

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

A ROADMAP TO *LOLITA*

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Spring 2012

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for a baccalaureate degree  
in English  
with honors in English.

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## ABSTRACT

Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* has been dismissed by readers, educators, and literary scholars as a perverse account of a pedophilic man's obsession with a young girl. This categorization ignores the ingenious design of the novel itself, and falls prey to the Foreword's warning against a stagnant reading of *Lolita*. In this paper, I provide a roadmap to the novel which guides the reader through its maze-like design. I explore the ways in which both author and narrator implant clues throughout the text, which could easily be ignored by the careless reader. However, I argue that these clues signify a fateful design of *Lolita*, controlled somewhat by Humbert himself. I then direct the reader to take part in the game of the novel by following the paths these clues create. The paths begin with Lolita's Ramsdale class list, appearing on the backside of a United States map, and end with the implications of the seemingly infinite literary allusions and generic parodies this list contains. Arriving at our destination suggests that the solution to the game rests with Humbert's invention of his confessional tale – as the ultimate element of a parodied confession must be neglecting to confess to anything truthful at all. I provide evidence for this reading through Nabokov's creation of an impossible timeline in the final pages of *Lolita* and Humbert's continuous tampering with the purported evidence throughout his narrative. Finally, I conclude that Humbert's manuscript is actually his transcription of an embellished dream which comprises very little truth.

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## INTRODUCTION

### How to Read *Lolita*

Vladimir Nabokov creates a seemingly unnavigable story in *Lolita*. His “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” names Gray Star as the novel’s capital, a fittingly ambiguous start or end point for the entangled web of roads criss-crossing its narrative. The novel is at once an obsessed man’s travel narrative across the United States and a guide full of clues and signposts driving the reader through its haze. After Humbert’s cross-country trip with Dolores ends in Beardsley, he proffers a useful metaphor for the roadmap which I will construct:

We had been everywhere. We had really seen nothing. And I catch myself thinking today that our long journey had only defiled with a sinuous trail of slime the lovely, trustful, dreamy, enormous country that by then, in retrospect, was no more to us than a collection of dog-eared maps, ruined tour books, old tires, and her sobs in the night—every night, every night—the moment I feigned sleep. (176)

Enough critics have maneuvered through the sinuous trails of slime residing on the surface of Nabokov’s work; they place their focus upon Humbert’s pedophilic acts rather than the structure underpinning his narrative. Because of *Lolita*’s allegedly pornographic and obscene content, Nabokov’s attempted publication was met with extreme trepidation. None of the approached publishers in the United States considered printing the manuscript, and the French publisher, Olympia Press, that acquiesced in 1955 held a reputation for collecting novels that would have been censored elsewhere (McGrath).

Fifty years after *Lolita* was published in the United States, reviewers still cling to this taboo subject. An article appearing in *The New York Times*’ Arts Section in

September of 2005, entitled “50 Years on, ‘Lolita’ Still Has Power to Unnerve,” describes the novel as both “upsetting” and “dirty,” claiming “it disturbs us more than ever because pedophilia has moved from the murky, seldom-visited basement of our collective consciousness to the forefront of our moral awareness” (McGrath). To begin to understand Nabokov’s intentions, his true reasons for fighting to publish a novel that could be so easily dismissed as child pornography, we must turn away from the dead end this path of analysis quickly reaches. Simply forcing all that lies within the pages of *Lolita*, those techniques for which Nabokov receives constant praise – his ingenious style, imprint of synesthesia, and maze-like narratives – behind the veil of Humbert’s physical acts misleads the reader.

Instead, Humbert’s dog-eared maps merit the thorough exploration precluded by such skeptics. In his autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov explains his process of constructing a chess problem:

I remember one particular problem I had been trying to compose for months. There came a night when I managed at last to express that particular theme. It was meant for the delectation of the very expert solver. The unsophisticated might miss the point of the problem entirely, and discover its fairly simple, “thetic” solution without having passed through the pleasurable torments prepared for the sophisticated one. (Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* 291)

This passage has been adopted by many scholars as a metaphor for Nabokov’s approach to writing. The surface layer of his work appeases the “unsophisticated,” or in the case of *Lolita*, at least baits those “unsophisticated” readers down Nabokov’s paths of sinuous slime. At the conclusion of Part One of the novel, those readers may have closed the book

forever, left to wonder how they were seduced into the promise of a sex scene between Humbert and Lolita, becoming devastatingly disgusted by their disappointment.<sup>1</sup>

Nabokov's language instead targets the "expert solver," or as Nabokov's biographer, Brian Boyd, describes, "the would-be sophisticated solver' who realizes there's more to the problem (the 'antithesis'); and the rush of surprise and delight awaiting the 'super-sophisticated solver' who reaches the problem's deepest solution (the 'synthesis')" (Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov* 4). Nabokov forges a complex partnership with his readers – he demands an almost unreasonable amount of attention and commitment from them, requiring a keen eye for detail and immense knowledge of his unending allusions, but he in turn rewards his readers with what he terms aesthetic bliss, "that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm" (315). Despite uncovering this fact as "the key to Nabokov," Boyd writes that Nabokov was still not satisfied:

That seems to me the key to Nabokov. He was a maximalist: someone who appreciated, as much as anyone has, the riches the world offers, in nature and art, in sensation, emotion, thought, and language, and the *surprise* of these riches, if we animate them with all our attention and imagination. Yet at the same time he felt that all this was not enough, because he could readily imagine a far ampler freedom beyond the limits within which he feels human consciousness is trapped. (Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov* 5)

His value of freedom and belief that human consciousness is trapped in its own solitary confinement manifests itself through Humbert Humbert's solipsistic memoir, in which he appeals to an imaginary jury with seductive language and almost completely shields the

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<sup>1</sup> Charles McGrath's "50 Years on, 'Lolita' Still Has Power to Unnerve" even claims that *Lolita's* time spent atop best-seller lists can be attributed to "heavy-breathing readers who were disappointed to discover that the racy bits were mostly confined to the first 140 pages."

reader from the title character's point of view. Literary critic Lionel Trilling expresses the misguided view produced by taking a wrong turn at pedophilia's dead end, insisting that Humbert has been beguiled by a corrupted nymphet and that "we have been seduced into conniving in the violation, because we have permitted our fantasies to accept what we know to be revolting" (Tamir-Ghez 65). This reading seems at odds with Nabokov's chess metaphor; if his only goal is to "enlist us, against our will, on Humbert's side,"<sup>2</sup> what purpose does *Lolita's* Part Two hold (Tamir-Ghez 66)?

*Lolita's* nightly sobs, only audible after Humbert's "feigned sleep," begin to break down the roadblocks in the novel when compared to Nabokov's childhood. Raised by two loving parents, whose acceptance and encouragement of his unique brilliance certainly contributed to his success, Nabokov decides to deprive Dolores of this fate. He consistently "[tests] his ideas against their apparent inversion or negation," perhaps giving the reader some insight regarding Dolores' dark childhood (Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* 6). The technique of inversion inherently resists the type of categorization Nabokov loathes, as every idea presented within or beneath the text possesses a reflection that commands attention.

Analyzing the inversion of his Foreword to *Lolita*, penned under the identity Dr. John Ray, Jr., reveals both a cautionary tale against trying to discern the right way to read *Lolita* and an attack on the distinctly wrong way to approach the novel; that is, through any Freudian or sociological lens. The Foreword discloses a scientific account of Humbert's death, the fate of many characters the reader has yet to meet, and urges the

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<sup>2</sup> Taken from a quote by Alfred Appel Jr. One of his readings of *Lolita* suggests that the novel comments on the relationship between author and reader.

reader to see the “dangerous trends” of American culture while “[applying] ourselves with still greater vigilance and vision to the task of bringing up a better generation in a safer world” (5-6). He reports on the novel’s characters “for the benefit of old-fashioned readers who wish to follow the destinies of the ‘real’ people beyond the ‘true’ story,” immediately conveying a malleable presentation of reality in the following lines, as well as across the endless routes of the novel. However, Ray’s note that a certain “Mrs. ‘Richard F. Schiller’ died in childbed, giving birth to a stillborn girl, on Christmas Day 1952, in Gray Star” signals that his Foreword should not be overlooked. But only on a second reading can Mrs. Richard F. Schiller be identified as our heroine, as her married last name is not revealed until two-hundred and sixty pages later. In Nabokov’s Afterword hundreds of pages later, the location is mentioned again for the second and last time. Gray Star, Nabokov tells us, is one of the “nerves of the novel,” “the capital town of the book” where beloved Dolly Schiller dies (316). The appearance of the novel’s capital in Ray’s Foreword implores the reader to start her roadmap here. After finishing the novel, the reader has gone everywhere with Humbert and Nabokov, conceivably seeing nothing if those dog-eared maps have been camouflaged by the sinuous trail of slime and repeated sobs.

Clinching the Foreword’s centrality to our roadmap, Alfred Appel Jr. elucidates

John Ray, Jr.’s real identity:

The first John Ray (1627-1705) was an English naturalist famous for his systems of natural classification. His system of plant classification greatly influenced the development of systematic botany. The reference to Ray is no coincidence. Nabokov was a distinguished lepidopterist... While I was visiting him in 1966, he took from the shelf his copy of Alexander B. Klots’s standard

work, *A Field Guide to the Butterflies* (1951), and opening it, pointed to the first sentence of the section on “*Genus Lycaeides Scudder: The Orange Margined Blues*,” which reads: “The recent work of Nabokov has entirely rearranged the classification of this genus” (p. 164). “That’s real fame,” said the author of *Lolita*. “That means more than anything a literary critic could say.” (326)

Above all else, Nabokov values the discovery spurred by exploration. He assumes the name John Ray, Jr. to encourage his careful readers to partake in the journey he sets forth rather than to reduce the novel to a case study in psychoanalysis or child abuse. We are meant to read John Ray’s Foreword as Nabokov’s first use of parody – in this case, of the 18th century introduction which elicits a specific, fixed reading of the narrative to follow. Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* provides a useful comparison here, as his preface stresses the moral of Moll’s story.<sup>3</sup> Like *Lolita*, *Moll Flanders* chronicles an outlaw through supposedly accurate memorandums. However, Defoe denounces his protagonist before the story even begins:

But as this Work is chiefly recommended to those who know how to Read it, and how to make the good Uses of it, which the Story all along recommends to them; so it is to be hop’d that such Readers will be much more pleas’d with the Moral, than the Fable, with the Application, than with the Relation; and with the End of the Writer, than with the Life of the Person written of. (Defoe 4)

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<sup>3</sup> The full title of Defoe’s novel gives an apt description of the plot: *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders, &c. Who was Born in Newgate, and during a Life of continu’d Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Year a Whore, five times a Wife (whereof once to her own Brother), Twelve Year a Thief, Eight Year a Transported Felon in Virginia, at last grew Rich, liv’d Honest, and died a Penitent. Written from her own Memorandums*. Allusions to Daniel Defoe can also be found within *Lolita*: Buck, Daniel in the *Lolita* class list (51) and an overall parody of the adventure novel epitomized by Defoe’s *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*.

This approach opposes Nabokov's maze-like construction in *Lolita*. The reader should not adhere to a moral of the story, but should rather follow the "Fable" itself in an attempt to solve the puzzle.

In contrast to the readers of *Lolita* who become preoccupied with the sinuous trail of slime and repeated sobs, I will follow Nabokov's direction and search out the nerves of the novel. To voyage through Nabokov's puzzle, I will compose a roadmap to *Lolita*, beginning and ending where he places his final nerve – Gray Star. He tells us to "pick out for special delectation" the hidden nerves of the novel: the Ramsdale class list, Charlotte uttering the word "waterproof," Lo playing tennis, the hospital in Elphinstone, the sound of children playing in a valley that Humbert overlooks toward the end of the novel. Instead, I will connect these "subliminal co-ordinates," while also taking into account the narrative's use of dogs, anagrams, and literary allusions, its confused calendar of events and manipulated evidence to plot my map of *Lolita*. Nabokov makes his own presence known, and thus his secret coordinates significant, within the novel through the character of Vivian Darkbloom, an anagram of *Lolita*'s author. The name itself juxtaposes light with darkness, just as a doctor whose expertise John Ray, Jr. refers to, Dr. Blanche Schwarzmann, combines white with black. Melding these images and colors leads us to Gray Star or some other Arctic locale at different times of the year.

Humbert moves into the Haze household in May 1947, as the Arctic sky is at its brightest and daytime stretches across much of each day's twenty-four hours. Most of Parts One and Two of the novel take place throughout spring and summer (of 1947 and 1949 respectively), during which the Arctic is bathed by the midnight sun that causes

these seasons' twenty-four hours of daylight. The autumnal equinox occurs on September 22 – a date with too much significance to be discussed in this paper's introduction – beginning the shift from twenty-four hours of daylight to twenty-four hours of darkness (see Chapter 3). During this period of darkness cloaking Gray Star and the Arctic Circle, Dolores dies in childbirth. Humbert references the connection between the Arctic's midnight sun and his narrative just once, stating that “dreams under the midnight sun tended to be highly colored” (34). Dolores's story is bracketed by John Ray and Vladimir Nabokov's references to an Arctic town during the twenty-four hour darkness of the winter solstice. But Humbert's first-person narrative is “highly colored” by the brilliance of the Northern Lights during the endless day of the summer solstice. Nabokov's coordinates and Humbert's narrative lead us to the novel's big surprise<sup>4</sup>, that it has all been a dream, commencing under the midnight sun and concluding during an endless polar night.

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<sup>4</sup> This passage concludes Brian Boyd's Introduction to *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, best justifying my own emphasis on Nabokov's multitude of surprises in the readings of *Lolita*: “[Nabokov] ends *Speak, Memory* on this note partly because it sums up his whole artistic credo: his desire to prepare for his readers the sublime surprise of discovery, a surprise that he knows he would ruin were he to point it out himself. Throughout his work he wants to make us gasp with wonder when we see how real things can be behind all that we take for granted; to impart a sense of the artful, deceptive munificence of life, concealing miracles of generosity behind the everyday; to suggest that the world before our eyes is a puzzle, but that its solution lies before us, and that we may somehow be headed toward the 'blissful shock' of discovering life's great surprise” (7).

