Lolita

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF VLADIMIR NABOKOV

Vladimir Nabokov was born into an aristocratic St. Petersburg family during the last decades of the Russian Empire. He was raised to speak, read and write in Russian, French, and English. His father was a Liberal politician and former Minister of Justice under the Tsar. The Nabokovs were forced to leave Russia by the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. They fled to England, and then to Berlin, where they joined the burgeoning community of Russian émigrés. Vladimir studied zoology and literature at Cambridge University before returning to his family in Berlin. In 1922, Nabokov's father was killed by an assassin, whose real target was another man. Forty years later, the incident would figure in Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire*.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the decades following the end of the Second World War, the United States reached a pinnacle of military power, economic prosperity, and cultural influence. American cars, Hollywood films, popular music, consumer products and fashion swept across Europe. The country was rapidly suburbanizing, and a middle class swelled by the G.I. bill and the booming economy aspired to new ideals of leisure and domesticity. The racial tensions and cultural upheavals of the 1960s had not yet manifested, and many cultural critics of the time believed that a new age of mass-media and conformity had arrived. *Lolita* satirizes, but also celebrates the culture of this era, epitomized by the clothes, crazes and interests of Lolita herself. Humbert Humbert views America skeptically, sometimes contemptuously, but usually with fascination.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Nabokov's work affected an entire generation of writers in the United States and England. The energy and excess of detail in his prose, the puzzle-like complexity of his narratives, and his irrepressible love of wordplay exerted a major influence on American and British literature. Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace, Zadie Smith and Martin Amis are among the writers most influenced by Vladimir Nabokov's work.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Lolita*
- **When Written:** 1952-1955
- **Where Written:** Ithaca, New York; Road Trips across the U.S.
- **When Published:** 1955 in Paris, 1958 in the United States
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Postmodern Novel / Road Narrative / American Novel / Immigrant Novel / Metafiction
- **Setting:** The French Riviera, Paris, the fictional town of Ramsdale, Massachusetts, Beardsley, motels and tourist attractions across the U.S.
- **Climax:** After Lolita refuses to run away with Humbert Humbert, he drives to Clare Quilty's mansion and kills him in a theatrical shootout.
- **Antagonist:** Clare Quilty
- **Point of View:** First-person retrospective

EXTRA CREDIT

Saved by Véra. Nabokov almost incinerated the manuscript of Lolita before submitting it for publication. It was saved by his wife and editor, Véra Nabokov.

Frank Lasalle and Sally Horner. The story of *Lolita* is at least in part inspired by the real-life kidnapping of Sally Horner by Frank Lasalle in 1948.

PLOT SUMMARY

A fictional **psychologist** named John Ray Jr., Ph.D. introduces the rest of the novel, presenting it as a case study in abnormal psychology. He explains that it was written by a murderer and sexual pervert, who refers to himself in the manuscript as Humbert Humbert. The author, as well as the girl he abducted—Lolita—are now dead. The former died of a heart attack while awaiting trial in prison, and the latter died in childbirth on Christmas Day. Both died in the year **1952**. Ray closes his foreword by praising the genius of the writer, condemning his actions, and recommending the book as a warning, a case study, and a guide to building a more ethical society. The foreword is dated August 5th, 1955.

Humbert Humbert's narrative begins with the story of Lolita's predecessor, his childhood love. Young Humbert meets Annabel Leigh at the **Hotel** Mirana on the French Riviera. His father owns the hotel, and Annabel's parents are family friends. The two children fall in love, and try desperately to find some way of having sex without being discovered. They almost succeed, but are discovered at the last moment by two swimmers. Humbert never sees Annabel again, and she dies of typhoid a short time after. Annabel defines Humbert's ideal of **nymphetry** until he meets Lolita.

As a young adult, Humbert moves to Paris. There and in

London, he receives a literary education, and begins publishing articles in journals. He represses his urge for the young girls he finds attractive, whom he calls "nymphets." Nevertheless, he takes every chance he can to be near them. He visits prostitutes to deal with his erotic urges. One of these prostitutes, Monique, is so **nymphet**-like that it makes a striking impression on him. He tries to find a little girl prostitute in the Paris underworld, but gives up after being scammed by a Madame.

Humbert Humbert hopes that the sexual and domestic routines of marriage will help him deal with his perverse desires. In 1935, he marries Valeria, the daughter of his doctor. It goes passably well for four years, at the end of which Valeria leaves him for a Russian taxi driver named Maximovich. Humbert Humbert leaves for the United States, where an uncle has left him a yearly stipend on the condition that he immigrates and shows an interest in business.

Humbert Humbert immigrates to New York, where he works for a University writing a book on French Literature. His mental health deteriorates, and he ends up staying in sanatoriums for several years. In between stays, he accompanies a scientific expedition to the arctic, where he acts as a "psychological recorder." The report he drafts is entirely fictional. Soon after, he has to return to the sanatorium, where he revels in his ability to deceive his **psychotherapists**.

Released from the sanatorium in 1947, Humbert Humbert moves to New England. He arranges to lodge in the town of Ramsdale with a family called the McCoos. He is excited to learn the McCoos have a little daughter. When he arrives, Mr. McCoo informs him that their house has burnt down. He refers Humbert instead to the Hazes, a mother and daughter living at **342** Lawn Avenue. Charlotte Haze, the homeowner, gives Humbert Humbert a tour of the house. He is unimpressed with the décor, and has the unpleasant impression that Charlotte is flirting with him. He's all but decided not to take the offer, when all of a sudden he sees Charlotte's daughter Dolores sunbathing on the piazza. He falls in love at once, feeling that this twelve-year-old **nymphet** is the reincarnation of Annabel, his childhood love. He takes Charlotte's offer and moves in.

Humbert Humbert begins keeping a diary. He writes about Lolita, detailing his fantasies and schemes to possess her. He is as discreet as possible, but manages to nuzzle her or touch her several times. Lolita fights constantly with her mother, who views her as a little brat. Charlotte is always trying to get Lolita out of the picture so that she can have time alone with Humbert Humbert, with whom its clear she wants to begin an affair. Meanwhile, Lolita takes a liking to Humbert.

One day, Humbert is left alone in the house with Lolita. While they sit together singing on the davenport, he uses her legs to masturbate through his dressing gown, later groping at her thigh. Having finally "enjoyed," a **nymphet**—without her noticing, he claims—Humbert is overjoyed.

Charlotte drives Lolita to summer camp, which he calls Camp Q. Before she leaves—Humbert claims—Lolita runs up the stairs to kiss him. Once mother and daughter have left, the maid, Louise, brings Humbert a note. It's a love letter from Charlotte, begging him to either marry her as soon as she returns, or to leave at once. Determined to stay near Lolita, Humbert decides to go through with it. Upon her return, Charlotte becomes Mrs. Humbert.

During a swim at the Hourglass Lake, Charlotte announces to Humbert that she's planning to send Lolita to boarding school as soon as she's back from camp. Humbert is furious. He considers drowning Charlotte, but thinks better of it. He desperately looks for ways to assert himself in the marriage, so that he'll be able to ensure that Lolita stays near him.

One day while he's out getting sleeping pills to drug Charlotte and her daughter to make it possible for him to molest Lolita undetected, Charlotte discovers Humbert Humbert's diary. When he returns home she screams at him, calling him a monster, and runs out into the street with incriminating letters in her hand. There, while Humbert is distracted by a telephone call, she is run over by a car and killed. Thinking quickly, Humbert Humbert arranges things so that he can become Lolita's guardian. He convinces John and Jean Farlow, close family friends, that he's Lolita's real father from a long ago affair with Charlotte.

Humbert picks up Lolita at Camp Q. He tells her that her mother is ill and takes her to **The Enchanted Hunters**, a motel in Briceland. There, he drugs her with sleeping pills and tries to molest her in the bed. He is surprised when she wakes up, and he gives up his molestation attempt. In the morning, Lolita initiates sex with Humbert—according to Humbert, at least. He believes that she was "corrupted," at summer camp. When the two get back on the highway, Lolita begins threatening to call her mother, or the police, and tell them everything. Humbert then reveals her that her mother is dead; orphaned Lolita has nowhere else to go.

Humbert Humbert and Lolita spend the next two years on the road, staying in **motels** and visiting tourist attractions throughout the United States. He creates a frantic, "fun" filled schedule to distract Lolita from any desire she might have to escape. He also threatens her: if she turns him in, she'll end up in some awful foster home. Throughout their journey, Humbert buys Lolita whatever she wants. In California, she starts taking tennis lessons. In the summer of 1948, Humbert Humbert begins having financial and legal worries about staying on the road. He decides to settle with Lolita in Beardsley, an eastern college town where a French friend named Gaston Godin is able to help him secure a job as a lecturer. He enrolls Lolita at the local girls school.

Lolita makes friends and adapts to her new environment. But

the Headmistress of the school, a woman named Pratt, begins to worry that something might be wrong with her home environment. She urges Humbert Humbert to let Lolita go on dates and socialize, as well as participate in the school play: a production of **The Enchanted Hunters** by Clare Quilty. As play rehearsals begin, Humbert's relationship with Lolita deteriorates. He mistrusts her, and worries she has told everything to a friend named Mona Dahl. When Humbert learns Lolita has been missing piano lessons, the two have a screaming fight, and Lolita runs out of the house. He catches up with her at a telephone booth, and her attitude has totally changed: she asks Humbert if they can go on the road again, but requires that she be the one to choose the route.

In May of 1949, Humbert and Lolita set out on another cross-country trip. As they travel, Humbert Humbert becomes concerned: someone who looks like his uncle is following them in a red car, and Lolita seems to be communicating with this man when Humbert isn't paying attention. Humbert becomes more and more anxious, feeling that Lolita is trying to escape from him with their pursuer. Eventually, he convinces himself that he's being too paranoid. In a town called Elphinstone, Lolita falls ill. Humbert Humbert takes her to the local hospital, where she stays for several days. When the time comes to pick her up, Humbert is horrified—the hospital staff informs him that Lolita's uncle picked her up. Humbert realizes that Lolita has escaped with the man who was pursuing them.

Humbert Humbert spends the rest of the summer looking for traces of Lolita and her lover. The man seems to have anticipated his investigation, and has left mocking false names in each of the **motel** registers. Humbert Humbert is impressed with the man's cleverness, and is ultimately unable to track him down. He falls into despair, ultimately starting a two-year relationship with a woman named Rita, who is something of an alcoholic and bum.

In the September of **1952**, Humbert Humbert receives a letter from Lolita. She is married to an engineer named Dick, and needs money so the two of them can move to Alaska for Dick's new job. She doesn't give her exact address, but Humbert Humbert manages to track her down anyway. He brings a gun, meaning to kill her husband, whom he assumes is the man who stole her away from him.

Lolita greets Humbert Humbert at the door to her house. She is older, pregnant, and no longer a nymphet, but he still loves her. When Humbert sees that her husband isn't the same man as her kidnapper, he decides not to kill him. Humbert presses Lolita to reveal the identity of the lover with whom she escaped from him. Reluctantly, she tells him: it was Clare Quilty, a playwright her mother had known, and with whom she'd reconnected at rehearsals for the Beardsley school's production of his play. Lolita fell in love with Quilty and ran off with him, but left him after he wanted her to be in his child pornography films.

Humbert Humbert gives Lolita the money she's asked for, and begs her to run away with him. For the first time, Lolita sees that her molester and "father," really did love her; she's surprised, maybe even touched, but firmly refuses. Heartbroken, Humbert Humbert drives away in tears.

Humbert Humbert returns to Ramsdale to meet with Jack Windmuller, so that he can transfer Humbert's property (formerly Charlotte's) to Lolita. While he's there, he walks by the old house at **342**. He tries to shock and offend everyone in town that he runs in to: Mrs. Chatfield, and the dentist, Ivor Quilty (Clare's uncle).

Humbert leaves Ramsdale in search of Clare Quilty. On his journey, he begins to have a moral awakening: he realizes how terribly he hurt Lolita. He tracks Quilty to a huge, rickety house called Pavor Manor. The door is open in the morning, and he heads inside, with his gun, to look for Quilty. When he finds and threatens him, Quilty is unimpressed: he alternately mocks, ignores, and negotiates with Humbert. The two pedophiles—who turn out to be very similar people—have a long, slow fight involving lots of wrestling and missed shots, a parody of combat in contemporary Westerns and other Hollywood films. Finally, Humbert manages to shoot Quilty several times. The playwright reacts theatrically to every wound: he plays the piano, delivers dramatic lines similar to those in a play, and hops up and down. Finally, he dies. Humbert leaves the house, announcing the murder to Quilty's drunk young friends on the bottom floor—they don't believe him or don't care.

Leaving Pavor Manor, Humbert drives on the wrong side of the highway until he is stopped by the police. He swerves the car to the top of the hill, then waits for arrest.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Humbert Humbert – The narrator of *Lolita*. Humbert is a highly educated, mentally unstable, literarily gifted European man with an uncontrollable desire for young girls, whom he calls "**nymphets**." Humbert Humbert is extraordinarily charming, sarcastic, and seductive to both his readers and the other characters. With his book—which he writes in prison—he wants to immortalize Lolita, and to justify his perverse desires as artistic necessities. By the end of the novel, he realizes the immense pain he has caused Lolita, and repents of what he has done to her. He dies of coronary thrombosis (heart failure) while waiting for his murder trial to begin.

Annabel Leigh – Humbert Humbert's childhood love, and Lolita's predecessor in his imagination. She and Humbert Humbert come close to having sex in a beachside cave, but are interrupted by two men. Not long after, she dies of typhoid before they can consummate their love. Annabel's name and

character come from a poem by Edgar Allan Poe, "Annabel Lee," which is also about a beloved young girl who dies early.

Valeria – Humbert Humbert's first wife. She is a Polish woman in Paris who paints in the Cubist style. Humbert marries her as an outlet for his uncontrollable desires. Though she is not a **nymphet**, she often acts like a little girl, which he finds attractive. Just before they are to leave Paris for the U.S., Valeria leaves Humbert Humbert for Maximovich. Valeria and Maximovich die as test subjects in a humiliating experiment in California.

Charlotte Haze – Lolita's mother and Humbert Humbert's second wife. Charlotte is a lively, pretentious young widow who looks sort of like the movie star Marlene Dieterich. She dreams of moving upwards in cultural sophistication and social class, but never succeeds. She falls madly in love with Humbert Humbert when he comes to live with her as a boarder, mostly because of his European refinements. She has issues with her daughter, whom she sees as a spoiled, bratty pest. Charlotte is a very jealous woman, and this jealousy leads her to discover Humbert Humbert's secret love for Lolita. Charlotte is run over by Frank Beale as she runs across the street to mail letters with information about Humbert's crimes.

Lolita (Dolores Haze) – The novel's title character, and Humbert Humbert's great nymphet love. Lolita begins the novel as a flirtatious, energetic twelve-year-old interested in comic books, crooners, and becoming a movie star. Her kidnapping and rape by Humbert Humbert—whom she reluctantly comes to view as a father—ruins her childhood. In her adolescence, Lolita learns acting and how to play tennis. As she matures, she gets better and better at manipulating Humbert. Eventually, she is able to plan an escape with her lover, the playwright and pornographer Clare Quilty. She leaves Quilty when he asks her to act in his porn films. She marries Dick Schiller, an engineer, and dies in childbirth on Christmas Day, **1952**.

Jean Farlow – A friend of the Hazes, wife of John. On the day Humbert Humbert considers and then refrains from drowning Charlotte at Hourglass Lake, it turns out Jean is watching from the bushes as she paints a nature scene. Just before he leaves for Camp Q, Jean tries to kiss Humbert Humbert. He rejects her. She later dies of cancer.

Clare Quilty – A children's playwright, child pornographer, and the novel's villain. Quilty is Humbert Humbert's double and spiritual twin: a fellow pedophile, writer, and brilliant student of literature. Quilty is not revealed as a major character until the end of the novel, but clues to his identity are strewn throughout the book. Lolita falls in love with Quilty, who helps her to escape from Humbert. But she then abandons Quilty when he asks her to perform in his pornographic films. Quilty himself, it turns out, is impotent. At the end of the novel, Humbert Humbert murders Quilty in his decadent manor house.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Aunt Sybil – Humbert Humbert's stern aunt, who may have had an affair with his father. Sybil helps to raise Humbert at the **Hotel** Mirana.

Monique – A Parisian prostitute. Humbert Humbert purchases her services because although she is a sexually mature young woman, she strikes him as a former nymphet.

Maximovich – A Russian taxi driver in Paris. Maximovich outrages Humbert by stealing his wife, then peeing in his toilet—which he leaves unflushed and with a cigarette floating in the bowl. Maximovich and Valeria die as test subjects in a humiliating experiment in California.

Mr. McCoo – The father of the family with whom Humbert Humbert is supposed to live in Ramsdale. After his house burns down, he sends Humbert to the Haze's place.

Miss Opposite – The old woman who lives across the street from the Hazes in Ramsdale.

Leslie – Miss Opposite's black driver and gardener. Leslie calls Humbert Humbert to tell him Charlotte has been run over. John Farlow claims to have seen Leslie bathing in the nude at dawn, and Charlotte suspects he's having an affair with Louise.

Louise – The Haze's black maid. Louise delivers Charlotte's rambling love letter to Humbert Humbert.

Dr. Ivor Quilty – The Ramsdale dentist, and Clare Quilty's uncle.

Jack Windmuller – A Ramsdale lawyer. Just before he drives off to kill Quilty, Humbert Humbert goes to Windmuller's office to transfer Charlotte's property to Lolita.

Frederick Beale, Jr. – The man who runs over Charlotte Haze. Frederick brings a chart to Humbert Humbert to prove his innocence, and then offers to pay the funeral expenses. He is shocked when Humbert Humbert accepts the offer.

John Farlow – Jean's husband and a friend of the Hazes. John is put in charge of the Haze estate after the death of Charlotte. After the death of Jean, he remarries and moves to South America, and turns over control of the estate to Jack Windmuller.

Shirley Holmes – The director of Camp Q, where Lolita spends the summer of 1947.

Charlie Holmes – Shirley's son, one of the only two boys at Camp Q. Charlie has sex in secret with the girls at the camp, including Lolita. He is the first person with whom she has a sexual experience.

Barbara Burke – Lolita's friend at Camp Q. While she and Charlie Holmes have sex, Lolita stands guard, and then joins in.

Gustave Trapp – Humbert Humbert's Swiss Uncle. Though he

doesn't appear in the novel, Humbert Humbert is reminded of him by the man pursuing his car—which later turns out to have been Clare Quilty.

Vivian Darkbloom – Clare Quilty's female co-writer. Vivian Darkbloom is an anagram for Vladimir Nabokov.

Clarence Choate Clark, Esq. – Humbert Humbert's lawyer during his imprisonment. He does not appear directly in the novel, but Humbert Humbert's instructions for when and how to publish *Lolita* are addressed to him.

John Ray Jr., Ph.D. – A prominent psychologist. John Ray is the fictional author of *Lolita's* foreword.

Harold Haze – Charlotte Haze's deceased husband, and Lolita's father.

Aubrey McFate – A student in Lolita's class in Ramsdale. Although she never appears in the novel, Humbert Humbert uses her name to personify the workings of fate and destiny in his life.

Headmistress Pratt – The headmistress of the Beardsley school for girls. Pratt believes in modern, practical education for girls—preparing them to be good wives and mothers—and is concerned about how Humbert does not allow Lolita to date or socialize in school.

Gaston Godin – A friend of Humbert Humbert's who teaches French at Beardsley College. Godin secures Humbert his job. Though the two play chess two or three times a week, Humbert hates Godin. Humbert suspects Godin of being a pedophile, because he is always surrounded by neighborhood boys.

Rita – An alcoholic young woman from Grainball City. Humbert Humbert spends two years living and traveling with her after Lolita disappears, though he never loves her and, in fact, is a little embarrassed by her.

