

An Analysis of the Dualistic Pattern in Nabokov's *Pnin*

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ABSTRACT

The idea of dualism, the recurring image of squirrel as well as the relationship between *Pnin* and the narrator have been the bull's eye for Nabokov and *Pnin* critics. Nabokov indicates that the structure of the novel has been well designed and that he has had a thought-out plan before setting out to write. Rather than a result of chance inspiration, *Pnin* has a well-organized pattern and the anecdotes throughout the novel are closely related. Based on the fact that the novel of *Pnin* revolves around dualism, the dualistic pattern appears in every chapter and the transition from one end to the other end of the dichotomy is implemented by the squirrel, a meaningful symbol in the novel. Structure outshines content, whereas content in turn serves structure. Nabokov fully illustrates the point in his novel *Pnin*.

Keywords: *Dualistic pattern, Pnin, Squirrel, Structure, Content.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nabokov began writing *Pnin* in 1953 and the first four chapters of *Pnin* appeared in *The New Yorker* before the whole book was published in the United States in 1957. The stories were first printed in installments and later expanded and revised in book form, which has caused critics to question whether the book has a well-knit structure and coherent meanings. As discerning a critic as Howard Nemerov has expressed the view that "as a novel, [*Pnin*] looks somewhat accidental" (Nemerov 261), similarly, Clancy says that "the jokes, coincidences and gratuitous intrusions on the part of the author [...] never welded into the structure of the novel but merely part of its brightly patterned and glittering surface." For the incompatibility between the narrative and the structure, Clancy dismisses *Pnin* "as a flawed and minor novel" (Clancy 124). To such criticism, Nabokov responds that "the design of *Pnin* was complete in my mind when I composed the first chapter which, I believe, in this case was actually the first of the seven I physically set down" (Appel 38). His answer indicates that the structure and the meaning of the novel have been well designed and that he does have a plan before setting out to write. Indeed, a careful perusal of the novel reveals that

far from being the result of chance inspiration, *Pnin* has a well-organized pattern and the anecdotes throughout the novel are closely related.

2. THE SYMMETRIC PATTERN OF THE NOVEL AND THE RECURRING IMAGE OF SQUIRREL

According to Julian W. Connolly, not half as being accidental in form, the novel follows a pattern Nabokov frequently resorts to. Julian refers to the pattern as Nabokov's spiral: "events, images, and associations recur over the course of the novel in a tightly controlled pattern [...]" ("The Wonder", 193). With chapter 4 as the divide, Connolly separates the novel into two sections of three chapters. Crucial images and incidents of the first three chapters will recur and transform themselves in the last three ones, following the "spiral" scheme. For Connolly, there exists in *Pnin* a dichotomy of present and past and the past often comes into the present unbidden and unwelcomed. In chapters 1, 2 and 3, *Pnin* seems to be unable to deal with the ominous and unsettling implications the past has brought to him. At the end of the first chapter for example, when the childhood past surges up in his mind, *Pnin* appears to be powerless and forlorn. In

chapters 5, 6 and 7, incidents and images of the first three chapters reappear, but transform themselves from being negative to positive. The distress and anguish Pnin felt unable to overcome in chapters 1, 2 and 3 have miraculously abated in chapters 5, 6 and 7. Dualism sits in the center of his argument. But before expatiating on the novel's dualistic structure, I would first examine three suggestions in Connolly's article. They are germane to the dualistic pattern that my paper revolves around.

Connolly has noticed the recurring image of squirrel in the novel and claimed that the squirrel in the first half of the novel represents the threatening and portentous elements while in the second half, it acquires an enlightening function. For example, in chapter 1 upon coming out of his spell of delirium, Pnin sees a squirrel sitting on the nearby ground. The squirrel is associated to the mysterious mind-confusing and fever-causing design on his bedside screen (see 12). In chapter 4 Pnin sends to Victor a picture postcard representing the Gray Squirrel. This time the squirrel is no longer a menacing creature. Instead, it assumes an educational role. It is convenient to put the squirrel into easy categories and confer on it opposite meanings. But it is also disconcerting to think that in analogy to the protagonist's transformation, the squirrel is able to transform itself from being demonic to angelic. The squirrel for Connolly seems to be endowed with some godly power such as what Emerson finds in nature, "[which] is not always tricked in holiday attire, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs, is overspread with melancholy today" (Emerson 32). The innocent creature too wears the colors of the spirit. Another more plausible explanation is that the squirrel is interiorized. Once interiorized, it breaks its physical limitations and is endowed with various metaphysical implications, all depending on how the viewer takes it. I concur with Connolly that the rodent is an important symbol in the novel but I object to the proposal that its connotations are inconstant and ever changing.

