Chapter - 1
CREATIVE GENIUSES

As a writer . . . . my objective has been to attempt to assimilate as well as I can the twentieth century aspects of my medium, to invent some myself, and at the same time . . . . to preserve the appeal that narrative has always had to do with imagination the simple appeals of suspense of story, with which I have been in love since the beginning . . . . (Frank Gado 11 – 12)

If the modernists, carrying the torch of romanticism, taught us that linearity, rationality, consciousness, cause and effect, naïve illusionism, transparent language, innocent anecdote, and middle class moral conventions are not the whole story, then from the perspective of these closing decades of our century we may appreciate the contraries of those things are not the whole story either. [And post modernists such as John Barth, James Joyce, Jorge Louis Borges, Toni Morrison, Edward Estlin Cummings, and Vladimir Nabokov to quote a few have introduced] disjunction, simultaneity,
irrationality, anti-illusionism, medium-as-message, political olympianism, and a moral pluralism approaching moral entrophy . . . . (Michael Hoffman 429-430)

The significance, relevance, consequence and the contributory character of the key terms involved in the epigraphs throw light on the creative abilities of John Barth and Vladimir Nabokov. Undeniably Barth and Nabokov are creative geniuses and post modern artists of repute. Only through a sincere and studied attempt one could analyze, synthesize, interpret and evaluate the individual crafted works of Barth and Nabokov, and rightly gauge and assess their thematic importance, relevance, and consequence, and on their form, structure and organization the Gestalt.

It is an acknowledged fact that the mind-set of Barth and Nabokov as creative artists is of an outstanding caliber and high artistic maturation. At this juncture, it is stressed and indisputably established that Barth and Nabokov are the outstanding and remarkable artistic geniuses, who have contributed immensely to the growth, strength, and relevance of American Literature, and by extension to World Literature.
Furthermore, the literary products of Barth and Nabokov gain lasting value mainly because they reflect on the problems and issues of life, which are universally experienced by all in all ages in the past and also in the years to come. In fact, life precedes literature as far as Barth and Nabokov are concerned. They have grown into great artists of significance, relevance, and consequence, who take pride in being American Writers in American English. Moreover, Barth and Nabokov take all the writing care at their disposal to see to it that the structure is of a balanced and perfect manner and that the organization is tightly well knit, without any loose ends.

In their accent on *Gestalt* Barth and Nabokov merit a close, critical, and analytical study. Barth and Nabokov concentrate on the generic form, which is fiction or short fiction. They realize the importance of balancing the form against the content. In other words, they do not sacrifice content for form. Yet again, Barth and Nabokov place the accent, in a balanced manner, on the elements of fiction or short fiction, and the rhetorical requirements, which overlap one another. There is the proper description of the *milieu*, *Zeitgeist*, *Weltanschauung* and the race, class and gender.
Barth and Nabokov place equal accent on accurate storytelling as well. They value the importance of tight plot construction, and effective narration. There is the right fusion of intellect and intuition. It is not all inspiration, but inspiration channeled through crafted art. Moreover, Barth and Nabokov never fail to take recourse to revisions. They firmly believed that repeated and proper revisions can ensure sophisticated level of perfection and complexity in their fictions.

It ought to be stressed that Barth and Nabokov are technical virtuosi. They are bestowed with the talent to employ the literary tools and devices with functional valuations and variations. Furthermore, the Weltanschauung of Barth and Nabokov is deeply colored but not totally obtruded by the stresses and strains Sturm-und-Drang the tensions and anxieties Angst experienced by men and women.

Barth and Nabokov capture as it were the very pulse of the present world, which has witnessed two Global Wars, the Wall Street Crash, the Great depression, the anomie and the great accent placed on materialism.
The major themes that draw the attention of writers the world over including Barth and Nabokov are not the age old subjects of birth, growth, maturity, passion, union, new birth, mutability, decay, death, and rebirth. On the other hand on the familial ground it is human relationships, which have suffered a serious jolt because of the accent on material side and animalistic side of life. And it is sex first and love next. The argument that is currently prevalent among the intellectuals is where there is satisfactory sex there is bound to be love and not otherwise. Consequently where there is no satisfactory sex there is bound to be violence and death. This vein of thinking began in the sixties of the twentieth century when post modernism made its mark.

Therefore, Barth and Nabokov concentrate on the psychic angle of their men and women characters, who suffer from mental crises. The family relationship has touched an unhealthy low because of sexism, or over-sexed or under-sexed condition, and the beastly animalism in men characters. There is the stress on a life that is rooted in a mechanical and daily dull routine. The tempo of life is one of a fast phase and it is fast living and nothing else. Therefore, the tragedy of men and women is that they have lost their self-respect, honor, and dignity, and as a consequence they lose their
separate and distinct individuality. In such a context, notwithstanding the phenomenal material gains and high standard of living men and women suffer from mental crises and as a result of the persistent psychic strains and stresses turn into neurotic case studies.

Incidentally, through their effective way of describing the scene of action and time of action, Barth and Nabokov evoke the right responses and correct emotions. But the descriptions do not root themselves at the level of emotions and physicality. On the other hand the power of evoked emotions strengthens the promotion of the next level of intellect and finally the higher level of moral and spiritual thinking.

The fictions and short fictions of Barth and Nabokov enable the perceptive and critically oriented reader to detect the clarity of their vision, range, depth, scope, and dynamism of their writing. In fact, through their literary products they project themselves as the most distinguished fictionists, and short fictionists of the postwar period. Thus, by applying their American ingenuity, their zeal for revision, and by their conscious and painstaking craftsmanship, committed art, clarity of vision, extensive reachable nature,
significance, relevance, and consequence, and with their richest and varied imagination, Barth and Nabokov enjoy the reputation of being known as the outstanding fictionists, and short fictionists.

