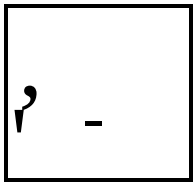

REFLEXIVE NARRATIVE IN *LOLITA*, BY VLADIMIR NABOKOV

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> Reality is a very subjective affair . . . you never get near enough because reality is an infinitive succession of steps, levels of perception. . . . Whatever the mind grasps, it does so with the assistance of creativity, fancy.
>
> Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*

Vladimir Nabokov's novels show that imagination creates its own reality by giving order and meaning to a subject. They do not reflect reality; instead, they express their own individual reality. Nabokov's novels are usually written in the form of manuscripts which narrate several events in an anterior temporal sequence. The narrator tells his personal story from his point of view, which is always different from that of the characters around him. Therefore, there are two realities, that of the narrator's and that created by the way in which he narrates, as the unreliable narrator inadvertently lets the reader know what the other characters think. For instance, in *Lolita* Humbert Humbert sees his stepdaughter as a nymphet, while other characters perceive

Lolita as an ordinary teenager; in *Despair* nobody but Hermann Hermann sees any likeness between him and Felix.

The way in which the narrators tell their stories makes the meaning of the novel different from or even contrary to what they wish to express. What Nabokov's narrators produce is not a faithful record of their past but an imaginative invention. As Patricia Waugh says in her book on metafiction, "[t]o write about oneself is implicitly to posit oneself as another, to narrate or historize oneself as a character in one's own discourse" (1984: 135). There is, then, a difficulty in portraying reality, because any point of view on reality is a subjective one, in which memory and imagination are mixed. Or, again, in Linda Hutcheon's words,

> We have only access to the past today through its traces, its documents, the testimony of witnesses, and other archival materials.... There are important parallels between the processes of history-writing and fiction-writing and among the most problematic of these are their common representation. . . . In fact, that teller —of story or history— also constructs those very facts by giving a particular meaning to events. (1989: 58)

In both *Despair* and *Lolita* the narrator's invention displaces reality, and the outcome is madness. That happens with Hermann Hermann in *Despair*, Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* and Kinbote in *Pale Fire*. Such neurotic distortions are well studied by Freud, who describes, for instance, a man who thinks that the doctor has advised him to flirt with his mother. This is of course not true. This patient substitutes fantasy for reality because of his excitement on meeting his mother (Freud 1988: 1575). Nabokov's characters distort reality for different reasons. When the external world fails, when they cannot achieve what they really want, they reject it by recreating a new reality. Their narcissism leads them to impose their point of view as the sole reality. Memory and imagination seem to overlap in the recollection of their experiences. The result is a gradual disorientation and madness.

Lolita is introduced by John Ray, a Ph.D. from Widworth who is the fictional editor of the book. John Ray and Humbert Humbert live in the same fictional world. Ray informs us that the writer of the text, which is presented as a true story, has entitled it *Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male*. Ray defends its publication because he considers it to be a lesson for everybody to learn —a classical justification similar to the one Fernando de Rojas used in his *Celestina*. However, the function is different because

Nabokov is just parodying this traditional device. In this introduction, John Ray tells in advance what has happened to the characters within the novel. Consequently, this introduction is a prolepsis (Genette 1980: 67) with respect to the following text, as it tells the reader in advance what has happened to those people who appear in the novel. Besides, Ray acknowledges adverse criticism of the novel: "The cynic may say that commercial pornography makes the same claim; the learned may counter by asserting that 'H.H.'s impassioned confession is a tempest in a test tube"(*L* 6). He also criticizes Humbert's attitude, "He is horrible, he is abject, he is a shining example of moral leprosy" (*L* 7). Therefore, this fictional editor draws criticism about the story into the text itself as he criticizes the hero of the novel. In a way, this foreword is a reflexive device. John Ray's moral and didactic point of view collides with Nabokov's comments about art.

> Why did I write any of my books, after all? For the sake of the pleasure, for the sake of the difficulty. I have no social purpose, no moral message. (Nabokov 1990: 16)

The reader soon discovers that this editor is one of Nabokov's constructions. This editor is a pretext for the author to make fun of what he stands for, an ironic device. As Humbert does in his narrative later, John Ray parenthetically comments on his own ideas: "('Do the Senses make sense?')" (*L* 5) and he also plays with words. Moreover, there is a game with his name. He is called **J**ohn **R**ay, **Jr**. His name is, then, symmetrical and reflexive (Field 1967: 331). The result is ironic because John Ray, Jr. seems to be a real moralist, but he turns out to be a rhetorical exercise.

