

The mirror contract : the dialogic function of the mirror motif in Nabokov's despair and Mishima's Forbidden Colors

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THE MIRROR CONTRACT:
THE DIALOGIC FUNCTION OF THE MIRROR MOTIF
IN NABOKOV'S *DESPAIR* AND MISHIMA'S *FORBIDDEN COLORS*

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Vladimir Nabokov's *Despair* (composed originally in Russian in Berlin, 1932)¹, works out the metafictional possibilities of the double and parodies the Narcissus myth to express his view of art. Yukio Mishima's *Forbidden Colors* (written in 1952 to 1953)² shows a similar focus on the double and the problem of authorial manipulation of a character. The protagonists of both works are novelists and therefore author-character. In both works, the author-character tries to cope with reality by taking over the autonomy of another character, his double and the "subject" of his portrayal. This imposition of one's subjectivity upon another individual's identity can be called an "engulfment" and is either an overt or subversive manipulation of the will and action of the "subject." Both writers pursue the problem that ensues: the double begins to resist his author and struggles to regain his autonomy. The mirror, out of which the author-character's double steps out, is a key motif for their novels' monologic or dialogic function. The mirror indicates their awareness of the subversive power of a solipsistic mind, and on another level the risks of monologic fiction — the kind of fiction which does not allow a dynamic Bakhtinian dialogue. This paper will explore the extent of dialogic discourse in Nabokov's and Mishima's treatment of the Narcissus myth in order to clarify Nabokov's aesthetics in contrast to Mishima's.

The two works show that Nabokov and Mishima differ in a crucial point. Nabokov has become well known as a metafictional author³ who wrote "dialogic" novels. Mikhail Bakhtin defined fiction as an interplay of dialogic "voices." By "dialogic" fiction Bakhtin means

those novels that introduce a semantic direction into the word which is diametrically opposed to its original direction. . . . the word becomes the arena of conflict between two voices. (Bakhtin 106)

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On the level of textual dialogue, the opposite semantic direction is introduced by parodies of other texts. For example, what one former author of the realistic school meant by a word such as "mirror" (as a faithful reflection of reality) gains an opposite meaning (as a distortion of reality) by parodic treatment. This means that a straightforward presentation of reality in any parodic context becomes impossible. Nabokov, often called a "deceptive" writer who enjoys playing tricks on his reader, has been reassessed since the 1980s as a forerunner of self-conscious metafiction who uses parody in order to seek a new relationship between the author and his fictional world. Patricia Waugh defines the Bakhtinian concept of realism as follows:

Realism, often regarded as the classic fictional mode, paradoxically functions by suppressing this dialogue. The conflict of languages and voices is apparently resolved in realistic fiction through their subordination to the dominant 'voice' of the omniscient, godlike author. Novels which Bakhtin refers to as "dialogic" resist such resolution. Metafiction displays and rejoices in the impossibility of such a resolution and thus clearly reveals the basic identity of the novel as genre. (Waugh 6)

We can apply the idea of Bakhtin's "dialogic voices" not only on the textual level of parody but also on character relationships. We can see a direct contrast in how Nabokov and Mishima see authorial manipulation. Mishima is self-conscious about himself as a writer but unlike Nabokov, Mishima never intrudes in his own novels. There are no Nabokovian figures, such as "the Russian author in the neighborhood" to whom Hermann decides to entrust his manuscripts in *Despair*, or that invisible author whose characters V at last realizes both his brother Sebastian and he might be at the conclusion of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941). In *Forbidden Colors*, the power-play of authorial manipulation is enacted only within the frame of Mishima's novel, without any metafictional permeations with the world of reality outside the fiction where both the real author and his reader exist. Therefore, his fiction cannot be called "self-conscious" in the sense of what a metafictional novel is. However, Mishima can be called an "intertextual" author. He used parody to build a dialogic interchange within the confines of his novel.

Both *Despair* and *Forbidden Colors* see a parallel between the conflict of the writer and the subject and the observer and the observed. The observer is an artist attempting to portray the observed, and the act of seeing is treated as an aggressive invasion of another's being. However, since the seer can impose his own subjectivity upon the seen, which implies that the act is a self-reflection as in looking into a mirror, the act of seeing can also be reversed. As one looks, one's reflection also looks back. In both works, because the observed "subject" is a living person, he reacts by taking his own initiative and doing his

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own "observation." Thus, there arises a conflict between the author and his character, or Narcissus and his reflection.

Although Nabokov and Mishima have no biographical connection to each other and no mutual influence⁴, they are both artists dedicated to their craft, to the precision of words.⁵ They share the same interest in the phenomenon that the mirror presented to Narcissus in the Greek myth. Their particular rendering of the myth suggests that art — "the mirror held up to nature" venerated by realistic writers — no longer imitates faithfully; it distorts, deceives, and sometimes kills. The mirror is therefore a significant motif in Nabokov and Mishima in determining the dialogic nature of their work.

Parodies are like distorting mirrors. They transform the original into new shapes, give a new rendering to familiar, accepted texts. Both *Despair* and *Forbidden Colors* are built on the basic parody of Dostoevsky's *The Double* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Both authors were familiar with these works although Mishima borrows more heavily from Wilde by comparison. They fill their novels with intertextual transformations of these texts.

Intertextuality, as Julia Kristeva coined the term, observes an essential characteristic of contemporary self-conscious fiction that "every text is built as a mosaic of citations, every text is the absorption and transformation of another text" (440-41). As Foster observed, Nabokov absorbs and transforms into *Despair* the fear of engulfment and increasing madness found in Dostoevsky's *The Double*, which is a classic example of intertextuality in that it is a parody of Gogol's "Diary of a Madman" (Foster 95, 107). Nabokov's *Despair* constructs a paradigm of Nabokov, the author, creating Hermann, the author-character, who tries to create Felix, the victim-double character in descending concentric circles of manipulative power. The intertextuality of *Despair*, parodying Dostoevsky, who parodied Gogol, all parodying the Narcissus myth, go on in endless concentric "dialogic" reflections. Besides Dostoevsky, *Despair* contains parodies of the detective novels of Conan Doyle, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, and the Joycean concept of "God-Dog" image of the artist. The parodic reverberations of the Narcissus paradigm create what Bakhtin called the "polyphonic" effect (Bakhtin 15). The result is an extremely complex irony, clearly convincing us of the failure of art attempted by a narcissistic artist, and concludes with the triumph of the arch-artist, Nabokov.

Dostoevsky's *The Double* provides both novels with the psychological conflict between the self and the sudden appearance of a double who eventually usurps the protagonist's identity entirely. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* provides both novelists with Wilde's parody of the Narcissus myth with the mirror-like device, a portrait created by a true artist, Basil Hallward. He instills the portrait with Dorian's soul. Basil recognized the perfect unity of body and soul in the beautiful, unblemished youth, and says, "Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter . . . It is not he who is reveal

ed by the painter, it is rather the painter who . . . reveals himself" (Wilde 23). Lord Henry Wotton, the decadent aesthete and aristocrat, voices his opposition: "An artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them" (29). These two views of "life" and "art" are the polarities upon which Mishima and Nabokov develop their aesthetics in their novels.

The characters of Nabokov and Mishima are allowed dialogic discourse in varying degrees of freedom. The central conflict occurs between the author-character and his double on the issues of their autonomy and life-art dichotomy. The mirror between these characters therefore becomes the instrument that can either subordinate the created being to the dominant voice of the author or liberate him and give him a voice of his own.

The myth of Narcissus provides the basic paradigm for the tragic fate of the ambitious author-character Hermann Karlovich and Shunsuke Hinoki. The paradigm of the Narcissus myth consists of three elements: Narcissus, his reflection, and Echo. Narcissus falls in love with his image in the water. This shows that he has been ignorant of his own identity, for he wonders who the beautiful youth is, and, in one of the most popular versions, despairing of fulfillment of his love, he falls into the water to his death, leaving the maiden Echo to pine away her life in eternally unrequited repetition. A double is born in the fluid water, unacknowledged by the original and therefore fluid in identity and a potential threat to the original's autonomy because he has all the abilities of the original without the latter's responsibility for his actions. The Echo-like woman, the third element in the Narcissus-myth paradigm, is the victim of this split since the double has stolen her place in the attention of Narcissus. Her love is never returned because the self-love of Narcissus is solipsistic and sterile. Moreover, bereft of the power of self-expression, she is doomed to echo other voices forever.

The Bakhtinian implications of this myth become apparent. If mirrors are used to subordinate the reflection, they, like echoes, only produce repetitions, not fruitful dialogic interplay of voices. In fact, instead of yielding the truth according to nature, mirrors can become a trap for the narcissistic beholder. He will not learn; he will see only what he wants to see. Self-love is sterile and destructive in that the person entrapped ceases to develop. He isolates himself from the Bakhtinian "dialogic" relationship to words. He hears merely echoes of his own voice. In this sense, the situation of Hermann and Shunsuke suggests another shared mythical paradigm: the myth of Medusa. Perseus, when defeating Medusa, uses his shield as a mirror. Medusa is petrified by beholding her own image. Seeing is an act of aggression in the parodic meaning of the mirror used by both Nabokov and Mishima, and the mirror therefore petrifies Narcissus.

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Forbidden Colors

Perhaps more than any other Japanese contemporary, Mishima was obsessed with the problem of disunity. It forms the basic structure of his fiction by presenting the violent conflict between the intellect and the body. Otto Rank's explanation of the evolution of the double in myth⁶ sheds light on the phenomenon of the double theme in modern literature, but not on the aesthetic reasons for a specific writer like Mishima or Nabokov for addressing themselves to this dialectically-structured theme. Consequently, paradox increasingly underlies his themes and characterizations in his literary career, and even his private life.⁷

The paradox of Mishima's life consists, as he said in *Sun and Steel* (Kodansha, 1968), of the "language of the mind" and the "language of the flesh." The first is the Charybdis of his over-sensitive, self-conscious imagination; the second is the Scylla of immobilizing fact, time and reality, which brought a tremendous sense of alienation. As Mishima confesses, it was his unique misfortune that he first became conscious of life through the "language of the mind." After he wrote *Confessions of a Mask*, Mishima felt at last free of his abundant self-consciousness.⁸ But the "language of the flesh," which ordinary children usually learn first, never became his mother tongue. It was learned self-consciously after he discovered its existence in the trip he took around the world immediately after he finished writing the first part of *Forbidden Colors*. It was only when he began to cultivate body-building and physicality in his thirties that he himself was able to master the "language of the flesh."

In Mishima's dialectic view of the mind and the body, living meant shutting one's eyes to one or the other. The novelist, in order to construct himself by the words of the mind therefore cannot commit himself to life of the flesh; he is incapable of involvement. In other words, life and art are mutually exclusive, and Mishima finds, in the course of his life, a way to rebuild his identity by the artificial power of his art. Mishima's aesthetic is therefore close to the art-for-art's sake writers like Oscar Wilde. In fact, Mishima has often been likened to the decadents. Nabokov, however, negates that dialectic. According to his biographer Brian Boyd, "Nabokov believed in art for *life's sake*" (10, italics original).

Mishima says in "What Is a Novel?" that the novelist sees no difference between his relationship to his internal self and to external life (225). Mishima believed that subjectivity was all for the artist. Mishima called the internal self the "world of expression" — the world of the mind — and the external life "the world of action" — the world of the flesh. Being alive meant, for Mishima's dialectic view of the mind and the body, shutting one's eyes to one or the other. The novelist, in order to construct himself by the words of the mind therefore cannot commit himself to life of the flesh; he is incapable of involvement ("What Is a Novel?" 225). In other words, life and art are mutually exclusive.

