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PARODY IN *PALE FIRE*: A RE-READING OF BOSWELL'S *LIFE OF JOHNSON*

by

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MORRIS, MATTHEW CHARLES EVANS, Ph.D. Parody in *Pale Fire*: A Re-reading of Boswell's *Life of Johnson.* (1996) Directed by Dr. James Evans.

This study explores Vladimir Nabokov's parody, in his 1962 novel *Pale Fire*, of Boswell's *Life of Johnson.* I attempt to show that Nabokov's numerous parodic references to Boswell's work in *Pale Fire* perform two significant functions. Like all of the parodies in Nabokov's novels, the Boswell allusions help give Nabokov's own book a sense of defintion or identity; by placing his own work in the context of another, earlier work, Nabokov's individual artistic concerns come into focus. His highly allusive novels, composed largely of pastiches of parody, thus are not created simply for pedantic purposes, i.e. to show to the reader how many books the well-read Nabokov digested throughout his life, but instead help him to combat Harold Bloom's anxiety impulse, the fear that any modern artist must somehow surmount when faced with the legions of dead strong poets and thinkers who came before him.

Parody also sends Nabokov's readers back to the original sources, helping them to re-read older texts, in new ways. Through the prism of his parody, Nabokov also revives moribund genres, books and plays for his readers, providing insights into them that might not be possible in the context of a strictly scholarly exercise. As I will show, the close reader of *Pale Fire* will, in addition to feeling the force of the authorial identity Nabokov has established for himself in his own book, also develop an intricate understanding of the controversies surrounding highly subjective books such as *The Life of Johnson,* and come to look at the works parodied in Nabokov's novel in a different light. Newer novels can thus inform readings of older texts, helping the reader to re-read the older works in important, new ways.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of Vladimir Nabokov's first novel, *Mary*, in 1925, critics of his work have pointed to the Russian novelist's use of parody as an important feature of his art. Because Nabokov's parodies can often be complex, and , as with his use of allusions, rich and detailed, some readers have been tempted to attack his books as little more than the products of a well-read show-off. Nabokov always countered that his novels were complex because the feelings he tried to describe in them were equally complicated. "[T]he main favor," Nabokov asked of his critics in *Strong Opinions*, "is sufficient perceptiveness to understand that whatever term or trope I use, my purpose is not to be facetiously flashy or grotesquely obscure but to express what I feel and think with the utmost trutfulness and perception" (77).

As his career progressed, Nabokov wove increasingly complex parodies into his highly allusive novels and stories, culminating with *Pale Fire* (1962). In this book, Nabokov expands the range of his parody, using it in ways that, in addition to enriching the text by aligning it with a tradition of earlier works, help give his own novel a sense of identity. Fighting triumphantly against Harold Bloom's "anxiety of influence," through his parody in *Pale Fire,* Nabokov is able to navigate, and negotiate, amongst earlier texts, in ways that help him find a place for his own work, amidst the scores of earlier novels, poems and stories that his book intricately catalogues.

Many critics have traced, with great detail and vigor, this function of Nabokov's parody. What has never been fully explored, however, is the way in which the parody in *Pale Fire* operates on another level, sending the reader back to the earlier works parodied, and with new insights into these older books, plays and stories.

One of the aims of Nabokov's art is to show that a great book can always yield new levels of

meanings, and new readings. In *Pale Fire*, not only does the novel itself seek to demonstrate this point in its design and structure but it also offers a new form of criticism that may be called "literary re-reading through parody." This new critical approach shows how a great text from the past, read "through" another book that parodies it, may be made to yield new aesthetic levels that will enrich our knowledge of the artistry of the earlier text. In this study, I will demonstrate how *Pale Fire* does indeed provide us with a new reading of *Life of Johnson*, specifically of the characterization and interplay of Boswell and Johnson. Thus, I will consider *Life of Johnson* in the light of a literary text purporting to be representational and not necessarily biographical in nature.

Chapter One will be divided into two sections. In the first, I will show how Nabokov uses parody to revive moribund genres and return readers to old novelists and poets, with new insights into their literary strategies. Many critics have noted Nabokov's love of parody since Lionel Trilling's famous essay, which, by pointing to *Lolita's* numerous links with more traditional literary forms, exonerated the scandalous novel of charges that it was too salacious for a 1950s audience. As Alfred Appel has observed:

> Nabokov practic(es) the art of assemblage, incorporating in the rich textures of *Bend Sinister, Lolita, Pale Fire,* and *Ada* a most 'Joycean' profusion of rags, tags, and oddments, both high and low, culled from books or drawn from 'real life. (Appel, xlvi)

And though Nabokov himself admitted that this "profusion" made for the disparate elements of a complex "literary game" that he certainly enjoyed playing[1], as Dabney Stuart and others after Appel have shown, the pleasures of his parody extend beyond mere play. To fully understand how Nabokov's use of older literary forms works, I will explore these ideas.

Pale Fire represents a unique crystallization of Nabokov's use of parody to encourage literary re-readings of a variety of novels, plays, and poems; perhaps no novel in the twentieth-century other than *Ulysses* incorporates such a complex and anastomatical system of parody to achieve it's purpose. In her analysis of the novel, Priscilla Meyer writes:

> (O)verlapping readings of *Pale Fire*...are neither exclusive or exhaustive. A name, a word, or sentence will appear in several separate contexts, but will rarely fit perfectly into a single interpretation, as it is designed to engender multiple reflections, the dappling of light that is for Nabokov an emblem of heightened consciousness. (Meyer, 9)

Though I will ultimately counter the assertion that this evocation of "multiplicity" is *all* that Nabokov is doing in *Pale Fire*, to better understand the intricate relation *Pale Fire* bears to *Life of Johnson*, I will show how Nabokov "engenders multiple reflections" on Boswell's work, as well as a variety of other novels, plays and poems. This analysis will constitute the second part of the first chapter.

Then in the second chapter, I will show how Boswell's biography, like Kinbote's commentary, frequently strays from its purposes, digressing in largely personal ways that suggest the impossibility of an "objective" biography, free from the subjective interludes of its author. This will be done by providing an analysis of Boswell's artistry, characterization, and psychological maneuvers, which are reflected in the text of *Life of Johnson*. "What I consider as the peculiar value of the following work," Boswell writes in the introductory paragraphs to the *Life*, "is the quantity it contains of Johnson's conversation." However, as even Frederick Pottle, perhaps the staunchest of modern Boswellians, has pointed out, "(T)he Johnsonian sections of Boswell's journals are not different in kind from the rest; they flow in and out with no change whatever in method or emphasis" (Pottle, "The *Life of Johnson*: Art and Authenticity," 67). This perspective throws the verisimilitude of these conversations into a more complicated light: how much of the story's fascination lies in Boswell's telling of it? The infection of subjectivity in any biography is a subtle one, and on a certain level, unavoidable. As Nabokov himself has written: "I doubt you could give me your phone number without giving me something of yourself" (*Strong Opinions*, 77).

Pale Fire (1962) opens with a passage from Boswell's *Johnson* (1791):

> This reminds me of the ludicrous account he gave Mr. Langton, of the despicable state of a young gentleman of a good family. "Sir, when I heard of him last, he was running about town shooting cats." And then in a sort of kindly reverie, he bethought himself of his own favorite cat, and said,

"But Hodge shan't be shot: no, no, Hodge shall not be shot.

An artist of great selectivity, Nabokov's choice of the passage from Boswell's *Life* as an introduction to what is arguably his most complex novel is not to be taken lightly. Yet despite (or perhaps because of) the openness of Nabokov's initial allusion, most critics of *Pale Fire* have overlooked the Hodge quotation and its thematic implications in the novel. In the third chapter, I will explore the numerous parodic connections that exist between *Pale Fire* and *Life of Johnson*, as well as with thematically-related works from within Nabokov's, Johnson's, and Boswell's separate *oeuvres*. The centerpiece of my dissertation, this lengthy chapter will be broken into seven smaller sections, each of which will be directed to a study of Nabokov's parody as it applies to a specific character, or relevant characteristic, in Boswell's *Life* ("Boswell/Kinote" "Prejudices" "Religion" etc.).

The final chapter, though necessarily selective, will provide a study of a representative passage from *Life of Johnson* that shows how Nabokov's parody affects a re-reading of Boswell. I will hold Boswell's style and biographical approach under a new and illuminating critical light that only a reading of *Pale Fire* can provide. Referring to Sebastian's similar delight in parody, the narrator of Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941) writes, "(A)ll of this obscure fun is, I repeat, only the author's springboard"(92). Of the many trails Nabokov's use of parody in *Pale Fire* leads his readers down, I will ultimately suggest one important place we are taken is back to the texts he is parodying in the first place. Understanding Kinbote's own particular struggles analyzing Shade's poem and life from within the tradition that Nabokov superbly parodies will of course enhance any reading of *Pale Fire;* at the same time a reader of *Pale Fire* cannot return to *Life of Johnson* without considering the events Boswell describes in this new and surprising light.

CHAPTER I

FIGHTING ANXIETY: IN SEARCH OF LOST IDENTITY THROUGH PARODY

> Another ideal runs ahead of us, a strange, tempting, dangerous ideal to which we should not wish to persuade anybody because we do not readily concede *the right to it* to anyone: the ideal of a spirit who plays naively--that is, not deliberately but from overflowing power and abundance--with all that was hitherto called holy, good, untouchable, divine; for whom those supreme things that the people naturally accept as their value standards, signify danger, decay, debasement, or at least recreation, blindness, and temporary self-oblivion; the ideal of a human, superhuman well-being and benevolence that will often appear *inhuman*--for example, when it confronts all earthly seriousness so far, all solemnity in gesture, word, tone, eye, morality, and task so far, as if it were their most incarnate and involuntary parody--and in spite of all of this, it is perhaps only with him that *great seriousness* really begins, that the real question mark is posed for the first time, that the destiny of the soul changes, the hand moves forward, the tragedy *begins*.
>
> --from The Joyful Science, epigram 382.

In *Strong Opinions*, Nabokov makes a precise distinction between satire and parody. "Satire," he writes, is "a lesson, parody a game." A lifelong opponent of didactic and moralistic art, Nabokov rarely satirized. But he often played the game of parody, and in increasingly complex ways. His use of parody provides his novels with a "comic relief of life," as Van Veen describes the books in the library in *Ada*, a sense of "reality" evoked through parody's conscious flaunting of artifice. And rather than undermining the autonomy of the author in a blur of intertextuality, one of the purposes of Nabokov's parody is to show how this activity tends to emphasize the control, and hence the sense of authorial identity, exerted by the writer in the composition of his or her book.

Nabokov was not the first writer to use parody for these purposes. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is a early, important record of an artist making a similar discovery about parody's potential for bringing about "a comic relief of life," as well as a useful method for establishing authorial identity. Though there have been many parodic novels since, particularly following the rise of Hobbes and his imitator, Locke--most such books attempting to debunk "realistic" representation by pushing the

conventions of novel-writing, and the problems of "catching up" with a character, to the foreground through their parody--it was Cervantes who provided the dimensions for such explorations of "reality." The later experiments with parody and the novel--from Sterne to Joyce--as Robert Alter has noted, represent "explor(ations) from different angles the imaginative potentialities of a kind of fiction that (Cervantes) authoritatively conceived" (29). As such, I will focus my introductory study of parodic books on Cervantes' novel, though there have been others (*Jacques Le Fataliste, Tristram Shandy, Ulysses,* etc.) that explored similar imaginative potentialities found in parody.

The central function of Cervantes' parody is--as we shall is also the case with Nabokov's modern version of the Cervantik parody--typically double-sided: recognizing Art's fundamentally artificial nature, and the potential dangers of its seductions, Cervantes is equally aware of the self-deceptive nature of the curate's so-called common-sensical understandings of things. Though the curate and the barber find much to laugh about in Don Quixote's madness from reading books that "dried up his brains" (64), their brains are equally dried-out by works of literature: the *Diana* by Salmantine must be burned, but the same story as told by Gil Polo should be treated, the curate intructs the barber solemnly, as if it were written "by Apollo himself" (61).

There is of course, more than one Don Quixote in *Don Quixote*; but the larger point for Cervantes is that the entire world is made up of errant knights, all of whom differ only in degree of madness. An important purpose of Cervantes' parody is to reveal the fragmentary and distended nature of all assumptions made by anyone, and *especially* by those who claim to know what "reality" really is.

In this respect, Don Quixote himself emerges as one of the more "realistic" characters in the novel, an ironic point made possible only through parody. The knight's description of Dulcinea reveals that the Don is both wholly devoted to the absolute truth of the "Dulcinea" he has created for himself--indeed, ready to fight to the death anyone who would contradict this vision--*and* conscious

of the essentially fictitious nature of his evocation. Don Quixote may possess a greater grasp of "realistic" thinking than the curate is even capable of suspecting:

> Her name is Dulcinea, her place of residence El Toboso, a village of La Mancha. As to her rank, she should be at the very least a princess, seing that she is my lady and queen. Her beauty is superhuman, for in it are realized all the impossible and chimerical attributes that poets are accustomed to give their fair ones. Her locks are golden, her brows the Elysian Fields, her eyebrows rainbows, her eyes suns, her cheeks roses, her lips coral, her teeth pearls, her neck alabaster, her bosom marble, her hands ivory, her complexion snow-white. As for the parts which modesty keeps covered from human sight, it is my opinion that, discreetly considered, they are only to be extolled and not compared to any other. (57)

As Alter notes, the Don's description of Dulcinea here is essentially a "catalogue of poetic cliches, virtually announced as such, which makes clear that Dulcinea is a composite creature..." (26). Yet despite her deliberately composite nature, or perhaps because of it, the reality of the image that Don Quixote creates is all the more insistently "real" in a world where the discontinuous is rarely acknowledged. Alter continues:

> If Dulcinea is too much a composite to be immediately present for us, the aura of her presence in the knight's imagination shines through the passage and so we see how a manifest fiction can become a reality in the imagination of its beholder, even as he recognizes the material from which the fiction has been composed (26).

Through the use of a chain of parodic features, a "real" Dulcinea--the Dulcinea of Don Quixote's intensely convicted imagination--begins to take shape, and in ways that may not be possible in more "realistic" novels, precisely because of their (Quixotic) insistent on the versimilitude of the world they inhabit. But Don Quixote, the pre-post-modernist, is above such distinctions. As Alain Robbe-Grillet, surely the latest in a long geneology of writers deeply influenced by Cervantes (and, as we shall see, a key influence on Nabokov when composing *Pale Fire*) writes:

> Literature is, then...the pursuit of an impossible representation. Knowing this, what I can I do? All I can do is organize stories, which are neither metaphors of reality nor analogues but act as working constructs. Then the ideology that governs our common consciousness and language structures will no longer be a constraint, a source of failure, since I've reduced it to the

status of material. (12)

By reducing the cliches and convention of the Romance to the status of Don Quixote's impassioned vision, Cervantes performs the unusual feat, perhaps available only to parodists, of giving new life to old images; he essentially makes "constructs," that seemed closed and archaic, "work" again, thus revivifying anew a woman's eyes so that they shine like the sun, in the light imagination of a quixotic hero, who is in turn evoked in the world Cervantes has created as imagined by the quixotic reader.

Despite his reservations about *Don Quixote*, and in particular, Cervantes' penchant for cruelty, Nabokov also was not unaware of this dimension of Cervantes' art. In his *Lectures on Don Quixote*, he clearly delights in Don Quixote's response to the maid who claims that a "Munaton the Magician" put a spell on his library, causing the Don's books to disappear: "'Freston, he should have said,' remarks Don Quixote...(and) the composure and artistic nature of this intonation is a peach to be palpated and piously savored" (118). Though Nabokov does not explicitly state this, clearly one prominent feature of this artistic peach is the way in which Don Quixote's reply to the maid suggests he consciously resides in the gloriously hypothetical, blending "reality" with the way things "should be." Cervantes' subtly worded response demonstrates again the Don's unshakeable belief in the power, and even priority, of the fictive.

As Alter points out, the patchwork nature of this parody gathers to perform a seemingly paradoxical purpose: by assimilating the cliches, by reducing everything from earlier romances to the "status of the material," "Cervantes the writer" begins to emerge. Alter writes: "If the Quixote calls into question the status of fictions and of itself as a fiction, it also affirms a new sense of the autonomy of the artist who has conceived it" (15). In this sense, Don Quixote, the master weaver of cliches and poetic expressions, stands as a reflection of the larger weaver, Cervantes himself, who, through the double-mask of the "interpreter" of "Cid Hamete's" text, begins to gain identity. But it is an "identity" that clearly exist in the "fictional"--is in fact, made possible only by a pastiche of

fictions, re-organized in a new and personal way to evokes this sense of "reality" through parody's "comic relief of life."

This is precisely what Mikhail Bakhtin would later seek to articulate in his important discussion of what he calls "Parody-Travestying" literature. This type of literature, he writes in *The Dialogic Imagination*, "introduces the permanent corrective of laughter, of a critique of the one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word, the corrective of reality that is always richer, more fundamental..." (55). The assumption made by most "realistic" artists, armed with what Robbe-Grillet sneeringly refers to as their "cumbersome machinery of continuity, linear chronology, causality, noncontradiction," that somehow they can *contain* reality in a "one-sided seriousness of the lofty direct word" ironically moves them further away from the "corrective of reality" (*Ghosts in the Mirror*, 47). Parody provides this corrective.

What exactly does this corrective reveal? And how does this evoke reality? Bakhtin's concept of the relation between content and form provides a partial answer to these questions. Parody's corrective, he writes,

> introduces...a critique of the one-sided seriosness of the lofty direct word that is...most importantly *too contradictory and heteroglot* to be fitted into a high and straightforward genre. (55)

Since life itself is a discontinuous, fragmented experience, any art that would imitate it must also replicate the gaps and discontinities of existence. The foolish consistency sought for by all small minds--including those hobgoblins of mimesis made mandatory by the cumbersome machinery of creating so-called "realistic" characters--can be avoided through the corrective of parody, which, by its very nature, implies a double-sided, contradictory quality to the world of the parodic novel, hence bringing the reader closer to a sense of the "real."

And, as we have seen in the case of Cervantes, parody can help the author demarcate his own place in the literary cosmos. Composing with an awareness of other works, evidenced through play,

can help give one's own creations a sense of freshness. Bakhtin was not unaware of this aspect of parody:

> ...it is necessary for (the artist) to fight against old literary forms, to make use of them, to combine them, to overcome their resistance or to find support in them...if it is significant and serious, every artist is the *first artist*, as it were; *he must immediately assume an aesthetic position with regard to the extra-aesthetic reality of action and cognition*, even if only within the bounds of his purely personal ethical-biographical experience. (284)

Assuming such an "aesthetic position" is tantamount to asserting an ultimate authorial autonomy. Fighting, and eventually overcoming, older literary forms can lead to what Borges would later call the process of "creating one's own precursors", a triumph of identity for the new artist who is no longer a slave to the anxiety of past influences, but an individual, liberated, creator (*Borges Reader*, 57). Through an assemblage of other fictions, the new writer-begins to gain definition.[2]

But perhaps most intriguing is Bakhtin's suggestion, made earlier in the same essay, concerning another possible function of parody, one that relates specifically to the older works of art being parodied. In a discussion about books that deal with, not the world "out there," but the word "world" in a literary context, Bakhtin writes:

> (These works) are assimilated according to external, purely "literary" considerations. Artistic form does not come together here with content in all its cognitive and ethnical weightiness face to face, as it were. Rather, one work of literature comes together with another, which it imitates or which it "makes strange," and against the background of which it perceives as something new. (284)

Bakhtin could have been writing about *Pale Fire* in this passage. Indeed, as we shall see, Nabokov's novel *is* a work assimilated *only* according to external, purely "literary" considerations. This kind of organizing principle is built on the activity of forcing one work of literature to merge with another, in turn making the older work "'strange'" and simultaneously providing the reader with a sense of seeing the older work in a new light. As we shall see, this is a central dimension of Nabokov's parody in *Pale Fire*, and one that he exploits to help the twentieth-century reader read an eighteenth-century

biography in a new, utterly strange, way.

Early in his career, readers noticed Nabokov's propensity to parody older literary forms and traditions, and attempted to understand the function of these games. The mock-epistolary and academic-analysis styles and structures used to great parodic effect in novels like *Lolita* (1955) and *Pale Fire* (1962) represent a late chapter in the history of a career dominated by parody, coupled with a sense of the literary and philosophic implications such an approach can be useful in exploring.

As a number of critics have pointed out, Nabokov's parody goes beyond sheer "fun" (i.e. the purely aesthetic pleasures of parody). Throughout his novels, Nabokov constantly returns to the idea that parody can act as a "springboard for leaping into the highest region of serious emotion" (*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, 96). What I will suggest in this chapter is that Nabokov's parody works in profoundly philosophical ways that are rooted in Bakhtin's conception of the "parody-travesty"; ultimately, Nabokov's own parodying helps the reader to understand how life and art share unexpected (and easily overlooked) ontological similarities. Or, as Vladislav Hodasevich more precisely and poetically defined it, reality *and* fiction are both "equally depicted...in the form of a disintegration of the stage set. Both worlds, in their relationship to the other, are for (Nabokov) illusory" (98). In parody, Nabokov found the ideal way in which to express this idea.

The idea of "reality" and fiction as illusory, and further of a parodist's ability to expose this situation through his or her self-reflexive novels, is not a new one, though I will argue that Nabokov's ultimate application of this concept is. As Margaret Rose writes in *Parody as Meta-Fiction*, novelists as early as Cervantes saw the potential for critiquing the truth of mimetic fiction in a work of fiction itself:

> Through Don Quixote's imitation of the heroes of the knightly Romance the latter are brought to life in distorted form and brought into conflict with the reality of Don Quixote's milieu, and with that of the reader whom the hero also represents. Through this dialectical confrontation of the fiction with its 'contradiction' -- within another fiction -- Cervantes is said to have created the way to the supression of the Romance. By this means Cervantes is also

> said to have contrasted fiction and reality to establish a more 'realistic' form of fiction. Yet it is also true that his use of parody in the novel is directed towards reflecting the fictional nature of the context in which the conflict of the Romance and reality take place, and that the realism of his work was reflexive and self-critical. (67)

Rose points out that Cervantes' decision to include his own *Galatea* in Don Quixote's library, as well as his use of a multiplicity of fictional authors--Cid Hamete and his 'interpreter'--suggests he was creating a book that functioned both as "the product and self-reflexive mirror of Cervantes' thought." As we have seen, those who, like the curate in *Don Quixote*, condemn works of Romance, finally choose to evaluate and even exclude certain works from the fire of reason, suggesting the insidiousness of Quixoticism; even the so-called "sane" characters of Cervantes story are infected by it. A belief in the "truth" of "fiction" is essentially, for Cervantes, universal; one man's dangerously fictional lie is another's pallative truth.

But by placing his own works in the library, Cervantes also calls in to question the conflict between "romance" and "realism" itself. Even my discussion of Nabokov's play with texts through parody cannot be assumed as wholly "true" in this sense; as Cervantes shows in *Don Quixote* there is no one perspective that can be said to be "above" the reaches of the fictional. "Reality" is as multi-faceted and subjective as the fragmented, multi-reflective coat that the Knight of the Mirrors wears which is made up of a number of tiny pieces of glass. A composite of mirrors and refractions, like the luminous Dulcinea, represents, nevertheless, a unity, and perhaps the only sense of identity that we can know in the post-Cervantic world of the novel.

In his essay on *Pale Fire* and parody, Robert Wilson suggests that in addition to pointing out the internal dialogism at work in a novel like *Pale Fire*, parody can illuminate character, and even provide "depth," a word seemingly outlawed in our post-modernist world. Exploiting the "contradictions and bifurcations" of a voice that reflects character, or, as Wilson puts it, "manifests the characterhood of character," need not preclude "depth" of character, or even authorial autonomy

(98). Despite a parodically created character's lacking his "own" discourse, a character can still possess a world.

In fact, according to Wilson, in *Pale Fire* this is exactly what happens: the reader learns more about Kinbote than might be possible in a more "realistic" novel because of the relation between a character's discursive zone and the concept of character-world:

> Together the two provide a model of how internal dialogism can operate in a literary text. The words of one utterance that traverse those of another bear with them the weight of the speaker's worldhood, the nexus of values, experience and ideology that informs each word. (97)

And, as critics of Nabokov following Hodasevich have observed, the use of parody helped Nabokov to create his own literary personality, but from *within* a terrarium of referential fiction. Through the use of a system of complicated cross-referencings to other novels in his own works, in novel after novel, "Nabokov the writer" begins to gain definition, just as we have seen is the case with Cervantes in his novel.

Of course, there are differences, rooted largely in history, between the motivations and consequences of Cervantes' parody and Nabokov's. But even from a modernist perspective (a vantage point that, though he never explicitly acknowledged as his own, could certainly be applied to Nabokov's artistry), Cervantes' isolation of his identity through a pastiche of earlier books and stories prophetically announces a key tenet of modernism, and one that Nabokov will exploit in his own way. In the tradtition of William James who said, "The world around is possibly a confusion, but it is only through assimilation of its disparities that the artist can begin his work," the authors of *Don Quixote* and *Pale Fire* seek to assimilate and absorb the various texts that they find themselves surrounded by, in the interest of "begin[inng] their work "(James, 271). Cervantes and Nabokov both accept this aesthetic concept, and attempt to expresss it in their works, despite the fact that neither attempt to align themselves with the school of modernism. In the case of Cervantes, this is chronologically impossible, and would have been, no doubt, spiritually impossible for him as well;

Nabokov meanwhile, was very open about his discomfort with "isms" (see *Strong Opinions*, 27). It could be argued that parody is not transhistorical; yet in their highly individual uses of it, Cervantes and Nabokov seem more closely related to one another than they are to most of their contemporaries.

But even as he is asserting himself and his own visions, amongst, and in relief to, others, Nabokov's novels encourage other readings, and of different authors. Indeed, they send the reader back to those works Nabokov himself loved and hated (for Nabokov hated with as much--perhaps even more--passion as he loved[3]). And his parody forces us to forever read these works in new and often surprising ways.

The notion of a permanently extensive power existing in a good book, a secret reading that is attainable through re-reading inspired by parody, suggests, as Nabokov was the first to admit, works of art as organic structures. His novels assert again and again that he accepted Charles Peguy's observation, "Homer is new this morning, and nothing is so old as yesterday's paper." The stage set of chronological "reality" that every literary historian must perform on begins to crumble in the face of an infinitely renewable art--a book that is always as "new as the morning," existing outside of time, capable of as many new readings as there are new readers. Time possesses as many troubling edges as fiction itself on Nabokov's own stage, which itself is in the process of disintegration. And because this is so, originality demands that the putative artist recognize previous literatures as self-sufficient worlds of their own, and work to develop an ability to respond to these earlier works (parodistically or otherwise), all of which exist, and will continue to thrive after one is dead. In *The Western Canon*, Harold Bloom, in many ways one of Nabokov's subtlest critics, suggests that this activity, born as all creativity is for Bloom in his famous Anxiety Impulse, may be what canonical literature is about in the first place:

> Aesthetic criticism returns us to the autonomy of imaginative literature and the sovereignty of the solitary soul, the reader not as a person in society but

> as the deep self, our ultimate inwardness. That depth of inwardness in a strong writer constitutes the strength that wards off the massive weight of past achievement, lest every originality be crushed before it becomes manifest. Great writing is always rewriting or revisionism and is founded upon a reading that clears space for the self, or that so works as to reopen old works to our fresh sufferings. (11)

Thus a book that is always as "new as the morning," existing outside of time, can be experienced by new generations of "fresh sufferers," while crowding out the sufferings of up-and-coming artists incapable of clearing the playing field.[4] One very effective method of opening these old wounds is through parody. An examination of how far researchers have seen into the rereading possibilities that Nabokov opens through parody will put in a clearer context what I wish to demonstrate for the first time as underlying his art. Many have obliquely referred to the type of reading I propose, but a complete investigation has been pending. Ironically (but in keeping with my general thesis about permanently extensive and existing art) the most probing scholar of this facet of Nabokov's art was also one of his earliest critics. Because Hodasevich's ideas represent the apotheosis of thinking about Nabokov and parody (and despite/because of the counter-chronos nature of this arrangement) I will analyze his discussion at the close of this chapter.

Lionel Trilling's "The Last Lover" (1958) is one of the earliest major essays to examine the use of parody in Nabokov's novels. In his study of *Lolita*, Trilling served several important functions. When it was first published, Nabokov's novel was still a source of controversy, and continued to be published by the prurient-minded Olympia Press.[5] The respectability that was to come with his contract with Putnam (1958) still eluded Nabokov, and *Lolita* had yet to blossom within literary circles. What is of utmost importance about Trilling's analysis is that it was one of the first to read the novel as a work of art that actually aligns itself with more traditional literatures *through* the use of parody.

He does this by suggesting that Nabokov chose to shock his readers with the story of Humbert Humbert's passion for a twelve-year-old girl, not merely in a pursuit of so-called "shock

value," but instead, in an attempt to rediscover "passion-love":

> If a novelist wanted, for whatever strange reason, to write a novel about the old kind of love, how would he go about it? How would he find or contrive the elements that make love possible?
>
> For example, if love requires scandal, what could the novelist count on to constitute scandal? Surely not--as I have already suggested--adultery. The very word is archaic; we recognize the possibility of its use only in law or in the past. Marital infidelity is not thought of as necessarily destructive of marriage, and, indeed, the word *unfaithful*, which once had so terrible a charge of meaning, begins to sound quaint, seeming to be inappropriate to our modern code. (12)

To write about the "old kind of love" requires more controversial subject matter than earlier passion-novelists could have imagined; times had changed by 1958,[6] morals loosened, and less was (and continues to be) found unacceptable in the games of love.

And yet, as Trilling points out, "unacceptability," or the presence of "scandal," is essential in the creation of passion-love. Increasing the age-difference between his lovers remained Nabokov's only solution to this problem of evocation, the sacred cow that could still be put to pasture. Thus, though *Lolita* is indeed "shocking," and the values it addresses new ones, for Trilling the actual "shock," and the passion-love this surprise is a product of, belong to older forms of novelistic emotions that date back to the days of Andreas Capellanus:

> I may seem to have been talking about *Lolita* as if in writing it Mr. Nabokov had undertaken a job of emotional archaeology. This may not be quite fair to Mr. Nabokov's whole intention, but it does suggest how regressive a book *Lolita* is, how although it strikes all of the most approved modern postures and attitudes, it is concerned to restore a foregone mode of feeling. And in nothing is *Lolita* so archaic as in its way of imaging the beloved. We with our modern latitude in these matters are likely to be amused by the minor details of his mistress's person that caught the lover's fancy in the novels of the 19th-century--the expressiveness of the eyes, a certain kind of glance, a foot, an ankle, a wrist, an ear, a ringlet; with our modern readers knowledge of the size and shape of the heroine's breasts, thighs, belly, and buttocks, these seem trifling and beside the point. Yet the interest in the not immediately erotic details of the female person was not forced on the lover or the novelist by narrow conventions; rather, it was an aspect of the fetishism which seems to attend passion-love, a sort of synecdote of desire, in which the part stands for the whole, and even the glove or the scarf of the beloved has an erotic value. (16)

Implicit in Trilling's argument is the notion that, though to modern readers, a 19th-century passion-love story frequently elicits little more than amusement, this response overlooks the often shocked, even outraged reactions older novels ignited in their contemporary audiences. A part stood for a much larger, often more erotic, certainly more controversial whole, and older readers could easily make the connection. And Nabokov would like the controversial feelings (mandatory for any "new" passion-love) generated in *Lolita* to equal those encouraged by earlier novelists.[7] Despite his disclaimer, for Trilling Nabokov was indeed an emotional archaeologist.

It is an obvious but often overlooked fact that many older novels were every bit as shocking for their readers as today's controversial books, poems and plays. And though it may be argued that the use of indirection and subtlety has all but vanished from newer novels about love, the sensual aspirations of a Henry Miller or a Princess de Cleve are essentially the same.

Thus, though *Lolita* radically re-invented the passion-love tale, Trilling points out that the environment of "the new that shocks"--outside of which, no passion-love can be said to exist--is (and shall always be) precisely a feature of this intense emotion. New novelists are no more exempt from generating the requisite shock value that must accompany any evocation of this kind of love than the older ones were. Nabokov is ultimately a reactionary in matters of love: he sought to achieve the same kind of effects that Abbe Prevost did in *Manon Lescaut*, and in ways that would be as shocking and scandalous to twentieth-century audiences as Prevost's narrator's adventures were for his reading public.

If this is so, then older novels can be enjoyed for their sensual pleasures in "new" ways, but the reader must first understand the depth of erotica that a Pushkin might plumb when he spends stanza after stanza discussing his beloved's feet. Once the reader has grasped the implications of such a device, once he or she has "relearned" the highly stimulating art of "sexuality expressed through synecdote," thus moving from the deceptively innocent part to the more passionate whole,

older, once controversial novels again regain their former heat as evocations of erotic, passion-love[8].

It is through parody that this effect is achieved in Nabokov's novels. Trilling closes his essay with a quotation from the concluding chapter of *Lolita*, in which Humbert proclaims to the reader his passion for Lolita that has now turned into love, an evolution of feeling that, Trilling suggests, reflects an

> ascent from "ape-like" lust to a love which challenges the devils below and the angels up over the sea to ever dissever (Humbert Humbert's) soul from the soul of the lovely Annabel Lee (sic) constitut(ing) the life-cycle of the erotic instinct. (17)

And yet to record this ascent, to resurrect from petty eros the often powerful emotions tied up so hopelessly in older resurrections, Nabokov parodies ancient forms of passion-love. No one should fault Trilling for failing to point this out; his focus was simply elsewhere. But the name of Humbert's first love, Annabel Leigh, certainly sends the reader back to Poe's earlier poem "Annabel Lee," only now encouraging a new reading through the prism of Humbert's passion.[9] The same can be said of the numerous parodies Nabokov uses to describe Humbert's love affair with Lolita---scenes from Bizet's opera Carmen, Goethe's *Erlkonig*, Dante's love for the nine-year-old Beatrice, etc. In each case the reader must return to the original source to fully appreciate the elements of passion-love in Nabokov's book. But in the process, the reader also gains an understanding of the vital and shocking qualities of the earlier stories parodied.

