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THE COMPOSITION
OF NABOKOV'S *PALE FIRE*

In a 1964 *Playboy* interview with Alvin Toffler (later collected in *Strong Opinions*), Vladimir Nabokov detailed his preferred method of composing novels, explaining “I do not go dutifully from one page to the next, in consecutive order, no, I pick out a bit here and a bit there, till I have filled all the gaps on paper. This is why I like writing my stories and novels on index cards, numbering them later when the whole set is complete” (*SO* 32). The purpose of this study is to bring to light some of the substantive and interesting features of the holograph manuscript (and subsequent, pre-publication revisions) of Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, first published by G.P. Putnam's Sons in 1962. The holograph manuscript, consistent with Nabokov's description of his writing process, is composed of 1092 individually numbered index cards and resides in the Nabokov archive at the United States Library of Congress.¹ In addition to this manuscript, three sets of hand-corrected galley proofs can be found in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. No typescripts that would fill the gap between the

¹ The exact number of index cards has at times been misreported as 1029, since this is the number on the final card of the manuscript. But the manuscript contains insertions that were added *after* the original numbering of the cards. Card 182, for example, is followed by thirteen cards numbered 182A-182M, before at last proceeding to card 183. When Nabokov submitted the cards to the Library of Congress, his accompanying letter claimed that “about 1075” cards were enclosed (*Selected Letters* 332). Archivists at the LOC checked the math and came up with a total of 1082; however, the span of cards numbered 183-307 was counted as 115 instead of the correct 125, thus accounting for the missing ten cards and the definitive total of 1092.

holograph manuscript and the galleys appear to be extant.

For the remainder of this study, the manuscripts (and printed first edition) will be referenced using the following abbreviations: holograph manuscript (HM), three galley proofs (G1, G2, G3), and the first printed edition of the novel (1E).

HISTORY OF COMPOSITION

In the same Toffler interview, Nabokov remarked that “at a very early stage of the novel’s development I get this urge to garner bits of straw and fluff, and eat pebbles” (31). By this he meant that he engaged in a process of collecting oddities, small observations, news clippings, and the like, many of which would later be incorporated into the novel proper. For Nabokov, this gathering of materials that would become *Pale Fire* began in 1957, while he was living in Ithaca, NY. In January of that year, he noted the color of snowflakes and the patterns bicycle tires make in the snow—images later incorporated into John Shade’s poem. In the following months, he sketched out a possible plot and continued to collect and create bits and pieces that would eventually make their way into the novel.² Despite this promising beginning, Nabokov did not commence writing the novel in earnest until November 29, 1960, when he set down the first twelve lines of Shade’s “Pale Fire.” At the time, Nabokov was living at the Hotel Negresco, in Nice, France. Less than a week later, he and Véra moved a few doors down to 57 Promenade des Anglais, apartment III,³ where he continued writing the poem, eventually completing it on February 8, 1961. Nabokov continued to work on the novel in Nice, while traveling through Italy (where Dmitri was beginning his operatic career), and finally in Switzerland, where the Nabokovs settled for good in August of 1961. On December 4, 1961, Nabokov noted in his diary that *Pale Fire* was completed. Two days later, Nabokov sent two copies of the typescript to his editor at Putnam’s, Walter Minton (Boyd 424-5). On December 8, he sent the holograph manuscript, in three packages, to Jennings Wood at the Library of Congress (SL 332). Putnam’s sent the first complete set of galley proofs (G1) to Nabokov in early February, 1962. He returned them, with comments and corrections, on February 8. Two more sets (G2, G3) soon followed and were returned on March 5 and April 5, respectively. The first edition of *Pale Fire* (1E) was published on April 25, 1962.

² I have transcribed several of these notes below.

³ Both of these addresses are noted on the index cards.

PROCESS OF COMPOSITION

Nabokov's first task in composing *Pale Fire* was to construct John Shade's poem. Like the larger novel, Nabokov composed bits and pieces of the poem and then filled in the gaps, though he did generally follow the order of cantos, starting with the first and progressing over the next two months towards the end of the fourth. One exception is that the latter half of the third canto was written almost entirely prior to the first half. So that readers may get a sense of Nabokov's pace and method, I provide below a glimpse into a productive six day stretch of work late in December 1960 (12/25-12/30):

- 12/25: Lines 209-220
- 12/26: Lines 195-208, 231-240
- 12/27: Lines 247-274, 293-314
- 12/28: Lines 357-382, 494-500
- 12/29: Lines 328-356
- 12/30: Lines 315-327, 393-402

Lines 985-999, the poem's conclusion, are dated not with a single date but with a range, 1/13-2/8, meaning Nabokov must have reworked them several times before they met his satisfaction. The next day, Nabokov wrote lines 941-956, and the poem was complete.⁴

While the end of 1960 and beginning of 1961 were almost wholly devoted to writing the poem, Nabokov did compose a few portions of the Commentary during this period. On December 4, 1960 (just his second day of work) he wrote a few sentences from what would become Kinbote's note to line 17, concerning Gradus' father and uncle (*PF* 77). On December 6 he wrote the section from Kinbote's note to line 70 describing the Zemblan loyalists who impersonated the king, wearing "red sweaters and red caps" (99). December 17 brought Shade's variant about "lockless doors" and "the Primal Scene" (94), which, given when it was composed, may indeed have been intended to be part of Shade's poem. Likewise, Shade's variant concerning "spacebombs" and "the selenographer" was written on January 8. Kinbote gives these lines as a variant to Shade's lines 923-930, and a look at Nabokov's cards reveals that the

⁴ It is not quite true that the poem was complete on February 9, 1961. Lines 673-677 are different in the HM than in 1E. The replacement lines were probably substituted during the revision of the typescript in December, 1961.

lines very likely held that position during the original composition of the poem. Of all the cards in the HM containing the poem “Pale Fire,” the card that holds lines 923-930 is the lone undated one. Kinbote’s introductory remarks to Shade’s variant (note to line 922) were written July 5, 1961, so we may infer that the replacement lines were inserted sometime near this date.

Nabokov began writing Kinbote’s Foreword on February 17, 1961, though as usual, he did not begin at the beginning. Indeed, most of the first two pages of the Foreword were not written until July. Five days after beginning work on the Foreword, Nabokov set it aside to spend more than two weeks (2/21-3/6) writing portions of Kinbote’s long note to line 130, in which he relates the story of the secret passage and King Charles’ escape from the castle. Nabokov then returned almost exclusively to his work on the Foreword, until a five-day period (3/18-3/22) when he wrote much of the note to line 149, relating the King’s escape over the mountains. Having gotten King Charles out of immediate danger, Nabokov traveled with Véra to Italy to see their son, Dmitri, and did not resume composing *Pale Fire* until late May, when he wrote the beginning of the note to line 17, which connected with the portion he wrote back at the beginning of his work, on December 4, 1960. That loose end tied up, Nabokov spent most of June, all of July, and the beginning of August in the Swiss Alps, putting the final touches on the Foreword in the middle of July and continuing to work on the Commentary.⁵ A marginal note to a card dated August 8 says “Montreux,” signifying the Nabokovs’ arrival in the place where, though they did not yet know it, they would live out the rest of their lives.

