“Mimicry, Time and Mind”: The Intersection of Art and Science in Vladimir Nabokov’s Fiction

Juan Wu

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This is to certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

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Juan Wu

28 June 2024

Authorship Attribution Statement

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Juan Wu

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As the supervisor for the candidature upon which this thesis is based, I can confirm that the authorship attribution statements above are correct.

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Abstract

Vladimir Nabokov, a renowned novelist and professional lepidopterologist, exerted a profound influence on Russian and English literature, with his significant scientific contributions duly recognized by scholars and critics. While the interplay of art and science in his works has garnered considerable attention, certain themes—such as evolution, mimicry, time, and mind—have received less scrutiny from critics.

This thesis integrates scientific concepts and literary analysis to examine how Nabokov engages with biology, physics, psychology, and cognitive psychology through his works. Chapter one offers a comprehensive literature review of Nabokov's work, exploring its aesthetic, ethical, metaphysical, and scientific dimensions. Chapter two discusses *The Gift* (1952) and "Father's Butterflies," examining Nabokov's parody of biography to challenge the dominance of Darwinian thought and to advance Nabokov's perspectives on creative evolution, non-utilitarian mimicry, and spiral speciation. Chapter three analyses the representation of time in *Ada* (1962), including purified, reversible, and parallel time, drawing connections to advancements in physics such as relativity and quantum mechanics. Van intertwines his philosophical treatise on time with his incestuous affair with Ada to explore nonlinear time and the complexities inherent in human relationships. Chapter four explores the psychological state of Hermann's subjective double in *Despair* (1936) in relation to its intertextuality with Dostoevsky's works. Nabokov parodies the psychological thriller and detective novel genres to reveal the tension between Hermann's erroneous assumptions and the absurd nature of his evidence. Chapter five decodes narrative patterns in *Pale Fire* (1962), focusing on Charles Kinbote's use of mirror symmetry, synchrony, and tree structure to connect John Shade's poem and the Kingdom of Zembla. Nabokov examines the nature of reality and perception through a multifaceted narrative blending poetry, commentary, and detective narrative techniques. Methodologically, Chapters two and three investigate how Nabokov intentionally integrates scientific knowledge into his literary creations. In contrast, Chapters four and five explore how he employs parallel tropes that resonate with subsequent developments in psychology and cognitive science.

This study reveals how Nabokov bridges art and science through his unique narrative techniques and integration of scientific principles. His works are shown to be imbued with a scientific orientation, blending artistic and scientific sensibilities. Nabokov employs literary strategies to poetically engage with and challenge scientific debates on evolution, time, mind,

and reality. Moreover, he suggests that literature can explore, enrich, and even anticipate scientific phenomena. By examining these themes, the thesis offers an interdisciplinary perspective on Nabokov's art and scientific interests, enhancing our understanding of both fields. This research contributes new insights into the multifaceted nature of Nabokov's writing.

Table of Contents

Authorship Attribution Statement III

Acknowledgements IV

Abstract V

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

1.1 Dual Identity and Cross-boundary Achievements 1
1.1.1 Literary Creation and Lepidoptera Research 2
1.1.2 Butterfly Morphology and Taxonomy 3

1.2 Nabokov Literary Studies and Scholarship 7
1.2.1 Aesthetic and Meta-literary Studies of Nabokov 7
1.2.2 Ethical and Metaphysical Studies of Nabokov 10
1.2.3 Intertextual and Cross-Discipline Studies of Nabokov 14

1.3 Nabokov Science Studies and Reviews 19
1.3.1 Science Studies and Nabokov's Scientific Views 19
1.3.2 Critics' Exploration of Nabokov's Scientific Dimension 21
1.3.3 Scientists' Debate on Nabokov's Lepidoptery Findings 28
1.3.4 Co-efforts from Critics and Scientists 30

1.4 Methodology and Structure of the Thesis 31
1.4.1 Key Concepts and Methodology 32
1.4.2 Structure and Significance 34

Chapter 2 "Alternative Evolution": Non-utilitarian Mimicry, Neutral Selection and Spiral Speciation in The Gift and "Father's Butterflies" 37

2.1 *The Gift* and Its Supplement "Father's Butterflies" 37
2.1.1 Censorship of The Gift and Rediscovery of "Father's Butterflies" 37
2.1.2 Literary Reviews and Multiple Interpretations of The Gift 40
2.1.3 Integrated Approaches on Art-Biology Studies 42

2.2 Mimicry as A Critique of Darwinian Natural Selection 44
2.2.1 Over-emphasis on Utilitarian and Mechanistic Underpinnings in Nature 44
2.2.2 Exclusion of Unpractical and Aesthetic Factors from Evolution 46
2.2.3 Underestimation of Creative and Intellectual Dimension in Organism 48

2.3 Coincidence theme as Alignment with "Neutral Evolution" 50
2.3.1 Teleology, Neutral Evolution and "Agent X" 51
2.3.2 Coincident Discovery and Emergent Chance 58
2.3.3 Intertextual Reference to Pushkin's "Chance" 59

2.4 Spirality as a Sign of Metaphysics in Speciation 61
2.4.1 Missing Gaps and Unknown Parts in The Origin of Species 62
2.4.2 Metaphysical Complexities and Spiral Symbols of Species 65
2.4.3 Ideological Dimension and Conceptual Nature of Species 67

2.5 Engaging Russian Darwinian Debate Within and Beyond the Novel 72
2.5.1 Allusive References to Russian Darwinian Debate 72
2.5.2 To Reveal or Fulfill the Gaps in Darwinism 74
2.5.3 To Include or Exclude Metaphysics from Biology 76

Chapter 3 "Texture of Time": Purified Time, Reversible Time and Parallel Time in Ada .. 80

3.1 *Ada* and "The Texture of Time" 81
3.1.1 Literary Review and Temporal Theme of Ada 81
3.1.2 Coherent Structure or Indeterminate Paradigm 82

3. 2 Nabokov, New Physics and Modern Philosophy....84
3.2.1 Nabokov, Einstein and Relativity Theory....84
3.2.2 Nabokov, Quantum Theory and Uncertainty Principle....86
3.2.3 Nabokov, Bergson and "Duration"....88

3.3.3 Purified Time: Mode and Motion of Dualistic Time....91
3.3.1 Continuous Fusion of the Present and the Past....92
3.3.2 Picturesque, Reversible and Rhythmic Attributes of the Past....96
3.3.3 Irreducible, Durable and Perceptual Qualities of the Present....97

3.4 De-spatialized Time: Power and Paradox in A-spatial Temporality....101
3.4.1 Identifying Distinct Entities of Time and Space....101
3.4.2 Excluding Space and Mathematics From Time....103
3.4.3 Paradox and Contradiction in De-spatialized Time....107

3.5 Reversible Time: Intricate Anagrams and Backward Time....110
3.5.1 Rearranging Letters and Reconstructing Time....110
3.5.2 Word Games and Anagrams....112
3.5.3 Recursive Temporality and Sensual Densities....114

3.6 Parallel Time: Multiverse Realities and Asymmetrical Temporality....116
3.6.1 The Multiverse of "Terra and Antiterra"....116
3.6.2 Mirror Doubles and Alternate Realities....118
3.6.3 Reality Construction and Temporal Simultaneity....120

Chapter 4 "Delusional Double": A Psychological and Behavioral Study on Hermann's Subjective Double in Nabokov's Despair....124

4.1 Intertextual Study of *Despair* and the Subjective Double....126
4.1.1 The Double Motif and Mirror Symmetry....126
4.1.2 Parodic Reference to Dostoevsky and Freud....128
4.1.3 Subjective Double Syndromes and the Fogg Behavior Model....133

4.2 Establishment of the Subjective Double at First Meeting....135
4.2.1 Primacy Effect and Double Fantasy....136
4.2.2 Mirror Images and Mental Rehearsal....138
4.2.3 Subjective Double and Intertextuality in The Double....141

4.3 Consolidation of Subjective Double at Second Meeting....144
4.3.1 Confirmation Bias and Fixed Mindset....144
4.3.2 Delusional Double with Intertextual References....147
4.3.3 Structural Parallels with Crime and Punishment....149

4.4 Justification of Subjective Double at Last Meeting....151
4.4.1 Obsession with Double and Sublimation of Crime....152
4.4.2 Parodying Detective Fiction and Evaluating the Validity of Evidence....153
4.4.3 Concrete Images and Sensory Details of the Murder Scene....156

4.5 Hermann's Behavior Model: Motivation, Ability and a Trigger....158
4.5.1 Motivation of Hermann's Subjective Double and Murder....158
4.5.2 Motor Cognition and Hermann's Ability to Murder....160
4.5.3 Trigger to Arouse Hermann's Murder....162

4.6 Origin of Subjective Double: Intellectual, Moral and Ideological Dimensions....164
4.6.1 Abuse of Analogy and Intellectual Inability....165
4.6.2 Lack of Empathy and Erroneous Delusion....168
4.6.3 Morbid Ideology and Political Implication....172

Chapter 5 Symmetry, Synchrony and Tree Structure: A Cognitive Study of Narrative Patterns and Pattern Recognition in Pale Fire....180

5.1 *Pale Fire* and Pattern Recognition 182
5.1.1 Pale Fire: Parody of Literary Commentary 182
5.1.2 Narrative Patterns and Pattern Recognition 184
5.2 Symmetry Structure and Mirror Mechanism in *Pale Fire* 186
5.2.1 Mirror Neurons and Reflective Symmetry 186
5.2.2 Symmetry of Cards, Lines and Dates in Shade's Poem 189
5.2.3 Mirror Images and Inverted Double 191
5.2.4 Shade's Crystal Land and Kinbote's Zembla 195
5.2.5 Zembla as Asymmetrical Mirror of Shade's Poetry 197
5.3 Synchrony and Juxtaposition in *Pale Fire* 199
5.3.1 Synchronization and Binding-by-Synchrony 200
5.3.2 Synchrony of TV Shows with Hazel's Suicide 202
5.3.3 Shade's Starting Creation and Gradus' Zembla Departure 206
5.3.4 Shade's Writing Process and Gradus's Approaching Progress 208
5.3.5 Shade's Completing Poem and Gradus's Committing Murder 210
5.4 Tree Structures and Hierarchical Patterns in *Pale Fire* 212
5.4.1 Tree Structures and Multilevel Referencing Notes 212
5.4.2 First-level Notes: To Correlate the Poem with Zembla 213
5.4.3 Second-level Notes: To Create Zembla out of Variants 216
5.4.4 Third-level Notes: To Construct Zembla in Commentary 219
5.4.5 Correlated Patterns and Cross-referencing Interactions 222
***Conclusion* 228**
6.1 Connection and Commonality of Arts and Science 229
6.2 Rediscovery of Arts: Anti-causality and Cognitive Power 235
6.3 Re-evaluation of Science: Validity, Limitation and Paradox 237
6.4 Nabokov's Science Philosophy: Idealism and Anti-positivism 242
***Bibliography* 246**

Chapter 1: Introduction

Vladimir Nabokov's reputation as one of the most influential writers of the 20th century is deeply informed by his parallel career as a professional Lepidoptera researcher, deeply interested in butterfly classification and evolutionary theory. As an artist-scientist, Nabokov occupies a unique position in the parallel histories of literature and science. His scientific work emphasized empirical approaches to data collection and the subjective nature of observation, where his aesthetic sensibilities directly informed his Lepidoptera research. For Nabokov, both literature and Lepidoptera research involve observation and description, an attunement to complexity and intricacy, aesthetic evaluation and scientific discovery. To some degree, Nabokov's career as a novelist becomes an expression of scientific research, with themes such as mimicry, obscure emotion, and the irrationality of the mind allowing him to explore the subtleties of nature and the ambivalent qualities of humanity. The inseparability of art and science was central to Nabokov's creative vision. In a 1959 interview, Nabokov stated, "I cannot separate the aesthetic pleasure of seeing a butterfly and the scientific pleasure of knowing what it is."[1] He insisted that art plays an essential part in understanding the world: "There is no science without fancy, no art without facts."[2] Nabokov's aesthetic sensibilities influenced his scientific work, while his artistic works expanded the role of art in understanding human nature and reassessing the function and limitations of science. Four areas of scientific interest stand out in Nabokov's literary works: biology (lepidoptery and evolutionary theory), physics (relativity and quantum theory), psychology (illusion and consciousness), and neuroscience (pattern recognition and cognition). This thesis investigates the fusion of scientific elements in Nabokov's literary works and the aesthetic qualities in his scientific work based on these four scientific perspectives.

1.1 Dual Identity and Cross-boundary Achievements

Nabokov's art and science link derives from his dual identity as a literary writer and Lepidoptera researcher. I will introduce his achievements in literary creation and Lepidoptery study, especially his significant contributions to the morphology and taxonomy of butterflies. Nabokov's scientific work profoundly influenced his aesthetic taste and literary creation.

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[1] Vladimir Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," in *Nabokov' Butterflies*, ed. Brian Boyd and Robert M. Pyle, trans. Dmitri Nabokov (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 529**.**

[2] Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (New York: Vintage International, 1989),79.

1.1.1 Literary Creation and Lepidoptera Research

Nabokov was born into an aristocratic Russian family on 23 April 1899. In 1919, he was forced to flee Russia after the Bolshevik revolution and studied Slavic and Romance languages at Cambridge University. After an assassin's bullet killed his father in 1922, Nabokov settled in Berlin and wrote novels, poems, and stories in Russian. He supported his family by translating, composing chess and crossword puzzles, and coaching tennis lessons. In 1937, with the rise of Nazism, Nabokov moved to Paris, and in 1939 he obtained a teaching position at Cornell University in the United States. After leaving Paris for America in 1940, Nabokov changed his language of composition to English. The publication of *Lolita* in 1955 was a significant breakthrough in his writing career, stimulating intense criticism for its risqué subject matter as well as admiration for its style and technique. Many critics attacked it, while many hailed it as a masterpiece. Owning to *Lolita*'s commercial success, Nabokov devoted himself to a career as a full-time writer. He returned to Europe and spent his last years writing in English, translating and revising his earlier Russian works. Nabokov's Russian novels run as follows: *Mary* (1926); *King, Queen, Knave* (1928); *The Defence* (1930); *The Eye* (1930); *Glory* (1932); *Camera Obscura* (1932), which was revised into English and retitled *Laughter in the Dark* (1938); *Despair* (1936); *Invitation to a Beheading* (1938), and the last Russian novel *The Gift*, which was written in the 1930s but published in 1952. Then follow his English works: *The Real Life of Sebastian Knigh*t (1941); *Bend Sinister* (1947); *Lolita* (1955); *Pnin* (1957); *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1962); *Transparent Things* (1972) and *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974). In 1998, the Modern Library editorial board poll placed *Lolita* fourth on a list of the greatest English novels of the twentieth century; a second Nabokov novel, *Pale Fire*, was placed fifty-third. Nabokov was securely established as one of century's most important writers.

Besides literature, Nabokov had a particular passion for science, especially Lepidoptery. Butterflies offered him aesthetic and intellectual pleasure, attracting him with their physical beauty and complex patterns. In his butterfly collection and classification work, Nabokov discovered a way to access nature and honed his sensitivity to intricate details. He submitted his first paper on a butterfly species to *The Entomologist* at a young age, but it was rejected. In 1919, while enrolled as a zoology student at Cambridge's Trinity College, Nabokov wrote his first published scientific article, "A Few Notes on Crimean Lepidoptera" – which appeared in *The Entomologist* when Nabokov was twenty-one – before switching his focus to French and Russian literature. In the 1920s, he spent hours working in museums' butterfly collections in

Berlin. After settling in the United States in 1940, Nabokov worked at the American Museum of Natural History and held a part-time curatorship at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. He spent considerable time examining the reproductive genitalia and wing patterns of specimens under the microscope. His six years at the Museum of Comparative Zoology were his most scientifically productive, during which he dissected over a thousand butterfly genitalia and created more than three thousand detailed butterfly illustrations. Nabokov detected implicit patterns in certain butterflies and identified core differences between species, becoming an expert on the tribe Polyommatini, commonly known as the Blues. In his 1945 paper "Notes on Neotropical Plebejinae," published in *Psyche*, Nabokov proposed a new classificatory approach for blues in tropical America. Kurt Johnson praised Nabokov's research on blues, noting that it "helps science answer some of the most perplexing biological questions about evolution in the New World tropics." The following section introduces his scientific achievements in butterfly morphology and taxonomy.

1.1.2 Butterfly Morphology and Taxonomy

Nabokov's dual identity as a writer and Lepidopterist suggests his scientific notions and taxonomical practices might bear influence on his literary creativity and narrative presentation. He contributed significantly to butterfly morphology and taxonomy, focusing on how species evolved. Unlike many scientists who sought to identify overarching principles or archetypes behind various species forms, Nabokov's approach to Lepidoptera work emphasized concrete and individualized case studies. This involved methods such as dissection, microscopic examination, form analysis, and the study of morphological variations.[3] Nabokov insisted on the significance of a synthetic approach, where morphology and empirical data collection inform butterfly classification.

Nabokov's defense of morphology may have influenced his emphasis on literary patterns and narrative form. In contrast to the prevalent statistical and mathematical approaches in the field, Nabokov underscored the power of morphology in observing, describing, and evaluating butterfly classification and discerning affinities and distinctions between species. Morphology, a term coined by the German writer and scientist Wolfgang von Goethe, entails identifying the underlying laws governing the perceptible forms and formation of living nature through

[3] Dieter E. Zimmer, *A Guide to Nabokov's Butterflies and Moths* (Hamburg: privately published, 2001).

disciplined perception.[4] It describes the similarities and differences in form and structure, particularly in "the smaller objects of living nature."[5] Nabokov stressed the importance of morphology in systemizing detailed comparisons and empirical data collection. He expressed concern about problems that might arise when many lepidopterists abandoned the morphological approach. Nabokov viewed morphology as a prerequisite for more advanced methods, criticizing approaches that relegate "the morphological moment to a secondary or still more negligible position" while employing terms like "potential interbreeding" that presupposes an initial morphological approach.[6] For Nabokov, morphology represents a synthetic scientific approach that requires aesthetic instinct, perceptual acuity, and scientific sensitivity. He proposed that uncovering hidden laws in natural phenomena should be based on solid empirical data collection and detailed comparative analysis. This synthetic approach allows Nabokov to explore alternative ideas on evolution beyond natural selection.

Nabokov's narrative experiments, influenced by his familiarity with the classics, were paralleled by his original contributions to Lepidoptera taxonomy. He established new genera, divided existing ones, and combined extant taxa into single groups. In the taxonomy field, two major modes of classification prevailed: the "lumpers," who favored systems with fewer, larger genera and a smaller number of distinct species, and the "splitters," who tended to extend genus or species status based on a lower threshold of distinction. Nabokov carefully evaluated the merits and drawbacks of both approaches, striving to strike a balance between lumpers and splitters. He noted significant variations within a single species or subspecies through extensive microscopic observation of butterflies and moths. For instance, in his work "Nearctic Members of Genus Lycaeides Hübner," Nabokov proposed that "argyrognomon is represented in North America by ten multiform intergrading subspecies," which could be grouped into three geographical arrays, while the species "Melissa" comprised a Western Nearctic group of four multiform intergrading subspecies and a monoform, isolated Eastern Nearctic subspecies.[7] Nabokov regarded the similarities of variation within a species as a reflection of nature across time, observing how subtle changes occurred across geographical regions.[8] After extensively studying the interface between living organisms and their environment, Nabokov proposed

[4] Joan Steigerwald, "Goethe's morphology: Urphänomene and aesthetic appraisal," *Journal of the History of Biology* 35 (2002): 291-328.
[5] J. T. Merz, *History of European Thought in the XIX Century* (New York: Dover, 1965), 231.
[6] Vladimir Nabokov, "Notes on Neotropical Plebejinae (Lycaenidae, Lepidoptera," *Psyche* 52.1-2 (1945): 3.
[7] Vladimir Nabokov, "The Nearctic Members of the Genus *Lycaeides* Hübner," *Bulletin of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard College* 101.4 (1949): 482.
[8] Ibid., 504.

causal relationships between environmental factors and organismic consequences. Dieter Zimmer suggests that Nabokov's scientific view resembled a pre-evolutionary morphological concept, while Brian Boyd argues that it aligned more closely with "Hugh Paterson's Recognition Concept of Species of the 1980s", focusing on the evolution of natural structure, underlying patterns, and interrelations among related species.[9] This debate underscores that Nabokov's biological views were not merely speculative but grounded in rigorous research.

Nabokov's keen ability to discern critical structures and key details led him to propose innovative criteria for establishing distinct taxa, focusing on specific proportions of the male armature and intricate wing structures. Recognizing the dynamic nature of organismal structures, Nabokov sought to unravel the mobile and mutated aspects of species evolution. Through his meticulous morphological investigations, he identified the male genital apparatus as a reliable determinant of the proximity between related butterfly species. Introducing the concept of the "magic triangle," formed by three apexes of the armature, Nabokov provided a heuristic tool to explore subtle variations among similar apparatuses.[10] Nabokov underscored the classification power of the genital apparatus, stating, "The combination of characters in the whole structure or its elements impacts the observer's perception of distinct structural types."[11] He posited that shared structural types imply phylogenetic affinities, although some false resemblances may arise from evolutionary processes veering in unusual directions.[12] Nabokov argued for the superiority of genitalia-based classification, contending that genital structures are minimally influenced by living or survival pressures. In his work "Notes on Neotropical Plebejinae," he asserted that natural selection does not directly affect the molding of the genital armature, emphasizing the complexity of the underlying physiological processes.[13] Convinced of the existence of phylogenetic links reflected in recurrent genital characters, Nabokov advocated for grouping schemes that align with the natural affiliations of species.[14] He regarded genital structures as reliable markers of relatedness within genera and species, possessing stability unaffected by natural selection.

In addition to the genital apparatus, Nabokov emphasized the importance of wing patterns, particularly those on the hindwing, as crucial elements for classification. Butterfly wing

[9] Brian Boyd, "Review of Dieter E. Zimmer, A Guide to Nabokov's Butterflies and Moths 2001", *Nabokov Studies* 6 (2000–2001), 218.
[10] Robert M. Pyle, "Between Climb and Cloud," in Brian Boyd and Robert M. Pyle, eds., *Nabokov's Butterflies*, trans. Dmitri Nabokov (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 44.
[11] Nabokov, "Notes on Neotropical Plebejinae (Lycaenidae, Lepidoptera)," 6.
[12] Nabokov, *Nabokov's Butterflies*, 354.
[13] Nabokov, "Notes on Neotropical Plebejinae (Lycaenidae, Lepidoptera)," 6.
[14] Ibid., 6.

patterns consist of hundreds or thousands of scales that can be meticulously mapped and labelled. Nabokov meticulously described variations in wing-pattern features, including macules, spots, and lines, while investigating the forces influencing the distribution of these marks and lines across species' wings. Disagreeing with Nikolai Kuznetsov's suggestion that wing patterns could be broken down into a series of stripes undergoing various modifications, Nabokov instead advocated a scale-line system for mapping and visualizing wings.[15] His extensive collection of butterfly drawings, featured in publications such as *Fine Lines: Vladimir Nabokov's Scientific Art* by Stephen Blackwell and Kurt Johnson, offers invaluable insight into Nabokov's visual interpretation of the natural world. These drawings showcase Nabokov's meticulous attention to detail and offer insight into his understanding of evolutionary theories, particularly regarding the morphology, temporal dynamics, and spatial aspects of butterfly evolution.

Nabokov's exploration of the morphological intricacies of butterfly variation mainly focused on the structural components of genitalia and wing markings. He observed that wing patterns exhibited variations across subspecies and species, yet the survival advantages of these variations remained unclear. He proposed that external features tended to adapt to new environments, while internal features, such as sexual organs, remained relatively stable and less directly influenced by environmental pressures. These internal features served as enduring markers of kinship, facilitating the identification of similarities between different organisms and resemblances among diverse animals. By analyzing external and internal features, Nabokov identified similarities and evolutionary connections among various organisms, particularly within the Blues family. He argued against a sole reliance on natural selection, highlighting what he saw as limitations of Darwinian principles.[16] Nabokov's innovative approach to butterfly classification, which integrated male genital armature and wing patterns, represented a significant advancement in the field.

Nabokov's study of butterfly populations and his observations of geographic variations align with the concepts of "neutral evolution" or "genetic drift," suggesting a deep understanding of evolutionary processes that parallel concepts later elucidated by evolutionary biology. These concepts propose that genetic changes in populations can occur due to random processes rather than natural selection. According to modern evolutionary theory, "neutral evolution suggests that most genetic variation within a population is selectively neutral,

[15] Nikolai Kuznetsov, *Lepidoptera*, trans. A. Mercado (Jerusalem: Israel Program for Scientific Translations, 1967), 166.
[16] Boyd, "Review of Zimmer's A Guide to Nabokov's Butterflies and Moths 2001," 219.

meaning it does not confer a significant advantage or disadvantage."[17] "Genetic drift" refers to the random fluctuations in allele frequencies over generations, especially in small populations where chance events can have a pronounced effects.[18] Despite his confidence in his classification system, Nabokov acknowledged the potential for refinement, recognizing the dynamic nature of scientific inquiry. In correspondence with Edmund Wilson, Nabokov stated, "My system could remain a wonderful and indispensable thing for some 25 years, after which another fellow will show how wrong I was in this or that. Herein lies the difference between science and art."[19] Nabokov's pioneering scientific research on butterflies has endured and influenced his aesthetic and literary creations. A review of Nabokov's critical reception will aid in the understanding of this influence, indicating where scholars have discerned the significance of Nabokov's scientific work, among other themes and orientations, and suggesting where further critical exploration is desirable.

1.2 Nabokov Literary Studies and Scholarship

In recent years, Nabokov scholarship has undergone significant expansion, broadening its critical scope from traditional aesthetic and meta-literary studies to encompass ethical and metaphysical dimensions and intertextual and cross-disciplinary inquiries. This section will introduce three major approaches to understanding Nabokov's work: aesthetic and meta-literary analysis, exploration of ethical and metaphysical themes, and investigations into intertextual connections and interdisciplinary perspectives.

1.2.1 Aesthetic and Meta-literary Studies of Nabokov

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, aesthetic and meta-literary studies dominated the critical approach to Nabokov's work. This era saw the publication of numerous books and scholarly

[17] Motoo Kimur, *The Neutral Theory of Molecular Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[18] Richard C. Lewontin and J. L. Hubby, "A Molecular Approach to the Study of Genic Heterozygosity in Natural Populations. II. Amount of Variation and Degree of Heterozygosity in Natural Populations of Drosophila pseudoobscura," *Genetics* 54. 2 (1966): 595-609.
[19] Vladimir Nabokov, *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya: The Nabokov-Wilson Letters (1940–1971)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 159.

articles by prominent scholars such as Alfred Appel, Charles Newman,[20] L. S. Dembo,[21] Douglas Fowler,[22] Donald Morton,[23] G. M. Hyde,[24] Julian Moynahan,[25] Carl R. Proffer,[26] Peter Quennell,[27] and Dabney Stuart.[28] Scholarship from this period focused on Nabokov's artistic achievements, delving into aspects of artistic form, literary allusiveness and polemical interjections, often directed at Nabokov's ideological opponents among the Russian emigrés.

Andrew Field, Nabokov's biographer, maintained a close relationship with the author and his wife. His two comprehensive biographies, *Nabokov: His Life in Art* and *Nabokov: His Life in Part*, offer in-depth examinations of Nabokov's artistic creation.[29] However, Field's analysis primarily concerns the aesthetic realm, overlooking the nuanced moral and metaphysical underpinnings intertwined with Nabokov's creative expressions. While Field concentrates on Nabokov's Russian works, Page Stegner's *Escape Into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov* centers on exploring Nabokov's aesthetics in his five American novels.[30] Yet Stegner's treatment of Nabokov's style and aesthetic sensibilities remains superficial, portraying Nabokov's art merely as an escape into aesthetics. For instance, in his interpretation of John Shade's poem in *Pale Fire*, Stegner aligns with Kinbote's view that the first line serves also as the last, disregarding Shade's profound metaphysical contemplations on death and their intricate integration into the novel's thematic fabric. William Rowe, in *Nabokov's Deceptive World*, primarily focuses on Nabokov's stylistic devices and narrative techniques. He argues that Nabokov's English prose bears traces of his Russian background and heritage.[31] However Rowe's analysis sometimes oversimplifies the complexity of Nabokov's works. For instance, his chapter on "Sexual Manipulations", analyzing sexual symbolism in Nabokov's works,

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[20] Alfred Appel and Charles Newman, *Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).
[21] Lawrence Stanford Dembo, *Nabokov: The Man and His Work* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967).
[22] Douglas Fowler, *Reading Nabokov* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press,1974).
[23] Donald E. Morton, *Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1974).
[24] George M. Hyde, *Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist* (London: Marion Boyars, 1977).
[25] Julian Moynahan, *Vladimir Nabokov* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).
[26] Carl R. Proffer, *Keys to Lolita* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1968).
[27] Peter Quennell, *Vladimir Nabokov: A Tribute to His Life, His Work, His World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979).
[28] Dabney Stuart, *Nabokov: The Dimensions of Parody* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).
[29] Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1967). Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Part* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977).
[30] Page Stegner, *Escape Into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967).
[31] William Woodin Rowe, *Nabokov's Deceptive World* (New York: New York Univ. Press,1971), 165.

incites Nabokov's disapproval and outrage.[32] Responding to Nabokov's denial of such usage, Rowe suggests that Nabokov's use of sexual symbolism serves as a deliberate parody of Freudian concepts rather than a subconscious or aesthetic technique.

Various scholars have approached Nabokov's literary works through the lens of aesthetics, evaluating the textual intricacies and authorial intentions embedded within them. In her work *Crystal Land: Artifice in Nabokov's English Novels*, Julia Bader proposes a comprehensive understanding of Nabokov's novels can be attained through an appreciation of their artifice.[33] Bader meticulously dissects each novel, elucidating how characters and narrators are strategically positioned to fulfil distinct artistic functions. For instance, she analyzes the subversion of conventional literary tropes in *Lolita*, the satirical portrayal of literary criticism in *Pale Fire*, and the interplay between narrator subjectivity and authorial intervention in *Pnin*. In *The Annotated Lolita*, Alfred Appel adopts a literary standpoint to expound upon Nabokov's intricate wordplay, arguing that its brilliance may elude readers unwilling to engage deeply with the text.[34] Similarly, Bobbie Ann Mason, in *Nabokov's Garden: A Guide to Ada*, underscores the meticulous artistry prevalent in Nabokov's oeuvre, suggesting that even seemingly minor details like the sexual characteristics of an orchid worn by a character can hold significant thematic weight.[35] Carl R. Proffer, in his *A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov*, focuses on Nabokov's mastery of language, elegant prose, and rich literary allusions.[36] While these critical inquiries enrich our comprehension of Nabokov's stylistic artifices, they also perpetuate the stereotypical perception of Nabokov predominantly or solely as an aesthetic writer.

The aesthetic perspective on Nabokov's literary achievements provides a lens through which readers can appreciate his mastery of language and brilliant style. Furthermore, it offers critics a framework to connect Nabokov's works to postmodern concepts such as metafiction, unreliable narration, and wordplay. However, this perspective can also give rise to misconceptions about his role as a novelist. Some critics, focusing solely on Nabokov's verbal virtuosity, have characterized him as a shallow aesthete disengaged from humanity. They point to his emphasis on aesthetic splendor, apparent indifference to social and political issues, detachment from moral and ethical inquiries, and departure from the moralizing tendencies of

[32] Vladimir Nabokov, New York Review of Books, 7 October 1971.
[33] Julia Bader, *Crystal Land: Artifice in Nabokov's English Novels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).
[34] Alfred A. Appel, *The Annotated 'Lolita'* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971) , xxvi.
[35] Bobbie Ann Mason, *Nabokov's Garden: A Guide to Ada* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1974).
[36] Carl R. Proffer, *A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1974).

Russian literary tradition.[37] Some have gone as far as to assert that his works lack "the moral and humane dimensions—profundities, compassions, inner developments."[38] Aesthetic and meta-literary analyses often foreground the artistic elements of Nabokov's writing while overlooking other significant themes. In response to these misconceptions, Nabokov addressed the issue of his perceived lack of moral depth in an interview, asserting that he believed that one day a reappraiser would declare that "far from having been a frivolous firebird, I was a rigid moralist kicking sin, cuffing stupidity, ridiculing the vulgar and cruel—and assigning sovereign power to tenderness, talent, and pride."[39] This defense of his moral stance prompted scholars to reevaluate the ethical dimensions of his works, leading to a deeper understanding of Nabokov's literary enterprise.

1.2.2 Ethical and Metaphysical Studies of Nabokov

Despite debates surrounding the moral implications of *Lolita* and the persistent characterization of Nabokov as primarily an aesthetic writer, scholarly discourse in the 1980s began to increasingly explore the ethical, philosophical, and metaphysical dimensions of Nabokov's oeuvre. In *Nabokov and the Novel*, Ellen Pifer challenges the notion that Nabokov's works lack moral, social, and philosophical depth. Pifer argues that even the most intricate of Nabokov's artifices "reflects the author's abiding interest in human beings, not only as artists and dreamers but as ethical beings subject to moral law and sanction."[40] Pifer contends that Nabokov's apparent detachment from his characters contributes to "a moral perception of reality."[41] Pifer places Nabokov's artificiality in a new light and proves that Nabokov and his works address acute moral and social issues. In *Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita: A Casebook*, Pifer further examines the reception and cultural implications of *Lolita*, presenting a collection of nine critical essays alongside an interview with Nabokov himself.[42] These essays dissect the novel's various textual and thematic elements while delving into broader cultural contexts and implications. In *The Novels of Vladimir Nabokov*, Laurie Clancy posits that Nabokov's moral and aesthetic sensibilities share a common foundation in emotion, distinct from mere utility.

[37] Alexander Dolinin, "Nabokov as a Russian Writer," in Julian W. Connolly, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Nabokov* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 56
[38] Robert Martin Adams, "Fiction Chronicle," *Hudson Review* 15 (1962): 423.
[39] Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 193.
[40] Ellen Pifer, *Nabokov and the Novel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), i.
[41] Ibid., iii.
[42] Ellen Pifer, *Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita: A Casebook* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002).

She asserts that Nabokov was "a great moral writer and critic of life."[43] Through these studies, a deeper understanding emerges of the moral themes, social critiques, and humanistic concerns embedded within Nabokov's literary corpus.

In recent years, the exploration of the moral dimensions of Nabokov's literary corpus has evolved, intertwining ethical inquiries with considerations of literary structure and psychological themes. Julian Connolly, in *Nabokov's Early Fiction*, draws upon a critical remark by Nabokov in his commentary on Nikolai Gogol: "Literature does not concern itself with social issues, but rather appeals to that secret depth of the human soul where the shadows of other worlds pass like the shadows of nameless and soundless ships."[44] Connolly identifies a central theme in Nabokov's works, namely "the crucial relationship between self and other."[45] He underscores the structural and thematic continuities between Nabokov's Russian and English writings, delineating Nabokov's distinct literary persona across these phases. Leland de la Durantaye, in *The Moral Art of Vladimir Nabokov*, takes *Lolita* as a case study to argue that Humbert, despite his artistic talents, lacks empathy, fails to adopt Lolita's perspective, and blurs the line between art and life. Durantaye contends that *Lolita* prompts readers to balance "the disinterested remove of aesthetic judgment with the interested proximity of moral judgment."[46] He asserts that in Nabokov's works, manner and substance are inseparable, as they are "intensely and integrally concerned with moral questions."[47] These studies shed light on Nabokov's skepticism toward collective existence, challenging the notion that this implies indifference toward individuals and personal relationships. Instead, they reveal how Nabokov's moral assertions and defense of individuality are woven into his artistic presentation.

Some critics examine the traditional or philosophical foundations underlying Nabokov's moral vision. In "By Trial and Terror," Gennady Barabtarlo argues that Nabokov's works juxtapose the world's mysterious beauty with the harsh consequences faced by protagonists consumed by desire and passion.[48] Barabtarlo compares Nabokov's moral vision and narrative style with Tolstoy's and the broader Russian tradition. He contends that Nabokov's Russian

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[43] Laurie Clancy, *The Novels of Vladimir Nabokov* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1984), 20.
[44] Julian W. Connolly, *Nabokov's Early Fictions: Patterns of Self and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 82-83.
[45] Connolly, *Nabokov's Early Fictions*, 2.
[46] Leland de la Durantaye, *Style is Matter: The Moral Art of Vladimir Nabokov*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 182.
[47] Ibid., 194.
[48] Gennady Barabtarlo, "By Trial and Terror," in Rodgers, M., Sweeney, S. eds., *Nabokov and the Question of Morality: Aesthetics, Metaphysics, and the Ethics of Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 87-108.

fiction often exposes characters' moral decline through third-person narration, whereas his English fiction reveals moral complexities through evasive first-person narration. Furthermore, Barabtarlo asserts that Tolstoy and the morally and religiously oriented Russian tradition significantly influenced Nabokov's treatment of morality. Similarly, Leland de la Durantaye, in his essay "The Art of Morality, or on *Lolita*," posits that Nabokov considered morality, as opposed to moralizing, inseparable from art.[49] De la Durantaye demonstrates how Nabokov creates tension between lyricism and parody in Humbert's narration, suggesting that *Lolita* is a moral book because it uses literary strategies to provoke readers to reflect on Humbert's immoral behavior. Ethical readings of Nabokov's work are closely linked to philosophical studies, as they both challenge the widespread view of Nabokov as merely a metaliterary writer. Instead, they propose that his aesthetic is rooted in an intuition of moral and transcendent realms, forming the basis of his art.

A significant influence on the philosophical or metaphysical approach to Nabokov's work was his wife, Vera, who suggested that the central fact of Nabokov's art might be an intuition about a transcendent realm. Vera's remarks regarding the dominance of metaphysical themes in Nabokov's legacy have inspired many critics to approach his work beyond merely metaliterary analysis. In the 1990s critics such as D. Barton Johnson, Pekka Tammi, Brian Boyd, Leona Toker, and Vladimir Alexandrov began to focus on the philosophical inquiries that permeate Nabokov's oeuvre, often integrating metafictional studies with metaphysical readings. Michael Wood, in *The Magician's Doubts*, claims that the ethical dimension in Nabokov's works resides in "the realm of the unspeakable," arguing that Nabokov "is neither the aesthete that he and his early readers kept making out he was, nor the plodding moralist that recent criticism, with an audible sigh of relief, has wheeled onto the page."[50] The prominence of metaphysical interpretation is evident in Brian Boyd's intertextual work, including his two-volume critical biography *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* and *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, as well as *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery* and numerous reviews and essays.[51] Barton Johnson delves into the metaphysical

[49] Leland de la Durantaye, "The Art of Morality, or on *Lolita*," in M. Rodgers and S. Sweeney, eds., *Nabokov and the Question of Morality: Aesthetics, Metaphysics, and the Ethics of Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 183-196.
[50] Michael Wood, *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994),7.
[51] Brian Boyd, "Literature and Discovery," *Philosophy and Literature* 23.2 (1999): 313–33. Brian Boyd, *Nabokov's Pale Fire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Brian Boyd, "Nabokov's Philosophical World," *The Southern Review* 14.3 (1981): 260-301.

significance in *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov*.[52] David Richter emphasizes that while "we must certainly heed Nabokov's plea not to read his narratives as social sermons, we need not turn him into a mere manufacturer of crossword puzzles and chess problems." [53] Leona Toker examines the interaction between Nabokov and notable philosophers such as Schopenhauer and Bergson.[54] These works collectively advance our understanding of the philosophical and metaphysical dimensions of Nabokov's art.

The metaphysical interpretive trend reached its peak with Vladimir Alexandrov's study, *Nabokov's Otherworld*, which examines the paradigmatic relationship between metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics in Nabokov's work. Alexandrov defines "metaphysics" as Nabokov's belief in a transcendent, nonmaterial, timeless, and beneficent realm that seemingly provides personal immortality and influences everything in the mundane world. He interprets "ethics" as Nabokov's belief in the absolute nature of good and evil, linked to the transcendent otherworld and accessible to humans, particularly artists, as universal criteria for judging human behavior. Alexandrov posits that Nabokov's "aesthetics" encompass two aspects: the theme of art creation, embodied in various forms in Nabokov's fiction, and his works' distinctive shape and style.[55] Alexandrov argues that Nabokov's metaphysics is inseparable from his ethics and aesthetics, which can be understood as "a single continuum of beliefs, not for separate categories of Nabokov's interests."[56] Jane Grayson comments on Alexandrov's tendency to identify the transcendent in Nabokov's works, noting, "The face of Nabokov which Alexandrov has chosen to fill his cover is austere, the gaze directed away from the reader out beyond the spine into the steely cosmic blue of an 'otherworld'."[57] Gennady Barabtarlo's *Aerial View: Essays on Nabokov's Art and Metaphysics* further refines the philosophical or metaphysical trend in Nabokov studies. Barabtarlo treats the metaphysical as a unifying theme in Nabokov's exploration of time, space, characters, narrators, and rhetorical devices. He demonstrates how Nabokov, through perfecting stylistic and structural elements of art,

[52] D. Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985).
[53] David H. Richter, "Narrative Entrapment in 'Pnin' and 'Signs and Symbols'," *Papers on Language and Literature* 20.4 (1984): 418.
[54] Leona Toker, *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press,1989. Leona Toker, "Philosophers as Poets: Reading Nabokov with Schopenhauer and Bergson," *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 24 (1991): 185-96.
[55] Vladimir E. Alexandrov, *Nabokov's Otherworld* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 568.
[56] Ibid., 5.
[57] Jane Grayson, "The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov," *Nabokov Studies* 3.1 (1996): 214.

"described the secrets of the hereabout and probed the mysteries of the hereafter."[58] Barabtarlo thus explores the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions in Nabokov's works.

In recent years the metaphysical study of Nabokov's works has taken new directions. Boyd diverges from Alexandrov's perspective, stating, "I regard *Nabokov's Otherworld* as flawed, after its fine introduction."[59] Nonetheless, Boyd maintains that metaphysics, ethics, and style are inseparable in Nabokov's work: "Although Nabokov would write differently in all sorts of ways if his metaphysics and ethics were thinner and poorer, we would still read Nabokov without them."[60] In contrast to Boyd's cautious approach to metaphysical criticism, Maurice Couturier explicitly objects to emphasizing metaphysical dimensions in Nabokov's criticism. He argues that those who attempt to prove the "celestial level of [Nabokov's] moral standards" often rely on his and sometimes his wife's statements to support their arguments.[61] Couturier argues that the metaphysical approach tends to suspiciously overlook all elements in Nabokov's work. Similarly, D. Barton Johnson expresses suspicion that "the subsequent widespread adoption of the 'metaphysical' Nabokov with his multiple worlds was in part motivated by some of the same fear of social pressures that triggered the perceptual shift from the cold, calculating virtuoso to the warm, gooey moralist Nabokov." [62] Ethical and metaphysical interpretations of Nabokov's works typically accept the existence of a priori moral or metaphysical standards against which readers are urged to evaluate protagonists' actions or motives. Both approaches view Nabokov's works as highly controlled and pre-determined texts, often overlooking the ambiguous parts, unresolved conflicts, unattainable truths, and hidden complexities in his narratives.

1.2.3 Intertextual and Cross-Discipline Studies of Nabokov

In recent years, many writers and critics, including John Updike, John Barth, Edward Albee, Edmund White, Donald Harington, David Slavitt, Sasha Sokolov, Yury Trifonov, Vasily Aksenov, and Andrei Bitov, have explored a broad range of intertextual and boundary-crossing topics in Nabokov's work. These critics investigate and evaluate the numerous literary

[58] Gennady Barabtarlo, *Aerial View: Essays on Nabokov's Art and Metaphysics* (Peter Lang, 1993), 1.
[59] Brian Boyd, "Nabokov as Storyteller," in Julian Connolly, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 47.
[60] Boyd, "Nabokov as Storyteller," 31.
[61] Maurice Couturier, "The Magician's Doubts and the Risks of Fiction," *Nabokov Studies* 3.1 (1996): 215.
[62] D. Barton Johnson and Brian Boyd, "Prologue: The Otherworld," in Jane Grayson et al., eds., *Nabokov's World*, vol. 1. (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2002), 19-26.

allusions and cultural references embedded in Nabokov's narratives, highlighting the intricate web of influences and connections that enrich his texts.

The intertextual approach to Nabokov's works establishes his connections with specific writers, thinkers, and cultural contexts, transforming "networks of allusions and references into "a dimension constitutive to the Nabokov poetic world."[63] Omry Ronen, in his article "Nabokov and Goethe," asserts that Nabokov drew themes and motifs from Goethe's works in his early short stories and novels. Similarly, Julian Connolly, in "Nabokov and Dostoevsky: Good Writer, Bad Reader?" examines the disjunction between Nabokov's public disdain for the religious and ideological content of Dostoevsky's works. Connolly argues that this inconsistency reveals Nabokov's complex attitude toward Dostoevsky's novels.[64] In "Nabokov and Freud," Jenefer Shute offers an insightful analysis of Nabokov's antipathy towards Freudian psychoanalysis.[65] Shute suggests that Nabokov's rejection of Freudianism stems from its imbalance between theory and data and its attempt to reduce the complexity of the human mind to singular underlying causes. Contrary to Freud, who focused on the unconscious, Nabokov explored the realms of consciousness and the unconscious in his works, emphasizing the importance of individual consciousness over collective unconsciousness. Shute contends that Nabokov's characters defy explanation through Freudian principles, showcasing the author's belief in the complexity and uniqueness of human psychology.

In *Vladimir Nabokov: Bergsonian and Russian Formalist Influences in His Novels*, Michael Glynn explores Nabokov's affinities with Russian Formalism and Bergsonism, tracing their impact on Nabokov's views regarding the mind-matter dichotomy, his stance toward Freud and Darwin, and his conception of scientific knowledge.[66] Glynn begins by examining Nabokov's reception of Bergson, who posited that the mind tends towards delusion and automatism. In this automatic mode, the mind becomes oblivious to material reality, leading to a rigid, mechanical, and distorted perception of the world. Bergson and Shklovsky contended that art and artists can counteract this tendency towards delusion by de-automatizing perception. Glynn identifies the influences of Bergson and Shklovsky on Nabokov's literary creations, examining characters such as Humbert in *Lolita*, Kinbote in *Pale Fire* and Hermann in *Despair*. Glynn

[63] Savely Senderovich and Yelena Shvarts, "Approaching Nabokovian Poetics," *Essays in Poetics* 24 (1999): 179.
[64] Julian Connolly, "Nabokov and Dostoevsky: Good Writer, Bad Reader?" in *Nabokov and the Question of Morality*, ed. M. Rodgers and S. Sweeney (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 33-50.
[65] Jenefer Shute, "Nabokov and Freud," in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. Vladimir E. Alexandrov (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 412-20.
[66] Michael Glynn, *Vladimir Nabokov: Bergsonian and Russian Formalist Influences in His Novels* (Springer, 2016), 3.

posits that these characters exemplify the theme of human delusion stemming from the mind's tendency towards automatism. In contrast, artist-characters like Pnin in *Pnin*, Shade in *Pale Fire* and Van in *Ada* are portrayed as capable of dispelling such delusions, refreshing their otherwise automated perceptions of reality. Glynn argues that Nabokov actively engaged with Bergson's and Shklovsky's conceptualizations of delusion, transforming them into distinctive characteristics apt for his fictional world.

In *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism,* John Burt Foster explores Nabokov's treatment of memory within the framework of European modernism.[67] Foster examines how Nabokov's novels, stories, and autobiographical writings intersect with the cultural milieux of early twentieth-century modernists, including Proust and Bergson in France, Freud and Mann in Germany, Joyce and Eliot in the Anglo-American sphere, and the legacies of Dostoevsky Tolstoy, and Pushkin in Russia. The book follows a roughly chronological order, with the initial section outlining the literary and historical foundations of a cultural biography focused on modernism. In the second chapter, Foster investigates Nabokov's artistic treatment of memory in his works and the correlation between his stance on European modernity and his memories. The subsequent chapter zooms in on Nabokov's narratives as a Russian émigré novelist grappling with memory. Foster's analysis extends beyond Nabokov's memory to encompass cultural memory, enriching the understanding of Nabokov's oeuvre within the broader context of modernism. Foster's meticulous examination of texts and exploration of the interplay between memory and imagination in Nabokov's works offer valuable insights. He highlights Nabokov's endeavor to reclaim "the tangled threads of his past and its personal truth."[68] While some critics challenge Foster's approach, aligning with Nabokov's aversion to "period terms and literary movements," Foster steadfastly defends his historical inquiry, arguing that Nabokov's personal preferences do not hinder a deeper understanding of his work.[69] In his article, "Transnational Authorship on the German-Slavic Border: The Examples of Nietzsche and Nabokov," Foster draws parallels between Nietzsche's and Nabokov's experiences of transnationalism and broader cultural phenomena such as globalization, multiculturalism, and postcolonial context.[70] Foster's exploration of Nietzsche's and

[67] John Burt Foster, *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism*. Princeton University Press, 1993.
[68] Ibid., 179.
[69] Ibid., 11-12.
[70] John Burt Foster, "*Transnational Authorship on the German-Slavic Border: The Examples of Nietzsche and Nabokov*," in *Cold Fusion: Aspects of the German Cultural Presence in Russia*, ed. Gennady Barabtarlo (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 224.

Nabokov's boundary-crossing as authors remains relevant and enlightening for contemporary transnational writers. The intertextual approach to Nabokov's novels offers valuable insights into their characteristics and techniques. According to Savely Senderovich and Yelena Shvarts, this approach views Nabokov's works as "semantic strata," with each layer spanning his entire body of work and endowing it with a distinct function.[71] However, critics argue that this perspective aligns Nabokov's works too closely with his intended ideas, potentially overlooking the inherent ambiguity in his writing and diminishing the validity of alternative interpretations.

The cross-disciplinary approach to Nabokov's novels broadens the scope of intertextual study to encompass diverse cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary dimensions. For instance, *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* features contributions from renowned experts and specialists who analyze his work from multiple angles. Many articles within the collection, titled "Nabokov and...", exemplify this cross-boundary research, opening up potentially fruitful avenues for exploration.[72] Similarly, *The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov* offers a comprehensive examination of Nabokov's legacy, from his early poems and short stories to his masterful novels. It delves into aesthetic strategies, ethical considerations, and political dimensions, providing readers with new critical pathways into Nabokov's multifaceted creative terrain.[73] In *Nabokov and His Fiction: New Perspective*, scholars offer fresh insights into Nabokov and his artistic endeavors, commemorating the centenary of his birth.[74] Galya Diment explores the interplay between Nabokov's personal experiences and his autobiographical artistry, while Maxim Shrayer tackles the Jewish themes in Nabokov's life and work. Julian W. Connolly scrutinizes Nabokov's poetic engagement with and revisions of Dostoevsky, while Barton Johnson examines Nabokov's relationship with Rupert Brooke. Ellen Pifer elucidates the subtle connections between Nabokov and Mary Shelley in *Lolita*, and Alexander Dolin reveals Nabokov's implicit response to historicism within his literary works. Lastly, John Burt offers a cultural critique of Nabokov's oeuvre, adding another layer of scholarly depth to the

[71] Savely Senderovich and Yelena Shvarts, "Approaching Nabokovian Poetics," *Essays in Poetics* 24 (1999): 158-81.
[72] Vladimir E. Alexandrov, ed., *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995).
[73] Julian W. Connolly, *The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[74] Julian Connolly, *Nabokov and His Fiction: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

discourse surrounding his work.[75] These diverse perspectives enrich our understanding of Nabokov's literary contributions and their broader significance within literature and culture.

Scholars in *Nabokov at the Limits: Redrawing Critical Boundaries* push the boundaries of Nabokov scholarship by exploring new thematic avenues.[76] Barton Johnson, Charles Nicol, and Barbara Wyllie delve into the musical dimensions of Nabokov's fiction. Johnson meticulously dissects the musical subtexts and references to composers, songs, styles, and forms in *Ada*, positing each allusion as a gateway to a secondary layer of meaning that enriches the novel's broader context. Nicol provides a nuanced examination of Nabokov's Russian musical heritage, tracing its influence from his early exposure to operas to its reflection in his literary oeuvre. Wyllie examines the resonance of popular music in Nabokov's major works, including *Lolita*, *Pale Fire* and *Ada*. Julian Connolly offers a comprehensive review of the recurring motif of music across Nabokov's literary career. Other scholars focus on the balletic elements within Nabokov's narratives. Nassim Ballestrini parallels Stravinsky's ballet *Petrushka* and Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*, positing shared thematic concerns regarding the intricate relationship between art and ethics. Susan Elizabeth Sweeney suggests that Marius Petipa's classic Russian ballet, *The Sleeping Beauty*, significantly influenced Nabokov's artistic sensibilities, serving as a critical subtext for *Lolita*. Further expanding the scholarly discourse, Ralph Ciancio, Christine Raguet-Bouvart, and Gavriel Shapiro explore Nabokov's engagement with the visual arts. Raguet-Bouvart examines the utilization of painting as a stylistic device in Nabokov's works, arguing that the interplay between linguistic and perceptual elements generates visible and interpretable ambiguity. Taking Humbert in *Lolita* as a case study, Raguet-Bouvart illustrates how artistic imagery intertwines with Humbert's solipsistic rhetoric. This research offers fresh insights into the multifaceted intersections between literature, music, ballet, and the visual arts within Nabokov's corpus.

Some critics argue that Nabokov's literature consistently raises complex, profound, and thought-provoking inquiries into morality and ethics. In *Nabokov and the Question of Morality*, Sweeney illuminates what she terms "the moral art of Vladimir Nabokov," concentrating on his ethical considerations within the framework of the novel.[77] Diverging from moral analyses prevalent in the 1980s, Sweeney's collection encompasses Nabokov's entire literary trajectory,

[75] Gennady Barabtarlo, "Nabokov's Trinity (On the Movement of Nabokov's Themes)," in Julian W. Connolly, ed., *Nabokov and His Fiction: New Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 134.
[76] Lisa Zunshine, *Nabokov at the Limits: Redrawing Critical Boundaries* (Routledge, 2012).
[77] Michael Rodgers and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, eds., *Nabokov and the Question of Morality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

examining themes such as just and unjust interpretations, religious symbolism, monomania, ethical quandaries, love and sacrifice, crime and punishment, and portrayals of sexuality, violence, and moral vacuity. With its subtitle, "Aesthetics, Metaphysics, and the Ethics of Fiction," the collection intends to elucidate subtle distinctions among these closely intertwined dimensions. The contributors scrutinize Nabokov's works alongside those of other literary and philosophical luminaries, including Carlyle, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Shklovsky, Wittgenstein, Lacan, and Derrida. Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of the collection extends beyond literary and cultural realms, engaging with fields such as anthropology, neuroscience, jurisprudence, religion, and philosophy. These multidisciplinary approaches yield fresh perspectives on the philosophical, ethical, and spiritual dimensions embedded within Nabokov's literary corpus.

This intertextual and cross-disciplinary approach not only enriches Nabokov's Studies but also deepens our comprehension of the distinctive features of Nabokov's literary works, transforming networks of allusions and references to specific writers or cultural contexts into integral components of the Nabokovian poetic universe. The aesthetic, ethical, and intertextual approaches emerge as three primary strands within Nabokov's criticism. In recent years, however, modern criticism has expanded to include the dimension of science, which has significantly developed over the past two decades. This scientific dimension is delineated in Nabokov's oeuvre, further broadening the scope of scholarly inquiry and offering fresh insights into the multifaceted layers of his literary creations.

1.3 Nabokov Science Studies and Reviews

1.3.1 Science Studies and Nabokov's Scientific Views

Science studies, an interdisciplinary field that investigates the development, practices, and cultural impact of scientific knowledge, has broadened its scope beyond traditional science-focused disciplines. Recently, it has gained prominence in literary criticism, particularly in examining how literature engages with, reflects, and critiques scientific thought. By exploring the representation and contestation of scientific ideas in literary works, critics illuminate the dynamic relationship between science and culture. This exploration reveals how literature grapples with scientific advancements, serving as a medium for questioning the epistemological, ethical, and philosophical foundations of science. Science studies thus opens new avenues for understanding the cultural implications of scientific concepts, demonstrating

that literature can both reflect and counter scientific discourse. For instance, Daniel Albright's *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism* examines how modernist poets engaged with early 20th-century scientific theories.[78] Similarly, Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* investigates the influence of Darwinian evolution on Victorian literature.[79] These works underscore the power of literature to interrogate and reinterpret scientific paradigms.

In literary criticism, particularly in the context of modern and postmodern works, science studies provides a framework for analysing how writers incorporate or challenge dominant scientific paradigms. Authors such as Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, and Italo Calvino have been studied for their engagements with physics, mathematics, and biology, revealing how literature can probe the limitations of scientific rationalism. This approach emphasizes the interplay between narrative, metaphor, and scientific thought, where literature often critiques deterministic views or embraces alternative ways of understanding reality, such as intuition, uncertainty, and subjectivity. Thus, science studies in literary criticism helps bridge the gap between the sciences and the humanities, demonstrating how literary works reflect ongoing debates within scientific communities and challenge the cultural authority of science.

Nabokov's works often juxtapose scientific concepts with metaphysical questions, employing narrative forms that challenge deterministic interpretations and explore alternative models of knowledge. To appreciate Nabokov's contributions to the dialogue between art and science, it is vital to consider his critical stance on scientific ideas. His engagement with themes like evolution and lepidopterology showcases the complex interplay between his literary artistry and scientific inquiry. Nabokov critiques deterministic interpretations of Darwinian theory, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of evolution that incorporates creativity and subjectivity. As he notes in *The Gift*, "Darwin's theory leaves no room for the instinctive, the unexpected, and the marvelous."[80] His writings reveal a profound appreciation for the intricacies of biological phenomena, particularly through his studies of butterflies, which serve as vehicles for exploring themes of mimicry and adaptation. Additionally, his philosophical reflections on time draw on advancements in physics, challenging conventional narratives and inviting readers to reconsider their understanding of reality. He stated, "Time is a very large,

[78] Daniel Albright, *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[79] Gilian Beer, *Darwin's plots: Evolutionary narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and nineteenth-century fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[80] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift*. Translated by Dmitri Nabokov (New York: Vintage, 1952), 24.

very beautiful, very cruel, and very silly, as it is not being lived by me at this moment."[81] These views reveal Nabokov as an astute observer and commentator on the scientific landscape. His perspectives, along with those of his literary personas, provide a foundation for a deeper exploration of the art-science dynamic that permeates his works.

Nabokov studies have been greatly enriched by his critical engagement with science, complemented by the methodologies and insights from science studies. Recent scholarship has moved beyond simply acknowledging Nabokov's interest in scientific topics, such as evolution and lepidopterology, to exploring his engagement with science through the lens of science studies. This approach positions his fiction not merely as a reflection of scientific ideas, but as an active participant in debates about science and its cultural implications. Science studies offer a valuable framework for analysing how Nabokov's fiction critiques and engages with scientific discourse, highlighting his ability to blend literary artistry with scientific thought.

Critics have explored Nabokov's engagement with scientific concepts—such as evolution, lepidopterology, and quantum mechanics—not merely as thematic elements but as integral to his narrative strategies and philosophical inquiries. Literary critics and scientists, including Charles Lee Remington, Kurt Johnson, Zsolt Bflint, Steve Coates, Dieter Zimmer, and Brian Boyd, have offered extensive evaluations of Nabokov's contributions to lepidopterology. They commend his scientific accomplishments, particularly his taxonomic work on the blues. To structure my examination of the interaction between art and science in Nabokov's works, I will divide the study into three categories: first, the exploration of Nabokov's scientific dimension by literary critics; second, the debates among scientists regarding Nabokov's lepidopterological findings; and third, collaborative critiques that emerge from the intersection of insights from both critics and scientists. This framework will allow for a comprehensive analysis of how Nabokov navigates and intertwines the realms of literature and science, revealing the depth of his contributions to both fields.

1.3.2 Critics' Exploration of Nabokov's Scientific Dimension

Many literary critics have explored the relationship between Nabokov's scientific research and his artistic expression, examining three prominent scientific themes within his works. Firstly, they explore the butterfly motif and its interplay with scientific and metaphysical realms. Secondly, they scrutinize the depiction of consciousness, dreams, and cognition in

[81] Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 190.

Nabokov's characters and protagonists. Lastly, they analyze Nabokov's narratives' spatial and temporal dimensions. Nabokov's scientific speculations within his literary creations can be seen as a critique against materialistic philosophy and a manifestation of his dedication to spiritualism and idealism. Moreover, they represent an extension of his scientific inquiry and critical examination of the world around him. While this might seem counterintuitive at first, by incorporating scientific themes, Nabokov not only enriches the depth of his narratives but also offers a philosophical lens through which readers can contemplate existential questions and ponder the complexities of human experience.

Firstly, critics often focus on Nabokov's profound passion for butterflies, rooted in his significant scientific achievements in lepidoptery. Dieter E. Zimmer's *A Guide to Nabokov's Butterflies and Moths* meticulously explores Nabokov's fascination with these winged creatures, tracing their influence on his scientific research and artistic creation. The book provides readers with a comprehensive overview, including a biographical sketch of Nabokov, his reflections on butterflies, a catalogue of species named after him, and a compilation of Lepidoptera referenced in his writings. Moreover, Nabokov ingeniously incorporates fictitious scientist-characters into his novels, enhancing their engagement with scientific themes. In "Nabokov's Trinity," Gennady Barabtarlo delves into the symbiotic relationship between Nabokov's morphological studies and his literary creations. Barabtarlo contends that Nabokov's meticulous attention to detail reflects his profound reverence for "the natural world, in all its micro-and macro-forms, for things small and large."[82] Through precise and vivid descriptions, Nabokov brings to life the beauty of the unnoticed and the grand, inviting readers to immerse themselves in his crafted narratives. For instance, *Ada* features Nabokov's rich, layered descriptions of the natural world, blending botany, lepidoptery, and vivid scenery. His portrayal of the lush, idyllic world of Ardis Hall is a testament to his ability to bring both the grand and the minute to life. Barabtarlo highlights that Nabokov's fiction exhibits distinctive traits: children often lack siblings and are frequently separated from their parents; narratives convincingly portray distorted perspectives of maniacs; natural phenomena are intensified during critical narrative moments; and the afterlife is depicted as visible from one direction only, akin to one-way mirrors in interrogation rooms. [83] Barabtarlo's work offers fresh insights into Nabokov's narrative techniques and illuminates recurring motifs and narrative strategies within his texts. By exploring the intersections between Nabokov's scientific and literary

[82] Barabtarlo, "Nabokov's Trinity," 134.
[83] Ibid.,112.

pursuits, critics uncover new dimensions of his artistic vision, thereby enriching our understanding of his multifaceted oeuvre.

Vladimir Alexandrov expands the discussion from philosophy to biology by addressing Nabokov's antipathy towards Darwinism in his "A Note on Nabokov's Anti-Darwinism, or, Why Apes Feed on Butterflies in *The Gift*."[84] In *The Quill and the Scalpel*, Stephen Blackwell explores the dynamic interplay between Nabokov's art and science. Blackwell highlights a shared interest between Nabokov and Goethe in empirical data collection, the subjective nature of observation, and the reciprocal relationship between science and art. However, unlike Goethe, Nabokov emphasizes more of human consciousness, philosophical speculation, and metaphysical exploration. Blackwell asserts that Nabokov's art and science are "fundamentally related and, by corollary, mutually illuminating."[85] Blackwell proposes we analyse Nabokov's works by examining "materials of which they are made, how they are formed, and how they give rise to meaning." [86] Blackwell states that intertextual interpretations of Nabokov's scientific references do not reveal a universal or definitive meaning but rather "a local meaning with special significance to the themes of the work at hand."[87] In *Transparent Things*, for example, ghostly or metaphysical occurrences symbolize complex psychological states or illustrate challenges to conventional rules of physics and causality. The narrative also explores the existence and influence of departed spirits, examining the temporal nature of reality and emphasizing consciousness as independent and elevated beyond material existence.[88] This approach reveals aesthetic properties and thematic intricacies within Nabokov's oeuvre.

Second, many critics have shown a keen interest in the themes of consciousness, perception, and cognition in Nabokov's works. Blackwell, for instance, is particularly attuned to Nabokov's understanding of consciousness and its impact on his artistic works. Blackwell posits that Nabokov aimed to present diverse models of how human consciousness perceives and shapes its reality. This reality comprises specific empirical phenomena, with multiple consciousnesses interacting both with these phenomena and with each other.[89] In *Nabokov's Ada: The Place of Consciousness*, Brian Boyd analyses how Nabokov meticulously

[84] Vladimir E. Alexandrov, "A Note on Nabokov's Anti-Darwinism, or, Why Apes Feed on Butterflies in The Gift," in Gary Saul Morson and Elizabeth Cheresh Allen, eds., *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature* (Evanston, Northwestern University, 1994), 239-44.
[85] Stephen H. Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel: Nabokov's Art and the Worlds of Science* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2009), 53.
[86] Ibid., 197.
[87] Ibid., 197.
[88] Ibid., 194.
[89] Ibid., 53.

investigates the nature and function of human consciousness in *Ada*.[90] Boyd contends that *Ada* is not an exercise in self-indulgence devoid of complex structure; instead, it is one of Nabokov's most morally stringent and rigorous planned novels. Boyd posits that each seemingly idiosyncratic detail in *Ada* is integral to the novel's overall structure, contributing to its status as an organic unity. Every narrative twist explores space, time, and consciousness, demonstrating Nabokov's intricate and deliberate approach to these themes. This perspective highlights the profound interconnectedness within Nabokov's work, where artistic expression and scientific inquiry are seamlessly woven together to probe the depths of human experience.

Elspeth Jajdelska combines anthropological and historical analyses of the constraints on depicting sex with cognitive studies on how the mind processes information.[91] She explores how Nabokov achieves aesthetic effects when describing painful or disturbing subjects. For instance, in *Lolita*, Nabokov's portrayal of sexual acts manages to avoid inducing feelings of shame in the reader. In "Kinbote's Heroism," Laurence Piercy employs action theory and narratology to dissect a pivotal scene in *Pale Fire*.[92] He examines how Nabokov represents complex mental states and involuntary actions, mainly through the character of Kinbote. Piercy contrasts Kinbote's spontaneous attempt to shield Shade from a bullet with how Kinbote later narrates the event in his commentary. He questions Kinbote's belief that the assassin aimed at him rather than Shade, demonstrating how Nabokov uses notions of free will, automatic behaviour, and retroactive assumptions of motives to create a paradox. This paradox can only be resolved by recognizing Kinbote as a multifaceted and dynamic narrator. In *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture*, Karen Jacobs significantly redefines our understanding of modernist literature by showing how evolving visual discourses, techniques, and technologies influenced the novels of that period.[93] In Chapter 2, Jacobs examines self-detection in James's *The Sacred Fount* and Nabokov's *The Eye*. She tracks the solipsistic breakdown of the division between the narrator's and the character's perspectives in Nabokov's self-reflexive detective novel, *The Eye*. Here, the narrator's obsessive quest to uncover the identity of a man who ultimately turns out to be himself exemplifies this breakdown. Jacobs

[90] Brian Boyd, *Nabokov's Ada: The Place of Consciousness*, 2nd ed. (Christchurch: Cyber editions, 2001).
[91] Elspeth Jajdelska, "'Obnoxious Preoccupation with Sex Organs': The Ethics and Aesthetics of Representing Sex," in Michael Rodgers and Susan Elizbeth Sweeney, eds., *Nabokov and the Question of Morality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 197-212.
[92] Laurence Piercy Piercy, "Kinbote's Heroism," in Michael Rodgers and Susan Elizbeth Sweeney, eds., *Nabokov and the Question of Morality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 143-158.
[93] Karen Jacobs, *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (Cornell University, 2002): 47-78.

employs Foucault's theory of discipline and surveillance to investigate the political dimensions of *The Eye*'s self-reflexive viewing model, providing a deeper understanding of the novel's intricate play with perception and identity.

Nabokov's sustained interest in visual art is evident in remarks such as "I think in images"[94] and "all the great writers have a good eye",[95] suggesting that visual imagery is a fundamental aspect of his artistic vision. He perceived literature and painting as closely intertwined art forms, stating, "We have no physical organ (as we have the eye regarding painting) that takes in the whole picture [of a book] and then can enjoy its details. But at a second, third, or fourth reading, we do, in a sense, behave towards a book as we do towards a painting."[96] This analogy underscores his literary work's layered and detailed nature, inviting readers to approach it with the same iterative engagement as they would a piece of visual art. In *The Sublime Artist's Studio: Nabokov and Painting,* Gavriel Shapiro assesses the significant role of painting in Nabokov's oeuvre. Shapiro's investigation extends to Nabokov's engagement with various art forms, including cinema, photography, theatre, music, and ballet.[97] He meticulously traces painting references in Nabokov's works, linking them to different styles, genres, and movements within Western painting, from the Old Masters to German Expressionism. Shapiro demonstrates how these artistic influences shaped Nabokov's perception of art and embedded visual subtexts within his literature. In *Nabokov and the Art of Painting*, Gerard De Vries, Donald Barton Johnson, and Liana Ashenden discuss Nabokov's profound appreciation for the visual arts and their pervasive influence on his writing. They argue that the visual art references in Nabokov's works are not merely ornamental but are carefully chosen to align with the themes and enhance the depth of his narratives.[98] For instance, in a chapter focusing on landscape painting, Shapiro links this artistic tradition to Nabokov's verbal descriptions of landscapes in his writings. Despite Nabokov's self-identification as a landscape painter, Shapiro emphasizes Nabokov's mastery in painting vivid scenes through words. He notes Nabokov's inspiration from painters like Isaac Levitan, Claude Lorrain, and J. M. W. Turner. Shapiro discusses how forest path imagery in *Glory* recalls illustrations from

[94] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 4.
[95] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1981), 141.
[96] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980), 3.
[97] Gavriel Shapiro, *The Sublime Artist's Studio: Nabokov and Painting* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009).
[98] Gerard De Vries and Donald Barton Johnson, *Nabokov and the Art of Painting* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 29.

children's literature, and describes the Tamara Gardens in *Invitation to a Beheading* as a deceptive landscape without specific artistic associations. This integration of visual art into his verbal art significantly enriches the reading experience, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of consciousness, perception, and cognition in Nabokov's literary world. Through such studies, critics reveal how Nabokov's artistic vision bridges the realms of the visual and the textual, offering more profound insights into the complexities of his works.

Third, in the realm of Nabokov's study, the engagement with time, space, and memory emerges as a significant theme. Gennady Barabtarlo, in *Insomniac Dreams: Experiments With Time By Vladimir Nabokov*, delves into Nabokov's artistic experiments with sleep, dreams, and memory.[99] Barabtarlo's analysis is based on a wealth of related materials, including annotated transcriptions of Nabokov's dreams and descriptions of dream scenarios and memories found in his diaries and letters. Barabtarlo argues that Nabokov's experiments are influenced by John W. Dunne's theory of serial time. This theory, which suggests that time may not be linear and that future events can be perceived in dreams, underpins many of Nabokov's explorations. Barabtarlo describes Nabokov's various experiments with dreams, identifying their prominent features and categorizing the dreams of Nabokov's characters into eleven distinct groups. Through this lens, Nabokov's literary works can be viewed as extended and specialized experiments with time, reflecting his attempt to probe the mysteries of mortality. Barabtarlo's research reveals how Nabokov's engagement with time and memory is not merely a narrative device but a profound philosophical inquiry woven into the fabric of his fiction. This examination enhances our understanding of Nabokov's complex approach to temporality and the human experience, demonstrating how his literary craft serves as a medium for exploring the more profound enigmas of existence.

