

# Secondary Zairja

**A Borgesian Introduction.** The zairja is an ancient computing method based on the idea of reducing given ideas into their concealed originary part by means of stochastic and aleatory means. Jewish, Arabic, and Christian scholars collaborated in the 11c. to formalize the zairja technique, linking it to astrological/astronomical calculations combined with the theory of humors, in particular the lore of melancholy and Saturn. An early exponent of zairja use was Ramón Llull, the Catalan mystic whose conversion to Christianity provoked him to write a calculative theory of epiphany in general; Llull's methods were formalized into university programs that lasted, at the University of Paris, until the Jesuits had them banned in the 16c. Rabelais was a covert advocate of Llullism; Góngorism was an outgrowth. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* would have been unthinkable without Llull's revisionary theory of memory or its knowledge of the function of arabesque elaboration.

## *the secondary*

The secondary as such is the construction of a past retroactively (re-)structured as traumatic. The secondary exists in everyday experience through the preposition "of," the backstage of any informal production, the kitchen in relation to the restaurant dining room, the forest, bird, and rainstorms behind the production of the paper on which this black ink now rests. In short, it is a flip of the focus of attention on what is indicated backwards to the means and methods of indication. It is the creation, out of the conventional meaning of any object or objective presentation, of a rebus.

Thus, the novel tells a good story, but its other stories involve the vacation the novelist spent writing it, the way the novelist's cousin or lover had accidentally suggested the plot line, or the publisher's dinner after meeting to arrange the book contract. There are, however, famous formalizations of this seemingly random series of potentialities. Vladimir Nabokov, in his novel *Pale Fire*, tells the story of a visiting scholar in Slavic languages at a university in the Northeast U. S. He is renting a house next door to a resident poet, and the two become friends at the same time the poet is completing his master-work. Just as the two are meeting on the occasion of the poem's completion, the poet is mysteriously assassinated. The friend decides to flee the scene in possession of the poem's handwritten manuscript, for fear that the poet's wife would suppress or alter the work. He spends his time in hiding annotating the poem to explain the poem's true subject-matter, his (delusional?) life as the exiled king of Zembla, a country indefinitely located in Eastern Europe. Although at first the annotations seem wildly improbable, by the end of the book the reader has an entirely inverted view that accepts that the poem has somehow "had, all along" a reverence for this precise delusional potentiality, and that the very act of reading the novel has uncovered this potentiality and extended into the present and future.

The Secondary Zairja formalizes *Pale Fire* as a methodology that can conscript any scholarly work with the same goal: to uncover a "past" within the work that could, just as easily, produced another work to extend and succeed it. The method is simple.

## *Procedure*

1. With the selected text, make comments on highlighted words, phrases, sentences, or sections.
2. Copy these out separately so that the original text is not easily available.
3. Insert spaces with at least three divisions between the comments.
4. Fill these spaces in with a secondary reflection that bridges between the comments and, as it goes, detects the general drift of critical thinking that had, from the beginning, driven a wedge between the reader and his/her independent thoughts. *Italicize* the original comments so that they may be easily distinguished from the secondary narrative.
5. As the bridge commentary develops, attempt to formalize any ersatz theses that develop, fictionally or realistically. Following Nabokov's trope of *dæmon/askesis* (Harold Bloom's terms for agent and flight), use abduction and flight/pursuit as the dominant motif, casting theoretical reflection within this action as relevant exposition.