In Montreux, Nabokov worked quickly and productively, moving back and forth through the Commentary, filling gaps and advancing the plot. By late October he had written Shade’s death scene. In early November, he hired Jaqueline Callier to type the typescript from the fair copy of the manuscript (Boyd 423). Nabokov’s last dated card, marked December 1, 1961, contains the opening few sentences of Kinbote’s note to line 42, a mere three pages on from the sentences concerning Martin Gradus that Nabokov wrote down just over a year before. Sometime during this final period, Nabokov composed the Index (the cards are undated), revised the typescript, and added final touches before declaring the book finished on December 4.

SUBSTANTIVE VARIANTS IN THE HOLOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT

⁵ Boyd writes that “By July 13 [Nabokov] was writing Kinbote’s foreword,” when in fact the Foreword was begun in February and *completed* on July 14 (Boyd 421).

For the purpose of this study, substantive variants are those which differ in significant ways from the eventual published version of *Pale Fire* (1E). By significant, I mean those passages which alter, undermine, reinforce, extend, and/or supplement the published version in ways that shed light on various aspects of Nabokov's composition process, including both his method of composition and his developing sense of the novel's plot, characters, and structure. The process of determining the significance and substance of the variants is of course subjective, and other scholars may find substance in passed-over variants that I have chosen not to present in this study. Is it significant, for instance, that in the HM, Kinbote's slacks (in a photograph described in the Foreword) are heliotrope, while in 1E they are lilac? Certainly the change is not accidental, and it may be possible to advance a theory as to why Nabokov made the change, but within the scope of this essay the change in adjective does not quite merit an entry of its own. While advocates of a purely descriptive approach to this essay might prefer each entry be recorded without any further elucidation or speculation, I have taken the liberty of providing some contextual information and, in some cases, interpretive possibilities, which should be seen as springboards to further scholarship rather than as an attempt to declare the last word. These notes always appear after the heading "Comment."

The entries that follow use the transcription method outlined below. I have treated misspellings and grammar errors (later corrected) as uncanceled variants. Each entry is preceded by the page number in 1E (which is the same in the Vintage paperback edition) and the index card number, or numbers, where the variant can be found (so that future scholars can easily locate the index card in question). In most cases, I have not transcribed the whole index card, preferring instead to transcribe only that portion containing the variant, along with the bare minimum of necessary context.

Formatting

- ~~canceled text has a line through it~~
- {~~curly brackets and a strikethrough show a cancellation within a cancellation~~}
- PUBLISHED TEXT IS ALL CAPS

- [PUBLISHED TEXT NOT FOUND IN THE HOLOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT IS IN BRACKETS]
- *uncanceled text in the holograph manuscript that does not appear in the published text appears in italics*
- ^carets indicate an insertion^ and ^^double carets indicate an insertion above an insertion^^ (and so on)
- subscript numerals show ₁SUCCESSIVE VERSIONS₁ ₂IN ORDER₂ when necessary for clarity
- angle brackets indicate an <uncertain reading> of a word. Sometimes a footnote is provided to show possible readings.
- illegible words appear as angle brackets enclosing two XXs: <XX>.

Foreword

16/9

There [THEIR] PLACE[S] is [ARE] INDICATED[,] ^OR AT LEAST SUGGESTED^ BY DRAFTINGS OF *known* [ESTABLISHED] LINES IN THEIR ~~vicinity~~ IMMEDIATE ~~vicinity~~ NEIGHBORHOOD. ¶ ^I should also add that^ a few of these jottings ^such as those cited in my note to lines x42,^ are smudged and diluted ^on the cards^ owing to the ~~carelessness~~ sloppiness of a ~~hotel~~ chamber-maid, <XX> in a Chicago <XX> hotel, who knocked over a glass of water in the <XX> which stood near ~~standing too close~~ my papers. Fortunately I had ~~copied out~~ made copies of all the variants before the mishap. IN A *sence* [SENSE], MANY OF THEM ARE MORE VALUABLE...

Comment: As revealed in the Index, Kinbote “contributed” many of the variants himself. The passage above would have explained to future investigators why the variants inserted by Kinbote are in not in Shade’s handwriting, but in his own.

18/13

I HAVE NO REASON TO SUPPOSE THAT <XX> (*unless my fussy legal advisor butts*

in) ANYTHING WILL ^EVER^ HAPPEN TO PREVENT ~~these happy relations~~ THIS *first stage in my relations* [INITIAL RELATIONSHIP] WITH GOOD OLD FRANK...

25/31

I SOMETIMES WONDERED IF HE DID NOT SUSPECT WHAT SHADE SUSPECTED, AND WHAT ONLY THREE OTHER PEOPLE (TWO TRUSTEES ~~who shall remain nameless~~ AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE ~~who died soon after I had been engaged~~) DEFINITELY KNEW.

Poem

58/60⁶

*(Indeed it sold exceptionally well—
Mainly because I had seen fit to dwell
In scholarly detail on the delights
Byron derived from little catamites)
I started a new poem. . . .*

Comment: These uncanceled lines were replaced later with the corresponding lines that appear in 1E. Had they remained, the focus on Byron's catamites would have established Shade's scholarly (at least) interest in realms we more readily associate with the homosexual world of Kinbote and Zembla.

66/79

THE NEWPORT FRILL INVETERATE IN ME.
~~My chin conceals a cactus in its cleft
And my right jowl is rougher than my left.~~
MY ADAM'S APPLE IS A PRICKLY PEAR:

⁶ Lines 673-677

Commentary

73/92

A BIRD CALLED IN ZEMBLAN *ampel* [SAMPEL]...

Comment: *Ampel* is derived from the old genus name for waxwings, *Ampelis*. Moreover, the greek root ampelo-, meaning vine, may be seen as being related to Vinogradus, one of Jakob Gradus' aliases, and Parthenocissus Hall (Kinbote's name for Main Hall, later Shade Hall), which was likely covered with *Parthenocissus tricuspidata* (Boston Ivy), a vine of the Ampelopsis genus. By adding the initial sibilant, Nabokov, in typical fashion, requires the "expert solver" to do a little more work.

75/99

~~fifteen out of thirty nephews might die before reaching pension age. It followed that an old codger (who had known poverty for six) after sixty years of poverty might find himself rich. Such possibilities led, of course, to strange excesses, both in the making of children and in their timely supression. It might work both ways. Explain. A foresighted youngster might dispose of his parents, but migraine and boredom prevent me from pursuing the subject.~~

~~To return to the king. His brilliant reign.~~

TAKE FOR INSTANCE THE QUESTION OF PERSONAL CULTURE.