Forbidden Colors is a key novel in Mishima's writing career. His decadent -aesthetic poses gave way to a more self -disciplined, dry self -irony after he finished Part I and took his first trip abroad from December 1951 to May 1952 (Ando 142, 149). This change may also be due to the fact that he had become more mature as a writer and that much of his post -war disillusionment had been overcome. At any rate, contrary to common public opinion, Mishima's change was neither instantaneous nor unexpected. Given Mishima's tendency to impose his will on reality, we could even say that he willed his change and saw in the countries he visited what he wanted to see. Before his departure for his five -month trip around the world, Mishima wrote, "I have indulged my sensitivity too extravagantly until now. On this trip abroad I shall take only little money with me, but hope largely to expend this sensitivity of mine before I return" (Nathan 111). As he expected, he succeeded in discovering the world of the flesh. He wrote in "My Wandering Years,"

As we came nearer to Hawaii, the sun became brighter. . . I felt as though I had crawled out of a dark cave and seen the sun for the first time. . . . And I began thinking of making myself anew. . . . Part II of *Forbidden Colors*, which I wrote after my return, is completely different from Part I. I began to write at a slower pace, and as the pace slowed down, I felt I was also growing. (403-4, translation and ellipses mine)

The "change" Mishima underwent was to what he called a "classicism." In an interesting essay written in July 1951 entitled "New Classicism," he defines the essence of classicism to be the ability to distinguish disparities.

Men resemble each other, but are not the same. The fact that the power to discover a new species of men resides only in men is, we must say, irrational. That is, man merely discovers a new species among the yet unknown elements within himself. An objectively discovered new species is impossible among men. . . . The reason for this is that, if, let us say, a new species of man did exist, and that a man discovered it, we can never call it a discovery. Discovery as an act is a right belonging to all men, and is a thing that is equal to all humanity. To discover means to be discovered. (*The Literary Life* 19-20)

Mishima propounds a view of man which is distinctly his own. By Mishima's characteristic paradox, the fact that to discover is to be discovered — to observe is to be observed — is the basic human condition. The mirror is an intrinsic part of existence.

Mishima started writing *Higyō* (meaning "secret pleasure"), the title of the second part of *Forbidden Colors*, beginning with Chapter 19 of the entire novel, immediately upon his

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return in May (Ando 150). The change in Mishima can be noticed in his emphatic admiration of the ancient Greek balance of the spirit and the flesh. References to Greek sculpture as admirable objects of art abound in Part II.

The Greeks had the rare power to look at internal beauty as if it were hewn from marble. Spirit was badly corrupted in later times, exalted through the action of lustless love, and smirched through the action of lustless loathing. (FC 282)

Mishima's portrayal of Shunsuke cannot be analyzed without considering the influence of these discoveries he made on this trip.

As if representing the earlier Mishima, Shunsuke, the protagonist and author-character of *Forbidden Colors*, personifies the "language of the mind." He is a materially successful novelist who faces a dead-end in his artistic talent and creates a tool for his revenge out of a living youth, Yuichi, who is a homosexual. This novel took Mishima further than any other work into the dark underworld of homosexuality. Its Japanese title, *Kinjiki*, or literally "forbidden colors," means the taboo of homosexuality. Yuichi is torn between the homosexual world and the world of art represented by his "author." According to Teiji Yoshimura, homosexuality, when it comes to the question of gaining individual identity, is seen as a sterile solipsistic relationship by Mishima (107). Shunsuke is one of the most self-conscious characters Mishima has ever created. He is a sixty-five-year-old novelist with a passion for vengeance against women whom he blames for having rejected him and excluded him from happiness. His narcissism is an excessive love of his art. He has a superabundant imagination, or what he calls the "spirit," which is the only beautiful part of an otherwise ugly, emaciated old man with a neuralgic knee, which he hates because its pain is a constant reminder of his body.

As we would expect, he is obsessed with mirrors. Mirrors in this novel tend to shut out reality. Shunsuke's subjectivity is a kind of mirror. So are words, which deceive, entrap and manipulate others. Distorting mirrors reside not only in Shunsuke, but also in the other puppeteer-like characters such as Kaburagi and his wife. They all attempt to manipulate Yuichi. The fact that characters are constantly looking into mirrors shows how self-conscious they are. The novel opens with a mirror situation, as Shunsuke looks at himself in a photograph on the cover of his newly published volume. In a long introductory passage with shifting viewpoints between Shunsuke and the omniscient narrator's dry comments, the old novelist's quality of mind is described: "There was something in the thinking of Shunsuke, in his attitude toward art and life, that persistently invited sterility" (FC 7). Shunsuke, like Mishima before his trip to the West, is deficient in objectivity because he hates the "naked truth to excess." The narrator analyzes Shunsuke's art:

This acute deficiency in objectivity, accompanied by clumsy, convulsive stabs at establishing a relationship between his inner world and that which lay outside it, imparted a certain freshness and naivete even to the works of his later years, but they took their toll. They took the strength from the very vitals of his fiction: the dramatic incidents, born of the collision of human wills; the humorous portrayals; the urge to limn human character — all nurtured by the rivalry between the human being and his world. On this score, two or three of the crustier critics still hesitated to acclaim him a great writer. (FC 7)

The reader becomes aware of the narrator's dry irony in passages such as this. *Forbidden Colors* is narrated throughout by a consistent, precise, critical and extremely distant voice. The voice is identical with the quality of Shunsuke's mind. In fact, we could say Shunsuke's story is told by a narrative persona who was his double. It is a notable contrast to *Despair*, which is narrated by the erratic, at times emotional voice of Hermann. Shunsuke is an emotionally empty man and finds it difficult to come to terms with reality because of his overriding subjectivity. Seeking to extend his thinking power beyond all limits, Shunsuke himself becomes the prisoner of thought. Isolated by the narcissism of his soul, he can only counterfeit his feelings with the magic of his words.

Shunsuke cannot offer a unifying vision because he is split by a dialectic. Gazing at his own photograph, Shunsuke explains that his life and his art were totally separate. His art was controlled entirely by his subjectivity, an absolute artistic power which drained his characters of life. In his own life, however, he was haunted with the passions of hatred and jealousy he totally excluded from his works. The root of the disastrous failure he had made of his three marriages lay in what Shunsuke himself calls his "foolishness" attributed to "a wild ability to handle abstractions." Just as he had been "afraid to endow his heroines with deep feelings" (8), he had been afraid to love his women deeply. As a result of his betrayal, he destroyed his three wives: the first became a kleptomaniac; the second fled into madness; the third, after countless infidelities, committed a love-suicide with a young lover. Shunsuke, in fact, was driven throughout his life by an irremediable misogyny. In one of Mishima's deliberately disgusting scenes, Shunsuke presses a beautiful Noh mask of a young woman over the bloated face of his drowned third wife until "the face of the drowned woman buckled under the mask like so much ripe fruit" (14). He triumphs symbolically over the woman who had hurt him by petrifying her — by superimposing upon her physical existence the abstract, idealized beauty of the Noh mask — a symbol of his art. The act is representative of Shunsuke's "immeasurable arrogance" (8), similar to the arrogance which made Hermann impose his mask upon Felix.

Women represent for him "the language of the body," all that is nonspiritual, real, factual. Loving a woman would have established him in the normal pattern of mankind.

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For Shunsuke woman is flesh, which he had denied all his life and which had repeatedly defeated him. "Woman survives everywhere and rules like the night. . . . Woman has no soul; she can only feel" (13). In the same way, he hates all young men, because they have what he has lost irretrievably — youth, instinctive energy, the vigor of "life," and above all the power to defeat women. When, therefore, Shunsuke spies on his young mistress Yasuko, already expecting to be defeated another time, and discovers her lover Yuichi, his hatred and jealousy is automatically expected. But he is astounded by the beauty of Yuichi, who is described like a male Venus, born of the waves. Mishima parodies the myth of Narcissus. Narcissus dies in water while Mishima's Narcissus is born of the fluidity of Shunsuke's subjectivity. The artist in Shunsuke responds and overcomes all emotional reactions. He immediately begins "creating" Yuichi artistically, appropriating the unaware young man's soul even before Yuichi knows of Shunsuke's existence:

Never will he be polluted by the poisons of art or things of that sort. He is a man born to love and be loved by woman. For him, I shall gladly retire from the world. Not only that, I welcome it. So much of my life has been spent fighting against beauty; but the time is approaching that beauty and I should shake hands in reconciliation. (23)

Yuichi, who felt guilty about deceiving Yasuko when he knew he would never be able to love a woman, confesses his homosexuality to Shunsuke. Shunsuke accepts his role as a father-advisor with fiendish delight, for he feels empowered to avenge upon all womankind with this beautiful youth as his agent. "With Yuichi's help he felt he could send a hundred still-virgin women off to nunneries. In this way Shunsuke for the first time in his life knew real passion" (25).

Meeting Yuichi is a self-discovery for Shunsuke as an artist, just as meeting Dorian had been an awakening to the unified vision of art and life for Basil Hallward. He realizes that his whole artistic career had been a failure.

In this world it is believed art and reality live quietly side by side; but art must dare to break the laws of reality. Why? In order that it alone may exist.

It is a shame, but the *Complete Works of Shunsuke Hinoki*, from their first lines, renounced war against reality. As a result his works were not real. (28)

While Basil is a true painter who discovered the beauty of moral purity in Dorian, Shunsuke only sees Yuichi's invulnerability to women.

Facing a dead end of his art, Shunsuke now dares to break the laws of reality by making it into fiction. He turns Yuichi into his fictional creation, and outlines the plot of a

novel he had not yet written by assigning to Yuichi the role of his son in spirit. In the central scene of the chapter which Mishima entitled "The Mirror Contract," Shunsuke offers to Yuichi a mutually profitable exchange wherein Yuichi will consent to move at Shunsuke's will in return for a sum of money the latter badly needs, for his family is poor. In his room, where Shunsuke holds this revealing talk with Yuichi, a little black mirror stands behind him, facing the young man and increasing in seductive power with Shunsuke's words.

"I will teach you, point by point, how a man who has felt desire behaves. . . . Don't confuse the stage with the dressing - room. I shall introduce you to the world of women. I shall bring you before the sets freshly made up with cosmetics and eau de cologne, sets before which I have always performed my mimicries. You will play the part of a Don Juan who never touches a woman. . . . Don't worry, I have served an apprenticeship in backstage machinations." (34 - 5)

It is not the money which motivates Yuichi in accepting the arrangement but the little round black mirror which had reflected his face and fascinated him all during their talk while Shunsuke enchanted him with his seductive praise of his beauty — "that artistic poison, the powerful poison of his words, loosened those inhibitions that had persisted so long" (36). It is the moment when Narcissus discovers his double in the water. Shunsuke, like a Mephisto, gains Yuichi's soul by the contract. However, Jinzai says that Yuichi's relationship to Shunsuke is not that of Faust's to Mephisto, because Yuichi did not desire the relationship (19). The question posed throughout Mishima's novel, and left ambiguous by its ending, is whether Yuichi was happy to accept Shunsuke as his father, the beautiful soul to match his beautiful body. It suffices at this point that Yuichi accepts the terms of the contract for materialistic reasons. Shunsuke in this scene engulfs his double and gains the autonomy of a young, beautiful body.

