

Juan Martinez

BRIDGE, MEDIAN, AND UNDERPASS:
NABOKOV'S CIRCULATION
IN MOVIES AND TELEVISION

OVERVIEW

In my archive of one hundred and sixty-seven references, one hundred and forty-seven cultural producers nod at Vladimir Nabokov in their novels, television shows, songs, and movies, sometimes explicitly, sometimes in ways that would only allow a reader already well acquainted with Nabokov to spot the reference.¹ That they reference Nabokov is not unusual. Intertextual studies provide ample evidence that this act is an integral component in creating new literature, and anyone who has set pen to paper, anyone who has made a movie or a TV show or a song, has done so with some awareness—conscious or not, acknowledged or not—of predecessors and of tradition, which leads to specific compositional and narrative choices. Authors are aware of other authors, other works. But why Nabokov? Why this particular author to such an unusual degree?

There are, of course, infinite, infinitely recursive elements involved in any given compositional moment, so it helps to figure out Nabokov's role, his value, his participatory weight, in any given writer's enterprise. Bourdieu's explorations into the sociology of creative

¹ There are numerous references published after 2009, but the cut-off point allows for a more normalized decade-by-decade examination of the material. This group forms the heart of the data-set: a wide, seemingly disparate accumulation of texts all referencing a single author—a range interesting both for the disparity and the singularity, since examining the particulars of the phenomena allows for an alternate way of grouping texts. The archive is attached to this article as an Excel file for easy perusal.

endeavors suggests that artists operate in a marketplace somewhat-but-not-quite analogous to, and highly dependent on, the traditional economic marketplace. The most persuasive, most interesting aspect of Bourdieu's work for the purposes at hand is that the rules governing the artistic marketplace—what he will term the field of cultural production—are dramatically similar to those found in the economic marketplace, but that the currency exchanged in the former, the domain of artists, is symbolic. It is cultural capital. However, cultural capital circulates in ways that will translate, eventually, into actual currency (grants, endowments, book sales, university positions), so that the honest and wholehearted pursuit of one form of capital potentially leads to a gain in the other.

There are reasons to suspect Bourdieu's approach: it might be too programmatic, it might assume too deterministic a view of human nature² (the creative class, Bourdieu asserts, is an easily recognizable demographic, and it is a demographic very much dependent *on* class—on constructed, bracketed notions of taste and education and income). All the same, the work is persuasive, and it provides a practical way to discuss the highly competitive nature of writing. One does not need to fully subscribe to Bourdieu's notions to accept that authors are aware of each other and that their works circulate in ways tightly connected to their relationships to a world of letters. Cultural capital is a useful way of thinking about the rise and fall of a literary endeavor, a literary movement, or a literary figure. If it is better accepted as an analogy than as fact (symbolic capital *as* a symbol of a process or phenomenon better served by some other terminology), that is fine—what matters more is that Bourdieu's framework allows for a fairly coherent discussion of how an entire group of artists (a field of cultural production—or, in this case, a set of discrete fields with considerable interlocking overlap) engage with each other (via symbolic units of currency: cultural capital).

Nabokov is a particularly valuable piece of currency in this field of cultural production: he was a critically acclaimed author but he was also a best-selling sensation. He has the benefit of being wholly within popular circulation, thanks to *Lolita*, its success and controversy, its film adaptations, and its immersion into the vernacular (“*Lolita*” as shorthand for a sexually voracious young girl (not, incidentally, Nabokov's formulation, or really even Humbert Humbert's), a creature and a term both separate from and linked to the novel of the same name), while also

² Bruno Latour will critique Bourdieu throughout *Constructing the Social*, finding that the Bourdieuan “symbolic economy of fields” is “misleading if taken as a description of the common world” and (worse) indicative of the “prophetic urge” inherent in traditional social sciences (189-190).

allowing for a series of obscure sets of signifiers whose meaning would only be clear to fellow readers of Nabokov's deep catalogue ("Lolita is famous, not I," Nabokov wrote, "I am an obscure, doubly obscure novelist with an unpronounceable name"). He is the best of all worlds: highly successful both within a community trafficking purely in cultural capital but equally successful in the far less symbolic arena of actual capital, a figure capable of astute business dealings, not the type to be circumvented by base tradesmen: Nabokov would write to his publishers too that he wrote for pleasure "but published for profit." He embodies the ambitions of many writers, first laboring in saintly obscurity³ then succeeding in every way—critically, commercially, personally—to an unprecedented degree: as a unit of symbolic capital, he is difficult to top.

Writers referencing Nabokov work through a great many received and general notions of authorship, since his symbolic capital extends beyond the authorial public epitext and deep into Nabokov's own cultural productions themselves, which are singularly authorially minded. Nabokov, after all, is the first author to reference Nabokov: he appears at the end of both *Priglasenie* and *Invitation to a Beheading*, and his works are interspersed throughout *Ada*, *Look at the Harlequins!*, and elsewhere. In his screenplay adaptation for Kubrick's version of *Lolita*, Nabokov writes in his own cameo as a distracted butterfly hunter, too caught up in his lepidopteral pursuits to provide adequate directions to Humbert Humbert.

If, as Reading points out in "Vulgarity's Ironist," Nabokov's *Pale Fire* is effective at guiding its own reading, with Nabokov possessing an "invisible lever for transforming critical analysis into readerly compliance," it is because Nabokov's work is so centripetally dependent on Nabokov himself (2006, p. 80). Nabokov is the arbiter of the aesthetic and ethical disposition of his own work. In *Strong Opinions*, he famously claims that his characters are galley slaves and that he is "the perfect dictator in that private world insofar as I alone am responsible for its stability and truth" (1990, pp. 95, 69).

A reference to Nabokov's authorial figure is made in the shadow of Nabokov's own commentary on authorship—the author as a galley master, the author as a dictator—and what that commentary means for authorship as a whole: that the authorial figure is the ultimate arbiter of his or her product, which leads to more general thoughts on writerly contrast, demarcation,

³ This obscurity seems nearly as important as other aspects of Nabokov's aura: that he still is, to some extent, a writer difficult to pin down—neither modernist nor post-, neither American nor Russian—is surely part of the appeal.

and difference. The Nabokov authorial figure, so assured, so serene and composed, presents itself as a particularly seductive model, so that the writer referencing Nabokov is, to some degree, reinforcing his or her own primacy as an author: I too am a galley master, a dictator. If a reference is made as a way of paying tribute and showing appreciation, it's well worth keeping in mind that what is being paid tribute to, what is being appreciated, is a trait shared between the writer referencing and the writer referenced, an articulation and recognition of a shared turn of mind.

This sense of recognition becomes partly more understandable when considering any single artist's reluctance to be seen as part of a larger field. One invokes an author partly as a way to illustrate what an author is or should be, what he or she should believe, and it is no surprise that Nabokov features prominently in works where the protagonist, often also a writer, stands at odds with accepted norms. Nabokov is a proud loner himself, famously distrustful of schools and groups and collectives and (as he put it) “-isms.” All this stuff carries over into the Nabokovian currency—what Genette identifies as the public epitext—which in turn informs readers.

