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In announcing the topic for this conference, Maurice Couturier pays tribute to the rich benefits Nabokov scholars have reaped from the painstaking efforts of those who have focused on the myriad references—artistic, historical, linguistic—embedded in the author's texts. He goes on to suggest, however, that "there may be limits to such an enterprise," although "we have no idea what those limits could be." This essay is an attempt to identify some of those limits and to show how annotations can implicitly or inadvertently shape the reader's understanding of a text, even when the annotator disclaims any attempt at interpretation. In *Lolita*'s case, specifically, the annotator striving to "solve" the novel's puzzles is liable, in the process, to undermine some of its crucial effects—ranging from the subtlest verbal inflection to the cumulative impact of a passage or scene. In the course of my discussion I will offer my own rudimentary version of an interpretive strategy for reading *Lolita*. While remaining open to both the annotator's discoveries and Nabokov's own reflections on art, it is confined to neither. My approach is based on a hermeneutics that has grown out of my experience as a reader, and re-reader, of Nabokov's texts.

No one can gainsay the rich benefits Nabokov scholars have reaped from the ongoing efforts of Nabokov's annotators, who have painstakingly identified myriad references–artistic, historical, linguistic–embedded in the author's texts. But as Maurice Couturier stated in his announcement for last June's conference, "there may be limits to such an enterprise" even if "we have no idea what those limits could be." This essay is an attempt to identify some of those limits and to show how annotations can implicitly or inadvertently shape the reader's understanding of a text, even when the annotator

disclaims any attempt at interpretation. In *Lolita*'s case, specifically, the annotator striving to "solve" the novel's puzzles is liable, in the process, to undermine some of its crucial effects–effects ranging from the subtlest verbal inflection to the cumulative impact of a passage or scene.

The two major annotators of *Lolita*, Alfred Appel, Jr. and Carl Proffer, both adopt a similar stance to the project of annotation. Appel, keeping in mind "the specific needs of college students," has sought to identify a host of references and allusions crucial to their understanding of *Lolita*'s "recondite materials" and "elaborate verbal textures." Appel also sought to confine most of his commentary on the novel's themes and "meaning" to his Introduction to *The Annotated Lolita*. Still, he implicitly, and to my mind sensibly, acknowledges the connection between his annotations and his critical approach to Nabokov when he says, "Neither the Introduction nor the Notes attempts a total interpretation of *Lolita* (Preface, *AnL* xi-xii). In his *Keys to Lolita* (1968), which preceded the first edition of Appel's annotated volume, Carl Proffer appears surprisingly unaware of the link between his reading of *Lolita* and the "keys" he provides to the text.

"This is not an interpretation," Proffer declares in the opening line of his Foreword; it is, rather, an attempt to provide "keys to some of the technical puzzles" in *Lolita* by "labeling" and offering "commentary on the literary allusions"; by providing "an inventory of the clues and deductions leading to Quilty's identity"; and by "listing" some "characteristic stylistic devices." Let us note, first of all, how the annotator's seemingly modest aim, to eschew the thorny ambiguities of interpretation in order to focus on solving the novel's "technical puzzles," suggests in its very terminology–words such as "technical," "inventory," "deductions," "listing"–a scientific apparatus that will lead to more precise results than the subjective act of interpretation. Adopting the guise of scientific researcher, Proffer implies that the "keys" he proposes to unearth in the text can be definitively located and labeled: as if these "keys" were not themselves embedded in and comprised of language in all its fluid and fluent ambiguities, as if they

existed on a plane of reality beyond or outside the text–like the metal gadgets we use to unlock doors or vaults.[1]

Those who propose to find a key to *Lolita* or any other work of literature forget, at their (intellectual) peril, the interpretive nature of the quest. As Nabokov took pains to point out, the "bare facts" are "never really quite bare"; they "do not exist in a state of nature" (*Gogol* 119 [Ch 4]). To register any "fact" or phenomenon, an act of perception and selection is necessary; even the simplest process of "labeling" and "listing" observed entities involves, to some degree at least, an interpretive act. Proffer's implicit assumption–that one can objectively solve "technical puzzles" in *Lolita* without recourse to subjective interpretation–contributes to a view widely propagated by Nabokov's negative critics: that the puzzles posed by his verbal designs exist for their own sake, to dazzle or defy his readers. Periodically sounding this note in his study, Proffer says, "Nabokov's works are fabricated piece by piece with the author aware of the exact position in the puzzle of each little piece… It is one of Nabokov's greatest strengths–and, I think, an ultimate weakness" (78). At times Proffer's impatience and even outright hostility toward the puzzle-maker serve to undermine his ultimate assessment of Nabokov as "one of the very best writers of this century" (119). Only two pages into his study, for example, he dismisses what he calls a "typically Nabokovian piece of tomfoolery." He follows up with this salvo: "anyone who is going to read a somewhat sadistic author like Nabokov must keep encyclopedias, dictionaries, and handbooks handy if he wants to understand even half of what's going on... This is rather annoying because works of art can have more wit than does them good" (4-5).

