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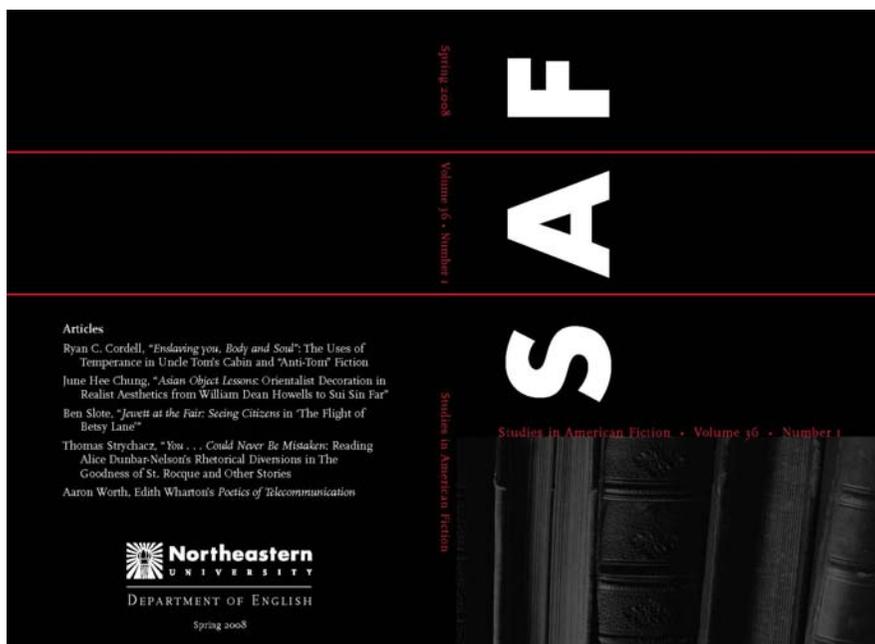
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Harriet Hustis, *Time Will Tell: (Re)Reading the Seductive Simulacra of Nabokov's Lolita*

**TIME WILL TELL:
(RE)READING THE SEDUCTIVE SIMULACRA
OF NABOKOV'S *LOLITA***

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Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, the sordid and self-professed "confessions of a white widowed male" named Humbert Humbert, concludes with a striking, if somewhat unsavory, reflection. Having narrated the story of his abduction and molestation of his thirteen-year-old step-daughter, Dolores Haze, and described his eventual murder of her impotent lover and subsequent abductor, the pornographer Clare Quilty, Humbert announces, "This then is my story. I have reread it. It has bits of marrow sticking to it, and blood, and beautiful bright-green flies."¹ Why, in the metaphoric gore of his own act of narration, does the incarcerated Humbert Humbert call attention to the fact that he has "reread" the story which he has (presumably) just penned? To what extent is his—and, by extension, the reader's—appreciation for the commingled elements of beauty and atrocity that he describes (the "marrow," the "blood," and the "beautiful bright-green flies") premised upon this act of rereading?² What does an act of rereading—both in and of Nabokov's *Lolita*—involve, entail and encourage, exactly?

In his chapter entitled, "'A Thousand Times and Never Like': Rereading for Class," Peter J. Rabinowitz argues that we often use the term "reading" to refer to two essentially different and distinct activities: "reading against memory" or "the process by which a reader makes *retroactive* sense of an *already completed* text," and "configurational" reading or reading "toward the end."³ For Rabinowitz, the former constitutes "the act of holding a work up to itself"; "reading against memory" emphasizes "the act of looking at the formal ingenuity of its coherence rather than being carried along by the perplexing flow of the plot," and thus it "stresses design at the expense of dramatic force."³ Ultimately, Rabinowitz concludes that "reading against memory" is really an act of rereading in disguise: it treats a text's retrospective coherence as an ever-present given by retroactively identifying it as that which is always immediately apparent.

Similarly, in his essay entitled "Good Readers and Good Writers," Nabokov insists that, for his own part, he "use[s] the word *reader* very loosely" because "[c]uriously enough, one cannot *read* a book: one can only reread it. A good reader, a major reader, an active and cre-

ative reader is a rereader.” According to Nabokov, “rereading,” or what Rabinowitz terms “reading against memory,” is the only way that we can accurately “acquaint ourselves” with a text. Unlike visual perception, Nabokov argues,

[i]n reading a book, we must have time to acquaint ourselves with it. We have no physical organ (as we have the eye in regard to a painting) that takes in the whole picture and then can enjoy its details. But at a second, or third, or fourth reading we do, in a sense, behave towards a book as we do towards a painting.⁴

Nabokov thus overtly privileges “reading against memory” (“rereading”) as the only way to comprehend and experience the inherently diachronic nature of narrative. When we read, we cannot immediately and instantaneously traverse space via perception (“take in the whole picture”) and experience, appreciate, or enjoy the attendant aesthetic details. According to Nabokov, reading is a prolonged acquaintance that extends over time; “good” reading therefore entails rereading because the combination of scope and precision—the integration of the textual and the temporal—is only an eventual result of multiple moments of consideration and deliberation repeatedly experienced in the wake of a prior familiarity with the text itself. In short, for Nabokov, the value of rereading appears to reside in its capacity to teach us about the expense—and expanse—of time.⁵

As Rabinowitz has suggested, however, when “reading against memory” (or rereading) is conflated with what is commonly labelled a “first-reading”—that is, when “coherence is . . . presented as if it actually were configuration”—“covert systems of value” are introduced. What is erased or suppressed is the fact that “rereading is not simply a chronological stage that comes, horizontally, after first reading. Rather, these two sets of strategies are represented vertically by two different [readers] at a given moment, two different [readers] who are inevitably in a power relationship with each other.”⁶ To treat coherence as if it is somehow simply configuration is thus to attempt to use a typically “horizontal” conception of chronology to disguise a vertical relationship of power; as Rabinowitz suggests, when practiced by readers who arrogate a measure of authority to themselves, it can exert a formative influence on the products and practices of interpretation. Ultimately, Nabokov’s *Lolita* explores the temporal problems and paradoxes that arise when someone who rereads “vertically”—that is, an individual who determinedly practices “reading against memory” in order to impose a covert system of values and a definitive, retrospective coherence upon a sequence of events—becomes a writer.

