BLACK BLOOD/RED INK: FACT, FICTION, AND AUTHORIAL SELF-REPRESENTATION IN VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S *LOOK AT THE HARLEQUINS!*, MARGUERITE DURAS' *L'AMANT DE LA CHINE DU NORD*, AND PHILIP ROTH'S *OPERATION SHYLOCK: A CONFESSION*

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ABSTRACT

DAVID PHILLIPS: Black Blood/Red Ink: Fact, Fiction, and Authorial Self-Representation in Vladimir Nabokov's *Look at the Harlequins!*, Marguerite Duras' *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, and Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock: A Confession*
(Under the direction of John McGowan)

In the past several decades, a new class of hybrid texts seems to have emerged: texts characterized by both 1) autobiographical referentiality, and 2) intertextual relations to earlier fictive works by the author. Such texts pose a variety of problems for their readers as well as for literary critics and theorists—problems revolving around a number of inter-related issues that coalesce around two primary questions: 1) How are such works to be read and interpreted?, and 2) What do the author's strategies of self-representation in such works reveal about the relations between their fiction and their lives? Answers to the first question may be arrived at through a consideration of various theories of fiction as both a discursive mode and a distinct literary genre—particularly the theory of fiction advanced by Gregory Currie in *The Nature of Fiction*, which defines fiction as a communicative act according to issues of authorial intentionality. Answers to the second question depend upon particular studies of individual works, informed and contextualized by answers to the first question. The present project is a comparative analysis of three such texts—Vladimir Nabokov's *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974), Marguerite Duras' *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991), and Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993)—which have been specifically selected for both the remarkable similarities in the situations that gave rise to them as well as

the specific strategies and techniques employed; and the significant differences in their respective authors' understandings of a) the nature of the self, how it is to be represented and on what authority; and b) the precise inter-relations between the autobiographical and the fictive. Through such a study we might gain greater insight into the range of possibilities inherent in the single common strategy of composing a hybrid text characterized by both autobiographical or autobiographically-derived self-representation, and intertextuality with respect to the author's own prior works.

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CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL AND CRITICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S *LOOK AT THE HARLEQUINS!*, MARGUERITE DURAS' *L'AMANT DE LA CHINE DU NORD,* AND PHILIP ROTH'S *OPERATION SHYLOCK: A CONFESSION*

On 6 February, 1973, Russian-born novelist Vladimir Nabokov noted in his diary: "Have corrected 285 pages of Field's 680 page work. The number of absurd errors, impossible statements, vulgarities and inventions is appalling" (qtd. in Boyd, *The American Years* 610). "Field's 680 page work" was a manuscript of the first full-length biography of Nabokov to be written. In late 1968, Harvard graduate and budding Russian scholar Andrew Field had received Nabokov's blessing, as well as virtually unlimited access to his private papers, to undertake the project. The first draft was delivered by Field to Nabokov in late January 1973, four years after the project had been "officially" sanctioned by the subject himself, and a month before that same subject recorded his lament in his diary. Brian Boyd, in his own definitive, two-volume biography of Nabokov, writes, "Marking them all in red pencil, [Nabokov] had the offending passages typed out with his notes: one hundred and eighty pages in all, and even then he had overlooked scores of major and minor blunders. There were simply too many errors for him to catch them all" (*The American Years,* 610).

The date is significant for another reason: Nabokov began his next novel—*Look at the Harlequins!* (1974), the last of Nabokov's novels to be published in his lifetime, and the last that he would complete—that very same day. According to Boyd, this is no mere

coincidence: “Field’s distorted ‘VN’ inspired the real Nabokov to make his next novel a deliberate travesty of his own life and of *Speak, Memory* in particular” (*The American Years*, 614). *Look at the Harlequins!* is the fictional autobiography of one Vadim Vadimovich (often foreshortened to “Vadimych”) N. From his name to the biographical details of his life, Vadim Vadimovich is a grotesque parody of Vladimir Vladimorovich Nabokov; he represents in virtually every way an inverted, funhouse-mirror-image of his creator. And Nabokov’s self-parody extends beyond the autobiographical to encompass the bibliographical: *Look at the Harlequins!* parodies, inverts, and otherwise distorts Nabokov’s prior fictive *oeuvre* in the same way that it parodies, inverts, and otherwise distorts his life and character: Nabokov transforms their content into biographical elements of Vadim’s life and transfigures their plots, themes, and titles into those of Vadim’s novels.

The complex, multi-layered inter-relations between life and art in and implicated by the novel are further complicated by the fact that Vadim Vadimovich is not the only figure of authorial self-representation in the novel. In a vertiginous *mise en abîme* structure, Nabokov inverts his inversions through a shadowy, marginal character: a mysterious, unnamed author with whom Vadim Vadimovich is confused—one whose name and books are strikingly similar to Vadim’s in the same way, it seems, that Vadim’s are strikingly similar to Nabokov’s. This parallelism is reinforced through the relation of the confusion of Vadim for this other writer to Vadim’s intermittent intimations that, as he describes it, “I might be permanently impersonating somebody living as a real being beyond the constellation of my tears and asterisks” (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!!* 96-97)—by “a dream feeling that my life was the non-identical twin, a parody, an inferior variant of another man’s life, somewhere on this or another earth. A demon, I felt, was forcing me to impersonate that

other man, that other writer who was and would always be incomparably greater, healthier, and crueler than your obedient servant" (89). This "incomparably greater, healthier, and crueler" "other writer" is, of course, the unnamed author with whom Vadim is confused: Vadim's creator, Vladimir Nabokov himself.

I. *Look at the Harlequins!* and the "Problem(s)" of Autobiographical, Intertextual Metafictions

Since the publication of *Look at the Harlequins!* in 1974, the kind of experimental, self-conscious blending of the autobiographical and the fictive/fictional[1] that characterizes it has become increasingly common. So too has employing similar strategies of dizzying self-referentiality and intra-corpus, intertextuality to explore, as *Look at the Harlequins!* does, the inter-relations between the historical figure/existence of the author and his or her (own) work. *Look at the Harlequins!* presaged a more uniquely "postmodern" and profoundly metafictive kind of self-fictionalization, or fictionalized self-representation than is to be found in what is referred to as "autobiographical fiction." In the intervening years, a number of similar works by authors with fictive *oeuvres* comparable to Nabokov's in terms of size and critical acclaim have appeared.

The three volumes of French *nouveau romancier* Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Romanesques* triptych, for example—*Le Miroir qui revient* (1985) [*Ghosts in the Mirror* (1988)], *Angélique*

[1] The terms "fictive" and "fictional" are often regarded as synonymous, even more or less interchangeable. I would like, however, to draw a distinction between them, one that becomes more important with regard to later definitions and conceptualizations. "Fictive" I use to mean more or less "of, related, or pertaining to the mode or genre of fiction," or to the property of ficticity that a particular representation may have. "Fictional," on the other hand, I use more or less to refer to the ontological status of represented objects, to the nature or mode of their existence.

ou l'enchantement [*Angélique, or Enchantment*] (1988), and *Les Derniers jours de Corinthe* [*The Last Days of Corinthe*] (1994)—represent the parallel autobiography of Robbe-Grillet himself and a narrative biography of (the fictional) Henri Corinthe, whose lives increasingly intersect and ultimately blend into each other in ways reflective and derivative of Robbe-Grillet's habitual themes and strategies. In American postmodern novelist John's Barth's similar hybrid memoir-novel *Once Upon a Time: A Floating Opera* (1991) actual and fictive pasts, presents, and futures intertwine to create an autobiographical narrative featuring virtually countless events, characters, tropes, and formulations from Barth's novels and short stories. The title itself not only suggests a fictive quality through the traditional fairy-tale opening invocation "Once upon a time," but points to the inter-relations between Barth's life as recounted here and the fiction that he has written through an allusion to Barth's first published novel—*The Floating Opera* (1956, revised 1967). Spanish novelist Javier Marías' *Negra espalda del tiempo* (1998) [*The Dark Back of Time* (2001)], also intertwines autobiography and fiction in a narrative that revolves around the Oxford reception of the Marias' own, presumably "autobiographical" novel *Todos las Almas* (1989) [*All Souls* (1992)]. The experimental *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) by expatriate South African novelist and Nobel laureate J.M. Coetzee, who currently resides in Australia, juxtaposes diary entries, essays and critical commentary, and more directly mimetic representation in a narrative revolving around the expatriate South African novelist and Nobel laureate currently residing in Australia, "Señor C."

The incredible complexity of these and similar works poses a variety of problems for their readers as well as for literary critics and theorists—problems revolving around a number of inter-related issues that coalesce around two primary questions: 1) How are such

works to be read and interpreted?, and 2) What do the author's strategies of self-representation in such works reveal about the relations between their fiction and their lives? Answers to the first question may be illuminated by consideration of what is referred to as "autofiction"; but they ultimately depend upon matters of literary theory broadly—particularly theories of fiction and fictionality. Answers to the second question depend upon particular studies of individual works, informed and contextualized by answers to the first question.

II. *Autofiction,* and the Blending of Autobiography and Fiction

Though not easily categorized according to the label, *Look at the Harlequins!* can be illuminated in terms of what is referred to as "autofiction," a term coined in 1977 by Sergé Doubrovsky that has since been used to characterize works by authors, such as Vassilis Alexakis, Martin Amis, Christine Angot, Paul Auster, Michel Butor, Catherine Cusset, Guillaume Dustan, Annie Ernaux, Alice Ferney, Philippe Forest, Francisco Goldman, Juan Goytisolo, Camille Laurens, Catherine Millet, Olivia Rosenthal, W.G. Sebald, and Anne Wiazemsky. A "portmanteau word" formed by blending *autobiographie* [autobiography] and *fiction* [fiction], *autofiction*, as Mar Garcia writes, "désigne souvent de manière sommaire des textes hybrids situés quelque part entre le roman et l'autobiographie [often designates in a summary fashion hybrid texts situated somewhere between the novel and autobiography]" (150-151)[2]. As such, both the concept and the term *autofiction* have been linked by its theorists to the similar English-language, essentially American concept of "faction"

[2] All bracketed translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

(Gasparini I) —a term formed by blending “fact” and “fiction” and that has been applied to such so-called “non-fiction novels” as Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*.

Autofiction essentially owes its conceptual existence to the theory of autobiography that was then being developed by Phillippe Lejeune. As Philippe Gasparini notes, “le mot autofiction est apparu immédiatement après la publication d'un texte fondateur en matière de poétique, *Le Pacte autobiographique* [the word autofiction appeared immediately after the publication of a foundational text on poetics, *The Autobiographical Pact*]” in which Lejuene sought to distinguish between autobiography and the strictly homodiegetic novel—to, in other words, establish theoretical grounds on which, a genuine autobiography be distinguished from a fiction presented as a first-person narrative account of a narrator-protagonist’s own experiences. Such works are textually indistinguishable from each other: “Il faut bien l'avouer,” Lejeune writes, “si l'on reste sur le plan de l'analyse interne du texte, il n'y a aucune différence” [“It must be admitted that if one looks only at an internal textual analysis, there is no difference”] (qtd. in Gasparaini II). Both present narratives filtered through the subject perceptions of a narrator-protagonist who employs first-person pronouns by way of self-reference. The distinction is to be found, then, outside of the strictly textual, in the more broadly contextual.

Lejeune defines autobiography as a distinct genre in terms of two commitments that comprise a particular contract between author and reader that he terms the “le pacte autobiographique”: “the autobiographical pact.” The first commitment is to the mutual identity of author, narrator, and protagonist: the autobiographer is the author of a text, narrated by him in his own name, of which he himself and the life that he has lived are the primary subjects. This identification of a narrator-protagonist with and as the author is not to

be made in the case of the homodiegetic novel, which may be regarded as a "fictional autobiography," but not a genuine one. The second commitment is to the fundamental veracity/facticity of the narrative account provided: the narrative has not been invented by the author but corresponds directly to actual lived experience. According to Gasparini, Sergé Doubrovsky read Lejeune's book, which was published in 1975, while he was writing a book that would ultimately be published two years later as *Fils*; and he recognized in Lejeune's theory certain of his own narrative practices in what he regarded as a novel, the protagonist of which had his own actual name. "Le héros d'un roman déclaré tel peut-il avoir le même nom que l'auteur?" he wrote to Lejeune. "Rien n'empêcherait la chose d'exister, et c'est peut-être une contradiction interne dont on pourrait tirer des effets intéressants. Mais, dans la pratique, aucun exemple ne se présente à l'esprit d'une telle recherche" ["Can not the protagonist of a novel have the same name as the author? Nothing prevents such a thing, and it is perhaps an internal contradiction that could be used to create interesting effects. But in practice, no example comes to mind of such a pursuit."] (Qtd. in Gasparini II).

As originally conceived by Doubrovsky, *autofiction* is defined as "fiction d'évènements et de faits strictement réels" ["fiction of strictly real events and facts"]; and to have engaged in the undertaking is d'avoir confié le langage d'une aventure à l'aventure du langage" … to have committed the language of an adventure to the adventure of language"] (Qtd in Gasparini II). Though originally conceived as a label specifically and only for *Fils*, the term was adopted by theorist and critic Jacques Lecarme, who began to attempt to establish autofiction more firmly as a literary genre. Lecarme retained Doubrovsky's original definition of *autofiction* as essentially autobiography properly regarded, through its employment of fictive techniques, as fiction. But as the term gained greater ground, it was

appropriated by other theorists and critics who began to extend and re-define it in ways more in accordance with established theories and notions of *fiction*—including most notably Gérard Genette, Vincent Colonna, and Philippe Lejeune himself.

To the extent that autofiction as conceived by Doubrovsky and Lecarme is or may be said to be fictive, it is only, essentially, through the quasi-autobiographer's employment of techniques, strategies, and devices that have been traditionally employed by writers of fiction. For Doubrovsky, as for many theorists and critics, this is sufficient for such a text to be considered at least partially fictive in nature. But autofiction as defined in this way does not seem to truly differ in any particularly meaningful way from autobiography as defined by Lejeune, for it retains or seems to retain both of the commitments that comprise the autobiographical pact. The claim here is that a Lejeunean autobiography can yet be fictive; but it is a claim that is largely asserted rather than demonstrated. Doubrovsky seems to want us to presume that the autobiographical pact does not actually adhere in the case of autofiction because though the narrator-protagonist shares the author's name and even, it would seem, biography, they cannot be said to be the same person because the autodiegetic narrator-protagonist is fundamentally fictive and the author is, of course, an actual individual. But it is not clear on what grounds the fundamental fictivity of the autodiegetic narrator-protagonist is to be asserted. It would seem to depend only upon another presumed assertion—that the text itself is fundamentally fictive. And this assertion, in turn, seems to derive only from the author's employment of techniques, strategies, and devices commonly deployed in fiction and not traditionally employed by autobiographers. The "argument" ultimately seems to beg the question more often than not, and to "answer" it through

tautological reasoning. For this reason, many have questioned whether Doubrovsky's autofiction really can or should be considered distinct from autobiography.

There is another line of reasoning according to which Doubrovsky's autofiction might be considered to be fiction. A number of theorists of autobiography and historiography more broadly—including Paul John Eakin and Hayden White—argue that any and all such narratives are ultimately "fictive" Autobiography relies, such critics argue, upon subjective memory and perception, which are not commensurate with the actuality of an irretrievable actual past, and which often cannot be confirmed or verified by other sources. Eakin refers in *Fictions in Autobiography* to "the vexingly unverifiable referentiality of autobiographical texts" (19), arguing that there is often little authority beyond the text itself on which to take it as factual. And the narrative structure of conventional autobiographies—and of modern historiographical works more broadly, White argues in "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," "imposes" a fundamentally artificial narrative structure, often complete with a specific interpretation and built-in meaning, upon past experience and otherwise discrete events with no necessary relations. "The coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life" that such narratives provide, White declares, "is and can only be imaginary" (27) and therefore, more or less fictional. Rather than illuminating the distinction between genuine autobiography and fiction, however, such an argument tends to blur it further; followed to its logical end, such an argument results in the claim that any and all (textual) representations are more or less equivalent in terms of their relations, or lack thereof, to an extra-textual actual world.

As opposed to Doubrovsky's theoretically problematic definition, Lejeune, Genette, and Colonna describe an "autofiction" that is ultimately much more grounded not only in

Lejeune's "autobiographical pact," but in a theoretical approach to fiction that clearly distinguishes it from what is often referred to as "natural" discourse about or contextualized according to the real or actual world. For these theorists, Gasparini writes,

> le néologisme « auto-fiction » désignait, à l'évidence, une fiction de soi. Autrement dit : une projection de l'auteur dans des situations imaginaires. Il revint à Vincent Colonna de développer cette idée, d'abord dans une thèse dirigée par Genette, puis dans un livre paru en 2004 aux éditions Tristram : *Autofictions et autres mythomanies littéraires.* Pour lui, l'autofiction relève du « fantastique » : « L'écrivain (…) transfigure son existence et son identité dans une histoire irréelle, indifférente à la vraisemblance ». (V)
>
> [For Philippe Lejeune, Gérard Genette and Vincent Colonna, the neologism "auto-fiction" designated, obviously, a fiction of the self. In other words, a projection of the author into imaginary situations. It fell to Vincent Colonna to develop this idea, in a thesis directed by Genette, then in a book published by Tristram Editions in 2004, *Autofictions et autres mythomanes littérares* [*Autofictions and Other Literary Mythomanias*]. For him, autofiction comes under the "fantastic": "The writer… transfigures his existence and his identity in an unreal story, indifferent to plausibility."] (V)

Colonna's definition/conception of autofiction (which Lecarme recognizes but distinguishes from "true" autofiction) is that of "fiction of the self." The subject of this type of autofictive text is the autobiographical self—the author-narrator-protagonist who inscribes his actual, extra-textual existence in a narrative consisting wholly or partly in non-actual, fictive events that may also involve non-actual, fictive settings, characters, etc. Understood in this way, the label autofiction would apply to works as diverse as Dante's *Commedia* [*The Divine Comedy*] (1308-1321), Jean Paul's *Biographie conjecturale* [*Conjectural Biography*] (1799), and Dominique Rolin's *Le Gâteau des morts* (1982) [*The Deathday Cake* (1987)], to name three specifically cited by Colonna; and Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004), which Gasparini singles out as particularly noteworthy.

This is the conception of autofiction implicated when Mar Garcia writes, "L'autofiction met l'accent sur la métamorphose et le travestissement, sur l'exploration de

l'altérité, sur la possibilité de vivre d'autres vies tout en se passant des intermédiaires qu'impose le roman" ["Autofiction emphasizes transformation and "dressing up," the exploration of alterity, the [possibility of living other lives, all the while doing without the intermediaries imposed by the novel"]; and, "La suppression du *–bios* et l'ajout de «fiction» permet à l'autofiction de se parer des atouts du roman sans renoncer pour autant au «je» qui, délivré de ses devoirs d'autobiographe (sincérité, éthique du vrai), peut enfin pratiquer le vieux rêve de la liberté illimitée –il peut promettre à la fois la confession et les mensonges" (150) ["The suppression of *-bios* and the addition of "fiction" allows autofiction to array itself with the benefits of the novel without, for all that, renouncing the "I" that, freed of its autobiographical duties (sincerity, truthfulness), can at last practice the old dream of unlimited freedom; it can promise confession and lies at the same time."] (150). The blend of autobiographical/historiographical fact and fiction that we encounter in such autofictive "fictions of the self" represents a game of hide-and-seek that the author instigates with the reader. It is, Garcia claims, "une invitation à lire entre les lignes, à dévoiler des énigmes, en un mot, à participer à la lecture de manière créative" ["an invitation to read between the lines, to reveal enigmas, in a word, to participate in reading in a creative way"] (150). The proper understanding of such texts depends upon and entails the ability to recognize what is factual, what is fictional, and/or what is indeterminate or ambiguous. It depends, that is, on recognizing their hybrid nature in terms of the blending of "natural" and "fictive" discourse—terms/concepts that will now be explored more fully….

III. Separating Fact and Fiction: On "Fictive" vs. "Natural" Discourse

Since the word *fiction* entered the English language, some time, it seems, in the fourteenth century— its earliest recorded use occurred in 1398, by John Trevisa in his translation of Bartholomew de Glanville's *De proprietatibus rerum* [*On the Order of Things*] ("Fiction")—it has been variously used to denote a wide array of related, but significantly different concepts and phenomena, many of them with pejorative connotations. Consequently, there is often a great deal of ambiguity surrounding the use of the label. The lack of precision with which the word is often employed—and the need for such precision of such importance—that Dorrit Cohn opens her theoretical examination of fiction, entitled *The Distinction of Fiction*, with a broad consideration of the various meanings attached to it:

> As the philosopher Hans Vaihinger remarked almost a century ago, "The word 'fiction' is subject to chaotic and perverse linguistic usage; even logicians employ it in different meanings, without taking the pains to define the term or to distinguish among its different meanings." Divergences in the significance of the term are plainly visible from the dictionary entries under fiction. Their only common denominator, it appears, is that they all designate "something invented"—a notion no less vaguely denotative than (though not exactly identical to) the word's Latin root, *fingere*, "to make or form." (Cohn 1)

In order to distinguish it particularly from the four broad meanings of "fiction as untruth, fiction as conceptual abstraction, fiction as (all) literature, and fiction as (all) narrative" (2), Cohn employs the term "in its specific generic meaning as a literary nonreferential narrative text"—a "use of the word [that] is not unusual," she declares: "in English critical language, *fiction* as the designation for an invented narrative—novel, novella, short story—has been current for more than a century and is, of course, a standard term for publishers, book reviewers, and librarians" (1-2). Such a generic meaning was in use as early as the late-sixteenth century: the first recorded use of *fiction* to mean "a statement or narrative

proceeding from mere invention; such statements collectively" occurred in 1599, when it appeared with this sense in Francis Thynne's *Animadversions* ("Fiction"). And by the mid-nineteenth century, it was being used explicitly to contrast with the broad genre of *nonfiction*, the first recorded use of which occurred in 1867, when in its earliest, hyphenated form it appeared in that year's edition of the *Annual Reports [of the] Boston Public Library* ("Non-fiction"). It is precisely such a distinction—fiction and nonfiction as separate, broad literary genres or representational modes—that is at issue in the case of autofiction and similar texts, such as Nabokov's *Look at the Harlequins!*, which directly implicate autobiography and blend it with fiction.

The more pronounced theoretical aspects of Cohn's treatment of fiction as a distinct literary genre or mode are informed and influenced by the work of German literary theorist Käte Hamburger—particularly, her ground-breaking book *Die Logik der Dichtung* (1957, 1973) [*The Logic of Literature* (1993)]. Firmly grounded in Aristotelian poetics, Husserlian phenomenology, and Wittgensteinian philosophy of language, Hamburger's work is profoundly concerned, as she writes, with "the definition and establishment of the concepts 'literature' and 'reality,' for our poetological observations are always, whether explicitly or implicitly, based upon this definition" (8). It is both, as Hamburger herself writes, 1) "*a theory of language*, which investigates whether that language which produces the forms of literature… differs *functionally* from the language of thought and communication, and, if so, to what extent. *The logic of literature* qua *linguistic theory of literature has as its object the relation of literature to the general system of language*" (3); and as Gérard Genette declares, 2) "a logic of literary *genres*" (xi).

Hamburger describes literature as "something other than reality" (9), and identifies it, through Aristotelian concepts/definitions of ποίησι (*poiesis*) and μίμησις (*mimesis*), specifically with *fiction*. To literature/fiction, she opposes what she terms "reality-statement": essentially any utterance that might be legitimately—that is, logically or reasonably—made by a potentially existing human entity. Hamburger implicitly defines of "the real" as the logically possible—an approach that suggests Roman Ingarden's phenomenological ontology as concerned with the potentially existing rather than the actually existing. The question of logical legitimacy is necessarily tied, for Hamburger, to the notion of what she terms the *statement-subject*. The statement-subject is neither an *actual* individual speaker nor a grammatical subject; rather it seems to represent a kind of *function* that may or may not be invested by an actual or hypothetical speaker—either of which represents a "real" statement-subject. If the statement can or could be legitimately made, according to the limits of human perception and knowledge, by an actual or even hypothetical human speaker, then the statement-subject is real and the utterance is properly characterized as "reality-statement." If not, then the statement-subject is necessarily not logically possible and is therefore fictive; consequently, the statements made by the fictive statement-subject are also themselves fundamentally fictive.

Hamburger's approach allows her to claim that fiction is recognizable as such by certain textual properties, that there are certain characteristics and features that "mark" a text and/or discourse as fictive rather than as reality-statement. These markers essentially revolve around the *Ich-origo*, or "I-originarity"—a term that she appropriates from phenomenology—of another human being. The "I-originarity" may be understood as the autonomous individual subject-hood of a entity, as a self-experience that is fundamentally

imperceptible and unknowable to others. Any representation of a human agent as such a subject—as an autonomous, sentient, self-aware, self-experiencing, thinking, and feeling subject with a fundamentally unknowable inner life—is necessarily fictive in nature according to Hamburger. It does not, and cannot, belong to "reality-statement" because there is no logically possible statement-subject capable of knowing with certainty the I-originarity of another human entity. Any statement-subject declaring the I-originarity of another human entity is not logically possible, is therefore necessarily fictive, and so the statements themselves are also fundamentally fictive. Consequently, any characteristic or feature that represents the I-originarity of a fictional character itself represents a distinguishing feature of fiction/fictive discourse. Hamburger identifies no fewer than four: 1) the use of verbs of inner action; 2) interior narrated monologue (*erlebte Rede*); 3) the anachronistic conjunction of deictic pronouns with the ("epic") preterite; and 4) dialogue and monologue as representation (rather than reporting). The significance of the first two features are obvious – they directly represent the inner life of characters, an inner life that we assume or posit or recognize in other actual people, but cannot actually *know* and, therefore, *represent*. The third characteristic stems from the conventional use of the preterite in fictive texts, not to indicate or refer to an actual past, but to confer a greater "sense" of the "reality" of what is being represented. This use of the preterite Hamburger calls the "epic preterite." What it *actually* represents is the fundamental *a-temporality* of the fictive world; since it is not "real," the time and space that it represents are not real either – the fictive world/text exists outside of time and space, as it were. Consequently, we can and do use deictic pronouns that would be nonsensical and unacceptable in conjunction with the preterite in "reality-statement" or "serious discourse" – but which, owing to the fundamental a-temporality of the

fictive text and the identification of time *within* the text as relative, are *not* in conjunction with the *epic* preterite. (That is, we can say, to use one of Hamburger's example, "Tomorrow was Christmas" in a fiction without, most likely, a reader's even noticing the illogicality.)

There is a great deal to recommend this theory and approach—particularly a rigorous and logically coherent system that objectifies the subject of literary study. There is also much that is lost, however. First and foremost among these things is ability to refer to anything but third-person narrative, what Hamburger calls "epic narrative," as *fiction* proper. And while her argument concerning *erlebte Rede* and the anachronistic use of deictic pronouns as textual markers of ficticity is compelling, the arguments pertaining to the use of "verbs of inner action" and to dialogue/monologue are more problematic, for related reasons. Hamburger is forced to distinguish between dialogue/monologue as "representation" and dialogue/monologue" as "reporting": as reportage, it is permissible as reality-statement; as direct representation, is properly fictive. This claim depends in part upon her claim that "to say" and other similar verbs denoting speech are really "verbs of inner action," since speech implies and depends upon thought. She also seems to argue that since it is improbable or unlikely that an actual human being would or could remember long stretches of dialogue or monologue that occurred in the past verbatim, then such representations of speech, whether direct or indirect must be understood as *mimetic* representation rather than the reality-statement of reporting. Both arguments seem rather specious.

Hamburger's stance regarding the role of ostensibly "real references" in fiction—that is, references that are ostensibly to actually existing, extra-textual things—is also problematic. Such references would belong to "reality statement"; but their incorporation into fictive discourse, Hamburger declares, "fictionalizes" them, divesting them of whatever

actual referential dimension they might otherwise have and rendering them fundamentally fictive statements. “The real,” when incorporated into fictive discourse, is subsumed to it and transformed by it. And, she tells us, we recognize a text as fictive upon the first appearance of one of the textual markers characteristic of fiction. Strict adherence to this theory would seem to demand that any text including a single example of a fictive statement irreconcilable with reality-statement be regarded as fundamentally fictive in its entirety.

The result is that if we follow Hamburger’s theory we are ultimately forced to regard many texts that might on other grounds be recognized as fictive as “reality-statement,” and many texts that might on other grounds be recognized as nonfiction as fiction. Hamburger herself seems aware that this poses a significant problem, for she makes certain allowances for “special forms” of fiction, such as certain first-person narratives that might be more properly characterized as reality-statement. And while she never addresses this issue directly, surely she is aware that historiographers and biographers commonly employ the devices that she regards as fundamentally and inherently fictive in nature and would not want to regard all such textual products as fictions. The implied black-and-white either-or approach to fiction and “reality-statement” is particularly problematic for the proper understanding of autofiction and similar works.

Though she continues largely in the tradition of Hamburger in *The Distinction of Fiction*, Dorrit Cohn also relaxes Hamburger’s strict “logic of literature” to consider the role played by referentiality in distinguishing fictive from natural discourse in ways that approach a more satisfactory method. Like Hamburger, Cohn also asserts the existence of textual indicators that “mark” the fictive text. And she essentially adopts those elucidated by Hamburger referring to them more or less *en masse* when she notes a recourse to narrative

representational forms not permitted in referential/historiographical narrative. She pays particular attention to the epic preterite, which she refers to as "psycho-narration," and dialogue. But she also recognizes two additional "signposts of fictionality," as she calls them—"signposts" not treated at all by Hamburger, since they derive from a narratological perspective that Hamburger consistently and intentionally avoids. The first is a "synchronic bi-level model" of narrative fiction, which consists in "story" and "narrative," or *discourse* and *récit*, to use Gérard Genette's terminology. This same model does not, Cohn says, apply to referential/historiographical narrative. The second is the separation of the narrative function into two figures: the author, and the narrator: again, according to Cohn, a feature absent from referential/historiographical narrative. Both signposts derive from Cohn's specific definition of fiction according to its "specific generic meaning as a literary *nonreferential* narrative text" (emphasis mine)—a definition that largely accords very well with Hamburger's own understanding, but breaks significantly from her on the issue of referentiality with respect to an actual, extra-textual world.

Cohn rejects Hamburger's notion of "reality-statement," as logically possible and legitimate discourse, as the proper oppositional term with respect to fiction. Instead, she distinguishes between referential narrative, identified with nonfiction, and nonreferential narrative, identified with fiction. "The adjective *nonreferential* in the definitional phrase," she declares, "signifies that a work of fiction itself creates the world to which it refers by referring to it" (13). In other words, nonreferential narrative represents and points to a non-actual world that has no ontological status independent of the representation itself: the nonreferential exists only in and through its representation. The *referential*, on the other hand, represents and points to the actual world, which has an independent ontological

existence prior to and apart from its representation; the referential depends in way, shape, or form on any representation of it. Expressed in Robert Scholes' terms, the writer of referential narrative asserts that the narrated events did, in fact, occur prior to their "entextualization" in a narrative, while "in fiction the events may be said to be created by and with the text" (qtd. in Cohn 15), to occur as a direct result of their entextualization. Because the diegetic content of referential narrative exists independently of it, referential narratives are verifiable: they are "subject to judgments of truth and falsity" (15): "We can check on the accuracy of a Thomas Mann biography, point out factual errors, and write a new one based newly discovered evidence," Cohn declares (16). Nonreferential narratives are, on the other hand, unverifiable, because their diegetic content is inextricable from the narrative that entextualizes it. "No competent novel reader would be inclined to check on the accuracy of Hans Castorp's life as told in *The Magic Mountain* or consult the archives to find out whether he was killed on the World War I battlefield where his fictional life ends" (16).

The referential status of a statement and/or the ontological status of referents is, then, an important consideration for Cohn. She agrees with Hamburger, however, concerning the totalizing effect of ficticity on any and all constituent statements, referring explicitly "to what hamburger calls 'the process of fictionalization' when she declares that "external references do not remain truly external when they enter a fictional world. They are, as it were, contaminated from within" (15). In other words, the incorporation of external references into fiction essentially transforms them into fictive references, so that their real relations to the actual extra-textual world become more or less moot.

Cohn's insistence on the significance of referentiality and the actual ontological status of referents is shared by John Searle, whose "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse" lays

out an alternate argument. In contrast to Hamburger and Cohn, Searle denies that there are any "semantic or syntactical" features that can or do distinguish "fictional discourse" from what he terms "serious" discourse. What sets "fictional discourse" apart from "serious discourse" in Searle's view is that serious discourse consists in illocutionary acts governed by "vertical" conventions that relate them to the actual world in actual situations and contexts. Fictional discourse, on the other hand, is characterized by "horizontal" conventions that effectively sever these relations. This is similar to Cohn's distinction between the referential—governed in Searlean terms by vertical conventions—and the nonreferential—governed in Searlean terms by horizontal conventions. Put simply, "serious discourse" relates to the actual world; fictional discourse does not. The referring acts of fictional discourse are *pretended* referring-acts—pretended because they do not refer to actually existing things. Referring acts that do actually refer, however—because the referents actually exist independently of the text—remain "real references," even when incorporated into a fiction. Searle denies the totalizing effect of fictive discourse and the "process of fictionalization" described by Hamburger and referenced by Cohn.

Searle's model of fiction essentially subscribes to an "as-if structure" theory of fiction, identifying fiction (and fictional discourse) with the *feigned*. What distinguishes the represented "reality" of fictional discourse from the representations of and references to the actual world in serious discourse is ultimately, the actual ontological status of referents; and this ontological status cannot be determined by any textual indicators or features, Searle says. Consequently, if fictional discourse is to be distinguished at all from serious discourse, it would seem that such a distinction must be made based on extra-textual knowledge concerning the author's "seriousness" of purpose or intent, and/or the (non-) actuality of the

implicated referents. Searle essentially concludes that text alone is insufficient for recognizing a work as fictive or nonfictive. Readers must rely upon context; and this context includes "the illocutionary intentions of the author," who intended either to engage in serious discourse, or in "the nondeceptive pseudoperformance" of fictional discourse, "which constitutes pretending to recount to us a series of events" (325)

IV. Fiction as Make-Believe: Gregory Currie's *The Nature of Fiction* (1990)

Each of the theories outlined above has certain compelling and attractive features as well as shortcomings or problematic aspects. The theory of fiction that Gregory Currie develops through his philosophical investigation into the "nature of fiction" in his book of the same name—*The Nature of Fiction* (1990)—combines many of the more convincing elements of these various accounts in one of the more compelling single theories of fiction to emerge in the past several decades. Most importantly for our purposes, Currie provides a theoretical and critical context that allows for the reading and understanding of autofiction and similar texts not simply as fiction, or even as fiction containing some real references, but as a blend of "natural" and fictive discursive practices.

A. Making Believe and the Role of Authorial Intentionality

Despite certain significant differences from both, at its most fundamental level, Currie's theory represents something of a synthesis of Searle's and Smith's respective positions. According to Currie fiction is defined jointly by 1) the intent of the utterance(s) in which the fiction consists—or rather, the attitude toward the propositions of a fiction that the reader is intended to take; and 2) the actual truth-value of those utterances—that is, the truth-value of

those references in the actual world. To the extent that Currie rejects a "pretence theory" of fiction in favor of a "make-believe theory," he might be said to maintain with Hamburger that fiction is to be defined as an "as-structure" rather than an "as-if" structure. But, like Searle, he adamantly disavows any notion that fiction is marked by certain more or less unique verbal structures, denying that there is any "linguistic feature necessarily shared by all fictional works and necessarily absent from all nonfictional works"(3)—such as the verbs of inner action, interior narrated monologue, the anachronistic conjunction of deictic pronouns with the preterite, or dialogue/monologue as representation rather than reporting that Hamburger identifies as proper only to, and denotative of fiction. "It is possible"—he declares—"for two works to be alike in verbal structures—yet for one to be fiction and the other not" (2). Further, Currie also argues that, in Searle's words, "the identifying criterion for whether or not a text is a work of fiction must of necessity lie in the illocutionary intentions of the author" (325). It is precisely such notions of illocutionary force and intentionality that lie at the foundation of Currie's theory of fiction. What distinguishes fiction from nonfiction is that it is the product of a different kind of illocutionary act, with a different *force*. "Whereas the writer of nonfiction performs the illocutionary act of asserting," says Currie, "the writer of fiction performs a different, characteristically fictional, illocutionary act" (14).

This characterization is more or less in keeping with the theory of fiction advanced by Barbara Hernnstein Smith in her lecture series *Exchanging Words: On the Economics and Ethics of Verbal Transactions*.[3] Here, Smith identifies fiction not with non-serious referring acts and non-actual referents, nor with an un-real statement-subject, but with the kinds of

[3] Published in *On the Margins of Discourse*: *The Relation of Literature to Language*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978. 79-154. Print.

commitment inherent in the speech-act itself. Smith opposes what she terms the "linguistic playground" to the "linguistic marketplace" in what is essentially an economic model of language and speech-acts. The "linguistic marketplace" is the domain of Searle's "serious discourse," and speech-acts there represent, in effect, economic currency with economic value. But there are certain statements that are "unspeakable"—that do not or cannot be used as currency in the kinds of economic transactions represented by serious speech. Such utterances are fundamentally un-serious in that they have no transaction-value and seemingly entail no commitments in terms of the real world. They are contextualized according to the conventions of the "linguistic playground"—the realm of fiction—rather than the "linguistic marketplace." The boundaries separating the linguistic marketplace from the playground are both real and understood or intuited, Smith says; not by textual properties, however, but by contextual signals. While she does not enumerate a great many of such signals, nor explicate them in any great depth, she suggests that certain situational variables, including tone of voice, pitch, stance, poise, body position, physical gestures, etc. are all crucial in indicating that what is (about to be, or is being) said is *fictive* in nature.

This same characterization of fiction-making as representing a distinct illocutionary act represents a fundamental disagreement with Searle's "pretence theory" of fiction. According to Searle's theory, in a proposition that Currie terms the "functionality principle" (14), employing language creatively does not and cannot represent a separate illocutionary act because "in general the illocutionary act (or acts) performed in the utterance of the sentence is a function of the meaning of the sentence…. If the sentences in a work of fiction were used to perform some completely different speech acts from those determined by their literal meaning, they would have to have some other meaning" (Searle 324). The work of

fiction consists not simply in language, Searle argues, but in the individual illocutionary acts that its constituent utterances already represent. In other words, each individual sentence appearing in a work of fiction, by virtue of the language in which it consists, has its own independent meaning and its own illocutionary force, which remains constant across the fictional discourse/serious discourse divide. Consequently, there can be no illocutionary difference between fictional and serious utterances; and so fiction cannot be defined in terms of its own distinct illocutionary force. The author of fiction is not making utterances with a distinctly fictive illocutionary force—he is *pretending* to make utterances with the illocutionary forces that they have by virtue of their more fundamental meaning. Searle's "pretence theory" is a version of the "as-if"-structure theory of fiction that Hamburger rejects in favor of an "as-structure" theory.

Currie rejects this notion, declaring simply, "The same sentence *can* be used to perform distinct illocutionary acts" (15). Individual sentences *may*, he argues, all be produced with a greater, overarching intentionality and illocutionary force that characterizes or defines the work as a whole as a single utterance, the product of a single speech-act. "There is a kind of act engaged in by an author of fiction and in virtue of which his text is fictional," Currie asserts; "we may call it an act of *fiction-making*" (11). According to Currie, the distinct illocutionary acts of *asserting*—which belongs to and is characteristic of nonfiction—and *fiction-making* are defined in terms of the attitude that the reader is intended to take toward the propositions in which the text as a whole consists: "What the other of fiction does intend is that the reader take a certain attitude toward the propositions uttered in the course of his performance. This is the attitude we often describe, rather vaguely, in terms of 'imaginative involvement' or (better) 'make-believe.' We are intended by the author to

make believe that the story uttered is true" (18). The reader of nonfiction, on the other hand, is intended to *believe* (i.e., to take the attitude of belief) the propositions (21).

The difference between belief and make-belief would seem best explained in terms of different kinds of belief: *dispositional* and *occurrent* belief. The former, which may be alternatively referred to as "evidential belief," is evidence-based; the latter, which may be alternatively referred as "perceptual belief," is perception-base. When we *occurrently* disbelieve a proposition, we "have the falsity of that proposition vividly before our minds. Usually we do not disbelieve the propositions of a fiction in this sense," Currie says (8). "We dispositionally, rather than occurrently, disbelieve the propositions of a fiction," he continues. "As readers and theatergoers we do not have the falsity of the story vividly before our minds" (8). That is, we may on a deeper level be aware of the fundamental ficticity of the work of fiction (an awareness deriving from empirical evidence and reason); but our occurrent disbelief is suspended, allowing us to accept, within the prescribed situational boundaries, the propositions of the fictive work.

Ultimately, this is not so very different from what Smith says with respect to the difference between fictive and natural discourses: In fictive discourse,

> the reader and author have entered a special relationship, one that is governed by assumptions, claims, and responsibilities quite different from those that obtain between the speaker and listener of a natural utterance. It is precisely the suspension [of the assumption "that the speaker means what he says and that the listener will take him to mean what he says"] that defines fictive discourse. (111)

In other words, the reader of fiction understands that he is intended to assume a different attitude, an attitude other than one of belief, to the propositions comprising the fiction-maker's utterance. The assumptions, claims, and responsibilities obtaining between author

and reader belong instead around a game of make-believe, engaged in beyond the boundaries of the "linguistic marketplace," in the "linguistic playground."

B. Reasonable Inference and "Background"

How precisely does adopting the attitude of make-belief work, and what precisely is it that we are making believe when we do so? Currie distinguishes between three inter-related terms: make-belief, make-believe, and making believe. "Make-believe [is] something we do," he writes. "'Make-belief' denotes a propositional *attitude*: an attitude we take toward the propositions of a story. But we also speak of something *being* make-believe…. In this sense, make-believe is a propositional *operator* (**M**) [as fiction is also treated as a propositional operator (**F**)]" (72). In adopting the attitude of make-belief that the author intends toward the propositions of a fiction, we are engaged in the act of making believe what is properly regarded as make-believe. All of this is part of what Currie refers to as the "game of make-believe," which represents the broader context in which fiction is read. What is make-believe—that is, what is true-in-the-game-of-make-believe (**M**)—and what is fictive—that is, what is true-in-the-fiction) (**F**)—"normally overlap a great deal," Currie notes; for what is fictive is precisely that which we are intended to make-believe. "But there are things that are make-believe in games of fiction that are not true in the corresponding fictions.

> It can be make-believe in a game of fiction that I am reading an account of events that have occurred, but that is not part of the fiction itself, since the story says nothing about me.
>
> In this way, each reader's reading generates a fiction larger than the fiction being read. (72-73)

According to Currie, one such part of the game of make-believe is

> not merely that the events described in the text occurred, but that we are being told about those events by someone with knowledge of them. Thus it is part of the make-

> believe that the reader is in contact, through channels of reliable information, with the characters and their actions, that the reader learns about their activities from a reliable source. To make-believe a fictional story is not merely to make-believe that the story is true, but *that it is told as known fact*. (72-73)

This implies, of course, a teller—a "fictional construct "similar to Hamburger's fiction-narrating "statement-subject" that Currie notes can be variously referred to as "an 'implied,' 'apparent,' 'postulated,' or 'ideal' author" (76). Currie himself adopts and employs the term "fictional author" to refer to this figure: the "fictional character constructed within our make-believe whom we take to be telling us the story as known fact" (76).

What the actual author of the fiction intends for us to make-believe is what the fictional author "believes"—in the sense, really, of what he knows to be true—concerning what he is telling us. "Our reading is thus an exploration of the fictional author's belief structure," Currie declares (76). And "the reader's task is to work out what the fictional author believes" (Currie 79). And the fictional author's belief set—what is true-in-the-fiction—is determined through both the text itself, and a complementary background of assumptions. The text alone is insufficient, Currie says: "When we try to build up a picture of someone's belief set we don't proceeds mechanically, by listing all the indicative sentences he utters, concluding that his beliefs are exactly the propositions expressed by those sentences" (77). As a general rule, Currie suggests, following David Lewis, that where no explicit dissimilarity between the world of the fiction and the actual world is asserted or implied, their similarity is and must be assumed. This extends, too, to the fictional author: though distinct from the actual author of the work, where no explicit dissimilarity is indicated in the text, we assume similarity. Specific assumptions about what the fictional author believes derive first and foremost, and primarily, then, from 1) what is known of the community to which the fictional author belongs and/or in which the work was produced ,

and 2) what may be reasonably inferred from that. This leads Currie to the "concept of an *informed reader*, a reader who knows the relevant facts about the community in which the work was written. The informed reader, unlike the fictional author, is not a fictional entity. A real reader can be an informed reader" (79). Ultimately, what is true-in-the-fiction is defined in terms of what it is reasonable for the informed reader of the story to infer that the fictional author believes (80). These beliefs, because they are those of a non-existent figure, are constituted by and through an informed reading of the text. Consequently, "as we read, we learn more about his beliefs, and we may come to change earlier hypotheses about what his beliefs are. Understanding the fictional author is thus like understanding a real person; it's a matter of making the best overall sense we can of his behavior" (76).

Such a theory is susceptible to accusations of what the American New Critics Monroe C. Beardsley and W.K. Wimsatt termed "the intentional fallacy." Yet the approach here is, Currie asserts, consistent with their critical approach as grounded in close textual reading. The text itself must not only allow for the kinds of assumptions that function to comprise in part the belief set of the fictional author; it must make them reasonably inferable: "To make a proposition *P* true in his fiction the author has to compose sentences that against the background of relevant community belief, make it reasonable for the reader to infer that the fictional author believes *P*" (109-110). It is not fallacious, Currie argues, to ascribe any particular intention to the author, with respect to what the reader is to make-believe (by ascribing a corresponding belief to the fictional author) if it is prompted by reasonable textual evidence. Consequently, such ascribed or assumed intentions/beliefs can be considered "internal to the text"; for Beardsley and Wimsatt declare, "What is (1) internal… is discovered through the semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of

the language, through grammars, dictionaries and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general *all that makes a language and culture*" (qtd. in Currie 110). "All that makes a language and a culture" would include, Currie argues, the "patterns of belief in a community" that comprise the "background" against or in which the work is read—the "background" from which the reader, in conjunction with more direct textual evidence, makes reasonable inferences/assumptions about what the fictional author believes (110-111).

