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## Nabokovilia: References to Vladimir Nabokov in British and American Literature and Culture, 1960-2009

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NABOKOVILIA: REFERENCES TO VLADIMIR NABOKOV IN BRITISH  
AND AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE, 1960-2009

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the

**Doctor of Philosophy in English**  
**Department of English**  
**College of Liberal Arts**

**Graduate College**  
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**THE GRADUATE COLLEGE**

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**Juan Martinez**

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**May 2011**

ABSTRACT

**Nabokovilia: Nabokov References in British and American Literature  
and Culture, 1960-2009**

by

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The dissertation examines allusions to the Russian-American novelist Vladimir Nabokov in the work of 147 contemporary cultural producers and – through this filter – the way in which allusion functions as symbolic capital in the field of cultural production. Critics have traditionally considered allusion a strictly localized phenomenon, but this approach – which draws upon the work of sociologists of literature such as Franco Moretti and Pierre Bourdieu, as well as the poetics of Gérard Genette – considers how a Nabokov allusion operates as an intra-authorial calling card, where Nabokov appears as an idealized, intransigent autonomous authorial figure in the work of Zadie Smith, Martin Amis, John Updike, Nicholson Baker, Salman Rushdie, Shelley Jackson, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, writers associated with the *McSweeney's* literary journal, and Anthony Burgess, among many others.

Writers reassert the autonomy of the individual author when they reference Nabokov in their own novels, and in doing so these authors form a sort of ad-hoc Nabokovian group or school even when the members and their immediate milieu would not seem to have anything in common otherwise. Nabokov functions as a particularly valuable unit of cultural capital given his symbolic freight: Nabokov stands for autonomous, intransigent authorial figures everywhere, bulwarked by equal parts mainstream bestselling success,

critical respectability, and seeming invisibility. Nabokov's intertextual narrative approaches serve as a means of positioning the reader and controlling readerly and critical reception, which in turn guide how Nabokov himself is referenced in other people's novels, short stories, poems, songs, and television shows. The aim is to provide quantifiable evidence of Nabokov's influence, and to explore the ways in which influence can (and cannot) be roughly quantified; these references allow for a narrower, better understanding of influence by positioning its function within the scope of contemporary intertextual criticism, specifically by examining the intersection of Bourdieu's field of cultural production and Genette's notions of hypertextuality and paratextuality. By delineating the nature and the degree of Nabokov's influence in the field of contemporary literature – an influence made explicit in allusions to Nabokov's work – the research further refines notions of authorial agency in intertextual studies.

Nabokov is one of the twentieth century's most densely allusive authors, one whose novels playfully referenced a dizzying array of literary figures, and one whose own influence on the contemporary literary field is often noted but seldom quantified. Nabokov-related publications aimed at both scholars and general readers will make a note of his influence, often by grouping him with Joyce, Borges, Beckett, and Kafka (with Nabokov as the Fifth Beatle in the panoply of influential literary figures), though the claim is made and then abandoned. The dissertation charts the impact of Nabokov's presence in contemporary literature.

Please note: the dissertation contains an embedded Excel spreadsheet, containing multiple spreadsheets, created using Microsoft Office 2007.

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## PREFACE

When cultural producers reference Nabokov, they reflect not so much on the author referenced but on themselves: on how they fit into their field of cultural production and on what it means to be a creator of an imaginative work. This reflection allows each producer to reinforce certain qualities associated with received notions of authorship: intransigence, autonomy, and independence. Though a Nabokov allusion appears to signal a breaking away from the field, I propose that – taken as a whole – the allusions serve as a consistent unifying factor grouping the seemingly disparate into a coherent whole.

The study of allusion is often strictly localized, since allusion generally seems to pertain to what is immediately at hand. To move away from this narrow focus, I use a theoretical framework that allows for expansion by borrowing from Bourdieu, Genette, and Moretti – Bourdieu for his concept of fields, Genette for his intertextual terminology, and Moretti for his idea of distant reading. The general shape and direction is roughly chronological, working from a study of nested allusions beginning in the seventeenth century to a close study of those Nabokov allusions found in the twenty-first century.

Chapter one examines the history of intertextual theory through nested references in the works of Robert Burton, Laurence Sterne, Alexander Pope, Jane Austen, and Nabokov. Also explored are the key theorists whose work allows for the project's framework, as well as the attendant terminology. I also provide a glimpse into the historical and social context contributing to Nabokov's authorial persona and an overview of current Nabokov scholarship.

Chapter two provides an overview and a distant reading of the Nabokov references found in the work of 147 cultural producers, and examines how these allusions point to a significant, and persistent, intra-authorial conversation wherein the figure of the autonomous, intransigent author is celebrated. I then focus on *Pale Fire* references, the demographic concordance between the data set and the publishing industry at large, and the ways in which Nabokov's distinctive title for his memoir, *Speak, Memory*, is appropriated, all the more interesting in light of the frequent allusions to the opening lines of *Lolita*.

Chapter three examines the ways in which Nabokov allusions in film and television differ from those found in literature, particularly in the disposition of and attitude toward disparate fields of cultural production. The focus is on how the means of dissemination affect dispositions toward one's specific field as well as toward the field of restricted cultural production.

Chapter four examines, in detail, how Nabokov allusions operate in the work of John Updike and Nicholson Baker. Notions of authorship and competition are both far more prevalent and less contested, though intra-authorial conversations about authorship – via authorial references – evince a gradual, historically-situated turn toward greater questioning. Updike demonstrates a great degree more confidence in the authorial figure than does Baker. Baker's authorial explorations are far more involved, particularly his book-length memoir-*cum*-critical-analysis of Updike *U&I*, wherein Updike's cultural capital is frequently joined to Nabokov's.

Chapter five examines Nabokov references in the works of the two generations who followed Updike and Baker (authors roughly contemporaneous with, respectively, the

beginning and end of Nabokov's own period of cultural production): Martin Amis and his Friday Lunch peers (Julian Barnes and Salman Rushdie), and Zadie Smith and her *McSweeney's* peers (Michael Chabon, Dave Eggers, and others). Where Baker points to the complications inherent in using Nabokov as a stand-in for the intransigent, autonomous authorial figure, it is in Zadie Smith and her contemporaries that Nabokov's cultural capital allows for commentaries on authorial dispositions no longer easily accessible. It is here that Nabokov's symbolic capital finds its highest valuation.

Thus, Nabokov's cultural capital circulates and grows in perceived worth as the very traits associated with him (and with perceived notions of authorship) find themselves circulating less and diminishing for the cultural producers engaging in this traffic. That is, perhaps, no surprise. We may value most what is absent, rare, or endangered.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

I would like to begin with someone else's words. The two authors at the heart of this chapter did so, and so it would make sense to follow them down this path, to do what Robert Burton does in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* when he presents himself as Democritus Junior (15), which is also roughly what Vladimir Nabokov did in his deliberately mangled take, in the first line of *Ada*, on the first badly translated lines of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (7). Mostly, I would like to begin with someone else's words because this chapter, and the project as a whole, explores why writers borrow from other writers, why they allude to other writers, and what these borrowings mean. Writers reassert the autonomy of the individual author when they reference Nabokov in their own novels, and in doing so these authors form a sort of ad-hoc Nabokovian group or school even when the members and their immediate milieu would not seem to have anything in common otherwise. Nabokov functions as a particularly valuable unit of cultural capital because of the Nabokov reference's symbolic weight as an autonomous, intransigent authorial figure, bulwarked by equal parts mainstream bestselling success, critical respectability, and seeming invisibility.

It would make sense, then, to begin with a deliberate echo – with a deliberate appeal to the authority that some other, more established voice may have. It would also make sense because borrowing is what writing and thinking are all about, all the time, and whether one chooses to see these acts as Roland Barthes does, as nodes connected in a larger web of meaning to many other nodes, or as Gérard Genette does, as hypertexts – as works whose existence depends on the deliberate distortion and parody of previous

sources (these sources Genette will call them hypotexts) – or whether one goes back further into the history of allusion and influence to find the same idea embedded in the Greco-Roman rhetorical concept of imitation: we never begin from zero, never start the recipe from scratch, there is always something there, previously written, to which our own writing responds. (Genesis, which begins the Bible and is itself a story of beginnings, compiles two earlier separate creation stories, likely of Babylonian origin. Even origins have origins.) And we're always doing it: see Melville's compilation of whale-related quotes, a throat-clearing before the leviathan (not to mention *Moby Dick's* debt to its whale-hunting sources, a not insignificant part of which involves wholesale heavy-duty lifting of whole passages) (7-11, 549-590),<sup>1</sup> or Walter Benjamin's quotations-as-criticism project (8),<sup>2</sup> or Principal Skinner and other *Simpsons* characters starting their speeches with "Webster's dictionary defines [blank] as" (Paakkinen),<sup>3</sup> which perhaps – more than Nabokov, more than Burton – best illustrates our propensity to lean outward, since Skinner's stump-opening is an act of quotation *and* a parody (itself a kind of quotation) of our efforts (in speeches good and bad, in comp. papers and beyond, in thought and speech) to look elsewhere for the comfort and reassurance of words: because they're not ours, these words. They belong to someone else. They're safely ensconced in quotation marks, familiar, and thus a kind of skeleton key to the new. Or – better –

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<sup>1</sup> The Norton Critical Edition of *Moby Dick* identifies Melville's sources throughout in footnotes, but see also the supplementary material, in particular the "Analogues and Sources" section which provides selections in their original form by their original authors.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin's "greatest pride," Hannah Arendt notes in her introduction to Benjamin's *Illuminations*, when discussing his dissertation *The Origin of German Tragedy*, was that (in Benjamin's own words) "the writing consists largely of quotations – the craziest mosaic technique imaginable" (8).

<sup>3</sup> The gag recurs often, and records of it can be found in *The Simpsons Archive Project* and elsewhere. For a representative example, see the episode guide to "Secrets of a Successful Marriage," where Homer (no master of the quick skim) says, "Now, what is a wedding? Well, Webster's Dictionary describes a wedding as, 'The process of removing weeds from one's garden.'"

they're a trail from the old to the new, the reader "led always from familiar objects toward the unfamiliar; guided along, as it were, a chain of flowers into the mysteries of life." These *are* (finally) someone else's words, though whose exactly may be in doubt; they're attributed to Charles Willson Peale, but the attribution is by David Wilson, who chose them as the motto for his Museum of Jurassic Technology, a Culver City institution whose playful propensity to mix the factual with the fictive can complicate a Works Cited page.

Instead, then, this beginning: the suggestion that all works *are* works cited, but that some citations are more interesting than others, and that this particular trail of citations is in some ways singular.

### Theoretical Framework

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

In this very limited sense, the various strains of intertextual studies are in more agreement than it would seem, at least in acknowledging the author, at the very least in

noting the author's impulse toward the new that draws him or her back to acknowledge the old. Genette and Mikhail Bahktin<sup>4</sup> and even Harold Bloom<sup>5</sup> find common ground in acknowledging that intertextuality begins with a writer writing, a writer's agency at the heart of the intertextual utterance, whether this act is borne out of anxiety (Bloom) or out of the impulse to parody, lampoon, or otherwise play with previous bits and scraps of literature (Genette), or out of the desire to mix one's voice with the welter of voices already out there (Bahktin). In the work of these three theorists, the writer's active participation is of some interest – less so in the post-structuralist approaches of Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, and Barthes. Their interest lies elsewhere: in the relation of one text to another, as seen in Kristeva's "Word, Dialogue, Novel" (34-61), or in the apparent instability of authorship itself, borne out in Barthes's "Death of the Author" (1466-1470) or Foucault's discussion of the "author-function" in "What is an Author?" (1622-1636). But all of them would of course agree that the very human act of sitting down, putting pen to paper, tapping keys to generate a written document – a text – does actually happen, but that a great deal can be gained by questioning the process, its terms, and the eventual product's relationship to the world – theirs is an exploration of larger intertextual systems. Much of what I explore benefits from their tremendously rich research while returning to more traditionally understood notions of authorship, influence, and allusion. Doing so is necessary, since in the work of Foucault and Kristeva, intertextuality is generally looked at on the page and is then abstracted to what it might mean to the larger system of literature; the emphasis is on the latter part. And quite properly: doing so allows us to see the uses and the application of referentiality as

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<sup>4</sup> See M.M. Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, particularly the "Discourse in the Novel" (259-422).

<sup>5</sup> See Harold Bloom's *A Map of Misreading* and *The Anxiety of Influence*.

well as referentiality's tremendous potential for generating and complicating meaning. This tendency to examine allusion as problem of poetics – as a concern of readers rather than one of writers – has continued in subsequent major explorations of intertextuality. In *Palimpsests*, for example, Genette traces a set of French novels whose plot and forward momentum stem from their debt to Homer's *Odyssey*. Genette's project is chiefly focused on poetics – on how intertextuality affects one's reading, enjoyment, and understanding of the text. The emphasis is on the finished product and on the reading of that finished product. Intertextuality, in Genette's model, hinges on what happens to us as readers.

I am, however, deeply interested in the writers themselves – in what prompted François Fénelon, Jean Giono, and Charles and Mary Lamb (among the many borrowers Genette considers) to look to Homer. This interest does not exclude the works themselves from consideration, but it does attempt to situate the works within what Pierre Bourdieu calls the field of cultural production, the localized, historically- and socially-bound set of circumstances that allow a particular author to write a particular book for a particular audience: the world of the work.

The focus is on cultural producers and the world in which they operate. Bourdieu's framework allows for a close examination of specific compositional choices within a specified, delimited context. The advantage lies, as Randal Johnson notes, in understanding each field “as a structured space with its own laws of functioning and its own relations of force independent of those of politics and the economy” (6). This emphasis allows agency for each cultural producer, a great advantage over models where the forces themselves shape the product or the producer. Here, he or she may be constrained by the rules of a particular field, but these are formal constraints, not



overwhelming impersonal forces that dictate every detail, the whole shape and heft, of the resulting product.

The great advantage in conceiving the field as a dynamic (and structured) space – a space where everyone participating vies for recognition and ascendancy – is that it provides a window into the competitive nature of cultural production. The term field, in the original French, is *champ*, which also carries the traditional connotations of a sports field. There are winners and losers in a field, but there are also multiple ways of arriving at victory and defeat. The traffic in which they engage in is germane to their field – and the currency (cultural capital, defined below) is not currency itself in its traditional form: what they are not vying for it is not capital, since it is not exactly economically driven, so the behavior of the participants is not reduced to dialectical materialism writ small. There are forces at play, and many of these forces do find their root in the economics of the world, but circulation, transformation, and success are not dictated by neat equivalences between the world of capital (and Marx's *Kapital*) and the more symbolic connotations of Bourdieu's cultural capital. So, while the framework does contain "important residues of Marxist thought," as Mahar, Harker, and Wilkes maintain, it is not exactly "post-Marxist": by situating each field as a locus of "strategy and struggle," and by seeing each agent participating in the field as a person using strategy – and "a logic of practice" – engaged in a search for recognition, the model breaks from a traditional Marxism and complicates the cultural, economic, and social components of cultural production (4, 17-18). If Bourdieu breaks here with Marx and his followers, and from what he calls "economism," it is because these previous equivalences are too simple and too reductive, though he maintains the same focus on the materiality of intellectual labor; he redefines

“the ‘symbolic’ as that which is material but is not recognized as such... and which derives its efficacy not simply from its materiality but from this very misrecognition” (4). Allusion can be understood in light of Bourdieu’s notion of these fields, which is where writers engage with each other, and compete with each other, in a type of marketplace, and that the material that they traffic in, in this marketplace, is composed of two kinds of imaginary currency: symbolic capital (the positive aura surrounding a particular bit of knowledge: fame, prestige, celebrity) and cultural capital (knowledge itself) (R. Johnson 7). Allusion can be thought of as a unit of capital whose value is both symbolic and cultural, or as cultural capital that has absorbed (as part of its meaning-making) its attendant symbolic capital. Cultural capital is a malleable term, used to explain phenomena as varied as art appreciation, fashion, and canon formation – useful there, as it is useful here, for its capacity to explain class-bracketed dispersals, assimilation, affiliation, and circulation of aesthetic attitudes and dispositions.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, all cultural producers traffic in symbolic goods, and one type of these goods is allusion, but important differences exist in both the type of producer, the field in which he or she operates, and the value and valence of the unit of cultural and symbolic capital being trafficked. True, they all traffic in the field of large-scale cultural production which is “specifically organized with a view to the production of cultural goods destined for non-producers of cultural goods, ‘the public at large’” (Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* 115). But it’s important to remember that – in Bourdieu’s framework,

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<sup>66</sup> For representative examples of these uses, see Bourdieu’s *The Rules of Art* for issues of art appreciation, Mark Greif’s “The Hipster in the Mirror” for those of fashion, and John Guillory’s landmark *Cultural Capital* for those of literary canon formation. Note, throughout, how Bourdieu’s terminology aids in complicating the seemingly simple navigation between symbolic and actual currency: “This challenges the philistine wealthy who, possessed of money but not the nose for culture, convert real capital into ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu’s most famous coinage), acquiring subculture as if it were ready-to-wear” (Greif).

partially adopted here – literature is created and disseminated in a symbolic marketplace that operates by “breaking with the public of non-producers, that is, with the non-intellectual fractions of the dominant class” (115). What Bourdieu will later define as the literary field finds its most vital disseminating force in what he calls the field of restricted production, “a system producing cultural goods (and the instruments for appropriating these goods) objectively destined for a public of producers of cultural goods” (163, 115). The fields in which each respective set of cultural producers operate are also to some extent separate, though of course overlap exists, and because the separation of the fields is evident in the way the material is marketed, sold, and consumed in the field of large-scale cultural production.

Doing so does not mean ignoring the rich insights afforded by other intertextual approaches, nor does it mean neglecting the trove of knowledge derived from traditionally understood notions of allusion and influence. It does mean, however, that allusion and influence are examined here chiefly for the way in which they shed light on cultural production – not what they do for the text so much as for what they do for the production of texts, though answering the latter question provides an interesting, unexpected window into the former. It also does mean, however, that the theoretical framework departs from traditional intertextual approaches discussed below, in the section titled *A Brief Literature Review of Intertextuality*, because so many of these other approaches regard literature as a system of texts abstracted from their means of construction and dissemination. Bourdieu allows for the messy immediate context of authorship (and authorial preoccupations) to color the work in ways that other theorists, Foucault in particular, do not. Foucault and Bourdieu, true, share a common historical

and social context, and both “had to situate themselves towards contemporary Marxism” (and both were criticized by many of those same Marxist theorists in the 1960s) but the term to explain the world preferred by the former is *discourse*, the latter *practice* (Callewaert 75).<sup>7</sup> It is a telling difference. As Callewaert points out, embedded in Bourdieu is “a critique of Foucault’s tendency to describe statements only on the basis of their formal characteristics, independently of their content and genesis” (96). When suitable, I mean to grab as much as I can from these seemingly disparate strains of thought. There are strange concordances, after all, and often terms and concepts that seem at odds are – on some level – synonymous, or at least synonymous enough. I’m all right with this magpie approach: the writers in question are magpies themselves.

Nabokov is a kind of tinsel for these magpies, a particularly bright and shining bit of material that these writers use to construct their narrative nests. Or, to use Bourdieu’s framework, Nabokov functions as a special kind of currency in the field of cultural production. That is where I’d like to begin: a reference is not merely made, is not wholly innocent of meaning. A writer will nod to another writer, often (very often) playfully, in his or her own work, and this act is curious enough, and it merits pause and reflection: *Why is this reference here? Why is it taking the form that it does?* When a significant number of writers engage in the same act, and when they all choose to focus on a single writer, we can find significant patterns of meaning, and see what these patterns say about Nabokov himself, his role in contemporary letters, and his relationship to a specific set of contemporary artists, though it may also lead to interesting insights into the relationship between intertextual studies and Bourdieu’s field of cultural production.

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<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu critiques Foucault in *The Rules of Art, The Field of Cultural Production*, and elsewhere, but see Callewaert’s “Bourdieu, Critic of Foucault” for a detailed, systematic overview.

A reference – an allusion, an intertextual node – functions as currency. Thus, an exploration into intertextuality leads into the ways in which authors traffic in literature and compete, through literature, for dominance in the field of cultural production. Nabokov is a particularly valuable piece of currency: he was a critically well-regarded author but he was also a best-selling sensation. Suellen Stringer-Hye, in “Vladimir Nabokov and Popular Culture,” likens Nabokov’s status to Alfred Hitchcock’s. “Both artists,” she writes, “stand at the crossroads of modern and postmodern culture – popularly accessible, yet critically acclaimed” (151). Nabokov has the benefit of being wholly within popular circulation, thanks to *Lolita*, while also allowing for a series of obscure set of signifiers whose meaning would only be clear to fellow readers of Nabokov's deep catalog.

At its broadest, the question is why so many different, seemingly divergent authors engage in the same sort of approach to referencing their predecessors, with Genette's *Palimpsests* and Bourdieu's *Rules of Art* and *Field of Cultural Production* as key elements of the theoretical framework. The question, however, centers on a specific set of writers (whose work fit neatly within what Mark McGurl terms the "Program Era,"<sup>8</sup> the range of contemporary fiction produced since the end of World War II) all referencing a single author, Nabokov. These formal limits – multiple allusions and references made to a discrete cultural producer whose productive span is contemporaneous to or (at its most distant) a generation removed from those engaged in the reference-making – broaden the

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<sup>8</sup> That McGurl begins his study with an extensive (if sometimes reductive) examination of Nabokov's roles as writer, critic, and teacher is both a tremendously happy accident and possibly no accident at all. McGurl likely was not thinking of the degree to which Nabokov is referenced in program-era fiction. Rather, Nabokov's outsized writerly persona was a more determining factor. McGurl quotes at length from Nabokov's *Strong Opinions*, noting all along the way Nabokov's mandarin tendencies. McGurl and the many authors in his book were drawn to Nabokov for the very same reason -- the outsized persona being very much a deciding factor.

scope of intertextual studies by examining, in detail, how a literary reference serves as a means through which authors define themselves against and align themselves with other cultural producers and with the field of cultural production in which they operate.<sup>9</sup>

While dramatic divergences do exist between the groups and individuals at hand, with distinct and easily traceable shifts in aesthetic approaches and results, there are also tremendously interesting affiliations at work – most interesting because Nabokov, as a unit of cultural capital signaling authorial autonomy, serves to unify these seemingly disparate writers via a single preoccupation: the individual author’s relation to and disposition toward his or her field. Cultural production – even contemporary cultural production, often called to task for fractiousness and disjunction – exhibits a remarkable continuity when explored through the constraints of a Nabokov reference: Nabokov, thought of as a key word in a Google search, can serve as a base standard for the creation of a coherent, self-selected, fairly large grouping that could be easily rearranged if one were to change the search criteria. Which is not to say that this dynamic, on-the-fly rearrangement affects the import of this particular grouping; in fact, it is the grouping’s improvisatory nature, with its deliberately constrained filter, that allows for a unique window into the relationship between cultural product, field of cultural production, and author. In referencing Nabokov, these producers find opportunities to talk about themselves.

It is an odd group, one whose most salient individual feature is, in fact, a recurring mistrust of groups, associations, and affiliations. It is no surprise, then, to find that

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<sup>9</sup> For other key critical surveys of contemporary fiction, see Patrick O’Donnell’s *The American Novel Now: Reading Contemporary American Fiction Since 1980*, as well as *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, edited by Emory Elliott.

Nabokov was a proud loner himself, famously distrustful of schools and groups and collectives and (as he put it) “-isms.” It isn’t just his many published statements that bear witness to this individualism. His biography<sup>10</sup> is, in many regards, a case study in perpetual outsiderdom: an émigré Russian-language writer in Europe, a tangential associate professor/entomologist in America, then an American citizen writing in English in a hotel room in Switzerland – the last detail carries through his entire life: the Nabokovs were always proud itinerant renters, and mentioned the fact repeatedly in interviews. All this stuff carries over into the Nabokovian currency – what Genette identifies as the “public epitext” – which in turn informs readers who are themselves writers.

This blurring – this slippage between reader and writer – merits a special caveat: the writers discussed, Nabokov included, must be treated as hybrid creatures. They may be writers, but they are also (one could say, primarily) readers. It is *as* readers, as cultural consumers, that they will absorb the information that they will later disseminate. They cannot talk about Nabokov – cannot *write* – without reacting strongly to some aspect of Nabokov’s work and aura (his public epitext) that speaks to them, and they cannot do so without absorbing – without *reading*, on some level – the disposition inherent in the

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<sup>10</sup> The best and most reliable biography of Nabokov is Brian Boyd’s two-volume landmark 1990 *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* and 1991 *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*. Andrew Field’s 1967 *Vladimir Nabokov: His Life in Art* and 1977 *Vladimir Nabokov: His Life in Part* are problematic, and they were criticized by Nabokov himself for their inaccuracy, but their reputation has been steadily (and deservedly) rehabilitated as of late (a number of factual errors are present, however). Stacy Schiff’s *Vera: (Mrs. Vladimir Nabokov)* is particularly useful for its treatment of and insights into both Vera Nabokov and her husband. Jane Grayson’s brief but substantive *Vladimir Nabokov*, part of the Overlook Illustrated Lives, offers a good account of the writer. On the Internet, there are two reliable biographical sources. Nabokov’s Wikipedia entry is thorough, responsible, and informative <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir\\_nabokov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_nabokov)>. The “About Nabokov” section of the International Vladimir Nabokov Society’s Zembla (long the site of record for all matters Nabokov), features a substantive biographical account as well as a detailed chronology <<http://www.libraries.psu.edu/nabokov/abvn.htm>>.

information, particularly in matters of taste, most particularly in matters of taste concerning reading and attitudes toward reading, which themselves inform matters of taste concerning writing and color attitudes toward writing. These reading/writing dynamics are tangled, and problematic, and they can prove difficult to piece out; for the cultural producers themselves, however, these dynamics may go unexamined, but they nonetheless often prove stultifying.

Zadie Smith, who has referenced Nabokov in two of her three novels (and who will be discussed at greater length below), comments on this problem throughout *Changing My Mind*, her collection of essays: “If your aesthetic,” she writes, addressing writer’s block, “has become so refined it is stopping you from placing a single black mark on white paper, stop worrying so much about what Nabokov would say; pick up Dostoyevsky, patron saint of substance over style” (103).

Smith’s own Nabokovilia is evident everywhere, but she qualifies it throughout. Fifty pages earlier, in “Rereading Barthes and Nabokov,” she provides the following footnote: “Nabokov nerds often slavishly parrot his strong opinions. I don’t think I’m the first person to have my mind poisoned, by Nabokov, against Dostoyevsky” (52). It’s not too much of a stretch to see how one recurring unit of cultural capital (Dostoyevsky) fluctuates in direct inverse relation to the other (Nabokov), but it’s also well worth noting why the latter would have such a powerful effect on the former. Smith reasserts some measure of independence from her chosen unit, but even this measure of resistance (*Nabokov may not like Dostoyevsky, but I do*) goes a long way to foreground Nabokov’s tremendous weight in Smith’s mind: to appreciate one (Dostoyevsky, Nabokov’s predecessor and countryman), she has to come to terms with the occasional fallibility of



the other (Nabokov). The weight, of course, as discussed above, is due to a great degree to Nabokov's tremendous presence as a self-contained, infinitely confident authorial figure, a particularly attractive and seductive unit of cultural capital for a fellow writer, as Smith herself acknowledges: "He seems to admit no ideal reader<sup>11</sup> except himself. I think of him as one of the last, great twentieth-century believers in the autonomy of the Author, as Frank Lloyd Wright was one of the last believers in the Architect" (52).

Nabokov stands in the field of cultural capital as a symbolic unit of the independent, fully self-sufficient creator – the Autonomous Author – and it's precisely in this happily self-imposed, self-declared isolation where others find kinship, proudly invoking the name of another isolated figure. The moment of the wholly autonomous author may have passed – Smith admits as much – but even if no writer can ever fully define herself in that way (and Smith, a fan of Barthes, a reader of Foucault, can't) it doesn't diminish Nabokov's appeal, and it doesn't devalue his symbolic capital. If anything, it enhances it – it makes it more attractive. It is as if each of these writers is declaring, when aligning him- or herself with Nabokov, that they see no need to align themselves with anyone. There is the immediate temptation to declare some sort of paradox at work. After all, these writers affiliate themselves with one another because they insist on their lack of affiliation. But all acts of demarcation and self-identification go through variations of this *Via Negativa* (*This is who I am, this is who I'm not*), and so it's not necessarily a sign of anything intrinsically self-contradictory. Rather, we mostly discover who we are by

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<sup>11</sup> An ideal reader of both other people's work and – most interestingly – his own. The pithiest iteration of the sentiment, replicated and taken as a sort of Nabokovian commonplace, comes by way Andrew Field, Nabokov's problematic first biographer: "Nabokov once said that his ideal readers consist of 'a lot of little Nabokovs.'" But see also this very similar iteration, in Nabokov's own words, in *Strong Opinions*: "[The author] clashes with readerdom because he is his own ideal reader and those other readers are so very often mere lip-moving ghosts and amnesiacs" (183).

turning away – by removing ourselves – from what we are not. If anything, this phenomenon may be better understood by noting that, when Brian of Monty Python's *The Life of Brian* tells the crowd, "You're all individuals!" and the crowd responds (in unison) "Yes, we're all individuals," they're actually technically correct. Yes, they are all individuals.

Smith may in some sense bemoan the passing of a literary period wherein one could define him- or herself in this way, but in referencing Nabokov she aligns herself with a mode of being, a mode of thinking about cultural production, that is fundamentally attractive to her, and to the other writers under consideration. Here, perhaps, is the greatest paradox: Nabokov's worth as symbolic capital is at its highest in authors whose own immediate circumstances forestall any possibility of their career resembling anything like Nabokov's. (This tension is explored in chapter two.)

Writers reassert the autonomy of the individual author when they reference Nabokov in their own novels, though it may be more accurate to think of this reassertion in strictly symbolic terms: what is being celebrated may not be so much autonomy as the *mystique* of autonomy, the desire for traits no longer easily available to current cultural producers. In doing so, these authors form a sort of ad-hoc Nabokovian group or school even when the members and their immediate milieu would not seem to have anything in common otherwise. Nabokov functions as a unit of cultural capital particularly valuable because of its symbolic weight as an autonomous, intransigent authorial figure, bulwarked by equal parts mainstream bestselling success, critical respectability, and seeming invisibility.

This model for understanding allusion – departing as it does from more accepted ways of understanding intertextuality (a brief history and discussion of the field follows

below) and based on the work of Bourdieu – need not apply exclusively to one author, nor is it entirely without precedent. Nabokov is not the only figure circulating. Others may do so as well, and they may do so for their own symbolic weight – but the model may hold true for them as well: the symbolic weight may have more to do with its relative importance in the mind of the cultural producer than with its relevance to the cultural product at hand. Whether it does or not is an interesting question, but its answer lays outside the matter at hand – the investigation of one author, Nabokov, heavily referenced and alluded to by 147 other authors – though the allusion-as-cultural-capital model certainly seems flexible enough to accommodate other variables. More interestingly, the model is already hinted at by Andrew Elfenbein in an article exploring cognitive-psychology approaches to literary influence. As an aside on Oscar Wilde’s allusions to Mary Ward, Elfenbein notes that Wilde’s use of Ward “resembles the jockeying for aesthetic capital within a field of cultural production of the kind that Pierre Bourdieu describes” (501). Elfenbein, however, favors a cognitive psychology framework over the one he has just sketched out: “the strength of such a Bourdieuan analysis is also its weakness, because it locates Wilde’s every artistic decision in the all-encompassing need to situate himself in a field of cultural production” (502).

This sort of predetermination or even overdetermination of aesthetic choices is certainly open to criticism, and it feels to some extent like a misreading of Bourdieu in Elfenbein’s insistence on an almost mechanistic or at least instinctual struggle for field domination. Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic capital, discussed above, necessitates a multi-valenced, complex, almost muddled understanding of what is trafficked and how one moves about in the field. Where Elfenbein sees a totalizing force I see only an element –

albeit a highly persuasive and frequently occurring one – contributing to an unusually high occurrence of specific, authorially-minded allusions. These allusions, this cultural capital, need not be thought exclusively in a strictly Bourdieuan framework – and it is here that I depart from Bourdieu: while I do maintain, as does Bourdieu, that much of what occurs in cultural production hinges on the producer’s disposition, which itself may well be dependent on the producer’s social class, what I find most relevant is the *circulation* of symbolic capital within the field of cultural production, not the social constraints and construction underlying the field. Doing so allows for a close examination of the sort of information exchange studied in both social-network theory and information theory, as well as Elfenbein’s own cognitive-psychology approach. Indeed, for “symbolic capital” one could substitute Elfenbein’s notion of persuasion and its role in memory, understood in cognitive-psychology as a network of spreading activation and explained on page 484, and still arrive at the same result: at Nabokov signifying a particularly valuable unit of meaning, heavily replicated and recurring precisely because of its efficacy and its capacity to replicate itself further. The more valuable the unit of meaning, the greater the likelihood it will be retained and disseminated.

Nabokov is retained and disseminated, and this range extends into the quantity and quality of scholarship focusing on his work. Some of the material finds echoes here, particularly examinations of Nabokov in light of Genette’s concept of the paratext, such as Duncan White’s “Dyeing *Lolita*: Nymphet in the Paratext” presented as part of the *Transitional Nabokov* conference in 2007 and Maria Alhambra’s “Time Camouflaged, or the Riddle of the Map: Paratextual Elements and Temporal Structure in the 1966 Revision of *Speak, Memory*.” White has also shed light on the ways in which Nabokov’s

public epitext provides the normative framework through which readers approach Nabokov's work in "Rereading Nabokov: Three Fallacies." Other recent key works of Nabokov scholarship – some notable for their interdisciplinary approach (most notably in examining Nabokov in light of other fields, such as painting or science) – include Leland de la Durantaye's *Style is Matter: The Moral Art of Vladimir Nabokov*, Eric Naiman's *Nabokov, Perversely*, Stephen Blackwell's *The Quill and the Scalpel: Nabokov's Art and the Worlds of Science*, Michael Maar's landmark *The Two Lolitas*, Kurt Johnson's *Nabokov's Blues: The Scientific Odyssey of a Literary Genius*, and Donald Barton Johnson and Gerard de Vrie's *Nabokov and the Art of Painting*. Earlier works of Nabokov scholarship remain in circulation for their relevance and usefulness, particularly Vladimir Alexandrov's *Nabokov's Otherworld*, Michael Wood's *The Magician's Doubts*, Leona Toker's *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures*, Ellen Pifer's *Nabokov and the Novel*, Alfred Appel's *Nabokov's Dark Cinema*, and Donald Barton Johnson's *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov*. There have been a number of edited collections of Nabokov scholarship, all of varying quality, though *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* and *The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov* are uniformly excellent.

### Methods, Limitations, and Terminology

At least 147 authors reference Vladimir Nabokov in 167 separate cultural products published between 1960 and 2009. There are numerous references published after 2009, but the cut-off point allows for a more normalized decade-by-decade examination of the material. This group forms the heart of the data-set: a wide, seemingly disparate

accumulation of texts all referencing a single author, a range interesting both for the disparity and the singularity, since examining the particulars of the phenomena (Why so many? Why so varied? Why do they all talk about Nabokov?) allows for an alternate way of grouping texts. It may be thought of as a self-willed, author-imposed canon – the Nabokophile as a member in a secret school of cultural production, his or her Nabokov reference a signifier of an entire aesthetic disposition. It is, by necessity, a distant, flattened reading, of the sort championed by Franco Moretti,<sup>12</sup> though it is followed with close scrutiny of Nabokov references in Nicholson Baker, John Updike, Martin Amis, Zadie Smith, the *McSweeney's* group, and others.) There are infinite ways in which the data can be examined, divided, folded, compared, connected, qualified, quantified, briefed, and debriefed, so the chief discriminating factor while engaging in taxonomy are the theoretical frameworks derived from Genette and Bourdieu. These inform the many ways in which data can and cannot be divided for purposes of this study. I also provide the data itself (please see the APPENDIX), since a few of the criteria are highly subjective and should therefore be as open as possible – as open as possible and as easily accessible to close scrutiny as can possibly be managed.

The data set gathered here is not exhaustive: it is likely that Nabokov references have been missed. It'd be surprising if they haven't. But the bulk of the references are fairly representative of a major slice of the literary fiction market, and they've been augmented

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<sup>12</sup> I am indebted to Moretti's quantitative approach in *Maps, Graphs, and Trees* and *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*. The approach has led to finding significant patterns in the data-set that would be otherwise difficult to glean in a single book, a single Nabokov reference. What Moretti's distant reading allows, here, is the emergence of a set of salient, consistent characteristics in hundreds of allusions that would be otherwise missed in focusing on merely one or two. The best discussion of Moretti's approach is found, not surprisingly, in Moretti. See "Conjectures on World Literature," where Moretti notes that distant reading "allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes -- or genres and systems" (Moretti).

by contributions from a wide number of interested Nabokov-minded readers who have contacted me with the allusions, and by the use of Nabokovian keyword searches in digitized book collections, chiefly Amazon's and Google's vast full-text libraries: "Nabokov" yielded a few, but *Pale Fire*'s "Kinbote" yielded more; "Lolita" complicated the process, for which see below; other Nabokov-oriented keywords include "John Shade," "Vivian Darkbloom," "Quilty," and "Pnin" (all characters appearing in Nabokov novels); there were also searches involving Nabokov book titles, such as "*Pale Fire*," "*Speak, Memory*," and "*Transparent Things*." The Nabokv-L Listserv participants have also provided a substantial number of allusions and references. Most, however, I have gathered as they've been found and recognized in well over a decade of Nabokov-minded reading. The list itself is informed by my reading habits and those of the people who have contacted me with their own finds. I love Nabokov, and so have collected Nabokov where I have found him. So have others. It's a data set composed, like Burton's, of reading "many books, but to little purpose, for want of good method," particularly since like Burton, like Burton's Democritus, I too "have confusedly tumbled over divers authors in our libraries with small profit for want of art, order, memory, judgment" (18).

There is, nonetheless, great potential profit in ranging this far. There's the sheer number of allusions collected. And there is, too, the sense that they point to a significant pattern of meaning, a way of understanding how authors align themselves into alternative traditions by way of half-hidden signs, sly references, secret handshakes.

