



Words, Works and Worlds in Joyce and Nabokov

Boyd Brian

Pour citer cet article

Boyd Brian, « Words, Works and Worlds in Joyce and Nabokov », *Cycnos*, vol. 12.2 (*Nabokov: At the Crossroads of Modernism and Postmodernism*), 1995, mis en ligne en juin 2008.

<http://epi-revel.univ-cotedazur.fr/publication/item/422>

Lien vers la notice <http://epi-revel.univ-cotedazur.fr/publication/item/422>

Lien du document <http://epi-revel.univ-cotedazur.fr/cycnos/422.pdf>

Cycnos, études anglophones

revue électronique éditée sur épi-Revel à Nice

ISSN 1765-3118 ISSN papier 0992-1893

AVERTISSEMENT

Les publications déposées sur la plate-forme épi-revel sont protégées par les dispositions générales du Code de la propriété intellectuelle. Conditions d'utilisation : respect du droit d'auteur et de la propriété intellectuelle.

L'accès aux références bibliographiques, au texte intégral, aux outils de recherche, au feuilletage de l'ensemble des revues est libre, cependant article, recension et autre contribution sont couvertes par le droit d'auteur et sont la propriété de leurs auteurs. Les utilisateurs doivent toujours associer à toute unité documentaire les éléments bibliographiques permettant de l'identifier correctement, notamment toujours faire mention du nom de l'auteur, du titre de l'article, de la revue et du site épi-revel. Ces mentions apparaissent sur la page de garde des documents sauvegardés ou imprimés par les utilisateurs. L'université Côte d'Azur est l'éditeur du portail épi-revel et à ce titre détient la propriété intellectuelle et les droits d'exploitation du site. L'exploitation du site à des fins commerciales ou publicitaires est interdite ainsi que toute diffusion massive du contenu ou modification des données sans l'accord des auteurs et de l'équipe d'épi-revel.

EPI-REVEL

Revue électronique de l'Université Côte d'Azur

Words, Works and Worlds in Joyce and Nabokov

Or Intertextuality, Intratextuality, Supratextuality,
Infratextuality, Extratextuality and Autotextuality in Modernist
and Prepostmodernist Narrative Discourse

Brian Boyd

University of Auckland

I want to compare two writers and two novels I love and to ask whether the multiplication of labels and terms helps us see them better, either together or apart. Perhaps I should start by citing as my epitext, from Genette's *The Architext*: "Jokes on the word text form a genre that seems to me indeed overworked."¹

Next, let me rub my Genette genie and borrow, steal, propose, adapt, and reassign some terms for some relations between words, works and worlds: *intertextuality*: the relationship between one work and other texts, by allusion and parody, or by accepting or challenging convention; *intratextuality*: which I will use for internal relations between the words of a text that are not accounted for simply by the coherence of a fictional world: verbal echoes, leitmotifs and the like; *supratextuality*: works within works, especially meta-supra-texts, texts which reflect the larger text they form part of; *infratextuality*: elements of a fictional world that while not actually being themselves self-contained texts (which would make them supratexts) approach word or story form: thoughts, dreams, speech, reports, especially where writers use them to explore the way we turn experience into narrative; *extratextuality*: reference to hard fact outside the fictional world, fact to which we all have some more or less independent access (like Napoleon or the battle of Borodino in *War and Peace*, even though Tolstoy both fictionalizes and yet tries to revise the factual record); and *autotextuality*: references to the writer, who in this case has unique unrestricted access to the facts but allows us entry under his or her terms.²

Since I am raising issues large enough to last a whole conference, let's compensate by focussing on small samples: the first paragraphs of *Ulysses* and *Ada*, with their ramifications through the rest of their chapters and novels.

First, *Ulysses*:

Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed. A yellow dressinggown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind him on the mild morning air. He held the bowl aloft and intoned: *Introibo ad altare Dei*. (1: 1-5)³

Here there seems to be no obvious intertextuality, in the sense of allusion, until the line from the Mass (which derives ultimately from the Vulgate version of Psalms). Mulligan with his bowl of shaving lather as mock chalice opens the novel by parodying the most important of Catholic rituals.

