

# Norman Fairclough's Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis in Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*

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*Pale Fire* (1962), is a postmodern novel presented as a 999-line poem titled “Pale Fire”, written by John Shade. Shade’s poem describes many aspects of his life. Canto 1 includes his early encounters with death. Canto 2 is about his family and the apparent suicide of his daughter. Canto 3 focuses on Shade’s search for knowledge about an afterlife. Canto 4 offers details on Shade’s daily life.

In Kinbote’s editorial contributions, he tells three stories intermixed with each other. One is his own story including what he thinks of as his friendship with Shade. Kinbote’s second story deals with King Charles II, the deposed king of Zembla. Kinbote’s third story is that of Gradus, a murderer forwarded by the new rulers of Zembla to kill the exiled King Charles. In the last note, to the missing line 1000, Kinbote narrates how Gradus killed Shade by mistake. The reader soon realizes that Kinbote is King Charles and he is insane and his identification with King Charles is a delusion.

## 2. Methodology

Fairclough’s line of study is concerned with the mutual effects of “formally linguistic textual properties”, “sociolinguistic speech genres”, and “formally sociological practices”. The main thrust of his analysis is that “if —according to Foucauldian theory— practices are discursively shaped and enacted, the intrinsic properties of discourse, which are linguistically analyzable, are to constitute a key element of their interpretation”. (Hesmondhalgh 122)

Discourse, according to Jeremy Hawthorn, “has experienced a relatively sudden rush of fashionability in the past couple of decade in a number of different academic and intellectual fields” (Abrams 72). Different approaches and thinkers have different attitudes toward discourse and give different definitions for it. Some scholars try to define it within linguistics. Some other scholars, like Foucault and Bakhtin, offer a more expanded meaning for discourse and discourse analysis. Their works have been very influential on the recent studies in the field of discourse analysis.

CDA does not bound its analysis to specific structures of text or talk, but systematically relates these to structures of the sociopolitical context. Norman Fairclough developed a three-dimensional framework for studying discourse. “Analysis of (spoken or written) language texts, analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice.” (Fairclough 9)

From Fairclough’s point of view, production of meaning is a social process including establishing of meaning. We constantly put signs in a network of relations with other signs to establish their meaning. In his works Fairclough addressed the ideological character of discourse. Fairclough, in his earlier work, called his approach to language and discourse *Critical Language Study*, defined the objective of this approach as “a contribution to the general raising of consciousness of exploitative social relations, through focusing upon language” (4). For Fairclough CDA “brings social science and linguistics ...together within a single theoretical and analytical framework, setting up a dialogue between them” (6). In CDA, there are three analytical focuses in analyzing any communicative event. They are *text*, *discourse practice* and *sociocultural practice*.

### 2.1. Text, Discourse Practice and Sociocultural Practice

The first model of Fairclough’s three-part model is *text*. According to Fairclough “analysis of text involves linguistic analysis in terms of vocabulary, grammar, semantics, the sound system, and cohesion-organization above the sentence level (57). Fairclough views text from a multifunctional perspective. In Fairclough’s perspective “any sentence in a text is analyzable in terms of the articulation of these functions” (58) which he labels as *representations*, *relations*, and *identities*.

The second analytical focus of Fairclough’s three-part model is *Discourse practice*. For him this dimension has two facets: *institutional process* and *discourse processes*. For Fairclough,

“discourse practice includes the division between society and culture on the one hand, and discourse, language and text on the other” (60).

Discourse practice can be explained through discussing *Intertextuality* and *intertextual analysis*. According to Fairclough:

Intertextual analysis focuses on the borderline between text and discourse practice in the analytical framework. Intertextual analysis is looking at text from the perspective of discourse practice, looking at the traces of the discourse practice in the text. (16)

In Fairclough’s perspective linguistic analysis is “descriptive” in nature and intertextual analysis is “interpretative” (16). Fairclough describes intertextuality as, “basically the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth.” (84)

Fairclough claims that intertextual properties of a text are realized “in its linguistic features” and linguistic features are descriptive in nature “and provide evidence which can be used in intertextual analysis, and intertextual analysis is a particular sort of interpretation of that evidence . . .” (61)

The Third analytical focus of Fairclough’s three-part model is *Sociocultural Practice*. For Fairclough analysis in this dimension pertains to three aspects of the sociocultural context of a communicative event: economic, political and cultural (62). According to Fairclough, one does not have to carry out analysis at all levels but any level that might “be relevant to understanding the particular event” (62).