The third party in the Narcissus paradigm, Echo, or womanhood, is played by the women who now suffer at Shunsuke's hands through Yuichi. The first half of Part I deals with Shunsuke's successful revenge against womankind by manipulating Yuichi. He succeeds in making Yasuko into the Echo of myth. Under his puppet strings, Yuichi marries Yasuko; but he seeks love in the young boys of the underground homosexual community instead of returning her love. Shunsuke's plan of revenge is extended then to Mrs. Kaburagi, the worldly beauty who had swindled him with her blackmailing husband in one of Shunsuke's blundering love affairs. He also directs Yuichi toward Kyoko Hodaka, another woman who had made him suffer. Yuichi invariably succeeds in making them fall in love with him and destroying their happiness by his cruel indifference. As Shunsuke says, Yuichi is his ideal "spiritual puppet" because the youth "doesn't take responsibility for

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his actions in the slightest" (103). Yuichi lacks circumspection, "the usual modern disease of youth," because he has no soul. Yuichi is Shunsuke's ideal puppet because the youth lacks autonomy.

The mirror reflection, however, begins to assert its own autonomy. Yuichi's homosexuality, discovered and encouraged by his puppet-master, ironically grows into Yuichi's personal motive in place of Shunsuke's revenge upon women "Like a schoolboy developing an interest in detested, enforced homework, he was becoming infatuated with the excitement of the inhuman comedy with womankind as antagonist" (120). Moreover, because his existence is purely physical, he hates anything which is lasting, and feels that the old man who has taken over his soul is death itself. "Yuichi suspected that the power that had taken possession of him was the power of the nether world" (121). In fact, it is Shunsuke who decides to die the moment he discovered Yuichi. The Mirror Contract made possible the completion of the only work of art Shunsuke now believes in — the most beautiful soul in the world, his own, unified with the most beautiful living body. Shunsuke therefore has no more use for his own ugly body. Ironically, however, when Yuichi discovered his own beauty in the mirror, he gained self-consciousness, the lack of which had made him so beautiful to Shunsuke.

Shunsuke forms a theory of art opposed to the naturalistic school, a reflection of Mishima's own:

To clothe formless experience with form and offer, as it were, human life in a ready-made suit of clothes is what the work of art attempts to do, the naturalistic school believes. Shunsuke did not agree. Form was the inborn destiny of art. One had to believe that the human experience within a work and a real-life human experience are different in dimension, depending on whether form is present or not. Within real-life human experience, however, there is something that is very close to what is experienced in a work. What is it? It is the impression accorded by death. We cannot experience death, but we sometimes experience the impression of it. We experience the idea of death in a death in the family, in the death of a loved one. In sum, death is the unique form of life. . . . (136)

In *Despair*, Hermann expresses a similar idea of death as a superior condition to life. "Life," says Hermann, "only marred my double" (22). As form is the inborn destiny of art, death is the destiny of life, an end for which, for Mishima, one should strive with as much earnest contrivance as the completed art form. Shunsuke has a vision of death as more real than life. For him the artistic work was "a kind of refined death," enabling life to touch and experience death in advance.

Internal existence is life; objective existence is nothing but death or nothingness. These two forms of existence bring the work of art terribly close to natural beauty. He was convinced that a work of art, like nature, absolutely must not have soul. Much less thought! Through lack of soul, soul is verified; through the absence of thought, thought is verified; through the lack of life, life is verified. This indeed is the paradoxical mission of the work of art. In turn it is the mission-making characteristic of beauty. (136-7)

Thus Shunsuke tries to make the beauty of Yuichi, his soullessness, into his last masterpiece, the verification of his soul. The power he commands as author-character, however, immortalizes by dehumanization, or what he calls "purification" of his puppet. To be human and alive is to be ugly and weak. Art cures the diseases of life, in his view, by imparting "the steely health of death." Yuichi, however, is a living being. Yuichi demands, "I want to become something. I want a real existence!" (141). Shunsuke counters with his insistence on the supremacy of art over life: "When it comes to representation. . . nothing can force it to act. The person in charge of it is the artist. Only representation can give reality to reality; realism does not exist in reality but in representation" (142). The puppet finds his own voice and Shunsuke realizes calmly that it was "no longer the voice of his creation." Shunsuke's attempt to manipulate Yuichi by the shared hatred of women is defeated.

The mirror metaphor is treated as a fluid surface between subjectivity and reality. Shunsuke believes that Yuichi's real existence is possible only through Shunsuke's representation: "Representation seizes the nucleus of reality, but it is not carried away by reality. Representation reflects its image in the surface of the water like a dragonfly; it skims that surface (142)." Nabokov's *V* in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* used a water-spider metaphor in a similar view of his art of representing his brother Sebastian. *V* "skimmed" the surface of reality and succeeded in seizing the nucleus, Sebastian. Then, *V* gives life to Sebastian in a reverse of the Narcissus paradigm. The difference between *V* and Shunsuke is that the latter never imagined the possibility that reality might step out of the water in an autonomous form. Ironically, Shunsuke finds himself falling in love with the character he had imprisoned in his subjectivity. Narcissus falls in love with his image precisely when his image begins to emerge from the water with autonomy. Yuichi begins to gain what he had so ardently wished for, his real existence, by winning his freedom from Shunsuke.

The outcome of Mishima's Narcissus paradigm is also ironic. Shunsuke had tried to make women as hopelessly unhappy as Echo, but he realizes that he himself had become an Echo. "Shunsuke hid his never-to-be-requited love. Something had to come to an end" (284). Shunsuke's power over Yuichi's autonomy ends, and a rival's manipulation over the

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youth begins. Count Kaburagi, resembling Lord Harry in Wilde's novel in more ways than Shunsuke, is the new rival puppeteer. Kaburagi saw his chance when he sensed that Yuichi was already vulnerable. Shunsuke had already made him self-conscious like Narcissus. Just as Lord Harry had revealed to Dorian the absolute beauty of Basil Howard's portrait, Kaburagi seduces Yuichi by transforming himself into a mirror, his eyes fixed in adoration upon the youth. "Behind that mirror he managed to conceal Nobutaka [Kaburagi] himself, his age, his desire, his complexity, and his ingenuity" (160). Kaburagi "sees" Yuichi and petrifies him.

Kaburagi's mirror of seductive words, however, puts him in an even smaller prison. Shunsuke had seduced Yuichi by the same power of words and his mirror had reflected Yuichi's image in the distorting vision of Shunsuke. Kaburagi, on the other hand, is not an artist so that he lacks the power to create a three-dimensional reality. He seduces Yuichi by showing him that he was beautiful to himself, that his beauty existed for himself alone to love. He tells Yuichi,

"When you 'love' another man, you are only too ignorant about yourself — you who were born on the pinnacle of perfection. . . . You don't need a name. . . . You are a type. You are on the stage. Your stage name is 'Young Man' . . . that has appeared in the myths, the histories, the societies, and the Zeitgeist of all the countries of the world" (161 - 162) .

Again, an "engulfment" succeeds. Yuichi falls in love with the evoked image: "The portrait painted by Nobutaka's words stole out of the mirror and gradually bore down upon Yuichi" (162). Kaburagi's mirror imprisons Yuichi in his own subjectivity. Yuichi becomes a narcissus in the true sense. Kaburagi, by becoming this perfect mirror instead of what he calls the "bad mirror" of Shunsuke, steals Yuichi from the novelist. Yuichi finds himself forgetting his benefactor-puppeteer completely, and becomes Kaburagi's private secretary and lover. With this turn of events, Part I approaches a climax. Since Shunsuke does not share Kaburagi's homosexuality (he has renounced any form of physical life), he cannot fight on equal ground. As if a mirror had been placed between the halves, situations are reversed in the same mirror-like inversion as Nabokov's *Despair* with the double declaring his freedom from the old puppeteer. Shunsuke's loss of his hold over Yuichi takes its toll on his own artistic efforts. Suddenly, the incompleteness, the feeling of outright failure he had undergone in his youth catches Shunsuke again. Shunsuke discovers that he has fallen in love with his own fictional character. He loses the role distance crucial to the puppeteer's magic. Part II was published after Mishima's trip to Greece marked the beginning of his desire to counterbalance his overburdened spirit with the newly-discovered language of the flesh. Shunsuke is an example of how the overburdened subjectivity continues to the

end to exercise its power over the language of the flesh. Mishima shows the dangers of monologic discourse in Shunsuke's power over Yuichi.

Part II begins with Kaburagi's defeat and returns to the basic conflict between Shunsuke and Yuichi. What Kaburagi failed to foresee is that his kind of mirror is interchangeable with any other of the same sort. He is overthrown by his own wife, who now works her own vengeance upon her husband by writing Yuichi a long letter of adoration. It is ever Yuichi's fate to be seduced by the mirror of words, especially when the mirror offers him freedom. He breaks up his relationship with Kaburagi and confesses to Shunsuke that he now is, of all impossibilities, in love with a woman. Shunsuke reacts with mad laughter, through which he discovers within himself

a sense of kinship with the world. . . . Such was the power of this laugh that it held within it a kind of connection between his existence and the world, an ability through which he could see with his own eyes the blue sky on the other side of the globe. (226)

Shunsuke's laughter is directed at the universal folly of man and also against himself. Shunsuke realizes that the table is turned against him. It is the beauty of Shunsuke's soul, and his love of it, which had made his wives and himself unhappy and kept him isolated. The fact that he loves Yuichi without any hope of being loved joins him to the other unhappy men and women in the world of folly. Shunsuke realizes his loss: "Somehow lately I am like a puppet and you are the puppet master" (244). Yuichi, for his part, realizes he cannot love Mrs. Kaburagi because, as Shunsuke points out, what he loves is himself. Shunsuke, however, is still the original seducer, the distorting mirror which had trapped Yuichi within the endless reflections of "seeing" himself and being "seen". Yuichi now experiences a fusion of the self, in which he realizes that his alter ego is Shunsuke. Sure again of his absolute power over Yuichi, Shunsuke writes a letter commanding him to seduce another victim, Kyoko Hodaka. The fusion of identity was again the correspondence of motives — their common hatred of women. Women pose a danger to solipsists like Shunsuke and narcissists like Yuichi because their language of flesh reminds the men of their human bondage. Yuichi obeys and humiliates the proud Kyoko in a hotel, switching places with Shunsuke in her bed. This was to be a doubling of physical identity for Shunsuke — to take Yuichi's place in physical union with a woman. Shunsuke's triumph, however, is empty, because he discovers that Kyoko's humiliation does not touch him. He realizes women can never be subjugated because he himself was convinced that no one could love him — he could never possess a woman and therefore it was impossible to defeat her. Shunsuke and the reality of flesh would never intermingle.

Yuichi also faces the defeat of his purity which his sense of uniqueness and

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narcissistic pride had built. His wife Yasuko becomes pregnant, like Dolores Schiller of *Lolita*. Womankind can give birth to live men and women, as Shunsuke and Humbert can never do with their art. When Yasuko begs him to be at her side during labor and birth, Yuichi is fascinated by the opportunity offered. What he discovers, however, is not the confirmation of his isolation as he expected but the reality of pain and physical suffering of a woman in her most fleshly act, the creation of new life. Confronted with this force, Narcissus forgets his own face. The baby is a girl — a new member of the feminine sex Shunsuke had taught Yuichi to hate. Yuichi discovers that existence lies in "seeing."

