“IN THE ROMANCE OF HIS PRESENCE:” NABOKOV’S PALE FIRE AND THE EROTICS OF COLD WAR CONTAINMENT CULTURE

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
School of Arts and Sciences
Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in English

By

Lisa Marie Chinn, B.A.

Washington, DC
July 20, 2009
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: Pale Fire, National Anxiety, and the Emergence of Containment

Culture .......................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter II: The Form and Function of Linguistic Periphrasis, Confession, and

Speech Acts throughout Pale Fire ............................................................................ 16

Chapter III: Dialectics of Desire: Kinbote as “Subject,” Kinbote as “Character” ... 36

Chapter IV: Cold War Ending and the “fate of the innocent author” ................. 58

Conclusion: .................................................................................................................. 70

Bibliography: .............................................................................................................. 81
Chapter 1: “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow/ Creeps in this petty pace from day to day”: Pale Fire, National Anxiety, and the Emergence of Containment Culture

Nabokov’s influence in America’s intellectual and cultural milieu as well as the popularity of Stanley Kubrick’s “Lolita” established Nabokov as a formidable creative force in post-World War II America. Indeed, D. Barton Johnson, a current Nabokov studies scholar, locates Nabokov at the vanguard of a new cultural movement, a movement influenced by Cold War politics, creative “exhaustion,” and the death of the author. Nabokov’s experimental text *Pale Fire* introduced American audiences to a critical mode claiming to operate apolitically in a very politically charged time in American history, a claim unchallenged until recent years. Meanwhile, Nabokov’s own claim to political apathy allowed works like *Lolita* to “stand on [their] own” (Johnson 145). Because of *Lolita*’s popularity, whether due to its sensational subject matter or true conviction that a new shift in the literary world was taking place, Nabokov was able to republish his older American works while translating his Russian oeuvre into English, saturating the 1960s with his creative genius (139). Nabokov’s 1962 experimental novel *Pale Fire* was hailed by critic and writer Mary McCarthy as one of the greatest works of art of the 20th century because of its “strangeness,” its very experimental aesthetic, an artistic taste that would become the impetus for postmodern experimental fiction (McCarthy 71).

As a writer aligned with linguistic aesthetics, a purity of the English language, rather than political ideologies or overt dogmatic “messages,” Nabokov claimed political
neutrality in his novels. But one cannot ignore the overt references to Nabokov’s own distaste for Freud, socialism, and the political movement sweeping Western countries in the 1960s. Indeed, his personal opinions, his politics, slip through the sieve separating the pure, masterful English language from murky references to political movements at key moments in most of his novels, and *Pale Fire* reiterates this paradigm. If *Lolita*, published and written prior to his departure for Switzerland,\(^1\) displays the very possibilities of what the open road does for narrative methods (recreated in Kerouac’s beat novel *On the Road*), then *Pale Fire*, published and written in the midst of his continental move, represented the intersection between experimentation and politics, desire and narrative form, exile and neurosis.

Vladimir Nabokov challenged narrative modalities, sexual representation, and stylistic capacity in his postmodern novel *Pale Fire*. By experimenting with the functions of narrative form, particularly the annotated text, Nabokov created a narrator so unreliable, so narcissistic that the interstices between desire, national anxiety, and subject formation create a mimetic relation to Cold War America, an America on edge over two conflated threads: the threat of nuclear warfare and the threat of homosexuality. In the novel, the dialectic between Shade and Kinbote problematizes the representation of Cold War masculinity, an identity constructed around stringent adherence to a masculine ideology. Postmodernism flows from containment culture (Nadel 1-10),\(^2\) flourishing through the constant threat of annihilation.

To define postmodernism is to attempt to define the ideology of “nothingness” (as would postmodern playwright Samuel Beckett), to follow the paths of exhaustion (in
John Barth’s seminal discourse on postmodern “literature of exhaustion”), and, at the historical end of the Cold War, to theorize the textuality of the nuclear age (as did deconstructionist Jacques Derrida). Though all of the aforementioned critics have influenced postmodern thought greatly, to pinpoint a single string running throughout each theory is at once difficult and necessary. The single string to my mind—and one I use most fully throughout this argument—stems from a culture of obsessive paranoia, a culture in and through which powerful external and internal modes of control influenced everyday life. The “outlet” for such control was manifested through literature, art, and music. The experimental text, previously relegated to the esoteric corners of literary culture, exploded in popularity, a popularity caused by cultural and political containment. According to Ann Douglas, “[p]ostmodernity, an avowedly U.S. phenomenon, and even postcoloniality, whose sources are largely elsewhere, are both roughly coterminous with the [C]old [W]ar, and even inexplicable outside the context it supplies” (75). To situate the burgeoning postmodern field within the Cold War context seems at once true to the roots of experimental texts while also deeply counterintuitive, for Cold War restrictions (an inherently hypermasculinized period of American history), so often called upon for “national security,” froze a nation in paranoid thought and allowed authors to flourish in the most creative modes ever seen in literary history. The Cold War and its effects, then, became a catalyst for an expansion of the literary imagination, and indeed the political imagination throughout the world. Tony Jackson, a prominent Cold War literary scholar, rethinks the effects of the Cold War on literature, suggesting its connection to apocalypse.
The absolute weapon constantly forced thinking to go as far as it possibly could in imagining the beginning and middle that could possibly lead to the absolute ending: apocalyptic war. But this particular kind of limit-case thinking always cycles into logical impasses. The consideration of oneself, the other, how the other perceives oneself, how one perceives the other perceiving oneself, etc., is an example of infinite regress, and yet it seems necessary to carry thinking this far in order to avoid destruction. (330)

The madness reinforced by “limit-case thinking” only enhances the residual pockets limited by containment culture. In other words, containment culture spurred creative experimentation precisely because Cold War culture represented solid, hegemonic, and lucid ideologies. Cold War policy’s “infinite regress” into paranoia, according to Jackson, helped save both the US and the USSR from the self-cancellation that could occur should one of the two powers miss one step in the mimetic framework constituting Cold War culture. Such anxieties propel the lunacies of the character Kinbote, the flamboyant, self-loving homosexual Zemblan in Pale Fire.

Indeed, Pale Fire “plays” with traditional forms of narrative and uses the paratext as the site for narrative to take place. The traditional—and even the modern—novel stayed relatively within the formal parameters and structural form of the novel as it has been known since the eighteenth century. But Nabokov chose to “play” with novelistic
form and thus subverted traditional modes of narration. David Larmour, a scholar studying the political underpinnings of postmodern works, avers that Nabokov uses his technique to display artistic control while concealing the underpinnings of the text:

Nabokov, in common with other twentieth-century writers like Borges and Joyce, does not suppress these latter forms of the game, but actually flaunts them. The result of this, however, is not only that the games of the characters are correspondingly ‘played down’; the effect is also to conceal something about the text itself; its ideological assumptions and discursive operations. (Larmour 4-5)

Nabokov’s overly effusive and aesthetically pleasing use of the English language, as well as dramatic characterization, help to conceal any discourse or ideologies underpinning the text. To do so effectively, Nabokov relies on the liminal status of his characters, characters relegated to the margins of life in America, but who are dramatic, showy, and extraordinary users of the English language.

Many theories have been posed as to who actually does the narrating throughout Pale Fire. One critic, Andrew Field, one of the first Nabokov scholars and close personal friend of Nabokov, argues that Shade narrates throughout, while another, Brian Boyd, the most prominent and controversial Nabokov scholar currently working in the field, argues for Kinbote as narrator. Still another, Brian McHale, a scholar of postmodernism, argues that both Kinbote and Shade narrate the novel together. The
controversy over polyvocality versus monovocality continues today, most prominent in the online website dedicated to Nabokov studies entitled “Zembla.” These arguments themselves would suggest ambivalence about the locations of homosexuality and authority in the text. I argue that Kinbote certainly narrates the “Foreword,” “Commentary,” and “Index,” but the “Poem” is narrated by Shade. Rather than argue over Kinbote and Shade, I privilege the “Foreword” and “Commentary” over the “Poem” in my reading precisely because Nabokov conveys the most powerful representation of Kinbote’s homosocial bond with and homosexual desire for Shade in these sections of the novel. Kinbote, through his interpretation of the meaning of the poem (and thus the multi-layered meaning of the whole), subsumes Shade’s text for his own purposes.

Cold War America’s control over every aspect of domestic life led to homosexual paranoia unlike any other period of US history. In McCarthy-era America, strictures upon the body led to stringent, inflexible modes of bodily representation and performance; thus the visible homosexual was condemned much like the visible communist. Identity is constructed around the visible and the invisible, through relations between subjects as well as through one’s relation to society. Current modes representing homosexual identities through desire, recognition, and speech acts inform my reading of the interstices between homosexual and heterosexual in Nabokov’s Pale Fire.

Cold War stringent adherence to bodily heteronormative acts ties the sexually “deviant” person to a breech of national security, as in the Walter Jenkins scandal. Walter Jenkins was Lyndon B. Johnson’s loyal administrative assistant who rose with
Johnson as he ascended the ranks of American politics. From Johnson’s run in the U.S. House of Representatives to his installation as the 36th President of the United States, Jenkins followed Johnson’s ascension and acted as a loyal servant to him. It was not until Jenkins rose to such heights that he was scrutinized closely, which led to his public “ou[s]ting” by the very government he served (Edelman 148).

Lee Edelman addresses Lyndon B. Johnson’s “Walter Jenkins Affair” in his book *Homographesis* in which the “outing” of Johnson’s senior official became one of the first introductions of homosexuality to post-World War II containment culture. News of a previous arrest for “‘disorderly conduct (pervert)’” (148) leaked during the affair, exacerbating the public’s castigation of homosexuality, a castigation that reflected what later scholars would come to call the “Lavender Scare,” the scare that had come to define homosexuality during the Cold War. Because Jenkins had access to “the top-secret ‘Q’ clearance from the Atomic Energy Commission” (Edelman 148), he was subjected to a search that would attempt to link homosexuality to communist infiltration. This homosexual “secret,” only ascertained after his appointment, led to his resignation as a top official in the White House. But only after his “secret” became public was resignation necessary. As the media vilified homosexuals, homosexual panic emerged as analogous to paranoia surrounding communism in America. Like communism, homosexuality had remained an invisible stratum of American society. For a homosexual to wield power in a hetero-obsessed, anti-communist America deceived the majority culture and stirred America’s conscience equally against the homosexual and the communist. Much like the “passing” of the communist, the “passing” of the homosexual
was threatening because of his ability to blend and ascribe to a heteronormative quotidian (Corber 2).

The public obsessed over the affair, expanding into discourse on the lifestyle of the homosexual as Newsweek printed article after article, retracing the minutiae of the life of the homosexual. While the media condemned Jenkins’s suspected homosexual act, they continued to write about it. The negative speech act (i.e. the condemnation of homosexuality) simultaneously positioned homosexual behaviors outside of heteronormativity (and thus outside of state-sanctioned acts of nationality) while finding pleasure in the most private of public spaces, the public restroom. For Jenkins to be publicly charged, the police would have had to stake out the YMCA in which the supposed actions took place, and in so doing it was necessary for the officers to view Jenkins in the act. Thus, the police gazed through peepholes in a bathroom stall and by doing so represented an attempted to control every aspect of normative nationhood all the while finding pleasure in the spectacle of the homosexual act (Edelman 150).

A nation enthralled with the spectacle of the water closet offers a context for understanding Pale Fire and its relationship to larger contemporary discourse. Both the police force in the Jenkins Affair and Kinbote’s gaze in Pale Fire act as intersections of power and pleasure, both for the bearers of discipline and the queer, foreign individual. Kinbote obsessively spies on his neighbor, the well-known poet, Shade: “The view from one of my windows kept providing me with first-rate entertainment, especially when I was on the wait for a tardy guest” (Nabokov 23). While Edelman’s spies are part of the American police force, the upholders of normative culture, Nabokov’s spy is Kinbote, the
exiled foreigner peering into normative American culture. The outsider ‘other’ replaces the enforcers of normative culture as the site from which pleasure and identification is recognized. Kinbote’s gaze elides national import and replaces it with ‘first-rate entertainment.’ Instead of offering us Americans spying on other Americans, Nabokov confronts his readers with the national anxiety at the very core of the Cold War, an anxiety about infiltrating and passing as socially ‘normative’ citizens.

Edelman’s ‘homographesis’ merges French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s formulation of desire with a Derridian deconstructionist formulation of language through the methodology of French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Reworking the most influential minds of twentieth-century criticism and literature, Edelman produces a neologism that incorporates the objective language structures of de Saussure and the political underpinnings of Lacanian psychoanalysis to produce a concept that both relies on objectivity as well as the highly political reconceptualization of the visibility of the homosexual in historical and contemporary culture.

Indeed, the very word ‘homographesis’ collapses two distinct operations into a single, distinct signifier:

Like writing, then, homographesis would name a double operation: one serving the ideological purposes of a conservative social order intent on codifying identities in its labor of disciplinary inscription, and the other resistant to that categorization, intent on de-scribing the identities that order has so oppressively inscribed. (Edelman 10)
Analogous to the Derridian concept of *différance*, “homographesis” would allow a signifier to be restricted within the bounds of normal, heterogeneous language use as well as to subvert and to challenge the very notion of the normal heterogeneous language use by an undoing of the reading of the body that is such a pervasive phenomenon within society.