Critics have diverse interpretations of the motifs and philosophies underpinning Nabokov's temporal presentation in his works. In *Dying for Time*, Martin Hägglund offers an in-depth analysis of Nabokov's aesthetics of time and memory, particularly in *Ada*. Hägglund connects the temporal and spatial dimensions in *Ada* to Proust's concept of involuntary memory and Woolf's idea of the 'moment.' He argues that Nabokov's writing is rooted in "the negativity of time," inscribing "memory, a trace of the past that spatializes time," while also being "left for the future and thereby marking a movement that temporalizes space."[100] In contrast to Brian Boyd, Hägglund posits that Nabokov's writing is motivated not by a desire to

[99] Gennady Barabtarlo, ed., *Insomniac Dreams: Experiments With Time By Vladimir Nabokov* (Princeton University Press, 2018).
[100] Martin Hägglund, *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 18.

transcend time but by a desire to "live on in time," which stems from "how the threat of negation is internal to the very being that is affirmed."[101] Boyd, in his response titled "Nabokov, Time and Timelessness: A Reply to Martin Hägglund," contends that substantial evidence supports the presence of metaphysical elements or aspects beyond human consciousness in Nabokov's works, which are central to Nabokov's philosophy of time.[102] Boyd tends to situate Nabokov's works within the author's intended ideas, whereas Hägglund focuses on the ambiguity and tension between time and desire in Nabokov's narratives. This scholarly debate enriches our understanding of the impulses, motivations, and philosophies driving Nabokov's art. Hägglund's approach offers a new way of reading Nabokov, emphasizing the validity of reader interpretation and opening up fresh perspectives on Nabokov's treatment of time.

Some critics contextualize readings of Nabokov within historical and political frameworks. In *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time,* Will Norman examines Nabokov's engagement with social, political, ideological, and temporal elements in Europe and the United States.[103] Norman argues that Nabokov's temporal manipulations serve as a defensive dialectic against history, attempting to assert aesthetic control over historical time in response to totalitarianism, the Holocaust, and the Cold War. Paul Giles explores temporal dimensions from texts to broader contexts in *The Planetary Clock: Antipodean Time and Spherical Postmodern Fictions*. Giles discusses how the Alice in Wonderland prototype, derived from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, influences the representation of time in cultural narratives of the Cold War era. He suggests that Carroll's work significantly impacted Nabokov's *Ada* and explores how Nabokov explicitly seeks to reverse time and space in his later fiction. Giles concurs with Martin Hägglund's observation that "a re-in script of Carroll's paradoxical logic of the double bind […] makes Nabokov's writings so powerful and allows them to live on beyond his intentions."[104] Giles proposes that the planetary scope in *Ada* allows the novel to "open up spatial and temporal horizons beyond any singular human perspective," and by recalibrating postmodernism on an antipodean scale, Nabokov performs a "supreme magician's trick of overturning his creations."[105] Giles situates his analysis of Nabokov within the historical context of Cold War postmodernism and suggests that the Alice prototype had a

[101] Hägglund, *Dying for Time*, 18.
[102] Brian Boyd, "Nabokov, Time, and Timelessness: A Reply to Martin Hägglund," *New Literary History* 37.2 (2006): 469-478.
[103] Will Norman, *Nabokov, History and the Textual of Time* (Routledge, 2012).
[104] Martin Hägglund, "Nabokov's Afterlife: A Reply to Brian Boyd," *New Literary History* 37.2 (2006): 481.
[105] Paul Giles, *The Planetary Clock: Antipodean Time and Spherical Postmodern Fictions* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 145.

pervasive influence on postmodern popular culture. These scholars explore Nabokov's significant engagement with science and history, providing thought-provoking treatments of his art and its place within broader cultural and historical contexts. This scholarship illuminates the interplay between Nabokov's literary creations and the historical periods he navigated, offering new perspectives on his attempts to reconcile aesthetic form with historical reality.

1.3.3 Scientists' Debate on Nabokov's Lepidoptery Findings

Besides literary critics, numerous Lepidopterists have scrutinized the validity and significance of Nabokov's scientific contributions. Despite his esteemed literary status, Nabokov's scientific work is controversial. The dispute between Nabokov and Martin Brown commenced with a 1950 letter to the Lepidopterists' News, wherein F. Martin Brown of the American Museum of Natural History raised objections to the lists and tables published by Nabokov in his 1949 paper titled "Nearctic Members of the Genus Lycaeides." Brown contended that these tables, which documented taxonomic characteristics like wing scale counts, lacked proper statistical analysis and were thus deemed useless. In response, Nabokov defended his approach, asserting that judgments based on detailed knowledge of individual cases are superior to statistical presentations of general frequency or range of a given structural peculiarity. He emphasized, "I have been concerned with 'qualitative' subspecies (since I consider that merely 'quantitative' phenomena have no taxonomic status) and with trying to restore the qualitative approach to its position of honor, while placing at its service quantitative values to guide the next man."[106] Nabokov staunchly upheld his methods, arguing that "natural science is responsible to philosophy—not to statistics," underscoring the importance of philosophical understanding in scientific pursuit.[107] Johnson and Coates highlight that statistical analysis for studying biological phenomena emerged when Nabokov's scientific work gained prominence. They argue that had Nabokov continued his academic pursuits and sought to refine his methods; it is plausible to assume he would have acquainted himself with statistical techniques.[108] While Nabokov's scale-counting method is not universally embraced, it has led to alternative discoveries outside traditional statistical principles.

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[106]Vladimir Nabokov, "Remarks on F. Martin Brown's 'Measurements and Lepidoptera,'" *Lepidopterist's News* 4 (1950): 75-76.
[107] Ibid., 75.
[108] Kurt Johnson and Steve Coates, *Nabokov's Blues: The Scientific Odyssey of a Literary Genius* (Cambridge, MA: Zoland, 1999), 330.

In *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory*, Stephen Jay Gould elucidates Darwinian core tenets and foundational principles.[109] The book highlights how specific evolutionary theories aligned with Nabokov's skeptical stance towards natural selection, a viewpoint shared by other biologists such as Alpheus Hyatt, William Bateson, Theodor Eimer, Hugo De Vries, and Richard Goldschmidt. In *Vera's Butterflies*, Gould suggests that Nabokov's entomological pursuits symbolize the transition from aristocrat-naturalists to the specialized approach of modern science.[110] Gould invites readers to contemplate how Nabokov's science influenced his literary creativity and vice versa, emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between his artistic interests and scientific vision.

In "Lepidoptera Studies," Charles Lee Remington thoroughly evaluates Nabokov's contributions to the field.[111] With close acquaintance with Nabokov, Remington highlights Nabokov's departure from mainstream classification presumptions, particularly in his original study of the Blues. Nabokov's scientific writings, according to Remington, offered a unique perspective on butterfly taxa, resulting in the naming of nine new genera and ten new species and subspecies that still hold validity years later. One of Nabokov's critical scientific concepts introduced by Remington is his ideas on biological mimicry. Nabokov's exploration of nonutilitarian mimicry or object resemblance challenged prevailing notions that all physical changes result from survival benefits and that natural selection sufficiently explains all evolution. Remington recognizes Nabokov as a leading authority on the Blues and acknowledges his adept handling of complex issues in studying southwestern satyrs, particularly Neonympha. Remington also notes that Nabokov may have lacked training in modern population genetics, leaving ample room for advancement in his taxonomic works.

Nabokov's scientific legacy was championed and popularized by subsequent scholars in the 1980s, including Charles Lee Remington, Kurt Johnson, Zsolt Bálint, and Dubi Benyamini. Kurt Johnson, in particular, expressed gratitude for Nabokov's contributions to scientific discovery, particularly his taxonomic work on Lycaenidae, commonly known as the Blues. Johnson characterized Nabokov as a theoretical taxonomist rather than a descriptive one

[109] Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).
[110] Stephen Jay Gould, "No Science without Fancy, No Art without Facts: The Lepidoptery of Vladimir Nabokov," in Sarah Funke, ed., *Vera's Butterflies* (New York: Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, 1999), 84-114.
[111] Charles Lee Remington, "Lepidoptera Studies," in Vladiir E. Alexandrov, ed. *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov (*New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 274-83.

"though the taxonomic science prevents Nabokov from making his mark in theory."[112] In his article "Recognizing Vladimir Nabokov's Legacy in Science: Where We Are Today; Where We Go From Here," Johnson summarizes Nabokov's scientific contributions.[113] He highlighted Nabokov's reluctance to further elaborate on his explanation for mimicry within the scientific community, suggesting that Nabokov preferred to express his fascination with mimicry regarding human emotion and natural wonder rather than through traditional laboratory science. Johnson emphasized Nabokov's careful preservation of his personal beliefs, contrasting his approach with scientists who allow their metaphysical inclinations to influence their scientific work.[114] The observations and insights provided by these scientists were instrumental in assessing the validity and limitations of Nabokov's scientific views and achievements. They offered a fresh perspective on the intersection of Nabokov's artistic and scientific endeavors, enriching our understanding of the relationship between literature and science in his work.

1.3.4 Co-efforts from Critics and Scientists

Some literary critics and scientists collaborate to explore Nabokov's interplay of art and science. In *Nabokov's Butterflies*, co-edited by Brian Boyd and Robert Michael Pyle, Nabokov's expertise in studying butterflies is illuminated through a collection of poems, letters, diary entries, interviews, and technical articles, reflecting his dual passions for science and literature.[115] Boyd contributes a detailed introduction situating Nabokov's studies within the context of his life, while Nabokov's son Dmitri provides English translations of "Father's Butterflies" and 12 poems originally penned in Russian. This rich compilation offers ample material to delve into the scientific aspects of Nabokov's life and works. Similarly, *Fine Lines: Vladimir Nabokov's Scientific Art*, co-edited by Stephen Blackwell and Kurt Johnson, offers a comprehensive examination of Nabokov's scientific contributions.[116] Drawing on Nabokov's laboratory notes, published scientific papers, and recent DNA-based confirmations of his hypotheses, the book gives comprehensive coverage of his meticulous study of butterflies.

[112] Kurt Johnson, "Lepidoptera, Evolutionary Science, and Nabokov's Harvard Years—More Light and Context," presented at American Literature Association, Cambridge, MA, 2001. 62.
[113] Kurt Johnson, "Recognizing Vladimir Nabokov's Legacy in Science: Where We Are Today; Where We Go From Here," *Nabokov Studies* 6 (2000-2001): 149-61.
[114] Ibid., 154-55.
[115] Brian Boyd and Robert Michael Pyle, eds., *Nabokov's Butterflies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 9.
[116] Stephen Blackwell and Kurt Johnson, *Fine Lines: Vladimir Nabokov's Scientific Art* (Yale University Press, 2016).

Nabokov's laboratory notes provide insights into his approach to resolving evolutionary questions, particularly regarding the Blues, and his contemplation of temporal and spatial issues. Including over one hundred butterfly drawings by Nabokov allows readers to explore his research methodology, comparison group selection, unique features identification, and species relationship discovery from a fresh perspective.

In *Nabokov's Blues: The Scientific Odyssey of a Literary Genius*, Kurt Johnson and Steve Coates provide a comprehensive overview of Nabokov's scientific achievements, particularly his taxonomic work on Blues. Johnson and Coates refine the taxonomy field, building upon Nabokov's pioneering efforts in the 1940s and beyond. They underscore their findings, building on Nabokov's foundational work, and focus on the biological diversity, geographic distributions, and taxonomic traits of Nabokov's six genera of South American Blues, describing Nabokov's impact on the field as "big science."[117] They believe that Nabokov identified groups that are sufficiently diverse and widespread to provide a database for significant questions about evolution and biogeography. They characterize Nabokov as a "lepidopterist with an analytic rather than synthetic approach," pointing out that his taxonomic expertise exceeded that of many of his peers.[118] However, they also recognize that this expertise made his work more susceptible to being overlooked or misunderstood by those less inclined to examine it thoroughly.[119] These studies provide valuable insights into how literature and science intersect in Nabokov's works, enhancing our understanding of his scientific endeavours and literary achievements. The review of Nabokov's art and science—drawing on literary critical appraisals, debates within the Lepidoptera community, and collaborative efforts between critics and scientists—reveals that the study of science has become a prominent approach in Nabokov criticism.

1.4 Methodology and Structure of the Thesis

While critics and scientists have examined the intersection of art and science in Nabokov's work, there remains a need for a comprehensive analysis that synthesizes their findings and provides new insights into this dynamic. This section highlights the academic gap I intend to address, outlining the key concepts and methodologies I will adopt, the central ideas of the main chapters, and the significance of my contributions to Nabokov's art-science discourse.

[117] Johnson and Coates, *Nabokov's Blues*, 290.
[118] Ibid., 48.
[119] Ibid., 290.

This thesis aims to enhance Nabokov scholarship by offering a nuanced understanding of the interplay between art and science in his works. By synthesizing existing research and presenting fresh perspectives, I hope to illuminate the importance of this intersection and its implications for our understanding of Nabokov's literary legacy.

1.4.1 Key Concepts and Methodology

The nexus between Nabokov's artistry and scientific inquiry has been extensively scrutinized in scholarly discourse. However, significant gaps persist in our understanding of this relationship. Existing scholarship predominantly centres on Nabokov's enthrallment with mimicry and his critique of Darwinism, often prioritizing his contributions to biological research and Lepidoptera studies over other scientific domains. Secondly, the broader philosophical underpinnings shaping the convergence of his art and science, notably his idealist philosophy and the metaphysical currents influencing his literary creations, have been comparatively neglected within Nabokovian scholarship. Thirdly, there is a tendency among critics to overlook the deliberate literary strategies employed by Nabokov in amalgamating scientific and artistic sensibilities, as well as the contemporary resonance of his insights within modern scientific disciplines. Indeed, advancements in neural evolution, developmental psychology, and new physics have corroborated and expanded upon Nabokov's earlier observations. With modern science charting ever more complex domains of human cognition and behavior, areas inherently intertwined with literary exploration, a revaluation of Nabokov's contributions is warranted. Thus, this thesis addresses three pivotal inquiries regarding Nabokov's interplay of art and science: What were Nabokov's perspectives on, and engagements with, the landscape of scientific inquiry? How did his scientific worldview inform his artistic oeuvre's thematic and stylistic contours? And what significance and contributions do Nabokov's scientific poetics offer to science and art?

The thesis addresses these three critical inquiries by examining how Nabokov's literary corpus intersects with four distinct scientific disciplines: biology, physics, psychology, and cognitive psychology. The selection of these domains is motivated by three primary considerations. Firstly, Nabokov's renowned scientific investigations into butterflies have rendered the intersection of his artistic endeavours with biology a focal point of scholarly inquiry. Secondly, his fascination with the intricacies of the human mind and consciousness finds vivid expression in the portrayal of characters such as the morally ambiguous Humbert in *Lolita*, the enigmatic Kinbote in *Pale Fire*, and the psychologically complex Hermann in

Despair, each representing various manifestations of human perversity. Lastly, Nabokov's engagement with the forefront of new physics is evidenced in his literary works' dialogues, narrative techniques, and thematic preoccupations. By examining the evolution of his scientific viewpoints, this thesis aims to delineate their contours and elucidate their impact on Nabokov's artistic output.

I have structured the thesis to present four distinct scientific perspectives, each highlighting one or two concepts most closely associated with Nabokov's works. Each chapter is carefully crafted to reflect scientific principles, which will be utilized to delve into Nabokov's interplay of scientific and aesthetic ideas. These concepts encompass mimicry, mutation, and evolution in biology; relativity, uncertainty, and subatomic theory in physics; illusion, cognitive bias, and obsession in psychology; and mind, cognition, and pattern recognition in cognitive psychology. In addition to these core scientific concepts from the four main domains, I further extend or refine existing models, such as Fogg's behaviour model in chapter three, to analyse the behaviour and motivation of narrators or characters in Nabokov's works. This model operates on the premise that the evaluation of a narrator's or character's behaviour and actions must be understood within a cognitive framework shaped by their motivation, abilities, and resources. By refining this framework, I posit that a character's behaviour is influenced by the convergence of four factors: motivation, cognitive ability or deficiency, intellectual or physical resources, and accidental chance or opportunity. An individual endowed with high motivation, competence, and ample resources will likely exhibit specific behaviours or make particular assessments when prompted by chance or opportunity. This framework helps us to uncover the underlying motives, cognitive abilities, available resources, and accidental occurrences that shape the behaviour and mentality of the narrators or characters.

Nabokov's profound fascination with the intersection of art and science shaped his distinctive literary style and granted him insights that were remarkably progressive for his era. This thesis endeavours to provide a comprehensive, interdisciplinary perspective on the interplay between Nabokov's artistic and scientific domains, exploring themes such as evolution and mimicry, the nuanced dynamics of mental analogy, the textual manipulation of time, and the intricate workings of the mind as depicted in Nabokov's oeuvre. Much like his exploration of aesthetics, ethics, and metaphysics, Nabokov's engagement with science, including his examination of memory and imagination, emotion and thought, and the concepts of time and space, emerges as another indispensable dimension of his literary works. By engaging with scientific theories while resisting their reductionist implications, Nabokov

creates a space where the boundaries between art and science become porous, facilitating a richer exploration of the human experience. His fiction engages with biology, physics, and psychology reflect scientific discourses and offer alternative modes of understanding that anticipate later developments in fields like evolutionary biology and cognitive science.

1.4.2 Structure and Significance

Through a holistic examination of these interconnected realms, the four chapters of this thesis illuminate the multifaceted genius of Nabokov's artistic vision, wherein scientific inquiry intertwines with aesthetic expression.

Chapter Two examines biological poetics in Nabokov's literary corpus, focusing on his Lepidoptera articles, which provide invaluable insights into his artistic creation. Nabokov, renowned as both a celebrated writer and proficient biologist with a keen interest in evolutionary theory, has had his work extensively analysed at the intersection of art and biology. However, his stance on Darwinian theory, Russian Darwinism, and scientific philosophy has received less attention. This chapter explores how Nabokov's lepidopterological research illuminates key aspects of his art, particularly through examining the novel *The Gift* and its companion piece, "Father's Butterflies." It addresses Nabokov's challenges to conventional notions of natural selection, evolution, and species origination in Darwinism, while also elucidating his concepts of creative evolution, non-utilitarian mimicry and coincidence. This chapter contributes to the discourse on art and biology in Nabokov's work by revealing his complex attitude towards Darwinian theory, largely shaped by his absorption of Russian Darwinism. It suggests his notion of coincidence in mimicry anticipates neutral evolution, positing intermittent development. Lastly, the chapter contends that Nabokov drew on East Asian philosophical traditions such as Daoism and Zhuangzi, evident in his aesthetic worldview, preference for intuition, and metaphysical inclinations.

Chapter Three explores Nabokov's engagement with the principles of the New Physics, such as relativity and quantum theory, in his novel *Ada*. While *Ada*'s treatment of time has been widely analysed, the integration of contemporary physical discoveries and literary strategies has often been overlooked. This chapter examines how Nabokov weaves scientific concepts of time, particularly relativity and quantum mechanism, into the narrative. It highlights his experimental treatments of temporality, focusing on Van's perceptions of purified, reversible and parallel time, and evaluates the paradoxical nature of decapitalized time in Van's essay "The Texture of Time." The chapter demonstrate how Van's representation of time

merges artistic and scientific sensibilities and how Van's concept of reversible time and parallel time transcends traditional linear views. By exploring the intersection of art and physics in *Ada*, the chapter reveals how Nabokov challenges conventional perspectives on time, liberating fiction from traditional temporal constraints and inviting readers to engage with new dimensions of physics artistically.

Chapter Four examines Nabokov's portrayal of the psychological landscape in *Despair*. While many critics view the novel as an ironic parody of Dostoevsky's novels and Freudian theory, little attention has been given to its potential reflection of the clinical syndrome known as the subjective double. This chapter explores the psychological mechanisms and mental conditions of Hermann's subjective double syndrome, drawing insights from psychopathology and intertextuality to unravel its complexities. It scrutinizes Hermann's three pivotal encounters with Felix, exploring how Hermann constructs, solidifies, and rationalizes his delusional belief that Felix is his double, culminating in Felix's murder—a crime Hermann perceives as a work of art. The chapter also examines Nabokov's intertextual references to Dostoevsky, situating Hermann's syndrome within a broader literary framework. The chapter demonstrates how Nabokov uses Hermann's subjective double to explore self-conscious solipsism and the subjective realities of the human mind. Nabokov's nuanced view of Dostoevsky shows both admiration and critique of the Russian literary giant. It also suggests that Nabokov's narrative anticipates or sheds light on the psychological dimensions of the subjective double syndrome, highlighting its intellectual, moral, and ideological implications. This chapter enriches our understanding of Nabokov's narrative artistry and the complexities of human psychology.

Chapter Five explores Nabokov's engagement with cognitive patterns and recognition in *Pale Fire*. While often seen as a parody of literary commentary, the novel's exploration of pattern recognition has been largely overlooked. It parallels scientific discoveries in this field, highlighting the connection between artistic creation and pattern formation. The chapter investigates how Kinbote uses narrative patterns to link Shade's poem with his imagined kingdom of Zembla, how he organizes information and references Zembla in his commentary, and how pattern recognition functions in his correlation of Shade's poem with his Zemblan narrative. The chapter argues that Kinbote employs asymmetry, synchrony, and tree structure to connect Shade's poem with Zembla. It suggests Kinbot's commentary constructs his imagined kingdom through parasitic means and posits that readers, despite recognizing his misinterpretations, may unconsciously accept the Zembla portrayed within his narrative. This chapter underscores the critical role of narrative patterning in deciphering Nabokov's artistic vision and illuminates the intricate interplay between literature and human cognition.

Elucidating the operation and function of pattern recognition offers valuable insights into the literature reception and human perception and interpretation.

Methodologically, Chapters two and three investigate how Nabokov consciously incorporates and engages with the scientific theories of his time. By examining evolutionary biology, Darwinian theory, and New Physics, these chapters demonstrate how Nabokov's fiction serves as a counterpoint to prevailing scientific paradigms, offering alternative perspectives that reflect his unique literary synthesis of science and art. In contrast, Chapters four and five adopt a more speculative and anticipatory approach, focusing on how Nabokov prefigures or intuitively mirrors developments in modern psychology and cognitive science. These chapters analyse Nabokov's use of psychological motifs, narrative structures, and unreliable narrators to explore themes of human perception, memory, and subjectivity. This method draws connections between Nabokov's narrative techniques and contemporary psychological concepts, such as split identities and the delusional double in *Despair*, and pattern recognition in *Pale Fire*. These chapters reveal Nabokov's foresight in aligning discourses in psychology and cognitive science, showcasing his innovative use of literary forms to engage with emerging ideas in the human sciences.

This thesis explores how discoveries from biology, physics, psychology, and cognitive psychology inform and shape Nabokov's literary themes and structures. This contribution to Nabokov's works' interplay of art and science unfolds across three critical perspectives. Firstly, it expands scholarly discourse on Nabokov's works beyond the realm of biology to encompass physics, psychology, and neuroscience. Secondly, it explores the function of scientific themes in character portrayal, underlying motivation, and narrative aesthetics, thereby enriching our understanding of Nabokov's multifaceted narrative craft. Thirdly, it elucidates how Nabokov deftly integrates scientific ideas into his texts through intricate literary techniques, thereby underscoring his works' interaction between art and science. Beneath the surface of the interaction between art and science lies Nabokov's keen observations, profound insights, and intuitive understanding of the human condition. By challenging established authorities in both art and science, Nabokov embraced alternative explanations and systems unbound by conventional theories and practices. This thesis posits a fresh perspective, positioning Nabokov as a serious writer and a rigorous scientist whose experiments in each domain were mutually informing. This thesis's aims, methods, and findings contribute to advancing literary criticism, fostering productive links with knowledge derived from biological evolution, physics, psychology and cognitive psychology. Through this interdisciplinary lens, Nabokov's works emerge as rich tapestries that intertwine artistic innovation with scientific inquiry.

Chapter 2 “Alternative Evolution”: Non-utilitarian Mimicry, Neutral Selection and Spiral Speciation in *The Gift* and “Father's Butterflies”

Nabokov was a formidable novelist and a professional biologist with a keen interest in evolutionary theory. While the interplay of art and biology in Nabokov’s works has received significant critical attention, less focus has been given to his complex stance on Darwinian theory and Russian Darwinism, the impact of his scientific insights on contemporary science, and the influence of philosophy on both his scientific and artistic creations. In this chapter, I will analyze *The Gift* and its supplement, “Father's Butterflies,” to offer fresh perspectives on the biological poetics of the novel. In Chapter two, the focus is on how Nabokov deliberately integrates evolutionary biology and Darwinian theory into *The Gift* and its supplement, “Father's Butterflies,” positioning his fiction as a challenge to dominant Darwinian frameworks. This approach highlights Nabokov's distinctive fusion of scientific ideas and artistic creativity, offering alternative perspectives that diverge from conventional biological thought.

My analysis incorporates key biological concepts such as evolution, mimicry, and species to examine Nabokov’s nuanced stance on Darwinism, his poetic engagement with the Russian debate over Darwin’s legacy, his resonance with East Asian philosophy, and his anticipation of recent breakthroughs in neutral evolution. Additionally, I will explore how Nabokov employs literary strategies and personas to convey his alternative ideas on non-utilitarian mimicry, spherical speciation, and creative evolution within the novel. This chapter advances three main arguments: firstly, Nabokov, through characters in the novel, highlights exceptional cases and gaps in Darwinian theory to question the claimed validity of science and emphasize the necessity for cautious attitudes towards this foundational scientific framework and its legacy; secondly, Nabokov’s concept of mimicry as coincidence may presage aspects of neutral evolution, suggesting intermittent rather than continuous development; and thirdly, that Nabokov’s scientific and literary pursuits may resonate with Greek and East Asian philosophies, particularly Daoism and Zhuangzi, giving his inclination towards non-linear, intuitive and metaphysical approaches that align with poetic ways of understanding the world.

2.1 *The Gift* and Its Supplement “Father’s Butterflies”

2.1.1 Censorship of *The Gift* and Rediscovery of “Father's Butterflies”

Nabokov is primarily celebrated for his literary accomplishments, yet his legacy as a serious scientist in lepidoptery is equally profound. As an expert on Blues (Polyommmatinae), a subfamily of gossamer-winged butterflies (Lycaenidae), Nabokov's lepidoptery research, particularly on butterfly mimicry, led him to develop compelling ideas about evolution and to question the completeness of Darwinian theory. While acknowledging the explanatory power of Darwinian natural selection for many natural phenomena, Nabokov recognized its limitations in fully defining or explaining all aspects of nature. His scientific inquiries profoundly influenced his literary works, shaping his reflection on Darwinism in his novels. Nabokov's keen aesthetic sensibility allowed him to identify gaps within and beyond natural selection. Therefore, the convergence of Nabokov's scientific observations with his aesthetic instinct is evident throughout his works, notably in his novel *The Gift*.

The Gift, written in the 1930s and published between 1937 and 1938, occupies a unique position in Nabokov's works as his final and longest Russian novel.[120] Set in 1920s Berlin, the novel charts the spiritual and aesthetic evolution of Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, a young Russian émigré writer. Divided into five chapters, each treats different facets of Fyodor's life. The first chapter explores Fyodor's contemplation of writing about tragic events involving fellow poets, particularly Yasha, a friend who succumbed to a complex love triangle. Fyodor ultimately decides against the idea of writing about this event. In the second chapter, Fyodor grapples with the challenge of composing a biography of his renowned father, a distinguished Russian naturalist and butterfly expert who disappeared during expeditions in Tibet. Encouraged by his mother to undertake the task, Fyodor begins but feels inadequate for the challenge and quits his effort. Chapter three depicts Fyodor's romance with Zinaida, the daughter of his Russian landlords, amidst which he conceives the idea of writing a biography of Nikolai Chernyshevski, a prominent figure in Russian social thought. However, his manuscript is vehemently rejected by the editor as a derogatory portrayal. Chapter four comprises Fyodor's controversial biography of Chernyshevski, criticized harshly in the Russian émigré press. Intertwined with Fyodor and Zina's relationship, this chapter reveals Zina's belief in their fated connection, inspiring Fyodor's next creative endeavor. The novel concludes with Fyodor reflecting on these experiences and planning his next literary project.

Nabokov wrote this novel to commemorate his father, an amateur lepidopterist and leading statesman, who was assassinated in 1922. In the novel, Fyodor's father, Godunov, never returns

[120] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Gift* (New York: Vintage International, 1991). Subsequent page references to this edition are cited in parentheses in the text.

from his last entomological expedition into Central Asia. To Nabokov's mother, Godunov seemed an exact portrait of her husband.[121] *The Gift* is one of Nabokov's most scientifically engaging, emotionally involved, and metaphysically speculative novels, considered by Nabokov to be his favorite and best Russian novel.[122] Boyd notes that *The Gift* "sets up powerful reverberations in his mind that lasted for decades" and "Nabokov's imagination did not want to leave *The Gift* alone."[123] Boyd claims that "almost all of Nabokov's major artistic projects for thirty years can trace their origins back to *The Gift.*"[124] The novel exerts a tremendous influence on Nabokov's works. Like Fyodor's rejection by the editor in the novel, when *The Gift* was serialized in *Contemporary Annals*, the editors of the journal perceived Chapter Four as a severe critique of Chernyshevsky's materialism and artistic ideas. Chernyshevsky, a prominent Russian critic with substantial influence on Russian literature and history, was the subject of this satirical biography. Consequently, due to the editors' concerns, the novel was published without Chapter Four. Nabokov considered this editorial intervention to be "an unprecedented occurrence, quite out of keeping with their exceptional broad-mindedness for, generally speaking, in their acceptance or rejection of literary works they were guided exclusively by artistic standard."[125] The rejection of chapter Four shows that Chernyshevsky remained a revered figure among Russian intellectuals. Fyodor censures Chernyshevsky's ideas on materialism and arts, thus presenting them as a background against which his aesthetic values and scientific notions stand out.

Nabokov wrote two supplements or addendum to *The Gift*: "Father's Butterflies" and *"*The Circle" ("Krug," 1934). Nabokov compares the two supplements to two satellites that orbit the novel "with the force that so festively animates the Dance of the Planets that is the universe."[126] "Father's Butterflies" was written in 1939, consisting of fifty-two pages, and has been preserved at the Library of Congress since the 1950s.[127] The first five sheets were typed by Nabokov's wife, Vera. The remaining is the handwritten material, with some illegible portions. Due to the co-efforts of Brian Boyd, Jane Grayson and Alexander Dolinin, and with the help

[121] Vladimir Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," In *Nabokov's Butterflies.* ed. Brian Boyd and Robert Michael Pyle (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 7.
[122] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*,13.
[123] Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 505.
[124] Ibid., 520.
[125] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 65.
[126] Ibid., 225.
[127] Ibid., 198.

of the library's sophisticated equipment, the text is available for public reviewing.[128] In the manuscript, Fyodor recounts his love for Lepidoptera and presents his father Godunov's scientific accomplishments as a lepidopterist and his incisive ideas on speciation and evolution.

There are many interpretations of why "Father's Butterflies" was initially included in *The Gift* and then withdrawn from the novel. Blackwell argues that Nabokov abandoned the supplement of "Father's Butterflies" probably because the chapter on Chernyshevsky was suppressed by the journal *Sovremennye Zapiski* in 1938. Due to the outbreak of the Second World War, Nabokov migrated to the United States and began writing in English in 1940.[129] Boyd suggests that it might be due to Nabokov's having "misgivings about mixing hard science with the kind of free speculation he had allowed himself from behind the mask of the Godunovs, father and son."[130] Thanks to the co-efforts of Brian Boyd, Robert Michael Pyle and the translation of Nabokov's son Dimitri Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies" is available in *Nabokov's Butterflies*. [131] Though "Father's Butterflies" was excluded from the final version of *The Gift*, it significantly deepens our understanding of Fyodor's relationship with his father. It also provides clues to Nabokov's scientific concerns on mimicry, speciation and evolution.

2.1.2 Literary Reviews and Multiple Interpretations of *The Gift*

The critical reception of *The Gift* ranges from aesthetic and meta-literary studies to a focus on its ethical and metaphysical dimensions to a more recent focus on intertextual and cross-disciplinary studies. Critics have long focused on its narrative devices, thematic complexity and literary allusiveness. There is a debate on whether Fyodor is an author of the text or a fictitious or "invisible author." Critics proposing that Fyodor is the "invisible author" of the novel include Yuri Leving, Alexander Dolinin, Leona Toker, and Marina Grishakova. Yuri Leving, in *Keys to The Gift: A Guide to Vladimir Nabokov's Novel*, draws from a broad range of resources, from Nabokov's private correspondence, archival copy, scholarly articles and publication records to make detailed analyses of the novel. Leving proposes that the novel is written by "an external, invisible author figure whose point of view occasionally coincides with Godunov-Cherdyntsev's cognitive horizon." [132] Boyd endorses Fyodor as an invisible

[128] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 199.
[129] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 40.
[130] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 8.
[131] Ibid., 198-234.
[132] Yuri Leving, *Keys to the Gift: A Guide to Vladimir Nabokov's Novel* (Academic Studies Press, 2011), 270.

author.[133] Pekka Tammi proposes a different understanding and points out that as long as Fyodor wants to "gain control over a reality of which his mind is a part, he will never be fully successful as a literary artist."[134] I think this idea might be a bit assertive, as it implies a definitive limitation on Fyodor's artistic potential based solely on his relationship with reality. While Tammi's perspective is insightful, it might be an overgeneralization that doesn't account for the complexities of Fyodor's character and creative process. Julian Connolly proposes that in *The Gift*, two modes of narrative presentation distinguish between the authorial and the character components of the self. The third-person narrative mode underscores Fyodor's character dimensions, and the first-person perspective stresses Fyodor's authorial dimensions.[135] I agree with this idea and want to add that the bifurcation in Fyodor's representation emphasizes the importance of consciousness in evolution and cognition. These literary reviews provide insight into the novel's plot, characters, style, motifs and structure.

In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars took an increasing interest in the ethical and metaphysical dimensions of Nabokov's work. In *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures*, Leona Toker deal with the combination of formal refinement and poignant humanism in Nabokov's fiction. She takes *The Gift* to demonstrate that tension of the finite and infinite, death and immortality. For instance, in Fyodor's account of his father's mysteriousness, speculating whether his father's journeys were attempts to escape rather than seek something. This uncertainty highlights the impossibility of fully understanding his father's connection to "infinite consciousness" or his past.[136] However, she uses nineteenth-century American writers like Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne to argue that Nabokov's ethical principles are far-fetched and lack convincing support. The metaphysical implication of the novel was inspired by Nabokov's wife, Vera, who states that Fyodor's description of a mysterious aura surrounding his father illustrates Nabokov's vision of the otherworld.[137] Nabokov's son Dmitri also acknowledges that Fyodor's description of his father portrays an essential aspect of Nabokov.[138] Vladimir Alexandrov makes a detailed analysis of the metaphysical elements in

[133] Brain Boyd, "The Gift," in Vladimir Alexandrov, ed., *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 3-17.
[134] Pekka Tammi, *Problems of Nabokov's Poetics: A Narratological Analysis* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarium Fennicae, 1985), 97.
[135] Connolly, *Nabokov's Early Fiction*, 185.
[136] Toker, *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures*, 171.
[137] Vera Nabokov, "Predislovie," in Vladimir Nabokov, *Stikhi* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979), 3-4.
[138] Dmitri Nabokov, "Translating with Nabokov," in George Gibian and Stephen Jan Parker, eds., *The Achievements of Vladimir Nabokov* (Ithaca: Center for International Studies, Cornell University, 1984), 176.

Nabokov's Otherworld. He proposes that the metaphysical elements provide an important dimension of Nabokov's parodic design in *The Gift*, which is the extensive evocation of Russian literature and culture.[139]These ethical and metaphysical studies explores the moral, social and metaphysical dimensions of Nabokov's works.

Since 2000, many critics have covered a broad range of intertextual and cross-boundary topics in *The Gift*. Alexander Dolinin discusses how Fyodor's literary education unveils Nabokov's multifaceted intertextual strategy with regard to Russian literature.[140] Gennady Barabtarlo relates the narrator of *The Gift* with Sebastian, the narrator in Nabokov's other novel, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*.[141] Marina Grishakova, in *The Models of Space, Time and Vision in V. Nabokov's Fiction: Narrative Strategies and Cultural Frames*, takes a semi-narratological approach to discuss the model of time and memory and addresses the myth of spontaneous creation and the motif of the creative act interrupted or artistic failure in the novel.[142] Stephen Blackwell, in Nabokov's *The Gift*, Dostoevsky, and the Tradition of Narratorial Ambiguity, relates the narrative voice of Fyodor in *The Gift* with Dostoevsky's artistic experiment in the fiction, *The Double*. Blackwell argues that *The Gift* creates an "inner author" who "merges with and diverges from" the narrator and protagonist. Such an elusive narrator joins Fyodor to ascribe form and meaning to the world around him.[143] Blackwell examines the boundaries of self and art, writing and reading, art and love in the novel, arguing that Nabokov makes the protagonist resemble himself, then explores the boundary by presenting the novel "as a reading, or reception, rather than as a telling, or presentation."[144] Blackwell argues that such an approach emphasizes the potentially subversive relationship between reading and boundaries and allows a radical reinterpretation of the novel. The intertextual and cross-discipline approach deepens our understanding of the thematic complexity of the novel.

2.1.3 Integrated Approaches on Art-Biology Studies

[139] Alexandrov, *Nabokov's Otherworld*, 108.
[140] Dolinin, "Nabokov as a Russian Writer," 56.
[141] Gennady Barabtarlo, "Taina Naita. Narrative Stance in Nabokov's The Real Life of Sebastian Knight," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 6.1 (2008): 57-80.
[142] Marina Grishakova, *The Models of Space, Time and Vision in V. Nabokov's Fiction: Narrative Strategies and Cultural Frames* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2006).
[143]Stephen Blackwell, "Nabokov's *The Gift*, Dostoevskii, and the Tradition of Narratorial Ambiguity," *Slavic Review* 76.1 (2017): 168.
[144] Stephen Blackwell, "Boundaries of Art in Nabokov's *The Gift*: Reading as Transcendence," *Slavic Review* 58.3 (1999): 625.

Recently, critics have renewed interested in the relationship between Nabokov's art and his lepidopterological research. Kurt Johnson, Zsolt Bflint, Steve Coates, Dieter Zimmer, and Brian Boyd, note Nabokov's scientific accomplishments, especially his taxonomic work on the Blues. Kurt Johnson asserts that Nabokov is a theoretical taxonomist rather than a descriptive taxonomist.[145] Charles Lee Remington claims that Nabokov makes excellent scientific contributions to mimicry yet suggests that Nabokov's lepidopterological approach is outdated and may lack specific training in modern population genetics.[146] Stephen Blackwell, in his "The Poetics of Science in, and around, Nabokov's *The Gift,*" stresses that Nabokov, in *The Gift*, strongly advocates for the centrality of art's role in understanding and approaching the world: "Art for Nabokov was thus the leading edge of evolutionary development, the most valid earthly token of the unknown and the unsuspected."[147] This scholarship provides multiple perspectives and resources to explore the novel's scientific dimension. However, less attention has been paid to the historical contexts and influence of Nabokov's biological ideas, the motivation behind his fascination with mimicry and antipathy for Darwinism, and the connection between the biological themes and the overall narrative of the novel.

The biological themes in Nabokov's novel, particularly evident in its second chapter, showcase Fyodor's parody of Godunov's biography. Here, Fyodor recalls his father's ideas, notably on butterfly mimicry, presenting Godunov's alternative views on evolution and species. This serves multiple purposes: to express Fyodor's deep affection for his father, to challenge the validity of Darwinian natural selection and species origins, and to engage in the Russian debate on Darwinism. Furthermore, it critiques Chernyshevsky's materialism and utilitarianism, topics extensively explored in Chapter Four of the novel. Despite this connection, critics often overlook the correlation between the novel's scientific themes and this chapter. Fyodor, as the narrator, intertwines Godunov's biological concepts with Chernyshevsky's satirical biography, illustrating Nabokov's broader critique of materialistic aesthetics. Sergei Davydov argues that the novel is an "aesthetic exorcism" of Nikolai Chernyshevsky.[148] Chernyshevsky proposed that material reality was superior to art that "all art is subordinate to

[145] Johnson, "Lepidoptera, Evolutionary Science, and Nabokov's Harvard Years—More Light and Context," 62.
[146] Remington, "Lepidoptera Studies," 274-83.
[147] Stephen H. Blackwell, "The Poetics of Science in, and around, Nabokov's *The Gift*," *The Russian Review* 62.2 (2003): 261.
[148] Sergei Davydov, "*The Gift*: Nabokov's Aesthetic Exorcism of Chemyshevsky," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 19.3 (1985): 357-74.

life, that it is dependent on the external world for both its content and its form."[149] Chernyshevsky's belief that art should serve life profoundly influenced Russian social ideals, a notion Nabokov sees as precursor to Leninist politics and socialist realism.

In *The Gift*, Nabokov uses Fyodor's narrative and Godunov's scientific insights to satirize Chernyshevsky's materialist views, portraying him "as the false Prometheus of Russian tradition, a savant whose sincere good intentions and abundant sufferings in the cause of righteousness cannot excuse the dullness, dogmatism, and anti-aesthetic bias of his judgments and influence."[150] Understanding Nabokov's poetic intentions enriches our interpretation of his presentation of Godunov's biological ideas. This serves as a basis to explore how Nabokov uses allusion to engage with debates in Russian evolutionary biology, how he takes utilitarian mimicry to challenge natural selection, how he takes mimicry to consider coincidental mechanisms that may affect the direction of evolution, and how he highlights the ideological nature and metaphysical aspects of species.

2.2 Mimicry as A Critique of Darwinian Natural Selection

Natural selection stands as one of Darwin's pivotal contributions to biology. While Nabokov acknowledges the validity of Darwin's theory of natural selection, he maintains a cautious stance regarding its perceived omnipotence and potential ethical implications. Nabokov challenges Darwinian theory through the lens of non-utilitarian mimicry, suggesting that natural selection overemphasizes utilitarian and mechanistic aspects, portrays organisms as passive participants in evolution, and underestimates the creative agency of organisms.

2.2.1 Over-emphasis on Utilitarian and Mechanistic Underpinnings in Nature

Nabokov's fascination with butterflies and mimicry profoundly influences his artistic work. The theme of mimicry appears in several of his literary works, where Nabokov uses it to critique Darwinian natural selection's emphasis on utilitarian and mechanistic aspects. Mimicry in nature involves adopting natural camouflage to mimic another creature, a concept that Nabokov parallels with parody in literature. Both mimicry and parody involve reworking

[149] Edward Brown, "Pisarev and the Transformation of Two Russian Novels," in Todd William Mills, ed., *Literature and Society in Imperial Russian 1800-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), 152.
[150] Moynahan, *Vladimir Nabokov*, 39.

existing forms into new contexts, altering external appearances while retaining basic similarities. Genre parody is a hallmark of Nabokov's literary style. For instance, *Pale Fire* parodies annotated scholarship, *Lolita* parodies the detective novel and confession genres, and the second chapter of *The Gift* parodies the biography of Godunov. Instead of directly presenting Godunov's ideas on mimicry, Nabokov has his narrator, Fyodor, reminisce about his father's thoughts on the subject. This layered approach demonstrates a fusion of artistic and scientific themes within the text.

The Gift is notable for its autobiographical elements, as Nabokov alludes to personal experiences and cherished moments in the novel, including his love for Véra, reverence for his father's memory, passion for Russian literature and Lepidoptera, and reflections on his Russian past juxtaposed with his émigré present.[151] Through Fyodor's recollections of Godunov, Nabokov pays tribute to his father, who was not only a passionate lepidopterist in his youth but also one of Russia's leading criminologists.[152] Although Fyodor acknowledges his inability to fully capture his father's scientific thoughts, he undertakes the project due to a profound bond that transcends the scientific essence of the subject.[153] By parodying Godunov's biography, Nabokov weaves together his scientific musings on mimicry and his emotional connection to his father into the fabric of the novel.

Nabokov explores his ideas on mimicry through his narrator the characters Fyodor and Godunov in *The Gift*. Mimicry is a central focus of Nabokov's scientific thought: "The mysteries of mimicry have a special attraction for me."[154] Critics like Vladimir Alexandrov and Dieter Zimmer have examined Nabokov's fascination with mimicry and its role in casting doubt on Darwinism in his works.[155] According to Blackwell, Nabokov's conception of mimicry encompassed inter-species mimicry and what he termed "object resemblance" or protective coloration.[156] Nabokov recognized the critical role of protective adaptation in evolution, noting, "The zebroid patterns, unique to certain groups in specific environments, suggest specialized protective adaptations rather than primitive designs."[157] However, Nabokov contended that natural selection alone could not explain all instances of mimicry. He

[151] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*, 397.
[152] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 3.
[153] Ibid., 216.
[154] Nabokov, *Speak Memory*, 124.
[155] Alexandrov, "A Note on Nabokov's Anti-Darwinism, or, Why Apes Feed on Butterflies in The Gift," 239-44. Dieter E. Zimmer, "Mimicry in Nature and Art," in Jane Grayson et al., eds., *Nabokov's World,* vol.1 (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2002), 47-57.
[156] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 38.
[157] Nabokov, "The Nearctic Members of the Genus *Lycaeides* Hübner," 483.

cited examples such as dead-leaf mimicking butterflies, caterpillars mimicking rhubarb roots, and bubble-like markings on owl butterflies as evidence challenging natural selection.[158] Nabokov argued that some butterfly mimicry was so precise in matching their environments that it surpassed the discernment of predators. He intended to complete a book titled *Mimicry in the Animal Kingdom and Butterflies in Art*, which aimed to included "all examples of mimicry in the animal kingdom."[159] Nabokov extended his scientific study of mimicry into the realm of art.

While Nabokov developed compelling ideas about mimicry, he did not intend to formalize them into scientific theory. According to Johnson and Coates, "Nabokov never tried to advance his explanation for mimicry in any formal or scientific setting that can be examined today."[160] Instead, Nabokov preferred to explore his alternative perspectives on mimicry through art. In *The Gift*, Nabokov employs a literary strategy, using fictional characters like Godunov to express "his awe about mimicry in terms that had more to do with human feelings and natural wonder than laboratory science."[161] Despite being a scientist in the novel, Godunov shares Nabokov's view on mimicry. Nabokov critiqued natural selection, arguing that when protective adaptations reached levels of mimetic subtlety exceeding a predator's ability to appreciate, the theory faltered.[162] He believed that beyond utility, aesthetic or metaphysical elements might influence mimicry, finding in nature and art alike a shared realm of non-utilitarian delight. As Nabokov expressed, "I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, and both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception."[163] Nabokov emphasized the importance of non-utilitarianism, proposing that aesthetic bliss transcends mere functionality. Similarly, in *The Gift*, Godunov argues that while arts and non-utilitarian activities may not contribute to physical survival, they are indispensable for experiencing higher intellectual pleasures. Godunov suggests that natural selection cannot fully explain mimicry, proposing the existence of creative or other factors within this phenomenon.

2.2.2 Exclusion of Unpractical and Aesthetic Factors from Evolution

[158] Zimmer, *A Guide to Nabokov's Butterflies and Moths 2001*, 117.
[159] Vladimir Nabokov, *Selected Letters 1940–1977*, ed. Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1989), 134.
[160] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 392.
[161] Ibid., 392.
[162] Nabokov, *Speak Memory*, 125.
[163] Ibid., 125.

In the novel, Godunov critiques Darwinian natural selection for overly emphasizing utilitarian and mechanistic aspects in nature as a paramount feature for survival. He uses nonutilitarian mimicry as evidence against natural selection's theory that survival hinges primarily on utility. Similar to Nabokov, Godunov rejects the practical purpose of the struggle for survival. Fyodor recalls that Godunov is repelled by the utilitarian aspects of applied sciences. In "Father's Butterflies," he refused to apply his scientific knowledge practically: "He detested applied entomology—and I cannot imagine how he could work in present-day Russia, where his beloved science is wholly reduced to anti-locust campaigns or class struggles against agricultural saboteurs."[164] This disdain for practical applications significantly influences his family. Fyodor recalls a moment when his mother asked him, "What was that funny rhyme about butterflies and moths that you and he composed together while we were walking?" (197). Fyodor promptly replied, "blue stripe, Catocalid, shows from under its grey lid" (197). This demonstrates how Godunov's influence led his family members to value aesthetic and impractical aspects of nature.

Godunov, as a fictional character in the novel, argues against the notion that all biological changes occur solely for survival benefits, a perspective rooted in his disdain for a utilitarian understanding of natural selection. In *The Gift*, Fyodor recalls Godunov discussing the enchantment of mimicry, describing "the enormous moth which in a state of repose assumes the image of a snake looking at you"; "a tropical geometrid colored in perfect imitation of a species of butterfly infinitely removed from it in nature's system, the illusion of the orange abdomen possessed by one being humorously reproduced in the other by the orange-colored inner margins of the secondaries"; and "the curious harem of that famous African swallowtail…which are also the models of numerous other mimics" (231). This passage illustrates that while Godunov acknowledges mimicry as an effective defense mechanism against predators, he also recognizes instances where mimicry surpasses practical survival needs. Godunov points to butterflies' diverse colors and patterns as evidence that mimicry is too intricate to be solely explained by utilitarian selection theory. He suggests that other factors beyond natural selection play a role in shaping nature.

Fyodor depicts Godunov not only as a prominent biologist but also as a distinguished Russian Lepidopterist renowned for his scientific expertise and achievements. Godunov held esteemed positions including Vice-President of the Russian Entomological Society, and membership in the Moscow Society of Investigators of Nature and the Imperial Russian

[164] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 213.

Geographical Society (215). His academic accomplishments lent considerable weight to his insights on mimicry and biology. His biographer Kholodkovski refers to him as "the conquistador of Russian entomology" (215). From 1885 to 1918, he undertook eight major expeditions and numerous minor journeys across lesser-explored regions worldwide, including Eastern Siberia, Altai, Fergana, the Pamirs, Western China, Mongolia, and Tibet. His discoveries during these journeys culminated in significant works such as *Lepidoptera Asiatica*, *The Butterflies and Moths of the Russian Empire*, and *The Travels of a Naturalist*. In addition to his books, he authored hundreds of papers in entomological journals from 1877 to 1916 (214), cementing his name alongside other pioneers in Russo-Asiatic fauna research. Given his stature as a preeminent entomologist, Godunov's insights on mimicry were not casual observations but rooted in rigorous research. Godunov's reputation as an expert in Lepidoptera, enhancing the persuasiveness of his views on mimicry and his critique of utilitarian selection.

2.2.3 Underestimation of Creative and Intellectual Dimension in Organism

Godunov challenges the utilitarian perspective of natural selection by presenting nonutilitarian mimicry as counter-evidence. He implies that evolution encompasses artistic, creative, and intellectual dimensions. For Godunov, utility contrasts sharply with his aesthetic view of life. His study of mimicry reveals nature's artistic sensibility. Kurt Johnson suggests that Godunov's comments on mimicry hint at a creationist interpretation of species development.[165] Nabokov describes feeling great ecstasy when surrounded by rare butterflies. Behind this rapture, he senses "something else, which is hard to explain. It is like a momentary vacuum into which rushes all that I love."[166] Godunov proposes that mimicry reflects nature's artistic impulse, transcending mere causality. He argues that natural selection cannot fully account for mimicry, which he describes as "the rough haste of evolution's unskilled forces."[167] He explains that some forms of mimicry are too delicate to deceive accidental predators—birds, reptiles, and others that are neither fastidious nor particularly fond of butterflies. Instead, these forms seem crafted by "some waggish artist precisely for the intelligent eyes of man."[168] This perspective aligns with Nabokov, who claimed that the theory of natural selection falters "when

[165] Johnson, "Lepidoptera, Evolutionary Science, and Nabokov's Harvard Years-More Light and Context," 33.
[166] Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 218.
[167] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 219-21.
[168] Ibid., 221.

a protective device was carried to the point of mimetic subtlety, exuberance, and luxury far in excess of a predator's power of appreciation."[169] Fyodor recalls Godunov's assertion that "nature found it amusing, or artistically valid, to retain, near a selected species, an elegant corollary."[170] Like Nabokov, Godunov believes that while artistic activities do not directly contribute to survival, they are essential for experiencing higher intellectual pleasures.

In *The Gift*, Godunov uses mimicry to illustrate the connection between natural phenomena and human consciousness. This connection is reinforced when he compares mimicry to natural rhymes or family jokes, which are noticeable only to the human mind: "Certain whims of nature can be...like a code or a family joke...accessible only to the illuminated, i.e., the human mind, and have no other mission than to give it pleasure."[171] Unlike Darwin, who excludes higher intelligence from evolution, Godunov argues that nature is allied with human intelligence. He believes there is an underlying intellectual or artistic impulse behind mimicry, taking the mimetic disguise as an exception to natural selection: "Let us leave in peace the famous 'struggle for survival': strugglers have no time for art."[172] Another example occurs when Fyodor recalls his father's butterfly illustration and simultaneously critiques the effectiveness of the painting. In the novel, butterflies hold multiple layers of significance: they symbolize nature's abundance, the magic of mimicry, the glory of scientific discovery, and the limitations or incompleteness of Darwinian theory.

Like Nabokov, Godunov accumulates butterfly illustrations, finding them an effective approach to studying Lepidoptera. In *Fine Lines: Vladimir Nabokov's Scientific Art*, Stephen Blackwell and Kurt Johnson showcase over a hundred of Nabokov's butterfly drawings.[173] Godunov, like Nabokov, uses these drawings to identify new traits of butterfly genitalia and uncover relationships between species and subspecies. Fyodor recalls his father's collection of butterfly illustrations, appreciating the power of illustration in scientific research. He believes illustrations are superior to specimens because they preserve the butterflies' marvelous colors: "Many black-coloured diurnal butterflies, when very fresh, have a striking metallic or moire, blue-green sheen, which does not survive in prepared specimens."[174] Fyodor extols the importance of drawing for capturing the essence of butterflies: "Certain black satyrids as well, when struck by the light, suddenly glow with the gloss of green inks, and thus the master's

[169] Nabokov, *Speak Memory*,125.
[170] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 226.
[171] Ibid., 219-21.
[172] Ibid., 223.
[173] Blackwell and Johnson, *Fine Lines*, 2.
[174] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 207.

portrait expresses the essence of the butterfly better than the specimen itself in the collection."[175] Fyodor advocates for the power of art in preserving the complex and subtle beauty of butterflies.

Fyodor elaborates that butterflies can be fully preserved and represented through painting, describing how our eyes are caressed by "the dark-cherry fore-wing, traversed by a mauve-pink stripe and adorned at its center by the golden emblem of its genus, in this instance a tapering, bowed half-moon."[176] He notes that "the emblem, which, on the actual moth, resembles a dab of gilt redolent of turpentine, must therefore be copied (and recopied!) in such a way that the painter's work transmits, besides all the rest, a resemblance to the work of a painter!"[177] Fyodor reiterates that paintings preserve the peculiar characteristics of butterflies so vividly that "you would be afraid to run your finger across the paper."[178] He argues that paintings are superior to specimens as they vividly represent butterflies and embody human consciousness.[179] Fyodor emphasizes that understanding butterflies requires three elements: artistic depiction, literary description, and scientific classification. He believes that without integrating these aspects, a butterfly would remain incomplete: "with no words and no art, without a penetrating and synthesizing process of thought, for me, a butterfly would remain incomplete."[180] Fyodor stresses the necessity of combining verbal description, artistic craftsmanship, and scientific classification to fully preserve the image of the butterfly.

Fyodor adopts his father Godunov's idea of nonutilitarian mimicry as counter-evidence to natural selection, highlighting the artistic, creative, and intellectual factors in evolution. Godunov's refutations of natural selection focus on three main points: its overemphasis on utilitarian and mechanistic aspects of nature, its exclusion of impractical or aesthetic factors, and its underestimation of the creative and intellectual dimensions in organisms. Nabokov uses his narrator and characters to express doubts about Darwinian natural selection, emphasizing nonutilitarian mutations and the generative side of evolution. While Nabokov does not deny the validity of natural selection, he insists it cannot be the sole force driving mimicry and evolution, recognizing it as a primary factor, but not the only one, in the evolution of species.

2.3 Coincidence theme as Alignment with "Neutral Evolution"

[175] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 207.
[176] Ibid.,211.
[177] Ibid.,211.
[178] Ibid.,209.
[179] Ibid.,203.
[180] Ibid.,203.

Nabokov takes mimicry to consider coincidental mechanisms that may affect the direction of evolution. Nabokov's understanding of teleology, his scientific perspective on coincidence, and the possible forces at play within evolutionary theory. Nabokov enhances the theme of coincidence or chance from three aspects: Godunov's scientific discovery of evolution through coincidence, Fyodor's biography of his father, and the intertextual reference to Pushkin's verses on chance. My arguments are threefold: Nabokov uses coincidence to challenge Darwinian natural selection; he encourages biologists and artists to pay more attention to often-overlooked coincidental phenomena in nature; and he anticipates mechanisms of neutral evolution, drawing insights from his scientific study, aesthetic instincts, and personal experiences.

2.3.1 Teleology, Neutral Evolution and "Agent X"

Teleology, derived from the Greek word telos, meaning "end" or "purpose", is the philosophical study of design, purpose, final causes or intended outcomes in natural phenomena.[181] One of the earliest proponents of this concept, Aristotle, posited that everything in nature possesses a purpose or an inherent goal toward which it is directed. In his *Physics*, Aristotle introduced the idea of final causes, emphasizing that the purpose or end of an entity is intrinsic to its nature.[182] Teleological explanations offer insights into the purposes behind natural processes. In contrast, Darwin's theory of evolution accounts for the diversity of life through mechanisms such as natural selection and mutation, emphasizing the role of randomness and chance.[183] While teleology views the purpose of an organism's traits as inherent to its existence, Darwin's theory argues that these traits arise from random mutations shaped by natural selection, often devoid of any predetermined purpose.[184] This tension between teleological perspectives and evolutionary theory invites a deeper exploration into the philosophical implications of purpose in the natural world.

[181] Victoria Alexander, *Teleology in the Philosophy of Science: The Case of the Gene* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.
[182] Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
[183] Ernst Mayr, *What Evolution Is* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 16.
[184] Martin J. S. Hodge, *Darwin's Place in Nature: 1836-1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 43.

Teleology is central to Nabokov's aesthetics, as he frequently intertwines art and science to convey a worldview where nature and fiction are governed by intelligent design. In the works of Nabokov, the interplay between these concepts can be explored through themes of purpose and adaptation, reflecting how artistic creation mirrors evolutionary processes.[185] Nabokov's engagement with teleological themes reflects his resistance to strictly mechanistic interpretations of life and art, favouring instead an intricate design that hints at a deeper purpose. In his narratives, teleology manifests both thematically and structurally, presenting the world as imbued with purpose while opposing randomness and determinism. For instance, *Pale Fire* displays an intricate structured relationship between the poem and its commentary, suggesting a teleological order that governs the interplay of text and meaning.[186] Similarly, *Speak, Memory*, emphasizes memory's role for imposing order and purpose on life's chaotic experiences.[187] Moreover, his scientific work in lepidopterology, particularly his taxonomic study of butterflies, further illustrates his teleological leanings.[188] Nabokov perceived the beauty and complexity of butterflies' patterns as emblematic of an artistic teleology, mirroring his literary focus on intricate design. For Brian, Nabokov's fiction critiques deterministic views and celebrates the idea that beauty, both in literature and nature, arises from a purposeful process.[189] Through his works, Nabokov employs teleology as a narrative technique and a deeper philosophical conviction, asserting that art and life are governed by an underlying order.

Nabokov's engagement with teleology, which emphasizes purpose and design, stands in contrast to his alignment with neutral evolution, a theory suggesting that many evolutionary changes occur without adaptive significance. This juxtaposition—from a purpose-driven perspective to the randomness inherent in neutral evolution—reflects Nabokov's exploration of the tension between order and coincidence, both in nature and in his art. Neutral evolution is a concept in evolutionary biology positing that many genetic variations within populations are not shaped by natural selection but rather occur due to random genetic drift, mutations, and other stochastic processes. Unlike adaptive evolution, where traits develop in response to environmental pressures to improve an organism's fitness, neutral evolution emphasizes that much genetic variation persists without conferring any selective advantage or disadvantage.

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[185] Brian Boyd, *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery* (Princeton University Press, 2001),112.
[186] Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 89.
[187] Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Vintage International, 1989), 101-102.
[188] Dieter E. Zimmer, "Nabokov as Scientist: A Reassessment," *Nabokov Studies* 2 (1995): 35-38.
[189] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, 230-233.

These changes, though often inconsequential, play a significant role in shaping the genetic makeup of populations.[190] The Neutral Theory of Molecular Evolution, proposed by Motoo Kimura in the 1960s, is a cornerstone of this perspective. Kimura argued that most evolutionary changes at the molecular level result from the random drift of neutral mutant alleles, rather than being driven by natural selection. [191] This theory suggests that evolutionary processes are not always purposeful or adaptive but can also be shaped by randomness and chance.

Nabokov's engagement with evolution, particularly through his work on insect mimicry, reflects a deep interest in the tension between adaptation and chance in species development. His critique of Darwinian determinism and exploration of mimicry suggests that some mimetic forms and behaviours arise from coincidences rather than purely adaptive processes.[192] This perspective aligns with the notion of neutral evolution, where random variations can lead to significant changes without direct adaptive significance. Nabokov critiques the deterministic aspects of Darwin's theory by emphasizing the significance of chance and coincidence in shaping evolutionary outcomes. He advocates for a broader understanding of evolution, where randomness and non-adaptive traits play a crucial role in contributing to biodiversity. This perspective aligns with the principles of neutral evolution, which asserts that not all evolutionary changes are driven by natural selection or adaptive processes, highlighting the importance of random variation in the development of species.

Nabokov's concept of "Agent X" can be interpreted as a nod to the unpredictable forces that shape evolution, much like the stochastic processes described in neutral evolution. He identified three forces shaping human beings: heredity, environment, and the mysterious "Agent X," with environment being the least influential and "Agent X" the most significant.[193] Although Nabokov never fully defines "Agent X," it can be seen as a poetic metaphor rather than a scientifically valid concept, suggesting an unpredictable, mysterious force that operates beyond the deterministic constraints of heredity and environment. While heredity involves genetic inheritance and the environment refers to external conditions, "Agent X" introduces an unknown factor that plays a significant role in shaping both human beings and evolutionary processes. This force allows for coincidences and unexpected outcomes that transcend the scope of natural selection or environmental pressures. In this way, Nabokov's "Agent X"

[190] Motoo Kimura, *The Neutral Theory of Molecular Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 30.
[191] Michael Lynch, *The Origins of Genome Architecture* (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, 2007), 20.
[192] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Butterflies of North America* (New York: Knopf, 1941), 104.
[193] Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 126.

acknowledges the role of chance in evolutionary processes, paralleling the ideas behind neutral evolution, where randomness plays a key role in shaping species development.

Nabokov's concept of "Agent X" serves as a subtle critique of Darwinian theory, resonating with the principles of neutral evolution. He believed that certain instances of mimicry could not be fully explained by natural selection alone, prompting him to rethink evolutionary mechanisms. Nabokov challenged the deterministic focus of Darwinian theory, arguing that it fails to account for the "miraculous coincidence of imitative aspect and imitative behaviours."[194] He posited that mimetic forms are "linked by coincidence between mimetic aspect and mimetic behaviours and mimetic habitat," emphasizing the importance of chance in evolutionary processes.[195] Nabokov's deep fascination with butterfly mimicry, particularly the intricate wing patterns, informed his exploration of two less-discussed categories: viceroy-monarch mimicry and dead-leaf mimicry.[196] He found it perplexing that neither the viceroy nor the monarch species appeared to benefit from their resemblance, leading him to question alternative mechanisms behind this evolutionary phenomenon. In contrast, dead-leaf mimicry, where organisms imitate the appearance of a dead leaf to blend into their surroundings, exemplified adaptation favoured by natural selection, enhancing survival and reproduction in specific environments. However, Nabokov suggested that even this remarkable mimicry might not arise solely from survival pressures or environmental changes, but also from coincidental factors. By exploring these non-utilitarian aspects of mimicry, Nabokov argued that evolutionary biology often overlooks the role of coincidence and randomness in nature.

Nabokov also introduced the concept of automimicry, observing how certain butterflies exhibit multiple forms within a single season, mimicking various objects in their environment. He notes that "in many species of butterflies, there are not only the usual mimetic forms but also a plethora of auto-mimetic forms", emphasizing the complexity and versatility of these insects.[197] This capacity for transformation reflects a sophisticated evolutionary adaptation, where the mimicry serves not only survival purposes but also aesthetic expression. Nabokov elaborates that automimicry showcases butterflies' remarkable ability to adapt their appearance, embodying the interplay of mimicry and environment: "a butterfly can represent many objects and forms, thus blurring the lines between identity and disguise."[198] He further explores how

[194] Nabokov, *Speak Memory,* 125.
[195] Nabokov, *Nabokov's Butterflies*, 310.
[196] Alexander, "Neutral Evolution and Aesthetics," 9.
[197] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Butterflies of North America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 118.
[198] Vladimir Nabokov, *Encounters with a Butterfly*. New York: Putnam, 1945), 58.

this phenomenon illustrates the fluidity of form in response to environmental stimuli, stating, "the more one observes, the more one realizes that these transformations are vital for survival and reproduction."[199] Nabokov's reflections on automimicry reveal his deep understanding of the intricate relationships between organisms and their surroundings, illustrating how randomness and coincidence can significantly shape evolutionary processes, as he argues, "the beauty of mimicry lies in its capacity to reflect the complexities of nature."[200] By underscoring the nuanced ways in which chance influences adaptation, Nabokov enhances our appreciation of the biodiversity present in the natural world.

Secondly, Nabokov's concept of "Agent X" suggests a dimension of purpose or design that resonates with teleological thought, which posits that nature can exhibit a degree of purposeful development. Teleology is the philosophical study of purpose or ends in natural processes, and "Agent X" introduces the notion that forces beyond randomness or mechanistic explanations shape life. Similar to teleology, which asserts that natural phenomena have inherent goals or purposes, "Agent X" implies that certain outcomes are not merely random but are influenced by an underlying intent or direction. Thus, Nabokov's "Agent X" aligns with a teleological framework, suggesting that evolution encompasses more than random chance, hinting at a guiding or purposeful element.

Leona Toker posits that Nabokov's concept of "Agent X" parallels Henri Bergson's idea of *élan vital*, a vital impulse that drives creativity and spontaneity in nature.[201] Bergson's philosophy of creative evolution rejects strict mechanistic views, arguing that life evolves through unpredictability and invention rather than by predetermined laws. His concept emphasizes originality and spontaneity, contending that evolution encompasses a telos characterized by unpredictability and emergence rather than fixed goals. Bergson asserts that functions influenced by interpretation can lead to unpredictable evolutionary paths, stating that "functions, as if dependent on interpretation, can have an unpredictable effect on the direction of evolution."[202] Within this framework, telos includes originality and must be emergent, inherently unpredictable. Nabokov's notion of "Agent X" suggests an unseen force influencing evolutionary outcomes, implying that certain traits arise not merely from random mutations or environmental pressures, but from a purposeful direction behind their development. Thus,

[199] Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 44.
[200] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Lepidopterology*. 1980. Edited by Dmitri Nabokov (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2000), 65.
[201] Toker, *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures*, 3.
[202] Alexander, "Neutral Evolution and Aesthetics," 9.

Nabokov's view of "Agent X" aligns with Bergson's philosophy of creative evolution, which emphasizes spontaneity and originality, asserting that life is shaped by a force that injects creativity and purpose into the evolutionary process.

Third, while Nabokov's concept of "Agent X" may critique Darwinian evolution through a teleological lens, it also presents a dilemma between a "purpose-driven" force of teleology and randomness of neutral evolution. He employs the notion of coincidence to challenge Darwin's ideas, questioning whether natural selection alone can adequately explain complex phenomena. Interestingly, Darwin's critique of teleology stems from a similar foundation, as he emphasizes that biological changes occur through random mutations without foresight or intention. Thus, both Nabokov's challenge to Darwinism and Darwin's critique of teleology are rooted in the inherent tension between randomness and purpose in the natural world. The tension between teleology and evolutionary theory arises from the idea that while evolutionary processes may be driven by random mutations, the resulting adaptations can reflect a sense of purpose. For instance, traits that enhance survival and reproduction can be seen as fulfilling a functional role, aligning with teleological perspectives.[203] This view is supported by the concept of "functionalism" in evolutionary biology, which suggests that biological features can be understood in terms of their utility within an organism's life cycle.[204] Conversely, critics argue that evolutionary theory inherently opposes teleological explanations, asserting that attributing purpose to biological processes undermines the randomness and unpredictability of evolutionary change.[205] This debate raises important questions about the nature of purpose in biology and the interplay between chance and design in the evolution of life.

Modern interpretations introduce ideas such as "emergent properties," proposing that while evolution lacks a predetermined goal, it can lead to complex systems and behaviours arising from simpler rules or interactions.[206] This perspective integrates elements of teleology by recognizing that certain traits develop as adaptive responses to environmental challenges. The term "teleonomy," coined by biologist Jacques Monod, captures this notion, referring to the appearance of purpose in biological processes without implying a guiding intention. It suggests that biological traits serve functions shaped by evolutionary pressures, thereby

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[203] Andreas Wagner, *The Origins of Evolutionary Innovations: A Theory of the Evolution of Evolutionary Innovation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 87.
[204] Stuart Kauffman, *The Origins of Order: Self-Organization and Selection in Evolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 41.
[205] Michael Ruse, *Darwin and Design: Does Evolution Have a Purpose?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 95.
[206] David J. Depew and Bruce H. Weber, *Evolution at a Crossroads: The New Challenge to Darwinism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 236.

blurring the line between teleology and evolution.[207] The relationship between teleology and evolutionary theory remains a dynamic field of inquiry, enriching our understanding of both the natural world and the philosophical implications of life and existence.

Nabokov's proposal of "Agent X," coupled with his refusal to define it, reflects his resistance to reductive scientific explanations of complex phenomena. For him, this undefined force imbues nature with a sense of mystery, aligning with his artistic emphasis on the unpredictability of life, art, and consciousness. By leaving "Agent X" undefined, Nabokov suggests a view of life and evolution that resists strict determinism, instead embracing an unpredictable and unknown force that influences outcomes in ways that heredity and environment alone cannot explain. In proposing "Agent X," he elevates the discourse on evolution from a purely biological perspective to a philosophical one. Given his metaphysical inclinations, the purpose associated with "Agent X" is not framed as a human intention; he consciously avoids imposing human concepts of purpose onto natural phenomena. Instead, "Agent X" reflects a god-like intention, rooted more in philosophy than empirical science. He might argue that while evolution appears purposeless, it can still point toward a higher, divine purpose, intertwining scientific inquiry with metaphysical speculation. Thus, "Agent X" embodies biological, teleological, and metaphysical perspectives, highlighting the complexity and unpredictability inherent in evolution.

