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Chess as Framework: The Rationale of Deception in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*

"Two— and only two— critical remarks really distress and anger me," Vladimir Nabokov writes in his notes for an unpublished second volume of his memoir *Speak, Memory*, "One is the accusation of my liking or loving 'to pull the reader's leg'; the other is the bland assumption that I am a 'satirist,'" (de la Durantaye 156). Nabokov's rejecting of the satirist label seems well-founded: his writing is filled with wit but strays far from the parody and bitter sarcasm for which the genre of satire is known; what is more puzzling, however, is his similarly strong rebuke of the accusation that he loves "to pull the reader's leg." Deception, it would seem, manifests not only as a part but often as the heart of a Nabokov work. This rings especially true for his 1962 *Pale Fire*, a novel which, as philosopher Robert Adams bluntly put it, "at first glance, seems to be… in spite of itself," (Haegert 406).

Pale Fire, "Nabokov's most baffling and elusive book," (Haegert 409) takes the form of a scholarly edition built around "Pale Fire," a 999-line poem by John Francis Shade. Scholar Charles Kinbote provides the reader with a foreword before the poem and a section of commentary and an index after. This general content structure is standard for a

scholarly edition, but everything below the emboldened headers of “foreword,” “commentary,” and “index” is anything but scholarly.

In the sections of the book authored by Kinbote, his scholarly commentary appears not as just that but instead as an “elaborately prepared misreading of Shade’s poem,” (Haegert 405). The poem could roughly be described as one that concerns the themes of family, death, art, and especially time and aging, but Kinbote’s interpretations of Shade’s poem lead instead to a lengthy, convoluted, yet deeply imaginative and erudite meditation on Zembla, “a distant northern land,” (Nabokov 315). Kinbote’s Zemblan tale, “so choked with allusion and thickets of improbable possibles that it barely avoids referential mania, and welcomes milder forms of paranoia” (Purdy 395) is both an impressively creative and profoundly disruptive addition to an edition of a text that is, by its function, supposed to clarify. By all means, one might be correct to suggest that Nabokov’s deceiving begins not at the poem or foreword’s start but even earlier, at the Table of Contents. How can a conclusion of this kind be drawn on a relatively stable basis if Nabokov so rejects— indeed, is distressed and angered by— the suggestion that he likes to “pull the reader’s leg?”

To resolve this inquiry, one might suggest we ought to go to the source then, to Nabokov’s own elaborations on his authorial intents. Yet, our prospects of answering this question would be made fully hopeless with this route given Nabokov’s well-documented loyalty to dissimulation: in the same year as *Pale Fire*’s publication, for instance, when asked in an interview: “‘Would you like to talk about *Lolita*?’ Nabokov replied, ‘Well, no,’”

(de la Durantaye 104). Nonetheless, though this candid remark may accurately serve as a synecdoche of Nabokov's willingness to discuss his own writing, and thus get us no further at unraveling Nabokov's intended purpose of deception in *Pale Fire*, a personal matter which Nabokov *did* write extensively on and discuss at length were his chess problem compositions.

In this essay, I will argue that by looking at Nabokov's writing on chess, his own chess problem compositions, the "chess framework" which we can distill from these compositions, and the scholarly analyses thereof, we can rationalize the role of deceit in *Pale Fire*. Heeding the reflection of John Haegert that "instead of rendering its mystery more accessible, many of the supposed 'reconstructions' of *Pale Fire* have only reduced and simplified the power and complexity of Nabokov's masterful imaginative achievement," (407) I will not argue in this essay that *Pale Fire* is actually somehow a "chess novel," subliminally about chess, or has an underlying chess theme. My aim in considering *Pale Fire* through Nabokov's relationship to chess and his work as a chess-composer is specifically to demonstrate the rationale of deception in *Pale Fire*, though these reflections certainly may have further applications as well.

