

## Nabokov and his *Lolita*: A Chronophobiac's Struggle to Retain Artistic Omnipotence

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### Acknowledgements

I have a myriad of wonderful people to thank for their contributions to the development and completion of this project. First and foremost I would like to thank Professor Steven Allaback for his extreme patience and faith in my project. I cannot possibly communicate the extent of my appreciation for his infinite understanding as I slouched, at a snail's pace, toward conclusion. I must express my gratitude to Professor Jim Kearney who played a fundamental role in helping me generate the scope of my thesis, always encouraging me toward more verdant pastures of thought. I am obliged to Professor Sven Spieker for his course on Vladimir Nabokov; his incredible insights about this elusive author and his still more elusive texts, planted the seeds of inspiration for this project. I would like to express my extreme gratitude to Professor Candace Waid, Professor Susan Derwin, Professor Theony Condos, Professor Elisabeth Weber, Lily Wong and Megan Fadel. All of these educators have expanded my mind in some way, significantly influencing the way I write and relate to texts. I want to commend Julia Panko and Shannon Brennan for being so supportive of UCSB's English Department Thesis Program and for furnishing my fellow thesis writers and myself with so many amazing academic opportunities. I also would like to thank my aunt, Sandra Miranda, who sparked my interest in narrative and storytelling at a very young age. For that, I owe her more than I can ever express. As is perhaps implicit in my dedication, I feel utterly indebted to my parents and any achievements that I accomplish are a direct result of the wonderful life they have created for me. I thank my mother Patricia Ward for her kindness and devotion. I would also like her to know how much I cherish her for instilling in me a sense of determinedness and the drive for self-education. I am grateful to my father, Anastasio Barouxis, who infused me with a great passion literature and for uncovering truths. He has kept me in resonance with ancient Greek pulse for epic life and epic stories.

My peers have been no less important in their contributions to this project. All of my classmates from English 196 merit utmost recognition—their feedback and camaraderie have proven invaluable over the course of writing this thesis. I want to thank my sister, Heather Harrison, who has always been there for me, championing me through all my endeavors with this project, of course, being no exception. I am grateful to Kristen Skjonsby, my kindred in life and literature, for her unwavering support and genuine interest in this undertaking. Both her fiction and analytical writing are leaps and bounds ahead of my own and I can only hope that one day my capacity for expression will approach such mastery of words and ideas. Jessica Martin, my friend and roommate, warrants much appreciation for her tolerance of my sometimes petulant behavior as burning the midnight oil became the standard. Her support and care have not gone unnoticed. I am really grateful to Josh Saylor and Kyle McNair, who provided welcome distractions and who both have an uncanny way of helping me keep life in perspective. Josh Lem's buoyant nature has been so refreshing over the course of writing this paper. He always managed to impart calm on me even on the days when I was involved in otherwise overwhelming tempests of thought. Of course, I feel only extreme gratitude toward Simon Bill, my technical support, for consistently fought-off all imminent computer disasters and for always treating me with great kindness. I want to acknowledge my dear friend Ellena Ngyuen for her

empathy as well as her diligence in always helping me get focused. Angie Glaser, who seems somehow cosmically attuned to my oscillations, is always there at the right moment to spur me on to the next. And finally, of all my peers, I am especially beholden to Chip Badley. Chip's drive and dedication have been a source of inspiration for me since the early stages of our friendship. He has helped me to grow multitude of ways and has proven to be a golden parallel in academics as well as in life.

This list is of course not all inclusive and if I have left anyone out whom I ought to thank, please accept my sincere apology and a belated, heartfelt thanks. Thank you, one and all.

## Introduction

“‘All reality is a mask,’ [Nabokov writes, and, indeed,] Nabokov’s narratives are masques, staging of his own inventions rather than recreations of the naturalistic world. But, since the latter is what most readers expect and demand from fiction, many still do not understand what Nabokov is doing they are not accustomed to ‘the allusions to something else behind the obvious ones taking place.’ There are thus at least two ‘plots’ in all of Nabokov’s fiction; the characters in the book ,and the consciousness of the creator above it—the ‘real plot’ which is visible in the ‘gaps’ and ‘holes’ in the narrative” (Appel Jr. xxvi).

As this excerpt from Alfred Appel Jr.’s preface to *The Annotated Lolita* intimates, the “real” plot patterned within Nabokov’s involuted narratives suggests itself only in open covertness; a mode so nuanced that his true abstinence from the “naturalistic world” (forsaken in favor of worlds born of Nabokovian omnipotence) unfurls itself all but barely palpable to those unfamiliar with his doubled-up literary project. Why such disregard? Arguably, it stems from his staunch sense of individualism—an lurid parade of self acclaim streaming with public statements of self validation—“I’m the shuttlecock above the Atlantic and how bright and blue it is there, in my own private sky far from the pigeonholes and the clay pigeons” (*Strong Opinions* 117). It is not as though Nabokov has no basis for his claims—his fictions, not to mention his entomological discoveries, are formidable in the way of evidence—yet even if his none too humble contentions ring true, the fetishization of his own uniqueness seems to bespeak some hidden anxiety. I intend to argue that this anxiety is derived from a compulsion to retain holistic control, artistic omnipotence, over his texts and that this need for control wells-up from an even more subterranean source—a need to defy the “prison of time” and to prove that he has existed, conclusively and irrevocably (*Speak, Memory* 20).

His artistic omnipotence seeks fulfillment through a carefully constructed, multi-faceted authorial persona. When he states that he is proud of being a person with “no public appeal,” and that “no creed or school has had any influence” on him, he distances himself from the public sphere in attempts to affirm his position as someone untouchably individual (*Strong Opinions* 3). Still, despite this distance, his distinct Nabokovian persona makes its way into his works time and time again, intimately confronting the reader with his presence. This simultaneous remoteness and omnipresence is a very delicate, very artful strategy that bolsters what Michael Wood asserts in *Nabokov: The Magician’s Doubts and the Risks of Fiction*, namely that Nabokov “appears to have treated much of his life as an art...not out of desire to deceive or hide but out of discretion and belief that style begins at home” (17).

Wood’s claim that he treated his life as an art is a compelling insight, since Nabokov was, indeed, supremely intentional about the ways in which he and his works are meant to be

perceived. Wood's conclusions concerning the motivations that drove the enactment of this persona seem to fall short, however. Yes, it provided a discretionary buffer between his personal life and the rest of the world and it may also have evolved from a desire to be self-reflexive of his primary literary project (that in art, the attention paid to style should always outweigh that paid to ideas), but concomitantly and perhaps most importantly his constructed, "complete" persona is a means of sustaining a sense of holistic control over his works (Wood 17). By achieving this holistic control, Nabokov meant to create an unyielding obelisk out of himself, uncompromising proof of his highly individual existence in the face of looming ages of wash—the erosive, corrosive waves of time that would undoubtedly revoke his person should he slacken vigilance.

In investigating Nabokov's need for total authorial control and the usurpation of time that it means to accomplish, the first part of my paper will specifically explore all the elements that constitute that artistic omnipotence, elements that manifest themselves within and without his fictions. Furthermore, this first part will concentrate on his explicit/implicit invocations of a God-like power position in relation to his works as a means of confirming the "absolute" quality of his creator's status. The three sections that follow this first will be an investigation of the foremost threats that potentially deny him fulfillment of his project; these threats include Sigmund Freud, Stanley Kubrick and the reader. Moreover, because his most famous novel, *Lolita*, can be seen as the locus within which both potential fulfillment and potential negation of his project reach their respective summits, it is only appropriate that it be given special focus in this investigation of artistic omnipotence.

The significant renown that *Lolita* achieved made Nabokov a literary star, aiding in his struggle to irrevocably prove his existence in the face of time's ravages. However, because both book and eidolon of the nymphet were propelled into unanticipated spheres of artistic and public reckoning (spheres: film and enlarged swaths of public consciousness), this fame consequently invited interference with the totality of omnipotence he aimed to impose on his works. Not surprisingly, given Nabokov's graduated sense of preparedness and intentionality, these threats were met by preemptively instituted safeguards and, when appropriate, retroactively instituted ones—defenses erected to insulate his authoritarian relationship with his art.

When discussing Nabokov's relationship with his works, we keep in mind that he is an author fixated on creating "masques of reality" (Appel Jr. xxvi). True enough, Nabokov's narratives are masques of reality in themselves, but what is more, they are masquerades assembled as component pieces in the more expansive, carefully orchestrated masquerade that is the Nabokovian artist persona; this persona erected to posture as his artist reality. As (already) repeatedly mentioned, this staged artist reality, his artist persona, is erected for the purpose of establishing authorial omnipotence, a standing secured by his fulfillment of the most powerful of power positions—that absolute, ubiquitous position of God. Just to be clear, his invocation of a God is but one part of a larger movement toward artistic omnipotence, an artistic omnipotence meant to signify the sense of holistic control that, for him, translates into security against time's contrary project of existential attrition. The following section is chiefly dedicated to analyzing Nabokov's God-like relationship of dominance over his *Lolita*, however, it will also incorporate exploration of the preemptive safeguard strategies that also contribute to the continuance of a cosseted, untouchable artistic omnipotence

Chapter 1: Nabokov's Artistic Omnipotence: My God, my God, why have you created me?

*My God died young. Theolatriy I found  
Degrading, and its premises unsound.  
No free man needs a God; but was I free?* –John Shade, *Pale Fire*

Nabokov's artistic omnipotence is constituted by the God-like role he satisfies in relation to his art. Nabokov capitalizes on this symbolically powerful relationship from the vantage point of this, our utterly incomprehensible "reality" (utterly incomprehensible as perceived from the position of a character within one of his fictions); he tethers himself to these worlds as their elusive, subtly palpable creator, a creator that imbues them with vain aspirations for true consciousness—consciousness of themselves, of the worlds that they inhabit, of their creator and of the spheres to which that creator belongs (Appel Jr. xxxii). The effect of his wholly complicated relationship connotes a sense of oscillation, meaning that his "divine" relationship with his works vacillates between being best understood through more literal lenses and at times through more symbolic ones. Overall, however, his documented perspectives on his works extend the reach of the supposedly metaphorical positions of God into the realms of the actual, the extant and in so, convolute the dividing line between the two.

Why is recognizing this *mélange* of fact and fiction so important to understanding Nabokov's relationship to his texts? It is significant because it indicates just how engrossed with his works he actually is. This engrossment, in turn, hints at that aforesaid driving force behind the creation of his art—the desire to counteract time. Such *mélange* is realized through the interweaving of his persona into his texts. From a position of omniscience he creates multiple works where he lives on forever, not just because he is the author of these works and will be read by future generations, but also because he makes himself integral to the content of the texts themselves.

These ideas are validated and further developed in Nabokov's response to an interview question concerning the importance of those autobiographical hints, not literally autobiographical, that crop up in his works. He asserts that imagination is informed by memory and that when discussing

"vivid individual recollection we are paying compliment...to Mnemosyne's mysterious foresight in having stored up this or that element which creative imagination may want to use when combining it with later recollections and inventions. In this sense, both memory and imagination are a negation of time" (*Strong Opinions* 78).

Besides providing a good example of the ambiguities that come into play when attempting to draw lines between Nabokov's factual and fictional worlds, this excerpt from *Strong Opinions*, his book of interviews, intimates that these instruments he utilizes for creating his art are also based in the negation of time. This means that on the levels of both product and process his art intends to thwart time's supremacy.

The manner in which his "products" thwart time is linked to their tangibility as texts, rejecting time's dominion by confirming authorial existence through their own physical existence. In addition, keeping in mind that the contents of these tangible texts are saturated with subtle allusions to Nabokov himself, his "products" are testaments to his existence because he is preserved in their innards as well as in the name externally inscribed along their spines. As for process, Nabokov's individual, internal mechanisms (memory and imagination) that he uses for crafting his art, in their very operation, rebel against time because they transport bits of

Nabokov's autobiographic past to his present, so that they can be reshaped and fixed within his "products," the texts themselves (the texts simultaneously suggesting their own kind of self-exclusion from time in the respects already outlined above). Essentially, elapsed moments, remembrances are removed from the finality of time's clutches; they are reprocessed and inserted into the eternal present of literary works with their futures secured by the tangibility of the texts that enshroud them, texts to be published and republished indefinitely.

In order to keep his God face in position, Nabokov needed to institute still additional safeguards, protective measures to act as adhesive. As a means of protecting the Nabokovian persona from vulnerability, Nabokov erected a strict system of regulating how he presented himself and was presented by others in the public sphere. Because his works and his interviews are the two foremost ways in which his artistic persona could be disseminated, he souses them with a sense of profound intentionality. I have already touched upon the strong intentionality perceptible in the content and creation of his works, and will now turn to its emergence in his public colloquies.

Interviews hold the promise of exposure, giving the subject of the interview a chance to infiltrate the consciousness of the public domain. In certain respects, a good amount of exposure would be understandably palatable for someone with Nabokov's specific concerns, namely in that it could help to establish a lasting legacy in the face of time's erasures. Publicity can aid in the formation of a legacy by ensuring that works and propagated authorial persona will have a continued existence in documented realms of public consciousness, and therefore provide even more evidence of his specific existence. However, this does not mean that Nabokov would stand for just any kind of exposure, especially that which would invade parts of his real, internal self meant to remain concealed behind the mask of his erected artist persona. Though Nabokov asserts that "speaking on one theme—oneself—is a sensation not to be despised," such assertions are not to be taken at face value; he does not mean to "speak of" or publicize Nabokov the man, but rather, he means to embellish and expand upon his authorial persona, to "construct in the presence of his audience what [he] hopes is a plausible and not altogether displeasing personality" (*Strong Opinions* 8, 158). This claim finds corroboration if one only consider the true nature of interviews.

An interview typically fosters direct, spontaneous communications than cannot otherwise be obtained from the person of interest if their existence is only recognizable through the works that they contribute to literature, art, and the like. Because of this more spontaneous aspect, it also leaves room for blunders and artlessness in the interviewee's responses namely in variables at the scene of the interview—surprising questions for which only unrehearsed, potentially sub-par answers can be provided, etc. Such variability and chance are incompatible with Nabokov's project of holistic control; he needed to be in charge of how he and his works were, are and will be presented. In his foreword to *Strong Opinions* he explains how he accounted for this quandary, managing to keep interviews solely on his terms: "...I take every precaution to ensure a dignified beat of the mandarin's fan. The interviewer's questions have to be sent to me in writing, answered by me in writing, and reproduced verbatim. Such are the three absolute conditions" (*Strong Opinions* xv). Essentially, Nabokov removes the possibility for artlessness, attempting to keep any and all meanings relating to himself and his works in a fixed, written state. The interviewers must adhere to his "absolute" conditions so no word-of-mouth flourishes can be allowed to contaminate the very precise, calculated renderings of himself that he means to impart on the public. What this means is that at the same time that he is able to expand public consciousness about himself and his works, he is also able to retain the sense control that he

seeks. Furthermore, beyond the realm of interviews in terms of public communications, Nabokov also extended such rigid measures into his teaching style. Teaching at various universities in the U.S., he contends that “throughout my academic ascent in America, from lean lecturer to Full Professor, I have never delivered to my audience one scrap of information not prepared in typescript beforehand” (*Strong Opinions* xv).

Additionally, the reader must keep in mind that *Strong Opinions* is, itself, a text and one comprised of interviews carefully selected by Nabokov himself at that. So, in tandem with keeping his various interviews anchored by the lead of his pencil, in his medium of comfort (the written word), he also assembles these interviews into a whole work exclusively dedicated to propagating his “strong opinions.” With his “strong opinions” carefully plucked from an expansive literary career and concentrated into one work, he fashions the correct lens (correct according to Nabokov) through which he and his art are to be viewed. Though, already having broadcasted his views in the original publications of these collected interviews, he secures the durability of his specific authorial presence by putting it into book form; a tangible book, to be found and perused alongside his other works on bookstores’ shelves. In this way *Strong Opinions*, now a part of the Nabokovian cannon, is a work evidencing his endeavor for artistic omnipotence in more explicit ways than that achieved through his fictions— a supplementary explicitness, meant to quash any ambiguousness applied to his art. When considering these explicit and implicit maneuvers together (i.e. through the content of his art, the processes through which this art is created, the tangibility of the texts, and the publicizing of his authorial persona) it testifies to the incredible scrupulousness with which he approaches his bid for artistic omnipotence. However, despite the otherwise exhaustive thoroughness that this system enacts in order to confer a sense of impenetrability, it still demonstrates vulnerability in its heavy reliance on written word. Because written language is inherently ambiguous, he builds the foundations for his project on somewhat faulty grounds. This dependency will be further explored later in the paper when I discuss the triad of threats to Nabokov’s artistic omnipotence and whether or not his methodical attempts to establish it have ultimately brought him victory against these threats and, most importantly, victory against time itself. Now, however, after just having discussed some particular strategies involved in the intricate system of artistic omnipotence, it seems appropriate to begin the more specific discussion of the role of “God” that Nabokov fulfills in relation to his fictions, with specific attention paid to his perhaps most remarkable novel, *Lolita*.