78/109

...DISTANT DIM ZEMBLA TO a GREEN *New England yard* [APPALACHIA].

Comment: All the geographic information in the novel points to the location of New Wye somewhere in the vicinity of Harrisonburg, Virginia, deep in the heart of what Americans call Appalachia. At some point, however, Nabokov seems to have imagined New Wye as being in New England, farther north. While Nabokov eventually caught himself and changed this reference, he may have neglected to change a similar reference in Kinbote's note to line 149, where we read that Odon's mother, Sylvia O'Donnell, "was an American, from New Wye in New England" (139).

83/127

JUDGING BY THE NOVELS IN MRS. GOLDSWORTH'S BOUDOIR, HER INTELLECTUAL INTERESTS WERE FULLY DEVELOPED, GOING AS THEY DID FROM *Adverse to Zhivago* [AMBER TO ZEN].

Comment: The two novels referenced here are *Anthony Adverse* (1933), by Hervey Allen, and the better-remembered *Dr. Zhivago* (1957), by Boris Pasternak. Nabokov's antipathy towards Pasternak's bestseller is well known. Indeed, it may be argued that *Pale Fire* and its fictional poet, John Shade, were created by Nabokov in part as a challenge to Pasternak's title character, also a poet. As such, *Pale Fire* presents itself as "[a]dverse to Zhivago," with the pun on "verse" further emphasizing the poetic medium of the challenge. Allen's long, picaresque novel was a popular bestseller in the early 1930s and became, in 1936, a Hollywood movie starring Fredric March and Olivia de Havilland.

99/183-4⁷

Turning to a little pocket diary I kept at the time I find ~~the distinct jotting under the date of Thursday 2 (on the day July 2 a succinct note establishing the fact that on Thursday July 2 I accompanied my friend on foot to the supermarket where he neighborhood shopping center—and no doubt imparted to him on the way information impelling the following delightful lines:~~

THERE ARE EVENTS, STRANGE HAPPENINGS, THAT STRIKE
THE MIND AS EMBLEMATIC. THEY ARE LIKE
LOST SIMILES ~~drift~~ ADRIFT WITHOUT A STRING,
ATTACHED TO NOTHING. THUS THAT NORTHERN KING,
(~~<XX> to be composed with <XX>~~
<XX> poetic metaphor)
WHOSE DESPERATE ESCAPE FROM PRISON WAS
BROUGHT OFF SUCCESSFULLY ONLY BECAUSE

⁷ This passage directly precedes Kinbote's invented variant in the note to line 70.

SOME FORTY OF HIS FOLLOWERS THAT NIGHT
IMPERSONATED HIM AND APED HIS FLIGHT—

~~Seems made to be composed <XX>~~

<XX> poetic metaphor

^HE *would have* NEVER [WOULD HAVE] ~~escaped~~ ^^REACHED THE
^^^WESTERN^^^ COAST^^ HAD NOT A FAD SPREAD AMONG ~~the~~ HIS SECRET
SUPPORTERS, ROMANTIC, HEROIC DAREDEVILS,^ OF IMPERSONATING THE
FLEEING KING. THEY ~~had dressed~~ ^RIGGED THEMSELVES OUT TO LOOK^ LIKE HIM
—<XX>, ~~white sport shirt, gray slacks and moccasins~~— ^IN RED SWEATERS AND RED
CAPS,^ AND POPPED UP HERE AND THERE, COMPLETELY BEWILDERING THE
REVOLUTIONARY POLICE.

His signalment was on every telephone post, in every police station.

116/242

97-98 *A curio: Red Sox Beat Yanks 5-4 on Chapman's Homer*

The [A] REFERENCE is presumably to ^such American games as ~~laerosse~~
^^baseball^^ or basketball^ <XX> or hockey, but why is it followed by [TO] THE TITLE OF a
^KEATS'^ FAMOUS SONNET by <XX>? <XX> If the “curio” is supposed to be merely a
misprint the garbling <XX> seems too pointless to be really humorous.

Comment: The references to various sports do not appear here in 1E because Nabokov moved them to the beginning of the note to line 130 (“I never bounced a ball or swung a bat”).

117/308

[FRANKLY] I [TOO] NEVER EXCELLED IN SOCCER OR *hockey* [CRICKET], *our*
two main games.[:] I AM A PASSABLE HORSEMAN, A VIGOROUS THOUGH
UNORTHODOX *swimmer* [SKIER, A GOOD SKATER, A TRICKY WRESTLER,] AND AN
ENTHUSIASTIC ROCK CLIMBER.

Comment: This passage is misplaced in the HM at the end of the note to 130, instead of

at the beginning. It was apparently written after Nabokov decided to remove the sports references in the note to line 98.

120/257

~~Flight was discussed almost daily through a conspirator on the premises who was in touch with all the <XX> young Royalists in town. But their schemes had hardly more than an artistic value.~~ ¶ A POWERFUL MOTORBOAT HAD BEEN PREPARED IN A ~~sea~~ COASTAL CAVE ^NEAR BLAWICK (BLUE COVE)^ [IN WESTERN ZEMBLA], BEYOND THE ~~mountain ridge~~ ^CHAIN OF TALL MOUNTAIN^ WHICH SEPARATED THE CITY FROM THE SEA; THE IMAGINED REFLECTION[S] OF THE TREMBLING TRANSPARENT WATER ON THE ROCK WALL AND BOAT ~~was~~ [WERE] TANTALIZING[,] BUT NONE OF THE SCHEMERS ~~ut~~ COULD SUGGEST ~~to the king, who was getting impatient and angry,~~ HOW THE KING *should* [COULD] ~~through its fortifications~~ ESCAPE FROM HIS CASTLE AND PASS ^SAFELY^ THROUGH ITS FORTIFICATIONS.

122/264

HIS CAMP BED AND [A] *an old-fashioned* BEDTABLE HAD BEEN PLACED, FACING THE WINDOW, IN THE *a1* [NORTHEAST] CORNER *of the board*. At *a5* [EAST] WAS THE TURQUOISE DOOR; *at e1* [NORTH], THE DOOR OF THE GALLERY; *at h5* [WEST], THE DOOR OF THE CLOSET; *at e8* [SOUTH], THE WINDOW.

Comment: Nabokov here employs chess notation, a move that would have anticipated the chess game between Mr. Campbell and Mr. Beauchamp a little later in the note. Following along in the same passage, the king's gaze stops "at e8" instead of "at the casement." On the back of this index card (264) Nabokov drew a square to represent the room, with markings and labels for the window, doors, and corner bed.