Not only does Edelman deconstruct the body/language dynamic within the bounds of language, but he also broaches psychoanalytic discourse through the Lacanian metaphor/metonymy dichotomy. Freud has conceptualized the reading of sexuality onto the body through the use of metaphor. The metaphorical tropology used by Freud suggests a conceptualization of sexuality as essence rather than act. To explain sexuality through essence, being, an innate quality of the individual allows one to “read” another’s sexuality, suggesting a transparent visibility and inherent identity formation read through the body. Lacan reformulates sexuality to display its metonymic foundations, foundations that go unexplored by Freud. Thus, the reading of sexuality comes from outside the body within the framework of signifiers, signifiers already inherent within the symbolic order of language rather than inherent within somatic symptoms “read” onto the body. Edelman conflates Freudian metaphor with Lacanian metonymy to arrive at an interstitial node of language that at once represents metaphor and metonymy, *de-*scription and inscription, legibility and obscurity, described through “homographesis.”

This concept explains the interstitial relation between the essence of existence and the legible mapping of sexuality onto the body relates to Cold War containment
culture by noting visible differences in sexuality, differences elided by a structured masculinity infiltrated as subsections of society. When a subject subverted the code, the state itself became involved in reiterating it (Whitfield 771). By masking the political impetus of his text with vivid word play, Nabokov scapegoats politics with his superb style and great command of the English language. But his circumvention of a direct relation to a political slant displays the influence of the very political nature of the society in which he lived, worked, and created. But as representative exile, Kinbote attempts to erase the visible markers that would position him outside of American hegemony; he fails miserably at every turn. His identity as the exiled King of Zembla, as a homosexual, and as the foreign “other” prohibit his assimilation into American culture; thus, he subsumes Shade’s poem “Pale Fire” to gain recognition and validation in the larger American hegemonic sphere. Although Nabokov claimed apathy towards all forms of political existence, his aesthetics suggest otherwise. Indeed,

[a]lthough *Pale Fire* may seem to be only an old-world aesthete’s novel of wordplay and allusion that is blissfully disengaged from real-world Cold War politics, it is in fact this very wordplay that allows Nabokov to engage cultural narratives that prescribed the limits of mid-century reality—a word that Nabokov tended to use gingerly, with quotation marks. (Belletto 756)

The “reality” so carefully elided through aesthetic pleasure of the text suggests a “reality” at the very core of any story he writes. This reality, however gingerly Nabokov
might have spoken of it, reveals a direct dialogue with the culture in which he lived. Perhaps the core of this reality lies in exile, exile as a national status, as a sexual status, and as an economic status. Nabokov not only represents the author as “exile,” but he writes Charles Kinbote as the exiled through his homosexuality, his nationality, and his economic standing. As the dethroned King of Zembla, Kinbote can never go home again, and expects Gradus, a professional assassin from Zembla, to assassinate him. Kinbote is an exile through his sexuality, as a homosexual living in a proscriptive 1950s/60s America; Kinbote is also an exile in his class standing: to move from aristocracy to middle-class academia alienates him from his background in every way possible.

John Shade should perhaps be the main character of this strange novel. John, a poet and professor in New Wye, Appalachia, finds himself the only pseudo-friend of Charles Kinbote, the strange foreigner from Zembla (which we are to assume is one of the satellite countries under the colonization of the USSR) who appears one day to teach in the Russian Language Department at Wordsmith College, a supposedly old, beautiful, traditional college eerily similar to Cornell University, the university where Nabokov taught in the 1950s and 1960s. The exiled King Charles Kinbote latches on to John Shade on one of Kinbote’s first days in New Wye and finds that the two are neighbors, leaving the latter no choice but to interact politely with the former. And thus commences the story of loneliness, exile, friendship, and heartache, leading to John Shade’s ultimate death and Kinbote’s swindling of Shade’s poem under the nose of Shade’s wife Sybil. Kinbote’s identity as “other” complicates the story in many confounding ways.
On the one hand, Kinbote is the exiled “other” who lives a life of abjection in New Wye precisely because of his sexual tendencies as well as his status as an exiled king of a foreign, soviet satellite country. By using Kinbote’s character to merge two “foreign” identities within one person, Nabokov shows his ability to explore the implications of an exile living in containment culture, a culture in which no one person inside and outside the country could escape:

When the exiled Charles looks into the pond and sees himself in the other and the other in himself, he registers the Cold-War fear of collapsed identities, a fear that Edelman and Rogin identify as proceeding from a similarity that makes difference unreadable, a *homographic* fear. For Nabokov, this homographic crisis, this orientation toward sameness that appropriates and transforms the other, has a political element: it marks Russian communism’s eradication of individual identity. (Bruhm 290-1)

No matter how much Nabokov claimed apathy toward political and ideological readings of his texts, politics affected his own aesthetics. Even the fictive Zembla looks eerily similar to a Russian satellite state, geographically placed between Russia and Western Europe, and the continual allusions to Zembla as a “northern country” pervade the text. (“Everybody, in a word, was content –even the political mischiefmakers who were contentedly making mischief paid by a contented Sosed (Zembla’s gigantic neighbor)”
(Nabokov 75)). Even though *Pale Fire* is considered an “experimental novel” and a “postmodern” novel, it is also a novel contained by a frigidity constructed through the dynamics of US- USSR relations, one that implies a familiarity inherent in Cold War containment narratives. According to Steven Belletto, with the story “of Zembla and its Revolution, Kinbote is not only inverting the homophobia of Cold War American culture, he is also reproducing a narrative that legitimates anti-[c]ommunist fears of subversion” (767). Because homosexuality, according to Kinbote, was accepted in Zembla, we see that this is not an acceptable reason for his being ousted as the leader of Zembla. Instead, we are left with no real explanation as to why his position as king is threatened, but I argue that the unknown is part of the political message of the whole. The reader is directed to ask why Kinbote has to leave for fear of death, but the *story* of the journey from Zembla to America is more important than the *reason* for the revolution.

As Kinbote flees Zembla, he does not disguise himself: “by the light of his torch the King now saw that he was hideously garbed in bright red” (Nabokov 133); instead, his supporters disguise themselves as Charles Xavier Kinbote, King of Zembla: “The government spent a ludicrous amount of energy on solemnly screening the hundreds of imposters packed in the country’s jails” (149). Thus, Kinbote’s own legibility as homosexual is imitated by the masses of imposters sacrificed for his safety. His dress and his intelligibility as homosexual could not be valid as the reason the Shadows attempt to assassinate him; instead, it is almost as if revolution alone is the reason for his abdication. The upheaval that is a tradition in Zembla (“Everybody knows how given to regicide Zemblans are: two Queens, three Kings, and fourteen Pretenders die violent
deaths, strangled stabbed, poisoned, and drowned, in the course of one century” (95)) is precisely the point that Nabokov is trying to make, that people die for absurd reasons, and revolutions start for absurd reasons. Yet, this is only one facet of political revolution. Kinbote represents another type of revolution, the revolution done through a long process of social change. If Kinbote inverts “the homophobia of Cold War America” through the Zemblan cultural acceptance of homosexuality, then the argument that he validates “anti-[c]ommunist fears of subversion” is only valid because the Shadows are unable to catch Kinbote. Although I would agree to some extent with Belletto’s conclusion, I also argue that our implied author Nabokov does not take Kinbote seriously, and so Kinbote serves as a kind of comedic relief for the reader. In true Derridian fashion, Kinbote symbolizes Derrida’s différance in that we engage with Kinbote insofar as he functions as a humorous character; but we disengage with him precisely because he is a faulty and humorous character. If we read Kinbote as I believe Nabokov would have liked us to read him, his homosexuality would only be one more fault among the unreliable and “deviant” characteristics. The unique mode through which Kinbote subverts the culture he is in and the culture from which he comes displays his status as an exile both in America and in Zembla, an individual without an identity reflected through the culture in which he lives. He is truly exiled.
CHAPTER 2: The Form and Function of Linguistic Periphrasis, Confession, and Speech Acts throughout Pale Fire

Just as Kinbote represents the exiled foreigner, the queer man through thematic devices seen in his obsession with Shade, he also represents “queerness” through structural and syntactic devices, a queerness exemplified through the antilinearity in the form of the novel and the “secret” implicit in his periphrastic speech acts. This “secret,” which fills the novel from beginning to end (“I sometimes wondered is he did not suspect what Shade suspected, and what only three people [. . .] definitely knew” (Nabokov 25)), is never explicit, confounding the message that Kinbote attempts to conceal. Is his secret inherently tied to his sexuality or is there another, more ominous “secret” from which the characters in the novel are concealed? He speaks about his position as King Charles the Beloved, exiled King of Zembla, and as we read the annotated notes, he reveals details about his life as king. But he also conceals (albeit not very effectively) his desire for other men, a desire that permeates the novel as much as his secret status as the ousted King of Zembla. Nevertheless, he holds on to the “secret” of his homosexuality throughout the novel.

Thus his homoerotic identity and his royal lineage are simultaneously concealed by periphrasis while both implicitly dominate the text. So when Kinbote introduces his readers to John Shade, the narrator of the poem with whom Kinbote admires as much as he does himself, one gleans from the tone of his narration that even more than admiration played into his gaze: “Our close friendship was on that higher, exclusively intellectual
level where one can rest from emotional troubles, not share them. My admiration for him was for me a sort of alpine cure” (27). While Kinbote relates the intellectual level of their discourse with an “alpine cure,” he denotes that discourse with Shade cleansed and cured Kinbote unlike others around him. Yet, admiration for Shade made him clean, made him absolve an explicit erotic recognition apparent underneath his “admiration.” The admiration that Kinbote feels toward Shade links a historical conception of the homosexual to both characters and the word “admiration” (“Admire”).

Indeed, in Epistemology of the Closet, Eve Sedgwick analyses James’ “The Beast in the Jungle” through the “secret” that Mr. Marcher never explicitly reveals but insinuates through many preteritive and periphrastic speech acts. Similarly, Kinbote boasts of his many manly exploits without identifying his desire. Thus, when he describes a Zemblan ball, he differentiates traditional, heteronormative “affair” from homosocial “sport:” “a formal heterosexual affair, rather refreshing after some previous sport” (Nabokov 105). By grouping “formal” with “heterosexual affair,” Kinbote displays the polite nature of the ball in relation to “heterosexual” as a site in which heteronormativity is reiterated. By contrast, “sport” is opposed to “formal” affairs; rather than explicitly equating sport with homosexuality, Kinbote redirects attention to the “heterosexual” ball. But because he elides the move toward homosexual identification, he also reiterates the historic “unknowability” and ineffability of homosexual desire.

Kinbote’s consistent redaction of homosexual articulation confirms the way in which male homosexual panic pervaded the 20th century; Sedgwick describes male homosexual panic as the brutal negation of alignment with the homosexual (185). She
utilizes the 19th century trope of the “urban bachelor,” a central figure in the works of Thackeray and James. And between the covers of such works she discovers the homosexual male who, because of social stigma, never fully realizes his desires as homosexual. Just when the bachelor seems to find himself romantically intertwined with a woman, a heightened physical awareness of “other bachelor pleasures” command his attention; pleasures of a soft, pliant bed, succulent food and nourishing drink arrest his attention, attention which would otherwise manifest through a physical attraction to the opposite sex: “[i]n fact the substantiality of physical pleasure is explicitly linked to the state of bachelorhood” (Sedgwick 191). And Sedgwick reminds us repeatedly throughout Epistemology of the Closet that societal discourse assumes legibility inherent within sexuality, an aspect of subject-hood immediately displayed within narratives.

Yet, the very modes of sexual panic in general and homosexual panic in particular confound the ease with which society claims sexual legibility. The very notion that one can find oneself in a panic over one’s own “coming to knowledge” of one’s sexuality indicates the multilayered undercurrents inherent within sexual structures. Indeed, sexual structures take the form of psychological arousal as well as linguistic patterns, patterns which display the precariousness, the oblique knowledge, attached to sexual discourse. When thinking through the idea of the periphrastic speech act, Sedgwick challenges us to contemplate the implications of homosexual panic: “The easy assumption (be James, the society, and the critics) that sexuality and heterosexuality are always exactly translatable into one another is, obviously, homophobic. Importantly, too, it is deeply heterophobic: it denies the very possibility of difference in desires, in objects” (196-7). Hence “easy
assumption(s)” lead to binary conceptualizations of intricate nuances within the psyche, binaries that exclude the very difficulties ensconced in sexual discourse. The epistemology of homosexual panic is deeply entwined with the periphrastic in the case of Victorian culture, and rather than ignore that which is implicit within the linguistic structure, Sedgwick confounds the binary “knowability/unknowability” to unravel sexual phobia qua phobia. The importance of such phobia in relation to Pale Fire is axiomatic: the phobias of the Cold War are directly related to the annihilation of a world, a culture, an ideology; and as the normal routes to reproduction cannot occur through homosexual relations, the homosexual threatened the very genealogy of the democratic state.

