FOCUSSED THRUST AREAS

Reader, if you are young and would live on love; if in flights of intercourse you feel that you and your beloved are models for a Phidias then don’t include among the trappings of your love nest a good plate mirror. For a mirror can reflect only what it sees; and what it sees is funny . . . . (John Barth 121)

. . . . He as I remember him, was penetrating everywhere, infecting with his presence. The way of thinking and the everyday life of every person, so that his mediocrity, his tediousness, his gray habitude were becoming the very life of my country. And finally the law he established the implacable power of the majority, the incessant sacrifice to the idol of majority lost all sociological meaning, for he is the majority . . . .

(Vladimir Nabokov, 18)

Barth focuses on the theme of sex in his fictions and treats it as a thrust area of his study of human beings. He repeatedly contends
that life situations take their roots and growth and development in love and sex.

Barth celebrates love, the full spectrum from the comic mechanics of sex to the dogma about deathless passion of Western civilization’s contradictory faiths in the companionship of mutual gender esteem and the boredom of marital familiarity.

Despite conjugal sentimentality, Barth puts stable marriage out to sea, and de-centers its trunk as Patricia Tobin argues “The rhizomatics of story, de-territorializing in the process also, the phallic genitality that is adultery’s bane and reproduction’s boon . . . .” (159).

Sex, especially sexual rivalry plays a major role in Barth’s fiction. Among the first person narrators, women assume metaphorical identities, as both muses and temptresses. In *The Floating Opera*, Todd’s self-destructive tendencies are, in some measure, dependent on his rivalry with Harrison Mack over Jane Mack, a motif that would be continued in the triangle, involving Jake Horner and the Morgans, and expanded into a rivalry of intellectual philosophies in *The End of the Road*. 
On his first sexual encounter with Betty June Gunter in his bedroom, Todd happens to catch their images reflected in the mirror on the dresser. The textual passage makes an interesting reading and it is quoted "Betty June’s face buried in the pillow, her scrawny little buttocks thrust skywards, me gangly as a whippet and braying like an ass. I exploded with laughter . . . ." (120).

Since the physical aspect of the act is to him intrinsically ludicrous, Todd concludes that to ascribe other dimensions to it is to engage in self-deception. Later observing a pair of crabs, Todd recalls a process that takes up to fourteen hours, and again ridicules abstractions and absolutes. The textual passage is quoted below:

Crabs refer to the male and the female thus coupled as one crab a doubler, just as Plato imagined the human prototype to be male and female joined into one being . . . . I laughed and made a mental note to make a physical note, for my inquiry, of the similarity between crabbers and Plato, and to remind Jane that there were creatures who took longer than I . . . . (53-54)

Though Todd could play the cynic well, can flippantly such things as the concept of love, and even reject the notion that there is
an essential difference between human love and crab love, he is dissatisfied with things as they are. His laughter, intended to convince the reader of his sophistication and detachment, at times is a symptom of frustration, and his state, but a step removed from hysteria.

In Todd’s preoccupation with himself, he fails to see Jane as anything but a sexual object. Consequentially, when Jane walks out of him, he is shocked, for he had not thought of her as a creature independent from his plans and lusts. Todd is also interested in the nature of writing. He never disguises his function as a storyteller, and opens the book with comments that simultaneously refer to navigation and narration, and of his intention to “let the creeks and covers go by” (3).

Todd also notes that fiction and life have mirroring qualities, though it is not clear, which is the subject, and which is the reflection. He introduces the chapter, Calliope Music, with double, nearly mirroring, columns of type. He likes to share his knowledge of writing with the reader, and in the chapter Coitus, smugly reveals that he is aware of climaxes and anticlimaxes, both in sex and fiction.
Barth uses *Kunstelroman* form to complement the sexual-competition motif, elaborated in *The Sot-Weed Factor*, which features rivalries between Burlingame and Ebenezer, and between Ebenezer and Billy Rumbly over Anna; between Eben and Mc Evoy, and between Eben and Captain Mitchell over Joan Toast; and other assorted rivalries developed in the sub-plots.