A good example of this occurs in the Chapter 11 when Humbert writes:

> what is most singular is that she, *this* Lolita, *my* Lolita, has individualized the writer's ancient lust, so that above and over everything there is--Lolita. (47)

As Alfred Appel has noted, Humbert here sees himself in a line descending from the great Roman love poets, and he does this by imitating their locutions (*Annotated Lolita* 357), thereby reviving "their ancient lust." As Appel notes, "The intonational stresses of "*this* Lolita, *my* Lolita" are borrowed from a donnish English translation of a Latin poem. H.H.'s models include Propertius (c.

50-16 B.C.) on Cynthia, Tibullus (c.55-19 B.C.) on Delia, and Horace (65-8 B.C.) on any of the sixteen women to whom he wrote poems" (357). Given the context of Nabokov's story, such parodies are surely meant to be humorous; however, Humbert's passion (as even he comes to realize, but tragically late) for Lolita *is* a real one, and the feelings she arouses in him as legitimate as those felt by earlier poets for earlier women. The parody thus amuses, but invokes respect for its sources as well, legitimating not only Humbert's attractions, but those of the Latin Poets, and for a modern audience.

It is a tactic that at least partly works--many readers initially mistook Nabokov *for* Humbert, reading *Lolita* as a kind of confession through fiction. But Nabokov angrily denied any connection: "I detest Humbert Humbert" (*Strong Opinions*, 14). In 1964, Alvin Toffler asked Nabokov why he chose the alliterative name, and he reiterated this contempt for this creation: "It is a hateful name for a hateful person" (26). What is undeniable is both the ironic appropriateness of the allusion, as well as its ability to send us back to the source material, though now with the capacity to re-feel the emotion that is being expressed there, through the intensity of passion-love that Humbert provides. For a brief moment, Nabokov resurrects the passion of Roman Love Poetry in his description of Humbert's own lust.

And in his *Annotated Lolita* (1969) Appel tracks down, with a scientist's passion, the various allusions and specific references Nabokov makes in *Lolita* to older poems, plays and novels. Though Appel's function is primarily as a scholar, and his book designed to clarify *Lolita* for college students, his analyses into the motives of Nabokov's parody suggest much:

> *Lolita* is a parody, a burlesque of the confessional mode, the literary diary, the Romantic novel that chronicles the effects of a debilitating love, the *Doppleganger* tale, and, in parts, a Duncan Hines tour of America conducted by a guide with a black imagination...(liii)

For too many of *Lolita*'s early readers (particularly the American ones, or the "readers" who never actually read it), the novel was little more than pornography, designed to titillate. Certainly to many

it was far from the sophisticated fun Appel describes, and explaining the ways of Nabokov to Christian-American Man and Woman is a major function of his essay. Appel does this by shifting the emphasis of discussion away from the subject matter of the novel to an analysis of *Lolita*'s formal concerns, which inevitably leads to an exploration of Nabokov's use of parody. Appel locates the motives for this play primarily in Nabokov's quest for absolute autonomy as an artist:

> As willful artifice, parody provides the main basis for Nabokov's involution, the 'springboard for leaping into the highest region of serious emotion,' as the narrator of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* says of Knight's novels. Because its referents are either other works of art or itself, parody denies the possibility of a naturalistic fiction. Only an authorial sensibility can be responsible for the texture of parody and self-parody; it is verbal vaudeville, a series of literary impersonations performed by the author. When Nabokov calls a character or even a window shade "a parody," it is in the sense that his creation can possess no other "reality." (xxvii)

Like Trilling, Appel reads Nabokov as a novelist who aligns himself with a larger tradition through his own works. But for Appel that tradition is more than one of love-stories. Convolution is such a dominant element in his writings that Nabokov's novels should be understood as part of genre of self-conscious artists, who are interested in evoking the primacy of the "reality" of their own creations. This "genre" includes Shakespeare, Moliere, the Romantic poets, Dickens, Proust and Joyce, to name a few of those to whom Nabokov's parodies and allusions frequently refer. And the pattern of parodies in *Lolita* reminds us that "(the novel) is but one part of that universe of fiction arrayed around the consciousness of Nabokov" (lxviii). Thus Appel's formalistic approach encourages readings that place the novel outside of any "reality" other than the one Nabokov creates. Certainly, we must think of Bloom's process of "clearing space for the self," an activity all artists who aspire to canonicity must engage in. By demarcating the lines of his own "stage," Nabokov announces the exclusivity of his artistically created world from other fictional places.

Such deliberately contrived techniques of course deny the possibility of naturalistic fiction, and Nabokov held "realism" in contempt throughout his career.[10] But, as Appel comprehensively

reveals, he also aligned himself with a "real" tradition when he wrote novels from this purely aesthetic point of view. Yet, despite this interest in creating his own "reality," Nabokov, for Appel, is not a mere "aesthete":

> Nabokov is able to have it both ways, involving the reader on the one hand in a deeply moving yet outrageously comic story, rich in verisimilitude, and on the other engaging him in a game made possible by the interlacings of verbal figurations which undermine the novel's realistic base and distance the reader from its dappled surface, which then assumes the aspect of a gameboard. (lx)

For Appel, the sense of play that Nabokov achieves through parody, is the chief motive behind his use of the device. But, as Appel is quick to note, this "play" can have serious, even "moving" repercussions in "reality"[11]:

> Nabokov defines in *The Gift* the essence of his own art: 'The spirit of parody always goes along with genuine poetry'...This spirit in Nabokov represents not merely a set of techniques, but, as suggested above, an attitude towards experience," Appel writes. (liv)

In *Ada*, Van Veen expresses a similar idea: "(The library) might have become a chapter in one of the old novels on its own shelves; a touch of parody gave its theme the comic relief of life" (137). But ultimately for Appel, Nabokov's interest in parody lies in servicing the novel that he is writing, providing a relief of *life* to its fictive proceedings, and not as a method of sending his readers back to older works of art, with new and inspired readings.

Dabney Stuart's reading of Nabokov is in this way typical. Like Appel, he delights in the sheer quilted qualities of Nabokov's complicated parodies, and the authorial autonomy these games tend to reinforce. But before he reaches this conclusion, Stuart *does* come tantalizingly close to a full-blown discussion of Nabokov's art as "literary re-reading." In *Dimensions of Parody*, he writes:

> Both Nabokov and Knight parody detective fiction, and it's a small move from the specific parody to the general consideration of the novel itself as a form of detection, a game of obscure fun, a mysterious composition in which the stress is on the pattern. I will be aiming my discussion at what the parody is the springboard for...The general structure of *The Prismatic Bezel* ("bezel" usually refers to the multifaceted surface of a cut jewel)

> mirrors the general structure of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. In *Bezel* a man called G. Abeson is murdered, and the initial chapters of the book concern the search for the killer. This takes some time, however, since the investigating detective is waylaid and is very late arriving at the boarding house where the killing occurred. During this time it is gradually revealed that everybody in the boarding house is related somehow, and the boarding house becomes a country house. As this happens, the style of the book changes so that the reader forgets the mystery, and begins to think he is in the surroundings of friendly, social experience. When the tardy inspector appears, the whole novel is thrown back into its opening atmosphere of suspicion, and doddering old Mr. Nosebag takes off his beard, revealing he is the dead man.
>
> Even within the few pages describing *Bezel* there are a number of Nabokovian clues dropped here and there. The most blatant of these is the verbal play with the dead man's name: G. Abeson read backwards is Nosebag...the dead man is an art dealer, and when the inspector arrives and begins to sniff Nosebag's possible guilt he says, adopting a Cockney accent, "Ullo, 'ow about Hart?" This question introduces a level above the level of detection. It suggests art is the culprit, which turns out to be true. Art *has* murdered Mr. Abeson, and resurrected him in old Nosebag. The game proceeds, obviously, but with a new dimension: the imagination is capable of giving life to the dead, including the form of a detective story. (2-3)

I have included this lengthy quotation because it helps serve to illustrate both the insightfulness of many of Nabokov's readers, as well as their limitations. Stuart's conclusion that the "imagination is capable of giving life to the dead, including the form of a detective story," defines precisely the intentions of a narrator who would use older stories as a "springboard" to other places. Indeed, after a close reading of the text-within-the-text of *Sebastian Knight* it would perhaps be difficult to go back to many works of detective fiction with as much enthusiasm as before--Nabokov's parody reveals the limitations of the genre even as he is exploiting them for his own, more complex purposes. The beauty of *The Prismatic Bezel* emerges from Nabokov's refusal to introduce into it certain conventions readers have come to expect from detective fiction--a reliable pattern to the drama involving rising action, denouement, a villain lurking in a dark alley (as opposed to the story *itself* as culprit). If these conventions did not already exist, *The Prismatic Bezel* would have no springboard from which to move us to different, more original realms of discovery in reading. But they do, and Nabokov's art insistently reminds the reader of this through the dynamic of his parody,

in the process forever changing the way we come to look at works in this pre-fabricated genre.

However Stuart, like Appel, cannot rest content with this sort of analysis, and feels compelled to find a moral dimension to the parody, outside of literary re-reading. Despite Nabokov's frequent pronouncement that his novels have "no moral in tow" (see the "Afterword to *Lolita*, p. 313), Appel and Stuart both sense something that verges on a moral philosophy in his parody:

> (H)uman perception is inevitably imaginative (and) one is faced with the deduction that all perceptual constructions, whether they are embodied in a novel or not, are parodies, and that the assumption that a human being lives in and can apprehend a comfortable "factual" reality is the most disturbing parody of all." (Stuart 113)

The "real world" outside of the "reality" created in the fiction, remains for both critics what is ultimately most "moving" about Nabokov's novels, and certainly not (or rather *only*) the relationship his books bear to others. But Stuart goes farther than Appel in his analysis of the comically human reliefs that begin to emerge through the parody of Nabokov's novels. Stuart traces in Nabokov's parodies what amounts to a categorical imperative:

> Playing this game of masks and mirrors is fun. It has been criticized by some as being no more than that. Some people think playing the game (of parodying) is not even fun...(however) Nabokov's novels *do* make one think, for what that is worth; the point is that they do not make one think in the terms to which one is habituated. They force one to come at problems from a different angle; like Sebastian himself, Nabokov uses the novel-as-game as a springboard to higher regions of emotion. He knows how to combine serious concerns with utter delight, which is to say he practices the substantial distinction between what is serious and what is solemn. The epithet "tragicomic" is at a slight distance from describing his fiction because he is too willfully perverse and bizarre. But always for a purpose, at least partly to jar his reader out of habitual modes of response to the world and lead him back into it with a fresh vision. (50-51)

For Stuart, Nabokov's literary universe, though seemingly amoral--and in its insistently intertextual structuring principles, outside of the reality of the world itself--is actually deeply informed by a belief in the virtuous power of art to awaken its audience to the "real" through a prism of fiction[12]. Put another way, for Stuart and Appel, Nabokov's books about books ultimately lead his readers away

from books themselves, and back to "real life." But it is "real life" as seen anew, and in ways that might not have been thought possible without the help of his parodic fictions.

Another follower of Appel, Robert Alter, makes a similar point in *Partial Magic*. Though the scope of Alter's study includes but also extends beyond Nabokov novels--his primary concern is to define a literary trend the dimensions of which Appel was already defining in 1968, the "self-conscious genre,"--Alter's approach to convoluted fictions, and the enjoyment he finds in reading them, is reminiscent of Stuart's:

> For a novelist, in the midst of the evoked fictional life of his novel, to devise a way of saying "Look, I'm writing a novel," could conceivably be no more than a mannerism, a self-indulgent game. When such devices are integrated into a large critical vision of the dialectic interplay between fiction and reality, they may produce one of the most illuminating dimensions of the experience we undergo when reading a novel...(xiv)

But what exactly constitutes this "most illuminating dimension"? For Alter, as for Appel and Stuart, it is the ability reflexive novels have to send the reader back to "reality." Again one thinks of Van Veen's literally "inter-textual library" that bears a realistically comic relief. Though the following quotation is taken from an essay on *Tristram Shandy*, Alter's idea can be applied to Nabokov's novels, a connection he will later make in the same book, and in a discussion of *Pale Fire*, though without this specificity:

> (T)he many mirrors of the novel set to catch its own operations also give us back the image of the mind in action; and at a moment when dominant intellectual assumptions had seemed to subvert philosophically the realistic aspiration of literature, literary self-consciousness paradoxically proves to be a technique of realism as well. (56)

A mirror of the mind in action that is itself mirrored in a work of reflexive art leads the reader very closely (perhaps closer than any work of fiction) to the "real."[13] For Alter, when the novel managed, after Cervantes, to "put us in touch with the imponderable implications of human mortality through the very celebration of life implicit in the building of vivid and various fictions," this was the "ultimate turn of the Copernican revolution" (244). He continues:

> The impulse of fabulation, which men had typically used to create an imaginary time beautifully insulated from the impinging presence of their own individual deaths, was turned back on itself, held up to a mirror of criticism as it reflected reality in its inevitably distortive glass. As a result it became possible, if not for the first time then surely for the first time on this scale of narrative amplitude and richness, to delight in the lifelike excitements of invented personages and adventures, and simultaneously to be reminded of that other world of ours, ruled by chance and given over to death. (244-45)

Alter places value precisely on those aspects of Nabokov's novels that Stuart finds important, i.e. the ability his books have to remind us, through a complex system of parody, of "that other world of ours, ruled by chance and given over to death." According to these Nabokovians, and despite his open disgust with and rejection of, realism, Nabokov was a closet realist, looking with perhaps a greater sense of realism than most "realist" writers--and from within the prism of his fictions--at the highly fictive outside world.

In his analysis of *Pale Fire* Alter writes:

> We do not surrender the imagination, but on our way to this ultimate point we have come to see the drastic costs and limits of living by it alone. Our vision of the imagination, through the history-haunted quixoticism of this self-conscious novel, has been both enlarged and subtly, somberly transformed; and that is precisely what the novelistic enterprise, from the seventeenth-century to our own age, has at its best achieved. (217)

These "subtle transformations" parallel closely Appel's description of Nabokov's novels as "heightened emblem(s) of our own efforts to confront, order, and structure the chaos of life," as well as Stuart's notion that the purpose of books like *Pale Fire* is to "jar (the) reader out of habitual modes of response to the world and lead him back into it with a fresh vision." Thus, the enjoyment of Nabokov's parody for these three major readers of Nabokov lies finally in the new context his complex and referential parodies provide the reader with for tranquilly viewing "reality" once again.

In *Nabokov's* Ada: *The Place of Consciousness*, Brian Boyd takes this premise and expands on it greatly. He defines Nabokov's moral cosmology that he reads as subtly interwoven into his texts, and in a manner reminiscent of Stuart's analysis, though with much greater scope and

detail. On the surface, Boyd *seems* to be describing a different approach to Nabokov from these other critics, who would read his novels as gangplanks to reality; but his suggestion of the sensation of "other worlds" must, for Boyd, inevitably lead the reader back to familiar territory--back to reality in the first place, and certainly not to older literatures *per se*. In a discussion of the "deepening responses" possible in *Ada* he notes:

> At their final stages they offer a tentative promise of successive enrichments of reality and at the same time an insistence that the world of real, responsible life is the only one we know and the only one in which we can act...he also allows other worlds of wonderful possibility to surround the one we know, and he encourages us to look for these new worlds by looking deeper into the pattern he himself has found in both nature (in his beloved butterflies) and time (in his unrivalled memory) (212)

For Boyd, these "other worlds" are populated by phantom existences that Nabokov in turn populated his own haunted novels with, encouraging a kind of pantheistic reading of "reality" as an experience that is only superficially random; in fact it is controlled and ordered by powers higher than any human autonomy, and all but invisible except to the most discerning artist or reader. Paraphrasing Nabokov, "reality" is the one word in the dictionary that must, by its definition be printed in quotation marks; but this is so for Boyd because Nabokov saw reality as an endlessly contrived affair, the authors of which often step out from behind the curtain into a coincidence in life, or, as Proust put it, from within "the miracle of an analogy."

But what of the context of the stories, poems, films and plays themselves that Nabokov plays upon in his novels? None of these critics fails to trace the various sources of the parody, but they all focus their studies on its frankly humanistic implications as the device applies to our perception of "reality." This is certainly an important point, and, given the frequent accusations of mere "aestheticism" at work in his novels and poems, the deeply serious nature of Nabokov's play cannot be emphasized enough. Overlooked, however, are the rejuvenating and revitalizing effects such play can have on the source material, the older works, which, after all, Nabokov is parodying in the first place. And this activity itself carries with it deeply philosophical implications that must be

understood if we are to catch Nabokov at what *he* is doing.

A partial response to this question can be found in a comparison between Nabokov and Proust. It is not an arbitrary yoking--as his famous Cornell lecture on the French writer--as well as the numerous parodies to *In Search of Lost Time* throughout his career--attests, Nabokov was a great reader of Proust. In Proust's view, books are like those memories that he describes as

> embodied...in some material object, as...the souls of the dead in certain folk stories....hid(ing) there. There it remains, captive for ever, unless we would happen on the object, recognize what lies within, call it by its name, and so set it free. (19)

Art also exists in relation to time in much the same way for Nabokov as it did for Proust, and Nabokov's concept of the future is central to understanding his parody; the reader cannot slap his knee as heartily as he should if he does not grasp the following: to a very great extent--but largely unexpressed in any direct, non-poetic language (because they were artists)--both writers believed in a timeless art that could transcend death. Reflecting on the famous "uneven paving stones" epiphany in *Time Regained*, Proust writes:

> The truth surely was that the being within me which had enjoyed these impressions had enjoyed them because they had in them something that was common to a day long past and to the present, because in some way they were extra-temporal, and this being made its appearance only when, through one of these identifications of the present with the past, it was likely to find itself in the one and only medium in which it could exist and enjoy the essence of things, that is to say: outside time. This explained why it was that my anxiety on the subject of my death had ceased at the moment I had unconsciously recognized the taste of the little madeline, since the being which at that moment I had been was an extra-temporal being and therefore unalarmed by the vicissitudes of the future. This being had only come to me, only manifested itself outside of activity and immediate enjoyment, on those rare occasions when the miracle of an analogy had made me escape from the present. And only this being had the power to perform that task which had always defeated the efforts of my memory and my intellect, the power to make me rediscover days that were long past, the Time that was Lost. (Proust, 904)

Nabokov also speculates about the possibility of a transcendence from time through artistic "extra-temporality" in *The Gift*, but there are critical differences between his thoughts on time and art and

Proust's, distinctions that, once understood, can help deepen an understanding of Nabokov's theory of literature as outside of time. In his search for "extra-temporality," Proust's eye is always on the past as seen through a mercurial and elliptical present; for Nabokov the reverse is so. Fyodor and the poet Koncheyev are discussing fame and time:

> "...there is a comforting feeling," said Fyodor meditatively. "One can borrow on the strength of the legacy. Doesn't it amuse you to imagine that one day, on this very spot, on this lakeside, beneath this oak tree, a visiting dreamer will come and sit and imagine in his turn that you and I once sat here?"
>
> "And the historian will dryly tell him that we never took a walk together, that we were hardly acquainted and that if we did meet we only talked about routine trifle."
>
> "But nevertheless try! Try to experience that strange, future, retrospective thrill...All the little hairs on the soul stand on end! It would be a good thing in general to put an end to our barbaric perception of time; I find it particularly charming when people talk about the earth freezing in a trillion years and everything disappearing unless our printing shops are moved in good time to a neighboring star. Or the drivel about eternity: so much time has been allotted to the universe that the date of its end should *already* have come, just as it is impossible in a single segment of time to imagine *whole* an egg lying on a road along which an army is endlessly marching. How stupid! Our mistaken feeling of time as a kind of growth is a consequence of our finiteness which, being always on the level of the present, implies its constant rise between the watery abyss of the past and the aerial abyss of the future. Existence is thus an eternal transformation of the future into the past--an essentially phantom process--a mere reflection of the material metamorphoses taking place within us. In these circumstances the attempt to comprehend the world is reduced to an attempt to comprehend that which we ourselves have deliberately made incomprehensible. The absurdity at which searching thought arrives is only a natural, generic sign of its belonging to man, and striving to obtain an answer is the same as demanding of chicken broth that it began to cluck. The theory I find most tempting--that there is no time, that everything is the present situated like a radiance outside our blindness--is just as hopeless a finite hypothesis as all the others. (354)

As the title of his famous book makes explicit, Proust was in search of lost time when writing *A La Recherche...*; the goal and central theme of the entire novel is the recapturing of Lost Time. Nabokov searches in his books, not for lost time, but instead, for a way *out* of time.[14] He does this by probing the possibilities of an art for time that has not yet transpired, with future recollections yet

to be imprinted on subjective memory. Thus his novels are designed for "visiting dreamers," in the future, as much as they are for the reader of the present moment. But the dream is always compromised by Nabokov's deep consciousness of the finite nature of this or any observation.

It was a theme that obsessed Nabokov throughout his career. In *Speak Memory* he describes the moment (age four) when he first become aware, not only of his age in respect to his parents, but of the concept of "age" itself. This troubling and beguiling sensation reveals, even at such an earlier age, Nabokov's urge to "picket nature (*SO*, 20):

> I felt myself plunged abruptly into a radiant and mobile medium that was none other than the pure element of time. One shared it--just as excited bathers share shining seawater--with creatures that were not oneself but that were joined to one by time's common flow, an environment quite different from the spatial world, which not only man but ape and butterflies can perceive. (21-22)

Separating time from space, with time as a "shared" and "mobile medium" that one is "plunged" into, suggests the possibility of a time *without* space, and vice versa. In fact, Nabokov postulated such existences: "Time without consciousness--lower animal world; time with consciousness--man; consciousness without time--some still higher state" (*Strong Opinions*, 30). Parody in Nabokov is always to a great extent about "picketing nature." In his countless plays on older books, intonations and genres, Nabokov shows how great writing does indeed involve a "rewriting or revisionism." And as the artist is asserting himself by imagining with as much clarity as possible future retrospections of his work, older works suddenly come to life in the wake of this experience, and are shown to never have "died" exactly--it was simply the readers who had left these worlds behind. Or as Bloom might put it, they perhaps felt their influence but failed to recognize the ineluctable anxiety that must be experienced when confronting previous writers as a "self-less" artist. (see also *The Gift* p. 16, 106, the penultimate chapter of *Speak Memory* for a similar discussion, *Lolita*, p. 88)

Literature is infinitely renewable, and the same applies to certain works of criticism. One of the earliest major analyses of Nabokov's art is--if not chronologically speaking--contextually, also

one of the most contemporary,[15] and only now being revived. In "On Sirin" (1937)[16], author Vladislav Hodasevich dissects the important connections that exist between Nabokov's novels and art, and in a manner that is remarkably precise, and even prophetic, given the numerous critics who have since examined this complex relationship.

Though he uses different terms than would later be adopted by critics of Nabokov, and though he is not specific in his tracing of allusions, Hodasevich underlines the importance of two features of Nabokov's parody that will continue to figure prominently as points of departure in almost every critical examination of Nabokov's parody that followed: Nabokov's delight with the sheer artistry of his text as evinced through parody, and the capacity his parodies have to send his readers back to their original sources with new insights and readings. He writes:

> Under thorough scrutiny Sirin proves for the most part to be an artist of form, of the writer's device, and not only in that well-known and universally recognized sense in which the formal aspect of his writing is distinguished by exceptional diversity, complexity, brilliance and novelty. All this is recognized and known precisely because it catches everyone's eye. But it catches the eye because Sirin himself places them in full view like a magician who, having amazed his audience, reveals on the very spot the laboratory of his miracles. This, it seems to me, is the key to all of Sirin. (97)

Nabokov's love of artistry of form aligns him with other great masters of archictectonics such as Flaubert, Joyce and Proust. But, as Hodasevich suggests, there is more to Nabokov than a delight in mere form. A hint of this deeper significance is seen in his willful placement of his devices in "full view."[17] Nabokov is entirely capable of creating fictions in that "well-known and universally recognized sense" of "exceptional diversity, complexity, brilliance and novelty," (think of *Ulysses*) but he goes beyond even this:

> Sirin has a novel built entirely on the play of autonomous devices. *Invitation to a Beheading* is nothing more than a chain of arabesques, patterns and images, subordinated not to an ideological, but only to a stylistic unity (which, by the way, constitutes one of the "ideas" of the work)...
>
> Peculiar to Sirin is the realization, or perhaps only a deeply felt

> conviction, that the world of literary creativity, the true world of the artist, conjured through the action of images and devices out of apparent simulacra of the real world, consists in fact of a completely different material--so different that the passage from one world into the other, in whichever direction it is accomplished, is akin to death. And it is portrayed by Sirin in the form of death. If Cincinnatus dies, passing from the creative world into the real one, then conversely, the hero of the story "Terra Incognita" dies at that instant when he finally plunges completely into the world of the imagination. And although the transitions are accomplished in diametrically opposed directions, both are equally depicted by Sirin in the form of a disintegration of the stage set. Both worlds, in their relationship one to the other, are for Sirin illusory. (98)

If both the world of fiction and the world of "reality"[18] are potentially fictitious, what better way to express this idea than through the props that an especially pronounced and self-conscious fiction itself provides? The notion of fiction and reality as disintegrating stages can of course lead to madness, and as we shall see, like Johnson and Boswell, Nabokov was haunted by two eighteenth-century themes--insanity and death. And he explored these experiences through several key figures in *Pale Fire*, constantly seeking and articulating ordering principles with which to fight off the cruelties and chaos of life. But equally possible in such an anti-chronos philosophy is the rejuvenation of "dead" books that were perhaps only playing possum in the minds of poor readers in the first place.

And it is somehow appropriate that in refutation of the conventional and linear conceptions of time held by most critics, and though Hodasevich tragically died young (cancer, June 14, 1939)[19], long before Nabokov would begin to parody with greater complexity novels and the process of writing, he was able to imagine, in a fatidic moment of observation, the advent of *Pale Fire*. At the close of his until recently forgotten and important essay, he writes:

> I think--I am almost convinced--that Sirin, who has at his disposal a wide range of caustic observations, will some day give himself rein and favor us with a merciless satiric portrayal of a writer. Such a portrayal would a be a natural development in the unfolding of the basic theme with which he is obsessed. (101)

The theme unfolded and bloomed in *Pale Fire*, using precisely the kind of protagonist Hodasevich

envisioned. It is to this work, and its use of parody that we must now turn.

****

Pale Fire represents a critical point in Nabokov's career. With this book, Nabokov eschews almost entirely the standards of "representational fiction," a method of writing that, in his earlier novels, he at least superficially seems to respect and employ. Written in the style of a text book, but describing a never-never land that has as much in common with Errol Flynn movies as it does with wide-awake reality, the dimensions of *Pale Fire*'s parody are also more intricate, mannered, and fabulated here than anywhere else in Nabokov's previous novels.

It was hardly the kind of thing readers expected from Nabokov in 1962. Much of *Lolita* reads like Byron rediscovered through Pushkin, with "light and shade effects rivalling those of the greatest English poets" (as Kinbote says of the poem Proust's "rough masterpiece" in *Pale Fire*). But the early sixties were also the peak years of the notorious *nouvelle roman*, and in particular its *enfant terrible*, Alain Robbe-Grillet, with whom Nabokov and his wife Vera once ate lunch in Switzerland, and maintained a friendship by mail until the Russian writer's death in 1977.[20] In his early novels, (and unlike his much more personal[21] later works) Robbe-Grillet constructs stories that announce their contrivances with a deliberate blandness, often by using highly baroque effects that situate the novel far away from the "reality" of an Updike suburb, or a Bellow burg. And in this light, *Pale Fire* can be read as a response to the burgeoning *nouvelle roman* genre, the members of which included not only Robbe-Grillet, but also Butor, Queaneau, and Pinget.

As in the best of Robbe-Grillet and Queaneau, everything in *Pale Fire* seems to be imbued with a mysterious significance that is hiding just behind the surface of the mock-utilitarian/academician writing style.[22] There is a certain dazzling quality to the novel's general sense

of pattern interlocking with pattern--many of the games seen perhaps more clearly than ever before in Nabokov--because of the stripped-down writing style that is consistently maintained throughout the book. In the first important review of *Pale Fire*, Mary McCarthy delighted in this sense of sheer complexity, a response that, as we shall, has been common enough since the book's publication:

> *Pale Fire* is a Jack-in-the-box, a Faberge gem, a clockwork toy, a chess problem, an infernal machine, a trap to catch reviewers, a cat-and-mouse game, a do-it-yourself novel. When the separate parts are assembled, according to the manufacturers's directions, and fitted together with the help of clues and cross-references, which must be hunted down as in a paper-chase, a novel on several levels is revealed, and these "levels" are not the customary "levels of meaning" of modernist criticism but plans in a fictive space, rather like those houses of memory in medieval mnemonic science, where words, facts and numbers were stored till wanted in various rooms and attics or like the houses of astrology into which the heavens are divided. (71)

McCarthy traces in this mnemonic storehouse a number of complicated cross-referencings, finding allusions in the title alone to Shakespeare (see *Hamlet* and 1.5.91), Shelley's "pale fire of opals," and a Gaelic word for fire (*ingle*), used by Kinbote to describe a boy favorite, but which also means blaze (84). McCarthy was the first to locate the origin of the title of Shade's book on Pope' poetry, *Supremely Blest* (see *Essay on Man* (267-270), as well as an important source for the word *zembla* (see the same poem, Epistle 2 v), and she makes further connections between the work and Pushkin's poem "Don Giovanni," *Timon of Athens*, chess, and *Alice in Wonderland.*

In opening the book up to an audience that may not have sensed the rippling effect of Nabokov's allusive, tricky and chess-like style of writing (a technique always present in his books, but often more submerged in the text), McCarthy introduced more readers to her Russian friend's books than ever before; and her essay that delights in the sheer "wildness" of a book clearly prophesies the extreme stylizations of Barth and Bartheleme in their late-sixties works, all of which were all-too-clearly created under the spell of *Pale Fire*. As she writes in her close:

> ...this centaur-work of Nabokov's, half-poem, half-prose, this merman of the deep is a creation of perfect beauty, symmetry, strangeness, originality,

> and moral truth. Pretending to be a curio, it cannot disguise the fact that it is one of the very great works of art of this century...(87)

McCarthy's analysis is vigorous, specific, and represents an important early examination of the novel. But like many studies of *Pale Fire* that were to follow, her focus is less on an individual aspect of the parody at work in the novel, and more on illustrating the "busy hum" of overlapping images and allusions in the book, and the considerable wit with which Nabokov weaves all of these elements into his story.[23]

Following McCarthy's lead, perhaps no one has been more successful in this level of analysis of parody in *Pale Fire* than Robert Alter, in his exciting essay "Nabokov's Game of Worlds." In addition to glossing even more allusions than McCarthy, Alter explores in greater detail the implications of a novel built on a profusion of parodies to earlier novels. McCarthy is content to enjoy the carve of Nabokov's weapon without bothering to draw conclusions about his methods; Alter's interests in the use of parody go deeper. In a career given over to parody, Nabokov's increasingly maturing grasp of parody and its potential function in fiction can help us understand the parameters such games impose, if the artist is to avoid self-indulgence. But though Nabokov may have forced the pattern of the play too much in some of his earlier novels (*Laughter in the Dark*, *The Eye*) Alter writes that in *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*,

> the repeated allusions to poets, to conventions of the novel, to all the trappings of literary tradition, beautifully fuse with the actual fictional predicaments of the protagonists, with the way they construe their world. The central characters themselves, even as we see them as artful designs in words, have a poignant intensity of life that surpasses any other characterization in Nabokov; and their cadenced, at times extravagantly figurative language is always an expression of their nature and their plight, not a self-indulgence of the author. Both novels take up the basic quixotic theme of the torturous, teasing relation between words and things, imagination and reality. (183-84)

Alter is clearly aware of the artistic dangers such play can lead to--an important distinction between his more directed analysis and McCarthy's treasure hunt lies in Alter's observation that the use of

parody can often serve as a springboard, but the leap may be to nowhere, or simply to an obscure form of gaming that serves no thematic or structural purpose. As we have seen in my general discussion of Nabokov's parody, Alter, like Appel before him, shapes his intricate, vigorous, and admirable collection of allusion through parody in such a way as to help support his basic contention that when the parody possessed a relationship to the book itself that went beyond mere "play," Nabokov used his parody to articulate a humanistic philosophy. Nabokov the master manipulator was as interested in announcing the autonomy of the artist as he was in weaving complex patterns of allusion in parody. It is the feeling of a "poignant intensity of life" that Nabokov's parody is able to evoke that counts for so much in Alter's approach to his novels, and his essay on *Pale Fire* is no exception.

However, the vigor of his analysis, unlike McCarthy's more hit-and-miss approach, is without question exceptional: Alter shows how allusion and references to Pushkin, Baudelaire, Butterflies, as well as to Johnson and Boswell (among many others) all help, not to "dehumanize" *Pale Fire*, but in fact to provide it with a "comic relief of life." At the close of the novel, when Kinbote writes that his "notes and self are petering out," the commentator briefly imagines himself in a number of different roles, including that of the *real* creator of *Pale Fire*, Vladimir Nabokov. As Alter points out, this cameo appearance by the author in his own book serves to remind the reader of something important, but easy to forget in the rush of a reader's imagination:

> These fictional materials we are told...however lifelike, however absorbing, have been assembled in the imagination of the writer, who is free to reassemble them in any number of ways, or to put them aside and tell his own story directly, and the fictional materials have no existence without the writer. (17-18)

Paradoxically, an intuition of life thus begins to surface in a novel that seems determined to remind us of its contrived existence. And it is precisely this sense of *life*, generated through the "teasing" play between artifice and art, "reality" and Reality, that Alter[24] and Appel (with Stuart) value so

highly in Nabokov's parodies.

Alter's encyclopedic analysis of parodic sources is so thorough and specific, so fast and furious, that it might be easy to conclude that this "evocation of the human," through a lattice of allusion and counter-allusion, is *all* Nabokov is doing with parody in *Pale Fire*. Numerous other critics --including Page Stegner, John Cheever, Wallace Fowler--have made the same or similar observations about parody in *Pale Fire*.