The association of squirrel to the spirit is also discussed in Rowe's *Nabokov's Spectral Dimension*. Pnin's dead boyhood sweetheart has a lovely name of Mira Belochkin which in spelling is very close to "belochka," the Russian diminutive for "little squirrel." Rowe delves into the cryptography between squirrel and "belochka" and his assumption is original and clever. Only it is far too stretched. According to Rowe, Mira's spirit frequently transfers its influence to the little rodent which with ease can stop wind and stir the foliage.

As the "rustling wind" suggests cryptographically Dr. Eric Wind, by abating wind and keeping it within her control, Mira's spirit, embodied by the innocent squirrel "has saved Pnin from vulgar Liza, of whom Mira's spirit is scornfully jealous" (Rowe 64). The connection of Belochkin to belochkin, to the little squirrel, and then to Dr. Wind is one of the extreme examples of hop, step and jump of his argument. The only problem is that Pnin, the focal figure of the novel being replaced by two very vague characters of Mira and Dr. Wind not only is unfair to Nabokov, but also deviates from the truth the novel intends to unveil.

Connolly also argues that in terms of structure chapter 4 is the novel's crux. It divides the novel into two halves and represents the crucial moment when the enigmatic transference of strength from Victor's inner world to Pnin's takes place. From chapter 4 onward, the character's transformation commences and awaiting Pnin is the realm of brightness, strength and beauty. The idea of transference of power resonates in Rowe's argument as well, except that the latter leans on the transference of influence from Mira's spirit to the squirrel. Obviously, both critics acknowledge dualism and the necessity of shift of power. If Rowe's connection is far too stretched, Connolly's is too simplistic in the way that Pnin's mysterious appropriation of Victor's dream has instantly and idealistically eradicated in Pnin all the anxieties, sadness and the deep sense of loss. Besides, it is too good to be true that Victor's brief visit is panacea warranting that Pnin will escape isolation for good and embrace everlasting freedom. Admittedly, Victor possesses some traits of a genius: the aloof superiority, artistic inclination, and sensitivity that can also be found, if partially, in Pnin. But this does not necessarily mean that Victor is Pnin's "most unflawed and precocious equivalent" ("The Wonder," 202). The fourteen years old boy is as flawed as any child: "[he] was being held for smoking cigars in the attic" (73). And he took the slower train simply because he might not get up in time (75). In addition, the conversation between Pnin and Victor is distinctly out of tune from the outset:

You arrived well? You had no disagreeable adventures?

None, sir.

You are very hungry

No, sir. Not particularly (76).

When asked if he wants to be a footballer, Victor flatly replied “in fact, I have football. I’m not very good at any game, really” (78). Again, he yawned while conversing with Pnin about Russian literature (79). The disharmony between the two has revealed that Victor can hardly be an ideal image and source for Pnin’s transformation. That the gift of football is swept away into the darkness symbolizes that Pnin and Victor have never entered into a meaningful connection.

Chapter 1 and 7 constitute a symmetric pattern. Connolly claims that the narrator, being an “unreliable, snobbish, and conceited character,” is disempowered and Pnin in contrast, is empowered in the final chapter (“The Wonder,” 209). On his way to Cremona Pnin easily falls victim to childhood recollections whereas on a later occasion in chapter 7, he reacts heatedly to the narrator’s anecdotes: “Now, don’t believe a word he says, Georgiy Aramovich. He makes up everything [...] He is a dreadful inventor” (138). In the course of the novel Pnin rises up against falsehood and calumny into which the narrator eventually falls. Here the narrator’s function is to implement the symmetrical construction and set off Pnin’s transformed image. He is as insignificant as unreal. Leona Toker acquiesces in Connolly’s suggestion that the narrator is a flesh-and-ink inhabitant of the fictional world and therefore an imaginary figure (Toker 23). While giving assent that the narrator’s perspective is problematic and often untrustworthy, I would argue that it is a fallacy to consider that the narrator’s questionable recollections have undermined his authorities. For one thing, there is no evidence in chapter 1 to support that the narrator has been in a stronger position. Contrarily, except for the comic description of his Russian compatriot, the narrator is also baffled as to the “the mysterious disease that one of [Pnin’s] doctors had yet detected” (12). For another, the fact that the narrator arrives at Waindell while Pnin manages to escape that very world in chapter 7 hardly adjudicates that Pnin has acquired more power over the novel’s storyteller. In order to fit in with his neatly designed dichotomy, Connolly forcibly divorces the two characters and puts them into opposing camps.