A small if significant portion of them fall into the shadowy area where the author and his most famous novel part ways. The *Lolita* references discussed throughout are most open to contention, but they appear when there is a chance that they partake of what

Genette refers to as the author's public epitext to some extent, however miniscule, even if Nabokov's aura has been reduced, diminished, or distorted in transit. The resulting material is sizable enough – the references gather material published between 1960 and 2009 – to allow for a number of connections and extrapolations, which taken together explain how Nabokov is referenced and, more interestingly, why.

Any data requires some form of taxonomy, which itself presupposes categories and values, and the data provided here is no exception: the Nabokov references have been first divided into those occurring in literature and those in popular culture, a division necessary for the way in which cultural goods are disseminated, since this dissemination in turn guides the disposition of the cultural producers involved. It bears repeating: The focus is on cultural producers, and cultural producers behave differently in their own respective fields. They may all traffic in symbolic goods, but important differences exist. True, they all traffic in the field of large-scale cultural production which is “specifically organized with a view to the production of cultural goods destined for non-producers of cultural goods, ‘the public at large’” (Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* 115). But it's important to remember that – in Bourdieu's framework, partially adopted here – literature is created and disseminated in a symbolic marketplace that operates by “breaking with the public of non-producers, that is, with the non-intellectual fractions of the dominant class” (115). What Bourdieu later defines as the literary field finds its most vital disseminating force in what he calls the field of restricted production, “a system producing cultural goods (and the instruments for appropriating these goods) objectively destined for a public of producers of cultural goods” (163, 115). If popular culture references are separated here from literary references, it is because the fields in which



each respective set of cultural producers operate are also to some extent separate, though of course overlap exists, and because the separation of the fields is evident in the way the material is marketed, sold, and consumed in the field of large-scale cultural production.

Two other important data-discrimination criteria are included here, and they're worth highlighting because they help shape how Nabokov operates as symbolic capital: the spur and the transtextual connection (the latter only counted where it can be identified). The spur is a term borrowed from Gregory Machacek, whose work is discussed below in the section titled A Brief Literature Review of Intertextuality. The spur identifies what exactly is being alluded to in a reference: the author, *Lolita*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, *Pale Fire*, etc. A transtextual connection borrows heavily from Genette's idea of transtextuality, defined in *Palimpsests* as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" and most specifically with his thoughts on two types of transtextual relationships: (1) architextuality, defined as "a relationship that is completely silent, articulated at most only by a paratextual mention," and (2) intertextuality, defined as "a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts" (1, 4). Here, a transtextual connection in the data identifies the modality of a textual copresence – that is, a transtextual connection identifies how a Nabokov reference is acting on, commenting upon, or reinforcing information presumed to be already embedded in Nabokov and his work. Here are the five categories transtextual connections identified (all well-known attributes of Nabokov's texts and the Nabokovian paratext, particularly his public epitext): (1) Authorial persona as arbiter of ethical or aesthetic disposition; (2) Fictional author as subject; (3) Insistence on the actuality of a fictional text; (4) Deliberate epitextual distortion; and (5) Blurring of authorial persona.

These categories point to the most interesting significant patterns of meaning found in the data set, but others may well exist, if in lesser numbers.

These divisions are useful because they allow for a more sophisticated handling of the material, particularly since it allows for a more careful examination of the difference between what, specifically, is being alluded to (the spur) and what the allusive act might imply (the transtextual connection). Doing so clarifies, for example, how a reference taking the author for its spur may not necessarily insist on a transtextual connection examining authorship. Or why one whose spur is *Pale Fire* may in fact silently use Nabokov's diffuse paratextual presence as the arbiter of an ethical or aesthetic disposition. It's a tremendously useful distinction, since an authorially-minded spur may in fact trigger a textually-minded transtextual connection, or vice-versa.

This vast network of transtextual connections is nothing new, and the case study presented below traces some of the same transfer and circulation of symbolic capital explored later, seen here in the work of Robert Burton, Laurence Sterne, Vladimir Nabokov, Alexander Pope, and Darin Morgan. I trace a set of interconnected allusions that link two densely referential works: Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. In both, the appropriation of outside material (hypotexts) allows for a greater degree of authorial control. That Burton himself, a heavy quoter, is himself heavily quoted should be no surprise. I examine the acknowledged and unacknowledged borrowings that Sterne makes in *Tristram Shandy* from *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, and compare these to the ways in which Vladimir Nabokov repurposes Pope's *Essay on Man* in *Pale Fire*, and how some of these same dispositions find their way into *Pale Fire* references made by the television show *The X-Files* and by a

mathematics textbook. These modes of textual appropriation are examined in light of Bourdieu's field of cultural production. Dense (often deeply hidden) intertextual cues work as units of cultural capital. Ultimately, the circulation of embedded, valuable units of symbolic meaning suggests that allusion may well be thought of as a mode of communication occurring primarily between a special kind of consumer, a special sort of reader: fellow cultural producers, fellow writers.

But I don't want to begin without clarifying intertextuality's tangled critical history and terminology, so that even though I've failed to begin with someone else's words, I may at least begin with a clear overview of why so much weight falls, in thinking and writing and elsewhere, on someone else's words. They're all we have.

#### A Brief Literature Review of Intertextual Theory

Burton complains, in his preface to *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, that no new knowledge is generated from the glut of newly published works. Every new author, he notes, himself included, is like a pharmacist handling known quantities of known goods: “as apothecaries we make new mixtures every day, pour out of one vessel into another” (23). He confirms this statement by copiously citing, quoting, and referencing in nearly every page of his massive book. Burton varies and refines his claim to the depletion and eventual exhaustion of knowledge, and he underscores it by quoting Thucydides, Jovius, and Scaliger, all within a line or two of his own set of similes, all stressing that nothing new is ever really added, with Gesner quoted on the same page for added emphasis, who claims that authors offer “no news or aught worthy of note, but the same in other terms.”

The same in other terms: one could, one would be very tempted to claim that this phrase applies just as well to the history of intertextuality. This temptation looms most large when discussing the division between traditionally understood notions of influence and allusion and the structuralist and post-structuralist approaches that took root after Saussure.<sup>13</sup> It's tempting to say that much of what has gone on in intertextual studies is an elaborate effort to refine and redefine the same basic terms – to find new terminology where perfectly acceptable concepts had comfortably nestled, or to destabilize previously stable notions of authorship and literary production, or to show why the seemingly simple and known is in fact complicated, strange, unknowable.

But there are a number of reasons why Burton's statement does not apply neatly to the history of intertextuality, not the least of which being that it does not apply neatly to Burton himself. Burton is in fact doing something more than pouring the same knowledge from one vessel into another. In compiling and in arranging his sources, and in adding his own particular filter, his own spin, and his own voice, he is fundamentally creating something new. The combinatorial aspect of Burton's work may lead to a claim of unoriginality – both for himself and for the whole of literature<sup>14</sup> – but he belies the claim with ample evidence of his own originality and wit, a small portion of which hinges on

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<sup>13</sup> Since the focus is almost entirely on this division between allusion and intertextuality, there are important intertextual topics not discussed. Overviews of the field are available. The one I've found particularly helpful in crystallizing the more difficult aspects of the field is Graham Allen's *Intertextuality*, cited throughout, though others are also easily accessible and certainly useful. See, for example, the John B. Clayton-edited *Influence and Intertextuality* and the equally helpful (if sometimes combative) book by Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* – both of which devote a good deal of time in arguing for the relevance of allusion and influence.

<sup>14</sup> Or, to be more accurate, for the state of literature in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, since Burton seems most concerned with his contemporaries. That the claim would have been made somewhere around the 1630's is of course also yet one more reason for why it's open to doubt, and why it's so wonderful to use it here, because it may well be the oldest complaint in the book – there's nothing more to said, nothing more to write – a claim analogous to the one floated around inventions and technology, that all that we need has been invented already and that we are, essentially, done.

this particular bit of preterition, that wonderful rhetorical trick of doing something while one claims that one isn't doing it, because Burton is well aware that his work adds to the general store of knowledge while claiming no additional knowledge is to be found.

Besides, Burton's statements on the impossibility to produce new stuff provide an adequate entry-point to just about every major mode of intertextual theory, where new additional knowledge can indeed be found. Intertextuality, in broad strokes, makes the same claims that Burton does: that everyone begins with more or less the same elements, that a writer mixes existing ingredients, pours ideas from one vessel to the next, reworking what is essentially already said, already explored. And intertextual theorists have accomplished what Burton has in their own field – they have refined and complicated our understanding of what we mean when we say allusion, or influence, or when we seek to understand the tangled relationship between a text and the world.

This tangled relationship is nothing new. For that matter, the claim that this tangled relationship is nothing new is also nothing new. Gregory Machacek, whose work will be cited below, opens his article with a reference to Macrobius's work on Homer and Vergil (522). Donald Lemen Clark's *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education*, written well over half a century before Machacek's 2007 article, argues for the classical practice of imitation – a fundamental intertextual exercise – as a key building block in learning how to engage the contemporary world (144-176). If, as Clark points out, imitation is about manner, not matter – style and not substance – the fact remains that both him and everyone who has since insisted on the primacy of the exercise does so by reassuring the reader/writer that what emerges, ultimately, is one's own voice (145). The same advice – and the same reassurance – finds its way into creative writing exercises and general advice on the craft

of writing. William Zinsser, in *On Writing Well*, urges writers to “never hesitate to imitate another writer. Imitation is part of the creative process for anyone learning an art or a craft” (238). The paragraph ends with the following (and familiar) reassurance: “Don’t worry that by imitating them you’ll lose your own voice and your own identity. Soon enough you will shed those skins and become who you are supposed to become” (238).

If intertextuality as a practice is old, the term itself is relatively recent, first appearing in Kristeva’s 1966 “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” where she suggests it as an extension of Bakhtin’s thoughts on the intersection of dialogue (that is, the words found in the work at hand, presumably those crafted by a writer and intended for a reader) and ambivalence (the work at hand in relation to its immediate social and cultural context). Intertextuality, Kristeva claims, is the notion that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (37). Here, a text is first compared to a mosaic,<sup>15</sup> and then to something very much similar to Burton’s apothecary’s mixture – as a compound made up of previously existing, presumably identifiable elements.

Kristeva is most preoccupied with an abstracted, semiotic system of meaning – the Saussurean world of signs and signifiers, not a particular work and its own specific set of worries.<sup>16</sup> I’m going to extend Burton’s simile to uncomfortable lengths, but it may help

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<sup>15</sup> And a mosaic of quotations at that – an effective, concise summary of Burton’s compositional method – though of course Kristeva is really thinking about a kind of implicit quotation, as agents operating with a shared, known set of signs and not perhaps with actual, identifiable bits of language that could be traced between one author and his or her predecessors.

<sup>16</sup> Bakhtin too will ground some of his most significant insights in Saussure, particularly matters of style (264), though this remark may well be contested. In the essays contained in *The Dialogic Imagination*, he only explicitly references Saussure once. It is safer, then, to say that the structuralist foundations that bulwark both Kristeva and Bakhtin have their root in a Saussurean view of language – chiefly, that language is a relational system of signs. For Kristeva, the system is rooted in the basic semiotic insights of Saussure: that language is composed of signs, that each sign is composed of a signifier (an arbitrary

keep this idea clear: for Kristeva, what is most interesting is the trafficking of Burton's vessels – the macroeconomics of the apothecary industry – not the particular ingredients that compose a particular potion in one particular vessel. Machacek, in his 2007 article arguing for the return of allusion as a vital and necessary term in intertextual studies, makes the point far more clearly. For Kristeva, he writes, intertextuality “denotes not so much the relations between particular texts as the semiotic principles and presuppositions that lie, as it were, between texts from a given culture and allow them to have what meaning they do” (523). What we commonly understand as allusion, adaptation, and influence – “the relation between particular texts” – holds a lesser degree of interest for Kristeva and the many intertextual theorists who followed suit. Machacek makes it very clear that, while it is easy to confuse allusion with intertextuality, the two concepts are not quite the same thing. I'm primarily concerned with the former – with allusion – but it's difficult to talk about this concept without first establishing the tremendous usefulness of the latter, particularly because allusion occurs through intertextuality. Allusion is an intertextual act.

But allusion is not the *only* intertextual act, which is why one can confuse the terms, and why, perhaps, Graham Allen begins his terrific, and tremendously lucid, overview of intertextuality with Saussure and with Kristeva proper. Allusion is not explored, not

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representational mark, like a sound or an image or a word) and a signified (the concept itself), and that signs only have meaning in relation to each other (so that, for example, we understand a sentence because each sound or phoneme is discrete and identifiable). For Bakhtin, language is rooted in the specific world of the speaker, and the speaker is capable of many different types of language, which will change according to the specific needs of the immediate context; here too, then, language is relational, and it is here too that we can see how this concept most fruitfully feeds into intertextuality, particularly when considering Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, the idea that anything anyone says is situated – that it'll depend on a set of circumstances that, when changed, would change the meaning in one way or another.

discussed – the term is invisible, or absent, or replaced altogether by the vocabulary introduced by Kristeva, Bahktin, Barthes, and Genette.

In the work of these four theorists, intertextuality is understood as a large, general system of connected texts – either as the diffuse relationship of one text to other texts or to its genre and expectations, or to a combination of both. Even Genette, who is most open to discussions of explicit textual passages that reference another identifiable text, will limit the presence of allusion as a lower order form of the larger system of textual relationships, which he will equate with quoting and plagiarism at the very beginning of *Palimpsests* (2).<sup>17</sup> Genette, on the same page, will nonetheless provide a serviceable definition of allusion as “an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text, to which it necessary refers by some inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible” a definition very similar to Machacek’s: “a textual snippet reminiscent of a phrase in an earlier author’s writing but smoothly incorporated into the new context of the imitating author’s work” (525).

Both, however, note that allusion is limited in nature – Machacek by stressing that allusion is “brief, discrete, and local” (525), Genette by noting (while discussing Rifaterre) that allusion is more meaningful “to the limited figure (to the pictorial detail) than to the work considered as a structural whole” (2-3) – though both also seemingly ignore their own limitations on the term later, Genette implicitly throughout *Palimpsests* in exploring the particular impact that these enunciations have on a work as a whole,

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<sup>17</sup> To be fair, Genete will devote a great deal of attention to the potential creative energy that these explicit passages provide in texts, but there is something telling in delegating the most traditionally understood notion to the lowest order in a taxonomy.



Machacek in noting the further uses of allusion, all of which will play a crucial role in how authors behave in the field of cultural production.

When we allude, pouring information out of one vessel into another, we are doing a number of things. On page 531, Machacek provides a useful breakdown of what these things are (I have reworded them, and although I've separated them by numbers for clarity, this division is not part of the Machacek's original schema):

1. We are, for one, saying that we like the information enough to pass it along – we're aligning ourselves with it. We are declaring an affiliation.
2. We are also creating a certain expectation of our audience – we may expect them to know where the allusion originated, and hence we're also saying to them that the values embedded in the allusion matter.
3. We are also, in a way, choosing a special kind of audience, by dividing readers into those who recognize the allusion and those who do not. The allusion, then, serves to “establish a special kind of rapport between author and reader” (531). Machacek will talk of it in terms of the writer appealing to the *cognoscenti*, to those selected few in the audience who are in the know.

There is, of course, no reason for why an allusion can't do all three simultaneously, while also working on a very basic, limited, local level. I'd argue too that there is a special relationship between all the functions, one seen most clearly in light of Bourdieu's notion of the field of cultural production, where writers engage with each other, and compete with each other, in a type of marketplace, and that the material that they traffic in, in this marketplace, is composed of two kinds of imaginary currency:

symbolic capital (the positive aura surrounding a particular bit of knowledge: fame, prestige, celebrity) and cultural capital (knowledge itself).

An allusion, I believe, is a special kind of cultural capital, useful because it already contains values we want to align ourselves with, all the more useful in that it comes already embedded with the symbolic capital associated with the writer one is alluding. This particular attribute of allusion may be viewed in any number of other ways. Bourdieu's ideas and terminology, however, provide a useful framework for what I'm discussing. He is particularly useful in examining what happens when so many writers focus on one particular predecessor but – like the material explored in intertextual theory at large – his ideas may be viewed as a later refinement of an already existing concept. New vessels, old medicine. Take, for example, the classical exercise of prosopopeia (or imitation) resurrected by Clark in his *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education*. Though Clark and his source, Hermogenes, never quite word it this way, it's clear that imitation – an allusive act if there ever was one – carries with it the ethical and ideological baggage of the imitated: “Let the figures conform to the persons assigned” (200). Substitute “symbolic capital” for “ethical baggage” (my words, not Clark's), and there's a close-enough approximation of what allusion does in a text, with the symbolic capital transferred from vessel to vessel, with the student learning what is embedded in the source, and thus carrying it forward.

Both allusion and intertextuality are concerned with carrying material forward, with the sense that what is on the page is forever looking forward, forever looking back. Both allusion and intertextuality argue for a continuity between the old and the new – a continuity so knotted, so tangled, that the old is never really very old, the new never

really very new. This confused chronology of sources and voices is nothing more than what we all experience as readers and as writers, apothecaries all, drinking in and pouring out the medicine, since reading equalizes all these disparate threads, the page accommodating all that we choose to throw at it. The vessels are all there. The question is why some are dipped into more than others.

### A Case Study in Nested Authorial Allusions

Writers reassert the autonomy of the individual author when they reference Nabokov in their own novels, and in doing so form a sort of ad-hoc Nabokovian group or school even when the members and their immediate milieu would not seem to have anything in common otherwise. Nabokov functions as a unit of cultural capital particularly valuable because its symbolic weight as unit of the autonomous, intransigent authorial figure, bulwarked by equal parts mainstream bestselling success, critical respectability, and seeming invisibility. But Nabokov himself, when alluding to other writers, does much the same thing. And so have others before him. This case study examines a series of nested authorial references and traces how the cultural capital embedded in allusion reinforces, frames, and informs authorial dispositions and modality: Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is referenced in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, *Shandy* is referenced in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* is referenced in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, and *Pale Fire* will be referenced in an *X-Files* episode, a Salman Rushdie novel, a mathematics textbook, and elsewhere. Throughout, authors embed fellow authors in their work to talk about themselves – their taste, their role in the field of cultural production, and their negotiation of the complicated

attitudinal possibilities inherent in the authorial public epitext. (It is no accident that an allusion benefits from its seeming invisibility: authors take perverse pleasure in celebrating the uncelebrated.) When authors allude, they appear to be reaching out to other writers and to readers acquainted with those writers, but they are also reaching inwardly: the territory they're exploring is their own.

Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*

Laurence Sterne's protagonist complains, in the first chapter of Volume Five of *Tristram Shandy*, that no new knowledge is generated from the glut of newly published works. Every new author is like a pharmacist handling known quantities of known goods: "Shall we for ever make new books," he asks, "as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another?" (309). That Tristram is stealing his line from Burton is only part of the fun, since the line itself is about everyone stealing, but then it is compounded, on the next page, with a general blanket condemnation of "every imitator in *Great Britain, France, and Ireland*," the whole thing preceded by mottoes borrowed from *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. And so here is a thief indignant at all the thefts of the world, the indignation vocalized at the very moment the thief is in the act of rampant stealing – the walrus bemoaning the fate of the oysters he is chomping down, the philandering politician publicly mourning the loss of our values.

The joke, once recognized as a joke,<sup>18</sup> disarms. There's the surprise (for a reader acquainted with *The Anatomy of Melancholy*) of finding Burton, and then the strange

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<sup>18</sup> Not as easy as it may sound: by all accounts (see, for example, H.J. Jackson, who will be cited extensively below), John Ferrier, the scholar who first traced Sterne's allusions to Burton, did so pretty much convinced that what was going on was, at least on some level, a simple case of plagiarism (457).

centripetal<sup>19</sup> action of the allusive act, since its force draws the reader back into *Tristram Shandy*, into Sterne, into Sterne's narrator Tristram: Why is Tristram misusing Burton? And why is Sterne having Tristram misuse Burton?

The act of borrowing confers authority on the borrower, not the source, though it's easy enough to trace the aesthetic affiliations of both works: they are both wildly digressive, woolly in style and structure,<sup>20</sup> though both are much more than this one single attribute. Surely, though, this wooliness would be enough justification for the reference. Sterne may be saying, Look, my book may digress, it may well be all about digressions, but it has a pedigree. However, readers well acquainted with the source – Machacek's cognoscenti – will recognize the sly distortions and disjunctions that Sterne has introduced, not the least of which is the mangling of the Burton mottoes, as well as – in a move similar to *Pale Fire's* Kinbote's inability to recognize a *Timon of Athens* reference despite having a copy of the play in his cabin – Shandy's perpetual inability to properly source and cite Burton material that his father knows well. And these distortions – because sly, because playful – point to a greater purpose: they are blind spots for Tristram, but not for astute readers of *Tristram*. H.J. Jackson traces these blind spots, which center on Tristram's father's discourses on death, love, and grief (463). But there are also much more localized examples, also cribbed from Burton, such as the confusion of Aristotle for Plato in chapter one of Volume Five, which occurs when Tristram bemoans how far man has fallen from the great ideal, the Great Creator, and a helpful footnote traces the multiple sets of allusions and misattributions Sterne's narrator is

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<sup>19</sup> And not, as one would think, centrifugal – the reader is pulled firmly into the path set by the writer, and not outwardly into the reference itself.

<sup>20</sup> More on digressions, and on the digressive nature of tracing allusions, in the digression that ends this section. (No references are made to Swift's thoughts on the subject as they appear in *Tale of a Tub*.)

engaging in (673). In all these instances large and small, Jackson points out, Sterne is bypassing his narrator and creating a direct avenue of communication between himself and his readers: “What must be emphasized, however, is that many of his errors can be discovered only by direct reference to the text of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, for Sterne deliberately distorted quotations and citations from the *Anatomy* in order to represent Tristram as a pedantic but unstable scholar” (463).

Again, this sort of communication via allusion only really works if the audience is well acquainted with Burton. It creates what Wayne C. Booth, in his *Rhetoric of Fiction*, calls a “secret communion of the author and the reader behind the narrator’s back” (300). And while Booth will discuss Nabokov’s “The Vane Sisters” in relation to this secret communion, it will also manifest itself throughout Nabokov’s oeuvre, most notably in another pedantic, unstable scholar, Charles Kinbote, about whom more later.

For now, back to *Tristram Shandy*, to whom Booth devotes two chapters, neither one of which explicitly addresses Sterne’s use of this author-reader collusion (the “secret communion” chapter appears almost a hundred pages later), though this collusion aids in what Booth sees as *Shandy*’s great aesthetic success, and its great novelty:

Since Tristram, unlike Montaigne, is really trying to tell a story, his struggle as a writer has itself a kind plot form impossible in Montaigne. Though this action disrupts the comic action that he pretends to be relating, the two are really interdependent... the action of writing a book does not seem here to be shown simply for the sake of making fun of other writers or their opinions... Despite the great amount of incidental satire, the action of Tristram in writing this book seems, like the great comic actions of Tom Jones or Don Quixote, to rise above any satirical intent,

to exist as something to be enjoyed in its own right: the satire is for the sake of the comic enjoyment, and not the other way around (230).

I'm quoting at great length here, but for good reason: Booth, in discussing *Tristram Shandy*, points to Sterne's great gift in making us care about a narrator stuck in a work whose major subject is writing itself – the frustrations of writing, the impossibility of writing to accurately record the real, the involutions inherent in attempting to sort out lived experience on the page. Booth reminds us of the huge gap between the actual substance of what happens in *Tristram Shandy* (Tristram is born) and “the fantastic chaos that Tristram makes of it” (231). The novel hinges on the mess of the narrative act itself and because of it, as Booth points out, the novel is singularly writer-centric: *Tristram* is about Tristram trying to write about Tristram, so it could be reduced, with all the implications of that word, to Sterne (the writer) riffing on Tristram (as a writer).

It is here, perhaps, that *The Anatomy of Melancholy* proves most useful to Sterne, since the material appropriated allows for both the Boothian collusion between reader and writer as well as for a secondary, shadowy reflection on the notion of authorship. The preface to *Anatomy* concerns itself, after all, with a lengthy examination of the uses and benefits and history of giving oneself a pseudonym, a mask, before attempting to write. That's one of the mottoes misappropriated for Volume Five, and identified in the Penguin-edition footnote (and documented widely elsewhere), and a central preoccupation of Burton's preface, “the use of a satiric voice or ironic persona and the freedom it affords” (671).

But there are many other ways in which a reader familiar with the preface would see Sterne's use of Burton, two authors sharing similar circular preoccupations. If Sterne

writes to address the involutions of writing, Burton does something much the same: “I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy” (20). This statement, like much of Burton, like much of Sterne, points to an awareness of what writing does for the writer, an awareness – a self-consciousness – that may find empathy, some kind of sympathetic throb, in the reader, one act a mirror of the other, and both intricately tied to the classical concept of imitation discussed in the previous section, where to speak in the voice of a model is to assume and understand and to adopt the model’s ethical baggage.

I mean to say that self-conscious writing – writing that explicitly addresses the emotional and ideological underpinnings it unearths – mimics the conscious rhetorical recreations required of a student engaging in prosopopeia. Both are not merely about the thing being said but about the very act of saying. Imitation, then, draws us inward, toward a greater awareness of who we are, what we want to say.

So, if Sterne is leaning on Burton’s mode of writing about melancholy, it is not because he is preoccupied with Burton or with melancholy, but in finding what is Sternian, what is Shandean, in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Jonathan Lamb’s “Sterne’s System of Imitation” explains it far more lucidly: “Between them they [Montaigne and Burton] represent the two sides of imitation: responding to literature as pure experience on the one hand, and converting experience into literary analogue on the other” (799).

Imitation is what Burton does (so Sterne is imitating an imitator): a great deal of the *Anatomy*’s preface is devoted to Burton defending his use of his Democritus pseudonym, mostly by citing a long and storied tradition of similar classical practices, and the preface itself is titled “Democritus to the Reader,” but it’s not just about the self-conscious mask.



It's also about the very self-conscious exploration of why it's okay for Burton, for all of us, to put on a mask self-consciously: we do it, as Lamb writes when thinking of Sterne and not of the author Sterne is imitating, because "imitation guarantees a mode of expression for sentiments that otherwise might have none" (Lamb). And though Burton begins with a defense of impersonation, he will move very quickly to how other writers help frame and defend one's work, "honourable precedents for this which I have done," taking one (Anthony Zara) to stand for many (20). These passages appear two pages before the apothecary line, and the apothecary line itself is one in the midst of a thicket of classical allusions on theft, ending with a screed on how little good literature one can find out there. But that is where the best poetry of the good thief is located – in choosing what is best and worth stealing from a dizzyingly ever-expanding field of letters. The trick lies not just in finding what is best, but in finding what is best hidden.

And here, too, we find evidence of Sterne's own voracious love of reading, but also of the joy in the recondite corners of the world's infinite library, in the places most valued because visited by the fewest, hungriest, oddest readers. We are consoled because what we are reading is so often unread, is so often neglected. Both Lamb and Jackson point to Sterne's taste in literature, which is decidedly out of tune with his time (as is Burton's, and Nabokov's): "By contrast, those critics who have studied the texts and methods he used to supplement his originality have tended to conclude that he had an old-fashioned taste for literature and wit and that what is odd about him is what is out of date" (Lamb 794). Jackson<sup>21</sup> reminds us that the *Anatomy* had been out of print "for

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<sup>21</sup> She will also speak of Burton in a way that reminds me of Kristeva's definition of intertextuality, as a mosaic of quotations, and talk of Sterne's method of composition in a way that recalls the previous section's discussion of intertextuality as a narrative engine: Sterne "did not take passages from the *Anatomy*

almost a century and was generally neglected” (466). That one’s taste in literature might be at variance from one’s contemporaries is, of course, a trait shared with Walter and Tristram – the creator bestowing the attributes he most cherishes, all of us made in somebody’s image.

Burton and Sterne both steal, and they self-consciously adopt personas that think about and address these thefts, and they do so for roughly similar reasons. If Burton writes about melancholy to forestall his own, Sterne introduces his heaviest doses of Burton at a moment when the Shandy household is dealing with the loss of a child, Tristram’s brother. Burton writes to console himself. So too is Burton borrowed, in Volume Five of *Tristram Shandy*; he is there for consolation – with many of the phrases quoted by Walter Shandy from Burton reflecting a cheerful pessimism, a rueful and resigned contemplation of a world gone wrong.

This dense system of allusion, then, allows a careful, well-informed reader to find yet another thread linking Burton to his thief: both the preface to the *Melancholy* and Volume Five of *Shandy* make a case for reading and writing as crucial, lifesaving modes of order in the welter and chaos of the lived. When faced with pain, with hurt, with death, with the fundamental and arbitrary mess of living, the good reader and writer can at least find consolation in knowing that he or she is not alone. Others have been here before. There are honorable precedents.

Tristram follows Burton. He writes, busy to avoid that of which he writes.

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or quote them unaltered. He chose his materials carefully, and treated Burton’s prose as though it were a mosaic which he could break up and reassemble in patterns of his own” (462).

And, of course, it will escape no one that Sterne is also having a great deal of fun with the unfortunate way in which this consolation falls flat. Because words do fail. Because pain cannot be forestalled, cannot be written or read away.

Nor does Sterne's evident sympathy for his characters, for Walter and Tristram (their odd reading habits, their unfortunate compositional practices), prevent him from poking fun at both, and at himself too, maybe – at the father for his various attempts to encapsulate all of the world's knowledge, at the son for his repeatedly forestalled and failed attempts to encapsulate and articulate his own world, his own life-story. They are both obsessive collectors of arcana, trivia, too busy with the various dangling bits of information to make something tangible and sturdy out of them, digressing because they can't help themselves, chasing whatever turn fits their fancy at the moment, much like Burton will do in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, the only difference being that their creator, Sterne, succeeds where they fail. His book, like Burton's, for all its digressions, finds a wide and appreciative audience, as well as a conclusion.

Sterne and Burton manage to say what they want to say, and they manage to finish saying it, whereas the antiquarian completists appearing and reappearing in their works never quite manage the same thing, much like quite another Dr. Burton, who Sterne will parody as Dr. Slop, a man “no quite able to separate his antiquarian self from the scientific, parading his learning ostentatiously and seriously vending the teachings of seventy writers on midwifery from the most ancient times, which he lists in a Preface” (Cash 136). To this very real gentleman we owe the forceps that will disfigure the very fictional Tristram.

I insist on approaching the end of this section with the source for Dr. Slop because in *Tristram Shandy*, as in *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, as in any experience lived or written or read, nothing is purely one thing. Nothing is even purely derived from one source – it isn't a simple matter of moving information from an old vessel to one that is new. An apothecary – a writer, a reader – is a mash-up artist, or at least someone as aware as Yorick is, in Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, that “there is nothing unmixed in this world” (123).

Such willingness to see the world as free-for-all play of free-floating signifiers, all of it one big mix, one infinite tangle of allusions, can lead to some dangerous avenues: dead ends, digressions. (Nabokov, in defending digressions in his massive commentary on *Eugene Onegin* [a scholarly work that rivals *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in its thoroughness and quirkiness], will resort to Sterne: “As Sterne said of his *Tristram Shandy* (vol 1, ch. 22) ‘...my work is digressive, and it is progressive, too... Digressions, incontestably, are the sun-shine – they are the life, the soul of reading.’” (195).) Nor would this be the only time that Nabokov would resort to Sterne's self-conscious take on allusion for consolation: when he had to teach Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* to a class of undergraduates, he had them read Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, one of the books referenced in the novel, partly as a way of “avoiding Austen herself as much as he could” (Boyd, Vladimir Nabokov: *The American Years* 184). Nabokov's *Lectures on Literature* shows how carefully, how lovingly, the Sterne allusion is traced:

Maria's quotation is from a famous passage in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768) in which the narrator, the *I* of the book called Yorick, hears in Paris a caged starling calling to him. The quotation is apt

in expressing Maria's tension and unhappiness at her engagement to Rushworth, as she intends it to be. But there is a further point, for the quotation from the starling from *A Sentimental Journey* seems to have a connection with an earlier episode from Sterne, a dim reminiscence of which in the back of Austen's mind seemed to have traveled into her character's bright brain, and there evolved a definite recollection. Journeying from England to France, Yorick lands in Calais and proceeds to look for a carriage to hire or buy that will take him to Paris. The place where carriages were acquired was called a *remise*, and it is at the door of such a *remise* in Calais that the following little scene occurs. The name of the owner of the *remise* is Monsieur Dessein, an actual person of the day, who is also mentioned in a famous French novel of the early eighteenth century, *Adolphe* (1815) by Benjamin Constant de Rebecque. Dessein leads Yorick to his *remise* to view his collection of carriages, post chaises as they were called, four-wheel closed carriages. Yorick is attracted by a fellow traveler, a young lady, who "had a black pair of silk gloves open only at the thumb and the two fore-fingers..." He offers her his arm, and they walk to the door of the *remise*; however, after cursing the key fifty times, Dessein discovers that he has come out with the wrong key in his hand, and, says, Yorick, "I continued holding her hand almost without knowing it: so that Monseieur *Dessein* left us together with her hand in mine, and with our faces turned towards the door of the Remise, and said he would be back in five minutes."

So here we have a little theme which is marked by a missing key, giving young love an opportunity to converse. (26-27)

No adequate reason exists for the quoted portion to be this long: the interested reader could, after all, find the relevant section in *Lectures on Literature*. They could even go to *Mansfield Park*. But I find Nabokov's trail of allusions so intoxicating – from Austen to Sterne to Constant and back again – that it's difficult to cut it short, even if the original allusion is absent.

Here it is: Maria Crawford, contemplating a locked gate, contemplating Sterne as well: "I cannot get out, as the starling said" (26). Nabokov himself would reuse the line, not long after, in a poem written by *Lolita*'s Humbert Humbert: "Where are you hiding, Dolores Haze? / Why are you hiding, darling? / (I talk in a daze, I walk in a maze, / I cannot get out, said the starling)" (240).<sup>22</sup> That *Lolita* itself was inspired, as Nabokov writes in the novel's Afterword, by a chimp's drawing of the bars of his own cage, may or may not pertain. What matters more, perhaps, is that these trails are inexhaustible, endlessly recursive – like Burton's vessels, like Sterne's – and that they allow for the endless production of new books. What matters most, however, if we're to take the lessons of Tristram and his father seriously, is knowing when to stop. It might as well be here, with Nabokov cribbing from a writer he did not much care for. Everyone, as somebody said, is a thief, and if there was a better ending for this section it has been stolen.)

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<sup>22</sup> That Nabokov is alluding to Sterne is no great secret: both the Alfred-Appel-edited *Annotated Lolita* and the Bryan-Boyd-edited *Library of America* edition will point to *A Sentimental Journey* as the starling's original perch. What's kind of wonderful, and kind of surprising, is to find in Nabokov's densely intertextual weave a homely, charming, mundane thread: the phrase stuck in his mind for its beauty, yes, but also because he had taught it, year after year, in Cornell.

Alexander Pope and Laurence Sterne References in Nabokov

Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* teems with textual misappropriations, its characters constantly stealing, quoting, misquoting, and referencing other literary works. These are figurative thefts, though one of them, Michael Woods is quick to point out, is also quite literal: Charles Kinbote will steal away to a remote cabin to comment on John Shade's last poem (180). Kinbote physically absconds with the material—John Shade's manuscript, the index cards of his epic poem—secreting it in hidden pockets and keeping it close to his body. He also absconds with the poem's meaning, so Shade's verse becomes, in Kinbote's commentary, a jumping-off point for the commentator's imagined Zembla, a land that for Shade exists mostly as a Pope reference scribbled on a margin. Kinbote finds that Shade has written down a few lines from Pope's *Essay on Man*. These are lines, Kinbote suspects, that Shade "may have been intended to cite as a footnote" (636). Shade will transmute Pope's "At Greenland, Zembla, or the Lord knows where" into a metaphor for his face, Old Zembla, "where my gray stubble grows, / And slaves make hay between my mouth and nose" (937-36, 483). Kinbote will in turn transmute Shade's poem into what Shade himself calls "*Man's life as commentary to abstruse / Unfinished poem. Note for further use*" (939-40, 483).

These thefts continue through *Pale Fire*'s Foreword, Poem, and Commentary, and their mode—their approach to intertextuality—serves as a kind of normative template for authors who will reference Nabokov's *Pale Fire* in their own works, so that Nabokov becomes not just the intertextual reference but also the reference's guiding principle. An external *Pale Fire* reference will read as though it belonged in *Pale Fire* proper—as

though Nabokov himself were writing it—thus reinforcing the source novel’s aesthetic and cultural ideologies.<sup>23</sup>

*Pale Fire* does carry an aesthetic and cultural ideology, though this assertion can be contested. Nabokov himself contested it. In *Strong Opinions*, he repeatedly expressed a dislike for turning a work of literature into a simple statement of purpose: “mediocrity,” he stated, “thrives on ‘ideas’” (66). In doing so he singled out “general ideas, the big, sincere ideas which permeate a so-called great novel,” which “amount to bloated topicalities stranded like dead whales” (120). But this rejection of outside influences—this turning away from biographical and social material to focus exclusively on a close reading of the text—is itself a kind of aesthetic ideology, one closely aligned to New Criticism. Moreover, as Amy Reading’s “Vulgarity’s Ironist” points out, Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* consistently lampoons academic approaches to reading and interpretation. Kinbote may be many things (king, madman, professor, neighbor, ping-pong player), but he is fundamentally an academic run amok. The article also points to Nabokov’s dismissal of middle-class modes of reading, which is fairly easy to find throughout but often overlooked because it occurs so near the surface of the text (90). Both Kinbote and Shade will lampoon specific cultural targets, enough of them to make *Pale Fire* “a novel of class taste as much as novel of academia” (90). *Pale Fire*’s approach to culture, Reading asserts, works as “invisible lever for transforming critical analysis into readerly

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<sup>23</sup> Major studies of Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* include Brian Boyd’s *Nabokov’s Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery* and Priscilla Meyer’s *Find What the Sailor Has Hidden: Vladimir Nabokov’s Pale Fire*. Boyd’s Nabokov biography, *The American Years* also contains relevant sections on the novel and its composition. See too the recent notes and critical articles of Jansy Mello, Alex Roy, Matthew Roth, Gerard de Vries, Alexander Dolinin, Matthew Brillinger, Anthony Fazio, Gerard de Vries, and Ward Swinson in *The Nabokovian*; also relevant is the work of Emmy Waldman, Matthew Roth and Tiffany DeRewal, Annalisa Volpone, Peter Lowe, and John Barnstead in *The Nabokov Online Journal*. Amy Reading’s work – cited above and throughout, and published in the *Arizona Quarterly Review* – merits special attention for its social, historical, and critical breadth.



compliance” (80). Although Reading’s observations are powerful and persuasive, they do not fully account for the novel’s particular persuasive effect. They do not take into account *Pale Fire*’s humor as its chief means to effect readerly compliance. Nabokov may be saying all that Reading ascribes him as saying—nearly all of it concords with his published interviews and essays—but none of it would prove as seductive and invisible were it not for his extraordinary gift for humor. Kinbote and Shade’s cultural ideology—and Nabokov’s by proxy—proves all the more persuasive because it manifests itself through parody, satire, and intertextual jokes, so that the reader is too busy laughing to note the writer’s strong opinion on modes of reading or forms of thought. The opinion is there as a matter of course. And there is no questioning the opinion because it hardly manifests itself, since what is actually registering—what is actually foremost in the reader’s mind—is a joke being made with the opinion itself as an outside referent, as a mode of thinking so stable and so given that one need hardly mention it. Thus Nabokov builds a strong network of discourse between appropriated external references, humor, and cultural and ideological standards.

