

**Nabokov's Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* Versus the Narrator in
The Enchanter: An Exploration of Their Approaches to the
Main Characters, Readers and Themselves**

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce pojednává o dvou dílech Vladimira Nabokova, přesněji řečeno o přístupu jejich vypravěčů k dalším postavám knih a srovnává je. Práce začíná souhrnem Nabokových děl, základními informacemi o *Čaroději* a *Lolitě* a kritickým pohledem na ni. V další části jsou rozebrány postavy děl a jejich vztahy k vypravěčům a také mezi sebou. Poslední kapitola se věnuje podobnostem a rozdílům ve vztazích mezi postavami.

Klíčová slova: Nabokov, Lolita, Čaroděj, Hubert Hubert, pedofilie, postmodernismus.

ABSTRACT

This Bachelor Thesis discusses two works by Vladimir Nabokov, more exactly the approach of their narrators to other characters in the books and it compares them. The thesis begins with the summary of Nabokov's works, basic information about *The Enchanter* and *Lolita* and its critical view. In the next chapter, the characters and their relationships towards the narrators and between them are analysed. The last chapter deals with similarities and differences in the relationships among the characters.

Keywords: Nabokov, Lolita, The Enchanter, Hubert Hubert, paedophilia, postmodernism.

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INTRODUCTION

“Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins.”¹ These are the first words of *Lolita*, the novel about a young girl and an adult man, who is sexually attracted to her. It is a famous novel, which shocked readers and also publishers. But not many people know that Nabokov worked on a story with the same theme years before *Lolita*. The story is called *The Enchanter*. This thesis deals with these two works, more exactly with their characters and their relationships. The first chapter serves as a look to Nabokov’s life. It deals with his roots and his relocation, his connection to postmodernism, and his literary works are mentioned here, including aforesaid *The Enchanter* and *Lolita*. The following chapter is focused on *The Enchanter*, a short story written in 1939, and its characters. The narrator’s approach to the characters is analysed and their relationships are discussed. The third chapter is about unique *Lolita* and its characters and the last chapter assembles and analyzes the similarities and differences between the two books’ characters and their approaches to other characters.

Reading *Lolita* in English is not very easy for readers who are not native speakers. As a matter of fact, a dictionary was the greatest helper during writing this thesis. Moreover, there are many puns and plays on words in the book, so it is a real challenge. But when the book is read, the readers can make their own opinions and these can differ a lot among various readers. Some readers might consider it a pornography, some might consider it a love story about an unrequited love and so on. Nabokov wrote an excellent piece of work and an eager reader should not leave it without interest.

Lolita is a challenge and its theme too, and this is the main reason why I have chosen this topic. During reading this thesis, readers will be acknowledged with many interesting facts about the characters in *Lolita* and their relationships and they will be compared with the characters from *The Enchanter* and the relationships among these. The aim of this thesis is to acknowledge readers with Vladimir Nabokov, his works *The Enchanter* and *Lolita*, and familiarize them with the relationships among the characters, their similarities and their difference in behaviour and approach to each other.

¹ Vladimír Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 9.

1 NABOKOV IN CONTEXT OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Vladimir Vladimirovič Nabokov can be said to be a very famous writer. Many people probably know him because of the book *Lolita*, which he wrote and it made him a world-known writer. To understand his works fully, it is relevant to know his background at least a little bit.

He was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1899 and was born into rich and aristocratic family with long tradition of high culture and public service.² He grew up in highly cultural environment and from an early age he studied English, later also French. He took writing lessons, played tennis and liked to ride a bike. His way of living, initially at home and then later in emigration, could be described as “high style”.³ In 1919, Nabokov family left for exile because of the Bolshevik Revolution and went to Berlin. After, Nabokov went to Trinity College in Cambridge and he gained degree in Slavic and Romance Languages in 1922. For next eighteen years he lived in Germany and France, writing mainly in Russian. Nabokov, his wife Véra and their son Dmitri moved to the United States in 1940.⁴ Naturally, they were first met by the Russian community. Nabokov called some of his friends and searched for a job. Although he had no prospects, he was happy that they are in America.⁵ Nabokov lectured on Russian Literature there. He began to write in English and he also worked in Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard, since he was an expert in a small group of butterflies. He produced several works on butterflies to the various scientific journals. Nabokov’s books in English earned him some respect, but the real success with a huge attention was the book *Lolita*. It was published in 1955 in Paris, and in 1958 in USA, and gave Nabokov the opportunity to resign his teaching position and devote himself to writing in Switzerland, where he and his wife moved in 1960. He passed away in July 1977, in Switzerland and is buried there.⁶

Vladimir Nabokov is very difficult to categorize. He wrote from poems through short stories to novels. He wrote in Russian and in English. As he stated in *Strong Opinions*, he was “not interested in groups, movements, schools of writing and so forth. I am interested

² See Alfred Appel, Jr., introduction to *The Annotated Lolita*, by Vladimir Nabokov (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), xvii.

³ See Milan Hrala, *Ruská moderní literatura 1890 – 2000* (Praha: Karolinum, 2007), 507.

⁴ See Appel, Jr., introduction to *The Annotated Lolita*, xviii.

⁵ See Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 13 – 14.

⁶ See Appel, Jr., introduction to *The Annotated Lolita*, xviii.

only in the individual artists.”⁷ Nabokov definitely belongs to American and Russian literature, because he contributed to both of these. In Russian guides we often read that he is “Russian writer who wrote also in English” and in West European guides we can read that he is “American author with Russian roots”. He belongs to those authors, who exceeded the environment of the culture which they came from.⁸ Literary critic and writer John Updike described Nabokov as “the best writer of English prose at present holding American citizenship.”⁹

Nabokov is also very difficult to put into one stream of literature. He might be very often considered as a postmodern writer. Some people might disagree. There is a very nice citation which summarize a bit the connection between Nabokov and postmodernism. “Knowing how much Nabokov hated to hear about literary influences, I will not even try to suggest that he was the Russian uncle of American postmodernism. The fact is that Nabokov’s American period coincided almost exactly with the rise of postmodernism: *Lolita* was published in Paris in the same year as the first major postmodernist novel, Gaddis’s *The Recognitions*, was published in New York. [...] There are undeniable similarities between Nabokov’s fiction and that one of the postmodernists.”¹⁰ Therefore, there is still a question whether Nabokov really belongs to postmodernists or not.

The main problem whether Nabokov belongs to postmodernists or not might be that the description of this stream is usually not very clear and might differ. Researchers might argue amongst each other what exactly is included in postmodernism, but they agree in at least one aspect: the end of united, universal point of view of world. It opposes unifying and general explanations and replaces it with a respect to diversity.¹¹ In postmodern literature, it is typical that we cannot trust narrator, just because s/he can have a different point of view than the reader has. In afterword to *Lolita*, Nabokov stated that reality is “one of the few words which mean nothing without quotes.”¹² It gives us the hint that we cannot trust Humbert Humbert and maybe to other Nabokov’s characters, because every character can have his/her own reality and it could include dreams, lies, phantasmagoria etc.

⁷ Vladimir Nabokov, *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 4.

⁸ See Hrala, *Ruská moderní literatura 1890 – 2000*, 506.