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PNIN AND THE NARRATOR

The idea of dualism, the recurring image of squirrel and the relationship between Pnin and the narrator have been the focus for Nabokov critics.

Through different lenses, Rowe, Toker and Connolly have explored various possibilities of the novel. Connolly is focused on constructing a dualistic structure; Rowe tries to connect the image of the squirrel to Mira’s spirit, and Toker whom I will in the following passage touch upon, attempts to combine Pnin and the narrator into one identity.

Undeniably, *Pnin* is novel replete with historical names, events and places which lead readers to believe that the book is the biography of a Russian exile, Timofey Pnin. The narrator, or the anonymous “I” in the first six chapters, is the only raconteur with inside information. But the confidence we have in him soon wears out and his narrative is clearly fraught with flaws. In the first two passages of chapter 1 for example, the narrator remarks that “Pnin had the whole coach to himself and around him sat nobody but a sleeping soldier and two women absorbed in a baby” (4). The fact that the narrator is not on the train but is able to describe the situation starts to undermine the authenticity of his accounts. More questionable a description occurs at the beginning of chapter 5. On its way to Cook’s house, Pnin’s car is observed from a lookout tower on the hilltop but “there [at the same time] was no living creature in that forlorn and listless upper region except for an ant [...]” (85). The narrator once again puts himself in an ambiguous situation where his narrative becomes unconvincing and even impossible. Stuart calls what we have been reading is “invention, an imaginative construction, a fiction partly disguised as fact” (Stuart 141). Referring to Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*, Toker also comments that the events in the first 6 chapters “turn out to be largely a product of [the narrator’s] imagination” (Token 23). Moreover, in the final chapter the narrator recalls how he met Pnin, “Dr. Pnin [...] returned with his son Timofey, a thirteen-year-old *gimnazist* [in] black blouse, black pants, shiny black belt. (I attended a more liberal school where we wore what we liked)” (131). The sentence within the brackets implies that the narrator is liable to have told lies about Pnin’s childhood since they never were schoolmates. Small wonder that when he tried to remind Pnin of their former meetings, Pnin denied everything and only vaguely recalled the narrator’s grandaunt but insisted on never meeting the narrator before (see 134). The so-called hard facts the narrator has laid out are merely workings of his imagination. If his accounts about Pnin and himself are “imagined,” he is no longer detached from the narrated and is free to project the imaginary experience of his onto the biography of Pnin. Being

emigrant survivors, and writers in exile, “each dissolves in the image of the nonexistent other,” they join force to extricate themselves from pain and sufferings (Rowe 26). When the voices of the narrator and protagonist become one, what the reader is left is to seek the “truth” *Pnin* suggests: the pursuit of human love and the cultural position and the wish to release soul from suffering. Here I would agree with Gordon that the novel is about the “figure of the Banished Man” (Gordon 148).

On one hand, the credibility of the narrator is eroded and his accounts are either fabricated or directly involve his, rather than *Pnin*'s experience; on the other hand, his imaginings of *Pnin* has created a community of Russian expatriates who share the same language and culture and who encounter alienation, vagabondage and a sense of insecurity that all exiles are inescapable of. As the narrated is an imaginary and collective persona, I would make a quantum leap from who speaks to what is spoken. *Pnin* says “the history of man is the history of pain” (126); he is implying the terrible plight he is unfortunately in. In terms of career *Pnin* is a non-tenure tracked, expatriate Russian professor, teaching minor courses to diminished classes at a minor American college. He is a fatherless son, sonless divorcee, weak with a pair of “spindly legs and frail-looking, almost feminist feet,” suggestive of sexual unattractiveness (1). He owns nothing but a jalopy he bought for 100 dollars. He has always been rootless and dispossessed in the town of Waindell. He speaks awkward English and has arrogant colleagues and a brazen, cruel ex-wife. If his American years are filled with life's downs, his Russian and European years were then full of ups a turbulent time could offer: a doctor father and a revolutionist mother, a boyhood sweetheart, a short-lived, but consensual marriage and some outstanding academic achievements. Obviously, Nabokov is intended to sever *Pnin*'s life into past and present, physical and spiritual and static and dynamic, thus creating a dualistic pattern that Nabokov criticism frequently orbits around.