Here, an allusion does not limit itself, as Machacek and Genette claim, to the immediate lexical field—to the paragraph or page or even chapter. Rather, the allusion signals an entire aesthetic disposition whose hallmark is often what McGurl will see as the figure of the privileged outsider: the outsider within the community, criticizing it from within, and legitimizing the community through criticism, the nonconformist “as a threat to social order and as a source of spiritual purity and violent renewal of that order” (2009, p. 198). McGurl sees this trend flowering in the 1960s, when writers were attempting to come to terms with the institutions that housed them, also the time that Nabokov references first surface in print. The ghosts of nonconformism were everywhere in that decade, but Nabokov is a nonconformist's nonconformist: politically conservative, aesthetically daring, refusing then (and still now) to fit into any neat category.

My project and its archive suggest that cultural producers reassert the autonomy of the individual author when they reference Nabokov in their own texts, and in doing so form a sort of ad-hoc Nabokovian group or school even when the members and their immediate milieu would not seem to have anything in common otherwise. Nabokov functions as a unit of cultural capital particularly valuable because of its symbolic weight as a unit of the autonomous, intransigent

authorial figure, bulwarked by equal parts mainstream bestselling success, critical respectability, and seeming invisibility.

This circulation can be seen in literature, but it also finds a fascinating purchase in television and film. As explored below, Nabokov takes on the mantle and the aura of the literary world at large, Nabokov as a complicated stand-in for the world of letters, with the particulars of his life and work blurring. The particulars become hard to distinguish, harder still to parse, and Nabokov himself grows distant, vague. The more he travels, the more he is absorbed by the cultural producers who reference him. They use him to talk about themselves. They find in him a suitable substitute for who they are, or who they would like to be. In every sense of the phrase, Nabokov becomes them.

UNDEAD NABOKOV

“I take it back! I’m sorry I called Nabokov a pedophile!” says a character (identified in the script only as “INTELLECTUAL”) in Peter Jackson’s 1992 *Dead Alive*, shortly before being bitten by zombies. The line barely registers: *Dead Alive* moves so fast, a frantic blur of gags and severed limbs and gore, that its relative oddity goes unremarked. What is Nabokov doing in a zombie movie, and a low-budget New Zealand movie at that? This allusion—like hundreds of others made to Nabokov across literature, television, movies, and songs—takes refuge in its seemingly localized and discrete range, but it points to a curious intersection of cultural producers who operate in contiguous but fundamentally different fields. The movie belongs to the field of large-scale cultural production where movies (even cult New Zealand zombie movies) are produced. Vladimir Nabokov, as a unit of cultural capital, circulates in that same field but originates in the considerably smaller literary field, so we find the author acting as a kind of invisible bridge between the two—a median, an underpass.

Dead Alive’s director Peter Jackson accommodates both the literary and the cinematic in that small, goofy, gruesome moment, and provides a commentary on their overlap, but he has done so before through his directorial and screenwriting duties as well as through his fervent, maniacally considered adaptations of novels—chiefly (to date) those of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, as well as Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones*. *Dead Alive* is also, in a way, a kind of adaptation, since like *Shaun of the Dead* (which it antedates) and *Return*

of *the Living Dead* (which it follows), *Dead Alive* is both a tribute and a send-up of zombie films, particularly those of George Romero (*Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead*, and its sequels). The movie is deeply intertextual. *Dead Alive* plays with genre conventions, wildly riffs on expected horror tropes, and gleefully mixes the (gruesomely) cartoonish with the (gruesomely) realistic. The reference itself is, on the face of it, tremendously cartoonish because of its incongruity—of all the things one can say, right before one dies, is this one particular regret the one that comes to mind?

Put another way, if Mary in Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (a character that also suggests that Nabokov is a pedophile) were about to get eaten by a zombie, would she also apologize for having called Nabokov a pedophile? However cartoonish, however incongruous, the reference is a sophisticated commentary on Nabokov's conflation with his character, particularly since the stereotypical intellectual is shown—in the brief, passing scene of his passing—as someone who values the simplified, glib bit of cultural capital (Nabokov = scandalous famous author = pedophile) over its more nuanced, complicated actual value (Nabokov = author of a famous novel whose narrator is a pedophile). Authorial epitext is blurred into a seemingly straightforward textual co-presence. The intellectual's regret, however, is short-lived. Right before he turns into a zombie, he straightens his tie and says, "Some of my best friends are pedophiles!"

This urge to correct, to refine Nabokov's image will recur, and as always the corrective urge in the reference will often be found in cultural products that are themselves concerned with cultural producers. Also relevant is noting that this blurring of an authorial persona with his or her cultural product is, in and of itself, a transtextual connection, since Nabokov himself plays with this idea frequently, particularly in his later fiction. This blurring leads to considerable complications when it comes to determining which references are "purely" Nabokovian, but it does not really affect the inter-field dynamics explored below.

The most salient form of transit occurs between the field of large-scale cultural production and the literary field. The means of dissemination differ between the two fields. Literature, unlike movies or television, is created and disseminated in a symbolic marketplace in the field of restricted production. But a great deal of transit occurs between these fields, and a cultural producer operating in the large-scale marketplace can traffic in symbolic capital

originating elsewhere. (Zombies, meet Nabokov.) Nabokov signals expansion and kinship instead of contraction and autonomy.

While this affiliation partakes, paradoxically, of Nabokov's cultural capital as an autonomous author, its transit from one field to the next simplifies and amplifies the author's currency: authorial autonomy is a given, and what is valued instead is literature's received associations with narrower, more exclusive fields of cultural production. (Bourdieu does not call the arts' inner sanctum the field of *restricted* cultural-production without reason, nor is he alone in finding it so.) Nabokov, in other words, is introduced as a stand-in for literature at large, and literature at large is introduced because of its signifying connotations of disinterestedness, high-mindedness, difficulty, and elusiveness. If Nabokov is an exotic figure in the literary field, his transit into large-scale culture allows the literary field as a whole to partake of that exoticism. All writers in effect become Nabokov.

Partly by design, and partly by accident, a Nabokov reference in popular culture expands, or aims to expand, the perceived class and social borders of its field, with Nabokov brought in as a legitimating force. Nabokov's freight does not lose much of its value in its transport from literature to television and movies, nor does the manner in which the reference is made change much. Obscure and clever Nabokov references abound in visual media, as do overt and obvious references, but those two groups are found in proportions roughly similar to those found in literature. What changes is the perceived symbolic weight of authorship: Nabokov does not circulate as a symbol of autonomy or intransigence and instead circulates as a more general signifier of the written. The cultural product's referential modality may or may not shift (it often does not) but the weight of Nabokov's symbolic capital is here used to negotiate middlebrow anxieties over genre. The same symbolic capital used to assert authorial independence is here used to associate the literary author's generic/paratextual aura with cultural products whose dispersal scale he or she could hardly dream of.