⁹ Appel, Jr., introduction to *The Annotated Lolita*, xix.

¹⁰ Maurice Couturier, “Nabokov in Postmodernist Land,” *Critique* 34, no. 4 (Summer 1993), <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.k.utb.cz/docview/1310176110/citation?accountid=15518> (accessed January 22, 2014).

¹¹ See Stanley, J. Grenz, *Úvod do postmodernismu* (Praha: Návrat domů, 1997), 20.

¹² Vladimir Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled Lolita* in *The Annotated Lolita* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 312.

“Nabokov’s narrators often emerge as liars or madmen, characters’ names can be puns, anagrams or emblems, and art becomes form of game-playing where an artist chases transcendent butterflies with a verbal net, seeking some fleeting imprint of the real.”¹³ Therefore, Nabokov’s reader should be careful whether believe or not to a particular character.

1.1 Literary Works

Nabokov published his first paper (on butterflies) in 1920. In the same year he contributed a poem in English to the *Trinity Magazine* at Cambridge, when he was a student there. Then, in Berlin and Paris, he wrote some Russian works – poems, stories and eight novels. They were absolutely banned and ignored in Soviet Russia, but they were read by many Russian émigrés.¹⁴ But his real commencement as a writer can be dated from January 7, 1921, when the name Sirin firstly appeared in emigrant newspapers *Rul’*. There were three poems written by Sirin – Nabokov’s pseudonym. Later, when he was asked why he chose this name, he stated: “In modern times *sirin* is one of the popular Russian names of the Snowy Owl, but in old Russian mythology it is a multicoloured bird, with a woman’s face and bust, no doubt identical with the “siren”, a Greek deity, transporter of souls and teaser of sailors.”¹⁵

The beginning of Nabokov’s literary career is connected with poetry. Although he did not reach a huge success in this field, some of his poetical works should not be forgotten – poem *Pale Fire* from the novel of the same name is a good example. His first collection of poems appeared in 1922, it was called *Grozd’* and it consisted of thirty-seven poems from year 1921 to 1922. In January 1923 another poem collection was published – *Gornij put’*, which contained one hundred and fifty-three poems from 1918 to 1923. He wrote poems in Russian and also in English and they are accepted ambiguously, he is more noted as a novel writer.¹⁶

Nabokov mentioned the following books as “a sufficiently detailed, and racy, account of the creative part of my European past” in his autobiography *Speak, Memory: Zashchita Luzhina*, 1930 (*The Defense*, Putnam, 1964), *Otchayanie*, 1936 (*Despair*, Putnam, 1966), *Priglasenie na kazn’*, 1938 (*Invitation to a Beheading*, Putnam, 1959), *Dar*,

¹³ Malcolm Bradbury and R. Ruland, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 388.

¹⁴ See Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 5.

¹⁵ Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 161.

¹⁶ See Michal Sýkora, *Od Mášeňky k daru* (Brno: Host, 2002), 23 – 25.

1952 (*The Gift*, Putnam, 1963) and *Soglyadatay*, 1938 (*The Eye*, Phaedra, 1965).¹⁷ But that is quite a modest list. For whatever reason, he did not mention these works: his first novel *Mary* (1926) – strongly autobiographical work, *King, Queen, Knave* (1928) with features of parody, games with words and also with typical theme for him – destiny. He wrote also *Glory* (1931), *Camera Obscura* (1932) and *The Waltz Invention* (1938). In the last work, he appeared to be interested in social happenings, mainly about absurdity of totalitarianism. Later all of these books were translated into English.¹⁸

Nabokov's output can be divided into two main periods – Russian and American. His Russian works are mentioned above, and the first novel he wrote directly in English was *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, it was written in 1939 in Paris. In this work, there are some facts similar to Nabokov's life story and there are also creative principles, which we can understand as a self-evaluation of his own artistic style. There are also many details of a chess play and almost detective investigation.¹⁹

American prose was created in a different environment, was written in English and was intended for a different audience, although the main feature stayed the same – emigration.²⁰ After moving to America in 1940, he contributed poems and stories to *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker* and wrote four novels, *Bend Sinister* (1947), *Lolita* (1955), *Pnin* (1957) and *Pale Fire* (1962). *Bend Sinister* is Nabokov's second English novel and is anti-totalitarian. But Nabokov emphasizes that it is primarily about the feelings of character Krug – how he goes into the world of absolute freedom, into madness, and he is killed by the soldiers' shots. This book is full of details, for example Joyce legacy can be found here. Actually, many hidden and obvious quotes of other authors – for example Tolstoy, Gogol, Poe, Stern – can be found in Nabokov's output.²¹

Novel *Pnin* was written after the successful *Lolita*, which will be analyzed later in this thesis. The main character of the book *Pnin* is a Russian emigrant, whose tragic destiny corresponds with other emigrants' destinies – they often live only through their past. It is written in simpler form than the previous novels, but Nabokov experiments also here, for

¹⁷ See Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 15.

¹⁸ See Miroslav Zahrádka, *Ruská literatura XX. století* (Olomouc: Periplum, 2003), 125 – 126.

¹⁹ See Zahrádka, *Ruská literatura XX. století*, 127.

²⁰ See Hrala, *Ruská moderní literatura 1890 – 2000*, 521.

²¹ See Zahrádka, *Ruská literatura XX. století*, 127 – 128.

example with a hierarchy of the narrators.²² Novel *Pale Fire* is an extraordinarily complicated work. It consists of poem by fictional poet and often non-logical commentary, which is made by also fictional professor. There are also other unreal data about names and a lexicon of unknown words. There is an intricate game of repetitive pictures of shadows, shades, glass, mirror, reflections, red and green colour etc.²³

In 1951, he also published his autobiography *Speak, Memory*. Here, he “rehearses the major themes of Nabokov’s fiction: the confrontation of death; the withstanding of exile; the nature of the creative process; the search for complete consciousness and the free world of timelessness.”²⁴ He wrote many other works in English, for example: *Nabokov’s Dozen* (1958), *Nabokov’s Quartet* (1966), *Poems and Problems* (1971), *Transparent Things* (1972), *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974), *Lectures on Literature* (1980) and *Lectures on Russian Literature* (1981).²⁵ In 1969, he wrote *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* – his most extensive novel, that produced a huge interest of critics and also readers. At that time, Nabokov even appeared on *Time* magazine cover.²⁶ In this novel, Nabokov wanted to examine the possibilities of his style and that is the reason why he followed mainly aesthetical goals, which are sometimes not understandable to a reader.²⁷

Vladimir Nabokov had his own typical style of writing. Many readers who are acquainted with his works probably recognize his book from the first pages. His books are full of ambiguity, topics about emigration and different types of games. His books can be difficult to read for some readers, because they can be lost in the story due to many hidden meanings and word plays. Overall, Nabokov is not only the author of *Lolita*, as we can see he was a fruitful writer who knew how to attract readers.

1.1.1 *The Enchanter*

In year 1939 in Paris, when Nabokov was laid up with some health problems, he had the first small idea of *Lolita* in his head. He wrote a short story in Russian – *Volshebnik*, in English *The Enchanter*. He read it to some of his friends, but was not pleased with it and set it aside. It can be considered as a predecessor of *Lolita*. Nabokov was sure he destroyed it around 1940, but it was found when he and his wife Véra collected some material for the

²² See Zahrádka, *Ruská literatura XX. století*, 128.