*****/431**

235 *Life is a message scribbled in the dark*

One is reminded of a certain fragment from a Sumerian poem discussed some

thirty years ago, I believe, in ~~the~~ ^{an amphiloical society's} ~~proceedings of an amphiloical society:~~

71 . . . it is a dream . . . it is a sleep

72 . . . silence

Comment: This uncanceled variant, Kinbote's note to line 235, does not appear at all in 1E. Circled at the bottom of the index card is a marginal notation: "1930 Am. Phil. Soc. Proc." This would seem to refer either to the American Philological Society Proceedings or to the American Philosophical Society Proceedings from 1930. I have not been able to locate anything relevant in either group's proceedings from 1930. I have, however, located a later article by Samuel Noah Kramer,⁸ published in the 1946 *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* (Vol. 90, No. 2), which contains the passage quoted above, with precisely the same line numbers and use of ellipses. Kramer's article, titled "Heroes of Sumer: A New Heroic Age in World History and Literature," presents summaries of all of the extant Sumerian epics, including five tales featuring the hero Gilgamesh. The quoted passage is from Kramer's translation of the last of these five tales, "Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living." The question, then, is why Nabokov thought to include a direct allusion to this obscure, and only partially extant, epic. The answer may lie in a possible analogy to Kinbote's experience, and in the poem's reference to a "cedar land." In the story, Gilgamesh comes to realize that he will not be granted immortality and therefore decides to "raise up a name for himself before he meets his destined end" (Kramer 126). The task he chooses for himself is to travel a long distance, crossing a range of high mountains, to reach the paradisaical Land of the Living, also known as the cedar land, where he will fell its cedars and bring them back. The land is protected by Utu, the sun god, as well as by seven demons and a monster called Huwawa; nevertheless, through a mix of strength and cunning, Gilgamesh overcomes these obstacles and seems well on his way to completing the task when the extant portion of the text leaves off.

How, then, is this relevant to Kinbote or to *Pale Fire* as a whole? It seems possible that Nabokov was toying with a connection between the cedar land and Cedarn, Utana, Kinbote's

⁸ Kramer's *New York Times* obituary states that he was "one of the foremost authorities on the ancient Sumerian language and literature" (Wilford). He was the first to translate and interpret many of the most important Sumerian texts, including "Gilgamesh and the Land of the Living," the title of which was Kramer's creation.

alleged location during the writing of the commentary. Cedarn means “of cedar,” pointing to the town’s being, in a literal sense, a land of cedars, and Utana, while clearly a portmanteau blend of Utah and Montana, recalls Utu. It is worth noting, too, that the town name Cedarn is likely an invention of Kinbote, rather than a real location in the world of *Pale Fire* (see my note on card 488), in which case Kinbote has explicitly chosen to make the connection between his own story and that of Gilgamesh. If so, it would comport with a larger analogy between the two figures. Like Gilgamesh, Kinbote is motivated by his knowledge that his time is running out. Therefore, he is determined to “raise up a name for himself” by traveling across (or into) high mountains (the Rockies) to a land of cedars, where he will perform the task (writing the commentary) that will secure his fame.

We are left to consider now why Kinbote chose these particular lines to quote. In the Gilgamesh tale, the lines occur at a moment of crisis, when Gilgamesh, in the midst of his journey through the mountains, falls into a deep sleep “from which he is awakened only after considerable time and effort” (127). Had Kinbote’s note survived the editing process, it would have fallen directly after the note to line 231, which ends with a series of questions and a fragmentary sentence: “Dark, disturbing thoughts” (168). Kinbote’s note to Shade’s idiomatic “Life is a message scribbled in the dark” would seem to be saying that the “it” in the Gilgamesh quotation refers to life itself. Life is but a dream and a sleep, followed only by silence. It is a note of despair, thus continuing the dark, disturbing train of thoughts from the previous note.

182/488

...HAD RENTED A LITTLE ~~<XX>~~ RANCH SOME FRIENDS OF ^THEIRS^, WHO WERE GOING ELSEWHERE, HAD AT CEDARN IN UTANA ~~<XX>~~ [ON] THE IDOMING BORDER (*now find me, killers!*)[.]

Comment: The parenthetical taunt seems to be directed at future assassins whom Kinbote imagines searching for the king. The implication here is that Kinbote has invented the town name Cedarn and the state names Utana and Idoming, in order to keep the “killers” from knowing his actual location. That these names are made-up makes sense when we consider that earlier in the same note, Kinbote reports that Sybil told him that the Shades would be vacationing

in “Wyoming or Utah or Montana” (182). If these actual states exist in the world of *Pale Fire*, then it is doubtful that their portmanteau counterparts, Utana and Idoming, also exist. Since, however, Nabokov removed the parenthetical, readers of *Pale Fire* have been unable to say with certainty whether or not Cedarn is an actual place name. It may be that Nabokov removed the line because it would have confused the present with the future. Kinbote’s killers could not read his taunt until after the publication of the commentary, by which time Kinbote, had he not killed himself, would surely have moved on, thus making the taunt irrelevant.

183/490

...HURLEYS’ TUMBLE-DOWN RANCH *in Rattlesnake Gulch*, LIFELESS.

185/495

...THROWBACK TO THE “CURIOUS GERMANS” (~~which Pope somewhere speaks of as being~~ WHO THREE CENTURIES ~~<XX>~~ AGO WERE THE FATHERS OF THE ^FIRST^ GREAT NATURALISTS.

Comment: Here again we see Nabokov resisting the urge to give his readers too much help in tracking down allusions. The phrase “curious Germans” is found in Pope’s poem, “Phryne.”

187/503

...ONLY UNDER THE CONDITION THAT JANE P.—DEEMED A PILLAR OF RELIABILITY—ACCOMPANY HER. *Hazel*, ^who^ had just struck up a warm friendship with kind-hearted Jane, accepted ~~<XX>~~ these terms, and one night the girls repaired to the barn, but h[H]ARDLY ^HAD THEY^ SETTLED DOWN ~~there~~ WHEN A[N] ^ELECTRIC^ STORM THAT WAS TO LAST ~~<XX>~~ ^ALL^ NIGHT *surrounded* [ENVELOPED] ~~the barn~~ ^THEIR REFUGE^ WITH SUCH THEATRICAL ~~claps~~ ULULATIONS AND FLASHES AS TO MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO ATTEND TO ANY INDOOR *ghost* [SOUNDS OR LIGHTS].

