

Humbert Rising:
The Nature and Function of the Two Parts in
Lolita

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Vladimir Nabokov was never one to miss an opportunity of balance, and *Lolita*¹ is full of balances, repetitions, and oppositions. This is as true of the novel's larger structure as it is of minutiae. The balance in a name like Humbert Humbert is reflected in the balance of the two parts of the book. In fact, the two parts of the book are vigorous opposites in structure and in tone, and this opposition sustains much of the plot's considerable energy. Part one is dominated by Humbert's solipsistic view of those around him, while part two suggests his gradual release from this condition. Thus, in the first part of the novel, Humbert has virtually complete control of the narrative perspective and the reader is expected on the whole to accept his version of the events being related, while in the second part the reader is invited to make a counter-reading, to see Humbert's perspective as limited and provisional, and to view the other characters as having distinct motivations apart from the enchantment of his imagination. Paradoxically, this allows us to see Humbert himself in a truer relation to the other characters and to take some measure of him in his tragic freedom.

Any autobiography or confession, as Humbert's narrative purports to be, is by nature problematical. We are given abundantly what we can never have in a conventional biography, the author's inner experience of events. At the same time, however, we lose the critical objectivity we expect in biography. Where the biographer's struggle is to move from outward public

¹My text is the Berkeley Medallion Edition of *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov. New York: Berkeley Publishing Corporation, 1966.

facts to some inkling of his subject's inner experience, the autobiographer's struggle is to establish some plausible connection between his inner experience of events and the events themselves as publicly witnessed. In practice, both these efforts achieve at best a provisional success. The biographer's imagination must furnish the empty building of publicly available facts. The autobiographer must contend with the solipsistic world of his memory and its protective artifices. Objectivity, as any therapist or rapist will tell us, is not a virtue for which our protective memories have any need or use. A novel that makes artistic use of the form of another genre, such as biography or autobiography, inherits some of the problems of the form along with its potentialities. In *Lolita*, Nabokov turns the inherent problem of the confession to artistic advantage. The native solipsism of the confessor becomes a most important illuminating strain of Humbert's complex character.

Like many novels concerned with the "history" of a major character, *Lolita* makes use of a "rise and fall" structure. The first part relates Humbert's rise to the height of his peculiar bliss, the possession of a nymphet, while the second part relates his fall from this state of grace. (As we shall see, however, *Lolita* is at once and paradoxically a "fall and rise" novel.) In part one, almost as an analogue of his rise to power, Humbert's solipsistic point of view is given complete control of the narrative. Even Annabel, with whom Humbert discussed as an equal his favorite topics, "the plurality of inhabited worlds, competitive tennis, infinity, *solipsism*, and so on" (14, italics mine), can be said to have been made in the image of Humbert's imagination, if not actually "solipsized." Like Quilty in his dark, unmanageable way, Annabel is depicted as Humbert's alter ego, with the same thoughts, dreams, and other "strange affinities" (16). In so far as she is distinct, however, with "seaside limbs and ardent tongue" (17), she is vulnerable to death, which Humbert's imagination cannot control. This example of his own victimization by fate (McFate in a later incarnation) haunts him throughout the novel. While the caretakers of the cemeteries in Ramsdale "report that no ghosts walk" (6), a number of ghosts, beginning with Annabel's, flit about in Humbert's consciousness, and against these Humbert struggles to establish control over the world of his mind. Humbert's obsession with nymphets is an effort to reincarnate Annabel, to manipulate a fate that has eluded his control.

