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Sputniks, Ice-Picks, G.P.U.: Nabokov's Pale Fire

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The Atlantic became one of the most contested military zones of the Second World War in the ferocious battles between the U-Boats and convoys. That militarization of the ocean entered a new phase in the Cold War with the NATO Treaty of 1949: the North Atlantic, battleground between the Axis and Allied forces, became the strategic core of the West's containment of the Soviet military threat. NATO became an organization in January 1950, inaugurating the high Cold War, and launching the Cold War 1950s as an international Atlantic Alliance. Its name has associated the Treaty Organization with maritime operations, and naval exercises typified its profile, as with the Mainbrace and Grand Slam exercises of 1952, or Operation Strikeback in 1957. Dominated by the United States's Second Fleet and the aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines of NATO's navies, the ocean was stamped as the key symbolic defence zone. Yet despite the importance of the carriers and destroyers and submarines, the real strategic defence systems were all airborne. The Atlantic, symbol of the containment of Soviet aggression with NATO at the heart of the Cold War, signified as Atlantic skies, the airspace over the North Atlantic and its Arctic airbases. And it was the Soviet's launching of Sputnik in 1957 that triggered a crisis about that airspace: the front page of the New York Times for October 5th 1957 pictures the trajectory of the satellite (or 'Soviet moon') over the North Atlantic Ocean. The Manchester Guardian noted that Sputnik meant ICBM capability (since it had been launched using an R-7 rocket, capable of 6,000 mile flights), and therefore global targeting of any citizen: 'The Russians can now build ballistic missiles capable of

hitting any chosen target anywhere in the world.'[1] The paranoia of that statement became more vivid when Krushchev visited the United States in 1959, timing his arrival in Washington to coincide with the crashing of Lunik 2 space vehicle on the moon – Cardinal Cushing feared for the life of his president: 'inviting Krushchev here is like opening up our frontiers to the enemy in a military war'.[2] This chapter looks at the Krushchev visit and the Sputnik scare as feeding into what one might call an Atlantic airspace paranoia of targeted citizenry. In particular, I will be showing how Vladimir Nabokov's Cold War political novel, Pale Fire, drew upon anti-communist journalism about the 1959 release of the killer of Trotsky in 1940 to structure a paranoid parable linking assassination fears with a Sputnik-targeting of the average American, figured by Nabokov as a Frostian poet hidden away in polite academic suburbia. Those assassination/targeting fears are figured in the approach of the political assassin, Gradus, who in the book is pictured flying to the US over the Atlantic on an intercontinental flight, mimicking the intercontinental ballistic missiles that Sputnik had revealed to the world.

Pale Fire is a political novel published in 1962 by the Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov when he was living in the US. It stages Nabokov's own sense of his public image as suspicious Russian-American interloper at the height of the Cold War, and contains a poem by the fictional poet John Shade and a deranged commentary on that poem by Charles Kinbote, neighbour and fellow academic, who is convinced he is the escaped king of a Central European country, Zembla, overrun by communist forces. Shade is shot on his doorstep, and the novel plays on Kinbote's conspiracy theory concerning the killing. He is convinced Shade was murdered by an agent of the communist secret state, Gradus. The novel is formally complex: it contains a long poem written by Shade about his own life, and a commentary by

Kinbote who develops his mad political reading of the poem in extensive and ludicrous footnotes and commentary. Kinbote believes Shade had encoded within his poem secret allusions to Zembla and Kinbote's own life trajectory. The footnotes detail long digressions into obscure Zemblan history, in particular a communist coup that overthrows the Zemblan monarchy, culminating in the assassination attempt on Kinbote. Irony points up Kinbote's deranged fabulations: readers can not only sense the craziness of the footnotes as commentary, but also question Kinbote's sanity: Zembla may very well be an elaborate fiction masking a more sinister possibility – that Kinbote may be the man who shot Shade in order to possess and own his poem. Nabokov is clearly satirizing literary criticism that politicizes art; but his target is as clearly the intrusion of the Cold War and anti-communist hysteria into the domain of literature. Kinbote drags a mad fiction of Soviet assassination into the retreats of US academe and suburbia from across the Atlantic, infecting the literature of the New World with European Cold War paranoia. This article will demonstrate how Nabokov deliberately draws on the narrative of the assassination of Trotsky to structure the Cold War assassination theme. In particular, it proves that he smuggled into Kinbote's account of the killing of Shade by Gradus allusions to the account of the killing of Trostsky by the Cold War anti-communist journalist, Isaac Don Levine, The Mind of an Assassin, published in 1959 to coincide with the release from captivity of Trotsky's murderer, Soviet hit-man, Ramon Mercader.