Mona Dahl – Lolita's best friend and confidante in the town of Beardsley. Mona is smart, sexually experienced, and helps Lolita to lie to Humbert Humbert. She may or may not have helped in arranging Lolita's escape with Quilty.

Mary Lore – A Basque nurse at the hospital in Elphinstone. Mary dislikes Humbert intensely, and may help Lolita to escape with Quilty.

Dick Schiller – Lolita's husband, a mining engineer with hearing problems who receives a very good job offer in Grey Star, Alaska. He knows nothing of Lolita's past.

Mrs. Chatfield – A woman who lived in Ramsdale and whose daughter went to the same camp as Lolita. Humbert Humbert runs into her near the end of the book.

Edusa Gold – Lolita's drama teacher at Beardsley.

Eva Rosen – One of Lolita's friends at Beardsley, whom Humbert Humbert considers to also be a nymphet.

Mary Lore – A nurse at the hospital where Lolita stays when she gets "sick" as part of her plot to run off with Clare Quilty. Humbert Humbert is paranoid that Mary Lore doesn't like him.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

PERVERSITY, OBSESSION, AND ART

There is a relationship between Humbert Humbert's desire for **nymphets** and his artistic gifts. The common link is obsession, which *Lolita* suggests is the connector between sexual perversion and artistic talent. Humbert Humbert's passion for Lolita is not only perverse, but also physically and intellectually obsessive. He is not satisfied with merely molesting Lolita, or even with having sex with her, as more ordinary pedophiles might be. These things, to him, fall short of his ultimate goal, which is to "fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets." Humbert Humbert literally wants to know Lolita "inside out," and he lavishes his attention—physically and with his mind—on every minute detail of her body and manner. This physical obsession with Lolita is microscopic: he takes pleasure in licking a speck from her eye, feeling the tiny downy hairs on her legs, and even in noticing the shine of her hair. His precise physical obsession is analogous to his equally precise artistic obsession, which is to immortalize Lolita in writing. As a pedophile and as an artist, Humbert is obsessed with small details. The linked themes of artistic and sexual obsession are two of the most common in Nabokov's novels, appearing in his novels *Pale Fire* and *Ada, or Ardor*, among others. As a writer, Nabokov believed that obsessive attention to detail was the hallmark of all truly great artists.

SUBURBIA AND AMERICAN CONSUMER CULTURE

Lolita pokes fun at the middle-class consumer culture of the American suburbs in the 1950s. As a savvy European aesthete, Humbert Humbert narrates his journey through his adopted country in a voice dripping with contempt. Many of the places and people in *Lolita* are pure caricatures of American "types." The novel makes fun of everything which was quintessentially "American" in the late 1940s and 1950s, good and bad: Hollywood movies, middle-class consumerism, motels, Freudian psychology, slang, racial stratification, and youth culture.

Humbert Humbert struggles to adapt his elite European sensibilities to his kitschy American environment. Much of the

novel's humor comes from moments when highbrow Humbert must endure American kitsch for the sake of lowbrow Lolita. This satire is particularly apparent in Humbert's marriage to Lolita's mother Charlotte: he is disgusted by her middle-class pretensions—especially her taste in art and her desire to take a cruise—but he plays along in order to stay close to Lolita. Although Humbert Humbert mocks the United States, one might say that the novel, in turn, mocks him. He is a caricatured member of a faded European literary elite, and his outrage is so outrageous that it makes him as ridiculous as the elements of American life he mocks.

EXILE, HOMELESSNESS AND ROAD NARRATIVES

Lolita is in many ways a novel about exile, about characters who have lost their homes. It is important to notice that there is no real "home," in *Lolita*: every place Humbert Humbert and his **nymphet** live is a temporary dwelling. Humbert Humbert's life begins at a hotel, and ends in a prison. In between, he lives in boarding houses, rented apartments, and **motels**—hundreds of them. He doesn't stay anywhere, or with anyone, for more than a few years. Further, he is an exile from his cultural home: a bewildered European in America. Lolita, too, is homeless. In Ramsdale, she is a newcomer who has lost her father and her hometown. With Humbert, she becomes a kidnapped orphan, with no way of putting down roots and living a normal life. *Lolita* is not only a story of exile, but a road narrative: a story of adventure by car which spans the length and breadth of the United States. The themes of exile and the road are part of what make *Lolita* a strong contender for the title of "The Great American Novel." The U.S. has always been a nation of immigrants, adventurers and exiles, and its history has been marked by internal migration and uprooting on a vast scale.

Exile is one of the great themes of Nabokov's novels. Nabokov himself was an exile from his home country, Russia, and he never really settled down permanently after leaving. He died in a hotel in Switzerland. Humbert and Lolita's wanderings were in part inspired by the cross-country butterfly collecting trip Nabokov took while composing the novel.

LIFE AND LITERARY REPRESENTATION

Humbert Humbert is not only a pedophile, but a literary scholar, and *Lolita* is as much—or more—about literature as it is about pedophilia. Often, literature functions as a lens through which Humbert sees and interprets the world around him. He also uses it as a tool to justify himself, and to make sense of his life. He uses Edgar Allan Poe's poem "Annabel Lee," to express his love for his childhood sweetheart. He often uses lines from French poetry to express his love for Lolita. To justify his passion for nymphets, he references the child brides or beloveds of famous literary figures like Petrarch, Dante, and Poe.

Humbert Humbert's perceptions of America and Americans are, likewise, often influenced by his reading. Where he lacks real knowledge of the world, he substitutes ideas from literature. To give one among many examples, his perceptions of the few black characters in *Lolita* are clearly influenced more by his familiarity with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* than by any real experience with black Americans: he imagines the old bellboy at The Enchanted Hunters as "Uncle Tom," and gives Miss Opposite's young driver and gardener Leslie the surname "Tomson."

Humbert's knowledge of literature enriches his imagination and experience of the world, but it often keeps him from seeing the reality in front of his face. The best example is probably his relationship with Lolita. Humbert's fantastic ideas about what **nymphets** are like come from mythology and literature, rather than any real little girls. These fantasies of frolicking nymphets on mystical islands keep him from noticing the thoughts and feelings of the real little girl he has abducted, of the damage he has done to Lolita, whom he supposedly loves.

WOMEN, INNOCENCE, AND MALE FANTASY

The flip side of Humbert Humbert's obsession with **nymphets** is his hatred of sexually mature women. Humbert Humbert treats the adult women of *Lolita* with almost infinite pity and contempt. Often, when angry, he thinks about killing them: he considers or at least imagines murdering Valeria, Charlotte, and Headmistress Pratt at the Beardsley School. Humbert's misogyny reaches its pinnacle in his marriage with Charlotte. Humbert hates Charlotte's body, and is disgusted by her sexual desire for him. He hates everything he perceives as feminine and domestic in his Ramsdale life, and associates women with stupidity, middle-class snobbery, and bad taste. Humbert Humbert's hatred of sexually mature women is related to his complex obsession with innocence. He hates older women because they lack the imagined purity and innocent devilishness of nymphets. He doesn't like women with mature sexual desires, even when those desires are for him.

Instead, he obsesses over the fantastical innocence of nymphets. Even when he learns that Lolita has had sexual experiences before, he continues to think of her as innocent, unconnected with the world of adult sexuality: "She saw the stark act [of sex] merely as part of a youngster's furtive world, unknown to adults." This obsession with Lolita's innocence and naïveté causes Humbert to miss the more complex aspects of her budding personality, something for which he—and just as or more importantly, she—will pay dearly. It allows him to convince himself, for example, that she doesn't notice him molesting her when she is very young. For the plot of Lolita, Humbert's belief

in his nymphet's innocence causes him not to believe in his suspicions when she plans her escape with Clare Quilty. By the end of the novel, though, Humbert Humbert has realized that he himself was the greatest threat to Lolita's innocence, and that he in fact destroyed her innocence in ways that could never be undone.

PATTERNS, MEMORY AND FATE

Throughout *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert seems to believe that his life is following the pre-established pathways of his fate. He tries to fit every event in his life into a mysterious pattern, finding subtle, hard-to-explain connections everywhere. Annabel Leigh's mysterious connection to Lolita is the first instance. Sunglasses appear on the cave floor with Annabel, and then again when Humbert Humbert first sees Lolita. Humbert Humbert also notices that life-changing things tend to happen to him around toilets and telephones: they are places "where [his] destiny [is] liable to catch." Another pattern in Humbert's story is the recurrence of the numbers **42, 52, and 342**, each of which appears many times in the novel. You could go on from there, but the general idea should be clear: behind the confusion of events in *Lolita*, there seems to be a deeper pattern. Humbert Humbert imagines these patterns in his life as the creations of "McFate," a character he has invented to explain his strange destiny. Humbert Humbert's confrontation with Clare Quilty seems like another instance of the workings of fate: earlier in *Lolita*, Humbert finds two posters in Lolita's room, one with his own name written on it, and the other with a picture of Clare Quilty.

It is unclear whether the patterns Humbert notices exist in the real world, or are merely products of his imagination. Humbert Humbert's artistic gifts might be interfering with his perception of reality: his vivid, obsessive imagination creates links between events and perceptions in his memory which may have no "real," relationship. Humbert Humbert often dwells on the difficulties of memory, in particular, memory's contamination by time, desire, and the imagination. Often, this contamination is symbolic. Humbert Humbert remembers the windows of Annabel's home as actual playing cards, because the adults were playing bridge inside while he and Annabel snuck out. The difficulties of memory, and the reality of patterns in fate, are recurring themes in almost all of Nabokov's novels.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE ENCHANTED HUNTERS

The Enchanted Hunters is the name of the motel where Humbert Humbert first rapes Lolita. It is also the name of Quilty's play. The image of the "enchanted hunter," is a symbol for pedophiles like Quilty and Humbert. They are "hunters," because they chase little girls. They are "enchanted," because their desires have warped their imaginations, and prevent them from seeing reality clearly.

NYMPHETS

"Nymphet," is the word Humbert Humbet uses to describe the kind of little girl he finds sexually attractive. Nymphets are supposed to be charming, mischievous, elusive mixtures of tenderness and "eerie vulgarity." When imagining nymphets, Humbert Humbert often uses imagery from classical mythology, folklore, and the natural world. Forests, islands, mists, beaches and trees become symbols of nymphets and nymphetry. For the male equivalents of nymphets, Humbert Humbert uses the word "faunlet." Lolita is the chief Nymphet in Humbert's life and imagination.

MOTELS AND RENTED HOUSES

None of the residences in *Lolita* are permanent. Humbert Humbert is born in a hotel, lives in Ramsdale as a boarder, never really settles down in Beardsley, and spends most of his time in hundreds of motels and roadside inns. The same goes for Lolita, who has already left her childhood home and moved to Ramsdale by the time Humbert Humbert encounters her. Motels in *Lolita* are symbols for the emotional homelessness of the major characters, none of whom have a real family or deep roots anywhere.

SUNGLASSES

When Humbert and Annabel are about to have sex in the beachside cave, the only witness (at first) is "somebody's lost pair of sunglasses." Later, when Humbert Humbert first sees Lolita, she is wearing sunglasses. These doubled sunglasses symbolize the important, almost mystical connection between Annabel and Lolita in Humbert Humbert's imagination.

FREUDIAN SYMBOLS

Throughout *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert is constantly making fun of Freudian Psychoanalysis. He calls Freud "the Viennese medicine man," (274) and points out everything that Freudians might consider to be an important psychic symbol—not because he agrees, but just to make fun. *Lolita* is chock full of Freudian symbols—guns which are compared to male genitals, for example—but they are not meant to serve their usual purposes. They symbolize nothing, and have been placed in the novel just to make fun of Freud.

342, 42 AND 52

The numbers 342, 42 and 52 recur in *Lolita*. 342 Lawn Avenue is the address of the Haze house in Ramsdale. 42 is the number of the room at **The Enchanted Hunters** where Humbert first rapes Lolita. Humbert is 42 at the time of his death. The number 52 also recurs. All the main characters die in 1952. Clare Quilty claims to have written 52 plays. There are 52 cards in a deck, and a deck of cards is often considered a symbol of fate. These numbers have no exact meaning as symbols, but they suggest an almost mystical pattern behind the novel's plot—a common device in Nabokov's novels.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Lolita* published in 1989.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

These are the first lines of the novel proper, in which Humbert Humbert offers an opening remark on his attraction for Lolita. The passage immediately immerses the reader in the narrator's both twisted and seductive psychology.

Rather than offering background information on him or Lolita, Humbert jumps straight into a bizarre mix of love expression and self-admonition. That Lolita is a "light" and "fire" presents her in a traditionally positive imagery of illumination and vigor, yet the tone immediately changes with the observation that that same light is a "sin." Even this line has a third turn, however, when Humbert appends the term "soul." Lolita thus may epitomize his evil actions, but she remains integrated into his deepest identity: Lolita, Nabokov implies, is a sin Humbert will be unwilling to renounce.

It's worth spending some time on the word-level choices Nabokov has made. The heavy alliteration in the lines gives the language a luscious quality: First come the five "l" sounds, subdivided into an "lo," three "li"s, and a final "lo." Then comes the two "s" sounds of "sin" and "soul" again, divided between the vowels of "i" and "o." Nabokov is a true master of such linguistic play. He uses it throughout his work to craft compelling prose, but this sentence seems a bit overdone—and purposefully so. As a parody of his own style, it indicates that Humbert's language may at times become overwrought.

Notice also the incessant repetition of the possession "my": Humbert may start the novel by discussing Lolita, but she is only ever seen in relation to himself. When read closely, these lines teach the reader to be cautious of any description the narrator will offer on Lolita—for his perceptions will always be warped through a similarly possessive viewpoint. She will be seen through the lens of his sin and his soul rather than on her own representative terms.

You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Having given the reader a series of ornate descriptions, Humbert Humbert notes his awareness of his own tendency for flashiness. He observes, more generally, that this is a style characteristic of murderers.

This is an odd comparison, and one must wonder why, in Humbert's opinion, murderers would feel compelled to overuse alliteration and poetic rhythm. The line comes just after Humbert gives a hard-to-follow explanation of his age difference from Lolita, likely implying that "fancy prose" allows one to hide sins or negative events beneath language. By aestheticizing the extensive age difference between Humbert and Lolita, it prevents the reader from judging him as harshly as we otherwise might. The implication is that the reader must be wary of fancy prose and must see Humbert as a linguistic seducer who obscures his sins under floral text.

The admission here is a double one: Humbert is confessing simultaneously to murder and to having written too fancily. In doing so, he equates somewhat oddly his aesthetic and ethical crimes, especially considering that "murderer" is the middle, rather than the emphasis, of the sentence. Homicide functions, in fact, as an excuse here for overwrought

writing. Admission of guilt, then, actually becomes another part of Humbert's linguistic game: By confessing to one lesser sin he is able to subtly insert a confession to a much larger one.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three, and, save for a pocket of warmth in the darkest past, nothing of her subsists within the hollows and dells of memory...

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert has begun to give a brief summary of his personal background. Here, he offers a glancing remark on his mother's death and absence from his life.

The passage's immediate—and presumably intended—effect is to garner the reader's sympathy for Humbert. He presents himself as a lonesome, even traumatized child, who lacked a maternal figure throughout his development. Humbert's mother's extremely early death, in particular, has removed her not only from his life, but also from his "memory," so she cannot even play a moral or inspirational role. That distance is also stressed by the lack of detail available on her death, which is only conveyed in two vague nouns in the parentheses: "(picnic, lighting)." Here we see Humbert's prose winning over the reader's emotional sensibilities in addition to our aesthetic ones.

Yet even in a line intended to garner sympathy, there are disturbing moments. The reference to his mother's "photogenic" nature applies an erotic eye to the woman, and considering that Lolita was described as a fire, the reference to "warmth" should invite similar caution. One need not commit to a fully Freudian reading of the passage in order to observe that there is a perversion to the way Humbert speaks of his mother. Nabokov places us, then, in an ethically compromised position in which we must assess whether a dead mother is indeed a good justification to treat Humbert with more compassion.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as 'nymphets'

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert breaks off while recounting his studies and travels to suddenly give this definition of "nymphets." He will use the term repeatedly throughout the book to refer to the young girls he finds sexually arousing. (It's also worth noting that the word "nymphet" has entered the English language thanks to Nabokov's invention here.)

The language here becomes suddenly distanced and scientific, as if Humbert is presenting an animal species or natural phenomenon. In particular, the use of specific "age limits" and the phrase "propose to designate" grant Humbert a false scholarly authority. As a result, the nymphet seems like an objective fact, when in fact this "type" is a perverted creation of one single narrator.

And it takes a good deal of careful reading to observe the insidious nature of the nymphet. The reference to "bewitched travelers" implies that these men are attracted partially due to an enchantment rather than out of rational choice—thus reducing their moral culpability. That the nymphets are likened in a subtle parenthetical to demons and have a "true nature" implies that their young age obscures a hidden coercive maturity. The term, then, reveals less about the actual "maidens" and more about the psychology of Humbert: He projects onto these girls a precocious sentience in which they are conniving and aware of their seductive power.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ In this wrought-iron world of criss-cross cause and effect, could it be that the hidden throb I stole from them did not affect their future?

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert Humbert chronicles, here, his early experiences encountering and resisting the allure of nymphets. He wonders, in particular, whether his gaze and thoughts may have had some unintended effect on their futures.

To evidence this rather bizarre question, Humbert gives a provocative image of how interconnected the world is: "wrought-iron world of criss-cross cause and effect." Literary metaphors describing interlocked lives are generally poetic, but "wrought-iron" gives this one a harsher sense of imprisonment. "Criss-cross" similarly turns what would be normally a linear "cause and effect" instead into an entangling morass. Humbert implies that the world's logic does not necessarily conform to rational rules, but rather often entraps one in an uncertain series of links. It recalls an earlier reference the "tangle of thorns" from the novel's opening, and also introduces the concept of paranoia and recurring patterns that will prove central to Humbert's character.

One must ask, after all, what the motivation would be for such a paranoid philosophical musing: Why would he desire for the nymphets to have been affected? Nabokov likely means to stress Humbert's egoistic complex, in which he wants to be seen as an all-important determiner of others' lives. If he did have some effect on the nymphets, it would demonstrate that his life is not simply constituted of passive perception, but can also inform the actions of those around him. Similarly, it would grant him an important *role* in the nymphet's lives, so this rumination becomes a way for him to be psychologically closer to them.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Quotes

Quine the Swine. Guilty of killing Quilty. Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with!

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert Humbert makes this exclamation when he finds a book in the prison library that includes an entry on Clare Quilty next to one on Dolores Quine—who bears the same name as Lolita (Dolores). His paranoid mind latches onto this coincidence and he laments the way he has been entrapped.

In response to this sense of paralysis, Humbert alludes to language as his only recourse for self-empowerment. Physically imprisoned, he is on trial for both a real jury and the jury of the reader—and thus has only his deceptive, florid prose to use as defenses and as objects of play. The sing-song rhymes of the first two sentences serve this exact function: Humbert cannot actually exonerate himself or change his circumstances, but he can compare "Quine" (who bears Lolita's name) to "Swine" and "Quilty" to being "Guilty." The sentence thus serves to both describe and enact how Humbert is restricted to games of language.

That Humbert addresses this mournful line to Lolita puts into parallel the way he wishes to play with her and his inability to do so. Thus while the line might seem to disempower Humbert, it also reiterates the sexual and seductive role of Humbert's writing: his exuberant use of language becomes a way to recreate his experiences with Lolita. Furthermore, the desperate, emotional note that creeps into the line's final exclamation is surprisingly tragic—underneath all the twisted obsession and wordplay, there is also an emotional heart to the character of Humbert Humbert.

Part 1, Chapter 13 Quotes

Lolita had been safely solipsized.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert delivers this pithy pronouncement during his first sexual experience with Lolita. He describes the encounter with highly abstract language that distracts the reader from visualizing the scene, while also pronouncing with pleasure his victory.