This type of ironic editor can blur the frontiers between reality and fiction. At the beginning the reader does not know if John Ray is an unreliable narrator or a reliable witness who is telling the truth. One could easily believe what John Ray says, and the story could be seen as Humbert's true autobiography —but of course the reader knows that the real author of the novel is Nabokov, and that, therefore, this is not an autobiography, but a novel.

Boris Tomashevski developed the concept of motivation in fiction. The strategies which *Lolita* and *Despair* show are not those of the realistic motivation, to use the term introduced by this critic to characterize those novels whose aim is to be realistic. *Lolita* does not attempt to be a realist novel. It shows, rather, features of *artistic motivation,* as Nabokov tries to defamiliar-

ize the traditional device with which an editor prepares the reader for the book that he is going to read.

> Artistic motivation. As I said, the use of a motif results from a compromise between realistic illusion and the demands of the artistic structure. (Tomashevski 1965: 84)

The story itself begins with Humbert's autobiography. If the reader happens to know that "Nabokov regards with profound skepticism the possibilities of autobiographical revelation" (Appel 1967: 125), s/he should not take it for granted that Nabokov is imitating a straightforward memoir. Like *Despair*, *Lolita* is written in retrospect. The whole story is an analepsis (Genette 1980: 48). It introduces a present time and the narrator talks about what happened previously. It is the typical device used by a "first-person narrator" for the purpose of exposition. Humbert, the narrator, tells the reader his experiences with Lolita in a self-conscious way:

> I am now obliged to describe in some tedious detail . . . (*L* 81)
> But a few incidents pertaining to those four or five days after Charlotte's simple death, have to be noted. (*L* 98)
> I am only a brute, never mind, let us go on with my miserable story. (L 190)

His narrative also seems to be a first draft which has been written in haste and which has not been altered. This is due to the fact that Humbert, like Hermann in *Despair,* is constantly using brackets, square brackets, hyphens and the form of a conventional diary to introduce his thoughts within his story; it does not present itself as carefully revised.

The way the narrator sometimes introduces his thoughts and explanations is different from techniques used in general in realistic novels. This is not only because he appears to be a self-conscious narrator, ("to retrieve the thread of this explanation"; *L* 124), but for other structural reasons. For instance, on one occasion he uses the form of a diary to make it part of his fictional memoirs:

> *Saturday*. For some days already I had been leaving . . . (*L* 48)
> *Sunday*. Changeful, bad-tempered, cheerful, awkward, graceful . . .
> *Monday*. Rainy morning. . . (*L* 49)

These are entries from a pocket diary where he wrote what happened during some of those days at Charlotte Haze's. He lets the reader know what he has experienced during a day, sometimes using "boring" entries to enhance realism. As it is a diary, this form appears as something natural within his biography because he is recalling his memories. Diaries and confessions are confidential and subjective. This form is chosen when the information is of a private nature and Humbert wants to narrate previous secret events of his life. But Nabokov mocks these techniques, as he is sure he cannot show reality as such (Nabokov 1990: 94).

There are frequent digressions and interruptions introduced in a variety of ways such as brackets, square brackets and dashes, to explain and comment on Humbert's story:

> The boxer had fallen extremely low when he met the good old priest (who had been a boxer himself in his robust youth and could still slug in a sinner) (*L* 45)

> In a few minutes —say, twenty, say half an hour, sicher ist sicher as my uncle Gustave used to say— I would let myself into. . . (*L* 123)

> (judging by the partisan flurry here and there among the audience) (L 219)

These commentaries give the narrator the opportunity to establish a distance from what he is telling. A conventional story does not have so many digressions introduced by the narrator as is the case here. This device used in the novel produces an effect of freshness on the reader, as if the narrator had not checked his notes before handing them in to be published.

Moreover, Humbert comments on the circumstances under which he is writing his memories, as Hermann also did in his. Thus, he tells the reader that he is writing in jail ("I am writing under observation"; *L* 10), which can be read as a metafictional comment. Humbert also comments on the circumstances in which he has to give more explanations following his lawyer's instructions. It appears, then, that the narrator is not totally free to describe whatever he wants.