C. The Signaling of Authorial Intentions: "Background" and/as Paratext

Reasonable inferences are based on textual evidence indicating or "signaling" authorial intentions concerning what the reader is to make-believe. The recognition of such evidence depends in part, as Currie demonstrates, on the informed reader's knowledge of the actual world. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to, knowledge of the actual author; knowledge of the kind of actual-world community or communities to which the fictional author can be ascertained to belong; and knowledge of any actual world referents implicated by/in the fiction. It also depends upon how the reader regards and understands the work as a whole—

> not only on the structure of the story but upon the *purpose* we perceive that structure to have, upon our *expectations* about the way in which the story will develop as we read, and upon our perception of certain elements as having a certain kind of *salience* within the story. And our perception of these things depends crucially on assumptions we make about the author's intentions…. Fielding's *Shamela Andrews* would be a mystifying work if we did not know it was intended as a travesty of Richardson's *Pamela*. (Currie 118)

And so our knowledge of the relations of the text to other texts; of the conventions and characteristics of literary genres, movements, and traditions; of literary history and even of history and institutions of literary publication is implicated as well. Some of these things

may, to a certain extent and from certain perspectives, be considered "internal to the text," as Currie suggests through his interpretation of Beardsley and Wimsatt's definition of that term. Many of them are clearly not, however, directly or explicitly textual in the sense that they belong to the main text itself. They are, to use Gerard Genette's terminology, *paratextual*.

Genette opens his 1987 work *Seuils* [*Paratexts* (1997)] by noting, "A literary work consists, entirely or essentially, of a text, defined (very minimally) as a more or less long sequence of verbal statements that are more or less endowed with significance.

> But this text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book. These accompanying productions, which vary in extent and appearance, constitute what I have called elsewhere [*Palimpsestes* (1981)] the work's *paratext*. (1)

Paratext, in other words, is what situates the text within the broader context of the actual world in which it 1) has been produced—first and foremost by an author, through a process of composition and inscription; but also by representatives, such as editors, publishers, translators, etc., of the formal institutions of literary production and publication)—; and 2) is and is intended to be read and interpreted by individual readers. Paratext represents and provides, can even perhaps be said to create, the *situation* of the text as a communicative speech-act.

> More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is rather, a *threshold*… that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an "undefined zone" between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text, an edge, or, as Philippe Lejeune puts it, a "fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text." Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text,

> a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies. (1-2)

Much of what is "internal to the text," to use the formulation Currie appropriates from Beardsley and Wimsatt, may be considered so because of and through *paratext*. Nor does paratext does not always consist in such "verbal or other productions… as an author's name, a title, a preface." Genette observes that "the sole fact of transcription—but equally, of oral transmission—brings to the ideality of the text some degree of materialization, graphic or phonic, which, as we will see, may induce paratextual effects. In this sense, one may doubtless assert that a text without a paratext does not exist and never has existed" (3). This is really to say that the notion of a text as a self-contained, hermetically sealed, independent entity is misguided; the text must be understood within and as part of broader context from which it cannot be meaningfully divorced. In and through the liminal phenomenon of paratext, the strictly textual and the extra-textual can be seen to bleed into each other.

Paratext may take the form of either *peritext* or *epitext*. *Peritext* refers to those paratextual elements that appear within the same published volume as the main text (Genette, *Paratexts* 4-5). In addition to the afore-mentioned author's name, title, and preface, more common peritextual elements include such features as dedications and/or inscriptions, epigraphs, intertitles (i.e., the titles of individual part, chapters, etc.), and notes. *Epitext* refers to those "distanced [paratextual] elements… located outside the book" (5)—"any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space. The location of the epitext is therefore anywhere outside the book….

> Anywhere outside the book may be, for example, newspapers and magazines, radio or television programs, lectures and colloquia, all public performances perhaps preserved on recordings or in printed collections: interviews and conversations assembled by the author… or by the intermediary…, proceedings of colloquia, collections of autocommentary…. Anywhere outside the book may also be the statements contained in an author's correspondence or journal, perhaps intended for later publication, either anthumous or posthumous. (344-345)

Included under the rubric of *epitext* is what Genette refers to more specifically as "pre-text," which may consist in hypotextual sources, preparatory documents (e.g., notes), programmatic outlines, plans and/or scenarios, "drafts proper" of the manuscript, "clean" manuscripts, page-proofs—and "after-text"—for example, revised, corrected, and/or restored texts (396-397). Pre-text may, according to Genette, provide "explanatory or evaluative comments"; but "more fundamentally, the paratextual function of the pre-text consists of offering a more or less organized tour of the 'workshop,' uncovering the ways and means by which the text has become what it is" (401).

Not all such information, however, is or will always be directly provided or even indicated through peritext. The author may expect the reader to rely upon peritextual phenomena for the business of proper reading and interpretation. "We must"—Genette reminds us—"at least bear in mind the paratextual value that may be vested in other types [than textual] of manifestation"; and these may even be "purely factual. By *factual* I mean the paratext that consists not of an explicit message (verbal or other) but of a fact whose existence alone, if known to the public, provides some commentary on the text and influence show the text is received" (7). To use a phrase employed by Beardsley and Wimsatt, "our habitual knowledge" of language and linguistic/literary conventions is, as Currie demonstrates, directly implicated in right and proper textual interpretation. Much of what is

paratextual in nature belongs to what Currie refers to as "background"; and what Currie refers to as "background" might be properly regarded, in Genettean terms, as paratext.

Genette's treatment of paratext and those aspects of Currie's theory of fiction that are directly related to theory of communicative acts have a great deal in common. Just as Currie regards fiction-making as a communicative act, depending in part upon the transmission of certain intentions through propositions/utterances with specific illocutionary force, so does Genette imply that texts are to be regarded as communicative acts. And much as Currie's definition of "meaning" primarily in terms of locutionary content and illocutionary force privileges the author in the communicative act (perlocutionary effect is considered almost solely in terms of how it should be derived from them), so too does Genette's concept of paratext. Again, paratext is

> the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies. (1-2)

And, Genette writes, "By definition, something is not a paratext unless the author or one of his associates accepts responsibility for it, although the degree of responsibility may vary" (9).

Like Currie, Genette explicitly invokes uses the concept of illocutionary force to describe the various functions that paratext, particularly peritextual elements/productions, may serve: "The *pragmatic* status of a paratextual element is defined by the characteristics of its situation of communication: the nature of the sender and addressee, the sender's degree of authority and responsibility, the illocutionary force of the sender's message, and undoubtedly some other characteristics I have overlooked" (*Paratexts* 8). Paratext may simply provide

information; it may convey a decision on the part of the author with respect to the transmission or reception of the text, or announce a commitment on the part of the author and/or contractual force; it may provide advice to the reader or critic in terms of reading, interpretation, and criticism, or even issue a command or order with respect to the same; it may serve a performative function. It may also explicitly indicate or announce authorial intent or authorial interpretation. One of the primary traditional functions of peritextual elements such as, for example, the "original assumptive authorial preface"—or, simply, the "original preface"—is monitory in nature—"*to ensure that the text is read properly*" (197, italics in original). That is, peritext may be used to "put the… reader in possession of information the author considers necessary for [the] proper reading" of the text (209).

Genette declares, "I am not saying that people must know [such] facts; I am only saying that people who do know them read [the] work differently from people who do not and that anyone who denies the difference is pulling our leg" (*Paratexts* 8). Currie, however, goes further with his notion of what he calls the "ideal reader," which directly implicates Genettean paratext, and particularly epitext. Currie's ideal reader is defined as "a reader whose make-believe can be regarded as appropriate to what he reads" (147). The ideal reader is, and must be, an "informed reader"—that is, a reader who knows, among other things, "the relevant facts about the community in which the work was written" (79). The ideal, informed reader is one who is able to appropriately *context*ualize the text—or, perhaps more accurately, to read the text within and according to its proper contexts. And this is essentially to say that the ideal, informed reader's reading is informed by *para*text—for, as Genette declares, "every context serves as a paratext" (8).

D. Fiction and the Real: "Dual Referentiality" and "Multi-Intentionality"

One of the great benefits of Currie's theory is that it develops a logical account of what is often termed "fictional truth," but which Currie prefers to speak of more simply as what is "fictional," or what is "true in (a) fiction"—without necessitating a new or different notion of what *truth* is. The actual "truth value" of an utterance is, according to Currie, distinct from the question of its illocutionary force; it is a function of its locutionary content, determined according to its referentiality with respect to the actual world—or, more precisely, what is believed or known of the actual world. The referentiality of an utterance does not, as Hamburger and Cohn argue, cease to operate merely because the utterance is incorporated into a work of fiction. As Wolfgang Iser notes in "The Significance of Fictionalizing," "The referential world which has been overstepped is still present in the text. Every literary text inevitably contains a selection from a variety of social, historical, cultural, and literary systems that exist as referential fields outside the text" (2) Actual-world referential relations remain at work in fiction; they have, however, no significance for determining what is *true in the fiction*—a separate issue from actual truth. Fictive propositions and utterances that do not directly correspond to actual reality or to paradigms of actual reality are not simply un-true: they are, Currie declares, fundamentally *false*. When he declares that fictive utterances do not "assert" anything, Currie is not saying with Hamburger, Cohn, and Searle that they have no referential relation to the actual world; he is saying only that they are not intended to be judged according to these relations, but are intended rather to be judged according to their relations to and their place within a broader fiction. Consequently, a statement that is

fundamentally "false" may also be "true-in-a-fiction."[4] This is because to be true-in-a-fiction is not to be true in some other way—it is to be regarded with an attitude of make-believe according to the game of make-believe that is occasioned by the communicative act of fiction-making. To put it again in terms of belief, if we dispositionally disbelieve fictive propositions it is because we know them to be *false*. But this does not preclude our *occurrently* believing them as "true in the fiction," or, simply, *fictional*.

This model essentially represents a rejection of the *referential/nonreferential* distinction as understood by Cohn. The fictive remains referential in Currie's view—it is simply not intended to be *believed* and therefore not to be judged solely or primarily in terms of that referentiality, but rather in terms of its primary self-referentiality. Just as we might, however, use the term *pretend* to describe the reader's act of make-believe, we might also revise the term *nonreferential* to describe that which is not intended to be judged in terms of its referentiality rather than that which does not refer. More importantly, however, it is a again rejection of the view that real references lose their referential status through their incorporation into a fiction. We should not regard "the London of the [fictive] Holmes stories" by Arthur Conan Doyle as a fictional London, as Hamburger would, Currie argues.

> Surely the reader of the Sherlock Holmes stories is supposed to understand that "London," as it occurs in the stories, refers to London. Someone who did not have the slightest idea what city London was, or who thought that the location of the story was as fictional as any of the characters in it, would not properly understand the story. The Holmes stories are about (among other things) London, not "the London of the Holmes stories," if that's supposed to be something other than London itself.

[4] Though Currie himself does not hyphenate the phrase "true in fiction," his own description of what he means by it recommends the practice. For Currie, "truth" can *only* mean a certain relation between a proposition and an actual state of affairs; he rejects the notion that there are different "kinds" of truth, or that truth is itself is merely a relational function. When he asserts, "Truth in fiction is one thing, truth another" (52), "truth in fiction" is to be taken as a single term: "truth-in-fiction" rather than the relativistic "truth, in fiction."

> Certainly, Doyle says things about London that are not true of London…. But this shows merely that what Doyle said was false. (5)

In other words, the fictive encompasses but does not fundamentally transform real references.

Defining fiction solely in terms of fictive intention or the attitude of make-believe would open the door, however, to the existence of fictions that also happen to be entirely true. While Smith might possibly be comfortable with this consequence, Currie is not. Consequently, in addition to fictive intent, he adds a second criterion: "A work is fiction iff [if and only if]"—Currie declares—"(*a*) it is the product of a fictive intent and (*b*) if the work is true, then it is at most accidentally true" (46). In distinguishing between the "accidentally true" and the "nonaccidentally true," Currie relies upon certain models of possible-world theory—particularly the concept of "counterfactual dependence," illustrated in the following example of a "reliable newspaper."

> The reports in a reliable newspaper *display counterfactual dependence on the facts*. What the paper says is true not merely in the actual world but in other worlds too. Not, of course, true in every world, but true in those worlds which would make the following counterfactuals true:
>
> (1) If different events had occurred, the paper's report would have been correspondingly different.
> (2) Were those events, in otherwise changed circumstances, to have occurred as they did, the paper would still have reported them. (47)

We can see in this again the importance of intentionality in Currie's theory of fiction (and nonfiction). The nonaccidentally true both *is* true—that is, it corresponds to an actual state of affairs—and is *intended* to be true. The accidentally true is true—that is, it corresponds to an actual state of affairs—but is *not intended* to be true; it may even be intended to be *false*. In light of this second criterion, an entirely true fiction is still possible—but incredibly unlikely.

This is not, of course, to say, that *nothing* in the fiction can be nonaccidentally true: Currie recognizes that "most works of fiction are to some extent based on fact. We encounter

the same kind of mixture when we consider how we are to take the author's utterances, for they will tend to be a mixture of fiction-making and assertion…. A work of fiction is a patchwork of truth and falsity, reliability and unreliability, fiction-making and assertion" (49). In this, Currie tends to find himself in agreement with Searle, who declares, "Sometimes the author of a fictional story will insert utterances in the story which are not fictional and not part of the story" (331): "A work of fiction need not consist entirely of, and in general will not consist entirely of, fictional discourse" (332). Hamburger certainly allows that fictions include references to things that are real—but these things are at best only pseudo-references, for they are devoid of any real referentiality. Through their incorporation into a work of fiction, they have become, through a process of fictionalization, fictional. As Cohn puts it, because of and through this process, "external references do not remain truly external when they enter a fictional world," which is why such references "are not bound to accuracy" (15).

Both Searle and Currie deny that incorporation into a work of fiction strips such statements of their referentiality. "The Russia of *War and Peace* is the real Russia," Searle declares, "and the war against Napoleon is the real war against the real Napoleon" (330). Currie even borrows the same novel from Searle to observe, "A story can be about someone without its being true of that someone, as *War and Peace* is about Napoleon even though it does not describe his activities correctly" (164). In Hamburger's theory, the reader of *War and Peace* knows all he needs to know and all he *can* know of "Napoleon" simply from the text of the fiction itself. But according to Currie's theory, this reader would not properly understand the character of Napoleon in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* did he not understand that the name "Napoleon" refers to an actual historical individual who, as emperor of France, led

a military invasion of Russia, etc. The incorporation of the name and biography of an actual individual into a work of fiction does not render that character fictional any more than the incorporation of "London" into a fictive story makes London a fictional setting. Employing a hypothetical example involving the name and identity of "Jones," Currie asserts, "Although your utterance is fictive rather than assertative, your use of 'Jones' still counts as a direct reference to Jones. 'Jones' remains rigid across the transition from assertion to fiction-making" (148). Just as Doyle can say things about London that are false yet true-in-the-Holmes-stories—that, for example, there exists an address 220B Baker St.—, so can Tolstoy say things about Napoleon that are false yet true-in-*War and Peace*. This does not make Napoleon a fictional character; it simply makes him a character in a fiction, about whom certain things that are true-in-the-fiction are actually false. Fiction is not, then, to be understood in terms of or in relation to the portrayal of fictional characters in their I-originarity, as thinking, feeling autonomous subjects, as Hamburger and Cohn suggest. If the fundamental falsity of fiction can be tied to any one traditional element of fiction, it would, in Currie's theory, seem to be plot: "There is no necessary connection between writing fiction and using fictional names," he says. "Our culture might never have hit upon the idea of 'making up' fictional characters. We might have been content to write fictional stories about real people, creatures, and things generally" (146).

Currie does, though, insist—similarly to Hamburger and Cohn—that these references are fully incorporated into the fiction:

> Where these pieces of information are an integral part of the narrative… we are not intended to bracket them out from the rest of the story. We are intended to adopt the make-believe attitude them as much as toward the description of fictive characters and their doings. So it may be that we are asked to make believe things that are nonaccidentally true, even though they are not, strictly speaking, fictional statements. (50)

To rephrase an earlier assertion, the fictive does not transform real references, but it does encompass them. What this means is not only that fact is not inconsistent with fiction, but that belief is not inconsistent with make-belief; only active *dis*belief is. Assuming an attitude of make-belief does not entail the suspension of any or all beliefs with respect to a proposition, only the suspension of occurrent disbelief of/in it. In cases where that which we are to make believe is known to be true, or believed, no suspension of dis/belief is necessary.

The idea that we may make believe that which is true—or, more importantly, that which we know to be true, i.e., that which we *believe*—has a somewhat remarkable consequence for Currie's theory of fiction with regard to the broader issue of referentiality, one that has profound significance for the contextualization and interpretation of autofiction and similar texts in particular. Simultaneously holding two distinct attitudes toward the same proposition is possible only if we simultaneously situate this same proposition within two different contexts—more precisely, within two different referential fields: 1) the world of the fiction, with regard to which we make believe the proposition; and 2) the actual world, with regard to which we believe the proposition). In other words, the dual attitude of make-belief/belief—which we might represent as "make/belief"—points to what we might term the fundamental "dual-referentiality" of certain utterances in fictive works. And the proper recognition of this (common) phenomenon—at least the dual attitude of make/belief, is necessary to the proper understanding of fictions containing dual-referential utterances. To return to a passage quoted earlier, Currie not only declares that "the reader of the Sherlock Holmes stories is supposed to understand that "London," as it occurs in the stories, refers to London," but he further asserts that "someone who did not have the slightest idea what city London was, or who thought that the location of the story was as fictional as any of the

characters in it, would not properly understand the story" (5). We do not bracket out this reference from the rest of the fiction, but neither do we set aside or suspend our real-world knowledge of the actual city of London when we read the fiction. This would seem to allow for at least the possibility, depending perhaps on context, of the same statement's being regarded as belonging to both fictive discourse and natural discourse.

Referentiality, in Currie theory, is closely tied to (authorial) intention: it is only through consideration of referentiality in conjunction with intentionality that we can fully characterize, and therefore understand, (communicative) speech-acts. And with respect to intentionality, there is a corresponding phenomenon to that of dual-referentiality: what we may term "multi-intentionality." Though he does not himself employ such a term to describe it, Currie does explicitly recognize such a phenomenon:

> I might tell a story that I know most people will take as fact but that will, I believe, be recognized as fiction by the few who recognize the clues I put into the text and with which I signal my fictive intention. It could reasonably be said that in uttering such a work I was performing more than one kind of communicative act: I would be asserting and fiction-making in one breath. Having communicative intentions of one kind does not always exclude the possibility that one has communicative intentions of another kind as well. (33)

Currie cites the Kingsley Amis story "Who or What Was It?" as just such a case: "[Amis] begins by saying that the events described actually happened to him. At first one is inclined to believe that this is a piece of autobiography. But events soon take a wildly supernatural turn. At some stage we are supposed to realize that this is fiction" (41). Such a story depends for its effect on the reader's *belief*, at least initially, in what is being narrated—an attitude that the author intends for the reader to take. Yet if the story is fundamentally a fiction, then the proper attitude the reader is to take—the attitude that the author intends for the reader to

take—is one of *make*-belief: an attitude that, Currie suggests, "Amis intends us *retroactively* to" take (41).

Of course multi-intentionality need not directly involve dual-referentiality. One might intend both for a reader to (initially) believe and (retroactively) make-believe a story devoid of any real references. Yet certainly much of the time it does. It is precisely the incorporation of real references—apart from or in addition to the (initial) absence of signals of fictive intent—that most effectively communicates the intention that a story is to be believed, that may be said to create an illusion that what is being narrated is true and persuades or convinces a reader to adopt or persist in an attitude of belief (and not merely the suspension of occurrent disbelief). In a case such as the Amis story, which is intended to be regarded initially as autobiographical, the first-person pronoun "I" alone counts as a "real reference," since the reader understands it in light of the autobiographical pact described by Lejeune: "I" in this case refers to the mutual identity of the (actual) author, as an actual historical figure with a real existence; the narrator, as the figure engaged in the narrative act of diegetic representation; and the protagonist, as the primary subject of the narrative. That there are or may be things asserted of Amis in the story that are not actually true does not necessarily reveal that this mutual identity is an illusion, and that "I" is not a real reference; it only reveals that certain things that Amis asserts of himself in the story are false and fictive. Once we have discovered that "Who or What Was It?" is a fiction, we simply regard it, properly, as a fiction about Amis. In other words, "Who or What Was It?" is an example of autofiction: a genre that seems to depend upon the kind of dual-referentiality, multi-intentionality, and simultaneous regard of certain statements as belonging to both "fictive" and "natural" discourse made possible by Currie's theory of fiction.

V. Basis for a Comparative Analysis: Situational and Textual Similarities

The prior three sections provide theoretical/critical context and grounds for answering the first question posed earlier with respect to autofiction broadly and autobiographical, intertextual metafictions like *Look at the Harlequins!* more specifically—i.e., How are such works to be read and interpreted in terms of a) the distinction between fictive and natural discourse? At least one aspect of the answer seems to be that they should be understood as communicative acts consisting partly in fiction-making, to use Currie's term, and partly in a more "serious" economic transaction, to employ Smith's language. The author of such a work deliberately situates himself, to continue Smith's metaphor, on the boundary dividing the linguistic playground from the linguistic marketplace, engaging in hybridized acts of self-representation that can only be profoundly personal and ultimately, unique. Answers to the second question—i.e., What do the author's strategies of self-representation in such works reveal about the relations between their fiction and their lives?—can, again, be answered only through particular studies of individual works. That said, there is value in a comparative study of a selection of such works. Through such a study we might gain greater insight into the range of possibilities inherent in the single common strategy of composing a hybrid text characterized by both autobiographical or autobiographically-derived self-representation, and intertextuality with respect to the author's own prior works. The present study is a comparative analysis of three such texts: Vladimir Nabokov's aforementioned *Look at the Harlequins!*, Marguerite Duras' *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991) [*The North China Lover* (1992)], and Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993). These three texts have been specifically selected for both 1) the remarkable similarities in the situations that gave rise to them as well as the specific strategies and techniques employed; and 2) the

significant differences in their respective authors' understandings of a) the nature of the self, how it is to be represented and on what authority; and b) the precise inter-relations between the autobiographical and the fictive.

Like Nabokov's novel, both Duras' and Roth's respective projects derived, at least in part, from personal crises pertaining to questions of self-identity, public persona, (auto)biographical representation, and authorial control over one's own image. *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* developed out of the increasingly contentious collaboration between Marguerite Duras and director Jean-Jacques Annaud on a film adaptation of Duras' 1984 book *L'Amant*—a book that itself enjoys a profoundly ambiguous relationship with Duras' life and earlier work. Adapting *L'Amant* for the screen necessarily implicates issues of representation (and/or self-representation) as well as authorship of and authority over the work itself. Duras, who had initially wanted to direct the film as well as write it, and director Jean-Jacques Annaud had significantly different visions of what the film should be. Duras, who saw the film as an opportunity to re-work the material, became more and more frustrated by what she saw as her increasing marginalization and disenfranchisement in the collaboration. She finally removed herself entirely from the project, and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* became something of a pre-emptive strike against a cinematic representation that, she said, "I didn't recognize" (Garis 2): she ensured that her book was published before Annaud's film premiered.

Roth's *Operation Shylock* similarly has origins in a crisis of (self-) representation—one linked to a psychological and existential identity crisis. As Roth himself describes it in *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (1988), "In the spring of 1987, at the height of a ten-year period of creativity, what was to have been minor surgery turned into a prolonged

physical ordeal that led to an extreme depression that carried me right to the edge of emotional and mental dissolution" (5)

> I was all at once in a state of helpless confusion and could not understand any longer what once was obvious to me: why I do what I do, why I live where I live, why I share my life with the one I do. My desk had become a frightening, foreign place and, unlike similar moments earlier in life when the old strategies didn't work anymore—either for the pragmatic business of daily living, those problems that everybody faces, or for the specialized problems of writing—and I had energetically resolved on a course of renewal, I came to believe that I just could not make myself over yet again. (4-5)

As a result, Roth turned from the self-fictionalizing of the Zuckerman novels first to the more ostensibly direct form of self-representation of autobiography, "in order"—he writes—"to recover what I had lost" (*The Facts* 5). But *The Facts* was only the first book in what would become an experimental, cross-generic four-book sequence; a sequence including *Deception: A Novel* (1990) and *Patrimony: A True Story* (1991) and culminating in *Operation Shylock: A Confession*. Like *The Facts*, *Operation Shylock* also opens with a description of Roth's 1987 "crack-up"; but it goes much further in describing this breakdown and in thematizing the struggle to assert, maintain, and control one's own identity—in terms of both self-identity and the public's perceptions of that self/identity.

Related to such issues in these works are the authors' relations to and understandings of their *oeuvres*. Like *Look at the Harlequins!*, both *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* and *Operation Shylock* also incorporate elements from their respective authors' various prior works. In *Look at the Harlequins!*, Vadim Vadimovich's life/biography is informed to greater or lesser extents by earlier Nabokov novels such as *Podvig* (1932) [*Glory* (1971)], *Bend Sinister* (1947), *Lolita* (1955/1958), and *Ada* (1969). And his own bibliography consists in hybridized transfigurations of Nabokov's novels with titles deriving from and reflecting aspects of their originals. The most significant precursor of Duras' *L'Amant de la Chine du*

Nord is, of course, *L'Amant*, as the relationship between the two titles itself suggests. The former is in many ways an extension of the latter, which is virtually contained within it; and this includes its intertextual relations with earlier Duras' works such as the novel *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950) [*The Sea Wall* (1967)], the *ciné-roman*-esque scénario *Hiroshima mon amour* (1960) [*Hiroshima mon amour* (1961)], and the novels and films of the so-called "India Cycle"—*Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964) [*The Ravishing of Lol Stein* (1964)], *Le vice-consul* (1965) [*The Vice-Consul* (1968)], *L'Amour* [*Love*] (1971), *La femme du Gange* [*Woman of the Ganges*] (1973), *India Song* (1975), and *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* [*Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta*] (1976). Roth's *Operation Shylock*, finally, has strong ties not only to *The Facts*, *Deception*, and *Patrimony*, but also to the four volumes comprising the *Zuckerman Bound* cycle—*The Ghost Writer* (1979), *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), and *The Prague Orgy* (1985)—and, *The Counterlife* (1986). While the precise functions and effects of this kind of intra-*oeuvre* self-referentiality vary from one text to the next, in all three cases it has the broader function of identifying the author as the author of a certain body of work featuring certain habitual elements and exploring certain characteristic themes, and, more significantly, as a literary artist.

Equally significant as the commonalities shared by these three works are the profound differences in the ways in which the three authors inscribe themselves and their work in the texts. Approaching them chronologically, the relation of the particular mode of authorial self-representation to the mutual identity of author, narrator, and protagonist that Philippe Lejeune identifies as the hallmark of autobiography as a literary form/genre in his concept of the "autobiographical pact" becomes increasingly explicit. The intentionally distorted

approximation of Vladimir Nabokov's name, life, and work in *Look at the Harlequins!* has essentially the same relationship with Nabokov's actual name, life, and work as do the words in a slant-rhyme: the reader is invited to make the identification even as he must recognize that it is deliberately imperfect. Duras' ambiguously self-referential uses of both first- and third-person pronouns in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* invites the reader to interpret the text more fully in light of Lejeune's autobiographical pact, though the work itself is not clearly identifiable as either autobiography or fiction. In *Operation Shylock,* however, not only does the author implicitly invoke the autobiographical pact in a preface, the mutual identification of author, narrator, and protagonist as "Philip Roth" is explicitly made in the text. And despite certain significant discrepancies between what is asserted of Philip Roth in the narrative and what is historically documented of Philip Roth, the narrator-protagonist seems to share the author's biography and bibliography. The increasing explicitation in this identification, however, does not necessarily correspond to an increase in the properly autobiographical nature of the texts: they are equivalent to each other in terms of their common hybrid nature and their common fundamental fictivity. Their differences would seem to owe instead to their authors' different understandings of the concept of a self, of the ways in which the self can (and/or should) be textually represented, and of the performative possibilities of literary texts.

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CHAPTER TWO

THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS AND WHAT VOLODYA FOUND THERE: *LOOK AT THE HARLEQUINS!*—VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S ANTI-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INTERTEXTUAL METAFICTION

The first little throb of *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974) went through Nabokov, according to his biographer Brian Boyd, on 25 September 1972 when he wrote the following lines in his diary: "'He had finished his task.' Start from there—with the flush and the bloom and the mist present throughout the book, but specified only by allusion to *several* forms of art: poetry, music, painting, architecture etc." (Qtd. in Boyd, *The American Years* 606).

> In this first flash of a novel that he still glimpsed only vaguely, Nabokov expected to stress the hero's ultimate accomplishment, though in an oblique manner. In its final form, *Look at the Harlequins!* would indeed conclude with "the flush and the bloom" of fulfillment, but until its close the novel would offer only futility, misdirection, the disquiet of non-arrival—apparently an echo of Nabokov's groans as he contemplated the possibility than an inept biography might drown out with its static the note of achievement in his own life story. (606)

The "inept biography" to which Boyd refers was more than a hypothetical misunderstanding of his life that might one day be written: it was, in the fall of 1972, all too real.

Véra Nabokov had been approached by Andrew Field in early 1968 with the idea of his writing the first full biography of her novelist husband. The Nabokovs had first met Field, then a graduate student in Russian at Harvard, in 1964, when the young upstart made a present of V.D. Nabokov's *Sbornik statey po ugolovnomu pravu* [*Essays on Criminal Law*] (1904) to the famed author—a book by his father that Nabokov himself had not read (Boyd, *The American Years* 483). In the following years, Field became a pioneer in "Nabokov studies." He began composing the first biographical work on Nabokov—ultimately published

in 1967 as *Vladimir Nabokov: His Life in Art*, drafts of which he sent to Nabokov as he prepared them. Nabokov was delighted by Field and his apparent dedication to "stress[ing] the breadth of Nabokov's Russian oeuvre and the need to see his newer works in light of the old" as well as critical originality—despite both the reservations of Field's fellow Russian scholars and his own misgivings about certain exhibited tendencies in Field's critical examinations of his work. In response to part of the manuscript of the work in progress that Field sent him in 1966, Nabokov sent Field a letter restating his opposition to Freudianism and "clichés of the couch" (511); and in late January 1967, reviewing the galley proof, Nabokov had to correct Field "on a multitude of 'quite astounding' mistranslations, garbled plot summaries, and fatuous critical assertions" (523).

In 1968, Field—who had by that time stayed with the Nabokovs in Montreux on more than one occasion—learned from Véra Nabokov that her husband had recently received a delivery from his sister Olga of "some one hundred and fifty letters that Nabokov had written to his mother in the 1920s and 1930s":

> The news of the letters precipitated Field's decision to ask if he could undertake Nabokov's biography. At the end of May, Véra replied that her husband "warmly welcomes" the project and "could not imagine anyone else whom he would want to accept as his biographer"—the other obvious choice, [Alfred] Appel [Jr.], knew no Russian. (Boyd, *The American Years* 532)

From that point on, Field would enjoy unprecedented access to Nabokov's private papers, including thirty-five boxes of personal belongings that had been sitting in storage in Ithaca, New York (564) since he had immigrated to Switzerland.

Field's biographies—*Nabokov: His Life in Part* (1977), and the later composite of *His Life in Art* with this volume, *VN: The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (1986)—are almost universally derided for its shabby scholarship. The low esteem in which he was held

by his colleagues even in the mid to late 1960s, Boyd writes, was the result of "a rather shallow knowledge of Russian and a shaky commitment to accuracy" (516). In his work on Nabokov, Field committed almost innumerable "blunders in translation, scholarship, and interpretation," in Boyd's words (604). He countenanced various unfounded rumors, lurid bits of gossip, and tongue-in-cheek pronouncements and jokes. His predilection for pseudo-Freudian psychological readings led him to make incredible logical leaps, as in his "discovery" that Nabokov called his mother "Lolita." This particularly egregious conclusion was a deduction, according to Boyd, based on a redacted letter from Nabokov to his mother, Elena: "In Russian, first names form diminutives, and the regular diminutive for Elena is 'Lyolya.' In the excised salutation, Field counted space for seven letters and deduced—eureka!—that Nabokov must have added a suffix and called his mother 'Lolita'" (620).

> Except that, as the originals prove, the word deleted in the copies was *radost'*, which means simply "joy" or "dearest." Everything was wrong about Field's would-be embarrassing conjecture. There are six letters in "Lolita," not the seven spaces Field counted in the deleted word. The diminutive of "Elena" is "Lyolya," not, as Field records it, "Lolya," and in Russian a Spanish suffix added to a Russian word is simply impossible, so that neither the first nor the second half of "Lolita" could have been formed from the diminutive of Nabokov's mother's name. And in Nabokov's set in any case it was quite unthinkable for a son to address his mother by her first name or a diminutive. (621)

Nabokov himself would have ample opportunity to decry the "appalling" number of "absurd errors, impossible statements, vulgarities and inventions" (qtd. In Boyd, *The American Years* 610) he found in drafts of the biography: reviewing a 680-page manuscript, Nabokov compiled "one hundred and eighty pages [of corrections/notes] in all, and even then he had overlooked scores of major and minor blunders. There were simply too many errors for him to catch them all" (Boyd 610). The final product, which finally appeared only weeks before Nabokov's death in 1977, has been described by Clarence Brown, in an article that appeared

in the *Trenton Times*, (September 1990), as "not only a vast compendium of error but so nauseatingly mannered and self-important as to have a kind of morbid appeal only for those fascinated by literary and scholarly pathology" (Qtd. in Boyd 619).

I. "A Deliberate Travesty": The Synthetic Nature of *Look at the Harlequins!*

Only in the context of "Field's distorted 'VN' [the title of the ultimate version of his biography of Nabokov],"insists Brian Boyd, can Nabokov's last completed novel, the oft neglected *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974) be understood. As the narrator-protagonist of *Look at the Harlequins!* notes, "The Russian term for any kind of betrayal, faithlessness, breach of trust, is the snaky, watered-silk word *izmena* which is based on the idea of change, shift, transformation" (74). Field's "betrayal" of his one-time benefactor and friend, a "transformation" of Nabokov's life and character and body of work, "inspired the real Nabokov to make his next novel a deliberate travesty of his own life and of *Speak, Memory* [Nabokov's autobiography] in particular" (Boyd *The American Years*, 614). A comment that Nabokov made in the summer of 1973 to his lawyer in New York concerning the latest draft of Field's book that he had reviewed is particularly telling. As he prepared to leave Montreux to work in earnest on the novel that would become *Look at the Harlequins!*, Nabokov confessed, "I cannot tell you how upset I am by the whole matter," he said. "It was not worth living a far from negligible life… only to have a blundering ass reinvent it" (Qtd. in Boyd, *The American Years* 616). If his life was to be reinvented at all, or so is the implication, it is not to be by "a blundering ass," but by someone capable of doing it artistic justice: Nabokov himself.

A. Antithesis: *Look at the Harlequins!* and Field's Biographical Project

Often written off as little more than an extended and self-indulgent "inside joke"—one that only the author himself could find funny—by even Nabokov's admirers, *Look at the Harlequins!* is the most profoundly self-conscious novel of an author who excelled in the art of self-conscious fiction. To many, it suggests a disarming degree of self-satisfied self-preoccupation in an author for whom solipsism, which he regarded as the greatest of moral and artistic failings, was a career-spanning theme. It is also amongst Nabokov's slimmer, though not necessarily slighter, novels—another probable cause of its generally being overlooked in favor of many of its more forebears. Few attempts have been made to justify the novel's place in what is widely regarded as one of the most staggeringly original and accomplished literary bodies of work of the twentieth-century; and so it remains one of the least studied and written about of Nabokov's English-language novels.

Look at the Harlequins! can be understood as the synthesis in a dialectical relation, the product of the resolution of Field's antithetical gross distortions of the "thesis" of Nabokov's own self-representations. It is the fictional autobiography (the *roman autobiographique* from which Lejeune seeks to distinguish true autobiography) of one Vadim Vadimovich (the patronymic often shortened to "Vadimych") N.—a funhouse-mirror-image of his creator who may be described as the bastard son fathered upon Nabokov by Andrew Field. The same qualities that mark him as a typical Nabokovian anti-heroic protagonist along the lines of Hermann in *Otchayanie* (1934) [*Despair* (1937, revised 1966), Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* (1955), Charles Kinbote in *Pale Fire* (1962) and Van Veen in *Ada'*(1969)—all, to a greater or lesser extent, (second-rate) artist-figures; self-absorbed and egocentric to the point of solipsism, ignorant and mindless of the real lives of others,

carelessly and casually cruel, blind to the true nature of reality—are qualities that Nabokov came to see in Field. Had he not actually existed, Nabokov might have easily invented him for one of his novels. *Look at the Harlequins!* is in part a response to and critique of Field's biographical project and the deadly sins of carelessness, imprecision, sloppy scholarship, misreading and mistranslations, eisegetic autobiographical and Freudian/psychoanalytical interpretations, and countenancing of idle gossip and slanderous rumor—the master's habitual bugbears—that Nabokov found there.

Part of the problem, as Boyd and Stacy Schiff, Véra Nabokov's biographer, suggest, is that Field was insensitive to Nabokov's sense of humor and playful teasing—and Nabokov was, writes Boyd, "an expert tease" (*The American Years* 581). Nabokov gently toyed with Field throughout their early interactions and informal interviews, jokingly alluding to nonexistent family secrets and scandals.

> One day Nabokov mocked Field's solemn harping on the myth that Nabokov's father was an illegitimate son of Tsar Alexander II. He danced a little jig: "Yes, sometimes I feel the blood of Peter the Great in me!" Véra, who had already observed Field's failure to understand her husband's jokes, shouted out that he must not say such things—and Field took that as confirmation that the Nabokovs feared this supposed family secret. (581) [see also 721 n58]

This alleged infidelity of Nabokov's maternal grandmother and his father's consequent supposed bastardy are parodied in *Look at the Harlequins!* as the possibility of Vadim's having been actually fathered by the Russian émigré noble Count Nikifor Nikodimovich Starov (who may also have fathered some or even all of Vadim's first three wives—an argument elaborated by D. Barton Johnson in his essay "Dementia's Incestuous Children in *Look at the Harlequins!*). And according to Schiff, "Vladimir had enjoyed pulling Field's leg about his previous wives and now"—in *Look at the Harlequins!*—"gave full rein to the idea,

providing a familiar catalogue of Nabokovian women" in the figures of Vadim's four wives (354).

B. Thesis: Nabokov's Autobiographical Self-Representations: *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (1966) and *Strong Opinions* (1973)

These anecdotes point to Field's subscription to such procedural methods as "the invasion of privacy, the inventions of *biographie romancée*, unlicensed psychological speculation"—methods that Boyd characterizes as typical of "modern biographical practice," but "that Nabokov had objected to for decades" (582). They also suggest that Field had an almost prurient interest in discovering that the secret history of Nabokov's life had was a lurid soap opera carefully concealed behind the mask of decorous restraint that Nabokov wore in the various editions of his autobiography, of which Field became increasingly suspicious. "It was after all the place par excellence where Nabokov was trying to tell *his* version of his past," Boyd explains (*The American Years* 612). He attempted to "correct" what he decided were errors and inaccuracies in *Speak, Memory* by interviewing virtually any- and everyone he could who had any claim to knowing Nabokov, often choosing to rely on their own recollections rather than Nabokov's when they failed to correspond to each other. To Nabokov he directly accused *Speak, Memory* of having "avoided facts," to which

> Nabokov replied that he could not let these lines stand "unless, in a special note, you list, Andrew, *all* the incorrect facts in *Speak, Memory* with the chapter and page." As it happens, there are at least twenty-one demonstrable errors in *Speak, Memory*, but Field knew too little of the details of Nabokov's life to identify a single one, and let the charge drop. (Boyd, *The American Years* 613)

Indeed, far from disregarding the facts of actual history, Nabokov displays in the final, revised edition of his autobiography a conscientious concern for accuracy, even and

especially when others' (more reliable) memories conflicted with his own. In the foreword to *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* he writes,

> While writing the first version in America I was handicapped by an almost complete lack of data in regard to family history, and consequently, by the impossibility of checking my memory when I felt it might be at fault….
>
> For the present, final edition of *Speak, Memory* I have not only introduced basic changes and copious additions into the initial English text, but I have availed myself of the corrections I made while turning it into Russian (11-12)

as well as of the corrections and revisions made available to him by relatives (14). Of course, one must still trust in the autobiographer's basic sincerity and honesty—but the relative openness in admitting to earlier mistakes and in properly crediting others' memories as likely more reliable suggests that such trust is well placed—despite Field's stubborn unwillingness to concede.

This is not to deny that *Speak, Memory*—a most unconventional autobiography—is characterized by a profound, almost self-effacing reticence. It is the record more of the perceptions of a unique, individual, artistic consciousness than of the historical romance disingenuously promised by the movie-trailer language on the back cover one paperback edition (Pyramid Books-G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1968):

> The initiations of love. The turmoil of revolution. The dangers and intrigues of exile. These are a few of the elements that Vladimir Nabokov weaves together in this bewitching chronicle of a young aristocrat transformed into a penniless writer by violent social upheaval. Living by wits and nerve he recorded the twilight world of men and women without a country….

This is, perhaps, a not totally inaccurate representation of Nabokov's life as lived between the 1899, the year of his birth, and 1940, the year he emigrated with his wife Véra and young son Dmitri to America. But it is a less than honest representation of a book from which the author is more of an absent presence than a recognizable hero. In this, *Speak, Memory* in some ways reflects Nabokov's insistence that "the best part of a writer's biography is not the

record of his adventures but the story of his style" (*Strong Opinions* 154-155). *Speak, Memory* is, like Philip Roth's memoir *The Facts* (1988), properly understood not simply as "an autobiography," but as "a novelist's autobiography," the non-fiction, first-person narrative counterpart of the *Künstlerroman* The reasons for this are two-fold: the first is related to Nabokov's notions of the relationships between "average reality," "true reality," and art. The second derives from what may be described as an ethics of privacy.

Nabokov's self-(re-)presentation as an artist is tied to his notions concerning the nature of reality. Nabokov seems to have recognized his true self, appropriately, in the writer—in, that is, the artist. As Schiff writes, "Vladimir himself delighted in explaining that the living, breathing, breakfasting Nabokov was but a poor relation of the writer, only too happy to refer to himself as 'the person I usually impersonate in Montreux'" (308). She is wrong, though, to interpret his "dissociat[ing] himself from the lame words he may—or may not—have let fall in conversation" as evidence of "a monumental ego doing his best to obliterate the self" (347). The real meaning of Nabokov's "[protests] that he had no real existence, that he was a mirage, an illusion, a masked performer, a mere shadow of his writing self" and of his "[declaration] that his books alone were his identity papers" (Schiff 311) is not that he wanted to disappear into an abstract construction, but rather that he identified his "true" self, his "ultimate" self as, like true or ultimate reality, obscured by the masks of everyday reality.

Nabokov's various pronouncements on the "subjectivity" of reality can be misleading for those who understand him to be suggesting a relativistic view. The falsity and inertness of what he referred to variously as "everyday reality" or "average reality"—"the reality of general ideas, conventional forms of humdrummery, [and] current editorials" (*Strong*

Opinions 118) are the byproducts of a process of oversimplification and homogenization, through which things and ideas are made more immediately accessible and palatable by reducing them to easily recognizable forms fit for consumption for the lowest common denominator. "True reality," on the other hand is a world of infinite complexity and individuation. To perceive it through the ready-made labels and models of "average reality" is to misperceive it. The proper perception of reality depends upon individual experience because the individual experience is as un-reducible as is reality itself. This is the meaning of Nabokov's pronouncement,

> Reality is a very subjective affair. I can only define it as a kind of gradual accumulation of information; and as specialization. If we take a lily, for instance, or other natural object, a lily is more real to a naturalist than it is to an ordinary person. But it is still more real to a botanist. And yet another stage of reality is reached with that botanist who is a specialist in lilies. You can get nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you can never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception. (10-11)

True reality remains necessarily beyond our (present) limited human capacity to perceive it in its totality, though we can approach increasingly nearer and nearer, in an asymptotic relation, through the twin sisters of Science and Art, both of which are exercises in precision as well as perception.

It is this same concern for precision—and not disingenuousness or a desire to deceive—that motivated Nabokov's approach to publicized/published interviews. In *Véra (Mrs. Vladimir Nabokov)*, Stacy Schiff humorously notes that Vladimir Nabokov "made a sensational discovery in 1965. We do not speak as we write" (312). This "discovery" was made following what Schiff describes as "a highly amusing, very forthcoming few days with Channel Thirteen's Robert Hughes" (312). In the introductory note written for its inclusion in the collection *Strong Opinions* (1973), Nabokov describes the resulting interview as follows:

"At our initial meetings I read from prepared cards, and this part of the interview is given below. The rest, represented by some fifty pages typed from the tape, is too colloquial and rambling to suit the scheme of the present book" (51). Elsewhere, as Schiff quotes, he was less self-forgiving:

> I am greatly distressed and disgusted by my unprepared answers—by the appalling style, slipshod vocabulary, offensive, embarrassing statements and muddled facts, The answers are dull, flat, repetitive, vulgarly phrased and in every way shockingly different from the style of my written prose…. I always knew I was an abominably bad speaker, I now deeply regret my rashness. (312)

"In future there would be no "spontaneous rot," she continues. "Questions would be written out and submitted in advance, answers composed on paper and revised only with VN's consent" (312). From then on, Nabokov began to much more carefully cultivate, with an attention unrivalled by many politicians and Hollywood figures, a public persona that has struck many as cold and aloof, arrogant and haughty; smug and supremely self-satisfied.