This perceived symbolic weight owes as much to Nabokov's symbolic capital as it does to the real-world exigencies of mass-cultural production. As pointed out before, it helps that Nabokov achieves general circulation through *Lolita*—his cultural capital derives from the twinned, seemingly irreconcilable elements of highbrow critical admiration and midcult bestselling sensation—and it is no surprise that so many references studied below will turn to *Lolita* but, again, not in proportions significantly different from those found in literature. It helps

too that a popular culture product requires a great deal of negotiation and compromise, so that nothing that circulates successfully is created without a significant amount of collaboration, so that notions of authorial agency are necessarily adjusted from one field to the next. The product's material conditions—what Johnson describes as the circuit of textual production, the circumstances and the world into which it is brought to being, from which it is developed and out of which it is circulated—will play a part in determining how its cultural producer feels about his or her role as an author. A screenwriter knows that others (producers, directors, actors, other screenwriters brought in at the last minute) will have a hand in shaping the product. In this field, authorial intransigence and authorial autonomy are suspect in practice, if admired in theory.

Nabokov's symbolic capital circulates in genre-specific media, and Nabokov's symbolic importance fluctuates between its dual roles of intransigent agent of autonomy/independence and legitimating ambassador of the written. Whereas Nabokov signals a turn toward individual, autonomous, and intransigent agency in the literary field, here he signals an expansion—he acts as a kind of bridge. Thus symbolic capital used to indicate a narrowing of movement operates to widen the world in which the cultural product works.

OVERVIEWS

I had assumed that the pool of references would grow wider as the number of presumed collaborators decreased—that it would be easier for a cultural producer to insert a Nabokov reference when the number of gatekeepers was limited—but that does not seem to be case. What does change is the degree to which he acts as a legitimating force. Nabokov, it seems, thrives just as well in popular culture artifacts where a significant number of participants affect the final product (there are references in 10 movies and 18 television shows) as where the number of collaborators or influencers is significantly reduced (there are references in 24 songs, 16 pop novels, and three textbooks). The distribution seems to confirm this relationship between reference and number of collaborators, with the largest percentage belonging to songs (33%) closely followed by television (25%), pop novels (22%), and movies (14%). This ubiquity confirms the seemingly innocuous pervasiveness of the allusive act—here, as in the written, allusion occurs under the cover of its own seemingly localized realm. If not exactly invisible, it is allowed to pass, allowed to circulate, because its perceived impact is so small.

This seeming invisibility extends as well to *Lolita*, which circulates widely in popular culture, often independently from its creator, but not as widely as one would assume. The expectation would be that *Lolita*, or “Hurricane Lolita” as Nabokov called the phenomenon, would overwhelm the list of references, but the novel is invoked only 60% of the time. Though by far the largest presence, it is nowhere near as ubiquitous as it could be. And the numbers remain consistent even when broken down by media: 50% of television shows reference *Lolita*, followed by 60% of movies that do so, and 63% of the novels. Songs reference *Lolita* the most, at 67%, though that percentage still leaves a respectable remainder that choose less widely circulating Nabokovian signifiers.

That said, many popular culture references that invoke Nabokov’s authorial persona will often confuse or blur the writer with his creation—a transtextual connection often but not always connected to its expected spur, *Lolita*. This confusion occurs most prominently in movie references, explored below, where Nabokov might just as well be Humbert. While one could argue that in these cases the cultural producer means to invoke *Lolita*, or the aura of *Lolita*, the fact remains that Nabokov was chosen instead—the author and his attendant paratextual set of signifiers, one of which is *Lolita*. Confused or not, what was invoked was a real human being, with a real set of publications, and not one of his galley slaves, as he was fond of calling his characters.

As with the novel references, references in the field of large-scale cultural production trickle in fairly early on and explode during the 1990s and 2000s, suggesting a strong relationship between two important factors: the greater circulation of Nabokov’s works starting in 1989 with the republication of the Vintage paperbacks as well as the greater complexity, diffusion, and variety of popular media during those decades. The earliest reference occurs in 1969 in the musical *Celebration*, the latest (keeping in mind that the cut-off date is 2009) around late September of 2009, during the first episode of the second season of the *90210* television show remake.⁴ One reference occurs in the 1960s, two in the 1970s, five in the 1980s, 30 in the 1990s, and 33 in the 2000s. The percentage of *Lolita* references, always high, does dramatically decrease as one goes forward in time. Only in the 1990s do we find the first reference to *Pale*

⁴ Other references continue to surface. For example, the Vintage paperback edition of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* is visible just above and to the right of Joaquin Phoenix in this frame of Spike Jonze’s 2014 movie *Her*.

Fire as well as the first reference to the author, which says much to confirm Nabokov’s ever increasing valuation in the field of cultural production during those decades.

This valuation benefits from the increasing variety and greater sophistication of popular culture artifacts from the 1990s and 2000s. In other words, Nabokov is more likely to be referenced because the environment has changed: the context in which pop culture now thrives allows for a wider net of signifiers and a deeper arsenal of external references. A Nabokov reference, then, can be read as a partial confirmation of half of the central thesis behind Steven Johnson’s *Everything Bad Is Good for You: How Today’s Popular Culture Is Making Us Smarter*. Whether or not mass media *is* making us smarter is debatable, but the increasing diversity of Nabokov references is certainly a sign of greater sophistication, which Johnson sees reflected in the increased complexity of popular culture—a culture that makes greater and more intricate cognitive demands from its consumers (2005, pp. 9-11). Thus, more obscure Nabokovian cultural signifiers enter the field.

Table 1: Numbers and Percentage of References by Decade

Numbers/decade	Totals	<i>Lolita</i>	<i>Pale Fire</i>	Author	% <i>Lolita</i> refs
1960s	1	1			100%
1970s	2	1	0	0	50% (or 100%)
1980s	5	4	0	0	80%
1990s	30	20	3	6	67%
2000s	33	16	5	9	48%
<i>Total numbers</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>59%</i>

The table above (with data drawn from the material included in the appendix) shows that the percentage of *Lolita* references decreases with each decade, allowing for less obvious, more sophisticated Nabokovian references to circulate; the only outlier occurs in the 1970s, where a savvy viewer commented on loose parallels between Nabokov’s *Look at the Harlequins!* and a 1975 episode of *Columbo* titled “A Deadly State of Mind,” but the connection is so tenuous that it might not be a valid or deliberate allusion. If dismissed, the progression is clear: the 60s and 70s are dominated by *Lolita* to the exclusion of all other Nabokov references, with the percentages then dramatically decreasing by decade: 80% in the 80s, 67% in 1990s, and 48% in the 2000s (See Table 1: Numbers and Percentage of References by Decade).

Another barometer by which to measure the relative growth in referential sophistication would be the degree to which a reference is hidden in plain sight—that is, how much information a relatively savvy viewer would be required to already know in order to pick up on the Nabokovian reference—and there is also evidence here to confirm that references do grow considerably more skillful at elision, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s. Again, the growth in obscure references owes much to the increasing sophistication of cultural products, with their attendant expectations of consumers going through and revisiting them. But it may be just as likely to suppose that Nabokov references become more obscure and more playful, partly because of Nabokov’s increased circulation in the field. Nabokov, as a circulating unit of currency, can afford to be hidden because he is otherwise so much in plain view.

