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**JOHN SHADE'S DUPLICATE SELVES:
AN ALTERNATIVE SHADEAN THEORY OF
*PALE FIRE***

I. Hypothesis

In the concluding section of Brian Boyd's groundbreaking monograph, *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery*,¹ he writes that "there are many more discoveries to be made in *Pale Fire*: perhaps more direct or at least additional ways of reaching the same conclusions, or new consequences of these proposals" (254). This essay springs from the latter of Boyd's possibilities—a new conclusion based in large part on the premises established by Boyd both in his Shadean reading of *Pale Fire* in *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*² (hereafter *B1*) and in the later monograph (*B2*), where Boyd recants much of his earlier argument. Boyd's Shadean theory largely rests on the many connections between Shade's world and Kinbote's imaginary Zembla—a web of coincidences so vast and complex that, he asserts, they can only be the product of a single consciousness. In his revised theory, Boyd abandons the Shadean view—that John Shade wrote both poem and commentary—in order to assert that Hazel Shade's ghost is responsible for the connections between the two worlds, while Shade's ghost contributes the Gradus material to Kinbote's commentary.

This essay proposes a different and, we believe, simpler explanation. In short, we propose that the astonishing connections between the worlds of Shade and Kinbote may best be explained by a theory of internal authorship which posits that Kinbote is a secondary, semi-autonomous personality of John Shade—a personality that arrives on the scene via John Shade's

¹ Princeton UP, 1999.

² Princeton UP, 1991.

“heart attack” and finally succeeds in becoming the primary personality at the moment of John Shade’s demise on the evening of July 21, 1959. While such a theory may shock some readers, we believe that it is merited by a combination of internal and external evidence, including literary and historical precedent.

Until now, serious consideration of such a hypothesis has been confined primarily to the Nabokov listserv, where Carolyn Kunin first asserted the theory in 2002.³ Kunin sees the escape from Zemblia passage as an allegory for Shade’s “cerebral stroke,” and she views the entire work as a refiguring of Stevenson’s *Jekyll & Hyde*, with Kinbote and Gradus’ battle for dominance in Shade’s psyche eventually leading to Shade’s institutionalization. We will pick up Kunin’s thread regarding Stevenson a bit later in this essay, but it is necessary first to establish the roots of our theory.

Readers of Nabokov know that even though each of his novels stands on its own, when read together his works reveal their connections to each other. Characters from earlier novels play cameo roles in later ones, and many themes and motifs reappear, always with a new twist, across the breadth of his oeuvre. Our interest here lies with the particular theme of the Double, which plays an important role not just in *Pale Fire*, but in *The Eye*, *Despair*, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Lolita*, and the aborted novel that became the story “Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster.” Fortunately, most of the work establishing the outlines of the Double theme in these texts has been accomplished already by other critics. Of particular note are two essays by Julian Connolly that trace the Double theme back to Dostoevsky’s short novel, *The Double*. In “Madness and Doubling,” Connolly shows how in *The Eye* Nabokov “reshaped” elements of *The Double* “according to his own design, thereby creating a new work with an entirely different thrust” (130). In his much more comprehensive article, “Nabokov’s (Re)visions of Dostoevsky,” Connolly extends his argument, asserting that “the central theme found in *The Double* and developed in *The Eye* and *Despair* — the preoccupation of a character with an apparent alter ego and a concern over a possible mingling or exchange of identity — became an essential theme in Nabokov’s work from this point onwards” (147). Connolly then traces the theme as it appears in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Pale Fire*. In his analysis of the latter, Connolly argues that Nabokov

³ NABOKV-L@LISTSERV.UCSB.EDU. Kunin introduces her Shadean hypothesis on 29 Aug 2002, with the subject, “Fw: Alternate Interpretation of Pale Fire.” As with our theory, she identifies Shade’s October 17th “heart attack” as the crucial moment that spurs Kinbote’s ascension and John Shade’s decline. Over the years, Kunin has added to her original argument, including a clearer delineation of the *Jekyll & Hyde* connection on 27 Aug 2006, in a message titled “FW: Why hide?”

constructs his novel in such a way that the reader discerns an intriguing pattern of interlacing themes, details, and concerns between the lives of John Shade and Charles Kinbote. . . . The worlds evoked both through Shade's poem and through Kinbote's commentary breathe with an energy and independent life of their own. Their relationship is less one of imitation or replication than of counterpoint and complement. (148)

Connolly does not attempt to account for these "interlacing" patterns, but he asserts that their presence is a testament to Kinbote's (and Nabokov's) appreciation of "the mystery and beauty of patterns of recurrence in the world" (148-49). Curiously, Connolly never quite shows how any of the characters in *Pale Fire* manifest either an "alter ego" or "a concern over a possible mingling or exchange of identity." These are, however, the very elements our theory addresses. We will return to *The Eye*, *Despair*, and Dostoevsky's *The Double* a little later, as we investigate a number of literary predecessors important to our theory. But for now it is enough to note that *Pale Fire*, even in the most traditional of interpretations, merges into a long line of Double tales by Nabokov and others.

In Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (B2), Brian Boyd lists ten "covert concords" between poem and commentary, the totality of which would seem to point toward more than simple coincidence or authorial play. To note them all here would be superfluous, but several of these "concords" may merit special mention. One is the fact that "Shade, Kinbote, and Gradus all share the same birthday (July 5), although Shade is sixteen years older than the other two." Another coincidence consists of, as Boyd explains it,

[t]he odd links between the end of Canto One, which describes Shade's childhood fits, when he was 'tugged at by play death' as he played with a 'tin wheelbarrow pushed by a tin boy' (whom we discover to be black) and the end of Canto Four and Kinbote's note to line 1000, which contain Shade's anything but playful death, the wheelbarrow of 'Some neighbor's gardener' who disarms Gradus after Shade has been shot. (112-113)

To these coincidences Boyd later adds another when he notes that Shade says in Canto Three that he is "ready to become a floweret / Or a fat fly, but never, to forget." In the commentary, Kinbote tells us that Sybil Shade has called him "an elephantine tick; a king-sized botfly; a macaco worm; the monstrous parasite of a genius" (171-72). Since the botfly, a play on the name Botkin/Kinbote, is indeed a "fat fly," and since, as Boyd points out, Nabokov associated the

violet (thus “floweret”) with homosexuality, Shade’s lines could be read as “a sly disclosure that in *his* preparation for the hereafter, he is ready to become the ‘pansy’ Kinbote, the botfly ‘King-bot’” (*B2* 121-22).

Oddly enough, each of these examples represents a coincidence more easily explained by Boyd’s purely Shadean theory than by a theory in which Hazel inspires both her father and Kinbote. If, for example, we believe that Kinbote really did have a black gardener who trundled down the lane with an “empty barrow,” the relationship of this image to that of Shade’s clockwork toy is too tangible to have been created by Hazel’s ghost. She may be able to help Kinbote dream up certain Zemblan details, but she can’t conjure flesh and blood in New Wye. And if this is the case, then she also could not be responsible for the fat fly/botfly coincidence noted above. Under the scenario of *B2*, Shade has no inclination to “become the ‘pansy’ Kinbote,” and Hazel could hardly have coordinated a coincidence involving Shade’s poem, Sybil’s put-down, and Kinbote’s name and sexuality.⁴ As for the birthday coincidence, Hazel would not be necessary at all, and as Boyd himself points out, Kinbote rarely asserts that he is similar to John Shade; indeed, he often goes to great lengths to show how they are different. Therefore, it is hard to understand why Kinbote would fabricate his date of birth in order to make himself more like Shade.

How, then, do we account for the coincidence of dates, which Boyd, in a post to Nabokv-L in December 1997, declared “a strikingly gratuitous coincidence if it leads nowhere”? The coincidence of birth dates is as good a place as any to begin building a theory of multiple personalities (hereafter, the MP theory). Indeed, several coincidences involving dates may be the first indicators, even to first-time readers of the novel, that Kinbote, Shade and Gradus may share more than a single scene together in the yard of Judge Goldsworth’s house. As Gerard de Vries has pointed out,

[t]he three men have much in common. First, they form a kind of “time-team.” Gradus’ “departure for western-Europe,” “took place on the very day” that Shade was beginning Canto Two. The choice of Gradus to carry out the regicide took place on the same day that Shade “penned the first lines,” and “Shade’s heart attack practically coincided with the disguised king’s arrival in America.” (241)

⁴ In a 1998 post to Nabokv-L, critic Gennady Barabtarlo wrote that the “floweret-pansy line” was among the most convincing of Boyd’s arguments for a pure Shadean reading of the novel. Boyd never sufficiently explains in *B2* how his new theory accounts for the coincidence.

De Vries also points out that Gradus' father's name is Martin, a bird of the swallow family, which aligns him with Sybil Shade, whose maiden name, Irondell, comes from the French for swallow. Likewise, Shade's cedar waxwing closely resembles the "silktail" in the armorial bearings of Zembla's King Charles II (241). As we shall see, these consonant details are but a few of the many which tie the three men together.

Opposition to Shadean theorizing rests heavily on the character inconsistency that Shade-as-conscious-artist provokes: the characteristics of John Shade — reasonable, staid, a lover of tradition — do not seem to correspond with an artist who would create alternate identities for creative purposes. But few theorists have considered the possibility that Shade may remain the sole author while not *deliberately* creating either Kinbote or Gradus. A key element of this line of thinking is the power of Shade's subconscious, which, when piqued by trauma,⁵ could trigger an instance — or instances — of dissociated identity. By investigating Shade's October 17th attack, its connection to the fits of his childhood, and a selection of the text's allusions that have not yet been thoroughly unpacked, a web can be identified which both supports Shade as sole author and resolves the major anti-Shadean objections. The case for Kinbote and Gradus as expressions of dissociated identity provides a portrait of John Shade that corresponds with reader expectations yet does not negate his artistic vision; moreover, it accommodates key passages of poem and commentary that have thus far been unresolved elements of the text as a whole.