Humbert exercises control over the circumstances of his life by controlling its narration. Even the most humiliating events, such as his first wife Valeria's desertion, are mitigated by Humbert's narration of them. When Valeria and her muscular lover Maximovich leave, Humbert is as frustrated in his desire

for revenge as Anton Petrovich in Nabokov's early story "An Affair of Honor": all he can do is slam the door behind them. But unlike Anton Petrovich, he is the ironic teller of his own story, and as such he can reduce Valechka and her taxi driver to absurdity:

I do not remember his ridiculous name but after all those years I still see him quite clearly—a stocky White Russian ex-colonel with a bushy mustache and a crew cut; there were thousands of them plying that fool's trade in Paris....With an atrocious accent to his careful French, he delineated the world of love and work into which he proposed to enter hand in hand with his child-wife Valeria....I can swear that he actually consulted me on such things as her diet, her periods, her wardrobe and the books she had read or should read. "I think," he said, "she will like *Jean Christophe?*" Oh, he was quite a scholar, Mr. Taxovich.(28-29)

It should be noted that this absurd taxi driver "made of pig iron" (30) is cuckolding Humbert just as another "pig-like" character, Quilty, will later do, but Humbert's helplessness in the situation is not nearly as apparent. He is still the ironic master of his own story, controlling the narrative in such a way that we accept pretty much at face value his version of characters and events. Valeria's departure is made to seem almost convenient. The same point can be made about Humbert's handling of other minor characters, such as the various prostitutes and psychiatrists he encounters before arriving in Ramsdale. Though the events are humiliating in themselves, their ironic narration by Humbert renders them innocuous. It is only with the arrival of his double, Quilty, that Humbert's control of our perceptions begins to slip and a counter-reading is invited.

We see this also in Humbert's relationship with Charlotte Haze. From the moment of his first seeing Lolita, his narration and our perceptions are focused on the nymphet. Charlotte is satirized as an annoying intruder on Humbert's bliss, an animated part of the *poshlust* of the background of 342 Lawn Street. It is not until after her love letter, when the course of events has rendered her useful in keeping Lolita within reach, that we begin to suspect Humbert has been subtly leading Charlotte on:

There may have been times—there must have been times, if I know my Humbert—when I had brought up for detached inspection the idea of marrying a mature widow (say, Charlotte Haze)

with not one relative left in the wide gray world, merely in order to have my way with her child (Lo, Lola, Lolita). I am even prepared to tell my tormentors that perhaps once or twice I had cast an appraiser's cold eye at Charlotte's coral lips and bronze hair and dangerously low neckline, and had vaguely tried to fit her into a plausible daydream.(66)

In order to deal with his "poor doting Big Dove" (67), his "brand-new large-as-life wife" (72), Humbert must "solipsize" Charlotte (as indeed he has done with Valeria), hunting for signs of the child about her, "a resemblance to the lovely, inane, lost look that Lo had when gloating over a new kind of concoction at the soda fountain" (71-72), evoking "the child while caressing the mother" (72). In effect, Humbert represents "Lotte" to his imagination as Lolita's older sister. He forces himself to make love, not to the mature woman, but the simulacrum of the child. And when the real Charlotte wriggles out of Humbert's control, he contemplates her murder. Throughout, *Humbert Rising* controls our perception of events. Even in the awkward moments when Charlotte discovers his diary and declares her independence of his control, Humbert's narrative fudges his discomfort: "Whatever Humbert Humbert said—or attempted to say—is inessential.... whatever H.H. murmured may be omitted" (89). McFate's subsequent elimination of Charlotte, certainly a wish-fulfilling event, seems an orchestration of Humbert's mind, the narrator's combining of the intricate threads of his story.

With regard to Lolita herself, we tend to accept without question Humbert's version of the events in part one. When he first sees her, she is wearing a pair of dark sunglasses not unlike the pair left on the beach when Humbert and Annabel made their last, desperate attempt at a tryst. For Humbert, Lolita appears as Annabel magically reincarnated, "the same child—the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair....I recognized the tiny dark-brown mole on her side" (38). Humbert's narrative insists on their identity, and aside from a few hints of her own banal idiolect which Humbert evidently does not care to consider—"I must go now, kiddo" (41)—Lolita exists in these early pages not so much as an independent character, but as a catalyst and prisoner of Humbert's imagination, fitted in his mind to the Platonic ideal suggested by Annabel. To seclude Lolita further from an independent existence, the narrative shifts immediately following their meeting to the form of Humbert's diary where we are given his perceptions without even the objectivity of an autobiogra-

pher's retrospective view. Our first sense of Lolita, therefore, is very much Humbert's own sense of her, and we accept without question his daemonic characterization:

What drives me insane is the twofold 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 pinkness of adolescent maidservants in the Old Country (smelling of crushed daisies and sweat); and from very young harlots disguised as children in provincial brothels; and then again, all this gets mixed up with the exquisite stainless tenderness seeping through the musk and the mud, through the dirt and the death. (43)

Humbert claims that his Lolita “has individualized the writer's ancient lust” (43), but the point might just as easily be made the Humbert's ancient lust has individualized and indeed created *his* Lolita, as well as the other characters who pass in the web of his narrative. Thus, while Charlotte is neatly sketched as an intrusive, chain smoking, “phocine mamma” (41), Lolita is just as neatly shown as a daemonic, flirtatious “seventh grader” displaying “the seaside of her schoolgirl thighs” (41). No perspective but Humbert's is even suggested at this point in the narrative, and our reading must concur with his.

Indeed, Humbert's control of the narrative is such that the usual language of eroticism is ironically reversed; to have the body of a woman is to be repulsive, to have the hips of a schoolboy is to be preternaturally attractive. At one point, Humbert laughs about a psychiatrist's file calling him “potentially homosexual” (34), and we laugh also. Psychiatrists, of course, are among the chief satirical targets of the novel, as in so many of Nabokov's writings. Although Humbert has associated “with uranists in the Deux Magots” (17), and will later befriend the homosexual Gaston, he is obviously not one of them; homosexuals parallel rather than duplicate Humbert's chronically uncertain relation with the society around him.

In the “diary” chapter, Humbert imagines himself as a spider “sitting in the middle of a luminous web and giving little jerks to this or that strand. My web is spread all over the house as I listen from my chair where I sit like a wily wizard” (47). In this way, he attends imaginatively to Lolita's movements about the house. The image of the spider with his “luminous web” is an

apt metaphor for Humbert's narrative, the imaginative act of reaching out for, touching, and controlling the other characters. In the first part of the novel, they are all drawn into Humbert's web, subjected to his imagination. Humbert in his chair spreading out his web, Humbert in his chair writing his diary, Humbert on the sofa "solipsizing" Lolita, Humbert narrating: in all these acts, the primary agent is Humbert's controlling imagination.

The masturbation scene is important in this respect. While Charlotte is away at church, praying as it turns out for guidance in her own relations with Humbert, Lolita in her role as daemonic nymphet plays teasingly around Humbert in the living room with a "beautiful, banal, Eden-red apple" (55). As she sits beside with her legs accross his lap, he contrives secretly to masturbate: "Sitting there, on the sofa, I managed to attune, by a series of stealthy movements, my masked lust to her guileless limbs" (56). Meanwhile, they bandy about a popular song concerning "little Carmen," which Humbert, associating with Merimee's *Carmen*, will add as an overtone to Lolita's identity. As he enters "a plane of being where nothing else mattered," it occurs to Humbert that "Lolita had been safely solipsized....In my self-made seraglio, I was a radiant and robust Turk, deliberately, in full consciousness of his freedom, postponing the moment of actually enjoying the youngest and frailest of his slaves....Blessed be the Lord, she had noticed nothing" (57-58)!

The importance of the scene lies in its suggestion that solipsistic Humbert has no desire or need for a Lolita not of his own creation. When he does feel such a need near the end of the novel, it will entail the establishment of fatal connections with the outside world, the death of one self in hope of the rebirth of another. The Lolita from whom he has "stolen the honey of a spasm" (59), is not yet a deliverer but a Platonic composite of Annabel, Poe's "Vee," Dante's "Bea," Petrarch's "Laureen," and Merimee's *Carmen*. In other words, she is an artistic creation of his imagination, subject to his narrative will: "What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own" (59). For most of the novel, it is this ideal, solipsized Lolita for whom Humbert longs. It is interesting that until she surprises him by seducing *him* at the Enchanted Hunters, his ambition remains to fondle her while she is in a sleep induced by "Papa's purple pills." Indeed, until it is pathetically too late, Humbert's vanity requires no response. Throughout part one, we are presented with Humbert's solipsized Lolita, a Lolita he kidnaps literally and figuratively. Humbert's control of

the narrative perspective insures that we see her this way.

