

Those unfamiliar with Jauss's work will find it most useful to refer first to *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* and, specifically, to "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," Jauss's major position paper on reception study. The reader will find Jauss's method of exposition here (as elsewhere) largely unencumbered by terminological obscurity or rhetorical self-indulgence. Both volumes provide illuminating introductions—that of Volume 2 by Paul de Man and of Volume 3 by Wlad Godzich. Translators Timothy Bahti (Volume 2) and Michael Shaw (Volume 3) deserve a note of praise for achieving English formulations of often "untranslatable" German expressions. The publication of Jauss's work in English marks a scholarly event of the first order and speaks very well of the University of Minnesota's fledgling "Theory and History of Literature" series. Few interested in the serious study of literature as a historical phenomenon will fail to benefit from the range and fluidity of Jauss's thought.

Ellen Pifer

NABOKOV AND THE NOVEL

Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980, Pp. 197.

David Packman

VLADIMIR NABOKOV: THE STRUCTURE OF LITERARY DESIRE

Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1982. \$16.

J.E. Rivers, and Charles Nicol, eds.

NABOKOV'S FIFTH ARC

Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1982. Pp. 317.

Reviewed by June Perry Levine

The two major lines that have been developing in Nabokov criticism over the past twenty years are growing exceedingly clear. Although these are the lines along which all modern criticism has been ranging, they are especially sharply defined in relation to Nabokov because his work polarizes response. On the one side stand the humanist critics who maintain that the chief value of literature lies in its representation of human beings in the real world; on the other stand the linguistic analysts who hold that the fictive world is structured reflexively rather than analogously. The three books under review indicate this division. In *Nabokov and the Novel*, Ellen Pifer declares: "My intention in this book is to demonstrate that even the most intricate of Nabokov's artifices reflect the author's abiding interest in human beings, not only as artists and dreamers but as ethical beings subject to moral law and sanction.... Nabokov's detachment from his characters and their 'invented habitus' contributes dramatically to a moral perception of reality" (pp. i, iii). In contrast to Pifer's humanist intention, David Packman writes in the Preface of *Vladimir Nabokov: The Structure of Literary Desire*: "The tactic of this study is to apply a reflexive critical apparatus to the problem of reading posed by and in a group of reflexive texts: the masterpieces of Vladimir Nabokov's English phase—*Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, and *Ada*. It is hoped that in the course of this scrutiny a number of methodological options available to the critic of modern fiction will be clearly illustrated" (p. viii). *Nabokov's Fifth Arc*, edited by J.E. Rivers and Charles Nicol, might seem to fall into the humanist camp because the editors write that the essays "attempt to focus attention on the human qualities of Nabokov's art and on the humanity that underlies and vivifies what is often interpreted as artifice for its own sake" (p. xv). However, the collection contains a number of pieces from proponents of both critical persuasions.

Nabokov's Fifth Arc is a handsome example of bookmaking—attractively designed and printed—but it is wretchedly proofread; the first page gives the twenty years Nabokov spent in Russia as "1899-1911," and in Dimitri Nabokov's essay, three lines of type are repeated, to mention but a couple of typographical errors. The book's organization may have seemed more

inventive prospectively than it has turned out to be in execution. The editors write: "To the four arcs of Nabokov's life—the Russian, the European, the American, and the neo-European—a fifth arc is now being added: the arc of Nabokov's continuing life as an artist.... The fifth arc is the arc of literary history" (p. xii). "The Fifth Arc" opens the book, but the essays in this section do not fit the rubric "literary history" especially well. The section contains a biographical overview: "Nabokov: A Portrait" by Alfred Appel, Jr.; a testy attempt "to set the record straight" about "a few posthumous slurs" by Dmitri Nabokov; Phyllis A. Roth's provocative article "Toward the Man behind the Mystification," which the author terms "an indication of a set of possibilities which I believe are worth further psychoanalytic investigation"; and "Nabokov's Critical Strategy," a persuasive attack on reflexive criticism, by James M. Rambeau. *Nabokov's Fifth Arc* then presents the first four "arcs" chronologically, that is, the novels, stories, and other works are addressed by critics in the order in which they were published. Rivers and Nicol's book is more conventionally structured than its apparatus might suggest and, like most collections of criticism, must be judged on the merits of the individual pieces.