There is one other semi-explicit intertext — to keep up the X factor, we could label this "contextual intertextuality" — in the shadow of the title, the Homeric resonance throughout the book, which, with the help of the chapter title in the serial publication of the novel, or

¹ Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1992), p. 82.

² This paragraph was suggested by Maurice Couturier's discussion of "transtextuality" (intertextuality, intratextuality — by which he means what I dub "supratextuality" — and autotextuality) in chapter 2 of his *Nabokov: ou la tyrannie de l'auteur* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), in Genette's series *Poétique*.

³ James Joyce, *Ulysses: Student's Edition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986). Citations in text according to episode and line number of the Hans Walter Gabler text.

Joyce's schemas, makes Stephen in one sense Telemachus and Mulligan Antinoos, a character notorious for his impiety.⁴

But there is another quite hidden allusion which shapes the phrasing and the fiction of Joyce's opening paragraph. Mulligan of course was based on Joyce's one-time friend Oliver St John Gogarty. In 1904, the year *Ulysses* takes place, George Moore was regarded as Ireland's best novelist; that very year he was writing a novel called *The Lake*,⁵ whose central character he named Oliver Gogarty; and he makes *his* Father Gogarty, in mocking allusion to the real Gogarty, the compulsive blasphemer, a scrupulous priest who comes to feel that he cannot continue to believe in the sacraments but who, rather than disillusion his parishioners by openly quitting the priesthood, stages his own apparent drowning. He often swims in the nearby lake. To fake his death, he strips off his priestly garb where he usually does, and swims across to the other side where he has stashed civilian clothes in which he can disappear to start a new life. Joyce reported the ending to his brother Stanislaus in high amusement:

Father Oliver Gogarty goes out to the lake to plunge in by moonlight, before which the moon shines opportunely on firm erect frame and grey buttocks: and on the steamer he reflects that every man has a lake in his heart and must ungird his loins for the crossing.⁶

Gogarty-Mulligan as buoyant mock-priest at the start of *Ulysses* inverts the conscience-stricken lapsed priest at the end of *The Lake*; Joyce remembers the "ungird" (itself of course a Biblical echo) in his "yellow dressinggown, ungirdled," and when at the end of the chapter Buck Mulligan undresses to swim in the Forty Foot Hole, a real priest emerges and dresses meekly as Mulligan as usual hogs the stage. Stephen looks on and thinks:

Dressing, undressing... The priest's grey nimbus in a niche where he dressed discreetly. I will not sleep here tonight. Home also I cannot go. A voice, sweettoned and sustained, called to him from the sea. Turning the curve he waved his hand. It called again. A sleek brown head, a seal's, far out on the water, round. Usurper. (1: 725, 739-44)

Stephen sees Mulligan as a usurper because *he* paid the rent for the tower and yet Mulligan has wangled the key from him; but he also sees Mulligan as the false priest usurping centre stage when he feels himself a true priest. Not that he retains his Catholicism, but he is "supersaturated" with it, as Cranly says in the *Portrait*,⁷ and he sees himself, having rejected the call to the Catholic priesthood, as something still higher, as "priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life";⁸ Mulligan by contrast reacts to the mass and Catholicism only by endlessly trivializing everything.⁹

Joyce himself of course would go on to endlessly quadrivialize everything in *Finnegans Wake*; but in *Ulysses* he seems to agree with Stephen's judgement, since the negative climax of the book is the black mass in "Circe" and the attack on Stephen that surrounds it. In the black mass Joyce echoes his own "yellow dressinggown, ungirdled, sustained gently behind him", with its echo of Moore's "ungird," and the "grey buttocks" he had also quoted to Stanislaus, when, after "Father Malachi O'Flynn" intones his "Introibo ad altare diaboli", the Reverend Mr. Haines Love "raises high behind the celebrant's petticoat, revealing his grey bare hairy buttocks." (15: 4698-706)

Here we have intertextuality, without a wisp of the anxiety of influence, in Joyce's playing with Moore; intratextuality, in the structural repetition of parody mass and black mass and the

⁴ There is another pointed but not-yet-explicit allusion in the "real" name behind the nickname "Buck": "Malachi," who in the last book of the Old Testament launches a tirade against the corruption of priestly service at the altar.