## CHAPTER 1

*“The clues were actually in italics; but that is not McFate’s way.”*

Throughout *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert takes note of the presence of dogs, creating a motif that cannot be ignored or simply attributed to coincidence. The repeated appearance of dogs does not suggest a static symbol which can be analyzed through one specific lens; rather, the details regarding the type and placement of these dogs warrant attention. In Alfred Appel Jr.’s annotations, Nabokov insists, “The type of writer I am, half-painter, half-naturalist, finds the use of symbols hateful because it substitutes a dead general idea for a live specific impression” (Annotations 364). This seems contradictory, as the John Ray, Jr. reader, abhorred by Nabokov, may be tempted to classify the overarching canine presence within Humbert’s story. However, the meaning does not lie with the symbol itself. Instead the meaning stems from the dogs’ interaction with the text and their connections to one another. In “Uncle Gustave’s Present: The Canine Motif in *Lolita*,” Ole Nyegaard stresses the importance of dogs to the larger picture of the novel, “The dog is only one element within the fabric that makes up the universe of the novel—as the paranoid Humbert correctly surmises, someone outside the scope of his understanding, a synchronizing phantom, has combined these elements” (Nyegaard 140). Commencing with this patterning of canines introduces the role of the reader as detective or explorer – sniffing out the clues definitively placed by Nabokov, but perhaps also not-so-coincidentally noticed by Humbert.

## *Sniffing Out the Clues*

A character named Shirley Holmes runs Lolita's overnight camp, Camp Q, signaling an allusion to Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and to the detective novel (64). Nabokov connects the camp, and in turn Shirley Holmes, with the presence of dogs in *Lolita* during a telephone conversation between Humbert and Lolita. After Humbert tells her that he and Charlotte plan to wed, she replies, "Gee, that's swell...When is the wedding? Hold on a sec, the pup—That pup here has got hold of my sock" (72). Prior to this pup's interference, Humbert brags, "I told [Lolita]—trembling and brimming with my mastery over fate—that I was going to marry her mother" (72). Nabokov creates a subtle convergence of Sherlock Holmes, fate, dogs, and Camp Q – cueing the reader to determine how these concepts relate. Arthur Conan Doyle's Holmes tale, *Wolfhound in the Adventure of the Creeping Man*, hints to the Nabokovian reader how dogs may interplay with the generic detective novel. In Doyle's story, the hound attacks his master at seemingly random times, but the significance of the dates on which these attacks occur cannot go unnoticed by the adroit detective Sherlock Holmes. Paying mind to such details allows Holmes to solve his case, and in turn challenges the reader to seek out the obvious clues hidden in plain sight.

"You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style" (9). Here, Nabokov parodies Holmes' mystery plot, as he reveals Humbert's crime to the reader on the first page of his narrative. Following the clues in a Holmes detective plot just once will lead the reader to solve the mystery, but countless readings of *Lolita* may not yield the same result. Nabokov does not wish his reader to be preoccupied with uncovering Humbert's

crimes, rather he invites his second-reader to use the same process of discovery to expose something entirely separate from said crimes. *Lolita's* clues are not placed to reveal a crime as they would be within an Arthur Conan Doyle story; the first read of *Lolita* cannot even reveal the true mysteries of the plot. At once, Nabokov casts the second-reader as detective and explorer, surely not driven by the purpose to learn what she already knows by page nine – Dolores Haze dies in childbirth and Humbert commits a murder, or two.

The first notable appearance of a dog occurs as Humbert drives down Lawn Street to the Haze household, after learning the McCoo family can no longer act as his host. Humbert recalls, “Speaking of sharp turns: we almost ran over a meddlesome suburban dog (one of those who lie in wait for cars) as we swerved into Lawn Street” (36). Humbert’s use of “meddlesome” to describe a suburban dog, probably a staple of millions of neighborhood streets just like Lawn, immediately elicits the reader’s attention, although only a second-reader could explain how a dog comes to be meddlesome. Dogs do not typically connote interference with a pattern of events, and thus personifying a dog in this way must adopt a purposeful meaning, one that refers instead to another meddlesome agent. Nabokov, through design, and Humbert, through imagery, drop another canine clue as he watches “the fool dog of the prosperous junk dealer next door [run] after a blue car—not Charlotte’s” (73). Humbert’s choice to note that the blue car was “not Charlotte’s” conspicuously hints that this dog will, eventually, have a run-in with Charlotte. The consequences of this encounter are still concealed from the reader,

although she can begin to sense the foreboding mixture of Nabokov's canines and Charlotte's fate.

After Charlotte reads Humbert's journal, in which he indiscreetly chronicles his love for Lolita, and confronts him, she rushes to her mailbox to share her findings. Their neighbor's dog has another plan in mind, as his intrusive nature finally has its desired effect and leads a car to swerve, causing Charlotte's "accidental" death (98). The conclusion of this chapter describes Humbert's assessment of Charlotte's accident:

In result of that weird interview, the numbness of my soul was for a moment resolved. And no wonder! I had actually seen the agent of fate. I had palpated the very flesh of fate—and its padded shoulder. A brilliant and monstrous mutation had suddenly taken place, and here was the instrument. Within the intricacies of the pattern (hurrying housewife, slippery pavement, a pest of a dog, steep grade, big car, baboon at its wheel), I could dimly distinguish my own vile contribution. Had I not been such a fool—or such an intuitive genius—to preserve that journal, fluids produced by vindictive anger and hot shame would not have blinded Charlotte in her dash to the mailbox. But even had they blinded her, still nothing might have happened, had not precise fate, that synchronizing phantom, mixed within its alembic the car and the dog and the sun and the shade and the wet and the weak and the strong and the stone." (103)

This passage presents a man entirely in love with the "agent of fate," who accomplished the feat he could not – murdering Charlotte. "The intricacies of the pattern" could have yielded endless results, many of which need not have led to Charlotte's death. Humbert correctly addresses this aspect of fate, but misconstrues its implications.

The dogs signal the tragic events to come, not acting as a static symbol that Nabokov would reject, but being purposefully placed throughout the novel as clues. The agent of fate can be interpreted as the dogs themselves, or the larger design they signify.

Either way, Humbert mistakenly assumes that his own actions catalyze the domino effect spurred by Charlotte's death. As we will see, Humbert plays no innocent, coincidental part in the events of *Lolita*; the language and rhetoric with which Humbert tells his story intertwine with the truth of the events he portrays.

In a further Nabokovian constructed coincidence, the driver who kills Charlotte after swerving to avoid the dog on Lawn Street is Frederick Beale, an allusion to Francis Beale, who translated Giachino Grecco's *Royall Game Chess-play* into English ("chess, n." OED). Adding chess into the discussion of dogs appearing as clues seals the characterization of the reader as detective, parsing out the clues in this game of *Lolita* to solve the mystery that encompasses the text itself. Similar canine placement occurs with Lolita's interaction with cocker spaniels following her mother's death. Nabokov (or perhaps, Humbert) chooses the breed of dog presented quite carefully – cocker spaniels exude friendliness and kindness, and can be used both for therapeutic reasons as well as sport ("spaniel, n." OED). As Lolita has just become an orphan traveling across the country with her ill-intentioned stepfather, her attraction to such a dog breed does not require Dr. John Ray, Jr.'s analysis.

"Humbert the Hound" only manages to take part in the chase, he does not possess the expertise or desire to provide the comfort any twelve year old girl would need following her mother's death (60). During Lolita and Humbert's first stay at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, Lolita "sank down on her haunches to caress a pale-faced, blue-freckled, black-eared cocker spaniel swooning on the floral carpet under her hand" (117). This childish distraction comes just a few hours before Humbert

permanently robs Lolita of her childhood and catapults her into a world of adulthood for which she is decidedly unready. As he guides Lolita to their hotel room, he describes Lolita leaving the dog “as she would leave [him] some day” (118). The cocker spaniel appears immediately before Humbert rapes Lolita, and follows her tragedy all the way into Clare Quilty’s trap.

After Humbert attempts a parody of a normal life with Lolita in Beardsley before continuing their cross-country travels, Lolita falls ill and must be hospitalized. He calls the hospital to check on his beloved stepdaughter only to learn that a certain Uncle Gustave has checked her out of the hospital with a cocker spaniel pup in tow (246). Gustave Trapp is Humbert’s father’s cousin, whose will led Humbert to the United States. Humbert notes an uncanny resemblance between the driver of the red Aztec convertible that he paranoiacally imagines tailing him and Lolita, and his cousin Detective Trapp. The true identity of this driver, who also pops up sporadically during Humbert’s travels across the United States map, is Humbert’s double Clare Quilty. His double, perhaps noticing Lolita’s earlier interest in the cocker spaniel at Enchanted Hunters, brings her a puppy to sweeten their escape. To Lolita, the puppy signals freedom from Humbert’s controlling grasp but at this point in the novel, it indicates impending doom for our heroine.

### *The Fateful Design of Lolita*

The skeptical reader may be tempted to overlook such a small detail as the presence of canines as a simple coincidence rather than an element of *Lolita* indicative of a larger design. But the careful reading Nabokov requires reveals that the placement of

dogs throughout the novel function as clues, foreshadowing tragic events and mapping out a purposeful design that cannot be entirely truthful. Such patterned coincidences do not exist in reality, and Nabokov's reliance on these clues tells the reader that their meaning does not end with the page on which the dog appears or the breed of each dog in the novel. In fact, the most notable breeds in the novel can serve as hunting dogs, referencing the hunt that commences as soon as Beale's setter instigates Charlotte's death – Humbert and Quilty's mutual chase. Humbert seems to address his author and creator while discussing fate:

Being inclined to be lenient, I only shook my benign head though strictly speaking such visits were taboo, since I felt instinctively that toilets—as also telephones—happened to be, for reasons unfathomable, the points where my destiny was liable to catch. We all have such fateful objects—it may be a recurrent landscape in one case, a number in another—carefully chosen by the gods to attract events of special significance for us: here shall John always stumble; there shall Jane's heart always break. (211)

Humbert's "fateful objects" are indeed "carefully chosen by the gods," or in his case, chosen specifically by his creator, Vladimir Nabokov. The end of the novel drives the events from the very beginning – dogs signal Charlotte's death before it takes place, a cocker spaniel suggests Lolita's eventual escape from Humbert which has yet to have been conceived. This would be impossible without the intervention of either the author himself or Humbert Humbert; in either case, such interference can be understood as tampering with the evidence. The events relayed in *Lolita* could not have occurred exactly as described, leaving us to follow the implications of this discovery by way of the roadmap such carefully planted clues create.

## CHAPTER 2

### *“Darling, this is only a game!”*

Humbert Humbert identifies the intervening force of the novel as fate, personified by the character Aubrey McFate. When referencing the general role of fate, Humbert writes, “The reader has also marked the curious Mirage of the Lake. It would have been logical on the part of Aubrey McFate (as I would like to dub that devil of mine) to arrange a small treat for me on the promised beach, in the presumed forest” (56). Aubrey McFate appears on Lolita’s class list, found on the back of a United States map, suggesting the list is somehow tied to the map of the novel. Nabokov further casts the reader as a player in the game, an explorer in the unknown, a detective in the case that is seemingly already solved, by dropping his name in this deceptively inconsequential context. Aubrey McFate as a character holds no power over Humbert’s life, as his only connection to our solipsistic narrator rests with his surname. Thus, our first step in playing Nabokov’s game lies in dissecting the implications of this rather significant name.

### *Aubrey McFate and Vivian Darkbloom*

The letters “MC” before fate hold no clear purpose aside from combining a common prefix with a common word to construct a viable surname. But Nabokov’s choices are much more purposeful than that – after all, why not assign Aubrey the last name O’Fate, Fateberg, DeFate, MacFate, LeFate, or some other amalgam? The letters “MC” curiously remind the reader (perhaps beginning to adopt some of Humbert’s

paranoia) of Vivian Darkbloom's biography of Clare Quilty, entitled *My Cue*. The reader first meets Clare Quilty in Chapter Eight, as Humbert transcribes a passage from a fictitious book he reads in prison, *Who's Who in the Limelight*:

In looking through the latter volume, I was treated last night to one of those dazzling coincidences that logicians loathe and poets love. I transcribe most of the page:

Quilty, Clare, American dramatist. Born in Ocean City, N.J., 1911. Educated at Columbia University. Started on a commercial career but turned to playwriting. Author of *The Little Nymph*, *The Lady Who Loved Lightning* (in collaboration with Vivian Darkbloom), *Dark Age*, *The Strange Mushroom*, *Fatherly Love*, and others. His many plays for children are notable. *Little Nymph* (1940) traveled 14,000 miles and played 280 performances on the road during the winter before ending in New York. Hobbies: fast cars, photography, pets. (31)

The biographical entry contains numerous intertextual references, all contributing to an impossible symmetry between Humbert and his double, Clare Quilty. The titles of Quilty's plays eerily track Humbert's life – *The Little Nymph* clearly refers to Lolita, although Humbert's obsession with young girls began long before little old Lo; *The Lady Who Loved Lightning* marks Lolita's moment of resistance against being cast as a helpless actor in someone else's play, as she tells Humbert, "I am not a lady and do not like lightning;" *Dark Age* describes Lolita's time with Humbert, and conceivably her time with Quilty as well, as her bright childhood turns decidedly morose following Humbert's arrival; in Beardsley, Lolita sits in a classroom called Mushroom, an indirect connection to *The Strange Mushroom*; *Fatherly Love* provides the most compelling evidence of an unlikely link between Humbert and Quilty by alluding to Humbert's delusional idea of his relationship with Lolita (220, 197). From Clare Quilty's very first appearance in *Lolita*, his identity's ties to Humbert's cannot be severed.

Vivian Darkbloom immortalizes Clare Quilty through her biography, just as Vladimir Nabokov immortalizes Humbert's tale. The name Vivian Darkbloom is an anagram for Vladimir Nabokov, acting as just one of the many word games positioned within the text of *Lolita*. This trick in particular asks the reader to consider the implications of Vivian Darkbloom as Vladimir Nabokov himself. Many critics attribute this anagram to Nabokov's implicit signature within a work that was almost published anonymously. Other critics argue that Nabokov comments on authorship through this simple word game, maintaining that he did not want the true author to escape the reader's perception of the novel. Prior to the actual publication of *Lolita*, and certainly before subsequent revised versions, Nabokov knew this manuscript was not to be published anonymously – Vivian Darkbloom remained intact. The three-layered narrative style suggests that Nabokov did, in fact, want the boundaries between John Ray, Jr., Humbert Humbert, and himself to be a distinct point of analysis, not a collective work authored clearly and exclusively by Nabokov. Rather, the anagram melds Quilty's creator with Humbert's creator, suggesting they can be more accurately described as one identity rather than two distinct characters. Concurrently, Aubrey McFate becomes an agent of fate driven by Nabokov rather than an independent actor; the text cues the reader to delve further into his name, resulting in a path that leads directly to Vladimir Nabokov as the character pulling Humbert's strings.