For the force and complexity of this Cold War satire, it helps to work out the immediate political context for the composition of Pale Fire: planned between 1956 and early 1958, William Boyd tells us, with a burst of writing in March 1958 and a 'new flash of inspiration' in November 1960.[3] The Cold War context for these two phases is interesting. The 1956-early 1958 phase coincides with the crushing of the

uprising in Hungary in 1956, and the start of the Space Race with the launching of Sputnik in 1957 and the US Explorer satellite in early 1958. Between 1958 and 1960, NASA is created with the launch of Pioneer 1 in 1958. 1959 sees Khrushchev becoming Premier, and visiting the US in September, the testing of Titan intercontinental ballistic missile, the Cuban revolution and Castro. Explorer 6 takes the first satellite photo of Earth, and Luna 3 the first photos of the dark side of the moon. In 1960, Sputnik 6 is launched and recovered with two dogs, the first living organisms to return from space. In October 1960, the ABM early warning system, Thule Greenland, detects the moonrise as a large Russian missile contingent headed for the US. The BMEWS radar had not been programmed to understand what the moon looked like as it rose in the eastern sky.

Sputnik had brought the concept of Russian intercontinental technology to the fore, visibly and spectacularly proving that the USSR could not only seek out and destroy US targets, but had them under satellite surveillance. As Lawrence Freedman put it in 1981:

No event focused popular attention on America's vulnerabilities to attack than the launching of the world's first artificial earth satellite, Sputnik I, by the Soviet Union on 4 October 1957. It brought home the fact that the United States no longer enjoyed invulnerability to the ravages of war. [. . .] This achievement in space captured the popular imagination in a way that stark and subdued reports of monitored ICBM tests could not. Sputnik exhibited the relevant technology in an exciting and visible fashion. As important was the general shock it provided to American self confidence. The Russians had shown that they could match - indeed exceed - the Americans in technological sophistication.[4]

Pale Fire bears the traces of these Cold War developments in its figuring of the approach of Gradus, the communist killer, towards Shade's household: he boards a flight for New York at Orly, and is figured as a menacing treat as he flies over the Atlantic Ocean. The communist regime, the Extremists, is identified in Kinbote's warped imagination with the technology of flight and surveillance: 'Airborne machines and everything connected with them cast a veritable spell over the minds of our new rulers whom kind history had suddenly given a boxful of these zipping and zooming gadgets to play with.'[5] Gradus is troped as a combination of Sputnik and missile in the eye and muscles of Kinbote's mind, as it is he whose narrative drive is most under the airborne spell of Cold War technology, despite or because of his reactionary resistance to it:

Although Gradus availed himself of all varieties of locomotive - rented cars, local trains, escalators, airplanes - somehow the eye of the mind sees him, and the muscles of the mind feel him, as always streaking across the sky with black traveling bag in one hand and loosely folded umbrella in the other, in a sustained glide high over sea and land. The force propelling him is the magic action of Shade's poem itself, the very mechanism and sweep of verse, the powerful iambic motor.[6]

This recalls the headlines for October 5, 1957: 'The Soviet Union announced today it has the world's first artificial moon streaking around the globe 560 miles out in space.'[7] The image of Gradus holding a traveling bag alludes to the meaning of Sputnik, 'fellow traveller'. Related to the pale fire theme, Gradus/Sputnik is an enemy satellite as artificial moon orbiting towards the Shade sun, just as Khrushchev

was approaching the Sun King of the US, the President, for the summit in September. Pravda for October 5 1957 claimed Sputnik could be observed 'in the rays of the rising and setting sun with the aid of very simple optical instruments (binoculars, telescopes, etc.)'[8] It is a lethal moon since US reaction to Sputnik identified it so strongly with the recent USSR ICBM successes; and also more practically because, as John Ranelagh wrote in his history of the CIA, since 'the Soviet SS-6 rocket which had put the Sputnik into orbit was obviously capable of intercontinental flight from the USSR to the U.S.A. the Sputnik itself was seen as having a bombing potential'.[9] Gradus flying towards Shade is timed, in Kinbote's paranoid imagination, to Shade's composition of the poem: and the poem is timed to tune in with the geopolitics of the Cold War. For instance, Gradus boarding a Russian flight at the start of his journey west is 'synchronized', Kinbote notes, 'with Shade's starting (Atlantic seaboard time) to compose' his second Canto.[10]

The Atlantic/Sputnik bombing paranoia may explain why the pale fire enemy moon, in its incarnation as the 'roundlet of pale light' of the barn ghost in Shade's suicidal daughter Hazel's notes, only communicates in broken words and meaningless syllables because it signifies 'a military disaster with cosmic consequences that cannot be phrased distinctly by the thick unwilling tongue'. Hazel's suicide, we recall, occurs on the very night Shade is discussing the atomic arms race with Pat Pink ('Pat Pink, our guest (antiatomic chat)').[11] Kinbote's assertion that it is the iambic rhythm of Shade's poem that is the motor propelling the Sputnik missile may allude to the famous 'beep-beep' signal emitted by the satellite, but more pertinently it is a confession of the tight relationship between enemy technology and the US domestic imagination within the muscles of the Cold War US mind. If Sputnik revealed the scary resemblance between US weapon defence systems and USSR

offensive ICBMs and surveillance technology, then this tracks the ways the US domestic imagination, figured in the Shades' beleaguered home, is shaped by the transatlantic enemy it fears just simply because it is constructed as a defence against its surveillance.