Nabokov's biological perspective is intimately linked to his view of art. His concept of "Agent X" integrates chance and design, acknowledging the role of random mutations while suggesting a deeper layer of intentionality guiding the evolutionary journey. He perceives art as a dynamic interplay of convention and creation. Similarly, teleology encompasses two dimensions, as Victoria Alexander describes: "directionality and originality."[208] One aspect involves conservative mechanisms that maintain or preserve order, while the other focuses on innovative or emergent mechanisms aimed at discovering or creating new orders. Nabokov presents the insightful idea that subtle resemblances extend beyond mere functionality. Recent advancements in neutral evolution bolster his argument, aligning with contemporary theories suggesting that development occurs not continuously but rather in occasional, intense bursts.[209] His interest in neutral evolution informs his thematic exploration of the tension between control

[207] Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 11.
[208] Victoria N. Alexander, "Narrative Telos: A Study in Phenomenal Patterns" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Centre, City University of New York, 2002).
[209] Victoria N. Alexander, "Neutral Evolution and Aesthetics: Vladimir Nabokov and Insect Mimicry," Santa Fe Institute Working Papers, no. 01-10-057 (Santa Fe, 2001), 9.

and coincidence. By proposing "Agent X," Nabokov rejects mechanistic determinism in favour of a dynamic view that includes spontaneity and unpredictability in evolution. His incorporation of telos underscores the interplay of design and coincidence in his works. Nabokov's literary and scientific inquiries, particularly regarding mimicry and his philosophical musings on evolution, resonate with the ideas of neutral evolution, highlighting the significance of chance and creativity in the evolutionary process and challenging conventional deterministic narratives that dominate traditional evolutionary theory.

2.3.2 Coincident Discovery and Emergent Chance

Nabokov uses Godunov's coincidental scientific discoveries and Fyodor's artistic creations to illustrate his challenge to a mechanistic and deterministic view of evolution, emphasizing its more dynamic, emergent, and unpredictable aspects. Godunov's discovery of coincidence-related evolution underscores the theme of chance. In "Father's Butterflies", he finds that evolution is influenced not only by deterministic mechanisms but also by accidental or coincidental principles. Godunov argues that mimicry cannot be fully explained by natural selection alone, which he dismisses as "the rough haste of evolution's unskilled forces."[210] He suggests that some forms of mimicry are too refined to solely deceive predators. His insights are not mere speculation but stem from years of research and a systematic gathering of elements that "harmonious grown out of an internal association of elements he had gathered."[211] This revelation occurs unexpectedly, revealing a hidden order through "the mental capabilities he employed in meticulously investigating haphazardly accumulated materials."[212] Godunov perceives this mystery of nature as akin to capillary attraction, occurring independently of the observer's intent.[213] Through Fyodor's indirect recollection, Godunov reflects on the vast improbability of disparate species evolving similar appearances by "a series of happy coincidences," such as a butterfly resembling a specific leaf with "the artistic bonus of a realistic flaw: a small hole eaten through it by somebody's larva."[214] The theme of chance pervades the contents and manner of Godunov's scientific exploration.

[210] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 219-21.
[211] Ibid., 214.
[212] Ibid., 214.
[213] Ibid., 214.
[214] Ibid., 224.

The theme of chance is further underscored by Godunov's accidental discovery and naming of a new butterfly species. In *The Gift*, Fyodor reminisces about his father's return from Siberia, where he unexpectedly encountered a new butterfly species. Upon returning home to Leshino Park, Godunov, initially preoccupied with family and recreation, noticed a distinctive Epicnaptera moth resembling a leaf, hanging asleep from a bush stalk. Although tempted to dismiss it as typical of its genus, he scrutinized it closely and realized it matched the specimen he had brought back from his journey—an undescribed species. Delighted by this discovery, he exclaimed, "I need not have gone so far!" (199) The family shared in his excitement, but fate took another turn when Godunov learned that another scientist had already described the species based on specimens from St. Petersburg, leaving Godunov unable to name it. Fyodor, witnessing his father's elation turn to disappointment, lamented throughout the night, feeling the sting of missed opportunity caused by this twist of coincidence or fate.

The theme of chance is further emphasized by Fyodor's exploration of his father's biography, *Chernyshevski*, and other artistic creations. As Godunov's accidental discovery of evolution underscores the role of chance, Fyodor titles his lengthy short story about his friend Yasha's fate as "if by any chance" (86). He describes his writing process as embracing "the rolled-up carpet of any chance subject" and unfolding "the whole of it before the reader" (464). For Fyodor, chance governs his writing subjects and his encounters, including his meeting with a beloved girl at a literary soirée two years after Yasha's death. In Chapter One, while writing his biography of Chernyshevski, Fyodor imagines what might happen if he explored Chernyshevski's belongings. He muses, "It is unthinkable that a stranger should touch them, but what a relief it would be if an accidental fire destroyed that precious little cabinet" (75). He speculates that Chernyshevski might suddenly rise and, "as if by chance," rearrange a chair in a way that could serve as a theme for a phantom (75). Another intriguing coincidence involves a prayer book from a Saratov priest, noting the birth of a boy named Nikolay on 12 July, christened the next day with Archpriest Fyod. Stef. Vyazovski as godfather—a name shared with the protagonist of Chernyshevski's Siberian novellas, given "by a strange coincidence" (532). The theme of chance is vividly illustrated through Fyodor's exploration of his father's and Chernyshevski's biographies, alongside his own creative works, revealing the profound impact of coincidence in shaping their lives and narratives.

2.3.3 Intertextual Reference to Pushkin's "Chance"

The theme of chance is enriched by the intertextual references to Pushkin's verses, bridging science and art within the narrative. Fyodor recounts his father Godunov's profound fascination with Pushkin, describing how he knew Pushkin's works well, often reciting them while walking. Godunov's admiration for Pushkin extended to studying the precision and clarity of his prose, finding inspiration in the prose of Pushkin's *History of the Pugachyov Rebellion* (202). To invigorate his creativity, Godunov memorized passages from this work. Fyodor recalls that Pushkin's influence permeated his father's life and writing, blending seamlessly with his daily routines and intellectual pursuits, stating "Pushkin entered his blood. With Pushkin's voice merged the voice of his father" (203). Godunov's reverence for Pushkin was such that he considered Pushkin's words among the most beautiful ever written. This deep admiration for Pushkin underscores the role of chance in shaping Godunov's literary and intellectual pursuits, further intertwining his scientific endeavors with his appreciation for artistic brilliance.

Understanding Pushkin's profound influence on Godunov allows us to grasp a pivotal scene in "Father's Butterflies." Godunov frequently recited Pushkin's verses and sought to emulate his style. In the narrative, Fyodor recalls a moment on the veranda when he observed his father crossing the lawn with a guest, engrossed in conversation. As they passed beneath a window, Fyodor overheard his father assert emphatically, "Yes, of course it was in vain that I said 'by chance,' and by chance that I said 'in vain', for here I agree with the clergy, especially since, for all the plants and animals I have had occasion to encounter, it is an unquestionable and authentic…"[215] Fyodor anticipated the conclusion of his father's sentence but could not discern it clearly; later, he remembered his father laughing with the guest. This memory transitions seamlessly into Fyodor's writing, where echoes of his father's laughter and voice fade into darkness, prompting him to remember the title of the book he had been reading.

Some critics, such as Brian Boyd, interpret this scene as a reflection of Godunov's affinity for Pushkin. The repetition of "vain" and "gift" in Godunov's speech recalls Pushkin's poem "Vain gift, chance gift, / Life, why were you given to me?"[216] Dana Dragunoiu, in *Vladimir Nabokov and the Poetics of Liberalism*, argues that Godunov's reworking of Pushkin's poem strengthens the theme of chance in the narrative.[217] Moreover, Dragunoiu suggests that this

[215] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 234.
[216] Brian Boyd, "'The Expected Stress Did Not Come': A Note on 'Father's Butterflies'," *The Nabokovian* 45 (2000): 24.
[217] Dana Dragunoiu, *Vladimir Nabokov and the Poetics of Liberalism* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 77.

intertextuality provides a crucial clue: Fyodor's recollection of his father's words triggers his memory of the book's title he was reading, potentially Darwin's *The Origin of Species*.[218] Gennady Barabtarlo further posits that the Russian word "Dar" (gift), a central motif in Pushkin's poem, serves as an associative link, aiding Fyodor in remembering the title of Darwin's seminal work. Thus, Nabokov intertwines Pushkin's verse with at least three functions: first, to enhance the theme of chance and underscore coincidence as a pivotal element in evolution; second, to foster the convergence of artistic and scientific pursuits, particularly in critiquing Darwinian theory; and third, to establish a narrative link between Fyodor's recollection of his father's conversation and the title of the book he was reading.

This analysis examines Nabokov's concepts of teleology, coincidence, and their portrayal through the narrator, characters, and intertextual references to Pushkin, all emphasizing the theme of chance. Nabokov employs coincidence to highlight natural instances lacking in survival and reproductive advantage, thereby challenging Darwinian natural selection. Moreover, he demonstrates a deep appreciation for coincidences, vividly describing instances of mimicry and urging lepidopterists to scrutinize these often-overlooked phenomena in nature, thus emphasizing non-utilitarian elements. While Victoria Alexander attributes Nabokov's insights to his interest in "the mechanisms behind teleological phenomena,"[219] which enabled him to develop a progressive theory of mimicry for his time, I argue that his perspectives derive from three primary sources: his scientific exploration of coincidental mimicry in butterflies, his innate aesthetic sensibilities, and his personal encounters enriched with incidents and a predilection for exceptional phenomena.

2.4 Spirality as a Sign of Metaphysics in Speciation

Nabokov's strategies for challenging Darwinian species theory include: first, highlighting the gaps, unknowns, and missing parts within species, casting doubt on the completeness of Darwinian explanations; second, introducing metaphysical complexities through symbolic representations, particularly using spiral symbols, to add layers of meaning beyond Darwinian mechanisms; third, underscoring the ideological or conceptual notion of "species" by proposing that the origin of species does not merely relate to concrete archetypal forms but

[218] Gennady Barabtarlo, "'He Said—I Said': An Afternote," *The Nabokovian* 45 (2000): 33-35.
[219] Alexander, "Neutral Evolution and Aesthetics," 9.

persists as an abstract concept within the human mind. These strategies reflect his philosophy of science and aesthetic inclinations.

2.4.1 Missing Gaps and Unknown Parts in *The Origin of Species*

The publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* in 1859 marked a pivotal moment in biology, proposing that numerous species evolved from a few ancestral forms.[220] This groundbreaking work was met with enthusiasm in Russia, where it became a cornerstone for evolutionary research. The country celebrated Darwin's centenary and the fiftieth anniversary of his book with grand events, underscoring its profound impact on science and philosophy. Josiah Royce noted that, apart from Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, no scientific work had shaped philosophy more deeply than Darwin's.[221] Similarly, Charles Peirce remarked that Darwin "has stirred science and philosophy as no man since Newton had done."[222] In contrast to many who embraced Darwinian evolution, Nabokov was intrigued by phenomena and mechanisms seemingly at odds with Darwin's theories. In *The Gift*, he employs his fictional characters to explore the fluidity and instability of species, challenging the traditional conceptualization of species and examining their metaphysical complexities.

Nabokov's perspective diverged from Darwin's emphasis on natural selection as the primary driver of species evolution. Through his meticulous study of butterflies, Nabokov observed that certain internal characteristics remained consistent across various external appearances and environmental conditions. He highlighted the importance of genital armatures as a more reliable criterion for species differentiation than external morphology alone. Contrary to Darwin's proposal that many species were variations within broader archetypes adapting within existing species limits, Nabokov argued against reducing the diversity of animals and plants to a few archetypes. He believed that the multitude of species could not be adequately explained by adaptation alone and criticized the oversimplification of evolutionary stimuli. Nabokov's exploration suggested that species evolution involved complex interactions and factors beyond mere adaptation, challenging Darwinian notions of evolutionary mechanics.

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[220] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, ed. Joseph Carroll (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003).
[221] Josiah Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1983), 286.
[222] Charles Peirce, *Selected Writings*, ed. P. P. Wiener (New York: Dover, 1966), 263.

Nabokov's exploration of species evolution through the lens of rhythm and gaps offers a compelling challenge to Darwinian perspectives on natural selection. In his 1943 paper, "Notes on the Morphology of the Genus Lycaeides," written during his tenure as a research fellow at Harvard University's Museum of Comparative Zoology, Nabokov employs rhythm metaphorically to describe how variations within species manifest as gaps, omissions, fusions, and sudden shifts. These rhythmic deviations, he argues, distinguish one species from another more distinctly than gradual adaptations.[223] Focusing on butterflies in the Lycaenidae family, particularly the Lycaeides genus, Nabokov's taxonomic and morphological study reveals both precise scientific observations and broader philosophical reflections on evolution and species variation. He closely examined the subtle differences in wing patterns, genital structures, and other morphological features, proposing that evolutionary changes occur not in a continuous, smooth progression but through interruptions—distinct breaks or leaps. As Nabokov asserts, "Gaps between species, often sudden, sometimes subtle, are not mere accidents; they are signatures of nature's underlying rhythm.[224] This metaphorical rhythm is central to his argument, where he challenges Darwin's emphasis on gradualism as the primary driver of species differentiation. Instead, Nabokov suggests that speciation often happens through abrupt shifts in form rather than slow, incremental changes. He writes, "It is not in the small, incremental shifts that we find the essence of evolution, but in the perceptible, sometimes abrupt shifts in form."[225] For Nabokov, these interruptions are crucial to understanding speciation, which he views as part of a dynamic, creative process of evolution, rather than the outcome of mere gradual adjustments through natural selection.

Nabokov's study goes beyond the mere identification of new species, highlighting the aesthetic and philosophical dimensions of biological forms. His descriptions of morphological details reflect a deep appreciation for the beauty and complexity of nature. For instance, he focuses on the genitalia of butterflies, often a key factor in distinguishing closely related species. His detailed analysis of these minute structures, particularly in male specimens, led him to propose several new species and subspecies within the Lycaeides genus. In the conclusion of his paper, Nabokov reflects on the broader implications of his findings, hinting at the metaphysical themes that would later permeate his literary works. He emphasizes the "gaps" between species as expressions of natural creativity, suggesting that nature, like art, is not

[223] Vladimir Nabokov, "Notes on the Morphology of the Genus *Lycaedes* (Lycaenidae, Lepidoptera)," *Psyche* 51.3-4 (1944): 137.
[224] Ibid., 161.
[225] Ibid., 254.

merely functional but also inherently expressive. As he writes, "The natural world reveals itself in fits and starts, in unexpected bursts of form and variation, much like the unfolding of a poem or a painting, where each line or stroke is at once connected to and distinct from what precedes it."[226] Nabokov engages in taxonomic study and meditates on the unpredictability of life and the creative processes that drive biological and artistic forms. His rejection of strict Darwinian gradualism and his belief that evolution involves leaps and gaps rather than smooth transitions mirror his scepticism of deterministic narratives in science and art.

The article "Notes on the Morphology of the Genus Lycaeides" showcases Nabokov's ability to blend rigorous scientific analysis with philosophical and aesthetic reflection. By suggesting that gaps and rhythmic deviations are crucial to species differentiation, Nabokov moves beyond conventional evolutionary theory, proposing a more dynamic process at play in nature's unfolding. His approach to understanding species echoes the views of Russian biologists like M. A. Maksimovich, a 19th-century botanist at Moscow University, who advocated for a holistic perspective on living organisms. Maksimovich viewed species not as static entities but as dynamic and continuously evolving forms within an "unbroken chain of objects in constant change."[227] This perspective aligns closely with Nabokov's exploration of species in his scientific and literary work. Nabokov, through his study of butterflies and his philosophical reflections, emphasizes the fluidity and variability within species. He discerns gaps, omissions, and variations as essential components that contribute to the evolutionary process rather than indicating shortcomings or imperfections in nature. By embracing the idea of species as constantly evolving entities, both Nabokov and Maksimovich challenge the prevailing view of species as fixed archetypes predetermined by natural selection. Nabokov questions Darwin's heavy reliance on adaptations to fill in the gaps in species evolution. Instead, Nabokov finds appeal in incompleteness, gaps, and missing links, highlighting their role in facilitating speciation and contributing to the aesthetic nuances of natural selection.

Nabokov extends his critique of gaps in scientific discovery to include scientific interpretation. In *The Gift*, rather than directly addressing Darwin's theory of species, Nabokov employs his fictional characters, Godunov and Fyodor, to articulate alternative perspectives. In "Father's Butterflies," Godunov introduces a new theory on species emergence and proliferation, conveyed indirectly through Fyodor's recollections of his father's original

[226] Vladimir Nabokov, "Notes on the Morphology of the Genus *Lycaedes* (Lycaenidae, Lepidoptera)," *Psyche* 51.3-4 (1944): 256.
[227] Alexander Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture, 1861-1917* (Sandford: Sandford University Press, 1970), 11.

Russian text and an incomplete English translation, supplemented by Murchison's explanations. Thus, he must re-translate the fragmental English version's key concepts and central ideas to Russian, where he acknowledges the distortion inherent in the process. Fyodor laments that his representation of his father's theory remains "an approximate image," akin to proposing that the initial division of all earthly specimens into two groups was influenced by centrifugal force.[228] Thus, Fyodor resorts to his vague memory, logical induction and creative imagination to fill the gap. Regarding Nabokov's adoption of a derivative approach to present the species theory, Blackwell suggests that Nabokov does so because he "has the technical prose grasped almost from the void, distilled, and refracted by an artistic mind."[229] Nabokov's choice of this derivative approach serves multiple purposes: highlighting gaps in scientific discovery and interpretation, integrating artistic and scientific elements, emphasizing the complexity and unknown dimensions of species, distinguishing Godunov's views from Nabokov's, and underscoring the role of creative imagination in scientific inquiry and interpretation.

2.4.2 Metaphysical Complexities and Spiral Symbols of Species

Nabokov's critique of Darwin for omitting divine intervention and higher intelligence from speciation is evident in *The Gift*. He employs symbols such as circles and spirals to signify metaphysical influences on species evolution. Symbols are potent tools that connect ideas, objects, and experiences. In Nabokov's works, circles and spirals carry profound spiritual and metaphysical connotations. The spiral holds a special place in Nabokov's worldview, where he likened his life to a "colored spiral in a small ball of glass,"[230] seeing it as a path to liberation: "The spiral is a spiritualized circle. In the spiral form, the circle, uncoiled, unwound, has ceased to be vicious; it has been set free."[231] Nabokov argued that spirals and circles play mysterious roles in relation to time and space, reflecting "the essential spirality of all things."[232] He speculated on dimensions beyond conventional understanding, where space might warp into time and time into thought, hinting at a deeper metaphysical realm.[233] These spiral symbols gain added significance in Nabokov's literary architecture. He likened the supplements "Father's Butterflies" and "The Circle" to satellites orbiting *The Gift*, suggesting a structural

[228] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 226.
[229] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 14.
[230] Nabokov, *Speak Memory*, 275.
[231] Ibid., 275.
[232] Ibid., 275.
[233] Nabokov, *Speak Memory*, 275.

analogy to spirals. Leona Toker interprets *The Gift* as embodying a spiral structure, symbolizing tension between the infinite and the incomplete. Each spiral in the narrative signifies a transformative juncture in the protagonist's life, perpetuating a cycle rather than closure.[234] Thus, *The Gift* unfolds as a sequence of interconnected cycles, reflecting Nabokov's philosophical stance on existence and consciousness.

In "Father's Butterflies," Godunov employs numerous spiral and circular images to articulate his alternative theories on species, challenging Darwin's emphasis on natural selection. He posits that each species represents a spherical variation, capturing geographical diversity along its equator while evolving over time in a circular pattern of constant longitude.[235] Godunov likens species to bubbles emerging through "mysterious mechanisms from the remains of previous species bubbles that have burst in a forward-moving process."[236] Furthermore, Godunov portrays species as an intricate network of natural ideas, conveying messages beyond their physical manifestations. Unlike Darwin, who prioritizes natural selection, Godunov argues for the primacy of the creative principle in evolution, suggesting that nature evolves intelligently and "grows wiser over time."[237] This perspective aligns with Henri Bergson's concept of creative evolution, as noted by Blackwell, where evolution continually creates new forms and ideas that shape the intellect's understanding.[238] According to Bergson, forms of life may appear stable but actually embody continuous movement and transformation. In his work *Creative Evolution*, Bergson proposes that "if evolution is a creation unceasingly renewed, it creates, as it goes on, not only the forms of life but the ideas that will enable the intellect to understand it."[239] Bergson employs the metaphor of a circle or spiral to illustrate his conception of evolution: "Evolution is a kind of circle…They are relatively stable and counterfeit immobility so well that we treat each of them as a thing rather than as progress, forgetting that the very permanence of their form is only the outline of a movement."[240] Bergson's metaphor of a circle or spiral resonates with Godunov's views, portraying evolution as a continuous cycle rather than linear progress.

This metaphorical use of spirals in discussing speciation enhances the integration of art and science, underscores the metaphysical dimensions of species, and acknowledges the

[234] Toker, *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures*, 3.
[235] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 219.
[236] Ibid., 219.
[237] Ibid., 219.
[238] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 14.
[239] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998), 128.
[240] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 128.

potential influence of divine and metaphysical forces in the evolutionary process. These symbols suggest a deeper, more complex understanding of evolution beyond Darwinian natural selection, emphasizing dynamic and creative aspects inherent in nature's development.

2.4.3 Ideological Dimension and Conceptual Nature of Species

In "Father's Butterflies," Nabokov presents an alternative perspective on the origin and nature of species that diverges from Darwin's conventional view. Nabokov, through the character of Godunov, challenges the notion of a species as a concrete, physical archetype. Instead, Godunov proposes that a species exists primarily as an abstract concept within the human intellect. This conceptualization is described by Blackwell as "uncompromisingly idealistic."[241] Godunov's statement portrays a species as an original concept that does not physically exist in reality but manifests infinitely in the reflection of nature. Each instance of a species is perceived by human intelligence as if it were "reflected in that self-same mirror," thereby acquiring its reality solely within the realm of human understanding, akin to "a living individual of that species."[242] Deviations and chance variations are viewed as mere reflections in this mirror, occasionally solidifying into stable local races. These races evolve outwardly from the central species idea, forming a conceptual circle.[243] This perspective suggests that metaphysical dimensions underlie Godunov's conception of species, emphasizing the role of human perception and intellect in defining and understanding the natural world. It posits species as reflections of an idealized form rather than discrete entities grounded solely in physical reality. In this conceptual framework, each instance of a species is perceived as a manifestation within the mirror of human understanding, acquiring its reality through intellectual contemplation rather than physical presence. Nabokov, through Godunov's exploration, challenges traditional scientific views of species formation and evolution, offering a philosophical lens that intertwines intellectual abstraction with the complexities of biological diversity and adaptation.

Godunov continues to elucidate the spatial dynamics of species, asserting that "races remain on the circumference of the species" due to intermediate variations linking the type with local variants.[244] This implies that while species may change over time, the core idea of

[241] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 40.
[242] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 216.
[243] Ibid., 216.
[244] Ibid., 216.

species remains unchanged. Expanding on the concept-oriented view of species, Godunov boldly declares, “It was not species that evolved in nature, but the very concept of species.”[245] He argues that species do not originate from concrete archetypes in reality but rather from conceptual frameworks within human cognition. This perspective resonates with Nabokov's assertion that “if species do exist, they do so taxonomically as abstract conceptions,” isolated from the ongoing evolution of empirical data, which historically imbued them with temporary significance.[246] Godunov further posits that the origin of species cannot be found in the natural world because the “evolutional ‘how’ and the metaphysical ‘whence’ of species” are rooted not in nature but in human understanding.[247] He contends that recognizing the conceptual nature of species is essential for addressing fundamental questions about their origins and correspond to the diverse living creatures observed in the world.

Godunov expands on his alternative theory of species origin by drawing an analogy between human history and species development. He prompts readers to consider the parallels between “the development of the individual and species.”[248] According to Godunov, human thought plays a crucial role in the evolution of species. He argues that nature encompasses all its manifestations and modifications shaped by time, questioning how it could exclude thoughts amidst the myriad embryos of countless organs.[249] Godunov asserts that species are constructs of the human mind and intelligence, bestowed by nature and persistently recurring in its repository, differing from the actual species “seen in sunlight as a marble god is distinct from the sculptor’s cerebral convolutions—but nonetheless, they exist.”[250] He emphasizes that the origin of species lies not in nature but in the human mind, existing alongside and predating the evolutionary process.[251] Rejecting Chernyshevski's materialism, which posited that “the tangible object acts much more strongly than the abstract concept” (261), Godunov’s strong idealistic stance profoundly influenced his son Fyodor. Godunov's perspectives underscore the role of philosophy in scientific inquiry and the dynamic interplay between nature and human cognition. It is essential to note that Godunov’s views on species align closely with Nabokov’s philosophy of science, where Nabokov argued that objective science cannot exist without

[245] Nabokov, “Father’s Butterflies,” 225.
[246] Ibid., 302.
[247] Ibid., 225.
[248] Ibid., 218.
[249] Ibid., 219.
[250] Ibid., 219.
[251] Ibid., 220.

human observations, consciousness, and awareness, thereby recognizing the pivotal role of personal cognitive mechanisms in all scientific investigations.

Godunov illuminates a transitional stage in species evolution where new species emerge while fading old ones cease active development. He argues against species reaching stasis at this juncture, suggesting instead that they transition from the realm of nature to the human mind, acquiring new features while retaining distinct characteristics.[252] This allows for the precise identification of subtle traits, as seen in his elegant distinction between two butterflies. Godunov posits that species share a familial resemblance, yet they remain wholly unknown and incomparable to familiar creatures today, reflecting the ambiance of their terrestrial era. [253] Godunov highlights the interplay and transformation between nature and mind within speciation. Despite the limitations of human intelligence, Godunov asserts its inherent affinity with nature, considering intelligence a gift of nature that exists in its repository, distinct in its essence yet fundamentally linked. Furthermore, Godunov contrasts the earth's rotational forces with an "energizing, thought-engendering rotation" that festively animates the universe's Dance of the Planets.[254] He emphasizes that in nature, the "lawlike regularity of repetition, of recognition, and of logical responsibility" are subordinate to the idea of this animating rotation, which "acting upon the ferment of life and provoked by that ferment itself."[255] Thus, Godunov extends the scientific discourse on species into the realm of philosophy.

Godunov's theory on species in "Father's Butterflies" has garnered diverse evaluations. Critics within the novel dismiss his theory as "lawless fantasy, a knight's move off the board into space (a consequence of the utter failure to assimilate the author's premises)."[256] The Lepidopterists similarly dismisses Godunov's spherical classification as "very coolly indicated in a footnote, applicable to all areas of nature, seemed mere confused and delirious."[257] In the real world, biologists like Russian entomologist Sergei Sinev critique Godunov's speciation theory for its flaws. However, Fyodor argues that grasping Godunov's perspective requires "an extraordinary leap, an acrobatic movement of the brain" away from Darwin's ideas.[258] Critics such as Kurt Johnson attempt to establish connections between Godunov's speciation theory and Nabokov's r scientific contributions.[259] Nabokov infused his novel with his philosophical

[252] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 228.
[253] Ibid., 219.
[254] Ibid., 226.
[255] Ibid., 226.
[256] Ibid., 213.
[257] Ibid., 213.
[258] Ibid., 215.
[259] Johnson, "Recognizing Vladimir Nabokov's Legacy in Science," 149-61.

views on science, rejecting strict reductionism and emphasizing the importance of subjective human experience in scientific inquiry. He argued that the observer's consciousness and awareness inevitably influence scientific observations. Therefore, Godunov's reflections on species and speciation in "Father's Butterflies" can be interpreted as a manifestation of Nabokov's philosophical stance on the role of human cognition in scientific investigations and the subjective nature of scientific observation.

Nabokov's deep fascination with butterflies instilled in him a profound reverence for the natural world. His exploration of butterflies led him to recognize the complexities and enigmatic nature of existence, juxtaposed with the limitations of human cognition. According to Nabokov, the world unfolds as "an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms," suggesting an ever-elusive reality beyond human comprehension.[260] Informed by his studies of butterflies, Nabokov exhibited a preference for the periphery over the central, the obscure over the obvious, and the exceptional over the conventional. This orientation may have been influenced by philosophical traditions such as Daoism and Zhuangzi from East Asian cultures, where similar themes of embracing the mysterious and unconventional are prevalent. Specializing particularly in the Blues among butterflies, Nabokov's extensive collection and study hinted at his belief in a deeper mystery underlying the world. His reflections on butterflies suggested to him the possibility of consciousness transcending death, hinting at the existence of a soul that persists beyond mortal life—an idea resonant with notions of immortality.

The Greek word for butterfly, "psyche," also means soul, drawing a profound symbolic connection between butterflies and the human soul. This association has been reflected in the naming of prominent lepidopterological journals like *Psyche*, which directly translates to "butterfly, moth and soul" in Greek.[261] The transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly parallels the journey of the soul, suggesting themes of metamorphosis and rebirth. This process symbolizes profound spiritual growth and renewal, akin to the soul's journey after death. In Greek mythology, butterflies are further linked to concepts of love and beauty. Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, is occasionally depicted alongside butterflies, underscoring their association with aesthetic and romantic ideals. In the mythological tale of Psyche and Eros, Psyche—meaning soul—is often portrayed with butterfly wings. This imagery reinforces the butterfly's symbolic role as representative of the soul's journey, emphasizing themes of love, transformation, and the eternal nature of the soul's evolution. Thus, across cultures and

[260] Nabokov. *Strong Opinions*, 11.
[261] Nabokov, "Father's Butterflies," 20.

mythologies, butterflies continue to evoke profound spiritual and existential themes, connecting the physical and metaphysical realms through their symbolism.

In East Asian cultures, particularly in China and Japan, butterflies hold deep symbolic meanings rooted in transformation, life cycles, and spiritual beliefs. The complete metamorphosis of a butterfly—from egg to caterpillar to chrysalis and finally to butterfly—is often seen as a metaphor for the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Consequently, the butterfly symbolizes immortality and the enduring nature of the soul. In many East Asian traditions, butterflies are believed to carry the souls of the departed. Spotting a butterfly is often interpreted as a spiritual sign that a deceased loved one is sending a message or remains present in some ethereal form, bringing comfort and reassurance to the living. Moreover, butterflies are intertwined with themes of love and romance in East Asian cultures. In Chinese tradition, the image of two butterflies together symbolizes a harmonious and blissful union, reflecting the belief in the enduring bond of love. In Japanese culture, butterflies represent ephemeral beauty and the transient nature of life. They are admired for their delicate and fleeting existence, serving as a reminder to cherish the present moment and appreciate the fleeting beauty of life itself. Butterflies in East Asian cultures embody profound spiritual, emotional, and philosophical concepts, illustrating the interconnectedness of life, nature, and the human experience through their symbolic representations.

Nabokov's study of butterflies extends to various cultural and philosophical dimensions, including references to Japanese haiku and Chinese and Japanese symbolism. Notably, Nabokov quoted an obscure Japanese haiku about butterflies in his notebook, a reflection of his interest in both biology and poetics. Andrew Field suggested a possible connection to Hirohito, citing their shared interests,[262] but Ahun'ichiro Akikusa argued for Lafcadio Hearn's influence, highlighting their shared multicultural backgrounds and fascination with insects. Hearn's best and final work, *Kwaidan* (*Ghost Stories*, 1904) featured stories about butterflies and insects, drawing on Asian legends and Zhuangzi's philosophical ideas, including the famous butterfly dream.[263] In this dream, Zhuangzi pondered whether he was a man dreaming of being a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming of being a man, touching on themes of identity and perception that resonated with Nabokov's philosophical explorations. Nabokov mentioned the

[262] Andrew Field, *The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (London: Macdonald, Queen Anne Press, 1987), 38.
[263] Ahun'ichiro Akikusa, "Nabokov and Hearn: Where the Transatlantic Imagination Meets the Transpacific Imagination," in Brian Boyd and Marijeta Bozovic, eds., *Nabokov Upside Down* (Northwestern University Press, 2017), 157.

Zhuangzi episode in his lecture as well as in *Ada*.[264] In Japanese and Chinese cultures, butterflies symbolize the soul of a departed person, representing rebirth and transcendence beyond death. This symbolism aligns with Nabokov's broader exploration of butterflies as carriers of spiritual and existential themes, reflecting his deep engagement with Eastern philosophies and cultural symbols in his literary and scientific pursuits.

The cultural resonance of butterflies' symbolism across Greek and East Asian cultures highlights profound universal themes and shared human experiences. The butterfly's transformative journey serves as a powerful metaphor for metamorphosis and transformation that resonates universally. Themes such as rebirth, immortality, and the journey of the soul are intrinsic to this symbolism, reflecting fundamental aspects of the human condition. The shared meaning of butterflies underscores the existence of archetypes—universal symbols deeply embedded in the collective unconscious of humanity. These archetypes manifest across diverse mythologies and cultures, transcending specific cultural boundaries. The butterfly, as an archetype, taps into these deeper layers of the human psyche, offering a symbolic language that communicates about life and existence, regardless of cultural or geographical differences.

Nabokov uses Godunov's alternative theory of species to critique Darwinian theory for overemphasizing natural selection, excluding divine or higher intelligence in speciation, and underestimating the link between nature and the human mind. Godunov's theory highlighted gaps in Darwinian evolution and stressed the role of metaphysical influences and human consciousness in species' development. Nabokov connected butterflies to themes of transcending death and the soul's journey, finding inspiration in Greek and East Asian philosophies. Nabokov's exploration through Godunov's theory enriched our understanding of species evolution, blending scientific critique with poetic insights and cultural reflections.

2.5 Engaging Russian Darwinian Debate Within and Beyond the Novel

Nabokov uses rhetorical strategies to increase the novels' scientific engagement, generate his critical commentary on the validity of Darwinian evolution, and engage extensively with Russian debates on Darwinian evolutionary theory.

2.5.1 Allusive References to Russian Darwinian Debate

[264] Akikusa, "Nabokov and Hearn", 161.

An allusion is a rhetorical device in which an object or circumstance from a related context is referred to indirectly. As Dieter E. Zimmer suggests, over fifty scientists' names are mentioned or implied in *The Gift*.[265] Among these allusions, one of the most prominent Russian scientists mentioned in the novel in relation to Darwinian theory is Nikolay Gavrilovich. The fictitious character Nikolay is highly suggestive of the real-world figure Nikolai Kholodkovskii, an evolutionary biologist from the early twentieth century who actively engaged in Russian debates about Darwin's legacy. There are several reasons why Nabokov chose Kholodkovskii for this allusion. Blackwell proposes that both Nabokov and Kholodkovskii shared a distaste for utilitarian Darwinism and conducted butterfly classification based on male genitalia.[266] Nabokov uses the allusion to Kholodkovskii not only to highlight their similar preference for aesthetics and their distaste for utilitarianism but also to engage with Russian Darwinian thought and the debates about Darwin's legacy.

Darwinism exerted significant influence in Russia. As Vucinich states: "In the Russia of the 1860s, Darwinism was widely accepted as an idea giving unity to all the sciences of life, a new philosophical orientation, and a call to social action."[267] In *The Gift*, the character who fiercely criticizes Fyodor's biography of Chernyshevsky is Professor Anuchin, whose resemblance to Dmitrii Nikolaevich Anuchin is made clear.[268] Anuchin was a distinguished Russian geographer, anthropologist, ethnographer, and influential Darwinian. He asserted that Darwinian theory changed biology and other branches of science and thought.[269] In Russia, attitudes towards Darwin's legacy were diverse. Aside from the pro-Darwinian perspective represented by Vucinich, many anti-Darwinians and biologists shared Nabokov's doubts about Darwin's theory. Gould notes: "A Nabokovian style of doubt remained quite common among evolutionary biologists, particularly among taxonomists immersed in the study of anatomical detail and geographic variation."[270] Through these allusions we can glimpse the complexity of the biological debate between Darwinism, anti-Darwinism, and neo-Darwinism in Russia.

In *The Gift*, Nabokov includes biographical information about Kholodkovskii to describe Nikolay Gavrilovich, the biographer of Godunov. In reality, Kholodkovskii was a specialist in entomology with a talent for literature, having translated Goethe's *Faust* and received the Pushkin Prize. Nikolay Gavrilovich is portrayed as a genius with exceptional literary talent

[265] Zimmer, *A Guide to Nabokov s Butterflies and Moths*, 350.
[266] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 40.
[267] Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture, 1861-1917*, 104.
[268] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 40.
[269] D. N. Anuchin, "Stoletie so dnia rozhdeniia Ch. Darvina," *Russkie vedomosti*, 1 February 1909, 3-4.
[270] Gould, "No Science Without Fancy, No Art Without Facts," 94.

from childhood. During his student days, Gavrilovich excelled in his studies and even copied out Feuerbach's maxim, "Man is what he eats" (433). His early writing exercises included strong sentences like, "Obey your sovereign, honour him and submit to his laws" (429). By sixteen, he had a good command of English, German, and seminary Latin, enabling him to read works by Byron, Eugène Sue, and Goethe. Gavrilovich is depicted as a well-rounded individual with a fine taste for literature. The narrator considers Nikolai Gavrilovich a "superb critic—penetrating, honest, brave" with a "vast, versatile mind" and "enormous, creative willpower" (401). Gavrilovich expresses his contempt for clichéd literature: "Is it surprising that the seamstress endowed with good looks little by little slackens her moral principles" (468). These descriptions of Gavrilovich in the novel suggest Nabokov's admiration for Kholodkovskii in real life. Kholodkovskii's dual identity as an evolutionary biologist and translator reinforces the interaction of art and science in the novel. Nabokov, who also shared a dual identity as a biologist and writer, had a similar preference for aesthetics. However, they differed in their attitudes toward Darwinian theory and the role of metaphysical dimensions in science.

2.5.2 To Reveal or Fulfill the Gaps in Darwinism

Nabokov and Kholodkovskii both recognized the limitations of natural selection, yet they approached Darwinian theory in different ways. Kholodkovskii aimed to refine Darwinian natural selection by incorporating new scientific discoveries to address gaps and unanswered questions within Darwinism. In contrast, Nabokov had no intention of bolstering the validity of Darwinism. Unlike Kholodkovskii, who excluded metaphysical considerations from biology, Nabokov embraced the integration of metaphysics into science.

Nabokov and Kholodkovskii had different attitudes towards the Darwinian survival principle. Knipovich believed that the Darwinian "struggle for existence" is "the most general model of biological relations, embracing the entire organic world. There is not a single organism that stands outside that struggle."[271] Nabokov agreed with the Darwinian theory that species evolve due to environmental pressures, but he was dissatisfied with its overly practical aspects. He emphasized that Darwinian theory should not be taken as a formula to explain all natural phenomena. For Nabokov, the aesthetics and creativity of nature highlighted the limitations of utilitarianism. In his *Lecture on Literature*, Nabokov stated, "we are all ready to

[271] Alexander Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 324.

accept evolution at least as a modal formula…it is one thing to try and find the links and steps of life, and it is quite another to try and understand what life and the phenomenon of inspiration are."[272] This statement shows that although Nabokov agreed with the basic principle of Darwinism, he insisted that evolution is too complex to be explained solely in utilitarian terms.

Though Kholodkovskii shared a similar distaste for utilitarianism with Nabokov, he did not challenge Darwinian theory but rather proposed ways to refine and improve it. Like Nabokov, Kholodkovskii suggested that natural selection should not be seen as "the only or almost the only factor responsible for such a complex phenomenon as organic development."[273] He argued that natural selection is a controlling force "but not a creative one: it concerns itself, so to speak, with the expediency of changes within organisms; it does not create those changes."[274] For Kholodkovskii, natural selection might lack "any explanation for the appearance of the first variations that underwent Natural Selection."[275] Kholodkovskii contended that Darwin's and Weismann's neo-Darwinian theories overemphasized natural selection. However, he supported Weismann's neo-Darwinian theory of heredity, particularly the concepts of "the continuity of the germplasm" and "the all-sufficiency of natural selection."[276] Kholodkovskii viewed Weismann as a strong defender of Darwinism, noting that neo-Darwinists seemed "more ardent Darwinists than Darwin himself."[277] He pointed out that the strength of Weismann's theory lay in its foundation for investigating heredity as a fundamental mechanism of organic evolution. However, he observed that the theory was too conceptually structured to be easily tested in empirical research.[278] Kholodkovskii highlighted the limitations of natural selection not to undermine Darwinian theory but to propose ways to strengthen its validity.

Both Nabokov and Kholodkovskii recognized that Darwin left some fundamental questions unanswered, but they approached these gaps in Darwinism with different attitudes. Nabokov viewed these unanswered questions as evidence to doubt the overall validity of Darwinian theory. He maintained a critical distance and had no intention to improve or advocate for Darwinism. In contrast, Kholodkovskii, a devoted Darwinist, embraced a more open attitude toward exploring various biological approaches within Darwinism. Kholodkovskii accepted the foundational principles of Darwin's theory, rejecting neo-vitalism and psychological

[272] Nabokov, *Lecture on Literature*, 378.
[273] Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought*, 276.
[274] Nikolai Kholodkovskii, *Biologicheskie ocherki* (Moscow: n.p., 1923), 135.
[275] Kholodkovskii, *Biologicheskie ocherki*, 136.
[276] Ibid., 136.
[277] Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought,* 165.
[278] Ibid., 166.

interpretations involved in metaphysical speculation. He favored the integration of Darwinism with experimental studies of heredity. Kholodkovskii believed that Darwinism's strength lay in its broad scope, concise concepts, and solid empirical foundation. While cautiously optimistic about Darwinism, he asserted that no other theory could replace its dominance in evolutionary biology. Observing the evolving trends in biology during the 1890s, Kholodkovskii noted the shift from phylogenetic morphology to more advanced experimental approaches in evolutionary biology by 1899. He recognized the need to integrate other scientific theories to enhance Darwinian theory. Kholodkovskii was particularly optimistic about experimental biology, which explored physiological evolution and environmental influences on evolution. He also pointed out that advancements in morphology could provide new insights into both the strengths and weaknesses of Darwinian theory. For instance, Kholodkovskii critiqued Darwin for focusing on variation without addressing its origin, a gap he believed experimental biologists could fill through studies of heredity. He remained open to exploring complementary biological theories alongside Darwinism, seeing them as potential enhancements rather than replacements.

2.5.3 To Include or Exclude Metaphysics from Biology

Apart from their differing views on addressing gaps within Darwinism, Nabokov and Kholodkovskii also held contrasting perspectives on the role of metaphysics in biology: Nabokov embraced the inclusion of metaphysical considerations in scientific inquiry, whereas Kholodkovskii opposed metaphysical interference with biological research. Nabokov's philosophical and metaphysical foundation influenced his scepticism toward utilitarian-oriented Darwinism. Scholars such as Kurt Johnson and Steve Coates observe that Nabokov conducted his scientific work in the 1940s, a period when the neo-Darwinian synthesis was not fully developed. They suggest that if Nabokov had worked later, he might have been more open to accepting natural selection. However, Brian Boyd argues that Nabokov "was too emotionally attached to a top-down explanation for existence to have accepted Darwinism."[279] I agree with Remington's assessment that "Nabokov had such a strong metaphysical investment in his challenge to natural selection that he might have rejected the evolutionary conclusions for his

[279] Boyd, "Review of Dieter E. Zimmer, A Guide to Nabokov's Butterflies and Moths 2001," 219.

satisfaction."[280] In contrast, Kholodkovskii welcomed the integration of Darwinian theory with other scientific theories but rejected the involvement of neo-vitalism in evolution.

The divergence between Nabokov and Kholodkovskii regarding the inclusion of metaphysics in science can be understood within the broader intellectual debate between mechanism and vitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Vitalism posited that living organisms differ fundamentally from non-living entities because they possess a non-physical element or are governed by principles distinct from those governing inanimate matter.[281] Some equated this vital element with the concept of a soul. Vitalists argued that living phenomena could not be fully explained by empirical evidence and mechanical processes alone. In the twentieth century, neovitalism found support amidst a resurgence of metaphysical inquiry in philosophy and growing resistance to purely mechanical principles in science. Neovitalism emerged from both philosophical and scientific domains, with Henri Bergson's concept of élan vital and Hans Driesch's notion of entelechy proposing integrating life forces beyond mere mechanistic explanations. Nabokov sympathized with certain neovitalist principles, favouring teleology over strict causality, internal influences over external ones, and holistic perspectives over atomistic ones.[282] In contrast, Kholodkovskii opposed neovitalism, arguing that it diverged significantly from Weismann's theory, which not only complemented but also extended Darwin's emphasis on natural selection's primary role in evolution.[283] He believed neovitalism could undermine Darwinism by introducing metaphysical concepts such as Driesch's entelechy, rooted in Aristotelian thought, which he deemed unsuitable for biological study. Kholodkovskii maintained that teleology, a philosophical notion, should remain distinct from natural scientific inquiry.[284] Thus, while Nabokov leaned towards neovitalist preferences for teleology, Kholodkovskii emphasized the causal mechanisms of Darwinism and advocated integrating other scientific theories to enhance rather than detract from its validity.

In *The Gift*, Nabokov's allusions serve a deeper purpose beyond mere wordplay: they enrich the novel's scientific discourse, reflect on Darwinian natural selection, and engage with Russian debates on Darwinism's legacy. Nabokov's remarks and writings demonstrate that he does not outright reject Darwinism; instead, he navigates between cautiously supporting Darwin's ideas and offering moderate criticism. Nabokov acknowledges Darwin's profound

[280] Remington, "Lepidoptera Studies," 282.
[281] William Bechtel and Robert C. Williamson, "Vitalism," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Craig (Routledge, 1998).
[282] Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought,* 170.
[283] Ibid., 166.
[284] Ibid., 173.

impact on our understanding of nature and society, yet he also identifies gaps and errors in Darwin's theory, emphasizing both its validity and limitations.

Summary

This chapter explores the interaction between art and biology in Nabokov's *The Gift* and "Father's Butterflies" from three perspectives. Firstly, Nabokov, through characters in the novel, acknowledges Darwinism's validity as a basic framework while revealing its inherent flaws, missing gaps, and exceptional cases. Nabokov revalues the limitations of Darwinism, including its omission of divine intervention, higher intelligence, and aesthetic and moral laws in nature and human society. However, Nabokov refrains from formalizing his alternative evolutionary ideas into a structured theoretical framework, opting instead to explore them through literature rather than scientific journals. Nabokov does not aim to challenge the power of science outright; rather, he questions the perceived omnipotence of scientific claims and calls for readers to adopt a cautious and critical attitude towards well-established scientific theories. Nabokov's motivation to write these novels was to show how aesthetics and matters of structure can function in non-utilitarian ways. For instance, through the characters and narrators in *The Gift*, he presents the idea that evolution does not need to operate solely through motivated natural selection but can also function neutrally. Mimicry does not evolve merely for survival but can also exist for aesthetic beauty. Similarly, species do not need to be concrete entities in nature but can function conceptually in our minds.

Secondly, Nabokov's concept of coincidence in mimicry resonates with contemporary theories of neutral evolution, which suggest that development occurs intermittently rather than continuously. He emphasizes instances where survival and reproductive advantage are absent, thereby challenging Darwinian natural selection. Nabokov explores mimicry by considering coincidental mechanisms that may influence evolutionary paths. A notable idea he introduces is that function is not strictly predetermined or teleological, but involves unpredictable, coincidental, and creative impacts on evolution. His examination enriches the theme of chance by intertextually referencing Pushkin's verses on the subject. This theme of chance serves multiple purposes: it challenges deterministic views of Darwinian natural selection, highlights overlooked coincidences in nature, and illustrates Nabokov's observations of neutral evolution.

Thirdly, Nabokov's engagement with species in his novel reflects a distinct aesthetic perspective favoring intuition over reason. Influenced by Greek and East Asian thought, particularly Daoism and Zhuangzi, Nabokov integrates these philosophies into both his

scientific research and literary pursuits. His exploration reveals resonance and inspiration drawn from Greek and East Asian stories and philosophies, particularly in their shared symbolism attributed to butterflies, which underscores the presence of archetypes in the collective unconscious. These archetypes, recurring themes in mythology and culture, signify shared meanings that resonate across diverse societies and beliefs. This chapter examines *The Gift* as a case of scientific encoding that expands readers' perception and sense-making. Nabokov's dual passion for literature and lepidopterology exemplifies a unique convergence of art and science in his life and work, where his observations in the natural world inform his scientific contributions and enrich the substance and style of his literary creations.

Chapter 3 "Texture of Time": Purified Time, Reversible Time and Parallel Time in *Ada*

Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle is considered one of Nabokov's significant late works, created after his move from America to Switzerland.[1] This narrative satirizes family chronicles by depicting an incestuous love affair between Ada and Van from childhood to old age. Part Four, titled "The Texture of Time," features Van's theoretical exploration of time. While the novel's treatment of time has received substantial critical attention, there has been limited scholarly focus on Nabokov's artistic engagement with emerging paradigms of new physics and philosophical debates on temporality. Particularly overlooked is an analysis of how Van's treatise intersects with the novel's broader narrative themes and structures.

This chapter explores Nabokov's nuanced representations and experiments with time in *Ada*, particularly in relation to advancements in New Physics, including theories of relativity and quantum mechanics. It unfolds through three main perspectives: firstly, it elucidates Nabokov's use of literary techniques to convey Van's unconventional notions of de-spatialized, purified, and perceptual time, exploring the power and paradox inherent in such conceptualizations. Secondly, it examines Nabokov's wordplay to suggest the possibility of reverse time, providing insights into the narrative complexities and philosophical implications of temporal reversibility within the novel. Lastly, the analysis evaluates Nabokov's portrayal of the twin planets Terra and Antiterra, exploring how he uses this dual planetary system to construct a multilevel universe characterized by asymmetrical temporality. Through these perspectives, the chapter aims to illuminate the interplay between narrative structure and the conceptual frameworks of new physics, shedding light on the profound thematic resonances and intellectual depth of Nabokov's treatment of time in *Ada*.

In exploring Nabokov's aesthetics of temporality in *Ada*, three interconnected points emerge: Firstly, "The Texture of Time" in *Ada* extends beyond being a mere episode, its thematic significance intricately woven into the narrative fabric. Van uses his exploration of unconventional time to rationalize his unconventional incestuous affair with Ada. Similarly, he glorifies his affair with Ada to bolster his bold assertion about the highly perceptible texture of time. For Van, both his concept of time and his incestuous relationship with Ada represent acts of rebellion against convention, offering pathways to freedom, aesthetic and intellectual

[1] Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969; rpt. London: Penguin, 1971). Subsequent page references to this edition are cited in parentheses in the text.

fulfillment. These narrative and character choices are instrumental to Nabokov's project of exploring how science and aesthetics can relate to each other. Secondly, Nabokov uses Van's concepts of pure, sensual and de-spatialized time to challenge conventional notions of causally sequenced temporality. Drawing inspiration from Einstein and Bergson, Nabokov engages poetically with philosophical inquiries on time, crafting a rich tapestry of temporal exploration that stretches narrative conventions. Lastly, Nabokov subtly explores themes of reversible time, multilevel universes, parallel realities, and alternate dimensions, evoking the multi-worlds interpretation of quantum theory. *Ada* serves as Nabokov's implicit engagement with New Physics, presenting and experimenting with time as both a response to and a challenge against conventional temporalities. Through *Ada*, Nabokov liberates himself artistically from the constraints of conventional time, navigating intersections between fiction, new physics, and modern philosophy. It invites readers to contemplate temporality's multifaceted nature amid the evolving landscapes of physics, philosophy, and human understanding.

3.1 *Ada* and "The Texture of Time"

3.1.1 Literary Review and Temporal Theme of *Ada*

In *Ada*, Nabokov weaves an incestuous love affair between Ada and Van, spanning from their childhood to their twilight years, culminating in their peaceful demise together in their late nineties. The narrative devotes significant attention to Ada and Van's formative years, detailing their summers in 1884 and 1888, a shared winter in 1892, and a pivotal week in 1905. It was not until 1922 that they reunited to embark on a lifelong companionship. Van dedicated six years to crafting the initial draft from 1957 to 1963. Subsequently, he meticulously revised the manuscript over the following two years, ultimately dictating the final version to his secretary, Violet Knox, in 1967. In *Ada*, Nabokov utilizes the framework of a family chronology as a vehicle for profound philosophical contemplation on the nature of time and the vicissitudes of age.

Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to Van's theoretical exploration of time and its aesthetic implications within the novel. Critics such as David Wood posit that after a prolonged linguistic turn, there is "a spiralling return to time as the focus and horizon of all our thought and experience."[2] Wood, after setting out the philosophical underpinnings of Nietzsche,

[2] David Wood, *The Deconstruction of Time* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), xxxv.

Husserl, Heidegger, and Derrida, proposes a reading of the novel that underscores the potential for a nonlinear and multifaceted temporality, emphasizing the importance of a sense of futurity for the "ethic-rational life."[3] In "Broken Dates: Proust, Nabokov and Modern Time," Michael Wood compares Nabokov's time treatment with Proust, Virginia Woolf and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Wood contends that time emerges as Nabokov's "least digestible theme," highlighting Nabokov's distinctive approach to temporal concepts.[4] Wood introduces a valuable distinction between two modes of temporal engagement: time as a subject of analysis, often discussed in the past tense, and time as an active practice, experienced in the present tense and imbued with subjective qualities. This framework offers a useful lens through which to explore Nabokov's treatment of time as a topic and practice in *Ada*.

In *Dying for Time*, Martin Hägglund evaluates the interplay between time and space in *Ada*, asserting that writing serves a dual function, as "an inscription of memory, a trace of the past that spatializes time" and as a function "left for the future" which "thereby marks a movement that temporalizes space."[5] Hägglund takes *Ada* to illustrate his theory of *chronolibido*, which elucidates the driving force of desire within the text and offers insight into his conception of the present moment. Hägglund argues the present is not an inherent entity but rather emerges from the interplay between the fading of the past and the anticipation of the future. Norman Page, in *Nabokov, History, and the Texture of Time*, explores the historical time within *Ada*, revealing Nabokov's crafting of a "Cold War pastoral" and his anti-communist stance, his distaste for the counterculture movement and the Vietnam protests in the 1960s.[6] Page argues that Nabokov's retreat from social and political engagement in Switzerland does not preclude the presence of historical time in his works from this period. These scholarly analyses deepen our understanding of *Ada*'s temporal aesthetics and significance.

3.1.2 Coherent Structure or Indeterminate Paradigm

Ada has been a battlefield over which debates have ensued about how to read Nabokov. One group of critics see this late-career novel as a deftly structured text that can be approached based on Nabokov's intentions. They seek a structural principle capable of accounting for the

[3] Wood, *The Deconstruction of Time*, 379.
[4] Michael Wood, "Broken Dates: Proust, Nabokov and Modern Time," in *Nabokov's World, I: The Shape of Nabokov's World,* ed. Jane Grayson, Arnold McMillin and Priscilla Meyer (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave, with School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 2002), 156-170.
[5] Hägglund, *Dying for Time*, 18.
[6] Norman, *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time*, 130.

internal coherence of the novel. The group is represented by Brian Boyd, Carl R. Proffer, Vladimir Alexandrov and Robert Alter. Carl R. Proffer examines brilliant language, elegant style, elaborate verbal puzzles and literary allusions in his *A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov*.[7] In *Nabokov's Otherworld,* Alexandrov investigates the paradigmatic relationship between metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics in Nabokov's works. He argues that Nabokov's metaphysics was inseparable from his ethics and aesthetics, with these three dimensions "understood as names for a single continuum of beliefs, not for separate categories of Nabokov's interests."[8] Brian Boyd conducts a detailed analysis of *Ada* and argues that *Ada* was not only one of the most rigorously planned novels: "Every flurry and twist proves to form part of a demanding critique of the moral responsibilities of consciousness and a mysterious, lucid and satisfying exploration of time, consciousness and beyond."[9] Boyd is also the editor of AdaOnline, which provides hypertextual annotations of the novel.[10] Boyd makes great efforts to uncover Nabokov's intention by reference to allusions and annotations, which "combine to suggest a behind-the-scenes timelessness."[11] Boyd's readings of *Ada* posit the importance of metaphysical themes in the plot and narrative while excluding other possible prominent themes.

Other critics see Nabokov's late novels as indeterminate or imperfect paradigms of postmodern fiction. They try to locate *Ada* in the context of postmodern fictional practices and post-structuralism. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth takes digressive plays and language in *Ada* to demonstrate how the novel "seeks to expand our possible reality by rescuing us and our language from the narrow conceptions to which historical habits of thinking have increasingly confined it."[12] Further, some critics think *Ada* is deficient because of artistic flaws, moral irresponsibility and loose structure. Mary McCarthy says her dislike of *Ada* even made her consider recanting her rapturous appraisal of *Pale Fire*. [13] I suggest that the two approaches are not contradictory; *Ada* exhibits a typical feature in Nabokov's late works, the coexistence of modernist textual mastery and postmodernist indeterminacy. This scholarship stresses that time in *Ada* plays a crucial role behind Nabokov's temporal aesthetics.

Many critics view *Ada* as Nabokov's detachment from social and political realities. However, scholarly attention has been lacking in exploring how Nabokov creatively

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[7] Carl R. Proffer, *A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1974).
[8] Alexandrov, *Nabokov's Otherworld*, 5.
[9] Boyd, *Nabokov's Ada*, II.
[10] http://www.ada.auckland.ac.nz/
[11] Boyd, "Nabokov, Time and Timelessness: A Reply to Martin Hägglund," 470.
[12] Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 40.
[13] Mary McCarthy, "A Bolt from the Blue," *The New York Review of Books*, 22 July 1971.

incorporates new scientific discoveries into the narrative. In effect, Nabokov kept an eye on the advancement of New Physics, applied scientific concepts and metaphors from physics to his works, and even made claims about physics findings and their relevance to art. He considered the terminological interchange appropriate since "I certainly welcome the free interchange of terminology between any branch of science and any raceme of art."[14] The artistic entanglements with modern physics often contribute to Nabokov's scientific inquiry. To Nabokov, the modern physics of relativity appears to resemble metaphysics.

Nabokov constructs three modes of temporal aesthetics in *Ada*: first, time is taken as an artistic topic, discussed and explored by the narrator Van, especially in his "Texture of Time". Second, time is addressed as a narrative structure by which the narrator recounts Van's experience, especially his incestuous affair with *Ada*. Van's notion of time is closely related to the circular narrative structure of *Ada*. At the outset of Van's treatise on time, he connects his recalling of Ada's affair with his current exploration of time. During the treatise, Van integrates the abstract notion of pure time with the concrete love story between Ada and Van. After presenting his view of pure time, Van would return to the original state, "just as gradually reversing analogies and disintegrating again into bland abstraction" (797). Third, time is deemed a cognitive practice and a psychological mechanism closely related to memory and consciousness. In *Ada*, Nabokov addresses time as a subject of inquiry, a structural element, and a practice imbued with subjective qualities.

3. 2 Nabokov, New Physics and Modern Philosophy

3.2.1 Nabokov, Einstein and Relativity Theory

Nabokov has an intense interest in modern physics and its influence on popular culture and literary practice. Despite Nabokov claiming that he did not believe in Albert Einstein's "slick formulae", some of Nabokov's lectures and early novels reveal his interest in the advances of relativity.[15] According to Andrew Crommelin, Arthur Eddington's observation of solar gravity on a distant star's light during an eclipse affirmed relativity theory in 1919.[16] The results showed that the star's light was bent the predicted amount by the sun's gravity, and the finding

[14] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 79.
[15] Ibid., 116.
[16] Andrew Claude de la Cherois Crommelin, "Results of the Total Solar Eclipse of May 29 and the Relativity Theory," *Science* 50.1301 (1919): 518-20.

upended the world of physics. Relativity theory undermined Newton's theory of gravitation and laws of mechanics, which dominated the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It also overthrew René Descartes' dualistic structure of reality that influenced scientific reasoning since the seventeenth century. Einstein proposed that the space-time continuum is finite but unlimited and curved, and the mass transforms into energy when the quadrate of the light speed is reached. There was much discussion on relativity and its philosophical implications from various perspectives.[17] New Physics became a cultural sensation and spread widely among artists. Nabokov likely had many opportunities to read about relativity and was probably familiar with its principles and ideas. His art was influenced and inspired by the concepts and ideas of modern physics.

Nabokov's attitude towards physics underwent a significant change. In the 1920s and 1930s, Nabokov incorporated relativity-related themes into his lectures and novels. For instance, in Nabokov's lectures on Tolstoy, Nabokov proposes that Anna and Vronsky's love makes their clocks move faster, which can allude to relativity theory. *Mary* (1926) begins with the narrator Ganin's contemplation of time in an elevator scene and ends with the juxtaposition of two train journeys. Ganin abandons the train arriving in Berlin and chooses the other train to depart not only Berlin but also his past. In *King, Queen, Knave*, the narrator refers to a travelling clock with "its concept of time." [18] In "Father's Butterflies", the protagonist links speciation to atomic and solar-system structures. These narratives demonstrate that Nabokov is fascinated with new physics and their breakthrough discovery. However, the allusions to physics are mainly presented in relation to Nabokov's explorations of time and memory.

In the 1940s, Nabokov took a particular interest in the nature and structure of the universe. In his lectures on the works of Anton Chekhov, Nabokov indicated that he was aware of recent advances in subatomic theory: "We get a world of waves instead of particles of matter, which, incidentally, is a nearer approach to the modern scientific understanding of the universe."[19] In Nabokov's lecture on tragedy, he pointed out tragedy's overdependence on causality or devices of cause and effect, which functioned as a "clockwork toy made in Greece that little children wind up and then follow on all fours."[20] In the 1950s and 1960s, time was not only a thematic

[17] Ronald W. Clark, *Einstein: The Life and Times* (New York: World Pub. Co., 1971).
[18] Vldimir Nabokov, *King, Queen, Knave* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 118.
[19] Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, 262.
[20] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Man from the USSR and Other Plays* (San Diego: Bruccoli Clark/HBJ, 1984), 327.

strategy but also a theme itself. In *Ada*, there is a whole chapter on the texture of time. Nabokov comments in *Ada* that Van "distinguishes between text and texture, between the contents of time and its almost tangible essence. I ignore that distinction in my *Speak, Memory* and was mainly concerned with being faithful to the patterns of my past."[21] The treatment of physics in his novels shows that Nabokov has an ever-increasing interest in new physics, and physics has changed from a narrative strategy to the main focus and theme.

3.2.2 Nabokov, Quantum Theory and Uncertainty Principle

Besides relativity, Nabokov was alert to Max Planck's theory of subatomic structure and de Broglie's wave nature of matter. Planck's study on heat and electromagnetic radiation illustrates that quanta, or energy at the atomic level, can unify wavelength, frequency, and power, thereby validating the discontinuous nature of reality. Louis-Victor de Broglie proposed that light manifests as a wave and a particle. This wave nature of matter drew the attention of scientists; as James Jeans stated, "We are beginning to suspect that we live in a universe of waves, and nothing but waves."[22] Erwin Schrödinger takes the analogy of light to posit that matter is simultaneously a wave and a particle. Theories of a subatomic structure and wave nature inspired Nabokov to form a new understanding of matter.

Nabokov was interested in Werner Heisenberg's quantum theory and the uncertainty principle. Heisenberg synthesizes Schrödinger's wave mechanics and Copenhagen's interpretation of quantum mechanics to formulate his uncertainty principle. For Heisenberg, the discontinuous subatomic process leads to uncontrollable alteration between observer and object where it is impossible to determine the exact position and velocity of subatomic particles simultaneously, and thus accurately describe reality. Heisenberg refutes the mechanism of causality in two ways: first, by demonstrating a lack of evidence for invisible causal connections; second, by asserting that no single experiment has proven the uncertainty principle to be incomplete.[23] The quantum interpretations and the uncertainty principle affect our understanding of how we relate to the world and the connections between art and science.

The New Physics completely transformed the understanding of time and space, the constitution of matter, and its interchangeable nature with energy. This directly affected how

[21] Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*,121.
[22] James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 48.
[23] Menas Kafatos and Robert Nadeau, *The Conscious Universe: Part and Whole in Modern Physical Theory* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990).

writers and artists understood their world, revising conventional notions of matter and duration. This revolution in physics also bore outsized social and political effects in time, with the development of nuclear technology and rapid advancements in electronics. Artists incorporated the new paradigm into their interpretation of the world and textual production, as Manuel Garcia Viñó demonstrates in "Relativist and Quantum Novel: Materials for the Construction of a Theory Applicable to Other Arts."[24] Writers used new physical theories in their creations, and critics adopt the physical concept in their evaluation. In *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism*, Daniel Albright uses quantum poetry, a mode of poetry based on a pattern of waves and particles, to describe the modernist poetry of W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot. [25] Albright proposes that the textuality of a poem resembles a quantum structure, in which the whole influences the parts, yet the elements simultaneously shape the whole. In this sense, the poem's meaning depends not only on the observer but also on the quantum state of the text.

Nabokov's engagement with the New Physics reflects his fascination with the evolving understanding of reality and its implications for art and literature. The breakthroughs in quantum mechanics and relativity challenged conventional notions of time, space, and causality, deeply resonating in Nabokov's work. He was captivated by the idea that reality could be perceived as fluid and perspectival, paralleling the insights of physicists like Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr. Nabokov's distaste for causality and determinism led him to embrace Heisenberg's quantum theory and the uncertainty principle, reinforcing his belief in the inherent subjectivity of observation and the supremacy of the mind over matter. This rejection of deterministic frameworks allowed him to adopt the New Physics principles of indeterminacy, complementarity, and subjectivity. Such a scientific revolution influenced his narrative techniques, prompting him to employ non-linear timelines and fragmented perspectives that reflect the complexities of human experience. In novels like *Ada*, he illustrates time as an elastic construct, where past and present intertwine in a manner that echoes the principles of relativity.[26] His characters grapple with memory and perception, mirroring quantum mechanics' uncertainty principle, which suggest that observation alters reality.[27] By integrating concepts

[24] Manuel García Viñó, "Relativist and Quantum Novel: Materials for the Construction of a Theory Applicable to Other Arts," *Heterodoxia* 22 (1995).
[25] Daniel Albright, *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and the Science of Modernism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[26] Eric Mason, *Nabokov and the New Physics: A Study of Time and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 45.
[27] Michael Wagner, "Quantum Mechanics and the Literature of the Absurd: Nabokov's View of Reality." *Literature and Science Journal*, 10. 2 (2016): 130-139.

from the New Physics into his literary works, Nabokov enriches his storytelling and reconsiders the interplay between science and art. This synthesis of scientific thought and literary creativity underscores his belief in the profound interconnectedness of all forms of understanding.[28] Through this intricate interplay, Nabokov redefines narrative structure and engages with the complexities of reality in ways that transcend traditional boundaries.

3.2.3 Nabokov, Bergson and "Duration"

Besides the New Physics theory of time, Nabokov was influenced by Henri Bergson's philosophy of time and his critique of Einstein. Bergson developed his understanding of time as duration in his *Time and Free Will*, *Matter and Memory*, *Creative Evolution* and *Duration and Simultaneity*. Bergson defines time in terms of perception and argues that new forms are produced as the past and the present merge.[29] Bergson stresses the perceptual dimension of duration and thus proposes that science does not fully grasp time. Given Bergson's popularity in the 1920s and 1930s and his strong consonance with Nabokov, Bergson's notion of time provides Nabokov with some central images and themes in his novels.

Some critics examine Nabokov's treatment of time, drawing connections to Bergson's theories. Leona Toker focuses on the philosophical underpinnings of time and memory as articulated by Bergson in a series of essays, including "Minds Meeting: Bergson, Joyce, Nabokov, and the Aesthetics of the Subliminal,"[30] "Nabokov's Worldview,"[31] "Nabokov and Bergson,"[32] and "Nabokov and Bergson on Duration and Reflexivity."[33] Toker explores how Nabokov incorporates Bergson's ideas into his literary works, particularly in terms of poetic treatment of time and memory. Toker suggests that Nabokov's understanding of time, influenced by Bergson, is not merely chronological but rather a fluid, subjective experience that intertwines with memory. Toker highlights how Nabokov's narrative techniques and

[28] Edward Bishop, *Nabokov and the Interplay of Science and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 78.
[29] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 1944.
[30] Leona Toker, "Minds Meeting: Bergson, Joyce, Nabokov, and the Aesthetics of the Subliminal," in *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism*, ed. Paul Ardoin, S. E. Gontarski and Laci Mattison (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 192-212.
[31] Leona Toker, "Nabokov's Worldview," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov*, ed. Julian W. Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 232-47.
[32] Leona Toker, "Nabokov and Bergson," in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. Vladimir. A. Alexandrov (New York: Garland, 2002), 367-73.
[33] Leona Toker, "Nabokov and Bergson on Duration and Reflexivity," in *Nabokov's World.* Vol. 1, ed. Grayson et al., 132-40.

portrayal of characters' inner worlds resonate with Bergsonian concepts of duration and the subconscious. Laci Mattison's perspective shifts towards ethical aesthetics and intersubjectivity in Nabokov's works, building upon Bergson's philosophical framework. Mattison argues that Nabokov's treatment of space, duration, and intuitive ethics expands upon Bergson's theories.[34] According to Mattison, Nabokov's literary practice enriches our understanding of Bergson's ideas by illustrating ethical dilemmas and subjective experiences through narrative and character development. Mattison's analysis suggests that Nabokov's novels serve as a medium to explore Bergson's concepts in a dynamic manner, particularly in how they relate to the ethical dimensions of human existence.

Tetyana Lyaskovets focuses on Nabokov's artistic representation of time, which she argues challenges and transcends conventional temporal boundaries. Lyaskovets contends that Nabokov's approach to time can be likened to spatial arts like painting and photography, suggesting a visual and multidimensional understanding of temporality. By spatializing time in his narratives, Nabokov, according to Lyaskovets, offers readers a new perspective on how time can be perceived and represented in literature.[35] This interpretation aligns with Bergson's idea of duration as a continuous flow rather than a static succession of moments, thereby demonstrating how Nabokov extends Bergson's theories through the creative medium of fiction. These critics illuminate different facets of how Nabokov engages with Bergson's philosophical ideas. Toker emphasizes the poetic and psychological dimensions of time and memory, Mattison explores ethical and intersubjective implications, while Lyaskovets focuses on the visual and spatial aspects of temporal representation. Their analyses showcase the complexity of Nabokov's engagement with Bergsonian philosophy in his literary works.

Einstein and Bergson, the greatest physicist and one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century, had an encounter and a public debate on the nature of time on 6 April 1922 in Paris. In *The Physicist & the Philosopher*, Jimena Canales describes the debate between Einstein and Bergson in Paris and traces how this debate influenced the intellectual history of the twentieth century.[36] Bergson argued that science could not exhaust our understanding of time. Bergson criticized Einstein's dualistic perspective on time, physical and psychological, as "a metaphysics grafted upon science, it is not science"; Einstein's relativity "pertains to

[34] Laci Mattison, "Nabokov's Aesthetic Bergsonism: An Intuitive, Reperceptualized Time," *Mosaic* 46.1(2013): 37-52.
[35] Tetyana Lyaskovets, "Approaching Nabokov with Bergson on Time: Why Spatializing Time?" *Kaleidoscope* 5.2 (2013): 98-118.
[36] Jimena Canales, *The Physicist & The Philosopher: Einstein, Bergson, and The Debate That Changed Our Understanding of Time* (Princeton University Press, 2015).

epistemology" rather than physics.[37] Bergson associated time with his "vital impulse", which refers to the impulse interwoven throughout the universe, giving life an unstoppable surge, ever productive of new, unexpected creations. Einstein considered Bergson's notion of time a psychological notion irreconcilable with the quantitative time in physics. Einstein showed that we should also abandon the belief that time and space belong to a different entity; instead, space and time are closely linked as dimensions of spacetime. Einstein proposed abandoning faith in objective and absolute conceptions of time since he had "banished this dogma from our minds."[38] For many, Bergson was defeated in the debate, which was seen to be the decline of philosophy and the rise of science as a victory of "rationality" against "intuition."[39] Einstein and Bergson represent two contrasting modes of modern times, the binary opposition between vitalism and mechanization.