In fact, the fictions and psychology of Barth and Nabokov stand upon common ground. Both are concerned with human motivations and behavior. Any examination of the fictions and psychology of Barth and Nabokov must concern itself with the direct fertilization of their imaginative writing by psychoanalysis. Thus art has for psychoanalysis the general function of resolving into one uniform flow of life all that springs from the inner well of primordial images and instinctive feelings and all that springs from the outer mechanism of actuality.

It should be admitted that the vision represents a deeper and more impressive experience than human passion. In fact, man has known of it from time past to time present. The rich mythology is a storehouse of such experiences. So, naturally the creative artist takes recourse to mythological imagery to express the weird paradox of his vision. It is with such a background that one examines and analyses the fictions and short fictions of Barth and Nabokov.
To begin with, it is an acknowledged fact that John Barth is an astounding artistic genius. He is the renowned Maryland Muse and one of the great contributors to American Literature and by extension to World Literature. In this connection it is worth making a note of the valid comment of Robert Scholes. "John Barth is The best writer of fiction we have at present and one of the best we have ever had..." (211).

Undeniably, Barth is an outstanding American creationist. As a postmodernist of great repute, Barth makes all his characters embark upon a voyage of thought and passion. The goal of his protagonist is to discover his real self, the real experience underlying the fiction in which they are imprisoned. For Barth the novel begins when a character becomes conscious of himself as an actor, perhaps the inventor of his own life drama. Postmodernist fiction is basically the transcension of premodernist and modernist mode of writing. In this connection, Barth makes a pointed observation, which is worth quoting here:

An ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his twentieth century
premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt but not on his back . . . . (202).

Twentieth century American Literature is very much concerned with exploration, experimentation and innovation in postmodern fiction. Antinovel, antihero, fabulation, metafiction, myth making, and black humor characterize the works of postmodernists. It ought to be stressed that John Barth along with Vladimir Nabokov, John Hawkes, Edward Estlin Cummings, Thomas Pynchon, William Gass, Robert Coover, and Donald Barthelme is responsible for the redefinition of fiction and short fiction in America that has taken place during the past forty years. Barth has helped to give fiction and short fiction a theoretical turn steering fiction and short fiction away from the conventionally realistic use of plot and character from an emphasis on verisimilitude or the texture of daily life, towards a concern with the writing of fiction itself.

One characteristic of postmodern fiction is the refusal on the part of writers to accommodate them to mainstream tastes. Barth’s projects are dual. He creates the extended and expansive novel that weaves tales and invents the short piece of fiction that scrutinizes
storytelling. Barth often compresses these elements into one work. In this context the pointed observation of Stan Fogal and Gordon Slethaug is worth recoding here, for it argues to the point. “Barth’s massive and sprawling works are part luxuriant, meandering narratives, part circuitous, dense, labyrinthine mazes. . . .” (6).

Barth has been called among other things a fabulator, a novelist of the absurd, a comic satirist, and a practitioner of black humor and the literature of exhaustion. This proliferation of labels is viewed as the result of a series of honest efforts to describe the nature of Barth’s fiction.

All the eleven major works Barth has published so far are multi-generic, perfect blending of the real and the unreal, mixtures of a variety of tones and levels of diction. His books exhibit broad affinities with those of other postmodernists and respond in certain ways to those of the major modernists. They also bear similarities to, and develop a dialogue with a number of decidedly premodernists authors and texts, such as The Holy Bible, Homer, Don Quixote, Thousand and One Nights, and Tristram Shandy.

The integration of academic and literary career is a significant dimension of Barth’s works. He has spent a great deal of time
lecturing on, as well as writing novels. Moreover, he incorporates passages into his fiction, exploring how to write, and presents a rationale for why he does what he does.

Barth’s Maryland connection is a significant one. Maryland supplies the topography that serves as model for his landscape of the imagination. Except for *Giles Goat-Boy*, which is set in an imaginary university, in all of Barth’s books, Maryland serves as either a point of departure or a final destination. Barth’s Maryland is not only the place where he directs a philosophical minstrel show, that turns all the world into a stage, but also the place where Eben Cooke’s flights of fancy are rudely terminated, where Bellerophon’s heroic pretension are deflated, as he is brought crashing to earth. It is, in fine, truly tidewater region where various antimonies tug in opposing directions to generate the dramatic tension that motivates his fiction.

Barth recalls how his fascination for the old tales, his desire to return to the origins of his art, stem from the time he was employed at Johns’ Hopkins as an *illiterate graduate*. The pointed observation of E.P. Walkiewics is quoted here:
One was permitted to get lost for hours in that splendorous labyrinth and intoxicate, engorge oneself with Story. Especially I became enamored of the great tale-cycles and collections. Soamdeva's *Ocean of Story* in ten huge volumes, Burton's *Thousand Nights and a Night* in twelve, the *Panchatantra*, the *Gesta Romanorum*, the *Novellino*, and the *Pent-Hept* and *Decameron*. If anything ever makes a writer out of me, it will be the digestion of that enormous surreptitious feat of narrative . . . . (2).

Barth loves to tell stories to rapt audiences action often giving way to the relating of a story that generates a string of stories. An appropriate image of the activity of Barth's is the thousand-and-one stories of the *Arabian Nights*, in which Scheherazade must string story after story together to save her life; if she offends her listener she forfeits her life.

The sound of Barth's prose is richly resonant with his life-long interest and formal training in music. Prior to his exposure to literature in College, he had intended to become a professional
musician. He was enamored of Jazz in High School, and thus enrolled himself in Julliard to study harmony and orchestration.

Financial constraints forced him to leave the School and join Hopkins, where he responded to a different calling. All the same, Barth has tried to remain true to both his initial and ultimate vocations, by approaching the art of living, as it were analogous to the art of musical composition. Barth’s statement made in an interview with Alan Prince is worth mentioning here in juxtaposition one to another, “I (Barth) conceive of the business of plot as a rather exact equivalent of the element of melody . . . .” (45).