This network of discourse may explain why so many of *Pale Fire*’s references are comic. In the reference to Pope’s Zembla, Kinbote despairs at finding so little of his own Zembla in Shade’s poem. The reader knows that Kinbote’s interpretation of Shade’s poem is wildly at variance with the evidence at hand – that’s the big joke, Kinbote’s continual misinterpretation and misappropriation of Shade’s material. But Shade will also appropriate and interpret. He will use Pope to his own ends: Zembla becomes his face. And Nabokov himself will mirror this technique through the length of the novel by having both Shade and Kinbote name-drop and make references – some obscure, most

not – to a vast number of writers. Herbert Grabes, in “Nabokov and Shakespeare: The English Works,” will tally a total of forty-six different writers, though he does remark that the majority of these references occur “via the mere mention of names rather than through actual intertextuality” (506). Grabes is mostly concerned with Nabokov’s relationship to Shakespeare, though his analysis of Nabokov’s multi-faceted approach to Shakespeare closely mirrors Reading’s. Grabes, like Reading, sees the novel as a critique of academic interpretation, which amounts to “pasting one’s own fantasy onto a famous author’s poem in order to catch some of that poem’s glory” (509). Grabes also sees Nabokov as enlisting Shakespeare to a number of other means, and though all are valid, they are relevant here only in that they point, again, to Nabokov’s use of intertextuality as a multivalenced means of discourse. That is, Nabokov doesn’t use Shakespeare merely to stress the parasitic relationship between Kinbote and Shade, or merely as a way to critique academic commentaries to literary works, or merely as a way to comment on strange relationships between disparate works of literature composed hundreds of years apart.

What matters most is that Nabokov is engaging intertextuality comically, and hence almost invisibly, so that his critique of taste and reading occurs without calling attention to itself. Nabokov’s great strength and persuasive power lies in that this critique is overt—one doesn’t need to read into the text to find it: the text itself, its very structure of Foreword, Poem, and Commentary, stresses the nature of the parody, and of course Kinbote’s own digressive and disjunctive tendencies go a long way to deliver the joke. One such disjunction is Kinbote’s response to Shade’s Pope reference: “So this is all treacherous old Shade could say about Zembla—*my Zembla?* While shaving his stubble

off? Strange, strange...” (636). Kinbote, the commentator, obviously ignores his own textual reference made just a few sentences prior. He has already identified Shade’s line as deriving from Pope’s Second Epistle of the *Essay on Man*, but has chosen—in the face of all available evidence, evidence available to the reader and provided by Kinbote himself—to violently repurpose the text. It is no longer Pope’s Zembla. It is no longer even Shade’s. It is, Kinbote insists, italics his, “my Zembla.” This Zembla—Kinbote’s—is one that Brian Boyd will further explore, though he will complicate it with that land’s various alternate territorial and textual realities:

Since Kinbote insists on the distinction between his Zembla and “Nova Zembla” (C.894, 267), his own Zembla must be different from those slim polar islands once called Nova Zembla. Now known more often by their Russian name, Novaya Zemlya, or “new land,” they were formerly... a byword for remoteness and coldness, connotations Pope’s friend Swift exploited when in his *Battle of the Books* he announces that “a malignant deity, call’d *Criticism*... dwelt on the Top of a snowy mountain in *Nova Zembla*.” Judging by geographical and linguistic indications, Kinbote’s Zembla is sometimes very close to Novaya Zemlya but shifts at times toward Scandinavia, perhaps toward Finland, where until November 1917 the Russian language had something like the presence it has in the Zembla of Kinbote’s youth, or perhaps toward Norway or Sweden, whose languages combine with Slavic traces to produce Zemblan. (79)

Here too is evidence of intertextuality’s role in effecting readerly compliance. The weave of shifting realities explored by Boyd hinge on nomenclature—as evinced by the various Zemblas—while directing the reader to Swift’s view of criticism as a monster far

removed from the actual substance and affairs of the world. The reality of the text depends on these multiple Zemblas, one of which is Kinbote's own, another of which belongs to the world of Swift and Pope and exists chiefly as figurative language, while another still can be found on an actual map, so that it is a real place, one whose location can be fixed. Thus Zembla is and is not what Kinbote's index claims it to be, "a distant northern land" (667). Here Boyd's endnote for *Pale Fire's* Library of America edition points to Pope again, since the description is lifted from line 154 of *Rape of the Lock*: "In some lone Isle, or distant Northern Land" (903). Wood, when discussing Zembla's geography, returns to Kinbote's comments about the name's etymology. Kinbote connects Zembla's name to resemblances and reflections, which for Wood "tends to push the place back toward the imaginary" (176). One could argue that it pushes Zembla outward into other texts. *Pale Fire* begins and ends with phrases that belong to neither the characters or to Nabokov, not exactly, though in their appropriation the lines are given a multiplicity—a richness—of meaning that pull simultaneously into and out of the text: into other texts (from *Timon of Athens* to *Rape of the Lock* with many other references along the way, references heading elsewhere, inwardly and outwardly, so that one may end up playing an annotator's version of the novel's Word Golf) and into other realities (the substance of Boyd's *Nabokov's Pale Fire* concern shadowy authorial intrusions, so that one character directs another's composition of the work, turning the novel into an elaborate game of metaphysical personae, and Nabokov himself into a skilled weaver of multiply stacked authorial voices). In all these cases, intertextuality's major role is to further solidify the shifting and elusive quality of reality. These multiple Zemblas are all in their own way quite real. What's more, their reality depends on their multiplicity—on

there always being another alluded Zembla behind the one immediately at hand. Reality exists because one Zembla alludes to the next, all acting as signifier, signified, referent, or referrer for each other. They're real, in other words, because they exist in relation to each other. Reality, incidentally, is a word that Nabokov insisted should always be enclosed in quotation marks.

A reader may not need to follow the intertextual trail too far to understand that the novel plays with these small textual distortions. *Pale Fire* brims with multiple mirror images, nearly all of which will allude to intertextual sources. Kinbote will compare himself to Shade's daughter Sybil, though he is also blurred into a professor Botkin and a certain Charles Xavier. Shade's poem begins with twin reflections: the shadow of a bird and the reflected blue of the sky on a window. And Shade himself suggests both shadows and ghosts, while the assassin's name will also blur from Grey to Gradus. And the assassination itself owes much to a doubling—actually a tripling—of identity, with the killer confusing Shade for the judge and with Kinbote confusing a escaped madman for a Marxist would-be regicide. Kinbote will further morph him, in the commentary's last line, into a curiously gentle personification of death: “a bigger, more respectable, more competent Gradus” (658). A number of critics, Priscilla Meyer in particular, have done much with Kinbote's close relationship to Hamlet. Both characters exhibit suicidal tendencies, and Nabokov does trace a discernible intertextual trail between one character to the other. It isn't merely that both are royalty and that both are isolated. As Bader points out, *Pale Fire*'s professor Botkin—one of Kinbote's doubles—can be found in *Hamlet* as a “bare bodkin” (III.i.76), though Kinbote himself insists on spelling it with a “t.”

There is also the matter of the title, which points to the single Shakespeare volume that Kinbote happens to have in his possession, *Timon of Athens*, as well as to old Hamlet's ghost: "The glow-worm shows the matin to be near / And gins to pale his uneffectual fire. / Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me" (I.v.89-91). Graben provides a useful overview of critics who have noted this reference, though the salient feature seems to be that Nabokov uses it at all (509). Again, there is a blurring of referents, the "pale fire" of *Timon* and the "pale fire" of *Hamlet*, and its function seems to mirror in the blurring of the various Zemblas noticed by Boyd. In both, the effect depends on the tension between competing claims to reality and actuality by various outside the text. Further complicating the matter is Kinbote himself, who misses the key lines from *Timon of Athens*: "The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction / Robs the vast sea; the moon's an arrant thief, / And her pale fire she snatches from the sun; / The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves / The moon into salt tears" (IV.iii.436-40). Kinbote, an isolated character, fails to uncover Shade's appropriation of Shakespeare, but goes on to discuss "dze Bart"'s Zemblan translator, whose badly botched version, retranslated by Kinbote into English, here acts as yet another blurred intertextual terrain, since the mistranslation occurs much earlier, on Kinbote's commentary to lines 39-42, and his failing to find very passage occurs in his commentary to line 962. Kinbote – as Reading, Grabes, Boyd, and many others have pointed out – exists as a parody of botched or excessive academic endeavor. Kinbote repeatedly insists that the reader follow him to his annotations. He dictates a certain way of reading the book, and there are enough early clues – the most glaring of which being his suggestion that the reader buy multiple copies so as to be capable of having several pages open at once – to let the reader in on the author's

intention: Kinbote the academic may insist on one way of reading Shade's *Pale Fire*, but it does not necessarily accord with Nabokov's. Reading further advances the idea, claiming that Nabokov "has built the structure of the novel so that it cantilevers out beyond the pages of the book to point to the true locus of meaning – Nabokov himself" (87). It's a powerful argument, and one that goes a long way to explain why so many *Pale Fire* references mimic Nabokov's approach. If a Nabokov work points to Nabokov himself, then it stands to reason that the very nature of the reference is Nabokovian in tone, mode, and approach.

To this idea one can also add the suggestion that, for Nabokov, a proper grasp of intertextuality is somehow equivalent to sanity, since Shade (and presumably the reader) can make sense of the references that baffle Kinbote. Shade's Pope and Shakespeare references are clear—they're clear to him and they're clear to anyone armed with the texts or with reliable commentators on the text. Kinbote, in his cabin, lacks the same access given the reader to resources beyond the poem itself. As a commentator whose major function is to act as a point of divergence ("see my note to line 991"), he cannot reach beyond the text and thus cannot build what Shade terms, in line 810, "a web of sense." Kinbote quite simply lacks the materials and sanity required for intertextual meaning-making. And his isolation is both physical and emotional, and this condition exists even before he leaves for his desolate cabin. He is removed from his neighbors, removed from his campus, and removed even from his own circumstances. He is either an exiled king or an émigré who has devised an elaborate fantasy to make his status bearable, but either way he is disconnected from the very substance and heft of the world around him. He is an egoist, seeing nothing in Shade's poem that is not a reflection of

himself, but he is also the keenest victim of his own egoism, trapped in a situation where all meaning grows distorted, blurred, and confused by his inability to thread the various texts together. Kinbote's capacity to make sense of the poem and, more importantly, of his world is curtailed by his inability to properly engage with intertextuality. He misquotes. He forgets. He misattributes. He fails to connect. He grows mad.

Nabokov in Anthony Burgess, *The X-Files*, Touré, Salman Rushdie, and Elsewhere

This madness recurs in works that reference *Pale Fire*. In Anthony Burgess's *The Clockwork Testament, or Enderby's End*, the titular character responds to a gun-wielding madwoman's order to turn the TV on, and to do put the volume on high (so as to mask the sound of gunfire) in this way: "You do it. Play Russian roulette with it. That's Nabokov, not me. *Pale Fire*" (126).

In an *X-Files* episode titled "José Chung's From Outer Space," the paranormal agents are forced to reconcile various – and conflicting – accounts of an alien called Lord Kinbote, though it becomes increasingly clear that the alien is likely the creation of a self-deluded character, Roky Crickeson, whose narrative becomes progressively more self-aggrandizing (D. Morgan). Kinbote again serves as an indicator of solipsism, since everything in Roky's account increasingly turns inward, as Lord Kinbote reveals to him that he has been chosen, and that he is actually the chosen ruler of a remote world not far removed, in spirit at least, from Nabokov's Kinbote's own distant northern land. And here the episode's intertextuality mirrors Nabokov's own approach in executing a kind of brilliant self- and genre-parody: the episode brims with intertextual references.

*Jeopardy's* Alex Trebek appears, though it isn't clear if it's actually Alex Trebek or if the



characters have been hypnotized into believing they saw the game show host. Jesse Ventura makes an appearance.

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

All three plots satisfy fairly basic narrative needs, as does "José Chung," so that intertextuality works mostly by perversely insisting that one can make sense of what's going on without outside references. There is, in fact, a case to be made for intertextuality as an agent or catalyst for madness, since the *X-Files's* Roky, like Don Quixote, has become so absorbed in his fantasies that he can no longer distinguish the fictional from the actual. A similar case could be made for Kinbote: he may not be suffering from a lack of intertextuality but rather from a surfeit of it, since everything in Shade's poem is taken, by him, as a secret reference to Kinbote's own life and fantasies. Here, however, it's clear

that both Vladimir Nabokov, the author, and Darin Morgan, episode's writer, include their respective intertextual references as means to bypass their story's narrators (Roky and Kinbote) and speak directly to a knowledgeable audience: what we find here is what we find in *Tristram Shandy*, a secret communion between the author and a specific, knowledgeable segment of the audience. The narrators may be mad, but the intertextual references allow for a seemingly objective evaluation of the immediate circumstances.

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

What's more, the success of the reference depends on Nabokov's own approach to intertextuality, one that relies on an ideal reader or viewer's seemingly inexhaustible stock of cultural knowledge. Many of their references, after all, lack internal cues to their intertextual nature. They're inside jokes, and they can be inside jokes only if entrance to

the territory is concealed, misdirected, or otherwise barred. This opacity may explain Darin Morgan's very Nabokovian-sounding remarks when asked, for the episode's DVD commentary, about Lord Kinbote's provenance: "Are you really asking? That's a literary reference which I'd rather not discuss. There's a character in *Pale Fire* by that name and it ties in with the themes."

Nabokov too was a famously evasive and elusive interviewee. When asked, for example, whether he believed in God, he replied, "I know more than I can express in words, and the little I can express would not have been expressed, had I not known more" (Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* 45). The similarity between Morgan and Nabokov, here, is on their refusal to provide a straightforward answer. *Pale Fire* is a notoriously playful novel, and this particular episode of the *X-Files* is playful along the same lines, but part of the playfulness lies precisely in the refusal to provide clear paths leading to a tidy resolution. Nabokov does not, for example, explain the literary palimpsest behind Zembla – its multiple uses and associations – nor does he fully account for Shakespeare's presence in the novel – neither the multiple sources for the title or the connotative echoes of Bodkin, botkin, and Kinbote. Nabokov expects the reader to do some homework. Morgan does not explain *Pale Fire*: he expects the viewer to pick up and read the novel.

Nabokov's brand of intertextuality requires labor. And embedded in the labor is the idea that other texts matter, and that the pleasure of reading stems partly from the ability to connect a multiple sources of information together into coherent patterns of signification. There is, then, in Nabokov's playful approach to referencing other texts, an inherent generosity: *Pale Fire*'s Kinbote may lack the capacity to reach much beyond himself, but *Pale Fire* itself spills over into other texts in ways that generate a kind of

radiant, silvery light into unexpected avenues. This generosity might also account for another popular mode of *Pale Fire* references, one where Kinbote's madness fades to the background and the reality of fictional texts is insisted upon.

This insistence finds its way into strange places. Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, which offers a blurred version of Brian Eno and U2, catalogs a library that consists of books and authors that exist only in other books and authors, so that in-between "Sal Paradise's odes to wanderlust, Nathan Zuckerman's *Carnovsky*" and Dedalus, Matzerath, Menand, F. Alexander's *Clockwork Orange*, the browser finds poetry books by John Shade (280). Rushdie had winked at Nabokov earlier in his career, in *The Satanic Verses*, when Chamcha, grown mad with fever, quotes a Zemblan proverb, to which another character sensibly replies, "How are you supposed to read a man who writes in a made-up lingo of his own?" (456).

Touré's *Soul City* follows much the same model, with the novel introducing a number of characters from different texts, *Lolita*'s Humbert Humbert included: "the insane little drummer boy Oskar Matzerath from *The Tin Drum*, crazy Dr. Charles Kinbote from *Pale Fire*, annoying Enid Lambert from *The Corrections*" (25). These characters are treated as actual human beings in the fabric of the narrative, much like Lee Siegel's *Love in a Dead Language* will treat Zembla as an actual territory with an actual language. Siegel will sprinkle these references through the novel, but they're most striking at the end, when he provides a bibliography where the following two entries appear:

Shade, John. 'Pale Fire.' Edited by Charles Kinbote. New Wye: Wordsmith  
College Press, 1966.

Zernovon, Remus Radomir. *Zembla-English Dictionary*. Bokay: Queen Blenda Press, 1908. (371-372)

These entries blur the fictional and the real – other entries include Carl Proffer’s *Keys to Lolita* (a real book) and Mary McCarthy’s review of *Pale Fire* for *Encounter* (a real review, a real magazine, a real writer). In fact, their very textuality lends them further legitimacy. It’s because they’re presented as bibliographic entries that they seem more real. *Stranger* still are actual reference books that insert these intertextual moments into the least expected places. In Robert Dechene’s *Fundraising Through Silent Auctions*, Charles Kinbote appears as the potential bidder for an emerald Tiara (29). In the index to a Princeton textbook, *Finite Structures with Few Types*, the interested mathematics student will find, under K, a certain “Charles Kinbote: not in the text” (Cherlin and Hrushovski). If the student is still looking, he or she should know that they’ll find Kinbote in *Zembla*, whose exact location is disclosed in the index to another book, under Z.

### Conclusion

I’m thinking here that the pleasure of insisting on the reality of fictional texts (one of the transtextual connections recurring in the data set) feeds into an appreciation of not just *Pale Fire*, and not just the works that reference *Pale Fire*, but also of our world at large. A great deal of pleasure springs from finding order, even arbitrary order, in what has always been a nearly unmanageable ocean of information. This pleasure, of course, shares much with the kind that others find in uncovering conspiracies. What I’m saying, then, is that the aim is to uncover a conspiracy – an arbitrary conspiracy, a fictional

conspiracy (fictional because imposed from without on unwitting participants, and fictional because its participants are engaged in, after all, make believe), but a conspiracy nonetheless, a world bound with secret knots of our own devising.

What binds these authors together is a love of what is seemingly forgotten, what is seemingly old fashioned or out of fashion altogether: Burton's for Gessen and the rest of a recondite classical tradition, Sterne's for Burton's (then) out-of-print woolly masterpiece, Nabokov's for Pope's mock-heroic couplets. What is allusive, for those writers and for the ones discussed throughout, is also hidden from general circulation, unfairly neglected, unseen, unappreciated. What is allusive is also – *almost* – elusive, almost but not quite. For the writers at hand, allusion provides a way to align themselves with an earlier, neglected, truer tradition – a tradition made all the more special because so few, seemingly, have entered it.

That last statement, too, is not without problems. The master list is fairly large – well over a hundred references from well over a hundred writers. And so the tradition can be nowhere near as secretive, nowhere near as neglected, as the previous paragraph makes it out to be. And Nabokov has not been, strictly speaking, neglected. If it is a secret club, the secret club of Nabokov admirers, then it is a secret club that keeps its secret poorly, and if the club thinks its membership is select, it may well want to look at its roster one more time: scores of people have joined, not just mainstream literary authors. Pop and horror and thriller writers are in there. So are textbook authors. So are script- and songwriters. They're all producing culture, and they're all finding common ground in one particular cultural producer.

All the same, I do believe that the allusions often take place in a shadowy, murky sort of marketplace, with the writers thrilled partly because they know that they're reaching an audience of fellow obsessives. I believe this is so, and I aim to explore this allusive trail with that belief in mind.

## CHAPTER 2

### AN OVERVIEW OF NABOKOV REFERENCES

Cultural capital circulates: Burton appears in Sterne, Sterne appears in Nabokov, and Nabokov appears pretty much everywhere. The previous chapter follows the thread of this circulation through a set of discrete cultural producers, but expanding and flattening the process provides a window into why this act speaks to authorial self-definition. Indeed, allusion is often assumed to be discrete and localized in its impact and its import. Machacek stresses that allusion is “brief, discrete, and local” (525), and Genette notes that allusion is more meaningful “to the limited figure (to the pictorial detail) than to the work considered as a structural whole” (2-3). But this localized view owes much to its circumscribed perspective: what is seen depends on where we’re looking from, and the traditional angle from which allusion is examined is far too narrow, too close, too proximate. We need to zoom out, as it were, from a simple copresence of texts (from a conversation between two or three cultural producers) into terrain that allows for a true exploration of the forces at work.

The 167 texts alluding to the corpus and authorial epitext of a single predecessor is one such possible point from which to begin this exploration. Cultural capital circulates partly because it allows cultural producers to talk about themselves by talking about others. But also of interest is *how* cultural producers arrive at this circuitous channel of self-definition, with its varying levels of complexity inherent in appropriating and repurposing units of cultural capital. Here we must distinguish between a spur – what is alluded to – and a transtextual connection – the modality of a textual copresence, which identifies how a Nabokov reference is acting on, commenting upon, or reinforcing



information presumed to be already embedded in Nabokov and his work. A spur does not necessitate a transtextual connection.

Consider, for example, Nick Cave's "The Elms and the Poplars (Henry's Dream)," whose spur is *Lolita*. The song weaves in an obscure reference to a passage that someone unacquainted with the novel would miss: "Oh baby please don't cry / And try to keep / Your little head upon my shoulder / Now we'll go to sleep // The elms and the poplars / Were turning their backs / Past the rumbling station / We followed their tracks" (Cave). In *Lolita*, we also find that "The elms and the poplars were turning their ruffled backs to a sudden onslaught of wind, and a black thunderhead loomed above Ramsdale's white church tower when I looked around me for the last time" (97). The spur is not easily identifiable, but the song takes advantage of the embedded cultural capital to further stress a transtextual connection between the two texts: each features a child, and over each child an unreliable narrator presides (the song's parenthetical subtitle reminds us that the goings-on are Henry's, not Cave's). Cave, like Nabokov, stands outside the first-person account and is to be relied on as the arbiter of an aesthetic or ethical disposition.

The spur is the same in the oldest song reference on record (1980), the Nabokov song allusion that most people can recall, and the one responsible for several generations mispronouncing Nabokov's name: The Police's "Don't Stand So Close To Me." However, unlike in Cave, the transtextual connection is not to be found here. When Sting, a former English teacher, writes "Loose talk in the classroom / To hurt they try and try / Strong words in the staff-room / The accusations fly / It's no use, he sees her / He starts to shake and cough / Just like the old man in / That book by Nabokov," we see both the situation at hand, the song's setting (a school) and narrator (teacher), as a particularly

fraught moment: it's a cultural product self-reflexively setting itself in a locus (the school) that arbiters culture presumably antithetical to rock and roll, narrated by one such arbiter of high culture (the educator), referencing a respected bit of that culture (the novelist) (Police). The chorus (and title), "Don't stand so close to me," stands at odds with the referential act itself. Sting (or Sting's narrator) may want the girl to stand back, but he himself wants to sit as close as he can to Vladimir Nabokov. Here, as elsewhere throughout, cultural capital is expended to bridge two seemingly disparate cultural creators. In the four minutes afforded by the song, the singer and the novelist are provided the space in which to come together and see what they have in common. But the modality has changed: the text does not explore, does not explode, the textual copresence, but reduces it to a fairly simple comparison ("What is happening here is the same thing that happened in that book") absent Cave's sophisticated appropriation of Nabokov's narrative approach. That said, Cave and Sting are both essentially doing the same thing: they're pairing themselves with Nabokov. And they're not alone.

At least one hundred and forty seven authors reference Vladimir Nabokov in one hundred and sixty seven separate cultural products. Taken as a whole, these cultural products – a large and seemingly disconnected group of texts all referencing a single author forms – are remarkable for both their disparity and their singularity, since in scrutinizing the particulars of both allows for an alternate way of grouping texts. Doing so creates a kind of grassroots canon – the Nabokophile as a member in a secret school of literature (a school created by its own participants without them actually knowing they were doing so), his or her Nabokov reference a signifier of an entire aesthetic disposition. The pattern emerges when Moretti's distant-reading methods are applied; having done so

below, those patterns allow closer examination of the meaning and relevance of a Nabokov reference in intra-authorial communication in subsequent chapters dealing with Nicholson Baker, John Updike, Martin Amis, the *McSweeney's* group, and others. Because the data lends itself to multiple grouping criteria, it is provided (along with the criteria being used) in the APPENDIX. This plasticity provides potential opportunities for looking at these allusions anew from a deliberately constrained, deliberately distorted perspective – alternate ways to think about how these writers reference Nabokov.

This particular inquiry, because of its self-imposed limits, offers insights into how writers in general engage with a single predecessor, while also exploring how allusion and intertextuality function in the field of cultural production. In this field, a referenced author functions as a unit of currency: writers making a reference are like consumers in any economy, and they spend not only for necessities (plot, character development, setting), but also to position themselves and to telegraph their aesthetic and ideological dispositions. A writer – a writer's work, a writer's aura – is a brand, and brands lead to conspicuous consumption: This is who I like. This is who I stand with. This is who I am.

To claim brand-consciousness or symbolic-capital-status to allusion re-states and re-articulates what is already known – what is already well established – about allusion and its relationship to intertextuality: that a reference signals an ideological, cultural, aesthetic, and social affiliation. That is, a writer alludes because doing so allows for an effective way to deliver a great deal of information in a highly compressed symbolic unit of meaning. Think of Bernard of Chartres, and of his assertion that we all stand on the shoulders of giants, and think too of the many ways in which information technology relies on piggyback protocols – on using code or routines or routes already well

established. Or think of intertextuality's basic premise: that nothing is built from scratch, and that every utterance leans on, stands on, what was previously uttered.

These are well-established areas of knowledge, but they can be complicated first by examining how commonplace assumptions about allusion fare when quantified and examined en masse, then by extending the impact and the weight of these references into the field of cultural production where these producers operate. To do so may strike some, may strike me, as unnecessarily thick-headed, but I've found that examining the seemingly obvious yields unusual rewards. What a reference does – why a reference occurs at all – is worth examining, well beyond its effect on the particular paragraph in which the reference is found. Doing so, as this chapter progresses, can open a line of inquiry that begins by asking whether a Nabokov reference (or a reference to any other particular writer) necessarily signals an affiliation with that author, but extends into the modality and manner of referentiality, mostly into examining whether an affiliation can exist without epi- and paratextual knowledge embedded in the reader, whether that matters, and by suggesting that the traditional order of understanding allusion should be (at times) reversed: the allusion may well be thought of as a mode of communication occurring primarily between writers. Many of the writers included in the study operate in more or less the same space: nearly all are still alive and nearly all are still working, and so there is the good luck – and good timing – of studying an ongoing phenomenon (the production of contemporary literature) through a particular frame.

What follows is a breakdown of the data itself and its potential usefulness in understanding allusion, referentiality, and intertextuality, presented visually whenever it's useful to do so. The breakdown reveals how allusion functions as symbolic capital,

capital used by authors to comment on and to position themselves in their field. The literary scene – what Bourdieu terms the literary field and locates as a sub-set of the field of large-scale cultural production – can be seen as a kind of stock market, which proves a serviceable, ad hoc way of thinking about a writer’s weight on the state of affairs at any given point: it fluctuates, it is transferred, it moves, it responds, it appreciates in value. It does all the things we expect from capital.

### A General Description and Preliminary Findings

A few basic facts about the texts in question: 66 of them are contemporary literary novels, 23 songs, 18 television episodes, 10 movies, nine humor pieces, seven poems, six short stories, five horror novels, five memoirs, three science fiction works, three textbooks, two graphic novels, and one each of erotica, and musical theatre. Collectively these works reference *Lolita* 77 times, the author 55 times, and *Pale Fire* 23 times. Other Nabokov works mentioned, though not to the same extent, include *Speak*, *Memory*, *Ada*, *Laughter in the Dark*, *Bend Sinister*, *Pnin*, *The Gift*, and the very early short story “Torpid Smoke.”

The Nabokov references have been first divided into those occurring in literature and those in popular culture, a division necessary for the way in which cultural goods are disseminated, since this dissemination in turn guides the disposition of the cultural producers involved. This distinction guides how cultural producers behave. Richard Johnson notes that the vast “reservoirs of discourses and meaning” that comprise the social “are in turn raw material for fresh cultural production. They are indeed among the specifically cultural *conditions* of production,” but he also notes that they are most often

disseminated as commodities (47). It bears repeating: The focus is on cultural producers, and cultural producers behave differently depending on what field they find themselves in. They do so to successfully navigate field-specific requirements greatly determined by the circuit of production. Producers of all kinds deal in symbolic goods, but there are significant differences to be found in how these products circulate. They share at least one common field: they all traffic in the field of large-scale cultural production “specifically organized with a view to the production of cultural goods destined for non-producers of cultural goods, ‘the public at large’” (Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* 115). However, in Bourdieu’s framework, the creation and dissemination of literature occurs in a symbolic marketplace that functions by “breaking with the public of non-producers, that is, with the non-intellectual fractions of the dominant class” (115). This breaking away, for the literary field, finds its most vital disseminating force in what Bourdieu terms the field of restricted production, “a system producing cultural goods (and the instruments for appropriating these goods) objectively destined for a public of producers of cultural goods” (163, 115). I’ve initially set apart popular culture references from literary references, but it’s a necessary separation, since the fields in which each respective set of cultural producers operate are also somewhat separate. There is overlap, but all the same the separation of the fields is evident in the way the material is marketed, sold, and consumed in the field of large-scale cultural production, though as the Cave reference shows above (and as the Stephen King and Anne Rice references show at the end of this chapter) a difference in the means of dissemination does not mean a difference in the degree of relative sophistication in the traffic of cultural capital.

While visual references – television and film – will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter, what’s surprising, overall, is that television and film references can often be as playful and as obscure as the ones found in contemporary literature, and that popular culture is perfectly capable of allusions beyond *Lolita*, a book name-checked 42 times in pop culture (with 26 other occurrences distributed mostly between the author himself and *Pale Fire*), a figure not terribly far removed from the 36 appearances that the book makes in mainstream literature.

Again (it bears repeating): there are far more references that use *Lolita* as its spur than the ones recorded the data set, and many of the ones preserved in the data set cannot be neatly categorized or traced back to Nabokov himself: some may well be traced to the 1962 Stanley Kubrick film adaptation, the 1997 Adrian Lyne adaptation, or to the shadowy, oversexed figure explored by Vickers in *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov’s Little Girl All Over Again*. That *Lolita*, according to Vickers, has relatively little to do with Nabokov: she is an agent provocateur, a seductress, a willing participant – she becomes, in other words, the figure *Lolita*’s unreliable narrator Humbert Humbert *wants* her to be, not the more complicated character crafted by the novel’s author. Vickers finds the historical root of the simplified, de*Lolita*fied *Lolita* in the newspapers and television programs of the 1950s, whose “public, they reasoned, wanted cartoonish representations of complicated things” (7). This widely circulating concept, it’s true, is only barely tangentially connected to the novel itself. The *Lolita* references discussed throughout are most open to contention, but they appear when there is a chance that they partake of what Genette refers to as the author’s public epitext to some extent,

however miniscule, even if Nabokov’s aura has been reduced, diminished, or distorted in transit.

This is all to say that the industry and ingenuity of a well-placed, oftentimes well-hidden Nabokov joke is not unique to Nabokov’s own field of cultural production. The difference has less to do with the relative sophistication of the reference and far more with the weight of an author’s aura. Which is to say: writers care way more about writers than anybody else, potential readers included.

Where the difference between one field and the other becomes most apparent is in how often Nabokov himself – the author, the author’s presence, his personality and his *bon mots* and misattributed *bon mots*, everything about him – appears. In pop culture, he’ll be invoked 15 times. In literature, he’ll show up in 40 separate references.

**Table 1: References in Popular Culture and Literature**

References	Total	In Popular Culture	In Literature
<i>Lolita</i>	78	42	36
Author	55	15	40
<i>Pale Fire</i>	23	8	15
<i>Speak, Memory, Ada, etc.</i>	15	3	12

This ratio is significant even when accounting for the slightly higher number of literature references: 96, or 25 more than the 71 classified in the table as popular culture.



Put simply, references to Nabokov himself make up about 20% of all popular culture references and 40% of those found in literature.

**Table 2: References by Percentage in Popular Culture and Literature**

References (By %)	Total	In Popular Culture	In Literature
<i>Lolita</i>	47%	59%	38%
Author	32%	21%	41%
<i>Pale Fire</i>	13%	12%	16%
<i>Speak, Memory,</i> <i>Ada, etc.</i>	9%	4%	13%

For now I want to focus exclusively on literature, beginning with a tentative hypothesis on why so many Nabokov references – again: 40%, nearly half – allude so explicitly to the author himself and not to his work, a hypothesis having to do mostly with the circumstances surrounding the immediate moment of composition, the physical moment when the writer put pen to paper and chose to reference Nabokov – the author of a text calling to mind and writing in the author of another text. What was going through his or her mind? Why Nabokov? And why call upon the actual author 40 times?

There are, of course, infinite, infinitely recursive elements involved in any given compositional moment, so it helps to figure out Nabokov’s role, his value, his participatory weight, in any given writer’s enterprise. Bourdieu’s explorations into the sociology of creative endeavors, explored in chapter one, suggests that artists operate in a marketplace somewhat-but-not-quite analogous to, and highly dependent on, the traditional economic marketplace. The most persuasive, most interesting aspect of

Bourdieu's work for the purposes at hand is that the rules governing the artistic marketplace – what he will term the field of cultural production – are dramatically similar to those found in the economic marketplace, but that the currency exchanged in the former, the domain of artists, is symbolic. It is cultural capital. However, cultural capital circulates in ways that will translate, eventually, into actual currency (grants, endowments, book sales, university positions), so that the honest and wholehearted pursuit of one form of capital potentially leads to a gain in the other. There are reasons to suspect Bourdieu's approach: it might be too programmatic, it might assume too deterministic a view of human nature<sup>24</sup> (the creative class, Bourdieu asserts, is an easily recognizable demographic, and it is a demographic very much dependent *on* class – on constructed, bracketed notions of taste and education and income). All the same, the work is persuasive, and it provides a practical way to discuss the highly competitive nature of writing. One does not need to fully subscribe to Bourdieu's notions to accept that authors are highly aware of each other and that their works circulate in ways tightly connected to their relationships to a world of letters. Cultural capital is a useful way of thinking about the rise and fall of a literary endeavor, a literary movement, or a literary figure. If it is better accepted as an analogy than as fact (symbolic capital *as* a symbol of a process or phenomenon better served by some other terminology), that is fine – what matters more is that Bourdieu's framework allows for a fairly coherent discussion of how an entire group of writers (a field of cultural production – or, in this case, a set of discrete fields

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<sup>24</sup> Bruno Latour will critique Bourdieu throughout *Constructing the Social*, finding that the Bourdieuan “symbolic economy of fields” is “misleading if taken as a description of the common world” and (worse) indicative of the “prophetic urge” inherent in traditional social sciences (189-190).

with considerable interlocking overlap) engage with each other (via symbolic units of currency: cultural capital).

Nabokov is a particularly valuable piece of currency in this field of cultural production: he was a critically acclaimed author but he was also a best-selling sensation. He has the benefit of being wholly within popular circulation, thanks to *Lolita*, its success and controversy, its film adaptations, and its immersion into the vernacular (“*Lolita*” as shorthand for a sexually voracious young girl (not, incidentally, Nabokov’s formulation, or really even Humbert Humbert’s), a creature and a term both separate from and linked to the novel of the same name), while also allowing for a series of obscure set of signifiers whose meaning would only be clear to fellow readers of Nabokov’s deep catalogue (“*Lolita* is famous, not I,” Nabokov wrote, “I am an obscure, doubly obscure novelist with an unpronounceable name”). He is the best of all worlds: highly successful both within a community trafficking purely in cultural capital but equally successful in the far less symbolic arena of actual capital, a figure capable of astute business dealings, not the type (to return to Burton) to be circumvented by base tradesmen: Nabokov would write to his publishers to that he wrote for pleasure “but published for profit.” He embodies the ambitions of many writers, first laboring in saintly obscurity<sup>25</sup> then succeeding in every way – critically, commercially, personally – to an unprecedented degree: as a unit of symbolic capital, he is difficult to top.

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<sup>25</sup> This obscurity seems nearly as important as other aspects of Nabokov’s aura: that he still is, to some extent, a writer difficult to pin down – neither modernist nor post-, neither American nor Russian – is surely part of the appeal, and the chapter exploring the writers who have both referenced Nabokov and have been published in *McSweeney’s* will return to this idea. But *McSweeney’s*, incidentally, made much of their own shadowy status with a motto that read, partially, “Created by nervous people in relative obscurity.”

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

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

A reference to Nabokov's authorial figure is made in the shadow of Nabokov's own commentary on authorship – the author as a galley master, the author as a dictator – and what that commentary means for authorship as a whole: that the authorial figure is the ultimate arbiter of his or her product, which leads to more general thoughts on writerly contrast, demarcation, and difference. The Nabokov authorial figure, so assured, so serene and composed, presents itself as a particularly seductive model, so that the writer referencing Nabokov is, to some degree, reinforcing his or her own primacy as an author:

I too am a galley master, a dictator. If a reference is made as a way of paying tribute and showing appreciation, it's well worth keeping in mind that what is being paid tribute to, what is being appreciated, is a trait shared between the writer referencing and the writer referenced, an articulation and recognition of a shared turn of mind.

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

Here, an allusion does not limit itself, as Machacek and Genette claim, to the immediate lexical field – to the paragraph or page or even chapter. Rather, the allusion signals an entire aesthetic disposition whose hallmark is often what McGurl will see as the figure of the privileged outsider: the outsider within the community, criticizing it from within, and legitimizing the community through criticism, the nonconformist "as a threat to social order and as a source of spiritual purity and violent renewal of that order" (198). McGurl sees this trend flowering in the 60s, when writers were attempting to come to terms with the institutions that housed them, also the time that Nabokov references first surface in print. The ghosts of nonconformism were everywhere in that decade, but Nabokov is a nonconformist's nonconformist: politically conservative, aesthetically daring, refusing then (and still now) to fit into any neat category. No wonder he finds

himself into two odd, nonconformist, and unclassifiable works of that decade – Julio Cortazar’s experimental novel *Hopscotch* and Umberto Eco’s parodic grabbag *Misreadings*.