In writing his confession, Humbert Humbert initially and repeatedly attempts to practice what Gary Saul Morson will identify as “backshadowing” or “foreshadowing after the fact.” In *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*, Morson characterizes “back-shadowing” as a conception of temporality that insists that “the present, as the future of the past, was already immanent in the past.”⁷ Thus, after linguistically fondling the name of his “nymphet” in the opening paragraph of his confession, Humbert Humbert points to the shifting temporalities of her identity: “She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita” (9). Morning, noon, and night, formal, casual, and sexual, “Lolita” will name a plurivocity that Humbert then insistently backshadows:

Did she have a precursor? She did, indeed she did. In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. In a principedom by the sea. Oh when? About as many years before Lolita was born as my age was that summer. (9)

Humbert’s answer to the question of “when,” exactly, the summer of his significant love occurs initially appears to position Lolita’s own birthdate as its point of reference, but his temporal isometrics are telling: his own age that summer is nearly equal to that of the retrospectively and fictitiously named “Annabel” (and thus, as he later admits, “Annabel” is not a “nymphet” at all, so it is not in that sense that she serves as “precursor” to Lolita) and his age that summer is also nearly equivalent to the number of years antecedent to Dolores Haze’s birth. Moreover, his age at that time is also equal to Dolores’ age at the time of her meeting with Humbert: namely, somewhere between twelve and thirteen. Figuratively, this is the “age” of Humbert’s “love”; literally, it is also the age of Annabel’s death.⁸

It is thus not Annabel herself that Humbert seeks to reincarnate in Lolita—rather, he seeks to break the “spell” cast by his abrupt awareness of the fact of her mortality:

Long after her death I felt her thoughts floating through mine. Long before we met we had had the same dreams. We compared notes. We found strange affinities. The same June of the same year (1919) a stray canary had fluttered into her house and mine, in two widely separated countries. Oh, Lolita, had *you* loved me thus! (14)

A temporal and spiritual affinity (Humbert and Annabel share both the “same dreams” and, coincidentally, the same experiences at the same time) that is ruptured by death, “love” and sexual initiation for Humbert Humbert become associated with a perverse synchronicity that he will insist can be captured visually. Thus, Humbert’s narrative frequently represents a quest for visual evidence of “retrievable time,” and his confession repeatedly asserts a “vertical” chronology of predetermined simultaneity that confers retrospective coherence on the configuration of his brief interval with Dolores Haze by backshadowing it as an episode prefigured by the death of Annabel Lee.⁹

As Morson acknowledges, backshadowing represents a kind of “chronocentrism”: by conferring a position of perceptual superiority on its practitioner, it conflates the “vertical” position of power occupied by the rereader with the horizontal experience of chronology and configuration characteristic of the first-time reader.¹⁰ In *Lolita*, the immanence of the present in the past—its figuration as the (literally, prescribed) future—allows Humbert’s inscription and interpretation of pre-pubescent girls as “nymphets” to function as a form of sexual conscription. His helpless seduction is thus always immanent (and, by extension, imminent) when a purported “nymphet” arrives on the scene.

Such arrivals mark the start of Humbert’s peculiar “game”: to play with “nymphets” is, in Humbert’s world, to play with time.¹¹ “Especially susceptible to the magic of games,” Humbert describes how, “[i]n my chess sessions with Gaston I saw the board as a square pool of limpid water with rare shells and strategems rosily visible upon the smooth tessellated bottom, which to my confused adversary was all ooze and squid-cloud” (233). Perception is a form of play that substitutes immediacy and simultaneity for temporal duration: this presumed transparency of objects and objectives will ultimately legitimize Humbert’s practice of nympholepsy as a form of self-proclaimed artistry, a magical “game” all his own. Just as “rare shells and strategems” are “all ooze and squid cloud” to a confused adversary,” so too in the case of nymphets,

You have to be an artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins and a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine... *in order to discern at once*, by ineffable signs—the slightly feline outline of a cheekbone, the slenderness of a downy limb, and other indices which despair and shame and tears of tenderness forbid me to tabulate—the little deadly demon among the wholesome children . . . (17, emphasis added)

The instantaneous discernment characteristic of Humbert's game-playing operates on the assumption that isolated details immediately define the "whole picture"—but only for those who already know what they're looking for. In short, Humbert's backshadowing fuels his self-proclaimed status as an exemplary nympholept because it allows him to insist upon an aesthetics of accurate immediacy premised on the assumption of immediate visual accuracy.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Humbert therefore locates "the nymphet" squarely in the eye of the beholder: "It is a question of focal adjustment, of a certain distance that the inner eye thrills to surmount, and a certain contrast that the mind perceives with a gasp of perverse delight" (17). This "focal adjustment" effectively creates a semiotics of the simulacrum that allows Humbert to (re)configure and (re)present Dolly Haze's "innocent game" as nymphet-Lolita's clever seduction of an "innocent" (but perceptive and well-informed) Humbert.¹² Fresh from the amatory experiences of summer camp, Dolores is eager to show off her newfound sexual knowledge to a determinedly naïve Humbert. Thus, Humbert's description of their first kiss counterpoints his restraint with the eagerness of a preconceived "nymphet":

Not daring, not daring let myself go—not even daring let myself realize that *this* (sweet wetness and trembling fire) was the beginning of the ineffable life which, ably assisted by fate, I had finally willed into being—not daring really kiss her, I touched her hot, opening lips. (113)

By insisting upon what this moment is not (it is "not really" Humbert's "daring" realization of his desire), Humbert emphasizes Lolita's eager reciprocity in order to construct the encounter as "an innocent game on her part, a bit of backfisch foolery in imitation of some simulacrum of fake romance" (113).¹³

The innocence of Lolita's game, as Humbert defines and perceives it, stems from its fakery: it is an "imitation" of a "simulacrum" of a "fake romance," and as such, it is, like Humbert's non-kiss, a moment of purported non-reality. Ultimately, like Humbert's definition of "nymphets" (upon which this scene implicitly depends for its sexual "logic"), Lolita's seduction, as described by Humbert, is dependent upon what Jean Baudrillard has identified as "simulation." In "The Precession of Simulacra," Baudrillard suggests that whereas "[t]o dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has," "[t]o simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have." Humbert doesn't have Dolores' consent to his "game": she doesn't know that she is his "nymphet," and even if she did, because she is a minor, in the eyes of the law, such consent is

neither hers to give nor his to obtain. Moreover, Dolly Haze doesn't have an innocent, bumbling Humbert on her hands: this is no "backfisch foolery"—and Humbert knows it. As Baudrillard acknowledges, simulation complicates the distinction between "the real" and the "not-real" in ways that go beyond mere pretending: "pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary.'"¹⁴ Nymphets are, in essence, simulations—by Humbert's own admission, they inhabit an "intangible island of entranced time" (17).

