

Simon Rowberry

“HIS AND MY READER”:
REREADING *PALE FIRE* HYPERTEXTUALLY

Many of the debates surrounding *Pale Fire* over the last fifty years have concerned the “true” authorship of the novel. Authorship is, however, not the concern of this paper, which argues that the different readers addressed within the text by Kinbote are of greater importance. I will examine *Pale Fire*’s structure through a reader-response inflected version of hypertext theory. There are two generally accepted readers of *Pale Fire*, as suggested by Herbert Smith: the Shadean reader, who focuses on the poem, and the Kinbotean, who focuses on the non-linear and predominantly examines Kinbote’s commentary.¹ A third implied reader, “encoded in the text, representing the integration of data and the interpretative process ‘invited’ by the text,”² supplements the other two: the Nabokovian reader. The first two explicit readers can be seen through Kinbote’s references to readership such as “his and my

¹ Herbert F. Smith, “The Topology of Pale Fire: An analysis based on Catastrophy theory,” in *Cross-Cultural Studies: American, Canadian and European Literatures: 1945-1985*, ed. Mirko Jurak (Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana, 1985), 186.

² Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), 119.

reader”³ in his commentary. Most readers quickly discard the initial two methods of reading and follow Nabokov’s advice and reread closely to hunt down clues in a hypertextual manner, free from the constraints of the linearity of the novel and the linearity of Kinbote’s cross-references. Nabokov used this method to explore the intratextual network within the novel and to subvert causality in the novel. This has unintended consequences, however, since Nabokov’s authority dissolves⁴ with the novel’s structural openness and with the elevation of the two great artists as protagonists.

Stuart Moulthrop’s definition of hypertext as “promiscuous, pervasive, and polymorphously perverse connection”⁵ encapsulates Nabokov’s fiction’s appeal in terms of its highly allusive and playful nature. One can see this hypertextuality within the entire Nabokov canon, from the explicit cross-references in *Pale Fire*, through to the textual and narrative layers of *Lolita* and the promiscuous nature of Nabokov’s fictional universe, whereby characters, and the author himself, travel from one text to another without fanfare. In a more technical sense, hypertext elevates the possibility of reading in a non-linear fashion – though it does not necessitate such a reading – and thus creates new connections unforeseen by a linear reading. David Cowart highlights this motif in *Pale Fire* by asserting that “the real subject of ‘Pale Fire’ (the poem) is its own intertextuality.”⁶ There is a strong symbiosis between the poem and the commentary, which Kinbote hints at, suggesting that “without my notes Shade’s text simply has no human reality at all” (*PF*, 25), but Kinbote’s text would also be less interesting without its anchor. The inherent connections within the novel form a hypertextual structure upon which all interpretations of the text depend. Manolescu-Oancea’s reading of Nabokov’s “intertextuality [as] usually a precise science, in which specific pointers signal a precise source”⁷ also suggests

³ Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (London: Penguin, 2000), 125. Henceforth in the text and footnotes as (*PF*). References to “Pale Fire” the poem will take the form (*PF*, l.xxx). Other references to the two conflicting readers in the novel include “my reader” (*PF*, 202, 223, 224, 235) and Shade’s readers (*PF*, 83, 140, 92). There are also eighteen neutral references to “the reader” (*PF*, 15, 25, 66, 100, 106, 119, 132, 152, 155, 164, 173, 180, 183, 184, 188, 192, 197 and 202). Only six of those notes, however, could refer to just Shadean readers.

⁴ It would, therefore, be misleading to label the Nabokovian rereader the ideal reader of *Pale Fire*, since his/her conclusions are often different from Nabokov’s. See Peter Hühn, John Pier, and Wolf Schmid, *Handbook of Narratology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 398.

⁵ Stuart Moulthrop, “You Say You Want a Revolution? Hypertext and the Laws of Media,” *Postmodern Culture* 1, no. 3 (1991), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v001/1.3moulthrop.html.

⁶ David Cowart, *Literary Symbiosis: The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth-Century Writing* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1993), 75.

⁷ Monica Manolescu-Oancea, “Humbert’s Arctic Adventures: Some Intertextual Explorations,” *Nabokov Studies* 11 (2007), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nabokov_studies/v011/11.manolescu-oancea.html.

that Nabokov used intertextuality in a technical manner akin to hypertext. Many critics have seen *Pale Fire* as hypertext. Ted Nelson, who coined the term hypertext, was the first to see *Pale Fire*'s hypertextual potential. In the late 1960s, Nelson gained permission to use *Pale Fire* to demonstrate his prototype hypertext system.⁸ He believed that the novel was highly connective and thus a perfect choice to demonstrate his early research, which would eventually inspire Tim Berners-Lee's World Wide Web.⁹ When literary hypertext theory started to gain popularity in the early 1990s, *Pale Fire* was often cited as a proto-hypertext, but this was never explored to any reasonable depth other than to confirm the novel's multicursal¹⁰ nature. Espen Aarseth approached *Pale Fire* as a hypertext from an empirical stance,¹¹ suggesting that the predominant motifs of its hypertextuality include: constant linking that does not change over time, an impersonal perspective whereby the reader is not a character in the text, random access, explicit links, and the fact that the reader's main role is to interpret the connections. From these features, Aarseth concluded that *Pale Fire* does not share many traits with narrative-based electronic hypertexts. This analysis, however, fails to capture *Pale Fire*'s greatest strength as a print-based hypertext: it is effortless in its artifice. The Nabokovian reader is sufficiently familiar with the text, commentary and index format and this familiarity increases the reader's confidence in assuming the hypertextual reading method. Boyd notes that *Pale Fire* is Nabokov's "most perfect novel structurally."¹² This achievement would not be possible without the underlying hypertextual current. In *Pale Fire*, Nabokov has created a hypertext that feels so natural that the reader does not necessarily realize that he/she is traversing the text in a non-linear manner. This is not a universal view of the text and some early critics, such as Page Stegner, believe the artifice is clunky: "Original and complex and full of wonderful language it certainly is, though I think it [sic] perhaps overcomposed and overcontrolled - Nabokov's *Finnegans Wake*."¹³ Perhaps it is now, in the digital age, that *Pale Fire* can be compared to other hypertext systems and can