The line employs a shocking, albeit brilliant, pun: Solipsism is the philosophical belief that nothing exists, or can be proved to exist, outside of the self. So to solipsize someone would

mean to view them as only a fictional projection of your own mind. It is a way to deny the external reality of other people and to bestow on them the significance that you so desire. Indeed, this is characteristic of how Humbert interacts with Lolita, always veiling her in metaphors and romantic tales. To do so "safely" implies less the actual security of Lolita herself and more the way Humbert has insulated himself from his own and the reader's judgmental eyes.

The pun holds a darker side, however, for the way it rhymes and recalls "sodomized," a term that comes from the Biblical tale of Sodom and that has since been applied generally to sexual actions deemed perverse or culturally inappropriate. Nabokov's linkage of sodomy and solipsism thus shows the high ethical stakes of accepting Humbert's language and theoretical pronouncements. To his eyes, Lolita may well be just a confluence of his internal desires, but the reader is being taught to note how this may obscure the actual human stakes of his sexual perversities.

❝ ...and my moaning mouth, gentlemen of the jury, almost reached her bare neck, while I crushed out against her left buttock the last throb of the longest ecstasy man or monster had ever known.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

At the climax of his sexual encounter, Humbert makes this striking appeal to the reader. He both incriminates himself and believes that the splendor of his language and sentiment will somehow serve to exonerate his actions.

In a sense, this is not an unexpected choice. Humbert began the section by explicitly calling attention to the readers as similar "gentlemen of the jury," and he often uses the phrase to cast us as arbiters on the morality of the narrative. Yet whereas his tone during such appeals is generally cautious and controlled, here he seems to have lost himself in the erotic energy of the events being described. Presumably, the "jury" will not find his pedophiliac descriptions redeeming. And, indeed, Humbert proves to be conscious of how horrific his action are: His "ecstasy" belongs to "man or monster," which obscures which one of the two he is. Yet Humbert's candid tone seems to imply that he does not particularly care, for it is not the moral designation of being a man over a monster that he seeks, but rather the superlative of "longest ecstasy." This description implies that he believes the aesthetic uniqueness of the experience will triumph over any judicial or moral system.

Part 1, Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ I had stolen the honey of a spasm without impairing the morals of a minor. Absolutely no harm done. The conjurer had poured milk, molasses, foaming champagne into a young lady's new white purse; and lo, the purse was intact.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

After finishing describing his perverse sexual encounter, Humbert reflects on how his action did not in fact maltreat Lolita. To justify this belief, he argues that the experience took place primarily within his own mind and with an aesthetic image of Lolita—and adds that she maintains her virginity.

As usual for Humbert, however, the main point is hidden beneath a thick layer of fancy images. Here, they are all luxurious foods: his orgasm is "honey," while his sex becomes "milk, molasses, and foaming champagne." He thus presents perversion in metaphors that, if literal foods, would be desired by a young girl (and also echo the physical results of his masturbation)—thus implying that Lolita has enjoyed, or at least been untroubled by, the experience. This, presumably, is why he feels that her "morals" have not been impaired and "no harm" has been done.

Yet Humbert's point is predicated on the idea that a purse that is "intact" has not experienced any negative consequences. That is to say, he believes that if Lolita has not changed externally or physiologically, that his actions had no adverse effect. In doing so, Humbert explicitly ignores her psychology and denies her interior experience—something that is particularly noticeable since he constantly describes the richness of his own psychology. Nabokov cautions the reader from developing such harsh divisions of what is internally and externally valid for others, asking us to be skeptical of how much Humbert values his aesthetic life while denying how others may experience the world.

Part 1, Chapter 18 Quotes

But I am no poet. I am only a very conscientious recorder.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert makes this pronouncement after telling Lolita that he will marry her mother and realizing how quickly she has forgotten their encounter. He notes that a poet might use an image—an orange blossom hardly withering on the grave—to express how quickly she will return to his grasp, but then says he is no poet, but only a recorder.

This line breaks with Humbert's previous self-presentation as a linguistic enchanter. Before, he had described his prose as florid and full of poetic rhythm and language. Yet here, he places just such an image in quotation marks and brackets it off as what a poet would say. Then he explicitly distances himself from such a role, even though he has been playing it throughout the novel thus far. We can take the expression as an attempt to claim narrative objectivity, and to respond to the reader's growing anxiety that Humbert Humbert may be an unreliable narrator. By casting himself as "a very conscious recorder," he claims that the text is a faithful copy of the events as they occurred—and that he takes great pains to ensure this spirit of truthfulness.

Yet this sentence itself is part of Humbert Humbert's poetic and rhetorical game: By using an image and then rejecting it, he both benefits from the aesthetic effect and from the narrative authority gained with a disdainful look at the poet. Nabokov establishes, then, a deviously split personality in Humbert Humbert's narrative style, in which he linguistically seduces us, while constantly denying that very seduction.

Part 1, Chapter 20 Quotes

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the majority of sex offenders that hanker for some throbbing, sweet-moaning, physical but not necessarily coital, relation with a girl-child, are innocuous, inadequate, passive, timid strangers who merely ask the community to allow them to pursue their practically harmless, so-called aberrant behavior, their little hot wet private acts of sexual deviation without the police and society cracking down on them.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87-88

Explanation and Analysis

While swimming at hourglass lake, Humbert contemplates drowning Charlotte in order to have freer access to Lolita. When he decides against the action, he uses it in an appeal to the reader-jury. He asks that we consider sex offenders not to be diabolical murderers or radical sinners but rather simple, timid people.

Humbert steps out of his poetic language, here, to adopt a scientific register of speech. His reference to "the majority of sex offenders" presents him as a well-read expert who has amassed quantities of data that can shed light on his specific case. Next, he minimizes the intensity of the pedophilia, noting that it does not necessarily require a "coital" relation. Just as he interpreted his first sexual experience with Lolita to have had no real effect on her, he contends that a "throbbing, sweet-moaning" experience can be personal and solipsistic. As a result, these sexual deviants are deemed "innocuous, inadequate, passive, timid": all adjectives that downplay their social power and thus their presumed effect on the object of their desire.

The main point of the passage is cleverly hidden beneath the tower of adjectives, but it essentially calls for his case to be considered a private and personal matter rather than something that is attended to by "the police and society"—who of course are represented by the reader as jury (and the actual jury who will soon be judging Humbert's case). This passage reiterates the way Humbert has constructed his reality as sealed off from social forces, and, indeed, that he has used this separation as a way to theorize and justify the actions of sexual deviants as innocuous.

Part 1, Chapter 33 Quotes

In the gay town of Lepingville I bought her four books of comics, a box of candy, a box of sanitary pads, two cokes, a manicure set, a travel clock with a luminous dial, a ring with a real topaz, a tennis racket, roller skates with high white shoes, a portable radio set, chewing gum, a transparent raincoat, sunglasses, some more garments—swooners, shorts, all kinds of summer frocks. At the hotel we had separate rooms, but in the middle of the night she came sobbing into mine, and we made it up very gently. You see, she had absolutely nowhere else to go.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 141-142

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert describes the events that transpire just after he informs Lolita of her mothers' death. To compensate, he buys Lolita a litany of presents and then later observes how their mutual exile has brought them closer together—just as he had wished.

Nabokov is riffing, here, on a specific type of American consumerism. As a European, Humbert would have not grown up with such an obsessive relationship with purchasing objects, but he sees them as a way to seduce and sedate Lolita. He presumes she can be placated with toys and sweets—and especially by clothing. We can read this as both a personal strategy of Humbert's and also a critique of the American belief that owning things provides a source of emotional significance and meaning. Lolita has just lost her mother, and yet the only response Humbert offers are purchased products and sexual manipulation. As an immigrant, Nabokov held an excellent critical eye for many such American practices, and this novel, in particular, takes aim at the magazine and film consumer industries Nabokov found distasteful.

The final lines in this passage shift the tone, however, from superficial to emotional and predatory. Humbert reflects with delight how entrapped Lolita has become in his game, for, without a mother, she can turn to no one except him. These lines should be recalled at other moments when Lolita seems complicit or even empowered in Humbert's games, for her actions only ever exist on top of this fundamental state of desperation—even if the desperation is covered by a consumerist veneer.

Part 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Mentally, I found her to be a disgustingly conventional little girl. Sweet hot jazz, square dancing, gooey fudge sundaes, musicals, movie magazines and so forth—these were the obvious items in her list of beloved things.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

As Part 2 begins, Humbert zooms the narration out and talks in broad strokes about the experience of traveling as an exile with Lolita. Here, he complains about her weak intellectual capacities and her preference for superficial, cliched experiences.

Humbert's complaints reveal a remarkable shift in his attitudes toward Lolita. Whereas previously she was presented only in idealistic terms that took her every action as beautiful and divine, here she becomes far more human. That Humbert's main point of contention is with her "mentally" points to how he has previously only valued and considered her physically. Seeing her only as an external object had allowed him to aestheticize her, but once he must reconcile with her actual thoughts and behaviors, Humbert must see her as a full internal being.

And what he finds there is, of course, "a disgustingly conventional little girl"—for she is after all a young girl, and a young American girl at that. Humbert complains of her preference for dances, sundaes, and other banalities, but these are standard fare for someone of her age. Indeed, the only shocking thing in "her list of beloved things" is that Humbert finds them shocking at all. This passage offers the first hint of how the pragmatic reality of caring for Lolita will become a burden that interrupts Humbert's fantasies.

❝ If some café sign proclaimed Icecold Drinks, she was automatically stirred, although all drinks everywhere were ice-cold. She it was to whom ads were dedicated: the ideal consumer, the subject and object of every foul poster.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert continues to criticize the superficiality of Lolita's preferences and actions. He casts her, here, as a quintessential American capitalist consumer.

His first complaint refers to Lolita's insatiability and fickle memory. She cannot recall, each time she sees a sign for cold drinks, that they are available easily and everywhere—not just at that one specific place. That is to say, she cannot connect other drink experiences to the

current one and to therefore make a rational judgment on the relative value of this café. This criticism is highly ironic, of course, for it is precisely that forgetful and innocent mindset that allows Lolita to be so easily seduced by Humbert. His tactics work on her just like an advertising campaign, and Humbert himself directly engages in capitalistic consumption by constantly purchasing gifts to subdue Lolita. Thus he is driving the exact process he dislikes.

The passage also offers a more general comment on American culture when it references "the ideal consumer." Nabokov appears to belittle the forgetful obsession with ice cream and ice drinks as not just a character flaw of Lolita but indeed one of Americans at large. It's worth noting that we would expect consumers to just be the "object" of advertising—that is to say, the viewer who desires what is being portrayed. But Lolita is also the "subject" of the advertisement or the thing being portrayed. Thus she is presented as both the (sexual) commodity and the one consuming the commodities, both an empowered purchaser and a helpless object.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ My only grudge against nature was that I could not turn my Lolita inside out and apply voracious lips to her young matrix, her unknown heart, her nacreous liver, the sea-grapes of her lungs, her comely twin kidneys.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

As Humbert continues to recount his and Lolita's travels across America, he oscillates between a loving and disparaging tone. Here, he switches into the former to reiterate his obsession with Lolita and to describe a passion so consuming that he wishes to connect with her full person—both inside and out.

This fascination with Lolita's interior seems at odds with Humbert's earlier obsession with her external appearance. Previously, he was frustrated with her "mentally" and preferred to see her as a projection of his own fantasies rather than an actual human. Here he wants to understand and come into contact with that interior—yet he never makes a reference to her mind or emotions. Rather, he seeks organs that regulate breathing and bodily functions, thus shifting the imagery to consumption. After all, "voracious lips" implies not a careful touch, but rather the act of greedily eating. And the organs are coated in his usual batch of aestheticizing adjectives. Nabokov thus displays how Humbert's attempts to express interest in other parts of Lolita eventually undermine themselves: Even when he presumes to be more caring, his actual language only reiterates sexual greed and twisted violence.

❝ We had been everywhere. We had really seen nothing. And I catch myself thinking today that our long journey had only defiled with a sinuous trail of slime the lovely, trustful, dreamy, enormous country that by then, in retrospect, was no more to us than a collection of dog-eared maps, ruined tour books, old tires, and her sobs in the night—every night, every night—the moment I feigned sleep.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

As he continues to recount his travels with Lolita, Humbert becomes increasingly desperate. He lapses more and more out of a poetic tone, or even a critical one, and instead reflects on the actual horror of what is transpiring.

This moment of seeming honesty begins with an expression of exhaustion and despondency. Though they have traveled all over America, they "had really seen nothing," which points to how Humbert has focused solely on Lolita and his own paranoia above all else. They have followed the narrative conventions of an American road trip, in which one goes in search of new experiences with different people and cultures, but instead Humbert's gaze has remained fixedly solipsistic and inward, only moving to a new place to best position his relationship with Lolita. As a result, the journey seems suddenly drained of meaning. What was before a fantasy land is instead just the detritus of "dog-eared maps, ruined tour books, old tires"—all physical reminders of the sad, desperate road-trip.

He contrasts these desolate images with "the lovely, trustful, dreamy, enormous country"—a remarkably positive take on America considering how harsh the European Humbert has been on the nation before. That their journey

has "defiled" America implies that the country was pristine to begin with, and casts their crimes as having a significant negative effect on the space. This is a notable shift from his earlier contention that pedophiles do no public harm, for here the very geography of America has been marked by their sinful travels. Nabokov positions Humbert, then, as increasingly aware of his moral complicity, not because he has necessarily come to a full self-accusation, but simply because the glamor of the travel has faded. In a sense, he can no longer seduce himself.

Furthermore, Humbert's brief admission that Lolita sobs every night when he himself is asleep is especially tragic and horrifying. It hints at other kinds of trauma that Humbert may have glossed over or repressed in his "confession," and is a stark reminder of the very real psychological horror Lolita is enduring at this time—something not even Humbert himself can deny any longer.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ O Reader! Laugh not, as you imagine me, on the very rack of joy noisily emitting dimes and quarters, and great big silver dollars like some sonorous, jingly and wholly demented machine vomiting riches; and in the margin of that leaping epilepsy she would firmly clutch a handful of coins in her little fist, which, anyway, I used to pry open afterwards unless she gave me the slip, scrambling away to hide her loot.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

As Lolita becomes more accustomed to Humbert's games, she develops an increased sense of agency in their relationship. She begins to demand money and objects, causing Humbert to reflect on his newly subordinate role as a pimp-like producer of currency.

Humbert's image here is both grotesque and comical. He transforms himself into a "machine" that is "emitting" money in an automatized fashion, but the contrasting use of the verb "vomiting" adds to the mechanical a sense of human filth. In contrast to the earlier poetic language used to describe his sexual encounters, this one becomes sickly with "leaping epilepsy," demonstrating that Humbert has begun to see his behavior as deviant.

Furthermore, the passage takes the earlier criticisms of American consumer culture and places them directly in the sexual moments Humbert previously found to be sacred. The image of the machine—and of Lolita holding the coins—directly presents their interaction like that of a prostitute and client. It makes explicit that he is paying for sex and presents Lolita as an active and manipulative agent in that encounter. Though we should be by now quite skeptical whenever Humbert presents Lolita as more aware that she may be, the passage makes clear that Humbert feels himself to have lost his prior complete control.

Part 2, Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ I felt instinctively that toilets—as also telephones—happened to be, for reasons unfathomable, the points where my destiny was liable to catch.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 211

Explanation and Analysis

As Humbert and Lolita depart Beardsley, Lolita makes a call at a gas station while ostensibly going to the toilet. This event causes Humbert to reiterate how often telephones and toilets have appeared at important junctures in his life.

This observation is characteristic of how Humbert functions as a self-aware narrator of his own story. He is not only conveying the events to the reader as they occur, but also annotating which symbols are important. He thus directs the reader's attention to certain images and clues to which we should be attentive. Nabokov is pointing out how certain personalities, like that of Humbert, have a tendency to read more into the symbolism of their lives—and thus to believe that their actions are preordained by destiny, or bear a special kind of aesthetic symmetry. This practice becomes a way for Humbert to retrospectively make sense of the events that have transpired.

But the fact that his paranoid personality has turned him into an interpreter of his own story also makes a broader claim on how all people, not just those who are deeply paranoid, look for consistent images that orient their destiny and the course of their life. The device also puts the reader in an uncomfortably similar situation as Humbert, for it stresses how analysis is being engaged in by both the jury and the accused.

Part 2, Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ We must remember that a pistol is the Freudian symbol of the Ur-father's central forelimb.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

Now at the Chestnut Court motel, Humbert has become increasingly paranoid and fearful that his escape with Lolita will fail. To increase his confidence, he consults his gun, which prompts this mockery of psychoanalysis.

Nabokov was an open critic of Sigmund Freud's theories, both in his fiction and in real life—and he found the methodology and the reading practices it invited insufferable. This line parodies the way Freudian critics will interpret any image as phallic: The "pistol" would normally be seen as an analog for the male genitals, due to its phallic shape and role as an assertion of violence and strength—and Humbert mocks this sexual reference by describing it as the "Ur-father's central forelimb"—thus stressing how ridiculous such one-to-one comparisons can be. Whereas the gun was intended to offer personal security, instead it just plays a ridiculous symbolic function. Nabokov seems to imply that the paranoid interpretation invited by psychoanalysis—one both performed and burlesqued by Humbert—prevents us from actually considering the reality of objects. And this idea is critical to the way that Humbert's flagrant use of symbolism has often distracted the reader from seeing the actual way he has violated Lolita.

Part 2, Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ Who can say what heartbreaks are caused in a dog by our discontinuing a romp?" (238)

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert, by now, is in the depth throes of anxiety and jealousy, and he has started to make sense of the actions of other humans and animals in a very warped way. Here, he offers a confusing question on a terrier with which Lolita has stopped playing.

The idea that a dog would experience "heartbreaks" (not just one but several!) from a child is on one level poignant, but on another rather far-fetched. So Humbert seems to be mapping his own frustrations with Lolita onto the behavior of the dog. This terrier, then, becomes a symbol of his own repeated "heartbreaks" every time Lolita halts their interaction. "A romp," after all, can mean either lighthearted childhood play or sexual activity, and this is the precise way that Lolita and Humbert's perverse romances have played out: Humbert wishes to cast them as cheerful and meaningless by cloaking them in the language of childhood and of play. Yet the image of the dog also implies a sharp shift in the power dynamics between the two characters, for it presents Lolita as now the owner of Humbert. Nabokov shows, then, how Humbert's ability to experience the world through images and romantic tropes can turn against him. It causes him to find even in the simplest interactions a form of personal desperation.

Part 2, Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ We all admire the spangled acrobat with classical grace meticulously walking his tight rope in the talcum light; but how much rarer art there is in the sagging rope expert wearing scarecrow clothes and impersonating a grotesque drunk! *I* should know."

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

After Quilty has stolen Lolita, he leaves a series of perplexing and teasing clues to his identity at the motels through which Humbert pursues him. Here, Humbert reflects on the seductive artistry of Quilty's game, praising the flirtatious way he might risk falling into Humbert's grasp.

To make this comparison, Humber uses the metaphor of the "acrobat," thus defining their game of pursuit as a form of artistry but also as a circus performance. Yet he differentiates the acrobatics in the novel from a traditional form with "classical grace" that would be softened with "talcum light," for the poise of this behavior is calculated and technical. Quilty's performance is extolled as a "rarer art"

precisely for its sloppiness: The rope is "sagging" rather than taught, and the acrobat wears "scarecrow clothes"—a gaudy and cumbersome attire—rather than the appropriate leotard. Yet despite appearing inhibited, he is still an "expert" and only "impersonating"—rather than himself being—drunk.

Humbert thus expresses an appreciation for what is haphazard over what is pristine—because it gives one the temptation that the acrobat will fall. Once more, he likens himself to Quilty with the phrase "I should know," indicating that Humbert has seen his own performances as those of a "sagging rope expert": He had repeatedly flirted with danger, often making irrational decisions but being saved by fate at the last moment. This passage, then, could be taken in two ways: either as proof of Humbert's descent in mania, in which he sees normal details of life as indicators of a paranoid circus performance; or as an indication that Humbert's various falls and slips—both linguistic and ethical—are all part of a brilliant, acrobatic "rarer art."