But as we have seen in his discussion of *Lolita*, Brian Boyd's readings of Nabokov's parodies move from the humanism of Alter, Appel and Stuart to even larger, more religious, implications. Unlike previous critics, Boyd suggests that Nabokov is not primarily interested in finding the individualistically "human" behind his network of parody--Boyd detects the outlines of an agnostic's sense of the hereafter in the parody as well. In one of the most startling[25] analyses of all of the Nabokov novels in his biography, Boyd concludes that John Shade *created* Kinbote, in attempt to savor the afterlife through the prism of immortal art. Though Fyodor states in *The Gift*, "The I of the book cannot die into the book," (333) Boyd argues this is precisely what happens in *Pale Fire*: the poet imagines his own death and creates the commentator who survives him (and, in his frequently mad, but no less poetic prose, even surpasses Shade and his often mawkish and domesticated poetry). The parodic invention that is Kinbote, a homosexual-christian-academician who is the antithesis of Shade, the heterosexual-agnostic-poet, helps Shade to better order his universe, which verges on the chaotic after the death of his daughter Hazel:

> Shade chooses to place Kinbote...in counterpoint to his own poem, in the hope that this study in the solitude of the soul will help him understand his daughter's death. Shade realizes he cannot know all the mysteries hidden in Hazel's soul, but he does know that she has been provoked to suicide by the prospect that she will have to spend her days without a partner. In creating Kinbote's desperate loneliness, Shade attempts to express the hope that even within the loneliness and despair that drove Hazel to her death there may have been something to match the private, magical radiance that Zembla has within Kinbote's mind...Although in the poem "Pale Fire," Shade shows himself convinced of something beyond death, every attempt

> to detect it...leads to a dead end. But when he leaves the facts of his own life and steps into the looking-glass world of Zembla, he feels free to speculate here as he cannot do in person. (449)

The sense that the hereafter can be glimpsed (though fleetingly) through art is also important to Nabokov's own invented philosopher, Pierre Delalande, in *The Gift*:

> The unfortunate image of a 'road' to which the human mind has become accustomed (life as a kind of journey) is a stupid illusion: we are not going anywhere, we are sitting at home. The other world surrounds us always and is not at all the end of some pilgrimage. In our earthly house, windows are replaced by mirrors; the door, until a given time, is closed; but air comes in through the cracks. (445)

Not only air, but gusts of such wind blow through Nabokov's literary structures; however, to have a complete sense of Nabokov's own intentions when parodying, it is of course important to understand what *he* is doing, in the context of the novel itself, and not Delalande and Shade's (or Alter's or Boyd's, which they closely resemble) ideas *per se* (see also pg. 106). Again we must think of Stuart, and his suggestion that the imagination is capable of "giving life to the dead"(2-3), to the tradition, not only of art as an Idea of Order (with intimations of an afterlife), but also to the tradition of men-of-letters, and in particular, the genre of the "double-chase" between rival biographers and their blurry subjects.

Unfortunately, Stuart has not published an analysis of *Pale Fire*. However, based on his studies of Nabokov's other books, we can surmise that his approach to this novel would no doubt ultimately lead in the direction Boyd has pointed to--upwards--though with a greater emphasis on parody's effects in evoking a humanism-through-art. Nabokov was also aware of the sense of transformations, of "jarring the reader" from within a moribund genre, to a different place. In *Laughter In The Dark*, he defines the "Hegelian syllogism of humor," a phrase coined by his fictional character Axel Rex as

> *Thesis*: Uncle made himself up as a burglar (a laugh for the children); antithesis: it *was* a burglar (a laugh for the reader); synthesis: it still was Uncle (fooling the reader). (143)

As with "The Prismatic Bezel"--and its transformation of Nosebag into G. Abeson--parody in *Pale Fire* can be seen to take us on a similarly Hegelian wild ride. But *how* one views this transformation is a matter of perspective. Priscilla Meyers suggests, in *Find What The Sailor Has Hidden*, that such a spiralling effect does indeed exist in *Pale Fire*, but like Nabokovians past and present, she sees this as leading to higher, more spiritual realms:

> The overlapping readings of *Pale Fire* here are neither exclusive nor exhaustive. A name, a word, or sentence will appear in several separate contexts, but will rarely fit perfectly into a single interpretation, as it is designed to engender multiple reflections, the dappling of light that is for Nabokov an emblem of heightened consciousness. (9)

Later Meyers will specifically connect this "emblem of heightened consciousness" to the afterlife[26]:

> Nabokov's creation expresses his wonder at the miracle of the universe...The knowledge concealed in *Pale Fire* reveals that 'every page in the book of one's personal fate bears His watermark,' and teaches us to find intimations of the divine in nature and art. Nabokov cast his novels as distortions of ideal images, images that themselves are but pale fire when measured against the brilliance of the kingdom we have left in being born and will enter when we reach the end of our poem. (229)[27]

Indeed such ideas are essential to any reading of Nabokov; a fascination with the possibilities of immortality can be found in virtually every Nabokov novel. But he was as interested in the problems connected with believing in an after existence[28] , and--as Stendhal notes in *The Red and The Black* what no poet can ignore--the possibility that such paradises might be impossible in the first place. And Meyer's suggestion that Nabokov's use of allusion and parody in *Pale Fire* "rarely fit(s) into a single interpretation, as it is designed to engender multiple reflections," is of course, itself an interpretation, and one that may be misleading. As Nabokov notes in *Strong Opinions*: "Often when reading my critics, I sense that the footprint they have discovered in my novels is their own" (*SO*). Meyer's emphasis on multiplicity here would seem to open the door for footprints of all shapes and sizes, and indeed, see this profusion as one encouraged by the novelist in his pursuit of "heightened consciousness."

The parody in *Pale Fire* does seem to springboard the reader in a number of directions, but I will argue that at least one of the places Nabokov takes us is specific, and traced by him in a deliberate and exclusive fashion. Unlike the chorus of critics who would theologize Nabokov's use of the device however, I prefer to read his parody as a signpost to the literary works it refers to themselves. In the comic realm of his parody in *Pale Fire*, Nabokov does point out the limits of human knowledge, and by implication, the "possibility of the possible as possible" (Ulysses, 707), and in a spiritual context. But he also does this by returning us to the previous books, and reminding the reader of Proust's ghostly, anxiety-inspiring (and indeed, agnostically pleasing) presences, eternally persisting in the sources themselves, waiting to walk the earth again. We will now closely inspect such a phantom.

CHAPTER II

BOSWELL'S *LIFE OF JOHNSON* AND THE STAINS OF SUBJECTIVITY

What are the possibilities of literary biography?
They are great fun to write, generally less fun to read. Sometimes the thing becomes a kind of double paper chase: first the biographer pursues his quarry through letters and diaries, and across the bogs of conjecture, and then a rival authority pursues the muddy biographer.
---Nabokov, from *Strong Opinions* (67).

"I should live no more than I can record"
---Boswell, from *The Life*

"My notes and self are petering out"
---Charles Kinbote, commentary to "Pale Fire"

"A moth having fluttered round the candle and burnt itself, he laid hold of this little incident to admonish me; saying, with a sly look and in a solemn but quiet tone, "That creature was its own tormentor, and I believe its name was Boswell."
---*Life*, 5 August 1763

Since its publication, rival authorities have pursued Boswell's own paper chase, *The Life of Johnson*, in great force and number. The "bogs of conjecture" into which Boswell frequently plunged continue to make his book especially interesting game not only for other biographers, but artists as well. To what extent is Boswell's *Life of Johnson* a historically accurate document, valuable as a record of events as they actually occurred, and how much of it is shaped by Boswell's own highly individualized perspective? In any recording of "factual" data, occurring in Nabokov's "applied time," there is no definitive answer to this question. Literature that raises such questions can make for splendid parody, and in the hands of an ardent subjectivist like Nabokov, play with convention can lead to conclusions that are complex and at times startling, shedding new light on the way in which books can be re-read through other texts.

To fully understand the dimensions of Nabokov's parody of the Boswell/Johnson

relationship as it is presented in the *Life*, it will be important to explore those aspects of Boswell's persona that critics have found most difficult to reconcile with his role as "objective" biographer, and the conclusions these disparities have led readers of the *Life* to make about the ultimate relationship between subjective fact and objective fiction. As Charles Kinbote writes at the close of his forward to *Pale Fire*, "The commentator has the last word" (22). Of course, it is the infinitude of future commentators on commentators who will have yet another "last word" on what occurred in any biography, fictional or otherwise. It is, however, to these readers that we must now turn if we are to fully appreciate the carve of Nabokov's own parodistic weapon.

The dispute between Donald Greene and Frederick Pottle over the legitimacy of Boswell's text as history nicely encapsulates many of the major points of contention in the debate. In his essay "'Tis a Pretty Book, Mr. Boswell, But--" Greene attacks the notion that the *Life* possesses any validity as a record of events. Greene finds the biography to have "grave faults indeed" and to be "a most inadequate biography of Samuel Johnson"(115). As an example of these faults, he points to Boswell's reports of Johnson's sayings in the *Life*, and the subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) ways in which Boswell "adorns" Johnson's practice of thinking aloud:

> (These) are not biography: they are material for the biographer, material that the biographer must scrutinize carefully when he uses it. As they appear in the *Life*, we all know, they are heavily (and silently) edited versions of Boswell's earlier jottings--edited so as to add color, heighten their dramatic effect, emphasize the traits of the Boswellian "Johnson" not sufficiently illustrated, in Boswell's opinion, in the original form of the report. Adverbs ("frowning," "gesticulating") are added, parenthetical speculations on the state of Johnson's mind are inserted, and there is a liberal sprinkling of superfluous "Sirs." Elsewhere I have called attention to Boswell's addition, in his account of Johnson's explaining to Goldsmith the legal maxim "The King can do no wrong," of such expressions as "majesty" and "the king is supreme; he is above everything," to make Johnson's "Toryism" seem closer to his own, and I protested that, though the reader may be more entertained by the revised than the original version, anyone attempting a serious study of Johnson's political views would be guilty of a gross breach of scholarly method if he used the revised rather than the original report. (126-27)

For Greene, *Life of Johnson* is far from an accurate "life" of Johnson, and more often only an ostensible one, suffused with Boswell's own ideas, desires and wishes; all of which, though they may make for fascinating psychological study, cut short the pursuit of biographical/biological truth. As with the case of his Toryism, Boswell frequently seems more interested in presenting a mirror version of his own political and personal ideas *through* his descriptions of Johnson--an activity that, as we shall see, Nabokov will exploit in comically provocative ways in *Pale Fire*--than an detached picture of Johnson. The *Life* then, for Greene, really only serves the purposes of future biographers and authorities who would improve on its "gross breach(es) of scholarly method"--people capable of seeing past all of the superfluous "sirs" and other additions and ornamentations.

For those interested in simply reading *The Life*, Greene suggests it be enjoyed only as *Tischreden*, or "Table Talk" books, a type of writing perhaps best exemplified by Eckermann's encounters with Goethe. What separates Eckermann's collection of meetings with a remarkable man from Boswell's is the German Boswell's willingness to call his work *Tischreden*--there is no confusion as to whether Eckermann's chats constitutes "biography"---his table talk with Goethe is just that--snippets and brief conversations that were collected at various points in the poet's life, and compiled in one volume for the delight of the public, if not the edification of historians.[29]

And yet, as Greene suggests, this is precisely what we have in *The Life of Johnson* as well, despite Boswell's biographical aspirations, or the thunderings of numerous Boswellians to the contrary.[30] And what is wrong with this sort of a reading? For Greene, nothing. In fact, though he has often been accused of an incapacity to enjoy Boswell, Greene is perfectly ready to find pleasure with *The Life*, but on his own terms. As he writes:

> (I)n this genre (of *Tischreden*)--a rare one--(*The Life of Johnson*) must rank very high indeed. If (the notion that *The Life* is "Table Talk") is allowed, I am happy to go along with MacCauley's praise, and repeat, with a slight modification, 'Homer is no more decidedly the first of epic poets, Shakespeare the first of dramatists, than Boswell is the first of composers of *Tischreden*. Eclipse is first, the rest nowhere.' Well, not quite.

> Eckermann comes a close second though he lacks Boswell's elan. Eckermann's reports sometimes drag in a way that Boswell's seldom do; but that may well be because Eckermann is a more faithful reporter--is a better biographer--than Boswell. (125-26)

A good biography--like a good translation--should never read "smoothly;" "real" life always contains a strong dose of the mundane, with events "dragging" now and then. Yet this does not exist in Boswell's supposed "life." Obviously amused, Greene points to Marshall Waingrow's publication of the nonjournal material from which Boswell constructed the *Life*, with its many passages annotated by Waingrow as "Not Used" by Boswell, or "Deleted" or "Omitted" as proof of his argument. He writes:

> It should not be thought paradoxical that the result of the labors of the galaxy of Boswell scholars like Waingrow and Pottle over the decades has been to render the *Life* more and more obsolescent as time goes on...no sane modern scholar be satisfied with the tied up, bowdlerized, and rewritten Johnson of Boswell's *Life* when a form at least closer to the original is available in his "private papers." To adapt what Housman said about manuscripts "corrected" by a later scribe or editor, give us the raw materials and we will mix our own Johnsonian salad, rather than buy Boswell's ready-made one. It may be pleasant to some tastes; for many others, the Boswellian seasoning seems to overpower the flavor the original ingredients. (136)

Greene's arguments appear to be reasoned, logical, and even sane, in a world of seemingly insane Boswellians, who insist on one particular "salad of events" with which to consume the story of Johnson's life. But, as Johnson himself noted, madness in men occurs much more often than superficial observers might suspect. For Greene, the method to Pottle's gentle form of insanity lies in his view of Boswell's book as "literary biography," and not "straight" biography. According to Pottle, viewing it otherwise would be to miss out on the fun of the book.

Pottle staunchly defends his view in response to this essay, finding in Greene's analysis, a "fear of the usurpative power of biography"(148). He writes in response:

> The *Life of Johnson*, in his opinion, is indeed a work of art, a minor masterpiece, but it is really more about Boswell than about Johnson...(but) Greene suffers from specialist's syndrome. Specialists generally tend not to

> care very much for literary biographies of the subjects of their specialty. Information, yes: Greene wants to know not merely Johnson's works but every minutest fact about him. He does not, however, wish anyone else to shape the information imaginatively for him; he wants to form his own idea of how Johnson looked and acted and spoke. But he is very much aware at the same time of the literary character of Johnson, the towering mind that emerges from Johnson's own writings, and he wants that aspect of Johnson always to dominate the other in the public consciousness. He wants it so much that he has come to wish the personal Johnson--all the vivid details of Johnson's appearance and gestures and talk--to be laid aside and forgotten, at least by everyone except people like himself who can be counted on to hold the two aspects properly together. What he wants is not a literary life of Johnson but a chronology. (152-53)

Pottle raises a troubling point--might not the image of Johnson that Greene and others have pleaded should have been better represented in the *Life, itself* remain a contrived version of the man, the poetic Johnson that emerges from his text, a figure conceived (and therefore shaped, with great selectivity) by Johnson himself? Why should we trust this version of Johnson over another such shaping, from an outside (though, in the case of Boswell, admittedly passionate and biased) observer? And anyway, Pottle finds in the act of "imaginatively shaping" a set of facts something that, though of little value as history perhaps, possesses a deeper aesthetic importance. And appreciating the *Life* requires a willingness to overlook certain flaws in the work. Echoing Rader[31], he writes:

> (N)othing alleged to be a structural fault in a literary work is really so if thoughtful readers do not react to it as a fault while reading...The *Life*..lacks narrative tension because Boswell knew that he did not have a story to tell. The organizing principle of the book is a massive idea or image of Johnson's human character existing as a whole only in Boswell's mind but ruling the book from the beginning to the end. (153-54)

But surely, as Prince Hamlet has noted, *nothing* is good or bad but thinking makes it so, a notion that Pottle feebly attempts to turn to his advantage here. Though Pottle rightly observes that critics like Greene ultimately imagine in their critique of Boswell a book that doesn't exist and proceed to descry this fact, his suggestion that Greene is sick with "specialist's syndrome" seems more *ad hominem* than cogent argument in favor of Boswell's *Life* as "literary history." And if we take by Pottle's

"literary work" a work of literature, then certainly a structural flaw is a structural flaw--are we to forgive the flaws of *Ulysses* because, say, Stuart Gilbert (certainly a thoughtful reader of the book) did not react to them as fault while reading it? Surely not.

In his splendid response to Pottle, Greene brings forward more provocative examples of the disparities between Boswell and Johnson, all of which point to the problems with the text in ways that are difficult to ignore, or forgive as the lamentable by-products of "literary history." In what ultimately constitutes a rebuttal to Pottle, he writes:

> To anyone who, like myself, has experienced the difficulty of trying to piece together from *The Life*, and *The Journals*, an accurate list of the dates on which Boswell was in Johnson's company, this is more than a little ironic. Boswell may have been concerned for such precision, but he very often didn't achieve it. There are numerous places in the Hill-Powell edition of the *Life* where Powell, in his page headings, has to correct the date given in the text of the *Life*, sometimes (also ironically) noting as his authority for the correction "Pottle *Private Papers of Boswell*." In the *Life*, Boswell writes that in 1778 "On Wednesday, March 18, I arrived in London," whereas his journal shows him to have arrived on Tuesday 17 March. In the same year Boswell writes, "On Saturday, April 14, I drank tea with him, and Powell notes "Saturday was April 18" and corrects the headline accordingly. In 1783, "On Monday, April 29, I found him at home"; footnote, "The correct date is Wednesday, April 30. *Boswell Papers*, xv. 206." And a dozen more of the same--so much for Boswell's careful double dating. (164)

Such discrepancies ultimately point to a subjectivity on the part of Boswell in relation to his material that critics like Pottle would have us forgive as a regrettable stumbling in the literary trek the biographer is mapping out so assiduously. Pottle (along with Rader) is really attempting to win the argument by changing the terms of it: as a "literary biography" (itself a vague term), Pottle states that Boswell's book is legitimate; but Boswell himself never calls his book such a thing, and seems convinced of the verisimilitude of his project. As Boswell observes, quoting from *Rambler* No. 60 in his introduction:

> We know how few can portray a living acquaintance, except by his most prominent and observable particularities, and the grosser features of his mind; and it may be easily imagined how much of this little knowledge may

> be lost in imparting it, and how such a succession of copies will lose all resemblance of the original. (12)

Clearly, Boswell views his own biography, since it is one that records only the "minute particulars" of Johnson's life, as free of the charge of distortion. Nothing, for Boswell, was lost in the making of a life into *The Life*; he would be humiliated by the labelling of his book as "literary biography."[32] In this light, Greene's argument must stand.

But both critics at least agree on one point--Boswell is *not* a biographer of Johnson, *per se*. One can either enjoy what Boswell is doing as something removed from biography, something that begins to look like a novel--a "literary biography"--or, as Greene perhaps more honestly chooses to do, criticize the *Life* as undeniably entertaining, even provocative and profound, canonical table talk in the guise of historic truth. Yet neither reading obscures the way in which Boswell obscures his subject matter, in what amounts to a highly personal approach to his material.

As critics of *The Life* have often discussed, many facets of his own character emerge from within the text, particularly in the forms of characterization, psychological maneuvers, and artistry. Boswell's artful depiction of his relationship with Johnson often casts suspicion on his ostensibly objective premises; his highly selective, frequently inconsistent portrait of those who surrounded Johnson further problematizes the text and its relation to the historical personages Boswell describes. The Oliver Goldsmith of *Life* is a case in point, and of special importance. As we shall see, this distorted portrait will play out in Nabokov's own parody in a number of ways.

Described by Horace Walpole as an "inspired ideot" (*Life* III, 412. n.6), Goldsmith's persiflage-misted character seems to have puzzled Boswell as much as anyone.[33] He rejected Reynold's interpretation of Goldsmith as "too subtle," and the one he provides, while not unfriendly, is deliberately limited in scope. In their first encounters described by Boswell, Goldsmith seldom betters Johnson in conversation, often acting more as a literary anvil off of which Johnson's sparks can fly. But, as Samuel Woods has pointed out, 10 April 1772 was a critical date in the development

of Boswell's relationship as we are to understand it from reading the journals. On that day he wrote the revealing entry:

> I felt a completion of happiness. I just sat and hugged myself in my own mind. Here I am in London, at the house of General Oglethorpe, who introduced himself to me just because I had distinguished myself; and here is Mr. Johnson, whose character is so vast; here is Dr. Goldsmith, so distinguished in literature. Words cannot describe our feelings. The finer parts are lost, as the down on a plum; the radiance of light cannot be painted.

Woods notes that beginning in March 1773 in the *Life*, Goldsmith also starts to defeat Johnson in conversation. But there were perhaps mitigating factors connected with this praise: these events took place only two years before Goldsmith's death, and simultaneous with the success of his major works, including *The Traveller* and *The Vicar of Wakefield.* As Wimsatt and Pottle observe, Boswell's letter to Goldsmith, in which he proclaims Goldsmith couldn't have "a warmer friend, or steadier admirer" than the one he had in Boswell, is indicative more of "innocent unscrupulousity" than any genuine compassion on Boswell's part: Boswell, not unlike the modern Hugh Kenner, was interested mainly in obtaining the autographs of famous men. Thus, Wimsatt and Pottle describe the letter he wrote for this purpose as one of his most "successfully artificial"(*Boswell for the Defence*, 151) but hardly a sincere one. He seems not to have been above a little exploitation in his relationship with Goldsmith.

And as Woods notes, Johnson's view of Goldsmith, "we see mainly in Boswell, so that it has become almost inextricably mingled with Boswell's presentation of Goldsmith" (241). Since Boswell's focus is primarily on Johnson, the view of Goldsmith is tangential, and almost always that of the "inspired ideot." This can provide little more than a superficial reading of his character and motives. Woods writes:

> (T)o Boswell, Goldsmith's antics often strike a discordant note, and what was almost certainly intended as jest was taken in earnest and gave rise to the genius-fool paradox that most of his contemporaries saw and that the *Life of Johnson* has perpetuated. However, knowing Goldsmith's literary

> gifts in comedy gives us some tentative insights into judging his social behavior." (241)

Boswell's portrait of Goldsmith, like his portraits of everyone in *The Life*, is tempered by his own personality, his quiddities and quixotic nature. This subjectivity can sometimes lead to depictions that, as in the case of Goldsmith, are not only inaccurate, but often unfair and deliberately misleading.

But though the issue of whether Boswell's enterprise is legitimately appraised as "Biography" or "Literary Biography" continues, the question of whether we should read *Life of Johnson* as a record of completely unadulterated fact has largely been settled. Even Pottle is ready to admit that Boswell "shapes" his text to great extent.

Richard Schwartz advocates a reading of *The Life* that eschews the reasonable norms of biography, simply because, for him, *The Life* never was intended to be read as one in the first place. "(T)he life should function the way it *does* function," he writes in "The Boswell Problem"(258). "It is not a bible," he continues, but "a catechism. It serves some basic functions and sets out certain facts, judgments, and points of view." Schwartz, like many others, has called attention to the scene in which Johnson accompanies Boswell to Harwich for Boswell's departure for Holland, as an example of a moment of fine, psychological artistry--if read rightly. A key chain of events--the refutation of Berkeley, his veneration of Colchester and defense of the notion of restoring the "Convocation to its full head (I 466)--lead in this passage to a Johnson that Schwartz accurately characterizes as one "thoroughly Boswellized. He is high Anglican, high Tory, witty, a social *Jean Bull*" (104). The description of the famous departure scene is equally guided by psychological shapings that often tell us more about Boswell than Johnson:

> My reverend friend walked down with me to the beach, where we embraced and parted with tenderness, and engaged to correspond by letters. I said, "I hope, Sir, you will not forget me in my absence." JOHNSON. "Nay Sir, it is more likely you should forget me, than that I should forget you." As the vessel put out to sea, I kept my eyes upon him for a considerable time,

> while he remained rolling his majestick frame in his usual manner: and at last I perceived him walk back into the town, and he disappeared. (I 472)

As Schwartz (with B.L. Reid) has pointed out, Boswell's literary recreation of this scene goes beyond merely (or only) recording the event; the artistry with which he invests the scene evokes for Boswell and the reader the melancholic Boswell's sense of the transience of his own joy as well:

> The craft in this passage is demonstrable. Boswell's own personality is illuminated throughout, while Johnson is, in many ways, obscured. For the person seeking to understand Boswell the account of his departure and the events leading up to it is a garden; for the person seeking to understand Johnson it is a minefield. However, if these pages do not reveal Johnson in his complexity, they do reveal what he was to Boswell and that, clearly, is a part of the total Johnson. What cannot be overstressed is the fact that it is only a part. (104)

Schwartz is less concerned with attacking or defending the strange and deeply personal *Life* as a "biography," or even recasting it as *Tischreden*; instead he seeks to provide a "balanced view of Boswell, one which avoids either patronizing him or damning him outright. He is certainly not above criticism"(105). Nor, Schwartz and others have argued, is Boswell beneath the task of being a literary artist in his own right. But to get to this level of appreciation, the reader must first understand *The Life* as *only* a partial reflection--a wonderfully evocative part, indeed the book possesses a pale fire of its own, but still only a part--of the total Johnson.

And yet, might this book that is "only a part," of the "total Johnson" also be simply another example, in the history of *all* biographies, of "the only part" of another human anyone can ever know, or be expected to record? Allan Ingram, in *Boswell's Creative Gloom*, takes this approach as his point of departure, suggesting that in composing *The Life*, Boswell sought to alleviate the pain of melancholy and the meaninglessness of life he felt, particularly towards the end of his life, in his intricate hobby-horse, *The Life* itself. The book was a local palliative for a man with a diseased soul in search of salvation and meaning. But this is the key to its "reality":

> The very business of writing...was probably important in maintaining Boswell in a less unbearable condition during this final period of his life.

> Also of value, though, must have been the fact that he was being forced to concentrate his mind upon the reality of Johnson and on what he had meant for him personally and for the public as a whole. This, like the biographical problem of selection of material and of the need for occasional anonymity, made it necessary for Boswell to step out of himself and see Johnson from a different point of view. His method of drawing Johnson for his own benefit in the journals had always been that of the realist, the 'Flemish painter.' He now had to present for public approval Johnson as a real and living man, and yet also as surpassing the limits imposed by mere flesh and blood and achieving the status of symbol fit to be reverenced as Boswell reverenced him. (190)

Boswell's relationship with Johnson was more than one of simple friendship, or even admiration; Boswell saw in Johnson and his ideas a sense of order, a meaning to life that, for a time, helped him to fight back his intuitive sense that life lacked order or meaning--this sense of order signified for Boswell and Ingram a greater, more real "reality" than one that might have been provided by an objective and empirical view.

Any number of passages strongly suggest such a reading, but Boswell's first encounter with Johnson is of particular interest, and as it will play a key role in the parody of *Pale Fire*, is worth examining here. As Boswell described the event, he was not only meeting a man, or even a famous one who he revered, but a kingly figure who was also an apparition, or inspiring sign, of the meaning life *could* have:

> At last, on Monday, the 16th of May, when I was sitting in Mr. Davies's back-parlour, after having drunk tea with him and Mrs. Davies, Johnson unexpectedly came into the shop; and Mr. Davies having perceived him through the glass-door in the room in which we were sitting, advancing towards us,--he announced his awful approach to me, somewhat in the manner of an actor in the part of Horatio, when he addresses Hamlet on the appearance of his father's ghost, 'Look my lord, it comes.' (I, 313-314)

Before the "glow-worm shows the matin to be near/and gins to *pale* uneffectual *fire*" (1.5.90-1) (italics mine), the ghost has, of course, revealed to Hamlet the true reason for his death; but he has also given the Prince an absolute truth--his version of the events that occurred, but also even the ghosts sheer existence in the first place--a commandment and sense of mission that Hamlet will let

live "within the book and volume of my brain/Unmixed with baser matter (1.5.104-105). And is this precisely what Johnson provided for Boswell, as the comparison to the ghost of *Hamlet* powerfully emphasizes.

Unlike the case of Hamlet, this feeling of an ordering principle at work in life, embodied for Boswell by Johnson, was by no means a permanent sensation for Boswell--when Johnson died, so too did Boswell's inspired feelings, as his comments late in the papers from the Malahide Castle make depressingly clear:

> What sunk me very low was the sensation that I was precisely as when in wretched low spirits thirty years ago, without any addition to my character from having had the friendship of Dr. Johnson, and many eminent men, made the tour of Europe, and Corsica in particular, and written two very successful Books. I was a board on which fine figures had been painted, but which some corrosive application had reduced to its original nakedness. (70-71)

And yet, when he was alive, Johnson was capable of clearing these feelings away, by virtue of the immense power of his piety and religious conviction, a power that Boswell himself worshiped and sought to evoke in his book. And it was as a result of this respect and sense of a mission that Boswell was Johnson's ideal biographer.

In addition to satisfying a need for religious and psychological clarity as regards life, there is an indication throughout *The Life* that Boswell sought, in the very act of composing, to get a better fix on his own identity in the universe as well. "The corrosive application," that again and again reduced Boswell to his "original nakedness" clearly depressed him greatly, and in many ways, his rejection of Hume and his principles is never more apparent than in these moments. Susan Manning suggests that this rejection--and a desire to bridge the gap between "thinking about self and perceiving one's own sensations" (128)--is part of the unique impulse behind Boswell's obsessive recording of his life around him, in *The Life*, and throughout his other writings. Comparing Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) to Boswell's journals, she notes a tension in Johnson's biographer

that will make its way into *The Life*:

> Within (Hume's) scheme, the wayward and floundering movements of the mind's impressions are given space, but never allowed to disrupt the rigorous progression of hypothesis and modification. In Boswell's writing, on the other hand, the models are models for the living, resolutions for conduct. In his journals there is always the hope--never fulfilled--that control over language will increase control over life, that rampant, often negative instinct may be harnessed by system. What Boswell is looking for is not a *relationship* between living and writing about living, but identity between the two, so that life and writing will reflect one another completely: the model or plan will become reality. (137)

Another victim of melancholy, David Hume eventually learned to accept his famous idea--that in one lifetime a man is not one identity but many[34]--with the same sense of confidence he expresses throughout his *Treatise*. On the other hand, Boswell, a man who saw himself as a board upon which "fine figures" had been painted, only to vanish and be replaced by the same blankness that was Boswell prior to his meetings with Johnson, Garrick, Reynolds etc., certainly also came to this conclusion about human personality, but he was less content with it, seeking instead to isolate his character in his writings, in ways that the happier, and more detached Hume would never have dreamed. As Manning notes:

> Attempting to "fix" himself in a character, Boswell cannot accept that self may be composed of contradictory elements, and is not something uniform without becoming the same thing. His journals aim to be a complete record of a man's--his own--selfhood in a way that Hume's analysis of the constituents of identity does not. (140)

Boswell's sense of melancholy in his writings is much more nightmarish, and the needs to suppress it that he strives to satisfy in writing *The Life* far greater, than anything in Hume's works. This is largely because Boswell expects so much more from his deeply personal writings. As Manning observes, in his style, Hume the philosopher is free to dramatize "sensation and reflection, participation and observation, at odds with one another, because it never risks naked self-exposure through the public voice (135).

This is hardly the case with Boswell, who in writing, did not seek to formulate a generalized

philosophical theory, but *actually saw* in his journals and books an image of himself. But this image could not be made to coincide with reality, and as Manning writes, such tensions leads only to "impenetrable negativity." She continues:

> everything Boswell records in one way or another represents "the ultimate failure to reflect sensations, of literature and life to match, and as such threatens the whole enterprise of constructing a self from the record of experience. (134-35)

In all of his evocations of transient feeling, Hume never includes his private self--he merely identifies emotional keys to help show how one can move from sanguinity to morbidity and back again, all *in the abstract*. Boswell's writings are a very different affair: in them he has none of the interests in articulating a public voice for a receptive audience that Hume the abstract philosopher had, and instead saw his journals and *The Life as* his identity. "They are," Manning writes, "the written image of his experience, the operation of imagination upon memory (133). When the image and the man could be made to correspond, all was well, and the book performed one of the major psychological functions Boswell sought in writing it[35]; when they did not, life suddenly became for Boswell an "insipid and ridiculous country dance" (*Grand Tour I*, p. 32) completely lacking in form and meaning. And suddenly, in a Humean sense, Boswell actually became a blank page again, much to his despair.

But such psychological demands on the part of the writer towards his own work does not preclude greatness in a biographer. For Ingram, as well as Harold Bloom (see below), Boswell's unique veneration of Johnson, far from making him hopelessly unsuited as Johnson's biographer, actually qualified him for the daunting task. No one should even attempt to approach Johnson, without some grasp of the immense Sound and Fury with which he lived his life, a sense that Boswell felt to the core of his being. Ingram writes:

> In the final analysis, it was Boswell's conscious artistry and integrity, his willingness to accept in all its implications his role as an author, that made it possible for him to carry to the *Life* the subjective truth of his journals...(193)

Far from a distraction or flaw, the "subjective truth of his journals" that Boswell is constantly bringing to his book is, in fact, for Ingram, what makes *The Life of Johnson* great, and even truthful, in the first place.

And this has led many contemporary readers of Boswell to ask the important question: might not all recordings, of any "real" event, after all be colored by what amounts to an ineluctable subjectivity on the part of the recorder? Is it possible, paraphrasing Nabokov, for anyone to give out even a phone number, "without giving some of (himself)?" In our post-Derridan world, most critics would agree with Nabokov and say no. This is so much so that Harold Bloom, in his introduction to critical essay on the *Life*, can matter-of-factly refer to Boswell's book as *both* "literary biography," and "biography," and in fact, not unlike Pottle, find a good deal to enjoy about the book in this double-light, even proclaiming its methods Johnsonian:

> Boswell is both neoclassical, as suits a follower of Johnson, and an apostle of sentiment, of sensibility and the Sublime, as was inevitable for a literary consciousness in Boswell's own generation...he reimagines Johnson by adopting Johnson's own realism. Johnson is a biographical literary critic, and M.J.C. Hodgart was accurate when he observed that "Johnson's short lines are the model for Boswell's concept of experience of life, and to identify himself closely with the men he writes about, sharing their problems and emotions...Boswell too has this ability, even if his close identification was primarily only with Johnson. That identification, an act of love, is at the center of *The Life of Johnson*...In the many-sided Boswell, this identification is necessarily dialectical, and yet it remains an identification. What persuades us is the elaboration, through adornment, variation, and refinement, of Boswell's surpassing admiration and reverence, of his love for Johnson. (7)

It is not despite, but because of, Boswell's deeply personal approach to his subject--that requires an extensive and elaborate use of adornment, variation, and refinement--that, Bloom argues, we have the vivid portrait of Johnson found contained in *The Life*. The human love that pervades the book provides it with a sense of refinement that could not be duplicated in a strict "chronology" of events.