⁸ As I examine more fully in Simon Rowberry, "Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*: the lost 'father of all hypertext demos'?", in *Proceedings of the 22nd ACM conference on Hypertext and hypermedia*, HT '11 (New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2011), 319-324.

⁹ Theodor Nelson, *Literary Machines 93.1* (Sausalito, CA: Mindful Press, 1993), 1/31.

¹⁰ That is, it can be read in both a linear and non-linear manner.

¹¹ Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 58-75.

¹² Brian Boyd, "Nabokov: A Centennial Toast," in *Nabokov's World. Volume 2: Reading Nabokov*, ed. Jane Grayson, Arnold McMillin, and Priscilla Meyer (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 11.

¹³ Page Stegner, *Escape into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967), 131.

become recognized as a lovingly crafted novel, not overcomposed or controlled, especially when compared to other hypertextual projects, such as the World Wide Web.

It is the effects of the novel's hypertextuality that are important. For example, the motif of the "death of the author" in the text is highlighted by the hypertextualization of the novel. On a literal level, this is the death of John Shade, but there is also the metaphorical death of the author(s). First, the authority of the poem is killed by Kinbote's commentary, subverting the linearity of the poem but this too is then subverted by Nabokov's subliminal instructions to the reader to ignore Kinbote's advice (*PF*, 18). Perhaps there is even a third author slain in the text as Nabokov's instructions and wishes are often subverted by the reader's own interpretation of events. Thus, the reader emerges as the custodian of the "reality" within the text. The elevation of the reader through the structure of *Pale Fire* reflects the struggle of hypertext theorists to create systems that empower the reader's sense of freedom, rather than further restrict them. Nabokov referred to this personal hypertext when he suggested, "curiously enough, one cannot read a book: one can only reread it. A good reader, a major reader, an active and creative reader is a rereader."¹⁴ The adjectives "creative" and "active" place the onus on the reader, rather than the author. This notion reflects the goals of reader-response theory, but more recent narrative theorists, such as Seymour Chatman, have argued that, although the implied reader is necessary for the communicative transaction with the implied author who is constructed through the reader's knowledge of the author's context, "the reader can constitute only one-half of that actualization."¹⁵ This communication model is limited in the case of ergodic literature including *Pale Fire*, which requires a feedback loop such as Ben-Arie's model of reading transactions.¹⁶ Ben-Arie's model posits that the author controls the *structure* of the text, but the way that the reader responds to this shapes his/her own interpretation which remakes the text through its structure.¹⁷ Thus, the proposition that one can only reread a book implies that one needs to understand the linearity of a text to subvert it. This is established in the first reading, so it is only in the second reading that Nabokov's dominant connections, along with the reader's own, begin

¹⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982), 3.

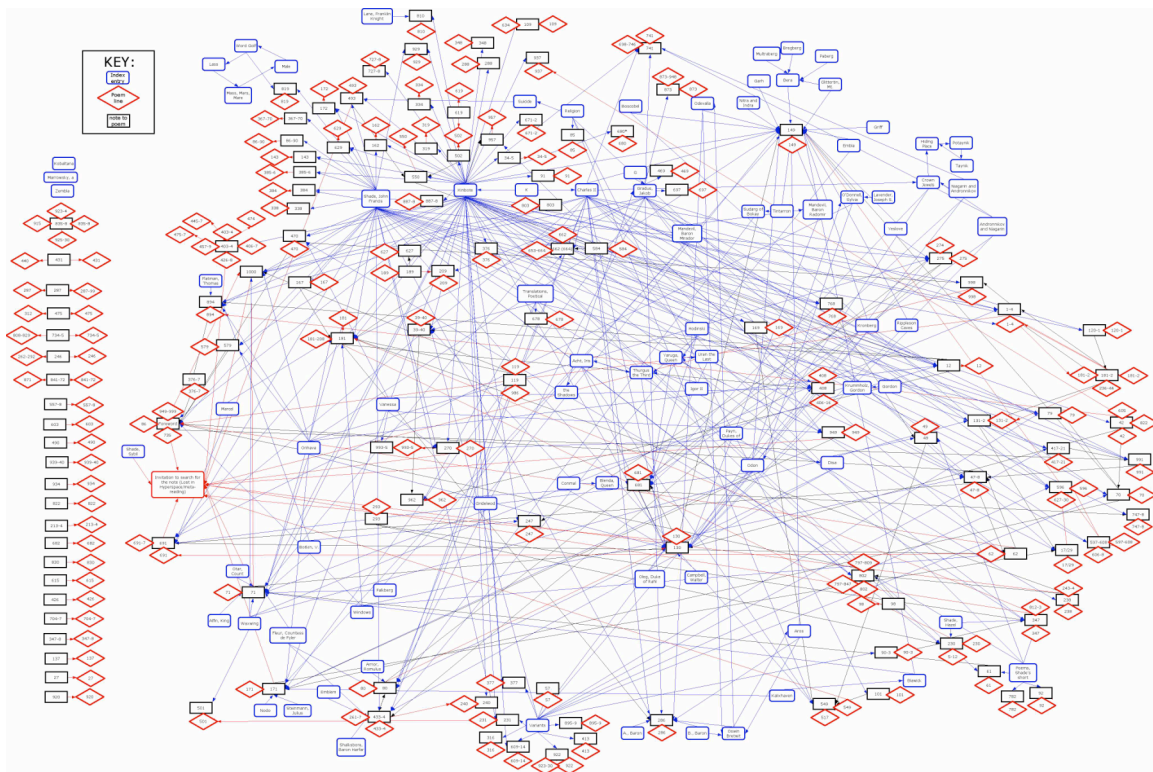
¹⁵ Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 75.

