that in their depiction of reality "life escapes; and perhaps without life nothing else is worthwhile" (149). Woolf's proposed remedy is to pursue the very strategy that guides *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse,* namely, to "examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day" in order "to come closer to life":

> Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from old; the moment of importance came not here but there. . . . Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness. . . . This method has the merit of bringing us closer to what we were prepared to call life itself.[23]

My concern in this chapter has not been to establish the verisimilitude of Woolf's narrative techniques. Rather, I have sought to demonstrate that her aesthetics of the moment—and the affective experience of being alive that this aesthetics seeks to call forth—depends for its effect on a chronolibidinal investment in the fate of temporal existence. If we are moved by how Woolf records atoms of experience, it is because we care about the survival of the ephemeral—of incidents and details that may be lost. The pathos of Woolf's *moments of living* stems from the fact that they are always already *moments of dying.* For this reason, however, the experience of reading Woolf may not only enhance one's feeling of being alive, it may also leave one devastated. No matter how vital the affirmation of life in Woolf's prose may be, it inscribes within itself the possibility that it may be unable to bear survival. There is no way to come to terms with the double bind of finitude, no way of approaching life that would allow one to accept death resolutely or immunize oneself from the traumatic impact of being mortal. Like the character in Kjaerstad's novel, even the most devoted reader of Woolf may thus have to close the book, never to open it again.

CHAPTER 3

Writing

Nabokov

WHEN THE PHONE rings, it will have been seventeen years since he heard her voice. It is July 14, 1922, and he has been driving all night to meet her at the hotel where they parted in 1905. He has aged, time has been lost, and faced with the prospect of seeing her again, he finds himself in a state of "exhilaration, exhaustion, expectancy, and panic."[1] He does not know who they have become to one another and which possibilities remain. Yet her voice on the phone cuts through his anxiety and resuscitates the past in spite of all the years that have passed:

> Now it so happened that she had never—never, at least, in adult life—spoken to him by phone; hence the phone had preserved the very essence, the bright vibration, of her vocal cords, the little 'leap' in her larynx, the laugh clinging to the contour of the phrase, as if afraid in girlish glee to slip off the quick words it rode. It was the timbre of their past, as if the past had put through that call, a miraculous connection ('Ardis, one eight eight six'—*comment? Non, non, pas huitante-huit—huitante six*). . . .
>
> That telephone voice, by resurrecting the past and linking it up with the present, with the darkening blue-slate mountains beyond the

> lake, with the spangles of the sun wake dancing through the poplar, formed the centerpiece in his deepest perception of tangible time, the glittering 'now' that is the only reality of time's texture. (436)

This scene from Nabokov's *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* recounts the reunion of the lovers Van and Ada Veen, whose memoir we are reading. The telephone call connects Van to the memory of their first reunion in the summer of 1886, when he called Ada and they met at the same place where they had first parted in 1884. This repetition of the past is now reflected as if in a mirror, when Ada calls him and the hotel that witnessed their final parting becomes the scene of their final reunion. It is an ecstatic moment—"the glittering 'now' that is the only reality of time's texture"—but one that is shot through with the sense of separation and loss that haunts the story of their love. Almost half the book is devoted to their first two summers together (1884 and 1888). In between, only a few fleeting meetings take place, and after the second summer another four years pass before they meet again. They spend a winter together in 1892 and barely a week in 1905. Not until 1922 (the time of the telephone call) are they reunited to live together for the rest of their lives.

If their relationship weaves a texture of time, then, it is one that stretches across long periods of absence and is torn by interruptions. In order to counteract this loss of time, Van and Ada persistently trace patterns of repetition. In narrating their story they emphasize reflections of the past that not only yield an experiential texture but also display apparently perfect symmetries. Yet in each repetition of the past, in each mirrored reflection—however perfect it may be—there is a displacement of time that testifies to temporal finitude. If the only reality of time's texture is the "now" (as Van maintains a propos the telephone call), it depends on an instance that ceases to be as soon as it comes to be. The drama of *chronos*—of a being that is the source of its own destruction—therefore haunts the insistence on the "now," which characterizes both levels of Van and Ada's autobiography. On the level of the narrative, they seek to hold on to the fleeting moments of their lives. On the level of narration, the same chronolibidinal desire recurs when they not only inscribe the past but also reckon with the temporality of the act of writing and seek to preserve its traces.

If this drama of *chronos* is intensified in *Ada,* it is because the lovers hyperbolically insist on the unique value of their lives. Constituting what Ada calls a "super-imperial couple" (60), they do not hesitate to underscore the incomparable quality of their love. This arrogance has been a source of disapproval even among inveterate Nabokophiles and it is true that "vain Van Veen" (one of his many alliterations) at times becomes a quite intolerable narrator. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to dismiss Van and Ada's vainglorious attitude as a mere character flaw or eccentric indulgence. Rather, it serves to highlight the chronolibidinal notion of writing that informs Nabokov's aesthetic practice. Precisely because of Van and Ada's excessive chronophilic investment in themselves, the chronophobia that haunts any chronophilia is made all the more visible and is acted out in a number of intricate ways.

The paradigm for such chronolibidinal writing is Nabokov's own autobiography, *Speak, Memory.* Nabokov ascribes a tremendous power to his proper consciousness, emphasizing in particular his ability to recreate the past in a clear and distinct fashion. This posture may seem to confirm Nabokov's notorious hubris, but at the same time it underscores the precariousness of any affirmation of one's life, however self-assured it may be. Nabokov mobilizes his power of recollection against the threat of forgetting, but everything he wants to remember was transient from the beginning.[2] The very first sentence of *Speak, Memory* invokes the existence of consciousness as "a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness," and Nabokov goes on to note that one is heading toward death "at some forty-five hundred heartbeats an hour" (17).[3]

The celebrated consciousness in *Speak, Memory* is thus not an idealized entity but one hypersensitive to the temporality of its own existence. In a discreet but important episode, Nabokov recounts how his mother—"as if feeling that in a few years the tangible part of her world would perish"—was led to cultivate "an extraordinary consciousness of the various time marks distributed throughout our country place" (33). The careful attention to memory is a response to the awareness of temporal finitude and leads to the "almost pathological keenness of the retrospective faculty" that Nabokov describes as "a hereditary trait" (60) of his family. When the young Vladimir went walking with his mother, she would pinpoint some cherished detail and in "conspiratorial

tones" say *Vot zapomni:* an imperative Nabokov translates as *now remember* (33).

The explicit memorization of the present recurs with a remarkable frequency in Nabokov's writings and is symptomatic of his "chronophobia," a term that he himself introduces in *Speak, Memory* (17). The main symptom of chronophobia is an apprehension of the imminent risk of loss and a concomitant desire to imprint the memory of what happens. It follows that chronophobia—in spite of what Nabokov sometimes claims—does not stem from a metaphysical desire to escape "the prison of time" (*Speak, Memory,* 18). On the contrary, it is because one desires a temporal being (chronophilia) that one fears losing it (chronophobia). Without the chronophilic desire to hold on to the moment, there would be no chronophobic apprehension of the moment passing away. It is this chronolibidinal desire to keep temporal events that motivates Nabokov's autobiographic protagonists. They seek to record time because they are hypersensitive to the threat of oblivion.

Nabokov's first great work, *The Gift,* is an instructive example. Berlin's Russian émigré culture here provides the backdrop for a chronicle of the young author Fyodor's life between 1926 and 1929. This chronicle turns out to have been in search of lost time, when Fyodor in the last chapter decides to write the book we are about to finish. It is intended as a declaration of love for his beloved Zina, who finally has come to illuminate his life after a number of complications have prevented them from meeting. Fyodor conceives the idea for the book on a glorious summer day while sunbathing in the Grünewald. It is the happiest time of his life: full of a sense of anticipation, of love, of creative inspiration. Yet in and through the very experience of happiness, he is "seized by a panicky desire not to allow it to close and get lost" (337). It is precisely this desire to keep what can be lost that is the impetus for his decision to write.

Thus, the inception of *The Gift* testifies to Fyodor's chronophilia and chronophobia. The gift refers to Fyodor's life (and especially his relationship with Zina) but also to his literary talent. This other "gift" will result in the book we are reading and includes some of Fyodor's preliminary efforts, among them a biography of his deceased father and commemorative love poems to Zina after their nightly meetings. The act of writing is thus explicitly an endeavor to remember, which is underlined

when Fyodor tells Zina about his idea to write an autobiography. *The Gift* shall commemorate the history of their love, Fyodor promises at the end of the book. In making this promise, he must figure the presence of the promise as a memory for the future. "One day we shall recall all this," Fyodor pledges on the last page of *The Gift* (366). This promise of memory leads him to inscribe the details of the fleeting evening with lyrical precision, as he and Zina leave a restaurant and wander out into the summer night.