The figure itself will remain relatively low—only 27% of Nabokov references in popular media can safely be considered obscure—but this percentage is actually two points higher than the 25% found in mainstream literature, suggesting again a somewhat equivalent degree of sophistication in the means through which Nabokov circulates in both fields. I do not mean to suggest that elision alone can be used to declare some kind of equivalency between literature at large and, say, a post-punk album by the British band The Fall. What I do mean to point out, much like Johnson in *Everything Bad is Good for You*, is that the cognitive demands necessary to decode a pop-culture Nabokov reference can be roughly equivalent (if not slightly more difficult) than one found in a literary reference.

The labor required to identify and decode a Nabokov reference may be similar, but the inherent weight and value of a reference does change in transit, both changing often in a way that signals a preoccupation with various fields of cultural production—a preoccupation hinging on the immediate, localized concerns of the producer. The standard mode of attack in studies of popular culture is to shift the symbolic weight of a product onto its consumers, often by suggesting that a product aims to undermine or subvert or otherwise deliver smuggled content onto unsuspecting audiences, or that the content in some way contains within it a more unstable or more far-reaching reading of itself. While these approaches have merit, I am more interested in the auto-poetic data embedded in the information: the ways in which a Nabokov reference will so often reflect a concern with authorial matters, with matters of authorship. This concern surfaces in the list of references, since the overwhelming majority of them feature a wide array of authorial stand-ins.

“THE SCREENWRITER AS GOD!” (NABOKOV REFERENCES IN MOVIES)

“*Lolita* is famous, not I,” Nabokov claimed in *Strong Opinions*. “I am an obscure, doubly obscure poet with an unpronounceable name.” Given the context in which Nabokov is referenced in movies—often when an older man (if not exactly Humbert Humbert’s 42 at the age of his demise) is seducing a much younger woman (if not exactly a nymphet)—one would assume that Nabokov need not be invoked at all. *Lolita* and Lolita should do fine all by themselves. That they are often accompanied by their creator may or may not strike one as odd, or at the very least as unnecessary, but the context in which they find themselves signals that the allusion is triggered by a twinned preoccupation: (1) the immediate situation at hand and its kinship to the Humbert Humbert/Lolita dynamic; and (2) the authorial figure and the world in which he or she operates. That is why Humbert is so often paired with Nabokov: doing so allows the creator of the cultural product to negotiate notions of authorship that often extend well beyond the immediate context and often well beyond the cultural product itself.

Cultural producers may well want to comment on contemporary culture. We forget that they may be just as interested in their own role and place in that culture, as well as their relationship to other producers and to producers in other fields, and that they indulge their interest by referencing other cultural producers.

This auto-poetic preoccupation may explain why Nabokov references occur in movies which address cultural production and thus have a tendency toward self-reflexivity and recursivity. One would think of authors, authorship, and the field of cultural production if one were already working with themes, plotlines, and characters that were tackling authors, authorship, and the field of cultural production. And this correlation is striking: nearly all Nabokov movie references occur in movies connected to the field of cultural production—the connection is often fairly obvious (no surprise to find Nabokov invoked in movies about writers and aspiring writers) but not always, and even in this more nebulous area, even in places where Lolita appears without her creator, opportunities arise for cultural producers to comment on themselves.

Which leads to this question: is a showgirl a cultural producer? Or, more specifically, in the context of the movie *Showgirls*, can Nomi Malone, the lead showgirl played by Elizabeth

Berkley, be considered a kind of authorial stand-in? And if so, when she is accused of being a “One-day Lolita Pollyanna”—one of the many odd insults thrown her way, and one of the most cryptic—can it be seen as a passing commentary on authorship (Eszterhas, *Showgirls*, 1995)? The answer to the last question is likely No. The insult is clearly too brief and said too much in passing and, moreover, was likely chosen by screenwriter Joe Eszterhas for its almost nonsensical stringing together of sing-song vowels and consonants than for any actual connotative value—though the connotations are clear: both Lolita and Pollyanna being naïfs, and Lolita being a seductive naïf at that.

But the movie does explore an artistic progression of sorts, and it was written by someone absorbed by authorial concerns. In the movie, the character remakes herself and succeeds at a heavy cost (the movie did not succeed, critically or commercially, also at a heavy cost), and does so in a way that suggests, in its own rough rags-to-riches sort of way, artistic development. While the Kyle MacLachlan character facilitates the character’s transformation, there is some wiggle room to see the Shue character as a self-fashioning agent engaged in the creation of a cultural product. *Showgirls* is awash in popular culture signifiers, all inserted and fought for by screenwriter Joe Eszterhas, whose oversized persona (reflected in his two Hollywood memoirs as well as in just about every interview he has ever given, including the ones following his recent conversion to Christianity) often reflects a deep preoccupation with the role of the writer (more specifically, with the role of the writer Joe Eszterhas) in the film world: the subtitle of his *Devil’s Guide to Hollywood*, one of his memoirs, is “The screenwriter as God!” [exclamation mark Eszterhas’s]. If Eszterhas sees something of himself in (misunderstood, maligned) Nomi—a character he named after his wife and then, following the movie’s poor reception, regretted (a fact mentioned in two of his memoirs: at length in 2010’s *Hollywood Animal* and, most succinctly, in *The Devil’s Guide to Hollywood* [173])—then one could see the admittedly throwaway insult hurled at her as a commentary on authorship, and on the necessary seduction inherent in successful storytelling, whether one does so in a screenplay, a novel, or a Tropicana showroom. That Nomi is a childhood nickname and that Lolita herself is a child, is a coincidence that may have escaped Eszterhas (2006, p. 173).

Other screenwriters reference *Lolita*, often in situations involving cultural producers, in ways that suggest the same twinned preoccupation: (1) the immediate situation at hand and its kinship to the Humbert Humbert/Lolita seduction; and (2) the authorial figure and the world in

which he or she operates. This twinned preoccupation finds one of its oddest expressions in scenes where the one blurs with the other—when the authorial figure of Nabokov is confused for the figure authored by Nabokov, where Nabokov is mistaken for Humbert. Both a testament to Nabokov’s (and *Lolita*’s) circulation in the culture *and* evidence of the ways in which cultural content tends to both amplify and simplify in transit, this blurring also allows a screenwriter to associate his or her content with the literary field while also reinforcing the autonomy of the authorial act.

This tendency crystallizes itself in references introduced by cultural producers who are themselves regarded as auteurs, and whose aspirations often extend beyond the filmic and into the literary. Woody Allen and Peter Jackson (the latter already discussed above) both introduce Nabokov references into their films, and they both do so in ways that blur Nabokov’s authorial persona with the Humbert/Lolita dynamic, though (curiously) it is Allen—in a movie about writers—who most strays most in this regard and Jackson—in a movie about zombies—who manages to make the reference itself a sharp, if offhand commentary on this very blurring.