> My lawyer has suggested I give a clear, frank account of the itinerary we followed, and I suppose I have reached here a point where I cannot avoid that chore. (*L* 151)

This seems to produce an effect of blurring of frontiers between fiction and reality. This occurs because Humbert makes the lawyer part of his story as he does with the jury, that is, the readers, who are reading his memoirs — yet another conjuring trick for the reader's benefit.

His narration is character-bound, told "in the first person" (Cohan and Shires 1988: 90) or autodiegetic, in Genette's terms (1980). The first person pronoun refers to the narrator and he is a main character in the story. Narrators of autobiographies often use the first-person to narrate their experiences as they are autodiegetic narrators. This is Humbert's case. But Humbert is not a traditional autodiegetic narrator.There are passages in *Lolita* which are written in the third-person in Humbert's story though he does not cease to be an autodiegetic narrator. Consequently, the focalization changes; that is, the perspective from which the events that are narrated changes. Humbert narrates using mostly internal focalization (Genette 1980: 192), that is from his point of view, as one knows his thoughts and perceptions. But, in the following example Humbert uses external focalization (Genette 1980: 190) to explain what is happening to him.

> Three doctors and the Farlows presently arrived on the scene and took over. *The widower,* a man of exceptional self-control, neither wept nor raved. *He* staggered a bit, that *he* did; but he opened *his* mouth only to impart such information or issue such directions as were strictly necessary in connection with the identification, examination and disposal of a dead woman, the top of her head *a porridge of bone, brains, bronze hair and blood.* (*L* 98) (emphasis added)

Here the narrator tells his experiences from an external point of view. He talks about himself in terms of *the widower* instead of *I.* He does not allow the reader to know his feelings or thoughts. Nabokov plays with the language, points of view and perspectives. Although this is not the type of focalization that Humbert normally uses, it gives the narrator the opportunity to be more objective and cool at portraying the situations. It is a sort of deceptive mask he uses to play with the reader. In this example the use of a "third-person narration" for Charlotte's death stresses his coldness, as Humbert, the narrator, was not in love with his wife. It is hypocritical behaviour. Besides, one also notices his coldness by the way he describes his wife. Her head is "a porridge of bone, brains, bronze hair and blood." This is what he can objectively see, but is an ironic description. She was for him a vulgar housewife and he cannot see her as his beloved wife.

Humbert's narration mixes two different times, that of the story which is the narrative content of his narration and that of the narrating (Genette 1980: 27). This is what usually happens in autobiographies, such as Nabokov's own *Speak, Memory* when, for instance, he says: "I did not know then (as I know perfectly well now) what to do with such things" (1969: 165). And since Humbert is writing after the events have happened, the narrator sometimes projects events which will occur later. Consequently, there are, according to Genette, several prolepses (1980: 76) in his narrative. Therefore, on several occasions he briefly comments on what will happen later.

> to Louise and the poplars (whom and which she —Lolita— was never to see again) (*L* 66)

> Lo, leaving the dog as she would leave me some day, rose from her haunches. (*L* 118)

From these examples one can infer that there are also two HHs; the Humbert who experiences the events narrated and who does not know what will happen next and the Humbert who writes his story in a wiser retrospect. "Here as throughout the novel one has the sense of a narrator performing for the benefit of an audience. There is Humbert the actor and Humbert the observer, a dichotomy stressed by the artificially didactic tone" (Clancy 1984:105). It is an instance of doubling, as the reader is learning about a character who is also the narrator of the story. But the latter Humbert really learns from his experiences. This is why Humbert makes some comments on what he should have done with Lolita but he did not. This is the case when they are alone for the first time in the hotel The Enchanted Hunters.

> If my happiness could have talked, it would have filled that genteel hotel with a deafening roar. And my only regret today is that I did not quietly deposit key '342' at the office, and leave the town, the country, the continent, the hemisphere— indeed, the globe —that very same night. (*L* 123)

He should have left the key instead of entering the room and making Lolita his lover. He would have avoided many problems; but he did not. The result is that the Humbert who writes the story regrets having harmed her to this extent, and he is able to recognize his guilt.

