast field of play. Characters like Adam Krug (*Bend Sinister*) and John Shade struggle with all the resources of their intellect to break through the limitations of their own consciousness; yet their strongly individual ways of apprehending the observable world act as the lens through which the reader sees that world, as though the world were indeed a mere extension of them.

The Cervantic paradigm is present but complex. Characters like Hermann write narratives that attempt to get at an ur-story of their own invention; the essence underlying their surface narration is the version of themselves they are trying to will into existence. Epistemically, they construct out of words selves already wholly formed in their minds. It is not new that the formation of a character's identity runs parallel to his narration; this is one of the hallmarks of Modernism. But in Nabokov there is a stronger feeling that the writing *is* the being, that a life is raw material for the making of art. Once this esthetic raw material has been transformed, it is the art that matters, not the life. The artistic gesture then stands alone, its connection to the real existing tenuously or not at all. If Dowell's manuscript is an

artifact reflecting (or honestly attempting to reflect) the "real" events of his life, the story of the typical Nabokov narrator aspires to be an independent form of reality.

We think of Humbert's plea in *Lolita* that the reader imagine him lest he should not exist. It sums up the Nabokovian narrator's position in general: He exists, even in his own reckoning, in no way other than how he presents himself in words (this is why in Nabokov's novels matters of style take on heightened significance); and while Nabokov narrators seem to believe that they are expanding themselves outward, like grand figures in Yeats's "artifice of eternity," they are really reducing themselves into the mere interaction of words. Underlying all the novels is a potent theme concerning the double-edge of exalting words so much that they take on quasi-ontological properties. Beneath the magnificent skeins of invention there is a vast emptiness. (Ironically, this has always been the criticism of Nabokov's work in general, that he constructs fabulous houses of cards insignificant in "meaning.") In other words, Nabokov narrators try to control the ur-story with narrative. This is the way they resemble Homeric narrators. To Humbert or Hermann, or particularly to the narrator of *Pnin*, there is very little gap between story and narrative. Story is seen to be entirely in the service of the narrative, as though

the way a thing is told dictated what it is. This is not to say that the paradigm is dispensed with--not at all. Nabokov narrators depend on the Cervantic paradigm in order to *be*; they require readers who are looking for the novel in the dislocation between narrative and story just as a swindler requires a mark looking to make an easy buck.

Nabokov's most satisfying essay into this form of narrative is his best novel, *Lolita*. *Lolita* is a great literary seduction, though Humbert's real target of conquest is not 12 year-old Dolores Haze but the reader of his testament. Written as a statement for a trial that never comes to pass, it is an intricate defense pretending to be a confession. In it the self-proclaimed "monster" creates an image of himself less monstrous than hapless, bumbling, hopelessly subject to a hideous obsession. It is a measure of Humbert's success (and of Nabokov's) that most readers of the novel really accept it as the history of an affair, of a great romance. Seducing the reader with wit, with self-promotion (or self-lashing as appropriate), and with some of the most rapturous love prose in English, Humbert manages to convince the reader of his genuine love for Lolita. Most useful in this quest is his pity. Monsters are supposed to be remorseless. It is his pity for Lolita that convinces us to listen to him, indeed, to *not* listen to him when he calls

himself "monster." He engages us in a conspiracy of pity just as he tries, with more or less success, to engage us in a conspiracy of nymphet worship; or, in a more minor key, in a conspiracy of enmity for an imperfect mother (Charlotte) who happens to be a philistine. In each case his prose turns people into tropes or into allegories, literary images subject to his control. The book itself, Humbert's book, is the perfect example. Plain, playful Dolores Haze is metamorphosed into *Lolita*. Humbert's re-creation of her out of words mimics his creation of "Lolita," the daemonic object of rapture, out of the raw material Dolores Haze, within the story. And though he has a keen eye and ear for the details of her personality, for her gum-cracking or wise-cracking, her child's moods, the way she scratches her leg, these observances are dragooned into service of the myth, becoming corporeal manifestations of some eternal essence.