Moreover, the implications of simulation for a scene of seduction are profound: as Baudrillard suggests in his essay "On Seduction,"

being seduced is still the best way of seducing. It is an endless strophe. There is no active or passive in seduction, no subject or object, or even interior or exterior: it plays on both sides of the border with no border separating the sides. No one can seduce another if they have not been seduced themselves.

According to Baudrillard, "seduction . . . makes use of weakness, makes a game of it, with its own rules": "the strategy . . . consists of drawing the other within your area of weakness, which will also be his or hers." Seduction is both "a calculated failure" and "an incalculable failure," it is "a challenge to the other to be taken in."¹⁵ In the scene at the Enchanted Hunters, Humbert simulates this challenge:

All at once, with a burst of rough glee (the sign of the nymphet!), she put her mouth to my ear—but for quite a while my mind could not separate into words the hot thunder of her whisper, and she laughed, and brushed the hair off her face, and tried again, and gradually the odd sense of living in a brand new, mad new dream world, where everything was permissible, came over me as I realized what she was suggesting. I answered I did not know what game she and Charlie had played. (133)

Simulating an ignorance that conveniently elicits "the sign of the nymphet," Humbert draws Dolores into his own area of weakness (pedophilia) in order to "make a game of" *her* weakness (a pre-teen penchant for sexual experimentation), a game "with its own rules." Thus, he admits that "[w]hile eager to impress me with the world of tough kids, she was not quite prepared for certain discrepancies between a kid's life and mine" (134). Humbert's aesthetics of immediate accuracy and instantaneous discernment ensures that he is always already

aware of any significant “discrepancies”—in fact, it is the surmounting of those temporal discrepancies by means of the nympholept’s peculiar capacity for “focal adjustment” that constitutes the “thrill” of identifying (and ultimately possessing) the “nymphet.”

Nevertheless, although Humbert’s ability to play games, to spatially visualize time and to immediately discern the “whole,” detailed “picture” of a “nymphet,” is repeatedly figured as both ocular and oracular, in this scene of seduction, “the sign of the nymphet” is represented as an erased moment of *auditory* evidence. Unable to “separate into words the hot thunder of her whisper,” Humbert’s realization that “everything was permissible” is literally “ineffable”: it is a “suggestion” that Lolita makes to which we, as readers, are never privy and which Humbert himself admits to mishearing initially or failing to comprehend.

Humbert’s ostensible omission at this point in his narrative is both striking and odd: given its context, Lolita’s “suggestion” would seem to be, on the one hand, easily memorable, and on the other, crucial proof of the “reality” of Humbert’s own alleged innocence and passivity. In effect, Humbert’s claims of seduction and “nymphet love” (135) rely upon the “hot thunder” of a “whisper” which is either inaudible or inaccurately registered at the time of the alleged seduction and then deliberately omitted in the retelling. The ultimate simulacrum, it adumbrates the vertical relationship of power that organizes Humbert Humbert’s “game” of seduction by suggesting the extent to which he reads against memory, insistently casting coherence as configuration: Dolores Haze is always the once and future Lolita.

Thus, Humbert’s omission is glaring evidence of the fundamental temporal substitution fueling his aesthetics of the simulacrum as the “reading against memory” of a (re)reader (and a bad one at that, by Nabokov’s standards). Moreover, in an essay entitled “Mimir and Memory,” Humbert also proposes “a theory of perceptual time based on the circulation of the blood and conceptually depending . . . on the mind’s being conscious not only of matter but also of its own self, thus creating a continuous spanning of two points (the storable future and the stored past)” (260). This reduction of the expanse of time to a self-determined and self-conscious continuum between “storable future” and “stored past” limits temporality to interiority and confines it to purely visual terms; thus, Humbert insists at the outset of his confession that

There are two kinds of visual memory: one when you skillfully recreate an image in the laboratory of your mind, with your eyes open . . . and the other when you instantly evoke, with shut eyes,

on the dark innerside of your eyelids, the objective, absolutely optical replica of a beloved face, a little ghost in natural colors (and this is how I see Lolita). (11)

In Humbert's conception of memory, the relevant "details" of others' lives only ever achieve their relevance by virtue of the way in which they visually fit into the "whole picture" always already circulating through the blood of the perceiver.¹⁶ His is thus a particularly dangerous form of "reading against memory" in which the existence of any initial, configurational reading-experience is overwritten by an overarching and overwhelming pattern of visually immediate and ostensibly self-serving coherence. Ultimately, Humbert Humbert is the antithesis of Nabokov's "good," "active" and "creative" reader.

Nevertheless, as Morson has observed, no matter how insistent or prevalent backshadowing may be, it always reveals the influence and intersection of multiple temporalities:

backshadowing may be based on three significant times: the period under examination; the outcome of that period; and the present, in which the backshadowing observer passes judgment on the earliest period. There is a bipolar story, with an observer located after its completion. The first period contained signs pointing to the second and read in the third. The signs are clearest in light of what happened later, but they were legible from the first.¹⁷

Backshadowing may offer a self-serving rereading of the past, but it is an act of rereading nonetheless: it may seek to conflate distinct temporalities, but it cannot ultimately deny them.

At the outset of his narrative, Humbert seems to want to suggest that because to know is to see and to see is to know, his confession will thus constitute a statement of the already-read and ultimately save him, both body and soul. However, as a result of his position within the third temporality created by backshadowing—that is, as an observer passing judgment on a previous time-period—he is systematically compelled to take note of his own (occasionally comic) misreadings.¹⁸ In one such incident of nymphic misperception, a "tender pattern of nudity" ("what looked like a nymphet in the act of undressing before a co-operative mirror") is really "the disgusting lamp-lit bare arm of a man in his underclothes reading his paper by the open window in the hot, damp, hopeless summer night" (20). Humbert's backshadowing here leads to an ironic admission: the consummately perceptive game-player once mistook the arm of a reader for a nearly-

naked nymphet.