Like just about every other film written and directed by Woody Allen, *Manhattan* focuses on the romantic and creative tribulations of a cultural producer: in this case, Isaac, a TV comedy writer, struggling to complete his first serious work, a book on New York. Thus, the movie teems with cultural signifiers intimately connected with the act of creation itself, most of which reflect an attempt to bridge disparate fields. Not surprisingly, the first such signifier is Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, and this musical piece also bookends the movie. *Rhapsody in Blue* is itself a blur of genres, classical and jazz, as well as a blur of methods, requiring both strict adherence to musical notation and (in one notorious passage) relatively free-range improvisation. Isaac himself, conversant in both “high” and “low” cultures, is struggling with reconciling these disparate fields in transitioning from television to literature, though he is also engaged in another sort of bridging—connecting with a romantic interest who is much younger than him. If he is bridging an age gap and if one of the most iconic images in the film happens to feature a bridge (the 59th Street bridge), that is all well and good, though this motif need not necessarily translate into a cogent argument. It need not be a motif at all: often, a connotative field may construct itself out of quirks or accidents, not design. All the same, one can hardly avoid seeing this sort of bridging as part and parcel of Allen’s M.O., and it does make it easier to see *Manhattan*’s Nabokov reference in context.

The reference acts as a bridge in other ways as well, which conflate not just Nabokov's authorial persona with that of his character but also serve to thread together the various romantic entanglements in the movie. It follows a conversation between Isaac's friend and soon-to-be lover, Mary (played by Diane Keaton), and his current lover, Tracy (played by Mariel Hemingway). Mary asks Tracy what she does, and when Tracy answers that she goes to high school, Mary turns to Yale—Isaac's best friend, a college professor—and says, "Somewhere Nabokov is smiling, if you know what I mean" (Allen, 1979). At the time, Mary and Yale are together, as are Isaac and Mary. Shortly thereafter, Yale will leave Mary, Mary will get together with Isaac but—fairly soon after—will return to Yale. Isaac will attempt to return to Tracy, but by the end of the movie she is ready to move on: she's leaving New York (and its roster of Allen's signature urban neurotics) for England. Mary's last words to Isaac are, "Not everybody gets corrupted. You got to have a little faith in people." Isaac, no Humbert Humbert (but no Nabokov either), finds himself revisiting *Lolita's* final moments: a distraught former lover unable to convince the object of his affection to stay with him—Lolita will stay in Alaska, Mary will fly to New York. But—again—not only is Isaac not Humbert, he is also not Nabokov, and so Mary's comment—particularly the word "corrupt"—feels less like a deliberate echo of the novel and more like an accidental, if sweet, convergence. Tracy's deliberate, explicit Nabokov allusion, however, points to a recurring preoccupation in Allen's oeuvre: the failure of high cultural markers to adequately account or regulate personal behavior. In other words, Allen consistently insists on presenting highly articulate people with a demonstrably deep arsenal of cultural knowledge who behave in ways that are thoroughly incongruous with that arsenal—they talk smart but act stupid. The Nabokov reference carries a whiff of this incongruity within it, though it is likely that the erroneous conflation belongs to Allen, not to Mary. That it is Nabokov who is invoked, and not Humbert Humbert, matters not simply because it is symptomatic of how cultural capital gets simplified and amplified in transit. It matters most because the conflation allows Allen to present both reference and author together, so that the audience is presented with not just an allusion directly applicable to the situation at hand but also with far more important knowledge: Allen's characters (a crew of novelists, professors, and sundry urbanites) have read, can talk about literary authors, and that Allen himself is capable of introducing this field into his own. A side effect, of course, of this reflected glow is that it happens to cast Nabokov as someone who would presumably approve of pedophilia.

In *Gregory's Two Girls*, it is an English teacher who, after quoting Nabokov to a schoolgirl, is corrected (by her) on the correct Russian pronunciation of the author's name (Forsyth, 1999). In *Beautiful Girls*, it is far more abrupt: when told that Natalie Portman's character must be the "neighborhood Lolita," she replies that he must be the "alcoholic shit-for-brains" (Rosenberg, 1996). In *Kicking and Screaming*, shortly after a workshop sequence where a short story is praised for featuring a character who "has a little Holden Caulfield crossed with Humbert Humbert," another character lovingly describes his movie as "about this guy who lives with his mother and sort of fall in love. It's real, uh, shocking, you know, like *Lolita*." The correction soon follows—"They weren't blood relations in *Lolita*"—but the aspiring screenwriter remains undaunted: "Well, see, I'm doing something different, then" (Baumbach, 1995).

Nabokov movie references may also serve more prosaic purposes. They may allow for the creation of a necessary distance between characters and creator, or they may serve as a necessary cultural landmark to situate the narrative in its rightful historical context—but these purposes never seem to stray too far from a preoccupation with the field of cultural production explored above. If, for example, the mother in Jim Jarmusch's *Broken Flowers* is unaware of the unfortunate connotations of the name she has chosen for her daughter ("Lolita"), the fact remains that the central character, the mother's former lover, who must fight off this Lolita's advances is someone deeply entranced by cultural products—classical music and old movies in particular (Jarmusch, 2005). The same goes for the Nabokov reference in the Valerie Solanas biopic *I Shot Andy Warhol*, where in a conversation with publisher Maurice Girodias *Lolita* is referred to as "high class porn" (Harron, 1996). The conversation rightly belongs in the film, both as a matter of historical record and as a way to situate the movie within a specific cultural context, but it is nonetheless connected to the interplay of cultural producers—and aspiring cultural producers—in the field of cultural production: painters, artists, publishers, writers, and their attendants, hangers-on, and companions.

That a Nabokov reference often finds itself at the margins but extends its reach well beyond the immediate allusive situation—bridging arenas of dramatically different scopes and means of dissemination, allowing characters (and their creators) to situate themselves against or within the literary field by presenting a Nabokovian bit of authorial capital—is made most clear in the Charlie Kauffman-scripted *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*, a movie adapted from *Gong Show*-creator Chuck Barris's highly suspect, notoriously unreliable memoir. The movie conflates

reality and fiction, makes deft use of actors playing themselves or variants of themselves, deliberately distorting an already unreliable record, and introduces—at a key moment—the following exchange between Chuck Barris (played by Sam Rockwell) and Patricia Watson, a spy (played by Julia Roberts):

Chuck: “So, tell me, Patricia, why did you come here tonight?”

Patricia: “I don't know. You're cute in a homely sort of way, and it's lonely when the civilian you're fucking calls out the name on your fake passport.”

Chuck: ““All the information I have about myself is from forged documents.””

Patricia: “Nabokov.” (Kaufman, 2003)

If Nabokov acts as another kind of bridge here (Patricia's “Nabokov” immediately triggers some wonderfully over-the-top, table-clearing, spies-in-peril love-making), the structure itself is rickety. The quote, often attributed to Nabokov, actually belongs to a 1978 film adaptation of Nabokov's *Despair*—though whether it belongs to screenwriter Tom Stoppard or to director Rainer Werner Fassbinder is unclear (Stoppard, 1978). It is tempting to see the insertion of an apocryphal, incorrect Nabokov quote as a deliberate, playful commentary on the vagaries of authorship. After all, Barris's entire account (including the portion at hand, where he is bedding sexy double agents) is highly suspect, and the movie serves as, among other things, a commentary on authorial unreliability. Further, this is a movie authored by a screenwriter who has explored similar themes in multiple scripts, most notably in *Adaptation* and in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. And so it would make sense that Kaufman should continue this exploration of unreliability via a deliberate misattribution of material actually belonging to Stoppard, another writer also engaged in authorial hi-jinks, from a movie (and a book) about someone convinced he has found his double. Nabokov's *Despair* is a bleak comic noir. And the novel to a great extent—and the movie to a lesser—is all about people getting things wrong. It is more likely, however, that Kaufman's misattribution is a genuine, not a disingenuous, mistake, though even if so the central point holds: Nabokov is introduced to bridge the gap between the literary and the filmic, at the heart of which—tipped between various worlds, all wildly unreliable—stands Chuck Barris, with Kaufman lurking in the shadows, both (like Allen's Isaac) creatures of popular culture infatuated with the authorial glamour of the literary field. No

surprise to find that Allen and Kaufman both invoke the literary author Nabokov shortly before a seduction.