It is quite likely that some critics would remark that Nabokov’s is not a particularly divergent attitude for a writer to assume towards his fictions, that it seems almost natural for authors to consider themselves progenitors of the fictive worlds that they pen. So, if it is an expected, almost automatic stance, what then makes Nabokov’s an exceptional one? By this point, I hope that the difference is readily evident to the reader of this paper, evident in his intense level of involvement with his art. If we turn to James Joyce, one of Nabokov’s contemporaries, we are made privy to a similar, yet diverging attitude toward authorship voiced through his alter ego Stephen Dedalus: “The artist, like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails” (*The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* 233). Joyce, like Nabokov, advocates the idea of the artist as creator, akin to the “God of creation,” however, the congruity stops there. By no means is Nabokov an “indifferent” God, “paring his fingernails.” In point of fact, he is a true omnipresent force, primed to inject himself into any scene as long as this interference complies with his stylistic standards. In attempts to communicate the weight that his presence is

meant to invoke, his own words are the best suited for the task: "...The design of my novel is fixed in my imagination and every character follows the course I imagine for him. I am the perfect dictator in that private world insofar as I alone am responsible for its stability and truth" (*Strong Opinions* 69). This statement on his position of as a foreboding God is not much lessened by other references to his characters as his "galley slaves" (*Strong Opinions* 95). However, this being said, there are moments of sensitivity to his books and characters spill out of his iron fist especially in relation to *Lolita*, his favorite creation, explaining that there is a "queer tender charm about that mythical nymphet" (*Strong Opinions* 21). What this indicates is that his fulfillment of the God role oscillates between being at times jealous and an at times merciful, significant in its likeness to most gods erected in human culture.

Putting Dedalus aside for a character derived from Nabokov's own brood, the poet John Shade can be looked to for an interesting example of a Nabokovian character's inborn struggle with the notion of God. The excerpt that heads this section of this paper is taken from the first canto of his poem "Pale Fire" and in just three brief lines he beautifully illustrates this internal conflict. At first he denies the existence of God, stating that a free man has no need for one, yet immediately after this assertion, he questions whether or not he is actually free. In expressing reservations about his status as a free man, he in turn lays suspicion on the veracity of the declaration that precedes it, namely that his "God died young" because he, as a liberated person, had no need for a deity. Since his notion of freedom seems so contingent on disbelief in God, it follows that if he truly believed God to be dead or to have never existed, then he would have no reason to question his freedom. The fact that he does, indeed, question his freedom suggests that Shade's internal processes are colored with denial and psychic muddle concerning the existence of a higher power; Shade's purported conviction of God as a nonentity is actually an unstable one, riddled with sincere doubts.

Shade's struggle is reminiscent of the psychological skirmishes typical of numerous other Nabokovian characters; he created them infused with a vain, confounding drive for achieving freedom, tangibility and consciousness, while at the same time engages them from a position of the progenitor that envelops them in constrained, unfathomable predestination. In various documented public discussions Nabokov explicitly alludes to his characters as though they are all but extant beings ("my poor little girl;" "...[Humbert] never existed. He did exist after I had written the book") (*Strong Opinions* 94, 16). Such treatment of his characters as though they are almost endowed with a third dimension, feeds into his textured, primordial power role in that it delivers his audience to a particular, ethereal impression—that he, in his own right, is just as capable of creating worlds and beings as any other deity (*Strong Opinions* 25,16). The motivation driving this competitive tenor is illuminated by the muddle of concurrent feelings he had in regards to life itself; at once, feeling in awe for life, astonishment at "the wonders of nature," yet at the same time, feeling betrayed as a result of the essential fleetingness of the experience. The idea that his "own life" made up of "fresh bread with country butter and Alpine honey," is actually sandwiched between "two black voids," was so unappetizing that it induced him to seek sustenance elsewhere, that is through art (*Strong Opinions* 152, *Speak, Memory* 20). Note how the perceived treachery of death, and her mistress, cold and indifferent time, obligate him to make jabs at the given world and universe when he exclaims, "How small the cosmos (A kangaroos pouch would hold it), how paltry and puny in comparison to human consciousness, to a single individual recollection, and its expression in words!" (*Speak, Memory* 24). By leveling the "cosmos" to a creation in miniature as compared to the creative handiwork of human consciousness and its infinite capacity for expression through language, he means to get his

hands on more life than what nature has rationed out for him; in fact, he means get his hands on the most life he can, eternal life through the written word. In all, he is attempting to counteract the devilish mistresses, decline force-feedings of life as a “tartine de merde” by creating worlds where he is God, publishing the books that convey his immortality as a renown author in our world and infuse this authorship with a palpable, supreme presence to ensure protection of his existence, in some form, for the ages of ages (*Strong, Opinions* 152).

Nabokov advocated “the view of the artist as something intended, complete,” he “spent a lifetime building an austere, cold, and unreachable public persona” and it is from these impressions that we are given further insight into the kind of God that Nabokov means to invoke (Wood 17, 18). Along with making his characters ineffectively grapple with trying to understand him as their Creator with a capital C, Nabokov, with his intended completeness to boot, aligns himself with a notion of God that corresponds with modern notions of a higher power. This is to say, that his characters’ struggles are meant to be reflexive of our own struggles with the idea of a higher power, albeit in an uncanny, slightly disorienting manner. (This disorientation is displayed in his patterning of himself into these worlds, so that he, as their God, is elusive, yet seemingly around every corner. Something not necessarily akin to what we feel in our world, but a standard sensation for the characters in his worlds). Still, despite this flavor of difference, he means for his position in relation to his created worlds and characters to fully synchronize with a concept pervasive in our own world, that the “wholeness, that man seeks, is already fulfilled in what God is” (*Patterns of Good and Evil* 134). Nabokov means to be this wholeness, this fulfillment of what his characters seek and yet can never, will never know, and so, in this manner he can be outside of time, infinite.

In *Strong Opinions*, Nabokov’s strong opinion on what a creative writer must do in order to write creatively need be quoted at length:

“A creative writer must study carefully the works of his rivals, including the Almighty. He must possess the inborn capacity not only of recombining but of recreating the given world. In order to do this adequately, avoiding duplication of labor, the artist should know the given world. Imagination without knowledge leads no farther than the back yard of primitive art, the child’s scrawl on the fence, and the crank’s message in the marketplace. Art is never simple” (32).

From this excerpt it is explicitly clear that Nabokov sees the creative writer as an entity in dialectic with the God of our “given world.” Nabokov’s presence as a God-like figure in relation to *Lolita* is not as overt as in others of Nabokov’s works like *Bend Sinister* or *Pnin*, books within which he explicitly injects versions of himself into the plots (through *dues ex machine* in terms of the former and as a character persona in terms of the latter), but even so, through certain subtleties Nabokov’s complex engagement with the errands of the “Almighty” shine through. The workings of Nabokov acting as God are mirrored and then deconstructed through Humbert Humbert’s own actions over the course of the novel. The narrative, written as Humbert’s first person account, chronicles his attempt to sustain a position of puppet master over his stepdaughter Lolita, sequestering her for his erotic desires. By novel’s end, the actual implementation of such a position proves futile; Humbert is ultimately compelled to resign himself to the force that he christens “McFate,” a force that the reader can identify as an alias for Nabokov, creator of Humbert’s world.

In the “davenport scene,” Humbert tries to steal the “honey of a spasm,” by achieving orgasm with Lolita, none the wiser, in his lap (*The Annotated Lolita* 62). Seeming to have accomplished his aim, he goes on to assert, “What I had 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” (*The Annotated Lolita* 62). This excerpt conveys Humbert’s explicit conviction that he has created another Lolita, one that encompasses the Lolita that exists prior to this moment in the narrative. What this means is that the little girl that Humbert interacts with, molests and quarantines in the name of his own desires, is swallowed up by Humbert’s constructed idea of her. If the Lolita he possesses is a thing without consciousness, a thing of his own devising, it does not really matter what he does to her, whether it be harmful or no; by stripping her of her status as child, a child that really exists relative to his own existence and by completely dehumanizing her with his philosophy on “nymphets,” he is able to suspend his culpability.

The davenport scene is set in motion when Humbert, emboldened by Mrs. Haze’s absence (away at church), teasingly, cunningly intercepts the “Eden-red apple” that he finds Lolita playing with in the living room. The fact that the action of the scene commences with an obvious allusion to Genesis links it to Nabokov’s self-professed project of studying and countering the works of his rivals, which in this case, is the world as attributed to the “Almighty” of Judeo-Christianity. The way Nabokov goes about recreating Christian creationism is very complex, seeming to match, reconstruct and in so counteract the fall of man and woman. It is striking that Lolita declines to go to church where she might hear a sermon about Adam and Eve and is instead made to become accomplice in Humbert’s first active, actuated sin. The davenport scene is poised as a rival lapsarian scene where Lolita fulfills the role of Eve and Humbert doubles as Adam and serpent.

In this scene, Lolita’s alignment with Eve is evident from the very out-set. She accepts the fruit that Humbert relinquishes to her, bites into it and subsequently becomes tangled up in the serpent’s coils and cunning. Nabokov seems more sympathetic toward his Eve than his counterpart is toward his female creation. Though the Bible makes it plain that both human parties are abject for this sinful conduct, enough to acutely increase both of their “sorrows” and cast them out of paradisiacal garden, it is still clear that there is a bias against Eve, a bias that has been exploited as justification for mistreatment of women (Genesis 3:23). Nabokov’s own judgment of his Eve diverges from the one perpetuated in the Christian tradition-- if looking beneath the surface of Humbert’s crafty narrative, divine sympathy glows and gleams for Lolita.

Nabokov’s sympathy is subtle, but it is the subterranean current that runs throughout the novel. One such moment of sympathy will be elucidated in our imminent dissection of the davenport scene, but still more incidents occur that prove we are supposed to view Lolita compassionately, not as the wicked, sinning nymphet that Humbert predominantly portrays her as. These incidences of perceptible sympathy are particularly concentrated in chapter 32, Part 2, but because it is one chapter in a long narrative within which a child-molester is attempting to persuasively articulate his position as a figure of sympathy, its full import often goes unrecognized. This strategy proves effective; this really rather heartbreaking chapter often fails to induce readers to shift their sympathies from Humbert to Lolita. In this chapter, Humbert for the first time, genuinely extends insight into what Lolita was feeling during their time together, revealing perceived yet suppressed memories where her sadness, helplessness were too palpable to go fully unnoticed.

While walking to a concert with Humbert and a friend, Lolita remarks to her friend as Humbert listens from behind, ‘You know, what’s so dreadful about dying is that you are completely on your own’(284). This emergence of depth is a slap in the face for Humbert, who

has tried to fit her into the limited terms of his nymphet philosophy and the totality of his solipsistic attitude:

“And it struck me, as my automaton knees went up and down, that I simply did not know a thing about my darling’s mind and that quite possibly, behind the juvenile clichés, 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, in my polluted rags and miserable convulsions” (284).

This revelation, that Humbert may not know a thing about Lolita’s mind, should be a bright neon sign indicating that we readers are similarly uniformed about her mind. Though this should push us to reconsider everything that we think about this little girl, this glowing sign is absorbed in the bright dazzle of Humbert’s narrative; the revelation is too brief a glimpse into her inner “garden” too late. Humbert’s narrative is so convincing, in fact, that many critics initially perceived Lolita as the more actively sinful agent of the text. In such criticism she is mistakenly conflated with the Eve of Christian tradition, rather than being taken as the reconfigured Eve of Nabokovian tradition.

These early critiques neglected the subtle currents of the narrative as well as Nabokov’s own admissions that his “poor little girl’s fate” was a heartrending one (*Strong Opinions* 25). Instead, many concluded that the focus of the text is one predominantly concerned with smashing up the cult of the child: it is the “child, the female, the American who corrupts the sophisticated adult, the male, the European” (Feidler 326-327). This excerpt communicates that the critics themselves were so deceived by the “serpent’s” beguilement that they take his suggestion of Lolita as seductress at face value. These early conclusions that Lolita is the seductress and corrupter seem to exhibit residues of ideas carried over from the Christian tradition. In emphasizing that she is “female” this articulation plays off of embedded ideas of the original sinner being woman. It is criticism that has succumbed to the serpent’s sibilant lullaby rather than recognizing the “cesspoolful of rotting monsters behind [Humbert’s] slow boyish smile” and narrative voice (*The Annotated Lolita* 44). It bypasses the fact that Lolita is a child and instead actually pushes accusations of sinfulness onto the female at an earlier age than ever before, insinuating that for the female entity there is no longer a safe temporality where blame and denigration cannot intrude; even the innocence of childhood is taken from her. These are the implicit dangers that await us if we take Humbert’s descriptions as truths.

From Chapter 32, we can take away the idea that Nabokov’s real focus or concern is childhood’s naiveté poisoned, betrayed by the world of adults with all of its “polluted rags and convulsions.” The evidence is all there even if we are seduced by the power of a narrative solely taken from Humbert’s perspective; besides this evidence, other safeguards like the novel’s afterword (“On a Book Entitled *Lolita*”) and his public assertions (found in *Strong Opinions*) encourage us to reread should such seduction occur, reread to see Humbert for what he is despite stylistic virtuosity and to locate the innocence of Nabokov’s Eve. In so doing, we can redress previous conclusions, coming to realize that she is not a seedy temptress, but a girl barely older than the rib she originates from.

Over the course of davenport scene of entanglement, it becomes clear that in Nabokov’s rendering the serpent (devil) and Adam figures are somehow collapsed in Humbert’s character. Humbert concurrently invokes both positions perhaps because Nabokov wants to diverge from the creation story, to be “sure not to duplicate” the work of his cohorts (the Almighty) (*Strong Opinions* 32). I will suggest that from Humbert’s given perspective, he sees himself as both an Adam figure, helplessly seduced by his desire for ripe, nymphet fruit, as well as that serpent

figure, conferring forbidden fruit to Eve and attempting to defy his creator in his interactions with her. Despite Humbert's perceived oscillation between these polarized Biblical dignitaries, Nabokov seems to only identify Humbert with the serpent. This is evidenced by the dearth of compassion he has for Humbert, by that tortuous cycle of elation and demoralization that he inflicts on the *Lolita* narrator. Throughout the course of the novel he invalidates the attitude of usurpation that Humbert displays in the davenport scene (an attitude that channels the mutinous spirit of that rebel angel), as well as that attitude of Adam-like helplessness, appealed to whenever convenient for the narrative moment.

Humbert's alignment with the Edenic serpent is obvious in the self-same manner that Lolita's association with Eve is obvious—namely through their Genesis evoking interaction of taunt and consumption of forbidden (admittedly, more like withheld) fruit. Of course for all this difference (difference which will be discussed shortly) in judgments placed upon the human creatures, there remains parallels in the divine condemnations of the serpents in the midst.

The serpent in the Garden of Eden is traditionally associated with the devil. Evidence of this tradition found in the seeming dialectic between Genesis and the Book of Revelation. In Genesis, God curses the serpent for tricking Adam and Eve into eating fruit from the tree of knowledge: "Because thou hast done this thou *art* cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life" (Genesis 3:14). Though this passage does not diametrically denote that the serpent is equated with Satan, a certain passage from Revelation does work to suture this association together: "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him (Revelation 12: 9). Now, consider these excerpts in relation to Nabokov's extra-textual assertions concerning certain individuals in his texts: "Some of my characters are, no doubt, pretty beastly, but I really don't care, they are outside my inner self like the mournful monsters of cathedral façade—demons placed there merely to show that they have been booted out" (*Strong Opinions* 19). Nabokov's affirmation that these "beastly," demonic characters are booted out of his "inner self" wholly resonates with the Genesis and Revelation communications of banishment, where God casts Satan ("that old serpent") and his cohorts out of His ethereal realm. Of course, one of the more if not the most beastly of characters in the Nabokovian canon is Humbert Humbert. He is the most beastly due to reminiscence with Satan in his qualities of cunning and deception, but what makes the resonance all the more complete, is his attempts to undermine his Creator's dominion.

Establishing the connection between the Genesis and Revelation passages, and how they together link the serpent and the devil figures, the Revelation passage is redolent of still another figure introduced in Isaiah: "How you have fallen from heaven, O Lucifer son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations "You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of my God...'(Isaiah 14: 12-13). Though this Biblical excerpt is not directly referring to Satan, but to Lucifer, the King of Babylon (tradition does often use the names Lucifer, Satan and Devil interchangeably, however), the figures are synonymous in that they merit God's damnation because of their attempts to usurp God's authority. These excerpts complement one another in driving home the notion that the attempt to undermine the "Almighty's" dominion is the act of utmost blasphemy. Such assertions hold true not just in the Judeo-Christian sphere, but in Nabokovian ones as well.

Humbert's attempt at true rebellion against his Creator occurs in the midst of the davenport scene when he expresses that he has solipsized Lolita: "With the deep hot sweetness thus established and well on its way to the ultimate convulsion, I felt I could slow down in order

to prolong the glow. Lolita had been safely solipsized” (*The Annotated Lolita* 60). This expression of solipsism is akin to saying in his heart “I will ascend to heaven, I will raise my throne above God,” because solipsism, by its very philosophical properties entails that everything, all existence, all thought emanates from Humbert and Humbert alone. Remember “that the solipsist’s main thesis is that everything which can ordinarily be said could, in theory, be said in a language which referred only to one’s own sensations” (*Analytical Solipsism* 25). If he is the “only” entity with sensations, with these sensations proffered as the sole reference point of reality, he is definitely aiming to elevate his throne above his Creator. Though moments before he is “mortally afraid that some act of God might interrupt him” he now seems to have catapulted himself into the opposite extreme where he can subvert God and create beings, “more real” than those that his “God” (or author) has created. Such blasphemy warrants the slow, internal unraveling that Humbert experiences as the workings of “McFate” (Nabokov) consistently surface and threaten his sacrilegious self delusion.

