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Fictionality of Nabokov's Autobiography *Speak, Memory*

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Sitaram Bohara has completed his thesis entitled “Fictionality of Nabokov’s Autobiography *Speak, Memory*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2067/05/01 B.S. to 2069/06/08 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Fictionality of Nabokov’s Autobiography *Speak, Memory*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Sitaram Bohara has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This research attempts to prove that the work, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* by Russian American writer Vladimir Nabokov straddles, both autobiography and fiction although it is especially an autobiography. It is written from the perspective of first person narrator, 'I'. Nabokov presents his personal description through this work. He has also written about his family members and other factual historical events. In the same way, we can find fictional elements in his text on the ground of memory, forgetfulness, public and private memory, photographs used in the text and his description of ancestors. I have tried to show the interrelatedness by using the methodological tool from Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir's book *Borderlines* and Linda Anderson's book *Autobiography*, which deal with intersections of autobiography and fiction.

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I. Introduction to Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*

Vladimir Nabokov's work *Speak, Memory* is an autobiographical work of art. Here, he has written about his personal description like his interest toward learning many languages, interested nature towards playing games, making and changing girl friends. Nabokov has also given the description of old historical events like the First World War, the Second World War and Russian Civil War in his work. But my project here is to show the autobiographical and fictional elements in this work and to prove the fact that *Speak, Memory* is both autobiography and fiction. Basically I am trying to prove my project on the ground of Nabokov's description of personal life, and memory, role of past, forgetfulness, public memory and private memory and use of photographs in *Speak, Memory*.

Nabokov was born on April 23, 1899 in St. Petersburg Russia in wealthy members of the Russian aristocratic elite family. His father was Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, and mother was Elena Ivanovna Nabokov. He was taken great care and pride in educating and promoting self-confidence in him and his siblings. His father was a politician. Vladimir Nabokov was mainly interested in literature and languages like Russian, French and English. In his teen age he saw the World War I, the Russian Revolution and the Russian aristocracy and dispersed its survivors all over Europe. His family was compelled to flee from Russia to Western Europe. In the same way, his family was affected by World War II in Europe; they escaped to the United States, where Nabokov fully developed his talents as an English language writer. In the pervious twenty years, he had devoted much of his time to writing Russian language works, to a lesser extent, he had also worked in French. Nabokov also has made reputation in US college and universities. He has written world famous novels, short fiction, drama and other genres. His world famous works are *Lolita*, *The Defence*,

Laughter in the Dark, Pale Fire, The Enchanter, Nabokov's Dozen, A Russian Beauty and other stories. He published his important autobiographical work *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*, in 1951 but he completed this work only in 1966, and it was published a year later. Nabokov got Nobel Prize for his world famous novel *Lolita*, which was published in 1955. This controversial novel has since sold over fifty million copies worldwide, which made him a famous author and celebrity.

Speak, Memory is an autobiographical work of Nabokov, which provides the atmosphere for author's vision and remembrance of time, space and of his family and attachments. Nabokov tells the reader that he tries to transcend the limits of mortality by reaching back to a time before his birth. The closest he can come to doing so, he says, is childhood. He describes his childhood as one of unspoiled privilege, happy one. His parents are liberal and support constitutional reform and moderate political climate of tolerance. Nabokov renders a description of Mademoiselle, a French speaking governess from Switzerland and leaves the strongest and most lasting impression upon him. In the middle chapter of *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov takes a reader through a variety of miniatures of his life prior to and during World War I. He describes his enduring passion for butterfly and moth collecting. He fell in love in his early age of ten with Colette. Nabokov's obsession with literature, starting with the illustrated adventure novel of Mayne Reid and he also spent his romantic life with Polenka. In the same way Nabokov returns to his romantic obsession and an affair with Tamara during World War I and writing poetry devoted to her.

The final section of *Speak, Memory*, contains his exile. Nabokov and his brother Sergey are awarded scholarship to Cambridge University, in England, where they study literature, play tennis and soccer and adjust to a life that precludes their returning to their native home. Nabokov continues to develop as a writer, and he also

develops a new obsession for chess that, like all his other passions, makes its way into his writing. Nabokov and Vera, his wife since 1925, and their son Dmitri, around the parks and haunts of Berlin, Paris and other European places to a point just prior to their departure for the United States, with the Nazis poised to take over much of Western Europe. Already exiled from Russia, Nabokov and his new family are exiled from Europe altogether. They are on their way to success in America but will eventually return to neutral Switzerland.

Speak, Memory is an autobiographical work. It explores the way memory and reminiscence provides the author with the artistic power to defy time through his writing. It is argued that the text through his writing, disrespects the convention of chronological linearity. The main concern of this study is to show the qualities of both autobiography and fiction. Mainly there are autobiographical elements because it is autobiography but the major issue of this project is to elaborate the fictional elements upon it and prove the fact that *Speak, Memory* is both autobiography and fiction. *Speak, Memory* contains Nabokov's reconsideration and re-imagination and sequences in his life.

In this text *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* Nabokov writes about his past family members by asking information from the old people of the village. So, the things he writes about his family are fictional because they are his second hand information. One of the more noticeable characteristic about *Speak, Memory: An autobiography Revisited* is that it only covers the first forty year of Nabokov's life and, of that, twelve of its fifteen chapters are devoted mostly to the time before the Russian Czar's downfall.

Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* is studied by different critics from different perspective. Erik France discusses how the use of memory and artifice perspective.

