The beginnings of a tendency to blur the line of demarcation between fiction and reality can already be observed in modernist literature. Reality is reduced (or raised) to the level of the individual's subjective experience of the world, taking on coherent shape only in terms of relationships associatively constituted by the individual consciousness. Every such constitution of reality is a unique construct and, in the last analysis, takes place in the realm of fiction. This permeation of our experience of reality with the stuff of fiction is reflected paradigmatically in Joyce's Ulysses, and its most characteristic mode of representation is the stream-of-consciousness technique.

Ulysses, however, also reveals that the distinction between reality and fiction, though it may be blurred, has not yet been radically abrogated within the modernist mode. There is another element or presence residing in modernist art which must be taken into account—something whose ever-shifting identity is rendered visible and salient by the selfsame techniques of selectivity and narrative perspective which serve to mediate the subjective determination of reality. This presence is another kind of construct: the presentation of a plane of reality—in the form of myth, and with a claim to pseudo-objective validity at the very least—which is equally accessible to all readers, however abundant or impoverished their personal experience might be. This myth, or these myths—whether Joyce's typological refashioning of the fortunes of Odysseus, Eliot's conception of the diachronic and synchronic unity of the 'mind of Europe', or Yeats's model of the widening gyre of history—constitutes a fictive analogy to that immanent and fundamental reality of which the experiencing individual may from time to time catch a fleeting glimpse, to the extent that his own consciousness permits this. These creative or poetic myths are universalist in scope, and are fiercely resistant to sceptical interrogation. Scepticism in modernist literature is thus substantially epistemological, restricted to the role of proclaiming the impossibility of an objective rendering of reality; at the same time, the concept of reality as a given, as a quantum to be reckoned with, is upheld, at least in the form of a narrative fiction. The shadow-line between fiction and reality may be blurred as far
as the individual consciousness is concerned; but modernism does not, as a
rule, go so far as totally to erase it.

I would contend that this situation no longer obtains in the case of a
writer like Nabokov (who, I suggest, is therefore quite rightly classified a-
mong the "postmodernists"). In my view, we can no longer speak of the
"subjective" experience of reality as holding center-stage in Nabokov's fic-
tions, which, unlike their predecessors, do not set out to present an "objec-
tive" reality with which the various fictional characters have a common point
of reference. Individual world-views in Nabokov's universe are no more than
random aggregations of subjective details or colorations. Indeed: there is no
longer a representation of discrete versions of a given reality, but merely a
range of synthetic constructs which may, at certain points or in certain hab-
itudal guises, touch on and even evoke what we conventionally take to be
"real," but which can with equal justification be termed "fantastic" (or "fic-
tive") or "realistic."

Scepticism in Nabokov thus expands to encompass even the normative or
pragmatically expedient conception of reality: the consequence of this, how-
ever, is the obliteration of the boundary between fiction and reality. Indiv-
dual syntheses which give themselves out as world-views are at best distin-
guishable by their distance from, or proximity to, prevailing conventions,
which can, in turn, be regarded as arbitrary.

I aim to show in the following, not only that this radical position is ac-
tually adopted by Nabokov, but also which techniques he employs in his
novels to present this position effectively. As is demonstrated by the great
variety of more strongly experimental literature that arose in the wake of
high modernism, there are manifold ways in which such a position can be
conveyed. We need go no further than to Virginia Woolf's The Waves in order
to find techniques which serve to crystallize the emphatic subjectivity of ex-
perience in literary modernism into something absolute: there is no longer
any comprehensive "myth" to which individual "views of reality" can be
made to relate.

Typical of "postmodernist" literature, by contrast, is an orientation to-
ward such genres of popular or mass culture as the western, science fiction,
pornographic literature, or the crime-novel. Such an orientation is logical, in-
asmuch as the erasure of the line between fiction and reality means that it
is only the "ruling" conventions which can serve as the last bastion of a con-
struct of reality which promises universal validity. If, then, these conventions
are employed and deployed only to be ironized or parodied, the result is the
exposure of the fundamentally arbitrary nature of such reality-constructs
as still find universal acceptance. Even the spoken or unspoken claim of mass
culture and popular literature to be the chief arbiters of what can or should
count as "real" stands exposed as a widely disseminated fiction (especially
when such an exposure takes the macabre form of black humor with its pro-