What we have yet to discuss in this reconfigured lapsarian scene is the Nabokov’s condemnation of his Adam, a condemnation made especially interesting when remembering that the Adam and serpent/Satan figures are technically collapsed in Humbert. We will soon discuss how Humbert attempts to position himself in the Adam archetype, while only bearing the imprint of the serpent in Nabokov’s eyes. First, however, I would like to comb through the davenport scene, to further explore the incident of fall; an exercise meant to further demonstrate Nabokov’s artfully concealed sympathy for his Eve as well as his somewhat less concealed disapproval of that cursed serpent.

The hollowness of Humbert’s bid for totality over Lolita can be found in the particulars of the very event he cites as evidence for solipsism. He writes that he reaches climax and “immediately afterward (as if we had been struggling and now my grip had eased)” Lolita jumps up to answer the phone and “there she stood and blinked, cheeks aflame, hair awry, her eyes passing over me as lightly as they did over the furniture” (*The Annotated Lolita* 61). Notice his narrative strategy: he parenthetically states that Lolita’s immediacy in jumping away from him made it seem “as if” they had been struggling and that only then did he relax his grasp on her enough for her to move away from him. The key words in this evocation are “as if,” because, as Humbert so delicately puts it, it is only in the realm of “as if” that this struggle occurs—not in the realm of their shared actuality. However, I will suggest that this supposedly hypothetical struggle and release does indeed occur, but that Humbert, at the time of this incident, is clouded by a solipsistic self delusion that enables him to pursue his lust without the restrictions of moralistic misgivings.

He invites the reader as well as himself to believe that “she had noticed nothing,” but his insensibility toward the ringing telephone, something he only notices once safely in the afterglow of his ecstasy (it “may have been ringing for ages as far as I was concerned”), as well as his inability to recognize Lolita’s manifest physical agitation suggests that the reader should make the contrary evaluation (*The Annotated Lolita* 61). Let us first address his inability to discern when exactly the telephone begins to ring. Though he describes the ringing as “formidably loud,” he is only able to recognize that it had been ringing after he has achieved his rapture, signifying that he is so detached from the actual goings on of the scene that he cannot even understand that a thunderous noise is sounding let alone when it had begun to do so. These elements of obliviousness demonstrate enough insensibility on his part to implicate his whole behavioral account with distortion. Put in more extrapolated terms, if he is not even capable of distinguishing the more conspicuous aspects of his objective surroundings, then it follows that

his awareness of his own conduct is less than objective, so muddled, perhaps, that he actually does engage in the struggle that he only purports as happening in the sphere of “as if.”

He reports that Lolita’s cheeks are “aflame,” her hair is tousled and that she avoids eye contact. Because these physical cues indicate embarrassment and/ or signs of person who has just engaged in some kind of physical struggle, they render Humbert’s conclusion (that she has “noticed nothing,”) a non sequitur deduction. Indeed, she has noticed that there is something amiss between her mother’s lodger and herself, otherwise she would not exhibit such attributes of agitation. Humbert maintains that Lolita is couched in ignorance throughout the entirety of his onanistic procedure, fully engrossed in her apple munching. However, we must keep in mind that Lolita is aligned with Eve and that consumption of the apple is associated with the acquisition of knowledge. In Lolita’s case, the knowledge she acquires comes in the form of a sense, a sense that Humbert has ulterior motives in his interactions with her. Though her moments of subjective experience are almost stifled by Humbert’s narration, the trace exhibitions of her disturbance give readers a chance to view Lolita as a more profound character than what is suggested by the merely one-dimensional titles that Humbert allots her throughout his confessional—titles along the lines of Lolita the solipsized, Lolita the nymphet, Lolita the brat. In this moment we are shown a Lolita troubled and vulnerable, too young to understand and reconcile the inappropriate advances of grown man, but sensitive enough to know that they are somehow unacceptable.

Before launching into the substance of the davenport scene Humbert states, “I want my learned readers to participate in the scene I am about to replay; I want them to examine its every detail and see for themselves how careful, how chaste, the whole wine-sweet event if viewed with... ‘impartial sympathy’ (*The Annotated Lolita* 56). This explicit statement that his first sexually driven encounter with Lolita is “careful,” “chaste,” “wine-sweet” if examined in its every detail is a convincing bluff. The way he lays out the scene makes it seem that all occurs as he says it does, that Lolita does not comprehend his behavior as anything improper. However, when we call Humbert’s bluff and scrutinize the event in its details we discover just how improvident, corrupt, and vinegar-sour it actually is. In effect, Humbert is hiding the evidence of non-solipsism in plain site—a tactic that seems very much in line with his creator (we will see how this notion of hiding in plain sight becomes dangerous ground, however, later on in the paper). Because he is writing in his jail cell, providing an account of events in retrospect, he is already well aware that his solipsistic hubris was folly. Be that as it may, he still intends to manipulate readers so that they become complicit in denying Lolita her subjective experience during the davenport scene and beyond. He does not want to give away the fact that Lolita has not been “safely” solipsized, yet he also wants all evidence to the contrary to be available in case some reader actually does comb through this episode, “examine its every detail” and find clues to the truth of the matter. Just as the serpent “deceiveth the whole world,” Humbert deceiveth the reader with his charming and deceptive, “fancy prose style,” which works to obscure Lolita’s reality (*The Annotated Lolita* 9). In so doing, perhaps he is attempting to make it so that readers can fully resonate with the rude awakening that Humbert’s arrogance and sense of omnipotence incurs at the hands of “McFate.”

Before turning to a discussion about Humbert as a self-designated Adam figure, I just want to make one additional point, namely that there is a certain irony affixed to Humbert’s belief that he fully solipsizes Lolita. Though Humbert is narrator and purported writer of this “confession,” his diction actually seems to point outside of himself, outward to his maker. This means to say that perhaps that which he refers to as the “overlapping,” “encasing” Lolita, is

unbeknownst to Humbert, not reflexive of his ability to subvert the realities of his world, but rather a reinforcement of his own encasement, an encasement within Nabokov's "more real," "overlapping" *Lolita*. In this way, Humbert's moment of self-purported, transcendent triumph becomes an instance in which the delicate baseline of involution surfaces in refracted form.

This kind of "meta" moment in which Nabokov's subject boasts about his ostensible independence only to have it actually point out the seams of his fabrication, subtly reasserts Nabokov's authorial, cosmic totality and reaffirms Humbert's "createdness." Humbert's moment of hubris in thinking that he could solipsize Lolita is punished by his own increasing awareness of a more powerful force beyond him, working against him; this force, "McFate" as he dubs it, appears entirely responsible for the at times poetically tragic and the at times wonderfully humorous patterns and coincidences that leave Humbert fraught and anxious (especially during the second part of novel when Quilty enters into the plot behind the scenes). Of course, from the reader's perspective McFate is easily identified as Nabokov; Humbert, like a great many other Nabokovian characters that precede and succeed him struggle "toward a self-awareness that only their creator has achieved by creating them—an involuted process which connects Nabokov's art with his life and clearly indicates that the author is not in this prison. He is its creator, and is above it" (Appel Jr. xxxii). Humbert's struggle in futility for control and self-awareness that just eludes him is the status quo that Nabokov means to maintain.

After having thoroughly discussed how Nabokov reorients his narrative to counter the Judeo-Christian lapsarian scene in terms of Eve and the serpent we must now, at long last, explore his treatment of the Adam figure. As has been previously indicated, Humbert fulfills both the serpent and Adam roles, but more precisely, I want to suggest that the dual embodiment of these otherwise polarized figures is evidence of Nabokov's resistance to Christian tradition's inequitable treatment of Eve as compared to Adam. In Nabokov's story, Adam has no real scapegoat in Eve; Humbert, in his Adam configuration, is just as culpable as the serpent because, simply put, he is one in the same with the serpent. This assertion brings into question whether or not an Adam figure is even present in this narrative, since it seems a paradox to exist as both the deceiver and the deceived.

In response to this query, will suggest that it is Nabokov does not conceive of Humbert in terms of the Adam archetype, a notion evidenced in his utter lack of sympathy for the character even before he encounters Lolita. If it is the case that Nabokov does not see Humbert as an Adam figure, then the paradox does not exist on the "divine" level. Still, though this paradox may not exist in Nabokov's realm, it seems that Humbert does indeed conceive of himself in such terms, setting up a complex formulation where he will appeal to helplessness in one moment only to reject it for extreme autonomy in the next. A telling comparison between three balcony scenes helps to communicate this complex formulation, where Humbert vacillates between conviction in his independence and belief in his helplessness, with Nabokov's oblique, divine presence serving to destabilize both realms of vacillation.

The first of these balcony scenes occurs very early on in the novel, before Humbert ever encounters Lolita, but long since his taste for nymphets first develops:

"I could list a great number of these one-sided diminutive romances. Some of them ended in a rich flavor of hell. It happened for instance that from my balcony I would notice a lighted window across the street and what looked like a nymphet in the act of undressing before a co-operative mirror. Thus isolated, thus removed, the vision acquired an especially keen charm that made me race with all speed toward my lone gratification. But abruptly, fiendishly, the tender pattern of

nudity I had adored would be transformed into the disgusting lamp-lit bare arm of a man in his underclothes reading his paper by the open window in the hot, damp hopeless summer night” (*The Annotated Lolita* 20).

Though this first balcony scene is not quite as enlightening without the other balcony scenes to complement it, it does serve to contextualize them. The terms of alienation that saturate this excerpt (“one-sided,” “isolated,” “removed,” “lone,” “hopeless”) are oblique enough to be simultaneously reminiscent of the plights of both a lonely Adam before Eve as well as a cursed, banished serpent and from these descriptions,

The second balcony scene occurs in the afterglow of Lolita’s supposed solipsism and so is appropriately colored by Humbert’s hubris:

“So Humbert the Cubus schemed and dreamed—and the sun of desire and decision (the two things that create a live world) rose higher and higher, while upon a succession of balconies a succession of libertines, sparkling glass in hand toasted the bliss of past and future nights... In a word, before such an Amazing Offer, before such a vastness and variety of vistas, I was as helpless as Adam at the view of early oriental history, mirage in his apple orchard” (71).

At the beginning of this excerpt Humbert adds the epithet “Cubus” to his name which seems to be a play on the word incubus. The incubus is a kind of demon that has sexual intercourse with people while they are sleeping (Encyclopedia Britannica). This renders his epithet highly appropriate given that Humbert has just been musing on the idea of having sex with an anaesthetized, drugged addled Lolita in the paragraph preceding this one. His self-designated epithet proves that he does not retreat from association with fallen angels in himself, or sexual demons, but even though he will not retreat from such terms it does not mean that he will cease to obscure it for the sake of his manipulative story. Evidence for this obscurity can be seen just in the fact that he alters the word “incubus” so that is one step removed from the, but also by covering it over with a somewhat contradictory figure, like Adam.

Self-association with the likes of incubi and fallen angels, entities that consistently make bids for power, is complicated by the fact that in the same paragraph he states that he “was as helpless as Adam” at the dawn of human history. This is the central moment in which Humbert makes his most apparent association with both of these primordial, Edenic figures most apparent and most evidently paradoxical. This balcony scene excerpt juxtaposed against the first is interesting in that now the balcony is no longer a place where he feels alienated and put upon, but rather the place where “libertines” make toasts to a multitude of nights. This euphoria is, of course, subsequently destroyed, and whether we take Humbert for Adam or “Cubus” at this time, both positions are undermined up until the third balcony scene, within which demoralization is perfectly crystallized.

This third and final balcony scene occurs after Lolita has been missing for some time:

“...I would crowd all the demons of my desire against the railing of a throbbing balcony: it would be ready to take off in the apricot and black humid evening; did take off—whereupon the lighted image would move and Eve would revert to a rib, and there would be nothing in the window but an obese partly clad man reading the paper” (264).

Though early in the novel, Humbert asserts that “you have to be an artist and a madman” to be able to identify a nymphet, he, a self-professed authority on this special sect of girl children, twice mistakes a half-naked man reading the paper for one of his nymphets (17). These repeated mistakes undermine his expertise on nymphets, but much more significantly, they undermine his

position as an artist. Because these errors in judgment transpire in almost identical circumstances, they can be seen as Nabokov's way of asserting himself into the narrative, since there is only one force (the Creator) that can cause Eve to "revert to a rib" as it were. So, even though this narrative, a beautiful triumph of words, is related from Humbert's perspective and attributed to his character, Nabokov is the only true artist in this world.

The fact that the artist, the Creator, manifests in the narrative as a "disgusting," "obese," "partly clad" man reading his paper, is only further testament to Nabokov's title as artist. It is elegant, exquisite irony that Humbert repeatedly begins to masturbate to an image that, in actuality, is the antithesis of his desire; poetic justice delivered from divine origins. Even though he cannot fathom these repeated circumstances as Nabokov occasioning to pattern himself into this world, Humbert still seems to recognize these moments as strokes of much too suspicious coincidence. When he writes about the object of his of desire reverting back into a rib, he seems to be suggesting that he recognizes that some inscrutable, divine interference is at work and at the same time that he acknowledges that he cannot escape this system that he has been wrought within; McFate will always be present to frustrate his life. As a result of finally internalizing the futility of grasping for independence, he is made to grapple with his essential powerlessness, a process which induces him to take-out his frustration on someone tangible, at least relative to himself.

Given the disturbance likely inherent in being made to realize that you are a pawn caught up in an expansive, unfathomable cosmic pattern, it can be construed that Humbert's lethal confrontation with Quilty is actually an incident of displaced existential frustration. Humbert is attempting to reconcile his impotence in the face of an omnipotent presence by conflating overwhelming, intangible "McFate" with elusive yet ultimately substantial Quilty. After Quilty manages to filch Lolita from Humbert's custody, one of Humbert's coping mechanisms consists in writing a poem about her absence. This poem includes some lines of proof substantiating Humbert's conflation of Quilty with McFate: "Happy, happy is gnarled McFate/Touring the States with a child wife." Though "McFate" (Nabokov) is the deterministic force that enables the child to escape from Humbert, it is not "McFate" that is "touring the States with a child wife," but Quilty. Perhaps, making this distinction explicit seems irrelevant, but keep in mind that though compounding these two figures in this instance is understandable given that he does not yet know the identity of the man who took Lolita, later it becomes apparent that he still has not parsed out the difference between them. He proceeds to revenge himself on that devilish, obscure playwright, faulting him for all his misfortunes and doing so despite an awareness that it is really a larger force, surrounding and working against him, that is the ultimate source of his tribulations.

Because Lolita has disappeared, with only the most recondite, remote traces of her left behind to tease and torture him, Humbert feels the most helpless he has ever felt. Due to this sense of powerlessness and the fact that there is no way that he can go up against the true source of his torturous, cosmic envelopment (solipsism is no longer an option, with its fallibility proven by Lolita's escape, her independence of him), he seeks revenge on a fellow pawn of this story (Quilty) in an effort to regain a sense of supremacy. In relation to this assertion, consider two lines drawn from another of Humbert's poems, the one that he makes Quilty read aloud just before he murders him: "Because you took advantage of my disadvantage... When I stood Adam naked" (*The Annotated Lolita* 299). From these accusatory lines it seems that he is attempting to shed his status as the serpent and implicitly foist it onto Quilty by analogizing himself with Adam once again. Though his previous self-designated associations with Adam-like



helplessness were meant to excuse/mitigate his lusts, in this moment it does seem to bespeak actual sentiments of hopelessness and vulnerability. Still, despite the fact that he resonates with the Adam figure more than he ever has (at least in terms of his helplessness) his altercation with Quilty occurs in the name of revenge and regaining a sense of agency; such motivations do not uphold the analogy of naïve, powerless disadvantage.

Returning to the scene of Quilty's homicide, Humbert at first seems to perceive his murderous act as an act of closure: "This I said to myself is the end of the ingenious play staged for me by Quilty" (*The Annotated Lolita* 305). From this quote it appears that Humbert is still displacing his frustrations of being enmeshed in a prison of predestination onto Quilty; he attributes the course of his life to the predetermined trajectory of the "ingenious play" that Quilty has "staged" for him. Though he persists in conflating Quilty with the orchestrator of his fate and hopes that killing Quilty will somehow reestablish a sense of control, he ultimately experiences no real relief or satisfaction, forcing him to revoke both conflation and closure: "I wondered idly if some surgeon of genius might not alter his own career, and perhaps the whole destiny of mankind, by reviving quilted Quilty, Clare Obscure. Not that I cared; on the whole I wished to forget the whole mess" (306). He subsequently relates that he feels little to no relief in the wake of Quilty's death. The anticlimactic nature of his final assessment of the crime indicates that Humbert's act of revenge, was all for naught and was only carried out under the governance of desperation as he convinced himself of a falsity—that McFate and Quilty are one in the same. Though he states that he just wants "to forget the whole mess" he still goes on to create this confession, a very detailed account that culminates in the relation of this crime. This just goes to show that his desires are not considered paramount. Even though he wants to just "forget" everything, he is still writes this narrative, which intimates that he is fulfilling the will of someone or something else outside of himself (Nabokov).