## *Clare Quilty*

Quilty's importance to Humbert's narrative stems from his character's unbelievable symmetry with our narrator. As each of his plays inherently connect him to Humbert Humbert, so too do his scattered appearances throughout *Lolita*. The end of Humbert's story includes a few lines referencing his pseudonym choice, "And I have toyed with many pseudonyms for myself before I hit on a particularly apt one. There are in my notes 'Otto Otto' and 'Mesmer Mesmer' and 'Lambert Lambert,' but for some reason I think my choice expresses the nastiness best" (308). Each listed possibility is doubled; Nabokov's protagonist cannot exist without a double and Quilty dutifully fills this role.

Humbert classifies Quilty as his evil shadow, dubbing him the "red beast" who chases him across the country only to steal his precious Lolita (219). His assessment of the posters above Lolita's bed inside 342 Lawn Street match his baffling self-designation as this tale's hero and Quilty as the evil antagonist:

I came out of my daze and found myself still in Lo's room. A full-page ad ripped out of a slick magazine was affixed to the wall above the bed, between a crooner's mug and the lashes of a movie actress. It represented a dark-haired young husband with a kind of drained look in his eye...The legend, by the Rev. Thomas Morell, called him a 'conquering hero.'...Lo had drawn a jocose arrow to the haggard lover's face and had put, in block letters: H.H. And indeed, despite a difference of a few years, the resemblance was striking. Under this was another picture, also a colored ad. A distinguished playwright was solemnly smoking a Drome. (69)

This "distinguished playwright" is none other than Clare Quilty, and Humbert perceives this poster arrangement as his triumph over Quilty. Further, he actually believes himself

to be the “conquering hero” in this parodic fairy tale – the knight in shining armor who will save Dolores from her overbearing mother and drab childhood. But Humbert and Quilty each contribute to Lo’s “dark age” and propel her into an irreparably damaged, and short-lived, adulthood.

Quilty seems to follow Humbert wherever he takes Lolita – his marks on Humbert’s course of events paralleling a nagging guilty conscience. His first physical run-in with the father-daughter pair occurs at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, just before Humbert first rapes Lolita. Humbert fears the hotel may be full, recalling, “A row of packed cars, like pigs at a trough, seemed at first sight to forbid access; but then, by magic, a formidable convertible, resplendent, rubious in the lighted rain, came into motion—was energetically backed out by a broad-shouldered driver—and we gratefully slipped into the gap it had left” (117). This scene marks the beginning of Humbert and Quilty’s cat and mouse game, driving the reader to play a part in the game while paying scrupulous attention to the details of their struggle. Nabokov creates a paradox in which the evil force clears the way for our “hero” to commit an unforgivable crime. The coincidence, although possible, is much too unlikely to escape the reader’s attention. A tug of war commences, in which one half of the double permits the other half to contribute to Lolita’s ruin.

Humbert’s advantage in this tug of war rests with his eloquent and persuasive language, he manipulates his story to convey it heroically rather than monstrously. But we know Quilty must also have a way with words, as his successful career playwrighting

proves – the first direct dialogue between Humbert and Quilty in the Enchanted Hunters Hotel demonstrates a much fairer fight than the reader would have previously imagined:

Suddenly I was aware that in the darkness next to me there was somebody sitting in a chair on the pillared porch. I could not really see him but what gave him away was the rasp of a screwing off, then a discreet gurgle, then the final note of a placid screwing on. I was about to move away when his voice addressed me:

“Where the devil did you get her?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I said: the weather is getting better.”

“Seems so.”

“Who’s the lassie?”

“My daughter.”

“You lie--she’s not.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I said: July was hot. Where’s her mother?”

“Dead.”

“I see. Sorry. By the way, why don’t you two lunch with me tomorrow. That dreadful crowd will be gone by then.”

“We’ll be gone too. Good night.” (126-127)

Quilty challenges Humbert at his own game; as Humbert uses language to cast the reader as accessory to his crimes, Nabokov creates a character who abuses Humbert’s tool, invading his well-controlled narrative to effectively characterize him as foolish, even if only for a few lines of dialogue. Quilty masks each of his lines by discussing the weather, successfully hiding his mal-intent from the master of words himself. This shared ability establishes another parallel between Lolita’s pursuers – what are the odds that Humbert meets his match the chapter before he violates Lolita, twenty chapters after he first puts Clare Quilty’s name on paper from prison, eight chapters after the cleverly dropped “waterproof” clue, or in this story at all (89)? Nabokov does not justify these impossible coincidences, rather he advances their unbelievability through increasingly subtle intertextual references, culminating with a scene in which Humbert describes himself and Quilty almost indiscernibly.

As Quilty made possible Humbert and Lolita's stay at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, Humbert's actions at the Elphinstone hospital allow Quilty and Lolita to escape from his grasp. Forging an unlikely partnership, Humbert leaves Lolita unattended at the hospital while she recovers from her illness, inadvertently paving the way for Quilty's turn with his nymphet:

A bright voice informed me that yes, everything was fine, my daughter had checked out the day before, around two, her uncle, Mr. Gustave, had called for her with a cocker spaniel pup, and a smile for everyone, and a black Caddy Lack, and had paid Dolly's bill in cash, and told them to tell me I should not worry, and keep warm, they were at Grandpa's ranch as agreed. (246)

Again, Quilty fools Humbert using his own misconceptions about Quilty's identity and beats our narrator at his own game. In contrast with Humbert's elaborate scheming and carefully chronicled thought process, Quilty needs only a smile and a puppy to lure away Lolita. Quilty manages to follow Humbert and Lolita, cast Lolita in his school play at Beardsley, and kidnap Lolita from a hospital – all while remaining completely undetected by Humbert. How can our suave narrator be so easily duped?

Humbert has warned his readers before, “not to mock me and my mental daze. It is easy for him and me to decipher *now* a past destiny; but a destiny in the making is, believe me, not one of those honest mystery stories where all you have to do is keep an eye on the clues” (210-211). He attributes his utter ignorance of Quilty's identity to a “mental daze” precluding him from recognizing the very clues he drops throughout his narrative, which lead his careful readers straight to Clare Quilty. For two years following Lolita's escape, Humbert scours the country for her and her accomplice only to discover that his solipsistic outlook has concealed the clues necessary to find them. Toward the

end of the novel, Mrs. Richard Schiller contacts Humbert asking for money and at long last the dysfunctional pair reunites, if only for a few awkward moments. Humbert conveys a shift in focus – rather than exhibiting complete preoccupation with Lolita, he still seeks the name of the man with whom Lolita left the hospital all the way back in Elphinstone. Mirroring the obscurity with which Humbert has addressed his double, he does not transcribe the coveted name from Lolita’s lips; instead he writes, “And softly...she emitted, a little mockingly, somewhat fastidiously, not untenderly, in a kind of muted whistle, the name that the astute reader has guessed long ago. Waterproof. Why did a flash from Hourglass Lake cross my consciousness? I, too, had known it, without knowing it, all along” (271-272). The seasoned *Lolita* reader will have no need to seek out this “waterproof” reference, but the act of turning back two hundred pages to locate the only other mention of “waterproof” matches Nabokov’s expectations of his readers – claiming the inability to follow his clues is simply not good enough.

Charlotte Haze speaks the word during their outing with the Farlows at Hourglass Lake. Jean Farlow mentions a rather scandalous nephew, “Next time I expect to see fat old Ivor in the ivory. He is really a freak, that man. Last time he told me a completely indecent story about his nephew. It appears–” (89). While this passage explains the significance of “waterproof,” Ivor’s last name appears some twenty pages before as Charlotte tells Humbert, “We have an excellent dentist. Our neighbor, in fact. Dr. Quilty. Uncle or cousin, I think, of the playwright...let me contact Ivor Quilty first thing tomorrow morning if it still hurts” (63). As Humbert writes his tale from prison, after he has murdered Quilty and lost Lolita, he could have transcribed the course of events

linearly without disguise and trickery – he must see value in shrouding Quilty’s identity until the final chapters of his story. Uncovering the truth is another step in the game of *Lolita*, it is a layer of the narrative that underpins the need to trek through the novel only to secure evidence that “waterproof” leads to Ivor, whose full name is Ivor Quilty, who is the uncle of a playwright, and said playwright must be the Clare Quilty of *Who’s Who in the Limelight*.

### Seeing Doubles

Although Humbert tries to convince his readers that these clues escaped him, his reaction to Lolita’s disclosure suggests differently, as he claims “[he], too, had known it, without knowing it, all along” (272). Humbert and Nabokov collude in hiding these clues in plain sight, for one could not succeed without the other, much like Humbert’s connection to his sometimes unwelcome double, Clare Quilty. Humbert’s choice of pseudonym may on the surface appear arbitrary, but its French pronunciation and allusory purpose imply a deliberate selection. Humbert should be pronounced *ombre*, evoking the French word for shadow – a clear reference to Quilty’s role in *Lolita*. As Alfred Appel Jr. notes in “‘Lolita’: The Springboard of Parody,” *ombre* alludes to the card game played in Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (Appel 220). The rape within Pope’s mock-heroic epic consists of the theft of a lock of hair, satirizing an actual event relayed to the author by a friend. This technique also infiltrates Humbert’s story, as Pope describes this trivial act in heroic terms, Humbert often presents his crimes through the veil of euphemistic

language. The narrator of *The Rape of Lock* references *ombre* in the context of the heroine's immortality:

Think not, when woman's transient breath is fled,  
That all her vanities at once are dead:  
Succeeding vanities she still regards,  
And though she plays no more, o'erlooks the cards.  
Her joy in gilded chariots, when alive,  
And love of ombre, after death survive. (Pope ll. 51-56)

Replacing "ombre" in the final line with our narrator's assumed name then reads, "And love of Humbert, after death survive." This inverts the final lines of *Lolita*, as Humbert writes:

And do not pity C.Q. One had to choose between him and H.H.,  
and one wanted H.H. to exist at least a couple of months longer, so  
as to have him make you live in the minds of later generations. I  
am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments,  
prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only  
immortality you and I may share, my Lolita. (309)

Humbert claims to have been granted a few more months of life for the sole purpose of immortalizing Lolita through the refuge of art; however, his acquired pseudonym refers to another immortalized heroine, one whose love of "ombre" transcends death. This allusion cannot be reconciled with Humbert's stated purpose at the end of the novel, for he believes Dolly will have a long life with Dick Schiller, never hinting that this hope will be unfulfilled. Perhaps this reference accounts for Humbert's chosen name; he knows all along that Dolly dies in childbirth and chooses his pseudonym as a clever ode to himself as well as his masterful immortalization of his love. Of course, if this accurately describes Humbert's logic, he again deceives the reader into believing that he holds no control over the actual events within his story – after all, he only has words to play with.

The game of *ombre* does not conclude with our superficial identification and understanding of Humbert's shadow, rather the novel's structure connotes a much more complex, chess-like game in which the reader must follow every possible path to the hazy truth of *Lolita*.

Humbert tells his reader that "Lo was playing a double game," referring literally to her doubles tennis match, but figuratively to his statement's inherent double meaning as well as his own double, Quilty. The metaphorical doubles match generates endless points of assessment – who comprises each pair? Is the ball always in Humbert's court, or is it really always in Quilty's court? Does this back-and-forth game truly center upon love or nothing but Humbert's delusions (French *l'oeuf* = egg = 0)? But perhaps most significantly, the doubles reference calls attention to Humbert Humbert's doubled name, in a state of constant metamorphosis throughout the novel. Following Humbert and Charlotte's marriage, "McCoo's brother" interviews the newlyweds and records Humbert's name as Mr. Edgar H. Humbert, occupation -- "writer and explorer" (75). Pairing his doubled name with Edgar invariably invokes Edgar Allan Poe's Doppelgänger story, entitled "William Wilson," while reaffirming the reader's role as "explorer" through the clues Humbert places within his confessional tale, often in the form of literary allusions. Alfred Appel Jr. provides a succinct summary of the story's ties to *Lolita*:

The course of *Lolita* and the Humbert-Quilty relationship are telescoped in "William Wilson," which is a first-person confession by a pseudonymous narrator who "fled in vain" from the Double who pursued him from school to school, a rival in scholarship rather than love. Wilson's "shadow" wears the same clothes as he does (Humbert and Quilty share a purple bathrobe), and when,

after traveling to Paris, Rome, Vienna, Berlin, and Moscow, Wilson cannot rid himself of his “brother,” he kills him, just as Humbert is “free to destroy my brother.” (Appel 222)

The scenes during which these protagonists decide to murder their shadowy counterparts warrant further attention, as each confrontation markedly blurs the distinction between the doubles. After Humbert finally determines the identity of his faithful double, he travels to Quilty’s Pavor Manor (or panic manor in Latin, Appel 222) on Grimm Road, finding the “master” exiting a bathroom, “leaving a brief waterfall behind him” (294). Quilty “swept by [Humbert] in a purple bathrobe, very like the one [Humbert] had. He either did not notice [Humbert], or else dismissed [him] as some familiar and innocuous hallucination” (294). As their struggle ensues, Humbert writes, “We fell to wrestling again. We rolled all over the floor, in each other’s arms, like two huge helpless children. He was naked and goatish under his robe, and I felt suffocated as he rolled over me. I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us” (298-299). Humbert purposely confuses the pronouns during this passage to disorient the reader and convey a sense of interchangeability between himself and Quilty. Our narrator takes pause in transcribing this scene to address his readers and discount any tempting comparisons to the “obligatory scene in the Westerns,” stating instead that, “He and I were two large dummies, stuffed with dirty cotton and rags. It was a silent, soft, formless tussle on the part of two literati, one of whom was utterly disorganized by a drug while the other was handicapped by a heart condition and too much gin” (299). In Quilty’s last plea for life, he reverses this characterization, telling Humbert, “You are drunk and I am a sick man” (301). Quilty seems to adopt some level of supernatural power, as Humbert

fires his “Chum” repeatedly but to no avail; Humbert notes that the entire ordeal took more than an hour. Following the ultimate success of Humbert’s murder, he reflects upon the outcome: “He was quiet at last. Far from feeling any relief, a burden even weightier than the one I had hoped to get rid of was with me, upon me, over me. I could not bring myself to touch him in order to make sure he was really dead” (304). After learning of this murder three-hundred pages prior, the reader expects some kind of reprieve, but Humbert quickly informs us that he feels no relief – a strange reaction given his lengthy pursuit of the victim who arguably ruined his life. Although Humbert does not elaborate much upon this feeling, and defends the necessity of his murder until the final page in his confessional tale, we may perceive this “weightier burden” as the discomfort of killing an inseparable part of himself.