The careful deliberation and premeditation with which he approached anything intended for public consumption are often, however, taken as evidence of self-serving deceitfulness. There are two implicit assumptions behind such an understanding: 1) that Nabokov duplicitously intended for the reader to believe that his carefully prepared responses were extemporaneous pronouncements, and 2) that there is greater sincerity, honesty, and authenticity in spontaneity, Nabokov openly acknowledged, however,—at least in *Strong Opinions*—the manner in which interviews were conducted. "I take every precaution to ensure a dignified beat of the mandarin's fan," he writes in the foreword to the collection. "The interviewer's questions have to be sent to me in writing, answered by me in writing, and reproduced verbatim. Such are the three absolute conditions" (xv). "The ideal form a written interview should take," he declares, is "a more or less neatly paragraphed essay,"

devoid of the "floating décor" and "artificial color of human interest, added by the manufacturer" (xvi) that plagues so many published interviews.

Though few, if any, of the collected interviews re-published in *Strong Opinions* could be considered neatly paragraphed essays in their own right, the deliberate, polished prose of Nabokov's answers has more in common with that form than with most transcriptions of more "natural" conversation. The published interviews of *Strong Opinions*—interviews transmuted into essays masquerading as interviews—contain many of the same tropes and stylistic devices found in his novels: extended metaphors; irony and self-irony; a high degree of self-consciousness; double-entendres and puns; literary allusions; often obvious, sometimes subtle self-references; and a strong poetic bent that makes liberal use of alliteration and assonance. And in this they evidence a degree of deliberate self-consciousness; reading between and behind the lines allows us to catch glimpses of a conspiratorial Nabokov winking playfully at us. In an interview conducted three years before Robert Hughes visited him in Montreux, in mid-July 1962, Nabokov recalled a passage from (the fictional) John Shade's poem *Pale Fire*

> where he says something I think I can endorse. Let me quote it, if I can remember; yes, I think I can do it: "I loathe such things as jazz, the white-hosed moron torturing a black bull, rayed with red, abstractist bric-a-brac, primitivist folk masks, progressive schools, music in supermarkets, swimming pools, brutes, bores, class-conscious philistines, Freud, Marx, fake thinkers, puffed-up poets, frauds and sharks." That's how it goes. (18)

Indeed, that *is* how the passage (IV: 924-930) goes, though the verse is rendered here in prose. Vladimir Nabokov was, by others' accounts as well as his own, blessed with amazing mnemonic powers; but such responses strain the limits of credibility even if we accept that his power of recall was anomalous. What Nabokov is performing here is not a feat of memory, but a magic trick, down to the last-minute suggestions—"yes, I *think* I can do it"—

that he may in fact fail before he (of course) succeeds in pulling a perfect white rabbit from his hat. In an "exchange with Alvin Toffler [that] appeared in *Playboy* for January, 1964," for which "great trouble was taken on both sides to achieve the illusion of spontaneous conversation," Nabokov even openly (and with profound irony) cops to the trick: When Nabokov decries his "lack of spontaneity" as his "principal failing as a writer," Toffler (ostensibly) encourages him, saying, "You're doing rather well at the moment, if we may say so." "It's an illusion," Nabokov admits (34). In other words, he did *not* intend for his reader to actually believe in the feigned spontaneity of his carefully prepared responses.

The strict control that Nabokov exercised over virtually every word that would be publicly attributed to him, even public representations of him, may be self-serving, but it was not born of a vain desire to deceive the public into holding a false image of him. While it is the great and powerful wizard that Nabokov most often and most clearly projected as his public persona, he was always careful to afford us glimpses of the man behind the curtain—the tri-lingual exiled émigré; the devoted son, husband, and father; the student and teacher (as well as producer) of literature; the ardent anti-Communist and "old-fashioned liberal" who was actually speaking. The stage-performances derived instead from a profound concern for absolute precision in an accurate representation of his actual thoughts, feelings, opinions, and inner life. It was a consequence of perfectionism, not puffery. His improvisational skills—the same that we all rely upon in our day-to-day dealings and interactions—were, he felt, unequal to the task of honest self-representation. "I think like a genius," he opens the foreword to *Strong Opinions*, "I write like a distinguished author, and I speak like a child…. My hemming and hawing over the telephone cause long-distance callers to switch from their native English to pathetic French. At parties, if I attempt to entertain people with a good

story, I have to go back to every other sentence for oral erasures and inserts" (xv). And he seems genuinely to have seen this as a real shortcoming. His response in full—partially quoted in the previous paragraph, to Toffler's question, "What do you regard as your principal failing as a writer—apart from forgetability?", reads, "Lack of spontaneity; the nuisance of parallel thoughts, second thoughts, third thoughts; inability to express properly in any language unless I compose every damned sentence in my bath, in my mind, at my desk" (34). In other words, while there may be a certain sincerity in spontaneity, it is no guarantee of either honesty or "authenticity"—qualities that are often unfairly and misleadingly conflated. In order to represent himself in a way that was consistent with who he actually was (as ,of course, he perceived and understood himself), what he actually thought, what he actually felt, what he actually believed, etc.—Nabokov needed the luxury of pencil, paper, and time to deliberate, premeditate, and calculate.

"Deliberation," "premeditation," and "calculation" have connotations of deception and dishonesty, but they more simply suggest precision. And as both a scientist and an artist, Nabokov valued precision above all. "In high art and pure science detail is everything," he declared; for art and science are the two modes through which we perceive, apprehend, and approach reality. The lack of precision leads to misperception; and misperception, as Nabokov teaches us in novel after novel, is dangerous. Nabokov's *oeuvre* is peopled with protagonists whose actions exemplify the disastrous results of failing to perceive the world rightly—of ignorance and inattention, of the lack of curiosity and compassion, of the failure of imagination and insight. Instead of the actual world, inhabited by unique and autonomous human subjects like themselves, such false artists as *Despair*'s Herman, *Laughter in the Dark*'s Albinus, *Lolita*'s Humbert, and *Pale Fire*'s Kinbote, perceive a solipsistic world of

their own making, inhabited by cardboard cutouts, paper dolls, wind-up toys, and animatronic mannequins. And to this list Nabokov added Vadim Vadimovich—Hermannian in his staggeringly egoistic ability to see his own image in the world around him; Albinian in the casual cruelty of his intimate relationships; Humbertian in his tendency to dehumanize his "loved" one through a process of aesthetic abstraction; Kinbotian in his near-mad solipsistic reduction of the world to a reality of which he is the center; and Fieldean in his careless inattention to detail. Just as in Dante's *Commedia* it is the perversion of the greatest virtue, love, that condemns us to hell, so in Nabokov is it the perversion of the greatest attribute, subjectivity, that damns us.

There is though another, equally important consideration informing the seeming coyness, even coldness, in Nabokov's public self-performances: his profound devotion to privacy where his intimate, personal (and particularly familial) relationships were concerned. Vladimir Nabokov was someone for whom, in the words of Marguerite Duras in *L'Amant*, writing was still "*moral* [moral]" (14); and he was well aware of the ethical dimensions of fictive and non-fictive/natural discourse alike. His reticence where his personal life was concerned, the relative lack of what many would recognize as human detail (including his relationships with his family) was the product of an awareness that to write about oneself is necessarily to write about other people:

> Although he can hardly undertake an autobiography without sacrificing some of his own privacy, he refuses to infringe on the privacy of others. His favorite sister, still living, receives a single mention by name in the first version of his autobiography; his close friends in school or in émigré days receive none at all; those he must mention, like "Colette" and "Tamara," he hides behind pseudonyms; and only when they are dead, like his parents, his uncle, or his cousin Yuri, will he let real people play a large part under their own names. (Boyd *The American Years* 151)

The absence of the kind of "juicy details" that Field hoped to uncover is not evidence of the lack of importance that he placed on these relationships, as some have supposed of the "cold" and "aloof" master, it is evidence of the inestimable value that they and the sanctity of autonomous selfhood held for him.

This is another point of contrast (and an ultimate point of comparison) between Vladimir and Vadim: where Nabokov shows decorous restraint in detailing his intimate relationships, especially that with his wife, "In *Look at the Harlequins!*, by contrast, Vadim discloses the most grotesque details even of his sexual relations with his wives" (Boyd, *The American Years* 629). Oblivious and/or simply insensitive to the real humanity of others, and their right to control how much or how little of themselves they choose to make public, Vadim behaves essentially as Nabokov saw Field as behaving with respect to his own life and, more importantly, the lives of his wife and son, his father and mother, even his brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

C. Synthesis: The Dual Referentiality of *Look at the Harlequins!*

Highly self-conscious with respect to both its partial origins in the life of the author and its status as a fictional autobiography, *Look at the Harlequins!* abounds with references and allusions to authors of similarly (quasi-) autobiographical works—including three late-nineteenth/early twentieth century contemporaries: Arnold Bennett, the English novelist whose works are set in fictionalized version of the region of England where he was raised; W.N.P. Barbellion (the *nom de plume* of Bruce Frederick Cummings), whose revised and published diaries are filled with observations and reflections bearing on the themes and concerns of Nabokov's novel; and, most notably, Marcel Proust, whose *A la Recherche du*

temps perdu [*In Search of Lost Time* / *Remembrance of Things Past*] (1913-1927), almost invariably read as a kind of *roman à clef*, is alluded to throughout the novel. What most clearly distinguishes *Look at the Harlequins!* from these works is that *Look at the Harlequins!* is "autobiographical" by way of anti-autobiography—an approach that has interesting implications in terms of the particular form of the dual-referentiality it exhibits.

II: V(l)adim(ir) V(l)adim(or)ovich N(abokov)

To borrow a metaphor inspired by the very first book that Nabokov ever translated (from English into Russian), *Look at the Harlequins!* is a record of Vladimir "Volodya" (as he was affectionately called by family and friends) Nabokov's experiences through the looking-glass and an account of what he found there. The primary strategy employed is one of inversion, but as Emma W. Hamilton writes in "*Look at the Harlequins!*: A Corpus Compendium,"

> When Alice goes through the Looking-Glass, she finds that the differences there abound and are far more than mere inversions…. Alice is the prototype of mirror-traversers, and what she proves is that Looking-glass land is far more than opposites land—opposites are too easy—instead it is a space of invention, subverting our expectations, created from the familiar pieces of our world recombined into something foreign, startling, and yet somehow applicable, meaningful. (14-15)

The life and works of Vadim Vadimovich N. are not simply inversions, then, of those of Vladimir Vladimorovich Nabokov—they are, in different respects and to greater or lesser extents, at different times—*per*versions and *sub*versions of their originals. Not everything in the novel, however, is completely fictitious or false with respect to Nabokov himself: as Schiff writes, "a latticework of truth occasionally flashes provocatively from beneath the luscious overgrowth of a thousand fragrant fictions" (352). As Maurice Couturier puts it in the essay, "I, X Does Not Equal Nabokov"—adapted from the fifth chapter of his book *La figure de l'auteur* (Paris: Seuil, 1995)—,

> In this instance Nabokov, who claimed as Proust did that the author's life is of no account and that only his writing is important, compelled his readers to take his own life into consideration. *Look at the Harlequins!* constitutes a kind of allegory on the theme of "the return of the author"; it is as if Nabokov, fearing near the end of his life that his subtle endeavors to absent himself from his texts might induce his readers to consider him an impostor or a pure fiction, had come back on stage for the last time to show that he was a real person…. Nabokov encourages us to practice a Sainte-Beuvian variety of criticism even as we celebrate the author's death, thus placing us in a highly paradoxical situation. (3)

Because Vadim is clearly modeled after Nabokov—for there is virtually no single aspect of his life or character that does not have some corresponding element, some "original" in Nabokov's own actual life and character—there is a sense in which *Look at the Harlequins!* is to be understood as a fiction "about" Nabokov. Following Gregory Currie's argument in *The Nature of Fiction* about the role of real references in fiction, we conclude that to not recognize the parallels between Vadim and Nabokov—to not understand Vadim as a version of Nabokov—is to not properly understand the novel. Ultimately, what this means is that the declarations that establish what is fictive of, or true-in-the-fiction of Vadim can and should be understood as also entailing assertions about Nabokov. And the truth-value of these assertions is variable: each of the various aspects of Vadim's life and character must be evaluated individually, according to the precise nature of its relation to the life and character of Nabokov, from which they are derived. Those aspects that are shared, by the two without revision or transformation are simultaneously both true-in-the-fiction, with respect to Vadim, and true, with respect Nabokov. Vadim's birth in 1899, for example, is to be properly evaluated in terms of both its being true-in-the-fiction that Vadim is born in 1899, and true that Nabokov was born in 1899. Those aspects of Vadim that represent inversions or re-imaginings of their corresponding aspects in Nabokov, however, are simultaneously both true-in-the-fiction, with respect to Vadim, and false, with respect to Nabokov. Vadim's

father's being "a gambler and a rake" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 96) for example, is to be properly evaluated in terms of both its being true-in-the-fiction that Vadim's father was "a gambler and a rake," and false that Nabokov's father was "a gambler and a rake."

A. The Original of Vadim: A (Brief) Comparative Biography, from Russian Childhood to European Exile

The similarities between Vadim's dysfunctional family and the Veens in Nabokov's *Ada* fittingly call to mind Nabokov's inversion in that novel of the opening line of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*: "All happy families are more or less dissimilar; all unhappy ones are more or less alike" (3). Vadim's broken home—"I saw my parents infrequently," he writes. "They divorced and remarried and redivorced at… a rapid rate" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 8)—and "atrocious, intolerable" childhood (7) invert the devoted, loving family and happy childhood of Nabokov's own life. Young Vladimir "Volodya" Nabokov saw his parents—who remained utterly devoted to each other in what was the first and only marriage for each—virtually every day of his young life. The portrait of his father that Vadim provides similarly derives from a blend of the fictional Veen family and a grotesque parody of Nabokov's own father, Vladimir Dmitrievich (V.D.) Nabokov.

> My father was a gambler and a rake. His society nickname was Demon [the name of Ada and Van's father in *Ada*]. Vrubel has portrayed him with his vampire-pale cheeks, his diamond eyes, his black hair. What remained on the palette has been used by me, Vadim, son of Vadim, for touching up the father of the passionate siblings in the best of my English romaunts, *Ardis* (1970).
>
> The scion of a princely family devoted to a gallery of a dozen Tsars, my father resided on the idyllic outskirts of history. His politics were of the casual, reactionary sort. He had a dazzling and complicated sensual life, but his culture was patchy and commonplace. He was born in 1865, married in 1896, and died in a pistol duel with a young Frenchman on October 22, 1898, after a card-table fracas at Deauville, some resort in gray Normandy. (96)

There are certain similarities between Vadim's and Nabokov's "princely" families, both of which might rightly be characterized as "devoted to a gallery of a dozen Tsars." But the portrait of Vadim "Demon" N., Vadim Vadimovich's father, is drawn from an almost total reversal of the life, character, and career V.D. Nabokov, who was a considerably cultured Anglophile, a rather sedate and temperate man of moderate habits, and a monogamist passionately devoted to his wife and the mother of his children, Elena Ivanovna Nabokov (*née* Rukavishnikova). He was also a man who did not quite "reside on the idyllic outskirts of history." Far from being of "the casual reactionary sort," V.D. Nabokov's politics were of the truly passionate, modern liberal democratic sort. A leading member of the Constitutional Democratic party (the *Kadets*), V.D. Nabokov played a fairly prominent role in the Russian politics of his day, being elected to the First Duma and serving as secretary to the Provisional Government established in the wake of the February Revolution. (The possibility, alluded to earlier, of Vadim's having been actually fathered Count Nikifor Nikodimovich Starov, as well as the possibility that his marriages may be incestuous, also echo similar elements in Nabokov's *Ada* as well as parodying suggestions of infidelity and illegitimate children in Nabokov's own family.)

Like Nabokov, Vadim is sent into exile in the wake of the Bolshevist Revolution. The high adventure of his escape resembles King Charles the Beloved's (a.k.a. Charles Kinbote's) alleged flight from Zembla in Nabokov's *Pale Fire* far more, however, than it does Nabokov's own retreat in stages—first to the Caucuses and then to England—with his family. Vadim writes, "One autumn evening poor Mstislav's ["a Polish landowner, a distant relation of mine"] young mistress showed me a fairy-tale path winding through a great forest where a last aurochs had been speared by a first Charnetski under John III (Sobieski)"

(Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 9); and before he crosses the border, to make good his escape, he is forced to shoot and kill a Red Army soldier (10). Both Vadim—a self-described "unpopular orphan" (4)—and Nabokov arrive in England, graduating from Cambridge in the spring of 1922 (by which time Nabokov had himself been technically "orphaned" by the murder of his father). Both, while students there, have distant encounters with the poet A.E. Housman, "whose glum features and drooping-thatch mustache [Nabokov] saw at Trinity's high table almost every night" (Boyd, *The Russian Years* 171). Vadim declares, "I had seen him many times from afar and once, plain. It was in the Trinity Library. He stood holding an open book but looking at the ceiling as if trying to remember something—perhaps, the way another Author had translated that line"(Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 22).

Vadim's émigré years in Europe are spent largely residing in Paris, which was, according to Vadim "becoming the center of *émigré* culture and destitution" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 51). Nabokov did live for a brief time—approximately eighteen months, until May 1940, when he emigrated to the United States—in Paris, a city he disliked immensely. ""Wherever they moved," Boyd writes, "Nabokov found Paris oppressive, and in later years he would recall it as the gray, gloomy city on the Seine. Sitting in the Deux Magots with George Hessen and his French translator, he ran the city down: 'Parizh,' he would say, in the Russian manner: 'Pas riche'" (*The Russian Years* 504).

Like Vadim and Iris, Vladimir and Véra Nabokov lived for a time in a shabby two-room flat in the 16th *arrondissement*. The Nabokov's address at 59 rue Boileau (their last Paris address) becomes Vadim's address at rue Despréaux,, 23—Boileau being the former half and Despréaux, being the latter half of the name of the seventeenth/eighteenth century French poet and critic Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux. During these years of European exile,

Vadim writes and publishes under the penname V. Irisin—a name deriving equally from Nabokov's own *nom de plume*, V. Sirin as from the name of Vadim's first wife, Iris; though at some point, like Nabokov, he desists from the practice and "revert[s] to [his] own family name" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 97)—conspicuously not provided. Brian Boyd notes that "when his invented double, Vadim Vadimych… describes the working methods of *his* émigré years, he partly matches his maker" (*The Russian Years* 345). Vadim describes them as follows:

> A first draft, made in pencil, filled several blue *cahiers* of the kind used in schools, and upon reaching the saturation point of revision presented a chaos of smudges and scriggles. To this corresponded the disorder of the text which followed a regular sequence only for a few pages, being then interrupted by some chunky passage that belonged to a later, or earlier, part of the story. After sorting out and repaginating all this, I applied myself to the next stage: the fair copy. It was tidily written with a fountain pen in a fat and sturdy exercise book or ledger. Then an orgy of new corrections would blot out by degrees all the pleasure of specious perfection. A third phase started where legibility stopped. Poking with slow and rigid fingers at the keys of my trusty old *mashinka* ("machine"), Count Starov's wedding present, I would be able to type some three hundred words in one hour instead of the round thousand with which some popular novelist of the previous century could cram it in longhand. (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 80-81)

To an excerpt from this same passage, Boyd appends, "Finally Nabokov, unable to type, would dictate the whole book to his wife as she typed it out" (*The Russian Years* 345).

B. Looking-Glass Library: A Comparative Bibliography

Nabokov's self-parody extends beyond the autobiographical to encompass the bibliographical: *Look at the Harlequins!* parodies, inverts, and otherwise distorts much of Nabokov's prior fictive *oeuvre* in the same way that it parodies, inverts, and otherwise distorts his life and character—by both transforming their content into elements of Vadim's life, and transfiguring their plots, themes, and titles into those of Vadim's novels. The

different echoes of Nabokov's own life and work—those that have been distorted as well as the crystal-clear—often reveal Nabokov's attitudes toward the incorporation of the autobiographical into an author's fiction, and suggest various links (both real and imagined) between the novels of his own body of work.

The text of Vadim's autobiography, in which Nabokov's novel almost entirely consists (*almost*—a point that will be addressed later), is preceded by a list of "Other Books by the Narrator." This list identifies Vadim as the author of twelve books as well as the narrator of the present autobiography—with the exception of *Exile in Mayda*, all novels, as Vadim's autobiography reveals. (The identification in this bibliography of Vadim as "the Narrator" rather than "the Author," as would be more fitting, represents a subtle metaleptic intrusion of the actual world into the fictional world of and surrounding Vadim's autobiography. It points, of course, to the fundamentally fictive nature of Vadim as his text's autobiographical author-narrator-protagonist; but it suggests that this fictive status may also adhere somehow in the world of the fiction in which Vadim is, ostensibly, an actually existing, true autobiographer.) The twelve titles are evenly divided into categories:

IN RUSSIAN:

Tamara 1925
Pawn Takes Queen 1927
Plenilune 1929
Camera Lucida (Slaughter in the Sun) 1931
The Red Top Hat 1934
The Dare 1950

IN ENGLISH:
See under Real 1939
Esmeralda and Her Parandrus 1941
Dr. Olga Repnin 1946
Exile from Mayda 1947
A Kingdom by the Sea 1962
Ardis 1970

In comparison, Nabokov had sixteen novels/novellas to his credit prior to the publication of *Look at the Harlequins!*; as well as three different editions of an autobiography, eight short story collections, five volumes of poetry (in addition to two privately printed collections), nine plays, a published screenplay, an imaginative biography of Nikolai Gogol, a work of criticism on translation, three published English-language translations of Russian works, and two Russian-language translations of English-language works. Despite the unevenness, however, the titles—in conjunction with the various descriptions of his works that Vadim provides over the course of his autobiography—invite a comparative bibliography. The relations between Vadim's works and Nabokov's are not reducible to a simple one-to-one correspondence; but virtually each one of Nabokov's own actual novels is represented in some way in and through Vadim's; and the precise nature of the varying relations also reflects different aspects of and elements from Nabokov's life. (In what follows, each of Vadim's twelve titles will be briefly considered in turn. The treatments of *A Kingdom by the Sea* and *Ardis*, which warrant special attention due to the precise nature of their thematic relations to Nabokov's project in *Look at the Harlequins!* As a whole, are more extensive.)

***Tamara* (1925)**

Little of Vadim's first novel *Tamara* is disclosed. When recalling it rather late in his autobiography, he supplies by way of description only the lyrical image of "a girl at sunrise in the mist of an orchard" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 228). Otherwise, the reader is given only to understand that the eponymous character shares with Vadim's daughter Bel (and his fictional character Esmeralda) a certain "regular striation of bright bloom along the outside of forearm and leg," so that his recollection of this feature of Bel's "smacks of self-

plagiarism" (169). Yet it is clearly understood to be the counterpart of Nabokov's own first novel, *Mashenka* (1925). The name "Tamara" is significant in Nabokov's own *oeuvre* as the pseudonym he gives in his autobiography to Valentina Shulgin (Boyd, *The American Years* 631), whom he identifies as his own "first love"—just as the eponymous Mashenka/Mary is the "first love" of Nabokov's protagonist in the novel bearing her name. Nabokov—somewhat uncharacteristically—notes the relationship himself in his introduction to the English-language translation/edition, *Mary* (1970):

> The beginner's well-known propensity for obtruding upon his own privacy, by introducing himself… into his first novel, owes less to the attraction of a ready theme than to the relief of getting rid of oneself, before going on to better things. It is one of the very few common rules I have accepted. Readers of my *Speak, Memory* (begun in the Nineteen-Forties) cannot fail to notice certain similarities between my recollections and Ganin's [the protagonist of the novel]. His Mary is a twin sister of my Tamara, the ancestral avenues are there, the Oredezh flows through both books, and the actual photograph of the Rozhestveno house as it is today—beautifully reproduced on the cover of the Penguin edition (*Speak, Memory*, 1969)—could well be a picture of the pillared porch in the "Voskresensk" of the novel. I had not consulted *Mashenka* when writing Chapter Twelve of the autobiography a quarter of a century later; and now that I have, I am fascinated by the fact that, despite the superimposed inventions… a headier extract of personal reality is contained in the romantization than in the autobiographer's scrupulously faithful account…. (xiii-xiv)

Nabokov even, according to Brian Boyd, "quotes at length from [Valentina's] love letters" in the novel (*The American Years* 631).

Pawn Takes Queen **(1927)**

Both the title and the plot synopsis—"a grandmaster betrayed" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 228)—of Vadim's second novel *Pawn Takes Queen,* which he describes as once "my most popular" (49), point to the juxtaposition of elements of two of Nabokov's Russian novels. The chess reference of the title, as well as the novels' grandmaster protagonist—the eponymous Luzhin—derive from Nabokov's own "chess" novel, *Zashchita Luzhina* (1930)

[*The Defense* (1964)], about a grandmaster's precipitous slide into madness. The novel concludes with Luzhin's leaping to his death from a window, apparently mistaking the checkered ground below for a life-sized chessboard—a suicide echoed in a homicide in Vadim's novel:

> The lady next to me informed me she had adored that treacherous conversation between the Pawn and the Queen about the husband and would they really defenestrate the poor chess player? I said they would but not in the next issue, and not for good: he would live forever in the games he had played and in the multiple exclamation marks of future annotators. (58)

The "pawn" and "queen" of Vadim's chess-allusive title also suggest, however, the "knave" and "queen" of Nabokov's *Korol', dama, valet* (1928) [*King Queen, Knave* (1968)], in which a cuckolded businessman (the king) is "betrayed" by his young nephew (the pawn/knave)—who "takes" his uncle's wife (the queen)."

***Plenilune* (1929)**

Vadim's self-described "moonburst of verse" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 228), the novella *Polnolunie* [*Plenilune*], corresponds to Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), a hybrid work consisting in a 999-line (eponymous) poem and a narrative ostensibly functioning as critical commentary on it. Both Vadim's and Nabokov's titles are references to the moon—the traditionally "literary" "plenilune" referring directly to the full moon; "pale fire" alluding to a line from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*: "The moon's an arrant thief, / And her pale fire she snatches from the sun" (V:3).

***Camera Lucida (Slaughter in the Sun)* (1931)**

The title of Vadim's *Camera Lucida*, which is later translated as *Slaughter in the Sun*, is a parodic inversion of Nabokov's *Kamera obskura* (1933)—translated into English first as *Camera Obscura* (1936) and later as *Laughter in the Dark* (1938, 1960). The only description of any substance is Vadim's brief blurb, "the spy's mocking eye among the meek blind" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 228)—which links it as well to Nabokov's relatively slight novella, *Sogliadatai* (1938) [*The Eye* (1965)].

***The Red Top Hat* (1934)**

"*The Red Top Hat* of decapitation in a country of total injustice" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 228-229), as Vadim glosses his fifth novel, is evocative of Nabokov's two most overtly "political" novels: the Kafka-esque *Praglasheniye na kazn'* (1938) [*Invitation to a Beheading* (1959)] and the Orwellian *Bend Sinister* (1947). In the former (a more literal translation of which is "invitation to a decapitation"), the protagonist Cincinnatus C. is found guilty of the crime of "gnostical turpitude"—opacity (i.e., the possession of a subjective inner life inaccessible to and unknowable by others) in a society in which everyone is literally, it seems, transparent. In the opening chapter, he is condemned "to be made to wear the red tophat—a token phrase that the courts had evolved, whose true meaning was known to every schoolboy" (Nabokov, *Invitation to a Beheading* 21). The latter novel, *Bend Sinister* is set in an unnamed, fictional country (which seems to be located in central/eastern Europe) following the establishment of a totalitarian regime, "a grotesque police state" resembling, as Nabokov writes in his introduction to the 1963 edition of the novel, "the idiotic and despicable regimes that we all know and that have brushed against me in the course of my

life: worlds of tyranny and torture, of Fascists and Bolshevists, of Philistine thinkers and jack-booted baboons," "infamous models" that allowed him to "[interlard] this fantasy with bits of Lenin's speeches, and a chink of the Soviet constitution, and gobs of Nazist pseudo-efficiency" (xiii). This suggested same-ness of the Russian/Soviet Bolshevist and German Nazi regimes is present as well in Nabokov's introduction to the 1959 English-language edition of *Invitation to a Beheading*, where he alludes to his "seeing both in terms of one dull beastly farce" (5).

***The Dare* (1950)**

Similarly to his *Pawn Takes Queen*, both the title and synopsis of Vadim's *The Dare*—"my best in the series: young poet writes prose on a *Dare*" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 229)—evoke two Nabokov novels. *The Dare*—" *Podarok Otchizne* was its original title, which can be translated as 'a gift to the fatherland'" (99) is essentially a conflation of Nabokov's *Podvig* (1932) [*Glory* (1971)] and the serially published (1937-1938) *Dar* (1952) [*The Gift* (1963)]—each of which is implicated in the English title. As a rather literal translation of the Russian *Podvig* (which, however, Nabokov himself typically transliterated as *The Exploit*), *The Dare* is a typically Nabokovian, bi-lingual punning allusion. The English *Dare* also adds a final *e* to the Russian *Dar*—the title of Nabokov's serially published (1937-1938) novel (1952).

"The novel begins with a nostalgic account of a Russian childhood (much happier, though not less opulent than mine," Vadim writes:

> After that comes adolescence in England (not unlike my own Cambridge years); then life in émigré Paris, the writing of a first novel (*Memoirs of a Parrot Fancier*) and the tying of amusing knots in various literary intrigues. Inset in the middle part is a complete version of the book my Victor wrote "on a dare": this is a concise biography

> and critical appraisal of Fyodor Dostoyevski, whose politics my author finds hateful and whose novels he condemns as absurd with their black-bearded killers presented as mere negatives of Jesus Christ's conventional image, and weepy whores borrowed from maudlin romances of an earlier age. The next chapter deals with the rage and bewilderment of émigré reviewers, all of them priests of the Dostoyevskian persuasion; and in the last pages my young hero accepts a flirt's challenge and accomplishes a final gratuitous feat by walking through a perilous forest into Soviet territory and as casually strolling back. (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 99-100)

The bulk of this summary corresponds more directly to Nabokov's *Dar*—a self-begetting novel revolving around a young Russian émigré poet in inter-war Berlin, widely recognized as Nabokov's most autobiographical novel. Victor's youth would seem to be (quasi-) autobiographical in the same way that Vadim's own youth is (quasi-) autobiographical—but in ways that more accurately reflect Nabokov's life than Vadim's. The three share in common a Cambridge education in England, and a period of émigré life in Paris—though Nabokov's stay there was much shorter than Vadim's is and Victor's would seem to be (the latter pair's Paris years correspond more directly to Nabokov's Berlin years). Victor's happy and "opulent" Russian childhood is a partial inversion of his own unhappy childhood, which is in turn a partial inversion of Nabokov's happy childhood (in this case, the inversion of an inversion returns us, more or less, to our original starting-point).

Victor's critical biography of Fyodor Dostoevski mirrors Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev "scandalously irreverent portrait" (Boyd *The Russian Years* 447) of Nikolai Chernyshevsky that comprises the middle section of Nabokov's *Dar*. The attitude that both Victor and his creator (Vadim) take toward Dostoevski's politics and art is not only the same as their mutual creator's (Nabokov's), it is essentially the same taken by Godunov-Cherdyntsev and his creator (whom he shares with Vadim) toward Chernyshevsky, whom Nabokov regarded, as Brian Boyd writes, as his idol Pushkin's "antithesis, intent on reducing free art, paradoxically, to the status of compelled propaganda in the cause of freedom" (T*he*

Russian Years 22). And the fifth chapter of *Dar* describes essentially the same kind of "rage and bewilderment of émigré reviewers," in response to an attack on Chernyshevsky as something of a sacred cow of the Russian émigré community, that Vadim's Victor faces in response to his similar attack. It is primarily the final element of Vadim's *The Dare* that derives directly from Nabokov's *Podvig*, which culminates with the young protagonist's undertaking to illegally steal across the Soviet border. Unlike Victor, however—and Vadim himself, who later engages in a similar "exploit"—Nabokov's protagonist (Martin Edelweiss) disappears in the attempt.

Though he discloses more of his English novels in terms of their plots and other various elements throughout his autobiography, Vadim recalls them much more succinctly: "My English originals, headed by the fierce *See under Real* (1940), led through the changing light of *Esmeralda and Her Parandrus*, to the fun of *Dr. Olga Repnin* and the dream of *A Kingdom by the Sea*. There was also the collection of short stories *Exile from Mayda*) a distant island; and *Ardis*, the work I had resumed at the time we met" (229). This cursory, almost dismissive treatment would seem in part to be an ironic recognition that Nabokov's own "English originals," beginning really with *Lolita* (1955), have overwhelmingly overshadowed the earlier Russian novels that garnered such praise and critical acclaim for "V. Sirin" (Nabokov's *nom de plume* at the time) during his west European exile, and that remain far less widely read and discussed, at least in Anglo-American literary-critical circles. Nabokov's introductions to the revised English translations of these novels often tend toward the nostalgic and sentimental, evidence of a profound emotional attachment as well as a high critical self-appraisal that, he always insisted, could simply not be understood or appreciated

by a non-speaker and -student of Russian. Vadim explains his own tendency to more highly regard his Russian works by declaring,

> If I estimated the second batch at a lower value than the first, it was owing not only to a diffidence some will call coy, others, commendable, and myself, tragic, but also because the contours of my American production looked blurry to me; and they looked that way because I knew I would always keep hoping that my next book--not simply the one in progress, like *Ardis*--but something I had never attempted yet, something miraculous and unique, would at last answer fully the craving, the aching thirst that a few disjunct paragraphs in *Esmeralda* and *The Kingdom* were insufficient to quench. I believed I could count on your patience. (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 229)

To what precise extent these pronouncements may be attributed to Nabokov, as pertaining to his own work, is unclear. But they do reflect—especially the last lines concerning (tellingly) "a few disjunct paragraphs in *Esmeralda* and *The Kingdom*"—the "private tragedy" to which Nabokov refers in his 1956 piece, "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" (typically printed as an afterword in subsequent editions of the novel):

> None of my American friends have read my Russian books and thus every appraisal on the strength of my English ones is bound to be bout of focus. My private tragedy, which cannot, and indeed should not, be anybody's concern, is that I had to abandon my natural idiom, my untrammeled, rich, and infinitely docile Russian tongue for a second-rate brand of English, devoid of any of those apparatuses—the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions—which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way. (*Lolita* 316-317)

That Nabokov nonetheless remains one of the greatest and most gifted prose stylists the English language has seen is often taken as evidence of a near-nauseating false-modesty in these lines. Nabokov is often accused by detractors and even admirers alike of arrogance—but an arrogance that tended to manifest itself in unabashed, often plain-spoken self-praise, and not through disingenuous posing (that was saved for other, more artistically playful games). Certainly he was aware that his talents as a writer in and of English were considerable; but there remains a clearly audible note of sincerity here. There is no reason not

to believe that the consummate perfectionist remained self-conscious with respect to composing in what was not his own native tongue, and aware of how he might better himself in the language that he gave up.

Despite what he might have preferred, Nabokov was throughout the last decades of his life much better known as the author of (first and foremost, of course) *Lolita*, of *Pale Fire*, and even of *Pnin* and *Ada*, than he was as the author of *Dar/The Gift*, *Zashchita Luzhina/The Defense*, or *Otchayanie/Despair*, *Priglashenie na kazn'/Invitation to a Beheading*; and he still is. Vadim is similarly far more famous (and infamous) as the author of *Kingdom by the Sea* than he is as the author of *The Dare*. The much greater degree of concrete detail present in Vadim's various references and allusions to his latter six works, reflect this proportionate fame.

***See under Real* (1939)**

Vadim's "first novel in English" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 226), the "ambitious, beautiful, strange *See under Real*" (129), roughly corresponds to Nabokov's own first published novel to be composed entirely in that language: *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941), with which it shares a common, significant word. The adjectives that Vadim uses to describe his novel might also apply to Nabokov's sometimes vaguely surreal pseudo-detective-novel that describes the narrator's efforts to find his mysterious half-brother, the brilliant novelist Sebastian Knight. The directing function of the phrase used to title Vadim's book—which results in "eventual tribulations in the catalogues of public libraries" (121)—is suggestive of the sequence of leads, each one deferring the attainment of his goal, followed by the Nabokov's narrator-protagonist. It is also suggestive of the fictional index of

Nabokov's *Pale Fire*—a labyrinthine "aid" that leads its consultant from one entry to another and back again in an endless circle of infinitely postponed revelation. The link to *Pale Fire* suggested by Vadim's *See under Real* may also reveal a clue to the "solution" of Sebastian Knight. Critics such as Mary McCarthy and Brian Boyd maintain—based on evidence taken from the Index as well as from Kinbote's "commentary"—the that the real identity of *Pale Fire*'s Charles Kinbote is the professor of Russian, V. Botkin. It has also been maintained that, similarly, the actual identity of the narrator of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is Sebastian Knight himself—or that the novel represents one of Knight's own novels. Nabokov's inking these two novels to each other through the fictional *See under Real* may be interpreted as further evidence that these two similar interpretations reflect Nabokov's own intentions/interpretations.

***Esmeralda and Her Parandrus* (1941)**

Esmeralda and Her Parandrus represents one of the more complex cases. One of its readers declares in a letter to Vadim that the novel, "despite its 'motley style and baroque imagery,' was a masterpiece "pinching strings of personal poignancy which he, a committed artist, never knew could vibrate in him" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 132). Both the criticism and the praise are reminiscent of characterizations of Nabokov's work broadly—but particularly *Lolita*. The title itself suggests certain connections to and parallels with Nabokov's most (in)famous of novels. "Esmeralda"—the name by which Hugo's "gypsy-girl" in *Notre-Dame de Paris* [*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*] (1831) is known suggests "Carmen," a name Humbert associates with his "Lolita" through a (fictional) popular song about the narrator's murder of his lover. In *Lolita*, the name/song is an allusion to Prosper

Mérimée's novella *Carmen* (1845), and the Bizet opera based upon it (1875)—in which the eponymous gypsy-girl is murdered by her lover. And Vadim's parandrus—a mythical creature who avoids detection through shape-shifting—is an apt metaphor for the chameleonic self-described "monster," Humbert Humbert.

Additional details link it more subtly and obliquely to several other Nabokov novels as well. "The mad scholar in *Esmeralda and Her Parandrus* [who] wreathes Botticelli and Shakespeare together by having Primavera end as Ophelia with all her flowers" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 162), suggests the mad scholar, Charles Kinbote, who in *Pale Fire* wreathes his own fantastic tale of Zembla and John Shade's poem on life, death, and the possibility of an afterlife together by "discovering" the latter in the former. That Kinbote might actually be a Prof. V, Botkin makes the parallel greater: Botticelli and Botkin, and Shakespeare and Shade begin with the same phonic sounds. The reference to Ophelia more tenuously links Vadim's novel to Nabokov's *Bend Sinister*, which features in its seventh chapter an extended treatment of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* , including Ophelia and her suicide. This thin thread is somewhat strengthened when Vadim later writes, "'Shall I grow a beard to cross the fronder?' muses homesick General Gurko in Chapter Six of *Esmeralda and Her Parandrus*" (204). "Gurko" is "gurk" with an added *o*, "Gurk" being both the name of a minor character in *Bend Sinister* as well as an inverse anagram of the protagonist's name, Krug. Together the two names form a palindrome, suggesting a circle—which is both the meaning of the Russian *krug* and the shape of the letter "o."

***Dr. Olga Repnin* (1946)**

"The story of an invented Russian professor in America… acclaimed as 'a blend of humor and humanism' by alliteration-prone reviewers" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 135), *Dr. Olga Repnin* is clearly the counterpart of Nabokov's own comic and poignant novel of a Russian professor in America, *Pnin* (1957). The appendage of the prefix *re-* to Timofey Pnin's surname to create Olga Repnin's results in a name meaning literally "Pnin again." The relationship between the two is similar to that adhering between Nabokov and Vadim. They are mirror-images in the dual sense of both reproducing and inverting each other's image: Nabokov's male protagonist becomes a female protagonist in Vadim's novel; but the awkward diction and tortured phrasing of Olga Repnin's English, as quoted by Vadim (158), echoes Timofey Pnin's own.

***Exile from Mayda* (1947)**

Very little is said of Vadim's *Exile from Mayda* beyond it's being a collection of short stories—Vadim's single such volume to Nabokov's eight over the course of his career—and Mayda's referring to " a distant island" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 229). (The closest of Nabokov's short story collections to Vadim's in terms of chronology would be *Nine Stories*—published in the same year as Vadim's volume—which consisted in "The Aurelian," "Cloud, Castle, Lake," "Spring in Fialta," Mademoiselle O," "A Forgotten Poet," "The Assistant Producer,""That in Aleppo Once," "Time and Ebb," and "Double Talk" ["Conversation Piece"]. "Mademoiselle O" would later appear as the fifth chapter of Nabokov's autobiography.) Vadim also refers vaguely at one point to a "Mr. Twidower"—"a name with certain connotations" (178) which suggests "widower"—who appears in the title

story (178). (The most famous of Nabokov's widowers is certainly the self-described "white widowed male" Humbert Humbert, though there are others—Adam Krug, for example.) It is also worth noting that "Mayda" is reminiscent of "Zembla," the (fictional) country of which Charles Kinbote claims in *Pale Fire* to be the deposed king; *Exile from Mayda* suggests the "exile from Zembla" that Kinbote claims is the secret subject of Shade's poem.

A Kingdom by the Sea (1962)*: Echoes of* Lolita *and Vadim Vadimovich's Autobiographical Fictions*

Of Vadim's twelve titles, *A Kingdom by the Sea* comes closest to clearly paralleling a single work of Nabokov's. *The Kingdom by the Sea*, an allusion to Poe's poem "Annabel Lee," which figures so prominently in its early chapters, was the working title of *Lolita* (*Dear Bunny, Dear Volodya* 215). Just as it was the financial success of *Lolita* that allowed Nabokov to retire from teaching in order to write full time, so too does Vadim's *Kingdom by the Sea* "[bundle] away all financial worries till the end of worrisome time" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 129). And like *Lolita*, too, Vadim's novel causes a minor scandal.

A protracted description of a "pirated" "copy of a Formosan (!) paperback reproduced from the American edition of" the novel, reveals some numerous parallels between the two books, in terms of the lives that they took on as well as their similar content.

> On the cover a publicity picture of the child actress who had played my Virginia in the recent film did better justice to pretty Lola Sloan and her lollypop than to the significance of my novel. Although slovenly worded by a hack with no inkling of the book's art, the blurb on the back of the limp little volume rendered faithfully enough the factual plot of my *Kingdom*.
>
> > *Bertram, an unbalanced youth, doomed to die shortly in an asylum for the criminal insane, sells for ten dollars his ten-year-old sister Ginny to the middle-aged bachelor Al Garden, a wealthy poet who travels with the beautiful child from resort to resort through America and other countries. A state of affairs that looks at first blush—and "blush" is the right word—like a case of irresponsible perversion (described in brilliant detail never attempted*

> *before) develops by the grees* [misprint] *into a genuine dialogue of tender love. Garden's feelings are reciprocated by Ginny, the initial "victim" who at eighteen, a normal nymph, marries him in a warmly described religious ceremony. All seems to end honky-donky* [sic!] *in foreverlasting bliss of a sort fit to meet the sexual demands of the most rigid, or frigid, humanitarian, had there not been running its chaotic course, in a sheef* [sheaf?] *of parallel lives beyond our happy couple's ken, the tragic tiny* [destiny?] *of Virginia Garden's inconsolable parents, Oliver and* [?], *whom the clever author by every means in his power, prevents from tracking their daughter Dawn* [sic!!]. *A Book-of-the-Decade choice.* (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 215-216)

The cover art seems to precisely reproduce the famous movie poster for Stanley Kubrick's 1962 adaptation of the novel for the screen: a close-up of Sue Lyon—whose name is similar to "Lola Sloan"—as "Lolita" peering coquettishly over heart-shaped sunglasses and sucking on a lollypop. The name of the actress playing the part of Vadim's Virginia (the name of Edgar Allen Poe's young cousin/wife, referenced in *Lolita*) "Lola," is one of the diminutives of Dolores listed by Humbert in his opening litany of names in Nabokov's novel. It is also—as is "Ginny," an abbreviated name corresponding to the various nicknames for Dolores Haze mentioned in *Lolita*—the name of the young girl Humbert initially imagines might satisfy his nympholepsy, Virginia "Ginny" McCoo.

The name "Bertram" is similar to both "Humbert," the double name the narrator-protagonist of *Lolita* adopts as a pseudonym, and "Lambert," a rejected alternate. Bertram's death in an "asylum for the criminal[ly] insane" occurs under similar circumstances to Humbert's death while under observation awaiting trial for the murder of Clare Quilty awaiting trial under observation. "Al Garden's" "travels with the beautiful child from resort to resort through America and other countries" is of course a version of Humbert's cross-country road-trips with his own under-aged ward; while his status as a "wealthy poet" identifies him as much with the commercially and financially successful Clare Quilty as with the *manqué* talent Humbert Humbert. Here the more direct parallels end, however, and

Vadim's novel comes to resemble more Humbert's fantasy than his reality, as the "state of affairs that looks at first blush… like a case of irresponsible perversion (described in brilliant detail never attempted before) develops by the grees [misprint] into a genuine dialogue of tender love." In *Lolita*, the opposite occurs, as Dolores "Dolly" Haze, a.k.a. "Lolita" comes to despise her cruel captor and eventually succeeds in escaping from him. The "brilliant detail never attempted before" to describe what is easily perceived as "a case of irresponsible perversion" is also Vadim's own: *Lolita* is actually a remarkably restrained and even "chaste" novel in terms of descriptions and other representations of sex acts of any kind. The plot takes another turn from Nabokov's *Lolita* when Ginny "at eighteen, a normal nymph, marries [Garden] in a warmly described religious ceremony." At eighteen, Nabokov's Dolly would be no kind of nymph, let alone a nymphet, at all for Humbert; while he does at one point imagine marrying her, it is more for the purpose of procreation in order to produce a new, second "Lolita" to replace the first lost to time and age. The "parallel lives… of Virginia Garden's inconsolable parents, Oliver and [?], whom the clever author by every means in his power, prevents from tracking their daughter Dawn [sic!!]" do, though, parallel the inconsolable Humbert's unsuccessful attempt to track down his "daughter" after she absconds with Quilty, the "clever author" of a "cryptogrammic paper chase" who always manages to remain one step ahead of his vain pursuer.