David Packman's *Vladimir Nabokov: The Structure of Literary Desire* addresses the critical debate between humanist and linguistic criticism: "Like the modern artistic texts that lay bare their devices—as if they were more concerned with themselves than with the world they ostensibly represent—today's criticism often pays as much attention to its own strategies of reading as to the texts it sets out to read" (p. vii). Packman offers a lucid description of the strategies of the modern critic. He also acknowledges the distaste some readers feel for such criticism: "One suspects that, in America, reflexive criticism has generated such anxiety because it sometimes seems to repress the literary text in favor of rather abstract theoretical discussions" (p. vii). If it was Packman's intention to avoid charges of repressing the text, he has not been altogether successful. I think that the author's purpose throughout his book is to present a complex critical methodology, and that the discussion of Nabokov's novels is largely illustrative. The stress in *Vladimir Nabokov: The Structure of Literary Desire* is on theory. Some readers will find this material engrossing, but the results of applying reflexive criticism to *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, and *Ada* are not as far ranging as might have been hoped. Packman's critical vocabulary, derived in part from Russian formalism and from semiotics, reconstructs ideas that have a long critical practice. For example, he devotes four pages to the scene in which Humbert masturbates while *Lolita* is sitting on his lap. Packman writes: "One may speculate that the nymphet's body is less important than the particular narrative end to which it is put. That is, her body is functional; it provides a springboard for the action of the narrative. To appropriate a particularly useful term from the rich vocabulary of Russian formalist criticism, the nymphet's body may be said to 'motivate' the scene, permitting the construction of a narrative" (p. 52). I take this to mean that the shape of the action influences as well as follows the requirements of the narrative. I have no quarrel with Packman's terminology, but it may not unlock new discoveries.

Packman, however, does offer the student of Nabokov something more than literary theory. For example, he carefully describes the devices of retardation, repetition, and suspense in *Lolita*. Nevertheless, because the presentation emphasizes the elucidation of these categories rather than an evaluation of their interplay, the reader cannot discover why he or she finds the devices more effective in *Lolita* than in, say, *Clarissa*. By focusing on the literal rather than the referential level of the novel, Packman shows us some new things: *Pale Fire* is "the representation of an assemblage of imaginary documents" (p. 74) in which "the doubling of the calendars that measure the progression of poem and of journey binds together the two seemingly disparate parts of the book" (p. 86). "In *Ada*, this form of literary narcissism [just described] is reflected in the theme of incest" (p. 90). (These structuralist ideas imply, I think, some homage to the Aristotelian categories of unity and coherence.)

Packman's organizing construct is "literary desire." The theme of desire in the three Nabokov novels is duplicated by the reader's desire for the text. I am not sure that I understand this premise. The strategy imputed to Nabokov is clear enough: "This doubling calls the reader's attention to his own activity, resulting in a subversion of the fictive world" (p. 1). But is Humbert's desire for *Lolita* or Van's for *Ada* paralleled, in fact, by the reader's desire to keep turning the pages? Surely the intense, indeed ecstatic, desire depicted on the thematic level—motivating even destruction and murder—is only very palely shadowed by the reader's interest in the texts—even the interest of a totally immersed reader. Unless the reader's passion for the text is as great as the characters' passion for their objects of delight, I do not think this device could possibly subvert the fictive world, although many other of Nabokov's devices do subvert it.