Erik France discusses how the use of memory and artifices gains the illusion of control over linear time in Nabokov's *Speak Memory*. He says:

Nabokov Charmingly remembers and recreates special moments from the first forty years of his life in *Speak, Memory : An Autobiography Revisited* Early on he informs the reader that he seeks to defy and transcend the limitations of linear time and mortality, using artifice to create a delicate and evocative interplay of words on paper. By carefully carting sentences, paragraphs, and chapters, he is able to create the illusion of having succeeded. Like the magic lantern show concocted by Lenski, Nabokov's autobiography creates a space for imagination and magic. (352)

Here, we find Erik France wants to say *Speak, Memory* has blending to elements of imagination and magic. So, it helps us to prove *Speak, Memory* as both autobiography and fiction. In the same way another critic, Robert Alter explores how Nabokov manipulates the past through language in *Speak Memory*, He says:

Memories of a happy, forever lost childhood can easily decline into the cheap coin of nostalgia. What partly makes, *Spark Memory* one of the most remarkable of modern autobiographies is Nabokov's ability to etch in prose the precious vividness of his past while keeping steadily in mind the necessary fate it shares with every human past of being wallowed up by oblivion. Only the intervention of art grants it the grace of a radiant afterlife, but that is, ineluctably different in kind from the first life. Instructively, at the end of chapter three, Nabokov fleetingly evokes an infinite regress of adult remembering childhood. (357)

To show the fictional quality in *Speak, Memory* Alter describes: "To affirm merely the former would be to succumb to self-indulgent delusion; to affirm merely the latter would be to concede that autobiography is impossible because it must always turn into fiction" (358).

In the same manner another critic, Dabney Stuart, regards *Speak, Memory* as fiction and how Nabokov has mixed facts upon it. He proves his idea from his words like:

It is imaginative narration in which events actions, and details of landscape, in themselves neutral, are formed, shaped, and rendered significantly by a single, ordering consciousness. It is, in short, fiction, a molding, not opposed to "fact" the popular distinction we have been numbed into accepting as a habit of daily perception, but the way "fact" is born. (359)

Above mentioned critics have viewed the text from different perspectives. Erik France discusses how the use of memory and artifice gains the illusion of control over linear time. Next critic Alter describes that autobiography is impossible because it must always turn into fiction. In the same way Dabney Stuart wanted to prove the fact *Speak, Memory* as fiction and how Nabokov has mixed fact upon it. But this research seeks to prove *Speak, Memory* as both autobiography and fiction. It tries to prove this on the ground of memory, forgetfulness, the role of past, use of narrative and use of photographs in the text. Nabokov has challenged the traditional chronological tradition. He wants to transcend the limitation of time. He writes about his old family members by asking the information from Old villagers. By using memory he has written the text. So, my main focus in the research is, by breaking linearity and using the elements like past, memory, forgetfulness *Speak, Memory* contains the qualities of both genres autobiography and fiction.

II. Blurring of the Boundary between Autobiography and Fiction

In her book *Autobiography* Linda Anderson has described the debates of autobiography and the account of the complex relationship between the theory and practice of autobiography. She has brought different autobiographers and their own views about autobiography. She describes the views of traditional autobiographers like Saint Augustine, Bunyan, Rousseau and Wordsworth and their works. In the same way Anderson talks about modern and postmodern autobiographers like Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and their works. Likewise, in the book she also talks about autobiographical writing especially by female and post colonial writers.

Writing about the self is regarded as autobiography. The first autobiographers in western world is known as Saint Augustine and *Confessions* is known as first autobiographical work which was written around 398-400 A.D. Augustine's autobiographies were influenced by Christianity. While writing autobiography Augustine also used memory where he met himself. He also assumed memory is the container of his experiences. For Augustine memory also exists beyond time and comprehension.

John Bunyan is another autobiographer who is described by Linda Anderson in *Autobiography* John Bunyan is seventeenth century autobiographer who belongs to England particularly the period after 1640. Bunyan's narrative also takes its form from the experience of spiritual conversion. Like Augustine Bunyan's works were also related to Christianity. Though Bunyan's views about autobiography were concerned with Christianity he was more open than Augustine. We can guess this from the lines said by Robert Bell. Bunyan is simply "never as sure as Augustine" (qtd. in Anderson 29).

James Boswell and Hester Thrale have their own view about autobiography. They also talk about diaries. For James Boswell the diary was an aide-memory, to be turned to retrospectively when 'remembrance' has faded (35).

However, the diary is also a register of one's life. About this Boswell says:

It was a place to return to in order to contemplate one's self, or one's 'character', otherwise unregarded in the disturbance and confusion of living'. 'It is very necessary to have our thoughts and actions preserved in a mode not subject to change, if we would have a fair and distinct view of our character. (35)

From the above line we know that for Boswell to preserve the life it should be recorded. He also says, "Sometimes it has occurred to me that a man should not live more than he can regard, as a farmer should not have a larger crop than he can gather in" (35).

Jean Jacques Rousseau was next eighteenth century autobiographers. He completed his work *Confessions* in 1770. Though the name of his work and Augustine is same but his work is new model of secular autobiography for romantic era.

Rousseau and William Wordsworth are romantic writers. They blend romantic feature in their autobiographical work. They broke the trend of Saint Augustine and other traditional writers whose works were revolving around Christianity. In this regard Huntington William said, "Rousseau both exemplifies 'modern romantic autobiography, and occupies a pivotal position in its historical development.

Rousseau's refusal of other sources for himself and 'radical internalization' of personal identity makes him, for Williams, both 'novel' and 'influential'" (43).

From the above lines of Huntington Williams we know that Rousseau's trend in autobiographical work is different than his predecessors. Rousseau also believes the

task of the autobiographer is to confess. He wants to say every thing in his work without hiding anything Jean Starobinski, says, "Rousseau would have liked to offer himself as 'an open book' to the reader, to revel his feelings without shadow or obliquity" (45).

Romantic autobiographers like Rousseau and Wordsworth give paradoxical view about autobiography. The slogan of romanticism is 'go back to nature' and in their autobiographical work they want to express their original self. So, it is paradox of romanticism on this matter Geoffrey Hartman says: "The great paradox of romanticism was that the vaunted 'return to nature', or the desire to overcome self-consciousness itself. Wordsworth's *Prelude* begins with a longing for a subject that eludes him" (53).

While writing autobiography romantic writer uses imagination, feeling, sentiment and past experiences. They are concerned with two consciousness: the consciousness of the self and the consciousness of other beings. The views of Rousseau and Wordsworth are somehow similar towards autobiography. Both are common in the sense of psychological vocabulary of sensation, feeling, memory and imagination. Both reveal nature, love and attempt to recover childhood experience. But concerning with differences between both Rousseau and Wordsworth Mitchell says:

Rousseau's outlook is more tragic his view of human relations hopeless and embittered; Wordsworth goes on affirming the value of love, not least by evoking his friendship with Coleridge in the very address of the poem, but it is in their opposed treatments of guilt that the most interesting comparison can be made, 'Rousseau confesses every thing and feels guilty for nothing', while 'Wordsworth confesses nothing and

yet seems to feel excessive, unmotivated guilt for some unnamed crime. (55)

From the above lines we know that even the romantic autobiographers are different in their view. Rousseau is pessimistic and Wordsworth is optimistic in their works of autobiography.