The parallels are great enough that even within Vadim's world (i.e., the world of Nabokov's novel *Look at the Harlequins!*), in one of several such metaleptic cross-overs, Vadim's *Kingdom by the Sea* is actually mistaken for what would seem to be Nabokov's *Lolita*. On a return flight from Moscow to Paris following a covert Soviet sojourn, Vadim is

accosted by a fellow Russian who, "pointing with a dramatically quivering index at *A Kingdom by the Sea* in my hands," castigates him for

> "this obscene novelette about little Lola or Lotte, whom some Austrian Jew or reformed pederast rapes after murdering her mother—no, excuse me—*marrying* mama first before murdering her—we like to legalize everything in the West, don't we, Vadim Vadimovich?"
>
> Still restraining myself, though aware of the uncontrollable cloud of black fury growing within my brain, I said: "You are mistaken. You are a somber imbecile. The novel I wrote, the novel I'm holding now, is *A Kingdom by the Sea*. You are talking of some other book altogether." (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 218)

Though not entirely accurate the Russian remonstrator's synopsis is a not unfair characterization of *Lolita* as filtered through a party-line Soviet Communist's prejudices and assumptions (some of which might, perhaps, be shared by a middle-class American philistine).

The echoes of *Lolita* that resound throughout *A Kingdom by the Sea* derive more immediately, however, in the world of the fiction, from the echoes of *Lolita* that resound throughout *Look at the Harlequins!* as an autobiographical account of Vadim's life. For *A Kingdom by the Sea*, the most *Lolita*-esque of Vadim's novels, is also his most autobiographical. As such, it is both a send-up popular mis-readings of *Lolita*, through and because of which Nabokov is still identified in the imaginations of so many as a pedophilic "dirty old man; and, secondly, another instance of inversion—this time, of Nabokov's own novelistic practices.

Look at the Harlequins! evokes *Lolita* virtually from its very beginning. "That magic summer" (4) that Vadim spends in Cannice with Iris Black (who will become his first wife) is vaguely reminiscent of Humbert's descriptions of his summer in Cannes with Annabel. A reference to the Mirana Palace in Cannice (30) evokes the Mirana Hotel owned by Humbert's father in *Lolita*, also on the Riviera. An early invocation of the word "nymphet" to describe

"a child of ten or so cradling a large yellow beach ball in her bare arms" who gives Vadim "a sweet lewd smile from under her auburn fringe" (29) suggests both Dolores "Lo"/"Lola""Dolly"/ "Lolita" Haze and her Riviera precursor Annabel Leigh as well as identifying Vadim, in this looking-glass world, as the creator of the neologism for which Nabokov is so famous.

There is something of Humbert Humbert at work in Vadim in virtually all of his relationships; and something of "Lolita" in almost every one of Vadim's lovers. Iris parallels the Dolly Haze as an object of pedophiliac attention: "'At eleven or twelve,' said Iris, 'I was as pretty as that French orphan…. I let smelly gentlemen fondle me'" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 29). (The parallel to the eponymous character in Nabokov's *Ada* that immediately follows—"I played indecent games with Ivor—oh nothing very unusual" (29)—which conflates the two Nabokovian heroines, is a parodic acknowledgment on Nabokov's part that many have wanted to see "Lolita" in Ada.) Like Dolly Haze (and, not incidentally, Ada Veen) Iris is tomboyish: "Now and then she liked to return on foot, being one of those small but strong lassies who can hurdle, and play hockey, and climb rocks, and then shimmy till any pale mad hour (*"do bezúmnogo blédnogo chása"*—to quote from my first direct poem to her" (33-34). There are also dissonant echoes of *Lolita* in Vadim's letter to the young woman who will become his second wife, Anna Ivanovna "Annette" Blagovo, an excerpt of which reads,

> *I only want you to be aware of the situation before proposing to you, Annette. Do not write, do not phone, do not mention this letter, if and when you come Friday afternoon; but, please, if you do, wear, in propitious sign, the Florentine hat that looks like a cluster of wildflowers. I want you to celebrate your resemblance to the fifth girl from left to right, the flower-decked blonde with the straight nose and serious gray eyes, in Botticelli's* Primavera*, an allegory of Spring, my love, my allegory.* (107)

The entreaties at the beginning of this passage are strangely reminiscent of Charlotte's confessional love-letter to Humbert in which she declares her desire to marry. But Vadim's reduction of his "love"-object to an artistic abstraction, a literary device, when he calls her his "allegory" is pure Humbert. Even the unnamed "You" whom Vadim addresses (in a parallel to Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*) is linked to "Lolita": she shares Dolores Haze's birthday.

The two characters who are most clearly and closely drawn after the tragic heroine of Nabokov's *Lolita*, however, are "Dolly" von Borg—the daughter of friends whose allure Vadim resists until she is twenty-four (twice Dolly Haze's age when Humbert Humbert succumbed)—; and Vadim's daughter with Annette, Isabel, called "Bel.," about whom Vadim comes to harbor sexual/romantic fantasies. As in *Lolita* such fantasies provide the impetus for a marriage to a woman who is not loved—though where Humbert marries Charlotte Haze as a pretext to remain in her house, where he hopes to indulge his nympholepsy with her prepubescent daughter, Vadim "resorts to a third marriage," in Boyd's words, in order to resist succumbing to his temptations. The outcome is in some sense the same: "Bel, despising her new stepmother [Louise] for the vulgarity under her elegant veneer and resenting her father for stooping to marry such a woman, closes off her mind against them both. The very move Vadim makes to protect Bel ends up stunting the growth he had tried to ensure" (Boyd *The American Years* 624). That Bel is inadvertently called "Annabelle"— by Louise and "Dolly" by Vadim also links her to Nabokov's nymphet: "Annabel" is the name of "Lolita's" Riviera precursor, and "Dolly" is one of the many names by which Dolores Haze is called. As the name of one of Vadim's past lovers, it also serves the same function as Humbert's conflating Annabel, his old love, and Dolly, his new one.

It is also with respect to Bel that Vadim's tendency to draw too heavily from his life for his fiction is most clearly manifested. "This is the romance in which Vadim brings his life and his art too close together," Emma Hamilton writes; "the transposition of his romance with Bel into his novel *A Kingdom by the Sea* seems to be virtually unaltered" (19). It also most clearly illustrates, she argues, the steep price that the artist pays when he invests too much of his reality and his real self into his art. *A Kingdom by the Sea* is essentially a proxy, a consolation prize that, as Hamilton notes, costs him a real relationship with Bel: Hamilton cites Vadim's own words in order to demonstrate that Vadim "sacrifice[s] the love he is cataloguing for the sake of its record" (21). After Bel is sent away to boarding school (in a parallel to Dolores Haze's being sent away to summer camp in *Lolita*), Vadim "cannot sustain both the writing of a rich text and a romantic relationship—especially the relationship that inspired the writing" (Hamilton 21).

> Its demands, the fun and the fancy of it, its intricate imagery, made up in a way for the absence of my beloved Bel. It was also bound to reduce, though I was hardly conscious of that, my correspondence with her (well-meant, chatty, dreadfully artificial letters which she seldom troubled to answer). Even more startling, of course, more incomprehensible to me, in groaning retrospect, is the effect my self-entertainment had on the number and length of our visits between 1957 and 1960…. (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 193)

As practiced by Vadim here, art supplants real life, robs it of its vitality, its immediacy, its urgency—robs it, that is, of its true *reality*. For Nabokov, who conceived of art as a method and means of perceiving, apprehending, and approaching reality, this is a gross misappropriation of real life and a gross misuse of art.

It is certainly not that Nabokov did not himself borrow elements from his own real life for use in his fiction, nor even that he attempted to hide or deny it when he did. While he always took great pains to emphasize the artistic originality of the invented worlds of his

novels—and even greater pains to distance himself from the Hermanns and Humberts of his *oeuvre*—he also admitted, for example, that his first novel, *Mashenka* (1926) [*Mary* (1970)] was essentially a rendering of the same "boyhood romance" that had inspired his very first publication, "a collection of love poems" (*Strong Opinions* 154). He wrote in the foreword to the English-language edition of *The Defense* (1964) "I gave to Luzhin, [the protagonist] my French governess, my pocket chess set, my sweet temper, and the stone of the peach I picked in my own walled garden" (11). And in the foreword to the revised English-language edition of *Despair* (1966) he locates "the remote abode to which mad Hermann finally scurries… in the Roussillon where three years earlier I had begun writing my chess novel, *The Defense*" (xiv). But Nabokov was also aware that such practices come with a price—that the process of fictionalization is often accompanied by a parallel process of de-realization. He opens his fifth chapter of *Speak, Memory* (derived from the earlier piece "Mademoiselle O"", a portrait of the French governess he gave to Luzhin whom Brian Boyd identifies as Cécile Miauton) by observing,

> I have often noticed that after I had bestowed on the characters of my novels some treasured item of my past, it would pine away in the artificial world where I had so abruptly placed it. Although it lingered on in my mind, its personal warmth, its retrospective appeal had gone and, presently, it became more closely identified with my novel than with my former self, where it had seemed to be so safe from the intrusion of the artist. Houses have crumbled in my memory as soundlessly as they did in the mute films of yore, and the portrait of my old French governess, whom I once lent a boy in one of my books, is fading fast, now that it is engulfed in the description of a childhood entirely unrelated to my own. (95)

One of the primary arguments that Hamilton makes is that through his inverted double, Vadim Vadimych, Nabokov not only parodies attempts to identify him with his more monstrous protagonists (particularly his most infamous character, Humbert Humbert), he also illustrates the dangers of drawing one's art too directly from one's life. And she sees in

Vadim's ultimate renunciation of his autobiographical approach art—by his refusal to subject "You" to the same treatment as the others—a

> realization that he cannot bleed his personal life into his text, because though it will vivify his writing, it will sap and kill his relationships. He admits this, saying, "reality would only be adulterated if I now started to narrate what you know, what I know, what nobody else knows, what shall never, never be ferreted out by a matter-of-fact, father-of-muck, mucking biograffitist. (22)

(This last bit can only, as Hamilton well knows, be another veiled reference to Nabokov's nemesis, Andrew Field.)

Ardis (1970): "The Myth of Cardinal Points" and "The Texture of Time"

Vadim describes his final novel, *Ardis* (1970) as "a stylized memoir dealing with the arbored boyhood and ardent youth of a great thinker who by the end of the book tackles the itchiest of all noumenal mysteries" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 231)—a vague but ultimately rather accurate description of another one of Nabokov's fictional autobiographies, *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*. The title of Vadim's novel derives directly from Nabokov's: *Ardis* is considered by *Ada*'s narrator-protagonist, Van Veen, as the title for his memoir. Like *Ada*, *Ardis* is its author's longest work spanning "733 medium-sized Bristol cards (each holding about 100 words)" (231)—compared to the 2500 cards that Nabokov's typist "turned into more than 850 pages" (*Strong Opinions* 122).

Vadim describes his *Ardis* as "my most private book, soaked in reality, saturated with sun flecks" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 234). Nabokov does not quite seem to have ever regarded *Ada* in this way (that distinction belongs to *Dar*/*The Gift*). But there are two respects in which *Ada* might be considered particularly "personal." The first is that Nabokov undertook nothing less in *Ada* than to create an entire world in, or at least according to his

image. The political geography and history of the planet Demonia, or Anti-Terra reflect in different ways the history of Nabokov's family line, his multi-cultural cosmopolitanism, and the story of his emigrations. The two countries that Nabokov considered his "homes," Russia and the United States, are in Demonia the single country of Amerussia—where English is spoken with liberal dashes of Russian and French. The Russian half of Amerussia is both a reclamation of a glorified past—the Russia of the 14th century Tatar empire, that is, the Russia of Nabokov's likely ancestor, the "Russified Tatar prince Nabok" (Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* 119)—and a revision of the loathed Soviet present. And the two most immediate safe-havens to which Nabokov retreated first from the Bolshevists and then from the Nazis—Britain and France—are also united as a single country. This strategy of "eversion"—the term used by Ray Arthur Swanson to describe Nabokov's turning the world as we know it inside-out—is very closely related to the similar strategy of inversion that Nabokov employs in *Look at the Harlequins!*

The second significantly "personal" aspect of *Ada* that links it directly to Vadim's *Ardis* is the treatise on time that comprises the fourth part in its entirety—the "original" of the chapter in Vadim's *Ardis* that "[contains] an account (couched in an overtly personal, intolerably tortured tone) of my own tussles with the Specter of Space and the myth of Cardinal Points" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 231). *The Texture of Time*, as the treatise in *Ada* is called is presented as a lecture by the narrator-protagonist Van Veen. Though Nabokov cautioned in an interview, "I have not decided yet if I agree with him in all his views on the texture of time. I suspect I don't" (*Strong Opinions* 143), he also admitted that the much of this section—*The Texture of Time* (Part Four of the novel in its entirety)—essentially reflects his own thoughts:

> He and I in that book attempt to examine the *essence of Time*, not its lapse. Van mentions the possibility of being "an amateur of Time, an epicure of duration," of being able to delight sensually in the texture of time, "in it stuff and spread, in the fall of its folds, in the very impalpability of its grayish gauze, in the coolness of the continuum." He also is aware that "Time is a fluid medium for the culture of metaphors."
>
> Time, though akin to rhythm, is not simply rhythm, which would imply motion—and Time does not move, Van's greatest discovery is his perception of Time as the dim hollow between two rhythmic beats, the narrow and bottomless silence *between* the beats, not the beats themselves, which only embar Time. In this sense, human life is not a pulsating heart but the missed heartbeat. (*Strong Opinions* 185-186)

(The notion that "human life is the missed heartbeat" between two beats echoes in some ways the famous opening passage of his autobiography, *Speak, Memory*: "The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness" (19).) One of the central themes of the *Texture of Time* section of *Ada,* as suggested in Nabokov's assertion above that "Time does not move," is that time and space, often conflated and/or confused, are absolutely distinct and essentially incomparable. This turns out to be essentially the *opposite* of the focus of Vadim's autobiographical protagonist's mental gymnastics—as his ultimate addressee reveals to him. The affliction that his protagonist describes—and from which he himself suffers—is actually the result of an in ability to "tell the difference between time and space" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 252). "His mistake," as "You" tells Vadim of his the man in his example,

> his morbid mistake is quite simple. He has confused direction and duration. He speaks of space but he means time. His impressions along the HP route [the route from Home, Hotel to Parapet, Pinewood in the hypothetical example that Vadim uses] (dog overtakes ball, car pulls up at next villa) refer to a series of time events, and not to blocks of painted space that a child can rearrange in any old way. It has taken him time—even if only a few moments—to cover distance HP in thought. By the time he reaches P he has accumulated duration, he is saddled with it! Why then is it so extraordinary that he cannot imagine himself turning on his heel? Nobody can imagine in physical terms the act of reversing the order of time. Time is not reversible. Reverse motion is used in films only for comic effects—the resurrection of a smashed bottle of beer—(252-153)

In other words, Vadim's "tussles with the Specter of Space and the myth of Cardinal Points" are an inversion of Van Veen's investigations into the "Texture of Time."

The precise nature of Vadim's "affliction" amounts to more than "simply" another parodic self-referential intra-corpus allusion. It represents a gross failure of the imagination with profound consequences. There are two additional aspects of the problem that allow Nabokov to further, again, illustrate the dangers of solipsism; and to demonstrate a final ironic difference between his creation and himself. The problem may be additionally described as Vadim's inabilities to perceive himself as existing in a world of which he is not the virtually literal center; and to imagine the process of reversal—or inversion. The first point is illustrated in Vadim's description of the problem in his letter to Annette:

> *Let me dwell briefly on the procedure involved; on my inability to follow it consciously in my mind—my unwieldy and disobedient mind! In order to make myself imagine the pivotal process I have to force an opposite revolution of the decor: I must try, dear friend and assistant, to swing the entire length of the street, with the massive façades of its houses before and behind me, from one direction to another in the slow wrench of a half circle, which is like trying to turn the colossal tiller of a rusty recalcitrant rudder so as to transform oneself by conscious degrees from, say, an east-facing Vadim Vadimovich into a west-sun-blinded one.* (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 106)

That is, the entire world must literally pivot and turn on Vadim as its central point. The problem is, then, related to a profoundly solipsistic worldview that isn't finally shattered until "You" frees him from it. The second point is illustrated in Vadim's description of the problem to Iris:

> "I want you to imagine yourself turning on your heel so that 'right' instantly becomes 'left,' and you instantly see the 'here' as a 'there,' with the lamppost now on your left and dead Médor now on your right, and the plane trees converging toward the post office. Can you do that?"
>
> "Done," said Iris. "About-face executed. I now stand facing a sunny hole with a little pink house inside it and a bit of blue sky. Shall we start walking back?"
>
> "*You* may, I can't! This is the point of the experiment. In actual, physical life I can turn as simply and swiftly as anyone. But mentally, with my eyes closed and my

> body immobile, I am unable to switch from one direction to the other. Some swivel cell in my brain does not work. I can cheat, of course, by setting aside the mental snapshot of one vista and leisurely selecting the opposite view for my walk back to my starting point. But if I do not cheat, some kind of atrocious obstacle, which would drive me mad if I persevered, prevents me from imagining the twist which transforms one direction into another, directly opposite…." (41-42)

That is, he cannot imagine something becoming its opposite—the very conceit, in a sense, on which *Look at the Harlequins!* itself is built..

III: "That Other Writer": The Real Life of Vladimir Vladimorovich, *Écrivain*

The inability to perform a simple about-face in the imagination is one of only two frightful, subtly linked, afflictions that plague Vadim Vadimych. The other takes the form of Vadim's intermittent intimations that his life is, as he says "the nonidentical twin, a parody, an inferior variant of another man's life, somewhere on this or another earth" (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 89). It is, in other words, the near-intuition of his actual status, beyond the boundaries of the world of the fiction, as a fictional character created by Vladimir Vladimorovich Nabokov as a kind of "counterself" (to use a term employed by Philip Roth with respect to his own various self-fictionalizations). And this sense is directly linked to what is a second—and in many respects far more significant—figure of authorial self-representation in the novel: the unnamed author with whom Vadim is more than once confused.

A. Intimations of the Author

The first real intimation of his status as Nabokov's double occurs on the eve of Vadim's visit to the bookshop owned and operated by "Oks" Oksman in order to inquire into the possibility

of hiring Anna Ivanovna Blagovo (who becomes his second wife) as a typist It is described in full as follows:.

> I now confess that I was bothered that night, and the next and some time before, by a dream feeling that my life was the nonidentical twin, a parody, an inferior variant of another man's life, somewhere on this or another earth. A demon [a cousin, perhaps, of Lolita's Aubrey McFate] I felt, was forcing me to impersonate that other man, that other writer who was and would always be incomparably greater, healthier, and crueler than your obedient servant. (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 89)

The timing is (or would be, were it not part of an all too deliberate plan) uncanny, for the very next day, Vadim is presented with an opportunity to discover the identity of "that other man, that other writer" when his books are confused by the bookseller with the remarkably similar titles of some other author. "Oks" almost immediately hails Vadim as "the author of *Camera Obscura*"—the title of Nabokov's novel published in a later, revised as *Laughter in the* Dark—which he declares, "your finest book in my modest opinion!" To which Vadim rudely retorts, "It ought to be modest… because, you idiot, the title of *my* novel is *Camera Lucida*" (92). Though the hapless bookseller professes to have merely committed "a slip of the tongue," and not to have actually confused Vadim's novel for another, he commits and compounds the same error again "'Look,' he cried, 'how many copies are out. All of *Princess Mary* is out, I mean *Mary*—damn it, I mean *Tamara*. I love *Tamara*, I mean your *Tamara*, not Lermontov's or Rubinstein's. Forgive me. One gets so confused among so many damned masterpieces'" (94). Not only is Vadim's *Tamara* confused with Nabokov's *Mary*, but Nabokov's *Mary* is confused with Lermontov's *Princess Mary*—the longest of the five novellas comprising *A Hero of Our Time* (1840), which Nabokov translated into English. (Oksman also seems to conflate Lermontov's poems "Tamara" and *Demon*, both published in 1841: there was an 1871 operatic adaptation of the latter by Anton Rubinstein, but no such treatment of the former.) Taken together, these misidentifications are not easily dismissed as

mere coincidences. They suggest that in the parallel reality of Vadim's world, there exists another Nabokov-figure—one who shares at least his catalog.

The direct parallels between this other, unnamed author and Nabokov himself extend even further than this, to include aspects of Nabokov's biography. Accompanying Vadim on the his return walk home, Oksman mistakes Vadim for Nabokov yet again—and not this time simply as the author of similar titles

> Your *confrères* say you are "arrogant and unsocial" as Onegin describes himself to Tatiana but we can't all be Lenskis, can we? Let me take advantage of this pleasant stroll to describe my two meetings with your celebrated father. The first was at the opera in the days of the First Duma. I knew, of course, the portraits of its most prominent members. From high up in the gods I, a poor student, saw him appear in a rosy loge with his wife and two little boys, one of which must have been you. The other time was at a public discussion of current politics in the auroral period of the Revolution; he spoke immediately after Kerenski, and the contrast between our fiery friend and your father, with his English *sangfroid* and absence of gesticulation—"
>
> "My father," I said, "died six months before I was born."
>
> "Well, I seem to have goofed again (*opyat' oskandalisya*)…." (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 95)

The prominent member of the Russian legislative body in the last days of the Tsars, the sedate and restrained political speaker, conforms perfectly to V.D. Nabokov—and not at all to the roguish roué Vadim describes in the brief portrait of his father that follows soon after. This, of course, would make one of the two little boys Oksman saw that day not Vadim Vadimovich, but Vladimir Vladimorovich. The near-epiphany of the previous night becomes now a virtually full-blown existential crisis—one in which Vadim now senses the parallel existence of an entire other world where his ideal original resides:

> There might be nothing particularly upsetting about a well-meaning, essentially absurd and muddled old duffer mistaking me for some other writer. I myself have been known, in the lecture hall, to say Shelley when I meant Schiller. But that a fool's slip of the tongue or error of memory should establish a sudden connection with another world, so soon after my imagining with especial dread that I might be permanently impersonating somebody living as a real being beyond the constellation of my tears and asterisks—that was unendurable, that dared not happen! (96-97)

Vadim remains, however, not-quite blissfully ignorant of the real significance of the coincidental contiguity of these two events. The same failure of the imagination that prevents him from properly conceiving a reversal or inversion, the transformation of one thing into its opposite, also, it seems, prevents him from identifying the "incomparably greater, healthier, and crueler" other writer whom he is forced to impersonate with this other author—with Nabokov. Nor is this the only occasion for such a discovery that presents itself to him. As previously noted, one of Vadim's novels is confused with one of Nabokov's on at least one other occasion, by another character, when a fellow passenger on an airplane flight refers to *A Kingdom by the Sea* as "this obscene novelette about little Lola or Lotte, whom some Austrian Jew or reformed pederast rapes after murdering her mother—no, excuse me—*marrying* mama first before murdering her"—again, a recognizable take on the "original" of Vadim's novel, Nabokov's *Lolita*. And just as he has with the considerably kinder Oksman, Vadim responds contemptuously, dismissively, and imperiously: "You are mistaken. You are a somber imbecile. The novel I wrote, the novel I'm holding now, is *A Kingdom by the Sea*. You are talking of some other book altogether" (218).

Vadim does ultimately come very close to a true revelation—one that bears on these earlier incidents—when, following a near fatal swoon into a temporary madness, he awakes having forgotten his surname.

> To the best of my knowledge my Christian name was Vadim; so was my father's…. I just could not make out in that darker corner of my mind what surname came after my Russian patronymic. I felt it began with an *N*…. Yes, I definitely felt my family name began with an *N* and bore an odious resemblance to the surname or pseudonym of a presumably notorious (Notorov? No) Bulgarian, or Babylonian, or, maybe, Betelgeusian writer with whom scatterbrained *émigrés* from some other galaxy confused me; but whether it was something on the lines of Nebesnyy or Nabedrin or Nablidze (Nablidze? Funny) I simply could not tell. I preferred not to overtax my willpower (go away, Naborcroft) and so gave up trying—or perhaps it began with a *B*

> and the *n* just clung to it like some desperate parasite?... Why had allusions to a Mr. Nabarro, a British politician, cropped up among the clippings I received from England concerning the London edition of *A Kingdom by the Sea* (lovely lilting title)? Why did Ivor call me "MacNab"?
>
> Without a name I remained unreal in regained consciousness. Poor Vivian, poor Vadim Vadimovich, was but a figment of somebody's—not even my own—imagination. One dire detail: in rapid Russian speech longish name-and-patronymic combinations undergo familiar slurrings: thus… the hardly utterable, tapeworm-long "Vladimir Vladimorovich" becomes colloquially similar to "Vadim Vadimych." (Nabokov, *Look at the Harlequins!* 248-249)

It is significant that Vadim gives up trying to make out his name just when he is on the verge, with "Naborcroft," of arriving at "Nabokov"; just as it is significant that he would note the garbling of Nabokov's given name and patronymic, "Vladimir Vladimorovich," as "Vadim Vadimych," his own name and patronymic. But give up he does; and this latter observation, by itself, seems to hold no particular significance for him….

B. Inclined Beams of Pale Light: Authorial Cameos and Metaleptic Insertions

D. Barton Johnson argues in "Dementia's Incestuous Children in *Look at the Harlequins!*" that these confusions of one set of novels with another, and the near-identification of the name "Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, are the result of "Vadim Vadimovich's" actually being the alter "personality state" of Vladimir Vladimorovich," who suffers from dissociative identity disorder. *Look at the Harlequins!* is really, he argues, "an account of the delusional world of the narrator during his existence as Vadim Vadimovich told entirely and consistently from that point of view….

> In the fictional universe of Nabokov's *LATH*, there exists a Nabokovian persona who shares much, but far from all, of the biographical background of the real, extra-fictional Nabokov…. This Nabokovian persona… suffers from periods of schizophrenia in which he is Vadim Vadimovich, the author of *Tamara, Camera Lucida, The Dare, A Kingdom by the Sea, Ardis*, etc. None of these works exist outside the mind of the mad narrator. They are simply distorted variants of the real works written by the sane half of the narrator's personality…. The other characters

> know that the narrator is mad and has periods in which he is the "other" personality….
>
> Vadim's incestuous wives and lovers (with the exception of the last) are no more real than his books, although like the books they are presumably delusional variants of real women in the world of "Vladimir Vladimorovich." … Vadim's "autobiography" is so neatly patterned because it never happened. Its' entirely the product of his disordered (or possibly his over-ordered) imagination during periods in which "Vladimir Vladimorovich" is supplanted by Vadim Vadimovich.
>
> VV has taken the advice of his invented great-aunt in the creation of his "oblique autobiography" [and] has invented his own delusional "reality" through inversion." (144-145)

There are precedents in Nabokov's *oeuvre* for such a strategy. It has long been maintained by many critics that *Pale Fire*'s obviously unbalanced Charles Kinbote is actually a doubly delusional Prof. V. Botkin, Following in similar footsteps, some critics have "discovered" that the ending of *Lolita*, or even the narrative in its entirety, has simply been imagined or hallucinated by a psychotic Humbert, who has been committed to an insane asylum rather than imprisoned (an interpretation that Brian Boyd effectively discredits in the essay "Even Homais Nods"). And it has similarly been suggested that the narrator-protagonist of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is Sebastian Knight himself, or that the text represents his most recent novel. While Johnson's diagnosis of, essentially, dissociative personality disorder, doesn't seem to directly contradict anything in the text, though, the simpler (and more) obvious explanation seems preferable—that Vadim Vadimovich and this "other" author (whom, following Johnson, we may fairly call) "Vladimir Vladimorovich" are distinct individuals (and not simply "personas"); and that the latter corresponds directly to Nabokov himself, who has, as the author of *Look at the Harlequins!* And Vadim's creator, metaleptically inserted himself directly into his novel.

This sort of authorial, Hitchcockian cameo has been a fairly common feature of Nabokov's novels It is a practice to which Nabokov obliquely alluded when, in a 1967

interview with Alfred Appel, Jr, he referred to the "picture in a picture" of "*The Artist's Studio* by Van Bock" (*Strong Opinions* 73)—an invented painting by an invented artist (a Flemish ancestor, perhaps, of Nabokov's invented philosopher Pierre Delalande). As Appel notes, the fictitious artists' "name is only an alphabetical step away from being a significant anagram" of Nabokov's own name. (73 n1). It is also only two substituted letters away from the surname of Dutch painter Jan van Eyck, whose portrait of *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride* (1434) has been identified by D. Barton Johnson as, in Maxim D. Shrayer's words, "the real pictorial subtext behind Nabokov's alleged painting" (Section 3: "Entering the Otherspace"). Hanging on the wall behind and between the two foregrounded subjects in this double portrait is a mirror; and in this mirror are reflected not only the two subjects, but two additional figures not otherwise depicted, one of whom has been identified as the artist himself, whose signature appears on the wall over the mirror. The majority of Nabokov's self-insertions tend, like van Eyck's, to be fairly subtle and rather unobtrusive. In *Pnin*, it is not until the last pages of the book that the narrative voice resolves into the homodiegetic figure of "Vladimir," the scant details of whom with which the reader is provided correspond to Nabokov himself. In *Lolita*, he takes the form of the anagrammatic Vivian Darkbloom, who returns (at least, Nabokov returns through the same name) as the compiler of the concluding "Notes " to the novel at the end of *Ada*. And he is visible in *King, Queen, Knave* as the sun-tanned old émigré wielding a butterfly net on the beach at the resort where the Dreyers are staying (a minor character transfigured as "the great pianist and butterfly hunter," a "bronzed old man with… hoary chest hair" (30) and a panama hat, Kanner).

Of particular significance, the authorial cameo that most closely resembles the parallel situation in *Look at the Harlequins!*, is Nabokov's appearance in the final pages of

Bend Sinister in the figure of the author who breaks off from composing the conclusion of the novel to "investigate the sudden twang" of a moth against the screen of his window (240). Like Vadim, the protagonist of this earlier novel (the first that Nabokov wrote after he emigrated to the U.S.), Adam Krug, is intermittently aware that "someone is in the know," that there is some greater, metaphysical being behind his reality—a "mysterious intruder who" in the last pages of the novel, as Nabokov writes,

> takes advantage of Krug's dream to convey his own peculiar code message. The intruder is not the Viennese Quack (all my books should be stamped Freudians, Keep Out), but an anthropomorphic deity impersonated by me. In the last chapter of the book this deity experiences a pang of pity for his creature and hastens to take over. Krug in a sudden moonburst of madness, understands that he is in good hands: nothing on earth really matters, there is nothing to fear, and death is but a question of style, a mere literary device. (xviii)

The "sudden moonburst of madness" that strikes Krug—the revelation of his status as a creature of the benevolent author Nabokov, is described in the following (lengthy) passage:

> In the middle of the night something in a dream shook him out of his sleep into what was really a prison cell with bars of light (and a separate pale gleam like the footprint of some phosphorescent islander) breaking the darkness. At first, as sometimes happens, his surroundings did not match any form of reality. Although of humble origin (a vigilant arc light outside, a livid corner of the prison yard, an oblique ray coming through some chink or bullet hole in the bolted and padlocked shitters) the luminous pattern he saw assumed a strange, perhaps fatal significance, the key to which was half-hidden by a flap of dark consciousness on the glimmering floor of a half-remembered nightmare…. The pattern of light was somehow the result of a kind of stealthy, abstractly vindictive, groping, tampering movement that had been going on in a dream, or behind a dream, in a tangle of immemorial and by now formless and aimless machinations, Imagine a sign that warns you of an explosion in such cryptic or childish language that you wonder whether everything—the sign, the frozen explosion under the window sill and your quivering soul—has not been reproduced artificially, there and then, by special arrangement with the mind behind the mirror.
>
> It was just at that moment, just after Krug had fallen through the bottom of a confused dream and sat up on the straw with a gasp—just before his reality, his remembered hideous misfortune could pounce upon him—It was then that I felt a pang of pity for Adam and slid towards him along an inclined beam of pale light—causing instantaneous madness, but at least saving him from the senseless agony of his logical fate. (232-233)

This “inclined beam of pale light” functions in *Bend Sinister* almost identically to a similar motif found in Christian art and literature of the Renaissance: as a sign of the conceiving and creative power of the Holy Spirit, issuing from God the Father, through which the divine Word is made flesh:

> Fascinated by light, some of the leading Flemish painters of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries adopted a striking symbolic image that was current in mediaeval thought. Theologians and poets often explained the mystery of the incarnation by comparing the miraculous conception and birth of Christ with the passage of sunlight through a glass window:
>
> > Just as the brilliance of the sun fills and penetrates a glass window without damaging it, and pierces its solid form with imperceptible subtlety, neither hurting it when entering nor destroying it when emerging: thus the word of God, the splendor of the Father, entered the virgin chamber and then came forth from the closed womb (St. Bernard). (Meiss 176)

That Nabokov—who once declared, “I think I was born a painter… and up to my fourteenth year, perhaps, I used to spend most of the day in drawing and painting and I was supposed to become a painter in due time” (*Strong Opinions* 17)—would be familiar with the imagery is likely, given the familiarity with Renaissance painting (particularly that of the Dutch/Flemish Old Masters) that he exhibited through (real and fictional) references scattered throughout various interviews (e.g., *Strong Opinions* 73, 168). And the same symbol, stripped of its overt Christian-religious significance, is an apt metaphor for Nabokov’s own personal metaphysics of art.

There is remarkably similar corresponding passage in *Look at the Harlequins!*, in which Vadim describes his own frequent nighttime episodes of near-insanity, which “are sometimes occasioned by a faint ray of light that awakens the sleeper into a state of madness. Along this narrow beam descends a row of bright dots” (*Look at the Harlequins* 140).

> At its worst it went like this: An hour or so after falling asleep (generally well after midnight and with the humble assistance of a little Old Mead or Chartreuse) I would

> wake up (or rather "wake in") momentarily mad. The hideous pang in my brain was triggered by some hint of faint light in the line of my sight, for no matter how carefully I might have topped the well-meaning efforts of a servant by my own struggles with blinds and purblind. There always remained some damned slit, some atom or dimmet of artificial streetlight or natural moonlight that signaled inexpressible peril when I raised my head with a gasp above the level of a choking dream. Along the dim slit brighter points traveled with dreadful meaningful intervals between them. Those dots corresponded, perhaps, to my rapid heartbeats or were connected optically with the blinking of wet eyelashes but the rationale of it is inessential; its dreadful part was my realizing in helpless panic that the event had been stupidly unforeseen, yet had been bound to happen and was the presentation of a fatidic problem which had to be solved lest I perish and indeed might have been solved now if I had given it some forethought or had been less sleepy and weak-witted at this all-important moment. The problem itself was of a calculatory order: certain relations between the twinkling points had to be measured or, in my case, guessed, since my torpor prevented me from counting them properly, let alone recalling what the *safe* number should be. Error meant instant retribution—beheading by a giant or worse; the right guess, per contra, would allow me to escape into an enchanting region situated just beyond the gap I had to wriggle through in the thorny riddle, a region resembling in its idyllic abstraction those little landscapes engraved as suggestive vignettes—a brook, a *bosquet*—next to capital letters of weird, ferocious shapes such as a Gothic *B* beginning a chapter in old books for easily frightened children. But how could I know in my torpor and panic that *this* was the simple solution, that the brook and the boughs and the beauty of the Beyond all began with the initial of Being? (15-16)

Whether or not Vadim connects these intimations of some other "enchanting region"—a phrase suggestive of Humbert's "enchanted island of time—to his other intimations of "another world" in which "that other man, that other writer" whom Vadim suspects himself of being forced to impersonate lives "as a real being beyond the constellation of [his] tears and asterisks" is unclear. His respective attitudes toward them, as suggested in the different corresponding passages, are rather different— one of groping desire in the former, one of existential dread and terror on the other. In an earlier passage in which he seems to be describing the same phenomenon as in the passage quoted just above, his attitude is somewhat more ambiguous—though it seems to have more in common with the near-

crippling fear that he is not his own man than with his frustrated gropings toward a more paradisiac realm.

> Had my morbid terrors not been replaced at the age nine or ten by more abstract and trite anxieties (problems of infinity, eternity, identity, and so forth), I would have lost my reason long before finding my rhymes. It was not a matter of dark rooms, or one-winged agonizing angels, or long corridors, or nightmare mirrors with reflections overflowing in messy pools on the floor – it was not *that* bedchamber of horrors, but simply, and far more horribly, a certain insidious and relentless connection with other states of being which were not exactly 'previous' or 'future,' but definitely out of bounds, mortally speaking. I was to learn more, much more about those aching links only several decades later, so 'let us not anticipate' as the condemned man said when rejecting the filthy old blindfold. (7)

The suggested ambivalence here is similar to that of the narrator in Nabokov's story "The Vane Sisters." A sneering skeptic of the supernatural, he is nonetheless impelled at the story's end to hopefully search for signs that the recently deceased Cynthia Vane is attempting to communicate with him. He fails in his efforts—but only because he fails to recognize the signs. The final paragraph of the story forms an acrostic—ICICLES BY CYNTHIA METER FROM ME SYBIL (Nabokov, "The Vane Sisters" 631)—a second attempt by the dead sisters to communicate with the narrator that directly points to the first: their having guided the narrator's movements earlier that evening to bring him to precisely the spot at precisely the time that D. arrives to inform him that Cynthia Vane has died. Like the eponymous sisters, Nabokov here gives Vadim no fewer than two chances, through two different media, to receive the message; and, presumably like the oblivious narrator of "The Vane Sisters," he seems to fail—a victim ultimately of his solipsistic egoism, which refuses to countenance the possibility that he may owe his existence to another entity's creative activity.

IV. Nabokov's Strategy of Oblique Self-Representation: Nabokov's Postmodern Novel of the Transcendent Self

Leaving aside such minor characters as the amateur lepidopterist Kanner, there are in *Look at the Harlequins!* two primary figures of authorial self-representation: the negative-image of Vadim Vadimovich and the intentionally underdeveloped photograph of the unnamed author whom D. Barton Johnson reasonably calls "Vladimir Vladimirovich." The truer and ultimately far more significant of the two is not, of course, Vadim—though by virtue of his using himself as a model/template, Nabokov ensures that one may learn about him from Vadim—, but the latter. And what we learn of and about Nabokov through "Vladimir Vladimorovich" is essentially the same as what we learn of and about him through what had already, by the time *Look at the Harlequins!* appeared in 1974, been made public through his autobiography and published interviews: that he was to be first and foremost understood as an artist, and that his private self was a gift bestowed only upon a circle of family and friends, in intimate, genuine inert-personal relationships.

Many of the strategies and devices that are so characteristic of Nabokov's *oeuvre*—irony, parody, mirroring/doubling, intertextuality, self-conscious self-referentiality, subversion, ludic "play"—are also characteristic of "the postmodern." Indeed, as Maurice Couturier notes,

> Nabokov's American period coincided almost exactly with the rise of postmodernism: *Lolita* was published in Paris the same year as the first major postmodernist novel, Gaddis's *The Recognitions,* was published in New York. When *Lolita* came out in New York in 1958, it largely helped free American fiction from censorship. There are undeniable similarities between Nabokov's fiction and that of the postmodernists. ("Nabokov in Postmodernist Land" 247)

And of no other novel in Nabokov's body of work is this more true than of *Look at the Harlequins!*, a book whose very form challenges more traditional notions of what the novel

is and what it can do. Stacy Schiff describes it as "[a] novel masquerading as a memoir" (352)—which in its guise as a homodiegetic, *roman autobiographique* it is. But it is more than that: *Look at the Harlequins!* takes the form of, essentially, a book within a book. It is not simply that the novel consists in a fictional autobiographical manuscript—it includes various fictional paratextual elements as well. One must distinguish not only Nabokov's text from Vadim's lexically identical text, but Nabokov's *Look at the Harlequins!* (a novel published in book-form) from Vadim's *Look at the Harlequins!* (an ostensibly "published" book-form autobiography), each accompanied by its own set of paratextual elements.

The front cover of the 1990 Vintage International trade edition of *Look at the Harlequins!*, for example, opens onto a flyleaf bearing the publisher's imprint, followed by two page nearing a list of other "Books by Vladimir Nabokov"; a half-title page; a title page; a copyright page (edition notice); and a page bearing the authorial dedication/inscription "To Véra [Nabokov]." Following the dedication is a *second* (half-) title page, followed by a page bearing a list of "Other Books by the Narrator," and a page bearing the intertitle "Part One," before the first chapter of the novel/autobiography begins on a page numbered "3." The second (half-) title page *might* be considered merely redundant (or re-redundant) were it not for the second authorial bibliography, which is irreconcilable with the actual, real-world paratext that has preceded it. These two "productions" have a dual textual nature—as part of Nabokov's main text, and as paratext with respect to Vadim's main text. (While Nabokov's *Look at the Harlequins!* as published in this edition concludes with "end matter" in the form of an "About the Author" page and a list of other titles published by Vintage International, there is no fictional end matter corresponding to the fictional front matter of Vadim's *Look at*

the Harlequins!). Nor is this a mere gimmick—it is profoundly related to Nabokov's strategies of self-representation in and with the novel.

In the pseudo-peritextual bibliography of Vadim's other books that appears at the very beginning of the novel, of Vadim is tellingly identified not as the "author" of his autobiographical *Look at the Harlequins!*, but as the "*narrator*." And this is because, as he himself is occasionally given to suspect if not quite understand, Vadim has no actual existence as a real, autonomous human subject with an independent ontological existence: his life as he understands it is an illusion. He is another one of Nabokov's "galley slaves" (*Strong Opinions* 5). Vadim's "autobiography" is truly a *fictional* autobiography—which is to say, it is not an autobiography at all: it is the product of a narrator-protagonist who only *believes* himself to be its author—and whose confidence that he is may also fool some readers into believing that he is. Nabokov—identified in the text with the "other" author "Vladimir Vladimorovich—is the true author; Vadim is merely the vehicle through which the text is inscribed: the *scriptor* that Roland Barthes announced following the "death of the author" ("Death of the Author," 1967).

In a very real sense, Nabokov performs his status as a traditional author as against the dehumanized, abstracted *scriptors* and "author-functions" of the kind of so-called "death of the author criticism" practiced by such leading theorists of the postmodern as Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. The significance of this (true) authorial self-performance is two-fold. It first and foremost asserts the primacy of Nabokov's public identity as an artist, to be known primarily, even solely through his works. But it also, secondly, points again to the real life of an actual historical individual who *is* that author.

As Paul John Eakin observes, “one of the great believers in the self in our time and one of our greatest artificers” (278)—and his staunchly held, more traditional concepts of a transcendent self and the author are linked. For Nabokov, authorship is not an act of self-effacement, in which the writing subject disappears into the text, which might be said to constitute his/its real mode of existence. Art can, though, if one is not careful or not caring—be misused in such a way as to constitute “the vengeful obliteration of others or the skulking effacement of the tattle-tale self” (Boyd, “A Book Burner Recants” 394). This is arguably Vadim’s situation—both as the kind of “tattle-tale self” that Nabokov refuses to be in his own writing, and as the *scriptor* whose proverbial pen is guided—like that of the narrator-protagonist of Nabokov’s “The Vane Sisters”—by a greater consciousness existing in a higher realm beyond what he is able to actually apprehend. Conversely, Nabokov—for whom as Boyd writes, “self-elimination can only be the falsest kind of self-transcendence” (“A Book Burner Recants” 391)—takes great pains not to divest himself of those aspects of his life that belong to neither the page nor the public, but to the intimate spaces shared by other human subjects in full possession of themselves and their lives, in genuine inert-personal relationships characterized by mutual love, compassion, and respect. True self-transcendence is to be achieved only through a transcendent self, which exists—in W. Norris Clarke’s formulation—as a “substance-in-relation” (14) which is self-possessing and self-communicative as well as self-transcending (these three characteristics being inert-related). And the true artist, as Nabokov understands him, is someone whose art is as informed and motivated by these cardinal virtues as are his relationships.

Nabokov as the self-performing author of *Look at the Harlequins!* balances the twin, contradictory impulses that Eakin identifies as lying behind the autobiographical impulse: to

reveal, and to conceal (the self) (35). Self-concealment here even functions in some ways as a form of self-revelation. In the process, he produced one of the more fascinating and genuinely personal books in his body of work—a book that, in the extent to which it directly implicates and internalizes a paratextual "background" (i.e., Nabokov's own actual life and work), and in its experimental form as a merely inscribed autobiography divested of an author contained within a genuinely authored novel, challenges our notions of what the novel is and does, and what it can be and can do.

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CHAPTER THREE

ÉCRIT EN ABÎME: *L'AMANT DE LA CHINE DU NORD*—MARGUERITE DURAS' INTERTEXTUAL FICTIONALIZED AUTOBIOGRAPHY

It is important for Nabokov that we understand that the overwhelming majority of the entailed assertions about himself and his own life as actually lived in *Look at the Harlequins!* are false—that to the extent that Vadim Vadimovich is a self-portrait, it is a profoundly fictionalized, and essentially fictive one. Only on those rare occasions where biographical details of Vadim and Nabokov are identical—a few common dates, for example; shared compositional practices; etc.—does Nabokov intend for his reader to take a simultaneous attitude of belief toward those assertions. And even these might be best understood as built-in exceptions proving the rule—that Vadim is *not* Nabokov himself.

