Lolita Study Guide

Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov

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Introduction

When Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* was first published in 1955 in Paris, it was soon banned for its controversial content. Yet as an underground readership grew, the novel gained international attention, and, as a result, the bans were lifted. Immediate responses to the work were understandably mixed. Many critics condemned it as pornographic trash, citing its "obscene" descriptions of a pedophile's sexual activities. Others applauded the work's originality and sparkling wit. The novel has now, however, gained almost universal approval as a brilliant *tour de force.* Readers find middle-aged narrator and protagonist Humbert Humbert to be both perpetrator and victim of his disastrous obsession with the young Lolita. In his record of his relationship with her, Humbert becomes a complex mixture of mad lecher who "breaks" the life of a young girl and wild romantic who suffers in his pursuit of his unattainable ideal. Donald E. Morton in his book *Vladimir Nabokov* argues that "what makes *Lolita* something more than either a case study of sexual perversion or pornographic titillation is the truly shocking fact that Humbert Humbert is a genius who, through the power of his artistry, actually persuades the reader that his memoir is a love story." Nabokov's technical brilliance and beautiful, evocative language help bring this tragic character to life.

Author Biography

Vladimir Nabokov was born on April 23, 1899, in St. Petersburg, Russia. Twenty years later, during the Bolshevik Revolution, he and his aristocratic family fled to Berlin. After graduating with honors from Cambridge in 1922, Nabokov lived in Berlin and Paris where he wrote and taught English and tennis. In 1925, he married Vera Slonim, who became his lifelong helpmate and mother of his only child, Dmitri.

In 1940, Nabokov immigrated to the United States where he soon became a citizen and embarked on an illustrious teaching career at Stanford, Wellesley, Cornell, and Harvard. After he moved to America, he began writing in English, a change that he notes with despair in his Afterword to *Lolita:*

My private tragedy, which cannot, and indeed should not, be anybody's concern, is that I had to abandon my natural idiom, my untrammeled, rich, and infinitely docile Russian tongue for a second-rate brand of English, devoid of any of those apparatuses□the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions□which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way.

Critics, however, insist that Nabokov's American period was his most successful. During his years in the United States, he completed his highly acclaimed *Bend Sinister* (1947), *Lolita* (1955), *Pale Fire* (1962), *Lectures on Literature* (1980), and *Speak Memory* (1951), as well as other noteworthy works. Nabokov died on July 2, 1977, in Montreux, Switzerland. During his lifetime, he was awarded the Guggenheim fellowship for creative writing in 1943 and 1952, the National Institute of Arts and Letters grant in literature in 1951, a literary achievement prize from Brandeis University in 1964, the Medal of Merit from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1969, the National Medal for Literature in 1973, and a nomination for a National Book Critics Circle Award in 1980 for his *Lectures on Literature.*

Plot Summary

Lolita is the story of a European scholar obsessed with "nymphets", and his travels around America with his beloved teenage stepdaughter Lolita, who runs away from him and resents his stealing her life.

Humbert Humbert (H.H.), a middle-aged European scholar of English and French literature, is obsessed with "nymphets", nubile girls like Lolita Haze and before her, Annabel Leigh. His obsession has gotten him thrown into prison facing trial for crimes not yet described. He marries briefly in Paris before immigrating to New York, where psychological problems plague him. He settles in New England to resume his scholarly vocation and enjoy nymphets without harming them. Renting a room from Lolita's mother, Charlotte, H.H. for the first time faces the chance of physical contact. Unattractive Charlotte also takes an interest in H.H. and ships Lolita off to summer camp to have him alone. Charlotte's marriage proposal is set against eviction and being cut off from Lolita, beneath whose bottom he experiences rapturous relief without her knowing. He vows never to harm her. In fifty days, Charlotte and H.H. move from quiet wedding to quiet funeral. He cannot bring himself to drown Charlotte when she decides Lolita must go to a boarding school, and is relieved when she runs into traffic and is killed.

H.H. picks up the orphaned Lolita at camp and drives her to see her ostensibly hospitalized mother. Sleeping pills do not work on Lolita, who shows she is aware of his intentions, but in the morning, she gratifies H.H. sexually using techniques learned in camps. They go on to vaginal intercourse, which leaves Lolita sore and angry. As they drive on, H.H. has mixed emotions but undiminished desires, and is unsure whether Lolita is serious about charging rape. When she learns that her mother is dead, however, Lolita has nowhere to go but into her stepfather's lusting arms. The pair travels twenty-seven thousand miles around the US, while bored Lolita turns frigid. Knowing Lolita needs a stable home life, H.H. settles in a quiet college town, but worries about neighbors and other hazards, while Lolita learns to manipulate him. Teachers find her behavior difficult and observe a suspicious disinterest in sex. H.H. allows her to perform in a play, The Enchanted Hunters, and grows suspicious that she is compromising them. They have a terrible fight, at the end of which he threatens to imprison her. He is overjoyed when she wants to undertake a second road trip. When they reach the Continental Divide, Lolita acts and dresses suspiciously enough for H.H. to begin keeping a pistol handy.

H.H. becomes sure that someone is following them, and believes it is his Swiss cousin Gustave Trapp, perhaps serving as a paid detective. Fearing he is going crazy, he is determined to fight for Lolita rather than surrender her. Lolita's hospitalization and H.H.'s infection, which he suffers through in bed, provide the opportunity for "Uncle Gustave" to abduct Lolita. For years, H.H. follows erudite across the country. Unable to live alone, he hooks up with dumb Rita, a kindly drunk, far too old to be a nymphet, until in 1952, a letter comes from Lolita. H.H. leaves Rita to track Lolita down and kill the fiend who has stolen her. Finding an impoverished, faded pregnant woman whose husband is not the

abductor, H.H. provides them financial security but is told he is worse than the abductor, for he has ruined her life. Finding the true perpetrator, H.H. riddles him with bullets after allowing him to have his stiff upper-lipped last words. H.H. has written this story to give Lolita and him immortality.

Part 1, Chapters 1-6

Part 1, Chapters 1-6 Summary

Humbert Humbert (H.H.) muses about Lolita. H.H. is born in 1910 in Paris. His father owns a luxury hotel and his mom dies when he is three. His maternal aunt, Sybil, raises him. H.H. is spoiled, makes excellent marks, and has many friends. Around age thirteen, La Beauté Humaine provides his only knowledge of sex. In 1923, he goes to a lycée in Lyon. H.H. falls in love with Annabel Leigh and they experiment sexually, but never find the privacy to have full intercourse. She dies four months after their last attempt at sexual involvement. H.H. never gets over Annabel's death and he thinks that that may be the cause of his involvement with Lolita.

H.H.'s youth flies by. He uses prostitutes for sex, consorts with the intelligentsia of his day, writes a book and teaches. He becomes fascinated with young girls, whom he calls nymphets, saying that any pedophile can pick out a nymphet in a picture of a group of girls. Annabel in the matured H.H.'s mind becomes a "nymphet."

H.H. does develop normal relationships with women his own age, but has to work strenuously at suppressing his lust for young girls who remind him of Annabel. He learns that breast development occurs at 10.7 years and pubic hair at 11.2. He pretends to read on park benches to watch nymphets play, his scholarly book hiding his erection.

H.H. often wonders what becomes of nymphets after he possesses them mentally without their knowing. He meets a French prostitute, who he thinks qualifies as a nymphet. After one sexual encounter with her, in which he is totally satisfied, he is not attracted to her the next time. H.H answers ads but the girls are unappealing; he also meets with a girl who is brought to him by a female pimp. He rejects the girl, but is blackmailed for having sought sex with a child.

Part 1, Chapters 1-6 Analysis

The opening chapters establish that the narrator is an educated middle-aged European writer who is obsessed with "nymphets", nubile girls like Lolita, and before her, Annabel Leigh. In a style he admits may annoy readers, H.H. muses about how this has gotten him thrown into prison facing trial for crimes not yet described. He is honest in confessing and/or justifying himself to the point of boasting. As a litterateur, H.H. pulls in references to Dante and Petrarch. He regularly uses untranslated French and criticizes those who misuse it.

Part 1, Chapters 7-12

Part 1, Chapters 7-12 Summary

In 1935, H.H. decides for his own safety to marry and selects Valeria, a cubist artist. They marry and move into a rented apartment for a laugh-filled nuptial night. In 1939, H.H.'s American uncle bequeaths him money on the condition he live in the US and attend to his business. When H.H. announces the move, Valeria lclaims her passport is not in order and then announces she has another man. He asks for the man's name. It is a taxi driver, ex-colonel from Russia. The colonel waits to carry Valeria's belongings out, giving H.H. no chance to hurt her. H.H. learns later that the couple, by then both corpulent, moves to California and takes part in an odd experiment by an American ethnologist. Valeria dies in childbirth in 1945.

Another world war begins before H.H. reaches New York where he writes perfume ads, resumes work on his French literature text, suffers insomnia, and glimpses nymphets in Central Park. After two mental hospitalizations, H.H. joins a twenty-month expedition in arctic Canada as a "recorder of psychic reactions." H.H. interacts with several psychiatrists, but does not take the process seriously.

H.H. seeks a sleepy New England town in which to write and swim. He hears the McCoos in Ramsdale have a room to rent, and a twelve-year-old daughter, whom H.H. envisions a nymphet. Upon touring the house, he spies the nymphet sunbathing. It is the same girl-child as H.H.'s Riviera love, peering over dark glasses: supple back, chestnut hair, polka-dotted black kerchief hiding juvenile breasts, and even a tiny mole on her side. A shiver of passionate recognition goes through H.H. as he memorizes her body and compares it to his dead bride's. This Lolita is destined to eclipse her prototype.

H.H. keeps a diary in 1947, whose contents his photographic memory now reproduces. H.H. sees Lolita at the clothesline and H.H. adores her bottom. Each successive day, H.H. adores different aspects of his "Lolita." Several days later, H.H. finds Lolita trying to get something out of her eye and H.H. licks the speck out and is more excited than when fondling Annabel. H.H. agonizes over Lolita's characteristics. The three sit on the piazza talking, and H.H. tells hilarious tales of the arctic and manages to touch Lolita. H.H. is sick with longing.

Charlotte talks about Lolita growing up and asks H.H. to tutor her next year. He does not commit, knowing that resisting temptation continuously in Lolita's presence would be difficult. On Friday, H.H. fears another breakdown if he remains under such intolerable temptation.

Saturday, fidgeting and shuffling to disguise her embarrassment, Lolita enters H.H.'s door, which he has been leaving ajar. She settles on his knee, but is distracted to go look in the basement when Louise comes yelling to come look. A couple days later, H.H.

searches for Lolita and circles back to his room and learns she has eaten the bacon off his breakfast tray. It seems a conspiracy of weather that keeps preventing a picnic they are supposed to have. Lolita holds his hand when her mother is not looking.

Charlotte announces they will go to the lake Sunday after church. H.H. realizes that Charlotte hates Lolita for being sweet on him, so he must at the lake dote on the mother and at some point remember leaving something behind to enjoy an orgy with Lolita in secret. He knows Lolita will be compliant..

Three weeks of frustration have left H.H. close to insanity. Charlotte has not told him that another nymphet, Mary Rose Hamilton, is invited and they will play happily apart, leaving Charlotte alone with her handsome lodger. Earlier, Charlotte hires a spinster, Miss Phalen, to sit Lolita while she goes to work in a nearby city; however, Miss Phalen breaks her hip.

Part 1, Chapters 7-12 Analysis

These chapters briefly record a disastrous "normal" marriage that allows Nabokov to comment on his fellow Slavic émigrés, and then bring H.H. to New York, where psychological problems land him in a hospital. He never seems far from the sanitarium thereafter, as he settles in New England to resume his scholarly vocation, but the criterion for his settling is the presence of nymphets. He knows how to enjoy nymphets without harming them, but in Lolita, faces for the first time the chance of explicit touching. Nabokov uses a reconstructed diary to heighten the frustration he feels being close to this difficult but intoxicating little girl. The forwardness she later shows is suggested here, and the mother's views on Lolita's obnoxious personality later come to be shared by the besotted H.H. That Charlotte is herself besotted with H.H. is growing clearer.

Part 1, Chapters 13-17

Part 1, Chapters 13-17 Summary

That Sunday is as bright as predicted, but Mary Rose is sick, meaning the picnic is off; Lolita refuses to go to church. Freshly shaved and perfumed, H.H. goes looking for Lolita and when he finds her, she shows him a magazine picture of a surrealist painter lying on the beach beside a half-buried Venus di Milo. He hides his arousal, adjusting his robe and talking fast. As Lolita innocently shifts her bottom across his lap, H.H. fights to put off "the ultimate convulsion," repeating her phrases as his hand creeps up her leg, which, fortunately, had been bruised the previous day, allowing him to commiserate. As she laughs, head thrown back, H.H. crushes out against her buttock the "last throb" of the longest ecstasy ever experienced.

Lolita goes to a movie with the Chatfields and Charlotte sets an elegant candlelight table. She has decided to send Lolita to summer camp until school resumes, leaving Thursday. H.H. is taken aback and pleads a toothache to cover his grim mood. He declines a call to Dr. Quilty. Lolita is angry about camp and says her mom and H.H. want to get rid of her. They drive her to camp the next day.

H.H. knows he has fallen in love forever with Lolita. Charlotte, in a letter, confesses her love for him and offers two solutions: move out or marry her and have a baby with her. H.H. dimly toys with marrying Charlotte to have his way with Lolita; the prospect of legally caressing and kissing Lolita three times a day seals it. He calls camp for Charlotte, but talks to Lolita, who almost seems to have forgotten him. Charlotte returns home and find him in Lolita's room.

Part 1, Chapters 13-17 Analysis

This section sees Lolita sent off to camp as Charlotte proposes to H.H., offering him the opportunity to regularly enjoy Lolita as he does one Sunday while Charlotte is in church. Charlotte's devotion to religion becomes more prominent going forward. H.H. is determined not to harm Lolita, including getting her pregnant (expressed rather obliquely in references to incubus), and is satisfied that she knows nothing about his rapturous orgasm. Achieving one for Charlotte seems problematic, but the opportunity is too good to pass up. Lolita's forwardness with H.H. and signs of affection will be revisited, as will the sleeping pill motif. Having been less than charitable in portraying Charlotte, H.H. repents as the climax of their story nears.

Part 1, Chapters 18-23

Part 1, Chapters 18-23 Summary

The wedding is a quiet affair, with Lolita remaining at Camp Q. Thanks to highballs, H.H. is able to evoke Lolita while caressing Charlotte in bed. She is intolerably tender at breakfast and takes his exasperation for the "silence of love." Their combined incomes suffice for middle-class needs. In the fifty days they are together, Charlotte annoyingly "glorifies" the house.

Charlotte and H.H. socialize with the few friends Charlotte has made. Thinking of Lolita browning at camp, H.H. impatiently anticipates drugging and fondling her. Charlotte is crazily jealous of everyone in H.H.'s past, and he pads and invents to satisfy her. H H.H. contemplates how a long confinement, Caesarean birth, and complications could leave him and Lolita alone together for weeks.

Charlotte talks about sending Lolita to a girl's boarding school. H. H. would have talked Charlotte out of it instantly, but he dares not give away his secret by suggesting he tutor Lolita. Back at the car H.H. realizes he must destroy Charlotte.

H.H. walks back to their "private beach," and H.H. contemplates drowning or poisoning Charlotte. He can't do it. As they lie on towels, Charlotte says she loves H.H. and kisses him heavily. H.H.'s silence when displeased frightened Valeria, but it does not work on Charlotte. Charlotte announces they will go to England in the fall and he objects, saying the female partner does not make unilateral decisions. She proclaims him her ruler and god and begs forgiveness. To press his advantage, H.H. acts aloof and moody. She suggests vacationing at quaint Enchanted Hunters Inn and asks what he would like for dinner. He grunts. She goes to bake a cake—something he does like. H.H. checks that the key to his locked drawer which Charlotte asks about is in its perfect hiding place.

H.H. visits their doctor for a sleep powder to put Charlotte and Lolita to sleep until St. Algebra takes Lolita away from him. At first Dr. Byron does not believe that his last prescription is inadequate to H.H.'s insomnia and suggests golf. H.H. insists and is given a vial of violet-blue capsules just on the market. At home, Charlotte is dressed as at their first meeting and does not respond. Finally, she turns and quotes his words about "The Haze woman, the big bitch . . ." She denounces him as a monster and threatens to scream if he comes near. She is leaving tonight. He will never see "that miserable brat" again.