There is an ugly kind of Platonism going on. *Lolita* is the reincarnation of Annabel who is herself most likely imaginary (a boyhood crush monumentalized by death and an arrested imagination), a literary icon borrowed from Poe. Humbert writes that his finding *Lolita* exorcized his obsession with Annabel; but we suspect that Annabel was vivified to be an excuse for his obsession with *Lolita*, the

pre-cursor whose existence proves that larger fates are at work. Annabel is an invented daemon, a connection to a vague essence for which Humbert purports to long. As a manifestation of that essence, of that desire, Lolita is less person than incarnation. We should be reminded by Humbert's position to Lolita that obsession entails taking a thing out of its context, out of the normal flow of events to which it belongs, isolating it and thus changing it with attention into an entirely new, distorted entity. Humbert's words, very late in the novel, on the poignancy of the absence of Lolita's voice from the "concord" of children playing, signifies his finally coming to recognize that he has isolated and distorted Lolita by stealing her childhood. Yet he will not let go of her as subject. His final statement is about "aurochs and angels," and preserving Lolita forever in his presence in the "refuge of art."

Humbert's manuscript is the apotheosis of his attitude toward Dolores Haze. He imprisoned the child within a deeply perverse construction when he "had" her; this construction celebrated the accidentals of her personality, but only as they contributed to his ideal. Having lost her, he turns her into the subject of an artistic treatment, a celebration of what he has destroyed. The gaze shifts a bit, but it is unchanged. The conspiracy in which Humbert has tried to

engage his readers turns out to be the esthetic reduction (posing as deification) of a human being. By force or by cunning one can possess a work of art, but not another human being. Humbert tries to possess Lolita when she is with him by cataloguing her every attribute; when she is gone he tries to regain her by turning it all into a written monument, by reducing her to a subject. We can see that Humbert follows the Cervantic paradigm though expecting more from it than more traditional narrators. Nelly Dean stabilizes the Heathcliff story, with all its horror, and makes it accessible to the reader of *Wuthering Heights*. Even Victor Frankenstein reports his own story to Walton in such a way to best illuminate the horrific consequences of his actions. Humbert pretends to do the same, but his ostensible tale of horror quickly turns into an essay on the raptures of nympholepsy. And this is what makes *Lolita* a far more horrific novel than *Wuthering Heights* or *Frankenstein*: Humbert never divests himself of the rapture; he never relinquishes possession of Lolita even if it requires possessing her only in art--as *Lolita*. The means by which we receive the story of Dolores Haze is the final and continuing manifestation of the solipsist desire which destroyed her.

We might conclude that in Nabokov there is no ur-story;

there are just narrators who have been conditioned by the novelistic paradigm (I am suggesting that these protagonists are post-Cervantic readers of their worlds) to see their lives or the lives of others as esthetic opportunities. In other post-Cervantic novels we witness narrators trying hard to get at some essential story, to represent it as clearly (perhaps as unclearly) as possible. In Nabokov we witness a person trying to create an ur-story *through* narrative. His narrators try to make truth out of style. Even characters like V. from *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* or John Shade from *Pale Fire*, who seem to be honestly trying to unravel some mystery of identity and understanding, tend to find only themselves at the end of their search; and the documents resulting from it--that is, the expression of searching--are far more important than their subjects are.

The narrator of *Pnin* seems at first to be an exception (as the lightly comic, episodic novel itself seems to be an exception in the Nabokov opus). His story begins as a disinterested third person narrative. But as the novel progresses this narrator takes form, revealing himself as someone having had quite a lot of contact with his subject. At the end of the novel he is actually taking part in the activities of Pnin's life rather than simply reporting them. In the famous last scene he fails to catch Pnin leaving town

with all his possessions; one is meant to feel that the latter is escaping more than the embarrassment meeting this character face to face would create: Pnin is escaping his narrator, driving off into a world beyond the confines of the unflattering stories that have been told about him. Pnin is tormented by a series of imitators and mockers within the world of the narrator's tale; as that narrator comes more into focus we see him as the worst tormenter of all, doomed (like professor Cockerell) by his affinity for telling Pnin stories to have no real identity beyond that. Indeed, we might conclude that this affinity is responsible for his being absorbed into the text as a character in the last chapter.