Born Marguerite Donnadieu on 4 April, 1914 in Gia-Dinh, an area of Saigon in the Cochinchina region of the French Indochinese Union, Duras' (she legally changed her name to that of her father's home village in the Lot-et-Garonne department of southwestern France after adopting it as a *nom de plume* in 1943) attitudes and intentions in her own, more profoundly autobiographical works represent a more complex, and complicated case. The autobiographical was a critical, even central element of her celebrated literary career, from the fictionalized family portraits in her first published novels—*Les Impudents* (1943), *La Vie tranquille* [*The Tranquil Life*] (1944), and *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950)—through the fictionalized (and re-set) memories of her Indochinese childhood in the works of the so-called "India Cycle"—which includes the novels *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* (1964), and

Le Vice-consul (1965); the play *India Song* (1973); and the films *La Femme du Gange* (1974) and *India Song* (1975)—to the different accounts of a youthful sexual relationship with an eponymous "Lover" in *L'Amant* (1984) and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991). The centrality to her literary output of the years and experiences of her childhood in the southern Indochinese regions of Cochinchina and Cambodia is such that Duras' biographer Alain Vircondolet has declared, "She has never written but one single book, that of her childhood amid the scent of the tamarind and cinnamon trees" (38). And the primary focus of her works increasingly became her taboo relationship with an older Annamese-Chinese man as an adolescent girl. In her own biography of Duras, *Marguerite Duras: A Life*, Laure Adler echoes Vircondolet's declaration in a similar observation: "All her life, in one form or another, Marguerite never stopped telling the story of the lover" (56)—the story that would bring her the most of her international fame, and that would allow her to transform history into myth. For as she returned again and again and again to the legend of the Lover, the presentation became increasingly autobiographical (in a formal/generic sense), even as the content became increasingly romanticized and demonstrably fictionalized—a process that entailed re-working her earlier fictions as much as it did re-inscribing and re-imagining her earlier life; a process that culminated in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991).

I. "*L'Amant Recommencé*": Autobiographical Aspects of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991)

L'Amant de la Chine du Nord cannot be understood apart from the earlier account of essentially the same affair, the more famous and more widely read *L'Amant*—a book that, according to Laure Adler's account—has its own origins in a family photo-album project that had been suggested to her by her son and which she undertook in 1983. Rummaging through

her cupboards, she came across "an old text and some family photographs, photos of her as a young girl and as an adolescent." The discovery prompted Duras—who was preparing written captions to accompany the photographs—to write, "Why has the absolute photograph of my life not been taken?… The absolute photograph is maybe the one that can't be taken, the one that recognizes nothing that is visible. It doesn't exist and yet it could have existed" (Adler *Marguerite Duras: A Life* 345). With this, the photo-album project began to morph into a new, different, more literary project—one that, originally conceived under the name *La Photographie absolue*, would become the novella-length *L'Amant*. Published late in the summer of 1984, the book was awarded months later, despite its not having been formally submitted for consideration—the Prix Goncourt (Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life* 350-351).

A. Jean-Jacques Annaud's *L'Amant* (1992)

In the authorial preface—signed Marguerite Duras" and dated "Mai [May] 1991"—that opens *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, Duras suggests that the immediate impetus behind the present text has been news of the title character's ("l'Amant de la Chine du Nord," or "the North China Lover"; also referred to as "le Chinois," or "the Chinese"; "l'Amant," or "the Lover" of the previous book) death: "*J'ai appris qu'il était mort depuis des années. C'était en mai 90, il y a donc un an maintenant…. J'ai abandonné le travail que j'étais en train de faire. J'ai écrit l'histoire de l'amant de la Chine du Nord et de l'enfant: elle n'était pas encore là dans* L'Amant, *le temps manquait autour d'eux*" (11) ["I learned that he had been dead for some years. That was May 1990, a year ago now…. I stopped the work I was doing. I wrote the story of the North China lover and the child: it wasn't quite there in *The Lover*, I

hadn't given them enough time" (1)[5]]. Conspicuously absent from this account—or any part of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*—is even the slightest allusion to the film adaptation of *L'Amant*, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud, that would be released in France seven months later, on 22 January 1992—a film adaptation on which Duras had been collaborating prior to her writing the book, and traces of which remain in the unique form and presentation of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*.

The film rights to *L'Amant* had been bought by Claude Berri in the spring of 1987. Duras herself had begun to prepare a screenplay for the project shortly after, before it was suggested to her by her former film assistant, Jacques Tronel (who facilitated the deal with Berri) Duras make the foundation of the film a recording of her reading the book (Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life* 375). Duras took the reading/recording sessions, which began that summer as an opportunity to revisit and re-explore *L'Amant*. "During the recordings"—Adler writes—"Marguerite rewrote her life, rewrote the book, dreamed out loud…. She did not want the film to be her story, rejected the chronology, objected to the erotic background and was thinking about a film on writing; because, for her, the story of *The Lover* was that of a child who discovers, thanks to the Chinese man, that she wants to be a writer" (376). She also intended during this time—and for a long time after—to direct the film as well. Berri, however, had been considering other directors for the job. By August, Annaud—the critically acclaimed filmmaker of *Noirs et Blancs en couleurs* [*Black and White in Color*] (1976), *La Guerre du feu* (*The Quest for Fire*] (1981), and the adaptation of Umberto Eco's novel *Il nome della rosa* (1980), *Le Nom de la Rose* [*The Name of the Rose*] (1986)—had agreed to take on the project. While Duras continued to labor on her screenplay, Annaud also began to

[5] All translations of passages from *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* and their citations are taken from Leigh Hafrey's translation of *The North China Lover* (New Press, 1992).

draft his own adaptation—as Adler describes it, “the story of a young girl who, against the exoticism of a colonial backdrop, has her first emotional experiences in the arms of a young Chinese, to the great scandal of the colony. They were obviously not on the same wavelength and not preparing the same film” (376). Despite the profound differences in their respective visions, Duras and Annaud continued to work alongside each other, if not always quite together, on the project for a year.

In the fall of 1988, Duras was hospitalized due to complications related to her emphysema and exacerbated by her alcoholism. In October of that year she fell into a coma from which she would not emerge until eight months later, in June 1989. Following her recovery, she returned to the project to discover that in her absence, Annaud had continued to work on the project, collaborating with Gérard Brach to prepare a script based on both the screenplay that Duras had been composing and the text of *L’Amant* itself (Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life* 376). Duras still somehow imagined as late as the fall of 1989, however, that she would ultimately be directing the film based on her own screenplay. Never appreciative of Annaud’s involvement from the beginning, she was more displeased with the screenplay that he and Brach had prepared during her hospitalization, and she became increasingly frustrated with what she saw as her increasing marginalization and disenfranchisement in the project. In her biography, Adler provides an account of an intense argument that lasted over three hours and resulted in Duras’ refusing to read any further in the screenplay: on the tenth page, Annaud and Brach had described a pothole through which the Chinese lover’s car is driving as “boggy”; Duras objected, declaring, “The pothole was never boggy, it was muddy” (377). Shortly thereafter, Duras—who had sold away her creative rights over both production of the film and, essentially, the book itself (Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life* 378)—parted

ways with the film project completely. She was far from done, however, with the work that she herself had done in preparation for it: "Another book was already brewing that would undermine the first," Adler writes. "She wanted to return to the myth of the lover" (379).

As Duras describes it in the authorial preface to *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, the period of that book's composition was experienced almost as a recapitulation of that long-distant time in her life when she, a poor little white girl in the colonies, took a Chinese lover in the Chinese district of Cholon on the outskirts of Saigon: "*Je suis restée un an dans ce roman, enfermée dans cette année-là de l'amour entre le Chinois et l'enfant…. Pendant un an j'ai retrouvé l'âge de la traversée du Mékong dans le bac de Vinh-Long*" (11-12) ["The novel kept me a year, enclosed me in the that year of the love between the Chinese man and the child…. For a whole year I went back to the days when I would cross the Mekong River, on the ferry to Vinh-Long"" (1-2)]. During that year, it was her story again, and she "returned to her original idea for the film script, using the matrix of *The Lover*, with long tracking shots of frozen images, of scenes that had marked the little Donnadieu girl for ever" (379).

B. "Duras's Own Story": *L'Amant* (1984)

As C.K. Sample notes in "Life and Text as Spectacle: Sacrificial Repetitions in Duras's *The North China Lover*," *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* "is a retelling" of both *L'Amant* and"—through and beyond it—"of Duras's own story," which the earlier book told. Laure Adler declares in her biography of Duras that "*The Lover* is not an autobiography" (348); and "when the book first came out, [Duras] kept repeating that it was fiction and not an autobiographical account" (345)—at least initially. But it was received as and understood to

be precisely that by a reading public who took, as Adler says, the book "at face value" (*Marguerite Duras: A Life* 345). Though the text is characterized by shifts in perspective and in the personal pronouns employed to refer to the narrator voice and to the protagonist, the narration is ultimately understood to implicate the mutual identity of author-narrator-protagonist—the beating heart of the autobiographical pact—as Marguerite Duras.

The ultimate identification of the narrator with the protagonist is accomplished explicitly through, as Eileen M. Angelini characterizes it in *Strategies of Writing the "Self" in the French Modern Novel*, "the first-person narration by Duras, the author-identified narrator, remembering her adolescence" (11-12). The identification of this narrator-protagonist with the author that Angelini refers to is accomplished somewhat more implicitly. The narrator identifies herself as the author of other, previous books when she declares, "J'ai beaucoup écrit de ces gens de ma famille, mais tandis que je le faisais il vivaient encore, la mère et les frères, et j'ai écrit autour d'eux, autour de ces choses sans aller jusqu'à elles" (*L'Amant* 14) ["I've written a good deal about the members of my family, but then they were still alive, my mother and my brothers. And I skirted around them, skirted around all these things without really tackling them" (*The Lover*, 7)[6]]. Currie's informed reader, familiar with Duras' *oeuvre*, would recognize this as an allusion to such earlier novels as *Les Impudents* and *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*; and so would reasonably infer that the narrator-protagonist is Marguerite Duras herself. Duras' readers can hardly be blamed then, for having believed that the narrative represented a true account of actual lived experience. And "in the end [Duras] gave up and agreed to remember herself as a fourteen-year-old girl who one day, on a ferry in Indo-China, in a large black car" (Adler 345). Nor did it take her

[6] Translations of passages from *L'Amant* and their citations are taken from Barbara Bray's translation of *The Lover* (Pantheon-Random House, 1997).

long: Leslie Hill refers to a television interview with Bernard Pivot on the program *Apostrophes* that aired later the same year that the book was published, in which Duras is shown "endorsing the accuracy of the text" (13). As Paul John Eakin writes, "It is precisely… a narrative's claim to be a version of the author's own life, anchored in verifiable biographical fact, that distinguishes an autobiography for the reader from other kinds of texts which it may closely resemble in other respects" (185). And so whether or not this second major aspect of Lejeune's autobiographical pact—a commitment to the fundamental veracity/facticity of the narrative account—was being kept in good faith, it was at this point being claimed.

As an explicitly acknowledged re-telling of the story that was told earlier in *L'Amant*, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* also claims the status of autobiography. This somewhat indirect claim is consolidated is through occasional footnotes—ostensibly made by the author according to her status as an actual, historical individual—providing historical, biographical, and/or situational context for various references made in the narrative. For example, after a passage representing an extended conversation between the protagonist and Hélène Lagonelle, who also appears in *L'Amant*, Duras provides a footnote informing the reader that Hélène, married and the mother of two, died at the age of twenty-seven from tuberculosis, testifying that she had received this information from "des tantes à elle qui avaient téléphoné après la parution du livre—*L'Amant*" (53n) ["This from aunts of hers who called after the publication of *The Lover*" (44). Other footnotes further contextualize different episodes according to their later fictionalization in the novels that Duras went on to write: the writing of her mother's story, which she promised one day to perform, in *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (see 97n), for example; and the transformation of women dancing with French

officers on the decks of docked ships into *Emily L*. (see 149n). In such instances, Duras, according to her function as the author of the work, testifies to the (ostensibly genuine) autobiographical nature of the narrative, to its historicity and facticity.

Read as autobiography, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* is more revealing in certain respects, and with regard to different matters, than *L'Amant*. It is, as Duras acknowledges herself in the preface, much more "the story of the North China lover and the child" that "wasn't quite there in *The Lover*." And in its even greater emphasis on the relationship itself, detailed through realistic descriptions and representations of people, places, and events in a generally linear chronological narrative, it corresponds more directly to traditional models of autobiography and memoir. The autobiographical aspects of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* are significant in another respect as well. Eakin also observes, "The autobiographer's access to the past is necessarily a function of his present consciousness of it. That is to say that the past that any autobiographical narrative records is first and foremost the period of the autobiographical act itself" (22). And the "autobiographical act" that *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* at least seems to represent was performed during a period of personal crisis for Duras—one deriving from her perceived disenfranchisement and marginalization from the representation of her work and life, which she felt had been wrongly appropriated by Annaud. This autobiographical "present" is also truly present in the text.

II. Palimpsest: The Hybrid-Nature and Intra-Corpus Intertexuality of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*

L'Amant de la Chine du Nord is a complex hybrid-work combining elements of various literary/textual forms and genres—the novel, the screenplay, and the autobiography. And as C.K. Sample notes, "The extratextual reasons behind the writing and publication of The

North China Lover serve as part of this complex process of hybridization." *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* may also then be described as a kind of palimpsest in which the traces of earlier works remain visible through and behind and beneath the surface narrative, revealing both its more immediate origins in the film adaptation and in *L'Amant* itself, through older texts containing elements of the story, to the actual lived experiences themselves.

A. Cinematic Aspects: Project for a Film Adaptation of *L'Amant*

"Although when the book came out Marguerite Duras denied it," Adler records in her biography, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* "began as a reworking of the film script" (378) that she had been preparing for the film adaptation of *L'Amant*. She "returned to her original idea for the film script, using the matrix of *The Lover*, with long tracking shots of frozen images, of scenes that had marked the little Donnadieu girl for ever…. It was the same but very different, an adolescence rewritten for CinemaScope. Duras was making her film through the visual writing, the numerous dialogues and stage directions" (379). Though, as noted earlier, Duras refuses to directly acknowledge either the film project or any of the filmmakers who continued to adapt the earlier book for the screen, the book's origins in and as a film project find textual expression in such elements all throughout.

There is an almost schizophrenic quality to the text, which announces very early on, "C'est un livre. C'est un film" (17) ["This is a book. This is a film" (6)]. This seemingly contradictory proposition identifies the book with the *ciné-roman*. Duras forsakes here the formal textual/graphic arrangement of the screenplay that she employed in the published "Scénario et Dialogue" for *Hiroshima mon amour*, favoring if not necessarily "privileging" the conventional prosaic structure and organization of paragraphs. But the text insists upon

its more explicitly and properly cinematic and filmic characteristics. Duras, in the role of author-director, incorporates film "production notes" throughout the text, often in the form of footnotes; but even the often more or less conventional prose of realistic narrative representation is frequently punctuated with reflections on an explicitly cinematic *mise en scène*; with directions for camera angles, the framing of shots, even casting. The manner of presentation also varies between the kind of direct mimetic representation proper to "epic fiction" as conceived by Hamburger, to a highly visual, often fragmentary, almost imagistic manner of presentation evocative of stage directions, or of a literary/textual transcription of and commentary on the images and sounds of a film as they are being projected. (At times, this is even more or less explicit, as when the author-director tells us what we can and cannot see—on the screen as it were: for example, "Et puis on la voie face à quelque chose qu'elle regarde, mais qu'on ne voit pas encore: Paulo" (Duras, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* 31) ["And then we see her looking at something that she sees but we cannot yet: Paulo" (Duras, *The North China Lover* 21)].

The main text opens with precisely such a strategy: "Une maison au milieu d'une cour d'école. Elle est complètement ouverte. On dirait une fête. On entend des valses de Strauss et de Franz Lehar, et aussi *Ramona* et *Nuits de Chine* qui sortent des fenêtres et des portes. L'eau ruisselle partout, dedans, dehors" (Duras, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* 13) ["A house in the middle of a schoolyard. Everything is wide open. Like a party. There are Strauss and Franz Lehar waltzes, but also "Ramona" and "China Nights" coming out the windows and doors. Water is running everywhere, inside and out" (*The North China Lover* 3)]. A few short, fragmentary passages later, the language of cinematic/theatrical design is directly invoked to refer to this setting: "La nuit est venue. C'est la même décor" (14)

["Night has fallen. The setting is the same" (4)]. And in his essay "Life and Text as Spectacle: Sacrificial Repetitions in Duras's *The North China Lover*," C.K. Sample makes the argument that the particular system of variable spacing employed also suggests or corresponds to a more cinematic quality:

> The extra spacing between the sections of narrative, while characteristic of Duras, is relevant to the meshing of film and book. Duras separates different parts of the same scene with just a few spaces between the lines, paralleling somewhat the quick cuts used in montage, while she separates other parts with more and more space, indicating more of a cinematic dissolve from one sequence of shots or scene into another. (Sample)

(Such a strategy, if this is in fact what Duras is doing here, could of course only be, though, an approximation of a technique for which there is and can be no direct equivalent.)

The most obtrusive and direct signs of the books origins in and as a screenplay, are, though, the various authorial asides concerning how the book—*this* book—will or would or might or should be translated to film. To cite only some of the more prominent examples….

> La camera balaie lentement ce qu'on vient de voir puis elle se retourne et repart dans la direction qu'a prise l'enfant. (Duras, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* 21)
>
> ["The camera slowly scans what we've just seen, then turns and starts off again in the direction the child has taken" (10).]
>
> En cas de cinéma on aura la choix. Ou bien on reste sur le visage de la mère qui raconte sans voir. Ou bien on voit la table et les enfants *racontés* par la mère. (28n)
>
> [For the movie, we can choose. We can stay with the face of the mother as she talks. Or we can see the table and children as the mother talks *about them* (18n)
>
> Dans le cas d'un film tire de ce livre-ci, il ne faudrait pas l'enfant soit d'une beauté seulement belle. Cela serait peut-être dangereux pour le film. Il s'agit d'autre chose qui joue en elle, l'enfant, de « difficile à éviter », d'une curiosité sauvage, d'un manque d'éducation, d'un manque, oui, de timidité. Une sorte de Miss France-enfant ferait s'effondrer le film tout entier. Plus encore : elle le ferait disparaître. La beauté ne fait rien. Elle ne regarde pas. Elle est regardée. (70)

> [If this book is made into a film, the child can't just have a pretty face. That could jeopardize the film. There's something else at work in this child—something "hard to get around," an untamed curiosity, a lack of breeding, a lack, yes, of reticence. Some Junior Miss France would bring the whole film down. Worse: it would make it disappear. Beauty doesn't act. It doesn't look. It is looked at. (61)]
>
> Et tandis que lentement il le recouvre de son corps à lui, sans encore la toucher, la caméra quitterait le lit, elle irait vers la fenêtre, s'arrêterait là, aux persiennes fermées. Alors le bruit de la rue arriverait assourdi, lointain dans la nuit de la chambre. (76)
>
> [And as he slowly covers it [her body] with his own body, without touching it yet, the camera might leave the bed, it might veer toward the window, might stop there at the drawn blinds. And then the noise from the street might come in, muffled, distant in the night of the room. (67)]
>
> *En cas de cinéma à titre d'exemple.*
>
> On filme la chambre éclairée par la lumière de la rue. Sur ces images-là on retient le son, on le laisse à sa distance habituelle de même que les bruits de la rue : de même que le ragtime et la Valse. On filme les amants endormis, Le Roman Populaire du Livre.
>
> On filme aussi la lumière pauvre, navrante, dans lampadaires de la rue. (81)
>
> [*Some pointers for a movie:*
>
> Shoot the room lit by the light from the street. Keep the sound on for these shots, but leave it at its normal level, along with the noise from the street – and the ragtime and the waltz. Shoot the sleeping lovers, The Book as Pulp Novel.
>
> And shoot the weak, sorry light from the streetlamps. (72)]
>
> En cas de film, le caméra est sur l'enfant quand le Chinois raconte l'histoire de la Chine. (88)
>
> [In a film version, the camera would be on the child when the Chinese tells the story of China. (79-80)]

The book even ends with several pages of "images proposes [suggested images]" that "pourrait server à la ponctuation d'un film tire de ce livre" (233) [could be used to punctuate a film based on this book" (227)]. (This may have been more than theoretical: according to Adler, Duras apparently anticipated a future film adaptation of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, which she would herself direct (*Marguerite Duras: A Life* 382).)

B. Novelistic Aspects: *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* and *L'Amant*

For all its insistence on its cinematic nature and qualities, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* remains in other ways very novelistic—even more novelistic than its most immediate literary predecessor, *L'Amant*. While its form is essentially that of the Durasian fragmented novel in the mode of *L'Amant*, there is a much greater preoccupation here with such more traditional elements of the novel as setting, character, and plot—all of which are more fully, logically, and conventionally developed. Much of this overlaps without a great deal of dissonance, with the text-as-film aspect of the book, so that at times the text-as-film and the text-as-book seem to coexist in a state of mutual identification, as when the text reads, "La jeune fille, dans le film, dans ce livre ici, on l'appellera l'Enfant" (21) ["In the film, here in this book, we'll call her the Child" (10). At other times, however, there is a sharp distinction drawn between the two, as when the text reads (almost immediately prior to the lines quoted above), "Dans le film, on n'appellera pas le nom de cette Valse. Dans le livre ici, on dira : La Valse Désespérée" (21) ["In the film, we won't give the waltz a name. Here in the book, we will call it: 'The Desperation Waltz'" (10)].

For the most part, the text unfolds in accordance with a more conventionally literary manner of narrative representation in keeping with its status/aspect as a "book" rather than a film. Frequent use is made of such fundamentally literary phenomena as interior focalization—essentially, the regulation of narrative information according to the restricted perspective of an individual figure within the narrative itself (see Genette's *Narrative Discourse* 189-194). Interior focalization is indispensable to what Hamburger and Cohn identify as one of the hallmarks of (literary, narrative)"epic fiction" (fiction "proper"):the portrayal of fictional characters in their I-originarity—that is, according to their status as

autonomous human subjects with essentially "unknowable" inner lives characterized by subjective thoughts, feelings, beliefs, etc.. (The portrayal of a character in his or her I-originarity also, according to Hamburger, necessarily, marks a text as a fiction. According to Hamburger's reasoning, it implicates a fundamentally fictive statement-subject—for no actual or possible statement-subject could know, with absolute certainty, another individual in his or her I-originarity. And the existence of a fictive statement-subject renders the narrative itself fictive. But there are other grounds for considering elements of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* to be fictive in nature—to which we will return.) And this interior focalization is variable, so that relatively minor characters become at times focal characters—for example, Hélène Lagonelle: "Hélène a peur tout à coup, une peur terrible entre toutes, de se cacher la vérité sur la nature de cette passion qu'elles ont l'une pour l'autre, et qui de plus en plus les fait si seules ensemble, partout où elles se trouvent" (Duras, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* 58) ["Hélène is suddenly seized by the fear, the one awful fear among all others, that she is deceiving herself about the true nature of this passion they have for one another, making them more and more alone together wherever they go" (Duras, *The North China Lover* 49)].

The more literary/novelistic aspects of the book also point to its connections to the novels of Duras' prior *oeuvre*—particularly those that told the same or similar stories or that contained the same or similar elements—and especially *L'Amant*, which Duras explicitly invokes in the authorial preface to *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord: "Le livre aurait pu s'intituler:* L'Amour dans la rue *ou* Le Roman de l'amant *ou* L'Amant recommence. *Pour fin on a eu le choix entre deux titres plus vastes, plus vrais:* L'Amant de la Chine du Nord *ou* La Chine du Nord" (11) ["This book could have been called *Love in the Street*, or *The Lover's*

Story, or *The Lover Revisited*. In the end, I had a choice of two broader, truer titles: *The North China Lover* or *North China*" (1)]. The three alternate titles proposed in the first sentence (and particularly the latter two) identify the present work as more than a re-telling of the same story, but as a companion-volume to and re-working of the book itself. (Incidentally, the second alternate title, which Leigh Hafrey translates as *The Lover's Story* would be more literally translated as *The Novel of the Lover*, casting a veil of fiction over the narrative.)

L'Amant de la Chine du Nord makes many of the intertextual connections between it and the earlier book—"le premier livre," as it is referred to— explicit. Characters, places, things, events are identified *as*, and not merely *with*, those of "the first book." The opening scene describes the semi-annual floor-washing of the Sa-Dec house also described in *L'Amant*:

> C'est une fête vive, heureuse.
>
> La musique, c'est la mère, une Madame française, qui jour du piano dans la pièce attenante.
>
> Parmi ceux qui dansent il y a un très jeune homme, français beau, qui danse avec une très jeune fille, française elle aussi. Ils se ressemblent.
>
> Elle, c'est celle qui n'a de nom dans le premier livre ni dans celui qui l'avait précédé ni dans celui-ci.
>
> Lui, c'est Paulo, le petit frère adoré par cette jeune sœur, celle là qui n'est pas nommé.
>
> Un autre jeune homme arrive à la fête : c'est Pierre. Le frère ainé. (Duras, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* 13-14)

> [It's a party, lively, happy.
>
> The music, that's the mother, a French lady playing the piano in the next room.
>
> Among the dancers is a very young man, French, handsome, he dances with a very young girl, also French. They look alike.
>
> She is the one who has no name in the first book, or the one before it, or in this one.
>
> He is Paulo, the little brother the young sister worships, the one who isn't named.

> Another young man joins the party: that's Pierre. The older brother. (Duras, *The North China Lover* 4)]

And later, when the scene is set for l'Enfant's meeting le Chinois on the ferry crossing the Mekong, the text declares, "C'est le bac sur le Mékong. Le bac des livres" (35) ["This is the ferry across the Mekong. The ferry in the books" (25)]. This is, then, the same story, about the same young girl, who takes a Chinese lover that is told in *L'Amant*; and, as the plural "livres" in the last quotation suggests, it is the same story that has provided elements that have appeared in other of Duras' books as well, which also echo throughout the text….

C. Les Amants: An Archaeological Excavation of the Lover-Figure in the Works of Marguerite Duras

"There are many men in Marguerite's work," Adler writes, "including three versions of the lover" (*Marguerite Duras: A Life* 55). The most immediate predecessor of the eponymous "North China lover" of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* is, of course, the titular "Lover" of *L'Amant* (1984). Each is recognizable in the other in their common ethnicity (Chinese); in their pale, practically white skin; in their shared age (mid- to late-twenties); their common French education and European-influenced cosmopolitanism; their mutual wealth—exemplified in their fine suits and their chauffeured, long black limousines—; their families, with forbidding fathers who refuse to allow them to marry the poor little white girl from Vinh-Long. Yet there are significant differences between them. Duras—who took offense to the idea that the new book was simply a re-writing of *L'Amant*—claimed that her "North China Lover" was not the same as the "Lover" of the previous book. The Young Girl is the same:

> Elle est restée cette du livre [*L'Amant*], petite, maigre, hardie, difficile à attraper le sens, difficile à dire qui c'est, moins belle qu'il n'en paraît, pauvre, fille de pauvres, ancêtres pauvres, fermiers, cordonniers, première en français tout le temps partout et détestant la France, inconsolable du pays natal et d'enfance, crachant la viande rouge des steaks occidentaux, amoureuse des hommes faibles, sexuelle comme pas rencontré encore. Folle de lire, de voir, insolente, libre. (Duras, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* 36)

But *he* is not: "In *The North China Lover*," Duras told Marianne Alphant, in an interview conducted for *Libération*, "the memory of the lover has vanished. He's been replaced by the new lover, also from Manchuria, with the same name and the same homeland" (Qtd. in Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life* 381). (We must take Duras' word for it that they share the same name, for it is a name that she withholds from both texts.) In *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* itself, Duras explicitly distinguishes him from his predecessor:

> De la limousine noire est sortie un autre homme que celui du livre [*L'Amant*], un autre Chinois de la Mandchourie. Il est un peu différent de celui du livre : il est un peu plus robuste que lui, il a moins peur que lui, plus d'audace. Il a plus de beauté, plus de santé. Il est plus « pour le cinéma » que celui du livre. Et aussi il a moins de timidité que lui face à l'enfant. (Duras, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (35-36)

In Gregory Currie's terminology and conception of fictional characters, "l'Amant de la Chine du Nord" and "l'Amant" refer to the same *role*, but not to the same fictional characters—for though the texts in which they appear overlap to a large extent, their respective descriptions contradict each other in un-reconcilable ways (see Currie's *The Nature of Fiction*, 171-179). Though still to a certain extent, as Adler describes the various lovers, "effeminate," "anti-macho," a "[slave] to feminine desire" (55) l'Amant de la Chine du Nord is a much more romantic and romanticized figure than the "Lover."

Part of the romanticism of the Lover as represented in these two works is his identification with the abstract "Other," achieved in part through the withholding of his/their actual name. He is only ever "l'amant," "le Chinois," or simply "il" or "lui." There is a

precedent for this in Duras' earlier work, in another lover-figure—one not addressed by Adler in her overview of the different "versions" of the lover: the anonymous Japanese architect, the exotic "Other" lover *Hiroshima mon amour* (film 1959, scenario 1960). In the credits of the Alain Resnais-directed film, and in the published scenario by Duras, he is identified simply as "Lui." And like l'Enfant in the *Amant* books, the French actress who takes this Asian lover also remains unnamed—known simply as "Elle." These same pronouns represent the most common references for the young girl and the Chinese lover in Duras' two books. This identification is reinforced by the final alternate title that Duras says she considered for *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*—simply, *La Chine du Nord*" (11). The identification of North China, a politico-geographical region, with the lover—whose family has emigrated from that region—evokes Elle and Lui's final mutual identification of each other with and as their politico-geographical places of origin in *Hiroshima mon amour* (1960):

> *Elle: Hi-ro-shi-ma. C'est ton nom.*
> *Ils se regardent sans se voir. Pour toujours.*
> *Lui: C'est mon nom. Oui…. Ton nom toi est Nevers. Ne-vers-en-Fran-ce.* (124)
>
> [She: Hi-ro-shi-ma. That's your name.
> They look at each other without seeing. Forever.
> Him: That's my name. Yes…. Your name is Nevers. Ne-vers-in-France.][7]

(It also underscores the importance of ethnicity, nationality, and above all foreignness—that is, the role of the "Other"—in Duras' stories of inter-racial sexual relationships between ethnic- French girls/women and older Asian men.) And in both *Hiroshima mon amour* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* marital entanglements complicate and contribute to the end of the affair: Where the Chinese lover is merely betrothed/engaged, in *Hiroshima mon amour*

[7] Translation mine.

the Japanese Lui is already married (as, too, is the French Elle). In both it is the Asian male who is more obsessed, more insistent upon a continuation of the affair; and the French female who is poised to leave.

(There is also an interesting parallel between *Hiroshima mon amour* and Jean-Jacques Annaud's film version of *L'Amant* that is worth mentioning. *Hiroshima mon amour* opens with an extreme close-up shot of two nude, embracing torsos: "*Ce couple de fortune, on ne voit pas au début du film. Ni elle. Ni lui. On voit en leur lieu et place des corps mutilés…* (Duras 9) [This couple of fortune, they're not seen at the beginning of the film. Neither she. Nor him. Seen in their place are mutilated bodies.[8]] While there is no direct correlative in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* of this initial refusal to reveal the characters' faces—to, that is, bestow upon them a concrete particularity and individuality—there is a similar postponement in Annaud's film adaptation of *L'Amant*. The first appearances of the characters on screen suggest an intended (perhaps essential) anonymity. In the first shot of the Young Girl, her facial features are obscured by the low-tilted brim of her hat. And the Chinese is first seen as blank face through the windshield of the car, his features obscured by the hazy glare across the glass. When he emerges from the car, the camera is focused on his feet—as in the earlier scene introducing the Young Girl as she emerged from the bus, the camera focused on her feet as well.)

The third "version" of the lover that Adler discusses is one of the earliest: Monsieur Jo of *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*. Like his literary descendents, he is in his mid- to late twenties, a fine dresser and the owner of a long black limousine; he is not without a certain cultured elegance. But he is "the puniest, the most grotesque, the most pathetic" of three: a

[8] Translation mine.

"skinny, drab, depraved… voyeur" who "is completely lacking in charm and yet loves seducing girls" (Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life* 55). He is also *white*. But despite his ethnicity—a more socially acceptable domestication of the exotic "Other" represented by the Annamese-Chinese lover—he seems in many respects to bear the strongest resemblance to what seems to be the earliest representation of the lover in Duras' writing. Laure Adler, in her biography, and Eva Ahkstedt, in a presentation entitled "Les états successifs de *L'amant*. Observations faites à partir de deux manuscrits de Marguerite Duras," both describe a narrative account of an affair with an Annamese called "Léo" discovered in a notebook which, Adler writes, "according to handwriting experts most likely dates from the war [i.e., the Second World War]" a private "diary" which "Marguerite Donnadieu never intended should be published" (56). Ahkstedt (who dates the notebook 1944 or 1945) provides the following summary:

> La toute première tentative pour décrire cette période de sa vie… commence sans préambule par la rencontre avec Léo sur le bac traversant le Mékong. Deux pages plus loin, l'histoire de l'amant est interrompue par divers souvenirs des conditions de vie dans la colonie et des relations entre la jeune fille, sa mère et ses frères. Ces souvenirs sont racontés pêle-mêle, apparemment dans l'ordre dans lequel ils se présentent à l'esprit de l'auteur. Il n'y a aucune trace, dans ce brouillon, de la composition habile du texte publié en 1984 [*L'Amant*], et le récit se termine subitement, en plein milieu. La narration se fait à la première personne (tandis que *L'amant* commence à la première personne pour adopter par la suite soit la première, soit la troisième personne à propos de la jeune héroïne), les temps verbaux utilisés sont surtout ceux du passé (dans des scènes où *L'amant* utilise le présent historique). La narratrice est désignée comme la jeune fille de l'histoire une quinzaine d'années plus tard, ce qui fait que le texte comporte, ne serait-ce qu'à un faible degré, le dédoublement de perspective du « maintenant et jadis » si caractéristique du récit autobiographique. Contrairement à *L'amant*, aucun renseignement permettant au lecteur de se représenter cette narratrice plus mûre n'est cependant fourni. (Ahkstedt 218-219)
>
> [The very first attempt to describe this period in her life begins without preamble with the meeting with Léo on the ferry crossing the Mekong. Two pages further in, the story of the lover is interrupted with various memories of living conditions in the colony and relations between the young girl and her mother and brothers. These

> memories are recounted pell-mell, apparently in the order in which they presented themselves in the mind of the author. There is no trace, in this draft, of the skilful composition of the text published in 1984 [*L'Amant*], and the narrative ends suddenly, in the middle. The narration is in the first person (as *L'Amant* begins in the first person to later adopt either the first person or the third person in relation to the young heroine), the verb tenses used are primarily past (in scenes where *L'Amant* uses the historical present). The narrator is described as the young girl of the story, fifteen years later; though there is not even the smallest degree of any of the "now and then" doubling of perspective characteristic of autobiographical narrative. Unlike *L'Amant*, no information is provided to allow the reader to picture her as older.[9]] (Ahkstedt 218-219)

The lover in this account—from which Adler quotes extensively (*Marguerite Duras: A Life* 56-67) is, like Monsieur Jo, a much more repulsive figure, he is ugly, possessive, and without any genuine appeal of his own. His only attractive quality is, apparently, his wealth. Adler writes, "Something that never really comes out in any of the 'official' versions"—i.e., *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*—"but is quite blatant in this piece, is the fascination with money—money the driving force behind desire" (57). The relationship in this account last nearly two years. Despite Léo's repeated efforts, Marguerite sleeps with him only once, only days before she leaves Cochinchina with her family to return to France in the summer of 1931 (66-67).

Adler is somewhat dubious of the actual nature of the text. "Is it a confession?" she queries "Or is it the outline of a novel? Who knows?" (*Marguerite Duras: A Life* 57). It is not entirely clear to what extent this account—or the later ones—corresponds to actual historical fact. But Adler observes that this story, which is recorded like a diary, certainly has a ring of truth about it" (57). And she is even more adamant about the young Marguerite Donnadieu's having had an affair with an older Chinese lover. There is behind this third,

[9] Translation mine.

earliest literary/textual layer an even older stratum: the historical fact of actual lived experience which served as the basis for the others (and to which we will return).

D. "Qu'il y aura des livres, on sait": Other Intra-Corpus Inter-Textual Relations

At one point in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, le Chinois asks l'Enfant about the books that she will write. When she says that they can't know about them yet, he responds, "Si, on le sait. Qu'il y aura des livres, on sait" (187) ["Yes, we know it. That there will be books, that we know" (181). The story of the Lover as it is told in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* is inextricably bound up with these books and the stories that they told—individual stories that, taken all together, represent the broader, greater story of Duras' Indochinese childhood. In addition to the story of the Lover, there are the story of the mother, and the story of the brothers; the story of the mad beggar woman; and the story of "Anne-Marie Stretter." All implicated and alluded to in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, they are stories that found much fuller expression much earlier in Duras' career—in *Les Impudents* and *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*, and in the novels and films of the "India Cycle."

1) "A Family Chronicle": Les Impudents (1943) and *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950) [*The Sea Wall* (1967)]

Duras' first novel, *Les Impudents*, is, simply described, the story of dysfunctional family modeled after Duras' own. As described by Adler, "It's the story of a vicious, good-for-nothing brother, a fiery but indecisive sister and their biased, violent mother, blinded by her love for her son, who live on a country estate" (It's the story of a vicious, good-for-nothing brother, a fiery but indecisive sister and their biased, violent mother, blinded by her love for

her son, who live on a country estate" (*Marguerite Duras: A Life* 67). Though fictionalized—Indochina is replaced with a harsh southwestern French landscape—it was, as Alain Vircondolet describes it, essentially an act of exorcism in which Duras—who took that name at the same time that she was writing this novel—[took] it upon herself to set down the story of a family that she carrie[d] inside her, a first novel with the inevitable attempts at resolving childhood problems, family tensions, and adolescent conflicts," its "mood alternating, despite its detachment, between the savage violence reigning within the family"—recognizable to readers of *L'Amant* and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* through the older brother (Pierre), and to a certain extent in the mother and the young girl too—and submission to the summer heat, the wind, the terraced lands of the Quercy plateau in southwestern France" (68)—recognizable to the reader of *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* through the vain struggle to master nature.

"*Un barrage contre le pacifique*, by comparison," as Leslie Hill writes in *Apocalyptic Desires*, "shows a greater fidelity to autobiographical facts" (41). Duras' first great literary success, *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*—which is explicitly referred to on multiple occasions in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*—is the story of the mother as recounted by l'Enfant to le Chinois on more than one occasion. Fairly early on, she tells him of the failed plantation on the Cambodian coast, of "à prendre le sol de la mer et à l'enfermer dans des talus de terre dure et à la laisser là pendant des années et des années pour la laver du sel avec l'eau de la pluie et la faire rizière prisonnière des hommes pour le reste des temps" (Duras, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* 48-49) ["taking ground from the sea and enclosing it behind hard earthen dikes and leaving it there for years and years to wash out the salt with rain water and make a rice paddy imprisoned by man for all time" (Duras, *The North China Lover* 39)].

Later, when she tells it again, this story is said to (at that time) also be the young girl's story as well.

> *Elle raconte l'histoire de sa vie. Le Chinois écoute de loin, distrait. Il est déjà ailleurs, il est entré dans la douleur d'aimer cette enfant. Il ne sait pas bien ce qu'elle raconte. Elle est toute entière dans cette histoire qu'elle raconte. Elle lui dit qu'elle raconte souvent cette histoire, et que ça lui est égal qu'on ne l'écoute pas. Elle dit : Même lui, qu'il n'écoute pas, ça fait rien.*
>
> > *– Ça fait rien que tu n'écoute pas. Tu peux même dormir. Raconter cette histoire c'est pour moi plus tard l'écrire. Je ne peux pas m'empêcher. Une fois j'écrirai ça : la vie de ma mère.* (Duras, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* 97)
>
> [She is telling the story of her life. The Chinese listens from far off, distractedly. He is already somewhere else, he has embarked on the pain of loving this child. He doesn't really know what she's talking about. She is putting all of herself into this story she's telling. She says to him that she often tells this story, and that she doesn't care if people don't listen to it. She says it doesn't matter even if he doesn't listen to it.
>
> "It doesn't matter if you're not listening. You can sleep for all I care. I'm telling this story so I can write it later on. I can't keep from doing it. Someday I'll write it, my mother's life." (Duras, *The North China Lover* 88)]

In a footnote, this story is explicitly identified as that of *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*: "Le pari a été tenu : *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*" (97n) ["She kept her promise: *The Sea Wall*" (88)]. The motive: revenge. When le Chinois declares that she wants to write this book because they were all abandoned in their poverty by their fellow whites, the l'Enfant corrects him: "C'est pas ça tout à fait. C'est pas l'échec de ma mère. C'est l'idée que ces gens du cadastre ne seront pas tous morts, qu'il en restera encore en vie qui liront ce livre-là et qu'ils mourront de le lire" (98) [" "It isn't that, exactly. It isn't my mother's failure. It's the idea that those people from the Land Registry won't all be dead, a few will still be alive to read the book and die reading it" (89). The suggestion in the original French—"*mourront de le lire*"—is that they will die *of* or from reading the book, not simply *while* reading it.)

2) "Une Valse Morte": **The India Cycle** *(1964-1976)*

Crucial to l'Enfant's discovery of her desire to write, her interest in stories (and telling them) is the figure of Anne-Marie Stretter, linked to the so-called "Desperation Waltz." When this "valse morte [dead waltz]" first appears in the book, is said to be "celle d'un livre. On ne sait plus lequel" (Duras, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* 20) ["Out of a story. No telling which one anymore" (Duras, *The North China Lover* 10)]. Despite the author-narrator's claim that we can't know which story (an assertion that serves to suggest that *all* of the stories are, by now, virtually indistinguishable from each other—that they are, perhaps, really all the same story anyway), it would seem to have come out of one of the stories "India Cycle" works: the tune has been played, as we later learn, by Anne-Marie Stretter.

A prominent character in the works of Duras' "India Cycle" and alluded to in *L'Amant,* Anne-Marie Stretter is the "femme en robe rouge [woman in the red dress]" who appears sporadically throughout *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*. She is spotted on another ferry by I'Enfant as she and the man who will soon become her Chinese lover are exiting their own ferry, the ferry where they have just met. "C'est Madame Stretter," l'Enfant says, "Anne-Marie Stretter. La femme de l'Administrateur général. A Vinh-Long on l'appelle A.M.S…. Elle a beaucoup d'amants, c'est de ça que vous vous souvenez…. Il y en a eu un, très jeune, il se serait tué pour elle… je ne sais pas bien" (39-40) ["It's Mme. Stretter. Anne-Marie Stretter. The General Administrator's wife. In Vinh-Long they call her A.M.S…. She has a lot of lovers, that's what you're remembering…. There was one very young one, he supposedly killed himself over her. I don't know the whole story" (30)]. Though she does not, as she admits, know the whole story, she later alludes to what little she knows (see

L'Amant de la Chine du Nord 108)—the outline of a story that she will grow up to tell in various ways in the "India Cycle."

III. An "Autobiography" Revisited: Re-Contextualizing *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*

L'Amant de la Chine Nord cannot be read simply according to its place in Duras' greater *oeuvre*, however. Its autobiographical aspects—the more overt and explicit as well as the more covert and implicit—require that it be contextualized as well according to both the life that it claims to be accurately representing, and the competing representation of that life against which it was intended to be a pre-emptive strike. The revelations of such re-contextualizations are rather remarkable….

A. "A l'ombre d'une jeune fille en fleur": The Facts in the Case of M. Donnadieu (1914-1929)

In her biography of Duras, Laure Adler displays a healthy skepticism where the various accounts of Duras' youthful affair are concerned. "Is the story of the Chinese lover true? All through her life Marguerite had a talent for confusing the issue, for having us believe lies she then ended up believing herself. There are so many different versions of the story that a biographer has to remain skeptical" (52-53). This situation is further exacerbated by what Paul John Eakin refers to as "the vexingly unverifiable referentiality of" even truly and properly autobiographical texts (20). As what Dorrit Cohn would refer to as nonreferential texts, autobiographical texts are theoretically verifiable—through their being tested against (experiences and perceptions) of the actual world accessible through direct scientific observation, logical deduction, the memories and accounts of others, documentation, etc. Yet

the autobiographer very often provides accounts that, while theoretically verifiable, cannot, for various reasons, *actually* be verified through any such means. No corroborating documentation or representation may exist, for example. The experience may not have been shared, for example, so that there exists the possibility of only a single account: the autobiographer's. Or those with whom an experience was shared cannot be identified or located; they may even be deceased, so that again there exists now the possibility of only a single account: again, the autobiographer's. If an experience was shared, others' perceptions or understandings of it may be, for whatever reason, deemed unreliable or of only limited use. In practice, the reader/researcher typically encounters any number of such problems, in any number of possible combinations. And such is the case with the story of Marguerite Duras', née Donnadieu's childhood and youth.

1) The Fiction in the "Facts"

It is not uncommon for biographers to find themselves forced to rely a great deal on their subjects' own recollections and autobiographical writings in their portraits of their subjects' childhoods—a typically little-documented period of one's life. For the biographer of Marguerite Duras, it would seem both a blessing and a curse that so much of what the woman who was born Marguerite Germaine Donnadieu in Gia-Dinh (at the time a neighboring province of Saigon) on 4 April 1914 wrote dealt with her childhood—for while there is clearly an autobiographical element to many of Duras' books, it is not at all clear how far precisely this element extends. If it is understood that Duras' writing tends toward the autobiographical, it is equally well understood that her life has also, to a greater or lesser extent (depending upon the particular work in question), been fictionalized.