When reading “The Beast in the Jungle” as a text in which male homosexual panic is the prevalent trope, Sedgwick states that May Bartram, the one who desires Marcher romantically, is “an imposing character, but –and- a bracketed one” (199). Much like Shade, May has very little “character” in the terms in which “character” will be discussed in the next chapter. Shade’s “character” is given voice within the poem and left voiceless throughout the rest of the text. This is not to say that he has no voice in the text; he quite forcefully speaks within the poem, a poem filled with grief, melancholia, and beauty, but his voice is subsumed by Kinbote’s commanding annotations once one reads further.

This subsumption, as I argue, takes complete hold over the tone, form, and texture of the whole, complete novel. In fact, by the end of the novel, one has forgotten completely about Shade’s narrative: he has been assassinated by the professional Zemblan assassin Gradus, but is mostly a ruse for Kinbote’s own story from the
beginning. The difference between the two characters lies as the site of the desiring subject: Shade may not desire Kinbote, but is the object of Kinbote’s desire (but Kinbote narrates his point of view); and May desires Marcher, but Marcher deals with his own panic without understanding explicitly the phobia of his own inner desires (and Marcher is the narrator of his tale).

Detailing this point of sexual understanding between the “traditional” Victorian desiring text and the text of Cold War containment culture allows us to understand Nabokov’s novel through Kinbote’s narrative, a narrative which extends periphrasis beyond sentence structure, beyond syntax. Indeed, the postmodern text, where form morphs, changes, extends beyond the boundaries of “traditional” novelistic form, the periphrasis takes on novelistic proportions to affect the form (rather than solely the syntax) of Pale Fire. For Kinbote’s notes imitate the effects of periphrasis upon the whole text. For instance, the “Contents” page preceding the actual text of the story contains a story in and of itself. Below is a simple outline following the exact parameters of the “Contents” page:
Contents

Foreword
[11]

Pale Fire
A POEM IN FOUR CANTOS
[31]

Commentary
[71]

Index
[305]
The very structure of the “Contents” page encapsulates the periphrasis inherent throughout the text. “Pale Fire” the poem is surrounded by a “Foreword” and “Commentary,” both of which are longer than “Pale Fire” itself; indeed it seems excessively longer than the poem itself, engulfed in the words, phrases, and comments of Kinbote. This structural encapsulation imitates the linguistic circumscription found in periphrasis itself.

It is through the invocation of convention that performative speech acts have binding power, according to Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter*, a prominent gender scholar (225), and thus the “We Know What that Means” (Sedgwick 204) of the 19th century binds the periphrastic speech act to the homosexual in the ensuing years. Just as Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, the evolution of the “secret” that is only secret because it masks explicit language use has become so known that “[w]hat is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting is as the secret” (Foucault 35). So, although the “secret” is “secret” insofar as it is indirectly related to the act, it is also directly related to homosexuality because of homosexuality’s complicated relationship with legibility and illegibility. When Kinbote speaks peripherally of his desired object choice, he performs his sexual identity, and in so doing, identity becomes legible through the historical use of the grammatical periphrasis. This reification of the negative “unknowability” contained in his periphrasis directs the reader’s attention *toward* his desired object rather than the usual ambiguity that such a phrase could elucidate. The oblique nature of the periphrasis allows the trajectory of
Kinbote’s sexuality to be read queerly: “The totalizing, insidiously symmetrical view that the ‘nothing’ that is Marcher’s unspeakable fate is necessarily a mirror image of the ‘everything’ he could and should have had is, specifically, in an *oblique* relation to a very different history of meanings for assertions of the erotic negative” (Sedgwick 202). Marcher’s “unspeakable fate” in which no future of regeneration is possible links to Cold War anxiety over the fear of nuclear annihilation, an annihilation that is a part of a long history of homosexual paranoia. Linked to both Cold War paranoia and homosexual paranoia, Kinbote’s own future recalls his desire to “live on” through editing, publishing, and commenting upon Shade’s creativity.

Through Kinbote’s obsession with the hetero-identified poet and academic Shade, Kinbote attempts, unsuccessfully, to consume Shade’s heterosexual identity by editing (and thereby gaining the authority of an editor over) Shade’s poem. Shade’s poem is a quiet, creative autobiography of Shade’s life. In it we find references to his family, his quiet life in New Wye, Appalachia, and an elegy for his daughter upon her death. Indeed, the poem is filled with references to this singular experience in the lives of the Shades. John Shade mourns the death of his only offspring, saturating the autobiographical poem with a haunting elegy to death, to the other side. Indeed, he spends much of his life searching for the thing that most already knew:

When somehow I suspected that the truth
About survival after death was known
To every human being: I alone
Knew nothing, and a great conspiracy
Of books and people hid the truth from me. (2. 167-172)

Commencing “Canto Two,” Shade is consumed by the afterlife even when he oddly does not know how to respond to those with definite answers. He is skeptical about the afterlife, but is obsessed with it as well, obsessed enough to journey across the country to meet a woman who, quoted in the local newspaper, had seen a “great white fountain” upon dying briefly, only to be resuscitated by modern medical technologies, just as Shade had when he had his heart attack. He learns from her that the journalist misquoted her, and the image was changed from “mountain” to “fountain”:

“There’s one misprint –not that it matter much:

*Mountain*, not *fountain*. The majestic touch.”

Life Everlasting –based on a misprint! (3. 801-803)

As Shade writes his disillusionment with “Life Everlasting,” Kinbote’s note displays his whole hearted devotion to God by going to church: “On such sunny, sad morning I always feel in my bones that there is a chance yet of my not being excluded from Heaven, and that salvation may be granted to me despite the frozen mud and horror in my heart” (258). One can only imagine what the “horror” is in Kinbote’s heart, but promptly after this situation, Kinbote “cried that [he] must see [Shade] in the evening and all at once, with no reason at all, burst into tears, flooding the telephone and gasping for breath, a paroxysm which had not happened to [him] since Bob left [him] of March 30” (259).

As one has come to expect by this point in the novel, Kinbote completely mistranslates--indeed, does not seem to attempt translation or elucidation of--Shade’s significant refusal of spirituality. Kinbote then equates his emotional reaction to Shade’s rebuffs as he
would a lover who has left him. His emotional instability and myopic point of view allows Nabokov to hyperbolize the homosexual, to make the homosexual more “queer” in all senses of the word, and to be unable to identify with and act in the “proper” heteronormative male.

Kinbote’s inability to hetero-identify can be read through Butler’s hypothesis of the bodily confession- the bodily act that becomes a speech act (“Undoing Gender” 162). So, when Butler speaks of “publishing” one’s act in language, the act becomes a bodily act through the use of the mouth and the mind. Similarly, Kinbote “publishes” his “act” through periphrasis, predicated on historicity, and in so doing also publishes the poem with his notes. Shade’s poem takes the classical form of the heroic couplet, utilized most effectively in Alexander Pope’s works, works that mock and scoff and satirize 18th century culture.¹ Such use in Cold War poetry is unique, for the use of the heroic couplet went out of fashion with the 18th century. Both the “publishing” of his queer identity and “publishing” the poem is analogously related through the concept of publishing. Publishing is both defined as putting forth for others to read and as proclaiming something that has been withheld, and in proclaiming both the poem and his queer identity, Kinbote melds the synecdoche of the body and the bodily act of speech (vocalization through the movement of the tongue, mouth, larynx, and lungs) (Butler 172-173).

For Butler, the act of confession denotes that one has, over a period of time, withheld speech. When one is at the point of confession, it “means that it is not yet made, that it is there, almost in words, but that the speaking remains in check, and that
the speaker has withdrawn from the relationship in some way” (166). And yet, Kinbote’s gaze and first-person narration makes the unknown known to the readers: “I experienced a grand sense of wonder whenever I looked at him, especially in the presence of other people, inferior people. This wonder was enhanced by my awareness of their taking Shade for granted, instead of drenching every nerve, so to speak, in the romance of his presence” (Nabokov 27). Although he never claims homosexuality as part of his identity, his desires, his actions are made apparent in another way- through the use of the gaze. Kinbote’s confession comes not at the point at which he gazes at Shade at the party; rather, the confession happens at the moment of writing. To write ones true feelings for another individual allows Kinbote to “confess” to his audience, the readers of the text, rather than confess to Shade or other inhabitants of New Wye. To do so would be to foster intimacy with those in New Wye, an intimacy that would make such narrative impossible. For if he chose to confide, confess, and intimate his feelings to those around him, he would have to be a different subject, less narcissistic, less interesting, less pliable to psychoanalytic discourse. To express the affect that Shade has over him, he writes into his annotations the feelings that he is certain no other person in the world could feel for Shade. These “others,” not seeing the genius that Kinbote sees in Shade’s poetry, cannot “worship” Shade as Kinbote does; thus, Kinbote withdraws from such people.

To complicate the narrative further, Shade’s life ends in death by an assassin who, Kinbote explains, really came to kill the King of Zembla. Shade no longer physically exists, leaving the poem behind. For through the elision of Shade, Kinbote relates his identity to Shade’s poem first through the bodily act of covering himself with the index
cards on which the poem has been written and in the form that the poem had rested until Kinbote’s “publishing;” “a few hours later took the manuscript out again, and for several days wore it, as it were, having distributed the ninety-two index cards about my person. [. . .] I blessed my royal stars for having taught myself wife work, for I now sewed up all four pockets” (300). For he not only mourns the death of Shade but he is unable to pursue his fantasy of “possessing” him. To “clothe” himself with the index cards on which the poem has been created allows Kinbote to reformulate his fantasy under aggressive subsumption. But because Kinbote never fulfills his desire of “having” Shade, his confession is oblique, periphrastic, quasi-truthful act of publication that never reaches the point in which homosexual act intersects with homosexual speech act. Kinbote “desires to be” Shade if he cannot have him (Corber 11).

Yet, it is not enough to read Kinbote’s sexuality through the epistemology of the closet. His closet is more deeply set: not only trying to conceal his homosexuality in Cold War America, he tries to conceal his identity as the future King of Zembla through the use of the third person singular to commence his story. Kinbote, however, is not very thorough with his secrets, and instead of keeping his secrets in the closet, by the end of the novel, all of his secrets are very out and masquerading on the theatre of his own word, which is the reason he chooses to publish the poem in the first place. So his secret, at once a homosexual secret, is also the secret of his exiled status. To know that Kinbote is the King of Zembla would not allow for Gradus to come creeping along quietly and steadily to the end of the novel. Even his secret as exile is confused with his secret as homosexual in one particular instance:
“And if you agree to show me your ‘finished product,’ there will be another treat: I promise to divulge to you why I gave you, or rather who gave you, you theme.” “What theme?” said Shade absently, as he leaned on my arm and gradually recovered the use of his numb limb. “Our blue inenubilable Zembla, and the red-capped Steinmann, and the motorboat in the sea cave, and…” “Ah,” said Shade. “I think I guessed your secret quite some time ago. But all the same I shall sample your wine with pleasure. Okay, I can manage by myself now.” (288)

What does Shade “know”? Does he “know” that Shade is crazy? Or is it Kinbote’s homosexuality? Kinbote quite obviously would like Shade to know that he is the King of Zembla and that it was his escape that he narrated in full detail, but what does Shade truly know? The ambiguity of this passage suggests that Shade is fully aware of the “secret,” the “I Know what that Means” that has remained part of a culture in which the secret is unmasked.

The genealogy between “unknowability” in the periphrastic speech act and the symbolic ordering of language shares a similar structure, a structure embedded in the dynamic between parole and langage. In Chiesa’s astute and precise summary of the Lacanian subject, he outlines how the subject functions within the symbolic sphere of subjectivity through the subject’s alienation through language: “the subject is never able to say exactly what he would like to say. His interlocutor is unable to grasp fully what
the subject actually means to tell him: words do not suffice to convey the subject’s desire appropriately, and consequently fully to satisfy it’’ (35). Just as characters in a novel, like John Marcher, like Charles Kinbote, the words on the page are never exactly what the intent of the narrator had in mind. Instead, the reader interprets the text to understand as fully as possible the narrator’s meaning. The “satisfaction” is always eluded; the subject of a novel desires the reader to understand him, yet both desirer and desired are left unable to interpret fully the meaning of that desire. Yet, “[a]t the same time, the subject’s individual speech –his perpetually addressing a counterpart in discourse- also always says more than the subject wants to say” (Chiesa 38). Just as the periphrastic conceals, it opens up ways in which to interpret; it guides the interpreter in one direction so that, on the one hand it conceals that which it would like to cover explicitly, yet on the other hand it reveals its true intent to those who understand the meaning of the periphrastic.