The clearest evidence that Gradus is a Cold War projection of Kinbote's own unconscious designs on Shade's privacies is in the fact that Kinbote is the artificial moon-commentator on Shade's sun or poem: 'I have caught myself,' says Kinbote, 'borrowing a kind of opalescent light from my poet's fiery orb'.[12] Gradus, as the enemy satellite, the artificial moon signifying surveillance and death with 'his idiotic journey across the Atlantic',[13] is a military correlative to Kinbote's literary envy. This becomes clearer if we take into account another of the Cold War narratives that coincided with the early compositional history of Pale Fire. The CIA apologist, Isaac Don Levine, published a very full journalistic account of the assassination of Trotsky, The Mind of an Assassin, in 1959.[14] The resemblances between Gradus and Trotsky's killer are intriguing: 'Jakob Gradus called himself variously Jack Degree or Jacques de Gray, or James de Gray, and also appears in police records as Ravus, Ravenstone, and d'Argus.'[15] In police and FBI records for Mercader, Trotsky's assassin, the aliases include: 'Jaimé Ramon Mercader del Río Hernández, aliases Frank Jacson, Frank Jackson, Jack Mornard, Jack Morton, Jacques Mornard Van-Dendreschd, Salvador Torkof, King.' Mercader pretended to be working for the Argus Publishing Company.[16] The possible complicity between Gradus and the secretly treacherous confidant, Kinbote, is sketched out in the complex history of Stalinist infiltration of the Trotsky entourage at Coyoacán, including the American duped by the GPU, Robert Sheldon Harte, who let the Siqueiros raiders in on May 24th 1940, and of course Mercader himself, who had seduced Sylvia Ageloff, one of Trotsky's

entourage, and insinuated himself into Coyoacán, tricking his way into a one-to-one meeting with Trotsky and killing him with an ice-pick on August 20th 1940. Trotsky was 62 when he died the next day, Shade's age when assassinated. And Mercader also flew from Paris to New York before flying on to Mexico; Stalin's gunman-assassin entered the New World flying through Atlantic airspace like the Sputnik-Gradus.

What this suggests is that Nabokov drew from Levine's account of Mercader to create an amalgam: Mercader is both Kinbote and Gradus. Kinbote gains access to the Shade household with the complicity of Sylvia O'Donnell - she arranges for Kinbote's lectureship at Wordsmith.[17] Mercader is brought into Coyoacán by Sylvia Ageloff. Kinbote indulges in an 'orgy of spying' on the Shades, taking detailed notes of his visits there, and of all visitors, ostensibly as research in the humble guise of literary commentator.[18] This act of spying is alluded to, in its Zemblan form, in the curious story of the detailed plan of 'the various approaches to a fortified palace' which Kinbote claims he gave to Shade, 'a rather handsomely drawn plan of the chambers, terraces, bastions and pleasure grounds of the Onhava Palace'.[19] Mercader spies on the fortified household, taking secret photographs that found their way back to Moscow, particularly in the preparations for the first attempt on Trotsky's life, the armed assault on Coyoacán in May 1940:

> Ramon's role at this pass [. . .] was to be that of a spy only […] he would be able to get and retain a photographic picture of house, patio, walls and guard towers, to establish where each member of the household slept, where the police were stationed and what routes they patrolled. […]He took numerous snapshots, probably with a concealed miniature camera, of the household and all its occupants. Copies, or

perhaps the originals, were sent to Moscow and were placed in the special Trotsky dossier in the KI Registry of the NKVD which occupied three floors.'[20]

Levine describes how Mercader '[wormed] his way into [Trotsky's] household', how he put on the 'mask of admirer and disciple', used the ruse of pretending to be writing a pro-Trotsky article on France to gain access to Trotsky: 'What better chance of carrying off the assassination and escaping alive than by developing a disciple-and-master relationship?'.[21]

Kinbote 'kills' Shade in order to get his hands on the manuscript of Pale Fire. He wears the index cards upon which the poem is written against his body:

[I] took the manuscript out again, and for several days wore it, as it were, having distributed the ninety-two index cards about my person, twenty in the right-hand pocket of my coat, as many in the left-hand one, a batch of forty against my right nipple and the twelve precious ones with variants in my innermost left-breast pocket. [. . .] I circulated, plated with poetry, armored with rhymes, stout with another man's song, stiff with cardboard, bullet-proof at last.[22]

This is a weird distortion of Mercader's killer kit, as described by Levine:

Inside the khaki raincoat, sewn into the lining of the right-hand pocket, there was a dagger with a brown sheath. [. . .] He also carried an ice-axe, or piolet, the handle of which had been cut down for easy concealment. [. . .] This weapon was in a pocket of the brown raincoat, and attached to it by a cord. In his back trousers' pocket, Ramon

carried a third weapon - a .45 caliber Star automatic pistol with eight bullets in the magazine and one in the firing chamber.[23]

Ramon also carried on his person a letter which purported to explain to the world the motives for the crime he was about to commit. In this purported 'confession', he claimed to be a disillusioned follower of Trotsky who had been ordered by the latter to go to the Soviet Union and kill Stalin, and had recoiled with horror from the proposal.[24]