²³ Ibid, 128 – 129.

²⁴ Appel, Jr., introduction to *The Annotated Lolita*, xxi.

²⁵ See Sýkora, *Od Mášeňky k Daru*, 17 – 18.

²⁶ See Michal Sýkora, „Americká“ témata (Brno: Host, 2004), 24.

²⁷ See Zahrádka, *Ruská literatura XX. století*, 128.

Library of Congress. It was a single copy of fifty-five typewritten pages in Russian. Later, when Nabokov was finished with *Lolita*, he reread *Volshebnik* and in year 1959 commented on it as “a beautiful piece of Russian prose, precise and lucid, and with a little care could be done into English by the Nabokovs.”²⁸ And as he uttered, it actually happened. *The Volshebnik* was translated into English in 1986 by his son Dmitri Nabokov. He also translated some other works his father wrote.²⁹

1.1.2 *Lolita*

Around 1949, the small idea about a little nymphet, which had never vanished, began to dance in his mind again. Combination of refreshed mind and inspiration caused that he started to treat his idea differently, and this time in English. The nymphet and the basic marrying-her-mother idea remained, but otherwise the work was new.³⁰ It was an idea of *Lolita*, a story about a child abused by an adult man, who married her mother only because of self-seeking reasons.

The book took a long time to be finished. Nabokov had to be acquainted very well with America and its way of living to create average reality. It was tough for him and once or twice he even thought about burning the draft. But then he considered it properly and he realized the story could be haunting him for the rest of his life. He worked on the story mainly in the evenings. When the book was finished – in the spring of 1954, four American publishers were shocked by it and refused to publish the book. There were different reasons for not publishing it, for some publishers it was too long, for others it was not good, because there were not any good people in the book. One of the publishers said that they would go to jail if they published it. Eventually, the publisher was found in Paris and the book was published in 1955.³¹

1.1.2.1 Critical view

Just as with everything, there is also a critical view of *Lolita*. It was reprobated by many people due to different reasons. Some parts at the beginning of the book might give the readers the feeling of obscene book. As Nabokov stated in afterword to *Annotated Lolita*, some readers might think that they are reading pornography. They can stop reading and put

²⁸ See Vladimir Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, trans. Dmitri Nabokov (New York: Putnam, 1986), xv – xx.

²⁹ See Nabokov, *About the Translator in The Enchanter*, 113.

³⁰ See Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled Lolita in Annotated Lolita*, 312.

³¹ *Ibid*, 312 – 316.

the book aside with the feeling of boredom. It might have been the biggest problem for the publishers – they did not read the typescript till the end and they considered it as pornography. The publishers simply did not like the theme, it was not about how Nabokov treated the theme. They would not probably like some other specific themes which might be concerned as taboo for many people, for example a happy marriage of a coloured man and a white woman resulting in many happy children and grandchildren, or a story about an atheist who lives a very happy and satisfied life and dies in his sleep at very high age.³²

There is even a critical essay in which Nabokov is being referred to as a closet pedophile. According to Centerwall, there are many arguments which support the verdict. For example, when choosing the actress for the character Lolita, he said that Sue Lyon was a nymphet whereas the other actress Tuesday Weld was not. Where did Nabokov acquire the ability to recognize a nymphet? Or he mentioned that he knew six pedophiles. Of course many people know many pedophiles, but who knows the exact number? Or let us have a look on the book *Lolita* from the simplest point of view. It is about molestation and pedophilia. But it is surrounded and stuffed with many other themes, which can be found by a clever reader. But *The Enchanter* is not, it is simple story about a pedophile. Maybe that is the reason why Nabokov claimed it to be lost for many years. But even though there is a small chance that Nabokov might have been a pedophile, it does not mean he should be respected less.³³

Another problem some readers mentioned was that *Lolita* is anti-American. This bothered Nabokov much more than the accusation of immorality. But he chose the settings and American people only because he was trying to be an American writer. “I am trying to be an American writer and claim only the same rights that other American writers enjoy. On the other hand, my creature Humbert Humbert is a foreigner and an anarchist, and there are many things, besides nymphets, in which I disagree with him. And all my Russian readers know that my old worlds – Russian, British, German, French – are just as fantastic and personal as my new one is.”³⁴ When Nabokov was asked why he wrote *Lolita*, he answered: “It was an interesting thing to do. Why did I write any of my books, after all? For the sake of the pleasure, for the sake of the difficulty. I have no social purpose, no moral message; I’ve no general ideas to exploit, I just like composing riddles with elegant solu-

³² See Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled Lolita* in *Annotated Lolita*, 312 – 314.

³³ See Brandon S. Centerwall, “Hiding in Plain Sight: Nabokov and Pedophilia,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1990), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40754944> (accessed January 23, 2013).

³⁴ Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled Lolita* in *Annotated Lolita*, 315.

tions.”³⁵ Therefore, it is clear that Nabokov wrote *Lolita* because it simply appeared in his mind and he used his imagination fully and properly to create an excellent work.

³⁵ Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 16.

2 THE ENCHANTER, ITS NARRATOR AND PLOT

In a book *The Enchanter*, there are two narrators who tell us the story. One talks to the readers as a part of the story and he sees into the main characters' minds and the other one is a narrator and a character at the same time and he talks to the readers in a direct speech. This exploration is focused on the narrator who is simultaneously a character. He does not have any name in the book and it is pointless to invent a name for him, so he will be called simply "he" or "the enchanter", as it is represented in the title of this book.

He is "Thin, dry-lipped, with a slightly balding head and ever watchful eyes."³⁶ This is a description of a not very handsome man and the reference to his eyes might be a warning against the person. The story begins with a short part of him thinking about himself and continues when he sits on a bench and he meets a girl who enraptures him. Before he sees the girl, he talks to her childminder. Then she appears – a twelve-year-old girl in violet clothes on roller skates. With her russet curls and pink mouth, she fascinates him. He faces his temptation and rather leaves. But he comes back the following day and the other days, too. From time to time, he speaks to the woman who takes care of her, but listens to her only when the girl is not near. When she is near, he is captivated by her and examines her, her appearance, her moves, everything. Eventually, the childminder tells him that the girl's mother has been her friend for five years. She also tells him that the girl's mother is a forty-two years old widow with serious health problems. She is nervous and does not appreciate the girl's presence. That is why the childminder takes care of her instead of her mother.

After a short discussion, all three people go to the girl's mother's house to see some furniture, because he mentioned that he could use some pieces. There he meets the girl's mother. Here, in the house he starts to think like a chess player, he thinks about every step he can make and he tries to choose the best tactics to get closer to the girl. The childminder takes her away the next day and he hesitates over his next moves.

After some visits, when he buys pieces of furniture, he sets his goal – marry the mother and be close to the girl. The mother knows that his financial situation is very good and her operations are very expensive. But she tries to explain him that she is seriously ill and not many years of life await her: "Let's even assume I last a few more years – what

³⁶ Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 7.

change can there be? I'm doomed until my dying day to suffer all the torments of my infernal diet, [...]. My character is hopelessly ruined. [...] now I'm demanding of everything [...] I'm poor [...] – what kind of existence would you have with such a wife?"³⁷ But he is stubborn, follows his plan and answers her: 'Which leads me to conclude,' said he, 'that my proposal has been accepted.'³⁸ Despite the mother tells him all the unpleasant facts and is rational, he insists on the marriage and is successful.