The final scene is thus Fyodor's version of *now remember,* pervaded by a remarkable happiness but also by a sense of "the weight and the threat of bliss" (366) that is due to the precarious "gift" of life. It is precisely by affirming the finite gift of his life that Fyodor is seized by the "panicky desire" to preserve it through narration. This narration must inscribe the past *and* the present with regard to the future, but it can do so only by entrusting survival to a medium that is itself destructible. Accordingly, in the last paragraph of *The Gift,* Fyodor marks the finitude of every writer and reader ("Good-bye, my book! Like mortal eyes, imagined ones must close some day") while at the same time expressing his desire to retain and prolong the experience of his finite life: "And yet the ear cannot right now part with the music and allow the tale to fade . . ." (366).

A parallel example is Nabokov's short story "The Admiralty Spire." Here the narrator recalls his first love, one distant summer when the gramophones played Russian *tsyganskie romansy:* a kind of pseudo-gypsy, sentimental music. The mood of the music, with its invocations of bygone landscapes and bittersweet memories, would seem suitable for the one who is writing in retrospect. Yet the young couple already apprehends their present happiness in the same spirit. The sense of temporal finitude—of how their tangible circumstances at any time can be taken away—leads them to "counterfeit the remoteness of time" (348). Anticipating loss in the very experience of bliss, they approach the present as if in retrospect, keeping its happening as a beloved memory. "We transformed everything we saw into monuments to our still nonexistent past by trying to look at a garden path, at the moon, at the weeping willows, with the same eyes with which *now*—when fully conscious of irreparable losses—we might have looked at that old, waterlogged raft on the pond, at that moon above the black cow shed" (348).

Given the prevalence of the motif *now remember,* we can understand why a large number of Nabokov's novels have the form of memoirs, where the protagonists narrate their own lives. These protagonists are all in the position of living on, since they have survived a time to which they return in memory. In writing their lives, they seek to reconstruct a past that otherwise would be lost but are themselves exposed to a future that may erase what has been inscribed. Furthermore, the act of writing does not supervene on a given consciousness but is at work in the experience of presence itself. This necessity of writing—of inscribing the present as a memory for the future—follows from the negativity of time. Every moment immediately negates itself—it ceases to be as soon as it comes to be—and must therefore be inscribed as a memory in order to be apprehended at all. Without the inscription of memory nothing would survive, since nothing would remain from the passage of time. The passion for writing that is displayed by Nabokov and his protagonists is thus a passion for survival. Writing is here not limited to the physical act of writing but is a figure for the chronolibidinal investment in living on that resists the negativity of time while being bound to it.

Nabokov scholarship, however, is dominated by the thesis that his writing is driven by a desire to transcend the condition of time. The most influential proponent for this view is Brian Boyd, who in a number of books has argued that Nabokov aspires toward "the full freedom of timelessness, consciousness without the degradation of loss."[4] According to Boyd, the possibility of such a life beyond death is a pivotal concern in Nabokov's oeuvre. Boyd is well aware that Nabokov and his protagonists are resolute chronophiles who treasure their memories and temporal lives. As he eloquently puts it, "the key to Nabokov is that he loved and enjoyed so much in life that it was extraordinarily painful for him to envisage losing all he held precious, a country, a language, a love, this instant, that sound."[5] At the same time, however, Boyd maintains that Nabokov regards temporal consciousness as a "prison" that he hopes to transcend through death.[6] Boyd's reconstruction of Nabokov's metaphysics hinges on the assumption that these two positions are compatible. For his account to work, the desire to retain temporal experience must be compatible with the desire for a timeless state of being. As I will argue, however, it is precisely the idea of such compatibility that

Nabokov undermines. Contrary to what Boyd holds, "the full freedom of timelessness" could never allow one "to enjoy endlessly the riches of time."[7] In a timeless state of being there are, by definition, no riches of time. The chronophilic desire to hold on to temporal experience is therefore incompatible with a metaphysical desire to transcend the condition of time.

Let me emphasize that I am not charging Boyd with having misconstrued Nabokov's philosophy. Boyd's account clearly draws on statements made by Nabokov himself, and we have already seen that *Speak, Memory* begins with a description of time as a "prison" that it supposedly would be desirable to escape. My aim, however, is not to make Nabokov's philosophy consistent but to elucidate how the logic of chronolibido is operative in his writing. This logic opens a new way of reading Nabokov's work, which does not rely on his philosophy but rather reveals the internal contradictions in the metaphysics reconstructed by Boyd. The philosophical position that Boyd rehearses does not become any more coherent just because the incoherence in question can be traced back to Nabokov's own thinking. My argument is rather that the logic of chronolibido undermines the Nabokovian metaphysics that Boyd assumes must serve as the foundation for a reading of his work.[8]

The logic of chronolibido emerges clearly in the preoccupation with death and the afterlife that runs throughout Nabokov's work. His protagonists are typically haunted by ghosts of the dead—Fyodor in *The Gift* by his dead father, Nabokov himself in *Speak, Memory* by his dead father, John Shade in *Pale Fire* by his daughter Hazel who committed suicide, Van and Ada by their sister Lucette who also committed suicide, and so on. In all these cases of mourning, the refusal to accept death is equally the refusal to accept an immortal state of being, since the latter would not allow the mortal beloved to live on.

A paradigmatic example is *Pale Fire,* where Shade's long autobiographical poem broaches the question of survival and immortality. The same poem reverberates in *Ada,* where Van and Ada translate Shade into Russian with particular attention to his notion of the afterlife. In response to his fear of death and Hazel's suicide, Shade holds out the hope "that we survive / And that my darling somewhere is alive" (58). As is clear from Shade's reasoning, however, the state of immortality cannot give him what

he asks for, namely, the survival of a mortal life. Shade frankly declares that he will "turn down eternity unless / The melancholy and the tenderness / Of mortal life; the passion and the pain. . . . Are found in Heaven by the newlydead / Stored in its stronghold through the years" (44). Insofar as Shade desires to keep these traits of mortal life, he cannot desire an immortal state of being. The pain and passion of mortal life would be inconceivable for an immortal being, since the latter could never fear or suffer from loss.

Boyd tries to solve the problem by understanding the timeless state of immortal being as an unlimited access to the temporal states of mortal being, namely, "an immortal consciousness" that would have access to "an always available past."[9] This argument presupposes that there could be a realm where the experiences of a temporal life remain intact and ready to be reactivated for a timeless consciousness. Shade's poem, however, provides an elaborate parody of exactly this idea. As he puts it:

> Time means succession, and succession, change:
> Hence timelessness is bound to disarrange
> Schedules of sentiment. We give advice
> To widower. He has been married twice:
> He meets his wives; both loved, both loving, both
> Jealous of one another. . . . (46)

The scenario makes vividly clear that one cannot eliminate the temporality of relations without eliminating the sense and meaning of the relations themselves. The same problem of temporality applies to the idea of resurrecting one's own mortal life. "What moment in the gradual decay / Does resurrection choose?" Shade asks rhetorically. "What year? What day?" (35). Shade's poem thereby targets the basic assumption of the metaphysics reconstructed by Boyd, namely, that a timeless consciousness could have access to the sense and meaning of a temporal life. For the latter argument to work, it must be possible to abstract the sense of a life from temporal relationality and finite embodiment. Even if such an operation were possible, however, it would eliminate the sense of the mortal lives that Nabokov and his protagonists want to keep. In a conversation about Shade's poem toward the end of *Ada,* Van makes precisely this point:

> Van pointed out that here was the rub—one is free to imagine any type of hereafter, of course: the generalized paradise promised by Oriental prophets and poets, or an individual combination; but the work of fancy is handicapped—to a quite hopeless extent—by a logical ban: you cannot bring your friends along—or your enemies for that matter—to the party. The transposition of all our remembered relationships into an Elysian life inevitably turns it into a second-rate continuation of our marvelous mortality. (458)

Both Shade's poem and Van's commentary thus undermine the idea that our memories or relationships could be transposed to an eternal life. When Boyd comments on Van's reading of Shade, however, he dissimulates the stakes. According to Boyd, Van's argument shows "the absurdity of merely eternalizing human life" and thereby teaches us to leave behind our "anthropomorphic confines" when we imagine the afterlife.[10] This reading is untenable for a number of reasons. Van does *not* seek to rehabilitate the idea of an afterlife beyond the reach of anthropomorphic imagination. On the contrary, he argues that the desire for an afterlife *is* anthropomorphic and therefore bears a contradiction—a "logical ban"—within itself. The desire for an afterlife is, on Van's account, motivated by a desire for one's mortal life to continue. By the same token, he is lead to "turn down eternity" since it would not allow for the "continuation of our marvelous mortality."