What's more, one of the aims of the attack in May had been to steal or destroy Trotsky's papers. Stalin was anxious to liquidate Trotsky at this time since he was preparing a biography of Stalin which would reveal to the world the totalitarian myths, murders, purges and lies of the regime, including the poisoning of Lenin. Levine speculates that the reason the naive Harte let in the Siqueiros raiders was that he might have been assured 'that nobody would be killed, that their sole mission was to seize Trotsky's archives so as to prove to the world that he was plotting against socialism and Russia'.[25] The GPU had stolen Trotsky's archives before, in Paris in 1936,[26] using the GPU agent provocateur, Zborowski, who had gained the confidence of Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov, to the extent of becoming, in the words of a defector quoted by Levine, 'literally the shadow of L. Sedov'.[27] Zborowski tipped off the GPU as to their location at the International Institute of Social History, whose premises were 'broken into and thoroughly ransacked [. . .] The burglars helped themselves only to the fifteen packages of the Trotsky files'.[28] The subsequent murder of Sedov in 1938 at a small hospital in Auteuil was also engineered by Zborowski, masked as a

suicide,[29] one of the possible sources of the story of Hazel's death in Pale Fire - both Hazel and Sedov die two years before their fathers' assassinations.

If Mercader (and Zborowski to a certain extent) provided material for Kinbote, he is even more clearly a source for the character of Gradus. We have seen that Mercader wore a brown raincoat. Gradus's key signature is his brown suit. Mercader felt ill, being sick with anxiety on the day of the killing. Natalia Sedova, Trotsky's wife, remembered him refusing a cup of tea just before the murder, and saying: '"I ate late and I can still feel my meal up here." He pointed to his throat. "It's choking me."'[30] Gradus also suffers from terrible indigestion on the day of the killing: 'he was forced to visit the washroom as soon as he got to the solidly booked hotel. There his misery resolved itself in a scalding torrent of indigestion.'[31] But it is Levine's Cold War rhetoric that brings Gradus and Mercader together most forcefully. For Levine, Mercader is a frightening product of a totalitarianism: 'a rationally indoctrinated murderer, the product of the age of reason at its dead end […] the pioneer of a line of soulless monsters, the harbingers of a coming race.'[32] Mercader was in the news whilst Nabokov was composing Pale Fire since he was due for release in 1960. Levine visited him in prison as part of the research for his book in February 1959,[33] the month chosen by Nabokov as the date Kinbote and Shade first meet,[34] Levine shocked to find the aging killer, after a lapse of eleven years since his first visit, 'with a double chin and tortoise-shell glasses, wearing an open shirt and slacks, and weighing at least thirty pounds more [. . .] the impression of a sedate bourgeois'.[35] Despite this impression, Levine still manages to crank up the Cold Warrior prose to trope Mercader as a robotic evolutionary nightmare: 'The hombre enigmatico thus turns out to be the prototype of the coming race as seen from Moscow in her universalist role of the mother of all nations. […] Beneath the mask of

the prisoner in Mexico lurks the Kremlin's happy robot of the future.' [36] Gradus is also an automatic man, a robotic creature of ideology: 'Mere springs and coils produced the inward movements of our clockwork man.'[37] For Kinbote, Gradus is only a 'half-man' who is also 'half mad',[38] a creature he must destroy to remove all traces of comparison with himself. Nabokov hints strongly that Kinbote visits Gradus in jail and slits his throat, eerily like Levine visiting Mercader:

I did manage to obtain, soon after his detention, an interview, perhaps even two interviews, with the prisoner. He was now much more lucid than when he cowered bleeding on my porch step, and he told me all I wanted to know. […] A few days later, alas, he thwarted justice by slitting his throat with a safety razor blade salvaged from an unwatched garbage container.[39]

The clues are there in Kinbote's 'perhaps even two interviews' - how could he forget? - and in the detail of the provenance of the razor - how could he possibly know? Nabokov took this whole episode from Levine: 'During the early days in prison he was once found in possession of a hidden razor blade in his pocket [. . .] what was troubling him was not any urge towards self-destruction, but fear of assassination at the hands of a Trotsky avenger.'[40] This fear of assassination is the source of Kinbote's persecution mania - whilst spying on the Shades, he lives in a constant terror of regicide by the Extremists, and pretends that it is this fear which motivates his spying:

Everybody knows how given to regicide Zemblans are […] Stealthy rustles, the footsteps of yesteryear, and idle breeze, a dog touring the garbage cans - everything

sounded to me like a bloodthirsty prowler. [. . .] I suppose it was then, on those dreadful nights, that I got used to consulting the windows of my neighbor's house in the hope of a gleam of comfort.[41]

Kinbote is masquerading here as a political target as crucial and charismatic as Trotsky, 'the object,' Levine writes, 'of a global man-hunt conducted with unlimited resources by a powerful modern state.'[42] He borrows the historical perspective of the Trotsky case: 'In the long roll of political assassinations which mark the pages of modern history […] there is not another case paralleling the murder of Trotsky.'[43] He borrows the sense of the inevitability of the assassination attempt from Trotsky's own sense of doom, particularly after the May 24 attack. Like Kinbote, Trotsky dreaded nightfall: 'Trotsky had become accustomed to live in the shadow of impending assassination. Every morning since the attack of May 24 he would say to his wife upon waking: "Another lucky day. We are still alive."'[44] But, as the strange and unsettling association between fear of regicide and the decision to spy on the Shades proves, Kinbote in the melodramatic nightfall of his mind is both Trotsky and Mercader, king and regicide, victim and killer.