Yet again, the valid observation of James Mckenzie is worth recording here for it corroborates to the argument already adduced:

When you listen to a very complicated piece of music, you obviously don’t hear all those notes the first time through, not in the sense of real cognition . . . . You play that fugue or that complicated jazz solo over and over again, or check the score, if there is a score, then you can train yourself to hear all the stuff that was there right along, and of course the same thing is true of literature . . . . (138)
Barth's study of harmony and orchestration has been, to an extent, responsible for his efforts to create a literature that forces the reader to recognize the abstract patterns that pass off as speech, centered in a specific voice. This, like his sense of place, is considered as yet another factor that contributed to the generation of apparent paradox in his art.

Barth is extremely busy challenging traditional concepts of the novel, of the relationship between the artist and the artifact, and the reader. In fact, Barth perceives the possibility that Literature is somehow exhausted, but simultaneously insists on the renewed vigor of *Literature of Exhaustion*. He sees the hope for the novelist, imbued with a sense of ultimacy. The pointed observation of Barth is needs to be quoted:

His [The artist’s] artistic victory, if you like, is that he confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work . . . . Muse spare me [Barth] (at the desk, I mean) from Social Historical Responsibility, and in the last analysis from every other kind except Artistic . . . . (59-60)
In answer to an interview he comments about his social criticism in his novels thus “My argument is with the facts of life not the conditions of it.” It is a question of emphasis: the urgent need to confront social and moral issues is subordinated to certain aesthetic interests.

As a writer of *The Literature of Exhaustion*, a seminal essay which appeared in Atlantic in 1967 Barth maintains a sharp focus, not on social problems, but on literary ones. This very choice of emphasis, as well as some of the themes and techniques that follow from it, however, has social causes. The identifying characteristic of The Literature of Exhaustion, is that writers of this movement pretend that it is not next to impossible to write original perhaps any literature. In other words, some writers use as a theme for new work of literature the agonizing hypothesis that literature is finished. *Exhaustion*, according to John O. Stark has two meanings in Barth’s essay:

One, that literature is, or is nearly used up; the other, that given its current condition, writers should invent and exhaust possibilities and thus create for literature an infinite scope. They can accomplish this latter purpose
by writing about the present exhausted state of literature, thereby making their original hypothesis a paradox . . . . (11)

The specific features of *The Literature of Exhaustion* are the topic of dreams, the image of the labyrinth, the mirror and the circle, and the construction of Chinese boxes. Barth’s work develops in an orderly fashion from book to book, his first two novels setting the stage for his *Literature of Exhaustion* phase rather than fully participating in it.

The problem was in choosing what kind of novel to write, Barth could have chosen as models what he calls “turn-of-the-century-type novels [written] in more or less mid-twentieth century language . . . . about contemporary people and topics” (66). But Barth avoided these writers like Tolstoy, Hemingway and Faulkner as nineteenth century finished models of interest as he is in the last third of twentieth century.

Yet again, Barth’s well-considered viewpoint related to the conception that the novel begins on an ironic imitation of the old tales is worth mentioning here:
With Quixote imitating Amadis of Gaul, Cervantes pretending to be the Cid Hamete Benegeli (and Alonso Quijano pretending to be Don Quixote), or Fielding parodying Richardson, "History repeats itself as farce" - meaning, of course, in the form of words of farce, not that history is farcical. The imitation . . . . is something new and maybe quite serious and passionate despite its farcical aspect . . . (72)

Since imitation of novels is parodies of proper novels, all objections to the use of conventional devices are obviated. Such novels mock the novel as an outmoded genre while at the same time, keeping the genre alive by infusing it with original blood, ironic and farcical imitation permits an artist paradoxically, to turn the felt ultimacies of the present day world into material and means for his work paradoxically by doing so he transcends what had appeared to be his refutation. This is a transcendence that results in new and original literature. Incidentally, Ihab Hassan puts his view thus:

Contemporary novelists [including Barth] conceive fiction to be either all or nothing. The Literature of Exhaustion falls in the first category. The Literature of
Silence in the second [category]. Both create very similar writing results, and they ultimately become nearly indistinguishable rather than opposite. Writers of both these types subvert traditional literary forms and try to de-realize the world... (13)

This latter goal is the dominant one for writers of the Literature of Exhaustion since the Literature of Exhaustion begins with the hypothesis that literature has used up all its possibilities, themes of imitation and lack of imitation abound in it. John Barth conveys his themes partly by means of a few images: the labyrinth, the mirror and the circle. He usually treats the mirror image negatively, because it repeats and therefore limits. The labyrinth and the circle are ambiguous and more complex. Character, plot, and style, beside their intrinsic interest, become pawns in the battle against reality and realism. Barth uses his characters who in many instances are two-dimensional to attack the notion of individual identity.

Similarly the style of John Barth’s writing calls attention to itself, thus literature creates artifice rather than imitating reality. Barth allows a traditional theme, a staple for realistic novel love to
appear in his works. He offers love as a solution, but not until after he makes his case against realism and commonsense notions of reality. Ihab Hassan defines silence as “the disruption of all connection between language and reality” (22). This absolute distinction between these two domains precedes the Literature of Exhaustion’s ultimate argument that the domain of language and literature paradoxically contains all reality and that the real world contains none.