A connective theme of Shade's poem is his exploration of death and the hereafter, and each canto includes a significant existential experience or reflection from Shade's life. He concludes his first canto with a description of "a strange fainting fit" that afflicted him in his eleventh year (P137).⁶ A "thread of subtle pain" in his head, "always present," on one afternoon triggers a sudden loss of consciousness (P140-46). While in this "momentary swoon," he seems to have an out-of-body experience, feeling "distributed through space and time" (P148). The episode prompts more such experiences: the blackouts occur every afternoon for one winter but then cease, and, pronounced well by a doctor who attributes the spells to growing pains, the child Shade begins to forget about them. As the man reminiscing, however, Shade compares the fits to an act of molestation and notes that "[t]he wonder lingers and the shame remains" (P166). In Canto Three, as part of his discourse on death, Shade describes the night of October 17th, 1958, when he experienced as an adult another fainting fit (P691-92). The evidence suggesting that this

⁵ Either organic or psychological trauma, both of which have been linked and studied in cases of dissociative identities.

⁶ All quotations from John Shade's poem "Pale Fire" will be cited with a "P" followed by the line number from the poem. All other quotations from the novel will be cited by page number only.

episode is of the same kind as those he experienced as a child rests in the similarity of descriptions. As a child, Shade experienced “a sudden sunburst in my head. / And then black night. That blackness was sublime,” while during the 1958 swoon, “A sun of rubber was convulsed and set; / and blood-black nothingness began to spin” (P146-47, 702-703).

Soon after the fit, Shade protests his doctor’s insistence that he could not have spiritually departed his body:

But Doctor, I was dead!

He smiled. “Not quite: just half a shade,” he said. (P727-28)

The doctor discredits Shade’s sense that he had in some way died when he passed out at the Crashaw Club, but his selection of words, as Shade depicts them, may imply that Shade underwent something more acute than a mere fainting fit. In context, “half a shade” suggests that half of Shade may indeed have died that day: half a Shade was severed from his consciousness.

One of the difficulties in establishing the MP theory derives from the fact that Kinbote’s voice dominates the novel to such an extent that we have a hard time discerning who the “real” John Shade might be. Given Kinbote’s unreliability, we are on the safest ground when we look to Shade’s poem for clues to his identity. If the MP theory has any merit to it, the evidence must come from Shade’s own voice. While many critics have declared John Shade to be the staid background against which Kinbote’s mercurial personality appears in stark relief, the internal evidence suggests that we should not be so sure. Indeed, “Pale Fire” provides ample evidence that John Shade is a much more complex character than many have assumed.

II. The Divided Self

If we are looking for evidence in “Pale Fire” of the division of John Shade’s self, or personality, we do not have far to go.

I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure in the windowpane;
I was the smudge of ashen fluff—and I
Lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky. (P1-4)

Here, as critic Charles Nicol pointed out in a 1997 post to Nabokv-L, we are faced with “the three — not two — waxwings in the first four lines.” The shadow, the smudge, and the seemingly immortal bird that continues on are three distinct selves (“I was,” Shade declares) which may, as Nicol suggests, directly relate to the book’s “three main characters,” Shade, Kinbote, and Gradus. Nicol argues that Kinbote, after absconding with the poem, “reads this and, seeing that Shade is obviously the dead bird (represented here by the smudge of ashen fluff), decides that Grey must be the Shadow, and his own land of mirrors, Zembla, is the reflected sky. He goes on to lift from the poem whatever he can.” While Nicol may be correct that the three birds — all claimed by Shade as related to his own personality — seem to point to the three connected characters, Brian Boyd has clearly shown that Kinbote’s Zembla fantasy must have existed before he ever read a line of Shade’s poem. As Boyd points out in *B2*, if Kinbote “had adapted the Zemblan story to the poem, he would not now be able to make so much of his disappointment at the disparity between them, and he would not have needed to concoct his variants” (119). What we are left with, then, is a conundrum. Why does John Shade appear as three different selves in the poem’s stunning opening lines? And why do these selves seem to correspond so exactly to the poet, commentator, and assassin?

As we continue on, we begin to see that images of division and/or duplication abound throughout the poem.⁷ In the very next lines of the poem Shade says, “And from the inside, too, I’d duplicate / Myself, my lamp, an apple on a plate” (P5-6). While the “inside” here denotatively refers to the inside of Shade’s house, we must begin to wonder whether or not he is also referring to the inside of his own mind. Indeed, Shade repeatedly duplicates himself, or imagines himself as another looking back at himself. In the “gradual and dual blue / As night unites the viewer and the view” (P18) we see Shade looking at his duplicate self, and we might also catch a glimpse of Kinbote (the eavesdropper, viewer) coming together with John Shade’s image (the view). Later, Shade offers a humorous (not to mention flawed) syllogism in which he declares that “*other men die; but I / Am not another; therefore I’ll not die*” (P213-14, italics Nabokov’s). But of course Shade *does* die (or seems to) not once but twice; therefore, according to Shade’s logic, he must be another. But one does not have to die a physical death in order to make this transformation. As Shade himself points out, “we die every day, oblivion thrives / Not on dry thighbones but on blood-ripe lives” (P519-20). And since this is so, Shade declares himself “ready to become a floweret, / Or a fat fly” (P523-24). Shade’s criticism of the Institute

⁷ Even the poem’s couplet form points to this doubling.

of Preparation for the Hereafter is that it assumes that the hereafter exists only beyond physical death; but Shade understands that even in life, the self's "best yesterdays" are ever in the process of erasure. In this sense, the present is a form of the hereafter as much as any "paradise" beyond might be. Indeed, just before Shade declares his "*other men die*" syllogism, he asks,

What moment in the gradual decay
Does resurrection choose? What year? What day?
Who has the stopwatch? Who rewinds the tape?
Are some less lucky, or do all escape? (P209-12)

Given that Shade has just finished talking about his stroke-addled Aunt Maud, who lost her power to communicate before she lost her life, it is surprising that Shade mentions "resurrection" here. Had he asked what moment *death* chooses, we could understand that some unfortunate people (like Maud) lose their minds or faculties before their actual physical death. By choosing to focus on resurrection, Shade shifts the emphasis from loss to renewal and at the same time implies that some people may rise again in a new form *before* the "escape" into physical death. Perhaps it is really possible to "let a person circulate through you" (P556), as the scholars at IPH suggest.

All of these references to doubling culminate in Shade's observations in Canto Four. Here, Shade uses his "methods of composing" (P841) as a means to explore the duality of his own mind. The most dramatic example of this duality is an episode of somnambulism:

I once overheard
Myself awakening while half of me
Still slept in bed. I tore my spirit free,
And caught up with myself — upon the lawn
Where clover leaves cupped the topaz of dawn,
And where Shade stood in nightshirt and one shoe.
And then I realized that *this* half too
Was fast asleep; both laughed and I awoke
Safe in my bed as day its eggshell broke,
And robins walked and stopped, and on the damp
Gemmed turf a brown shoe lay! My secret stamp,
The Shade impress, the mystery inborn. (P873-86)

As was the case when, during his fit, “half a shade” seemed to split off from the rest of his personality, here Shade clearly describes his sleepwalking as a case of dissociated identity. It is worth noting that Shade’s IPH is but a thinly veiled reference, on the part of Nabokov, to the Society for Psychical Research, whose founder, F.W.H. Myers,⁸ wrote the famous study *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903) — a title Nabokov tweaks in line 169 when Shade notes his thoughts about “survival after death.” (We will discuss Myers more fully later on.) Somnambulism is a primary focus of Myers’ work — and practically all studies of dissociative identity from the time period — because such cases “seem to occupy a kind of midway position among the various [psychic] phenomena” (Myers 156). Following Myers’ definition of a ghost in his chapter “Phantasms of the Dead,” he explains that what had previously been interpreted as communication with the spirit world would be better understood as communication “from a mind in one state of existence to a mind in a very different state of existence.”⁹ Such communication is not only restricted to séances and ghost hunts; rather, it occurs in various forms, the first of which is “spontaneous somnambulism, or colloquy between a person asleep and a person awake” (217). Myers proceeds to investigate somnambulism specifically as a source of divided personality, asserting that “the commonest mode of origin for such secondary personalities is from some access of sleep-walking, which, instead of merging into sleep again, repeats and consolidates itself, until it acquires a chain of memories of its own, alternating with the primary chain.” The secondary phase so developed “may to all outward semblance closely resemble normality” and “may resemble a suddenly developed *idées fixe* triumphing over all restraint” (60).

Shade’s sleepwalking scene, with its implications of a second self that emerges at night,¹⁰ nicely prefigures the later emergence in Canto Four of Shade’s muse: “And that odd muse of mine / My versipel, is with me everywhere, / In carrel and in car, and in my chair” (P946-49). A versipel (in addition to being a pun on “verse”) is a werewolf — literally a “turn-skin,” from the Latin *versipellis*. John Fiske notes that in the medieval period people believed that “while the

⁸ Myers is directly mentioned as one of the spirits summoned by a séance in Nabokov’s short story “The Vane Sisters.” Myers may be familiar to some for his oft-cited description of a walk with George Eliot at Cambridge: “I listened, and night fell; her grave, majestic countenance turned toward me like a sybil’s in the gloom” (qtd. in Maixner 212). This combination of Sybil and gloom may find an echo in Shade’s reference to Sybil as a “dark Vanessa” (P270). Kinbote’s commentary to this line contains a description of his “uneasy” and “volatile” nature, which he glosses in the Index as “the sable gloom of his nature marked like a dark Vanessa with gay flashes” (308).

⁹ This is, perhaps, an apt summation of the difference between our theory and that of Brian Boyd in *B2*.