Nabokov avows that "literary characters...are invented by an author whose will they serve. The conditions of 'life' in fiction are neither 'natural' nor 'autonomous.' All literary versions of human beings serve the author that creates or recreates them" ("On Human Freedom and Inhuman Art" 54-55). This being said, it is worthwhile to ask whether or not Humbert can be absolved since Nabokov, as I have hopefully demonstrated, definitely invokes divine determinism in regards to the characters of his fictions. Is Humbert excused for his nympholepsy since his creator conceived him with such an unnatural ailment? Since free will is negated, can Humbert really be held accountable for his misdeeds? Before answering these thorny questions first consider the idea of Nabokov as the "sensualist so in love with a world that includes his wonderful self" that he "desperately embraces divine determinism as a last resort, as an irrational way of celebrating and preserving material idiosyncrasy. That is, Nabokov's love of this world determines his divine determinism, not vice versa" (Andrews 6). Because Nabokov loves our world, yet disdains and fears its essential evanescence, he is compelled to create other worlds where his "wonderful self" cannot dissolve. However "irrational" it may seem that Nabokov invokes "divine determinism" in his works to preserve "material idiosyncrasy" (or more to the point, his own idiosyncrasy) it is actually a very understandable affair. Who does not identify with his attachment to this earthly world, at least in some degree? So, because we identify with his project of attaining immortality through art, and because cannot Nabokov pardon Humbert, it is the case we cannot either.

In the concluding part of this chapter, I want to assert that the last couple of sentences in *Lolita* serve as the ultimate point of involution in the novel, dovetailing the discussions of

Nabokov's drive to retain artistic omnipotence within his texts in order to secure a slice of the temporal eternal. In these final lines it appears that Humbert is addressing Lolita directly saying,

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

Logic informs us that these last few lines are in Humbert's voice given that it is the conclusion of his long confession. Though I agree that this is true on a concrete, ostensible level, I will argue that it is simultaneously Nabokov's own voice emanating from the text. In an interview with Alfred Appel Jr., Appel asks Nabokov whether or not readers are supposed to understand the shift in narrative voice (from third person to first person) as an introduction of another voice altogether (*Strong Opinions* 73). Though Nabokov intimates that he did not mean to bring in another voice, he does remark that he is “glad [he] managed to achieve this remoteness of tone at the end” (73). Even if he explicitly states that all intent was absent, this intimation should automatically ring suspicious; any time that Nabokov expresses lack of intent in regards to his work, but contentment in its effect, it likely means that intention actually does exist therein given the extreme purposefulness that he inscribed on his artist persona. If we decline to take Nabokov's statement at face value and instead scrutinize it in the opposite terms that he offers, we can see this as reversed admittance of his inclusion of another voice in these last sentences.

Though this narrative maneuver, this shift in voice, can be easily written off when considering that Humbert indulges in this technique often throughout the text without it being indicative of outside voices, the matter of its materialization in the concluding moments of the text (an ever important moment in any novel) and the actual content of these lines, serve to halt such dismissals. The ambiguous voice intimates that he or she wants to make Lolita “live in the minds of later generations” and that through the “refuge of art” they will “share” “immortality.” Because the substance these lines wholly resonate with Nabokov's artistic project, it seems clear that this is his voice resounding out of this textual world. It is Nabokov, addressing both his Lolita, and his *Lolita*—addressing them in tinges of pathos, to confirm the sad fact that the “only” immortality available to them is the one that art offers. In *Strong Opinions*, when Nabokov says that *Lolita* was “the composition of a beautiful puzzle—its composition and its solution” he seems to be alluding to the discovery of what it takes to achieve literary if not literal, immortality (20). He created a novel concerned with the limitations of time and crafted it in such way that the incredible *Lolita* materialized—in *Lolita* he has his salve for the rupture of chronophobia. However, *Lolita* and its promise of immortality for Nabokov was and is menaced by various threats, threats that would work to undermine Nabokov's artistic omnipotence and potentially overrun or annihilate his art by mis-association, misinterpretation and the like.

Chapter 2: The Freudian Threat: Why Feud? What are you so Afreud of?

“Only in one field has the omnipotence of thought been retained in our own civilization, namely in art. In art alone it still happens that man, consumed by his wishes, and his playing, thanks to artistic illusion, calls forth effects as if it were something real. We

rightly speak of the magic of art and compare the artist with a magician. But this comparison is perhaps more important than it claims to be. Art, which certainly did not begin as art for art's sake, originally served tendencies which today have for the greater part ceased to exist. Among these we may suspect various magic intentions"—Sigmund Freud, "Animism, Magic and Omnipotence of Thought"

Sigmund Freud's conception of art as the last retainer of the "omnipotence of thought" in Western society strikes an immediate, evocative chord with the exploratory crux of this paper-- Nabokov's project of sustaining artistic omnipotence. Putting this redolence aside for the moment, observe that earlier on in "Animism, Magic and Omnipotence of Thought," Freud states that "mankind [did not come] to create its first world systems through a purely speculative thirst for knowledge, that "the practical need of mastering the world must have contributed to this effort...namely the elaboration of directions for making one's self master of men, animals and things as well as their spirits" (867). What Freud seems to suggest here and throughout the essay, is that the humankind's first understandings of the world, could only be achieved by first believing that us humans could potentially play an active role in influencing world systems; this active role of influence amounting to magical (comparable to godly) capabilities. This potential to exact magic fostered a sense of omnipotence in the face of world that would otherwise prove to too overwhelming and internally destabilizing for the individual. Freud argues that belief in magic, in divinity within the self, has largely died off in the working world of Western society, but that it has been re-appropriated, concentrated and rechanneled in such a way that it now exclusively inundates the sphere of art. Through art, the artist can tap into that state of existence where omnipotence is the prospective standard; creating whole worlds that bend to the artist's good authority, again assuming the role of master of men, animals, and spirits. In so doing, the artist engenders a space within which he no longer need acknowledge certain realities (individual smallness relative to the cosmos, the inevitability of death); for the artist, there exists only ubiquity, eternity, freedom from death.

It doesn't take much concentrated consideration to discern why art would thus appeal to someone with Nabokov's particular ailment of chronophobia. It enables him to rebel against that "prison of time spherical and without exits," permitting him to do so through the creation of an alternate, omnipotent self that can never be taken into time's custody (*Speak, Memory* 20). Yet, however significant and relatable Freud's idea may seem in regards to Nabokov's authorial project, if Nabokov were to catch wind of such associations he'd likely have spared no venom to paralyze these profane ideas at their source. In his opinion, the only permissible link between himself and "the Viennese quack" Freud is one grounded in polemic opposition (*Strong Opinions* 47). Note one of his typically caustic remarks drawn from his autobiography: "I reject completely the vulgar, shabby, fundamentally medieval world of Freud, with its crankish quest for sexual symbols (something like searching for Baconian acrostics in Shakespeare's works) and its bitter little embryos spying, from their natural nooks, upon the love life of their parents" (*Speak, Memory* 20). Of course Nabokov need not agree with psychoanalytic theory, but this ferocious, lifelong hate seems to go beyond mere distaste. Why such vehement hostility? There have been many proposed explanations for this intense antipathy, but the most convincing suggests that, perhaps, Nabokov viewed Freud as his formidable antecedent dominating spheres of thought that he desired to dominate himself. With this in mind, we are brought back to that earlier excerpt in which Nabokov declares that a "creative writer must study carefully the works of his rivals." Since we have already discussed how he serves as the almighty of his own worlds,

in opposition to the “Almighty” of our given world, we can now turn our attention to this other rival, this Freud, and all that Nabokov has invested in the thickly palpable enmity he brandishes at the famous psychoanalyst.

Though psychoanalytic theory might never have ascended to the heights that it did had it not emerged at the finish of the Victorian era, an era often cited for its repressive stance toward sex, it nevertheless did achieve a tremendous dominance that left imprints of its influence on many aspects of twentieth-century Western culture (Blackwell 102). Freud did not consider himself a fiction writer (though he himself “admitted that his case histories read ‘like short stories’”), but he was a writer nonetheless, a writer with indelible influence who delved into many of fiction’s familiar territories including memory, dreams and the like (Shute 79). Because Nabokov endeavored to carve up these same territories in the name of his own artistic vision, it is no wonder that he perceived Freud as an artistic adversary, and, by extrapolation, an adversary to the totality of his artistic omnipotence. Before beginning more specific discussions on how Nabokov perceived him to be a menace to artistic omnipotence and the specific strategies he used to counter this menace (spotlight on these strategies as manifested in *Lolita*), I would like to touch on a couple other critical explanations that are important to both note (and to deflate or encourage, depending) when trying to understand this famous literary feud.

Citing that the gentleman doth protest too much, Nabokov’s aversion to Freud is sometimes interpreted as anxiety over the prospect of his own dark secrets being uncovered should psychoanalytic theory be applied to his life and works. In “Hiding in Plain Sight,” Brandon S. Centerwall makes the claim that Nabokov is himself a “closet pedophile” (473). This article attempts to prove that *Lolita* is actually a confession of Nabokov’s pedophilic inclinations and that such an artful confession is an attempt to achieve relief from the turmoil he experienced from the deviant sexuality he shared with his “avatar,” Humbert. Centerwall cites several reasons for this being the case, but puts particular focus on the following lines of evidence: Nabokov and Humbert Humbert share striking similarities (both “are European émigrés who teach comparative literature at American colleges), similarities that wouldn’t necessarily stop just before sexual preferences come under scrutiny; Nabokov may have been molested by his uncle which may have, in turn, resulted in Nabokov’s development of sexual deviancy to be sublimated into his writing (evidence for this sexual abuse is faulty, drawn from the much disparaged Field biography); and Nabokov wrote several pieces prior to *Lolita* that incorporate the plot of his magnum opus in some rough form or another, reflecting that pedophilia is omnipresent in his mind (Centerwall cites the seed story for *Lolita*, *The Enchanter*, as well as *The Gift*.) (477, 479, 476-477).

Centerwall’s argument that the writing and publishing of *Lolita* was a way for Nabokov to put his alleged burden out into the world and in so experience some relief (hiding in plain sight, as the title of his article suggests) takes many leaps that are well formulated in a rhetorical sense, but are thin in evidence. Though the maneuver of “hiding in plain sight” is actually a very interesting maneuver and a choice tactic in his narratives themselves (remember how all evidence to the contrary is present when Humbert claims to have solipsized Lo), there is no convincing evidence that this technique is being utilized for the purpose that Centerwall proposes. He seems to bypass Nabokov’s abilities as a fiction writer, in favor of the inflammatory, advocating that only a person with pedophilic tendencies could write about pedophilia so intricately and eloquently. Besides being ludicrous at times, (What real evidence is there that Nabokov’s uncle had “the hots for him?” That Uncle Ruka actually molested the future author?) his overall analysis is simply guilty of being much too myopic; it underestimates

Nabokov's level of intentionality, exceptional talent and artfulness (Centerwall 479). Centerwall's assessment leaves no room to consider that perhaps Nabokov's construction of the "nymphet" is not really some sly way of voicing his preoccupation with little girls (making it so obvious it would get dismissed), but rather an intentional admission of his preoccupation with time.

Harkening back to previous discussions of Humbert's alternate forms as serpent/ Satan, it is clear that Nabokov means to present his abject character not just in the light of sinner against Creator, but that of cruel betrayer of childhood. He of course achieves this betrayal by ushering Lolita much too quickly into the sexual spheres of womanhood that she is not ready to enter. This idea still holds despite the fact that Lolita is not a virgin when she and Humbert first have sex; one incident of consensual juvenile groping in the woods with someone equivalent in age hardly justifies that she is equipped for years of forced sexual cohabitation (reinforced by psychological exploitation) by someone decades older than herself. This being said, consider Jenefer Shute's apt statement regarding some of what's invested in concept of the "nymphet:" "The nymphet is defined in terms of time, and nymphet love is a desperate attempt to deny the metabolic, to reverse time or to find an island of timelessness in its death bound flow" (Shute 81-82). What this suggests is that Humbert does indeed share a selfsame quality with his creator (a shared quality that can only be recognized separately in their separate worlds; Nabokov is a chronophobiatic in terms of our own world, yes, but not within Humbert's world because in that world he is Humbert's God and is eternal, outside of time), but this quality is not pedophilia as Centerwall would have it, but rather that of chronophobia. A core difference between them (among many), however, is that Humbert is prepared to genuinely harm others—that is, kidnap, rape, murder them--in order to luxuriate on "an island of timelessness." Though Nabokov too craves this security of timelessness, Nabokov cannot, does not accept such appalling behavior (in one instance in *Strong, Opinions* he refers to Humbert as "a vain cruel wretch," and supplies similar bouts of derision throughout that text), especially toward children who are still gloriously unaware that "time, so boundless at first blush is actually a prison" (*Speak, Memory* 21). Nabokov instead means to secure timelessness through his art

Humbert's subterranean drive to attain immortality bypasses art and becomes expressed in terms of his sexual proclivities. For him the adult woman is a thing already "infected with the stigmata of sex and death; her body can thus offer no respite, no reprieve, only a lethal induction into decay" (Shute 82). However, if all adult women provoke disgust due to their pollution by time, why then doesn't Humbert's desire extend to all children since it is youth, with its pristine timelessness expressed in accessible flesh, that he really lusts after? The answer for why this isn't the case can be attributed to a sort of inborn defense-mechanism that helps make Humbert's desires somewhat more tolerable to himself; in maintaining that only very particular, utterly specific kind of girl children tempt him, he means to convince the reader (and himself) that these "nymphets" are not actually children. If they are effectively rendered "non-children," then it means that he need not show them the respect that children do require. Through this dehumanization he distracts from the fullness of his culpability, but make no mistake, his concept of the nymphet is just a flashy label attached to a false philosophy. The flashiness of the word is meant to distance the reader from all of what it really entails: a consuming attraction to children (because of youth's allure of immortality), painted over with his preferred aesthetic qualities (a secondary concern). Though it can be said that in writing his confession, in creating art (a Nabokov approved strategy for attaining immortality), he is attempting to rectify his

wrongs, restore Lolita the eternity that he robbed from her, he still, nevertheless befouled her childhood and because of this most sinister sin, he is irrevocably damned by his creator.

Humbert's damnation is confirmed through Nabokov's own perspectives on childhood. Early on in his autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov mentions that looking back on one's childhood is "the next best [thing] to probing one's eternity" (21). Given Nabokov's obsession with time, and his drive for securing an eternity other than that of erasure and black void, the fact that childhood is associated with a bright point of escape and immortality makes it something fundamentally sacred to him. This means that the devastation that Humbert wreaks on Lolita's childhood is really tantamount to the most blasphemous action that a character can exact in a world according to Nabokov.

Now, leaving off of the real link between Humbert and his creator, the link that Centerwall mistakes as a shared fondness for little girls, I want to address another more interesting and truthful explanation for Nabokov's obsessive hate for Freud. This explanation articulates that Nabokov detested Freud because he represented "what he most vehemently disliked: the generalizing of the rich particularities of which life is made up" (de la Durantaye 61). Nabokov believed that attention to detail was what made high-art, high-art and felt that the stature of "true" art is short-changed when the lens of psychoanalysis is applied to it. However, in critiquing Freud and psychoanalysis, Nabokov fell prey to what he supposedly so adamantly revolted against, namely that he was very general in his criticisms.

In *Strong Opinions* he advances that his knowledge of Freudianism is reserved to a "bookish familiarity only" since "the ordeal is much too silly and disgusting to be contemplated even as a joke (23). This sweeping disapproval displays the selfsame pitfall of generalization that he brings against psychoanalysis. If he merely possesses a "bookish familiarity," how can he condemn it, especially when his stance as an author is so much tied up in attention to details? Moreover, it seems that Freud actually shared "much the same position as Nabokov on the general-versus-specific issue in the creative arts" as demonstrated when Freud was asked "whether any writers inspired by his work had written great works of art, [he] replied with a firm no." He goes on to say, "Books directly inspired by psychoanalytic theory may be interesting...but their external inspiration makes them too schematic. Truly creative writing, Freud insisted must originate from within the individual writer" (Alexandrov 52). Freud's position indicates he too believed that good writing should not be "schematic" or informed by generalities and that the writer's own individual visions and interiority should be privileged in the process of creative writing.

So, why does Nabokov disdain Freud and his theory so utterly, so completely when "psychoanalysis, like literature and unlike experimental psychology, focuses on individuals and their stories" (Blackwell 103)? When that denigrated theory and its maker do, in fact, have a particular sensitivity toward the specifics? The reason brings us back to the idea that the two writers are rivals who "shared and competed for the domain of human narrative" (Blackwell 103). Because neither psychoanalysis nor Freud had a sensibility for particulars to the *extent* that Nabokov did it makes for much trumpeted point of disassociation and distinctiveness. Stressing a quality like "extent" gains significance when an adversary's project is not so dissimilar from your own creative platform because such emphasis on subtle points of difference becomes necessary in order to wrest away some of the contended for territories of thought or what have you.