Just as the periphrastic insinuates, the naming of the “I” claims the historicity of the symbolic but not identification of the subject as such:

the ‘I’ which functions as the grammatical subject of a given statement may not be identified with the ‘I’ which carries out this act of speech. The former is nothing but the linguistic correspondent of the ego. The alienating ‘wall of language’ overlaps with imaginary alienation: it is nothing but the latter’s transportation into words. (Chiesa 38)

So, when someone or some character uses the “I” in a sentence to talk of himself, he refers back to himself in the symbolic order by using and “citing” (as Butler would say)
the symbolic signifier that is the “I.” Yet, the “I” is only a symbolic signifier for the actual subject and not the subject himself; instead, this lack of correspondence between the “I” and the subject provides a “wall of language” that the subject cannot move within, but also cannot move without. Much to the dismay of the subject, the wall at once acts as a shield of the symbolic from which the subject may pluck his words for use to communicate with the other, but the wall also acts as the very barrier to being fully comprehended by the other. It is this very function of the symbolic that Nabokov utilizes when Kinbote speaks of his own homosexuality. The homosexual panic so clearly elucidated in Sedgwick is caught in the web of psychoanalytic explanation. This panic is no more clearly exemplified than when Kinbote speaks of his former life as a Zemblan “king-in-training,” where his sexual exploits, at once completely revealed and concealed, take shape through adventure, substantiation, and substitution.

Kinbote commences his Zemblan story in the “Commentary” by using the third person singular to refer to Charles Xavier Kinbote, and it is only later, as the reader reads through the text that we are to understand that the Charles Kinbote of New Wye, Appalachia is also the Charles Kinbote of Onhava, Zembla. The use of the third person singular “he” functions to conceal Kinbote’s identity, an identity that only necessitates concealment until the assassin Gradus finally “comes for” Kinbote. Thus, when Kinbote speaks of his life and adventures in Zembla, he does not assume his own identity. Instead, by using the third person singular, he conceals his adventures with other men, and substantiates homosexual panic of Cold War America. Take, for instance, the adventure in the closet (a trope that will be replayed throughout the text):
Oleg walked in front: his shapely buttocks encased in tight indigo cotton moved alertly, and his own erect radiance, rather than his flambeau, seemed to illumine with leaps of light the low ceiling and crowding walls. Behind him the young Prince’s electric torch played on the ground and gave a coating of flour to the back of Oleg’s bare thighs. (Nabokov 127)

Instead of naming himself as the “young Prince,” Kinbote chooses to use the third person singular in its place; and the description of Oleg, Kinbote’s first boyfriend, leaves little to the imagination. It is as if the male gaze has been transformed onto the body of the desired male, the male with whom Kinbote goes on adventures when younger. As this is a flashback, the “young Prince” recollects in detail the “shapely buttocks,” the “tight indigo,” and the “bare thighs” which all indicate a recreation of Oleg’s youthfully beautiful body, a body that Kinbote lusted after. Indeed, to place the parts of the sexualized body in conjunction with images of adventure and erection solidifies the reading of Kinbote’s desire: “moved alertly,” “erect radiance,” and “electric torch” all seem to signify much more than the surface level interpretation, and it is much more than the homosocial bond at play. The male gaze, whether placed upon the female or another male body, has the power to transform the object into a sexually explicit image. And yet Kinbote defies the notion of the homosexual by carefully masking his own identity. Not once does he say, “I lusted after him.” Instead, the periphrasis and continual splitting of
description from “I” as subject allows him to provide an image of the homosexual Cold War male.

It is no coincidence that the Prince and Oleg find themselves in a secret hidden passageway through a closet door when this scene commences. This is the closet through which Kinbote escapes his revolutionary captors at the climax of the Zemblan narrative. The Prince recollects the time he and Oleg went through the passage to find a door on the other side, and the chamber in which the door is hidden is the very room in which the revolutionaries hold him captive. So, when Kinbote remembers the closet, he finds himself escaping through the secret passage and into the national theatre. The passageway leads to the theatre and nowhere else, thus Kinbote is able to escape, helped by Oleg who now happens to be the star of the National Theatre, and is lead out of the city in his own car. I mention this only because the closet, once he is inside, he never emerges from that closet. He is concealed as a homosexual, and the closet helped him live, but concealed his identity forever.

Not only do we see explicit references to his homosexuality, but we also see the rebuffing of womanly advances throughout. Thus, the negative attributes that he gives toward women as sexual object alludes to his preferences as well. Take, for instance, Charles Xavier’s reactions to his own wife, Princess Disa: “He hardly squirmed at all when she stroked his hand or applied herself soundlessly with open lips to his cheek which the haggard after-the-ball dawn had already sooted. She did not seem to mind when he abandoned her for manlier pleasures” (109). Although he seems to be complimenting the Princess, the aversion that he has even for the one with whom he is
to reproduce an heir displays his dissatisfaction with the female sex. His ability to “hardly squirm” when she touches him displays the aversion that he has, which, when juxtaposed next to “manlier pleasures” displays his object choice quite lucidly.

Yet, to call Kinbote a homosexual would at once liberate him from the homosexual panic that Nabokov seems intent on keeping in place, but also could be injurious to his own psyche, for Butler states in her imaginative work on speech act theory entitled *Excitable Speech*:

> But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call. Thus the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response. (2)

What is Kinbote’s “possibility for existence”? How could Kinbote benefit from being called a “homosexual”? How does his disguise help him in the fictive world of New Wye, and what is Nabokov telling his audience through this concealment of a large part of Kinbote’s existence? For Kinbote not only masks his “possibility for existence” by negating a name corresponding to his identity, an identity already fractured by so many disguises, but by masking his own identity, the responsibility to “unmask” Kinbote’s convoluted past and subjectivity lies within the purview of the reader. Thus, while Butler
masters the conceptualization of the interpellated subject in society, it is upon the reader to unmask the interpellated subject-character of Pale Fire. And although Butler stays within the bounds of the social throughout her work, as most philosophers do, I would like to bring the idea of the speech act and “interpellating” into the text to display the powers of society and culture upon a novel like Pale Fire. However, I understand the temporal difficulties of placing the concept of the instantaneous speech act into a non- (or rather omni-?) temporal novel (in the sense that one can read a novel over and over again without a variation on the discourse level).

Thus, the interpellation of the character is outside of the instantaneous bounds of the immediate speech act in theoretical approaches to society. Instead, interpellation within fiction does not have an immediate temporality. A temporality that is immediate cannot exist within fiction, as fiction is necessarily read and reread so that analysis necessitates change, variation, between readers and critics. So Kinbote, by using the periphrastic construction of linguistic speech when speaking of his predilection for males rather than females, the “we know what that means” of the periphrasis necessitates a paralyzing affect for the one being called, but it also gives him an outlet to explain his desires as well. Not only does the periphrasis represent Sedgwick’s homosexual panic, it also represents homosexuality in a pseudo-mask, a mask that represents panic, but also represents that which he is unable to say explicitly due to Cold War strictures upon the male body.

Sedgwick argues that Marcher has no future precisely because his desire for men leaves no chance for reproductive capability. But Kinbote has a future through the
creation of the novel that transcends human evolution. Indeed, the last lines of the “Commentary” outline the future in which Kinbote is said to have:

God will help me, I trust, to rid myself of any desire to follow the example of two other characters in this work. I shall continue to exist. I shall assume other disguises, other forms, but I shall try to exist. I may turn up yet, on another campus as an old happy, healthy, heterosexual Russian, a writer in exile, sans fame, sans future, sans audience, sans anything but his art. (300-301)

Kinbote “shall” exist. There is no question. He has already “assumed” another disguise in this passage by transcending the boundaries of temporality, has eluded death unlike heteronormative Shade, and has become the creative force for Nabokov’s artistic expression. Although Marcher hides his life within the closet, Kinbote hides within each of us; he challenges the bounds of who we believe ourselves to be and challenges the bounds of desire and the visibility of those desires. The Cold War is over, but the pale fire of homosexual paranoia continues to burn weakly in contemporary society.
I adhere to a chronological reading of *Pale Fire*, not because I dislike following Kinbote’s unreliable advice in the “Foreword,” in which he suggests we “read the notes first, then the poem, then the notes alongside the poem” (28), although the reader may find the former desirable, as the novel can be read in the order that Kinbote calls us to. Yet, Nabokov plans the novel according to tradition, arranging the text as one arranges an annotated text; thus, Kinbote’s desire for his audience to read the notes first is thwarted by Nabokov’s arrangement. Arranging the text according to tradition validates Nabokov’s authorial presence while undermining Kinbote’s attempt at authority. To rearrange the novel (as I believe is Kinbote’s authorial attempt) with the notes coming temporally prior to the poem would allow Kinbote almost total control over the whole of the fictional tale, a tale already fraught with authorial tension. Kinbote’s attempt to rearrange a “natural,” “traditional” ordering of fiction enacts a type of chronologically-challenged pseudo-authorial presence which connects historical order of fiction to Kinbote’s failure to enact Cold War masculinity and sexuality.

Indeed, the form Kinbote is so intent upon challenging also challenges the very historicity of the form of the annotated text. Let us not forget that Kinbote is able to tell his story in the notes precisely because Shade has been killed. Because Shade, the only character who adheres to the ideal of Cold War masculinity, is absent in the publication of the autobiographical poem, Kinbote’s own psychological attachment to Shade (and thus to the poem) allows the formal elements of the novel a much richer and
varied interpretation. Mourning and melancholia at the detachment from country and man enters Kinbote’s psyche after Shade’s death as well as after his escape from Zembla. Emphasizing these two points of temporal and spatial change in relation to their ability to enact mourning (i.e. mourning for one’s homeland and mourning for the death of a beloved) will inform my analysis not only in the reconstruction of Kinbote’s psyche, but also in the reconstruction of the divided form of Pale Fire.

I argue that the order of events in which Nabokov chooses to unravel the Zemblan plot prior to Shade’s death provides yet another way of reading the text in which Kinbote’s desires change, morph, and reduplicate to collapse his identity into Shade’s. Kinbote’s sexual desire for Shade is complicated by his desire to be Shade, but this evolution in Kinbote’s desire manifests after Shade’s death and will be discussed later as my argument evolves.

Kinbote as character exemplifies many qualities of the desiring subject formulated by Lacan in which the subject enters into discourse with his psychic object, forming a bond through recognition, a recognition predicated upon the traditional psychological definition: “In the study of thinking and memory, the mental process whereby things are identified as having been previously apprehended or as belonging to a particular known category, usually distinguished from the process of recall” (“Recognition”). Yet, Judith Butler furthers the traditional notion of recognition by adding a dialectical component; recognition is not just the process of remembering a visual cue, but it is the dynamic interplay between two individuals with various conceptions of themselves and the world surrounding them (“Undoing Gender” 132). Thus, the relationship between Kinbote and
Shade is an optimal study of the psyche formed through characters in a novel. I foreground my analysis of the desiring subject within the bounds of Lacanian desire, and then move from Lacan to more recent conceptualizations of the desiring subject.

The subject is always constituted through language, and so a character like Kinbote is even more so constituted through his use of the “I,” since it is the only indicator of Kinbote as subject within a novel. Current conceptions of character (working with James Phelan’s formulation of “character,” further explored below) allow the reader to view the character in a mimetic relationship with the subject constituted in society. This “I,” according to Lacan, can only be used in the “mirror stage” in which the subject has been deferred as well as reflected in the sight of the mother. Through deferral and reflection the subject utilizes language to replace a lack, a lack produced by the realization that full epistemic subjectivity is impossible. This lack, this disjunction from the body of the mother produces desire: “Demand always bears on something other than the satisfaction which it calls for [. . . ] and each time the demand of the child is answered by the satisfaction of its needs, so this ‘something other’ is relegated to the place of its original impossibility” (Rose 32). This “original impossibility” is filled in with “something other” and the subject repeats this “something other” throughout life. Desire is never satiated. It moves, transposes itself onto something or someone else, but it continuously circulates within the subject.

Kinbote’s former life as King of Zembla exemplifies the very underpinnings of Lacan’s desiring subject. Kinbote has multiple names and multiple identities throughout the text, and the index outlines all of these names for us: “Dr. Charles Kinbote, King
Charles II, Charles Xavier Vseslav, The Beloved, Solus Rex” (306). His myopic view of
the world surrounding him and his inability to befriend many people leads to the
narcissistic replication of his own identity, a replication that fills the void for the desire of
other object, other bodies. Kinbote desires his own body as object.

Kinbote is able to escape Zembla only because his supporters dress exactly like
him, confounding authorities as to who the “real” King Charles is. This replication of
himself supports Lacan’s analysis of the psyche through character formation, but expands
that formula as our subject-character builds upon the image of the homosexual,
narcissistic male of Cold War society. And he also fills the void left through language, a
void only filled through fantasy. Within this desire language fills the void as a fantasy in
which the Other can become fixed. In Kinbote’s case, the Other shifts between his two
worlds: in Zembla, his “Other” or the “Law of the Father” is none other than himself.
But when he reaches America, destitute, with no supporters and reigning status, he
attempts to follow America’s “Other,” the historicity of the hyper-exaggerated male
masculine containment model.