In assigning the roots of Ebenezer and Henry’s quests to sex, Barth went further back in literary history than the eighteenth century. His precedents include the sexual impetus for the Trojan War, the sexual possessiveness of *The Odyssey*, the sexual forbearance of Aeneas, the perverted sex-drive of Dante, and the romanticism of Quixote.

Zack Bowen makes a pointed observation, which is worth quoting here “Burlingame’s search for penis extension is the dark side of Eben’s search for a monumental work of poetry to glorify and possess both whore and sister muses . . . .” (30).

Joan Toast is the testimonial both to Barth’s casual vision and to man’s inhumanity to man. Joan anticipates Anastasia in *Giles Goat-Boy* as a grandiose personification of the She of “Night-Sea Journey.” The ideal woman is one of the main themes in Western
literature particularly since the time of Petrarch and Dante. Barth uses the idea of the ideal woman for the sake of irony, and what he presents in Joan Toast is not the traditional ideal, but realistic woman-female.

Jac Tharpe's about Joan needs to be quoted:

Joan is Proserpina in Hades for six months of suppuration, decay, and torture, and gradual expiation. She is not merely the symbol of man's lust and mistreatment of woman, nor of the sins and crimes of mankind . . . . Some cultures call some acts both sinful and criminal. But what occurs first is human activity. The great he inspires activity, she responds to it and suffers it. She is the activity . . . . (46)

At numerous points in the book, abstract reasoning and scholarship are linked to sexual or scatological. Burlingame compares his own biological investigations with the mathematical inquiries of his century's greatest theoretical scientist, and the significant, relevant, and consequential. The textual passage quoted below gives a full view about Burlingame:
But ere I was twenty I knew more of the world’s passions than did Newton of its path in space. No end of *experimenta* lay behind me; I could have writ my own *principia* of the flesh! . . . (358)

According to Burlingame’s version of intellectual history, Newton and his University colleague, More, are passionate scholars who display a lust for truth, that is matched only by their lust for young lads. Their famous debates over the merits of Cartesian philosophy is fired by their desire to express their own affections, and after “hours of colloquy,” they fall “to tearful embraces” and “move into the same lodgings,” where “they would couple the splendors of the physical world to the glories of the ideal, and listen ravished to the music of the spheres” (26).

Barth himself has pointed out that “most of the truly preposterous incidents of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, are based on facts,” while also playfully suggesting that scholars will one day find his “improvisations,” such as “the homosexual affair” between More and Newton, to be true, “filling in actual historical gaps” (46)

Barth suggests even further erotic possibilities in Burlingame. A man of many identities, yet of no one identity, Burlingame is
congenitally impotent. He embraces an exuberant pan-sexuality, which includes all living things, indeed all of nature. He does not offer the Absolute Genital as the source of all value, nor does he elevate it to mystical status. The anarchic passion of America is more innocent than the political, but it too, generates its own problems. Pirates do rape a whole shipload of women. Unbridled sexuality, in other words, can be brutal and aggressive. And passion is as often unsanctioned as innocent, as in the incestuous bond which Ebenezer and his twin-sister, Anna, finally recognize.

Barth has indeed written as Leslie Fielder has suggested, a "kind of erotic tale with historic trimmings which Mark Twain tried and failed at in 1601" (23).

In *Giles Goat-Boy* Barth elaborates the themes of carnality and loss of innocence. The first view of carnality is allegorical: Giles chooses to be a man rather than a goat, and regrets the decision because of his casual knowledge of man. But this knowledge is great. Besides learning of death, he learns a great deal about sexual indulgence, as well as sexual inclinations. Barth's characters often have physical disabilities, frequently sexual, as is the case with Todd, Jake, Henry, and Ebenezer. Max, Sear, and Eierkopf also are

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sexual handicaps. Croaker has sexual troubles, as do Anastasia, Chikie, and Hedwig Sear.