The act of "refinement" could of course be interpreted as nothing more than the biographer's license to disguise, or even censor, the subject's less-than-admirable traits and characteristics. At

best a critic like Schwartz points to Boswell's interventions and his "Toryizing" of Johnson as an inevitability of any biography. But more often than not, the *Life* reveals a biographer willing to allow the bad and the good into the picture he is creating of Johnson. This is especially the case when such unseemly details can work to enhance the overall conception Boswell has of his hero. A good example of this openness, and how Boswell is able to turn unpleasant revelations about Johnson's character to his advantage, occurs at the very end of the book, prior to Johnson's death:

> His great fear of death, and the strange dark manner in which Sir John Hawkins imparts the uneasiness which he expressed on account of offenses with which he charged himself may give occasion to the injurious suspicions, as if there had been something of more than ordinary criminality weighing upon his conscience. On that account, therefore, as well as from the regard to truth which he inculcated, I am to mention (with all possible respect and delicacy however) that his conduct after he came to London, and had associated with Savage and the others, was not so strictly virtuous, in one respect, as when he was a younger man. It was well known that his amorous inclinations were uncommonly strong and impetuous. He owned to many of his friends, that he used to take women of the town to taverns, and hear them relate their history---In short, it must not be concealed, that like many other good and pious men, among whom we may place the apostle Paul upon his own authority, Johnson was not free from propensities which were ever 'warring against the law of his mind'...no man will deny that thousands, in many instances act against their conviction. Is a prodigal, for example an *hypocrite*, when he owns he is satisfied that his extravagance will bring him to ruin and misery? We are *sure* he believes it; but immediate inclination, strengthened by indulgence, prevails over that belief in influencing his conduct. Why then shall credit be refused to the *sincerity* of those who acknowledge their persuasion of moral and religious duty, yet sometimes fail of living as it requires? I heard Dr. Johnson once observe, 'There is something noble in publishing the truth, though it condemns one's self.' (1176-77)

Here perhaps more than anywhere else in the entire *Life*, Boswell reveals a surprising candor as regards Johnson's shortcomings, but without losing sight of the inherent greatness of his subject. In fact, Johnson's struggle against various "propensities" that warred against his mind enhances his nobility.[36] As Boswell presents these flaws of moral character, it becomes clear that it was Johnson's *own* ability to honestly acknowledge and confront them that in part made him the astonishingly compelling moralist that he was for Boswell and others. In fact, Johnson's struggles with moral

issues could not have a power over future Boswellians, Boswell conjectures, if readers "imagine(d) that the sins, of which a deep sense was upon his mind, were merely such venial trifles as pouring milk into his tea on Good Friday"(1178). The fact that Boswell has found a pleasing way to present these shortcomings does not alter the fact that he has allowed them into his *Life*.

As William R. Siebenschuh, in his essay "Fact and Fiction," observes, even the act of admitting these facts into the biography, and allowing as how this activity is "the most difficult and dangerous part of any biographical work"(1178) can *itself* be viewed as a tactic, a shaping process designed to create an illusion of the "real":

> Boswell makes it clear that he has taken a great risk. He is bearing Johnson's soul; he is apparently telling everything--no matter what the risk. Who, unless in retrospect and in the light of concrete evidence to the contrary, can believe that he has held anything back? The illusion is very powerful. But almost everything is not everything; generalities are not specifics, and recent discoveries make it clear that he was holding something back and must have known that he was. (95)

Just as, during the fall of the Third Reich, high-ranking Gestapo officers were known to shoot their own men in front of the invading Russian army so as to appear to be on the side of the allies, perhaps, Siebenschuh suggests, Boswell includes disparaging details in his *Life* to cheat his audience into accepting his version of the events. And yet, quoting Waingrow, Siebenschuh notes that "virtually everything is admitted to the published work 'in one form or another.'

> It is clearly the form their admittance takes that determines our reaction to them...it would be difficult to demonstrate that Boswell seriously exceeds the proper bounds of the interpretive or speculative biographer. The problem is that he claims he is neither, when in fact he is both. (96)

This process of forming then, need not be seen as a preclusive activity. "In one form or another"--usually as viewed from Boswell's intensely philosophic perspective, the reader of the *Life does* in fact have an opportunity to "see" the real Johnson, warts and all; but, as is the case throughout the book, these are presented from a peculiarly personal vantage point, that of the biographer.

And after all, though a biography could perhaps be more "objective" in its handling of

material, most contemporary critics would agree that this would only be a matter of degree; a fully objective "biography" cannot be said to exist, because all communication, oral or verbal, inevitably involves a subjective coloration. As Derrida observed in his famous deconstruction of Levi-Strauss:

> When Levi-Strauss says in the preface to *The Raw and the Cooked* that he has 'sought to transcend the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible by placing [himself] from the very beginning at the level of signs,' the necessity, the force, and the legitimacy of his act cannot make us forget that the concept of the sign cannot in itself surpass or bypass this opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. The concept of the sign is determined by this opposition: through and throughout the totality of its history and by its system.(323)[37]

Greene is bothered by the Boswellian prism through which any reader must gaze when attempting to see Johnson in *The Life*. And indeed, just as Derrida recognizes in Levi-Strauss, "the necessity...force, and...legitimacy of his act," so too must we feel this when reading Greene. He is, after all, in pursuit of the *real* Johnson, and not "Boswell's Johnson." But this sense of legitimacy cannot make us forget "that the concept of the sign [any biography] cannot in itself surpass or bypass this opposition between the sensible and the intelligible." Is it in fact possible for anyone to view reality, and then "objectively" record what has transpired? As Kant and his followers (of whom Derrida is certainly a post-Nietzschean member) have shown, the external world is only sensation, and the mind a highly selective, permanently subjective agent. Johnson is and will always be *someone else's* Johnson--Boswell's, Piozzi's, Greene's, even Johnson's own conception of himself, which is itself a detached work of art, creatively shaped in a few poems, numerous prose writings and aphorisms, all dreamed up by a man with a shrivelled wig.

Read in this way, *The Life* becomes a book as much about Boswell, or more specifically Boswell's "admiration and reverence, his love for Johnson," as it is about Johnson himself. To fully appreciate its value as a literary biography (a term that for Bloom is--because it must be--synonymous with "biography"), requires an understanding of Boswell's motives for creating the book in the first place. Bloom and Ingram (and certainly Nabokov) suggest that this subjective "truth" is

ultimately the only real one anyone can know. Vermeer's "View of Delft" was conceived with an empirical eye that is ultimately the product (like all of the best Flemish paintings) of what amounts to an intensely personal vision. Read this way, "Biographers" who insist on pruning as much as possible their own psychological, emotional, even as is frequently the case of Boswell's recordings, spiritual responses to their subject, paradoxically move the reader farther away from objectivity as well. As Johnson himself notes in *Rambler* No. 3:

> The task of an author is, either to teach what is not known, or to recommend known truths by his manner of adorning them; either to let new light in upon the mind, and open new scenes to the prospect, or to vary the dress and situation of common objects, so as to give them fresh grace and more powerful attractions, to spread such flowers over the regions through which the intellect has already made its progress, as may tempt it to return, and take a second view of things hastily passed over or negligently regarded.

And as the Malahide papers make abundantly clear, Boswell "constantly opened new scenes to the prospect," through the art of elaboration and by "vary(ing) the dress and situation of common objects."

But the authorial presence in *The Life* is quite different in nature from those encountered in traditional works of fiction. In *Language and Logos in Boswell's* Life of Johnson, William C. Dowling compares Boswell's role in the book to Fielding's narrator's in *Tom Jones*, making an important distinction between the autonomy of a fictional narrator and an inevitable antithesis we come to see in Boswell the biographer and his subject:

> ...whatever we normally mean by the world of a literary work, it is at least obvious that in dealing with narrative we closely associate the concept with an idea of narrative consciousness, of the narrator as a mediating presence between us and the world of the story. This is in fact just what we have in mind when we recognize a certain affinity between the *Life* and a novel like *Tom Jones*. As the narrator of *Tom Jones* mediates between us and the world inhabited by Tom and Sophy and Squire Western, we want to say, Boswell as narrator mediates between us and the world inhabited by Johnson, Burke, Goldsmith, and the rest of the huge cast of characters who populate the *Life*. (25)

But of course, we cannot, and this is in large part because of the way in which Boswell's perception

of Johnson is determined by his pre-conceived notions of Johnson, formed through reading his books. There is indeed an unending tension, throughout the book, between the Johnson Boswell knows in the *Rambler* and *Rasselas* (and whom Boswell acquaints the reader with in his own *Life*)--an eloquent and powerful articulator of what Bloom calls "Wisdom Literature" (7)--and the slovenly, coarse Johnson with the shriveled wig and unbuckled shoes. And this tension originates not merely in the conflict between physical and literary "reality." Dowling associates the slovenly Johnson, often moved to the background, if not completely forgotten in Boswell's idealized portrait based largely on conversation, with the less-than-moral Johnson of his *Prayers and Meditations*; the Johnson we meet in these revealing prayers is someone constantly fighting off the weaknesses of sensuality and other vices, and stands in as alarming contrast to Boswell's spiritual conception of Johnson, as his literary vision of the man differs from the actual, often uncouth person with poor table manners. The question arises as to which is the more "real," and Dowling's conclusions bear a striking resemblance, among other things, to Hodasevich's on Nabokov:

> It is not that the luminosity of Johnson's conversation creates the illusion that causes one to forget or ignore the slovenly particularities of his appearance and surroundings, but that in the moment of his speech one suddenly sees that it was physical reality itself, a reality of shriveled wigs and unbuckled shoes, that was the illusion. One remembers what one had forgot, and what can be reached only in extraordinary circumstances--and Johnson talking is, throughout the *Life*, the most extraordinary of circumstances--that our heart's being and home is with infinitude, that there is only the world of the mind. (28)

This is an important point, splendidly observed: as with Nabokov's novels, where the stages of reality and fiction are both "equally disintegrating," so too does it become difficult to decide precisely which is more real to the reader of Boswell's *Life*: the "real," corpulent Johnson, scarfing down food and often overwhelmed with chronic fears about existence, or the confident, commanding Dictionary Johnson, the Great Cham, whose flashing wit that lives detached from any physical being--on the page of Boswell's book--could put almost any man in his place. And Dowling's wording here is both

precise and provocative: the "infinitude" he speaks of is no intimation of immortality, but the real thing, a sense of completeness of philosophy and vision that is as immortal as *Life of Johnson* itself, a canonical work, that, as Bloom has noted, like all such books, "is a literary work...of such strangeness that we either never altogether assimilate, or that becomes such a given that we are blinded to its idiosyncrasies"(4). Either way leads to immortality, the infinitude of the world of the solitary mind.

Thus for Dowling, the *Life* must be read as a complex anastomose of antithetical relations between Boswell and Johnson, both of which are individually susceptible to accusations of distortion or elaboration, but together come closest to any approximation of the "real" that we can have in a literary biography.

From a historical perspective, this was certainly a new kind of phenomena--not only in terms of how the book was written and Johnson's personality preserved, but the fact that it was in print in the first place. In *Printing, Technology, Letters & Samuel Johnson,* Alvin Kernan points out that the complex persona of Johnson (as well as Boswell) that we have in the life stands as the first example of a new type of writer, required by the dawning of the print era. Pope's prophecies in *The Dunciad* of "a deluge of authors cover(ing) the land," had, to a certain extent, come true by the mid-eighteenth-century. And Johnson was at the forefront of this new movement. Kernan notes:

It was Samuel Johnson who told his monarch in the King's Library that the literary *ancien regime* was dead, and that in its place there was a new print-based letters ruled not by kings--or by printers--but by writers.

> As an extremely interesting and powerful personality who wrote books, Johnson provided the kind of legitimation for letters that would increasingly in the future validate literary activity and its primary product, books. But Boswell's Johnson is an interesting writer in ways that particularly fit the realities of print and the needs of letters in the eighteenth-century England, and he therefore became in Boswell's hands not just an important writer, but the type of the modern writer. (149)

Johnson knew about printing, and in particular, how increasingly ubiquitous printed material could be used for human ends. This included the creation of a literary persona, an entity that could be

looked upon, by the reader, as having, as Kernan writes, "created order and meaning...which thus become defenses against alienation and meaninglessness"(149). Throughout his life, Johnson stood on his own treacherous Dover cliff, struggling against madness and the sense of a chaotic world around him. Taking on immensely difficult tasks such as compiling a dictionary and an accurate edition of the plays of Shakespeare became for Johnson more than simply literary projects: these endeavors allowed for, as Kernan writes, an "order to be imposed on chaos and meaning (to be) realized in the face of emptiness" (150). And such avenues for creating order were as new to the eighteenth-century as the widespread distribution of printed texts themselves. In Boswell (and through him, Johnson) we see the age-old "radical problem" of finding a "believable structure of meaning" and its new, "radical solution" -- both in what Johnson says about the world in his own texts, and how Boswell records and shapes his talk into the *Life* in a way that he hopes will "Johnsonize" every reader, and possibly, the universe as well.

Yet another perhaps more amusing dimension to this controversy that must be considered (as it will also play out in interesting ways in Nabokov's parody) is the one John Vance explores in his essay "The Laughing Johnson." Though someone other than Boswell may have been capable of recording his life with greater veracity, every one who met Johnson was equally subject to his complex irony. Johnson was a very difficult person to "read," and as Vance suggests, he may have ultimately had more to do with the shaping of his character in the *Life* than Boswell. And any other hypothetical biographer (from the Greene camp or otherwise) would certainly have been a victim of his indirection at some point as well. Vance observes that such methods were dear to Johnson's all-important sense of presentation, and we can never perhaps give them the full weight they deserve in any interpretation of the man:

> The desire to be in control and protect his privacy is at the heart of much of Johnson's unique brand of humor...indications of his ability to disguise his true feelings and keep others off balance and unable to predict his behavior [include] his angry and very revealing reply to Goldsmith's assumption that

> members of the club had already 'travelled over one another's minds": 'you have not travelled over *my* mind, I promise you.' The conviction with which Johnson answered Goldsmith emphasizes his fervent wish to remain aloof from scrutiny. Being inscrutable, unpredictable, and elusive meant to Johnson being in control of events around him--and his sense of humor helped him achieve this state. (223)

The notion that an objective biography of Johnson *could* exist, presupposes the idea that Johnson, or any man for that matter (see below), is somehow capable of being captured and isolated in words. But as Vance shows, this may not have been the case--particularly with someone like Johnson, who delighted in protean postures and positions, one minute highly responsive to questions, the next refusing to provide Boswell with an answer to why he has now (1766) ceased writing more frequently.[38] As Vance cogently remarks:

> Considering the evidence of Johnson's sense of humor and its various manifestations, the reader must weigh heavily the possibility that many of Johnson's unforgettable and disturbing statements and responses, those not corroborated by other biographical sources or by his own writings, were the effusions of the laughing, not the serious, Johnson (224).

It is thus apparent that an understanding of Johnson through a reading of Boswell's *Life* carries with it the requirement that the reader constantly keep before him a number of mitigating factors, all of which must be considered if we are to avoid the ontological traps inherent in *any* biography. Boswell clearly was plagued by his own personal problems--melancholy, vanity, and a propensity to decadent behavior. In fact, he was such a rakish character, that critics from McCauley onwards have wondered how someone like Boswell could've written such an important work as *The Life*. But is a genuine "biography" even possible, or only, as Hobbes would have it, yet another "sound that humans make with their mouths" when attempting to describe the indescribable--in this case, a human work that records humanity, free of human subjectivity?

David Daiches, in opposition to Manning, suggests that Boswell may have been playing a similar kind of game, though, in the case of the more melancholic commentator, with considerably less laughter. It is difficult, if not impossible, to definitively assess Boswell's sense of self-conscious

artistry, when he was composing *The Life*. Echoing Ingram, Daiches argues that he was more aware of this than perhaps has been suspected:

> He is fully aware of the chameleon element in his own character, of his need to model himself now on this man and now on that, and he positively relishes the contradictions that he observes in his own nature... An actor is supposed to be able to get out of himself and enter into the personality of the character he is acting. In a sense this is what Boswell often did--seeing himself as Rousseau or Voltaire before presenting himself to each of them so that he could know what aspect of him they would be most likely to respond to. When he sought Rousseau's advice or pressed Voltaire to tell him what he really believed about religion he was speaking, as it were, in each case from within the other person's consciousness, having prepared himself by studying it and imaginatively entering into it. (3-4)

In this light, Manning's sense that Boswell's limited philosophy, from which he could not escape--recognizing that his art and life could not be made to cohere, and yet seeking this coherence anyway--though it often lead to unhappiness, also provided some of the greatest minds of the eighteenth-century with (to paraphrase Johnson on Goldsmith) the perfect "anvil" off of which their sparks could fly. Without this question mark man, who sadly looked back on his life towards the end as a "blank," we would not have the images we have in Boswell's writings of Rousseau, Voltaire, and above all, Samuel Johnson.

And the question lingers--is any biographer completely free from taking the plunge into "bogs of subjectivity"? Could Greene and his followers be imagining something that can only be approached by degree, without ever reaching the lucidity of purely scientific observation? Does such a state of mind even exist in the first place? As we shall see, *Pale Fire*, one of the most romantic books of the twentieth-century, answers these, and other similar speculations, triumphantly in the negative.

CHAPTER III

PARODY BOSWELL'S *LIFE OF JOHNSON* IN *PALE FIRE*

Only once in Nabokov's entire career did he choose to open a novel with a quote from another book. Nabokov was a highly selective artist and, as such, the fact that he chose to include a quote from *The Life of Johnson* in *Pale Fire* cannot be overlooked. As I have suggested, the spirit of *The Life* animates *Pale Fire* in surprising ways; and, as we shall see, the reverse is also the case--Nabokov's parodic novel springboards the reader backward in time, uncovering new ways of understanding Boswell's "biography" as it does this.

To understand exactly where this parody takes the reader it will be important to see first in specific detail how Nabokov's allusions perform their rejuvenating task. In this chapter I will trace the numerous allusions to the *Life*, and, where appropriate, also to several major subsidiary works by Boswell and Johnson which are obliquely or directly referred to in Johnson's biography.

Nabokov's parody, as such, frequently distorts and inverts the source material to perform its function of sending the reader back to the earlier texts. Thus, often the very qualities that make up the personal psychology of one character (Boswell's rampant heterosexuality) will be reversed in the parody (Kinbote's equally energetic homosexuality). Parody is after all, not a perfect reflection of the work it parodies, but a distorted one. Through the distorted image however, as we shall see, the initial impetus for the game of parody is revealed in a clearer light than before.

1)Boswell-Kinbote-Nabokov: Characters of, Religion

Kinbote and Boswell share many affinities. Both are obsessed with their homelands and sexual adventures; both dislike dancing[39], cats,[40] and especially detractors of their heroes, and their biographies of them. But perhaps no other similarity so strongly connects, and plays such an

important role in the characters of, Kinbote and Boswell, than their sense of religious duty. It is an issue that will inform both scholars' every critical move and play a central role in their separate conceptions of biographical commentary. Boswell and Kinbote also both suffer from frequent bouts with fear and desperation, as they struggle to incorporate this strong sense of religious mission into their often chaotic lives. And though both Boswell and Johnson were Christians, Nabokov's parody makes us feel all the more strongly what we sense throughout the *Life*--Johnson's usually serene, poetic "Christianity" differs greatly in character from Boswell's more groping, frequently frustrated, faith.

Throughout the *Life*, the native Presbyterian Boswell protests loudly his interests in Christianity, and seeks to control his actions, and even choice of friends, based on his ostensibly rigorous, rigid faith. Though he admired Hume as a person, Boswell wonders in the *Life* whether he should continue his relation with the Scottish philosopher because of his arguments against Christianity (v.30). Discussing John Campbell, a politician and biographical writer, Johnson mentions that it is unfortunate he did not attend church more often. In a note, Boswell observes:

> (T)hough Milton could without remorse absent himself from public worship, I cannot. One the contrary, I have the same habitual impressions upon my mind, with those of a truly venerable Judge who said to Mr. Langton, 'Friend Langton, if I have not been at church on Sunday, I do not feel myself easy.' (I.418)

This sense of "uneasiness" is indicative of the spiritually palliative effect Boswell sought in religion, often without being able to repress his ever-present melancholy. Of course for Boswell one of the gems of Johnson's character was his deeply-felt religious piety, and Boswell frequently searches for satisfying responses to difficult theological questions in his discussions with Johnson. "My mind has been somewhat dark this summer," he wrote in a letter to Johnson dated May 27 1775, "I have need of your warming and vivifying rays; and I hope I shall have them frequently" (ii.381). And in April 1778 of *The Life* he writes:

> I expressed a wish to have the arguments for Christianity always in readiness, that my religious faith might be as firm and clear as any proposition whatever, so that I need not be under the least uneasiness, when it should be attacked. JOHNSON. "Sir, you cannot answer all objections."

Johnson, that most rare sort of thinker, a religious intellectual, understood well the contradictions and gaps in Christian thought. But he still found comfort and happiness in believing, and showed only discomfort when the more probing Boswell introduced certain perplexing aspects of the faith, like free will, into conversation (ii.82). For Johnson, most of these questions were easily dismissable. Every one of Hume's arguments against Christianity, Johnson boasted, he had long ago considered and rejected. "Truth," he told Boswell, "is a cow that will yield (Hume) no milk, so (he has) gone to milk the bull' (i.444). Boswell too rejected Hume's arguments, as well as everyone else's, against Christianity, but with less certainty; his frequent demands for arguments in favor of the faith strongly suggest his belief was on far less certain grounds than Johnson's.[41]

Uncertainty about his religion seems to have haunted Boswell particularly at night. In a letter to Temple he writes of the "doubts which have ever disturbed thinking men," that come upon him when "awake in the night, dreading annihilation or being thrown into some horrible state of being"(ii.381). Later he mentions the melancholy he often feels while "in bed"(iii.390). And Boswell tells Johnson that when he wakes at night, his "excellent spouse consoles me with sensible, easy talk" (*Journals*, 285). As we shall see, Kinbote too faces many a perilous mental adventure after dark.

In a letter to Johnston from April 1764, Boswell connects Christianity with a life free from this intense melancholy:

> I have now proper ideas of religion. That is the most important article indeed. I am determined to act my part with vigour, and I doubt not to have a reward. My mind will go always stronger by discipline. Even this last attack has not been unrepelled by me. I really believe that these grievous complaints should not be vented; they should be considered as absurd chimeras, whose reality should not be allowed in words. One thing I am sure of, that if a man can believe himself well, he will be really so. The dignity of human nature is a noble preservative of the soul. Let us consider ourselves as immortal beings, who though now in a state inferior to our

> faculties, may one day hope to exult in the regions of light and glory (*Journals* 93).

Despite the seeming sincerity of these sentiments, "considering" immortality as fact is a shade different from implicitly and piously accepting it as one; only a man who might not "believe himself well" would need to remind himself to do so, in order to be "really so." And though Boswell held to his Christian views throughout his life, he seems to have struggled to make his inconsistent moods and feelings fit with the tenets of religion. "My mind will go always stronger by discipline" reminds us of those painful moments recorded in his *Journals* when his mind was less strong, less disciplined.

An enormous sexual appetite stood as another obstacle between the less-than-sanguine Boswell and Christian serenity. Boswell constantly searched the scriptures for justification for concubinage, often comically seen attempting to justify his prurient ways to God, his readers, and no doubt, himself. His discussion about fornication from April 1772 is typical of such speculations:

> [A] question arose, whether fornication was a sin of a heinous nature; and that I had maintained, that it did not deserve the epithet, in as much as it was not one of those sins which argue very great depravity of heart: in short, was not, in the general acceptation of mankind a heinous sin. (172)

In his response to this question, Johnson makes a distinction between a whoremonger, and a man who gets "one wench with child" (172). Boswell obviously approved of this--his note accompanying this passage encourages the reader to mark the "just and subtle distinction" Johnson makes here (172). And discussing Johnson's sexual life with Elizabeth Desmoulins, Boswell's reaction to the description of Johnson's narrow escapes from temptation with his maid, in this light, sound like the remarks of a seasoned veteran of the war against lustful impulses: "So you saw the struggle and the conquest(?)" he asks with great interest (323). Indeed Boswell fought against his own proclivities to infidelity throughout his life, but with little success. Early in his *Journals*, Boswell describes his first affair with a married woman, and the philosophical and theological problems this situation

raised for him:

> I was in love with the daughter of a man of the first distinction in Scotland...She made no difficulty of granting me all. She was a subtle philosopher. She said, 'I love my husband as a husband, and you as a lover, each in his own sphere. I perform for him all the duties of a good wife. With you I give myself up to delicious pleasures. We keep our secret. Nature has so made me that I shall never bear children. No one suffers because of our loves. My conscience does not reproach me, and I am sure that God cannot be offended by them.' Philosophy of that sort in the mouth a of charming woman seemed very attractive to me...What could I do? I continued my criminal amour, and the pleasures I tasted formed a counterpoise to my remorse. Sometimes even in my very transports I imagined that heaven could not but smile on so great a happiness between two mortals. (27)

Boswell's sense of consecration outside of the strictures of religion followed him throughout his lust-filled life; but despite his sense of these pleasures acting as "counterpoise to (his) remorse," they seem to have just as often contributed to his melancholy. Even in moments of happiness, such as he felt in March 1776, Boswell could still write:

> Nothing disturbed me but a degree of unsettledness as to the consistency of concubinage, or rather occasional transient connections with loose women, and Christian morals. I was sensible that there was a great weight of interpretation against such licence. But as I did not see precisely a general doctrine for practice in that respect in the New Testament, and some Christians, even Luther, did not think it an indispensable duty to cohabit only with one woman, and my appetite that way was naturally strong and perhaps rendered stronger by encouragement, I could not decide against it. (287)

Though several times he sought justification for his actions from Johnson, and despite the distinction between a "whoremonger" and a man who gets one woman with child that Johnson allowed, Boswell seems to have never really satisfied his guilt in this regard. In a memorable exchange during their tour of the Hebrides, Boswell clearly relishes the distinction he forces Johnson to make concerning the licentiousness of a single woman and that of a married one (JOHNSON. There is a great difference between stealing a shilling, and stealing a thousand pounds" [v.209]). But when Boswell raises the topic of India, a country where such distinctions are "strictly observed,"

Johnson rejects such an idea:

> JOHNSON. Nay, don't give us India. That puts me in mind of Montesquieu, who is really a fellow of genius too in many respects; whenever he wants to support a strange opinion, he quotes you the practice of Japan or of some other distant country, of which he knows nothing. To support polygamy, he tells you of the island of Formosa, where there are ten women born for one man. He had but to suppose another island, where there are ten men born for one woman, and so make a marriage between them. (209)

This was not the answer Boswell wanted from Johnson, and the scene quickly shifts. But in a revealing note to the above passage, Boswell writes that such a "wild supposition has actually happened in the Western islands of Scotland, if we may believe Martin, who tells it of the islands of Col and Tyr-yi, and says that it is proved by the parish registers" (209). But a later (1852) note by Carruthers calls this perhaps overly hopeful information into doubt. Carruthers writes that the parish where Boswell said such practices took place "no longer exists," adding sneeringly, "and we need hardly say the modern registers give no countenance to the supposition" (210). Thus, Boswell's "strange opinion" goes unsupported.[42] And his continued nights of sex and drunkenness with Jenny Taylor and Nanny Smith later in life only contributed to the sense of fear and gloom that often compromised his religious faith (293-94).

Uncertainty about futurity led Boswell to speculate frequently on the uncertain foundations of his own mind. The serious struggle Boswell waged to maintain his sanity is easy to overlook because it is largely omitted from the *Life*. But Boswell's approving attitude towards several of Johnson's ideas about madness suggest a clear sense on Boswell's part of encroaching madness in *The Life*; indeed, he even boasts of it. Boswell responds to Lady McLeod's wonder over Johnson's worries about his own insanity with the telling, even envious," Madam...he knows that with that madness he is superior to other men" (v. 215). Johnson blamed his own fears on the "vile melancholy" he said he inherited from his father, but Boswell had equal reason for concern about his own blood: his brother John, as is well known, was deranged from his youth (v. 215), and Boswell

frequently worried that he might one day share in his brother's madness. On a visit with John after a duel in March 1776, Boswell writes in his *Journal*:

> I thought of my duel at the time; and that it was well to have fought in a good cause before sinking into the state in which I saw my brother and which I feared might be my fate one day. (276)

In a letter to Johnston written in 1763 and preserved only in the *Journals*, it seems as if this day had already arrived, though only temporarily. He writes of a "deep melancholy" that seized him on his travels to Utrecht:

> All the horrid ideas that you can imagine, recurred upon me. I was quite unemployed and had not a soul to speak to but the clerk of the English meeting, who could do me no good. I sunk quite into despair. I thought that at length the time was come that I should grow mad. I actually believed myself so. I went out to the streets, and even in public could not refrain from groaning and weeping bitterly. (83)

Such a fearful, uncertain temperament led Boswell to consider suicide. Describing his early years, Boswell notes in his *Journals*: "My gloomy ideas of religion returned, and sometimes I believed nothing at all. I thought with irresolute horror of taking my own life" (6). And in the *Life*, he asks Johnson whether all men who commit suicide are mad (ii.228), an interesting question given Boswell's own concerns for his life.

In the *Journals* after Johnson's death, we see a Boswell who, though fame awaits him in the publication of the *Life*, has lost much interest in life; life, in fact, became for him the *Life*, and little else. His attempts to find "creditable employment" (378) met with failure, he had little success in his new role as a London lawyer, and Boswell seems particularly troubled by his depression in the final years. In his *Journal* from October 1794, a year before his death, he writes: "Entertaining company is a weary labour to me, and when I pay visits I seem to myself to be fighting battles..."(344). This is not the Boswell of old, addicted to the pleasures of social entertainments and the fascinating discussion these could give rise to. Death awaits Boswell, and he seems to be more than ready: in his final letters to Temple, he thinks, with some serenity, of his friendship with his schoolfriend, not only as it has been in life, but as it will exist in the "hereafter" (380).

But were Boswell's intentions ever less-than-trustworthy? Johnson seems to have questioned their legitimacy, and particularly what he called Boswell's "affectation of distress" (iv. 71). In 1781, Boswell wrote to Johnson, complaining of the "recurrence of the perplexing question of Liberty and Necessity" (71). Johnson replied to this serious-sounding letter the same way he answered all of Boswell's questions about melancholy and spiritual vacuity, with scorn and indignation, even accusing Boswell of being an imposter who dabbled in the "hypocrisy of misery." In a July 2, 1776 letter to Boswell, what Boswell chose to omit remains, in this context, as important as what he leaves in:

> Your last letter, after a very long delay, brought very bad news.[Here a series of reflections upon melancholy, and--what I could not help thinking strangely unreasonable in him who had suffered so much from it himself--a good deal of severity and reproof, as if it were owing to my fault, or that I was, perhaps, affecting it from a desire of distinction.] (iii. 86-87)

Boswell doesn't respond to these accusations of affectation, and Hill, among others, has noted that "he seems at times to boast of [his hypochondria], as Dogberry boasted of his losses; so that Johnson had some reason for writing to him with severity..." (i.65). As the final, often extremely depressing letters to his son reveal, Boswell pursued fame to the end of his life, relishing in the possibility of holding a government post, and making a name for himself in London society.[43] Given the vaguely contemptuous responses his frequent complaints of melancholy brought out in others, we should consider the motives that may exist behind his "hypocrisy of hypochondria."

These troubling, potentially self-created personal tendencies and struggles that surrounded his religious faith closely resemble Kinbote's own insanity and search for religious meaning in *Pale Fire*. In *Pale Fire* though, Nabokov exaggerates these parallels to great parodic effect. Shade, a self-described "happy agnostic" (a religious "faith" that bears a relation to Johnson's own, more orthodox Christianity, see below) confounds the ultra-Christian Kinbote with his confident, ready answers to perplexing religious questions. And like Boswell, Kinbote's concerns run into frighteningly gloomy

areas of speculation that could be of his own making.

In the note to line 47 of "Pale Fire" we are given our first glimpse of Kinbote's Christianity. Watching with binoculars Shade compose his poem, Kinbote notes: "I knew that whatever my agnostic friend might say in denial at *that* moment Our Lord was with him" (89). Shade's serene agnosticism, as we shall see, stands in parodic relation to Johnson's generally serene Christianity; and, as in the case of Boswell's more tempestuous and wavering faith that could at least marvel at the miracle of Johnson, Kinbote here glories in his God through the marvel of Shade's genius.

In *Pale Fire*, however, the spiritual distances between the two men are even greater than those in *The Life*. In a note to line 101 which reads, "No free man needs a God," Kinbote grumbles:

> When one considers the numberless thinkers and poets in the history of human creativity whose freedom of mind was enhanced rather than stunted by Faith, one is bound to question the wisdom of this easy aphorism. (116)

This notion suggests a great divide exists between Shade's aesthetic agnosticism and Kinbote's religion: one of Shade's favorite poets, Shakespeare, was of course accused by Boswell and Johnson of lacking in moral virtue. And later in a note to line 549, in which Shade and Kinbote discuss St. Augustine's views on the "unimaginable," Shade complains, "Why must one *always* quote St. Augustine to me?" (227).