## *2.2. Orders of Discourse and Hegemony*

Fairclough believes, some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse, others are marginal, or oppositional or 'alternative'. (4) The political concept of hegemony can usefully be used in analyzing orders of discourse. Sometimes a particular social structuring of semiotic difference may become hegemonic. Hegemony is a term that Fairclough borrowed from Marxism. The term was first introduced by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci believes that “bourgeoisie establish and maintain what he calls hegemony, which is the assumptions, values and meaning that shape meaning and define reality for majority of people in a given culture” (Bressler 198). This shaping of people’s ideology is, according to Gramsci, “a kind of deception whereby the majority of people forgets about or abandons their own interests and desires and accepts the dominant values and beliefs as their own” (198).

A hegemonic discourse suppresses its literal content, including its specific demands for its specific origins as a single universe, its self-representation as the principle of order itself. Then, a hegemonic discourse transforms into an imaginary one, for it claims to embody the whole principle of reconstruction of the entire ideological domain. (*Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* 103)

In fact, dominant groups maintain their dominance less by overt repression than by subtle forms of control that manufacture the consent of dominated groups. The concept of hegemony in discourse theory is an attempt to account for the internal coherence of concrete discourses.

### 2.3. Identity and Discourse

Fairclough believes that one does not have access to reality, outside of discourse, which is defined as a “differential ensemble of signifying sequences in which meaning is constantly renegotiated” (Torfing 85). In this perspective, through discursive practices, signifiers, meanings, and identities are brought together to form particular constructions of the world. In simple word reality can only be made sensible to us through our descriptions of it; it means through discourse.

Since there is no extra-discursive ground upon which meanings can be said to rest, meanings and identities are always in flux, and more importantly, are never beyond political contestation. “Every identity is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside which both denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at the same time.” (*Discourse and Ideologies* 39). According to Howarth:

Full identities are 'always already' dislocated and unattainable because of their relationship with an exterior identity which both makes the identity possible and which prevents its ultimate fixity or closure. Exclusion is thus constitutive of discourses, and consequently of identities, exclusions and dislocations show the points where identity can no longer be stabilized in a meaningful system of differences, but is contested by forces which stand at the limit of that order. (106)

Fairclough believes that identity is achieved through language and discursive practices and through the confrontation of the subject with the other which consequently reveals whatever is taken as natural. (34) He argues any human phenomenon is the product of a system of conventions and that the meanings given to the world are historically and socially determined as a construction of discourse.

## 3. Discussion

*Pale Fire* is the last, incomplete 999-line poem in four cantos by well-known poet John Shade, with a foreword, commentary and index by Editor Charles Kinbote who is a university instructor. Through the commentary, the novel becomes the story that Kinbote wishes to tell, the story of Charles X who is the exiled and beloved king of Zembla. During the course of novel, Kinbote demonstrates himself an unreliable narrator, and the reader must distinguish the layers of illusive truth behind the tale. The novel's unusual structure has attracted much attention, and it is often cited as an important example of metafiction (McCaffery 21) it has also been called a "poioumenon" (Fowler 372)

In the fictional forward, Kinbote introduces the poet John Shade. Kinbote introduces himself to be different from other critics of Shade and presents himself as a neighbor and friend of the poet. The poem is imagery and focuses on themes of death. It is an autobiographical work and features Shade's relationship with his wife and daughter and his daughter's suicide after being rejected on a date. In the commentary, instead of explaining the poem, Kinbote uses the poem to tell his own tale.

Kinbote mentions that he is, indeed, the exiled King Charles X. He tells the story of King Charles with some details that no stranger could know. The king is educated and well-loved. His father dies in a plane crash, and Charles is not close to his mother. After her death, he is on pressure to make an heir, but he is gay and cannot have a relationship with a woman to produce an heir. Finally he marries a queen, but she in the end leaves Zembla to live on the Riviera.

Soon after a revelation takes over the government of Zembla, and people imprison King Charles in the castle. Charles finds an old underground way that leads him out of the castle, and he escapes through the mountains. The king visits his wife on the Riviera and then goes America to teach at a university while he's in exile.