“In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself” (Poe, “William Wilson” 233). This quote marks the final line of Poe’s short story, spoken by the double William Wilson to the narrator of the same name. The narrator has become so inseparable from his double that he actually kills himself when intending to murder his double – the same can be said for Humbert, who dies of coronary thrombosis while incarcerated for killing Quilty. The main parallel between these scenes from *Lolita* and “William Wilson” exists in the ambiguous language used to address the doubles, breaking down the barrier separating each pair and presenting a unified, interchangeable identity. Poe relies upon a mirror to cast serious doubt on the existence of the double William Wilson at all; as the narrator stares at his double, facing an insurmountable desire to kill him, he drives his sword into the double

only to find that he stands in front of a mirror and has stabbed himself. Nabokov also employs a reflective surface in the form of water whenever Quilty appears. Humbert identifies toilets as one of his “agents of fate,” and this agent links directly to Quilty, or perhaps Humbert’s own reflection. At the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, Humbert complains that “there is nothing louder than an American Hotel,” citing numerous disturbances to his long-awaited night with Lo (129). As Humbert has already challenged us to be mindful of toilets flushing and Nabokov leads us to Quilty’s identity only through the word “waterproof,” the passage after Humbert’s complaint insinuates Quilty’s pervasive presence:

When that stopped, a toilet immediately north of my cerebellum took over. It was a manly, energetic, deep-throated toilet, and it was used many times. Its gurgle and gush and long afterflow shook the wall behind me. Then someone in a southern direction was extravagantly sick, almost coughing out his life with his liquor, and his toilet descended like a veritable Niagara, immediately beyond our bathroom. And when finally all the waterfalls had stopped, and the enchanted hunters were sound asleep, the avenue under the window of my insomnia, to the west of my wake--a staid, eminently residential, dignified alley of huge trees--degenerated into the despicable haunt of gigantic trucks roaring through the wet and windy night. (130)

Both of these mundane, regular toilet flushes direct the reader to Quilty. Humbert describes the first flush as coming from north of his “cerebellum,” an odd word choice to signify the room above 342. He subtly implies that Quilty himself comes from his cerebellum, or part of his brain, adding evidence to Quilty’s existence only as Humbert’s reflection. The toilet flush adopts Quilty’s characteristics – being “manly” and “energetic” – and exhibits a similar influence over Humbert’s life by shaking the wall behind him both literally and metaphorically. The second flush may also be attributed to

Quilty, as it contains the familiar waterfall reference and addresses his frequent drinking, a vice Humbert also displays. His “waterfall nuisance” eventually nabs Lolita from the Elphinstone hospital, taking her to a ranch featuring “an indoor waterfall” (164, 276). The numerous mentions of water conclude within Humbert’s final chapter, as he writes, “This then is my story. I have reread it. It has bits of marrow sticking to it, and blood, and beautiful bright-green flies. At this or that twist of it I feel my slippery self eluding me, gliding into deeper and darker waters than I care to probe” (308). His “slippery self” exists as the waterproof Quilty, whose murder weighs more heavily on Humbert than Quilty’s watery appearances throughout his plot. Humbert does not care to probe these “deeper and darker waters” because he knows (without knowing) exactly who he will find lurking beneath the reflective surface.

The mirror in Poe’s “William Wilson” and the water in *Lolita* serve the same purpose. Rather than two separate William Wilsons, there exists only the narrator, who has split his psyche into two parts. Nabokov’s disdain for Freudian psychology seeps through many pages of *Lolita*, but that does not discount his use of parody to create his own Doppelgänger pair. The connections between these characters cannot be explained away by coincidence, forcing the reader to consider the veracity of Humbert’s portrayal of his *ombre*. As illustrated by the arrangement of posters on Lolita’s bedroom wall, Humbert casts himself as the well-meaning hero and Quilty as the evil pursuer, aiming to corrupt and violate his innocent nymphet. By parodying Poe’s Doppelgänger story, Nabokov questions the validity of the binary between good and evil; no reader of *Lolita* can close the book and claim to categorize any character as purely good or purely evil.

Nabokov merges the identities of Humbert and Quilty to epitomize the presence of both good and evil within everyone.

This allusion to Poe unlocks a vital clue to solving the game of *Lolita* – Quilty does not simply represent Humbert’s evil shadow, he is only Humbert’s shadow. Humbert paints his story, and the doubling of his purple robe does not reflect an unlikely coincidence. Rather, he selects the same color for his double’s robe because it is familiar to him, and he cannot reveal the actual color of Quilty’s robe because there exists no robe; there exists no Quilty. His identity draws too much from Humbert’s to be understood as a separate entity. The impossibility of Quilty’s existence as described and understood by Humbert becomes the first fictive device distancing Humbert’s narrative from truth. Following the paths Nabokov lays out for his reader yield similar revelations, although analyzing the abundance of allusions in *Lolita* proves to be no easy task.

Elizabeth Phillips’ article, “The Hocus-Pocus of *Lolita*,” discusses extensive parallels between *Lolita* and many of Poe’s other works, surely not developed within the novel by mere chance. Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” introduced his readers to the detective story, with the narrator documenting his friend C. Auguste Dupin’s exploits. The murders of the story’s title are wrongly attributed to a banker and correcting this error requires Dupin’s distinct logic, which leads the investigation to an unlikely perpetrator:

It was a minute anatomical and generally descriptive account of the large fulvous Ourang-Outang of the East Indian Islands. The gigantic stature, the prodigious strength and activity, the wild ferocity, and the imitative propensities of these mammalia are sufficiently well known to all. I understood the full horrors of the murder at once.

“The description of the digits,” said I, as I made an end of reading, “is in exact accordance with this drawing. (Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” 155)

An Ourang-Outang commits the gruesome murders described, which Dupin discovers largely due to the animal’s handprints found on the victims. This echoes Humbert’s description of his own hand as an “ape paw” during a negligible scene in which he meets Rita (258). Perhaps the link comments on Humbert’s style of narration, as he shields the reader from an accurate depiction of events, he consequently conceals his own guilt. Detective Dupin only reveals the true murderer through his attention to clues the police themselves have overlooked, as the reader can only hope to derive an accurate reading of the novel through analyzing the clues hidden just beneath the text (Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” 151-54). The seemingly random references to monkeys throughout *Lolita* further guide the reader to Poe’s story – Humbert sees through “aging ape eyes,” hears with an “ape ear,” walks on “monkeyish feet,” and whines about the difficulty of “[concealing] things--especially when one’s wife keeps monkeying with the furniture” (39, 48, 52, 93). The Ourang-Outang’s owner watched helplessly as the animal murdered his neighbors, and sold the monkey to the Jardin des Plantes, the Parisian zoo, following the horrific incident (Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” 162). With this knowledge in tow, Nabokov’s stated inspiration for *Lolita* inherits its own double:

The first little throb of *Lolita* went through me late in 1939 or early in 1940, in Paris, at a time when I was laid up with a severe attack of intercostal neuralgia. As far as I can recall, the initial shiver of inspiration was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes, who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: this sketch showed the bars of the poor creature’s cage. (311)

While explaining his narrator's solipsistic tendencies through the ape's entrapment inside of a cage, Nabokov also parodies the conclusion of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." If the plot of *Lolita* springs from both a saddened state of solipsism as well as parody, we must prepare ourselves to inspect every camouflaged instance of the technique.

Detective Dupin returns in Poe's "The Purloined Letter" to solve a much less violent mystery – a case of a missing letter. The police force searches the residences of the parties involved quite thoroughly but simply cannot find the letter they seek. As *Lolita* has been established as an inverted detective story, in which Humbert reveals his crime prior to producing any evidence or motive, "The Purloined Letter" arms the Nabokovian reader as literary detective with a methodical means of identifying clues.

After Dupin successfully finds the letter, he explains his reasoning:

For its practical value it depends upon this, and the Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of this identification, and, secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged. They consider only their own ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which they would have hidden it. They are right in this much—that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of the mass; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course. (Poe, "The Purloined Letter" 15-16)

And thus while reading *Lolita*, readers search for clues either where they can imagine placing them, or where they may have previously located such textual clues within other works. As in "The Purloined Letter," Humbert and Nabokov successfully hide their telling clues in plain sight because of the reader's preoccupation with less obvious red-herrings – tracing Nabokov's colored imagery only to learn that he did not equate colors

with static symbols, taking part in Humbert's paper chase only to discover our awareness of Lolita's kidnapper all along, or reaching the end of the novel to little solace, as Humbert's story just does not piece together properly. The detective that both author and narrator require must possess Dupin's skill of delving into the clues so astutely hidden in plain sight.

### *Hidden Nerves of the Novel*

And when I thus think of *Lolita*, I seem always to pick out for special delectation such images as Mr. Taxovich, or that class list of Ramsdale School, or Charlotte saying "waterproof," or Lolita in slow motion advancing toward Humbert's gifts, or the pictures decorating the stylized garret of Gaston Godin, or the Kasbeam barber (who cost me a month of work), or Lolita playing tennis, or the hospital at Elphinstone, or pale, pregnant, beloved, irretrievable Dolly Schiller dying in Gray Star (the capital town of the book), or the tinkling sounds of the valley town coming up the mountain trail (on which I caught the first known female of *Lycaeides sublivens* Nabokov). These are the nerves of the novel. These are the secret points, the subliminal co-ordinates by means of which the book is plotted—although I realize very clearly that these and other scenes will be skimmed over or not noticed, or never even reached, by those who begin reading the book under the impression that it is something on the lines of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* or *Les Amours de Milord Grosvit*. (316)

So Nabokov notes in his Afterword to *Lolita*, mapping out his precious "nerves of the novel" for the devoted reader to seek out and catalog. As Lolita's Ramsdale class list appears on the back of a map, it conceivably acts as the map of the novel, of which Gray Star is the capital. The unbelievable number of literary allusions and intertextual references contained in this list diminishes any possibility of coincidence. These names were carefully selected to evoke a sub-layer of meaning, available only to the

“sophisticated” reader Nabokov desires. Below is the class list in its entirety, or as

Humbert refers to it, “a poem I know already by heart” (51):

Angel, Grace  
Austin, Floyd  
Beale, Jack  
Beale, Mary  
Buck, Daniel  
Byron, Marguerite  
Campbell, Alice  
Carmine, Rose  
Chatfield, Phyllis  
Clarke, Gordon  
Cowan, John  
Cowan, Marion  
Falter, Ted  
Fantasia, Stella  
Flashman, Irving  
Fox, George  
Glave, Mabel  
Goodale, Donald  
Green, Lucinda  
Hamilton, Mary Rose  
Haze, Dolores  
Honeck, Rosaline  
Knight, Kenneth  
McCoo, Virginia  
McCrystal, Vivian  
McFate, Aubrey  
Miranda, Anthony  
Rosato, Emil  
Schlenker, Lena  
Scott, Donald  
Sheridan, Agnes  
Sherva, Oleg  
Smith, Hazel  
Talbot, Edgar  
Talbot, Edwin  
Wain, Lull  
Williams, Ralph  
Windmuller, Louise (51-52)

An initial perusal shows three sets of twins – the Beales, the Cowans, and the Talbots – atypical of any average middle school class. The twins serve as subtle reminders of Humbert and his double, and also comment on the improbability of such overt coincidences between the two characters. To maneuver through this list, I will refer to Gavriel Shapiro’s article devoted to the subject. Although every name holds meaning, I will only focus on those vital to my argument – namely those which allude to literary works suggestive of invention or fantasy within a supposedly truthful, confessional narrative.

### **Beale, Jack and Mary**

See page 13 for an explanation of the reference to Gioachino Grecco’s chess manual, *Royall game of chess play*.

### **Buck, Daniel**

Shapiro posits that the surname refers to James Joyce’s character in *Ulysses*, Buck Mulligan (Shapiro 318). Buck operates as a vehicle of parody in *Ulysses*, and his appearance within Nabokov’s roadmap indicates the importance of parody to understanding *Lolita*. The first name, being rather common, could allude to anyone, but given its pairing with a surname invoking parody, it likely refers to Daniel Defoe, who authored the early confessional novel, *Moll Flanders*. Taken together, the name Daniel Buck urges the reader to perceive Humbert’s tale not as a confession as his own full title

title, *Lolita or the Confession of a White Widowed Male*, suggests, but as a parodic confessional narrative.

### Campbell, Alice

As Vladimir Nabokov translated Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* into Russian, Miss Campbell's first name arouses his assault of generic fairy tale conventions in *Lolita* (Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* 19). After he drugs Lolita at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, he says, "A breeze from wonderland had begun to affect my thoughts, and now they seemed couched in italics, as if the surface reflecting them were wrinkled by the phantasm of that breeze" (131). Following their stay, Humbert boasts that Lolita has entered his "umber and black Humberland," dubbing her his "Frigid Princess" (166). His word choice suggests that he wants to chronicle a fairy tale, not once does he fully depict the horrific events actually taking place. Humbert grants the reader a small glimpse into Lolita's perception of her life, as he writes, "Yes, she said, this world was just one gag after another, if somebody wrote up her life nobody would ever believe it" (273). She sees her life in realistic terms, while a parodied fairy tale ensnares Humbert's rhetoric. He refers to himself as "a comic, clumsy, wavering Prince Charming" and offers Lolita the chance to "live happily ever after" (109, 278). This degree of enchanted language hints at Humbert's delusion, which seems otherwise hidden behind his mission of aestheticizing the monstrosity of his actions.

*Alice in Wonderland* and its sequel, *Through the Looking Glass*, function as a radical euphemism for Lolita's experience with Humbert; Lo finds herself in a black

Humberland, completely incompatible with Alice's fantastical wonderland. Nabokov's professed confessional narrator does not defer to fantastical language accidentally, as he writes in his autobiography, "I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception" (Nabokov, *Speak Memory* 125). Following Humbert's enchanted language marks another step in Nabokov's deceptive game – Nabokov parodies two opposing genres, the confessional and the fairy tale. Rather than chronicling Humbert's journey "through the looking glass," Nabokov instead uses reflective surfaces to emphasize Humbert's insurmountable solipsism and remind the reader of his pesky double, precluding an escape from the prison of his mind, let alone an escape to a magical wonderland. Humbert describes the Enchanted Hunters Hotel:

Parody of a hotel corridor. Parody of silence and death.

"Say, it's our house number," said cheerful Lo.