### Authorially-Minded Transtextual Connections

It is striking that this preoccupation with Nabokov as an authorial figure is present from the very beginning. Of the three earliest references I have found, all appearing in 1963, two will turn to the Nabokov authorial presence as kind of arbiter. A third, one outside the data set, is Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* – a work of reportage, and unrepresentative of the rest of the material studied, but useful as an entry-point into the curious, shadowy role of Nabokov’s authorial persona as an arbiter of aesthetic or ethical dispositions. Eichmann will be shocked by *Lolita*:

But the point here is that officialese became his language because he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché. (Was it these clichés that the psychiatrists thought so “normal” and “desirable”? Are these the “positive ideas” a clergyman hopes for in those whose souls he ministers? Eichmann's best opportunity to show this positive side of his character in Jerusalem came when the young police officer in charge of his mental and psychological well-being handed him *Lolita* for relaxation. After two days Eichmann returned it, visibly indignant; “Quite an unwholesome book” – “*Das ist aber ein sehr unerfreuliches Buch*” – he told his guard.) (49)

The clichés, and the mode of thinking underpinning them (what Arendt will later call the banality of evil), should be here seen not just in light of *Lolita* itself but of Nabokov’s

pronouncements on *poshlost* – on what Nabokov termed the falsely important and the falsely beautiful. It is this particular frame that makes this first Nabokov reference so slippery, since what is referenced seems to be Nabokov’s work, not Nabokov or his authorial persona as an arbiter of an aesthetic or ethical disposition. (In fact, just about every other reference to Nabokov’s authorial persona is far more straightforward.) The spur in this allusion may be *Lolita*, but the truly interesting transtextual connection can be found in Nabokov himself. Arendt’s anecdotal choice is not haphazard; Eichmann’s aesthetic disposition (what he likes, what he finds unwholesome) aids in mapping out the limits of his ethical behavior, as Svetlana Boym points out: “To analyze the novelty of his existential position, Arendt uses aesthetic categories: the failure of imagination and banality. Arendt’s conception of banality is reminiscent of Nabokov’s critique of *poshlost* and kitsch and the writings on kitsch and cultural commodification by Hermann Broch, Adorno, and Clement Greenberg” (302). Arendt, no fan of Nabokov, finds his conflation of aesthetics and ethics persuasive, useful in mapping the parameters of Eichmann’s morality which is strewn through and through with *poshlost*. A hallmark of middlebrow sensibility, *poshlost* appears in his work as a signifier of oppression – witness, for example, the police state of *Bend Sinister* and its representatives’ love of cheap sentimental poetry. *Lolita* itself, Arendt well knows, is just as full of casually nuanced critiques of *poshlost*: Charlotte Haze’s Mexican knick-knacks and Cha-Cha-Cha records, the roadside motels, the sodas, the institutional jargon of schools and camps and popularized psychology. That Nabokov appears in another institutional setting (an Israeli prison) is of some interest, though what seems most pertinent is that Arendt is concerned with showing Eichmann as a conformist – as someone whose sensibility, ethos, and mode

of thinking are conventional: a person who is bound by and who expresses himself through clichés, and is hence incapable of appreciating (or even knowing how to read) *Lolita*. For Arendt, for purposes of illustration, Nabokov is an arbiter of morality because he is unconventional – an authorial figure standing at the opposite end of banality.

Nabokov will also appear as a barometer of taste in another 1963 work, Cortazar's experimental novel *Hopscotch*, where one of its central characters, also a writer, remarks on the quality of café conversations:

It's sad to reach the point in life where it's easier to open a book to page 96 and converse with the author, from cafe to grave, from boredom to suicide, while at the surrounding tables people are talking about Algeria, Adenauer, Mijanou Bardo, Guy Trebert, Sidney Bechet, Michel Butor, Nabokov, Zao-Wu-Ki, Luison Bobet, and in my country the boys talk, what do the boys talk about in my country? (92)

The narrator, a Chilean in Paris, an émigré like Nabokov, finds communion with an unnamed author – an act of referentiality concordant with those previously explored. (*This is who I am, that is who I'm not.*) Nabokov is dismissed precisely because, with Hurricane Lolita in full force, he is far too common a conversation subject. His value as cultural capital wanes, in 1963, because he is over-circulated, ever-present, a signifier quickly losing signification.

The situation has changed somewhat four years later, in 1967, when a character in Guillermo Cabrera Infante's *Three Trapped Tigers* laments the misreading of Nabokov (and two other writers in equally prominent circulation): “There are also awful readers of Borges and others who read Sartre but don't understand him and who read and don't



understand Nabokov or even have any feelings for him” (368). While it is tempting to pose one reference in direct conversation with the other, *Tigers* accusing *Hopscotch* of missing the point of Nabokov entirely, it is far more productive to see these two references as representative if contrasting responses to a prominent figure in the field of cultural production.

More to the point, perhaps, is the sense that as Nabokov’s value waxes in the tight, relatively small-knit circle of cultural production as it wanes as a unit of symbolic capital in the wider middlebrow world of book clubs and general cultural chatter – the Kubrick movie come and gone, the steady stream of new Nabokov novels less shocking and more demanding. It is no accident that Boyd titles the chapter dealing with the years immediately following publication of the novel “*Lolita* Explodes,” a chapter followed by one titled “Chased by Fame”: that last chapter chronicles, among other things, the transformation of the author into a celebrity (393-424). *Lolita*, one can well imagine, is precisely the sort of book Charlotte Haze herself would have in her bookshelf; she needn’t have read it or (to paraphrase Cabrera Infante) read it well for her to talk about it – by the mid-sixties the novel had been domesticated and consigned to its cubbyhole, *Lolita* as a mildly risqué conversation piece. Indeed, the Cabrera reference cited above – overt and (like Cortazar’s) occurring within the type of intellectual café/salon conversation that parallels (presumably) ones that the novels’ authors engaged in in their field of cultural production – is not the only one in *Three Trapped Tigers*. Cabrera Infante later re-introduces Nabokov in a way that only a knowledgeable reader would recognize: “What you have to do is to go on your way, all quiet and good, to the movies – at least the real women you find there lead you to nowhere more dangerous than a seat in the

stalls. They're just usherettes. Although in Switzerland there's this White Russian, several times an exile, who has the idea that even usherettes can lead to disaster" (436). The White Russian multiple émigré is Nabokov, and someone casually familiar with his authorial epitext may identify him, but the usherette that leads siren-like to disaster belongs to *Laughter in the Dark*.

What is prized, by Cabrera and by many other writers engaging in identical referential acts, is the relative rarity and obscurity of the Nabokovian cultural capital. This capital provides a singular opportunity to comment on authorship – for the author to say what kind of author he or she is (an alignment with the Nabokovian camp) – while reaching an equally informed audience (also aligned with the same camp). Equally prized is Nabokov's prose of course, which is justifiably singled out (but elsewhere, in interviews and reviews, not in the references) for its lapidary qualities, for its singularities and deftness, and for its sheer breathtaking beauty. It seems obvious, overly so, but it must nonetheless be both acknowledged and placed into context: writers may very well reference Nabokov because they like Nabokov's writing. That said, it's striking that so few references bother to comment on the aesthetics and poetics of Nabokov's prose. Instead, most writers focus on Nabokov's strong opinions, on his writerly dispositions and pronouncements, and on his authorial figure. They may like Nabokov's writing, but when they talk about him it's often in terms of Nabokov's own likes and dislikes. Most, in other words, spend their energies engaging in a kind of guessing game: Given X, what would Nabokov do/say/think?

A reference, then, often serves as a self-imposed authorial check – a bracelet embossed with the acronym *WWND?* – although it also serves as a way to work around

the perceived shadow of a (self-imposed) master. If one can't write like Nabokov, one might as well write about him. That Nabokov weighs heavily on figures of cultural production is borne out even in disavowals or qualified disavowals – more so, perhaps, than in wholehearted endorsements like the one that follows below.

While it is already apparent in the Cortazar and Cabrera Infante references of the sixties, its force is still evident in 2010. In a *Guardian* series on writing advice, Geoff Dyer tells novelists to avoid “sucking up to Nabokov.” (He means, of course, Nabokov the authorial figure – the Nabokov Inside, lurking in the writer's head, likely lurking even in Dyer's head: he is probably speaking from experience.) Martin Amis, whose own Nabokov references are discussed in a subsequent chapter, also remarks on his need to free himself from his influence when writing. Zadie Smith has referenced Nabokov in all three of her novels (and will be discussed at greater length in the same chapter analyzing Amis), and she comments on this problem throughout *Changing My Mind*, her collection of essays. This particular turn of phrase (already mentioned in chapter one) is strikingly Dyer-like: “If your aesthetic has become so refined it is stopping you from placing a single black mark on white paper, stop worrying so much about what Nabokov would say; pick up Dostoyevsky, patron saint of substance over style” (103).

Smith's love of Nabokov finds its way to many of the topics explored in *Changing My Mind*, but it is a love tempered by conscientious self-analysis. In a footnote to “Rereading Barthes and Nabokov,” she admits that “Nabokov nerds often slavishly parrot his strong opinions. I don't think I'm the first person to have my mind poisoned, by Nabokov, against Dostoyevsky” (52). One unit of cultural capital (Dostoyevsky) loses value when offset against the other (Nabokov). Smith gains autonomy from her chosen

unit – she doesn't have to agree with everything Nabokov says – but even this disavowal (*Nabokov may not like Dostoyevsky, but I do*) goes a long way to foreground Nabokov's powerful effect on Smith: in liking Dostoyevsky, Nabokov's predecessor and countryman, she is also admitting to the Nabokov's capricious take on other cultural producers. It's difficult to do, all the more so given Nabokov's tremendous presence as a self-contained, infinitely confident authorial figure, a particularly attractive and seductive unit of cultural capital for a fellow writer: "He seems to admit no ideal reader except himself. I think of him as one of the last, great twentieth-century believers in the autonomy of the Author, as Frank Lloyd Wright was one of the last believers in the Architect" (52).

As I said in chapter one, Nabokov stands in the field of cultural capital as a symbolic unit of the independent, fully self-sufficient creator – the Autonomous Author – and it's precisely in this happily self-imposed, self-declared isolation where others find kinship, proudly invoking the name of another isolated figure. It is as if each of these writers is declaring, when aligning him- or herself with Nabokov, that they see no need to align themselves with anyone. There is the immediate temptation to declare some sort of paradox at work. After all, these writers affiliate themselves with one another because they insist on their lack of affiliation. But all acts of demarcation and self-identification go through variations of this *Via Negativa* (*This is who I am, this is who I'm not*), and so it's not necessarily a sign of anything intrinsically self-contradictory. Rather, we mostly discover who we are by turning away – by removing ourselves – from what we are not. If anything, this phenomenon may be better understood by noting that, when Brian of Monty Python's *The Life of Brian* tells the crowd, "You're all individuals!" and the

crowd responds (in unison) “Yes, we’re all individuals,” they’re actually technically correct. Yes, they are all individuals.

**Table 3: References by Decade**

	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
<b>Total References</b>	8	8	7	32	41
<b>Refs. Alluding to the Author</b>	4	3	3	13	20
<b>Percentage Alluding to the Author</b>	50%	38%	43%	41%	49%

Each individual Nabokov reference, however, once compiled, leads to some startlingly consistent figures. The authorial figure, as mentioned above, was referenced 42% of the time, more than any other Nabokov-related reference (*Lolita* is an unsurprisingly close second, appearing in 38% of the references). More surprisingly still is how stable this figure remains on a decade-by-decade breakdown: roughly about half, consistent with the figure discussed above. This consistency is all the more significant precisely because it does not vary even as the actual number of references dramatically increases in volume. There are only a total of eight references apiece for the 1960s and the 1970s, and only seven for the 1980s – figures dwarfed by the 32 references of the 1990s and the 41 from the 2000s. But the handful of pre-1990s references parallel the percentages of the post-1990s references. To wit: The author is referenced in 50% of the

8 1960s references, in 38% of the 8 1970s references, in 43% of the 7 1980s references, in 41% of the 32 1990s references, and in 49% of the 41 2000s references. If a new Nabokov reference were to surface tomorrow, the odds are pretty good, about as good as a coin flip, that it would be invoke the authorial figure.

There is an equally strong possibility that this ratio extends well beyond Nabokov and into other referential acts in the field. Writers may well invoke Cervantes as often as than they do *Don Quixote*'s Don Quixote, Salinger more than his Seymour Glass or Holden Caulfield, Homer more than Ulysses, Joyce more than Mr. Bloom. While a comparison of this sort lies well outside the data studied here, it does point to a number of intriguing avenues, not the least of which is the pragmatic uses to which authors subject the very notion of authorship. If writers reference other writers in the ways they do Nabokov, then allusion should be better understood (at least partially) as a means of telegraphing alignments and affiliations germane to the field of cultural production and not necessarily to the cultural product in which the allusion is located.

In the case of the Nabokov references, this mode of allusion seems all the more intriguing precisely because no clear correlation can be found with modes that would explain it within the immediate world of the novels where the reference occurs, which strongly suggests that the reference signals an authorial preoccupation with notions of authorship extending well beyond the fictional setting where the reference resides. Nabokov is invoked as the arbiter of an aesthetic or ethical disposition in 46% of the references where a clear transtextual connection can be established (a clear transtextual connection can be established in 72 of the 97 references, though the total number of connections tally at 85 because of overlapping connections). Nabokov is invoked in

conjunction with a fictional author residing within the novel 29% of the time where a clear transtextual connection can be established (put another way: in the data set, almost thirty percent of transtextual connections occur in works that prominently feature a writer as protagonist or narrator).

The overlap between these two fields should be fairly large, but the data suggests otherwise. If the Nabokov reference involves the author himself, it would seem natural for it to function in terms of authorship *within* the novel: a writer would reference an author in his or her fiction because he or she is talking about a fictional author. However, though both percentages comprise a respectable number of transtextual connections – 45% with Nabokov as ethical or aesthetic arbiter (a total of 39 entries), 25% in conjunction with authors and their field of cultural production (a total of 25 entries) – the territory where these two connections meet is relatively small: it happens in only 17% of the entries. The figure increases modestly even when the sample is reduced to only those containing those two variables: in references featuring transtextual connections signaling Nabokov as the aesthetic or ethical arbiter *and* a fictional author, the two elements are found together in only 12 entries, roughly 19% of the time .

This particular subset of references, then, finds a home in novels intimately concerned with the world of authors, such as Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* or Martin Amis's *The Information*, but just as often finds a *pied a terre* in works that go to great lengths to stress that their characters are (seemingly) removed from the world of authors, such as Alan Bennett's *The Uncommon Reader* or Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, though what's most significant is how in all four each reference operates well beyond its immediate zone of impact. On the surface, it looks like authors may use Nabokov to stress a point

about the field of cultural production relative only to the moment of the utterance. In Barnes, it is to comment on the relative merits of translating a predecessor: “It is *une petite levrette d’Italie*: a small Italian greyhound bitch. Nabokov, who is exceedingly peremptory with all translators of Flaubert, renders this as whippet. Whether he is zoologically correct or not, he certainly loses the sex of the animal, which seems to me important” (63). In Amis, Nabokov signals dissatisfaction with a commonplace opinion: “Richard had hated all the poets and novelists too, but the playwrights, the playwrights... With Nabokov, and others, Richard regarded the drama as a primitive and long-exhausted form. The drama boasted Shakespeare (which was an excellent cosmic joke), and Chekhov, and a couple of sepulchral Scandinavians. Then where were you?” (M. Amis, *The Information* 268). Even if one ignores that Amis’s *The Information* is widely regarded as a half-veiled commentary on that writer’s relationship with Julian Barnes, it’s important to see that Nabokov operates here as a legitimating force well beyond that page where each reference appears, Nabokov in both a token signifying dissent and dissatisfaction. True, this dissent and dissatisfaction pertain to the immediate fictional circumstances prompting the reference, but it easily spills into the actual joint field of cultural production where Amis and Barnes operate – writ small, London’s literary culture; writ large, it’s the field of contemporary literature. No surprise, given that both novels have contemporary British novelists for protagonists.

But the same blurring occurs even when the figure involved in the reference is not a fictional author. In Alan Bennett’s *The Uncommon Reader*, the figure is not even wholly fictional; instead, Bennett places the very real Queen Elizabeth II in an imagined



scenario. The queen has become an avid reader, which (to the dismay of her handlers) leads to bouts of inquiry and independence:

Less to her credit, before Norman's mysterious departure the Queen had begun to wonder if she was outgrowing him... or rather, out-reading him. Once upon a time he had been a humble and straightforward guide to the world of books. He had advised her as to what to read and had not hesitated to say when he thought she was not ready for a book yet. Beckett, for instance, he had kept from her for a long while and Nabokov and it was only gradually he had introduced her to Philip Roth (with *Portnoy's Complaint* quite late in the sequence) (71).

This same sense of independence and singularity – the passage implies that Nabokov's not for beginners, and certainly not for common readers – is found in one of the queen's imagined subjects, in a completely different novel, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*:

To be more precise, Millat hadn't read it. Millat knew nothing about the writer, nothing about the book; could not identify the book if it lay in a pile of other books; could not pick out the writer in a lineup of other writers (irresistible, this lineup of offending writers: Socrates, Protagoras, Ovid and Juvenal, Raddclyffe Hall, Boris Pasternak, D.H. Laurence, Solzhenitsyn, Nabokov, all holding up their numbers for the mug shot, squinting in the flashbulb) (194).

If all four references signal a kind of intransigence, and if Nabokov functions at all as a useful indicator of a particular character's disposition, it's well worth noting how – in juxtaposing these four British contemporary writers of seemingly divergent backgrounds and modes of expression – one can detect the murmurs of a common conversation regarding authorship. It is a conversation both germane to but independent from the four

books in which its scraps of dialogue are found, and it's mostly about the how's and why's of the writing world. If, in all four, we find evidence of intransigence, dissent, and dissatisfaction as qualities intrinsic to the formation of an authorial persona – the sense that authorship, properly executed, belongs to and aligns itself with the peripheral – it may well be because the authors can't help but use their fiction to comment on the field in which their fiction circulates.

Bennett's queen, once she becomes a full convert to the world of books, abandons office. *The Uncommon Reader* ends with Elizabeth deciding that she might try her hand at writing a semi-autobiographical novel: she may enter the field of cultural production, and her first act (partially signaled by the presence of Nabokov) is to set herself apart by resigning her post and retiring from public view. Bennett's novel, seemingly preoccupied wholly with the transformative possibilities of reading, turns in its final pages into a commentary of its complementary act: writing, authorship. The queen is not alone: all four authors, in talking about Nabokov, end up mostly talking about themselves.

This conversation has been ongoing through the 46 years (1963-09) in which Nabokov references are found, the only difference being the dramatic increase in numbers over the last two decades – an increase explained as much by a shift in authorial modalities as by the changed material circumstances surrounding the circulation of Nabokov's oeuvre. Only eight references apiece surface in the 1960s and 1970s. Only seven references surface in the 1980s. In the 1990s, however, there are 32 references. In the 2000s, the tally is 41.

While Nabokov never vanishes from the various fields of cultural production entirely, the way in which the references wane, then wax, find striking correlations in critical

conversations regarding Nabokov in particular and authorship as a whole. It's important to keep in mind that Nabokov reaches the height of popular circulation in the late fifties and early sixties with the publication of *Lolita*, its scandal, its best-sellerdom, and its looming presence in a cultural conversation simultaneously concerned with the morality of literature and with literature's nascent proto-post-modernist narrative techniques. *Lolita* is, as De La Durantaye has pointed out, a book whose central ethical dilemma is intrinsically and intricately tied to narrative distance, a distance measured in three different ways: between the author and the narrator, the narrator and the reader, and the reader and the author (186-7). If the conversation surrounding the novel concerns itself with what *Lolita* is about – pedophilia and child abuse – the problem for those reading it has far more to do with how the story is being told – through an unreliable narrator whose confession is court evidence, but also evidently self-serving, funny, monstrous, and charming. How are we supposed to read *Lolita*? And how are we supposed to read the author of *Lolita*? If the conversation finds company in other ongoing discussions and explorations of narrative framing – no surprise to see that John Barth and Thomas Pynchon and other leading post-modernists are avowed admirers of Nabokov's works and will reference Nabokov in their work (Pynchon in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Barth in *Letters*) – what's perhaps most striking is that it's a conversation from which Nabokov the historical figure will be gradually eased out for two decades, only for Nabokov the unit of cultural capital to gradually emerge at the beginning of the 1990s.

This fluctuation in value parallels changes in the circulation of Nabokov's work through the decades in question, suggesting the dramatic impact of the means of diffusion on the field of cultural production. The 1970s are particularly illustrative: Nabokov finds

his sales and impact on the world of letters diminishing. His last American publisher, McGraw-Hill, had relatively little experience in marketing trade fiction, and Nabokov's biographer, Brian Boyd, reports that his last five books (several of which collected early Russian language stories written during his émigré years) sold poorly (651). Boyd attributes the shift in attitude to the changing times, assessing Nabokov's reputation in his last years as "oddly mixed," though Nabokov even then seems like a particularly valuable unit of cultural capital; Boyd will quote J.D. O'Hara as representative of the attitude toward the writer in 1977, the year of his death: "a strange position in the Alps of contemporary literature, at once admired and forgotten" (654). The 1980s will prove an equally fallow period for both Nabokov's reputation (Boyd, on page 655, proposes that "intellectual fashions too had changed") and book sales, and it's perhaps no surprise to find so few references to Nabokov in novels of that period. What's striking perhaps, is that this seemingly straightforward, tightly coordinated waxing and waning of three distinct elements (book sales, critical consensus, intertextual references) is broken so dramatically, and so drastically, shortly after Vintage reissues Nabokov's entire oeuvre in standard paperback format, starting in 1989. This correlation alone cannot stand as evidence. After all, while one can argue that Vintage responded to a perceived change in attitudes toward Nabokov, one could also conceivably say that the Vintage reissues triggered this change. It is very likely that both of these possibilities are somewhat true: that Nabokov's new publisher sensed a shift in the market for his fiction, and that in making the fiction more widely available than it had been in over a decade the field took new notice of a figure that, for years, had been simultaneously admired and forgotten.

O'Hara's epithet for Nabokov helps explain the extraordinary spike in references and their correlation to the Vintage paperbacks: Nabokov, after all, had not really been languishing for the three decades preceding 1989; he never entirely faded from view; he was, as O'Hara noted, both admired and forgotten, and so still benefitted from the same set of perceived attributes that had always attached themselves to his public epitext. In fact, even as Nabokov's back catalog resurfaced, the same seemingly contradictory traits remained embedded to his value as a unit of currency in the field of cultural production – a best-selling figure who had not sold well for the past thirty years, a notorious personality whose most salient traits (nationality, distance from his characters, politics) were liminal and difficult to pin down, a critically acclaimed writer who had not been read or approached critically in years. For writers picking up his work in the newly designed editions, Nabokov must have felt like buried treasure. Though the books were once again widely available (and some more widely available than they had ever been before) they nonetheless retained their sense of mystery, rarity, and reduced circulation.

Note, too, that this correlation will find another in the number of articles indexed in the MLA Bibliography, suggesting that scholarly criticism – another participant in the field of cultural production – hinges on the same material conditions of cultural diffusion as other actors in the same network: from 1950-1959, 14 articles have Nabokov as a subject; from 1960-1969, 90 articles do; from 1970-1979, 329 do; from 1980-1989, 478 do; from 1990-1999, 1004 do; and from 2000-2009, 1009 do. When set against the number of references, the growth in both falls along roughly the same proportions per decade (rising dramatically in the 60s (a period where Nabokov's public epitext was at its

highest) and the 1990s (a period that saw the Vintage paperback re-release) and holding steady otherwise).

**Table 4: Comparison of Novel References and Nabokov Articles in MLA International Bibliography**

<b>Decade</b>	<b># of Refs in Novel</b>	<b># of Nabokov articles in MLA International Bibliography</b>	<b>Comparative Growth Factor in Novels/Articles</b>
<b>1950-1959</b>	0	14	N/A
<b>1960-1969</b>	8	90	8x/5x
<b>1970-1979</b>	8	329	1x(no growth)/3.4x
<b>1980-1989</b>	7	478	.85x(no growth)/1.4x
<b>1990-1999</b>	32	1004	4.6x/2.1x
<b>2000-2009</b>	41	1009	1.3x/1x

The proportions – the comparative growth – follow parallel lines, but the dramatic increase in number of scholarly articles suggests, roughly, a general explosion in intellectual labor, one not limited to Nabokov studies. Again, it’s important to understand that the multiple sets of relationships explored in this section are dependent on each other in some way, but it’s just as important to acknowledge that one factor cannot be directly assigned a cause, another an effect. What matters is that the world of culture cannot be neatly separated from the material conditions through which this culture circulates, so that an author’s rise and fall and subsequent return can be traced alongside the seemingly pedestrian decisions leading to paperback reprint rights, a newly redistributed backlist, or even a freshly redesigned uniform set of visually striking covers.

A Nabokov reference functions as a form of secret communication occurring chiefly between participants in the field of cultural production, though (as the dramatic increase in references attest) the secret has more to do with the conversation itself than with the relative visibility of the circulating currency. If Nabokov is hidden, he is often hidden in plain sight: in the data set, 61 of the 96 references are identified as “Overt” (a potential reader would not need to be familiar with Nabokov or his work to understand that a reference is being made); 11 are classified as “Mostly Overt” (so that a reader would have to be somewhat familiar with Nabokov’s public epitext to catch the reference); and 25 are classified as “Obscure” (a reader would have to be conversant in Nabokov’s catalog of works to identify the reference). Examples of overt Nabokov references include the Barnes, Amis, Smith and Bennett passages quoted above: they all explicitly acknowledge the presence of the reference and identify its source by name, so that a reader unfamiliar with Nabokov would rightly assume, from the reference’s immediate context, that the figure in question is an author. A “Mostly Overt” reference, on the other hand, would require of the reader *some* knowledge of Nabokov’s work, though not necessarily a deep knowledge. For example, a reader may successfully identify a *Lolita* reference via its two most famous characters, even if the reference uses the titular character’s unabbreviated name, as happens in James Hynes’s *Kings of Infinite Space*: “When he was really pissed off, he composed items with inappropriate references that he figured Bonnie wouldn’t get – ‘Mr. Humbert (*brought, brung*) Dolores a banana” (42). Consider too this Erica Jong reference, from *Fear of Flying*, also classified as “Mostly Overt,” that explicitly references the title of a considerably less known Nabokov work:

“You can damned well publish your filthy books posthumously,” Randy screeched, “if they contain a word about any character who even remotely resembles me!”

“And I assume that you are going to kill me so as not to delay publication.”

“I mean after we die, not after you die.”

“Is that an invitation to a beheading?”

“Stuff your literary allusions up your ass...” (62)

Here, too, as above, Nabokov works as a commentary on intransigence and resistance in the field of cultural production, though enough information is provided that a curious reader could identify the reference’s provenance with relatively little effort. It would take far more work to locate the place from which Alexander Theroux has pulled this heavily paraphrased Nabokov reference for *Darconville’s Cat*: “‘Reality,’ it’s been written, ‘is the only word in the language that has no meaning without quotation marks’ (231). Equally obscure, if not more so, are references to Sirin, Nabokov’s pen name during his émigré years, though multiple novelists enjoy treating this shadowy authorial figure as a fully functioning participant in the cultural world of their novels: John Updike will turn Sirin into a Russian colonel in *The Coup*; Lemony Snicket (a pseudonymous author himself) will introduce his friend, Mr. Sirin, a lepidopterist, in *The Hostile Hospital*; Zadie Smith will have a name-dropping character in *The Autograph Man* remark, “Pfui! You write better than you speak, I think. But of course our dear Sirin said this was true of all the great writers, and he should’ve known. He was a great friend of my third husband” (233). Sirin is not alone: Vivian Darkbloom, an anagrammatized Nabokov initially appearing in *Lolita* as a fledging author, then reappearing in an explanatory note for *Ada*, is re-



introduced in Andrew Lewis Conn's *P.* as a "newly emerging woman director" of pornography (32) and is thanked in the Afterword of Arthur Phillips's *The Egyptologist* for her "invaluable example" (384). No surprise to find that so many obscure Nabokov references turn to some of the most authorially-minded signifiers: pseudonyms and pseudo-authors.

More surprising, however, is the relative rarity of truly obscure references – one could argue that even in the most truly recondite allusions there is an urge for the Nabokovian unit of meaning to be unearthed, and most are hidden, like Timon's treasure, under just a few rocks. This trend toward explicit, overt referentiality can be seen more clearly when the figures quoted above are examined in terms of percentages: 25% of the references are obscure, 75% overt or mostly overt, and all but a few would suggest to a reasonably intelligent reader that something or someone outside the present circumstances is being alluded to.

#### *Pale Fire* and its Readers

Some texts, however, lend themselves to a kind of joyful furtiveness: references to *Lolita* and the author are seldom made in a way that could be classified as obscure (only 18% of the *Lolita* references could reasonably be cataloged as such, and only 12% of those made to the author); *Pale Fire*, on the other hand, attracts a intriguingly large percentage of obscure references, 8 out of the 16 found, or 50%.

Why *Pale Fire*? An allusion often functions as a commentary on the field of cultural production, so that a reference reflects an authorial concern with his or her place, as an author, in the world of cultural production – that is to say, a reference (an intertextual

utterance, an allusion) affords a singular opportunity for commentary outside the text precisely because of its perceived limited scope. The structure of *Pale Fire* parallels this approach, with Kinbote's Foreword and footnotes using Shade's poem as a starting point for a mode of meaning-making nearly independent from its source. This is another way to say that, as Wood points out, *Pale Fire* is a novel teeming with theft, and it is a theft associated with the intertextual act – with the deliberate borrowings made by one writer from his or her predecessors, and an allusion to *Pale Fire* is close in spirit to the allusions made in *Pale Fire*, as chapter one discusses.

More to the point perhaps is that *Pale Fire* goes out of its way to demarcate and define proper forms of intertextual acts. Kinbote's mean of appropriating meaning is evidently improper, since (as discussed in case study in chapter one) the widening interpretive divides between the spur (a line or a passage from Shade's poem) and the corresponding commentary (Kinbote's footnote) serve to establish a direct line of communication between the reader and the author. Kinbote can't be trusted, but the creator behind Kinbote can. While De La Durantaye has seen this divide as an indicator of Nabokov's ethical and moral preoccupations – the creator arranging and allowing for an order that is missed by his creations – it's not too far of a stretch to see these dynamics as intrinsically literature-minded: that Nabokov is commenting on the world at large, granted, while also commenting on the world of books. *Pale Fire*, more than any other Nabokov work, celebrates the act of careful, attentive reading while simultaneously insisting on the impossibility of doing so without attending to the concerns and structural cues established by the author.

In the time of Barthes, as Smith points out, Nabokov writes a novel about the primacy of authorship. What is being mocked, throughout, is misreading, missing out on information, lacking the necessary set of data to fully enter into the ongoing conversation at the heart of the field of cultural production. Hence, perhaps, the unusually high percentage of obscure references to *Pale Fire*, a work that – more than *Lolita*, more than Nabokov himself – would likely have gone unread by an otherwise reasonably well-informed reader. The point of a *Pale Fire* reference may well be to act as a particularly strong commentary on the primacy of authorship for a privileged audience whose entry-point hinges on what Reading terms “readerly compliance.”

Moreover, it’s notable that it is a conversation occurring in primarily the same tone as the text from which the allusion is drawn: if *Pale Fire* parodies certain modes of reading, note that *Pale Fire* allusions themselves are far more likely to be parodic in tone themselves, far more than any other: 60% of *Pale Fire* allusions playing in some way with the text (of *Lolita* allusions, 40% are parodic, and of the ones made to the author, only 25% are parodic). This figure is particularly worthy of attention because the overwhelming majority of Nabokov allusions are, in fact, fairly straightforward references that do not transform the source text in ways that would suggest parody. Nabokov and his works will often be merely referenced 62% of the time, with parodies in only 38% of the instances documented in the data set. Again, while this disparity may be explained in fairly prosaic ways – it is, after all, far easier to name-check an author than it is to expend energy on the sort of transformative, playful word games necessary in a fundamentally parodic allusion – the playful attention paid to *Pale Fire* suggests, unsurprisingly, that authors respond to works in the mode of the work being alluded, so

that a commentary on the primacy of the author reveals, to some degree, the dependency of that author on already previously established modalities extant in the field. An author claiming his or her own primacy, then, does so at the risk of articulating the many levels of textual, aesthetic, and cultural anchors on which that primacy depends.

### Hypotextual Distortions

Curiously, this sort of dependency seems almost absent in the references most likely to exhibit it: the texts that parody specific passages from Nabokov's work, what Genette terms hypotexts, defined in *Palimpsests* as the chronologically earlier text in a hypertextual relationship (5). More curious still is that all such instances of hypotextual distortion can be neatly divided into just two categories: passages parodying the opening lines of *Lolita* and references distorting the title of Nabokov's memoir. The latter attracts primarily humorists: Tom Bissell and Jeff Alexander publish a book of spurious DVD commentaries titled *Speak, Commentary*; and George Saunders will write a article for the *New York Times* promoting weight-loss via the "amazing no-eat diet" titled "Eat, Memory," the same title used in the book that collected Saunders's piece alongside other *Times* articles on food. Robert Ito's "Speak, Memorates," published in the 2010 January issue of *The Believer*, is not comedic (and not part of the data set given it's publication date), but the magazine itself does tend toward the whimsical in its paratexts, with subheaders outlining unusual or quirky material to be found in the corresponding column. A reader acquainted with the spur may well want to know the linkages connecting it to the new material, but the practice of subtly distorting a previously established title is well established. For example, once Updike resurrected the Trollopian practice of adding

“Redux” to a title to indicate a sequel (for *Rabbit Redux*) there was a flurry of articles and columns using the word. Nabokov himself, of course, borrowed the title from the standard Classical tradition of appealing to the personified figure of memory before embarking on recollections. *Speak, Memory*’s initial, discarded title, following its first publication as *Conclusive Evidence*, was *Speak, Mnemosyne*.

That the spur and the reference bear relatively little relation to each other suggests other ways in which authors reassert their primacy, since the allusion indicates a kind of alignment and sympathy independent from content – Nabokov’s memoir, after all, is not concerned with DVD commentaries, fad diets, or Japanese ghosts, so the allusion works as a way to (again) indicate a preference in the field of cultural production, a preference not immediately applicable to the cultural product at hand – an alignment seen most clearly in the curious set of *Lolita* references the playfully alter the novel’s famous first lines:

Lolita, light of my fire, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of my tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.

She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita. (7)

Two humor pieces delight in playing with these opening paragraphs, but they are accompanied by a set of references that – while somewhat comedic – are varied enough in tone to suggest that the practice may find its roots in authorial reassertions of control. In reappropriating and repurposing the rhythm and cadence of an earlier predecessor, an

author finds him- or herself consciously enacting a kind of Bloomian misreading, a misreading that places primacy on the parodic act (and the authorial figure responsible for it) rather than on the text or author being parodied, as happens in Umberto Eco's "Granita":

Granita. Flower of my adolescence, torment of my nights. Will I ever see you again? Granita. Granita. Gran-i-ta. Three syllables, the second and third forming a diminutive, as if contradicting the first. Gran. Ita. (7)

That Umberto Eco's humor piece is collected in a book titled *Misreadings* is a happy coincidence, but note that the epitextual distortion was initially triggered, as Eco notes in the book's foreword, by "the fact that the translation of the protagonist's name is Umberto Umberto." Here, the parodic act is trumped by the author engaged in the parody, less so in Steve Martin's "Lolita at Fifty," where the hypotextual distortion is buried deep in the story, and is preceded by a subtle, gentle commentary on Nabokov's adjective of choice for his nymphet:

She broke her akimbo slouch (Lolita was rarely not akimbo; in fact, her third husband, Mark, observed that at any given moment, a randomly selected part of her body was always catty-corner to another) and drifted over to the remaining plastic bag full of apples, in a manner so lazy that even after the walk was over, it seemed as though it hadn't happened. She hoisted the bag lazily in a locked fist and rested it against the back of her raised forearm, slung the bag into the trunk with a slew-footed twist, and handed the gaping boy a single. Reading his name tag, she raised her eyes and gave him a "Thank you, Rory."

The boy replied, "Thank you, Miss... Miss..."

“Lo-lee-tah,” she tongued. A column of sweat drained down the boy, and he entered puberty. (94-5)

Penn Jillette’s *Sock* also plays with hypotextual distortion while reasserting, within the allusion, the sort of distinction from the spur that suggests a claim to authorial primacy (if in Martin it is a question of choice in diction, in Jillette it is in matters of pronunciation):

Helen Cynthia Parenteau, called "Nell." Nell Parenteau. The tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate. Except, Nell Parenteau doesn't use the tip of the tongue – it uses lips, a grimace, then a tongue tip on the palate, but who cares? She was still Helen on the dotted line. (Jillette)

While Penn Jillette is better known as a magician and Steve Martin is better known as an actor (and while both are also known as working comics), their engagement with a towering figure in a field of cultural production suggests an understanding of intertextuality’s potential as capital –as symbolic currency for authorial agency, competency, positioning, and primacy. This understanding parallels the one found in, for example, Shelley Jackson’s first lines of her novel *Half Life*:

Blanche, white night of my dark day. My sister, my self. Blanche: a cry building behind sealed lips, then blowing through. First the pout, then the plosive; the meow of the vowel; then the fricative sound of silence.

Shhhh.

Blanche is sleeping. She has been sleeping for fifteen years.

I can tell you the exact moment I knew she was waking up. But allow me a day's grace. Let me remember that last afternoon, unimportant in itself, wonderfully unimportant, when I was still Nora, Nora Olney, Nora alone. (5)

In Jackson's case, as in Jillette and the others where the presence of *Lolita* is perhaps more evident, what matters most is not that a previous cultural product has resurfaced but that its resurfacing hinges on the primacy of the author engaging in the referential act. If a reader familiar with *Lolita* recognizes its ghost in the lines of another author, it's important to note that the spur's deliberate hypotextual distortion draws attention to that author's competency, to his or her ability to create a parallel text whose major communicative drive is independent from the meaning embedded in the source.

