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On Donald Cammell's Film Adaptation of ***PALE FIRE***

Vladimir Nabokov sent Donald Cammell (1934-1996) a heretofore largely unknown and unpublished letter, dated July 30 1971, praising the notes he had read of Cammell's proposed film adaptation of *Pale Fire*. In 1970-71, after the release of what is now his most famous film, *Performance* (1970), starring James Fox and Mick Jagger, Cammell worked extensively on a major film project to be set in Morocco and North Africa titled *Ishtar* (not to be confused with the film starring Warren Beatty and Dustin Hoffman released in 1987). He worked on and off on *Ishtar* for much of the next decade and a half, but, alas, the film was never made. As Cammell's biographer, I knew that he had attempted an adaptation of *Pale Fire* in 1974, but the letter written by Nabokov to Cammell (of which Donald was justly proud) was never recovered during the many years my wife Rebecca and I worked on our book (see the description of the book below). The letter from Nabokov to Cammell was discovered by David Cammell, Donald's brother, just a couple of months ago, in December 2008, among his personal papers. During the writing of the book, David assured us of the letter's existence because he'd read it, but was unable to find it. Although the letter was found, its discovery, obviously, happened too late to include in our book (published in April 2006), but now that the letter has been found, happily it is available to scholars.

I was mildly surprised by the date of the letter--July 30, 1971--as the treatment Donald had written of *Pale Fire* is dated May 1974 (in an earlier post on the NABOKV-L I had mistakenly indicated the date as *March* 1974). During the 1970-71 period, prior to moving to Los Angeles in January 1972, most of Donald's friends and acquaintances had assured me that he was working on *Ishtar*. But it is clear that he had begun thinking of adapting *Pale Fire* during this period, perhaps earlier. In July 1971 Donald and his then romantic companion, Myriam Gibril, were living in David Cammell's flat on Old Church Street in Chelsea, literally just around the corner from Mick Jagger. (David was in Thailand making commercials for his company, Cammell, Hudson & Brownjohn, and gave them the use of the flat.) On 12 May 1971, Donald and Myriam had attended Mick Jagger's wedding to Bianca in Saint-Tropez, subsequently taking a trip to Morocco as part of his research for *Ishtar*. Ironically, in late July 1971, or about the time the author's letter would have arrived at the Old Church Street address, Donald and Myriam were in Egypt, appearing as Osiris and Isis, respectively, in Kenneth Anger's film *Lucifer Rising*. They no doubt returned to London after the completion

of shooting to discover the letter from Nabokov had arrived; it must have subsequently remained in David's flat, over the years eventually getting mixed in with David's other papers, only to resurface thirty-seven years later, and almost thirteen years after Donald's death in April 1996.

His treatment--Donald himself does not refer to his work as a "treatment," simply a "version"--of *Pale Fire* is sixty pages long, with the cover page and Donald's "Foreword" adding two more additional pages. It is a hybrid affair, parts of it written in screenplay form, other parts in treatment form, with much of it copied, in truncated form, directly from the novel itself. As Donald himself noted, there's way too much material included in his version to make a film (even one on an epic scale, which was financially impossible for Cammell to pull off), but his purpose was to demonstrate the novel could be filmed if the narrative were made clear, as it were, so his "treatment," or "version," begins with a tantalizing "teaser," introducing the assassin Jakob Gradus, then jumping back in time a few months (a superimposed title is to read "February 1959"), moving fluidly in time from New Wye to the country of Zembla, weaving the story of Charles Kinbote's past (as Charles Xavier) with his developing friendship with poet John Shade. On page 36, Cammell includes a scene of John Shade reading part of his poem to his wife, the verses about his memories of his daughter Hazel, "a child who inherited not only the writer's fine mind, but his stunted unattractive body; a very ugly, strange little girl, who died in tragic circumstances at the age of 16. The central theme of Shade's great poem is this personal tragedy, and his own battle to come to terms with it," Cammell wrote. "The idea, of course, is to depict the extreme contrast between what Shade is actually writing about it -- this moving, but prosaic, very American reminiscence of his life and family -- and the glamorous, crazy, spectacular melodrama of King Charles' life -- the Zemblan Saga -- which is what Kinbote believes he is writing about."