¹⁶ Udi Ben-Arie, "The Narrative-Communication Structure in Interactive Narrative Works," in *Proceedings of the 2nd Joint International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling: Interactive Storytelling*, ICIDS '09 (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2009), 156, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-10643-9_20.

¹⁷ Ibid.

to emerge. It is Nabokov's connections, however, that solely govern our initial reading of the text.

The first example of the novel's hypertextuality is in the explicit cross-references, which start from the foreword. Brian Boyd posits in *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery*, that if one follows the only explicit cross-reference to the commentary, "(See my note to line 991)" (PF, 15), in the foreword, one's journey following the connections ends with the penultimate annotation.¹⁸ Boyd suggests that this is the only cross-reference in the foreword and that it propels the reader onto a path which ends near the novel's conclusion and which starts to demonstrate Kinbote's unreliability.¹⁹ There are, however, deeper layers of references embedded within the foreword. Kinbote also alludes to "my last note to the poem" (PF, 16), once more a reference to the dénouement of the plot, more carefully hidden. Most interestingly, there is an almost cryptic clue: 'as mentioned in a note my reader shall find' (PF, 18). Through Kinbote's foreword, Nabokov has mapped out three methods of reading the novel: in a linear manner, following Kinbote's links, or forgoing suggested connections to follow one's own intuition.



¹⁸ Brian Boyd, *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 51.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Figure 1: A map of explicit links within *Pale Fire*

The trusting or unsure reader can follow the explicit references. The standard hierarchical linked path will ensue and allow the reader to follow Kinbote's linear trail through his notes. This subverts the linearity of the Shadean story, but creates a further linearity through Kinbote's commentary. This is similar to the main flaw of the hyperlink because one can only explore certain pre-determined choices in a linear manner that the reader may not wish to follow.²⁰ Thus, the Shadean and the Kinbotean readers trace similar narrative paths, albeit with a different focus. Figure 1 is a map of all explicit links made in *Pale Fire*. There are over 500 cross-references between the three segments of the novel, although it should be noted that 69% of all references are from the index, only referring to the commentary, thus increasing the autonomy of Kinbote's narrative over Shade's poem. The index is a sub-set of the graph that immediately demonstrates Kinbote's unreliability. Kurt Vonnegut summed up Kinbote's role as a self-indexer in his novel *Cat's Cradle*, suggesting that a self-indexer is an amateur who reveals more about his/her personality and flaws than expected.²¹ This has a corollary which is abundantly clear in Kinbote's commentary to "Pale Fire" – the writers who forge their own connections through their own text also reveal their own personality flaws or paranoia. For instance, Kinbote repeatedly draws the reader's attention to certain annotations, in particular to the note to line 149, which paints a vivid picture of Zemblan geography, without attempting to gloss Shade's poem. Furthermore, the index contains only two direct references to the poem. Kinbote uses the index to strengthen the connections within his own narrative, rather than to highlight the patterns within the poem. Hazel Bell posits that "'Bias' would be too weak a word to apply to the indexer's selection and terminology: it gives a fine example of editorial power corrupting."²² The theme of Kinbote's "editorial power corrupting" could be the center of the novel explicitly seen in the overwhelming number of connections in the index compared to the number of the references to the poem. Moreover, Kinbote's overall editorial influence over the poem is unknown. He has taken the liberty to add the one thousandth line, whether intended by Shade or not and professes, "I have italicized the Hazel theme" (*PF*, 156). One cannot know the extent of

²⁰ See Mark Bernstein, "More than legible: on links that readers don't want to follow," in *Proceedings of the eleventh ACM on Hypertext and hypermedia*, HYPERTEXT '00 (New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2000), 216–217.

²¹ Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* (London: Penguin, 2000), 86–7.

²² Hazel K. Bell, "Indexes as fiction and fiction as paper-chase," *The Indexer* 20 (1997): 210.

Kinbote's editorial totality. It does appear, however, that Kinbote has kept most of his major amendments to the marginalia, such as his suggestion for line 1000, and the variants which favor his narrative.