This demonstration will be arranged as follows: first, I will consider Nabokov's thoughts on and the scholarship concerning a widely celebrated chess problem he published in his memoir *Speak, Memory*; second, I will address how these considerations reveal and allow us to construct a "chess framework" by which to consider *Pale Fire* and

the deceit therein; third, I will discuss the individual component parts of a chess problem, such as chess pieces, and how these component parts can be thought of as analogous to content in literature; fourth, I will demonstrate how the relationship between the chess-composer and problem-solver is unique; fifth, I will analyze at length Nabokov's reflection on the "real clash" between the author and the reader; and finally, I will consider Nabokov's perspective on "narrative endings," as revealed through his writing on chess and as related to deception in *Pale Fire*.

Towards the end of his memoir, Nabokov published a chess problem that has since become his most widely admired. To him, it seems it was also most beloved, as he would later republish the problem to serve as the introduction to his 1970 *Poems and Problems*. Out of all Nabokov's chess compositions, it is this problem in particular which, scholars agree, most strikingly resembles the structure of *Pale Fire*. To begin our analysis of this chess composition, its connections to the role of deceit in *Pale Fire*, and, most critically, the "chess framework" it allows us to construct, an excellent place to start is the vivid (though lengthy) opening to it which Nabokov himself provides:

> I remember one particular problem I had been trying to compose for months. There came a night where I managed at last to express that particular theme. It was meant for the delectation of the very expert solver. The unsophisticated might miss the point of the problem entirely, and discover its fairly simple, "thetic" solution without having passed through the pleasurable torments prepared for the sophisticated one.

> The latter would start by falling for an illusory pattern of play based on a fashionable avant-garde theme, which the composer had taken the greatest pains to "plant." Having passed through this "antithetic" inferno the by now ultrasophisticated solver would reach the simple key move as somebody on a wild goose chase might go from Albany to New York by way of Vancouver, Eurasia, and the Azores. The pleasant experience of the roundabout route (strange landscapes, gongs, tigers, exotic customs, the thrice-repeated circuit of a newly married couple round the sacred fire of an earthen brazier) would amply reward him for *the misery of the deceit*, and after that, his arrival at the simple key move would provide him with a synthesis of poignant artistic delight. (Ackerley 88; emphasis mine)

Plainly put, the chess problem has a trap that, at first, appears as the obvious (albeit convoluted) solution. However, once this fails and the solver takes further account of not just the individual dynamics of each chess piece but the larger, cohesive whole of the entire problem, the true— actually quite simple though unorthodox— solution is revealed. Arriving at the solution to this chess problem demands, as Nabokov explicitly addresses in his opening to it, a journey through the “thetic,” “‘antithetic’ inferno,” and “synthesis of poignant artistic delight.” Here, Nabokov refers to the Hegelian dialectic model of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Nabokov’s employing of this method will serve as the foundation for our “chess framework” and is where we will now turn our attention.

The journey from false understanding to confusion and deception and, finally, to synthesis which the chess problem necessitates its solver must go on seems remarkably similar to Nabokov's fiction, "whether we push the chess-fiction comparison or not," (Purdy 381). Indeed, a connection between the now-described structure of this chess problem and the structure of *Pale Fire* would likely be plausible to any careful reader of the book. This "plausible" can turn into quite undeniable, though, if we make an effort to push the "chess-fiction comparison."

Consider, for instance, scholar Chris Ackerley's more elaborate, Nabokovian description of the solver's experience when challenged with this particular composition: "an apparent and teasing structure which the understanding can readily grasp; the awareness of a greater complexity as it is realized that the pattern given is incomplete, or deliberately misleading; and the need to arrive, having passed through the pleasurable torments of deceit, at the simple key move which resolves the problem," (103). This account is helpful for two primary reasons: for one, it highlights the "pleasurable torments of deceit" that are so integral to Nabokov's chess compositions and, of course, his literary works; for another, it refers to "the awareness of a greater complexity," which I take as a reference to the significance of the individual component parts of the chess problem which, only when fully considered, allow one to move from deceit to resolution. These more specific and less structural elements of the chess problem warrant our attention now that

the formal aspects of the composition have been addressed and the idea of a "chess framework" introduced.