The scene at the Enchanted Hunters, of course, is the climax of this narrative movement, and introduces, in the character of Quilty, an uncontrollable element that will invite us to make a counter-reading of Humbert's recitation of the events of part two. At the Enchanted Hunters, Humbert—the room key in his fist, and his fist in his pocket—rises to a height of solipsistic control never again to be attained. Inside the room he has locked a “hermetic version” (114) of Lolita. Appropriately, Room 342 is described as a veritable hall of mirrors:

There was a double bed, a mirror, a double bed in the mirror, a closet door with a mirror, a bathroom door ditto, a blue-dark window, a reflected bed there, the same in the closet mirror, two chairs, a glass-topped table, two bed tables, a double bed. (110)

The mirrors, of course, suggest at once Lolita's own bewildering loss of identity and Humbert's solipsism. Like Humbert's name, everything in the room is doubled, implying his complete dominance. Just as Humbert's and Quilty's identities will blur in their death struggle (“We rolled over us” (272)), Humbert's and Lolita's identities blur among the mirrors that reflect the scene of the seduction.

Paradoxically, the seduction, the climactic height of Humbert's rise to bliss, represents also a fall:

I should have known (by the signs made to me by something in Lolita—the real child Lolita or some haggard angel behind her back) that nothing but pain and horror would result from the expected rapture. (115)

In another passage, he regrets that he did not “leave the town, the country, the continent, the hemisphere,—indeed, the globe—that very same night” (114). The height of Humbert's solipsistic paradise is at once the depth of his personal hell. But it is only through his fall from grace in the second part of the novel that he rises above solipsism and attains some saving knowledge of his true relation and responsibility to others. This may seem an awfully “moral” point to make about a novel by someone as given to parody as Nabokov, but if we neglect it, we miss the real poignancy of Humbert's fate. Parody and the detection of one's characters do not preclude the establishment of a moral dimension for them; indeed, they may provide our surest footing in the moral ambiguity of the twentieth century.

Interestingly, it is when he accidentally meets Quilty at the Enchanted Hunters and engages in a strange riddling conversation (the nature of which, for the first time, he does not comprehend or direct) that Humbert's control of the narrative begins to slip. Quilty, who represents significantly Humbert's shadow or *Doppelgänger*, is an uncontrollable character who cannot be subjected to Humbert's imagination, and who begins to invite our ironic counter-reading of events.

The second part of the novel begins with an extended overview of Humbert's and Lolita's first year of traveling around the United States. Much of it is devoted to a marvelous satire of American ways, such as the diner with its "impaled guest checks, life savers, sunglasses [a subtle reminder of the Annabel/Lolita theme?], adman visions of celestial sundaes, one half of a chocolate cake under glass, and several horribly experienced flies zigzagging over the sticky sugar-pour" (142). Amid such general satirical descriptions, and very tentatively at first, a different vision of Lolita begins to emerge. Humbert repeatedly claims that he's doing everything he can to make Lolita happy, and indeed he indulges her with all sorts of treats, but it becomes apparent that she is actually a most unwilling prisoner and a very different girl from the one he imagines. Humbert is even disappointed in her mind, for unlike the Annabel he would reincarnate in her, she belongs among the objects of his satire:

Lolita, when she chose, could be a most exasperating brat....
Mentally, I found her to be a disgustingly conventional little girl.
Sweet hot jazz, square dancing, gooey fudge sundaes, musicals,
movie magazines and so forth—these were the obvious items in
her list of beloved things. (135-36)

All this is at variance with the Platonic ideal Humbert had formed of her. On her own—and we begin to see more and more such signs of her independent existence—Lolita aspires to a different ideal. She is "the ideal consumer, the subject and object of every foul poster," who patronizes "only those restaurants where the holy spirit of Huncan Dines had descended upon the cute paper napkins and the cottage-cheese-crested salads" (136). In other words, she is as typically American as the other objects of Humbert's satire, and this separates her from the European ideal of Annabel. At the same time, these leanings toward American *posh lust*, as well as her attraction to the vulgarities of Hollywood, all point, though Humbert does not yet know this, to her attraction for Quilty.