Einstein and Bergson represented two dichotomies that characterized modernity. Bergson's understanding of time was associated with his metaphysics and vitalism, and Einstein's idea of time was linked with his physics and rationality. In their later years, particularly following the rise of the Nazi regime and the detonation of the first hydrogen bomb, both Bergson and Einstein came to acknowledge and appreciate the merits of each other's theories. Despite their reconsideration, the debate led to a split or rivalry between science and the humanities, physics and metaphysics, and objectivity and subjectivity.[40] Bergson significantly influenced modern writers, such as T. S. Elliot, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner. Nabokov was no exception; Einstein and Bergson impacted and transformed his understanding of time.

Nabokov's understanding of time reflects a complex interplay between the ideas of Bergson and Einstein, positioning him within the discourse on temporal experience. While Einstein's theory of relativity presents time as a measurable fourth dimension, Bergson critiques this view by advocating for a subjective understanding of time as a flowing, lived experience. Resonating with Bergson, Nabokov emphasizes the qualitative aspects of time that shape human perception and creativity, often portraying it as fluid and fragmented—akin to Bergson's notion of "durée," where the past and present coexist and inform one another. At the same time, he acknowledges Einstein's insights, recognizing the principles of indeterminacy and subjectivity inherent in relativity. However, Nabokov critiques Einstein's objective

[37] Canales, *The Physicist & The Philosopher*, 203.
[38] Hermann Weyl, *Space-Time-Matter* (London: Methuen and Co., 1922), 174.
[39] Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1957), 16.
[40] Canales, *The Physicist & The Philosopher*, vii.

conception of time, arguing that it oversimplifies the complexity of human experience by reducing time to a linear, quantifiable entity. He believes this perspective neglects the richness of subjective perception, memory, and emotional nuances that characterize human life. He advocates for a more holistic understanding that embraces the intricacies of consciousness and the dynamic nature of human existence. This critique reflects his broader philosophical stance, which seeks to reconcile scientific insights with the depths of subjective experience. Nabokov explores the tension between objective measurements of time and subjective experience, suggesting that true understanding lies in the interplay between these contrasting views.

The tension between Bergson and Einstein regarding the nature of time significantly influences Nabokov's engagement with the New Physics, particularly in his literary exploration of temporal experience. While Bergson's notion of "durée" emphasizes the fluid and subjective nature of time, Nabokov adopts this concept to reflect the complexities of human memory and perception. This fluidity enables him to construct non-linear timelines, creating a rich tapestry of interconnected moments that challenge conventional chronological storytelling. Simultaneously, Nabokov acknowledges Einstein's revolutionary ideas, which frame time as a measurable dimension inextricably linked with space. His recognition of relativity's principles, such as indeterminacy and the observer's role in shaping experience, adds depth to his exploration of time. By integrating these scientific ideas, Nabokov not only deepens his literary complexity but also engages in a philosophical inquiry into existence. The interplay between Bergson's philosophical insights and Einstein's scientific principles allows Nabokov to carve out a unique narrative path that transcends traditional storytelling. He positions his characters within a framework where time is not merely a linear progression but a dynamic force that shapes identity and experience. This duality enhances his engagement with the New Physics, enabling him to blend artistic expression with scientific inquiry, inviting readers to reconsider their understanding of reality and the interconnectedness of time, space, and consciousness.

3.3.3 Purified Time: Mode and Motion of Dualistic Time

In "The Texture of Time", the narrator, Van, posits an alternative understanding of time, framing it as a personal and perceptual construct encompassing both the past and the present. I will explore Van's concept of pure time as it pertains to consciousness in *Ada*, and the distinctive attributes of the past and the present within Van's temporal framework. Van's conception of individual and perceptual time closely resembles Bergson's philosophy of duration. Moreover, his lyrical and sensory treatment of time aligns closely with Bergson's

ideas. Through "Texture of Time," Van and Nabokov, engage in poetic dialogue with Bergson, intertwining time with consciousness and portraying it as a highly personal and subjective entity in which the past and the present overlap in their production and invention of the new.

3.3.1 Continuous Fusion of the Present and the Past

Van resembles Bergson in presenting his personal, pure and perceptual time in a highly aesthetic or sensual manner. The title "The Texture of Time", chosen initially by Nabokov as the title for *Ada*, underscores the thematic significance of time throughout the narrative, emphasizing its centrality to the novel's overarching concerns and structural elements. Van's "The Texture of Time" resonates strongly with Bergson's understanding of time.

In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson identifies art as a medium that allows one to experience the texture of time. Bergson's concept of duration encompasses three fundamental aspects. First, he posits duration as an ever-progressing fusion of the past and the present. In *Duration and Simultaneity*, Bergson formulates the texture of time as a constant becoming of the past into the present, which merges to produce new forms. He describes duration as "a homogeneous and ever-progressing fusion of the past and the present that creates new forms."[41] Second, Bergson elucidates the texture of time by formulating the difference between chronological and personal time. Chronological time, known as spatialized time, focuses on quantifying time using words, figures, and spatial dimensions. In contrast, duration represents personal time, characterized by the lived and continuous experience of the past and present overlapping within consciousness. Third, Bergson suggests that consciousness plays a crucial role in preserving the past within the present. Memory, he contends, conveys something of the past into the present, continuously enriching our mental state with accumulated duration. Bergson illustrates this concept by likening duration to a snowball rolling upon itself, steadily accumulating an ever-increasing image of the past.[42] Bergson proposes that duration constitutes a continuous blending of time and consciousness. In *Creative Evolution*, he characterizes duration as a temporal reality that shares with consciousness "a continuity of change, preservation of the past in the present."[43] This intimate relationship between time and consciousness is further emphasized in Bergson's assertion that, for us, time is "identical with the continuity of our inner

[41] Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity, with Reference to Einstein's Theory*, trans. Leon Jacobson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).
[42] Bergson, *Creative Evolution, 2.*
[43] Ibid., 23.

life."[44] He suggests that duration can be experienced as "uninterrupted solidarity of the before and after" through consciousness and perception, highlighting the intrinsic link between time and conscious awareness.[45] Bergson describes time as "the very fluidity of our inner life," implying that duration is a continuous integration of time and consciousness.[46] The parallels between Bergson's notion of duration and the time presented by Van in *Ada* are striking. Van's dual panels of the past and the present, characterized by an accumulated image of the past and a consciousness-oriented experience of time, closely resemble Bergson's concept of duration.

The motivation, theme, and structure of Van's "The Texture of Time" strongly evoke Bergson's concept of duration. Van claims his motivation for undertaking this endeavor as a quest to "purify my notion of Time," emphasizing a desire to "caress time" and "examine the essence of Time" rather than "its lapse" (758). He longs to intimately engage with Time, seeking to caress it rather than merely observe its progression. To achieve this, Van selects specific facets of Time for study, such as "Pure Time, Perceptual Time, Tangible Time, Time free of content, context" and "Motionless Time" (762). Van's conception of pure time is intricately tied to consciousness and perception. He asserts his focus on "only the Time stopped by me and closely attended to by my tense-willed mind" (762). In pursuing pure time, Van deliberately excludes considerations of the future and space, aiming to rejuvenate Time by "cutting off Siamese Space and the false future" (797). He disconnects the ties of time with spatial dimensions and speculative future events. This approach highlights Van's understanding of time as a deeply personal and subjective experience devoid of any inherent connection to universal time. Van's individualized and subjective conception of time aligns more closely with Bergson's philosophy of duration than with Einstein's time physics. It emphasizes the intimate relationship between human perception and the experience of time, resonating with Bergson's view of duration as a continuous and personal unfolding of lived experience.

To further elucidate his concept of pure time, Van challenges the conventional notion of time as a flowing, dynamic force, proposing that time is static and motionless. He posits that what appears to be the changing and flowing of time is, in reality, a result of two factors: the fluctuations of conceptual time within the human mind and the advancements in timekeeping and measurement technology. Regarding the first factor, Van asserts that since time is intimately linked with human cognition, our symmetrical organs predispose us to perceive time

[44] Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity,* 44.
[45] Ibid., 50.
[46] Ibid., 44.

in a manner he describes as “amphitheatric” (761). He suggests that our perception of time might differ if humans possessed different sensory organs. Van illustrates this point by dissecting the phrase “passage of time,” arguing that it is merely a construct of the mind, lacking any objective counterpart but easily understood through spatial analogies (770). As for the second factor, Van contends that advancements in timekeeping technology, from sandglass to atomic clocks and portable pulsars, have contributed to the illusion that time progresses in a linear, one-dimensional fashion, produced the illusion that “Old Time become Newton’s” (762). He asserts that this perception of time as a linear and arrow-directed entity is illusory, stemming from the mysteries of growth and gravitation (761). Van emphasizes that time is an immutable and independent entity unaffected by human perception or technological advancements.

After identifying the texture of time, Van introduces his concept of dualistic time, wherein he divides time into two distinct panels: the past and the present. He challenges the conventional perception of time by excluding space and the future from its purview. Departing from the tripartite division of time into past, present, and future, Van asserts that the future is uncertain, describing it as a realm of “not-yet” that may never materialize (793). Van argues that only the past, which persists in his memory, and the present, which his consciousness endows with duration and reality, constitute the authentic components of time (793). He contends that any anticipation or expectation of future events should be considered part of the present, as they exist within conscious awareness. Notably, Van's dismissal of the future is influenced by his apprehension regarding the anticipated reunion with Ada. By excluding the future from his conception of time, Van establishes a dichotomy between the past and the present. This notion of time resembles Nabokov's fundamental insight on time: “I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another.”[47] Here, it suggests a cyclical pattern of time, wherein the past and the present overlap and intertwine in a perpetual transformation cycle.

After delineating the two panels of time, Van proposes a circular or spiral pattern in which the past and the present interact dynamically. He describes how the past permeates the present, asserting that the past’s “shadows and shapes showed through the still soft, long, larval now” (762). Van’s conceptualization of time leans more towards the philosophical and psychological realms than the physical domain. He suggests that time embodies “a sense of continuous becoming”, likening it to “a steady vibration” and “a memory in the making” (792). Van’s depiction of time as spiral emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between the past and the

[47] Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 139.

present. In this framework, the present serves as a time repository, continually absorbing new material from the past. Meanwhile, the past, enriched by accumulated experiences, converses with the present through memory and perception. The continuous exchange and transformation between the past and present enhance our awareness of time within consciousness.

Van's conceptualization resembles Bergson's notion of duration, which proposes that time continuously unfolds due to an overlapping of the past and the present in a person's consciousness. In *Duration and Simultaneity*, Bergson posits that intuition allows individuals to experience time as duration, characterized by ever-evolving fusion of the past and the present that creates new forms, which reflects Bergson's belief that the past continuously accumulates, rolling up with the present, all blending together to form an indivisible and dynamic continuum.[48] Unlike a scientific or mathematical view that might see time as points along a line, Bergson's emphasis on intuition as a means to grasp this continuous flow suggests that true understanding of time escapes conventional measurement and can only be grasped through a direct, immediate, and personal experience. His approach aims to capture the fluid and changing nature of reality, seeing time as fundamentally creative and generative, constantly bringing about new forms and realities. His critique of Einstein revolves around the idea that relativity, while revolutionary, offers a conception of time that is too detached from the human experience of time as lived and felt. For Bergson, Einstein's time, regulated by clocks and defined by simultaneity across different observers, neglects the subjective experience of time, which is central to human consciousness. Bergson's theory of time and Van's notion underscore the uninterrupted transformation of the past and the present, highlighting the interplay between external phenomena and internal cognition.

As Van speeds across Switzerland to meet Ada after her husband's death, he grapples with and refines his thoughts on time, a process that parallels his journey. However, the interaction between his contemplations and the physical journey complicates his understanding of time. In his contemplation on time, Van argues against the notion of time as a flowing entity, advocating instead for its static and motionless nature. Yet, as he delves deeper into his two panels of time, the past and the present, he acknowledges the fluid interaction and transformation between these temporal dimensions within human consciousness. This fluidity challenges the rigidity of his initial concept of time and introduces ambiguity to his narrative. The parallel between Van's swerving journey and his evolving thoughts on time underscores his contemplations' non-linear and erratic nature. This lack of successive and logical structure in his contemplation

[48] Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity*, 44.

mirrors the unpredictability of his journey and adds complexity to his understanding of time. Van's exploration of time is marked by contradictions and uncertainties, highlighting the multifaceted nature of temporal experience.

3.3.2 Picturesque, Reversible and Rhythmic Attributes of the Past

Van posits some distinct attributes of the past to establish its pivotal role as the foundational panel within the framework of the circular or spiral mode of time. The primary attribute of the past resides in its accumulated imagery, a concept that diverges from the conventional linear perception of time. While conventionally perceived as a linear progression of time, Van challenges this notion by suggesting that the past is not a fleeting entity but an ongoing accumulation process in the mind. He posits that the present is characterized by a continuous buildup of the past, likening it to "the constant building up of the Past, its smoothly and relentlessly rising level" (780). In Van's perspective, the past is not merely a transition or dissolution of time but rather a duration embedded within consciousness, imbued with "an accumulation of sense" (770). Drawing parallels between his philosophical meditation on time and his journey, Van employs the metaphor of the reverse mirror to elucidate his thoughts. He describes his ability to put his past into "reverse gear," a maneuvre that plunges him into a state of reflection devoid of "any logical or chronal sense" (757). Van elucidates that the past is not a linear sequence of events but a collection of sensory impressions and vivid recollections, which he describes as "the taste, the tinge, the tang of our being" (794). He contends that the past is not bound by strict orderliness but a constant accumulation of images; thus, it can be easily "contemplated and listened to, tested and tasted at random" (771). In other words, the past can be freely manipulated and rearranged according to individual will or intention. Van posits that the past has not vanished; instead, it endures through the accumulation of imagery in consciousness. Thus, as the narrator, he is granted the agency to shape and influence its narrative trajectory in the present.

The second defining aspect of the past is its inherent reversibility. Van posits that contrary to the common perception of the past as immutable and unalterable, we can re-visit or re-organize the past in our consciousness if similar stimuli occur (770). He contends that the apparent fixity of the past is not a testament to time's irreversible nature but rather a reflection of the constraints of human cognition. Van employs the metaphor of the reverse gear and the receding road in his journey to illustrate the process of engaging with the past. He observes that when he attempts to focus on the images receding behind him, he experiences a sense of

temporal disorientation, requiring a concerted mental effort to attune his attention backward. This deliberate engagement allows him to discern and appreciate the details of the past, such as the shades of a passing landscape (778). Furthermore, Van asserts that through conscious attention, individuals possess the agency to selectively choose, edit, or rearrange the sensory impressions and images of the past according to their will. He characterizes the past as a "generous chaos," suggesting that individuals endowed with a powerful memory can selectively retrieve and reconstruct specific moments, such as a "summer morning in 1922," and juxtapose them in illuminating arrangements (772). However, Van acknowledges the challenges inherent in recollecting and reconstructing the past, particularly in maintaining consistency across different emotional contexts. He notes that the same object may evoke disparate perceptions based on varying emotional states, complicating the process of reconstructing past experiences (773). Nevertheless, Van contends that encountering similar stimuli can trigger the recollection and reconstruction of past images within the mind, underscoring the dynamic nature of our engagement with the past.

The third distinctive characteristic of the past lies in its rhythmic qualities, as elucidated by Van. He proposes that the texture of time resides in the intervals between past and present, which he metaphorically describes as "the dim intervals between the dark beats" (775). Van posits that the past entails a shorter duration than the present, viewing it as the immediate predecessor to the present moment. He emphasizes the significance of this "still-fresh" past slipping into the present during moments of "instant inspection of shadow sounds" (775). Van contends that due to its brevity, the past aligns more closely with the "authentic rhythm of Time" (775). Furthermore, Van elaborates on the concept of "dim intervals" or "dim continuum" within the texture of time, highlighting that these intervals are not objectively quantifiable but somewhat subjective impressions derived from perceiving the gaps between vivid events (775). He suggests that individuals can access these dim intervals by actively engaging with the rhythmic beat of time, employing sensory faculties to grasp its fleeting essence.

Van's exploration of the picturesque, reversible, and rhythmic aspects of the past challenges conventional interpretations of the past, inviting reconsideration of its temporal dimensions. And it underscores the perceptual nature of time and its intimate relationship with consciousness, emphasizing the subjective experience of temporal rhythms.

3.3.3 Irreducible, Durable and Perceptual Qualities of the Present

Besides stressing the past's picturesque, reversible, and rhythmic dimensions, Van justifies prioritizing the present within his spiral model of time. Like his delineation of the past, Van proposes the irreducible, durable, and consciousness-oriented features associated with the present. The first among these is its independent and irreducible nature. Van contends that the present constitutes a distinct entity, separate from past and future realms. This assertion resonates with Nabokov's notion that there is a profound connection between the reality of time and "an incalculable" element or "indeterminism and irreducible contingency" in the universe.[49] Van exposes a paradox inherent in the conventional understanding of the present. While it is often dismissed as non-existent and quickly classified into past or future categories, he argues that it possesses tangible reality and duration. Van claims that the present is the only reality we know since both the past and the future do not exist yet. He articulates this by stating that the present "follows the coloured nothingness of the no-longer and precedes the absolute nothingness of the future" (778). This paradox of presence introduces a conceptual complexity into Van's framework. He maintains that the present stands independently, defying reduction to past or future states. By affirming the existence of the present, Van challenges conventional notions of temporality and asserts its independence within the temporal continuum.

The second defining characteristic of the present is its perceived duration. Having established the independent nature of the present, Van contends that it possesses a distinct temporal span, treating the interval between successive events as its perceived duration. In this assertion, Van challenges Augustine's concept of the vanishing present. Augustine conceptualizes the present as a fleeting moment caught between the past, which has already transpired, and the future, which is yet to unfold. He suggests that the present lacks a designated duration and is destined to vanish instantly. Despite acknowledging the shared experiences of grappling with temporal concepts, including the "oddly physical torment of the shallowing mind" and "the evasions of cerebral exhaustion", Van maintains a different perspective on the present (759). Unlike Augustine's portrayal of the present as fleeting and devoid of duration, Van asserts that it possesses tangible temporal qualities. He argues against reducing the present to mere fleetingness, emphasizing its substantiality and distinct temporal duration, distinguishing it from past and future temporal fragments. In doing so, Van highlights the significance of the present and critiques Augustine's underestimation of its temporal relevance.

[49] Gerald James Whitrow, *The Natural Philosophy of Time* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1960), 295.

Van argues that the irreducibility and duration of the present stem from human consciousness retaining "the still-fresh Past" (775) and "constant accumulation of images" (771). Employing a metaphor, Van describes the duration of the present as akin to "the dimensionless point of geometry is by a sizable dot in printer's ink on palpable paper" (779). He suggests that within the fleeting span of the present, individuals experience a momentary sense of "nowness," lasting approximately "three or four seconds" (779). According to Van, capturing the duration of the present requires excessive attention to time, as a sense of becoming lies within "its stuff and spread, in the fall of its folds, in the very impalpability of its greyish gauze, in the coolness of its continuum" (758). In this context, Van's propensity for alliteration might relate to his time theory. By employing alliteration, the present moment is stretched out or elongated in sound, with repetition ensuring its duration and fostering conscious awareness of time passing. Van suggests that to grasp time, one must focus on the present moment and contend with the fleeting nature of consciousness, often likened to "the octopus of one's brain" (789), as the present swiftly slips away from awareness. Van proposes that the present resides within "the dim intervals between the dark beats" (775). Therefore, to grasp the duration of the present, one must perceive these interval beats with concentrated perception and heightened senses. Van suggests that time is not merely a universal and measurable entity but a physiological experience—a sense of continuous becoming. He imagines that if "becoming" had a voice, it might manifest as "a steady vibration" (792). Van contends that the present indeed exists and possesses a distinct duration, which cannot be merely reduced to fragments of the past and future.

The third defining quality of the present lies in its intimacy with human consciousness. Van characterizes the present as the temporal span directly perceived by individuals, imbued with the "lingering freshness of the past" (779). He suggests that our access to the present is facilitated by our consciousness, which updates our perception of time within the realm of consciousness rather than relying solely on external stimuli. Van observes that compared to the past, the present is closer to consciousness because a person's sense of succession is more robust in our perception of the present (774). Van underscores the intrinsic link between the present and consciousness, emphasizing the role of conscious awareness in apprehending the immediate present. He refers to the present as the "Deliberate Present," highlighting the pivotal function of deliberate attention in endowing the present with duration and reality. Van posits that individuals can discern the sequence of temporal moments only through "deliberate attention to the flow of consciousness" (778). To illustrate the interplay between attention and time, Van offers a counter-example elucidating why time may subjectively appear to pass more

quickly in adulthood compared to childhood. He attributes this perception to the diminished attentiveness to time induced by childhood boredom, suggesting that time is not an objective entity but rather a subjective experience influenced by the mind's attention. According to Van, the sensation of time passing faster stems from a lack of attentiveness to time; as he articulates, the sense of faster time depends upon "one's not being attentive to Time" (763). He contends that by cultivating heightened awareness of time within consciousness, individuals can mitigate this perception and attain a slower sense of time, enabling them to grasp the present's duration.

Van's conception of time resonates with Bergson's concept of duration in several vital respects. Both Van and Bergson assert that perception or intuition enables individuals to experience time as duration, a continuous blending of the past and present that engenders new forms. This ever-progressing fusion underscores the dynamic nature of time, characterized by its fluidity and continuity. Secondly, both Van and Bergson describe the figuration of time in terms of consciousness. Bergson posits that time, or duration, is rooted in consciousness, which preserves the past in the form of memories, thus ensuring its presence in the present moment. In *Duration and Simultaneity*, Bergson's notion of duration, which encompasses the continuous blending of past and present, resonates with Van's conception of time as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon shaped by conscious experience. Bergson elucidates how memory conveys the past into the present, likening mental states to a snowball accumulating duration as it advances along the road of time.[50] This idea of the accumulation of duration and its influence on consciousness echoes in Van's "Texture of Time," suggesting the influence of Bergson's concept of duration on Van's understanding of temporal dynamics.

Van's conceptualization of purified time encompasses two panels: the past and the present. I have examined the picturesque, reversible, and rhythmic attributes attributed to the past and the irreducible, durable, and consciousness-oriented features associated with the present. Van's understanding of time resonates with Bergson's concept of duration, which emphasizes the intersection of time and consciousness in both the present and the past. Van and Bergson advocate for perception as the gateway to experiencing time as duration within the realm of consciousness. Bergson's notion of time is a foundational intellectual influence that permeates Van's discourse on temporal dynamics. The conjunction of time and consciousness, as Bergson highlights, is mirrored in Van's delineation of the past and the present, underscoring the role of perception in shaping our experience of time. Therefore, Bergson's concept of duration is a guiding intellectual force and impulse that informs Van's reflections on temporal phenomena.

[50] Bergson, *Creative Evolution,* 2.

3.4 De-spatialized Time: Power and Paradox in A-spatial Temporality

Van's portrayal of personal and perceptual time is characterized by the continual merging of past and present within human consciousness. Within his philosophical discourse on time, Van posits a rejuvenation of time by "cutting off Siamese Space and the false future" (793). He contends that time and space are distinct entities, with time existing independently of spatial changes. Van purifies time by isolating it from space and its relevant direction and motion. Van's exclusion of space from the temporal realm in *Ada* challenges the implications of Einstein's theory of relativity. However, it also raises potential paradoxes stemming from his conceptualization of de-spatialized time.

3.4.1 Identifying Distinct Entities of Time and Space

Bergson suggests that our tendency to spatialize time is a fundamental obstacle in comprehending time. Our perception and conceptualization of time often occur in relation to space, undermining its inherent fluidity, known as "duration." Bergson notes that by amalgamating the past and the present, duration exhibits a characteristic of simultaneity akin to spatial representations.[51] This distinction between space and time, as articulated by Bergson, significantly shapes Nabokov's interpretation of temporality.

In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson illustrates the concept of duration by aligning it with the water flow, where "states blend as raindrops with the water of the lake" (166), emphasizing its fluid and continuous nature. As articulated by Bergson, this watery imagery of duration significantly influences Nabokov's conception of time. In *Speak, Memory*, the narrator vividly portrays his encounter with pure time, likening it to immersion in "a radiant and mobile medium" and "shining seawater" shared with other beings connected by the flow of time.[52] The narrator underscores the unique nature of this temporal realm, emphasizing its contrast with the spatial world.[53] However, it is ironic that even this imagery, depicting the subject immersed in the flow of time, still relies on spatial concepts—the subject's location within the stream and the symbolic action of time washing over them. Nabokov's depiction of bathers in the seawater echoes Bergson's imagery of raindrops merging with the lake's water. Bergson

[51] Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity*, 45.
[52] Nabokov, *Speak Memory*, 21.
[53] Ibid., 21.

and Nabokov depict time as a fluid and fleeting phenomenon within human consciousness, where the past and the present intertwine seamlessly to form an organic whole.

In *Ada*, Van's contemplation on space and time resonates with Bergson's discourse, particularly his insistence on maintaining a clear distinction between the two. Rejecting the notion of time-space analogies, Van asserts, "Space is the outside of Time, or the body of Time, or that Space is suffused with Time" (765), dismissing these as simplistic spatializing metaphors that blur the boundary between space and time. He criticizes such time-space analogies for perpetuating the misconception of time flow as a natural phenomenon, describing them as mere metaphors "flowing along with a yardstick" (764). For Van, the conflation of time and space stems from intellectual laziness, and he argues that careful consideration allows for the identification of distinct characteristics between the two. Van emphasizes the importance of time, stating, "I cannot imagine Space without Time, but I can very well imagine Time without Space. 'Space-Time' is that hideous hybrid whose very hyphen looks phony. One can be a hater of Space, and a lover of Time" (767). In alignment with Bergson, Van contends that time contaminated by space would hinder our notion of the time.

To elucidate the distinction between time and space, Van posits that they engage different senses: space pertains to vision, while time is loosely associated with audition. He contends, "Space is related to our senses of sight, touch, and muscular effort; Time is vaguely connected with hearing" (767). However, we need to acknowledge the difficulty in comprehending change without visually assessing time. Van draws upon an intertextual quotation from John Shade in *Pale Fire*: "Space is a swarming in the eyes, and Time a singing in the ears" (767). He remarks, "Space flutters to the ground, but Time remains between thinker and thumb when Monsieur Bergson uses his scissors" (767), emphasizing the tactile and auditory aspects of time. Despite the common perception of time as fluidity, Van suggests this view is narrow-minded. As Van writes, we tend to take the human blood circulation to explain the time, "The body's innate awareness of its bloodstream" (764). According to Van, the intersection of time with space occurs only in "the sharpest feeling of nowness, in visual terms, is the deliberate possession of a segment of Space collected by the eye (780). In his quest to purify time, Van rejects the time-space analogy and underscores the sensory experiences of time and space.

Van's conceptualization of purifying time resembles Immanuel Kant's notion of the pure concept of time and Bergson's concept of disentangling time from space. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defines time as the purest schema of a pure category, describing it as an a priori intuition that enables us to grasp sensory experiences. However, Kant contends that neither space nor time is conceived as a substance; instead, they are elements of a systematic

mental framework that organizes the experiences of any observing subject.[54] Similarly, like Kant, Van posits time as a conceptual framework for sequencing events and comparing object motions. However, Van diverges from Kant by asserting that space and time are independent substances that constitute the framework of the observing subject.[55] This perspective aligns more closely with Bergson's idea of separating time from space. Like Bergson, Van argues that time possesses substance and enjoys a distinct reality. He rejects the relativistic notion that "no natural change by which one state of the universe could be distinguished from any other," asserting instead that time is not derived from the mechanical changes of the universe.[56] According to Van, the universe coexists with time but does not generate time through its change processes, indicating that time and space have fundamentally different natures.

3.4.2 Excluding Space and Mathematics From Time

In Einstein's conception of the time-space continuum, time and space are regarded as inseparable entities. Van's approach to disentangling space from time involves three key steps. Firstly, he advocates for the autonomy of time from space, arguing against the habitual association of time with spatial dimensions or physical motion. Van asserts that time is fundamentally a cognitive construct, rendering conventional methods of time measurement inadequate. He dismisses the notion of "space-tainted, space-parasite time, the space-time of relativist literature" as an artificial concept that blurs the distinction between time and space (766). According to Van, only the past and present can be classified within the spatial domain, with other temporal phenomena merely numerical symbols or aspects of space. He emphasizes that the texture of time differs significantly from that of space, rejecting relativists' portrayal of time as "the piebald four-dimensional sport" and "a quadruped with one leg replaced by the ghost of a leg" (762). Van highlights the consequences of conflating time with space, suggesting that such confusion diminishes time's autonomy and relegates it to another dimension of space.

Van elucidates three factors contributing to the conflation of temporal elements with spatial ones. Firstly, he highlights the association of time with internal sensations and natural

[54] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Vasilis Politis, trans. J. M.D. Meiklejohn (Rutland, VT: Everyman, 1993 [1934]), 501.
[55]Ibid., 503.
[56] Fraser J. T., *The Voices of Time: A Cooperative Survey of Man's Views of Time as Expressed by the Sciences and by the Humanities* (New York: G. Braziller, 1966), 501.

phenomena, such as “the body’s innate awareness of its bloodstream” and the “ancient vertigo caused by rising stars” (764). Secondly, Van identifies the influence of time-space analogies derived from conventional time measurement methods, exemplified by “the creeping shadow line of a gnomon, the trickle of an hourglass, the trot of a second hand” (764). Thirdly, he addresses the role of habitual language or speech patterns, exemplified by expressions like “time flies” or “time flows.” Van suggests that language may limit our understanding of time, echoing Bergson’s observation of the tension between the fluidity of lived time and the symbolic language of science and communication. Bergson posits that this tension arises from language reducing time’s uninterrupted flow to a spatialized arrangement of parts, often represented by a clock or a line.[57] Consequently, Van portrays time as a stream that invariably traverses “our chronographic landscapes” (764). He argues that our internal experiences, observation of natural phenomena, and linguistic habits predispose us to fuse time with space.

In the second step of his argument, following the assertion of time's independence, Van challenges the notion that time can be quantified or measured using spatial concepts. He contends that the movement of physical objects across spatial dimensions does not equate to the passage of time itself. Van argues that since time is distinct from space, spatial measurements, which quantify distances between objects, cannot accurately measure the duration of events. While we often measure time using spatial concepts, we typically measure space independently of time. This apparent asymmetry suggests that space holds greater independence within the time-space hierarchy. However, it is crucial to recognize that changes in the shape of space can only be accurately measured relative to time. This acknowledgment underscores the interplay between these two fundamental dimensions. Van expresses concern that space encroaches upon the domain of time, metaphorically described as “Space introduc[ing] its eggs into the nests of Time: a ‘before’ here, an ‘after’ there — and a speckled clutch of Minkowski’s ‘world-points’” (767). Here, “before” signifies the past, and “after” the present. Van is concerned that Minkowskian space-time may undermine the autonomy of time.

Van emphasizes that time is not a random or ambiguous sensation but a highly subjective perception. To grasp time, one must engage with “the utmost purity of consciousness” and “the most rational element of life” (768). He argues that our tendency to measure time in terms of space does not stem from an inherent intimacy between the two dimensions but because “A stretch of Space is organically easier to measure mentally than a stretch of Time” (767). It implies that the tendency originated from the cognitive ease of mentally measuring spatial

[57] Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity*, 127.

stretches compared to temporal ones. Van observes that when space encroaches upon the domain of time, it gives rise to complexities in which space thrives; however, time resists reduction to mathematical formulas, to "blackboard roots and birdies" (767). Van argues that measuring time does not unveil its essence because time is deeply personal and subjective within an individual's consciousness. He further challenges the notion that space itself can be accurately quantified. Van asserts that while motion occurs within space, measuring space does not equate to comprehending its true nature. He employs the analogy of an odometer not representing the road it measures. Van elucidates this by describing space as a "plasm" in which matter, or "concentrations of space plasm", are organized and enclosed (541). While we can measure the "globules of matter and the distances between them", the space plasm remains incomputable (541). Moreover, Van reiterates that time cannot be effectively measured through spatial means, challenging the mathematical principles of relativity theory.

Van argues that the space-time continuum, often hailed as the ultimate truth, is instead "the flaw inherent in mathematics which parades as truth" (768). This idea echoes the skepticism expressed by Nabokov. Nabokov, in his notes labelled "Relativity," expresses doubt regarding Einstein's theory of relativity, dismissing it as comprised of "slick formulae" and labelling the mathematical universe it presents as "an unreal world, a jumble of symbols, a flourish of formulae."[58] Moreover, Nabokov suggests that what the relativist claims to have discovered is not an objective truth but rather "the flaw inherent in mathematics parading as truth."[59] I think the main reason Nabokov challenges the theory of relativity and its mathematics is that he wanted to refer to time as an independent entity accessible to human consciousness and beyond deterministic causality.

In the third step of his argument, Van challenges the temporal implications of relativity theory by examining the concept of simultaneity. Van provides examples to counter the notion of time travel implied by relativity, humorously illustrating the absurd implication that a person travelling at the speed of light would return younger than if they had stayed home. This challenges Einstein's twin paradox, a thought experiment in special relativity that demonstrates the concept of time dilation. In the twin paradox, two identical twins are involved, one embarking on a high-speed journey through space while the other remains on Earth. According to Einstein's theory of special relativity, time passes at different rates for objects in motion

[58] Cards "Relativity 1&2," "Notes for 'The Texture of Time,'" Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
[59] Card "Rel[ativity] 8: Whitrow (p 222)," "Notes for 'The Texture of Time,'" Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

relative to each other. Specifically, time appears slower for objects moving at high speeds relative to an observer. [60] Besides, Van uses his experience, such as driving, to demonstrate that events can be perceived as simultaneous when they occur within the "same span of attention" (769). Furthermore, he presents a scenario to illustrate the limitations of relativity, questioning whether "tactile coincidences" are as misleading as visual ones (544). Van suggests that if a hand touches two spots simultaneously, the events may appear to occur at different locations, but for the observer of the hand, they happen simultaneously.

As Stephen Blackwell observes, Van's concept of simultaneity resembles Nabokov's, particularly in their shared critique of relativists' treatment of simultaneity on a cosmic scale.[61] Nabokov's notes on "Simultaneous Events" provide an example of simultaneity aimed at challenging the time-travel implications of relativity. He describes the mental confusion arising from attempts to mate the concepts of "light = signals" with "travelling clocks" employing mathematical formulas. [62] Nabokov argues that relativity disregards the existence of simultaneity in the universe, highlighting the distinction between the world as observed at "a given instant of individual time" and the world as it exists at "a definite instant of universal time."[63] He posits that if an observer could be everywhere simultaneously, an observer who can transcend the physical possibilities could have a chance to achieve simultaneity. To illustrate this concept, Nabokov imagines an enormous hand touching two distant points in the universe and simultaneously relaying information about each to its owner. Blackwell notes that some physicists refute Nabokov's argument on two grounds: the limitations imposed by the

[60] In the twin paradox, one twin (let's call her Alice) stays on Earth while the other twin (let's call him Bob) travels away from Earth at a significant fraction of the speed of light and then returns. From Bob's perspective, due to time dilation, time on his spacecraft appears to pass more slowly than it does for Alice on Earth. As a result, when Bob returns to Earth, he finds that less time has passed for him compared to Alice. The paradox arises when we consider both perspectives. From Alice's viewpoint on Earth, she observes Bob's clock as moving slower due to time dilation while her own clock remains steady. However, from Bob's viewpoint on the spacecraft, he observes Alice's clock on Earth as moving slower while his own clock appears normal. So, when Bob returns to Earth, he finds that less time has passed for him compared to Alice, which seemingly contradicts the fact that each observer perceives the other's clock as moving slower. The resolution of the paradox lies in the fact that Bob experienced acceleration during his journey, which breaks the symmetry between the twins' frames of reference. According to general relativity, acceleration affects time dilation, so Bob experiences less time passing due to both his velocity and the acceleration he undergoes during his journey. Therefore, the paradox is resolved, and there is no actual contradiction in the theory of relativity.

[61] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 162.

[62] Card "Rel[ativity] 8: Whitrow (p 222)," "Notes for 'The Texture of Time,'" Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

[63] Card "Rel[ativity] 6: Whitrow (p. 179)," "Notes for 'The Texture of Time,'" Berg Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

speed of nerve signals and the gravitational consequences of such a massive hand.[64] Despite these critiques, Nabokov's primary motivation for challenging relativity appears to be his desire to assert time as an independent entity accessible to human consciousness and beyond deterministic causality. Similarly, Van rejects the notion that time is governed by the mathematical laws of space, viewing them as indications of gaps through which alternative systems can be perceived.

3.4.3 Paradox and Contradiction in De-spatialized Time

To what extent has Van successfully dissociated space from time? Firstly, Van's endeavour to purify time from space contradicts his inclination towards spatialization. Despite denying a relational connection between time and space, Van frequently employs spatial metaphors and references to illustrate his ideas on time. Nabokov portrays Van's concept of time through a journey, reflecting Van's experience of driving speedily across Switzerland to unit with Ada. Van's contemplations on time unfold parallel to his physical journey, with his rewriting of "Texture of Time" coinciding temporally with his driving expedition. Van compares his thoughts on time to the act of driving, highlighting the intertwined nature of his spatial and temporal experiences. His description of his Greek car and swerving journey navigating the alpine highway mirrors the erratic nature of his thoughts on time. The spatial maps used by Van to guide his journey and reminisce about Ada further underscore the inseparability of space and time in his consciousness. Even when Van encounters moments of disorientation during his drive, he remains acutely aware of the inescapable temporality, as reflected in his realization: "Time is rhythm: the insect rhythm of a warm, humid night, brain ripple, breathing, the drum in my temple" (760). This acknowledgment hints at the inherent difficulty in disentangling time from spatial influences in Van's perception.

Secondly, Van's attempt to isolate time from space is undermined by his recurrent spatial configuration of time in his writing practice. Despite his efforts to disentangle temporality from spatial metaphors, Van frequently resorts to spatial imagery, metaphors, or objects to convey his understanding of the past and the present. He acknowledges the persistent interference of space in his pursuit of pure time, recognizing that many who have attempted to grasp the essence of time have got lost "in obscurity or have bogged down in Space" (796). Van grapples with the challenge of de-spatializing time, ironically using a spatial metaphor to depict this

[64] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 162.

struggle as akin to rummaging in a glove compartment for a road map (759). He likens his persistent endeavour to isolate space from time to blind driving in the darkness and rain without maps, where even the wipers function as reminders of space intruding upon time, as "the blind finger of space poking and tearing the texture of time" (759). Van's frustration with space's intrusion into his temporal contemplations is palpable, as he describes time as a "hollow hole" or "dim pit", obstructing his grasp of the texture of time. He complains that whenever he has a chance to approach time, space repeatedly returns like a "comedy villain" with the "pendulum" of spatial influence (760). Even when Van seeks to describe his awareness of the immediate past, spatial analogies inevitably creep in, further complicating his efforts to exclude space from time. Van had to use a spatial analogy to represent the awareness of the present: "the constant building up of the Past, its smoothly and relentlessly rising level" (780). Van's reliance on spatial configurations of time contradicts his assertion of separating space from time.

Thirdly, despite Van's prioritization of pure time, we can discern elements of spatialization of time and temporalization of space in *Ada*. Van's comparison of time to rhythm introduces a paradox in his conceptualization of temporal rhythm. While striving to extract space and its measurements from time, he paradoxically resorts to spatial and mathematical measures to perceive rhythm. For instance, Van illustrates the subjective and perceptual nature of time by citing the limitations of odometers in representing the road. He contends that the road cannot be captured objectively but is instead a blend of personal sensory experiences: "see as a black mirror of rain under turning wheels, hear as a sticky rustle, smell like a damp July night in the Alps, and feel like as a smooth basis" (765). It includes visual reflections, auditory sensations, olfactory perceptions, and tactile sensations. This mingling of senses in spatial measurement highlights the perceptual density allowed by the fusion of time and space, contradicting Van's attempt to separate space from time. In another example, Van claims that despite the interference of space, he could listen to time "for a brief concave moment warily and worriedly" (761). However, Van's claim of listening to time is challenged when he realizes that what he perceives as time is the sensations of his blood circulation, "coursing through my brain, and thence through the veins of the neck heartward, back to the seat of private throes," devoid of any temporal relation (761). This acknowledgment underscores his failure to grasp pure time without spatial influence. Van had to admit his inability to comprehend time without the aid of space: "What I endeavour to grasp is precisely the Time that Space helps me to measure" (760). Even in recollecting past events, such as the summer of 1884, Van notices discrepancies in chronographic representations, revealing the paradox in his portrayal of time. Despite his efforts to exclude space from time, Van often resorts to spatial categories and

physical manifestations of temporality in his depiction, weakening his argument against the spatialization of time.

Critics such as Hägglund and Norman point out inconsistencies or discrepancies between Van's treatment of space-time relations and his assertions of pure time. Hägglund contends that the logic of Van's exposition in "spacing time and timing space thus undermines the purported thesis of the text."[65] He argues that the inconsistency within Van's concept of de-spatialized time reveals a paradoxical negativity inherent in time itself. Similarly, Will Norman observes a discrepancy between Van's claims and his narrative practice. Norman extends the theme of unavoidable spatial interference in Van's conception of pure time to the entirety of the novel *Ada,* suggesting a tension between Nabokov's efforts to capture the aesthetic experience of pure temporality and the intrusion of historical and socio-political factors.[66] He posits Ada as a battleground between "timeless aestheticism and historical particularity", highlighting the struggle to maintain "uncorrupted temporality" amidst external influences.[67] Thus, Hägglund and Norman identify a paradox or inconsistency in Van's attempt to de-spatialize Time.

Through Van's deliberate dismal of space from time, Nabokov engages poetically with the debate between Einstein and Bergson on the nature of time. While Nabokov does not reject some fundamental tenets of relativity and even employs them to challenge determinism in his works, he remains dissatisfied with the space-time relationship posited by relativity theory. Utilizing Van's endeavour to separate space from time as a literary device, Nabokov offers a poetic critique of the temporal implications of relativity. He views subjective, perceptual, and de-spatialized time as avenues through which an alternative understanding of temporality can emerge, effectively countering the perceived notion of time. In doing so, Nabokov aligns himself with Bergson's critique of the fusion of space and time in relativity theory. However, it is worth noting that Nabokov may acknowledge certain limitations in Bergson's concept of duration. This paradox in Van's de-spatialization of time, as depicted in *Ada*, serves as a testament to the complexities inherent in Nabokov's exploration of temporal themes.

Van's perspective on time is multifaceted: he views time as a realm of sensual pleasure and fulfilment, free from space constraints and exempt from mathematical laws. However, despite his insistence on the purity of time and its separation from space, Van's reliance on spatial configurations to convey temporal concepts paradoxically results in the spatialization

[65] Hägglund, *Dying for Time*, 96.
[66] Norman, *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time*, 1.
[67]Brian Boyd/Martin Hägglund, "Nabokov, Time, and Timelessness: A Reply to Martin Hägglund/Nabokov's Afterlife: A Reply to Brian Boyd," *New Literary History* 37.2 (2006), 469-478.

of time. Norman offers insightful commentary on this discrepancy, suggesting that it reflects Nabokov's poetic contemplation of Bergson's notion of duration. Norman observes that *Ada* "acknowledges the seductions of Bergsonian idealism" while "registering its structural limits and even questioning its aesthetic value."[68] *Ada* layers temporal dimensions onto spatial descriptions, blurring the distinction between time and space and challenging Van's attempts to purify time from spatial influence. This paradox in Van's treatment of time reflects Nabokov's scepticism toward exclusively quantitative and statistical approaches to truth. It also demonstrates Nabokov's simultaneous engagement with and detachment from his era's prevailing scientific and philosophical paradigms.

3.5 Reversible Time: Intricate Anagrams and Backward Time

Nabokov's intellectual versatility beyond writing includes composing chess problems and creating Russian crossword puzzles. He emphasizes that the aesthetic pleasure derived from games is similar to the enjoyment of art. Nabokov regards his artistic creation as a form of play, asserting that "true art is never simple always an elaborate, magical deception."[69] Among his literary works, *Ada* stands out for its abundance of word games. Nabokov employs techniques such as anagrams and palindromes to illustrate the analogy between time and consciousness and to integrate his notion of reversible time into the narrative. Throughout *Ada*, the narrative is imbued with a recursive texture of time, characterized by temporal transposition rather than a linear sequence. Anagrams in particular serve as a tool for Van to depict reverse time. Additionally, intricate wordplay is employed to showcase Van's art of refraction and to challenge conventional notions of linear time sequencing.

3.5.1 Rearranging Letters and Reconstructing Time

Nabokov employs anagrams to convey the concept of time's reversibility and to challenge traditional linear perceptions of time. An anagram involves rearranging the letters of a word to form a different word, a technique that Nabokov frequently utilizes in his literary works. Fond of palindromes, which represent the most intricate form of anagram, Nabokov explores two types: reciprocal palindromes, which yield the same forward and backward, and nonreciprocal

[68] Norman, *Nabokov, History and the Texture of Time*, 61.
[69] Rowe, *Nabokov's Deceptive World*, x.

palindromes, exemplified by words like "evil" and "live." In *Pale Fire*, Nabokov satirizes T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* by subjecting the author to a playful manipulation of "mirror words", transforming "T. S. Eliot" into "toilest."[70] Through these linguistic devices, Nabokov reverses the flow of time within his narratives by running letters backward in his anagrams.

In *Ada*, Nabokov takes the anagram and narrative structure to challenge the conventional forward direction of time, which typically perceives time as flowing from the past to the present and onward to the future, but not in reverse. Van questions the linear concept of time as a unidirectional motion, stating, "The direction of Time, the ardis of Time, one-way Time, here is something that looks useful to me one moment but dwindles the next to the level of an illusion obscurely related to the mysteries of growth and gravitation. The irreversibility of Time (which is not heading anywhere in the first place) is a very parochial affair" (761). Van suggests that to comprehend time, one must mentally traverse in the opposite direction from the conventional flow, indicating a potential for time's reversibility. He posits that while time may appear irreversible to human consciousness, it is not inherently so; instead, it is the limitations of human perception that prevent us from accessing time in its reverse direction. Thus, according to Van, an individual with heightened consciousness may be capable of revisiting the past through memory and sensory stimulus.

In *Ada*, Nabokov employs wordplay and games to encapsulate thematic concerns and develop central characters, reflecting his belief in the intrinsic connection between art and play. In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov remarks on the analogy between art and nature: "Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception."[71] Barabtarlo suggests that Nabokov's emphasis on re-reading implies a spatial reversal of time, as it involves moving from effect to cause, akin to reverse reading.[72] For instance, Van's upside-down 'knack of topsy-turvy locomotion' and his walking on his hands illustrate the inversion principle, reflecting his ability for reverse memory (126). In *Ada*, western Canada is reimagined as a Russian-speaking province called "Estoty", highlighting the spatial rearrangement intertwined with temporal manipulation (17). The novel depicts Van and Ada responding to their first summer in 1884, showcasing spatial and temporal transpositions. Van's stint as "Mascodagama" in the circus, where he performs a "magical reversal" by standing on his head, further exemplifies his defiance of spatio-temporal gravity. His capacity to perceive phenomena like "an ascending waterfall or sunrise in reverse" (269) and his ability to run the "reel of time

[70] Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (1962; rpt. London: Penguin, 1973), 154.
[71] Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 125.
[72] Barabtarlo, ed., *Insomniac Dreams,* 169.

backward" (689) are reminiscent of Proustian backward time. The word games in *Ada* are cryptograms, inviting readers to decipher their underlying messages.

In *Ada*, numerous references evoke the notion of Proustian backward time. For instance, Van's assertion that "Time is but the memory in the making" (792) recalls Proust, and the narrator recounts Van's difficulty in rereading Proust without "a roll-wave of surfeit and a rasp of gravelly heartburn" (25). Van grapples with "our Fourth-Wall Time" (605), where his imagination is susceptible to reversal. Unlike Proust's temporal transcendence, Nabokov coordinates spatiality and temporality in *Ada*, creating a complex temporal landscape. During the writing of *Ada*, Nabokov, who had chronic insomnia, explored the scientific analysis of dreams inspired by J. W. Dunn's *An Experiment with Time* (1927). Dunne proposed that dreams could be precognitive and linked to the past. Dunne, a friend of H. G. Wells, was dedicated to the aesthetics of time travel. However, whether or not this principle of "reverse memory," as Nabokov termed it (512), holds remains uncertain. Barabtarlo, who edited the index cards containing Nabokov's recorded dreams, mentions Nabokov's joy upon discovering that one of his dreams anticipated a television film he watched three days later. Barabtarlo argues that Nabokov overlooked that this dream followed the dramatic sequence in one of his short stories written many years earlier.[73] Although Dunne's hypothesis is not scientifically validated, Nabokov incorporates Dunne's ideas into the reverse structures of *Ada*. Van's exploration of the past, akin to "the searchlight of back thought," leads him to grapple with "problems of space and time, space versus time, time-twisted space, space as time, time as space" (226). Van rejects the idea of having any "Proustian pangs" and insists on how his "perverse gratification" (247) involves the reconstitution of lost time. Thus, *Ada*'s allure lies in part in its elegant and subtle wordplay and games, which enrich its thematic exploration of time and memory.

3.5.2 Word Games and Anagrams

Van employs wordplay with anagrams like "incest and insect" to symbolize Ada's entomological passion and to present his alternative view of time as revisable. His unconventional understanding of time closely aligns with his justification of the incestuous relationship with Ada. Van suggests that their unconventional perception of time and their taboo love transcend ordinary temporal and spatial constraints, offering a pathway to liberation.

[73] Barabtarlo, ed., *Insomniac Dreams,* 40.

The insect recurs in word games, such as "incest and Insect" and "Ada is scient anent incest and the nicest incest", where "incest" and "nicest" are cleverly derived from "insect" (382). Ada, known for her adeptness at word games, views them as mental challenges akin to "verbal circus" (318), with logogriphs (puzzles involving anagrams) holding particular allure. Her fervent interest in entomology aligns with her fascination for insects, mirroring her intense affection for Van, which extends to their incestuous relationship. When Demon discovers their affair, Van remarks on the convergence of art and science "incestuously" and "meet in an insect" (620), highlighting the unconventional union. Van reflects on the historical connotations of "incestuous," which once implied "interference with human evolution" rather than mere moral impropriety (197). In contrast to traditional family structures that expand outward, the incestuous bond between Ada and Van represents a reversal of the typical family tree. It creates a unique lineage that challenges societal expectations. Van perceives his relationship with Ada as a defiance of conventional norms and a symbol of liberation from the constraints imposed by conventional notions of time and space. By embracing their incestuous relationship, Ada and Van transcend the boundaries of conventional morality and societal expectations, forging a path that defies traditional familial structures and offers a new perspective on love and kinship.

The wordplay connecting "incest and Insect" establishes a thematic link between Ada and the insect world, intertwining their love with the natural ecosystem. *Ada* portrays their relationship as "an unprecedented and unrepeatable event" that grew out of the natural world within the broader tapestry of life, drawing imagery from nature to illustrate its significance (113). This connection is depicted through sensory experiences, such as "the mighty whiff of Summer Savory or Yerba Buena on a coastal slope; the dancing flitter of a Holly Blue or an Echo Azure" (113) combined with other birds, flowers and butterflies. Van's fascination with insects parallels his fascination with Ada's body, as he derives a particular pleasure from studying and handling them. His description of pinning moths and butterflies evokes sensual imagery, with vivid details like the "soaking, ice-cold absorbent cotton" and the "satisfying crackle" as the pin penetrates their bodies (87). Through this parallel, Van symbolically connects his creation of butterfly specimens with his physical intimacy with Ada, blurring the lines between the tactile experience of handling insects and his relationship with Ada.

The narrative comprising *Ada* appears preoccupied with spatializing time through the lens of physical sensuality, intertwining the temporal and the sensual within the narrative.[74] Hägglund emphasizes the radical temporality depicted in *Ad*a, noting that it reveals "a

[74] Hägglund, *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov*, 19.

constitutive temporal difference at the heart of the self."[75] Van and Ada's incestuous relationship challenges temporal barriers and spatial boundaries, disrupting the conventional notion of the family tree as a spatial representation of time. Typically, family trees map the traces of the past onto the present but often exclude the possibility of interbreeding among different branches. Blackwell suggests family trees are designed to "highlight and obscure biological links."[76] Thus, Van perceives their affair as a rebellion against the genealogical advance of the family tree, revealing its inadequacy in depicting the interconnectedness of past and present. In this way, Van's exploration of alternative concepts of time closely mirrors his justification of their unconventional incestuous relationship with Ada.

3.5.3 Recursive Temporality and Sensual Densities

In Van's contemplation of time, Ada's name and body transcend mere linguistic play; they embody a reversal of temporal duration. The palindromic nature of Ada's name, reading the same forwards and backwards, symbolizes this temporal reversal. Ada interprets her name as a sign of reversibility, expressing in a letter to Van that he could rescue her by coming to her. She vividly imagines their reunion, from waving to him in El Paso to travelling together to various destinations (334). Ada's request for Van to send her a single Russian word, representing the end of her name, further underscores the significance of her name as a symbol of their connection and potential reversal of time. Van, sceptical of irreversible duration, sees Ada's name as more than a linguistic palindrome; it bridges the temporality he seeks to navigate.

In *Ada*, Van's conceptualization of temporality is intertwined with sensual and even erotic imagery, particularly in his relationship with Ada. Adam Barrows suggests that Ada embodies Van's idealized perception of time, representing his desire to transcend spatial constraints.[77] Van often employs time-related concepts to describe Ada, further blurring the boundaries between physical intimacy and temporal experience. For instance, Van describes Ada's eyes as resembling clock dials, with intricate details reminiscent of hour markers (104). Their sexual encounters are depicted in vivid detail, with Van's arousal described as a relief map of African rivers and Ada tracing the contours with her finger as "the blue Nile down into its jungle" (119).

[75] Hägglund, *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov*, 23.
[76] Blackwell, T*he Quill and the Scalpel*, 85.
[77] Adam Barrows, "Mapping Our Tomorrows: Time in Nabokov's Ada," in *Time, Literature, and Cartography After the Spatial Turn: The Chronometric Imaginary* (New York: Palgrace Macmillan, 2016): 93-119.

Even Van's physical arousal is likened to a clock dial, with its "steady clockwise launch and ponderous upswing of virile revival" (121), symbolizing the passage of time and the anticipation of intimate moments. Through their physical interactions, Van experiences a heightened awareness of time, with each moment marked by the rhythms of their bodies. Ada describes their encounters as "uncomfortable exertions," with mundane objects in their surroundings taking on a symbolic significance, such as an empty medicine bottle rhythmically tapping on a shelf (144). Van's incestuous affair with Ada challenges conventional notions of time and genealogy, offering him a glimpse into a realm of pure temporal experience. Through Ada, Van seeks to transcend the constraints of linear time, embracing the sensual and erotic dimensions of their connection to access a deeper understanding of temporality.

Van's perception of time is deeply intertwined with his sensual desires, particularly his obsession with Ada. He often expresses his fascination with time in terms of sensory passion and desire, drawing parallels between his longing for Ada and his fascination with temporal concepts. This integration of physical intimacy and temporal fascination is evident in his description of his motivation to write about time, where he expresses a desire to "caress time" and "delight sensually in Time, in its stuff and spread, in the fall of its folds, in the very impalpability of its greyish gauze, in the coolness of its continuum, I wish to do something about it; to indulge in a simulacrum of possession" (420). The language used by Van, such as "caress time" and "delight sensually," evokes imagery of intimate physical contact or sexual encounters, suggesting a strong correlation between his lover Ada and his preoccupation with time. This analogy helps to explain why Van compares his treatise on the texture of time to a love novella, gradually "building a logical love story, going from past to present" (562–563). This indicates that Van's possession of Ada is intertwined with his pursuit of understanding pure time. Jenefer Shute argues that Ada's physical body manifests Van's desire, constituting the cartography of his longing. Nabokov's portrayal of the female body in *Ada* carries a rhetorical function and attains a high level of "self-conscious elaboration and investment."[78] Ada embodies Van's yearning to access temporal rhythms, becoming the tangible object of his sexual possession of time. In this way, Van uses Ada's physical, sensual body to explore and express his highly perceptual and sensual notion of time. Simultaneously, his meditation on this highly sensual concept of time supports his fascination with Ada.

[78] Jenefer Shute, "'So Nakedly Dressed': The Text of the Female Body in Nabokov's Novels," in Ellen Pifer, ed., V*ladimir Nabokov's Lolita: a Casebook* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 112.

In *Ada*, Van employs word games not only to challenge the linear progression and irreversibility of time, but also to corelate with the thematic concern of his incestuous affair with Ada. Van strategically embeds hidden messages, obscure patterns, and recurring motifs within these word games to link his meditation on time with his fascination with Ada. For Van, Ada's name and body transcend mere linguistic play; they become conduits for a reversible temporality, bridging the gap and inspiring his meditation and projections on time. In this context, Ada symbolizes time's fluid and reversible nature, embodying both its backward and forward trajectories. Nabokov's use of verbal anagrams adds depth to the novel's recursive and sensual artistry, navigating the complexities and densities of temporal perception and inviting readers to reconsider the links between Van's notions of time and his relationship with Ada.

3.6 Parallel Time: Multiverse Realities and Asymmetrical Temporality

In *Ada*, Nabokov parodies science fiction to defamiliarize human history, proposing alternative ideas on time. Nabokov constructs a multilayered universe by depicting twin planets, Terra and Antiterra, characterized by asymmetrical temporal dynamics. Additionally, the novel investigates Nabokov's portrayal of parallel existences across alternate realities, illustrating the potency of consciousness in shaping these multifaceted realms while acknowledging the potential risks inherent in such constructions. Through *Ada*, Nabokov extends his exploration and experimentation of temporal themes beyond the textual realm into the cosmic domain.

3.6.1 The Multiverse of "Terra and Antiterra"

Parody refers to imitating a particular writer's style or genre for comedic effect, a device which constitutes a significant facet of Nabokov's literary art. *Ada* skillfully engages in the mimicry of two distinct narrative genres: family chronology and science fiction. In *Ada*, the setting unfolds on an alternative planet known as Antiterra or "Demonia, our splendid planet" (238), referred to by Van as "our young Vandemonian" (296). The inhabitants of Demonia are aware of Earth's existence, which they name Terra. Terra takes on connotations of a celestial afterlife and thus embodies an ethereal ideal. As Ada remarks, Terra is perceived as "where they say our souls go" (158). Van perceives Antiterra as a realm of anti-matter where the primacy of mind over matter allows for transformative aesthetic creativity. However, he discovers that Antiterra is not a transcendent ideal world but one replete with significant historical, geographical, and chronological disparities. Terra resembles an alternative

geography of Earth, with dual hemispheres bridging East to West and North to South, where "the brown Orient Express joined London to Ceylon and Sydney, via Turkey and several Channels" (272). Through the juxtaposition of Terra and Antiterra, Nabokov employs a cartographic approach to project temporal divergence onto a distant astronomical body. Within the narrative framework of *Ada*, the twin planets of Terra and Antiterra serve as embodiments of parallel realities, exhibiting a temporal discrepancy of a century and marked disparities in cultural and political landscapes. Adam Barrows elucidates how *Ada* employs elements of science fiction, presenting "the alien's eye view of human time, history, and culture that serves to defamiliarize the human and suggest alternative perspectives on the nature of time."[79] While Nabokov parodies science fiction tropes, he does not render Terra entirely alien; instead, the inhabitants of both worlds share commonalities, existing as akin yet asymmetric species.

The structural foundation of *Ada* seems to rest upon a duality akin to what it terms "double-talk mirrors" (17). Blackwell proposes that Nabokov probably drew the concept of Antiterra from H. G. Wells's *Men Like Gods* (1923), where individuals traverse between Earth and its parallel counterpart, or possibly from Murray Leinster's story "Sidewise in Time."[80] Blackwell suggests that Antiterra may represent the "macroscopic consequences of subatomic indeterminacy in mirror-twinned worlds", serving as an anti-world or parallel reality to Terra.[81] While I concur with this notion, I want to add that the idea of Antiterra may have come from multifaceted sources influenced by a fusion of scientific breakthroughs and historical occurrences. Firstly, the word-formation of Antiterra indicates that it is probably inspired by the discovery of antimatter in the 1930s by Paul Dirac, whose theoretical framework posited antielectrons as the antiparticles of electrons.[82] Antimatter is characterized by matter with "reversed charge, parity, and time, known as CPT reversal."[83] Some scientists proposed antimatter galaxies, which offers a compelling parallel to the concept of Antiterra. Furthermore, the idea of Terra and Antiterra may have been influenced by observations of mirror-like doubling or mirror-worlds, as suggested by Katherine Hayles, who notes Nabokov's familiarity with Martin Gardner's *Ambidextrous Universe*.[84] Gardner's work investigates the interplay between symmetry and asymmetry in the natural world, exploring phenomena ranging from

[79] Barrows, *Time, Literature, and Cartography After the Spatial Turn*, 103.
[80] Blackwell, T*he Quill and the Scalpel*, 163.
[81] Ibid., 163.
[82] Paul Dirac, "The Quantum Theory of the Electron," *Proceedings of the Royal Society A* 117.778 (1928): 610–624.
[83] "Antimatter," *Wikipedia*, last modified January 6 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antimatter
[84] N. Katherine Hayles, *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 111-37.

subatomic particles to macroscopic objects and their implications for the fundamental laws of physics. Gardner's discussion of the mirror double and the notion of a "time-reversed world," where the laws of physics operate in reverse, sparked Nabokov's creation of Terra and Antiterra. Lastly, the concept could have been shaped by American space exploration in the 1960s, coinciding with *Ada*'s publication in 1969. The Apollo moon landing and the transmission of Earth images from space might have sparked Nabokov's imagination, offering literary motifs.

In *Ada*, Terra and Antiterra may serve as mirrors of one another, but they remain fundamentally distinct. These two planets have been temporally out of sync for a hundred years and differ in their communication media. On Antiterra, electricity use is prohibited, with hydraulics as a replacement energy source. "L disaster" in Antiterra refers to electricity-related catastrophes resulting from human exploitation. Van refers to this calamity as the "Lettrocalamity." Unlike the inhabitants of Terra, who use telephones and telegrams, those on Antiterra utilize a "dorophone" for communication, with water as the medium. This water-based communication is crucial in a pivotal scene where Van and Ada reunite. On 14 July 1922, Van drives to meet Ada at the hotel where they last parted in 1905, seventeen years prior. Anxious about seeing Ada in her aged state, Van is in a state of "exhilaration, exhaustion, expectancy, and panic" and is interrupted by the sudden ringing of the phone (781). Ada's voice on the phone triggers memories of their past reunions and partings, allowing Van to access the texture of time. He vividly describes Ada's voice as "the timbre of their past as if the past had put through that call, a miraculous connection" (786), embodying the essence of their shared history, evoking past moments with remarkable clarity. Through this phone call, Van reconnects with the past and perceives "the glittering 'now' that was the only reality of Time's texture" (787), realizing the present moment as a tangible manifestation of time's continuity. For Van and Ada, this persistent engagement with past reflections serves as a means of countering the loss of time, allowing them to inscribe the past and preserve the fleeting present.

If we consider the difference in communication media between Terra and Antiterra, Ada's voice on the phone has several poetic functions: first, to suggest that hearing may be more efficient than vision in recollecting the past or approaching the texture of time; second, to illustrate water-oriented communication at Antiterra provides an excellent opportunity to access the texture of time; third, to expand significantly the temporal and spatial horizons of the present and presence. Ada's voice on the telephone creates a co-presence between the past and present, transcending the bondage of spatiality and temporality.

3.6.2 Mirror Doubles and Alternate Realities

Terra and Antiterra serve as cosmological extensions of the novel's theme of duality and mirror images. The twin planets are intricately linked to the main characters, reflecting their relationship throughout the narrative. The interpretation of Terra and Antiterra varies among critics, with some viewing them as symbolic representations of the incestuous relationship between Ada and Van. Bobbie Ann Mason suggests that the sibling planets reflect the novel's overarching incest theme.[85] Lucy Maddox further elaborates on the significance of these twin planets, noting that they represent the "dual nature of human experience" and the inherent need for a "split vision" and room for "slight asymmetry" when perceiving complex phenomena.[86] The asymmetry between Terra and Antiterra mirrors the multifaceted nature of reality depicted in the novel. Terra and Antiterra are not merely settings within the narrative but essential literary devices woven into character portrayal and thematic exploration in the novel.

Van perceives Terra and Antiterra as akin to twin siblings with asymmetrical temporality, mirroring the familial resemblance between himself and Ada. He draws parallels between the relationship of these twin planets and the familial connection between Lucette and Ada, emphasizing the "artistry of asymmetry" within these relationships (280). In Part Two of the novel, Van recounts the narrative of his first fiction, *Letters from Terra*, where the scientist Sig Leymanski experiences a corruption of spatio-temporal barriers, demonstrating a deviant desire for a Terran female observed under a microscope (340). Through this narrative, Van portrays Terra and Antiterra as out-of-sync twin planets that exemplify the possibilities of parallel worlds or realities. Besides Terra and Antiterra, Van explores the possibilities of parallel realities and the diverging paths of life through a pivotal scene depicting Van's attempted suicide. When Van presses the trigger of a pistol to his temples, the narrative presents two potential outcomes, existing in parallel at that moment: "Nothing happened—or perhaps everything happened" (455). One possibility suggests that Van remains alive, experiencing a sense of continuity akin to a night's passing, especially during moments of intense emotion of "great happiness or great desolation" (445). The other outcome suggests that Van is on the brink of death yet seamlessly transitions into the following morning with a "spurious past discreetly but firmly attached behind" (445). In this scenario, the pistol in Van's hand could transform into a harmless object, such as a pocket comb, indicating a divergence between the intended action and its consequences. This scene illustrates the intersection between

[85] Mason, *Nabokov's Garden*, 13.
[86] Lucy Maddox, *Nabokov's Novels in English* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1983), 210.

consciousness and the realm of alternate possibilities, highlighting the complexity of consciousness and existence.

In *Ada*, Nabokov employs the parody of science fiction to introduce the concept of Terra and Anti-terra, representing asymmetrical temporality within a multi-level universe. These twin planets act as a cosmological extension of the novel's theme of doubles and the interplay between fantasy and reality. Their existence as parallel realities is imbued with elements of subatomic theory and quantum mechanics, suggesting a connection to the multi-worlds hypothesis of quantum theory. Through this narrative device, Nabokov explores alternate realities and the complexities of temporal divergence within his fictional universe.

3.6.3 Reality Construction and Temporal Simultaneity

Despite existing independently and out of sync by a century, Terra and Anti-terra in *Ada* have the potential for contact through consciousness or obscure psychophysical channels. Van conducts psychiatric research on individuals experiencing these interworld contacts, mainly focusing on patients with conditions such as terraphilia and chronophobia. Chronophobia manifests as temporal and spatial dysfunction, while terraphilia involves a chronic inability to regulate sensory perceptions and actions. Van's interest in these patients is evident in his studies conducted at the mental institution on the “Idea of Dimension and Dementia” (518). He is particularly fascinated by patients with chromesthesia, noting their remarkable talents, such as the ability to discern rapid flashes occurring “every three milliseconds (0.003!)” (760). According to Van, this heightened sensitivity allows for a unique contact between Terra and Anti-terra. It suggests that consciousness or sensory perception plays a crucial role in establishing the connection between the two worlds and transcending time constraints.

Van’s exploration of the effects of excessive acute consciousness and its potential risks is exemplified through his adoptive mother, Aqua, who is a patient suffering from terraphilia. Nabokov indirectly presents Aqua's mental condition through Van’s recollections of her statements and experiences. Aqua claims to hear “magic-music boxes talking and singing, drowning the terror of thought” (42), indicating an extreme sensitivity to sensory stimuli. Diagnosed with an “extreme form of mystical mania combined with existing alienation” (43), Aqua exhibits morbid sensitivity, particularly to tap water, which she perceives as “a fragment of human speech lingering in one’s ears” and inducing mental panic and physical pain (44). As her disorder worsens, Aqua experiences temporal disorientation, struggling to comprehend the passage of time conveyed by a clock's hands. To her, interpreting the clock's hands is as

challenging as deciphering the “sign language of a secret society” (47). Eventually, Aqua's sensory perception breaks down entirely, leading to a linguistic disorder where the meaning of words collides, and temporal order collapses into simultaneity. In her suicide letter, Aqua compares the clock to a “klok (piece) of a chelovek (human being),” emphasizing the importance of knowing one's place in time and space (53). Van uses Aqua's experiences to address the issue of temporal disorientation and collapse of temporal order, highlighting the profound impact of excessive consciousness on one’s perception of reality.

Nabokov’s portrayal of the power of consciousness in constructing multi-realities and approaching the texture of time underscores the complexities of human perception and consciousness. While he highlights the potential for individuals to transcend conventional temporal boundaries through heightened sensitivity, he also illustrates the risks associated with excessive consciousness, namely temporal dysfunction. Exploring the interplay between consciousness and temporal perception is relevant in the modern world. With advancements in communication and transportation, distant places are increasingly perceived as existing in temporal simultaneity, leading to a compression of time and space. However, for individuals with susceptible minds, this compression may result in mental disorientation or dysfunction. Nabokov's insights serve as a poignant reminder of the relationship between consciousness, perception, and the experience of time in an era characterized by rapid technological progress and interconnectedness.

Summary

This chapter examines the intricate texture of time portrayed in *Ada*, uncovering its paradoxes and contradictions within the framework of new physics. Through the lens of Van's “The Texture of Time,” Nabokov integrates his scientific thoughts on time, drawing upon the principles of relativity and quantum theory. This exploration is not confined to a single episode within *Ada* but rather permeates and interweaves throughout the novel. The aesthetic experience of temporality is not a peripheral feature in *Ada*. Instead, it lies at the heart of the novel’s art and is one of the most consistent, defining characteristics in Nabokov’s work.

Some distinctive features characterize Nabokov's aesthetics of temporality in *Ada*. Firstly, “The Texture of Time” in *Ada* extends beyond being a mere episode; Van’s unconventional notion of time is interwoven with his incestuous affair with Ada throughout the novel. Van uses his exploration of unconventional time to rationalize his relationship with Ada, and similarly, he defends their affair to support his alternative understanding of time. The analogy

between Van's alternative concept of time and his relationship with Ada becomes evident when he introduces his philosophical prose on time to her, describing his treatise as a kind of love story novella. Van claims his investigation of time is akin to building a love story, "going from past to present, blossoming as a concrete story, and just as gradually reversing analogies disintegrating again into bland abstraction" (422). For Van, both the abstract meditation on time and his concrete and sensual affair with Ada represent acts of rebellion against convention, offering pathways to individual liberty, aesthetic bliss, and intellectual achievement.

Secondly, Van's exploration of the texture of time represents a fusion of artistic and scientific sensibilities. Nabokov employs a poeticized interpretation of relativity to underscore the intricate relationship between time and consciousness, transcending a purely materialistic worldview. By incorporating metaphors from new physics directly linked to the universe's physical laws, Nabokov engages with theoretical physics and shapes the role of language and narrative in conveying temporal concepts. In *Ada*, time occupies a central thematic position, not merely as a backdrop but as the focal point of the work. Nabokov's poetic dialogue with the new physical assumptions and conceptions of time enriches cultural understanding of temporality, offering a unique aesthetic response to the evolving landscape of physics.