Dualism is concomitant with symbolism. Vladimir E. Alexandrov asserts symbolism “cultivates the kind of metaphysical dualism or division between visible phenomena and a “high” spiritual reality” (Alexandrov 215). According to Glynn, there is an affinity between Nabokov and the French symbolist poets such as Verlaine and Rimbaud (*Bergsonian* 7). Moreover, Nabokov has avidly read the poetry of his compatriot, Alexander Blok who is a leading figure of the Russian Symbolism style. Nabokov once says “I am a

product of that period, I was bred in that atmosphere,” and Alexandrov interprets it as Nabokov's admission of “his own artistic origins in the so-called Silver Age of Russian culture” (see Alexandrov 213).

Silver Age of Russian culture is said to have begun in the mid-1890s and to have ended after the Russian Civil War. It was a period of social and cultural upheavals and pursuits and was dominated by several artistic movements, among which symbolism stood out. Symbolism is a modernist reaction to industrialism and materialism which advocate scientific interpretation and logical positivism. In the realm of art, empirical philosophy holds that the essential elements of art can be analyzed through objective procedures. Man can access history and art by way of scientific methods. Objecting to the empiric relationship between man and art, symbolism manifests that man are distinct from matter and that having an inner life, man is able to assign meanings to his and others' actions. Symbolism intends to construct a realism that transcends the realities. It is spiritualism that requires intuitive, rather than rational understanding. Here symbolists maintain two worlds of the physical and the spiritual, convinced that the subjective world reveals the deeper and more profound aspect of life.

Not only did Nabokov admit with humility that his works originates in Silver Age of Russian culture, but also his critics claim that Nabokov engages himself in “a higher order beyond our shadow world” (Johnson 3). Brian Boyd, prominent Nabokov scholar, notices that Nabokov leads his readers to “see through to other worlds beyond” (Boyd 319). Richard Borden argues that the frequently recourse to childhood expresses Nabokov's “spiritual and metaphysical nostalgia” (Borden 109).

Meanwhile, there are voices of disapproval among the Nabokov critics as well. Glynn's “the word is not a shadow. The word is a thing” – Nabokov as anti-Symbolist” directly confronts the current criticism. Claiming symbolism distrusts the word, yearns for obliquity and therefore manifests a deep ambivalence,” Glynn asserts that Nabokov believes “in high art and pure science detail is everything” (“The word,” 6). He further argues that because of the distrust of the word, symbolism also disbelieves the world and situates itself in a spurious realm. Nabokov's fictions, Glynn insists, “explore the collision between the individual creative consciousness and the strange, surprising

world in which that consciousness is situated” (“The word,” 8). Last but not least, symbolism detaches itself from the objective, common realm of experience, “[whereas] Nabokov often directs his gaze inwards, this is tempered with a sense of the reciprocal relationship between individual consciousness and a reality external to oneself” (“The word,” 9).

In terms of the attitude toward word, I would think that Glynn is primarily making reference to Pnin’s poetry: “the Symbolists seized upon the verbal symbol which they prized for its obliquity and its transcendent potential” (“The word,” 6). For symbolist poets, words are applied as symbols to achieve complexity or opacity of meanings. Being dense and changeable, symbolist poetry speaks to a narrowly focused sphere of readers and sometimes leaves the reading public disorientated. Clarity and direct apprehension of the world that Nabokov adheres to refers first and foremost to poetry, not to his fictions, since Nabokov “began as a poet [...] and he continued to write poetry all his life” (Alexandrov 214). Additionally, so far as clarity and opacity are concerned, there exists the degree of differences. To say the word is a thing is equally unfair as to say the word is a shadow to such writers as Nabokov who knows too well the modernist movements such as Symbolism and Formalism. In fact, the divided opinions of the critics regarding Nabokov’s literary predilection make viable a symbolist reading of *Pnin*.

The other suggestion that symbolism situates itself in the spurious realm and avoids the common, lived experiences will be analyzed in the following passages. Nabokov’s comments, ambivalent and sometimes contradictory, should be subject to the evidential anecdotes in the text. “Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile [...] Hence there is no surprise in the fact that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic, nor again in the fact that criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author” (Barthes 389). If the author and the critic are endowed with the same authorities, their interpretations of the text are and should be equally valid.