Unfortunately, I have not seen the materials Cammell sent to Nabokov in 1971, and apparently they have not been located among the author's papers. I'm therefore unable to say precisely what the author reviewed in 1971, but I assume what he read at that time was reasonably close in conception to the 1974 version. In any case, I believe the version dated May 1974 was (re)written earlier that same year, as can be determined by some contemporary allusions in the text. For instance, on page 2, Cammell likens Kinbote's "style of speaking" to "that of John Houseman's magnificent lawyer in a recent film." The film he is referring to, of course, is *The Paper Chase*, in which Houseman gave a highly memorable performance as a highly demanding professor of law; that film was released in October 1973. His adaptation also, embarrassingly, contains a glaring anachronism: although the opening moments are set in February 1959, there is a reference to "an extraordinary Blonde clothed in a pink tee shirt with

the Rolling Stones' tongue hanging out of it." That famous logo of the Rolling Stones was not introduced until 1971 or so, and besides, the Rolling Stones as such didn't exist in 1959. That kind of slip is uncharacteristic of Donald's work, I should add.

I also should note that Cammell's adaptation is not "polished" as such. It contains handwritten corrections and revisions, and certain portions are circled with the accompanying instruction to "move" that particular section to a different page, with the proper directions for its insertion. Cammell's best films have a very unusual, fluid time structure, consisting not only of flashbacks but flash forwards, flash cuts of all sorts, as if the entire action were happening all at the same moment, not unfolding in linear or chronological time. Past and present collide in dazzling, "kaleidoscopic" fashion, often in startling juxtaposition, and certain portions of his adaptation of *Pale Fire* clearly suggest that, if he were to have filmed it, it would have employed his characteristic editing style.

I should note that Donald greatly admired *Lolita* as well as Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of it; James Mason, an actor Donald very much liked, would later appear in the first film Donald wrote, a caper film titled *Duffy* (1968). I know that he also admired Nabokov's *Despair*, but I do not know what he thought of Fassbinder's 1978 film adaptation of it, although I suspect he liked it.

I should also note that Donald Cammell worked on many, many projects during the final twenty-five years of his life, most of them unrealized. His proposed film of *Pale Fire* was one of them.

**Notes on the treatment:** I have laboriously re-typed several pages of the treatment (the first few and the final few) and indicated Donald's handwritten notes by including them in italic and coding them in blue. I've struck through those passages that Donald also struck out in pencil, and transcribed the text faithfully.

*Following is a brief bio of Cammell taken directly from the dust jacket of the hardcover edition of my and Rebecca's book, Donald Cammell: A Life on the Wild Side (FAB Press, 2006):*

The son of poet and critic Charles Richard Cammell – heir to the Cammell-Laird fortune and biographer of Aleister Crowley – Donald Cammell was born in Edinburgh, Scotland in January 1934. From a young age he demonstrated a prodigious talent as an artist, and by the time he was nineteen years old he enjoyed a studio in Chelsea where he was a highly sought-after portrait painter. He soon became restless and disillusioned with society portraiture, abandoning this career in the early 1960s to take up residence in Paris. Prompted by his love of the movies, Cammell began writing screenplays. In 1965, after the sale of his first work for the screen, *Avec Avec* (filmed

as *Duffy* in 1968), he met the Rolling Stones, becoming friends with both Brian Jones and Mick Jagger. His friendship with Jagger led to the latter's starring in *Performance* (1970) – now considered a masterpiece of world cinema – which Cammell wrote, and then co-directed with Nicolas Roeg. In early 1972 Cammell moved to Hollywood, where his filmmaking ambitions were frequently frustrated. Over time, however, he managed to direct some stylish and disturbing films, including the science fiction film, *Demon Seed* (1977) and the horror thriller about a killer with a dissociated identity, *White of the Eye* (1987). In the late 1970s he collaborated with Marlon Brando on a proposed film project, *Fan-Tan*, an epic adventure about female pirates. In 1982, with the film realization scuttled, Cammell transformed *Fan-Tan* into a novel; despite the enthusiastic reception by its prospective publisher, Brando prevented its release. The novelization was eventually published in 2005, after Brando's death. Donald Cammell made one further film, the erotic thriller, *Wild Side* (1996, restored posthumously 1999), before committing suicide in April 1996 at the age of 62.