187/504

...WOULD COME INSTEAD[.] BUT HAZEL *was terrified of boys* [FLATLY REFUSED THIS NEW ARRANGEMENT]

187/505

...^A^ TYPESCRIP~~T~~ BASED ON ~~<XX>~~ JOTTINGS ~~<XX>~~ MADE ON THE *stop* [SPOT] (*her mother who has ^should have^ them may will verify, ^I hope,^ the transcription*)

188/510

PADA ATA LANE PAD NOT OGO OLD WART ALAN THER TALE F[E]UR FAR RANT LANT ~~<XX>~~ TAL TOLD

Comment: Readers have long puzzled over the errant math that appears in the passage relevant to the barn ghost's message. In 1E, Kinbote says that Hazel made eighty attempts, with seventeen receiving no response from the ghost (189). The transcription, however, contains sixty-one characters and seventeen spaces (granting a space at the end), for a total of 78. There seem to be two letters missing. The HM reveals that Nabokov simply made a mistake. The original line of transcription contains sixty-three characters and seventeen spaces, for a total of eighty. The word "feur" in 1E appears as "fur" in HM, and in the HM three letters are heavily canceled between "lant" and "tal." Above each of the letters, including the canceled letters, Nabokov placed a dot, with a downstroke over every tenth letter—clearly a counting device. In all, he made sixty-three marks. In the lower margin of the card he even did the math, writing a simple equation of $63 + 17 = 80$. But he made two errors. When he went back and canceled the three letters between "lant" and "tal," he forgot to change the number in Kinbote's calculation, something he again failed to do when, sometime later, he changed "fur" to "feur." In the end, he took away three letters and added one, for a deficit of two.

192/524⁹

⁹ This passage, canceled lightly with four horizontal lines, appears between the third and fourth stanzas of Shade's "The Nature of Electricity."

~~{Further on}^In the next line^ the poet supposes that when in repairing an electric gadget he happens “to touch a little bitter wire”^it is^ some old enemy biting him. Two {more}^other^ stanzas discuss the heavy toil to which we mercilessly condemn the imprisoned souls {who}^we plug in to^ make our machines run <XX> (“this jump spark may have been the mind of one who could the ages span”). {The}^A glorious^ final stanza redeems some of the <XX> poem’s easy didactic wit:~~

194/528

I BELIEVE I CAN GUESS ^~~(IN MY BOOKLESS MOUNTAIN CAVE)~~^ WHAT POEM IS MEANT <XX> BUT WITHOUT LOOKING IT UP I ~~hesitate~~ ^WOULD NOT WISH^ TO NAME ITS ~~distinguished~~ AUTHOR. ^ANYWAY^[,] I DEPLORE MY FRIEND’S VICIOUS THRUSTS AT THE MOST DISTINGUISHED POETS OF HIS DAY. ^~~{The reader knows} My reader must help me^ Here I sit in my bookless {mountain} cave; but thou, my mirror twin, toilest.~~

~~Here I sit bookless ^and idle^ in my mountain cave but ^I know^ thou toilest, my reader, my mirror twin.~~

Comment: The poet in question is of course T. S. Eliot. Eliot’s name is “toilest” spelled backwards. References to “my reader” and “my mirror twin” are an allusion both to Baudelaire’s famous poem “Au Lecteur,” which ends with the line “*Hypocrite lecteur, —mon semblable, —mon frere,*” and to Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” the first section of which ends with Baudelaire’s line. It appears that Nabokov, after abandoning the canceled sentences here, went back and added “in my bookless mountain cave” to the first sentence of the passage.

204/570

...WHETHER OR NOT IN THE COURSE OF ^POSSIBLE^ EXCURSIONS ALONG THE COAST ~~(for surely they did go sight seeing despite the exigencies of a task that had been preceded, no doubt, by just a few miscarriages)~~ THEY EVER REACHED CAP *Turque* [TURC]...

Comment: The “task” at hand is the conception of Hazel. But how could Kinbote know

whether or not Sybil had miscarried previously? Apparently, this was, in Nabokov's eyes, too speculative even for Kinbote.

217/625

...AND THE BARBAROUS TRADITIONS OF SLAVERY ~~with their~~ ~~insidious~~ inquisitions (“would you want your daughter to marry a negro?”).

217/627

...THE GENTEEL ~~adore~~ ENDORSEMENTS AND NOW USED “COLORED MAN” FOR “~~nigger~~ [NEGRO]”...

218/627

...(A SUDDEN BROTHER HERE OF THE “HEBREW GENTLEMAN” IN VICTORIAN ~~novels~~ NOVELETTES) *where young Beau has to endure a money lender's “oily affability”*

Comment: See, for example, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 1879 novel, *The Cloven Foot*, in which we encounter Mr. Mosheh, a diamond merchant, who addresses a customer with “oily affability” (72) or Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen's *A Daughter of the Philistines* (1883), where Simon Loewenthal, a stock broker, presents himself “with all the oily affability of his race” (39).

200/550

but Beyond a general impression of indecency OUR PREOCCUPIED PLOTTER DID NOT REGISTER *anything of all this* [ANY OF THESE DETAILS] [~~except an~~ ~~beyond a~~ ~~general impression of indecency~~] [AND MERELY EXPERIENCED A GENERAL IMPRESSION OF INDECENCY]. “GORDON IS A MUSICAL PRODIGY[,]” SAID MISS BAUD ~~rather~~ [,] AND Gordon [THE BOY] WINCED. *He is also hockey champion, she added went on and Gordon winced again sighed.* [“]GORDON, she said, WILL YOU SHOW THE GARDEN TO THIS GENTLEMAN? ~~All right, said the~~

224/648

...BUT FROM ALL FORMS OF SACRAMENTAL WORSHIP. *I often reproached him for never visiting the splendid church which had just been erected at the end of Shakespeare Avenue.*

230/667

SO I HAD ^YOUNG PEOPLE, STUDENTS;[:]^ THE FIRST TIME, THE SON OF A *Shah*, [PADISHAH;] THE SECOND TIME, MY GARDENER,[:] AND THE THIRD TIME <XX> ~~boy in the index~~ ^THAT GIRL^ with ^IN [THE] BLACK LEOTARD WITH a [THAT] LONG WHITE FACE AND^ EYELIDS PAINTED ~~green, and the~~ A GHOULISH GREEN whom my <want one>¹⁰ ~~old friend used ^I am told^ to give ^I am sure <Lucid>^ tutorial advise in the ^secluded^ office of ^a^ considerate <XX> colleague ^while they <XX>^ who would pace ^in his dreams^ <XX> ^<long> silent^ corridors to head off elderly ladies with no sense of humor or pity or mere affinity towards a well-meaning and loving man.~~

Comment: This passage is admittedly hard to decipher, there being several words and phrases that don't seem to naturally fit the syntax of the sentence. Nevertheless, the gist of the canceled passage seems to be that Kinbote was told that Shade used a colleague's office to meet privately with the girl in ballerina black. The "elderly ladies" are most probably cleaning ladies. The implications of this passage, had it survived, would surely have affected readers' understanding of the relationship between John and Sybil Shade.

235/682 (back)¹¹

In my "chance inn," a log cabin in Cedarn, Utana, the venetian blinds plagiarise the poet's line 612-614. Both motels are still open but the only people around are weekend hunters. At first the diabolical radio music coming from what I thought was a carousel or fair across the

¹⁰ "wanton"?