There was a double bed, a mirror, a double bed in the mirror, a closet door with mirror, a bathroom door ditto, a blue-dark window, a reflected bed there, the same in the closet mirror, two chairs, a glass-topped table, two bedtables, a double bed: a big panel bed, to be exact, with a Tuscan rose chenille spread, and two frilled, pink-shaded nightlamps, left and right. (119)

Humbert cannot escape his own reflection, nor can he shed the presence of his double, as every item in the hotel room is doubled, even without Quilty's physical appearance.

Following this road in the game route leads to Humbert's insertion of fairy tale language and imagery into what should be a truthful account of events.

## Cowan, Marion

During Humbert's pursuit of Quilty, he recalls a book Lolita once read with a character named Marion:

Then I picked up her book. It was some trash for young people. There was a gloomy girl Marion, and there was her stepmother who turned out to be, against all expectations, a young, gay, understanding redhead who explained to Marion that Marion's dead mother had really been a heroic woman since she had deliberately dissimulated her great love for Marion because she was dying, and did not want her child to miss her. I did not rush up to her room with cries. I always preferred the mental hygiene of noninterference. Now, squirming and pleading with my own memory, I recall that on this and similar occasions, it was always my habit and method to ignore Lolita's states of mind while comforting my own base self. (286-287)

This kitschy "trash" novel speaks to Lolita on a level Humbert never chose to reach, a level inaccessible to his solipsistic, snobbish European culture. Humbert characterizes himself as Lolita's rescuer, only through Marion does he learn that she truly misses Charlotte Haze and remains unsatisfied with Humbert's parody of parenting. He claims to prefer the "mental hygiene of noninterference" but has only practiced the opposite during his life with Lolita. In fact, his behavior epitomizes the overbearing parent; keeping close watch of his child, disbelieving her claimed whereabouts, and removing her from her average American life to begin with. Humbert certainly cannot label his relationship with Lolita as hygienic, although "squirming and pleading" with his own memories (as he does with Lolita herself) may generate such a delusion. After hundreds of pages detailing Humbert's grotesque mind, Marion acts as the window through which he comprehends Lolita's loneliness, and his own ignorance of such feelings. A fictive intertextual allusion functions as another street on the roadmap of Lolita's class list.

## **Fantasia, Stella**

In Italian, Stella Fantasia translates to star fantasy, or as Shapiro suggests, “stellar fantasy” (Shapiro 322). Perhaps it is this name which holds the solution to Nabokov’s hidden game of the novel, it is simply another of Humbert’s stellar fantasies, containing unending allusions which spread across the pages of *Lolita* as do the roads on which Lolita and Humbert travel. The juxtaposition of fantasy with Humbert’s confessional travel narrative stresses Nabokov’s parody of each genre. The novel itself reads as a “stellar fantasy,” with an impossible number of coincidences, literary allusions, intertextual references, and an inverted “whodunnit” paired with a “happily ever after” tale.

## **Haze, Dolores**

The placement of our title character’s name on this alphabetical class list raises immediate suspicion, as “‘Haze’ only rhymes with the heroine’s real surname” (3-4). If Humbert memorizes this list as he claims, John Ray, Jr. must be lying about the disguise of Dolores’ actual last name in his Foreword or, more likely, Humbert lets slip his quite flexible definition of memory by transcribing a falsified class list that he classifies as accurate. As his readers know, Humbert writes this narrative from prison, entirely from memory. If his idea of memory conflicts with the reader’s own perception of the term (defined as the faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information), he compromises his entire story’s reputability.

A simple search yields two-hundred and thirty results for words that rhyme with “haze,” any of which could be Dolores’ last name.<sup>5</sup> The word haze seems to be inseparable from Lolita’s childhood, perhaps explaining why John Ray selected it to mask her true identity. Still, the numerous possibilities reflect the endless possibilities of interpreting *Lolita* as well as the difficulty with which the reader pursues truth. Neither Nabokov nor Humbert provides information supporting one rhyme over any other, the exercise of working through the possibilities proves most useful as the truth is simply beyond the reader’s reach.

### McCoo, Virginia

As noted, “MC” can be viewed as the initials of Vivian Darkbloom’s biography of Clare Quilty, *My Cue*. Shapiro cites the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of coo as a British exclamation of surprise, “which Humbert experiences on many occasions, and specifically when he learns that McCoo’s house burnt down, and then, quite unexpectedly, meets Lolita at the end of his touring the Haze residence” (Shapiro 326). Taken further, the connotation of surprise operates as a cue for the reader – as the agents of fate hand surprises to Humbert, Nabokov in turn readies the reader for his own surprise.

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<sup>5</sup> As Lisa Sternlieb writes in “Vivian Darkbloom: Floral Border or Moral Order?,” “no name in this novel should remain unexamined...One could no doubt write a dissertation on the various possible interpretations this clue presents. Is Dolores going through a phase? Is she caught in a maze? Is she John Ray’s?” (Sternlieb 159). I add to this list: Does Humbert’s entire narrative commence with a mental daze? Is Dolly stuck in a state of malaise? Is she solely an object of Humbert’s gaze with no identity of her own? Does she embody Humbert’s states of grays throughout the novel? Is Lolita a creation of Humbert’s craze?

The phonetic similarity between the full surname McCoo and Darkbloom's biography, *My Cue* must not be overlooked. The title of this biography only appears in *Lolita's* Foreword while its author remains similarly absent from the novel's plot. This could be attributed to the tangential nature of Darkbloom's character to the actual events Humbert describes, but takes on dubious implications in the context of Nabokov's hidden nerves of the novel. If Vivian Darkbloom does not pervade the text as Quilty does, how could she select such an apt name for his biography? If *My Cue* and an exclamation of surprise are linked through this student's name, what surprise is the reader meant to distinguish? Humbert does not project this name onto the class list accidentally, rather he purposely plants a clue here to indicate Vivian Darkbloom's invisibility – simply because there is no Vivian Darkbloom, there is only her anagram, Vladimir Nabokov. Accepting this as a likely hidden truth of *Lolita* raises the question: who authored *My Cue*? Of course, Quilty's devoted double and creator is the only character who holds the information necessary to choose such a title, and the metafictional awareness of his own author – Vladimir Nabokov. This surprise creates overwhelming skepticism of Humbert's factual plea to his jury, forcing the reader to consider the ramifications of his constant interference with the text.

### **McFate, Aubrey**

See page 16 for an explanation of Aubrey McFate's significance to *Lolita* related to fate. Combined with the name of Lolita's school after leaving Ramsdale, Aubrey suggests Aubrey Beardsley, an English illustrator during the 19th century. Beardsley

became famous for his erotic illustrations as well as the illustrations he completed for Oscar Wilde's works. His presence on this list calls attention to the dichotomy between true art and obscene eroticism, a distinction for which Nabokov clearly held no regard. Beardsley also provided illustrations for Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, alluded to through the pronunciation of Humbert's name. See examples below.



*“The Rape of the Lock” and “The Billet-doux”*

### *Solving the Game*

Nabokov's hidden nerve of the novel lends the reader a maze-like roadmap, taking the reader through *Lolita* armed with an immense number of allusions and intertextual references. Following Nabokov's game, beginning with Aubrey McFate and ending with Lolita's Ramsdale class list, the reader is charged with identifying the solution. Aubrey McFate connotes a larger design to the novel, unknown to the reader

until she can make sense of the class list – his name within the larger context of this list unveils the extent of Nabokov’s parody. Humbert uses the word self-referentially multiple times, but it adopts the qualities of a masterful chess maneuver when lent to the names he purposefully “memorizes” on the back of a United States map. Monica Manolescu-Oancea also reads the novel this way, describing Nabokov’s “intertextual signals” as “either seriously erudite or mischievously erudite, part of a game that includes the reader, challenging him or fooling him, transforming him into a discoverer of the intertextual world of the book” (Manolescu-Oancea 2). While she focuses on the ties between Humbert’s arctic adventures, Herman Melville’s *Pierre*, and Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, the true coordinates of the novel rest with the melding of fantasy and reality, confession and lie, mysterious and known. Stemming from the class list, we see that Humbert takes great, but muted effort in conveying parody of these genres, leading to an overarching surprise.

And what better surprise than running straight into the “mirror you break your nose against,” formed by Humbert and Nabokov’s parody (225). The ultimate element of a parodic confessional narrative lies with not confessing anything at all; the pinnacle of a monstrously parodic fairy tale rests with the genuinely fantastical nature of Humbert’s narrative; the embodiment of an inverted detective story hinges on Humbert’s failure to commit a single crime. The symmetry between Humbert and Quilty is too perfect, the coincidences too frequent, the names on the Ramsdale list are too meaningful. Humbert admits that he is “especially susceptible to the magic of games,” and thus creates a game for his dearest readers (233). Following this path laid out by Humbert and corroborated

by Nabokov only drives the reader to one capital of the novel – the narrative parodies itself, and the words that fill Humbert’s manuscript describe a course of events that never actually occurs. Lolita tells us that no one would believe the story of her life, and Humbert leaves her rare line of dialogue intact to communicate that we should not believe it; not because of the horrific crimes that unfold, but because of the ubiquitous design of the novel, imposing itself upon every turn on the roadmap.

## CHAPTER 3

### *"A little dreamy."*

#### *Impossible Timeline*

Nabokov placed nothing in this novel accidentally, and the paradox created by Humbert's articulation of realism through the language of fantasy and parody is a vital point of analysis. The final chapter of *Lolita* contains either the biggest blunder or sneakiest trick of contemporary fiction; Nabokov's sophisticated reader would probably side with the latter. According to Dr. John Ray, Jr. (just another double, JRJR), Humbert died of coronary thrombosis on November 16, 1952 (3). Humbert states that he began writing *Lolita* fifty-six days prior to his death, "first in the psychopathic ward for observation, and then in this well-heated, albeit tombal, seclusion" (308). This means that Humbert would have had to begin writing on September 21, 1952, the day before he received Dolly Schiller's letter. Humbert creates an impossible timeline; he could not have been writing from a psychopathic ward if he had yet to even visit Lolita, uncover his double's identity, discover said double's whereabouts, and set out on his murderous pursuit. Why would Humbert, with his photographic memory and disciplined recording of events, or Nabokov, with his carefully planted clues and elaborate language, purposely convey an impossible timeline of events?

Answering this question has preoccupied many Nabokov scholars, most of whom recognize Nabokov as the greatest author of modern history, capable of any literary feat. Yet some of their analyses clash with such a reputation, and violate the trust Nabokov works so hard to maintain with his readers. I will relate four of the most well-known

theories on this chronological discrepancy and supply textual evidence complementing or discounting their theories, eventually to arrive at my own interpretation of these fifty-six days.

Christina Tekiner approaches the discrepancy in her article “Time in *Lolita*,” by proposing that Humbert enters a “psychopathic ward” the day he receives Lolita’s letter (September 22), fabricating all events transcribed thereafter (310). She describes these events as suspect compared to the narrative composed until that point:

It is only after September 22 that all the conflicts of the novel are neatly resolved: Humbert claims that he has met with Lolita and, for the first time, that he loves the person as well as the nymphet; he admits and accepts the fact that he has lost her forever; he discovers Quilty’s role; and, finally, after characterizing Quilty as an immoral version of himself, Humbert kills him. In addition to resolving neatly the conflicts of the novel, these events tend to exonerate rather than to condemn Humbert, and this in itself is enough to suggest that Humbert has altered or entirely invented them. (Tekiner 466)

She attributes the dating inconsistency to the reader’s mischaracterization of events, rather than an authorial error. Her summation of the last nine chapters of *Lolita* deludes the reader into believing Humbert’s “happily ever after;” whether we believe he dies of a broken heart in prison, as the novel suggests, or in a psychiatric ward, as Tekiner suggests, his coronary thrombosis still robs him of his “fancy prose style” as he rushes to finish the last few lines of his story before dying and precludes him from reuniting with the light of his life once more.

Tekiner likens Quilty’s murder scene inside of Pavor Manor to the fictional play Humbert pens earlier in the novel, *The Murdered Playwright*, arguing that the parallel verifies her claim of Humbert’s fabrication (31). She astutely draws a comparison

between the enchanted language used to describe Quilty's murder and the realistic language framing Humbert's first stay at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, often pleading with a jury which indicates his institutionalization for statutory rape rather than murder (Tekiner 468). Textual support for this reading stops quite a bit short, as the main evidence derives from interpreting a vague letter from John Farlow that arrives on the same date as Lolita's – his letter terms Humbert's "affairs" "very strange and very aggravating" (266). While Tekiner could be correct in suggesting that Humbert's guilt lies with statutory rape, not the murder which we agree he never commits, he could not have been arrested just days later based on a paranoiac reading of Farlow's ambiguous phrasing. Although Humbert does not describe his stay at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel in enchanted terms as with his much briefer time at Pavor Manor, his pleas to the jury are equally misplaced, as he dies in prison without presenting his manuscript to a jury other than the reader herself. While Tekiner's claims present a theory similar to the one reflected later, her article does not take *Lolita's* complex, maze-like structure into account. For the sake of convenience, the pattern of clues and allusions in the novel entirely escapes her argument, and Nabokov does not intertwine his work so completely with these clues only to put forth a solution to the game that divides them.