Lacan describes this fixity of language as the point of relations between two
subjects. He states emphatically that “There is no sexual relation” because the
“unconscious divides subjects to and from each other, and because it is the myth of that
relation which acts as a barrier against the division” (Rose 46). Thus, that division begins
in the subject’s own psyche. Because subject cannot reconcile a fully conscious psyche
within itself, there is no possible true sexual relation. In the imaginary stage, Lacan
argues that the Other finally develops in the psyche of the subject, thereby adding an
influential structure within the human psyche. Freud defines the “Other” as the phallus in the strict physiological terms of the penis; yet Lacan defines the “Other” through the Law of the Father, which is also termed the phallus. The “Other” as defined by Lacan represents those ideas that regulate one’s interior and exterior life and is constantly in a dialectical relationship within the subject’s psyche. The Other as phallus or the Law of the Father involves those structures that construct and mediate the world in which we live; thus the imaginary is the psychological state of submission and subversion seen in the dialectics between the subject and his relationship with the Other.

The real stage is the site where Lacan locates the subject’s jouissance, “l’objet petit a,” and the drive. The drive exhibits itself through feints with the Other, whereas “l’objet petit a” is a remnant from birth from which the Other always remains unknown. Jouissance is both the excess of desire (orgasm in a physiological sense) and the unknown component of the Other that disgusts and simultaneously desires to know the Other even more. Jouissance is experienced outside the subject’s body, so the desire to know the object is formulated through which is always outside of one’s own body. Desire is constituted through both the drive to know through language and through sexuality, the drive that remains outside the symbolic order of language.3

I outline Lacan’s three stages so that I can foreground my analysis of current conceptions of psychoanalysis while simultaneously discuss the implications of relating the subject in society to the subject in a novel. James Phelan outlines three characteristics of the optimal character, which correspond quite well to Lacan’s formulation of the subject. He states that the optimal character has these three functions called the
“synthetic, the mimetic, and the thematic” (110). The synthetic, according to Phelan, is the construct of the character as artificial, as a made-up construct, made up by the omniscient author. The mimetic function describes the physical characteristics of the fictive subject, such as what the character looks like, how tall or short the character is, or defining physical abnormalities that may set him/her apart from other characters. The thematic function of the character details the character’s ideologies, point of view, mode of seeing the world. These three components constitute an optimal character if delineated thoroughly; similarly, Lacan’s subject moves between the mirror, symbolic, and real stages throughout his life and in so doing becomes the optimal example of the relation between conscious and unconscious being. I outline both Phelan and Lacan to display, if only tangentially, the similarities between the constructed character of a novel and the constituted subject of society so that those readers who may question the usefulness of psychoanalysis to analyze Kinbote may find more similarities between character and subject.¹ It is through this construct of the character as subject that I continue my analysis of Kinbote’s conscious and unconscious desires.

Lacan responds to American psychoanalytic theories generated through a dyadic theory of relationality. This theory, known as object-relations theory, privileges the relationship between two people before the relation of the subject to himself. By moving psychoanalysis outside of the relation between oneself (soi) and one’s psyche to a relationship between two subjects, Jessica Benjamin moves the point of analysis away from internalization and toward the relation between object and subject, since
“there is always a relationship between at least two people” (Mitchell 3). Lacan responds to American notions of object-relations by incorporating language once more into his analysis. He argues that the subject is formed through language, the “the subject is the subject of speech (Lacan’s *parle-être*), and subject to that order” (Rose 31).

Thus, the subject can only be in relation to another by a movement within the ordering of language and is constituted through the order of language. And so language operates through a loss of the object, since the slippery “I” is taken up by each subject and elides permanent definition in the symbolic order of language. Hence, the subject of the sentence, “I,” is the same subject as one who employs the “I.”

As Jacqueline Rose summarizes in her astute introduction to *Feminine Sexuality*:

Symbolisation starts, therefore, when the child gets its first sense that something could be missing; words stand for objects, because they only have to be spoken at the moment when the first object is lost. For Lacan, the subject can only operate within language by constantly repeating that moment of fundamental and irreducible division. (31)

There is never any relation between subject and object; the object itself is the order of language that fills the division between mother and child, between human and human, between subject and object. Yet, it is still valuable to think through Jessica Benjamin’s recent work in object-relations theory in light of Judith Butler’s Hegelian underpinnings.
It is through a reworking of object-relations theory that the relationship between Kinbote and Shade can be evaluated.

Prior to Shade’s death, Kinbote exemplifies the subject of object-relations theory. Yet, after Shade’s death, Kinbote’s actions are not explainable through traditional psychoanalysis alone; it is just as difficult to explain Kinbote’s actions through any formal character analysis without accounting for the way in which chronology and linearity construct Kinbote’s actions, leading to a new temporal understanding of them. Yet, before discussing temporality and chronology within the text, Judith Butler’s analysis of Jessica Benjamin’s object-relations theory in *Undoing Gender* provides the framework for my analysis of Kinbote’s construction of identity.

Jessica Benjamin, according to Butler, assumes that recognition is possible and is the mode through which acceptance of one’s own identity occurs. The act of recognition is a process that lies in the psychic understanding that subject and Other are reflected in each other. However, this type of recognition does not allow for a collapse of one identity into another, nor does it allow for the destruction of the otherness of the Other. Instead, this process, according to Butler via Benjamin, takes place through discourse. In this regard, this concept of recognition relies on the communicative --the discursive-- relation between subjects. Delineated as neither performative nor reflective, recognition of the Other is separate but related to the subject through psychic structure (Butler 131-2). Thus, recognition occurs through discourse, through spoken thoughts, through relations between two individuals on the micro level and society and the individual on the macro level. Kinbote’s limited discourse with Shade is mapped throughout as if the two
had grand conversations, as if the polite discourse between two colleagues signified a larger, more emotionally profound relationship. Kinbote’s fantastical identification with Shade lies precariously close to destruction if a rupture in Kinbote’s fantasy world touches the “real” fictive world that surrounds him. Indeed, he seems to construct an identity through a rupture of healthy recognition. If recognition occurs within the space of discourse, then Kinbote’s space should allow for more discourse. But the more interaction that Kinbote has with the world around him, the more that world interrupts the construction of his identity. Shade’s death allows Kinbote the opportunity to attempt to subsume Shade’s identity.

To mitigate the effects that society places on Kinbote’s identity, he relates in an unusual way to those around him. After narrating his first encounter with Shade, Kinbote states that “[h]enceforth I began seeing more and more of my celebrated neighbor” (Nabokov 23). The phrase “seeing more and more of my neighbor” usually denotes a relation in which discourse occurs between two subjects; it is through discourse that relationships are born. But Kinbote’s longing for recognition destabilizes his identity: Shade does not recognize Kinbote the way that Kinbote recognizes Shade.

Equal recognition is not necessary in Benjamin’s (nor Butler’s) analysis. But recognition can be conceptualized through the relation of the subject’s psychic relation to the object. Thus, Kinbote’s fantastical construction of identity is incongruous to his psychic relation to the object of his choice. When Kinbote narrates the rest of the paragraph, we see that he literally means “seeing” more and more of his neighbor: “The view from one of my windows kept providing me with first-rate entertainment, especially
when I was on the wait for some tardy guest. From the second story of my house the
Shades’ living-room window remained clearly visible” (23). Thus, his imagined
relationship with Shade is just that: an imagined relation that never truly occurs through
intersubjectivity. Just as unrequited love works within the frame of incongruity between
the subject and psychic object, so Kinbote’s desire for Shade functions in a social and
sexual relation that is analogous to the trope of unrequited love. Kinbote’s desire for
Shade is seen throughout the “Commentary,” especially in the lines addressing Shade’s
love for his daughter. Kinbote longs to replace any object of Shade’s affection: “Line
334: Would never come for her- ‘Would he ever come for me?’ I used to wonder waiting
and waiting, in certain amber-and-rose crepuscules, for a ping-pong friend, or for old
John Shade” (184). While hiding in Shade’s bushes, Kinbote longs to identify with and
desires to have Shade through the most optimal way that he knows how, through spying.
Kinbote’s ocular obsession stands in for a discursive relation between the two.

Kinbote’s longing for recognition is a longing for more than intersubjectivity
itself. In fact, Butler states that Benjamin’s contribution to object-relations theory lies in
her argument that intersubjectivity is not the same as object relations-- the “external
Other” (132) goes beyond the mind’s construction of the object:

[W]hatever the psychic and fantasmatic relation to the object
may be, it ought to be understood in terms of the larger
dynamic of recognition. The relation of the object is not the
same as the relation to the Other, but the relation to the Other
provides a framework for understanding the
relation to the object. The subject not only forms certain
psychic relations to objects, but the subject is formed by and
through those psychic relations. (132)

“Intersubjectivity” adds to the notion of the object relations the psychic relation to the
external Other that stands outside of the object itself. The Other is understood as the
symbolic framework upon which a subject constructs a social replica through which to
identify the object. The object is understood as that which is can stand outside of psychic
purview, in Kinbote’s case, Shade. The “dynamic of recognition” forms a triangular
conception of recognition: the subject psychically relates to the object through a relation
to the Other and is formed by its psychic relation to the object. Kinbote’s relation to
Shade is mediated by the Other -- the society in which both inhabit. Yet, this Other takes
on a different form for Kinbote because he has not always inhabited the same
geographical, political, and societal space. To the contrary, Kinbote’s Other on the
macro level will inevitably take in more geographical space than the space in which
Shade resides and has resided in his whole life. Kinbote interrupts Shade’s space not
only within the bounds of the narrative, but as a part of the shape of the poem.

Kinbote as subject becomes Kinbote as psychic object; yet the twist is that Shade
misrecognizes Kinbote as the psychic object altogether. In Canto 3, Shade mourns the
suicide of his daughter, but is disrupted by a movement that he places within the text:

“What is that funny creaking- do you hear?”/ “It is the shutter on the stairs, my dear.”/ [ .
. . ] “I’m sure it’s not the shutter. There- again.”/ “It is a tendril fingering the pane.” (3.
653-658) Kinbote in fact infiltrates the poem by his spying and so changes the outcome
of the poem. Shade’s consistent misrecognition (and misreading) of Kinbote’s antics can be seen as a variation of recognition. Unbeknownst to Shade, Kinbote in fact makes his way into the poem. Shade denies Kinbote’s presence outside of his house, thus wishing to avoid forming any psychic relation with Kinbote. What is interesting is the fluctuating recognition and identity formation between the two main characters. Both are simultaneously formed by each other, and at different points within the novel evade formation. Recognition in this case highlights the fact that identity is constantly in flux; the psychic object does not necessarily represent the Other as construed in the subject’s psyche, and the subject constructs the psychic object.

Butler certainly reads Benjamin’s analysis of the dyadic nature of recognition through the tertiary and Lacanian conception of the symbolic Other. Using the Other of desire as the foundation of the triangulation occurring in every relationship, Butler interprets Lacan’s (genitive) use of “desire of the Other” of Hegel’s (dative) use of “desire for the Other” (137). Hegel’s conception grammatically denotes a linear trajectory from one subject to another, thus a dyadic formulation. However, Lacan uses the genitive “of the Other” to display that the subject desires the Other’s desire, not the Other him-/herself. Lacan’s genitive denotes a continual regeneration of desire through different modes, and desire never ceases throughout a subject’s life. Instead, the genitive “desire of the Other” allows for a continual renewal of desire within the subject. Perhaps it is here that we might discuss his conception of Other and other to clarify the moves that Butler makes throughout her analysis of Jessica Benjamin’s work.
Lacan’s formulation lends itself to triangulation in which the desire is possessed by both the subject and the Other, leaving as the bond between two people:

What does desire desire? It clearly still continues to desire itself; indeed, it is not clear that the desire which desires is different from the desire that is desired. They are homonymically linked, at a minimum, but what this means is that desire redoubles itself; it seeks its own renewal, but in order to achieve its own renewal, it must reduplicate itself and so become something other to what it has been. It does not stay in place as a single desire, but becomes other to itself, taking a form that is outside of itself. (“Undoing Gender” 137)

Perhaps Kinbote desires Shade on the level of sexual desire, but on another level he also desires the desires of Shade (a normal, stable life with a loved one, a house and US citizenship, autonomy). For Kinbote, Shade stands as the “other” object of desire as well as the “Other” as confirmation of the hegemonic, heteronormative American culture Kinbote desires to be recognized in. But as Kinbote acts more and more strangely and insists that Shade tell of Kinbote’s Zemblan banishment, his desire “redoubles itself” while Shade’s desire stays relatively stable. Thus, Kinbote desires the desires of Shade: his desires expand, morph, and “reduplicate,” which leads to Shade’s destruction. Triangulation, then, involves a third, symbolic Other, the Other symbolizing white, middle-class, heteronormative America.
This interpretation only furthers Butler’s argument for a postoedipal triangulation in which heterosexual triangulation is formed around the phallic Other and homosocial triangulation can be read in myriad ways, one of which she formulates through Lacan’s use of the genitive. Butler deviates from Lacan, and subsequently from Benjamin, when describing the “third” in the nexus of desire. The third is “both inside the relationship, as a constituting passion, and ‘outside’ as the partially unrealized and prohibited object of desire” (140). Thus, Butler’s postoedipal triangle furthers the idea of the Other as both Kinbote’s desire for Shade as constituting a whole relationship and the unknown “outside” object of desire. We can only speculate what the unknown “outside” object of desire could be, but it is certain that Kinbote desires the desires of Shade and we can assume Kinbote would like Shade to desire the desires of Kinbote: “Line 42: I could make out- [ . . . ] the dazzling Zembla burning in my brain. I mesmerized him with it, I saturated him with my vision, I pressed upon him, with a drunkard’s wild generosity, all that I was helpless myself to put into verse” (Nabokov 80). Thus, in this text, Kinbote’s desires signify the desire to be reciprocal. Neither Butler nor Benjamin subjects the subject to such scrutiny.