The wedding really happened and they become husband and wife. He expects the moment when he can be with the girl alone. He must be careful and play the game safely. He suffers and avoids any intimacy with his wife and is caught between despair and hope. Later, the mother is transported to a hospital and she dies after a surgery. He pretends to be in a total shock at her funeral. He talks to the childminder, thanks her for the care and informs her that he will take care of the girl. He needs two weeks to manage his matters and then he will probably take her to south and maybe abroad.

The next chapter begins with his monstrous plan. He does not care about a place to live as long as the girl is with him. "The locus did not matter – it would always be adorned by a little naked foot; the destination was immaterial."³⁹ Finally, he arrives to the childminder's place to take the girl and continue with the journey. He promises the girl that they will go to the seashore and the girl is enthusiastic about the trip and thinks about swimming. After some time in a car, they lodge at a room with a double bed, because the hotel has nothing else to offer because of the flower show in town and many visitors. The girl is exhausted and when they are in their room, she "straightened, stretching up like an angel, for a split second tensed every muscle, took another half step, and softly descended onto his lap."⁴⁰ The enchanter takes advantages of this and touches her, feeling her skin and body under her clothes. For a second, it reminds him a moment of his childhood – a bedtime with his sister, who died long time ago. After the girl is asleep, he desires to unhook her belt. But there is a knock at the door. The police want to talk to him. He goes downstairs and discovers that the police are mistaken.

On the way back to his room, he is confused because he does not know the room number. Finally, he finds the right room and goes inside. There, on a bed, he finds the girl,

³⁷ Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 27 – 28.

³⁸ Ibid, 28

³⁹ Ibid, 53.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 64.

who is deep asleep. He comes to her and thinks about things he can do. He stares at her body and her breast. He does not know where to start. Eventually, he starts “to cast his spell, he began passing his magic wand above her body, almost touching the skin, torturing himself with her attraction, her visible proximity.”⁴¹ This is the time he desired for a long time, now he can finally possess the girl.

When the enchanter notices that the girl is awake, he thinks: “No, I beg you, don’t take it away!”⁴² His fairy tale suddenly ends and he realizes how strange and terrifying this probably is for the girl. She screams and tries to run away, but cannot open the door. “Be quiet, it’s nothing bad, it’s just a kind of game, it happens sometimes, just be quiet,”⁴³ he tries to save the moment. But everything is lost and the girl is impossible to calm. So he runs outside the room and locks her there. Then, in front of the door, he was “gradually sinking.”⁴⁴ Nabokov might have thought this expression for the enchanter’s state of mind and also for his physical arousal.

There are too many people at the corridor. He runs away from all of them and that is where it all ends. He is hit by a car in front of the hotel and “the film of life had burst.”⁴⁵

2.1 The narrator

As John S. O’Connor writes in his article, “In examining the role of truth in fiction, perhaps the most important place to start is with an examination of the reliability of narrators.”⁴⁶ He also mentions that readers need to take three steps to understand the meaning of unreliable narrators. These steps are: compare the narrator’s words and behaviour, check the facts of the story, apply your knowledge of the world.⁴⁷ If these steps are followed, it is clear, that the enchanter is an unreliable narrator. There are parts, when he absolutely realizes that his plan is monstrous, but does not admit it fully and rather tries to convince himself and the reader that his behaviour is not that bad. For example, the mother is described as not a pretty woman with a wart on her nose. But the enchanter marries her and then he

⁴¹ Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 73.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁶ John S. O’Connor, “Seeking Truth in Fiction: Teaching Unreliable Narrators”, *English Journal* 83, No. 2 (February 1994): 48, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.k.utb.cz/docview/237303739/fulltextPDF?accountid=15518> (accessed March 20, 2014).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

thinks “what a superb period she had had under his tutelage, how he had incidentally provided her with some real happiness to brighten the last days of her vegetative existence.”⁴⁸ He tries to make the readers think that he did a good deed when he married an ugly woman and that she probably should be grateful that he improved her last days. In actual fact, he only married her to use her and he waited for her death. As Dmitri Nabokov stated in the afterword to *The Enchanter*, “The man is a dreamer like others, although in this case a very rotten dreamer. Distasteful as he may be, though, one of the most poignant levels of this story is that of his – occasionally objective – introspection.”⁴⁹ Yes, the book is full of introspection of the enchanter. He thinks about himself and his acts a lot, he knows that he should not do what he does – to try to possess the little girl and her immature mind. Nevertheless, he does it and wants to have an understanding from the readers.

2.2 Attitude to the mother and their relationship

In the book, the mother serves as an imaginary bridge to the girl. There is not a part where there are some nice feelings towards her, from any character. She appears for the first time when the enchanter pretends to need some furniture. She is described as “a tall, pale, broad-hipped lady, with a hairless wart near a nostril of her bulbous nose.”⁵⁰ That gives the reader a feeling that she is not pretty, maybe even ugly. After the enchanter leaves the house, he decides to stay close to her. He thinks: “I must say she doesn’t look too decrepit to me, but if she does take her bed and die, then the setting and the circumstances for a potentially jovial relationship will crumble, then it will all be over.”⁵¹ Therefore, he knows that there are some risks in his plan, but to stay close to the mother is the only way how to stay close to the girl. He is not interested in the mother as a woman, but only as a tool to reach his monstrous goal.

As it is seen in the following part, he feels sorry for the mother for a while. But he was engulfed by his main goal (to be with the girl) and was able to not realize her as a person: “He felt both sorry and repelled but, realizing that the material, apart from its one specific function, had no potential whatever, he kept doggedly at his chore, which in itself demanded such concentration that the physical aspects of this woman dissolved and van-

⁴⁸ Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 49.

⁴⁹ Dmitri Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled The Enchanter in The Enchanter*, 97.

⁵⁰ Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 21.

ished.”⁵² The mother is even called “cumbersome behemoth.”⁵³ That clearly shows that the narrator tries to disgust the readers by telling them bad things about her. The enchanter was disgusted by her, but wanted to make his presence to the girl as natural as possible (when he is her stepfather, it is natural that he is still with her and takes care of her).

At one night, the enchanter, rather than face his nuptial obligation, goes roaming in the night. He considers various alternatives what to do with his new wife, who is already superfluous. He thinks about poison and probably he enters a pharmacy, maybe makes a purchase (it is not clear from the text). When he is back at home, he sees a light under the door of “dear departed”⁵⁴ and he thinks: “Charlatans... We’ll have to stick to the original version.”⁵⁵ As Dmitri Nabokov stated in afterword to *The Enchanter*, “Dear departed” can mark that in his mind, she is already dead. “The original version” is probably that he must either satisfy his wife or find a convincing excuse to say good night and go to bed. “Charlatans” can be the pharmacists, whose poison he bought or did not buy.”⁵⁶ Therefore, it is clear that in some moments, the enchanter loses patience with his odious wife and wants to solve it quickly.