The modern and postmodern autobiographers who are described in the work of Linda Anderson are Sigmund Freud, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. While describing autobiographers chronologically from past to the present Anderson has also described about the view towards autobiography of those writers. For her traditional writers were mainly concerned with Christianity. Gradually, she finds change in their view and she says romantic autobiographers concerned with nature, human feeling and emotion. She finds break in the traditional system of autobiographical elements.

Sigmund Freud is the next autobiographer about whom Anderson talks about. The main subject we can find in the work of Freud is 'unconscious'. He regards human being as neurosis. And for him what a writer writes is his childhood drama of love, hate and jealousy in relation to one's parents. Though he also talks about past memory and consciousness, his idea about autobiography is different in many sectors from the traditional writers.

Roland Barthes is a postmodernist thinker. He propounded the theory of 'the death of the author'; it means in his work the author is not present. While writing the author thinks that he is present in his text but as soon as the work is finished the presentation of the writer is not there. Readers are free to create their own truth upon the text. In the same way for Barthes autobiography does not expose the self of the

author rather its meaning depends on the reader. Barthes's view about how meaning of autobiography cannot remain singular can be found in his words like these He says:

This book is not a book of 'confessions', not that it is insincere, but because we have different knowledge today than yesterday: such knowledge can be summarized as follows: what I write about myself is never the last word: the more 'sincere' I am, the more interpretable I am, under the eye of other example than those of the old authors, who believed they were required to submit themselves to but one law authenticity. (71)

By the above lines of Barthes about autobiography, we know that he is always in part of the plurality in meaning of the autobiography. For him time is not the same forever so as the time changes the meanings is also changes. So, he against the traditional belief that autobiography can represent the self.

The view of Derrida towards autobiography is different from that of Barthes. He scatters autobiography as a motif or theme throughout his work. He is also against Rousseau's idea about presence in the text. He is against the dichotomy between presence and absence. Derrida finds autobiography at work deconstructing its supposed rational or theoretical basis. He also challenges the view of autobiography related to singularity and religion. He favours multiplicity in meaning.

Feminist and poststructuralist critics after the 1980s challenged the traditional canonical view of Saint Augustine, Rousseau and other canonical writers. They say autobiography in the past was only as males' genre. They try to bring the marginalized women writers at the centre. Feminist writer find the language phallogentric and they thinks that language can not represent the female voice. So, they also challenge the level of language.

Gunthorunn Gudmundsdottir has shown in her book *Borderlines* that how autobiography and fiction are inter-related. Her emphasis is upon role of fiction in autobiography than role of autobiography in fiction. Though she has shown the differences between autobiography and fiction, she has not created definitive border between autobiography and fiction rather she has shown various areas where autobiography and fiction interact. Because of her main examination upon the relationship between autobiography and fiction in autobiographical works rather autobiographical from the works of fiction, we can apply her ideas in Nabokov's *Speak Memory* to show both fictional and autobiographical qualities upon it.

According to Gudmundsdottir, the slight difference between autobiography and fiction is in the field of referentiality. To prove her logic she gives example of Paul de Man's work *Autobiography as De-Facement*. To give emphasis upon her idea of showing fictionality in autobiographical work, she says when autobiographers attempt to write from the viewpoint of the past, automatically there comes fictionality because we can never speak authoritatively from the past. So, the writer wants to say where there is sense of the past in autobiography there is fictionality. The same idea of the writer is applicable to Nabokov's *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* because most of the time Nabokov has written this autobiography from the view point of the past.

Gudmundsdottir has given examples of many writers in her work to prove that how fiction and autobiography are inter-related. For her fictional elements can be found in the autobiographical works because autobiographical writing is related to memory, forgetfulness, narrative, structure, gender, cultural crossing , biography through autobiography, photographs. For her autobiography is related with these elements and so they are automatically in one way or another related to fiction. She

tries to show the borderlines between fiction and autobiography both in the level of theme and structure. So, the subjects related with autobiography given by the writer here are like memory, forgetfulness, narrative structure, gender, cultural crossings biography through autobiography and photographs, which are in one way or another related to fiction, can be found in Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* also. He has used these qualities upon his work *Speak, Memory* so, it is very easy to find fictional elements in Nabokov's *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*.

To show how memory plays important role to make autobiography fictional, Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir brings the works of different writers like Lillian Hellman, Georges Perec and Paul Auster, who talk about memories relationship to writing, the role of forgetting in life writing and the connection between private memory and public memory shows the relationship between fiction and autobiography. Memory is an overwhelming force. So, to show the relationship between fiction and autobiography it is in elements because memory transforms present into past, it turns one thing to another, children into old people and old people into children. Memory makes autobiographic works fictional in a way that people can create different things into his memory when he is staying inside a room. It is basically related to past and past is always related to fiction. In this way memory plays great role in the relationship between fiction and autobiography. In *Speak, Memory* also Nabokov, by using his past memory, writes about his old grandparents and his other ancestors. So, memory plays great role to make *Speak, Memory* fiction. The truth which assumed in the past may not be truth for today because it changes due to the course of time and place. So, in the autobiography also if we write about past events they may change today because the truth assumed as truth in the past may not be truth now.

From the lines written by Gudmundsdottir about Austur, We know the role of memory, She writes:

Auster writes on his life by remembering other lives, other writers, other stories, other texts. He writes about himself in the third person, thereby putting himself beside other characters in other texts he has read. But while writing on these connections and coincidences in other texts he has read. But while writing on these connections and coincidences he emphasizes strongly that they have a completely different meaning in fiction from their place in life writing. Anything that forms a pattern is a collection of meaningless coincidences in real life, whereas if it was part of a plot in a novel the pattern would point to a subtext or symbolism. (28-29)

Like memory the role of forgotten is same to make the autobiographical work fictional. Remembering and forgetting are connected in such a way it is impossible to discuss one without the other. The role of forgotten can be understood from these lines, “We can see in this how writing, memory and forgetting are all inextricably linked in the autobiographical process. Not only can forgetting influence the whole structure of the text, it can also be the very reason for starting to write, as an attempt to retrieve what has been lost” (35).