When speaking of the imaginary, Lacan uses the notion of the mirror stage in which a baby comes to view itself in a mirror and identifies with that image. While he may identify with his image, he realizes that the image itself is constituted outside himself; thus he psychically vies for his own image while eroticizing his image, because it is the one aspect of humanity outside the purview of the psyche. What does this mean for the homosexual man? Could the psychic ideal which becomes dynamic in
the imaginary stage never truly develop out of the imaginary? What about the symbolic and the relation between the constitution of one’s dynamic relation between the imaginary and symbolic? Chiesa avers that

[t]he subject who, when considered as an ego, is nothing but the consequence of an alienating identification with the imaginary other, wants to be where the other is: he loves the other only insofar as he wants aggressively to be in his place. The subject claims the other’s place as the (unattainable) place of his own perfection. It goes without saying that, for the same reason, this ambivalent relationship is also self-destructive. (Chiesa 20)

Can we view Kinbote and Shade’s relationship as ambivalent? And if so, we only have one view of the dynamic between the two, although we have glimpses allowed by the implied narrator that display the unreliability of Kinbote as narrator and thus a more egalitarian view of the dyadic relation between the two. Yet, because of Shade’s death, the narration is aggressively usurped by Kinbote, which allows what Lacan would call (given my interpretation of the literality of Lacan’s formulation) the ambivalent relationship that is also self-destructive. But for whom is the relation self-destructive? Is the subject or the other more self-destructive? In the case of Shade and Kinbote, Kinbote seems more self-destructive, but what about Shade’s death? He certainly does not kill himself, but perhaps we can read his death as an allegory in Kinbote’s process of assimilation. If so, the destruction happens outside the purviews of the psyche but
certainly becomes destructive to his psyche. His actions become more and more erratic, and his desire for the poem usurps his desire for Shade. There is no mourning upon the death of Shade. The mourning process reverts to an over-protection of the poem.

If desire fluctuates from a “desire in the other” to “desire for the other,” then the dialectic of desire is complicated in its moves towards the other and oneself. In Kinbote’s case, his desire becomes that much more aggressive through the death of Shade. No longer able to ‘have’ Shade recognize him in any capacity, Kinbote becomes obsessed with everything that surrounded Shade’s life, except for the person who perhaps “knew” Shade (in that ontologically whole way) best in life; that is, Sybil, Shade’s wife. Kinbote undeniably cannot accept Sybil in any capacity, except as a hindrance to the mind of Shade throughout. In fact, Kinbote’s entry for Sybil in the “Index” states: “Shade, Sybil, S’s wife, passim” (313). Thus, Sybil never enters into the triangulation of desire as constituted by Eve Sedgwick and René Girard. For Kinbote to leave unmarked the passages in which Sybil appears within the text becomes a metaphor for his homosexuality as well as a metaphor for his desire for Shade: the only woman who enters the American portion of Kinbote’s story is elided at every turn. No longer forced into heterosexual intercourse with anyone (unlike his Zemblan alter ego), he would rather not speak of women nor pretend to desire any woman. The fight over the poem with Sybil at the very end displays the ways in which aggression obviates itself after the object of desire no longer lives.

A move through the mirror stage of identification explains some of Kinbote’s actions in so far as the destruction which follows desire makes itself apparent in the final
pages of the novel, the final pages in which Kinbote witnesses his friends death and proceeds to steal the poem. Chiesa observes that

I do not want to destroy him (the other) because he 
has the object of my desire; on the contrary, I want to destroy him because he is the object of my primordial desire: the other qua specular image literally stands in my place, there where I desire to be a unity, and supercede alienation. (25)

Kinbote simultaneously has a desire to be Shade while desiring what Shade desires. If Kinbote desires the desires of Shade and also desires Shade to desire Kinbote’s desires, then Kinbote’s desires should “redouble” themselves outside the purview of the psychic object. But because Kinbote desires (in a very controlling manner) reciprocity for the psychic object, both his identity and desire collapse into a tangled nexus of identity formation and desire. Even though the unknown object of desire remains unknown consciously, Kinbote certainly desires Shade to write the story of Kinbote’s expatriation. If Kinbote were read through Lacanian subjectivity, his psyche would move continually through the imaginary, symbolic and real throughout his life, and in some ways, he would come to an ontological understanding of himself by the end of the novel through the death of Shade, and similarly through the death drive of Lacan. The destruction of recognition, a possibility in both Lacan’s and Butler’s analysis of triangular desire, returns us to the question of recognition itself. What does Butler mean by “recognition” in the first place? The concept of recognition first formulated in Hegel’s Phenomenology
of Spirit has had widespread implications from the naissant developments of psychoanalysis to today. Benjamin formulates recognition through her views on object-relations theory (object relations theory differs from Lacanian psychoanalysis in that there is a reformulation of the subject’s relation to the object of desire):

A process that is engaged when subject and Other understand themselves to be reflected in one another, but where this reflection does not result in a collapse of the one into the Other (through an incorporative identification, for instance) of a projection that annihilates the alterity of the Other. Recognition implies that we see the Other as separate, but as structured psychically in ways that are shared. ("Undoing Gender" 131-2)

Unlike the precarious position of destruction in Lacan’s mirror stage, Benjamin happily preserves the alterity of the Other, an alterity constructed autonomously, in each subject but remains shared in that each subject formulates recognition similarly. But recognition can collapse. Recognition collapses when subject and Other enter into power relations against the shared reflection. Shade’s status as poet is enviable and unattainable by exiled Kinbote who comes from the land of “resemblers.” ("The name Zembla is a corruption not of the Russian zemlya, but of Semberland, a land of reflections, of ‘resemblers’" (Nabokov 265)). It is through aggression that recognition can be destroyed: “What this means is that there will be times when the relation to the Other relapses into the relation to the object, but that the relations to the Other can and must be restored” ("Undoing
Gender” 134). Because what Shade has is unattainable by Kinbote in any feasible way, aggression destroys recognition. I do not mean to say that Kinbote is aggressive in attempting to harm Shade in any way, but rather Kinbote’s aggression lies in his obsession with Shade and the poem, and after Shade’s death (which is a brutal killing that is very aggressive) Kinbote’s aggressive actions to preserve the poem on his body collapse and destroy the recognition between Kinbote and the memory of Shade. Kinbote’s desires are beyond that of recognition; they border on obsessive, precariously collapsing recognition from which desire expands beyond the psyche’s Other.

That is, Kinbote desires the desire of Shade to create an autobiography through poetry. Kinbote’s spying has finally allowed him to influence the poem, albeit inadvertently and only in relation to Shade’s mourning of the death of his daughter. Previous to Kinbote’s interruption in Shade’s poetic narrative, Shade journeys to find the afterlife. He finds that “no self-styled/ Spirit would touch a keyboard of dry wood/ To rap out her pet name; no phantom would/ Rise gracefully to welcome you and me” (3. 648-651). Through Shade’s denial of an afterlife for his daughter, he also erases the possibility of any temporality outside of rational, reasonable normal Western time; indeed, he even removes the utopian hope of an afterlife through his consistent disregard of Sybil’s implicit interpretation of the events that cold winter night:

“What is that funny creaking- do you hear?”

“It is the shutter on the stairs, my dear.”

“If you’re not sleeping, let’s turn on the light. I hate that wind! Let’s play some chess.” “All right.”
“I’m sure it’s not the shutter. There-again.”

“It is a tendril fingerling the pane.”

“What glided down the roof and made that thud?”

“It is old winter tumbling in the mud.” (3.653-660)

The discourse between Sybil and John in fact revolves around an invisible Kinbote hiding in the bushes (“As I strained to see better, standing up on my knees in a horribly elastic box hedge, I dislodged the sonorous lid of a garbage can. This of course might been mistaken for the work of the wind, and Sybil hated the wind” (90)). Shade’s refusal to acknowledge the invisible and unknowable brings to light an interesting dichotomy between Shade’s relation to his framework of the Other and the one in which Kinbote operates. John Shade’s consistent denial of the unknowable -in every sense- allows for a relationship between him and Kinbote. For if one does not recognize the unknowable, interior world of Kinbote then one cannot truly “know” what lies behind the visible. Visibility corresponds with the legibility of the scene within the poem. In fact, the form of Shade’s poem relies on the knowable, normative structure of the historic heroic couplet to stringently measure time in meter and rhyme.

The historicity of the heroic couplet mitigates Kinbote’s interruption and contains Kinbote’s actions within the boundary of the poem. The heroic couplet, Shade’s expressive medium, has been used for centuries in the English language and is associated with both containment and division. As Kinbote embodies the space and time of the “Commentary,” his encroachment upon Shade’s space and time of the “Poem” exhibits the discursive relation between queer and normative. By queer space and time I
mean the anti-linear, anti-historic form that indicates Kinbote’s visibility within the novel and is most prominently seen in the “Commentary.” Because Shade misidentifies the actions occurring outside his home and places them within linear time, he elides a collision of queer and normative. But because Kinbote is able to disrupt the quiet winter night, he approaches the normative. But Kinbote certainly “has the last word” (29), usurping the text with his queer anti-linearity after Shade’s death.

This anti-linearity is exemplified in the “Foreword” in which Kinbote tells his audience how to read Shade’s poem, which is to read it concurrently with Kinbote’s “Commentary” to the poem. This lends Kinbote authority over the text and over his readers. If one were to follow Kinbote’s advice, the poem’s linearity is disrupted by Kinbote’s influence:

Although those notes, in conformity with custom, come after the poem, the reader is advised to consult them first and then study the poem with their help, rereading them of course as he goes through its text, and perhaps, after having done with the poem, consulting them a third time so as to complete the picture” (28).

Indeed, if we are to believe that the “commentator has the last word,” Kinbote binds his readers to the text only through the nexus of authority that he “steals” in the wake of Shade’s death. Butler proclaims in Bodies that Matter that “[i]f the performative
operates as the sanction that performs the heterosexualization of the social bond, perhaps it also comes into play precisely as the shaming taboo which ‘queers’ those who resist or oppose that social form as well as those who occupy it without hegemonic social sanction” (226). Kinbote’s unauthorized commentary “queers” the novel by performing as the commentator and occupying that space without hegemonic authorization.

Kinbote does not perform heterosexualization precisely through his resistance to the hegemonic powers that tell him he cannot edit and publish Shade’s poem: “I would have it published without delay, with my commentary, by a firm of my choice [. . . ] I defy any serious critic to find this unfair. Nevertheless, it has been called (by Shade’s former lawyer) ‘a fantastic farrago of evil’” (Nabokov 16). Thus, the binding power Kinbote exerts as author of the “Foreword” and “Commentary” suggests an illusory authority over the text, illusory because of his inability to perform the heterosexualization of that social bond. Kinbote assumes authority over the text through his suggested reading in which linearity plays a small portion. Indeed, the “plot” of the novel is divided into three different sections: Kinbote’s story of his fleeing Zembla, Shade’s story of the loss of his daughter, and the third, more embedded story of Gradus’ movements toward killing Shade. By embedding Gradus’ story into the notes, Kinbote has reinterpreted the traditional form of linearity and has complicated the antilinear narrative to exhibit the importance of his subsumption of the text. Subsuming Shade’s text thus stands in the place of Kinbote’s own explicit, outward identification as a homosexual. Instead, we are to insinuate through periphrastic speech acts and bodily confession his desires throughout the text.
Chapter 4: Cold War Ending and the “fate of the innocent author”

When Shade dies Kinbote breaks the rules of identification versus desire as outlined by Butler. Both identification and desire are collapsed into one another by the end of the novel and after Shade’s death one finds it difficult to distinguish Shade’s memory from Kinbote’s textual body. To conceptualize the place and timing of Shade’s death within the text relates to a temporal understanding of the psyche’s attachment to identification and desire while to read this novel in light of its discourse, order, and timing displays the difference between reading desire between two characters in a novel and reading desire in a human subject. For although the human subject and characters in novels certainly are bound in a mimetic relationship with one another, it is only fair to address the limits of novelistic characterization in relation to temporalities that become incongruous with any type of theoretical underpinnings meant to philosophize the human subject. With this caveat in mind, I argue that the temporal ordering of the novel complicates Kinbote as desiring subject because the arrangement of the text allows Kinbote to embody and “wear” the text, the only remnant of Shade’s life, after Shade’s death.