¹⁰ In his essay “*Pale Fire* and *The Life of Johnson*,” Gerard de Vries observes that throughout *Pale Fire*, Kinbote is closely associated with the moon, while Shade is associated with the sun (48).

werewolf kept his human form, his hair grew inwards; when he wished to become a wolf, he simply turned himself inside out" (121). Sabine Baring-Gould (whose book *Family Names and their Story* provided Nabokov with many of the character names in *Pale Fire*)¹¹ relates the medieval case of a murderer who, after being caught, declared that "the only difference which existed between himself and a natural wolf, was that in a true wolf the hair grew outward, whilst in him it struck inward." In order to check this assertion, the magistrates had his arms and legs cut off! (65) On the literary side, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* includes a scene in which the doctor reports that Duke Ferdinand "said he was a wolf, only the difference was, a wolf's skin was hairy on the outside, his on the inside" (5.2.19-21).

Though Nabokov used the particular term *versipel* only in *Pale Fire*, he has played with the idea of the turn-skin before. In a scene from *Despair* that seems a deliberate counterpart to Shade's shaving scene (in which he gazes at himself in the mirror and considers growing a beard), we find Hermann discoursing on the evils of mirrors and the luxury of his newly-grown beard. Hermann complains that a flawed mirror can turn the gazer into a "man-bull" with a neck which "draws out suddenly into a downward yawn of flesh," or, alternatively, it can reveal a man "torn in two" (21). In Canto Four of "Pale Fire," John Shade, peering into his shaving mirror, observes that his almost permeable skin (perhaps befitting his versipellian nature) is "less secure" than it once was, and "ridiculously thin." He continues, "Or this dewlap: some day I must set free / The Newport Frill inveterate in me" (P895-900). Webster's 2nd defines "dewlap" as both "the pendulous fold of skin under the neck of animals of the ox tribe" and "a flaccid fold of fat or flesh on the human throat." Thus, when Shade references his downward-yawning dewlap, he is essentially conjuring himself as Hermann's "man-bull." Hermann refuses to look at mirrors for fear of seeing himself transformed into a man-beast; John Shade looks into his mirror and sees the "man-bull" already there. We must then wonder if he also sees himself "torn in two."

But the versipel image, as it specifically refers to werewolves, is even more explicitly evoked by another of Hermann's observations, which immediately follows his discourse on mirrors. While admiring his beard (much as Kinbote admires the "rich tint and texture" of his own) Hermann boasts, "I am disguised so perfectly, as to be invisible to my own self! Hair comes sprouting out of every pore. There must have been a tremendous stock of shag inside me. I hide in the natural jungle that has grown out of me. There is nothing to fear. Silly

¹¹ See Roth, "A Source for Character Names in *Pale Fire*," *The Nabokovian* 59.1 (2007): 5-9.

superstition!” (21). This presents us with a puzzle. What is the “silly superstition” to which Hermann here refers, and why might it engender fear? The answer may be found in the image of a man with “a tremendous stock of shag” growing inside him, a man who, in essence, becomes hairy by turning himself inside out—in other words, a versipel.

Nabokov probably chose to depict Hermann in this fashion because the werewolf is the beast whose attributes most closely resemble a case of dual, or dissociated, personality. Hermann believes that he has the power to dissociate, and even though Felix is not truly his double, Hermann has either projected his own face onto his image of Felix, or, more likely, he has imagined that he himself has Felix’s face. The reason he refuses to look anymore at mirrors is that he might be confronted with the terrible (to him) truth that he does not look like Felix at all. Though Hermann cannot control his dissociated self in the way he imagines, he does in fact suffer from dissociation. Instead of finding his double in Felix Wohlfart,¹² the double exists in his own mind. In the same way, a werewolf presents us with a single body inhabited by two distinct personalities.

While the versipel serves perfectly well as an image of Shade’s poetic absent-mindedness, we cannot now ignore the fact that Nabokov has already established, via *Despair*, the werewolf as a metaphor for a dissociated personality. That is not to say that Nabokov could not then use the versipel in additional ways. (Indeed, the versipel image perfectly suits the larger theme of doubleness that has been building throughout the poem.) But Shade’s somnambulism reveals a double existence — like day and night, sun and moon — that is especially associated with werewolves, who are popularly thought to emerge during the night of a full moon. As Gerard de Vries has noted, Nabokov must have known that on the last full night of John Shade’s existence — July 20 and 21, 1959 — a full moon hovered in the sky above North America (“Wheels” 44). Even the detail of the “brown shoe” left on the lawn resembles a common trope in werewolf tales. Gervase of Tilbury, writing in the thirteenth century, testified that “[i]f one of a wolf’s limbs was cut off, the bewitched human being might be freed from enchantment, and the wound be reproduced in the corresponding body as a proof that the witch has shape-shifted” (qtd. in Geiss and Bunn 51). Shade’s shoe is a version of this same image, the “amputated” shoe/foot serving as the “secret stamp” that confirms the reality of Shade’s “inborn” condition.

Given the connection between werewolves and the idea of dual personalities, it is not surprising that Charles Kinbote (a.k.a., Charles the Beloved), who seems to be a secondary

¹² In German, Wohlfart means “welfare,” but Nabokov’s English ear surely identified both a *wolf* and *art* in the sound of Felix’s surname.

incarnation of a Wordsmith professor named V. Botkin, also takes part in the werewolf motif. The most obvious link to werewolves comes from his regal name, Charles Xavier Vseslav. Vseslav is a clear allusion to the werewolf-prince, Volx Vseslav'evich, better known as Vseslav of Polotsk.¹³ In *The Song of Igor's Campaign*, which Nabokov translated into English from Old Russian, Prince Vseslav, a ruler and judge by day, becomes a wolf at night:

but at night he prowled
in the guise of a wolf.
From Kiev, prowling, he reached,
before the cocks [crew], Tmutorokan.
The path of Great Hors,
as a wolf, prowling, he crossed. (661-66: brackets Nabokov's)

Though this anecdote about the werewolf-prince is but a small part of the epic, Nabokov was surely aware of the greater corpus of Vseslav tales. He must, for instance, have read with interest "The Vseslav Epos," a long and fascinating article by his then friends and colleagues, Roman Jakobson and Marc Szeftel. Indeed, in a 1950 letter from Nabokov to Szeftel, Nabokov wrote that he was "looking forward to Vseslav," by which he meant that he was looking forward to reading the article, which had recently appeared in *Slavic Studies* (Diment 108). In the article, the authors collate and analyze all of the known narratives concerning the magical Polock prince, noting that the name Vseslav "is rare in Russian tradition" (303). Jakobson and Szeftel show that "the whole context of the Vseslav epos plainly indicates that it is a werewolf story" (356). Surely Nabokov had this very Vseslav in mind when he gave Charles the Beloved that "rare" name.

III. Psychical Research and Ansel Bourne

Now that we can see that both John Shade and Charles Kinbote are directly associated with werewolves (via "versipel" and "Vseslav," respectively) and recognize how werewolves embody the idea of doubled consciousness, the picture of Kinbote as Shade's secondary personality becomes clearer. At the same time, the radical narrative shift this scenario requires must generate many new questions. In order to fully grasp what Nabokov himself knew about dissociative identity disorders, we must turn to a few of his unpublished notes from the late

¹³ This connection was first brought to our attention by Jerry Friedman in a post to Nabokv-L (7 Dec 2006).

1950s, housed in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library under the heading “Notes on Various Subjects.” One of the note cards, written in Nabokov’s hand, is labeled “Psychical Research Today, DJ West, London 1954,” a reference to Donald J. West’s parapsychological text *Psychical Research Today*.¹⁴ Nabokov’s notes on West confirm his interest in late nineteenth century psychical research, and particularly the work of F.W.H. Myers. The passages he notes in West’s book come from the chapter on “The Psychology of Mediumship,” in which West details Myers’ findings with regard to the connection between allegedly psychic phenomena and abnormal mental states. Nabokov’s first citation reads, “F.W.H. Myers . . . put forward the theory of the subconscious mind,” while further down on the card he notes, “human survival after bodily death,” a reference to the title of Myers’ famous work. Nabokov’s note about the “subconscious mind” comes directly from West’s description of Myers’ case studies of “persons carrying on purposeful activities without conscious deliberation”:

Myers was one of the earliest . . . to see that, in order to produce the phenomena of automatism, a lot of creative mental activity must go on of which the individual is unaware. This led Myers to put forward the theory of the subconscious mind. . . . Myers thought that in the same way as a subject may perform some action automatically in response to a subconscious impulse, so he might conjure up a mental image or vision automatically without conscious deliberation. (56)

The reference here to automatism, creativity, and psychological bifurcation certainly resonates with Shade’s description of his own creative process, when in Canto Four he writes,

A muse in overalls directs the drill
Which grinds and which no effort of the will
Can interrupt, while the *automaton*
Is taking off what he has just put on
Or walking briskly to the corner store
To buy the paper he has read before. (P855-60, italics ours)

Here we have a portrait of Shade, the “automaton,” his body (and thus part of his mind) doing one thing while the other half of his brain conjures a “mental image or vision automatically without conscious deliberation.”

¹⁴ All quotations are used with permission from the Nabokov estate.

When applied to the perplexing correspondences between Kinbote and Shade, Myers' development of the notion of the subconscious mind resolves some of the primary Shadean objections. If John Shade created the character of Charles Kinbote, and the act initiated in Shade's subconscious, then Shade is no longer the calculating artist that defies his character portrait. Shade's ability to "conjure up a mental image" like Zembla is not necessarily something that needs to be reconciled with his given personality traits, though we still need to reconcile the Zembla tale with what Shade knew of literature and language.