At the time of writing autobiography the writer writes what he remember and he discards not only those things which he cannot remember but also the things which are not favourable events of his life. In *Speak, Memory* also Nabokov writes only favourable things about his family but he discards the negative parts about his family like aristocratic family background, his own making and changing girl friends are also

not presented negatively. Forgetting is tendency of human being and s/he forgets wither intentionally or unintentionally which makes one's writing fictional.

Autobiography is a process of remembering but it does not represent a smooth flow of memories. There are doubts and hesitation where forgotten is seen. Forgetting plays great role to make fictionality in memory. Writing without forgetting is impossible. Though forgetting is regarded as hindrance to autobiographical writing. In this way, we know the relationship between writing and forgetting from these lines:

Writing an autobiography entails choosing some memories and discarding others. More than that, it also means choosing a forms for these memories, a narrative structure in doing so the autobiographer consciously forgets other interpretations of the same event, other memories that might contradict the one he or she writes about. If remembering is being present to something that was earlier, 'the act of writing it down turns it into the past' and the past is irretrievable. (36)

Another most important element which makes fictionality inside autobiography is editing. People generally think the things which the autobiographer has forgotten is not there but sometimes the same things can be there. Editing offers different version not the true one. It adds more layer to original thing which makes past more obscure and brings fictionality. In the subject of forgetting sometimes people are compelled to forget reality. In fascist societies memory is controlled by powerful people of the society. We can find the same idea into Peter Burke's essay "History as Social Memory" in this way, "It is often said that history is written by the victors. It might also be said that history is forgotten by the victors. they can offered to forget while the losers are unable to accept what happened and are condemned to brood over it, relive it and reflect how different it might have been" (39).

The next point which shows relationship between autobiography and fiction is private memory and public events. Though autobiographer wants to write his/her private memory in his/her autobiography but his/her private memory cannot remain aloof from public events happened in his contemporary life period. In his work *Speak, Memory*, Vladimir Nabokov is also affected by the contemporary events of his time like first world war, Russian civil war. It is because autobiography is related to memory of people and it is society from where people acquire their memories.

Narrative style is next element which brings fictionality in autobiography. Writers narrate the stories of parents, grand parents and great grandparents in their autobiography. At the time of narrating such past events fictionality comes in the autobiography. Nabokov in his autobiography *Speak, Memory* narrativizes the past events of his old family members where the effect of fictionality automatically comes.

Editing is next subject which shows relationship between autobiography and fiction. Mainly it is believed that autobiographer never writes what he has forgotten but at the time of editing forgotten things may be the part of the memory he or she is writing on. Gunthorunn Gudmundsdottir also says by giving the example of Perec's text that his text is riddled with footnotes, correction and gaps. It means at the time of writing footnotes, corrections and gaps in autobiography forgotten things come there and there is possibility of the presence of fictionality in autobiography. David Bellos believes this absence is central to Perec's work as he writes:

[It] is explicitly built on nothing, on the absence that lies at the heart of the language, and which is the truest expression of the self. Perec described himself as being like a child who does not know what he wants or fears the most: to say hidden, or to be found. In fact there is no tension in Perec's work between self affirmation and denial. What

he achieved through intense reflection on the writer's material [...] is the paradoxical assertion of the self by the conscious construction of its absence. (37)

This above extract gives us the idea that generally people think writer cannot write the forgotten things upon his writing but that is not always true. At the time of editing the writer can write whatever he had forgotten before. Like the child's uncertainty about either he fears the most! to stay hidden or to be found. In the same way, according to Perec at the time of writing the writer can forget sometimes and while editing he can remember that pervious one is right or the later one. This paradoxical nature of writing shows the relationship between autobiography and fiction in any work of art.

In the same manner to show the relationship between autobiography and fiction Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir writes:

One could say that the awareness of the elusiveness of memory, the presence of the forgotten, causes a constant questioning in the texts, 'a hypercritical presence' that is apparent to a greater or lesser degree in most autobiographies. Fiction is, of course, a good device to gloss over memory lapses. But this is not the role of the fictional chapter in Perec's text, or if it is, it is in a much more subtle way than we usually presume. He dose not fill in memory lapse and make up stories. Instead he includes a horrific fictional tale of a fascist society. The process of editing is so apparent that it become an obstacle course in the chapters on childhood memories but it is nowhere evident (or is a least discreet) in the fictional tale. (38)

Here writer wants to show the political influence upon writing. For him in the fascist societies not reality plays true role because in Fascist societies people cannot

remember freely Even their memory is also influenced by the contemporary socio-political atmosphere of the society. In the same way, Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* cannot remain aloof from this effect. Though he wants to write only truth events upon his autobiography *Speak, Memory*, in any way it is affected by his aristocratic social background and the political events at that time like-First World War, Russian Civil War and Second World War. So, it shows the clear relationship between autobiography and fiction in Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*.

To clarify this idea more Gudmundsdottir brings Peter Burke's words in his essay. He writes, “It is often said that history is written by the victors. It might also be said that history is forgotten by the victors. They can afford to forget, while the losers are unable to accept what happened and are condemned to brood over it, relieve it, and reflect how different it might have been” (39).

From the given lines we know that history, which traditionally regarded as fact is written by the people who are victorious or who are in power. So, what they write is upon their own favour. They neglect the losers. But the powerless people are compelled to follow what is written by the powerful. So, this also helps us to show fictionality into Vladimir Nabokov's work *Speak, Memory*. His autobiographical work is intentionally or unintentionally affected by his social and political position. That creates fictionality in the text, *Speak, Memory*.

To prove the fact that the relationship between autobiography and fiction writer gives the example of Paul Auster. Auster talk about the work of French Poet. To show how seeing, remember and writing are related Auster brings the work of French Poet. In his work *The Invention of Solitude* he says:

Memory, then, not so much as the past contained within us, but as proof of our life in the present. If a man is to be truly present among

his surrounding, he must be thinking not of himself, but of what he sees. He must forget himself in order to be there. And from that forgetfulness arises the power of memory. It is a way of living one's life so that nothing is ever lost. (44)

Here, it is said to write the truth about one's surrounding he must forget himself because he should remember what he sees. The forgetfulness is necessary to arise the power of memory. So, the same idea we can find in *Speak, Memory*. To remember the past event Nabokov must forget his present condition. Only then memory about his past things he forgets present truth. In this way, in his work *Speak, Memory* fictionality enters in the name of remembering past events.