⁵ London: Heinemann, 1905.

⁶ James Joyce, *Letters*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Viking, 1966), II, p. 154.

⁷ *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Chester G. Anderson (New York: Viking, 1968), p. 240.

⁸ *Portrait*, p. 221.

⁹ See Brian Boyd, "A Plain Clothes Priest." *James Joyce Quarterly*, 15:2 (1978), 176-79.

narrative repetition of the garment raised behind the celebrant; and intertextuality and intratextuality fused, through the echo of Moore, verbally (ungird, grey buttocks) and conceptually (Father Gogarty). We also have infratextuality, in the way Stephen makes a little narrative, an inchoate story of usurpation, out of Mulligan's asking for the key; and we can connect the novel's opening with an example of supratextuality, if we look at Stephen's story "A Pisgah Sight of Palestine, or the Parable of the Plums", another parody mass, on another tower,¹⁰ but with Stephen as the parodist, deliberately transmuting the elements of his everyday morning into a work of imagination, a first *Dubliners* story, a satiric picture of Dublin sterility. But Joyce answers his young alter ego by having Bloom in "Ithaca" offer Stephen a kind of mass, "Epps's massproduct, the creature cocoa" (17: 369-70). Bloom may seem in one way the perfect correlative of the old virgins spitting out their plumstones onto stony ground, since he has been spilling his seed for ten years, on the admittedly less stony ground of Molly's buttocks, and has just had his wife pumped full of seed by Blazes Boylan; but despite all that, Bloom has qualities that refute Stephen's negative judgement on his fellow Dubliners.

We also have here, therefore, a complex autotextuality, an echo of Joyce in 1904, as young man and young writer, and an anticipation of the maturer Joyce, with his sense of identification with and celebration of Bloom rather than Stephen, as well of course as a very special, very Joycean extratextuality, since the Martello Tower and the Forty-Foot Hole like so many other features of Joyce's Dublin, such as the distance from the railings to the bottom of the area at 7 Eccles Street, could be checked outside the text.

If we turn to the opening of *Ada* —

"All happy families are more or less dissimilar; all unhappy ones are more or less alike", says a great Russian writer in the beginning of a famous novel (*Anna Arkadievitch Karenina*, transfigured into English by R.G. Stonelower, Mount Tabor Ltd., 1880). That pronouncement has little if any relation to the story to be unfolded now, a family chronicle, the first part of which is, perhaps, closer to another Tolstoy work, *Detstvo i Otrochestvo* (*Childhood and Fatherland*, Pontius Press, 1858).¹¹

— and its connexions with other parts of the novel, we could easily by looking at these lines or their connections with other parts of the book find examples of intertextuality (Tolstoy, for instance), intratextuality (the Tolstoy echoes that frame Part 1 and the whole novel), supratextuality (the transfiguration theme next seen in the "transfigured" *Eugene Onegin* of Part 1 Chapter 2), infratextuality (if not here, in the first words Van and Ada utter later in the chapter, where they spontaneously speak what look like written sentences, and almost seem to know they are in the exposition of a novel), autotextuality (not hard to find in when "Van's book" is an anagram of "Nabokov's"), and a kind of extratextuality as special as that of *Ulysses*, where Nabokov's very specific distortions require us to find out more about this world of ours to know just how he has altered it into this or that feature of Antiterra.