This narrator's chasing to catch Pnin, to keep him as a continuing source for more anecdotes (by making him his assistant)--to keep him confined to the margins of his narrative--reflects his desire to make his version the *real* version of Pnin. He does not so much want his narrative to come as close as possible to the ur-story; he wants the *real* Pnin to conform to his version. Nabokov very cleverly comments on the relationships between narrators and stories and between narrators and readers by taking this swerve away from the expected. We become accustomed to this voice as the authority on the life of the funny professor; when it

reveals itself to be equally bound (even more bound) to the limits of the narrative, we truly see the gap between a narrative and the story it is trying to describe; not only are they not the same thing, they are completely separate entities antagonistic to each other.¹³⁴

Yet there is always the sketchy outline of a more "true" story barely palpable behind the powerful discourses of Nabokov's narrators. We have to read through their narratives to see that the worlds they believe they had constructed really belong to the author himself. Nabokov's worlds are closed worlds. The transcendent order that philosopher Adam Krug suspects to exist running parallel to the savage world he is forced to inhabit in the novel *Bend Sinister* turns out to be that of his author who shuts down Krug's world at the point where his protagonist is about to be murdered. Coincidence, repetition, resemblance--these are the signs, the rents in the fabric through which Krug believes himself able to view that otherworld (as they are

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A narrator trying to encompass another character in his prose is a frequently recurring theme in Nabokov's works. Besides Humbert and the *Pnin* narrator there is V. from *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and, of course, Kinbote who (when he can tear himself away from his primary subject) does try to limn his friend Shade. As is the case in *Pnin*, the reader is left with the impression that it is the writer who becomes ensnared in the web of his artifice while the subject escapes.

in every other novel by Nabokov, to every other of his protagonists). In the hindsight afforded by Nabokov's *deus ex machina*, all of them turn out to be traces of his author. Chess master Luzhin (*The Defense*) comes to see his life as a chess match he cannot win against a higher power able to make moves in phantom areas beyond the board. Those moves are the incidents of plot, the matter of the story--the higher power is quite evidently the mind of his author.

The minor demiurges like Humbert or Herrmann, who believe themselves to be directing matters in their story, always fear there is some McFate controlling them, but the fear is actually part of the pose of their eminence. None of Nabokov's narrator/protagonists ever really gets to understand the full extent of the game. There is some suggestion that one is not privy to such information until after death (as we hope it is in the real world). But what really obscures them from revelation is their solipsism. All the mirrors Nabokov is so famous for reflect their images back to these characters rather than offer a sight beyond their circumstance--just as their narratives are the means by which these protagonists try to advertise themselves as directors of those very circumstances.

The Cervantic paradigm has become complex. Nabokov uses a reader's expectations about the access a narrator is

supposed to have to the ur-story to full advantage. He creates narrators who believe themselves to be authors. They think they can use the lives they have been given as raw material for new inventions, for new novels of their own creation. We can never tell to what extent their version coincides with the ur-story. And so, again, in Nabokov, there is no ur-story; there is just a narrator inventing stories. We can verify to what extent they are *not* true because Nabokov, the game designer, makes us aware of the stories' inconsistencies. In his best novels, however, Nabokov exploits the reader's conditioning in reading novels. He exploits our willingness to enter into a contract with the narrator to allow us access to the ur-story. We realize the extent of the game Nabokov is playing with us when we do find ourselves listening to Humbert, when his prose begins to convince us that he is indeed talking about aurochs and angels.