The reader can use Kinbote's references to the book's linearity to spatially discover the note he is referencing. An example of this is his reference to "my last note," which must appear at the end of the book. This directly challenges the reader's confidence in the hypertextual nature of the narration as he/she can skip to the end of the text and miss the bulk of the exposition. This, in turn, challenges the perceived limit of the printed page. N. Katherine Hayles notes this trend and describes the book as a "Random Access Device" whereby one can flip to any part of the text at random and gain insight.²³ The final reference in the foreword to the note the reader will find is a more refined and useful version of random access: searching through the text for implicit connections. This is more appropriate to a "pure" hypertextual reading²⁴ because it lacks hierarchy, and assumes the form of an isomorphic graph, whereby the reader can arrange the structure of the text to meet his/her own needs without adjusting the form of the text.²⁵ Furthermore, the reader can use these links as a starting point to interpret the deeper resonances within the text. Thus, Kinbote's connections, however useless the majority of them appear to be to the Nabokovian reader, are invaluable for providing a blueprint for reading the poem and commentary hypertextually that the reader will improve upon.

The three *Pale Fire* readers represent three archetypal hypertextual readers. Kinbote's direct reference is a form of hierarchical hypertext, since there is a clear sense of order in the links. The second, indirect allusion can be linked to a meta-reading approach to hypertext, whereby the reader scans the physical text for the last note. Finally, the vague allusion to searching allows the reader to immerse him/herself in the layers of the text, rather than trace the well-followed paths throughout the novel. Moreover, these two latter methods of reading counter Kinbote's explicit instructions in his foreword:

²³ N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge and London: The M.I.T. Press, 2002), 99.

²⁴ An opinion widely espoused by the hypertext community, particularly by Frank Halasz, who asserts "a query is just an incomplete link" in "Reflections on NoteCards: seven issues for the next generation of hypermedia systems," in *Proceedings of the ACM conference on Hypertext*, HYPERTEXT '87 (New York, NY, USA: ACM, 1987), 345-365.

²⁵ It should be noted that a good index should fulfill this role in print-based media. See Jay David Bolter, *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), 22.

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

Herbert Smith notes that the decision to follow or ignore Kinbote's instructions in one's first reading is paramount. If the reader follows Kinbote's instructions, he will be more sympathetic to Kinbote, but if one takes the poetic approach of ignoring the instructions and reads the poem first, he will become a poetic reader. Smith's claim is problematic, since it ignores Nabokov's assertion that rereading supersedes reading, and thus one initially reads *Pale Fire* to understand the text's structure before formulating an interpretation based upon one's understanding of said structure. It is highly unlikely that the reader would support either a Shadean or Kinbotean perspective until he starts to reread. When one rereads, however, instead of supporting one of the two initial reader types, the Shadean or the Kinbotean transforms into the Nabokovian as the reader starts to question the structure he had initially followed.

This transformation highlights Nabokov's authority in the text because in a typical Nabokovian manner, there are three artists in *Pale Fire*, the thetic John Shade, the antithetic Charles Kinbote, and the synthetic Vladimir Nabokov.²⁶ This synthetic reader emerges through rereading the text. The theme of multiple authors and personalities is explored through Kinbote's potential alias, Botkin, a variant of "bodkin," which Boyd notes is a "person wedged in between two others where there is proper room for two only."²⁷ Where there should be two, the poet and the annotator, Nabokov has squeezed in. Similarly, Nabokov hoped that his ideal rereader would wedge himself between the Kinbotean and the Shadean reader and hopefully displace them. Nabokov also asserted his authority in the text by referencing his earlier novels, *Lolita*²⁸ and

²⁶ Noted in Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), 315; and Priscilla Meyer and Jeff Hoffman, "Infinite Reflections in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*: The Danish Connection (Hans Andersen and Isak Dinesen)," *Russian Literature* XLI (1997): 199.

²⁷ Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 444; See also "Bodkin, n.," *OED*, 2010, <http://oed.com/view/Entry/20925>.

²⁸ See (*PF*, 1.680, p. 49; 161; 191; and 243). In (*PF*, 191), note Kinbote mentions "his 1958 hurricane," alluding to the year *Lolita* was published. Furthermore, when Kinbote says "modern taximen are as talkative as were the barbers of old" in (*PF*, 210), this may be an allusion to the difficult "Barber of Kasbeam" sentence in *Lolita*. (See

Pnin.²⁹ He also refers to himself,³⁰ an act he undertook several times in his canon,³¹ including in *Lolita*,³² *King, Queen, Knave*,³³ *Pnin*³⁴ and *Bend Sinister*,³⁵ where his intrusions are the most apparent. Grishakova takes this to its logical conclusion, positing that “Nabokovian characters live in the shadow of auctorial presence.”³⁶ These references have an impact on the literary universe in which Nabokov’s characters reside. Their own fictional artifice is apparent through Nabokov’s playful nature. Christopher Nash notes that these extra-literary characters appear in *Pale Fire* and suggests that “the very flat, matter-of-fact quality of these allusions confers a kind of ‘objective external’ existence of the central figures of those other works of fiction.”³⁷ Nabokov flattens his fiction into one macro-text and attempts to appropriate the rest of the Western canon into this macro-text.³⁸ He creates a “web of sense,” which readers can follow in order to understand his texts. *Pale Fire* and its complex network structure stand as a microcosm of his canon and of the connections that manifest themselves between the texts.

One can also see confusing connections from the poem to the commentary (even though cause and effect dictates that the commentary cannot influence the poem) when Nabokov includes cryptic references to the commentary throughout Shade’s poem. Robert Alter envisions

“Afterword to *Lolita*” in Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, ed. Alfred Appel Jr. (London: Penguin, 2000), 316),

²⁹ See (*PF*, 124; 210; and 222). “A bald-headed suntanned professor in a Hawaiian shirt sat at a round table reading with an ironic expression on his face a Russian book.” (*PF*, 221) matches descriptions of Pnin.