When Boyd himself recognizes that "an eternalization of anything resembling his mortal life is logically impossible" and concedes that "anything we *can* imagine collapses under the absurdity of trying to transpose the conditions of temporality into eternity,"[11] he in fact concedes the ground for his own reading of Nabokov. If it is absurd to transpose the conditions of temporality into eternity, then it is equally absurd to hold out the possibility of a timeless consciousness that would have access to the personal past of a temporal consciousness. Boyd's self-contradictory reasoning is evident even within single paragraphs of his text. "Scrupulously avoiding the logical absurdity of eternalizing the necessarily finite condition of human consciousness," Boyd asserts, "Nabokov satisfies his desire for freedom by imagining the various limitations of the mind transcended in death. Death could offer us

a completely new relation to time: freedom of our being pegged to the present, freedom of access to the whole of the past."[12] The idea of a realm where past events would be accessible forever is a clear example of eternalizing the finite, since past events had to be finite in order to become past in the first place. The only way to avoid this "logical absurdity" is to say that being in a state of eternity has nothing to do with preserving events of temporal life, since an eternal state of being would make one indifferent to the past as well as the future. That is why it is consistent to emphasize (as many religious sages do) that *detachment* is the path to the salvation of eternity. Only by becoming indifferent to the fate of temporal life can one embrace the absolute quietude of eternity. Following a chronolibidinal insight, however, Nabokov's protagonists insist that there is a constitutive *attachment* to temporal life, which undercuts the supposed desirability of eternity. Precisely because they are invested in the survival of temporal life, they turn down the prospect of eternity.

The chronolibidinal logic at work here does not deny that we dream of paradises and afterlives. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate that these dreams themselves are inhabited and sustained by temporal finitude. The fictional universe of *Ada* is organized around this idea. *Ada* is set on a planet called Demonia, or "Antiterra" in what appears to be the colloquial usage. With the invention of Antiterra, Nabokov rewrites the history of our world in an apparently wishful way, so that Russia and America, for example, belong to the same country. Taken together with Van and Ada's insistence on their exceptional happiness, it may thus seem as though Nabokov has created a "paradisal Antiterra," as John Updike puts it in a blurb that appears on most covers of the book. Yet the inhabitants of Antiterra dream of Terra as another world or as a life beyond death. The point here is not whether those who envision Terra on Antiterra are right or wrong (some people in the novel consider them as mad, others consider them as visionaries) but that the Terra they envision, by all appearances, is identical to life on Earth. Inversely, the Antiterra of the novel is just as marked by temporal finitude as our own Terra. The world of Antiterra thereby serves to underline—in both directions—that wherever you go or dream of going you will take time with you.

If this drama of chronolibidinal attachment becomes particularly visible in *Ada,* it is because the protagonists so strongly emphasize the investment in their singular lives and depict the happiness of their love as paradise itself. The first lines of the novel set the tone by reconfiguring the first lines of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina.* In *Ada* it is unhappy families that are all alike, while happy families are happy each in their own special way. This inversion of Tolstoy's premise permeates the book. As in so many nineteenth-century novels, the romance of Van and Ada is set against a dark family secret. Officially they are cousins, but in fact they are brother and sister, the products of a confidential love affair they unravel during their first summer together. At that time, Ada is twelve years old and Van fourteen, but neither their age nor the incest taboo can soften their passion. On the contrary, the young siblings soon become lovers in every sense of the word.

That their forbidden love does not lead to a predestined tragedy but lives on for more than eighty years is of course a cunning demonstration of the happy family. Despite a number of *contretemps* that keep them separated for long stretches of time, the story elides traditional tragic narratives of love by letting Van and Ada emerge from their partings to reunite and live happily ever after. The very actuality of happiness, however, is haunted by the threat of loss. As Michael Wood has argued in an insightful reading of *Ada,* Nabokov does not treat happiness as something that is unattainable or impossible but rather as something whose precious quality depends on being susceptible to loss. The actuality of happiness in *Ada* makes clear that the threat of loss is *internal* to the experience of happiness itself, "not because happiness is doomed, or because fate is unkind, but because happiness is intelligible only under threat; intelligible only as its own threat."[13]

Accordingly, even in the most brazenly blissful moments of the book there is an apprehension of possible mourning. Within the space of single sentences, the affirmation of love is haunted by its opposite and contrary categories clash: passion/pain, beau/beast, tenderness/torture, happiness/helplessness. The logic of chronolibido thus emerges in beautiful, entangled phrases—as when Van describes how the sight of Ada's twelve-year-old hands gave rise to "agonies of unresolvable adoration" (85). Van's adoration here signifies an irrevocable emotion; it is "unresolvable"

in the sense that it cannot be dissolved. At the same time, even the seemingly perpetual bond of love can always be broken and is thus characterized by an "unresolvable" contradiction that permeates Van's adoration with symptomatic agonies.

Almost four hundred pages later, the same word reappears concerning Van's aging: "physical despair pervaded his unresolvable being" (448). Van's being is here "unresolvable" because his resistance to its approaching death yields a conflict that cannot be resolved. This "unresolvable" problem of aging is staged on both levels of *Ada,* as the novel divides into two narratives. The main narrative spans from 1884 to 1922, recounting the intricate love story of Van and Ada, with an epilogue from 1967 when they are on the verge of death. We here find them worrying about who will die first and leave the other in solitary mourning. Indeed, "each hoped to go first, so as to concede, by implication, a longer life to the other, and each wished to go last, in order to spare the other the anguish of widowhood" (457). The happy ending is thus shown to be essentially compromised by finitude. Van and Ada have managed to survive almost all the classical *contretemps* of a great romance, but the *contretemps* of death cannot be avoided, only delayed.

The writing of the book begins in 1957 and probably comes to an end sometime in 1967, when Ada is ninety-five and Van ninety-seven. We learn that it took six years to write and dictate the first draft of the book (1957–1963), after which Van revised the typescript and rewrote it entirely in long hand (1963–1965). He then redictated the entire manuscript to his secretary, Violet Knox, who finished typing up the new version in 1967. For Van's ninety-seventh birthday, Violet prepares a special edition of the supposedly finished memoir, "ideally clean, produced on special Atticus paper in a special cursive type (the glorified version of Van's hand), with the master copy bound in purple calf" (459–460). Yet this pristine copy is "immediately blotted out by a regular inferno of alterations in red ink and blue pencil" (460) that Van and Ada continue to inscribe in the text up until their death. The book has thus been interrupted, rather than finished, and the text we read is a posthumously published manuscript. Although the manuscript does not relate exactly when Van and Ada died or who died before the other, an editorial note asserts that neither one of them is alive at the time of publication.

Nabokov's ingenious move is to stage the ten-year period of writing (1957–1967) parallel with the narrative running from 1884 to 1922. By way of interpolated parentheses, we get to witness Van and Ada in the process of writing their past. Van is the main signatory of the text, but Ada takes over from time to time, and both of them interrupt the narrative of the past to refer to circumstances at the time of writing, comment on certain details, admit lapses in memory, or demand that certain passages be eliminated or rephrased. Ada, especially, inserts a large number of additions that supplement, correct, and quarrel with Van's version of their life. In effect, the act of writing emerges as a chronolibidinal drama in itself. The moods of the narrators range from exorbitant self-confidence to elegiac intonations and nervous arrogance. The emotional shifts are due not only to their love story being perforated by partings, or to the depicted young lovers being so distant in time, but also to Van and Ada as writers being marked by impending death. Telling takes time, and we are not allowed to forget the irrefutable process of aging. On the contrary, it breaches the act of narration. For example, an enchanting episode in the first half of the novel is disrupted by an inserted addition that might be Van's last words. Via an editorial note informing us that "the end of the sentence cannot be deciphered but fortunately the next paragraph is scrawled on a separate writing-pad page" (173), we are displaced from Van and Ada as young lovers in 1888 to Van reading the proofs in 1967, pointing out that he is sick, that he writes badly and can die at any moment, in a note that ends with an instruction to the editor of the book: "Insert" (174).