P A L E F I R E

A Version of the Novel

by

Vladimir Nabokov

Prepared by

Donald Cammell

May 1974 © Writer's Guild of America West. [business card]

PAULA  
WEINSTEIN

IFA  
International Famous  
Agency  
9255 Sunset Boulevard  
Los Angeles, California 90069

## FOREWORD

This is NOT a "treatment" for a film. Nor is it a synopsis of a literary masterpiece.

It is, rather, a sort of re-telling of Nabokov's novel – a re-arrangement of the book's originally rather weird and complex structure – in a more or less cinematic form.

I have tried to retain, at this time, the unique flavour of the original by simply quoting chunks of its text – mutilating them a bit, (I apologise with desperate sincerity to Mr. N. for this liberty-taking) – but not "treating" them – breaking them down, movie-treatment fashion.

The scenes are thus described in Nabokov's style – mangled, but still his – not mine; nor in basic movie-treatment prose. For better or for worse, I think this is the best way to present the story at this stage. I have omitted, for reasons of length and haste, numerous episodes which I wonder now if I should not have included; but all this can be re-examined later.

To those who find Nabokov's prose too rich or too baroque (I know he's not everyone's cup of tea), I can only ask that they try to be patient with it. The story, the scenes, the dialogue, and above all the characters, are marvelous, funny, suspenseful, intensely human.

As to the main character – Kinbote, alias Charles Xavier, ex-King of Zembla – he is a true hero; a lovable, brave, amusing, eccentric, tragic and totally believable hero. To me, anyway.

The result is rough – very rough – and of course there is about 200% too much material here for a film. But these pages present the story, extracted from Nabokov's magnificently tangled book, and the basic form, of a fabulous film. From them, a proper, well-pruned 'treatment' can be prepared; or, more sensibly, a terrific script.

The blue sky, touched with fabulous pink trails of sunset. A July sky. Below, the mountains of Appalachia, the small college town of New Wye, home of great Wordsmith University.

On the highway a couple of miles outside the town, a local bus stops – moves on again – to reveal a short man in a brown suit, with a briefcase. He starts up a country road: Dulwich Road, says the sign.

The campus of Wordsmith dominates the rural landscape.

“Here are the great mansions of madness, the impeccably planned dormitories (bedlams of jungle music) the magnificent palace of the Administration, the brick walls, the archways, the quadrangles blocked out in velvet green. . . the prison-like edifice containing classrooms and offices, the famous avenue of all the trees mentioned by Shakespeare, a distant droning sound, the hint of haze, the turquoise dome of the Observatory, the Roman-tiered football field, deserted on summer days except for a dreary-eyed youngster flying – on a long control line in a droning circle – a motor-powered model plane.”

The man in the brown suit trudges in and out of sunlight and shade – indistinct, shadowy – we glimpse his profile, maybe: his big nose, his powerful jaw, his short stubby hair. His name is Jakob Gradus.

He comes to a stop, unexpectedly, in the middle of the road; puts down his briefcase, holds his stomach with both hands. A long, distressing sigh escapes from his – which is swallowed in the rumble of an old Chrysler sedan as it rumbles round a bend, heading for the highway – swerves to avoid him with tire-squeals, etc. The car just misses him.

In the Chrysler, a woman in her fifties, still beautiful in her best hat, brakes and looks back with a mixture of concern and irritation. But the short man, phlegmatically picking up his briefcase, (his other hand still nursing his little paunch) starts trudging on up the road without bothering to look round. Sybil Shade accelerates again, continues on her way too.

Gradus rounds another bend. Two houses stand opposite each other, on either side of the road.

CLOSE-UP: the mail box of the bigger of the two houses, inscribed boldly “H.W. Goldsworth;” and underneath, more boldly still but rougher, in gold paint: “Dr. Charles Kinbote – in residence.”