> 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. (*L* 286)

It is not till the end of the story that he understands that Lolita is not a nymphet but a young woman, now pregnant. He offers his commentaries to explain his innocence in the hope of being forgiven for Lolita's rape, though not for Quilty's murder. Humbert does not recognize his guilt for killing Quilty because he thinks that Quilty has not only robbed him of Lolita but has also made her his lover. The commentary gives him the opportunity to ask his audience for understanding of his life so that he may eventually be forgiven and be able to demonstrate the purity of his motives.

> Now I wish to introduce the following idea. Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travellers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic. (*L* 16)

> I had thought that months, perhaps years, would elapse before I dared to reveal myself to Dolores Haze; but by 6 she was wide awake, and by 6.15 we were technically lovers. I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she who seduced me. (*L* 132)

> Oh, do not scowl at me, reader, I do not intend to convey the impression that I did not manage to be happy. (*L* 164)

The narrator has to explain his behaviour and he must allow the reader to understand the reason for past events.

> To be convicted Humbert needs only to recall facts, to be pardoned he must ask his audience to read his life with the aid of the commentary, to compare it with other written lives, to see that child rape and murder can be disturbing but convincing metaphors for a desire, for moral and aesthetic perfection. (Maddox 1983: 67)

The narrator addresses himself to the reader in order to explain his past actions. He is the focalizer who filters the story the reader reads. There is an *I* which talks directly to a *you* that is a reader. It produces an effect of closeness and confidence between them, even the effect of a confessional tone. However, the author builds up a tension by this means. On the one hand

the narrator uses a tone of confidence and confession but, on the other, he distances himself from what he is telling by making ironic comments or descriptions and referring to himself in the third-person, which lends it a cool distant tone. He does this when describing the way Charlotte dies or the way Lolita gets rich as a result of negotiating with him while he is using her for sex.

Examples can be found of other rhetorical effects achieved by the narrator. He sometimes addresses himself directly to specific people instead of the average reader.

> (I notice the slip of my pen in the preceding paragraph, but please do not correct it, Clarence) (*L* 32)

> (Jean, whatever, wherever you are, in minus time-space or plus soul-time, forgive me all this, parenthesis included) (*L* 104)

The narrator asks them to act. This constitutes another way in which fiction and reality merge into one. How does this come about? The narrator makes those people part of his fiction by naming them, and so, they are real within his fiction. The reader, once more, has to analyse the text and see what is fiction and what is not.

There are several other features of the narrative which lead the reader to understand that Humbert is not a traditional narrator. One such incident would be when the narrator recognizes that he is going out of his mind. That is, he himself recognizes that the reader cannot totally trust him: "Perhaps I was losing my mind" (*L* 227). Besides, he invents words or plays with their sounds. Therefore, if he is capable of twisting separate words, what is to prevent him from twisting the total sum of the words, that is to say the text itself? When the narrator invents words he may be giving clues designed to detract from his story's credibility. He could be consciously making himself unreliable.

> I would coach in French and fondle in *Humbertish.* (*L* 35)

> She had entered my world, *umber* and black *Humberland,*. . . To think that between a *Hamburger* and a *Humburger*, she. . . (*L* 164)

> 'That was my *Lo,*' she said, 'and these are my *lilies* 'Yes', I said, 'yes. They are beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!' (*L* 40)

> *Mr Edgar H. Humbert* (*L* 187)
>
> I would find him through *Uncle Ivory* if she refused. (*L* 273; emphasis added in all instances)

Within the text there are many words which Humbert himself has invented, such as in the first two examples. But the narrator also plays with the sound of the words and with associations of words and meanings of words. That is what is demonstrated in the third example, where the narrator compares Lolita with flowers. The fourth example is an instance of wordplay with the names of Humbert and Edgar Allan Poe. It refers to the fact that Poe also fell in love with a beautiful teenage girl who also died very young (Maddox 1983: 73). In the last example, "uncle Ivory" refers to Dr Ivor Quilty, the dentist.

Apart from being a witty narrator, as the previous examples show, Humbert is also a lazy one who does not want to waste time in his descriptions. He consciously wishes not to be seen as a narrator in the realist tradition. In order to achieve this he avoids releasing information to the reader. Therefore, the reader is compelled to use his/her imagination.