At some point, as indicated by Giles' capacity for sex of various kinds, including that with animals, the disability is perhaps a capacity. Giles also has been engaged in an identity quest that involves not merely winning a patrimony, but also discovering it. The climax of that quest comes in Giles' third and final descent into the Belly of WESCAC. It is significant that the twins make the final descent into the Belly disguised as one, but even more important is the fact that the moment of awareness for them is also a sexual consummation. The textual passage makes interesting reading, and hence it is quoted below

It is the sweet place that contained me; there was no East no West. But an entire, single, seamless campus . . . . all one, and one with me. Here lay with there, tick clipped tocked, all serviced nothing; I and My Ladyship, all, were one . . . . (673)

WESCAC is in effect, God, impregnating a virgin, slaughtering thousands, responsible for its own history, the silent, awesome power that pervades the campus the world. Anastasia,
George Giles's Ladyship, is his major supporter, lover, and at the same time, the consummate female victim, suffering and enjoying the bestial lusts of the whole campus. Zack Bowen makes a pointed observation, which is worth quoting here “She has the overtones of Tolstoy’s Anastasia, as a constant source of inspiration, but one which is localized in her crotch . . . .” (43). Giles’s perplexing assignment of getting to know her is never convincingly fulfilled in all of its implications. His remarkably detailed physical examination of her, complemented by his coital examination and achievement of some spiritual nirvana in the ecstasy of orgasmic knowledge, yields a physical, un-definable peace in love. Once again, the pointed observation of Zack Bowen is worth quoting here.

Anastasia’s vulva, the dark beacon of George’s George, is reminiscent of the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock that had summoned Gatsby to his ruinous fate, while Anastasia’s relieving so many others of their sexual anxieties lies somewhere between wantonness and martyrdom . . . . [Ibid]

Anastasia fulfills the role of every stereotypical life-giver, allowing Giles to press through WESCAC’s innards in a state of
heavenly bliss, in full physical consummation that rises to the level of mysticism in their love. Sex is the common thread tying all the characters of *Giles Goat-Boy*, and the rest of Barth’s works together, and certainly the motivating force of most of the characters.

The short fiction, *Night-Sea Journey*, the first piece in *Lost in the Funhouse*, appears to be an epitome of the statement of the mystery. But the mystery of the link between life and death remains. Ambrose, the sensitive youth, chooses to tell stories instead of making love. The choice is forced on him by his awareness that a choice exists. Peter, interested only in earthly paradise, does not know of the choice. Peter is comparable to the gross twin of *Petition*, and is the Peter of *Water Message*, whose name is quite likely a sexual pun; or possibly he is really Ambrose’s incarnation of a fantasy about his sexual being.

The funhouse is everything. The term, *funhouse*, refers to the Universe and it is also the palace of art and the palace of pleasure. Ambrose feels the curse of the narrator of *Night-Sea Journey*, who gave him a heritage of urge against the instinctive. He is like the twins of *Petition*, instinctively ambivalent. His instinct is phylogenically to the tunnel of love and the funhouse, while he also
instinctively seeks to prevent that instinct from operating, in consonance with the appeal made by the sperm of *Night-Sea Journey*, from which he came.

The "little slap slap of thigh on ham" (88) appears to be the only explanation of the principle on which the funhouse operates, as Todd and Jake recognize in their observations on coitus. Even the artist’s work is the result of that principle’s operation. The phrase "vessel and contents," (3) of *Night-Sea Journey*, suggests that the idea of form and content, while also being a sexual metaphor. The narrator is also the take-bearer of a generation that of his immediate companions who perish in their vessel and of the generations of story tellers, heroes, and progenitors. The short fiction, *Autobiography* shows the child lost in the funhouse of linguistic ambiguity, where words express vague intuitions of creativity of both life and story, sex and sublimation.

Ambrose of *Water Message* is lost in the funhouse of adolescence. He is particularly caught between fact and fancy, as he begins to mature. He gains the knowledge that major secrets exist but does not know the extent of his ignorance. He already prefers fancy, because he is an imaginative adolescent, and because he is a
fledgling artist with honeyed tongue. In *Lost in the Funhouse* the themes of art and love couples. *Lost in the Funhouse* is an attempt to see whether the medium can possibly serve as the message.