Nabokov's compulsion to emphasize the *extent* brings to mind Freud's concept "the narcissism of minor differences." This concept maintains that "each individual is separated from

others by a ‘taboo of personal isolation,’ and it is precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike that form the basis of feelings of strangeness and hostility between them” (Elms 168-169). What seems implicit in this statement is that establishing unmistakable delineations between one’s self and another similar person is important for securing individual identity. This means that on the one hand, drawing the lines between one’s self and a person who is completely different is unnecessary since difference is readily apparent while on the other hand, when it comes to someone comparable to one’s self, these lines are necessary as a matter of self-preservation. It is a matter of self-preservation because identity and thus internal stability are at stake when the division between self and other gets blurred. Nabokov, for his part, could not allow his division to get blurred, that is, if he desired to secure an identifiably separate, lasting legacy for himself. To ensure that he remained distinct he needed to enact certain strategies that included adopting a hostile attitude toward his rival and underscoring their disparities.

As the “narcissism of minor differences” points out, “Nabokov didn’t hate Freud because their basic concepts of human nature were so radically opposed; he hated Freud because they were so much alike” (Elms 169). However, even if it is the case that the narcissism of minor differences is at work here, that it truly is the agent responsible for this taut relationship, it does not mean these minor differences are undeserving of examination. In fact, as Nabokov would likely contend these minor differences should be the most important points of discussion. Though the reader can appreciate that his privileging analysis of difference over that of similarity is likely skewed by the fact that he need put emphasis on his particularity in order to be that author who that stressed particulars, his differences from Freud, however “minor,” do communicate original, subtle points of deviation.

I want to suggest that one of the delicate, yet definitive differences between Freud and Nabokov (one of the things that makes the latter original and thus deserving of that coveted domain unto himself), is that his project for artistic omnipotence with its goal of securing immortality conflicts with Freud’s commitment to symbols. In “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” Nabokov states, “...Everyone should know that I detest symbols and allegories (which is due partly to my old feud with Freudian voodooism and partly to my loathing of generalization devised by literary mythists and sociologists)...” (*The Annotated Lolita* 314). These explicit reasons (Freud, generalizations) are by now familiar to us as points of aversion for Nabokov so it seems appropriate that symbols would be cast by the wayside considering their association with these much despised elements, but there is yet another reason provoking antipathy. This reason emerges from the notion that “once installed in the symbolic order, we cannot contemplate or possess any object without seeing it unconsciously in the light of its possible absence, knowing that its presence is in some way arbitrary and provisional” (Eagleton 161). What this excerpt indicates is that the symbol is not only associated with the psychoanalysis and oversimplification, but also the looming black void from which Nabokov is attempting to fashion some avenue of escape. The symbol by its very function, serves to deaden the significance of objects of our world. This is something utterly distressing to someone like Nabokov whose established project is to “recombine” and “reinvent” objects of this world to populate own worlds, ones with verve eternal; he does not want objects to die in this world he wants to reinvent these objects making them more alive (*Strong Opinions* 32).

The following passage, drawn from the chapter on psychoanalysis in Terry Eagleton’s *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, further elucidates why Nabokov’s was so repulsed by this particular theory and its investment in symbolism:

“There is no death in the imaginary since the world’s continuing existence depends on my life as much as my life depends on it; it is only upon entering the symbolic order that we confront the truth that we can die, since the world’s existence does not in fact depend on us. As long as we remain in an imaginary realm of being we misrecognize our own identities, seeing them as fixed and rounded and misrecognize reality as something immutable (Eagleton 162).

What this excerpt indicates is that, not only does symbolism deaden objects of this world by tendering the possibility of their absence, but it also forces us to “confront the truth that we can die” should we enter into its order. Because Nabokov’s entire artistic project is founded in a desire to escape death, to not have the memory of his existence eroded by time, it is only to be expected that he would therefore disdain to take part in the symbolic order. He prefers the construction of his imaginary, textual worlds, where he is an “immutable” entity, “fixed,” “rounded,” and total.

Death and time’s passage (in as much as this passage effectuates one’s essential nonexistence) are antithetical to his project, things that the symbol makes permissible and, in fact, implicitly endorses. However, his distaste for symbolism should not be taken as a dismissal of all figurative language--what would Nabokov’s writing be without its sensuous metaphors, for example? In fact it can almost be said that he relinquishes a world of death, of symbols, for a world of eternal life, of imagination and metaphor. This means to say that he rather than exchanging one thing for another, he wishes to explain, communicate certain things in light of other terms, expanding meaning and injecting illumination rather than elimination. This is exhibited in power role as God in relation to his texts; his artistic omnipotence is being expressed in this ubiquitous archetype of God, but does not function as a substitute for it in the way a symbol would. It injects vibrancy and unfurls his powers of imaginations through the flexibility of the deity metaphor.

Perhaps, in view of all of this, some would consider Nabokov’s point of deviation to be a major difference rather than a minor one; that this eschewal of symbols is actually a huge disparity between them. Though this may be a tempting thought, their difference is not quite as large as one may think despite what has been elucidated above. Recall that both Nabokov and Freud are highly interested in how internal systems of human individuals work; they both desired to explore anxieties, fantasies, compulsions—wanted to lay them out in all their complexities, which as a result, renders them essentially similar. Both of them occupy the sphere of abstract, yet concrete, intensive thought concerning the predicaments of individual people/characters, but their devices for probing and exploring are what diverge from one another; Freud appealed to symbols, Nabokov immersed himself in imagination and metaphor.

Despite Nabokov’s attempts to disassociate from Freud and promote his own stance of favoring particulars and disdaining symbols, this confrontational energy toward Freud obviously fueled his creative spirit. Though Nabokov condemns Freud in most of his works leading up to and following *Lolita* (in forewords, in interviews, in the text themselves—serious saturation!), it is with *Lolita* that Nabokov’s condemnation of Freud reaches its zenith, not because it is the most vicious of his attacks on Freud, but because it is his most famous work and made his case of contra all the more publicly diffused. In his subtly caustic way, he sets up the novel as a case study that deals with taboo sexual material in an effort to stick it to the Freud; yet, for all of his antagonism it is undeniable that *Lolita* would not have been *Lolita* without Freud. I want to discuss what Freud’s inversely constructive influence does to Nabokov’s position of power, specifically as to whether or not it gets its tentacles into Nabokov’s art in ways that actually



circumvent the *Lolita* author's fearsome, almost consuming intentionality. If so, this would mean that Nabokov's polemic opposition to Freud ultimately ends-up linking the two figure-heads on a confrontational continuum that does not just work to undermine Freud, but reverses direction, potentially undermining Nabokov's artistic omnipotence and chance at immortality.

Perusing *Lolita*, the reader will likely notice just how saturated with psychoanalytic allusions it really is, even from the very outset. As previously mentioned, the book is framed as a case history, an opening which is soon followed by Humbert's narration of his purported scene of trauma. The incident of trauma occurs when he and his first love, Annabelle Lee, are just about to consummate their passion for one another on a secluded part of a beach in the French Riviera. However, they are subsequently, fatefully interrupted by two passersby, nullifying their chances of ever actually having intercourse (she dies of typhus in Corfu a few months later). Of course, as our author would have us know, this allusion to psychoanalytic theory should not be taken as evidence of anything, but ploy on Nabokov's part. In his foreword to *Despair* he states that "the attractively shaped object or Wienerschnitzel dream that the eager Freudian may think he distinguishes in the remoteness of my wastes will turn out to be on closer inspection, a derisive mirage organized by my agents" (8). Given this expressly communicated level of intentionality and strategy, reason for including this traumatic scene can be taken as a highly sophisticated tactic with which conniving Humbert means to diminish the wrongs he commits against Lolita by shifting a portion of his responsibility onto that chance unfortunate event. In so doing, he sets up a causal relationship; the supposedly traumatic experience of his childhood directly results in the pedophilic sickness of his adulthood. The relation of this event works to reduce the fullness of fault that would otherwise be laid against him, meaning that because the tragic event that befell him could not have been helped, he consequently developed unnatural sexual desires, ones that could not have been helped either. The danger in following this line of helplessness to its natural conclusion is grounded in the fact that if nothing could have been helped, what could stop Humbert from convincingly claiming that he could not help acting on his desires, that he was helpless to helplessly developed lust as a result of a helpless event. The answer: nothing really could or does stop him, and so Lolita suffers the fate that Humbert thrusts upon her through sexual abuse as well through his failure to take full responsibility for this abuse.

Incorporating such a basic tenant of Freudian theory (a scene of trauma) supports the idea that "Nabokov's strategy against what he sees as the banal plot of vulgar Freudianism is simply to absorb it into his own narrative, playing it out to the letter, and having it eventuate in dismal bathos" (Shute 76). Evidence of this play and subsequent bathos can be seen in how Humbert eventually tends to his moment of trauma through Lolita: "The able psychiatrist...is no doubt anxious to have me take my Lolita to the seaside and have me find there, at last, the 'gratification' of a lifetime urge and release from the 'subconscious' obsession of an incomplete childhood romance with the initial little Miss Lee (166-167). "Finally, on a beach in California" he does, indeed, attempt to recreate the interrupted scene, this time with Annabelle's successor: "...the fog was like a wet blanket, and the sand was gritty and clammy, and Lo was all gooseflesh and grit, and for the first time in my life I had felt as little desire for her as for a manatee" (167). Though perhaps the best remedy for curing him of his "nympholepsy," as far as what would be conjectured though likely not encouraged by psychoanalysts, the successful performance of sexual intercourse on a beach fails to provide Humbert with ultimate "release" or satisfaction, in fact, it causes the exact opposite effect (it stands alone as the one moment in which Humbert feels little to no desire for his Lolita). So, not only does Humbert appeal to psychoanalytic

theory as an excuse for his obsession with little girls, he uses it as an excuse to act out his supposed scene of trauma once more, doing so “to the letter.” However, in relating that the re-creation of the beach scene does not free him of his “subconscious obsession” or diminish his lust for nymphets, he seems to be admitting, in his own manipulative, covert manner, that his purported scene of trauma is, in fact, a farce—it is not the causal reason for his deviant desires (there is no causal reason) and so, it cannot be lent as justification for his crimes. Without the defense of a trauma, Humbert should be held wholly responsible for his grievous misconduct toward Lolita, but because he has already woven such a distracting narrative of sympathy for himself (blinding the reader with the bait of trauma), it is difficult to estrange ourselves from pitying him, even in the face of this subtle admission of farce and full fault.

At this moment of Humbert’s confession, Nabokov is commenting on what he perceives to be the core flaws of psychoanalysis, namely its generalities and schematized, causally-based system of rationale. He seems to suggest that these flaws lend themselves to excuse for dangerous creatures like Humbert, or even for the more flesh and blood criminals of our own reality because they offer a means of escaping deserved culpability (namely by citing some tragic event in their past as reason for why they are they way that they are, connoting implicit helplessness in actuating their injurious deeds). By intimating that Humbert never experiences real trauma and merely paints a portrait of mental/emotional disturbance for the purpose of diverting some blame, he consequently fences all of psychoanalytic theory within the language of scapegoat. Nabokov’s point seems highly reductive—bent on throwing the whole theory out based on the idea of potential misuse (denying the notion that psychoanalysis is a lot more involved in the particulars of situation than what he contends an does not function to remove a person’s culpability should he or she commit a crime). However, he communicates this point in such an artful way that the blunt point is rendered subtle and intricate, really showcasing Nabokov’s powers as an artist capable of making highly involved and wonderfully stylized art from what he contends are base materials.

Another key instance in which Nabokov has Humbert invoke psychoanalytic theory is just after he and Lolita have begun their sexual relationship, when he is attempting to keep her cooperative and to naturalize their relationship:

“The rapist was Charlie Holmes, I am the therapist—a matter of nice spacing in the way of distinction. I am your daddum, Lo. Look, I’ve a learned book here about young girls. Look, darling, what it says. I quote: the normal girl—normal, mark you—the normal girl is usually extremely anxious to please her father. She feels in him the forerunner of the desired elusive male (“elusive” is good, by Polonius!). The wise mother (and your mother would have been wise, had she lived) will encourage a companionship between father and daughter, realizing—excuse the corny style—that the girl forms her ideals of romance and of men from her association with her father” (*The Annotated Lolita* 150).

As Jenefer Shute puts it in *Nabokov and Freud: The Play of Power*, “what Nabokov is responding to here is that particular domestication of Freudian theory in American culture, whereby the dark and disruptive urges dreamed out of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna have been transformed into a social hygienics the intense sexual investment of the familial scene into a cute rehearsal of bourgeois marriage” (65). Shute’s analysis seems to bring us back to earlier claims, ones that suggest that the application of explanatory generalities (to individuals or their individual family systems) stands as the irksome dividing line between Freud and Nabokov. He is against Freud’s theory inasmuch as it is infused with dominant culture because it is within the

space of dominant culture that general ideas about an already all-purpose theory could become dangerously distorted. The dangers of distortion may become manifest through conduct much too redolent of pedophilia and incestuous relations (parent's actually actuating the "cute rehearsal," acting as the precursors to their children's future romantic interests), as well as through a public consciousness much too accepting of such perverted activities. Understandably, Nabokov is warning against true cultural integration and naturalization of such ideas because for him there is no such thing as a "normal girl," or normal boy, or normal individual, for that matter. So, since there is no real template of normality, the application of Freud's outline of the interior normative, with its sexual basis, could, if fitted to individuals and their individual family units, result in emotional confusion and fracturing.

Perhaps, Nabokov was, indeed, responding to the oversimplification and "domestication of the Freudian theory;" perhaps he really was just intellectually opposed to (what he perceived to be) the one-size-fits-all template of psychoanalysis and correspondingly felt obliged to beseech his readers to neither accept it as universal nor allow it to be integrated into culture, to be housebroken into twisted banality. Nevertheless, even if all of this holds true, I will suggest that there remains a still more subterranean motivation accounting for Nabokov's inclusion of that crafty speech of Humbert's (denoted above), a motivation derived from that other earlier claim, his engagement in the narcissism of minor difference.

Nabokov recognized that Freud too was preoccupied with exploring human idiosyncrasy as well as the interiorities of individuals and their family dynamic, had built a legacy on it; so, in order to subvert Freud's title to the previously outlined subject matter and the ubiquity with which Freud is associated with these subjects within Western culture, he had to confront that ubiquity head-on. He tackled Freud's sweeping influence by framing it in terms of inherent perversity, hinting that the adoption of psychoanalysis into the household may lead to asylum for criminals (they could appeal to psychoanalytic rhetoric for excuse) as well as cast an admissible, normative air around any sexual preoccupations between parents and children. Notice how he cues the reader in on the perversity that quotidian integration of this theory could bring about, explicitly pointing out how that the term "the rapist" is camouflaged when spacing is removed, creating the entirely different word "therapist." This seems to suggest that the therapist is but the rapist in hiding; the psychoanalytic therapist, like the rapist, actuates detrimental injury, but in the guise of a helper, a bringer of progress. So, when Humbert claims that he is not a rapist but a therapist we are to understand confessing to the latter, is as bad as admitting the truth of the former. This means that in Nabokov's artful rendering, the therapist, the rapist, and Humbert become aligned with one another, emerging out of Freudian theory with labels reading "danger" attached to them and in so help to carve a lasting piece out of the Freudian legacy by vilifying what it stands for and creating anxiety over the possible effects of its influence.

In addition to all of this, Humbert's above quote, plays off of my assertion of the delicate yet definitive difference between Nabokov and Freud (disdain for versus deference to symbols), while also calling to mind the key difference between Nabokov and Humbert. The excerpt runs parallel to Nabokov's repulsion for a deadened world constituted by symbols because it emerges from a likely uneasiness to see sex, and thus time and death be introduced into the sphere of children—to see a world of "eternity", become deadened and finite by a theory based in such notions (*Strong Opinions* 21). For Nabokov, childhood is the temporal realm reserved for swells of eternity and immortality for every individual, so he correspondingly revolts against the idea of children being seen in sexual terms whatever the case—whether it be through theoretical discussion or through the more direct sexual objectification that his creature, Humbert, enacts.

Because sexuality is a marker of time's passage, the idea of sexualizing children, of shoving them into time is tantamount to sacrilege for a chronophobic, so anxious to create a legacy that is able to transcend time.

It is not a stretch to say that *Lolita* could not have been *Lolita* without its thrusts at psychoanalysis and its comment on the strange imprint that Freud left on American culture (even if it is for the purpose of exchanging Freud's imprint for that of his own). But does this mean that his artistic decision to incorporate Freud end-up reversing direction, and undermine his artistic omnipotence over *Lolita* and thus his chance at immortality? I will conclude that the ultimate answer is no, but it is a humble, not resounding no. The modesty of this answer is primarily due to the fact that Nabokov was on the offensive, working against an expansive yet immobile enemy that could make no real strikes at him as he attacked it and simultaneously began to achieve prominence as a writer; though Freud had the precursor's advantage, he also had the precursor's disadvantage, where he cannot make reply to the opposition blazing out at him Nabokov lucked out in a way; he went riding towards a ubiquitous enemy, without knowing it was already moribund—a downturn that allowed him to hollow out that legacy belonging to Freudian thought. In any event, he deposits psychoanalytic red herrings, explicitly says that he has planted them, and then cajoles the reader into staying far away from any serious application of psychoanalytic theory to his texts simply because anything that seems a savory “Wienerschnitzel dream” is an intentionally implemented trick that will turn to ash in the reader's mouth. In this way he elevates himself within the sphere of human narrative and art and, in effect, psychoanalytic theory rendered the lesser body of thought, synthesized within the Nabokovian whole.