The alacrity with which the annotator has moved from studied detachment to outright exasperation and circular logic ("annoying because...") recalls Nabokov's own invented commentator, Charles Kinbote, whose annotations to John Shade's poem in *Pale Fire* (1962) appear, at times, to anticipate Proffer's. Let me note just a few of

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[1] The dangers inherent in this kind of approach, which reifies the text and its so-called "keys," are evinced by a recent book whose title, *Solving Nabokov's* Lolita *Riddle*, already sounds a warning note. Far from unlocking or "decoding" the text of *Lolita*, the author wreaks havoc not only with the novel but with Nabokov's life.

Proffer's more Kinbotian statements: "It is curious that there are so few allusions to Russian literature [in *Lolita*]," he remarks, adding, "I suppose Nabokov got most of these out of his system in earlier works, especially *The Gift*" (20). Later, after stating that Humbert's "memoir makes a very poetic novel" (41), Proffer directs the reader to an endnote at the back of his book. Here, to the reader's surprise, he does not supply a reference but a self-referential comment on his comment. The one-sentence endnote reads, à la Kinbote, "I confess that I find Humbert at least as charming as he is sick" (142 n. 68). A more bizarre echo of Shade's commentator occurs in another endnote, in which Proffer compares Humbert's use of historical and anthropological data to the Marquis de Sade's. "Justine is alluded to elsewhere in *Lolita*," says Proffer, "and there may be other parallels, but the book is too vile for me to read through" (141, n.54). While Justine and her author provoke Proffer's moral outrage, *Lolita* and her author merely prove irritating. As Proffer says in his chapter on Nabokov's style, "The obsession with colors in his novels and critical works has always annoyed me" (110).

I could go on, but the point of this discussion bears not on Mr. Proffer's foibles as a commentator but rather on the way that even the most well intentioned annotator can, in the pursuit of "factual" keys or reference points, misconstrue and distort the effects of the text. Lest you think that I am beating a dead horse, or critic, I shall draw on *The Annotated Lolita* for my next example. Appel's note glosses a passage that occurs near the end of the novel, just before Humbert opens the letter from Dolly Schiller that leads to his long-sought reunion with her. The first letter he opens, however, is from his former neighbor in Ramsdale, John Farlow, whose now deceased wife, Jean Farlow, was a friend of Charlotte Haze. Both letters contain a surprise for Humbert–one mild, the other stunning. In Farlow's case, the "successful dealer in sporting goods" and "part-time lawyer" turns out to be radically unlike "the dull, sedate and reliable person" fixed in Humbert's memory. Since Jean's death Farlow has moved to South America, married "a very young" Spanish "girl"–the daughter of "a count"–and is about to embark on a honeymoon in India (78-79, 265-66). The effect on Humbert of this unexpected news is promptly eclipsed, of course, when he opens the second letter and discovers that his long-lost Lolita is pregnant, married, and living in "Coalmont."

Before revealing the contents of either letter, Humbert prepares his readers for both surprises by making the following observation: "I have often noticed that we are inclined to endow our friends with the stability of type that literary characters acquire in the reader's mind. No matter how many times we reopen 'King Lear,' never shall we find the good king ... at a jolly reunion with all three daughters and their lapdogs. Never will Emma rally, revived by the sympathetic salts in Flaubert's father's timely tear" (265).

Humbert's allusions to Shakespeare and Flaubert call attention to the artifice in which Humbert and the other characters are embedded. His reference to King Lear's nonexistent "reunion with all three daughters" slyly hints at Humbert's unexpected reunion with Lolita. (The book of his life is still being read, after all.) Similarly, the naming of Emma Bovary adds to the pattern of allusions to *Madame Bovary* that underscore, throughout the novel, Humbert's romantic obsession with the nymphet and his perceived betrayal by her. Attempting to gloss this passage, Appel directs readers to Part III, Ch 8 of Flaubert's novel, where Charles Bovary and Dr. Canivet (not "Carnivet," as Appel's note has it) try to save her life. "They summon the very distinguished Dr. Larivière," Appel says, "but he cannot do anything for her." Then, in a strained attempt to solve the puzzle produced by Humbert's reference to "Flaubert's father's timely tear," Appel succumbs to an odd bit of false logic: "Old Rouault [misprinted "Roualt" in Appel's text], Emma's father," Appel opines, is "Flaubert's father, because [Flaubert] said, 'Emma Bovary? c'est moi!'" Not only is this syllogism unconvincing; it makes one wonder how Appel's telegraphic reference to Flaubert's famous declaration–"Emma Bovary? c'est moi!"–can possibly enlighten students unfamiliar with that novel's complex rendering of romantic sensibility. That the annotator is straining to make sense of his own assertion–that Emma's father is Flaubert's father because Flaubert identifies with his heroine–becomes clear in his next sentence. Here Appel is compelled to admit that Emma's father, old Rouault, does not actually arrive at the Bovary household until *after* Emma has died. In other words, as Appel himself says, Rouault's "tears are not too 'timely'" after all (*AnL* 438, n. 265/2). Why then, the perplexed reader may ask, does Humbert call the father's tear "timely" in the first place"–if, by "Flaubert's father," Humbert means Rouault? Is the

author playing some sort of trick on us? Is this another example of what Proffer calls Nabokov's "tomfoolery" or, in another formulation, his stylistic "hocus-pocus"? (*Keys* 87).