Ihab Hassan claims that writers seek silence by trying to do without the traditional elements of fiction, such as character, plot, metaphor, and meaning. Barth is tentative about the connection between art and life; for him it is at best a hypothesis but a most useful one, providing a theme for nearly all of his artistic output. Campbell Tatham claim Barth’s novels as:

Barth’s novels are commentaries on theories of the novel: in so far as novels are a part of life, Barth’s novels are a commentary on a part of life. The result is the movement of artistic self-consciousness to the foreground of the artifact: the result is the production of
imitations of novels, which attempt to represent not life directly but a representation of life . . . . (46)

Thus, in *The Floating Opera*, Barth suggests the aesthetic implications of necessarily self-conscious narrative art. *The Floating Opera* is fundamentally concerned with the definition of the point of view involved in the art of artistic creation. The narrator is an extremely self-conscious novelist, one who takes great pains to emphasize his function as a storyteller. Todd’s narrative challenges the popular notion that a novel provides an illusion of reality, that it speaks of characters or events as if they really lived or really happened. The textual passage makes interesting reading.

Good heaven, how does one write a novel? I [Todd Andrews] mean, how can anybody stick to the story, if he’s at all sensitive to the significance of things? . . . . (2)

Robert Scholes presents in *The Fabulators* another view of contemporary literary scene. By fabulative literature he means literature that insists on its unreality, that announces its artifice. Clearly the *Literature of Exhaustion* flaunts the distinctness from the real world, claiming to be real in a truer sense. Scholes mentions that the fabulators oppose realism, which makes them akin to the
writers of the *Literature of Exhaustion*. When he identifies the motive for fabulation, the unbearable weight of the knowledge of tradition that stifles writers today, he agrees with Barth. Barth makes use of techniques like Chinese boxes to make reality problematic and then to suggest that the real world has no reality. He also attacks realism and argues that literature should primarily be about literature, not about everyday reality.

Time, the most important thing, presents problems to Barth. He attacks the basic constituent of the realistic conception of the world. And Barth also treats negatively the companion theme of time memory because he recognizes the relations between these two themes and between memory and past reality. If he admits the possibility of memory, he also admits that the real world once did exist; otherwise it could not be remembered. For the same reason, Barth attacks the common notion about space.

Art invariably involves artifice; and a different way to come to terms with the discrepancy between art and the real things is to affirm the artificial element in art. The essence of Barth's aesthetic is the assertion that even as vision is personal, potentially arbitrary, so art cannot hope, and should not try to mirror the existence of an
objective reality. Barth says that art again and again assumes and affirms artifice. In the fiction it is recorded thus:

The demise of the novel and the short story, "the writer pleads, needn't be the end of narrative art . . . . The final possibility is to turn ultimacy, exhaustion, paralyzing self-consciousness and the adjective weight of accumulated history. What a nauseating notion, but the fact of the narrative, involuted as it is, proves the writer right, 'Oh, God comma I abhor self-consciousness, he lovingly moans, delighting in his own pose . . . . (109 and 113)

The self-conscious pose, riddled with mockery, and seemingly exhausted, manages somehow to turn back upon itself, confront its own intellectual dead end, and accomplish new human work. The result is an artistic victory of impressive proportions. Thirteen years after the publication of *The Literature of Exhaustion*, Barth came up with *The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodernist Fiction*, a companion piece, in which he makes the most of hindsight and new insights gained from both reading and writing to reclarify some of the statements made, and reconsiders some of the issues raised in the
earlier essay. Barth maintains thus “The true postmodernist . . . .
keeps one foot always in the narrative past . . . . and one foot in, one
might say, the Parisian Structuralist present . . . .” (204).

That present is a highly self-reflexive space in which realism is
no longer allowed or offered. Parisian Structuralists, for Barth, are
those for example, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida who have
been prominent in emphasizing the act of reading rather than the
content of reading. Therefore, understanding Barth requires the
understanding this paradox he loves the myths, stories, and
techniques that saturate accessible, realistic works of fiction, yet he
cannot merely retell or represent them. Barth uses materials and
forms like The Holy Bible, stories about early America, The
Odyssey, folk tales, epistolary novel, Clarrisa by Samuel
Richardson, etc, but he does not employ them traditionally. He is too
aware of their formulaic, stylized qualities; “there’s no going back to
Tolstoy and Dickens except on nostalgia trips” (202).

One of Barth’s most frequent themes is the ambiguity of love.
One can find not only great consistency in his thinking, but also an
increasing tendency to affirm the possibility of love. Barth’s
tenuous, limited affirmation of love is most clearly defined in the
Menelaid, but it is an important motif in short fiction in which he increasingly identifies the dilemmas of lovers with those of artists. Apparently that kind of love, which represents a creative attempt to be free from the prison of the self, has become, for him at least, as noble an affirmation as is the artist's comparable attempt to transcend his limitations in his art. Barth never confused the possibility of love with inevitability or necessity. When Barth was writing novels, love was popularly supposed to be personally redemptive, if not a universal panacea. Even in the most absurd of worlds, the argument ran that love could establish something of value, some refuge against the otherwise universal chaos.

From the beginning Barth has regarded love as the very essence of the absurd. Like many comic artists, he uses man's sexual imbroglios to reveal his essential silliness, but he goes beyond many writers in his insistence that there is not necessarily any sense in any kind of love, not only that which is barely sexual. Barth never denies that love exists, nor does he deny its power; he just consistently denies that it has any necessary meaning, and often unfashionably insists on showing its powers to be anything but redemptive.
From Freya Mooney in Barth’s unpublished Postgraduate Dissertation, *Shirt of Nessus*, through Rennie Morgan, Ebenezer Cooke, and Menelaus, characters are strewn throughout in his *Oeuvres* for whom the experience of love has been both incomprehensible and frightening, and at times even disastrous. Thus, Barth establishes his reputation as a creative genius.

And turning the focus on Nabokov, one acknowledges the indisputable fact of the matter that he is a distinguished creative genius endowed with remarkable creative capacities, imaginative bent of mind, verbal brilliance, writing skills and the rich ability to marry inspiration with expression. Nabokov is an extremely outstanding artistic genius, and he excels in the field of fictional and short fictional writing.

