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"NOT TEXT, BUT TEXTURE"

Nabokov and the Joycean Momentum

What have you learned from Joyce?
Nothing.
(Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*)

James Joyce and Vladimir Nabokov met a few times while Joyce was living in Paris in the late thirties. He was fascinated by Joyce's sagaciousness and strong personality. On his part, the Irish writer empathized with this young Russian artist to the point of helping him in a difficult moment of his career.[1] Nabokov's admiration for *Ulysses* is widely documented as well as his rejection of most of the rest of the Joycean production. For instance he defines *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* "a feeble and garrulous book" (Nabokov 1990, 71), and while he never commented on *Dubliners*[2] he left his most caustic remark to Joyce's last novel *Finnegans Wake*. He declared to detest the *Wake* as he considered it "one of the greatest failures in literature" (Nabokov 1980, 342), in which "a cancerous growth of fancy word-tissue hardly redeems the dreadful joviality of the folklore and the easy, too easy, allegory" (Nabokov 1990, 102). Yet, despite his dismissive and boastful comments on the author of *Ulysses* – "James Joyce has not influenced me in any manner whatsoever" (Nabokov 1990, 102) – to Nabokov Joyce remains an inescapable reference point both in terms of style and narrative devices.

[1] In this regard, Richard Ellmann notes that "on hearing that Vladimir Nabokov was to lecture on Pushkin, and would probably confront an empty hall, Joyce made a point of attending so as to save his young friend from undue embarrassment." (Ellmann 1982, 699) Nabokov recalls the same episode observing that "A source of unforgettable consolation was the sight of Joyce sitting, arms folded and glasses glinting, in the midst of the Hungarian football team" (Nabokov 1990, 86).
[2] In honour of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Vladimir Nabokov, PEN American Center, The New Yorker, Vintage Books and Manhattan's Town Hall brought together a group of authors on 15 April 1999 to read from and reflect on Nabokov's work. In his speech Martin Amis's observed that although Nabokov never commented on *Dubliners* "he did mark up a short story in the anthology he was sent, often giving zed or z-minuses to writers with hemispherical reputations like Lawrence, and he did give Joyce an A+ for "The Dead."

In this essay I consider the kind of influence Joyce exerted on Nabokov with particular reference to his major works *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. The first part provides some examples of the impact of *Ulysses* on Nabokov's novel *The Eye* (*Soglyadatai*, 1930) – which was published when he was in Europe[3], while the second part focuses on the possible analogies between *Finnegans Wake* and *Pale Fire* (1962), and in particular on the way both Nabokov and Joyce create for their characters a specific idiolect and linguistic universe of its own.

As a result such a comparison discloses a series of interconnections that go well beyond the mere concept of influence. In other words, although it may be true that when Nabokov begins to study Joyce systematically he is "definitely formed and immune to any literary influence" (Nabokov 1990, 71), it is quite apparent that Joyce's "noble originality and unique lucidity of thought and style" (Nabokov 1990, 71) cannot be so easily dismissed. Indeed Joyce surfaces in Nabokov's narratives as a sort of textual reverberation from a sophisticated interplay of literary as well as cultural references.

The way Nabokov concocts and organizes his textual material has been often considered as "postmodern".[4] For instance the self-reflexive treatment of the author-reader relation, the use of an unreliable narrator, the textual fragmentation, and the recourse to different planes of reality, which are typical of postmodern narratives, might be associated to Nabokov's style. By contrast, I argue, that his response to Joyce's peculiar style can be investigated and interpreted within a modernist context, whereby modernism, or better in this particular case Joyce's modernism, becomes a turning point for his own writing. As John Burt Forster Jr. has observed

> when Nabokov self-consciously assembles a context for his writing, modernist culture itself enters his works as something that he directly emulates, amplifies or attacks. (Forster 1993, xii)

It is precisely in such self-conscious emulation, amplification and attacks towards Joyce's own modernist style that the Nabokov-Joyce controversial relation articulates itself.

Joycean Echoes in *The Eye*

The Eye marks a crucial passage in Nabokov's style. This "little novel", as he defines it in the "Foreward" to the English edition (1965), translated by his son Dmitri and supervised by himself, presents a crucial technical achievement: it inaugurates

[3] This is true if we do not consider the unfinished *Solus Rex*. Notably Nabokov's first American novel *Bend Sinister* incorporates *Solus Rex*.

