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***THE SELF AS MYTH, MASK AND CONSTRUCT
IN VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S SPEAK, MEMORY!***

Keywords: *autobiography, fiction, identity, Paul de Man, de-facement, specular structure, Philippe Lejeune, memory, self-parody, Hitchcock-effect*

Abstract: *In my paper I study the strategies of constructing the self in Nabokov's revisited autobiography, which constitutes a focal point in the net of his life work. The memoir does not only reconstruct the identity from a temporal and mnemonic perspective and in an intercultural context, but it also offers a self-portrait as a literary construct, worth being remembered by posterity. In my hypothesis, Nabokov's text makes use of the "rhetoric of fiction" at least to the same extent in which he manipulates fiction by considering it a "shelter" for autobiographical elements. Fiction and autobiography become terms reflecting each other in his life work, as a specific sort of "specular structure". Nabokov's fiction as well as his autobiography requires the same type of reading: that of solving puzzles.*

The paper discusses how Nabokov's text slips out of the traditional interpretation of autobiography, and why it can be considered as an illustrative example of Paul de Man's re-interpretation of the term autobiography. There is an inherent contradiction between what the text explicitly asserts and what its rhetoric actually reveals. The illusion of the unified self is created by a game of mirror reflections, showing in fact a puzzle-image, a distorted face. I examine the symbols of revealing and the games of disguising the self, which aim at creating a (post)modernist image of the self. As a conclusion, I suggest breaking the autographical contract in the case of the author and book under discussion, and I propose a reading strategy and understanding unbiased by the opposition autobiography vs. fiction, in which this boundary is dissolved by the rhetoric and games of the text.