¹¹ This paragraph is written on the unnumbered back of card 682, the front of which contains Kinbote's note to line 615 ("two tongues"). It is a version of the last paragraph of the previous note, which, in the HM, appears on card 680. Since this variant was supplanted entirely by the text on card 680, I have eschewed the variorum formatting used in the other transcriptions and have not noted insertions. All canceled text is illegible.

road—it turned out to be a transient tourist camp—was so bad that I almost moved to another place, but the campers forestalled me. I have had a sturdier table put in and a more comfortable chair. Nevertheless, I am very lonely, very lonely, and this work of annotation is not progressing well, and a cold wind rattles through the withered aspens, and my little fisherman is gone.

***/696

676 *delights*

These are manifold. Impaling deep tenderness on the stake of strong passion is, of course, the classicist's choice. Other ways to paradise may be tried, as the one we heraldists call engoulant or inguillant, or vorant. The ways to paradise are narrow and ^but^ a good boy never chokes ^on the gorged sword^. The more cultivated lover likes to face his armed twin. Thus the green spark that lit the caveman's face spurted forth from two redwood sticks. The ways to paradise ^sometimes^ cannot be told sometimes from those of ^to^ hell. Blasphemy, insomnia and disgust.

"Oh let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!"

Comment: This undated card is placed between Kinbote's notes to lines 671-672 and line 678. The word "delights" is found in the uncanceled variant (discussed above) in which Shade reveals that his book, *The Untamed Seahorse*, investigates "the delights / Byron derived from little catamites." Like Shade's line, this passage was removed during the revision process and does not appear in 1E. In heraldry, *engoulant* means "partly swallowed" and *vorant* means "devouring" or "swallowing." One is reminded of an image from *Lolita*, where Humbert describes "a choking snake sheathing whole the flayed trunk of a shoat" (134). I have not been able to find any evidence of the term *inguillant*. One wonders if it might be rooted in "inguin-," meaning "groin." The last sentence, in quotation marks, is from *King Lear* (1.5.40). Had it survived the revision process, this meditation would arguably have qualified as the most sexually explicit passage in the novel. It is unclear whether Nabokov first revised the lines in Shade's poem, thus making this passage extraneous, or vice-versa. One imagines, however, that had he wanted to keep the passage, he could have found a way to include it, even without the corresponding line in "Pale Fire."

243/704

WHY OUR POET CHOSE TO GIVE HIS ^1958^ HURRICANE A LITTLE[-]USED SPANISH NAME [(SOMETIMES GIVEN TO PARROTS)] ^INSTEAD OF “Jane” [LINDA] OR “Clarissa” [LOIS],^ IS NOT CLEAR.

Comment: Nabokov realized that, since hurricanes are named in alphabetical order each year, his replacement names for Lolita also needed to start with L. A marginal notation at the bottom of this card says “Autumn 1958,” indicating that Nabokov knew a fall hurricane would typically have a name beginning with a letter somewhere in the middle of the alphabet. In the real 1958, the last named storm was Janice, which formed on October 5. This is similar to Jane, just as Clarissa is similar to Cleo, the actual name of the third storm of 1958.

246/721

FAIN WOULD I ELUCIDATE THIS BUSINESS OF PARACHUTING BUT (^IT^ BEING A MATTER OF MERE SENTIMENTAL TRADITION RATHER THAN A UTILITARIAN METHOD OF TRANSPORTATION) THIS IS NOT STRICTLY NECESSARY IN THESE NOTES TO “Pale Fire” [PALE FIRE]. ~~Moreover I have observed that any digression leads to a kind of hellish washing machine rotation in my brain. ¶~~ WHILE KINGSLEY, THE BRITISH CHAUFFEUR, AN OLD AND ABSOLUTELY FAITHFUL RETAINER, WAS DOING HIS IMPERTURBABLE BEST TO CRAM THE BULKY AND ILL-FOLDED ~~digression~~ ^PARACHUTE^ INTO THE BOOT...

247/722

...WHICH TOLD OF THE “DISTINGUISHED POET’S” HOSPITALIZATION. ~~From this account I learned that his heart had stopped pumping for ^{about}^ more than ten minutes {and} ^but^ that an alert doctor had {opened his chest} ^made an incision^ with a pen knife and compressed his heart by hand to keep the blood circulating upon which it had finally resumed beating.~~

Comment: This version of Shade’s attack was clearly influenced by the *Daily News*

account of an actual resuscitation that Nabokov recorded on a notecard in 1957 (see below for transcription).

250/732-3

...ONCE CONFUSED ~~<XX>~~ NEURALGIA WITH *cerebroscerosis* [CEREBRAL SCLEROSIS]^)^, ~~rien que ça, as the French say;~~ AS I ~~<XX>~~ GATHERED FROM SHADE HIMSELF[,] NO ^EMERGENCY^ INCISION, ~~by means of a handy penknife, which nobody carries now anyway) was~~ ~~<XX>~~ WAS *made* [PERFORMED]; THE HEART WAS NOT ~~massa~~ COMPRESSED BY HAND; AND IF IT STOPPED PUMPING AT ALL, THE PAUSE MUST HAVE BEEN VERY BRIEF [AND SO TO SPEAK SUPERFICIAL].

Comment: The deadpan French phrase means “nothing but that.” The description here matches the earlier canceled passage about the newspaper account.

259/765

“MOUNTAINS,” HE ANSWERED. *He may have said “a mountain” but I heard what I wanted to hear.*

262/773

SOME OF MY RECORDS ARE: HATE-LOVE IN THREE, ^LASS-MALE IN FOUR, ^LIVE-DEAD IN *eight (with a “hump” in midcourse!)* [FIVE (WITH “LEND” IN THE MIDDLE)].

Comment: Nabokov was three over par the first time through the course from live to dead. His route may have been: live-lime-limp-lump-hump-hemp-heap-head-dead. Nabokov preserved a notecard (773a) full of his attempts, which I now transcribe:

Front of card:

live dive give

live ~~five fine find~~ line lind lend lead dead

live ~~livy levy~~ dive five

~~line aine anne~~

live ~~fine find fend~~

line} bine bind bend bead dead

live-leve-lene-lend-lead-dead

Back of card:

hate have hove love

~~last east ease base bale male~~

lass ~~mass~~ ^{^mast^} bass base bale male

live hive ~~hire fire~~ hire ~~dire dirt~~ diet

here herd head dead

~~dead~~ live-love-lore-lord-load-lead-dead

live-hive-hire-here

herd-head-dead

live-~~love~~-lore-lord ~~load~~ load lead dead

270/803

...WE FIND THE FOLLOWING, LIGHTLY DELETED, VARIANT:

~~And yet not thus is the main problem solved.~~

~~An artist is a person not involved~~

~~In the surrounding world where he but rents~~

~~A carrel, far from the noisy malcontents,~~

~~Brutes, bores, class-conscious Philistines, Freud, Marx,~~

~~Fake thinkers, puffed-up poets, frauds and sharks.~~

Comment: In the top margin, just above these lines, Nabokov tried out the following barb: The cheap ¹and silly ~~<XX>~~ ¹⁻²humbuggery ²⁻of Chatterley.