Gradus peers at the mailbox – regards the superb Ferrari GT coupe, 1955 vintage, standing in the driveway. As he walks up to the front door, he pauses to rest his hand on its hood – still warm. He climbs the steps to the shadowed porch of the old, gloomy, half-timbered residence, and rings the bell.

CLOSE-UP: of his splayed thumb. Door chimes. He waits, rings again. He sighs. Is the house empty?

Then, through the sound of the evening crickets, we hear approaching VOICES...

Dr. Charles Kinbote is returning to his house, accompanied by his friend John Shade, the great American writer and poet. They have come from the latter's handsome old frame house opposite.

They're a splendid-looking pair: Dr. Kinbote, six-foot four-inches tall, powerfully constructed, golden-bearded, blue-eyed, flamboyantly but elegantly dressed in striped silk shirt and white flannel trousers...Shade, sixty-one years old, bushy-gray-haired, short and fat, hobbling along with his curious, crab-like walk, a little ahead of Kinbote..."One fat shoulder rolling, the other rising; his gray mop of hair, his creased nape; the red bandanna handkerchief limply hanging out of one hip pocket, the wallet bulge of the other; the grass stains on the seat of his old khaki pants." Under his arm, he is carrying a huge fat envelope, open at one end, bulging with what look like index cards.

From the porch, Gradus turns and stares at them, as they approach through the junipers and shrubs at one side of the lawn. Now we hear their voices distinctly...Kinbote's first; a rich mellow voice with a slight accent (sort of British tinged with Nordic – a bit like Max von Sydow's, maybe?) But the fact that he is not American is less a matter of accent than the elaborate perfection of his syntax, the grandness of his phraseology.)\*

KINBOTE: ..."I'm ready to share my favorite wine with my favorite poet! And if you agree to show me, John, to show me your poem -- you will have another treat..."

SHADE: "I've swung it, by God!" He boisterously decapitates a dandelion with his walking stick.

KINBOTE: "...Another treat, John. I promise to divulge to you why I gave you -- or rather who gave you -- your theme!"

\*A style of speaking perhaps not unlike that of John Houseman's magnificent lawyer in a recent film. Kinbote's verbal excesses, like his other eccentricities, are as savagely irritating to his enemies as they are amusing and awe-inspiring to his admirers.



CLOSE-UP: A Red Admiral butterfly. Glorious and crimson, it alights on Shade's sleeve. He stops – the butterfly takes off – in his delight, Shade stumbles, nearly drops the envelope. Kinbote grasps his arm, rights him, and smoothly relieves him of his burden, poising it in his hand playfully but snugly as they cross the lawn. Over his shoulder, Shade growls, "What theme?"

(Beyond them a profile of a thick-set Gradus detaches itself, its briefcase, from the shadows of the porch.)

KINBOTE: "Our blue unforgettable Zembla, and the motorboat in the seacave, and – "

"Ah, says Shade, "I think I guessed your secret quite some time ago, Charles!" He chuckles, pauses, grunts, "Looks like you have another visitor, my friend."

Kinbote stares at the figure on the porch...then frowning darkly, he strikes ahead, growling something under his breath.

~~Gradus steps forward into the evening light.~~ His big Luger automatic gleams dully as he raises it.

A very brief ~~moving~~ CLOSE-UP of Gradus' unforgettable eyes...

Kinbote's stare of precognitive horror – his ferocious bellow of indignation – the crash of Gradus' malign old gun...

*Kinbote charges the assassin, oblivious of all danger.*

↑The first bullet rips a sleeve button from his shirt as ~~he Kinbote waves raises~~ his great arms to ward off the bullets. A second, a third shot – who is Gradus aiming at? Is Shade hiding behind Kinbote, or is Kinbote trying to protect him? Then the old man stumbles, Kinbote trips over him. As they fall together, the envelope containing the Poem on its 92 index cards slips from K's upraised hand.