Thirdly, Nabokov challenges conventional notions of causal sequences and deterministic temporalities by exploring Van's impulses towards a purified and perceptual concept of time. Van's idea of pure time emphasizes the fusion of the present and the past, deliberately excluding space and the future. However, this idealized notion of time encounters paradoxes when faced with the ambivalent coexistence of space and time. These paradoxes highlight the tension between Van's desire to separate time from spatial constraints and the inevitable presence of space within the temporal framework. Nabokov uses these unresolved tensions to engage in the debate between Einstein and Bergson on time. While Nabokov aligns with Einstein's principles of indeterminacy and relativity, opposing mechanism and determinism, he remains critical of Einstein's conception of time and space. Conversely, Nabokov embraces Bergson's philosophy of time, reflecting his inclination towards metaphysics and anti-rationalism. Yet, he acknowledges the paradoxical nature inherent in the de-spatialization of time, suggesting an exploration of temporal concepts beyond the confines of scientific or philosophical frameworks.

Lastly, Nabokov employs the concepts of Terra and Antiterra to suggest a multiverse where logically possible universes coexist. Through this narrative device, he explores parallel realities and highlights the power of consciousness in constructing and shaping reality. The depiction of the multiverse in *Ada* resonates with the many-worlds interpretation of quantum

theory, which posits that the universe splits into parallel realities at each quantum instant. Although quantum mechanics was formally proposed in 1957, it is conceivable that Nabokov, being intellectually curious, encountered ideas related to it before its popularization in the late 1960s. However, without direct evidence or statements from Nabokov himself regarding his knowledge of quantum mechanics, it remains speculative to assert the extent of his understanding before its formal proposal and popularization. Nabokov's artistic intuition allowed him to construct an alternative model akin to the many-worlds interpretation of quantum theory. *Ada* serves as a platform for Nabokov to challenge deterministic temporalities and liberate fiction from conventional constraints, artistically engaging with new physics and modern philosophy. Thus, *Ada* represents more than just an aesthetic retreat from social realities; it reflects Nabokov's engagement with fundamental questions of existence and reality.

Chapter 4 "Delusional Double": A Psychological and Behavioral Study on Hermann's Subjective Double in Nabokov's *Despair*

Nabokov penned his sixth Russian novel, *Despair* (Otchaianie), while residing in Berlin in 1932.[1] Translated into English by Nabokov himself in 1936, he described it as his "first serious attempt […] to use English for what may be loosely termed an artistic purpose" (xi). *Despair* unfolds through the narrative lens of the protagonist and murderer, Hermann, who recounts what he believes to be the perfect crime involving doppelgängers in a disorienting and self-contradictory first-person monologue. While many critics interpret *Despair* as a satirical nod to Dostoevsky's literary style and to Freudian concepts, little attention has been given to its connection with the cognitive science, especially clinical syndrome known as the subjective double. Through this work, Nabokov reveals his fascination and experiments with the complexities of the human mind, imagination, and cognition.

Cognitive science is an interdisciplinary field that explores the mind and its processes, including perception, memory, language, reasoning, and emotion. It draws on methods and theories from diverse disciplines such as psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, artificial intelligence, anthropology, philosophy, and education to understand how humans and other animals acquire, process, and store knowledge. By examining both conscious and unconscious mental processes, cognitive science sheds light on how we comprehend and interact with the world.[2] The relationship between cognitive science and art is particularly close. This discipline provides insights into how human cognition engages with creative processes, as well as the perception and interpretation of artworks. Artistic creation often involves cognitive mechanisms such as pattern recognition, emotional memory, and symbolic thinking. These cognitive processes are essential for artists and characters as they generate ideas, make decisions, and convey meaning. Conversely, art serves as a valuable lens for cognitive scientists, offering unique perspectives on human creativity, imagination, and the ways the brain processes symbolic meanings and emotional responses.

The previous two chapters focused on biology and New Physics, showing how Nabokov had direct engagement with Darwinian evolution and Einstein's theory of relativity. This chapter evaluates the protagonist's abnormal psychological states and mental complexities in

[1] Vladimir Nabokov, *Despair* (New York: Vintage International, 1989). Subsequent page references to this edition are cited in parentheses in the text.
[2] Paul Thagard, *Mind: Introduction to Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 1-3.

Despair, drawing parallels with theories of Subjective Double Syndromes. This approach reveals deeper affinities between Nabokov's narrative and contemporary psychological insights, inviting readers to examine the psychological intricacies of the double as a manifestation of internal conflict and fractured identity. By linking the novel to Subjective Double Syndrome, we can interpret the protagonist's experiences as reflections of his illusory double, illustrating how this double serves as both an alter ego and a cognitive source. Furthermore, this framework encourages an exploration of the interplay between perception and reality, suggesting that the double not only represents a split within the individual but also complicates the understanding of authenticity in Nabokov's narrative. Engaging with the text through the lens of Subjective Double Syndromes allows readers to uncover deeper layers of meaning related to themes of illusion, self-deception, and identity. This perspective also facilitates a broader discussion about how Nabokov's literary techniques mirror contemporary psychological theories, positioning his work as both a literary endeavour and exploration of the human psyche.

By examining the three encounters between Hermann and Felix, the chapter scrutinizes how Hermann forms, solidifies, and rationalizes his delusional belief that Felix is his double, culminating in his conviction that murdering Felix is a form of art. Furthermore, it explores Nabokov's portrayal of Hermann's syndrome within the intertextual context of Dostoevsky's literary oeuvre. This study posits that Hermann's cognitive limitations, lack of empathy, and warped ideology are pivotal in nurturing his erroneous delusion. Some main arguments emerge from this analysis: Firstly, Nabokov uses Hermann's subjective double to parody the genre of murder fiction and expose the gaps and flaws within the study of evidence. Hermann's claim of being identical to Felix is a misguided basis for his search for evidence. The more evidence he collects, the more absurd his conclusions become. Nabokov reveals that evidence is only effective when it is based on a rational or realistic hypothesis. Secondly, Nabokov utilizes Hermann's subjective double to underscore the significance of motivation in shaping human behaviour and to explore the narrative potential inherent in subjective realities. By identifying or clarifying the most reliable motivation, we can properly evaluate Hermann's evidence and arguments. Thirdly, it reveals Nabokov's complicated stance towards Dostoevsky, showcasing a blend of admiration and critique. Lastly, it suggests that Nabokov's narrative either anticipates or mirrors the psychological complexities associated with the subjective double phenomenon, shedding light on its intellectual, moral, ideological, and intertextual dimensions. This chapter challenges the prevailing interpretation of Nabokov's supposed disdain for Dostoevsky, arguing that *Despair* simultaneously draws from and subverts Dostoevsky's literary legacy. It

underscores how literary works can act as a conduit for exploring psychological phenomena and clinical syndromes, thereby potentially enhancing our understanding of these complexities.

4.1 Intertextual Study of *Despair* and the Subjective Double

4.1.1 The Double Motif and Mirror Symmetry

The concept of the double, often intertwined with themes of duality, identity, and the psyche, has been examined through numerous critical perspectives. Freud's theory remains the most influential, rooted in his exploration of the uncanny and the nature of self. In *The Uncanny*, Freud suggests that the double originates in early psychological development as a self-protective mechanism—an external projection of fears and unresolved conflicts by the ego.[3] Over time, the double transforms into a symbol of repressed fears, guilt, or desires, embodying disowned or hidden aspects of the self. Freud posits that this figure is inherently unsettling because it disrupts one's sense of unity and autonomy, exposing suppressed impulses and inner contradictions.[4] The encounter with the double, Freud argues, evokes the "uncanny" by blurring the line between the familiar and the strange, creating existential dread.[5] The double thus becomes a reminder of mortality and fractured identity, challenging the stability of self. In literature, the double can be seen as a representation of internal conflicts, serving as a mirror to the protagonist's darker, suppressed aspects and often precipitating psychological turmoil or moral ambiguity.[6] Freud's analysis of the double has since influenced many literary interpretations, offering insights into characters' inner lives and psychological dimensions.

Literary critics frequently draw on Freudian theories to analyse how doubles represent internal conflicts, repressed desires, or alternative identities within characters. For instance, Dostoevsky's *The Double* illustrates the protagonist's struggle with self-perception and the uncanny nature of the doppelgänger. Scholars also examine the double as a vehicle for exploring themes of alienation and fragmentation in modernist literature. In works like Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the double embodies

[3] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, 1917-1919, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 219-256.
[4] Ibid., 220.
[5] Ibid., 236.
[6] Ibid., 236.

tensions between morality and immorality, self and other, or reality and illusion.[7] Recent interdisciplinary approaches integrate insights from cognitive science and cultural studies, further expanding the double's interpretation as both a psychological and social construct. These perspectives view the double not only as a narrative device but also as a means of exploring complex issues of identity, agency, and the human condition, making it an enduring subject for scholarly inquiry in literary studies.

In *Despair*, the protagonist, chocolate merchant Hermann, encounters a tramp named Felix, whom he believes to be his physical double. Hermann concocts a scheme to murder Felix for insurance money. Extensive scholarly research has examined the double motif within the novel. However, Nabokov's narrative takes an ironic turn in its conclusion. Despite Hermann's meticulous planning, a crucial flaw emerges: no one else notices or perceives the striking similarity between Hermann and Felix. The police identify Felix's true identity, debunking Hermann's belief in their interchangeable duality. Hermann accounts his crime as a crime of genius before being arrested. In the foreword, Nabokov contrasts Hermann with another of his characters, Humbert from *Lolita*, deeming: "Both are neurotic scoundrels, yet there is a green lane in Paradise where Humbert is permitted to wander at dusk once a year, but Hell shall never parole Hermann" (xiii). In other words, Humbert is granted a semblance of redemption in Nabokov's vision, and Hermann is condemned unequivocally. This characterization marks Hermann as one of Nabokov's most detestable figures.

The narrative structure of *Despair* showcases a mirror symmetry that aligns with its theme of duality. Hermann recounts his story across ten chapters, followed by an epilogue, with symmetry as the guiding principle. These ten chapters can be divided into two mirroring halves: the first (chapters one to five) and the second (chapters six to ten) reflect each other. Hermann perceives this symmetry as an accomplishment akin to "a game of patience, arranged beforehand", where he sets out the cards for success in the first half, then gathers them in reverse order, and presents the prepared deck to others with unwavering confidence in its outcome in the other half (122). Beyond the overarching symmetry of the two main parts, specific motifs and suggestive details are symmetrically distributed throughout the narrative. For instance, chapters two and nine exhibit a mirror-like symmetry, where elements like the yellow post on Ardalion's plot of land, the car, the brush, and the pinecone find their mirrored

[7] George N. Christodoulou, "The Origin of the Concept of Doubles," in *The Delusional Misidentification Syndromes*, ed. George N. Christodoulou (Basel, Switzerland: Karger; 1986), 1-8.

counterparts. This detailed mirroring extends to the novel's general structure and specific details, reinforcing the theme of duality and adding depth to the storytelling.

In *Despair*, narrative temporality and perspectives exhibit striking mirror symmetry. The three encounters between Hermann and Felix are arranged with symmetrical consequences. Notably, there is a four-month interval between the first meeting on 9 May and the second on 1 October. Similarly, another four-month gap exists between the second meeting and the final encounter on 9 March. This symmetrical arrangement places the initial meeting in early summer and the last meeting in winter, with October serving as the midpoint in autumn. Besides the temporal symmetry, Hermann recounts his supposed perfect crime of doubles according to the principle of mirror symmetry. His narrative is dominated by a solipsistic and narcissistic worldview, with his fixation on the double shaping the narrative structure. Hermann adopts a dual-time perspective, narrating the future and the past, which mirror each other. For instance, in Chapter Two, while describing the summer landscape on Ardalion's land in June, Hermann abruptly foreshadows the snowy scene of the future murder in winter (March), as depicted later in Chapter Nine. Hermann elucidates that through his imaginative projection of snow in summer, "the future shimmers through the past" (37). This bidirectional flow of time reinforces the novel's thematic exploration of duality and mirrors.

4.1.2 Parodic Reference to Dostoevsky and Freud

Numerous critics have analysed the novel's intertextual engagement with the theme of duality and its parodic references to the works of Dostoevsky – this is not surprising, given the thematic affinities between Despair and several of Dostoevesky's novels. When a French translation of *Despair* appeared in 1939, Jean-Paul Sartre remarked, "This author has a great deal of talent, but it is of the old school. I am thinking of his spiritual mentors, particularly Dostoevsky […] But Dostoevsky believed in his characters. Mr. Nabokov no longer believes in his, nor even in the art of the novel."[8] Nabokov vehemently refuted Sartre's critique and asserted that the double theme is "a frightful bore" and dismissed Felix in *Despair* as a "false double."[9] He argued that unlike Dostoevsky's novels, *Despair* does not "uplift the spiritual organ of man, nor does it show humanity the right exit" (xii). Nabokov inserted an ironic remark from Sartre in the preface of the novel: "I do know French and shall be interested to

[8] Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Art*, 231-32.
[9] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 83-84.

see if anyone calls my Hermann 'the father of existentialism'" (9). Nabokov's denial of Dostoevsky's influence on *Despair* likely stems from his critique of Dostoevsky's tendency towards excessive focus on general ideas, ideological overload, lack of concrete details, and what he perceives as "melodramatic muddle and phony mysticism."[10] However, despite Nabokov's persistent denials, many critics agree with Sartre that *Despair* parodies Dostoevsky's work. Pifer argues that in *Despair*, Nabokov exposes the double motif as "a deceptive shadow-theme, tracing delusions of Hermann's mad mind," and the novel "burlesques the breathless, urgent immediacy of Dostoevsky's confessional narrative."[11] Pifer parallels Hermann and Raskolnikov, the deluded murderer in *Crime and Punishment*. Unlike Sartre, Pifer contends that Nabokov does not merely parody Dostoevsky but combines repetition and divergence to craft his unique style. Despite Nabokov's repeated criticisms of Dostoevsky, the influence of Dostoevsky's thematic duality and narrative style persists within *Despair*. This influence holds particular significance within Nabokov's literary intentions, as he employs parody and other forms to elucidate and develop the thematic elements of his novel.

Nabokov's views on Dostoevsky needs careful interpretation, particularly in light of the latter's soaring popularity in Western Europe and the United States during the 1930s. Many readers romanticized Dostoevsky's exploration of the human psyche and moral dilemmas, aligning these qualities with contemporary interests in Freudian psychoanalysis and existentialist philosophy.[12] Critics often connected Dostoevsky's novels to these movements, perceiving his characters as embodiments of raw intensity and internal conflict resonant with Freud's theories on repression and Kierkegaard's reflections on crises of faith and individuality.[13] In contrast to this cultural reverence, Nabokov critiqued Dostoevsky for sacrificing narrative artistry in favour of psychological and moral exploration. He argued that Dostoevsky's tendency toward sentimental and redemptive endings undermined the authenticity of his characters' psychological complexity, resulting in a form of moralizing that Nabokov found artistically shallow. His dismissive remarks, such as labelling Dostoevsky a "cheap sensationalist" indulging in "sentimental, moralistic" fiction, stemmed from his prioritization of narrative form over moral content.[14] Nabokov noted that Dostoevsky's

[10] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 226.
[11] Pifer, *Nabokov and the Novel*, 97-118.
[12] James Woodward, "Russian Literature and Psychoanalysis." (1991): 805-807. Rancour-Laferriere, Daniel, ed. *Russian literature and psychoanalysis*. Vol. 31. John Benjamins Publishing, 1989.
[13] D. M. Bethea, *The Shape of Chaos: Dostoevsky and Nabokov's Despair* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 45.
[14] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Russian Literature* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 71.

characters often serve as vehicles for ideological debates rather than fully realized individuals, which can dilute their psychological depth. By criticizing Dostoevsky, Nabokov sought to clarify the distinction between the author's thematic concerns and the oversimplified interpretations prevalent in popular discourse. However, Nabokov's engagement with Dostoevsky goes beyond mere dismissal. In *Despair*, for instance, he intricately parodies Dostoevskian tropes, appropriating the doppelgänger motif to expose the absurdity of Hermann's self-righteous descent into madness.[15] Rather than entirely rejecting Dostoevsky, Nabokov's works reveal a complex dialogue with Dostoevskian themes, blending irony with engagement and critique with homage. By engaging with Dostoevsky, Nabokov articulates his vision of art which privileges the aesthetic and intricate over the moral and psychological.

Besides Nabokov's engagement with Dostoevsky, Nabokov's engagement with Freud is also characterized by both overt rejection and subtle interplay. Known for his disdain for Freudian psychoanalysis, Nabokov often criticized Freud's theories as reductive, especially his focus on sexuality and the unconscious. Nabokov dismissed Freudian symbols and motifs as overly simplistic, undermining the depth of individual creativity and imagination. Despite this aversion, Nabokov's works frequently grapple with themes reminiscent of Freudian concepts, such as repressed desires, doubling, and identity crises. In *Lolita* and *Despair*, Nabokov explores psychological dimensions that echo Freudian ideas. Rather than embracing Freudian theory, Nabokov manipulates these elements to expose the limits of psychoanalysis, often using irony to reveal the gaps between Freudian interpretations and his characters' rich inner lives. This dynamic suggests that Nabokov viewed Freud less as a guiding influence and more as a figure against whom he could define articulate his vision of human consciousness, characterized by complexity, mystery, and the irreducibility of personal experience.

Nabokov consistently mocked Freudianism, seeing it as a reductive and overly prescriptive framework. In 1931, alongside the publication of his novel *Despair*, Nabokov penned the essay "What Should Everyone Know?", in which he satirized Freudianism as a supposed universal remedy for all human ailments with a set of simplistic interpretations.[16] This critique reflects Nabokov's resistance to psychoanalytic theory, which he believed constrained the depth and complexity of human experience. His disdain for Freud is also evident in his response to an invitation from Gleb Struve to contribute to a paper celebrating for Freud's seventy-fifth birthday. Declining the offer, Nabokov remarked, "I recently published my opinion about

[15] J. Connolly, *Nabokov's Deceptive World: Art and Illusion in Despair* (Yale University Press, 2016).
[16] Vladimir Nabokov, "Chto vsiakii dolzhen znat'?" in Vladimir Nabokov, Sobranie sochinenii russkogo perioda v piati tomakh, vol. 3 (Sankt-Peterburg: Simpozium, 1999), 697-99.

Freudianism, which nauseates me, in 'Novaia Gazeta,' so I don't have any desire to write about it anew."[17] This rejection underscores his opposition to the widespread acceptance of Freudian ideas, which he viewed as incompatible with the complexity of consciousness and creativity.

There has been considerable debate surrounding Nabokov's antipathy towards Freudianism. Geoffrey Green highlights that despite Nabokov's disdain for Freud, he paradoxically displays Freudian undertones in his works.[18] Shute suggests that Nabokov's anti-Freudian stance serves as a means to assert interpretive authority over his texts, revealing the paradox that Nabokov employs methods that seem to deny the independence of the text while highlighting its autonomy. Shute argues that Nabokov's use of parody and polemic inadvertently point to the texts they are designed to refute, inscribing the boundaries of a particular historical moment and the limitations of authorial power.[19] Durantaye posits that Nabokov's conflict with Freud stems not only from the perceived failure of psychoanalysis to achieve scientific status, but also from its pretensions to operate as a unified discourse within the realm of human sciences. Nabokov critiqued not just the scientific aspirations of psychoanalysis, but also its totalizing claims to understanding human behaviour.[20]

Despite Nabokov's overt dismissal of Freudianism as a simplistic psychological theory, the influence of Freud's ideas is undeniably present in his works, suggesting a complex relationship between Nabokov and Freudian psychology. Nabokov often employs symbolism and dream-like imagery in his works, elements reminiscent of Freud's interpretation of dreams and his theories about the subconscious mind. For example, the use of dreams and surreal imagery in *Ada or Ardor* suggests a subconscious layer to the narrative that resonates with Freudian concepts. Furthermore, Freudian themes of sexuality and repression are evident in Nabokov's exploration of taboo subjects and the tension between desire and societal norms in works like *Lolita*. The complex portrayal of Humbert's obsession with Lolita and the psychological mechanisms he employs to justify his actions reflect a nuanced engagement with Freudian ideas about sexuality and the unconscious. These illustrate how Nabokov's works exhibit influences from Freudian psychology despite his overt criticisms of Freudianism.

Nabokov's dismissal of Freudianism can be attributed to several key factors. Firstly, his emphasis on individual freedom leads him to reject the reductive sexual implications often

[17] Vladimir Nabokov, "Pis'ma V. V. Nabokova k G. P. Struve, chast' vtoraia (1931–35), " E. B. Belodubrovskii and A. A. Dolinin, eds., *Zvezda* 11 (2003): 115-50.
[18] Geoffrey Green, *Freud and Nabokov* (University of Nebraska Press,1988).
[19] Shute, "Nabokov and Freud," 412-20.
[20] Leland de La Durantaye, "Vladimir Nabokov and Sigmund Freud, or a Particular Problem," *American Imago* 62.1 (2005): 59-73.

associated with Freudian psychoanalysis.[21] Nabokov asserts that the human psyche and behaviour are far too complex to be reduced solely to sexual causes or other simplistic causal mechanisms.[22] Secondly, Nabokov opposes Freud's tendency to generalize from individual cases and prioritize common causality over the uniqueness of individual experiences. Nabokov values personal idiosyncrasies over overarching rules or universalities. Thirdly, Nabokov perceives significant flaws or inherent limitations in Freudian theory. Nabokov critiques Freud's understanding of childhood attachment to parents, arguing that Freud's theories distort the authentic nature of these bonds. Boyd points out that Nabokov's critique is not merely a personal opinion but is supported by contemporary developmental psychology, which offers more nuanced insights into the complexities of parent-child relationships.[23] Despite Nabokov's disdain for Freudianism, Freudian themes persist as a conspicuous motif in his works. Nabokov often employs his narrators or characters as counterexamples to challenge Freudian reductionism. In *Despair*, Nabokov portrays Hermann's psychological aberrations through the dissonance between his subjective perception of a double and the objective reality perceived by others. Hermann claims that his motivation for murder "is not mercenary greed, not merely that, not merely the desire to improve my position" (52). His motivation beyond mere greed or self-interest serves as a reminder that his psychological state cannot be neatly explained through preconceived psychoanalytic paradigms or causal laws. Nabokov thus underscores the limitations of reducing complex human behaviour to simplistic Freudian frameworks, urging readers to recognize the multifaceted nature of the human psyche.

While the interpretations of *Despair* in relation to Dostoevsky and Freud shed light on certain cultural and intellectual influences on the novel, they may inadvertently overlook other significant psychological themes within Nabokov's art. Nabokov's works delve into a wide array of psychological phenomena, inviting readers to explore the complexities of the human mind from various perspectives. Boyd suggests that Nabokov captivates readers' imaginations by tapping into what modern psychological developments have identified as grounded cognition. This concept encompasses our ability to understand the desires, intentions, and beliefs of others, as well as our capacity for empathy.[24] Nabokov's narrative experiments with

[21] Alan C. Elms, "Cloud, Castle, Claustrum: Nabokov as a Freudian in spite of e Himself," in Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, ed., *Russian Literature and Psychoanalysis* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1989), 353-68.
[22] Esther Menaker, *Otto Rank: A Rediscovered Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 9.
[23] Brian Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov: Selected Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 111.
[24] Brain Boyd, "The Psychological Work of Fictional Play," in *Stalking Nabokov* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 109-20.

the delusional double in *Despair* may thus reflect contemporary psychological conceptions and theories of the mind and cognition. By considering these psychological dimensions, readers can gain deeper insights into the workings of Nabokov's characters and the underlying themes of his novels. Rather than solely focusing on the influences of Dostoevsky and Freud, exploring Nabokov's engagement with broader psychological concepts enriches our understanding of his literary achievements and the complexities of human experience portrayed in his works.

4.1.3 Subjective Double Syndromes and the Fogg Behavior Model

Recent advancements in clinical and cognitive psychology regarding delusional misidentification syndromes offer valuable insights into the causal explanations for Hermann's abnormal cognition and aberrant behavior, as depicted in *Despair.* Nabokov employs a first-person narrative to immerse readers into Hermann's psyche and explore his inner workings. However, unravelling Hermann's actual psychological state and motivations proves to be a challenging endeavor. While Hermann is our primary source of information, his narrative is unreliable as he manipulates it to justify his crimes and influence readers' perceptions. We take a three-step approach to uncover the circumstances and delve into Hermann's motivations. Firstly, we must analyze Hermann's first-person narrative to understand the story's content. Secondly, it is imperative to reconstruct the actual situation involving Hermann and Felix. Lastly, we need to discern Hermann's genuine concerns and motivations for his actions. Hermann aims to achieve two primary objectives: to persuade readers of his obsession with a subjective double and to elevate his murder into a work of art. To accomplish these goals, Hermann must convince readers that Felix is his double, despite the resemblance being only recognized by himself and based on a misidentification of Felix and himself. Unravelling the intricacies of Hermann's psyche and motivations is essential to fully comprehend the complexities of *Despair* and Nabokov's exploration of psychological themes within the novel.

The delusional nature of Hermann's double in *Despair* bears a striking resemblance to what cognitive psychologists have identified as Delusional Misidentification Syndromes (DMS).[25] These syndromes, which manifest in neuropsychological disorders, offer valuable insights into understanding Hermann's psychological condition. DMS encompasses four distinct subtypes. The first subtype, Capgras' syndrome, involves the delusional denial of

[25] G. N. Christodoulou and S. Malliara-Loulakaki, "Delusional misidentification syndromes and cerebral 'dysrhythmia'," *Psychiatr Clin (Basel)* 14 (1981): 245-251.

identifying familiar individuals, replaced by doubles who bear a physical resemblance but are perceived as imposters.[26] The second subtype, Frégoli syndrome, is characterized by falsely identifying familiar individuals among strangers, believing that these individuals retain their psychological identity despite apparent physical differences. [27] The third subtype, Intermetamorphosis syndrome, a variant of Frégoli syndrome, involves the belief that familiar and unfamiliar individuals physically and psychologically interchange.[28] The fourth subtype, the syndrome of subjective doubles, first described in 1978, entails the delusional belief that a stranger has physically transformed into the patient's self while retaining their original psychological identity.[29] While Hermann is a fictional character, we cannot employ techniques such as transcranial magnetic stimulation and other sophisticated procedures to monitor and measure changes in his brain activity. However, his delusional double construction in *Despair* closely resembles symptoms associated with subjective doubles syndrome. Thus, while Hermann's condition cannot be clinically diagnosed, it can be partially understood or approached through the interdisciplinary lenses of literature and psychology. The exploration of Hermann's character offers valuable insights into the complexities of human cognition and the manifestation of delusional beliefs within the realm of fiction.

The Fogg Behaviour Model (FBM) serves as a compelling theoretical framework for analysing *Despair*, particularly in its exploration of psychological motivations and the complexities of human behaviours. According to the FBM, behavior is influenced by three key factors: motivation, ability, and triggers, each consisting of subcomponents. For a person to engage in a target behavior, they must possess sufficient motivation, adequate ability and be triggered to perform the behavior. These three factors must align simultaneously for the behavior to occur.[30] The vertical axis represents motivation, with low motivation toward the bottom and high motivation toward the top. The horizontal axis denotes ability, with low ability on the left and high ability on the right. The star in the center symbolizes the target behavior. The star's position and the direction of the arrow indicate the interplay between motivation and

[26] Joseph Capgras and Jean Reboul-Lachaux, "L'illusion des socies dans un delire systematise chronique" (The Illusion of Doubles in a Systematized Chronic Delirium), *Bull Soc Clin Med Ment* 11 (1923): 6-16.
[27] Paul Courbon and Gaston Fail, "Illusion de Fregoli" (Illusion of Fregoli), *Bulletin de la Société Clinique de Médecine Mentale* 15 (1927):121-124.
[28] Paul Courbon and Tusques J., "Illusions d'intermetamorfose et de la charme" (Illusions of Inter-metamorphosis and of Charm), *Annales Médico-Psychologiques* 90.1 (1932): 401-406.
[29] George N. Christodoulou, "Syndrome of Subjective Doubles," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 135 (1978): 249-251.
[30] Brian J. Fogg, "A behavior model for persuasive design," in *Proceedings of the 4th international Conference on Persuasive Technology*, 2009, 1-7.

ability, suggesting that high levels of both are necessary for the target behavior to manifest. Additionally, the presence of triggers is depicted by the arrow pointing towards the target behavior. Figure 1 below visualizes the core concepts of the FBM.

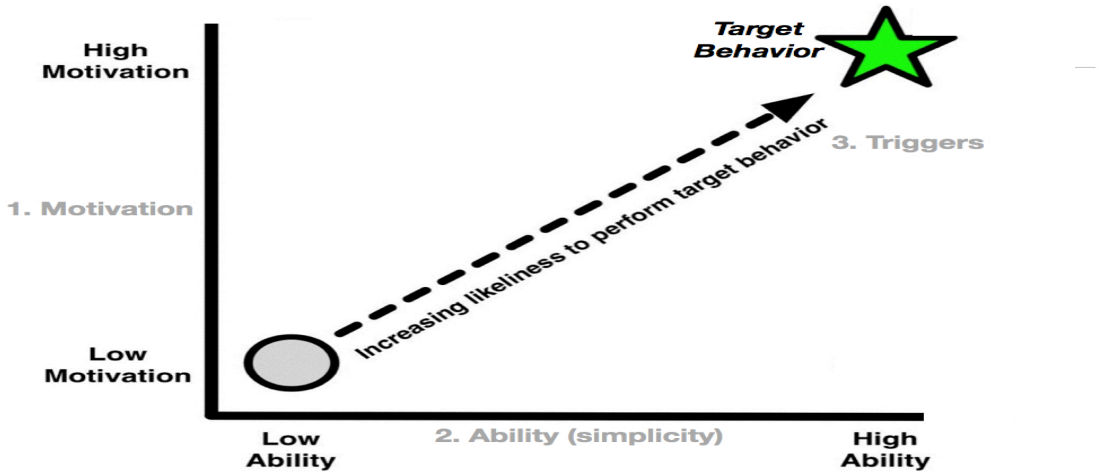

Figure 1: The Fogg Behaviour Model of three factors: motivation, ability, and triggers.

The Fogg Behaviour Model provides an effective framework for understanding the drivers and action of Hermann's behaviours in *Despair*. By analysing Hermann's behaviours through the lens of the FBM, we can gain insights into the complex interplay between his motivations, abilities, and triggers, illuminating the psychological mechanisms underlying his actions. In *Despair*, Hermann's delusional perception of his subjective double exemplifies the dissonance between his motivations and his ability to confront reality. The FBM enables readers to dissect Hermann's escalating mental instability, illustrating how his desires for identity and validation propel him toward increasingly irrational actions, culminating in murder. By situating Hermann's behaviours within the FBM, readers can better understand how external and internal prompts contribute to Hermann's delusions and moral unravelling, as well as appreciate Nabokov's intricate exploration of the human psyche in *Despair*.

In this chapter, I will employ the subjective doubles syndrome and Fogg Behavior Model to analyse how Hermann forms and strengthens his delusional subjective double and commits murder in *Despair*. Hermann's delusional double complicate the concept of subjective doubles and shed light on the complex drives of human behavior in psychology.

4.2 Establishment of the Subjective Double at First Meeting

The first meeting between Hermann and Felix is crucial for uncovering the motivations and formation of Hermann's delusional belief that Felix is his double. Nabokov draws parallels between Hermann's illusion and Dostoevsky's *The Double*. This initial establishment of the delusional double becomes Hermann's principal cognitive paradigm and serves as a strong motivation for his subsequent murder of Felix in the novel.

4.2.1 Primacy Effect and Double Fantasy

The primacy effect, closely linked to the syndrome of subjective doubles, influences Hermann's delusional belief that Felix is his double during their first meeting. The primacy effect refers to a cognitive bias where individuals recall information presented at the beginning of a sequence better than later information.[31] Coined by Hermann Ebbinghaus, this effect suggests that items presented first are more effectively stored in long-term memory due to their more concentrated processing.[32] During their initial encounter, Hermann focuses on the similarities between himself and Felix, contributing to the establishment of his delusional belief.

In Chapter one, Hermann, a chocolate manufacturer facing the threat of bankruptcy, grapples with profound discontentment in his life. Hermann embarks on a business trip to escape the monotony and seek a solution to save his failing business. During this journey, he encounters a tramp named Felix and is struck by their uncanny resemblance. This initial encounter forms the basis of Hermann's delusional belief that Felix is his double. Despite lacking solid evidence, Hermann is convinced of their similarities with unwavering personal convictions. He describes feeling a strange compulsion as he approaches the tramp, experiencing a sense of disbelief and physical discomfort upon recognizing the likeness: "Trumpets, please! Or, still better, that tattoo that goes with a breathless acrobatic stunt. Incredible! I doubted the reality of what I saw, doubted my sanity, felt sick and faint—honestly, I was forced to sit down, my knees were shaking" (17). This vivid description illustrates Hermann's intense reaction to the perceived resemblance, imbuing it with a sense of mystique and incredulity. Hermann emphasizes their similarities, albeit without concrete evidence, relying instead on his subjective astonishment: "Its perfection, its lack of cause and object, filled me with a strange awe" (19). Here, Hermann's portrayal of Felix as his double is based solely on his personal and dramatic response to their likeness, highlighting the subjective nature

[31] Andrew Coleman, *Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 688.
[32] Hermann Ebbinghaus, *On Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology* (New York: Teachers College, 1913).

of his belief. Despite the absence of objective evidence, Hermann's conviction is unwavering, setting the stage for the development of his delusional belief in Felix's double identity.

During the first meeting, Hermann's fixation on his delusional belief leads him to overlook Felix's actual situation and feedback. Hermann invites the readers to look at them "from the side, but just in passing; not too closely, please, gentlemen, or you might get the shock of your lives" (21). Despite moments of doubt regarding the fallibility of human eyesight, such as, "I have come to know the partiality and fallaciousness of human eyesight", Hermann quickly dismisses these concerns and persists in his subjective double fantasy (21). When Felix seeks Hermann's assistance in finding work, Hermann repeatedly ignores his pleas, instead focusing on his thoughts regarding their perceived similarities: "It was he and not I who first perceived the masonic bond in our resemblance, and as the closeness itself had been established by me, I stood toward him—Our resemblance struck me as a freak bordering on the miraculous" (23). Hermann indulges in his double fantasy: "He appeared to my eyes as my double, that is, as a creature bodily identical with me. It was this absolute sameness that gave me so piercing a thrill. He, on his part, saw in me a doubtful imitator" (23). In this passage, Hermann describes feeling a "piercing thrill" at the absolute sameness he perceives between himself and Felix, dismissing any doubts raised by Felix's perception of him as a "doubtful imitator." Hermann's preoccupation with his delusional belief in the double and disregard for Felix's needs reveal his arrogant and self-centered nature. Furthermore, his narrative is highly unreliable, as he is driven by his subjective fantasies rather than objective reality. Therefore, it is prudent to approach Hermann's claims of resemblance and double with skepticism, recognizing them as products of his delusional mindset rather than accurate reflections of reality. Hermann's pathological perspective also underscores the struggle for integrity between the narrator and readers.

Throughout the interaction with Felix, Hermann remains fixated on the delusional resemblance between them, disregarding opposing facts and counter-opinions. As they bid farewell and shake hands, Hermann describes feeling a curious sensation akin to Narcissus fooling Nemesis by aiding his reflection out of the brook (23). It can be seen as a direct rebuke of Freud, since Freud frequently drew on Greek mythology to develop his psychoanalytic concepts and syndromes. For instance, the Oedipus Complex, where a son's unconscious desire for his mother and rivalry with his father parallels the Greek myth of Oedipus who unknowingly fulfilled a prophecy of patricide and incest. Similarly, Freud's concept of Narcissism, named after Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection, underscores his theory on self-love and fixation. Hermann's reference to Narcissus may thus serve as a critique of Freud's reliance on mythological archetypes to explain human behavior. Additionally, this

metaphorical description serves as a direct rebuke of Freud, underscoring Hermann's intense preoccupation with his perceived likeness to Felix and further reinforcing his delusional belief in their double identity. Hermann directly addresses the reader, expressing a fervent desire to convince them of his double belief: "How I long to convince you! And I will, I will convince you! I will force you all, you rogues, to believe…" (26). Despite his passionate plea, Hermann fails to provide evidence to support his claim. Instead, he shifts the blame onto the reader, suggesting that any failure to recognize the similarity is due to their lack of observation rather than the validity of his assertion. Hermann's act of deflecting responsibility onto the reader also illustrates the struggle between Hermann and the readers. Moreover, Hermann rationalizes his inability to fully convey their resemblance through words by attributing it to the limitations of linguistic expression, suggesting that "Words alone, owing to their special nature, are unable to convey visually a likeness of that kind: the two faces should be pictured side by side, by means of real colors, not words" (26). Thus, he advocates for a medium such as painting would be better suited to accurately depict their supposed resemblance: "It is not literary methods that I need, but the plain, crude obviousness of the painter's art" (26). This disregard for linguistic limitations further highlights Hermann's obsession with the physical similarities between himself and Felix while disregarding any differences. Hermann's excessive focus on the perceived physical similarities and his dismissal of opposing facts and feedback from Felix illustrate his delusional fixation on the double identity, revealing his skewed perception and refusal to acknowledge reality.

4.2.2 Mirror Images and Mental Rehearsal

Hermann's attempt to establish his delusional belief that Felix is his double through a mirror reveals his desperation and frustration with Felix's disbelief. Initially, Hermann's anger flares as he accuses Felix of being blind for failing to recognize their supposed resemblance (21). He implores Felix to look at each other, hoping to elicit a revelation of their shared likeness. However, Felix's confusion only deepens, thwarting Hermann's expectations. Hermann raises his right arm in absurdity, expecting Felix to mirror his actions. However, Hermann's disappointment is palpable when Felix fails to comply, "his left [arm] did not rise, as I had almost expected it to do. I closed my left eye, but both his eyes remained open," further exacerbating his frustration (21). Desperate to prove his point, Hermann uses a pocket mirror, urging Felix to examine his reflection. Yet, Felix's continued perplexity only intensifies Hermann's exasperation, leading him angrily to accuse Felix of foolishness (22). When

Hermann places his face in the mirror, Felix appears to understand his point. However, rather than affirming their resemblance, Felix denies it, asserting that a rich man never quite resembles a poor one (22). Despite Felix's denial, Hermann stubbornly clings to his delusional belief, refusing to accept any opposition to his conviction. This scene highlights Hermann's inability to acknowledge reality, as he persists in his delusional fantasy despite all evidence.

After their initial encounter, Hermann relies on the mirror as a tool to validate his subjective double hypothesis. The mirror serves a dual purpose in Hermann's construction of the subjective double. Firstly, he uses it to dissociate his image and replace it with that of Felix, effectively blurring the boundaries between himself and his perceived double. Secondly, Hermann rehearses his similarities with Felix by examining his reflection in the mirror, drawing parallels between their appearances and actions. For instance, when Hermann gazes into the mirror, he imagines Felix standing before him, meticulously observing their shared characteristics and behaviors: "Felix awaiting me. Pale-faced and solemn, he drew near. He was now well-shaven; his hair was smoothly brushed back. He wore a dove-grey suit with a lilac tie. I took out my handkerchief; he took out his handkerchief too—a truce, parleying" (24). Hermann justifies his belief by comparing his reasoning to Aristotle's syllogism: if Hermann resembles himself in the mirror and also resembles Felix in the mirror, then Felix must be Hermann's double.

Hermann's reliance on the mirror proves to be both empowering and unsettling. While it initially fuels his obsession with finding evidence of the double, the mirror occasionally betrays him by reflecting aspects of his actual appearance that contradict his delusional beliefs. Hermann perceives the mirror "would reflect a bearded stranger—for that beard of mine has done jolly well, and in such a short time too! I am disguised so perfectly as to be invisible to myself" (31). However, the mirror suddenly serves as counter-evidence to undermine his double hypothesis: "Now that is a word I loathe, the ghastly thing! I have had none of the articles ever since I stopped shaving. Anyway, the mere mention of it has just given me a nasty shock, breaking the flow of my story" (31). Mirrors serve as reminders of his true identity and disrupt his constructed narrative. This inconsistency leads to Hermann's mixed obsession and aversion towards the mirror: "Mirror. Mirror. Well, has anything happened? Mirror, mirror, mirror. As many times as you like—I fear nothing. A mirror. To catch sight of oneself in a mirror" (31). Hermann's fixation on his mirror and his fluctuating relationship with it highlight the tension between his desire to validate his subjective double hypothesis and the reality that undermines it. The mirror paradoxically strengthens and weakens Hermann's delusional belief, underscoring the unreliability of his narrative and the precarious nature of his mental state.

In Hermann's obsessive fixation with the double, he continuously rehearses their supposed likeness in his mind and interprets these mental rehearsals as concrete evidence. Each recollection of his encounter with Felix is imbued with exhilaration and certainty, as Hermann fervently believes in their striking resemblance. For instance, Hermann recalls the thrill he experienced upon first encountering Felix, claiming that the marvel of their likeness made his heart skip a beat (24). Even when observing Felix in repose, Hermann is convinced that the motionless figure reflects his face and sees it as a flawlessly pure image of his death (24). He rationalizes that life only marbles their resemblance, suggesting that death brings about an artistic perfection akin to how "a breeze dims the bliss of Narcissus" (25). Hermann's fixation on the idea of his double underscores his psychological unraveling and challenges conventional notions of identity and perception.

Despite lacking concrete evidence to support his double hypothesis, Hermann asserts with unwavering certainty that they share identical features, "I possess large yellowish teeth; his are whiter and set more closely together, but is that important? On my forehead, a vein stands out like a capital M imperfectly drawn, but when I sleep, my brow is as smooth as my double" (27). In this passage, Hermann stresses minute details such as the shape of their eyes and the smoothness of their brows when at rest. He dismisses any differences between them as inconsequential or distorted: "very slightly altered in comparison with mine: here more compressed, there smoothed out. We have eyes of the same shape, narrowly slit with sparse lashes, but his is paler than mine" (27). Hermann refuses to acknowledge Felix's appearance or any doubts the reader raises. Hermann's obsession with the double made him ignore the glaring dissimilarities between himself and Felix, as he selectively focuses on perceived similarities and ignores contradictory evidence. This highlights the extent to which Hermann's delusional belief shapes his perception and interpretation of reality, further emphasizing the unreliability of his narrative.

Hermann's fixation on the delusional double established at their first meeting is not driven by a search for hard evidence, but rather by his continual mental rehearsal of the perceived resemblance between himself and Felix. He relies on "the irrational memory of my senses" as proof of their similarity, frequently swapping his image with that of Felix in his mind (27). He describes seeing himself in Felix's guise, with his face appearing motionless, akin to that of a dead man. Even during mundane activities, such as boarding a train at the station, Hermann experiences illusions of people being shocked by their likeness. He imagines scenarios where they attract attention and even face potential legal repercussions for their resemblance: "People would notice us together; jump up, surround us, drag us to the police station …Or is it indeed

a crime in itself for two people to be as alike as two drops of blood" (28)? Hermann is preoccupied with the double in his processing and interpretation of information through the lens of the supposed resemblance. The mirror serves as a tool for Hermann to reinforce his delusional belief, as he repeatedly seeks visual confirmation of their likeness. His mental rehearsals and reliance on the mirror become integral components of his cognitive processing, shaping his understanding of reality and influencing his subsequent decisions, including those related to the murder plot. This double mode of thinking becomes Hermann's cognitive framework, guiding his perceptions and actions as he navigates the narrative.

4.2.3 Subjective Double and Intertextuality in *The Double*

In Hermann's initial establishment of his delusional belief, Nabokov skillfully incorporates an intertextual level that echoes the themes of Dostoevsky's works, particularly the double motif. Foster's study on Nabokov's art of memory sheds light on this intertextual layer, suggesting that *Despair* contains a deliberate intertextual memory of Dostoevsky within Hermann's narrative of memory.[33] Expanding upon Foster's insight, I argue that Nabokov goes further by embedding an intertextual double of Dostoevsky within Hermann's subjective double. This intertextual double serves as a literary device that deepens the complexity of Hermann's delusion while engaging with Dostoevsky's thematic preoccupations.

Throughout *Despair*, Nabokov subtly weaves references to Dostoevsky's exploration of duality and identity, inviting readers to connect Hermann's narrative and the themes prevalent in Dostoevsky's oeuvre. By doing so, Nabokov pays homage to Dostoevsky and enriches the psychological depth of Hermann's character. This intertextual layer adds a nuanced dimension to Hermann's delusion, suggesting that his fixation on Felix as his double is not merely a product of his psyche but can also be read via broader literary influences. In this way, Nabokov masterfully blurs the lines between reality and fiction, inviting readers to interrogate the nature of identity and perception within the context of literary tradition. The intertextual link between Nabokov's *Despair* and Dostoevsky's *The Double* is profound, especially concerning the double motif. In both works, we see protagonists who grapple with the presence of their doppelgängers, projecting their insecurities and anxieties onto these mirrored reflections.

Hermann's description of their resemblance as a mimic relation highlights the striking similarity between himself and Felix and evokes parallels with Dostoevsky's Golyadkin and

[33] Foster, *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism*, 91.

his double. At the first meeting, Hermann describes their remarkable resemblance "as if I were the mimic and he the model" (22). Here, this mimic relation applies not only to him and Felix but also to him and *The Double*. This mimicry underscores the thematic exploration of identity and self-perception in both novels. Bakhtin makes high claims for art in *The Double*, in which "every text is built as a mosaic of citations, every text is the absorption and transformation of another text."[34] Bakhtin's comment on *The Double* as a mosaic of citations resonates with Nabokov's approach to intertextuality in *Despair*. Nabokov, like Dostoevsky, draws upon literary predecessors and reinterprets their themes and motifs within his narrative framework. This intertextual dialogue enriches the reading experience by engaging with multiple layers of interpretation. Nabokov's familiarity with Dostoevsky's own intertextual parody of Gogol's works adds another dimension to the relationship between *Despair* and *The Double*. By echoing Dostoevsky's playful engagement with literary tradition, Nabokov establishes a network of references that enhances the depth and complexity of his narrative. In this way, the intertextual dialogue between *Despair* and *The Double* underscores the thematic continuity between the two works and highlights the literary tradition from which they both emerge.

Nabokov's complex relationship with Dostoevsky is evident in his admiration for *The Double* despite his criticism of Dostoevsky's style and thematic approach. Nabokov's recognition of *The Double* as an exceptional work underscores his appreciation for Dostoevsky's narrative skill and intertextual prowess. He considers *The Double* an underestimated masterpiece and a brilliant exception to Dostoevsky's idea-oriented fiction. In his lectures on literature, Nabokov told the students *The Double* was "the very best thing he ever wrote."[35] Nabokov praises Dostoevsky's intertextual skill and claims that Dostoevsky's imitation of Gogol is "so striking as to seem at times almost a parody."[36] In *Despair*, Nabokov cleverly incorporates elements of *The Double* while critiquing Dostoevsky's stylistic and thematic choices. By mimicking the plot and double motif of *The Double*, Nabokov intertwines his narrative with the themes of his predecessor. In doing so, Nabokov pays homage to Dostoevsky's literary legacy while offering his perspective on the limitations inherent in Dostoevsky's works.

In *Despair*, a crucial passage where Hermann considers potential titles for his manuscript reflects Nabokov's subtle intertextual engagement with Dostoevsky's novels: "something

[34] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 78.
[35] Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 289.
[36] Ibid., 289.

beginning with ‘Memoirs of a —’ of a what? I could not remember, and, anyway, ‘Memoirs’ seemed dreadfully dull and commonplace. What should I call my book, then? ‘The Double’? But Russian literature possessed one already. ‘Crime and Pun’? Not bad—a little crude, however. ‘The Mirror’? ‘Portrait of the Artist in a Mirror’” (211). The titles are allusive to four references to Dostoevsky’s novels: *Crime and Punishment*, *The Double*, *Notes from the House of the Dead* and *Notes from Underground*. These titles serve as nods to Dostoevsky's oeuvre while highlighting the influence of other literary traditions, such as the Irish tradition cited in the allusion to James Joyce’s *Portrait of An Artist as a Young Man*. Moreover, Hermann’s fleeting acknowledgement of “a grotesque resemblance to Rascalnikov” from *Crime and Punishment* further underscores the intertextual dialogue between *Despair* and Dostoevsky's works (199). Despite Hermann's denial of the resemblance that “No, that’s wrong. Cancelled”, the parallels between Hermann's obsession and Raskolnikov's psychological turmoil suggest a deeper connection between the characters (199). Nabokov's incorporation of elements from *The Double* in *Despair* showcases his engagement with Dostoevsky's legacy while offering his distinct perspective on themes of identity, morality, and the nature of narrative fiction.

The contrast between Dostoevsky’s double-voiced dialogue in *The Double* and Hermann's solipsistic narrative in *Despair* highlights the difference in narrative style and thematic focus between the two works. While Dostoevsky explores the complexities of identity and perception through a double-voiced dialogue, Nabokov’s Hermann is consumed by his narcissistic worldview. Hermann’s obsession with the double aligns with his narcissistic tendencies, leading him to overestimate his abilities while underestimating Felix and the reader. The novel's opening paragraph exemplifies this, as Hermann boasts of his creative prowess but immediately undermines his claim with a Gogolian digression. Hermann asserts his talent in the first paragraph, claiming he has the power and a “marvelous ability to express ideas with the utmost grace and vividness” (13). However, this assertion is swiftly undermined by Hermann’s subsequent admission of his inability to describe events, confessing, “Gentle reader, nothing at all would have happened” (13). This contradiction dismantles Hermann's claim of an innate creative disposition, prompting readers to question his reliability and mental stability. Throughout the novel, Hermann's attempts to persuade the reader of Felix's status as his double and justify his murder as a work of genius are repeatedly undermined by the reality that Felix does not resemble him. This discrepancy exposes Hermann's artistic ineptitude and moral cruelty, revealing his narrative and character flaws. Nabokov's intertextual reference to *The Double* within Hermann's establishment of his subjective double further emphasizes Dostoevsky's influence on the novel.

Nabokov pays homage to Dostoevsky's literary legacy by incorporating themes of duality, existentialism, and psychological depth into *Despair*. For instance, Hermann's delusional belief that Felix is his double echoes similar themes explored in Dostoevsky's *The Double*. Furthermore, Hermann's existential crisis and moral dilemmas parallel those of Dostoevsky's protagonists, reflecting a deep engagement with Dostoevsky's existentialist philosophy. However, Nabokov also critiques Dostoevsky's thematic and stylistic choices and develops his distinct approaches to storytelling and character portrayal. Unlike Dostoevsky's dense and reflective prose, Nabokov employs a more playful and ironic narrative voice. Additionally, Nabokov's character Hermann exhibits a self-awareness and intellectual sophistication that contrasts with the more morally conflicted and psychologically tormented characters in Dostoevsky's novels. Nabokov showcases his mastery of language and narrative technique, demonstrating a keen attention to detail and a playful manipulation of literary conventions. This homage adds depth to Nabokov's work, enriching the thematic and philosophical layers of *Despair* while also showcasing his intellectual engagement with literary tradition. It elevates Nabokov's reputation as a literary innovator who not only pays tribute to his predecessors but also challenges and transcends their influence, ultimately solidifying his standing as one of the most important literary figures of the twentieth century.

Hermann concentrates on the physical similarities between himself and Felix while disregarding Felix's actuality and responses. Hermann employs mirror images and mental rehearsals to solidify his delusional conviction that Felix is his double. Nabokov skillfully incorporates an intertextual layer into Hermann's formation of this delusion, presenting *Despair* as his inventive response to Dostoevsky's *The Double*. In doing so, Nabokov reveals a complex blend of antipathy and admiration towards Dostoevsky.

4.3 Consolidation of Subjective Double at Second Meeting

After establishing Felix as his double in their initial encounter, Hermann's fixation on resemblances continues into their second meeting, where he persists in ignoring reality and others' reactions to reinforce his subjective notion of duality. Nabokov's portrayal of Hermann's consolidation of this subjective double includes intertextual references to *Crime and Punishment*, highlighting the intricate layers of Hermann's psyche.

4.3.1 Confirmation Bias and Fixed Mindset

Confirmation bias is a crucial mechanism aiding Hermann in constructing his subjective double. Coined by English psychologist Peter Wason, confirmation or congeniality bias refers to seeking, interpreting, and recalling information that aligns with one's preexisting beliefs or values. [37] Psychological research has consistently demonstrated that individuals tend to gravitate towards evidence that reinforces their existing notions, while disregarding or discrediting information that contradicts them.[38] This bias plays a significant role, particularly in situations involving desired outcomes, emotionally charged issues, and deeply ingrained beliefs. It impacts both real-world individuals and fictional characters alike. In *Despair*, Hermann's confirmation bias towards the double is evident as he selectively chooses information that bolsters his delusional concept of duality, while dismissing conflicting details and refuting opposing arguments.

During their second encounter, Hermann solidifies his subjective double by selectively searching for and interpreting information that aligns with his delusion, while steadfastly denying any opposing views or evidence. For instance, Hermann's initial letter to Felix blurs their identities by stating, "It seems that I was the receiver—not the sender" (69), indicating his inclination towards interchangeability. Subsequently, Hermann orchestrates their second meeting on 1 October 1930 at Tarnitz, as detailed in his subsequent correspondence. Consumed by his fixation on duality, Hermann interprets the falling of leaves onto the water's surface as a symbolic rendezvous with his replica: "When a dead leaf fell, there would flutter up to meet it, out of the water's shadowy depths, its unavoidable double. Their meeting was soundless. […] I could not tear my gaze away from those inevitable meetings" (72). For Hermann, the leaf and its mirrored reflection in the water indicate his impending encounter with Felix.

As the departure draws near, Hermann confronts his reflection in mirrors – "At that time, I was still on admirable terms with mirrors" (74) – hinting at his deepening entanglement with the concept of mirroring and self-perception. Moreover, Hermann interprets his wife Lydia and her cousin Ardalion's apparent disregard for him as though he were a mere apparition, expressing, "as if indeed it was merely my reflection that was present, my real body being far away" (75), further illustrating his detachment from reality. In *Despair*, the relationship between Hermann and Ardalion is portrayed as distant and strained. Lydia appears discontented

[37] William Hart, D. Albarracin and A.H. Eagly, "Feeling Validated Versus Being Correct: A Meta-analysis of Selective Exposure to Information,"*Psychological Bulletin*, 135.4 (2009): 555-88. Raymond S. Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises," *Review of General Psychology* 2 (1998): 175-220.
[38] Scott Plous, *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making* (McGraw-Hill,1993), 233.

in her marriage to Hermann and seeks emotional fulfilment through her interactions with Ardalion. Ardalion seems more attentive and sympathetic towards Lydia's needs, leading to Hermann's suspicion and jealousy. Their relationship serves as a source of tension and contribute to Hermann's growing paranoia and delusions. Hermann's meticulous planning for their second meeting underscores his singular focus on images and information that validate his delusional double, while disregarding objective reality and counter-evidence.

Hermann experiences a fleeting uncertainty regarding his double hypothesis while awaiting Felix's arrival. He entertains that Felix might be "a product of my imagination, which hankered after reflections, repetitions, masks, and that my presence in a remote little town was absurd and even monstrous" (79). However, when he finally lays eyes on Felix, Hermann briefly questions whether his impression of Felix as his double could be a delusion or hallucination: "never could he have been my double" (84). Despite this momentary hesitation, Hermann swiftly dismisses his doubts and reverts to his belief in their resemblance, focusing on searching for evidence to affirm his double hypothesis. For instance, he reflects on the erosion of their likeness over time due to the workings of Felix's facial expressions, reaffirming their striking resemblance by stating: "How our remarkable likeness got broken by the working of his face. If he were to attain old age, I reflected, his grins and grimaces would end by eroding completely our resemblance, which is now so perfect when his face freezes" (85). Besides, Hermann whimsically speculates on the possibility of their shared parentage by saying, "how marvelously alike we are! Mightn't one suppose my father had sinned with your mother" (86). Felix anticipates Hermann finding work for him, yet Hermann remains oblivious to Felix's plea, preoccupied instead with validating his double hypothesis.

The bar scene in Hermann and Felix's second meeting highlights a significant disparity between Hermann's subjective interpretation or expectation and the actual responses of others. When they enter a bar, and the waiter gazes at them, Hermann interprets the waiter's glance as evidence of their resemblance, citing Pascal's musings on the lack of interest in encountering two similar individuals separately (89). However, the irony lies in the fact that the waiter's glance is simply prompted by the routine query of their order. Similarly, Hermann presumes that other customers perceive him and Felix as brothers by saying, "We were reflected by the misty and, to all appearances, sick mirror, with a freakish slant, a streak of madness, a mirror that would have cracked at once had it changed to reflect one genuine human countenance" (99). However, the customers remain indifferent to any perceived similarities. These instances underscore Hermann's tendency to misconstrue or invent evidence to support his double belief, interpreting every clue as confirmation of his subjective reality. This scene underlines the

extent of Hermann's delusion and his inability to perceive reality accurately. It serves as a telling moment where Hermann's constructed world collides with the truth, emphasizing the gap between his distorted perception and the genuine reactions of those around him. This disconnect plays a pivotal role in illustrating Hermann's descent into delusion and the isolation accompanying his fixation on the subjective double.

Hermann resorts to deception by fabricating a story for Felix, claiming to be an actor and offering him a job as his understudy, purportedly to act as his double in case of emergencies (96). However, Felix sees through Hermann's ruse, expressing frustration at being misled. He rebuffs Hermann's offer and voices disappointment at being fooled (97). Recognizing Felix's discernment, Hermann concocts another falsehood, pretending to confess to Felix that he is on the brink of committing an unlawful act and requires a double to exonerate him and divert suspicion, promising Felix a thousand marks as a reward (107). Hermann anticipates Felix's unquestioning belief in his deceit; however, Felix astutely questions the integrity of Hermann's claims, "What if it's all a lie? … what if I don't believe you", demonstrating his shrewdness (107). This interaction highlights Felix's perceptiveness and discernment, contradicting Hermann's earlier portrayal of him as gullible. Hermann's resort to deception and manipulation underscores his selective interpretation of information, reinforcing his bias towards the double while disregarding reality and contradictory evidence.

4.3.2 Delusional Double with Intertextual References

In examining Nabokov's integration of intertextual references to Dostoevsky in Hermann's development of the subjective double, it becomes evident that *Despair* abounds with allusions to Dostoevsky and his literary works. Hermann acknowledges Dostoevsky as "our national expert in soul ague and the aberrations of human self-respect," recognizing the profound insight Dostoevsky brought to the exploration of the human psyche (98). This acknowledgment underscores Hermann's awareness of Dostoevsky's influence on his perception of the subjective double. Furthermore, Hermann's comparison of his past experiences with reading as something that "smacks revoltingly of plagiarism" suggests a self-awareness of his tendency to draw upon Dostoevskian themes and motifs (80). This comparison highlights Hermann's literary consciousness and indicates a blending of his personal experiences with the narrative techniques employed by Dostoevsky. The intertextual references to Dostoevsky within Hermann's narrative reinforce Hermann's individual bias towards the double. It accentuates the role of literature in shaping Hermann's perception of reality, while

also adding layers of complexity to his character by situating him within the broader literary tradition of exploring themes of identity, madness, and moral ambiguity. Thus, Hermann's individual double bias is strengthened by the intertextual reference to Dostoevsky.

In Chapter eight, Hermann fabricates a Dostoevskian tale about his fictional double brother to manipulate his wife into cooperating with his crime. According to Hermann's invented narrative, his younger brother was a student in Germany when war erupted, leading to his recruitment into the conflict against the Russians. Hermann asserts their physical resemblance was so uncanny that even their closest relatives struggled to tell them apart. He vividly describes instances where their indistinguishable similarity led to confusion, such as when they exchanged beds at night, leaving their mother unable to discern who slept where, creating an "indescribable oneness" between them (148). Over the years, Hermann claims, their likeness only grew perfect. As Hermann concocts this elaborate tale to sway his wife, he acknowledges its Dostoevskian quality, recognizing its resemblance to the conversations often found in Dostoevsky's works, particularly in the context of tavern scenes. He remarks that the story possesses elements characteristic of Dostoevsky's writing style, noting the presence of "thumb screw conversations" and the use of "false humility," "repetitions of incantatory adverbs," and other mystical embellishments typical of the famous Russian author's literary technique (98). This scene underscores the intertextual references to Dostoevsky within Hermann's construction of the subjective double, highlighting the influence of Dostoevsky's themes and narrative techniques on Hermann's imagination and his attempt to manipulate others through the recreation of a fabricated Dostoevskian narrative.

Hermann recounts an extraordinary encounter at a café in Prague when he stumbles upon his brother, who harbors a chilling intention to end his life on his upcoming birthday, 9 March. In a surreal twist, the brother proposes a macabre pact, urging Hermann to view his imminent demise as a gift, suggesting, "Make a gift of death. We two are still more alike than we were formerly. In our sameness I see a divine intent" (150). His wife, gripped by disbelief, grapples with Hermann's unsettling revelation that his life is insured for a substantial sum and that his corpse will be discovered in a remote woodland area (151). Undeterred by his wife's disbelief, Hermann directs her to seize the insurance claim, envisioning her as his widow, poised to collect the windfall and retreat to seclusion abroad. "My real name will have died with my brother. We resemble each other, don't interrupt, like two drops of blood, and he'll be particularly like me when dead," Hermann asserts (151), weaving a plan where his brother's death catalyzes a calculated financial gain.

Despite Hermann's assertion that the scheme is motivated by a sense of duty to fulfil his brother's final wish, his fixation on the insurance money reveals his true motivations. "Much do I care indeed for that insurance money! But how can I refuse, tell me, how can I deprive him of one last joy?" he contends, blurring the lines between altruism and self-interest (152). As Hermann elaborates on the uncanny resemblance between himself and his brother, his wife, Lydia, recoils, likening the unfolding narrative to a work of fiction. "It's all so appalling, so unexpected; I thought it only happened in books," she remarks, highlighting the surreal and unsettling nature in Hermann's scheme (152). In this web of deception and manipulation, Hermann's double becomes a pawn in his quest for financial gain, as he exploits those around him to satisfy his desires.

Hermann's penchant for fabricating stories, as evidenced by his manipulation of his wife, draws a parallel to Ardalion's accusation of Hermann engaging in "dark Dostoevskian stuff," a reference to Raskolnikov's meticulously planned murder in *Crime and Punishment* (215). Hermann acknowledges the source of his inspiration, admitting that his tale is borrowed from "old Dusty's great book, Crime and Slime. Sorry: Schuld und Sühne (German edition)" (187). Yet, he exhibits no remorse for plagiarism, asserting that "an artist feels no remorse, even when his work is not understood, not accepted" (187), justifying his actions with a brazen indifference to ethical considerations. When confronted with the possibility of being accused of plagiarism, Hermann dismisses such concerns, likening plagiarism to a "pleasant robbery" and flaunting his literary prowess by critiquing the perceived deficiencies in Dostoevsky's novels: "very artificial, though not badly constructed. What will you feel, reader-writer, when you tackle my tale? Delight? Envy?" (91). In an audacious display of self-assurance, Hermann even attempts to persuade the reader that utilizing others' material for one's craft is not only acceptable but flattering: "I grant you that … crafty and experienced imagination…What if I find it rather flattering that you should steal my property? Theft is the best compliment one can possibly pay a thing" (91). By likening his appropriation of others' work to the repainting of a stolen car by a motorcar thief, Hermann reveals a disregard for intellectual property, an absence of respect for the creative efforts of others, and a lack of empathy for their contributions. His attitude towards plagiarism underscores his self-serving nature and willingness to exploit others for personal gain, demonstrating a moral bankruptcy that permeates his character.

4.3.3 Structural Parallels with *Crime and Punishment*

Nabokov portrays Hermann's delusions of having a double and his belief that his murder is an art form by parodying *Crime and Punishment*. Nabokov's lectures reveal his evolving attitudes towards Dostoevsky's novel. As a young boy, he found *Crime and Punishment* "wonderfully powerful" but later lost interest. Nabokov mentioned revisiting *Crime and Punishment* to prepare for discussing Dostoevsky in one of his books, likely referring to *Despair*. Despite Nabokov's criticisms of *Crime and Punishment*, Sergei Davydov has highlighted numerous thematic and structural parallels between *Despair* and Dostoevsky's work.[39] Foster proposes in *Despair* that Nabokov incorporates intertextual references to Dostoevsky's novels, including *Crime and Punishment*, within Hermann's memory.[40] I agree with their assertion and want to add that the intertextual reference to *Crime and Punishment* enhances Hermann's double bias.

One thematic similarity between the two novels is the protagonists' perception of themselves as talented geniuses and their view of murder as a creative act. Hermann, in particular, likens crime to "an art, and card tricks" (132), proudly considering himself a talented criminal. He disparages renowned authors and criminals alike, asserting his superiority: "But what are they—Doyle, Dostoevsky, Leblanc, Wallace—what are all the great novelists who wrote of nimble criminals, what are all the great criminals who never read the nimble novelists—what are they in comparison with me? Blundering fools" (132). Hermann sees his encounter with Felix as a stroke of luck, a fortuitous opportunity to realize his artistic vision: "That piece of luck fitted exactly into the place I had made for it; I pounced upon it and used it" (132). Hermann perceives his crime as an achievement, and as the "most natural way of leading up to that same act which is really but a link in the chain, one detail, one line in the book, and must be logically derived from all previous matter" (132). Despite anticipating the reader's revulsion towards his idea, Hermann defends his conception of the "genius of a perfect crime" (133). Hermann attributes the reader's failure to recognize the brilliance of his plan to their lack of perception, claiming they lack his keen sightedness and see nothing remarkable where he perceives a marvel (133). This portrayal reveals that Hermann's delusional belief in doble stem from his egoism, cruelty, and moral bankruptcy.

In *Despair,* Nabokov provides strategic details to expose Hermann's unreliable narration and untrustworthy personality. Nabokov's criticism of Dostoevsky's supposed neglect of vivid imagery and sensory perception contrasts with his meticulous attention to detail in portraying

[39] Sergei Davydov, "Dostoevsky and Nabokov: The Morality of Structure in *Crime and Punishment* and *Despair*," *Dostoevsky Studies* 3 (1982): 157-70.
[40] Foster, *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism*, 95.

Hermann's character.[41] For instance, Nabokov employs sensory details to undermine Hermann's literary talent. When Hermann attempts to write chapter one, he is plagued by an intense itching sensation, causing his hands to tremble and his desire to shriek or break something: "My hands tremble, I want to shriek or to smash something with a bang…This mood is hardly suitable for the bland unfolding of a leisurely tale. My heart is itching, a horrible sensation. Must be calm, must keep my head" (15). This physical discomfort disrupts Hermann's writing process, casting doubt on his ability to maintain narrative coherence and reliability. The itching recurs as Hermann continues to write, hindering his progress and causing him to doubt his literary talents: "I have got to the important part and quenched the fire of that itching" (18). Later, when Hermann reads about the murder in the newspaper, the itching sensation returns, further undermining his narrative stability by virtue of the "itching sensation creeping over me" (205). These recurring instances of itching serve as a metaphor for Hermann's inner turmoil and psychological instability, weakening his narrative reliability and casting doubt on his claims of literary talent. Through these details, Nabokov skillfully exposes Hermann's unreliable narration and untrustworthy personality, challenging readers to discern the truth amidst the tangled web of deception and delusion woven by the protagonist.

Hermann's subjective double evolves in tandem with his absurd belief that his murder is an art form. At their second meeting, Hermann solidifies his delusional double by selectively attending to information that supports his position while vehemently refuting arguments that contradict his opinions. Nabokov incorporates intertextual references to Dostoevsky within Hermann's consolidation of the subjective double, parodying thematic and structural elements found in *Crime and Punishment*. However, Nabokov's portrayal distinguishes Hermann's false sense of genius from authentic creativity and moral responsibility.

4.4 Justification of Subjective Double at Last Meeting

In the final meeting between Hermann and Felix, Hermann's subjective double plays a pivotal role in his justification of murder as an art form. This encounter serves as a culmination of Hermann's delusional beliefs, as he perceives Felix not only as his double but also as a catalyst for his murderous actions. Hermann's interpretation of murder as art is further reinforced during this meeting. Furthermore, Nabokov utilizes this scene to create an artistic recreation of the murder scene in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed.* By incorporating elements from

[41] Nabokov, *Lecture on Russian Literature*,104.

Dostoevsky's work, Nabokov adds depth and complexity to Hermann's delusions, highlighting the intertextual connections between the two novels.

4.4.1 Obsession with Double and Sublimation of Crime

At the murder scene, Hermann's preoccupation with his subjective double and the notion of committing the perfect crime overshadows any empathy for Felix's suffering and imminent death. While Hermann is too obsessed with his subjective double to notice Felix admiring the car, he believes they have already switched identities. He perceives Felix's gaze not as one filled "with the longing of ogling indigence, but with an owner's quiet satisfaction" (175). Before carrying out the murder, Hermann meticulously prepares, taking three deliberate steps: shaving Felix's moustache with snow, trimming his nails, and exchanging clothes. While shaving Felix's moustache, Hermann accidentally cuts him, causing blood to stain the snow. Although Felix winces in pain, he bravely refrains from making a sound (177). Next, Hermann trims Felix's nails, searching for evidence to validate his belief in their subjective resemblance. Despite the noticeable physical differences, Hermann dismisses the difference, reassuring himself that any disparities will eventually fade: "But never mind, I thought, they'll pale by and by" (178). Furthermore, Hermann places his wristwatch in Felix's hands, symbolizing the final step in their exchange of identities. Delighted by Felix's compliance, Hermann revels in the sight of Felix standing before him as "my double, in my quiet dark-grey suit" (180). Through Hermann's actions of shaving Felix's moustache, trimming his nails, and exchanging clothes, several crucial points emerge: Hermann's steadfast adherence to his belief in their subjective doubling, his callous disregard for Felix's suffering as he views him merely as a means to achieve his insurance payout and fulfil his morbid artistic vision, and his methodical mental rehearsal and enactment of the murder plan. These details underscore Hermann's moral depravity and the depths of his obsession with his subjective double and the pursuit of his twisted version of artistic perfection.

After completing his meticulous preparations, Hermann callously instructs Felix to turn around before shooting him in the back, "He turned, and I shot him between the shoulders", demonstrating a chilling lack of empathy and humanity (181). The act is carried out with cold-blooded efficiency, reflecting Hermann's utter disregard for Felix's life. Even as Felix falls to the ground, Hermann interprets his movements through the lens of his delusional belief in their subjective double, seeing significance in the way Felix's body moves before succumbing to death: " he did not fall at once; first he terminated a movement still related to life, and that was

a full turn almost; he intended, I think, swinging before me in jest, as before a mirror; so that, inertly bringing that poor piece of foolery to an end" (181). Hermann's reaction to Felix's death further underscores his lack of remorse or sympathy. Hermann approaches Felix's lifeless body with a morbid and detached interest, viewing it as evidence of his subjective double and his murder as a perfect work of art. He compares himself to an author meticulously examining his work, "probing and testing every syllable, and finally unable to say of this brindle of words whether it is good or not" (181). Hermann scrutinizes Felix's corpse as his handiwork, with every feature frozen in place like elements of a carefully crafted composition. As Hermann gazes upon Felix's face, he sees not the lifeless visage of his victim but rather a reflection of himself, likening it to looking at his image in a stagnant pool (181). Hermann's reaction to the murder scene reveals his profound narcissism and cruelty, with his sole concern being the validation of his delusional beliefs and the pursuit of his twisted vision of artistic perfection.