[4] See for instance Kondoyanidi 1999, Green 2008, Danglli 2010 and Abbasi 2013.

Nabokov's employment of the first person narrator. Obviously such a stylistic choice has important repercussions on the story itself. For example it dramatically complicates the narrator's point of view: the plot is in fact based on the possibility that the narrational "I", who guides the reader through the story, and the ineffable Smurov are the same person. Hence, on the one hand, the story is presented from a claustrophobic and inescapable point of view – the "I"'s – and on the other, this "I" appears utterly unreliable, which leads the reader to believe that the voice belongs to a probably delusional, if not completely mad, character. Moreover this "I", as the unique narrative voice, comes from a disembodied consciousness: it is in fact the result of a residual psychic energy (Barton Johnson 1995, 131), as a consequence of the protagonist's supposed suicide.

The emphasis on the character's conscience, the uncensored penetration of his/her most intimate thoughts – which is a hallmark of modernism – here becomes the very substance of the story. Even the title suggests a similar interpretation. In fact, in the English edition of the novel Nabokov chose to translate the Russian title *Soglyadatai*, which literally means "the spy" or "the reconnoiterer", with *The Eye*, playing with the homophony between the pronoun "I" and the substantive *eye*. Such a connection between the two lays particular emphasis on the story's point of view. The *eye* in fact symbolically represents a passageway into the dimension of consciousness. When the *eye* conflates into the "I" the story becomes an infinite *myse en abyme* of the subject (as the speaking voice) and of his multiple refractions. It is precisely through this *eye*/"I", through this particular point of view, that the reader enters the character's consciousness. However such overlapping, rather than clarifying the nature of the events narrated and their plausibility, complicates things even further. Indeed, despite Nabokov's declaration in the "Foreward" that "the author disclaims all intentions to trick, puzzle, fool, or otherwise deceive the reader", it becomes immediately clear that *The Eye* resists interpretation. Even if the reader, as expected by the author, easily detects the relationship between the narrational "I" and Smurov, the story maintains its intricacies, because "the stress is not on the mystery but on the pattern": for theirs is not a one-to-one connection but a one-to-many. Notably at the very end of the novel the reader comes to know that:

> I [the narrational "I"] do not exist: there exist but the thousands of mirrors that reflect me. With every acquaintance I make, the population of phantoms resembling me increases. Somewhere they multiply, I alone do not exist. Smurov, however, will live on for a long time. (Nabokov 1965, 103)

Paradoxically the narrational "I" can exist only through its own multiplications, through the infinite series of disembodied images that it perceives both as "a projection of" and "other from" itself. Although not perfectly superimposable, these phantoms "resemble" each other just enough as to make the reader question Smurov's "real"

identity. In this regard the etymology of "resemble" can be helpful. Resemble comes from the middle English *resemblen,* "to appear", which derives from the Latin *simulare*, "to imitate" (Online Etymology Dictionary). The kind of relationship between the narrational "I" and Smurov is indeed based on imitation and simulation. The narrational "I" is never completely superimposable to a particular reflection, rather it needs a virtually infinite number of reflections to continue to exist. Therefore Smurov must remain ineffable and undefined, because he subsumes in himself all of these existential possibilities: unlike the "I" he "will live on for a long time" (Nabokov 1965, 103).

In the polyphonic interplay of the multiple narrative voices of *Pale Fire* one can find a similar provocative closure, when at the very end of the novel Kinbote, reflecting on Gradus' untraceability declares:

> But whatever happens, whatever the scene is laid, somebody, somewhere, will quietly set out – somebody has already set out, somebody still rather faraway is buying a ticket, is boarding a bus, a ship, a plane has landed, is walking towards a million of photographers, and presently he will ring at my door – a bigger, more respectable, more competent Gradus. (301)

Likewise the closing paragraph of *Pale Fire* presents a vertiginous multiplication of narrative subjects, of Gradus-like identities, all ready to accomplish their murderous intent. In Kinbote's ravenous and paranoid presumptions, Gradus is not even identifiable with a single individual; on the contrary he randomly proliferates in different places at different times. Adding another meaning to his very name, in such a continual regeneration – which like in *The Eye* "increases the population of phantoms" resembling himself – he *gradually* becomes more and more "respectable" and "competent" for his task.