Perhaps Ellen Pifer asserts so insistently in *Nabokov and the Novel* that "Nabokov's 'aesthetic' artifice may embody and develop the traditionally humanistic concerns of the novel while breaking with its formal conventions" (p. 54) because she fears that the humanist view is being swamped by the rising tide of the new aesthetics. The strengths of Pifer's book lie within the strengths of her tradition, common sense and good judgment. She is at her best in her discussion of *Despair*: "The dubious and pernicious logic of Hermann's claims has, strangely enough, tended to go unrecognized by most critics of the novel. Apparently misled by the madman's own delusions, they take seriously his banal identification between the perfect murder he plans to commit and the perfection of a work of art. While, from the very first page of the novel, Hermann persists in comparing himself to a poet or an actor and the staging of the murder to art, Nabokov is hardly suggesting that artistic pretensions alone make an artist" (p. 99). Pifer rarely cites French structuralists, but she does read Russian, and her comparison between the English and Russian texts of *Despair* is helpful. She also supplies a corrective to narrowly aesthetic judgments of Humbert Humbert and Charles Kinbote.

There are problems, however, with Pifer's approach. Using a methodology that relies heavily on literary history, her chapter on "The Question of Realism" is necessarily selective, overly general, and rather thin. A more serious difficulty occurs when her writing suggests muddled conceptualization. The chapter on *King, Queen, Knave* is especially opaque, as the following excerpts indicate: Both Dreyer's and Martha's versions of reality are shown to be constructs, or fusions, of mind and matter. The material properties of the [train] compartment are ultimately psychic in nature, taking shape in the consciousness that endows them with personal significance. (p. 30) Like Tom [the dog] Dreyer's world is a highly personal metaphor... (p. 31) In Nabokov's view, the murder-thriller is as banal a literary form as the brutal act on which it depends for its meager effects. (p. 38) Articulation—the strategies of composition—demands the vigilant exercise of consciousness, which in turn requires vigilant perception to be grasped. (p. 48) Despite its soundness and sanity, *Nabokov and the Novel* is often verbose, relying on paraphrase, summary, repetition, and moralizing to extend the analysis.

Most of Nabokov's critics treat certain issues in considerable detail, for example: the relation between art and life, gamesplaying, doubling, the nature of reality, and the role of the critic. Not surprisingly, there is a high correlation between a critic's espousal of a humanist or linguistic approach and his or her position on these issues, although no body of critical work is as tidy as my schema.

Critics who view literature in general and Nabokov's work in particular as an activity whose primary purpose is to reflect the external world are inclined to minimize the separation between art and life. Thus, Carol Schloss writes in "Speak Memory: The Aristocracy of Art": "Nabokov's topic, then, is art's ability to recoup the losses of the 'real' world. But he does not view art and nature as antithetical. On the contrary, he insists that the procedures are analogous.... Because nature itself is deceitful, and because nature provides the building blocks from which Nabokov creates his 'unreal estate,' he must, paradoxically, deceive his readers in order ultimately to reward them with the treasures of perception he has accumulated for himself." (pp. 225-26). Schloss, whose short article is one of the most valuable pieces in *Nabokov's Fifth Arc*, goes on to create an unforced connection between Nabokov's form and content: "His intention [in *Speak Memory*] is to reveal life's pattern by violating chronology and, by so doing, to penetrate the camouflage of time" (p. 226). In her essay, "Humbert Humbert and Artistic License," Gladys M. Clifton, who also minimizes the gulf between fictive and human life, quotes Richard Poirier on *Lolita*: "While Nabokov's parody is of an extraordinarily compassionate kind, resisting all but the most delicate translation into interpretive language, nearly all of his interpreters continue to insist on irrelevant distinctions between art and life, fiction and reality" (pp. 166-67). Clifton ends her essay by combining the reflexive and referential aspects of the novel: "Humbert's self portrait is a fascinating combination of artistic triumph (as he intended) and moral failure (as Nabokov intended)" (p. 169). Phyllis A. Roth, believing that an understanding of Nabokov's life will help to understand his fiction, describes the interplay between the life and the work: "I am not arguing that his fiction is shallow, merely self-serving, or ultimately reducible to childhood traumas. On the contrary, I am affirming the genius of Nabokov's imagination, an imagination which employs experiences of this life to body forth visions of other worlds; to confirm for us that this transformation of memories can indeed enable us to progress beyond the sources of these memories, although we are finally, as Nabokov was well aware, 'consumed by that which we were nourished by'" (p. 44).