Part 2, Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ It is not the artistic aptitudes that are secondary sexual characters as some shams and shamans have said; it is the other way around: sex is but the ancilla of art."

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert grows increasingly despondent over Lolita's absence and begins to conflate her with other women in his life. In response, he describes their experiences as a route to the creation of art.

Here, Humbert rejects what he sees as a common hierarchy between sex and art in which "shams and shamans" (probably another mocking reference to Freud and psychoanalysis) see the aesthetic as secondary to the purely sexual. Humbert he does not fully deny the value of sex, but rather considers it most important as a means to art. (If this seems to contradict the reality of Humbert's own life, it is probably because it's another example of him aestheticizing and beautifying his own sexual obsessions and sordid acts.)

An ancilla is a device used to obtain or master something difficult, so "the ancilla of art" would be something that helps someone create art. To call sex "but the ancilla" is to render it solely a means to aesthetic ends rather than a goal in an of itself. Humbert is thus building on his previous defense for his actions under the idea that his Lolita is an aesthetic construction. After all, she has served as the ancilla to the very narrative that we are reading. This line demands a revisiting of Humbert's earlier language when describing his sexual encounters, which was itself highly aesthetic and metaphorical. Here, he implies that the metaphors were not used to obscure the sex, but rather that the sex served as the inspiration for the language. And by valorizing its gorgeous language and intricate structure, we seem to be affirming Humbert's exact point.

Part 2, Chapter 29 Quotes

❝ I could not kill *her*, of course, as some have thought. You see, I loved her. It was love at first sight, at last sight, at ever and ever sight.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 270

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert has finally been able to track down Lolita and her husband, and he arrives with murderous intentions. But when he sees them in person he cannot bring himself to go through with the act, and he reflects once more on his love.

He pre-empts, here, reader's expectations with the phrase "as some have thought." Up to this point, the novel has seemed to follow the tropes of a detective and revenge narrative, but it reaches here only an anti-climax as opposed to the expected conclusion. Even at this later moment in the text, Humbert remains aware of his readership as a jury—and is still narrativizing his life, even as the expected narrative has fallen through.

Humbert's profession of eternal love for Lolita contrasts rather starkly with the actual type of affection in the scene. Humbert's previous romantic descriptions and accompanying metaphorical language have faded away, and he sees the older Lolita in much more realistic terms. Yet, read closely, the construction of "at first sight, at last sight, at ever and ever sight" might offer an explanation: By equating "first" and "last," Humbert implies that it is the original image of Lolita as nymphet that still dictates his image of her. In cultivating that myth and turning it into this

novel, he has immortalized her as "ever and ever sight." Thus while the conventions of genre fiction may have failed and his view of her is reduced to banal realism, he has been able to, through the text, create a more permanent image.

Part 2, Chapter 35 Quotes

❝ We rolled all over the floor, in each other's arms, like two huge helpless children. He was naked and goatish under his robe, and I felt suffocated as he rolled over me. I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Clare Quilty

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 299

Explanation and Analysis

Humbert has finally discovered Quilty, and he plans to murder him for kidnapping Lolita. After attempting and failing to shoot him several times, Humbert begins to fight him fist-to-fist.

This description of the fight stresses how Humbert and Quilty are similar and interchangeable, even indistinguishable. First, Humbert describes how both are rolling over the floor, but he maintains the distinction between them as "two" oversized children. (The infantile references and latent homoeroticism are worth mentioning briefly.) But as the sentence continues, the divisions between subject and object break down. "he rolled over me" and "I rolled over him" are phrased in perfectly opposite terms. Then "We rolled over me" indicates that Humbert has merged his identity with that of Quilty; "They rolled over him" steps outside of Humbert as narrator to refer to both himself and Quilty as "they." And "we rolled over us" unifies them entirely as both the subject and object of the fight.

The brilliant line-by-line development underscores how Humbert and Quilty have been playing similar roles throughout the novel (essentially acting as "doubles" or "doppelgängers," a common theme in Russian literature and Nabokov's work). They are both sexual perverts, both artists in a sense, and both paranoiacs—and this is what has made them so able to intuit the other's actions at every moment. In their final battle, they fuse together, as if whoever succeeds will also have killed himself. That Humbert was brought down by a close analog to himself indicates, also, his own original culpability—for it seems to position the blame back onto him even as their identities intermingle.

Part 2, Chapter 36 Quotes

❝ 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.

Related Characters: Humbert Humbert (speaker), Lolita (Dolores Haze)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 309

Explanation and Analysis

As the novel draws to a close, Humbert reflects again on all the wrong he has done to Lolita and wonders whether anything can be done to address his crimes. He ends his text with the promise of immortality, which the two will hold within the text, as a partial redemption.

Humbert returns, here, to his more floral way of writing and to his philosophical musings on art. He references a variety of artistic tropes: "Aurochs" are a now-extinct cattle species that were depicted in cavemen paintings, while "angels" are traditional religious icons—both of which survived due to "durable pigments." To connect the two is to bring the most primitive and most religious art into a single sentence, just as he crosses genres from painting to writing with the reference of "prophetic sonnets." What unites all forms of art, Humbert, explains is how they function as a "refuge" by giving their subjects "immortality."

The text thus becomes a way to not only repent for what Humbert has done to Lolita, but also an attempt to offer her memory a small reprieve. Though he may not be able to grant her an actual childhood free of perverse pain, he can retrace their history together and crystallize it forever into this novel. Here, then, we see the moral impetus Humbert feels to write, and we also gain insight into why he found it necessary to write in such fancy prose. Beyond just a seduction mechanism, that style allowed him to rewrite his memory of Lolita into the most beautiful setting possible. Yet we must always remain skeptical readers to the end—and note that Humbert's last lines smack of a nostalgia for his sexual experiences with Lolita. True, he may be offering her a bit of redemption, and a tragic declaration of devotion, but only in so far as he continues to speak for her and preserve his own nymphet obsessions for eternity.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

FOREWORD

The foreword to "Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male," is written by the fictional **psychologist** John Ray Jr., Ph.D., a specialist in perversions and abnormal states of mind. It frames the remainder of the novel as a manuscript sent in by a criminal. Ray informs his readers that this criminal died on November 16th, **1952**, while in "legal captivity,"—just days before his trial was scheduled to begin. Faithful to the author's instructions, Ray does not name him or specify his crime, referring to him instead by his chosen pseudonym: Humbert Humbert. He explains that every name in the manuscript has been changed—a few by him, most by Humbert—except for the name of Lolita, who is too important to the story. Ray directs readers curious about the "'real,' people beyond the 'true,' story," to scan their newspapers from September and October, 1952. He explains that he has changed almost nothing that he received. He gives a brief account of what several characters have been up to since the end of the enclosed story, including Mona Dahl, the writer Vivian Darkbloom, and "Mrs. Richard F. Schiller," who has recently died in childbirth.

This foreword frames the rest of the novel as a medical document, rather than a creative work. John Ray Jr. lists his sources, specifies dates, and provides documentary information about the 'real' story not told in the text which follows. The irony here is that the foreword is just as fictional as the rest of the novel. It is not really the foreword to a medical case history, but a parody of scientific style. All the made-up evidence makes it feel "real," while we know it is not. The idea that a particular style of writing can influence whether or what we are reading feels "true," or "realistic," will remain important throughout Lolita. Vivian Darkbloom is an anagram for Vladimir Nabokov. By hiding his name in the fake foreword, the author slyly reminds his readers to be suspicious of writing (like the foreword) which pretends to represent "real life," with complete accuracy: every piece of writing comes from someone with an individual perspective and agenda. Before the novel even starts, we are told that its protagonists are both dead: "Mrs. Richard F. Schiller," is Lolita.

Ray defends the enclosed manuscript against anticipated objections. Though certain scenes in the novel can be considered "aphrodisiac," he points out that it uses no obscene language. He mocks the "paradoxical prudes," who are disgusted by erotic scenes, yet hypocritical enough to accept the "lavish array," of obscene words in mainstream novels. He cites the 1933 Supreme Court decision in *United States v. One Book Called Ulysses* as precedent for the idea that erotic writing which serves an artistic purpose is not pornography.

Here, "John Ray Jr." seems to express the opinions of the author, who knew that Lolita's subject matter would cause a scandal. It did: the book was banned in several countries. Ray makes two arguments in the book's favor: first, that true works of art redeem any kind of content; second, that mainstream American culture is already filled with obscene material. We should be suspicious of these arguments. They are almost the same as the arguments Humbert uses to justify his rape of Lolita: that his lust is artistically motivated, or that Lolita was sexually "corrupted," by her culture before Humbert found her.

Anticipating "the learned," who might object that Humbert Humbert's pedophilia is not a unique (and thus scientifically interesting) case, Ray makes an argument for the literary merit of the book. Alternating between aesthetic praise and moral condemnation, he attempts to describe the personality and style of the author. Ray concludes his foreword by claiming that the text of *Lolita* is important in three capacities: as a case history, as a literary work, and most importantly, as an ethical guide: for parents who should be more vigilant in caring for their children. The book is a "general lesson," which "warn[s] us of dangerous trends."

John Ray's gushing praise for the narrator's personality is meant to put us "on guard," as readers: it's a little strange to hear psychologist praise a pedophile. If Humbert has so easily charmed John Ray, why not us as well? The end of John Ray's foreword parodies the moralistic attitude toward literature that the author despised. Nabokov is mocking those who believe literature is supposed to provide "general lessons," and function as a moral guide. The joke becomes clear after reading the rest of the novel. It's difficult to imagine Lolita's improbable, wholly unique experience as a guide to any general "trend."

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

Humbert Humbert begins his manuscript by repeating the name Lolita in various ways, lingering on the mouth sensations associated with saying it. He mentions a predecessor to Lolita, a girl he loved "in a princedom by the sea." He writes as though speaking in front of an audience, referring to his readers as "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury."

The "princedom by the sea," is an allusion to Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee," a narrative poem describing a romance between two children which ends in the death of the girl. The poem hints at the novel's tragic conclusion. The choice of Poe is significant; he married his cousin when she was a child. Humbert's decision to refer to his readers as members of a "jury," reminds us that the writer is in jail, and also that his narrative is an attempt to justify himself to the world: another indication we should be on our guard.

PART 1, CHAPTER 2

Humbert Humbert explains his background and upbringing. His heritage includes a "salad of racial genes," from all over Europe; he is the son of an English woman and a man of mixed Swiss, French, Austrian and German descent. Humbert was born in Paris in 1910, and spent his childhood at the **Hotel Mirana** on the French Riviera, a resort owned by his father. His mother died when he was three years old, but he was doted on by everyone in the "private universe," of the hotel: his father's lady-friends, tourists, and the hotel help. He lived a charmed life filled with physical activity, illustrated books, and the gentle sternness of his Aunt Sybil. He is careful to mention that he had no abnormal sexual experiences before the age of thirteen: his childhood knowledge of sex was limited to looking at nude drawings and discussing puberty with a friend.

For most of Lolita, Humbert is an exile, a homeless stranger moving from hotel to hotel in a foreign land. Here, we can see that in some ways Humbert was born into "exile": he grew up in a hotel, motherless and without a definitive national identity. Humbert is careful to establish his sexual "innocence," in childhood: he wants to show he was psychologically normal before he was seduced by nymphets.

PART 1, CHAPTER 3

At thirteen, Humbert Humbert has his first romance. The girl is Annabel, the daughter of a family friend. He complains that he can no longer visualize her in full detail, since the singular image of Lolita has fully replaced her in his mind. Nevertheless, he tries to describe the story of his brief romance. Annabel and young Humbert fall madly in love with one another, but find it impossible to get away from adults. They touch each other in secret as often as possible, but cannot fully satisfy their budding desires. Finally, they manage to escape to a cave on the beach, with nothing in it but a pair of **sunglasses**. They are about to have sex, but are discovered by two older men, who mock them. Humbert abruptly ends this scene to tell his readers that Annabel died of typhoid four months later.

The sunglasses in this scene reappear when Humbert first sees Lolita: he establishes an almost mystical link between the two girls. Because he cannot visualize Annabel, Humbert is in some sense "exiled," from his earliest memories; a feeling which parallels his separation from Lolita during the time of his writing. Humbert is always scheming to be alone with Annabel. The erotic frustration which comes from his inability to do so recurs throughout the novel. Annabel Leigh's sudden death from typhoid is a parody of Edgar Allan Poe's stories and poems, in which female characters often die from sickness.

PART 1, CHAPTER 4

Humbert Humbert asks himself what connection there might be between his young romance with Annabel and his adult obsession with Lolita. Were these normal pubescent feelings, or did his perverse sexual tastes begin then? He concludes that his passion for Lolita began, magically, with her predecessor Annabel. After this account, he precedes to describe his first sexual experience with Annabel: an interrupted session of mutual masturbation one evening in the mimosa grove of her family's garden. Humbert dwells on the sights and smells surrounding the memory: the stars, Annabel's "biscuity odor," and the shapes of the mimosa leaves. He remembers the windows of the house as playing cards, and hypothesizes that this image might appear to him because the adults were playing cards inside.

Humbert cunningly represents his pedophilic love for Lolita as innocent by identifying it with his childhood love for Annabel. Humbert is highly sensitive: sights, smells and feelings leave a strong impression on his memory, and this fuels his imagination. Humbert's visualization of the windows as playing cards reminds us that we never recall our memories perfectly; they are reshaped by the thoughts and feelings which surround them. This will become more important as Humbert moves into the story of his relationship with Lolita, which is powerfully reshaped by his feelings and his imagination.

PART 1, CHAPTER 5

Humbert Humbert discusses his young adulthood. He spends a few years as a college student in London and Paris—first studying psychology, and then, English Literature. He hob-nobs in literary cafés, submits articles to journals, and begins writing volumes on French literature for English-speaking students. He represses his urge for young girls, and restricts his sex life to visiting prostitutes.

Humbert lives the life of a dilettante. Instead of starting on a stable career, he moves from place to place, changing his field of study and submitting articles to journals. Humbert's unstable professional life, along with his sexual perversion and immigrant status, are part of what make him an outsider. Nothing ties him to the fabric of ordinary social life. He has no family, and instead of dating, he sees prostitutes.

Interrupting his narration, Humbert Humbert introduces the idea of the **nymphet**: a special kind of little girl, between the ages of nine and fourteen, who is mischievous, slightly vulgar, and possesses difficult-to-explain charms. Humbert cites examples of relationships between men and nymphets throughout history and literary history: Petrarch's Laura, Dante's Beatrice, and the biblical prostitute Rahab. During his young adulthood, Humbert "[tries] to be good,"—he never tries to molest a little girl. Nevertheless, he often visits parks and orphanages to be in the presence of nymphets, fantasizing about scenarios in which he could molest them without fearing the consequences.

Humbert slyly tries to connect his lust for young girls with his artistic gifts, using famous writers and literary sources as examples. He presents his pedophilia as something aesthetic, rather than something physical. Even his encounters with real little girls become literary: he imagines elaborate scenarios of molestation. When he molests Lolita, Humbert will represent it in the same way: as something aesthetic, rather than something associated with a real and physical girl.

PART 1, CHAPTER 6

Humbert Humbert wonders what happened to the **nymphets** he visually enjoyed but never touched, speculating that the activity of his imagination might have somehow changed their fates. He recalls one instance during his life in Paris when he did run into a "former nymphet"—a teenage prostitute named Monique, whose services he solicited after running into her on the street. Humbert sleeps with Monique three times, but by the third time, remarks that she is already becoming too much of a woman for his tastes. The encounter inspires him to look for child prostitutes in Paris. He asks a madame, who is at first disgusted, but then refers him to someone else. Eventually, he is presented with a girl—but not one he considers a nymphet. He finds her so repulsive that he gets up to leave, but the procuress and her family emerge from behind a curtain to blackmail him into paying.

Humbert is carried away with his own imagination: he imagines it as capable of changing the real world. This blurring of the line between life and literature recurs throughout Lolita. Humbert gets tired of Monique quickly, and isn't satisfied by the small girl the later Madame shows him. Both of these encounters demonstrate how specific his notion of a "nymphet" is: it is rare for him to find anyone who qualifies.

PART 1, CHAPTER 7

Sometime after his escapades in Paris, Humbert Humbert decides to marry, hoping that marital sex and domestic life will help him to control his desire for nymphets. He chooses Valeria, the daughter of a Polish doctor who is treating him for dizziness. Valeria is an aspiring painter in the Cubist mode, which Humbert Humbert finds vulgar. He regrets that he could have made a better choice than her; describing his looks, he explains that women have always found him irresistible, in part because of the repressed virility which shows in his facial features.

This is the first of Humbert's many attempts to live a normal social life. What makes it hard for him here and later on is his hatred of "vulgarity," a category within which he includes trendy art, domestic life, and the sexuality of adult women. Valeria represents all of the things Humbert—an exile, pervert, and aesthete—despises. Humbert's traditionally masculine exterior contrasts with his deviant interior. His irresistible looks also parallel his charming narrative voice—an implicit warning to readers to be careful.

PART 1, CHAPTER 8

Humbert Humbert describes his brief marriage to Valeria, which lasts from 1935 to 1939. Though she is in her late twenties, he is attracted to her because of her childlike behavior and looks. Though these thrill him at first, he quickly grows bored with her, distracted by the daughter of the grocer across the street. He receives word that his uncle in America has died and left him a fixed income for life—on the condition that he must move across the Atlantic and show some interest in business.

Humbert's lack of attraction to mature women is a recurring theme in the novel. Ironically, this fixed income is what will allow Humbert to wander around the United States with Lolita—the exact opposite of the "settled," life as a businessman his uncle had in mind.

Humbert Humbert begins making plans to move, but Valeria becomes restless; she reveals that there is another man in her life, a White Russian taxi-driver named Maximovich. Valeria breaks the news to Humbert in Maximovich's taxi; the three of them go from there to a café, where Maximovich explains his life plans with Valeria to Humbert. The three of them go from there to move Valeria's things out of Humbert's apartment. Once the two lovers have left, Humbert discovers that Maximovich forgot to flush after peeing in his toilet—and further, left a cigarette floating in the bowl. He is enraged, and begins to fantasize about killing them—or at least slapping Valeria, as one should "according to the rules of the movies." He is angry, not because he cares about Valeria, but because she has unexpectedly deceived him.

Paris in between the World Wars was filled with Russian exiles like Maximovich—or Vladimir Nabokov himself. Humbert will later comment that pivotal moments in his life often involve toilets and telephones. This is the first example. Humbert often comments on "the rules of the movies," and other clichés of fiction. He uses these rules to call attention to the way he shapes his own story. Unlike more traditional narrators, Humbert calls attention to the fact that he is designing the story he tells.

Switching to the time of his writing—from prison, in 1955—Humbert Humbert notes with satisfaction that Valeria and Maximovich recently died in Pasadena as test subjects in a humiliating psychological and eugenicist experiment. Humbert then examines the prison library, from which he copies a "dazzling coincidence"—a section of a book containing a mention of a man named Clare Quilty. Quilty is a dramatist known for his work with a certain Vivian Darkbloom writing plays for children, including *The Little Nymph*.

The death of Valeria and Maximovich is a satire on the pseudoscience of the mid-twentieth century, which Nabokov hated. The "dazzling coincidence," Humbert mentions is that the tiny prison library contains a book mentioning the very man he's been imprisoned for killing: Clare Quilty. This reinforces Humbert's belief that the events in his life have been planned out by something or someone else. Of course, since this is a novel, Humbert is quite right: the anagrammed mention of the author's name (Vivian Darkbloom) reminds us that this is a work of fiction.