Until now Yuichi had been incapable of feeling he existed unless he "was seen" in toto. His consciousness of existing, in short, was a consciousness of being seen. The youth now revelled in a new sense of existence, an indubitable existence in which he was not looked at. In short, he himself was seeing. (293)

In seeing his wife's impassive face like an animal's after the ordeal of birth, Yuichi realizes, "Compared with that expression, . . . all human expressions of tragicomic pathos were little more than masks" (294). Echo proves formidable when she is used as a symbol of humanity. Yuichi is won over by life. When the mirror he had always used at home is broken by a maid, Yuichi only smiles at its symbolic meaning.

In the ensuing battle between life and art, Shunsuke realizes that he is driven to defend his very essence as an artist by Yuichi's new self-assertion. On his part, Yuichi feels lost like a character without an author. Yuichi's homosexuality is exposed to his wife and mother. Mishima displays a weak treatment of Yuichi's wife and mother as obtuse victims without depth, for the sake of a neatly logical and cruel solution. Yasuko crawls into a callous blindness, forsakes all absolutes, and renounces all claims to feeling anything. She is reduced to an automaton-like Echo. In her end, Shunsuke's revenge utterly succeeds. Mishima's treatment of women, never too convincing, shows inconsistency and lack of focus in his treatment of Yasuko.

Now free of the power of the mirror, Yuichi plots his way out of Shunsuke's world of illusion. He first decides to throw over his most recent patron, Kawada, who was the wealthy successor of bankrupt Kaburagi. He receives the exact amount Shunsuke had paid for the Mirror Contract as parting money from Kawada.

Once he had smashed his way out of the cage of the mirror and forgotten his own face and come to regard it as something that did not exist, then for the first time he had begun searching for the position of the seeing person. He had been set free from the childish ambition of dreaming that society might supply him with some kind of image that would be a substitute for the image that the mirror

had reflected. Seeking this in the very middle of youth, now, he was impatient to complete the difficult operation of basing an existence on something he couldn't see. (389)

Yuichi is in search of his own soul at the risk of losing his beauty. Before he takes the money to Shunsuke, Yuichi witnesses a cabaret building on fire. Fire occurs several times in the novel as a symbol of life, the irrational energy it excites in the mind of man which makes of him a blind, unconscious creature. Yuichi then aimlessly wanders into a movie theater. Yuichi is still wavering between the two worlds of fiction and reality.

The final confrontation between Shunsuke and Yuichi is as crucial to the meaning of the mirror metaphor as the "Mirror Contract" chapter, and harks back to all the dialogic dimensions of the former chapter. It begins with Yuichi's sudden appearance before Shunsuke in his study "as if he had appeared out of all the books Shunsuke had been poring over" (395). Yuichi had come intending to return the money and free himself forever of the Mirror Contract. Shunsuke's last name, Hinoki, suggests the cypress wood out of which a classical Japanese stage is made, and as a stage manager he again casts a spell over Yuichi. Under Shunsuke's stare and endless words about art and his spirit, "Yuichi's power, as one who sees . . . had been lost, as if he had been put under a spell" (398). Shunsuke's look, like Medusa's, "turned its object to stone, it robbed him of his will, it reduced him to nature" (398). Shunsuke had been one step ahead of Yuichi in expecting this last meeting. It is a logical conclusion that can be foreseen ever since the Mirror Contract.

As in that former scene, Yuichi now feels the presence of a third person in the room, his spiritual double.

"The old author seemed to be talking to another person behind Yuichi. . . the thing Mr. Hinoki was looking at was not me. Another Yuichi who is not me is in this room. . . . Another beautiful youth clearly existed in that study — a youth who never shrinks no matter how much he is stared at. . . ." (397-398)

Shunsuke has conjured forth Yuichi's soul which he had appropriated with the Mirror Contract. As he talks on about art, he gives life to Yuichi's new double while suppressing Yuichi's efforts to speak. Yuichi is made to sit in silence and listen. Yuichi "felt as if, close by, the sculpture of the beautiful youth was listening intently in the same way. In the room the miracle had already occurred" (399). The "miracle" is Shunsuke's last great masterpiece, the union of his soul with Yuichi's. Although Shunsuke could not join Yuichi in life, he could unite with him spiritually with the art of his words.

Shunsuke now gives his final lecture to Yuichi on his concept of art. Expression is

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diluted by life, robbed of its real precision in life. The only possible form in which expression and action are united is death — not just any death, but suicide. In Shunsuke's view, creation is exclusively a spiritual and intellectual act. Suicide is the only possible form of the union between the mind and the body, the perfect form of articulation, since the fluidity of life is solidified, defined, by a death chosen by one's own will. "Suicide might be called death through action. A man cannot be born of his own will, but he can will to die" (400). Yuichi's marriage to Yasuko and the birth of their daughter represents the instinctive, will-less function of the body while the willed destruction of it represents its direct opposite, the body functioning in complete agreement with the spirit. Death by accident or old age is dissolution into fluidity; but the choice to die expresses existential action and obtains an identity by the assertion of one's absolute autonomy. What Shunsuke's theory implies, however, is that such self-assertion sacrifices any hope of humanization, the link of spirit and body that would make Yuichi a whole, three-dimensional living being, not a portrait or an invisible sculpture.

Shunsuke at last succeeds in creating his masterpiece and commits suicide at the moment of performing "the miracle." He plays a game of chess with Yuichi — another mirror image. As Nabokov was also aware, chess pieces stand in mirror images against each other. Yuichi wins the game, undoubtedly maneuvered by Shunsuke, for he admits defeat with delight. By his suicide Shunsuke acts out exactly what he had taught and asserts his spirit's final dominance over his flesh by leaving Yuichi all of his wealth in his will. Yuichi has fallen irretrievably into Shunsuke's trap, checkmated forever. Yuichi's plan to return the 500,000 yen debt had failed. To make matters worse, he was depressed by the thought that his entire life would be bound by the ten million yen through which Shunsuke had expressed his love for him.

The ending is a solipsistic triumph for Shunsuke, the author-character. Yuichi has become Shunsuke's heir in more than money. He loses not only the distorting mirror of Shunsuke's words but also his soul, which he had failed to take back by returning his debt. His autonomy is therefore forever lost. Yuichi tells himself, "But watch out! You get hit by a car now and you'll spoil it all." He will go on living like a mechanical doll and will continue to be his unreflecting, thoughtless self. His bid for freedom has failed completely, and his winning the chess game only proves that he had played Shunsuke's fiction to the end. Whether Yuichi accepts him or not, Shunsuke forces himself on Yuichi as his spiritual father and dies in order to create an artistic perfection. With this "nameless freedom" which "hung heavily in his chest," similar to what Humbert feels after killing Quilty in *Lolita*, Yuichi wanders into the street, sees a flower shop full of blooms, thinks "you can buy a lot of flowers" with the inherited money, and gets his shoes shined.

Shunsuke Hinoki is a darker and colder author-character than even Hermann, who also makes a last bid against life but who appears sympathetic by contrast because of his

blunders. The ending spreads a pervasive sterility, like Shunsuke's own novels. Shunsuke is destined to fail as a creative savior, since his art rejects all forms of life. He did develop as a character, but joining humanity only made him love his subjectivity the more. He becomes a Medusa who petrifies his work of art, Yuichi, in a death-in-life. Yuichi's last unemotional reaction to the flowers shows that his soul is already dead to the joys of life.

Shunsuke does not represent Mishima but rather figures as the embodiment of one logical extension of Mishima's aesthetic, much of which Mishima rejects while halfway in writing the book. Mishima, unlike Shunsuke, values the body, and the ironic tone of the narrator is proof that he knows the dangers of subjectivity and the loss of balance between subjectivity and reality.

We have seen that the mirror stands for the self-consciousness of the author-character in *Forbidden Colors*. The mirror can have two opposing functions: either open or closed systems for Narcissus. If the mirror is used for selfish manipulation, it is a closed system that engulfs him entirely. But if it is used selflessly, it is an open system, creating three-dimensional images, and endows him with autonomy. It liberates him from solipsism and reveals his true face. Shunsuke evokes Yuichi's soul not for Yuichi's sake but entirely for himself. His words again petrify Yuichi. Even though Yuichi is aware of the other presence, he fails to recognize it as his double. He does not gain self-knowledge, nor does Shunsuke intend it.

The mirror in this novel, like Shunsuke's words, is a closed system. It discourages dialogic discourse. Although parody is used to display Mishima's awareness of new aesthetic ironies in the conflict between life and art, the fundamental subjectivity of the artist dooms him to self-destruction. Shunsuke's mirrors — his words, the little black mirror, the new double for Yuichi — originate in the fluidity of his mind, not in life. Narcissus gazes only at the water's surface and never reaches the depths of real life. Although Yuichi is born of water, it is the water of Shunsuke's subjectivity. Although Mishima consciously underwent a change toward the "language of the flesh" while writing this novel, he does not show any way out of the solipsism of his author-character. Death is the ultimate negation, or petrification, of life. His final work of art, not made in the language of the body, perishes with its author. The work Shunsuke creates does not "articulate" in the sense of reaching any reader who could understand it. The risks of monologic discourse is shown in its full extent.

Despair

Mirrors can function as either open or closed systems for dialogic interaction in Nabokov's *Despair*, which is commonly considered one of the minor works of his early period. Nabokov also uses the mirror motif and treats the doppelgänger theme in which the

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usurpation of identity involves the question of artistic autonomy in *The Eye*, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Laughter in the Dark*, *Lolita*, *Pale Fire* and *Ada*. But Connolly, who adopts the Bakhtinian concept of the dialogic function of fiction, calls *Despair* "one of the finest examples of the dual - voiced discourse in Nabokov's entire oeuvre" (157). The double theme as a psychological problem, which Nabokov considered "a frightful bore" (Strong Opinions 83) is parodied with gusto, using for his springboards Dostoyevsky⁹ and Wilde.

Nabokov's author-character sees mirrors basically as traps fatal to the narcissistic egoist, a sterile end to creativity. Nabokov the author takes up the challenge of transforming this function into an open system. The double theme is explored by Nabokov in order to expose the deceptive depth of the two-dimensional mirror. Nabokov is allied with the true artist who creates out of the two-dimensional pages of fiction three-dimensional reality and opens an escape route from the closed system of the solipsistic self. Thus the author-characters in Nabokov's fiction concern themselves with imperfect and perfect mirrors (or open and closed systems) which can liberate or trap the ego. The question of who engulfs whom, who holds the shield of Perseus against the petrifying glance of Medusa, separates the true artist from the false.

Time, which rigidifies living moments into dead facts and history, threaten the freedom of the artist. Nabokov writes in *Speak, Memory*, "The prison of time is spherical and without exits" (14). In that prison of time, Nabokov's Hermann Karlovich, like Sebastian of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, Humbert of *Lolita*, and Kinbote of *Pale Fire*, loses his identity and suffers from the imprisonment of his solipsistic subjectivity. The key to the prison in *Despair*, as in the other novels, is found in the parodic imagination of the artist and his memory. He transcends the spherical prison of time by distorting it three-dimensionally into a spiral.

Nabokov's metafiction cannot be fully comprehended without the awareness of the fictive arena outside the story (the first of the novel's multiple frames) in which the novelist engages himself in a game with his reader to try to win the reader's dialogic response to his "voice." We saw that Mishima did not have this outside frame. Neither Mishima nor the reader is addressed by Shunsuke. This difference, besides the monologic - dialogic question, also has to do with a primary difference of mode between the two works: *Forbidden Colors* is a tragedy; *Despair* is definitely a comedy. Nabokov's comic irony pervades in *Despair*, and it has an open ending.