We begin to see also that Humbert controls his love not with passion but with threats. At first he threatens her with being sent to Miss Phalen's Appalachian farmhouse, and then with life as a "ward of the Department of Public Welfare" (138). But the best he can do is keep her quiet. He succeeds in "terrorizing Lo," but with all the ice cream bribes he buys her, he is "much less successful in keeping her in a good humor" (139). Humbert's control of the narrative is no longer absolute: a very different version of the story emerges between his lines. Their "indolent *partie de plaisir*" (141), as he puts it, is really a difficult struggle "to keep my companion in passable humor from kiss to kiss" (142). Humbert's narrative cannot quite gloss over the various rows he has with her, or his jealousy of various "grease monkeys" and roller skating companions she happens to meet. Even when his imagination etherializes her, as when he sees her on a ski-lift "floating away from me, celestial and solitary," outsiders intrude uncontrollably on the scene: she rides "up and up, to a glittering summit where laughing athletes stripped to the waist were waiting for her, for her" (147). Humbert and his solipsized Lolita can only exist in a void created by his imagination, emblemized by the "hermetic seclusion" of the room at the Enchanted Hunters. Here, as in Beardsley, society intrudes on Humbert's solipsistic version of events.

The lack of understanding between Humbert and Lolita is suggested gradually and in a number of ways. For instance, Humbert cannot teach her to play tennis, something he hopes will give them "more amusements in common" (148), and even after she takes expensive lessons from a professional (incidentally, a pederast), the brow-beaten little girl cannot push herself to win. Humbert does not yet see, as we begin to see, how her normal desires have been stunted. He passes quickly over such suggestions of these desires as her fascination with pictures of brides. And though he doesn't seem to mind, we note her indifference to his ecstasies. Solipsistic Humbert wishes to devour her, to "turn my Lolita inside out and apply voracious lips to her young matrix, her unknown heart, her nacreous liver, the sea-grapes of her lungs, her comely twin kidneys," while she remains "a typical kid picking her nose while engrossed in the lighter sections of a newspaper" (151). When she reads a newspaper column on ways children might guard against sex crimes (by obeying "a few don'ts"), Humbert duly notes the absurdity of the article in light of their situation, but not the suggestion in Lolita's eagerly reading such an article that she might consider herself similarly victimized. That Humbert's relationship with Lolita is in fact very different from his relationship with Annabel becomes clear in the comical passages

relating his repeated and failing attempts to find a love beach, “a sublimated Riviera, or whatnot” (152) in America on which to consummate his interrupted affair with Annabel. Later, when he recounts the “definite drop in Lolita’s morals” (167), the difference becomes even more apparent. Humbert must begin bribing, in effect paying Lolita for her favors. To the reader, though not to Humbert, she seems more a reincarnation of the young prostitute Monique than Annabel. Humbert himself comes to realize this only at the end of the novel when he describes his gift of money to Dolly Shiller as a “*petit cadeau*” (254). In the course of part two, the image of the real Lolita gradually separates itself from the reincarnated nymphet of Humbert’s imagination. At first we see it only around the edges, like a blurred color separation, but eventually it becomes more and more apparent, culminating in the image of pregnant Dolly Shiller. And we see it against and in spite of Humbert’s narrative protestations to the contrary: “Annabel Haze, alias Dolores Lee, alias Loleeta” (153). Ultimately, the solipsist has “only words to play with” (32).