Cultural producers may well resist the idea that Nabokov appears in movies as a kind of aspirational brand—as a figure used to negotiate notions of authorship and to bridge the “high” field of literary production with the “low” field of popular culture. They may well object to this division between the fields, and they would do so with good reason—the latter is not only better paid but has arguably produced some of the most stirring, sophisticated, and rewarding cultural artifacts of the past few decades. They may well argue that a Nabokov reference is the result of chance and individual taste, and that no consistent pattern can be drawn from the allusions discussed above. There is something to that argument: in finding patterns, the observer always risks overreaching, finding significance where none exists, behaving like Hermann in *Despair* and deciding that his or her image is reflected in a stranger who does not resemble us one bit. But the pattern seems to bear out. The double resembles the observer. And Nabokov references tend to appear in movies that demonstrate a greater-than-average preoccupation with cultural production at large and with cultural producers in particular.

Not always, though. And perhaps this still from *I Love You, Man* serves as a welcome reminder that not all signifiers need to fit the pattern one has uncovered. If there is a reason for Nabokov’s *Ada* to lurk, like it does, over Paul Rudd, I for one am at a loss for what that reason may be (see Figure 1: Nabokov in *I Love You, Man*).



Figure 1: Nabokov in *I Love You, Man*

“ONE ACROSS, EIGHT DOWN” (NABOKOV REFERENCES IN TELEVISION SHOWS)

There are ten Nabokov references found in movies, but nearly twice that number in television, 18, which would suggest strong confirmation of another Johnson hypothesis—that syndication, DVDs, Blu-Rays, the Internet, and increasing and ever-proliferating distribution means have resulted, over the years, in ever more sophisticated TV shows designed to bear repeated viewings with embedded and encoded information built in to reward attentive audience members (2005, p. 159). Johnson sees the economic motive in forging highly allusive, referential entertainments, and the data set’s spike of 1990s and 2000s references concords with Johnson’s assumptions, but the relative sophistication of Nabokov references drops precipitously in TV shows. Nowhere in the master data set are there more banal, half-understood nods to *Lolita*, though these are balanced to a great extent by clever, obscure, well modulated references. This is to say that a denser referential field does not necessarily yield better or more sophisticated references, just more of them. The quality varies, but the measured increase is in quantity. That said, all television references do share one common trait: more than movie references, television references demonstrate a greater preoccupation with the referenced cultural capital’s legitimating potential, so that Nabokov signals a cultural anxiety, an attempt to align the product with received notions associated with the literary field. Nabokov, in other words, is often invoked as shorthand for literature at large and for its attendant connotations of difficulty, elusiveness, and high-mindedness.

This impulse occurs in even the tawdriest references, those where *Lolita* is invoked partly to titillate, partly to telegraph faux-sophistication. If Timothy Lea, a writer for *CSI: New York*, names a bar frequented by pedophiles *Nabokov’s*, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that the bar itself is actually far more sophisticated, far better looking and more upscale than it has a right to be. Nor does a reference need to refer to a criminal act to partake of this faux sophistication. Often, Humbert Humbert is be invoked, with varying degrees of success, as a way to both connect the situation at hand with the *Lolita*/Humbert dynamic while also signaling an affiliation with the field of cultural production. Thus, *Dream On*’s Martin will be greeted as Humbert Humbert by his (young) girlfriend’s mother in a 1992 episode (Engel, 1992), and Chuck in a 2008 *Gossip Girl* episode also refers to a predatory character as a Humbert Humbert (John, 2008); a soon-to-be love interest in a 2002 *Dawson’s Creek* episode quizzes students with an

inane *Lolita* question (“When Humbert gets called away for the urgent phone call, he returns to find Lolita doing what with the likes of Clare Quilty?”) (Fattore, 2002); Brenda in a 2002 *Six Feet Under* episode describes a character as her Humbert Humbert (Taylor, 2002); and a sixteen-year-old aspiring author in a 2007 *Californication* episode is praised for potentially writing the “smartest, sexiest novel since *Lolita*” (Kapinos, 2007). All these characters, operating within the constraints of their cultural product, declare an affiliation with higher, presumably more sophisticated fields: Martin is a book editor, Chuck an urbanite ne’er-do-well, the *Dawson’s Creek* professor a once-great novelist, Brenda a successful academic and book author, and *Californication*’s protagonist a burnt-out novelist. Very little actual intellectual labor happens in any of these episodes, and Nabokov appears to lend a measure of legitimacy to the characters’ intellectual aspirations: they must be writers, and they must be smart. How can they not be? After all, here they are, writers and cultural producers all, name dropping Nabokov. Most, however, mispronounce his name.

A *Lolita* reference need not mean an obvious, overt, or simplistic concordance between the novel and a cultural product. In fact, the most playful television reference happens to explicitly address Nabokov’s most famous novel while managing to be both thoroughly engaging and to truly exploit the Humbert/Lolita dynamic in ways that are subtle and surprising. More surprising still, perhaps, is that the reference appears in a traditional three-camera sitcom: *NewsRadio*. Another traditional sitcom, *The Big Bang Theory*, also references Nabokov, though arguably less successfully (and more overtly). In both, however, the reference finds a higher register partly because the dynamic inherent in the situation resonates to a far greater degree than those previously mentioned, and partly because the reference is treated lightly, free from the midcult anxiety and *poshlostian* gravitas weighing down the previous references.

The *NewsRadio* reference succeeds because its *Lolita* allusion frees itself from both author and text—paradoxically, it establishes the primacy of the authorial figure (and the authorial stamp) by eliding the author it references. The 1998 episode, titled “The Lam,” features a self-described agent of “pure evil” named Johnny Johnston (played by Patrick Warburton) who seduces Lisa Miller (played by Maura Tierney). He proposes by saying, “Lisa Miller, light of my fire, fire of my loins, will you marry me?” (Johnson & Marcil, 1998). This deliberate hypotextual distortion of *Lolita*’s famous opening passage aligns itself with the distortions found in novels as disparate as Shelley Jackson’s *Half Life* and Steve Martin’s anthology of *New Yorker* “Shouts &

Murmurs” pieces. Here, in this television show, as in the passages of literature also parodying *Lolita*’s opening passage, one can return to the issue of affiliation and alignment, and say that a deliberate epitextual distortion of the sort practiced by Shelley Jackson, the writers of *NewsRadio*, and the others engage in serves as a unit of cultural capital that allows each writer to declare him- or herself an independent, fully self-sufficient creator—the Autonomous Author. It’s precisely in this happily self-imposed, self-declared isolation where each *Lolita* parody finds common ground: in the seeming textual subservience to what came before in the field, which in being parodied establishes both the competency of the author and the primacy of authorship (and authorship’s primary identifying trace: style) over content. What is brought to the surface, after all, when engaging in these deliberate hypotextual distortions, is the author’s calling cards, his or her most immediate identifying traits, the authorial figure, his or her personality, “not the matter,” to quote Nabokov, “but the manner.” In *NewsRadio*, Nabokov functions as a currency whose primary asset is style—the free play and expression of words and ideas. Johnny Johnson succeeds in his seduction because he is so smooth, as the people around him remark, but then again so does the show, and so does Humbert Humbert, the most monstrous stylist of all, both a tragic figure and a figure of pure evil, who reminds us that one should “always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style” (1996, p. 7).