4. THE DUALISTIC PATTERN IN EVERY CHAPTER

Most critics agree that the novel of *Pnin* is constructed around dualism. But the dichotomy I elaborate on differs from Connolly’s. Connolly separates the whole novel into two halves with

chapter 4 being the demarcation line. Each chapter in the first half can be paired with a corresponding chapter in the second half. The first half represents negativity, the second half, positivity and chapter 4 stands for transition. The dualistic pattern I revolve around occurs in every chapter and the transition from one end to the other end of the dichotomy is implemented by the emblematic animal of squirrel.

In a train to Cremona “some two hundred versts west of Waindell,” Pnin makes his first appearance. He has his “academic perch since 1945” and is “like so many Russians [...] inordinately fond of everything in the line of timetables, maps and catalogues” (see 4). First, the narrator and Pnin tacitly consent to use “verst”, the Russian unit of length, instead of “mile” to measure distance. Second, Pnin is still unable to forgo his Russian habit of “puzzling out schedules for himself” (4). Finally, “perch” literally is a rod or branch serving as a roost for a bird. Metaphorically, it can either be an elevated place for sitting and resting, or be a position that is secure, advantageous or prominent. Given the fact that Pnin arrived in America less than a decade ago and took a minor, non-tenure tracked teaching position in a small university, he more resembles a bird perching temporarily on a branch. The description of Pnin’s miscalculated trip is of significance in a way that it intimates the dual worlds Pnin oscillates between: on one side is the present angst and despair and on the other side is the ease and comfort with which he travels back in the past. Nabokov deliberately cultivates a condition of exile and sets the tune of the whole movement at the very beginning of the novel. The short trip is for Pnin, an “Odyssey” which predictably is filled with impediments: He took the wrong train, failed to retrieve his bag, and boarded the bus, only to find that he left the lecture paper at the waiting room. His ordeal culminates in his sitting on a park bench, overpowered by some “eerie feelings”, “tinge of unreality”, and the sensation of being totally divested (see 12).

Si Maqian (ca. 145 or 135 BC – 86 BC), ancient Chinese historian once says that 人穷则反本，故劳苦倦极，未尝不呼天也；疾病惨怛，未尝不呼父母也” (while one is in trouble, one recalls his origin. Thus, when one is worn with toil, one cries to heaven; when one suffers great pain, one cries to one’s parents). Feeling painful and panicked, Pnin recalls his parents. His reaction to the predicament is intrinsic. When he despairs, he unconsciously slides back into his inner world, to his childhood memories for succor and solace. The suffocation and the ensuing fantasy are explained as “being the subconsciously

evoked shock of one's baptism which causes an explosion of intervening recollections between the first immersion and the last" (13). Pnin half knows he is in between the real and imaginary worlds. Instead of resisting it, he enters the imaginary world. The evocation of religious practice merits our attention. Baptism symbolizes rebirth and renaissance. Before being baptized, one lives a worldly life and after baptism, one steps into the realm of spirituality and acquires new and more profound understanding of life. That Pnin has the sensation of being baptized implies that he has acquired strength and new knowledge from the world of imaginings.

The transference of influence is implemented by the symbolic figure of squirrel. Squirrel "[comes] from a Greek word which meant 'shadow-tail'" (64). According to *Oxford Dictionary of English*, a shadow includes the following two meanings: 1) a dark part of something or an area of complete darkness; and 2) something that lasts only for a moment or is just a hint of something. The squirrel appears in Pnin's mind and before his eyes. In a trance he retreats to his childhood years and sees "a squirrel holding a reddish object in its front paws" and in a trice he finds himself back in the park, with "a gray squirrel sitting on comfortable haunches on the ground before him" (14-16). The visions of the screen in his nursery and himself sitting on the bench begin to fuse, so do the memory and reality, and the pluperfect and the present (see Barabtarlo 77). The red object is the very hint of the connection between the two worlds, of the real existing together with the unreal, and the social with the metaphysical. More than just a literary prop, it acquires trans-literary implications and ambitions.

Contradicting the conventional expectations that the exiled protagonist retreats to the cocoon of the past and bewails his considerable loss, Pnin turns the disadvantage of exile into a "subtle protective device" (Pifer 218). The moment of helplessness and isolation means liberty and discovery. What he has discovered is less important than the very act of recollection and the rapid recuperation. His fear is dispelled and he is able to trudge to the station where a series of fortuitous circumstances will right every mistake he has previously made.