The scenes at Beardsley, where the girls learn, in Gaston Godin’s phrase, “not to spell very well, but to smell very well” (161), are important in suggesting Lolita’s estrangement from Humbert’s ideal. Beardsley provides a new social entanglement. For the first time since Camp Q, Humbert must deal with various people—teachers, neighbors, schoolmates—who make rival claims to influence the Lolita he has carefully solipsized. The first of these is Headmistress Pratt who advocates “the four D’s: Dramatics, Dance, Debating and Dating” (161), all social activities of the kind Humbert, if he is to keep Lolita in the seclusion of his imaginary ideal, must prohibit. As Miss Pratt puts it, “with due respect to Shakespeare and others, we want our girls to communicate freely with the live world around them rather than plunge into musty old books. We are still groping perhaps, but we grope intelligently, like a gynecologist feeling a tumor” (162). Although this program, for obvious reasons, appalls Humbert, he feels he has no choice but to go along with it. He cannot simply satirize Pratt away; though she is as ridiculous as Valeria and Maximovich, she still claims a degree of authority over a Lolita equally abstract but very different from Humbert’s. Pratt’s Lolita is the absurd composite of psychological characteristics drawn from various “special research reports” (177), and measured against a pre-formulated ideal. “‘She is still shuttling,’ said Miss Pratt, showing how with her liver-spotted hands, ‘between the anal and genital zones of development’ ” (177). Indeed, Pratt herself does not hesitate to force Lolita into her own mold: “Sighs a good

deal in class. Chews gum vehemently. Does not bite her nails though if she did, this would conform better to the general pattern—scientifically speaking, of course” (177). In effect, Pratt offers a rival solipsism to Humbert’s, and thus threatens his control of the narrative and our assent to his version of events. She also forces Humbert to give up a measure of physical control over Lolita, insisting that he allow her to participate in the performance of Quilty’s play, where Lolita will be enabled to form an alliance with Humbert’s more formidable rival.

Neighbors and schoolmates also create problems for Humbert. The neighbors, such as the “odious spinster” (164) Miss East, keep Humbert in check by pestering him and Lolita with busybody questions: “And where is your mother, my dear? And what is your father’s occupation? And where did you live before” (164)? While these attempts to discover something about Humbert prove fruitless, they keep him in a state of anxiety about his secret. Interestingly, Gaston, who is admired by everyone in spite of his own parallel secret, a homosexual taste for young boys, remains blithely indifferent to Humbert’s domestic situation. Indeed, he is not even certain how many “daughters” Humbert has.

Lolita’s friends are more dangerous. Though he forbids her for the most part to see boys, Humbert allows Lolita to befriend a number of girls from the Beardsley School: “Opal Something, and Linda Hall, and Avis Chapman, and Eva Rosen, and Mona Dahl” (173). His hope is that Lolita will bring other nymphets into his circle, but in this he is disappointed. Either the girls do not possess nymphet qualities, or Lolita, out of some sense of rivalry perhaps, drops them. We see, of course, that Humbert cannot control them. They are autonomous characters his imagination cannot manipulate, and by establishing her own relations with them, Lolita claims another degree of freedom. This is especially the case with Mona Dahl, the girl Lolita likes best and Humbert least. “Mona, though handsome in a coarse sensual way and only a year older than my aging mistress, had obviously long ceased to be a nymphet, if she ever had been one” (173). She is already something of an actress with a streak of vulgarity, and it is she who first involves Lolita in “dramatics.” Humbert is unsettled by Mona, who becomes Lolita’s rival confidant and likes to drop puzzling hints about their secrets. Humbert must narrate here things he does not yet know or understand, but which the reader is expected to pick up on. In other words, Humbert, whose control of the narrative and its situations was so tight in part one, is now subject to dramatic irony. The reader sees the events of the story diverging from his

awareness of them.