The manner is significantly less elegant in the pilot episode of *The Big Bang Theory*, which also references Nabokov, but does so far more explicitly, diminishing the weight of the authorial stamp while reinforcing Nabokov’s cultural capital as a stand-in for the literary field—with its attendant connotations of intelligence, high-mindedness, and difficulty. Nabokov, alongside multiple other signifiers, appears to demonstrate Leonard’s facility with facts and figures. He solves his neighbor’s crossword puzzle, saying, “One across is Aegean, eight down is Nabokov, twenty-six across is MCM, fourteen down is, move your finger... Phylum, which makes fourteen across Port-au-Prince... See, Papa Doc's capital idea, that's Port-au-Prince, Haiti” (Lorre, 2007). Nabokov is here, most explicitly, a piece of cultural capital—a bit of knowledge to be bandied about, a demonstrable token of a character’s intellectual arsenal.

This form of reference—Nabokov as an intellectual item in a list of similar intellectual items—recurs in other shows. Nabokov appears in a list, produced via hypnosis, of Russian authors in an episode of *Alias*, alongside Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov (Orci, 2002). In an *X-Files* episode entitled “Never Again,” Scully drafts a list of suspect Russians for Mulder to

investigate: Nabokov appears in the company of Russian-American comedian Yakov Smirnoff and the 1920s filmmaker Vsevolod Pudovkin (Morgan & Wong, 1997). Nor is this the only instance of an *X-Files* Nabokov joke. Darin Morgan, another writer for the show, references *Pale Fire*'s Kinbote in his episode "José Chung's From Outer Space," where the paranormal agents are forced to reconcile various—and conflicting—accounts of an alien called Lord Kinbote, though it becomes increasingly clear that the alien is likely the creation of a self-deluded character, Roky Crickeson, whose narrative becomes progressively more self-aggrandizing (Morgan D.). Kinbote serves as an indicator of solipsism, since everything in Roky's account increasingly turns inward, as Lord Kinbote reveals to him that he has been chosen, and that he is actually the chosen ruler of a remote world not far removed, in spirit at least, from Nabokov's Kinbote's own distant northern land. And here the episode's intertextuality mirrors Nabokov's own approach in executing a kind of brilliant self- and genre-parody: the episode brims with intertextual references, the oddest of which involves *Jeopardy*'s Alex Trebek, though it is unclear whether the characters have been hypnotized into believing they saw the game show host.

Multiple parodic scenes abound, including one that spoofs the broadcaster's other major extra-terrestrial draw at the time, *Alien Autopsy*, while also throwing in self-reflexive and -directed jabs (someone other than Mulder, for example, also displays an "I Want to Believe" poster, but he has crossed out "Want to"). Roky Crickeson, Lord Kinbote's creator, is a name that sounds suspiciously similar to that of former 13th-Floor-Elevators-frontman Roky Erickson, and Erickson had a notorious history of drug abuse and multiple mental breakdowns. Again, as in Nabokov, the viewer is allowed to miss these references: they fly by at breakneck speed and do so without severely affecting the larger skein of the story—that of two FBI investigators, agents Mulder and Scully, attempting to solve a mystery—much in the same way that *Pale Fire*'s commentary, no matter its multiple digressions, is driven in large part by three interlocking plots, that of Kinbote's attempts to connect with Shade, that of Gradus/Grey's assassination plot, and that of Charles Xavier's escape from Zembla.

All three plots satisfy fairly basic narrative needs, as does "José Chung," so that intertextuality works mostly by perversely insisting that one can make sense of what's going on without outside references. There is, in fact, a case to be made for intertextuality as an agent or catalyst for madness, since the *X-Files*'s Roky, like Don Quixote, has become so absorbed in his

fantasies that he can no longer distinguish the fictional from the actual. A similar case could be made for Kinbote: he may not be suffering from a lack of intertextuality but rather from a surfeit of it, since everything in Shade's poem is taken, by him, as a secret reference to Kinbote's own life and fantasies. Both Vladimir Nabokov, the author, and Darin Morgan, the episode's writer, include their respective intertextual references as means to bypass their story's narrators (Roky and Kinbote) and speak directly to a knowledgeable audience: as in *Tristram Shandy* and other highly intertextual works, we find here a secret communion between the author and a specific, knowledgeable segment of the audience. The narrators may be mad, but the references allow for a seemingly objective evaluation of the immediate circumstances.

Lord Kinbote also serves as a signal for an intertextual shorthand that follows Nabokov's own intertextual methods. The viewer is expected to either understand or gloss over the references, but those in the latter camp are given information that, in some ways, also acts as what Reading called the transformation of "critical analysis into readerly compliance" (80). That is, intertextuality turns the reader and the viewer into a compliant spectator, since in lieu of analysis he or she is actually performing a kind of passive, multiple series of readings, tracing the references without questioning the text itself and choosing, instead, to go where the author tells him or her to go. Further, there is no attempt on the part of anyone in the episode to explain Kinbote's name or to make sense of it beyond the immediate reality of the screen so that, as in *Pale Fire's* nod to *Hamlet*, one could quite easily never know the connective threads between one work and the other. These references, like the multiple overlapping *Zemblas*, point to a kind of manufactured reality that can only be decoded through additional layers of information.

What's more, the success of the reference depends on Nabokov's own approach to intertextuality, one that relies on an ideal reader or viewer's seemingly inexhaustible stock of cultural knowledge. Many of their references, after all, lack internal cues to their intertextual nature. They function as inside jokes only if entrance to the territory is concealed, misdirected, or otherwise barred. This opacity may explain Darin Morgan's very Nabokovian-sounding remarks when asked, for the episode's DVD commentary, about Lord Kinbote's provenance: "Are you really asking? That's a literary reference which I'd rather not discuss. There's a character in *Pale Fire* by that name and it ties in with the themes."

Nabokov too was a famously evasive and elusive interviewee. When asked, for example, whether he believed in God, he replied, "I know more than I can express in words, and the little I

can express would not have been expressed, had I not known more” (Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 1990, p. 45). The similarity between Morgan and Nabokov, here, is their refusal to provide a straightforward answer. *Pale Fire* is a notoriously playful novel, and this particular episode of the *X-Files* is playful along the same lines, but part of the playfulness lies precisely in the refusal to provide clear paths leading to a tidy resolution. Nabokov does not, for example, explain the literary palimpsest behind Zembla—its multiple uses and associations—nor does he fully account for Shakespeare’s presence in the novel—neither the multiple sources for the title nor the connotative echoes of Bodkin, botkin, and Kinbote. Nabokov expects the reader to do some homework. Morgan does not explain *Pale Fire*: he expects the viewer to pick up and read the novel.