Overall, the mother has only one role in the book. To mediate some contact with the little girl. Without her, it would be very unnatural that an adult man is interested in a young child. Enchanter does not feel love or any other pleasant feeling towards her and only wants to make use of her.

2.3 Attitude to the girl and their relationship

The enchanter and the girl have a strange relationship. There are not many dialogues between them. And when they talk to each other, the content is not very important, because the enchanter perceives her as a subject of his lust. It is the narrator, who tells the readers the most information about their relationship. At the beginning of the story, the narrator says that “he [the enchanter] would have given a sack of rubies, a bucket of blood, anything he was asked”⁵⁷ for “the glow of her cheeks, the twelve pairs of narrow ribs, the down along her neck, her wisp of a soul.”⁵⁸ Therefore it is clear that even though he does

⁵² Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 25.

⁵³ Ibid, 30.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 40.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ See Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled The Enchanter* in *The Enchanter*, 100 – 101.

⁵⁷ Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 19.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 18.

not know her, he is fascinated by her from the first moment he saw her, without knowing any of her characteristic features.

Later in the story, he plans his future with the girl. There are some necessary measures mentioned, which he needs to take, like: “not to let her go anywhere alone, make frequent changes of domicile [...], keep a sharp eye out lest she make friends with other children or have occasion to start chatting with the woman from the greengrocer’s or the char.”⁵⁹ He basically plans how to destroy her life only to make her as dependent on him as possible. He wants to be somebody she feels admiration for. And he acts like he there is nothing wrong about this. He thinks “for what could one possibly reproach the enchanter?”⁶⁰ He justifies himself, considers himself an enchanter, because he will help the little girl to be in a better world, in his world, where he takes care of her. He thinks she needs it, because her childhood “was not a very happy childhood, that of a half-orphan: [...] a home without caresses, strict order, symptoms of fatigue.”⁶¹ But before he can take her to the better world, he must enchants her with “his magic wand.”⁶² This magic wand represents his private parts.

After he marries her mother, he tries to be with the girl as often as possible. And when the mother is dead, the path to the girl is quite open and with no bigger obstacles. In a train, on his way for the girl, he thinks about the girl: “Thus they will live on – laughing, reading books, marvelling at gilded fireflies, talking of the flowering walled prison of the world, and he would tell her tales and she would listen, his little Cordelia, and nearby the sea would breathe beneath the moon.”⁶³ Here he idealizes the whole situation and is excited about this thought so much, that even a lady who sits across from him changes compartment. The reaction of the lady might be considered a reaction of other people to his thoughts. He thinks about a young girl and how he spends the time with her and other people feel disgusted by it and leave. There is a big clash between what he considers normal and what other people (who are morally healthy) consider normal.

Overall, the girl is not important as a human being in the story. The enchanter is interested in her only because she is a young girl, not because of her personality or demeanour. Simply, he has an opportunity to be closer to a little girl and he uses it. At the end of

⁵⁹ Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 55.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 56.

⁶¹ Ibid, 18.

⁶² Ibid, 73.

⁶³ Ibid, 57.

the story, when he casts his spell to the girl and she wakes up, he realizes how the girl probably sees the situation: “some monstrosity, some ghastly disease – or else she already knew, or it was all of that together.”⁶⁴ That was the first time the girl realizes that there is something wrong. During the story, she thinks about the enchanter as about a nice man, who takes her swimming and considers their trip as a big adventure. At the end the girl is horrified by him and the outfall of the story is probably the best for their relationship – it ends.

2.4 Attitude to himself and the reader

At the very beginning of the story there is quite a long part of the enchanter thinking about his deviation. “How can I come to terms with myself?”⁶⁵ is the first sentence. It is a question for himself and he tries to answer it for himself and also for the readers. It is clear that he is not happy about what kind of a human he is. He mentions that he had “five or six normal affairs”⁶⁶, but that cannot be compared to his “unique flame.”⁶⁷ It tells us that he probably tried to be “normal” and have a relationship with an adult woman, but there is something that attracts him much more. As Dmitri Nabokov stated in the afterword to *The Enchanter*, “In agonizing moments of introspection he recognizes the beast and tries to will it away.”⁶⁸ But then, he tries to justify himself as it is seen in part like: “This cannot be lechery.”⁶⁹ and “For I cannot even consider the thought of causing pain or provoking unforgettable revulsion. Nonsense – I am no ravisher.”⁷⁰ He tries to rationalize his behaviour – in his eyes and also in the eyes of the reader. Considering his thought at the beginning of the story, he is confused – he is not happy about himself and he knows that he is not a good person, but tries to justify it and gain reader’s fondness.

He refers to his expressions as “absentminded smile.”⁷¹ And immediately adds, that “only *humans* are capable of absentmindedness.”⁷² Here he shows that “he too might after all be human.”⁷³ In the afterword to *The Enchanter*, Dmitri Nabokov writes: “The En-

⁶⁴ Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 74.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 98.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 4.

⁷¹ Ibid, 11.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled The Enchanter in The Enchanter*, 98.

chanter, evil conjuror though he may be, lives partially in an enchanted world. And, common madman or not, he perceives himself on a special, poetic plane as a mad king (for he knows that he is, in any case, mad).”⁷⁴ Yes, there are some parts in the story where the enchanter really gives the impression that he considers himself something more, he feels like the mad king and he sets the rules. The relationship to himself and the reader is quite similar, because he lies to both of them. He lies that he is an enchanter and that the girl will have a better future with him. He has some rational moments throughout the story when his mind seems to be clear, but more often, he only tries to rationalize his malicious actions.

⁷⁴ Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled The Enchanter* in *The Enchanter*, 98.

3 LOLITA AND HUMBERT HUMBERT AS A NARRATOR

The book *Lolita* is not only improved *The Enchanter*. It is a different story with different characters, who are significantly developed throughout the story. It can be said, that it is more elaborated story than *the Enchanter*. For example the names – they are not only randomly chosen names, Nabokov really thought about them to be as suitable as possible for the characters. “For my nymphet I needed a diminutive with a lyrical lilt to it. One of the most limpid and luminous letters is “L”. The suffix “ita” has a lot of Latin tenderness, and this I required too. Hence: Lolita. [...] Another consideration was the welcome murmur of its source name, the fountain name: those roses and tears in ‘Dolores’.”⁷⁵ That is only a short demonstration how *Lolita* is elaborated. The story also starts with a part about Lolita’s name. Humbert Humbert mentions five forms of her name: Lo, Lola, Dolly, Dolores and Lolita, each for a different situation. More exactly, the book starts with a foreword by John Ray, Jr., Ph.D., who is an editor of Humbert Humbert’s diary and who was asked to edit the diary before it goes into printing. H. H. wrote the diary years ago and is already dead – he died in 1952, a few days before his trial.

Part one starts, as mentioned above, with a section about Lolita. Then Humbert Humber, who is a narrator of the story, describes his happy childhood and he mentions his relationship with Annabel Leigh. They were in love and when H. H. wanted to possess her, two men interrupted the moment by their ribald encouragement. Soon after, Annabel died and maybe that was the moment which caused H. H. to be such a beast, as the readers will be acknowledged later in the story.