The individual components of a chess problem can be thought of as analogous to content in literature. Each chess piece ("character") has an impact on the larger whole of the problem ("story") by introducing new information and complicating existing relationships. In an especially excellent chess problem, like the one we have been discussing from *Speak, Memory*, "each piece contributes to the dynamics of the whole," (Ackerley 90). Thus, each line of play in the chess problem "demands the solver's attention," (Gezari and Wimsatt 111) because each relationship expressed appears significant and perhaps necessary for arriving at a solution ("conclusion" / "end of the story"). In other words, the complicated relationships and at-times deceptive nature expressed through a well-designed chess problem are not wholly unlike how "in *Pale Fire*, Shade's poem and Kinbote's commentary question, undercut, and parody each other," (Gezari and Wimsatt 111) and, because of this intricate relationship, the text demands the reader's utmost focus. This undercutting, however, does not necessarily mean the eventual solution of a chess problem (or a story) is as complicated as the sum of the individual pieces of its content. In fact, "the actual mates which are achieved sometimes turn out to be less interesting than the intricate interweaving of… [the] lines of play," (Gezari and Wimsatt 111).

The proposal that the set-up of a chess problem is sometimes more deceiving than the true solution is, without doubt, demonstrated in Nabokov's composition and, arguably, its literary equivalent is also demonstrated in *Pale Fire*. In his chess composition, the relatively simple solution to the problem is veiled so well because the content of the composition— the complex dynamics and interactions of all the different chess pieces— "is in some immediate peril everywhere of being 'overstood'— rather than understood," (Haegert 409) and this risk of "overstanding" is no less severe in *Pale Fire* wherein "Kinbote's fantasy life is sufficiently rich and circumstantial that it is all too easy to overlook his primary function… that of reader and interpreter," (Haegert 414). Yet, with this proposal of "overstanding," we seem closer than ever before to enrolling in the "deception for deception's sake" school: being aware of the strategies which Nabokov uses to deceive may allow one to further elaborate on and analyze them, but it does not seem to go as far as to rationalize them. In the context of chess, where now can we turn to address the gap between awareness and rationality? With what happens *on* the chessboard now described at length, I suggest that we ought to explore what we can deduce from *off* the chessboard while still remaining as an observer in the parlor room: What can we make of the relationship between the chess-composer and the problem-solver? What were Nabokov's own views in this regard?

The relationship between the chess-composer and the problem-solver is a unique one and is also very distinct from the relationship between the players competing in a game

of chess. Whereas "chess games involve a contest between two opposed forces, White and Black," (Gezari, "Chess and Chess Problems" 48) and through this contest, one player is likely[1] to achieve victory and the other defeat, "the solver of a chess problem isn't meant to lose," (Gezari, "Chess Problems and Narrative Time" 153). Chess problems are essentially puzzles, wherein the emphasis lies on solving, not winning. This is because you functionally *cannot* win a chess problem. Instead, you aim to arrive at a solution within the constraints of the chessboard set-up and the instructions with which the composer provides you, *e.g.,* "White to play and mate in *x* moves." The closest the solver of a chess problem can get to defeat is simply not yet solving the puzzle, and I would confidently affirm that the difference between not-yet-solved and solved and defeat and victory is profound. Clearly then, the claim that "chess problems are a highly specialized aspect of chess whose composition and solution entail skills quite distinct from those of the game-player," (Johnson 282) is by all accounts reasonable. With this in mind, it would also be reasonable to deduce, I submit, that not only do chess problems entail skills distinct from those engaged in a competition of chess, but also chess problems can produce power dynamics distinct from standard chess games. This latter fact is one Nabokov appeared to be aware