Nabokov's next note on the *Psychical Research Today* card, "a shot of pentothal/the drug pentothal," is from West's reflection on automatic writing as a venue to voice one's subconscious:

We don't accept responsibility for our dreams, so desires that we should hate to admit when awake can find fulfillment in dream fantasy. Similarly, after being hypnotized, or being given the "truth drug" pentothal, or in automatic writing, in all of which situations the subject can disclaim responsibility, personal revelations frequently come forth. This is the reason why automatic writing is so often taken up with sexual topics and obscenities, for these are the very ideas that in the ordinary way the civilized person would be careful not to express too crudely. (57)

That the release of the subconscious thought through automatic writing or a "truth drug" often takes unexpected forms makes Nabokov's citation of this passage particularly compelling, as Shadeans often struggle to find a source in the poet for Kinbote's highly sexualized and often outrageous voice.¹⁵ Shade, the respected scholar and professor in a small, sleepy Appalachian town, "would be careful not to express too crudely" any opinion or observation. As a form of "automatic writing" on the part of Shade, Kinbote's commentary may express versions of things that Shade as a "civilized person" cannot. It is worth noting, however, that twice within "Pale Fire," John Shade pictures himself as a king. In line 605 he imagines "our royal hands" being tied, and in line 894 he pictures himself in his bathtub, where "He'd / Sit like a king there, and

¹⁵ Many who doubt the Shadean theory have pointed out that Shade does not seem to show any homosexual tendencies or an affinity for young boys. It may be worth noting, however, that in the holograph manuscript of *Pale Fire*, there appears an uncanceled variant, in which Shade explains that his book of essays, *The Untamed Seahorse*, "sold exceptionally well — / Mainly because I have seen fit to dwell / In scolarly [sic] detail on the delights / Byron derived from little catamites" (P673-6; quoted with permission). It is unclear why, very late in the composition process, Nabokov replaced these lines with a fairly blasé description of students returning to college. Perhaps he thought he had too blatantly highlighted a connection between Shade and Kinbote, or he simply thought them out of character for Shade. In any case, the variant proves that at one point Nabokov placed within Shade's orbit considerable information and imagery related to Byron's sexual habits, which could then have found an outlet in Kinbote's tales of Zemblan ingledom.

like Marat bleed.” Jean-Paul Marat, the French revolutionary, was stabbed to death by the assassin Charlotte Corday. Shade, then, fancies himself both as a king and as the target of an assassin, a scenario exactly matching that of Charles Kinbote. Note too that in both instances where Shade imagines himself a king, he abandons the first-person singular in favor of a more distant, externalized point-of-view — an inkling of the greater dissociative event that will soon occur.

Nabokov continues with West’s automatic writing thread, noting “automatic writing/sometimes – like blotting paper impressions,” a reference to West’s description of the process:

Automatic writings, like dreams, are not always easy to interpret. Sometimes the writing is back to front, like blotting-paper impressions, and has to be held up to a mirror in order to be deciphered. The letters may be scrawled, and words and sentences may run into each other without breaks or punctuations. Ideas, instead of being set down fully and coherently, may be compressed into cryptic sequences of words and phrases. These difficulties are probably signs of the subject's resistance to the clear expression of the forbidden thoughts and feelings that strive to find an outlet in the script. (57)

The mirror-renderings of automatic writing bring to mind the skewed reflections of New Wye present in Kinbote’s Zembla, the “Land of Reflections.” The facets of Shade’s world detectable in Kinbote’s account may not be clear metaphors for specific elements of Shade’s experience but may be instances and reflections from Shade’s consciousness that have been blotted and absorbed by his subconscious. Additionally, West’s description of “words and sentences running into each other without breaks or punctuation” resembles Hazel’s barn communication with the “roundlet of pale light” (57). Boyd perceives the “automatic writing” nature of this communication and attributes it to Shade’s deceased Aunt Maud. However, Nabokov’s interest in West may reveal that his concern is less with actual paranormal encounters and more with the capacity of the subconscious to render something that could be interpreted as paranormal. West, for instance, when examining the famous case of Mrs. Curran, an American woman who claimed to be channeling the writing of a 17th century Englishwoman, concluded that “[s]ince it was Mrs. Curran who did the writing, it was more than likely Mrs. Curran herself who was responsible for the extraordinary intellectual feats involved. To postulate a spirit intellect in the background is only to put the explanation one stage further away” (63). West’s conclusion here

precisely matches our own feelings regarding the role of Hazel Shade's "spirit intellect," as presented by Brian Boyd.

On his *Psychical Research* card Nabokov notes, "a victim of mental dissociation, he developed a secondary personality." This sort of mental dissociation is taken up by West as he explains the development of a subconscious entity through the practice of automatic writing:

Automatic writing done by persons interested in Spiritualism sometimes purports to be dictated by an outside personality or spirit. The writing may be signed by some strange name and develop a style and character of its own, a sort of secondary personality. Myers took an intense interest in these secondary personalities. He quoted cases in which the secondary phase was not restricted to writing, but for periods banished the primary personality altogether, so that the individual lived a sort of Jekyll and Hyde existence, now with one character now with another. (58)

What West is describing seems to jibe with the MP theory as we have applied it to *Pale Fire*. It also directly precedes an example which further resonates with Nabokov's narrative:

A case of this kind was Ansel Bourne, an American preacher. He was a rather unhealthy man who had since childhood suffered from depressed moods. When he was sixty-one, he lost his sense of identity, wandered off into a distant town, and set up as a store-keeper under another name. After six weeks he suddenly reverted to his old self and came back home. (58)

Since Nabokov, in his note, uses the masculine pronoun ("he"), we can be sure that he is referring to Ansel Bourne, the only male example given by West of someone who "developed a secondary personality." Could it be that the story of Bourne — a 61-year-old man who lost his identity, became another, and wandered west to a far-off town — inspired Nabokov to create John Shade, *another 61-year-old man* who, we assert, loses his identity, becomes another, and wanders west to Cedarn?

The connections between Bourne and Shade, in addition to their age, are notable. Richard Hodgson, another original member of the S.P.R, detailed Bourne's case in his study "A Case of Double Consciousness" (1891). According to Hodgson, Bourne, like Shade, suffered from strange fits as a child: "[H]e had been subject to the 'blues' since childhood. . . . These would sometimes last a few hours, sometimes a week. Occasionally, at such times, when walking, he would find himself two or three miles away from where he had last noticed himself as being" (236-7). Bourne's wife likewise revealed that "Bourne had had several 'fainting fits' in

the course of his life” (237). One of these fits took place in 1857. According to a pamphlet cited by Hodgson, Bourne was struck deaf, dumb, and blind; however,

[h]is mind was perfectly alive all of the time. . . . About him all was silent as though there were neither a God, nor life, nor motion in the whole wide universe. This silence was as though the soul had been cast into a deep, bottomless, and shoreless sepulcher, where dismal silence was to reign eternally. (224)¹⁶

This experience sounds not unlike John Shade’s childhood fit: “And then black night. That blackness was sublime. / I felt distributed through space and time” (P147-48). Even the diagnosis of Bourne’s condition mirrors that of John Shade. Hodgson believes that Bourne’s fits “suggest that Mr. Bourne has been subject to some form of epilepsy, and that during his eight-week absence in 1887 he was suffering from a *post-epileptic partial loss of memory*” (237, italics Hodgson’s). Hodgson concludes, quoting J. Hughlings Jackson, that “after the fit, he was a different person, although in the same skin; or, as the popular phrase is, the post-epileptic patient ‘was not himself’” (237). Kinbote’s own thoughts about Shade’s childhood fits seem to mirror this diagnosis: “It must have been with him a mild *form of epilepsy*, a derailment of the nerves at the same spot, on the same curve of tracks, every day, for several weeks, until nature repaired the damage” (147, italics ours).¹⁷

If Nabokov intentionally drew on the story of Ansel Bourne when he composed *Pale Fire*, this would provide the most compelling argument for the connection between Nabokov’s interest in the subconscious and a Shadean hypothesis. While even the most straightforward interpretation of the text advances a theory of dissociated identities (Kinbote is Botkin), the immediate parallels between John Shade and Ansel Bourne support a reading in which John Shade, rather than Botkin, is the true source of Kinbote’s personality. John Shade, who over the course of his poem refers to himself as “demented,” “twisted,” and “hysterical,” is a classic example of the very kind of individual addressed by West. Indeed, West’s conclusions about

¹⁶ As a corroborating detail, Hodgson also cites the case of an English boy who lapsed into a state in which he “could not speak, hear, or see” (239).

¹⁷ A more speculative link to Bourne may concern Bourne’s appearance. A photograph of Bourne shows him to be clean-shaven except for a beard that traces his jawline and the lower part of his chin, a style which closely resembles what was once called a “Newgate Frill.” In Canto Four, Shade, complaining about shaving his “dewlap,” opines that he may someday “set free / The Newport Frill inveterate in me” (P899-900). It has always been unclear why Nabokov wrote Newport instead of Newgate, but it may be worth noting that Newport is a well-known city in the tiny state of Rhode Island, the state from which Ansel Bourne hailed. In fact, Coventry, Rhode Island, where Bourne lived at the time of his attack, is a mere 30 miles by highway from Newport. So perhaps Shade’s desire to “set free” his Newport Frill was Nabokov’s sly reference to the bearded Rhode Islander, Ansel Bourne.

Ansel Bourne seem particularly relevant. He writes, “[i]t is clear that secondary personalities which manifest in automatic writing, or in hysterics like Bourne . . . are not independent individuals, but dramatisations of repressed tendencies. This is the reason why secondary personalities often have characteristics seemingly opposite to those of the primary individual” (59). That Kinbote is “seemingly opposite” of John Shade is a fact noticed by even the earliest critics of *Pale Fire*. West’s observation, which we know that Nabokov read at the time he was preparing to write *Pale Fire*, gives us another rationale for that mirroring effect.