The imminent threat of death that is explicit in Van's note is implicit throughout the text, not only because the protagonists are shadowed by their writing selves but also because the negativity of time is at work in the very presence of life. "We die every day; oblivion thrives / Not on dry thighbones but on blood-ripe lives," John Shade writes in *Pale Fire* (44). In *Ada,* this chronophobic apprehension of finitude explicitly accompanies the chronophilic investment in temporal life. Having recently fallen in love, Ada and Van undertake an excursion in the resplendent landscape that surrounds the family estate, Ardis Hall. In a playful exchange of memories, they compare travel itineraries from childhood, trying to figure out where and when they might have seen

each other for the first time. Already in the midst of this blissful experience of love, however, they are haunted by the sense of temporal finitude that is intrinsic to consummate happiness itself:

> "But this," exclaimed Ada, "is certain, this is reality, this is pure fact—this forest, this moss, your hand, the ladybird on my leg, this cannot be taken away, can it? (it will, it was). *This* has all come together *here,* no matter how the paths twisted, and fooled each other, and got fouled up, they inevitably met here!" (123–24)

Van and Ada's marginal comments are usually identifiable through an appended description, such as "Ada's note" or "late interpolation." Significantly, the interpolated parenthesis here is exempt from this practice. It would be easy to read the stealthy reminder—*it will* be taken away, *it was* taken away—as a belated insight signed by the aged couple. Yet such a reading disregards how *it will, it was* resonates not only in the act of retrospective narration but also in the actuality of Ada's experience. Rather than pinpointing a pure presence, her articulation of *this* is an act of memorization through which she tries to imprint details before they disappear. Such an act would be unthinkable without the sense that *this* is ceasing to be and needs to be recorded. While Ada's emphatic *this* and *here* are spatial locutions, her question is motivated by the negativity of time that inhabits the spatial determination of something as being *this* and *here.* Repeated seven times, her insistence on *this* marks temporal displacement in the very act of trying to mitigate it.

Ada's insistence on the present thus recalls the scene in *Speak, Memory* where Nabokov's mother teaches him to *now remember.* Ada turns both toward what is no longer and what is not yet by retaining the present as a memory for the future. This double temporal structure is doubled once again when the event is inscribed in the autobiography. On the one hand, Van and Ada turn backward in time by recounting past events. On the other hand, they turn forward in time by addressing readers to come, including their future selves. Both their experience and their writing are therefore haunted by the refrain *it will* be taken away, *it was* taken away. The perilous implications of this refrain are underscored by Van and Ada's decision to publish the book posthumously.

They hold on to their memories, but the desire to keep their lives is concomitant with the awareness that every detail will be taken away from them in death. Indeed, it is the sense of temporal finitude that makes Van and Ada promise each other to hold on to what happens. As Van describes it, their love gives rise to "a complex system of those subtle bridges that the senses traverse . . . between membrane and brain, and which always was and is a form of memory, *even at the moment of its perception*" (174, my emphasis).

The necessity of memorization, then, answers to a form of writing that is operative in perception itself. The inscription of memory—and thereby the writing of time—is at work in Ada's articulation of *this here* as a perceptual presence. On the one hand, she performs a *spatialization of time* since the moment is recorded as a trace of the past. On the other hand, she performs a *temporalization of space* since the trace of the past is left for the future and thereby remains exposed to the possibility of erasure. This implicit relation between time and space is explicit in the passage leading up to Ada's remark. Van recounts how on that summer day he "found himself tackling, in still vague and idle fashion, the science that was to obsess his mature years—problems of space and time, space versus time, time-twisted space, space as time, time as space—and space breaking away from time in the final tragic triumph of human cogitation: I am because I die" (123). On Van's account, the negativity of ceasing to be ("I am because I die") is thus what distinguishes time from space. As we will see, however, the negativity of time does not establish it as independent of space. On the contrary, the negativity of time makes it altogether *dependent* on space.

The interdependence of time and space is crucial for the entire novel, but given Van's allusion to "the science that was to obsess his mature years," his statement above should primarily be read against his philosophical treatise *The Texture of Time.* This treatise occupies the fourth part of *Ada* and is intertwined with a narrative of Van's journey (by car) from the Dolomites to Switzerland. We here return to the time with which I began this chapter: it is the middle of July, 1922, and Van is on his way to the hotel where he will meet Ada for the first time in seventeen years. During this journey, Van composes *The Texture of Time.* It is a measure of its pivotal status that Nabokov had first planned to use the title of the

treatise for the novel itself. Nonetheless, in approaching *The Texture of Time* we need to be armed with critical vigilance. On one level, the treatise denies that time and space are interdependent. Van repeatedly maintains his search for a Pure Time that would be independent of space. On closer inspection, however, these assertions do not answer to the logic of Van's writing. What emerges is rather a necessary co-implication of time and space, which is accentuated by Van's stylistic ingenuity and subverts his philosophical claims.

We thus come to a crossroads in our reading. All of Van's metaphors—including the title of his treatise—describe time in spatial terms and thus contradict his notion of Pure Time. A sympathetic reader may try to explain away this circumstance by arguing that what Van calls pure time is something immediately given, an unmediated experience of duration that is incompatible with the spatialization intrinsic to language. From such a perspective, pure time is an interior quality that cannot be translated to external, quantitative categories. To measure time would be to distort its proper essence, to discriminate separate phases in what is originally an indivisible unity. A number of Van's formulations may seem to invite such a reading, but in fact the very idea of immediacy is undermined in his writing. The following passage is an instructive example:

> What nudged, what comforted me, a few minutes ago at the stop of a thought? Yes. Maybe the only thing that hints at a sense of Time is rhythm; not the recurrent beats of the rhythm but the gap between two such beats, the gray gap between black beats: the Tender Interval. The regular throb itself merely brings back the miserable idea of measurement, but in between, something like true Time lurks. How can I extract it from its soft hollow? The rhythm should be neither too slow nor too fast. One beat per minute is already far beyond my sense of succession and five oscillations per second make a hopeless blur. The ample rhythm causes Time to dissolve, the rapid one crowds it out. Give me, say, three seconds, then I can do both: perceive the rhythm and probe the interval. A hollow, did I say? A dim pit? But that is only Space, the comedy villain, returning by the back door with the pendulum he peddles, while I grope for the meaning of Time. What I endeavor to grasp is precisely the Time that Space helps me to measure, and no wonder I fail to grasp Time, since knowledge-gaining itself "takes time." (421)

Van's inquiry is here guided by the idea that the essence of time is an indivisible presence. When examined, however, the idea turns against itself. Van aims at a pure interval that would harbor "true time," but he soon realizes that the interval only comes into being through a distended temporality. The interval cannot be a pure presence. On the contrary, it divides every moment from within. Van's argument is thus haunted by minutes, seconds, and oscillations within seconds, despite his attempt to debase measurement as a "miserable idea." Van's philosophical ambition is to elucidate experience at its most immediate, but what he discovers is that there can be no presence in itself.

The impossibility of presence in itself becomes particularly evident when Van applies a method he calls "Deliberate Presence." Deliberate presence consists in directing the energy of thought toward what is happening *right now*. Van describes it as follows:

> To give myself time to time Time I must move my mind in the direction opposite to that in which I am moving, as one does when one is driving past a long row of poplars and wishes to isolate and stop one of them, thus making the green blur reveal and offer, yes, offer, its every leaf. (31)

The very focus on the present thus demonstrates that there cannot be an immediate presence. Even if Van brought the car to a halt, he would still be driven toward the future. Consequently, every moment—like every detail in the fleeting landscape—can only appear as past. Temporality divides not only what appears but also the self-awareness of the one to whom it appears. Temporal division is here marked by an inherent delay in the reflexive act of giving oneself "time to time Time." The interval separates the present from itself in its event, and without such discrimination nothing could ever be distinguished. A page further on, Van continues in the same vein:

> Since the Present is but an imaginary point without an awareness of the immediate past, it is necessary to define that awareness. Not for the first time will Space intrude if I say that what we are aware of as "Present" is the constant building up of the Past, its smoothly and relentlessly rising level. How meager! How magic! (432)

Van here concedes that the experience of temporality depends on spatiality. Given that every temporal moment immediately negates itself, it must be retained by something other than itself. Such retention is unthinkable without the spatial inscription of a trace that can remain from one moment to another, thereby opening the possibility of both short-term awareness of the past and long-term memory.

Van's desire to retain evanescent moments is therefore not compatible with a desire for the supposed pure time of presence in itself. Rather, Van seeks to spatialize time and temporalize space. Despite his overt denunciation of space, the narrative of his treatise archives temporal events in spatial signs. Inversely, without temporalization these spatial signs could not persist and relay the past to the future. Such "chronographies" (88) are necessary to keep the memory of the past. The logic of the exposition—in spacing time and timing space—thus undermines the purported thesis of the text.

A similar complication can be tracked in Van's discussion of the future in *The Texture of Time.* Van describes the treatise as a "Work-in-Progress" (439) and openly addresses "the dawning desk of the still-absent reader" (420). Nevertheless, he makes several attempts to deny that the future is a valid temporal category, which perhaps can be ascribed to a psychological cause. While writing *The Texture of Time,* Van is palpably nervous about the prospect of meeting Ada after seventeen years, and he himself says that the purpose of his philosophical speculations is to keep him from brooding over their anticipated reunion.