One can return to the issue of affiliation and alignment explored above, and say that a deliberate hypotextual distortion of the sort that Jackson and the others engage in serves as a unit of cultural capital that allows each writer to declare him- or herself an independent, fully self-sufficient creator – the Autonomous Author. It's precisely in this happily self-imposed, self-declared isolation where each *Lolita* parody finds common ground: in the seeming textual subservience to what came before in the field, which in being parodied establishes both the competency of the author and the primacy of authorship (and authorship's primary identifying trace: style) over content. What is brought to the surface, after all, when engaging in these deliberate hypotextual distortions, is the author's calling cards, his or her most immediate identifying traits, the authorial figure, his or her personality, "not the matter," to quote Nabokov, "but the manner."



## Race, Gender, Age, and Other Demographics in the Data-Set

That so much emphasis is placed on style is not necessarily surprising: the manner in which information is conveyed is frequently considered an author's primary identifying hallmark, no matter his or her demographic background, though this background is often taken into account when explaining certain discursive tendencies in narrative. McGurl will identify this strain of contemporary fiction as the triumph of auto-poetics, or the validation and expression of one's cultural, ethnic, and personal experience through narrative, which in turn leads (in his account) to the rise of high cultural pluralism, "which combines the routine operation of modernist autopoetics with a rhetorical performance of cultural group membership preeminently, though by no means exclusively, marked as ethnic" (56). However, an examination of the authors referencing Nabokov seems to accord with the demographics of publishing at large, which suggests that this privileging of ethnicity as a hallmark of contemporary fiction is problematic.

This accord points to a discrepancy in the primacy of auto-poetics in the field of cultural production: while the perception (as McGurl hints) is that institutional, post-war fiction privileges the work of minorities, the numbers suggest the opposite. The realities of publishing seem far more aligned with what Guillory identifies as political capital than with cultural capital, and with issues of what is represented since (as he points out in another context) "Such representation does not address or compensate for the socioeconomic conditions of their existence so long as the school continues to distribute cultural capital unequally" (38). The demographics here are skewed, but they are skewed in roughly the same proportions as in the literary field at large. To pretend otherwise is to do these cultural producers a disservice. Put simply, the overwhelming majority of books

that include a Nabokov reference are published by young, white, male authors. But the overwhelming majority of books in the field of cultural production *at large* are, in fact, being published by young, white, male authors. The data set is concordant with the larger world of publishing: the authors of *The Culture and Commerce of Publishing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* note that 81.8 percent of the publishing industry is white, and that while the proportions of men and women are roughly the same within that demographic, the percentages change drastically when focusing on decision-making roles: only 17.1 percent of those roles are filled by women (Greco, Rodriguez and Wharton 167-169). The numbers are fairly consistent: a 2011 *New Republic* essay – written in response to the VIDA organization’s report on the low numbers of women being reviewed in major literary venues – also finds that, with almost no exceptions, the lists of major publishing houses are composed of (at best) 30 percent female authors, with most at 25 percent or below (Franklin). The authors referencing Nabokov, as a subset, seem to replicate the economics of mainstream publishing, suggesting that a writer is no more or no less likely to reference Nabokov because of his or her background – it merely affects the chances that a particular writer will be published at all.

In grouping together writers whose major identifying mark is a Nabokov reference, the hope is to offer an alternative means of arranging and thinking about authorship, one that does full justice to the varied participants in the field of cultural production while acknowledging that their participation still hinges, to some degree, on accidents of birth and class.

This acknowledgement seems particularly important because so much of the demographic data suggests that a Nabokov reference is, to some degree, one of the few

ways in which a particular writer distinguishes him- or herself demographically from the field of cultural production at large (so that while they have been singled out for having introduced a Nabokov reference into their own work, they are also for the most part fairly representative of the literary field). Many of the writers involved are still alive: of the 85 whose biographical data could be clearly traced, only 21 are dead, which means that 75% of the people under discussion are still active in the field. 82% of the writers are male, 17% female. The average age at which a writer will make a Nabokov reference is around 46, which is also the set's median age, though the mode falls at 33, the age at which five of the writers in the set included a Nabokov reference. In a curious correlation, 33 is also close to the average age at which a writer will publish his or her first novel.<sup>26</sup> The oldest person to make a Nabokov reference did so at age 80, the youngest at 22. The distribution, along the decades, seems to correspond with the traditionally understood peaks and valleys of a writer's productive years: 7 made references while in their 20s, 25 while in their 30s, 21 while in their 40s, 18 in their 50s, 10 in their 60s, 3 in their 70s, 1 in her 80s.

Thus, 75% of all Nabokov references are made when the writer is between the ages of 30 and 59, though of course these are fairly productive years for most people, and even a breakdown of those years by decade (29% for those in their 30s, 25% for those in their 40s, 21% for those in their 50s) seem to point at the very unsurprising fact that writers follow the normal productivity outputs of other human beings in other fields of endeavor. Equally unsurprising is that – while writers are scattered all over the globe – the most

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<sup>26</sup> For an author's perspective on this phenomenon, see "Why New Novelists Are Kinda Old, or Hey, Publishing is Slow" (Scalzi). For an editor's, see the *New Yorker* comment prefacing the magazine's 1999 "Future of American fiction" issue (Buford 65).

significant percentage of them make their home in New York, still a central locus in the field of cultural production: 21 of them do, or 25%. Incidentally, New York is also where Nabokov first sets foot in America in May of 1940: as a place that gathers and traffics in all kinds of capital, it's tough to beat.

### Nabokov in Popular Fiction

When Nabokov is referenced in popular fiction, the reference bridges two disparate if overlapping fields of cultural production: the field of restricted cultural production and field of large-scale cultural production. The reference allows the producer to negotiate and refine his or her feelings over the authorial role. In a chapter exploring allusion as a sort of bridge between fields, this sort of reference is a particularly powerful connector, since it partakes both of the legitimizing power of the cultural currency as well as of the currency's symbolic power in the literary field of cultural production (with Nabokov standing in for the Autonomous Author and for authorial intransigence). The references align the cultural product with the literary field, but they also allow an author primarily identified with the field of large-scale cultural production to declare his or her autonomy.

No surprise, then, to find Nabokov often paired with fictive participants in the field of cultural production. In Stephen King's *The Regulators* (written under the pseudonym Richard Bachman), a literary agent approaches the house of "his client, who had once been spoken of in the same breath with John Steinbeck, Sinclair Lewis, and (after *Delight*) Vladimir Nabokov" (Bachman 225). King, with co-author Peter Straub, include Nabokov in a litany of authors bridging a wide strata in *Black House* (and ending with a

Dickens title that echoes the novel's own), which can partly be read as a commentary on the arbitrary limits separating one field from the next:

They began with Chester Himes and Charles Willeford, changed gear with a batch of contemporary novels, floated through S.J. Perelman and James Thurber, and ventured emboldened into fictional mansions erected by Ford Madox Ford and Vladimir Nabokov. (Marcel Proust lies somewhere ahead, they understand, but Proust can wait; at present they are to embark upon *Bleak House*). (105)

Anne Rice, too, will pair her vampire, Lestat, with Nabokov, and like King and Straub's her reference is a not-so-veiled commentary on authorial autonomy, and on fields of cultural production (with their attendant agents of commentary and criticism). In *The Tale of the Body Thief*, Rice has Lestat quote Humbert Humbert's line on the parallels between murderers and stylists, and (immediately after) has him remark that "I already know of course that I am sensuous, florid, lush, humid – enough critics have told me that" (2).

A host of other popular authors follow suit, the chief referential modality being a desire to link their cultural product to Nabokov, and to comment on the borders separating one field from the other. There, as with Rice, King, and Straub, a reference operates as a kind of free-trade zone – as the shared area in a Venn diagram – where two fields traditionally understood to be kept apart are shown to share a common set of influences: they both use the same capital.

And the reference will often circulate in the same manner and register as the cultural capital it engages with. While the references in Dan Simmons's science fiction novels are

particularly playful (see the appendix), one of the most striking belongs to crime writer Donald E. Westlake's caper-comedy *Don't Ask*:

Deliberate. Not an escaped homicidal lunatic from Transylvania; not a bewildered Ukrainian in a four-door Lada who'd made the mistake of trusting his Soviet maps; not a French balloonist blown off course, nor a Berliner full of Berliners who'd fallen asleep on the through train, nor a Zemblan lepidopterist insensibly crossing the border net in hand in pursuit of some rare butterfly. (71)

Here we see a conflation of author and character (Nabokov is a Russian and a lepidopterist; Kinbote is a Zemblan and an avid ping pong player with zero interest in butterflies). And here too we see an author engaging in high comic style ("a Berliner full of Berliners") whose slyness and elusive approach allows a kind of freedom and light-heartedness that is itself a commentary on the authorial role, on its capacity to surprise and join disparate signifiers and to behave however it feels fit: autonomous, intransigent, dependent on no one but itself and the few choice authors he or she chooses for company.

This same sort of intransigence manifests itself in a genre that should not, by all accounts, allow for this sort of playful referencing – instructional textbooks and how-to manuals – though perhaps it's precisely because the genre requires a great many constraints on authorial movement and expression that one finds it so riddled with Nabokovian in-jokes, and with Nabokovian in-jokes so focused on the very authorially-minded *Pale Fire*. The constraints may explain why Kinbote appears in three separate works. He is the donor of an emerald tiara in Robert Dechene's *Fundraising Through Silent Auctions: A Complete Guide* (29), the owner of a successful import and export business in Andrea Gefner's *Business Letters the Easy Way* (also published under the title

*How to Write Better Business Letters*) , and as a particularly puzzling entry in the index for Gregory Cherlin and Ehud Hrushovski's mathematics textbook *Finite Structures with Few Types*: "Kinbote, Charles: Not in the text" (192).

Kinbote is not alone. *Lolita*'s Quilty also finds himself in a book of advice. William Germano's *Getting It Published* presents the following example: "An editor in psychology might acquire thirty titles a year in the field, five of which will come in through the efforts of professor Quilty, the distinguished abnormal psychologist, whose extensive contacts have enabled her to build the respected series *Narcolepsy Today*" (52).

That this last reference explicitly deals with advice on negotiating a particular field of cultural production is an accident, but it is a happy accident. The authorial figure here, as in Westlake's *Zemblan lepidopterist*, finds a freedom and a level of autonomy contingent to some degree on the figure being referenced, and to a greater degree on the reference hiding in plain sight. Nabokov's cultural capital, like most capital, accrues value when its circulating orbit is deliberately narrowed.

## CHAPTER 3

### NABOKOV IN TELEVISION AND MOVIES

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

*Dead Alive*’s director Peter Jackson accommodates both fields here, and provides a commentary on their overlap, but he has done so before through his directorial and screenwriting duties as well as through his fervent, maniacally considered adaptations of novels – chiefly (to date) those of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy as well as Alice Sebold’s *The Lovely Bones*. *Dead Alive* is also, in a way, a kind of adaptation, since like *Shaun of the Dead* (which it antedates) and *Return of the Living Dead* (which it follows), *Dead Alive* is both a tribute and a send-up of zombie films, particularly those of George Romero (*Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead*, and its sequels). The movie is deeply intertextual. *Dead Alive* plays with genre conventions, wildly riffs on expected horror tropes, and gleefully mixes the (gruesomely) cartoonish with the



(gruesomely) realistic. The reference itself is, on the face of it, tremendously cartoonish because of its incongruity – of all the things one can say, right before one dies, this one particular regret is the one that comes to mind? Put another way, if *Manhattan*'s Diane Keaton's Mary (who also suggests that Nabokov is a pedophile) were about to get eaten by a zombie, would she also apologize for having called Nabokov a pedophile? However cartoonish, however incongruous, the reference is a sophisticated commentary on Nabokov's conflation with his character, particularly since the intellectual is shown – in the brief, passing scene of his passing – as someone who values the simplified, glib bit of cultural capital (Nabokov = scandalous famous author = pedophile) over its more nuanced, complicated actual value (Nabokov = author of a famous novel whose narrator is a pedophile). As in Westlake's *Pale Fire* reference from the previous chapter, authorial epitext is blurred into a seemingly straightforward textual copresence. The intellectual's regret, however, is short lived. Right before he turns into a zombie, he straightens his tie and says, "Some of my best friends are pedophiles!"

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

The most salient form of transit occurs between the field of large-scale cultural production and the literary field. The means of dissemination differ between the two fields. Literature, unlike movies or television, is created and disseminated in a symbolic marketplace in the field of restricted production. But a great deal of transit occurs between these fields, and a cultural producer operating in the large-scale marketplace can traffic in symbolic capital originating elsewhere. (Zombies, meet Nabokov.) Nabokov signals expansion – signals kinship – instead of contraction and autonomy.

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

Granted, a popular-culture affiliation with the literary field also indicates a border, a delimiting, and a demarcation, since popular-culture producers use Nabokov to differentiate their creation from others in their immediate turf ("I belong there, not here"), but they do so while still hewing to the strictures of their genre – a reference in popular culture amplifies the literary field well beyond its localized set of concerns all while

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

This perceived symbolic weight owes as much to Nabokov's symbolic capital as it does to the real-world exigencies of mass-cultural production. As pointed out before, it helps that Nabokov achieves general circulation through *Lolita* – his cultural capital derives from the twinned, seemingly irreconcilable elements of highbrow critical admiration and midcult bestselling sensation – and it's no surprise that so many references studied below will turn to *Lolita* but, again, not in proportions significantly different from those found in literature. It helps too that a popular culture product requires a great deal of negotiation and compromise, so that nothing that circulates

successfully is created without a significant amount of collaboration, so that notions of authorial agency are necessarily adjusted from one field to the next. The product's material conditions – what Johnson describes as the circuit of textual production, the circumstances and the world into which it is brought to being, from which it is developed and out of which it is circulated – will play a part in determining how its cultural producer feels about his or her role as an author. A screenwriter knows that others (producers, directors, actors, other screenwriters brought in at the last minute) will have a hand in shaping the product. In this field, authorial intransigence and authorial autonomy are suspect in practice, if admired in theory.

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

### Overviews

I had assumed that the pool of references would grow wider as the number of presumed collaborators decreased – that it would be easier for a cultural producer to insert a Nabokov reference when the number of gatekeepers was limited – but that does not seem to be case. What does change is the degree to which he acts as a legitimating force. Nabokov, it seems, thrives just as well in popular culture artifacts where a

significant number of participants affect the final product (there are references in 10 movies and 18 television shows) as where the number of collaborators or influencers is significantly reduced (there are references in 24 songs, 16 pop novels, and three textbooks). The distribution seems to confirm this relationship between reference and number of collaborators, with the largest percentage belonging to songs (33%) closely followed by television (25%), pop novels (22%), and movies (14%). This ubiquity confirms the seemingly innocuous pervasiveness of the allusive act – here, as in the written, allusion occurs under the cover of its own seemingly localized realm. If not exactly invisible, it is allowed to pass, allowed to circulate, because its perceived impact is so small.

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

That said, many popular culture references that invoke Nabokov’s authorial persona will often confuse or blur the writer with his creation – a transtextual connection often but not always connected to its expected spur, *Lolita*. This confusion occurs most prominently in movie references, explored below, where Nabokov might just as well be

Humbert. While one could argue that in these cases the cultural producer means to invoke *Lolita*, or the aura of *Lolita*, the fact remains that Nabokov was chosen instead – the author and his attendant paratextual set of signifiers, one of which is *Lolita*. Confused or not, what was invoked was a real human being, with a real set of publications, and not one of his galley slaves, as he was fond of calling his characters.

As with the novel references, references in the field of large-scale cultural production trickle in fairly early on and explode during the 1990s and 2000s, suggesting a strong relationship between two important factors: the greater circulation of Nabokov's works starting in 1989 with the republication of the Vintage paperbacks as well as the greater complexity, diffusion, and variety of popular media during those decades. The earliest reference occurs in 1969 in the musical *Celebration*, the latest (at the time of the writing, and keeping in mind that the cut-off date is 2009) round late September of 2009, during the first episode of the second season of the *90210* television show remake. One reference occurs in the 1960s, two in the 1970s, 5 in the 1980s, 30 in the 1990s, and 33 in the 2000s. The percentage of *Lolita* references, always high, does dramatically decrease as one goes forward in time. It's only in the 1990s that we find the first reference to *Pale Fire* as well as the first reference to the author, which says much to confirm Nabokov's ever increasing valuation in the field of cultural production during those decades.

This valuation benefits from the increasing variety and greater sophistication of popular culture artifacts from the 1990s and 2000s. In other words, Nabokov is more likely to be referenced because the environment has changed: the context in which pop culture now thrives allows for a wider net of signifiers and a deep arsenal of external references. A Nabokov reference, then, can be read as a partial confirmation of half of the

central thesis behind Steven Johnson’s *Everything Bad is Good For You: How Today’s Popular Culture is Making Us Smarter*. Whether or not mass media is making us smarter is debatable, but the increasing diversity of Nabokov references is certainly a sign of greater sophistication, which Johnson sees reflected in the increased complexity of popular culture – a culture that makes greater and more intricate cognitive demands from its consumers (9-11). Thus, more obscure Nabokovian cultural signifiers enter the field.

**Table 5: Numbers and Percentage of References by Decade**

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

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

other Nabokov references, with the percentages then dramatically decreasing by decade: 80% in the 80s, 67% in 1990s, and 48% in the 2000s (See Table 5: Numbers and Percentage of References by Decade).

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

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



can be roughly equivalent (if not slightly more difficult) than one found in a literary reference.

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

#### Nabokov References in Movies

“*Lolita* is famous, not I,” Nabokov claimed in *Strong Opinions*. “I am an obscure, doubly obscure poet with an unpronounceable name” Given the context in which Nabokov is referenced in movies – often when an older man (if not exactly Humbert Humbert’s 52) is seducing a much younger woman (if not exactly a nymphet) – one would assume that Nabokov need not be invoked at all. *Lolita* and *Lolita* should do fine all by themselves. That they are often accompanied by their creator may or may not strike

one as odd, or at the very least as unnecessary, but the context in which they find themselves signals that the allusion is triggered by a twinned preoccupation: (1) the immediate situation at hand and its kinship to the Humbert Humbert/Lolita dynamic; and (2) the authorial figure and the world in which he or she operates. That is why Humbert is so often paired with Nabokov: doing so allows the creator of the cultural product to negotiate notions of authorship that often extend well beyond the immediate context and often well beyond the cultural product itself.

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

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

Which leads to this question: is a showgirl a cultural producer? Or, more specifically, in the context of the movie *Showgirls*, can Nomi Malone, the lead showgirl played by Elizabeth Berkley, be considered a kind of authorial stand-in? And if so, when she is accused of being a “One-day Lolita Pollyanna” – one of the many odd insults thrown her way, and one of the most cryptic – can it be seen as a passing commentary on authorship (Eszterhas, *Showgirls*)? The answer to the last question is likely No. The insult is clearly too brief and said too much in passing and, moreover, was likely chosen by screenwriter Joe Eszterhas for its almost nonsensical stringing together of sing-song vowels and consonants than for any actual connotative value – though the connotations are clear: both Lolita and Pollyanna being naïfs, and Lolita being a seductive naïf at that. But the movie does explore an artistic progression of sorts, and it was written by someone absorbed by authorial concerns. In the movie, the character remakes herself and succeeds at a heavy cost (the movie did not succeed, critically or commercially, also at a heavy cost), and does so in a way that suggests, in its own rough rags-to-riches sort of way, an artistic progression. While the Kyle MacLachlan character facilitates the character’s transformation, there is some wiggle room to see the Shue character as a self-fashioning agent engaged in the creation of a cultural product. *Showgirls* is awash in popular culture signifiers, all inserted and fought for by screenwriter Joe Eszterhas, whose oversized persona (reflected in his two Hollywood memoirs as well as in just about every interview he’s ever given, including the ones following his recent conversion to Christianity) often reflects a deep preoccupation with the role of the writer (more specifically, with the role of the writer Joe Eszterhas) in the film world: the subtitle of his *Devil’s Guide to Hollywood*, one of his memoirs, is “The screenwriter as God!” [exclamation mark

Eszterhas’]. If Eszterhas sees something of himself in (misunderstood, maligned) Nomi – a character he named after his wife and then, following the movie’s poor reception, regretted (a fact mentioned in two of his memoirs: at length in 2010’s *Hollywood Animal* and, most succinctly, on page 173 of *The Devil’s Guide to Hollywood*) – then one could see the admittedly throwaway insult hurled at her as a commentary on authorship, and on the necessary seduction inherent in successful storytelling, whether one does so in a screenplay, a novel, or a Tropicana showroom. That Nomi is a childhood nickname and that Lolita herself is a child, is a coincidence, and one that may have escaped Eszterhas (173).

Other screenwriters reference *Lolita*, often in situations involving cultural producers, in ways that suggest the same twinned preoccupation: (1) the immediate situation at hand and its kinship to the Humbert Humbert/Lolita seduction; and (2) the authorial figure and the world in which he or she operates. This twinned preoccupation finds one of its oddest expressions in scenes where the one blurs with the other – when the authorial figure of Nabokov is confused for the figure authored by Nabokov, where Nabokov is mistaken for Humbert. Both a testament to Nabokov’s (and *Lolita*’s) circulation in the culture and evidence of the ways in which cultural content tends to both amplify and simplify in transit, this blurring also allows a screenwriter to associate his or her content with the literary field while also reinforcing the autonomy of the authorial act.

This tendency crystallizes itself in references introduced by cultural producers who are themselves regarded as auteurs, and whose aspirations often extend beyond the filmic and into the literary. Woody Allen and Peter Jackson (the latter already discussed above) both introduce Nabokov references into their films, and they both do so in ways that blur

Nabokov's authorial persona with the Humbert/Lolita dynamic, though (curiously) it is Allen – in a movie about writers – who most strays most in this regard and Jackson – in a movie about zombies – who manages to make the reference itself a sharp, if offhand commentary on this very blurring.

Like just about every other film written and directed by Woody Allen, *Manhattan* focuses on the romantic and creative tribulations of a cultural producer – in this case, Isaac, a TV comedy writer, struggling to complete his first serious work, a book on New York – and so the movie teems with cultural signifiers intimately connected with the act of creation itself, most of which reflect an attempt to bridge disparate fields. It's no accident that the first such signifier is Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, and that this musical piece bookends the movie. *Rhapsody in Blue* is itself a blur of genres, classical and jazz, as well as a blur of methods, requiring both strict adherence to musical notation and (in one notorious passage) relatively free-range improvisation. Isaac himself, conversant in both "high" and "low" culture, is struggling with reconciling these disparate fields in transitioning from television to literature, though he is also engaged in another sort of bridging – connecting with a romantic interest who is much younger than him. If he is bridging an age gap, and if one of the most iconic images in the film happens to feature a bridge (the 59<sup>th</sup> Street bridge), that is all well and good, though this motif need not necessarily translate into a cogent argument. It need not be a motif at all: often, a connotative field may construct itself out of quirks or accidents, not design. All the same, it's difficult not to see this sort of bridging as part and parcel of Allen's M.O., and it does make it easier to see *Manhattan's* Nabokov reference in context.

The reference acts as a bridge in other ways as well, which conflate not just Nabokov's authorial persona with that of his character but also serve to thread together the various romantic entanglements in the movie. It follows a conversation between Isaac's friend and soon-to-be lover, Mary (played by Diane Keaton), and his current lover, Tracy (played by Mariel Hemingway). Mary asks Tracy what she does, and when Tracy answers that she goes to high school, Mary turns to Yale – Isaac's best friend, a college professor – and says, "Somewhere Nabokov is smiling, if you know what I mean" (Allen). At the time, Mary and Yale are together, as are Isaac and Mary. Shortly thereafter, Yale will leave Mary, Mary will get together with Isaac but – fairly soon after – will return to Yale. Isaac will attempt to return to Tracy, but by the end of the movie she is ready to move on: she's leaving New York (and its roster of Allen's signature urban neurotics) for England. Mary's last words to Isaac are, "Not everybody gets corrupted. You got to have a little faith in people." Isaac, no Humbert Humbert (but no Nabokov either), finds himself revisiting *Lolita's* final moments: a distraught former lover unable to convince the object of his affection to stay with him – Lolita will stay in Alaska, Mary will fly to New York. But – again – not only is Isaac not Humbert, he is also not Nabokov, and so Mary's comment – particularly the word "corrupt" – feels less like a deliberate echo of the novel and more like an accidental, if sweet, convergence . Tracy's deliberate, explicit Nabokov allusion, however, points to a recurring preoccupation in Allen's oeuvre: the failure of high cultural markers to adequately account or regulate personal behavior. In other words, Allen consistently insists on presenting highly articulate people with a demonstrably deep arsenal of cultural knowledge who behave in ways that are thoroughly incongruous with that arsenal – they

talk smart but act stupid. The Nabokov reference carries a whiff of this incongruity within it, though it's likely that the erroneous conflation belongs to Allen, not to Mary. That it is Nabokov who is invoked, and not Humbert Humbert, matters not simply because it is symptomatic of how cultural capital gets simplified and amplified in transit. It matters most because the conflation allows Allen to present both reference and author together, so that the audience is presented with not just an allusion directly applicable to the situation at hand but also with far more important knowledge: Allen's characters (a crew of novelists, professors, and sundry urbanites) have read, can talk about literary authors, and that Allen himself is capable of introducing this field into his own. A side effect, of course, of this reflected glow is that it happens to cast Nabokov as someone who would presumably approve of pedophilia.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Patricia: “Nabokov.” (Kaufman)

If Nabokov acts as another kind of bridge here (Patricia's “Nabokov” immediately triggers some wonderfully over-the-top, table-clearing, spies-in-peril love-making), it's important to note that the structure itself is rickety. The quote, often attributed to Nabokov, actually belongs to a 1978 film adaptation of Nabokov's *Despair* (you won't find it in the novel) – though whether it belongs to screenwriter Tom Stoppard or to director Reiner Werner Fassbinder is unclear (Stoppard). It's tempting to see the insertion of an apocryphal, incorrect Nabokov quote as a deliberate, playful commentary on the vagaries of authorship. After all, Barris's entire account (including the portion at hand, where he is bedding sexy double agents) is highly suspect, and the movie serves as, among other things, a commentary on authorial unreliability. Further, we're talking about a movie authored by a screenwriter who has explored similar themes in multiple scripts, most notably in *Adaptation* and in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. And so it would make sense that Kaufman should continue this exploration of unreliability via a deliberate misattribution of material actually belonging to Stoppard, another writer also

engaged in authorial hi-jinks, from a movie (and a book) about someone convinced he has found his double. Nabokov's *Despair* is a bleak comic noir. And the novel to a great extent – and the movie to a lesser – is all about people getting things wrong. It is more likely, however, that Kaufman's misattribution is a genuine, not a disingenuous, mistake, though even if so the central point holds: Nabokov is introduced to bridge the gap between the literary and the filmic, at the heart of which – tipped between various worlds, all wildly unreliable – stands Chuck Barris, with Kaufman lurking in the shadows, both (like Allen's Isaac) creatures of popular culture infatuated with the authorial glamour of the literary field. No surprise to find that Allen and Kaufman both invoke the literary author Nabokov shortly before a seduction.

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

to appear in movies that demonstrate a greater-than-average preoccupation with cultural production at large and with cultural producers in particular.

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



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

### Nabokov References in Television Shows

There are ten Nabokov references found in movies, but nearly twice that number in television, 18, which would suggest strong confirmation of another Johnson hypothesis – that syndication, DVDs, Blu-Rays, the Internet, and increasing and ever-proliferating distribution means have resulted, over the years, in ever more sophisticated TV shows designed to bear repeated viewings with embedded and encoded information built in to reward attentive audience members (159). Johnson sees the economic motive in forging

highly allusive, referential entertainments, and the data set's spike of 1990s and 2000s references concords with Johnson's assumptions, but it's important to note that the relative sophistication of Nabokov references drops precipitously in TV shows. Nowhere in the master data set are there more banal, half-understood nods to *Lolita*, though these are balanced to a great extent by clever, obscure, well modulated references. I do not mean to say that Johnson is wrong. I do mean to point out that a denser referential field does not necessarily yield better or more sophisticated references, just more of them. The quality varies (some is quite simply outstanding), but the measured increase is in quantity. That said, all television references do share one common trait: more than movie references, television references demonstrate a greater preoccupation with the referenced cultural capital's legitimating potential, so that Nabokov signals a cultural anxiety, an attempt to align the product with received notions associated with the literary field. Nabokov, in other words, is often invoked as shorthand for literature at large and for its attendant connotations of difficulty, elusiveness, and high-mindedness.

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

(young) girlfriend's mother in a 1992 episode (Engel), and Chuck in a 2008 *Gossip Girl* episode also refers to a predatory character as a Humbert Humbert (John), a soon-to-be love interest in a 2002 *Dawson's Creek* episode quizzes students with an inane *Lolita* question ("When Humbert gets called away for the urgent phone call, he returns to find Lolita doing what with the likes of Clare Quilty?") (Fattore), Brenda in a 2002 *Six Feet Under* episode describes a character as her Humbert Humbert (Taylor), and a sixteen-year-old aspiring author in a 2007 *Californication* episode is praised for potentially writing the "smartest, sexiest novel since *Lolita*" (Kapinos). All these characters, operating within the constraints of their cultural product, declare an affiliation with higher, presumably more sophisticated fields: Martin is a book editor, Chuck an urbanite ne'er-do-well, the *Dawson's Creek* professor a once-great novelist, Brenda a successful academic and book author, and *Californication's* protagonist a burnt-out novelist. Very little actual intellectual labor happens in any of these episodes, and Nabokov appears to lend a measure of legitimacy to the characters' intellectual aspirations: they must be writers, and they must be smart. How can they not be? After all, here they are, writers and cultural producers all, name dropping Nabokov. Most, however, mispronounce his name.

A *Lolita* reference need not mean an obvious, overt, or simplistic concordance between the novel and a cultural product. In fact, the most playful television reference happens to explicitly address Nabokov's most famous novel while managing to be both thoroughly engaging and to truly exploit the Humbert/Lolita dynamic in ways that are subtle and surprising. More surprising still, perhaps, is that the reference appears in traditional three-camera sitcom: *NewsRadio*. Another traditional sitcom, *The Big Bang*

*Theory*, also references Nabokov, though arguably less successfully (and more overtly). In both, however, the reference finds a higher register partly because the dynamic inherent in the situation resonates to a far greater degree than those previously mentioned, and partly because the reference is treated lightly, free from the midcult anxiety and *poshlostian* gravitas weighing down the previous references.

The *NewsRadio* reference succeeds because its *Lolita* allusion frees itself from both author and text – paradoxically, it establishes the primacy of the authorial figure (and the authorial stamp) by eliding the author it references. The 1998 episode, titled “The Lam,” features a self-described agent of “pure evil” named Johnny Johnston (played by Patrick Warburton) who seduces Lisa Miller (played by Maura Tierney). He proposes by saying, “Lisa Miller, light of my fire, fire of my loins, will you marry me?” (Johnson and Marcil). This deliberate hypotextual distortion of *Lolita*’s famous opening passage aligns itself with the distortions explored in chapter two. Here, in this television show, as in the passages of literature also parodying *Lolita*’s opening passage, one can return to the issue of affiliation and alignment, and say that a deliberate epitextual distortion of the sort practiced by Shelley Jackson, the writers of *NewsRadio*, and the others engage in serves as a unit of cultural capital that allows each writer to declare him- or herself an independent, fully self-sufficient creator – the Autonomous Author. It’s precisely in this happily self-imposed, self-declared isolation where each *Lolita* parody finds common ground: in the seeming textual subservience to what came before in the field, which in being parodied establishes both the competency of the author and the primacy of authorship (and authorship’s primary identifying trace: style) over content. What is brought to the surface, after all, when engaging in these deliberate hypotextual

distortions, is the author's calling cards, his or her most immediate identifying traits, the authorial figure, his or her personality, "not the matter," to quote Nabokov, "but the manner." In *NewsRadio*, Nabokov functions as a currency whose primary asset is style – the free play and expression of words and ideas. Johnny Johnson succeeds in his seduction because he is so smooth, as the people around him remark, but then again so does the show, and so does Humbert Humbert, the most monstrous stylist of all, both a tragic figure and a figure of pure evil, who reminds us that one should "always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style" (7).

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

This form of reference – Nabokov as an intellectual item in a list of similar intellectual items – recurs in other shows. In an *X-Files* episode entitled "Never Again," Scully drafts a list of suspect Russians for Mulder to investigate: Nabokov appears in the company of Russian-American comedian Yakov Smirnoff and the 1920s filmmaker

Vsevolod Pudovkin (Morgan and Wong). Nor is this the only instance of an *X-Files* Nabokov joke. Darin Morgan, another writer for the show, references *Pale Fire*'s Kinbote in his episode "José Chung's From Outer Space," which is discussed in chapter one. Nabokov also appears in a list, produced via hypnosis, of Russian authors in an episode of *Alias*, alongside Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Chekhov (Orci).

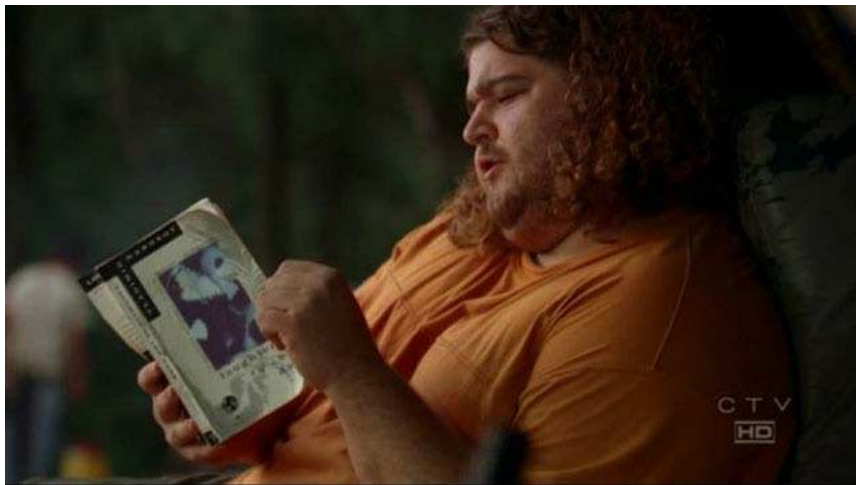


Figure 2: Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark* in *Lost*

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



television show and the philosophers and authors and characters it references, I suspect that *Lost*'s primary aim in referencing is to align itself with these products, and to claim a kind of kinship between these disparate cultural producers.

### Conclusion

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

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

contemporaneous and nearly contemporaneous with him (such as John Updike and Nicholson Baker) and with those writing right now (such as Martin Amis and Zadie Smith). The following two chapters discuss those authors and their peers, and their multiple, surprising, and intricate Nabokov references. To paraphrase Baker's Cyril Connolly epigraph from *U & I*: they may be referencing Nabokov, but who they're really wanting to talk about is themselves.

## CHAPTER 4

### NABOKOV IN UPDIKE AND BAKER

Writers do want to talk about themselves when they talk about other writers, but they also find other avenues, other opportunities to do so, some far less subtle. Sometimes, they simply insert themselves into their work, often for brief cameo appearances. The auto-poetic impulse runs strong, and the impulse is fairly steady, though it is complicated by the cultural and social circumstances surrounding the authorial role in his or her particular field of restricted cultural production. When Vladimir Nabokov (born in 1899) writes himself into his own work, he appears as a creature infinitely more confident than his characters: he delivers them from pain, allows them to escape the confines of the world they heretofore inhabited, and (in his *Lolita* screenplay) even corrects lepidopteral misunderstandings when asked for driving directions. His characters may be lost, but he himself is not. John Updike (born in 1932) finds himself lampooned, derided, and criticized (to great comic effect) by his character Henry Bech.<sup>27</sup> The novels of Nicholson Baker (born in 1957) all feature a Nicholson-Baker-ish narrator, an authorial persona far less confident than either Baker or Nabokov.<sup>28</sup> Zadie Smith may see Nabokov as the last in a line of authors who can see themselves in a tradition of the great (and likely white, and likely male) Autonomous Author, but the cultural capital embedded in auto-authorial

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<sup>27</sup> Key critical studies and biographies of Updike include Alice Hamilton's *The Elements of John Updike*, George Searles's *The Fiction of Philip Roth and John Updike*, Joyce Markle's *Fighters and Lovers: Theme in the Novels of John Updike*, Judie Newman's *John Updike*, and William Pritchard's *Updike: America's Man of Letters*. See also Kathleen Verduin's "Imprinting Mortality: Updike's Anxiety and the Culture of Books" and James Silver's "The Problem of Omniscience in John Updike's *Roger's Version*."

<sup>28</sup> Key critical studies of Nicholson Baker include Arthur Saltzman's *Understanding Nicholson Baker*, Pold Soren's "Novel Media: On Typographical Consciousness and Marginal Realism in Nicholson Baker," Ros Chambers's "Meditation and the Escalator Principle (on Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine*)," and Philip Simmons's "Toward the Postmodern Historical Imagination: Mass Culture in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer* and Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine*."

preoccupations refuses to stop circulating: the currency gains value almost precisely because it belongs to a historically-situated moment no longer practically available to contemporary cultural producers. Nabokov may be a gold doubloon. But a gold doubloon is, if anything, all the more valuable for its less-than-smooth transactional requirements.

Writers reassert the symbolic autonomy of the individual author when they reference Nabokov in their own novels, and in doing so these authors form a sort of ad-hoc Nabokovian group or school even when the members and their immediate milieu would not seem to have anything in common otherwise. While Updike and Baker are certainly not the first authors to reference Nabokov, they merit special attention.

In this chapter, I will argue that their references demonstrate a historically-situated preoccupation with the tangled relationship between the author's symbolic capital and his or her standing in the field of cultural production. Updike is a near-contemporary of Nabokov, and thus finds a more coherent congruency between his individual authorial role and the Autonomous-Author symbolic capital embedded in a Nabokov allusion. For Baker, a later writer, the case is complicated by many of the same circumstances that trouble Zadie Smith: Nabokov (and Updike), when alluded, circulate as symbols of intransigent, autonomous authorship – it's a tremendously appealing unit of symbolic weight, all the more appealing for its unattainability. Both Updike and Baker will articulate a variation of the same idea: when an author references another author, the referential act extends well beyond the immediate passage and will often serve as an opportunity for the author to explore the inherent tensions in participating in what is, in essence, a vibrant, competitive marketplace. But Baker's position is more fraught: his book *U & I*, a hybrid of memoir and literary criticism, admires Updike for qualities that

Baker feels he lacks, both in his cultural production but (most importantly) in his public authorial epitext. Baker lacks Updike's confidence and his certainty. Baker and Updike are of particular note too because they reference each other as well as Nabokov: Baker in *U & I*, his book-length exploration of Updike (his works and his authorial persona), and Updike in his short, amused review of Baker's book on Updike. While Updike will phrase it far more elegantly, the central motive behind a referential act concords with the one explored here. An authorial allusion works as a kind of intra-authorial calling card, with authors exploring their place in the field by seeing where and how other authors have fared.