When Nabokov names the first component of the narrative a “Foreword,” it affects its interpretation in two ways. Firstly, the assumption eludes the reader that the Foreword functions as a Foreword, as a type of introduction by the author which would ease into the body of the novel. The novel begins with Kinbote’s narration of his
adventures with John Shade in New Wye. Gérard Genette, in his seminal work *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, calls the preface a part of the paratext, or a component outside of the main body of the text, as I have discussed previously. Yet, Nabokov manipulates the paratext to situate it inside the discursive body. Disorganizing traditional modes of novelistic organization helps Nabokov to achieve the affects of ordering that meld into the temporal realities of the novel. Thus, because Nabokov situates the preface within the discursive whole, he plays with temporality with ease: Kinbote is allowed to speak from the beginning because he “edits” the poem and “comments upon” the poem:

> Let me state that without my notes Shade’s text simply has no human reality at all since the human reality of such a poem as his (being too skittish and reticent for an autobiographical work), with the omission of many pithy lines carelessly rejected by him, has to depend entirely on the reality of its author and his surroundings, attachment and so forth, a reality that only my notes can provide. To this statement my dear poet would probably not have subscribed, but, for better or for worse, it is the commentator who has the last word. (28-9)

The flamboyant Kinbote finds his mentor’s autobiographical poem too reserved, too humble, for the John Shade that Kinbote has known. Indeed, the “human reality” of Shade’s poem, according to Kinbote, lies directly in the rejected lines of the poem, not the poem as it currently stands in publication. The rejected lines are privileged over Shade’s initial poem, and the “reality” peripheral to Shade’s creation becomes the central
focal point for Kinbote. Not only has Kinbote led his audience outside of the bounds of
the heroic couplets, but also he has taken a poem by Shade and turned it into a narrative
of Shade’s relationship to Kinbote, Kinbote’s relationship to New Wye, Kinbote’s
relationship to Zembla, Kinbote’s relationship to Oleg. Indeed, the notes spiral, digress,
turn sharply from one event to another, disordering linear spatio-temporal narrative. As
the “commentator has the last word,” he also, in this instance, has the first. Shade’s poem
is surrounded from beginning to end by Kinbote’s words. The “reality” that surrounds
Pale Fire is that the pithiness comes from Kinbote, but the authority, as much as Kinbote
would like to claim authority, is given by the “happy, heterosexual man” (301) who will
continue to exist because of Nabokov’s ingenious creation.

Secondly, because we find in the introduction that the main character is deceased,
all we have are remnants of a man who does not tell his own story. We have instead
Kinbote, whom we know from the very first sentence is not the most stable, or reliable,
narrator. None of these devices employed by Nabokov are new; yet, what makes the
novel experimental is Nabokov’s ability to employ the paratextual structures, the
structures that would allow Shade to voice his own life through the very parameters that
constitute his death. Narrative temporalities coincide with paratextual ordering to
produce a story about an exiled king and his infatuation with the dead poet. Indeed, the
arrangement of the text, as I have stated earlier, is as much a component of the narrative
ordering as the actual events within the bound volume. Genette’s elucidation of narrative
discourse may help to think through the text’s order, an order that confounds and
complicates story, character, and analysis.
Genette predicates his analysis of narrative (récit) discourse (discours) on three different classifications in his work entitled “Order, Duration, Frequency,” one of which I approach in my discussion of narrativity:

[T]he categories of time (temporal relationship between the narrative [story] and the ‘actual’ events that are being told [history]; the mode (relationships determined by the distance and perspective of the narrative with respect to the history); and of voice (relationships between the narrative and narrating agency itself: narrative situation, level of narration, status of the narrator and of the recipient, etc.). (25)

The first category of time that Genette approaches is the temporal ordering of the text. Using Marcel Proust’s A la Récherche de Temps Perdu, Genette analyzes the use of order in the text. Neither chronological nor achronological, the ordering of the text challenges normal conceptions of time. Unique narratives defy temporal order to allow the author deeply layered narrative, providing complexity, a complexity that is necessary for any truly great work of art. In Pale Fire, Nabokov orders the text to be narrated at a time subsequent to the death of Shade, and in so doing Nabokov is able to imagine a character who, through Kinbote’s inability to view the world as a “normal” subject, subsumes Shade’s poem; that is, Kinbote is allowed uninhibited freedom over the text precisely because Shade is dead, and Shade’s position as a popular poet within the story world lends Kinbote the agency needed to tell his story of Zembla. Genette subsequently defines the two types of anachronisms that occur within a text, two types that are
especially pertinent to the text. He calls them external and internal anachronisms.

External anachronisms are outside the limits of the temporal field defined by the main narrative. Internal anachronisms are within the limits of the temporal field defined by the main narrative. On the one hand, much of the ordering of events relies on the order of Shade’s life. Yet, so many of the events are not within the bounds of a traditional story; in fact, it could be argued that there is no one “story” but multiple stories which are intertwined through the form of the poem (i.e. Shade’s autobiographical poem-story and Kinbote’s multi-narrative within the “Forward” and “Commentary”). There are two types of internal anachronisms according to Genette: completive and repetitive. Completive “complete” the text by referring back to some point previous to the current story time. Repetitive anachronisms are redundant, but bring back important information to the present narrative time. I argue that both completive and repetitive anachronisms comprise the “Foreword,” the “Commentary,” and the “Index” to the extent that almost the whole of Pale Fire may be read almost exclusively through internal anachronisms.

Take, for instance, the first paragraph: “Pale Fire, a poem in heroic couplets, of nine hundred ninety-nine lines, divided into four cantos, was composed by John Francis Shade (born July 5, 1898, died July 21, 1959) during the last twenty days of his life, at his residence in New Wye, Appalachia, U.S.A.” (13). We have an anachronistic event that Kinbote relates in “real” readerly time. Shade’s death is an anachrony; it takes place before the story begins, but we are immersed in the life he previously led through our reading.
Through our immersion in the post-Shadean world, we see how identification collapses with desire after his death. Kinbote desires Shade throughout the text, but we as readers only see this desire after Shade’s death. Once Shade has died within the internal temporality of the narrative (in the last ten pages), we see that the desire that Kinbote had for the body, the object, transforms into a desire to identify with the text itself. And although Kinbote always desired Shade for his ability to write poetry, a skill Kinbote lacks, we see that Shade was more than just a vessel to transport a story. After Shade’s death, Kinbote projects his physical desire onto the manuscript of Shade’s poem:

a few hours later took the manuscript out again, and for

several days wore it, as it were, having distributed the

ninety-two index cards about my person, twenty in the right-hand pocket of my coat, as many in the left-hand one, a batch of forty against my right nipple and the twelve precious ones with variants in my inner-most left-breast pocket. I blessed my royal stars for having taught myself wife work, for I now sewed up all four pockets. Thus, with cautious steps, among deceived enemies, I circulated, plated with poetry, armored with rhymes, stout with another man’s song, stiff with cardboard, bullet-proof at long last. (300)

Having faced the traumatizing event of assassination, Kinbote wears the cards as armor in the literal sense as well as the figurative: if Kinbote can “steal” the poem, wear it on his body, then not one person would realize that he had taken it, worn it, and become “bullet-
proof” through his manipulation and publication of the text. If only we knew which cards corresponded with what written component, each nook and cranny of his corporeal body would encompass a livelier image of a metaphorical “written body.”

Nevertheless, the desire to “embody” the poem, to stitch the text to clothe the body, displays his desire transferred and collapsed into a “construction” (in the literal and metaphorical sense) of the poem. I am not arguing that he leaves Shade behind; instead, the poem embodies Shade himself (it is his autobiography after all) while the poem stands in for the (dead) body of Shade. Thus, Kinbote not only identifies with Shade through the poem’s usurpation, but the desire so prominently read in Kinbote’s narrative becomes a desire to be Shade after his death. This is only further substantiated by Kinbote’s need to publish the poem himself without the help of Sybil or Shade’s own publishers: “Such hearts, such brains, would be unable to comprehend that one’s attachment to a masterpiece may be utterly overwhelming, especially when it is the underside of the weave that entrances the beholder and only begetter, whose own past intercoils there with the fate of the innocent author” (17). Implicit within the discourse of bodily desire comes the desire of the narrative action.

The narrative is a site at which desire manifests itself. In his article on narrative desire, Peter Brooks links the notion of ambition with that of desire, a notion that propels the narrative upon a trajectory of desire. Ambition provides the necessary drive for a protagonist to propel forward, to produce a narrative with a dynamic plot, and indeed the only way in which a narrative ends is through the reconciliation of that drive. To satiate
ambition “through success or else renunciation” is to end a piece of fiction (Brooks 133).
Kinbote exemplifies both the desiring subject in the Lacanian and sexual terms of desire and also the ambitious exile, desiring for his story to be told by a master storyteller. Where does sexual desire end and ambition begin? It could be said that both sexual desire and ambition are continuously intertwined, as is certainly the case with Kinbote: he not only desires Shade as an object of pleasure, but he desires Shade for his agency, the agency unavailable to a somewhat crazy, exiled king.

But perhaps we should look at the dynamic of desire within the narrative act once more. Brooks avers:

The narrative act discovers, and makes use of, the intersubjective nature of language itself, medium of the exchange of narrative understandings. Here in the dialogic dynamic of the narrative transference –a topic for later elaboration- we may make our nearest approach to the antique dealer’s notion of savoir, the knowledge wrested from the doomed dialectic of vouloir and pouvoir, in the transformatory function of narrating itself. (136)

Using well-known psychoanalytic terms such as vouloir and pouvoir to discuss the functioning of the narrative allows us to approach narrative as we approach the characters that function within the narrative; that is, we can examine the intersubjective nature of language itself in terms of text and subject, seeing where text and subject meet, and
where plot and discourse meet within a text. When speaking of the nature of desire inherent within the text, the intersubjective nature of language pronounces itself in its most apparent fashion. Yet, for a narrative to exist, it must be held together by characters who move the plot forward, and in that movement portray the intersubjectivity which is inherent not only in language, but within the desire that can be displayed through language. Thus, his Foucauldian concepts of vouloir and pouvoir have much more in common with the transformatory function of the dialectic of desire between two characters than with the narrative itself. This being said, it is pertinent to follow René Girard’s concept of triangular desire within his seminal work Deceit, Desire, and the Novel to understand how intersubjectivity works within narrative. To focus solely on intersubjectivity dismisses the Other that inherently comes between two individuals within this process of relations between men. Drawing on Girard, I will not only address intersubjectivity as a construct between two conscious minds but will address how desire functions within the novel.

Girard conceptualizes desire as a straight line that connects the subject to the object, but however useful this formulation may be, it becomes more complex when ambition manifests as desire. With this ambition, there is always a “third” component that links the subject to the object, a linkage between subject and object through a symbolic ideal. Hence, we have a subject desiring an object conceptually understood through the spatial structure necessary to understand a tertiary nature of desire. The conceptual triangle is flexible; it can move from an isosceles to an obtuse triangle and
back again, depending upon the spatio-temporality of the subject, the object, and the symbolic ideal (15-16).

For Girard, desire continuously flows through the subject, and this is where desire starts, but not where desire ends. Desire lives within the subject; it is constantly referred to within the subject, emanating for the subject, and projected onto the object and the Other. One does not locate desire within the object of desire; nor is desire found in the Other of one’s desire. But the Other functions as a hegemonic force restricting and constructing what and who one desires. While Girard may be correct in assuming that desire starts and finishes within the bounds of the subject, the Other’s construct of the subject acts as a pulsion for desire, for object choice, for ambition.

Conflating Brooks’ notion of narrative desire, a desire in which ambition propels a plot, with Girard’s notion of triangular desire, in which the subject chooses one’s object based upon the object’s body as well as a symbolic ideal, allows a powerful analysis of desire in literature. If Lacan has given society the mechanics to delve into the human psyche, then Brooks and Girard have given society the mechanical structure to analyze the literary subject.

Kinbote’s ambition, an ambition that includes the desire for both the Shade’s physical body and Shade’s textual body, propels the plot through a labyrinth of text, text that functions as Kinbote’s autobiography. Just as Shade narrates his life in the poem, Kinbote narrates his in the commentary. The desire, the ambition, to be recognized by Shade, by the culture in which Kinbote finds himself situated, and by the literary elite of America propels the narrative through Cold War culture.
Indeed, even the ending defies traditional narrative endings. Kinbote does not
die, as one would expect. Instead he “shall continue to exist. I may assume other
disguises, other forms, but I shall try to exist. I may turn up yet, on another campus, as
an old, happy, healthy, heterosexual Russian, a writer in exile, sans fame, sans future,
sans audience, sans anything but his art” (300-1). Kinbote’s description oozes Cold
War fears, fears that imagine masked foreigners working for the Russian government
toward the destruction of the US.

And in one sense, he succeeds in his quest. Shade, the “happy, heterosexual,”
American male indeed dies, whereas the odd, homosexual foreign male continues to
exist. Yet, he “shall continue to exist” as a “happy, healthy, heterosexual Russian,” oddly
analogous to our author. The author has inserted himself into the last paragraph of the
commentary, confounding the author function with the functioning of the character.
Nabokov as author has reasserted his authority over the text, metamorphosing Kinbote
into a description of Nabokov as author himself. Thus, the authority once granted
Kinbote as character functions to displace Kinbote as character while melding him into
the image of the author function. Nabokov’s play with his own author function allows
for Kinbote never to escape existence. Indeed, as Nabokov lives eternally through works
like Pale Fire, not to mention Lolita or Ada, so lives Kinbote as author and Kinbote as
character.