Kinbote mixes with this tale information, his relationship with his neighbor, John Shade, and the reader recognize that although Shade was compassionate toward Kinbote, they were not the great friends that Kinbote claims. Kinbote gives some information that he cannot possibly know about the journey of an assassin on his way to kill the exiled king. In Kinbote's story, the assassin shoots excitedly and accidentally kills Shade instead of his real target, Kinbote. The reader finds that in truth the killer is an escaped madman who mistakes Shade for the judge who sent him to an asylum for the criminally insane.

Kinbote is the sole "editor" of John Shade's poem "Pale Fire." Kinbote notes that this has caused some problems among his jealous academic colleagues. Although Kinbote is a literature

professor, his colleagues believe that he is not educationally or emotionally qualified to be a sole editor. John Shade's widow is also worried about Kinbote. Kinbote's final argument is that he is actually Charles the exiled king of Zembla. The reader soon recognizes that Kinbote is insane and his identification with King Charles is a delusion. In an interview Nabokov said that "Kinbote committed suicide after finishing the book" (74). Michael Wood believes "This is authorial trespassing, and we don't have to pay attention to it" (186). But Brian Boyd believes that "internal evidence points to Kinbote's suicide" (106). Line 493 of the poem addresses the subject of suicide.

### *3.1. Style, Narrative and Creation of Objective Reality by Language in Pale Fire*

The study of style is one of the most important parts of Norman Fairclough's Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis. It cannot be denied that language and literature are quite dependent on one another. In the study of style, point of view is an important index of study. "It is a perspective through which a story is told". Indeed, the sort of narrative framework that a story employs has a great impact on the feel, colour, texture and even characterization of that story (Simpson 26).

In *Pale Fire* Kinbote uses a semi-omniscient narrative style to tell the stories of King Charles, he gives the king, personal thoughts and actions in order to lead the reader to accept that Kinbote is actually King Charles. But very soon the narrative discloses that Kinbote lives in fantasy and believes himself to be the exiled king of Zembla. Kinbote proves himself to be an unreliable narrator.

From the beginning of the story Kinbote's stability and motivation are called into question. Another important issue to mention is that there is no country called Zembla on our map and there is no real nation called Zembla. The Zemblan expression sound like Russian which is Nabokov's nationality. In Alexander Pope's "Zembla" (a poem by pope), the phrase refers to Novaya Zemlya, which is an Arctic Russian Island. Nabokov has taken details from his actual word and this is a kind of parody. For example the name 'Charles the Beloved', is taken from Charles VI, who had two nicknames, "Le Bien-Aimé" which means "The Well-beloved" and "Le Fol", which means 'The insane'. Kinbote tells the reader that Charles reign from 1936-1958 was a "reign of peace." (Boyd 56)

That King's reign (1936-1958) will be remembered by at least a few discerning historians as a peaceful and elegant one. Owing to a fluid system of judicious alliances, Mars in his time never marred the record. (*Pale Fire* 57)

Actually 1936-1958 is the time of World War Two and Nazi aggression. As it is depicted here the unusual cast of Nabokov's mind appears in terms of the figurative language used throughout the

novel. Symbols, metaphors and irony are some obvious unified devices Nabokov employs to convey some concepts in relation to his character's actions and the surrounding he lives in.

Searching through the history of the novels, it is found out that most of the prose fictions tend toward autobiography. The fact suggests that forces are made upon the novelist to take the social and psychological details out of his own experience, and to apply them to the realm of art. Indeed, it is the only way that the artist will be satisfied.

For Nabokov, language is the medium of his art; he encodes those contents within his text by the particular use of language, and a variety of linguistic techniques or devices. Investigating those techniques through which the novel is presented is what stimulates, and at the same time advances our mental powers. We as the reader trace in linguistic features to make sense of what *Pale Fire* is about, what its structure, its symbolic force is, in fact we are communicating the work along with the pleasure arises to others.

### *3.2. Discourse and Social Identity in Pale Fire*

According to discourse theory, the literary work as a cultural production has almost been considered an appropriate vehicle to transform and express the dominant ideology "they treat literary texts as the direct expression of the writer's ideology or of the class whom the writer represents" (Selden 1993, 127).