To cope with backshadowing's revelations of misperception, Humbert initially attempts to erase or rewrite moments that might suggest the collapse of his coherent vertical chronology—in particular, he will seek to control the temporal duration of textuality by privileging visual synchronicity over verbal sequentiality. Thus, he recalls how, in a lost photograph of himself and Annabel taken “on the last day of [their] fated summer and just a few minutes before [they] made [their] second and fatal attempt to thwart fate,” “Annabel did not come out well”—in fact, she isn't even looking at the camera and all that can be seen of her (assuming, of course, that his memory of the photo is accurate) are “her thin bare shoulders and the parting in her hair” (13). Years later, Humbert will seek out the existence of another, strangely analogous photograph: while en route to his pre-planned rape of the drugged Dolly Haze, he claims that “there came a blinding flash—and beaming Dr. Braddock, two orchid-ornamentized matrons, the small girl in white, and presumably the bared teeth of Humbert Humbert sidling between the bridelike lassie and the enchanted cleric, were immortalized” (127). After Dolores's disappearance, Humbert experiences a “curious urge to relive his stay” with Lolita at the Enchanted Hunters and he therefore looks for the photograph that he believes to have been taken as “a much better possibility of retrievable time” than the experience of revisiting the lobby of the motel itself (261). Ultimately, however, no such chance wedding-photo seems to exist. As the scene of Lolita's seduction suggests, the visual synchronicity of temporality depends on an act of simulation, on pretending to have what one doesn't have; it is perhaps not all that surprising, therefore, that none of the testimonial photographs that Humbert seeks to offer up as evidence ultimately exist.¹⁹

Moreover, Humbert resorts to such strategies as displaying “[e]xhibit number two . . . a pocket diary bound in black imitation leather, with a golden year, 1947, *en escalier*, in its upper left-hand corner” that he then describes “as if it were really before [him]” (40). What he “reads” or, more accurately, “writes,” into evidence, however, is a “brief materialization” of this prior text (“a puny unfledged phoenix”) offered “by courtesy of a photographic memory” (40)—a “materialization” not unlike the erased “hot thunder” of Lolita's whispered invitation. Much like the lost photo of Annabel or the apparently non-existent snapshot of a predatory Humbert Humbert at the Enchanted Hunters, this text was destroyed almost as soon as it was written: thus, when he writes his confession in 1952, Humbert claims that this diary was “destroyed five years ago”—that is, in 1947 (40).

Asserting the validity of his (ironically) “photographic” recollection of his diary, Humbert insists, “I remember the thing so exactly because I wrote it really twice. First I jotted down each entry in pencil (with many erasures and corrections) . . . then, I copied it out with obvious abbreviations in my smallest, most satanic hand” (40). This insistence on the exactitude of his visual recollection of an act of verbal duplication and replication—an assertion that conveniently (re)erases the “many erasures and corrections” and that may or may not spell out the “obvious abbreviations” of the first draft and its subsequent copy—allows Humbert to claim that, “for all the devil’s inventiveness, the scheme remained daily the same” (55).²⁰

In short, in the temporal and textual logic of Humbert’s narrative, simulacra are supposed to readily supplant reality: the original—be it Annabel or a pocket-diary—can be exactly and reiteratively duplicated in a copy of the “stored past” circulating through the blood and brain of Humbert Humbert. It is this logic that provokes Humbert to interject, when he feels that he has “written more than a hundred pages and not got anywhere yet,” when his “calendar is getting confused,” and when he doesn’t think he can continue: “Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita. Repeat till the page is full, printer” (109). For Humbert Humbert, the diachronic nature of the written word is initially an imposition, an inadequate substitute for the games he used to play with the “living Lolita.” Thus, when he attempts to describe Charlotte Haze’s accidental death, Humbert feels compelled to “put the impact of an instantaneous vision into a sequence of words; their physical accumulation in the page impairs the actual flash, the sharp unity of impression” (97). The attempt to describe the accident that killed Dolores’ mother reiterates the dilemma of Lolita’s seductive whisper: a “sharp unity of impression” once again cannot be aligned with or contained by a “sequence of words” because the “physical accumulation” of words on a page suggests duration—and, “bad” reader that he is, Humbert always wants to extol the instantaneous impression, to assert coherence over configuration by reiteratively encapsulating a singular Lolita—“his” “Lolita”—until “the page is full.”

Ultimately, Humbert’s backshadowing—his assumption of the empowered position offered by the “vertical” chronology of a reading against memory—collapses precisely because the act of writing itself invokes and depends upon the experiencing of multiple internal and external temporalities. There is no synchronized “retrievable time,” no purely bipolar, solipsistic span between “the storable future” and the “stored past” that can simply be (re)captured or registered by (ab-

sent) external evidence. Narrative necessitates an awareness of duration; to write is to take the past out of storage and re-present it. Likewise, (re)reading is “good” only to the extent that it inaugurates the possibility of further rereading and thus generates opportunities for a further acquaintance with details not previously assimilated. And, as the old cliché would have it, the devil is in the details.

Thus, in the course of his narrative, Humbert Humbert will begin to realize that, literally and figuratively, time will tell. As a writer, Humbert is compelled to exteriorize temporality, to give memory its necessary physical duration—at the very least, in the form of words on a page that are never necessarily simultaneous with the “unity of impression” that he recollects—and, by extension, to reread the very presumptions of synchronicity and accuracy that have constituted his act of reading against memory. For Humbert to reread what he has already reread is to not only be compelled to admit the discrepancy between what is seen and what is heard, between reality and simulacra, and between an original and its copy, but also to begin to realize the possibility of what Morson identifies as “sideshadowing.” According to Morson, “sideshadowing admits, in addition to actualities and impossibilities, a *middle realm* of real possibilities that could have happened even if they did not.” Thus, early in his narrative, Humbert admits,

When I try to analyze my own cravings, motives, actions and so forth, I surrender to a sort of retrospective imagination which feeds the analytic faculty with boundless alternatives and which causes each visualized route to fork and re-fork without end in the maddeningly complex prospect of my past. (13)

As Morson suggests, “[b]y focusing on the middle realm of possibilities, by exploring its relation to actual events, and by attending to the fact that things could have been different, sideshadowing deepens our sense of the openness of time.” The attempt to visually incorporate moments of “retrievable time” in a narrative confession slowly but surely gives way to Humbert Humbert’s realization of the fact that, in Morson’s words, “[t]hings could have been different from the way they were, there were real alternatives to the present we know, and the future admits of various paths.”²¹ Ultimately, it seems to be the act of writing that leads Humbert to this realization and that, in effect, begins to teach him how to reread as a “good,” “major,” “active” and “creative” reader.