The next element which shows the relation between autobiography and fiction is private memories and public events while remembering history to prove this Gudmundsdottir says:

Remembering is not only a personal matter necessary for our sense of identity and mental well-being, it is also a very public matter, formed by social situations and often politically contentious. Our lives are intricately and sometimes drastically linked to and / or inseparable from what happens in the society we live in. And the same is true for our memory: "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories. (45)

By the above lines we are clear that memory of the people cannot remain aloof from the public events of the society. So, pure and personal work is impossible because without memory writing cannot be possible. To clarify this idea the writer gives the example of Georges Perec's work *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*. In this book, Perec has

written that his life was influenced by the Second World War. It means Nabokov's work *Invitation of a Memory* is really influenced by the events like the World War I, Russian Civil War and World War II.

Narrative is another important element which creates borderline between autobiography and fiction. Narrative is concerned with organization or making sequence of the events. Writers narrate their favourable events frequently but the events which they want to keep inside the shade they narrate them rarely.

So, above discussion attest to the fact that autobiography can offer base from which to examine the role of narrative structure as a meaning making process. The type of narrative structure and organization autobiographer choose is clearly linked to the autobiographical identity they create. Doubt is in these texts about the causality narrative structure establishes reflect doubt about the possibility of writing a definitive account of one's life and an awareness of the fictional aspect of all narrative.

III. Autobiography and Fiction in *Speak, Memory*

Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* can be recounted as both autobiography and fiction. He destabilizes the boundary between autobiography and fiction by creating confusion on readers. He writes both accurate autobiography and fiction in its parameter. *Speak, Memory* is an Autobiography in the sense that it is written with first person pronoun I and I's relation with other family members and of this generation forwarded by his old generations through second hand information indicates the autobiography's fictional autobiography.

Rewriting of memory forgetfulness of the past events is further indicated that *Speak, Memory* is fictional. Here, in his autobiography *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* Nabokov has written about his old family members by remembering. He writes about his old generations by asking to seniors. He has tired to transcend the limits of mortality by reaching back to a time before his birth.

In chapter three of the autobiography *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*, he says:

According to my father's first cousin Vladimir Viktorovich Golubtos, a lover of Russian antiquities, whom I consulted in 1930, the founder of our family was Nabokov Murza. (floruit 1380), a Russianized Tatar prince in Muscovy. My own first cousin, Sergey Sergeevich Nabokov, a learned genealogist, informs me that in the fifteenth century our ancestor owned land in the Moscow principality. He refers me to a document (published by Yushkov in *Acts of the XIII-XVII centuries*, Moscow, 1899) concerning a rural squabble which in the year 1494, under Ivan the Third, squire Kulyakin had with his neighbours, Filat, Evdokim, And Vlas, sons of Luka Nabokov. (17)

From the above lines we know that in *Speak, Memory*, Vladimir Nabokov has known about his past generation or ancestors by asking the information from old people. He knew from his father's first cousin Vladimir Viktorovich Golubtsov, a lover of Russian antiquities whom he consulted in 1930 that the founder of his family was Nabokov Murza (flourished 1380), a Russian Tatar prince in Muscovy. So, here Nabokov knows about his ancestors by asking old people of the village and consulting with them about his family. So, this kind of information proves the autobiography as fiction because writing about one's family by getting information from third person cannot be totally reliable. Nabokov also says:

Carl Heinrich Graun, the great grandfather of *Ferdinand Von Korff*, my great grandfather, was born in 1701, at Wahrenbruck, Saxony. His father, August Graun born (1670), an Exciseman (Koniglicher Polnischer and Kurfurstlicher Sachsischer Akziseneinnehmer "- the elector in question being his namesake, August II, king Poland) came from a long line of parsons. His great-great-grandfather, Wolfgang Graun, was in 1575, organist at Plauen (near Wahrenbruck), where a statue of his descendant, the composer, graces a public garden. (18-19)

From these lines above, we can say that in his autobiography the writer has included the past events. He has written about his third or fourth previous generation. So, all what he has written are not facts because a person cannot know about his own life in totally correct manner but here the writer has written the events which occurred three or four century before. This kind of writing also helps to this autobiography to be fictional.

Martin Hagglund in his work review "Chronophilia: Nabokov and the Time of Desire" says:

To inscribe something is first of all an act of memory. Regardless of what, to whom or why i write, my word become traces of the past at the very moment when they are imprinted. Accordingly, writing has a capacity to store historical data, to document and record what has taken place. When someone reads my text i may already be dead, or the significance of my words may not longer be the same. Moreover, the inscription themselves always risk being erased. (447)

Above lines say that without memory no writing is possible. This same idea is applicable here in Nabokov's *Speak Memory* too. Here is also what he has written become traces of the past at the very moment when his work is imprinted, which makes it fictional. But here he has also written historical data, documents and record which make *Speak Memory* autobiography.

Next ground upon which we can say *Speak, Memory* as fictional is remembering. When one write about his past he writes it by remembering. Here in chapter four of *Speak, Memory* also the writer has written about his childhood days with the help of remembrance. He says:

A quarter of a century later, i learned two things: that Burness, by then death, had been well known in Edinburgh as a scholarly translator of the Russian romantic poems that had been the alter and frenzy of my boyhood, and that my humble drawing master, whose age i used to synchronized with that of grand uncle and old family servants, had married a young Estonian girl about the time I myself married. When a learned these later developments, i experienced a queer shock, it was as if life had impinged upon my creative right by wriggling on beyond

the subjective limits. So elegantly and economically set by childhood memories that i thought i had signed and sealed. (39)

In the given lines the writer has written the things of remembrance. While writing this autobiography *Speak, Memory* he writes upon it about his childhood days. Though now he is a matured man he is writing his boyhood days by remembering his childhood. He remember that Burner was poet for whom he was frenzy in his childhood and he was his master. He also remembers that he had married the same woman to whom his teacher Burness had married, about which he was unknown in his past but now he is remembering. This event of the autobiography also makes it fictional because no one can remember exactly what was happened in the past. At the time of remembering about past events fictionality automatically comes there.