In "Nabokov's Time Doubling: From The Gift to Lolita," Alexander Dolinin supports a two-pronged narration theory, separating Humbert the writer from Humbert the described (Dolinin 26-27). He agrees with many of Tekiner's points, primarily favoring a narrative Humbert invents beginning on September 22, 1952. He also provides further evidence that the discrepancy should not be dismissed as an error, citing

meticulously accurate calculations just three chapters before the arrival of Lo's letter, "[Humbert] correctly identifies the Fourth of July, 1949, the day of Lolita's disappearance, as a Monday, and even calculates that on the next day she would turn exactly five thousand three hundred days old" (Dolinin 30). Dolinin departs from Tekiner in suggesting the existence of two viable timelines, one stemming from reality, the other from a novel-within-a-novel composed by Humbert, beginning with the first line of chapter twenty-seven, "My letterbox in the entrance hall belonged to the type that allows one to glimpse something of its contents through a glassed slit" (263). His conclusion diverges further from Tekiner's, as he does not suggest that Humbert suffers a mental breakdown, forcing him into a deluded state of mind in which he fabricates the end of his story. Rather, Dolinin pictures Humbert happily finishing his work of art:

[The timeline] may mean only one thing—that after the fatal Independence Day of 1949 Humbert Humbert has *nothing* (Lolita and Quilty included) to remember and to report but his own efforts to write the "immortal" book in which he would transfigure his past and make up a future. That is why in the last paragraph of the Russian *Lolita* the narrator suddenly states that he is currently not in a New England prison but in New York: "I am in New York, and you are in Alaska," and, therefore, at home, at his writing desk but not in a cell awaiting trial, as he has tried to convince his gullible readers. (Dolinin 39)

While the inconsistency of Humbert's location between the Russian and American versions of the novel certainly warrants analysis, Humbert still does not suggest that his New York residence consists of something more grandiose than a prison cell. Suggesting that Humbert escapes persecution and incarceration (whether in a psych ward or prison) conflicts with Nabokov's inspiration for the novel as recounted in his "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*," namely the imprisoned ape in the Jardin des Plantes who only knew the

bars of his own cage (311). Dolinin creates a version of Humbert Humbert completely free of any cage, unleashed from the constraints of the solipsistic world he creates by the force of fiction itself and devoid of any accountability for ruining a child. Surely Dolinin could explain away the disparities his theory produces – for example the rushed sentences at the end of *Lolita* (caused by Humbert’s encroaching demise), John Ray, Jr.’s Foreword disclosing Humbert’s cause and time of death, and Humbert’s metafictional references to Clarence Choate Clark, Esq. throughout his narrative, to name a few. But he cannot disregard his theory’s clash with Nabokov’s inspiration for *Lolita*. Humbert exiles himself to a prison of his own mind as well as a literal prison, the human consciousness’ victory over these prisons commences with the reader’s acceptance of Nabokov’s game. Solving the game allows us to escape seclusion, but that is not McFate’s way.

In Julian Connolly’s article “‘Nature’s Reality’ or Humbert’s ‘Fancy’?: Scenes of Reunion and Murder in *Lolita*,” he examines the theory proposed by scholar Elizabeth Bruss, much like those of Tekiner and Dolinin described above – that “Humbert’s reunion with Dolores Haze and his execution of Clare Quilty are imaginative fabrications by Humbert the narrator” (Connolly 41). He states that Humbert’s revealing confession in Chapter Twenty-Five – that his “mind was cracking” and that he was “losing contact with reality” – suggest his fabrication begins with Dolly’s letter (Connolly 43). Connolly then addresses a potential discrepancy, as Dolly signs her letter with the same name John Ray, Jr. divulges to his readers, it seems impossible that both Humbert and John Ray would know her married surname without some kind of document from Dolly herself. That is,

unless Humbert also fabricates the Foreword and uses John Ray, Jr. as another doubled pseudonym. Connolly puts forth two explanations for this deceptive technique:

By staging his own death and donning the new identity of John Ray, Jr., the figure who previously had used the name Humbert Humbert achieves several purposes. First, he reserves for himself the “final word” on Humbert (and initiates the process of shaping the reader’s reception of the text). Second, he elevates Humbert and Dolly onto a transcendent plane that lies beyond the ravages of time and the terror of impending death. (Connolly 45)

While convincing, these justifications conflict with the mental breakdown which Connolly argues acts as the catalyst for Humbert’s fabrication – could a delusional madman, devastated by loss and betrayal, really create a multilayered narrative in which he adopts two pseudonyms, falsifies a letter from Dolly, invents a scene of reunion portraying a completely changed Humbert who loves Lo just as she is, and fake his own death just after killing Quilty? Although I agree with Connolly’s line of reasoning – specifically that at least parts of the novel are fabricated – his theory seems to be missing some vital clue Nabokov or Humbert drops within *Lolita*. A clue that would explain how a narrator who has deserted reality in favor of a mental daze maintains the same elaborate prose style of the preceding two-hundred pages, why the character driven almost exclusively by obsession would discontinue his search, and which event within the narrative acts as the barrier between fact and fiction.

Brian Boyd’s essay “Even Homais Nods: Nabokov’s Fallibility” in *Stalking Nabokov* suggests that the chronology discrepancy stems entirely from authorial error. He admits that “Nabokov was of a notoriously precise, even pedantic temperament, hard on anyone else’s mistakes, exigent about particulars, insistent on an exactitude of detail and

a delicacy of interconnection that make it natural to expect him to ensure the accuracy of all his work” (Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov* 298). However, he goes on to reference some twenty-one factual errors in Nabokov’s autobiography, *Speak Memory*; many of these errors are geographical and chronological (Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov* 299-306). In response to the particular inconsistencies of *Lolita*, Boyd writes:

In view of Nabokov’s fallibility, it seems much sounder, let alone much more economical, to call into question a single numeral than to doubt the detailed reality of a whole series of major scenes. It seems especially peculiar to suppose that virtually everything in the last eighth of the novel is fabricated, except for the first nine words of the sentence quoted above: “When I started, fifty-six days ago, to write *Lolita*.” Why, if even the trial mentioned in this sentence is Humbert’s fiction (as it usually is for the revisionists), if the psychopathic ward too is a fraud (as it is for Dolinin and sometimes for others), is the “fifty-six” swimming in this sea of falsity to be fished out as incontestable fact? (Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov* 307)

Boyd appeals to Nabokov’s proven fallibility as the lens through which he examines Humbert’s “fifty-six” day authorship of *Lolita*. He raises a valid criticism in his assessment of other theories, namely that Humbert’s calendar cannot be perceived as “incontestable fact” if we reject the remainder of his narrative as “falsity.” He mentions another error in *Lolita*’s calendar, occurring during the passage in which Humbert receives Dolly’s letter – “the morning Humbert comes down to check the mail is ‘early in September 1952’ according to the 1955 and 1958 editions. Yet three pages later we find, ‘The letter was dated September 18, 1952 (this was September 22)’” (Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov* 307). As September 22 cannot be classified as “early September,” Boyd confronts *Lolita*’s “revisionists” with a decidedly unintentional error that Nabokov later corrected in Alfred Appel Jr.’s annotated version.

Boyd ignores the very process of this correction, even concluding, “To reduce to Humbert’s solipsistic fancies Lolita in her final proud but abashed independence of Quilty in his strutting irrepressibility is to gain nothing and lose almost everything—and all for the sake of one *revisable* digit” [emphasis added] (Boyd, *Stalking Nabokov* 319). Boyd is exactly right, Nabokov could have revised fifty-six days to any other number, dissolving the chronological discrepancy of Humbert’s narrative, just as he revised “early September” to “late September.” However, Nabokov adopted no such revision, leaving the reader to continue studying this puzzle. Boyd also neglects to acknowledge the cleverly placed clues indicative of a larger design to the novel in his argument – although his complete reading of *Lolita* in *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* certainly does not refute this presence – and thus his theory simply cannot satisfy the reader who has played the game and followed the roadmap of *Lolita*. The fifty-six days provides the reader with another clue to parse out the truth of Humbert’s fantastical confession, not a number selected in error but rather an intentionally positioned clue adding to the impossibility of *Lolita* as put forth.

These theories provide useful lenses through which we can study the final ten chapters of *Lolita*, but fail to capture the larger patterns of the novel, weaving through Humbert’s manuscript and driving the reader across its roadmap. I argue that Humbert, not Nabokov, conveys this impossible calendar of events to hint at his narrative’s inherent impossibility. He wants his readers to occupy the middle ground between truth and fantasy, in which the capital of this novel (Gray Star) is positioned. Analyzing the text in this way, equipped with the map guiding us through the intricate, intertwined nature of

the innumerable clues beginning on page one of the novel, reveals a purposeful deception beginning long before Dolly Schiller's letter. Taking Humbert's constant interference with the veracity of his own story into account insinuates that his fabrication of the events transcribed commences before he even meets Lolita.

### *Tampering With the Evidence*

Further distancing his narrative from the truth, Humbert violates the conventions of a confessional travel narrative by interfering with its accuracy. Humbert admittedly expresses his narrative "touched up by the colored inks of sensitive memory," curtailing the truthful presentation of any evidence (14). He addresses a paradox central to his story, he portrays nothing faithfully, instead everything filters through his "memory" – memories denote a recollection of actual occurrences while applying ink to these memories suggests creation and invention. These disturbances to the text continually remind the reader of Humbert's control over the events transcribed, and although he claims to compile this manuscript as evidence for the jury, he seems to have very little regard for the truth.

After moving into the Haze household and seeking out a medium through which he could express his salacious fantasies, Humbert introduces exhibit number two to his jury:

Exhibit number two is a pocket diary bound in black imitation leather, with a golden year, 1947, *en escalier*, in its upper left-hand corner. I speak of this neat product of the Blank Blank Co., Blankton, Mass., as if it were really before me. Actually, it was destroyed five years ago and what we examine now (by courtesy of

a photographic memory) is but its brief materialization, a puny unfledged phoenix. (40)

Humbert teases us with tangible evidence, hoping to substitute its insights with an undoubtedly tainted, misleading “photographic memory.” Although he claims to copy these destroyed journal entries word-for-word, he notes that the journal itself is “bound in black imitation leather,” perhaps commenting on the inevitable process of imitation he undertakes while rewriting these entries on entirely new pages. Alfred Appel also notes that Blankton, Mass. does not exist, stating, “there is no such town. The ‘blanks’ make fun of the ‘authenticity’ of the pages of both the diary and the entire novel, H.H.’s ‘photographic memory’ notwithstanding” (Annotations 356). Humbert exploits the implications of physical evidence to make his parodic intentions clear, and to further the reader’s doubt that he has truthfully committed any crimes on these “blank” pages.

By Humbert’s fourth journal entry, he undermines the validity of the entire journal as evidence – admitting the “beginning [is] perhaps amended” (42). The amended beginning reads, “I know it is madness to keep this journal but it gives me a strange thrill to do so; and only a loving wife could decipher my microscopic script” (42). Because of Humbert’s persuasive rhetoric, we characterize Charlotte as a desperate shrew whose sole purpose rests with precluding Humbert from obtaining the true object of his desire; however, he writes that “only a loving wife could decipher [his] microscopic script,” which Charlotte eventually does, only to incite her own accidental death. The amendment process to Humbert’s journal concludes as he admits inside of his telling parentheses, “(all this amended, perhaps)” (47). While the quote refers specifically to a Friday journal entry, the contents of this entry involve one of the most obvious nerves of the novel –

Quilty's murder. Linking an "amended" journal entry to his double's murder actually functions as metatextual evidence, building the reader's case that this murder certainly did not take place as described, or more likely, did not occur at all.

Humbert continues abusing his narrative position while recounting the rare lines of dialogue throughout the novel. Because the dialogue is so sparse, we can assume that much has been omitted either as a stylistic technique or a method of concealment. But Humbert inserts gaps into significant conversations, as exemplified during his exchange with Charlotte after she finds, and reads, "exhibit two:"

"The Haze woman, the big bitch, the old cat, the obnoxious mamma, the—the old stupid Haze is no longer your dupe. She has—she has..."

My fair accuser stopped, swallowing her venom and her tears. Whatever Humbert Humbert said—or attempted to say—is inessential. She went on:

"You're a monster. You're a detestable, abominable, criminal fraud. If you come near—I'll scream out the window. Get back!"

Again, whatever H.H. murmured may be omitted, I think.

"I am leaving tonight. This is all yours. Only you'll never, never see that miserable brat again. Get out of this room." (95-96)

For reasons unknown to the reader, Humbert does not disclose his reactions to Charlotte's fit of hysteria, instead choosing to admit that he has removed lines of dialogue from his compilation of evidence for the jury. He subtly violates our trust by insinuating that although he responds to Charlotte, his words are too incriminating to make known. Humbert takes similar liberties when recording information from the letters he receives from both Charlotte and Dolores Haze. After documenting the contents of Charlotte's

love letter, forgoing any disclaimer suggesting the letter has been meddled with, Humbert concedes that he has only copied the portions of the letter which he deems necessary:

What I present here is what I remember of the letter, and what I remember of the letter I remember verbatim (including that awful French). It was at least twice longer. I have left out a lyrical passage which I more or less skipped at the time, concerning Lolita's brother who died at 2 when she was 4, and how much I would have liked him. Let me see what else can I say? Yes. There is just a chance that "the vortex of the toilet" (where the letter did go) is my own matter-of-fact contribution. (68-69)

His own "matter-of-fact contribution" more importantly includes his dishonest presentation of the letter's contents. He again shields the reader from a certain truth that lies behind all he has omitted, camouflaged, misremembered, or misrepresented. When Humbert receives Dolly's letter, he recalls, "The letter was dated September 18, 1952 (this was September 22), and the address she gave was 'General Delivery, Coalmont' (not 'Va.,' not 'Pa.,' not 'Tenn.'—and not Coalmont, anyway—I have camouflaged everything, my love)" (267). Although he obscures Dolly's exact location perhaps for her own benefit, he shamelessly filters material evidence through his own interpretation, not once putting forth a completely unaltered document, and thus he compromises the believability of his entire story.

The most striking breach of confidence in Humbert's narrative derives from his ordering of events in the final few pages of the novel. After Humbert flees Quilty's manor following his murder, he recounts a purported epiphany concerning his treatment of Lolita:

As I approached the friendly abyss, I grew aware of a melodious unity of sounds rising like vapor from a small mining town that lay at my feet, in a fold of the valley. One could make out the

geometry of the streets between blocks of red and gray roofs, and green puffs of trees, and a serpentine stream, and the rich, ore-like glitter of the city dump, and beyond the town, roads crisscrossing the crazy quilt of dark and pale fields, and behind it all, great timbered mountains...And soon I realized that all these sounds were of one nature, that no other sounds but these came from the streets of the transparent town, with the women at home and the men away. Reader! What I heard was but the melody of children at play, nothing but that, and so limpid was the air that within this vapor of blended voices, majestic and minute, remote and magically near, frank and divinely enigmatic—one could hear now and then, as if released, an almost articulate spurt of vivid laughter, or the crack of a bat, or the clatter of a toy wagon, but it was all really too far for the eye to distinguish any movement in the lightly etched streets. I stood listening to that musical vibration from my lofty slope, to those flashes of separate cries with a kind of demure murmur for background, and then I knew that the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord. (307-308)

Humbert describes this scene with such unabashed amazement because his story up until this point has predominantly ignored Lolita, guarding the reader from her emotions and dialogue, callously describing her as a mere object of desire, and killing her before the plot begins. He looks over the valley, describing the “geometry of streets” that “[crisscross] the crazy quilt” of his tale, and from this omniscient perspective selects this episode to conclude the story. Humbert finally sees what the sympathetic reader has known all along – “the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from [Humbert's] side, but the absence of her voice from that concord,” full of average children enjoying the average happenings of a happy upbringing. Just before his death, Humbert wants to convey his final stage of metamorphosis, one that includes his profound realization that he has robbed Lolita of her innocence, her childhood, and her life. However, stepping back a few lines reveals that this “epiphany” occurred before he

even found the pregnant Dolly Schiller: “One day, soon after her disappearance, an attack of abominable nausea forced me to pull up on the ghost of an old mountain road that now accompanied, now traversed a brand new highway, with its population of asters bathing in the detached warmth of a pale-blue afternoon in late summer” (307). Even after experiencing this shift in mindset, he continues searching for Lo, considers killing her husband to snatch her into his happily ever after, and eventually does kill her other corrupter – Clare Quilty. This trickery operates as the final piece of evidence we need to cast doubt on the sincerity of his novel, and taken further indicates how *Lolita* can be understood as a complex trick in itself. Humbert takes advantage of his role as our narrator, opportunistically ordering the events to most strengthen his case.