270/803

AN AGE IN WHICH A PACK OF ROGUES CAN BLUFF

Selenographs; an age that could suppose

Auden wrote poetry, and Faulkner prose.

~~A-d-n~~

~~F-lkn-r~~

Comment: These lines are altered in 1E, with the line about Auden and Faulkner replaced by the jab at Dr. Schweitzer that Nabokov composed for the variant directly following this one.

270/804

^Shade seems to have been faced here by a certain embarrassment of riches.^ The end of the penultimate line, and the last one are replaced in the margin by three additional tries, all struck out in succession

...an age that found

Eliot original and Pound profound

...an age

That saw in Dr. Schweitzer a great sage.

...age that mistook

Dr. Zhivago for its greatest book

Comment: This passage, with its three alternate endings, does not appear in 1E, where it is replaced by a different passage (“England where poets flew...”) not appearing in HM. For the second time, Nabokov deleted a reference to *Dr. Zhivago*, perhaps fearing that he would seem jealous by protesting too much.

271/805

FREUD

~~How my friend {roared with laughter} chuckled the day I called expressly on him (interrupting to his profound relief no doubt ^the visit of^ a local politician) to show him two tidbits I had found among my papers:~~

283/848

~~...DISMISSING his awful ^THE SICK MAN’S agonizing^ EXISTENCE, she turned to~~

[TO ATTEND TO THE WANTS OF] MR. *Reginald* [GERALD] EMERALD WHO WAS ~~takin~~ *wanted to take* ~~<XX>~~ [TAKING] OUT A FAT BESTSELLER IN A *^glossy^ white jacket with black and red letters* [CELLOPHANE JACKET].

Comment: Nabokov mistakenly renamed Gerald Emerald, calling him Reginald throughout much of the latter half of the HM. In the HM, Emerald is not simply trying to check out any bestseller. Readers familiar with the Nabokov's hardcover editions will recognize the book with the red and black lettering as none other than *Lolita*, by Vladimir Nabokov, a bestseller in 1958. Alas, Nabokov had already established, via Kinbote's note on Hurricane Lolita, that in the world of *Pale Fire*, Nabokov's bestseller does not exist. Emerald could not, therefore, be checking it out of the university library. Still, one regrets the loss of this delightful self-reference.

287/869

~~^On the way home^~~ I HAD [JUST] MET SYBIL SPEEDING TOWNWARD (~~you~~ ~~^always^ drove {awfully} ^frightfully^ fast, Sybil dear!~~) AND ~~hoped so~~ ~~^THEREFORE^~~ *had* [NURSED] SOME HOPES FOR THE EVENING.

Index

309/970¹²

his thoughts on little anglers ^angels^ and ingles; HIS SENSE OF HUMOR, 680;

Comment: This uncanceled variant may have been related to the deleted note to line 676 ("Delights"), though that note does not specifically mention the boy angler from the note to line 609. The note to line 680, concerning "Hurricane Lolita" does not seem connected to the variant.

315/1029

ZEMBLA, A DISTANT NORTHERN LAND.

Comment: Beneath this, circled, Nabokov wrote "nothing more, no ref." The circle indicates a direction to the typesetter: not to be transcribed as part of the text. Below this,

¹² Part of the Index entry for "Kinbote."

however, Nabokov included a sentence in square brackets, which, had he not canceled it out with a heavy, wavy line, would have appeared at the bottom of the last page of *Pale Fire*. The line reads “[index not completed by the late Dr. ^Vseslav^ Botkin].” Several mysteries would have been solved by this line, including Kinbote’s real identity as Botkin, the fact that Botkin and King Charles II, whose full name is Charles Xavier Vseslav, share a name, and that Botkin/Kinbote has passed away, presumably by his own hand. But the inclusion of the line would raise the question of who its author might be (since it was written after Botkin’s death). Ultimately, Nabokov decided to let readers discover, or infer, these plot elements without further assistance.

SUBSTANTIVE OMISSIONS IN HOLOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT

The entries that follow describe instances where the holograph manuscript (HM) does not include passages that appear in the first published edition (1E). In every case, the omitted lines must have been added during the revision process that occurred in late November and early December of 1961, prior to the setting of the first galley proofs (G1). Omissions mentioned in the section on substantive variants have not been repeated here.

Foreword

18/13 In the passage concerning Frank the publisher, the sentence “Insert before a professional” is missing.

19/17 Missing parenthetical “(the two last of the four ‘white-nosed months,’ as we call them)”; missing “—and this at the latitude of Palermo.”

26/35 After “fleshy, Hogarthian tippler,” missing “of indeterminate sex.”

Commentary

76/101

Missing “of Angus MacDiarmid’s ‘incoherent transactions’ and”

79/112

Missing “cavesdrop”

Comment: Nabokov evidently drew the definition of stillicide from his copy of the second edition of *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, which provided the wording for Kinbote’s entry. Like the HM entry, it does not mention cavesdrop.

83/126

In passage about the Goldsworth family, HM is missing entire sentence describing portraits of “Mr and Mrs. G” and the “beloved early Picasso.”

148/350

HM does not include the final sentence of the note to line 167: “My slip—change to sixty-first.”

Comment: This was a happy accident. It appears that the mistake was, at first, Nabokov’s own. Rather than fixing it, he simply transferred the blame to Kinbote and allowed us to enjoy the joke at Kinbote’s expense.

166/425

After “because they were afraid of Hazel” the phrase “and afraid to hurt her” is missing.

173/451

Missing “and the fackeltanz in the park.”

174/451

The conclusion of the note to line 275 is missing, beginning with “After line 274 there is a false start” through the end of the note.

184/493

Missing entire last paragraph of note to line 319, concerning American and European

faunal names.

218/630

Missing last sentence of note to line 490, concerning Exton's natural history museum and Samuel Shade's birds.

EXTRATEXTUAL NOTES

Interleaved with the cards that comprise the HM, Nabokov included several notecards from the late fifties, which contain observations, thoughts, and images that would later become part of *Pale Fire*. These were never meant to be included in the novel (as written), but were, it seems, left there as plums for future researchers. Though not officially part of the novel, the cards are numbered according to their position in the HM, just as if they were part of the manuscript proper. I present some of them here, in order of appearance, with the card number. In addition to the cards shown below, Nabokov provided a few cards containing material that he included in Kinbote's commentary. These include the Proust quotes from the note to line 181, the quotes from Pfister and Fromm included in the note to line 929, and the key to Shakespeare's trees from the note to line 998.

I have tried in my transcriptions to preserve the lineation and approximate spacing of the handwritten text as it appears on the index cards.