H.H. goes up to his room and finds his little table raped and retrieves his diary from under Charlotte's pillow and fetches a Scotch bottle and declares to her broad back that she is ruining both of their lives by hallucinating. Those are notes for a novel. Charlotte says nothing and there is no answer when he announces drinks are ready. The phone rings: Leslie Tomson announcing Charlotte has been run over. Sure enough, Charlotte is not in the living room.

H.H. rushes out to see on the far side of their steep street a black Packard on Miss Opposite's lawn and police talking to Frederick Beale, Jr., driver of the Packard; his seventy-nine-year-old father lies beside the car to the right while Charlotte's mangled remains lie under a lap robe on the sidewalk. John and Jean put him to bed in Lolita's room and keep vigil from the master bedroom. The funeral is as quiet as was the wedding.

H.H. is drunk his first night of widowhood and sleeps. When John, as Charlotte's adviser, asks H.H.'s plans, Jean reminds him that he, not Harold Haze, is Lolita's biological father. H.H. convinces a visiting cleric that his spinster cousin in New York will help care for orphan and after the funeral intends to take her to totally different surroundings. H.H.'s real reasons for keeping Lolita away is to prevent busybodies from scheming to take her away or Lolita herself suddenly to feel distrust, repugnance, or fear and ruin his moment of triumph.

Stodgy, solemn Beale talks to H.H. and tells him the inquest absolves Beale of fault in the accident. Beale offers to cover funeral expenses and is taken aback when H.H. accepts. H.H. weeps.

Part 1, Chapters 18-23 Analysis

These chapters take H.H. and Charlotte from quiet wedding to quiet funeral. H.H., who assures his readers (still not explicitly identified as legal jurors) that few so-called sex offenders are murderers or rapists. Having married Charlotte and finding himself unable to drown her—a "perfect" crime that he realizes would have been witnessed—H.H. intends to drug them both so he can enjoy Lolita. He is weaving stories: visiting a mental ward in the course of research for a novel, impregnating Charlotte in 1934 during a visit to America, and needing to take mourning Lolita far away to recover. This sets up their travels in Part 2, during which he initially tries the drugging ploy but discovers he does not need to cover his obsession from Lolita.

Part 1, Chapters 24-33

Part 1, Chapters 24-33 Summary

H.H. leaves Ramsdale obsessed with "ethical doubts and fears." Having kept Lolita away from wedding and funeral, he plans to pick Lolita up at camp, saying her mother is undergoing a serious operation, take her sleepily from inn to inn, and eventually tell her Charlotte is dead.

H.H. spends the afternoon in Parkington buying beautiful skirts, scanties, and swimming suits for Lolita. He ends his shopping spree by buying an elegant valise to hold all his purchases. He wires ahead for a room near the camp with twin beds and, nervous about how to word their relationships, mistakenly signs it "Homberg." At camp, the director gives a report of Lolita's camp behavior and commiserates about Charlotte's (supposed) illness.

Settle in the car, Lolita asks dutifully about her mother. H.H. says the doctors do not know what the trouble is yet; they will get to the hospital in Lepingville, which has many theaters. Lolita has had a good time at camp but is not sorry to leave. When he claims to have missed her, Lolita denies he cares for her because he has not yet kissed her. H.H. pulls off the road as quickly as possible and Lolita flows into his arms and mouth.

As they roll through town, Lolita remarks that Mother would be mad if she learned they are lovers and insists that they are. H.H. is anxious to reach the inn. Back in the car, she rejects a kiss on the neck, but admits to being fond of him. It is dusk when they reach fake-colonial Briceland. Lolita wants to see the movie for which people are queuing up, but H.H. intends for her to be unconscious by nine pm.

H.H. learns at the desk that because of a religious convention and flower show, he has been unable to hold their room past six pm. H.H asks for any room and a cot for his exhausted ten-year-old daughter. There is only one room available, with a roomy double bed; they will have to see about a cot. The room contains a double bed and mirrors on every door, and other normal furniture. Lolita asks if they must sleep together, warning Mother will divorce him and strangle her. H.H. declares that for all practical purposes he is her father and responsible, in Mother's absence, for her welfare. They will be thrown together a good deal. Lolita helps him find the word for which he is searching—incest.

Lolita wants to stop the "kissing game" and go to eat. After dessert, H.H. produces his vial of pills and pretends to swallow one. As hoped, Lolita is curious and wants to try a Vitamin X Purpill. It works fastand H.H. sits her down on the edge of the bed, swaying, and undressing.

H.H. heads downstairs for twenty to thirty minutes. Lolita's innuendos had not disturbed him, and he plans to "operate" on her only when she is anesthetized. H.H. knows little about American schoolchildren, but he should have recognized that Lolita is different

from innocent Annabel and that his expected rapture will turn to pain and horror. After wandering the hotel and fantasizing, H.H. returns to the room.

Lolita wakens as soon as H.H. touches the bed. When her breathing suggests sleep, H.H. climbs into the narrow space given him. After a long vigil, H.H. closes in on her bare shoulder, but she sits up, gasps, mutters, and returns to her position. H.H. burns with desire and dyspepsia.

After fetching water for himself, H.H. brings her a cup and, watching her go instantly back to sleep, knows he should wait but cannot. Lolita moves at six am, and H.H. feigns sleep, hoping she will not be shocked and perhaps bolt. She is energetic, matter-of-fact, and out of pride does not give up when H.H. has difficulty. He feigns stupidity and lets her have her way as long as he can endure.

In boundless misery, H.H. hopes to sort out heaven and hell in this nymphet love. H.H. has read that in St. Louis, Chicago, and Cincinnati, girls mature at the end of the twelfth year; Lolita is born within three hundred miles of Cincinnati, so he has followed nature. He is not even her first lover.

Lolita disjointedly tells H.H. how she is debauched, the previous summer at a different camp by a tent mate. Lolita's first heterosexual experience comes at age eleven soon after they arrive in Ramsdale. At camp this year, she has sex with a male camper, but is repulsed by the young man. H.H. feels awful by ten am and still tingles from the feel of Lolita's demonic body. H.H. asks again about his wife and requests the desk tell her they are driving to Aunt Clare's.

Entering the car, Lolita makes sure that H.H. sees her pain, calls him a "brute", and then rides in silence. H.H. feels panic beside this orphan with whom he has had intercourse three times that morning. She says she ought to turn him in for rape and H.H. does not know whether to take her seriously. He sweats as she claims he has torn something inside her and calls him other ugly names. She wants to call her mother.and H.H. announces that Charlotte is dead. In Lepingvillet hey have separate rooms but during the night, Lolita comes to him, sobbing, having nowhere else to go.

Part 1, Chapters 24-33 Analysis

Part 1 concludes with H.H.'s description of how he picks up the orphaned Lolita at camp and drives her to see her ostensibly hospitalized mother. H.H. is frustrated that the sleeping pills do not work on Lolita and is somewhat concerned by her awareness of his intentions, but in the morning receives the energetic sexual attention she has learned during two summers at camp. She then tells him about her experiences and laughs that he had not done such things at her age. It appears from Nabokov's obtuse descriptions that their first time is manual and/or oral, but by ten am, they have had had vaginal intercourse three times and Lolita is sore and angry. In asides to the reader(s), he earlier insists he had wanted only to experience quick orgasms while touching her. As they drive on, H.H. has mixed emotions but undiminished desires, and is unsure

whether Lolita is serious about charging rape. When she learns that her mother is dead, however, Lolita has nowhere to go but into her stepfather's lusting arms.

Part 2, Chapter 1-2

Part 2, Chapter 1-2 Summary

H.H. and Lolita begin extensive travels around the US, first renting double rooms then a single one. ventually he grows bolder and rents singles. Occasionally H.H. gives in to Lolita's demand for a "real" hotel that she reads about as he is petting her on a side road.

Plainer $5 motor courts become their "habitual haunts." Lolita mopes for hours being cajoled, threatened, and promised things before giving H.H. a few seconds of joy. He is not prepared for her boredom, griping, and goofing off. As they drive further west and the immediate threat diminishes, H.H. threatens Lolita with the reformatory.

However, H.H. must avoid exasperating Lolita to the point that she reveals their secret. He reminds her of when she used to swoon over him and urges her to kiss her "old man". Should she claim he has raped her, he will go to jail, but she will be institutionalized, knitting, singing hymns, and eating rancid pancakes, supervised by a Miss Phalen. Lolita is thus terrorized into behaving, but also has goals set before her eyes to keep her happy. Lolita has no eye for scenery and resents having things pointed out.

At his lawyer's suggestion, H.H. writes frankly about their itinerary. H.H.'s purpose is to keep Lolita in a "passable humor" between kisses. They experience the full gamut of American tourist life. They pass the winter in the desert, the spring in the blooming foothills. Yellowstone is somber, its geysers symbolizing H.H.'s passion.

Everywhere, H.H. and Lolita fight. During longer stops, H.H. indulgently allows Lolita, after violent mornings in bed, to visit children's attractions. The first time he lets her go to a roller rink, H.H. insists on sitting in the car outside, watching. Wherever they stop, H.H. inquires about places where children congregate, and Lolita insults him for wanting to be caressed while he watches nymphets. Rarely does he find a nymphet who surpasses his Lolita. H.H. tries to teach Lolita to play tennis, to have something in common, but s he gets angry at his advice. In California he hires a famous and expensive tennis coach. There are close shaves. One night, H.H. loves too loudly, and in the morning, the virtuous conventioneer next-door comments. H.H. brings Lolita morning coffee, but withholds it until she does her duty.

Part 2, Chapter 1-2 Analysis

Part 2 begins with entertaining descriptions of travels around the US by car. Ostensibly written at his lawyer's behest to show he has taken good care of his ward, they allow a foreigner to characterize mid-twentieth century American life, deftly and perceptively. Lolita is bored with everything and H.H. has to terrorize her into keeping their dangerous secret.

Part 2, Chapter 3-10

Part 2, Chapter 3-10 Summary

Having satisfied her rash curiosity, Lolita becomes bored with H.H.'s needs, and becomes his cruel "Frigid Princess". H.H. is constantly searching for the perfect place to make love to Lolita and at the same time find release from his obsession with the long-dead Annabel. At one secluded spot, a woman and her children come upon him with the naked Lolita on his lap. He coolly gathers Lolita up and gets in the car and leaves.

Another unpleasant incident occurs in a movie theater, when two harpies mutter about his putting his arm innocently around Lolita's shoulder. Because of Lolita's obsession with the movies, they watch sometimes 200 a year. H.H. tells her he is sending her to a high-class, no-nonsense, non-coeducational school. Once, they are stopped by police and Lolita sweet-talks them, seeming more afraid of the law than H. H.

H.H. constantly wonders about the legal status of him as Lolita's step-father. He researches the topic, but finds no definitive answer. He encourages Lolita to read some classics, but she doesn't want to spoil her vacation.

H.H. knows now that they should have scrambled across the Mexican border until Lolita attains marriageable age around 1950 and produces a Lolita II—and even Lolita III for his grandfatherly years. He does his best with Lolita I, but knows he is a failure. He decides to settle near Beardsley, a school for girls. He hopes to get a position at a small college in the same town. He has probably spent close to 10,000 on their "vacation" and needs to slow down the cash outflow.

H.H. and Lolita arrive at 14 Thayer St., which Gaston Godin has rented from a colleague on sabbatical. Lolita occupies the couch, turns on the radio, and examines old magazines. H.H. hopes the expensive day school will provide Lolita a good education, but is told that it concentrates more on smell than spell, preparing girls to be housewives and mothers. Another reason for selecting Beardsley is that its playground can be seen from H.H.'s bedroom/study with binoculars. His view of nymphets is quickly ruined by a fence, however. H.H. remains "never rude, always aloof" of neighbors. His greatest concerns are a nosy spinster neighbor and the housecleaning lady.

Gaston, another neighbor, is too self-centered and abstract to notice H.H.'s relationship with Lolita. He keeps albums of the neighborhood boys. H.H. prefers to hold their two to three chess matches per week in his own home. Gaston is too dull to hear Lolita practicing dance steps downstairs, which H.H. pictures in his mind. Lolita's morals drop as she takes monetary advantage of H.H.'s passion. He fears her accumulating enough money to run away to Broadway, Hollywood, or some dismal ex-prairie state.

H.H. skeptically reads columns advising fathers not to frighten boys away but to welcome them and make them feel at ease. If daughters break rules, they must talk it

over in private, lest the boys feel he is an ogre. H.H. has lists of things that he "absolutely forbids" and others that he "reluctantly allows." She seems to adapt better than H.H. had hoped, while he lives in constant anxiety.

Lolita's girl friends are disappointing: bashful, formless, pimpled, fat, hairy, or too old. Lolita's closest friend, Mona, is intelligent, elegant, cold, and lascivious. She evades H.H.'s questions about the kind of boys Lolita knows, but jokingly declares them rivals for the horse-faced Rev. Rigger. When Mona asks about the writer "Ball Zack", H.H. suspects Lolita is pimping him, but she glares at them together when she comes home and he leaves them alone.

Part 2, Chapter 3-10 Analysis

H.H. describes his growing despair over Lolita's indifference toward his lusts, his fear at being caught, and the expense of their wanderings before turning to a description of settling in the quiet college town of Beardsley. Nabokov takes the opportunity to comment on modern education theory. He tries to keep a low profile, while the "Ice Princess" seems to seek witnesses. He offers sketches of the neighbors and other hazards in town and Lolita's friends, most of whom do not excite him. H.H.'s attempts to speak teenage patois are particularly comical. Lolita is learning to manipulate her pathetic old man.

Part 2, Chapters 11-17

Part 2, Chapters 11-17 Summary

One Monday in December, huge, frowzy, blunt Pratt summons H.H. to review Lolita's progress. Feeling like he is mounting a scaffold, he sits on a lowly hammock. She asks bluntly if H.H. is "an old-fashioned Continental father". He admits to being conservative. Pratt explains that Lolita's biological and psychological drives have not yet fused. She is attractive and bright but careless and distracted; defiant, impudent, and rude to teachers; her grades are declining; she mixes slang with big words; she sighs, chews gum, and giggles. It is Lolita's and God's business that she lacks religion. Having no chores at home is turning her into a princess. Teachers report that Lolita's tennis form is good but her concentration poor, that she has either exceptional emotional control or none, that she cannot verbalize emotions, and that she is either myopic or pretends in order to mask scholastic incompetence. She seems "morbidly uninterested" in sex, and since Beardsley prepares girls for mating and child rearing, Pratt wants the family doctor to explain the facts of life, and her be permitted to socialize with boys outside the home. Lolita refuses to discuss her home situation, but friends say that H.H. vetoes dramatics. Pratt insists that he let Lolita play the nymph in The Hunted Enchanter, a part for which she excels in try-outs. Pratt threatens having Lolita examined by the school psychiatrist, at which point, H.H. says she can be in the play.

Lolita comes down with bronchitis and spends a week in bed, during which H.H. does not relent sexually. H.H. throws a party for Lolita, inviting both boys and girls, which is a total failure. Lolita is totally caught up in her theater role. H.H. notes the play's title and figures the play is an anonymous, whimsical, juvenile version of some banal legend, but The Enchanted Hunters is a recent composition, original and highbrow. Lolita forbids H.H. attending rehearsals. When she mentions the inn where H.H. rapes her, he feigns incomprehension, at which she laughs and rides off on her bike and returns with a hand "dreaming" in her lap.

Lolita and H.H.'s relationship becomes fraught with small fights and tension. He cannot control her and realizes she has become a teenager and capable of getting him in trouble while protecting herself. Their interaction is a series of bribes, extortion, and even occasionally genuine affection. She wants to do another road trip. They leave for Ohio, en route to the Continental Divide, where Lolita wants to see Magic Cave in Wace and Red Rock in Elphinstone, where a movie star recently committed suicide. Once again in wary motels, H.H. pays for two rooms. He knows the telephone will be his downfall.

At Chestnut Court, Lolita is listless, even about visiting her hometown. H.H. is feeling good after a walk, but finds Lolita dressed, made up, and glowing diabolically. She admits to going outside briefly and sets to eating, while H.H. considers the boy's smile. He undresses Lolita, looking unsuccessfully for signs of infidelity. From then on, H.H.

keeps handy the small blue .38 caliber automatic that he inherits from Harold Haze and learns somewhat to shoot from Farlow.

Part 2, Chapters 11-17 Analysis

Lolita's teachers provide an amazingly detailed report on her difficult behavior, emphasizing her suspicious disinterest in sex. The headmistress wants H.H. to relent on dramatics (which Nabokov takes the opportunity to critique). The play is entitled The Enchanted Hunters, and Lolita is the first to mention the coincidence, stating clearly that this is where H.H. rapes her. Lolita grows engrossed in the play, which should be a healthy thing, but H.H. grows increasingly suspicious that Lolita is compromising them. They have a terrible fight, at the end of which he threatens to imprison her she knows where, and is overjoyed when she wants to undertake a second road trip. The scene changes to the Continental Divide, where Lolita acts and dresses suspiciously enough for H.H. to begin keeping a pistol handy.