Nabokov also challenges Cold War anxiety in the last phrase “I shall exist” (300).
As Derrida claimed the Cold War a “textual” war, that is a war of rhetoric and symbolic
strictures rather than a physical war, such a phrase plays into the anxiety of the “Red Scare” (not to mention the “Lavender Scare”), for Kinbote exemplifies the precarious position of foreigners in the US in general, and homosexual foreigners in particular. Kinbote exists for all eternity through Nabokov’s craft, becoming a threat to containment culture precisely because he continues to exist. He will exist, within Pale Fire that is, and perhaps he lingers here, a faint flicker of containment culture fears, a residue of past paranoia leading to an indescribable future.
Conclusion: “[I]n the language of Kinbote’s projected melodrama, people perish not only from the discourse of others, as Barthes says, but from the very imagination of others, caught in the clash of lurid figments.” -Michael Wood

Puzzles, logic, and games: Vladimir Nabokov mastered the art of interweaving story with an element of play, a combination that led to a new cultural, literary, and artistic movement. Postmodernism, defined by creative experimentation, moved society out of the absurdity of the “textual war,” the Cold War, and into a new aesthetic movement, one that subverted traditional notions of beauty, symmetry, and expression. Indeed, postmodernism produced some of the most oddly beautiful pieces of art, literature, and music. *Pale Fire*, to my mind, is one of those oddly beautiful pieces of literature, art, and music bound to the printed page for all to read for generations to come. Masterfully constructed, *Pale Fire* burns deep in the recesses of the postmodern movement as one of the first experimental texts produced at the height of the “Red Scare,” the “Lavender Scare,” and containment culture in America.

My analysis of *Pale Fire* as a deeply political work is informed by current work in identity studies, queer studies, psychoanalysis, and narrative theory. The political nature of *Pale Fire* stems from the implicit messages deeply embedded in Nabokov’s creativity; but rather than focus agency on Nabokov himself—the person, the author, the teacher—the agency flows from the characters, the structure of the novel, and the linguistic choices made to construct such a memorable work of art.
Indeed, the use of the periphrasis allows us to question linguistic underpinnings inherent in all works of literature. As readers, overt messages and explicit linguistic devices usually lead to lazy reading; and the less the challenge, the more likely we are to put a book down. For the reader, implicit messages are necessary, even welcome, and without a little challenge, reading becomes dull, monotonous, and a time-waster.

The utility of the periphrasis functions to unmask Kinbote’s desires, an unraveling that delves deeply into the recesses of the character’s identity, and the way he constructs himself. Kinbote does not adhere to the masculine norms of containment culture; instead, he represents and confirms Cold War fears, fears revolving around Russians, socialism, and homosexuals, all of which were viewed together as the major threat of Cold War containment culture.

Indeed, Kinbote’s slowly unraveling identity throughout the text exaggerates fears inherent to the culture in which Nabokov lived. The historical underpinnings in Pale Fire confirm these fears, and it is my analysis that displays Nabokov’s creative “play” with these fears. The historicity of the periphrasis, the use of the periphrasis to talk about homosexuality without discussing homosexuality, allows Nabokov to state implicitly the knowledge of the closet, a hermeneutic knowledge fraught with paranoia and concealed desires.

This desire for another, for the “Other,” acknowledges the necessity of psychoanalysis to produce a correct analysis of the psyche that Nabokov attempts to construct. Psychoanalysis is as much about language as it is the whole being, and for the purposes of my study, psychoanalysis can be equally theorized through the lens of a
character in a novel as it can be used to analyze the subject sitting in a psychiatrist's chair on a weekly basis. Because the “I” is interwoven within the character, and indeed used by the character as an identificatory sign, the “I” is as connected to the character as it is connected to the subject as living, breathing human being.

This use of the “I” in living, dynamic language, as well as in the text, allows characters to have agency (albeit restricted to the page to which they are bound). This agency may not live in the dynamic, human realm of every day life, but the agency of Kinbote imitates real life interactions. Indeed, it could be said that Kinbote has more agency even than the average live subject, for Kinbote lives through generations, living past Nabokov the subject-person himself.

Kinbote’s longing for recognition through Shade tells us much about the intricate levels of desire within complex, interwoven narratives. No longer working within the realm of intersubjective relationality, I argue that Kinbote’s relation to Shade twists and turns and manipulates psychoanalysis in ways that further both Benjamin’s object-relations theory as well as Lacan’s notion of desire. Both complicate and structure the psyche through interaction with the Other, but what the Other represents shifts in Pale Fire, first representing Shade’s relation to New Wye, then shifting to Kinbote’s relation with himself in Zembla, and finally shifting once more to Kinbote’s conception of Shade’s agency in all of its multifaceted and complicated modes.

Understanding the concept of triangulation, triangulation as a trope in psychoanalysis and in the novel allows for new modes of conceptualizing desire. Triangulation, then, becomes the triangulation of desire, desire constituted through the
Other, through one’s own psychic understanding and conceptualization, and through ambition to acquire what another desires. Desire morphs into object-relations theory through triangulation of the object, subject and other; and it flows through the novel as the link between the subject and the object, the ideal, something that is not a “real” structure but a metaphor for understanding the tertiary nature of desire.

This tertiary nature of desire reduplicates and propels the narrative in its ambitious pursuits. As our knowledge of Kinbote grows, the narrative grows, reduplicates, and moves forward in time, complicating Kinbote’s narrative and providing the plot with the ambitious desire necessary to bring forth Shade’s death. As Gradus moves closer and closer to Kinbote, Kinbote’s narrative reveals a layer of Kinbote’s identity while also complicating it.

Many questions about this text are still in critical debate with those who study Nabokov, and indeed, most of those questions cannot, or will not, be answered easily. Perhaps my analysis raises more questions than it answers, questions that I cannot answer in the space of a few brief pages; but one hopes that the questions lead to more rigorous analysis of the entertaining experimental text that is Pale Fire.

We cannot pretend to know what games Nabokov may have hidden without our knowledge, and the “Index” seems full of references that were never in the text itself. Perhaps we will never truly know if Gradus is one person or multiple people, as can be inferred from the “Index” (307); we certainly cannot map Zembla onto any geographical map of this world; and New Wye may resemble Ithaca in many ways but is not the same town. Shades of reality enter Nabokov’s fictive realm, and that is what Nabokov does
well: he masks “reality” well enough for his audience to see only shades of the historical Cold War era. The knowledge that is unmasked as we delve into Pale Fire is only revealed through nuances in language, in periphrasis, in the language of desire.

Michael Wood proclaims that “I think myself that Nabokov underrates the energy and the wit that Kinbote and his book still possess at the end; but must be right to point to the proximity of suicide to his narrator’s mind. The novel is light and funny in all kinds of marvelous ways, but we shall miss everything if we miss its darkness” (186). In Kinbote’s attempts to live after the death of Shade, there is an air of shadows, darkness, and depth that, if we take his emphatic “I shall continue to exist” (300) as mere entertainment from a crazy narrator, then we shall miss the point of Kinbote’s existence in the first place.

He exists to complicate our notions of Cold War fears, fears stemming from death itself. The homosexual represents that death, the death of reproduction, of democracy; and Kinbote represents those fears living in American culture of the death of democracy, of a way of life that propels humanity into a textual war, a Cold War, a war that could, if instigated, annihilate a whole society through nuclear technology. But even though Kinbote represents the outright fears of America, we find hope at the end of the novel: he shall continue to exist, just as America and Russia have continued to exist long after the threat of war has diminished. Kinbote’s existence, and Nabokov’s creativity, allows us to hope for temporal eternity, an eternity created through literary, linguistic, and artistic genius.
Notes to Chapter 1

1 Feeling less and less like the America that Nabokov grew to love and idealize due to an emergence of the “organically grown” literary movement, the beats, he was able to uproot his family and return to Europe. It is no coincidence that he settled in Switzerland, the country claiming political neutrality in all affairs of the world. Though he intended to return to the US after a few years abroad, health and American radical ideologies prevented him from returning to the land that inspired so much of his writing (Johnson 146).

2 “Containment culture” is a phrase first used by Alan Nadel to explain the cultural restrictions surrounding the both the body and society during the height of national fears that nuclear war was about to commence (Nadel 1-10). See Nadel’s Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age for further reading.

3 Gérard Genette defines “paratext” as the part of the text that is not part of the story; thus it is the title page, the table of contents, the index, etc. Gérard Genette’s influence and reading of the paratext cannot be underscored enough.

4 Brian Boyd, a prominent Nabokovian scholar, argues that Kinbote writes his commentary with Shade’s ghost informing his narrative. His argument is very controversial, but nonetheless viable. Andrew Field made the case for Shade as the
sole author in 1967. Brian McHale has decided upon undecidability, that it is impossible to tell who wrote what (NABOKOV-L listserve, December 1997- February 1998).

5 Take, for instance, this phrase from Pale Fire: “[R]eality’ is neither the subject nor the object of true art which created its own special reality having nothing to do with the average ‘reality’ perceived by the communal eye” (130).

6 Although some may question the very notion of economic exile in Nabokov’s works, I point to one of many passages in which his Zemblan kingly domestic space is contrasted with a more middle class space inhabited during his years teaching in Zembla: “One recalls with nostalgic pleasure its light gray carpeting and pearl-gray walls [. . . ], a shelfful of calf-bound poets, and a virginal-looking daybed under its rug of imitation panda fur. How far from this limpid simplicity seemed the palace and the odious Council Chamber with his unsolvable problems and frightened councilors!” (76) Indeed, many similar passages follow when he inhabits the Goldsmith residence, where discomfort in the upper-class space is similar to the palatial Zemblan space of his reign.

7 Kinbote does resemble Charles Stuart, also known as Charles the Pretender or Bonnie Prince Charlie to various sections of English rule. He was also exiled and lived much of his life on the continent rather than in England.
Notes to Chapter 2

1 See, for instance, Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*. 
Notes to Chapter Three

1 Indeed, Lacan asserts that the subject continuously moves from the mirror stage to the symbolic to the real in a fluctuation throughout the subject’s life.

2 Lacan argues that there is no “Other of the Other,” and so language, and thus identity, can never be fixed into one solid function. The signifier that is the phallus has no fixed symbolic identity in the subconscious or the conscious and thus cannot symbolize the lack that a subject attempts to constantly reach, differing significantly from Feud. But the concept of the “Other of the Other” in recent discourse will be discussed in full detail later.

3 In his lecture entitled “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire,” Lacan attempts to show how the epistemological understanding of the subject has shifted from the Cartesian whole, conscious subject (“I think, therefore I am”) to a much more complex and divided subject. Freud’s “chain of signifiers” becomes the point from which Lacan navigates his discussion of the way in which a human comes to speak, to understand, and to stumble through thinking and speaking, for through the stumbles of speech is proper psychoanalysis applied. It is through the subversion of the subject that an understanding of desire is manifested. Through the “locus of Speech,” or the Other (Lacan 683), the subject constitutes himself while simultaneously approaching and retreating from Speech. The dialectic of desire manifests through the emergent ego-ideal
identity that the subject constructs through his relationship with the “locus of Speech.”

This ego-ideal becomes a fixed image and subsequently a
“function of mastery” (685) for the subject. Within the imaginary, the ego attempts to eradicate any divisions of unconscious multiplicity, forming a pseudo-unity also known as the conscious.

Indeed, many scholars working in Nabokov studies have left theoretical analysis almost completely out of their works. D. Barton Johnson (Worlds in Regression) offers an astute analysis of Nabokov in his works, but relies on close readings to his work. Brian Boyd uses close readings in his (in)famous analysis of Pale Fire entitled Nabokov’s Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery. Many newer scholars, such as Steven Belletto, Steven Bruhm, and Steven Whitfield find value in Derridian theoretical approaches.

In the Symbolic ordering of the psyche, the subject comes to terms with two disparate yet similar conceptions of the other from which subject constitutes himself. In his philosophical enquiry into Lacan, Lorenzo Chiesa states that Lacan’s work shifted from the subject’s relation with “the other” to “the Other” around 1955, moving from the small to the big Other in his analysis. For Lacan, “the big Other may be equated with: (a) language as structure (as in structural linguistics); (b) the symbolic order as the legal fabric of human culture (in accordance with Lévi-Strauss’s anthropology); (c) the
Freudian unconscious as reformulated by Lacan in his widely promoted return to its original, subversive signification” (Chiesa 35). Thus, the Other, instead of relating to a formula of the object, or other, relates to that which exists outside of the physical body of the other person as well as that which constitutes the symbolic construct of the unconscious through linguistic formations, culture, and the unconscious as divided and splintered from the conscious and also the subject “subjected” to the unconscious (i.e. the inability to move the subject away from the unconscious). Lacan moves from the subject as ego (in Freudian terms) to the subject as I (in linguistic terms).

6 “[D]esire is both (a) an imaginary desire on the basis of which the subject qua ego desires what the other desires, and consequently aims at aggressively destroying the other (‘desire in the other’); and (b) a symbolically mediated desire which makes the subject desire the other: he desires that the other recognize and desire him -- his desire -- and in order to do so he can recognize the other only by temporarily overcoming aggressivity, by entering/ accepting the mediation of the symbolic Law through speech (‘desire for the other’) (Chiesa 24-5).
Bibliography