Ambrose, who inspires Lady Amherst’s sexual and literary excesses, is inclined to view Her Ladyship thus:

... a fancied embodiment (among her other, more human, qualities and characteristics) of the Great Tradition and puts her and himself through sundry more or less degrading trials, which she suffers with imperfect love and patience, she being a far from passive lady, until he loses his cynicism and his heart to her spirited dignity and, at the climax, endeavors desperately, hopefully, perhaps vainly, to get her one final time with child: his, hers, theirs . . . (767)

This courtship, and the correspondence it leads to, are both the core and the source of *LETTERS*, and in recording them, Barth provides the readers with a delightful example of his recommitment to linear composition. Lady Amherst, a middle-aged British woman, is fending for herself in the alien environment of an anti-intellectual, backwater American College, where campus politics has turned in
their confrontation with the mainstream of national protest movements.

Lady Amherst is confused by her tolerance and sexual outrage and personal mistreatment from one she loves so she translates the covert sexual dance of the Richardson novel, sanitized and cloaked in social-moral-economic rituals of courtship and marriage, into frank acknowledgement of her modern liberated taste for sex. Besieged by Ambrose's sexual demands, stormed and taken, she is an older and wiser Clarissa, less confined by her society's relaxed equation of sex and sin, and hence less under the constraint of losing her soul, her life, and her place in society. She is merely dismissed from the faculty of Marshyhope State University for moral turpitude.

Ironically, the actions that lead to her professional "disgrace", scandalous sexual behavior with Ambrose and, worst sin of all, recording it in writing on the letterhead of the provost's "office", are the means of revitalizing a worn-set of literary conventions. Her desire to give "a more fictitious aspect" to her "weekly confession," to emulate, as if she "... were a writer writing first-person fiction, an epistolary novelist composing and editing alas, in holograph" (378) leads beyond her modest aims to a renewed epistolary form.
imbued with a candid twentieth century psychology, moral code, and self reflexive aesthetic.

The tale of Lady Amherst and Ambrose’s efforts to conceive is symbolically a story about a later modernist’s efforts to revitalize the novel, and her letters become the keystone in that work. In LETTERS, Lady Amherst’s sexual bouts with Ambrose are the ground on which Barth conceptualizes new life into both an old and a new fictive form.

Then there is the comic stand off in the sexual chiasmus of the Mensch brothers. Peter with high fertility but low potency, Ambrose with high potency but near sterility projects a subterranean level of irony about the allegorical means by which the narrative is involved in its own self-creation.

The symbiosis here is of word and sex (of pen and penis) ranks among the more important and ubiquitous leitmotifs in the fiction, LETTERS. The “low mobility” of Ambrose’s sperm is ironically prolepsis of LETTERS’ aesthetic chances of patriarch-hood in the waning decades of the twentieth century.

Max F. Schulz describes LETTERS thus

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LETTERS is a Great Recombinant American novel, the sorely besieged damsel of eighteenth century epistolary novels . . . warding off sexual assaults with her left hand while recording them to a pen pal with the right is transfigured by Barth into a fortyish literary scholar, who irrepressibly celebrates her dual insatiable sexual and scriblerian appetites . . . (107)

Extending Schulz's commentary and construction, it is said that as Barth himself writes, he assaults and parodies the genre with his left hand as he renews it and his art with his right. Lady Amherst remarks thus

. . . . I [Lady Amherst] hunger and thirst for more: my left hand creeps sleeping himward as the right writes on; now I've an instrument in each, poor swollen darling that I must have again. He groans, he stirs, he rises; my faithful English Parker pen . . . . must yield to his poky pencil, pencel, pincel, penicellus, penicillius, peee . . . . (70)

Employing all of his modern virtuosity to re-exploit the possibilities and work within the extremely limited conventions of
the epistolary novel, and resuscitating that early-exhausted form by providing a healthy infusion of twentieth century sexuality, Barth creates conditions in which past and present apparently cross-fertilize each other.