Part 2, Chapters 18-22

Part 2, Chapters 18-22 Summary

Great thunderstorms follow as H.H. tries to shake the Detective Trapp in his Aztec Red convertible. H.H. cannot say when he is first positive that the red convertible is following them, but remembers his first clear view of the driver at a filling station talking with Lolita as though they have known each other for weeks. The next day, the red car is behind them and too powerful to outrun. In a factory town, a policeman lets H.H. through an intersection but halts Trapp.

Mona writes Lolita care of the Wace postmaster, describing the play's success with Linda standing in. Mona is going to Europe and may not be at Beardsley when Lolita returns. While H.H. reads the letter, Lolita vanishes—forever, he fears. He paces Main St., unable to ask a policeman for help, peers into the stores, meditates in his parked car, inspects the park, and crazily expects Lolita to turn up. After twenty-eight minutes, she does: timidly touching his sleeve. She claims to have met a Beardsley girl and H.H. insists on verifying their time together, but she tells him to go to hell. He shows her the license plate number of her boyfriend's car that he has jotted down. H.H. drives out of Wace with Lolita reading comics. At a picnic ground, he backhands her, and immediately feels remorse. H.H. knows a new cycle of persecution has begun. In Wace, H.H. realizes that Trapp is switching rental cars. H.H. spies Trapp stopped behind them when they get a flat tire. When H.H. walks towards him, Trapp backs, laughs, and points: the blue sedan is rolling away with Lolita at the wheel. H.H. thinks he is losing his mind and likely to end up murdering someone. He moves the gun to his pocket.

At another stop, a bellboy summons him to an urgent long-distance call. H.H. places four calls to various offices before bribing the attendant to confirm that the original call is local. He finds Lolita is playing doubles, but her round-headed partner flees to a gray car when he sees H.H. H.H. notices Trapp looking at them and vomits. They leave in the morning.

In Elphinstone's Silver Spur Court, H.H. and Lolita occupy the kind of pine-log cabin that she likes on their first journey. Lolita is shivering and feels awful. Fearing poliomyelitis, as any American parent would, H.H. rushes her to Dr. Blue at the small but modern hospital. Blue diagnoses a virus infection and Lolita is whisked away. It is the first time in two years they are separated and H.H. rushes back before dawn.

Over the next three days, Lolita improves and H.H. visits eight times, bringing a bouquet and books he drives sixty miles to buy. He finds Nurse Mary Lore, who dislikes him, removing a tray on which there is a crumpled envelope that Mary says is hers. Lolita asks for her clothes, gray valise, and Mother's trunk. In the morning, shivering, boozing, and dying, H.H. asks Hays's boyfriend to deliver two bags. H.H. passes word to Lore that H.H. is staying in bed. When the fever breaks, H.H. calls the hospital to hear that Lolita has checked out with Uncle Gustave, who pays her bill, and takes her as agreed

to Grandpa's ranch. H.H. races to the hospitaland roars in the reception room. H.H. announces he is not on good relations with his family and leaves a free man, determined to find and destroy Gustave.

Part 2, Chapters 18-22 Analysis

Trapp appears to become a real person in Champion, where H.H. considers how his early tennis lessons prevent Lolita's becoming a champion tennis player. The thought of Trapp as a paid detective haunts H.H. as they drive, convincing him he may be going crazy—and making violence possible. H.H. is determined to fight for Lolita rather than surrender her, but also realizes deceptive Lolita is losing the quality of nymphet. Years later, he wishes he had film of her playing tennis. Lolita's hospitalization in Elphinstone and H.H.'s catching the bug provides the opportunity to hustle her away. Only at the end of the novel will Gustave Trapp be exonerated.

Part 2, Chapters 23-29

Part 2, Chapters 23-29 Summary

H.H. begins a long and expensive tracking of Lolita and Trapp. He stays in 342 motels, and only picks up twenty clues. He believes Trapp is playing with him. Trapp comes close to slipping up, but never does, and H.H. admires his skill. It is obvious that Lolita is in on the game by some of the clues that are left.

Three empty years follow. H.H. seldom dreams of Lolita, but she haunts his sleep disguised as Valeria and/or Charlotte, a complex ghost at vivisecting parties. H.H. destroys Lolita's insipid teen magazines, but other things are harder to relinquish. During his "retreat," H.H. composes a melancholy poem to his 5,300-day old starlet in hiding. Psychoanalyzing the poem, he pronounces it a "maniac's masterpiece"; stark, and lurid. He writes others but never forgets about revenge.

Losing Lolita hardly cures H.H. of pederosis. He looks for nymphets to enjoy on playgrounds and beaches, but never thinks of sinking his fangs into one. Two years of constant indulgence have left habits of lust, however, that he fears will either drive him insane or tempt him into action. Solitude corrupts him into seeking company and care in the person of Rita, a woman twice Lolita's age and three-quarters of H.H.'s. She is slight, dark-haired, pale-skinned, with charming asymmetrical eyes, an angular profile, and supple back. They meet somewhere between Montreal and New York in the Tigermoth bar. Amiably drunk, she insists they are schoolmates and holds his hand. H.H. decides to give her a try and they end up constant companions. They cruise at ninety mph for two dim years, from the summer of 1950 to the summer of 1952. She is the sweetest, simplest, gentlest, and dumbest person imaginable. H.H. includes her in the memoir merely to thank her for saving his life.

Rita approves of H.H.'s plans to shoot Lolita's abductor and gets bruised undertaking a fruitless investigation of her own. They abandon the search when it is clear that Lolita is not playing championship tennis on the Pacific Coast. H.H. publishes an essay on "Mimir and Memory", which brings an invitation to lecture in New York from September 1951 to June 1952. He lodges on campus and visits Rita, whom he prefers not to display, in a roadside motel. Rita sobs that H.H. will leave her like all the others. He amuses her with a French ballad, puts her in the car, and drives her to New York, where they are happy.

In September 1952, H.H. fetches the mail: Rita's mother on Cape Code, who thinks she should marry H.H., and John Farlow's hysterical, bewildering letter. Busybodies wonder what has become of Lolita while he lives in California with a notorious divorcee.

Another letter announces that Lolita is married and expecting around Christmas. Dick has a big job lined up in Alaska, but they need $300-$400. Dick cannot know about her past. She has been through much sadness and hardship. He intends to find Schiller and

kill him with his little black "Chum." H.H. makes himself as handsome and smart as possible, drives to Coalmont, and talks to the lone Schiller in the phone book. H.H. asks at several stores before someone directs him to the last house on Hunter Rd.

Around two pm, H.H., pulse fluctuating wildly, gun in his trouser pocket, rings the bell and sees Lolita: several inches taller, wearing pink-rimmed glasses, a sleeveless cotton dress and sloppy slippers, heaped-up hair, new ears, freckled cheeks hollow, shins and arms pale and hairy, and an enormous belly. He cannot kill Lolita, whom he loves at first, last, and every sight. She points out Dick, dark-haired in overalls, working atop a ladder on their neighbor's shack, and Dick is instantly reprieved. Her faded beauty reminds H.H. of Botticelli's Venus. H.H. demands to know where her abductor is, causing Lolita to bristle. She explains that Dick knows nothing, raking up muck cannot help, and she is amazed he has not figured it out. When H.H. makes to leave, Lolita softens and whistles the name. It bring no shock or surprise to H.H. Relaxing, Lolita says Dick "the lamb" is the only man she has ever loved. Her relationship with H.H. is a dull party, a rainy picnic, and mud caking her childhood. The past is the past. Lolita grants that H.H. has been a good father.

H.H. and Lolita sit apart as he asks about the betrayal. Smoking with her mother's mannerisms, she denies betraying him. Cue likes little girls (and is nearly jailed for it), but does nothing to Lolita. H.H. does not intend to torture his darling, worn out at seventeen, whom he loves more than anything on earth or beyond. He begs her to leave Dick and this "wakeful hole" to live and die with him. When she refuses, H.H. hands her $4,000, breaks into hot tears, and begs her not to touch him but to reconsider coming with him. She would rather go back to Cue, who only breaks her heart, not her life. Lolita wants to call Dick, but H.H. cannot bear it. Saying an accountant will contact her about her rosy financial situation, H.H. avoids a kiss, offers her the old car, and drives away in tears.

Part 2, Chapters 23-29 Analysis

These chapters provide a detailed story of H.H. following Trapp's erudite clues strewn across country, with signs of Lolita's complicity. He quickly sees that the only male instructor at Beardsley could not be the abductor, is hospitalized, and for three years suffers torment. Unable to live alone, he hooks up dumb Rita, a kindly drunk, far too old to be a nymphet, who saves his life. The Enchanted Hunters reappears, pointing towards the ending. H.H.'s leafing through bound newspapers provides details of life in 1947. A letter from Lolita, now married, separates H.H. from Rita as he tries to find her through a post office general delivery, determined to kill the fiend who stole her. Instead, he finds a faded and pregnant young woman living in abject poverty. Her husband is not the abductor, on whose trail H.H. sets, having provide his true love financial security and been told he is worse than the abductor, for he ruins her life.

Part 2, Chapters 30-36

Part 2, Chapters 30-36 Summary

Leaving Coalmont around four pm, H.H. would have been back in Ramsdale by dawn had he not taken a shortcut that gets him stuck in mud. Cursing his plight and changing into old clothes, he walks to a farm and a wrecker has him out by midnight. Back on the highway and into a small town, he pulls over for a drink before proceeding to The Enchanted Hunters, weeping "drunk on the impossible past." He sees with great clarity himself and his love.

He relives the years with Lolita, knowing he has loved her in a despicable and brutal way and has at times known how she feels—and experienced hell. He sees that even the most miserable family life is better than the "parody of incest" that he could offer Lolita.

Returning to Ramsdale, H.H. visits the cemetery to say goodbye to Charlotte. H.H. considers entering the old house where he, Charlotte, and Lolita lived but notices a dark-eyed nymphet in white shorts studying him but a violent-looking, sweating man's glare reminds him that he is wearing muddy pants and a torn sweater, is unshaven, and has bloodshot eyes. He plods back to the car. On his way out, stout Mrs. Chatfield recognizes him and asks with evil curiosity about his and Lolita's doings. He is happy to tell her about Lolita's marriage to a "brilliant young mining engineer", and asks if daughter Phyllis has ever told about being raped by Charlie Holmes. At his lawyer's, H.H. hands over information about Mrs. Schiller and walks out into the sunshine "a contented pauper."

H.H. sets out to execute Clare Quilty. With a loaded gun that aches to be discharged, H.H. finds turreted Pavor Manor, but decides to return in the morning. When no one answers, H.H. enters and finds in the drawing room evidence of a party. H.H. encounters Cue and unwraps Chum. Cue recalls Lolita but denies H.H. could be her father. H.H. orders Cue to concentrate on why he is about to die. Arguing he rescued Lolita from a "beastly pervert," took her on a joyride, and, being impotent, had no fun with her, Cue suddenly lunges and the gun flies under a chest of drawers. The two men wrestle and H.H. acquires the gun again. He shoots Cue, after declining Cue's offer of all Cue's worldly goods to leave Cue alive. He shoots Cue again at close range and watches him die. Driving away, H.H. picks up a police tail and pulls over, relieved.

Rereading his story, H.H. finds it too slippery. He has camouflaged names of people and places to avoid harming anyone. His own pseudonym, he feels, is the one that best expresses his "nastiness." He starts writing Lolita fifty-six days ago in a psychopathic ward, and completes it in a warm cell awaiting trial. He has decided not to parade Lolita in public, so his intended legal defense will be published only after her death. He would sentence himself to thirty-five years for rape but dismiss the murder charges. He begs Lolita to be true to Dick and loving to her baby; he will haunt Dick if he mistreats her.

Lolita should not pity Cue; H.H. has outlived him to make sure their story is recorded. It brings them immortality.

Part 2, Chapters 30-36 Analysis

The final chapters return H.H. to Ramsdale and Parkington to wrap up financial matters to Lolita's benefit, learn where her abductor lives, and execute him for rape and kidnap. There is a touch of comedy in the non-Western battle between the out-of-condition and chemically slowed combatants, picking up an early allusion to Lolita's favorite reading and movie genre, and in the victim's attempt at keeping a British stiff upper lip as he is riddled with bullets. H.H. finally declares why he has written the story to aid his legal defense, but decides to seal it until Lolita's death. He admonishes her, lovingly, to be a good wife and mother and not to pity Cue. This story is the only form of immortality available to Lolita and him.

Characters

Mona Dahl

Lolita's "elegant, cold, lascivious, experienced" girlfriend Humbert decides she "had obviously long ceased to be a nymphet. if she ever had been one."

Jean Farlow

Jean and her husband John are Charlotte's friends. In an effort to prevent the pair from paying too much attention to his plans, Humbert suggests that Lolita is the product of an affair he had years ago with Charlotte. Humbert considers Jean "absolutely neurotic" and notes that she "apparently developed a strong liking for me." Jean dies of cancer two years later.

John Farlow

Farlow looks after Charlotte's estate after she dies.

Gaston Godin

Gaston, who teaches French at Beardsley College, finds Humbert and Lolita a house to rent. Humbert trusts him because he is "too self-centered and abstract to notice or suspect anything." While revealing a "colorless mind and dim memory ... nonetheless, everybody considered him to be supremely lovable." Humbert suggests a sinister motive behind Gaston's enjoyment of the company of the small boys of the neighborhood: "There he was devoid of any talent whatsoever, a mediocre teacher, a worthless scholar, a glum repulsive fat old invert, highly contemptuous of the American way of life, triumphantly ignorant of the English language there he was in priggish New England, crooned over by the old and caressed by the young oh, having a grand time and fooling everybody."

Charlotte Haze

Lolita's mother appears as both victimizer and victim. Humbert rents a room from her and eventually marries her so that he can be close to Lolita. Charlotte is a type of middle-aged woman "whose polished words may reflect a book club or bridge club, or any other deadly conventionality, but never her soul; women who are completely devoid of humor, utterly indifferent at heart to the dozen or so possible subjects of a parlor conversation, but very particular about the rules of such conversations, through the sunny cellophane of which not very appetizing frustrations can be readily distinguished." She "combined a cool forwardness ... with a shyness and sadness that caused her

detached way of selecting her words to seem as unnatural as the intonation of a professor of speech." Charlotte resents Lolita's affection for Humbert and so packs her off to camp. Humbert writes, "she was more afraid of Lolita's deriving some pleasure from me than of my enjoying Lolita " Yet she turns into a "touching, helpless creature" with Humbert, at least until she discovers his true feelings about her and Lolita. "McFate" conveniently removes her from Humbert's life when she is hit by a car.

Dolores Haze

See Lolita

Humbert Humbert

A name invented by the author/narrator of "Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male." Humbert is a witty, cultured European with a destructive obsession for young girls. For several years he lives with Lolita, his young stepdaughter, whom he coerces into granting him sexual favors. In his recreation of his life with Lolita, he calls himself "an artist and a madman " He tries to convince the "ladies and gentlemen of the jury," of the following partly true description:

the majority of sex offenders that hanker for some throbbing, sweet-moaning, physical but not necessarily coital, relation with a girl child, are innocuous, inadequate, passive, timid strangers who merely ask the community to allow them to pursue their practically harmless, so-called aberrant behavior, their little hot wet private acts of sexual deviation without the police and society cracking down upon them We are not sex fiends1 . We are unhappy, mild, dog-eyed gentlemen, sufficiently well integrated to control our urge in the presence of adults, but ready to give years and years of life for one chance to touch a nymphet. Emphatically, no killers are we. Poets never kill.

Yet at other points, Humbert admits that his "pathetic" obsession with Lolita "broke" her life. In the Foreword, the narrator suggests that Humbert writes of himself and Lolita with "a desperate honesty," and comments on "how magically his singing violin can conjure up a tendress, a compassion for Lolita that makes us entranced with the book while abhorring its author." Humbert dies of heart disease in prison, while awaiting his trial for the murder of Lolita's lover, Clare Quilty.