Humbert’s interference with the text should be understood much the same way as his parody of a confessional narrative – he parodies the evidence he compiles for the jury by so clearly violating the accuracy required of such documents. Just as confessing to an imagined crime marks the pinnacle of a parodic confessional narrative, assembling evidence that has been tampered with for an unseen jury indicates that there exists no crime for which Humbert can be convicted. His small inconsistencies and suppressing of the truth do not only connote an unusual level of manipulation of the story; they encourage the reader to comprehend the intimate details of Humbert’s deception – his evidence is faulty because the crimes for which he compiles this evidence have not occurred outside of Humbert’s mind. Tampering with the evidence emphasizes Humbert’s little regard for authenticity; truthfulness escapes his narrative because it is not the purpose of his story. Instead, this assault on authenticity drives the reader traveling across

the roadmap of *Lolita* to assess what Humbert has actually transcribed on the pages of *Lolita* if not a factual account of events. Further, if the inspiration of his narrative does not originate from reality, we must turn to the coordinates of clues that Nabokov and Humbert plot throughout the novel to derive the origin of this unbelievable story.

### *Embellishing a Dream*

The clue almost entirely ignored by Tekiner, Dolinin, Connolly, and Boyd is the word dream, mentioned in *Lolita* seventy-four times, certainly a notable presence inside of a three-hundred and nine page novel. It is the clue that can make sense of Humbert and Nabokov's unnavigable narrative, weaving a complex pattern of coincidence and fate which constantly calls the accuracy of Humbert's manuscript into question by forcing the reader to consider the strong presence of its authors. The roots of Humbert and *Lolita*'s relationship do not derive from a truthful account of events, which Humbert has consistently proven unable to provide. Rather, the fateful interference of canines, odd arrangement of names and identities, omnipresent literary allusions, and falsified evidence suggest a complete lack of truth that commences with a dream.

Lending importance to the dream-state invariably invokes Sigmund Freud, whose methods of analysis Nabokov despised. However, following *Lolita*'s parodic path reconciles Nabokov's personal skepticism of psychoanalysis with Humbert's transcription of a dream, and in fact, lends more credibility to this theory. Humbert pairs an early reference to dreaming with an allusion to Edgar Allan Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* and the first mention of Clare Quilty, as he copies a page from *Who's Who in the Limelight*, revealing that actor Roland Pym starred in the

plays *I Was Dreaming of You* as well as *The Strange Mushroom*, the latter authored by Clare Quilty (31). This link implies that dreaming represents another element of parody, suggestive of the same deceptive fiction with which Humbert and Nabokov encircle Quilty's character. Humbert pokes fun at those who hope to unlock this novel's puzzle with the principles of psychoanalysis, as these fixed ideas would effectively reduce *Lolita*'s boundless imagination and inventiveness to a mere case study in dream analysis, rather than imploring the reader to focus on the construction and purpose of the dream.

During Humbert's institutionalization, he admits:

I discovered there was an endless source of robust enjoyment in trifling with psychiatrists: cunningly leading them on; never letting them see that you know all the tricks of the trade; inventing for them elaborate dreams, pure classics in style (which make them, the dream-extortionists, dream and wake up shrieking); teasing them with fake "primal scenes;" and never allowing them the slightest glimpse of one's real sexual predicament. (34)

Humbert outlines his narrative structure within a passage intended to satirize psychiatry – suggesting he gained much practice inventing elements, concealing components, and faking memories of primal scenes. His admission of enjoyment resulting from this deception signals that he implants delusive episodes into his text to distract the reader, acting as red-herrings to preclude the reader from deriving the truth of *Lolita*. He embeds these tactics within his confessional travel narrative, connoting a strong parallel between his satire of psychiatry and the text that purports to be a factual account of events.

Dreamy language continues to permeate Humbert's story, blurring the boundary between reality and fantasy during some of the novel's most pivotal scenes. As Humbert

persuades himself that he and Lolita are being followed by Gustave Trapp, he comments on the interchangeability of the two vehicles involved in the chase:

Then he turned to other makes and passed through a pale dull rainbow of paint shades, and one day I found myself attempting to cope with the subtle distinction between our own Dream Blue Melmoth and the Crest Blue Oldsmobile he had rented; grays, however, remained his favorite cryptochromism, and, in agonizing nightmares, I tried in vain to sort out properly such ghosts as Chrysler's Shell Gray, Chevrolet's Thistle Gray, Dodge's French Gray..." (227)

To Humbert, the almost imperceptible differences in gray paint shades between his car and Quilty's transforms his dream come true (his relationship with Lolita) into an agonizing nightmare in which, his identity becomes similarly indistinguishable from his double's. Before Humbert even discloses the victim of his murder, or the role his double plays throughout the novel, he shares a suspiciously foreshadowed journal entry<sup>6</sup>:

Incidentally: if I ever commit a serious murder...Mark the "if." The urge should be something more than the kind of thing that happened to me with Valeria. Carefully mark that *then* I was rather inept. If and when you wish to sizzle me to death, remember that only a spell of insanity could ever give me the simple energy to be a brute (all this amended, perhaps). Sometimes I attempt to kill in my dreams. But do you know what happens? For instance I hold a gun. For instance I aim at a bland, quietly interested enemy. Oh, I press the trigger all right, but one bullet after another feebly drops on the floor from the sheepish muzzle. In those dreams, my only thought is to conceal the fiasco from my foe, who is slowly growing annoyed. (47)

Again, Humbert eerily foreshadows events of the plot using references to a dream. He curiously tells the reader to "mark the 'if'" of the conditional "if I ever commit a serious murder," although he has already outed himself as a murderer in Chapter One. Perhaps he

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<sup>6</sup> I also mention this journal entry on pages 55-56.

merely means to suggest that Quilty's murder should not be defined as a "serious murder," asking the reader to consider if any other type can take place. The unbelievable symmetry between Humbert's dreamy, not-so-serious murder and Quilty's comic murder scene proves that there is, in fact, a kind of murder devoid of seriousness. Our gifted narrator creates comedy out of tragedy, only killing his pesky double within a dream completely bereft of suavity. He recounts the scenario with noticeable frustration, as he shoots his gun repeatedly but cannot claim his victim, instead he aims to "conceal the fiasco from [his] foe, who is slowly growing annoyed." This fiasco matches Humbert's nearly botched murder in Pavor Manor, as he fires his gun at Quilty but cannot seem to maim his target. Humbert's "quietly" interested enemy also implicates Quilty in this passage, as the word only differs from his name by one letter. As our narrator departs from the mansion, he notes that he "gently, dreamily, not exceeding twenty miles an hour...drove on that queer mirror side [of the road]," solidifying the involvement of a dream with his double. Although the allusions to Poe provide enough evidence to constrain Quilty's identity to Humbert's cerebellum, the dream-like rhetoric surrounding Quilty's murder reveals his character's inspiration as stemming from one of Humbert's dreams. Humbert's second mention of amendment in *Lolita* shows a marked shift from the first mention just five pages before, during a journal entry detailing his desire for Lolita. Rather than purely amending the beginning, as with this earlier entry, he now confesses, "all this amended, perhaps." He plainly informs his readers that nothing in his confessional tale denotes truth, hiding his clues in the plain sight of parentheses while blatantly reflecting this documented dream of murder on Quilty's murder scene.

Similar language does not escape Humbert's characterization of the Hazes, as an early indicator in *Lolita* presupposes the type of clues he will place in communicating that this mother-daughter pair is also confined to his cerebellum. During Humbert's arctic adventure, undertaken as a therapeutic method, he writes, "I noticed, for instance, that dreams under the midnight sun tended to be highly colored, and this my friend the photographer confirmed" (34). I believe that this multicolored dream under the midnight sun marks the beginning of Humbert's *Lolita*. From this point onward, he closely ties weather and highly colored imagery, suggestive of his dream's pervasiveness; only during these illuminated scenes are we privy to the contents of Humbert's dream. In fact, much of Humbert's time on 342 Lawn Street can be described as "highly colored;" his first few journal entries describe a heat wave, in which he appreciates colors as "prismatic" (42). Under this "midnight sun" Humbert's dreams and reality meld to suggest the dominance of the former over the latter. Just as he dreams of killing Quilty, Humbert's hope of eliminating Charlotte becomes possible only during a sunny weekend, during which the Haze family will travel to Our Glass/Hourglass Lake: "Same date, later, quite late. I have turned on the light to take down a dream. It had an evident antecedent. Haze at dinner had benevolently proclaimed that since the weather bureau promised a sunny weekend we would go to the lake Sunday after church" (53). His dream centers upon how best to placate Charlotte during this outing, as to disrupt her aversion to Lo's initial fondness for Humbert. After reading Charlotte's love letter, "Humbert the Cubus schemed and dreamed—and the red sun of desire and decision (the two things that create a live world) rose higher and higher, while upon a succession of balconies a succession of libertines,

sparkling glass in hand, toasted the bliss of past and future nights” (71). He conspicuously notes the two elements that “create a live world,” presumably out of a dream world, and both derive from the “red sun” indicative of the Arctic “midnight sun” that stimulated this dream. In the ultimate attempt to appease Charlotte, Humbert determines marrying the mother will bring him closest to the daughter, largely by distracting Charlotte with the promise of newlywed bliss.

His focus markedly shifts at the lake, as he instead constructs Charlotte’s perfect murder, which he is incapable of executing. Prior to describing this plan, Humbert corrects his naming of the lake – “Hourglass Lake—not as I had thought it was spelled” (81). This marks an exceptionally indicative clue, as Humbert consciously changes his spelling of the lake when Charlotte’s time is running out. The scene during which Humbert carries out Charlotte’s murder within his mind features highly colored imagery, as “a dark-red private plane that droned overhead...disappeared in the blue [sky]” while he observes the “glossy whiteness of her wet face so little tanned despite all her endeavors, and her pale lips, and her naked convex forehead, and the tight black cap” (86). Humbert repeatedly pairs bright, illuminating weather with such colored scenes to metatextually evoke his Arctic voyage dreams, sending the reader again back to the beginning of the novel to interpret the implications of this link. Although he decides to leave Charlotte’s death up to chance, his desire to circumvent her role in this incestuous love triangle certainly evokes his tendency to attempt to kill during dreams. The day on which “fate” intervenes and finally eradicates Charlotte echoes this perfect murder Humbert establishes, urging the reader to explore the true identity of her killer.

Although her actual death does not occur at Humbert's hands, he still assigns himself a large role in the timeline of events, writing his journal in microscopic script that only a loving wife could interpret and hiding this salacious journal where only a loving wife could find it.

Dreams infiltrate Humbert's portrayal of Lolita and justify his refusal to allow his title character to obtain a forceful voice within his narrative. If Lolita arises from Humbert's dream, he simply cannot comment on her true identity or provide his readers with her dialogue because these facts do not exist. After he masturbates in Lolita's presence – in another well-colored scene, donning a purple bathrobe in quest of an Eden-red apple – he explains (57-58):

I felt proud of myself. I had stolen the honey of a spasm without impairing the morals of a minor. Absolutely no harm done. The conjurer had poured milk, molasses, foaming champagne into a young lady's new white purse; and lo, the purse was intact. Thus had I delicately constructed my ignoble, ardent, sinful dream; and still Lolita was safe—and I was safe. What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own. (62)

Humbert safely solipsizes Lolita with such ease because she is “but [his] own creation,” deriving from his own mind, invisible in reality. He vehemently posits that no harm has been done to his precious nymphet, putting his “sinful dream” onto an entirely separate Lolita – “another, fanciful Lolita.” Nabokov's “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” maintains that the novel “has no moral in tow” because dreams are inherently amoral. Humbert protects Lolita from the invasion of impaired morals with the amorality, not immorality, of solipsism (314). Lolita exists only in his dreams, safe from the real pain of death, rape,

and exploitation she experiences. Humbert hints at this fact following one of the most obscene, indecent scenes of the novel, implying that on some level of consciousness, he is aware of the pain his dream self inflicts on this child. “Absolutely no harm done” reiterates *Lolita*’s solipsized amorality, as in actuality, no harm can be done to a character within a dream, all is absolved once the dreamer awakens.

The feminist critic may attack Nabokov for oppressing Lo by silencing her voice and eliminating her freedom. However, this approach loses traction within a dream state, in which the dreamer (and his author) cannot be held accountable for the limited recollection of Dolores Haze, and certainly should not be accused of producing a work of blatant misogyny. Humbert does not irrationally deny Lolita’s character her own will and consciousness, rather these represent facets of her character that cannot come to Humbert through a dream. He furthers this portrait of Lo by referring to her as his “dreamy pet,” combining our familiar canine clue with the impetus of Dolores Haze herself (120). Humbert controls Lolita with leash-like force, drawing her into Humbert the Wounded Spider’s inescapable web, because she springs from his Arctic dreams. Just before Humbert rapes Lolita, he recalls: “As I look back at those seasick murals, at that strange and monstrous moment, I can only explain my behavior then by the mechanism of that dream vacuum wherein revolves a deranged mind; but at the time, it all seemed quite simple and inevitable to me” (122). Only within this morally devoid “dream vacuum” can Humbert justify his behavior, perhaps implying that said behavior *only* occurred within this vacuum. Humbert inserts a major blow to Freudian psychology with this “dream vacuum,” asserting that morality does not exist in this all-permissible place, and therefore

insisting that dreams resist the type of categorization and analysis on which Freud would rely. When Humbert and Lolita begin their kissing game before having sex during that fateful day in Room 342 Enchanted Hunters, he acknowledges that the act thrusts them into “a brand new, mad new dream world, where everything was permissible” (133).