³⁰ These fissures are most apparent in (*PF*, 1923-930), where Shade describes his pet hates, which mirror Nabokov’s. Jessie Thomas Lokrantz also notes the trope of the Vanessa butterfly (*PF*.993, 58) as being a Nabokovian trope, and thus a sly indication of his presence in the text (Jessie Thomas Lokrantz, *The Underside of the Weave: Some Stylistic Devices used by Vladimir Nabokov* (Upsala: Upsala University, 1973), 35). In a similar way Nabokov declares, “[Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*] knows nothing about Lepidoptera” in Alfred Appel Jr., “Notes to *Lolita*” in Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, ed. Alfred Appel Jr. (London: Penguin, 2000), 327. Thanks to Nick Greer, Jerry Friedman, Jim Twigg, and others from “Nabokv-L,” <http://listserv.ucsb.edu/archives/nabokv-l.html> (29 April 2010) for all their input on the Nabokovian authorship debate.

³¹ One of the first critics to note this was Page Stegner in *Escape into Aesthetics*, 73.

³² Through the anagrammatic ‘Vivian Darkbloom’ in Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, 4.

³³ Vladimir Nabokov, *King, Queen, Knave* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 254

³⁴ The narrator can be seen to be an intrusion of Nabokov in *Pnin* (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2004), *passim*.

³⁵ See the authorial intrusion in chapter 18. Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 188-201.

³⁶ Marina Grishakova, *The Model of Space, Time and Vision in V. Nabokov’s Fiction: Narrative Strategies and Cultural Frames* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2006), 197.

³⁷ Quoted in Robert Rawdon Wilson, “Character-Worlds in *Pale Fire*,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 23 (1990): 86-7.

³⁸ Noted by Ole Nyegaard, “The leitmotif racket in *Lolita* - marginal notes on Nabokov’s use of motifs,” *Miranda* 3 (November 2010): 10, http://www.miranda-ejournal.eu/1/miranda/article.xsp?numero=3&id_article=article_08-794.

this as “an ideogram of the novel’s structure: poem flowing into commentary and vice versa.”³⁹
This seepage occurs most explicitly when Shade posits,

*Man’s life as commentary to abstruse
Unfinished poem. Note for further use
(PF 1.939-40)*

Kinbote responds to this note, suggesting,

If I correctly understand the sense of this succinct observation, our poet suggests here that human life is but a series of footnotes to a vast obscure unfinished masterpiece. (PF, 214)

These connections appear in far more subtle places too, but the unmentioned, traceable connections between the poem and the commentary are far more interesting than the links Kinbote suggests the reader should follow. Thus, the Nabokovian reader through his hypertextual reading fully appreciates the *jouissance* of the novel,⁴⁰ achieving bliss in a way that is unattainable from other ways of reading.

Rather than relying on Kinbote’s glosses, the Nabokovian reader has to track down the sources to references on his own. Some of the clues to Nabokov’s references are within the text and simply need to be hunted down, such as the source of the title⁴¹ and the references to T.S. Eliot. Nabokov encourages the reader to discover the poet he is lampooning in Shade’s poem (PF, 1.376) and for the alert reader, the corresponding gloss (PF, 154) appears on the same page as Kinbote’s mention of T.S. Eliot – the solution to the riddle. Nabokov plants these implicit connections within the novel so that the discerning rereader will fill the gaps and see that

³⁹ Robert Alter, “Autobiography as Alchemy in *Pale Fire*,” *Cycnos* 10, no. 1 (1993), <http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/index.html?id=1313>.

⁴⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Jamie Blustein and Ann-Barbara Graff are currently exploring the connection between “the pleasure of the text” and hypertext fiction. See Jamie Blustein and Ann-Barbara Graff, “Towards a Politics of Reading: Narrative, Literary Hypertext and Meaning,” in *Proceedings of the Narrative and Hypertext Workshop* (presented at the HT ’11, Eindhoven, 2011), <http://nht11.ecs.soton.ac.uk/papers/11-jblustein.pdf>.

⁴¹ C.f. (PF, 66 and 223). Boyd notes this in *The American Years*, 437.

Kinbote has inadvertently done what he has tried his hardest to avoid – he glossed the allusions in the poem, but in all the wrong places. This is the microcosm of the entire industry of intertextuality and criticism in one novel. Boyd posits that “*Ada* could serve as a one text course on intertextuality.”⁴² Arguably, *Pale Fire* could serve a similar purpose with the added bonus of exploring the roles of explicit intratextuality and of the critic. Moreover, Boyd proposes that the discoveries within the text “demand no infinite Borgesian library – just a good dictionary, a complete Shakespeare, and curiosity, memory and imagination.”⁴³ One has to reread the book since otherwise the reader will not spot the references Nabokov cryptically plants within the text. It may be true that every allusion in the poem is supplemented by a reference to the source text elsewhere by Kinbote. In fact, one may find an adequate commentary if one rearranges Kinbote’s notes into an order that favors source finding, rather than Kinbote’s narrative.