Nabokov is deeply concerned with offering more than anything an understanding of the nature of reality, society, and the individual. He is chiefly interested in the real life condition and the logical view of history. Nabokov's books could be measured within the notion of ideology as a dominant system of thought and value running through his narrative. *Pale Fire*, for example, attempts to represent the ideologically contaminated reality of an individual's life where his identity is being constructed. Nabokov seems to explore the never-ending workings of ideologies in the life and history of the main characters, while he is aware of their imaginary relations to the real.

One of the most apparent aspects in Nabokov's works is that of social identity and subject formation. As discourse theory denotes, a subject 'misrepresents' the world in ideology because he wants to do so, because there is some reward or benefit for him in doing so. Similarly Kinbote in *Pale Fire* is looking for an imaginary world by which he can hide his suppressed identity. He fakes a new identity for himself through fiction. He wants to rebel against his background by adopting a new identity. Kinbote acts in a system of thoughts and beliefs that only gives him an illusion of

reality. His portrayal of his life as monarchs in the kingdom of Zembla is just the fantasy of a madman.

Let me state that without my notes Shade's text simply has no human reality at all since the human reality of such a poem as his (being too skittish and reticent for an autobiographical work), with the omission of many pithy lines carelessly rejected by him, has to depend entirely on the reality of its author and his surroundings, attachments and so forth, a reality that only my notes can provide. To this statement my dear poet would probably not have subscribed, but, for better or worse, it is the commentator who has the last word. (*Pale Fire* 10)

Knibote uses Shade's poem in order to tell his story and very soon reader finds out that Knibote's identity is merged with Charles II. Then the Russian emigré Botkin, makes his way into the narrative. At this point reader tries to figure out who the real author of the text is and which character is real and which part of the story is fiction. In order to find out the truth, the reader moves between the lines of Shade and Kinbote's commentary, but this attempt just leads the reader to an open ended web which is designed by stylistic features of Nabokov writing.

### 3.3. *Shade's Identity and Style*

Shade's *Pale Fire*, is an autobiographical narrative. Shade as an individual is alienated from the social environment and only he absorbs passively the impressions from the world around him. As an intellectual Shade is a man who experiences both internal and external exile. As a character he is voiceless all through the course of novel and he is given voice just through his poem. Shade's poem is his crated autobiography and there are so many references to his family and life. For Shade his wife and daughter are the center of his world and after his daughter's death he tries to make some sense out of his life. Shade's poem is sometimes an elegy upon the death of his daughter.

It can be inferred from the novel that Shade experiences 'internal exile' both in the family and country where he lives, because he is not accepted in his environments as he wishes, as the result he turns to himself, uses his art and fantasizes his life and future, and as these fantasies deepen in him, he becomes more and more separated from his surroundings. Shade's poem is a parody of higher education, intellectual-aesthetic complexity and narrowness of bureaucratic ideology and deconstructive criticism.

By using Kinbote as a critic Nabokov tries to show that Kinbote as a critic does not offer commentary on Shade's poem and his notes of clarification are not relevant to Shade's poem and by using Shade's poem Kinbote is trying to tell his story. As a child at the earlier stages of development he enjoys exploring nature, especially birds, trees and their shades.

Where are you? In the garden. I can see  
 Part of your shadow near the shagbark tree.  
 Somewhere horseshoes are being tossed. Click, Clunk.  
 (Leaning against its lamppost like a drunk.)  
 A dark Vanessa with crimson band  
 Wheels in the low sun, settles on the sand  
 And shows its ink-blue wingtips flecked with white.  
 And through the flowing shade and ebbing light  
 A man, unheeding of the butterfly – (*Pale Fire* 55)

Shade gives some details about his childhood, including the death of his parents. Beside autobiographical details, his poems also have some philosophical dimensions. His skepticism is shown through his poems and he also does not believe in God. Canto one tries to explain how Shade developed his poetical abilities. While reading *Pale Fire* instead of studying what is written in black and white on the page, the reader must go through the techniques of narrative, point of view, sound of the prose and the other procedures through which introduces the process of the many-sided-development of his protagonist.

One of the figurative language used throughout the novel is symbolism. As an example when in Canto One his parents die he uses the image of snow and shadow and by using symbols like trees and insects he tries to convey the idea of death and life as a part of chain of being. In his poem he shows death of both the young and the old. Death of his parents, aunt and his daughter, and in describing their death he discusses the philosophy of life and afterlife and mixes poetry and philosophy.