In contrast, critics who assume that Nabokov's fiction is reflexive, such as Larry R. Andrews, see art and life as two separate orders: "Finally, we sense the hoax," he writes in "Deciphering 'Signs and Symbols': "The story is a fiction, and nobody is responsible. Yet the joke is a serious one. Nabokov is not simply playing an empty game at our expense. He is affirming art as sacred play" (p. 151). If the characters are not "responsible" because the author destroys the illusion of their responsibility, then the traditional—albeit implicit—contract of realist fiction which posits that the characters are models of real people is void: As soon as we appreciate that the story is a fiction and that all its clues are therefore false, the "reality" of the boy and his mania is shattered, and it is no longer possible to speak of our participation in his "world." There is no ambiguity left at the end about the significance or meaninglessness of the symbols in the story, and speculation about the boy's possible suicide is irrelevant, since the world of the story has ceased to exist with the story's final punctuation mark. It has been translated, so to speak, from our perspective to the higher sphere of the artist's fictive world (in which we are characters too)... (p. 150) Here is solipsism with a vengeance, but Andrews raises more questions than he answers. Why are all the clues in a fiction necessarily false? In any event, if there is no possibility of the clues being true, does it make sense to speak of their falseness? If we do not participate in the boy's fictive world, and we are characters in Nabokov's world, what is the point of this "serious" joke?

Many critics discuss Nabokov's literary games. The proponents of linguistic analysis put particular emphasis on this device, as can be seen from Andrew's reference to "art as sacred play"—although Andrews does not indicate by what or to whom this play is consecrated. Packman, who also treats play at length, quotes Huizinga to the effect that play "is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained from it" (p. 8). Although Packman considers play to be serious—but not utilitarian—anthropologists and psychologists have hypothesized that, in most cultures, play serves the function of rehearsal for adult life. Humanist critics would, presumably, be more interested in applying this theory to Nabokov's games.

Because humanist critics often direct their analysis to a novel's referential level, rather than its literal level, they are less inclined to find doubling a paramount feature of Nabokov's work. One of Nabokov's major themes is the uniqueness of subjective reality. Therefore, a genuine double is a contradiction. But reflexive critics look at doubling as a structural device, not a facet of character development, and uncover a good deal of it in the novels.

So too, the nature of reality in Nabokov's work is treated very differently by reflexive critics such as Paul S. Bruss than by humanists like Pifer. In "Nabokov's Last Two Novels," the final essay in *Nabokov's Fifth Arc*, Bruss writes: "In Nabokov's work all 'reality' is a text in need of editing. If, however, the process of editing assumes that there is an ultimate 'reality' that is discoverable by careful scrutiny of the available evidence, then the process must emerge as self-defeating and dangerous to its originator" (p. 298). The Nabokovian literary text "imitates the shifting nature of reality and becomes an authoritative source by virtue of showing that there are no authoritative sources. In his last two novels and throughout his career [Nabokov establishes] the text that creates 'reality' by dramatizing the many ways in which it eludes human perception" (p. 298). Bruss's attempt to define Nabokovian reality by showing how it operates in texts as a shifting of levels and perspectives is a worthwhile project which is partly undermined by his final reification of reality as *something* that "eludes human perception." Pifer relies on Nabokov's statements to interviewers about reality in fashioning her interpretation of his ideas: "There is no story, or history, without a teller; there is no 'truth' for which human consciousness is not responsible.... Nabokov's self-conscious mode of fiction is, quite obviously, a truthful reflection of his assessment of reality, based on his particular premises.... He refused to abstract 'life' from the particular individual whose consciousness informs it. This commitment to the singularity of human perception governed Nabokov's definition of reality and his methods for rendering such reality in his fiction" (p. 126).