For Humbert, the possibilities generated by sideshadowing are “a source of great and terrible wonder” (21); thus, in narrative retro-

spect, he admits to having “often wondered what became of” the “nymphets” he visually “possessed”:

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? I had possessed her—and she never knew it. All right. But would it not tell sometime later? Had I not somehow tampered with her fate by involving her image in my voluptas? (21)

If time is open and sideshadowing is possible, if he actually operates in a “wrought-iron world of criss-cross cause and effect,” then “nymphets” might very well be affected by Humbert’s covert activities—or they might not. The point is, you can never be certain of your perception. Thus, although he will want to insist that his secret act of Sunday-morning masturbation in the presence of an unwitting Dolores Haze leaves her unaffected because he has “possessed” only a self-serving simulacrum, his “own creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own,” his act of writing the story of this simulacrum and its possession will nevertheless compel him to realize that both now and then, “Lolita” was and is much more than “a photographic image rippling upon a screen” (62). Thus, at the end of his confession, he will testify to a significant change in authorial intention:

When I started, fifty-six days ago, to write *Lolita* . . . I thought I would use these notes in toto at my trial, to save not my head, of course, but my soul. In mid-composition, however, I realized that I could not parade living Lolita. I still may use parts of this memoir in hermetic sessions, but publication is to be deferred. (308)

No longer playful words on a page delivered in the dependably “fancy prose style” of a murderer (9), Humbert Humbert’s recollections take on a life of their own, one that he realizes he cannot simply “parade” in order to “save” his “soul.”

As he begins to question the neat span between “stored past” and “storable future,” Humbert thus begins to conceive of both his narrative and his life as a “destiny in the making” and not merely the documentation of a quest for “retrievable time” and significant synchronicities: coherent interpretation gives way to the complexities of configuration as Humbert Humbert seeks to re-present his story in narrative form. Thus, as he outlines the circumstances surrounding Dolores’ eventual disappearance, he cautions the reader “not to mock”

him: "It is easy for him and me to decipher *now* a past destiny; but a destiny in the making is, believe me, not one of those honest mystery stories where all you have to do is keep an eye on the clues" (210–11). In effect, it is Clare Quilty, Humbert's putative "brother," a pornographer who seduces and ultimately absconds with Dolores, who reveals (in "his genre, his type of humor—at its best at least—the tone of his brain") "affinities" with Humbert's own personality, who teaches Humbert the rules and the stakes of his own game and who shows him the difference between reading and reading against memory, between coherence and configuration (249). "A tease" who lures Humbert on a "cryptogrammic paper chase" (250), Quilty challenges Humbert's self-professed ability to see through "all ooze and squid-cloud" to the "shells and strategems" beneath: he makes a game of Humbert's "weakness," and in doing so, forces Humbert to realize the extent and significance of that "weakness." His is also a seduction-by-simulacra. Thus, Humbert acknowledges, "[a]mong entries that arrested my attention as undoubtable clues *per se* but baffled me in respect to their finer points I do not care to mention many since I feel I am groping in a border-land mist with verbal phantoms turning, perhaps, into living vacationists" (250–51). There is always the possibility of a reality behind simulations; again, the point is, you can never be certain—coherence may not be the ultimate result of configuration.

Teased by Quilty's simulations and ultimately compelled to write that part of his narrative "which . . . might be called "*Dolorès Disparue*," Humbert slowly begins to realize both what he has lost and what he has done, as he embarks on "three empty years" (253). Thus, although he admits that "[o]n playgrounds and beaches, [his] sullen and stealthy eye, against [his] will, still sought out the flash of a nymphet's limbs," he recognizes that "one essential vision . . . had withered" (257). To depict this experience, he seeks to convey, not "the impact of an instantaneous vision," but rather the "general impression . . . of a side door crashing open in life's full flight, and a rush of roaring black time drowning with its whipping wind the cry of lone disaster" (253–54). The aesthetic pleasures of perverse synchronicity have given way to the pain of disastrous duration as seductive simulacra are exposed as fleeting phantoms. In turn, the more durable emotional realities of loss and culpability begin to be registered by the sudden influx of "roaring black time." In the course of Humbert's narrative, both what has disappeared and what remains will increasingly be registered as things to be heard, not seen.

Seduced by simulacra, as the "confused adversary" of Quilty's game, and, ultimately, as a narrator of "McFate's way" (211), in his experi-

ence of the “cryptogrammic paper chase,” Humbert is forced to realize that he has frequently been a “bad” reader and that he cannot conclusively substitute coherence for configuration; thus, he can no longer function as the controlling step-father who, by “putting the geography of the United States into motion,” managed to give Dolores “the impression of ‘going places,’ of rolling on to some definite destination, to some unusual delight” when they were really going nowhere (152). As he now recognizes, “our tour was a hard, twisted, teleological growth, whose sole *raison d’être* . . . was to keep my companion in passable humor from kiss to kiss” (154). With its teleology exposed as an act of simulation, the “boundless alternatives” available to Humbert Humbert begin to appear: instead of exclusively backshadowing, he sideshadows. Thus, as he begins to assess the “openness of time,” “smothered memories, now unfolding themselves into limbless monsters of pain” emerge to tell a very different story (284).

Thus, while “[t]humbing through [a] battered tour book,” he now “dimly evoke[s]” not only the “Magnolia Garden” that is advertised as a must-see for children (because they “will ‘walk starry-eyed and reverently through this foretaste of Heaven, drinking in beauty that can influence a life’”), but also, and perhaps more importantly, the ironically grim response of “grim Lo”: “Not mine” (155). Although Humbert will insist upon defining her as “the ideal consumer, the subject and object of every foul poster” (148), she ironically testifies here to the fact that the “beauty that can influence a life” cannot influence hers: this ad is thus not “dedicated” to her at all. In recording her response, Humbert is sideshadowing, implicitly suggesting the existence of a “*middle realm* of real possibilities that could have happened even if they did not.” Thus, he admits that “[n]ow, squirming and pleading with [his] own memory, [he] recall[s] that . . . it was always [his] habit and method to ignore Lolita’s states of mind while comforting [his] own base self” (287).

Even more telling is Humbert’s revised perception of Lolita’s tennis-game: the source of an “indescribable itch of rapture” (230), he nevertheless feels compelled to retrospectively “insist that had not something within her been broken by me—not that I realized it then!—she would have had on top of her perfect form the will to win” (232). “Attending to the fact that things could have been different,” Humbert remembers her serve:

She would wait and relax for a bar or two of white-lined time before going into the act of serving, and often bounced the ball once or twice, or pawed the ground a little, always at ease, always

rather vague about the score, always cheerful as she so seldom was in the dark life she led at home. (231)

In the “white-lined time” of her tennis serve, Lolita can “wait and relax,” “cheerful” and “at ease” because she is for a brief moment not subject to the “retrievable time” of Humbert’s sexual conscription.²² No longer content with a “photographic image” of his “nymphet,” Humbert laments, “Idiot, triple idiot! I could have filmed her! I would have had her now with me, before my eyes, in the projection room of my pain and despair!” (231). Although still visually conceptualized, possession for Humbert is no longer simply an instantaneous flash of synchronicity and coherence, but a duration of pain and despair unfolding itself before his eyes and (more importantly) ears.