PART 1, CHAPTER 9

Returning to his past, Humbert Humbert recounts his migration to New York City, which he makes after a long stay in Portugal at the beginning of the Second World War. In New York, he begins working; first as a perfume advertiser, and then, with encouragement from a university, on his manual of French literature. He spends several years on these books, after which he has a nervous breakdown. He stays in a sanatorium for more than a year, twice. After this, he is enlisted by a doctor friend to accompany an arctic expedition as a recorder of psychic reactions. The expedition helps him to clear his head, but the scandalous psychological reports he writes are totally made up. This amuses him; when he must go to a sanatorium for a third time, he continues to play games with **psychoanalysts** by repeating exactly the kind of dreams and patterns of thought they describe in their books. He gets enormous delight from stealing and reading the reports they have written about him; all of them misdiagnose him with some sexual "problem" other than pedophilia.

Humbert has no stability in his life. He is an exile without a steady job, family, significant other, or permanent home. He has no social or psychological grounding, and lives entirely on the margins of society. It is important to remember all of this later, when Humbert meets Lolita. The loneliness and emptiness of his life allow Lolita to become the center of his world. Humbert manipulates his psychoanalysts at the sanatorium by telling them what they already expect to hear. This alerts us to Humbert's slipperiness as a narrator: he plays with our expectations as readers in the same way that he manipulates his analysts. The incompetence of the psychoanalysts is part of the novel's constant satire of psychoanalysis, which Nabokov represents as dangerous nonsense.

PART 1, CHAPTER 10

Released from the sanatorium, Humbert Humbert plans a move to New England. He arranges to board in a town called Ramsdale with the McCoo's, a family he knows through the perfume company, which has a small girl. Upon his arrival, he is met by Mr. McCoo, who explains that his house has burned down. Humbert imagines whimsically that his burning desire to see McCoo's young daughter might have caused the fire. Mr. McCoo sends Humbert to the house of some friends, the Hazes, who are also looking for a boarder. Reluctantly, Humbert goes along, and is driven by McCoo's chauffeur to the Haze home. Humbert Humbert is let in by Louise, the family's black maid. He looks at his surroundings in disgust, finding the prints, furniture, and everything else to be evidence of bad taste.

The fire at the McCoo's house is a freak accident, but it also leads Humbert to his "destiny": meeting Lolita. The lines between coincidence and fate become blurry in the novel. Humbert has a tendency to blur the lines between real life and his literary imagination, and this tendency is reflected in the fantastical image of his desires burning down the McCoo's house. As a member of the European elite, Humbert has contempt for the "tasteless," furnishings of the middle-class Haze home. Hiring black domestics like Louise was a suburban status symbol in Pre-Civil Rights America.

Humbert Humbert is shown around the house by Charlotte Haze, who he contemptuously describes as "a weak solution of Marlene Dietrich." During the tour of the house, he quickly gets the idea that she is attracted to him, and imagines the reason she is looking for a boarder might be to start an affair. Humbert is deeply uninterested in Charlotte and her house, until she leads him outside to the piazza and garden. There, he sees Dolores—Charlotte's daughter, whom she calls "Lo," and "Lolita"—for the first time. Lolita is sunbathing and wears **sunglasses**. Humbert is immediately overpowered by passionate feelings. He imagines that Lolita is the reincarnation of Annabel.

When Humbert sees Lolita, he instantly falls in love. This is where the story really begins—the chapters before this one are summaries covering long periods of time. Once again, Humbert uses comparisons from Hollywood film to tell his story: Marlene Dietrich was a famous actress of the time. Later on, Humbert will try to understand the personalities and actions of both Dolores and Charlotte by using Hollywood as a reference point. The reappearance of sunglasses (first seen in the seaside cave in Chapter 3) underscores what Humbert sees as the mystical relationship between Lolita and Annabel Leigh.

PART 1, CHAPTER 11

Humbert Humbert recopies—from memory—two weeks of entries from a diary he kept at the Haze's in the summer of 1947. The diary is a record of his attraction to Lolita—and sometimes the weather—which unfolds over several weeks in June. He writes it in his most difficult-to-read handwriting, so that no one who might discover it would bother to read it. Over the summer, Humbert spends an enormous amount of time trying to be alone with Lolita, coming up with all kinds of schemes and fantasies. He is constantly frustrated in his attempts by Charlotte, who sends Lolita away constantly so that *she* can be alone with Humbert, with whom she seems to want to start an affair. Humbert doesn't ever manage to get alone with Lolita for long, but he does have a few brief, intimate moments with her: he licks her eye to remove a speck, sits her on his knee, and nuzzles her in the darkness while he sits with her and Charlotte on the piazza. As he narrates, Humbert emphasizes the most minute details of Lolita's body; not only what she looks like, but what she feels like and how she smells. Humbert begins imagining that Lolita is inviting his sexual interest, especially after learning from Charlotte that he looks like one of Lolita's favorite Hollywood stars.

Just like the sunbathers and the parents of Annabel Leigh, Charlotte presents an obstacle to the fulfillment of Humbert's desires. A love triangle of sorts forms between mother, daughter and lodger. Love triangles, secrecy, diary entries, the importance of the weather, and the difficulty of seeing the beloved are all clichés of romantic fiction. This chapter is a parody of such writing. Once again, Humbert blurs the lines between life and literature, constantly calling attention to the fact that he is not just reporting events, but designing a narrative. Humbert's diary is the beginning of his attempt to immortalize Lolita in writing and in his memory. He is interested in every detail of her body, as though she were a work of art. The association of sexual desire with art recurs throughout the novel.

PART 1, CHAPTER 12

Finishing with his diary, Humbert Humbert complains of the frustration he felt at being so close to Lolita, while remaining unable to sexually possess her. He imagines his desire as a devil who erotically tempts him, then ruins his opportunities. He names the devil "Aubrey McFate," after a name he has seen in a list of Lolita's classmates.

Humbert imagines his life as planned out and controlled by invisible forces. This is part of the book's self-awareness—Humbert seems to have some idea that he might be a fictional character, or at least that the patterns in his life resemble something planned out by a devilish author.

PART 1, CHAPTER 13

Humbert Humbert and the Hazes are scheduled to go for a lakeside picnic with another family, the Hamiltons. But the Sunday outing is cancelled by Charlotte when the Hamilton daughter gets sick. Lolita, furious, refuses to go to church with her mother. Charlotte leaves her at home with Humbert Humbert, who takes advantage of the opportunity to have his first sexual experience with Lolita. Dressed in his dressing gown and pajamas, he finds her in the living room, where he starts a play fight by stealing her apple and magazines. The two end up sprawled on the sofa. Lolita stretches her legs across Humbert Humbert's lap, and he takes advantage of the positioning to rub his genitals against her and have an orgasm. He describes the feeling in very abstract, literary language. While he discreetly masturbates, Humbert Humbert distracts Lolita by singing one of her favorite songs, a crooner tune about a woman named "Carmen," who is ultimately shot by her lover. When Humbert touches Lolita's inner thigh, she jumps up and leaves the room. Humbert believes that she has noticed nothing.

Like almost every other important event in the novel, Humbert's time alone with Lolita isn't something he plans for, but a freak accident—the result of a fight between Charlotte and Lolita. The difference between fate and chance is a recurring question in the novel. The apple Lolita is holding can be understood as a symbol of lost innocence, as in the Bible. Humbert's language becomes most literary and abstract at the moment he describes his orgasm. He represents his pleasure in such ornate, complicated language to distract his readers from paying too much attention to what he is doing: molesting Lolita. The story in the Carmen song foreshadows the ending of Lolita: the breakdown of a relationship, followed by violence. Lolita runs away, but Humbert claims she noticed nothing. This seems unlikely, and gives us reason to think that Humbert might be misrepresenting, or misunderstanding, some parts of the story—that he might be what's called an "unreliable narrator."

PART 1, CHAPTER 14

Humbert Humbert mentally congratulates himself on having "enjoyed" Lolita without her knowing it. He reasons that the real Lolita is not necessarily the same as the creation in his mind. That evening, Charlotte and Humbert dine alone. Lolita has gone to see a movie with the Chatfields. Charlotte takes advantage of the opportunity to flirt with Humbert, inviting him to sit out on the piazza with candles. Charlotte also tells Humbert that she's planning to send Lolita to summer camp for three weeks. He's so upset with this news that he goes to bed at once, pretending a toothache. Charlotte recommends the services of Doctor Ivor Quilty.

By focusing on his fantasies, rather than the reality of what has happened, Humbert convinces himself that he has not really done anything. Humbert often makes himself believe that things in his imagination are real, and that real things are only in his imagination. Humbert is totally unmoved by the sexual interest of an adult woman. The name Quilty appears numerous times in Lolita before the appearance of Clare Quilty, Humbert's nemesis. This has something to do with the theme of patterns and fate: there are signs that Quilty is coming, long before he appears.

PART 1, CHAPTER 15

Although she doesn't want to go, Charlotte sends Lolita off to summer camp. Humbert Humbert, distraught, considers leaving the house until she returns. He fantasizes about masquerading as a girl and following Lolita to camp, but quickly dismisses the idea. Just before Lolita leaves with Charlotte, she runs up the stairs to give Humbert a passionate kiss.

Remembering that Humbert is not always a reliable narrator, we must be skeptical. Did Lolita really kiss Humbert? He has good reasons to make up something like this: by calling Lolita's "innocence," into question, he excuses his own behavior.

PART 1, CHAPTER 16

As Charlotte drives Lolita to Camp Q, Humbert Humbert dashes off to look through his **nymphet's** underwear. In her room, he discovers two posters: one from an advertisement, with his name written next to a handsome male face, and another depicting a famous playwright, Clare Quilty. His snooping is interrupted by a call from the maid, Louise, the only other person left in the house. Louise gives Humbert a long, rambling love letter from Charlotte, which instructs him to leave the house unless he reciprocates her feelings and wishes to marry her, and also to act as Lolita's father.

Quilty's poster and Humbert's name appear next to one another in Lolita's bedroom. This foreshadows the final confrontation between Humbert and Quilty their rivalry and similarity regarding their passion for Lolita. Charlotte's love letter is another event in the series of freak accidents—or twists of fate—that allow Humbert to become Lolita's guardian. The exaggerated passion of the letter continues the parody of romantic stories which began in Chapter 11.

PART 1, CHAPTER 17

Humbert Humbert is at first horrified by the letter, but comes to realize that marrying Charlotte would give him the opportunity to be with her daughter without arousing suspicion. He begins fantasizing about all the opportunities married life would give him to molest Lolita—by giving her sleeping pills and then molesting her, for instance—and ultimately resolves to do it. To prepare himself for Charlotte's return, he eats rich food and drinks liquor, hoping that these will function as aphrodisiacs. When Charlotte returns, Humbert is drunkenly mowing the lawn, watched curiously by Leslie, the neighbor's black gardener.

Here, Humbert begins making decisive plans to fulfill his perverse fantasies about Lolita. No longer content to wait for "accidents," (like the one in Chapter 13), he decides to marry Charlotte and begin his vast deception. Before Charlotte even arrives, Humbert is already trying his best to act out the role of suburban husband. But because he is such an outsider (as a European, a pervert, a bohemian, and a snob), his act is comically unconvincing from the very beginning. The neighbor's gardener already knows it doesn't look right. Humbert often drinks alcohol during times of stress. Here, he is using it to make himself aroused for Charlotte; he is not normally attracted to adult women.

PART 1, CHAPTER 18

Humbert Humbert and Charlotte are married in a quiet ceremony. They are interviewed for a society column the next day, and Humbert uses the opportunity to invent a plausible backstory for their relationship, which Charlotte accepts. Charlotte busies herself "glorifying the home," buying new furniture and visiting neighbors with the enthusiasm of a young bride. Humbert notes that most of the more refined neighbors don't socialize much with Charlotte.

Charlotte, a socially excluded widow, is eager to become the ideal American housewife. She is the perfect target for Humbert's tricks, because she already wants to believe that he is the perfect husband. She isn't even suspicious when he makes up a backstory for their relationship, something which will later allow him to pretend to be Lolita's father.

PART 1, CHAPTER 19

Charlotte makes Humbert Humbert tell her all the details of his love life to date, encouraging him to insult his previous lovers. He is disgusted by her jealousy, but obliges it, "padding," his sexual history with invented women as he goes along. Humbert is contemptuous of Charlotte's melodramatic way of speaking, which he thinks comes from soap operas. He is also upset by Charlotte's seeming hatred for her daughter, whom he has begun to imagine as his own.

Charlotte lives in a fantasy world of melodramatic romance which comes from popular culture. This disgusts Humbert, a refined European scholar, but also allows him to deceive her: he makes up stories based on what he knows is already there in her imagination. Once again, this should put us on guard as readers: we are given a clear example of Humbert's ability to make up deceptive stories based on what his audience expects to hear.

PART 1, CHAPTER 20

Humbert Humbert and Charlotte go for a swim at the Hourglass Lake. On the walk from the parking lot to the beach, Charlotte tells Humbert she plans to send Lolita to boarding school immediately after camp. Humbert, horrified, excuses himself by claiming he needs to go back to the car. He tries to think of ways to convince Charlotte to change her plans, but can't think of any way to do it without revealing his perverse desire for Lolita.

The name "Hourglass Lake," gives us the idea that time is running out for Humbert—he must act quickly or lose Lolita.

Desperate, Humbert Humbert starts to think about killing Charlotte. He paces through the woods, where he sees two young girls emerge from a bathroom together. They remind him of Lolita. He returns to the lake to swim with Charlotte, and realizes this might be a perfect opportunity—he might be able to drown her. There are two visible spectators, men building a wharf on the opposite shore, but Humbert thinks they're far enough away to make it look like an accident. He's about to go through with it, but changes his mind at the last minute. When he and Charlotte return to shore, Jean Farlow arrives, and reveals she's been watching them from the bushes and painting a lake scene the entire time.

All little girls begin to remind Humbert of Lolita. This is a symptom of his obsession. Humbert has fantasized about killing a wife before (Valeria, when she left him in Paris) but this time, he is serious. Only chance or 'fate,' stops him: because Jean is hidden in the bushes, this is a stroke of luck. As we have seen, Humbert's story progresses through such strokes of luck, rather than his own planning.

PART 1, CHAPTER 21

With Lolita off at camp, Humbert Humbert and Charlotte spend the months of June and July together in Ramsdale. Humbert is alarmed by Charlotte's plans to send Lolita to boarding school right after she returns from camp. He struggles to find ways of asserting himself, hoping to gain enough influence over Charlotte to change her mind. He is astonished that she doesn't respond to the silent treatment or his other attempts at emotional manipulation. He finally finds an opportunity to show who's boss when Charlotte announces a romantic surprise cruise to England. Pretending outrage, Humbert makes fun of the cruise and complains that she makes too many decisions without consulting him, her husband, first. It works: Charlotte ends up begging Humbert Humbert for forgiveness. Resolving to "press [his] advantage," he ignores Charlotte and works in his study for the next few days. On one of these days, Charlotte comes in and notices the locked drawer where Humbert keeps his diary. She asks what's in it, and he responds "Locked up love letters." He starts worrying that the key isn't well hidden. Humbert flips through an encyclopedia, where Charlotte recognizes a town she's visited: she asks if he'd like to spend the fall there, at a quaint hotel called **The Enchanted Hunters.**

Humbert continues to deceive Charlotte by playing the role of American husband. His usual techniques of emotional manipulation don't work on her. He has to act like the "man of the house," asserting his control, before she'll respond the way he wants. Here again, we see how Humbert, the consummate manipulator, responds to the expectations of his "audience." Charlotte's encounter with Humbert in the study foreshadows two later events in the narrative: Charlotte's discovery of Humbert's diary, and Humbert's stay with Lolita at the Enchanted Hunters.

PART 1, CHAPTER 22

Pretending he has insomnia, Humbert Humbert convinces the Haze family doctor to prescribe him sleeping pills. He tests these pills on Charlotte, meaning to use them on Lolita when she returns from camp. Worried that they aren't strong enough, Humbert goes back to the doctor for a more powerful prescription. When he returns, he discovers that Charlotte has opened his drawer and read his diary. She screams that he's a monster. Hoping to talk his way out of the situation, Humbert urges her to calm down, telling her that she's hallucinating. Charlotte ignores him: she's furiously writing a letter, with two others already stamped and ready on the table. Humbert leaves for the kitchen to pour her a scotch. He tries to think of ways to fix the situation. On the way back to the living room, he receives a telephone call from Leslie, the neighbor's gardener—Charlotte has been run over by a car.

In his own mind, and when manipulating others, Humbert often makes fantasy and reality switch places. To make his own fantasy into reality, he must try and turn Charlotte's reality (her realization of the truth) back into fantasy, by convincing her she's hallucinating. Once again, a freak accident—Charlotte's death—saves Humbert and changes the entire course of the story. The number of such coincidences suggest, to Humbert, the influence of fate (though to the reader it might hint at the constructedness of the novel, to Nabokov's hand in determining what happens). As Humbert later points out, significant events in his life tend to happen around toilets and telephones.

PART 1, CHAPTER 23

Humbert Humbert goes outside to view the scene of the accident. While crossing the street to send her letters, Charlotte was run over by a car driven by a man named Beale, who was swerving to avoid a collision with a dog. Humbert takes advantage of the confusion at the scene of the crash to destroy the letters Charlotte was planning to send. He stuffs them into his pocket, where he "claw[s] them to fragments." When he tries to reassemble them later, he can only make out a few sentences. One of the letters was for Lolita, another was for the headmistress of a reform school, and another was clearly addressed to him.

Cars are very important to the plot of Lolita. The image of a car swerving off-road can be interpreted as an analogy for the sudden turn away from ordinary domestic life which Lolita is about to experience. Humbert's perspective on the events that take place in Lolita is the only one available to us as readers. He has destroyed alternative stories, like those which might have been told in Charlotte's letters. It is important to remember this as we read through Humbert's confession: by the time he is writing, nobody is left alive to contradict him. We have little reason to trust him.

The Farlows arrive and comfort Humbert, who pretends to be traumatized by the death of his wife. Realizing that he's been given a perfect opportunity, he schemes up a way to remove Lolita from Camp Q and become her guardian. First, he fakes a call to the camp in front of the Farlows. He tells them that Lolita is on a five-day hike, and cannot be reached. Later, he convinces Jean and John that Lolita is really *his* daughter (not Harold Haze's) by inventing an affair with Charlotte in 1934. This convinces them to let Humbert deal with Lolita's future.

Knowing that nosy friends and neighbors are always sniffing for scandal, Humbert tells the Farlows something he knows they will believe. He makes up his affair with Charlotte the same way he invented his love life. The letter Q in Camp Q is another little detail which foreshadows the eventual appearance of Clare Quilty, the novel's antagonist.

Humbert receives a visit from Beale, the man who ran over Charlotte. Beale is expecting a lawsuit, and tries to convince Humbert that the accident was not his fault. He disingenuously offers to pay for Charlotte's funeral expenses, and is shocked when Humbert actually accepts.

Beale is expecting Humbert—who appears to be a dignified, grieving widower—to refuse his offer out of pride. Of course, Humbert is faking it: one faker tricks another.

PART 1, CHAPTER 24

John and Jean Farlow help Humbert Humbert to load up his belongings for the trip to fetch Lolita. Just before he goes, Jean corners him in the hallway and tries to kiss him; he doesn't let her. She expresses the hope that they will someday see one another again.

Once again, Humbert is irresistible to the adult women he is incapable of being interested in.

PART 1, CHAPTER 25

Humbert Humbert drives to Camp Q to pick up Lolita. He is anxious, fearing that Lolita will mistrust him, or that someone will realize he isn't Lolita's legal guardian. When he calls the camp from a payphone, he is told by the camp mistress, Shirley Holmes that Lolita is on a hike, and won't be back until the next day. Humbert Humbert is pleased to learn that his story, made up to trick the Farlows, has come true. He wonders if "McFate," might have arranged it that way. While waiting for Lolita to return, Humbert buys her a suitcase full of new clothes. Finally, he makes a reservation for the next night at **The Enchanted Hunters,** a motel in a nearby town.