Kinbote constantly asserts the importance of God in one's life, despite these protests. In a wicked parody of Boswell's probings of Johnson's faith, as he attempts to set his mind at ease about all of the things that plagued him--futurity, concubinage, death, etc.---Kinbote continually turns the subject of discussion to religion, much to Shade's annoyance. In a note to line 549 ("While snubbing gods including the big G"), Kinbote writes:

> Here indeed is the Gist of the matter. And this, I think...our poet himself missed. For a Christian, no Beyond is acceptable or imaginable without the participation of God in our eternal destiny, and this in turn implies a condign punishment for every sin, great and small. (223)

Religious argument dominates the commentary, as it sometimes does *The Life*; however, by the

twentieth century, a less specific, more generalized, pantheistic/agnostic and democratic sense of Emersonian faith has replaced Johnson's orthodox/aristocratic Christianity. In both cases, however, the separate commentators are uncomfortable with their place in the universe, and attempt throughout their works to make sense of themselves, and their relation to their subject matter. In *Pale Fire*, the gist, the rub, for Kinbote, is simply the existence of God, and being aware of His "participation in our eternal destiny"; and his commentary, among other things, attempts to push (with a doubter's force) this idealogy onto any reading of the poem. So too is this the case with Boswell in his conversations with Johnson, though in Shade's shaded and contented agnosticism Nabokov parodically extends the spiritual differences that, as we have seen, already existed between the two 18th-century thinkers.[44]

The nature of Kinbote's faith stands in ironic and parodic contrast to Boswell's High Church of England as well. Kinbote writes, in a note to the same line:

> I had mentioned--I do not recall in what connection--certain differences between my Church and his. It should be noted that our Zemblan brand of Protestantism is rather closely related to the "higher" churches of the Anglican Communion, but has some magnificent peculiarities of its own. The Reformation with us had been headed by a composer of genius; our liturgy is penetrated with rich music; our boy choirs are the sweetest in the world. (224)

The resemblances between Zemblan faith and the "'higher' churches of the Anglican Communion" connect Kinbote's religion with that of Boswell and Johnson, but with a parodic twist: just as Boswell fought to restrain his sexual desires, so too does a note of Kinbote's carnality enter into even this discussion. What makes his religion truly wonderful is how the liturgy is "penetrated with rich music," sung by boy choirs that Kinbote the ardent pedophile cannot shake from his mind.

And as in the case of Boswell, Kinbote's concern about futurity is closely linked with ideas about madness and death. Just as Boswell sought refuge from the threats of madness he frequently felt throughout his life, so too does Kinbote, though far less successfully. At the end of the especially

digressive and Kinbotian note to line 47, to close a discussion about the campus, and the various dormitories that Kinbote describes as "great mansions of madness...bedlams of jungle music" he simply writes: "Dear Jesus, do something" (92-93), a plea that can be read as a despairing voice searching for coherence in an increasingly noisy and maddening world. Such a lament can be traced in the tone of much of Boswell's writings, as he seems to beg someone--Johnson, God, Jesus--to provide clarity in a world of animal impulses and seductive prostitutes.

Night time, with the solitude that it brings, is just as devilish a playfield for such thoughts for Kinbote as it was for Boswell. In a note to line 62, he writes: "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" (95). Nabokov's parody closely mirrors Boswell's tendencies towards gloominess here. Kinbote notes that "The Goldsworth castle became particularly solitary after that turning point at dusk which resembles so much the nightfall of the mind" (98). But in the case of Nabokov's parody, we get much closer to the inner-turmoils of Kinbote's mind at these moments. He fears kidnapping by anti-Karlists, who "would smuggle the chloroformed scholar back to Zembla, Rodnaya Zembla, to face there a dazzling decanter and a row of judges exulting in their inquisitorial chairs," like Boswell experiencing a particularly bad Scottish nightmare (96-97).

Such madness, as in the case of Boswell, leads to thoughts of suicide. Where Boswell tiptoed around the idea of suicide as a form of escape from the miseries of life, Kinbote deals with the issue head-on, even speculating that there is a higher, thoroughly Christian, justification in suicide. "At times," he writes in his discussion of nighttime fears: " 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..."(97). The link between the despair of a life without religious meaning and suicide closely resembles Boswell's fears. But the nature of Nabokov's parody allows us to enter (in what is ostensibly a commentary of another man's poem!) into our "commentator's"

skull, falling in line with the rhythm of his pathological pulse even, as he attempts to make sense of things. Describing in startlingly cool detail the best procedure for committing suicide, Kinbote the Christian envisions an "ideal drop...from an aircraft, your muscles relaxed, your pilot puzzled, your parachute shuffled off..." as the falling (but not fallen) Christian ultimately finds obliteration in the "Lap of the Lord" (221). Kinbote concludes this section, which amounts to a glorification of suicide, with a troubling speculation that perfectly exaggerates Boswell's[45] brand of Christianity:

> 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 in the book of one's personal fate bears His watermark, how can one doubt that he will also preserve us through all eternity?
>
> So what can stop one from effecting the transition? What can help us to resist the intolerable temptation? What can prevent us from yielding to the burning desire for merging in God?
>
> We who burrow in filth every day may be forgiven perhaps the one sin that ends all sins (222).

The suggestions made here are hardly original, though their sublimely absurd presentation certainly is. Kinbote's plea for suicide sends us back to Hamlet's famous "To Be or Not To Be" speech, which poses many of the same questions about whether to face the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Of course, when they first met, as we have seen, Johnson reminded Boswell of that Prince's Father's Ghost. As we shall see, the link this play provides between Kinbote and Boswell is complex and will be extended to include Johnson and Shade.

Kinbote's deeply felt relationship to his commentary, and the psychological needs that he satisfies with his work, remind us of the importance the *Life* assumed for Boswell; and as with Boswell, there is a sense in Kinbote that once his commentary is completed, life has no more meaning or purpose. Nabokov's parody makes these feelings of a fatal connection with one's work more explicit: "My notes and self are petering out," Kinbote writes at the close of *Pale Fire* (300). In an interview, Nabokov said it was to be assumed that, after the last page had been written, Kinbote commits suicide (*SO*, 105).

Nabokov's parody of Boswellian gloom also exploits the connection between sexual desire and theological fear; but where Boswell, in his moments of depression intermingled with debauchery that in turn feeds the depression, cannot escape from pangs of guilt, Kinbote's madness pretends to comfortably erase these troubling fears, prefacing his own soliloquy for suicide by noting that it is merely a "simple and sober description of a spiritual situation" (219). Kinbote's "sobriety" suggests to him that "the more lucid and overwhelming one's belief in Providence, the greater the temptation to get it over with, this business of life, but the greater too one's fear of the terrible sin implicit in self-destruction" (219) an idea he complacently accepts. As in the case of Boswell, Kinbote cannot stave off his prurient interests, which, as with Boswell, seem always to be around the corner of his philosophical wanderings:

> In fact, a good Zemblan Christian is taught that true faith is not there to supply pictures or maps, but that it should quietly content itself with the warm haze of pleasurable anticipation. To take a homely example: Little Christopher, a frail lad of nine or ten, relies completely (so completely in fact, as to blot out the very awareness of this reliance) on his elders' arranging all the details of departure, passage and arrival. He cannot imagine, nor does he try to imagine, the particular aspects of the new place awaiting him but he is dimly and comfortably convinced that it will be even better than his homestead, with the big oak, and the mountain, and his pony, and the park, and the stable and Grimm, the old groom, who has a way of fondling him whenever nobody is around. (220)

The agony of existence cruelly complicated by sexual desire that Boswell found in his own mental experiences is parodied with great economy in this passage. Kinbote's rampant id moves from abstract philosophical considerations to the back of a barn in his rapist's imagination, shot through with perverted hints of fairy-tales and a brother Grimm, as if this derailing train of ideas were natural and relevant to the discussion. The appalling conclusions the "christian" Kinbote makes about life quickly and easily metamorphose into the grotesque, but Nabokov's parody comically eliminates all Boswellian guilt and despair over "wretched changefulness" (iii. 193) here; Kinbote in fact seems scarcely aware that he cannot "preserve, for any long continuance, the same views of any thing,"

madly moving from mania to pscyhomania.

And to pseudomania as well. As in Boswell's writing, there are suggestions throughout the text that Kinbote may not be all that he pretends, that his insane visions of Zembla and a poem that would eulogize it, may be only part of a larger fantasy that he consciously controls and manipulates. Kinbote forces his story of Zembla on Shade with a self-described "hypnotist's patience," and a hypnotist is after all, a conjurer, an illusionist. And at the close of the novel, Kinbote allows as how, though he will "continue to exist" (a theory debunked by Nabokov, see above): "I may turn up yet, on another campus, as an old, happy, healthy, heterosexual Russian, a writer in exile, sans fame, sans future, sans audience, sans anything but his art" (301). Kinbote suggests that he may not even *be* Kinbote, describing himself as a writer who sounds a great deal like the heterosexual author of *Pale Fire* itself. This final, elegant, and self-consciously frayed edge to Kinbote's increasingly dissolving identity could be little more than a last convolutional turn in what has already been a highly convoluted text that reflects reality as it reflects itself; in addition, we can surmise that the basis for Kinbote's reality is no more reliable to him than it is to the increasingly shocked reader, attempting to find any sign of a useful gloss of Shade's poem in the commentary.

2)Boswell-Kinbote: Biographical Practices/Prejudices

Boswell, like Kinbote, allowed himself to fall into the busy hum of mankind around him on occasion; but he rarely forgets to observe with his solipisist's eye the differences he perceived to exist between himself and others. In a typical *Journal* entry for October 1773, Boswell describes his fatigue following a dance at the Hebrides, and his reasons for participating in the first place:

> I was really fatigued with violent dancing. I do not like dancing. But I force myself to it, when it promotes social happiness, as in the country, where it is as much one of the means towards the end as dinner; so I danced a reel tonight to the music of the bagpipe, which I never did before. It made us beat the ground with prodigious force. I thought it was better that I should engage the people of Skye by taking a cheerful glass and dancing with them rather than play the abstract scholar. (265)

Boswell may despondently question to himself who he is, but he is never confused about how he stands in relation to other men. He is the "abstract scholar" who lives in a world populated largely by provincials, like his fellow Scots.

Kinbote similarly views mankind and his relationship to it, in this light. Offering a "candidate for (his) third ping-pong table who after a sensational series of traffic violations had been deprived of his driving license" a ride home, Kinbote finds himself involved in a modern day equivalent of the earlier Scottish party:

> In the course of an all-night party, among crowds of strangers--young people, old people, cloyingly perfumed girls--in an atmosphere of fireworks, barbecue smoke, horseplay, jazz music and auroral swimming, I lost all contact with the silly boy, was made to dance, was made to sing, got involved in the most boring bibble-babble imaginable with various relatives of the child, and finally, in some inconceivable manner, found myself transported to a different party on a different estate, where after some indescribable parlor games, in which my beard was nearly snipped off, I had a fruit-and-rice breakfast and was taken by anonymous host, a drunken old fool in tuxedo and riding breeches, on a stumbling round of his stables...when I reached Arcady, swearing to myself never to be caught like that again and innocently looking forward to the solace of a quiet evening with my poet. (158)

This scene is one of the very few set outside of New Wye that does not seem to belong purely to Kinbote's Zemblan fantasy. His actions and movements in this "real" world reveal an easily manipulated person, who seems lost in another world, where one is "made to dance" and listen to "boring bibble-babble." Like Boswell, Kinbote is happiest when he is away from the rest of the world that is caught in the neglect of sensual music,and instead, "in the company of "(his) poet."

For both Boswell and Kinbote, their separate idols differ greatly from other men, and as such, can be viewed in entirely different ways. In fact, Johnson and Shade become in the eyes of their admiring beholders more like works of art, or creatures from another planet or universe, than mere mortals amongst others. Boswell, who proudly claimed to "worship" Johnson (iii.332), writes that before meeting Johnson he

> had the highest reverence for (him), which had grown up in my fancy into a kind of mysterious veneration, by figuring to myself a state of solemn elevated abstraction, in which I supposed him to live in the immense metropolis of London. (384)

And it was a reverence that was scarcely compromised by actually meeting the Great Cham and even taking extensive, intimate, trips with him. Boswell marvels at the prospect of seeing Johnson at last in Scotland, not only because of Johnson's prejudices against his country, but also because Johnson is Johnson--his presence anywhere in the world represents much more than a stopover in a tour by an uncouth man with a tiny wig, and, in Boswell's eyes, becomes more like a miraculous visitation from a prophet. "I exulted," Boswell writes in the *Tour of the Hebrides*, "in the thought that I now had him actually in Caledonia" (v.21). Boswell's view of Johnson here is both as a worthy traveling companion, and as someone who it will be interesting to "have" in a certain place, thanks to his own machinations; a human specimen whose actions will be interesting to observe in a new and unusual setting. And Boswell frankly admits that

> during all of the course of my long intimacy with him, my respectful attention never abated, and my wish to hear him was such, that I constantly watched every dawning of communication from that great and illuminated mind. (ii. 357)

This is surely a sign of great respect, but we should not overlook the slight note of detachment Boswell's reaction to Johnson's intense personality implies. Boswell is not simply conversing with Johnson and marvelling at the profusion of his interesting ideas; he stands back from his subject to mark the actual "dawnings" that occur in his "illuminated mind," as if the sheer activity of Johnson's thought processes were as fascinating, and worthy of respect, as the thoughts themselves.

As he is presented in *Pale Fire*, John Shade also takes on the appearance of an elevated person, a deity who magically walks the earth. But Nabokov's parody pushes this elevation even farther than does Boswell's veneration of Johnson. In the case of the *Life*, we at least have the evidence of hundreds of conversations, many of which poke fun at Boswell, with which to form our

Flemish portrait.

But Kinbote's picture of Shade is more impressionistic, even pointilistic, in its presentation. The few dialogues between Kinbote and Shade included in the commentary are abstract in nature, and rarely deal with the personal (a dimension, Kinbote proudly notes, the two stayed away from in their encounters: "Our close friendship was on that higher, exclusively intellectual level where one can rest from emotional troubles, not share them," [27]).

Instead, Kinbote detaches himself even further than Boswell from his subject, viewing Shade more as a work of art or pure mystery, than a human being. Like Boswell, he delights in the operations of his idol's mind as much (if not more than) the ideas he forms; but Nabokov's parody exaggerates these tendencies as to make any trace of the corporeal Shade almost vanish in the veneration:

> My admiration for him was for me a sort of alpine cure. I experienced a grand sense of wonder whenever I looked at him, especially in the presence of other people, inferior people. This wonder was enhanced by my awareness of their not feeling what I felt, of their not seeing what I saw, of their taking Shade for granted, instead of drenching every nerve, so to speak, in the romance of his presence. 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. He is looking from the terrace (of Prof. C.'s house on that March evening) at the distant lake. 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. (27)

We have come a long way from Boswell's simple admiration of Johnson's imagination, and the ideas that can almost be glimpsed "dawning" on him. Kinbote's description suggests what Boswell's only implied--Shade is not just a great poet; he is a different order of being all together--there is something in his brain that distinguishes it from the others, with their "synthetic jellies" and commonplace ideas.

And there is something that distinguishes both Boswell and Kinbote as well, something both

are equally conscious of: an unusual capacity to appreciate their idols and communicate what makes them great to others. As we have seen in the passage about dancing in Scotland, Boswell clearly saw himself as a different quality of person than the commoners of his country; this sense of elevation extended to his powers of biography. In the introduction to the *Life*, Boswell, comparing his biography with Hawkins', writes that, not only did he see Hawkins in Johnson's company, "but once, and I am sure not above twice," but also his rival biographer lacked "that nice perception which was necessary to mark the finer and less obvious parts of Johnson's character" (i.27). In the same section he refers to Hawkins's "ponderous labours" that "exhibit a *farrago*, of which a considerable portion is not devoid of entertainment to the lovers of literary gossiping" (28). Boswell accuses Hawkins of putting an "unfavorable construction" upon "almost every circumstance in the character and conduct of my illustrious friend" (28), including Mrs. Piozzi in the attack at the close, pointing accusingly towards the "slighter aspersions" she made towards Dr. Johnson in her own *Anecdotes*.

As Boswell criticizes Hawkins' biography for his critical biography, he defends his own highly Johnsonian biographical approach in which he never overlooks the minute or the mundane in his portrait of Johnson. Boswell insists in the opening pages of the *Life* that Johnson will be seen in the work,

> as he really was; for I profess to write, not his panegyrick, which must be all praise, but his Life; which, great and good as he was, must not be supposed to be entirely perfect. To be as he was, is indeed subject of panegyrick enough to any man in this state of being; but in every picture there should be a shade as well as light, and when I delineate him without reserve, I do what he himself recommended, both by his precept and his example. (30)

To a great extent, Boswell lives up to this approach: we are given precise descriptions of Johnson's uncouth appearance, his prejudices, and the at times mildly cruel ways in which he treated his friends in conversation. The Hodge quotation is itself a perfect example of a detail important in a Johnsonian biography. And yet, despite such assurances, as the *Journals* reveal, Boswell was more

than willing to suppress information that detracted from the character of Johnson he sought to "delineate," or that revealed the seedier sides of his own prurient character. Johnson's sexual dalliances with Elizabeth Desmoulins, and Boswell's numerous evenings spent with the likes of Nanny Smith and Jenny Taylor, to take but a few examples, never appear in the *Life*.

Kinbote is an avowed Johnsonian in his biographical practices as well, noting during a discussion of a section of the poem on Hazel, which he finds detrimentally "expanded," that "a commentator's obligations cannot be shirked, however dull the information he must collect and convey" (164). However, like Boswell, he also chooses to suppress information, and shape other events, to suit his own needs. Like Boswell too, despite these private agendas, he is quick to hold his biography up as the most accurate and valuable for scholars. Kinbote's Hawkins/Goldsmith, the mysterious Prof. Hurley, is referred to only briefly, and then condescendingly in the text of *Pale Fire*. His critique of the poem "Pale Fire" in the introduction ("None can say how long John Shade planned his poem to be, but it not improbable that what he left represents only a small fraction of the composition he saw in a glass, darkly") Kinbote deems "nonsense!" (14). And Kinbote angrily quotes a criticism of his contractual agreement with Sybil that uses the same word as Boswell--farrago--to describe his competing biographers' questionable enterprises.

Kinbote reveals his eye for Flemish detail, a la Johnson, in his opening description of Shade, a portrait that, though it includes mention of his neighbor's "sublime" face, doesn't ignore the less-than-pleasant aspects of his features:

> (His) face had something about it that might have appealed to the eye, had it been only leonine or only Iroquoian; but unfortunately, by combing the two it merely reminded one of a fleshy Hogarthian tippler of indeterminate sex. (26)

Just as Boswell reports that there was something unpleasantly Hogarthian about Johnson's appearance (i. 250), so too does Kinbote allow this unflattering comparison into his commentary. And in the introduction, he notes that, watching Shade "re-combining elements" of the world in an

artistic fashion, he experienced

> the same thrill as when in my early boyhood I once watched across the tea table in my uncle's castle a conjurer who had just given a fantastic performance and was now quietly consuming vanilla ice. I stared at his powdered cheeks, at the magical flower in his buttonhole where it had passed through a succession of different colors and had now become fixed as a white carnation, and especially at his marvelous fluid-looking fingers which could if he chose make his spoon dissolve into a sunbeam by twiddling it, or turn his plate into a dove by tossing it up in the air. (28)

This delight in the ordinary, the everyday events in an extraordinary person's life, parallels closely Johnson's insistence,[46] in *Rambler* No. 60, that

> more knowledge may be gained of man's real character by a short conversation with one of his servants, than from a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree and ended with his funeral. (87)

And though Kinbote does not question servants, we are given an often outrageous amount of mundane details into his "illustrious friend's" life, with Kinbote's pursuit of empirical truth verging on the Borgesian: spying with his binoculars, Kinbote is able to report precisely when the light in Shade's study is on, and even calls up the Shades and abruptly hangs up, to determine why Sybil on occasion jumps out her chair and runs into another room (23-24).

During certain notes in the commentary of "Pale Fire," Kinbote uses the method of recording dialogue, with the speaker's last name and colon preceding each comment, made famous by Boswell in the *Life*. And as in numerous Boswell/Johnson exchanges, Kinbote and Shade do not always see eye to eye; but Kinbote, like Boswell, does not omit these conversations from his *Life* any less than he forgets to include the more agreeable discussions.

In a particularly, revealing, highly Boswellian note, to line 172, that Kinbote recalls he preserved in a "pocketbook (in which) I find, jotted down...extracts that had happened to please me (a footnote from Boswell's *Life of Dr. Johnson*, the inscriptions on the tree in Wordsworth's famous avenue, a quotation from St. Augustine, and so on)," he includes a discussion the two had about teaching Shakespeare. Earlier (see above), Kinbote puzzles over Shade's assertion in "Pale Fire,"

that "No free man needs a God," by pointing to the numerous "thinkers and poets...whose freedom of mind was enhanced rather than stunted by Faith"(116). Such a notion, though Johnson would've approved, prevents (as it did in the case of Johnson, see below) the kind of delight in Shakespeare that Shade describes in this dialogue:

> 'First of all, dismiss ideas, and social background, and train the freshman to shiver, to get drunk on the poetry of *Hamlet* and *Lear*, to read with his spine and not with his skull.' Kinbote: "You appreciate particularly the purple passages?" Shade: "Yes, my dear Charles, I roll upon them as a grateful mongrel on a spot of turf fouled by a Great Dane".(155)

Given the nature of Kinbote's religious beliefs, it is as great a mystery why he should enjoy Shade's poem, as it is that Johnson could somehow find something to enjoy in Shakespeare. Admittedly, Johnson accepted the Bard into the Canon, but his admiration was highly qualified: he grumbles about the lack of a moral in the plays, and even compares favorably an ordinary passage from Congreve's *The Mourning Bride*, to any line of poetry in Shakespeare. Given the usual ferocity of his opinions in other matters, one would expect the Great Cham to have had something more like Tolstoy's great contempt for both Shakespeare *and* Milton. But Johnson refrains from rejecting completely either of these writers, recognizing too clearly the artistic powers a Shakespeare possessed, even as he expresses his discomfort at the moral taciturnity of a *Lear* (for more on this discussion, see below in my comparison of Shade and Johnson).

And clearly, Kinbote must have found something to disagree with in Shade's aesthetic approach to art expressed here. Anyone who believes that a religious agenda always "enhances" art, could not be altogether happy with Shade's delight only in "rolling" on the "purple passages" in Shakespeare. And, just as Boswell often does when it is obvious that the direction of the conversation does not completely please him, Kinbote abruptly changes the subject, moving on to more agreeable terrain.

Thus, despite the often extremely close tracings of their separate hero's characters, Boswell

and Kinbote cannot resist imposing their own private agendas on their biographies, and, frequently, on the very subjects of their biographies. It is to several specific agendas that we now must turn.

Prejudices

Boswell and Kinbote tend to construct their lives around those of their idols as often as possible. Boswell, a Scot, became a passionate London citizen, largely because of the joy he found in Johnson's "busy hum of men," and despite the financial ruin his life in England ultimately brought upon him. Boswell describes seeking out Johnson in London, as he was "impatient...to see the extraordinary man whose works I so highly valued, and whose conversation was reported to be so peculiarly excellent" (i.391). Kinbote too, seems greatly influenced in his decision to adopt New Wye as his exile from Zembla because Shade is there. Upon his arrival in the U.S., King Charles is handed a newspaper article about the poet's recent hospitalization, and Kinbote details how he had been "looking forward to meeting my favorite American poet..." But as always in Nabokov's parody, the turns of Kinbote's egomania and false nobility send him elsewhere, even at this potentially heartfelt moment of reflection on the poet's demise:

> ...who, as I felt sure at that moment, would die long before the Spring Term, but the disappointment was little more than a mental shrug of accepted regret, and discarding the newspaper, I looked around me with enchantment and physical wellbeing despite the congestion in my nose. (247)

Other such pressing matters rage against Kinbote's skull, something that, superficially at least, rarely happens to the more pious and reverent Boswell. But as we have seen, Boswell is just as capable of shaping his text in largely personal ways, following his narrative as it suits his own purposes, and not those of "historic fact."

Both the fictional Charles Kinbote and James Boswell seek fame and glory through the writings of others. Both men are, in a sense "pale fires" of the men they idolize and pursue, in their separate paper chases. Unlike most commentators, however, Kinbote and Boswell cannot rest content with "merely" annotating a poem by, or writing a biography of, their heroes. Boswell and

Kinbote both have an agenda, and it is one they would like to see reflected in the writings and thinkings of their famous friends. Boswell followed several causes closely, and sought to make Johnson a follower of these too: Toryism, Boswell's interest in Corsica, and, though somewhat reluctantly, his sense of the growing importance of a still-backwards Scottish culture.

A devoted Tory, Boswell clearly wished to see Johnson become, like himself, a full-fledged, even "zealous" follower (iv. 117). Throughout the *Life*, (and to the great annoyance of Greene, among others) Boswell strives to "torify" Johnson's ideas. In a discussion of Johnson's definition of the word "Tory"[47] in his Dictionary, an obviously approving Boswell gently attributes Johnson's often prejudicial definitions to the account of "capricious and humorous indulgence" (v. 207).

Later, in 1777, Boswell laments the fact that Johnson never followed through on plans to write a *Biographia Britannica* (iii. 174), passing this over to Dr. Kippis. Although Boswell found that Kippis "discharged the task judiciously," he regrets that the task had not been assigned to a "'friend to the constitution in Church and State'" (174). In a note to this passage, he defends his statement, writing that

> the expression 'A friend to the Constitution in Church and State,' was not meant by me as any reflection upon this Reverend Gentleman, as if he were an enemy to the political constitution of this country, as established at the revolution, but, from my steady and avowed predilection for a *Tory*, was quoted from 'Johnson's Dictionary' where that distinction is so defined.' (175)

Yet, it has been shown that, in his definitions of "Tory" and "Whig," Johnson basically followed the trends of current lexicographical tradition. Thus, Boswell's suggestion of personal significance here may have been overstated.[48] Still, Boswell does not hesitate to illustrate this "predilection" throughout *The Life*, even if his efforts to do so intrude upon the veracity of his project. Greene and others have pointed to a discussion between Goldsmith, Boswell and Johnson that was first recorded in the journals, only to be "revised" (and Toryfied) by Boswell later, as evidence of this sort of manipulation of facts:

The journal entry reads:

> Johnson showed that in our constitution the King is the head, and that there is no power by which he can be tried; and therefore it is that redress is always to be had against oppression by punishing the immediate agents. [(from *London Journal*, ed. F.A. Pottle (New York, 1950) p. 292]

In *The Life*, Boswell writes:

> JOHNSON. Sir, you are to consider, that in our constitution, according to its true principles, the King is the head; he is supreme; he is above every thing, and there is no power by which he can be tried. Therefore it is, Sir, that we hold the King can do no wrong; that whatever may happen to be wrong in government may not be above our reach, by being ascribed to Majesty. Redress is always to be had against oppression, by punishing the immediate agents. (i. 423-4)

Clearly much modification has gone into the passage by the time Boswell included it in *The Life*. Johnson here is simply pointing out that the Crown is essentially exempt from prosecution. But in the hands of Boswell, the tiny speech becomes something close to an oration to Toryism. As Greene notes:

> In Boswell's elaboration in *The Life*, by the addition of such words as "supreme" and "majesty," it sounds vaguely like a declaration of divine-right politics. To make the mythical Johnson qualify "constitution" by "according to its true principles" is a brilliant touch."(*The Politics of Samuel Johnson* 292-93)

Boswell's Scot background, with the Stuart family tendencies towards divine right politics clearly influences his editorial style here. Boswell frequently presents Johnson's ideas in a light most favorable to his interests; and, as even Greene admits, he often does this with great panache, slightly qualifying a state that could lead to Toryism here, substituting a stronger adjective there.

Johnson, it is important to remember, never advocated any political position *per se*. As Greene points out, like Hobbes before him, Johnson was more concerned with clear thinking, and "dispel(ling) the cant which, as (he) saw it, dangerously obscured the reality" (246). Johnson's definition of Tories and Whigs, that he provided for the self-described "zealous Tory" Boswell years after the *Dictionary* (1781), and especially Boswell's response, or lack of one, is, in this context,

telling. Johnson replied to Boswell's query by noting:

> A wise Tory and wise Whig, I believe, will agree. Their principles are the same, though their modes of thinking are different. A high Tory makes government unintelligible; it is lost in the clouds. A violent Whig makes it impracticable: he is allowing so much liberty to every man, that there is not power enough to govern any man. The prejudice of the Tory is for establishment; the prejudice of the Whig is for innovation. A Tory does not wish to give more real power to Government; but that Government should have more reverence. Then they differ as to the Church. The Tory is not for giving more legal power to the Clergy, but wishes that they should have a considerable influence, founded on the opinion of mankind; the Whig is for limiting and watching them with a narrow jealousy.' (iv. 117-18)

Greene speculates that Boswell's lack of comment suggests the distinction Johnson made "puzzled him: this was not (Boswell's) idea of the difference between a Tory and a Whig" (14). For Boswell, a Tory was a supporter of Bute, of Lord North; for Johnson, the applications of the term were less specific, because it seems his own political ideas were ultimately less partisan. Greene's comparison of Johnson's "politics" with Orwell's sums up this non-partisan political stance well:

> Orwell, whose approach to politics, to his calling as a writer, and to life in general is often strikingly similar to Johnson's. Orwell defines political purpose in writing as "desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's ideas of the kind of society they should strive for...My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice...I write...because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention. (21)

As we shall see, such basic concerns for justice, coupled with an innate contempt for cruelty, form the basis, not only of Johnson's political philosophy, but Shade's as well. As with Boswell, such a stance does not sit well with Kinbote, the partisan thinker who buzzes around his serenely non-partisan illuminator.

An obsessive interest in Corsica came to represent another, more unusual, aspect of Boswell's partisanship that frequently dominated both his discussions with Johnson, and his recording of *The Life*. In addition to his Toryism, Boswell became a committed pro-Corsican during the time he knew Johnson, and encouraged him to join this cause. In an August 1766 letter, Johnson

praises Boswell's recently published *Account of Corsica*, though with a note of irritation about his obsessive interest in the island:

> As to your History of Corsica, you have no materials which others have not, or may not have. You have, somehow or other, warmed your imagination. I wish there were some cure, like the lover's leap, for all heads of which some single idea has obtained an unreasonable and irregular possession. Mind your own affairs, and leave the Corsicans to theirs. (ii. 22)

Later Johnson clearly seems to have tired of Boswell's predilection for Corsica, urging him to "empty (his) head of (it), which I think has filled it rather too long" in a letter dated March 23, 1768 (58). Boswell fired back a letter the following month expressing his shock at Johnson's indifference:

> But how can you bid me 'empty my head of Corsica?' My noble-minded friend, do you not feel for an oppressed nation bravely struggling to be free? Consider fairly what is the case. The Corsicans never received any kindness from the Genoese. They never agreed to be subject to them. They owe them nothing; and when reduced to an abject state of slavery, by force, shall they not rise in the great cause of liberty, and break the galling yoke? And shall not every liberal soul be warm for them? Empty my head of Corsica! Empty it of honour, empty it of humanity, empty it of friendship, empty it of piety. No! while I live, Corsica, and the cause of the brave islanders shall ever employ much of my attention, shall ever interest me in the sincerest manner (ii.59).

Despite the poetry of Boswell's emotion here, the actual motives for his concerns were later shown to be dubious; in his note to this passage, Hill observes that on the *same day* that he wrote the above to Johnson, Boswell said in a letter to Temple:

> Old Oglethorpe (who has come to see me and is with me often, just on account of my book) bids me not marry till I have first put the Corsicans in a proper situation. 'You may make a fortune in the doing of it,' said he; 'or, if you do not, you will have acquired such a character as will entitle you to any fortune. (59)

At this stage in my analysis, it is important to mark the duplicity of Boswell's interests. It is also important, however, to note that Boswell's performance here is utterly convincing, shading perhaps even into something akin to a genuine feeling for the plight of the Corsicans. His admiration for General Paoli seems heartfelt (see below). But other motives, such as those revealed in the Temple

letter, suggest otherwise. And through the character of Kinbote, Nabokov will comically parody many of the motives that can lurk behind patriotism, that final refuge for fools and scoundrels.

Though he sensed the great cultural divides that existed between Scotland and England--and in particular London--more than anyone, Boswell reveals throughout the *Life* that he would've also liked for Johnson to share some kind of sympathy for his homeland, most famously by successfully persuading him to take a tour of the country with him. In his introductory statements concerning their tour of the Hebrides, Boswell, though he writes that British blood, being "nearer the sun" is "richer and more mellow," than that of the Scottish, also notes that

> when I humour any of them in an outrageous contempt of Scotland, I fairly own I treat them as children. And thus I have, at some moments, found myself obliged to treat even Dr. Johnson. (*Tour of the Hebrides*, 20)

"Even" Dr. Johnson, he adds, because, despite his prejudice against Scotland, a bias that Boswell freely admits to (19), Johnson, according to Boswell,

> allowed himself to look upon all nations but his own as barbarians: not only Hibernia, and Scotland, but Spain, Italy and France are attacked in ("London") If he was particularly prejudiced against the Scots, it was because they were more in his way; because he thought their success in England rather exceeded the due proportion of their real merit; and because he could not but see in them that nationality which I believe no liberal-minded Scotsman will deny. (20)

Certainly Boswell did not, and his frequent appeals to Johnson to upgrade his opinion of the country and its people show this tendency. But Johnson's prejudice against the country, as Boswell takes pains to point out, was one of "the head, and not of the heart" (ii.301).

And he does this even when Johnson seems, for the moment, to have forgotten this distinction himself. After their trip, Johnson continued to poke fun at Scotland. In a particularly memorable verbal joust from May 15 1776, Boswell can almost be seen to sweat at his idol's sarcastic edge:

> Mr. Arthur Lee mentioned some Scotch who had taken possession of a barren part of America, and wondered why they should choose it.

> JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, all barrenness is comparative. The *Scotch* would not know it to be barren.' BOSWELL. 'Come, come, he is flattering the English. You have now been in Scotland, Sir, and say if you did not see meat and drink enough there.' JOHNSON. 'Why yes, Sir; meat and drink enough to give the inhabitants sufficient strength to run away from home.' All of these quick and lively sallies were said sportively, quite in jest, and with a smile, which showed that he meant only wit. (77)

Certainly Johnson's railleries here and elsewhere must be understood through several layers of irony. But Boswell's insistence that we understand Johnson's remarks as examples of "jests" only is to be marked.