The clearest indication of this is in the sinister scene where Kinbote masquerades as Charlotte Corday visiting Marat in his bath-tub, described in the index as an act of penetration: '[Kinbote's] penetrating into the bathroom where his friend sat and shaved in the tub': 'I hear so clearly in my mind's ear Sybil's cool voice saying: "But John cannot see you, he is in his bath"; and John's raucous roar coming from the bathroom: 'Let him in, Sybil, he won't rape me!'[45] The triangle of Kinbote-Sybil-Shade echoes the Mercader-Natalia-Trotsky relationship. Mercader used his relationship with Sylvia to charm Natalia and thus gain access to Trotsky:

after Trosky's death it was Natalia's testimony, backed up by Sylvia's hatred of the betrayer, which most directly challenged Mercader's alibi, alias and fake autobiography; just as it is Sybil who is Kinbote's most vociferous accuser. The Corday connection may have been drawn from Levine:

He resorted to the seduction of an innocent woman as a means of attaining the friendly confidence of his victim for his murderous design. And yet his whole defense echoes Charlotte Corday upon her assassination of Marat […] But what a difference. Charlotte Corday killed Marat as a bloodthirsty tyrant in power, while Trotsky was a hunted and cornered man when struck down.[46]

If, for Kinbote, Gradus is only a 'half-man' it is clear that this is because the other half is Kinbote himself. He is a split man, having introjected a paranoid version of Trotsky as hunted and cornered man, and the double masks of Mercader as admirer and friend in the target's entourage, and Kremlin hatchet man. The double role of Trotsky-Mercader reproduces Mercader's own split consciousness.

Mercader had been subjected to 972 hours of psycho-social tests and interrogations by two criminologists, who went on to produce a monumental 1,359 report for the court, entitled "Organic-Functional and Social Study of the Assassin of Leon Trotsky", much of which finds its way into Levine's Cold War text, indeed giving it its title, The Mind of an Assassin. Levine uses the criminologists' Freudianism to belittle Mercader as a neurotic Oedipal killer of father-substitute Trotsky: 'he had become a revolutionist because he was still caught up in the neurotic prison of a childhood struggle against paternal authority and was acting out that struggle in a different and larger arena.'[47] The examiners go further, arguing that

Mercader was playing out a role as sketched out in Otto Rank's 1909 version of the Oedipal myth in The Myth of the Birth of a Hero in which the hero fantasizes he is the son of a king, the king sensing danger exposes the new-born babe to extreme danger, but the child is saved and goes on as an adult to wreak revenge by killing his father.[48] This myth fitted Mercader to a tee:

[Ramon] claimed to be the son of a Belgian diplomat of noble origin associated with the Belgian court (the hero as son of the king). […] He had killed the "evil father" in the form of Trotsky [and] believed that he would be acclaimed by history as a hero who had saved the working-class from a false leader. [. . .] The conflict between an acquired aggressiveness and a deep-seated passivity made the Soviet order a natural home for him.[49]

Levine backs up his use of Otto Rank's mythological rewrite of the Oedipal complex with the work of Cold War Freudian, Dr. Norbert Bromberg, of the American Psychoanalytic Association: Bomberg, Levine tells us, theorized communist hatred of capitalism as hatred of the father, and communism as neurotic version of mother love (which explains Levine's sarcastic reference to the Soviet Union as 'mother of all nations').

Kinbote's fantasy of himself as son of a king is Nabokov's broad parody of the Mexican criminologists' soft Freudianism, coloured by Levine's Cold War rhetoric. The whole of Kinbote's Zemblan account could be said to be a fake autobiography to mask the designs of a Kremlin killer. The fake autobiography is deliberately written by Nabokov to mimick an extravagant Otto Rank-style fantasy myth, with Bomberg-style McCarthyite dream interpretation. Levine's dream

interpretation is Freud recruited to the Cold War. He recounts one of Mercader's dreams, of a boat race that takes place off Royan, one of Trotsky's French hideouts:

Would it not be plausible to visualize the Deisel-powered boat in Ramon's composition as Stalin's ship of state? […] The boat which had sunk would seemingly represent Trotsky's organization, and the men who "were swimming" would fittingly describe the floundering Trotskyites in the international regatta of communism.[50]

Kinbote's dreams of his Zemblan wife Disa invite similar interpretation. He dreams of her with guilt and anxiety, associating her with Sybil in obscure grief for some nameless infidelity. The whole business about the concealed crown jewels, and the papers she must sign is set up deliberately to be compared with the Extremist search for the king - in the very next note Gradus misinterprets a message from Extremist Headquarters informing him 'that letters from the King divulging his whereabouts could be obtained by breaking into Villa Disa and rifling the Queen's bureau'.[51] Villa Disa, as the site of both Disa's resistance to the disguised King and her concealment of papers which prove his guilt, is a dream version of the Shade household under the double surveillance of commentator identifying poem with the body of the poet, wracked with guilt over Sybil as widow.