From a stylistic perspective, Nabokov effaces the presence of the narrative voice – and consequently of the traditional well-defined point of view – in favour of a multiplicity of refracted and fragmentary voices. Therefore he dramatically complicates the role and function of the narrator, whose (individual) voice turns into a polyphony of silent voices within a network of stories to be told and re-told, disrupting the world that has been depicted, and making it multilevel.

Certainly the textual aspects I have focused on can only in part convey the impact of *The Eye* on Nabokov's future works. Nonetheless I consider them instrumental in discussing the kind of influence Joyce has exerted on Nabokov's style in such a crucial moment of his production. Hence the choice of identifying the narrator with a disembodied consciousness that "pulsate[s] and create[s] images", (Nabokov 1965, 21), as well as the shift from a singular to a multiple point of view, and finally the peculiar author-reader relationship, which such narrative devices imply, are all elements that can be traced back to *Ulysses*. Despite Nabokov's peremptory declarations about

the non influence of Joyce's writing on his own style, the kind of technical achievements presented in *The Eye* is reminiscent of the pioneering experimentations of *Ulysses*. Even the pun in the title is somehow anticipated in Joyce's text, when in the "Ithaca" chapter, to the question "What did the first drawer unlocked contain?" the impersonal narrator answers:

> an infantile epistle, dated, small em monday, reading: capital pee Papli comma capital aitch How are you note of interrogation *capital eye* I am very well full stop new paragraph signature with flourishes capital em Milly no stop. (Joyce 1993, 17.1791-94, my italics)

Milly's infantile epistle to her father, written as if it were a dictation exercise, contains a series of words, whose first letters are transcribed as following a teacher's suggestion to spell them correctly. Hence Milly writes "em" for Monday, "pee" for Papli, and, remarkably, "capital *eye*" for the pronoun I, reproducing the same pun of Nabokov's title, with practically the same ontological implications. In both cases, this particular pun invites a reflection between the objective and subjective point of view. As for Joyce, the "I"/*eye* in the letter[5] subsumes the interplay between a completely objective narration – represented by the scientific gaze (*eye*) through which each object, piece of furniture and event is duly catalogued and recounted[6] – and the characters' subjectivity that ineluctably surfaces in the text, undermining the certainty of a "neutral" narration. Because in Milly's letter punctuation is translated into words, it contributes to the semantics of the text, revealing once again the artificiality of writing as well as its deceptive nature. Whatever the point of view, Joyce's text denies the reader any form of totalizing hermeneutics. Accordingly, Milly's letter articulates itself between the conclusive "I am very well full stop" and the inconclusive "new paragraph signature with flourishes capital em Milly no stop". Hence the letter remains suspended between a "full stop" and a "no stop", between meaning and its deferral. One is reminded of Jacques Derrida's last statement in his well-known essay "Signature Event Context":

> as a disseminating operation separated from presence (of Being) according to all its modifications, writing, if there is any, perhaps communicates, but does not exist, surely. Or barely, hereby, in the form of the most improbable signature. (Derrida 1982, 329)

[5] Letters in Joyce have often a metonymical function, as if they were a reproduction of the text in a smaller scale. See for instance letter/mamafesta in *Finnegans Wake*.

[6] Notably Joyce declared that he wrote "Ithaca" in the "form of mathematical cathechism" (Ellmann 1982, 501).

Provocatively Derrida closes his essay with his own signature followed by a full stop. By contrast, Joyce leaves the letter incomplete because there can be no reconciliation between the I/*eye*, between the outer gaze and the subjective perspective of reality. The "I" loses himself/herself in the *eye*, the points of view clash. At the same time the reader is invited to enter and escape narration, to see the events from the inside, from the character's mind, and to abandon them, in favour of a more detached point of view. The private writing between a daughter and her father is presented as a specimen of a writing exercise. Her emotions are objectified and translated into barely meaningful alphabetical signs described by the narrator's inquisitive gaze. The reader is on the threshold between the "I" and the *eye*, forced to unravel an impossible double bind, which does not admit any solutions. The more the reader tries to overcome the gap between the "I" and the *eye* the more the text loses its coherence and sense.