Nabokov is an outstanding creative genius and a great prose stylist. He is a postmodernist of repute bracketed with the real greats such as Jorge Louis Borges, Edward Estlin Cummings, John Barth, James Joyce, and Toni Morrison. Nabokov sees to it that in his works there is unity, cohesion, coherence, completeness, harmony, balance, symmetry, and above all order. At this point it is imperative to introduce a valid argument of Austin Warren for it qualifies the
art products of Nabokov, and it reads thus “We must rather adapt a view for which the term Perspectivism, seems sensible. We must be able to refer a work of art to the values of its own time and of all the periods subsequent to its own . . . .” (34).

This above quoted assertion of Austin Warren serves as a convenient parameter to gauge the range, scope, artistic creativity and purpose sense in the fictions and short fictions of Nabokov. In fact, it admirably and adequately qualifies his mind and art. And Nabokov’s themes such as love, hatred, sex, alienation, the absurd conditions of life, psychic stresses and strains, and the secondary status of women and his crusade to redeem the women from their suspended state and show them the means to empower themselves through education and economic independence are always creative and have vistas.

The flawless triumph of Nabokov’s art lies in his creative ability to give expression to adequately and admirably to his feelings, thoughts, and experiences in his literary products, and invest them with the balanced proportions, symmetry, perfection, cohesion, order and unity.
Nabokov, the creative artist with nerve and vitality, absorbs and expresses everything that he witnesses in the society and Establishment of his period. In a way, his fictions and short fictions can be termed as so many revealing social documents, without the least trace of propaganda literature. They sound at times as protest literature, but never get reduced to the level of propaganda. As such, Nabokov is affected by society and the Establishment, and he intends and wants his fictions to have social relevance and consequence. Moreover, he wishes that his literary works provide the necessary and needed correctives, and the healthy and definitive prescriptions so that the society and the Establishment would mend and alter for the better. Yet again, Austin Warren’s assertion “The writer is not only influenced by society; he influences it. Art not merely reproduces life but also shapes it . . . .” (102) deserves to be quoted.

So much so, the fictions and short fictions of Nabokov qualified by moral earnestness, intellectual intensities, and social expectations, prove to be a genuine and objective study of the society and the Establishment. The observation of William O’Connor that “Society becomes the work of art” is a pointer in this regard (126). Moreover, two more assertions of Austin Warren
deserve to be examined in conjunction with the assertions already quoted in this regard:

.... that literature can be used as a social document and literature can be made to yield the outlines of social history .... literature is simply a mirror of life, and thus, obviously a social document .... [Austin Warren’s other contention is]. The most immediate setting of a work of literature, we shall then recognize, is its linguistic and literary tradition, and this tradition in turn is encompassed by a general cultural “climate”. Only far less directly can literature be connected with concrete economic, political, and social conditions. Of course, there are interrelationships between all spheres of human activities .... (105)

Thus, based on the assertions of Harry Levin, Austin Warren, and William O’Connor, the literary products of Nabokov cannot be branded and dismissed as mere propaganda literature. On the other hand, they are real purposive art, and they succeed in achieving a reach that transcends time and space. The pointed observation of Terry Eagleton is relevant here “To write well is more than a matter
of “style”; it also means having at one’s disposal an ideological perspective, which can penetrate to the realities of man’s experience in a certain situation . . . .” (27).

In fact, Nabokov, the American genius artist, through his fictions and short fictions promotes a high level of mentation in the sensitive and perceptive readers, and persuades them to shed their individual ego and embrace the corporate ego, and thereby accept intersubjectivity as the way of meaningful life. Incidentally, the literature of Nabokov speaks directly to the mind and heart of the reader. It is precisely because ideas or mental pictures are the rough material of this writer.

In representing reality Nabokov is absolutely limited by the very conditions of the art of writing and by the elements of fiction, and short fictions to project the mental aspects of the external existence, which he portrays. In fine, Nabokov’s fictions reproduce external reality in its mental aspect.

Nabokov employs the representation of the objective aspects of reality to assist in the presentation of this mental aspect. But then literature is not altogether objective, for there is a blend of the subjective element. In other words the fictions of Nabokov are
mainly objective in character but there is a controlled infusion of subjectivism in his objective representation of life that he witnesses around his self in his period of life.

Nabokov firmly believes that his mind transference is of real value and is of equal importance to objective reportage. As such one detects his mind transference in his fictions and short fictions. Yet again, the accent that this creative genius places is on high seriousness of absolute sincerity, and as such to present the greatest number of greater ideas. It is with such a perspective on the art of writing that one assesses the merits of Nabokov as a creative artist. In fact, he projects himself as the representative and perfect spokesperson of the women and men of his time. Nabokov’s main focus is on the plights and predicaments, stresses and strains the tensions and anxieties the struggles and sufferings, and the psychic traumas and hysteric conditions of his characters. Furthermore, in delineating the characters Nabokov bestows the same attention and care with which he projects the female protagonists better.

In fact, Nabokov has employed his art tools with functional variations and valuations. In fact, through verbal mastery, language manipulation and maximization, linguistic experimentation,
innovative forms and technical devices of excellence, Nabokov has
gained recognition as a creative self. In the case of Nabokov it can
be safely argued that all of his knowledge starts with his private
sensations, ideas, feelings, and experiences, and sense data of his
individual mind.

It is Nabokov's egocentric predicament. To begin with, his
knowing mind operates within the circle of his private sensations,
ideas, feelings, and experiences, and sense data. In fact, his
individual mind is subject to sensations, ideas, attitudes, emotions,
and beliefs as received by his mind and fed into it. As such, reality is
reduced to his mind being governed by private sensations, ideas,
feelings, experiences, and sense data.