¹⁰ There are a number of reasons for seeing the brawn and the juicy plums of Stephen's story as part of a parody mass, as mock equivalents of the bread-that-becomes-flesh and the wine-that-becomes-blood of the mass: Joyce's comments on the analogy between his work and the mass at the time of his writing *Dubliners*, and his clear attempt in the "Parable of the Plums" to have Stephen invent a first "Dubliners" story; the links between the two women, "elderly and pious," of the "Parable of the Plums," and the two sisters of the priest in the first of the actual *Dubliners* stories, "The Sisters"; and the suggestion that Stephen's watching Buck Mulligan's parody mass atop the Martello tower has in part inspired this story atop Nelson's Column, a suggestion confirmed by the echo in "Circe's" black mass ("Raises high behind the celebrant's petticoats") not only of "A yellow dressinggown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind him," but also of "But it makes them giddy to look so they pull up their skirts [...]. And settle down on their striped petticoats" in Stephen's story.

¹¹ *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), p. 3.

We can take all these as read.¹² Obviously, Nabokov here works in a very different way from Joyce; he obtrudes the relationship of *Ada* to the tradition of the novel in way that Joyce doesn't,¹³ even though Joyce's allusion to the man who had been Ireland's most important novelist shows him covertly engaging with the tradition as much as Nabokov does in overtly taking on *his* homeland's greatest novelist.

In relating word and work and world Nabokov deliberately destabilizes things. Van claims to set out the facts of his past, yet he begins by invoking the tradition of fiction; he cites a garbled version of the opening of *Anna Karenina*, and we're not altogether sure whether on Antiterra Tolstoy's text is as different as the Antiterran Chekhov's *Four Sisters* is from our *Three Sisters* or whether this is simply a bad translation. Nabokov plays with inside and outside; the world of the novel and the world of the reader; the relationship between original and translation, original and imitation, original and revision; similarity and dissimilarity; relatedness and unrelatedness.

In foregrounding the tradition of the novel, in destabilizing the whole world of this novel, he is very different from the surface solidity of the opening of *Ulysses*: he is not a modernist but a postmodernist. At the beginning of *Ulysses* Joyce extends the limits of the old conventions, which had never before permitted the kind of hyperprecision of object, action or thought that he begins to develop in this first chapter. At the beginning of *Ada* Nabokov does not suggest that conventions stop short of nature but shows *as* conventions what we often take for nature;¹⁴ and rather than try directly for originality, he calls it into question by paradoxically stressing his imitativeness even as he thereby demonstrates his novelty: the very paradigm of postmodernism.

But I would rather explain what's going on here in other terms. The very local terms, for instance, of the immediate context. Nabokov needs an old-fashioned opening, an invocation, an expository prologue, to make all the more surprising the first realized scene — the first “discriminated occasion,” in Henry James's phrase — a young boy and girl naked together, in between two rounds of lovemaking, in the attic of some roomy nineteenth-century manor or *roman*.

Or in terms of the larger and very personal context of Nabokov's unique intellectual background, his exploration of similarity and difference in biology, in speciation and in mimicry. Nabokov *agonized* over the species concept in his time at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology in the mid-1940s:

The idea of “species” is the idea of difference; the idea of “genus” is the idea of similarity. What we do when trying to “erect a genus,” as the saying goes, is really the paradoxical attempt to demonstrate that certain objects that are dissimilar in one way are similar in another. The first line of thought implies “specific distinction,” the second “generic affinity”.¹⁵

These biological notions not only populate *Ada* as invented species in real genera but pervade it as part of Nabokov's overall inquiry into “relationship” as fact and notion.

Or I would explain *Ada*'s special instabilities in terms of Nabokov's lifelong metaphysical exploration of the barrier between the “inside” of mortal life and the “outside” that we cannot reach, as it were, while the book of life is still open. And that is a theme he had been probing from the first. We find in the opening scene of *The Gift*, back in the unequivocally

¹² See Brian Boyd, “Annotations to *Ada*, 1: Part 1 Chapter 1.” *The Nabokovian* 30 (Spring 1993), 9-48.