Likewise, in Nabokov's novel the reader is first led to follow the "I", to enter his mind and see everything from his own point of view. Then, the "I" turns into the *eye*, a disembodied gaze deprived of any identifiable subjectivity, which through a series of textual mirrors, reflects reality in what apparently seems an objective way. As the story goes on, the fracture between the "I"/*eye* becomes deeper and deeper because, in a sort of meiotic recombination, the "I"/Smurov divides and replicates himself into an infinite number of other subjectivities ready to take his place. Once again the reader is invited to unravel this double bind, to reconcile the "I" with the *eye*, and once again such an unravelling proves to be impossible. Nabokov's story inscribes itself precisely in the fissure produced by the semantic slip between the "I"/eye, stemming and growing from it. Analogously to Milly's letter, *The Eye* presents no closure and the reader is left with Smurov's address to some "cruel, smug people…", who doubt about his final epiphany:

> the only happiness in this world is to observe, to spy, to watch, to scrutinize oneself and others, to be nothing but a big, slightly vitreous, somewhat bloodshot, unblinking eye. (103)

It is not difficult to recognize in those "suspicious people" the reader(s), who is/are invited to share in the voyeuristic pleasure of the gaze all its possible articulations.[7] The gaze here functions as a subtle scrutiny of the events from a distance. After all, according to Nabokov, the reader's task is first and foremost to disclose and admire the wonder of the author's creation. Both Joyce and Nabokov deny the reader a reassuring "full stop", ironically longed for by Derrida, and leave their novels in tension, as if they were a textual machine ready to generate new stories. Here the ellipsis at the "end" of

[7] "Observe", "spy", "watch" and "scrutinize" are only an example of the conspicuous use of verbs related to sight in the novel.

The Eye and the "no stop" at the end of Milly's letter aim to produce a continual textual parthenogenesis, which is crucial to both Joyce's and Nabokov's writing.

Incoherent Transactions: *Finnigan's Wake*[8]

Nabokov refers to *Finnegans Wake* as "a formless and dull mass of phony folklore, a cold pudding of a book, a persistent snore in the next room, most aggravating to the insomniac I am" (Nabokov 1990, 71). Hence, it will not come as a surprise that in response to Alfred Appel's question about a textual convergence between *Finnegans Wake* and *Pale Fire,*[9] he answered quite peremptorily that Joyce's last novel "has no inner connection with *Pale Fire*" (Nabokov 1990, 74).

Such a firm judgment might discourage one from speculating about a dialogic tension between *Finnegans Wake* and *Pale Fire*. Yet, I do not think that this issue can be so easily dismissed. After all, Nabokov truly believed Joyce to be a genius:[10] for him the Irish writer's works were a challenge as well as a significant source of inspiration. In *Pale Fire,* for instance, this is particularly apparent in Nabokov's treatment of Kinbote's commentary, which from both a narrative and a linguistic point of view can be associated to the beguiling narratives of the *Wake.*

Indeed, rather than being a formal critical apparatus,[11] as one would expect it to be, Kinbote's commentary is a formidable work of imagination which parasitically draws life from the dissected main text, whose broken sentences and words are recycled for a different narrative. Even the title is reversed and anatomized in Kinbote's coercive appropriation of "Pale Fire", reappearing above the textual surface as "wavelets of fire" and "pale and phosphorescent hints" (297). Thus, Kinbote's contribution turns into a whirlpool of "contrapuntal" translations of images and echoes, partly belonging to his own existential experience and partly to Shade's.

It is remarkable that, precisely during this activity of sorting out the threads of his rhizomatic web of (non)sense, Kinbote should recall to his mind Joyce's last novel:

> Of course it would be unseemingly for a monarch to appear in the robes of learning at a university lectern and present to rosy youths Finnigan's Wake [sic] as a monstrous extension of Angus MacDiarmid's "incoherent transactions" and of Southey's LingoGrande ("Dear Stumparumper", etc). (Nabokov 1962, 76)

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[8] A more extensive version of this section has already been published in Volpone 2009.