Perhaps the most significant indication of Humbert’s emerging understanding of the openness of time and the possibilities of sideshadowing occurs in the moment when the now-married Dolly Schiller reveals the identity of her “abductor.” Like her previously suggestive “hot thunder” of a simulation of whispered seduction, the name of Clare Quilty is omitted at this crucial narrative moment. In its place, Humbert transcribes the instantaneous experience of a significant temporal substitution, only to then immediately wonder, “Why did a flash from Hourglass Lake cross my consciousness?” (272).

This literally and figuratively temporal “flash” is at least partially auditory: in speaking “softly, confidentially, arching her thin eyebrows and puckering her parched lips,” Dolly’s “kind of muted whistle,” recalls the expression on the face of her mother Charlotte when she comments, “softly, making a fish mouth,” that Humbert’s watch is “Waterproof” (89). Unlike the sudden “burst of rough glee” that is “the sign of the nymphet” or the “hot thunder” of her equally significant, but also unrecorded “whisper,” this muted utterance is not erased, but *replaced* with a resonant memory of Dolly’s mother. Preoccupied with thoughts of murdering Charlotte, with “watch[ing her], with the stark lucidity of a future recollection (you know—trying to see things as you will remember having seen them),” Humbert forgot to remove his wrist-watch before going for a swim in Hourglass Lake (86). The artist Jean Farlow, while attempting to paint Hourglass Lake, “noticed something [Humbert] overlooked,” namely, this very wrist-watch (89); without realizing it at the time, the artist noticed a detail that pointed to a potential sideshadow.

The unanticipated influx of this memory at this particular moment of revelation and insight—a memory both of time’s ironic durability and of the potential configurations that shape and escape attempts

at retrospective coherence—thus embodies the very essence of sideshadowing. In Dolly’s “kind of muted whistle,” past, present and future—and the middle realm of unrealized alternatives suggested by actualities—are invoked in a metaphor for enduring temporality (a waterproof wrist-watch) whose multi-layered significance can only be appreciated in an act of “good,” “active” and “creative” rereading. Humbert’s “flash” testifies not to synchronicity and immediate visual coherence, but to duration and the complexities of verbal configuration that can only be appreciated after the fact, as details that seemed insignificant at the time of their occurrence return with an ironic vengeance to assert their unforeseen dominance over the manifold possibilities of the future.

Similarly, after his murder of Clare Quilty, as he sits by the side of the road and awaits his arrest for “disregard[ing] the rules of traffic” and “disregard[ing] the laws of humanity,” Humbert recalls a moment “soon after [Lolita’s] disappearance,” when he pulled over to the side of another road to alleviate “an abominable attack of nausea” and looked out over “a low stone parapet on the precipice side of the highway” (307). What Humbert sees, however, is less important than what he hears: “a melodious unity of sounds rising like vapor from a small mining town that lay . . . in the fold of the valley” (307). Noticing the brilliant colors of the landscape, Humbert nevertheless insists that

even brighter than those quietly rejoicing colors . . . both brighter and dreamier to the ear than they were to the eye, was that vapory vibration of accumulated sounds that never ceased for a moment, as it rose to the lip of granite where I stood wiping my foul mouth. And soon I realized that all these sounds were of one nature, that no other sounds but these came from the streets of the transparent town. (307)

The “vapory vibration” of incessant, unified sound that Humbert hears is nothing more or less than the “melody of children at play,” a “vapor of blended voices” that is “too far [away] for the eye to distinguish any movement in the lightly etched streets” (308). Unable to see, Humbert is compelled to listen to auditory testimony of very different, but equally “magical” games—to paradoxically *hear* the sideshadows of alternative possibilities suggested by the passage of time:

I stood listening to that musical vibration from my lofty slope, to those flashes of separate cries with a kind of demure murmur for background, and then I knew that the hopelessly poignant thing

was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord. (308)

Sidelining himself after the murder of Quilty, Humbert Humbert remembers and recognizes a very different kind of synchronicity—a moment that works not to collapse occurrences into a prefabricated, visually transparent pattern of rosy eventuality, but to sideshadow and thus open up the possibilities for additional rereadings and interpretations.²³

Perhaps the most controversial of such potential rereadings is, not surprisingly, one of Humbert's own, inserted right before the murder of Quilty. Confronted with the "hopelessly worn" figure of a married and pregnant Mrs. Richard F. Schiller, he insists,

I looked and looked at her, and knew as clearly as I know I am to die, that I loved her more than anything I had ever seen or imagined on earth, or hoped for anywhere else. . . . I insist the world know how much I loved my Lolita, *this* Lolita, pale and polluted, and big with another's child, but still gray-eyed, still sooty-lashed, still auburn and almond, still Carmencita, still mine. (277–78)

Alexander Dolinin has argued that this revelation testifies to the fact that "Humbert Humbert gains the ability to love, which liberates him from his maniacal fear of time."²⁴ Such liberation becomes questionable, however, in light of the terms in which Humbert expresses his love: repeatedly looking at Dolly Schiller, he "insists" that he loves Lolita because he "still" sees "his" Lolita in the "pale and polluted" woman before him. His repetition of the word "still" a total of five times in one sentence might appear to signal duration, but in many ways, it simply evokes the "Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita" of an earlier moment of collapse: in this moment of purported love, Humbert Humbert's conception of time is not open and free, but possessively iterative—literally and figuratively, Humbert insists that time stands "still," and that he sees that temporal stability in "*this* Lolita," who is, as she has always been, "his," regardless of appearances.

Ultimately, to the extent that his relationship with Lolita is a visual one of "love at first sight, at last sight, at ever and ever sight" (270), Humbert Humbert can never fully break out of the confines of backshadowing chronocentrism. As a result, his confession repeatedly testifies to both his and, to a lesser extent, Dolores', respective experiences of entrapment in a covert set of values of his own creation. Lolita's absence, however, necessarily suspends both Humbert's

visions and his vigilance: in these moments, he listens, rereads, sideshadows and, ultimately, writes.²⁵ Critical debates about whether or not Humbert Humbert has conclusively achieved moral awareness and experienced definitive and exculpatory regret for his actions (interpretations that privilege or, conversely, refuse to privilege, the scene of the “friendly abyss” or his retrospective declarations of “love,” for example) appear miss the point of the novel’s representation of time: as Nabokov suggests in *Speak, Memory*, “the prison of time is spherical and without exits.”²⁶ If Humbert Humbert is the ape who has drawn the bars of his cage, his cage is Nabokov’s conception of time, and as such it is spherical and three-dimensional.²⁷ No merely linear sequence of events between “then,” “now,” and “later,” it is the representation of time that both creates and complicates the possibility of Humbert’s moral awareness in *Lolita*.²⁸ To the extent that this representation of temporality is repeatedly linked to the activities of reading and writing, ethics and aesthetics are ultimately (and, for many, problematically) interconnected in Nabokov’s complex novel.