#### Nabokov in Updike

Updike's 27 January 2009 death occasioned a flurry of obituaries, several by authors who – keeping true to Updike's prolific spirit – wrote more than one panegyric, no surprise given the subject's own broad field of interest. That Martin Amis did so is even less surprising. He had repeatedly expressed his admiration for Updike: he had profiled him in a piece collected in *Visiting Mrs. Nabokov*, collected again years later, along with additional Updike material, for a sizable chunk of *The War Against Cliché*, a critical anthology where Updike figures prominently (the only other author to receive more space is Vladimir Nabokov).

In October of 2009, months after his warm appreciation of Updike's life and works, Amis returned to the author for a newspaper piece on the health care debate. His single face-to-face meeting with Updike, Amis recalled, had taken place in a hospital, and so the conversation turned to "The City," an Updike short story that takes place mostly in

hospitals, which reminded Amis “of a sentence I wrote about *Lolita*, and the meticulous moral reckoning to which Nabokov subjects Humbert Humbert: ‘As in an American hospital, every tear-stained pillowslip, every scrap of soiled paper tissue, has eventually to be answered for.’” The conversation moved to matters of craft, to questions of perfection and imperfection in prose (no story, Updike maintained, could be considered “perfect”), and to Nabokov’s assessment of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, in the middle of which Amis comments on Nabokov’s stated admiration for Updike’s prose. Updike’s response is guarded: “He signed his little letter ‘cordially.’ It was pretty minimalist, that note. Making me suspect that Nabokov only loved my prose when it was lauding the prose of Nabokov.”

Updike’s own 1977 obituary for Nabokov was fully laudatory, in no way guarded, nor for that matter (for the most part) were those for Updike himself in 2009. But obituaries are public documents, intended for a general audience, whereas what Amis records is a semi-private, semi-confidential conversation between two professionals. But the qualifiers matter: Amis, after all, was conducting an interview meant for public consumption.

Of interest here is less Updike’s cageyness in assessing Nabokov’s praise than the thread of thought connecting the authors: Amis moves from Updike, to Updike’s story, to Nabokov’s method of giving stories a grade, to the hypothetical grade Updike’s story would have received, to Updike’s own assessment of Nabokov’s assessment of Updike (and its contingency on Updike’s own assessment of Nabokov) <sup>29</sup>, and then to Nabokov’s

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<sup>29</sup> To say nothing of Updike’s choice of “minimalist” as a pejorative which, in 1987, a time where Raymond Carver and Anne Beattie were in vogue, carried with it its own loaded connotations in the field of cultural production

take on Joyce. That the conversation is somewhat circular is a given. But that it is, in its own small way, a moment deeply entwined with how agents operate in the field of cultural production may be less so: Nabokov, and to a lesser extent Joyce, appear as units of cultural capital traded between Amis and Updike, with the value of exchange debated – the older writer adjusting the younger’s (seemingly) overvalued Nabokov-praise.

Writers exchange these units of symbolic and cultural capital continuously; they do so in and out of their works, in private hospitals and in department hallways, in newspaper and magazine reviews and in private conversations, but it is in their own fiction – which frequently blurs these public and private spheres as well as distinctions between “real” and fictive authorial personas – that these units of cultural capital operate most powerfully. That writers allude to other writers is not unusual, and that an allusion will feel necessary, organic to the story, because it will more often than not bulwark a structural narrative is also normal, but an allusion also circulates, reinvigorates, and reinforces the values inherent in what is referenced – and it will also reinforce the value of the agent engaging in the referential act.

This interplay is at work everywhere, but the Nabokov references in Updike are striking for how they reposition both the reader and the work’s normative framework, a situation paralleled in Nicholson Baker’s own Nabokov references as well as in Baker’s references to Updike. The presence of Nabokov in the work of Baker and Updike serves much the same purpose: a Nabokov allusion reinforces aesthetic positions ascribed by the authors making the reference, all while allowing a kind of alignment with Nabokov’s writerly persona – the inherent dispositions and modes of articulation derived from interviews, prefaces, conversations and various authorial paraliterary endeavors, the giant

diffuse apparatus whose various spindly parts Genette identifies as key paratextual components and which he will collectively name the public and private epitexts (344-403).

It is, in fact, in the series of epitexts immediately following Updike's death that he was most closely linked to Nabokov. Adam Gopnik, writing the obituary for the *New Yorker*, a magazine for which Updike was a legendarily long-standing contributor, notes that it was through Updike that their readers learned to appreciate Nabokov and Borges (Postscript: John Updike). The appreciation (of Gopnik for Updike and of Updike for Nabokov) transforms itself, a few paragraphs later, into an acknowledgement of Nabokov's influence, along with Proust's, in Updike's writing, particularly his early short fiction. In discussing "Museums and Women," a story Gopnik calls "a summation, almost a formula, of the compound, mature Updike style," influence takes on its usual spectral associations (perfectly natural, and perfectly fine, given how much space this chapter has given to obituaries): "Nabokov haunts the first long sentence." Nor is *The New Yorker* obituary alone in noting Nabokov's ghost haunting Updike's prose. Rand Richards Cooper's "To the Visible World: On Worshipping John Updike" will also zero in on Nabokov's influence: "Several of the stories in his 1966 collection, *The Music School*, betray the telltale ventriloquism. Touches of ornate syntax; a cold control tempered by warmly lyrical memory; an eccentric concern with visual pattern that turns the observable world into a created work of art: this was a voice Updike got straight from Vladimir Nabokov, who in turn had fashioned it partly from Proust" (17).

Baker himself, writing in 1991, seventeen years before Updike's death, imagines Updike's funeral, where readers "would be mourning the man," and the man's "Prousto-



Nabokovian, morally sensitive, National-Book-Award-winning” style (19). Baker imagines Updike’s funeral while insisting, repeatedly through *U and I*, on the importance of writing about Updike while he is still alive (Baker, *U and I* 8-9, 13-15). And Amis, writing years later, on the occasion of Updike’s death, will also speak of his vitality while they talked at the hospital: “That day at Mass General, John Updike was alive.”

And still is. Or some form of him is: the authorial Updike persona is to some degree still active, his ghost still lingering, the diachronic distinctions of a late or early period flattened by the sudden stop of new prose. (Baker objects precisely to these losses in *U and I*’s first chapter – the loss of perspective triggered by an author’s demise and by an oeuvre’s sudden inflation after the waning and waxing of an ongoing literary career, instead of the actual, expected fluctuations in the quality and output of living, breathing human beings.) A writer is many different things. And there is a distinction between the “author” and the messy, shabby, all too corporeal creature in whom the author-function resides, a fact that Updike himself is deeply aware of, and one that he comments on in “Writers I Have Met,” a piece written in 1966, still relatively early in his career: “the writer’s physical presence is a light from a star that has moved on.” He reminds us that the authorial persona is a performance, and he finds that the accoutrements required of that performance “carry around with them a field force that compels objects to conform to their literary style.” He will extend the concept later: “Writers, like everyone else, see a world their personalities to some extent create.” Both of these statements confer on the authorial persona a normative framework that extends both into the outside (in the first statement, where the reader complies with the expected stylistic norms of the writer in question) and into the inside (in the second statement, where the writer selects the

signifiers from which his or her own text, his or her own world, will be constructed). And both assume, implicitly, much of what Genette explores in the epitext chapters of *Paratexts*: that the aura and ephemera surrounding an author will dictate, and to a great extent predict, the behavior of both author and reader. We act how we're expected to act given the information we're given.

Updike notes, in "Writers I Have Met," that every reader experiences the very best that a writer has to offer already – on the page, in the book – so there is no need to meet the actual human being, the darkened star, who produced it. All the same, he writes, "I would like to meet, I suppose, Vladimir Nabokov and Henry Green, but recognize the urge as superstitious, a seeking of a physical ritual to formalize the fact the we already are (I write as a reader) so well met."

I write as a reader: all writers *are* readers first, readers foremost,<sup>30</sup> and Updike's careful reading of Nabokov took place over the entire span of his career (the indices to Updike's collections of assorted critical prose bear Nabokov's name prominently and frequently). Gopnik and Cooper are right, however, in identifying the sixties as the moment where Nabokov may have surfaced most overtly, most prominently, in Updike's mind – and in Updike's style. In addition to "Writers I Have Met" and to the Nabokovian cadences of his early stories, this is also the period where Updike first reviews Nabokov

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<sup>30</sup> Cooper, while remembering meeting Updike at a reading, provides further confirmation (though none, of course, is really needed): "a mop-haired groupie, female, dressed in black lace and bare midriff, inserted herself between me and Updike, brazenly demanding to know how to 'to become a writer.' Updike tried politely to parry, but she asked again and again, beseeching him, She *had* to become a writer, did he have any, like, you know, any *advice*? At last Updike turned toward her and said, coolly and to my infinite satisfaction, 'Have you tried reading?'" (18) The gender politics of the anecdote are of course queasy, and they are all the more so for being unexamined. But it's this very same lack of reflexivity that allows for the symbolic capital of the Autonomous Author to operate and to circulate so powerfully through the reader/writers examined throughout: it presupposes a neutral set of conditions immediately available to all cultural producers even if – as the data-set shows, as the demographics of the publishing industry demonstrate – those conditions favor the white and the male.

in *The Republic*: a qualified if mostly positive review of *The Defense* titled “Grandmaster Nabokov,” which Updike begins by saying that Nabokov “distinctly seems to be the best writer of English prose at present holding American citizenship,” and which he follows with a line that would later be perpetually printed and reprinted on the cover of Nabokov’s Vintage paperback reissues: “He writes prose the only way it should be written – that is, ecstatically” (318, 319).

Updike, in passing, mentions Nabokov’s pseudonym during his émigré period, the “twenty years of European residence (1919-1940), under the pen name of ‘V. Sirin,’” followed closely by a rebuttal of Nabokov’s artificiality and “‘virtuosity,’ as if he is a verbal magician working with stuffed rabbits and hats nobody could wear” (320). But Updike’s own final assessment finds fault in more or less the same places. He cannot believe Luzhin’s suicide, Updike finds, because he cannot believe in Luzhin, and the entire enterprise feels overdetermined. Nabokov, Updike writes, “seems blocked by something outside the novel, perhaps by the lepidopterist’s habit of killing what it loves; how remarkably few, after all, of Nabokov’s characters do evade the mounting pin” (327).

This review is the final piece in Updike’s first collection of critical writing. The review, then, and its subject, occupies a prominent place in *Assorted Prose*, though I find that it is Sirin, more than Nabokov, who lingers in Updike’s thoughts. (The collection begins with Updike’s “Talk of the Town” pieces that appeared unsigned in their original *New Yorker* form; *Assorted Prose* is bookended by a once-anonymous Updike and a once-pseudonymous Nabokov.) What I find most intriguing is Updike’s need to note the pseudonymous nature of *The Defense*’s initial publication, which he links (mostly via

proximity) with traits often associated with Nabokov: coldness, cruelty, playfulness, games, and artificiality. To be sure, Updike is citing a historical fact, a curiosity about a writer that would be of genuine interest to a *New Republic* reader. But it is also the type of paratext noted by Genette since, once known, a pseudonym directs the reader toward the authorial intent and presence lurking beyond the text immediately at hand: “the name may have been chosen with an eye to the particular effect,” the permutations of which lead to an exploration “to the mixture of motive and manner that adds up to the calculation of an effect” (49).

And while Sirin may have not been the only model, there is something Sirinesque to the moment when Bech – a fictional Jewish novelist, the subject of a long-running series of Updike short stories – interviews Updike, which he will do three times. Bech’s first interview occurs in 1971, three years before Updike would write to congratulate Nabokov on his book of collected interviews, *Strong Opinions*, a time when Nabokov’s authorial presence circulated widely. Updike, responding to a question on how he views his novel, ends his answer (“a slow paste which in the glitter of print regains something of the original, absolute gaiety”) by reflecting that “describing it like this makes me sound more Nabokovian than I feel” (56). It is both an admission and a disavowal, but more striking still is that the form (a pseudonymous author interviewing himself) and the style itself (impish, playful, both cold and ornate) is Nabokovian. Updike, impersonating Bech, adopts a Nabokovian framework.

Nor is this interview the only time that Bech and Nabokov cross paths. His presence is felt throughout the Bech stories, often implicitly, sometimes overtly. In 1969’s “Rich In Russia,” the following allusion telegraphs Bech’s aesthetic and personal disposition –

Bech as a contrarian, an impish nonjoiner – while allowing Updike to comment on the performative nature of an authorial presence: “Reynolds, himself something of a spy, was with them whenever Bech spoke to a group, whether of translators (when asked who was America’s best living writer, Bech said Nabokov, and there was quite a silence before the next question) or of students (whom he assured that Yevtushenko’s *Precocious Autobiography* was a salubrious and patriotic work that instead of being banned should be distributed for free to Soviet schoolchildren). ‘Did I put my foot in it?’ Bech would ask anxiously afterward – another ‘act’” (12-13). The allusion works within the immediate context of the story: Bech the troublemaker chooses a banned White Russian émigré writer as the paragon of American literature. But there is more at work, since this story has, as an appendix, a series of letters written by Bech, cross-referenced in the text itself, in a way that mirrors Nabokov’s 1962 *Pale Fire*. In a story brimming with authorial preoccupations – Bech, a fictional author, offers his own author an opportunity to expound on authorial “acts” (in every sense of the word, but particularly the literary and para-literary activities associated with a writer: readings, book tours, interviews) as well as on other, actual authorial personas, such as Nabokov – Updike finds both a subject and a mode of expressing that subject in Nabokov’s own authorially-minded novel, one that – as in *Pale Fire* – will also insist on the reality of fictional texts. Bech, according to a fictional bibliography found in page 152 of *The Complete Henry Bech*, is the subject of a critical article:

Gilman, Richard, “Bech, Gass, and Nabokov: The Territory Beyond Proust,” *Tamarack Review*, XXXIII.1 (Winter, 1963) 87-99.

That Updike should have paired his creation with Proust is no accident: they are both, in their own ways, aligning themselves with the “Prousto-Nabokovian” sphere in the field of cultural production – a decidedly rarefied field. Bech will resort to Nabokov again in London: “He felt he had seen the hand before. In a novel. *Lolita? Magic Mountain?* Simple etiquette directed that he ask her how she was” (109). Here, as before, as in the example that follows, Updike aligns himself, and Bech, and the reader, with Nabokov’s own tangled intertextual modalities, wherein the borders between the real and written blur, Nabokov himself used as currency in Bech’s – and by extension Updike’s – field of cultural production. This currency exchange occurs most clearly in the following two examples, the first because it deals in one of the most powerful units of symbolic capital in literature, the second because it effects a back-and-forth, the same kind of negotiating that Amis and Updike engaged in when sitting at the hospital table.

Updike bestows on Bech what he himself was denied, the Nobel Prize, which triggers a series of necessary, required authorial performances:

These professional personalities operated at an energy level that stretched Bech’s brain like chewing gum on the shoe of a man trying to walk away. Terry Gross, in her beguilingly adolescent and faintly stammer voice, had put it to him more brutally yet: “How can you explain it? It must feel like a weird sort of miracle, I mean, when Henry James and Theodore Dreiser and Robert Frost and Vladimir Nabokov didn’t...”

“I’m not a Swedish mind-reader,” was all Bech could manage by way of apology. “I’m not even a Swedish mind.” (468)

The invocation is not as straightforward as it might appear. Updike's opinion of Bech's oeuvre is mixed, but having aligned his fictional author with Nabokov in previous stories, and having assigned to him authorial dispositions common to all three, what is at stake is a voluble, dynamic revaluing of the prize itself. (The story ends with Bech's acceptance speech, and with Bech's infant daughter waving and saying hi to the academy.) There is, in this 1997 story, a much gentler consideration of the shifting roles of the author in the field of cultural production, particularly when compared to the more jagged, more agonistic trumping one finds in the 1969 Bech: "Eyeball to eyeball. He toasts Jack London, I toast Pushkin. He does Hemingway, I do Turgenev. I do Nabokov, he counters with John Reed. His mouth engulfs the glass and crunches. I think of what my dentist would say, my beautiful gold caps..." (143).

There will be equally pointed rounds of toasts in Updike's *The Coup*:

My opposite number, Colonel Sirin, who in this single installation commanded perhaps the equivalent in expenditure of the entire annual military budget of Kush, discovered that I comprehended English and, no doubt more coarsely than he intended, proposed honor to "all good niggers." I responded with the seventy-seventh sura of the Koran ("*Woe on that day to the disbelievers! Begone to that Hell which you deny!*") as translated in my native tongue of Salu, whose glottal rhythms enchanted the Reds in their dizziness. Our store of reciprocal heroes exhausted, the briefing blackboard was dragged forth and we matched toasts to the letters of our respective alphabets. (35)

Sirin, the Nabokov pseudonym that so preoccupied Updike in 1964, reappears in 1978, transformed into an oafish Soviet general – the sort of authoritarian figure that Nabokov

himself lampoons in *Bend Sinister*, *An Invitation to a Beheading*, and elsewhere. Sirin reappears much later in the novel to save the narrator, a very Nabokovian exile, and while discussing the eradication of a city in the middle of the desert, the following intercession occurs: “But find my Sheba unharmed, Colonel Sirin, and we will let this amusement park endure as a memorial to the happy event” (237). A great distance separates this amusement park from Kinbote’s, in *Pale Fire*, where the mad annotator complains, in the fictional foreword, of its loudness “outside my present lodgings.” Too great a distance, perhaps, to suggest any sort of real connection, but *The Coup* is the first Updike novel set outside the United States, with *Brazil* the second, which followed over a decade later. Suellen Stringer-Hye, in her *VN Collation*, notes that reviewers consciously paired both of these novels with Nabokov. *The Coup*, a *Financial Post* review notes, is “narrated by francophone dictator – who sounded like Vladimir Nabokov on Prozac.” And Updike himself, when interviewed about *Brazil*, claims that it “should appeal to most anyone who used to be pleased by Nabokov’s excursions into the semi-real. I’m not Nabokov, and there was much about his fictional worlds that’s a little constraining, but I did love the attitude he brought to the art of fiction, a kind of detached, almost scientific wish to do something new with this form. I don’t see that much anymore. The people who write novels now seem to be very serious people who want to sell a million, or make a million at least” (Stringer-Hye, *Albion and Black Albinos*). Again, Updike moves from Nabokov’s writing (his “excursions into the semi-real”) into Nabokov’s writerliness (“the attitude he brought to the art of fiction”) to general, abstracted notions of the author’s relation to the field of cultural production (“the people who write novels now”).



This function parallels the Nabokovian allusions in the Bech stories and in *The Coup*, where the reference functions as a genuine intertextual cue – a means to telegraph a structure, a mode of narration – while drawing the reader into questions of authorial disposition. An allusion functions as a means to telegraph a much larger, much more complex intertextual relationship, a relationship hinging on the paratextual ephemera surrounding the author in question. Updike’s Nabokov allusions are not purely celebratory – there are decidedly mixed connotations in his comments to Amis, in his reviews, and the allusions embedded in the stories and novels (though it is here, curiously, in Updike’s fiction, that we find him at his most positively epideictic). Aleksei Zverev is right in pointing out that “Updike’s attitude toward Nabokov was always extremely complicated,” and his “Nabokov, Updike, and American Literature” synthesizes the various seemingly contradictory evaluations that the younger writer made of the older (537, 537-548). Updike, Zverev notes, “attempts to state his own understanding of a problem that the majority of Nabokov scholars simply ignore: is he or is he not connected with the American native tradition, whatever the names by which that tradition might be designated?” (538).

Updike’s Nabokovian allusions concord with Zverev’s insight: Bech, an outsider in most regards but thoroughly at home in his native New York, will invoke Nabokov when abroad – in Russia, in Sweden, in Czechoslovakia – and Sirin appears in a novel chiefly about exile, narrated by an émigré. These allusions create a cogent bridge between these two writers, and they do so in a way that suggests Updike’s trepidations and celebrations of his predecessor, existing as both an acknowledgement of stylistic and cultural affinities and as an opportunity to articulate where these affinities end: Nabokov is an outsider, I

am a native. The allusions function as a graduated, nuanced evaluation of how one authorial persona engages with another, and they provide persuasive proof of what Zverev fails to find: “The tendency to interpret Updike as Nabokov’s literary pupil was obvious from the very first critical interpretations of his works. However, despite the seeming cogency of these attempts, to this day they do not look fully proven” (537).

I do not mean that tracing the dense, and numerous, epitextual nodes linking Updike to Nabokov account for proof. Nor, for that matter, are Updike’s Nabokov allusions necessarily proof of a stylistic link. These, however, together with the observations made in the obituaries quoted above, suggest a significant affinity. It is this affinity, articulated via the sort of half-hidden cues of the sort Updike engaged in, may suggest the existence, *sub rosa*, of “a school of Nabokov’s real students,” a “Nabokov school,” which Zverev laments does exist: “Strictly speaking, even faithful students did not appear” (543). I’d argue that it did, that it does exist, but that – following the normative framework set by Nabokov – his “faithful students” express their allegiance in the modalities dictated by Nabokov himself: and so it is a school simultaneously allusive *and* elusive, one reserving its communication, as Updike does, via a submerged thread of half-hidden epitextual and intertextual utterances.

#### Nabokov and Updike in Baker

This alliance-via-allusion mode is mirrored in Nicholson Baker’s *U and I*, a book tracing Updike’s presence in Baker’s life and writings. Throughout, Baker preoccupies himself not just with Updike, but also with what Updike would do if he were in Baker’s shoes. When, for example, Baker’s wife tells him of an ad for X-raying Halloween candy,

Baker considers what Updike would have done with the information: “If John *Updike* were thirty-two years old and living in this town, I thought, he would have known beforehand about that incredible X-ray offer and he would have driven up there with his kids after going trick-or-treating with them,” and he would have written an amazing “Talk of the town” piece (23-25). Or not: Baker thinks that Updike might have been above it.

Here, as elsewhere, what guides this hypothetical prose piece is a normative framework constructed out of Baker’s understanding of Updike’s authorial persona. The book asks, over and over again, What would Updike do? And it does so while compulsively returning to Nabokov: Baker ends his hypothetical Halloween-piece reflections by wishing he had Updike’s “assured touch” and “adjectival resourcefulness,” citing as example Updike’s review of Nabokov’s *Glory* (25).

Nor is this the only Nabokov allusion in *U and I*. Nabokov appears in 38 of the volume’s slim 180 pages<sup>31</sup>, which should not be interpreted as quantitative evidence of his influence. Baker himself, in *The Size of Thoughts*, will trace the appearance of the word “lumber” through literature, as an exercise in the endless recursive and allusive power of language – particularly language that seems to lurk at the margins. Nabokov, like lumber, may be taken as an arbitrary signifier, though no author (other than the two titular figures) will be as frequently invoked. Nabokov may be said to haunt the margins of *U and I* but he does so, from first appearance to last, in a way that spills into, and sometimes crowds out, the main subject.

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<sup>31</sup> *U and I* has no index, so the pages containing explicit Nabokov allusions are listed here for those interested in tracing Baker’s intertextual trail in more depth: 5, 7, 14, 19, 21, 25, 33, 46, 65, 67, 69-70, 72, 74, 82, 87, 92, 115-121, 124-8, 137-8, 141, 154, 160, 170, 175.

It is this first appearance that – as in Amis’ recollection of his hospital conversation with Updike – stresses allusion’s transactional nature in the field of cultural production. Baker, hearing of Donald Barthelme’s death, thinks of writing a letter to Barthelme’s *New Yorker* editor, a thought that inevitably leads to obituaries, and specifically to Updike’s “model obituary” for Nabokov (5). While Baker cannot recall any specific phrase from Updike’s obituary, he remarks on both the piece’s tone and on its “sad but not-choked-up quotability,” the combination of which allows for further circulation: Baker hopes that a quote from his letter would be used in the Barthelme *New Yorker* obituary, which in turn offers a reevaluation of both the subject and the agent engaging in the referential act (6). The obituary, I can’t help noting, keeps resurfacing as a model epitext, and in all of these – Amis’ and Cooper’s and Gopnik’s for Updike, Updike’s for Nabokov’s, Baker’s for Barthelme – the kinship claimed by the author signals an appreciation for an unacknowledged tradition as well as for that tradition’s vitality, for its continued transactional power, even if (as so many of these obituaries claim) it is a force that functions best when shunted to the margins. It is as though these writers can only fully love what is not fully, easily, and visibly circulating. This is not surprising. It’s what happens with any form of currency. We all love what is rare – or what we perceive as rare.

The writers in question sell well, publish widely, are critically praised, but their idiosyncracies resist taxonomy. Baker and Updike live at the margins of Mark McGurl's *The Program Era* and elsewhere, the former labeled a miniaturist and a disciple of Jorge Luis Borges and Donald Barthelme, the latter remarked only as an exception to the trend of the institutionalized post-war writer (376, 30). McGurl doesn't find fault with

John Updike – he'll remark, in passing, on the quality of his prose<sup>32</sup> – but he does not fit neatly into McGurl's comprehensive history of post-war fiction (Updike, like Updike's Bech, would have been fine with this outsider status), so when Updike does appear, as an example of someone whose books allowed for a life mostly separate from universities, part of a select few who “have only glancingly, if at all, gotten with the program,” McGurl does not attempt to place him in context (30). Updike exists, his prodigious output and ubiquitous presence cannot be denied, but *The Program Era* suggests that both his authorial persona and his literary production are anomalous, anachronistic, and difficult to pin down. In a book capable of wide-ranging, all-inclusive, categorizing discussions on the last fifty years of fiction, Updike does not fit neatly, this despite his outsized presence in the field – as a *New Yorker* critic, as a bestselling-but-critically-respected novelist, and as an active presence (either as a conscious influence, in the case of writers like Nicholson Baker, Jay McInerney, and Tom Bissell, or as its near opposite (which amounts to the same thing), as someone to react against, in the case of writers like David Foster Wallace or Shelley Jackson).

Other significant surveys of postwar fiction will follow the same trend, neglecting the significant body of writers who consciously set themselves with or apart from Updike. *The Columbia History of the Novel* relegates Updike to two pages, with half devoted to a comparison between John Cheever and Updike, the other half to an appreciation of the Rabbit books (508-509). Updike makes three appearances in *The American Novel Now*, all of which center on the Rabbit books (20, 35, 81). Nabokov features more prominently

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<sup>32</sup> Very much in passing, and glancing in more ways than one. McGurl will compare Updike's style to Flannery O'Connor's, and finds that both aim at a middle-of-the-road graceful invisibility: “Along with O'Connor, one might think of the lovely, not-too-challenging sentences of F. Scott Fitzgerald or of the consummately controlled-but-lively ‘good writing’ of John Updike” (128).

in these surveys, but remains elusive, with *The Columbia History* finding “the resulting mix” of *Lolita* “difficult to interpret” (707) and with *The Modern American Novel Now* reducing Nabokov’s project to a commentary on language’s ability to shape the world (56). Both attempt to pigeonhole Nabokov into postmodernism, neither successfully or convincingly.

Nabokov may have appealed to Updike partly despite, as Zverev claims, Nabokov’s perpetual status as an outsider in literature, though it is this very outsider-quality that attracts both Updike and Baker – Nabokov as a heretofore missing, because foreign, piece of the American tradition. Updike, after all, owes much to Nabokov’s stress on literature’s “non-utilitarian” quality, a close cousin of Flaubertian disinterestedness: “The lacuna in the native tradition that Nabokov would doubtlessly be able to fill, were he really to become an American writer, was created precisely by an attachment to ‘non-utilitarian delights’ that is not characteristic of this tradition” (Zverev 542). This affinity reflects itself both in their attachment to Nabokov and in the referential modalities that reflect this attachment, most particularly in the case of Baker. Nabokov does, in fact, frame the normative framework in which he is referenced. For Baker, Nabokov embodies a series of traits that are reflected in his own prose, particularly in his close-focus observations on what is often overlooked, uncategorized, and (until Baker gets to them) unremarked upon, observations which are in turn arranged synchronically, with little regard for the material’s historical context, with one stray observation leading to the next, with the deeply personal (the bathroom habits and shoe-lace shopping of *The Mezzanine*, for example, or the nose-picking and airplane-tray-arranging of *Room Temperature*) happily conjoined with the literary, the writerly, the allusive (Marcus Aurelius appears in

*The Mezzanine*, Nabokov and others in *Room Temperature*). These allusions and these digressions feed Baker's narrative – Baker's narrative is in fact composed of little else but these elements (shorn of these, the novels feature little physical action: what actually happens in *The Mezzanine* is that the narrator goes up an escalator – in *Room Temperature*, the narrator bottle-feeds his daughter). Baker may be focusing on the “non-utilitarian,” or on what may be traditionally regarded as such, but doing so places as much stress on the subjective – on the authorial voice mapping the trail of allusions and digressions while securing the connective thread holding everything together – as it does on the subject matter. They're connected, in Baker, because the allusive nature of the work dictates the normative framework being used, the same mimetic intent present in all literary endeavors – to have the form of a piece reflect, as accurately as possible, a distillation of what is observed, observable, and recorded by sensory experience.

Reading, pace Baker, is as sensory experience as any, and his books are as much as about bookishness and the readerly as they are about literature and the writerly. The lived and the read intermix, as Pold points out, so that “just as the narrator [of *The Mezzanine*] reads books typographically, he reads the world typographically with a preoccupation on layout, details, and surfaces that function as infinite commentaries or bottomless footnotes” (147). This “marginal reading of the world,” Pold notes, affords “some minor but not unimportant degree of freedom” (147). While Pold is correct in asserting this (marginal) freedom's dependence on marginality – on an agent's ability to step away from traditional hegemonic narratives and approaches – it seems equally important to note that it is a freedom that depends on its patchwork, hybrid unclassifiability. Baker's texts, odd themselves, are drawn to oddities on all levels.

One such oddity is the Baker-defined “commash,” a hybrid of a comma and a dash singled out his “History of Punctuation,” of which he finds in abundance (sixty plus) in Nabokov’s *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, and whose absence he laments in everything Nabokov wrote after *Speak, Memory*. “*The New Yorker*,” Baker surmises, “must have sweated it out of him” (85). On the same page, Baker also singles out Updike’s *The Centaur* for its use of “reversed commashes.” Both writers are singled out for their relish in nonstandard punctuation, which in turn mirrors their unorthodoxy at large, in matters of style, of writerly disposition, of general unclassifiability. The former serves as a nice, if minor, correlative of the latter. They are as odd in matters large and small. So is Baker. He is so difficult to classify that even small, seemingly unimportant paratextual elements – crucial for publishers in telegraphing key information to prospective book-buyers – prove vexing or amusing or both: the back cover of the Granta edition of his novel *Invitation to a Beheading*, for example, claims that the book is “Non-Fiction,” and the blurb on the front cover of the Vintage edition of (the very nonfictional) *Invitation to a Beheading* claims that the book is “one of the most entertaining and penetrating studies of literary admiration since Vladimir Nabokov’s [very fictional] *Pale Fire*.”

*Pale Fire*, and its mad commentator/footnoter/narrator Charles Kinbote, trail Baker’s “Lumber,” another essay collected in *The Size of Thoughts*<sup>33</sup>. Here, as elsewhere, Nabokov is referenced and is alluded to for himself, for his writings, and (most importantly) for the powerful, allusive, referential nature of his writerly persona and authorial dispositions: “Nabokov and Housman both used huge critical projects (Pushkin, Manilius) as counterweights to the trebuchet-flights of their lyricism. Naturally I looked

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<sup>33</sup> *The Size of Thoughts*, like *U and I*, does not provide an index. Here are the pages for Baker’s Nabokov references in “Lumber”: 214, 221, 243, 246, 253, 264-7, 268-275.



semi-diligently in Housman's writing for the l. word [lumber], since any appearance of it would help me in my passing attempt to yoke him and Nabokov by violence to same limber-load" (269-270). Baker, in hunting down lumber's appearance throughout literature, is engaging a kind of Kinbotian scholarship exercise, replete with digressive Kinbotian footnotes, but it is to Nabokov himself, to his sense of authorial competence and confidence, that he most powerfully alludes (Baker will follow lumber into *Pale Fire*, but will focus far more closely, two pages later, on Nabokov's teaching of *Madame Bovary* at Cornell at the beginning of the following section) (237-4).

A few pages earlier, Baker had quoted Virginia Woolf on what he dubs "the intergenerational federation of commentators": "A learned man is a sedentary, concentrated solitary enthusiast, who searches through books to discover some particular grain of truth upon which he has set his heart" (264). On the same page, a few lines below, Baker quotes Samuel Johnson's assertion that "a commentary must arise from the fortuitous discoveries of many men in devious walks of literature," though he confesses that "I haven't read this quotation in its original context; I have plucked it from a paragraph by Pope's fussy Charles Kinbote of a commentator, the Reverend Whitwell Elwin." Baker sees his commentary as one following in the tradition of like-minded commentators, fellow readers, a loose confederacy whose most unique, most identifiable feature is – aside from erudition – an appreciation for the rare and out of the way.

In doing so, Baker aligns himself with what may be regarded as unrecorded – or at the very least an underrecorded – literary tradition, its members unofficial (because noncanonical) keepers of the true, the "real" literary flame. This alternate tradition hinges on the seemingly invisible quality of its most salient figures, much like Baker's own

fiction insists, as Pold notes, on a marginal reading of the world. Ella Ophir claims that this sort of reclamation work has its roots in modernist fiction, in what Virginia Woolf herself termed “the accumulation of unrecorded life,” where the celebration of the everyday and the “absorption in the sensory particular may incline and enlists them [the observations themselves] in the service of human fellowship” (10). Ophir will remark on Baker’s debt to the modernists, but she will also note that he is a far more cheerful writer than his predecessors (14).

This cheerfulness is part of the normative framework adopted by Baker, and Nicholson, from Nabokov and his own line of predecessors. If they are, as the references above indicate, deeply preoccupied with an unrecorded tradition, they record their own responses in the form of jokes. Bech’s Nabokov references are comical in nature. So are Baker’s digressions. Here, perhaps, is why this self-selected literary tradition exists at the margin: humor is notoriously slippery, notoriously unstable, easy to appreciate but hell to explain. A joke, particularly a joke hinging on fairly recondite knowledge of a set of authorial dispositions and narrative modes, may not register, and even if it does it begs, by its very nature, not to be taken seriously. No surprise, then, that it figures so prominently in these authors. Humor disarms. It ameliorates the supposedly narcissistic tendencies inherent in the works of Nabokov or Updike – critics repeatedly accused both authors of solipsism. Humor, too, abounds in Baker, a necessary rhetorical tool if we’re to accept Mads Thomsen’s assessment of his oeuvre as a “fictive meta-autobiography” (297). We needn’t: the work of Baker – and the work of Nabokov and Updike and any other writer – may properly be regarded as a fictive meta-autobiography, inasmuch as what appears on the page is filtered through a singular agent making a set of discrete

choices of lived and textual experience. It may be more accurate to say that Baker, in placing so much primacy on the observer, the noticer and accumulator of the dross of everyday life, is (like Updike, like Nabokov) exceedingly writer-centric. I write as a reader, Updike claims, and Baker the fictive meta-autobiographer is in agreement: the novelist is the reader of the world.

One form of reading mediates another, however, so that the narrator of Baker's *Room Temperature*, while feeding his baby, thinks of Nabokov's *Glory*: "I had been bothered by a sentence early on that claimed that the mother's love for the hero was so violent and intense 'that it seemed to make the heart hoarse.' Basic anatomy aside, the phrase seemed wrong – strained and conventional and rhythmically bad and untrue to the real sensations of love" (101-2). In caring for his young child, though, Baker realizes that the Nabokov line "was coming to mind increasingly frequently, and seeming each time to capture more exactly the real pneumatics of the parental sensation: sometimes in looking at the Bug I felt as if I was crumpling up, hunching my shoulders, deflating like a pool-side flotation toy to be folded away for the winter" (102). We love that which is most rare, most immediately near us, most ineffably ours: it is Baker's love for his child that I'm thinking of, not of his choosing Nabokov as a normative framework for articulating that love.

Baker himself is well aware that a writer is thinking mostly of him- or herself when alluding, when referencing another writer, when discussing literature. His motto for *U and I*, after all, is this line from Cyril Connolly: "It may be *us* they wish to meet but it's themselves they want to talk about." And Updike, reading through that line and well near the end, down to the last Nabokov reference, after Baker celebrates not having won any awards, or at least attempts to find solace ("But no, it's good, it's good, it's better that

way: few people will imitate me, because there is clearly no glory in it, and my relatively unrecognized and unfêted position allows me, just barely, to write this kind of nose-pressed-against-the-store-window book”<sup>34</sup>), to the point at the bottom of the page where he declares that Updike and Nabokov “were heroes” (175). Updike responds in his review of *U and I*: Baker, he writes, “looks to ‘Updike’ less to learn how to write than to learn how to be a writer,” praising him for his efforts, and noting that “his scrupulous wrestle with the impalpable can be quite comic, but his basic point is serious: out of the books of others we sift a book of our own, wherein we read the lessons we want to hear” (311-312). The same could be said of Nabokov’s presence in Updike or Baker, or that of any other writer strenuously insisting on the solitary nature of the enterprise, all the while conjuring a host of other, equally lonesome, like-minded peers, all nodding, all eagerly egging each other on.

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<sup>34</sup> Baker’s thoughts find a satisfying parallel in Pold’s assessment of *The Mezzanine*’s narrator and in this chapter at large. It is precisely Baker’s uncanonical writerly persona, a creature performing a “marginal reading of the world,” that allows for “some minor but not unimportant degree of freedom” (Pold 147)

## CHAPTER 5

### NABOKOV IN AMIS, SMITH, AND OTHERS

And writers do egg each other on: what might be lost in the discussion that follows, and what should be stressed, is that authors interact with each other socially. They're friends. They're rivals. They have alliances and dalliances and fallings-off. Zadie Smith will first meet Martin Amis at a party. Neal Pollack will befriend Dave Eggers and will then write for Eggers' *McSweeney's* enterprise, and their friendship will end with the termination of their author-editor relationship. Writers find ways to get together and to pull apart, and they reassert the autonomy of the individual author when they reference Nabokov in their own novels, and that in doing so these authors form a sort of ad-hoc Nabokovian group or school even when the members and their immediate milieu would not seem to have anything in common otherwise.