We have thrown in our lot with the strong narrative voice. We accept that it is not the "true" story, but over the course of the history of the novel we have been willing to grant it a new kind of truth, that of the go-between, our advocate or agent towards the story. Finding himself like Beckett at the end of that tradition, Nabokov problematizes the relationship between narrator and ur-story in a similar

fashion. The speaking voice has sway over the story; yet there is a self-conscious awareness that what is being created is a literary artifact rather than an ostensibly authentic or authoritative recounting. Where Beckett purges story and isolates voice, Nabokov obscures story with a narrative voice that aspires to Homeric eminence. In Beckett the Cervantic novelistic paradigm is a source of anxiety; the transforming of the essential story into an esthetic product called narrative is a routine made absurd and vicious by repetition.¹³⁵ The Beckett narrator is trapped, immobilized by this routine of telling narratives, disfigured by his inability to communicate in any other fashion and doomed to continue doing so. The Nabokovian narrative voice sees in the novelistic paradigm leave to create itself. Narrative is a canvas upon which to represent an estheticized self, and narrative's putative role of groping towards the ur-story is reduced to merely one of many methods for creating a persona.

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Here we might recall one of Beckett's other creations, Watt, the character obsessed with covering with language every permutation of possibility in the most simple operations of life, even to the extent of having to invent bizarre hybrid languages. The result is complete automatism, proving just how wide the gap is between language and what it is meant to modify.

Pale Fire

Pale Fire is one of the most innovative novels since *Don Quixote*; if we were looking no deeper than the surface, we would have to say that the parody of the critical edition is the nearest (perhaps the perfect) twentieth-century analogy for the parody of the Romance epic. But *Pale Fire* also carries the technique of the self-creating narrator, initiated by *Don Quixote*, further than any subsequent work.¹³⁶ Most important, it plays with the dislocation between story and narrative in precisely the same way *Don Quixote* does, setting up a mock war between two powerful narrative voices.

As Quixote and Cide fight for control of the Quixote "story" with their incompatible versions, Shade and Kinbote fight for control of "Pale Fire" after the poet's death. These battles occur on the narrative plane. We are meant to realize in both works that there really is no ur-story; there are just the self-generated, self-serving, narratives of involved characters--of narrators who *become* characters because they are so engaged with their subjects that they lose "proper" narrative distance from them. The extreme case

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Its closest rivals are *A Tale of a Tub*, *Tristram Shandy* and *Moby Dick*. The way these works join *Pale Fire* in so closely following the Cervantic narrative paradigm must be the subject of a different paper.

best illuminates the general rule; Kinbote is the novelistic narrator, the one creating narrative as a double of what he perceives to be an indivisible truth. Extended far beyond the limits of plausibility, he reveals that the novelistic project is founded on the individual voice, the idiosyncratic version wilfully detaching itself from its monolithic, Homeric "story." It is the quixotic voice, the madman's version making its own truth out of this disenfranchisement--making itself.

To the extent that Kinbote's comments are in competition with the poem they assume the position occupied by narrative in the Cervantic novelistic paradigm (his words about letting his critical apparatus take on the "monstrous semblance of a novel" [p.86] have more than comic relevance). Again, the narrator sets himself up initially as the original reader/possessor of the ur-story before presenting his version of it. Kinbote positions himself towards the poem as though he were its exclusive audience. Only he has understood its full meaning, and thus his explication is more than commentary; it is the version of "Pale Fire" that will reveal it, the translation that can bring it to life. Here is the crux of Nabokov's parody, but there are deeper ramifications. Shade too is a versionist. His "Pale Fire" (the real "Pale Fire") is meant to be a kind

of narration of the essential ideal qualities Shade discerns at work beneath or beyond the surface of the reality in which he exists. It is an attempt to reach the ideal. While there is not a specific ur-story Shade is trying to reach, his approach to life does resemble a poetic interpretation; it is a reading. "Pale Fire" is meant to be the result of that reading. Both authors write as a way of explicating what they perceive to be a quasi-Platonic text already existing somehow, somewhere, fully formed. Kinbote's relationship to Shade's poem may be in the end only a parody of the Cervantic narrative paradigm (the poem is, after all, only a false ur-story towards which Kinbote's narrative pretends to reach), but his position to the King Charles story, to his "Solus Rex," is very much in accord with it. The Commentary is the narrative of *that* ur-story disguised as a critical apparatus.