As we have seen, Boswell tempered his allegiance to his country with a deep conviction of the power of "rich" English blood, even priding himself on his ability to make this distinction. Describing Johnson's impact on the "general elevation of language of his country," Boswell quotes from a poem by Courtenay to illustrate this point. But, as even he notes, there is a "too great partiality for one of (Courtenay's) friends" in the poem as well. The passage that mentions this friend reads: Amid these names can *Boswell* be forgot/ Scarce by North Britons now esteem'd a Scot? (i. 223) Clearly Boswell enjoyed his Scottish past, and delighted in showing Johnson scenes from it on their famous tour. In addition, he was hypnotized by the exuberance of English life and the richness of English culture.

But this passage, included in Johnson's biography not only because of the peroration Courtenay makes to Johnson's powers of expression, but also because it mentions Boswell and his unusual and complex status as a "Scot," provides a useful bridge from Boswell to Kinbote. In his analysis of the poem "Pale Fire," Kinbote's allegiance to his country, the mythical Zembla, overwhelms the commentary, with Kinbote shaping the ideas, not just of the commentary, but of Shade's poem, so that they both fit into his massive misreading that in turn becomes the novel *Pale Fire*. Nabokov's parody exaggerates Boswell's exaggerative "reporting," making outrageous fun of all "objective criticism" in the tradition of Johnson's biographer.

The first major connection Kinbote makes between the poem and Zembla occurs in his commentary of line 12, that includes the phrase: "that crystal land." Following his opening speculative remark ("Perhaps an allusion to Zembla, my dear country"), the bogs of conjecture begin to trickle into the commentary, ultimately overflowing into our reading of the poem, and creating, not an academic work but, something that, despite Kinbote's good intentions, very much bears the "monstrous semblance of a novel" (86) he fears his notes could metamorphose into. The proceeding note also serves to remind us of Boswell, and especially his propensity to politicize his "paper chase" with issues that were important to him. The opening of the note states:

> Perhaps an allusion to Zembla, my dear country. After this, in the disjointed, half-obliterated draft which I am not at all sure I have deciphered properly:
>
> Ah, I must not forget to say something
> That my friend told me of a certain king.
>
> Alas, he would have said a great deal more if a domestic anti-Karlist had not controlled everyline he communicated to her! Many a time have I rebuked him in bantering fashion: "you really should promise to use all that wonderful stuff, you bad gray poet you!" And we both would giggle like boys. But then, after the inspiring evening stroll, we had to part, and grim night lifted the drawbridge between his impregnable fortress and my humble home. (74)

The note parodies a number of themes we have seen in the background of Boswell's *Life*--Kinbote's interest in Shade's use of Zemblan lore wildly spoofs Boswell humbler, but less decisive concerns that Johnson share his sympathies with Scotland, Corsica, and Toryism. Like Boswell, who is always pleading the case of his own "distant northern land" (as Kinbote refers to Zembla), Kinbote, throughout his "analysis" finds clues pointing to his country and reasons for reading the entire poem as a secret ode to Zembla. Later, in his note to line 42 ("I could make out") Kinbote notes, with an unusual certainty:

> By the end of May I could make out the outlines of some of my images in the shape his genius might give them; by mid-June I felt sure at last that he would recreate in a poem the dazzling Zembla burning in my brain. I mesmerized him with it, I saturated his vision, I pressed upon him with a drunkard's wild generosity, all that I was helpless myself to put into verse.

> Surely it would not be easy to discover in the history of poetry a similar case--that of two men, different in origin, upbringing, thought associations, spiritual intonation and mental mode, one a cosmopolitan scholar, the other a fireside poet, entering into a secret compact of this kind. At length I knew he was ripe with my Zembla...(80)

Boswell's comfortable assurance that his "Johnson" would be an accurate one, with "Flemish" detail relating only to Johnson himself, enters into Nabokov's parody here. Like Boswell, Kinbote assumes that the controlling forces (politics, art, religion) in his life must have had some influence on Shade as well. As Boswell will frequently pride himself on being a "good companion" to Johnson, so too does Kinbote feel that he compliments Shade in important ways. But in Nabokov's parody the relation between commentator and commentatee is outrageously complex and, from one side at least, deeply personal: Kinbote "saturates" Shade with his vision, and never thinks of himself as the moth Johnson compares Boswell to, that flits about the pale fire of his genius. Indeed, it is difficult for us to imagine two men entering into a "secret compact" of the type Kinbote describes, but Boswell and Johnson can be seen as a prototype for such forms of madness.

And the political aspect of the commentary parodies nicely Boswell's "zealous" Toryism. Kinbote's insistence that we find, lurking behind the poem, references to the King of Zembla, sends us back to Boswell's "adjustment" of Johnson's statements to Goldsmith about the King, and his relation to law, where the biographer throws in a "majestic," or a "divinely chosen," for good measure, but not in the interest of good scholarship.

And Zembla resembles in a number of ways the fairy-tale like Corsica, with its never-never-land King and curious customs. In the note to line 12 we are introduced to Charles the Beloved. Kinbote raves about the efficacy of his political reign, and with a Boswellian enthusiasm:

> That King's reign (1936-1958) will be remembered by at least a few discerning historians as a peaceful and elegant one. Owing to a fluid system of judicious alliances, Mars in his time never marred the record. Internally, until corruption, betrayal, and Extremism penetrated it, the People's Place (parliament) worked in perfect harmony with the Royal Council. Harmony, indeed, was the reign's password. The polite arts and

> pure sciences flourished. Technicology, applied physics, industrial chemistry and so forth were suffered to thrive...the climate seemed to be improving. Taxation had become a thing of beauty. (75)

Corsica, a country that struggled under Genoese oppression, had hardly risen to the level of Zembla, but General Paoli certainly imagined such a Utopian state, and Boswell respectfully includes his (ultimately unfulfilled) visions in his record of his tour:

> I said that things would make a rapid progress, and that we should see all the arts and sciences flourish in Corsica. 'Patience Sir," said he, 'The arts and sciences are like dress and ornmanent. You cannot expect them from us for some time. But come back twenty or thirty years hence, and we'll show you arts and sciences, and concerts and assemblies, and fine ladies, and we'll make you fall in love among us, Sir.' (167)

Nabokov parodies the charming, highly idealistic vision of his country General Paoli paints for Boswell (and by implication, Boswell's own exaltation of Paoli) by suggesting that not only has culture "suffered to thrive" in Zembla as the General imagined it would in Corsica one day, but even the weather has improved on account of the king and his "glorious" reign.

And Charles the Beloved resembles General Paoli in a number of parodic ways. As we shall see in the case of Sybil-Margaret Boswell, the parody reverses situations, or in this case, moral values, for humorous effect. Boswell describes Paoli's virtues as if he were a god, or a thinker close even to Johnson in greatness:

> His notions of morality are high and refined, such as become the father of a nation. Were he a libertine, his influence would soon vanish for men will never trust the important concerns of society to one they know will do what is hurtful to society for his own pleasures. He told me that his father had brought him up with great strictness, and that he had very seldom deviated from the paths of virtue. That this was not from a defect of feeling and passion, but that his mind being filled with important objects, his passion were employed in more noble pursuits than those of licentious pleasure. I saw from Paoli's example the great art of preserving young men of spirit from the contagion of vice, in which there is often a species of sentiment, ingenuity, and enterprise nearly allied to virtuous qualities. Show a young man that there is more real spirit in virtue than in vice, and you have a surer hold of him during his years of impetuosity and passion than by convincing him his judgement of all the rectitude of ethics. (168)

It is important to note Boswell's focus on the refinement of Paoli's morality, and in particular, the influence Paoli had over young men, and their moral upbringings. Preserving young men from "the contagion of vice" is a special ability of Paoli's that Boswell admires, and as with all suggestions of this disease in Boswell's writings, there is a sense of his own infection as he admires others warding it off. Boswell, of course, was a great womanizer, who and his comments here evoke some of the melancholy he clearly felt about the contagion he caught early in life and could not control. In Paoli, as in Johnson, he saw a shining of example of strength in the face of the disease of "licentious pleasure."

Kinbote's Charles parodies not only Paoli, but Boswell's uncertain relation to him and his principles. Like Paoli, a great reader of the *Spectator*, the *Tatler*, and Swift, Charles is a lover of foreign arts, and "had become, despite frequent migraines, passionately addicted to the study of (English) literature" (76). But unlike Paoli, and despite good intentions, Charles is hardly a model of virtue, particularly where young men are concerned. A prolific homosexual, King Charles has for bed partners a continuous number of "young nobles, artists, college athletes, gamblers, Black Rose Paladins, members of fencing clubs," and "other men of fashion and adventure" (120). Charles' sexual leanings make his relationship with the tragic queen Disa highly problematic; he tells her that his disinterest in her sexually is because of "an old riding accident" (208), and yet she finds a riding boot in their bed (208), and at last leaves Charles for the Riviera, so the king can "amuse himself with a band of Eton-collared, sweet-voiced minions imported from England" (209).

Like Boswell, Kinbote's relationship to his subject (and his subject's values) is complex. Before we learn that Kinbote *is* Charles, it is made clear that the commentator is himself a homosexual, and a quite prolific one at that, though in a parody of Boswell's guilt-ridden heterosexuality, Kinbote never questions the ethics of his behavior. As we have seen in the discussion of Kinbote's and Boswell's sexuality, it is important to hear in his description of King

Charles' love interests, Kinbote's own desires. His artful use of highly subjective adjectives like "sweet-voiced" "men of fashion and adventure" stand in marked, parodic contrast to Boswell's reticent approach to his own uncontrollable lusts--all of which were, of course, censored out of the *Life*--and his veneration of people with stronger value systems than his own.

Nabokov's parody is multifarious. In addition to poking fun at the source of moral strength Boswell seems to gain from his encounters with Paoli, Kinbote's obsession with the purely fictional Zembla parodies Boswell's less-than-honest dealings with the Corsicans. As noted above, Boswell was at least partially interested in the island as a place that he could exploit for his own ends; so too, is Kinbote constantly pushing Zembla on Shade with that "hypnotist's patience" in the hopes that the poet will immortalize his northern land in a poem. And much of Boswell's narrative is shaped, like Kinbote's, not by mundane reality, but in the interests of dramatic and political effect.

Johnson praised Boswell's record of his tour of the island, favoring the second part that deals with Boswell's personal encounters, over the largely derivative first section, which focuses on the history of Corsica. He wrote:

> There is between the *History* and the *Journal* that difference which will always be found between notions borrowed from without and notions generated within. Your *History* was copied from books; your *Journal* generated within. Your *History* rose out of your own experience and observation. (146)

But as has been noted since its publication, many of the notions were indeed generated within, after a process of shaping and revision.[49] To aid the cause of the Corsicans, who faced Genoese oppression backed by the threat of French aid, Boswell deliberately emphasized the Roussean primitive and utopic aspects of the Corsican society, to help rally support for the cause.[50]

A rumor that Boswell was a British spy persisted during his visit to Corsica, and it was to be a story that Boswell sought to give substance to through "smiling denials" later in Genoa.[51] And years later, during the tour of the Hebrides, when he was mistakenly listed in an inn as "General

Paoli," Boswell did nothing to change this mistake, seeming even to delight in the confusion.[52]

Zembla, Kinbote is always ready to reminds us, was *his* contribution to Shade's poetic spirit, a saga that the American poet became "saturated" with, and that, the commentator implies, lead to the greatness of "Pale Fire"; this despite the fact that the theme, as it is "expressed" in the final draft of the poem, lurks only in the background. As Kinbote writes:

> Although I realize only too clearly, alas, that the result, in its pale and diaphanous final phase, cannot be regarded as a direct echo of my narrative (of which, incidentally, only few fragments are given in my notes--mainly in Canto One), 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 1000-line poem in three weeks. There is, moreover, a symptomatic family resemblance in the coloration of both poem and story. 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. (81)

The sunset glow of Kinbote's pale fire fed, he would have us believe, Shade's "Pale Fire." And, like Boswell with Corsica, Kinbote stands in at least somewhat of a detached relation to his beloved country, about which he "hypnotizes" others. Though he seems to fervently believe in his cause, and loathes the cruelties of the anti-Karlist now in power, Kinbote also recognizes his story as having great poetic, and even marketing, potential, as a detached work of art waiting to be illuminated by a gifted poet. Nabokov cleverly supplies this sense of detachment in the style of the text, as well as through the cracks of Kinbote's own mind, the fissures of the story that come to the fore as he tells it.

Learning of Boswell's misunderstanding about his initial meeting with Paoli forces readers of the *Tour of Corsica* to remember that what we have in Boswell's text is only one translation, one "misreading" to paraphrase Bloom, of events. Boswell writes that for "ten minutes we walked backwards and forwards through the room hardly saying a word," and attributes the General's reserve to his being "in continual danger from treachery and assassination" and to give Paoli's powers of physiognomy time to analyze a new subject (162). Boswell accepts Paoli's reserve as if it were no

more than his usual way of dealing with strangers.

But years later, Fanny Burney, in her record of Paoli's version of the first meeting, wrote that the General's reserve came about because of a fear that Boswell was a spy:

> I look away from him, and in a moment I look to him again and behold his tablets. Oh! he was to the work of writing down all I say! Indeed I was angry. But soon I discover he was no imposter and no spy, and I only find I was myself the monster he had come to discern. (*Burney,* ii. 100)

Nabokov parodies this comedy of errors, and its implications about the fallibility of human perception, by giving Kinbote the inspiration to recreate such a confused meeting, and enjoy its implications, even as he misses out on the larger implications about mistranslation and misreading that are embodied in *his* commentary. When the evil Gradus visits Oswin Bretwit, he fails to give the appropriate Karlist hand signal, thus alerting Bretwit to his treachery:

> 'All right, I am ready. Give me the sign,' he avidly said.
> Gradus, deciding to risk it, glanced at the hand in Bretwit's lap: unperceived by its owner, it seemed to be prompting Gradus in a manual whisper. He tried to copy what it was doing its best to convey--mere rudiments of the required sign.
>
> 'No, no,' said Bretwit with an indulgent smile for the awkward novice. "The other hand, my friend. His Majesty is left-handed, you know."
>
> Gradus tried again--but, like an expelled puppet, the wild little prompter had disappeared. Sheepishly contemplating his five stubby strangers, Gradus went through the motions of an incompetent and half-paralyzed shadow-grapher and finally made an uncertain V-for-Victory sign. Bretwit's smile began to fade. (180)

Bretwit confuses Gradus for what Paoli realized Boswell in fact really was--a reporter. He promptly dismisses him, and Kinbote, as much as anyone, seems to enjoy the humor of the situation, delighting in seeing such a villain as Gradus get kicked out of the home of so excellent a Karlist as Bretwit. Thus, Nabokov provides his commentator with the opportunity to understand clearly the nature of the mixed identity situation that takes place in the meeting with General Paoli. But the larger joke is still on Kinbote--even as he laughs at the absurdity of Gradus' attempts at the secret sign, and his subsequent rebuke by Bretwit, we the reader continue to marvel at his own vast misreading of the

poem itself, an activity that is thematically reflected by the Gradus-Bretwit encounter that Kinbote describes with glee.

But perhaps nowhere is this sense of manipulated text and text manipulating commentator more apparent than in the scene when we discover that Kinbote is the King. It is presented by Kinbote in an offhanded fashion, as if the reader knew this important "fact" already. In his note to line 691, Kinbote begins by describing the continuing adventures of the "disguised king," only to suddenly move from third person description to first person. The transition occurs in mid-sentence, and with the sudden presence of the unassuming "I," Kinbote fuses his main character with himself as if the transition were easy and natural (247).

Thus, like Boswell before him, Kinbote "becomes" a leader, not because he really is royalty, but because it suits his own mad purposes: Boswell chose to transform himself into British spy and later "General Paoli" to help his pet-cause, and suit his vanity; Nabokov's parody extends such motives to wilder lengths--Kinbote's metamorphosis is also caused by vanity, but it is the vanity of a *genuine* madman, who is also a prose-poet. He is both the detached observer to the world he created, and, simultaneously, swept away by it, and thrown into it.[53]

CHAPTER IV

PARODY IN *PALE FIRE,* PART TWO

Kinbote, like Boswell, met his idol late in life; and Boswell only spent time with him for approximately 425 days.[54] Though we have no record of Boswell defending the intimacy of his relationship with Johnson--despite the seemingly limited number of days that they actually spent together--it is fair to assume that Boswell would have been offended by the implications of Greene's bean-counting--i.e. how could Boswell be said to truly "know" Johnson the way a definitive biographer should, if they only spent little more than a year's worth of days together?

In the introduction to *Pale Fire*, Kinbote notes:

> The calendar says I had known (Shade) only for a few months, but there exist friendships which develop their own inner duration, their own eons of transparent time, independent of rotating, malicious music. (11)

In this context, Kinbote's defense of his own relationship with Shade reads like a protest Boswell would be forced to make in the age of Greene and other revisionist critics. And the emphasis on the quasi-mystical, anti-chronos of their friendship outside of "transparent time" sounds like Boswell rethought from a twentieth-century, post-Einstein perspective. And, as have seen earlier, both men had little interest in time's signature--music.

Other obstacles exist in the Boswell/Kinbote relation that are parodistically paralleled in the Kinbote/Shade relation. Boswell married his cousin Margaret Montgomerie on November 25, 1769 (140), and soon became concerned as to how his new domestic situation might interfere with life in London, and more importantly, his friendship with Johnson. Boswell writes:

> I came to London in the autumn, and having informed him that I was going to be married in a few months, I wished to have as much of his conversation as I could before engaging in a state of life which would probably keep me more in Scotland, and prevent my seeing him so often as when I was a

single man...(68)

The distance between the two men was to be more than one of geography. Later, in a letter written by Johnson to Boswell in late November 1773, Johnson rightly suspects that Mrs. Boswell doesn't care for him: I shall go to Oxford on Monday. I know Mrs. Boswell wished me well to go; her wishes have not been disappointed (268-69).

Boswell, astounded by Johnson's penetrating mind, notes:

> My wife paid him the most assiduous and respectful attention, while he was our guest; so that I wonder how he discovered her wishing for his departure. The truth is, that his irregular hours and uncouth habits, such as turning the candles with their heads downwards, when they did not burn bright enough, and letting the wax drop upon the carpet, could not but be disagreeable to a lady. Besides, she had not that high admiration of him which was felt by most of those who knew him; and what was very natural to a female mind, she thought he had too much influence over her husband. She once in a little warmth, made, with more point than justice, this remark upon that subject: 'I have seen many a bear led by a man; but I never before saw a man led by a bear.' (269)

From this point onward, Johnson seems to take a perverse delight in begging forgiveness for any rudeness he may have displayed towards Boswell's wife, through Boswell.[55] Mrs. Boswell should not be overlooked--Boswell chooses not to comment on her witty characterization of the two men, suggesting she had talents that may have escaped Boswell's often narrow, generalizing mind ("what was very natural to a female mind, she thought he had too much influence over husband").

In 1775, the quiet war was obviously still continuing, as Johnson asked Boswell to teach his daughter Veronica to "love me. Bid her not mind mamma" (379). In 1776, he hopes to be "reconciled" to her (424). It is not clear if such a reconciliation was ever made. Obviously Johnson sensed that Mrs. Boswell didn't care for him, and the two men both realized that Boswell's marriage forced them to revise their own intense relationship somewhat. Boswell's desire to "have as much of (Johnson's) conversation as possible" is a clear indication of this.

The opening Zembla observations bring up the theme of estrangement-through-marriage that

we find in the *Life*, though in *Pale Fire*, Nabokov parodies this situation in *Pale Fire* by reversing the domestic partners: Kinbote's Johnson, Shade, is the married man who, because of his wife Sybil's obvious distaste for Kinbote, must distance himself from his commentator-biographer. Like Johnson, Kinbote is acutely aware of this problem, and frequently returns to it. As he writes in the note to line 247:

> From the very first I tried to behave with the utmost courtesy toward my friend's wife, and from the very first she disliked and distrusted me. I was to learn later that when alluding to me in public she used to call me "an elephantine tick; a king-sized botfly; a macao worm; the monstrous parasite of a genius." I pardon her--her and everybody. (171-72)

Just as Mrs. Boswell expressed her amazement at giant, bearish Johnson leading Boswell about, so too does Sybil, in this parodistic novel of mirrors and counter-mirrors, grumble at the attachment the tall Kinbote (who is known in the English Department as "The Great Beaver") has for Shade. And she is "anti-Karlist" or anti-King, something Boswell (like Kinbote) could not tolerate in anyone.

And like Boswell with his wife, Kinbote tends to subordinate Sybil's role in Shade's poetic life. To Kinbote, Sybil is a pawn, a puzzle, that stands in the way of his catalytic powers over Shade. In the introduction, Kinbote portrays himself as a reassuring "friend" of the poet, who, upon his death

> (i)mmediately prevailed on (Shade's) distraught widow to forelay and defeat the commercial passions and academic intrigues that were bound to come swirling around her husband's manuscript (transferred by me to a safe spot even before his body had reached the grave) by signing an agreement to the effect that he had turned over the manuscript to me. (15)

Suspicions of "academic intrigues" are uppermost in Kinbote's aspiring mind, not consoling grieving wives. One wonders how the man who marvels at the dead poet's manuscript in his pocket, seconds after his shooting, prevailed on the "distraught widow"? There is no mention, and a lawyer she hires after the deal is struck calls the whole affair a "farrago of evil," speculating that the "tremulous" signature on the contract might "have been penned 'in some kind of peculiar red ink'"(16).

Throughout the introduction and commentary, Kinbote rarely mentions Sybil, and when he

does, he chooses only the most uncomfortable moments from which to gather descriptive details. Her first appearance is typically slanted to portray her as a vindicative woman: "...John at the wheel, strenuously grimacing and Sybil fiercely talking to him"(20). And later when Sybil is late picking Shade up Kinbote gives him a ride home. On the way, he generalizes like Boswell at his most miserably epigrammatic: "Wives, Mr. Shade are forgetful" (22). And when they arrive home, Kinbote describes her explaining her lateness to John in a perfunctory, vaguely doubting manner:

> Then she addressed her husband saying he might have waited in his office another minute: she had honked and called, and walked all the way up, et cetera. I turned to go not wishing to listen to a marital scene, but she called me back: 'Have a drink with us..(23)

His characterization of the moment as a "marital scene" is uncertain, and perhaps inaccurate given the nature of the discussion; and the et cetera trivializes the event further. Even from their introduction (and despite Sybil's friendly opening invitation) Kinbote distances himself from her, portraying Sybil as a domineering, often angry woman. Later, when Kinbote interrupts Shade's reading of his poem to Sybil, it is Shade who utters an "unprintable oath," at his unfortunate appearance (he apologizes later to Kinbote, attributing the outbreak, by Kinbote's account, to "his having mistaken, with his reading glasses on, a welcome friend for an intruding salesman"); the kinder, more composed Sybil offers Kinbote coffee (91). But here as elsewhere, Kinbote cannot resist including his mean-spirited suspicions about Sybil's motives: "(victors are generous)" (91).

According to the commentator, Sybil's crimes extend to the realm of Kinbote's cherished religiosity as well. Significantly, she is the reason, according to Kinbote, for the theological divide that exists between the two men. In a note to line 549, Kinbote blames Sybil for having: "wean(ed) her husband, not only from the Episcopal Church of his fathers, but from all forms of sacramental worship" (224). Thus, Kinbote casts Sybil as a sibylline of Heathenism.

The actual poem, and Shade's description of Sybil, comically underlines the vast differences that must exist between the Sybil that Shade knew (and who, presumably, comes closer to the actual

Sybil) and Kinbote's obviously biased presentation of her in his text:

> Come and be worshiped, come and be caressed
> My dark Vanessa, crimson-barred, my blest
> My Admirable butterfly! Explain
> How could you, in the gloom of Lilac Lane,
> Have let uncouth, hysterical John Shade
> Blubber your face, and ear, and shoulder blade? (269-74)

Such veneration stands in marked contrast to Kinbote's soft-pedaling of Sybil. In Shade's poem she becomes his Beatrice, his spiritual companion and ideal. Yet Kinbote ignores her presence generally throughout his discussion of the poem, and of Shade's life. The single gloss on her name (see note to line 247 above) is defensive in nature, and tells us little even about Sybil. The note begins with some extremely sketchy (given the digressive precision--to the point of an empirical nightmare) background information ("I understand she came of Canadian stock, as did Shade's maternal grandmother ("a first cousin of Sybil's grandfather, if I am not greatly mistaken"). And her sole index entry, a *passim*, stands in minuscule (and thus symbolic) relation to John's much larger one, or the even more enormous set of listings Kinbote reserves for his own entry.

Here we can see Nabokov's parody in high gear--by reversing the situation in *The Life*--Nabokov presents a mirror image of the Johnson-Boswell-Margaret situation in Shade-Kinbote-Sybil--we are forced to rethink both *Pale Fire* and *The Life*--Johnson, married young to a much older woman who died years before he did, led a solitary, though colorful and active life; Boswell, though he says he loved his wife to her death, clearly felt uncomfortably removed from Johnson after his marriage. In *The Life*, married life is problematic for Boswell, and Johnson, though obviously interested in the opposite sex, distanced himself from the institution after the death of Tetty, preferring to wage ambiguous wars against physical temptation with chambermaids. In Shade, however, we see an artist who has found an even higher level of conjugal bliss than either experienced by these two figures, as presented in *The Life*. As he writes in "Pale Fire":

> We have been married forty years. At least

> Four thousand times your pillow has been creased
> By our two heads. Four hundred thousand times
> The tall clock with the hoarse Westminster chimes
> Has marked our common hour. How many more
> Free calendars shall grace the kitchen door?
> I love you...(1.273-281)

Shade, a poet who often resembles Johnson in his poetic philosophy, found in Sybil something neither Johnson or Boswell were able to in their relationships with their wives--a long love between two people who closely match one another on an emotional *and* intellectual level. We can only begin to sense this, however, by understanding the source of the parody, and what the comparison Nabokov is parodistically drawing between the two works, signifies.

Johnson/Shade: Characters

In a note to line 894, John Shade tells his colleagues that he has been said to resemble at least four people: "the lovingly reconstructed ancestor of man in the Exton Museum; two local characters...(and) Samuel Johnson (267). In the *Life*, Boswell describes Johnson with typically Flemish, if slightly grotesque, detail:

> His figure was large and well formed and his countenance of the cast of an ancient statue; yet his appearance was rendered strange and somewhat uncouth, by convulsive cramps, by the scars of that distemper which it was once imagined the royal touch could cure, and by a slovenly mode of dress. He had the use only of one eye; yet so much does mind govern and even supply the deficiency of organs, that his visual perceptions, as far as they extended, were uncommonly quick and accurate. So morbid was his temperament, that he never knew the natural joy of a free and vigorous use of his limbs: when he rode, he had no command or direction of his horse, but was carried as if in a balloon. (4.425)

Johnson here seems clumsy, even slovenly, and Boswell clearly wonders along with his readers at the strange contrast he was witness to; Johnson's outward unkemptness seems not to belong with so fastidious a mind.[56] Boswell doesn't overlook these unsavory details--in this he is like Johnson himself, who, while he praised Pope's abilities as a poet in his *Life of Pope*, described in horrifying detail the sight that many servants met with when at the invalid poet's bedside.

Kinbote too focuses on these aspects of Shade, marking the radical differences between the external appearance and internal glories of his subject. Like Boswell, Kinbote marvels at how the power of his subject's inherent greatness of spirit works to balance these physical shortcomings and "supply the deficiency of organs." But in Nabokov's parody, Kinbote goes into absurd detail as he traces the source for the contradiction:

> His whole being constituted a mask. John Shade's physical appearance was so little in keeping with the harmonies living 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 been only 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. (25-6)

It is not only the "present-day bards" who have the gorilla-like appearance Kinbote sees in Shade. As we have seen, both Johnson and Shade are compared to figures from Hogarth: just as Kinbote sees Shade as the "fleshy Hogarthian tippler of indeterminate sex" (no doubt from *Vice*), so too does Beauclerk note that Johnson resembles Hogarth's "Idle Apprentice" (i. 250). And like Boswell, Kinbote finds in these "waste products eliminated from the intrinsic self" ironic attributes, coming as they do from a man of such great intellect. For Kinbote the internal-external differences may even, in some mysterious way, be related, and simply a natural part of the process of "being" a genius. In Johnson's case, his mind supplied "the deficiency of organs," sharpening his senses greatly. And in describing a painting of Johnson by Reynolds, Boswell notes that "there is in it that appearance of a laboring working mind, of an indolent reposing body..."(iv. 450). Like the equally uncouth and brilliant Shade, Johnson was, to a great extent, his own cancellation.

Shade/Kinbote

We have seen how Boswell and Kinbote view their subjects: both deeply venerate their separate heroes, and, in the exaggerating mind of Kinbote, Shade resembles a god. And in the case of Johnson, we have seen how Boswell takes an elusive, "laughing" approach to the people he was surrounded by, presenting only provisional versions of himself to even his closest friends, often seeming to delight in maintaining contradictory stances, or simply in being elliptical.

The same can be said of Shade, though in Nabokov' parody, his attitudes and positions on other people, and in particular his curious commentator, become even more garbled, even more removed, because of the incessant interventions of Kinbote; all of which makes Shade more difficult to define with anything like the certainty that a Vance possesses when he analyzes the "laughing Johnson." But snatches of Shade's ellipticism still make it through the barbed wire of his commentator's shapings, and these are distinctly Johnsonian in nature.

In the note to line 172, Shade, in one of the few quotes of his that Kinbote provides for us in the commentary, says that it is strange to consider that Russian intellectuals "should lack all sense of humor when they have such marvelous humorists as Gogol (and) Dostoevski" (155). In the case of Gogol, such a marvelling is certainly apt--Gogol's comedy in plays like *The Inspector General*, and novels like *Dead Souls* matches the humor of a Cervantes or Sterne, and of course Nabokov himself wrote an entire book on Gogol exploring his whimsical genius.

But Dostoevski can hardly be called a comic writer--His most famous works scarcely have any trace of humor in them, as Nabokov derisively notes in his lecture on him (130). Surely Shade, someone who in aesthetic principles at least, closely resembles Nabokov, is aware of this; in this light, his remarks to Kinbote here amount to little more than a leg-pull, and example of the "laughing" Shade, who, like Johnson, obviously enjoys a good joke, even if, in assuming a false position, he runs the risk of having it at his own expense.

And in Shade's responses to Kinbote's wild talk of Zembla, it is difficult to ascertain how seriously the poet takes his faithful follower; this confusion suggests a playfulness, a prankishness on the part of Shade toward his friend that must remind us of Johnson's similar tactics. In the note to line 433, when Kinbote offers Shade "all this marvelous material" relating to Zembla, Shade replies:

> 'That's all very well, Charles. But there are just two questions. How can you know that all this intimate stuff about your rather appalling king is true? And if true, how can one hope to print such personal things about people who, presumably, are still alive?'
>
> 'My dear John,' I replied gently and urgently, "do not worry about trifles. Once transmuted by you into poetry, the stuff *will* be true, and the people *will* come alive. A poet's purified truth can cause no pain, no offense. True art is above false honor.'
>
> 'Sure, sure,' said Shade. 'One can harness words like performing fleas and make them drive other fleas. Oh, sure.'(214)

Kinbote blithely takes this as an approving response, and presses ahead in his discussion to other matters. But the repetitions of 'Sure,' surely suggest a sarcasm toward the entire enterprise on the part of Shade that has escaped the tentacles of Kinbote's self-congratulating commentary. And his comparison of the act of composing such a work to making fleas perform further suggests Shade's doubtful attitude about his strange friend's "marvelous material" (214). But as is frequently the case in the Boswell-Johnson dialogue, these pokes elude the observer.

And like Johnson, Shade seems to have a far more acute grasp of the workings of his commentator/biographer's mind, than his friend does of his own. In a note to line 991, Kinbote reminds Shade of the "theme" that he has provided for him:

> 'What theme?' said Shade absently, as he leaned on my arm and gradually recovered recovered the use of his numb limb.
> 'Our blue inenubilable Zembla, and the red-capped Steinmann, and the motorboat in the sea cave, and--'
> 'Ah,' said Shade, 'I think I guessed your secret quite some time ago. But all the same I shall sample your wine with pleasure...' (288).

Kinbote delights in the prospect of drinking wine with Shade, and thinks little of what he could be referring to here as his "secret." But the reader can surmise that the nature of Shade's secret must in

part relate to his understanding of Kinbote's shaky mind. He enjoys his knowledge of the Quixoticism of his friend, even as he delights in the Cervantic explosions of euphoria that Kinbote comes out with in their discussions; and we the readers are let in on the joke too. Such one-sided discussions parody closely those unintentionally revealing moments in the *Life* when Johnson withholds or deliberately distorts facts in ways that, though they may go over Boswell's head, often (and ironically) do not escape the grasp of the reader.

Politics

Johnson and Shade both share a deep hatred for racial prejudice (see *Life* ii. 476-7, *Pale Fire*, 216), despite an equally great disinterest in partisan politics. In *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, Johnson writes:

> The reader...will discover what will always be discover'd by a diligent and impartial enquirer, that wherever human nature is to be found, there is a mixture of vice and virtue, a contest of passion and reason. (viii)

As Greene notes in his *Politics of Samuel Johnson*, Johnson frequently reflects a "radical egalitarianism" in his political writings, that is closer to that of "the modern scientific anthropologist" than "to those of either the seventeenth-century missionary or the eighteenth-century Rousseauist" (68). Johnson, as is well known, supported Francis Barber, a negro, for years, sending him to school and leaving him a hefty annuity.