As Hermann examines the contents of Felix's bag, he comes across a passport with Felix's photo, noting that the pictured face does not closely resemble his own. Instead of considering this as evidence against the claimed resemblance between him and Felix, Hermann attributes it to human error and negligence in official documentation, dismissing it as a result of "human fat-headedness, carelessness, slackness of senses" (183). This rationalization reflects Hermann's tendency to bend reality to fit his delusional beliefs, refusing to accept anything that contradicts his notion that he has a subjective double. Furthermore, Hermann's contempt for Felix is evident when he discovers that Felix's profession listed in the passport is that of a musician. Despite claiming to be an artist himself and viewing his murder as a masterpiece of perfection, Hermann derides Felix's talent as a musician, mocking him as "numbskull, who had played the fiddle, surely, in the way lackadaisical footmen in Russia used to twang guitars on summer evenings, was called a musician" (183). This irony highlights Hermann's hypocrisy and intention to diminish Felix's worth and deny his talents to suit his desires. Hermann's reaction to the items found in Felix's bag underscores his selfishness and disregard for others' lives and talents. He selectively accepts information that confirms his subjective double while disregarding anything that challenges it, demonstrating his complete lack of empathy and concern for the suffering of others. Hermann's actions reveal a profoundly narcissistic and morally bankrupt character, willing to manipulate and exploit others for his selfish ends.

4.4.2 Parodying Detective Fiction and Evaluating the Validity of Evidence

Following the murder, Hermann reinforces his delusional belief in the subjective double by likening himself to a writer, his murder to a work of art, and the police to literary critics. Here, Nabokov parodies the genre of detective fiction, emphasizing the importance of valid prerequisites or conditions in the study of evidence. Hermann's belief in his resemblance to Felix is noticed only by himself, illustrating his own illusion contrary to objective reality. With this incorrect premise, no matter how detailed the evidence he accumulates, it only undermines his credibility and works against his efforts.

With the incorrect premise of his double, Hermann stubbornly clings to his delusions, rejecting any evidence that contradicts his warped perception of events and focusing solely on the evidence that aligns with his premise. Upon reading a newspaper report detailing the murder, Hermann interprets the information through the lens of his delusional subjective double. The victim's identity is established, as the police have identified him as Felix through a walking stick bearing his name found in the car. However, the identity of the murderer remains undisclosed. Hermann misconstrues the situation, stating, "I grasped two facts: first, that the murderer's identity was known, and second, that of the victim was not" (195). Hermann becomes incensed when the report fails to acknowledge the supposed resemblance between himself and Felix: "Not a word was there about our resemblance; not only was it not criticized (for instance, they might have said, at least: "Yes, an admirable resemblance, yet such and such markings show it to be not his body") but it was not mentioned at all" (196). Hermann laments the absence of any mention or criticism of their likeness. He even goes so far as to imagine how Felix's countenance would change after death, stating that "the stages of its decomposition would have tallied with mine" to emphasize their supposed resemblance (196). As readers, we realize that such a claim that resembles this is absurd and unverifiable.

When the police deduce that the murderer intended to mislead them into believing that Felix is his double, Hermann attributes their failure to recognize the resemblance to their unwillingness to see what they are reluctant to see (201). In Hermann's eyes, the police's refusal to acknowledge the resemblance between himself and Felix is a testament to their narrow-mindedness and inability to perceive the truth. Hermann manipulates and distorts information to support his delusional belief in the subjective double and the artistic nature of his murder. He selectively interprets facts and disregards conflicting evidence, solidifying his obsession with his delusional double and reinforcing his warped perception of reality. Hermann's narration and recollection of events serve to perpetuate his scheme and bolster his delusional obsession, highlighting his psychological instability and moral depravity.

Hermann refuses to accept police judgment as evidence against his delusional belief that Felix is his double. Instead, he likens the police's judgement to a biased literary critic who dismisses a book's worth based on personal bias and "first gratuitous assumption" (202). Hermann accuses the police of disregarding the remarkable resemblance between himself and Felix, focusing instead on insignificant flaws or "small and quite immaterial blemishes" (202). He argues that if they had approached the situation with a deeper understanding, they would have recognized the actual value of his masterpiece, much like how minor errors do not diminish the beauty of a great work. However, Hermann fails to realize that his beliefs stem from his delusions and subjective interpretation. Instead, he attributes the lack of recognition to human biases and prejudices, refusing to acknowledge his role in the misunderstanding. Hermann's comparison of the police's judgement with critics' evaluation touched on a central topic about the process of interpretation: what value do we place on surface resemblances versus deep structures? Can underlying similarity take different forms? What are their relative values? In Nabokov's dissatisfaction or even antipathy towards critics' interpretation of his works we can see that despite the absurdity of Hermann's statement of claims, it reveals the unavoidable bias inherent in all interpretations. It seems that through Hermann, Nabokov reveals two significant modes of reading or interpretation: fixed reading and open reading. Fixed reading refers to reading to support the prior judgment; opening reading encourages one to absorb all information with open-minded interpretation without rushing to a conclusion.

Even when faced with undeniable evidence to the contrary, Hermann remains steadfast in his conviction of his double's perfection. He accused the critics who "jumped to the groundless conclusion that my very idea was radically wrong, thereupon picking out those trifling discrepancies, which I myself am aware of and which have no importance whatever in the sum of an artist's success" (204). He absolves himself of any responsibility, attributing any perceived mistakes to the biased judgments of his critics. Hermann maintains that his meticulously planned murder is a flawless achievement guided by his creative intuition. He expresses his ultimate goal of gaining recognition: "To justify and save the offspring of my brain, to explain to the world all the depth of my masterpiece, did I devise the writing of the present tale" (204). Throughout, Hermann persists in his hypothesis of Felix being his double and views the murder as an artistic endeavor. He selectively interprets information to support his subjective narrative while disregarding conflicting evidence and reality.

Nabokov parodies the detective genre to underscore the importance of establishing a valid foundation for examining evidence. Hermann's belief that he resembles Felix is recognized only by himself, revealing his initial incorrect stance that contradicts reality. Thus, due to this

erroneous assumption, no matter how comprehensive the evidence he gathers, it ultimately erodes his credibility and hinders his endeavours.

4.4.3 Concrete Images and Sensory Details of the Murder Scene

In presenting Hermann's subjective duality and his meticulous crime, Nabokov parodies the murder scene from Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*. Nabokov critiques Dostoevsky's approach, noting a lack of vivid imagery and a neglect of sensory perception in portraying events. He states that Dostoevsky's work ignores "the natural background and all things relevant to the perception of the senses."[42] Despite this criticism, Nabokov praises Dostoevsky's ability to evoke gloomy landscapes and memorable imagery in *The Possessed*.[43] In *Despair,* Nabokov skilfully reimagines the murder scene, infusing it with his distinct literary style characterized by precise details and tangible imagery.

During their final encounter, as Hermann drives to the scene of the crime, he observes the landscape blanketed in snow, with only hints of black and whitish hues defining the surroundings – the stark contrast between the darkness of the trees and asphalt against the pale sky and patches of snow (173). This visual juxtaposition may mirror the moral dichotomy between Felix and Hermann, portraying them as symbols of good and evil respectively. Through vivid descriptions, Nabokov's narrative further solidifies Hermann's cold and callous nature. For instance, Hermann's method of shaving Felix with melting snow, mixing it with soap, and applying the icy lather onto his face demonstrates his calculated cruelty. Despite Hermann's claim of gentleness, Felix's face becomes a canvas of pain, marked by blood, snow, and lather, with a noticeable scratch near his ear that oozes a small ruby-coloured bead of blood (177). These visceral details not only contradict Hermann's version but also serve as precursors of the impending violence and murder. Through this meticulous portrayal, Nabokov effectively constructs the murder scene and delves into the depths of the characters' psyches, laying bare their true natures amidst the chilling backdrop of snow and blood.

Nabokov underscores Hermann's fixation on the double amid the chilling murder scene, a motif reminiscent of Peter Verkhovensk's actions in *The Possessed*. Foster suggests that Nabokov's adaptation of *The Possessed* serves a dual purpose. Not only does it emphasize the vividness and sensory detail of the original work, but it also raises moral questions that

[42] Nabokov, *Lecture on Russian Literature*, 104.
[43] Ibid., 128-129.

contribute to Nabokov's critical assessments of *Crime and Punishment*.[44] Both Nabokov and Dostoevsky purposefully veil moral qualms in their portrayal of these grim events, reserving their ethical judgment for the perpetrators' heinous crimes against their victims. In Hermann's callous act of shooting Felix in *Despair*, echoes of Verkhovensky's murders of Shatov resound. Both protagonists exhibit a disturbing lack of empathy as they extinguish their victims' lives. Hermann, consumed by his obsession with his doppelgänger, muses, "Our likeness was such that I could not say who had been killed, I or he" (182). This sentiment reflects his warped perception of self and other, blurring the lines between perpetrator and victim in a disturbingly narcissistic manner.

Hermann's mindset at the moment of the murder is depicted as a euphoric triumph, akin to an artist's moment of creative ecstasy. He views the act as a validation of his supposed genius, as "a certain extraordinary, madly happy, an all-solving moment which it was imperative I attain; the moment of an artist's triumph; of pride, deliverance, bliss" (193). Hermann takes the murder as proof of his genius. He eagerly anticipates recognition and praise for his macabre masterpiece, "I longed, to the point of pain, for that masterpiece of mine to be appreciated by men" (188). Despite his defence that "every work of art is a deception" and his claim that he is "the pure artist of romance," it is evident that his true motivation lies in the pursuit of financial gain through insurance money (188). Despite Hermann's elaborate rationalizations and delusions of grandeur, his true intentions remain transparent to the reader. Nabokov employs vivid imagery to illuminate Hermann's inner turmoil and self-delusion, portraying his descent into moral depravity with chilling clarity.

The third encounter between Hermann and Felix marks a crucial turning point in Hermann's descent into madness, symbolizing the culmination of his delusions and the validation of his twisted conviction that murder can satisfy as a form of art. Nabokov's narrative draws a satirical parallel to the murder scene in *The Possessed*, infusing it with vivid sensory descriptions and details that serve to illuminate Hermann's selfishness and cruelty amidst the harrowing tableau of the murder. The three meetings progressively illustrate Hermann's fixation on his subjective doppelgänger and his delusional pursuit of the perfect crime, while disregarding the profound suffering and tragic demise of the innocent Felix. Nabokov's depiction of the murder scene enriches Hermann's character with layers of meaning, highlighting thematic parallels between *Despair* and works of Dostoevsky.

[44] Foster, *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism*, 101.

4.5 Hermann's Behavior Model: Motivation, Ability and a Trigger

I will employ the Fogg Behaviour Model to gain insight into Hermann's behaviours and actions in the novel. Through this model, I will examine how three key elements—establishment, confirmation, and murder of his subjective double—converge at the three meetings, shedding light on Hermann's motivations and actions. Although Hermann's behaviour is exceptionally eccentric and not typical of ordinary human conduct, the FBM framework allows us to uncover the possible underlying factors driving his behaviour and actions. Utilizing the FBM's core components—sufficient motivation, adequate ability, and effective triggers—I will dissect how Hermann's actions towards his subjective double, Felix, culminate in murder. The model posits that for behaviour to occur, individuals must possess the motivation and ability to enact it. Through this lens, I will explore how Hermann's motivations, abilities, and triggers intertwine to propel him towards his tragic actions. This analysis deepens our understanding of Hermann's character and offers broader insights into the interplay of psychological factors that influence human behaviour.

4.5.1 Motivation of Hermann's Subjective Double and Murder

In the Fogg Behaviour Model, motivation is the initial and pivotal factor in driving individuals toward their goals or fulfilling their needs. Fogg outlines a framework for motivation consisting of three primary motivators, each with dual aspects: pleasure and pain, hope and fear, and social acceptance and rejection.[45] Fogg suggests that the pleasure/pain dimension represents individuals' immediate responses to current situations, playing an adaptive role in activities related to self-preservation and the propagation of our genes, such as hunger and sex. The anticipation of outcomes characterizes the hope/fear dimension, while the social acceptance/rejection dimension underscores people's inclination toward actions that garner social approval. In Hermann's case, his behaviour in the murder scenario manifests as shooting Felix and rationalizing it as both an expression of art and the elimination of his subjective double. Therefore, Hermann's establishment, consolidation, and justification of his subjective double serve as pathways to heighten his motivation to commit the murder.

Hermann's motivation for murder becomes evident during the initial encounter between Hermann and Felix. The phrase "albeit business, remained pretty dull" is a crucial clue,

[45] Fogg, "A behavior model for persuasive design," 6.

indicating that his business is not as prosperous as he portrays; instead, it teeters on the brink of bankruptcy (19). Hermann fabricates Felix as his double to conceal one of his primary motivations: fear of the looming financial ruin. Desperately seeking a way out of his financial crisis, Hermann constructs Felix as a scapegoat. Connolly proposed an explanation for Hermann's murder of Felix, suggesting that Hermann projected his financial woes and familial misfortunes onto Felix. Felix's death allowed Hermann to reset his career and family life.[46] While I find merit in this perspective, I contend that Hermann's motive for murder is multifaceted. It stems not only from his desire to resolve his financial crisis but also from innate malevolence, excessive egoism, and an obsession with resemblance. Hermann's construction of the double and subsequent murder of Felix are not products of accidental happenstance. Instead, they originate from long-standing malevolent schemes and calculated ruthlessness. Hermann's actions are driven by a sinister blend of motivations, revealing the depths of his depravity and his willingness to manipulate and sacrifice other's lives for personal gain.

The irony lies in Hermann's escalating belief in the double hypothesis and his growing motivation to murder Felix, despite his overt contempt for him. While Hermann attempts to persuade readers to acknowledge their similarities, he consistently demonstrates disdain for and superiority over Felix. For instance, Hermann describes Felix's appearance without a hint of sympathy but with palpable contempt, portraying him as "lank, dirty, with a three days' stubble on his chin…His thin-knitted tie dangled sideways, and there was not a button on the front of his shirt. A few pale violets were fading in his buttonhole; one had got loose and hung head downward" (19). In contrast, Hermann proudly boasts of his attributes: "a bird-witted but attractive wife who worshipped me," a comfortable lifestyle with a "nice little flat," an "accommodating stomach," and a blue car. He asserts his refined taste for art, seeing within himself "a poet, an author", and possessing "big commercial capacities" (113). Hermann views Felix as his inferior double, regarding him as "no more than a harmless curio" (113). Hermann's contempt for Felix is evident throughout the narrative: "He was not merely a fool; he was a fool of the melancholic type. Even his smile was glum" (85). Hermann's disdain reaches its peak when he declares, "There was gathered in him, I believe, the whole bouquet of human stupidity" (86). He interprets Felix's denial of their resemblance as stemming from Felix's "limited intelligence and timorous humour" (99). Paradoxically, the more contempt Hermann exhibits towards Felix, the more entrenched he becomes in the double hypothesis. From Hermann's disdain for Felix, it becomes apparent that a crucial factor underlying

[46] Connolly, *Nabokov's Early Fiction*,150.

Hermann's construction of Felix as his double is the perception of Felix as a social outcast, easily exchangeable and disposable without severe consequences.

4.5.2 Motor Cognition and Hermann's Ability to Murder

Ability represents the second crucial factor in the Fogg Behaviour Model. Enhancing ability can propel individuals across the behaviour activation threshold. Fogg contends that boosting ability does not necessarily involve training or teaching people new skills, as individuals are often reluctant to learn unfamiliar tasks. Instead, Fogg suggests simplifying design considerations by focusing on six elements: time, money, physical effort, brain cycles, social deviance, and non-routine activities. In *Despair,* Hermann faces a challenge in simplifying the act of murder. Consequently, he relies on motor cognition to meticulously plan and rehearse the murder repeatedly in his mind. Motor cognition refers to the mental processes through which the mind utilizes information stored in the motor system to plan actions or predict and interpret others' actions.[47] Motor imagery, a component of motor cognition, entails mentally simulating or rehearsing physical activities. Cognitive psychologists have studied this phenomenon extensively, and advancements in neuroimaging have enabled researchers to compare brain activity during task performance with mental rehearsal.[48] Motor imagery reflects our awareness of our movements and fosters self-consciousness about them. In *Despair*, Hermann utilizes motor imagery to craft murder schemes and mentally rehearse the act of murder. This strategy allows Hermann to refine his plans, anticipate potential obstacles, and prepare himself to execute his sinister intentions.

Despair hinges on the stark contrast between Hermann's subjective double and his actual circumstances, juxtaposed with his mental rehearsal of murdering Felix and the eventual physical execution of the crime. The narrative is propelled by Hermann's relentless pursuit to actualize his murderous intentions. In Chapter Two, on a summer Sunday in June, Hermann ventures to the murder scene—a plot of land near a lake owned by Ardalion. Everything Hermann encounters is filtered through the lens of his double hypothesis. For instance, when Hermann observes a pair of birch trees, he perceives them as symbolic of couples, reflecting his fixation on the duality inherent in his double hypothesis: "a couple of couples, if you

[47] Edward E. Smith and Stephen M. Kosslyn, "Motor Cognition and Mental Simulation," in *Cognitive Psychology: Mind and Brain* (New York: Pearson, 2006), 452-53.
[48] M. Roth et al., "Possible Involvement of Primary Motor Cortex in Mentally Stimulated Movement: A Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Studies," *NeuroReport* 7 (1996): 1280-84.

counted their reflections" (42). Hermann also notices a yellow post along the highway, installed by the selling agency to denote various prices. Although Hermann encounters the yellow post for the first time, he feels an uncanny sense of familiarity, viewing it as "familiar to me as a thing of the future" and unable to dissociate his initial encounter from its eventual role in the murder plot (45). It reveals that Hermann regards the yellow post as a landmark for the murder, utilizing it in his mental rehearsals of the crime: "It stood up in my dreams. By its position, my fancies found their bearings. All my thoughts reverted to it. It shone, a faithful beacon, in the darkness of my speculations" (45). This location ultimately serves as the setting for the murder, with the landscapes, pine trees, and yellow posts reappearing in the actual scene of the crime. Nabokov skillfully highlights the intricate interplay between Hermann's motor cognition of the murder and his obsession with the subjective double, underscoring the psychological complexity driving Hermann's actions.

In Chapter Nine, as Hermann drives to the murder scene for the third and final encounter with Felix, he emphasizes his discovery of the pine trees three times: "There passed by, in slow succession, pines, pines, pines" (173). The pine trees echo his earlier sighting of pine trees in June: "five pine trees, and a patch of heather, courtesy of the surrounding wood" (43). The presence of the pine trees confirms to Hermann that he has arrived at the correct location for his murderous scheme. Hermann's excitement peaks when he spots the yellow post in the distance. To him, it resembles "a yellow finger," and as it grows closer, it takes on a vivid clarity: "It wore a skullcap of snow… The yellow post was very yellow indeed" (173). Beyond the field lies the wood, which was "painted a flat grey on the backdrop of the pale sky", the designated site for Felix's murder (173). The sight of the yellow post reinforces Hermann's conviction regarding the murder location and bolsters his determination to translate his mental rehearsal of the murder into action.

A closer examination reveals that Hermann's murder scheme is not the result of an accidental incident but meticulous planning. He appears to have mapped out his planned getaway route during his initial visit to the location in June. After committing the murder, Hermann calmly navigates through the wood and around the lake, guided by his detailed mental imagery: "in the ghostly gloaming, among ghostly snow.… But how beautifully I knew the right direction, how accurately, how vividly I had visualized it all, when, in summer, I used to study the paths leading to Eichenberg" (182). A cross-reference reading of Chapters Two and Nine underscores Hermann's long-standing determination to murder Felix and his extensive mental rehearsals of the crime. Hermann's reliance on motor cognition to orchestrate his murder plan is evident, yet he struggles to synchronize his mental constructs with reality.

4.5.3 Trigger to Arouse Hermann's Murder

The third and final major factor in the Fogg Behaviour Model is the trigger, which serves as a prompt, cue, or call to action, motivating individuals to engage in a behaviour. Fogg categorizes triggers into three types: sparks, facilitators, and signals. Sparks are effective for individuals with low motivation, facilitators are beneficial for those with high motivation but lacking ability, and signals are most effective when individuals possess the motivation and ability to perform the target behaviour, as they do not seek to motivate the task but rather prompt action. Triggers play a crucial role because they can prompt impulsive actions. In Hermann's case, if he intends to carry out his murder plan, he requires a well-timed trigger. The appropriate trigger must be present at the critical moment to prompt Hermann's action. Triggers can manifest in various forms, but successful triggers share three key characteristics: Firstly, individuals must notice the trigger. Secondly, they must associate the trigger with the target behaviour. Thirdly, the trigger must occur when individuals are motivated and able to perform the behaviour.[49] These characteristics ensure the effectiveness of the trigger in prompting the desired action. In *Despair*, several triggers prompt Hermann to vacillate between abandoning or executing his murder plan.

Hermann once gave up his plan for murder; however, an incident prompts his temptation. Hermann and Felix stay in a hotel for one night at their second meeting. Hermann wakes from the nightmare of a congealed grease dog. This unsettling dream serves as a trigger, seemingly urging Hermann to relinquish his murderous intentions. He interprets the nightmare as a sign of fate, compelling him to renounce his plan and spare his double. He resolves to leave the room, determined to resist temptation by saying, "Forever leave and forget, and spare my poor double. I was now superstitiously keen to turn away from temptation forever" (107). However, another trigger or incident reignites Hermann's temptation. One day, a maid informs Hermann of a visitor, leading him to anticipate Felix's arrival. Hermann finds himself in morbid anticipation, yearning for Felix's presence to desperation: "I should die if he did not—oh, he was bound to come" (121). Despite instructing the maid to dismiss the visitor, who turns out not to be Felix, Hermann's imagination runs wild. He envisions the maid's shock and fantasizes: "How she would have rushed to me and gasped, and clung to me, babbling about the marvel of our resemblance" (124). Hermann interprets this incident as a twist of fate, perceiving it as a

[49] Fogg, "A Behavior Model for Persuasive Design," 7.

sign that Felix has reappeared and is offering his services, relieving Hermann of any responsibility "that the fatal succession of events might incur" (120). Following this trigger, Hermann's passion for his subjective double intensifies, exerting a "muffled but formidable violence" that spirals beyond his control (125). Hermann becomes increasingly susceptible to external influences, perceiving mundane objects such as mailboxes, a postman, and a stamp-emitting automaton as exerting a "ruthless influence" upon him (125). Eventually, Hermann succumbs to temptation and resolves to carry out the murder of Felix.

Aroused by the incident involving the visitor, Hermann orchestrates a letter to Felix for their third meeting, during which he plans to carry out the murder. He manipulates Felix's inquiry about finding a job, twisting it to imply that Felix is willing to accept any proposal, no matter how revolting, and has "commanded me to make use of his services" (130). Hermann distorts Felix's letter to absolve himself of responsibility for the impending events. To further alleviate his guilt, Hermann enlists the help of an innocent girl to deliver the letter. He feigns weakness in his eyes, persuading the girl to drop the letter into the mailbox, thus implicating her unwittingly in his sinister plot. The irony lies in Hermann's pretence of vulnerability when crossing the street, which he justifies as "Art for art's sake" despite no one around to witness it (134). Hermann convinces himself that he is absolved of wrongdoing: "My conscience is clear. Not I wrote to Felix, but he wrote to me; not I sent him the answer, but an unknown child" (135). Hermann exploits Felix and the innocent girl as tools to achieve his nefarious goals and evade accountability. Here, Hermann's justification notably exploits the efficient cause aspect of Aristotle's theory of causation. Aristotle's theory, known as the four causes, offers a framework for comprehending the origins or explanations of phenomena in the natural world. These causes include the material cause (the substance from which something is made), the formal cause (the underlying pattern or structure), the efficient cause (the agent or force bringing about the phenomenon), and the final cause (the ultimate purpose or goal). Hermann manipulates the circumstances by contending that he is not the efficient cause behind the letter reaching Felix; instead, he attributes it to the innocent girl as an intermediary. This manoeuvre attempts to distance himself from direct culpability, asserting that since he did not physically dispatch the letter, he cannot be held responsible for its content or repercussions. However, this rationale sidesteps the moral responsibility inherent in his actions and intentions. Hermann's distortion of events and manipulation of others demonstrate a callous disregard for individuals and the situation. The catalyst driving Hermann toward murder is not a genuine accident but rather a byproduct of his delusional imagination fuelled by inherent malevolence.

Decoding Hermann's behaviour within the Fogg Behaviour Model (FBM) framework provides valuable insights into the dynamics of human motivation and action. Through the lens of the FBM, we can understand how Hermann's motivations, abilities, and triggers converge to drive his actions in *Despair*. Firstly, examining Hermann's motivations reveals a complex interplay of factors. From financial desperation to narcissistic superiority and an obsession with his subjective double, Hermann's motivations are multifaceted and deeply rooted in his psyche. The FBM helps us recognize how these motivations interact and evolve, shaping Hermann's decisions and actions. Secondly, analysing Hermann's abilities sheds light on the role of capability in determining behaviour. Despite his meticulous planning and rehearsal of the murder, Hermann's actions are hindered by his inability to reconcile his mental constructs with reality. The FBM underscores the importance of translating motivation into action, highlighting how Hermann's shortcomings ultimately impact the outcome of his plans. Lastly, exploring the triggers that prompt Hermann's behaviour reveals the role of external stimuli in influencing human actions. From nightmares to chance encounters, various triggers propel Hermann towards both contemplation and execution of the murder. The FBM framework helps us understand how these triggers interact with Hermann's motivations and abilities, shaping his decisions and behaviours. It highlights the interplay of internal and external factors that drive behaviour, offering valuable perspectives on the psychological mechanisms in *Despair*.

4.6 Origin of Subjective Double: Intellectual, Moral and Ideological Dimensions

This section evaluates the origins of Hermann's subjective double in *Despair*, drawing insights from Nabokov's narrative as well as recent neuroscientific findings. Firstly, Nabokov emphasizes Hermann's propensity for abusing analogy and his struggle to discern between difference and uniqueness. Hermann's reliance on analogy blurs distinctions and fosters the creation of his subjective double, a distorted reflection of himself shaped by his perceptions and biases. Secondly, Nabokov underscores Hermann's lack of empathy as a critical factor in forming his subjective double. Recent neuroimaging studies corroborate this insight, revealing neural correlates associated with empathy deficits in individuals prone to developing distorted self-perceptions and projections of others. Thirdly, Nabokov introduces an ideological and political dimension to Hermann's subjective double. Hermann's distorted worldview and moral ambiguity contribute to the ideological underpinnings of his double, intertwining intellectual, ethical, and ideological dimensions in the character's psyche. By examining these factors, we understand the origins of Hermann's subjective double and his subsequent murderous

behaviour. It reveals a complex interplay of cognitive, emotional, and ideological factors driving Hermann's descent into delusion and violence.

4.6.1 Abuse of Analogy and Intellectual Inability

In *Despair*, Hermann's construction of Felix as his double is a subjective illusion stemming from his profound and abnormal fixation on analogy and resemblance. This process involves the complexities of conceptual blending or integration, which are fundamental to even the most basic forms of thought.[50] Fauconnier and Turner propose three primary operations in the complicated process of conceptual blending: identity, integration, and imagination.[51] Recognition of identity or resemblance involves a complex and imaginative mental process where "identity and opposition, sameness and difference, are apprehensible in consciousness and have provided a natural beginning for form approaches."[52] Integration occurs swiftly and often unnoticed, yet it is a sophisticated cognitive process with "detailed structural and dynamic properties and operational constraints."[53] Both identity and integration rely heavily on the involvement of the human mind and imagination, which are pervasive and can generate imaginative simulations even without external stimuli.[54] From these key elements, it becomes evident that the process and outcomes of conceptual blending are inherently imaginative and creative. Hermann's subjective double emerges as a product of this process, reflecting his preexisting bias towards resemblance and his urgent financial crisis. The intricate interplay of identity, integration, and imagination in conceptual blending shapes Hermann's delusional perception of Felix as his double, highlighting the profound influence of cognitive processes on human perception and behaviour.

In *Despair,* Nabokov portrays Hermann's subjective double as intricately intertwined with his excessive abuse of analogy and his inability to discern differences. Hermann's subjective double is deeply rooted in his propensity for analogical thinking, a cognitive process humans have evolved to preserve and identify resemblances among various events or situations. From childhood, individuals learn to employ analogy to comprehend the natural world, acquire language, and enhance linguistic proficiency. Throughout history, the perception of analogy

[50] Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and The Mind's Hidden Complexities* (Perseus Books Group, 2002),6.
[51] Ibid., 6.
[52] Ibid., 6.
[53] Ibid., 6.
[54] Ibid., 6.

has undergone significant shifts. Initially valued for its role in reasoning and algorithmic systems, analogy later fell into disfavour, perceived as imprecise and relegated to fuzzy thinking or intuition. However, by the late 1970s, analogy experienced a resurgence, garnering attention as a complex and fundamental cognitive operation.[55] Experimental psychologists utilized clinical and computer modelling to demonstrate the power of analogy as a cognitive process.[56] Analogy has since been recognized as a valid cognitive and intellectual capability, instrumental in discerning patterns within complexities and facilitating communication.

In *Despair*, Nabokov uses the character Hermann to illustrate the dangerous consequences of the abuse of analogy, which tends to emphasize similarities while downplaying differences. Hermann's obsession with analogy blinds him to individuality and differences, leading him to perceive his subjective double not as a manifestation of mental illness or cognitive deficiency but as a unique talent for uncovering resemblances unnoticed by others. Hermann's tragic trajectory underscores the profound impact of cognitive processes on human perception and behavior, serving as a cautionary tale against the unchecked exploitation of analogy. In *Despair*, Hermann's subjective double emerges not as a factual reality but as a product of his abuse of analogy. This abuse leads him to form an illusory correlation between himself and Felix. Illusory correlations, in psychological terms, occur when individuals mistakenly perceive a connection between two unrelated variables.[57] There are two main types of illusory correlation: distinctiveness-based and expectancy-based. The former arises when attention is disproportionately focused on specific information, creating the perception of a relationship between unrelated variables. The latter occurs when preexisting expectations or beliefs influence the perception of connections between variables.[58] Hermann's subjective double exemplifies a blend of both types of illusory correlation. His excessive attention to the imagined resemblance and his preexisting expectation of a double or analogy contribute to this illusory correlation. Hermann becomes increasingly preoccupied with this perceived resemblance, disregarding Felix's individuality and suffering. In the preceding sections, the meetings between Hermann and Felix serve as a backdrop to explore Hermann's fixation on the delusional resemblance between himself and Felix. Hermann's obsession with analogy made

[55] Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think,* 14.
[56] Ibid., 14.
[57] D. L..Hamilton and R. K.Gifford, "Illusory correlation in interpersonal perception: A cognitive basis of stereotypic judgments," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 12 (1976): 392-107.
[58] D. L. Hamilton and T. L. Rose, "Illusory Correlation and the Maintenance of Stereotypical Beliefs," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 39 (1980): 832-845.

him ignore Felix's uniqueness and plight, illustrating the profound consequences of his abuse of this cognitive mechanism.

The sporadic biographical details about Hermann suggest that his obsession with analogy and subjective doubles predate his encounter with Felix. From childhood Hermann demonstrates a tendency to perceive false resemblances where none necessarily exist. For instance, in Chapter One, he compares the sun setting behind the Pyrenean mountains to Mount Fuji, indicating his inclination to draw parallels between disparate elements (15). Similarly, in Chapter Ten, Hermann remarked the "mauve-shaded sugar cone of a mountain resembling Fujiyama" (192). Another example is that on the second meeting, Hermann identifies various aspects of Tarnitz as resembling locations from his past experiences, a St. Petersburg suburb: "I discovered things most remarkably and uncannily familiar to me" (80). He attempts to support his claims with anecdotal evidence, such as identifying details that he believes correspond to his past experiences. These details include "a low pale-blue house", "an old-clothes shop", "a street lamp", and "the same bare birch tree with the same forked trunk in an iron corset" (80). However, Hermann's assertions about these resemblances lack solid evidence and appear based solely on his subjective feelings and personal judgment. These resembling connections are tenuous at best and rely more on Hermann's imagination than objective reality.

Hermann's reflection on his understanding of resemblance further underscores the subjective nature of his perceptions. He describes recognizing passages from his past life, suggesting a tendency towards imaginative reconstruction rather than factual observation. Hermann makes a statement about his understanding of resemblance: "Every man with a keen eye is familiar with those anonymously retold passages from his past life: false-innocent combinations of details, which smack revoltingly of plagiarism"(80). This statement reveals his confidence in his ability to discern resemblance, even when it may be based more on fantasy than reality. Hermann's predisposition towards seeing analogies and resemblances reflects not an objective reality but an imaginative fantasy or purposeful construction. This tendency likely contributes to the development of his subjective double syndrome and underscores the complexity of his psychological makeup.

Hermann's obsession with resemblance extends to a fascination with reversibility, wherein he consistently seeks to reverse or rearrange elements to suit his preferences. This inclination is evident throughout various incidents in his life, illustrating his deep-seated tendency towards analogy, resemblance and reversibility. During his school days, Hermann's penchant for reversing classics led to poor marks in Russian writing, as he consistently inverted Russian and foreign classics. Similarly, when tasked with retelling the plot of Othello, he

reverses the roles of the major characters, presenting "the Moor sceptical and Desdemona unfaithful" (56). This pattern continues when Hermann performs in a drama, altering lines to his liking, such as transforming "The prince bade me announce that he would be here presently" to "The prince cannot come: he has cut his throat with a razor" (100). Hermann takes pride in these actions, revelling in his delight in manipulating and reversing established narratives. His behavior is characterized by "exquisite delight" and "glee," indicative of his deep satisfaction with his reversals (100). This pattern of behaviour, rooted in Hermann's abuse of analogy and intellectual deficiencies, partly explains his subjective double syndrome. Despite the absence of physical similarity between Hermann and Felix, Hermann insists on their identity at first sight. However, these supposed similarities go unnoticed by others, as Hermann's illusion stems from his fundamental biases and intellectual deficiencies, operating at both conscious and unconscious levels. Hermann's biographical details and the manifestation of his subjective double reveal that analogy and resemblance form his guiding principle and primary mode of interpreting information. This pervasive tendency shapes his perception of reality and underscores the complexity of his psychological makeup.

4.6.2 Lack of Empathy and Erroneous Delusion

Nabokov skilfully portrays Hermann's lack of empathy and morality in his depiction of Hermann's erroneous delusion, suggesting a connection between Hermann's deficiency in empathy and his subjective double, solipsistic illusion, and egoistic personality. This insight aligns with recent studies on brain dysfunction, highlighting empathy as a uniquely human ability to understand and reason about others' affective and cognitive states.[59] Naomi Olson compares the autoscopic phenomena experienced by Fyodor in *The Gift* and Hermann in *Despair*, noting their differing reactions. Olson argues that empathy is crucial in how individuals relate to themselves, others, and the world.[60] Hermann's subjective double illusion and narcissistic narrative exemplify his lack of empathy, as he fails to consider the perspectives and experiences of others.

Nabokov emphasizes the importance of empathy in artists' work, asserting that they must be able to enter into the souls of others momentarily to create ethical and aesthetic art. Leland

[59] Peter Brugger, "Reflective Mirrors: Perspective-Taking in Autoscopic Phenomena," *Cognitive Neuropsychiatry* 8 (2007): 182.
[60] Naomi Olso, "Double Vision: Autoscopic Phenomena in Nabokov's Fiction," in Brian Boyd and Marijeta Bozovic, eds., *Nabokov Upside Down* (Northwestern University Press, 2017), 99-107.

de la Durantaye points out that Nabokov believes that the artist's work is ethical and aesthetic; his task is to "enter, for a moment, into a passerby's soul."[61] However, Hermann serves as a stark counter-example to Nabokov's ideal, as he arrogantly claims artistic talent while callously murdering a stranger under the guise of artistry. Stephen Blackwell suggests that Hermann's assumption of talent and achievement masks a more profound self-loathing cloaked in narcissism.[62] Clare Rosenfield adds that Hermann's inability to explore the depths of others' lives reflects his shallow understanding of the world, focusing only on surface realities.[63] This tension between surface and depth is essential when considered an analogy for reading. It suggests that despite apparent differences in details, there may be an underlying typical structure. Conversely, two books might appear to share a similar structure or plot but differ significantly in deeper aspects. Hermann's rejection of opposing viewpoints and his indulgence in his delusions further underscore his lack of empathy and his inability or unwillingness to view the world from others' perspectives. In *Despair*, Nabokov paints a chilling portrait of a character consumed by his ego, devoid of empathy or moral compass, illustrating the dangers of solipsism and self-absorption.

Nabokov's portrayal of Hermann in *Despair* underscores the pivotal role of empathy in shaping Hermann's delusional double and driving his judgments, decisions, and actions. Recent studies on brain dysfunction provide compelling evidence supporting Nabokov's insights into the relationship between empathy and cognitive malfunction or erroneous delusion. Neuroimaging studies have identified the involvement of specific brain regions, particularly the temporoparietal junction (TPJ), in empathetic processing. Dysfunction or breakdowns in these processes can lead to cognitive malfunctions, including erroneous delusions. The TPJ is consistently activated in neuroimaging studies on empathy and is crucial for moral decision-making and awareness of the distinction between self and other. Moreover, cognitive processing in social cognition, such as empathy, relies on the interaction between various brain regions, including the medial prefrontal cortex and the posterior temporal gyrus at the junction with the parietal cortex. These regions are involved in processing social cues and are essential for empathetic responses.[64] Discussions on the role of TPJ and other microanatomical locations

[61] de la Durantaye, *Style Is Matter*, 54.
[62] Stephen Blackwell, "Nabokov's Wiener-schnitzel Dreams: *Despair* and Anti-Freudian Poetics," *Nabokov Studies* 7 (2002/2003): 136.
[63] Clare Rosenfild, "*Despair* and the Lust for Immortality," *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 8.2 (1967): 186.
[64] Jean Dexety and Claus Lamm, "The Role of the Right Temporoparietal Junction in Social Interaction, " *Current Opinion in Neurobiology* 20.2 (2010): 165-170.

highlight their significance in empathy processes.[65] Nabokov's portrayal of Hermann in *Despair* offers a compelling exploration of how empathy, mediated through specific brain regions like the temporoparietal junction, influences cognitive processes and can contribute to the formation of delusional beliefs.

While no direct evidence suggests that Nabokov incorporated clinical knowledge into *Despair,* his portrayal of Hermann aligns with the contemporary understanding of empathy's role in cognitive functioning. Hermann's lack of empathy is depicted as central to his delusional double and physiological disorder, underscoring the interplay between empathy and cognitive processes in shaping human behaviour and perception. Nabokov's exploration of Hermann's character offers valuable insights into the complex relationship between empathy, mental function, and psychological disorders, resonating with contemporary research findings in neuroscience and psychology.

Hermann's murder of Felix and his justification of his delusional double can be seen as a continuation of the cruelty, selfishness, and immorality that characterized his childhood. From the outset, Hermann provides inconsistent and exaggerated information about his parents, weaving elaborate tales to create a false image of his background. Hermann said his father was a Russian-speaking German from Reval who graduated from "a famous agricultural college" (14). His mother was a Russian and came from old princely stock. He recounts a graceful image of his mother: "On hot summer days, a languid lady in lilac silks, she would recline in her rocking chair, fanning herself, munching chocolate, all the blinds down, and the wind from some new-mown field making them billow like purple sails" (14). Later, the reader knows that the image of his mom is from the labels on the chocolate and all his parents' information are unreliable. Hermann's admission later that "true, my mother was of low birth and my father's father herded geese in his youth" (168). Hermann's unreliable parents' information underscores his propensity for deceit and manipulation without feeling any shame.

Hermann exhibits a disturbing lack of empathy and moral compass throughout his life. As a child, he engages in acts of cruelty, such as stealing peaches, burying cats alive, and inflicting harm on his playmates (56). He even fantasizes about committing more heinous acts, questioning whether he possesses the potential to become a criminal genius (58). Hermann's disregard for morality is evident in his proud admission of his talent for lying and his enjoyment of deception. Hermann admits that his thirst for falsehood and his addiction to painstaking lying

[65] Jan Verplaetse et al., T*he Moral Brain: Essays on the Evolutionary and Neuroscientific Aspects of Morality* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009).

existed all the time (58). He sees lying as a source of "glee" and revels in the art of "sweet lying" (34). Moreover, Hermann justifies his immoral actions by contending that the morality of bullying, stealing, and slaughter depends on the circumstances, demonstrating his complete disregard for ethical standards (185). The encounter with Felix catalyses Hermann's descent into criminality, as it provides an opportunity for him to actualize his long-standing abnormal tendencies. Hermann's delusional double becomes a convenient justification for his murderous actions, allowing him to rationalize his behaviour and absolve himself of guilt. Hermann's transformation from a deceitful and morally bankrupt individual into a cold-blooded murderer is a chilling portrayal of the corrosive effects of unchecked selfishness, cruelty, and immorality. His descent into criminality is a stark warning about the dangers of indulging in one's darkest impulses and the importance of upholding ethical principles in society.

Hermann's attempt to use Freudian theory as a shield to deflect blame from his own innate evil and immoral actions is a manipulative tactic aimed at misleading the reader. Hermann recounts his parents' disciplinary actions: "My mother would give me a cuff on the ear, my father thrash me with a riding whip which had once been a bull's sinew." However, the parents' punishment did not "dismay me in the least—rather, it furthered the flight of my fancies. With a stunning ear and burning buttocks, I would lie among the tall weeds in the orchard" (55). In this way, Hermann seeks to suggest that his abnormal personality may have been caused by childhood trauma. However, Nabokov challenges this notion by emphasizing that Hermann's habitual lying and lack of morality are rooted in his innate wickedness rather than external influences. Nabokov's opposition to Hermann's attempt to invoke Freudian theory underscores the danger of using psychological explanations to excuse criminal behaviour. Nabokov highlights criminals may abuse Freudian theory to justify or relieve their crime: "such as when a filthy murderer with the brain of a tapeworm is given a lighter sentence because his mother spanked him too much or too little—it works both ways."[66] By critiquing the potential misuse of Freudian principles in legal proceedings, Nabokov highlights the ethical consequences of attributing criminal actions solely to childhood experiences or parental upbringing.

Hermann's criminal inclination, cruelty, and excessive egoism are portrayed as inherent traits rather than products of external factors. These traits contribute to Hermann's decision to resort to murder as a means of resolving his financial troubles and rationalizing his actions as a form of art. Nabokov's critique of Hermann's defence strategy is a cautionary tale about the limitations of psychological theories in explaining criminal behaviour and the importance of

[66] Nabokov, *Strong Opinion*, 116.

holding individuals accountable for their actions, regardless of their upbringing or past experiences. Hermann's manipulation of Freudian theory underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of human nature and the complexities of moral responsibility.

4.6.3 Morbid Ideology and Political Implication

In *Despair*, Nabokov weaves ideological and political dimensions into Hermann's subjective doppelgänger, illustrating how deeply held beliefs can shape and distort one's perception of reality. Hermann's affinity for communism aligns with its sameness-driven ideology, blurring the lines between his personal delusions and political sympathies.

Justifying his actions as artistic endeavours, Hermann extends his obsession with doubling to justify his crimes, creating a narrative that remains unsettlingly distant from conventional morality. As Hermann delves deeper into his ideological fervour, he lionizes the concept of resemblance, embracing Soviet ideology as a beacon of sameness. Hermann believes that "Communism, in the long run, was a great and necessary thing; that young, new Russia was producing wonderful values, although unintelligible to Western minds and unacceptable to destitute and embittered exiles" (30). His belief in the righteousness of communism is fervently expressed, extolling its virtues as a necessary force for societal transformation. Hermann inserts his passion for resemblance into his political identification "that history had never yet known such enthusiasm, asceticism, and unselfishness, such faith in the impending sameness of us all" (30). However, this fervour made him ignore the realities of individualism and diversity, dismissing dissenting voices as mere echoes of a bygone era. In Hermann's worldview, communism emerges as a utopian ideal, promising a world of homogeneous unity and creating "a beautifully square world of identical brawny fellows, broad-shouldered and microcephalous" (30). His fervent advocacy made him unaware of the complexities of human existence, reducing individuals to mere replicas in his pursuit of ideological purity. This obsession with uniformity alienates him from those around him and serves as a sharp reminder of the dangers of ideological fervour unchecked by empathy and understanding.

A pivotal exchange unfolds between Hermann and Ardalion, delving deep into the themes of resemblance and individuality. As Ardalion staunchly upholds the individual uniqueness by saying, "Every face is unique", Hermann's reaction is one of vehement rejection: "Unique! … Isn't that going too far" (50). To Hermann, the notion of uniqueness seems preposterous, leading him to argue for categorizing human faces into distinct types akin to zoological classifications (51). His fervent belief in the existence of these types serves as a foundation for

his obsession with resemblance, exemplified by his references to famous figures and iconic images: “Napoleons among men, Queen Victorias among women. People have told me I reminded them of Amundsen” (51). In Hermann’s worldview, resemblance holds paramount importance, with individuals reduced to mere reflections of predefined archetypes.

Hermann’s insistence on the significance of resemblance becomes a means of justifying his fixation on subjective duality and his acts of violence as artistic expression. However, Ardalion counters this perspective with calm assurance, “What the artist perceives is the difference between things. It is vulgar who note their resemblance” (51). Ardalion asserts that true artistry lies in perceiving the differences rather than their superficial similarities. Hermann’s unwavering defense of resemblance, such as “It is the resemblance that matters,” reveals his psychological investment in his delusions and hints at a deeper ideological dimension (51). This fixation on resemblance becomes intertwined with his political beliefs, as he seeks to use it to justify his actions and validate his distorted worldview. His perception of Ardalion as a threat to his ideological framework underscores how his fixation on resemblance shapes his interactions and motivations. This conversation, occurring in the wake of Hermann’s encounter with Felix, is a pivotal moment in his descent into delusion. It marks a turning point where his obsession with resemblance becomes a means of justifying his actions and a lens through which he interprets the world around him. As Hermann’s worldview becomes increasingly distorted, his defence of resemblance takes on a sinister significance, reflecting the dangerous intersection of personal obsession and ideological fervour.

Moreover, Hermann's desire for his book to be embraced by Soviet youths underlines his affinity for the Soviet regime and its ideological alignment with his own distorted beliefs. His readiness to associate with the regime suggests a shared conviction in the supremacy of sameness and the sacrifice of individuality for the collective good. In Hermann's delusional pursuit of his subjective double, he becomes a manifestation of fundamental evil, using his warped ideology to justify atrocities. However, his descent into darkness is symbolic of the broader dangers inherent in totalitarian regimes, where ideological zeal can lead to devastating consequences on a mass scale. The echoes of Hermann's delusions reverberate far beyond his actions, serving as a stark warning against the seductive allure of ideologies that seek to erase the essence of humanity in pursuit of an illusory utopia.

The political and ideological undertones of Hermann's obsession with resemblance come sharply into focus during his final meeting. Here, Hermann articulates a chilling vision of a “classless society of the future”, where physical likeness symbolizes the ideological sameness promised by socialism (168). In his twisted worldview, the physical resemblance between

himself and Felix becomes a harbinger of a world devoid of individuality, “a world of Helixes and Fermanns; a world where the worker fallen dead at the feet of his machine will be at once replaced by his perfect double smiling the serene smile of perfect socialism”, where everyone is interchangeable and expendable in service to the collective (169). There may be a pun within the swapped names, as ‘Helixes’ suggests a three-dimensional spiral shape, symbolizing repetition and uniformity and implying a world where individuals are replaceable, much like a helix’s repetitive, continuous structure (and curiously anticipating the double-helix structure of DNA, discovered by Francis Crick, James Watson, and Rosalind Franklin in 1952). ‘Fermann’ reverberates with the surname of Enrico Fermi, an Italian-American physicist instrumental in the development of nuclear physics and a core team-member of the Manhattan Project during World War II. Hermann’s assertion that all men will eventually resemble one another reflects a dangerous belief in the erasure of individual identity, paving the way to justify his heinous act. By denying the uniqueness of each person, Hermann attempts to rationalize his murder as merely an act of eliminating a redundant iteration in the grand scheme of a uniform society.

Moreover, Hermann’s desire for his book to be embraced by Soviet youths underlines his affinity for the Soviet regime and its ideological alignment with his own distorted beliefs. Hermann visualizes that Soviet youths read his book “under the supervision of an experienced Marxist who would help them follow through its pages the rudimentary wriggles of the social message it contains” (169). His readiness to associate with the regime suggests a shared conviction in the supremacy of sameness and the sacrifice of individuality for the collective good. In Hermann’s delusional pursuit of his subjective double, he becomes a manifestation of fundamental evil, using his warped ideology to justify atrocities. However, his descent into darkness is symbolic of the broader dangers inherent in totalitarian regimes, where ideological zeal can lead to devastating consequences on a mass scale. The echoes of Hermann's delusions reverberate far beyond his actions, serving as a stark warning against the seductive allure of ideologies that seek to erase the essence of humanity in pursuit of an illusory utopia.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1977 adaptation of Nabokov's *Despair* marks a departure from the original novel, introducing elements of political and historical context, particularly surrounding the Weimar Republic and National Socialism. While Nabokov's novel is set in Germany in the early 1930s without direct references to Nazism, Fassbinder's film deliberately incorporates these themes, prompting various interpretations from critics. Some critics, such as Edward Plater, argue that Fassbinder's inclusion of references to Nazism transforms the story

into an allegory of the rise and fall of National Socialism [67] Cook expands on this idea, suggesting that Hermann's murder of Felix symbolizes the genocide committed by Germany, with Felix representing both a victim of Hermann's madness and a broader victim of war and the Holocaust. Hermann's obsession with double and his crazy narcissism led to his murder and madness, just like those directed in Germany by Nazism.[68] I concur that the presence of Nazism in the film serves to deepen Hermann's mental crisis, reinforcing the parallels between his obsessive desire for resemblance and the destructive ideologies of Nazism. Furthermore, by extending beyond the specific German context, the novel's themes of narcissism and the quest for resemblance offer poignant reflections on human nature and the potential for ideological fanaticism to justify heinous acts. Gordon Slethaug's observation about the horror of using Hermann's desire for sameness to justify atrocities underscores the enduring relevance of the novel's themes in contemporary discourse.[69] In contrast to Hermann's obsession with uniformity, Nabokov's emphasis on difference and plurality is a powerful critique of ideological conformity and the dangers of seeking sameness at the expense of individuality. Ultimately, Fassbinder's adaptation, with its incorporation of Nazi themes, enriches the narrative by providing a broader historical and political context. Through Nabokov's exploration of human nature and the perils of ideological extremism, the novel continues to resonate and provoke meaningful reflection.

Hermann's subjective duality is a complex interplay of intellectual deficiency, moral depravity, and ideological fluidity, all inextricably interconnected. His deficiencies in empathy and imagination are not isolated traits but rather symptoms of a broader cognitive and ethical deficit. This interconnectedness underscores the psychological complexity of Hermann's character and invites exploration from moral and political perspectives. Hermann's intellectual shortcomings contribute to his moral irresponsibility and lack of empathy. His inability to comprehend the perspectives of others or envision alternative viewpoints renders him incapable of engaging with ethical dilemmas in a meaningful way. Consequently, his actions are driven by selfish desires and a disregard for the consequences of his behavior on others. Besides, Hermann's moral vacuum is further exacerbated by his penchant for cruelty and egoism. His willingness to manipulate and harm others for his gain reflects a profound moral bankruptcy,

[67] Edward MV Plater, "Fassbinder's Despair: A Political Allegory," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 13.4 (1985): 222.
[68] Eugene Crook, *Fearful Symmetry: Doubles and Doubling in Literature and Film* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1981), 138.
[69] Gordon Slethaug, *The Play of the Double in Postmodern American Fiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press，1993), 51.

where the pursuit of self-interest precedes any consideration of ethical principles or human decency. Furthermore, Hermann's ideological fluidity adds another layer to his subjective double. His willingness to adopt and discard ideologies based on their utility to his agenda highlights the malleability of his convictions and the absence of any genuine moral or political compass. By examining Hermann's subjective double through multiple lenses, including moral and political dimensions, we gain a deeper understanding of the psychological forces at play within his character. This nuanced exploration enriches our interpretation of Hermann's actions and prompts broader reflections on the nature of morality, empathy, and ideology in the human psyche. These ideas allow the readers to understand better the novel's characters, themes, and implications, as well as to consider how these interconnected traits shape a character's actions and narrative and reflect on broader moral and ethical questions. Readers are invited to consider the implications of a character's actions in the story and real-world ethical dilemmas. Compared with memoirs, which are often constrained by the boundaries of real-life events and personal experiences, novels can freely explore and extrapolate on characters' psychological and moral dimensions in a more fictionalized and symbolic manner.

Applying these ideas to literature, particularly novels, can significantly enhance character analysis. Understanding a character like Hermann through the lenses of intellectual deficiency, moral depravity, and ideological fluidity allows readers to consider how these interconnected traits shape a character's actions and narrative. Moreover, exploring such complex characters encourages readers to consider the implications of a character's actions not just within the story but also in the context of real-world ethical dilemmas. These ideas facilitate the exploration of concepts such as empathy, the consequences of intellectual limitations, and the fluidity of ideological beliefs, leading to a richer understanding of the novel's themes and messages.

Summary

This chapter maps the various layers of Hermann's delusional belief that Felix is his double and his subsequent conviction that his murder is a form of art in *Despair*. It is divided into six sections, each focusing on a different dimension of Hermann's psyche. The first section provides an overview of the novel's plot and structure, highlighting the academic lacuna in understanding Hermann's subjective doubles. The subsequent sections explore Nabokov's portrayal of Hermann's behaviours and mental state during his three meetings with his victim, Felix, drawing on intertextual references to elucidate the nuances of his delusion. These sections aim to illuminate the mechanisms through which Hermann's obsession with the double

manifests and evolves throughout the narrative. Section five examines the motivations, capabilities, and triggers that drive Hermann to commit murder, while section six decodes the intellectual, moral, and ideological dimensions underpinning his subjective doubles.

Firstly, Nabokov parodies the genre of detective fiction within the novel to emphasize the critical necessity of establishing a sound foundation for examining evidence. Hermann's conviction that he resembles Felix is acknowledged solely by himself, exposing his initial erroneous stance that diverges from reality. As a result, this mistaken assumption diminishes his credibility and hinders his efforts, regardless of the thoroughness of the evidence he collects. This highlights the peril of basing investigations on subjective beliefs rather than objective truths, a theme central to Nabokov's critique in the novel. Moreover, Hermann's insistence on his resemblance to Felix reflects how unchecked subjectivity can distort one's perception of reality, leading to irrational conclusions and flawed decision-making. By juxtaposing Hermann's delusions with detective fiction, Nabokov challenges readers to reconsider the reliability of narrative construction and the fallibility of human perception in interpreting evidence. This parallels debates in psychology and philosophy about the role of cognitive biases in shaping beliefs. Furthermore, Hermann's downfall demonstrates the dangers of unchecked ego and self-delusion in the pursuit of truth. His refusal to acknowledge contradictory evidence underscores the human tendency to prioritize confirmation bias over objective reasoning. Nabokov's exploration thus invites reflection on how personal biases and preconceptions can influence fictional narratives and real-world investigations, urging a more critical approach to evaluating evidence and constructing coherent interpretations.

Secondly, Nabokov utilizes Hermann's subjective double to portray the ego-centric mentality and subjective realities of the human psyche. Through Hermann's delusional belief in his double and the subsequent murder of Felix, Nabokov suggests that motivation is central to human behaviour. The novel underscores the influence of one's mindset on actions, emphasizing themes of identity, integration, and imagination. Hermann's fixation on the double leads to the development of a morbid fixed mindset, exacerbating his bias towards the double and fuelling his murderous intentions. Nabokov portrays the intricacies of human motivation, highlighting the subjective nature of reality and the impact of individual perception on the construction of truth. Nabokov challenges the notion of objective reality, suggesting that reality is inherently subjective and influenced by one's motivations and mindset. The novel serves as a reminder that the more motivated an individual is, the greater the influence of their mind on their perception of reality and subsequent actions. Through Hermann's journey, Nabokov

prompts readers to contemplate the complexities of human psychology and how motivation shapes our understanding of the world around us.

The third aspect explores how Nabokov portrays the psychic state and mental condition of Hermann's delusional subjective double through intertextual references that engage the reader. Hermann employs his delusional double not only to rationalize his crime but also to manipulate the perceptions of readers, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. Nabokov weaves together artistic frames, mainly through intertextual references to Dostoevsky's works, to imbue Hermann's delusion with a sense of creativity and complexity. By intertwining Hermann's delusional narrative with literary references, Nabokov challenges conventional cognitive models and provides fertile ground for investigating phenomena such as delusional misidentification syndrome. The blending of reality and fiction, coupled with Hermann's manipulation of the reader's perception, creates a layered and nuanced exploration of the human psyche and the nature of delusion. Through this interplay of text and reader engagement, Nabokov invites readers to question the boundaries of sanity and imagination, prompting a deeper examination of the intricacies of delusional thinking. It enriches the narrative and offers valuable insights into the complexities of mental illness and the subjective nature of reality.

The last aspect considers Nabokov's reflection or anticipation of the psychological condition of the subjective double in *Despair*, emphasizing the intellectual, moral, and ideological dimensions that intersect with this psychological phenomenon. Nabokov's depiction of Hermann's delusion aligns with psychological studies on patients with subjective double syndrome, who persistently experience delusions regarding their abnormal perceptions. Nabokov highlights Hermann's lack of empathy as a fundamental factor underlying his illusion, a trait consistent with contemporary studies on brain dysfunction. Hermann's biased interpretation of information to support his subjective double reflects his intellectual deficiency and moral irresponsibility. Moreover, Nabokov suggests that Hermann's subjective double and his murder of Felix are influenced by his deficient deductive reasoning skills, moral apathy, and his fixation on a morbidly sameness-oriented ideology. This portrayal underscores the interconnectedness of intellect, morality and ideology, suggesting that they operate at both conscious and unconscious levels, shaping our perception and interpretation of emotionally charged information and pre-existing beliefs. By illustrating how intellect, morality, and ideology interact within the psyche, Nabokov offers a nuanced exploration of the subjective double phenomenon, challenging simplistic notions of intelligence and morality. The novel enriches our understanding of Hermann and prompts broader reflections on the complex interplay between cognition, ethics, and ideology in shaping human behaviour and perception.

By dissecting Hermann’s subjective doubles through multiple lenses, this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the psychological intricacies at play within Nabokov's narrative. It addresses the gap in scholarly understanding surrounding Hermann’s subjective doubles and their potential connection to delusional misidentification syndrome, a neuropsychological disorder. It demonstrates that Hermann's intellectual deficiencies, moral apathy, and fluid ideological stance contribute to his fixation on the double and his ultimate plan to commit murder. Moreover, it prompts broader reflections on the nature of delusion, morality, and ideology in shaping human behaviour and perception

Chapter 5 Symmetry, Synchrony and Tree Structure: A Cognitive Study of Narrative Patterns and Pattern Recognition in *Pale Fire*

Pale Fire is one of Nabokov's most delicately crafted works, renowned for its complex structure and interwoven narratives.[1] The novel consists of a foreword written by Charles Kinbote, a lengthy poem titled 'Pale Fire' by the poet John Shade, and Kinbote's extensive commentary and index on the poem. *Pale Fire* is often interpreted within the context of literary commentary or academic satire. However, less attention has been given to Nabokov's creative play of narrative patterns and the concept of pattern recognition within the novel. In *Pale Fire*, a convergence emerges between scientific notions of pattern recognition and the act of artistic creation. Scientific pattern recognition involves identifying recurring sequences or structures within data, while artistic creation often entails detecting, organizing, and reinterpreting patterns of experience, emotion, and meaning. This convergence is illustrated through Kinbote's commentary on Shade's poem, which layers fragments of reality with imagination that invites readers to trace patterns and interpret connections across differing perspectives. Kinbote's obsessive interpretations mirror a scientific impulse to decode, yet his distorted observations demonstrate how personal biases can warp both scientific and artistic truths, challenging readers to distinguish the objective patterns and subjective narratives.

Pattern recognition serves as both a guiding principle and heuristic for interpreting *Pale Fire*, as it encourages readers to actively seek out and identify recurring themes, motifs, and structural elements within the text. This method allows for a deeper exploration of the narrative, prompting readers to look beyond the surface of linear reading and to consider how various components interrelate. By recognizing patterns, readers can engage with the text in a more analytical manner, uncovering connections between different narrative threads and characters. Additionally, this approach enhances comprehension of Nabokov's artistic techniques, revealing how he crafts layers of meaning through deliberate repetition and variation. For instance, motifs related to duality and reflection recur throughout the poem and commentary, prompting readers to examine how these patterns inform the characters' identities and experiences. Pattern recognition not only aids in deciphering the complexities of *Pale Fire*, but also illustrates the interplay between reader perception and the construction of meaning,

[1] Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire* (New York: Vintage International, 1989). Subsequent page references to this edition are cited in parentheses in the text.

positioning the act of reading as an active, dynamic process shaped by the recognition of interconnected elements within the narrative.

Through the lens of pattern recognition, this chapter addresses three central inquiries: firstly, what narrative patterns does Kinbote produce and then use to establish correlations between Shade's poem and the fictional realm of Zembla? Secondly, how does Kinbote employ these patterns to structure information and weave intricate references to Zembla throughout his commentary? Lastly, what are the mechanisms and reliability of pattern recognition as Kinbote correlates Shade's poem with his created country of Zembla? Section one sets the stage by introducing the plot, providing a literary review of *Pale Fire*, and an overview of scholarship on patterns and pattern recognition. Section two examines the novel's symmetry structure and mirror mechanism, analysing instances of symmetry in Shade's poem. Additionally, it explores how Kinbote exploits this symmetry to craft an inverted duality, constructing Zembla as an asymmetrical reflection of Shade's poetry. Section three attends to the patterns of synchrony and juxtaposition within *Pale Fire*. Synchrony refers to the simultaneous occurrence or alignment of actions, events, or processes. In psychology, synchrony describes how "individuals naturally mirror each other's gestures, speech rhythms, or facial expressions, establishing an intuitive sense of rapport and social bonding." [2] Synchrony is crucial in social interactions, as it fosters feelings of understanding and connection among individuals. In literature, synchrony enhances thematic depth by aligning various narrative elements, where symbols, motifs, and parallel events converge to emphasize interconnectedness throughout the text. This section examines the synchrony between television shows and Hazel's suicide in Shade's poem, as well as the synchrony between Shade's poetic creation and Gradus' impending act of murder in Kinbote's commentary. Lastly, section four elucidates the tree structure and hierarchical patterns prevalent in Kinbote's commentary. It demonstrates how Kinbote utilizes multilevel notes to establish connections between Shade's lines and his portrayal of Zembla, creating a complex network of interrelated patterns. Through this comprehensive analysis, the patterns at play within *Pale Fire* shed light on Kinbote's narrative construction and the profound interplay between scientific theory and artistic expression in Nabokov's masterpiece.

This study advances three interconnected arguments: firstly, in *Pale Fire*, Kinbote employs three primary patterns—mirror symmetry, synchrony, and tree structure—to correlate Shade's

[2] Smith, J. *Understanding Social Synchrony: The Science of Human Connection* (Psychology Press, 2020), 45.

poem and Zembla; secondly, Kinbote's seemingly absurd commentary on Shade's poetry is not merely a manifestation of his mental instability or literary ineptitude, but rather a deliberate strategy to construct Zembla through his parasitic commentary; thirdly, while readers may recognize Kinbote's misinterpretation of Shade's poem, they often unwittingly accept the Zembla narrative embedded within Kinbote's parasitic and narcissistic commentary. This highlights the importance of narrative patterns in uncovering Nabokov's artistic vision and underscores how cognitive processes shape and construct our perception of reality. The theme of pattern recognition in *Pale Fire* deepens our appreciation of Nabokov's technique, illuminating the dynamic interplay between literature and human cognition. By intertwining these realms, Nabokov suggests that the creative and analytical acts of perceiving patterns are central to both understanding and reshaping the world, positioning art and science as complementary lenses through which human experience and knowledge are crafted.

5.1 *Pale Fire* and Pattern Recognition

5.1.1 *Pale Fire*: Parody of Literary Commentary

Pale Fire is a parody of scholarly commentary structured into four parts. The foreword, commentary, and index are composed by Charles Kinbote, while the poem titled 'Pale Fire' is written by the poet John Shade. Most critics suggest the presence of two distinct narrators: Shade, who narrates the poem, and Kinbote, who narrates the foreword, commentary, and index. Brian Boyd challenges this notion by proposing a singular narrator, John Shade; however, Boyd later revises his stance, acknowledging the dual narrative voices of Shade and Kinbote.[3] Within the poetic verses of 'Pale Fire', Shade recalls poignant moments from his life, including his childhood memories, his blissful marriage to Sybil, the tragic loss of his daughter Hazel to suicide, and his contemplation of the metaphysical realm. In contrast, Kinbote's commentary serves as a platform for constructing his kingdom of Zembla. Mirroring Shade's reflections, Kinbote interweaves the experiences as Zembla's exiled monarch, detailing his royal upbringing, his apprehension towards a palace uprising, his strained relationship with the queen, and his peculiar fixation on homosexuality. Kinbote ingeniously aligns Shade's poetry with his fabricated Zemblan saga, juxtaposing the poet's introspective verses with the impending threat of a would-be assassin named Gradus, dispatched from Zembla to murder Kinbote. Tragically,

[3] Boyd, *Nabokov's Pale Fire*, 4.

on the morning Shade completes the 999th line of his poem, Gradus mistakenly targets Shade for Kinbote, resulting in the death of Shade. Seeing Kinbote as her husband's would-be rescuer, Shade's widow Sybil entrusts Kinbote with editing Shade's poetry alongside his commentary.

Pale Fire has generated controversy among critics centred upon the reading strategies that the novel demands. Some contend that its imbricated structure and tonal variation renders it daunting to approach, with Frank Kermode dubbing *Pale Fire* "one of the most complex novels ever written."[4] Peter Rabinowitz goes further, describing it as a "frustrating" and even "impossible" novel to read, "the number of possible novels begins to proliferate at a geometric rate."[5] Wayne Booth posits that Nabokov, as an "evasive" author, hides behind veils of fiction, adding layers of complexity to the reader's engagement.[6] Despite the apparent complexity, Nabokov doesn't intend to erect barriers to reader access; instead, he invites the discerning reader to explore the text through multiple lenses. In line with Brian Boyd's perspective, I concur that the novel's complexity is not a reading obstacle or impediment but rather a rewarding journey of discovery. Boyd suggests that by following the narrative clues meticulously, readers will realize that Nabokov incorporates successive surprises and multiple discoveries on different reading levels.[7] Boyd further asserts that Nabokov employs *Pale Fire* as a canvas to experiment with narrative artistry, delving into profound themes such as "life and death, sanity and madness, hope and despair, life and loneliness, privacy and sharing, kindness and selfishness, creativity and parasitism.[8] A thoughtful and multi-faceted approach is essential to unravel the layers of *Pale Fire* and understand how Nabokov intertwines his notions of ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics.

Despite the debate surrounding the accessibility of the novel, numerous critics extol its remarkable postmodern attributes, narrative intricacies, and manifold interpretations. Mary McCarthy lauds *Pale Fire* as a pinnacle of 20th-century literature, describing it as "a Jack-in-the-box, a Faberge gem, a clockwork toy, a chess problem, an infernal machine, a trap to catch reviewers, a cat-and-mouse game, a do-it-yourself kit…a creature of perfect beauty, symmetry, strangeness, originality, and moral truth."[9] John Burt Foster asserts that *Pale Fire* stands as a masterpiece of postmodern fiction, while Matei Calinescu suggests that the novel transcends

[4] Frank Kermode, "Zemblances," *New Statesman* 9 (1962), 671-72.
[5] Rabinowitz Peter, "Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences," *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1977), 121-41.
[6] Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 149.
[7] Boyd, *Nabokov's Pale Fire*, 4.
[8] Ibid., 456.
[9] McCarthy, "A Bolt from the Blue," 21-27.

its American context to resonate on a global scale.[10] Martin Amis contends that Nabokov adeptly weaves a captivating narrative replete with "believable characters, a strong storyline, and vivid, humorous prose."[11] While much scholarship interprets *Pale Fire* as a satirical take on literary commentary and an embodiment of postmodern ambiguity, less attention has been given to Nabokov's artistry in utilizing patterns and pattern recognition within the novel. A pattern refers to a regular arrangement of lines, shapes or colours, an intended arrangement of things, an observable model of traits and characteristics, or a discernible model of features, acts and situations.[12] Humans have evolved to possess a capacity to detect patterns and derive meaning from seemingly chaotic information. Kinbote employs narrative patterns and pattern recognition to forge connections between two disparate things: Shade's poem and his Zembla. And, Kinbote utilizes patterned information to influence and guide the reader's interpretation of the labyrinthine narrative of *Pale Fire*.

5.1.2 Narrative Patterns and Pattern Recognition

I choose to study patterns and pattern recognition in *Pale Fire* for two primary reasons. The pattern concept is central to understanding Nabokov's scientific pursuits and artistic endeavours. In Chapter Two, I discussed Nabokov's status as a renowned expert in lepidopterology. He devoted considerable attention to the intricate patterns found on butterfly wings and the taxonomic relationships within butterfly families. It stands to reason that Nabokov's fascination with patterns extends beyond the natural world to encompass the complex interplay of patterns in human cognition and artistic expression. For Nabokov, art mimics the patterns in nature. Throughout his novels, including *Pale Fire*, Nabokov constructs interlinked worlds within worlds, echoing the sentiment expressed by Shade in the poem: "A system of cells interlinked within/ Cells interlinked within cells interlinked/ Within one stem" (59). Nabokov's emphasis on meticulous detail over overarching concepts aligns with his belief that "There is nothing wrong about the moonshine of generalization when it comes after the sunny trifles of the book have been lovingly collected."[13] Therefore, studying *Pale Fire* through the lens of narrative patterns aligns with Nabokov's creative intentions and offers a

[10] Foster, *Nabokov's Art of Memory and European Modernism*, 231.
[11] Martin Amis, "The Sublime and the Ridiculous: Nabokov's Black Farces," in *Vladimir Nabokov: A Tribute*, ed. Peter Quennell (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 73-87.
[12] "Pattern," Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesauru, Cambridge University Press.
[13] Nabokov, *Lecture on Literature*, 1.

fresh perspective for exploring the novel's structural complexities, thematic concerns, and narrative artistry. By examining the patterns woven throughout the text, we gain insight into the underlying connections that define Nabokov's masterful storytelling.

Besides, pattern recognition offers a novel approach to unravelling the motivations behind Kinbote's commentary, his narrative construction of Zembla, and Nabokov's manipulation of patterns in *Pale Fire*. Brian Boyd suggests that patterns play a crucial role in shaping identity and facilitating predictive abilities. He proposes that humans develop pattern recognition skills from infancy, instinctively discerning recurring signals and responsive behaviours in their environment.[14] This inherent tendency toward pattern recognition reinforces neural pathways involved in processing patterns across auditory, visual, and behavioural domains.[15] Boyd's insights extend to the realm of art, where exposure to diverse patterns within the novel enriches neural circuitry and enhances the mind's capacity for social cognition and scenario construction.[16] Patterns serve as a dual benefit for both writers and readers. Writers adeptly craft multiple patterns at various levels, shaping information in intentional or innovative ways. Attention to pattern creation is crucial; overly chaotic formations may confound readers, while overly obvious patterns risk diminishing reader engagement. For readers, proficiency in identifying multiple patterns enhances their ability to accurately discern the protagonist's motivations and actions. As Stephen Jay Gould aptly observes, the human mind derives pleasure from discerning patterns, a fundamental aspect of grappling with a complex world.[17] *Pale Fire* presents an ideal opportunity to investigate how the protagonist and the author weave interconnected or intersecting patterns, shedding light on the role and function of pattern recognition within the novel's narrative landscape.