According to Gudmundsdottir the next ground which brings fictionality upon autobiography is forgetfulness. Forgetting is special characteristic feature which every human being has. At the lime of writing every writer writes the things whatever is inside his memory but all the facts cannot remain inside people's mind. Sometimes it is possible that he had remembers what was did really happen in the past. That nature of forgetfulness also brings fictionality upon any autobiographical work. Here in the autobiography *Speak, Memory* by Nabokov in seventh part of fifth chapter he writes:

There is an appendix to Mademoiselle's story. When i first wrote it i did not know about certain amazing survivals. Thus, in 1960, my London cousin Peter de Peterson told me that their English nanny, who had seemed old to me in 1904 in Abbazia, was by now over ninety and in good health; neither was i aware that the governess of my father's two young sisters, Mlle Bouvier (later Mme Conrad), survived my father by almost half a century. She had entered their household in

1889 and stayed six years, being the last in a series of governesses. A pretty little keepsake drawn in 1895 by Ivan de Peterson, Peter's father, shows various events of life at Batovo Vignette over an inscription in my father's hand: A celle qui a toujours su se faire aimer et qui ne saura jamais se faire oublier; signatures have been appended by four young male Nabokov's and three of their sisters, Natalia, Elizaveta, and Nadezhda, as well as by Natalia's husband, their little son Mitik, two girl cousins and Ivan Aleksandrovich Tihotsik, The Russian Tutor.

(53)

Above lines prove how forgetfulness makes a work of autobiography fictional. Nabokov had forgotten about the English Nanny about whom his cousin Peter de Peterson had told him. He has also forgotten about his father's two youngest sisters, governesses. Though the writer has forgotten about the reality of those old governesses, he has written about them whatever a bit memory about them in his mind. So, it brings fictionality in *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*.

Nabokov writes other people's biography through his autobiography. In chapter nine of the autobiography he has composed the autobiography of his father. He writes:

Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, jurist, publicist and statesman, son of Dmitri Nikolaevich Nabokov, Minister of justice, and Baroness Maria von Korff, was born on July 20, 1870, at Tsarskoe Selo near St Petersburg, and was killed by an assassin's bullet on March 28, 1922, in Berlin. Till the age of thirteen he was educated at home by French and English governess and by Russian and German tutors; from one of the latter he caught and passed on to me the *passio et morbus*

aureliani. In the autumn of 1883, he started to attend the "Gymnasium" (corresponding to a combination of American "high school" and "junior collage") on the then Gagarin Street (presumably renamed in the twenties by the shortsighted soviets). (86)

Above lines by Nabokov show the biography of his father. He writes about the profession of his father and his father's date of birth. He also writes how his father was killed by the assassin's bullet on March 28, 1922, in Berlin. He also writes his father was taught by the English governess and Russian and French tutors. All of these information given by him about his father are not totally reliable because if a person writes about himself it may not totally true but here he is writing about his father. So, what he write about his father are the informations he heard by others he knows after reading about his father. So, biography through autobiography cannot be totally factual. This also makes *Speak, Memory* fictional.

Gudmundsdottir says the next element which shows the relation between autobiography and fictional is private memories and public memory. In the autobiography Nabokov has written his memory and which does not totally depend upon him. Memories are two kinds: public and private memory. Whatever comes at human's mind is not all his own because he is really in touch with the society and history. So, in the second part chapter nine Nabokov says:

When the Soviet Revolution made it imperative for us leave St. Petersburg, that library disintegrated, but queer little remnants of it kept cropping up abroad. Some twelve years later, in Berlin, I picked up from a bookstall one such waif, bearing my father's *exlibris* Very fittingly it turned out to be *The War of the Worlds* by Wells. And after another decade had elapsed, I discovered one day in the New York

public library, indexed upon my father's name, a copy of the neat catalogue he had privately printed when the phantom books listed therein still stood, ruddy and sleek, on his shelves. (90)

By the above lines Nabokov wants to expose his memory. Though he may think he was expressing the private memory it is not real. His memory is affected by the social events which took place in his contemporary time. He says the Russian Revolution compelled them to leave their hometown St. Petersburg. He also says he had taken a book from public library by his father's card. So, the memories whatever he has written are affected by the socio-economical condition of his contemporary period. So, the memory affected by society cannot be personal and factual.

Another place which makes the autobiography fictional is in fifth part of chapter 13 he is remembering his past days and says:

When, after an absence of almost seventeen years I revisited England, I made the dreadful mistake of going to see Cambridge again not at the glorious end of the Easter term but to the raw February day that reminded me only of my own confused old nostalgia. I was hopeless trying to find an academic job in England (The ease with which I obtained that type of employment in the U.S.A. is to me, in back thought, a constant source of grateful wonder). In every way the visit was not a success. I had lunch with Nesbit at a little place, which ought to have been full of memories but which, owing to various changes, was not. He had given up smoking. (135)

Above lines are Nabokov's expression of his remembering of past days when he was seventeen years old he had revisited to England and he found his journey unsuccessful. He is also remembering his hardship when he felt while searching job at

England. He is also remembering about his friend Nesbit and the changes he found on him at his next coming. So, here he is writing his remembrances that bring fictionality in *Speak, Memory*.

The photographs used in the autobiography also make it fictional because the photograph used in page 106 by the writer. Here, the photo belongs to the author aged nineteen, with his brothers and sisters, in Yalta, November 1918. Krill is seven; Sergy (unfortunately disfigured by flow in the picture), wearing a rimless prince-nez and the uniform of the Yalta Gymnasium, is eighteen; Olga is fifteen; Elena (firmly Claspig Box II) is twelve (106). Here, in the picture his brother Sergey is disfigured. So, we cannot say exactly on how he really was. So, this kind of photograph also makes the autobiography fictional.

Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* is genuinely an autobiographical work. It lies under the genre of autobiography. We can find the fictionality inside this because he has written this from the view point of the past. Here, he has narrated past events and the story and biography of his old family members and other ancestors.