Chapter 3: The Kubrick Flick: Celluloid *Lolita*? I have no celluloid *Lolita*.

“...She snatched out of my abstract grip the magazine I had opened (pity no film had recorded the curious pattern, the monogrammic linkage of our simultaneous or overlapping moves”—Humbert Humbert, *Lolita*

“How did they ever make a movie of *Lolita*?” This question serves as the tagline affixed to Kubrick's film version of Nabokov's novel. The answer to this question seems to be grounded in “the common complaint that Kubrick had been too timid to represent the novel's notorious sexuality.” (Gabbard 2-3). So, in response to the tagline's inquiry, it seems that the only way that “they” were ever able to make a movie of *Lolita* was by shying away from an accurate portrayal of Humbert's erotic obsession, accurate portrayal of which is pertinent if the film was to faithfully reflect the crux of its source material. Bringing complaints of timidity against Kubrick seems unfair however, given that if he had decided to emphasize Humbert's sexual pathology, he would have come into conflict with “the lingering strength of the Production Codes,” a conflict that would have, in turn, run the risk of immobilizing the film's distribution (Gabbard 2). Now, if this same tagline question was directly posed to Nabokov himself, it is very likely that he would dismiss the whole query on the grounds of irrelevancy. Irrelevant, because as he ultimately puts it, Kubrick's film is “not what he wrote” and so, by implication, any attempt to discover how “they” made a movie of *Lolita* is immaterial since, in Nabokov's terms, such a movie was never made. Essentially, he iconoclastically rejects this threat to his artistic powers over his “little girl,” even though this time he is up against a much more direct and animate threat than that which Freud poses (*Strong Opinions* 105-106).

The adaptation of *Lolita* into a screenplay and its subsequent transformation into a film provides a vantage point from which we can observe Nabokov's attempts to reconcile the threat of another artist engaging with his work. To be more particular, an artist that does not merely engage with Nabokov's work, but one that engages with it in such a way that it menaces his project of artistic omnipotence. This suggests that despite his calculated efforts to sustain artistic omnipotence, there remains a chink in his armor, a chink through which another artist (one with the right tools at his or her disposal), may be able to puncture the flesh of his supposedly untouchable artist persona. Keeping this potential for vulnerability in mind, observe that in *Strong Opinions*, only one other figure is mentioned with the same frequency as Freud, this figure being the film director Stanley Kubrick. Of course, this seems entirely natural given that interviewers would likely be curious to ask Nabokov questions about Kubrick and that Nabokov, in turn, would be willing to discuss Kubrick since Kubrick was, after all, the man responsible for the first film adaptation of famed *Lolita*. However, there is still more to be said concerning these public parleys about Kubrick and celluloid *Lolita*, much more than which can be ascribed to a matter of course.

Kubrick worked in a medium that can arguably permeate public consciousness to a greater degree than that which novel's are able to achieve (perhaps because films are more immediate and can be absorbed more passively than that of novels), and was a burgeoning virtuoso of such a delectably time defying medium. Because of these circumstances and the fact that he intended to make a movie based on Nabokov's *Lolita*, Kubrick had the potential to become the greatest threat to Nabokov's artistic omnipotence of all, namely because he possessed the correct means to effectively erase Nabokov's *Lolita* from the public consciousness. When taking this notion of possible erasure and the subterranean anxiety that must be attached to this prospect, Nabokov's shifting public statements about the movie make more and more sense because these diverging stances correspond with the appropriate maneuver required at a given time in order to legitimize his primacy over *Lolita*.

Nabokov makes several different references to Kubrick's film adaptation of his novel and if these references are looked at sequentially, a gradual estrangement from the Kubrick film becomes palpable. Initially, in 1962 when the film premiered, Nabokov does not verbalize anything that contradicts the notion that he singularly penned the screenplay for the *Lolita* film and that the production of the film is faithful to what he had written. He states that "if he did not write the script somebody else would" and so as a means of avoiding a "collision of interpretations" he does just that, and in so "safeguards a *Lolita* acceptable to" him (*Strong Opinions* 6).

Two years later, however, when asked to give his opinion on the film adaptation, his original statement seems to have undergone a bit of metamorphosis. Instead of being *the* writer behind the film, he demotes himself to the position of a donor who provided a "preponderating portion" of the direct material used for production. Despite this degree of retraction in authorial standing, Nabokov avows that Kubrick's is a film displaying "moments of unforgettable acting and directing," with need of only minor alterations (heavier emphasis on small details like the motels that *Lolita* and Humbert stayed at, etc) (*Strong Opinions* 21). Within the same year he states that he greatly admired the film *Lolita* as a film—but was sorry not to have been given an opportunity to collaborate in its actual making. People who liked my novel said the film was too reticent and incomplete. If, however, all the next pictures based on my books are as charming as Kubrick's, I shall not grumble too much" (*Strong Opinions* 49). These remarks seem grateful

and in fact defensive of Kubrick's work against these "people" critical of the film adaptation of his *Lolita*.

In 1966, an additional two years after these preceding statements, he puts forth another diverging opinion on the movie, one that marks a definitive deviation in his thinking on celluloid *Lolita*. He reveals that he has been thinking about publishing the screenplay he wrote for Kubrick and "though there are just enough borrowings from it in his version to justify my legal position as author of the script, the film is only a blurred skimpy glimpse of the marvelous picture I imagined...in its own right it is first-rate, but it is not what I wrote" (*Strong Opinions* 105). The fact that he refers to Kubrick's film as a "blurred skimpy glimpse" of what he had originally envisioned, effectively downplays Kubrick's artistic prowess, at least where portrayals of *Lolita* are concerned. Nabokov rejects Kubrick's artistic endeavor because it is something poles apart from what he "imagined" and "wrote" and so, by rejecting it on these grounds of divergence, Nabokov attempts to ensure that his art is not conflated with that of another, that his individual artistic omnipotence remains intact. Though he mitigates this rather harsh dismissal of the film, by calling it "first-rate in its own right" such mitigation only further disassociates Kubrick's *Lolita* from Nabokov's *Lolita* because he relegates it into its own discreet sphere—to be sure, a first-rate sphere "in its own right," but one only barely related to that which holds Nabokov's *Lolita*.

Immediately following the above commentary on the movie, he articulates, "I shall never understand why [Kubrick] did not follow my directions and dreams. It is a great pity" (*Strong Opinions* 105-6). This expression of disappointment seems to echo Humbert's own lamentation that appears at the onset of this section of the paper. That quote extracted from the beginning of the davenport scene when Humbert is playing his cunning game of keep-away with Lolita's apple. In the process of this interaction Humbert asserts that "it is a pity that no film" had recorded their movements, and obviously, if we keep with the logic of the above belated Nabokovian opinion, Humbert need not stray from these feelings of pity since the extant *Lolita* film still fails to record these movements in a sufficient way (*The Annotated Lolita* 60). Perhaps, by echoing one of his own characters he means to reassert his dominance in a similar manner to that which he employs within his narratives, namely by invoking some kind of involution.

Patterning his subtly authoritarian presence into the world of *Lolita* so that he is forever intertwined to the body of the text, has already been established as one of Nabokov's prime methods of asserting omnipotence. However, in directly adopting the speech of a character within *Strong Opinions*, a text that discusses yet is external to the fictive world that that particular character hails from, is yet another breed of involution that affixes an additional layer of dominance to his mechanism of control. Not only does he echo "Humbert's" words, but the specific words that he does echo hit on the lost opportunities of immortalizing Lolita on film. Remember that Humbert's expression of pity over never having filmed his Lolita, both at the onset of the davenport scene and later in the novel when he attempts to fix the beauty of her tennis technique into language ("That I could have had all her strokes, all her enchantment immortalized in segments of celluloid, makes me moan today with frustration.") (*The Annotated Lolita* 232). This echo serves to remind the reader of the remarkable strides toward immortalization that Humbert, or rather Nabokov, achieved despite lack of celluloid. In echoes he seems to be suggesting that, yes, a motion picture can be worth endless words, that it can immortalize, do justice but that in the case of the *Lolita* text it simply can never live up. In an echo he means to strip away the idea that Lolita can really be immortalized in any other medium than that which she was first gestated within, that is the written word; immortalization through

words is the only art form that can do her justice (perhaps unless Nabokov's exact wishes as stated in the screenplay were enacted).

Of course Nabokov's disparagement of how Kubrick translated the novel to the screen seems rather unfair. After all Kubrick, is himself an artist and should be allowed artistic license, especially where his own medium is concerned (notwithstanding that his artistic license was already tempered by the Production Codes). In exercising this artistic license within the constraints that it could be exercised, Kubrick correspondingly ran the risk of Nabokov's disapproval, a disapproval that he indeed ultimately reaped. However, it is likely that Kubrick would have won only frowns from Nabokov no matter what he did so long as he neglected to follow Nabokov's explicitly laid out "directions and dreams." That is to say that even if, or perhaps especially if, Kubrick's' visions for *Lolita* had been implemented differently and won equivalent critical praise to that of the *Lolita* novel Nabokov still would have looked down on it. However, this is more of a discussion of personal distaste, than that of what he would express in public sphere. Presently, I shall discuss this difference between the motivations behind the difference in his public and private views as well as what motivated the shifts in his public stances on the film, but will first look at what undermined Kubrick's realization of becoming a real menace to Nabokov's artistic omnipotence.

Richard Corliss advocates in his study of the dialectic between the film and novel that Kubrick had directed the movie at just the wrong moment, that is, when the Production Codes were still so strict that they really prevented *Lolita* from becoming "the film that this gifted director might have made" (Corliss 13). Though the Production Codes proved a hindrance to Kubrick, (so much so that Kubrick would later call celluloid "*Lolita* his one manifest failure"), sometimes what proves to be the frustration of one artist, ends up becoming the fortune of another. I will argue that the Production Codes were inadvertently beneficial to Nabokov's project of artistic omnipotence because they helped keep Kubrick's threatening artistic license somewhat in check (Corliss 12). Without this check, it is up for debate as to whether or not Kubrick would have truly lived up to his potential as substantial threat to Nabokov's project, a substantial threat that may have robbed the Russian artist of his *Lolita*, his solution for flouting time. If only Kubrick were able to put off making the movie, to wait "for commercial film to grow up, to get down and dirty and for his natural boldness to assert itself—he surely would have made a *Lolita* true to his ambitions and the novel's elusive heart. But he and *Lolita* met at the wrong time. He was too young; she, in his eyes, too old" (Corliss 86). Through Corliss' stylized remarks, it is clear that though time often reveals itself as Nabokov's sworn enemy, in this instance it offers Nabokov an escape from the devastation that Kubrick could have exacted on his artistic omnipotence.

In light of all of this, what still remains to be explained is why Nabokov expresses these feelings of "pity" and disappointment only several years after the film's release. Why didn't he articulate his displeasure immediately after viewing the film, that is express it as soon as he saw that his specifically delineated directions had been largely ignored? Drawing from Geoffrey Green's *Freud and Nabokov* yet again, Green asserts that the driving force behind Nabokov's evolving attitude toward the film derives from the human tendency "to misremember in order to maintain a story about ourselves that is more gratifying in some way than the story that proceeds from the past" (63). In Freudian terms, this tendency stems from the ego's fear of external danger, or in more extreme language, the fear of total obliteration by outside forces. Green avers that when Nabokov viewed the film and saw that it did not accurately portray what he had written, it confronted his ego with a sense of external danger which in turn, instantaneously

triggered self-preservation instincts that manifested themselves as the inability to recollect the reality of the matter. He contends that Nabokov's fear of having his "writer's ego, his creative self" destroyed causes him to misremember the actual lack of correlation between his screenplay and Kubrick's movie (63-64). Though I certainly agree that Nabokov does struggle with the fear of having his artistic self overridden, it remains to be seen if his change in perspective on the film is actually caused by unconscious disassociation or not.

Could Nabokov really have "misremembered" the contents of his screenplay to such an extent that he was initially convinced that Kubrick had followed his explicit directions? That it was only after some temporal distance that his ego gradually began to let down its defense mechanisms (as indicated by the progressive estrangement in his opinions issued about the film), allowing him to come to grips with the reality of the discrepancies and his true feelings on the matter? Well, bearing in mind just how meticulous Nabokov was in how he presented himself in the public sphere and the intricate systems he erected for the sake of achieving artistic omnipotence, I am inclined to believe that his transformation in opinion cannot be attributed to misremembering. Furthermore, because the interviews concerning the movie are collected and preserved in *Strong Opinions*, a text that is no different from any of his other texts in terms of the Nabokovian standards of precision and cautiousness applied to it, it is unlikely that Nabokov would have actually included interviews that gave indication of real mental slippage. Still, I do perceive that there is truth in the idea of Nabokov amending his estimations of the Kubrick movie in order to secure the safety of his "ego" in so far as it has bearing on his artist persona. I will suggest that he took on a more active, consciously driven role in this narrative of shifting opinion, namely in that he shifted his opinions based on what best complemented his attempts to establish his lasting, artistic omnipotence in the face of time's erosive powers.

Before and even after the film premiered, Nabokov could not have anticipated how the film was going to be received. If celluloid *Lolita* had indeed lived up to its potential for high critical praise and positive public reception, then, naturally, Nabokov would want his name to remain fixed as writer of the screenplay, would have wanted this despite Kubrick's abandonment of the screenplay submitted. I say naturally because it seems a reasonable expectation that he would want to remain part and parcel with an acclaimed filmic manifestation of *Lolita* as a means of giving his own legacy a fighting chance, to try to insure it from getting buried, smothered beneath that of Kubrick's. Kubrick's deviation from Nabokov's script would have generated private, internal frustration no matter what, however, if it had become a decidedly renowned motion picture, he would have kept his frustration cloistered from external view in the interest of serving his greater project of leaving a lasting imprint on time. This is substantiated by the fact that he keeps himself aligned with the film at the outset of its release and only changes his attitude much later on when it becomes clear that Kubrick's *Lolita* is generally considered the lesser of these two *Lolitas*.

This being said, if celluloid *Lolita* had realized its possibility for greatness it is likely, even with Nabokov keeping his reservations closeted, that this success would have rendered his artistic omnipotence and more to the point, his claim for transcendence over time utterly compromised. Such compromise is made likely by that which I've already asserted, namely that the nature of film is a lot more immediate and pervasive within cultural and temporal apparatuses than novels are. Bearing this in mind, imagine we lived in an alternate dimension, one where everything is held constant except that Kubrick's *Lolita* had deservedly achieved commendations equaling those of its source material. Well, despite equivalency in merit, if people were confronted with the name *Lolita*, Kubrick's *Lolita* would likely be the nymphet automatically



evoked, more often than not. The reason that Kubrick's *Lolita* would win out has everything to do with the inherent advantage of immediacy that it enjoys as conferred to it by the medium within which it was wrought; in effect, celluloid *Lolita* would rob textual *Lolita* of its immortality, that immortality that Nabokov is meant to share with this latter *Lolita*. So, all in all, for Nabokov, though it undoubtedly "is a great pity" that Kubrick neglected to observe his exact directions, it is also great luck that in his departure he failed to achieve a precise, full, gaze of a picture that the alias of his Dolores Haze requires. If Kubrick had both deviated and succeeded, the competition to retain legacy would likely have been futile.

We must always remember that all of Nabokov's textual creations feed into strategy, that mechanism is ever involved, and his documented, gradual estrangement from the Kubrick movie is no different; it is something that supplies additional momentum for the compulsion of satiating his need to lord over his novels and characters in the most absolute terms. The reader may recall a certain quote used earlier on in this paper, one that truly crystallizes his need for authorial omnipotence: "...the design of my novel is fixed in my imagination and every character follows the course I imagine for him. I am the perfect dictator in that private world insofar as I alone am responsible for its stability and truth" (*Strong Opinions* 69). Taking this excerpt into even more comprehensive consideration, not only is the "stability" and "truth" of his created worlds in jeopardy if he does not fulfill his role as the "perfect dictator", but if he fails to fully exercise this power then he, as an artist, is potentially annihilated, and along with it his entire attempt at abetting chronophobia. This claim is validated by his decision to write the screenplay in the first place, maintaining that "if he did not write the script somebody else would." This contention hints at his compulsion to keep holistic control over his creations, keep it out of the hands of someone else, even in art fields separate from his own. As previously discussed, Nabokov struggles against Kubrick's individual artistic visions for retaining primary authorial command over *Lolita*, but as a result of the *Lolita* film's deficits, Nabokov's position remains largely secure.