The central story of chapter 2 is the meeting of Pnin and Liza. Pnin recalls his European life prior to his meeting with Liza. In those years "Pnin, then a rising young scholar and [Liza], a more limpid mermaid" and their life was full of exciting

anecdotes (30). Pnin worked on two part-time jobs and Liza studied under the "remarkable and formidable old lady, Dr. Rosetta Stone" (30). They attended the literary soirees together. He wrote her tremendous love letters while she composed verses in anapest. Life was not perfect and full of hardship for them. But both stubbed their toes on life's vicissitudes. They made the best use of their exile condition. The romance of the past, however, was short and soon was replaced by the pragmatic meeting of the present. Liza descends to be a vulgar, cruel woman with "impure, dry, sordid, infantile soul" and Pnin now feels pathetic, rather than sympathetic with her (41). In this chapter the endearing past and the depressing present constitute the recurring dualistic pattern. The thirsty squirrel again catches Pnin's eyes. He waters the little creature and sees it depart without appreciation. Here the squirrel symbolizes Liza and her ingratitude. Meeting her and later watering the squirrel may have reminded him of the fact that he has nothing left in terms of family, the little creature, however, has awakened him that "this is the earth, and I am, curiously enough, alive, and there is something in me and in life" (40).

The description of Pnin's academic life sits in the center of chapter 3. It starts with the description of Pnin's uncomfortable lodgings and ends when Isabel is about to take her room back. Besides, in this chapter "his Russian was music and his English was murder" (47). Pnin often becomes the butt of mockery when he effusively introduces Russian history and literature to his Elementary class students. Contrastingly, the library where Pnin could read Russian literature has become the sacred site and copious fountain of comfort and personal happiness:

Many good young people considered it a treat and an honor to see Pnin pull out a catalogue drawer from the comprehensive bosom of a card cabinet and take it, like a big nut, to a secluded corner and there make a quiet mental meal of it, now moving his lips in soundless comment, critical, satisfied, perplexed, and not lifting his rudimentary eyebrows and forgetting them there, left high upon his spacious brow where they remained long after all trace of displeasure or doubt had gone (55).

Captivated and enchanted, Pnin forgets everything painful. Russian literature becomes his soul companion that soothes his wounded heart and nurtures his inquisitive mind. He embraces isolation, for it brings him not loneliness, but warmth and a

sense of cultural position. He now lives a life in which he freely judges, questions, and gives solutions. The realm of another for catharsis is further to be found in the school's New Hall where an old Russian documentary is played. Pnin again is so intoxicated by it that he is unable to check the "hot, infantine, uncontrollable fluid" on his face (59).

Here the dichotomy is between the present academic life and his literary and historical tours in Russia's past. In contrast to his constant moving about, he has a firm anchor in the cultural heritage of his nation. No longer being tortured by his awkward English and by the slow process of assimilation, Pnin is an adept and authority of his language. Whereas in the previous chapter the squirrel appears to be an ungrateful creature, the emblem, now dashing in front of him and chattering in the tree, seems to alert him to the dirty black ice of the flagged path and to guide him to the safety of the library where the transference of power is to be completed.

Chapter 4 opens with a dream in which Victor has a Father King who flees from the besieged palace. At the end of this chapter, Pnin in his dream sees the sequel to Victor's story. The dualistic pattern is reflected in the relationship between the "water father" and the adopted son. Chapter 4 is the chapter throughout which Pnin does not allow himself to drift into the past. Although he fails to form a meaningful connection with Victor, he and the boy have many traits in common: non-conformist, aloof, sensitive, and passionate about art. The inner richness of both Pnin and Victor is in sharp contrast to the emptiness of the life of the Waindell people (see Clancy 119). The dream the "father" and the "son" have shared implies that there exists a complementary relationship between the two. Pnin sees himself in Victor and Victor represents hope for Pnin. Interestingly, the squirrel appears on the postcard to Victor, which belongs to "an educational series of depicting Our Mammals and Birds" (64). Once again, "squirrel" meaning the shadow-tail, seems to point to the subtle, shadowlike connection between Pnin and Victor.