> changes in outlook *and so forth.* (*L* 34)
>
> replacing them by others, *and so on.* (*L* 77)
>
> co-operative, energetic, *and so forth.* (*L* 80)
>
> B-room Room-BA *and so on.* (*L* 195; emphasis added in all)

The reader has to imagine the rest of the description because the narrator does not finish it. The reader has to be active because s/he is forced to create part of the text as the narrator avoids completing it. The reader also creates a fictional world as the narrator does. The reader always creates such a world, but this becomes especially true in Nabokov's fiction. Moreover, Humbert/Nabokov stresses the overuse of stock phrases which are supposedly used to explain things but do not really add any information. A further example would be the narrator's failure to copy all that he should have copied. This is what the reader finds in the shortest chapter of the book:

> Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita. Repeat till the page is full, printer. (*L* 109)

The narrator is too lazy to bother repeating her name till the page is full. He provokes the reader. He shows the reader that he is narrating but his story must be finished by others too. However, the printer does not fulfill his job either, and the reader has to imagine it. As is also the case in *Despair*, reading is shown not to be a passive comfortable act. Another device Humbert uses to provoke the reader is to play with the form of the words. For instance, the narrator uses capital letters to draw the reader's attention, to shock him or to mark something such as alliteration:

> I produced a small vial containing *Papa's Purple Pills.* (*L* 121; emphasis added)

Moreover, in some cases the narrator deliberately plays with the reader in order to confuse him/her. This happens, for instance, when Humbert reads Charlotte's declaration of love after having confessed his love for Lolita and having had a warm good-bye because Lolita goes on holiday. When the reader starts reading the declaration of love, s/he does not know who has written it.

> And simultaneously Lolita arrived, in her Sunday frock, stamping, panting, and then she was in my arms, her innocent mouth melting under the ferocious pressure of dark male jaws, my palpitating darling! . . . . The hollow of my hand was still ivory-full of Lolita.... *She* had a message for me . . . an unstamped, curiously clean-looking letter in my shaking hand. This is a confession: I love you (so the letter began; and for a distorted moment I mistook its hysterical scrawl for a schoolgirl's scribble). . . . Pray for me —if you ever pray. CH (*L* 66-68)

In this example, the reader is told that Lolita has kissed Humbert when she leaves the house for the camp. Then, the narrator reveals that she has a message for him. But he does not inform us who "she" is, "she" could be either Lolita's mother or Lolita. The reader does not discover the identity of the author of the letter until the end, where it is signed by Charlotte Haze.

The narrator makes use of other confusing coincidences. This is the case of the use of number 342:

> Dr Edgar H. Humbert and daughter, 342 Lawn Street, Ramsdale. A key (342!) was half shown to me . . . 'Say, it's our house number,' said cheerful Lo. (*L* 118)

The narrator uses the same number to provoke the reader and to produce another reflexion. Humbert does not want to be realistic. His desire to avoid realism is also shown through his use of irony. An early example of this is the seaside love scene involfing Humbert as a boy and Annabel Leigh; considerable erotic tension is built up but their attempt at sex is frustrated (together with the reader's expectations) when some fishermen intrude upon them. Another example is when Humbert speaks about the book he is reading in order to get to "know" his daughter. Its title is *Know your own daughter* (*L* 172), read by Humbert in the Biblical sense related to sex. This is ironical because he does not treat her as a daughter but as a nymphet and in fact carries out (in the Biblical sense) the behest of the title. This irony is also made explicit through the adjectives he uses to address the readers who are reading his story: "Oh, winged gentlemen of the jury!" (*L* 124) "Frigid gentlemen of the jury!" (*L* 132). Another strategy for avoiding realism is through the use of ambiguity, as a result of which the reader is forced to doubt what the narrator is telling him/her. That is the case with Quilty's murder. It seems impossible to believe that Humbert cannot have killed Quilty after shooting so many bullets into him. Humbert's confusion jumbles up his syntax as he describes the fight with Quilty:

> 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.* (*L* 297; emphasis added)

As Humbert's goal is not to follow the conventions of the realist novel, he feels no remorse about giving false information. Rampton says that if one believes that Humbert's confession is sincere, one has not only lost the game to the author, but also his "game of worlds." This critic thinks that the literary self-consciousness that Nabokov stresses is very important because it involves the reader "in a complex range of responses" (Rampton 1984:108).