It is therefore not the case that, as Trevor McNeely has insisted, “[t]o defend this work . . . requires, plainly and simply, that the moral issues it raises must be ignored” because, plainly and simply, a defense of *Lolita* (if such a defense is necessary) is not thereby necessarily a defense of Humbert Humbert and his acts of rereading. In “‘Lo’ and Behold: Solving the *Lolita* Riddle,” McNeely argues that “[i]t is perhaps the cleverest of Nabokov’s devices so to have structured his book that the reader is forced into a moral/aesthetic dilemma by it from which there is no escape” except “to reject totally both book and author for the frauds they are” since “[e]very other approach to the book victimizes the reader.”²⁹ Setting aside McNeely’s sweeping interpretive proclamation, it is nevertheless true that Nabokov’s text coerces the reader into “a moral/aesthetic dilemma . . . from which there is no escape,” because that dilemma is premised upon the spherical conception of time as a necessary component of the activities of both writing and (re)reading.

In the end, it is (ironically, but perhaps not surprisingly) Humbert Humbert himself who best summarizes the problems and paradoxes of this moral, temporal and aesthetic no-exit. Following a brief profession of Catholicism and an attempt to purge himself through the “spiritual solace” offered by religious confession, Humbert concludes that “nothing could make my Lolita forget the foul lust I had inflicted on her” (283). As a result, he decides that

Unless it can be proven to me—to me as I am now, today, with my heart and my beard, and my putrefaction—that in the infinite run it does not matter a jot that a North American girl-child named Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac, unless this can be proven (and if it can, then life is a joke), I see nothing for the treatment of my misery but the melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art. (283)

Recognizing that, despite all of his insistent and ongoing acts of reading against memory, he will never obtain conclusive proof of the coherence and alleged insignificance of what he did to Dolores Haze, Humbert Humbert admits that the writer that he is “now, today,” accepts both the impossibility and the futility of such proofs. In the end, however, by forcing him to acknowledge the significance of so many of the details that he previously overlooked (the “bits of marrow,” the “blood,” and the “beautiful bright-green flies”), the refuge of “articulate art” can only offer an intermittent but ever-increasing awareness of the painfully and endlessly proliferating moral alternatives embedded in the sideshadows of time.

Notes

¹ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Random House, 1997), 308.

² In *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), Michael Wood analyzes the extent to which “[t]he larger effect of the games in *Lolita* is to make the text, or anything resembling a text, into a metaphor, an image for what is readable and misreadable in the world” (104). Likewise, in *Vladimir Nabokov: The Structure of Literary Desire* (Columbia & London: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1982), David Packman has examined the ways in which, in Nabokov’s fiction, “the desire represented thematically in the text mirrors the reader’s desire for the text; this doubling calls the reader’s attention to his own activity” (1), and in *Vladimir Nabokov: A Critical Study of the Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), David Rampton has suggested that “*Lolita* . . . constitutes [Nabokov’s] admission that the reader is not there only to be teased and tyrannized but is a vital part of a co-operative enterprise, and that aesthetic principles exist to be analyzed, tested, and refined in the product of that enterprise” (120).

³ Peter J. Rabinowitz and Michael W. Smith, *Authorizing Readers: Resistance and Respect in the Teaching of Literature* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998), 95, 98–99. Rabinowitz in fact uses Nabokov’s novel as an example of these two very different reading strategies: “Reading *Lolita* for the first time, we are apt to be caught up in questions about what will happen to Lolita. Reading against

memory makes us more aware of the intricate artiness of the work as a whole” (98–99).

⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, “Good Readers and Good Writers,” in *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt, 1980), 3.

⁵ Alexander Dolinin argues that “Nabokov . . . renders the movement of time consciously and deliberately. . . . [F]or Nabokov it is . . . a pivotal theme, a constructive principle, and the object of a sophisticated literary game.” “Nabokov’s Time Doubling: From *The Gift* to *Lolita*” *Nabokov Studies* 2 (1995), 5.

⁶ Rabinowitz, 98, 100.

⁷ Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1994), 234.

⁸ Dolinin argues that, to the extent that Humbert Humbert’s “imagination keeps recycling the previously known and experienced,” he “commits what is according to Nabokov the deadliest epistemological sin, the sin of generalization” by “[n]eglecting details and thinking in generic terms” (24). Ultimately, Dolinin argues, Humbert Humbert “is looking for stereotypes and rough analogies, and therefore identifies Lolita, a new and unique person, as a clone of his dead sweetheart” (24). David Packman suggests that ultimately, “repetition is Humbert’s tactic for negotiating his own desire, both at the time of his involvement with the nymphet (the story time) and, perhaps more importantly, in retrospect (the time of the story-telling act)” (60).

⁹ Thus, in the scene at the Enchanted Hunters, when Dolly Haze significantly but innocently asks Humbert Humbert, “You mean . . . you never did it when you were a kid?”, Humbert can literally and “quite truthfully” answer, “Never” (133). Dolly then ironically announces, “Okay . . . here is where we start”—a gesture that she believes opens a future temporality (the consequences of which she is unfortunately unaware—as so many twelve-year-olds so often are), but one which enables Humbert to backshadow her sexual complicity by synchronizing the temporality of her experience with his own missed encounter with Annabel.

¹⁰ Morson, 235.

¹¹ In “introduc[ing]” the “idea” of the “nymphet,” Humbert Humbert openly “substitut[e]s time terms for spatial ones” (16), and thus, as Vladimir E. Alexandrov notes in *Nabokov’s Otherworld* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), “Humbert’s discussion of the conditions necessary to perceive a nymphet hinges on the issue of time” (167).

¹² As Linda Kauffman observes, “[i]n view of his unreliability, it is doubtful [Humbert’s] claim that Lolita seduced him is true; more important, it is unverifiable, and credulous critics who read the novel as a reflection of life thus end up merely reifying codes that can be traced directly from literature, codes that . . . first idealize the woman loved from afar and then degrade her by blaming her for her own rape and humiliation.” “Framing Lolita: Is There a Woman in the Text?”,

Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), repr. in Harold Bloom, ed., *Lolita* (New York & Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1993), 154.