“Dream world” holds clear significance in this quote, indicating that everything we read henceforth exists only in this dream; but the emphasis on the word “new” points to a pre-existing dream, one that Humbert believes was less “mad” and “permissible.” Humbert’s depiction of the extent of this “dream world” culminates in his assertion that he is “just [Lolita’s] old man, a dream dad protecting his dream daughter” (149). Humbert presents Lolita and dreams indivisibly, providing a satisfactory defense of her absence within the novel while commenting on his mode of invention relied upon throughout a “confessional” narrative, which only contains a confession that there really is nothing to confess.

Although Humbert does not outwardly attribute his tampering with the evidence to the shortcomings of a dream, he directly observes the inherently faulty qualities of dreams throughout his story, dropping hints that the two share a common link. While logging the Hourglass Lake related dream in his journal, Humbert concludes the entry by addressing “one of those little omissions due to the absent-mindedness of the dream agent” (54). His “omissions” should be noted as much more significant than “little,” but attributing his repeated concealment of facts and evidence to the interference of a dream agent adds even more validity to my proposition, theorizing that Humbert’s entire narrative stems from a dream under the Arctic midnight sun. He again inadvertently

blames the gaps in his story on a dream, telling his readers after Lo disappears from Elphinstone with Quilty, “the gin kept my heart alive but bemazed my brain, and after some lapses and losses common to dream sequences, I found myself in the reception room” (246). Toward the very end of the novel, Humbert tells us that what we have read and continue to read is a dream sequence. Like “The Purloined Letter,” he hides the clue to solving this mystery right under our noses. Such “lapses and losses” are not limited to this scene; they mar his entire narrative and subsequently insinuate that the novel should be read as a dream sequence. The sequence begins during Humbert’s Arctic adventure, as that marks his first actual dream within *Lolita*. All of the events transcribed thereafter stem from this dream, the content of which Humbert noticeably excludes from his story, acting as an even stronger signal that the story itself is the dream. Commencing his story with a dream makes the traverse of this roadmap plausible – Humbert returns to the mental institution following his Arctic trip and begins embellishing the dream solely to mock his doctors but soon becomes preoccupied with the characters he has created and further fictionalizes his tale with literary allusions and clues to bury the truth of his fiction underneath complex, rocky terrain. He allows his dream’s gaps, omissions, interferences, and lapses to remain intact as the final telling gesture of his deception, because he cannot recreate or revisit the dream to extract more details. Humbert’s fourth mention of dreams proves to be the most notable in the context of this argument, as he asserts, “The dimmest of my pollutive dreams was a thousand times more dazzling than all the adultery the most virile writer of genius or the most talented impotent might imagine” (18).

## CONCLUSION

I have started with Nabokov's dog-eared maps and nerves of the novel to construct a roadmap of *Lolita*, and ended with a globe, of which I have only examined one hemisphere. Humbert's narrative begins with a dream under the Arctic's midnight sun and concludes at the same place during a Gray Star polar night. This transition from dream to nightmare takes place on the autumnal equinox, which marks the Arctic's shift in weather from twenty-four hour light to twenty-four hour darkness. The date of the autumnal equinox highlights another brilliant Nabokovian coincidence, as it is the same date on which Humbert receives Dolly Schiller's letter, September 22. Rather than focusing on the illuminated tale which delineates Humbert's dream, I could have chronicled the obfuscated narrative beginning with the cloudy haze of Gray Star and Lolita's nightly sobs. Instead I have considered the vivid, bright side of Vivian Darkbloom's paradox, looking at the clues hidden in plain sight – the dog-eared maps indicating that we are reading a dream sequence in which our narrator and author explore the terrain between truth and fiction.

Many Freudian and feminist critics have traversed the other hemisphere of this globe, eclipsing the reading I put forth. My argument, that Humbert's multiple crimes exist only in his dreams, would seem to support a psychoanalytic interpretation. But crucially Humbert has used his dreams to mock and parody this mode of thought. He has barred his analysts access to his sexual proclivities, instead satirizing them with his capacities for deception. I have inverted a Freudian reading of *Lolita* – which would likely interpret Humbert's dream as a gateway to his deepest sexual desires – by

deciphering Humbert's dream as the starting point for his intricate, boundless roadmap. A sexual reading of *Lolita* reduces the novel to a mere case study, effectively limiting my roadmap to one single path, which reaches a dead end as soon as Humbert refuses to "bore [his] learned readers with a detailed account of" the much-anticipated sex scene (133). The Freudian and feminist approaches merge with Nabokov's parody of Edgar Allan Poe, as many attributed Poe's stories' repeated murder of beautiful women to the death of his mother and wife. In this vein, the death of Humbert's mother could be viewed as a precedent to Dolly's tragic end, and her limited direct role in the novel may be associated with a Freudian-like resentment of his mother's abandonment.

Humbert's first mention of his mother redirects these critics to my road of thought, as he writes, "my very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three, and...nothing of her subsists within the hollows and dells of memory, over which...the sun of my infancy had set" (10). He comically brushes off what should be a traumatic experience by explaining his mother's death with two words and his much-used parentheses. A psychoanalyst may clutch onto this "freak accident" as the obligatory childhood trauma that damages a patient's psyche for years to come. But the parallels between this quote and the conditions of Humbert's dream under the midnight sun would be lost within these reductive readings of *Lolita*. Humbert directs us right back to our roadmap by using his "photogenic mother" to invoke his photographer friend from the Arctic trip during which his dream takes place, the presence of lightning to encourage an illuminated rather than obfuscated reading of his story, and the sun to refer to the

midnight sun that spurs his dream. His second maternal reference directly addresses his psychotherapists' focus on his infancy:

When my mother, in a livid wet dress, under the tumbling mist (so I vividly imagined her), had run panting ecstatically up that ridge above Moulinet to be felled there by a thunderbolt, I was but an infant, and in retrospect no yearnings of the accepted kind could I ever graft upon any moment of my youth, no matter how savagely psychotherapists heckled me in my later periods of depression. But I admit that a man of my power of imagination cannot plead personal ignorance of universal emotions. I may also have relied too much on the abnormally chill relations between Charlotte and her daughter. But the awful point of the whole argument is this. It had become gradually clear to my conventional Lolita during our singular and bestial cohabitation that even the most miserable of family lives was better than the parody of incest, which, in the long run, was the best I could offer the waif. (287)

Within this passage, Humbert admits that his only true memories of his mother's death have been "vividly imagined." He again references toying with his psychotherapists, as he refuses to produce any tantalizing evidence of an early childhood trauma or the beginning phases of an Oedipus complex. Rather, Humbert tells his readers about his hecklers who hope to dredge up deep-seated anguish in the context of *Lolita's* other maternal figure, Charlotte Haze. He admits that he could not possibly miss his mother because he holds no true memory of her existence in the same paragraph containing the admission that "the most miserable of family lives was better than the parody of incest" he offers Lo. A man of Humbert's "power of imagination" describes memories of Charlotte and Lolita that are no more real than those of his deceased mother. He creates no profound emotional attachments, and therefore remains unable to recognize that a twelve year old girl would surely miss her mother, because this novel only takes place in his head. This fact of imagination lessens the degree of his own suffering but does not

make Lolita's suffering any less real. The void within Lolita that Humbert eventually attributes to Charlotte's absence could only exist in his imagination, as it clearly departs from his inability to feel any semblance of emotion towards his own mother. In his Afterword, Nabokov writes that some readers of *Lolita* who only managed to flip through Part One described the novel as "'Old Europe debauching young America,' while another flipper saw in it 'Young America debauching old Europe'" (314). My roadmap has no connection to Old Europe or Young America, or any combination of the two, but instead maps out the paths of Humbert's imagination and these paths' implications on Humbert's narrative that seems to welcome limitless readings while also debunking the more narrow-minded analyses.

Unlike the critics who focus on the novel's sinuous trail of slime and sobs in the night, I focus on another dimension of the text, in which Humbert and Lolita never actually sleep together. Her telling sobs in the night precede and prohibit rest just as Humbert feigns sleep. Lolita's most significant states of consciousness occur while she is awake, while Humbert's entire experience takes place within the unconsciousness of a dream. Her final slumber comes just before she seduces Humbert at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel:

And then, she sat up, gasped, muttered with insane rapidity something about boats, tugged at the sheets and lapsed back into her rich, dark, young unconsciousness. As she tossed, within that abundant flow of sleep, recently auburn, at present lunar, her arm struck me across the face. For a second I held her. She freed herself from the shadow of my embrace—doing this not consciously, not violently, not with any personal distaste, but with the neutral plaintive murmur of a child demanding its natural rest. (130)

Humbert constantly attempts to interfere with Lolita's "natural rest," by trying to hold her against her will, feeding her sleeping pills, or only allowing her to express her sadness once sleep eliminates him from consciousness. These interferences with sleep should be read as further evidence of Humbert's dream state as well as his inability to experience the intimacy of actually sleeping with Lolita, as opposed to sleeping with her as a direct euphemism for having sex. Following this passage, Lolita remains wide awake as Humbert sleeps soundly under the Arctic's midnight sun. Their states of being are separated by incompatible levels of consciousness, but Humbert draws them nearer as he describes the origin of his fascination with landscapes – "those painted oilcloths which were imported from America in the old days to be hung above washstands in Central-European nurseries, and which fascinated a drowsy child at bed time with the rustic green views they depicted" (152). Humbert's description of his drowsy self comes the page before he juxtaposes these landscapes with Lo's similar fascination with public restrooms:

Now and then, in the vastness of those plains, huge trees would advance toward us to cluster self-consciously by the roadside and provide a bit of humanitarian shade above a picnic table, with sun flecks, flattened paper cups, samaras and discarded ice-cream sticks littering the brown ground. A great user of roadside facilities, my unfastidious Lo would be charmed by toilet signs—Guys-Gals, John-Jane, Jack-Jill and even Buck's-Doe's; while lost in an artist's dream, I would stare at the honest brightness of the gasoline paraphernalia against the splendid green of oaks, or at a distant hill scrambling out—scarred but still untamed—from the wilderness of agriculture that was trying to swallow it. (153)

Humbert and Lolita occupy different hemispheres; she becomes preoccupied with the naming conventions of roadside facilities while Humbert is "lost in an artist's dream," in

which he sees actual paintings laid out before him. The image of “gasoline paraphernalia against the splendid green of oaks” alludes to a 1940 oil painting by Edward Hopper, entitled *Gas* (shown below).



“Lost in an artist’s dream” unveils a multitude of possibilities: Is Humbert lost in Nabokov’s dream? Are the characters and events of *Lolita* lost in Humbert’s dream? Are the psychoanalysts and feminist critics stuck in the gaps of Humbert’s dream? Are we lost in the maze of the narrative’s dream? By describing a physical work of art, Humbert establishes his role in the narrative as an artist instead of a chronicler of truth; everything in his imagination derives from art. He dreams of allusions to paintings, Edgar Allan Poe, William Shakespeare, Gustave Flaubert, fairy tales, and countless other forms of art indicative of his “artist’s dream.” Only in a dream can these allusions meld with reality, and only in this dreamy version of reality can an artist record a series of events that fail to

take place outside of his mind – Humbert carefully plots Charlotte’s murder, but a car accident steals his glory; he fantasizes about seducing Lolita over and over again, only to be seduced by her; he stages a dramatic murder of Quilty, to be replaced by comical chaos during take one. Humbert is literally *just* an artist, who recreates his experience of a dream for his beloved readers. Instead of viewing Humbert as a perverse man guilty of corrupting an innocent nymphet and murdering his double in cold blood, we should perceive him as an artist moving through the imaginative dreams overpowering his mind, much like Charles Dickens in Robert William Buss’ 1870 painting entitled *Dickens’ Dream* (shown below). Dickens is surrounded by the characters of his works; had



Humbert been seated in this chair, the occurrences populating the pages of *Lolita* would appear before us. A dream’s effectiveness rests with its ability to convincingly pose as

reality, dreamers believe the events occurring within their mind are real until the very end, as they are jolted awake by a wildly vivid image. For a short time after the dream, the dreamer always believes the events to be true, and herein lies Humbert's trick. We believe his narrative (to an extent) until the midnight sun's vividness jolts us back into reality, while amplifying the effectiveness and pervasiveness of his replicated dream reality. Humbert and his reader share the reaction described in the final lines of John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? // Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?" (Keats ll. 79-80).

By arriving at our destination on the journey of *Lolita*, we have uncovered the truth of Humbert and Lolita's unbelievable story – Humbert chronicled and embellished a story he dreamt during a trip to the Arctic simply to poke fun at his analysts, but quickly began to share his pseudonym's obsession with the Haze nymphet and added layer upon layer of mazes to conceal the depth of his deception. What influence does this realization have upon Humbert's immortalization of Lolita, or Nabokov's ingenious work? With this novel, Nabokov challenges the distinction between truth and fiction, breaking down the false barrier that divides the two. He puts forth a narrator who plunges his reader's trust into the darkest domain of deception, never to be regained, only to show us that only through this fiction-within-fiction can we glimpse truth. Humbert does not abide by generic conventions – not of a detective plot, memoir, confessional narrative, travel narrative, tragedy, or comedy – instead, he masks his dream with overt parodies of these conventions. But in this exaggerated fictive territory, we glimpse some of the most real human emotions to occupy the pages of contemporary fiction. My reading of *Lolita* has

made the questions that have haunted critics largely unanswerable. Is this novel pornographic or an extended prophetic sonnet? Does the novel present an amoral or immoral tale? Do Humbert and Nabokov create art within *Lolita*, or kitsch? Is Humbert's dream a Freudian trap? We cannot definitively answer such divisive questions when reading Humbert's narrative as a dream sequence, opening his tale to endless interpretations. Above all else, Nabokov used fiction to explore the topography of human consciousness in a decidedly anti-conventional mode. If we only read *Lolita* in terms of normal contexts, in which our days are propelled by dogma and the trivialities of daily life, we neglect Nabokov's objection to thrusting the novel into a dimension beyond its current range. The author himself puts it best, as he smoothly entreats us to get lost within Humbert's "artist's dream:"

There are gentle souls who would pronounce *Lolita* meaningless because it does not teach them anything. I am neither a reader nor a writer of didactic fiction, and, despite John Ray's assertion, *Lolita* has no moral in tow. For me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm. (314-15)

In the spirit of Nabokov, I too have aspired to connect my reader with another state of being, one that favors the imagination and the invention of dog-eared maps and ruined tour books over the inconsequence of didactic fiction; and this is perhaps the only state of being in which art can be the norm – the dream state.

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