Furthermore, as Nabokov was a chronophobiac,⁴⁴ he wanted the reader to read the text hypertextually as it allowed him to disrupt space and time usually presented in a linear manner in novels. Nabokov expressed a preference for Bergsonian time, focusing on duration rather than on the applied time of clocks and chronologies⁴⁵ and this often led to him playing with the idea of fictional chronologies in his novels. Grishakova argues

Nabokov’s time though and time lived... a combination of the universal (clock) time and multiple nonlinear forms of temporality is typical of Nabokov's fiction. There is, on one hand, a rather explicit chronological framework of action... and on the other hand, the 'spiritual time' of memory and imagination⁴⁶

“Multiple nonlinear forms” are arguably the goal of hypertext fiction, and one can immediately see the dislocation of “spiritual time” and applied time in Kinbote’s commentary to “*Pale Fire*”.

⁴² Brian Boyd, *Nabokov’s Ada: The Place of Consciousness* (Christchurch: Cybereditions, 2001), 301.

⁴³ Boyd, *Nabokov’s Pale Fire*, 37.

⁴⁴ Brian Boyd, “Nabokov, Time and Timelessness: A reply to Martin Hagglund,” *New Literary History* 37 (2006): 469.

⁴⁵ Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 116.

⁴⁶ Grishakova, *The Models of Space*, 75.

Kinbote attempts to transcend applied time by writing his story into the multi-linear commentary. Moreover, there are various types of space and time present in Nabokov's fiction. Gabriel Zoran argues that there are three levels of space in fiction:

The topographical layer: space as a static entity ... The chronotopic level: the structure imposed on space by events and movements, i.e. by spacetime... The textual level: the structure imposed on space by the fact that it is signified within the verbal text⁴⁷

Hypertext theory is an attempt to exploit the third level, the textual level, and to explore the differences this level creates in the topography and chronotography of the text. This spatio-temporal disruption of *Pale Fire* is the most evident when Kinbote describes Gradus's journey to New Wye.⁴⁸ When describing Gradus' flight to Copenhagen, Kinbote states that "spacetime itself is decay" (*PF*, 132). Kinbote's comment can be read in juxtaposition to his presentation of the Gradus material in the commentary's chronological order since he notes the forthcoming appearances of King Charles's potential assassin. The repeated references to spacetime also highlight the potential to read general relativity in the novel, despite Nabokov's claim that "I've drawn my scalpel through spacetime, space being the tumour... While not having much physics, I reject Einstein's slick formulae; but there is no need to know theology to be an atheist."⁴⁹ The hypertextual nature of the book allows Nabokov to subvert this traditional spacetime, since one can jump around the text with little regard for any spatio-temporal dimensions. The reader only escapes the temporality of Kinbote's narrative if he/she reads in the Nabokovian manner, since overall, fifty-two cross-references in the notes refer forwards to future notes, and the remaining twenty-one refer back to prior notes. (Please clarify what "forward" and "back" refer to here. Do you mean within Shade's poem?) The cross-references emphasize Kinbote's role in the creation of the poem and they constantly attempt to persuade the reader to jump forward in the novel. By

⁴⁷ Gabriel Zoran, "Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative," *Poetics Today* 5, no. 2 (January 1, 1984): 315.

⁴⁸ See (*PF*, 110, 123, 132, 183 and 214/217-8). In the note to line 596, he even plays with this theme, stating "What was Gradus doing that day? Nothing. Combinational fate rests on its laurels" (*PF*, 183).

⁴⁹ Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 116.

subverting Kinbote's new linearity, Nabokov is asking us to subvert typical spacetime into his own concept of time. Interestingly, Nabokov situates himself against the dominant force in general relativity metaphors in Twentieth Century fiction: stream of consciousness.⁵⁰ Rather than having an omniscient narrator who can enter the characters' minds at will, Nabokov presents Kinbote as a fallible and human narrator who proceeds to build on his singular misinterpretation of others' motives.

Nabokov seems to suggest that by reading *Pale Fire* in a hypertextual manner, the reader can marvel at the pluralism of his novel. This pluralism through hypertext has allowed critics to posit the various schools of authorship in *Pale Fire* from John Shade as single author, to more complicated models, such as Boyd's Hazel Shade theory in *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery*. Peter Rabonwitz argues that the truth in the text is "profoundly unattainable" since the novel does not contain a meaningful center.⁵¹ One cannot call either the poem or the commentary the centerpiece of the novel, but as Patrick O'Donnell posits the foreword, poem, commentary and index,

mirror each other and reverberate against one another so that our attention
is diverted from assessing the truth or informational value of the poem or
the commentary⁵²

Even though critics have argued that both the poem and the commentary are the centerpiece of the novel, the Iserian gaps⁵³ they create due to their resonances mean that the reader has to supplement the text with his/her imagination. This has perhaps been overlooked in the *Pale Fire* criticism, but in the *Lolita* criticism the idea of indeterminacy has been frequently discussed, most prominently with respect to Nabokov's possible mistake in dating a letter.⁵⁴ In the *Pale Fire* criticism, there have been various assertions concerning what most likely happened in the "real

⁵⁰ Both Nabokov and the stream of consciousness school of thought used Bergson as a starting point. See Shiv K. Kumar, *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel* (London and Glasgow: Blackie & Son Limited, 1962).

⁵¹ Quoted in Emma Lieber, "Having Faith in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*," *Nabokov Studies* 11 (2009), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nabokov_studies/v011/11.lieber.html.

⁵² Patrick O'Donnell, *Passionate Doubts: Designs of Interpretation in Contemporary American Fiction* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986), 6.

⁵³ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 39.

