



Cases of Academic Misconduct

May 2015
Examination Session

Core Components

Extended Essay / English Literature

Infringement: Plagiarism

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LANGUAGE IN LOLITA

The novel *Lolita* contains a plot that can be hard to believe as authentic events in a person's lifetime. The readers are introduced to the pedophilic relationship Humbert Humbert pursues with young Dolores. Humbert from the beginning of the novel displays his canny use of syntax. Humbert has the ability to deceive and construe readers with his use of "fancy" poetic language. This ability in turns effect the way readers interpret his admiration and obsession of a young female adolescent.

Ellen Pifer notes in *The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov* that readers are warned of Humbert's duplicitous nature from the outset (187). On the opening page of his memoir Humbert announces, "You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style." (9). He acknowledges his ability of distracting readers from the fact that he is a murderer with the evocative power of his language. Nabokov has filled *Lolita* to the brink with exquisite metaphors, intricate wordplay, puzzles and allusions to other authors and their works. The pervasiveness of different workings of the English language makes its importance to the novel undeniable. Nabokov has been considered a master of prose by critics and I would argue that the depth present in *Lolita* supports this notion. This depth is especially discernable in his choice of imbuing the novel's narrator, Humbert, with a faculty for using literary devices and rhetorical ploys. I will thus, in this final section, expand upon the ways Humbert uses language to conceal his designs from the reader throughout *Lolita*.

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Humanities and Theology

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The concept of the nymphet is introduced by Humbert in chapter five and is thereafter referred to many times. He explains that nymphets are girls only between the ages of nine and fourteen, and possess certain characteristics that separate them from other children: "the fey grace, the elusive, shifty, soul-shattering, insidious charm" (17). Humbert adopts a certain tone when discussing the concept in these passages, making his nymphets seem otherworldly, magical and rare. The nymphet is described as "fey", a "demon" in contrast to normal "human" girls, and males risk falling under her "spell". Additionally, he notes that "time plays a magic part", the nymphet is something ephemeral, something that can only be experienced during a limited period of time (17; italics added). The discussion of nymphets in these passages can be interpreted as Humbert trying to romanticize his attraction to young girls. By adhering to the sublime otherworldliness of nymphets he wants to create a justification for his actions. If Humbert had opted to exclude the concept of the nymphet in his discourse it would have affected his portrayal in the novel. Lacking this excuse he would have seemed even more monstrous than he is in his pursuit of Lolita. A similar otherworldliness to that of nymphets can also be distinguished in another concept, the enchanted hunter. In addition to elevating the objects of his attraction, the nymphets, Humbert also seeks to improve his own status, as the pursuer of said object – the enchanted hunter. It first appears in the novel as the name of the hotel where Humbert first has sex with Lolita at the novel's midpoint, "The Enchanted Hunters". It is also the name of the school play Lolita had a part in during her time at Beardsley. The expression being in the plural in these two instances is important plot-wise since it arguably does not only refer to Humbert Humbert, it also includes his counterpart, Clare Quilty. The

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"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." (127)

The playful inclusion of some sounding words in Quilty's replies in this exchange is an example of Nabokov's penchant for word games. Michael Wood describes the scene as "Humbert's anxiety getting into the sound of Quilty's words" (125). Humbert's unconscious is signaling the moral turpitude of sleeping with Lolita. The meeting proves to be fateful since from this point Humbert is not the only pursuer of Lolita's affections. The antagonist of the novel is thereby established. The presence of this antagonist is again

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noted when Humbert asks Lolita about the author of the play in which she participates, to which query she answers: "Some old woman, Clare Something, I guess" (209). Quilty being the author of the play with the same name as the hotel, further linking Humbert to Quilty. The enchanted hunter is a complement to the concept of the nymphet. The intention is the same; Humbert seeks to defend his attraction to young girls. Ascribing otherworldly, magical attributes to him, being "enchanted", does this. The implication is that the nymphet guides his actions. He is not in full control of himself, having lost himself in his obsession with Lolita. This obsession of Humbert's gives the novel its impetus as it governs his every action. She is the reason he murders Quilty at the end of the novel and ultimately meets his demise in prison. She is also the reason why he marries Charlotte, and almost goes through with murdering her. In Humbert's life Lolita is "above and over everything there is". none of the other people he starts relationships with seems to compare to her (45). Charlotte is contemptuously referred to as the Haze woman. This admittance of first name serves to create a distance to Charlotte in contrast to Lolita, who is almost always referred to on a first name basis. Even Humbert's first love, Annabel, does not compare to Lolita in Humbert's mind, "as she does not gain the same status, being referred to as a "faunlet" as opposed to nymphet (16-17)." Moreover, Amit Marcus argues that Humbert creates his own fantasy version of Lolita, reducing her to an aesthetic object. This reduction enables him to take advantage of Lolita without feeling much guilt, since she has become a mere artistic representation (187). His callousness is exemplified in chapter three where Lolita breaks down and cries after having sex with him. He exultantly refers to her bursting into tears as "a salutary storm of sobs" (169), showing no regret whatsoever. Humbert is,

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