Valeria Humbert

Valerie is Humbert's first wife. He marries her in an effort to control his desire for young girls. Humbert admits he fell for "the imitation she gave of a little girl," but soon discovers she is at least in her late twenties. Initially his naivete prevents him from seeing that he "had on his hands a large, puffy, short-legged, big-breasted and practically brainless *baba....* Her only asset was a muted nature which did help to produce an odd sense of comfort in [their] small squalid flat." When she falls in love with another man, Humbert leaves for America. Later, he finds out that she died in childbirth

Lolita

In the first lines of the novel, Humbert characterizes Lolita as "light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul." Readers see her from Humbert's point of view, which presents an often idealized but sometimes realistic image of this young girl, with whom he had an incestuous relationship for several years. Initially he defines Lolita as a nymphet, a category of young girls between the age of nine and fourteen who exhibit "fey grace, the elusive, shifty, soul-shattering insidious charm," and a certain "demonic" nature. He admits, "what drives me insane is the two fold nature of this nymphet□of every nymphet, perhaps; this mixture in my Lolita of tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity, stemming from the snub-nosed cuteness of ads and magazine pictures, from the blurry pink-ness of adolescent maidservants in the Old Country and from very young harlots disguised as children in provincial brothels." Sometimes he sees her as a combination of naivete and deception, of charm and vulgarity, of blue sulks and rosy mirth, . When she chose, [she] could be a most exasperating brat . . [with her] fits of disorganized boredom, intense and vehement griping, her sprawling, droopy, dopey-eyed style□a kind of diffused clowning which she thought was tough in a boyish hoodlum way Mentally, I found her to be a disgustingly conventional little girl.

Most often, Humbert projects Lolita as a vision of innocent beauty, as when he watches her play tennis:

[E]verything was right- the white little-boy shorts, the slender waist, the apricot midriff, the white breast-kerchief whose ribbons went up and encircled her neck to end behind in a dangling knot leaving bare her gaspingly young and adorable apricot shoulder blades with that pubescence and those lovely gentle bones, and the smooth, downward-tapering back

Yet, almost against his will, Humbert recognizes that "Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac." After she leaves Humbert, Lolita lives for a time with Clare Quilty. He throws her out after she refuses to allow him to put her in a pornographic film. A few years later she dies during childbirth.

Miss Pratt

Miss Pratt is headmistress at Beardsley School for girls. She tells Humbert that Lolita's grades are slipping and that she appears "morbidly uninterested in sexual matters." In an effort to help Lolita, she convinces Humbert to let her be in the school play.

Clare Quilty

Lolita runs off with him during her second cross-country trip with Humbert, who drops clues throughout the text that Quilty is a projection of an extreme version of himself. Nevertheless, he constructs a history for him. Quilty had known Lolita's mother, since his brother had been her dentist. He was the mysterious man who sat in the shadows at

the Enchanted Hunter and quizzed Humbert about Lolita. Intrigued by their relationship, he followed the pair to Beardsley, where he wrote and produced a play for Lolita, who considered him "a genius," a "great guy," and "full of fun." This "great guy," however, encourages Lolita to engage in group sex and to participate in pornographic films. When she does not agree, he kicks her out. Humbert finds him "gray-faced" and "baggy-eyed" before he shoots him.

Dolores Haze Schiller

Also going by Dolores, Dolly, Lola, Lo, and L, Lolita is twelve years old when she becomes sexually involved with the novel's middle-aged narrator, Humbert Humbert (H.H.), and is married, pregnant, impoverish, and worn out at age seventeen at the novel's end. She is born 1 Jan. 1935 in Pisky, somewhere in the midwest, and lives for two years in Ramsdale when H.H. is besotted with her, rents a room, and marries her mother, Charlotte, who prefers her dead son to the living daughter she identifies as aggressive, boisterous, critical, distrustful, impatient, irritable, inquisitive, listless, negativistic, and obstinate. H.H. sees Lolita as a reincarnation of his youthful lover, with her dark glasses, supple back, chestnut hair, polka-dotted black kerchief hiding juvenile breasts, and even a tiny mole on her side.

Mother and daughter compete for H.H.'s attention. H.H. is near insanity by the time they are alone, and Lolita's twitching on his lap causes an orgasm. Charlotte sends Lolita to camp for the summer, where she does not learn about her mother's fatal accident until H.H. arrives, intending to drive her drugged, inn-to-inn, until the time comes to reveal Charlotte's death. In The Enchanted Hunters Inn, Lolita warns that Mother will divorce him and strangle her if they sleep together, begs off the "kissing game" until they have eaten, and, drugged, mutters the name of a lesbian lover at camp, confirmed after dawn by a fluttering and probing tongue that no boy could have taught her. Back on the road, Lolita makes sure that H.H. sees her pain, calls him a "brute", and rides in silence. Only learning of her mother's death forces Lolita to comply.

H.H. and Lolita travel twenty-seven thousand miles around the US from August 1947 to August 1948, arguing, reconciling, making love, and sleeping. Lolita is thus terrorized into behaving, by warnings that should she claim he has raped her, she will be institutionalized. Having satisfied her rash curiosity, Lolita becomes bored with H.H.'s needs, and becomes a cruel "Frigid Princess". When H.H. announces they are returning East to enroll her in a high-class, no-nonsense, non-coeducational school, she harangues him with a mixture of entreaty, insult, double talk, vulgarity, childish despair, and a semblance of logic. In Beardsley, Lolita's morals drop as she takes monetary advantage of H.H.'s passion. Knowing the magic of her mouth, she raises her bonus price for a "fancy embrace". H.H. fears Lolita will run away if she accumulates enough. At school, she is characterized as bright but careless and distracted, defiant, impudent, and rude. Teachers report that Lolita's tennis form is good but her concentration poor, that she has either exceptional emotional control or none, that she cannot verbalize emotions, and that she is either myopic or pretends in order to mask scholastic incompetence. She seems "morbidly uninterested" in sex. She briefly takes an interest

in drama, but asks to drop out of school and go on another long trip. Before departing, Lolita studies tour books and maps with zest. As they head west, Lolita shows signs of collusion with someone following them. In Elphinstone, Lolita is hospitalized with a virus. H.H. rightly suspects a plot, as Lolita checks out with an "Uncle Gustave", setting H.H. on a vain multiple-year search.

Only in 1952 does a pregnant, impoverished, but content Mrs. Richard F. Schiller contact H.H., asking for $300-$400. She has been through much sadness and hardship. Lolita denies betraying him. The real abductor, Cue, takes her to a dude ranch outside Elphinstone, promising her a movie part. When Lolita refuses to take part in bizarre sex acts, he throws her out. H.H. begs her to live and die with him. When she refuses, he hands her $4,000, and goes to murder Cue.

Humbert Humbert

The novel's middle-aged narrator, H.H. is in prison awaiting trial for murdering the abductor of his minor stepdaughter, Lolita Haze, with whom he has been committing incest for years. Writing the account over the course of fifty-six days is his attorney's idea, to help with his defense. Halfway through the writing, however, H.H. decides against releasing it until seventeen -year-old Lolita has died, sometime in the twenty first century. Describing himself as lanky with soft, dark hair, heavy eyebrows, a woolly chest, queer accent, and the "stepfather of a gaspingly adorable pubescent pet, a stepfather of only one month's standing, a neurotic widower of mature years and a small but independent means, with the parapets of Europe, a divorce and a few madhouses behind him".

H.H. is born in Paris in 1910, raised at his widowed Swiss father's luxurious Hotel Mirana on the Riviera, and educated in London and Paris in English and French literature. H.H. becomes enamored of "nymphets" after his childhood lover, Annabel Leigh, dies before they can consummate. He takes to pleasuring himself while watching prepubescent girls cavort in parks and on beaches. He also visits prostitutes, which leads him to decide it is safer to marry. H.H. spends 1935-39 married to Valeria, who leaves him for a White Russian émigré when he announces they must move to New York in order to inherit money from an uncle. After two mental hospitalizations and working in arctic Canada, H.H. in 1947 seeks a sleepy New England town in which to write and swim. He rents a room in Ramsdale from a disagreeable widow, Charlotte Haze, whose sunbathing twelve-year-old daughter enchants him. As H.H. falls for Lolita, Charlotte falls for him. Having sent Lolita to camp, Charlotte demands that he either vacate the house or marry her, and he chooses the latter to stay near Lolita. Charlotte's plans to send Lolita to boarding school while they visit Europe brings H.H. close to drowning her, but he cannot do it. Charlotte is killed crossing the street to the mailbox after reading diary entries about her and declaring the fifty-day marriage over.

The relieved widower picks up Lolita, planning to keep her drugged, inn-to-inn, but she shows this is unnecessary, and in The Enchanted Hunters Inn, fulfills H.H.'s lifelong dream. They travel twenty-seven thousand miles around the US from August 1947 to

August 1948, with Lolita turning into a cruel, disinterested "Frigid Princess" and H.H. experiencing a "paradise of hell-flame". H.H. settles in quiet Beardsley, teaching. When the maladjusted Lolita wants to drop out and resume traveling, H.H. contemplates a flight to Mexico. En route to Colorado, H.H. suffers "persecution mania", seeing a man who looks like his cousin Gustave Trapp pursuing them, and signs that Lolita is in collusion. Hospitalized with a virus infection, Lolita checks out with Uncle Gustave, and H.H. begins searching, part of the time in company with Rita, an amiable drunk three-quarters his age. In September of 1952, Lolita—now Mrs. Richard F. Schiller—writes H.H., asking for money. H.H. sets his affairs in order and sets out to kill her abductor. Learning his identity, H.H. hands Lolita $4,000, breaks into hot tears, begs her to come with him, and, when turned down, finds and executes playwright Clare Quilty in cold blood. H.H. would sentence himself to thirty-five years for rape but dismiss the murder charges. Recording his and Lolita's story will bring them immortality.

Charlotte Becker Haze Humbert

H.H.'s second wife, whom he marries in Ramsdale, Charlotte is a widow in her thirties, living with her twelve-year-old daughter, Dolores (Dolly, Lolita, Lola, Lo, L), and offering a room for rent. H.H. takes a tour of her house at 342 Lawn St. only to be polite, but finds Lolita a perfect nymphet and takes the room. The house reflects the romantic tastes of Charlotte's late husband, Harold E. Haze, twenty years her elder, reflecting their honeymoon in Vera Cruz, Mexico. Charlotte first—and last—appears dressed in sandals, maroon slacks, and yellow silk blouse. With a square-face, shiny forehead, plucked eyebrows, bronze-brown bun, wide-set sea-green eyes that avoid one's look, and a quizzical smile, Charlotte is not unattractive, but H.H. sizes her up as a typical, conventional, humorless suburbanite who will undoubtedly enmesh him in an affair. Her smoking and constant gossipy phone conversations annoy H.H., and even after he has decided he must accept her ultimatum to marry or move out, he has difficulty accepting her "noble nipple and massive thigh". Worse, Charlotte is a "woman of principle" and a devout Christian who will kill herself if she finds that H.H. does not believe in God.

Charlotte considers Lolita a "regular pest", a poor student who exaggerates, is sullen and evasive, rude and defiant, and decides to send her to Camp Q for the rest of the summer, hoping it will teach her responsibility and that she is no starlet, but is actually homely. She also wants to get H.H. alone, for she has fallen in love with him at first sight, as she confesses in a written note. H.H. fights down initial repulsion and the wedding is a quiet affair, with Lolita remaining at Camp Q. Highballs help H.H. evoke Lolita while caressing Charlotte in bed. She spends their fifty days together "glorifying" the house, jealously asking about H.H.'s past, and confessing her own love life. When Charlotte decides to enroll Lolita in a strict, religious boarding school, H.H. considers drowning her in Hourglass Lake, but cannot harm his "clumsy seal", but when she announces a trip to England, he puts his foot down on unilateral decisions. On the last day of her life, Charlotte picks a lock and finds nasty diary entries about herself. She denounces H.H., and as she crosses the street to mail three letters, is struck by Frederick Beale, Jr.'s Packard and killed instantly. Her funeral is as quiet as her wedding.

Frederick Beale, Jr.

The driver of the shiny black Packard that strikes and kills Charlotte on Miss Opposite's lawn, Beale is a stodgy, solemn, large-nosed man who visits H.H. the next day with a diagram of the accident complete with visual aids used in statistics. It shows clearly and conclusively that Beale had swerved to avoid the Junk dog and again, unsuccessfully, to avert the tragedy. His seventy-nine-year-old father, Frederick Beale, Sr., a passenger at the time, and other witnesses sign the document. H.H. agrees it is not Beale's fault and an inquest upholds his view. Expecting H.H. to decline, Beale offers to cover funeral expenses and is taken aback when he accepts. Meeting the agent of fate and learning the intricacy of the event, H.H. sees his contribution is getting Charlotte angry enough to dash across the street. He weeps.

Barbara Burke

A sturdy blond two years older than Lolita, Barbara is the best swimmer at Camp Q, and recruits Lolita, the second best, to help carry her boat to the lake and stand watch while she has sex with repulsive Charlie Holms, the camp mistress's repulsive but indefatigable thriteen-year-old son. Lolita eventually takes turns, and finds it fun and "fine for the complexion", but is repulsed by Charlie. At night, Lolita whispers Barbara's name.

Dr. Byron

The Ramsdale doctor who regularly sees the Hazes, Byron relies on patent drugs rather than medical science. H.H. visits him, seeking a sleep powder to put Charlotte and Lolita to sleep so he can have his way with Lolita. Various bromides prove ineffective, and Byron does not believe that H.H.'s claimed insomnia is that bad. Nevertheless, he gives him a vial of violet-blue capsules just on the market. H.H. knows to be careful with Byron, having once mentioned a sanitarium and having to explain he had done research on a novel.

Mona Dahl

Lolita's closest friend in Beardsley, Mona is intelligent, elegant, cold, and lascivious. She evades H.H.'s questions about the kind of boys Lolita knows, but jokingly declares them rivals for the horse-faced Rev. Rigger. H.H. suspects Lolita might be pimping him with Mona, but she glares at them together when she comes home and he leaves them alone. Mona writes Lolita care of the Wace Post Office to tell her about the play Lolita has abandoned to begin their second great trek, describing the trouble she has with her French lines. Mona's father is taking her to Europe.

The Farlows

Pipe-smoking John Farlow is a part-time lawyer who handles some of Charlotte's affairs (and runs a successful sporting goods store in Parkington), while tall, dewy-eyed, neurotic, large-toothed, dark-complexioned thirty-one-year-old Jean paints landscapes and portraits. Jean is painting Hourglass Lake while H.H. contemplates drowning Charlotte there to prevent her from sending Lolita to a boarding school. When a runaway vehicle kills Charlotte, the Farlows spend the first night with the widower and buy his story that he, not Harold Haze, is Lolita's biological father. On the day H.H. leaves Ramsdale, John helps pack the car, while Jean glues herself to H.H.'s lips and hopes to see him again. Jean dies of cancer two years later, and John, rather than fading into widowhood, moves to South America, where he remarries. He writes H.H. about turning over the "Haze complications" to lawyer Jack Windmuller.

Gaston Godin

A mediocre teacher of French and worthless scholar at the Beardsley College for Women, Gaston Gaston is too self-centered and abstract to notice H.H.'s relationship with Lolita. A colorless, flabby, melancholy bachelor, with thinning hair pasted across his head, he rarely bathes and always dressed in black. His English is a "burlesque", but everyone loves and pampers him. He and H.H. play two to three chess matches a week in H.H.'s home. Gaston is afraid of every move and regularly checks himself.

Charlie Holmes

The repulsive but indefatigable thriteen-year-old son of Camp Q's head mistress, Charlie is Lolita's first heterosexual experience, when she takes turns with Barbara Burke. Lolita finds it fun and "fine for the complexion", but is repulsed by Charlie. Years after taking Lolita across country and losing her, H.H. returns and is questioned by Mrs. Chatfield. Annoyed, he asks if her daughter Phyllis has ever told about being raped by Charlie Holmes. Chatfield admonishes him for talking about the recently killed in Korea.

The Junks

H.H. and Charlotte's next-door neighbors on Lawn St. in Ramsdale, the Junks own a "hysterical setter" that chases cars. When the dog darts out in front of Frederick Beale, Jr., he swerves his shiny black Packard twice, but strikes and kills Charlotte on Miss Opposite's lawn. The Junks subsequently put their "mansion" up for sale and board it up.

Annabel Leigh

The object of H.H.'s affections in his youth, Annabel dies of typhus before they can consummate their love. Their intimacy occurs in a mimosa grove where, beneath the stars, Annabel seems to glow. Her face shows half-pleasure and half-pain as he touches between her legs, which she opens and closes to control his hand. Their kissing starts dryly and nervously before they open their mouths and he directs her to the "scepter" of his passion. Something interrupts them—probably a cat—followed by her mother's frantic voice. H.H. is haunted by that grove for twenty-four years until he breaks Annabel's spell by incarnating her in Lolita.