[9] Appel questioned the analogies between the *Wake*'s fifth chapter, devoted to Anna Livia's mamafesta, and *Pale Fire,* since for Appel, that particular chapter of the *Wake* is very close in spirit to Nabokov's novel (Appel 1967, 137).

[10] This is what he declared in an interview with James Mossman at the BBC (4 October, 1969).

[11] Kinbote dismisses these kinds of studies by defining them as "nonsense" or as something "aside from the veritable clarion of internal evidence" and the like.

The passage refers to King Charles' passion for literature. Disguised in his physical appearance and under false identity (according to Kinbote, it would be inconvenient for a King to work at a university), he becomes an esteemed professor who lectures on *Finnegans Wake*.[12] Here, Joyce's novel is related to Angus MacDiarmid, a champion of Scottish folklore and culture, author of *A Description of the Beauties of Edinample and Lochearnhead* (1815) written in a somewhat broken and clumsy English, and to the romantic poet Robert Southey, in this case mentioned more for his love of riddles, puns and nursery rhymes than for his poems. Unequivocally, Nabokov aims to emphasize the extreme linguistic experimentation and parody offered by these authors. In a single annotation, he conflates Joyce, MacDiarmid and Southey as the ultimate paradigm of linguistic nonsense and distortion.

As for Angus MacDiarmid, Nabokov seems to refer to the Scottish antiquary and journalist Robert Scott Fittis who, in *Sports and Pastimes of Scotland Historically Illustrated*, describes him as follows:

> He appears to have acquired just sufficient knowledge of the English language to enable him to use an English dictionary, from the study of which his untutored mind formed an extraordinary style of composition. The Description was reprinted at Aberfeldy in 1841, and again in 1876, and is altogether unique as the production of an untaught Highlander striving to express his thoughts in literary English. A copy of the first edition apparently fell into the hands of Robert Southey, who quoted and laughed over one of its queer phrases "men of incoherent transactions". (47)

As a humorous and witty intellectual, Robert Southey was amused by MacDiarmid's "queer language" which evoked his word-games and jokes. In particular, Kinbote's allusion to the "Lingo Grande" refers to a sort of linguistic game played between Robert and his sister-in-law, Sarah Fricker, the wife of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Sarah had invented a language, "Lingo Grande", as her family called it, which she spoke with her friends and children. According to Molly Lefebure, "the fullest surviving account which we have of this language occurs in a letter from Southey to [his friend] Grosvenor

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[12] In the current Vintage International Edition of the book, *Finnegans Wake* is spelled "Finnigan's Wake." Other editions of the novel carry the same misspelling, while in the Penguin Classics (and in more recent American editions) the novel's title is correctly spelled. Ironically, such a mistake has been inherited by the translations of *Pale Fire* as well. In particular, Richard Zahnhausen has noticed that in the "Afterward" to the German translation, Andrew Field has ascribed the misprint to Kinbote, as another proof of his mediocre literary culture. The question has been discussed in the on-line Nabokov forum, where some of the most prominent scholars have reached the conclusion that most likely it is a misprint; yet this explanation has not convinced the Nabokovian community and the debate is still on-going.

Bedford dated 14 September 1821" (Lefebure 1985, 82). The letter begins with "Dear Stumparumper", which is how Mrs. Coleridge addressed Bedford in her language.

Moreover, from 1814, Southey "began working on a book which he at first was tentatively calling 'Dr Dove' and ultimately was to publish as *The Doctor*, a tome of seven volumes, comprising collections of mottoes, anecdotes, fairy tales, nursery tales, social history, gossip, folklore and ballads, punning and play with words, attempts at serious etymology and essays on every subject under the sun" (Lefebure 1985, 80). Southey's work can be inscribed onto the literary tradition (inaugurated by Lawrence Sterne[13] and later developed by Lewis Carroll) devoted to systematically undermining narration in its deepest structure and seriously putting into question the effectiveness of linguistic communication.