Once again, Humbert wonders if his imagination might have some influence on reality itself: his hiking story has come true. He suspects that fate is conspiring to create a certain pattern of events in his life. McFate is the name of a girl in Lolita's class, whom Humbert imagines as the personification of the forces which control his destiny. Humbert's decision to go to The Enchanted Hunters—which will turn out to be fateful—is once again based on a freak accident: Charlotte happened to point it out once in the encyclopedia. Continuing to manipulate people based on their fantasies, Humbert buys Lolita what he assumes she most dreams of: fashionable clothes. Humbert's brief attempt at living a domestic, married life is over. He is once again an outsider, an exile without a fixed home or identity.

PART 1, CHAPTER 26

Humbert Humbert takes a brief break from telling his story to complain of his headaches and discomfort in jail. He worries that he might have the dates in his story mixed up, but notes that the events in the last chapter "must have been around August 15, 1947." He worries about his physical and mental health, especially his heart and head.

Once again, Humbert's reliability is put in doubt. We are also given some insight into what is driving him so fanatically to finish the book he is writing: he seems to know that he won't be alive for very much longer.

PART 1, CHAPTER 27

Humbert Humbert picks up Lolita at Camp Q. He tells her that Charlotte is very sick, and pretends they are headed to a hospital where she will be having an operation. Meanwhile, he takes Lolita to **The Enchanted Hunters**. While they drive, Lolita adopts a teasing, childishly flirtatious attitude with Humbert; she says that they've become lovers, and threatens that her mother will be very upset. Further, she hints to Humbert that she's done something sexual at camp. When they arrive at the hotel, Humbert gives Lolita the suitcase full of clothes he purchased for her. They kiss.

As with Charlotte, Humbert uses Lolita's childish romantic fantasies to manipulate her. We should be suspicious of Humbert's representation of Lolita's behavior. As with the kiss at the top of the stairs (Chapter 15), we can't be sure that Humbert isn't embellishing Lolita's flirtatiousness to justify his molestation of her.

Two conferences are taking place at The Enchanted Hunters: one involving clergy members, and other involving botanists. During dinner, Humbert gives Lolita the sleeping pill he earlier tested on Charlotte. He leaves her to fall asleep in the room, locking her inside, and takes a walk through the hotel to calm his nerves.

Lolita is filled with botanical and religious motifs. The combination of clergy members, botanists, and the sleeping innocence of Lolita evokes the Garden of Eden just before the fall of man: Humbert's great sin, the rape of Lolita, is about to take place.

PART 1, CHAPTER 28

As he waits for Lolita to fall asleep, Humbert Humbert walks through the **hotel**. He reaches a pinnacle of happiness as he realizes that Lolita is finally his. He enjoys feeling the key to the room in his pocket. Humbert pauses in his narrative to justify himself to his readers: he explains that he planned to "spare [Lolita's] purity," by only molesting her in her sleep. He also argues that Lolita was not an innocent, but already sexually corrupt.

As he nears the point in the story where he does the most wrong (rapes Lolita), Humbert begins to defend himself more and more. He usually does this by casting doubt on Lolita's sexual "innocence"; by suggesting that she might have started it, which does not legally or morally relieve him of responsibility for taking care of a minor to whom he should have been a guardian and protector. Keys have significance as a sexual symbol. Humbert holds the "key," to Lolita's "lock"—he now has her trapped, under his physical control.

Humbert visits the hotel porch, where he has a strange conversation with a man sitting in the dark. The man seems to suggest that the real relationship between Humbert and Lolita is not quite what it seems. He invites the two of them to lunch, but Humbert refuses.

This man later turns out to be Clare Quilty, Humbert's nemesis. He recognizes that Humbert is a pedophile, most probably because he is one himself.

PART 1, CHAPTER 29

Humbert Humbert returns to the room to molest Lolita. To his surprise, she wakes up easily; the pill given to him by the doctor must have been a fake. Humbert spends the rest of the night unable to sleep from excitement, making small, subtle attempts to touch Lolita in the dark.

As usual, Humbert's plans for the fulfillment of his fantasies are frustrated at the very last moment. The narrative of Lolita might be said to "tease," Humbert: it gives him what he wants, and then snatches it away.

When Lolita wakes up in the morning, she nuzzles Humbert and—to his great surprise—initiates sex with him. Humbert sees this as evidence that Lolita was depraved by her American upbringing long before she was with him. Humbert explains that sex was not the most important thing for him, with Lolita: his real goal is "to fix once and for all the perilous magic of nymphets."

Once again, we should be careful before trusting Humbert's version of events. Later on in the novel, Lolita will accuse him of raping her. Despite his perverse sexual desires, Humbert is prudish in his attitude toward culture. He is disgusted by the visibility of sex in American culture, which he uses as a scapegoat for his behavior. As usual, Humbert downplays the physical aspect of his desires. He claims that his desire for nymphets is a matter of aesthetics.

PART 1, CHAPTER 30

Humbert Humbert envisions himself repainting The Enchanted Hunters' dining room to suit his erotic fantasies. He imagines murals depicting violent tropical animals, colorful foliage, a suburban scene, a slave child, a summer camp, and a lake with a fire opal in its center.

Humbert projects the exotic images that populate his fantasies upon his mundane surroundings. Because of Lolita, even the sleaziest motel becomes—for Humbert—a vivid, tropical paradise. In the same way, Humbert's sleazy pedophilia is reinterpreted—by him—as an aesthetically profound experience.

PART 1, CHAPTER 31

Humbert Humbert tries to explain the strange mixture of the "bestial and the beautiful," in his love for nymphets. He launches into a legal defense of his sexual behavior: Roman law allowed girls to marry at twelve, and certain states in the U.S. still allowed marriage at that age under special circumstances. Finally, in an effort at justification, Humbert tells his readers that he was not even Lolita's first lover.

Bestial and beautiful is a good way of describing Lolita as a novel: there is a tension between the perverted subject matter and the highly aestheticized prose. The intensity of Humbert's attempts at self-justification suggests suppressed feelings of guilt. By the end of the novel, these feelings will become more explicit.

PART 1, CHAPTER 32

Later in the morning, Lolita tells Humbert Humbert about her first sexual experience, which took place at Camp Q. It started when she stood guard for two friends, Barbara Burke and Charlie Holmes, while they had sex in the bushes on Willow Island. Curious, Lolita began having sex with Charlie as well.

Throughout Lolita, Humbert uses remote forests and islands as imaginative scenery for his fantasies. These, along with the word "nymphet," hark back to the erotic stories of Greek mythology: the story of Apollo and Daphne, for instance. That Lolita's first sexual experience should be take place on an island is suspiciously similar to Humbert's fantasies.

Soon after she tells this story, Humbert Humbert and Lolita leave **The Enchanted Hunters**, getting back on the road. Lolita—who may or may not be joking—begins to frighten Humbert by threatening to call the police and tell them he's a rapist. When she asks to call his mother, Humbert abruptly informs her that she's dead.

Now sure of the fact that Lolita is under his power, Humbert allows himself—for a brief moment—to stop deceiving her.

PART 1, CHAPTER 33

Lolita is shocked at the news of her mother's death. To calm her down, Humbert Humbert buys Lolita toys, clothes and baubles. She and he take separate rooms at the local **motel**, but she comes into his room late in the night for comfort. Humbert notes with satisfaction that "she had absolutely nowhere else to go."

Humbert has made Lolita into an exile and an outsider, like him. Taken away from her school, family, and friends, she will be forced to wander with Humbert, who plies her with whatever he can to make her complacent and also exults in his power over her.

PART 2, CHAPTER 1

Lolita and Humbert Humbert spend the next year (August 1947 to August 1948) traveling across the country. They go everywhere, from New England, to the South, to the Rockies, to the Pacific Coast, to the Canadian border, back through the Midwest, and finally back to the eastern "college town of Beardsley."

Although Humbert and Lolita are not living ordinary American lives, their status as orphans and wanderers is what makes Lolita an ideally American story. From its beginnings, America has been a nation of immigrants and misfits. Stories of wandering and migration are central to American history.

Along the way, Humbert keeps Lolita obedient and under control by threatening her: if she misbehaves, he will take her to an isolated cottage to learn French and Latin. If she reports him to the police, he warns that she will become a foster child living a life of poverty. Humbert keeps Lolita occupied by trying to keep her excited about the next destination on their cross-country trip. Along the way, they become expert in motels and hotels, which they classify and critique.

Humbert uses a combination of coaxing and threats to control Lolita. Above all, he tries to keep her interested in the next stage of the journey. The way Humbert controls Lolita's attention is similar to the way he tries to control his readers and our attention. Never letting us outside of what he wants us to see, he must keep his readers interested until the very last page, so that he can fully justify himself. Unlike Lolita, Humbert has never lived in his own home—only hotels and rented rooms. The motels that Humbert and Lolita stay in function as a reminder that neither character has a real home to return to.

PART 2, CHAPTER 2

Humbert Humbert goes into greater detail about his year of travels with Lolita. He sarcastically lists the tourist attractions they visit, emphasizing that the only reason for the trips was "to keep [Lolita] in passable humor from kiss to kiss."

Humbert's sarcasm and mockery of tourist traps distract readers from considering Lolita's feelings and situation. "Passable humor," is a particularly insensitive way of describing the difficult emotional coping of a kidnapped, sexually abused girl.

Much to Humbert's consternation, Lolita attracts attention of boys and young men wherever she goes. He becomes jealous and afraid, refusing to let her go anywhere without his close supervision. Humbert enrolls Lolita in tennis lessons during a long stop somewhere in California, and often takes her swimming. As the year passes, Lolita begins to treat Humbert with more indifference and hostility. She fights with him for constantly keeping her away from other people, and for preventing her from living a normal life.

Humbert gives Lolita lessons to create something resembling a normal suburban life for her. This is, of course, impossible. He doesn't want her to know any other people, and keeps her from developing relationships with friends, teachers, and boys. Humbert's need to have Lolita in isolation from the rest of the world deprives her of normal childhood experiences, and she reacts with anger.

PART 2, CHAPTER 3

Still describing his year of travels with Lolita, Humbert Humbert explains how at one point he tries to recreate his childhood beachside love with Lolita. He finds a cave on a California beach, but somehow, it just isn't the same. He jokes that Freudian psychologists will no doubt be interested in this attempt to recreate his sublimated, original desire.

Humbert's romance with Lolita is an attempt to recreate his idealized childhood romance with Annabel Leigh. But it doesn't work. Humbert is not a young boy, but an adult kidnapper. Freudian psychoanalysis teaches that most of our desires are disguised replacements for an "original," desire: usually, the desire for the mother. Although he despises psychoanalysis, Humbert identifies this scene as the kind of event psychoanalysts might like to interpret.

As they continue their travels, Humbert Humbert and Lolita have a few close encounters with being discovered: once while having sex in a forest, another time when they are stopped by two policemen, and a third time in a movie theater. Humbert, worried about the legal situation, begins to do research on guardianship. Though he thinks it might be best to establish himself as Lolita's legal guardian, he is too afraid to tempt fate.

Living the life of a criminal deviant is beginning to wear Humbert down. But he is afraid to begin pretending to live an ordinary life, something which he has failed at twice: once with Valeria, and once with Charlotte. Humbert's respect for fate keeps him from making plans. As we have seen, his plans usually fail, and the good things that happen to him are the result of his luck, which he is afraid of tampering with by being more careful. The recurrence of forests and movies in connection with sex is important. For Humbert's imagination, both are associated with eroticism.

Equally anxious about his financial situation, Humbert uses his friend Gaston Godin to find a position as a French Professor at Beardsley college. There, he plans to settle down and enroll Lolita in school. Humbert reflects sadly on his year of travel with Lolita, which he imagines as having "defiled" the whole country. He lets slip that Lolita cries every night, as soon as he pretends to fall asleep.

The name "Beardsley," emphasizes that Humbert is using this job as a "beard," to disguise his perverse relationship with Lolita. Here, Humbert's guilt leads him to tell us more about Lolita's feelings than he has previously. Humbert constantly identifies Lolita with America. Compared with Europe, America was considered a young culture. Humbert imagines he has corrupted the country in the same way he has corrupted Lolita.

PART 2, CHAPTER 4

Humbert Humbert and Lolita move into a house in Beardsley. When he goes to speak to Headmistress Pratt of the local girls' school, he is horrified by its "modern," curriculum, which stresses practical skills and preparing girls for the world of dating, marriage, and homemaking. Reluctantly, he decides to enroll Lolita.

As always, Humbert is horrified by the ordinary world of domestic life—especially suburban American life. As an intellectual and student of literature, he cannot bear to think that Lolita will only be learning practical skills. At the same time, his concerns are prosaic and base and truly vulgar: he is also worried about her dating, because of his jealousy.

PART 2, CHAPTER 5

Living in a fixed location with Lolita for the first time, Humbert Humbert becomes anxious about his neighbors, all of whom strike him as too curious about he and his "daughter." He has a contemptuous attitude toward all of these people: two English professors, a businessman, and an old spinster who asks Lolita—in Humbert's opinion—too many questions.

Even having settled down, Humbert remains an outsider. Because he fears that he will be discovered, he cannot form relationships with any of his neighbors, and become part of the community. His domestic life is a charade.

PART 2, CHAPTER 6

Humbert Humbert's only real acquaintance in Beardsley is Gaston Godin, the French professor who secured him his job. He is confident that Godin is too self-absorbed and stupid to notice his molestation of Lolita. Further, he notices that Godin is always surrounded by young boys: he speculates that Godin might be something of a pervert himself. Humbert has contempt for Godin, who he regards as a mediocre charlatan of a scholar, loved by the Americans in the town because they don't know any better. Humbert plays chess with Godin two or three times every week, and Godin is so oblivious to the details of Humbert Humbert's life that he mistakenly believes Lolita has sisters.

Humbert's contempt for Godin, his fellow pedophile, might have something to do with the fact that Godin has something he does not: the love of the community around him. It is ironic that Humbert thinks of Godin as a "fake" scholar, given that most of his own life is an act put on to conceal his relationship with Lolita. For someone with Humbert's detail-oriented personality, there is nothing more pathetic than Godin's obliviousness.

PART 2, CHAPTER 7

Lolita devises a way of taking advantage of Humbert. She demands more and more pocket money and favors in exchange for affectionate caress or sex act. Humbert begins to worry she will save enough to run away to Hollywood, or to somewhere she can secure a job.

Humbert has turned Lolita into an unwilling prostitute. But his constant deceit has begun to make her savvy: she is learning how to take advantage of him. In many ways, this shift characterizes the entire arc of Lolita's life with Humbert. He begins by tricking her, and she escapes by tricking him.

PART 2, CHAPTER 8

Humbert Humbert becomes concerned as Lolita socializes more frequently with her schoolmates. Above all, he is jealously terrified of Lolita going on any dates. Though he tries to adjust, he is horrified by what is considered normal behavior for American teenagers. He reads the local newspaper's advice column for teens, and becomes alarmed. He is relieved to notice that Lolita seems little interested in the boys around her. He reflects constantly and anxiously on the charade of his suburban life, hoping that nobody will notice its depravity and fraud.

Humbert's prudishness is ironic and hypocritical in the extreme. He is a child molester, and yet, he is horrified by the dating culture of American teens. Humbert's anxiety persists no matter what his situation. Before he had Lolita, he was anxious about finding ways to molest her. When he was on the road with her, he spent all his time thinking of ways to distract her. Now that he has "settled down," with her, he lives in constant anxiety that he will be discovered or that she will develop feelings for a boy.

PART 2, CHAPTER 9

Lolita makes friends with the girls in her school. Humbert enjoys their presence at the house, finding that Lolita's attractiveness is enhanced by her having "a bevy of page girls." One of them, Eva Rosen, he even considers to be a nymphet. Lolita's closest friend is Mona Dahl, an intelligent and experienced girl who claims to have had a love affair with a marine. Humbert worries that Lolita may have confessed something about their relationship to Mona, from whom Humbert is always trying to learn details about Lolita's school life.

Humbert's worrying goes beyond ordinary sexual jealousy, or even fear that Lolita will escape. What he hates most is the idea that anyone has a perspective on Lolita other than him; that she even exists outside of his imagination. Though he is pleased by her pretty female friends, he immediately starts worrying about anyone other than himself having any kind of relationship with Lolita at all. He becomes suspicious of Mona, but also tries to use her to make sure Lolita doesn't have anything important in her life beyond her life with him.

PART 2, CHAPTER 10

Lolita begins to develop contempt and disdain for Humbert. Whenever he approaches her, even to express affection, she assumes he wants sex and becomes disgusted. Humbert gives an example of such an incident: when he crawls on his knees to nuzzle Lolita's skirt, she tells him to leave her alone and makes fun of his facial expression.

Although we have no reason to doubt the truth of the story in this chapter, we must be aware that Humbert is using it to win our sympathy. He presents himself as the victim, and Lolita as the cruel mistress. In this way, he casts his rape and abuse of Lolita as, instead, a kind of pastoral, a literary genre in which a lovelorn man is mistreated by his haughty beloved.

PART 2, CHAPTER 11

One day, Headmistress Pratt calls Humbert Humbert in to discuss Lolita's worrying behavior at school. She is worried that Lolita is sexually and socially repressed, and that her father's strictness about dating and socializing might have something to do with it. Chalking up this behavior to Humbert's being an "old-fashioned Continental father," she urges him to loosen his restrictions on her behavior. In particular, Pratt asks Humbert to let Lolita participate in the school play, a production of **The Enchanted Hunters**. Humbert agrees, frightened that Pratt has noticed something wrong with Lolita. Before leaving the school, he visits Lolita in class, where he pays her a few cents for a hand-job. He is later shocked by his boldness in taking such a huge risk.

Here, we get a glimpse of the damage Humbert has done to Lolita. By abusing her, he has turned her into an outsider, a social misfit like himself. The reappearance of the name "The Enchanted Hunters,"—the motel where Humbert first raped Lolita—should put us on our guard. Something with great importance for Humbert's fate is about to take place. We can speculate from his previous behavior that Humbert might be aroused by knowing he is on the brink of getting caught.

PART 2, CHAPTER 12

After she recovers from a fever, Humbert allows Lolita to have a "Party with Boys," in the house. Every ten or twenty minutes, Humbert invents an excuse to come downstairs and check on what's going on. The party goes terribly: one girl doesn't show up, one boy brings his cousin, and nobody can dance. When it's over, Lolita says the boys disgusted her. Delighted with this, Humbert buys her a bicycle, a new tennis racket, and a book on the history of painting.

Lolita's social life is as much a sham as Humbert's, probably because of the abuse she has suffered has made her antisocial. He is relieved to see this, and rewards her with gifts.

PART 2, CHAPTER 13

Lolita begins rehearsing for her lead role in **The Enchanted Hunters**, a play about a young farmer's daughter who hypnotizes lost hunters in the woods. Eventually, she encounters a young poet who cannot be hypnotized, and who tries to convince her that she is actually a figment of his imagination. The message of the play is that "mirage and reality merge in love."

The message of the play mirrors the structure of the novel. Humbert's Lolita is not quite the "real," Lolita, but rather an image of her, modified by his impassioned, guilt-ridden imagination. The poet in the play avoids the girl's spell by thinking of her as a figment of his imagination. In the same way, Humbert tries to turn the real Lolita into his own literary creation, which makes it possible for him to abuse her without remorse.

Humbert Humbert notes the coincidence between the name of the play and the name of the **motel** where he first raped Lolita, and is thrilled when she points this out. He assumes that the play and the motel are both named after a New England legend of which he is unaware. (Years later, he learns that the play was a contemporary work by a theatrical troupe based in New York.) There is a "special," rehearsal, but Humbert is not invited—Lolita wants to make sure what he sees on opening night is totally new to him.

Humbert is fascinated by coincidences. But this one doesn't mean quite what he thinks it does. The playwright behind "The Enchanted Hunters," is actually Clare Quilty, with whom Lolita will soon run off. Quilty's name appears earlier in connection with a New York Theater troupe, in Part 1 Chapter 8. Lolita's concern with opening night is strange when we consider her growing hostility toward Humbert. This is our first indication that she is beginning to plan her escape.