[1] Here, I mean to account for the prospect of a draw. Although draws are actually the most common endgame result in the highest level of professional chess play and, of course, a draw is the result of both chess games played in *Pale Fire* (Sybil versus Shade and Kinbote versus Shade), draws are more nuanced than a clear win or loss, are not generally what one thinks of when contemplating the ultimate result of a chess game, and, in my view, less exemplify the chess-composer/writer and problem-solver/reader relationship I aim to highlight here. Even then, there is certainly something to be said about how Nabokov has written both chess games in *Pale Fire* to end in draws, though I do not have space to address that fully in this essay.

of, in the sense that he seemingly manipulated the powers vested in him as a chess composer to produce unusually complicated chess problems in which deceit is embedded and unorthodox solutions required. The unique control a chess-composer has over his composition and, specifically, the way Nabokov wielded this power is what I will address now, given that the distinct relationship between the chess-composer and problem-solver (as opposed to game-players) has been established.

"It should be understood that competition in chess problems is not really between White and Black," Nabokov writes in *Speak, Memory*, "but between the composer and the solver (just as in a first-rate work of fiction the real clash is not between the characters but between the author and the world[2])…" (Gezari and Wimsatt 106). Nabokov's reflection here proves significant as it suggests that a condition for a work of fiction to be "first-rate" is that within it, there must exist a "real clash" between "the author and the reader." I do not aim to justify this position but instead make a genuine effort to highlight it because it is precisely thoughts like this that Nabokov was willing to share regarding his chess compositions— but often not in regard to his literature— that confirm our ultimate inquiry— that is, how chess helps us unravel deception in *Pale Fire*— is a worthwhile pursuit. In recognition of the fact that Nabokov himself is the one drawing the chess-fiction comparison here, the remaining aspects of this reflection that deserve our attention are: one, what is the "real clash"; two,

[2] In a 1971 interview, when asked about this quote, Nabokov amended it slightly in saying "I believe I said 'between the author and the reader,'" (Ackerley 94). Seeing as how this amendment is what Nabokov initially intended to say and also makes the quote connect to my argument even more explicitly, my analysis is written with respect to this later clarification.

how is it achieved; and three, why might Nabokov hold in such high regard this so-called "real clash"?

For one, the "real clash" to which Nabokov alludes seems to represent the struggle the solver of a challenging chess problem must undergo as they develop a solution. In other terms, the "real clash" appears to be analogous to the "'antithetic' inferno"; the necessary but miserable stage of deceit a solver (or reader) is subjected to on their journey towards "a synthesis of poignant artistic delight." In my view, defining the "real clash" as such seems sensible, especially when we again consider that "a game [of chess] may cease to be interesting when the superior force of the White men makes it clear that a White victory is inevitable, but a [chess] problem transfers the interest from victory to how the solution is achieved," (Gezari, "Chess Problems and Narrative Time" 152). The "real clash" with which Nabokov is concerned is not one where victory is ultimately inevitable or literally fought over. Instead, the "real clash" is a conflict we enter knowing a solution is guaranteed. Thus, our interest is always focused on the development of that possible solution— even if that means engaging with and developing our solution amidst deception.

For two, Nabokov achieves the "real clash" he so desires— and thus subjects his solver (or, reader) to engage in the process of solution-finding— through varying methods[3] but, of course, the most effective and, perhaps, his most beloved, would be the embedding

[3] Other methods, besides deception, Nabokov use to achieve the "real clash" might include his excessive use of allusions, his layered wordplay and puns, or his rich and sensory-filled descriptions.

of deception in the very same envelope he hands over to his solver-to-be when he delivers his challenging chess composition (or novel). The most potent example of "the embedding of deception" in Nabokov's chess compositions I have thus far referenced would be the trap he designed and made as an essential element to his widely celebrated *Speak, Memory* chess problem.