Mercader, for the examiners and for Levine, is a personality split into killer and mythological prince. The use of Freud to control and belittle Mercader's Stalinist politics turns on interpretation of his dreams, establishment of the true biography hidden beneath the farrago of fantasy aliases assumed by Mercader in order to prove both that he was a GPU agent and that the Soviet Union could infiltrate any system, any household, however well-guarded and knowledgeable about the totalitarian

regime. Trotsky is dangerous because he is a writer, about to write the biography of Stalin to rip the ideological mask off the dictator - which is why the GPU went to such lengths to appropriate or destroy the Trotsky archive. Mercader wormed his way into the household through his fake marriage to Sylvia and tender approaches to Natalia, Trotsky's wife. He managed to do this because, Levine argues, he himself was split into two by Oedipal drives which both motivated his killing of father Trotsky, the Old Man of the Opposition, and structured his capacity to deceive (he really somehow believed his own alias, which enabled him to resist Mexican police, CIA and FBI investigations and criminological-psychoanalytic examinations). In all this, he became, for Levine, living proof of the McCarthyite conspiracy theory: the enemy was devious, shape-shifting, having at its disposal lethal split personalities as agents provocateurs.

In an extraordinary section of the 'Prisoner against Psychologist' chapter, Levine tells us of Mercader's taste in art:

He [. . .] discussed a painting by Frida Kahlo, the wife of Diego Rivera [the owners of the Coyoacán house]. Mercader was fond of this particular painting. It was of psychological interest because it represented a dual personality. It is called The Two Fridas and shows the artist as two women seated side by side on a bench with hands clasped. Superimposed on the breasts of both women are anatomical drawings of the human heart. These hearts are linked by blood vessels which wind between the two figures, and blood drips slowly from the end of a vein which is held by a doctor's clamp.[52]

Kahlo's picture may lie behind the doubling theme in Pale Fire: the Shadows are 'the shadow twins of the Karlists', just as Gradus is Kinbote's shadow twin. Kinbote's obsession with Shade's heart - he desperately hopes Shade will die of a heart-attack so that he may claim possession of the poem - is intricately connected to his own double role as killer-commentator, both hating and fearfully in 'love' with Sybil/Hazel: 'He was, had always been, casual and heartless. But the heart of his dreaming self, both before and after the rupture, made extraordinary amends.'[53] His own insides, the domain of the heart of his dreaming self, is linked by blood vessels to the wracked insides of his shadow twin Gradus, as he imagines him streaking through the air, as Sputnik-ICBM, towards the heart of the US:

We can even make out (as, head-on but quite safely, phantom-like, we pass through him, through the shimmering propeller of his flying machine, through the delegates waving and grinning at us) his magenta and mulberry insides, and the strange, not so good sea swell undulating in his entrails.[54]

This is the heart of the Cold War pathology, the heart of McCarthyite paranoia: a deep inhabiting of the citizen's very insides by the spectre of the communist Other.

Levine is most spectacularly a Cold Warrior when he looks into the Mercader report for evidence about not only the mind but the body of Trotsky's assassin. The physiological tests undergone by Mercader are weird and telling: the examiners are trying to draw up a portrait of a typical GPU assassin's body, observing abnormalities - lack of body hair, left-handedness, broad shoulders slightly stooped, green, myopic eyes, extremely hypersensitive skin, rapid brain waves, strong heart beat.[55] The obsession with secret psychology, secret biography, secret internal self turns out, in

Levine's text, to be a paranoid construct of the enemy as one's own secret body's twin, a rival espionage network deep within the entrails of the US citizen.

Shade is a Cold Warrior too, though of a seemingly mild liberal variety, rather like Nabokov himself, or like Nabokov's father, who was shot dead by a Royalist extremist in 1922. Nabokov had participated in the 1905 revolution as a liberal member of the Kadets; he had written about the Provisional Government in a work that Trotsky quoted in his history of the revolution. It was Trotsky's Red Army that killed the Romanov imperial family. But it was a royalist, or Karlist, who shot Vladimir Nabokov, in an attempt on the life of the leader of the Kadets in Berlin. Kinbote is a royalist and a communist, since both forces cooperated in perpetuating the cycle of violence and extremism which the Nabokovs, father and son, abominated. Shade abominates political extremism too, imagining himself being shot by 'some goon/Political', but taunting the 'dedicated imbeciles', inveighing against the party line and gloomy Russian spies in his poem;[56] he is quoted by Kinbote ranting against Marxist totalitarianism: 'Marxism needs a dictator, and a dictator needs a secret police, and that is the end of the world'.[57] Shade, with his uxoriousness, his Frostian rugged individualism, his neo-Christian conservatism, his democratic principles, and his passionate advocacy of the freedom of the individual, is a portrait of the CIA's image of Trotsky, just as Kinbote-Shade is a portrait of the split personality of the Mercader assassin.