¹³ Cf. Couturier 73: “Les références au genre romanesque sont plus nombreuses encore, faisant d'*Ada* une sorte d'anthologie et de manuel du roman moderne, ce que n'était pas et ne prétendait pas être *Ulysse*.”

¹⁴ Cf. Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979), p. 17: “our experience with the new novel alters our reading of the old, makes us more aware of the problematical character of conventions formerly assumed to be matters of nature rather than culture.”

¹⁵ Box 6, Lepidoptera MSS, Vladimir Nabokov Archives, Berg Collection, New York Public Library; forthcoming in Brian Boyd and Robert Pyle, eds., *Nabokov's Butterflies* (Boston: Beacon, 1996).

prepostmodernist 1930s, a novel that just as explicitly invokes the tradition of the novel, in its first lines, and in the image of the mirror being carried along the street that plainly replies to Stendhal's famous image of the novel¹⁶ — so that by some miracle of optics Nabokov makes a blue and white mirror reflect a red and black one, and by pointing it skywards makes art reflect something above and beyond life.

No writer can be assessed outside his or her context, but a context is something we half create and half receive. Or *more than half* create: the more original a writer is, the more idiosyncratic the selection of the context available at a given time, to the point where a generalized context like “postmodernism” can provide more blur than focus.

The openings of *Ulysses* and *Ada* are each highly allusive, linked in complex fashion to the remainder of the novel, and utterly different in the way word and work and world interrelate.

Joyce conceals allusions unless they are part of his characters' worlds; Nabokov obtrudes them to stir up his readers' minds.

Both play with the relationship between life and art, Joyce in order to have his art reflect life more accurately and fully than ever before, to be at once more localized and raw yet more universal and immemorial; Nabokov in order to link the world of life to the world of art to a world beyond life and to suggest the artful play behind them all.

Joyce builds covertly but in detail on his own life; Nabokov eschews private reference but parades the public sense of himself, in the Russian here, in Van Veen's very name, in the characters of his hero and heroine.

Ulysses begins with confidence in the known objective world, and bases its authority on its capacity to render that world with even more precision than hitherto. *Ada* reflects from the start a world that is always known imperfectly, deceptive in all it hides, playfully realer than it seems. But while at first glance that may seem akin to postmodernism, it ends up quite at odds with current epistemological scepticism.

Joyce collects, Nabokov selects. Joyce strips down, stops, piles up; Nabokov probes, twists, flows. Joyce substantiates, transubstantiates, debunks, rebunks; Nabokov catches, flips onto another dimension, slips back to the three or four he started from. And all this seems much more a matter of personal posture than the march of the times.

I'd like now briefly to compare the start of *Ulysses* and *Ada* in the way their works address one particular part of their world: in the way they choose from and challenge the wordstore of the past in order to define the present as an “item of time.”

In the allusions with which they open, *Ulysses* and *Ada* both look forward to their positive and negative climaxes. Mulligan's parody mass anticipates the negative climax of the black mass and the positive climax of the mass that the Jew Bloom serves up to the apostate Stephen. In *Ada* the distortion of *Anna Karenina* points to the positive climax of Van's and Ada's coming together, in *their* uniquely happy family, and the negative climax of Lucette's death, in the suicide that links her with Anna.

But Joyce also takes issue with Homer in the way he presents his climaxes. He rejects both the foreshadowing that shapes the *Odyssey* from the start, from Zeus's decree in the council of the gods, and the decisiveness of the story's climax, when Odysseus slaughters the suitors.