Nabokov parodies certain types of criticism, but he also explores the way narrative works by complicating to almost absurd extremes the essential duality inherent in the genre of the novel. The endless reflections between poem and commentary, between Shade and Kinbote, that seemingly endless rivalry, are emblematic of the duality. The Timonian paradigm of the sun and moon encapsulates those aspects at work in the genre I have outlined. The moon, stealing the

light of the sun is trying to reach it through copying. It is making itself a distorted version of the moon; its paler fire is evidence that the original cannot be replicated but only approached. Novelistic narrative is invented in that gap between an imagined, ideal story and the heterogeneous and, by definition, corrupt attempt made to duplicate it. The moon is that corrupt reflection suddenly made subject to human contingencies.

It is of course ironic that Don Quixote and Kinbote, thought they incarnate the essential nature of the novelistic paradigm, desire their literary inscription to be carried out by poets. Still it is fitting; intense idealists, they are naturally antipathetic to the corruption inherent in the novelistic discourse--as though they realize that narrative is a degraded version of the story. Their literary landscapes are filled with doubles for this very reason; they are agents of the real. Each in his own topsy-turvy way incorporates them into his story: Quixote sees these agents of the real as enchanters; Kinbote sees them as traitors and murderers. In a sense their origin can be traced back to those whom Quixote and Kinbote probably regard as the ultimate representatives of narrative

corruption, Alonso Quixano and Professor Botkin.¹³⁷

Cervantes, working without precedent, patching together his new genre out of the conventions of existing ones, sets old eminence, old decorum and certainty, old essentialism, on a collision course with a new, experimental narrative incertitude. Setting Cide against Quixote, he teaches us to read this genre--which only reveals itself as such later--by introducing its most defining element into the action itself.

Don Quixote is the figure of Cervantes' new form. Going about the country, creating himself out of the raw material of his observations, turning his environment into the setting of his delusions, Quixote exemplifies the novelistic project. So too Nabokov's Charles Kinbote. These madmen refuse to occupy their native literary landscapes. The new paths they take are dictated by the stubborn paradigms devolving out of their madness. Theirs are alternative

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In another way Botkin represents the "real" layer beneath the fantastic covering of Kinbote's writing. He is an agent of the story in the Cervantic novelistic paradigm, the monadic ur-story of which Kinbote is a self-perpetuating and insane version, careering ever further away from its center. From our training as readers in the genre we assume that this ur-story exists. Botkin is an emblem of our expectations; as such he is a linchpin of Nabokov's parody. He is Godot, the explanation, the monadic truth that does not actually appear. He is the ur-story unreachable by Kinbote's narrative.

realities running parallel to ones imposed by Cervantes and Nabokov; creating themselves out of the original, they are reflections, versions. Kinbote and Quixote are proto-narrators making their lives into stories of their own creation within the novels that contain them.

Thus, again, madness is the natural element of the novelistic imagination. I have contended that the unique identity of the genre resides in the bifurcation of story and narrative. I believe that Nabokov recognized this and saw its original in the clash of versions central to *Don Quixote*. *Pale Fire* is his *Don Quixote*. It is a recapitulation seen from the other end of what Nabokov may have taken to be a dying tradition; I do not think of it as a copy, certainly not a parody. In many ways *Pale Fire* is also the last shout of Modernism (perhaps it should be called the modernist *Don Quixote*). Modernism's privileging of the subjective is, after all, basically a return to the quixotic perspective, and Kinbote's commentary is the ultimate expression of modernist quixotism. Seeing perhaps that the novel had nowhere left to go, Nabokov returns to the origin of the form. He takes us back into the mind of the madman, into the extreme limits of a subjectivity so powerful that the "real" is nothing more than raw material for self-inscription. He takes us back to a character fully

determined to write himself into being.

I like to think of the two works as the upper and lower layer of a palimpsest. *Pale Fire* is written over *Don Quixote*; the under layer shows through the over, the over layer enlarges the under. Cervantes' contribution to the novel does not make much sense until viewed through the lens of his successors. Likewise, so Borges tells us, great artists create their precursors.¹³⁸ Nabokov's revisiting *Don Quixote* in *Pale Fire* creates a precursor (despite what he propounded to Harvard freshmen in *Lectures on Don Quixote*) as it sharpens our focus of the *Quixote* itself.

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