In any event, Van's line of reasoning encounters severe problems. His proclaimed stance is that anticipations of the future—whether in the form of hope or fear—are inessential phenomena for a proper understanding of time. When Van specifies his argument, however, he pursues a completely different thesis: that the future is not predetermined. His simple point is that coming events do not yet exist. This argument does not refute the future as a temporal category, but is rather intrinsic to the definition of the future. Accordingly, we get to witness yet another U-turn in the treatise. What was supposed to be negated is instead emphatically affirmed:

> The unknown, the not yet experienced and the unexpected, all the glorious "x" intersections, are the inherent parts of human life. The determinate scheme by stripping the sunrise of its surprise would erase all sunrays—(441)

The relation to the future is here articulated as a necessary condition of experience. In spite of Van's programmatic declarations, this insight is at work in his argument from the beginning. Van has no qualms about appropriating a concept of the past while attempting to denounce what he calls the false third panel in the triptych of time. It is impossible to accept a concept of the past and deny a concept of the future, however, since the two concepts are interdependent. That something is past means that it has been overtaken by a future. Inversely, anticipations of the future are anticipations of a past to come. Whatever happens *will have been* in a future anterior that marks the becoming of every event.

Although the temporality of the future anterior operates throughout the novel, one scene in particular captures it with striking precision. The scene in question is triggered by a photograph that portrays Van and Ada as young relatives in the summer of 1884. In a stylized setting, they pose for the family photographer, and the occasion turns out to be memorable indeed:

> Van stood inclining his head above her and looked, unseeing, at the opened book. In full, deliberate consciousness, at the moment of the hooded click, he bunched the recent past with the imminent future and thought to himself that this would remain an objective perception of the real present and that he must remember the flavor, the flash, the flesh of the present (as he, indeed, remembered it half a dozen years later—and now, in the second half of the next century). (316)

Through the self-reflective movement of trying to capture himself in the photographic moment, Van illuminates how even the most immediate

experience is pervaded by the negativity of time. His very act of perceiving is divided between the negative determination of being no longer ("the recent past") and the negative determination of being not yet ("the imminent future"). It is precisely because of this constitutive negativity that the experience of time depends on the material support of a spatial trace. Without the support of such a trace there could be no experience of time, since there would be nothing that could retain the recent past for the imminent future. This necessity of recording time is further underscored by the material support of the photograph, which pinpoints a certain moment by duplicating it as a trace on the film. Analogously, Van is both witness and witnessed when he *thinks to himself* that he must memorize the moment. The event is inscribed as a trace in his consciousness, while the interpolated parenthesis demonstrates how the inscription of time enables repetitions of the memory. Within the space of a single sentence we move from the summer of 1884 to the winter of 1892—when Van encounters the photograph in an apartment in Manhattan—all the way up to the 1960s, when the sequence of memories is archived in the autobiography.

The connection to technological memory in Van's series of recollections is deeply significant for the novel. Van and Ada have a tremendous ability to recall the past, but they are dependent on supplementary devices to retain the flight of time—everything from clocks and calendars to photographs and telegrams. Furthermore, the fictional universe of *Ada* gives a hint as to the importance of technology. To a large extent, the world of Antiterra corresponds to our own, but Nabokov rearranges the historical course of events. For example, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, cars, telephones, and cinemas are part of everyday life. This revision of the history of technology is not just playful but is closely intertwined with the time theme of the novel. In the foreword to *Speak, Memory,* Nabokov writes that all our memories ought to be microfilmed, and a chronophile does indeed have good reasons to be fascinated by mnemotechnical devices. The possibility of saving sense data, of transmitting visual and sonorous phenomena, increases dramatically with inventions such as the tape recorder and the film camera. "Time is but memory in the making" (440), Van claims with a striking phrase in his treatise. A decisive question, then, is what material supports are available

for archiving. Time must be spatially inscribed, and an advanced technology provides a greater capacity for storing and transferring what happens.

Nevertheless, humanist ideologies have traditionally demoted technology, arguing that its artificial modes of production distort the immediacy of living presence. When phenomena are reproduced mechanically there is an inevitable spacing between origin and transmission. To surrender one's face to a camera or to deposit one's voice in a tape recorder is to be duplicated by an exterior medium that is subject to reiteration and dislocation. What becomes clear in *Ada,* however, is that such temporal spacing is not an unnatural process but is always already at work in the "interior" of the subject. Rather than being essentially different from a system of technological mediation, the perceptual apparatus itself depends on the mediation of the trace.

We can discern the necessity of mediation in Van's thoughts before the camera in 1884. Parallel to the explicit act of photography is an implicit act of *chronography* that marks the mnemotechnics of the psyche. In both cases, it is a matter of inscribing traces that give experience both the chance to live on and to be effaced. Just as photographs can easily fade or be destroyed, Van will suffer from forgetfulness and death. Yet there is a difference of degree to be noted. The photograph is described as "an objective perception of the real present," capable of preserving details independently of Van's memory and repeating them without his animating intention. While the photograph's designated mnemonic power depends on Van's ability to resuscitate "the flavor, the flash, the flesh of the present," such animation cannot sublate the inanimate repetition of the technological medium. By transferring sense data to an exterior receptacle, Van strengthens his ability to resist the threat of forgetting, but through the same gesture he commits himself to a medium that does not belong to him. When one is photographed or recorded on tape, there is always the possibility of the face or the voice being reproduced in a different context, beyond the control of its presumed origin. The same condition applies to written words, which are not only readable and repeatable in the absence of the author but also susceptible to manipulation. As we will see, this problem of technological mediation is at the heart of chronolibidinal writing in *Ada.*

A first clue is a number of connections between the project of the memoir and technical devices. On several occasions, Van and Ada imagine that episodes from their past are displayed as a motion picture, and they are repeatedly attracted to the idea of a particular event being accessible through magnetic tape or cinematographic recording. A dialogue between the couple in 1884 is thus presented by Van and Ada in 1967 with the appended regret that they did not tape the conversation, since it would have allowed them to reactivate sonorous traces of their past. Words printed on paper do not exhibit such an apparently direct link to sense data, but they can nevertheless perform an analogous function. The style of writing in *Ada* is perhaps the most elegant example of literary mnemotechnics, since it reactivates the sense of the past by elucidating subtle nuances of experience. Van and Ada, however, also pursue a more advanced technology of writing. Already to inscribe an event is a form of programming, since it relies on the ability of future readers to translate the marks on the page into "living" impressions. The strategies of writing in *Ada* extend the scope of such programming, since they not only narrate the past but also *record the act of narrating the past,* thereby documenting the ten-year period of writing as a drama in itself that gradually evolves in the margins of the book.

For example, the episode when Van and Ada make love for the first time is repeatedly interrupted by arguments between the two at the time of writing, when they recall the event more than seventy years later. At times, Van attempts to protect himself from the emotionally charged subject by having recourse to summarious or lecherous phrases, but Ada protests and gives us a more delicate description of what happened, as they take turns writing the episode. That the alternating process of writing is staged in the text is no coincidence; it is consistent with the chronophilic and chronophobic sense of autobiography that pervades the memoir. Throughout the novel, we can observe the desire *to narrate the one who is narrating,* to integrate the process of writing the autobiography into the autobiography itself.

The ambition to narrate the one who is narrating is brought to a head in a number of supplementary markers that are mainly appended to Ada's notes. An inserted comment may be followed by characterizations such as "Marginal note in red ink" (104) or "Marginal jotting in Ada's 1965 hand; crossed out lightly in her latest wavering one" (19). Such specifications are recurrent and typographically distinguished from the editor's notes, which are given in square brackets according to the model: [Ed.]. It is thus Ada herself who provides the additional descriptions of her marginal notes, in accordance with a chronophilic and chronophobic logic. When the manuscript is printed as a book, the marginal notes will cease to be marginal and will be transferred to the center of the page (as indeed they are in the edition we read). For the same reason, the color of Ada's ink will have been erased when her handwriting is replaced by printed letters. It is therefore necessary to describe these characteristics in order to prevent them from vanishing without a trace. When Ada writes a note in 1965, she thus adds that it is a note written by herself in 1965. This doubling is operative even when impending death has deprived Ada of physical strength: her wavering hand lightly crossing out text describes itself as a wavering hand lightly crossing out text. These inscriptions may seem to be an extreme form of chronophilia and chronophobia, but the very project of the memoir resonates in Ada's desire to record as much as possible. The text is programmed to retain its character when transmitted from one material support to another and enables us to track different dates of inscription on one and the same page.