At this moment, the film slips progressively into SLOW MOTION... and yet SLOWER, as the CAMERA closes in inexorably on the falling envelope. Its flap has come open, the cards gently fan out sideways as we hear a SOUND, long and echoey, a slow-sound-motion...of a final shot...

A CLOSE-UP of Gradus' gun-barrel, its smoke-wisp.

An ULTRA SLOW MOTION shot of the Bullet itself traversing the dusk-gray screen.

Now in extreme CLOSE-UP, the top card of the poem slides out of the envelope. In Shade's neat penmanship, the Title,

"PALE FIRE"

on the pink top line – followed by the first two lines of the poem itself, *on the index card, frozen in space and time...*

~~The image freezes; the card frozen in space...~~

"I was the shadow of the waxwing slain  
By the false heaven of the windowpane"

>THE BULLET pierces the word "shadow."

The bullet enters the screen from foreground left; spiraling slowly like a lethargic space-ship, it approaches the dead center of the card. Then, for a moment, the Bullet is motionless, too, in silence.

We do not know, who, if anyone, it will pierce. Only the poem appears to be a certain target.

The SCREEN goes BLACK.

The CREDITS begin, as we FADE IN:

SHOT of Waxwing, taking off from a juniper bush in Shade's garden...it soars against the blue sky...small gray bird with reddish wings...

CLOSE-UP: Reflected sky and clouds in a windowpane. A CRASH – the pane cracks, as the bird flies into it...

CLOSE-UP: of the dead waxwing, lying in snow stained by its blood.

During the Title Sequence – over, or emerging from, the music cue – we hear Shade's voice off-screen – a resonant [sic] mid-American voice – reading the first verse of the poem.

"I was the smudge of ashen fluff, and I  
Flew on, lived on, in the reflected sky"

CLOSE-UP: The cracked windowpane...a gray feather sticking to it where the bird hit it. The reflection of Shade's face appears in the glass.

REVERSE ANGLE: from INSIDE the SITTING ROOM; but now it is NIGHT, and we see the reflection of the room, including Shade himself, sitting at his desk on which stands a stack of the large white index cards on which he usually writes – as his VOICE OFF continues, describing what we see:

"And from the inside, too, I'd duplicate  
Myself, my lamp, an apple on a plate:  
Uncurtaining the night, I'd let dark glass

Hang all the furniture above the grass,  
And how delightful when a fall of snow  
Covered my glimpse of lawn and reached up so  
As to make chair and bed exactly stand  
Upon that snow, out in that crystal land!"

As the CAMERA slowly pulls back, Sybil Shade, the writer's wife enters the room, regards her husband, smiles, then briskly goes to the window and closes the curtains. Freeze frame. The screen goes dark.

(End of CREDITS)

A white winter sky – on which is supered the title:

NEW WYE, APPALACHIA, FEBRUARY 1959

CAMERA angles down to John Shade in his garden, snow-covered as in the scene before. He looks down, bends, picks up the body of the dead waxwing. Regards it carefully.

CAMERA pulls back to a long shot of old Shade looking at bird; to a MATTE SHOT – as if through binoculars...

CLOSE-UP: Dr. Charles Kinbote, spying on Shade from the upstairs window of his house on the opposite side of the road. He lowers binoculars, raises a cassette recorder microphone, presses button, dictates...

KINBOTE: "Incidentally, it is curious to note, that a crested bird called, in Zemblan, a 'Silk-tail' – closely resembling a waxwing in shape and shade – is one of the three heraldic creatures in the Royal Arms of the King of Zembla, Charles the Beloved, born 1915, reigned 1936-1958 (the other two being a Reindeer and a Mermaid.)"

As Kinbote dictates these words, his eyes go to a large, blue Morrocan-bound book lying on a table nearby, on which the royal arms of Zembla are embossed. Then there comes from across the road the sound of a car starting; and Kinbote runs with his field glasses and recorder to another window of the bedroom – can't see much – tree in the way – he exits the bedroom with his equipment...