IV. “What, has my face changed?”

West’s notion that Ansel Bourne represents a case of someone living “a Jekyll and Hyde existence” leads us back to Robert Louis Stevenson and his most famous novel. In his lecture on *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, delivered to his Cornell students from 1948 to 1958 and later published in *Lectures on Literature*, Nabokov concludes his discussion with a description of Robert Louis Stevenson’s death. He cites Stevenson’s last words: “What’s the matter with me, what is this strangeness, has my face changed?” and then continues, “What, has my face changed? There is a curious thematic link between this last episode in Stevenson’s life and the fateful transformations in his most wonderful book” (*Lectures* 204). Unraveling Stevenson’s personal narrative reveals not only the threads of inspiration for his most famous dissociative identity tale but also connective strands to F.W.H. Myers and the Society for Psychological Research, as well as to the dissociative elements of “Pale Fire.”

In the appendix to Myers’ *Human Personality* chapter on “Disintegrations of Personality,” he presents a letter sent to him by Stevenson, in which Stevenson describes what Myers terms “a transient perturbation of personality of the most violent kind,” the result of which was “a kind of supraliminal duality, the perception at the same time of two personalities — the one rational and moral, the other belonging to the stratum of dreams and nightmare” (356). Stevenson gives several examples in which a second self, whom he calls “the other fellow,” seems to vie with his primary self. In these accounts, many of the details seem remarkably similar to those given by John Shade. Like Shade, who describes himself as a child as “Asthmatic, lame and fat,” “a cloutish freak,” and “demented” (P129, 134, 167), Stevenson notes, “I had infamous bad health when I was a child and suffered much from night fears; but from the age of thirteen until I was past thirty I did not know what it was to have a high fever or

to wander in my mind” (qtd. in Myers 356). John Shade suffered his fits when he was eleven, and also seemed to wander in his mind (“I felt distributed through space and time”) before the fits suddenly “ceased” and his “health improved.” In the first account of dissociation given by Stevenson, he tells how, while staying in Nice, he suffered an attack:

From the beginning of the evening *one part of my mind* became possessed of a notion so grotesque and shapeless that it may best be described as a form of words. I thought the pain was, or was connected with, a wisp or coil of some sort; I knew not of what it consisted nor yet where it was, and cared not; only I thought, if the two ends were brought together, the pain would cease. Now all the time, with *another part of my mind*, which I venture to think was *myself*, I was fully alive to the absurdity of this idea, knew it to be a mark of impaired sanity, and was engaged with *my other self* in a perpetual conflict. (qtd. in Myers 356-57, italics Stevenson’s)

Stevenson’s description of a confrontation with an “other self” resonates with John Shade’s description of his sleepwalking, but we should also notice the “wisp or coil” whose ends Stevenson wants to connect. Just before Shade describes his childhood fits and the “thread of subtle pain” that “ran through” him (P139-40), he mentions seeing the “miracle of a lemniscate” drawn by a bicycle’s tires on the sand (137-39). A lemniscate is a figure eight; thus it might be imagined precisely as a “wisp or coil” with its ends tied together. Likewise, we should recall that it is Shade who at IPH learned “[h]ow to keep sane in spiral types of space,” who describes the afterlife as it “spirals from the tuber’s eye,” and who, during his own trance state, sees a spinning “system of cells interlinked within / Cells interlinked within cells interlinked / Within one stem” (P559, 619, 704-06).

Stevenson’s second incident of dissociation also finds echoes within *Pale Fire*:

I fell asleep and woke, and for the rest of the night repeated to myself mentally a nonsense word which I could not recall next morning. I had been reading the day before the life of Swift, and all night long one part of my mind (*the other fellow*) kept informing me that I was not repeating the word myself, but was only reading in a book that Swift had so repeated it in his last sickness. (357)

The reference here to Swift and his descent into madness should immediately bring to mind Kinbote’s note to line 231, where he reveals a variant written by Shade: “And minds that died before arriving there: / Poor old man Swift, poor —, poor Baudelaire” (167). Kinbote imagines

himself to be the two missing syllables, but “John Shade” fits equally well and seems a more likely choice, given Shade’s apparent reluctance to reveal the name he has in mind. Even more relevant might be Kinbote’s declaration in his note to 270 that “I notice a whiff of Swift in some of my notes” (173). Here Kinbote, Shade’s “other fellow,” finds his own voice mixed up with Swift’s, while Stevenson’s “other fellow” declares that the primary self is channeling Swift.

Summing up his situation, Stevenson writes, “I am tempted to think that I know the other fellow; I am tempted to think he is the Dreamer described in my Chapter on Dreams” (358). Stevenson’s “A Chapter on Dreams” was first published in *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1888 and later appeared as a chapter in Stevenson’s 1892 book of essays, *Across the Plains*. Given Nabokov’s interest in Stevenson, psychical research, and dreams in particular (he kept a journal of his own dreams for a time), it is exceedingly likely that he knew of and had read “A Chapter on Dreams.”¹⁸ Stevenson’s essay begins with an examination of the passage of time:

The past stands on a precarious footing; another straw split in the field of metaphysic, and behold us robbed of it. . . . [O]ur old days and deeds, our old selves, too, and the very world in which these scenes were acted, all brought down to the same faint residuum as a last night’s dream, to some incontinuous images, and an echo in the chambers of the brain. (122)

Stevenson’s anxiety in this passage exactly matches that of John Shade, who declares that “oblivion thrives” and “our best yesterdays are now foul piles / Of crumpled names, phone numbers and foxed files.” Given this reality, Shade says that he is “ready to become a floweret / Or a fat fly, but never to forget” (P519, 521-24).

As Brian Boyd has pointed out in both *B1* and *B2*, Shade seems to be advancing the notion of “becoming” Kinbote, and he does so as an alternative to forgetting his old self, as Stevenson puts it. In “A Chapter on Dreams,” Stevenson devises a strikingly similar antidote. In essence, Stevenson proposes that the void left by the loss of the past may be filled by the presence of the “Dreamer,” the “other fellow,” who operates while the primary self is sleeping. Stevenson (speaking of himself in the third-person) describes the development of his Dreamer when, while still a student, he began “to dream in sequence and thus to lead a double life — one of the day, one of the night — one that he had every reason to believe was the true one, another that he had no means of proving to be false” (123). Eventually, as he himself became a more

¹⁸ It is in this essay that Stevenson gives his account of the origin of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

sophisticated, professional storyteller, his Dreamer (with the assistance of his actors, the “Little People”) also took on these qualities, until at last the Dreamer was able to construct “better tales than he could fashion for himself” (125). Stevenson in the end concludes that the Dreamer is

no story-teller at all, but a creature as matter of fact as any cheesemonger or any cheese, and a realist bemired up to the ears in actuality; so that, by that account, the whole of my published fiction, should be the single-handed product of some Brownie, some Familiar, some unseen collaborator, whom I keep locked in a back garret, while I get all the praise and he but a share (which I cannot prevent him getting) of the pudding. (127)

Stevenson then gives, as an example of this collaboration, the story of the genesis of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a story about “that strong sense of man’s double being which must at times come in upon and overwhelm the mind of every thinking creature” (127). The scenario presented here is precisely that which informs our theory of *Pale Fire*. Charles Kinbote is John Shade’s “other fellow,” his “unseen collaborator,” who manages to escape from his locked room (the “lumber room” in Onhava) and emerges finally to take over the role of primary personality.

The focus of Nabokov’s lecture on the *Jekyll and Hyde* is the nature of Jekyll’s transformation and his relationship to his dissociated self. As already noted, Carolyn Kunin has presented a detailed argument for the thematic connections between *Pale Fire* and *Jekyll & Hyde* on the Nabokov listserv, observing that Nabokov’s descriptions of what occurs between Jekyll and Hyde parallel his descriptions of the relationship between Kinbote and Shade. In an October 3, 2006 post to the listserv, Kunin observes that in his lecture Nabokov specifically identifies Hyde as a parasite on Jekyll. Nabokov notes that Hyde’s name resembles

hydatid from the Greek ‘water’ which in zoology is a tiny pouch within the body of man and other animals, a pouch containing a limpid fluid with larval tapeworms in it — a delightful arrangement, for the little tapeworms at least. Thus in a sense, Mr. Hyde is Dr. Jekyll’s parasite — but I must warn you that Stevenson knew nothing of this when he chose the name. (182)

Like Kunin, we feel that this parasitic image represents one of the original germs of *Pale Fire*. Julian Connolly, writing about Nabokov and Dostoevsky, has noted that Nabokov was not above taking an idea from another writer and trying to improve on it. He notes in particular Nabokov’s comment that one “may still derive artistic delight from imagining other and better ways of looking at things, or what is the same, expressing things, than the author you hate does” (qtd. in

Connolly, “Nabokov’s” 144). While Nabokov certainly did not “hate” Stevenson, he was not above criticizing his faults. In his lecture on Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis,” for example, he argues that in *Jekyll and Hyde* “there is a flaw in the artistic realization of the story. . . . The fantastic side of the setting — Utterson, Enfield, Poole, Lanyon, and their London — is not of same quality as the fantastic side of Jekyll’s hydization. There is a crack in the picture, a lack of unity” (252). Indeed, “the thing, after all, is only a superb Punch-and-Judy show” (254). It would seem, then, that Nabokov (like Stevenson himself, in fact) considered *Jekyll and Hyde* to be a work of stylistic genius which was nevertheless deeply flawed as a whole. *Pale Fire* is, in some sense, his attempt to create that “other and better way,” a work whose style and sense are seamless, whose balanced, though fantastic, narratives mirror each other in a unified way without cracking. To this end, he too has created a character who is a parasite — “an elephantine tick; a king-sized botfly; a macaco worm; the monstrous parasite of a genius” (171-72) — on another character, though in fact, as in Jekyll and Hyde, they share the same body.