Profoundly informed in particular by *L'Amant* (1984) and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991), the portrait of her youth that scholar, biographer, and novelist Alain Vircondolet draws in *Duras: A Biography* (1991, 1994) has an almost oneiric quality. Vague and impressionistic, given not only to generalizing but to poeticizing, it is in some ways a condensing of the two "Lover" books. Yet Vircondolet is not prepared to accept these accounts at face-value. "What if," he asks, "from clinging, obsessive, adolescent memory, Duras had invented the story of the Lover, reinventing it with each book, nourishing a legend?" (35). And the biographical representations that are directly derived from Duras' own pseudo-autobiographical or dubiously factual accounts are often qualified with such terms as "supposedly."

Adler's approach in *Marguerite Duras: A Life* —which was enormously well received by both the reading public at large and scholars and critic, despite being denounced by Vircondolet, who accused Adler of having "cannibalized" his own work as well as that of other Duras scholars, such as Christine Blot-Labarrère, without proper citation and documentation—takes a more journalistic approach. Informed to a certain extent by the author's own personal relationship with her subject, which began in the late 1970s when Adler was fourteen (Adler, "La vérité recomposée de M.D.") Adler's portrait of Duras is ultimately derived in much greater part from extensive archival and field research—including access to the sixteen boxes of personal documents (journals, manuscripts, drafts, photographs, etc.) that Duras had bequeathed to the Institut de la Mémoire de l'Édition Contemporaine after her death (Adler 8), as well as personal interviews with a number of close friends, colleagues, and acquaintances from throughout Duras' life.

Adler insists in her biography, “The lover existed. I visited his grave, saw his house. Marguerite had a relationship with a Chinese man” (*Marguerite Duras: A Life* 53). Though she does not identify him by name, the historical “lover” has been identified as Huỳnh Thủy Lê. In a literary travelogue piece written for the *New York Times*—“The Saigon of Marguerite Duras”—Matt Gross also describes visiting the house—now a popular tourist attraction known as the Nha Co Huỳnh Thủy Lê. The affair seems to have lasted approximately two years (Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life* 63)—closer to the period covered in *L’Amant* than in *L’Amant e la Chine du Nord*. Beyond this, however, there is little beyond what Duras herself wrote to shed light on the historical facts of the case. And Adler’s research reveals some of the extent to which *L’Amant*, and later *L’Amant de la Chine du Nord*, were fictionalized.

“The Lyautey Boarding School”—for example—“never existed” (49). This explains why Gross, who was able to visit for himself not only the Nha Co Huỳnh Thủy Lê , but Dong Khoi Street (the former Rue Catinat), the Video Mini Dong Khoi (formerly the Eden Cinema), the Cholon district, and even a school that may well be housed in the same building as that run by Duras’ mother, Marie Legrand Donnadieu, was “unable to find Duras's dormitory, the Lyautey Boarding School, on any map.” The young Marguerite Donnadieu did attend the lycée Chasseloup-Laubat in Saigon, beginning in 1929 (when she was fifteen years-old)—but instead of residing at the fictional Lyautey school, she boarded at the home of one “Mademoiselle C” (Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life* 49). Nor was there any Hélène Lagonelle—a girl who Duras “revealed” at one time to be the model for Lol V. Stein, allowing, Leslie Hill says, “a belated autobiographical reading of the 1964 text” (65). At least, there was no girl either of that name or matching the descriptions provided in *L’Amant*

and *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*. Of Duras' three fellow boarders, two were teachers and one was a young girl named "Colette, two years younger than Marguerite and also a pupil at the lycée" (Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life* 49). Perhaps it is Colette of whom Duras' writes in the footnote describing Hélène's short life and death.

The administrator's wife known as Anne-Marie Stretter in Duras' books has been identified by many Duras scholars as Elizabeth Striedter. Alain Vircondolet described her in his biography of Duras as a woman whom Duras is said to have first encountered in Vinh-Long in 1930, a woman "whose name she [would] later forget, and who [would] reappear as Anne-Marie Stretter, the mythical name of the phantasm, the name that sets her writing in motion" (25).

> This woman, whom [Duras] would follow around town, fantasizing about her, imagining her as a legendary princess, was an object of reprobation for the entire bourgeoisie. Her mother vociferated against her, judging her literally "out of place," that is, not in conformity with the customs of colonial life, with its moral obligations….
>
> She [Duras] learned that a lover had just killed himself out of love for her [Striedter]. And suddenly, Elizabeth Striedter became the dispenser of life and death, the sea goddess who gave herself to men and then took herself back, pretended to belong to them but brought death to them. (27)

According to Laure Adler, however, the administrator's wife and Elizabeth Striedter were two different people. The (unnamed) wife of the administrator lived "in the remote corner of Siam where Marguerite spent her holidays. When she was little, she and her mother had been to visit her out in the sticks where she lived…. The little girl had been struck by her beauty" (262). Elizabeth Striedter was "the mother of one of [Duras'] classmates at the lycée Chasseloup-Laubat in Saigon" whom Duras "as a teenager had visited every day for several years: "Beautiful the perfect mother and a gifted musician" (262). If this is correct, then it

would seem unclear which one it was who had the "red hair [and] pale complexion" described not only by Duras herself in her books, but Alain Vircondolet in his biography of Duras (27). Both Vircondolet and Adler agree, however, that it was to a party given by an aged Elizabeth Striedter (as opposed to and/or distinct from the administrator's wife)—then living in a retirement home—that Duras was invited by letter in 1977. It was this same Elizabeth Striedter who wrote a letter to Duras after the latter failed to attend: "Madame," the letter reads,

> You are right to remain silent. Out of the young woman I was, your imagination created a fictitious image that retains its charm precisely on account of that mysterious, preservable anonymity. I am so deeply convinced of it myself that I decided not to read your book nor see your movie [*India Song*]. The discretion of memories, of impressions that keep their value by remaining in the shadows, aware that their reality has become unreality. (Vircondolet 34) [Adler quotes this same letter in its entirety in her biography (262)]

And it was this same Elizabeth Striedter again who died at the age of ninety-one the following year, on 8 October 1978 (Adler 262).

2) Les petits cadeaux d'amour: Repetition, Revision, and Resolution—Writing as Wish-Fulfillment, and Imagination Inflation

There is a great deal that cannot be known of Marguerite Donnadieu's early life; much of it has been lost now to legend and to literature. But many of the facts that have been discovered, as briefly treated in the preceding section, reveal that Duras was telling the truth when at first she claimed that *L'Amant* was a novel and not an autobiography. The invocation of the autobiographical pact in the service of a heavily fictionalized autobiographical narrative would actually identify *L'Amant* with the genre of autofiction, somewhere between Doubrovsky's and Colonna's conceptions of it. Yet Duras, by ultimately "agreeing" to

remember this version of her life as autobiographically factual, very early on became complicit in the public's misreading of the book—which she came to sanction and endorse. Though we cannot know with absolute certainty what exactly prompted Duras to reverse her public stance, two things allow us to advance a reasonable hypothesis concerning what motivated Duras' ultimate identification of historical fact with her autobiographical fictions: 1) the almost cyclical recurrence of the story of the lover throughout her work, and 2) the unbroken, steady movement of increasing romanticization in each succeeding version.

Repetition—and the Freudian notion of repetition compulsion as described in Freud's "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through" (1914) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—may well be the key to the story of the lover specifically, and to Duras' *oeuvre* more broadly, as concerned as it is with notions of trauma, forgetting, and remembering. Duras' obsessive re-working of the same thematic material and the same story might well be understood as deriving from an inability (conscious or unconscious) to resolve her own complicated feelings regarding her youthful affair with the Chinese. In *Telling It Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film* Bruce F. Kawin refers to Freud's notion that repetitive activity is symptomatic of and results from some concealed trauma:

> Until we resolve the conflicts that rigidify our associations, every attempt we make to create something new (a *second* novel) will be twisted into a re-expression, in however cleverly modified a form, of our concealed concerns.
>
> … The fact this his [the author's] style and his preoccupations spring from the same unresolved material, and therefore appear well suited, may keep him from realizing that both may be uncreative and compulsive. (15)

What Freud is describing—i.e., repetition compulsion, that is an unconscious or subconscious "acting out" of an unresolved past conflict or trauma—is the result of repression and resistance to remembering. It is a form of—or, more precisely, a substitute

for—remembering. The repetition compulsion itself must become, Freud writes, a motive for remembering (154)—and/or for working through the resistances to remembering. While this precise process would not seem to apply directly to Duras. But the broader outlines and the vocabulary of Freudian psychoanalysis do, as Deborah Glassman writes in "Fascinating Vision and Narrative Cure: Marguerite Duras' *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*," lend themselves to analysis of Duras' *oeuvre*.

> Drawing on a psychoanalytic vocabulary to describe Duras's traumatized characters is eminently justified by the range and shape of the themes of her work. It is in some sense justified as well by her own invocation of a psychoanalytic vocabulary. In the course of lengthy inter- views and discussions of her work, she frequently has recourse to a psycho- analytic terminology, which she uses in a general rather than a clinical way…. Insofar as Duras invokes with ease a vocabulary that springs from a conceptual universe made possible by Freud and his disciples, one that is consonant with the preoccupations manifest in her work, we can reasonably argue that a psychoanalytic framework offers an appropriate and useful approach to her work. (77-78)

Adler suggests that it is the earliest, unpublished version of the story of the lover—called Léo—that would seem to be the most directly autobiographical and factual (a suggestion supported, though certainly not proved, by the close proximity of "Léo" to "Lê"). If this account is to be privileged, then it suggests that the actual affair was much closer to an ordeal that the young Donnadieu endured than the love story told in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*. Adler suggests that the affair was motivated far more by money than by love, and was implicitly sanctioned by Marie Legrand Donnadieu: the young daughter of a defeated, poverty-stricken mother, the sister of a thieving opium-addicted older brother, "Marguerite was for sale," Adler writes (*Marguerite Duras: A Life* 60).

There are similar suggestions even in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, which otherwise, paradoxically, paints the most romantic portrait of the relationship as a genuine and

passionate love affair—a story ”d’un amour aveuglant” (Duras, *L’Amant de la Chine du Nord* 51) [“of a blinding love” (Duras, *The North China Lover* 42)]. The disparity between l’Enfant’s poverty and le Chinois’ wealth is more greatly emphasized than in *L’Amant*, beginning with their first meeting on the ferry (see 40). Hélène confesses to l’Enfant that she believed that she had slept with le Chinois because she is poor (see 93). L’Enfant herself occasionally confesses that money has been a factor. She tells le Chinois on one occasion, “Je suis allée avec toi pour que tu me donnes de l’argent, même si je ne le sais pas” (145) [““I slept with you so you would give me money, even if I didn’t know it” (137)]. Even when she believes herself to truly love le Chinois, l’Enfant still recognizes that money has been a crucial factor in the relationship. When, her mother asks her whether or not she were seeing him just for the money, she responds, “Non….Pas seulement” (198) [“No… Not just” (192)].

If Adler is right, these are the last traces of the shame associated with a quasi-traumatic act of virtual child-prostitution. Through the revised repetitions of the story that she told, however—from the first more directly autobiographical account of “Léo,” through the more further-removed-from-reality figure of Monsieur Jo in *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*, to the more romanticized Lover of *L’Amant*, culminating in the ultimate ideal of the North China Lover in *L’Amant de la Chine du Nord*—, Duras worked to sublimate her shame and resolve the conflict.

Her transformation of this much more shameful and wretched tale in the love story of *L’Amant* and *L’Amant de la Chine du Nord* represents more than a self-therapeutic attempt to resolve psychic conflict; ii also represents an act of wish-fulfillment—and of revenge.“The writer’s revenge on reality,” Adler calls it: The game of love she metamorphosed when she wrote her versions of the lover. The writer’s revenge on reality! Expanded and romanticized,

the story rang so true, was so moving and apparently authentic, that the episode with the lover became a part of her life that was never challenged" (*Marguerite Duras: A Life* 61). It was an act that began in earnest with *L'Amant*, for which she

> made some improvements to Leo, whom she would no longer name and who would for ever be known as the lover. He hadn't had smallpox and was no longer rickety or ridiculous. His skin was soft, his gestures slow, his eroticism was oriental. Marguerite dreamed out loud of what could have been, of what should have been, the story of her adolescence. (346)

In other words, "la Duras" the artist was able to give herself the life-story that she deserved and which actual life had denied her. And once this novel was understood by the public to be her true, actual life-story, Duras' received permission to regard it in the same way. Only she alone would now need convincing. Adler claims that she succeeded:

> By the end of her life Duras had convinced herself and others that she had loved the Chinese. Writing had wiped away the distaste, obliterated the shame of the mother selling the child, and exaggerated the relationships. She adjusted what she had been through and thereafter what Marguerite Duras had written in *The Lover* became more real to her than her own recollections. (Adler, *Marguerite Duras: A Life* 348)

It is entirely possible that by the end of her life Duras really did believe the legend of the Lover that she wove out of the story of her past. In *Fictions in Autobiography*, Paul John Eakin notes that "fiction can have for an autobiographer the status of remembered fact" (7). He cites an example from Mary McCarthy's autobiographical *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1957) in which McCarthy admits to no longer being able to determine whether a remembered and recounted story is an actual lived event, or essentially a fiction, previously constructed, inspired by actual lived events (15). "The lesson f McCarthy's experience of the autobiographical act"—Eakin asserts—"is that the process of self-discovery is finally inseparable from the art of self-invention" (55). As late as 1984, in the immediate wake of

L'Amant's publication, Duras may have still been in a position to distinguish fact from fiction—but her repeated claims concerning the veracity of the account, once she agreed to adopt it as autobiography, may very well have influenced her memories of those events. Kawin observes the following paradoxical aspect of repetition: "Beginning its experience or its description over and over can have the effect of discovering or strengthening the reality of that experience; but in the human memory, repetition more often than not is the destroyer and not the saver: a neutralizer, habituator, and falsifier" (27). And psychologists such as Elizabeth Loftus have shown that the "retrieval" of a false memory—particularly if performed repeatedly—can in fact result in the formation of a memory that is or may become indistinguishable from "real" memories of actual events. This may even be something of an occupational hazard for the writer, Kawin suggests:

> Writing about something real, or something that is real in one's imagination, is similar to repeatedly remembering anything. For an artist to describe a scene in his head, the scene must be called up many times until the proper words for it are found. By that time the artist is lucky if h can at all remember the scene as he first conceived it. What is more likely is that what he has substituted for its reality on paper has also taken the place of the original fantasy in his head. The effect is just as completely the fictionalization of reality when he turns a mental reality—the fantasy the story, the past, the idea of the emotion—into a delineated captured structure on paper as when he performs the same examining and describing and rearranging disservice in memory We take our pasts and what we do to them is exactly analogous to the half-accurate art of autobiography.
>
> Formulated, the experience has the reality of a formulation….It is art now, or adapted memory—a process of substitution that is the basis of much art; and the better the substitution, the better the art—the worse the chances of the accurate survival of the experience. (29-30)

Adler notes that during the period following the publication of *L'Amant* Duras was engaged in a virtually obsessive, interminable process of revisiting, revising, and re-writing her earlier texts/works. This came to include, of course, *L'Amant* itself—re-told in and as *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, the last account of the Lover that Duras ever gave.

B. The Issue of Authorial Control: *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (1991) and *L'Amant* (1992): A (Brief) Comparative Analysis

Perhaps one of the more remarkable (and seldom commented-upon) aspects of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, given its origins and the impetus behind it as a pre-emptive strike against Annaud's version of Duras' book and childhood as put on the screen in his film of *L'Amant*, is the incredible extent to which it and Annaud's film resemble each other. Though Duras is reticent on the subject in the book itself, she was more forthcoming in acknowledging that it was prompted by the abortive collaboration. When Leslie Garis asked her in an interview for the *New York Times*, "Why go over the material [of *L'Amant*] again?" Duras responded, "Because there is a film maker who is one of the greatest in the world, whose name is Jean-Jacques Annaud, who took on 'The Lover.' He told a story that I didn't recognize, so I said: 'Now you're going home, it's finished. I don't want to work with you anymore.' I was a little nasty" (2). This response would seem rather disingenuous, and not only because she suggests in it that it was Annaud who was essentially "fired" from the project (which, of course, he brought to completion without Duras), but because the narrative of his film is immediately recognizable to the viewer familiar with *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* as that of Duras' book. Anyone ignorant of the chronology would be perfectly justified in mistaking the film for an adaptation of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* rather than *L'Amant* itself: the similarities between these two far outnumber (and arguably outweigh) those between either the film and the 1984 book, or the 1984 book and the 1991 book.

1) Traditional Linear-Chronological Narrative: Scene-by-Scene Similarities

During their (*de facto*) collaboration, ne of the things to which Duras seems to have objected, at least initially, was Annaud's decision to focus on the *story* of the young girl and the older Chinese lover. According to Adler, Duras "did not want the film to be her story, rejected the chronology, objected to the erotic background and was thinking about a film on writing; because, for her, the story of *The Lover* was that of a child who discovers, thanks to the Chinese man, that she wants to be a writer" (376). When Annaud began to work on his adapted screenplay, however, he centered it on "the story of a young girl who, against the exoticism of a colonial backdrop, has her first emotional experiences in the arms of a young Chinese, to the great scandal of the colony" (376). (And the "erotic background" to which Duras objected became, to the minds of many, a near-pornographic foreground.) And yet *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*—ostensibly a completely different vision—ultimately also focused much more and in much greater detail on this story than *L'Amant* did. It essentially eschews the a-chronological (often seemingly trans-temporal), associational structure of the earlier book's narrative, as well as the mythopoeic overtones surrounding the depictions of the mother and the brothers, and the more metaphysical aspects of the self and self-realization, in favor of a more prosaic, linear chronological narrative that is virtually indistinguishable from that of Annaud's film.

Even more to the point, from beginning to end, the later book and Annaud's film feature virtually identical scenes with virtually identical dialogue—including a number of scenes and lines nowhere to be found in *L'Amant* (1984). Duras limits her scope in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* to the same eight-month span of time covered by Annaud's film is limited (eight months corresponding directly to the longer, approximately eighteen-month

period over which the affair is stretched in *L'Amant*). Though at times the precise chronology/order of events is slightly altered, the greatest differences between these corresponding scenes are often that they are expanded in the book. A list of only the more significant points of direct comparison includes the following….

1) *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* opens with a "house-cleaning" scene (also described in *L'Amant*) closely resembling a scene depicted approximately half-way through Annaud's film.

2) As in Annaud's film, an early scene revolves around dialogue between the l'Enfant and la Mère revolving primarily around Pierre and the dysfunctional family relations that characterize their home life.

3) The details of l'Enfant's meeting "l'Amant de la Chine du Nord" on the ferry crossing of the Mekong are virtually identical to its depiction in Annaud's film—from the physical details of dress and appearance, to the "cameo" appearance by Anne-Marie Stretter on the ferry, to the long drive to the Lyautey boarding school (though the precise details of their interaction during this drive are bolder, more confident, more playful in Duras' book). Even minor details match up here: for example, the shoes worn by the Young Girl in *L'Amant* (1984) are gold lamé; whereas in both *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (35) and *L'Amant* (1992) they are black lamé.

4) In a lengthy dialogue that night, at the Lyautey boarding school, Hélène tells the Child about Alice, a girl at the school who has been prostituting herself in a ditch behind the building at night (53-58)—a scene absent from *L'Amant* (1984) but found in Annaud's film

5) Shortly after, in another scene absent from *L'Amant* (1984) and virtually identical to one in Annaud's film, l'Enfant, on her way to the *lycée,* sees the Chinese waiting in his Morris Léon-Bolle outside the school—and kisses the window….

6) Just before going for the first time to the bachelor quarters where she loses her virginity—as in Annaud's film— l'Enfant dances with Hélène, teaching her the bullfighter's *paso doble*.

7) The comparatively more graphic (with respect to *L'Amant*) scene of l'Enfant's losing her virginity contains numerous details and a great deal of dialogue found in Annaud's film that are not found in *L'Amant* (1984)—including Le Chinois' bathing her afterward.

8) Following this scene, in both *l'Amant de la Chine du Nord* and *L'Amant* (1992), l'Enfant and le Chinois dine together at a Chinese restaurant, where she confesses, "J'aime pas beaucoup les Chinois" (86) ["I don't much like the Chinese" (77)]—though he seems more disconcerted by the admission in Annaud's film than in Duras' book.

9) As in Annaud's film, there is much more biographical detail provided for le Chinois, who tells l'Enfant, "On est partis de la Mandchouri quand Sun Yat Sen a décrété la République chinoise. On a vendu toutes les terres et tous les bijoux de ma mère. On est partis au Sud. Je

me souviens, j'avais cinq ans" (86-87) [We left Manchuria when Sun Yat-sen proclaimed the Chinese republic. We sold all of our land and all of my mother's jewelry. We left for the south. I remember. I was five years old…. (78)].

10) In l'Enfant's confession to Hélène of her first time with the Chinese, the girls' conversation in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (91-92) is simply an expanded version of what is in Annaud's film.

11) La Mère meets with the school director in a scene that, though it arrives much earlier in Duras' book, is virtually identical to its counterpart in Annaud's film.

12) Another scene in Annaud's film: Le Chinois' chauffeur arrives to pick up l'Enfant, informing her that le Chinois has gone to Sadec to be with his father, who has fallen ill; in his absence (120).

13) A driving tour of Saigon that is described in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* (see 86) follows the same itinerary as a corresponding sequence in Annaud's film.

14) As in Annaud's film, le Chinois tells the Child that now that she will be leaving the colonies to return to France, he can no longer make love to her (133).

15) As in Annaud's film, just prior to their departure from the colonies, the mother suddenly sees the girl's hat and asks, "C'est moi qui t'ai acheté ça?" "Qui veux-tu d'autre… il y a des

jours où on peut faire acheter ce qu'on veut" (196) [""Did I buy that?" Who else?... There are days when we can make you buy anything we want." (189)].

16) And similar to Annaud's film, there is a scene in which the Child, on the steamer en route to France, huddles just outside the music room and listens to a man playing the piano: "L'enfant s'est allongée par terre sous une table contre le mur. Celui qui jouait du piano ne l'avait pas entendue, ni vue. Il jouait sans partition, de mémoire, dans le salon éteint, cette valse populaire et désespérée de la rue" (229) ["The child stretched out on the floor under a table against the wall. The piano player didn't hear or see her. He was playing that popular and desperate waltz from the street without a score, from memory in the darkened room. (223)

2) Characterizations

The vast majority of the figures described in Duras' *L'Amant* (1984) are characterized by a certain anonymity—with *very* few exceptions, these characters remain unnamed—and a kind of abstract universality. They are with few exceptions referred to by *labels* that identify them according to their relations to l'Enfant, according to their functions in the myth of her life. The corresponding characters in Annaud's film are far more individualized, more personalized, more *humanized*. This may be understood as the unavoidable result of the characteristic over-specification of cinema as compared to literature: any realistic, traditional on-screen portrayal entails the casting of specific individuals to portray even the most broadly and vaguely drawn characters, and it is difficult to mask their individuality. Though certainly there are cinematic approaches that might be employed to more faithfully

correspond to the portrayals of Duras' characters (in some cases almost reduced, arguably, to mere actants). The more recognizably "real" characters in Annaud's adaptation could perhaps be said to be a result of his decisions to both closely adhere to what is most immediately adaptable in the source material (rather than the more abstract themes that Duras initially favored); and to engage in a more traditional, "spectacular" form of cinematic presentation than what Duras herself favored in her own films. And yet the characters in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* are often far more recognizable in those of Annaud's film than in those of Duras' earlier book. Their shared characters are portrayed—apart from the differences imposed by their respective media—in essentially identical ways, even and especially where the characterizations differ from those of *L'Amant*.

La Mère, for example, is much less distant, less cruel, with more warmth than in *L'Amant* (1984); and she shows a much greater interest in her daughter's well-being and in her desires, particularly her desire to become a writer. L'Amant himself is different in many of the same ways—somewhat less feminine, more assertive and self-possessed—even occasionally cocky in l'Enfant's family's presence. And though these two characters—the most significant after l'Enfant herself—remain unnamed, the two brothers are identified in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* as Pierre (the older brother) and "Paulo" (the younger brother). (Duras' own two brothers of the same exact parentage were Pierre and Paul.)

The character who undergoes the greatest transformation from *L'Amant* to the two later re-workings is perhaps Hélène Lagonelle, whose status as something of a "double" for l'Enfant is even more pronounced. Where in *L'Amant* (1984) she is portrayed as simple, innocent, frightened, and child-like, in both the later book and Annaud's film she is much more intelligent and self-aware, much more mature and self-assured—especially where her

sexuality is concerned. In *L'Amant* her sexual immaturity and timidity, her perfect ignorance of *jouissance* is one of her defining characteristics. In both *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* and the film adaptation of *L'Amant* (1992), she is far more sexually curious; she confesses to having sexual desires, even to self-pleasure.

3) Re-Writing the Self: Authorial Control: Self-Inscription, Self-Narrativization, and the Autonomous Artistic Act of Self-Determined Self-Re-Creation

Given the vast number of similarities between her 1991 book and Annaud's 1992 film (of which the above passages provide only a sampling), how then are we to reconcile Duras' repeated claims that, as she told Leslie Garis, Annaud "told a story [she] didn't recognize"? There is no reason to suspect that the break between Annaud and the other filmmakers, and Duras was anything less than total and final. It is highly unlikely that either the shape of Duras' book would have continued to be informed by the evolving film, or that the filmmakers would or could have taken continuing cues from Duras' developing manuscript. In other words, there is no evidence to suggest that any similarities between them are not the result of a common origin. Either Annaud and Brach ultimately retained a great deal more of Duras' drafts of a screenplay, or Duras appropriated for herself a great deal of their work. The former is the likelier explanation; especially when contextualized according to the marathon argument over semantics—"boggy" vs. "muddy"—that precipitated the final split. If Duras could claim to not recognize her "muddy" road in Annaud's "boggy" one, then there is no reason to doubt that she would be equally capable of claiming not to recognize the story that she told in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* in the story that he told in his film version of *L'Amant*, despite an overwhelming preponderance of similarities.

Perhaps what Duras didn't recognize as her own, and hers alone, was simply the name in the writing and directing credits—that is, ultimate authority and a virtually total, *auteur*-like control over even the smallest detail of any representation of her work and her life. Adler notes in her biography that Duras "hated people delving into her life, loathed on principal the idea that someone other than herself should write about her" (6). This of course is precisely what Annaud, with Brach, was doing in preparing his own screenplay; that he would be able not only to write about her life, but to *direct* it as it would appear on cinema screens around the world, with the potential, as a film, to reach a wider audience than her own books had, could only have been galling to someone who had spent decades carefully constructing a mythic past and identity for herself. In his book *Apocalyptic Desires*, Leslie Hill sees in the "exacerbated assertiveness that is often characteristic of Duras's media persona…

> not so much overweening egotistical arrogance, as some readers or viewers have been quick to assume, but rather an abiding sense of the author's own anxiety and the fragility of her relationship to her own writing. (The anxiety of dispossession associated with authorship is also no doubt a factor in Duras's continual rewriting of her own texts, the most spectacular case of which was, in 1991, the transmogrification of *L'Amant* into *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*.) (16)

Yet with Duras, it would seem difficult to separate this "anxiety of dispossession associated with authorship" from an anxiety of dispossession of one's self –especially where *L'Amant*, and later, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* are concerned. Through the quasi-autobiographical book that she came to embrace more or less as true autobiography, and through her consolidation, Duras' work and her life became essentially inseparable.

In his poem "The Choice," W.B. Yeats proposes, "The intellect of man is forced to choose / Perfection of the life or of the work." For Duras, perfection of the life—in its

entirety, from childhood to the present and beyond—was accomplished through the work. By the last phase of her career, she seems to have been engaged in an effort to transform herself and her life, through a process of self-entextualizing, self-inscribed, self-narrativization in the service of an artistic act of self-determined self-re-creation. Nowhere is this more evident than in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*. Essentially fictive in its deviations from the facts of an actual past, it nonetheless presents itself as an autobiographical account one profoundly informed by Duras' present needs to both rewrite her past (literally), and to re-assert her own authority and control over how that past was to be presented. In the process, she accomplished a virtual reversal of the more conventional relations between art and life. Referring to Proust in his seminal essay "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes writes, "In a radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel, as is so often maintained, he made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model" (169). Duras does something similar in her final version of the Lover. She takes her own earlier books, novels and autobiographical fictions into which she had put her life—*Les Impudents, Un barrage contre le Pacifique, Hiroshima mon amour, Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, *Le Vice-consul*¸ *India Song*, and, above all others *L'Amant*—and then modeled her own life, after the fact, through willed memory, on those books—a self-fictionalized life that she then inscribes yet again as autobiography. It is dual process of the simultaneous fictionalization of reality, and "realization" of the fiction. In this, Duras' writing did finally become, as she declared in *L'Amant* it must be "toutes choses confondues en une seule par essence inqualifiable" (15) ["all things confounded into one through some inexpressible essence" (8)].

The absolute authorial control that a writer can wield over her text—and that a writer of Duras' statute by the late phase of her career might expect to exert even over the editing

process—provided Duras with the means to re-write her past, her life, hers*elf* as she saw fit. And the written text provided the only actual, material existence for this self-determined self—the self as self-narrativized self-creation—that would otherwise be left to languish in the imagination or, at best, in mere memories. This, "la vie textuelle," the textual life—is the real "vie matérielle" that Duras sought not to live, but to have lived. That traces of the actual past have remained to contradict Duras' self-made myth, however, demonstrates that, as of yet, her efforts have not been entirely successful.

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CHAPTER FOUR

BEING PHILIP ROTH: *OPERATION SHYLOCK: A CONFESSION*—PHILIP ROTH'S INTERTEXTUAL PERFORMATIVE "CONFESSION"

"I learned about the other Philip Roth in January 1988," writes Philip Roth, "a few days after the New Year, when my cousin Apter°[10] telephoned me in New York to say that Israeli radio had reported that I was in Jerusalem attending the trial of John Demjanjuk, the man alleged to be Ivan the Terrible of Treblinka" (Roth, *Operation Shylock* 17). Apter's incredible report receives confirmation four days later from a more credible source—Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld, whom Roth has been scheduled to interview for the *New York Times Book Review* in Jerusalem at the end of the month. This "other Philip Roth," it turns out, is doing more in Jerusalem than simply attending the Demjanjuk trial: Appelfeld informs Roth that *The Jerusalem Post* had advertised the week prior a lecture—to be delivered "by Philip Roth" in Suite 511 of the King David Hotel—entitled "Diasporism: The Only Solution to the Jewish Problem" (18). "Finally, having convinced myself during a largely sleepless night that some fluky series of errors had resulted in a mix-up of identities that it was in my best interest to disregard," Roth arises the next morning and immediately places a telephone call to suite 511 of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem: "Then a man came on the line. I asked if this was Philip Roth. 'It is,' he replied, 'and who is this please?' (19)

So begins the narrative of Philip Roth's nineteenth book, the confounding, experimental *Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993): the improbable, though allegedly

[10] The superscripted circle denotes that the name is a pseudonym, as Roth explains in the Preface: "Any name that has been changed is marked with a small circle the first time it appears" (*Operation Shylock* 13).

factual account of, as Roth writes in a Preface, "actual occurrences that I lived through during my middle fifties and that culminated, early in 1988, in my agreeing to undertake an intelligence-gathering operation for Israel's foreign intelligence service, the Mossad" (13). Roth's first mediated encounter with this "imposturing other" incites a bizarre journey through a surreal Wonderland that takes Roth from London to Jerusalem and the Israeli/Palestinian West Bank, to, he claims, Athens and "a second [undisclosed] European capital" (357), through a series of encounters with an eclectic cast of characters—including Roth's "Jerusalem counterself" (29), the messianic prophet of "Diasporism" whom Roth dubs "Moishe Pipik"; Pipik's lover-disciple, the reformed anti-Semite Wanda Jane "Jinx" Possesski"; the aforementioned Appelfeld and Demjanjuk; the Arab-Palestinian intellectual George Ziad; and the mysterious donor "Smilesburger."

I. "The Autobiographical Writer That I Am": Self-Representation in Roth's *Oeuvre*

In early 1987, following a minor surgical operation on his knee, Philip Roth was prescribed

Operation Shylock opens with a harrowing account of a real-life episode of virtually psychotic depression that Roth experienced in early 1987, following a minor surgical operation on his knee. For the treatment of his post-surgical insomnia, Roth was prescribed the benzodiazepine-derived medication triazolam, then marketed under the brand-name Halcion, to which he became dangerously addicted and which, it has been suggested, can induce psychosis in certain patients—a condition that has been referred to as "Halcion madness."

> My mind began to disintegrate. The word DISINTEGRATION seemed itself to be the matter out of which my brain was constituted, and it began spontaneously coming apart….
>
> Hallucinations … stampeded through me day and night, a herd of wild animals I could do nothing to stop…. Two, three, four times a day, without provocation or warning, I'd begin to cry…. I cried before friends, before strangers; even sitting alone on the toilet I would dissolve, wring myself dry with tears, an outpouring of tears that left me feeling absolutely raw—shorn by tears of five decades of living, my inmost being lay revealed to everyone in all its sickly puniness.
>
> I could not forget my shirtsleeves for two minutes at a time. I couldn't seem to prevent myself from feverishly rolling up my shirtsleeves and then rolling them down just as feverishly and meticulously buttoning the cuff, only immediately to unbutton the cuff and begin the meaningless procedure once more, as though its meaning went, in fact, to the core of my existence. I couldn't stop flinging open the windows, and then … banging them shut as though it were not I but someone else who had flung them all open. My pulse rate would shoot up to 120 beats a minute even while I say, brain-dead, in front of the nightly TV news, a corpse but for a violently thumping heart…. That was another manifestation of the panic that I could do nothing to control: panic sporadically throughout the day and then without letup, titanically, at night.
>
> I dreaded the hours of darkness. Climbing the obstacle course of stairs to our bedroom one painful step at a time … I felt myself on the way to a torture session that this time I couldn't survive. My only chance of getting through to daylight without having my mind come completely apart was to hook hold of a talismanic image out of my most innocent past and try to ride out the menace of the long night lashed to the mast of that recollection….
>
> … Each morning, when the panes began to lighten in the east-facing windows just to the side of where I lay, whatever relief I felt from my terror of the night that had just ended was copiously displaced by my terror of the day about to begin. Night was interminable and unbearable, day was interminable and unbearable, and when I reached into my pillbox for the capsule that was supposed to carve a little hole where I could hide for a few hours from all the pain that was stalking me, I couldn't believe… that the fingers trembling in the pillbox were mine. "Where's Philip?" I said hollowly to Claire…. "Where is Philip Roth?" I asked aloud. "Where did he go?" I was not speaking histrionically. I asked because I wanted to know. (20-22)

In the throes of this existential identity crisis, plagued by crying-spells, panic attacks, and his increased insomnia, Roth even became suicidal.

> I thought about killing myself all the time. Usually I thought of drowning: in the little pond across the road from the house…. When we came to New York that May for me to receive an honorary degree from Columbia, I opened the window of our fourteenth-floor hotel room after Claire had momentarily gone downstairs to the drugstore and, leaning as far out over the interior courtyard as I could while still holding tight to the sill, I told myself, "Do it…." (22-23)

Roth's struggle with "Halcion madness" lasted, as he writes in *Operation Shylock*, for roughly "one hundred days and one hundred nights" (22); and it would take many more weeks, once the cause had been determined, for him to withdraw completely from the effects of the drug and the havoc it had wreaked on his psyche.

It is, of course, impossible to know to what extent this account may have been fictionalized; but it is consistent with other, more overtly historiographical accounts of this event in Roth's life—including the more vague and reticent, but evocative allusions that Roth provides in the opening section of his self-described "novelist's autobiography," *The Facts* (1988):

> A moment comes, as it did for me some months back, when I was all at once in a state of helpless confusion and could not understand any longer what once was obvious to me: why I do what I do, why I live where I live, why I share my life with the one I do. My desk had become a frightening, foreign place and, unlike similar moments earlier in life when the old strategies didn't work anymore—either for the pragmatic business of daily living, those problems that everybody faces, or for the specialized problems of writing—and I had energetically resolved on a course of renewal, I came to believe that I just could not make myself over yet again. Far from feeling capable of remaking myself, I felt myself coming undone. (4-5)

The self-portrait painted in *Operation Shylock* receives further confirmation and endorsement by the actress Claire Bloom, with whom Roth had been cohabiting for approximately twelve years and who would become his second wife in 1990. In her memoir *Leaving a Doll's House*, which covers her twenty-year relationship—from its beginnings in 1974 to the

finalization of their divorce in 1995—with Roth, Bloom declares that this "grueling and sobering account… is neither inaccurate nor overblown; it was just as he recorded it" (178).

A. "A Kind of Intricate Explanation to Myself of My World": The Fictive Mode of Self-Representation

Roth has often lamented his protagonists' being identified with himself; yet he has also always done a great deal to, if not actually encourage autobiographical readings of his novels, then at least confuse the issues by drawing extensively from his own life and experiences for his fiction. As Peter L. Rudnytsky writes, "His disclaimers notwithstanding, Roth repeatedly writes novels that invite the reader to find resemblances shading into identities between himself and his work" (27). According to Alan Cooper in *Philip Roth and the Jews*, such readings were even lent a certain legitimacy by Roth himself with his autobiography *The Facts*:

> Before the autobiographical *The Facts* (1988) and *Patrimony* (1991) … most critics' attempts to construct Roth's biography from the fiction were mere surmises, often way off base and irrelevant to appreciation of the novels. But in disclosing the limited facts of *The Facts* and in making his father's life and death a public subject, Roth gave the nineties an opening for legitimate speculations on the use of his own life in his fiction. (51)

The Facts opens with a statement of purpose—an explanation of and for a literally uncalled-for account that also provides, at the same time, one of the clearest and most direct explanations of Roth's practices as a novelist. "In the past, as you know," he writes to Zuckerman, "the facts have always been notebook jottings, my way of springing into fiction. For me, as for most novelists, every genuine imaginative event begins down there, with the facts" (3). "Until now"—he continues—"I have always used the past as the basis for transformation, for, among other things, a kind of intricate explanation to myself of my

world" (4) Fiction, for Roth, represents an essentially interpretive mode of engagement with reality. It also constitutes a kind of direct participation in reality: an extension, a continuation of what is or has been through alternate or revised history. Throughout his literary career, Roth has employed fictional characters to function as alter-egos or stand-ins: Alexander Portnoy of *Portnoy's Complaint*, Peter Tarnopol of *My Life as a Man*; David Kepesh of *The Professor of Desire*, *The Breast*, and later, *The Dying Animal*; and especially Nathan Zuckerman of the novels of the *Zuckerman Bound* cycle, *The Counterlife*, and later the novels of Roth's "American trilogy" and *Exit Ghost*. In order to create their lives, Roth has had "to imagine things not quite as they had happened to me or things that never happened to me or things that couldn't possibly have happened to me happening to an agent, a projection of mine, to a kind of me" (*The Facts* 6). And in the process, he has vicariously experienced, through the exercise of creative imagination, lives and experiences that are not and have not been his own, but are close to his own or could have been his own.

The realization that his own actual life experiences might provide the raw material for such artistic self-transformation essentially marks his birth as an artist as recounted in *The Facts*. Prior to this, his stories—"mournful little things about sensitive children, sensitive adolescents, and sensitive young men crushed by coarse life" (*The Facts* 60)—seem to have been, in his own estimation, examples of a second-rate artist poorly imitating great, or at least better ones.

> Without entirely knowing it, I wanted my fiction to become "refined," to be elevated into realms unknown to lower-middle-class Jews of Leslie Street, with their focus on earning a living and raising a family and trying occasionally to have a good time. To prove in my earliest undergraduate stories that I was a nice Jewish boy would have been bad enough; this was worse – proving that I was a nice boy, period. The Jew was nowhere to be seen; there were no Jews in the stories, no Newark, and not a sign of comedy—the last thing I wanted to do was to hand anybody a laugh in literature. I

> wanted to show that life was sad and poignant, even while I was experiencing it as heady and exhilarating; I wanted to demonstrate that I was "compassionate," a totally harmless person. (60)

Ironically, out of all of the confessions made in *The Facts*, it is this one that be regarded as providing the strongest grounds for charges of any latent Jewish "self-hatred." The coarse clowning and vulgar exuberance through which Roth would begin to mature as an artist—and which would inform *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), the reception of which resulted in the most virulent and widespread charges against Roth of anti-Semitism—is understood by Roth to be inherently Jewish and a celebration of particularly Jewish qualities and resources, rather than a vehicle for Jewish self-loathing self-mockery. Aspiring to create "Art," Roth was surprised to discover, while performing scenes from his childhood in the predominately Jewish community of Weequahic in Newark for his young American literature professor, Bob Maurer, and his wife Charlotte, that what he regarded as grossly inappropriate for serious literature was capable of eliciting precisely the kinds of reactions and responses that he wanted his short stories to evoke.

> When I jumped up from the table to mimic my more colorful relations, I found they were not merely entertained but interested, and they encouraged me to tell more about where I was from…. It did not dawn on me that these anecdotes and observations might be made into literature, however fictionalized they'd already become in the telling. Thomas Wolfe's exploitation of Asheville or Joyce's of Dublin suggested nothing about focusing this urge to write on my experiences. How could Art be rooted in a parochial Jewish Newark neighborhood having nothing to do with the enigma of time and space or good and evil or appearance and reality? (*The Facts* 59)

Though Roth the undergraduate-novitiate-seeking-to-dedicate-himself-to-the-service-of-high-Art may not yet have discerned the significance of this encouragement, Roth the novelist-autobiographer-and-author-of-such-works-as-*Portnoy's-Complaint,* clearly sees in it the moment when the aspiring eighteen year-old writer of mediocre short stories first crossed

paths with the clown, the comedian, the impersonator, *raconteur*, the autobiographical chronicler of mid-twentieth century Jewish American life.

Autobiographical elements have been evident in Roth's work from the stories of his first published book, the collection *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959). Alan Cooper even declares, "*All* [Roth's] protagonists share [his personal background] and use it as the anchorage from which they move out into the world" (72), emphasis mine. Darren Hughes, in reading "Recollections from Beyond the Last Rope," which he characterizes as an early "personal narrative and bildungsroman" (257-258), sees in "the young Roth of the narrative… the recognizable prototype of Neil Klugman," the protagonist of the novella *Goodbye, Columbus* (258). And the Army basic training camp of "Defender of the Faith" certainly owes something to Roth's own experiences as a twenty-one year-old volunteer in the mid-1950s. The early, uncollected short story "Novotny's Pain" (1962), which would seem to have been inspired by the cause of Roth's own medical discharge from the Army in 1956 following a lower-back injury during basic training, clearly owes even more. And Gabe Wallach, the young hero of Roth's first novel *Letting Go* (1962), seems modeled in many respects after his creator.

In *The Facts*, Roth on several occasions reveals precisely to what extent, and how, he incorporated figures and events from his life into his fiction—beginning with his second novel. *When She Was Good* (1967) is essentially "an imaginary elaboration, at once freely invented and yet close to the spirit—and even to the pattern of events"—of the early life of Roth's first wife, Margaret Martinson Williams (whom he pseudonymously calls Josephine "Josie" Jenkins in the autobiography) (144).

> Eventually the book became for me a time machine through which to look backward and discover the origins of that deranged hypermorality to whose demands I had proved so hopelessly accessible in my early twenties. I was trying to come to some understanding of this destructive force, but separate from my own ordeal, to exorcize her power over me by taking it back to its local origins and tracing in detail the formative history of injury and disappointment right on down to its grisly consequences – again, not as they'd erupted in the context of our marriage … but as they might have evolved had she been, instead of a Josie who'd escaped her past at least geographically and had wound up a working woman in Hyde Park, a Lucy imprisoned in the enraging, emotionally overcharged hometown with its full roster, for her, of betrayers, cowards, and vicious enemies. I was ridding myself in *When She Was Good* of the narrative spell that her legend had so successfully cast over my will, a purgation achieved by taking her victim's gruesome story as gospel, but then enlarging it with a hard-won, belated understanding of the inner deformation suffered by the victim herself – perhaps suffered even more grotesquely than anything else and ending inescapably in her self-destruction. (*The Facts* 145)

The book also provided Roth with the opportunity to "exploit," in his terms, a "painful, ludicrous episode" (74) from his undergraduate days: his landlady's discovery of his girlfriend (whom he calls Paula "Polly" Bates in *The Facts*) hiding under his bed, and her threat to report the example of his moral turpitude to the college dean, who could expel him for it (72-75).

There are also suggestions in *The Facts* that, despite Roth's particular efforts distance himself from this character, there *is* after all a sense in which the namesake protagonist of *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) "is" Roth—or rather, a derivative of Roth. In light of the relative candor with which he reveals the autobiographical origins of certain elements of *When She Was Good* and *My Life as a Man*, Roth seems much more reticent where *Portnoy's Complaint* is concerned. This is perhaps only to be expected given that he had spent the better part of the prior twenty years essentially disavowing any meaningful connection to the character most famous for having masturbated into a piece of liver which his family later ate

for dinner. Where many readers have perceived in the novel an autobiographical self-portrait, Roth prefers that they see *Portnoy's Complaint* as a novel "unhampered by fealty to real events and people" (156) as well as to his

> apprentice's literary models, particularly from the awesome graduate-school authority of Henry James, whose *Portrait of a Lady* had been a virtual handbook during the early drafts of *Letting Go*, and from the example of Flaubert, whose detached irony in the face of a small-town woman's disastrous delusions had me obsessively thumbing through the pages of *Madame Bovary* during the years I was searching for the perch from which to observe the people in *When She Was Good*. (157)

Still, the novel had, Roth writes, "begun as a hopped-up, semifalsified version of an analytic monologue that might have been mine" (156). And when Zuckerman criticizes the autobiographical manuscript that represents the primary text of *The Facts* as being not as "true," not as *revealing* as the fiction, he tells Roth that it "simply because it *is* you and not Tarnopol, Kepesh, Portnoy, or me" who is being portrayed (168). The inclusion of Portnoy's name in a list that is otherwise made up of more obvious fictional stand-ins and alter-egos, undermines any presumption of total honesty in Roth's complete denials that he "is" Portnoy, or that Portnoy "is" he.