Another point worth our consideration, insofar that Nabokov carefully designs the "real clashes" in his chess compositions (and, to a relevant extent, his fictions), is the earlier suggestion that chess problems can produce power dynamics distinct from standard chess games. "In [chess] problems," writes scholar D. Barton Johnson, "all pieces are in a sense pawns, for all moves are foreordained by the composer," (287). This is a critically important observation we cannot afford to overlook when addressing how Nabokov carefully crafts the "real clash": the toolbox belonging to the chess composer is a highly versatile one, and the mindful composer who aims to design a problem "meant for the delectation of the very expert solver" can do just that with incredible precision if they so desire. (Much like, for instance, a mindful and dynamic writer could produce a rather complicated novel filled with deceit that, ultimately, remains meaningful.)

Further still, the precision which the chess composer wields in the context of their compositions does not concern only the overall design of the problem, how complicated the problem is or if there are any traps, or the moves the composer anticipates the solver will

perform. The composer's precision can extend to and, perhaps, reflects most obviously in the particular chess pieces they include in their composition. In a more elaborate sense:

> In modern chess problems there is an economy which is not characteristic of chess games and an 'economy of complexity' that is characteristic of fine art… the problem, while it may not include all the kinds of pieces present in the game, enhances the differentiation of the chessmen by admitting precisely the amount of force proper and necessary to its given situation. (Gezari and Wimsatt 106)

As the composer, Nabokov is able to admit "precisely the amount of force proper and necessary" to achieve the "real clash" that he believes to be a condition for a first-rate problem (and for first-rate works of fiction).

For three, though Nabokov may have not specifically commented on the "why" as to his holding in such high regard the "real clash," it is an element of his chess compositions (and, by extension, his fictions) that he developed both consciously and meticulously to such a degree that it warrants, at the least, a hypothesis. Indeed, the "real clash" between the solver-and-composer or reader-and-writer, especially when this clash is informed through or by deception, is the element of Nabokov's works with which this essay is principally concerned, thus making the forming of a hypothesis on this matter all the more significant. I propose that we can form a hypothesis as to why Nabokov values the "real clash" to such an extent via two sources: first, a discussion of what the challenge presented

by the “real clash” means for Nabokov’s aesthetic; and second, Nabokov’s own perspectives on narrative endings.

To the first source, Nabokov’s belief that the so-called “pleasurable torments,” an equally remarkable and peculiar dichotomy, take shape when he deploys the “real clash” in his chess compositions (or, perhaps, his fictions) ought to be addressed. As we have established, the “real clash” is analogous to the “‘antithetic’ inferno.” Thus, it would stand to reason that although the “real clash” can result in the problem-solver falling for “illusory patterns,” being subjected to frustrating levels of deceit, and embarking upon “wild goose chases,” it is precisely through overcoming this methodological madness which produces “pleasurable torments” for the solver. In fact, it seems that the “real clash” is specifically the “inferno” aspect that characterizes the antithesis stage of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis model. Ultimately, then, I posit the cause that allows a solver’s (or reader’s) experience to transform from just plain, frustrating torments to “pleasurable torments” is directly associated with that solver’s (or reader’s) overcoming the challenge of the “real clash” between themselves and the author (or composer). With this transformation now accounted for, let us address how it impacts Nabokov’s aesthetic.

A defining quality of Nabokov’s aesthetic, I suggest, is the tension a solver (or reader) undergoes as they approach and have their solving (or reading) experience transformed by the “pleasurable torments” which Nabokov had taken the greatest pains to “plant.” Interestingly, this acute tension is felt by the solver (or reader) while searching for

a solution despite the insurance, as discussed previously, that Nabokov's careful design will inevitably reveal a solution if only we can remain focused on trying to find it. In other words, although "the reader, like the solver, is not expected to 'lose' in this competition… Nabokov's aesthetic places some stress on the difficulty of the struggle and on a proportionate relationship between difficulty and genuine satisfaction," (Gezari and Wimsatt 115). This calculation "between difficulty and genuine satisfaction" proves to be both an intriguing and purposeful calculation from the mind of Nabokov. Yet, it is also a profoundly complicated calculation that, perhaps, also manifests as a "pulling of the reader's leg." I would suggest that we again must avoid enrolling in the "deception for deception's sake" school: we instead ought to now question further. Why has Nabokov gone through all this trouble to craft difficulty? How can we rationalize this difficulty— the myriad forces of deceit competing for the reader's (or solver's) attention— within a "chess framework"? With this line of inquiry, Nabokov's own perspectives on narrative endings can enhance our understanding and analysis.