⁵⁴ See Brian Boyd, "'Even Homais Nods': Nabokov's Fallibility, or, How to Revise *Lolita*," *Nabokov Studies* 2 (1995): 62-86.

world” of New Wye, but less with respect to the stability of either Shade or Kinbote’s versions of events or the facts upon which they rely. The epistemological quest has been favored over the ontological questions. Stegner perhaps comes closest to this realization when he suggests that “the reality of *Pale Fire* is as chimerical as the identity of the ‘real’ Sebastian Knight, or the dream fantasies that constitute the fictional world of *Bend Sinister* or *Invitation to a Beheading*.”⁵⁵ The plethora of potential worlds in *Pale Fire* is a great example of Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, whereby one can understand only so much about the text, but basic deducible axioms are insufficient to build significant discoveries upon. The text is unapproachable from one single definitive lens. Thankfully, this pluralism exists despite Nabokov’s comments. He stated, for example, “...the day on which Kinbote committed suicide (and he certainly did after putting the last touches to his edition to the poem).”⁵⁶ In an interview he said, “I wonder if any reader will notice... that the nasty commentator is not an ex-king and not even Dr. Kinbote, but Prof. Vseslav Botkin, a Russian and a madman.”⁵⁷ Finally and most crucially, in a rejected draft of *Speak, Memory*, he quoted an apocryphal version of Shade’s poem, stating

Nobody will heed my index,
I suppose,
but through it a gentle wind *ex*
Ponto blows⁵⁸

Most of these comments are taken as absolutely true, but Nabokov also asserted that “of course ‘lane’ is the last word of Shade’s poem,”⁵⁹ suggesting that Kinbote’s line 1000, and perhaps any other line, was not part of Shade’s final design, has not been widely accepted as canonical and has been left to interpretation and debate – the reader has not simply accepted Nabokov’s

⁵⁵ Stegner, *Escape into Aesthetics*, 21.

⁵⁶ Alfred Appel and Vladimir Nabokov, “An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov,” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1967): 137.

⁵⁷ From his diary from 1962, quoted in Andrew Hoyem, *On Nabokov’s Poem “Pale Fire”* (San Francisco: Arion Press, 1997), 4.

⁵⁸ See David Lodge, “What kind of Fiction did Nabokov Write? A Practitioner’s view,” *Cynos* 12, no. 2 (1995), <http://revel.unice.fr/cynos/document.html?id=1470>.

⁵⁹ Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 73.

“solutions.” The poem’s conclusion should perhaps be reconsidered, since the main reason for line 999 being vital to the poem was outlined by an often overlooked early article on *Pale Fire* by Carol Williams, who suggests

The theme of this poem is that perhaps - 'who knows?' - 'the dead' exist on earth in electricity: Shakespeare may light 'a whole/Town'; perhaps the streetlamp numbered 'nine-hundred-ninety-nine' is 'an old friend of mine' (as the tin wheelbarrow, the subject of line 999 of 'Pale Fire' is an old childhood friend of John Shade)⁶⁰

Shade had earlier identified his childhood toy, the tin gardener, as his *memento mori*, which resembles Kinbote’s gardener, whom Shade sees before he dies. This is a lot more pertinent and subtle than Kinbote’s line 1000 which explicitly asserts Shade’s awareness of his impending death. The Nabokovian reading of finding the patterns in both the poem and the commentary causes one to realize that the friend in line 999 is Shade’s childhood toy and *memento mori*. Only the Nabokovian reader is in the position to make these connections since they require careful rereading.

Thus, through Kinbote’s address to the reader(s) throughout the book, Nabokov subtly alerts us to the different ways of reading the text. In true Nabokovian fashion, he is not interested in the reader following either of the two methods that he explicitly highlights in the foreword and throughout Kinbote’s commentary. Instead, he hopes the reader will reread and find the connections within the text. Unfortunately for Nabokov, he has created a text with such dense connections and resonances that he lost his authorial control that he had retained longer than most other authors of similar stature. In this article, I have highlighted the three particular benefits of reading the text in a Nabokovian hypertextual manner: a greater understanding of the intertextual playfulness of *Pale Fire*, drawing attention to the delineation of time within the novel, and most importantly, it confronts the reader with the instability of the text, which must be confronted by the reader before he interprets the text. There are indeed many other ways in

⁶⁰ Carol T. Williams, “Web of Sense: *Pale Fire* in the Nabokov Canon,” *Critique* 6, no. 3 (Winter 1963): 38.

which a hypertextual approach can be helpful to interpret *Pale Fire* and the rest of Nabokov's corpus. More work needs to be undertaken on these complex and elusive motifs, which will lead to a better understanding of Nabokov's work and how he expected the reader and the text to interact.

WORKS CITED

- Aarseth, Espen J. *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Alter, Robert. "Autobiography as Alchemy in *Pale Fire*." *Cynos* 10, no. 1 (1993).
<http://revel.unice.fr/cynos/index.html?id=1313>.
- Appel, Alfred, and Vladimir Nabokov. "An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov." *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1967): 127-152.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by Richard Miller. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.
- Bell, Hazel K. "Indexes as fiction and fiction as paper-chase." *The Indexer* 20 (1997): 209-211.
- Ben-Arie, Udi. "The Narrative-Communication Structure in Interactive Narrative Works." In *Proceedings of the 2nd Joint International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling: Interactive Storytelling*, 152–162. ICIDS '09. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2009. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-10643-9_20.
- Bernstein, Mark. "More than legible: on links that readers don't want to follow." In *Proceedings of the eleventh ACM on Hypertext and hypermedia*, 216-217. HYPERTEXT '00. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2000.
- Blustein, Jamie, and Ann-Barbara Graff. "Towards a Politics of Reading: Narrative, Literary Hypertext and Meaning." In *Proceedings of the Narrative and Hypertext Workshop*. Eindhoven, 2011. <http://nht11.ecs.soton.ac.uk/papers/11-jblustein.pdf>.
- "Bodkin, n." *OED*, 2010. <http://oed.com/view/Entry/20925>.
- Bolter, Jay David. *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991.