As Appel writes, Nabokov's art "records a constant process of becoming — the evolution of the artist's self through artistic creation" ("Introduction" xxii). As quoted before, Wilde's Basil Hallward says, "Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter" (23). Nabokov's fiction can be seen as a self-portrait made possible by painting his opposite. If his art succeeds in allowing dialogue of opposite voices to occur, he will grow as an artist.

Shunsuke had cast a spell over life with his articulation, but only at the cost of his own life, which throws into doubt the value of any attempt to impose illusion on reality. Art would mean death for the artist. For Nabokov, risking one's humanity is a necessary part of creation, but art and life are not dialectic opposites. It could be a simple realization that the "subject" has a soul, as Humbert realized at the end of *Lolita*. But that realization is the acknowledgment of the subject's autonomy, which dissolves the engulfment. To acknowledge the autonomy of a puppet is a disastrous admission for a puppeteer. But only then does his world become truly alive and animate the real world with his creations by coming to life in the mind of his readers. The dialogic function of fiction is made possible when the artist acknowledges his character's right to express himself.

In *Despair*, Nabokov correlates the fate of a failed artist with the deterioration of his mind. Much of Nabokov's game with his reader consists in gleaning the objective truth through the distortions Nabokov carefully camouflages in Hermann's subjective narration. A neurotic narcissist who loves his wife because she loves him, he discovers a perfect copy of himself in a vagabond named Felix and perpetrates what he thinks is a perfect crime. He writes the story of his murder of his double as an attempt to assert his freedom as an artist and has found a possible editor, "a Russian novelist in the neighborhood," who sounds suspiciously like Nabokov.

There are no less than five layers in the narrative structure of *Despair* — five games played between contestants for autonomy. Inside the external frame consisting of Nabokov and his reader, the Nabokovian emigré novelist - editor silently and invisibly edits Hermann's narration, coloring the reader's perception with his presence and presenting a threat to Hermann. Inside this frame, Hermann tells his story to his readers (the first of them being the Nabokov-like editor), trying to convince him of the success of his art. Within that frame, Hermann is involved in rivalry, in art and love, with Ardalion, the genuine artist. In the kernel of all these plots, Hermann is involved in a rivalry over his identity with Felix, his "subject." The layers of narrative frames echo each other in reverberating interchange of ironic voices.

As William Carroll finds, there is dense intertextuality in *Despair*, especially by literary allusions to such Nabokovian favorites as Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Wilde and Conan Doyle, who "haunt the text and continually betray Hermann" (83). We learn, for instance, that Hermann's name is taken from the protagonist of Pushkin's *Queen of Spades* which emphasizes Hermann's schizophrenia between his Russian blood and German birth (Carroll 86). His yellow gloves are shared by Lord Henry in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as are his love of lilacs (89). *Despair* begins and ends on the same dates as Turgenev's *Diary of a Superfluous Man* (95). These intertextual details pack the text with polyphonic ironies.

As in Mishima's novel, characters become mirrors to each other. Seeing is an act of

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engulfment, so that eyes can be as murderous a weapon as Medusa's. In the Narcissus myth paradigm, Hermann is Narcissus, Felix is his reflection, his wife Lydia is Echo, and Ardalion, her lover, is the ripple in the water that destroys his attempt to satisfy his self-love. The allusions fill the novel with literary "mirrors" in order to create a special awareness in the reader, as Carroll states:

They spin a web of significance entrapping Hermann, though he steadfastly denies that any external force controls him. The overall irony implies another world beyond this one, another power beyond the feeble human will. (95)

In the dialogically opposed views of Hermann presented by Ardalion and hinted unawares by Hermann's own narrative, he is a cold bore and bourgeois bully to his wife and other people. He is, in his own words, a "second-rate businessman making chocolates," which are sold in a box with a lady in lilac and a fan as trademark. Lilacs appear repeatedly as in Hermann's favorite tie. Besides the allusion to Wilde, it is a pun on Nabokov's pen name during his Russian years, "V. Sirin." The Russian word for lilac is "siren 'yu" (Carroll 90). The lilac lady resembles Lydia, whose affair with Ardalion crops up often in the narrative as the sign of the infidelity of his Muse. It is the emblem of disintegration both of his business, his marriage, and his art. Carroll also comments that Nabokov's great achievement in *Despair* is that the texture of ironic allusion enables the reader to live imaginatively in the fictional world and even makes the reader "co-conspirators, not opponents, by making them complete the allusions, correct the errors and become unseen accomplices in 'crime as art'" (102).

Despair contains as many paradoxes as *Forbidden Colors*, although Mishima is basically a dialectic thinker and Nabokov tends to bring dialectics eventually to synthetic unity. They both start with the same paradox — a character who is also an author. Nabokov's paradoxes focus on the comic failures of Hermann: a businessman-artist, a writer who blames the waywardness of his pen, an Echo-like wife who cuckolds him.

Hermann is a two-dimensional mirror, trying to engulf Felix on one hand with his subjectivity and his reader on the other with his self-reflecting, artificial narrative. He loves word-play, mirror-images and reversible puns like "dog-god" or "Fermann-Helix." He is an incorrigible liar who fills his narrative with labyrinthine false leads and dead-end streets, devices used in the detective story which he aspires to imitate, such as his lies about his mother's noble birth or his murder of Lydia. He can forget himself only when he lies: "I lied as a nightingale sings, ecstatically, self-obliviously, reveling in the new life-harmony which I was creating" (47).

But as liars go, Hermann is a false artist not because he lies merely in order to deceive and cheat but because he lies badly; he does not deceive anyone because his memory is

faulty. He has been telling lies to his wife so long that he has lost control over them, but thinks he is safe in Lydia's stupidity. Hermann is a bad actor. In his only real experience on the stage, he cannot stick to the assigned role but compulsively makes up his own lines. Accordingly, Hermann is only a second-rate artist, for what is an artist if not a good liar? In order to lie well, the artist must have absolute control over his subjectivity. This is a basic difference between Hermann and Shunsuke.

Hermann's great sin, his solipsism, manifests itself in his tendency to see the sameness in everything. He applauds Soviet Russia for the same tendency: "History had never yet known such enthusiasm, asceticism, and unselfishness, such faith in the impending sameness of us all" (27). In the light of Nabokov's aristocratic emigre background, the irony is obvious. Hermann, in his insistence on the oneness of perception — that his solipsistic mind is supreme over life's diversity — belongs to the Soviet Russias of the world where individuals are deprived of their uniqueness, where the dialogic discourse of language and the fluid, ever-changing variations of life are outlawed.

Hermann has an inadequate relationship with reality because of his extreme self-consciousness. He tries to expand the gap between himself and reality. Suffering from schizophrenia, which he calls "that imp Split," he is an observer of himself in various roles. "Seeing" results in petrifying himself, the dangerous consequences of which he does not realize until too late. An actor at heart, he tells Felix that he is a professional actor who needs an understudy and tries to cast his double into that subservient role.

Hermann suffers from ontological insecurity. He is threatened with the loss of his identity because he is neither a genuine businessman nor a genuine artist. His chocolate business is on the verge of bankruptcy, the virtual end of all the bourgeois values that had given him identity. He is therefore a "superfluous man," as in Turgenev's story, which is a traditional Russian theme, as G. M. Hyde points out (99). He feels threatened by engulfment. Since he has no real identity, he fills the gap with multiple pseudo-identities. A credulous reader will at first fall into the traps Hermann sets to make himself look like a talented, thorough master of his art and his crime. He claims his manuscript of this narrative is filled with twenty-five kinds of handwriting. He transforms himself into different voices, suddenly turning into Felix, for example. Fowler calls the major characters in Nabokov's fiction who resemble the author "equivalents" — artists, would-be unifiers as well as the most sensitive creatures in his fictional world — who are usually of European birth, male, gifted, with taste and cultural sensibility equalling Nabokov. Fowler points out, "Nabokov creates in his fiction a character who could have created Nabokov's fiction" (14). However, Hermann falls quite short of the talent and perceptions of a true equivalent. He comes closer to a materialist than any other Nabokovian equivalent. But even in this early work, Nabokov's "equivalent" is held responsible not for being a materialist but a solipsist who ends in cleverly fooling himself.

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Ontologically insecure Hermann, therefore, is open to engulfment and needs, in fact, the existence of his double to fill the vacuum of his identity. He describes his mind on the fatal morning of meeting Felix as "absolutely empty, and thus comparable to some translucent vessel doomed to receive contents as yet unknown" (17). Hermann's vulnerability stands in direct contrast to Shunsuke, since what the latter needed was a physical vessel for his soul to engulf but he lacked the subjective substance of a real artist. Whatever Shunsuke's crime may have been, he at least was a genuine artist and desired Yuichi's eternal youth, not his death. The encounter with Felix shocks Hermann, not only because of the striking "resemblance," but also because Felix shows him what he would look like in death, "the flawlessly pure image of my corpse" (22).

we had identical features, and . . . in a state of perfect repose, this resemblance was strikingly evident, and what is death, if not a face at peace — its artistic perfection? Life only marred my double; thus a breeze dims the bliss of Narcissus; thus, in the painter's absence, there comes his pupil and by the superfluous flush of unbidden tints disfigures the portrait painted by the master. (22)

At the moment Nabokov's narcissus meets his double, the question of ontology arises. Who is the original of the two? "Something in his attitude cast a queer spell over me: the emphasis of that immobility, the lifelessness of those widespread legs . . ." (16). Thus it is Felix who, even while sleeping, casts the first spell, not Hermann. It is significant that Hermann immediately associates Felix with death. Hermann immediately plots his double's murder. Connolly explains that his motive is to kill himself, a form of suicide resembling Shunsuke's: "Hermann may hope that his destruction of Felix will eradicate his own status as a literary character and provide him with new life as a literary creator" (151).

Thus Hermann petrifies Felix in his subjective vision. Death is the wished-for possession of the double's existence in order that Hermann may exist. Felix's identity, appropriated by Hermann into his "empty vessel," must stay permanently Hermann's. He will not share Felix's fate. Mishima's Shunsuke wished for a union, although it is true that Shunsuke only wished to make Yuichi share the fate he prescribed for both. Alive, Felix can change, and become the rival "vessel" for his identity and must be killed. Hermann's crime, therefore, is an attempt to realize the artistic perfection of his self-portrait in the form of Felix's dead face.

In order to perpetrate his artistic crime, Hermann tries to convince Felix of their doubleness, and mirror images are abundantly used: they look into each other's eyes; they listen to each other listening to each other; Hermann produces a pocket mirror to show their faces side by side; he notices that Felix is left-handed and tries vainly to see Felix lift his left arm by lifting his own right arm. Such attempts naturally fail. Hermann is

immediately threatened with Felix's independent will. Felix seems to him to treat him "as if I [Hermann] were the mimic and he the model He on his part saw in me a doubtful imitator" (20-21).

Hermann differs from Felix in more ways than he thinks. In his narrative style, Hermann tends to steal others' artistic creations, like Turgenev's prose-poems or Pushkin's poetry, which, being himself a distorting mirror, he turns into a banal drama of his own life. Imperfect counterfeiting is creative only when it is selfless. When it is done for a common thief's motives without the artist's gift, it is bound to fail. Felix, in turn, steals Hermann's phallic silver pencil, which symbolizes the writer's fertile imagination in the deliberate Freudian and Joycean parody. This theft, however, is a vital loss to Hermann, whereas his theft of Turgenev or Pushkin only reveals his own ineptitude. Felix's walking stick is a similar life symbol because it identifies him even in death. It brings Hermann's downfall.