Where Homer covers the ten years of Odysseus's wanderings, Joyce insists on the density of the moment. Through that density he celebrates the real, transmutes it into “radiant [...] everliving life.” Of course as he advances through the novel he leaves behind the early hyperrealism of “Telemachus” for the stylizations of “Cyclops” or “Circe” or “Ithaca”; he moves from extending the limits of convention in order to encompass the complexity of the real to examining the way conventions shape what we see as real; he shifts, if you must, from modernism to an early postmodernism. But even in doing this he does not undermine the real,

¹⁶ *Le Rouge et le Noir*, Pt. 2 Ch. 49.

but instead seems to reaffirm it. It is the very solidity of his world that allows us to see it in such a variety of perspectives, to find in it such a plethora of connexions and especially to sense in it such a gamut of possibilities. Echoing Bakhtin, Gary Saul Morson, in his recent *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, stresses the importance of the “thick description” in fiction in demonstrating the openness of time: fiction recreates the moment in all its thickness in a way that philosophical discussions of time or historical accounts of the past cannot do.¹⁷ And no one makes the moment thicker than Joyce.

As the relation between the parody mass and the black mass abundantly demonstrates, Joyce carefully controls the shape of his novel, but he ensures that that shape does not imply events that are in any way predetermined. Stephen’s spending the night out on the town until he becomes dangerously drunk results from his reluctance to remain any longer under the same roof as Mulligan, but nothing in the opening scene can point ahead to his chance encounter with Private Carr and Private Compton.

Joyce deliberately lets the *Odyssey* parallel complicate the relationship between expectation and fulfilment. Like Odysseus and Telemachus, Bloom and Stephen do eventually unite, though only after they have inconclusively brushed past each other four times in central Dublin, like Fyodor and Zina again and again not quite meeting in Nabokov’s *The Gift*; but their overlap at 7 Eccles St is brief and inconclusive, and Bloom’s manner of routing the suitors, by ousting the image of Boylan in Molly’s mind, by getting her to bring him breakfast in bed, could hardly be less like the *Odyssey*’s resounding and bloody climax.

Morson in his book talks a good deal about foreshadowing, especially the strong foreshadowing in Greek narrative; but he doesn’t distinguish this clearly enough from something else we call foreshadowing, when a later event can be seen, but only *after* the fact, to have been prefigured when we return to the start and reread. That second kind of foreshadowing — perhaps we could call it undershadowing — is quite distinct from the advance stencilling in of the future in the *Odyssey*, and saturates *Ulysses*, but only in such a way as to affirm the openness of a world so rich in options and connections.

For all that the novel ends on a threefold positive, Molly’s great “Yes”, Bloom’s kindness to Stephen, and the possibility that Stephen might one day turn that into something like *Ulysses*, we don’t really know what will happen to Stephen on June 17 or to the Blooms when Molly brings Poldy his breakfast in bed. Far ahead of the fact, Zeus can guarantee Odysseus’s homecoming; but Joyce prefers the short span of time, the unresolved action. In the dense world of *Ulysses* even a few hours are too rich in surprises to make prediction possible.

In *Ada* Nabokov too takes issue with a famous Greek precursor. Of all literary works *Ædipus Rex* has the most intense foreshadowing and the strongest sense of inescapable fate, hidden from Oedipus until his discovery of his past shows his future closed off. “We are told”, comments Morson, “that the man who solved the riddle of the Sphinx can draw inferences from past and present events better than any living person.”¹⁸ In *Ada*’s first scene, Van and Ada like *Ædipus* carry out detective work on their past, draw inferences faster than anyone has ever done in fiction,¹⁹ discover they are family, and instead of being horrified at their incest, instead of feeling fate foreclosing on them, shrug it all off and live and love for another eighty years.²⁰

Joyce has Stephen explicitly address the question of unrealized possibilities:

¹⁷ New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1994, p. 4

¹⁸ Morson 59.

¹⁹ J.B. Sisson even goes so far as to assert that “Van Veen in *Ada* is a grotesque variant” “of the Holmes persona” (“Nabokov and Some Turn-of-the-Century English Writers,” in Vladimir Alexandrov, ed., *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov* [New York, Garland, 1995], 528-36, p. 529).

²⁰ Voir Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 546-47.