Valeria Zborovski Humbert Maximovich

H.H.'s first wife, whom he marries in Paris, Valeria (Valechka) paints cubist trash and is the daughter of a Polish doctor who treats H.H. She is in her twenties, tells various stories about how she loses her virginity, and has an attractive little-girl style. Soon after marriage, however, her short, curly blond hair shows dark roots and she lets herself go into a fat baba. When H.H. reveals they are moving to New York, Valeria reveals that she has another man in her life, an ex-Colonel in the Tsarist Army, whom H.H. meets driving their cab. They talk civilly in a café until H.H. suggests Valeria pack and leave. As she packs, Maximovich apologizes repeatedly in atrocious French and makes himself at home. After they have gone, H.H. discovers Maximovich has not flushed the toilet in which he has urinated and discarded a cigarette—the ultimate insult. H.H. is spared a bloody nose by being too slow to catch up with Maximovich. H.H. later learns that Valeria dies in childbirth in 1945, after she and her equally corpulent husband take part in anthropological studies in California.

The McCoos

A retired and impoverished couple in Ramsdale whom H.H. learns through a cousin want to rent the room vacated by their late aunt, the McCoos have a baby and a twelve-year-old daughter, whom H.H. imagines as a nymphet and rents the room.

Monique

A Parisian prostitute, claiming to be eighteen but obviously younger, Monique is the only professional who brings H.H. genuine pleasure. She retains a "nymphic echo" in her young body that thrills him, combined with a professional wag of her rump. H.H. asks that she wash her grubby hands, but otherwise finds her charming. They meet again that evening, during which H.H. lets himself go completely. Their third date is less successful, as Monique matures overnight, and she fades into memory.

Miss Opposite

H.H. and Charlotte's neighbor across the Lawn St. in Ramsdale, Miss Opposite's front lawn is where Charlotte is killed when a black Packard swerves twice to avoid hitting the Junks' dog.

Miss Phalen

A bleary-eyed spinster, Miss Phalen cares for Lolita one summer in her isolated, dilapidated Appalachian farmhouse that earlier had belonged to the Haze family. Threatening to return Lolita there and to tutor her in French and Latin usually results in improved behavior as she and H.H. travel cross-country. Phalen had been slated to become Lolita's live-in babysitter so Charlotte could return to work, but suffers a fall in Florida. Her sister runs a strict school in which Charlotte wants to enroll Lolita in order to have H.H. entirely to herself.

Miss Pratt

The headmistress at the Beardsley School for girls, Pratt, a huge, frowsy, beady-eyed, blunt woman summons H.H. to review Lolita's progress and problems as she matures sexually. She asks if H.H. is "an old-fashioned Continental father" before explaining that Lolita's biological and psychological drives have not yet fused. She surveys Lolita's good points and deficiencies, supposes stuffily that it is up to Lolita and God that she lacks religion, and more directly criticizes Lolita having no household chores. Pratt wants the family doctor to explain to Lolita the facts of life, and Lolita be permitted to socialize with boys outside the home. Lolita refuses to discuss her home situation, but friends say that H.H. vetoes dramatics. He must let Lolita play the nymph in The Hunted Enchanter, a part for which she excels in try-outs. Pratt next informs H.H. frankly that Lolita has written an obscenity in lipstick on health pamphlets and is in detention. If she does not improve, the school psychiatrist will analyze her.

Clare Quilty

Lolita's true abductor, "Cue" is a wealthy and well-known playwright (listed in the prison library's Who's Who in the Limelight [1946]) who bears a slight resemblance to H.H.'s Swiss cousin, Gustave Trapp, whom H.H. takes as Lolita's abductor. When Cue appears by the pool in Champion, CO., H.H. is convinced he is a detective hired by a busybody to determine what is going on between him and his underage stepdaughter, and takes him for Gustave. He believes he has been seeing him driving an Aztec Red convertible and a variety of gray cars. He learns the truth from the married Lolita: Cue takes her to Hollywood to try out for a part in the film version of his play Golden Guts, a tennis picture, and throws her out when she refuses to take part in "weird, filthy, fancy" sex acts. H.H. vows to shoot him to death.

Cue is the nephew of the inferior Dr. Quilty, Charlotte's family dentist, whom H.H. dupes into revealing his whereabouts. H.H. drives to the Quilty ramshackle ancestral homestead, Pavor Manor, north of Parkington. Drunk on gin and unskilled with a handgun, H.H. confronts Cue, who has been mixing drugs and alcohol at a party, and struggles to get him to understand why he is about to die. Cue keeps a stiff upper lip in trying to negotiate his way out, offering H.H. his home and its amenities and saying he has merely given Lolita a vacation while removing her from a monster's control. Nevertheless, H.H. opens fire, emptying two clips into the corpulent body and one that takes away half his face after he crawls into bed. Satisfied after an hour that Cue is dead, H.H. admits the murder to downstairs guest, who toasts the long overdue action. Lolita is less angry at Cue than H.H., for he only breaks her heart, not her life.

Rita

A woman twice Lolita's age and three-quarters of H.H.'s, Rita is slight, dark-haired, pale-skinned, with charming asymmetrical eyes, an angular profile, and supple back. Amiably drunk when she meets H.H., she insists they are schoolmates and holds his hand. They become constant companions from the summer of 1950 to the summer of 1952. Rita is fresh from her third divorce and has been abandoned by at least seven men. She is the sweetest, simplest, gentlest, and dumbest person imaginable (e.g., playing Russian roulette with an automatic pistol), and H.H. includes her in the memoir only to thank her for saving his life. A letter from Lolita puts H.H. back on the road, alone, and sad to leave drunken Rita.

Richard F. Schiller

Lolita's husband, whom she marries after her abduction and abandonment by Clare ("Cue") Quilty, Dick moves with her to a clapboard shack near his childhood home in impoverished Coalmont, but has been promised a good job in Alaska. When H.H. visits, packing a gun and intending to kill Lolita's abductor, Dick is on a ladder, repairing his one-armed neighbor's roof. They come in for beer, and H.H. has an opportunity to observe Dick: blue-eyed, black-haired, unshaven, dirty-handed, and "guessing" about everything. H.H. is annoyed by these things, but thinks he will be a good husband for Lolita. He gives them $4,000 with no strings attached.

Elizabeth Talbot

Lolita's first sexual contact, at camp the summer before the action of the novel, Elizabeth is a girl whom H.H. remembers Charlotte mentioning, wishing she and Lolita were friends. Elizabeth's father is an executive and she attends a swanky private school.

Gustave Trapp

H.H.'s good-natured, foolish cousin, hairy, oval-faced, tanned, balding, Trapp resembles the playwright Clare Quilty, Lolita's real abductor, whom H.H. pursues along the reverse of their drive from Beardsley to the Rockies. In Switzerland, Trapp disgustingly drinks beer and milk and lifts weights on the beach in proper attire.

Objects/Places

Beardsley School for Girls

An expensive day school, the Beardsley School, administered by Miss Pratt, emphasizes the "four D's: Dramatics, Dance, Debating and Dating". Beardsley tries to channel its girls into constructive activities. Communication is more important than composition. They have done away with topics irrelevant to young girls and concentrate on the attitudes they will need to deal with their lives and their husbands. Narrator Humbert Humbert, a French scholar, gets help from a faculty member in renting the home of a colleague on sabbatical, and getting H.H. into a teaching position at Beardsley College. Lolita does not take to the school, except to the drama club, which produces The Enchanted Hunters. Before she can perform in it, Lolita asks to leave on a second extended trip across the US.

Camp Q

Run by Shirley Holmes, author of Campfire Girl, Camp Q is the summer experience set in a "striped and speckled forest" that widow Charlotte Haze hopes will teach her twelve-year-old daughter Lolita responsibility. It will also get Lolita out of her hair as she pursues her new lodgers, the novel's narrator Humbert Humbert. Camp Q is located in another state, one hundred miles past Parkington and the fork away from Lake Climax. Lolita is on a hike when H.H. phones to arrange to pick her up after her mother's accidental death. The camp's owner is "sluttish"; her stucco office is in bad shape. Each cabin is dedicated to a Disney creature. Water sports are conducted on Lakes Onyx and Eryx. Lolita experiences her first heterosexual encounter there with Charlie Holmes, the mistress's repulsive thirteen-year-old son.

Champion Hotel

A Colorado resort between Snow and Elphinstone, Champion has tennis courts where H.H. realizes that his early training has left Lolita with no ambition to win. Her form is perfect, but her game lacks heart. A red-haired older man and young actress suggest doubles, and before H.H. can decline, he receives fake phone call. Returning, he sees a figure resembling his Swiss cousin Gustave Trapp, whom he has convinced himself is tailing them, probably employed by some busybody intent on finding out what he is doing with Lolita. H.H. suffers convulsions as part of his "persecution mania". Leaving Champion for Elphinstone, Lolita hardly notices the scenery.

Coalmont

An industrial community some eight hundred miles from New York City, Coalmont is where Lolita settles after marriage in 1952. She writes her stepfather from whom she

flees years earlier, narrator Humbert Humbert, from a General Delivery address, not wanting her new husband to learn her sordid past. H.H. drives to Coalmont, finds in the phone book only one Schiller, who does not know Richard, but sends H.H. to his cousin at 10 Killer St., a tenement house. H.H. interviews old people and grubby nymphets, who say Richard moved after marriage and no one knows his address. H.H. asks at several stores before someone directs him to the last house on Hunter Rd. It is a clapboard shack, shabbily furnished. After a long visit and failed attempt at getting Lolita to abandon Coalmont to live with him, H.H. gives her $4,000 to start a new life in Alaska and heads off to kill the abductor she has finally named.

Elphinstone

A town in the Rocky Mountains where Lolita is hospitalized with a virus which also fells H.H. who suffers through it in the motel room, Elphinstone marks the end of the road for stepfather and daughter. Pedophile playwright Clare ("Cue") Quilty, impersonating Lolita's Uncle Gustave Trapp, checks her out, pays her bill, and leaves word that he is taking her to Grandpa's farm, as prearranged. He takes her to a deluxe dude ranch an hour away, where he overindulges in drugs and alcohol, and films bizarre sexual acts performed by his companions. When Lolita refuses to take part, he throws her out and she wanders off to years of odd jobs and finally marriage.

Enchanted Hunters

Located in the secluded, faux-colonial town of Briceland, The Enchanted Hunters is an inn that Charlotte recalls visiting with her late first husband. Narrator Humbert Humbert recalls the conversation after Charlotte's death and makes reservations there for his first night alone with his stepdaughter Lolita. Briceland is four hours beyond Camp Q, where Lolita is enrolled, and some one hundred miles from home in Ramsdale. Lolita declares the inn "swank". A religious convention and a flower show are in town. Near closing time in the spacious, pretentious dining room, they check into Room 342, coincidentally their house number in Ramsdale. After drugging Lolita so he can have his way with her, H.H. wanders the public rooms, avoiding conversations and imagining Lolita naked. On the porch, a drunk asks about "the lassie" and refuses to believe she is his daughter. In the morning, Lolita becomes his lover, and they set off on a meandering trip across the US.

Settling in Beardsley, Lolita signs up for a part in a recently written, highbrow play, coincidentally entitled The Enchanted Hunters. In it, all of the hunters—a banker, plumber, policeman, undertaker, underwriter, and escaped thief—wear red caps and uniforms and remember their real lives as dreams or nightmares. A seventh hunter wearing a green hat is a Poet who insists he has invented Diana and the entertainment she offers. In the end, a kiss proves that "mirage and reality merge in love". Lolita is engrossed in the role and forbids H.H. from attending rehearsals as some parents do. When Lolita mentions the inn where H.H. rapes her, he feigns ignorance, at which she laughs and rides off on her bike and returns with a hand "dreaming" in her lap. Near the end of the novel, it is revealed that the play's pedophile author, Clare ("Cue") Quilty,

sees H.H. and Lolita in Briceland and begins following them across the country and abducts and subsequently abandons her in Colorado.

Hotel Mirana

Narrator Humbert Humbert's father's splendid establishment on the Riviera, Hotel Mirana is where H.H. spends his formative years, including schooling at a nearby English day school, before being sent of in 1923 to a lycée in Lyon. Remarkably, Mirana is also the name of a motel outside of Wace, CO, where H.H. and Lolita spend a tense night after she disappears for a half hour, during which H.H. thinks she is gone forever with some lover.

Parkington

A New England town near Ramsdale, Parkington is the locale of John Farlow's successful sporting goods store and part-time legal practice, one hundred miles from Camp Q, where Lolita is sent for the summer. After her mother's accidental death, H.H. stops in Parkington to phone ahead to arrange for her release in his custody. H.H. spends the afternoon shopping for Lolita, wires ahead to The Enchanted Hunters Inn for lodging next night, and manages to sleep briefly.

Ramsdale

A small New England town where narrator Humbert Humbert (H.H.) rents a room in a house at 342 Lawn St., Ramsdale is little described. A writer with a penchant for swimming, H.H. selects Ramsdale because he hears it has a woodlake, Hourglass Lake, and a room for rent in a house where he may be able to indulge his interest in "nymphets". It burns down the day he arrives, and he looks at widow Charlotte Haze's house only to be polite. In the back yard, he encounters her twelve-year-old daughter, Lolita, sunbathing, and immediately takes the room. To stay near the girl, H.H. accepts Charlotte's ultimatum to marry. Charlotte's plans first to send Lolita away to summer camp and then to enroll her in a live-in girls' school so they can travel to Europe convinces H.H. that he must do away with his wife, and he concocts a perfect murder in Hourglass Lake. Unable to carry it out, H.H. is relieved of his problem when an angry Charlotte rushes across the street to mail three letters and is killed by a careening car. She is buried in the local church, as quietly as she was married fifty days before. H.H. packs the car and leaves to pick up Lolita and camp. Years later, he returns to arrange for the sale of the property.

Wace

A town in the Rocky Mountains where Lolita hopes on their second tour to see Indian dances at the opening of the tourist season. They arrive late, but Lolita receives a general post office letter from friend Mona, telling her about the play she has

abandoned. Lolita disappears for a tense twenty-eight minutes, claiming to have met an old Beardsley friend for a soda and window-shopping. H.H. warns her to be careful and knows a new period of persecution is beginning.

Themes

Taboo

Sitting in jail awaiting trial for murder and rape, Humbert Humbert (H.H.) sees his relations towards his stepdaughter Lolita as pathetic. She alone attaches the proper name to his lust: incest. From adolescence, H.H. realizes that "nymphets" hold fantastic power over men ten to forty (and up to ninety) years older than they. For him, the catalyst is losing girlfriend Annabel before they consummate their relationship. He frequents prostitutes during his twenties and thirties, feeling shame and terror and fearing insanity looking at girls like Annabel, and marries "fluffy and frolicsome" Valeria, hoping that marriage will keep him safe. H.H. tries to be civilized and good, respecting the purity, vulnerability, and innocence of children, but his heart beats seeing a "demon child". He pretends to read on park benches to watch nymphets play, his scholarly book serving as a fig leaf. H.H. often wonders what becomes of nymphets after he possesses them mentally without their knowing. The crisis for H.H. comes when he watches Lolita sunbathing and rents a room in her mother's house, giving him for the first time access to a nymphet. He knows how to enjoy Lolita, impinging on her chastity, and draws close to insanity before he gets his chance.

A complicating factor comes when Lolita proves to be the sexual aggressor. Her fluttering and probing tongue confirms a lesbian has coached her at camp, and she satisfies him the first time without modesty and with hopeless deprivation. She laughs that he has not done such things in his youth. Camp has taught her that oral sex is fun and "fine for the complexion", even with a repulsive boy. Afterwards, in boundless misery, H.H. finds nymphet love a combination of heaven and hell in this, where beauty and beast merge with no borderline. He rationalizes the he is not Lolita's first lover and, thus, has not technically deflowered her. When lust overcomes H.H. on the road, Lolita shrilly rejects pulling over, calls him a "chump", "revolting creature", and "dirty old man". She says she ought to turn him in for rape. H.H. does not know whether to take her seriously or not. There are close shaves on the road, including strangers commenting on excessive noise. As Lolita turns into a cruel "Frigid Princess", H.H. remains enthralled, despite the nastiness, fuss, vulgarity, danger, and hopelessness, in a paradise of hell-flames. At the end of the novel, Lolita reveals that her rescuer, Cue, also likes little girls and is nearly jailed for it, but, being impotent, does nothing to her. When H.H. confronts him with a gun, Cue argues that he has rescued Lolita from a "beastly pervert", and had merely taken her on a joyride.