Humber Humbert meets Lolita when searching for accommodation in Ramsdale (after his unsuccessful marriage and mental collapse), where we wants to write. He is enthralled by this twelve-years-old girl and compares her to Annabel. Her mother, Charlotte Haze, falls in love with Humbert and he marries her, only to be close to Lolita. He writes a diary where he confesses his true feeling and this diary is later found by Charlotte. After she reads all the horrible things H. H. writes about, she is in shock and runs in the street in front of the house, where she is killed by a passing car. From that moment, Lolita is no longer protected from H. H. Charlotte did not like her daughter very much, but she was the safety obstacle who sheltered Lolita.

⁷⁵ Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 25.

After Charlotte dies, H. H. decides not to tell the truth to Lolita. He pretends her mother is in hospital. Before he picks her up from camp, he goes shopping for some clothes for her. “Oh Lolita, you are my girl, as Vee was Poe’s and Bea was Dante’s, and what little girl would not like to whirl in a circular skirt and scanties?”⁷⁶ There is a reference to Virginia Clemm, a thirteen-year-old cousin of Edgar Allan Poe, whom he married. Later in the story, H. H. registers in a hotel as “Edgar” There are many more references to E. A. Poe in the story.⁷⁷ Bea and Dante is a reference to Dante Alighieri and Beatrice – a girl who mesmerized Dante at the age of eight and later was his inspiration.⁷⁸ The narrator wants to show the readers that he is not the first men, who found love and passion in a young girl. Both Poe and Dante are considered respectable artists these days and he compares himself to them. The book is full of references to other writers and their works.

The story continues when H. H. takes Lolita from camp and they go driving around the country, moving from one hotel to another one. In hotel The Enchanted Hunters, Lolita says that she had some sexual experience with a boy at the camp. The same day H. H. has sex with Lolita for the first time. Later, he reveals that her mother is dead and gives her no choice but to stay with him and obey his monstrous rules. And the first part ends.

The second part describes their common life. After a long travelling across the USA, Lolita is enrolled to girls’ school and Humbert is very strict to her, considering school activities and also contact with boys. Another character – Clare Quilty, appears to be more and more noticeable in the story. After some time, they go driving through the USA again and Clare Quilty – reader still does not know who he is – is following them and he meets Lolita when H. H. is not near her. When Lolita becomes ill and is in hospital, Clare Quilty makes her to go with him. H. H. is desperate and desires to find Lolita. After a long searching, he capitulates and finds a girlfriend. But then he receives a letter from Lolita, in which she informs him she is married, expecting a baby and she asks him for money. H. H. finds her, even though she did not write her address. He gives her a big amount of money, wishes her luck (after she refuses to leave her husband and be with him) and goes to kill Clare Quilty for stealing love of his life. He finds him in his house and after a fight, he kills him. And that is where the plot ends. At the end of the book, H. H. adds that he wants this confession to be published after Lolita’s death.

⁷⁶ Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, 107.

⁷⁷ See Appel, Jr., *Notes to Pages 40 – 43 in The Annotated Lolita*, 357 – 358.

⁷⁸ See Appel, Jr., *Notes to Pages 19 – 20 in The Annotated Lolita*, 342.

3.1 The narrator

As in *The Enchater*, we cannot believe to Humbert, because he is an unreliable narrator. He tries to persuade the readers that it was Lolita who started the whole, strange relationship with sexual content. He attempts to put Lolita into a role of a calculating and cold-hearted person and himself into a role of a real victim and he greatly uses his linguistic skills to do that. He wants to defend himself by statements like: “the majority of sex offenders that hanker for some throbbing [...] relation with a girl-child, are innocuous, inadequate, passive, timid strangers [...]. We are not sex fiends! [...] Emphatically, no killers we are.”⁷⁹ But bright readers know, that he is an unreliable narrator and that he cannot be trusted completely. For example, when he says “it was she who seduced me,”⁸⁰ readers probably know that a twelve-year-old child is not acquainted with sex and the feelings which are connected to it. And, as John O’Connor defined, they apply their knowledge of the world and realize that H. H. wants to deceive them. Even though Lolita has some experience from the camp, she has no further knowledge of this adult world, it is simply funny distraction for her and she does not think about its consequences. Moreover, when Lolita is told that Humbert did not have any sexual experience when he was a kid, she wants to show him how it is. She says “here is where we start,”⁸¹ and without knowing that H. H. intentionally provoked her, she “teaches” him how it is done. She wants to impress him with “the world of tough kids.”⁸² And that is a great example of how manipulative he can be to Lolita and also to the readers. As Richard H. Bullock states “in looking at his past he cannot separate facts from fantasy, and he cannot obtain verifications of past events, as when he searches for the news photograph of himself in *The Enchanted Hunters* to find that it shows only a blurred, unidentifiable shoulder.”⁸³ The fact that he cannot separate facts from fantasy makes him clearly an unreliable narrator.

3.2 Attitude to Charlotte and their relationship

Humbert Humbert firstly describes Charlotte Haze as “poor lady [who] was in her middle thirties.”⁸⁴ He does not find anything attractive about her and says that she is a woman

⁷⁹ Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, 87 – 88.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 132.

⁸¹ Ibid, 133.

⁸² Ibid, 134.

⁸³ Richard H. Bullock, “Hubert the Character, Humbert the Writer: Artifice, Reality, and Art in *Lolita*,” *Philological Quarterly*, November 30, 1983, 188.

⁸⁴ Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, 37.

“completely devoid of humor, [and] utterly indifferent at heart”⁸⁵. But he knows she is a perfect connection between him and Lolita and marries her. He often refers to her as “Haze woman,”⁸⁶ “big cold Haze”⁸⁷ or “mother Haze”⁸⁸ in the story. He despises her. But their relationship develops, his feelings change later in the story. “Bland American Charlotte frightened me. My lighthearted dream of controlling her through her passion for me was all wrong. I dared not do anything to spoil the image of me she had set up to adore. I had toadied to her.”⁸⁹ She is no longer “the poor lady,”⁹⁰ how he describes her at the beginning of the book. He realizes that she might be a big threat and thinks about murdering her. He has a chance to drown her in a lake, but loses courage to do that, he considers it and thinks about how easy it would be, but he adds: “But what d’ye know, folks – I just could not make myself do it!”⁹¹ He has a chance to kill, but he does not use it. By stating this, H. H. probably wants to prove that he is not such a huge monster, as some readers might think.

Charlotte loved H. H. from the first moment she saw him (as she wrote in a letter for him). And later in the story, it is clear that she still loves him. She calls him “Hum”⁹² or “dear.”⁹³ But she is suspicious. She wonders what is in his locked drawer. H. H. does not give her a satisfying answer and one day she decides to find it out. And she finds his diary, full of disgusting truth. “You’re a monster. You’re a detestable, abominable, criminal fraud”⁹⁴ she says to him after he comes home. Her love changed to hate. H. H. offers her a drink and wants to convince her that she misunderstood it and that she read only fragments of novel. But Charlotte is not there anymore. H. H. answers a call and hears that Charlotte is dead. There is no sadness, no sorrow in Humbert Humbert’s head. He only mentions it as “Charlotte’s simple death.”⁹⁵

For Humbert Humbert, the best thing about Charlotte Haze is that she has a young daughter. That is all that matters to him. She could be perfect and he would not care, because simply he could not love a woman: “she was my Lolita’s big sister – this notion, perhaps, I could keep up if only I did not visualize too realistically her heavy hips, round

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 56.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 57.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 43.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 83.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 37.