At another window, Dr. Kinbote now has a proper view of the Shade's front driveway as Mrs. Shade backs their old Chrysler out of the garage, while he dictates into his recorder:

"Never shall I forget how elated I was on learning that the suburban house rented for my use from Judge Goldsworth who had gone on vacation to England, into which I moved on February 5, 1959, stood next to that of

the celebrated American poet whose verses I had tried to translate into Zemblan twenty years earlier!"

Kinbote's observations are interrupted by a tortured scream of spinning wheels on the ice of the Shade's driveway. Dr. Kinbote lowers his field glasses with a smile of satisfaction...

In the driveway, old John Shade is clumsily distributing handfuls of sand over the ice from a bucket. He wears snowboots, wrapped in scarves, his gray locks blowing in the icy breeze.

Dr. Kinbote lumbers down the stairs of the Goldsworth house still dictating into his recorder...

"On one of my first mornings there, as I was preparing to leave for College in the powerful car I had just acquired - Ferrari four-and-a-half litre GT, 1955, one of my favorite vintages - I noticed that Mr. and Mrs. Shade, neither of whom I had yet met socially, were having trouble with their old sedan in the slippery driveway...

Kinbote strides out of the front door of his house, buttons himself into his magnificent fur coat - past his Ferrari in his own driveway, stuffing his recorder into his overcoat pocket - crosses the road - slips, skids, and sits down hard on the snow and ice at the roadside. He remains there, stunned, as the Shades' Chrysler emerges from their driveway, nearly runs him over, and proceeds down the road; they don't see him at all.

Kinbote rises, dusts the snow off his coat, regards the car disappear. He extracts his microphone, presses his button... "I had not, as yet, as I say, met them socially." He turns regards his house. Gloomily..."The Goldsworth mansion had little to recommend it. The heating system was a farce" (he stumps back up his driveway). "February and March in Zembla used to be pretty rough, too, of course."

Follows a series of SHOTS, hair-raising, (in the manner of a cops-and-robbers car chase) of Charles Kinbote at the wheel of his Ferrari roaring up the Wordsmith College, broadsiding round the icy curves. As he downshifts, racing style, from fifth to second on entering the avenue of Shakespeare's trees, his progress is watched with amazement by a group of students.

We rediscover Dr. Kinbote in his classroom at Wordsmith College; in the middle of addressing his class in his grandiose but rather endearing fashion for the first time.

He reminds his students (numbering a dozen at most) that the course he is going to teach, is the only one available in America for the study of the Zemblan language. As he speaks he

draws a rough – a very rough – map of Northern Europe on the blackboard, indicating Norway, Sweden, Denmark, etc., and next door to them the half-forgotten Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. “Now all annexed by Russia as Soviet Republics.” Right in there, nestling among these obscure old countries on the shores of the Baltic Sea, Kinbote inscribes, with a dramatic flourish, the tiny irregular shape of The People’s Republic of Zembla.

Half of his class we can categorize as intensely earnest super-high-IQ CIA recruits, (educated at Federal expense); the remaining half-dozen include several owl-eyed future professors of languages (among whom young, crew-cut, blonde, dreamy-eyed Bob, of whom more later), a middle-aged lady, (infatuated by Kinbote’s beard) and an extraordinary Blonde clothed in a pink tee shirt with the Rolling Stones’ tongue hanging out of it. Dr. Kinbote turns to face them.

His voice betrays deep emotion as he reminds his class that until the Revolution of 1958, Zembla was a Kingdom. In fact, the last king of Zembla, Charles Xavier the II, called by his people the Beloved, was himself one of the greatest scholars and linguists every born to that far off northern land. “As a Zemblan refugee,” Dr. Kinbote observes, “I hope you will join me in a silent prayer for his well-being, in exile – in hiding – in South America, they say...he reigns, however, forever in the hearts of his countrymen – a symbol of Zembla’s glorious past and a living reproach to the wretched grip of Totalitarian Dictatorship that has swallowed up his country...” (etc., etc.) He looks at his watch, “Tomorrow we will commence our study of the language itself...”

In the Faculty Club of the college, John Shade is lunching with three or four other eminent Professors at his usual table. Dr. Kinbote makes an impressive entrance, and is formally introduced to the famous writer by the head of the Languages Department, Dr. Nattochdag. Shade gruffly offers him a seat, recommends the pork. Kinbote seats himself and explaining that he’s a vegetarian produces from his briefcase a large and varied selection of raw vegetables, fruit and a bottle of Danish ale.