The nature of Nabokov's work has caused many writers to ponder the function of literary criticism. Packman says that the questions posed by current critical discourse are: "How should a reader approach a text and how can he make sense of it?" These are certainly necessary questions, but are they sufficient? The question of the values of the work is, apparently, not posed by modern critical discourse. Yet, if reflexive critics were convincing in their contention that Nabokov has written a string of novels about aesthetic theory, the question of whether the novels provide genuine instruction and delight would remain for many readers. Rambeau's essay in *Nabokov's Fifth Arc* formulates an attack on the insufficiency of the reflexive position by

asserting that the formal properties of fiction are not the subject matter of fiction: "It is no doubt part of the duties of Nabokov's critics and editors and annotators to detect what they can in his elaborate ruses, but their final duty is to avoid the entrapment within his strategies which Appel's edition [*The Annotated Lolita*] illustrates" (p. 32). Rambeau appears to be counseling critical detachment here, yet, at the same time, urging intense concentration: "The qualities [in art] of muteness, of being overheard, are what the literary critics must deal with, must articulate, must explain" (p. 25).

One of the most rewarding essays in *Nabokov's Fifth Arc*, Margaret Byrd Boegeman's "Invitation to a Beheading and the Many Shades of Kafka," employs an eclectic critical approach. An influence study, an exercise in genre, thematic, and linguistic criticism, the article argues persuasively the unlikely thesis that Cincinnatus C. serves as an emblem for Nabokov's planned crossing over from Russian to English composition. Furthermore, Boegeman's article is perhaps an augury that the next stage of Nabokov studies may see an attempt to combine referential and reflexive criticism in some new amalgam.

Victor J. Ramraj
MORDECAI RICHLER
Boston: Twayne, 1983. Pp. 154.

Arnold E. Davidson
MORDECAI RICHLER
New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1983. Pp. 203
Reviewed by Allison Mitcham

Victor J. Ramraj's and Arnold E. Davidson's recent critical works on Mordecai Richler, both published in the United States, should help dispel Richler's early frustrations about being judged chiefly in Canada by standards he felt were provincial and inferior. One recalls Richler's protagonist saying in *Saint Urbain's Horseman* (1971): "If they [the Canadian reviews] were bad it would be humiliating, and if they were good it wouldn't be satisfying either." Such bitterness ought to be a thing of the past, as both Ramraj and Davidson make clear, while stressing that Richler now occupies a significant place in the world literary scene.

Ramraj, for instance, who is meticulously fair in crediting other critics with some of the ideas he subscribes to, draws attention to the number of well-known critics on both sides of the Atlantic who have, over the years, written on Richler's work. Anthony Burgess, Philip Toynbee, George Woodcock, Leslie Fiedler, Malcolm Ross, Desmond Pacey, and William New have all, Ramraj notes, had their say. Davidson leans most heavily for his commentary on George Woodcock's book on Mordecai Richler, which is also called *Mordecai Richler* (1970) and on Woodcock's essay "The Wheel of Exile" (1971). Indeed, so noticeable is Woodcock's influence on Davidson's work that one cannot help wondering whether Davidson's book would ever have been written without Woodcock's. True, he both subscribes to and, occasionally, refutes Woodcock's ideas directly; but at times he fails to acknowledge them. For instance, his chapter on Duddy Kravitz runs remarkably close—both in tone and substance—to parts of Woodcock's chapter on the same subject.

Davidson's assumption that Richler belongs in a world literary context is supported by allusions to other novelists as well as critics. His analogies take in such international literary figures as Hemingway, Camus, Bellow, and Fitzgerald. One of his analogies, however—an extensive one in Chapter 6 between Richler's *The Incomparable Atuk* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*—seems somewhat forced, especially the paragraph which begins: "These comic parallels to and mock inversions of *The Great Gatsby* bring us to the heart of Richler's novel *The Incomparable Atuk*" (p. 106).

Although, on the whole, Ramraj's and Davidson's books are thorough studies of Richler's development—from *The Acrobats* (1954) to *Joshua Then and Now* (1980)—Ramraj's is the more