- Boyd, Brian. "'Even Homais Nods': Nabokov's Falibility, or, How to Revise Lolita." *Nabokov Studies* 2 (1995): 62-86.
- . "Nabokov, Time and Timelessness: A reply to Martin Hagglund." *New Literary History* 37 (2006): 469-479.
- . "Nabokov: A Centennial Toast." In *Nabokov's World. Volume 2: Reading Nabokov*, edited by Jane Grayson, Arnold McMillin, and Priscilla Meyer, 8-14. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002.
- . *Nabokov's Ada: The Place of Consciousness*. Christchurch: Cybereditions, 2001.
- . *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- . *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Chatman, Seymour. *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Cowart, David. *Literary Symbiosis: The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth-Century Writing*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1993.
- Field, Andrew. *Nabokov: His Life in Art*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967.
- Grishakova, Marina. *The Model of Space, Time and Vision in V. Nabokov's Fiction: Narrative Strategies and Cultural Frames*. Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2006.
- Halasz, Frank G. "Reflections on NoteCards: seven issues for the next generation of hypermedia systems." In *Proceedings of the ACM conference on Hypertext*, 345–365. HYPERTEXT '87. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 1987.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *Writing Machines*. Cambridge and London: The M.I.T. Press, 2002.
- Hoyem, Andrew. *On Nabokov's Poem "Pale Fire"*. San Francisco: Arion Press, 1997.
- Hühn, Peter, John Pier, and Wolf Schmid. *Handbook of Narratology*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Implied Reader*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
- Kumar, Shiv K. *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel*. London and Glasgow: Blackie & Son Limited, 1962.
- Lieber, Emma. "Having Faith in Nabokov's Pale Fire." *Nabokov Studies* 11 (2009). http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nabokov_studies/v011/11.lieber.html.
- Lodge, David. "What kind of Fiction did Nabokov Write? A Practitioner's view." *Cycnos* 12, no. 2 (1995). <http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/document.html?id=1470>.

- Lokrantz, Jessie Thomas. *The Underside of the Weave: Some Stylistic Devices used by Vladimir Nabokov*. Upsala: Upsala University, 1973.
- Manolescu-Oancea, Monica. "Humbert's Arctic Adventures: Some Intertextual Explorations." *Nabokov Studies* 11 (2007).
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nabokov_studies/v011/11.manolescu-oancea.html.
- Meyer, Priscilla, and Jeff Hoffman. "Infinite Reflections in Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Danish Connection (Hans Andersen and Isak Dinesen)." *Russian Literature* XLI (1997): 197-222.
- Moulthrop, Stuart. "You Say You Want a Revolution? Hypertext and the Laws of Media." *Postmodern Culture* 1, no. 3 (1991).
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v001/1.3moulthrop.html.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Bend Sinister*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981.
- . *King, Queen, Knave*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- . *Lectures on Literature*. Edited by Fredson Bowers. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982.
- . *Pale Fire*. London: Penguin, 2000.
- . *Pnin*. New York: Everyman's Library, 2004.
- . *Strong Opinions*. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- . *The Annotated Lolita*. Edited by Alfred Appel Jr. London: Penguin, 2000.
- Nelson, Theodor. *Literary Machines 93.1*. Sausalito, CA: Mindful Press, 1993.
- Nyegaard, Ole. "The leitmotif racket in Lolita - marginal notes on Nabokov's use of motifs." *Miranda* 3 (November 2010). http://www.miranda-ejournal.eu/1/miranda/article.xsp?numero=3&id_article=article_08-794.
- O'Donnell, Patrick. *Passionate Doubts: Designs of Interpretation in Contemporary American Fiction*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986.
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London and New York: Methuen, 1983.
- Rowberry, Simon. "Vladimir Nabokov's pale fire: the lost 'father of all hypertext demos'?" In *Proceedings of the 22nd ACM conference on Hypertext and hypermedia*, 319–324. HT '11. New York, NY, USA: ACM, 2011.
- Smith, Herbert F. "The Topology of Pale Fire: An analysis based on Catastrophy theory." In *Cross-Cultural Studies: American, Canadian and European Literatures: 1945-1985*, edited by Mirko Jurak, 183-192. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana, 1985.

- Stegner, Page. *Escape into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov*. London: Eyre and Spotiswoode, 1967.
- Vonnegut, Kurt. *Cat's Cradle*. London: Penguin, 2000.
- Williams, Carol T. "Web of Sense: Pale Fire in the Nabokov Canon." *Critique* 6, no. 3 (Winter 1963): 29-46.
- Wilson, Robert Rawdon. "Character-Worlds in Pale Fire." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 23 (1990): 77-98.
- Zoran, Gabriel. "Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative." *Poetics Today* 5, no. 2 (January 1, 1984): 309-335.