Still, even if his position is *largely* secure, it is not *wholly* secure and evidence for some slight vulnerability remains observable. To be exact, this vulnerability is found in the fact that any struggle or doubt concerning textual *Lolita*'s dominance was permitted to occur. Though Nabokov's *Lolita* managed to retain supremacy over that of Kubrick's in terms of merit and legacy, the fact that its title was ever put into question mars the full sense of omnipotence meant to surround and pervade *Lolita*, its world, characters and extensions. The question creates a fissure within his supposedly total, enclosed system of perfect authority; a fissure through which stability and truth may eke out. Kubrick's film can be considered a danger to the totality of Nabokov's artistic omnipotence even if its substance does not obscure the illustriousness of the novel because invested in its very existence is the reminder that the novel's supremacy was ever doubted. Because of this danger, I will contend that Nabokov is compelled to respond to this menace by engaging in another Freudian derived process, namely by attempting to "restore an earlier state of things" in the narrative of his artistic omnipotence (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 57).

An attempt to return to safer, more controlled circumstances is first made apparent in Nabokov's third reference to the Kubrick film in a 1966 interview in *Strong Opinions*. In this reference he reveals his aspirations for publishing the screenplay that he had originally submitted to Kubrick. By returning *Lolita* to a textual form, he is trying to usher *Lolita* back into a domain within which he retains creative control, a move meant to reinforce his artistic omnipotence against potential destabilization. In 1974, he was finally able to realize his aspirations and

published the script equipped with a rather enlightening preface. In the final paragraph of this preface to *Lolita: A Screenplay* he expresses that his “first reaction to the picture was a mixture of aggravation and regret,” but that these negative feelings quickly receded, telling himself “that nothing had been wasted after all, that [his] scenario remained intact in his folder, and that one day [he] might publish it—not in a pettish refutation of a munificent film but purely as a vivacious variant of an old novel” (*Lolita: A Screenplay* xiii). Besides communicating that his distaste for the film was immediate (further dismantling Green’s argument of gradual estrangement from the film due to misremembering), this declaration functions to emphasize that the publication of the screenplay is not a “pettish refutation” of a “munificent film.” However, this intimation of harmlessness and the allowance of a scrap of praise are heralded by contradictory expressions born of opposing sentiments. In the paragraph preceding this the final one, Nabokov writes that “most of the [film’s] sequences were not really better than those I had so carefully composed for Kubrick and I keenly regretted the waste of my time” (xiii). His regret is only alleviated when he realizes that his “scenario remained intact,” ready for publication at some future date which can be translated as *Lolita*’s return to its native sphere of written language that he feels relieved that he has not wasted his really very precious time in writing something that, at last, was forsaken. It means he can smooth over the cracks in his mechanism introduced by Kubrick’s film, the film that shook this mechanism’s foundations in the rumble of its infidelity to Nabokov’s *Lolita* screenplay. No matter his explicit avowals to the contrary, publishing the screenplay is most certainly a refutation of Kubrick’s attempt to bring down his dominion.

From the screenplay it is obvious that Nabokov would have lived up to his usual calling card of control had he been given the chance to direct the *Lolita* movie himself:

“If I had given myself as much to the stage or the screen as I have to the kind of writing that serves a triumphant life sentence between the covers of a book, I would have advocated and applied a system of total tyranny, directing the play or the picture myself, choosing settings and costumes, terrorizing the actors, mingling with them in the bit part of guest, or ghost, prompting them, and, in a word, pervading the entire show with the will and art of one individual... All I could do in the present case was to grant words primacy over action thus limiting as much a possible the intrusion of management and cast” (*Lolita: A Screenplay* x).

The above lengthy tirade against collaboration reaffirms his goal of retaining artistic omnipotence. Not only was Nabokov asserting his artistic omnipotence by retextualizing *Lolita*, but also through the specific content of the screenplay that he provided. Though the structure of placing the murder at the beginning of the film belongs to Nabokov, it is not executed in the way that Nabokov advocates in his *Lolita* script. In the opening of the screenplay, as Humbert is presumably driving closer and closer, the camera, in the brief interim before he arrives, is instructed to survey Clare Quilty’s mansion. Nabokov gives very specific directions regarding how the camera should be maneuvered in presenting the scene. These maneuvers including gliding, sliding and dipping seem to affix an otherworldly quality to the way these events are being laid bare. This stance of ethereal watchfulness that the camera is communicating through its movements is made even more prominent as the opening stage directions progress. After finding Quilty, “the CAMERA locates the drug addict’s implementa, and with a shudder withdraws” (*Lolita: A Screenplay* 1). By simulating a shudder of dismay it conveys a stance of bearing judgment on Quilty’s drug use. These connotations parallel Nabokov’s own public

denouncements of drug users (There is nothing “more Philistine, more bourgeois, more ovine than this business of drug duncery.; Young dunces who turn to drugs cannot read *Lolita*, or any of my books.) (*Strong Opinions* 114). By including one of his own strong opinions in this subtle way, in what can be considered his bit part of holy ghost, Nabokov sets the stage for the rest of the screenplay’s particularities which all together create the effect of his enveloping authorial presence.

Nabokov’s attacks on Freud and psychoanalysis abound in the screenplay of *Lolita*, but are noticeably diminished in the film. Moreover these attacks are in fact, somewhat more blatant in the screenplay than they are in the novel—perhaps owing to the mindset that more heavy handed references need be written into the screenplay if they are to be even somewhat palpable on the screen. In his script, Nabokov makes some obvious digs: “Good Lord, how I envy today’s youngsters and their progressive Freudian freedom” or “‘Afraid’ is Freudian lingo” (5, 167). However, this blatancy is intensified by the fact that Nabokov not only maintains the case study framework that introduces the novel, but also incarnates John Ray Jr. (the psychoanalyst that introduces Humbert’s confession as a case study), making him an actual character much more engaged in the story; he narrates much of the film’s prologue (including Humbert’s marriage to Valeria and hospitalization due inner turmoil about his desires) and is later resurrected in act three as a narrative bridge between Humbert’s loss of and search for Lolita.

The psychoanalyst’s much more tangible role in the screenplay provides an avenue through which Nabokov can flesh out his “impersonation of the suave John Ray” to a much fuller extent than that which gets flaunted in the Foreword to *Lolita* the novel (“On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” 311). In effect, it seems that Nabokov is camouflaging himself in the skin of a Freudian; maintaining his omniscience as God in relation to this world, but doing so by ironically outfitting himself with the mask of a psychoanalyst, a mask only worn for the purpose of flaunting underhanded yet conspicuous derision. When relating the scene in which Humbert and Valeria, his first wife, argue in the back of a cab over her plans to leave him for another man, Ray makes a lot of otherworldly yet interactive narrative commentary on scene, with particular attention paid to the cab spiriting them home: “I think the cab driver ought to have turned left here. Oh, well, he can take the next cross street” and “Look out! Close shave. When you analyze those jaywalkers you find that they hesitate between the womb and the tomb” (12, 13). Though the sense of omniscience that Ray conveys through his narrative style can perhaps be attributed to his familiarity with Humbert’s confession (entrusted to the doctor by Humbert) this does not seem to be the case when considering that these comments could not have been incorporated in Humbert’s confession; the commentary is too much outside the scope of what would have been feasibly perceptible to Humbert. During this scene Humbert is likely so preoccupied with the goings on between himself and Valeria that he wouldn’t have noticed the missed turn or the jay-walkers meaning that such comments are Ray’s own appended flourishes.

But why insert these particular flourishes; what does Nabokov mean to accomplish in doing so? I will suggest that the reason for inserting these flourishes is a way of creating a space that is removed from yet engaged with the story; a space that can obviously only be occupied by a deity figure, which we are to take for an injection of Nabokov himself. Other questions arise: why must we take this deity figure as a manifestation of Nabokov? Can’t it just be a creatively rendered and inserted narrator? The answer to these questions lies in the notion that Nabokov simply would not give a Freudian license to narrate his worlds in any capacity, except ironically and only if he is the one impersonating the ironic Freudian. Moreover, because he is writing this character with its imminent translation into the film medium in mind, he needed to write himself

into the script in this manner as a means of bolstering his manifold strategies that aim to secure artistic omnipotence. In effect, we are to think of John Ray as Nabokov, acting as a deity with a sense of humor, but one seriously pointing at the perceived flaws of this leading school of thought.

Essentially Kubrick relegates this necessary safeguard of criticism toward Freud to one appearance: Quilty waits for Humbert in his home and pretends to be the school psychoanalyst desiring to investigate Lolita's home life. Because Peter Sellers plays this psychoanalyst in an over the top, dramatically comedic fashion, it can be considered a potential jab at Freudianism. Yet, even though he includes this possible jab at psychoanalysis, the scene, as it appears in the film, is not really seem that preoccupied with the fact that Quilty is disguised as a psychoanalyst. It is simply more preoccupied with the fact that it is Quilty interacting with a none-the-wiser Humbert. This means that any criticism of Freud takes a back seat to Quilty's torture games; it is merely a functional disguise for the greater purpose of toying with Humbert.

Despite Kubrick's failure to incorporate the specific camera movements and the bulk of the Freudian attacks, this neglect would still likely have been permissible had Kubrick faithfully portrayed the more direct manifestations of Nabokov that appear in the screenplay. This is to say, that his distinct authorial presence appears in still more embodied ways besides that which has already been discussed. When Humbert and Quilty encounter each other on the Beardseely College campus (something which does not occur in the novel), Quilty makes snide remarks indicating that he knows about the situation between Humbert and Lolita, but these remarks prove too slight for Humbert to comprehend his meaning at this point in the plot. Though this seems like the point of the scene—to throw the two pedophiles together in an upfront daylight setting, there lurks another, perhaps, more substantial motivation for this scene's inclusion. Notice that, seemingly superfluously, Quilty is accompanied by his co-writer Vivian Darkbloom. As superfluous as this may seem, however, this assessment is, of course, dashed upon remembering that Vivian Darkbloom is an anagram of Vladimir Nabokov.

In Nabokov's screenplay version Vivian does not serve the same practical function that she does in the novel, wherein Lolita diverts Humbert's attention from time spent "rehearsing" for the school play with Clare Quilty by maintaining that Clare is the female playwright and Vivian the male. Vivian's ostensible function in the screenplay, however, is reduced to two short lines: "I am Vivian Darkbloom" and "My niece Mona goes to Beardseely School with your daughter" (146). This latter avowal is the functional information that later provides the assumptive link between Mona and Lolita, enabling them to correspond during Lolita's "lost" years, a correspondence that in turn puts Lolita and Humbert back into communication once Mona visits Humbert (presumably on Lolita's charge) and determines it is safe for Lolita to write him and ask him for money. However, going beyond this functional declaration, Vivian's claim to true significance is equivalent to that which she retains in the novel: she is an artful representation of Nabokov's ubiquitous position within his narratives.

Besides the invocation of Nabokov through anagram, Quilty communicates a series of increasingly peculiar (Nabokov evoking) descriptions as he introduces Vivian to Humbert: "My collaborator. My evening shadow. Her name looks like an anagram. But she's a real woman—or anyway a real person." (146). This introduction seems to point outward, outside the world of the screenplay to its creator—a notion that becomes more and more convincing with each successive sentence that Quilty utters in this passage. He initially refers to Vivian as his "collaborator," a term which puts the two of them on a somewhat equal playing field, where they are separate, discrete. Right after, however, he states that she is his "evening shadow," an epithet

that does not necessarily follow from equality; it seems to associate her with an elusive yet fixed component in his life; something that he does not have control over, yet haunts his movements and behaviors. What makes this vague redolence of Nabokov even more concrete is Quilty's subsequent comment that her name looks like an anagram, which it, in fact, is. That he explicitly prompts the audience to examine her name for its properties as an anagram, and that the anagram happens to be of Vladimir Nabokov, indicates that Nabokov desired to challenge both film spectators and readers, alike, to recognize his presence within this work. Quilty brings this redolence of Nabokov to the fore when he asserts that Vivian is a "real woman," but then qualifies the designation of womanhood by saying, "or anyway a real person." Such a qualifier may not initially lay suspicion on her sex since it could be attributed to an offhand joke, but given her name is an anagram of the name belonging to the male draftsman of this screenplay, it propels her character into the sphere of dubiousness. The additional ambiguity draws our considerations outward toward Nabokov, who is both male, a real person and whose name is faintly concealed within the name of a female alias. All of these elements, taken together, seem the secret pigments that effectively draw out Nabokov's own portrait from the portrait of a woman playwright as a Nabokovian character.

Though Vivian Darkbloom does appear in the *Lolita* film, she is not presented in such a way that her character would be suggestive of Nabokov. In the film, her already minimal speaking role is reduced to silence and in she is often partially hidden from the eye of the camera in the scenes that she does appear in. Bearing this in mind, Kubrick, in effect, "has put Nabokov in a doubly humiliating situation as a rejected screenwriter and as marginalized and mute if inscrutable woman. Kubrick humbles Nabokov as Nabokov humbles Humbert" (Gabbard 10). By removing the cunning, self-reflexivity invested in this character, Kubrick was exercising his powers as an artist in his own right (despite restrictions) and challenging Nabokov's holistic control. This idea is still furthered when Kubrick disregards the scene where Nabokov means to directly humble Humbert, and which, in its omission from the film, ironically, becomes another point where Kubrick humbles Nabokov.

In Nabokov's screenplay, sometime during their first cross-country journey, Humbert and Lo are lost and in need of directions. At this point, heralded in by the specified shot of the car's radiator grill, plastered with dead butterflies, a character named Vladimir Nabokov enters the scene. Humbert approaches him though he is evidently engrossed with his butterfly hunting. Before asking for directions, Humbert asks whether or not the butterfly Nabokov has just caught is a "rare specimen" (128). Nabokov then proceeds to correct Humbert, stating, "A specimen cannot be common or rare, it can only be poor or perfect" going on to say "You meant 'rare species'"(128). Because it has no narrative or structural function within the screenplay, it seems that the exclusive purpose of this scene is to humble Humbert. Though he never knows it, Humbert is made to meet his maker, and we as readers are made privy to that striking interplay. In this interaction Humbert is judged and reduced by this seeming nonentity (but, in fact, all entity); an interaction meant to communicate to us spectators that Humbert can never be removed from Nabokov's control even outside the *Lolita* novel. By removing yet another key scene, where Nabokov is endeavoring to showcase his God-like role and maintain his artistic omnipotence even in the film medium, it made for a hole in Nabokov's intricate web, a hole that compelled him to retextualize his *Lolita*; a way of rectifying the humbling" that Kubrick showed him in celluloid *Lolita*. By retextualizing *Lolita* he puts an official buffer between himself and Kubrick's film, definitively proving that the film is not his *Lolita* at all, giving the public the celluloid *Lolita* that should have been and doing it in the safety of a textual format.

Still keeping true to his strategy of God-like involution, Nabokov again purveys his presence within the world of the screenplay when Lolita runs away from home in the middle of a pivotally intense fight she is having with Humbert (He has just wrenched her away from the school play's after party, the Quilty play in which she had performed the leading role. Humbert's abrupt manner owes to a heightened sense of distrust in Lolita after encountering her piano teacher who reveals that her pupil has been skipping lessons; he fears she is surreptitiously running around with boys of her own age). He follows after her, eventually finding her in a drugstore at which point the screen directions read, "At its far end, Lolita is revealed through the glass of a phone booth, a little mermaid in a tank. She is still speaking. To whom? Me? Cupping the tube, confidentially hunched over it, she slits her eyes at Humbert, hangs up, and walks out of the booth" (*Lolita: A Screenplay* 163). The answer to the question of whom Lolita is speaking to is an obvious one for those already familiar with the novel; she is, of course, speaking to Clare Quilty (or at least one of his co-conspirators). However, the fact that Nabokov tenders himself as Lolita's possible confidante just goes to reaffirm that the retextualized *Lolita* is no different than its novel precursor when it comes to validating Nabokov's cosmic presence, his cosmic authority, within each of their respective worlds. What makes this suggestion of Lolita potentially conversing with her creator all the more significant is that there is no real way to translate such a suggestion into film. This means that the suggestion is chiefly intended for readers to internalize rather than for actors to execute; it is not a true, implementable part of the stage directions. Perhaps the function of this brief moment of involution is therefore meant to disorient all readers, actors, directors, forcing them outside of the narrative within which they are, by now, deeply immersed to confirm that Nabokov is very much the force that drives this world toward fruition. In this way he is able to express a subtle point of refutation against Kubrick's disregard for many of the other points of his. This means that it is not something that Kubrick could have neglected to incorporate, but rather a point of reminder, perhaps intended for Kubrick himself, that Nabokov is the artist, the omnipotent force in charge of *Lolita* in all its materializations.

In terms of Nabokov's strategy for usurping time perhaps the most important thing about *Lolita: A Screenplay* is its final lines in relation to the novel. Overall, the screenplay does not make much use of direct quotation from its precursor, however, this being said, the final two sentences of the script are taken from the novel verbatim. No doubt the reason for specially using these two lines can be attributed to the fact that it is a beautiful, highly stylized ending that offered just as striking a conclusion for a motion picture as it did for a novel. Still, it may also be because it reaffirms Nabokov's compulsion for creating art; this compulsion being the possibility for immortality (*Lolita: A Screenplay* xiii).