Chapters 5 and 6 form a very interesting dichotomy. Although Cook's Castle is in America, its current owner is a Russian descendent who, "instead of populating their country place with children and grandchildren," follows for years the custom of inviting "every even-year summer, elderly Russians (Cook's fathers or uncles, as it were)" to this summer resort of his (86). At Cook's

way of collecting the Russian expatriates is of significance. The reason his offspring do not reside in the castle is that they have lost the ability to nourish any emotional attachment to anything Russian:

Some parents brought their offspring with them— healthy, tall, indolent, difficult American children of college age, with no sense of Nature, and no Russian, and no interest whatsoever in the niceties of their parents' backgrounds and past. They seemed to live at the Pines on a physical and mental plane entirely different from that of their parents" (87).

From another standpoint, the resort is ritualistically becoming a temporary locality where the older generation of Russians collectively recalls the bygone days, rests their mind and gains strength from their ancestors. Hiding in the forest and mysterious, the Castle becomes Pnin's Mecca. "You turn north and go on bearing north at each crossing [...] you just bear north and you'll get to Cook's in 12 minutes flat. You can't miss it" (84). The direction of north reminds us of the magnetic north. Like the magnetic pole, the castle itself signifies the right direction in the maze of forest roads in addition to being a spot for recollection. The place, the guests and the topics are Russian from top to toe. Pnin for the first time becomes an impeccable authority of his literature, a beloved and respectable intellectual whom Konstantin Ivanich Chateau has regarded as his very dear friend, and a personable individual the famous Russian painter, Ivan Illyich Gramineev is so fond of. In addition to having the company of the warm-hearted Russian friends, Pnin has also envisioned his parents, relatives, and more importantly, his childhood sweetheart, Mira. They have refreshed his spirit, rejuvenated and strengthened him. The emblematic couple at the end of chapter 5 resonates with the theme of this chapter: the pervading mood of peace and quiet sadness and the unmistakable promise and hope in future.

In analogy to the Russian setting in chapter 5, the scene of chapter 6 is entirely American. The ease with which Pnin talks with his compatriots is replaced by the vague grievances Pnin harbors for his American colleagues. The tension between Pnin and Bodo and Jack Cockerell is becoming visible, as the latter two resent keeping the job for Pnin. An outsider playing a supporting role, Pnin seldom joins their voluble and bombastic talks. Ironically, he is meditating on how to purchase the house and settle down in Waindell, totally unaware of the

prospects that he soon will be dismissed. The snug and warm feeling he has in chapter 5 is blown away and a sense of loneliness, impuissance, insecurity and being betrayed has overwhelmed him in chapter 6:

He looked very old, with his toothless mouth half open and a film of tears dimming his blank, unblinking eyes. Then, with a moan of anguished anticipation, he went back to the sink and, bracing himself, dipped his hand deep into the foam (129).

Chapter 5 and chapter 6 form the dualistic pattern. The two gatherings are in acute contrast with each other: The homeless Russian expatriates have given Pnin a sense of belonging while the American intellectuals who live a stable life have snuffed out his hope of having a home of his own. With his compatriots Pnin has tears and laughter and even a seizure, but he exults because he is a rightful member of an imagined community whereas he never feels at home with his long-time colleagues in the real-world setting. Therefore, “nationalism” is a cultural artifact regardless of national boundaries. Although it is the result of imaginings, it could command such profound emotional legitimacy (see Anderson 4).

Unlike the previous chapters in which the image of squirrel is elaborated on, chapter 5 and chapter 6 only make suggestions to the creature. Mira’s family name, Belochkin resembles Belochka, which in Russia means “little squirrel.” Episodes about Mira also disperse chapter 5. Considering the Greek interpretation of squirrel as shadow-tail, it is hard not to form a connection between the shadowlike Mira and the squirrel. In chapter 6 Pnin’s American colleagues have a conversation over the color of the bowl. Margaret Thayer says when she was a child she imagined Cinderella’s shoes to be of the same greenish blue glass. Pnin corrects her, saying the princess’ shoes is not made of glass, but of “Russian squirrel fur” (118). The bowl and Cinderella’s squirrel-fur made shoes have the same function. Cinderella’s shoes have empowered Cinderella and transformed a homely girl into a charming princess. It symbolizes hope. So does the bowl. However heartbroken Pnin is on knowing he will be dismissed, he has not broken the bowl when washing up the dishes. The bowl is a gift from Victor who symbolically represents a succession relationship with Pnin. The description that “the bowl stood aloof and serene on the safest shelf of a cupboard, and the little bright was securely locked up in the large dark night” delivers the message of

hope (129). In these two chapters the squirrel is linked to the deceased Mira and the propitious bowl.