Two such writers, Martin Amis and Zadie Smith, certainly do not make for a likely pair. Amis is white, male, and born in 1949, and as of late the critical consensus is that he has progressively embodied a set of traits almost automatically associated with white male writers of a certain age<sup>35</sup>: a retreat into reactionary politics, a clumsy treatment of race, and latent misogyny<sup>36</sup>. Zadie Smith, on the other hand, is born in 1975, female, and

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<sup>35</sup> All of these, it should be said, were also traits linked to his father, the novelist Kingsley Amis, at roughly the same moment in their careers.

<sup>36</sup> James Diedrick qualifies the last charge in *Understanding Martin Amis*. He finds that misogyny is one of the two "most persistent charges leveled against his work" (the other is a showy, empty virtuosity), but he refines the accusation; according to Diedrick, critics charge that Amis "harbors a deep (if unconscious) animus toward women" – and not the more overt forms of Norman Mailer-ish chauvinism that the novelist himself lampoons in *The War Against Cliché* and elsewhere (20). Diedrick demonstrates, throughout the book, that Amis builds an authorial persona perfectly distinguishable from his loutish male narrators into his work, and points to John Fuller's "Yob Action," published in 1987 in *Village Voice*, as a representative critique of Amis's treatment of women, but for a more recent example see Maud Newton, whose blog has persistently linked to negative reviews of Amis's recent work while characterizing Amis himself as swaggerer who deliberately courts controversy (See, *inter alia*, <http://maudnewton.com/blog/?p=7305> and <http://twitter.com/maudnewton/statuses/8163214195>). For more considered analyses of gender issues in

her mother is Jamaican, and critics place her at the forefront of the postcolonial literary scene<sup>37</sup>. These two authors, however, have more in common than may be immediately obvious. They share a similar educational background: Smith attended Cambridge, Amis Oxford. They share a similar rise to prominence: their first novels were strikingly successful, and they were published at a similar (and relatively young) age, Smith's *White Teeth* at age 25, Amis's *The Rachel Papers* at age 24, all while in a froth of media attention that has since followed them throughout their careers, at the center of which were issues revolving around an intriguing authorial persona. Smith and Amis were initially brought to public notice partly because of their precocity (with both writers praised for their verbal pyrotechnics and for their narrative verve), and partly because of their parents: Smith for her multi-cultural background, Amis for his literary lineage (a famous novelist who is the son of a famous novelist). They both fall under the term Diedrick reserves for Amis: "the author as a cultural event" (9).

That they're both fundamentally London writers – residing in and writing about the city – may seem like making too much of too little, but the city matters. London is the heart of Britain's field of cultural production. Zadie Smith herself has acknowledged Amis's shadow in her own treatment of the city, citing *London Fields* as a crucial influence on *White Teeth* and commending its exploration of "the random connections that are made in London" (*Sense of the City: London*). Moreover, her first encounter

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Martin Amis see the essays by Philips Tew, Susan Brook, and Emma Parker collected in *Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond*, edited by Gavin Keulks.

<sup>37</sup> See for example the essay by Gen'ichiro Itakura's in *A Sea for Encounters: Essays Towards a Postcolonial Commonwealth*, the essay by Eva Knopp's in *Translation of Cultures*; the essay by Barbara Schaff in *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*; and the essays by Ulka Anjaria, Raphael Dalleo, and Tracey L. Walters collected in *Zadie Smith: Critical Essays*.

with Martin Amis (at Ian McEwan’s wedding, “many years ago, before I was published myself”) confirms London’s confluence of literary connections: “I can recall being introduced to Martin Amis (whom I was busy plagiarizing at the time) and being shown his new baby. Meeting Martin Amis for me, at nineteen, was like meeting God. I said: ‘Nice baby’” (Smith, *Zadie Smith Talks With Ian McEwan*).

Likewise, that these two writers repeatedly reference Vladimir Nabokov in their own novels (and in their nonfiction) may seem like a trivial, coincidental similarity, but this chapter will show how these references function as units of currency within a localized field of cultural production independent from the text in which the references are found. Smith and Amis, when referencing Nabokov, reassert the autonomy of the authorial figure.

Other writers do the same, and those who orbit in close proximity to Amis and Smith are of particular interest here: a Nabokov allusion functions as a unit of cultural capital that allows each of these writers to declare him- or herself an independent, fully self-sufficient creator – the Autonomous Author, Nabokov’s primary symbolic unit of meaning<sup>38</sup>. A Nabokovian allusion, then, can be better understood – at least partially – as a means of telegraphing alignments and affiliations germane to the field of cultural production, alignments transcending the cultural product in which the allusion is located.

The writers in question all reference Nabokov, and they all move within two highly localized fields whose salient traits and central nexus are easily identifiable: (1) the London of Martin Amis and his contemporaries and friends, novelists who published

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<sup>38</sup> See chapter one.

major works in the mid-eighties and early nineties; (2) the McSweeney's group<sup>39</sup>, with which Zadie Smith has been loosely affiliated and which has released works from the mid-nineties into the late 2000s. Of the London group, I examine Martin Amis (particularly *London Fields* and *The Information*, though his memoir *Experience* and his nonfiction collections *Visiting Mrs. Nabokov* and *The War Against Cliché* are also pertinent) while noting Nabokov references in the work of two other major contemporaneous figures, Julian Barnes (for *Flaubert's Parrot*, with a brief look at his memoir *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*) and Salman Rushdie (for *The Satanic Verses* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*). Of the McSweeney's group, the chapter will deal primarily with Zadie Smith (for *White Teeth*, *The Autograph Man*, and *On Beauty*, as well as the nonfiction collected in *Changing My Mind*) while noting Nabokov references in the novels of Michael Chabon (*Wonder Boys*, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier*

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<sup>39</sup> McSweeney's was initially known for its eponymous literary journal whose first issue was released in 1998, as well as for its web site <<http://www.mcsweeney.net>> which published short humor pieces daily, but the brand has since expanded into a book imprint, two additional literary journals (*The Believer* and *Wolpin*), as well as a series of nonprofit writing centers with chapters in San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, Ann Arbor, and Boston. For a fair and fairly recent assessment, see Stephen Amidon's 3 February 2008 *London Times* "Their Master's Voice: The Rise and Rise of Brand McSweeney's" <[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/books/article3277269.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article3277269.ece)>. Robert Lanham's 2005 essay "The McEggers Tang Clan" found in *Bookmark Now: Writing in Unreaderly Times* provides a solid critique as well. Dave Eggers, the writer and founder of McSweeney's, initially rose to prominence for founding the proto-McSweeney's-ish *Might*, to which his bestselling memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* devotes a chapter. Eggers is so inseparable from the McSweeney's imprint that most news articles discussing one will also discuss the other. For critical articles focusing on Eggers's writing see Liesbeth Korthals Altes's "Sincerity, Reliability and Other Ironies: Notes on Dave Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*; Narrative Unreliability in the Twentieth-Century First-Person Novel" in *Narratologia: Contributions to Narrative Theory* (2008); Kevin Brooks's "Dave Eggers's *What is the What* as World Literature" in *World Literature Today* (2010); Paul Elie's "A Fugitive Catholicism: The Work of Richard Rodriguez, Dave Eggers and Czeslaw Milosz" in *Commonweal* (2004); Ansgar Nunning's "Fictional Metabiographies and Metaautobiographies: Towards a Definition, Typology and Analysis of Self-Reflexive Hybrid Metagenres" in *Self-Reflexivity in Literature: Text & Theorie* (2005); and Aliko Varvogli's "'Underwhelmed to the Maximum': American Travellers in Dave Eggers's *You Shall Know our Velocity* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*" in *Atlantic Studies: Literary, Cultural, and Historical Perspectives* (2006).

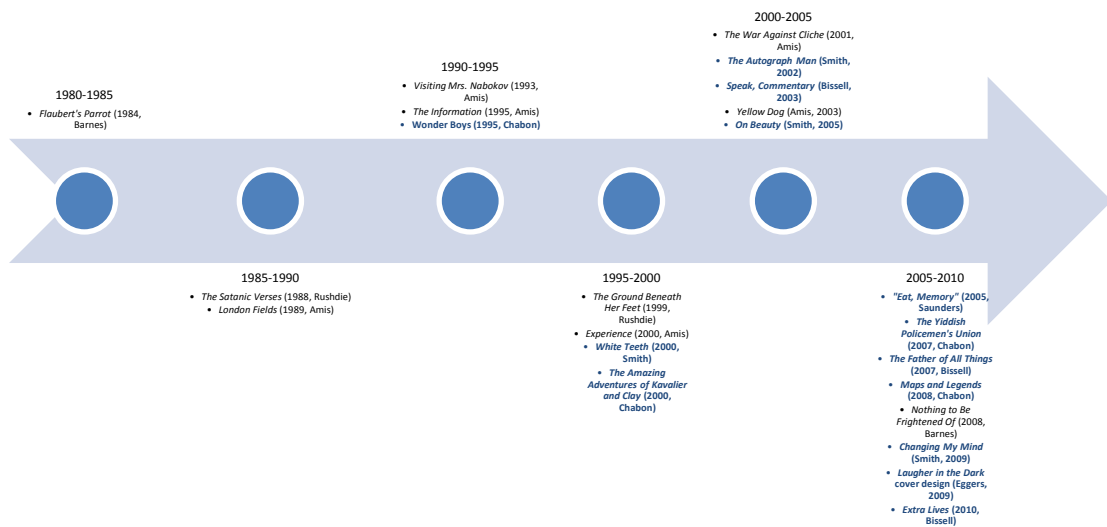


*and Clay*, and *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, and the essays collected in *Maps and Legends*) and in the humor pieces of Tom Bissell (*Speak, Commentary*, with a brief look at the Nabokov references in two nonfiction works, *The Father of All Things* and *Extra Lives*), George Saunders (for the short piece "Eat, Commentary" collected in the book of the same name), Neal Pollack (for *The Neal Pollack Anthology of Contemporary Literature*), and two short pieces by Ryan Shields and Mike Sacks.

The groupings themselves serve as a rough organizing tool, and the various affiliations examined serve to explore how relatively distinct aesthetics will return to the same source – Nabokov – for symbolic capital. The chapter, then, is less interested in exploring these allusions as marks of influence (though influence can be found) and more concerned with how the social dynamics of cultural production leave visible traces in the cultural products themselves, and how these traces, when examined collectively, point to significant patterns in how writers interact. Moreover, when looking at a Nabokov reference as criteria for group affiliation, we arrive at a more dynamic, ad hoc form of understanding clusters of contemporary writers. A highly localized demographic profile may be significant, but it becomes far more so, and far more interesting, when paired with the recurring, persistent, and sub-rosa presence of a nod made to a predecessor in the guise of an inside joke or an overt literary reference.

The large number of works in question present a few logistical challenges, not the least of which is chronological overlap, since the discussion should be understood in the light of the two groups' simultaneous or quasi-simultaneous activity in the field of cultural production as well as the relatively recent nature of the material produced. The timeline below (see Figure 3: Timeline of Nabokov-referencing authors, 1980-2010) provides a

rough visual approximation of the ways in which the cultural products of these two groups stand in relation to each other: those in black belong to the London set, those in blue to McSweeney's. While timelines provide the illusion of a coherent data-set, it's important to understand that the works provided do not constitute a representative sample of the output of any one of these writers, merely the works relevant to the current study (Barnes, Rushdie, and Amis have certainly been very productive in the latter part of the aughts, but those later works are not looked at in this chapter). What the timeline does show, fairly clearly, is the ever increasing density of works referencing Nabokov as the decade progresses<sup>40</sup>.



**Figure 3: Timeline of Nabokov-referencing authors, 1980-2010**

Also, since the relationship to the McSweeney's group – the publishing imprint, web site, community writing centers, and journals (*McSweeney's*, *The Believer*, and *Wolphin*)

<sup>40</sup> The increase corresponds to the increase of Nabokov references in the larger subset explored in chapter two: it's closely connected to the dearth of in-print Nabokov material in the eighties and the subsequent Vintage International paperback reissue of his work in the nineties.

founded by Dave Eggers – might not be immediately obvious, the chart below provides a quick overview:

**Table 6: Writers and their Relationship to McSweeney's**

<b>Writer</b>	<b>Relationship to McSweeney's</b>
<b>Tom Bissell</b>	<i>Speak, Commentary</i> published by McSweeney's, portions of which originally appeared on the web site; pieces published in <i>The Believer</i>
<b>Michael Chabon</b>	<i>Maps and Legends</i> published by McSweeney's; edited <i>Thrilling Tales</i> for the journal
<b>Dave Eggers</b>	Founder and publisher of McSweeney's
<b>Neal Pollack</b>	<i>The Neal Pollack Anthology of American Literature</i> published by McSweeney's, portions of which originally appeared on the website
<b>George Saunders</b>	<i>The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip</i> reprinted by McSweeney's; has published numerous stories in the journal (see issues 4, 24, and 33)
<b>Zadie Smith</b>	Published "The Girl With Bangs" in issue 6 of the journal; edited <i>The Book of Other People</i> , a collection of stories, for 826 New York; and has published numerous nonfiction essays in <i>The Believer</i>

By clustering this last set via a connection to a single publishing enterprise, the goal is to examine a cross-section of contemporary writers through a series of filters whose constraints are clear, explicit, and – most importantly – contingent on material culture: in addition to their having made a reference to Nabokov, these writers are chosen for their

presence in a sub-field of cultural production with a concrete, measurable presence in the larger world of publishing, one whose means of diffusion have proven to have significant impact in that larger field (by way of example: a book initially published by McSweeney's in hardback will often receive wider distribution, and a wider readership, in paperback form under a traditional, mainstream publisher; *The Neal Pollack Anthology of American Literature* and Michael Chabon's *Maps and Legends*, both discussed below and both initially published by McSweeney's in hardback, were later released in paperback by Harper Perennial; another example: Chris Adrian's *The Children's Hospital* found wide release as a Grove Press paperback after its initial appearance under the McSweeney's imprint). Other classifications may be made out of the same data set. And, in alternate classifications, some of the writers in this group may find themselves grouped with the writers of the London set. The hope is that the very flexibility of the criteria used in creating these two groups point to an alternate way of thinking about literary schools and movements – to examine the ways in which writers may form self-selected, improvisatory alliances whose borders, significance, and membership spring from the cultural capital with which these writers traffic.

While dramatic divergences do exist between groups and between individuals, with distinct and easily traceable shifts in aesthetic approaches and results, there are tremendously interesting affiliations at work – most interesting because Nabokov, as a unit of cultural capital signaling authorial autonomy, serves to unify these seemingly disparate writers via a single preoccupation: the individual author's relation to and disposition toward his or her field. Cultural production – even contemporary cultural production, often called to task for fractiousness and disjunction – exhibits a remarkable

continuity when explored through the constraints of a Nabokov reference: Nabokov, thought of as a key word in a Google search, can serve as a base standard for the creation of a coherent, self-selected, fairly large grouping that could be easily rearranged if one were to change the search criteria. Which is not to say that this dynamic, on-the-fly rearrangement affects the import of this particular grouping; in fact, it is the grouping's improvisatory nature, with its deliberately constrained filter, that allows for a unique window into the relationship between cultural product, field of cultural production, and author.

These improvised alliances are explored by examining (1) the Nabokov references in the work of two of Amis's London contemporaries, Julian Barnes and Salman Rushdie, and the references' relation to the paratextual exchanges between Martin Amis and the two writers in question; (2) the Nabokov references in the McSweeney's group made by, among others, Neal Pollack and Michael Chabon; the former parodies outsized literary personas in ways that mirror the fall-out between Amis and Barnes, and which would find another real-life referent in the awkward public scuffle between Pollack and Dave Eggers; the Nabokov references in the novels of Michael Chabon are also examined in light of assertions of authorial autonomy within and beyond the world of the works, which find parallels in the Nabokov-minded humor pieces of Tom Bissell, Mike Sacks, and others; (3) Nabokov references in Zadie Smith's and Martin Amis's novels and nonfiction and the ways in which they reassert authorial autonomy while pointing to parallel aesthetic concerns in the work of these two seemingly divergent writers; (4) the contrasts in attitudes toward authorship, authorial persona, and the field of cultural production in the London and McSweeney's groups.

## Nabokov in Amis, Barnes, and Rushdie

Writing about V.S. Pritchett's collected criticism, Amis notes: "All artist-critics are to some extent secret proselytizers of their own work; they are secret agents" (65). The quote comes from Amis's own book of collected criticism, *The War Against Cliché*, and it parallels the sentiments expressed by both Baker and Updike in Chapter Three – Baker in his Cyril-Connolly-penned *U & I* epigraph ("It may be *us* they wish to meet but it's themselves they want to talk about") and Updike in his *U & I* review ("out of the books of others we sift a book of our own, wherein we read the lessons we want to hear"). Writers may talk about themselves when they talk about other writers, but nowhere does this auto-authorial preoccupation ring truer than when nested into itself: Writers talk most about themselves when talking about writers *who are themselves talking about other writers* (who, we can assume, are in fact talking about themselves). This is as true of Amis on Pritchett – a commentary on collected criticism found in a book of collected criticism – as it is of Baker (via Connolly) on Updike, and of Updike on Baker, but it is most evident when Martin Amis and Julian Barnes talk of Vladimir Nabokov talking about other writers.

Amis and Barnes both reference Nabokov's *Lectures on Literature* in their fiction. How they do so signals a preoccupation with authorial autonomy extending well beyond the works in which the reference is found. Salman Rushdie, while seemingly steering clear of Nabokov's *Lectures*, will use rhetorical approaches similar to those employed by Barnes and Amis to arrive at the same destination. This section will examine Nabokov references in the novels of Barnes and Rushdie. I will explain how these commentaries

reflect the authors' attitudes toward the perceived field of cultural production, and how they dovetail with the authors' behavior toward each other in the actual field of cultural production.

Amis, Barnes, and Rushdie have all written extensively about each other. They all do so "with the confidence, coolness and superlegitimacy of the fellow practitioner," a phrase borrowed from Martin Amis's *The War Against Cliché* (250). If the phrase "coolness and superlegitimacy" strikes a reader as suspect, particularly a reader who knows of the bitter fall-out between Amis and Barnes, the same reader should keep in mind that, at its core, the dispute had nothing to do with aesthetics and everything to do with the field of cultural production, Amis switching from one literary agent to another, the replaced agent being Pat Kavanagh, Barnes's wife. I mean to say that, even at their most acrimonious, all of these writers aim to manifest command and control of the field in which they find themselves. Even at their most aggrieved, they exhibit a wounded parsimony, and they aim to establish a competency over the matters at hand that transcend those of their adversary. Therefore: coolness, superlegitimacy. That the phrase comes from a review of Nabokov's *Lectures on Literature* is of some interest, but of more interest is how so many of Amis's words on Nabokov, found in the collected criticism, later migrate into his fiction.

This migration should be examined in light of Barnes's Nabokov references found in *Flaubert's Parrot*. Once again, the chronology is of some interest. *Flaubert's Parrot* was published in 1984, which makes it the oldest published novel in the timeline presented above. Martin Amis's *The Information*, a novel on authorial rivalry widely seen as (among other things) a veiled commentary on his relationship with Barnes, is published

in 1995, which would seemingly place its Nabokov reference well into the next decade. However, it can be argued that Barnes and Amis begin their use of a fictionalized Nabokov at roughly the same time.

In a 1985 review of Nabokov's collected plays (reprinted in *The War Against Cliché*), Amis writes, "Oh, yes. And Shakespeare. The fact that Shakespeare should have been, of all things, a *dramatist* is one of the great cosmic jokes of all time – as if Mozart had spent his entire career as a second-wash-board or string-twanger in some Salzburg skiffle group" (255). Ten years later, in 1995's novel *The Information*, Amis will return to the same commentary on plays and playwrights: "With Nabokov, and others, Richard regarded the drama as a primitive and long-exhausted form. The drama boasted Shakespeare (which was an excellent cosmic joke), and Chekhov, and a couple of sepulchral Scandinavians. Then where were you? Deep in the second division" (268).

Amis, ten years later, could not pass up the cosmic joke, its use in both passages serving as a means of alignment for Amis. If Nabokov, symbolic capital of authorial autonomy, is here used to telegraph who counts in the field and who doesn't (the latter being pretty much all playwrights with the exception of Shakespeare), it's curious to see that the same unit of cultural capital will be used by Barnes to further hone authorial autonomy via a singular rhetorical move. In *Flaubert's Parrot*, Barnes will point out an error in *Lectures in Literature* which further legitimizes authorial autonomy. The actual Nabokov may be wrong, but the symbolic Nabokov is more right than ever.

First, the error. While discussing Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Nabokov notes that "the theme of Emma's daydreaming has some connections with the whippet, the gift of a gamekeeper," which, when lost, "symbolizes the end of her mildly romantic, elegiac



daydreaming at Tostes and the beginning of more passionate experiences at fateful Yonville” (138, 139). The whippet does not appear in the 1948 Rinehart version of *Madame Bovary*, translated into English by Eleanor Marx Aveling and used by Nabokov for his Cornell courses; this edition and the others adopted for the course were “selected,” the foreword to *Lectures on Literature* informs us, “for their cheapness and the convenience of his students” (xv). For the course, Nabokov translated significant portions of *Madame Bovary* himself, and he prefaced a question in a Cornell exam with the following statement: “All translations of *Madame Bovary* are full of blunders; you have corrected some of them” (Boyd, Vladimir Nabokov: *The American Years* 170, 187). The whippet missing from Aveling’s translation was one such blunder, and one that mattered. All details mattered. Nabokov insisted on “the supremacy of the detail over the general, of the part that is more alive than the whole, of the little thing which a man observes and greets with a friendly nod of the spirit while the crowd around him is being driven by some common impulse toward some common goal” (373).

The sentiment parallels that of Flaubert himself, whose exacting standards for his prose demand of the author a quasi-scientific detachment and precision summed up by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in page 28 of *The Field of Cultural Production* as disinterestedness. What matters, Bourdieu suggests, is the artist’s gaze, the authorial stamp, “...the form, the technique, in a word, the art, thus instituted as the exclusive aim of art. Flaubert in the domain of writing and Manet in painting are probably the first to have attempted to impose, at the cost of extraordinary subjective and objective difficulties, the conscious and radical affirmation of the power of the creative gaze, capable of being applied not only (through simple inversion) to base and vulgar objects,

as was the aim of Champfleury's and Courbet's realism, but also to insignificant objects before which the 'creator' is able to assert his quasi-divine power of transmutation" (265). Nabokov insisted that the authorial stamp – the authorial gaze – hinged on the primacy of detail and on the careful arrangement of multiple sets of such details. "Style is matter," Nabokov wrote in a letter to Katherine White. John Updike, in the foreword to *Lectures on Literature*, notes that Nabokov's novels are filled with "a formidable density of observed detail – 'sense data selected, permeated, and grouped,' in his own formula" (xxvi). So Nabokov's insistence on detached precision, on finding the precise term, on being particular rather than general, finds its antecedent and likely progenitor in Flaubert, and so it's fitting that Nabokov bothered to correct his teaching copy of Flaubert for his students: the dog, Nabokov tells his students, is a whippet.

Only it's not – not quite. Julian Barnes corrects Nabokov in the novel *Flaubert's Parrot*: "Madame Bovary has a dog, given to her by a game-keeper whose chest infection has been cured by her husband. It is *une petite levrette d'Italie*: a small Italian greyhound bitch. Nabokov, who is exceedingly peremptory with all translators of Flaubert, renders this as whippet. Whether he is zoologically correct or not, he certainly loses the sex of the animal, which seems to me important" (63). If the novel, wherein a doctor finds himself both reflecting on Flaubert and searching for the actual stuffed parrot kept by Flaubert while he wrote "A Simple Heart," reads like a gentle satire on the unreliability of seemingly fixed details (there are 50 possible parrots, Emma's eyes will change colors, Flaubert's life could be read as a unqualified success or a qualified travesty), it also reads like a celebration of these very same fixed details. It's not just that Barnes has clearly read Nabokov's *Lectures on Literature*, and it doesn't matter much that he finds fault

with Nabokov's choice of whippet – what matters most is that Barnes is in full agreement with Nabokov in asserting the primacy of these seemingly trivial distinctions.

And if they're not trivial, it's because these distinctions – the careful aggregate of painstakingly chosen particulars – all derive from an author whose choices are assumed to be deliberate and meaningful. Barnes finds fault with Nabokov because they both agree: Flaubert's "sense data selected, permeated, and grouped," must add up to something. The dog – whippet neuter or greyhound bitch – cannot be haphazard.

Amis turns to Nabokov for confirmation of a judgment of a whole genre – drama. Barnes turns to Nabokov to correct him. In both instances, authorial autonomy is in play. This autonomy manifests itself in three increasingly wider spheres: it can be found on the paragraph level, in the novels that contain them, and in the larger field of cultural production. Autonomy is evident in the respective paragraphs featuring the Nabokov quote: Amis's narrator (and Amis himself in the original 1985 passage) invokes Nabokov to determine who constitutes a legitimate player in the field of cultural production; Barnes corrects Nabokov to stress the authorial autonomy of Flaubert. This authorial preoccupation extends to the novels themselves: *The Information* is about authorial rivalry, about who properly belongs in the field and who does not (the authors in question each regard the other as impostors and frauds); *Flaubert's Parrot* exists entirely in an autonomous authorial field, the world of Flaubert, his works, and contingent cultural capital derived wherefrom, Nabokov's lecture included. Further, a Nabokov reference allows Amis and Barnes to explore their own position in the field of cultural production: Nabokov, writing about Flaubert, allows Amis and Barnes to talk about themselves – and about each other.

Other Nabokov references in *Flaubert's Parrots* provide similar opportunities, with the authorial figure signaling a unique force in meaning-making. The narrator muses, "Perhaps Nabokov had read Flaubert's letters before writing *Lolita*" (73) in response to an incident in Flaubert's Egypt excursion, where – atop a pyramid, he "noticed a small business-card pinned in place. 'Humbert, Frotteur,' it read, and gave a Rouen address" (69). The narrator asks: "Isn't it, perhaps, a notable historical coincidence that the greatest European novelist of the 19th century should be introduced at the Pyramids to one of the 20th century's most notorious fictional characters? That Flaubert, still damp from skewering boys in Cairo bath-houses, should fall on the name of Nabokov's seducer of underage American childhood? And further, what is the profession of this single-barreled version of Humbert Humbert? He is a *frotteur*. Literally, a French polisher; but also, the sort of sexual deviant who loves the rub of the crowd" (69). On page 91, as an aside on politically correct terminology ("Nowadays we aren't allowed to use the word *mad*."), the narrator explores the fraught relationship between what is said and what is meant: "I say *mad* and *adultery*, that's what I say. *Mad* has the right sound to it. It's an ordinary word, a word which tells us how lunacy might come and call like a delivery van. Terrible things are also ordinary. Do you know what Nabokov said about adultery in his lecture on *Madame Bovary*? He said it was a 'most conventional way to rise above the conventional'" (91).

What Nabokov is doing here – atop the pyramid besides Flaubert, alongside the narrator in the channel crossing that prompts thoughts on madness and adultery – is stressing an author's autonomy from simple chronology or geological proximity. Communication occurs across vast distances, and if traces of one author are found in

another it's in service of their shared independence from the conventional so that, in the words of Bourdieu, the "literary and artistic field is constituted as such in and by opposition to a 'bourgeois' world which had never before asserted so bluntly its values and its pretension to control the instruments of legitimation" (58). Terrible things, the narrator insists, are ordinary and bourgeois, contingent on the outside world for legitimacy. Authors are not.

This insistence on the extraordinary qualities associated with the author – on identifying and demarcating the sphere in which the author operates – finds a corresponding impulse in Salman Rushdie's Nabokov references, where knowledge of cultural capital aligns specific characters with their author (and with the field of cultural production in which he or she operates) and where an insistence on the actuality of a fictive world serves to further underline a cultural product's independence from ordinary constraints. As in *Barnes* and elsewhere, a Nabokov reference in Rushdie signals a preoccupation with authorial matters extending beyond the immediate domain where the reference is found.

The reference must, of course, pertain to the matter immediately at hand, and in Rushdie's case all his references do: but they also serve a larger purpose. Gregory Machacek will stress that allusion is "brief, discrete, and local" (525), and Gerard Genette will note that allusion is more meaningful "to the limited figure (to the pictorial detail) than to the work considered as a structural whole" (2-3), but Rushdie's (and Barnes's and everyone else's) Nabokov references don't seem to localize themselves in the manner suggested by these critics.

For example, the first Nabokov reference in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* appears, at first blush, to be serve a strictly localized purpose – to mark Gibreel Farishta as someone fundamentally different (unread, unschooled) from Allie Cone. Allie “didn't know what he knew, what she could take for granted: she tried, once, referring to Nabokov's doomed chess-player Luzhin, who came to feel that in life as in chess there were certain combinations that would inevitably arise to defeat him, as a way of explaining by analogy her own (in fact somewhat different) sense of impending catastrophe (which had to do not with recurring patterns but with the inescapability of the unforeseeable),but he fixed her with a hurt stare that told her he'd never heard of the writer, let alone *The Defence*” (311). But while the reference is apposite, and while it serves a purpose traditionally associated with allusion (to comment on matters at hand via an analogous situation found elsewhere: Luzhin's fate and that of Gibreel are, after all, similar, and they meet similar ends: they're both manipulated to a great extent into violence by external circumstances with considerable influence from an overt authorial figure), the reference dovetails with another appearing hundreds of pages later in a way that signals a preoccupation with the subjugated relationship between author and character, creator and creation, that extends beyond the book itself.

The reference in question points to a character's dependence on authorial goodwill, and to the privileged status of those capable of acknowledging that dependence and navigating the field in which it is created. Gibreel and his rival Saladin Chamcha leave a restaurant following an altercation with a fellow diner:

“Baba, if that's in your top ten,” Gibreel said in the taxi home, “don't take me to the places you don't like so much.”

“‘Minnamin, Gut mag alkan, Pern dirstan,’” Chamcha replied. “It means, ‘My darling, God makes hungry, the Devil thirsty.’ Nabokov.”

“Him again,” Gibreel complained. “What bloody language?”

“He made it up. It’s what Kinbote’s Zemblan nurse tells him as a child. In *Pale Fire*.”

“*Perndirstan*,” Farishta repeated. “Sounds like a country: Hell, maybe. I give up, anyway. How are you supposed to read a man who writes in a made-up lingo of his own?” (441).

A page earlier, the two had been discussing matters of taste – favorite movies, favorite books. Saladin’s taste falls strictly in Bourdieu’s concept of the bourgeois, and it is this very disposition, Saladin’s “babbling determination to turn the world into a cluster of hit parades,” that convinces Chamcha “that it wouldn’t take much, now, to push him over the edge” (440). Chamcha is pushed much in way Luzhin is pushed, and much in the way *Pale Fire*’s Kinbote is pushed. And Saladin succeeds. Saladin manipulates Gibreel into a fit of jealousy which results in Gibreel killing Allie – but the ostensible villain, Saladin, is also an authorial stand-in, not merely because Saladin and the author share the same cultural capital (they both know Nabokov, as does Allie, whereas Gibreel does not) but also because they are in effect engaging in an authorial decision: the manipulation of a figure across an envisioned plane.

Moreover, Gibreel’s quote comes from the very end of *Pale Fire*, the penultimate page, only a few paragraphs from Kinbote’s last lines anticipating the inevitable arrival of “a bigger, more respectable, more competent Gradus,” his killer – and, in these last two pages of Nabokov’s novel, Kinbote’s life-and-death musings presents themselves in

terms specific to the field of cultural production: “My notes and self are petering out,” Kinbote writes (the former equivalent to the latter), and he hopes “to rid myself of any desire to follow the example of two other characters [both dead],” to live in the form of a figure curiously similar to his creator’s own authorial persona: “an old, happy, healthy, heterosexual Russian, a writer in exile” (657-8). It is ultimately to this figure – ostensibly the biggest, most respectable, most competent Gradus of them all – to whom all characters bow down. Gibreel ends his stint in *The Satanic Verses* much as Luzhin does in *The Defense*: by finding only one way out, by dropping out of the game. Luzhin jumps out of his hotel window, the world dissolving into a chess set. Gibreel “put the barrel of the gun into his own mouth; and pulled trigger; and was free” (546). Saladin, like Kinbote, lives, and is offered a chance for happiness “in spite of all his wrong-doing, weakness, guilt – in spite of his humanity – he was getting another chance. There was no accounting for one’s good fortune, that was plain” (547). But there is some accounting: the author is the Great Accountant, the Most Competent Gradus, who dispenses at will.

Saladin cannot understand why anyone would read an author who writes in a made-up lingo all his own, but this puzzlement would be just part and parcel of an uninitiated audience’s lack of familiarity with the carefully aggregated specifics of the field of cultural production. It’s not just the made-up lingo, it’s caring enough about the world of letters to accumulate seemingly useless knowledge. In the case of Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*<sup>41</sup>, the confusion also extends to the considerable amount of trivia

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<sup>41</sup> There are two other Nabokov references in the novel, both alluding to *Lolita*: “I suspected her of whitewashing the past, and said as much more than once. It never failed to rile her. ‘Extremes of experience is one thing,’ she’d snarl. ‘You know my views on that: I’m for ‘em. Bring ‘em on! I want to have them for myself?, not just read about them in the paper. But Bombay’s Lolita I was not.’” Here’s the other: “And this in the far-off 1950s! In ‘underdeveloped’ India, where boy-girl relations were so strictly controlled! True,



embedded in the story, transmogrified by name and situational alterations that are themselves a parody of literary alternate universes such as the Antiterra of Nabokov's *Ada*, and so the book's ideal reader would need extensive familiarity the minutiae of contemporary literature and popular culture. In the case of this passage, knowledge of *Pale Fire* is only one bit of necessary data among many:

[Ormus] picks up one of the paperbacks abandoned in his cabin –it must be Mull Standish who brought them aboard in the hope of pushing a little culture into his sons, who have promptly tossed them into the spare cabin, the one they never enter, the one that's now Ormus's little hole of privacy. Books by famous American writers, Sal Paradise's odes to wanderlust, Nathan Zuckerman's *Carnovsky*, science fiction by Kilgore Trout, a playscript – *Von Trenck* – by Charlie Citrine, who would go on to write the hit movie *Caldofreddo*. The poetry of John Shade. Also Europeans: Dedalus, Matzerath. The one and only *Don Quixote* by the immortal Pierre Ménard. F. Alexander's *A Clockwork Orange* (280).

John Shade, *Pale Fire*'s fictional poet, subject of Kinbote's mad annotations, here appears as an actual person alongside other characters transmogrified from their original cultural products (those of, among others, Jack Kerouac, Philip Roth, Kurt Vonnegut, James Joyce, and Jorge Luis Borges). They are characters who, when returned to the cultural product to which they originally belong, are themselves commentaries on the

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true: but permit me to say, 'underdeveloped nation' or not, one of our prime cultural artifacts was a highly developed apparatus of hypocritical disapproval, not only of any incipient change in social mores, but also of our historically proven and presently hyperactive erotic natures. What's the *Kama Sutra*? A Disney comic? Who built the Khajuraho temples? The Japanese? And of course in the 1950s there were no girl tarts in Kamathipura working eighteen hours a day, and child marriages never took place, and the pursuit of the very young by lecherous old humberts -- yes, we'd already heard of the new Nabokov shocker -- was utterly unknown. (Not.) To hear some people talk, you'd conclude that sex hadn't been discovered in India by the mid-twentieth century, and the population explosion must have been possible by some alternative method of fertilization."

field of cultural production – they’re all authorial figures: here they receive primacy and a kind of independence from their original context. Insisting on the actuality of these fictional figures, which (again) live in a parallel universe much like the Antiterra of Nabokov’s *Ada*, Rushdie allows these figures to circulate much like their real-world counterparts. They need only the legitimacy of their provenance to merit inclusion, and they need only the recognition of a knowledgeable reader to gain acceptance into the fabric of the story. The joke, after all, only works if one recognizes that these real characters are all made up, and it’s safe to say that they would have been missed by the unfortunate Gibreel who, even after the premise had been explained, would not have seen the point: why are all these writers busying themselves with the characters of the other writers? Don’t they know it’s all made up? Don’t they know it doesn’t matter?

That it matters to knowledgeable readers is enough, but that the knowledge reinforces authorial autonomy is of greater significance. These characters, after all, cannot be understood without prior knowledge of the works in which they originally circulated – and given how these are all authorial personae, stand-ins for the writers or parodies of a certain types of writers or a combination of both, they are all assigned significance because they operate in a fictionalized version of the authors’ own fields of cultural production.

And there’s no doubt that the field matters to the authors in question. Rushdie (quoted in Diedrick’s book) defended Amis after he was accused of “greed, parsimony, vanity, and disloyalty” by noting that “the public print rounds upon the public figure and tries to tear him apart. It really has nothing to do with the money. It’s just ‘This guy has had it too good for too long – let’s murder him’” (10). Barnes himself (as quoted by Diedrick)

agreed with that sentiment five years before their fall-out: “His mixture of precocity, great intelligence, and wide sexual success is bound to provoke envy” (9). His prose style, Barnes adds, leads to “something very infectious and competitive.” Competition is a running motif even before the toxic rivalry at work in *The Information*: Amis, in 1991, writes a warm recollection of a snooker game – his adversary is Julian Barnes (Amis wins). The piece is collected in *Visiting Mrs. Nabokov*, which also features glowing profile that Amis writes of Rushdie for the December 1990 *Vanity Fair*, while Rushdie was still under the *fatwa*. Barnes will write a similar piece about Rushdie for the 21 February 1994 issue of *The New Yorker*, a magazine where, two years later, Amis will write of watching (and hating) *Four Weddings and a Funeral* with his friend Rushdie. Other writers do the same, so how these three approach each other as peers in the field of cultural production is not necessarily unique – if anything, it’s illustrative of the field.