So, to the second source, regarding Nabokov's perspectives on narrative endings, he writes in *Speak, Memory* when ruminating further on his admired chess composition: "As Sartre and Benjamin compellingly argued, [a] narrative must tend towards its end, seek illumination in its own death. Yet this must be the right death, the correct end. The complication of the *detour* is related to the danger of short-circuit: the danger of reaching the end too quickly, of achieving the im-proper death," (Gezari, "Chess Problems and

Narrative Time" 156). This quote offers us desperately needed ammunition to address not only the rationale of why Nabokov might hold in such high regard the so-called "real clash" but also gives us a specific datum on which we can branch off from to do good on our ambition of rationalizing the role of deceit in *Pale Fire* by considering, in this case, Nabokov's writing on chess. Therefore, I will now consider how Nabokov's remark might inform his holding in such high regard the "real clash" and also how the "detour" aspect of this remark elucidates the purposeful role which deception plays in *Pale Fire*, thus moving our focus back more explicitly towards our primary concern of how chess helps us unravel deception in the novel.

For our first consideration of Nabokov's remark, his belief that there is a "right death" distinct from an "im-proper death," as opposed to an all-encompassing, unmodified death— a death that is neither good nor bad, nor right nor improper, but simply the end of a narrative or the end of a life— suggests a rationale as to why he might hold in such high regard the "real clash." In my view, it also puts a definitive end to the suggestion that, within *Pale Fire*, deception exists for deception's sake. It seems that Nabokov's rumination suggests a desire to, on the surface, design and expand the meaning of the stages of narrative and, in a deeper, less obvious way, design and expand the meaning produced by the reader's own engagement with his novels (or his chess compositions). As far as the surface level is concerned, it proves unsurprising that a writer as careful and erudite as Nabokov would want his overall narrative arcs to be designed in such a way that, at their

end, they seem complete and satisfying. It may be a little more interesting that Nabokov claims that the narrative— in its totality— "must tend towards its end," but this still is not too extraordinary given Nabokov's thorough approach to the craft of writing. Nevertheless, what could be categorized as notable, or even extraordinary, would be Nabokov's claiming that a narrative must "seek illumination in its own death."

A narrative whose ending is good is not good enough for Nabokov. No, not at all: it would appear that, for Nabokov, a narrative's end is correctly written only when it is, at a minimum, intellectually engaging, enlightening, and maybe even challenging. Therefore, if a condition for a work of fiction to be "first-rate" is that within it there must exist a "real clash" between "the author and the reader," then it would be through the additional condition of the narrative seeking "illumination in its own death" that would satisfy the "real clash." This is because inherent in the narrative's "illumination in its own death" would be the "detour": the carefully designed, challenging and thought-provoking, deception-filled, yet ultimately solvable problem that Nabokov painstakingly creates and embeds into his craft. In other words, the "detour" serves as the instigator of the "real clash," and it is precisely the notion of the "detour" that can finally give us a useful answer as to why Nabokov holds in such high regards the "real clash." The notion of the "detour" also proves significant as it seems to inform Nabokov's use of deceit in *Pale Fire*.

