



Pale Fire by Nabokov Vladimir (1962-11-01)

Hardcover

Vladimir Nabokov

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Pale Fire looks like the publication of a 999-line poem in four cantos ("Pale Fire") by the fictional John Shade. Shade's poem digressively describes many aspects of his life. Canto 1 includes his early encounters with death and glimpses of what he takes to be the supernatural. Canto 2 is about his family and the apparent suicide of his daughter, Hazel Shade. Canto 3 focuses on Shade's search for knowledge about an afterlife, culminating in a "faint hope" in higher powers "playing a game of worlds" as indicated by apparent coincidences. Canto 4 offers details on Shade's daily life and creative process, as well as thoughts on his poetry, which he finds to be a means of somehow understanding the universe. In Kinbote's editorial contributions he tells three stories intermixed with each other. One is his own story, notably including what he thinks of as his friendship with Shade. After Shade was murdered, Kinbote acquired the manuscript, including some variants, and has taken it upon himself to oversee the poem's publication, telling readers that it lacks only line 1000. Kinbote's second story deals with King Charles II, "The Beloved," the deposed king of Zembla. King Charles escaped imprisonment by Soviet-backed revolutionaries, making use of a secret passage and brave adherents in disguise. Kinbote repeatedly claims that he inspired Shade to write the poem by recounting King Charles's escape to him and that possible allusions to the king, and to Zembla, appear in Shade's poem, especially in rejected drafts. However, no explicit reference to King Charles is to be found in the poem. Kinbote's third story is that of Gradus, an assassin dispatched by the new rulers of Zembla to kill the exiled King Charles. Gradus makes his way from Zembla through Europe and America to New Wye, suffering comic mishaps. In the last note, to the missing line 1000, Kinbote narrates how Gradus killed Shade by mistake.

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