But Nabokov emerges as a mature artist to underscore the fact
that to be a creative writer he has to shake off his personal self and
accept the corporate self and at times the transcendent self. In fact,
Nabokov finds ample reason in his personal ego being cancelled and
annulled by the corporate ego. All the same, Nabokov argues that if
sense qualities are private and elative to the knowing subject, then
the ethical and aesthetic values of goodness and beauty, since they
are resident in perceived notions and works of art, are similarly subjective.

Ethical questions, therefore, have tended to be framed in terms of individual emotional response to a moral judgment rather than in terms of objective rightness or wrong. As stated earlier, Nabokov realizes the importance of his private sensations, ideas, feelings, experiences, and sense data, which are allowed to find expression in socially accepted behavior. But then Nabokov is conscious of the fact that strong aggressive impulses must be sublimated in group life. The reason is that society would not accept and tolerate the strong impulsive behavior of an individual. If that is not possible, then the individuals must express them in a manner that will appear constructive or harmless to the welfare of other persons.

Nabokov realizes that the social self or ego has the strength of its own, and motives that are sociably desirable, and ethically tenable, and therefore the social self does not depend upon the primitive id, or source of inspirational energy for her strength. On a higher level of personal development Nabokov sees to it that his hostile feelings and ideas find exact expression in righteous indignation over social injustices and evils.
At this point there is the need to define the term, *character*, in fiction. The term, *character*, refers to a personage in fiction, short fiction, poem or drama and also denotes the essential qualities and personality traits of a fictional or real individual. The ability to create compelling and believable characters is one of the hallmarks of the literary artist, such as Nabokov.

It ought to be noted that a character in a work of fiction is realized in a number of ways. If the character is a flat character then there is no artistic maturity. But the character in fiction should be a round character, a three dimensional character. A round character is generally a complex personality, given to poly urges and is a fully realized individual. The chief character or a protagonist of a fiction is usually three-dimensional. His adversary, if any, is known as the antagonist. It must be stressed that the male and female characters of Nabokov measure themselves up to be graded as round characters. But then, he introduces some flat characters to off set his round characters. And characterization in literature is the presentation of attitudes and behavior of imaginary persons in order to make them credible to the critically oriented and perceptive reading public. Characterization is a unique feature of fiction. Criticism regards
good characterization as an important criterion of excellence in fiction.

A character may be drawn with a few marked personality traits or with a complex collection of them. The male and female characters of Nabokov belong to both variety mentioned above. And the male and female characters in Nabokov’s fictions are psychic case studies just as Saul Bellow’s Herzog is. From this point onwards a brief analysis of Bildungsroman and Kunstelroman becomes necessary to better appreciate the fact that Nabokov is a mature fictionist. The essential generic characteristic of the Bildungsroman fiction is a concern with the portrayal of an individual’s bildung, where bildung denotes a harmonious self-maturation. Bildungsroman fictions are about the growth of the characters. In fact, the development of the male and female protagonists is the immediate and ultimate concern. Michael Beddow offers a satisfactory definition:

... it [the Bildungsroman fiction] is an essential part of the heroes’ growth and self-discovery that they are separated from the familiar surroundings in which they were brought up and enter into an alien environment.
Cut off from their original environment and not wholly at home in their new one, the various heroes are thrown back upon their own inner resources and have to place a good deal of reliance on their private values and aspirations. (170-171)

Judged against these parameters of the Bildungsroman fiction it can be safely argued that Nabokov's novels are Bildungsroman fictions. Furthermore, Bildungsroman fiction deals with the growth in understanding by way of assimilating experience. The protagonist passes through successive stages of apprenticeship, which leads to his mastery in the art of living.

In a Kunstelroman fiction the protagonist grows through learning experiences and matures, and along with the protagonist the artist also grows through learning experiences in the art of writing, and ultimately matures as a splendid and superb artist. Nabokov through the male and female characters in his fictions grows through the learning experiences and matures into a great and accomplished artist. And Nabokov projects himself as an Omniscient narrator. But at times there is the blend of the authentic "I" and the imagined "I"
as effectively achieved by Herman Melville in the very first classic, and immortal sentence “Call me Ishmael” in *Moby Dick*.

Nabokov began to find his moorings as a fictionist and short fictionist in Berlin as an émigré writer of Russian literature. There were not many émigré Russians in Berlin then. Nabokov’s greatness as a creative genius was not immediately felt because of the medium and the limited audience in Berlin.

In his Russian novels Nabokov reminisced about and slipped into the past. Based on the Russian milieu, Russian race, and the calamitous moment after the Russian revolution and upheaval, Nabokov dealt with themes such as the life of an émigré in Berlin, the longing for the homeland, and the love for Russian literature. Sylvia Paine reads these subjects under one head stating that “loss [of the homeland and the Russian literature that he loved] had been the burden of most of Nabokov’s art.” (65).

In *Mary*, there is the nostalgic yearning of the protagonist, Lev Gavin, for Mary, the girl he had left behind in Russia. Lev Gavin the Russian émigré in Berlin, meets Aleksey Alfyorov, a fellow émigré. Gavin’s lover Mary is no Alfyorov’s wife, and Mary is expected in Berlin. On the day of her arrival, Gavin plots to get Alfyorov drunk.
so that Alfyorov would miss meeting Mary at the station. Gavin goes to the station to meet Mary. But he does not wait in the station till the arrival of the train for Gavin realizes that Mary will not be the same person. Donald E. Morton remarks thus:

The details of the novel [Mary] amply reflect the conditions of émigré life in Berlin, and the absent girl is a symbol of the exile’s longing for their lost homeland. It is a novel about the dangers of nostalgia, which as Nabokov says in his introduction to the work tends to remain “throughout one’s life” an insane companion . . . . (27-28)