From the moment of the encounter, Hermann has desperately tried to play the original of the two. His analysis of Felix's possible attitudes toward him betrays this anxiety. He shakes hands with Felix "only because it provided me with the curious sensation of Narcissus fooling Nemesis by helping his image out of the brook" (21). Ironically, he helps his double to emerge three-dimensionally from the watery mirror. The worse his business becomes, the stronger the projected image of Felix grows. Hermann has to cling to the physical details of his life in order to find "proofs that I was I," a losing battle in one so out of touch with reality. He therefore comes to hate mirrors — he ceases to have mirrors about him ever since he stopped shaving, that is, since he began acting out his plot to murder Felix, since they have become a threat to his autonomy and might steal his identity. His fear of crooked mirrors can also be applied to his own crooked vision:

A crooked mirror strips its man or starts to squash him, and lo! there is produced a man-bull, a man-toad, under the pressure of countless glass atmospheres; or else, one is pulled out like dough and then torn into two. (27)

He hates parodies, although every allusion he makes is an unintentional parody. His insecurity makes him have nightmares about empty rooms, symbolic of his lack of identity. If he had approached the mirror until he touched it, he would have become aware that there is no resemblance. But he prefers to hold Felix at a distance and he finally loses his identity to Felix in his schizophrenic nightmare, in which Felix approaches him until they overlap; when he senses Felix pass through and emerge on the other side, Felix has stolen his eyes, and Hermann is left eyeless. In Hermann's mind, mirrors become transparent and invisible. His failure to control his subjectivity impairs his vision, in contrast to Ardalion, an artist with good vision who evidently has absolute control of his

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illusionary magic.

Felix is not really Hermann's double. Nabokov has said in an interview that Felix is actually a "false double" (Strong Opinions 84). The real double is Ardalion, the genuine artist, who has stolen something more than a silver pencil — his wife Lydia. Ardalion has painted Hermann's portrait, and Hermann senses that Ardalion's "revoltingly bright eyes" are dangerous. Hermann says that he has feigned nearsightedness as a defense, and even mentions his "hatred of competition." Hermann becomes increasingly weak in his power to see. When Hermann sees Ardalion's sketch of him, he is shocked that Ardalion left the face eyeless. Ardalion is Hermann's real rival in art since in projecting his own image onto Felix (as well as in the act of writing about himself), Hermann is trying to paint his self-portrait. Hermann calls Ardalion a "mountebank of a man, red-blooded and despicable," but merely thinks Ardalion's locked door is a sign of the poor painter's fear of creditors, not of jealous husbands. Lydia, caught half naked in Ardalion's bed, is sure of her husband's egotistic blindness, and daringly riddles him with her lover's name: "My first is a romantic fiery feeling. My second is a beast. My whole is a beast too, if you like — or else a dauber" (93). Hermann is aware of Ardalion's daubs filling the room and of the answer to the riddle, "Ardor-lion" as he spells it, but does not get the joke. He fails to see, or rather is unwilling to see, that they are lovers. Ardalion is dressed in "a patched, color-smear'd house-painter's smock — a veritable Harlequin costume, and always wears a silver cross, linking him to Felix who had stolen Hermann's silver pencil. Hermann calls Felix "a fool of the melancholic type" (69) and calls Ardalion "my fool" (172), but never realizes that they both make a fool of him. When Hermann later refers to the portrait as "the nasty-colored death mask," he shows his subconscious fear that Ardalion had petrified him, as Perseus had done to Medusa. Ardalion shows himself the better artist in the incomplete portrait of the incomplete artist Hermann.

Ardalion's contrast to Hermann spotlights an important factor in Nabokov's aesthetics: the value of details. Claire Rosenfield interprets differently:

. . . the world that sees only surfaces is filled with poor artists and successful businessmen, with critics who do not recognize the maker's genius. Ardalion, who believes that the Sistine Chapel is in Dresden, who misquotes the poet Nekrasov, who does not like Dostoevsky, who sees the narrator's crime in the conventional mold — as an attempt to gain the money from his life insurance policies — exposes his inferiority in his belief that "every face is unique," that the artist perceives "primarily the difference between things." (68)¹⁰

But nothing is more important in Nabokov's art than "surfaces." The distinct details of life, not the general resemblances that ignore human individuality, is what is valuable in art.

According to Carroll, "The details of life — sticks and pictures — continuously elude and trip up Hermann, who prizes not variety but repetition, not the Many but the One, not others but himself" (91). Ardalion tells Hermann, "What the artist perceives is, primarily, the *difference* between things. It is the vulgar who note their resemblance" (44). Hermann insists on Felix's resemblance to himself. His ideal nation is Soviet Russia driving toward "the impending sameness of us all." He therefore overlooks details which make individual differences. His face lacks details that would have given him an identifiable face. Ardalion is the one who notices that Hermann has a "tricky" face and tells him, "All your lines sort of slip from under my pencil, slip and are gone" (43). Ardalion adds, "Every face is unique" (43). It takes a genuine artist who values the diversity in life to see the lack of identity in Hermann. Ardalion says in his letter to Hermann after the murder,

It is not enough . . . to kill a man and clothe him adequately. A single additional detail is wanted and that is: resemblance between the two; but in the whole world there are not and cannot be, two men alike, however well you disguise them. (170)

Ardalion also points out how hackneyed Hermann's "ingenious" idea of embezzling the insurance money is (171).

Ardalion is not only superior as an artist; he is ahead of Hermann also in using words. Hermann recognizes his inferiority to Ardalion in the use of words when he finds himself at a loss to describe Ardalion's insulting letter accusing him of having "torn [Lydia] to pieces," and giving the reader the only objective point of view of Hermann's crime: "I scarcely know in what words to describe it. There are no such words. My correspondent has already used them up . . ." (172). Nabokov makes him use the word "correspondent" as an obvious pun on the double theme. Hermann sends Ardalion away before killing Felix, not because he admits that the painter is Lydia's lover but because he might influence her from obeying his strict directions to embezzle the insurance money. He says, "I had decided long ago that this meddlesome portrait-painter was the only person of whom I ought to beware" (108). Hermann is willfully blind to the truth told by Ardalion's portrait. He makes a significant pun in entertaining the idea of changing his confessional mode to the epistolary:

Ex writing to Why and Why to Ex, page after page. Sometimes an outsider, a Zed, intrudes and adds his own little contribution to the correspondence. . . . And when at last Zed butts in suddenly with a letter to his own personal correspondent (for it is a world consisting of correspondents that such novels imply) telling him of Ex's and Why's death or else of their fortunate union, the reader finds himself feeling that he would prefer the most ordinary missive from

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the tax collector to all this. (58)

The world of *Despair* consists of "corresponding" selves, and when Hermann says that his narrative can become epistolary, he suggests that he can also insinuate the reader into becoming a "correspondent," a double. Since Nabokov uses the same pun of X and Y in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, it is worthwhile pursuing its meaning. "Ex" refers to the dead, the petrified, and in this novel it is Felix whom Hermann has killed. "Why" refers to Hermann himself, who must explain why he killed Felix in this narrative. "Zed" is both Nabokov, the silent editor, and Ardalion, who ends the narrative by the rude intrusion of the objective view in the form of a letter. In Bakhtinian terms, Hermann refuses to make the dialogic relationship with Felix here also. His narrative is monologic; his argument that Felix is his double is one-sided. And most striking of all, Felix's letter blackmailing him, which Hermann says was "a true masterpiece" on Felix's part, turns out to be written by Hermann. He shows the letter to Orlovius, intending to leave a tell-tale sign that he was close to a breakdown. Later, in his last place of hiding, Hermann reads in the newspapers that Orlovius said Hermann used to write letters to himself (159). Orlovius had recognized Hermann's handwriting in Felix's letter. This makes us suspect the authenticity of the twenty-five different handwritings Hermann had boasted of. As in the art of lying, he proves inept in forgeries. The reader becomes aware that all the different voices the book seemed to be filled with in the beginning turn out to be monopolized by one voice. Thus, Hermann is not capable of the epistolary form which promises dialogic discourse. He cannot make his reader his "correspondent."

Hermann's involuted narrative, full of distortions, labyrinthine digressions and artificiality, at first sight resembles Nabokov's art. Hermann believes in his inventive genius and claims to have mastered all the techniques and craftsmanship of literature. He says he is fully in control of his narrative. On the contrary, it meanders and often has to catch up with itself. He often stops to admire a well-written sentence, spoils the reader's suspense by letting the cat out of the bag before its time, and even admits at one point that a paragraph just written should belong to the beginning. He gives his reader a choice among several beginnings for Chapter Three. Hermann makes so many stage asides that, together with other errors, he deliberately ruins the magic spell of illusion altogether.

As narrator, Hermann deliberately exposes the dubiousness of his confession. He says that "the first person is as fictitious as all the rest" and protests (too much) that he exercises an exquisite control not only over himself but also over his style of writing. He defends himself at these moments by blaming his memory, which he says is photographic and demands his absolute obedience. A photograph, in contrast to Ardalion's painting, is a perfect imitation. Hermann's "photographic" art reflects solely himself, not a selfless reflection of individuality of others. Julia Bader analyzes the effect of authorial intrusions

and artificiality that deliberately interrupt the illusion in Nabokov's fiction and sees it as an attempt by the author to survive through his rival author - character's narrative:

In creating a chasm of discontinuities within his fiction, the writer can both approximate the dread of being shut off from the keen pleasures of consciousness and exercise a kind of control over death and loss through artistic assertion. (9)

Nabokov not only survives but succeeds in evolving as an artist with the metafictional devices of intrusion and self - reference.

As many critics besides Bader have also noted, Nabokov disperses throughout Hermann's narrative self - referential reminders that the ultimate authority over the illusion of the novel is Nabokov himself. "Zed" in the XYZ alphabetic series is the ultimate letter, meaning he has the last say. As D. Barton Johnson discusses, the alphabetic motif is used as cryptic signs to express Nabokov's central theme, "the creative act" (397 - 8).

One of the many other self - referential motifs is the bird referent.¹¹ We have already seen that Nabokov puns on "lilac" with his pen name "Sirin" in Russian. In Russian folklore, according to Boyd, a sirin is a fabulous human bird of paradise. Nabokov explains why he chose this pen name in 1923, "This wonder - bird made such an impression on the people's imagination that its golden flutter became the very soul of Russian art" (Boyd 180).

The bird referent connects Nabokov to Felix, who loves listening to birds and feeding them. Felix says, "There was nothing like freedom and the singing of birds" (86). As a tramp, he is indeed as free as the birds, while Hermann desires but is not able to fly: "I was like an insular species of bird that has lost the knack of rising into the air and, like the penguin, flies only in its sleep" (34). In the blackmailing letter, Felix's signature Hermann forges is "Sparrow." Nabokov is linked with birds also as the Joycean "artificer" Dedalus, the inventor of the wax wings for his son Icarus. Icarus is the make of Hermann's blue car. Hermann's arrogance, like that of Icarus of myth, causes his downfall and the failure of his art. Icarus also falls to death in water like Narcissus.

Another proof of Nabokov's authorial manipulation, as Davydov pointed out in the text's "symmetric topography" and cleverly disguised repetitions of seasonal details and dates, is the mirror - like construction of Hermann's chapters (92). He meant to make them exactly ten, divided into halves at the precise moment that he began acting out his "crime as art," on September 9. However, symmetry would mean sterile, perfect reflection. Nabokov contrives for Hermann to be forced to add an extra chapter at the end, Chapter 11, in which Hermann is finally cornered. An object is found in the car that identified the murdered man and Hermann is forced to read his own narrative for clues as to what that object was. As Davydov writes, "The shift of the mirror finally returns the power, which was temporarily usurped by the literary pretender, Hermann, to the legitimate author" (96).