The dramatized narrator, whose voice we have heard from the beginning, gradually reveals his identity in chapter 7. With Pnin walking out of the narrator’s shadow, the two Russians have formed a dichotomy. They oddly do not enjoy each other’s company and the narrator’s friendliness and Pnin’s detestation are made clear on several occasions. But there is no denial that we are presented with two perspectives to perceive the same world. For the narrator, he is equipped with the analytical capacity to weave a story while for Pnin, he is the center of the story. Each is incomplete without the other and both together offer us some insight into a unique experience. The dualism in chapter 7 is to lay out that the narrator not only tells the story but also participates in it and that Pnin’s biography is both real and imaginary. Therefore, *Pnin* is a personal story as well as a story of a community.

The squirrel in the last chapter, a stuffed one, arises from the narrator’s memory. A dose of symbolism effectively puts out this elegant emblem. It connects the narrator’s and Pnin’s world. “I could see a map of Russia on the wall, books on a shelf, a stuffed squirrel, and a toy monoplane with linen wings and a rubber motor. I had a similar one but twice bigger, bought in Biarritz” (132). This statement is important and tell-tale because the stuffed squirrel reminds us that the narrator has had a similar childhood. Whether his narration is factual or imagined does not matter, but the fact that both belong to an imagined community does account.

As a recently naturalized American, Pnin does not have a good sense of reality and lacks the knowledge of human nature. His English is poor and he has difficulty adapting the new environment. Confronted with the changing and hostile realities, Pnin retreats into his inner world. For him an imagined community appears more real than the world around him. To retreat into the spiritual realm does not mean that Pnin falls victim to self-abandonment or wraps himself up in the cocoons of isolation. Instead, after a brief tour back in time he acquires perseverance, self-confidence and a strong belief of his individuality. It is this uncompromising stance against all the odds that “secures the readers’ respect for him” (Grabes 51). The open ending when Pnin is seen to set off for an unknown destination indicates that his pursuit of identity is part of his life and that pursuit is far from over.

The novel has a distinct dualistic structure. The past memories and the present realities constitute the dichotomy in the first three chapters. By resorting to his past, Pnin is energized to confront his present predicament. Victor and Pnin, representing two generations of Russians, also form a dualistic pattern in chapter 4 in which Victor holds hope for Pnin. Chapters 5 and 6 are diametrical opposites with chapter 5 revolving around the gathering of the Russian expatriates and chapter 6 giving accounts of a party of American intellectuals. In the first 7 chapters the narrator hides behind the narrated. The revelation of his identity in chapter 7 makes manifest the dual narrative perspectives, with one angle of narration complementing the other.

Throughout the 7 chapters, one message prevails: Pnin relishes his elitist cultural position, love and happiness. His frequent recourse to the imagined community reflects his spiritual and metaphysical nostalgia. Admittedly, Pnin is isolated and depressed in the real world; he is, however, not a pessimist and defeatist in face of adversity. What Nabokov endeavors to achieve is not the social and historical conditions of the émigrés. Pnin's departure does not signify social misfortune. Instead, his heading for the next destination makes him more of an undaunted explorer.

5. CONCLUSION

The dualistic pattern appears in every chapter and the transition from one end to the other end of the dichotomy is fulfilled by the squirrel. The dualistic structure will not be a complete one without the transitional figure of squirrel. Its recurrence in every chapter and the changing manner of its recurrence makes it a meaningful symbol. The squirrel either skips between realms of present and past such as in chapter 1, or roams freely in the worlds of concrete and abstract: in chapter 2 the squirrel stands for Liza's ingratitude; in chapter 3 it acts as a reminder of hazards and an usher conducting Pnin to the library; it becomes an educational image on the postcard in chapter 4; in chapter 5 it is associated to Pnin's childhood girlfriend, Mira; chapter 6 links it to the color of Cinderella's shoes and in the final chapter the squirrel unifies the two narrative voices. The squirrel is like a ritualistic existence in which reality and imagination converge. Its engagement and recurrence throughout the novel demonstrate that it is an effectual symbol. The obliquity and ambivalence associated with it once again speaks of

the symbolist principles of "spurious realm" and "transcendental potentials."

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