“And I like to cook my own meals. Consuming something that had been handled by a fellow creature was, I explained to the rubicund convives, as repulsive to me as eating any creature, and that would include – lowering my voice – the pulpous pony-tailed girl student who served us and licked her pencil.”

As he sits there crunching carrots, Kinbote is really conscious only of John Shade. Maybe we listen in on his own account of this first meeting... [end page 7]

[Top p. 57, scene after Shade has been killed by Jakob Gradus]

Kinbote stands on the porch, as Shade's body is born in state to an ambulance. Three or four cops surround Gradus' corpse. Pictures are taken of it. A grizzled senior policeman peers at the battered head.

1st Policeman: "Know who this is?"

2nd Policeman: "Nope."

1st Policeman: "This is Jack Grey. Goddamn maniac killer the Judge sent to the nut-house four, five years back, remember? Never forget those eyes..."

The other cops remember, in head-shaking unison, the famous case, the killer's escape last year.

CLOSE-UP: Kinbote.

He opens his mouth...closes it. Sits down on the porch step. ~~There comes the SOUND of an old car. Sybil's Chrysler pulls into the driveway...~~

The Captain extracts from the corpse's coat pocket an airline ticket from New York to New Wye - exhibits it triumphantly...

1st Policeman: "See? 'Jack Grey.' (sympathetically) ~~Poor~~ *Fuckin'* crazy sonuvabitch. He swore in court he'd get the Judge. (He relishes this...) Well, he got the wrong guy, *hunh?*" ~~Must have bad eyes. (They look strange, it's true, as we know.)~~

~~4<sup>th</sup> Policeman: "The lights none too good. Looked a bit like him, too."~~

~~1st Policeman: "Case of mistaken identity!" (To Kinbote with a clap on his back) "To bad, Doc. You got guts. (a last word for Grey/Gradus' body). "They should've given the poor mother the hot seat in the first place."~~

~~Kinbote is at a loss for words. No doubt he is in a state of shock, as Sybil suddenly comes running up the lawn, flings herself onto his broad breast. She weeps, of course, as she thanks him for trying to save her husband's life. There are murmurs of respect from the cops, who appreciate heroism in the face of gunfire. (... "Threw himself between the gunman and his target," murmurs one of them.)~~

"There are things for which no recompense in this world or the next is great enough, *Charles,*" Sybil whispers. ~~to the hero.~~

Kinbote's faculties return. He pats her hand. "Sybil... there is a recompense...It may seem a modest request, but – give me permission, Sybil, to edit and publish John's last poem. *I wish to write a little commentary to it, that I believe will illuminate it in a most remarkable light, my dear...*"

Sybil gazes up at Kinbote...

DISSOLVE TO: On a bleak mountainside in Montana, a Motel room. A desolate little holiday resort; a little lake, an amusement park, etc. not far off. We hear the SOUND of Kinbote's voice as we admire the view, before revealing him, sitting at the plastic table, listening to his own VOICE coming from ~~the tape~~ *his tape recorder*; beside which stands, now very dog-eared, the ~~familiar~~ stack of 92 index cards: John Shade's last, lost masterpiece.

"Of course, she did not give me permission. That moment of grateful grief you soon forgot, dear girl. However, permission or not, I kept possession of my Poem."

*A LONGSHOT OF KINBOTE: standing on the front doorstep of Judge Goldsworth's house.*

~~As K. speaks, we DISSOLVE into a sequence of dramatically presented SHOTS of the events he describes; some of which are indicated here, starting with, for example, the image of K. surrounded~~ *He is surrounded* by reporters *and* photographers. *He is a Kinbote* grown monstrously fat...