Had Pyrrhus not fallen by a beldam's hand in Argos or Julius Caesar not been knifed to death. They are not to be thought away. Time has branded them and fettered they are lodged in the room of the infinite possibilities they have ousted. (2: 48-51).

Like Joyce, although even more emphatically, Nabokov has his brightest hero consider and reject the idea of a fixed future, in the long reflections of his *The Texture of Time*.

He calls Ada's manor Ardis, after the Greek for *point of an arrow*, and throughout the story of Van and Ada's love at Ardis he plays with time's arrow. He establishes a powerful tension between on the one hand Van's initial sense of the unlikelihood of Ada's returning his love and on the other his and Ada's knowledge as they tell the story, and ours as we read it, that they will be lovers for a lifetime. Yet even though he has shown us in advance that they are still happily together in old old age, he still surprises us by making their adult life lurch through decades of bitterness, regret and separation. Just when this seems to confirm the arrow of implacable, one-way time and the impossibility of retrieving Ardis, just when time's momentum hurtles Van and Ada further and further apart, against all expectation a sudden change of mind on Ada's part restores them to each other for a final happy forty years.

Morson coins the term "side-shadowing" for the way novelists (his examples are Dostoevsky and Tolstoy) reassert freedom in their worlds by showing alternative possibilities that could have come to pass. No one does this more than Nabokov in *Ada*. About to fight a duel, Van sees a butterfly float past, and knows "with utter certainty [...] that he had only a few minutes to live" (310), but as it turns out he suffers only a minor wound. At the end of Part 2 of the novel, and again at the end of Part 3, Van presents false futures as if they had happened, then having duped us dismisses them to offer what actually occurred. And Nabokov even invents Antiterra, as a concrete other world of historical possibilities unrealized on our Terra, a whole world of sideshadows, a book-length reminder of time's other options.

But for all that Joyce and Nabokov combine tight control with an utter rejection of the determinism of Greek storytelling, their methods could not be more different. Joyce stresses openness in the present by *showing* the open present slowly unfolding. (He also makes his time a Leibnizian monad or a Borgesian aleph: each moment, fully realized, contains or reflects all time, especially as we move towards *Finnegans Wake*.)

Nabokov prefers to have us look not from the midst of the moment but across the vista of a whole lifetime; he displays what was a long series of open presents now preserved in the past, now become part of the design of time. He stresses, he *insists* on, the openness of the present, but he feels he must equally stress first the preservation of the present once it becomes past, and then the design perceptibly embedded in it that now looks like foreplanning. He likes to combine present-time openness with retrospective closure: hence for instance Quilty's identity, nebulous beforehand, tauntingly sharp and specific in time's rear-vision mirror.

Dorrit Cohn notes the contrast between a third-person character's ignorance of his or her future self and a first-person narrator's knowledge of what happened next, and freedom to slide back and forth anywhere along the line that connects his or her two selves.²¹ This partly explains Nabokov's unusual predilection for third-person self-reference by first-person narrators: he generally presents these characters (Fyodor, Humbert, Van) in the third person, to stress the openness of time as it unfolds for them, and yet has them tell their own story, refolding retrospective time as if to make its now visible patterns half theirs.

Speaking of her dreams of acting, Ada says: "In 'real' life we are creatures of chance in an absolute void — unless we be artists ourselves, naturally; but in a good play I feel authored, I feel passed by the board of censors, I feel secure." (426) Nabokov sees our discovery of pattern in our personal past as somehow deeply liberating, something that can turn us from

²¹ *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes of Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), p. 145.

creatures of time to co-creators, co-authors, of the script of our past, but also as something that in no way impinges on our freedom of action and choice in the present.

Even when we start with Joyce's and Nabokov's similarity of aims and methods (open time, Greek critique), we soon arrive at the irreducible difference between two writers with so much in common. And if we have left still further behind us pre-texts and post-texts, modernism and postmodernism, it's because I think they get us nowhere near the complexities of the particular case or the excitement of writers' unique engagements with their world.