Finally, the narrator allows the reader a role within his confession. The obvious tactic that the narrator employs to make the reader explicit is by means of addressing him directly as reader, as jury or as *you.* He knows that his reader is his judge. Therefore, the narrator forces him/her to read his memories and, while he does so, Humbert makes him/her participate in his

evolution throughout the story. "The reader, then, shares in the enacted evolution and development of the narrator's consciousness and moral sensibility" (Clancy 1984: 112). At the beginning the reader cannot refrain from thinking of Humbert as a monster in the light of his behaviour with Lolita and his previous lovers. In the end, the reader understands better Humbert's guilt and sadness, but the narrator maintains a consistent ironic distance and this attitude makes it difficult for the reader to reach a conclusive judgment.

In this relationship created between the narrator and the reader, the narrator at times obliges the reader to accept a certain idea which he particularly wishes to stress.

> Now, in pursuing what follows, *the reader should* bear in mind . . . . (*L* 152)
>
> *The reader must* now forget Chestnuts and Colts, and accompany us further west. (*L* 215)
>
> And now *see* what I was repaid for my plans. (*L* 62)

The narrator uses modal verbs which mean obligation or expressions which make the reader take notice. Therefore, the reader is faced with statements of duty or commands which compel him to follow the instructions given by the narrator; he is invited to become an active partner in the act of reading. The reader has to rearrange the information and has to imagine the remainder of the information that the narrator has omitted.

> (who, as the reader will mark, was more afraid of. . . .) (*L* 55)
>
> as the reader knows (*L* 104)
>
> The reader may well imagine what I answered (*L* 158)
>
> I am, as the reader has gathered by now, a poor businessman; (*L* 171)
>
> the name that the astute reader has guessed long ago. (*L* 270)

The reader is not passive in his reception of all the information that the narrator gives. He has to take part actively, remembering, imagining and guessing. S/he is forced to revise his/her understanding. It is a kind of uncomfortable reading since the reader cannot be passive. S/he has to develop

an awareness of literature and language as subjective human artifacts. Besides, the narrator may stand at a distance and ask for something or demand a specific attitude from the reader:

> Please, reader: no matter your exasperation with the tender-hearted, morbidly sensitive, infinitely circumspect hero of my book, do not skip these essential pages! *Imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me;* try to discern the doe in me, trembling in the forest of my own iniquity; let's even smile a little. (*L* 129; emphasis added)

> (. . . let's talk to them, please —let's talk to them, reader! —please I'll do anything you want, oh, please . . .) (*L* 155)

In all the examples the narrator wants the reader to take an active role. That is why he uses mainly imperatives and an imploring tone. In the first example the narrator desperately cries for the reader's help to create the story. He openly acknowledges that he is a fiction. He cannot exist if the reader does not imagine him. He draws attention to the importance of the act of reading. It is a statement which sums up the narrator and the reader's behaviour in a metafictional novel. The reader is forced to take an active role within the fiction and the narrator acknowledges he is a fiction.

Another device that the narrator uses on purpose is an overuse of realism in some of his descriptions. Realist novels usually display very careful descriptions of places or objects. The narrator seems to have explored those places or to have looked at those objects very closely. However, Humbert mocks the detailed descriptions. The result is that the reader himself realizes both that the narrator is fully aware of the use of this device and that his aim is to shock the reader:

> Oh, you know (noisy exhalation of breath)— the hotel you raped me. Okay, skip it. I mean, was it (almost in a whisper) The Enchanted Hunters? Oh, was it? (musingly) was it? (*L* 200)

> began to pick up the pebbles between her feet . . . —and chuck them at a can. *Ping*. You can't a second time. *Ping*. (*L* 41)

> Ah-ah-ah, said the little door. (*L* 266)

The explanations the narrator gives between brackets are too detailed. The same is true of the other two examples. The narrator transcribes even the

sounds and noises produced by movements and objects. These descriptions do not help the reader to guess Humbert's thoughts or indeed, the reasons for his actions with Lolita. They are descriptions which hinder the flow of the story itself and draw attention to the style of the description instead. However, this device is not original to *Lolita*, as Nabokov already employed this technique in *Despair*, one of his first novels. These descriptions have a hilarious effect on the reader. That is, a result opposite to the one the narrator was supposedly aiming at.

The narrator sometimes achieves comic effects with other kinds of descriptions as well. This happens when Humbert recalls how he recognizes that Lolita is a nymphet. He appeals to the device used in fairy tales when the king recognizes his long-lost kidnapped child by seeing a special mark on the child's body (*L* 39). Another playful literary allusion appears when the narrator confides to the reader where Lolita has hidden her money.