"For several days – while I underwent the ordeal of minor formalities with the police (who were most courteous, even deferential), newspaper interviews, a visit from the Mayor, Sybil's lawyers, and so forth – until I was securely installed, with a modified name and appearance, in quieter surroundings – I actually wore it. *the poem*. Having distributed the ninety-two index cards about my person, I sewed up all four pockets. Thus, plated with poetry, stiff with cardboard, bullet-proof at last, an hour after John Shade was laid to rest, (a nationally televised event) I left New Wye forever. I was obliged to leave, obviously – and in the utmost secrecy, since my incognito and current disguise were obviously now known to the Extremists.

(SHOT of ~~K.~~ *Kinbote* in his Ferrari, zooming northward, in the night, through mountains and deserts...)

"But oh, Oh imagine the agony of silence that was forced upon me by fate! The torture of having to conceal the truth of the tragedy – forcing myself to agree with all that piffle about Jack Grey, madman and escapee from a prison asylum, mistaking Shade for the Judge who sent him there! Oh, it was I, I, Charles Xavier the Beloved, that

Gradus was aiming at – I who bear, *upon* ~~on~~ my great royal shoulders the burden of my friend's mistaken murder!

~~SHOT: K. reading poem in a previous motel room, beside a roaring highway...~~

*BIG CLOSE-UP: Kinbote, in his MOTEL ROOM*

*Seated at the plastic table. He DEALS the INDEX CARDS of the Poem, one by one, as if playing a strange game of patience...*

"I shall never forget my agony when I read his last masterpiece. Where was Zembla the Fair? The battlements of my sunset castle? The whole wild, glorious romance that I had pressed upon my poet with a hypnotist's patience? Simply not there! What did I have instead? A rather old-fashioned autobiographical narrative – beautifully done, of course – but deliberately drained of every trace of the marvelous stuff I had contributed, by that tyrannical anti-Royalist, his wife, Sybil..."

~~(SHOT: (A little flashback to *John* Shade, reading to Sybil in their kitchen. He gesticulates...)~~

"That poor, misguided woman, who, as I had witnessed myself, had forced my poor friend to read her the rough drafts of his work, in order to censor it personally – to purge it of my magic, my Zembla!

(CLOSE-UP: the stack of cards, as K.'s hand replaces, religiously, their thick rubber band)

"Now, I will perhaps send the manuscript back to her, and the University Authorities who are hunting me as fanatically as any Extremist assassin."

(He poises the bundle in his big hand.)

"Or, then again, I may not.

"Gentlemen, I have suffered. Like my legend itself, I am petering out. My migraine is severe today. But I will continue to exist..."

(Shimmering IMAGES of the King – Fleur de Fyler – Queen Disa... dissolving into the seashores of Zembla)

"...I may assume other disguises, other forms. I may huddle and groan in a madhouse; or, history permitting, I may one day sail back to my Kingdom, and greet with a sob that luminous grey coastline, those blue mountains in the mists of time..."



"But whatever fate his in store for me, someone, somewhere, has already set out – has boarded a plane, a ship, a bus – will one day ring at my door..."

(LONG SHOT...through the window of K.'s motel room; as he lies there in bed...a tall, gaunt FIGURE in a brown raincoat gets off a bus, on the road outside, carrying a briefcase...)

"...A bigger, keener-eyed, more competent Gradus."

"I, too, have completed my work..."

(The rotating spools of the recorder; K. pats it reverently.)

"My Commentary to the ghost of a poem – a mutilated masterpiece. One day, when I too am a ghost (any day now, my doorbell will ring again), it will be given to the world. The true story will be told."

(K. puts on his silk dressing-gown – in his night-cap...)

"Despite your efforts, Sybil, this poem, too, is haunted – by the shimmering specter of Zembla and her unfortunate King..."

(He gets into bed)

"The echoes of my mind, the spangles of my glory..."

(DISSOLVE TO *a shimmering image of the young* ~~epic shots of~~ Prince Charles in his Hispano-Suiza in Onhava Cathedral, praying...)

"...A pale fire, a pale fire indeed!"

CLOSE...CLOSER, CLOSING...on Kinbote, closing his eyes.

"I pray for the good Lord's benediction to rest upon me, and on my country."

DISSOLVE TO: the mountains of Zembla...the grey mists enfold them.

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