Though as an émigré writer of Russian literature his impact on the reading public was marginal, as an American genius he rose to great prominence. With the publication of Lolita Nabokov came to be recognized as an accomplished artist. It is of interest to record Nabokov’s sense of humility. In a 1947 interview, quoted in “The Art of Fiction” Nabokov seemed to minimize his personal success. “Lolita is famous, not I. I am an obscure artist with an unpronounceable name . . . .” (111).
But the fact remains that in the American novels, *Bend Sinister*, *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, and in the one translated into English from Russian, namely, *An Invitation to a Beheading*, and in the last major work, *Ada or Ardor*, one detects Nabokov's creative capacities, literary capabilities, and language skills. These works are refreshingly liberate and replenish art. Donald E. Morton, while mentioning Nabokov’s literary eminence, observes thus:

It was only after many years of creative struggle that fame came to him with the publication of his twelfth novel. At that the struggle was necessarily carried out in several countries (Russia, Germany, France, and the United States) and in two language: first Russian then English . . . . Deprived through the fortunes of wars and revolution of both his homeland and his language, Nabokov has brought to American fiction qualities not found to the same degree in the works of any other living writer . . . . (2)

Nabokov had examined themes such as sex, love, individualism, identity, the loss of it, and the search for it, freedom and the search for the creative self with a maturity of vision, which
he never could accomplish in his Russian novels. In this context, one records the fact that Nabokov belonged to an aristocratic family in St. Petersburg or in Vyra, which ceased to exist in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Though his works do not bear witness to his predilections for self and power, Nabokov did feel deeply about the change in the political arena, which cut him away from the land he loved, and the language he valued most. Donald E. Morton asserts thus:

Nabokov's father Vladimir Nabokov, Sr., was next to the Czar of Russia in authority. But he was a freethinker, and a Republican in spirit. The real and good nature of Nabokov’s father was neither appreciated nor valued by the Czarist. Unfortunately, he was assassinated. Nabokov was pained by the unnatural death of his brother Sergey later, in the Nazi Concentration Camp... (Ibid)

Russia and Russian literature were close to his heart. Since he was an individualist Nabokov found Russia after the upheaval to be no more a place of freedom. On the other hand, he found America to be the land of liberty allowing scope for freedom of thought and
expression. In fact, Nabokov was aristocratic by birth, and temperament in art, Anglophile in upbringing, Cantabrigian in education, anti-Fascist, anti-Nazi, involved American citizen and a detached observer. Nabokov was a remarkable polyglot with his grasp of American English, French, German, and Russian quite profound. This linguistic mastery could be traced to his family history. Andrew Field records about Nabokov’s linguistic mastery thus:

*Ada* is the Nabokov novel, which parodies family chronicle, and Nabokov was widely complimented by many reviewers for having invented a whole new world in that novel [*Ada*] . . . . The Catherine wheel of language in *Ada* is the way the Nabokovs, not just Vladimir really do speak in the household of Nabokov’s father and grandfather it was French at the table, English in the nursery, and freedom to use macaroni combinations as the mood or need was felt and soon this respect too, *Ada* is an historically accurate voice of a family . . . .(59)
Nabokov was a great admirer of Pushkin, whose work *Eugene Onegin* he had translated into English. Clarence Brown argues in "Nabokov's Pushkin and Nabokov's Nabokov" that "Pushkin is Nabokov's fate." (196) Nabokov professed his distaste for Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. Alfred Appel Jr., refers to the reason adduced by Nabokov for his dislike of these three authors "The mythical didacticism of Gogol, or the utilitarian moralism of Tolstoy or the reactionary journalism of Dostoevsky are of their own making, and in the long run nobody really takes them seriously . . . ." (37).

Nabokov repeatedly stated that he had no faith in Sigmund Freud, and he was not familiar with Franz Kafka's works. This thesis maintains that it was one of the poses of Nabokov. One detects the Kafkan mode and the psychic patterns in his works. Nabokov's favorites apart from Pushkin, were William Shakespeare, Edgar Alan Poe, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Jorge Louis Borges, and Alain Robbe-Gillet. Donald E. Morton points out in this regard thus "Nabokov himself has named Poe, Melville, Hawthorne, and Emerson as "the great American writers he most admires . . . ." (5).
Nabokov suffered displacements and the resultant disorientation several times. The Russian upheaval saw his displacement to Berlin resulting in the first instance of disorientation. Then for the sake of Cambridge education he had to experience displacement again. It was because of his Jewish wife, Vera Evsena, whom he fondly loved, that Nabokov had to suffer displacement for a third time. To avoid Nazi persecution of his wife he moved to New York on his own volition.

Nabokov achieved artistic fulfillment only in America. Nabokov’s life in America as a teacher-artist testified to the fact that he never remained outside the American mainstream life, but he entered the very center of it. He did this not with a sense of resignation. He became a part of America because he knew that only in acceptance lay life. Furthermore, he was able to bear disorientation because of his zest for life. He grew as a mature artist in America which was recorded thus:

A colored spiral in a small ball of glass, this is how I see my own life. The twenty years I spent in my native Russia (1899-1919) take care of the thetic arc. Twenty-one years of voluntary exile in England, Germany,
France (1919-1940) supply obviously the antithesis. The period spent in my adopted country forms a synthesis and a new thesis . . . (211)

One aspect of importance, as far as Nabokov’s art was concerned lay in his artistic ability to marry the past with the present. Furthermore, death as a subject of serious interest engaged his mind. Yvotte Louria analytically argues thus:

A sense perception triggers an inkling of some far-off memory; . . . . the past moment becomes present, so that there is a coexistence between the past and the present. This moment of co-existence between the past and the present represents a glimpse into a work of art. The work of art, that is the book that has just been written by the narrator, is his eternity . . . . (471-472)

Geoffrey Green remarks thus about *Invitation to a Beheading*.