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There is a telling difference between Hermann's art and Nabokov's. Nabokov's memory is not rigidified in the past but always alive, protean, changing with Nabokov. Nabokov's concept of time as protean, established in *Speak, Memory* and reinforced in his novels, transforms his memory from a perfect mirror into a distorting mirror. The artificiality of his fiction is not a mirror of Narcissus, as is the case with Hermann, but a means of self-parody, enabling him to re-create and introduce an opposing semantic direction to his imprisoned past.

While Ardalion's portrait penetrates into Hermann's essence, Hermann's narrative is a hard surface he cannot penetrate. In fact, he hates reading what he had written. "I have long ago abandoned reading over what I write — no time left for that, let alone its nauseating effect upon me" (132). It is significant that Hermann begins plotting Felix's murder on the day Ardalion finishes the portrait. September 9, moreover, is another mirror image. The mirror for Hermann only reflects a perfect image of himself. Carroll sees mirrors as not only sterile but silent:

Mirrors have been the focus of [Hermann's] greatest fears and fantasies, at once a screen between two realms and a polished reflecting surface giving Hermann back nothing but himself. The lack of sound here, moreover, is only fitting for phantasms. (99-100)

Dialogically speaking, Hermann is not only blind but deaf. It is a telling proof of Hermann's "deafness" that he cannot remember hearing the sound of the shot he fired to kill Felix. A dead man does not hear the shot that kills him. As we have already seen, killing Felix was a form of suicide.

Hermann's chances to find his identity as a true artist comes to a dead end. He kills Felix in order to borrow another life. However, the result of killing his double is total failure for Hermann, because he had overlooked the vital fact that Felix in reality did not resemble him at all. The full irony of his anxiety as to which is original erupts with sudden impact. Hermann had depended on Felix to give him his form; but whereas he thought he had engulfed his double, he had, in fact, invited an invasion of his identity by a total stranger. Now he finds himself entirely formless as well as blind, and even uncertain as to which had killed which.

"At that moment when all the required features were fixed and frozen, our likeness was such that really I could not say who had been killed, I or he. And while I looked, it grew dark in the vibrating wood, and with that face before me slowly dissolving, vibrating fainter and fainter, it seemed as if I were looking at my image in a stagnant pool" (144).

Chapter Ten in which Hermann's breakdown seems eminent begins with Felix's voice which seems to take over the narration, giving Felix's version of the story.

One day I met a swell fellow who kept saying he was like me. Nonsense, he was not like me in the least. But I did not argue with him, he being rich, and whoever hob-nobs with the rich can well become rich himself. . . . I killed the bluffer and robbed him. . . . That poor gentleman in his fine overcoat lies dead, not far from his car. (146)

However, this could not be told by Felix not only because he is dead by this time but also because he is voicing what Hermann wants the murder to appear to the reader. It is actually Hermann's voice displaying his ventriloquism. Hermann never lets Felix speak.

However, Hermann realizes that killing Felix does not destroy the sterile solipsism of his mind. He had appropriated Felix's clothes by killing him, but not his soul. He had not known him inside, as an entire, coherent personality, as a true artist would have done. He therefore forgets Felix's symbolic stick at the scene of the crime. His narcissism had made him incapable of personal involvement with his double. He realizes the switch in identity had somehow been made:

Thus, a reflected image, asserting itself, laid its claims. Not I sought a refuge in a foreign land, not I grew a beard, but Felix, my slayer. Ah, if I had known him well, . . . I might even have found it amusing to take up new quarters in the soul I had inherited. I would have known every cranny in it. . . . But Felix's soul I had studied very cursorily, so that all I knew of it were the bare outlines of his personality, two or three chance traits. (147)

Since he had petrified Felix in his fear of involvement, Hermann's murder of Felix naturally means inheriting a petrified soul. Hermann remains more than ever in isolation. Moreover, Hermann, in contrast to V of Sebastian Knight, fails to account for a simple law of multiplication. He sees too late the implication of a false artist facing his double, as he remembers having come close to seeing the truth shown on a blotting paper:

Those irrational characters, preceded as it were by a minus, remind me always of mirrors: minus x minus = plus. It struck me that perhaps Felix too was a minus I, and that was a line of thought of quite astounding importance, which I did wrong, oh, very wrong, not to have thoroughly investigated. (102)

Hermann, who has difficulty with the pen, the writer's tool for articulation, is like the

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blotting paper, which is another variation on the mirror motif, which reverses the original word when applied to the page. Felix steals the symbolic silver pencil at their first meeting because Hermann does not have the right to it. By petrifying Felix, he had taken an entire stranger as his false double, another "minus," as his mirror. The result is, like a mirror facing a mirror, an infinite repetition of nothingness. A minus multiplied by a minus is a "plus," a genuine artist — that is, Nabokov — a possibility that is frightening for Hermann. If he himself was a minus, there could only be another artist controlling them all. Shunsuke made a similar calculation, as has been discussed, but he added zeros instead (*FC* 398). At least Shunsuke is aware that his subjectivity produces nothing substantial, no matter how often it is repeated. Hermann should have seen Felix as a "plus" by giving him autonomy and added it to his minus, to cancel his egotism out in selfless creation.

The basic parodies in the novel are solved in the last chapter. Hermann had called Nabokov my "reader - writer." He finally discovers that his basic "mistake" had been his omission of reading what he had written. He should have been his own reader. A genuine artist must know what his reader will read, feel, respond to, and "voice" when reading his work. Thus, Hermann's one-sided "seeing" and "talking" (writing) are exposed as the cause of his failures in Nabokov's aesthetic.

Hermann should have embraced the fluidity of the world outside, and risked his humanity by recognizing that Felix was a separate entity. Instead, Hermann reacts to the "despair" of his situation by covering reality with more and more absurd illusions, by turning the humanity around him into rigid stones. Far from becoming a Perseus, he remains a Medusa. Hermann is, to the end of his life, a plagiarist who can never create originals because he himself is fake. Fleeing from the police, Hermann moves into a second-rate hotel. His room is as fake as any stage of a play, with "walls like cardboard" and although there is no mirror in it, there is a painted one — "a looking glass with only one reflection" (150). Nabokov's humor carries its point. A painted mirror, being two-dimensional, can only give one motionless reflection from one angle. This is Nabokov's ironic "portrait" of Hermann.

Hermann's narrative deteriorates into a "lame diary" in the last chapter, a solipsistic confession addressed to himself rather than the epistolary form, which would have established a link with humanity. Hermann's view of a created character resembles a ghoulish Dracula:

An author's fondest dream is to turn the reader into a spectator; is this ever attained? The pale organisms of literary heroes feeding under the author's supervision swell gradually with the reader's lifeblood; so that the genius of a writer consists in giving them the faculty to adapt themselves to that — not very appetizing — food and thrive on it, sometimes for centuries. (23)

Hermann is a failure on his own terms for, as the hero of his narrative, he lacks the faculty of adapting to the reader's lifeblood. He fails to humanize himself. His last entry is dated April 1, as a final joke. He fails in making anyone but himself an April fool. But Nabokov himself certainly is not at a dead end. He has played the double game of deceiver and undeceiver to his reader. Through Hermann's narrative, he has revealed the extent of damage solipsism can cause if he fails to humanize himself, at the same time that he has shown his mastery in conveying the objective truth in the substance of, and in spite of Hermann's distortions.

"Zed" - Nabokov and Ardalion - Felix do not form the only alliance against Hermann. His wife Lydia, while she plays the role of Echo, also works subversively against Hermann's manipulations. Nowhere is Hermann's blindness toward humanity shown more ironically than toward his wife. He says, "She liked everything to be echoed" (30) and repeatedly calls her ignorant and stupid. He had spent the ten years of their marriage telling her "lies about [himself]" (31). And yet, what Lydia says and does undermines Hermann's lies. Ten is also the number of the chapters he had intended for his narrative. Lydia tears the detective story she is reading in two and hides the second so that she would not be tempted to read the ending. The action reflects his own mirror-like division of chapters, but since she tore it with her eyes closed, it is not certain exactly where her division was made. Hermann says that in his neat, ordered world, Lydia "spreads disorder" (30). She survives all his attempts to petrify her.

One way in which she survives is by foreshadowing the end of Hermann's story. Hermann finds that "to her the term 'mystic' was somehow dimly connected with 'mist' and 'mistake' and 'stick'" (29). The two last words hint at the ending — he makes the mistake of forgetting Felix's stick in the car. Another way is by piercing the illusion of Hermann's solipsism. He tells his strange sensation of what he calls "dissociation." When he makes love to Lydia, he experiences a schizoid split between himself in bed and himself as observer. The farther the distance between his observing and observed selves, the more he enjoys the sensation. However, Lydia's voice awakens him from that spell: "From the distant bed, where I thought I was, came Lydia's yawn and voice stupidly saying that if I were not yet coming to bed, I might bring her the red book she had left in the parlour" (33). Actually, he had not been making love to Lydia nightly as he said at all. It had all been fabrication to entrap his reader.

Lydia breaks his illusion again when he tells her the horribly cliché tale of his long-lost "brother" who conveniently offers his life for his use in embezzling the insurance money. Lydia says, "I've just been reading a story like that" (120). The "ingenuity" of the tale is at once reduced to the level of her "second-rate detective story," the book with the red cover she had torn in two. When he again falls short in imagination and cannot devise how to kill the "brother" with all the appearance of a suicide, Lydia volunteers to invent it for him,

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pretending to have remembered how it happened in her book. Yet, Hermann is only the more convinced that "she had no imagination whatever" (123).

Lydia is thus the reader for Hermann's deceptive tale and stands for the reader of this novel as well. The first characteristic Hermann describes of Lydia is that she is a voracious reader of books. Hermann begins writing of her "in the past tense," hinting that he is trying to petrify her in the rigidity of time and trying to convince the reader that he had killed Lydia. He would have the reader believe that Lydia was indeed a hopelessly passive receptor of his egotism: "A shattered mirror. Yes, it did happen, although not quite in the ordinary way. The poor dead woman" (30). And then, Hermann addresses his reader and reveals it is an April-fool joke. "And a damned good fool I have made of someone. Who is he? Gentle reader, look at yourself in the mirror, as you seem to like mirrors so much" (30). Lydia at first seems to play Echo of the Narcissus paradigm. What he does not suspect is that Lydia's mirror is not so faithful. Lydia's infidelity and alliance with the genuine artist Ardalion is therefore strong proof that this Echo is independent of her Narcissus. Nabokov puts faith in his reader to track down all of Hermann's lies and see through his tricks.

Lydia's subjectivity proves difficult for Hermann to manipulate. Hermann's drill of Lydia on what to do after his "brother" is found dead is entirely done in spoken words, for he refuses to write it down, trying to make her "echo" his words. But her "stupidity," which we suspect she is pretending, keeps her from remembering his words. She tells him, "You sort of oppress me" (125). Lydia is the humanity Hermann had oppressed by his narcissism. Ardalion berates Hermann in his letter — the only piece of writing by another author in the novel, since Felix's is a forgery: "You are the meanest of mean scoundrels, using for your mean ends the innocence of a credulous young woman" (171). Although we can no longer see Lydia as "innocent" or "credulous," we can see the irony of Hermann's hurt response: "To call my gay, empty, and not very bright Lydia a 'woman frightened out of her wits', . . . really, that is a bit thick" (172). Carroll explains that Nabokov's great achievement in *Despair* is that "the texture of ironic allusion enables the reader to live imaginatively in the fictional world and even makes the reader 'co-conspirators,' not opponents, by making them complete the allusions, correct the errors, and become unseen accomplices in 'crime as art'" (102). Thus, there are two presences felt in the novel who are "unseen": Nabokov, the author, and the reader. Nabokov allies Lydia with the reader.