¹³ Kauffman will argue that Humbert's step-daughter "only serves as a simulacrum when her nicknames—Lolita, Lo, Lola, Dolly—are used, for her legal name, Dolores, points too directly toward another representation—Our Lady Of Sorrows—and thus to a higher law than man's" (156–57). Consequently, "[a]n abyss lies between the 'Lolita' who is purely imaginary product of Humbert's desire and the 'Dolores' whose 'guardian' is the source of her suffering" (156–57).

¹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra," in *Simulacra and Simulation*, tr. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1994), 3.

¹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, "On Seduction," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster, tr. Jacques Mourrain, Second Edition (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), 163, 165.

¹⁶ In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), philosopher Richard Rorty points to the sentence describing the barber of Kasbeam—identified in the Afterword to *Lolita* as one of "the nerves of the novel" (316)—as "epitomiz[ing] Humbert's lack of curiosity—his inattentiveness to anything irrelevant to his own obsession" (163). By contrast, Nabokov advocates "the supremacy of the detail over the general, of the part that is more alive than the whole, of the little thing which a man observes and greets with a friendly nod of the spirit while the crowd around him is being driven by some common impulse to some common goal." "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," in *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt, 1980), 373. Nabokov thus suggests that the "capacity to wonder at trifles—no matter the imminent peril—these asides of the spirit, these footnotes in the volume of life are the highest forms of consciousness" (374). Despite his seemingly voracious capacity for detailed observation, Humbert Humbert is nevertheless no artist, as Nabokov defines the term, because he ultimately fails to experience what Nabokov identifies as "the main delight of the creative mind," namely, "the sway accorded to a seemingly incongruous detail over a seemingly dominant generalization" (374).

¹⁷ Morson, 234.

¹⁸ Michael Wood thus notes that Humbert's "memory . . . is better than his understanding" (115).

¹⁹ James Tweedie identifies these many photographs (including that of Dolores's deceased baby brother) as "loose ends that Humbert is unable to tie down" but that nevertheless "bear . . . deathly weight." "Lolita's Loose Ends: Nabokov and the Boundless Novel," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 46, no. 2 (2000), 163, 162. He thus argues that "[b]ecause the photograph is an inadequate or undesirable means of recalling Lolita and because his story is of necessity textual, Humbert's narrative runs the gamut of rhetorical strategies for calling for an absent figure" (163). Interestingly, however, in *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Random House, 1989), Nabokov begins his own story by describing

“a young chronophobic” who viewed unsettling evidence of “the prenatal abyss” in “looking for the first time at homemade movies that had been taken a few weeks before his birth” (19). Nabokov thus suggests that although “[n]ature expects a full-grown man to accept the two black voids, fore and aft, as stolidly as he accepts the extraordinary visions in between” (20), films and photographs can confront the viewer with the “impersonal darkness” of “the walls of time” and that although he himself has “journeyed back in thought,” he has “groped for some secret outlet only to discover that the prison of time is spherical and without exits” (20). It is perhaps this existential no-exit that Humbert seeks to avoid by invoking films and photographs that, because they are lost or were never made, offer the possibility for “some secret outlet” from “the remote regions” that border upon “the free world of timelessness” (20).

²⁰ Wood notes that “[a]t a crucial moment [Humbert] gives us a moving speech *verbatim*, and then says ‘words to that effect’; and a moment later, ‘to that effect’. He is only translating, or recreating” and thus “[w]e are reading Humbert’s novelisation of Humbert’s life” (118). More to the point, we are reading a rereading or reading against memory that is in the process of being represented as configurational.

²¹ Morson, 6.

²² Packman notes that Lolita’s tennis-playing “is inscribed upon Humbert’s memory, a privileged moment in the narrative which permits a meditation on the nymphet’s absence and strategies for negotiating the desire it animates” (48–49).

²³ A significant point of contention in criticism of *Lolita*, this apparent epiphany both supports and complicates interpretations of the novel that want to argue for Humbert’s ethical reform. As Alexandrov notes, “[c]ritics have claimed that Humbert’s expressions of contrition, and professions of love for the married Lolita are undermined by passages in which he allows his passion for her to eclipse all other feelings. . . . [T]his feature of the text is . . . an inevitable consequence of the fact that Humbert’s recollections of Lolita are both a record of his experiences as they happened, and the way he views them later, when he is recording them in prison” (161). According to Alexandrov, these two distinct “points of view” and thus “the two time frames” of the novel are separated by the “fundamental change in Humbert’s attitude toward Lolita that occurs during the ‘friendly abyss’ scene” (161). The problem that readers face, however, is where to locate this “fundamental change” textually: vaguely located in a roadside moment of nausea that occurs during that part of his narrative known as “Dolorès Disparue,” to what extent does it influence the confession that Humbert writes? Thus, while Michael Wood insists, “I can’t believe in Humbert’s new love partly because there is nothing in his self-portrait to suggest he can rise to it, and partly because he is protesting too much . . . too anxious for us to see the change in him. . . . I can’t believe in his repentance because the language of his renunciation is the language of gloating” (139), James Tweedie notes that “Humbert’s expressions of love convince many, not only because they hint at redemption but also because the language itself is enchanting” (159).

²⁴ Dolinin, 25.

²⁵Jen Shelton notes that although “[m]eant to invoke sympathy, [Humbert’s] self-serving expressions may also focus attention on what Humbert would not have readers see: his very real usurpation of Dolly’s childhood.” “‘The word is incest’: sexual and linguistic coercion in *Lolita*,” *Textual Practice* 13 (1999), 286. Similarly, Julian W. Connolly argues (albeit to very different ends) that “when Humbert recognizes that Dolly has broken free from the ‘island of entranced time,’ entering the flow of dynamic change, he begins to understand or acknowledge the folly (and the criminality) of his own attempt to suppress the forces of change.” “‘Nature’s Reality’ Or Humbert’s ‘Fancy’?: Scenes of Reunion and Murder in *Lolita*,” *Nabokov Studies* 2 (1995), 48.

²⁶ Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 20.

²⁷ In the Afterword, Nabokov remembers how “the initial shiver of inspiration [for *Lolita*] was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes, who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: this sketch showed the bars of the poor creature’s cage” (311).

²⁸ Although I agree that, as Brian Boyd will suggest in *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), “[t]he emphasis throughout *Lolita* on the contrast between a forward and a rear view of time is ultimately a moral one” (254), as my analysis has indicated, I also believe that the conception of time in the novel is more complicated than it is simply contrastive, and that this complexity is largely due to the text’s representation of the interconnection of (re)reading and writing.

²⁹ Trevor McNeely, “‘Lo’ and Behold: Solving the *Lolita* Riddle,” *Studies in the Novel* 21, no. 2 (1989), repr. in Harold Bloom, ed., *Lolita* (New York & Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1993), 138.