PART 2, CHAPTER 14

Humbert Humbert learns that Lolita has begun skipping piano lessons. He becomes so anxious that he loses a game of chess to Gaston Godin for the first time. When he confronts Lolita, she tells him she's been rehearsing for the play with Mona Dahl. Humbert calls Mona for confirmation, which she gives, but still doesn't believe Lolita. He accuses her of lying, and further, of having told Mona everything about them. The two have a screaming match in the house, during which Lolita calls Humbert a rapist, accuses him of killing her mother, and threatens to have sex with the first man who asks her to. Humbert tries to keep Lolita from running out of the house, but is distracted when the phone rings—it is the spinster neighbor, calling to complain about the noise. Humbert reflects on the role of telephones in the important moments of his life.

Humbert and Lolita's façade of ordinary life collapses as he begins to realize she is up to something. Humbert's loss at chess suggests that someone—like Lolita and Quilty, for instance—might be outmaneuvering him somewhere else. As earlier with Charlotte, a telephone call stops Humbert from keeping Lolita from running out of the house. We see here that Lolita has been more aware of what Humbert has done to her than she appears to be in earlier chapters. She describes events differently than he has presented them, causing us to doubt his earlier story. She calls him a rapist, where Humbert earlier claimed she initiated sex. We become aware of how much—Lolita's feelings, for instance—Humbert has been suppressing or hiding from his readers.

After hanging up, Humbert pursues Lolita out of the house and on foot through the rainy night. He finds her in a telephone booth, on a call with someone. Suddenly adopting a much friendlier attitude towards him, she announces that she wishes to leave Beardsley and go on the road again, just so long as she can choose the destination. When they get back home, she asks Humbert to carry her up the stairs, saying that she's "feeling romantic."

Lolita's sudden change in attitude is suspicious. It should be clear that she is manipulating Humbert, even to him. The way Humbert accepts her explanation without asking questions goes to show how much his feelings warp his perceptions and judgment. As we have seen, telephones are never insignificant details in this novel. Lolita has been on the phone with Clare Quilty. She is planning her escape with him.

PART 2, CHAPTER 15

Humbert Humbert fixes up the car for a long trip, telling Lolita's school that he's been called away to an important job in Hollywood. As they drive away on this second road-trip—which Lolita has carefully planned—a car pulls up alongside them. The drama coach of the school, Edusa Gold, shouts that it's a shame Lolita is leaving the play; the author was raving about her after the special rehearsal. Humbert asks Lolita who the author is, and she responds that it's some old woman, someone with the first name Clare.

Quilty's name has been appearing, with little explanation, since the beginning of the novel. We later learn that Lolita met Quilty and planned her escape at the special rehearsal. Now Lolita is beginning to tell manipulative stories that hide the truth, saying Clare is a woman. The encounter with Miss Gold lets us know what a good actress Lolita has become. These acting skills help her to deceive Humbert..

Humbert tells Lolita how happy he is that she's given up the play. Nevertheless, he can't help but wonder why. He worries that she's too quick to change her mind about what she likes, noting the "abrupt changes in [her] disposition," since he's known her. He doesn't wait for an answer, but warns her that "There are things that should never be given up."

Humbert mistakes Lolita's plan to escape for a harmless inclination for changing her mind. His conception of her as a mischievous nymphet—rather than a thinking, planning, maybe even revengeful (justifiably) human being—keeps him from seeing what she's up to.

PART 2, CHAPTER 16

Humbert Humbert and Lolita leave Beardsley and drive west. They go through a town close to Lolita's Midwestern hometown of Pisky, but do not visit it. At a gas station, Lolita slips off, ostensibly to use the toilet, while Humbert isn't looking. He thinks nothing of it at the time, but notes in retrospect that he should have realized she was using this moment of freedom to telephone someone.

Once again, an important event takes place in connection with toilets and telephones—this is the pattern Humbert recognizes in his fate. Humbert tells us something he didn't realize at the time it took place: that Lolita was probably calling someone. This is something he does throughout the novel: attempt to come to terms with his loss of Lolita by understanding what really happened during their time together. Humbert prevents Lolita from seeing her hometown. By kidnapping Lolita, he has made her into a wanderer without a home, like himself.

Later on, at the Chestnut Court motel where they are staying, Humbert returns from his grocery shopping to notice that Lolita has a certain "glow." He suspects that she has had sex with another man while he was gone. He rips off her clothes to see if he can smell anything, but cannot verify his suspicions. He wonders if they are anything but a "madman's fancy."

Humbert's obsession with Lolita makes it hard for him to distinguish between his jealous fantasies and well-grounded suspicions. His intense desire causes him to make up fantastic stories—like the novel—which are hard to distinguish from reality. For Humbert, there is a link between erotic obsession and art.

PART 2, CHAPTER 17

Growing suspicious of Lolita and the plan of the trip she has made, Humbert decides to stay at the Chestnut Court motel for another night. He feels that his fate is somehow closing in on him, but reassures himself by checking on his gun, which once belonged to Harold Haze. He sarcastically remarks that the gun is "the Freudian symbol of the Ur-father's central forelimb." He complains that he's a terrible shot, but mentions that he had some practice shooting with John Farlow in Ramsdale.

Through Humbert's relationship with Harold Haze's gun, Nabokov is mocking psychoanalysis, which makes a symbolic connection between guns and male genitals. He doesn't intend for this connection to be taken seriously, and presents it in order to make fun of it. Once again, Humbert views "Fate," as a shadowy force which is plotting his downfall. He tells his story as though aware that he is a character in a novel. Humbert's bad shooting with Farlow foreshadows his final gunfight with Quilty, in which he will miss many times.

PART 2, CHAPTER 18

Humbert Humbert and Lolita travel farther west. A red Aztec Convertible begins following them on the highway, and Humbert worries it might be a police detective. The man in the car reminds him of his uncle, Gustave Trapp. He begins having what he thinks are hallucinations: one night at a motel, he finds himself naked and standing outside, with a masked man looking at him. He never determines definitively whether or not this was real. During a stop at a gas station, he catches Lolita speaking to an older man: the driver of the car. He begins to suspect the occupant of the red convertible isn't a detective, but someone whom Lolita knows.

Just as his desires made it hard for him to distinguish between fact and fantasy, jealousy makes it difficult for Humbert to determine whether or not his rival is real. The red color of the convertible reminds us of the red color of lips and apples, symbols of sin, sexuality, and infidelity. Fast cars also have a sexual connotation, especially in the 1950s America of Lolita. It is ironic that Humbert mistakes Quilty for a detective. After Lolita's disappearance, he will become a detective himself, attempting to find out just who Quilty is.

Humbert Humbert is alarmed by Lolita's good mood and teasing attitude about their pursuer. Humbert is eventually able to shake off the red Aztec, but he becomes suspicious again after taking Lolita to see a play in Wace, Nebraska. The play is by Vivian Darkbloom and Clare Quilty. As they stand up to leave, Humbert becomes concerned: Lolita is beaming at the stage, where the writers are making an appearance. He asks her about Quilty, whose poster she had in her room as a child, but she deflects him by asking if he means the Ramsdale dentist with the same name.

Vivian Darkbloom is an anagram for Vladimir Nabokov. By linking his alter ego with Clare Quilty, Nabokov is letting us know that Quilty's role as Humbert's rival and tormentor is similar to his own role as a novelist. Quilty is the secret agent behind Humbert's fate (losing Lolita), just as Nabokov is responsible for the fates of all his characters. By mentioning Quilty's appearance earlier in the novel, Humbert the narrator is giving his readers clues to the identity of the mysterious rival, inviting us to go back and notice the scattered references to Quilty which appear throughout the text.

PART 2, CHAPTER 19

Humbert Humbert and Lolita stop in Wace, where Humbert has set up a P.O. box in which they can receive mail. Lolita receives a letter from Mona Dahl. Suspicious, Humbert reads the letter before giving it to Lolita (Mona reports that she is moving to Europe), but when he looks up after reading it, Lolita has disappeared. In a panic, Humbert thinks she's escaped him forever, but she soon returns.

As is often the case in Lolita, an important event in the novel—Lolita's disappearance—"almost happens," just before it happens for real. This is a device used to create a feeling of tension, but it happens so often that it becomes a parody of the technique. Humbert's fear that Lolita is using letters to communicate with the outside is an ironic reversal of his relationship with her mother in Part One. In his jealousy, he begins to act as ridiculously and suspiciously as Charlotte did toward him.

When he interrogates her, she says that she ran into a friend. Humbert doesn't believe her, and he reaches for a piece of paper on which he's written their pursuer's license plate number. To his surprise, it's been erased. Quickly, he drives out of Wace, continuing west. Unsure of whether or not he's imagining things, he sees their pursuer everywhere: in different cars, and once with young passengers. At one point, Humbert's car gets a flat tire, and he sees the other car pull over far behind him. Humbert gets out of the car, determined to confront their pursuer, but Lolita distracts him by taking the wheel and trying to drive away. When he gets back in, she claims that the car started moving by itself. Meanwhile, the pursuing car has made a U-turn and sped away.

Here, Humbert's terrified jealousy becomes even more extreme, causing him to see pursuers everywhere. This is an extension of a broader theme in the novel: obsessive desire is the source of illusions which make reality and fantasy difficult to keep separate. Cars have enormous symbolic importance in Lolita. Humbert's flat tire suggests that the end of his long cross-country journey with Lolita is close at hand. Quilty is always slipping just out of Humbert's grasp, a characteristic which will become most extreme in the novel's final chapter. This teasing tendency is part of Quilty's link with the workings of fate, which also seems to be always just beyond Humbert's understanding.

PART 2, CHAPTER 20

Humbert Humbert regrets that he ever allowed Lolita to learn acting—all it did was help her to deceive him. He also happily reflects on her beautiful form in tennis, speculating that she might have become a tennis champion had he not molested her and broken her spirit.

Acting and the theater are central themes in Lolita, and they become increasingly important as the final chapter with the playwright Clare Quilty approaches. Just as she acted in Quilty's play, "The Enchanted Hunters," Lolita is acting out the drama of her escape from Humbert on Quilty's instructions. Humbert views Lolita's theatrical skill as a kind of loss of innocence. As the moment of Lolita's disappearance approaches, Humbert the narrator begins to experience remorse for what he has done, wondering what Lolita could have become had he not interfered in her life. Humbert will explore his remorse at greater length in Chapter 32.

The two of them continue driving west, and stop in Colorado. There, on the tennis the courts of the Champion Hotel, they play tennis. In the middle of their game, two young people approach and ask to join. Soon after, Humbert is summoned for a long-distance call in the hotel lobby, which turns out to be fake. From the window, he sees that a third stranger—a man—has joined the game. The man banters with Lolita, taps her on the behind with his racket, and leaves. When Humbert returns to the court, he is in tears. He begs Lolita for an explanation—she gives none.

In this chapter, Lolita's tantalizing near-escapes continue, in a parody of novelistic tension. The false telephone call continues the pattern of toilets and telephones as important agents in Humbert's fate. Throughout the novel, the ever-tearful Humbert presents himself as a hysterical, sentimental lover. This is both a parody of romance novels and an effort at self-justification. Humbert tries to build sympathy from his readers by presenting himself as weak and desperate, as actually loving the young girl he has raped and abducted.

PART 2, CHAPTER 21

Humbert Humbert is going mad with anxiety. He expects Lolita to try and escape from him very soon, at any moment. One morning by a motel pool, he is alarmed to notice that a strange man—who he thinks he recognizes from previous encounters—is ogling Lolita. For a moment, beneath the "peacocked shade," of a tree, the man looks like a lustful satyr. But something changes, and he begins to look like Humbert's uncle, Gustave Trapp. He is even more alarmed when he realizes that Lolita is aware of the man's look, and seems to share some kind of sexual understanding with the man. Suddenly, Humbert feels ill: he vomits. While he is being sick, he notices Lolita giving him a suspiciously calculating look.

Humbert's jealousy has so provoked his imagination that men he sees looking at Lolita appear to him as satyrs, creatures from mythology known for their insatiable sexual desire and which are usually paired with nymphs. Once again, Humbert cannot tell the difference between reality and fantasy. Ironically, the man he sees probably is his real rival, Clare Quilty. One of the central "jokes," of Lolita is that Humbert's insane, fantastical suspicions just happen to be true. We are meant to think that Lolita and Quilty might be poisoning Humbert, another ironic reversal of the situation in Part One, in which Humbert was planning to sedate Charlotte and Lolita. This is a continuation of the theme of Lolita's lost innocence: she has become a schemer and poisoner, like Humbert himself.

PART 2, CHAPTER 22

At a motel in Elphinstone, Lolita falls ill with a fever. Humbert Humbert takes her to a nearby hospital, where she stays overnight. Humbert spends a sleepless night at the motel, alone for the first time in almost two years. The next morning, he receives a call that Lolita is responding well to treatment, and will be better in a couple of days. Humbert begins to get sick as well. Over an indeterminate period of days, Humbert comes to see Lolita at the hospital eight times. He gets the impression that Mary Lore, the nurse who is caring for Lolita, dislikes him. He starts fearing that the hospital staff is conspiring against him.

Because Lolita is not with him, Humbert's insomnia returns. Earlier in the novel, Humbert refers to himself as a "nympholept," a word combining his passion for nymphets with the word narcolept, a person who suddenly falls asleep. Throughout the novel, Humbert associates Lolita with sleep and dreams. Humbert's obsessive jealousy leads him to believe that even the staff of a hospital in a town he's never visited might be plotting against him. Mary Lore is the last in a series of people who become suspicious after encountering Humbert and Lolita in an institutional setting. The headmistress of the Beardsley school is another example.

The day after his final visit, Humbert receives a call that Lolita is ready to leave the hospital. Since he's too sick (from an infection and from drinking) to pick her up, he says he'll be there the next morning. When that morning comes, he receives another phone call from the hospital: Lolita's "uncle," has already checked her out. Guessing, correctly, that Lolita has been stolen by the pursuing stranger, Humbert Humbert rushes to the hospital in a drunken rage. There, he makes a huge scene, and only agrees to leave after realizing he might be arrested if he doesn't calm down. He resolves to pursue Lolita's lover and kill him.

Lolita has finally run off with Clare Quilty. Extending the pattern of toilets and telephones, a phone call marks an important turn in the story. Humbert has long been remarking on the pursuer's resemblance to his own uncle. When the hospital staff refers to the man who has taken Lolita as her uncle, it suggests that she must have been telling her new lover about Humbert's paranoid fantasies. Calling the man her uncle might be a joke at Humbert's expense. Before encountering Lolita, Humbert was in and out of sanatoriums. As soon as she disappears, the threat of arrest or institutionalization returns.

PART 2, CHAPTER 23

Humbert Humbert spends nearly four months trying to track down the man Lolita ran off with. He visits **342** hotels, motels, etc., and at each of them, he checks the guest register for evidence. The man seems to have anticipated Humbert's investigation, and has left a trail of mocking pseudonyms: Arthur Rainbow, Donald Quix, Harold Haze, G. Trapp.

The number of hotels and motels Humbert visits is the same as the Haze's address in Ramsdale, suggesting a pattern in Humbert's fate—or at least in his own imagination. As always, it is difficult to tell the two apart. The pseudonyms left by the man Humbert is pursuing (Quilty, though Humbert doesn't know it yet) are all jokes: some of them about literature, and others about Humbert. Arthur Rainbow is a mangled version of Arthur Rimbaud, a French poet whose work Humbert includes in the textbook he is compiling. Donald Quix is a play on Don Quixote, a famously naïve and idealistic knight from a novel of the same name. Harold Haze is Lolita's deceased father, and G. Trapp is Humbert's uncle, with whom Quilty shares a strong resemblance.

By interpreting these pseudonyms, Humbert comes to realize several things: that the affair between Lolita and this person probably began in Beardsley; that Lolita gave this man the plan of her current road trip with Humbert in advance; that Lolita has told the man intimate details about her and Humbert's life; and that this man is very similar in personality and education to Humbert himself. Nevertheless, the search ends in failure. Humbert returns to Beardsley.

The pseudonyms Humbert finds enable him to recognize that Lolita was not been "kidnapped," but cooperated in her own escape. How else would the man she fled with know the details about Humbert's personal life contained in his mocking pseudonyms? Quilty's literary sophistication and mocking arrogance mirrors Humbert's own. The idea that some people have "doubles," is an important motif throughout this novel, as well as within Nabokov's other books. The theme of the double was popular in nineteenth century Russian literature, a tradition by which Nabokov was strongly influenced.

PART 2, CHAPTER 24

Back in Beardsley, Humbert Humbert tries to figure out who the kidnapper might be. He thinks he's narrowed it down to an art teacher at Lolita's school, but just before deciding to shoot the man, he realizes he's made a mistake. He also hires a private investigator, a man who spends two years earnestly tracking down one of the kidnapper's pseudonyms before coming up with an elderly American Indian, who cannot possibly be Lolita's kidnapper.

Although it's clear that Lolita escaped by her own choice, Humbert continuously refers to the man she left with as her kidnapper. Ironically, Humbert himself is the only man who has ever kidnapped Lolita. Once again, Humbert is trying to justify his perverse obsession by manipulating the connotations of certain words. Humbert the narrator makes Humbert the character look ridiculous for his failure to correctly identify the kidnapper. Based on the extravagant number of "clues," he has provided to the reader, it should be painfully obvious that Clare Quilty is responsible. Nabokov is parodying detective novels.

PART 2, CHAPTER 25

Without Lolita, Humbert Humbert falls into despair. Over the next few years, he throws away or donates Lolita's clothes, books, and other items. When he dreams about her, she is strangely mixed with Valeria and her mother, Charlotte. Humbert writes a long poem about Lolita, begging her to reveal where she has gone. Though Humbert is still attracted to nymphets, the loss of Lolita has dimmed the pleasure of being around young girls—he no longer fantasizes about kidnapping one.

Throughout his story, Humbert has stressed Lolita's absolute singularity for him. She is the center of his imaginative world, and all of his perceptions of his surrounding environment are modified by her presence. Now that she is gone, he begins to lose that clear picture of her. She mixes with other women in his dreams, a demonstration that the loss of her has damaged the clarity of Humbert's imagination. Once again, romantic obsession is tied to the imagination and artistic creation.

PART 2, CHAPTER 26

Humbert Humbert becomes involved with a woman named Rita, a kind but not particularly intelligent alcoholic from a place he refers to as "Grainball City." They spend two years together, first traveling, and then at a place called Cantrip, where the local college offers Humbert an apartment in recognition for a paper he's published called "Mimir and Memory." Embarrassed of Rita, Humbert doesn't allow her to stay with him at the apartment, and makes her stay in a nearby roadside inn.

Having lost Lolita, Humbert turns his attention to the study of memory. The word Cantrip, which means "magical spell," suggests that there's something magical about memory's ability to recover what we have lost. In many ways, this is Humbert's reason for writing this story: having lost Lolita, he wants to artistically recover her in memory. Memory and its connection with loss are important themes in all of Nabokov's writing. Without Lolita, Humbert becomes a kind of drifter. He ends up with Rita, who is equally without a home or purpose. Like all the other non-nymphet females in Humbert's life, Rita is just a placeholder: he doesn't care about her.

Sometime during the years he spends with Rita, Humbert returns to Briceland, the town where The Enchanted Hunters motel is located (though he can't bring himself to visit the motel itself). At the local library, he looks for a picture of himself in an old issue of the newspaper; he remembers having accidentally stepped into a photograph at the convention in the hotel lobby. Though he finds the picture, he can find no trace of himself in it.

Humbert's inability to find himself in the photograph is an allegory for the agonies and difficulties of memory. Having lost Lolita, Humbert begins to have trouble believing that his time with her was real: he looks for "evidence," in the real world, and fails to find it. By returning to Briceland, Humbert is retracing his steps, a journey that will continue in later chapters as he returns to Ramsdale and other places he visited with Lolita. His writing of the novel is a similar kind of retracing.