The name of Shade's wife is taken from Greek mythology. In Greek mythology Sybil is a female prophet with ability to foresee the future but Sybil Shade is completely different and her life is full of misfortune and she cannot foresee future and this is just a name and unlike Greeks he sees Sybil as a way to get through life.

Most remarkable fact for studying symbolism in *Pale Fire* is that throughout the book realistic detail is transformed into symbol. Sometimes it is impossible to distinguish Nabokov's symbolism

from realistic description. There are some places in the novel where the reader might expect a reliable guidance, but Nabokov does not scruple to assert his authority as author.

To speak on death (“to lecture on the Worm,”  
Wrote President McAber).  
You and I,  
And she, then a mere tot, moved from New Wye  
To Yewshade, in another, higher state.  
I love great mountains. From the Iron Gate  
Of the ramshackle house we rented there  
One saw a snowy form, so far, so fair,  
That one could only fetch a sigh, as if  
It might assist assimilation.  
Iph  
Was a larvorum and a violet:  
A grave in Reason’s early spring. And yet  
It missed the gist of the whole thing; it missed  
What mostly interests the preterit:  
For we die every day; oblivion thrives (*Pale Fire* 33)

In the style of Shade’s poetic narration one can notice the influence of Wordsworth (1770-1850), the English poet who is considered as one of the founders of Romanticism. In Canto One there are some references to a literary figure called GoldsWorth. Later he mentions “Chapman’s Homer” who translated Homer’s work. In his poem entitled “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” John Keats (1795-182, Romantic poet) debates his impression of Chapman’s translation. While commenting on these parts Kinbote makes some errors in interpretation.

A reference to the title of Keats’ famous sonnet (often quoted in America) which, owing to a printer’s absent-mindedness, has been drolly transposed, from some other article, into the account of a sport event. For other vivid misprints see note to line 802. When one considers the numberless thinkers and poets in the history of human creativity whose freedom of mind was enhanced rather than stunted by Faith, one is bound to question the wisdom of this easy aphorism (see also note to line 549). (*Pale Fire* 79)

The theme of misreading is presented in this part. Kinbote in reading of Shade's poem makes errors of interpretation. These parts lead reader to consider the appropriate relationship between a literary work and a literary criticism.

In his sixties as a young man Shade believes that truth can be found in books, but later he became a skeptic. Similar to Romantic writers Shade pays attention to the small details of nature. Sometimes Within the poem, Shade debates the functions of poetry as a genre, but his poems are parts of a story. Nabokov's strangeness of writing in no way makes the reader being baffled, dismayed, or irritated. His work has to offer some challenges for reader's settled ways of thinking and make sense of the world it represents, similarly CDA studies discourse is concerned with "isolating ideology in discourse" and showing "how ideology and ideological processes are manifested as systems of linguistic characteristics and processes." (Fairclough 189)

#### **4. Conclusion**

In *Pale Fire* Kinbote uses a semi-omniscient narrative style to tell the stories of King Charles, he gives the king, personal thoughts and actions in order to lead the reader to accept that Kinbote is in fact King Charles. But very soon the narrative discloses that Kinbote lives in fantasy and believes himself to be the exiled king of Zembla. Kinbote proves himself to be an unreliable narrative.

One of the most apparent aspects in Nabokov's works is that of social identity and subject formation. As discourse theory denotes, a subject 'misrepresents' the world in ideology because he wants to do so, because there is some reward or benefit for him in doing so. Similarly Kinbote in *Pale Fire* is looking for an imaginary world by which he can hide his suppressed identity. He fakes a new identity for himself through fiction. He wants to rebel against his background by adopting a new identity. Kinbote acts in a system of thoughts and beliefs that only gives him an illusion of reality. His portrayal of his life as monarchs in the kingdom of Zembla is just the fantasy of a madman.

Nabokov's use of the English language and his dramatic characterization, covers any discourse or ideologies underpinning his text. The theme of homosexuality, Exile and identity formation are among the most important issues portrayed in *Pale Fire*. Vladimir Nabokov's experiences as an exiled writer in America plays an important role in creating the protagonist of *Pale Fire*. In *Pale Fire* through the characters that appear lost in their surroundings and lack required communication abilities, Nabokov portrays the common problems of emigration. Kinbote

is an example of a character, whose obsession with Zemblan past is more exciting than his present and migration has increased his isolation from society.

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