As part of his rationalization, H.H. frequently meditates on taboo in asides to readers and/or Lolita. He cites clinical data: breast development occurs at 10.7 years and pubic hair at 11.2. He laments maturing in a civilization that discourages older men from courting girls of twelve, whereas nymphet-love is common in history (Dante, Petrarch). The church adopts Roman law's stipulation that a girl may marry at age twelve, and some states in the US tacitly preserve this. Elsewhere it is fifteen. Nowhere is it considered wrong for a forty-year-old brute to penetrate a youthful bride after being

blessed by a priest. Telling Lolita about how Sicilians accept sexual relations between fathers and daughters, he notes that should she invoke the detestable Mann Act and claim he has raped her, he will go to jail, but she will be institutionalized. Fear keeps Lolita with H.H. for quite a while.

Beauty

Narrator Humbert Humbert (H.H.) frequently waxes eloquent on his ideal of human beauty, derived from his frustrated adolescent love affair with "honey-colored skin", "thin arms", "brown bobbed hair", "long lashes", and a "big bright mouth". Between ages nine and fourteen, some girls—by no means all—are "nymphets", bewitching men many times older than they, occupying an enchanted island in a vast, misty sea. They must be graceful and charming, but need not always be beautiful. Normal men looking at a group picture of schoolgirls cannot choose the nymphet, while artists and madmen discern them at once. From his first glimpse of her, sunbathing on the "piazza", H.H. shivers with passionate recognition of his dead bride's body, but also knows he has only two years before she ceases to be the nymphet he can appreciate. For H.H., reaching college age marks the death of the nubile body, which becomes entombed alive in fleshly coffins.

H.H. can appreciate mature beauty, but not be attracted by it. When he and Charlotte marry—so he can remain close to Lolita—he needs alcohol to evoke Lolita's beauty while caressing his new wife. He finds Charlotte's looks improve as her smile becomes less contrived, and H.H. sees a resemblance to Lolita's inane look in a soda fountain or clothes store. He also sees Lolita's rolling-eye grimace in his new lover. Charlotte's smoke-tainted, lusty kisses on the beach and the prospect of having children together are not attractive. Her sudden accidental death relieves him of the problem, and he drives around the United States for two years, an itinerary that H.H. describes in detail, being moved by much of the scenery. He is even more enthusiastic during their second road trip, especially at the wonders of nature, particularly the Rocky Mountains. Recalling how as a child he pictured the long Appalachian chain as mountainous like the Alps or Tibet, he is greatly disappointed by reality. After leaving the flat, expressionless Great Plains, he again sees fine art rather than cheap posters unveiling in the skies. As he and Lolita reach the Continental Divide, H.H. is disappointed that she can ride for hundreds of miles through magnificent nature without caring—and growing angry when he points things out to her.

When Lolita is stolen, H.H. finds solitude corrupting, and he seeks the company and care of a non-nymphet. Rita, a woman twice Lolita's age and three-quarters of H.H.'s, is slight, dark-haired, pale-skinned, with charming asymmetrical eyes, an angular profile, and supple back. He leaves her only when he hears from his missing stepdaughter, knowing his fate is to execute Lolita's abductor. He finds Lolita married, faded badly, and heavily-pregnant at seventeen, smoking in her mother's fashion, and imagines her nipples distended and cracked, and yet he insists, vehemently, that he is filled with love for her precisely as she has become.

Fear

Fear follows narrator Humbert Humbert (H.H.) throughout his life, from the thrilling minutes he fears being caught with Annabel through his nymphet-watching times in parks, beaches, and classrooms, although he gets good at appearing innocuous in his surroundings. He so fears being beaten up by pimps or infected by prostitutes that he marries Valeria. He constantly fears losing his sanity, and undergoes several hospitalizations. He fears he is capable of murder or mayhem, and seems relieved when he cannot drown Charlotte. H.H. fears that someone like Dr. Byron will see through the intricate stories he tells to get his way.

By far, H.H.'s greatest fear is losing Lolita, for whom he falls for at first glance. To stay near her he rents a room from her mother, whom he dislikes from first glance. When given an ultimatum—marry Charlotte or move out—H.H. marries and endures unappealing sex that requires alcohol and mental pictures of Lolita. H.H. fears letting Lolita know he is having orgasms when she cavorts on his lap. He again fears separation when his diary is discovered, but fate intervenes and he becomes Lolita's de facto guardian. To lessen the suspicion that he fears neighbors harbor against him as a recent immigrant and groom, H.H. sets up a fanciful scenario whereby he is Lolita's biological father. This puts off the busybodies until he can get out of town.

Once H.H. has sex with Lolita, he fears that she is serious when she uses the words rape and incest. H.H. fears trying to adopt her legally and of being caught in one of the stricter states. Fleeing into Mexico is the safest course for him with the best long-term outcome, but he dares not cross over. He pays for both sections of double rooms to avoid suspicion that they are sleeping in one bed. He knows he must avoid exasperating Lolita to the point that she reveals their secret. Reading a newspaper article about someone being jailed under the detestable Mann Act, H.H. points out that it does not apply to her case, but should she claim rape she will be institutionalized under conditions worse than being watched by Miss Phalen. This terrorizes Lolita into behaving. Having studied law books about varying state laws on guardianship, he concludes that the best policy is keeping quiet—but not so quiet as to attract busybodies.

H.H. rightly fears that Lolita wants to run away to Broadway, Hollywood, but believes keeping her from accumulating money provides safety. Lolita seems to be imparting secrets to her intelligent, elegant, cold, and lascivious best friend Mona, and has caused enough problems in school that H.H. fears that the school psychiatrist may be called in to analyze her. In a great fight, lust turns to anger in H.H. as he warns Lolita not to tell secrets to Mona and threatens to pull her out of school and lock her up. Lolita calls him unprintable names and claims he tries to rape her while Mother is alive—and probably is Mother's killer. This precipitates their second road trip. At one stop, H.H. becomes so convinced that Lolita is in cahoots with a private detective that he strips her, looking unsuccessfully for signs of infidelity, and begins keeping handy the small blue .38 caliber automatic. In Wace, Lolita vanishes for twenty-eight minutes, driving H.H. crazy with fear, but unable to approach a policeman for help. She outwits him on recording the

detective's license plate number and abets the man's avoidance of H.H. in the mountains. H.H. grows so frustrated and angry that he backhands Lolita. Past Wace, H.H. is convinced that the detective is frequently changing cars to frustrate him. H.H. admits suffering "persecution mania", explains away a fake phone call and convulsions, but knows the end is coming—and it does. Perhaps the only thing H.H. does not fear is the outcome of his trial and judgment in a hereafter.

Style

Point of View

Lolita is narrated in the first person past tense throughout by an educated Swiss-American, who is a scholar of English and French literatures and—not incidentally—a pedophile. Humbert Humbert (H.H.) is in jail, awaiting trial for cold-blooded murder and rape. Having reread his story after fifty-six days of work, H.H. finds it too slippery. He has camouflaged the names of people and places to avoid harming anyone. His own pseudonym, he feels, expresses well his "nastiness". He starts writing Lolita in a psychopathic ward, on the advice of his lawyer, and completes it in a warm cell awaiting trial. He has decided not to parade Lolita in public, so his intended legal defense will be published only after her death. He believes he has survived in order to immortalize their story.

These technical details are revealed only in the concluding pages. Earlier, H.H., who now realizes the depravity of his behavior and repents for having stolen Lolita's youth, adopts a number of poses. He realizes from the start that he has an annoying, provocative style. He seeks to justify not his pedophilia, but his intellect and erudition. He frequently addresses asides to the ladies and gentlemen of the jury and judge, seemingly as a witticism. He addresses lost Lolita (lost where is not clarified until late) with abject apologies for not being able to control his passions. H.H. claims to have a photographic memory but conveniently forgets facts that would reveal the ending too early. He seems above all to want to "come clean", declaring he would sentence himself to thirty-five years for raping Lolita, but would dismiss charges for executing playwright Clare Quilty in cold blood.

The Foreword, ostensibly by Dr. John Ray, Jr., clarifies that H.H. dies in prison on 16 Nov. 1952, before his trial starts. H.H.'s lawyer hires him to edit the manuscript. Ray finds that H.H. has done an excellent job of suppressing details that could identify Lolita, who dies in giving birth to a stillborn daughter on Christmas Day in the "remote northwest". He points out that the story contains no four-letter words, belying any claim of pornography, and sites studies that show how common pedophilia is. Ray clarifies that he finds H.H. horrible and capricious and does not glorify him. He cannot be taken for a gentleman. Hopefully, Lolita, when it becomes a classic in psychological circles, will make for a safer world.

Setting

Lolita is narrated by an educated Swiss-American pedophile, Humbert Humbert (H.H.) awaiting trial for cold-blooded murder and rape. From his "tombal jail", probably located in New England but barely described, he writes a confession that his lawyer thinks may help his capital case. He sketches in broad strokes his early life in Europe, which throughout the novel sets him apart from non-immigrant Americans. Scenarios on the

Riviera and in Paris are fleeting, for what matters is his need to ogle "nymphets", nubile girls with a certain air of knowing. There are bits of color about his European homes and those in New York and arctic Canada, but these are incidental to the main story, which begins in May of 1947, when he rents a room from the widow Charlotte Haze in the quiet New England town of Ramsdale. H.H. has hidden personal and place names behind clever pseudonyms to protect his stepdaughter's identity until after her death. Ramsdale, with its church, stores, and nearby lake, are painted broadly. More attention is given to Charlotte's décor. After her sudden death, H.H. goes on the road, picking Lolita up at Camp Q in another state, and driving her around the United States. Ostensibly on his lawyer's advise, H.H. describes the long, twisting route in minute detail, with a writer's flair and European's eye.

Feeling a need to settle Lolita, H.H. settles in a quiet college town near her Midwestern birthplace. The Beardsley house resembles that in Ramsdale, and the town receives little detail. When Lolita tires of school and has given H.H. reason to worry that their sordid secret might unravel, they return to the road, driving from Beardsley to the Continental Divide. The Rockies are rather richly described, partly because Lolita finds the scenery uninteresting. She is abducted and her distraught stepfather begins years of searching, which are telescoped. He and drunken girlfriend Rita drive from New York to California searching and back again. While in New York, H.H. receives a letter from Lolita, now married, living in a dingy industrial town some eight hundred miles away. Coalmont, where she settles after marriage in 1952, is described in surprising detail.

Language and Meaning

Lolita is a secular apologia pro vita sua by an imprisoned murderer and rapist. Narrator Humbert Humbert (H.H.) is a well-educated scholar of English and French literatures and a cultured European living in a decidedly uncultured American milieu. Lolita, the young nymphet to whom H.H. serves as stepfather and lover, regularly admonishes him for using French and highfalutin words. In a private school, teachers make note of Lolita's mixture of standard adolescent slang and vocabulary of decidedly European origin. Throughout the novel, H.H. shows disdain for anyone who uses French with anything less than perfect fluency.

H.H. has been for years a voyeuristic pedophile and has obviously studied the history of the phenomenon, which he shares in occasional asides to his readers. When Charlotte Haze dies, leaving him in charge of his luscious ward, he studies the varieties of American state law on the subject and shares his findings with readers in scholarly asides. The Foreword, ostensibly by H.H.'s posthumous editor, observes that the story is void of four-letter words, but inevitably sensual throughout. H.H. seems to pride himself on finding figurative ways of describing his passions and the phenomenon of nymphetism. The highbrow vocabulary that fills Lolita cannot help but challenge even the most erudite readers.

In a novel marked throughout by the delicious use of language, the high point comes during H.H.'s pursuit of Lolita's abductor, who turns out to be a fellow pedophile and a

well-known playwright. The man exults in using "insulting pseudonyms" to register in hotels, proving to H.H. that he is toying with him. H.H. turns detective, hoping the highbrow allusions will result in a slip-up. Cue tantalizes H.H., challenging his scholarship, and keeps him on the track by making his enigmas easier if he senses H.H. is losing the trail. Some references make H.H. laugh.

Structure

Lolita consists of two numbered but untitled parts. The first part consists of thirty-three numbered but untitled chapters, varying in length from a few sentences to dozens of pages. The first part provides background on narrator Humbert Humbert's European background, including his analysis of why he is a voyeuristic pedophile, immigration to the United States, his settling in quiet Ramsdale somewhere in New England, marriage, widowhood, and setting on the road with his orphaned "nymphet" stepdaughter, Lolita.

The second part, consisting of thirty-six numbered but untitled chapters, follows H.H. and Lolita around the country on a meandering road trip whose only purpose is to keep her amused between sessions in bed. It portrays mid-twentieth century rural America through the eyes of a cultured foreigner at a level of detail explained H.H.'s lawyer, suggesting proof that he cared for his ward well. As they leave the Midwest on a second adventure, following an interlude in a quiet college town where conflicts between them percolate, H.H. becomes paranoid about being followed and worries Lolita is colluding. In fact, she is, and disappears in Colorado, ostensibly with her uncle. In telescoped fashion, H.H. tells of years of searching for Lolita, including more driving adventures with a drunken companion, Rita. When a letter comes from Lolita, now married, H.H. rushes to her, learns the truth about her abduction, and rushes to execute the perpetrator. He describes how he has written the story, which immortalizes them, and awaits trial.

In the Foreword, ostensibly by John Ray, Jr., Ph.D., H.H.'s posthumous editor, H.H. dies shortly before his trial, and shortly before Lolita, which accounts for the novel being published before the twenty-first century as H.H. expects. An essay, "On a Book Entitled Lolita," by Vladimir Nabokov discusses the evolution of the work.

Historical Context

Sexuality in the 1950s

Traditional attitudes about sex began to change during the 1950s□the time in which *Lolita* appeared and just after the period in which Humbert and Lolita were sexually intimate. Dr. Alfred Kinsey's reports on the sexual behavior of men and women (1948, 1953) helped bring discussions of this subject out in the open. Although many Americans clung to puritanical ideas about sexuality, they could not suppress questions that began to be raised about what constituted normal or abnormal sexual behavior. Movie stars like Marilyn Monroe and Brigitte Bardot, who openly flaunted their sexuality, intrigued the public; and *Playboy* magazine, begun in 1953, gained a wide audience. Hugh Hefner, publisher of the magazine, claimed that the magazine's pictures of naked women were symbols of "disobedience, a triumph of sexuality, an end of Puritanism." *Playboy* itself promoted a new attitude toward sexuality with its "playboy philosophy" articles and its centerfolds of naked "girls next door." In the 1960s relaxed moral standards would result in an age of sexual freedom. Yet, most Americans in the 1950s retained conservative attitudes toward sexuality: they did not openly discuss sexual behavior, and promiscuity□especially for women-□was not tolerated

The Affluent Society

In *The Affluent Society,* published in 1958, John Kenneth Galbraith examined American consumerism in the 1950s, a time when more than ever before Americans had the money not only to acquire necessities but also to spend on "conveniences" and "improvements" to their lives. The higher standard of living enjoyed by Americans during this period resulted from the United States's participation in World War II, which enabled the country to become the strongest and most prosperous economic power in the world. Money poured into defense spending helped to create a successful military-industrial complex that bolstered the economy: companies produced goods that caused them to become prosperous and hire more workers, who would in turn buy more goods.

In this "age of plenty," customers could choose from a wide variety of innovations; the two most popular were new automobiles and suburban homes, both of which became important status symbols. Car manufacturers sold 21 million new cars during this period, most with powerful V-8 engines, tail fins, and lots of chrome. Developer William J. Levitt dotted the American suburban landscape with developments that crammed together hundreds of inexpensive, assembly-line houses with wall-to-wall carpeting and fully mechanized kitchens. The number of new homeowners in the 1950s increased by an unprecedented 9 million.

Americans' new materialism resulted from their eagerness to forget the hardships of the economic depression of the 1930s and the war that dominated the 1940s. Now the focus was on obtaining a good white-collar job, marrying, and raising a family in a

suburban home with a lawn and a backyard barbecue. As the work week decreased to forty hours, Americans enjoyed more leisure time for personal comfort and entertainment.