> Once I found eight one-dollar notes in one of her books (fittingly—*Treasure Island)*. (*L* 182)

Humbert stresses the fact that her money, which is her hidden treasure, is kept out of sight in the novel whose story has also to do with a hidden treasure; there are eight notes because that was the number cried out by John Silver's parrot ("Pieces of eight!"). The reader must have some literary knowledge to understand these intertextual games.

The previous examples are intended to obtain extra narrative effects from the reader's activity. However, there are other effects within his narrative that Humbert wants to produce. Both Hermann and Humbert attempt to impose their imagination on the real world. The former thinks he has carried out the perfect crime and the latter believes he has found his nymphet. Neither of them is right. Hermann does not fulfil his expectations and Humbert finds an average American girl. What Humbert pursues is just a figment of his imagination —a state of affairs he is sometimes able to recognise.

> What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita —perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness —indeed, no life of her own. (*L* 62)

Lolita becomes a symbolic construction, she is not just a teenager. The girl seems to be a metaphor for literary creativity. Lolita is the desired work created by the author. She has no life of her own. Humbert has imagined her but the reader also has to imagine the story in order to be able to understand the author's work. That may be another reason why Humbert calls Lolita Carmen. "'My Carmen', I said (I used to call her that sometimes)" (*L* 242). He knows she is the result of his imagination, she is his construction, his creation. Something similar happens with Humbert's description of Lolita at tennis. Rampton sees it as "an exercise in the special art of seeing her as an object" (1984: 19). This theme has been criticized and rejected by feminist criticism. Feminist critics often draw attention to the fact that women have always been considered as an object by men. Women have always been related to passivity because they are constructed by men. Therefore, men have always denied women's subjectivity and responsibility for their actions (Moi 1991: 92). These examples reinforce the fact that Humbert sees Lolita as a sculpture he has moulded. Moreover, the meaning of the Latin word Carmen also has to do with creation. According to the dictionary, it means:

> Carmen-inis: (Cano) n: canto, música // poema, composición en verso. . . // parte de un poema, canto // fórmula mágica, sortilegio, hechizo. . . // respuesta de un oráculo, predicción. (*VOX)*

The name Carmen is connected with magic. Consequently, "A nymphet is magical always" (Long 1984: 142) and Humbert speaks about the "demoniac" nature of nymphets (*L* 16). Besides, he introduces that name, as a way to show that she is his own creation. It is a metafictional feature used to dehumanize the characters, to show that they are fictional. Hutchison notices that Humbert calls Lolita "Carmen" especially at the end of the novel. He thinks that Humbert uses it to build up a reference to Prosper Mérimeé's *Carmen* which turns out to be deceptive at the end, since in Mérimeé's *Carmen* Carmen's lover kills her when she deserts him for another man. But, in Nabokov's *Lolita,* Humbert asks Lolita, addressing her as Carmen, to go with him. She rejects that offer and instead of killing her, Humbert kills Quilty (Hutchison 1983: 102). However, I feel that he calls her Carmen because she is his construction. In the novel Humbert has possessed not her but his own construction. As Pifer notes,

> he does behave towards Lolita as though she were the mere instrument of his will. Like an author dreaming up a character, Humbert

> despotically transforms the twelve-year-old American kid into an aesthetic mirage. (Pifer 1981: 164).

Apart from that, calling Lolita "Carmen" is a fiction-within-a-fiction device as well —a *mise en abyme*. "Carmen" is Humbert's creation, while both creator and creation are the work of another author. There is another *mise en abyme* related to Lolita. It is the use of the theatrical play. The script of the play is a summary of Lolita's role within the novel:

> the complete text of The Enchanted Hunters, the playlet in which Dolores Haze was assigned the part of a farmer's daughter who imagines herself to be a *woodland witch,* or Diana, or something, and who, having got hold of a book on hypnotism, *plunges a number of lost hunters* into various entertaining trances before falling in her turn under the spell of a vagabond poet. (*L* 198; emphasis added)