In the chapters concerning Lolita's preparation for Quilty's theatrical, this divergence becomes particularly apparent. In the manner of Emma Bovary, Lolita pretends to take piano lessons with her own Miss Emperor while in fact going for "extra rehearsals" with Quilty. Humbert, who does not understand what is going on, takes the play lightly, contenting himself with comments about detesting "the theatre as being a primitive and putrid form" (182). True to form, he shows a romantic's distaste for acting. For him, Lolita is simply "stage-struck" (182). In fact, as Humbert will later note, acting is teaching her the refinements of duplicity, and of course, allowing her further freedom from his orbit. Humbert's innocence is partially exploded a week before the performance when Miss Emperor calls to ask why Lolita has been missing her piano lessons. Humbert, who is playing chess with Gaston at the time, becomes so distracted that he almost loses his queen to his docile opponent. Indeed, his unaccustomed loss of control of the board suggests his loss of control of the narrative and Lolita's fate.

When Lolita returns home, they have the most explosive and detailed row of the book. Earlier fights were glossed over by Humbert's narration, but in this one we get a sense of what Lolita says in such situations:

She said she loathed me. She made monstrous faces at me, inflating cheeks and producing a diabolical plopping sound. She said I had attempted to violate her several times when I was her mother's roomer. She said she was sure I had murdered her mother. She said she would sleep with the very first fellow who asked her and I could do nothing about it. (187)

We don't know what was said in earlier fights, but in this one Lolita suggests a very interesting counter-interpretation of the events in Ramsdale (was she not so thoroughly solipsized that morning after all?) and ends with a declaration of independence from Humbert's will. When a snooping neighbor calls to complain of the noise, she even escapes the house. Humbert finds her in a telephone booth where she has just made a call ("Tried to reach you at home" (189)) and undergone what seems a complete change of heart. The Lolita who has been accustomed to charge money for unwilling sessions of love-making suddenly comments: "Carry me upstairs, please. I feel sort of romantic to-night" (189). Humbert swallows all this, "shedding torrents of tears" (189), but the reader does not. Quilty and Lolita are now directing the action, and Humbert relates events over which he has no control.

From this point on, Quilty makes his presence felt in Humbert's narrative. All through the book, there have been hints of his presence—the Who's Who page, the Drome ad, references to Ivor Quilty and his nephew—but until the accidental meeting at the Enchanted Hunters, Humbert is able to ignore these. The meeting at the Enchanted Hunters is disturbing to Humbert because he cannot control it, but even then it is not perceived as threatening. Though Quilty occupies the toilet next door, Humbert is able to leave the next morning with his prize. In the later scenes of the novel, however, Quilty, in the form of the mysterious Detective Trapp, is able to torment Humbert, and largely because he is so completely and obviously out of Humbert's control. Indeed, the *Doppelgänger* itself is a solipsist's nightmare fantasy. Instead of an independent character being drawn *into* the self, controlled, and made part of it, a version of the self splits off and runs amok. This is the case, for instance, in Dostoyevsky's *Double* and Gogol's *The Nose*, both works that Nabokov in varying degrees admired, as well as such English works as *Frankenstein* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

Quilty cannot be drawn into the web of Humbert's consciousness because he represents a rival version of that consciousness. Only Quilty, seeing Humbert and Lolita at the Enchanted Hunters, would guess what they were up to. As a playwright and "author of fifty-two successful scenarios" (272), Quilty is as adept at creating fictive narratives as Humbert, and indeed his machinations begin to control Humbert's own narrative. Humbert is no longer the controller of our perspective, but the sufferer of plot reversals we see coming. He is reduced to reading Quilty's text by means of the latter's many clues. Many critics have noted how the conventions of detective fiction take over the novel at this point, but it is important to remember that the detective story within *Lolita* is essentially Quilty's creation. Humbert, who cannot imagine who his tormentor is, becomes helplessly unable to control the ordering of events (Lolita and Quilty have worked out an itinerary he knows nothing about), and is subjected eventually to the undeniable humiliation in the hospital at Elphinstone. Having lost solipsistic control of the narrative, Humbert loses literally and figuratively *his* Lolita, who was always a creation of his imagination.