The originality with which Nabokov stages such chronolibidinal writing is perhaps best measured against the analysis of temporality pursued by Gerard Genette in his study of narrative discourse. While the narration of time by definition takes time, Genette observes that "almost all novels in the world except *Tristram Shandy*" proceed as if the fictive narrating of the narrative has "no duration; or, more exactly, everything takes place as if the question of its duration had no relevance."[14] This idea that "narrating involves an instantaneous action, without a temporal dimension" (222) is, according to Genette, one of the most unchallenged fictions of literary narrative. What makes *Tristram Shandy* an exception is its explicit thematization of the temporality of narration. With characteristic wit, Tristram points out that he lives faster than he writes and never will be able to catch up with himself in the telling of his life story. After having managed to narrate only the first day of his life in one year of writing, he has in fact fallen behind three hundred and sixty-four days in the narration of his life.

If the articulation of Tristram's insight is rare, the way in which *Ada* stages the time of narration—including acts of revising and editing the manuscript—is all the more unique, if not unprecedented. Perhaps the most dramatic example is the pages devoted to Lucette's suicide. Here the narrative not only bears traces of Van's grief at the time of narration but also of his secretary typing the sentences he dictates to her: recording her mishearings, misspellings, and lines that testify to how Van fumbles with his notes while dictating the description of Lucette's death.[15] Even in blissful moments of the book, however, we can trace the time of writing and the emotional strain it places on those who are involved in recalling their past. The following passage, taken from the narrative of the first time Van and Ada made love, is an instructive example of how the temporally extended process of writing is staged in the text. The point of departure is a summer night in 1884:

> For the first time in their love story, the blessing, the genius of lyrical speech descended upon the rough lad, he murmured and moaned, kissing her face with voluble tenderness, crying out in three languages—the three greatest in all the world—pet words upon which a dictionary of secret diminutives was to be based and go through many revisions till the definitive edition of 1967. When he grew too loud, she shushed, shushingly breathing into his mouth, and now her four limbs were frankly around him, as if she had been love-making for years in all our dreams—but impatient young passion (brimming like Van's overflowing bath while he is reworking this, a crotchety gray old wordman on the edge of a hotel bed) did not survive the first few blind thrusts; it burst at the lip of the orchid, and a bluebird offered a warning warble, and the lights were now stealing back under a rugged dawn, the firefly signals were circumscribing the reservoir, the dots of the carriage lamps became stars, wheels rasped on the gravel, all the dogs returned well pleased with the night treat, the cook's niece Blanche jumped out of a pumpkin-hued police van in her stockinged feet (long, long after midnight, alas)—and our two naked children, grabbing lap robe and nightdress, and giving the couch a parting pat, pattered back with their candlesticks to their innocent bedrooms.

> "And do you remember," said gray-moustached Van as he took a Cannabina cigarette from the bedside table and rattled a yellow-blue matchbox, "how reckless we were, and how Larivière stopped snoring but a moment later went on shaking the house, and how cold the iron steps were, and how disconcerted I was—by your—how shall I put it?—lack of restraint."
>
> "Idiot," said Ada from the wall side, without turning her head.
>
> Summer 1960? Crowded hotel somewhere between Ex and Ardez?
>
> Ought to begin dating every page of the manuscript: Should be kinder to my unknown dreamers. (98–99)

At least four different time-levels can be discerned here. Initially, we are treated to an episode from 1884, which necessarily was written at a later date—in its first version probably sometime in the late 1950s. When the first parenthesis interrupts the narrative we become aware of yet another time-level, since Van here is *reworking* the section we read. The narration of the summer night is then resumed, but the depiction of the "crotchety gray old wordman" is continued in the following paragraph, which displaces us to a hotel room where Van and Ada are working on the manuscript. If we wonder exactly when this scene takes place we soon realize that the same question occupies Van ("Summer 1960? Crowded hotel somewhere between Ex and Ardez?") when he on *yet another* occasion reads the text and notes that he ought to begin dating every page of the manuscript. It seems reasonable to attribute the last comment to 1967, since a reference to this year has been inserted into the description of the episode from 1884—if the reference to 1967 does not testify to yet another date of inscription, yet another time-level.

In any event, Van and Ada enable us to track how they return to the same passage several times, as they record themselves in the act of making further additions or commenting on their comments. Their obsessive investment in recording themselves, however, also serves to accentuate their disappearance. Van and Ada apply themselves to an ingeniously programmed textual archive, but even the most advanced technology runs the risk of being distorted. The possibility of malfunction is built into the

system from the beginning, due to the finitude of both the machine and its designers. It is thus significant that the book we are reading is an unfinished manuscript. This is easy to forget since the prose of the novel is so elegant and arrogant, but there are several furtive mementos to be noted. In a number of places, incomplete sentences remain in the text and are subsequently repeated and completed. These momentary disruptions of the progressing narrative create the same effect as when the needle of a gramophone is caught in a track: we become aware of how the act of reading or listening is dependent on a fragile mechanism.

The editor's remarks, which appear about twenty times throughout the novel, underline the technological corruptibility. As mentioned earlier, what might be Van's last word is a technical instruction ("Insert"). The inserted addition that interrupts an amorous scenario in 1888 is in turn interrupted in the middle of a sentence and followed by the editor's square brackets, where we learn that the rest of the sentence is illegible. Apparently, the margins of Van's proofs have not allowed sufficient space for his notes, but he has continued writing on a separate sheet and these notes have been inserted in the printed book following Van's concluding instruction. In this case, then, the editor appears to be faithful to the manuscript. At the same time, his interventions mark a series of interruptions that become more and more critical. As the book proceeds, one can observe that the editor is insolent in some of his comments. In the middle of a dialogue, he begins to speculate on whether Van has obtained the lines from other sources. Even in Van's and Ada's intimate love letters he takes note of solecisms with a pedantic *sic!* The man behind these remarks is a certain Ronald Oranger, who, as it turns out, has at least one special interest in the book. When in the final chapter Van is about to describe his beautiful secretary, Violet Knox (who was to become Mrs. Ronald Oranger), the sentences in question are replaced by an omission mark. The autobiography of our super-imperial couple has thus been bowdlerized by a jealous husband. Nabokov's stealthy irony reminds us that the written can never protect itself against being grafted onto a different context. Van and Ada inscribe layer upon layer of memories in their texture of time, but their hypermemoir also holds the threat of a lifeless repetition upon its posthumous publication, when readers and editors can do as they please with the dead letters.

Nevertheless, Nabokov scholars have sought to locate a transcendent meaning that would redeem the displacements of time that *Ada* records. A telling example is Robert Alter, who, in an otherwise valuable essay, misreads the part played by Ronald Oranger. Relying on no textual support except the possibility that Ronald Oranger is an anagram ("angel nor ardor"), Alter claims that Oranger is an angelic figure whose final responsibility for the text of *Ada* confirms the idea that art can create a "perfected state" of paradise. Indeed, in Alter's view "the ultimate sense" that *Ada* seeks to convey is that "all threats of evil, including the evil of the corrosive passage of time" can be "finally transcended by the twinned power of art and love."[16] My reading of *Ada* has argued for an opposite view. The very idea of a perfect paradise is shown to be untenable in *Ada,* since threats of destruction are intrinsic to even the most amazing happiness and the most meticulous work of art. It is thus an appropriate irony that the figure Alter assumes to be the angelic guardian of the book's metaphysical ambition in fact is a petty editor who disfigures the text and reminds us that corruption is always possible.[17] Far from redeeming corruptibility, the writing of Van and Ada highlights that the chance of inscription is inseparable from the risk of erasure. Whether their mnemotechnics are "interior" or "exterior" it is a matter of *chronographing:* of saving time in spatial marks. In the same process of preservation, however, Van and Ada are forced to underline their dependence on marks that not only are destructible but also exceed their control.

In reckoning with the problem of writing time, *Ada* can be seen to engage the legacy of the modernist novel in general and Proust's *Recherche* in particular. The latter is a recurrent intertext throughout the book, and it is instructive to compare the final pages of *Ada* with the final pages of the *Recherche. Ada* is divided into five parts that gradually become shorter and shorter, as if mirroring the dwindling of time left at the narrators' disposal. The epilogue that constitutes the final part is leaf-thin and situated in 1967. Van and Ada are here trying to complete their autobiography, but they do not know how to end or when to stop revising the manuscript. As Van points out, "one can even surmise that if our time-racked, flat-lying couple ever intended to die they would die, as it were, *into* the finished book" (460), but for that very reason they seek to keep the book alive

through an interminable process of revision. The physical pain of dying here begins to set in and at times seems to syncopate the very syntax of the writing. This physical pain is in turn compounded by the psychological fear of death, strikingly described by Van as the chronophobic "wrench of relinquishing forever one's memories" which animates the chronophilic investment in "accumulating again and again the riches of consciousness that will be snatched away" (457).