Attitudes toward class distinctions also changed during the 1950s. Many Americans echoed Ernest Hemingway's assertion that the only factor that set the rich apart from the rest of the classes was that "they have more money " As more members of the middle class acquired the goods that had previously been reserved for the wealthy the large shiny cars, the backyard swimming pools, the memberships to golf clubs some class lines began to blur. Having and spending money lost the stigma it had had in the previous two decades when the wealthy had been criticized for lavish lifestyles in the face of depression and war. With the economy booming, the rich spent as they had in the twenties, and the burgeoning middle class emulated their habits. The introduction of department stores and restaurant charge cards also helped ordinary Americans spend much like the rich did

Critical Overview

Lolita's interesting publishing history begins after Nabokov finished the novel in 1954 and submitted it to four American publishers, all of whom rejected it due to its shocking themes. Refusing to make any revisions to the manuscript, Nabokov sent it to Olympia Press in France, a company known for publishing pornography. After publication, however, France banned the "obscene" book, which cemented its popularity with underground readers. When tourists brought the book into America and Britain, U.S. Customs agents grudgingly allowed it in, but British officials convinced France to confiscate any remaining copies In response to these censorship efforts, novelist Graham Greene, in a *London Times* article, declared it to be one of the ten best books of 1955. The controversy surrounding *Lolita* brought it international attention. As a result, the bans were rescinded and in 1958 this now notorious novel was published in the United States by G. P Putnam & Sons. It immediately soared to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list where it remained for over a year.

The controversial novel earned mixed reviews after its publication in America. Many critics found it to be immoral, including a writer for *Kirkus Reviews,* who called for the book to be banned, insisting, "That a book like this could be written□ published here□sold, presumably over the counters, leaves one questioning the ethical and moral standards.... Any librarian surely will question this for anything but the closed shelves." A *Catholic World* reviewer argues that its subject matter "makes it a book to which grave objection must he raised." A writer for *Library Journal* echoes these criticisms, stating "thousands of library patrons conditioned to near-incest by *Peyton Place* may take this in stride. However better read before buying. Although the writer prides himself on using no obscene words, he succeeds only too well in conveying his meaning without them." Orville Prescott in his review in *The New York Times* finds two reasons to attack the novel: *Lolita,* he writes, "is undeniably news in the world of books. Unfortunately it is bad news. There are two equally serious reasons why it isn't worthy of any adult reader's attention. The first is that it is dull, dull, dull in a pretentious, florid and archly fatuous fashion. The second is that it is repulsive."

Several other critics, however, offer then-strong support of the novel, dismissing the charges of pornography and praising its artistic presentation of humor and tragedy. *New Yorker* reviewer Donald Malcolm considers *Lolita* "an artful modulation of lyricism and jocularity that quickly seduces the reader into something very like willing complicity." In *The Annotated Lolita,* editor Alfred Appel Jr. declares the book to be "one of the few supremely original novels of the century," while *San Francisco Chronicle* reviewer Lewis Vogler calls it "an authentic work of art which compels our immediate response " Those who praise the novel, however, sometimes have difficulty with its complexity, a typical characteristic of Nabokov's works. Andrew Field in *Nabokov: His Life in Art* writes, "Virtually all of the foremost literary critics in the United States and England have written about Nabokov, with enthusiasm often bordering on awe ... but their eloquence, where one wants and would expect explication, betrays the fact that they are at least as ill at ease with Nabokov as they are fascinated by him."

Nabokov's literary success continued after the publication of *Lolita,* which is now widely considered to be one of the outstanding novels of the twentieth century. During the next twenty years he produced works, including *Pale Fire,* his autobiographical *Speak Memory,* and *Lectures on Literature,* that solidified his literary reputation. Most critics would agree with writer Anthony Burgess's conclusion in *The Novel Now: A Guide to Contemporary Fiction* that Nabokov is "a major force in the contemporary novel."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Perkins is an Associate Professor of English at Prince George's Community College in Maryland. In the following essay, she examines how the narrative form of Lolita *reveals the main character's attempt to artistically recreate his relationship with a young girl*

Some critics read Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* as a story of Humbert's unrequited love for the title character; others consider it a record of the rant-ings of a mad pedophile, with, as Humbert himself admits, "a fancy prose style." Nabokov's innovative construction, in fact, highlights both of these aspects as it reinforces and helps develop the novel's main theme: the relationship between art and experience. By allowing Humbert to narrate the details of his life with Lolita, Nabokov illustrates the difficulties inherent in an attempt to order experience through art. As he tries to project an ideal vision of his relationship with Lolita, Humbert manipulates readers' responses to him in order to gain sympathy and to effect a suspension of judgment Ultimately, though, tragic reality emerges within his art.

In *'Lolita' and the Dangers of Fiction* Mathew Winston comments on Humbert's motive: "The artist wants to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets The lover wants to write a history that will glorify his beloved for future generations.. . In his final words, 'this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita,' Humbert appears as Renaissance sonneteer, boasting that he will make his love immortal in his writing." Humbert does accomplish his goal in part: his manuscript contains beautiful and heartfelt descriptions of "the perilous magic of nymphets"; it also records, however, the devastating results of his illicit obsession for a young girl.

Humbert tries to manipulate his readers' response throughout his memoir by presenting a poetic portrait of Lolita and his life with her He admits, "I hope I am addressing myself to unbiased readers." In an effort to provide himself with an excuse for his obsession with Lolita, he details his relationship with Annabel, Lolita's "precursor" at the beginning of the novel. Of his adolescent relationship with Annabel, he writes, "the spiritual and the physical had been blended in us with a perfection that must remain incomprehensible to the matter-of-fact, crude, standard-brained youngsters of today." He suggests that educated readers will thus comprehend the beauty of that relationship, as well as his with Lolita.

Before he begins the details of his life with Lolita, Humbert introduces the following idea: "Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as 'nymphets.'" This description suggests he was a "hunter," "enchanted" by the "nymphet" Lolita almost against his will He asserts that "under no circumstances would [he] have interfered with the innocence of a child."

In another effort to suspend readers' judgment, Humbert frequently interrupts his memoir with descriptions of sexual customs in other countries and other time periods. He notes that society dictates sexual taboos and that they change from culture to

culture and in different time periods. "Let me remind my reader" he begins, that in the past girls Lolita's age frequently married and that artists like Dante and Petrarch "fell madly in love" with young girls. Thus, he intimates, readers should not impose judgment on him based on twentieth-century moral standards.

Humbert provides eloquent descriptions of Lolita that reveal the "incomparable" and "poignant bliss he feels in her presence." In the following passage, he mythologizes her as he reveals his exquisite pleasure over watching her play tennis'

I remember at the very first game I watched being drenched with an almost painful convulsion of beauty assimilation. My Lohta had a way of raising her bent left knee at the ample and springy start of the service cycle when there would develop and hang in the sun for a second a vital web of balance between toed foot, pristine armpit, burnished arm and far back-flung racket, as she smiled up with gleaming teeth at the small globe suspended so high in the zenith of the powerful and graceful cosmos she had created for the express purpose of falling upon it with a clan resounding crack of her golden whip.

Humbert illustrates the depths of his feeling for her when he admits that in his assessment of their life together, everything "gets mixed up with the exquisite stainless tenderness seeping through the musk and the mud, through the dirt and the death, Oh God, oh God And what is most singular is that she, *this* Lolita, *my* Lolita, has individualized the writer's ancient lust, so that above and over everything there is Lolita."

The wit and humor Humbert invests in his artistic reconstruction of his past further gain readers' sympathy and restrict their efforts to judge him. *New Yorker* contributor Donald Malcolm observes, "an artful modulation of lyricism and jocularity quickly seduces the reader into something very like willing complicity." The memoir contains several examples of Humbert's verbal brilliance and quick wit, but the most inventive occurs at the end during his comic scene with Clare Quilty, presented as Humbert's evil twin. In their death struggle, which recalls another lesser artform, Humbert notes,

I rolled over him We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us . [E]lderly readers, will surely recall at this point the obligatory scene in the Westerns of their childhood Our tussle, however, lacked the ox-stunning fisticuffs, the flying furniture He and I were two large dummies, stuffed with dirty cotton and rags .. When at last I had possessed myself of my precious weapon, and the scenario writer had been reinstalled in his low chair, both of us were panting as the cowman and the sheepman never do after their battle

Humbert, however, cannot hide the reality of Lolita's suffering in his idealized portrait of her. He often, almost uncontrollably, undercuts his romantic vision with disturbing details of his responsibility for her "broken" life. At one point he admits, "I simply did not know a thing about my darling's mind and that quite possibly, behind the awful juvenile cliches, there was in her a garden and a twilight, and a palace gate□dim and adorable regions which happened to be lucidly and absolutely forbidden to me ... living as we did, she and I, in a world of total evil.... [O]h my poor, bruised child. I loved you.... I was

despicable and brutal, and turpid, and everything... and there were times when I knew how you felt, and it was hell to know it." Another time he writes, "I recall certain moments ... when after having had my fill of her ... the tenderness would deepen to shame and despair." Ironically, though, Humbert's brutal honesty gains him a measure of respect from his readers.

Humbert reveals his complex nature when he insists, that to love a nymphet, "you have to be an artist and a madman." In the Foreword, the fictitious Freudian psychiatrist John Ray Jr. insists, "No doubt, he is horrible, he is abject, he is a shining example of moral leprosy, a mixture of ferocity and jocularity.... [B]ut how magically his singing violin can conjure up a tendresse, a compassion for Lolita that makes us entranced with the book while abhorring its author." Donald E. Morton, in his *Vladimir Nabokov,* argues, "What makes *Lolita* something more than either a case study of sexual perversion or pornographic titillation is the truly shocking fact that Humbert Humbert is a genius who, through the power of his artistry, actually persuades the reader that his memoir is a love story. It is this accomplishment that makes the novel a surprising success from the perspective of Humbert Humbert's desires and intentions." Yet while readers recognize the poignant love story in *Lolita,* they also identify it as a tale of cruel victimization, and in its entirety as an illustration of the artist's difficult task in successfully ordering experience through art.

Source: Wendy Perkins, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 2000

Critical Essay #2

In this overview, Eisinger argues that Lolita *is not so much about its plot as it is about art; he asserts that the novel's "primary if not its sole reality is language."*

The apparent subject of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* is the titillating perversion of a madman who virtually kills his wife in order to make captive and lasciviously possess her 12-year-old daughter; and when the child, who has in fact seduced him, escapes him, running off with another man, he apparently kills that man. This lurid tale would seem to invite either a sensational or a moral response. The problem Nabokov deliberately sets for himself, however, is to persuade the reader to transcend the erotic content and eschew moral judgment in order to perceive his novel as an artistic creation and not as a reflection or interpretation of reality. *Lolita* is not immoral or didactic, he has said; it has no moral. It is a work of art. The apparent subject of the novel is Humbert Humbert's perverted passion for a nymphet. But we come closer to the real subject if we perceive that his passion is his prison and his pain, his ecstasy and his madness. His release from the prison of his passion and the justification of his perversion is in art, and that is the real subject of the novel: the pain of remembering, organizing, and telling his story is a surrogate for the pain of his life and a means of transcending and triumphing over it; art, as it transmutes the erotic experience, becomes the ultimate experience in passion and madness.

Late in the hook Humbert says that unless it can be proved to him that it does not matter that Lolita had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac, then he sees nothing for the treatment of his misery but the palliative of articulate art. At the end of the novel, addressing Lolita, he says, I am thinking of angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. Here is the only immortality he and Lolita may share. Here is the only balm that will soothe. Here, in art, are the forms that will control the passionate furies while the music of the words cloaks it all in saving beauty.

Not that "reality" doesn't intrude. Nabokov sought and captured the way schoolgirls talk; he conveys the feel and the smell of American motel rooms in all their philistine vulgarity. But a major thrust of the novel is toward undermining and mocking the concepts of fact, reality, and truth in fiction, toward destroying, in short, the very bases of literary realism. Nabokov undercuts a firm conception of reality by involving Nabokov the "author," Humbert the "narrator," and John Ray the supposititious editor in the making of the book, creating an ambiguity and uncertainty about authorship, reliability, and authority which attack the validity of fact, reality, and truth: can we trust the criminally insane Humbert as the primary source of our knowledge of events and people, especially since "Humbert Humbert" is Humbert's own invention? And more especially since his diary, presumably the original source of the narrative, has been destroyed? Or the pompous Ray, who speaks of newspapers which carry the story of Humbert "For the benefit of old-fashioned readers who wish to follow the destinies of the 'real' people beyond the 'true' story ...," a man who asserts that the tale tends toward a moral apotheosis? The factitious factual character of the story that Ray emphasizes is only a device for encouraging our conventional expectations as readers of traditionally

realistic fictions which make traditional moral judgments. Nabokov will disappoint these expectations just as he has deliberately confused the point of view and the identity and relationship of the characters. The techniques of the novel are forms of play for him, as art itself is play.

Writing his memoirs in prison, Humbert says, Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with. It is the case that word play and pure sound are one source of the wit and joy of the novel, as Humbert imagines the nymphet he would coach in French and fondle in Humbertish. Nabokov uses language so that it draws attention to itself. It is frequently more important than the action of the novel. It is thus possible to argue that if Humbert had only words to play with, he never had a flesh and blood 12-year-old girl at all. She is a fantasy, imagined by a madman imprisoned as much in his cell as he is in his lust. Indeed the entire book may be a fantasy. When Humbert kills Clare Quilty, the playwright who abducted Lolita, the characters move as though they were underwater or with that heavily retarded motion common to nightmare. Quilty may be as unreal as Lolita, Humbert's alter ego haunting him for his guilt in relation to the child. Lolita is thus an occasion for Humbert's fantasy of sex and Quilty for his fantasy of violence and revenge. It is as necessary to transmute the pain of one's fantasy life into art as it is the pain of one's conscious and quotidian life. Whether Lolita and Quilty are "real" or not, language will serve as a means of dealing with them.

It is not only through language that Lolita is removed from the "real" world. As a nymphet, she is nymphic, that is, daemonic. A nympholept like Humbert instantly recognizes and always burns for such a creature. When he gets her into bed, in an inn called appropriately enough for a magical, mythical experience The Enchanted Hunters, he thinks of her as an immortal daemon disguised as a female child. Thus it is possible to read Lolita as a daemonic spirit residing in the human id, that is, as an irrational, self-destructive force related to the primitive in man that will overwhelm his rationality with the frenzy of its appetite. The price of this ecstasy is its inevitable pain. And so we return to language, because only it, only art, will bring these demonic energies under control. And that is the essence of the entire novel: its primary if not its sole reality is language.

Source: Chester E Eismger, *"Lolita.* Overview," in *Reference Guide to American Literature, 3rd ed,* edited by Jim Kamp, St. James Press, 1994

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, O'Connor discusses Lolita *as a parody of several popular genres, as a work rich in characterization, and as the catalyst for Nabokov's success as a writer.*

Lolita stays like a deep tattoo. Critics tumble over one another racing to publish articles on its twists, myths and artifices. Paperback houses have reprinted it again and again. It is the second most often cited title in *Book Week's* Poll of Distinguished Fiction, 1945-65. It has been made into a movie, a successful one at that. Sales and critical attention have opened the way for the appearance of many of Nabokov's other novels, particularly his early or Russian novels. Without *Lolita,* Nabokov's rise to literary sainthood might have been delayed beyond his natural years. Indeed, it might never have occurred.

Nabokov's twelfth novel was brought out in 1955 by Maurice Girodias' Olympia Press in Paris when the author was fifty-six years old. It had been rejected by four American publishers on a variety of grounds, all, according to Andrew Field, stemming from "a compound of fright and incomprehension" *{Nabokov, His Life in Art).* Though Girodias had now and then published the works of distinguished writers such as [Lawrence] Durrell, [Samuel] Beckett and [Jean] Genet, he was known mainly for an output of "dirty books." He saw in *Lolita,* some of whose literary values he recognized, mainly a weapon in the fight against moral censorship. Nabokov was soon forced to insist that he would be hurt if his work became a *succes de scandale.* The author needn't have worried; during the year following its publication, *Lolita* was given not a single review and soon became just another book on the Olympia list, not even sufficiently pornographic to compete with some of Girodias' other titles, such as *White Thighs* and *The Sex Life of Robinson Crusoe.*

An early sign of the lastingness of *Lolita* seems to be the unanimity of contempt it aroused in snobs and slobs alike after it did find a public of sorts.

Orville Prescott in the daily *New York Times* (August 18, 1958) declared:

Lolita, then, is undeniably news in the world of books Unfortunately it is bad news. There are two equally serious reasons why it isn't worthy of any adult reader's attention. The first is that it is dull, dull, dull in a pretentious, florid and archly fatuous fashion The second is that it is repulsive.