In other words, Nabokov associates *Finnegans Wake* with two main literary traditions: "nonsense" and "regional literature". In this regard, both MacDiarmid's and Southey's stylistic devices might be considered to be excellent precursors of those employed by Joyce in the novel. Hence, it will not come as a surprise that Kinbote describes the *Wake* as a "monstrous extension" of MacDiarmid's and Southey's works. Nabokov is mocking what he believed was the total nonsense of Joyce's language as well as the audacity of his style in *Finnegans Wake*. As for MacDiarmid, in his genuine ignorance of the English language, he rendered his thoughts in an approximate prose form, including semantic slips, misquotations and decontextualized translations from Scottish. Such a peculiar use of language can be compared with Joyce's provocative attempts to show the unpredictable mechanisms of linguistic communication. Analogously, Southey's intentional deconstruction of language and grandiose project of *The Doctor* seem to anticipate the *Wake*. In his intention of producing an omni-comprehensive text that ranges from serious to humorous and encompasses all literary genres, Southey is creating a precedent for Joyce's novel. However, whereas the romantic poet needs six volumes to accomplish his project, Joyce encapsulates the wor(l)d in 628 pages.

Priscilla Meyer considers the reference to MacDiarmid a parody of the Scottish poet, James MacPherson. MacDiarmid was trying to establish a cultural and national tradition for Scotland just as Macpherson, in his eighteenth century forgery, was trying to affirm a specific literary and epic inheritance through the mysterious discovery of the ancient bard, Ossian.

Here Nabokov's description of the *Wake* as "a dull mass of phony folklore" or as "regional literature full of quaint old-timers and imitated pronunciation" (Nabokov 1990, 71) might be useful. Similarly to MacPherson, Joyce is (re)creating a national epic, intentionally forging a tradition that does not exist. From this perspective, the

[13] Southey considered himself the rightful heir of Lawrence Sterne, indeed he turned the tale *The Doctor* into a book with "much of Tristram Shandy about it." See Lefebure 1985.

Wake becomes for Kinbote the highest example of literary deceit, a model reference to make Zembla more tangible. Indeed, to turn his imaginary land into a real place, Kinbote needs to endow it with a national history, a culture and, of course, a language. Consequently, the very essence of his library is its Zemblan translations of the major achievements of western culture, *Finnegans Wake* included.

It is as if the books in the library were a draft copy of the original, a plagiarized and manipulated collection of the ideas that have contributed to the advancement of human knowledge. In this infinite catalogue, the *Wake*, with its overt plagiaristic nature, embodies the ultimate parody of this calculated forgery. The annotations and comments of Prof. Jones to the Tiberiast Duplex as a comic counterpart of *The Book of Kells* (from which the letter-mamafesta seems to derive), are a further extension of MacPherson's cooked up annotations to Ossian's Son of Fingal, echoed by Joyce in the very title of his novel.

Finally, the context in which Kinbote mentions *Finnegans Wake* deserves some attention. He lingers on a digression in the note to "crystal land" in line 12. In his reading, this expression might be an allusion to his "beloved Zembla". His painful exiled condition often leads him to misinterpret Shade's words as encrypted signs of his country. Thus, he argues that in the passage he is commenting on, the main subjects are exile and nostalgia. Recalling Joyce in this context is more than appropriate. Like Kinbote and, of course, Nabokov, he chose to leave his motherland and never return. Despite this drastic decision, we know that Joyce wrote only about Ireland and Dublin. As a matter of fact, Kinbote's pathological contextomy[14] and distorted interpretation turn Zembla into the center of Shade's poetical discourse.[15]

One cannot help but compare King Charles/Kinbote's lectures with Nabokov's. During his stay in America, Nabokov taught at Stanford University, Wellesley College, Harvard and Cornell. Posthumously his lecture notes on European and Russian literature were published under the titles *Lectures on Literature* (1980) and *Lectures on Russian Literature* (1981). In his famous course on the Masterpieces of European Fiction (Literature 311-12 delivered in 1954 at Cornell University), a prominent place was given to *Ulysses*, which Nabokov considered one of the greatest achievements of the twentieth century. It is quite ironic that Nabokov's fictional counterpart, King Charles/Kinbote, does not teach *Ulysses* but, rather, *Finnegans Wake*, as if the latter were more appropriate to a professor, who manifests signs of mental disorder.