It is autobiography in the sense that, autobiography is a genre upon which the writer writes his self. Expression of the self is the essence of autobiography. So, through this work the writer has expressed his own history and contemporaneity. In this work Nabokov has described the events or great historical events like the World War I, World War II and Russian Civil War. He has written factual events upon it so we can say this autobiography. In the same way, in this work *Speak, Memory* Nabokov has written his own personal events, he has also presented here the description of his family members. His parent's description, his brother's and sister's description all lie inside the category of autobiography. By the help of these things

expressed in this work we validly can regard *Speak, Memory* by Russian American writer Vladimir Nabokov is autobiographical work of art.

In the course of describing his contemporary events in chapter one, part three Vladimir Nabokov says:

The place is of course Abbazia, on the Ardiatic. The thing around my wrist, looking like a fancy napkin ring, made of semitranslucent, pale-green and pink, celluloidish stuff, is the fruit of a Christmas tree, which Onya, a pretty cousin, my coeval, gave me in St. Petersburg a few months before. I sentimentally treasured it until it developed dark streaks inside which I decided as in a dream were my hair cuttings which somehow has got into the shiny substance together with my tears during a dreadful visit to a hated hairdresser in nearby Fiume. On the same day, at a water side cafe, my father happened to notice, just as we were being served; two Japanese officers at a table near us, and we immediately left-not without my hastily snatching a whole *bombe* of lemon sherbed, which i carried away secreted in my aching mouth. The year was 1904. I was five. Russia was fighting Japan. With hearty relish, the English illustrated weakly Miss Norcott subscribed to reproduced war pictures by Japanese artists that showed how the Russian locomotives-made singularly toylike by the Japanese pictorial style-would drown if our Army tried to lay rails across the treacherous ice of Lake Baikal. (4)

By the above lines Nabokov has described an event which took place in Abbazia, on the Ardiatic. He says that when he and his father were being served at a waterside cafe they saw two Japanese officers near the table and they escaped from there. Here,

he has described the event of 1904 when he was only five years old. Here, he also informed us that at that time there was fight between Russia and Japan. By seeing this kind of real historical events which occurred in real life history in the past we say *Speak, Memory* as autobiographical work of art.

In the same manner the next event which happened to his life time was that his father was imprisoned by the Tsar for long time and later left. His father's assassination by Tsar also proves this *Speak, Memory* as autobiography. In chapter one, fourth part he says:

When, in July 1906, the Tsar unconstitutionally dissolved the parliament, a number of its members, my father among them, held a rebellious session in Viborg and issued a manifesto that urged the people to resist the government. For this, more than a year and a half later they were imprisoned. My father spent a restful, if somewhat lonesome, three months in solitary confinement, with his books, his collapsible bathtub, and his copy of J.P. Meller's manual of home gymnastics. To the end of her days, my mother preserved the letters he managed to smuggle through to her-cheerful epistles written in pencil on toilet paper (these i have published in 1965, in the fourth issue of Russian language review *Vozdushnie Puti*, edited by Roman Grynberg in New York). (6)

By the above lines Nabokov has informed us the real events occurred in Russia during 1906. At that time the Tsar had dissolved the parliament and they imprisoned the writer's father also because he was also a member of a parliament at that time. We also know from here that Nabokov's father was imprisoned one and half in a lonely confinement. Later when he was released, a village schoolmaster managed a great

party due to that happy condition. We know from these lines that the Tsar had continued their monopoly at that time in Russia. Here, Nabokov has given portrayal of contemporary history and his father's real condition. We also know that he was Member of Parliament of contemporary Russian. So, it is an autobiography.

The next essence which proves *Speak, Memory* us autobiography that in Chapter Second, part four he has given the description of his mother. He says:

With great clarity, I can see her sitting at a table and serenely considering the laid-out cards of a game of solitaire; she leans on her left elbow and presses her cheek the free thumbs of her left hand in which, close to her mouth, she holds a cigarette, while her right hand stretches toward the next card. The double glim on her fourth finger is two marriage rings-her own and my father's which, being too large for her, is fastened to hers by a bit of black thread. (16)

From the above lines the writer has given the description of his mother. We know from here that his mother plays card and we also know about her sitting style. His mother's smoking habit is also presented here. His mother has worn two marriage rings of his father's and next one is of her own. So, the description of his mother also shows autobiographical quality in this work.

The next logic to prove this work autobiography is that, Nabokov has given the genuine description of his father. In chapter nine, part second he writes:

He still came, almost daily, however, to spar or fence with my father. I would dash, with my fur coat half on, through the green drawing room (where an odor of fir, hot wax and tangerines would linger long after Christmas had gone), toward the library, from which came a medley of stamping and scraping sounds. There, I would find my father, a big

robust man, looking still bigger in his white training suit, thrusting and parrying, while his agile instructor added brisk exclamations ("Battez!" "Rompez!") to the click-clink of the foils. (90)

Here Nabokov has given us the information that the sound of his father is very loud. He also gives other bodily description of his father. His father was strong and robust man. He took part in training also. He writes his father was influential politician of his time in Russia. He had become minister also. This type of real description of family member is also enough proof to say *Speak, Memory* autobiography.

We find *Speak, Memory* fictional by the lines written by John Burt Foster in his writing, "Nabokov before Proust: The Paradox of Anticipatory Memory," says:

Later on, Ganin concludes that since the mood of anticipation was initially so important, his picture of that summer must derive as much from imagination as from literal truth. He can remember Mary so vividly only because 'their imaginary meeting and the meeting which took place in reality had blended and merged imperceptibly into each other.' Some such close relation between memory and imagination is, of course, a literary common place ; but we should notice that Ganin's insight foreshadows a guiding assumption behind Nabokov's very idea of an art of memory, that artifice is an unavoidable part of remembering and counts as much as fact. Even more striking, however, is the attribution of this necessary fictive element to anticipation rather than retrospection. (80)

By the above lines John Burt Foster says anticipation and imagination are closely interrelated subjects. He also says Ganin's inside foreshadows the guiding assumption

behind Nabokov's very idea of an art of memory. So, in *Speak, Memory* also he has strongly used his art of memory which makes art fictional.