Prescott shared contempt with "Stockade Clyde" Carr, a barracks-mate of Nabokov's former student and, later, editor, Alfred Appel, Jr. Appel found and purchased the Olympia edition in Paris in 1955 and brought it back to his Army post, where Clyde, recognizing the publisher said, "Hey, lemme read your dirty book, man!" Urged to read it aloud himself, Clyde stumbled through the opening paragraph: "Lolita, light of my life. Fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo ... lee ... ta" then tossed down the book and complained, "It's goddam littachure!" ... Nabokov seems to have anticipated some of the

fads, fashions and contempts of both schools. In the foreword to the novel, Nabokov's alter-ego, or mask, the scholar John Ray, Jr., says "... those very scenes one might ineptly accuse of a sensuous existence of their own, are the most strictly functional ones in the development of a tragic tale, tending unswervingly to nothing less than moral apotheosis." Nabokov's works are full of such clues and warnings, but only sensitive readers pick them up. In fact, *Lolita* remained an underground novel until 1956 when Graham Greene in *The London Times* placed it on his list of the ten best novels published during the previous year. As Field points out:

Greene's pronouncement aroused great controversy, but also stimulated the interest of many important and respected critics and writers, who, with few exceptions, were quick to recognize the enormous importance and non-pornographic nature of the novel.

By 1959 many literary people had taken and followed Greene's signal (I might say, *"Not until* 1959 ..."). V. S. Pritchett in *The New Statesman* appreciated the novel and addressed the problem of the so-called pornographic content, no doubt aware that the U.S. Customs Bureau had for a time confiscated copies of *Lolita:*

I can imagine no book less likely to incite the corruptible reader, the already corrupted would surely be devastated by the author's power of projecting himself into their fantasy-addled minds As for minors, the nymphets and schoolboys, one hardly sees them toiling through a book written in a difficult style, filled on every page with literary allusions, linguistic experiment and fits of idiosyncrasy.

Such praise seems mild, given what we now know of the general richness of the novel. To one degree or another, for example, critics have demonstrated that *Lolita* is a full-blown psychological novel with roots deep in nineteenth century models; a detective novel with conventions that date back to Poe, perhaps beyond; a confessional novel; a Doppelganger Tale; an extended allegory for the artistic process; a sexual myth more complicated and mysterious than comparable Freudian stereotypes; even a fable with correspondences to the Little Red Riding Hood story. And of course it to some degree parodies these types.

In his final confrontation with Quilty, "the kidnapper," Humbert, "the detective," comically plays his role to the extreme. Then, as if to remind us that popular genres often share both conventions and cliches, Nabokov mixes matters; that is, for moments at least, a scene from a detective novel becomes, as well, a scene from a Western, "detective" becoming "cowboy," etc. Quilty has just knocked Humbert's pistol ("Chum") under a chest of drawers:

Fussily, busibodily, cunningly, he had risen again while he talked I groped under the chest trying at the same time to keep an eye on him. All of a sudden I noticed that he had noticed that I did not seem to have noticed Chum protruding from beneath the other corner of the chest 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

The final sentences signal exhaustion, not only in the narrator and his opponent but, as importantly, in the author who lurks behind them and the reader who waits ahead Yet Nabokov still isn't satisfied, as parodist he has recognized and used the possibilities for exhaustion in the detective/Western, pushing the scene to its sterile limits; now he provides the rewarding twist, presented in Humbert's comment:

In its published form, this book is being read, I assume in the first years of 2000 A D. (1935 plus eighty or ninety, live long, my love), and elderly readers will surely recall at this point the obligatory scene in the Westerns of their childhood. Our tussle, however, lacked the ox-stunning fisticuffs, the flying furniture.... 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 with too much gin When at last I had possessed myself of my precious weapon,□ both of us were panting as the cowman and the sheepman never do after their battles.

Heretofore in the scene we've been presented with a mocking of roles and literary genres, but now we find connections between poor detective writing and poor Western film making, specifically in the fight-scene cliche. Not only do genres share cliches; so do modes (fiction and film).

Here, as in many of Nabokov's novels, parody is close to essence. Literature is not the only object of Nabokov's playful pen Material as unrelated as the author himself (anagramatically called Vivian Darkbloom) and artifacts of the American culture, such as motels, come under the writer's amused eye. That Nabokov's work and its parts are at the same time themselves and imitations of themselves is no surprise to readers of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, Laughter in the Dark,* and other of the author's subversive fictions.

Characters imitate literary or historical figures outside the work (Humbert Humbert as Edgar Allan Poe), they imitate characters within the work (Humbert as Clare Quilty) and they imitate themselves (Humbert, the lecherous father and Humbert, the dutiful father). They constantly confront mirrors, adopt disguises or masks, and become, at least in terms of *motif* butterflies, hunters and chess pieces. Word-games abound, particularly those that involve repetitions (Humbert Humbert or JohnRay, Jr JR JR) and connotative resonances (like the surname Haze). Punning and similar games which allow a kind of verbal playback appear frequently. Clues, false clues, symbols and allusions are bounced against each other like the white dot in an electronic tennis game, though the author's hand remains steadily, constantly on the controls. And beneath all the trickery and games, as if in concession to realists like [Gustave] Flaubert and Saul Bellow there lies a more or less traditional, a tragic, love story.

Humbert's comment on the fight, quoted above, also reveals a quality that readers attending Nabokov's parodic vision may easily overlook- a depth of characterization. There are dimensions to Lolita, Quilty, Charlotte and others in the novel Humbert is extraordinarily complicated: a lover, criminal, detective, cowboy, mocker, serious in each endeavor, even the most foolish. After noting "this mixture in my Lolita of tender dreamy

childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity," Humbert shares the depths of his feelings for her, saying:

all this gets mixed up with the exquisite stainless tenderness seeping through the musk and the mud, through the dirt and the death, Oh God, oh God And what is most singular is that she, this Lolita, my Lolita, has individualized the writer's ancient lust, so that above and over everything there is□Lolita

The subject here, however, is the novel and its readers, what happened and what might have happened. Consider. Because *Lolita* survived, as literature, as a popular novel, it prepared the way for subsequent Nabokov works, especially *Pale Fire* and *Ada,* which might otherwise have found no audience of notable size, might not even have been published by a commercial press. In sustaining a reasonably healthy life for itself, *Lolita* also made possible the translation and publication of Nabokov's important early novels, including *Mary, King, Queen, Knave, The Defense* and *The Eye* Further, it brought invitations for Nabokov's short stories from editors of good-paying magazines who previously had ignored his work.. Finally, it provided for the author that glowing credential of a writer's popular success, a movie, which came about largely because of solid paperback sales. A work, then, which at the beginning was completely ignored, then existed as a controversial under-the-counter pornographic novel was finally published by a respectable house (The first Putnam edition appeared in August, 1958, and there were seventeen printings in the following thirteen months.) seemed to catapult its author into daylight. Yet this was decades after he had begun writing. How strange, especially when one recalls that *Lolita* was not discovered by an informed critic making a studied response *or* by an enterprising editor at a commercial publishing house but as the result of the bare mention of it made by another practitioner of Nabokov's lonely craft, a mention that itself might have gone unnoticed had the novel lacked the power to stir and sustain controversy. The oddness of it all might appeal to no one more than to Nabokov himself.

And so it did.

In "An Afterword to Lolita" he recalls his experiences with the four American publishers who'd rejected his novel before he sent it to Girodias: He found some of the reactions "very amusing." One reader thought the book would be all right if Lolita were turned into a twelve-year-boy and he was seduced by Humbert, "a farmer, in a barn, amidst gaunt surroundings, all this set forth in short, strong, 'realistic' sentences." Nabokov insists that everybody knows that he detests symbols and allegories,

. an otherwise intelligent reader who flipped through the first part descnbed *Lolita* as "Old Europe debauching young America," while another flipper saw in it "Young American debauching old Europe "

Publisher X, whose advisers got so bored with Humbert that they never got beyond page 188, had the naivete to write me that Part Two was too long. Publisher Y, on the other hand, regretted that there were no good people in the book Publisher Z said if he printed *Lolita,* he and I would go to jail.

The author, after years of absurd neglect, had developed a shell of protection; any response now would amuse him. In jail or an asylum he would surely have laughed, perhaps scribbled out the folly of his fate on the walls of his cell.

I've intended my remarks to be informative and stimulating, not conclusive, and therefore I must warn myself away from the temptation to make something definite of all of this. The best closing is to be found in some of the words Nabokov himself wrote about *Lolita.* They seem to be a gentle phosphorescent light by which trailing fish□critics, teachers, writers, students, publishers and the like□might be guided. When he thinks of the novel, he says:

. 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 lot of work), or Lolita playing tennis, or the hospital at Elphmstone, or pale, pregnant, beloved, irretrievable Dolly Schiller dying in the 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 parts he calls "the nerves of the novel." They are the "secret points, the subliminal co-ordinates by means of which the book is plotted."

And surely, I dare add, some of the reasons the novel has survived even its own audiences.

Source: Phillip F. O'Connor, *"Lolita;* A Modern Classic in Spite of Its Readers," in *A Question of Quality: Seasoned "Authors" for a New Season, Vol. 2,* edited by Louis Filler, Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980, pp. 139-43

Quotes

"Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta.
"She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita.
"Did she have a precursor? She did, indeed she did. In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. In a princedom by the sea. Oh when? About as many years before Lolita was born as my age was that summer. You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style." Part 1, Chap. 1, p. 9

"I groped for the timetable I had in my pocket and surreptitiously fished it out to look as soon as possible for a train. I was still walking behind Mrs. Haze through the dining room when, beyond it, there came a sudden burst of greenery - 'the piazza,' sang out my leader, and then, without the least warning, a blue sea-wave swelled under my heart and, from a mat in a pool of sun, half-naked, kneeling, turning about on her knees, there was my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses." Part 1, Chap. 10, p. 39

"She made me tell her about my marriage to Valeria, who was of course a scream; but I also had to invent, or to pad atrociously, a long series of mistresses for Charlotte's morbid delectation. To keep her happy, I had to present her with an illustrated catalogue of them, all nicely differentiated, according to the rules of those American ads where schoolchildren are pictured in a subtle ratio of races, with one - only one, but as cute as they make them - chocolate-colored round-eyed little lad, almost in the very middle of the front row. So I presented my women, and had them smile and sway - the languorous blond, the fiery brunette, the sensual copperhead - as if on parade in a bordello. The more popular and platitudinous I made them, the more Mrs. Humbert was pleased with the show." Part 1, Chap. 19, pp. 79-80

"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." Part 1, Chap. 23, pp. 98-99

"'Look here, Lo. Let's settle this once for all. For all practical purposes I am your father. I have a feeling of great tenderness for you. In your mother's absence I am responsible for your welfare. We are not rich, and while we travel, we shall be obliged - shall be thrown a great deal together. Two people sharing one room, inevitably enter into a kind - how shall I say - a kind -'
" 'The word is incest,' said Lo - and walked into the closet, walked out again with a young golden giggle, opened the adjoining door, and after carefully peering inside with

her strange smoky eyes lest she make another mistake, retired to the bathroom." Part 1, Chap. 27, pp. 119-120

"Frigid gentlewomen of the jury! I had thought that months, perhaps years, would elapse before I dared to reveal myself to Dolores Haze; but by six she was wide awake, and by six fifteen we were technically lovers. I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she who seduced me." Part 1, Chap. 29, p. 132

"A combination of naïveté and deception, of charm and vulgarity, of blue sulks and rosy mirth, Lolita, when she chose, could be a most exasperating brat. I was not really quite prepared for her fits of disorganized boredom, intense and vehement griping, her sprawling, droopy, dopey-eyed style, and what is called goofing off—a kind of diffused clowning which she thought was tough in a boyish hoodlum way. Mentally, I found her to be a disgustingly conventional little girl." Part 2, Chap. 1, pp. 147-148

"Now, in perusing what follows, the reader should bear in mind not only the general circuit as adumbrated above, with its many sidetrips and tourist traps, secondary circles and skittish deviations, but also the fact that far from being an indolent partie de plaisir, our tour was a hard, twisted, teleological growth, whose sole raison d'être (these French clichés are symptomatic) was to keep my companion in passable humor from kiss to kiss." Part 1, Chap. 2, p. 154

"Query: is the stepfather of a gaspingly adorable pubescent pet, a stepfather of only one month's standing, a neurotic widower of mature years and a small but independent means, with the parapets of Europe, a divorce and a few madhouses behind him, is he to be considered a relative, and thus a natural guardian? And if not, must I, and could I reasonably dare notify some Welfare Board and file a petition (how do you file a petition?), and have a court's agent investigate meek, fishy me and dangerous Dolores Haze?" Part 2, Chap. 3, p. 172

"I am now faced with the distasteful task of recording a definite drop in Lolita's morals. If her share in the ardors she kindled had never amounted to much, neither had pure lucre ever come to the fore. But I was weak, I was not wise, my schoolgirl nymphet had me in thrall. With the human element dwindling, the passion, the tenderness, and the torture only increased; and of this she took advantage." Part 2, Chap. 7, p. 183

"She preferred acting to swimming, and swimming to tennis; yet I insist that had not something within her been broken by me - not that I realized it then! - she would have had on the top of her perfect form the will to win, and would have become a real girl champion. Dolores, with two rackets under her arm, in Wimbledon. Dolores endorsing a Dromedary. Dolores turning professional. Dolores acting a girl champion in a movie. Dolores and her gray, humble, hushed husband-coach, old Humbert." Part 2, Chap. 20, p. 232

"I stopped at the last 'house' - a clapboard shack, with two or three similar ones farther away from the road and a waste of withered weeds all around. Sounds of hammering came from behind the house, and for several minutes I sat quite still in my old car, old

and frail, at the end of my journey, at my gray goal, finis, my friends, finis, my fiends. The time was around two. My pulse was 40 one minute and 100 the next. The drizzle crepitated against the hood of the car. My gun had migrated to my right trouser pocket. A nondescript cur came out from behind the house, stopped in surprised, and started good-naturedly woof-woofing at me, his eyes slit, his shaggy belly all muddy, and then walked about a little and woofed once more." Part 2, Chap. 28, p. 269

"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." Part 2, Chap. 36, p. 309

Adaptations

Lolita was twice adapted for the screen. The first version was directed in 1962 by Stanley Kubrick from Nabokov's screenplay and starred James Mason, Shelley Winters, and Sue Lyon as Lolita. This initial film was released by Warner and is available from Warner Home Video.

The second film version, featuring a screenplay by Stephen Schiff, was directed by Adrian Lyne and stars Jeremy Irons, Melanie Griffith, and Dominique Swain. The film was released in 1997 by Trimark and is available from Vidmark/Trimark Home Video.

The novel was also recorded in an audio version read by Jeremy Irons and released by Random House Audio in 1997.

Topics for Further Study

At one point in the novel, Humbert admits that he never found out the laws governing his relationship with Lolita. Investigate what rights Humbert had as a stepfather in 1955 and what the penalties for incest were.

Research the psychological term "obsession" and apply it to Humbert.

Read Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* and compare and contrast each novel's treatment of obsession and its effects.

Investigate the effects of incest on children and compare your findings to the effects Lolita's relationship with Humbert had on her.

What Do I Read Next?

Death in Venice (1913), by Thomas Mann, is a tragic tale of an acclaimed author's obsession for a young boy and an exploration of the nature of beauty.

Nabokov's 1962 *Pale Fire,* a hilarious look at a different kind of obsession, presents a brilliant parody of literary scholarship.

Speak Memory (1951), by Nabokov, is a moving account of his life and family

Nabokov wrote *Lolita: A Screenplay* for the 1962 film version of his novel. Stanley Kubrick rewrote much of it when he transferred it to the screen.

Topics for Discussion

What is Rita's role in the novel? How does she help develop H.H.'s character?

What part do movies play in the novel? What do their depiction reveal about H.H.'s purpose in writing?

Why does H.H. include so much detail about mid-20th century America at the beginning of Part 2? Do you find it enhance the novel or detracts from its main thread?

Why does Lolita suddenly want to leave school and undertake a second road trip? Do you find the climax adequately foreshadowed in the departure as H.H. claims readers will?

What does Annabel contribute to the story? Is it fair to blame her for H.H.'s fetish? What else might contribute?

Are any of H.H.'s arguments about views on sexuality in antiquity and overseas make sense? Is mid-20th century America sexually repressed or prudent?

Had H.H. survived to stand trial for murder and rape, how would you as a juror have found?

Further Study

Martin Anus, review in *The Atlantic,* September, 1992 Analyzes Humbert's psyche and the effect he has on others in his life, including Lolita, as well as acts of cruelty and moral issues in *Lolita*

Roger Angell, "Lo Love, High Romance," *The New Yorker,* August 25 & September 1, 1997, pp. 156-59.

Revisits the novel as a new movie version is released in 1997.

Frank S. Meyer, review in *National Review,* December 11, 1995

Examines Nabokov's intentions behind writing *Lolita*

Rex Werner, "'Lolita' Gets Old Waiting for a Date," *Variety,* June 2, 1997

Discusses the controversy surrounding the distribution of the 1997 film version of *Lolita.*

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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