Roth much more clearly drew from his own actual lived experience for his 1974 novel *My Life as a Man*, whose protagonist, Peter Tarnopol, is the first of Roth's more obviously autobiographically derived characters. As Roth describes it, *My Life as a Man* is essentially a fictionalization of his own disastrous first marriage to the woman he calls "Josie Jensen" (actual name Maggie Martinson)—an attempted literary exorcism. In one particularly insightful passage, Roth even admits to having written an actual incident from his own relationship with Martinson/"Jensen" into the novel virtually without any revision:

> The description in *My Life as a Man*, in the chapter "Marriage à la Mode," of how Peter Tarnopol is tricked by Maureen Johnson into believing her pregnant parallels almost exactly how I was deceived by Josie in February 1959. Probably nothing else in my work more precisely duplicates the autobiographical facts. Those scenes represent one of the few occasions when I haven't spontaneously set out to improve on actuality in the interest of being more interesting—I couldn't have been *as* interesting…. To reshape even its smallest facet would have been an aesthetic blunder, a defacement of her life's single great imaginative feat, the wholly original act which freed her from the fantasized role as my "editor" to become, if for a moment only, a literary rival of audacious flair, one of those daringly "pitiless" writers of the kind Flaubert found most awesome, the sort of writer my own limited experience and orderly development prevented me then from even beginning to resemble—masterly pitilessness was certainly nowhere to be found in the book of stories whose publication she so envied and to which she was determined to be allied…. Dostoevsky himself might not have been ashamed to pay a hundred-word tribute to the ingenuity of her trick. (*The Facts* 107)

Like Tarnopol, Roth confesses, he was left to wonder why he had "forsaken" another, more preferable girl for one who would wreak such havoc on him (see *The Facts* 90); and also "like Peter Tarnopol in an all but identical situation in *My Life as a Man*," he didn't believe Maggie/"Josie's" daughter when she telephoned Roth to inform him that her mother, his by-then ex-wife had been killed in a car accident.

One of the significant respects in which Tarnopol and Roth mirror each other, however, is in their respective/mutual relations to Nathan Zuckerman—in Alan Cooper's words, "*the* writer whose public history was closest to Roth's own" (210, italics in original). Though Zuckerman himself seems unaware of it—at least he doesn't acknowledge it in his closing letter to Roth—Peter Tarnopol is Zuckerman's "original" creator: Nathan Zuckerman first appeared not in the first volume of the *Zuckerman Bound* cycle, *The Ghost Writer* (1979), but in *My Life as a Man*, where he is Tarnopol's own fictional creation and alter-ego. That is, he begins his literary life as the autobiographically drawn fictional alter-ego of the

autobiographically drawn fictional alter-ego of Philip Roth, his creator's creator as well as, ultimately, his own. Between *My Life as a Man* and *The Ghost Writer*, Nathan Zuckerman undergoes a silent transformation from a metadiegetic fiction-within-a-fiction to a figure whose ontological status as a protagonist on the level of diegesis is undifferentiated from Tarnopol's own: the word become "flesh." And in assuming direct responsibility for authorship of Zuckerman, Roth essentially assumes the role of Tarnopol as Zuckerman's creator: the flesh become "word."

Though its narrative ends in 1969, with the completion of what Roth suggests is his first truly "Rothian" novel, *Portnoy's Complaint*, there are scattered references throughout *The Facts* to the later Zuckerman novels and some of the ways that they recapitulate figures and events from his own life—beginning in some ways with the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint*. As Roth writes, "The ramifications of the uproar it fomented eventually inspired me to crystallize the public feud into the drama of internal family dissension that's the backbone of the Zuckerman series, which began to take shape some eight years later" (*The Facts* 117). The round of violent accusations of anti-Semitism and Jewish self-hatred that it precipitated were, however, merely a recapitulation of the scandal that surrounded the publication of "Defender of the Faith" ten years earlier, in the April 1959 edition of the *New Yorker* magazine. And specific details from this first extended battle with a veritable army of "angry middle-class and establishment Jews, and a number of eminent rabbis" (*The Facts* 113) were also to appear in fictionalized form in what would become the first volume of the *Zuckerman Bound* cycle, *The Ghost Writer*. In the "All in the Family" chapter of *The Facts*, Roth relates how on one occasion, his mother, "having been shaken by a derogatory remark she'd overheard at a Hadassah meeting—she asked me if it could possibly be true that I was

anti-Semitic" (*The Facts* 119). It is essentially the same question that Zuckerman's mother asks of him in *The Ghost Writer*. But where Roth, as he records, "smiled and shook my head no" (*The Facts* 119), Zuckerman reacts much more coyly and antagonistically: "I'll leave it to you. What do you think?" And where Roth's own mother was "entirely satisfied" with the response (*The Facts* 119), Zuckerman's mother's doubts remain unresolved: "Oh, I don't know anything any more—all this from that story!" (*The Ghost Writer* 108). In the same chapter of *The Facts*, Roth also relates his experience three years later, in 1962, as a panel member at the "Crisis of Conscience in Minority Writers of Fiction" symposium at New York's Yeshiva University—an experience that he calls an "excommunication" and a "trial" (*The Facts* 127). The moderator's "first question … was this: 'Mr. Roth, would you write the same stories you've written if you were living in Nazi Germany?'—a question that was to turn up some twenty years later in *The Ghost Writer*" (*The Facts* 127).

While he remains essentially silent on the topic of the other individual volumes of the *Zuckerman Bound* cycle, *The Facts* does contain autobiographical details that have echoes in these later novels. Roth's uncle Bernie, whose divorce and subsequent marriage to a much younger woman are seen as a "betrayal" of the Jews and the Roth family (*The Facts* 14), would seem to be in some ways a model for the thrice-divorced Nathan Zuckerman in *Zuckerman Unbound*, and even Nathan's younger brother Henry as portrayed in certain chapters of *The Counterlife*. The "diligent example" that Roth says his older brother Sandy set for him by actively pursuing an artistic vocation, and their father's cautious acceptance of this determined pursuit, seem to have provided the inspiration for the essential inversion of this situation in *Zuckerman Unbound*: Henry's dreams of becoming an actor are crushed by their father's invocation of duty, loyalty, obligation, and responsibility. Though Zuckerman

curiously fails to notice it in *The Facts*, his third and most recently divorced wife, Laura, in *Zuckerman Unbound* would seem to have been modeled after Ann Mudge, the socialite-activist whom Roth refers to as "May Aldridge" in *The Facts*. Like Zuckerman, as revealed in *Zuckerman Unbound*, Roth nearly died as the result of a burst appendix in 1967 (*The Facts* 138). And Josie's attempts to "become" him, as Roth describes it (*The Facts* 97), are echoed in Alvin Pepler's status as Zuckerman's pseudo-double in *Zuckerman Unbound*, as well as in Moishe Pipik's more overt and explicit "doubling" of Roth in *Operation Shylock.*

Nathan Zuckerman remained Roth's sole fictional preoccupation from the time that *The Ghost Writer* began to take shape in the last years of the 1970s, through the other novels of the *Zuckerman Bound* cycle—*Zuckerman Unbound* (1981), *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), and *The Prague Orgy* (1985)—and through *The Counterlife* (1986). There are suggestions in Roth's opening letter to Zuckerman in *The Facts* that this extended engagement with the construction of such a fully imagined and fully drawn "counterself" took a toll on him—and contributed to if not necessarily resulted in the "fiction fatigue" that overcame him in the mid- to late-1980s.

> The two longish works of fiction about you[11], written over a decade, were probably what made me sick of fictionalizing myself further, worn out with coaxing into existence a being whose experience was comparable to my own and yet registered a more powerful valence, a life more highly charged and energized, more entertaining than my own… which happens to have been largely spent, quite unentertainingly, alone in a room with a typewriter. I was depleted by the rules I'd set myself—by having to imagine things not quite as they had happened to me or things that never happened to me or things that couldn't possibly have happened to me happening to an agent, a projection of mine, to a kind of me. If this manuscript conveys anything, it's my exhaustion with masks, disguises, distortions, and lies. (6)

[11] It is not entirely clear what precisely these" two longish works" are—though we might presume that they are *Zuckerman Bound*—consisting in four volumes (*The Ghost Writer*, *Zuckerman Unbound*, *The Anatomy Lesson*, and *The Prague Orgy*)—and *The Counterlife*.

One even wonders if the obsessive self-fictionalizing, most extensively practiced in the *Zuckerman Bound* novels and culminating in the radical destabilizations of *The Counterlife* wasn't a significant factor in Roth's loss of sense of self as well as his fiction-fatigue. Alan Cooper writes in *Philip Roth and the Jews*,

> In almost a decade of inhabiting Nathan Zuckerman, Roth had turned the practice of [authorial] impersonation [of a fictional character] inside out. Nathan was not only a writer, he was *the* writer whose public history was closest to Roth's own…. In contriving Nathan, Roth had taken distorted public perceptions of himself and had distorted them further, to intensify the predicaments of his character and the issues those predicaments embodied. (210)

Cooper's formulation in declaring that "Roth had turned the practice of impersonation inside out" is incredibly insightful; for it suggests that Roth had done more than simply create an alter-ego for himself—Roth in a sense has made of himself the kind of victim that Zuckerman is with respect to Alvin Pepler, and that the Philip Roth of *Operation Shylock* is with respect to Moishe Pipik. Nathan Zuckerman is not simply a character who represents an impersonation of Philip Roth: he is a figure who impersonates him. The danger of such an impersonation, which entails "tak[ing] distorted public perceptions of himself and… distort[ing] them further, to intensify the predicaments of his character and the issues those predicaments embodied," is perhaps that the author himself may no longer be able to separate sincere self-representation from pure fictionalizing. This is essentially the charge that Zuckerman himself makes when he declares to Roth, "My guess is that you've written metamorphoses of yourself so many times, you no longer have any idea what *you* are or ever were. By now what you are is a walking text" (162). If Roth has lost himself, Zuckerman suggests, it is in and to his fictions; hence the need to turn away from the fictive and toward the autobiographical as a mode of self-representation, as "the antidote and answer to all those

fictions that culminated in the fiction of [Zuckerman]" (Roth, *The Facts* 6) As Roth writes to Zuckerman,

> In order to recover what I had lost I had to go back to the moment of origin. I found no one moment of origin, but a series of moments, a history of multiple origins, and that's what I have written here in the effort to repossess life. I hadn't ever mapped out my life like this but rather, as I've said, had looked only for what could be transformed. Here, so as to fall back into my former life, to retrieve my vitality, to transform myself into *myself*, I began rendering experience untransformed. (*The Facts* 5)

B. The Autobiographical Mode of Self-Representation: Self-Discovery in and through *The Facts*

The autobiographical mode of self-representation is, as Roth declares to Zuckerman, distinct and fundamentally different from the fictive, despite certain similarities in their traditional mutual reliance on narrative as a structural and interpretive principle. Yet Roth seems to suggest in *The Facts*, specifically in the letter from Zuckerman to Roth with which the book concludes, that autobiography itself may ultimately represent only a different kind or order of fiction—even that autobiography might ultimately be a less truthful medium. In offering his critique of the autobiographical manuscript that comprises the bulk of *The Facts*, Zuckerman offers a partial critique of the genre of autobiography as a whole, which he asserts places certain restrictions on not only the author's imagination, but his license to be honest and truthful

> What you choose to tell in fiction is different from what you're permitted to tell when nothing's been fictionalized, and in this book you are not permitted to tell what it is you tell best: kind, discreet, careful—changing people's names because you're worried about hurting their feelings—no, this isn't you at your most interesting. In the fiction you can be so much more truthful without worrying all the time about causing direct pain. You try to pass off here as frankness what looks to me like the

> dance of the seven veils—what's on the page is like a code for something missing. (162)
>
> We get this fictional autobiographical projection of a *partial* you. Even if it's no more than one percent that you've edited out, that's the one percent that counts—the one percent that's saved for your imagination and that changes everything. But this isn't unusual, really. With autobiography there's always another text, a countertext, if you will, to the one presented. It's probably the most manipulative of all literary forms. (172)

This constitutes the primary foundation of Zuckerman's critique: that "the facts" of Roth's early life and career as represented by the autobiographer represent a partial truth that is also, necessarily, a distortion of the truth. But the ethical demands of the autobiographical mode/genre seem to constitute only one source of what Zuckerman perceives as reticence on Roth's part. The other is the undisclosed motives that may lie behind not the autobiographical project itself—described by Roth in his prefatory letter to Zuckerman—, but the particular portraits drawn of the figures in its pages, including Roth himself.

> The personal historian is expected to resist to the utmost the ordinary impulse to falsify, distort, and deny. Is this really "you" or is it what you want to look like to your readers at the age of fifty-five? You tell me in your letter that the book feels like the first thing you have ever written "unconsciously." Do you mean that *The Facts* is an unconscious work of fiction? Are you not aware yourself of its fiction-making tricks? Think of the exclusions, the selective nature of it, the very pose of fact-facer. Is all this manipulation truly unconscious or is it pretending to be unconscious? (164)

The question is, of course, largely rhetorical: Zuckerman seems not to be in a position to judge. His only knowledge of Roth, apart from what Roth has disclosed to him in his own letter comes, apparently, from the fiction. He cannot attack the autobiography's veracity directly; he can only view it with suspicion and cast doubt upon its accuracy.

This is an ambiguous strategy on Roth's part, for it represents a kind of biographical reading of the fiction—the kind of reading that Roth laments throughout the book and that

Zuckerman also at times suggests is naïve. But it is also perfectly in keeping with the pronouncements that Roth makes about his use of the autobiographical in his fiction. This seeming paradox derives from and points to two inter-related things. 1) Zuckerman performs a triple function here, as a) a surrogate for Roth, as self-critic; b) a stand-in for us, the reader; and c) a full-fledged fictional character in his own right. 2) The relationship between the facts and the fiction, as illustrated by and documented in *The Facts* itself, is an incredibly complex one not easily reducible to a simple formula. And this latter point actually extends to the former, for in his triple function the Zuckerman of *The Facts* represents a complex amalgamation of the autobiographical, the hypothetical, and the more properly fictive. The criticisms that Zuckerman levels against *The Facts* represent objections that variously seem to be Roth's own, might be raised by potential readers, and belong specifically to Zuckerman himself.

Many critics seem largely to have taken Zuckerman's critique, however, at face-value, often citing as corroborating evidence a passage from Roth's prefatory letter:

> Obviously the facts are never just coming at you but are incorporated by an imagination that is formed by your previous experience. Memories of the past are not memories of facts but memories of your imaginings of the facts. There is something naïve about a novelist like myself talking about presenting himself 'undisguised' and depicting 'a life without the fiction.' … It isn't that you subordinate your ideas to the force of the facts in autobiography but that construct a sequence of stories to bind up the facts with a persuasive *hypothesis* that unravels your history's meaning. I suppose that calling this book *The Facts* begs so many questions that I could manage to be both less ironic and more ironic by calling it *Begging the Question*. (*The Facts* 8)

This is often taken to support Zuckerman's wondering notion that *The Facts* may ultimately represent a "fiction," unconscious or otherwise. Yet Roth himself, in an even more overtly and explicitly "non-fictional" context, admonishes the reader to not, in turn, naively accept

Zuckerman's critique as authoritative or definitive. When Mervyn Rothstein, in an interview with Roth conducted on the occasion of the publication of *The Facts*, alluded to Zuckerman's calling into question the veracity and/or accuracy of Roth's self-portrait, Roth, responded essentially by asserting the facticity of the book and problematizing Zuckerman's problematization of it.

> This is a set of facts…. In the end, there is someone who comes along, another voice, that questions, not the truthfulness, but the ability of the writer to be revealing in this form. It's the muse speaking, isn't it? The muse says, "You can't do this, you're better at the other thing." The muse, in effect, says: "You're too discreet. This isn't sufficiently savage. Candor's a kind of cover."
>
> Now one shouldn't accept what Zuckerman says at face value. He has self-interest operating there—he wants to exist, he wants me to write about him, not about myself. And he also makes a good case as to why he's a better vehicle. The autobiography consists in part in the clash of those points of view, of being torn between the facts and the fiction, torn between the autobiographical impulse to understand something and the fictionalizing impulse to understand something. Which is the way to understand it—not for the world, not for any other writer, but for me? ("From Philip Roth, 'The Facts' as He Remembers Them)

While it is couched in terms of friendly professional advice, from one writer to another, Zuckerman's admonishments to abandon autobiography and return to fiction is ultimately, as Zuckerman himself finally explicitly acknowledges, an argument "against [his] extinction, in some eight thousand carefully chosen words." And though he laments, "I seem only to have guaranteed myself a new round of real agony!" he closes, as does the book, with a note of resignation: "But what's the alternative?" (*The Facts* 195).

Roth is simply doing in the metaleptic correspondence with Zuckerman—which he began writing "when he was at about midpoint in the book" (Finney)—what he has always done: fiction-making. The opening letter's being addressed to a fictional character marks it as an act of playing pretend on Roth's part that requires his reader to engage in a related act of

make-believe. Roth's fictive engagement is even more pronounced and is far more sustained in Zuckerman's closing letter, where Roth is again inhabiting the fictional alter-ego that he abandoned in order to write the autobiography that is bookended by these two letters. Indeed, as this final letter progresses, it increasingly represents more than a relatively simple act of ventriloquism: it becomes by the end a fully realized fictional scene representing Zuckerman and his wife, Maria Freshfield Zuckerman, as fully-fledged fictional characters, requiring the reader to make-believe a whole set of fictive declarations.

The fiction-making of the bookending correspondence, has been taken by many readers and critics as evidence of the fundamental ficticity of the ostensibly nonfictional autobiographical text that is sandwiched between them. Roth himself seems to sanction such a view through the reflections on and interrogations of autobiography as a form that are to be found particularly in Zuckerman's closing letter. Implicit in Zuckerman's critique—as in the postmodern tendency to regard autobiography as essentially "fictional" if not necessarily *fictive*—is the notion that the truth can only be "the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Zuckerman never directly calls into question the fundamental veracity of "the facts"—only the presumably negative effect that engaging in a selective and limited representation of them has had on the accuracy of the resulting portrait. The implication, however, is that this itself constitutes sufficient grounds for regarding the autobiography as a kind of fiction—a charge that Zuckerman comes closer to leveling more directly when he writes,

> The personal historian is expected to resist to the utmost the ordinary impulse to falsify, distort, and deny. Is this really "you" or is it what you want to look like to your readers at the age of fifty-five? You tell me in your letter that the book feels like the first thing you have ever written "unconsciously." Do you mean that *The Facts* is an unconscious work of fiction? Are you not aware yourself of its fiction-making tricks? Think of the exclusions, the selective nature of it, the very pose of fact-facer. Is all this manipulation truly unconscious or is it pretending to be unconscious? (164)

This passage contains echoes of one of the primary claims advanced by Paul John Eakin in *Fictions in Autobiography*: in the autobiographical act, "the materials of the past are shaped by memory and imagination to serve the needs of present consciousness" (56). This and related insights concerning the extent to which memory itself, and not merely autobiographical texts, cannot be trusted as objective representations of empirical facts have led many to regard autobiography, as Zuckerman suggests here, as a kind of fiction.

To seriously entertain this notion however, is to fail to fully appreciate the significance of Dorrit Cohn's declaration, "Referential narratives are verifiable and incomplete, whereas nonreferential narratives are unverifiable and complete" (16). It is precisely their incompleteness that, among other characteristics and features, distinguishes referential texts such as autobiographies from fiction. The partial (i.e., incomplete) truth of an autobiography distorts only if and when it is presented or received as a comprehensive representation of the absolute truth in its totality. Awareness of the partiality of the portrait drawn in autobiography should preclude our reading it as fiction—not confirm it. To indict autobiography on the grounds that it can only ever present a partial truth is to indict it for not being not only what it cannot be, but what it doesn't necessarily claim to be and what it doesn't need to be. To equate the partial truth of autobiography with fiction is essentially only to read what is a fundamentally referential narrative as though it is nonreferential—as though it purports to represent absolute truth. And to read it in this way is to misread it.

Roth does qualify "the facts" to a certain extent; but this qualification is much more limited in its extent and application than a wholesale interrogation of the nature and function of autobiography intended to result in its condemnation as fiction.

> Autobiographies do give us information. They do give us a sense of the life and the progress of the writer. They don't necessarily mislead us. I vouch for these facts. This is more or less how it came to pass.
>
> I think that my experience in college, for instance, at Bucknell, was as I wrote it—from a distance, of course, of many years. Sure, that may be a distorting factor. But I checked it out with various people. I talked to lots of people in my past. I didn't just rely on my memory. I sent that chapter to my old Bucknell English teacher. Not for a grade, though she gave me one. I said, "Mildred, how did I do?" and she said, "An A for content, a B for style."
>
> When I wrote the Chicago stuff, I talked to friends who were there when I was there. I went out and walked around, because it quickens your memory. I spoke to my brother, I spoke to my father. I treated the job a bit as a journalist. I was my own fact checker. (Roth, "From Philip Roth, 'The Facts' as He Remembers Them")

But the facts and the fiction are ultimately much more clearly demarcated from each other in this book than many critics—taking Zuckerman's dissatisfaction for a much more radical skepticism than it really is—would like to recognize. We do not encounter in *The Facts* the blending of the facts and the fiction so much as their intersection.

If Roth seems conflicted in *The Facts*, it is because ultimately his efforts to "[render] experience untransformed" are not really the goal so much as they are a means to another end: to recover a an image of himself in which he recognizes himself as himself. And this image would seem to be that of the maker of fictions of/about himself. This is what he seems to be pointing to when he declares to Katherine Weber that the Zuckerman letters are "autobiography too—this is to give you some sense of what it is to be a writer. The letters are also what they appear to be: a genuine challenge to the book. Yet that challenge comes from me. We know, therefore, that this self-challenging aspect is a very strong ingredient in my life as a novelist" (qtd. in Tuerk 131). Roth's use of the term "autobiography" here is misleading, for he employs it metaphorically. The closing letter from Zuckerman, at least, cannot be autobiography in the same sense that the main text of *The Facts* is

autobiography—certainly not in the sense of Philippe Lejeune's "autobiographical pact" in which the text's author, narrator, and protagonist are understood to be the same person. When Roth refers to the letters as "autobiography" he seems really to mean that it is represents a form of writing about the self that derives from, reflects, and to a certain extent communicates something of that self. And what is being communicated here—indeed, what is being *performed* here—is that aspect of himself that Roth had lost and which he has regained: the ability to engage in fiction-making. And for Roth, as he has declared in his opening letter, fiction-making means fictionalizing, of and from the facts.

C. Practicing Deception: The "Roth Variations"

In the books that immediately followed, the juxtaposition of fact and fiction found in *The Facts* became an even more thorough and extensive blending of the autobiographical and the fictive/fictional as literary modes, and not simply as characterizations of individual elements. *The Facts* can be regarded as the first in a four-book sequence that represents an experimental, cross-generic cycle, a collection of inter-related meditations on the nature of literary genre and especially the porous boundary separating fact from fiction, that we might —following a discarded working title for *The Counterlife*—refer to as the "Roth Variations." Like the self-described "novelist's autobiography" *The Facts*, each succeeding book bears a specific generic marker situating it within a broader literary tradition, from *Deception: A Novel* (1990), through *Patrimony: A True Story* (1991) to the self-styled "confession" *Operation Shylock*. Of the four, only *Deception*, as a self-proclaimed "novel," identifies itself with fiction, as opposed to the autobiographical/historiographical modes of such nonfictional genres as the autobiography, the "true story" of memoir, and the confession. Even *Deception*,

however, which consists purely in a series of dialogues and monologues of increasingly problematic nature and origin, directly implicates the autobiographical pact through the identification of its narrator and/or protagonist, "Philip," with the author, Roth, during the period of the composition of *The Counterlife*. It is even characterized within the text as Philip's notebook for that (other) novel; and it has been suggested by many that this characterization may, in fact, be more or less true: that *deception* may in fact be, or have its origins in, Roth's own "writer's notebook for *The Counterlife*" (Cooper 233). Roth himself has gone a step further by referring to the novel as autobiography of the same order as *Patrimony*, which is more traditionally, straightforwardly autobiographical than *The Facts*: "When I want to write autobiography as in *Deception* or *Patrimony*," he told Irene Bignardi in an interview published in the Italian *La Republica*, "I do it without mask" (qtd. in Smith 104).

Whether or not this is a more honest pronouncement than the genre indication of the book's subtitle, though, is—intentionally, it would seem—unclear. As Margaret Smith notes, this declaration, if true, is "somewhat of a revelation in itself, as it was previously considered by critics and publishers alike as a novel" (104-105)—that is, as precisely what it proclaimed itself to be. Claire Bloom—as Roth's partner of over ten years at the time, as much of an "informed reader" as Currie might imagine—however, reveals that at the time of its writing, she herself was inclined to see it as more autobiography than fiction. In her memoir *Leaving a Doll's House*, she describes reading the first completed manuscript of the "novel":

> I eagerly opened the folder. Almost immediately I came upon a passage about the self-hating, Anglo-Jewish family with whom he lives in England. Oh well, I thought, he doesn't like my family. There was a description of his working studio in London, letter-perfect and precise. Then I reached the descriptions of all the girls who come over to have sex with him…. As Philip always insisted that the critics were unable to

> distinguish his self-invention from his true self, I mindfully accepted these Eastern European seductresses as part of his "performance" as a writer; but I was not so certain. Finally, I arrived at the chapter about his remarkably uninteresting, middle-aged wife, who, as described, is nothing better than an ever-spouting fountain of tears constantly bemoaning the fact that his other women are so young. She is an actress by profession, and—as if hazarding a guess would spoil the incipient surprise lying in store—her name is Claire.
>
> I no longer gave a damn whether these girlfriends were erotic fantasies. What left me speechless—though not for long—was that he would paint a picture of me as a jealous wife who is betrayed over and over again. I found the portrait nasty and insulting, and his use of my name completely unacceptable
>
> … He tried to explain that he had called his protagonist Philip, therefore to name the wife Claire would add to the richness of the texture. I replied I didn't care whether it did or not. (182-184)

Bloom's reaction is anticipated in the text itself. In *Deception*, "Philip" responds to his wife's accusations of infidelity by "explaining" that his manuscript is fiction—that "it is *not* myself. It is *far* from myself—it's play, it's a game, it is an *impersonation* of myself" (184, italics in original). As Josh Cohen writes in "Roth's Doubles," "Philip's defense, in other words, is an appeal to the clear distinction between his real self and its fictive double. The problem for Philip and his readers, spousal and otherwise, is that once it rears its head, the specter of deception refuses to be contained in this way" (82). Nor is this a problem only for "Philip" and his readers: as revealed in Bloom's anecdote, it was a problem for Roth and his own. (It is possible that the scene in *Deception* was written after and based on the real-life scene that Bloom describes. In either case, the similarities point to the inter-relations between fact and fiction in and through the book.)

II. And Starring Philip Roth as Himself: The Facts and Fiction of *Operation Shylock*

The truly imaginative blending of biographical and historical fact, and fiction in *Deception* is matched if not exceeded by that of *Operation Shylock*. As Margaret Smith observes," "So successful is Roth's elusive writing technique in *Operation Shylock* that reviewers and librarians alike have had difficulty in its cataloguing. One reviewer from the *Spectator* claimed it to be a very buoyant book, part truth, part fiction" (102). Indeed, one is as likely to find *Operation Shylock* on the biography/memoir shelf of a bookstore as the fiction/literature shelf. It is in light of these conflations and confusions that Alan Cooper has written, "In the brilliance of hindsight one might also dwell on that statement by Philip in *Deception,* "To compromise some 'character' doesn't get me where I want to be. What heats things up is compromising me" (Cooper 252). And such an act of self-compromise can be accomplished, of course, only through authorial self-representation in the autobiographical mode.

A. "As Accurate an Account as I am Able to Give of Actual Occurrences That I Lived Through": *Operation Shylock* and the Autobiographical Pact

The sub-titular, paratextual genre identification of *Operation Shylock* as a "confession" marks it as a work of ostensible nonfiction. The word "confession" evokes both legal and religious discourses, with: their implicit overtones of working toward a discovery of the truth; and it situates the book within the broader literary context of "modern" autobiographical writing as exemplified by the respective *Confessions* of Augustine of Hippo and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. More significantly, the author Philip Roth seems to explicitly identify himself as the narrator-protagonist of his text in the authorial preface, where legal discourse is explicitly invoked: "For legal reasons," he declares, "I have had to alter a

number of facts in this book"; but ultimately, "the book is as accurate an account as I am able to give o actual occurrences that I lived through" (13) Outside of the text, too, Roth has always claimed publicly that *Operation Shylock* is a sincere work of non-fiction: a genuine undisguised confession of how he became an operative of the Mossad. One month after the book's publication, in a review/article published in the *New York Times*, Roth protested to Esther B. Fein, "The book is true":

> I'm not trying to confuse you. Look, let me tell you something that a lot of people have trouble believing. This happened. I stepped into a strange hole, which I don't understand to this day. There are many people who say they don't believe this and I tell them: 'I'm not going to quarrel with you. That's not why I was put on earth.' But I can tell you that, in substance, this happened. It was necessary to make changes, as I said in the introduction, but they don't affect the substance of the book.

Such protests had been necessitated—at least from the perspective adopted by Roth for such interviews—by the fact that, as Roth himself alluded to immediately after this claim, "There will be people who will confuse themselves by being too clever, and assume that I'm that clever. I'm not. I'm flat-footed. Almost every reader I've presented this book to believes this is a novel."

Fein herself seems more or less willing to suspend her own disbelief, at least for purposes of the interview; but she also makes it rather clear in her review that this is what she is doing. "A look of what could only have been bewilderment crossed his listener's face," she writes early on, "and the lingering memory of a line in the book came to mind: 'What fun it must be for him putting me on like this.' And Roth—the Roth now sitting at the offices of his publisher, Simon & Schuster, not Roth, the book's narrator, or Roth, the narrator's impersonating nemesis—went on…." Later she refers to Roth's "ingenious performance" in the interview—"as if [he] means to extend the theme of 'Operation Shylock'—the wrestling

contradictions within the soul—from the pages of his book into a book-tour interview." But the "willing suspension of disbelief," in Coleridge's famous formulation, is of course a demand placed upon the reader by works of the imagination—by, essentially, *fiction*. And fiction is precisely what Roth's book has most widely been received as.

B. "A Novel in the Guise of a Confession": Factual Discrepancies and Fictionalizing

Despite Roth's continued public protests that *Operation Shylock* is indeed the non-fictional "confession" that it proclaims itself to be (to this day he has never publicly acknowledged it as anything but this), it has been widely received as a work of fiction. Indeed, the very same day that "A Bit of Jewish Mischief" appeared in the pages of the *New York Times Book Review*, there appeared in the very same publication a review of *Operation Shylock* by D.M. Thomas that appeared in which the reviewer referred to the book as a "novel." Roth himself has planted what in hindsight look like "clues" to the book's actual status. In a piece originally published in *The Ontario Review* in 1974, Roth describes the various origins of his books in a passage in which he might have been describing *Operation Shylock* specifically:

> Book ideas usually have come at me with all the appurtenance of pure accident or chance, though by the time I am done I can generally see how what has taken shape was spawned by the interplay between my previous fiction, recent undigested personal history, the circumstances of my immediate, everyday life, and the books I've been reading and teaching. (Roth, "After Eight Books" 112-113)

The same year, Roth opened his essay "Imagining Jews" with a lamentation that through biographical readings of *Portnoy's Complaint*, "a novel in the guise of a confession was received and judged by any number of readers as a confession in the guise of a novel" (218). One cannot help but to hear echoes of the phrase "novel in the guise of a confession" in

Operation Shylock's subtitle "A Confession." And in case we miss these subtler references, Roth planted an allusion to a more recent work in his conversation with Fein.

> "I won't get into this debate with them," he said. "The only thing I've told them is that when I wrote 'Portnoy's Complaint,' everybody was sure it was me, but I told them it wasn't. When I wrote the 'Ghost Writer' everybody was sure it was me, but I said none of these things ever happened to me. I never met a girl who looked like Anne Frank. I didn't have some nice writer take me into his house. I made it all up. And now when I tell the truth, they all insist that I made it up. I tell them, 'Well, how can I make it up since you've always said I am incapable of making anything up?' I can't win!"

It is the same complaint—made in similar terms—that "Philip" makes in *Deception*, published only three years earlier: "I write fiction and I'm told it's autobiography, I write autobiography and I'm told it's fiction, so since I'm so dim and they're so smart, let *them* decide what it is or isn't" (184). (And it's made with the same wink that Nabokov gives to his audience through his interviews, when he claims to be paraphrasing what turns out to be an exact quote that we know he has not actually committed to his memory.)

While it is arguably impossible to determine the precise extent to which the narrative account provided in *Operation Shylock* corresponds to or deviates from actual lived experience, Roth's claims to absolute facticity are belied by certain discrepancies between the text, other published remarks of Roth's concerning the events narrated there, and the biographical facts of his life. Nor does the claim made in the preface—that the factual alterations that have been made are minor changes that mainly involve details of identification and locale and are of little significance to the overall story and its verisimilitude" (13)—adequately account for many of them. Roth, for example, refers on multiple occasions in *Operation Shylock* to his "wife," the actress Claire Bloom. He was indeed married to Bloom in 1993, when the book was published; but in 1988, when the

events described allegedly took place, the couple had not yet married: their marriage would not take place until 19 April 1990. And if Bloom's account in *Leaving a Doll's House* is to be believed, there is no reason to think that Roth was inclined to regard her as a "wife" rather than a long-time companion prior to January 1990, when she proposed to him, and he asked for time to think about it (188). Retaining Bloom's actual name as well as the fact of their cohabitation while fictionally altering their marital status, however, does nothing to prevent the reader's ability to identify the Claire of the narrative with the real-life Bloom.

Roth alters the historical record in *Operation Shylock* in other ways as well, as when he, in the words of Kate McLoughlin, "contorts the events of the Demjanjuk trial to give" Eliahu Rosenburg's testimony—with its contradictory claims that "Ivan the Terrible" both died and is, as John Demjanjuk, alive—"precedence" (117). Roth presents Rosenburg's testimony of 27 January 1988 as *surprisingly* contradictory. Yet prior testimony in the trial had already made the contradictions in Rosenburg's claims apparent. In representing the testimony—and, more importantly, the reactions to it—as he does, Roth reveals that his guiding muse here may be other than Clio. And again, the preface would seem to offer no particular justification for this sort of alteration.

One of the most significant discrepancies is the one found in "A Bit of Jewish Mischief," where Roth for the first time publicly asserted—outside the covers of the book itself—the veracity of the account of the events described in *Operation Shylock*:

> In January 1989 I was caught up in a Middle East crisis all my own, a personal upheaval that had the unmistakable signposts of the impossible, as opposed to those of the predictable, plausible reality to which I am as hopelessly addicted as any other human being. A man of my age, bearing an uncanny resemblance to me and calling himself Philip Roth, turned up in Jerusalem shortly before I did and set about proselytizing for "Diasporism," a political program he'd devised advocating that the Jews of Israel return to their European countries of origin in order to avert "a second

> Holocaust," this one at the hands of the Arabs. Inasmuch as his imposturing constituted a crisis I was living rather than writing, it embodied a form of self-denunciation that I could not sanction, a satirizing of me so bizarre and unrealistic as to exceed by far the boundaries of amusing mischief I may myself have playfully perpetrated on my own existence in fiction.

This *précis* accords almost perfectly with what is written in *Operation Shylock*; except that here Roth identifies the year as 1989 rather than 1988: the actual year of Roth's trip to Israel to interview Aharon Appelfeld, the same year in which that interview was published in the *New York Times* as "Walking the Way of the Survivor," and the same year in which the testimony from the Demjanjuk trial that Roth incorporates into his book was recorded. The misidentified year might simply be the product of an editorial oversight or an error in typesetting—though no "correction" seems ever to have been published. Roth himself may have misidentified the year through carelessness or confusion; but if so this itself might be regarded as problematic, even suspicious. The most likely explanation is that Roth intentionally misidentifies the year as part of a game in which he is engaging the reader—the game that Fein suspects Roth is playing when she speculates that Roth is "extend[ing] the theme of 'Operation Shylock'—the wrestling contradictions within the soul—from the pages of his book into a book-tour interview."

III. "The Other Philip Roth": The Sources and Origins of "Moishe Pipik"

The actual existence of "the other Philip Roth," Roth's "Jerusalem counterself" whom he dubs "Moishe Pipik"—or "Moses Bellybutton," as the Hebrew/Yiddish name would be transliterated into English—, has ever been corroborated by any historiographical documentation or external evidence. Roth's account in *Operation Shylock* of his encounter with an "imposter double" in Jerusalem in January 1988, as well as the much briefer account

in “A Bit of Jewish Mischief” of such an encounter in 1989, would seem to be fictional. As Roth’s own use of the term “counterself”—a term employed in *The Facts* to describe Nathan Zuckerman—suggests, however, there are precedents for such a figure, whose origins are to be found in Roth’s biography as well as in his fiction.

A) Autobiographical Origins

As noted by both Debra Shostak in her book *Philip Roth—Countertexts, Counterlives* and Peter Rudnytsky in his essay “True Confessions in *Operation Shylock*, there appears in the margins of the first draft of *Operation Shylock* the following handwritten note: “Moishe Pipik (When I was *clowning* as a child, my nickname)” (qtd. in Shostak 184). Shostak is unwilling, in Rudnytsky’s words, “to draw the obvious and legitimate inference that this confirms the autobiographical origins of Pipik’s sobriquet” (30); she avers that this textual, inscribed “I” might as easily be identified with the narrating “I” of the text as with the author of the manuscript, and that the two are not necessarily commensurate with each other (184). Rudnytsky, who openly admits to taking both *The Facts* and *Patrimony* at their autobiographical word, is, on the other hand, unwilling to subscribe to the “far-fetched implications of [Shostak’s] devotion” to the postmodern doctrine of “absolute indeterminacy” (30). In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, Rudnytsky treats this “I,” written in Roth’s own hand, as an actual self-reference. In accordance with this reading, “Moishe Pipik” is a Rothian self-representation along similar lines as Peter Tarnopol and Nathan Zuckerman: a distillation of certain elements and aspects of Roth’s self, given fuller life through a process of fictionalization. In this, Roth’s Pipik is also similar to Nabokov’s Vadim Vadimovich: self-distortion derived from the facts of his creator’s life.

The false reports of "Philip Roth's" activities, in which the real Philip Roth is not engaged, in a city where the real Philip Roth himself is not, also have parallels in Roth's biography. In "Imagining Jews," Roth describes how in the wake of the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint* in 1969, the media essentially created, through false reports and gossip—stories, for example, romantically linking Roth to Barbra Streisand, even though "the famous Jewish girl celebrity and the newly minted Jewish boy celebrity had and still have not met" (217)—a "Philip Roth" with a life more or less his own, apart from that of Roth himself.

> While "Philip Roth" began boldly to put in public appearances where I myself had not yet dared to tread, or twist, I took up residence for four months at the Yaddo retreat for writers, composers, and artists in Saratoga Springs.
>
> Mostly, news about my *Doppelganger*'s activities, of which the foregoing is but a small sample, came to me through the mail: anecdotes in letters from friends, clippings from the columnists, communications (and gentle, amused admonitions) from my lawyer on inquiries from me about libel and defamation of character. (217)

In one eerily prescient false report, Roth even learned that he had allegedly "suffered a breakdown and been committed to a hospital" (217).

Roth would draw directly from this "media myth-making, sometimes benign and silly enough, and sometimes… pretty unsettling" ("Imagining Jews" 217) for the second volume in his *Zuckerman Bound* cycle, *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981)—and with an additional imaginative twist. Zuckerman is confronted by more than the essentially media-created persona with which he shares a name and, presumably, a biography. He must also contend with the unbalanced Alvin Pepler—who, though not a *doppelgänger* in a strict sense, functions as a counterself of another sort and who is another of Moishe Pipik's (literary/textual) forebears.

B) *Zuckerman Unbound*: Alvin Pepler

Alvin "the Jewish Marine" Pepler is initially portrayed as little more than a fictional counterpart of the Herbert Stempel, who became infamous for his role in the so-called "quiz show scandals" of the late 1950s. Over the course of the novel, however, he also emerges as a more sinister (and anachronistic) Mark David Chapman-figure: an obsessed and deranged "fan" who, Zuckerman fears, might be driven to violence, even murder. Chapman's real-life identification with the protagonist of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* becomes in Roth's novel Pepler's identification with the eponymous protagonist of Zuckerman's *Carnovsky*. This identification with a fictional character is compounded and complicated, however, by Gilbert Carnovsky's identification, through biographical readings of the novel bearing his name, with and as Zuckerman himself—a situation that mirrors the popular identification of Roth himself with and as the eponymous protagonist of his own breakthrough novel *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969). "That book is the story of my life no less than yours," Pepler tells Zuckerman" (328). The implications are not lost on Zuckerman, who thinks to himself "*The man is mad. And fixed on me. Who is he behind the dark glasses? Me! He thinks he's me!*" (329). Pepler ultimately accuses Zuckerman of having plagiarized his (i.e., Pepler's) life: "Those hang-ups you wrote about happen to be mine, and… you knew it… you stole it!" (335), and "You fuck up Newark and you steal my life" (336). By imagining that Zuckerman has been masquerading as his double, Pepler becomes Zuckerman's double—a kind of counterself. "P. as my pop self?" he muses. "Not far from how P. sees it" (339).

C) *The Counterlife*: Jimmy Ben-Joseph and "Forget Remembering," the Literary Forebear of the Doctrine of Diasporism

Alvin Pepler is reconstituted five years later in *The Counterlife* as Jimmy Ben-Joseph—another misreader of Zuckerman's novels who presents himself neither as the biographically "plagiarized" original of Zuckerman's protagonists, nor as the uncanny biographical "double" of the author himself, but as the spiritual product and embodiment of Zuckerman's fiction. Zuckerman first encounters Jimmy Ben-Joseph, as he introduces himself to Zuckerman, in the "Judea" chapter at the Western, or Wailing Wall in Jerusalem where, the manic young man says, he has been "praying for [Zuckerman] to come" (103). Jimmy is a recent arrival in "Eretz Yisrael"— a typically Zionist Hebrew appellation translating to "Land of Israel"—and, he says, a student at the Diaspora Yeshiva. A scion of the West Orange Lustigs who inspired Zuckerman's short story—described in *The Ghost Writer* and alluded to in *Zuckerman Unbound*—"Higher Education," he is also Zuckerman's self-styled "greatest fan" (102).

Jimmy's being a Lustig establishes a certain tenuous connection between himself and Pepler, who was similarly excited to meet Zuckerman. It is through a Lustig that Zuckerman is alleged to have learned the details of Pepler's life, which he then ostensibly used as the basis for *Carnovsky*: Zuckerman seem to remember "somebody in his family—more than likely Cousin Essie—once mentioning a Pepler family from Newark, and their oddball son, the quiz contestant and ex-Marine" (197). A more suggestive connection between Jimmy Ben-Joseph and Alvin Pepler is made through Zuckerman comment, "Intriguing as people like Jimmy can sometimes be, you usually get the best of them in the first three minutes. I've attracted them before" (103).

The parallels between Jimmy and Pepler—and between Jimmy and Pipik—become more pronounced in Zuckerman's second, far more extended and harrowing encounter with him in the following chapter, "Aloft," where Jimmy is cast in the role of Jewish terrorist who attempts to recruit Zuckerman for a hijacking of the El Al flight from Tel Aviv to London on which they are both passengers. Like Pepler, Jimmy is also implicitly identified with such (anachronistic) delusional murderer-assassins as Mark David Chapman and, now, John Hinkley: Zuckerman characterizes him as "a one-man band high on grass (and his own adrenaline), a character a little like one of those young Americans the Europeans can't quite believe in, who without the backing of any government, on behalf of no political order old or new, energized instead by comic-book scenarios cooked up in horny solitude, assassinate pop stars and presidents" (191). He also, like Pepler, reveals himself to be a misreader—at least as far as Zuckerman is concerned—of Zuckerman's novels whose misreading is inextricably intertwined with what would seem to be delusional pathology and a certain latent violence.

The planned hijacking is, as Jimmy reveals, intended to promote his solution to what he calls "*the last Jewish problem*" (189)—a solution that he credits Zuckerman with inspiring. The "Jewish problem" that Jimmy identifies may be understood as manifesting in the commemoration of the Jewish past of anti-Semitic victimization and suffering as most significantly represented in and by the *Shoah*. Such commemoration, Jimmy's argument implies, is even symptomatic of ostensible Jewish moral self-superiority—a burden to the Jews and an indictment against the *goyim* who feel that "Israel is their prosecutor, the Jew is their judge" (189) and who then "rush to make Israel the villain. This is now the club they sue on the Jews—you the prosecutor, you the judge, *you* shall be judged, judged in every infraction to the millionth degree! This is the hatred that we keep alive by commemorating

their crime at Yad Vashem" (189). The ostensible solution to this alleged problem is—as Jimmy's prepared press release declares—to "FORGET REMEMBERING" (188), to establish a "ZIONISM WITHOUT AUSCHWITZ!" and a "JUDAISM WITHOUT VICTIMS!" (189). "We are torturing ourselves with memories! With masochism!" he explains to Zuckerman. "And torturing goyisch mankind! The key to Israel's survival is no more Yad Vashems! No more Remembrance Halls of the Holocaust! How what we have to suffer *is the loss of our suffering*! Otherwise… they will annihilate the State of Israel *in order to annihilate its Jewish conscience!* We have reminded them enough, we have reminded *ourselves* enough—*we must forget!*" (189). "Jews without a Holocaust will be Jews without enemies!" (190).