Curiously, it is at this point that Humbert begins to develop in human terms. Having lost Lolita, he learns through his relationship with Rita that he can have a relatively normal affair with a mature woman. There is no question of free-spirited Rita, "the most soothing, the most comprehending companion that I ever had" (236), being solipsized. She is no ideal, but an

independent “other” who responds, unlike Lolita, to his kisses, and moves in and out of his life with ease. To some extent because of Rita, Humbert comes to a clearer understanding of his relations with the other characters and to two important insights: that he loves the real Lolita to whom he has behaved monstrously in fashioning her in his own imagination, and that he must kill the rival devil Quilty, which on one level is tantamount to killing himself. In a number of moving passages, Humbert reviews his relationship with Lolita and sees for the first time not the nymphet, but the sad little girl whose childhood he killed:

I recall that...it was always my habit and method to ignore Lolita's states of mind while comforting my own base self.... It had become gradually clear to my conventional Lolita during our singular and bestial cohabitation that even the most miserable of family lives was better than the parody of incest, which, in the long run, was the best I could offer the waif. (261-62)

Toward the end of the novel, he recalls hearing “the melody of children at play,” and realizes “that the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord” (280). Breaking out of the vicious circle of his solipsism (in the language of *Speak Memory*, one might almost say, changing the vicious circle to a spiral), Humbert is able, tragically too late, to experience a non-selfish love for a Lolita independent of his imagination.

Interestingly, as he prepares to murder Quilty, Humbert takes control of the narrative again. The revelations of the true nature of his love for Lolita and the identity of Quilty confer on him a new freedom and power. He is able to manipulate Ivor Quilty, for instance, at will. Whereas Quilty had been Humbert's haunting shadow, Humbert (physically close to death himself) now becomes a shadow following Quilty, a “raincoated phantasm” (268) seeking revenge.

The murder scene has the kind of grotesque, tragicomical quality often associated with Elizabethan revenge plays. Humbert's nemeses have always been linked with bathroom imagery—Maximovich relieved himself in Humbert's bathroom and neglected to flush the toilet, while Quilty himself disturbed Humbert in the Enchanted Hunters by flushing the toilet in the next room. Now Humbert meets Quilty coming out of a bathroom “leaving a brief waterfall behind him” (268). The scene of their struggle is appropriately messy and melodramatic, both in terms of physical struggle and dialogue.

In a reverse echo of their conversation at the Enchanted Hunters, Quilty does not seem to comprehend who is confronting him. Humbert, however, is perfectly aware now of their relation and essential identity:

We rolled 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.... It was a silent, soft, formless tussle on the part of two literati, one of whom was utterly disorganized by a drug while the other was handicapped by a heart condition and too much gin. (272)

The identity of Humbert and Quilty has already been suggested in the scene where Humbert practices shooting an old sweater that he is later forced to wear himself. The murder of Quilty is thus palpably a form of suicide, as the killing of a *Doppelgänger* so often is. (One might consider, for instance, Victor Frankenstein's fatal pursuit of his monster.)

But the murder here is also an exorcism of what Humbert has come to see as the evil in himself. Indeed, Humbert cannot escape or even exculpate himself—he is too deeply involved in the evil Quilty represents more purely, and too deeply aware of this involvement—but he is free “to exist a couple of months longer” and to make Lolita “live in the minds of later generations” (281). It is a tragic freedom. His crimes lead irremediably to Lolita's and his own death, and the best he can offer her is “the refuge of art.... the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita” (281). In terms of moral knowledge, however, Humbert, like Lear, has risen out of solipsism to a tragic awareness of himself in his true relation to others.

In actual autobiography, we do not expect this degree of self-awareness, nor are we generally invited to read between the lines and against the intention of the author, no matter how sorely we are tempted to do so. Witness the relative lack of irony in even a work like *Speak Memory*. *Lolita*, however, is a novel purporting to be an autobiography. As such, it is under the imperative to round off its fictive world, and this involves allowing some adequate, objective assessment of its characters. *Lolita* accomplishes this by means of the carefully plotted, ironic reversal of Humbert's assumptions and claims in part two of the narrative. Humbert may rise in tragic stature only by his fall, and in this way, the reader is able to judge the confessor in his breadth and fullness and offer him the only forgiveness he can share.