Pale Fire offers a congruence between the scientific discovery of pattern recognition and artistic creation. This chapter evaluates how Kinbote utilizes pattern recognition to interweave Shade's poem and his depiction of Zembla into a complex and intersecting web. Three fundamental questions guide this investigation: Firstly, what are the most prominent patterns Kinbote constructs in his portrayal of Zembla? Secondly, how does Kinbote leverage pattern recognition to guide readers through the array of information, drawing rich connections and

[14] Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 2.
[15] Ibid., 2.
[16] Ibid., 2.
[17] Stephen Jay Gould, *The Flamingo's Smile: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton, 1985), 199.

associating Shade's poem with Zembla? Thirdly, what are the mechanisms and implications of pattern recognition in Kinbote's correlation of Shade's poetry with his portrayal of Zembla?

The central focus of this chapter revolves around Kinbote's utilization of patterns of mirror asymmetry, synchrony, and tree structure to correlate Shade's poem and his depiction of Zembla. Three interrelated arguments are proposed: Kinbote deliberately employs these patterns to bridge Shade's poem with his portrayal of Zembla. Through exploring mirror asymmetry, synchrony, and tree structure, Kinbote constructs a narrative framework that links elements of Shade's poetry with the imagery and themes of Zembla. Secondly, it is argued that Kinbote's seemingly absurd commentary on Shade's poems is not merely a manifestation of his mental disorder or literary incompetence. Instead, it is posited as a conscious ploy by Kinbote to fashion Zembla out of his parasitic commentary. Kinbote's commentary serves as a vehicle through which he reshapes Shade's work to suit his narrative agenda, effectively constructing Zembla based on the fabric of Shade's poetry. Thirdly, it is suggested that while attentive readers may discern Kinbote's misinterpretations of Shade's poem, they may unconsciously accept his construction of Zembla. This phenomenon underscores the power of narrative patterns and the malleability of perception in shaping readers' acceptance and understanding of the text. It also influences the production of narrative sense in readers as we seek patterns to make sense of the text. Nabokov, through Kinbote's manipulations of patterns, warns us of the pitfalls inherent in this process. *Pale Fire* demonstrates the importance of narrative patterns in deciphering Nabokov's artistry and exploring the intricacies of human cognition. By examining the function of pattern recognition within the novel, insights are gleaned into the art and the complexities of reality construction, encompassing memory, imagination, and cognition.

5.2 Symmetry Structure and Mirror Mechanism in *Pale Fire*

In *Pale Fire*, the symmetry evident in Shade's poem contrasts sharply with Kinbote's portrayal of Zembla, which he presents as an asymmetrical reflection of Shade's poetry. The interplay of symmetry and asymmetry aids Kinbote in constructing Zembla within his parasitic commentary on Shade's poem. While the mirror mechanism offers a pathway to grasp the actions and emotions of others, it does not ensure proper and accurate comprehension. Kinbote's self-obsession and fixation on Zembla hinder his ability to truly understand Shade's actions, emotions, and artistic expression.

5.2.1 Mirror Neurons and Reflective Symmetry

I will briefly outline the mirror mechanism and the concept of symmetry structure. The mirror mechanism constitutes a fundamental brain process that transforms sensory perceptions of others' behaviour into one's own motor or visceromotor representations regarding that behaviour.[18] This mechanism is closely associated with discovering mirror neurons, a specialized class with mirror properties. Mirror neurons activate when an individual performs a particular motor action and when they observe another person executing a similar action with a shared goal.[19] Initially identified in the ventral premotor cortex (PMv) of macaque monkeys (area F5), mirror neurons have since been detected in various cortical areas across numerous species, utilizing techniques such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and neural tracer methods.[20] Pioneering neuroscientist Giacomo Rizzolatti elucidated the functional organization of the cortical motor system, particularly emphasizing the goal-directed nature of the mirror mechanism in both monkeys and humans.[21] This neuroscientific breakthrough suggests that the mirror mechanism may serve multiple vital cognitive functions, including the comprehension of actions and emotions. Rizzolatti's concept of mirror-based understanding posits an internalized comprehension wherein the same motor processes and representations that govern one's actions also contribute to the perception of others' actions.[22] Consequently, a fundamental connection exists between one's actions and emotions and observing others displaying similar behaviours. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that while the physiological and psychological responses may often intertwine, they are not always distinct. Building upon Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia's assertion, it becomes apparent that while the mirror mechanism provides a potential pathway to understanding others, it is not guaranteed to be comprehensive.[23] This notion will be exemplified through the character of Kinbote, illustrating how the mirror mechanism may offer insight into others' actions yet falls short of ensuring accurate understanding.

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[18] G. Rizzolatti and C. Sinigaglia, "The Mirror Mechanism: a Basic Principle of Brain Function," *Nat Rev Neurosci* 17 (2016): 757-765.
[19] G. di Pellegrino, et al., "Understanding motor events: a neurophysiological study," *Experimental Brain Research* 91.1 (1992): 176-180.
[20] K. Nelissen, et al., "Action Observation Circuits in the Macaque Monkey Cortex," *Journal of Neuroscience* 31.10 (2011): 3743-3756.
[21] G. Rizzolatti, G., et al., "Cortical Mechanisms Underlying the Organization of Goal-directed Actions and Mirror Neuron-based Action Understanding," *Physiological Reviews* 94.2 (2014): 655-706.
[22] Corrado Sinigaglia and Stephen Butterfill, "A Puzzle About the Relations Between Thought, Experience, and the Motoric, " Synthese, 192. 6 (2015): 1923-1936.
[23] Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, "The Mirror Mechanism: a Basic Principle of Brain Function," 765.

The mirror mechanism is intertwined with symmetry due to the reflective nature of mirrors. Symmetry, encompassing physical properties, abstract systems, aesthetic frameworks, and fundamental patterns, plays a pervasive role across various domains. Examples abound in nature, where animals, plants, and flowers often exhibit bilateral or mirror symmetry. Within human cognition, symmetry facilitates the exploration of the self and enhances awareness of the external environment. Conversely, asymmetry is equally fundamental and prevalent. Many biological organisms, including cells, lungs, and the heart, display asymmetrical characteristics, which may confer advantages such as improved spatial arrangements or enhanced fitness. In *The Ambidextrous Universe*, Martin Gardner analyses the interplay of symmetry and asymmetry across nature, the universe, human culture, and scientific realms.[24] Gardner eloquently explores the phenomenon of mirror reflection in natural settings and elucidates the roles of symmetry and asymmetry at molecular and cosmic scales.[25] Notably, Gardner's engagement with the literary works of Nabokov adds a poetic dimension to his discourse. This literary connection is exemplified by Gardner's incorporation of lines from Nabokov's *Pale Fire* into his text, crediting the fictional character Shade and even putting Shade's name in the index. It was reciprocated by Nabokov's inclusion of quotes from Gardner's book in his novel *Ada*. Nabokov had the protagonist Van quote two lines from Gardner's book: 'Space is a swarming in the eyes, and Time a singing in the ears," says John Shade, a modern poet, as quoted by an invented philosopher ("Martin Gardiner" [sic].) in The Ambidextrous Universe, page 165 [sic].'[26] Furthermore, Nabokov's novel *Look at the Harlequins!* illustrates a character influenced by *The Ambidextrous Universe* who struggles with distinguishing left from right.[27] This episode underscores the intriguing intersection between scientific inquiry and artistic expression, blending elements of seriousness and humour and crossing categories of fictiveness and actuality. The subsequent section examines Kinbote's use of symmetry structure to establish connections between Shade's poetry and the fictional realm of Zembla.

In *Pale Fire*, the concept of mirroring congruence extends beyond simple alignment, symbolizing the intricate ways in which Nabokov's characters, themes, and structures mirror

[24] Martin Gardner, *The New Ambidextrous Universe: Symmetry and Asymmetry from Mirror Reflections to Superstrings* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005).
[25] The editions of *The New Ambidextrous Universe* have different subtitles. Martin Gardner, *The New Ambidextrous Universe: Left, Right, and the Fall of Parity* (New York: Basic Books, 1964); *Mirror Asymmetry and Time-Reversed Worlds* (New York: W. H. Freeman, 1979); *Symmetry and Asymmetry from Mirror Reflections to Superstrings* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005).
[26] Nabokov, *Ada*, 577.
[27] D. Barton Johnson, "The Ambidextrous Universe of Nabokov's *Look at the Harlequins!",* in Phyllis Roth, ed., *Critical Essays on Vladimir Nabokov* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984), 202-215.

each other. The novel's dual narrative of Shade's poem and Charles Kinbote's commentary exemplifies this mirroring: Kinbote's obsessive interpretation of Shade's text reflects his internal chaos, illustrating a distorted form of congruence where his identity and delusions map onto Shade's work in a mismatched yet reflective pattern. This mirroring of narratives highlights Nabokov's play with symmetry and discord, as Kinbote's misinterpretations act as warped reflections of Shade's poem. The act of recognizing patterns thus becomes a doubled process, where congruence implies both alignment and distortion, underscoring Nabokov's exploration of subjective reality and the limits of interpretation in art. Through this mirroring, *Pale Fire* demonstrates how congruence in artistic form can illuminate characters' psychological depths, making the alignment between scientific and creative acts central to understanding the novel's intricate interplay of perception, delusion, and meaning.

5.2.2 Symmetry of Cards, Lines and Dates in Shade's Poem

Kinbote's observation regarding the symmetry structure of Shade's work proves astute. In the opening remarks of the forward, Kinbote provides a seemingly accurate portrayal of the poetry, describing "Pale Fire" as a poem written in heroic couplets of nine hundred and ninety-nine lines and divided into four cantos. Additionally, he provides biographical details of the poet, John Shade (born 5 July 1898, died 21 July 1959), during the final twenty days of his life at his residence in New Wye, Appalachia, USA (13). The table below illustrates Kinbote's observations regarding the symmetry exhibited in Shade's poem, including the alignment of index cards, line lengths, and their creation dates.

Canto	Index Cards (80)	Lines (1000 Lines)	Dates (20 Days)
Canto One	13 Cards	166 Lines	July 2-4 (3days)
Canto Two	27 Cards	334 Lines	July 5-11(7days)
Canto Three	27 Cards	334 Lines	July 12-18(7days)
Canto Four	13 Cards	166 Lines	July 19-21(3days)

Table 1 Symmetry Structure of Shade's Poem

According to Kinbote, Shade crafted his poem using eighty index cards. The proportion within each canto displays symmetry: Canto One and Canto Four mirror each other in length, spanning thirteen cards each, while Canto Two and Canto Three exhibit similar lengths with 334 lines each, encompassing 27 cards. Kinbote asserts that he possesses a detailed calendar outlining the process of Shade's work: Canto One commenced on July 2 and concluded on July 4; Canto Two was initiated on Shade's birthday, July 5, and finalized on July 11; Canto Three

began on July 12 and concluded on July 18; finally, Canto Four commenced on July 19 and ended on July 21. Consequently, Canto One and Four, Canto Two and Three, exhibit identical line lengths and creation durations: three days and seven days, respectively. This meticulous alignment underscores the symmetrical structure inherent in Shade's poetic composition.

Kinbote offers a perceptive analysis of the structure of Shade's poem, suggesting that it is "beautifully accurate" under "its confused surface", likening it to a pool where one must dive in to appreciate its depths (14). He praises its symmetrical structure. He refutes the perspectives of a Shade expert who views the poem as disjointed drafts as well as the view of Prof. Hurley, who suggests the texts represent only an unfinished fraction of the composition. To support his argument, Kinbote cites Sybil's remarks that Shade had no intention of extending the poem beyond four parts and Shade's proclamation of nearing the end of his labour on the evening of July 21 "(See my note to line 991)" (15). Kinbote proposes that the poem comprises 1000 lines, with the last line mirroring the first, thus forming a symmetrical structure. However, the final line, being an extrapolation of Kinbote's, significantly alters the structure of the entire poem. Part one consists of 116 lines, while part two comprises 334 lines. Similarly, part three also contains 334 lines, and part four concludes with 116 lines. Kinbote describes this structure as having two identical central parts flanked by shorter wings, with each half consisting of five hundred verses (15). Notably, on the chaotic night of the murder, Kinbote carries Shade's manuscript in his shirt pockets, distributing the index cards strategically: twenty in both of the left and right pockets of his coat, forty in his right breast pocket, the twelve "precious ones with variants" were put in his "innermost left-breast pocket", which was close to his heart (300). This act, which he describes as "plated with poetry" and "armored with rhymes," underscores his observation of the symmetry and his cherish for the variants lines since it relates to his Zembla. By identifying the symmetry within Shade's poem, Kinbote seeks to refute criticism, assert his qualifications as an editor of Shade's poetry, and showcase his intellectual prowess in pattern recognition. However, while Kinbote persuades readers of the poem's structural symmetry, his subsequent misinterpretations and misjudgments of its content undermine his credibility as a commentator. Despite his astute observation of the poem's form, Kinbote's competence remains questionable due to his eccentricities and biases.

In *Pale Fire*, the mirror mechanism and a/symmetry play crucial roles in Kinbote's interpretation and commentary of John Shade's poetry. While the mirror mechanism provides Kinbote with a pathway to engage with Shade and his literary works, Kinbote's narcissistic tendencies lead him to prioritize self-aggrandizement, romanticized self-portrayals, and the construction of his legend of Zembla. Consequently, he becomes too absorbed in his fictitious

world of Zembla to comprehend Shade's artistic intentions fully. In *Pale Fire*, the fictional land of Zembla has been analyzed by critics for its etymological play on the word "resemblance." The name Zembla is suggested to be a corruption of "Semblerland," meaning the land of resemblers or reflections. This concept aligns with the novel's themes of mirrored realities and the blurring of truth and illusion. Zembla, therefore, is not just a fictional place but a symbol of the novel's exploration of literary creation and perception, reflecting both the real world and the delusional interpretations of its characters.[28] Kinbote's recognition of the symmetrical structure within Shade's poem, juxtaposed with his absurd misinterpretation of its thematic content, underscores the significance of motive in genuine understanding. Kinbote's fixation on Zembla impedes his ability to analyse Shade's work objectively. His commentary becomes entangled with his obsession, preventing him from appropriately assessing the poem. Moreover, Kinbote's thematic interpretations are coloured by his underlying agenda of constructing and promoting Zembla. As a result, his commentary consistently seeks to establish connections between Shade's poetry and his Zembla rather than genuinely grappling with the nuances of Shade's thematic explorations. Kinbote's overwhelming preoccupation with Zembla precludes him from engaging in an impartial analysis of Shade's poem. Instead of approaching the text objectively, Kinbote's interpretations are clouded by his motivations and biases, ultimately hindering his ability to fully appreciate the depth and complexity of Shade's literary creations.

5.2.3 Mirror Images and Inverted Double

Kinbote utilizes the mirror mechanism and asymmetry to craft an inverted version of the doppelgänger motif. The theme of the mirrored double is a recurring motif in Nabokov's literary works, as seen in characters like Humbert and Quilty in *Lolita*, Hermann and Felix in *Despair*, and Ada and Van in *Ada*. Nabokov's narrative style often incorporates symmetry and asymmetry as deliberate design elements, lending depth and complexity to his storytelling. *Pale Fire* features numerous instances of mirror imagery, beginning with John Shade's opening lines where the bird is slain due to "the false azure in the windowpane" (I. 2). In Zembla, the motif of mirrors and windows recurs throughout various figures and places, such as the Extremist revolution in the Glass Factory (120), Gradus' fascination with glass (77), the stained-glass windows at King Charles's palace (121), the scarlet reflection of the fleeing King

[28] Alexey Sklyarenko, "Zembla as land of resembles in *Pale Fire*," *The Nabokovian*, The International Vladimir Nabokov Society, June 12, 2024, https://thenabokovian.org/content/zembla-land-resemblers-pale-fire.

on the pool (143), the multiplied image of Fleur in the dressing-room mirror (111), and Hazel's reflection adorned with Sybil's furs (II. 360-61). These instances underscore the significance of mirror imagery in deciphering Nabokov's narratives. By weaving mirror images into the fabric of his storytelling, Nabokov invites readers to contemplate the themes of reflection, illusion, and duality. The presence of mirrors serves as a literary device through which characters confront their own identities, grapple with distorted perceptions of reality, and navigate the processes of self-discovery. Thus, understanding the role of mirror imagery is crucial for unravelling the complexities of Nabokov's novels and uncovering the deeper layers of meaning embedded within his narratives.

Kinbote renders Shade an inverted version of his doppelgänger despite their apparent dissimilarities. This concept resonates with Freud's exploration of the uncanny. The term "uncanny", translated into German "unheimlich" or "Heimlich," carries nuanced meanings, ranging from the familiar and homelike to the strange and dreadful, depending on the context and the speaker's intentions.[29] In his essay on the topic Freud posits a psychological explanation for the uncanny, suggesting that it arises from experiences or knowledge that were once familiar but subsequently repressed into the unconscious mind.[30] According to Freud, the prefix "un" in uncanny signifies repression, with the uncanny serving as a manifestation of the return of the repressed.[31] This motif of the double manifests in various forms, including split characters, automata, fantasies, visions, and dreams—all stemming from repressed experiences or a sense of existential terror. [32] Freud further argues that the uncanny plays a pivotal role in forming the conscience, wherein the ego's ability to separate and judge itself becomes compromised. In cases of delusion, the conscience becomes detached from the ego, and self-observation morphs "the new faculty of self-criticism to belong to the old surmounted narcissism of the earliest period of all."[33] Despite their profound disparities, Kinbote's claim of shared ideas with Shade reflects his endeavour to create an inverted duality between himself and Shade. The table demonstrates Kinbote's use of asymmetrical structure to delineate parallels and contrasts between Shade and himself, effectively blurring the lines between reality and illusion and accentuating the eerie nature of their relationship.

[29] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in Philip Rieff, ed., *Studies in Parapsychology* (New York: Collier, 1971), 25.
[30] Ibid., 20.
[31] Ibid., 51.
[32] Ibid., 4142.
[33] Ibid., 4041.

Notes	Shade (Poet)	Kinbote (Commentator)
Line 172: books and people	claimed similar ideas on book review, reading strategies, Marxism and Freudianism	
Line 929: Freud	claimed agreement on anti-Freudian theory	
Line 819: Playing a game of worlds	claimed a similar hobby for word games	
Line 894: a King	claimed a similar notion of resemblance	

Table 2 Kinbote's Construction of Inverted Double

In his note titled "Books and People," addressed to Line 172, Kinbote contends that he and Shade held remarkably similar perspectives on various intellectual and social matters. Firstly, they both exhibit a shared detachment towards the sensationalized and hyperbolic nature of book reviews, preferring a measured approach amidst the fervour of praise or critique (155). Secondly, they share a mutual disdain for reading strategies prioritising abstract ideas and socio-political contexts over the visceral experience of engaging with literature, advocating instead for a more instinctual and intuitive approach to reading, reminiscent of Nabokov's sentiments (156). Lastly, they harbour a common scepticism towards ideologies such as Marxism and Freudianism. Kinbote echoes Shade's sentiment that while Marxism leads to totalitarianism and tyranny, Freudianism at least allows for individual agency and participation in political processes (156). Kinbote's identification of Shade as his double in this note stems from their shared attitudes towards book reviews, reading strategies, and ideological critiques. Despite their stark differences, Kinbote takes the seeming resonance between himself and Shade in their intellectual outlook and social critiques to align himself with Shade and blur the boundaries between reality and fiction within the narrative.

In his note to Line 470: "Negro," Kinbote aligns with Shade's perspective on racial prejudice. Shade contends that "Vulgarity and Brutality," the two abhorrent elements he detested most, converge in racial prejudice. He emphasizes that discrimination between anti-Jewish and anti-African American sentiments epitomizes "diabolical persecution and the barbarous traditions of slavery" (216), characterizing both biases as "the tears of all ill-treated human beings" (216). Shade also draws attention to a "family likeness (tensing of simian nostrils, sickening dulling of eyes)" shared by the "jasmine-belt lyncher and the mystical anti-Semite" (216). In this note, Kinbote claims that he and Shade share a similar critique of the vulgarity and brutality inherent in racial discrimination. However, Shade reveals his contempt for the alleged similarities, instead emphasizing the value of uniqueness and individuality. In the note to Line 929: "Freud," Kinbote demonstrates his shared disdain for Freudian theory with Shade. Kinbote references absurd examples from college textbooks on psychoanalysis, including an assertion that an analytic teacher can deduce a young man's lustful fantasies from

his nose-picking habits and a claim that the red velvet cap in the German version of 'Little Red Riding Hood' symbolizes menstruation (271). By citing these examples, Kinbote reinforces Shade's critique of Freudian theory's vulgar and nonsensical aspects. In the note to Line 819: "Playing a game of worlds," Kinbote introduces Shade's fondness for word games, particularly word golf. Kinbote describes Shade's delight in word games like "hate-love in three, lass-male in four, and live-dead in five" (262). Kinbote uses the inverted structure of the word golf to subtly replace or undermine Shade's poetic world with his interpretation centred on Zembla. These notes illustrate Kinbote's use of asymmetrical structure to construct an inverted double between himself and Shade. Kinbote strategically aligns himself with Shade through selectively shared critiques and preferences despite their differences.

In the note to Line 894: "a King," Kinbote asserts his agreement with Shade's commentary on resemblance; however, he misinterprets and opposes Shade's notion of defending individuality. Instead, Kinbote focuses on the Zemblan King's escape journey and the supposed resemblance between himself and the King. Shade describes a scene where he sits after shaving, adorned with warm shoes, suggesting to "Sit like a king there, and like Marat bleed" (VI 892-4). Kinbote comments that he "resembled that unfortunate monarch" (264). A visiting German lecturer from Oxford remarks on the "absolutely unheard-of" resemblance and the "astounding similarity of features" between Kinbote and the King (264). Kinbote attributes this to all bearded Zemblans resembling one another and notes the significance of the name Zembla as the land of reflections and resemblances (264). However, Shade counters that there is no actual resemblance between Kinbote and the exiled King, asserting that "resemblances are the shadows of differences. Different people see different similarities and similar differences" (264). When a professor of physics suggests that history has denounced the King, Shade disagrees, suggesting that "In due time, history will have denounced everybody. The King may be dead, or he may be as much alive as you and Kinbote" (264). Shade then casually reveals that the King left the country dressed as an athlete in scarlet wool (264). Kinbote interprets Shade's talk and accompanying gesture as proof that Shade has deciphered his identity as the exiled Zemblan King. This revelation may either coincide accidentally with the King's escaping process or inspire Kinbote to fabricate the narrative of the King's escape.

The conversation centres on resemblance, shedding light on the dynamics between Shade and Kinbote while subtly hinting at the circumstances surrounding Shade's murder by Gradus. Shade reflects on his perceived resemblance to various individuals, including Judge Goldsworth, the homeowner of Kinbote's residence. When Kinbote was asked about the origin of his name, he dismissed it with a quip about refugees from Nova Zembla, adding a layer of

mystery to his identity. Shade's inquiry about the meaning of "kinbote" in Zembla language unveils a poignant exchange, where Kinbote replies that "Yes, a king's destroyer," which associates it with regicide, hinting at his exiled monarch status (264). This conversation serves multiple purposes: it highlights Kinbote's desire to emphasize their supposed resemblance while exposing the stark contrast between their personas. It also underscores Shade's belief in individual uniqueness, contrasting with Kinbote's attempts to align Shade's poetry with his Zemblan narrative. The conversation subtly suggests that Shade's murder was not an accidental misfire aimed at Kinbote but rather a targeted attack on Judge Goldsworth. Kinbote attempts to fashion Shade as his opposite reflection, entwining Shade's poetry with his Zembla narrative, thereby further obscuring the boundaries between reality and fiction.

5.2.4 Shade's Crystal Land and Kinbote's Zembla

I will investigate Kinbote's utilization of mirror symmetry to establish a correlation between Shade's poem and his imagined kingdom of Zembla. Mirror symmetry, defined as the reflection of an object in a mirror, becomes a literary device Kinbote employs to extract the mirrored imagery in Shade's poem and overlay it onto his conceptualization of Zembla. Consequently, Zembla assumes a mirroring relationship with Shade's poem. However, it is noteworthy that Kinbote's portrayal of Zembla significantly surpasses Shade's poem in length and proportion. Kinbote constructs Zembla as an asymmetrical, mirror-reflected world in relation to Shade's poem. Nevertheless, this asymmetrical representation of Zembla fails to complement Shade's poetry; it undermines his poem's original intention and authentic merits. Table 3 represents Kinbote's use of mirror asymmetry to mirror corresponding parts of Shade's poem and to establish a correlation between Shade's literary work and his Zembla.

Categories	Items	Shade (Poet)	Kinbote (Commentator)
Geography	Location	"Crystal Land"	Zembla
Nature	Bird	"waxwing slain"	Zemblan Waxwing and King Charles Xavier
	Butterfly	"dark Vanessa", "red Admirable"	Zemblan Vanessa
Family	Father	Samuel Shade (bird study)	King Alfin (aeroplane obsession)
	Mother	Caroline Lukin	Queen Blenda
	Partner	Sybil	Queen Disa
	Relatives	Aunt	Uncle

Table 3 Kibote's Mirror A/Symmetry in Corelating Shade's Poem with Zembla

The tables illustrate Kinbote's endeavour to fashion Zembla into an asymmetrical, mirror-reflected rendition of Shade's poem across three key dimensions. Firstly, he employs the

asymmetry structure to supplant Shade's portrayal of the "crystal land" with his depiction of Zembla. Secondly, he strives to establish Zemblan counterparts for elements such as insects and butterflies mentioned in Shade's poem. Lastly, Kinbote redirects Shade's references to his family towards contemplations on the familial dynamics of the Zemblan monarch, King Charles. Kinbote made great efforts to align Zembla with the reflective nuances of Shade's poetry; his portrayal of Zembla disproportionately surpasses Shade's corresponding elements in both length and proportion.

Focusing on the reference to "crystal land" in line 12 of Shade's poem, I will elucidate Kinbote's utilization of symmetry to replace Shade's concept with his Zembla. In Shade's "Crystal Land" verse, the lines "Upon that snow, out in that crystal land" connote the snow-covered landscape reflected in a window. However, in Kinbote's commentary, he interprets "crystal land" as an allusion to "Zembla, my dear country" (74). Kinbote asserts that he discovered this association two lines below the "crystal land," where Shade hints at the exile of a certain king: "Ah, I must not forget to say something /That my friend told me of a certain king" (74). Kinbote identifies himself as the exiled monarch and describes his "crystal land" as the idyllic realm of Zembla during the reign of King Charles Xavier (1936-1958). Kinbote said this era was characterized by peace, harmony, and prosperity, with a flourishing arts scene and advancements in science and technology (75). Kinbote subtly reveals his identity by recounting the king's penchant for literature and his resemblance to the disguised king who lectured on literature in disguised "heavy make-up, with wig and false whiskers" (76). Kinbote's mention of another note reinforces this inference "(see also note to line 894)" (76), further suggesting his dual role as commentator and disguised king.

In the note referencing "that crystal land", Kinbote directs readers to two cross-references: "(see notes to lines 39-40 and 962)" (76). Following these cross-references leads to notes on lines 39-40, which focus on two discarded lines from Shade's poem: "and home would haste my thieves/ The sun with stolen ice, the moon with leaves" (79). Kinbote draws parallels between these lines from Shakespeare's "*Timon of Athens* (Act IV, Scene 3) where the misanthrope talks to the three marauders" (79). This comparison highlights a subtle asymmetry between Shakespeare's version and Kinbote's Zemblan interpretation of *Timon of Athens*.

Kinbote admits he only possesses the Zemblan version of *Timon of Athens*, which lacks an equivalent phrase. Conmal's translations, though flawed, remain unquestioned due to his royal status, perpetuating inaccuracies in Zemblan interpretations of English literature. Additionally, in the note to line 550 ("debris"), Kinbote urges readers to disregard differences between the English original and Zemblan translation of *Timon of Athens*, attributing

discrepancies to 'wistful thinking.' These instances underscore the asymmetry between the original and translated versions, highlighting a significant gap between Shade's poem and Kinbote's commentary. Kinbote strategically employs the asymmetry structure to distort the significance of Shade's poetry and construct Zembla within his commentary.

Kinbote's retranslation of the passage from a Zemblan version into English—"The sun is a thief: she lures the sea/ and robs it. The moon is a thief:/ he steals his silvery light from the sun. / The sea is a thief: it dissolves the moon" (79)—reveals discrepancies when compared to Shakespeare's original text. Kinbote's translation lacks fidelity and accuracy, as acknowledged by his instruction to examine Conmal's translations of Shakespeare's works: "See note to line 962" (79). This leads us to Line 962: "Help me, Will. Pale Fire" (285), which reveals that Shade derived the phrase "pale fire," the title of his poem, from Shakespeare. Kinbote admits he only possesses the Zemblan version of *Timon of Athens*, which lacks an equivalent phrase. Conmal's translations, though flawed, remain unquestioned due to his royal status, perpetuating inaccuracies in Zemblan interpretations of English literature. This instance underscores the asymmetry between the original and translated versions, highlighting a significant gap between Shade's poem and Kinbote's commentary.

5.2.5 Zembla as Asymmetrical Mirror of Shade's Poetry

After examining how Kinbote replaces Shade's "crystal land" with his imagined Zembla, I analyze how Kinbote utilizes symmetry and asymmetry to provide Zembla with corresponding elements such as insects, birds, and butterflies, aligning them with Shade's original version. I will focus on the appearance of the waxwing bird, which recurs in lines 1-4, 131, and 999 of Shade's poem. In Shade's opening lines: "I was the shadow of the waxwing slain/ By the false azure in the windowpane; / I was the smudge of ashen fluff — and I/ Lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky" (73), the waxwing symbolizes the transition between life and afterlife, representing Shade's contemplation of mortality and the afterlife. Kinbote's commentary on the opening lines interprets the waxwing as a bird colliding with a glass pane, juxtaposing the real world with its mirrored reflection. Kinbote then diverges into a highly egocentric commentary, reminiscing about observing waxwings feeding near Shade's house and associating them with Zembla (73). He links the Zemblan waxwing to the heraldic symbols of King Charles, suggesting a connection between the exiled monarch and Shade's poem. Kinbote presumes that his discussions about the exiled King with Shade imply that the King should be the central theme of Shade's poem. This assumption reflects Kinbote's tendency to

impose his interpretations onto Shade's work, suggesting that his obsessions and interests heavily influence his understanding of the poem's themes and motifs. The first note concludes with Shade's commencement of writing the poem, coinciding with Gradus's departure from Zembla (74). Kinbote's first commentary reveals his obsession with Zembla and his tendency to impose his Zembla onto Shade's work, disregarding Shade's true intentions. Kinbote's note to Shade's opening lines lacks a comprehensive analysis of the poem and fails to provide reliable context for Shade's themes and motifs. Instead, it highlights Kinbote's self-centeredness and his attempts to use Shade's poetry to serve his interests, particularly his fixation on Zembla. This demonstrates Kinbote's manipulation of the poem to suit his agenda rather than respecting Shade's artistic vision.

In addition to the reference to "waxwing slain", in the note to line 270—"My dark Vanessa"—Kinbote transitions from Shade's Vanessa butterfly to Jonathan Swift's poem, directing readers to "lines 993-995 (to which see note)." Shade identifies Vanessa as The Red Admirable, while Kinbote interrupts, mentioning his knowledge of the butterfly as "Zemblans call it harvalda (the heraldic one)" and recalls its presence in the "Palace Gardens" (173). Kinbote suggests that Shade pointed to Vanessa as "he walked to his doom (see, see now, my note to lines 993-995)" (173). Following this directive, readers are led to the note to lines 993-995, which describes an encounter before Shade's death. As Shade and Kinbote walked to Shade's house to celebrate the completion of his work, a "Red Admirable (see note to line 270) came dizzily whirling around us like a coloured flame" (290). This demonstrates Kinbote's method of constructing Zembla by providing Zemblan counterparts for the various elements in Shade's poem, including land, insects, and butterflies.

Kinbote utilizes the asymmetry structure to shift the focus from Shade's parents to those of King Charles Xavier of Zembla. "Pale Fire" can be considered a quasi-autobiographical poem, as Shade incorporates elements of his personal life and experiences within the poetry. In the note to Line 71, Kinbote briefly provides information about Shade's parents: his father, Samuel Shade (1852-1902), who was a medical professional and a bird enthusiast, and his mother, Caroline Lukin, who collaborated in her husband's bird studies and illustrations (101). Moving on to Lines 86-90, Kinbote introduces Shade's upbringing by his aunt Maud Shade (1869-1950) following the death of his parents (113). However, Kinbote swiftly transitions to a detailed account of the parents of King Charles Xavier of Zembla. King Alfin the Vague (1873-1918), the King's father, is described as absent-minded and a poor linguist with a passion for flying apparatuses akin to Samuel Shade's bird obsession (103). King Alfin's demise in an aeroplane accident in 1918 profoundly affected Charles Xavier, stirring "hideous dreams" upon

discovering photographs of the accident. (104) Queen Blenda, Charles Xavier's mother, is depicted as a robust horsewoman who succumbed to a mysterious familial blood ailment in 1936, prompting remorse and fear in the young prince (109). Corresponding to Shade's Aunt Maud, Kinbote introduces the King's uncle, a detached translator of Shakespeare who remains disengaged from Zemblan politics. Kinbote mirrors and superimposes Shade's poem's reflected themes and imagery onto Zembla, establishing a mirror symmetry between Zembla and Shade's poetry while diluting the significance of Shade's cherished arts and family. Throughout the commentary, Kinbote gradually unveils the geographical and natural properties of Zembla alongside the formative experiences and familial dynamics of the exiled King. Through fragmented narratives, Zembla and its exiled monarch are gradually revealed to the reader, underscoring Kinbote's manipulation of Shade's poetry to serve his narrative agenda.

Pale Fire furnishes textual evidence and literary cases elucidating the operations and functions of mirror asymmetry. Kinbote uses the asymmetry structure to establish an inverted double between himself and Shade, his observation of the symmetry within Shade's poem, and his mirroring of Shade's corresponding geographical locations, natural environments, and human relationships to correlate Shade's poem with Zembla. I propose three arguments: first, Kinbote utilizes the inverted double to bind himself to Shade; second, he employs mirror mechanisms and asymmetry structures to associate Shade's poetry with his Zembla; third, Kinbote's deployment of asymmetry structures inversely elevates the significance of his Zembla theme while undermining Shade's poem. *Pale Fire* exemplifies the function and limitation of the mirror mechanism. While it may provide a framework for understanding others, motivation plays a vital role in genuinely comprehending them. Kinbote, however, lacks the intention to understand Shade and makes no effort to decipher Shade's preoccupations with the otherworld, his love for Sybil, and his grief over Hazel's suicide. Kinbote's obsession with Zembla blinds him to Shade's actions, emotions, and artistic endeavours, rendering him incapable of grasping Shade's true intentions and creative merits.

5.3 Synchrony and Juxtaposition in *Pale Fire*

In 'Pale Fire', Shade utilizes synchrony to depict their anxious wait for Hazel and her eventual suicide. The alignment of TV shows with Hazel's suicide by Shade underscores Shade's anguish at losing his daughter and his contempt for crude commercialism. In the commentary, Kinbote mirrors this technique by synchronizing Shade's poetic creation with Gradus' approach. Synchrony is not merely an objective temporal coincidence; instead, it is a

subjective construction by the observer, a form of juxtaposition aimed at correlating unrelated events to fulfil a specific purpose.

5.3.1 Synchronization and Binding-by-Synchrony

I will introduce the two fundamental narrative strategies of juxtaposition and synchrony and their recent scientific implications. Synchrony, defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, refers to coordinating events or activities to coincide.[34] Synchronization involves orchestrating events to operate a system in unison, with systems functioning in this manner described as synchronous or 'in sync.' Conversely, juxtaposition involves placing two things close together to compare or create a specific effect. [35] It is a rhetorical device that highlights contrasts by presenting concepts or elements side by side. Unlike synchrony, which implies a logical connection between seemingly unrelated items, juxtaposition suggests a logical fallacy on the part of the observer, where the connection is claimed rather than inherent. Jean Piaget differentiates juxtaposition and syncretism across three domains: visual perception, verbal intelligence, and logic. In visual perception, juxtaposition involves the absence of relations between details, while syncretism entails a holistic vision suppressing individual information. In verbal intelligence, juxtaposition lacks relations between sentence terms, while syncretism fosters an all-encompassing understanding of the sentence. In logic, juxtaposition lacks implication and reciprocal justification between successive judgments, whereas syncretism seeks to bind everything together, often through ingenious or facetious means. [36] In *Pale Fire*, examples of synchrony include Shade's linking of Hazel's suicide with their restless waiting at home and Kinbote's alignment of Shade's poetic composition with Gradus' nearby murder. These instances resemble juxtaposition in that there is no inherent connection between the paired events; instead, the association is a subjective construction by the observer and a deliberate strategy to create a particular effect.

Neuroscientists propose that synchronous oscillations among neuron populations provide a potential solution to the binding problem—a fundamental concern in understanding how our brain circuits encode and integrate decisions, actions, and perceptions. This phenomenon allows our minds to merge objects, backgrounds and features into a unified perceptual

[34] "Synchrony," Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, Cambridge University Press.
[35] "Juxtaposition," *Wikipedia*, January 3, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juxtaposition.
[36] Jean Piaget, *Judgement and Reasoning in the Child* (London: Routledge, 2002), 59.

experience.[37] The binding problem in neuroscience encompasses several distinct issues, including general coordination considerations, the subjective unity of perception, and the challenge of variable binding.[38] These facets collectively contribute to the complexity of understanding how disparate elements are integrated into a cohesive whole within the brain. Synchrony, far from being merely an objective temporal measure, is intricately intertwined with human perception. Binding-by-synchrony (BBS) is closely linked to synchrony, involving the temporal correlation between neuron impulses and the stimulus-dependent synchronization of coherent neuron activity.[39] Peter Milner proposes a hypothesis of BBS, suggesting that features of individual objects are bound together through the synchronization of activity across different neurons in the cortex.[40] This theory significantly enhances our understanding of the role of synchrony in processes such as perception, identification, and pattern recognition.

The Binding-by-Synchrony (BBS) theory has garnered significant attention in cognitive research for its proposed role in neural functioning. This theory suggests that when the brain receives a stimulus, neurons in different regions synchronize their activity transiently.[41] This synchronization helps in integrating information from various parts of the brain involved in processing the stimulus. Christoph Von der Malsburg highlighted feature binding as a challenge that goes beyond cellular firing rates.[42] Feature binding refers to the brain's ability to combine different features of an object (such as colour, shape, and motion) into a unified percept. It presents a challenge because neurons representing different features are often distributed across different brain areas, and the brain must coordinate their activity to perceive the object as a whole. However, Vincent Di Lollo contested this idea by demonstrating that module code can jointly encode multiple features, effectively addressing the issue of feature binding.[43] Module code refers to the idea that groups of neurons (modules) encode specific

[37] Antti Revonsuo and James Newman, "Binding and Consciousness," *Consciousness and Cognition* 8.2 (1999): 123-127.
[38] Jerome Feldman, "The Neural Binding Problem," *Cognitive Neurodynamics* 7 (2013): 1-11.
[39] Andreas K. Engel, et al., "Stimulus-dependent Neuronal Oscillations in Cat Visual Cortex: Inter-columnar Interaction as Determined by Cross-correlation Analysis," *European Journal of Neuroscience* 2.7 (1990): 588-606.
[40] Peter M. Milner, "A Model for Visual Shape Recognition," *Psychological Review* 81.6 (1974): 521.
[41] Miguel Romera, et al., "Binding Events Through the Mutual Synchronization of Spintronic Nano-neurons," *Nature Communications* 13.1 (2022): 883.
[42] Christoph Von Der Malsburg, "The Correlation Theory of Brain Function," *Models of Neural Networks: Temporal Aspects of Coding and Information Processing in Biological System*s (New York, NY: Springer New York, 1994), 95-119.
[43] Vincent Di Lollo, "The Feature-binding Problem is an Ill-posed Problem," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 16.6 (2012): 317-321.

features of an object. Di Lollo's work suggests that these modules can encode multiple features simultaneously, which helps in addressing the challenge of feature binding.

Numerous studies have emphasized the link between rhythmic synchronous firing. Neurons often fire in synchrony with each other, especially in the gamma frequency range (around 40-60 hertz).[44] This synchronous firing is believed to play a role in information processing and communication between different brain regions. This synchronization mechanism identifies synchronous neuronal signals for subsequent processing in cortical information areas, facilitating the grouping of spatially segregated neurons that respond to the same stimulus.[45] This process binds these responses for joint processing and encodes relations temporally.[46] Neural oscillations are believed to play a role in timing and somatosensory perception.[47] Neural oscillations are rhythmic fluctuations in the electrical activity of the brain. These oscillations are thought to regulate various cognitive processes, including perception, attention, and memory. In the context of feature binding and BBS theory, neural oscillations help in coordinating the activity of distributed neurons and binding together different features of an object for unified perception. The synchronization mechanism shares similarities with parallel structure, as synchronized activities occur simultaneously or in the same direction. However, unlike parallel movements, synchronized activities maintain a constant distance apart. This suggests that individuals or activities like Shade and Gradus may have opportunities to converge in synchronization. In examining Shade's poem and Kinbote's commentary, I will explore the intersection and influence of synchrony and juxtaposition on the narrative.

5.3.2 Synchrony of TV Shows with Hazel's Suicide

My investigation will focus on synchrony and juxtaposition within Shade's narrative of the events leading up to Hazel's suicide. In Canto Two, Shade recounts the tragic event one March night in 1957. As Shade reflects on Hazel's final hours, he interweaves them with his uneasy anticipation of her return home. This juxtaposition highlights the synchronous nature

[44] Engel, et al.,"Stimulus-dependent Neuronal Oscillations in Cat Visual Cortex," 588.
[45] Christoph Von der Malsburg, "The what and why of binding: the modeler's perspective," *Neuron* 24.1 (1999): 95-104.
[46] Catalin V. Buhusi and Warren H. Meck, "What Makes Us Tick? Functional and Neural Mechanisms of Interval Timing," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 6.10 (2005): 755-765.
[47] Ehud Ahissar and Miriam Zacksenhouse, "Temporal and Spatial Coding in the Rat Vibrissal System," *Progress in Brain Research* 130 (2001): 75-87.

of their experiences—the simultaneous unfolding of Hazel's fateful decision and Shade's apprehensive wait.

Time	Hazel's Suicide	The Shade's Waiting	Relevant Lines
	Blind date with Pete Dean in March 1957	Arranged by Shade's typist Jane	"shot a death ray at well-meaning Jane" (II. 407).
8:15	Hazel decided to take the bus alone.	The Shade waited restlessly and frequently watched watch.	"It's eight fifteen" (II. 403)
	Hazel was on the bus.	The Shade turned on the TV and commented on advertisements.	"A nymph came pirouetting…" (II. 413-416).
	Hazel was on the bus.	Sybil listened to the door, and Shade checked through the window.	"More headlights in the fog…" (II.444-446).
12:00	Hazel stopped at Lochanhead.	The Shades watched the movie Remorse.	The famous face flowed in, fair and inane… " (II. 452-456).
	Hazel walked towards the lake	Sybil played network roulette.	"The dial turned and tiked..." (II. 465-467).
	Hazel committed suicide in the lake.	Sybil switched off the TV.	"As life snapped, we saw…" (II. 471-472); "He came too late" (II. 477).
	A watchman found Hazel's body.	The Shade heard the sad news of Hazel's death from the police.	"And suddenly a festive blaze was flung…" (II. 484-487).

Table 4 Synchrony and Juxtaposition of Hazel's suicide with the Shade's waiting

Hazel's tragic decision unfolded after a blind date with Pete Dean, the cousin of Shade's typist Jane's fiancé. Upon meeting Hazel and finding her physically unattractive, Pete hastily fabricated an excuse about a forgotten appointment with a friend in danger of landing in jail if he failed to show up. Despite Hazel's polite understanding of his abrupt departure, Pete's reaction left its mark. Subsequently, Hazel opted to take the bus home alone. Meanwhile, Shade awaited her return anxiously at home, observed by Sybil, who noted the time—"It's eight fifteen" (II.403)—as Hazel boarded the bus and disembarked at Lochanhead, ultimately sealing her tragic fate. Shade turns on the TV to alleviate his uneasiness, "The screen / In its blank-broth evolved a lifelike blur,/ And music welled" (II. 405-406). His worries about Hazel lead him to direct a metaphorical "death ray" towards Jane, feeling a sense of remorse for orchestrating the blind date (II. 407). As he watches, a stark contrast arises between the physically unattractive Hazel and the glamorous image of a girl on TV: "A nymph came pirouetting, under white / Rotating petals, in a vernal rite /To kneel before an altar in a wood/ Where various articles of toilet stood" (II. 413-416). Shade takes this advertisement, embodying the "vulgar ring" of contemporary society, and serves as a jarring reminder of the absurdity of the age (II.420). Meanwhile, Sybil listens intently at the door, imagining the sound of the phone ringing. Shade rubbed the window and checked through the window only to find "More headlights in the fog…only some white fence/ And the reflector poles passed by unmasked" (II.444-446).

The juxtaposition of Hazel's suicide with the televised image of a movie star highlights the stark contrast between the reality of Hazel's tragic end and the superficiality of celebrity culture. As Shade observes the glamorous image on the screen—describing the famous face with its fair complexion, parted lips, and swimming eyes—he reflects on the artificiality and emptiness of such representations. The description of the "soft form dissolving in the prism of corporate desire" (II. 452-456) underscores how the entertainment industry commodifies beauty and desire, reducing individuals to mere objects of consumption. The term "corporate" carries a dual meaning here, referring to bodily desire and the pervasive influence of industry collusion in shaping societal norms and values. This highlights the commercialization and exploitation inherent in the media's portrayal of beauty and desire. Shade, seeking solace for himself and Sybil, suggests watching the movie *Remorse*, perhaps hinting at his regret for arranging the fatal blind date. As Shade remains engrossed in the movie, Hazel reaches Lochanhead and gazes at the "ghostly trees", perhaps reflecting on the finality of her decision (II. 460). This juxtaposition underscores the profound contrast between the artificial world of entertainment and the harsh reality of human suffering, serving as a poignant reminder of the complexities of life and the consequences of our actions.

The thunder rumbling above intensifies Shade's anxiety, amplifying the sense of foreboding surrounding Hazel's fate. Meanwhile, Sybil's engagement in network roulette adds uncertainty as the dial turns and channels flicker, cutting abruptly from commercials to fleeting glimpses of the face (II. 465-467). A notable foreshadowing occurs within the televised programming, where Shade detects subtle hints of impending violence. An image of "an imbecile with sideburns" (II. 468-69) poised to use his gun serves as an eerie premonition, mirroring the impending tragedy. Similarly, the sight of "a jovial Negro raised his trumpet" (II. 470) on the TV anticipates the eventual scene where the gardener subdues the gunman with his spade at the murder scene. These glimpses of violence and discord within the televised content mirror the tumultuous events unfolding in Shade's life, heightening the tension surrounding Hazel's fate. Shade's apprehension peaks as the storm rages outside, and the TV screen flickers with ominous imagery, underscoring the sense of impending tragedy permeating the scene.

As Sybil switches off the TV, Shade observes, "As life snapped, we saw /A pinhead light dwindle and die in black Infinity", hinting at Hazel's impending demise (II. 471-472). Meanwhile, a watchman and his uneasy dog traverse the reedy back, but he "came too late", signalling Hazel's tragic fate (II. 477). As the Shades wait anxiously until midnight, the howling wind outside intensifies, hurling twigs against the windowpane, adding to the atmosphere of impending doom. The narrative's back-and-forth shift between Hazel and her

parents heightens tension and poignancy, ultimately culminating in Hazel's heartbreaking suicide. When a car arrives at their home bearing the sad news, "And suddenly a festive blaze was flung / Across five cedar trunks, snow patches showed,/ And a patrol car on our bumpy road /Came to a crunching stop. Retake, retake!" (II. 484-487). Here, a festive blaze and snow accentuate the suddenness and jarring nature of the revelation. While some speculate about Hazel's possible attempt to cross the lake or her potential loss of way, the Shades confront the grim reality of her suicide: "She took her poor young life. I know. You know" (II. 493). As Shade reflects on Hazel's last moments, he envisions her standing on the mist-covered lake, shivering in the cold before tragically succumbing to the watery depths (II. 497-400). Through his poetic portrayal, Shade utilizes synchrony to express his profound love for his daughter and his disdain for crass commercial advertisements. The bitter irony lies in the reconciliation of Shade's poetic depth with his condemnation of commercialism. While commercialism may not directly cause Hazel's suicide, she becomes entangled in its web, undervalued and overlooked for her brilliance, talents, and intelligence, which are overshadowed by society's emphasis on superficial appearance and beauty standards. For Shade, the vulgarity extends beyond the mass industry, serving as a poignant reminder of the societal forces that contribute to Hazel's tragedy.

The synchronized pattern between Shade's poetic lines and the TV shows he views on the evening of his daughter's suicide reveals a more profound commentary on the influence of mass culture and the media on individual perception and behaviour. By correlating Shade's poetic attack on vulgar elements of mass culture with the TV shows he watches, Nabokov highlights the pervasive nature of societal stereotypes and their potential impact on individuals, particularly vulnerable individuals like Hazel. John Foster argues that Nabokov "resonates with Horkheimer and Adorno, for whom mass culture and the media posed an even more serious threat to the individual."[48] This perspective aligns with the idea that Shade's poetic critique extends beyond mere personal disdain for certain aspects of mass culture to a broader indictment of the cultural industry's role in perpetuating harmful stereotypes and ideals. Shade's attack on feminine stereotypes and vulgar mass culture underscores the potential dangers posed by societal norms and expectations, which can undermine individuals' mental well-being and even endanger their lives. By drawing attention to this synchronized pattern, Nabokov prompts readers to consider the profound impact of mass culture on individual psyche and societal values, highlighting the need for critical engagement with media and cultural representations.

[48] John Burt Foster, "Poshlust, Culture Criticism, Adorno, and Malraux," in Julian Connolly, ed., *Nabokov and His Fiction: New Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 217-235.

5.3.3 Shade's Starting Creation and Gradus' Zembla Departure

I will explore the synchronization orchestrated by Kinbote between Shade's poetic creation and the regicidal journey of Gradus. In Kinbote's commentary on the lines: "It's eight fifteen (And here time forked)" (II. 403-404), he astutely notes the synchronous arrangement of Shade's activities, such as watching television and the tragic event of Hazel's suicide following her disappointing blind date with Peter. However, despite acknowledging this synchronicity, Kinbote displays a lack of sympathy for Shade's anguish over the loss of his daughter, dismissing Shade's poignant depiction of Hazel's demise as "too laboured and long," reducing it to a mere "synchronization device" (197). Kinbote mirrors Shade's contrapuntal artistry by intertwining Gradus's journey from Zembla to Appalachia with Shade's poetic composition. Numerous textual bridges connect Shade's process of writing poetry with Gradus's progress toward his murderous goal. This deliberate synchronization underscores the interconnectedness of Shade's creative endeavours and Gradus's nefarious mission, revealing layers of thematic depth and narrative complexity within *Pale Fire*.

Time	Shade's poem creation	Gradus's murder progress	Relevant Notes
1 July 1959	Shade's starting to write the poem.	Gradus's departure from Zembla to Appalachia (actual date: 5 July)	Notes to "I was the shadow of the waxwing slain" (I.1-4); "And then the gradual"(I.17); "gray" (I.29); "Points at the puddle in his basement room"(II. 596).
4 July	Shade finished Canto One.	Gradus left Zembla.	Notes to "five minutes were equal to forty ounces" (I. 120-121); There was a time, etc." (I. 167);
5 July	Shade started composing Canto Two on his sixty-first birthday.	Gradus left from Zembla to Copenhagen.	Notes to "today" (II. 181);
7 July	Shade wrote line 286 of Canto Two.	Gradus flew from Copenhagen to Paris.	Notes to "gradual decay" (II. 209); "A jet's pink trail above the sunset fire" (II. 286).
July10	Shade wrote lines 406-416.	Gradus drove from Geneva to Lex to visit Odon and then to Geneva.	Notes to "A male hand" (II. 408).
15 July	Shade continued to write Canto Two.	Gradus landed at Côte d'Azur airport.	Notes to "Conclusive destination" (VI. 697).
16 July	Shade worked on lines 698-746.	Gradus arrived in Nice and found a letter with an address in Villa Disa.	Notes to "the outer glare"(VI.741); "address" (VI. 768).
19 July	Shade began to write Canto Four.	Gradus found a letter with an address in Villa Disa.	Notes to: "Now I shall spy, etc." (VI. 835-838).
20 July	Shade started with line 873 and ended with line 980.	Gradus took a plane from Paris to New York.	Notes to "My best time" (VI. 873); "And all the time" (VI. 949).
21 July	Shade finished his poem.	Gradus arrived in New Wye and shot Shade at Kinbote's rental house.	Notes to last line 999.

Table 5 Synchrony and Juxtaposition of Shade's poetic creation with Gradus's murder

I will take Kinbote's note to Line 17 of Shade's poem and its interrelated notes to examine how Kinbote juxtaposes Shade's writing initiation with Gradus's departure from Zembla. Gradus is first mentioned in the initial note to Lines 1-4: "I was the shadow of the waxwing slain", wherein Kinbote concludes by synchronizing Shade's commencement of the poem with

Gradus's departure from Zembla (74). However, a discrepancy arises when we discover that Shade began writing the verse on July 1st, while Gradus left Onhava on July 5th. This inconsistency not only underscores Kinbote's lack of respect for Shade and his work but also suggests that Kinbote's synchronization of Shade's composition process with Gradus's departure is not based on factual evidence but instead serves as a deliberate scheme to unveil his identity as the exiled King of Zembla.

Kinbote further links the recurring motif of "greyness" in Shade's poem with Gradus's identity and progress in his murderous mission. In the note to "Line 17: And then the gradual; Line 29: gray" (77), Kinbote seizes upon two words, "gradual" and "gray", in Shade's poem to introduce Gradus. According to Kinbote, Gradus is known by various aliases in police records, including Jack Degree, Jacques de Grey, James de Gray, Ravus, Ravenstone, and d'Argus (77). Interestingly, in the note to Line 949: "And all the time", Kinbote adds additional names for Gradus: "Vinogradus", "Jacques d'Argus", and "Jack Grey" (273). According to Kinbote's narrative, Gradus initially travelled to Zembla as a wine salesman, later joining the Extremist party and assuming the mission of assassinating the exiled King. Kinbote presents Gradus's journey from Zembla to Appalachia alongside Shade's creative process in crafting his poem, directing readers to refer to his note on Line 596 for further insight (78).

Following Kinbote's instruction, we turn to the note to Line 596. In this note, Kinbote draws attention to a variant he claims to have preserved in Shade's draft, which reads: "Should the dead murderer try to embrace / His outraged victim whom he now must face? / Do objects have a soul? Or perish must / Alike great temples and Tanagra dust" (231). Kinbote elaborates on the significance of the phrase "Tanagra dust", suggesting that it symbolizes the impending encounter between Shade and Gradus in death, as their ghosts are destined to meet Shade's "radiant spirit" (231). Kinbote emphasizes the importance of this variant to his Zembla, noting that he attempted to replace Shade's "weak lines 627-630" with this more resonant passage (231). The motif of "Tanagra dust" recurs in the subsequent note accompanying Lines 597-608, where Kinbote suggests associating the passage with the earlier variant from Line 596. He explains that Shade and Gradus, represented by "Tanagra dust," will confront each other "in real life, in real death" (233). Kinbote would speculate on Gradus's actions if the extremists were to capture the King, citing Lines 606-608 of Shade's poem, which describes the King's defiant behaviour in the face of captivity (234). According to Kinbote, the King would taunt his captors and demonstrate his superiority over them, reinforcing his assertion that an "anti-Darwinian aphorism: The one who kills is always his victim's inferior" (234). In this manner, Kinbote implies Gradus's culpability in Shade's murder, weaving together the themes of death,

fate, and retribution in his interpretation of Shade's poetry and the events surrounding his demise. The note accompanying Line 17 is referenced twice within the note to Line 171 and the note to Lines 131-132. In the note to Line 171, Kingbote briefly introduces Gradus's conspiracy to assassinate the exiled King and directs the reader to "(see note to Line 17 where some of his other activities are adumbrated)," noting that the details become gradually more apparent as Gradus's arrival approaches in both space and time (152). This reference reveals Gradus's intentions as he moves closer to carrying out his murderous plot.

In his analysis of Lines 131-132, Kinbote interprets Shade's phrase "the shadow of the waxwing slain" as a symbolic representation of Shade himself, with the "waxwing slain" symbolizing his eventual murder and the "reflection that will shatter him" suggesting the impending arrival of Gradus (135). Kinbote posits that the force propelling Gradus forward is "the magic action of Shade's poem itself, the very mechanism and sweep of verse, the powerful iambic motor" (137), implying a connection between Shade's poetry and Gradus's action. Kinbote directs readers to "see note to Line 17" to gain further insight into Gradus's approach (135), highlighting the interconnectedness between Shade's initiation of writing the poem and Gradus's initiation of his murderous mission. Kinbote cross-references the note to Line 17 and its related notes to synchronize Shade's creative process with Gradus's vicious intentions, illustrating the intricacies of their parallel narratives within the poem.

5.3.4 Shade's Writing Process and Gradus's Approaching Progress

In examining Line 181 and its related notes, Kinbote weaves together Shade's creative endeavour and Gradus's advancing journey. The emphasis on the note to Line 181 is particularly notable, appearing repeatedly in lines 120-121, 167, and 209. Notably, the note to Lines 120-121 highlights Shade's completion of Canto One on July 4, 1959, coinciding with Gradus's departure from Zembla, described as "his steady blunderings through two hemispheres" (117), a connection reinforced by the reference to Line 181. Similarly, in the note to Line 167, Kinbote's interpretation mistakenly equates Shade's sixty-first birthday with sixty, urging readers to consult the note to Line 181 "today" for additional context, emphasizing the immediate relevance of Shade's poetic process (147). The note to Line 209: "gradual decay", further underscores this parallelism, as Kinbote references Gradus's progression towards Copenhagen, with a nod to Line 181, signifying the interplay between Gradus's movements and Shade's poetic creation. According to Kinbote, Gradus's anticipated arrival in Paris post-July seven coincides with Shade's poetic exploration, as Gradus "sped through this verse and

is gone - presently to darken our pages again" (163). Through these interrelated notes, Kinbote masterfully juxtaposes Gradus's advancing approach with Shade's creative endeavour, highlighting the intertwined narratives within the text.

Given the repeated emphasis on the note to Line 181 in Lines 120-121, 167, and 209, it is pivotal to evaluate its significance. In this note, Kinbote asserts that Shade commenced composing Canto Two on July 5th, aligning it with Gradus' departure from Zembla, boarding a plane for Copenhagen from the Onhava airfield (158). Kinbote divulges his awareness of Shade's composing date by spying on Shade's birthday party, which took place on the same day. This intrusive behavior underscores Kinbote's narcissistic tendencies and contradicts any claims of genuine intimacy with Shade. Kinbote's knowledge of Shade's birthday stems from Shade's book jackets. Kinbote's attempt to secure an invitation to Shade's party, rebuffed by Sybil, exposes his resentment, labelling her as a "domestic censor" for supposedly obstructing the inclusion of Zembla themes in Shade's poetry (81). By acknowledging himself as a "very sly Zemblan" and presenting his gift to Shade as a "royal gift," Kinbote subtly discloses his identity as the exiled King (163). Throughout the night, Kinbote spies on Shade's birthday gathering and observes the commencement of Canto Two. This synchronicity highlights Shade's initiation of writing Canto Two on July 5th, coinciding with Gradus' departure from Zemba to Copenhagen.

In the note to Line 17, Kinbote draws a connection between Shade's Line 230, where Hazel is referenced as "a domestic ghost", and a member of Shadow, an extremist group from Zembla, who escorted Gradus into a clothing store. Kinbote directs readers to later notes (to Lines 286 and 408) for more descriptions of Gradus. Following this guidance, we turn to the note in Line 286: "A jet's pink trail above the sunset fire" (174). Kinbote reveals that when Shade penned this line on July 7th, Gradus completed the second sinister journey by flying from Copenhagen to Paris (174). Kinbote then recounts Gradus' subterfuge in obtaining information about the exiled King from Oswin Breetwit. Disguised as an apolitical commissioner, Gradus feigned interest in transacting valuable papers of a Zemblan noble family. He confirmed the King's absence from Zembla through Oswin's unwitting disclosure (179). Kinbote expresses frustration at his futile search for Zemblan traces in Shade's poem, lamenting their supposed connection's lack of warmth and intimacy (177).

Following the instruction to see another note to Line 408: "A male hand", we delve into Kinbote's account of Gradus' activities when Shade composed lines 406-416 on July 10th. During this time, Gradus drove from Geneva to Lex to visit Odon, assuming the guise of an art agent to gather intelligence about the exiled King. However, Odon saw through Gradus'

disguise and divulged no pertinent information. Nevertheless, a chance encounter with a man mentioning the Riviera reminded Gradus of Queen Disa's palazzo, providing a potential lead. This note concludes with Gradus returning to Geneva as Shade "took a fresh card" (202). The interconnectedness of the note to Line 181 and its related notes underscores Kinbote's deliberate synchronization of Shade's poetic narrative with Gradus' relentless pursuit, highlighting the weaving together of their parallel trajectories within the poem.

5.3.5 Shade's Completing Poem and Gradus's Committing Murder

In Kinbote's notes to Shade's Canto Four, we witness how he employs synchrony to juxtapose Shade's completion of the poem with the progress of Gradus's murderous mission. Firstly, in the note to Lines 697, Kinbote details Gradus's arrival at the airport on July 15, 1959. There, Gradus learned from local news of a burglary at Villa Disa. Subsequently, Gradus is informed by a senior member of the Shadows about the letter taken from the King, which contains his university address. This revelation connects Kinbote to his identity as the exiled King of Zembla. In the note to Line 768, Kinbote meticulously describes the letter penned by the King on April 2 from France, emphasizing the correct address as "Dr. C. Kinbote, KINBOTE" rather than "Charles X. Kingbot, Esq." (256). The letter directs readers to the note on Line 49. Following Kinbote's guidance, we turn to the note to Line 49: "shagbark", which expands from Shade's mention of trees to Queen Disa's quatrain of Shade's short poems in her album. Kinbote references a letter from southern France on April 6, 1959, further solidifying the connection between Kinbote and the exiled King of Zembla. These interconnected notes skillfully weave together Shade's poetic exploration and Gradus' pursuit, leading readers to infer Kinbote's true identity as the exiled King of Zembla.

In the note to lines 835-838, Kinbote asserts that Shade commenced writing Canto Four on July 19. However, he criticizes the initial lines, dismissing them as a convoluted mishmash of phrases and enjambments: "the cunning working-in of several inter-echoing phrases into a jumble of enjambments" (263). Moving to the note for Line 873: "My best time", Kinbote describes Shade's composition on July 20, juxtaposing it with Gradus's activities. As Shade begins writing "My best time," Gradus is depicted boarding a jet at Orly airport as he embarks on his nefarious mission: "fastening his seat belt, reading a newspaper, rising, soaring, desecrating the sky" (263). Continuing the note for Line 949, Kinbote aligns Shade's creative process with Gradus's journey. As Shade writes the final lines on July 20 in New Wye, Gradus arrives in New York from Paris, symbolizing "two silent time zones had now merged to form

the standard time of one man's fate" (272). Gradus proceeds to New Wye, where he encounters the exiled King, who recognizes him by his distinctive features. The contradiction arises between Kinbote's claim that Emerald drove Gradus to the specified address and the police's belief that Gradus hitched a ride from a trucker in Roanoke. This inconsistency underscores Kinbote's unreliability as a narrator, casting doubt on the veracity of his perspective.

In the final note to Line 999, Kinbote recounts the moment when Shade completed his poem, coinciding with Gradus's arrival and the tragic shooting of Shade at Kinbote's rented Goldsworth house. Kinbote believes that Gradus aimed to shoot him, but Gradus's subsequent actions contradict this assumption. Instead, Gradus pays no attention to Kinbote, treating him as insignificant. Furthermore, Gradus confesses to the police that his name is "Jack Grey, no fixed abode, except the Institute for the Criminal Insane," leading authorities to suspect that he recently escaped from the institution (295). This revelation suggests that Jack Grey may be a criminal who fled the asylum to avenge Judge Goldsworth, who previously sentenced him to imprisonment. Thus, Jack Grey mistakenly shoots Shade, mistaking him for Judge Goldsworth. Despite these contradictory circumstances, Kinbote remains steadfast in his belief that Gradus intended to target him. He dismisses Gradus's confession as a ruse to deceive the police. He even speculates that Gradus's subsequent suicide in prison is a result of his despair at realizing he had targeted the wrong person. Kinbote meticulously synchronizes Shade's poetic creation with Gradus's act of murder, suggesting a calculated strategy or conspiracy to align events in a planned synchrony. This synchrony serves Kinbote's agenda to correlate Shade's poem with Zembla and reveal Kinbote as the exiled King of Zembla.

Shade's utilization of synchrony and juxtaposition depicts Hazel's tragic suicide alongside the anguished anticipation of her return, while Kinbote's manipulation of synchrony intertwines Shade's poetic composition with Gradus's murderous journey. Through this analysis, I aim to present three key arguments. Firstly, I contend that synchrony transcends mere temporal coincidence; instead, it is a narrative tool for juxtaposing seemingly disparate events to serve a specific purpose. Kinbote's synchronization of Shade's poetic endeavour with Gradus's murderous pursuit is not grounded in factual alignment; instead, it reflects a deliberate effort to intertwine Shade's poetic universe with the realm of Zembla. Secondly, *Pale Fire* offers insights into the complex nature of synchrony, demonstrating how events occurring at different velocities relative to various observers can appear simultaneous from particular perspectives. Shade's narrative presents Hazel's tragic trajectory alongside television performances, creating a sense of temporal convergence. Similarly, Kinbote perceives Shade's poetic composition and Gradus's impending violence as parallel events, underscoring the

subjective nature of synchrony. Lastly, I argue that Kinbote employs synchrony as a narrative device to establish internal connections between the novel's embedded layers of fiction, subverting conventional narrative hierarchies. By decoding these synchronized patterns, readers are guided to anticipate thematic resonances between Shade's poem and Zembla that Kinbote seeks to unveil. The exploration of synchrony in *Pale Fire* illuminates the interplay between narrative construction and reader interpretation, inviting us to uncover and evaluate the interconnected threads of meaning woven throughout the text.

5.4 Tree Structures and Hierarchical Patterns in *Pale Fire*

In *Pale Fire*, dendrogrammic structures are employed to illustrate the intricate relationships between the poem and its commentary within the narrative. While a tree structure is a general data structure that represents hierarchical relationships through nodes connected by edges, a dendrogrammic structure is a specific type that visually represents the arrangement of clusters or hierarchical relationships. Dendrograms are particularly effective in depicting how items are grouped based on their similarities or distances. Although all dendrograms can be classified as tree structures, not all tree structures function as dendrograms; the latter emphasizes clustering and relational patterns among data points, whereas tree structures encompass a broader range of hierarchical representations without necessarily focusing on those similarities. This dendrogrammic approach allows readers to visualize the interconnectedness of themes, motifs, and interpretations that radiate from Shade's poem and Kinbote's commentary, presenting a network of references and associations. The dendrogrammic arrangement underscores the idea that interpretations can both diverge and converge, much like the branches of a tree. Each interpretative layer not only provides insight into Shade's work but also reveals Kinbote's biases and psychological complexities. By employing this structural framework, readers engage with the text in a way that mirrors the cognitive processes involved in pattern recognition and associative thinking.

5.4.1 Tree Structures and Multilevel Referencing Notes

Kinbote employs a hierarchical tree structure to construct multi-level referencing notes that establish correlations between Shade's poem and the fictional realm of Zembla. These notes can be categorized into three levels: first-level notes, which directly comment on Shade's lines; second-level notes, which Kinbote directs readers to explore within the first-level notes;

and third-level notes, nested within the second-level notes. The distinctive feature of the third-level notes is their deeper exploration and elaboration on specific details or anecdotes within the second-level commentary, often providing more insights into Zemblan history, culture, or characters. This hierarchical structure enables Kinbote to interweave Shade's deleted lines with his Zemblan narrative, effectively creating layers of interpretation. However, it is essential to note that Kinbote's multi-level commentary does not elucidate Shade's poem. Instead, it predominantly functions to advance Kinbote's agenda of constructing his version of Zembla and establishing his identity as the exiled king. By utilizing this complex framework, Kinbote blurs the lines between fiction and reality, weaving his narrative within Shade's poetic tapestry to assert his presence and significance of Zembla within the text.

Like a botanical tree with interconnected roots and branches, a tree structure serves as a hierarchical framework for organizing and representing information, facilitating easy navigation and search. Widely utilized in specific fields like computer science and graph theory, a tree structure comprises nodes linked by edges, establishing a hierarchical relationship among them.[49] At the pinnacle of the tree structure lies the root node, serving as the starting point from which all other nodes emanate. Nodes preceding a specific node are called parent nodes, while those succeeding are termed child nodes. Nodes sharing the same parent are known as siblings, and nodes devoid of child nodes are labelled leaf nodes. The connections between nodes are denoted as branches or edges, forming the fundamental pathways within the structure.[50] In *Pale Fire*, Kinbote's commentary can be likened to the nodes within a tree structure. The overarching Zembla narrative acts as the root node from which various branches extend. Kinbote's first-level notes serve as parent nodes, housing subsequent layers of commentary represented by the second-level and third-level notes. This hierarchical arrangement mirrors the recursive nature of tree structures, with each node potentially branching out into multiple child nodes, thereby creating a comprehensive web of interconnected information. Through tree structure, Kinbote intertwines Shade's poem with his Zemblan narrative, forming a sophisticated network of connections in the novel.

5.4.2 First-level Notes: To Correlate the Poem with Zembla

[49]"Introduction to Tree Data Structure and Algorithm Tutorials," GeeksforGeeks, https://www.geeksforgeeks.org/introduction-to-tree-data-structure-and-algorithm-tutorials/.
[50] Ibid.

In examining Kinbote's first-level notes, we observe how he utilizes a tree structure to establish connections between Shade's poem and his Zemblan narrative. Each first-level note serves as a parent node, branching out to further levels of commentary that reaches deeper into Kinbote's interpretations and personal agenda. For instance, in this first-level note to Line 42 of Shade's poem, Kinbote expresses his disappointment at Shade's failure to incorporate Zembla into his work despite Kinbote's persistent efforts to urge him to do so. This note is a gateway into Kinbote's narrative, highlighting his fixation on Zembla and his desire to intertwine it with Shade's poem. However, upon revisiting Shade's original text, it becomes apparent that this note diverges significantly from the content of Line 42.

Shade's poem, Line 42, "I could make out our front porch when I'd take Lake Road to school, whilst now, although/ no tree Has intervened," recounts Shade's reminiscence of his front porch and the changes he observes over time. He reflects on the transformation of a shagbark tree near his house, describing its evolution from a young tree with dark jade leaves to a mature tree that now casts shade over his daughter's swing. The imagery of white butterflies and the phantom of his daughter's swing evoke a sense of loss and grief, hinting at the tragic death of his daughter, who committed suicide by drowning in a lake. Contrary to Shade's intention, Kinbote's notes to these lines ignore Shade's poignant emotion and his tragedy, instead focusing on the absence of Zembla in the lines. This discrepancy underscores Kinbote's tendency to project his preoccupations onto Shade's work, demonstrating the subjective nature of his commentary and the intricate layers of interpretation within the text.

Root Node	**1st Level Notes (Parent Nodes)**	**Connecting Branches or Edges**
Zembla	Notes to Line 42: "I could not make out."	All describes Kinbote's disappointment at Shade's poem and his determination to make Zembla out of it.
	Notes to Line 937"Old Zembla".	
	Notes to Line 1000: "I was the shadow of the waxwing slain."	