As confirmation of this link, we can look to an indirect, but indisputable, reference to Stevenson’s novel embedded within *Pale Fire*. In Gerard de Vries’ essay “Fanning the Poet’s Fire,” he points out that Nabokov has placed two “stillets” in the novel: one in the Index, where we find under the entry for V. Botkin “a Danish stiletto” (Hamlet’s “bare bodkin,” presumably), and one in lines 34-35 of Shade’s poem, where Shade refers to icicles as “stillets of a frozen stillicide.” De Vries notes that in his lecture on Stevenson,

Nabokov writes that the name “Jekyll” comes from the Danish name Jökulle, which means an “icicle” and that Jekyll’s “scientific studies led wholly towards the mystic and the transcendental and drew him steadily towards the truth that man is not truly one, but truly two.” [In *Pale Fire*] Nabokov mirrors the classical doppelgänger theme of this story . . . because instead of disuniting his characters he lets them absorb each other. (242)

Had Nabokov limited the Jekyll reference to the Index entry for Botkin, we could see it as merely relating to Botkin and Kinbote, but by bringing Shade into the mix, he has complicated the matter and revealed that the theme of dissociation extends into the realm of John Shade, as well.

Nabokov’s comment about Jekyll’s revelation that “man is not truly one, but truly two” is itself an echo gathered from Goethe’s famous “Gingko Biloba” poem, in which Goethe compares himself to the gingko leaf and declares, “I am one and also two.” We should not be surprised to

learn that *Pale Fire* contains its own allusion to this poem. In his note to line 49, Kinbote quotes Shade's poem, "The Sacred Tree," which, like Goethe's poem, takes as its subject the shape of a gingko leaf. While Nabokov could not have anticipated his readers noting this link to his (as yet unpublished) lecture on Stevenson, the two-way connection to Goethe's poem nevertheless further establishes the link between *Pale Fire* and *Jekyll and Hyde* in Nabokov's own thinking.

V. Other Allusions

Beyond *Jekyll and Hyde*, we can discern a number of other Double tales that hover in the background of *Pale Fire*. The importance of shadows (and Shadows) throughout the novel may, as Gerard de Vries has argued, point us to Hans Christian Andersen's story "The Shadow," in which a scholar "from the cold countries" loses his shadow. After a time, his shadow returns, but it is much more substantial and independent than it once was. While the man seems to fade, his shadow grows more gregarious. In the end, the shadow convinces his love interest, the princess, that he is in fact the real person and the scholar is the shadow. The man is sent away and, in the last sentence of the story, executed. Here we clearly see "the preoccupation of a character with an apparent alter ego and a concern over a possible mingling or exchange of identity," which Connolly identifies as one of the chief themes in Nabokov's work.

As Connolly has shown, Dostoevsky's *The Double* lies squarely behind much of the plot and texture of both *The Eye* and *Despair*. The connection may extend to *Pale Fire*, as well. Details within the first five chapters of *The Double* repeatedly alert us to the impending split (or duplication) that will seize Golyadkin. (Like the man in "The Shadow," Golyadkin will eventually succumb to his more gregarious double and be carted off either to a madhouse or to a less than pleasant hereafter.) Just as John Shade is "half a shade" deceased, Golyadkin is "half-dead" (28). Then, just before the second Mr. Golyadkin appears, we read that "Mr. Golyadkin was killed — killed entirely, in the full sense of the word, and if he still preserved the power of running, it was simply through some sort of miracle, a miracle in which at last he refused himself to believe" (32). And a moment later: "at that instant he was dying, disappearing" (33). Connolly rightly sees a parallel between these moments and the "suicide" of the narrator in *The Eye*, where the narrator declares that he is dead, but because "after death human thought lives on by momentum," he is able to remain on earth for a while (20).

In *Pale Fire*, Nabokov does double duty by having Shade “die” not once but twice. Like Smurov, Shade declares his own death (“And then one night I died”) even though he doesn’t die a physical death. Then, like Smurov, he is (allegedly) shot and, we contend, continues to “live on, fly on” in the reflected mind of Charles Kinbote. Indeed, *The Eye* resembles a rough draft of *Pale Fire* in many ways. In both cases we are confronted with a decidedly unreliable narrator. Kinbote is a homosexual, and the narrator of *The Eye*, according to Roman Bogdanovich, is one as well — a “sexual lefty,” “sexually unfortunate” (84).¹⁹ And like Kinbote, the narrator (who is of course Smurov himself) speaks from the point of view of a dissociated personality. In *The Eye*, the narrator decides to find “the real Smurov” by examining his neighbors, who are “not live beings but only chance mirrors for Smurov” (89). But of course he himself is Smurov. Likewise, in *Pale Fire*, Kinbote obsessively spies on his neighbor, John Shade, hoping to catch a reflection of his own story, his Zembla. But we would assert that Kinbote’s observations are much the same as Smurov’s: he is, in some sense, spying on himself.

When Smurov does finally become himself again at the end of *The Eye*, he notices that “a young man in a derby carrying a bouquet, hurried toward me. That reflection and I merged into one. I walked into the street” (97). In this image — a man and his reflection merging and becoming one — we find a perfect inversion of the opening lines of Shade’s poem, where the bird meets its reflection; but instead of merging, the images remain separate, one falling to the ground dead, one sticking to the window, and the other flying on “in the reflected sky.” In this sense, *Pale Fire* is more like “The Shadow” and *The Double*, where the original meets his demise even as his reflection continues. Still, the echoes of *The Eye* in *Pale Fire* are so distinct that we have to wonder whether Nabokov named his Appalachian town New Wye so that we might hear both “New I” and “New Eye” reflected in its auditory wake.

VI. Gradus and Botkin

¹⁹ Gary Adelman argues convincingly that in *Despair* Hermann is likewise a homosexual, whose perception of Felix as his double is an “expulsion into the open of his blocked homoeroticism, a crucial aspect of the novel that critics have persistently ignored” (101). Adelman particularly points to the Hermann’s night at the inn with Felix: “Hermann has a terrible nightmare. Some sort of dog-like creature made of 'grease or jelly, or else perhaps, the fat of a white worm' keeps getting in his way. When it touches him, he feels something like an electric shock. Dreaming then that he has awakened, he makes out on the sheet of the bed next to his the likeness of the same dog liquefied, like white larvae. Groaning with disgust, he opens his eyes and spies on the bed next to his 'telltale stains of a slimy nature,' and peering closely, spots the little dog glued to the fat stem of a bedside plant. Waking finally . . . Hermann decides to slip off before Felix wakes. 'That's finished for good; from this time forth, life shall be pure.'” (103)

While most of this study has been consumed with establishing the involuted relationship that connects Shade and Kinbote, we must also account for the roles of other characters. In particular, we must figure out how Jakob Gradus and V. Botkin fit into this new narrative. Gradus is something of an enigma. He seems, at first blush, to be merely one of Kinbote's inventions, necessary in order to account for the real murderer, Jack Grey. Yet just as Shade and Kinbote exhibit numerous connective traits, Shade and Gradus seem to have prominent similarities as well, as Brian Boyd has already shown.²⁰ How, then, might Gradus fit into a theory of multiple personalities? The most obvious possibility is that he is a third, less-developed personality within the shared consciousness of Shade and Kinbote. This idea may find a partial foundation in Nabokov's understanding of *Jekyll & Hyde*, as he maintains that the personalities of Jekyll and Hyde are not completely distinct:

There are really three personalities — Jekyll, Hyde, and a third, the Jekyll residue when Hyde takes over. . . . [I]f you look closely at Hyde, you will notice that above him floats aghast, but dominating, a residue of Jekyll, a kind of smoke ring, or halo, as if this black concentrated evil had fallen out of the remaining ring of good, but this ring of good still remains. Hyde still wants to change back to Jekyll. (183-4)

To apply Nabokov's understanding of the "Jekyll residue" to *Pale Fire*, the parallels between Kinbote's passages and elements from John Shade's life could be understood as a "Shade residue" that lingers in Kinbote, the "half a shade" that Shade still maintains when Kinbote appears. The third personality may also be represented by Gradus, who, like the "Jekyll residue," seeks to eradicate the secondary personality but ultimately fails. In this scenario, Gradus, The Shadow, is "a residue... a kind of smoke ring" that results from the fracturing of Shade's psyche.

We might also consider Gradus as something akin to a catalyst who has been lurking in John Shade's system until at last he emerges, causing the final clash of personalities that results in John Shade's demise and Kinbote's ascendancy. No critic has yet noticed that Gradus' tour through the Wordsmith campus and library resembles a biological tour through a body or brain. This analogy is set up by Kinbote's remark in the note to line 691, in which he commends

²⁰ Boyd asks, "Why too, for that matter, is Shade so pointedly gray?... Why does Shade not only have the same birthday as Gradus or de Grey, but also a name that can mean the same as Gradus's other alias, Degree? Why all this on top of the identification of the man who kills Shade as a Shadow, when Shade has written 'I was the shadow of the waxwing slain,' or on top of Jakob Gradus's trade as a glass-maker, and his mirror-reversed image as a 'mirror-maker of genius,' maker of mirrors of a special sky-blue tint that seems to reflect directly the azure reflections of the opening of Shade's poem?" (*B2* 210-211).

Wordsmith's president, Billy Reading, "whose mind was a library and not a debating hall" (249). If the Wordsmith president's mind is a library, then Nabokov has cleverly made Wordsmith's library a mind, just as the map of the campus looks to Gradus like "a writhing stomach" (280). As we follow Gradus on his dyspeptic tour through the library's "labyrinth" of hallways and stacks, several architectural details should clue us in to the fact that this is not merely a library. When Gradus ascends the stairs, he finds himself "among the bewitched hush of Rare Books. The room was beautiful and had no doors; in fact, some moments passed before he could discover the draped entrance he himself had just used." He then enters "a circular room" where he finds professor Pnin sitting "at a round table reading with an ironic expression on his face."²¹ Gradus then descends again "down a helical staircase" and finds himself in "Vault P," where "a well-lit, pipe-lined, white-washed passage" leads him to the bathroom where he at last relieves himself (282). Given Kinbote's remarks about Billy Reading's mind, it isn't hard to see how the doorless Rare Books room with a draped entrance; the round room at the top of the library (with "bald-headed" Pnin sitting in it, as if to emphasize its head-like roundness); the DNA-like helical staircase;²² and the intestine-like, pipe-lined passage to the bathroom, taken together, resemble a living organism. This notion is intensified if we notice that the library's Vault P has a corollary in Kinbote's Index, where, in the entry for Igor II, we find:

a very private section of the picture gallery in the Palace, accessible only to the reigning monarch, but easily broken into through Bower P by an inquisitive pubescent, contained the statues of Igor's four hundred catamites . . . later presented by K. to an Asiatic potentate. (308)

There is a clear equivalence created here between Vault P and Bower P. For sexless Gradus, the Vault is but an antechamber to the bowels, while Bower P, for the pubescent Charles, represents a passageway to sexuality. Moreover, Kinbote's reference to an "Asiatic potentate" may be related to the "slim Hindu boy" whom Gradus, after using the bathroom, encounters among the stacks of Vault P.