Yet Johnson never specifically refers to himself as a member of any particular party; in the passage from the *Voyage*, Johnson views the human situation from the perspective of a "diligent and impartial enquirer," a point of view that perhaps comes closest to illustrating his political perspective. And he would no doubt have been as averse to referring to himself as a "radical egalitarian" as he was to being dubbed a "Tory." Greene writes:

> (Johnson) was a hard-headed, skeptical, perfectly independent observer and reporter of the complex political scene of his time. The motto he chose for his *Rambler* essays--it is also the motto of the Royal Society in the pioneer of modern empirical science, *Nullius addictus in verba magistri jurare*,

> "Committed to the idealogy of no ideologue"--could also be the motto for a study of his political views and involvements. (lvi)

Like many famous "diligent and impartial" observers (think of Hobbes), Johnson constantly descrys the great disparities that exist between what is said and what is meant, particularly in the political arena. As Johnson makes clear throughout his political writings, nothing disturbed him more than the tendencies in all parties towards "cant"--a inclination to, as he puts it in the *Idler* no. 10,

> deny the most notorious facts, contradict the most cogent truths, and persist in asserting today what they asserted yesterday, in defiance of evidence, and contempt of confutation. (280)

Such is the nature of most political thinking for Johnson, and if he had any allegiance, it finally seems to have been with any party dedicated to the dispelling of all cant. As Greene points out, Johnson's attacks, in the *Vindication of Licensers of the Stage*, on such "cant-phrase" as "regard for posterity" and "liberty," are not attacks on these notions *per se*; instead Johnson deplores the ways that men have shaped these words to their own political benefit.[57] In this light, Greene makes a striking comparison between Johnson and Orwell:

> The debasement and perversion of the vocabulary of morals and politics is filled with the gravest potential danger; and Johnson, like Orwell after him, was properly concerned about a future in which 'Freedom is slavery' might become a viable slogan. (107)

Johnson is above all suspicious of men, and of men's use of words. He makes fun of both Tom Tempest the Jacobite, *and* Jack Sneaker, the Whig, in *Idler* No. 10. Though he may have felt uncomfortable with Hobbes' atheistic tendencies, Johnson certainly shared with that great thinker a concern for clear thinking, and a hatred for words that are little more than *sounds made with one's mouth*.

Though Nabokov's parody allows for Shade's similar political views to be compact with his highly (and deliberately) unJohnsonian ideas on religion, the similarities in purely secular thought between the two should not be overlooked. In a discussion with Kinbote about religion, Shade notes

that there are only two sins: "murder and the deliberate infliction of pain." Kinbote responds by asking "And so the passwords is--? Shade: Pity" (225).

Such a stance may hardly seem like a position at all, much less a political one; and by partisan standards, Shade's appeal to pity hardly qualifies as a "card-carrying" posture. But as Richard Rorty, in his analysis of Nabokov's politics (*Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*) as expressed through his novels, notes, there *is* the makings of a political philosophy here, and it closely resembles Orwell's, which, as we have seen, in turn bears comparison to Johnson's:

> Both Nabokov and Orwell were political liberals, in a broad sense of the term ....they both met Judith Shklar's criterion of a liberal: somebody who believes that cruelty is the worst thing that we do. (146)

In the character of O'Brien in *1984*, Rorty argues that we are allowed to see cruelty from the inside, in much the same way that Nabokov give his readers a ring-side seat of cruelty in his portrait of Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* (146). The password, the "moral" to be drawn from such depictions--pity for the world, pity for Lolitas--is not a strictly partisan one unless possessing a sense of universal pity can somehow be aligned with a party. But though one could debate whether such an organization exists (or indeed, needs to) Johnson and Shade are clearly aware (as was Hobbes) of the great potential for evil--and thus, lack of pity--that politics can engender. Even philosophical positions that Nabokov and Shade find offensive are innocent by comparison to the politics of cruelty. Shade angrily responds to Kinbote's comparison of two of his pet peeves, Freudians and Marxists:

> Marxism needs a dictator, and a dictator needs a secret police, and that is the end of the world; but the Freudian, no matter how stupid, can still cast his vote at the poll, even if he is pleased to call it [smiling] *political pollination*. (156)

Such a party-free aversion to cruelty, coupled with an allegiance to pity, also characterizes well the politics of Samuel Johnson. His "radical egalitarianism" and the insights into the nature of politics illustrated in the *Idler* No. 10, could be read as nothing more than a deeply felt contempt for

cruelty, and further, reflective of an intuitive sense of compassion and pity for the plight of all men; and such a sense must come with a deeply felt understanding of the capacity in men to perform evil acts, something a Hobbes is always insisting upon. Or as Johnson bluntly puts in *Idler* No. 10:

> Of all kinds of credulity, the most obstinate and wonderful is that of political zealots; of men who, being numbered they know not how or why, in any of the parties that divide a state, resign the use of their eyes and ears, and resolve to believe nothing that does not favour those whom they profess to follow (280).

It is the ability to recognize the good and bad in anyone, from a "diligent and impartial" perspective, that is ultimately, for both Shade and Johnson, of greatest importance. As long as there are men, the presence of the never-ending conflict between vice and virtue will demand the ability to distinguish cant from legitimate dialogue, a level of discernment that Johnson, Orwell, Shade and Nabokov encourage. These are issues that both Johnson and Nabokov obviously felt strongly about; particularly in the case of Nabokov, who barely escaped from Russia with his own life, the politics of cruelty--i.e. "the end of the world"-- is nothing to laugh about, and Nabokov makes Shade's politics so closely resemble Johnson's as to almost negate all parodic distinctions. It is a conflation of compassion.

Religion and Art

Shade, an agnostic, and Johnson, a Christian, would seem to differ in religious beliefs; and they do if one makes in-name-only distinctions. But Shade expresses his sense of the mystery of the universe through his art in a manner that approaches a religious evocation; and Johnson's faith, for all of its orthodoxy, was a highly Romantic one.

Nowhere are the similarities between the two men's "faiths"--as well as the parodic distinctions Nabokov makes between the Worlds According to Shade and Johnson--more apparent than in their separate meditations and thoughts on the arts. In a famous scene from the *Life*, Johnson points to Richardson's ability to understand the workings of man as evidence of his artistic greatness:

> In comparing (Richardson and Fielding), (Johnson) used this expression; 'that there was as great a difference between them as between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial-plate. (49)

What bothered Johnson about Fielding was that "he was a blockhead...what I mean by (this) is that he was a barren rascal" (ii. 173-4); in other words, Fielding was a writer who carried no moral in tow with his art. Richardson could actually understand the ways of men well enough to legislate mankind, a purpose that was--as, for Johnson, all great art should strive to be--eminently Christian. To truly enjoy and understand Richardson's works, Johnson famously said, one must read for the sentiment and not the story.

Boswell's memorable response ("the neat watches of Fielding are as well constructed as the large clocks of Richardson, and his dial-plates are brighter") reflects a more purely aesthetic approach to the arts, an interest in the surface "story" and the "neatness" therein, over its sentiments; it was a secular view that did not sit well with Johnson, even when he recognized that the enjoyment of certain much-vaunted works depended on this type of response. This is particularly the case with Shakespeare, a writer who Johnson at times finds

> carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place...He misses opportunities of instructing...(*Preface to Shakespeare*, in *Oxford Johnson*, 427)

In this context, it can be said that Shakespeare, for Johnson, loved the surface of the watch, and no doubt possessed great insight into its workings; but, for Johnson, all too often he ignored the task of tracing these and providing his audience with exalted sentiments. Instead Shakespeare preferred to dabble in the quibbles Johnson loathed, and operations of chance requiring study of specifics, not in Johnson's beloved generalities. In the famous *Rambler* No. 4, he states his beliefs in the power of

these even more bluntly:

> It is...not a sufficient vindication of a character that it is drawn as it appears, for many characters ought never to be drawn; nor of a narrative that the train of events is agreeable to observation and experience, for that observation which is called knowledge of the world will be found much more frequently to make men cunning and than good. (177)

For Johnson, there was no confusion as to the best artistic credo--an artist should always present the world as a schemata for drawing moral truths, and never simply present it.

And yet, despite these bluntly stated views on art (his attack on *Tristram Shandy*, for example, is perfectly consistent with Johnson's stated aesthetic theory), Johnson frequently found himself delighting in less-than-didactic art. He sat in on many dress rehearsals of Goldsmith's hardly instructive *She Stoops To Conquer*, roaring with laughter, and encouraging backers (ii. 208). And he lists *Don Quixote*--a book which, excluding the perhaps not completely sincere recanting by the Don at the close, seems made more for mirth than morality--as one of three books he would read from cover to cover (*Piozzi's Anecdotes*, no. 281)[58].

And in the introduction to *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding makes a distinction between the comic and the burlesque that ironically recalls several points Imlac makes about poetry in Johnson's own *Rasselas*. Hogarth is not merely a "burlesque" painter, or caricature artist; he draws from nature. Fielding writes:

> ...for sure it is much easier, much less the subject of admiration, to paint a man with a nose, or any other feature, of a preposterous size, or to expose him in some absurd or monstrous attitude, than to express the affections of men on canvas. It hath been thought a vast commendation of a painter to say his figures *seem to breathe*; but surely it is a much greater and nobler applause, *that they appear to think.* (9-10)

To create such an illusion, a close attention to original, unique detail is necessary, and cannot be achieved by dwelling only in generalities.

Johnson makes the same point in *Rasselas* when Imlac says of poetry:

> The business of the poet is not to examine the individual, but the species;

> to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades of verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portrait of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind...(352)

As Greene points out, the word "general" here does not mean "abstract," a word not in Johnson's critical vocabulary, and instead, as the following line makes clear, "accessible to the experience of many" (812). Giving these words to Imlac (and letting the prince later sneer at them), Johnson seems to suggest he does not endorse them completely; and indeed, they reflect a contradiction in his aesthetics that he never fully resolved--on the one hand, art should be dedicated to the business of legislating mankind, and instructing in useful sentiments. Shakespeare's greatest weakness, for Johnson, is that he did not strive to "make the world better," and instead looked upon it with something like the "taciturnity of nature" (*As You Like It*, ii.2.34-5), hardly a didactic posture.

But art must also possess something of the "original" that audiences can readily identify with. As Greene notes, "The best known poetic flowers, such as Blake's sick rose and Wordsworth's daffodils, are very general and do not have their streaks numbered" (812). Such flowers were obviously not created *only* to instruct, and their power of originality lies more in an eye for certain specifics of nature than didactic abstractions. And Johnson's ideas are always supported by a scientific power of observation. As Dachies writes in his introduction to Johnson, "Johnson is thought of as the great generalizer, but what gives his generalizations strength is that they are rooted in the particulars of his self-knowledge" (2221). The impulse to find an "original," through "striking features," remains as much a part of their creation, as any interest in clothing dogmatic principles with the use of generalities.

In the character of John Shade, Nabokov's parody suggest a way of resolving this contradiction; Shade wholeheartedly embraces the aesthetic over the moral, but in a way that fuses the Age of Reason with the Age of Romanticism. If we rearrange Nabokov's play on words, the frame house "between Goldsworth and Wordsmith" that Shade describes in his poem (1.47) nicely

defines the spirit of his poetry, and indeed, his philosophy of life. Shade is somewhere between Wordsworth and Goldsmith, balancing a mind easily given over to irrational enchantment, with a cold and lucid sense of reason constantly in search of an ordering principle. Johnson felt both of these impulses as well--he needed and found spiritual meaning in his deeply religious faith--but he was equally capable of responding to the romanticism of a Shakespeare in deeply felt ways. But unlike Shade, who values "not text, but texture," Johnson insisted on the primacy of "sentiment" and texts rooted in morality.[59]

Shade, as we have seen, encourages a reading of Shakespeare that emphasizes "getting drunk on the poetry of *Hamlet and Lear*," reading, as Shade puts it, "with the spine and not the skull" (155). In his *Lectures on Literature,* Nabokov elaborates on this kind of reading:

> It seems to me that a good formula to test the quality of a novel is, in the long run, a merging of the precision of poetry and the intuition of science. In order to bask in that magic a wise reader reads the book of genius not with his heart, not so much with his brain, but with his spine. It is there that occurs the telltale tingle even though we must keep a little aloof, a little detached when reading. Then with a pleasure which is both sensual and intellectual we shall watch the artist build his castle of cards and watch the castle of cards become a castle of beautiful steel and glass (6)

The happy meeting ground that Shade and Nabokov discover between the brain and the heart nicely symbolizes their aesthetic/philosophical approaches. In his *Lectures on Russian Literature*, Nabokov attacks all scholars who suggest that Shakespeare has ghosts in his play because people believed in spirits in the Bard's day. "(F)rom the moment the murdered king's ghost enters the play, we accept him and do not doubt that Shakespeare was within his right in introducing him into his play," he writes. "In fact

> the true measure of genius is in what measure the world he has created is his own, one that has not been here before him (at least, here, in literature) and even more important, how plausible he has succeeded in making it (106)

Plausibility, for Nabokov, requires a scientific attention to detail. An artist must have the "passion of a scientist, and the precision of a poet (*SO*, 77); the unexpected adjectives associated with scientist

and poet here serve to underscore Nabokov's (and by implication Shade's) belief in an art that is "sensual *and* intellectual," combining the heart and the brain (i.e. the spine), and the sensibilities of a Goldsmith with those of a Wordsworth[60].

Seen as statements of spiritual purpose, a number of telling and highly parodic parallels can be drawn in this light between Johnson's "The Vanity of Human Wishes" and Shade's "Pale Fire." Both poems search for meaning, and a sense of grounding in what the separate poets see as a deceiving (and deceived) universe. Johnson comes down firmly on the side of religious salvation; but, as we have seen, the rich, highly imaginative and artistic sides of his personality frequently belie such intended purposes, and *Vanity* is not explicitly Christian; the ghost of Fielding, given over to the pleasures of the text itself as the author attempts to isolate "originality," haunts even his most defiantly rigid and moralistic stances. With Shade, the shadows of such impulses cease to be problematic because he embraces them, and finds that the act of artistic creativity can lead to a kind of salvation of its own. And Nabokov's parody helps *us* to see this.

"The Vanity of Human Wishes," like "Pale Fire," expresses a belief in an idea of order, a hope of meaning. The final stanza of Johnson's poem makes clear what this hope is:

> Where then shall Hope and Fear their objects find?
> Must dull Suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?
> Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,
> Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?
> ...
> But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice.
> Safe in His power, whose eyes discern afar
> The secret ambush of a specious prayer. (344-54)

The vanities of the world, though seductive, always lead to a life outside of God, and hence, away from genuine meaning. In painstaking detail, Johnson illustrates a number of famously vain projects, and watches them collapse in the face of outrageous fortune. For Johnson, a strong belief in "faith" that "pant(s) for a happier seat" ultimately remains the only way to clearly order the seemingly chaotic, vanity-addicted universe. It is in the "celestial Wisdom" that man can be made "calm,"

"mak(ing) the happiness she does not find" (367-8). All else should be rejected as nothing less than vanity in a pleasing disguise.

This, as we have seen, extends to art without a moral as well. Johnson despised the trickeries of a Sterne, and felt only disgust for Fielding's amoral books. These, like the false dreams of vanity and conquest that possessed a Charles XII (see lines 193-221), carry with them no sense of the celestial Wisdom for Johnson, and thus will ultimately be given over to chance and remain fallible, dangerously misleading, visions. Books that delight simply in "reflecting life" are of "no use" Johnson writes in *Rambler* No. 4; why not, he asks, "turn the eye immediately upon mankind, as upon a mirror, which shows all that presents itself without discrimination(?)" (177).

And life is, after all, as Johnson insists in his poem, a state of "protracted woe" and better to be done with, than to have "enlarged...with a multitude of days," as the foolish suppliant prays might happen (255).[61] Merging with God in the afterlife can ultimately be the only purpose for any man, and his sole preoccupation while in this life, which acts as a kind of way-station between non-existence and a higher one. The purpose of art is to help others see this as clearly as possible.

Yet there is a fundamental contradiction here, rooted in the ghosts of Fielding that we have already seen possess Johnson: if "life," and the (for Johnson) merely frivolous ornamentation of it found in purely aesthetic works of art, is something to be rejected outright as foolish vanity, why does Johnson describe these ideas in such a rich, famously sumptuous style? Johnson is now considered one of the fathers of modern prose; before him, most prose was conceived in an entirely different, far less ornate manner, and even Nabokov, in his lecture on *Mansfield Park*, suggests that the usually spartan Jane Austen's use of compact, highly colorful parenthetical descriptions was a "trick she learned from Samuel Johnson" (57).

But if, for Johnson, the responsibility of art was *only* a moral one, why did he indulge in such sophisticated writing styles? Why not opt for the cruder, far simpler style of a Bunyan or a

Swift, whom Johnson ironically condemned as a man who "had to count to ten, and counted right" (ii.65)? Johnson, in his own "counting" is not above meandering away from rote expression of ideas, and right into the thick of poetic expression through complex metaphor and simile. He complains of the "froth from the surface" in Sterne, but at the same time displays a syntactical complexity and flexibility in his writings that is the equal of anything in *Tristram Shandy* (iii.30). In other words, Johnson's writing is often artistic, despite himself; Swift, whom Dryden warned away from attempts at poetry, never really created a memorable poetic style in the manner of Johnson's, preferring instead to "count to ten," in a style that best suited his direct thoughts and ideas. We do not read Swift for the poetry, but for the ideas expressed in his poetry; with Johnson, like the best of artists, the brilliant turn of phrase he uses often surpasses in interest and complexity the idea he is attempting to articulate.

In his study of Johnson's literary criticism, Jean Hagstrom suggests that this tension between imagination and more didactic forms of expression represents a flaw primarily of Johnson's youthful thinking. His attacks, Hagstrom notes, occurs more prominently in the earlier than in the later works. And Johnson's definition of imagination itself, and particularly the double conception he was capable of making when using the term, needs to be clarified here. As Hagstrom points out, Johnson increasingly attempted to bridle the imagination as it represented a faculty that obscured reality, and not the imagination that stood for a power to combine new ideas and forms inventively. "Johnson," he writes only "considered the *fantastical* and the *visionary* to be mischevious effects of the imagination operating from reality"(91). On the other hand, the imagination of a Homer, reflecting a "vigor and amplitude of mind," and employed for far different purposes, elicited only praise from Johnson.

"Pale Fire" makes sense of these contradictions, rejoicing in "texture" (i.e. the "froth of the surface") over "text" in ways that Johnson could not bring himself to do, while finding a spiritual

meaning in this activity. Like Johnson in "The Vanity of Human Wishes," Shade possesses a great fear that this world is nothing but chaos, and seeks to find a believable idea of order; and as with Johnson, his poem is a record of his search, including descriptions of various fatuous attempts at meaning, before closing with a discovery of celestial Wisdom.

Following his daughter Hazel's tragic death, Shade searches for a greater understanding of the universe. Canto Three of "Pale Fire" describes Shade's attempts to organize an "Institute of Preparation For the Hereafter (I.P.H.)" or as he refers to it, "L'if, lifeless tree! Your great Maybe, Rabelais/The grand potato" (501-2). The pun on *peut-etre*, that even Kinbote allows is an "execrable" one (222), demonstrates Shade's love of Johnson's hated quibble, a stylistic feature that further throws the two in parodic relief to each other by signifying in Shade a love of "art for art's sake," form over content, "texture over text." Nothing could be less (purportedly) Johnsonian.

But the search for a reliable meaning in this life and the next is perfectly Johnsonian. Shade, like Johnson, cannot rest content with earthly vanities that he daily watches topple, and searches for greater, absolute truths. As he writes:

> ...we die every day; oblivion thrives
> Not on dry thighbones but on blood-ripe lives,
> And our best yesterdays are now foul piles
> of crumpled names, phone numbers and foxed files. (519-22)

But Shade's artistic curiosity goes deeper than Johnson's. Whenever Boswell brings up issues of futurity, Johnson warns him not to reflect about it too much. Shade, on the other hand, is more than ready to contemplate heaven's dimensions, and puzzling difficulties:

> Time means succession, and succession, change:
> Hence timelessness is bound to disarrange
> Schedules of sentiment. We give advice
> To widower. He has been married twice:
> He meets his wives; both loved, both loving, both
> Jealous of one another. Time means growth,
> And growth means nothing in Elysian life.
> Fondling a changeless child, the flax-haired wife
> Grieves on the brink of a remembered pond

Full of a dreamy sky (567-76)

The Institute explores cremationism, the role "planets had played as landfalls of the soul," and even the "fate of beasts was pondered" ((628-29). Eventually however, I.P.H. goes into a decline as "Buddhism took root," and a "medium smuggled in/Pale jellies and a floating mandolin" (639-640). Shade, like Johnson, rejects all such cabalistic activities as products of human vanity. The Institute in this way was helpful to his philosophical development however:

> learnt what to ignore in my survey
> That tasteless venture helped me in a way.
> I Of death's abyss. And when we lost our child
> I knew there would be nothing: no self-styled
> Spirit would touch a keyboard of dry 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. (645-52)

Just as Johnson in his poem carefully walks his reader through various enterprises of great pitch and moment, only to watch as they crumble to nothingness, so too does Shade here blast conventional, horror-movie ideas about the Beyond, pointing to a deeper terror that may be all we have--the sense of "nothing" that so terrified Johnson when he read *Hamlet* and *Lear*.

Shade's sense of "celestial Wisdom" comes to him when he suffers a seizure, and in his blackout, envisions a "tall white fountain" (707). Suddenly Shade feels as if he has been given a glimpse of something above time's reparations, a permanent and absolute vision of truth. He writes:

> My vision reeked with truth. It had the tone,
> The quiddity and quaintness of its own
> Reality. It *was*. As time went on,
> Its constant vertical in triumph shone.
> Often when troubled by the outer glare
> Of street and strife, inward I'd turn, and there,
> There in the background of my soul it stood,
> Old Faithful! And its presence always would
> Console me wonderfully. (737-46)

Like Wordsworth before him, Shade's spot of time is a comfort, something to reflect upon in tranquility, and *with* great tranquility--it's presence is consoling because of the strange "reality" the

image presents to him, outside of life's "protracted woe." But unlike Wordsworth, Shade is willing to test the validity of even this revelation, and travels across country to visit a woman who claims in a magazine article Shade reads that she too has seen a fountain in a vision. Such a "twin display," Shade reasons, would be a confirmation of the significance of his fountain:

> If on some nameless island Captain Schmidt
> Sees a new animal and captures it,
> And if, a little later, Captain Smith
> Brings back a skin, that island is no myth.
> Our fountain was a signpost and a mark
> Objectively enduring in the dark,
> Strong as a bone, substantial as a tooth,
> And almost vulgar in its robust truth! (699-776)

Shade's skepticism pushes him farther than the Romantic poets, towards an ultimate justification of the mildly supernatural experience that took hold of him. And interestingly, Shade argues for this confirmation with imagery that closely resembles an image of a "returning voyager" bearing furs that Johnson used in a discussion of the after-life and, the importance of faith, with Boswell (v. 208). But alas, he learns that what the second dreamer saw was a *mountain*; the fountain was a misprint.

Shade is momentarily shaken in his pursuit of the absolute. But he realizes with a depth and penetration that requires a love of "texture over text," that the coincidence of such a misprint could *itself* be "read" as a "signpost and a mark" of robust truth. As he writes:

> 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. (803-15)

And in the discovery of such pleasures, Shade closes his poem, feeling "reasonably sure" that he will

awake the next day, and that things will be more or less as they were the day before. He has found a tentative reason for continuing to hope in this misprint, rejoicing in the potential "link-and-bobolink" he senses in a game that suddenly seems to have a "correlated pattern" to it.

But Nabokov the author of *Pale Fire* pushes things further. The emphasis during the mountain/fountain section of Canto Three is on the topsy-turvical coincidences, on digressions that add up to a "web of sense." There are an incredible number of digressive meanings that this central motif of "pale fire" takes on in the course of the poem--and indeed, the novel itself--but I will concentrate on one that will, I hope, show a central concern of Nabokov as reflected through Shade. Though Kinbote points out that the phrase "pale fire" occurs in a passage from *Timon of Athens*, what is never mentioned once in the book, but what must have been known to Nabokov, is that there is at least one more "pale fire" in Shakespeare, and in an much more well-known play, too: *Hamlet*. The speech of the Ghost exhorting Hamlet to revenge his death in Act I, scene v, ends thus,

> ... Fare thee well at once!
> The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
> And gins to pale his uneffectual fire.[62]

This is important because Shade is killed by psychopath Jack Grey (although Kinbote is convinced that the killer is the would-be regicide Gradus) just after completing the nine hundredth ninety ninth line of his poem:

> I feel I understand
> Existence, or at least a minute part
> Of my existence, only through my art,
> In terms of combinational delight;
> .....
> I'm reasonably sure that we survive
> And that my darling somewhere is alive,
> As I am reasonably sure that I
> Shall wake at six tomorrow, on July
> The twenty-second, nineteen fifty-nine
> And that the day will probably be fine. (971-83)

The poet is killed a few minutes after he writes this by a man who has mistaken him for someone

else; Kinbote is with him, and imagines that the killer has come from Zembla to kill *him*. As Kinbote sardonically notes later, he plans to write an "old-fashioned melodrama with three principles: a lunatic who intends to kill an imaginary king, another lunatic who imagines himself to be that king, and a distinguished old poet who stumbles by chance into the line of fire, and perishes in the clash between two figments" (301). The death of the poet after he has reached relative serenity about metaphysical-religious problems parallels that of Hamlet after he has decided that Providence has a direction, since it saved him from the death that Claudius had arranged for him in Britain. Both Nabokov and Shakespeare then overturn this kind of conviction by the violent deaths of their protagonists, raising the question of any order, of a "correlated pattern." Nabokov's tentative answer is that perhaps only the "texture" matters, not the "text." In other words, not the text of reality but the texture that our mind "feels" when it makes into an imaginative whole its discordant and digressive perceptions. Nothing could be more (ostensibly) unJohnsonian.

Thus, the text generates its own meanings besides those intended by the fictional narrators Shade and Kinbote, even as the text of the "The Vanity of Human Wishes" generates, in its rich use of imagery and metaphor, and despite Johnson's didactic intentions, poetic meanings on all levels beyond control of the narrator (this being a symptom, as the anti-poet Swift has shown in his *Tale of a Tub*, of the madness of the Moderns). Kinbote quotes from a letter written by a Franklin Lane, and these words are the key to the novel, and to Nabokov's aesthetics:

> And if I had passed into that other land, whom would I have sought?... Aristotle! -- Ah, there would be a man to talk with! What satisfaction to see him take, like reins from between his fingers, the long ribbon of man's life and trace it through the mystifying maze of all the wonderful adventure.... The crooked made straight. The Daedalian plan simplified by a look from above--smeared out as it were by the splotch of some master thumb that made the whole involuted, boggling thing one beautiful straight line (261)

In the "topsy-turvical" world of *Pale Fire*, the master thumb is Nabokov's, which can create an extremely ordered novel out of discontinuities. The relentless nature of spiralling in the novel is well indicated by the fact that the above quote, which presents in nutshell the main idea of the novel,

really *is* from the diary of Franklin Lane, and it is a coincidence worthy of all the other ones in this novel about the coincidence that life and art exist that Nabokov happened to find in a completely alien writer exactly the words he needed; further that the words have been made an integral part of the novel. This is only possible because of Nabokov's view of reality. In *Strong Opinions*, an interviewer asks:

> In your new novel *Pale Fire* one of the characters says that reality is neither the subject nor the object of real art, which creates its own reality. What is that reality?
> Reality is a very subjective affair. I can only define it as a kind of gradual accumulation of information; and as specialization. If we take a lily, for instance,... a lily is more real to a naturalist than it is to an ordinary person. But it is still more real to a botanist. And yet another stage of reality is reached with that botanist who is a specialist in lilies. You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you can never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable. (10-11)

We may conclude that for Nabokov (and by implication, Shade), there was a certain *order* in the very disorder of reality, or to put it differently, that the order of reality was disorder. Far from being disturbed by this fact, Nabokov is delighted by it (as was Sterne by the disorder of the mind). Thus, *Pale Fire* is a book in which the text is constantly digressing from the central poem of the title, as, in its way, the text of the "Vanity" delights in the grandeur of language, the artistry of the text, despite Johnson's theoretical beliefs in poetry.

To the minds of Sterne or Nabokov, the crooked, the self-contradictory, the illogical, the unexpected are a great, perhaps even the chief, source of mental delight. For Johnson, they are the greatest dangers against a reasoned and ordered life. The former find disorder orderly; disorder is not madness. As Johnson sees it, the mania for digressions results in writers ending up with having said nothing at all, and encourages a softening of the "abhorrence of faults because they do not hinder our pleasure," as Johnson grumbles in *Rambler* No. 4. In fact, such accusations *have* been brought up against Sterne and Nabokov. The novelist's contention is that reality is discontinuous, and that the writer must follow nature, something that Johnson himself contradictorily admits. But it is through

Shade that Nabokov truly makes the "crooked straight," and through his parody of Johnson that we are given a lucid view of the Great Cham's own stumblings on this issue.

Thus, Nabokov's parody of Boswell in *Pale Fire* is multi-layered--specific allusion comically tweaks the more indulgent aspects of Boswell's biographical technique in intricate ways. And we are given insights into the perils of the eighteenth-century biographer's paper chase by the even wilder one that Nabokov created almost two hundred years later, and that reverberates with echoes of the earlier pursuit. On another level, his parody makes a serious point about the nature of reality itself. In a boldly romantic fashion, Nabokov's parody asserts what amounts to a governing principle in all of his novels:

> Paradoxically, the only real, authentic worlds are, of course, those that seem unusual. When my fancies will have been sufficiently imitated, they, too, will enter the common domain of average reality, which will be false too, but with a new context which we cannot yet guess. Average reality begins to rot and stink as soon as the act of individual creation ceases to animate the subjectively perceived texture. (*SO* 118)

It is impossible to capture Reality--such a force cannot even be said, like time itself, to exist as anything but a concept, a tentative response to the world around us. What we are always left with instead is only "reality"--a view of the things and people around us that is ineluctably influenced by the stains of subjectivity.

CONCLUSION:

A LITERARY RE-READING OF BOSWELL'S *LIFE OF JOHNSON*

I have suggested, throughout this dissertation, that the possibility of reading the works of others through a prism of parody is a useful activity; and further, one that Nabokov himself encourages in his own books. To fully appreciate the potential for such a literary re-reading of another text, it will be important to test the premise by selecting a passage from the *Life,* and seeing how a reading of *Pale Fire* could be said to influence our reading of the earlier text.

Any passage from the *Life* could be chosen for this literary experiment, but in keeping with Nabokov's spirit, I will use the quote from the *Life* that he opens *Pale Fire* with, analyzing the passage in detail, and with the insights that Nabokov's book can provide us with when reading it. First, the quote:

> This reminds me of the ludicrous account he gave Mr. Langton, of the despicable state of a young gentleman of good family. "Sir, when I heard of him last, he was running about town shooting cats." And then, in a kindly sort of reverie, he bethought himself of his own favorite cat, and said, "But Hodge shan't be shot: no, no, Hodge shall not be shot. (xi)

On its own, such a passage seems innocent enough. And the reader of the *Life* unfamiliar with *Pale Fire* could reasonably be expected to sense the curious nature of the scene described, as well as the remarkable capacity Johnson had to be carried away by his own imagination.

And if the reader is familiar with Pottle's approach to reading the *Life*, he can rejoice in there having been a James Boswell in the first place to record such events, and with an eye for such Flemish details. If the reader is familiar with Greene's ideas about the *Life*, he may scoff at the typically Boswellian crudity of biographical method evidenced here--his being "reminded" of a scene described to him by someone else, before moving on to other issues of greater personal interest. If

the reader has read his Vance (or is even familiar with Johnson's wily character from his own writings and other selections of Boswell), Johnson's fears about his cat may be seen as one of an endless series of impostures--the laughing Johnson snickering at himself as he laughs at the credulous world around him.

But if the reader is familiar with *Pale Fire*, all of these issues have been crystallized for him already, in the novel itself; and further, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for the careful reader of *Pale Fire* to prevent any future readings of the *Life* from being tempered--consciously or otherwise--by the considerations about biography that Nabokov forces his readers to make.

The careful reader of *Pale Fire* who returns to Boswell can see in the passage several key themes of the future novel, in miniature. The phrase, "This reminds me," reminds *us* that Boswell's account, like Charles Kinbote's auto/biographical "commentary," is itself--and despite the Flemish sense of detail--a series of events often constructed less with an interest in overall design and structure, and more as these scenes suggested themselves to Boswell's mind. Just as Locke saw that ideas of duration arose from "reflection on the train of ideas," so too does Boswell frequently choose to record the events in his life only as this train presents them to him.

Of course, many readers have noticed how such ideas are parodied in *Pale Fire*, and further, how that novel is enhanced by a reading of Johnson. But the influence of these ideas in the *Life* is also enhanced by the knowledge the *Pale Fire* reader has of Kinbote's commentary, an ostensibly academic work that veers from cold analysis of the poem, to deeply personal recollection, to purely imagistic fantasy, following a plan dictated by the whims of the commentator's highly imaginative reading.[63]

The adjective "ludicrous" is an example of the literally thousands of a value judgments made by Boswell in *The Life*. As we have seen, (and as any careful reader of *Pale Fire* must acknowledge) a sense of the subjectivity of all personal accounts acts as central theme in Nabokov's novel.

Kinbote's incalations, ranging from the quietly condemnatory to the violently eulogistic, echo in the background of our reading of Boswell, forcing the reader to rethink his responses to what Johnson's biographer would like to pass off as a "Flemish portrait."

The fact that the information recorded here was gathered second-hand cannot be missed by our careful re-reader. And of course, any reader of the *Life* can easily grasp the idea that Boswell heard from Langton that Johnson said this, removing him, and thus the reader, from the actual event. But the added reading experience of *Pale Fire* helps to better evaluate the passage--to "re-read it" essentially--and enhances the sense of the digressive ends subjectivity can lead to--the "bogs of conjecture" that begin to widen and deepen--the moment anyone takes up a pen. After experiencing the utterly unrelated places that Kinbote's narrative takes us, in his attempt to "commentate" on Shade's poem, the reader who now returns to the *Life* will laugh with greater intelligence, and question with more penetration, the reliability of this and all purportedly "objective" texts. This is of great importance in a world given over to generalities and distortion; all tools, which, in the hands of Johnson's and Shade's dreaded Politicians of Cruelty-- symbolized in the character of the generalizing Jakob Gradus--can lead to despair and death.

The actual quotation is also important to mark: Johnson's reflections on his cat stand as an example of precisely the kind of detail Johnson--and Nabokov--valued in a biography. Not the stuff of a easy "chronology," the Hodge quotation is information that could have easily been imparted by a chambermaid of Johnson's--an ideal witness to interview if one is to compose a biography according to the Johnsonian method. And the *Pale Fire* reader who returns to Boswell can also compare this detail with countless others included by Kinbote in his commentary--his description of Shade's rubbing his knees when talking, his passion for forbidden liquor, his slovenly appearance etc.--details which seem to escape for a brief moment from the highly subjective perspective of the commentator, and spring into the imaginary realm of unadulterated truth.