A synthesis of all the different strands of information we have been discussing at length might read like such: for a work of fiction to be "first-rate," there must exist within it

a "real clash" ("between the author and the reader"); this "real clash" is achieved through the narrative's seeking "illumination in its own death" because for a narrative to have "illumination in its own death," there must exist within the work of fiction a deceptive "detour" devised by the author, such that the reader does not reach the narrative's end too quickly and risk making its solution or the experience of arriving at that solution less meaningful ("the danger of short-circuiting").[4]

Nabokov's work— be it either his chess compositions or his novels— is undeniably challenging. I would concede that, at times, it can even prove highly frustrating. However, with this point conceded, the synthesis outlined above demonstrates the challenges Nabokov designs for his chess compositions and novels are not without method. Indeed, they appear to be generated from Nabokov's belief that their inclusion will produce not only a more complicated narrative but also a more meaningful one for his readers. Therefore, Nabokov holds the so-called "real clash" in such high regard because if he does not design and embed it properly, it could render his challenge less meaningful, flat-out impossible to overcome, or unimpressively trivial. Simply put, it seems that Nabokov does

[4] A logical diagrammatic representation of this synthesis could appear as follows: $(f \leftrightarrow c \leftrightarrow n \leftrightarrow d) \ \& \ (\neg s)$. In this logical equation, the variable *f* represents the "first-rate" work of fiction, the variable *c* represents the "real clash," the variable *n* represents the narrative's seeking "illumination in its own death," the variable *d* represents the "detour," and the variable *s* represents the dangerous "short-circuit." The symbol ↔ represents "if and only if," the symbol & represents "and," and the symbol ¬ represents "not." This isn't properly written in formal logic, nor does it have to be. This is an English essay, after all! Even then, this diagram can (hopefully) prove useful for two reasons. One, the concepts I am discussing are slightly convoluted by nature, so if my written synthesis didn't clarify for my reader, perhaps this will. Two, it demonstrates on a microscale how remarkably interconnected and thoroughly designed all the different elements of Nabokov's narrative are. (To be clear, this interconnectedness is demonstrated through the biconditional "if and only if" statements; that is, *f* can only be true if and only if *c* is true and *c* can only be true if and only if *n* is true… and so on, so forth.)

not mind subjecting his readers (or chess problem solvers) to complexity because this complexity is not produced— nor does it exist— in a vacuum; instead, it is a byproduct of his developing a sophisticated and deceptive "detour" to satisfy the "real clash" and, thus, ensuring that his work, be it fiction or chess compositions, is first-rate.

Consequently, of all Nabokov's writing on chess discussed herein, it is the notion of the "detour" that most persuasively allows us to rationalize the role of deceit in *Pale Fire*. Nevertheless, this is not the only notion that furthers our efforts to rationalize Nabokov's allegiance to deception: we have also given attention to his widely celebrated and frequently discussed *Speak, Memory* chess composition; the "chess framework" as elaborated in the aforementioned problem and as clarified through the structure of thesis-antithesis-synthesis; the individual component parts of his chess problems and how, when fully considered, these parts allow one to move from deceit to resolution; and the unique relationship between the chess-composer and problem-solver, with particular focus towards how Nabokov wielded his power as a chess-composer to design the "real clash."

How readers and scholars interpret the meaning of deception within *Pale Fire* is, of course, still up for debate and not the primary consideration of this essay. Why Nabokov crafts deceit to be such an integral aspect of *Pale Fire* and the ultimate role it plays, however, is our paramount concern, and it is my view that, as demonstrated, we can uncover enduring answers to this posed "why." So, no: Nabokov does not love "to pull the reader's leg"; undoubtedly, however, to provide a more accurate idiom, he does love "to

beat the reader's brain out." With this said, though, the mental effort Nabokov subjects his readers to endure is most certainly not for its own sake and definitely not in vain. Instead, the role of deceit in *Pale Fire* and Nabokov's desire to integrate it so fully seems quite rational when we consider Nabokov's relationship to chess and his work as a chess-composer: if deception is integrated in a thorough, thoughtful, and unique way, it provides a more intellectually engaging, memorable, and, overall, meaningful reading experience—at least in Nabokov's view. And, for better or worse, it is Nabokov's view that matters most because it is he who has the last word.

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