The play is another reflexion, this time of Lolita's story. Lolita is a nymphet; Lolita is Carmen, a magic formula, a little witch who makes both Quilty and Humbert love her by means of her enchantments. In the play Lolita is also a woodland witch persecuted by two lost hunters such as she is persecuted by both Quilty and Humbert in the novel. As happens with Hermann in *Despair*, Humbert rejects the real world as he does not adopt either of the roles he should; he is neither a husband nor a father. He is a "nympholept" and that is the passion which rules his life. Accordingly, in the first part of the book he justifies himself by explaining his passion and fulfills his dream by living with Lolita. But in the second part of the book he loses his nymphet. On finding her again, he realizes that she is not his little Carmen but just a young woman. In *Lolita*, the narrator who is the hero finally matures and is able to see reality. As a result he feels guilty of having robbed Lolita of her childhood.

> He has already acknowledged his own greater guilt, his having robbed her of her childhood and turned her into an idealized object of desire. Before confronting Quilty he has found Lo, again, and discovered in himself a genuine love for the person she has become. (Nicol and Rivers 1982: 161)

Humbert shows a different Lolita at the end of the book. "He has only this one scene to show how the twelve-year-old girl so clearly stabilized in our mind has changed into a more mature and more reflexive young woman"

(Rampton 1984: 114). She is not called Lolita but *Mrs Richardson Schiller*. Her body and her face have changed. She resembles her mother, she was "becoming only a slightly altered version of her mother" (Maddox 1983: 79). For instance, when Humbert imagines Lolita to be Charlotte rising from her grave ("Gracefully, in a blue mist, Charlotte Haze rose from her *grave" —L* 273). This is a sentence which could be taken as a prolepsis (Genette 1980: 67) referring to Lolita's death as her mother also died quite young. Lolita turns out to be an ordinary young woman who loves her husband and baby, though she still thinks of Quilty as "a great guy in many respects" (*L* 274). It is then that Humbert realizes that Lolita has a life apart from his world. Robert Kiely asserts "Lolita repeatedly eludes Humbert's desire to comprehend and possess her completely. She eventually escapes from him, grows older, and takes charge of her own story" (1993:143). The end of the book is filled with an outburst directed against himself for depriving her of her childhood. However, nothing can be changed. She will not be thirteen again. She will not live with him anymore and she will die in childbirth. Humbert discovers that he really loves her, though she starts being another version of her mother (Maddox 1983: 79), a woman Humbert has rejected. But this love is a mature one as he understands that nymphets only live in his imagination. His only thought is to see art as a way to "the only immortality" he and Lolita can "share" (*L* 307). Humbert uses art as a way to share eternity with her; they will live forever through literature. In fact, it could be a metaphor for artistic creation. Humbert creates something which ends up by having a life of its own. This fantasy, then, is a reflection of Nabokov's fiction-making since he introduces a motif which deals with creation and invention.

Humbert relates adventures where his memory overlaps with imagination. Nabokov shows with these examples what he has usually asserted, as in the following extract:

> The past is a constant accumulation of images, but our brain is not an ideal organ for constant retrospection and the best we can do is to pick out and try to retain those patches of rainbow light flitting through memory. The act of retention is the act of art, artistic selection, artistic blending, artistic re-combination of actual events. (Quoted in Maddox 1983: 117)

Nabokov recognizes that he cannot show reality in a simple form. There is a more problematic relationship between fiction and reality than the one realist fiction has led the reader to believe. Nabokov's use of madmen as the

protagonists of several of his novels questions our sense of reality and shows it to be something nobody can take for granted. He reveals that problematic relationship between fiction and reality. Autobiographies are supposed to depict reality. Nabokov shows, though, that autobiographies can create a reality of their own. This hero admits having committed murder and child rape, but they could be taken as metaphors for an author's search for aesthetic perfection. Moreover, the reader realizes that s/he cannot trust this narrator. He cannot believe his stories *à la lettre*. The reader is a modern reader who has to remember information or reshape it. In addition, the narrator can address himself to the reader. This openly makes the reader part of the act of reading. The relationship between author and reader is explained by Nabokov in an image in *Speak, Memory* :

> . . . but every time the delicate union did take place, with the magic precision of a poet's word meeting halfway his, or a reader's, recollection. (1969: 209)

This narrator imposes an aesthetic pattern on real life. Humbert offers the story he is writing to Lolita as it is the only eternity that they can share. Humbert blurs the frontiers between fiction and reality in order to go on living by means of art, in literature.a

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