The last two lines taken from novel and implemented into screenplay are concerned with secret durable pigments and shared immortality between Lolita, Humbert, and (arguably) Nabokov. In implementing these particular lines from the novel into the screenplay, Nabokov is providing for his future by making multiple investments in *Lolita's* immortality, and thus that of his own. In the sentences leading up to the last two, Nabokov makes his case for immortality still more barefaced in the screenplay (his second investment): "...While the blood still throbs through my writing hand, you are still as much part of blest matter as I am. I can still talk to you and make you live in the minds of later generations" (*Lolita: A Screenplay* 213). Though these preceding lines are also pulled directly from the final passage of the novel, they are not recorded in the same manner as their source material, exhibiting heavy omissions. The reason for this seems to be motivated by a need to make his case more concentrated and therefore more obvious

to the audience of his intended film—something he does not want to lose to subtlety. Nabokov deletes all the advice he communicates to Lolita in the novel final paragraph, condensing the matter to its core, this core being that Lolita's, or more to the point, *Lolita's*, immortality is this author's ultimate goal.

Though Kubrick, again, did not incorporate this critical component of Nabokov's screenplay and occludes Nabokov's artistic omnipotence from penetrating the medium of film, his own restrictions made it relatively impossible to create a film that could really usurp Nabokov's title to *Lolita*. Even though the film did not supersede the novel, publishing the screenplay was necessary in order to demonstrate just how much of a stranger Kubrick's *Lolita* is from the *Lolitas* of his own manufacture. In so doing, he means not only to emphasize the distance between them, but also create another published work that feeds into his safeguards and strategies that protect against obstruction of his authorial presence.

#### Chapter 4: The Reader: The Omnipresent Threat to Artistic Omnipotence

*Q: You've been quoted as saying that in a first-rate work of fiction, the real clash isn't between the characters, but between the author and the world. Would you explain this?*

A: "I believe I said 'between the author and the reader,' not 'the world,' which would be a meaningless formula, since a creative artist makes his own world or worlds. He clashes with readerdom because he is his own ideal reader and those other readers are so often mere lip-moving ghosts and amnesiacs" —*Strong Opinions*

The third and most potent threat of all, the one that has the most real potential for utterly dissembling Nabokov's project is the selfsame entity that Nabokov cannot do without: the reader. In terms of reader reception theory of the Wolfgang Iser variety, what makes the reader threatening stems from individual sentience and consciousness, specifically in that he or she "makes implicit connections, fills in gaps, draws inferences and tests out hunches; and to do this means drawing on a tacit knowledge of the world in general and of literary conventions in particular. The text itself is really no more than a series of "cues" to the reader, invitations to construct a piece of language into meaning. In the terminology of reception theory, the reader "concretizes" the literary work which is in itself no more than a chain of organized black marks on a page" (Eagleton 66).

According to this branch of literary theory the reader is what confers meaning to any text, intimating that the author needs the reader in order for his or her works to exist. Nabokov is no different in this respect, especially when considering that the deep-seated objective of his artistic project consists of securing proof of his individual existence for all of time; something that cannot be achieved unless he persists in the consciousness of all of current and future readerdom. In order to diminish this dependency, Nabokov attempted to mend these "gaps" and holes in his narrative by filling them with his own distinct presence (gaps and holes that would otherwise be stuffed with the interiority of some unknown, threatening reader). In so doing, Nabokov intended to make it so that he himself is an essential ingredient in "concretizing" his works, that is, he made it so that his readers are unable to give his works meaning without taking his supreme authorial presence into account. He employs several strategies to achieve this

indispensability to the reader's processes of allotting significance. However, the best place to start our investigation of the Nabokov-reader relationship is by analyzing how he capitalizes on his role as God in relation to his texts and attempts to extend it outwards so that it encompasses readers and mitigate the threat that they pose.

In Genesis, the Bible states: "So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:27). Though Nabokov does take this conduct of his rival into account by creating worlds with characters that too bear the imprint of his image, he raises the stakes by taking his rivals attributed creations (men and women; readers) and shapes them in terms of his own simulacrum: "I don't think that an artist should bother about his audience. His best audience is the person he sees in his shaving mirror every morning. I think that the audience an artist imagines, when he imagines that kind of thing, is a room filled with people wearing his own mask" (*Strong Opinions* 18). In advocating that the artist should only imagine his audience as a throng of "people wearing his own mask" he thwarts the development of a potentially major problem. This problem is, of course, interference with immortalizing his specific existence, by an overwhelming and inconceivable hoard of readers. In thrusting his own image onto these readers, however, he is able to exchange the threatening for the comforting (and thus contributing yet another element to apparatus of artistic omnipotence).

In investigating Nabokov's extension of the God-like role outward from his texts, outward to encompass the reader, first consider, Gustave Flaubert's position on the author's God-like role within the text and the effect of "astonishment" that it should have on the reader: 'How has this been done?' they will say, and they will feel crushed without knowing why" (Wood 12). Nabokov indeed wanted to transmit this sense of astonishment, but instead of crushing his spectators, he opted to annul their individuality, making them extensions of himself. But how does he get these readers outfitted in his mask? How does he manage to stretch his God-like role out from his created worlds into the world of readers and actually make them extensions of self? I will suggest that he manages to do this through a number of strategies two of which include indirect assertion and direct instruction (in forewords, afterwords, and within interviews) which work to either (mildly) shame or cajole the reader into internalizing his works on his specific terms—all of this, of course, feeding into his God-like role and further validating his artistic omnipotence.

He indirectly guides the reader away from the application of any unsanctioned hermeneutical analysis to his texts (especially that belonging to the psychoanalytic bracket, which he was sure to denigrate explicitly and implicitly both within and without his fictions) through. An instance of this implicit conduction can be seen when he declares that "a work of art has no importance whatever to society. It is only important to the individual, and only the individual reader is important to me" (33). Though not explicitly laid out in this statement, when Nabokov suggests that art should have no importance to society, to the collective he is really saying that *true* art should have no such importance. He thereby creates a hierarchical structure within which his art is elevated to the status of art the truest given that it is solely preoccupied with the individual and purportedly makes no large-scale claims. In intimating that lesser art is concerned with big ideas and true art with the individual, he subtly coaxes readers away from scrutinizing his work for socio-political messages—one of the most traditional avenues for analyzing texts. He claims no responsibility to do social or political work through his texts, offending the sensibilities of those who cleave to such literary traditions, and in effect (in the desired effect), makes himself stand-out.



So what does his art mean if it is created in opposition to macrocosmic ideological significance? This question of meaning is addressed in another quote, one imbued with more implicit hints on how to read his texts: “For me, a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere connected with other states of being where art...is the norm” (“On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” 315). This excerpt intimates a very particular stance on art and its function, which in turn reinforces his individuality. In privileging “aesthetic bliss” over ideological content, he beseeches us to consider the blissful manner with which he conveys his created world through letters, wanting us to be awed by these texts and enjoy the dazzle with which he builds the Nabokovian cosmos; we are supposed to find meaning in the pleasure of reading, in the bliss of design, much like one would experience in gazing upon some grand mountain vista or the like in the natural world.

Despite all of this, there is some obvious incongruity invested in Nabokov’s self-perpetuated claims that his art possesses no significance in relation to society. This incongruity arises when considering certain assertions made earlier on in this paper. To be precise, earlier on we observed that he absorbs psychoanalytic theory within his works, artfully vilifying it as medieval and detrimental—such vilification emerging out of a desire to dismantle its sweeping presence in Western culture. Whether or not it derives from individual, self-centered motivations (a desire to displace Freudian influence with his own) the fact remains that his art does aim to do some cultural work by undermining psychoanalytic theory as a societal, cultural phenomenon, conflicting with the veracity of the preceding claims. This being said, by diverting his readers’ attention, persuading them, us, that nothing fruitful awaits in analyzing his works in terms of human collectives, he is able to keep the true nature criticism of Freud, that is his large-scale role in culture, effectively veiled. Readers thereby absorb this criticism in a kind of passive manner, not necessarily realizing that Nabokov is going against his own parameters for high art by making a point relevant to the society within which he lives. He obscures the true nature of his disparagement by shrouding it in his high art rhetoric, which, in turn, enables him to covertly accomplish the cultural work of lesser art, while still maintaining the status of a true artist; essentially having his cake and eating it too.

Now, as we turn to the explicit directions that Nabokov decrees in order to get his readers to adopt his way of reading texts, we bear witness to how overt he can be in such matters: “You read an artist’s book not with your heart (the heart is a remarkably stupid reader), and not with your brain alone, but with your brain and spine. ‘Ladies and gentlemen, the tingle in the spine really tells you what the author felt and wished you to feel’ (*Strong Opinions* 41). Perhaps in this way, by advocating the “tingle in the spine” as the optimal appendage through which to comprehend his works, Nabokov means to steer readers away from the application of their individual, mental and emotional baggage that these, their other limbs of consideration (brain, heart), would likely bring to his texts if he does not explicitly endorse an alternate substance to mediate understanding. As a locus for concretizing texts, the spine is pristine, metaphorical ground, and bringing awareness to its “tingle” an original maneuver, so in advocating the tingle in the spine as the source of true meaning, Nabokov again asserts his individuality and while at the same time attempts to create a mode through which a lasting presence of individuality gets maintained.

How do we go about understanding his charge to adhere to the tingle in the spine, that is, what does this expression really mean? Perhaps, in an appropriately nebulous yet distinct way, it is reflexive of Nabokov’s peculiar manner of fixing his work in the reader’s mind; this “fixing” being peculiar because it consists of making his texts so evocative that there is no way for

reader's get a complete, total grasp on it. Though this idea of manifold evocation as a way of fixing his works appears counterintuitive (an air of ambiguousness seems contrary to anything fixed), I will suggest that it is not as contrary as it seems; the process that the reader undergoes when reading Nabokov's text is a figurative tingle in the spine (though perhaps, literal for some) —it is an experience of pulsating astonishment at worlds uncanny and inundating, an experience that can be recognized inasmuch as it is an experience and one spurred by the text. However this recognition stops short of imparting overall meaning, fails to keep the text still for long enough so that it can be concretized in a truly personal and holistically comprehensible way. As the readers stretch to grasp something firm, something that they would be able to make stick, what they end up grabbing hold of is this tingling in the spine, the strangeness and astonishment that it imparts and the sense that all of it is immersed in the residues of Nabokovian presence. These materializations, these effects are what Nabokov means to make fixed properties; this experience is to be what the reader secures in his or her consciousness rather than that of a fixed text itself. What this all means is simply that which has been detailed before, namely the reader is made unable to really consider these novels without considering their author; designer becomes intrinsic to the internalizing manifold design.

Other instances of explicit instruction, ones that occur in still more sharp and pointed terms need be mentioned only briefly, especially when it comes to his instructions regarding psychoanalytic theory, a point upon which we have already probed Nabokov's feelings extensively. Nabokov was not shy to censure readers that may subscribe to the theory ("All my books should be stamped, Freudians keep out") with such statements serving his purpose in two complementary ways (*Bend Sinister* xviii). One of these ways consists of chasing away those who would be offended at such jibes, doing so right from the start so that he can filter out readers who would not be willing to accept his terms of readership. The second function is a kind of negative reinforcement for those readers who do continue reading, past these initial tests of censure. By asserting that Freudians are unwelcome or by calling the heart "a remarkably stupid reader" he lays out the desired framework through which his novels are to be read (explicitly demarcating the boundaries of acceptable and reproachful reading) and in so doing, it seems that he is banking on the reader's desire to avoid condemnation. This means that in order to escape classification as one of those "lip moving amnesiacs" he writes about, he trusts that his remaining readers will inhabit his perspectives on how to his texts and, in effect, enable him to keep these readers outfitted in his familiar mask of self (*Strong Opinions* 65).

These techniques for training readers to read his works crop up in *Lolita* as much as they do in any of his other texts. We have already investigated the notion that Nabokov consistently tests his readers as a means of keeping them engaged and "fit" to read his texts, while at the same time ensuring that his status as puppet master is ever present in mind and spine. This is further evidenced in the fact that he has his creature, Humbert, directly address the reader twenty-nine times throughout *Lolita* (Alfred Appel lvii). In these direct asides, Humbert consistently plays on the reader's sympathies: "Imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me" and "try to discern the doe in me" (*The Annotated Lolita* 129). Such pleadings are of course howled or bleated by wolf in sheep's clothing. If we fall prey to this, if we imagine Humbert in the manner that he wishes (a victim to his uncontrollable lusts and thereby pitiable) then we have been seduced by the serpent and have no room in Nabokov's kingdom of readers.

Though *Lolita* is a difficult enough novel to read what with its high stylization and onslaught of recondite allusions, it becomes all the more complicated with its baseline plot concerning child molestation, more complicated because such subject matter presented in the

manner that it is, could foster misinterpretation (misinterpreted as a pornographic novel or a novel sympathetic to pedophiles). Since confusion about this plot line indeed got magnified at the time of its publication (understandably so, given that it was published into the still rather conservative, American society of the 1950's), Nabokov felt compelled to make clear what reader's should be reading his novel for, doing so in his afterword, "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*."

In this short addendum, he advocates that the novel's style should be the primary concern to all those reading *Lolita*. In advocating style over the technically racy content, he attempts to avoid the outcry that a conservative society may voice if readers were left to their own devices. If he had in fact, left them to their own devices, he seemed to believe that his readers without his direct instruction, would fall for the trap of the novel and actually think he means for them to feel compassion for Humbert. Because of this apprehension, he emphasizes the novel's "aesthetic bliss," the stylistic panache that reveals the striking beauty and danger inherent in the idea that a child molester could ever make himself out to be a sympathetic figure. He goes on to say that "there are gentle souls who would pronounce *Lolita* meaningless because it does not teach them anything. I am neither a reader nor a writer of didactic fiction, and despite John Ray's assertion, *Lolita* has no moral in tow" ("On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" 313). This proves to be another instance of reprimanding readers, reprimanding them so that they will not analyze his works for anything other than that which he deems appropriate. He encourages his readers to align themselves with his own tastes in fiction; pushes them to shun "didactic fiction," or at least persuade them that meaning does not always have to well from the didactic—they need only look at his *Lolita* for an example. In rejecting the idea that there are moralizing, instructive qualities in his fiction Nabokov means to spirit his readers away from the "why" and the "what" (Why write a book on child molestation? What is Nabokov trying to say here? What's the moral of the story?), attempting to have them honor the "how" instead. Because the former approaches in regards to literature have long been the questions privileged in readerdom (the "why" and "what"), the fact that he endorses the "how" instead, makes him stand out in the field of fiction. This conspicuousness buttresses the individuality of his artistic persona he and thereby bolstering his prospects of escaping the anonymity and effective nonexistence, that time would otherwise foist upon him.

As Alfred Appel Jr. puts it in his preface to *The Annotated Lolita*, "Because Nabokov continually parodies the conventions of "realistic" and 'impressionistic' fiction, readers must accept or reject him on his own terms. Many of his novels become all but meaningless in any other terms" (lv). Bearing this quote in mind, let's now consider it alongside another of Appel's insightful quotes, the one that introduces the entire paper and describes Nabokov's narratives as masques of reality. When the two quotes are synthesized, they communicate the following point: Nabokov's narratives are masques of reality and we have to accept them on his own terms because in his created worlds he holds dominion over meaning and application of any other meanings besides that which he endorses would fall short of communicating their true value; value which is extant, but inaccessible to those unwilling to subscribe to his conditions. Within the first few pages of *Lolita*, when psychoanalyst, John Ray Jr., is discussing why Humbert's façade we find resonance with Appel's idea of masks, and find that beyond these masques and masks is our author, Nabokov, compelling us to read in the manner that he sees fit: "...this mask--through which two hypnotic eyes seem to glow—had to remain unlifted in accordance with its wearer's wish" (*The Annotated Lolita* 3). It is through masks, and masques that Nabokov is made present, alive within his fictions, not just present in the form of god of these worlds, but in his insistence that readers read according to his wishes. He attempts to hypnotize, to get readers

to obey the stipulations of the writer veiled behind the masks, attempting to achieve such objectives by confronting us with his presence on the page. The constant confrontation of his presence, communicates the feeling that we are being watched, an understandably disquiet pronouncement, given those explicitly described eyes, glowing beyond the page, not belonging to Humbert, but rather to that of his creator.

When all is said and done, the anticipated question that arises is whether or not all of this is just wishful thinking; were his attempts to make readers obey, to keep them in line with what he deemed appropriate readership, merely the stuff of pipe-dreams? In part, yes. For quite some time, Nabokov's tactics of keeping his readership corralled within analytical spheres that would have been acceptable to him (given that they either supported his artistic omnipotence and the legacy of an artistic persona that he promoted). However, in recent years there has been an advent of criticism that looks at his works in psychoanalytic terms or attempts to find moral, social messages hidden therein. What this means is that for all his strive the threat of the reader is the most potent and unconquerable threat of all and as a result, his image or the aura of his books may become presented in ways that he would not supported because they may poison the well in terms of how he wants his works and persona remembered as time spans onward. Still, though the threat of the reader cannot be negated,, anyone seriously contemplating *Lolita* cannot escape acknowledging Nabokov's specific wishes and the express effects that he wishes his works would have on his readers.

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