

Synopsis

The Nightmare of Misrepresentation:

The Rents in the (Pseudo-)autobiographical Text in *Look at the Harlequins!*

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The story of *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974), Vladimir Nabokov's last published novel, is ostensibly the autobiography of the protagonist-narrator Vadim Vadimovich N. However, numerous self-references and auto-allusions to Nabokov's life and works persist on such reading to regard this fiction as the pseudo-autobiography by the mischievous author. Focusing this textual duality in this infamous novel, which has long been termed "narcissistic" or "hermetic" since its publication, this paper will investigate the possibility to reevaluate Nabokov's art of self-parody.

Vadim the autobiographer tries to discern the "thematic design" hidden in his life and represent it in his narrative, just as Nabokov does in *Speak, Memory*. Vadim's autobiography has the double "watermark": one is what the narrator calls the monogrammatical interlacement of his wives and works, the intertextual network of the author's own works is another. In other words, reader is expected to re-construct or "revise" the protagonist's life and works by collecting Nabokov's auto-allusions and correcting the misrepresented figure of "Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov."

Furthermore, Vadim's story seems to be modeled after Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector (Revizor)*. References to this play also allude to *Nikolai Gogol* (1944) in which the author says "[o]ne cannot hope to understand an author if one cannot even pronounce his name" (NG 150). In a sense, *Look at the Harlequins!*, this self-parodistic story of the character whose name is the distorted version of his creator's, can be read as an ironical repetition of this "strong opinion" of Nabokov. Regarding his autobiographical act, Vadim seems to parody this "dream play" (NG 54) of Gogol; that is to say, he rewrites his own life, where he has been mistaken by "some other writer," turning it into a kind of nightmarish story.