To preserve man’s memories and to bestow upon them some measure of protection from the destructive effects of time was to engage in an artistic process: “The act of retention is the act of art, artistic selection, artistic blending, artistic recombination of social events”. The
point of conjunction between actual recalled events and fictional invented ones was a “delicate meeting place between imagination and knowledge, a point arrived at by diminishing large things and enlarging small ones that is intrinsically artistic . . .” (377)

It is interesting to introduce the passage, *in extenso*, where Cincinnatus imaginatively recalls his meeting with Emmie, as a painter in this regard:

Everything was reproduced fairly accurately as far as the grouping and perspective was concerned, and were it not for the drab colors, the stirless treetops and the torpid lighting, one could slit one’s eyes and imagine oneself gazing through an embrasure, from this very prison, at those very gardens. The indulgent gaze recognized those avenues, that curly verdancy of groves, the portico at the right, the detached poplars, and, in the middle of the unconvincing blue of the lake, the pale blob that probably was a swan. Afar, in a stylized mist, the hills humped their round backs, and above them, in that kind of slate blue firmament under which Thespians live and
die, cumulus clouds stood still. All of this was somewhere not fresh, antiquated, covered with dust, and the glass through which Cincinnatus was looking bore smudges, from some of which a child's hand could be reconstructed . . . (65)

On this very point of memory and imagination serving as intermingled faculties in Nabokov, Sylvia Paine makes a further observation by studying time and space in relation to them, and it is worth quoting here, for it argues to the point "If space and time are not the major supports in the structure of Nabokov's works, but auxiliary to memory and imagination, they are nevertheless important themes, threads in the pattern . . . ." (54-55).

In the brilliant novels, then Nabokov married memory with imagination and space with time. Furthermore, he arranged and patterned the world of nature and lives of the people in arresting ways. At the primary stage of imagination Nabokov captured the dynamic shaped action with a compliment to descriptive verisimilitude. Nabokov himself had remarked thus "My [Nabokov] concern is to capture everything the pictures, the scene, the detail exactly . . . ." (83).
Nabokov cultivated through the conscious mind his perceptions of the external world. This process provided him with abundant material. More than that he was able to mime exactly what he perceived. Such perceptions, through sense helped him to produce artistic creations, wherein he dealt with ambiguities of love, sex, and art. Such indivinables were the means with which he explored the mystery that lay at the center of human existence.

Furthermore, through sense experiences he metamorphosed into art, Nabokov created enduring consciousness, which turned into a shared experience between the artist and his audience. This sense of consciousness is a key factor in his *Oeuvres*. Sylvia Paine makes a pointed, and studied comment, which is worth recording here:

The magic of Vladimir Nabokov’s brilliant novels, . . . distils sense experience into an essence that art explores and expands via imagination until it seems to yield the secrets of nature and of creation itself, consciousness magnified by the mirror of art and the mutual reflections of the minds in the world . . . . (25)

To be involved in such a consciousness Nabokov expected of the reader an imaginative participation in the created art. Since he
had labored hard to produce a literary work, he wanted the creative reader to put in a similar endeavor so as to grasp the full import and artistic merits of the work. What he had stated, in this context argues to the point:

I work hard. I work long on a body of words until it grants me complete possession and pleasure. If the reader has to work in his turn so much the better. Art is difficult . . . (115)

It was Nabokov's deep concern for creating great artistic works that has served as the impetus in him to explore the possibilities of language, and arrive at an individual style of writing. Nabokov did grow into a remarkable stylist. Be it description, narration, characterization, dialogue writing or argumentation though Nabokov repeatedly denied the last mentioned as feature of his works one could detect the Nabokovian imprint. He could claim a style entirely his own only after perseverance, industry, and proper application of mind. John Wain in Nabokov's Beheading states thus:

Nabokov had expended a life time's devoted effort on the task of refining an absolutely individual style, which will convey the thousand and one idiosyncratic nuances
suggested by his imagination; both in English and (according to Marc Slonim) in Russian, he has brought this linguistic instrument to the pitch of perfection . . . . (17)

In this context, L. L. Lee argues that Nobokov

. . . . is concerned above all with the making of and the made work of art as it is related to other works of art, especially in its linguistic and cultural tradition. That is he is concerned with the work of art as expression in itself for the reader or spectator as well with what it says about man in the universe . . . . (3)

Moreover, Nabokov was a meta-fictionist. He celebrated the power of creative imagination. But then there was the element of uncertainty about the validity of the imaginative representations. As a meta-fictionist Nabokov was extremely self-conscious about language. To him language no longer reflected a coherent, meaningful and an objective world. He considered language as an independent, self-contained system, which generated its own meanings.
The known world was created in fiction through language and Nabokov was interested in manipulating language in the construction of reality. At each stage in the novel, Nabokov endeavored hard about the many possible ways of the story, which became the story of its telling. Patricia Waugh's observation need to be quoted:

Elaborate introductions to the novel, footnotes, marginalia, letters to publishers inclusion of the physical "scaffolding" of the text these again are the reminders of the text's linguistic condition . . . . Several of Vladimir Nabokov's novels begin in a similar fashion. Lolita begins with a foreword by John Ray (the friend of Humbert Humbert's lawyer), who completes the stories of the personages in Humbert's story, beginning at the point where Humbert's story ends. The novel ends with a comment on the book by Nabokov himself. He admits that such a commentary may strike the reader as an impersonation of Vladimir Nabokov talking about his own books . . . . (97)
In several ways, then, Nabokov's novels merit serious consideration because of their linguistic construction, descriptive excellence, and dialogue writing. With great attention one studies Nabokov's works, because they are noted for their literary merits and contextual values. It is only right to assess Nabokov as a creative genius of rare caliber committed to project universal values and humanistic concerns in his art products.

Thus, it is strongly established that Barth and Nabokov are remarkable and astounding creative geniuses.