The fiction, *Chimera*, is a lecture on the nature of fiction, disguised as a kind of re-telling some of the very old stories. For Barth’s Genie in *Lost in the Funhouse*, who reiterates the analogy between lovemaking and story telling, dialogue is described in sexual terms. The textual passage makes interesting reading and it is worth quoting here:

> The teller’s role, he felt, regardless of his actual gender, was essentially masculine, his listener’s or reader’s feminine, and the tale was the medium of their intercourse . . . . (34)

Genie assumes the masculine role; while Schherazade and Dunyazade listen, but the readers are in the feminine role of listening to Dunyazade tell the story, just as Shah Zaman is listening. Scheherazade is the primal storyteller to Genie as well as his audience, while the masculine roles of both the Shah brothers are received by their position as listeners and their imminent doom.
Zaman reverses sexual roles twice in his plight as potential emasculated victim of Dunyazade’s knife, and then as teller of a story that he hopes will alleviate his dire situation, in which she again becomes the passive female audience. All these sexual role changes correspond with the pattern of narration and the narratives, within narratives tend to create an androgyny of sexual roles.

The most immediate connection between love and art is the correlation between sexual potency and one’s ability to overcome the various stumbling blocks in life writer’s block, middle age, etcetera. Scheherazade, then, is the most prolific and apparently successful storyteller. Calyxa is adept at lovemaking, but Perseus is impotent so long as he feels himself a failure. As his story and recapitulation progresses, as his vanity and expectation for the future increases, his sexual desire and potency increase.

In “Dunyazadiad,” competition for empowerment in framing the text is aligned with lovemaking, as compositional collaboration. The identification is made explicit by Dunyazade, when she describes her sister’s conversation with the Genie. The textual passage makes interesting reading to quote
writing or reading, or telling or listening, were literally ways of making love. . . . the popularity of love. . . . as a theme for narrative, the lover’s embrace as its culmination, and post-coital lassitude as its natural ground, what better time for tales than at day’s end, in bed after making love. . . . to express and heighten the community between the lovers, comrades, co-workers? (25)

The title, *Sabbatical*, signifies more than the opportunity for a journey; it is about rebirth, reviewing and renewing the means of and reasons for writing fiction. The sailing as a literal metaphor of control embraces both the voyage and the creation of the novel. The sabbatical story, which contains the key, starts at Wye Island, a mysterious place that gives the book its structure and credence as a mystery novel.

The novel ends not at Wye Island, as expected, but the Y or confluence of branches of the Langford Creek in Chesapeake Bay, and at the vital sexual center of the body. Fenn early suspects and later confirms that wye Island is a CIA base, and as such it provides the structural key to the complications and mystery of the plot.
Adrift in such a world, facing choices about what they will do in life, and the meaning of life in general, Fenn and Susan hit upon a progeny of art instead of begetting a biological creation, in writing their story, in making a sense of their world, their means become their end. The act of living represented in their art is to be their life.

After all of their soul searching, Fenwick and Susan, determine to "... swing the tides and winds, take what comes ..." do their "work" and "savor" "their" ... pleasures and each other, while ... offering what little they can to the world and for the best" (360). Although Fenwick and Susan never have children, they come to share the satisfaction Fenwick feels whenever he marvels at the fact "That everything should live, grow, evolve, reflect respond to beauty, reproduce its kind ... or makes further beauty of another kind" (362).

And Nabokov concentrates on individualism and freedom as his focused thrust areas. While giving expression to these twin themes of major importance to Americans, Nabokov voices his protest at those impositions, that deny the individual evolving into an individualist, enjoying full freedom Nabokov's cry against the social wrongs perpetrated in the modern world is not shrill, strident,
sentimental, or effeminately hysterical. On the other hand, it is his mature sensibility that guides and disciplines his denunciations and strictures.

In fact, Nabokov's protest literature has a certain sobriety and decorum. One other factor that should be recorded here is that no other American intellectual has indicted authoritarianism; both Right and Left, without mincing words, so very effectively, and forcefully, and poignantly as Nabokov has done. But Nabokov is more vehement than other American artists in castigating and decrying social ills, barring, of course Allen Ginsberg and Edward Estlin Cummings.

As recorded earlier Nabokov approves of the individualists and individualism. In the same breath he denounces collectivists. He draws the line of difference and demarcation between the individualists on one side and the collectivists on the other side.