Undoubtedly, the compelling linguistic experimentations of HCE's Wakease prefigure both Kinbote's dense Zemblan "heteroglossia and multi-languagedness" (Bakhtin 1981, 274) with its polysemic blending of Russian, English and other

[14] This expression refers to the practice of quoting out of context, whereby the meaning of a passage, removed from its original context, can be easily distorted and misinterpreted. See McGlone 2005.

[15] There are a number of episodes in the novel in which Kinbote argues that his Zembla is the subject-matter of the poem.

languages; as well as Hazel's peculiar use of "mirror words" or "twisted words" – as Shade would have it. For instance, in his comment to line 109 of "Pale Fire", Kinbote states that Shade's word "iridule" means "an iridiscent cloudlet, Zemblan muderperlwelk". Kinbote's Zemblan analogue is a compound word in which there are allusions to English, Russian and German (just to mention the most apparent languages). Indeed, "muderperlwelk" echoes the English expression, "mother of pearl welk" ("welk" being a particular kind of mollusk or shell), the Russian "perlmutr", and the German "perlmutter". Moreover, "welk" in German brings to mind both "welken", which means "withered" and "wolke", which means "cloud". Each of these references contributes both to the articulation of meaning and to the emergence of a *différance* between Shade's line and Kinbote's Zemblan version. The effect of the endless deferral of meaning, in the passage from one language to another, is even more dramatically intensified by Kinbote's attitude towards Shade's text. Like a virus, he creeps into the cracks of translation and the clefts of language to deconstruct Shade's poetic *imaginaire* and substitutes it with his own. The result is the kind of undecidable tension and infinite play of allusions that characterize the language of *Finnegans Wake*.

The analysis of the compound word "muttheringpot" (20.7) can serve both as an example of such a practice and as a meta-reflection on the use of languages in the *Wake*. Joyce employs this expression in the context devoted to cooking and communication. In this case, the very act of speaking/writing is analogous to the preparation of a dish. "Mutther" refers to German "Mutter", which means both "type mould" and "mother". It is women, and in particular mothers, who are traditionally associated with food and cooking, as it is to a feminine sphere that the notion of "native language" is metonymically referred in the expressions, "mother language" or "mother tongue". Furthermore, "muttheringpot" echoes the English "melting pot", "muttering" and "murmuring" as if communication were a long, continuous indistinct sound of blending languages, like the bubbling of a pot on the stove, a hidden message which becomes meaningful only if properly "cooked". It is a perspective that polyglot Nabokov seems to put into practice quite literally.

As for Hazel's private idiolect, again *Finnegans Wake* is a point of reference. Wordplays like "top" for "pot" or "redips" for "spider" could be easily added to the Wakean linguistic repertoire. Certainly Joyce's novel presents an abundant use of mirror words and metathesis. The acronyms used by the author to refer to his characters, ALP (Anna Livia Plurabelle) and HCE (Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker), are often written in reverse.[16] For example the first three letters of the term "echoland" (13.5) correspond to the initials HCE in reverse order, thus, "echo-land" can be also read as "HCE's land", i.e. Ireland. Sometimes Joyce uses palindromes (which are a particular kind of mirror words) as in the following question: "And shall not Babel be

[16] For the use of acronyms in *Finnegans Wake* see McHugh 1976.

with Lebab?" (258.11-12). Indeed not only is "Lebab" the reverse of "Babel" but it is also "a palindrome incorporating the Hebrew word for 'heart' (lebhabh), as well as a derivative of the Irish word leabhar, meaning 'book'" (Armand 2001). It follows that for Joyce, mirror words represent a formidable instrument for increasing the novel's semantic density. In Nabokov, they are a repetition on a smaller scale of the novel's main pattern which consists of an infinite play of reflections, reverse images and (a)symmetrical juxtapositions. After all, "Pale Fire" opens with the image of "a waxwing slain/by the false azure in the windowpane" (33).

To conclude, in such a complex hypersemiotic reference system, meaning is turned into the most visible effect of an "ongoing dynamism". Through the evocativeness of certain semantic nodes, as in the case of the passages on which I have just commented, in both novels the reader is brought to develop his own reference pattern according to his knowledge, competence and experience.

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