And what of Nabokov himself? Kinbote sounds most like Nabokov when he satirizes the fellow-travellers of the US academy, as with the Professor Pat Pink, who had had an 'antiatomic chat' with Shade, we remember, on the night of Hazel's suicide:

A professor of physics now joined in. He was a so-called Pink, who believed in what so-called Pinks believe in (Progressive Education, the Integrity of anyone spying for Russia, Fall-outs occasioned solely by US-made bombs, the existence in the near past of a McCarthy Era, Soviet achievements including Dr Zhivago, and so forth).[58]

But beneath the surface Cold Warrior Nabokov often posed as is a writer who knows that it is the Cold War itself which is the enemy, creating in all writers when they write in Cold War America a personality split into three - Shade-Kinbote-Gradus - in a self-destructive compact mass of conflicting cells, tormented entrails. He knew this because he had already been infected by the virus before the war, before both wars, deep in his own family pathology and history. When Shade falls into his black faint at the lecture on Why Poetry is Meaningful to Us, one of 'those peevish people who attend / Such talks only to say they disagree', points his pipe at him and he falls into 'the attack, the trance, / Or one of my old fits' (ll. 688-92). Shade is unconsciously reenacting the lecture in 1922 which saw the death of Nabokov's father. Milyukov, the Kadet leader, was lecturing significantly on 'America and the Restoration of Russia' when the two gunmen struck - Nabokov had knocked the first gunman, Peter Shabelsky-Bork, to the ground and was shot dead by the second, Sergey Taboritsky, who was later to be appointed second-in-command to General Biskupsky, head of Hitler's department for émigré affairs in 1936 Berlin, an appointment which precipitated Nabokov's flight to Paris.[59]

In his trance, Shade half-dies in prefiguration of his own death at the hands of Gradus-Kinbote - Kinbote seems to 'remember' March 28, 1922 too, appropriating the heroic role of Nabokov's father: 'Shade's widow found herself so deeply affected

by the idea of my having "thrown myself" between the gunman and his target' that she agrees to Kinbote's appropriation of the manuscript.'[60] And it is in that trance that Shade has a vision of a nightmare system of interlocking cells:

Blood-black nothingness began to spin
A system of cells interlinked within
Cells interlinked within cells interlinked
Within one stem.[61]

Kinbote approves of these lines: 'The fitting-in of the threefold "cells interlinked" is most skilfully managed, and one derives logical satisfaction from the "system" and "stem" interplay'.[62] Deep within the death-entranced body of the Cold War citizen is an image of the insides of the imagination as a threefold system of cells, threefold like the body-systems called Kinbote-Gradus-Shade, or Mornard-Mercader-Trotsky. The systems are interlinked in their own internalized, pathological and self-destructive Cold War, turned fruitlessly, fearfully and guiltily towards the accusing widow-suicide, Sybil-Hazel, Natalia-Leon Sedov.

The US Cold War, as analysed by Nabokov, drew much of its virulent energy from fantasies, paranoia and sensationalism generated by a fusion of Russian and American fictions of power. Crossing the Atlantic as communist missile system, Gradus connects the story of Trotskyite anti-Stalinist propaganda with the high Cold War of the late 1950s US. Shade is the representative of a native Trotsykite resistance to the Stalinist foreign body because Trotsky had been recruited to the American cause in the struggle against the Soviet Union. His advocacy of workers' democracy, his anarchist individualism, his defence of artistic freedoms as instanced in the

Breton-Rivera Mexican manifesto, his courageous accusation of Stalin's purges and demystification of the spy and killer GPU networks, made him a prime source of American anti-Soviet propaganda. As Saul Bellow remembered, in a lecture on the Cold War, the assassination of Trotsky in 1940 marked a watershed for American Trotskyists, initiating their powerful conversion into anti-communists and future cold warriors. And Bellow was there, with practically a front seat on the big event:

> I was in Mexico at the time and an acquaintance of the Old Man […] Trotsky agreed to receive my friend Herbert Passin and me in Coyoacán. It was on the morning of our appointment that he was struck down […] When we went to his villa we must have been taken for foreign journalists, and we were directed to the hospital. The emergency room was in disorder. We had only to ask for Trotsky. A door into a small side room was opened for us and there we saw him. He had just died. A cone of bloody bandages was on his head. His cheeks, his nose, his beard, his throat were streaked with blood and with dried iridescent trickles of iodine. He is reported to have said once that Stalin could kill him whenever he liked, and now we understood what a far-reaching power could do with us; how easy it was for a despot to order a death.[63]

For Bellow, the killing energised the Trotskyites gathered round the Partisan Review, those like Dwight Macdonald, James Burnham, Sidney Hook, Clement Greenberg, Meyer Schapiro and Harold Rosenberg who had sided with the Old Man during the Moscow show trials. Those same intellectuals would provide the ideological base for Cold War anti-communism in the post-war. Trotsky's assassination was investigated thoroughly by the FBI partly as a means of discovering covert agents in the US, partly

as evidence in the propaganda war, as we can see in the obvious close relations between the authorities and the publication of Levine's book.