Nabokov maintains that the individualist is a healthy, complex, a naturally homogenous, citizen of immortality. The individualist is a little more than everything; he is democracy. In the individualist is humility and in his humility is his individualism. He is alive. On the other hand, the collectivists are snobs. In fact, the collectivists
cannot take the right decision and right initiative, and think, and act independently. The collectivists will not attempt to live and love with a sense of independence. Their life, in short, is marked by negative attributes, which stick to them permanently. They people the world only with their kind. It is in the light of his undying hatred towards the collectivism and group tendencies that one should appreciate Nabokov’s *Oeuvres.*

What Nabokov hates and decries in the collectivists is their mass mentality. And Nabokov is psychologically and intellectually anti-Collectivist. He lashes at the authoritarian form of government after the Russian upheaval in 1917 in Russia that had believed in suppressing individual liberty. Therefore, he turns his wrath against Communism at a time, when many American intellectuals such as Edward Estlin Cummings, and Theodore Drieser, to quote a few, were infatuated with Communism, and accepted it as a progressive form of government.

But Nabokov hates Communism, which believes in and devotes itself to crushing everything that is spontaneous, individualistic, original, and free. Nabokov is aware of the fact that Marxian dialectics places the accent on materials production at the
expense of individuality. Consequentially men and women are reduced to the level of ciphers and to a state of being mere automatons. Nabokov’s thesis then is that Communism cripples the individualist. It turns the citizen into a mere automaton and a cog in the giant wheel of the nation. The Communist regime brainwashes, and indoctrinates the citizen to accept Communism as the ideal form of government, and to look down upon Democracies as the sanctuaries of the capitalists. Furthermore, in Nabokov’s dictionary the Fascists irrespective of their political affiliations are no better than the Communists. They perpetuate cruel acts and callously undermine any respect for life. Therefore, Nabokov turns his wrath against the Communists and the Fascists.

In fact, Nabokov’s social consciousness is acute and sharp. In his artistically introduced Protest Literature he concerns himself with his anti authoritarianism and anti commercialism. In Nabokov’s fictions he avoids political bias. It is contended that he is an ideologue, and to Nabokov art alone is of primary importance, relevance, and consequence. But one cannot certainly miss detect his anti-authoritarianism in *Invitation to a Beheading* and *Bend Sinister*. As Edmund Wilson quotes
The issue for Nabokov, as it had been for Chekhov and the Russian symbolists, was not ignoring or suppressing the economic or social factors, but . . . of incorporating them organically into a literary work in ways that do not reduce the work to a sociological sermon or lesson and do not pander to quotidian topical preoccupation. (19)

And it is Quentin Anderson who categorically asserts thus

Nabokov habitually asserts independence of his art from all ideological and psychological generalities, *Invitation to a Beheading* and *Bend Sinister* are occasioned by their times and reflect Nabokov's response to the idiocy of Communism and Nazism . . . (24)

Furthermore, L.L. Lee, Julian Moynahan, Donald E.Morton and Beverly Gray Birnstock read *Invitation to a Beheading* and *Bend Sinister* as fine artistic works that do not ignore the theme of Authoritarianism, and its evil influences, and how it can bend individualists like cincinnatus C., and Adam Krunge.

Therefore, one begins examining, *in extenso*, Nabokov's anti-authoritarianism with his definition of a tyrant in *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories*, which reads thus:
Little by little, though, his countenance consolidated: his cheeks and cheek-lines, in the official photographs, became overlaid with a godly gloss, the olive oil of public affection, the varnish of a completed masterpiece; it became possible to imagine that nose being blown, or that finger poking on the inside of that lip to extricate a food particle lodged behind a rotten incisor. Experimental variety was followed by a canonized uniformity that established the now familiar story and the lusterless look of neither intelligent nor cruel, but somehow unbearably eerie eyes. (13)