Nabokov’s brand of intertextuality requires labor. And embedded in the labor is the idea that other texts matter, and that the pleasure of reading stems partly from the ability to connect multiple sources of information together into coherent patterns of signification. There is, then, in Nabokov’s playful approach to referencing other texts, an inherent generosity: *Pale Fire*’s Kinbote may lack the capacity to reach much beyond himself, but *Pale Fire* itself spills over into other texts in ways that sheds a kind of radiant, silvery light into unexpected places. This generosity might also account for another popular mode of *Pale Fire* references, one where Kinbote’s madness fades to the background and the reality of fictional texts is insisted upon.



Figure 2: Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark* in *Lost*

All these references—the ones found in *The Big Bang Theory*, *The X-Files*, and *Alias*—suggest a kind of tidy tallying of up intellectual capital, claiming literature’s aura of difficulty and elusiveness (all three episodes go to great lengths to demonstrate the vast intellectual storehouses of the players engaged with the reference) without taking it much further. The same could be said of Hurley’s reading of *Laughter in the Dark* in *Lost* (see [Figure 2: Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark* in *Lost*](#)): the reference may be meaningful, but its chief effect is to further extend the show’s already insistent, repeated, and overt claims to the literary/intellectual field. This is, after all, a show with principal characters named Locke, Sawyer, Hume, and Rousseau. While certain affinities may exist between the television show and the philosophers, authors, and characters it references, I suspect that *Lost*’s primary aim is to claim kinship between these disparate cultural producers.

CONCLUSION

Producers of popular culture reference Nabokov to align themselves with the literary field—the field associated with Nabokov’s locus of cultural production. Doing so allows these producers to articulate anxieties over the borders and limits and perceived attributes of their own field. Nabokov remains a particularly attractive unit of cultural capital because he is both a critical and commercial success, thus fulfilling to a great degree the popular-cultural idea (or ideal) of the literary author: cerebral, successful, vaguely American, vaguely European, moneyed, disinterested in money.

These same traits make Nabokov so attractive to his fellows in the literary field. If so, producers in the literary field and those in the field of large-scale cultural production share more than just a common preoccupation with this particular novelist. They share the same received set of signifiers for an idealized author figure. Nabokov may in fact be attractive to the literary field because he works so well as a kind of shorthand for the figure of the author in popular culture. That is, the possibility exists that participants in the literary field—like just about everyone else—look to the field of large-scale cultural production for idealized personifications of role models and authorial figures. Nabokov, as a unit of cultural capital, might have made his way from the literary field into popular culture, to be rediscovered there—alongside all the other powerful symbols circulating in mass media—by his fellow writers, both by authors

contemporaneous and nearly contemporaneous with him (such as John Updike and Nicholson Baker) and with those writing right now (such as Martin Amis and Zadie Smith). To paraphrase Baker's Cyril Connolly epigraph from *U and I*: they may be referencing Nabokov, but who they are really wanting to talk about is themselves.

WORKS CITED

- Alias* ("Cipher"). By Robert Orci. 2002.
- Baker, Nicholson. *U and I*. New York: Random House, 1991.
- Beautiful Girls*. By Scott Rosenberg. Dir. Ted Demme. Perf. [Natalie Portman](#). 1996.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- _____. *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.
- Boyd, Brian. *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Broken Flowers*. Dir. Jim Jarmusch. 2005.
- Californication* ("The Devil's Threesome"). By Tom Kapinos. 2007.
- Callewaert, Staf. "Bourdieu, Critic of Foucault: The Case of Empirical Social Science Against Double-Game-Philosophy." *Theory, Culture & Society* 23 (2006): 73–98.
- Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*. By Charlie Kaufman. Dir. George Clooney. 2003.
- CSI: New York* ("Youngblood"). By Timothy J. Lea. 2005.
- Dawson's Creek*. By Gina Fattore. 2002.
- De La Durantaye, Leland. *Style Is Matter*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.
- Despair*. By Tom Stoppard. Dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder. 1978.
- Dream On* ("The Undergraduate"). By Stephen Engel. 1992.
- Eco, Umberto. *Misreadings*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1993.
- Elfenbein, Andrew. "On the Discrimination of Influence." *Modern Language Quarterly* (2008): 482–507.
- Eszterhas, Joe. *The Devil's Guide to Hollywood: The Screenwriter as God!* New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2006.
- Genette, Gérard. *Palimpsests*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

- _____. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Gossip Girl* (“There Might Be Blood”). By Stephen John. 2008.
- Gregory’s Two Girls*. Dir. Bill Forsyth. 1999.
- Guillory, John. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- I Shot Andy Warhol*. Dir. Mary Harron. 1996.
- Jackson, Shelley. *Half Life*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2007.
- Johnson, Steven. *Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today’s Popular Culture is Actually Making Us Smarter*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2005.
- José Chung’s From Outer Space*. By Darin Morgan. Dir. Rob Bowman. 1996
- Kicking and Screaming*. Dir. Noah Baumbach. 1995.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Machacek, Gregory. “Allusion.” *PMLA* (2007): 522–536.
- Manhattan*. Dir. Woody Allen. 1979.
- Martin, Steve. “Lolita at Fifty.” *Pure Drivel*. New York: Hyperion, 1993. 93–99.
- McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Moretti, Franco. *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900*. New York: Verso, 1993.
- _____. “Conjectures on World Literature.” January–February 2000. *New Left Review*. 1 March 2011 <<http://www.newleftreview.org/A2094>>.
- _____. *Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*. New York: Verson, 2007.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lectures on Literature*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1980.
- _____. *Nikolai Gogol*. New York: New Directions, 1961.
- _____. *Novels 1955–1962: Lolita, Pnin, Pale Fire, Lolita: A Screenplay*. The Library of America, 1996.
- _____. *Novels 1969–1974: Ada, Transparent Things, Look at the Harlequins!* New York: Library of America, 1996.
- _____. *Strong Opinions*. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- NewsRadio* (“The Lam”). By Sam Johnson and Chris Marcil. 1998.
- Reading, Amy. “Vulgarity’s Ironist: New Criticism, Midcult, and Nabokov’s “Pale Fire”.” *Arizona Quarterly* 62.2 (2006): 77–98.
- Showgirls*. By Joe Eszterhas. Dir. Paul Verhoeven. 1995.
- Six Feet Under* (“In Place of Anger”). By Christian Taylor. 2002.
- Smith, Zadie. *Changing My Mind*. New York: Penguin, 2009.

Stringer-Hye, Suellen. "Vladimir Nabokov and Popular Culture." Larmour, David H.J. *Discourse and Ideology in Nabokov's Prose*. London: Routledge, 2002. 155–159.

The Big Bang Theory ("Pilot"). By Chuck Lorre. 2007.

The X-Files ("Never Again"). By Glen Morgan and James Wong. 1997.

Vickers, Graham. *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov's Little Girl All Over Again*. Chicago Review: Chicago Review Press, 2008.