The voyage of Gradus toward his fateful encounter with Shade and Kinbote is, in some sense, a voyage both through Shade's art (Kinbote finds him everywhere in "Pale Fire") and through his body. When Kinbote says in his note to lines 120-121 that on July 4, Gradus "was getting ready to leave Zembla for his steady blunderings through two hemispheres," we should

²¹ Perhaps Pnin is amused at seeing another character trapped and bewildered in someone else's narrative, as he once was.

²² There are many "spiral" staircases in Nabokov's works. To our knowledge this is the only "helical" one.

imagine the hemispheres of Shade's brain, as well as a map of the world. In the end, like any catalyst, Gradus will be burned up in the chemical reaction of Kinbote and Shade's competing identities.

A more vexing problem for our theory is the existence and role of "V. Botkin" in the narrative. It is abundantly clear from Kinbote's Index, as well as other textual clues, that at least some part of Kinbote believes that his origin is found in Professor Botkin, an "American scholar of Russian descent" (306).²³ Indeed, *Pale Fire* can be enjoyably read with this fairly simple revelation at its center. Once, however, we acknowledge all of the seemingly supernatural coincidences that link Shade, Kinbote, and Gradus together, V. Botkin becomes a more problematic figure. What do we do with him if we assert that Shade, rather than Botkin, is Kinbote's primary personality?

The answer to this question may not be as unsolvable as it first appears. To suggest that Kinbote is a secondary personality of John Shade does not likewise suggest that Kinbote realizes this fact. As Myers and others have repeatedly shown, it is possible for both primary and secondary personalities to be aware of one another while still not grasping that they share a body. It is, however, possible that Kinbote/Shade, sensing *someone* behind the Charles identity, may have chosen Shade's real-life neighbor, V. Botkin, as that source. If we look back at both *The Eye* and *Despair*, we can see Nabokov playing with slightly different versions of this notion. In *The Eye*, the narrator believes (or *asserts* that he believes) that he is observing one of his neighbors, Smurov, though in fact he himself is Smurov. In *Despair*, Hermann Karlovich, whose name represents a combination of Shade and Charles,²⁴ believes himself to be a perfect double of a stranger, Felix, though in fact he looks nothing like him. In *Pale Fire*, Nabokov creates another variation on this same idea. V. Botkin has indeed moved into Judge Goldsworth's house while Goldsworth is on sabbatical. He shares an occasional evening ramble with Shade, and it is even possible that he is an eccentric fellow, though probably not to the same degree as Kinbote. Kinbote, then, is a complex made up of John Shade's own subconscious and his observations of his neighbor, V. Botkin. Like Smurov and Hermann, Shade confuses himself with a neighbor/stranger, though in Shade's case it is his secondary personality, Kinbote, who takes on that confusion.

²³ "Russian descent" seems to imply that Botkin is American-born, perhaps of Russian parents or grandparents. However, in a 1962 interview with the *New York Herald Tribune*, Nabokov states that Professor Botkin is "a Russian and a madman" ("Nabokov's Plums" 2).

²⁴ Hermann translates as "mr. man," while Shade points out that his last name in Spanish is "almost man." Karlovich more obviously corresponds to Karl/Charles.

If Kinbote is a mixture of the scholar and poet John Shade and his eccentric Russian neighbor, V. Botkin, his Zembla narrative should reflect that mixture. One of the largely unacknowledged difficulties of the traditional reading of the novel has been a failure to account for how much of Kinbote's Zembla (as well as Kinbote's larger knowledge base) seems to spring not from Russian history and literature (as one would expect from the Russian Botkin, and which Nabokov certainly could have managed) but from English history and literature. Indeed, many of the most important of Kinbote's allusions come specifically from Alexander Pope, the very poet on whom John Shade is a leading expert. As Kinbote himself notes, Shade's reference to Zembla comes from Pope's *Essay on Man*, and thus we associate Kinbote's Zembla with Pope, as well. This sense is intensified by the fact that the final words of the Index, "a distant northern land," come directly from Pope's "Rape of the Lock."²⁵ When Kinbote calls Shade's friend Paul Hentzner a "curious German" (185), he is quoting by heart from Pope's poem "Phryne." And he is easily able to recognize another quote from *Essay on Man* when he encounters it in one of Shade's variants (202-03). Does it seem at all plausible that V. Botkin, who does not appear to teach in Shade's department, just happens, like Shade, to be an expert on Pope? So much so that he describes his homeland in terms cribbed directly from Pope's mock epic?

But that is just the tip of the allusive iceberg. The whole Zemblan narrative is stitched together from a knowledge base consistent with Shade's education and interests. Priscilla Meyer has shown that Zembla's King Charles is in many respects a thinly-veiled version of Charles I and II of England. His escape narrative, from Boscobel to Colonel Montacute, is full of details directly drawn from an era of British history well-known to any scholar of renaissance and neoclassical literature. In addition to this history, the Zembla narrative contains clear allusions to other works of western literature. Anthony Hope's popular novel *The Prisoner Of Zenda* is an obvious influence, as is *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. Kinbote's escape over the mountains, complete with cloak, cap, and a night in a hayloft, is taken directly from Arnold's "The Scholar Gypsy," from which Kinbote quotes in his note to line 1000.²⁶ Thurgus the Third's mistress, Iris Acht, bears a striking resemblance to Irene Adler, Sherlock Holmes' adversary in Conan Doyle's story "A Scandal in Bohemia." And it is Shade, not Kinbote, who introduces Holmes into the novel via his lines about the pheasant in Canto One (P27-8). Kinbote's description of soldiers playing

²⁵ To our knowledge, this connection was first made in a post by Brian Boyd to Nabokv-L, 14 Dec 2000.

²⁶ Arnold's gypsy goes about "In hat of antique shape, and cloak of gray." In winter, he climbs "the Cumner range" and then beds down in the "straw of some sequestered grange." The narrator then imagines the gypsy's grave "Under a dark-fruited yew-tree's shade." John Shade once moved to "Yewshade," in a "higher state" (P509).

“lansquenet” (122) is lifted from the chapter “The Game of Lansquenet” in Alexandre Dumas’ *Twenty Years After*, in which soldiers play the card game outside a room where England’s Charles II is held prisoner. Aros, the “capital of Conmal’s dukedom” (305), is also the name of the setting for Robert Louis Stevenson’s story “The Merry Men,” in which a man who appears to be dead rises from his grave and chases a thieving “madman” to his death. Even the description of Thurgus the Third “in a dressing gown of green silk, and carrying a flambeau in his raised hand” (314) has as its original the most American of images: the Statue of Liberty.

Against this wealth of western literature and lore, along with a good dose of Norse mythology, we have comparatively little Russian flavor. As Brian Boyd has pointed out, “there is actually little connected Russian in the Commentary” (B2 124). And we do have a hint that Shade knows his Russian literature. In his note to line 172, Kinbote reports Shade’s comment that the Russians “have such marvelous humorists as Gogol, Dostoevski, Chekhov, Zoschenko, and those joint authors of genius Ilf and Petrov” (155). Many American intellectuals of the 1950s would be familiar with the first three authors listed here, but the references to Zoschenko and Ilf and Petrov reveal a deeper interest in Russian literature than we might expect. We should also remember that Shade’s mother (and thus his maternal grandfather) had the last name Lukin, which Nabokov knew as a common Russian name, though Kinbote asserts that it is British.²⁷ So it is certainly possible that Shade could have supplied Kinbote with the little Russian that appears in the commentary. It seems to us less likely that V. Botkin, from what we know of him, could have supplied Kinbote with what can only be described as a writer’s deep, almost instinctual, knowledge of English literature and history.

Finally, it worth noting that Nabokov has written before about a recent Russian émigré teaching at an American university. Indeed, Professor Pnin makes a cameo appearance in New Wye, where he chairs the Russian department at Wordsmith. But Kinbote/Botkin differs from Pnin in one very significant way: his English is far, far superior to Pnin’s. While Pnin naturally struggles to express himself in English, Kinbote’s commentary reveals a startling display of eloquence and sophistication in English. While it’s true that Nabokov, himself a Russian émigré, wrote Kinbote’s words, he could hardly have done so in the early 1940s, when he first came to America. For Kinbote/Botkin to be so astonishingly eloquent after, we must assume, such a recent arrival, seems both remarkable and curious.

²⁷ In his commentary to *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov singles out for praise a play by the 18th century Russian author Vladimir Ignatievich Lukin.

VII. Passing the Baton

What happened to John Shade on the evening of July 21, 1959? In order to understand those final, crucial moments, we must first consider what happened to him before that momentous day. In his childhood, Shade suffered from fits, the exact nature of which is hard to pin down. Perhaps they were, as Kinbote surmises, a form of epilepsy, or, as Dr. Colt claims, “mainly growing pains” — though it’s hard to imagine what “mainly” would mean here, or that daily blackouts could be so blithely dismissed. Jim Twiggs, in a post to Nabokv-L, has argued forcefully that Shade’s comparing the fits to an act of molestation is an indication of some kind of non-consensual sexual experience involving Aunt Maud. It is hard to see how Aunt Maud is specifically implicated here, but we agree with Twiggs that the metaphor is “jarring.” Moreover, Kinbote’s interpretation of it (“a country girl’s shy kiss”) contains a pun quite similar to that used by Shakespeare when Hamlet says to Ophelia, “Do you think I mean country matters? . . . That’s a fair thought to lie between maid’s legs” (3.2.116, 118-19).