⁹¹ Ibid, 87.

⁹² Ibid, 82.

⁹³ Ibid, 93.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 96.

⁹⁵ Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, 99.

knees, ripe bust, the coarse pink skin of her neck and all the rest of that sorry and dull thing: a handsome woman.”⁹⁶ Charlotte would have a chance for love with H. H. only if she was a young girl. Moreover, he describes her as a bad mother who is jealous of her own child and he takes advantage of it and tries to convince the readers that he gives Lolita love which she lacks from her mother. So not only he uses her to be close to Lolita, he also uses her to gain some sympathy from the readers.

3.3 Attitude to Lolita and their relationship

The relationship of Lolita and Humbert Humbert is very complicated and changes throughout the story. When H. H. first sees her, he immediately thinks of Annabel. “It was the same child – the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair.”⁹⁷ H. H. says that he has “rotting monsters behind his slow boyish smile. And neither is she [Lolita] the fragile child of a feminine model.”⁹⁸ By this, H. H. wants to emphasize that Lolita has some defects of character, too. He suggests that he and Lolita are alike. Lolita is not a good example of well-behaved and nice girl. She is rebellious and moody. But still, she is an innocent, pubescent girl. And H. H. knows it. “I knew, of course, it was but an innocent game on her part, a bit of backfisch foolery in imitation of some simulacrum of fake romance.”⁹⁹ She plays with him, kisses him now and then and considers it an interesting and funny game.

Their relationship escalates when they go travelling after Lolita’s mother’s death. H. H. plans to anaesthetize Lolita with strong sleeping pills and molest her. But there is a big surprise. The pills do not work and in the morning, Lolita seduces H. H. She tells him about her sexual experience from the camp and she has sex with him three times. Later that day, she tells him: “You revolting creature. I was a daisy-fresh girl, and look what you’ve done to me. I ought to call the police and tell them you raped me. Oh, you dirty, dirty old man.”¹⁰⁰ She is confused and her attitude to H. H. is unstable. Even H. H. is not sure about her behaviour and he asks himself: “Was she joking?”¹⁰¹ The same day they have sex, Lolita is told her mother is not in a hospital but is dead. And from that moment, Lolita is ut-

⁹⁶ Ibid, 72.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 39.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 44.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 113.

¹⁰⁰ Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, 141.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

terly dependent on H. H. and he knows it as he states at the end of part one: “You see, she had absolutely nowhere else to go.”¹⁰²

H. H. threatens Lolita with a stay in “correctional schools, the reformatory, the juvenile detention home, or one of those admirable girls’ protectories where you knit things, and sing hymns, and have rancid pancakes on Sundays”¹⁰³ if she goes to the police and tells them the truth. In the middle of the book, H. H. summarizes their relationship: “Despite our tiffs, despite her nastiness, despite all the fuss and faces she made, and the vulgarity, and the danger, and the horrible hopelessness of it all, I still dwelled deep in my elected paradise – a paradise whose skies were the color of hell-flames – but still a paradise.”¹⁰⁴ H. H. considers it a paradise, but Lolita is desperate and he hears “her sobs in the night – every night, every night – the moment I feigned sleep.”¹⁰⁵ Even though Lolita cries at nights, H. H. still pursues his dream of possessing a nymphet, no matter how she feels.

Lolita knows there is no way out of her pitiful situation. H. H. manipulates her and he even pays her for sex. “Her weekly allowance, paid to her under condition she fulfils her basic obligations, was twenty-one cents at the start of the Beardsley era – and went up to one dollar five before its end.”¹⁰⁶ But he is afraid she could run away when she saves enough money, so he sometimes steals the money back. He becomes more and more possessive about Lolita. And the more he forces her, the more she revolts. He forbids her school activities and contact with boys. She hates him, but feels trapped.

But the relationship still develops. As Richard H. Bullock writes, one day Humbert does not find Lolita – the light of his life, but he finds Dolores Haze. “No longer a nymphet, she reminds him instead of a prostitute, and after a fight and her escape from the house, she becomes aware of her ability to control the situation and does so immediately: ‘this time we’ll go wherever *I* want, won’t we?’ As a symbol of her new-found control over Humbert, Lolita demands intercourse while Humbert, having “adjusted” and seeing her again as a nymphet, is now her prisoner.”¹⁰⁷ This prisoner is afraid of losing Lolita, because he feels Clare Quilty’s presence. The picture of H. H. changes, as he is no longer the charming and strong man, he is terrified of losing his nymphet and does everything for

¹⁰² Ibid, 142.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 151.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 166.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 176.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 183 – 184.

¹⁰⁷ Richard H. Bullock, “Hubert the Character, Humbert the Writer: Artifice, Reality, and Art in Lolita,” *Philological Quarterly*, November 30, 1983, 187.

her. Eventually, despite his prudence, H. H. loses Lolita when she disappears from hospital. He meets her again after three years. “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.”¹⁰⁸ The readers are acknowledged that he no longer loves the young nymphet, but he loves Lolita, the pregnant and married girl. But Lolita does not love him and refuses the offer to be with him again and live with him. He understands it because he thinks he broke her life. He gives her four thousand dollars and she is happy that she can afford a better life with her husband. Humber is broken-hearted, but reconciled with his fate: “I was driving through the drizzle of the dying day, with the windshield wipers in full action but unable to cope with my tears.”¹⁰⁹ He goes to kill Claire Quilty to at least calm his anger and to take revenge for stealing his love.

3.4 Attitude to himself and the reader

Humbert Humbert describes himself as “an exceptionally handsome male; slow-moving, tall, with soft dark hair and a gloomy but all the more seductive cast of demeanor.”¹¹⁰ And he also states: “I could obtain at the snap of my fingers any adult female I chose.”¹¹¹ It is probably true, because he does appeal many women in the story. But the description makes readers think that he is arrogant and conceited. Nabokov speaks about H. H. in *Strong Opinions*: “Humbert Humbert is a vain and cruel wretch who manages to appear ‘touching.’”¹¹² This statement might surprise many readers, as they might consider Humber a sympathetic pedophile, since he is a very convincing narrator.

As Alfred Appel, Jr. writes in the introduction to *Lolita*, the first person, in which the story is written, creates “formidable narrative problem of having an obsessed and even mad character meaningfully relate his own experience [...] by the understandable element of self-justification which his perversion would necessarily occasion.”¹¹³ It is not easy to comprehend the whole story and the characters with all their feelings and moreover, there are many points of view as readers can look at it. They are not told what to think. They are placed in front of a man who tells a story and they are made to think about the story from his point of view, nevertheless not exclusively, because they are allowed to have their own

¹⁰⁸ Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, 270.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 280.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 25.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Nabokov, *Strong Opinions*, 94.

¹¹³ Appel, Jr., introduction to *The Annotated Lolita*, xxxix.

point of view – which can change by rereading the book. As Appel says: “the uniquely exhilarating experience of rereading it on its own terms derives from the discovery of a totally new book in place of the old, and the recognition that its habit of metamorphosis has happily described the course of one’s own perceptions.”¹¹⁴ Readers might have difficulties with understanding the relationships among the character and this thesis might help them to comprehend these.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, xvii.