Nabokov’s Introductory Note to *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories* fits well in the context, though Alfred Appel Jr., argues that theses Prefatory Notes are there to deliberately mislead the readers. It is contended that these Notes, if they are to beguile the readers are like his protestations, which only go to prove that Nabokov is maintaining a pose in “Hitler, Lenin, and Stalin dispute my tyrant’s throne in this story and meet again in *Bend Sinister*, 1947, with a fifth toad. The destruction is thus complete . . . .” (11).
To the Authoritarian Tyrant of a collectivist State the one guiding factor is the level of materials production. Everything in life and love is studied in relation to the material wealth of the nation for which each individual has contributed. When the prison Director and the jailer through blandishments and threats tried to force Cincinnatus C., to sign a statement that he had nothing to complain about, and that his life in the prison had been quite comfortable, it is nothing but a state practice in Totalitarian State, as evidenced in the text:

Prisoner, in this solemn hour when all eyes are upon thee, and the judges are jubilant, and thou art preparing for those bodily movements that directly follow severance of thy head, I address to thee a parting word. It is my lot and this I will never forget to provide thy sojourn in jail with all that multitude of comforts, which the law allows. I shall therefore be glad to devote all possible attention to any expression of thy gratitude, preferably, however, in written form and on one side of the sheet . . . . (16)
Through such collaborations the Authoritarian government tried to seek approval of its policies and ways of rule. It was with this end in view that the government sought his conviction. *Bend Sinister* has a greater punch and is artistically more satisfying than *Invitation to a Beheading*. L. L. Lee in argues to the point:

*Bend Sinister* was Nabokov’s second novel in English written by a man who had experienced both Nazi and Communist regimes. And although the novel is neither quite history, it is Nabokov’s most explicitly political novel; that is it deals most concretely with living political themes . . . (193)

Moreover, the basic principle of life is *ekwilism*. Nabokov scathingly attacks *ekwilism* as a violent and virulent political doctrine in *Bend Sinister*. Paduk, the dictator, pointed out that he owed to Skotoma, the father of collectivism, the *ekwilist* idea. The confrontation that Adam Krug had with the *Ekwilist* soldiers demonstrated the nature of the soldiers. They had regimented themselves to obey the dictator and implicitly carry out his commands. Their life was marked by intellectual illiteracy. They lacked individuality and they had merely become extended arms of
Paduk. Krug angrily referred to the mark that the soldiers failed to affix. He told them with disgust that they could scrawl a cross or gammadion. In this outburst there is an attack against the emblem of the Ekwilist State, which looked like a rumpled, crushed, and dislocated but still writhing spider.

After castigating totalitarianism Nabokov decries the defects that he found in American society. In fact, he personally experienced some of the difficulties, which his hero Pnin, in his fiction, entitled, *Pnin*, had to pass through. Incidentally one records that Pnin is the genuinely endearing figure in all of Nabokov’s fictions and short fictions. Pnin was a mild, pedantic, middle-aged émigré who taught Russian at Waindell College. Pnin was part of the exodus of Russian liberals and intellectuals. His life was one of continual misery. He lost his first love Mira Belochkin in a Nazi Concentration Camp. His marriage with Liza Bogolepov ended in a failure. She deserted him in favor of Dr. Eric Wand.

During the trip to America Liza pretended that she got separated from Dr. Eric Wind only to make her emigration to America smooth. After arriving in America, Liza and Dr. Eric Wind departed together leaving Pnin to start life in America in loneliness.
After serving Waindell College for four and half years Pnin lost the job. Thus, the life of Pnin was one of unending struggles. He lost his land, his first love, his wife, and finally his job. Moreover, people and circumstance victimized Pnin. But he gamely faced all difficulties and confronted all challenges. Pnin’s struggle that began with the Russian upheaval persisted in America also. He was undone by the strange ways of the American universities. In the words of Charles D. Nicol “Far from a cliché down, Pnin is inescapably comic because he is a Penguin out of water, a man who had the world pulled out from under him . . . .” (4). Pnin became a laughing stock of the academics because of his poor English and strange behavior. Granville Hicks’ observation is worth quoting here:

Pnin is a ludicrous figure. With his absurd ways of speaking English, his grotesque manners, his rich assortment of idiosyncrasies, his incomprehensible enthusiasms and his talent for doing the wrong thing he is everybody’s laughing stock . . . . (12)