The same chronolibidinal anxiety over keeping memory and physical health emerges in the final pages of the *Recherche.* To recall, the *Recherche* does not end with Marcel's aesthetic revelation but with a set of chronophobic speculations concerning how and if he will be able to write his book. As Marcel emphasizes, "I would need a good number of nights, perhaps a hundred, perhaps a thousand" and at any moment death could come to interrupt the telling of his story (6:353/4:620). Indeed, even before starting to work on his book, Marcel falls in a staircase and suffers from a memory loss that intensifies his anxiety over not being able to write. "I asked myself not only 'Is there still enough time?' but also 'Am I still in a sufficiently fit condition?'" (6:353/4:621). Yet, while Marcel articulates the potential difficulties of writing the book, these difficulties are not enacted as a drama within the frame of the fiction. We know that Proust was unable to finish the *Recherche* before his death and that he struggled to enter revisions in the galley proofs up until the end. Within the frame of the fiction, however, we do not get to witness an analogous struggle on the part of Marcel as the writer of the pages we are reading. There are occasional references to the present life of the narrator, but we do not learn under what circumstances he writes the book, and there are no visible traces of the different dates of inscription, revision, and proofreading.

By making all these aspects of writing visible within the frame of the fiction, Nabokov's *Ada* ups the ante on Proust's *Recherche.*[18] If one takes seriously the idea of writing one's life, one cannot simply tell a story as though one's life had come to an end. Rather, one must record both the process of writing itself and the life that continues beyond the life that is written. By the same token, it becomes clear that one's life never reaches an end in the sense of being completed. There is no completion or redemption of life, only an irredeemable interruption, and it is the traces of

such interruption that *Ada* records. Interruption should not, however, be understood as the interruption of a life that would be intact or complete if it were allowed to continue. Rather, the life that continues is in itself already marked by interruption: it reckons with irreversible losses and continues to record the negativity of time in its very continuation.

To examine the seams in the texture of time is thus to see the material destructibility of every thread of memory and the inherent fragility of every cherished connection. There is here perhaps no better example than the scene with which I began this chapter. When Van picks up the phone in 1922, the sound of Ada's voice after seventeen years not only gives rise to an involuntary memory that resuscitates the past; the scene also inscribes a discrete allusion to a specific scene in Proust. In the third volume of the *Recherche,* Marcel hears his grandmother's voice on the phone for the first time, and the event gives rise to an extended reflection on the experience of telecommunication.[19] On the one hand, the telephone has a "magic" ability to transport us "hundreds of miles" in "only a few seconds" and "bring before us, invisible but present, the person to whom we wish to speak" (3:127/2:431). On the other hand, the proximity of someone who is actually absent recalls "at what a distance we can be from those we love at a moment when it seems we only have to stretch out our hands to retain them" (3:128/2:432). Thus, the telephone line that enables one to bridge spatiotemporal distances in life also anticipates the "eternal separation" (3:128/2:432) of death. "Many times," writes Marcel, "I have felt that the voice was crying out to me from depths from which it would never emerge again, and I have experienced the anxiety that was one day to take hold of me when a voice would return like this . . . to murmur in my ear words I would dearly like to have kissed as they passed from lips forever turned to dust" (3:128/2:432).

The mediators in this drama of life and death, proximity and distance, are "the young ladies of the telephone" *(les Demoiselles du téléphone)* whom Marcel describes both as "the All-Powerful Ones who conjure absent beings to our presence without our being permitted to see them" and as "the ironic Furies who, just as we are murmuring private words to a loved one in the hope that we are not overheard, cruelly call out: *J'écoute*" (3:127/2:432). When Van describes the phone call

from Ada, he seems to imagine a conversation with one of these operators, who is now not only endowed with the power to connect a call to another spatial location but also to another time in the past, with the year he wants to reach turned into a telephone number: "It was the timbre of their past, as if the past had put through that call, a miraculous connection ('Ardis, one eight eight six'—*comment? Non, non, pas huitante-huit—huitante six*)." While the structure of recollection is parallel, it seems to lead to opposite effects in the *Recherche* and *Ada* respectively. For both Marcel and Van, the separation between the body of the other and her voice on the phone leads them to perceive her differently, since they cannot follow what she says "on the open score of her face," as we read in Proust (3:128/2:433). For Marcel, this separation from the body leads him to hear the "actual voice" (3:128/2:433) of his grandmother for the first time, but what the voice reveals is "how pain had cracked it in the course of a lifetime" (3:129/2:433) and how she is about to die: "I wanted to kiss her; but all that I had beside me was her voice, a ghost as bodiless as the one that would perhaps come back and visit me when my grandmother would be dead" (3:129–30/2:434). For Van, too, the separation between Ada's body and her voice on the phone leads him to perceive "the very essence, the bright vibration, of her vocal cords," but what the voice reveals is how this essence—"the little 'leap' in her larynx, the laugh clinging to the contour of the phrase"—has been preserved despite all the years that have passed.

In place of the intimation of death in the *Recherche, Ada* thus insists on the vigorous resurgence of life. Yet the resurgence of life cannot ultimately be separated from the intimation of death, since both have their source in the spacing of time that makes it possible to separate the voice from the body in the first place. This spacing may allow the voice to survive at odds with the dramatic aging of the body, but it may also leave one with the ghost of a voice after the body has ceased to be alive. Up until the end, Van and Ada will insist on keeping their lives and their memories, but they can do so only through the spacing of time that exposes them to the threat of loss and the possibility of having their words repeated or manipulated after they have died.

It is thus by dramatizing the spacing of time that *Ada* manages to tackle what Van in the closing pages calls the "one great difficulty" of

writing the book: "The strange mirage-shimmer standing in for death should not appear too soon in the chronicle and yet it should permeate the first amorous scenes" (456–57). Indeed, the sense of death comes to permeate every scene of love and affirmation in *Ada* precisely because of the insistence on life. Even at the height of youth and in the midst of a summer day there is a sense of ceasing to be that induces the passion for the moment. This spacing of time—and the interdependence of love and loss that follows from it—is the cause of the chronophobia that haunts chronophilia from beginning to end.

She demonstrates also, however, that the critique of euphemism and literalism will have to involve gestures that are in some ways both euphemistic and literal because writing a novel or making an argument or maintaining a friendship requires moments of purposeful blindness as well as moments of direct attention." Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, 88.

18. John Graham, "Time in the Novels of Virginia Woolf," in *Critics on Virginia Woolf,* ed. J. E. M. Latham (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970), 33, 30, 31.
19. Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," in *Moments of Being,* ed. J. Schulkind (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), 79, 72.
20. Schulkind, "Introduction," in *Moments of Being,* 17. Subsequent page references are given in the text.
21. Bohrer, *Suddenness: On the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance,* trans. R. Cowley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 59.
22. Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," 72. Subsequent page references are given in the text.
23. Woolf, "Modern Fiction," in *The Common Reader: First Series* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1984), 150. See also the argument in Woolf's essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown": "In the course of your daily life this past week you have had far stranger and more interesting experiences than the one I have tried to describe. You have overheard scraps of talk that filled you with amazement. You have gone to bed at night bewildered by the complexity of your feelings. In one day thousands of ideas have coursed through your brain; thousands of emotions have met, collided, and disappeared in astonishing disorder. Nevertheless, you allow the writers to palm off upon you a version of all this, an image of Mrs. Brown, which has no likeness to that surprising apparition whatsoever. . . . You should insist that she is an old lady of unlimited capacity and infinite variety; capable of appearing in any place; wearing any dress; saying anything and doing heaven knows what. But the things she says and the things she does and her eyes and her nose and her speech and her silence have an overwhelming fascination, for she is, of course, the spirit we live by, life itself." ("Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," in *The Virginia Woolf Reader,* ed. M. A. Leaska, San Diego: Harcourt, 1984, 335–36). For an analysis of this ambition to render "life" in relation to the aesthetics of the art of cinema, see Laura Marcus's excellent *The Tenth Muse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapter 2.