89

Oct. 7, 1957

Pale Fire

Waxwings: knocking themselves out in
full flight against the reflected world of
our picture window leaving a little gray fluff
on the pane.

Feeding to-day in the autumn sun
on the shale-blue berries of the juniper

near the orange-brown hickory tree.

The painted yellow tips of their
tail feathers, the vermillion dashes ornamenting
the tender-gray wings.

93

line 14 Crystal¹³ Pale Fire

30.1.57

Snowflakes falling, mild,
shapeless, slow and opaque, of a dull
dark white against the light wight
of the noontime sky

Describe traces of tyres on bright winter morn

Comment: For all his genius, Nabokov was a rather inattentive speller, quite capable of spelling the same word two different ways within the same sentence. This is probably the earliest note (January 1957) containing imagery that eventually made it into the final text.

102

3.Aug.1957

Pale Fire

Snatch of conversation:

I have also felt that Finnigan's Wake
is but an extension of Robert Southey's
letter to Grosvenor C. Bedford ("Dear
Stumparumper") of Sept. 14, 1821.

Southey dubs the Lingo-Grande. There
are more samples in a letter of Dec. 24, 1822
to same (a cousin apparently)

¹³ circled and erased

See also Joyce
in other box

Comment: Some have argued that Nabokov intentionally caused Kinbote to misspell the title of Joyce's work (Finnigan's instead of Finnegans) in the note to line 12, but the card reveals that Nabokov himself was misspelling Joyce's work as far back as 1957. More proof that "Finnigan's" is an unintentional mistake can be found in Nabokov's corrections to the subsequent Penguin edition, where he explicitly directs the copy editor to change "Finnigan's" to "Finnegans" ("Corrections").

241

13 Oct 1957

Pale Fire

The book lay open at the index: moon, moonrise
moor, moral

Anthology of poetry

247

Apr. 8, 1957 123-124

Pale Fire

Life's sweetest pleasure lies in meditations on death.

Infinite foretime and infinite aftertime
close like two great wings, et c'est tout.

In the very first scene a corpulent solemn
gentleman arrives with resplendent luggage in
a taxi and takes over the house. Neighbors are

interested. He is the butler (hired by
ex-King Felix the First in New York)

Comment: The line numbers in the heading, which must have been added later, refer to similar lines in “Pale Fire” (more accurately, lines 122-124).

414

13.III.57

Pale Fire

A wonderful point in favor of some kind of
personal hereafter is this:

When the mind rejects as childishly
absurd a paradise with musical angels
or abstract colonnades with Horace
and Milton in togas conversing and
walking together through the eternal twilight,
or the protracted voluptas of the
Orient or any other eternity—such
as the one with devils and porcupines—
we forget that if we could have
imagined this life before living it
would have seemed more improbable than all our hereafters.

720

26 May 1957

Pale Fire

Her heart stopped pumping for 2 ½ hours
during heart surgery. A surgeon compressed
her heart by hand to keep ^the^ blood circulating

and finally it resumed beating.

(Daily News)

Comment: The details noted here come from a wire report that appeared in Sunday newspapers throughout the country on May 26, 1957. Like John Shade, the patient, Mrs. Dorothy Hull, declared herself temporarily dead, saying “I never knew I had died until they told me yesterday” (“I Never Knew” 1A).

THE GALLEY PROOFS

Three sets of galley proofs were exchanged between Putnam’s and Nabokov. For each set, Nabokov submitted handwritten corrections, as well as responses to queries from the copy editor. Nabokov’s corrections were largely accidental rather than substantive, with one notable exception. In his 2012 *Nabokov Online Journal* article, “*Pale Fire*’s Black Crown,” James Ramey revealed his discovery of a hand-drawn crown that Nabokov inserted into novel’s title page in his corrections to G1. The crown (in printed form) appears on the title page of 1E, but not on successive editions by other publishers. Ramey argues convincingly that the missing crown jewels in the novel were hidden by Nabokov on his title page, in the form of the crown he inserted into G1.

G1 does not contain any other substantive additions, but Nabokov did provide the copy editor with several interesting clarifications, most of these in response to the editor’s queries. With regard to the name Repburg, whom Kinbote calls “a landscaper of genius” (93), Nabokov wrote, “a modern Repton,” a reference to eighteenth century English landscape architect, Humphry Repton.

To a query about the word “adeling,” Nabokov wrote, “var. of atheling; Webster, 1960.” In *Webster’s*, adeling is indeed given as a variant of atheling, meaning “the heir apparent or prince of the royal family.”

Nabokov also directs the copy editor to the table of measures in *Webster’s* for a definition of “alin,” which Kinbote uses in his note to line 71 (106). Alin is defined as an Icelandic

measure, equivalent to two feet.

Webster's has no entry for "skoramis," so Nabokov instead provided his own definition ("chamberpot of a poet") and directed the editor to "see Browning's letters and *Classic. Dict.*" To my knowledge, Browning does not mention this word in his letters. Rather, it is included in his poem "Pachiarotto," where the speaker cautions his critics to make haste, lest his housemaid empty "on your pates . . . / what, pan or pot, bowl or *skoramis* / First comes to her hand" (189). This usage mirrors Kinbote's report of John Shade's quip about book reviewers: "I have never bothered to lean out of my window and empty my skoramis on some poor hack's pate" (155).

Perhaps the largest typographical error in G1 was the setting of the faculty club scene (note to line 894) as a playlet, with names capitalized and dialogue italicized. Nabokov wrote in the margin that "The thing is a skit on the conversations in Boswell's *Life of Dr Johnson*, old editions." This clarification amplifies the Boswellian echo that sounds throughout the novel, beginning with the epigraph regarding Johnson's cat, Hodge.

The G2 and G3 page proofs provide little in terms of substantive corrections or comments, with one exception. In Kinbote's note to lines 376-377, he includes a parenthetical that says "see Forward and note to line 894." Readers have wondered whether the misspelling of Foreword was Kinbote's or Nabokov's, and now we have the answer. To the copy editor's query about this spelling, Nabokov wrote an emphatic "STET," meaning "let it stand."¹⁴

NABOKOV'S MANUSCRIPTS

I have attempted in this essay to present a select history of the *Pale Fire* manuscript's composition and revision. That is to say, my efforts here are by no means comprehensive, and there is much work to be done. Given the excellent state of most of Nabokov's extant manuscripts, combined with the author's secure reputation as a giant of twentieth century letters, I hope we can look forward to even greater access to notes, manuscripts, diaries, and other materials related to the composition of his works. The advent of exciting digital technologies

¹⁴ All quotations from the galley proofs are used with kind permission of the Vladimir Nabokov estate and the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.

related to manuscript studies, combined with liberalized access to the manuscripts themselves, will, I hope, result in a new period in Nabokov Studies, wherein a focus on composition and revision will augment and, perhaps, transform the vibrant lines of interpretation that now exist.

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