4 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THEIR APPROACHES AND AMONG THE RELATIONSHIPS

There are certain similarities and also some differences between the main characters, their attitudes and overall in their relationships. Nabokov himself wrote about the works that “The nymphet [...] was really much the same lass, and the basic marrying-her-mother idea also subsisted; but otherwise the thing was new and had grown in secret the claws and wings of a novel.”¹¹⁵ The following lines serve as the clarification of main characters’ relationships and their similarities and differences.

4.1 The mother and Charlotte

Firstly, let me start with the relationship between the enchanter and the mother, and Humber Humbert and Charlotte. It is very similar. The most obvious fact is that the women serve only as a bridge to the girls. They are used as tools to reach the narrators’ dark desires. Both the mother and Charlotte are described as obstacles and the enchanter and Humbert need to overcome them in order to be with the girls. The mothers have one very repulsive feature and that is they do not love their own daughters. The mother is bothered by the existence of her child, because she needs a calm household to relax and heal herself and Charlotte is even jealous of her child. Both of the narrators think about killing the women, the only thing that differs is the manner of killing them. The enchanter considers poison, and drowning is a good idea for Humber Humbert. But neither of them find the courage to do it. Another similar fact is that when the women die, the men do not express any sadness. The mother’s death is commented as “the person was no more”¹¹⁶ and Charlotte’s death is described as “Charlotte’s simple death.”¹¹⁷

The main difference can be found in the effort which the men have to make for the purpose of being married with the women. The enchanter needs to try hard, he needs to convince the mother that it is a good idea to marry him. The narrator in *The Enchanter* describes the effort as: “weeks of murmuring, exploration, persuasion, intensive remolding of another’s pliable solitude,”¹¹⁸ and on the contrary, Humbert is simply on the right place in the right time and the circumstances are very propitious for him. As a matter of fact, he

¹¹⁵ Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, xvii.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 49.

¹¹⁷ Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, 99.

¹¹⁸ Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 24.

does not think about marrying Charlotte until she writes him the love letter. Then he realizes it would help him a lot, because presence of a father to his daughter is natural, unlike the presence of an adult man to a young girl.

4.2 The girl and Lolita

The relationship between Humbert and Lolita is much more different than the relationship between the enchanter and his young girl. The main difference is that the relationship in *Lolita* is developed. Of course, the story happens in a longer interval so it is natural that characters develop. There is not much development in the relationship between the enchanter and the girl. He is obsessed by her from the beginning till the end of the story and she does not care about him very much throughout the story and fully realizes his existence at the very end of the story. Another difference is that Lolita has her own personality and she has an opinion, but the girl from *The Enchanter* seems to be voiceless, she is given only a few exclamations like “You lost the hands of your watch”¹¹⁹ or “Everything could have caught fire!”¹²⁰ As Dmitri Nabokov states, the girl is “very different – perverse only in the madman’s eyes; innocently incapable of anything like the Quilty intrigue; sexually unawakened and physically immature.”¹²¹ On the other hand, Lolita is a stubborn and impudent girl with sexual experience. All of this leads to different behaviour to the girls. For example H. H. forces Lolita to say nothing about their relationship or she ends in an unpleasant institution. The enchanter does not need to do that, because the girl simply does not know about his feelings and terrible intentions. Another difference is that H. H. meets Lolita when she is not a nymph anymore and he declares he still loves her. But Lolita does not love him. The story is mainly about an unrequited love. But in *The Enchanter*, readers do not know how he would react in that situation. The enchanter’s behaviour toward the girl is more delicate, Humbert is sometimes tough to Lolita. The end of these two relationships is different, too, as it is mentioned above.

The main similarity between the approaches to the girls is that they are both sexual objects of the two adult men. Both of the men are enchanted by the girls and both of them would do almost everything to be with the girls, even consider a murder. Also, both of

¹¹⁹ Nabokov, *The Enchanter*, 15.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 58.

¹²¹ Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled The Enchanter in The Enchanter*, 109.

them reach their goals and have a sexual intercourse with the girls, only with the different outfall of that.

4.3 Narrators and readers

As among the characters, there are of course similarities and differences between the narrators and their approaches, too. In *The Enchanter* there is I-form and he-form, while *Lolita* is written solely in I-form. Nevertheless, readers are allowed in both books to see only the pedophiles' points of view. The readers' attitude to narrators might differ, because in *The Enchanter*, nothing against the law happens until the end and the whole story gives the readers the feeling of curiosity and expectation. The readers might think that eventually, the enchanter is not that bad and that he will do nothing bad or immoral to the girl. On the other hand, Humbert has first sexual experience quite early in the book (even though *Lolita* does not know about it) and the readers probably want H. H. to stop with that perverse sexual behaviour. H. H. uses irony and humour to seduce the readers, the enchanter lacks it.

When considering the two books and their similarities and differences, there is one appropriate statement from Dmitri Nabokov: "As for *The Enchanter*'s contribution, occasional ideas and images from it are indeed echoed in *Lolita*. But, as I – and many others – have noted in the past, themes and details of various kinds often recur in Nabokov's novels, stories, poems, and plays. In this case, the echoes are distant and the dissimilarities substantial."¹²² *Lolita* and *The Enchanter* are different stories with different characters and their behaviours, however with some similarities.

¹²² Nabokov, *On a Book Entitled The Enchanter* in *The Enchanter*, 109.

CONCLUSION

Vladimir Nabokov is mainly known for his famous work *Lolita*. But as the readers are acknowledged in chapter one, he is the author of many other works and also poems. *The Enchanter* and *Lolita* are very similar as for the main theme. An adult man is sexually attracted to a young girl and uses her mother as a tool to be as close to the girl as possible. But it is appropriate to realize that the characters in the books are not the same, although *The Enchanter* can be considered *Lolita*'s predecessor. *Lolita* is much more advanced than the girl in *The Enchanter*. She has her own opinion and she considers the relationship with Humbert Humbert a funny game. She is proud and stubborn and these are the reasons why she had the first sex with him voluntarily. But later, she does not do it voluntarily, she is forced to do it by manipulating and threatening by H. H. Whereas the enchanter's girl is a quiet, childish girl who likes to ride roller skates and she does not know about the enchanter's intentions until the last pages. Their relationship does not have a chance for developing, as it ends so fast.

The mother and Charlotte are both poor mothers. While the mother from *The Enchanter* only longs for a calm household without a child, Charlotte is even jealous of her daughter. But nevertheless, both of them are the girls' protectors. They simply protect the girls by their presence. And this protection disappears when the mothers die. Both mothers serve mainly as an imaginary bridge to the girls and the narrators have no nice feelings toward them.

The main difference between the narrators' approaches is that H. H. uses humor, irony and many puns to seduce the readers. The enchanter is more prosaic and not as entertaining as Humbert. Both of them are unreliable narrators and readers cannot trust them. They are not able to distinguish facts and fantasy and there is a big clash between what they consider normal and what other people consider normal. The last chapter dealt with similarities and differences more in depth and acknowledged the readers with the facts, that the characters, including narrators, have different feelings in both works, although with some similarities.

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