

**From: Shoko Miura**

Dear Zoran,

Thank you for your amazing reply. It looks like I hit upon a gold mine when I was just scratching the ground!

I had no idea you knew so much about Chaplin's movies. I love them, too, but never went deeply into them. Your citing of the "Sardine Song" especially was a delight. Now that you have focused on the stationary "tree" and the "flower," in contrast to the animate "sardine" and the "flea" (Calvero's flea routine earlier), I can see that Chaplin was as masterful at weaving recurrent motifs and underlying themes as Nabokov was. As you pointed out, this contrast recurs in Terry's psychosomatic paralysis and Calvero's re-animation of Terry in the ballet. How Nabokovian!

Another point you made which made me see the work of empathy in comparing Chaplin and Nabokov is your interpretation of Columbine looking out of the window in the *Harlequinnade*. It reminded me of the waxwing killed "by the azure of the windowpane" in *Pale Fire*. Both windows are the border between two worlds—of the living and the dead (or the dying), but also between the "real world" and the world of art. Where does Calvero die? Between curtains dividing the stage where Terry dances and backstage where the clowns return to their normal lives. Kinbote escapes death in his kingdom by creeping through green curtains. Windows and curtains seem to suggest for both artists the line between Time (a succession of minutes) and No Time (where such a succession does not exist). So long as we are alive, we are not allowed to cross this border. The work of empathy, it seems to me, enables one to cross it. Empathy works by using imagination, the essential medium of art. When you empathize, rather than sympathize, you cross the border between yourself and another thing or person. Sympathy is merely "feeling with" another but empathy enables you to share your selfhood with another's selfhood. You quoted a passage of Humbert's uncharacteristically honest admission:

...behind the awful juvenile cliches, there was in her a garden and a twilight, and a palace gate - dim and adorable regions which happened to be lucidly and absolutely forbidden to me....

Here Humbert faces an invisible border because he cannot share his selfhood. However, as you discussed, Calvero can because his love is capable of the nobility of self-sacrifice. What is impressive in the ending is that the curtains between which Calvero dies serves both as entry and exit. Reality and fiction of the stage can merge, like the work of empathy. Calvero's death opens the border for Terry who inherits his world of art.

Your reply led me to clarify my thoughts and a thread (about Nabokov's border motifs) I myself have been following for a dozen years. I know that your eyes have made it difficult to write and concentrate. I also have a problem with my eyes since a tiny clot lodged in my brain three years ago. So, I sincerely appreciate your generosity.

### **From Zoran Kuzmanovich**

Dear Shoko, I am glad you were able to find something worthwhile in my musings about *Limelight*. You are quite correct about Chaplin's clever interweaving of motifs, especially the flea one:

[Comment #1] "flea" (Calvero's flea routine earlier) The interesting part about this routine is that it contains some bawdy jokes and some historical homage. The flea that Calvero discovers fighting with Henry and that may or may not be the one that repeatedly bites Calvero is named Phyllis (syphilis). At the same time, the routine is a tribute to Marcelino, a great auguste (clown who does not wear the traditional oversized costuming of the clown) whom Chaplin highly respected. Chaplin worked with Marcelino (whose wife "left" him for another). At the same time, *Limelight's* story structure is an allusion to (or perhaps a tribute to) *Laugh, Clown, Laugh* (1928).<sup>i</sup> Either way, the stories are very

similar.

[Comment # 2] Windows and curtains seem to suggest for both artists the line between Time (a succession of minutes) and No Time (where such a succession does not exist). Absolutely, where we find Calvero at the end is the border between the not quite over yet and the not quite yet, especially if you look closely at the final scene where Calvero says: “I believe I'm dying, Doctor. But then, I don't know. I've died so many times.”

[Comment #3] I sincerely appreciate your generosity. Ditto. The drum from the Noh play you took me to still resonated in my head. I am sorry about the clot. My doctor has mentioned that as a likely scenario for me.

I am very grateful to Akiko who behind the scenes connected us all just as she did the last time I was in Japan. (This time she also took on the task of quietly correcting the errors my compromised eyes left in.)

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<sup>i</sup> From [Laugh, Clown, Laugh \(1928\) Lon Chaney, Bernard Siegel, Loretta Young | \(ok.ru\)](#): A clown named Tito Beppi (Lon Chaney) adopts orphaned Simonetta (Loretta Young), and they begin to travel and perform in the circus together. As Simonetta grows into a beautiful young woman, Tito eventually falls in love with her. Though the girl actually has eyes for the young and noble Count Ravelli (Nils Asther), she pretends to want the kindly clown because she is unwilling to break his heart. When Tito realizes that he stands in the way of her happiness, things turn tragic.