In the subject matter of making *Speak, Memory* fictional by Nabokov's use of photographs Laurence Petit in his article, "Speak, Photographs? Visual Transparency and Verbal Opacity in Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*" says:

Moreover, what is particularly striking in the case of this photography is that the actual photographs are not merely included in the text to illustrate and authenticate it, but are in turn accompanied by illustrating captions whose increasing length and density reveals that Nabokov favours the powers of the written word far more than those of the visual image. And what is even more interesting in those captions is that what the writer particularly relishes in those written words is their capacity to be opaque and misleading, and thus to obscure rather than clarify the meaning of the photographic image. (7)

Here, Laurence Petit says that Nabokov has used not the actual photographs in his work but he has used illustrating captions whose increasing length and density reveals that Nabokov favors the power of the written words far more than visual image. If the photographs he has used in *Speak, Memory* are not actual, they make it fictional.

Will Norman shows *Speak, Memory* as autobiography. He shows the historical event of Nabokov's life as he says how Nabokov's father was died in this way:

He was arrested, accused of being a "British Spy" and sent to a Hamburg concentration camp where he died of inanition, on 10 January 1945. It is one of those lives that hopelessly claim a belated something-compassion, understanding, no matter what-which the mere recognition of such a want can neither replace nor redeem. (85)

By the above lines we know the personal historical background of Vladimir Nabokov. His father died in concentration camp and he has accused as a "British Spy". It also shows the cruelty of the revolution and Nabokov's personal history which makes *Speak, Memory* an autobiography.

The next point which supports to make *Speak, Memory* autobiography is that we find Nabokov's sexist and love making nature with many girl friends in the work. Here, he makes affair with girls like Palenka, Tamara, Colettee. In this chapter twelve, part he says:

Not only is the experience in question, and the shadows of all those charming ladies useless to me now in recomposing my past, but it creates a bothersome defocalization, and no matter how I worry the screws of memory, I can not recall the way Tamara and I parted. There is possibly another reason, too, for this blurring. We had parted too many times before. During that last summer in the country, we used to part forever after each secret meeting when, in the fluid blackness of the night, on that old wooden bridge between masked moon and misty river, I would kiss her warm, wet eyelids and rain chilled face, and immediately after go back to her for yet another farewell and then long, dark, wobbly uphill ride, my slow, laboriously pedaling feet trying to press down the monstrously strong and resilient darkness that refused to stay under. (119)

According to theorist of autobiography, autobiography is expression of self. In the above lines the writer has shown his personal life. Here, he has shown his totally private and personal life events. He writes his meeting with a girl named Tamara and the behaviours happened between and among them and also their separation from

their affair. This kind of fact given by the writer in the text helps us to prove my logic that *Speak, Memory* is autobiographical work of art. The photographs given in the text, which picturize him with his family members, him alone and his brother and sister proves *Speak, Memory* autobiography.

We know from Linda Anderson's *Autobiography* that autobiography is the presentation of the self. So, here in *Speak, Memory* Vladimir Nabokov has presented his private life from his birth to his old age. His description of family members and relatives, his personal interest of moth collecting, playing and learning different languages are all his private life events. His love affair with many girls, marriage with Vera and giving the description of his son Dmitri Vladimirovich Nabokov all are his expression of self. So, we can regard this work *Speak, Memory* as autobiographical work of art.

So, to prove my research point that *Speak, Memory* is both autobiography and fiction I gave the textual proofs. Nabokov's description of ancestors by gaining second hand information, his talking about past many years before, his use of memory to describe the events, forgetfulness and photographs, which are mutilated prove this work fiction and his expression of self and historical events, and description of family and family members makes it autobiography.

IV. Conclusion: Insertion of Fact and Fiction in *Speak, Memory*

Vladimir Nabokov's work *Speak, Memory* is both autobiography and fiction. It is autobiography in the sense that through it Nabokov has described his personal life using the pronoun 'I' in the whole text. His personal behaviours like moth collecting and desire to learn different languages are the facts which prove this work autobiography. In the same way, according to theorists' of autobiography, autobiography is the expression of the self. Here, in the text, all his private facts, his description of contemporary historical events like First World War, Second World War and Russian Civil War, description about parents and his use of photographs, with his relative and other family members all lie under the witnessing point of calling *Speak, Memory* as autobiography.

In the same manner, *Speak, Memory* is fiction also, though it is the expression of the self of the Vladimir Nabokov but not only that. Here, he has also given the past history of his ancestors before three or four century ago. He has written about his ancestor by asking information from his old relative and villagers. In chapter three he has written about the founder of his family Nabokov Murz, a Russian prince in Muscovy. Most of the time he has written from the perspective of the past in this work. So, the presence of the past automatically brings fictionality in *Speak, Memory*. Remembering is next ground upon which *Speak, Memory* is fictional because people cannot exactly remember the past things. At the time of remembering the possibility of adding something and leaving something is mostly possible. In chapter four he has written about his childhood days with the help of remembrance.

Forgetfulness is another element which makes *Speak, Memory* fictional. Forgetting is essential human nature. No man can remain totally fresh always. So, here in *Speak, Memory* Nabokov has written about his past forgotten events. He is

expressing his forgotten things through his memory. So, there is always possibility of adding new and leaving the real things.

Nabokov's portrayal of his father's biography through his own autobiography in chapter nine also makes *Speak, Memory* fictional because it is difficult for people to write real things about self but writing real events about other cannot be totally factual about his father's profession, interest and his inclination towards politics. He also describes the historio-political events by regarding the Tsars as cruel but it may be possible that politician of that time were more cruel than Tsar.

In the second part of chapter nine Nabokov talks about his own experience. Here he also talks about the contemporary socio-political events which directly affect his personal memory. So, from the respective of personal memory and private memory also *Speak, Memory* is fictional.

Photographs used in this work helps to make this work both autobiography and fiction. The photos he gives here are with his family members and relatives. They give the real information about him but the photos which are mutilated due to technical or other draw backs cannot give real information. Rather they create fictionality upon it.

In this way, by getting the expression of self written by using the pronoun 'I' in the whole text, description of family members and other historical contemporary events and written from the perspective of past, use of memory, forgetfulness, public and private memory, and photographers, we can say that Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* is both autobiography and fiction.

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