Table 6 1st level Notes Correlating Shade's Poem with Zembla

In the note to Line 42, Kinbote's commentary diverges significantly from Shade's intentions, as he disregards Shade's reflection on Hazel's death and instead focuses on his obsession with Zembla. In an attempt to reconcile his disappointment with Shade's poem, Kinbote contrasts his previous admiration for Shade's supposed depiction of Zembla with his disillusionment upon realizing the absence of Zembla from the poem's final form. He expresses his frustration that Shade's work lacks the Zemblan elements he had hoped for, describing it as "pale and diaphanous," not "a direct echo" of the substance he had envisioned contributing to it (81). Kinbote's resentment towards this perceived failure is evident, as he feels that Shade's

poem has “deliberately and drastically drained of every trace of the material” he contributed (82). Kinbote resolves to assert his narrative presence by “borrowing a kind of opalescent light” from Shade’s work, effectively appropriating the poem to serve his agenda of constructing his version of Zembla (81). This parasitic approach reflects Kinbote's determination to assert control over Shade's creation and shape it to fit his desires rather than respecting Shade's intention and artistic merits. This note underscores Kinbote’s single-minded obsession with Zembla and his willingness to manipulate Shade's work to serve his ends.

The note to Line 42 and its connection to Line 937: “Old Zembla”, illustrate Kinbote's profound disappointment and frustration with Shade's poem, particularly in its perceived lack of references to Zembla. In the note to Line 42, Kinbote meticulously scrutinizes Shade’s work, only to discover a few casual allusions to “royalty (605, 822, and 894) and the Popian Zembla in line 937,” which ultimately fall short of his expectations (81). This disappointment is echoed in the note to Line 937, where Kinbote reacts vehemently to Shade's brief mention of Zembla in a footnote: “At Greenland, Zembla, or the Lord knows where,” accusing Shade of betrayal for treating Zembla so casually (272). The parallels between the notes to Lines 42 and 1000, “I was the shadow of the waxwing slain,” further underscore Kinbote’s disillusionment with Shade's poem and his determination to appropriate it for his purposes. Both notes depict Kinbote's realization that Shade’s work does not align with his vision of Zembla, prompting him to seek solace in the variants and deleted lines that he believes are key to constructing his version of Zembla from Shade's poem.

In the aftermath of the chaotic murder, Kinbote’s disappointment climaxes as he examines Shade's poem and realizes its autobiographical nature and lack of “all the unique atmosphere of my kingdom” (297). His suggestion to title the poem “Solus Rex” reflects his desire to assert his narrative authority, only to be thwarted by Shade's choice of “Pale Fire” (296). Kinbote’s reaction to this perceived rejection is one of rage and bitterness, as he devalues Shade's poem as devoid of “my magic” and lacks the “special rich streak of magical madness” that he associates with Zembla (297). This selfish attitude underscores Kinbote’s fixation on Zembla and his inability to appreciate Shade’s artistic vision on its terms.

Upon rereading the poem, Kinbote perceives a faint semblance of connection between Shade's work and Zembla in phrases like “dim distant music” and “vestiges of colour in the air” (297). Kinbote regards these subtle echoes of Zembla within Shade's poem as invaluable, akin to “echoes and spangles of my mind, and a long ripple-wake of my glory” (297). Determined to construct Zembla from Shade’s poem, Kinbote sees these “echoes and wavelets of fire, and pale phosphorescent hints, and all the many subliminal debts” as fertile ground for his creative

reinterpretation (298). Kinbote's fixation on recreating Zembla leads him to view criticism of his commentary as an attack on his vision, likening it to "a mixture of journalistic callousness and the venom of vipers" (298). Despite this, he maintains a delusional belief that despite the "intrigues and dirt," Shade may not be bothered by his commentary, dismissing any potential offence as inconsequential (299). The interconnected notes to lines 42, 937, and 1000 provide insight into Kinbote's overarching scheme: suppressing Shade's poem with his Zemblan narrative. These notes reveal Kinbote's obsession with Zembla and his assertion to replace his version over Shade's artistic creation.

5.4.3 Second-level Notes: To Create Zembla out of Variants

Kinbote's strategy becomes apparent in the second-level notes as he emphasizes the significance of Shade's deleted variants connected to his Zembla theme. Upon realizing that Shade's poem lacks direct references to Zembla, Kinbote seeks to imbue it with Zemblan elements by reconstructing the "vaults of the variants" of Shade's draft (82). In doing so, Kinbote directs the reader's attention to notes in lines 70, 79, and 130 (82). These second-level notes exhibit common characteristics: first, all three notes concentrate on the deleted variants in Shade's draft, elevating their importance over the finalized version. Second, the content of each note revolves around the Zemblan theme, described by Kinbote as "the specific imprint of my theme, a minute but genuine star ghost of my discourse on Zembla and her unfortunate king" (82). Third, Kinbote's narrative strategy disregards Shade's original intentions and focuses instead on the deleted lines. He then prioritizes these lines over the finalized version and establishes connections to the Zembla theme and the exiled king. The table illustrates Kinbote's systematic approach to correlating Shade's deleted variants with the Zembla theme.

1st Level Notes (Parents Node)	2nd Level Notes (Child Nodes)	Connecting Branches or Edges
Notes to Line 42	Notes to Line 70: "The new TV."	"There are events… Impersonated him and aped his flight –" (To elaborate on the escaping process of the Zemblan King.)
	Notes to Line 79: "a preterist".	"The evening is the time to praise the day." (To prove that Shade incorporates a Zembla quatrain in his poem.)
	Notes to Line 130: "I never bounced a ball or swung a bat."	"As children playing in a castle find…a secret corridor–". (To account for Zemblan King's escaping through the tunnel.)

Table 7 2nd level Notes Correlating Shade's Variants with Zemblan Theme

Kinbote strategically utilizes the deleted variants to weave his Zemblan narrative in examining the second-level notes. First, in the note to line 70, "The new TV," Kinbote seizes upon certain unnumbered and deleted lines to depict the King's escape. Emphasizing the

significance of these deleted lines, Kinbote underscores their emblematic nature: “There are events, strange happenings, that strike/ The mind as emblematic. They are like/ Lost similes adrift without a string,/ Attached to nothing. Thus that northern king,/ Whose desperate escape from prison was/ Brought off successfully only because/ Some forty of his followers that night/ Impersonated him and aped his flight –” (99). Kinbote favours these deleted lines over the finalized version as he perceives them to vividly evoke the Zemblan King's escape from the palace. In this note, Kinbote depicts the King fleeing with the assistance of devoted supporters who mimic his actions, thus bewildering the revolutionary police. Given Kinbote’s asserted identity, this could serve as an additional motivation for him to grant heightened legitimacy to the deleted lines.

In the second-level note to line 79, “A preterist”, Kinbote seizes upon a deleted line to suggest that Shade has incorporated a Zemblan quatrain sourced from him. Shade’s poem, “A Preterist: one who collects cold nests” (I, 79), reflects Shade’s lament over the loss of his ornithologist parents. However, Kinbote redirects the focus away from Shade’s grief and onto a deleted line in the draft’s margin: “The evening is the time to praise the day” (107). Kinbote interprets this deleted line as evidence that Shade sought to integrate a Zemblan quatrain he had shared: “The wise at nightfall praise the day,/ The wife when she has passed away,/ The ice when it is crossed, the bride/ When tumbled, and the horse when tried” (107). In this interpretation, Kinbote positions himself as “the wise,” representing the disguised King of Zembla, while “the wife” alludes to the deceased Queen Disa. By emphasizing the deleted line and proposing its Zemblan origin, Kinbote subverts Shade’s original intention and imposes his Zemblan narrative onto Shade’s poem.

In the third second-level note to line 130, “I never bounced a ball or swung a bat,” Kinbote delves into a detailed exploration using four discarded lines to narrate the Zemblan King’s escape through a tunnel. Initially, Kinbote diverts from Shade’s description of his childhood physical limitations in sports to his self-aggrandizement regarding athletic prowess. Kinbote then focuses on the discarded verses following line 130, which depict children discovering a secret corridor hidden behind toys in a castle. The lines read, “As children playing in a castle find/ In some old closet full of toys, behind/ The animals and masks, a sliding door/ [four words heavily crossed out] a secret corridor –” (118). Kinbote interprets the “secret corridor” as a metaphor for the King of Zembla’s escape from the palace via a concealed tunnel. Kinbote expresses his intense interest in these discarded lines due to their thematic relevance to the Zemblan King’s evasion. Kinbote appropriates Shade’s discarded material through this analysis to reinforce his Zemblan narrative within the commentary.

In the note to Line 130, Kinbote provides an extensive narrative detailing the king's escape. Drawing parallels to chess, Kinbote invites readers to envision the scenario as a complex chess problem, with the king as the solitary black piece in a strategic position, reminiscent of a "king-in-the-corner waiter of the solus rex type" (118). He suggests that Zembla's royalists faced insurmountable challenges from extremists, likely supported by a neighbouring nation, hinted at as Russia due to its advantageous proximity across the sea (119). Following the revolution, Zembla plunged into chaos marked by violence, arrests, and executions, leading to the king's imprisonment within the palace walls. Cut off from the outside world, the king's only connection remained through Odon, a prominent actor in Zembla. Despite numerous failed escape attempts orchestrated by the king's loyalists, hope seemed elusive. However, a breakthrough emerges when the king is relocated to a lumber room, where he discovers a key in a closet door, triggering a flood of memories and providing a glimmer of opportunity amidst the darkness of captivity. This gripping account presented by Kinbote highlights the king's resourcefulness in the face of adversity, setting the stage for a dramatic escape narrative within the context of Zembla's tumultuous political landscape.

Kinbote skilfully incorporates Shade's discarded lines to narrate the King's discovery of the secret tunnel, adding intrigue to the storyline. As the narrative unfolds, the Prince's reminiscence of his childhood escapades with Oleg, a remarkable and enigmatic playmate, sets the stage for the discovery. The discarded verse describes, "As children playing in a castle find/ In some old closet full of toys", leading them to stumble upon an unexpected find in a cluttered lumber room—a Zemblan edition of *Timon of Athens*, translated by the Prince's uncle (124). The discarded lines progress to reveal the Prince's astonishment as he uncovers a sliding door concealed behind the toys, unveiling a secret corridor shrouded in mystery. With a gilt key in the same room, the Prince unlocks the door and ventures into the passageway with Oleg, illuminating their path with torches. Their journey through the tunnel leads them to an unexpected encounter as they overhear the passionate sounds of a liaison between Iris Acht and her secret lover echoing through the corridors of the Royal Theatre. The revelation of this illicit affair, possibly involving the Prince's grandfather, King Thurgus, adds a layer of intrigue to the narrative, shedding light on the hidden complexities of royal life. The Prince's subsequent pneumonia suggests the overwhelming nature of his discoveries, both in terms of the secret tunnel and the scandalous affair, leading to a period of illness and delirium. In his delirium, he strives to probe "an endless tunnel and try the next to clasp the melting haunches of his fair ingle" (128). The Prince's poignant recollection of this transformative experience underscores

the lasting impact. Through Kinbote's storytelling, Shade's discarded lines interweave with the narrative, enriching the tapestry of the King's tumultuous journey of discovery.

In this detailed account, Kinbote further elucidates the King's daring escape from the confines of the palace, painting a vivid picture of his journey through the secret tunnel to freedom. As the King discovers the hidden passage and gathers provisions for his escape, Kinbote captures the tension and anticipation of the moment, likening the King's feelings to those of a chess player presented with a last-minute opportunity to salvage a lost game (129). The King's descent into the tunnel, by the dim glow of his torch, is imbued with a sense of both trepidation and exhilaration. Kinbote describes the King's emotional journey as he grapples with anguish and longing yet finds solace in the spectral presence of Ole's ghost. The discovery of Odon's dressing room at the tunnel's end adds a dramatic twist to the narrative, as Odon's assistance becomes instrumental in the King's escape from the palace's confines. Kinbote masterfully builds suspense and intrigue, drawing the reader deeper into the King's adventure. By directing the reader's attention to the note on line 149, which transforms Shade's "fountain-mountain" incident into the King's mountain journal following his escape, Kinbote underscores the King's escaping experience in the context of Shade's poem. Through this strategic placement and repetition of references, Kinbote reinforces his overarching narrative agenda, which centres on intertwining Shade's poetic creation with the Zemblan King.

5.4.4 Third-level Notes: To Construct Zembla in Commentary

This web of interconnected notes reveals Kinbote's systematic effort to weave Shade's poetry together with the narrative of his beloved Zembla. By guiding readers through a multi-level exploration of the poem, Kinbote establishes a complex network of references that underscore the thematic resonance between Shade's verses and the Zembla's history.

In directing readers to consult additional notes on lines 149 and 171, Kinbote expands upon the themes introduced in the note to line 70, deepening the account of the King's escape and the political intrigue surrounding his reign. The note to line 149 concerns the King's daring journey over the mountain, symbolizing his ascent to freedom and his challenges in navigating the treacherous terrain of exile. Meanwhile, the note to line 171, "a great conspiracy," exposes the conspiracy to regicide the King by Zemblan extremists, highlighting the threat of conspiracy and violence that looms over the kingdom. Furthermore, by extending the analysis of line 130 to encompass a discussion of line 149, Kinbote creates a spiral pattern of intertextual connections that reinforces the thematic coherence of his narrative. Through this recursive

structure, Kinbote invites readers to identify and interpret clues embedded within Shade's poetry, revealing the intersection between art and politics in the world of Zembla.

The table below visually represents Kinbote's tree structure, illustrating cross-references and thematic linkages that define his commentary on Shade's poem. Through this carefully constructed framework, Kinbote crafts a narrative that invites readers to explore the rich tapestry of Zemblan that lies in Shade's poetic vision.

First-level (Parent Node)	Second-level (Child Nodes)	Third-level (Leaf Nodes)
Note to Line 42: "I could make out" about his decision to make Zembla out of Shade's variants.	Note to line 70, "The new TV", about King's escaping from Zembla.	Note to line 149: "One foot upon a mountain", accounting for Zemblan King's escape from the mountain.
		Note line 171, "a great conspiracy", about Zemblan extremists' conspiracy to regicide the King.
	Note to line 79, "a preterist", about KInbote pressing Shade to incorporate Zembla quatrain into the poem.	
	Note to line 130: "I never bounced a ball or swung a bat", accounting for Zemblan King's escaping through the tunnel.	Note to line 149: "One foot upon a mountain", accounting for Zemblan King's escape from the mountain.

Table 8 Tree Structure and Multilevel Notes Corelating Shade's Poem with Kinbote's Zembla

First, in Shade's line 149, "one foot upon a mountain," he develops the implications of his near-death experience and the subsequent revelation of a contrapuntal theme. Initially, Shade recounts a childhood incident where he narrowly escapes death following a heart attack while playing with a toy. He vividly describes the sensation of being engulfed in darkness, experiencing a profound connection to both earthly and ethereal realms: "One foot upon a mountaintop, one hand / Under the pebbles of a panting strand, / One ear in Italy, one eye in Spain" (II. 146-51). Shade's encounter with "a tall white fountain" (II. 699) prompts him to consider its significance as a symbol of transcendent or otherworldly experiences. Intrigued by the possibility that the fountain might offer insights into the afterlife, Shade becomes excited when he learns of a woman's claim to have seen such a fountain during a near-death experience. Eager to explore this connection further, Shade drives to meet with the journalist who reported the sighting. However, Shade's excitement turns to disappointment when he discovers that the reported "fountain" was, in fact, a misprint for "mountain." This revelation leads Shade to question the validity of his epiphany, lamenting the idea that "Life Everlasting—based on a misprint!" (II. 699). This disappointment and revaluation prompts Shade to a deeper understanding of the nature of existence.

On his way back, Shade is struck by an epiphany that the significance of the incident lies not in the resemblance of specific details but in the interconnected patterns and correlations that permeate life. He describes this realization as a shift from focusing on "text" to "texture,"

from “dream” to “topsy-turvical coincidence,” and from “flimsy nonsense” to “a web of sense” (II. 808-15). This revelation of “Some kind of link-and-bobolink, some kind / Of correlated pattern in the game” leads Shade to embrace finding meaning in the intricate interplay of life’s experiences rather than searching for definitive answers or explanations (II. 808-15). Thus, Shade’s exploration of line 149 reflects the complexities of human existence and the profound insights that can be gained from moments of near-transcendence. Through his poetic exploration, Shade invites readers to contemplate the interconnectedness of life and the inherent beauty of existence.

Second, in the analysis of Kinbote's note to line 149, we observe a deliberate diversion from Shade’s focus on the symbolic significance of a misprinted “fountain” to Kinbote's preoccupation with connecting Shade's narrative to the Zemblan King’s mountainous escape. Rather than addressing Shade's contemplation on the meaning of the misprint and the disappointment it brings, Kinbote redirects the narrative towards aligning Shade’s imagery with the geography of Zembla. Kinbote interweaves elements of the Bera Range in Zembla with Shade's mountain imagery, suggesting a geographical parallel between Shade's poem and the Zemblan landscape. Additionally, Kinbote inserts subtle hints about his assumed identity as Charles the King, tying his narrative to the events described in Shade’s poem.

Kinbote elaborates on the King’s treacherous journey through the mountains, detailing encounters with benevolent farmers and moments of temptation with a character named Garh. When the King approaches the quay of Blawick, the policeman takes the King as a masquerade and lets him go. The King walks on restlessly and looks for Odon, who takes him out of Zembla. Kinbote finishes the notes with a statement, “I trust the reader has enjoyed this note” (147). Throughout the note, Kinbote subtly inserts clues supporting his claim of being the exiled King, reinforcing his narrative agenda. Despite the deviation from Shade's original intention and the omission of Shade's contemplative musings, Kinbote's commentary further entrenches his fabricated narrative of Zembla and his identity within the framework of Shade's poem. Thus, while Kinbote's analysis may appear far-fetched and self-serving, it effectively contributes to his overarching goal of connecting Shade's poem with his Zemblan.

Third, in analysing Kinbote’s note to line 171, “a great conspiracy,” Kinbote's web of connections between Shade's poem and his Zembla become more prominent. Kinbote recounts the emergence of extremists within Zembla who conspired to assassinate the exiled King, believing him to still be within the country's borders due to their strict control over transportation. Kinbote critiques the extremists' incompetence and shortsightedness, highlighting the fatal flaws inherent in their oppressive regime. As they belatedly realize the

King's escape, they hastily plot to eliminate him, resorting to drawing lots to select the assassin. Kinbote focuses on Gradus, the chosen assassin, portraying him as a figure of "formidable simplicity", "dull soul", and "hopeless stupidity", driven by blind adherence to generalized ideologies rather than nuanced understanding (152). Gradus has morbid worship for general ideas: "the generality was godly, the specific diabolical" and classifies everything beyond his comprehension as "injustice and deception" (152). He has no intention of figuring out the reason for the uneven distribution of wealth; instead, he takes the difference itself as unfair. Gradus believes that scientists, writers, and mathematicians all hold an unfair share of power (152). Thus, Gradus's distorted perception of justice and fixation on wealth redistribution align him with the destructive ideals of the Zemblan Revolution, leading him to accept the mission to kill the exiled King.

Kinbote's analysis underscores Gradus's role as a pawn in a more significant ideological conflict, highlighting the folly of fanaticism and the dire consequences it can yield. Moreover, Kinbote subtly inserts personal anecdotes and reflections into the narrative, alluding to his horror at the prospect of regicide and hinting at his identity as the exiled King. His mention of a childhood story that made him a lifelong vegetarian adds depth to his character, suggesting a traumatic past that continues to influence his actions. Through these personal touches, Kinbote further intertwines his experiences with the narrative he constructs around Shade's poem. Kinbote's third-level notes serve as a vehicle for expanding upon his Zemblan and reinforcing his narrative agenda. By weaving elements of Shade's poem with his invented world, Kinbote constructs a complex tapestry of interconnected themes and characters, inviting readers to delve deeper into the layers of meaning hidden within the text.

5.4.5 Correlated Patterns and Cross-referencing Interactions

In the analysis of Kinbote's note to line 80, "My bedroom," we uncover his strategic use of the tree structure and cross-referencing techniques to transition from Shade's domestic life with Sybil to the royal narrative of King Charles and Queen Disa in Zembla. Rather than focusing on the significance of Shade's bedroom, Kinbote redirects the narrative to the bedroom of the Zemblan King, accounting for the monarch's growth and sexual orientation from youth. Kinbote employs a multi-layered approach to guide readers through this thematic shift. He directs readers to two additional notes: one to line 275, "We have been married forty years," which elaborates on the marriage of King Charles and Queen Disa, and another to lines 433-434, "To the ... sea / Which we had visited in thirty-three," recounting the King's visit to Queen

Disa after he escaped from Zembla. By interconnecting these notes, Kinbote establishes a complex web of references that transitions between Shade's narrative and the Zemblan legend.

Furthermore, Kinbote employs circular referencing, directing readers back and forth between different notes to reinforce the interconnectedness of the narrative elements. For instance, in the note to line 275, Kinbote prompts readers to consult the note to line 247, "Sybil," for further information about Shade's wife. Similarly, he suggests revisiting the note to lines 433-434 in both the note to line 80 and the note to line 247, creating a circular pattern that reinforces the thematic resonance between Shade's domestic life and the Zemblan royal story. The table below demonstrates that through these cross-referencing strategies and the tree structure, Kinbote navigates between multiple narrative layers, blending Shade's poem with Zemblan. This approach enriches the textual experience for readers and underscores Kinbote's role as a cunning narrator who manipulates the narrative to suit his agenda.

First-level	Second-level	Third-level	Fourth-level
Note to Line 80: "my bedroom"	Note to line 275: "We have been married forty years."	Note to line 247: "Sybil"	Note to lines 246: "My dear"
			Notes to line 578: "The other."
			Notes to lines 433-434: "To the sea which we had visited in thirty-three".
	Note to lines 433-434: "To the sea which we had visited in thirty-three".		

Table 9 Multi-level Notes Corelating Shade's Poem with Kinbote's Zembla

First, Kinbote's commentary on line 80 reveals a deliberate shift from Shade's reference to his bedroom to a discussion about Prince Charles Xavier's sexual orientation and marital situation. While Shade's mention of the bedroom likely pertains to personal reflections, Kinbote redirects the focus to Prince Charles Xavier's romantic and marital affairs. Kinbote narrates an incident involving Queen Blenda's awareness of Charles's homosexual inclinations and her subsequent attempt to engage him through the intermediary Feur. However, Charles demonstrates no romantic interest in Feur and directs his attention towards the male servants. Furthermore, Kinbote prompts readers to explore additional insights into Shade's marriage by referring them to notes on lines 275 and 433-434.

In the second-level notes to line 275, Kinbote diverges from Shade's marriage to elaborate on the union between King Charles and Queen Disa in Zembla. Kinbote contrasts Shade's marital portrayal with the complexities of Charles and Disa's relationship, highlighting Charles's indifference and cruelty towards Disa despite her affectionate demeanour. The narrative delves into the circumstances surrounding their meeting and eventual marriage, emphasizing Disa's forgiveness and unwavering love for Charles despite his mistreatment.

When the Zemblan Revolution breaks out, Disa writes a letter to the King to stay with her: "I want you to know that no matter how much you hurt me, you cannot hurt my love" (205). Disa's resilience is showcased through her willingness to reconcile with Charles amidst political upheaval, underscoring her commitment to their relationship despite its challenges.

Kinbote draws parallels between Shade's wife, Sybil, and Queen Disa, suggesting a connection between the idealized portrayal of Sybil in Shade's poem and Disa's physical appearance. However, unlike Shade's loving depiction of Sybil, Charles's relationship with Disa is fraught with indifference and cruelty on his part. Despite Disa's enduring love and forgiveness, Charles remains emotionally distant and callous, contrasting with Shade's portrayal of marital devotion. The narrative also hints at Kinbote's identity as the exiled King of Zembla, mainly through his intimate knowledge of Charles and Disa's relationship and his cryptic assurances to Shade regarding the truthfulness of his rendering. When Shade asks Kinbote about the reliability of the sources, Kinbote assures Shade once he transformed the stuff into poetry, "the stuff will be true, and the people will come alive. A poet's purified truth can cause no pain, no offence. True art is above false honour" (214). Kinbote's enigmatic promises to reveal an "ultimate truth" and an "extraordinary secret" (215) further suggest his deeper involvement in the Zemblan monarchy and its affairs, inviting speculation about his true identity and motives.

In the third-level notes to lines 433-434, Kinbote continues to diverge from Shade's visit to Nice to Queen Disa's Villa. Queen Disa spent her first fifteen years in the villa and returns in 1953 after breaking her marriage with King Charles. This shift in focus highlights Disa's tumultuous relationship with King Charles and her eventual departure from Zembla. Despite Disa's enduring love and forgiveness, King Charles remains indifferent and cruel towards her, prioritizing his desires over their marital bond. Charles takes Disa's suffering as "dreadful outbursts of temper" and annoying "blazes and blasts" (207). Charles lies to Disa, saying he is impotent, but absurdly adds, "A cruise with his pals and a lot of sea bathing" would restore his strength (208). Charles promises to give up his homosexual inclination; however, he succumbs to temptation and repeatedly returned to his old habit. Kinbote's narrative underscores Disa's resilience and determination to end their troubled marriage, symbolized by her return to the Riviera after leaving Charles. Through Kinbote's narration, the complexities of Charles and Disa's relationship are laid bare, revealing Charles's indifference and cruelty towards Disa despite her unwavering love and forgiveness. Kinbote's narrative highlights the stark differences between Shade's portrayal of marital devotion and the complexities of Charles and Disa's relationship within the Zemblan monarchy. By shifting the focus from Shade's narrative

to the intricacies of Charles and Disa's marriage, Kinbote offers a nuanced exploration of love, forgiveness, and personal agency within royal politics and relationships.

After cross-referencing the notes to lines 433-434, we return to the note to line 275, where Kinbote directs readers to pay close attention to Sybil through third-level notes: "(see note to line 247)". Following this instruction leads us to the note attached to line 247: "Sybil." Kinbote asserts that Sybil's origins should be traced back to Canada. However, readers might question the basis for this assertion. Kinbote reveals that Sybil harboured hatred towards him, labelling him with derogatory terms such as "an elephantine tick; a king-sized botfly; a macaco worm; the monstrous parasite of a genius" (171). Despite claiming forgiveness, Kinbote's commentary belies his true feelings as he attacks Sybil. In the third-level note for line 247 "Sybil," Kinbote further inserts three fourth-level notes referencing lines 246, 578, and 433-434. Upon examination, Kinbote neglects to acknowledge Shade's deep affection for Sybil, dismissing their relationship as merely serving a "structural purpose to transition to" his daughter (171). Additionally, in the fourth-level note for line 578, labelled "the other," Kinbote suggests the presence of another woman in Shade's marriage and directs readers to associate this woman with one of Shade's students mentioned in his foreword (228). These notes illuminate Kinbote's vindictive and narrow-minded nature as he seeks revenge on Sybil for her disdain towards him by undermining her portrayal in his commentary.

In this section, I analyze how Kinbote employs a tree structure within his annotations to establish a multi-level system of references and notes, thereby establishing connections between Shade's poem and his imagined realm of Zembla. Kinbote's approach mirrors the structure of a tree data model, with the Zembla code serving as the root node. Building upon this foundation, Kinbote utilizes the tree structure to construct first-level notes as parent nodes and second-level notes as child nodes. The third-level notes then function as leaf nodes, weaving a network that links Shade's poem to the polity of Zembla. Kinbote's commentary extends beyond merely providing relevant information and interpretations of Shade's poem. Instead, his primary objective is to divert readers' attention towards his elaborate intertextual web of Zembla and his self-proclaimed identity as the Zemblan King. This sentiment forms the root node of Kinbote's narrative, representing his overarching desire to intertwine Shade's poem with the saga of Zembla. As readers delve deeper into the layers of Kinbote's commentary, they uncover a rich tapestry of Zemblan history, culture, and politics, each branch extending from the central theme of Kinbote's narrative ambition.

Summary

This chapter investigates Kinbote's utilization of patterns of a/symmetry, synchrony, and the tree structure within *Pale Fire* to establish correlations between Shade's poem and his fictional realm of Zembla. I explore Kinbote's deployment of an a/symmetrical structure, which manifests in creating an inverted duality between Shade and himself. Kinbote observes the symmetry inherent in Shade's poem and aligns it with corresponding elements of geography, natural settings, and interpersonal dynamics in his portrayal of Zembla. Through this mirror mechanism and the manipulation of a/symmetry, Kinbote intertwines Shade's poetry with the thematic elements of Zembla, effectively subverting the significance of Shade's work while accentuating his Zembla-centric narrative. Despite the mirror mechanism potentially offering Kinbote a means to comprehend Shade, his preoccupation with Zembla prevents a genuine understanding of Shade's psyche. Kinbote remains fixated on Zembla, failing to grasp Shade's motivations, emotions, and artistic expressions, including his obsession with the otherworld, his love for Sybil, and his sorrow over Hazel's suicide. Kinbote's obsession with Zembla is a barrier to accurate interpretation of Shade's intentions, rendering him incapable of truly understanding Shade's actions, emotions and art correctly.

I explore Shade's utilization of synchrony to juxtapose Hazel's suicide with their anxious vigil, as well as Kinbote's manipulation of synchrony to juxtapose Shade's poetic endeavours with Gradus's murderous journey. In this context, synchrony transcends mere temporal coincidence; instead, it functions as a narrative device to establish connections between disparate events for a specific narrative purpose. In Kinbote's case, the synchrony between Shade's poetic creation and Gradus's pursuit is not grounded in factual evidence; instead, it is a deliberate narrative construction aimed at advancing his agenda of constructing Zembla and asserting his identity as the exiled King. Furthermore, I investigate Kinbote's deployment of the tree structure within his annotations to create multi-level referencing notes, facilitating the correlation between Shade's poem and his imagined realm of Zembla. In this structure, akin to a node in a tree data model, the Zembla code serves as the root node. Kinbote strategically employs the tree structure to establish first-level notes as parent nodes and second-level notes as child nodes, with third-level notes serving as leaf nodes, forming a complex web that links Shade's poem to the intricacies of Zembla. However, Kinbote's commentary does not provide genuine insight or interpretation of Shade's work; instead, it aims to divert readers' attention towards his intertextual web of Zembla and his purported identity as the exiled King.

I put forth three interconnected arguments. Firstly, I argue that pattern recognition is not merely fuzzy thinking or ambiguous intuition but a potent cognitive capability and associative

facility. It can be a compelling narrative strategy to establish connections between seemingly unrelated elements. Kinbote adeptly employs patterns of mirror symmetry, synchrony, and tree structure to correlate Shade's poem with Zembla, thereby illustrating both the efficacy and limitations of pattern recognition. Secondly, I contend that Kinbote's seemingly absurd commentary on Shade's verses is not a manifestation of mental disorder or literary incapability but rather a deliberate scheme to construct Zembla through his parasitic commentary. This highlights the potential of the human mind in reality construction, drawing upon faculties of memory, imagination, and cognition. Thirdly, I argue that while attentive readers may identify Kinbote's misinterpretation of Shade's poem, they unconsciously seek traces linking to Zembla. Despite recognizing Kinbote's logical flaws and narrative conspiracy, readers are trained to discern synchronized patterns of familiar stimuli, anticipating their significance within the novel. Kinbote strategically employs synchrony to forge internal links between the various levels of fiction, correlating Shade's poem with his Zembla. In *Pale Fire*, Nabokov masterfully intertwines Shade's poem with Kinbote's commentary, creating a polyphonic literary texture wherein independent voices maintain autonomy while converging to produce a new harmonious whole. This chapter elucidates how pattern recognition is crucial to decoding Kinbote's construction of Zembla and understanding the complexities of *Pale Fire* and Nabokov's artistry.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how Nabokov's literary writing engages with four scientific disciplines: biology, physics, psychology, and cognitive psychology. Nabokov's interest in the interplay between art and science enables him to develop a distinctive prose style and to apply scientific insights in ways unique among his literary peers. By examining themes such as evolution and mimicry, the textual representation of time, and workings of the mind, this thesis offers an integrated, interdisciplinary perspective on the complex relationship between Nabokov's art and his scientific interests, and reflects on how this relation shapes the way readers might understand his literary narratives. Nabokov's blending of art and science enhances our understanding of the two fields, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of science and the reflective and predictive power of the arts.

Chapters Two and Three examine Nabokov's engagement with contemporary scientific theories, including evolutionary biology, Darwinian theory, and New Physics. They illustrate how his fiction serves as a counterpoint to prevailing scientific paradigms, demonstrating how scientific knowledge influences thematic and structural elements, from the biological intricacies in *The Gift* to the conceptualization of time in *Ada*. In contrast, Chapters Four and Five adopt a more speculative approach, exploring how Nabokov resonates with developments in psychology and cognitive science, such as subjective double and cognitive mapping. The methodological differences between these chapters have significant implications for understanding Nabokov's literary legacy. Chapters Two and Three position him as a writer who critically engages with and critiques the scientific paradigms of his time, highlighting his deep understanding of the relationship between science and art and suggesting that his works can be seen as dialogues challenging reductive scientific hypothesis. Conversely, the speculative nature of Chapters Four and Five portrays Nabokov as a prescient figure whose narrative innovations resonate with modern psychological theories. This duality underscores his ability to navigate between rigorous intellectual engagement and imaginative exploration, suggesting that his fiction is both reflective of its historical context and anticipatory of future discourses. Ultimately, these methodological distinctions enrich our appreciation of Nabokov's oeuvre, revealing the complexity of his exploration of human consciousness, perception, and creativity, while inviting readers to consider the broader implications of integrating scientific inquiry with artistic expression.

6.1 Connection and Commonality of Arts and Science

Nabokov's influence on Russian and English literature is well-established. Thanks to the efforts of scholars such as Robert M. Pyle, Charles Lee Remington, Kurt Johnson, Steve Coates, and Steven Blackwell, Nabokov's significant scientific contributions are also widely recognized. However, ample room remains to explore the tension between his scientific views and his metaphysical philosophy, his perspectives on time and space, his political motives and artistic presentation, and his reflection on and prediction of scientific ideas. This thesis adopts critical scientific concepts and literary approaches to examine Nabokov's engagement with four scientific disciplines: biology, physics, psychology, and neuroscience.

Chapter one demonstrates that Nabokov's lepidopterological research significantly illuminates his artistic works in his *The Gift* and its supplement, "Father's Butterflies." I propose four arguments in this chapter. Firstly, as both a formidable novelist and a professional biologist with an interest in evolutionary theory, Nabokov held a multifaceted and critical attitude towards Darwinism. He did not entirely reject Darwinian theory but approached it with scepticism, particularly regarding its emphasis on the utilitarian aspects of natural selection. Nabokov challenged the Darwinian focus on utility and survival mechanisms, suggesting that it underestimated the complexity and creativity inherent in nature. This perspective allowed him to explore and emphasize aspects of evolution not solely driven by survival and reproduction. His scepticism towards Darwinian orthodoxy and his interest in the non-utilitarian aspects of nature significantly influenced his literary work. His fiction often treats themes of complexity, coincidence, and the interplay between reality and perception. The detail and layered meanings in his writing reflect his scientific curiosity and openness to the profound beauty of the natural world. Secondly, by highlighting the role of coincidence in mimicry, Nabokov draws attention to unpredictable and non-linear aspects of evolution, as well as often-overlooked coincidental phenomena in nature. This idea resonates with his artistic sensibilities, where creativity and unexpected connections play crucial roles. His notion that coincidence in nature should be appreciated echoes his aesthetic philosophy that values serendipity and creativity. Nabokov's concept of coincidence in mimicry may even foreshadow aspects of neutral evolution, suggesting that development happens sporadically rather than continuously. Thirdly, Nabokov emphasizes the gaps within species and the conceptual nature of the concept of species itself, proposing that the origin of species is not merely a matter of concrete archetypal forms but at some level an abstract concept within the human mind. His literary works are imbued with metaphysical and symbolic dimensions, which can be seen as a response

to the perceived limitations of Darwinian theory. His use of symbols, such as spirals, and his exploration of abstract concepts like the nature of species, add layers of meaning that transcend traditional evolutionary explanations. Lastly, Nabokov's unique position within Darwinism illustrates a synergy between his aesthetic vision and scientific inquiry. He may have integrated elements of Greek and East Asian philosophies, such as Daoism and Zhuangzi, into his scientific research and literary works. His preference for intuition over a singular reliance upon reason, along with his metaphysical inclination, shows a harmonious blend of artistic and scientific thought. These tendencies align with a mythical or poetic understanding of the world and serve as a reflection of the Western modernist logic-oriented view of the world. Nabokov's critical perspective allowed him to explore themes of creativity, coincidence, and the metaphysical in both his scientific and artistic endeavours, thereby enriching his contributions to literature and science.

Chapter two evaluates Nabokov's nuanced representations and experimental treatment of time in *Ada*, particularly in light of advancements in the New physics, notably theories of relativity and quantum mechanics. The analysis unfolds from three distinct perspectives: Firstly, Nabokov employs literary techniques to convey Van's unconventional notions of de-spatialized, purified, and perceptional time, thereby activating the power and paradox inherent in such conceptualizations. Secondly, Nabokov's subtle wordplay to suggest the possibility of reverse time offers insight into the narrative complexities and philosophical implications of temporal reversibility within the novel. Lastly, Nabokov's portrayal of the twin planets Terra and Antiterra within the narrative demonstrates that he deploys this dual planetary system to construct a multilevel universe characterized by asymmetrical temporality. The chapter appraises the interplay between narrative structure and the conceptual frameworks of the New Physics, illuminating the thematic resonances and intellectual depth of Nabokov's treatment of time in *Ada*. The interplay of art and physics in *Ad*a allows Nabokov to push the boundaries of both disciplines. By incorporating theories from the New Physics into his narratives, such as relativity and quantum mechanics, Nabokov demonstrates how these concepts can influence literary techniques. We can observe this influence in the way Nabokov uses non-linear narratives and fragmented perspectives to mirror the uncertainties and interconnectedness found in quantum mechanics. Integrating physical themes or concepts such as de-spatialized time or temporal reversibility not only serve as plot devices but also provoke philosophical reflections on human experience, perception, and existence.

In examining Nabokov's aesthetics of temporality in *Ada*, I make three interconnected points. Firstly, "The Texture of Time" is not merely an episode within *Ada*; its implications

permeate and interweave throughout the novel. Van's exploration of the texture of time showcases a unique blend of artistic and scientific sensibilities, underscoring its significance as a thematic thread intricately woven into the narrative fabric. In *Ada*, Van's construction of his thesis on "The Texture of Time" is more than just an intellectual pursuit; it serves as a deeply personal exploration intertwined with his relationship with Ada. Their incestuous relationship, taboo yet passionately pursued, mirrors Van's philosophical musings on time, suggesting a mutual affirmation between his theoretical constructs and lived experience. Through Van's narrative voice, Nabokov masterfully blends his meditation on time with his passion for Ada, inviting readers to contemplate the interplay between intellectual inquiry and personal introspection within the broader context of the novel's temporal themes. This thematic thread reveals Nabokov's ability to merge scientific concepts with literary art, demonstrating his skill in creating a narrative that operates on multiple levels of meaning. By embedding complex temporal themes throughout the novel, Nabokov invites readers to engage deeply with the narrative, encouraging a more nuanced and reflective reading experience.

Secondly, Nabokov employs Van's concept of pure, perceptual, and de-spatialized time to challenge conventional notions of temporality as causally sequenced. By doing so, he poetically engages with the ongoing debate on time, drawing inspiration from the philosophical inquiries of Einstein and Bergson. This approach allows Nabokov to disrupt traditional linear storytelling, instead presenting time as a fluid and subjective experience. This narrative technique not only enriches the reader's understanding of the characters' inner lives but also reflects Nabokov's artistic aim to transcend the boundaries of conventional narrative forms. Van's unconventional relationship with Ada further enriches this exploration, presenting them not merely as taboo lovers but as embodiments of Nabokov's thematic concerns. Their forbidden love challenges societal norms and underscores the novel's exploration of freedom and individuality, reflecting Nabokov's rationale for presenting them in a way that intertwines their personal and philosophical dimensions. Through Van's musings, Nabokov crafts a rich tapestry of temporal exploration that pushes the boundaries of narrative convention, showcasing his innovative approach to the art of storytelling.

Lastly, Nabokov's construction and exploration of reversible time, multilevel universes, parallel time, and alternate realities subtly allude to or evoke the many-worlds interpretation of quantum theory. By incorporating these advanced scientific ideas, Nabokov positions his work within the context of contemporary scientific discourse, bridging the gap between art and science. Far from withdrawing from social realities, *Ada* serves as Nabokov's implicit engagement with the New Physics, presenting and experimenting with time as both a response

to and a challenge against causal temporalities. This engagement highlights Nabokov's commitment to exploring the frontiers of human knowledge and his belief in the power of art to reflect and interrogate complex scientific theories. *Ada* represents Nabokov's artistic liberation from the constraints of conventional time as he deftly navigates the intersections between fiction, the New Physics, and modern philosophy. Through *Ada*, Nabokov questions deterministic views of time or challenges the limitations of empirical approaches, and invites readers to ponder the multifaceted nature of temporality in relation to the landscape of physics and philosophy. For Nabokov, the interplay of art and physics provides a platform for artistic experimentation and expression, and expands the thematic scope of his narratives and underscores his belief in the interconnectedness of human creativity, intellectual exploration, and the pursuit of knowledge.

Chapter three synthesizes literary and psychological perspectives in *Despair* to examine Hermann's abnormal psychological states and mental complexities. Hermann forms, solidifies, and rationalizes his delusional belief that Felix is his double, culminating in his conviction that murdering Felix is a form of art. Nabokov portrays Hermann's syndrome within the intertextual context of Dostoevsky's literary oeuvre. This analysis highlights four main arguments: Firstly, Nabokov parodies the detective narrative genre in the novel to stress the need for a solid foundation in evidence examination. Hermann's belief that he resembles Felix is his alone, undermining his credibility despite gathering extensive evidence. This theme underscores the novel's caution against favouring personal beliefs over objective truths. Hermann's insistence on his resemblance reveals how unchecked subjectivity distorts reality, challenging readers to reassess the reliability of narratives and human perception in analysing evidence. Hermann serves as a warning about the dangers of ego and self-delusion in seeking truth, stressing the need for objective reasoning over confirmation bias. Nabokov take Hermann to reflection on how biases influence narratives and real-world investigations, urging critical evidence evaluation and interpretation. Secondly, Nabokov employs Hermann's subjective double to emphasize the role of motivation in shaping human behaviour and to explore the narrative possibilities inherent in subjective realities. I posit that Hermann's cognitive limitations, lack of empathy, and warped ideology are pivotal in nurturing his erroneous delusion. By applying the concept of the subjective double, I show how Nabokov's narrative illuminates the complexities of psychology, demonstrating how internal motivations influence outward actions and perceptions within the narrative framework.

Thirdly, the analysis reveals Nabokov's nuanced perspective on Dostoevsky, demonstrating both admiration and critique. Contrary to the prevailing interpretation of

Nabokov's disdain for Dostoevsky, *Despair* showcases a complex engagement with Dostoevsky's literary legacy. Nabokov draws inspiration from Dostoevsky while also subverting his themes and techniques, asserting his unique narrative style and philosophical viewpoints. Lastly, Nabokov in *Despair* anticipates or reflects the psychological intricacies associated with the subjective double phenomenon. This exploration sheds light on its intellectual, moral, ideological, and intertextual dimensions. *Despair* challenges conventional interpretations by illustrating how literary works can serve as vehicles for exploring psychological phenomena and clinical syndromes. This chapter challenges preconceptions about Nabokov's relationship with Dostoevsky, arguing that *Despair* not only acknowledges but also creatively engages with Dostoevsky's legacy. Through Hermann's subjective double, Nabokov invites readers to ponder the intellectual and moral dimensions of human psychology, showcasing the profound potential of literature to illuminate and enrich our understanding of psychological complexities. *Despair* merges psychological study with detective storytelling, challenging and subverting genre expectations. By twisting these conventions, Nabokov critiques the detective genre's dependence on rational deduction and probes the complexities of subjective experience. This narrative approach prompts readers to reflect on how established genre norms shape their interpretations of characters and plot developments, complicating traditional narrative structures and unveiling deeper thematic layers. Ultimately, Nabokov's exploration encourages a critical examination of both fictional narratives and real-world investigations, highlighting the influence of biases on perceptions of truth and reality.

Chapter four explores how *Pale Fire* bridges scientific advancements in pattern recognition with artistic creation. In *Pale Fire*, a convergence unfolds between scientific theories of pattern recognition and the act of artistic composition. This chapter makes three central inquiries: firstly, what narrative patterns does Kinbote generate, and how does he forge connections between Shade's poem and the fictional realm of Zembla? Secondly, how does Kinbote utilize these patterns to organize information and interweave references to Zembla throughout his commentary? Lastly, to what extent does Kinbote successfully use pattern recognition to align Shade's poem with his vision of Zembla? This study advances three interconnected arguments: firstly, in *Pale Fire*, Kinbote employs three primary patterns—mirror symmetry, synchrony, and tree structure—to link Shade's poem with Zembla. These patterns serve as interpretative frameworks through which Kinbote intertwines the fictional Zembla with Shade's poetic narrative. This use of patterns reflects Nabokov's fascination with complexity and structure, showcasing his ability to blend seemingly disparate elements into a cohesive artistic vision. In *Pale Fire*, the novel's structure itself serves as a canvas for exploring

these themes of pattern recognition and artistic creation. Nabokov employs a unique narrative structure—where Kinbote's commentary frames Shade's poem—to illustrate the interplay of mirror symmetry, synchrony, and tree structure. This structure enhances the complexity of the narrative and underscores Nabokov's fascination with blending disparate elements into a cohesive artistic vision. By weaving these patterns in the novel, Nabokov challenges readers to engage deeply with how narrative form influences interpretation and meaning in literature.

Secondly, Kinbote's seemingly eccentric commentary on Shade's poetry is not merely a result of his mental instability or literary inadequacy but a deliberate strategy to construct Zembla through his parasitic commentary. By imposing his narrative over Shade's poem, Kinbote seeks to assert his version of reality, blurring the lines between fact and fiction. This deliberate strategy underscores Nabokov's exploration of unreliable narration and the subjective nature of reality, themes that permeate his work. Lastly, while readers may discern Kinbote's misinterpretations of Shade's poem, they often unknowingly embrace the Zembla narrative embedded within Kinbote's parasitic and narcissistic commentary. This underscores the importance of narrative patterns in deciphering Nabokov's artistic vision and how cognitive processes, such as pattern recognition, shape our understanding of complex literary works like *Pale Fire*, revealing deeper layers of meaning beneath the surface. This aspect of Nabokov's art highlights the power of storytelling to shape perception and the susceptibility of readers to be influenced by persuasive narratives. Alongside this narrative manipulation, *Pale Fire* weaves in elements of a detective story, offering a meta-commentary on literary criticism and the investigative nature of uncovering hidden meanings within texts. It reveals Nabokov's understanding of human cognition and his ability to manipulate narrative structures to create specific literary effects. These arguments emphasize the crucial role of narrative patterns in deciphering Nabokov's artistic vision and illuminate the ways in which literature can challenge and manipulate perceptions of reality through narrative construction.

The four chapters demonstrate that art and science are inseparable from Nabokov's creativity. His works are deeply infused with a scientific orientation, where science is not merely a thematic episode but is interwoven within the literary strategies of nearly all his writings. Nabokov believes that the affinity between art and science lies in their mutual grounding in nature and human consciousness, and he puts this belief to use in composing narratives with specific forms, themes, and generic features. In *The Gift*, he parodies biography; in *Ada*, he playfully engages with science fiction and the family chronicle; *Despair* parodies psychology and detective fiction; and *Pale Fire* satirizes critical commentary in concert with the detective novel. These works not only showcase Nabokov's mastery of literary parody but

also highlight his profound exploration of human perception and the constructed nature of narrative genres. He posits that human consciousness and cognitive and perceptive abilities are effective and sophisticated tools for artistic creation and scientific investigation. Nabokov argus that since human consciousness is an integral part of nature and interacts with it, art is not alien to scientific discovery but rather enhances it. He asserts that the "creative force of human consciousness" can access nature's "depths of reality."[1] Nabokov emphasizes that scientific and artistic activities are not radically distinct; they share a profound commonality and mutually benefit each other.

6.2 Rediscovery of Arts: Anti-causality and Cognitive Power

Nabokov underscores the profound connection between the arts and sciences, highlighting their anti-causal and cognitive potency. Firstly, he contends that the arts embody forms of knowledge beyond science's reach. Secondly, he esteems the arts for their capacity to challenge the logic and deterministic nature inherent in scientific inquiry. Thirdly, Nabokov argues that the arts possess the ability to revise and refine scientific hypotheses, stimulate innovation, and even forecast scientific advancements.

Nabokov believes that the arts represent forms of knowledge that are inaccessible to science. He considers the arts an open and unbounded system transcending rationality and causality. Nabokov highlights the power of art in identifying and justifying inherent coherence from a large body of evidence. Like scientists, artists seek to identify or construct intrinsic correlations. Nabokov uses his narrators—such as Humbert in *Lolita*, Hermann in *Despair*, and Kinbote in *Pale Fire*—to explore the narrative potential of self-conscious solipsism and the subjective realities of the mind. When defending their errors or crimes, these narrators use the same evidence as their prosecutors (the author) but under different explanatory frameworks, compelling the jury (the reader) to judge which explanation is more convincing. For example, in *Pale Fire*, Nabokov creatively plays with pattern and pattern recognition, demonstrating that narrative pattern is critical to understanding his art. This exploration furnishes insights into both the art of literature and human cognition.

Nabokov values the power of art in challenging the logos and causality of science. While science strives to discover the rules that reflect the empirical regularities of the world, valuing principles of regularity, consistency, and coherence, art seeks out irregularities, novelty, and

[1] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 11.

singularities. Nabokov's stance on anti-causality asserts that art can enjoy autonomy and freedom beyond the laws of causality. Steven Blackwell argues that Nabokov aims to use aesthetic perception to escape the deterministic laws of causality, achieving free will in Schopenhauerian terms.[2] I agree with this idea and would add that this free will extends to the individual and God. Nabokov suggests that there is a divine will beyond deterministic mechanisms and causality. Nabokov despises practical utilitarianism but places pure science alongside pure art, both of which can escape causality and achieve aesthetic and intellectual bliss. He remarks, "The highest achievements in poetry, prose, painting, and showmanship are characterized by the irrational and illogical, by that spirit of free will that snaps its rainbow fingers in the face of smug causality."[3] For example, in *Ada*, Nabokov's protagonist, Van, proposes an individualized, purified, and textured conception of time that challenges the most influential philosophies and the notions of causal and deterministic temporalities.

Nabokov contends that the arts not only have the capacity to revise and refine scientific hypotheses but also to inspire and even predict certain scientific hypotheses. His scientific intuitions offer insights into recent studies of complex systems. For instance, Nabokov displayed a keen interest in the "magic triangles," the reproductive apparatus of the male butterfly form, which appeared to be minimally affected by environmental and survival pressures. Steven Blackwell argues that Nabokov's synthetic approach to species and his study of non-adaptive apparatus anticipated the work of Stephen Jay Gould and Richard C. Lewontin, who proposed that many features may lack adaptive advantages.[4] Alexander suggests that Nabokov's preference for coincidence might anticipate or support the concept of neutral evolution.[5] Nabokov's prediction regarding neutral evolution illustrates that an artist's intuition can align with scientific inquiry. In *Despair*, Nabokov uses Hermann's psychological mechanisms to reflect or anticipate the clinical syndrome of the subjective double, highlighting its intellectual, moral, and ideological dimensions. Nabokov suggests that literary works may predict or offer valuable insights for extending the investigation of scientific problems or psychological syndromes. His works thus offer an excellent

[2] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 187.
[3] Nabokov, *The Man from the USSR and Other Plays*, 326.
[4] Stephen Jay Gould and Richard C. Lewontin, "The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme," in *Shaping Entrepreneurship Research* (Routledge, 2020), 204-221.
[5] Victoria N. Alexander, "Nabokov, Teleology, and Insect Mimicry," *Nabokov Studies* 7 (2003):177-214.

opportunity to deepen our understanding of human nature and broaden our exploration of scientific phenomena.

6.3 Re-evaluation of Science: Validity, Limitation and Paradox

Nabokov emphasizes the particular power of the arts and brings attention to science's validity and limitations. His revaluation of science can be summarized from three perspectives. Firstly, regarding his overall attitude, Nabokov harbours a suspicion of the pervasive validity of scientific theories. Secondly, concerning scientific objects, Nabokov favours exceptional cases and accidental factors over deterministic causality. Thirdly, regarding scientific methodology, Nabokov prefers qualitative over quantitative research and leans towards a subjective or intuitive approach rather than a purely statistical or mathematical method. Nabokov's scepticism towards science and his emphasis on its limitations may stem from his scientific philosophy and his inclination towards idealism rather than positivism.

Firstly, in his works, Nabokov skilfully intertwines science and art, illustrating their interconnectedness while also expressing scepticism about their convergence. In *Despair*, for instance, he explores the psychological complexities of Hermann through a lens that acknowledges the scientific foundations of cognition and perception. Hermann's delusions serve as a mirror to scientific inquiries into the mind's workings, yet they also reveal the limitations of such analyses in capturing the depths of human experience. Beneath this synthesis, Nabokov maintains a critical perspective on the complete integration of science and art, highlighting the shortcomings of scientific methods when applied to the nuanced realm of human emotion and creativity. For example, Kinbote's misguided attempts to impose a scientific rationale on Shade's poem underscore the risks of reducing art to mere empirical analysis. Nabokov's scepticism suggests that while scientific inquiry can enhance our understanding of artistic endeavours, it cannot fully encapsulate the richness and subjectivity inherent in artistic expression. His works invite readers to appreciate the dialogue between science and art while also acknowledging the distinct boundaries that define their respective domains.

Nabokov tends to criticize rather than support prevailing scientific theories, often seeking to challenge or undermine the authority of any systematizing theory or claim of knowledge. He stresses the cognitive limitations or vulnerabilities inherent in science, as evidenced by his critiques of figures such as Darwin, Freud, and Einstein. While science is often assumed to provide objective knowledge, Nabokov reminds us there is no genuinely objective science, as humans engage in scientific inquiry through unavoidably

subjective observation and cognition. He asserts that there are no bare facts, as even seemingly objective observations are inevitably influenced by the subjective perspectives of the observer and describer. In his words, "bare facts do not exist in a state of nature, for they are never really quite bare […] I doubt whether you can even give your telephone number without giving something of yourself."[6] Personal biases and subjective views indicate that individuals might bring their misconceptions and biases into their scientific research. Additionally, when encountering unexplained phenomena, people often create plausible explanations or fabricate an outcome, which can result in errors or misinterpretations. Nabokov believes that while nature can be studied scientifically, this approach may also give rise to faulty schemas and false knowledge.

Nabokov suggests that science taken as doxa can distort our understanding of nature and the world or suppress alternative explanations. This perspective is vividly illustrated through Hermann in *Despair* and Kinbote in *Pale Fire*. In *Despair*, Hermann's belief that he has found his double in Felix, whom he considers a perfect likeness, demonstrates a profound misperception of reality. Hermann constructs a schema based on his subjective interpretation of similarity, ignoring objective evidence that contradicts his belief. This mirrors Nabokov's critique of scientific objectivity: just as Hermann's flawed perception leads to disastrous consequences, scientific inquiries influenced by subjective biases could result in erroneous conclusions. Hermann's delusion underscores the danger of over-relying on one's subjective framework to interpret the world, a critique that parallels Nabokov's scepticism towards the absolute authority of scientific theories which might overlook or misinterpret the complexity of nature. In *Pale Fire*, Kinbote's commentary on Shade's poem serves as another example of how subjective perspectives can distort understanding. Kinbote imposes his narrative of Zembla over Shade's work, constructing a reality that aligns with his obsessions rather than the poem's actual content. His elaborate interpretations, often detached from the poem's original meaning, illustrate how an individual's subjective framework can overshadow and distort the intended message. This reflects Nabokov's assertion that scientific observations are influenced by the observer's perspective, leading to potentially flawed conclusions. Kinbote's imposition of his Zembla narrative, despite its evident absurdity, demonstrates how dominant explanatory models can suppress alternative interpretations, much like how entrenched scientific paradigms can marginalize other ways of understanding nature. Hermann's and Kinbote's distorted realities serve as metaphors for the potential pitfalls in scientific inquiry, where subjective

[6] Vladimir Nabokov, *Nikolai Gogol* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1944), 119.

interpretation and the imposition of preconceived frameworks can distort the true nature of phenomena. Nabokov's portrayal of these characters suggests a scepticism towards the idea that science, with its claims to objectivity, can fully capture the multifaceted reality of the world. Instead, he highlights the need for a more nuanced approach that recognizes the limitations and subjectivity inherent in all forms of knowledge.

Due to the complexity of nature and unavoidable subjectivity of the observer, Nabokov emphasizes that a fundamental gap exists between human perception and nature's ultimate truth. He views nature, the world, or reality as "an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable."[7] This perspective highlights Nabokov's recognition of the limitations inherent in human understanding and the interpretative nature of observation. By acknowledging this gap, Nabokov underscores the elusive and multifaceted nature of reality, which can never be fully captured through a single viewpoint. Nabokov underscores the inaccessibility of the unknown and the limitations of science, stating, "We shall never know the origin of life, or the meaning of life, or the nature of space and time, or the nature of nature, or the nature of thought."[8] This suggests that the world is more intricate than our perception allows, and no matter how precise science becomes, it cannot fully capture the ultimate truth. Nabokov encourages his narrators and characters to question the authority of science and propose ideas grounded in nonutilitarian or artistic principles. It is important to note that Nabokov does not deny science's ability to provide detailed information about nature. He acknowledges the power of science in describing and explaining nature and the human world. Nevertheless, he insists that much of the unknown lies beyond human perception, knowledge, and consciousness. This theme permeates his work, inviting readers to explore the boundaries of perception and the intricate relationship between the observer and the observed.

Secondly, regarding scientific objects, Nabokov favours exceptional cases and accidental factors over deterministic causality. He challenges science's causal and deterministic laws by emphasizing particular circumstances, unexpected situations, random elements, and unknown domains. Nabokov argues that the objects of scientific study are not static but are constantly in motion and subject to change. For instance, he critiques Darwinism's selective principle by pointing out that if a species is inherently bound to change, it becomes challenging to identify the specific stimulus responsible for that change. Nabokov suggests that the hidden aspects of nature and human life lie in "the

[7] Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 10.
[8] Ibid., 45.

underside of the weave" [9] and "other climes of this world."[10] He proposes that a careful observer can access these unknown domains through irregularities and exceptional cases. This perspective fosters a deep fascination with unconventional situations, unique mechanisms, and extraordinary events, evident in the singularity of his narratives and themes. In *The Gift*, Fyodor's father employs mimicry to illustrate elements in nature that surpass mere survival, reflecting a profound engagement with the exceptional and the singular. Similarly, in *Ada*, Van's exploration of time defies linear causality, showcasing Nabokov's fascination with the irregular and extraordinary. Furthermore, Nabokov deepens Van's exploration of temporal singularity through his incestuous affair with Ada, emphasizing the intertwining of personal and temporal anomalies. Through these characters, Nabokov challenges deterministic narratives and underscores the importance of alternative perspectives in both scientific inquiry and artistic creation. While Nabokov acknowledges the significance of causality, he argues against it being the sole legitimate explanation of nature and the world, advocating instead for non-causal and non-mechanistic scientific hypotheses. His intense interest in exceptional cases and uncharted domains aligns with Thomas Kuhn's notion that "novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation." [11] Embracing novelty, exceptions, and anomalies enhances awareness of phenomena that diverge from conventional expectations, thereby enriching scientific understanding.

Thirdly, regarding the scientific method, Nabokov prefers qualitative over quantitative research and favours subjective, ideological, philosophical, or intuitive approaches over statistical and mathematical techniques. His scientific poetics are infused with a solid philosophical flavour and a metaphysical bent. Nabokov is sceptical of the role of scientific work in the modern world and questions its reliance on mathematical principles. He asserts that mathematicians succeed because "we have allowed them to dictate the terms of the competition. The fate of every theory of the universe is decided by a numerical test."[12] Nabokov questions whether mathematicians understand the world better than poets. He argues that historically, numbers served to support human cognition and "happened to fit into the pattern we apprehended"; however, in the modern world, society has become increasingly grounded in numbers, and no one is "surprised at the queer fact of the outer network becoming an inner

[9] Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, 17.
[10] Nabokov. *Speak, Memory*, 35.
[11] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 64.
[12] Arthur Eddington, *New Pathways in Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), 324.

skeleton."[13] Nabokov contends that despite the dominance of mathematics in contemporary society, "in this divinely absurd world of the mind, mathematical symbols do not thrive. Their interplay, no matter how smoothly it works, no matter how dutifully it mimics the convolutions of our dreams and the quantum of our mental associations, can never really express what is utterly foreign to their nature, considering that the main delight of the creative mind is the sway accorded to a seemingly incongruous detail over a seemingly dominant generalization."[14] In *The Gift* and "Father's Butterflies," Nabokov portrays his characters, like Konstantin, shifting the concept of evolution from the biological realm into the domain of mind and consciousness, arguing that evolution occurs not in the actual world but in human consciousness. In *Ada*, the protagonist Van proposes a similar view, suggesting that time does not change, but our conception of time within the human mind changes. Nabokov suggests that subjective or intuitive approaches have a place in interpreting and discovering nature and the world**.**

Nabokov makes many insightful remarks on science; however, there is some paradox within his anti-causality stance. He views science as a rigid, deterministic, and closed system. Yet, scientific hypotheses such as Darwinism, Freudianism, and Einstein's theories of relativity are not deterministic; they are complex explanatory systems consistently revised by their proponents. To some degree, Nabokov's critiques were not aimed at the scientific theories themselves but rather at simplified versions of these theories in readers' minds. For example, Nabokov often satirizes Freudian psychoanalysis based on a caricatured or simplified version of Freud's causal account of human personality and minds. To Nabokov, Freud's theory appears simplistic, reductive, and false. However, the actual power and depth of Freudian theory are much more significant, necessitating Nabokov's lifelong struggle with it. Just as Nabokov's literary works are sometimes simplified by readers, leading to controversy, equally, he may have misunderstood or oversimplified scientific hypotheses, leading to his controversial critiques of these systems of thoughts. Such misunderstandings are unavoidable due to the limitations of human cognition and the complexity of reality.

Nabokov presents a paradox in his view of the nature and progression of science. While science is often regarded as pursuing truth, most scientific theories are fundamentally hypotheses that align with current logic and evidence. These theories serve as tools for achieving specific understanding rather than absolute truths. Scientific hypotheses provide explanatory and descriptive frameworks to discern universal patterns within complex

[13] Nabokov, *Lecture on Literature*, 374.
[14] Ibid., 374.

phenomena, not immutable laws. In "Ultima Thule," the narrator Sineusov reflects on scientific progress, noting that hypotheses are initially proposed and then tested through "calculation and experiment," often characterized as "mimicry and the pantomime of truth." Once accepted, these hypotheses stand as the prevailing explanations until new evidence or scrutiny reveals their shortcomings.[15] This illustrates science as a dynamic process of continual refinement, where faults and errors in hypotheses are challenged and improved upon by subsequent scientific inquiry. Nabokov argues against overstating the authority of science, emphasizing that all hypotheses are subject to revision or replacement with new or exceptional evidence. However, while highlighting the changeability and vulnerability of scientific knowledge, Nabokov may overlook that similar progress occurs across all domains of knowledge and the arts. As both scientist and artist, Nabokov engages in a process where he corrects the errors of his predecessors while also being subject to refinement or correction by future scientists and artists. This dual perspective underscores Nabokov's recognition of the iterative nature of knowledge creation, involving the building upon previous insights, correcting errors, and incorporating new discoveries or perspectives. It reflects Nabokov's belief in the dynamic nature of intellectual pursuits, where advancements in understanding are progressive rather than static, driven by ongoing inquiry and exploration.

6.4 Nabokov's Science Philosophy: Idealism and Anti-positivism

Nabokov asserts that science should address philosophical questions rather than merely rely on statistics. This remark highlights the necessity of exploring the intellectual underpinnings of his conception of science. Nabokov's preference for exceptional cases and accidental factors over deterministic causality and his favouring of subjective, philosophical, or intuitive approaches over statistical and mathematical methods illustrate his alignment with idealism and his disdain for positivist materialism. Nabokov's stance on positivism aligns with Owen Bennett Jones's distinctions. Jones contrasts positivism with idealism within the context of Russian social philosophy, noting that "positivism was associated with progress, with empirical science, with realism in psychology and literature, and thus with the courage to see the world concretely 'as it exists.' Idealism, conversely, was seen as dreamy, abstract, passive, a mystical realm, and therefore reactionary."[16] Among the various forms of idealism, Stephen

[15] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 514.
[16] Owen Bennett Jones, *Problems of Idealism: Essays in Russian Social Philosophy* (Yale University

Blackwell argues that Nabokov may have been most influenced by Kantian idealism, which acknowledges the limitations of human cognition and the mysteries of empirical reality.[17] While I agree with Blackwell's assessment, I would add that Nabokov's endorsement of liberal idealism and opposition to positivism might also have been shaped by his father's Russian liberal idealism and elements of Eastern and ancient Greek philosophy.

Kant's recognition of the limits of knowledge likely influenced Nabokov's scepticism of science. Kant proposed that an enormous unknowable domain remains inaccessible to human perception despite humanity's extensive knowledge of the world. He asserts that while human understanding is limited, a higher understanding might be able to uncover the underlying causes of natural phenomena within the mechanism of nature, which human cognition cannot fully comprehend.[18] Kant emphasizes the necessity of studying individual consciousness, which diverges from empirical phenomena and a shared sense of reality. Nabokov's scientific endeavours led him to recognize the limitations of science, aligning with Kant's view that an infinite realm exists beyond human capacities of perception, knowledge, and cognition. Nabokov suggests that due to the limitations of human cognition and the complexity of reality, we will never fully understand the origin of life, the meaning of existence, the nature of space and time, or the nature of thought.

Nabokov was also influenced by Kant's notion of human subjectivity and dignity. Kantian legal philosophy, which emphasizes personhood, justice, and natural law, significantly impacted Russian criminal law and jurisprudence.[19] Kant argued that human subjectivity cannot be reduced to naturalistic explanations, as individuals possess absolute value and dignity; thus, moral consciousness should be central to legal, political, and ethical considerations. Russian idealists, such as those in the Moscow Psychological Society, integrated Kantian idealism with Orthodox theology, proposing that liberalism and idealism mutually reinforced the doctrine of natural law.[20] They absorbed Kant's ideas on the self's irreducibility to naturalistic explanations and emphasized "the principle of the person, its absolute dignity, its natural and inalienable rights."[21] These idealists argued that positivism's reliance on

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Press, 2003), x.

[17] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 60.

[18] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 275.

[19] Randall Poole, "Kantian Foundations of Russian Liberal Theory: Human Dignity, Justice, and the Rule of Law," presented at the conference "The Weimar Moment: Liberalism, Political Theology, and Law," Institute for Legal Studies, University of Wisconsin Law School. 2008.

[20] Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*, 72.

[21] Jones, *Problems of Idealism*, 29.

empirically derived knowledge undermines human dignity. However, the government led by the Constitutional Democrats, which supported these views, was overthrown by the Bolsheviks, who adopted positivist materialism as their core principle. Nabokov embraced Kant's commitment to protecting human dignity and opposed utilitarianism and positivism, criticizing them for failing to acknowledge human autonomy and moral obligations. Stephen Blackwell contends that Nabokov's struggle against positivist materialist philosophy was "a life-or-death battle waged in ink," in which Nabokov sought to counter "the Bolsheviks' ideology of positivist certainty, teleology, mass conformity, and control" with "an artistic and scientific program based on individuality, curiosity, beauty, and the unknown." [22] Nabokov's endorsement of idealism and disdain for positivism were shaped by Kant's idealism and Russian liberal philosophy.

In addition to Kant's idealism and Russian liberal philosophy, I argued in Chapter One that Nabokov may have absorbed elements of Eastern philosophy, such as Daoism and the teachings of Zhuangzi, into his scientific research and literary creation. Nabokov speculated that there was a mystery behind the world and possibly a consciousness beyond death, suggesting the existence of a soul transcending mortality. In *The Gift* and *Pale Fire*, the butterfly symbolizes the soul and immortality. Nabokov referenced the Zhuangzi episode in his lecture and novel *Ada*.[23] He was fascinated by the butterfly dream of Zhuangzi, who dreamed he was a butterfly and experienced life as a butterfly within the dream. This ontological doubt—that his human experience might merely be the butterfly's dream—resonated with Nabokov. He likely found inspiration in East Asian stories and philosophy. Nabokov's aesthetic view and preference for intuition over reasoning align with the Eastern way of understanding the world. His endorsement of liberal idealism and opposition to positivism may have been shaped by a confluence of influences: Kantian theory, his father, Russian liberal idealism, and Eastern philosophy.

Nabokov reminds us that science is not purely neutral knowledge; instead, it can be easily transferred into the political and social domains and manipulated by those with malicious intentions. Science can be transformed into a political program aimed at reshaping or reconstructing society on ostensibly rational grounds, often based on overconfidence in its power to solve societal problems. Nabokov highlights the double-edged nature of science, noting that it is not inherently true knowledge but rather a hypothesis subject to explicit or

[22] Blackwell, *The Quill and the Scalpel*, 6.
[23] Ibid., 161.

potential errors. He warns that science can be co-opted into a political or social program or power institution. Nabokov was cautious and sensitive to the dangers posed by knowledge or discourse claims, urging us to recognize that any scientific or artistic assertion might be linked to an assertion of power. In some cases, the popularity of science is not due to the validity of its knowledge system but rather the support of a power or political institution. Nabokov advocated for a critical scientific spirit to guard against political or social manipulation.

Nabokov helps us recognize that art and science are not opposing forces; they share much in common and are complementary despite belonging to different disciplines and discourses. Nabokov integrates scientific ideas into the sights, sounds, and textures of his literary works. In doing so, art reduces the power and validity of science while paradoxically gaining a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of it. Nabokov's works serve as the connective tissue that unites these diverse areas of knowledge. He suggests that we can only accurately identify problems and develop effective solutions by integrating dual or multiple perspectives. The distinctiveness of Nabokov's novels, characterized by their composite structures, unconventional subject matter, and complex themes, exemplifies his beliefs about the synergy between science and art. In *The Gift*, he parodies biography to explore non-utilitarian mimicry, neural evolution, and spiral species, challenging Darwinian concepts. *Ada* intertwines a philosophical treatise on time with a romance narrative to explore nonlinear time and the complexities inherent in human relationships. In *Despair*, Nabokov parodies the psychological novel and detective novel genres to examine the intricate interplay of subjective duality and mistaken assumptions. In *Pale Fire*, he interrogates the nature of reality and perception through a multifaceted narrative blending poetry, commentary, and detective fiction. These elements underscore Nabokov's commitment to integrating scientific inquiry with artistic creativity, crafting narratives that provoke readers to transcend conventional boundaries. This approach does not adhere to the dominant theoretical paradigms of literary studies; instead, it engages with the complexity of Nabokov's texts, using scientific discovery to explore the richness of his works and the intricacies of human nature, minds, and behavior. This thesis illuminates the interaction of art and science in Nabokov's works and inspires readers to rediscover commonalities and recreate linkages within the vast expanse of knowledge.

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