Jimmy credits Zuckerman as the "intellectual author" of "Forget Remembering." "The big idea itself"—he tells Zuckerman—"I owe to you! Forget! Forget! Forget! Every idea I ever had, I got from reading your books!" (190) And when Jimmy, who has brandished a hand grenade, and Zuckerman, as his assumed accomplice, are taken into custody by El Al flight security, it is Zuckerman who is assumed to have written the "Forget Remembering" statement—at least to somehow be responsible for them: A security agent, brandishing Jimmy's manifesto, tells Zuckerman, "You're the author of this."

> "I am *not* the author of that! *He* is! I couldn't begin to write that crap! This has nothing to do with what I write!
>
> "But these are your ideas."
>
> "In no conceivable way are those my ideas. He's latched onto me the way he's latched onto Israel—with his fucking craziness! I write fiction!" (200)

The "intellectual author" of the "Forget Remembering" manifesto is not Zuckerman, but a fictional construct, a projection and product of Jimmy's misreading of Zuckerman's fiction, Jimmy adopts an absurd doctrine that he mistakenly attributes to the author of that fiction.

The mid-air melodrama of "Aloft" is really a dramatization of the tension between kind of Jew that Zuckerman actually is (or understands himself to be), and the kind of Jew that he is perceived to be—particularly by those segments of the Jewish community who have been alienated by the perceived perpetuation of negative Jewish stereotypes through such works as *Carnovsky*, whose misreadings Jimmy seems in some ways to share.

The same tragicomedy of misreading and misperception also lies behind Pipik's advocacy of "Diasporism," the literary heir of Jimmy Ben-Joseph's doctrine of "Forget Remembering." Much as Jimmy credits Zuckerman as the inspiration for his manifesto, Pipik claims to represent in Josh Cohen's words, "the authentic spiritual distillation of Roth's fiction" (91). Like "Forget Remembering," "Diasporism" represents a profoundly iconoclastic program that promises the deliverance of the Jewish people through the radical reversal of a conventional, late-twentieth century Jewish stance. Where Jimmy Ben-Joseph attempts to dismantle the institutionalized remembrance of the *Shoah*, Moishe Pipik seeks to dismantle the modern Jewish nation-state of Israel as it has evolved.

D) The Autobiographical Origins of "Diasporism": Roth on the Role of Israel in "the Jewish Problem"

Shortly after a telephone call from Roth's friend, the Israeli author Aharon Appelfeld, confirms Apter's report of Roth's alleged presence in Jerusalem, the real Roth, in London, telephones the King David Hotel, where he is allegedly a guest, and in the guise of French journalist "Pierre Roget" asks to speak to Philip Roth. It is in the course of the following mock interview that Pipik-as-Roth, describes for Roth-as-Roget the doctrine of Diasporism. The notion of the modern state of Israel, in the geographic region of Palestine, as a Jewish

homeland is, according to Pipik-as-Roth, a dangerous myth. In his virtually the only logical, foreseeable end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a “second Holocaust,” the “destruction of Israel in a nuclear exchange” (43) with Islamic Arab countries who have devoted themselves to its eradication. “Israel has become the gravest threat to Jewish survival since the end of World War Two," he declares (41). The only alternative, the only feasible solution to this current Jewish problem is, he declares, “Diasporism”:

> Diasporism seeks to promote the dispersion of the Jews in the West, particularly the resettlement of Israeli Jews of European background in the European countries where there were sizable Jewish populations before World War II. Diasporism plans to rebuild everything, not in an alien and menacing Middle East but in those very lands where everything once flourished, while, at the same time, it seeks to avert the catastrophe of a second Holocaust brought about by the exhaustion of Zionism as a political and ideological force. Zionism undertook to restore Jewish life and the Hebrew language to a place where neither had existed with any real vitality for nearly two millennia. Diasporism's dream is more modest: a mere half-century is all that separates us from what Hitler destroyed. (44)

The return of European Jews to Europe would represent the true homecoming, Pipik declares, one that would ensure the continued survival of the Jewish people in a greater Jewish Diaspora. “You know what will happen in Warsaw, at the railway station, when the first trainload of Jews returns?” Pipik-as-Roth asks rhetorically. “There will be crowds to welcome them. People will be jubilant. People will be in tears. They will be shouting, ‘Our Jews are back! Our Jews are back!” (45). “With all due respect, Philip Roth,” Roth-as-Roget retorts, “your prophecy strikes me as nonsense. It sounds to me like a farcical scenario out of one of your books—Poles weeping with joy at the feet of the Jews! And you tell me you *are not* writing fiction these days!” (46)

The exchange between Pipik-as-Roth and Roth-as-Roget, with its debate concerning the extent and impact of anti-Semitism, its invocations of Hitler and the shadow of the

Shoah, is reminiscent of a similar exchange between Nathan Zuckerman and his father in *The Ghost Writer*, concerning the alleged perpetuating effect that Zuckerman's short story "Higher Education" may have with respect to negative stereotypes of Jews and anti-Semitism. Both represent fictionalizations of accusations that have been leveled against Roth throughout his career. The irony here is that Roth, as Roget, is essentially playing the part of his own critics, accusing "Philip Roth" of a dangerous naïveté that blinds him to the real threat still posed by global anti-Semitism and the real significance of Hitler's Third Reich and the Shoah. What Roth as the narrator-protagonist doesn't quite seem to fully appreciate here, but what Roth as the author certainly does, is that while he, the actual Philip Roth, finds Diasporism a dangerously absurd concept, large segments of the public would find I more than credible that Philip Roth might advocate such a program. As Timothy Parrish notes, the "diasporan assimilation" that Pipik espouses "represents a form of Jewish identity that is almost exactly identical with Roth's" own actual notions of Jewishness (qtd. in Rudnytsky 39).

For Roth, Israel represents the politico-geographical embodiment of the almost irresolvable tension between a mythic trans-historical Zion, populated by the virtuous-heroic descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the all-too-real ambiguities of a modern political state born in and sustained by bloodshed—a state that, furthermore, might be legitimately regarded as an occupying force by those who were displaced by its founding. It is primarily the former notion of Israel that is explored in *The Counterlife*, where the Zuckerman of the "Judea" and "Aloft" chapters confronts in the Jewish settlement of Agor, in the contested region of what is referred to as the Palestinian West Bank, a radical Zionist vision that is nothing less, as Zuckerman conceives it, a Jewish counterlife—a macrocosmic

Jewish self-reinvention that mirrors and reflects the impulse toward self-reinvention as experienced by individual Jews: "In this unfinished, other-terrestrial landscape," Zuckerman muses, "attesting theatrically at sunset to Timeless Significance, one might well imagine self-renewal on the grandest scale of all, the legendary scale, the scale of mythic heroism" (Roth, *The Counterlife* 127).

The radical Zionist vision of a new Jewish homeland is, Zuckerman believes, as much a dream of Jewish self-reinvention as re-location. The problem with this, for both Zuckerman and Roth, is two-fold. First, this re-invention seems predicated upon a Jewish desire to divest themselves of their inherently Jewish qualities and characteristics.

> Zionism, as I understand it, originated not only in the deep Jewish dream of escaping the danger of insularity and the cruelties of social injustice and persecution but out of a highly conscious desire to be divested of virtually everything that had come to seem, to the Zionists as much as to the Christian Europeans, distinctively Jewish behavior—to reverse the very form of Jewish existence. The construction of a counterlife that is one's own antimyth was at its very core. It was a species of fabulous utopianism, manifesto for human transformation as extreme—and, at its outset, as implausible—as any ever conceived. A Jew could be a new person if he wanted to. In the early days of the state the idea appealed to almost everyone except the Arabs. All over the world people were rooting for the Jews to go ahead and un-Jew themselves in their own little homeland. I think that's why the place was once universally so popular—no more Jewy Jews, great! (Roth, *The Counterlife* 166-167)

The second is that what they're being replaced with is a new mythology that threatens to supplant the much more complex history and complicated realities of Jewish history in such a way as to exacerbate the "historical predicament" of the Jews rather than resolve it. At a 1961 symposium on "The Needs and Images of Man" at Loyola University, Roth addressed what the dangers of what he identified as "some new Jewish stereotypes," one of them was the Jew-as-fighter as portrayed in Leon Uris' novel about the founding of the modern state of Israel, *Exodus* (1958):

> The Jew is no longer looking out from the wings of on the violence of our age, nor is he its favorite victim; now he is a participant. Fine then. Welcome aboard. A man with a gun and a hand grenade, a man who kills for his God-given rights (in this case, as the song [i.e., the theme from the film adaptation of *Exodus*] informs us, God-given *land*) cannot sit so easily in judgment of another man when he kills for what God has given *him*, according to his accounting and inventory. ("Some New Jewish Stereotypes" 146)

Uris' Jew-as-fighter is a kind of antidote to the Jew-as-victim, intended to allow Diaspora Jews a sense of self-pride that the degradations of history, culminating in the horrors of the *Shoah*, have made difficult. It also, Roth suggests, allows Gentiles—particularly those with a latent streak of not-quite-acknowledged anti-Semitism—a self-exculpatory sense of "relief" that the machinations of overt anti-Semites have not reduced the Jews to a state of pure, broken victimhood. The realities of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict more broadly, however, are as Roth suggests in the final lines of the passage quoted above far more complicated than the oversimplified portraits of virtuous-heroic warrior-Jews fighting for the survival of their people and their homeland allow. A more accurate portrait than the one provided by the self-aggrandizing myth-making of *Exodus*, Roth suggests, is to be found in the far less self-assured and self-congratulatory, far messier ambiguities of Elie Wiesel's novel *Dawn* (1961)—a kind of "sequel" to the memoir-novel of the Holocaust *Night* (1955/1958/1960).

> The hero of *Dawn*… is overcome with shame and confusion and a sense that he is locked hopelessly and forever is a tragic nightmare. No matter how just he tells himself are the rights for which he murders, nothing in his or his people's past is able to make firing a bullet into another man anything less ghastly than it is…. ("Some New Jewish Stereotypes" 146-147)

The figure of the Jew-as-fighter is more than an antidote to the old stereotype of the Jew-as-victim—he threatens to become its antithesis.

Roth is skeptical of the role played by the modern state of Israel in the "the Jewish question," particularly with respect to the claims and demands that it makes upon all Jews in terms of their Jewish identity and their "Jewish allegiance," and with respect to the dangerous transformation of Jews that is being enacted in its name. This real skepticism is distorted through his counterself, Pipik's misreading of him into an actively and explicitly anti-Zionist reverse exodus, predicated upon a woeful naïveté where the reality of global (and, particularly, European) anti-Semitism is concerned. It is, in other words, the counterself's counter-view—an attitude and program consisting in elements that, to paraphrase a formulation, are variously not quite Roth's own, or have never been Roth's own, or couldn't possibly be Roth's own.

IV. Roth's Counterlife: Self-Performance and Performativity in *Operation Shylock*

Like Pipik's resemblance to Jimmy Ben-Joseph, and Diasporism's resemblance to "Forget remembering," the emphasis on the figure of the counterself, and all of the other "counters" that accompany it, closely identifies *Operation Shylock* with Roth's earlier novel, *The Counterlife*, where Roth first employed the formulation. Indeed, it represents *The Counterlife*'s own "counterself"—a counterwork that similarly blends biography and fiction in such a way as to transform Roth's stay in Israel in 1988 into an experience paralleling Zuckerman's stay in Israel in 1978 as described in the "Judea" and "Aloft" chapters of *The Counterlife*.

A. An Intertextual, Autobiographical Metaficton of the Self

It is not only Jimmy Ben-Joseph and "Forget Remembering" that have counterparts in *Operation Shylock*. Zuckerman's friend, the self-described "politically impotent, morally torn apart" anti-settlement "Israeli malcontent" journalist Shuki Elchanan (*The Counterlife* 183) has his counterself in the figure Arab Palestinian intellectual George "Zee" Ziad, whose pronouncements concerning Israeli-Palestinian relations and the Arab-Israeli conflict echo Shuki's own. Zee is also the counterself of, a mirror-image of the radical Israeli Zionist Mordecai Lippman, the leader of a Jewish settlement in the West Bank to which Zuckerman has in *The Counterlife* gone to retrieve his brother Henry. His brief visit at the Agor settlement is recapitulated in *Operation Shylock* as Roth's visit to the West Bank home of Zee's family, as Zuckerman's debate with the radical Zionist West Bank Jewish settlers is mirrored in Roth's debate with Zee's anti-Zionist, pro-Palestinian West Bank Arab family. And the Israeli security agents aboard the El Al flight from Tel Aviv to London in the "Aloft" chapter recur in *Operation Shylock* in the form of the Mossad agents who take Roth into custody, with the mysterious "man the beige suit" reborn as the enigmatic Smilesburger.

Operation Shylock is, in other words, Roth's own *Counterlife*, a novel that represents the various possible lives that Zuckerman imagines for himself through overt acts of making fictions of the self. As Alan Cooper notes, "Nathan Zuckerman is composing fiction about a character with his own name and circumstances, as Philip Roth would later do in *Deception* and *Operation Shylock*" (215). The only objection to this formulation would be that, in accordance with Currie's approach, it would seem to be more accurate to say that they are creating fictions not about fictional characters with their names and circumstances, but that they make themselves characters in their fictions. Roth himself seems willing to sanction

such an approach: in *Deception*, Philip qualifies his claim that the figure in his fiction "is *not* myself, it is an impersonation of myself" by also suggesting, "Maybe it's more easily grasped the other way around—everything here is falsified *except* me" (184).) Again, as that book's Philip also says, "To compromise some 'character' doesn't get me where I want to be. What heats things up is compromising me."

Operation Shylock represents the next logical step, after *The Counterlife* and the previous books of the "Roth variations," in Roth's autobiographically-derived fictions: not only a fiction about the self rather than a self-fictionalization, but one that derives from and models itself after those earlier self-fictionalizations. One consequence of this strategy is to implicitly acknowledge the autobiographical nature and content of his earlier novels, an acknowledgment previously made in *The Facts*. Another consequence is to affirm the significance of the imaginative life and of the imagined counterlives of those books to and for Roth as both an author and a creative human individual. What is so remarkable about the identification of Roth with Zuckerman here is that it is not an identification of Zuckerman with Roth: in *Operation Shylock* Zuckerman is the model after which Roth patterns himself; whereas in the earlier fictions, Roth has been the model after which he has patterned Zuckerman. There are precedents for this reverse-relationship in *The Facts* as well, where Roth often compares himself to or describes himself in terms of his fictional alter-egos, rather than the other way round. And in this, Roth has found a countermethod to juxtapose against the more traditional method of fictionalizing in which he has previously engaged: putting the fiction into the "facts" rather than putting the facts into the fiction.

B. Roth's Manifold Personality: Performing the Postmodern (Jewish) Self

The self-contradictions and paradoxes of Roth's self-representations and self-performances in *Operation Shylock* are related to the more postmodern conceptions of self and self-narrative at which Roth has arrived over the course of his literary career. Debra Shostak writes in *Philip Roth—Countertexts, Counterlives* that

> the terms of his investigation [have shifted]—roughly, for example, from a psychoanalytic view of selfhood determined by the past to a poststructural interpretation of selfhood as performance, or from realistic to postmodern narrative strategies, or from the ethnic subject construed in terms of assimilation into society to the same subject construed as internally multiple, indeterminate, or self-divided. (14)

Nowhere is this "poststructuralist interpretation of selfhood as performance" more explicitly formulated in Roth's work than in the "Christendom" chapter of *The Counterlife*, where Zuckerman confesses to Maria

> Being Zuckerman is one long performance and the very opposite of what is thought of as *being oneself*. In fact, those who most seem to be themselves appear to me people impersonating what they think they might like to be, believe they ought to be, or wish to be taken to be by whoever is setting standards. So in earnest are they that they don't recognize that being in earnest *is the act*. For certain self-aware people, however, this is not possible: to imagine themselves being themselves, living their own real, authentic, or genuine life, has for them all the aspects of a hallucination.
>
> I realize that what I am describing, people divided in themselves, is said to characterize mental illness and is the absolute opposite of our idea of emotional integration. The whole Western idea of mental health runs in precisely the opposite direction: what is desirable is congruity between your self-consciousness and your natural being. But there are those whose sanity flows from the conscious *separation* of those two things. If there even *is* a natural being, an irreducible self, it is rather small, I think, and may even be the root of all impersonation—the natural being may be the skill itself, the innate capacity to impersonate, I'm talking about recognizing that one is acutely a performer, rather than swallowing whole the guise of naturalness and pretending that it isn't a performance but you. (356-366)

"I certainly have no self independent of my imposturing, artistic efforts to have one," he later continues. "Nor would I want one. I am a theater and nothing more than a theater" (367). Whether or not we should take this as an absolutely accurate representation of Roth's own real feelings on the subject of the self, it is at least a reflection and attempted explanation of the kinds of performances and self-performances in which Roth has been engaging throughout his career, even his life. And as Shostak suggests when she refers to Roth's postmodern representation of "the ethnic subject… as internally multiple, indeterminate, or self-divided" (14), the paradoxical plurality of contradictory self-performances is, for Roth, related to the issue of his "Jewishness."

To be a Jew is, according to Roth, to live in a kind of tension. There is in the Jewish character, as he understands it, a kind of "nervous forcefulness" on the one hand that strains against such the solemnity of such Jewish values as self-abnegation, self-sacrifice, and service on the other resulting in an "unpredictably paradoxical theater" (*The Facts* 122)—one that happens to appeal strongly to Roth's personal "taste for dramatic juxtaposition, an infatuation with the coupling of seemingly alien perspectives," which may also represent part of his cultural inheritance as a Jew. Roth identifies with the "nervous forcefulness" of and in the Jewish character. He refers all throughout *The Facts* Roth to such ostensibly "Jewish" traits as "undisguised contentiousness, … excitability, and a gift for satiric irony" (114), to a certain peculiarly Jewish "strain of vulgarity" that functioned as a "defense against overrefinement" (115), and to his own and his friends' "playful confidence … in our Jewishness as an intellectual resource" (115).

This is, of course, only one aspect of the experience of being a Jew as Roth understands it, however. The other is represented by everything that this "nervous

forcefulness" strains against, including various claims and demands made upon one's identity as well as restrictions on and sanctions against certain behaviors. The tension between these two can result, as Roth well knows, in divisiveness in the Jewish community, as competing understandings and models of what is and means to be a Jew clash. This conflict has been at the very center of Roth's work, even his literary career, and it is present in *Operation Shylock*, where Roth suggests that this very divisiveness is in fact central to what it is to be a Jew."The divisiveness is not just between Jew and Jew"—Smilesburger tells Roth—"it is within the individual Jew.

> Is there a more manifold personality in all the world? I don't say divided. Divided is nothing. Even the goyim are divided. But inside every Jew there is a *mob* of Jews. The good Jew, the bad Jew. The new Jew, the old Jew. The lover of Jews, the hater of Jews. The friend of the goy, the enemy of the goy. The arrogant Jew, the wounded Jew. The pious Jew, the rascal Jew. The coarse Jew, the gentle Jew. The defiant Jew, the appeasing Jew. The Jewish Jew, the de-Jewed Jew…. Is it any wonder that the Jew is always disputing? He *is* a dispute, incarnate!" (Roth, *Operation Shylock* 334)

Josh Cohen sees in this pronouncement a definition of "Jewishness [as] a kind of internal proliferation of selves made through words" (Cohen 85). The Jewish self is, that is, a quintessentially "postmodern self": to use Shostak's term, a performance, "internally multiple, indeterminate, [and] self-divided." Like Roth's self-representations in *Operation Shylock*.

C. A Book-Form, Performative Text: Paratext and/as Text

The "manifold personality" of the postmodern (Jewish) self that Roth performs in and through *Operation Shylock* is reflected in, even itself performed by, the text itself. As noted earlier, it presents itself as a "confession" in the autobiographical/historiographical mode of

nonfiction. The apparently authorial, first-person singular preface seems to confirm and reinforce this genre identification: the initials with which it is signed—"P.R."—correspond to those of the book's author, so that through preface author's identification of himself with the narrator-protagonist of the text, the autobiographical mutual identity of author-narrator-protagonist is established. This identification, in turn, seems to identify the preface as, to use Gérard Genette's terminology, "authentic"; that is, its "attribution to a real person is confirmed by some other (if possible, by *every* other paratextual sign" (*Paratexts* 179). The preface is further characterized by two additional aspects familiar to readers of works of contemporary journalism and historiography: the seemingly unself-conscious invocation of certain undisclosed legal concerns, and the relatively detailed historical/archival situation of the vaguely-defined subject matter. The latter further functions as testimony to the veracity/facticity of the narrative account and his commitment to that veracity/facticity, satisfying the second criterion of autobiography as defined by Philippe Lejeune.

> I've drawn *Operation Shylock* from notebook journals. The book is as accurate an account as I am able to give of actual occurrences that I lived through during my middle fifties and that culminated, early in 1988, in my agreeing to undertake an intelligence-gathering operation for Israel's foreign intelligence service, the Mossad. (13)

Interpreted in light of the expectations provisionally established by the subtitle, the Preface acts to simultaneously reinforce those expectations. If we have had little to no reason to regard the factual status of the text with skepticism prior to the Preface, we would seem to have even less after reading it.

The final page of the book, however, bears a contradictory, "contract of fiction" in the form of a "Note to the Reader":

> This book is a work of fiction. The formal conversational exchange with Aharon Appelfeld quoted in chapters 3 and 4 first appeared in *The New York Times* on March 11, 1988; the verbatim minutes of the January 27, 1988, morning session of the trial of John Demjanjuk in Jerusalem District Court provided the courtroom exchanges quoted in chapter 9. Otherwise the names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. This confession is false. (399)

This disclaimer announces the fundamentally fictive nature of the text and its (re)presentations, as opposed to the nonfictive nature announced in and by the title and preface. The two primary functions of the "contract of fiction" are essentially to provide the appropriate generic context for the audience's reading and interpretation of the text; and to thereby protect the actual, real-life author from legal charges of slander or libel (in the actual world). Due to the contextualizing function of this "contract," such disclaimers typically appear as front matter, in the beginning pages of the book, before the main text; often on the copyright page. The unconventional placement of this disclaimer in a closing "Note to the Reader" problematizes this function—particularly in light of both 1) the Preface's opening invocation of the legal context with respect to which the text has ostensibly been composed (which the Note echoes); and, far more significantly, 2) Smilesburger's injunction, in the final published chapter, to "call [the book] fiction. Append a note: 'I made this up'" (387). The reversal in the conventional ordering requires a re-appraisal and re-assessment of the text that we have just read—a text that has at least implicitly been presenting itself as a work of non-fiction—resulting in an *ex post facto* re-reading. Roth seems to intend for us to, as Gregory Currie puts it, retroactively make believe the text that he has also, all along, intended us to believe.

This does not mean that everything in the preceding text is actually *false*, however. It doesn't even necessarily mean that *anything* in the preceding text is false. For if the Note provides a (belated) context for the (re-)reading and (re-)interpretation of the text, the text also provides a context for the reading and interpretation of the Note. And textual evidence suggests that the Note is either a lie, or itself a fictive utterance. Approaching the Note from a habitualized assumption of the fundamentally referential nature of the text, we may actually treat the Note as something akin to what it appears to be: a disavowal of the directly referential nature of the text for the purpose of avoiding potential legal entanglements and lawsuits predicated upon claims of slander, defamation, etc. In this particular case, however, the assumption would be that Roth, who has effectively "blown" his cover as a covert agent for Israel's national intelligence agency and revealed sensitive information regarding that nation's/agency's actions, *has* the told the truth up to this point, and that the Note is a deception, a piece of deliberate misinformation designed to mask the truth as a fiction—to create "plausible deniability." Such an interpretation is consistent with the cloak-and-dagger "spy games" that have seem to have been taking place from the very beginning of the narrative. Unlikely as it might be, it is certainly possible that this Note does, in fact, represent the only piece of false information in the text. We know that the Roth of the text feels no particular "patriotic" duty with regard to Israel, and so we can well imagine that he would feel no particular compulsion not to divulge at least as much as has been divulged in the text. The Note, then, would represent plausible deniability only for *Roth*, not necessarily for Israel; and a legal defense for Roth against Israeli retaliation, not a defense for Israel. *Operation Shylock*, then, *could* plausibly be regarded as a referential narrative, as an actual "confession." And indeed the book can be found, in some bookstores, in the non-fiction

section – though it is far more likely that this is due to simple ignorance or a good-faith acceptance of the subtitle and what it implies rather than such an interpretive reading.

The reader/critic seems faced with an either/or proposition: either the preface has been written in good faith—meaning that the text is essentially autobiographical/ historiographical in nature—or the note to the reader has been written in good faith—meaning that the text is essentially fictive in nature. The solution would seem to be indeterminate: either conclusion can be supported by appeal to the text; and since it is the paratextual productions themselves that are problematic, they cannot be appealed to in order to resolve the problem. There does seem to be a solution, however. Genette notes that the text/paratext distinction is by nature at least potentially ambiguous: "We do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text" or not (1). This ambiguity can be and often is exploited, particularly in the realm of the "postmodern," as it is here. What seem to be peritextual productions—the apparently authentic authorial preface, the note to the reader/contract of fiction—are in fact elements of the main text….

The pages of a preface, like those of other, related paratextual productions (e.g., the "foreword" and the "introduction"), are often conventionally numbered according to the system of lower-case Roman numerals. This is done to differentiate them from the pages of the main text, which are conventionally numbered according to the system of Arabic numerals. The preface in *Operation Shylock*, however, begins on a page bearing an Arabic numeral. Further, the numbering of the pages indicates that each prior individual page of the book—from the flyleaf, bearing simply Simon & Schuster's graphic logo, through a page bearing a list of other works "By Philip Roth," a title page, a dedication page, a table of "Contents," and a page bearing two separate epigraphs—has been counted in the numbering

(despite these pages' not bearing printed page numbers). And though the physical page on which the note to the reader appears is unnumbered, the Table of Content lists a corresponding page number for it: also an Arabic numeral. This unconventional numbering suggests that each of the pages contained between the two covers of the book is to be properly regarded as belonging to the main text. And since the basic paratextual elements that appear on the covers—the author's name, the title, publisher, etc.—are reproduced in these pages, the conventionally paratextual functions of the covers may also be cancelled out. In light of these cancellations, the co-incidence of the initials of the preface's author and those of the author of the text would be insufficient to posit the genuine authenticity of the preface: in the absence of peritext to establish the relations between text, book, author, reader, and world, the author of the book may well function as a fictional figure—no matter the extent to which he may resemble an actual person. *Operation Shylock* essentially subsumes peritext to the main text, so that every aspect of the book—traditionally the medium through which a text is presented—is properly regarded as part of the text itself. It doesn't simply exploit the conventions of the book as a material form in which a text is manifested; by directly incorporating all of the conventions of the book into the fiction, it makes the material book and the (more abstract) fictive text indistinguishable from each other, and indivisible. The text doesn't merely find material expression in the book, it *is* the book. *Operation Shylock* is a performance of the book *Operation* Shylock in the same way that its textual author-narrator-protagonist is a performance of Philip Roth as author-narrator-protagonist—in all of their paradoxical self-contradictions.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

There are historical precedents for many of the various elements and strategies found in *Look at the Harlequins!*, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord,* and *Operation Shylock*—from the extensive fictionalization of authorial autobiography of Proust's seminal *À la Recherche du temps perdu* [*In Search of Lost Time*] (1913-1927), and the protagonist's metaleptic confrontation with his creator, the author Miguel de Unamuno in Unamuno's *Niebla* [*Mist*] (1914); through the pseudo-self-portraits of the Romantics, such as in Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1850) and Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* [*The Sorrows of Young Werther*] (1774); to Dante's autofictive self-inscription in his *Commedia* and beyond. The particular blend of autobiographical referentiality on the one hand, and intertextuality with respect to the author's own prior fictive works on the other, however, does not seem to have emerged in precisely such a form until the tail-end of the twentieth century, with the broader emergence of postmodern conceptions of the self, of the author and his relation to his work, of the value and function of narrative and narrativity, and of textuality and representation. One of the particular benefits of a comparative analysis of these three texts in particular is that through it we are able to see how three different authors with profoundly different stances on these issues yet engaged in remarkably similar projects informed by and giving expression to their own particular notions of self and the proper relations between the autobiographical and the

fictive in their work—notions that roughly correspond to stages in the evolution of postmodern theories of these very issues.

I. Nabokov, Duras, and Roth, and the Evolution of Postmodern Literature of the Self

Nabokov, Duras, and Roth were all actively engaged in literary composition between the years 1959 (when Roth's first book, the collection *Goodbye, Columbus* was published) and 1977 (when Nabokov died, leaving behind him fragments of an unfinished novel). But this same span of chronological time, during which literary postmodernism emerged, corresponds to different stages in the three authors' respective lives and careers. For Nabokov, this was the last stage of a life that began in 1899 and a literary career that truly began in the early 1920s. For Duras, these years represent the middle of a life that began in 1914 and ended in 1996, and a career that began in the early 1940s. For Roth, born in 1933, this was essentially the beginning of a literary career in which, over fifty years later, he is still actively (and prolifically) engaged. These differences are important in understanding the different relations to the "postmodern" that each figure had (and has), relations that inform the specific natures and functions of their respective works of "autobiographical metafiction."

In the preface to his book *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, eminent theorist and critic of autobiography Paul John Eakin briefly charts the evolution of his own thought regarding the nature of "the self" From an early belief in "a final and irreducible self," Eakin worked his way through a more "tentative" idea that whether autobiography "dis-covers" or actually "invents" a self is "beyond our knowing, for knowledge of the self is inseparable from the practice of language," arriving at a present conviction that the "self" represents "less… an entity and more… a kind of awareness in process"—a conviction

accompanied by a reluctance to even "speak of 'the self,' for the definite article suggests something too fixed and unified to represent the complexity of self-experience" (x). These same three phases in Eakin's approach to the question of the self are implicated to a remarkable degree in and by the three texts under consideration here. It is Nabokov's ultimate dedication to a now almost theoretically archaic idea of "a final and irreducible self" that informs both the negative self-portrait he paints in the figure of Vadim Vadimovich, and the more directly drawn sketch-outline of himself that he provides through the figure of the unnamed author in *Look at the Harlequins!*. His idiosyncratic metaphysics ultimately revolve around a belief in the existence of an "absolute reality" approachable through the accumulation of knowledge of an actual, empirical world that, while perceived and "animated" by individual, subjective consciousness, is not created by it. The transcendent self is a part of actual reality, both as perceived and as the "absolute reality" behind and beyond these perceptions. Nabokov was, as a result of such convictions, particularly troubled by what he saw as gross misperceptions of himself, his work, and the relationship between them. He was throughout his literary career plagued by misreading that wrongly identified him with, often, his more reprehensible and loathsome characters. In his foreword to the revised English-language edition of *Despair*—a first-person narrative account of the solipsistic and narcissistic protagonist's murder of his ostensible "double" for purposes of insurance fraud—he records that the "rather grumpy Englishman" whom he hired to aid him in his first translation of the novel in 1936 "refused to continue" after the first chapter, "saying he disapproved of the book; I suspect he wondered if it might not have been a true confession" (xi). And the shadow of suspicion that *Lolita*'s almost equally solipsistic and narcissistic narrator-protagonist—essentially criminally guilty of the kidnapping, false

imprisonment, and physical and sexual abuse of a child as well as murder—cast over Nabokov continues to hang over his posthumous reputation. Victimized as he saw it by an equally morally reprehensible misreading and misrepresentation of his life by a biographer willing to wrongly sacrifice his subject's reputation in order to secure his own, Nabokov was inspired to employ parody and inversion in the service of an anti-autobiographical, intertextual metafiction that employs a number of strategies characteristic of "postmodern" fiction in the service of attitudes toward the self and the inert-relations between the life and the work that owe more to Modernism. Through *Look at the Harlequins!* Nabokov 1) affirms the primacy of his status as an eminent artist and author in terms of his public self, and 2) asserts his right to a private life to be shared only with chosen intimates. In the process, he also 3) affirms his views of an objective, empirical reality and a transcendent self, the misperceptions of which have tragic real-life consequences; and 4) explores the often ambiguous role played by his biography in the reading and interpretation of his novels.

Where Nabokov reveals himself to be, as Eakin has elsewhere called him, "one of the great believers in the self in our time" (*Fictions in Autobiography* 277), Duras shows herself in *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord* to ultimately be more invested in the idea of the self and self-inscription, of reality and text as mutually implicating and mutually informing. Duras was the author of body of work that invariably drew as much from her life experiences and memories as from purely fictive invention, beginning with the family portraits and legends of the autobiographical fictions of her earliest books—*Les Impudents* and *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique* foremost among them—and culminating in the ultimate indistinguishablity of fiction from autobiography and autobiography from fiction first in *L'Amant*. Feeling herself disenfranchised in a project to adapt *L'Amant* for the screen—a marginalization representing

as much a self-alienation as an alienation from her own work, Duras produced an ostensibly even more autobiographical narrative account of the story that she told there to be published solely under her own name*: L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*. This book not only provides a literary *auteur*'s self-account to compete with what she now saw as another's appropriation of her life and her work; it also re-affirms both 1) biographical readings of *L'Amant* as well as *Les Impudents* and *Un Barrage contre le Pacifique*, and 2) the historicity of characters and events portrayed in the works of her India Cycle—characters and events that have been revealed to be fictionalized. In the process, it works to consolidate more "postmodern" conceptions of reality and the self as the textually constituted products of narrative acts. Her insistence on the essential veracity of the fictionalized autobiographical account of *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, and the supplanting of an increasingly remote and uncertain past by a self-made myth, testify to the ambiguous relation of self-representations to an actual self and suggest Duras' ultimate devotion to the idea that "the self is"—or perhaps *can* be—"inseparable from the practice of language."

The problematization of narrative and textual authority enacted through the dominant narrative of Duras' own self-accounts reaches an apotheosis in Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*. Haunted by the capricious contingency of reality, the "manifold personality" of the Jew, and a more radically postmodern conception of the self defined almost purely as the capacity for self-performance, Roth is the author of an extensive body of work that has derived, as he himself explicitly acknowledges in his "novelist's autobiography," *The Facts*, from the facts of his actual existence as an historical individual. These facts represent for the author a springboard into acts of fantastical, often farcical self invention and self-re-invention, explorations of the "counterselves" and "counterlives" that *might have been*.

These fictionalized alter-egos and alternate realities have, however, often been understood as more or less directly autobiographical self-portraits through reductionist biographical readings that deny the role played by imaginative self-re-creation. Exacerbating this uneasy relationship between fact and fiction was Roth's virtually psychotic nervous breakdown in the spring of 1987, resulting in an almost complete loss of a sense of self that impelled him to embark upon a cross-generic exploration of this complex relationship across four books, beginning with *The Facts* and culminating in *Operation Shylock*—a book that practices and performs radically postmodern conceptions of the self as essentially only the capacity for self-performance. The deliberate confounding of fact and fiction in what is essentially a self-performance of the self's capacity for such self-performances seems designed to illustrate Eakin's definition of the self as "less… an entity and more… a kind of awareness in process."

II. The Theoretical/ Critical "Return of the Author," and the Significance for the Identification of New Genres

There is a second significant aspect of these kinds of texts and their analysis. They might be further situated according to a contemporary "return of the author," after the "death of the author" announced by Roland Barthes and further preached by such figures as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. The author's resurrection can be witnessed in both contemporary literature and the arts, and criticism Alongside the emergence of autobiographical, intertextual metafictions like *Look at the Harlequins!*, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, and *Operation Shylock* is a parallel phenomenon of *biographical* intertextual metafictions that also explicitly dramatize the interplay between the author's life and the

work, and re-assert—even if imaginatively or speculatively—the real relations that adhere between them. And during this same recent period of time we have seen increased theoretical/critical efforts to rehabilitate the role of the author as a genuinely authoritative figure in the process of textual interpretation and criticism.

In a review of Jay Parini's *The Passages of H.M.* (2010)—as the subtitle announces it, a "novel of Herman Melville"—Christopher Benfey remarks upon the contemporary proliferation of novels about "major literary figures," referring to a new "bastard genre of biographical fiction." Such novels, Benfey observes, "are stunningly popular at the moment, with distinguished examples such as Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* and Colm Toíbín's *The Master*, along with more recent renderings of Charlotte Brontë, Stephen Crane, and Emily Dickinson." He might also have mentioned, among others, Matthew Pearl's novels *The Poe Shadow* (2006) and *The Last Dickens* (2009), and Brian Hall's *Fall of Frost* (2008). Though not specifically noted by Benfey, one of the common features of such novels is the direct incorporation of elements from these authors' literary works into the re-imaginings and fictive reconstructions of their lives. This phenomenon is to be found as well in the theater, and especially in the cinema, where it has been particularly widespread and, since the 1990s, increasingly common—though earlier examples are certainly to be found). To list but a few….

> *Kafka* (1991). Directed by Steven Soderbergh. Screenplay by Lem Dobbs. In 1919 Prague, insurance agent Franz Kafka (Jeremy Irons) finds himself embroiled in the midst of a Kafka-esque plot, elements of which closely resemble aspects of the Austrian novelist's *The Castle* and *The Trial*.

Shakespeare in Love (1998). Directed by John Madden. Screenplay by Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard. In Elizabethan England, the young playwright and actor Will Shakespeare (Joseph Fiennes) finds artistic inspiration through a Shakespearean romance with young noblewoman and aspiring actor Viola de Lesseps (Gwyneth Paltrow).

Quills (2000). Directed by Philip Kaufman. Screenplay by Doug Wright (based on his play). In his final days as an inmate at the Charenton asylum, the Marquis de Sade (Geoffrey Rush) continues to write, despite increasingly drastic measures, with the aid of a virginal maid (Kate Winslet), a voracious reader of his work.

Adaptation (2002). Directed by Spike Jonze. Screenplay by Charlie Kaufman and (the fictional) Donald Kaufman (based on the book *The Orchid Thief* by Susan Orlean). Screenwriter Charlie Kaufman attempts to write a screenplay for a film adaptation of Susan Orlean's (Meryl Streep) non-fiction book *The Orchid Thief.*

Finding Neverland (2004). Directed by Marc Forester. Screenplay by David Magee (based on the play by Allan Knee). James Barrie (Johnny Depp) is inspired to write *Peter Pan* through his friendship with four fatherless children and their mother (Kate Winslet).

The Brothers Grimm (2005). Directed by Terry Gilliam. Screenplay by Ehren Kruger. Folklorists (and con-artists) Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm (Matt Damon and Heath Ledger) become involved in a real-life fairy-tale akin to those they have been collecting when they are enlisted to break a witch's evil curse to save a princess.

Becoming Jane (2007). Directed by Julian Jarrold. Screenplay by Kevin Hood and Sarah Williams (with Jane Austen receiving a writing credit for her excerpted letters). A young Jane Austen's (Anne Hathaway) early romance closely parallels the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Molière (2007). Directed by Laurent Tirard. Screenplay by Grégoire Vigneron and Laurent Tirard): Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (Romain Duris) finds himself entangled in a series of events closely resembling the plots of Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and *Tartuffe*.

Goethe! [*Young Goethe in Love*] (2010). Directed by Philipp Stölzl. Screenplay by Alexander Dydyna, Christoph Müller, and Philipp Stölzl. After failing his law exams, young Johann Wolfgang Goethe (Alexander Fehling) falls hopelessly in love with a young woman (Miriam Stein) engaged to be married.

The Raven (2011). Directed by James McTeigue. Screenplay by Ben Livingstone and Hannah Shakespeare. In his final days, Edgar Allan Poe (John Cusack) tracks a serial killer inspired by his macabre stories.

This brief list runs the gamut from cases where the fiction is known or acknowledged, through established historical fact or documented evidence, to have a strong autobiographical component—e.g., *Goethe!*—; through cases where speculation based upon scant documentation and historical evidence suggests possible or even likely connections between the life and the work—e.g., *Becoming Jane*—; to more blatantly fantastic blendings of documented facts and fictional elements from the author's works, from the relatively restrained—e.g., *Quills*—to the more outlandish—e.g., *The Brothers Grimm*. In all cases, however, there is at bottom the implicit assumption and assertion that the experiences and the personalities of authors *matter* when it comes to the business of reading and understanding the work that they have produced through acts of artistic creation that are always, in some way, personal. As Wolfgang Iser notes, "As the creation of an author, the literary text evidences a particular attitude through which the author directs himself or herself to the world" (2).

One of the questions prompted, as Benfey notes, by the proliferation of such works is, "Why [is] the bastard genre of biographical fiction is so stunningly popular at the moment…. How could Henry James, of all people"—the subject of Colm Toíbín's aforementioned novel *The Master*—"who had almost no outward life at all, emerge as a favorite subject for novelists?" Benfey's suggestion, in the immediate continuation of this passage, is that perhaps "our own inner lives, our inward lives, are precisely what we are now afraid of losing," that "those long-ago lives seem somehow richer, deeper, than our own hectic and increasingly 'virtual' pursuits." This might explain the popularity of such works; but it doesn't explain the proliferation itself, which is its own question: Why have these new

"genres" of "biographical fiction," as Benfey calls it, and the parallel phenomenon of autobiographical, intertextual metafictions become increasingly common in the first place? A fear of the loss of the inner or inward life may again be the answer—but not to an increasingly "virtual" and superficial engagement with reality, but to virtually institutionalized postmodern, poststructuralist theories and critical approaches that essentially deny the significance of the author with respect to his work.

Since the establishment of such New Critical doctrines as the "intentional fallacy" and the apparent insistence on the autonomy of the text as a self-sufficient object of analysis, virtually any consideration of the author—particularly in terms of either his ostensible intentions or his biography—has been susceptible to charges of critical heterodoxy and theoretical illegitimacy. But as Gregory Currie notes in *The Nature of Fiction*, the originators of the so-called "intentional fallacy," Monroe Beardsley and W.K. Wimsatt, took a much more expansive view of "text" than many of their critical descendents have tended to. And many of their followers, while generally maintaining a more or less dismissive attitude toward the question of the value of authorial biography with respect to the interpretation of texts, have yet recognized that there may after all, in some cases, be some "use in biographical study," as René Wellek and Austin Warren suggest in their essentially New Critical *Theory of Literature* (79). Though they emphasize that "one cannot, from fictional statements… draw any valid inference as to the biography of the writer" (76) and "the work of art is [not] a mere copy of life" (78), they ultimately offer such observations by way of urging caution rather than declaring any and all forms of biographical criticism out of bounds:"We must conclude"—they write—that the biographical interpretation and use of every work of art needs careful scrutiny and examination in each case" (78-79). And they

continue by recognizing that, “still, there are connecting links, parallelisms, oblique resemblances, topsy-turvy mirrors. The poet’s work may be a mask, a dramatized conventionalization, but it is frequently a conventionalization of his own experiences, his own life. If used with a sense of these distinctions, there is use in biographical study” (79).

This is precisely what a number of critics seem to have been increasingly re-discovering recently, as autobiographical, intertextual, metafictive texts such as the three examined here have slowly, but steadily multiplied over the past few decades. Cheryl Walker’s “persona criticism,” for example, while it avoids identifying meaning strictly according to the historical experience of a single individual human subject, also attempts to discover a critical method capable of “reconceiving the author-function” as described in the “death of the author” criticism of such theorists as Michel Foucault (114).

> Rather than erasing the author in favor of an abstract textuality, I prefer a critical practice that both expands and limits the role of the author, in my case by finding in the text an author-persona but relating this functionary to psychological, historical, and literary intersections quite beyond the scope of any scriptor’s intentions, either conscious or unconscious. (114)

And in his essay “Life as Intertext: Distance, Deception, and Intentionality in Marek Hlasko’s *Killing the Second Dog*,” George Gasnya similarly suggests, “a middle way of reading fictional(ized) autobiographies, one balanced between, on the one hand, the study of autonomous textuality in which the centrality of the historical author is displaced and, on the other, more traditional “persona criticism” in which the biographical and textual are intimately related” (1). Suzanne Nalbantian takes such approaches a step further in her book *Aesthetic Autobiography*. While theories of autobiography have, by focusing on “on questions of referentiality, mimesis, and the issue of the ontology of the self,” explored the issue of fiction or fictionalization in autobiography, “the question of autobiographical truths

within the fictional form has certainly not been a concern of the critics thus far," Nalbantian asserts, "and can represent an evolution in the study of the relationship between the self and the text" (26). Nalbantian's book is, as a comparative study of "a common aesthetics of transmutation in fiction" in the work of Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Anaïs Nin, who "reclothe[d] personal facts in poetic relations, in a re-presentation of the person, not the personality" (44), such a study. In this, *Aesthetic Autobiography* is a very similar project to the one undertaken here. The primary differences being ultimately 1) the extent of the explicit identification of authorial self-representations with the authors, including the invocation of the autobiographical mutual identification of author-narrator-protagonist; and 2) the intertextual incorporation of self-referential elements from their own *oeuvres* in these texts. Much as they may be contextualized according to the form/genre of autofiction, the sorts of texts discussed here may alternately or also be regarded as belonging to Nalbantian's category of "aesthetic autobiography."

Such tentative movements toward a new, post-poststructuralist author criticism represent both a recognition of the insights provided by poststructuralist theoretical models and critical approaches, and a rejection of and rebellion against its excesses, which have tended to reverse the teleological relations between author and text, reduce the author to a mere "after-effect, as it were, of the act of writing" (Gasnya 2). It remains unclear what precisely the new face of the author will or even should look like in the field of literary study. What does seem to be clear, however, is that there exists the potential and the desire—perhaps even the necessity—to discover a *via media* between a kind of Sainte-Beuvian critical approach that risks reducing all fictive texts to variants of the *roman à clef*, and a kind of postmodernist theoretical approach that denies the significance or existence of anything

other than autonomous text. Perhaps the kind of analysis attempted here may yet have a place in this.

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