PART 2, CHAPTER 27

Humbert Humbert receives two letters which have been forwarded to his Cantrip apartment. The first is from John Farlow, who is now widowed and remarried to a Spanish girl. John, who is moving to South America, wants nothing more to do with the properties he is controlling in Lolita's name. He warns Humbert that he is turning his legal responsibilities as guardian of Lolita's inheritance over to Jack Windmuller, and that Humbert better "produce Dolly quick." Humbert reflects on the difference between fictional characters and real people: although we expect real people to have the stability of fictional characters, they often surprise us by changing radically over the course of their lives. Humbert is surprised that John Farlow, the quiet widower, has remarried and moved to South America.

Humbert's passing mention of the fact that John is now a widower indicates how little he cares to notice women who are not nymphets—or other people in general. The careful reader will remember that Jean Farlow, John's deceased wife, was passionately in love with Humbert: she watched him when he swam at Hourglass lake, and tried to kiss him soon after Charlotte's death. In the narrow-mindedness of his obsession, Humbert neglects to mention any of this. Humbert's reflection on the ways real people change over time prepares us for his reunion with a changed Lolita in the next chapter. This thought about characters invites us to consider Humbert's manuscript as an attempt to create an unchanging, fictional Lolita, who is immortal and remains a nymphet forever.

The second letter is from Lolita. She is now married to an engineer and pregnant. She asks Humbert for money in order to move to Alaska, where her husband Dick has a job offer. Lolita declines to give her exact address, worried that "Dad," might still be angry about her escape three years prior. The letter is dated September 18th, 1952. She signs it "Dolly, Mrs. Richard F. Schiller."

Lolita has changed. This chapter and its letter are one of the only parts of the novel in which we are given a perspective on Lolita which is relatively untainted by Humbert's obsessive imagination. The appearance of the date reminds us of how central Lolita is to Humbert's world. He uses her to measure everything, including time, which has gone unmarked in preceding chapters. 52 is also an important number in the book. The appearance of Lolita's letter after John Farlow's relatively insignificant letter is a device used to create a feeling of surprise. Traditional novels don't usually include letters which are unimportant to the plot, but John's is used to create a greater sense of importance behind Lolita's. Lolita's letter is one of the first reminders we are given that Lolita is not the name Dolores Haze prefers. Humbert's decision to use his pet name for her throughout the manuscript reminds us of how central his own perspective is to the character he creates out of the real girl.

PART 2, CHAPTER 28

The very next day, Humbert Humbert leaves for "Coalmont," the town where Lolita and her new husband live, bringing his gun with him. On the way there, he stays one night in a motel. The next morning, he prepares himself physically and psychologically to kill Lolita's husband, whom he believes must be the man who stole her from him. He dresses well for the occasion, as though preparing for a duel. When he arrives in "Coalmont," he does a little investigating before finally making his way to the last house on Hunter Road—a sad little shack of a place.

Humbert's dressy duel preparations are a mark of his fanciful, literary imagination. He is preparing for a confrontation with his rival as elaborate and melodramatic as something out of a nineteenth-century romance. Humbert's aristocratic imagination clashes with a much more mundane reality: Lolita is living in a small, cheap-looking house, a setting which is hard to square with Humbert's theatrical dreams of revenge. The smallness of the house hints at what we learn definitively in the next chapter: Lolita has not married Quilty, a rich playwright with a fancy convertible, but rather a humble engineer.

PART 2, CHAPTER 29

Humbert Humbert rings the doorbell, and "Dolly Schiller," answers the door. She is older—no longer a nymphet—but clearly pregnant. She takes him inside and he sees her husband—and immediately decides not to kill him, realizing this isn't the same man who took her away three years prior.

Humbert's decision to refer to Lolita as Dolly Schiller at the beginning of this chapter is striking. It is meant to underscore just how much she has changed—so much that he cannot or does not want to deny it.

Lolita and Humbert sit down in the living room. He demands she tell him the identity of the man who took her away. Initially reluctant, she finally reveals his name: Clare Quilty, the author of *The Enchanted Hunters*. Quilty, who had been a friend of Charlotte's, had known Lolita since her early childhood. He had also seen her and Humbert at **The Enchanted Hunters** motel. They had reconnected at Beardsley during the special rehearsal of his play. Soon after Quilty had taken her out of the hospital, he took Lolita to the Duk Duk ranch, where he tried to make her participate in his pornographic films. After she refused, Quilty threw Lolita out. She worked in restaurants for two years before meeting her husband Dick, who still knows nothing of her background.

The careful reader will have already realized that the man Lolita escaped with was Clare Quilty. This is the end of the "detective novel," portion of Lolita: the mystery (which is more of a parody of a mystery) has been solved. Quilty's invisible presence at every step of the plot underscores his role as Humbert's double or shadow. He was everywhere, but Humbert didn't notice him. Quilty, Humbert's double, is a pornographer. This should make us think about the pornographic qualities of Humbert's writing: is he just the same?

Humbert is heartbroken when Lolita comments that Quilty is the only man she ever loved. Humbert can see that she only considers him her father and molester. Dick enters the room and Lolita introduces him to Humbert, who considers him an ordinary and innocuous young man. Dick quickly leaves the room so "father and daughter," can catch up.

There is a bitter irony in the fact that Lolita now thinks of Humbert as a father. Early on in the story, this was all he wanted anyone to believe: it was the perfect cover story for his relationship with her. Now, Humbert is heartbroken because the fiction of his fatherhood has become "fact," and the reality of his love has been forgotten by Lolita, who never reciprocated it in the first place.

As Humbert prepares to go, he pleads with Lolita to come with him. She thinks he's asking her to have sex with him in exchange for the money she needs. Humbert is deeply wounded by her assumption: he sees she never knew he really loved her. He gives her an envelope with four thousand dollars, and asks once more if she'll come with him. Calling him "honey," for the first time, she gently refuses. He starts crying. She tries to give him a kiss, but he avoids her. Making a final, unsuccessful plea to his "Carmencita," before reaching his car, Humbert drives away in tears.

Lolita's immediate assumption that Humbert wants sex—and her surprise that he loves her—underscores the difference between Humbert's fantasy about the relationship between them and the reality of it. This chapter is a view of Lolita and Humbert's relationship with the rose-colored glasses of Humbert's obsession removed. This final scene between Humbert and Lolita is one of the few moments of genuine tenderness in the novel. Humbert presents his earlier relationship with Lolita as filled with tenderness, but there, it is hard to separate his obsession with nymphets from genuine affection. Throughout Lolita, experiences of loss are repeated. Humbert has already lost Lolita, and his "reunion," with her becomes a repetition of that initial loss. Memory is a similar kind of rediscovery, one which relives the initial loss. Through the emotion of his language, Humbert the narrator repeats the loss experienced by Humbert the character.

PART 2, CHAPTER 30

Humbert Humbert leaves Coalmont and drives toward Ramsdale. In a secluded spot along the way, he practices his marksmanship, preparing to confront Quilty. His car gets stuck in the mud of a dirt road, but a wrecker pulls him out. He drives to a nearby town, and sits up in his car all night crying, "drunk on the impossible past."

With Lolita's anticlimactic refusal to return, Humbert's story has in some ways run out of steam. His decision to pursue Quilty is almost a necessity of storytelling: only a dramatic confrontation (which Lolita failed to provide) can equal his powerful feelings of loss. This is both a parody of the way novels "usually work," and one more example of Humbert's self-consciously literary view of his own life. Humbert compares his nostalgic tears to drunkenness. This combination highlights two things: the pain of memory, and the intoxication of remembering, both of which are major themes in the novel.

PART 2, CHAPTER 31

At a rest stop between Coalmont and Ramsdale, Humbert Humbert recalls a conversation about religious transcendence he once had with a priest in Quebec. He tries to think about religion, but can find no comfort in it: nothing can erase the damage he inflicted on Lolita's life. Humbert begins to realize the moral seriousness of what he's done, and ends the chapter with two lines of verse which meditate on the necessary connection between the moral sense and the sense of beauty.

The relationship between ethics and beauty is one of the central themes of Lolita. One of the main ways Humbert tries to justify his crimes is through the beauty of his writing, as well as the beauty he recognizes in his feelings for Lolita. Humbert concludes that beauty and the moral sense must be connected. But his own novel argues otherwise: it is a beautiful story about an immoral relationship.

PART 2, CHAPTER 32

Newly conscious of ruining Lolita's childhood, Humbert meditates on moments when he noticed but coldly ignored her pain. He remembers her hopeless expression in the mirror when she thought he wasn't looking; her sadness when seeing the happiness of normal families; her fear when his physical affection suddenly transformed into lust. Tortured by these memories, Humbert realizes that the "parody of incest," he offered Lolita was no substitute for any real kind of family life.

Lolita is filled with small details, and Humbert prides himself on being an attentive observer. But now, he begins to realize how much desire caused him to ignore the details of Lolita's inner life. Sexual fantasies warped his perceptions. Here, Humbert becomes painfully aware of the suffering he caused and ignored. Humbert calls his relationship with Lolita a "parody of incest," because he has been posing as Lolita's father. He begins to realize that the life he lived with her was a cruel imitation or parody of ordinary family life.

PART 2, CHAPTER 33

Humbert Humbert returns to Ramsdale. Ghostlike, he haunts the places he used to frequent when he was a lodger at the Haze's. He walks past the house at 342 Lawn, where he says hello to a little girl playing in the yard. The little girl is alarmed, and Humbert realizes that he looks haggard and frightening, with dirty clothes, an unshaven face, and bloodshot eyes.

Like Humbert the narrator, Humbert the character is retracing his steps. He has a frightening, ghostly appearance because he is like a ghost in his own memories: reliving the past, but unable to overcome the loss of it. Early in the novel, Humbert's handsome appearance and superficial charm distracted others from his perverse inner life. Now his outside resembles his inside—he frightens little girls.

While visiting a restaurant he once went to with Charlotte Haze, Humbert runs into Mrs. Chatfield, who all but accuses him of having kidnapped Lolita. He tells her about Lolita's marriage to Dick, and just to shock her, informs her about Charlie Holmes' sex with the little girls at Camp Q—perhaps including Mrs. Chatfield's daughter Phyllis. Mrs. Chatfield, outraged, tells Humbert that Charlie has just been killed by enemy troops in Korea.

When Humbert lived in Ramsdale, his life was an act: he played the role of suburban husband in order to get to Lolita. Now, no longer caring about the consequences of his actions, he can say outrageous, true things. By telling Mrs. Chatfield about the girls at Camp Q, he is challenging the suburban façade of moralism and decency. She of course doesn't want to hear it. The mention of the Korean war is a rare intrusion of history into Humbert's narrative. Although his manuscript includes the years of the First and Second World Wars, it only mentions them in brief asides. Humbert's aestheticism and nymphet-obsession make him careless about historical events.

Humbert proceeds to the office of Jack Windmuller, the lawyer to whom John Farlow had handed over responsibility for the Haze estate. He tells Windmuller about Lolita's marriage, and arranges for her properties to be transferred to her.

Humbert's visit to the lawyer reminds us of someone going to make his last will. Knowing that he may die in his confrontation with Quilty, and having no friends or family of his own, he tries to set right some of what he has done wrong by returning the inheritance he took from Lolita after Charlotte's death.

Finally, Humbert visits the local dentist, Ivor Quilty. Ivor is Clare's uncle, something Humbert has learned from his conversation with Lolita. After offering to buy a whole new set of teeth, he abruptly announces that he's changed his mind, and will have another, better dentist do the procedure.

After a lifetime of careful scheming to get what he wants, the despairing Humbert is free to behave without fear of consequences. He plays this mean-spirited joke on the dentist—probably because he is related to Quilty— just for spite. In doing so, he mimics what he imagines to be his own fate—a cruel force which almost gives him what he most desires, only to suddenly take it away.

PART 2, CHAPTER 34

Humbert Humbert leaves Ramsdale and drives to Clare Quilty's house—Pavor Manor—on Grimm Road. He arrives at night, and many cars are parked outside. Reassured that Quilty is at the house, he leaves, planning to return in the morning. On the way back to the lodge where he's staying, he passes a drive-in movie. A man onscreen raises his gun.

Pavor means "fear" in Latin, and the Brothers Grimm were famous compilers of German fairytales. The two together suggest that Clare's manor is fantastical and terrifying. An atmosphere of menace is created around Humbert's coming confrontation with Quilty. The movie character's gun enhances this atmosphere of menace. The atmosphere of menace can be understood as a parody of gothic novels, which often end with a confrontation with a frightening villain in a ruined estate. Once again, Humbert is telling his story in a self-consciously literary way.

PART 2, CHAPTER 35

The morning of the next day, Humbert Humbert oils his gun and drives to Pavor Manor, murder on his mind. He knocks at the door several times, but nobody answers. He tries the door, finds it unlocked, and enters. Humbert goes through the house unlocking every door and pocketing every key he finds left in its lock: he doesn't want Quilty to hole himself up in a room. While he's walking toward a third bathroom, Quilty steps out of it and goes downstairs, failing to notice Humbert. Quilty wears a purple bathrobe, which Humbert notices is very much like one of his own.

Quilty's emergence from the bathroom completes the pattern of toilets and fate which recur through the novel. The fatedness of toilets for Humbert perhaps suggests the way that baser needs have dominated Humbert's life. The beginning of Humbert's confrontation with Clare is anticlimactic, deflating the tension which has been building for the previous chapters, another example of Humbert's melodramatic literary imagination running up against a more ordinary real world. Note that Humbert was wearing a bathrobe during his first sexual episode with Lolita. The shared item of clothing suggests that Quilty is Humbert's shadow or double, and also raises a hint that in attacking Quilty, Humbert may also be subconsciously attacking himself for what he himself did to Lolita, that his pursuit of revenge is also a seeking of redemption.

Humbert Humbert follows Clare Quilty to the parlor, where the playwright finally notices him. Confused, he asks him if he's Brewster. Humbert tries to remind him of his identity by asking him if he remembers Dolores Haze. When Quilty pretends ignorance, Humbert shouts at him to sit down. Quilty notices Humbert's gun, but doesn't seem particularly scared. Humbert tells Quilty to concentrate on his final moments of life, but Quilty goes on talking and fiddling with his cigarette.

Humbert is trying to create a melodramatic scene of confrontation, but Quilty deflates the mood with his flippant, casual behavior. This happens throughout the novel: Humbert is trying to create a tragic love story, but Quilty, with his tricks and mockery, turns it into a joke.

Humbert tries to shoot Quilty in the foot, but the gun jams: when it finally fires, "with a ridiculously feeble and juvenile sound," the bullet goes into the carpet. Quilty reaches for the gun, but Humbert pushes him back down, asking him to think about his "kidnapping," of Dolly Haze. Quilty protests, claiming that he saved her from "a beastly pervert." Quilty reaches for the gun, but Humbert pushes him back down into the chair. During the scuffle, the pistol falls and slides beneath a chest of drawers.

The way Humbert describes his missed shot is a parody of the way guns in movies and novels are often associated with sexual potency. The "feeble," sound of the gun suggests impotence in the face of Quilty, who defeated Humbert in the sexual contest over Lolita. It is deeply ironic that Humbert calls Quilty a kidnapper. Quilty only ran away with her, while Humbert kidnapped her as a child. Quilty's reply reminds us of the great distance between Humbert's fantasy about his life with Lolita and the reality. Neither Quilty nor Humbert is any good at fighting. Their contest is a parody of dramatic shootouts in Hollywood films.

Quilty warns Humbert to "stop trifling with life and death," remarking that as the author of **fifty-two** plays, he knows a lot about both. Humbert and Quilty both go for the gun, and end up wrestling on the ground: "We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us." Finally, Humbert secures the gun. He gives Quilty a poem to read; the poem explains why it is Quilty has to die. After reading it—stopping every few verses to make a joke—Quilty begins trying to negotiate with Humbert. He offers him the whole house, along with his collection of erotica. He tells him to be reasonable and find himself another nymphet.

Quilty is warning Humbert not to confuse his life with literature. A fight to the death over Lolita might be the "right" ending for a good story, but in Quilty's view Humbert should just go find another little girl. The number fifty-two is significant in Lolita. It's the number of cards in a deck, weeks in a year, and the final year in the story's chronology. The fact that Quilty has written 52 plays darkly hints that he might be responsible for some of the insidious patterns Humbert has noticed in his life. On the other hand, the allusion to a deck of cards suggests that it might all be luck. Whether or not things happen because of chance, fate, or conspiracy is one of the central themes of Nabokov's writing. During the wrestling, it becomes hard to tell Quilty and Humbert apart, another suggestion that they are doubles for one another.

Humbert, unconvinced, takes a shot at Quilty—he misses again. Quilty runs into the other room, where he sits down and begins playing the piano. Humbert shoots him again, hitting him this time, and Quilty howls theatrically. Humbert chases Quilty up the stairs, shooting him repeatedly. Quilty responds to every shot with theatrical cries, shivering as though being tickled. He manages to reach the bedroom, where he tucks himself into bed. Humbert shoots him a final time, then heads downstairs, profoundly disturbed by Quilty's lack of fear and nightmarish refusal to die.

Quilty mocks Humbert to the end. His theatrical howling and jarring behavior is a parody of the melodrama Humbert seems to expect from the scene of his revenge. Rather than a feeling of relief and triumph, Humbert feels disturbed: even in death, Quilty has made him feel manipulated, like the butt of a joke. This passage is disturbing in part because Quilty's desire to psychologically torture Humbert is so inhuman: even death will not keep him from his tricks.

Humbert walks down the stairs, where he encounters a group of young people having drinks. He tells them he's killed Quilty. They take it as some kind of joke. As Humbert leaves, Quilty crawls onto the second-floor landing and finally dies. Humbert realizes that this is "the end of the ingenious play staged for me by Quilty."

What makes Quilty so ingenious is that he anticipates Humbert's mindset and intentions at every step of the plot. He does this when he kidnaps Lolita, when he teases Humbert with pseudonyms, and in the final fight. In this, he resembles Nabokov himself, who is constantly anticipating what his readers expect to happen (based on what "usually happens" in novels and films) and giving them something close to it, but surprisingly different. This ending itself is a perfect example: while we might expect a dramatic confrontation with Quilty, his frightening humor and strange way of dying is a surprise.

PART 2, CHAPTER 36

Humbert Humbert departs Quilty's manor. He leaves his raincoat and the murder weapon behind. No longer caring what happens to him, he decides to drive back on the wrong side of the highway. Eventually, he finds the road blocked by police cars. He swerves off to the side, climbing a grassy hill populated with cows. The scene reminds him of two deaths: his mother's and Charlotte's.

Now that the story has ended, Humbert drives on the wrong side of the highway back where he came from, simultaneously moving backwards in his memory. Humbert the character is at the end of his story, and begins to reflect on the past.

As he waits for the police to arrest him, Humbert Humbert recalls a moment of reflection he had soon after Lolita's disappearance. He remembers looking at a small town from the crest of a hill, listening to the sound of children playing far below. The experience made him realize that the really tragic part of his story was not his loss of Lolita, but Lolita's loss of a happy childhood among other children. Reflecting on having finished his story, he gives an instruction to his publishers: the book should not be published until both he and Lolita are no longer living. Humbert ends the book as though speaking to Lolita, wishing her happiness and promising to immortalize her in art.

Here, Humbert gives us his scene of redemption, his fullest recognition of what he has done. His crime, as he understands it, was to deprive Lolita of two things that he, an eccentric exile, never knew: a home and a place in a community. Two stories end here at the same time. One is the story of Humbert the character, and it ends with his arrest. The other is the story of Humbert the narrator, who has just finished figuring out the plot—the pattern and meaning—of his life. The story of the telling is no less important than the story of the life told: Humbert's manuscript has been an emotional attempt on his part to immortalize Lolita, make sense of his life, and come to terms with his crimes.

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