Even following the fall-out between Barnes and Amis, Amis’s own final reflection on the event was relatively measured (as was Barnes’s) – this coming from the same writer whose fictionalized, frustrated novelist remarks, in passing, in *The Information*, that “writers should hate each other” (232). It’s odd enough that Amis should have made tabloid headlines at all – odder still that he did so for a mixture of reasons that mix genuinely tawdry tabloid concerns, divorce and cosmetic dentistry, with inside-baseball stuff, his switching agents from Barnes’s wife to Andrew Wylie (who, among many other clients, handles the Nabokov estate). It feels somehow indicative of the last gasp of the literature of oversized personalities, with correspondingly oversized advances, where an author could hope to occupy the same rarefied status in the popular imagination as a

movie star, the days of the unlikely pairing of Henry Miller and Marilyn Monroe – or, as tabloids widely reported in 2008: Salman Rushdie and Scarlett Johansson.

#### Nabokov in McSweeney's

A writer will allude to Nabokov as a way to assert authorial autonomy – to align him- or herself with Nabokov, a kind of ultimate symbolic autonomous author – though this sentiment might seem suspect when authors go out of their way to parody outsized authorial persona, which is just what Neal Pollack does in *The Neal Pollack Anthology of American Literature*. However, no send-up of writers can exist without the parodist giving more consideration to their interaction in the field than anyone else ordinarily would. No parody succeeds without the parodist taking what he or she's making fun of seriously. The Neal Pollack persona presented on the page (and on the computer screen originally: the bulk of the material first appeared in the McSweeney's web site) is an amalgam of celebrity writers – public intellectuals – like Edmund Wilson, Norman Mailer, and Allen Ginsberg, only less modest. Pollack claims to be the “greatest living American writer,” and the *Anthology* (Pollack's first book) includes a timeline that – much like the paratextual apparatus in the Everyman's Library editions and in other editions of classic works – will place events in the author's biography alongside significant literary and historical moments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here are three, all set off against significant moments in Nabokov's literary career:

**Table 7: Neal Pollack's Timeline of Literary History**

DATE	AUTHOR'S LIFE	LITERARY CONTEXT	HISTORICAL EVENTS
1936	Begins fourth grade. Publishes essay, "Does Faulkner Write Too Much?" in <i>American Mercury</i> .	Faulkner: <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> Nabokov: <i>Despair</i> .	Spanish Civil War begins
1953	<i>Salinger Alone; Europe: The Forgotten Continent</i> . Marries the novelist Mary McCarthy. Divorces the actress Mary McCarthy.	Nabokov: <i>Lolita</i> .	José Stalin dies.
1957	Publishes biography of Stalin. Plots with Nabokov to kill Pasternak. Hangs out with the Beats. Spends time in Cuba, with Castro.	Pasternak: <i>Doctor Shivago</i> . Ginsberg: <i>Howl (or The Ballad of Pollack)</i>	America seethes with paranoia

The joke depends on a reader recognizing just the incongruity between the claim being made (Neal Pollack as the greatest living American writer) and the reality (Neal Pollack, minor Internet sensation), but also on the inherent incongruity of what is being parodied – the notion of a celebrity author. If the wider public sphere offers the tools of legitimation (as Bourdieu notes in the passage quoted above), then Pollack's send-up is a

parody of those tools – the celebrity profile, the self-aggrandizing essay, and the hagiography at work in collected letters, such as the ones documenting the friendship and eventual falling-out between Vladimir Nabokov and Edmund Wilson. The Nabokov-Wilson letters were edited and collected in *Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya*, but Pollack's parody (also found in the *Anthology*) parodies the collection's original title, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*.

In the *Pollack-Wilson* letters, the fictionalized Wilson writes to Pollack, "Myself, I am trying to put pen to paper, but when your work looms before me like a Hydra of prose, I am cowed. I hope your testimony before HUAC is a successful one. All my love to Vera-Ellen," and signs off (as the actual Wilson would) with the nickname "Bunny" (96). If Nabokov's wife Vera is part of the parody, so too is the sense of an authorial persona so daunting it eclipses all others.

Pollack's response to Bunny is Nabokovian in its hauteur and self-confidence: "Well, *Europe: The Forgotten Continent* has been published in the States, despite the efforts of the lawyers to keep it safe from our impressionable youth. Already, the moralistic firestorm has begun, and the calls for a public burning emanate from the more hayseed corners of this disturbed republic. In that vein, I reread your *Memoirs of Hecate County* last night, and, I must be honest, fell asleep around page 15" (96). Authorial one-upmanship may be parodied here, but again the joke hinges on a great deal of inside knowledge, with an imagined reader already disposed to know about relatively obscure rifts in the field of cultural production. Pollack may be calling into question the notion of a celebrity author, but doing so presupposes a readership for whom authors can, conceivably, be regarded as such. The only people who would find Pollack funny would

be those who would care enough about the concept of authorship and intra-author rivalry in the first place.

Nabokov circulates throughout the McSweeney's group as the standard-bearer of autonomous authorship – authorship free from and opposed to conventional criticism or the constraints and requirements of everyday life. Nabokov appears sporadically in Pollack's book, but he is the sole subject of two short McSweeney's pieces: Mike Sack's "Less is Best, Mr. Nabokov" and Ryan Shields's "Nabokov Didn't Have to Put Up with Payroll," pieces published in the McSweeney's site on 20 July 2001 and 26 June 2007 respectively. Sacks anonymously submits Nabokov's "Torpid Smoke" to several online manuscript evaluation services, and the humor piece consists of selected snippets from the resulting critiques. Shields imagines a disgruntled office worker whose every real and imagined slight is contrasted to Nabokov's imagined freedom from bosses, human resources, and co-workers. As in Pollack, the pieces offset Nabokov's autonomous authorial persona – his symbolic capital – against an incongruous context, with the resulting friction serving to legitimize the idea of the independent creator.

These two humor pieces traffic almost wholly within Nabokov's symbolic capital, since no actual reference is being made to a specific text or biographical datum; symbolic capital, in this context, falls under what Genette's *Paratexts* would call "the public authorial epitext," received notions surrounding a particular author (354-370). And so maybe it's no surprise that so many Nabokov references engross themselves in other, closely related paratextual matter – indices and prefaces and – to cite one specific example – the timelines in Neal Pollack's *Neal Pollack Anthology of American Literature*. The title's joke is doubly contingent on paratexts, since titles are paratexts and

since “Neal Pollack” appears where, traditionally, the paratextual imprimatur of a Norton or a Longman would stand. Titles are the subject of persistent, oft-repeated Nabokov allusions: George Saunders’s “Eat, Memory” plays on the title of Nabokov’s memoir, *Speak, Memory*, but so does an article in the January 2010 issue of *The Believer*, Robert Ito’s “Speak, Memorates.”

As does Jeff Alexander and Tom Bissell’s *Speak, Commentary*. Billed on its front cover as “the big little book of fake DVD commentaries,” the jokes hinge on the home entertainment equivalent of a paratextual component: the supplemental, alternative audio that frames and provides context and commentary to what’s shown on the screen. An additional paratextual element, film-critic Glenn Kenny’s preface, includes an additional Nabokovian allusion: Kenny suggests that the reader supply him- or herself with “two copies of the book (come on, they’re cheap enough), two readers, the DVD, and you” in an elegant nod to Kinbote’s demand that his reader buy two copies of his annotated *Pale Fire* (2).

Paratexts recur in Nabokov references, partly because Nabokov himself played with them frequently (there’s *Pale Fire*, of course, where the bulk of the narrative takes the form of extended endnotes, but there’s earlier examples, chief of which would be the foreword to *Lolita* penned by the fictional John Ray), but also partly because they matter more to the field of cultural production than it does to most consumers of its cultural products: the Acknowledgments pages is one such example, thanking agents and fellow practitioners and family members, for one. Others may read these pages – they’re there for public consumption – but a context in which the names themselves may be truly meaningful is not necessarily open to all. Often, these pages mix the reasonably public



(writers will sometimes mention who they were listening to while writing their novel or will provide key references consulted for the fiction) with the inscrutably private (cryptic messages, inside jokes) with something in-between (writer will thank A for B).

The novelist Michael Chabon mixes all three in his “Author’s Note” for *The Yiddish Policemen’s Union*, and he will point the reader to a Nabokov reference embedded in the text itself that would have been otherwise missed: a chess problem that solves the whodunit element in the novel “was devised by Reb Vladimir Nabokov and is presented in his *Speak, Memory*” (414). Here, as elsewhere, Nabokov circulates through the novel as a symbol of authorial autonomy, but before exploring how Nabokov circulates, it’s worth noting that many of Chabon’s novels place thematic importance on the notion of authorship: there are the comic book creators in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, and there’s also the writer-professor protagonist of *Wonder Boys*, who is suffering from writer’s block.

Nabokov references surface in both of these authorially-minded novels. In *Kavalier and Clay*, Chabon inserts a relatively obscure *Lolita* reference; in one of Kavalier and Clay’s comic books, a character called “Judy Dark” confronts “the Cimmerian moth goddess Lo,” though if the entomological clue seems too general, if even Lo seems too general – it could be *any* Lo, after all, not the one standing four feet ten in one sock – it’s worth knowing that Nabokov’s original name for his nymphet was Juanita Dark, a nod another young, tragic figure: Joan of Arc. The Nabokov reference in *Wonder Boys* is far less abstruse: in defense of his overlong, never-ending, problematic work-in-progress, the narrator (an author and creative writing professor) compares it to “*Ada*, you know, or

*Gravity's Rainbow*. It's the kind of novel that teaches you how to read it as you go along" (312).

*The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, on the other hand, waits until the end – waits until after the end, in fact – to teach you how to read the problem at the heart of the novel's mystery. It's described on page 162, and the note itself occurs on page 414, and while notable on its own it's also a singular demonstration of Chabon's mastery over the Nabokov oeuvre: Chabon chooses to skip past the one Nabokov novel fully dedicated to chess, *The Defense*, to select a far more recondite (and far more elegant) problem. If the Nabokov allusion follows the model set by the person being alluded – Nabokov, after all, relished the very same sort of elusive, intricate intertextual play – it's also worth noting that information that could very well have slipped by with no loss to the reading experience. Knowing may enhance the world of the book, but not knowing is without significant consequence.

The information does change how one frames the chess problem. Initially a clue left behind by a character revealed to be the messiah, the problem becomes a means for the author to acknowledge his admiration of a fellow practitioner – one of allusion's traditional, accepted functions. One can leave aside the potential for connections between the author of this work and a God-like figure, though it's possible to argue that, inadvertently or not, Chabon may be saying something along those lines: if the chess problem belongs to an incarnate God, and then it turns out that it originally belongs to an author, then a case could be made for a rough equivalence between one and the other (which would not stray from a classical understanding of a work or from some forms of theology: the creator and the Creator leading parallel lives with parallel interests). What

does seem fairly clear is that – for a reader just finished with the novel and now skimming through the back matter – the brief, seemingly innocent nod to Nabokov in the “Author’s Note” drastically reframes a recently concluded reading experience, particularly since no reader (not even a fairly well informed reader, not even most readers well acquainted with Nabokov’s work and with *Speak, Memory* in particular) would have likely spotted the reference. The authorial nod here posits autonomy in another way: it is the author who determines and guides how meaning is made, and where meaning can be found, with the author providing the necessary clues to where meaning may be decoded, the destination being the world created by another author’s cultural product.

If the traffic of cultural capital as described here seems far too self-involved and -serving – authors praising authors because in doing so they praise themselves – it may well be worth noting that there is something genuinely generous and giving in it as well: Chabon’s enthusiasm for Nabokov is clear, and any nod to Nabokov is also of course first and foremost a nod to Nabokov. Chabon’s “Author’s Note” may well win Nabokov new readers. Better to see it in the same terms that explain some of the biological and evolutionary rationales for kindness, philanthropy, volunteerism, and cooperation. We’re wired for it. In helping others we feel good ourselves. And so maybe this reciprocity finds parallels in the circulation of cultural capital.

If so, it would find some confirmation in Dave Eggers’s hope that “whatever came next in the literary world would be different, mellower, less tense, less rivalrous, and thus altogether better,” a sentiment expressed in “Small Corrections to Neal Pollack’s Piece in the *Times Book Review*.” The piece, published online in 2005, marked an awkward end to the relationship between Eggers and Pollack. Eggers asks that Pollack retract a statement

about the potential for fame in their field (“We’re about to enter a new age of literary celebrity”) and Pollack does, though he insists that “I still remember some conversation where some concept of ‘literary celebrity’ was mentioned, but who knows the context at this point.” If the scuffle sounded like a distant echo of Pollack’s parodic targets – the thundering of Edmund Wilson v. Vladimir, Mailer v. World – the irony was likely not lost on any of its participants: writers calling each other out after having made fun of writers calling each other out. (Nabokov, in “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” notes: “After doing my impersonation of suave John Ray, the character in *Lolita* who pens the Foreword, any comments coming straight from me may strike one – may strike me, in fact – as an impersonation of Vladimir Nabokov talking about his own book.”) And if the scuffle also had echoes of the one that occurred ten years earlier between Julian Barnes and Martin Amis, it may have been of interest to some that at least one figure had remained constant throughout the years, Andrew Wylie, Amis’s agent, who did not – as Pollack claims – take care of McSweeney’s business interests; he “does one thing for us, which he does very well and which helps us exist: he sells foreign rights to certain McSweeney’s books” (Eggers).

Eggers’s own nod to Nabokov is, like Chabon’s, paratextual in nature. Eggers provided a cardboard-cutout illustration for Vintage International’s 2010 redesign of Nabokov’s *Laughter in the Dark*: with its foreshortened, clawlike arms and highly stylized, highly figurative features (bobbed hair, parted lips), the illustration is cinematic in ways that pay homage to Nabokov’s own cinematic ambitions for the novel while grounded in the immediate world where the writer composed it, the Berlin of the 1930s – the world of F.W. Murnau and Fritz Lang. Here, as elsewhere, a great deal of information

circulates hidden in plain sight, with one author communicating with another through currency that, to most observers, would not appear to signify much.

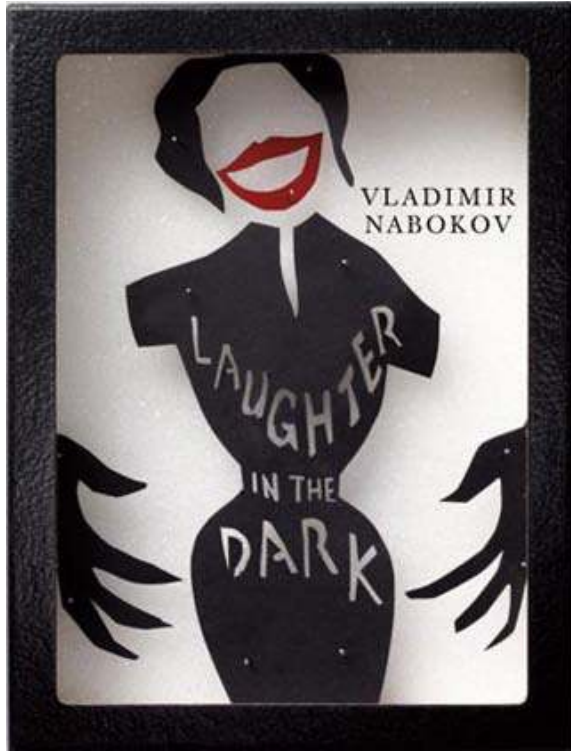


Figure 4: *Laughter in the Dark* cover designed by Dave Eggers for Vintage International

#### Nabokov in Amis and Smith

chapter one explored, in passing, how Amis and Smith's Nabokov references are often paired with intransigence, so that a Nabokov reference signals a deliberately contrarian opposition to an established viewpoint (and to the commonplace and to the Flaubertian notion of received ideas) which in turn reinforces Nabokov's symbolic capital as the Autonomous Author – but why intransigence? And autonomy from what, exactly? The authorial persona may be naturally contrarian, and so a safe answer might be (a la Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*), What have you got? However, a close

examination of the Amis and Smith references reveals that Nabokov is often wielded in direct opposition to a very specific group: the same world Flaubert opposed, “a ‘bourgeois’ world which had never before asserted so bluntly its values and its pretension to control the instruments of legitimation” (Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* 58). Nabokov allows Amis and Smith to reject assigned, expected notions either associated (or imagined to be associated) with their authorial personae, notions tied to bourgeois/middlebrow perspectives on class, race, and taste – perspectives which often serve as legitimating filters for the dissemination, marketing, and analysis of cultural products.

These are notions of taste closely linked to the concept of *poshlost* as described by Nabokov in his book on Gogol: *poshlost* “is not only the obviously trashy but also the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive” (70). Nabokov illustrates both his critique of *poshlost* and his praise for Gogol’s satire of *poshlost* with examples drawn from, among other places, Flaubert. And Nabokov, too, reserves his sharpest judgment for bourgeois channels of legitimation (Nabokov will single out “the literary supplement of daily newspapers” as one such channel). *Poshlost*, he warns, “is especially vigorous and vicious when the sham is *not* obvious and when the values it mimics are considered, rightly or wrongly, to belong to the very highest levels of art” (68). Nabokov’s appreciation of “obvious trash” (which, he finds, “contains sometimes a wholesome ingredient”) has some obvious similarities to Susan Sontag’s appreciation of camp, though what is of greater concern here – because its dynamics will find counterparts in the aesthetics of both Amis and Smith – is that high and low are embraced, and what is rejected is the middle ground and the middlebrow. Most

importantly, Nabokov's particular focus is not on the cultural product itself but the means through which that product is disseminated and legitimized.

This dissemination – with its corresponding legitimating processes – succeeds because of what Rubin's *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* identifies as a class-dependent “modern anxiety about the self” (99). These class anxieties turn culture into a commodity whose purpose, once it leaves the field of cultural production, is to allow for individuals to fashion themselves as they see fit (Rubin 168, 174-5). In this context, a cultural product is only good – is only useful – if it provides sufficient means for self-fashioning and -identification. (This is who I am, This is what I like, This is what I belong to.) And so it's no surprise to find Nabokov warning, in the “Good Readers and Good Writers” of *Lectures on Literature* against the very Oprah-like pronouncement, that “The reader should identify himself or herself with the hero or the heroine” (Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature* 3). The reader, Nabokov maintains, should do no such thing.

Zadie Smith follows the same path. Asked to read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by her mother, she is initially reluctant: “I preferred my own freely chosen, heterogeneous reading list. I flattered myself I ranged widely in my reading, never choosing books for genetic or sociocultural reasons” (Smith, *Changing My Mind* 3). On page seven, she will paraphrase Nabokov's *Lectures on Literature* warning and adopt it as her own: “I disliked the idea of ‘identifying’ with the fiction I read.” Two pages earlier, she acknowledges that Nabokov shaped some of her own aesthetic dispositions, even with regard to issues as seemingly minute and technical as her “resistance to dialogue (encouraged by Nabokov, whom I idolized),” though perhaps Smith's strongest commentary on Nabokov's influence in matters of taste (on herself and others) comes

from a footnote in “Rereading Barthes and Nabokov”: “Nabokov nerds often slavishly parrot his strong opinions. I don’t think I’m the first person to have my mind poisoned, by Nabokov, against Dostoyvesky” (Smith, *Changing My Mind* 5, 52). She does, however, find herself liking *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, though in terms that complicate and enrich the legitimating forces that initially prompted her to resist the novel, so that a simple, reductive character identification becomes instead “a real, tangible quality, an essence I can almost believe I share, however improbably, with millions of complex individuals across centuries and continents and languages and religion...” and caps off even that admission with “Almost – but not quite” (13).

The legitimating forces which Smith finds troublesome are now most embarrassed, she finds, with anything that they might find middlebrow themselves, so that E.M. Forster is relegated to “Notable English Novelist, common or garden variety,” and scholarly editors of his work (Smith adds) “find it necessary to address the middlebrow elephant in the room with almost unseemly haste” (Smith, *Changing My Mind* 14, 15). Smith, on the other hand, finds him perfectly charming, celebrating him on page 5 as “a rare bird” and “a tricky bugger.” Forster is a writer whose *Howard’s End* she’d pay extended homage to in her 2005 novel *On Beauty* (discussed below). It’s a curious reversal, Smith celebrating an author whose standing is dubious precisely because he could conceivably be regarded as middlebrow, which is itself a class-conscious middlebrow anxiety, since it’s less about the cultural product and more about what the cultural product would say about the person consuming it. Smith, like her fellow practitioner Forster, is above such matters.



As is Amis. He is asked by his son about class and – specifically – about *their* class, where they fit, who they belong to:

From the wheel I said ruggedly, – We aren't. We don't buy that stuff.

– Then what are we?

– We're outside all that. We're the intelligentsia.

– Oh, he said, and added in deliberate falsetto: Am I an intellectual? (M.

Amis, Experience 16).

It doesn't seem too far a stretch that one particular attractive trait of Nabokov's – one that finds resonance in the work and lives of Amis and Smith – is his unclassifiability: he, like them, is outside all that. He inhabits the same uneasy, difficult-to-chart terrain as them, and his performance in that terrain is reason enough for attraction. His symbolic capital acquires greater weight not simply because of his tremendous literary success – success in both the field of cultural production (as a widely regarded, widely influential, widely read producer) and beyond (as the bestselling author of a *success d'scandale* whose products achieved wide dissemination) – but also because his symbolic value is freighted with complicated class connotations. Nowhere are these clearer in the many, and insistent, uses of the word “aristocratic” to describe his demeanor (profiles of Nabokov, often appearing in the very same literary supplements of daily newspapers that he'd decry for *poshlost*, would abuse the adjective), which would translate for “haughty” or “snobbish” if it weren't for the fact that Nabokov was, in fact, a White Russian and hence an actual (albeit, for half his life, mostly a penniless) aristocrat, a former member of an émigré community, many of whose members were also royalty in exile. That Nabokov labored – happily, if under difficult circumstances – for most of his life, and

that this labor trafficked far more heavily in symbolic cultural capital rather than actual capital, serves to further underscore the point: Nabokov was a proud member of the aristocracy of taste as described by Forster, and whose traits are in essence those valued in Bourdieu's field of cultural production – disinterestedness, a belief in the importance of the cultural product qua product, a desire to be outside of all that, a celebration of the cultural producer as a rare bird.

I mean to suggest that this particular set of traits seems a far more likely reason for Amis's attraction to Nabokov than the one suggested by Diedrick in *Understanding Martin Amis*: the difficult relationship between Amis and his father, the novelist Kingsley Amis, which (Diedrick claims) led the son into “a search for substitute literary ‘fathers’” (13). Kingsley himself, incidentally, makes a Nabokov reference in one of his later novels, the 1984 *Stanley and the Women*, where a character explores the vast chasm separating the quality of author's work from his or her ability to properly evaluate or even talk about it: “You certainly get that with writers. There are all sorts of examples. Oh... Yes, Nabokov. You know, *Lolita*. Talks balls by the yard about what he does and yet he's an absolutely super novelist” (115). Going by his *Letters*, Kingsley himself didn't seem to find Nabokov a super novelist, but he also had trouble finishing his son's novels, indicating perhaps a generation revaluation of currency<sup>42</sup>, with Nabokov gaining

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<sup>42</sup> There is a clear and explicit relationship between these three subjects – Vladimir Nabokov's aesthetics, Martin Amis's novels, and generational divide – in the two Nabokov-related passages in Kingsley Amis's correspondence: “Got through a lot of reading here. Or rather *not* got through a lot. *Despair*, by Vladimir Nabokov. CUNT. That chap is an absolute shibboleth, isn't he? What do you think of Nabokov? Well – BANG!! He's what's wrong with half of US wirtn, -- there are other things wrong with the other half – and has fucked up a lot of fools here, plus, or including as you might wish to say, my little Martin. I don't know about you but I can bear anything, even stream of conc., better than realizing there's a narrator here whom I can't trust” (K. Amis, *The Letters of Kingsley Amis* 938-9); “I laughed heartily at your excellent jest about Martin's book. You almost had me believing that you sort of, well, *enjoyed* it or something, ha ha ha. If I

greater traction and value over time, though *Lolita* did remain a steady, notorious presence in the field of cultural production from the start.

*Lolita*'s ubiquity cannot be denied: Nabokov called the surrounding and mounting media attention "Hurricane Lolita," and said, famously, in *Strong Opinions*, "*Lolita* is famous, not I. I'm an obscure, doubly obscure novelist with an unpronounceable name". And so the novel, inevitably, circulates throughout the work of both Smith and Amis though – again – not without the corresponding intransigent commentary on taste found in other Nabokov references already discussed. Amis will devote a whole section of his writings on Nabokov in *The War Against Cliché*, but he'll reserve his thoughts on *Lolita* to the very end, in the last bit of the section entitled "Great Books": the book ends with Amis's assessment, an essay titled "Nabokov's Grand Slam," further underscoring both the tremendous weight and value of this particular cultural product in Amis's mind. Amis does not limit his admiration of *Lolita* to his nonfiction – his novels make frequent passing mentions to the hurricane – though again, like the "cosmic joke" migrating from the 1985 review of Nabokov's collected plays to 1995's *The Information* (discussed in the introduction), one passage Amis praises in "Nabokov's Grand Slam" finds its way to *London Fields*.

The passage, praised by Amis for its "cruel displacement," with "the old made young and the young made old" is quoted on page 484:

I was forced to devote a dangerous amount of time... to arranging the bed in such a way as to suggest the abandoned nest of a restless father and his tomboy

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didn't know you better I'd, etc. I hated its way of constantly reminded me of Nabokov. but of course I'm very old-fashioned. Set in my ways, what?" (K. Amis, *The Letters of Kingsley Amis* 989)

daughter, instead of an ex-convict's saturnalia with a couple of fat old whores.

Then I finished dressing and had the hoary bellboy come up for the bags.

The same passage will return to Samson Young, Amis's writer *manque* narrator of *London Fields*, though Young will attribute it to Nicola Six, the novel's femme fatale:

She needed fifteen minutes. One to envelope her bikini in a plain white cotton dress. Another to give the bedclothes a fantastic worrying. What was the delightful phrase in *Lolita*: the guilty disarray of hotel linen suggesting an ex-convict's saturnalia with a couple of fat old whores? (130)

If, as Andrew Elfenbein supposes while examining the intersection of cognitive psychology and literature, "literary allusion arises from a special case of spreading activation: memory networks have stored not just a concept but an actual strip of language," then the case for Amis's repeated dips into particular, specific bits of the Nabokov oeuvre become a little more clear – Amis is engaging in a kind of "tape loop," a "unique collocation of words" that have, "over time, become unyoked from their original context and end up linked to concepts that have little to do with the associations they had when they first entered memory" (485, 486). Thus cultural capital is more likely to circulate if its particular, unique syntactical arrangement is found to be persuasive; this is an important part of Elfenbein's larger point, explored at length throughout the article: writers engage in allusion because they recognize in an earlier, remembered, embedded language cluster a unit whose cognitive purpose is *persuasion*: we remember that which persuades us – what sticks with us, what takes permanent residence in our brain, is what we repeat. And so: Amis's twice-repeated uses of "cosmic joke" and "saturnalia of fat old whores," and Zadie Smith's remark that Nabokov nerds will parrot Nabokov's own

strong opinions, and her deliberate use of Forster's plot structure in *Howard's End* for her novel *On Beauty*, which incidentally also references *Lolita*:

She did it. She jumped off the bed and into his lap. His erection was blatant, but first she coolly drank the rest of his wine, pressing down on him as Lolita did on Humbert, as if he were just a chair she happened to sit on. No doubt she had read *Lolita*. And then her arm went round the back of his neck and Lolita turned into a temptress (maybe she had learned from Mrs Robinson too), lasciviously sucking his ear, and then from temptress she moved to affectionate high-school girlfriend, sweetly kissing the corner of his mouth. But what kind of sweetheart was this? (315)

The novel is, among many other things, an exploration on the modalities of taste, and specifically a gentle satire on the modalities of taste in university settings – who should be read, who we'd be embarrassed to be found reading (principally Forster, who Smith clearly adores and whose protagonist, Howard, does not) – and so it's no surprise to find that the other paired figure in the associative loop from Smith's *Changing My Mind* appears on page 240: "She's just a typical pretty-girl, power-game playing, deeply shallow human being. She tries to hide it by reading one book by *Barthes* or whatever – *all* she does is quote Barthes; it's so tedious." Smith confesses in her *Changing My Mind* essay that she was guilty of pretty much the same crime.

Even more interesting is Smith's open, "easy" handling of this Nabokov allusion, a change to some extent from the relatively more obscure references she makes in *White Teeth* and *The Autograph Man* (explored in Chapter II); her very first Nabokov allusion also has *Lolita* for a spur, but it is relatively more difficult to identify the specific source unless one has read the novel (Smith does include a short, italicized, parenthetical

“apologies to Nabokov”). The title, “Picnic, Lightning,” is lifted<sup>43</sup> from Humbert’s pithy description of the conditions surrounding his mother’s death: “My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three, and, save for a pocket of warmth in the darkest past, nothing of her subsists within the hollows and dells of memory, over which, if you can still stand my style” (7). Matters of style – style understood as particularly persuasive, embedded language loops – will continue: Smith’s narrator will note that “You can always count on love to ruin your prose,” a transmutation of Humbert’s “You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style” (7). Smith wrote and published the story while she was a student – it was collected in the online *The May Anthology of Oxford and Cambridge Short Stories*. If it differs to any great extent from her 2005 Nabokov allusion in *On Beauty*, it’s that the traffic in cultural capital is now less obscure, more overt, more relaxed. But Nabokov does not stop circulating: he is still there, inescapable, well remembered in 2005 and just as fresh, just as present, in 1997. That the words of Nabokov and those of Smith become entangled – that they belong as much to the person remembering them as they do the person responsible for them – is ultimately unsurprising, unsurprising and inevitable: “Other people’s beauty and passion seem to implicate one somehow” (Smith, Picnic, Lightning).

Again: allusion works best through implication, so that the language clusters stored in one’s memory (a model for which is memorably described as “networks of spreading activation” (Elfenbein 484)) are appropriated, turned into one’s own, replicated, passed on – persuasion as a virus, the circulation of cultural capital as the perpetuation of what one values most in one’s self, transmuted into one values most in another. This process

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<sup>43</sup> Not a singular occurrence: Billy Collins also found this particular language cluster too good to pass up. See his poem “Picnic, Lightning,” collected in the 1998 book also titled *Picnic, Lightning*.

may explain, then, why these writers find themselves most drawn to passages where Nabokov talks about another author – why (to return to the very beginning of this chapter) authors talk most about themselves when they talk about an author talking about another author.

These language loops prove more persistent, and more ubiquitous, than their carriers may realize. In her “K. Kafka, Everyman,” collected in *Changing My Mind*, Zadie Smith writes, in passing, in a footnote:

As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic *Ungeziefer*. Various translations as *insect*, *cockroach* – much to the horror of Nabokov, who insisted the thing had wings – *bug*, *dung-beetle*, the literal translation is *vermin*. (71)

In Martin Amis’s *The Information*, we find the following, embedded in the brain of the novel’s anti-hero, the failed novelist Richard Tull: “To paraphrase a critic who also knew about beetles and what they liked, Kafka’s beetle took a beetle pleasure, a beetle solace, in all the darkness and the dust and the discards” (238). This reference is considerably more obscure than other Nabokov references made by Amis elsewhere in *The Information* (and discussed above). Of more interest, however, is that Tull’s beetle thoughts have been only slightly reshuffled in transport. Nabokov’s original line, from the Kafka chapter in *Lectures on Literature*, reads: “curiously enough, Gregor, though a very sick beetle – the apple wound is festering, and he is starving – finds some beetle pleasure in crawling among all that dusty rubbish.” (Tull festers a bit himself: bitter, ignored, he is a writer of unreadable fiction condemned to read and review lengthy, unreadable biographies.) The language cluster, much like the beetle, stays buoyantly alive under

rather trying circumstances – allusion always capable of one more flight in the field of cultural production.



## CONCLUSION

In *Strong Opinions*, Nabokov wrote, “I am not interested in groups, movements, schools of writing and so forth” (4). The Nabokov references discussed above – those made by the London and by the McSweeney’s group – signal authors contemplating, commenting on, and wrestling with the meaning of authorship in light of groups, movements, and schools of writing. If the a Nabokov reference serves as a means to reassert the possibility of an autonomous author – an autonomy from any instrument of legitimation (bourgeois or not) existing immediately beyond the immediate field of production – then this reassertion exists almost as a hiccup, a cognitive process wherein language recurs almost inadvertently. Allusion, to some extent, benefits from its apparent, understood limits and constraints. A Nabokov reference may reflect concerns that extend well beyond the particular sentence, the particular paragraph, and even the particular cultural product in which it finds itself, but its power hinges partly on its seeming innocence, its apparent limited range, and the received, understood notion that no allusion travels beyond its immediate lexical field. A Nabokov reference, then, allows an author to indicate his or her own independence, intransigence, and freedom from systems and institutions and groups. A writer is, to use the words Amis used for his son, outside all that. Or wants to be.

That everyone operates – has to operate – within the constraints of systems, groups, institutions is a given. And that any anxiety regarding this dependence often manifests itself in ways that signal further affiliations, further interdependences, is perhaps not terribly surprising. The writers discussed here belong to a self-imposed group whose

most salient feature, expressed through their use of Nabokov, is a reluctance to belong to a group.

Here is where some of the most exciting work remains to be done: Nabokov allusions can be used to examine how contemporary cultural producers align themselves. More generally, if allusion allows authors to situate themselves and to comment upon the field in which they operate, then allusions to other authors may further refine or complicate these intra-authorial conversations, conversations which serve two purposes: (1) to position the author in the field of cultural production, and (2) to comment on the authorial role and (by extension) to allow for an externalized self-reflection on what it means to be a cultural producer. A Nabokov reference, then, allows for an exploration of the authorial role, but it also clarifies how any such exploration serves as criteria for inclusion into a school or group.

In allowing this authorially-minded preoccupation to enter the conversation, the way in which 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century literature is arranged shifts: authors who loom large in surveys figure less prominently (they are less often alluded), while those whose presence is marginal are suddenly far more visible. They are still at the margins, but the margins become far more important. It is at the margins that authors declare their affiliations and mark their territory.

The theoretical framework that has worked so far has its limits: it combines the sociology of Bourdieu with the poetics of Genette, but it neglects the class preoccupations of the former and the attention to readerly pleasure and surprise of the latter. While reintroducing these elements into further explorations of Nabokov allusions is worth the effort, so is paying attention to how cognitive psychology is changing our

understanding of literature. If Nabokov is thought of as a particularly effective unit of persuasion – and the data set certainly points in that direction – then potentially interesting work lies ahead. In asking, “Why so much Nabokov?” the answer seems to lead both deeper into what happens to the brain when we read, but also further back into a cultural producer’s tangled relationship with his or her field – with the mutually incompatible desires to declare autonomy and to find companionship, kinship, and understanding. This last potential avenue for further exploration is, in many regards, a return to a fundamental truth behind reading and writing: they are both lonely businesses at whose heart is the fervent desire to connect, to join, and to find like-minded souls.

I’m reminded of Thomas Frank’s *The Conquest of Cool* which, while tracing the rise of the Vernbach agency and its rehabilitation of the VW brand in the 50s, finds that the most useful advertising stance turns one’s panic and discomfort with being part of being a small, voiceless, anonymous member of a demographic – just one more consumer in a vast undifferentiated sea of like-minded, like-walleted fish – into the very instrument through which the product is pitched. The commercial parodies the modality and rhetoric and conventions of a commercial, so that it becomes a parody of the thing it is – commercialism as a self-aware, self-mocking force that is nonetheless bent on selling you something. The consumer is allowed the language and stance of rebellion, the sense that a choice, in this particular field, matters.

It may. What we buy and who we like do reflect, to a significant degree, our individualized dispositions and circumstances. But it’s probably a good idea to remember that our choices are contingent on those of others – other selves, other groups, other fields

– and that like it or not we do exist in a context larger, and more complex, than we are capable of charting, or even recognizing.

## APPENDIX

### THE DATA SET

The Excel spreadsheet has been embedded to this file. Double-click to see the full range of data or to see the other worksheets that form the data set.

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Year of Publication</b>
Adamson, Isaac	<i>Tokyo Suckerpunch</i>	2004
Adler, Bill (pseudonym)	<i>80 Days in Captivity</i>	2005
Alameddine, Rabih	<i>Kooloids</i>	1998
Alice Donut	<i>"Green Pea Soup" (Donut Comes Alive)</i>	1988
Allen, Woody	<i>Manhattan</i>	1979
Amis, Martin	<i>The Information</i>	1995
Amis, Martin	<i>London Fields</i>	1989
Andersen, Kurt	<i>Turn of the Century</i>	1999
Baker, Nicholson	<i>U &amp; I</i>	1991
Baker, Nicholson	<i>Room Temperature</i>	1990
Barnes, Julian	<i>Flaubert's Parrot</i>	1984
Barth, John	<i>Letters</i>	1979
Baumbach Noah	<i>Kicking and Screaming</i>	1995
Beard, Henry and Douglas	<i>Bored of the Rings</i>	1969
Beaton, M.C.	<i>Agatha Raisin and the Day the Floods Came</i>	2002
Beattie, Ann	<i>Another You</i>	1995
Bend Sinister	<i>Bend Sinister</i>	2001
Bennet, Alan	<i>The Uncommon Reader</i>	2007
Bissell, Tom (McSweeney's)	<i>Speak, Commentary</i>	2003
Bissell, Tom (McSweeney's)	<i>The Father of all Things: A Marine, His Son, and</i>	2007
Blackman Steve	<i>Las Vegas ("Secrets, Lies and Lamaze s.5-ep1</i>	2008
Block, Lawrence	<i>Burglar on the Prowl</i>	2004
Bolt, Tom	<i>Dark Ice</i>	1993
Boyd, William	<i>Armadillo</i>	1998
Boyd, William	<i>"Adult Video"</i>	1999
Boyle, T.C.	<i>"Killing Babies" (After the Plague)</i>	2001
Bradbury, Malcolm	<i>Unsent letters</i>	1988
Bram, Christopher	<i>Lives of the Circus Animals</i>	2003
Brautigan, Richard	<i>"Getting to Know Each Other" (Revenge of the L</i>	1971
Brockmeier, Kevin	<i>"These Hands" (Things That Fall From the Sky)</i>	1997
Burgess, Anthony	<i>The Clockwork Testament: Or, Enderby's End</i>	1974
Burgess, Anthony	<i>Outside Mr. Enderby</i>	1968
Cabrera Infante, G.	<i>Three Trapped Tigers</i>	1967
Campbell, Eddie	<i>Three Piece Suit</i>	2001
Capote, Truman	<i>Answered Prayers</i>	1987
Capote, Truman	<i>Music for Chameleons</i>	1980
Carson, Tom	<i>Gilligan's Wake</i>	2003

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