Arthur Mizener makes an interesting observation, “Pnin is uncomfortable in this world without quite knowing it and without at all knowing why . . . .” (66). Not with standing the pains of life he
had to undergo, and despite the loneliness that was imposed on him by his wife, Liza, and then by the academics, he led his life without losing his self-respect. If Nabokov decries the attitude of the American community towards a foreigner whose proficiency in English is suspect in *Pnin*, he satirizes the American critical industry in *Pale Fire*. In this context, William Barrett’s observes in his *Review* views thus:

In a literary, no less in a musical performance there is a special delight provided by sheer virtuosity. A dazzling virtuoso of letters, perhaps the most dexterous . . . . Vladimir Nabokov can always be counted on to do the unexpected thing. In *Lolita* he loosed a storm of scandal across the nation. *Pale Fire* will hardly seem scandalous by comparison, but as a literary tour de force it surpasses anything else Nabokov has done . . . . (108)

John Shade, the American poet, composed a 999-line poem, in four cantos, entitled *Pale Fire*. John Shade’s autobiographical poem dealt with his parentage, life, the death of his ugly duckling daughter, his obsession with his own mortality, and how he should endeavor to confront it. Gradus assassinated John Shade mistaking him for Judge
Goldsworth who had sentenced Jack Gray. Thus, John Shade lost the opportunity of completing the poem by writing the thousandth line. In this context, William Barrett makes a pointed observation, which is worth mentioning here “By mistake Gradus kills John Shade. Modern dictatorships spare the buffoon (Kinbote) but kills the poet (Shade) . . .” (110).

The straightforward and intellectual poem of John Shade was turned into a complex and difficult one by the commentator Charles Kinbote of Wordsmith University. Kinbote’s Foreword, Commentary, and Index, which were supposed to clarify the meaning of Shade’s poem, left the reader confused. The edition was less than scholarly. The Foreword written in a nervous meandering style was marked by irrelevant interjections, and obvious proof reading errors. When Nabokov introduces the intellectually arrogant and subjective Charles Kinbote as the author of exhaustive notes, elaborate textual analysis and commentaries, it is with one single purpose of lashing at the American critical industry. William Barret reads the purport of *Pale Fire* correctly thus:

This is a brilliant and bitterly flavored satire, for serious but not solemnly literal readers, which requires some
knowledge of literature and vocabulary for best appreciation. Although Shade's poem concerns the death of his ugly duckling daughter Professor Kinbote's elaborate textual analysis of it presented in a devastating parody of scholarly annotation and pedantry interprets it as a chronicle of the fall of the Kingdom of Zembla to the Soviets. Dominantly satire, the book can also be read as parody, mystery, or fantasy of insanity. Nabokov's virtuosity of style, metaphor, and pun is displayed here as his aversion to communism, psychoanalysis, literary critics, homosexuals, and puritan hypocrisy . . . . (786)

In *Lolita* Nabokov satirizes the American society for its several ills. John Wain's context makes a detailed statement:

Nabokov laughs at the smooth façade of American middle-class gentility, which finds everything wonderful, . . . . Lolita herself becomes a typical image of the American starlet a mixture of external attractiveness and basic vulgarity, of sound rationality and senseless violence . . . . (19)
Walter Cohen identifies Charlotte Haze and Lolita as victims of exploitation:

It is one thing for an American to attack the policies of a foreign government . . . . It is quite another to insist that one’s own nation, though victorious over Fascism abroad, duplicates at home elements of its former foe’s most despicable programs. This clear sightedness about the United States is one of Lolita’s distinctive features and it is a means to our identification with Humbert. Charlotte and Lolita are not products of commodity society but its victims . . . . (170)

Nabokov, in fact, castigates Authoritarianism and satirizes the ills of society be it Right Wing or Left authority. And that happens to be Nabokov’s focused thrust areas. Moreover, Nabokov’s Protest Literature at no point reduces itself to the level of a propaganda literature, And that is the unique strength of Nabokov’s Protest Literature.

Thus, it is established that sex and its ramifications for Barth, and individualism and freedom for Nabokov serve as the focused thrust areas in their Oeuvres.