Johnson's reaction also carries several important implications in relation to Nabokov's novel that will not be missed by our careful re-reader who returns to Boswell via *Pale Fire*. Johnson, we may speculate post-Kinbote, reacts to his own observation in one of three ways:

a) He is actually carried away with a fear for his pet's life, providing (again, according to the Johnsonian insistence on the "everyday") valuable biographical details--

1) Johnson's tenderness for animals, even a domesticated cat and

2) a bizarre, quixotic psychological propensity that he might have had to become swept away by his own formidable imagination.

or

b) Johnson plays the game of the "Laughing Johnson," acting, *a la* Goldsmith, the part of the "inspired ideot," saying things he doesn't believe in the interest of fun and self-deprecating humor.

or

c) a combination of a and b: Johnson's motives are humorous, but in the background of the joke he wishes to underline his genuine concern about the animal and its uncertain fate.[64]

Again, it is important to note that a non-reader of *Pale Fire*, after much study of secondary materials relating to the *Life*, could just as easily draw similar conclusions about the scene; but for the Nabokovian, these ideas have already been comprehensively presented to him or her in the thematic lines of *Pale Fire* itself. And additionally, since Nabokov has put these ideas into his narrative, since he has, essentially, made them *perform* for him, and service the artistic tasks he has set for himself, the *Pale Fire* reader who now reads Boswell is given the rare opportunity of actually observing the ironies of subjectivity in action; this is also the case in Boswell' *Life*, but the exaggerations of Nabokov's parody help to enhance our understanding of the complexities in the eighteenth-century writer's putative version of "reality" as we grapple with the twentieth-century commentator's. In the literary re-reading that *Pale Fire* encourages us to make, Nabokov overturns

his dreaded "applied time," and--figuratively speaking--"influences" a reading of Boswell in a number of ways: Shade's gentle yet evasive manner with Kinbote is suggested (b and c), as is his hatred of cruelty (a); in addition, we are reminded of Kinbote's personal agenda and how it constantly directs the *Life*, affecting any reading of Shade's character in *Pale Fire*, just as Boswell's ulterior motives, his choosing to "move ahead" in the discussion after deeming Johnson's comments "ludicrous" in the *Life* similarly influences our understanding of that thinker (a,b,c). Boswell draws no conclusions about the meaning of the quotation, other than dismissing it as "ludicrous." But ludicrous in what way? Deliberately ludicrous, or unconsciously so? As any connosieur of Kinbote's Zembla, and his unearthly (and even unjustified, given the actual quality of the at-times mundanely suburban "Pale Fire") passion for Shade's poetics will already realize, these are not idle questions, arbitrary gazings at the "froth" of the book, but important clues that combine to form a trail of subjectivity leading throughout the entire of the *Life* back to the biographer himself. And the rich, intricate echoes of Zembla in Corsica and Boswell's Toryism only make the parody more insistent on this score.

Nabokov's parody also helps the reader better grasp the possibility that *both* Boswell and Johnson (like Kinbote and Shade) may be under the influence of their personal hobby-horses as they gaze at one another. By superimposing the image of his highly subjective book onto an equally subjective one, Nabokov encourages the reader, from his or her own subjective and individualistic perspective, to interpret the interplay of parody between books, but with a new understanding of the parameters of each. Such a situation reflects precisely that of the neurotic biographer in a paper chase after an equally elliptical and elusive subject. It is this experience, this sense of what Robbe-Grillet calls "the unresolved tension" existing between the world of subjectivity and the Kantian *out there*, that, Nabokov's parody suggests, comes closest to any idea of the "objective" that we can finally be said to possess (Interview, 159).

Lurking in the background of all meditations on the all-consuming subjectivity of all perspectives are the ideas of Montaigne. He has, in this sense, long ago consumed (to speak in Bloom's terms) much of this dissertation already. As Montaigne has famously observed, "Men do not know the natural infirmity of their mind" (817). And of course, admitting to this and writing essays--or in Nabokov's case, creating an entire novel, complete with false commentary of a false poem--brings one no closer to the truth as even the French philosopher allowed. But, as Montaigne also wrote:

> A spirited mind never stops within itself; it is always aspiring and going beyond its strength; it has impulses beyond its powers of achievement. If it does not advance and press forward and stand at bay and clash, it is only half alive...It is more of a job to interpret the interpretations than to interpret the things, and there are more books about books than about any other subject: we do nothing but write glosses about each other. The world is swarming with commentaries; of authors there is a great scarcity. (818)

Montaigne is typically ironic--one wonders whether there is or could be such a thing as an author, in a world given over to commentaries. And as Bloom has noted, the strong writer always creatively misreads his predecessor's works--Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* represents a bad reading of Marlowe's Barabas. Ultimately a truly original work may be less interesting than a distorted copy of one.

There is no reason to see why these artistic misreadings could not be said to take place in the realm of "Reality" as well. In this light, the telltale adjectives, highly directed and even blocked conversations and elliptical responses that Boswell elicited from Johnson for the *Life*, bear close inspection, and cannot be dismissed as mere marginalia--and, as I have argued, no careful reader of *Pale Fire* would do this; in fact, our Nabokovian realizes that, in the case of Boswell, the use of words like "ludicrous," and his sense of theatrical drama applied to everyday life, work--or Boswell would have them work--to inform our understanding of Johnson himself, and in ways that may be misleading, or, as we have seen even Greene allow, brilliant. And Johnson, like the equally laughing

Shade (for whom, again, Bloom would say Johnson is ultimately an important Shade is his artistic personality), does not help matters in his love of masks.

And it is on this level, removed from purely ontological questions, that we must also view, as is obviously the case in *Pale Fire*, Kinbote's commentary: as a work of art in itself, the unusual (but undeniable) aesthetic merits of which deserve the reader's attention as much as Shade's poem. Less obvious, but just as important in Nabokov's literary re-reading, is to see Boswell in this way also. In *The Western Canon*, Harold Bloom writes that Shakespeare cannot be illuminated with a new doctrine:

> Instead, he will illuminate the doctrine, not by prefiguration but by postfiguration as it were: all of Freud that matters most is there in Shakespeare already, with a persuasive critique of Freud besides. The Freudian map of the mind is Shakespeare's; Freud seems only to have prosified it. Or, to vary my point, a Shakespearean reading of Freud illuminates and overwhelms the text of Freud; a Freudian reading of Shakespeare reduces Shakespeare, or would if we could bear reduction that crosses the line into absurdities of loss. (25)

I find Bloom's insistence that we question the nature of our own, ostensibly "new" theories about Shakespeare, and see in them shadows of ideas that have already been set down much more clearly by Shakespeare himself, to be a healthy one, and worthy of developing if we are to truly appreciate the depth and greatness of a Shakespeare. He is, in a sense--and though in this hopelessly ideological age the phrase has been hopelessly trivialized--outside of time. Like my reading of Boswell, such a reading of Shakespeare requires a rejection of the history of literature as "progressive," an activity that, as Bloom points out, does not occur in works from the Canon (how can we be said to have progressed anywhere from Dante to Tolstoy?) (27-29). We must come to see Shakespeare as still *ahead* of our grasps of the world around us, still far outdistancing Freud in cognitive understandings, still eluding Marx in the grasp of politics he displays in *Coriolanus*.

Nabokov is cheering in the background: as Hodasevich remarked about Sirin's novels, the stage set of reality--and with it we must include those of "chronology" and "historical readings"--

begins to crumble when we read a great novel like *Pale Fire*. In this type of curious deconstruction, we are allowed to witness the impossibility of escaping from the anxiety (to paraphrase Bloom) that earlier writers force the new ones to feel when they attempt to create.

But if a novel surpasses a previous work (if, in other words, we are discussing someone other than Shakespeare) there is a possibility, not only of the newer novel rising aesthetically above the earlier one, but also of it helping us to see the older book in a new light. Certainly a reading of Shakespeare influenced (and continues to influence) any reading of Marlowe. Nabokov's parody provides us with a consummate study of these relations--Bloom's anxiety as it applies, not to future writers, but to Proust's ghosts. And

Boswell walks the earth again--perhaps the most important aspect of Nabokov's parody is how it helps us to see Johnson's biographer elevated to the level of an artist. Though Boswell's artistry hardly surpasses Johnson's as expressed in the *Life*, certainly Boswell's presentation is lively and unusual, and worthy of study. And Kinbote is a great key to appreciating this dimension of his artistry. As with the earlier revelations supplied by Nabokov's parody about the nature of observation, so too do specific events in Kinbote's commentary send us back to Boswell, serving--even as they poke fun--to argue persuasively for a reading of him as a kind of hidden artist, within the text of his *Life*; a neurotic of genius with bad biographical habits, and inclinations to horribly "misread" his subject, all of which, as we have already seen, can lead to great art. At the close of *Pale Fire*, his clothes lined with Shade's poem, Kinbote proclaims:

> ...with cautious steps, among deceived enemies, I circulated, plated with poetry, armored with rhymes, stout with another man's song, stiff with cardboard, bullet-proof at long last. (300)

This is Kinbote at his most mad, but also his most poetic and artistic--the series of alliteratives, culminating with "stout with another man's song" are worthy of Milton at his most passionate, but from a modern, Robbe-Grilletian perspective. But this is one of dozens of examples of formal

beauty to be found in his commentary. So too must we read Boswell's poignant description of his meeting with Johnson, his famous parting with him, and the countless, seemingly unrelated, at times pathologically personal anecdotes that make up the *Life* as the work of no ordinary man. As Sterne famously observed in *Tristram Shandy*, "Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine;--they are the life, the soul of reading" (52). If this is so, the gems of Boswell's insights, especially those that stray from his purpose, should be admired as important evocations of a personality, and, like Kinbote's moodily brilliant prose that revivifys it for a modern audience, artistic on their own terms.

The activity of literary re-reading in the manner I have suggested is relatively new, and, I believe, of great importance to future scholars. In addition to illuminating both *Pale Fire* and *The Life of Johnson*, the thesis I have presented in this dissertation can be extended to encompass different works, in different comparisons. In the case of Nabokov's novels, studies of this kind are already under way: Michael Long's *Marvell, Nabokov* (1990) makes similar points about the relation between the earlier poet and the later Russian writer, as his playful title suggests; and as I have attempted to do with Boswell, Long encourages a reading of Marvell *through* Nabokov's parody of his poems.

As in the case of Long's study, my own re-reading does not only compares works, but encourages an understanding of them in relation to one another. In fact, what I have been attempting in this study goes beyond simple "comparison." Nabokov's complex allusions to Boswell throughout *Pale Fire* make clear that he intended us to read his book as it stands face-to-face with the *Life of Johnson*, and makes, as Bakhtin observed, the older book "stranger" than it ever was; but even in works where these connections are not as apparent--or even, for that matter consciously intended--future re-readings can still be conducted, and in ways that lead to useful ends. The benefits of reading, to take but one example, the works of Emerson through Nietzsche, carefully adjusting our view of the earlier writer according to the spiritual affinities and differences the later writer

demarcates could surely be a productive activity.

And along the way, though the literary re-reader would surely be forced to notice the comparitively similar aspects of each writer--a deeply felt sense of the protean nature of the universe, and an exaltation of one's own nature etc.--the real spirit of the re-reading could be said to have less to do with specific comparison, and more with what I will call a "reverse anxiety impulse." Nietzsche, like Nabokov, a great artist who certainly felt little anxiety about his relation to most earlier writers and thinkers, could look back on his precursors and, paraphrasing Borges, "create them" for himself.

This process of re-creation surely gives us a closer understanding of the later artist's personality and literary character; and there are literally hundreds of studies of Nabokov's uses of allusion, and how these enrich the artisty of his own text. But we are also made to look at the source of the artist's backwards glance, and with new insights. In an upheaval of Bloom's important view of the pervasive influence of anxiety, certain writers and poets, I argue, can actually, in a sense, return the anxiety back to their forebearers, forcing us to rethink the previous writers through the new method of interpretation the newer ones have provided. Who could ever forget Yeats' description of Keats in "Ego Dominus Tuus":

> His art is happy, but who knows his mind?
> I see a schoolboy, when I think of him,
> With a face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window,
> For certainly he sank into his grave
> His senses and heart unsatisfied,
> And made--being poor, ailing and ignorant,
> Shut out from all the luxury of the world,
> The coarse-bred son of a livery-stable keeper--
> Luxuriant song. (55-62)

This is surely Yeats at his greatest; but even more important to what I am arguing here is the notion that, even as the images the Irish poet presents remain in our memory, so too does Yeats' actual reading of Keats; Yeats' dark, poignant and gently critical understanding of Keats as "a

schoolboy...with a face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window" effects a re-reading of all of Keats if seen in the proper light. And this would even be so if the examples chosen were not so specific--"Lapis Lazuli," to take but one example, informs any reading of "Ode To a Grecian Urn," and in ways that are not strictly comparative.

Put another way, literary re-readings of the Nabokovian type require a search for similarities and differences, or shadows of these, not necessarily because they are there, but because it is illuminating to juxtapose texts and discover, by inventing, new ways to read the texts: i.e. we can read Nabokov and Boswell, or Nabokov and Marvell, or any successor and any precursor in the light of each other, ignoring for the large part the question of influence (and of course Nabokov could not be said to have had a literary influence on anyone writing before 1920, the date of his first publication.[65]) These relations exist, have always been in place, and will continue to be so, as long as there are artists creating. It is only left to future scholars, in the voracious spirit of a Boswell, to listen in on these implied or explicit thematic conversations between authors, and in the process, find new ways of opening fresh sufferings.

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APPENDIX

1. And even, enjoyed parodying himself. See *Pale Fire*, note to line 734, a deliciously cruel swipe at game-obsessed Nabokovians: "The poet's plan is to display in the very texture of his text the intricacies of the 'game' in which he seeks the key to life and death."

2. Proust writes that the budding author seeking a subject matter should begin by parodying his favorite author (*Art and Literature,* 91).

3. e.g. see his highly critical "Lecture on Dostoievski" in *Lectures on Literature.*

4. Though he does not care for Nabokov, Bloom's ideas here are ironically Nabokovian, and *Pale Fire,* among many other things, a concise literary demonstration of a number of Bloom's central ideas (see below).

5. For a complete (and exciting) account of *Lolita's* publication, see Boyd's *Nabokov: The American Years* pp. 255-70.

6. One wonders in fear what a modern *Lolita* might be forced to look lie. Or even if it is still a possibility...

7. Ibid, p. 264. Jason Epstein, then a leading editor of Doubleday, certainly faced a modern manifestation of these shocked emotions in the late fifties, when attempting to persuade Doubleday's appalled Board of Directors that *Lolita* was indeed a book worth publishing.

8. Nabokov was a connoisseur of the subtly sensual in poetry. See his twenty-three page commentary on stanza XXXII of *Eugene Onegin* in which he lovingly traces the history of the "pedal theme" in poetry, with discussion of foot imagery in Jonson, Moore, Hugo and others.

9. It is significant that Trilling misspells the name of Humbert's love--the parody and the source it parodies, though in one sense standing in comic relief to one another, are, in another way, almost indistinguishable. See also *Look At The Harlequins!* (1975), Nabokov's final novel, and the title of his character Vadim Vadimovich's (an author who parodistically resembles Nabokov) novel written near the time of *Lolita's* composition: *A Kingdom By the Sea* (see "Annabelle Lee" line 2).

10. See *Strong Opinions,* pg. 118:

> Paradoxically, the only real, authentic worlds are, of course, those that seem unusual. When my fancies will have been sufficiently imitated, they too, will enter the common domain of average reality, which will be false too, but within a new context which we cannot yet guess. Average reality begins to rot and stink as soon as the act of individual creation cease to animate a subjectively perceived texture.

11. Appel later notes that Nabokov's "triumph in art is but a heightened emblem of all of our own efforts to confront, order, and structure the chaos of life, and to endure, if not master, the demons within and around us" (lvii).

12. Stuart's analysis of the purpose of Nabokov's parody is reminiscent of a long line of art theorists, perhaps none more memorable than Schopenhauer, who in his *World as Will and Idea* writes: "(E)very work of art endeavors to show us life and things as they are in reality; but these cannot be grasped directly by everyone through the mist of objective and subjective contingencies. Art takes away this mist" (Schopenhauer 406). Nabokov was a great reader of Schopenhauer (see Tooker, 77).

13. Or, paradoxically, to the fictional. As Borges, on reflexive fiction, has written:

> Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be 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. (*Labyrinths,* 196).

14. "The prison of time is spherical and without exits," Nabokov writes in *Speak Memory* (20).

15. Compare R.M. Abrahms' similar observation, made thirty years later, in his "letter" to "Baron Stendhal":

> Spontaneous delight, my dear Baron, there you have it; my former colleague N. has a notable tendency to admire architectural fiction of a superlative inevitability, but his own style is something else again--something rarer and more precious, I venture to think. This can be said without the slightest diminution of the appreciation due Flaubert, Joyce, and Proust--none of whom is, indeed, remarkable for unpredictability, or the finely improvised sense of excess. N. actually goes farther than this...N.'s fiction rejoices precisely in those bold transformations, those sudden modulations from one key of fantasy to another, those audacious leaps and gestures of abrupt imaginative imbalance which were your own special delight (Appel/Newman, 335).

16. "Sirin" was a pseudonym for Nabokov that he later discarded.

17. Even in life Nabokov was notorious for deceiving others into believing stories he made up by describing them with a remarkable sense of empirical "truth," and conversely, describing facts of science in ways that made them seem incredible (Boyd, 475).

18. A word that Nabokov noted, "must, by definition, be printed in quotation marks" (*Strong Opinions,* 57). I shall observe this rule throughout my dissertation.

19. Of special interest here is the conclusion of Nabokov's "On Hodasevich," published in the Paris emigre journal *Sovremennyya zapiski* (Paris 1939), written on the death of the poet. In this moving tribute, Nabokov's compassion for his late friend is notably heightened by his sad but realistic dismissal of Hodasevich's physical "reality," that is as ephemeral as "hailstone on a window sill," and the emphasis on the less contingent, truly living poems. Both "sets," in other words, disintegrate equally. This is an example of what Hodasevich meant when he described Nabokov's steadfast

> realization or perhaps only deeply felt conviction, that...the true world of the artist, conjured through the action of images and devices out of apparent simulacra of the real world, consists in fact of completely different material--so different that the passage from one world to another, in whichever direction it is accomplished, is akin to death.

The essay points to an early example of Nabokov's attitude toward art and time--Hodasevich may be dead, but his poems are bequeathed gold shin (ing) on a shelf in full view of the future."

20. He later referred to this experience fondly, saying he was lucky enough to have dined in his life with

Joyce and Robbe-Grillet (see *Strong Opinions,* 201).

21. And completely underrated, unread masterpieces (out of print in the U.S. 1996)--*Project For a Revolution in New York, Topology of a Phantom City,* and *Recollections of the Golden Triangle,* make up a trilogy that equals in its power the *Lolita/Pale Fire/Ada* trilogy, and far surpass anything Robbe-Grillet has written before or since.

22. See Boyd, pg. 428:

> The style of...the commentary is much leaner and more direct than that of *Lolita* and *Ada*--a plainness of texture necessary in a book whose structure resembles an Escher castle--but at the same time magical because of the bright invention behind every verbal formulation.

In a conversation I had with Dr. R. Smith of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, he noted that, during a 1988 interview with Robbe-Grillet, who was visiting the campus then, R-G was very enthusiastic about *Pale Fire.*

23. But we must question a majority of McCarthy's tracings: when the essay came out, Nabokov, though grateful for her comments, noted that "90% of her symbols were not fathered by me" (VN to William McGuire, Oct. 28 1962).

24. In his essay on *Pale Fire,* Alter himself quotes approvingly Appel's observation that Nabokov's parodies in *Lolita* are "deeply humanistic" (184).

25. And clearly limiting, if not completely erroneous approaches. Though Boyd is correct in finding an "intimation of immortality" in *Pale Fire,* and though the examples he cites that hint at the Shade-as-Kinbote idea are tempting, in the overall scheme of *Pale Fire,* there is nothing which conclusively suggests that Shade is Kinbote. One example of Boyd's analysis is representative:

> According to Nabokov's dictionary, Webster's Second, a kinbote is a bote or compensation 'given by a homicide to the kin of his victim.' Jack Grey, the man who kills Shade, certainly does not give Kinbote to Sybil, nor would she want him. The only way the name makes the sense that Nabokov indicates it ought to have is if Shade, in compensation for the shock of fictively killing himself off, presents Sybil with the maddening but supremely colorful Kinbote, whose attacks on Sybil, if reflected through one more mirror so that we can read them the right way around, are of course a tribute to her staunch loyalty. And "Botkin" is just as apt. Webster's Second records one meaning of bodkin--or as Kinbote insists 'botkin'--as "a person closely wedged between two or other persons," like Kinbote trying to thrust himself between John and Sybil Shade. Its main meaning of course, will remove the figmentary interloper between the two Shades as soon as he has finished his commentary and index (444).

But in the complex world of *Pale Fire,* where one word ripples with allusion and structural significance, definitively choosing one definition of Kinbote/Botkin over another--always a dangerous enterprise when reading Nabokov, who loathed symbols in literature, see *Strong Opinions*--and then applying this to a larger thesis that fuses characters together in a religious schema seems ludicrous.

Leona Tooker attempts the same thing in her essay on *Lolita,* wherein she suggests (much more persuasively, though her criticism is shot through with the same kind of flawed and restrictive thinking as Boyd's) that Humbert creates Quilty. But as with Boyd's similar analysis, there are loopholes, created by Nabokov himself to prevent his books from being read in any "systematic" manner. In this introduction, Ray, an outside observer, notes that a book called *My Cue* "is to be published shortly," suggesting that Quilty is a "real" person in the book, and not a fictional doppleganger created by Humbert. And as if to put a final twist on the events that permanently remove *Lolita* from the world of linear-analysis a la Tooker

and Boyd, *My Cue* is written by Vivian Darkbloom, which is an anagram for Vladimir Nabokov.

This detail could be seen as strengthening Tooker's argument, just as the various etymologies in *Pale Fire* at least suggest that Shade and Kinbote are one in the same. But nothing is conclusive, and more often than not, Nabokov's symbols are tentative in nature.

26. As does Nabokov, though once again, I will argue that this is only a facet of his art, and not its governing principle. See *Strong Opinions* where he notes: "Time without consciousness--lower animal world; time with consciousness--man; consciousness without time--some still higher state" (30).

27. Again we must think of Proust, who is always in the background of *Pale Fire*, and one of the few non-fictional characters cited in the book's index. See Bergotte's death at the Vermeer exhibition (III, 186). See also "Pale Fire" lines 221-31:

> So why join in the vulgar laughter? Why
> Scorn a hereafter none can verify:
> The Turk's delight, the future lyres, the talks
> With Socrates and Proust in the cypress walks,
> The seraph with his six flamingo wings
> And Flemish hells with porcupines and things?
> It isn't that we dream too wild a dream:
> The trouble is we do not make it seem
> Sufficiently unlikely; for the most
> We can think up is a domestic ghost.

But it is of vital importance to recognize that for both Proust and Nabokov, the question of an afterlife has not been, nor could be, conclusively answered in this life. In different sections of both works, atheism and the possibility of absolute chaos, is explored with equal energy and enthusiasm (see below).

28. See chapter three, for my analysis of Shade's rumination on multiple wives arguing in heaven over jewelry in "Pale Fire."

29. Even in Eckermann's book, though, there is a tension between "truth" (*das Wahre*) and "reality" (*das Wirkliche*). In a letter written in 1844, Eckermann candidly writes: "(A)lthough I have invented nothing in it, and it is all perfectly true, it is nevertheless selected." --from a letter to Laube, March 3 1844.

30. And despite the distinction that Boswell makes between his book and the then en vogue Table-Talk books: "Of one thing I am certain, that considering how highly the small portion which we have of the table-talk and other anecdotes of our celebrated writers is valued, and how earnestly it is regretted that we have not more, I am justified in preserving rather too many of Johnson's sayings, than too few; especially as from the diversity of dispositions it cannot be known with certainty beforehand, whether what may seem trifling to some, and perhaps to the
collector himself, may not be agreeable to many; and the greater number that an author can please in any degree, the more pleasure does there arise to a benevolent mind (12-13).

The *Life*, for Boswell, is obviously much more than Table-Talk, even on a gigantic scale: he is presenting a unified vision of the universe through quotes and descriptions. See also the second advertisement in which Boswell asserts that his book has helped "Johnsonize" the land (xv).

31.Rader: "(T)hrough the *Life*, many subtle features, quite distinct from its factual substance, conspire to renew and intensify our sense of the grandeur of the subject. Recurring epithets like "my illustrious friend" give us a tug of pleasure and reanimate our established estimate as we think subconsciously , 'he *was* illustrious.' Even such apparently irrelevant aspects of the book as its praise of great men, or its literary allusions, or Boswell's digression on the qualities of a noble estate contribute in the aggregate to the massive special effect of the whole." (34-5).

32. Though Boswell *does* note that this *Life* will be much more than a "chronological series of actions or preferments," and will focus more on the "manners of behavior of (his) hero" (12). However, for Boswell this does not preclude objectivity; his *Life* will still contain Johnson's "real character" (12).

33. His journal entry of July 1763 is in this way typical: "Goldsmith was in his usual style, too eager to be bright"--July 1763 (74).

34. "Self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impression and ideas are supposed to have reference" (Hume, 130).

35. See *London Journal*, p. 54, for one example of a good day, when Boswell's sense of personal continuity, free from Humean disparities, was especially strong:

> I got up excellently well. My present life is most curious, and very fortunately is become agreeable. My affairs are conducted with the greatest regularity and exactness. I move like clock-work. At eight in the morning Molly lights the fire, sweeps and dresses my dining room...I lie some time in bed indulging indolence, which in that way, when the mind is easy and cheerful and most pleasing...

36. See the unforgettable *Journals*, which in many ways surpass the *Life*, and in particular the famous account given in April 1783, where Johnson is likened to a struggling "warrior" who conquerors his prurient impulses .

37. In his famous rebuttal of Hume, Johnson anticipates this idea:

> BOSWELL. David Hume said to me...he was no more uneasy to think he should *not be* after this life, than he *had not been* before he began to exist. JOHNSON. 'Sir, if he really thinks so his perceptions are disturbed; he is mad: if he does not think so, he lies. He may tell you, he holds his finger in the flame of a candle, without feeling pain; would you believe him? When he dies he at least gives up all he has. BOSWELL. 'Foote, Sir, told me that when he was very ill he was not afraid to die.' JOHSON. It is not true sir. Hold a pistol to Foote's breast, or to Hume's breast and threaten to kill them, and you'll see how they behave.

As in the Derrida, it is a question of ineluctable modalities--Hume's philosophy fails to come to terms with its own terms, its own stage of existence (the reality of life as totality, as "all one has"), which, of course, is vital to formulating philosophical thought in the first place; so too does Levi-Strauss use signs in an unintentionally humorous attempt to overthrow signs. And Hume also attempted to disprove causality, but by using methods of logical causality to make this point, a fact he quietly passed over.

38. One of the literally dozens of examples of Johnsonian indirection; of course, Boswell, who recognized early on this tendency in his idol, prided himself on penetrating closer than anyone else Johnson's seemingly impenetrable mind. See Vol. 4, pg. 31 of the *Life:*

> He would say, 'I dine to-day in Grosvenor-square;' this might be with a duke; or, perhaps, 'I dine to-day at the other end of town;' or 'A gentleman of great eminence called on me yesterday.' He loved thus to keep things floating in conjecture: *Omne ignotum pro magnifico est.* I believe I ventured to dissipate the cloud, to unveil the mystery, more freely and frequently than any of his friends.

It is to Boswell's credit that he saw this unveiling as a "frequent" occurrence, and not a continuous one.

39. See *Journals,* pg. 265, *Pale Fire,* pg. 158.

40 See *Life* (iv.197), and *PF*, pg. 85.
And later, in the same papers as he watches Langton fi

41. See also *Boswell Papers,* ed. Pottle, x.p.131. Failing to start a conversation about theological questions he writes:

> This kind of conversation allways *(sic)* produces some degree of melancholy in my mind. I was gloomy for a little and wished to be again in the Fly frame, with common thoughts about the roads and the price of provisions. I must really get Mr. Johnson to put me down a short, clear system of Religion.

And later, in the same papers as he watches Langton fight a losing battle with Beauclerk over religion, Boswell writes:

> It made me somewhat melancholy to find that even Langton , who has studied Religion so much, was, like myself, unable to convince another...Arguments for Christianity are not always ready to a man (140-41).

42. See also the discussion the American who lives a Rousseaian existence with his Indian wife (228). Perhaps not without some significance of juxtaposition, Boswell follows Johnson's sneering response with a discussion on suicide.

43. See *Journals,* pp. 375-81.

44. And, at least according to Kinbote, it is Sybil who was the cause of this theological disagreement. See below in my discussion of Sybil.

45. And Johnson's as well. See "The Vanity of Human Wishes," and Johnson's view of life as "protracted woe" (line 258). See below, in my discussion of Johnson and Shade.

46. And Nabokov's: in *Strong Opinions*, he lists events he would like to see on film, including," Herman Melville at breakfast, feeding a sardine to his cat" (97). The parody in *Pale Fire* reflects back, not only on Boswell and Johnson, but on the author of the novel as well. A study of this dimension of parody in *PF* would, in fact, itself make an excellent subject for a future dissertation.

47. "One who adheres to the ancient constitution of the state, and the apostolical hierarchy of the Church of England; opposed to *whig*" (294).

48. See J.B. Sledd and Gqin Kolb, "Johnson's Definitions of Whig and Tory," *PMLA 67* (1952), 882-5; Benjamin and Dorothy G. Boyce, "Dr. Johnson's Definitions of 'Tory' and 'Whig'" *Notes and Queries* (April 1953), pp. 160-61.

49. See Thomas Gray's attack on Boswell's *Corsica*, where he sounds strangely like Professor Hurley in *Pale Fire.* Gray called the book "a dialogue between a green-goose and a hero." Hurley's invective against Kinbote-Shade echoes closely this sentiment (see p. 14 of *PF*, and *Horace Walpole's Correspondence,* ed. W.S. Lewis, xiv, 174).

50. See "Boswell and Corsica," from *Boswell On the Grand Tour,* edited by Frank Brady and Pottle (McGraw-Hill Book Co., 147).

51. See "Boswell and Corsica" p. 145.

52. "(Valentine White) gave us a letter of introduction to Mr. Ferne, master of store at Fort George. He shewed it to me. It recommended 'two celebrated gentlemen; no less than Dr. Johnson, author of his

Dictionary--and Mr. Boswell, known at Edinburgh by the name of Paoli.'--He said, he hoped I had no objection to what had been written; if I had, he would alter it. I thought it was a pity to check his effusions, and acquiesced; taking care, however, to seal the letter, that it might not appear that I had read it" (123).

53. In a 1967 interview, Nabokov was asked to respond to E.M. Forester's assertion that "his characters took hold of him." Nabokov: "What an absurd idea! We must pity his characters then, for being forced to go to such places as India" (*SO*, 214).

54. Donald Greene, in his essay "Tis a Pretty Book, Mr. Boswell, But--" concludes that a conservative estimate of the number of days the two men actually spent together totals 425 (134).

55. See the January 1774 letter (272).

56. But we don not find Boswell reacting to him this way in the *Life*. There, Boswell confidently notes that, "I found that I had a very perfect idea of Johnson's figure, from the portrait of him painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds..." (392). But in the *Journals*, Boswell's description of Johnson at this moment is in keeping with his later portrait, and more frank in nature:

> Mr. Johnson is a man of a most dreadful appearance. He is a very big man, is troubled with sore eyes, the palsy and the king's evil. He is very slovenly in his dress and speaks with a most uncouth voice (64).

57. As one may, in our own day (5/22/95), deplore the now-derogatory connotations the once-noble word *liberal* carries.

58. The other two--*Robinson Crusoe* and *Pilgrim's Progress*, more closely reflect Johnson's interest in the didactic; but Defoe's novel, in particular, possesses other delights that Johnson could not have been unaware of. And of course, he famously told Boswell that he read Fielding's *Amelia* in one sitting (ii.43).

59. As Volterra sneeringly notes in *Of Happiness*:

> When you parade a particularly dreary form of prudery as a rare virtue, you often get paid in the currency of other's high esteem. Samuel Johnson habitually went half-way with his wife's maid, but always refrained from possessing her though she was willing. Throughout his life he wrote solemnly on the virtues of chastity, and championed the great sentimentalist of his century Richardson for his tedious and contrived novels on the perils of giving in to the pleasures of the sense. (259)

60. And it is revealing that Nabokov, who so valued details, gives to Gradus, the villain in *Pale Fire*, a love of the general:

> He worshiped general ideas and did so with pedantic aplomb. The generality was godly, the specific diabolical. (152)

61. Paraphrasing the commentator of "Pale Fire," a whiff of Kinbote flits about this passage as well--Johnson comes close to advocating that "sin that ends all sins" that Kinbote discusses in his note to line 493 (see above).

62. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 1150.

63. See Nabokov's description of Gogol's style in his *Lectures on Russian Literature* where he prophetically envisions the kinetics of Kinbote:

> ...the passage that had started in a rambling colloquial manner all of a sudden

> leaves the tracks and swerves into the irrational where it really belongs; or again, quite as suddenly, a door bursts open and a mighty wave of foaming poetry rushes in only to dissolve in bathos, or to turn into its own parody, or to be checked by the sentence breaking and reverting to a conjuror's patter, that patter which is such a feature of Gogol's style. It gives one the sensation of something ludicrous and at the same time stellar, lurking constantly around the corner--and one likes to recall that the difference between the comic side of things, and their cosmic side, depends upon one sibilant (56-57).

64. Greene, in a discussion of Johnson's political views, nicely defines this kind of complex stance:
> (Johnson) could joke about matters that he took seriously, and joke about the seriousness with which he took them, and in the midst of joking know that they remained as serious as ever. There is in Johnson (it needs, unfortunately, still to be pointed out) a great deal of the habit of complex irony that one associates with the most sensitive minds" (*The Politics of Samuel Johnson*, 18).

65. A Russian translation of *Alice in Wonderland.* See Boyd.