Trotsky signified core anti-Communist values through the trajectory of the Partisan Review intellectuals into ideologue positions of power in the cultural Cold War. As Alex Callinicos has argued in his book on Trotskyism:

> In the 1930s and l940s an astonishingly large number of what later become known as the New York Intellectuals became directly or peripherally involved in the American Trotskyist movement – among them Saul Bellow, James Burnham, James T. Farrell, Clement Greenberg, Sidney Hook, Irving Howe, Seymour Martin Lipset, Mary McCarthy, and Dwight Macdonald – before drifting rightwards towards Cold War liberalism or neo-conservatism.[64]

Those ideologues included Vladimir and Vera Nabokov: and it is telling that the infiltration of Levine's Cold War monograph on Mercader into the systems set up by Pale Fire mimics the manner in which Nabokov's own imagination, family history and very insides had been seduced by the killing (and assassinating) fictions of Cold War culture and history. The Atlantic figures in Nabokov's fiction as a transmission zone for the incoming missile killing machines, combinations of Stalinist assassination robots entering US airspace (Mercader's crossing the ocean towards his target) and the new late 1950s lethal technologies (Sputnik, ICBMs) that took the same trajectory across NATO airspace to kill each representative 'John Shade' US citizen. Nabokov's adaptation of Isaac Don Levine's Cold War portrait of Mercader explores and stages the technologized paranoia which nuclear targeting of each and every U.S. citizen had inaugurated with Sputnik's traversal over North Atlantic

waters. The novel takes the story of Trotsky's murder by the transatlantic GPU agent and rewrites it as a NATO conspiracy theory of Atlantic technocultural paranoia, a Gradus-Kinbote missile system flying over the seas to the heart of the US.

Notes

[1] Manchester Guardian for October 7th 1959, 'Next Stop Mars?", quoted James J. Harford, Korolev: How One Man Masterminded the Soviet Drive to Beat America to the Moon (New York: John Wiley, 1997), p. 125.

[2] Cf. Fred Kaplan, 1959: The Year Everything Changed (New York: John Wiley, 2009), p. 107 and Deborah Welch Larson, Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations During the Cold War (Ithaca, MY: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 95.

[3] William Boyd, Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991).

[4] Lawrence Freedman, The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 139-40.

[5] Vladimir Nabokov, Pale Fire (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1991), p. 120.

[6] Pale Fire, p. 110.

[7] Harold K. Milks, Moscow correspondent, Associated Press, Lewiston Daily Sun October 5 1957:

https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1928&dat=19571004&id=-0cpAAAAIBAJ&sjid=LWgFAAAAIBAJ&pg=1274,3373423&hl=en (accessed April 8 2015).

[8] Qtd. Nasa website: http://history.nasa.gov/sputnik/14.html (accessed February 8 2015).

[9] John Ranelagh. The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA (Cambridge, Mass.: Sceptre, 1988), p. 322.

[10] Pale Fire, p. 122.

[11] Ibid. p. 150-51.

[12] Ibid. p. 67

[13] Ibid., p. 213.

[14] Isaac Don Levine, The Mind of an Assassin (New York: Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1959).

[15] Pale Fire, p. 64.

[16] Mind of an Assassin, p. 56.

[17] Pale Fire, p. 196.

[18] Ibid., pp. 72, 181, 129.

[19] Ibid., p. 87.

[20] Mind of an Assassin, pp. 77-8, 80.

[21] Ibid., pp. 93, 107, 105.

[22] Pale Fire, p. 235.

[23] Mind of an Assassin, pp. 118-9.

[24] Ibid., pp. 118-9.

[25] Ibid., p. 99.

[26] It was not the first time. They had tried to destroy the archive in Norway earlier in the year.

[27] Ibid., p. 58.

[28] Ibid., p. 30.

[29] Ibid., p. 39.

[30] Ibid., p. 122.

[31] Pale Fire, p. 220.

[32] Mind of an Assassin, p. 7.

[33] Mind of an Assassin, p. 200.

[34] Pale Fire, pp. 18-9.

[35] Mind of an Assassin, p. 201.

[36] Ibid., p. 214.

[37] Pale Fire, p. 123.

[38] Ibid., p. 218.

[39] Ibid., pp. 234-5.

[40] Mind of an Assassin, p. 202.

[41] Pale Fire, pp. 78-9.

[42] Mind of an Assassin, p. 5.

[43] Mind of an Assassin, p. 5.

[44] Mind of an Assassin, p. 108.

[45] Pale Fire, pp. 243, 207-8.

[46] Mind of an Assassin, p. 6.

[47] Ibid., p. 184.

[48] Ibid., pp. 184-5.

[49] Mind of an Assassin, p. 185.

[50] Ibid., pp. 178-9.

[51] Pale Fire, p. 171.

[52] Mind of an Assassin, p. 165.

[53] Pale Fire, p. 166.

[54] Pale Fire, p. 218.

[55] Mind of an Assassin, p. 161.

[56] Pale Fire, p. 607.

[57] Ibid., p. 126.

[58] Ibid., p. 209.

[59] Boyd, American Years, pp. 190, 427.

[60] Pale Fire, p. 234.

[61] Ibid., p. 59.

[62] Ibid., p. 199.

[63] Lecture delivered in April 1993 at the Collegium Budapest entitled 'Intellectuals in the Period of the Cold War', published as 'Marx at my table', Guardian (April 10, 1993), p. 23.

[64] Alex Callinicos, Trotskyism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), , p. 3.