In any case, as we have already seen, Shade’s fainting fit at the Crashaw Club seems a reprisal of his earlier physical and/or psychological malady, and it triggers the arrival of Kinbote into Shade’s doubled consciousness. As the hour of Shade’s demise approaches, Nabokov repeatedly allows us to see elements of the ultimate transfer of consciousness that will soon occur. In the note to line 991, Kinbote sets the scene by noting, along with the sound of horseshoes, the “ecstatic barking of the boxer dog whom most of the neighbors disliked (he overturned garbage cans) greeting his master home” (287). As is often the case in Kinbote’s commentary, the parenthetical aside turns out to contain a key piece of information. In his note to lines 47-48, Kinbote relates how, while eavesdropping on the Shades, he “dislodged the sonorous lid of a garbage can” (90). Why, we must ask, does Nabokov provide us this coincidence of detail, which only a careful reader will catch?²⁸ Kinbote himself has no motivation for blaming the dog, since he himself has admitted to knocking over the garbage can lid. But what if Nabokov is telling us, through the echo of that lid at the very end of his novel, that what Kinbote perceives as himself, separate from John Shade, can be accounted for by other outside forces? Just as in the opening stanza of Shade’s poem, where he looks outside and “duplicate[s]” himself, uniting “the viewer with the view,” here Kinbote (a part of Shade’s mind) is projecting himself out into Shade’s yard, thereby accounting for the garbage can noise that was actually

²⁸ This coincidence was first noted by Jansy Mello in a post to Nabokv-L, 30 Oct 2006.

caused by the neighborhood dog. On a larger scale, of course, he has done the same with V. Botkin, Shade's neighbor.

When in line 998 Shade refers to "Some neighbor's gardener," Kinbote is offended by the offhand quality of the reference, which he describes as a "vagueness I can only assign to his desire . . . to give a certain poetical patina, the bloom of remoteness, to familiar figures and things." But once again we get an immediate aside to which we should pay attention: "although it is just possible he might have mistaken him in the broken light for a stranger working for a stranger" (290-91). Here, as with the comment about the boxer dog, the truth wedges itself in, almost unnoticed. Why is it "just possible" that Shade might think it is a stranger's gardener? Shade has lived on Dulwich Road practically all his life. It is likely that the only stranger with a gardener living nearby is Judge Goldsworth's tenant, V. Botkin. We may thus surmise that Shade is not nearly as well-acquainted with his neighbor as Kinbote would have us think. While Shade may have had some limited interaction with V. Botkin, Shade's own words, along with Kinbote's aside here, reveal that most of the conversations, events, and various intimacies that he claims to have shared with Shade are really the product of his own imagination and/or his limited interaction with Shade's primary personality. Just as he has created the elaborate Zemblan narrative from shards of English literature and history, so too has he constructed his New Wye narrative out of bits and pieces of John Shade's own inner life and local observations.

If we desire more proof of the instability of Kinbote's New Wye descriptions, we need only observe Kinbote's note to line 894, in which he recounts an incident in the faculty lounge where a German lecturer recognizes him as the Zemblan king, and Gerald Emerald finds Charles the Beloved's picture in the encyclopedia. Since Zembla is clearly a fiction, and there is no Zemblan king, the events in Kinbote's note cannot have happened as he claims. And if *this part* of Kinbote's New Wye narrative is unreliable, can we really be sure that all the other events he recalls happened as he claims? It seems possible that Nabokov included the note to line 894 in part to alert readers to the fact that even Kinbote's relation of events in New Wye can't be taken at face value.

This does not mean that we cannot appreciate and even relish all of the events *as related*; it simply means that while we enjoy, say, Kinbote's exchange with Sybil the day after Shade's birthday party, we can likewise enjoy imagining that external conversation as an inward expression of something in John Shade's Kinbotean personality. We delight, after all, in Oswin

Bretwit's blunt-witted battle with Gradus even though we know it has no reality outside of Kinbote's mind.

Returning to the moments just before Shade's transformation, we should note the significance of the geography as Kinbote presents it. In the beginning of his note to lines 993-995, Kinbote notes the Red Admirable, which appeared "[o]ne minute before his death, as we were crossing from his demesne to mine" (290). Kinbote's use of "demesne," rather than "yard" or "lawn" or some other more concrete description, should alert us to the possibility of a secondary meaning: that Shade's body is moving from the possession of his primary personality to that of his secondary personality, Kinbote. A similar move will be made in the note to line 1000, where Kinbote says that Shade, already dying, reaches for his hand, "as if passing to me, in a sublime relay race, that baton of life." This metaphor is exceedingly precise, since it implies that Kinbote did not fully have life until John Shade's life gave way, just as a runner in a relay race is part of the race but has not yet contributed until he has seized the baton himself.

The arrival of Gradus, the catalyst, on the scene finally brings together all three of the selves foreshadowed in the first lines of John Shade's poem. And as in those first lines, only one will "live on, fly on" after the collision. Kinbote is strangely vague about the week he spends in New Wye after Shade's demise. Why does he not mention anything about Shade's funeral, or lack of one? What were the "secrets" and "dead fish" that Shade's death unleashed (17)? And is it really likely that Sybil Shade, even in her most vulnerable of moments, signed a contract allowing Kinbote to publish her husband's poem? Yet Kinbote does seem to have Shade's poem, and he even seems to have found a publisher, as his comical instructions to the "professional proofreader" confirm (18). In fact, these instructions in the Foreword are among the first clues that Shade and Kinbote are not as distinct as they may seem.

Kinbote's publisher, "good old Frank," is a puzzling figure. It is irrational by any hypothesis that the publisher of *Pale Fire* would be trustworthy. No publisher with any integrity would allow Kinbote to publish his work as a legitimate literary commentary. Kinbote's insanity would be as apparent to him as it is to us, if not more so. Clearly, Frank, if he exists at all, is not a particularly ethical intercessor. But the evidence that points distinctly to Shade and not to Botkin or another individual as commentator can be found in the Foreword itself, when Kinbote seems to add one of Frank's required changes without removing the editorial markup:

Frank has acknowledged the safe return of the galleys I had been sent here and has asked me to mention in my Preface — and this I willingly do — that I alone am responsible for any mistakes

in my commentary. Insert before a professional. A professional proofreader has carefully rechecked the printed text . . . (18)

The “Insert before a professional” indicates that Kinbote has been directed by Frank to include this disclaimer. Also supporting this assumption is the inserted “and this I willingly do,” which seems to be an addition that Kinbote has interjected into Frank’s already-composed sentence. “Frank has acknowledged the safe return of the galleys... and has asked me to mention in my Preface...” suggests that Frank sees Kinbote’s Foreword as a Preface. Traditionally, if an author writes his own introduction to a text, it is called a preface, and if written by someone else it is called a foreword. Frank’s labeling thus indicates that he sees the composer of the introductory element as the same writer who penned the poem: John Shade. Since Frank is not a particularly ethical businessman, his acceptance of whatever Shade chooses to write—as long as he himself is not implicated in the “mistakes” in the commentary—is not so surprising. He is sure to make some money on the deal, even if it means taking advantage of an obviously insane man.

VIII. The Dust of its Husk

With no Providence the soul must rely on the dust of its husk, on the experience gathered in the course of corporeal confinement, and cling childishly to small-town principles, local by-laws, and a personality consisting mainly in the shadows of one's own prison bars. (226-27)

So asserts the devoutly spiritual Kinbote, as he defends his belief in God to Shade. The “shadows of one’s own prison bars” calls to mind the anecdote Nabokov cited as being the first germ of his novel, *Lolita*, “about an ape in the Paris Zoo, who after months of coaxing by scientists produced finally the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal, and this sketch . . . showed the bars of the poor creature’s cage” (*Strong Opinions* 16). Despite its new outlet of expression, the ape relays only what it knows. Like the animal conditioned to draw, Shade’s subconscious is coaxed out of its natural latency into a new expressive capacity — but ultimately, its source of creative nourishment remains unchanged. Kinbote is an expression of Shade — not an independent being but a lens through which Shade’s mind is projected. But as Kinbote gains supremacy, his only source of material is obliterated: he is a projector without a film reel. Secluded in Cedarn, he must survive solely on “the dust of Shade’s husk,” the reminiscences of Shade he manages to

tenuously grasp in his Cedarn hideout: “the experience gathered in the course of corporeal confinement.” As he reaches the end of his Commentary, Kinbote assesses his fate:

Yes, better stop. My notes and self are petering out. Gentleman, I have suffered very much, and more than any of you can imagine. I pray for the Lord's benediction to rest on my wretched countrymen. My work is finished. My poet is dead. (300)

As he reaches the end of his work, the final entries of the Index, Kinbote expends the final remnants of the husk of Shade's personality, and it becomes clear that he will soon escape the confines of his corporeal confinement.

There are, no doubt, more facets to our argument than we have space to address here. There are likewise many questions, doubts, and lines of attack that have been insufficiently addressed thus far. There is, unfortunately, no perfect theory to suit *Pale Fire*, though it remains a near-perfect work of art. We do not assert that this theory provides the only true or useful or enjoyable way of approaching *Pale Fire*. Like Brian Boyd, we acknowledge that there may be different conclusions that can be drawn from the same evidence. Yet we also believe that Nabokov intended that we consider the solution we have proposed here — a solution that aims to resolve many aspects of the novel that have thus far remained spare pieces to the puzzle. Reading *Pale Fire* is not a zero-sum game; one level of understanding need not negate all others. Through this analysis, we hope that we have expanded the ways readers can approach the novel, without diminishing the legitimate joys of other lines of interpretation.

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