When the reader realizes the autonomy of Lydia, Nabokov accomplishes the entirety of his purpose in writing *Despair*. For he establishes the autonomy of the reader by the reader's own realization that Hermann is a totally deceptive narrator. The dialogic balance is established at the same time between the author and character. Hermann is now seen not as an author-character but merely a character who failed as an author. Nabokov evolves into the supreme artificer of his fiction. The mirrors of Hermann's two-dimensional world are transformed by the three-dimensionality of Nabokov's portrayal,

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giving human voice to his characters, even to Hermann, for he says, "Maybe it is all mock existence, an evil dream; and presently I shall wake up somewhere; on a patch of grass near Prague. A good thing, at least, that they brought me to bay so speedily" (176). It has indeed proved to be a "mock existence" since he was a creation by Nabokov. Even for Hermann, Nabokov generously and ironically assigns future autonomy as a real Felix.

Conclusion

Whereas Mishima had left Yuichi a soulless automaton, Nabokov is able to overcome the duality of the mirror of Narcissus by metafictional transcendence. Although Shunsuke perfected his art, it is not a selfless liberation. He merely paints an invisible portrait on his subjective canvas from a living model for his own self-satisfaction. Yuichi remains forever in his debt and is not allowed to speak back. Although Shunsuke does "grow" as an artist by discovering the way to express ideal beauty on his own terms, his art destroys life "in order that art alone may exist." Mishima's ironic tone suggests that he did not share Shunsuke's aesthetic, but *Forbidden Colors* arrives at the only conclusion logically possible for believers of art for art's sake within the Narcissus paradigm. In contrast, Hermann is an inferior artist whose logic is destroyed by his breakdown in the course of his narrative. His mental decline parallels that of his artistic power and runs conversely with the reader's realization of the reality beneath his deceptions.

Nabokov takes Hermann's story as a case history of self-love, and shows his reader the power of selfless art to liberate himself, his character and his reader. The dialogic discourse of *Despair* demonstrates the value of distorting mirrors as open systems. The moment an attempt at "engulfment" fails and a double steps out of the two-dimensionality of the mirror, a dynamic dialogue is begun. It endows freedom and autonomy upon the double. However, it may be too simplistic to say that a mirror can be so easily transformed into a device for humanistic revelations when we remember Mishima's inexorable logic. Both authors placed art above all values in their aesthetic. But after all, the concept of art for art's sake is ontologically solipsistic. Mishima was aware of its tragic consequences. Both our authors were also keenly aware of the dangers of narcissism for an artist. If the act of creation is motivated by merely a desire to engulf another's existence, art becomes a dangerous trap. All depends on the mirror, the artist's vision of life, through which he portrays life. If he conceives of life as merely a copy of his mind, the mirror is lethal; but if to him life is an endless variety of different identities, the mirror he holds up to nature distorts the author's face. He sees other characters in it and is able to create. Art for *life's* sake and art for art's sake may lie just a hair's breadth apart, or, as they might say, only a mirror's reflection away.

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Notes

1. *Despair* was serialized in 1934, published as a book in 1936 in Russian, and translated into English by the author in 1965 (Boyd 382).
2. Mishima finished the first part of *Forbidden Colors* in 1950. It was serialized in the literary magazine *Gunzo* from January to October of 1951. The second part, entitled *Higyo*, was serialized in another monthly, *Bungakukai*, from August 1952, to August of the next year (Ando 142 - 150).
3. Waugh as well as most critics and Nabokov himself agree that Nabokov is a metafictional author. He has been called a "conjuror," "puppeteer," "fabulator" and "artificer" and Nabokov has been often quoted as saying, "All art is deception" (*Strong Opinions* 95). An opinion to the contrary has been propounded by Robert Merrill, who points out that not all of Nabokov's fiction is about art. His examples are *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*. However, Merrill discusses Nabokov's early fiction, including *Despair*, as distinctly different from his later novels (written in English) since "the fictional worlds of these novels are self-contained and not subject to the authorial intrusions which mark — and often distinguish — Nabokov's truly fabulistic fictions" (443).
4. Mishima and Nabokov have no biographical connection with each other. As far as I have researched, they never knew of the other's existence. Nabokov was born in 1899; Mishima, in 1925, in completely different parts of the world. They both happened to have aristocratic ancestry, and both suffered a wrenching of roots at the beginning of their twenties — Nabokov culturally, in emigrating to Berlin, Paris, London and the U.S.; Mishima psychologically, in the total collapse of values of post-war Japan. They did share some literary influences in common: Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Gogol among the Russians, Joyce, Wilde, and Edgar Allan Poe among the English and Americans. However, Mishima shows unique preferences for the French decadent tradition of Raymond Radiguet, Marquis de Sade, and Comte de L'île-Adam as well as Andre Gide, the existentialists Camus and Sartre, Jean Cocteau, Jean Genet and Norman Mailer. The editors of *Critical Works of Yukio Mishima* have collected Mishima's prominent criticism on these foreign writers.
5. Mishima's devotion to words was as ardent as Nabokov's. He wrote,

. . . Rhetoric consists of words, and creativity is carefully expunged from words. To see and feel things precisely is not to gamble with words but to put words in their proper order and to limit the meaning and nuance of each word. [Postwar writers at the time of a virtual flooding of all kinds of styles and literary schools] all did the opposite. They forgot to polish the lens and, trying to see their subject quickly, they mistook the haziness of the lens for haziness of the subject. Or else, they preferred distorted lenses and enjoyed looking through them. The eye of the writer is actually his metier, and therefore his words. When he tries to see something, a novelist adjusts his eyes, that is, his words, like a cat getting ready to jump at a ball. Because of this neverending sport, the function of words becomes extremely puristic. The only way in which words gain universality is for it to have universal meaning by being clearly defined. Universality means a changeless law of arrangement of words, and creativity

means the effective combination of existent words. (*The Literary Life* 20. Translation mine.)

6. Otto Rank assumes that man's persistent fear of oblivion "caused the primitive . . . to create a body - soul which he might locate in his shadow, in his reflection in a mirror, or in a lake, and which survived the disintegration consequent upon the ever - present fact of death. Dreams of the dead or the absent, the disappearance and reappearance at dawn of one's shadow, gave assurance that somewhere a spiritual self existed and preserved that precious individuality, that identity, that totality that the ego of each man covets. But modern, urban, sophisticated man makes the Double a symbol of death rather than of eternal life Originally, the double was an identical self (shadow, reflection), promising survival in the future; later, the double retained together with the individual's life his personal past; ultimately, he became an opposite self, appearing in the form of evil which represents the perishable and mortal part of the personality repudiated by the social self" (81 - 82).
7. Mishima's extremely complex, voluminous and versatile literary output can be divided into three phases: Works of his early phase (such as his best autobiographical novel, *Confessions of a Mask* of 1949) were still predominantly written in "the language of the mind," from the beginning of the Second World War to 1951. However, his trip around the world, especially to Greece, overturned his extreme self - consciousness and he discovered the "language of the flesh" in the Hellenic glorification of the human body. The transitional period before the trip saw the publication of the first part of *Forbidden Colors*. His second phase, during which he began his self - transformation toward the "language of the flesh," produced the second part of *Forbidden Colors*, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (Shinchosha, 1956), and *Kyoko's House* (Shinchosha, 1959). The last phase, in which he became interested in Indian mysticism and the idea of reincarnation at the same time that he organized "Tatenokai," his private army, and prepared for his own death, produced the great tetralogy, *The Sea of Fertility* (Shinchosha 1965 - 1970).
8. As Nathan explains, Mishima said that the Pacific war was the climax of his life, and the rest of his life, after the war ended in the summer of 1945, was an interminable antclimax. In direct contrast to Nabokov, in whose fiction metamorphoses occur usually in the summer, Mishima often associates summer, the time of full bloom of youth, with death, as in the short story written at the same time as Part II of *Forbidden Colors*, "Death in Mid - Summer" (1952) because of this war experience. Mishima explains,

The decadence which followed that destruction, that grotesque life which had been placed back to back with death — for me, that was summer. The glistening putrescence and the season of rebirth, that was summer. I have the feeling that for me, midsummer continued without a break from 1945 through 1947 and into 1948. (Nathan 168)

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As Mishima later wrote, the writing of *Confessions of a Mask* had a purgative effect (Nathan 90). It conquered to an extent the monster of self-consciousness within himself. Mishima wrote of his *Confessions of a Mask*, "What I attempted in writing this book is a kind of trick for returning to life" (Jinzai, 19. Translation mine).

9. Georges Nivat notes that Nabokov rated Dostoevsky as "a C plus or D minus in literature" in his *Lectures on Russian Literature* given at Cornell University and says, "Techniques of second-rate detective thrillers and cheap psychology of the abyss, trivial religious images — everything that Nabokov hates — are epitomized in Dostoevsky's fiction. The only work that finds favor in Nabokov's eyes is *The Double*, not because it relates to the theme of the 'Doppelganger' . . . but because it is an obvious and shameless imitation of Gogol's 'The Nose.'" (398)
10. As for Rosenfield's accusation about the Sistine Chapel in Dresden, Ardalion's exact words, upon hearing that Hermann is traveling to Dresden, is "My kindest regards to the Sistine." His reference is not to the Chapel in the Vatican but to the "Sistine Madonna" by Raphael in Dresden's National Art Gallery painted for the Church of St. Sixtus in Piacenza, Italy, dated 1513 - 14 (Kamon 53). No doubt the reference is a deliberate ruse by Nabokov, or the Nabokovian editor, and proves he is tricky to the most careful readers.
11. Connolly numbers among the self-referents the "wilted tulip" found in one of Lydia's drawers because it hides a pun for Nabokov's name. The tulip, which reappears in one of Ardalion's paintings, is in a "leaning" (in Russian, *nabokoi*) vase (Connolly 158).

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鏡の契約：

ウラジミール・ナボコフの『絶望』と三島由紀夫の『禁色』における鏡のモチーフの対話的作用

三浦笙子

ウラジミール・ナボコフの『絶望』と三島由紀夫の『禁色』は、それぞれ、鏡というモチーフによって作家である主人公とその分身と見なされた人物との関係を説いている。ミヒヤエル・バフチンの言う「対話的作用」が主人公と分身との間に生じれば、分身のidentityが確立される。同時に、主人公の芸術家としての生命も対話的作用が生じるか否かに左右されていることが分かる。

鏡が二次元的存在をナルシスに与える場合、三島の俊輔のように自己は孤立し、分身の自律は認められず、その唯我論的な作品は不毛に終わる。しかし、鏡が三次元的な働きをすれば、ナボコフのヘルマンのような、作家として失格である人物が分身を虚構から作りだし、その生命さえ奪っても、分身は鏡から脱けだすことができる。ナボコフは、ヘルマンの虚構を読者に見抜かせ、作家—人物間のみならず作家—読者間に対話作用を働かせる。ナボコフの作った鏡は、ナボコフの芸術家としてのidentityを確立させるのである。

この論文では、鏡のモチーフの対話的作用を通じて作家の芸術論に光をあてて見たい。