3. WRITING: NABOKOV

1. Nabokov, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (New York: Penguin, 1971), 433. Subsequent page references are given in the text.
2. For important discussions of how Nabokov attempts to preserve the particular through the powers of his prose, which nonetheless is marked by an irrevocable temporal finitude, see Robert Alter, "Nabokov and Memory," *Partisan Review* vol. 54, no. 4 (1991): 620–29, and Michael Wood, *The Magician's Doubts,* 83–102. For an excellent account of Nabokov's notion of memory in relation to the problem of nostalgia, see also Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

3. The same chronophobic awareness leads Van Veen "to sleep on one side only, so as not to hear his heart; he had made the mistake one night in 1920 of calculating the maximal number of its remaining beats (allowing for another half-century), and now the preposterous hurry of the countdown irritated him and increased the rate at which he could hear himself dying" (*Ada,* 446).
4. Boyd, *Nabokov's Ada: The Place of Consciousness* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis Publishing, 1985), 65. The idea that Nabokov seeks to transcend time and finitude is a guiding thread in all of Boyd's studies, which in addition to the book on *Ada* include *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), and *Nabokov's Pale Fire: The Magic of Artistic Discovery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Another major and influential study that maintains Nabokov's visions of a life beyond death is Vladimir Alexandrov's *Nabokov's Otherworld* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). See also Alex de Jonge's early essay "Nabokov's Uses of Pattern," which prefigures Boyd's and Alexandrov's understanding of Nabokov's metaphysics. De Jonge holds that for Nabokov "time must be denied or overcome in order to establish the truth," namely "that nothing is ever lost, and that apparent loss is an illusion, the creation of a partial and blinkered consciousness." De Jonge, "Nabokov's Uses of Pattern," in *Vladimir Nabokov: A Tribute,* ed. P. Quenell (London: Morrow & Co., 1972), 72.
5. Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years,* 10.
6. See, for example, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years,* 283, and *Nabokov's Ada,* 73.
7. Boyd, *Nabokov's Ada,* 65.
8. See also Martin Hägglund, "Nabokov's Afterlife: A Reply to Brian Boyd," *New Literary History,* vol. 37, no. 2 (2006): 479–481.
9. Boyd, *Nabokov's Ada,* 65.
10. Boyd, *Nabokov's Ada,* 72.
11. Boyd, *Nabokov's Ada,* 74, and *Nabokov's Pale Fire,* 258.
12. Boyd, *Nabokov's Ada,* 73.
13. Michael Wood, *The Magician's Doubts,* 220. The theme of incest in *Ada* further underlines this point and can helpfully be elucidate through a comparison with the treatment of the same theme in the Romantic tradition. As Peter Brooks has argued, "throughout the Romantic tradition, it is perhaps most notably the image of incest (of the fraternal-sororal variety) that hovers as the sign of a passion interdicted because its fulfillment would be too perfect, a discharge indistinguishable from death, the very cessation of narrative movement. Narrative is in a state of temptation to oversameness, and where we have no literal threat of incest (as in Chateaubriand, or Faulkner) lovers choose to turn the beloved into a soul sister so that possession will be either impossible or mortal: Goethe's Werther and Lotte, for instance; or Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse.*" Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 109. In contrast, *Ada* takes up the incest motif and frees it of guilt and anxiety, insisting on the happy consummation of Van and Ada's love. The tragic drama of desire is thus shown to reside not in a barred access or a taboo that makes the object of desire unattainable, but rather in the temporal finitude that animates and agonizes the very fulfillment of love. *Ada* here abounds with references to

Chateaubriand's *René* in particular. While René and his sister Amélie die unhappy, consumed by guilt and having never consummated their love, Van and Ada live happily ever after, while being haunted by the shadow of loss and death that is intrinsic to happiness itself.

14. Genette, *Narrative Discourse,* 222. Subsequent page references are given in the text.
15. See here also Michael Wood's analysis of the narration of Lucette's suicide and his eloquent description of the pathos of the scene of writing: "the sight of this old man dictating a death he can scarcely bear to think about thickens and darkens the story without reducing its impact in the least . . . Lucette's death is not described, and he can't really imagine it. What we see is his attempt to write it, with its combination of uncertain tone, distraction, a deep regret that is not quite guilt, and patches of spectacular verbal success" (*The Magician's Doubts,* 223).
16. Robert Alter, "*Ada,* or the Perils of Paradise," in *Vladimir Nabokov: A Tribute,* 118.
17. Note that Ronald Oranger can be read as Ronald Or Anger, which underlines the character trait that can be discerned from his notes.
18. To be clear, I regard the difference between Proust and Nabokov on this score as a difference of degree rather than of essence. Thus, I do not agree with Genette's assessment that "Marcel's act of narrating bears no mark of duration, or of division; it is instantaneous . . . a single moment without progression" (*Narrative Discourse,* 223). Rather, as Landy has argued in detail, "the apparently homogeneous narrative of the *Recherche* in fact comprises several superimposed layers, each one deposited by a separate narrating instance, a separate diachronic *moi*. . . . Subtle shifts in tone are detectable across the main body of the novel, from the bright, extroverted shades of the first third to the dark insularity of the last; in addition, its narrator gradually countenances a greater degree of complexity in the world, acknowledging for example that societies and individuals change in and of themselves, as well as in relation to the observer. . . . Proust, in other words, is using the temporal aspect of his narrative to convey an inner tridimensionality, to make powerfully palpable an existence that not only incorporates a multiplicity of minor selves but also—even when one is merely narrating one's life, and thus barely living it—changes across time" (Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction,* 133). While I fully agree with this incisive analysis, I seek to highlight how Nabokov takes the staging of the act of narration one step further, precisely in order to make the temporality of narration even more "powerfully palpable."
19. For an insightful reading of the telephone in Proust with regard to the question of technological mediation, see Danius, *The Senses of Modernism,* 12–17.

4. READING: FREUD, LACAN, DERRIDA

1. Freud, "On Transience," 14:305/10:358. References to Freud refer to the English translation first, followed by reference to the German *Gesammelte Werke,* 18 volumes, ed. A. Freud (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1968–1978), with volume number followed by page number. References to the English tradition are to the *Standard Edition,* 24 volumes, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–1974), except in the case of "Timely Reflections on War and Death," where I refer to Shaun Whiteside's new translation in Freud, *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia* (London: Penguin, 2005). In some cases translations have been modified and throughout I have changed the standard translation of *Trieb* from "instinct" to "drive."
2. My thinking of libidinal economics is indebted to Henry Staten's exceptional books *Nietzsche's Voice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) and *Eros in Mourning.* Staten argues that the libidinal economy should be understood in terms of a "dialectic of mourning" which "begins with the process of attachment to, or cathexis of, an object, without which mourning would never arise, and includes all the moments of libidinal relation in general (the moments of libidinal approach, attachment, and loss), as well as the strategies of deferral, avoidance, or transcendence that arise in the response to the threat of loss—strategies by which the self is 'economized' against the libidinal expenditure involved in mourning. . . . As soon as desire is something felt by a mortal being for a mortal being, eros (as desire-in-general) will always be to some degree agitated by the anticipation of loss—an anticipation that operates even with regard to what is not yet possessed. This anticipation calls forth the strategies of libidinal economization" (*Eros in Mourning,* xi–xii). Staten goes on to trace the dialectic of mourning in masterful readings of a number of canonical texts in the Western tradition. Similarly, in *Nietzsche's Voice* Staten pursues a very powerful "psychodialectical reading" of the strategies of libidinal economization in Nietzsche's texts.
3. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* 18:28/13:28. Subsequent page references are given in the text.
4. Freud, "Timely Reflections on War and Death," 192/10:353. Subsequent page references given in the text.
5. Letter to Jones on October 27, 1928, in *The Complete Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones,* ed. R. A. Paskauskas (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993), 652–53.
6. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 14:257/10:445. Subsequent page references are given in the text.
7. See in particular Freud's *The Ego and the Id.* For a perspicacious analysis of the shift in Freud's conception of mourning from "Mourning and Melancholia" to *The Ego and the Id,* see Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), chapters 5 and 6. I want to underline, however, that the shift in Freud's conception of mourning should not lead one to deny the necessity of a violent severing from the other in the experience of mourning. Butler herself does not make this mistake, but it is a move that her analysis has been taken to support. An instructive example is Tammy Clewell's influential and in many ways thoughtful and nuanced essay "Mourning Beyond Melancholia" (in *Journal of American Psychoanalytical Association* vol. 52, no. 1, 2004: 43–67). Clewell reads Freud's insistence on the necessity of "killing off" the attachment to the other in mourning as an effect of the assumption that there is "a subject who might exist without its losses, a subject capable of repudiating attachments to lost others" (60), whereas "all this changes" (60) in the later period beginning with *The Ego and the Id* (1923). On Clewell's account, Freud's later work would allow us to "reconceive the unresolved grief in melancholic mourning as a foundation for an affirmative theory of endless mourning" (56) and thus lead us "toward an affirmation of enduring attachments that no work of mourning can sever" (56, see also