The answer turns out to be quite simple. Humbert, showing off his knowledge of French literature, alludes to the noted resemblance between Flaubert's invented character, the formidable surgeon Dr. Larivière, and Flaubert's own father, a celebrated surgeon who, according to scholars, served as the model for Dr. Larivière (*MB* 363 (Part III, Ch 8); see Steegmuller, Introduction, MB xi, xxiii). The only competent doctor in the novel, Dr. Larivière is arguably the only admirable character as well. Godly in his dedication to healing and impervious to the allure of romance, luxury, and social ambition that ultimately destroys Emma, he is nevertheless capable of profound pity. It is the sight of Charles's "grieving face" at Emma's bedside that melts the great doctor's icy reserve; he cannot, Flaubert writes, "keep a tear from dropping onto his shirt front" (364). The good doctor's tear is indeed timely, for Emma dies shortly thereafter. That we have caught Appel napping is not the point. What is significant is the way in which the annotator's failure to identify one minor reference among the welter of allusions in Nabokov's text prompts him to reach for an explanation that misleads rather than informs. Impelled by his method and the obligation to account for all of the keys to *Lolita,* the well-meaning annotator winds up selling both the text and its readers short. Perhaps more important, such reductive logic–Emma's father equals Flaubert's father because Flaubert once said that Emma Bovary *c'est moi*–sets a poor example for those very "college students" for whom Appel's annotations are, by his own admission, largely intended.

If, as I have suggested, the annotative act is also, inevitably, an interpretive one, it follows that we must not approach it naively; we must appropriate or discard the annotator's "take" on the text, just as we do when confronted with more direct forms of critical argument. Given the oblique nature of the interpretive strategy underlying the annotator's quest for solutions, we may need to remain even more alert. Let me demonstrate my point by turning to a cluster of richly textured passages in *Lolita* that render the well-known scene in which Humbert and Lolita arrive at the Enchanted Hunters hotel. As my discussion of these passages proceeds, I will pause to consider some

relevant, if highly divergent, interpretations that arise from the annotations supplied for them. As should become clear, the annotator, whose stated aim is to identify key references to these passages without interpreting their context and effect, not only commits the act of interpretation; he often does so–in large part because of his assumption of objectivity–without proper regard for accuracy of detail and consistency of argument.

Before turning to the passages in question, I think it only fair to offer a rudimentary outline of my own interpretive strategy when reading not just *Lolita* but any work by this author. As I have discussed elsewhere, Nabokov's literary method, which radically undermines the conventions of realism, calls for distinctions that lie outside the familiar poles of art vs. life, fiction vs. reality.[2] Just as Humbert calls attention to the "fancy prose style" in which his narrative is couched, so the design of *Lolita* foregrounds the processes of fiction-making by which the novel's "reality" has been fabricated (9). Fiction, Nabokov suggests everywhere in his work, is not, as routinely assumed or defined, opposed to truth but rather the means by which truths are discovered. At the same time, the fictions that human beings construct and create operate at different levels of consciousness; not all are equally telling or incisive. While some are generous and vital, others are borrowed or base. As Nabokov's own term, "average 'reality,'" suggests, his art is only tangentially concerned with that landscape of cultural and historical signposts that is the realist's primary concern: the received ideas, conventions, and attitudes that constitute the collective life of society (Afterword, *AnL* 312). Reduced to the most common denominators of human consciousness and perception, this collective or shared "reality" emerges, in a Nabokov novel, as reality in its least compelling form–particularly as a subject for art. The drama that takes center stage in Nabokov's fiction is that of individual consciousness coming to grips with perceived events, people, and phenomena. Crucial to this process is the way in which a character's unique desires and perceptions animate the world he or she perceives as real.

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[2] My discussion of this aspect of Nabokov's fiction began with *Nabokov and the Novel* and is continued, most recently, in my forthcoming essay, "Art as Pedagogy in *Lolita.*"

If a Nabokov novel, as earlier suggested, calls for distinctions that lie outside the conventional polarities of art and life, fiction and reality, what might they be? The simplest and most effective answer, I have found, begins with recognizing all constructs of "reality" as fictions of varying kinds and degrees. Let fiction with a lower-case "f" signify Nabokov's "average 'reality,'" the collective world of common denominators that we all share and to some degree inhabit in our daily lives. Then let Fiction with a capital "F" signify the more intimate and compelling "reality" that is uniquely meaningful to each individual. Here elements of "average 'reality'" may take on grave importance, as they do for Dolores Haze and her mother, or prove a matter of indifference, as they do for Humbert Humbert, as individual consciousness subjectively registers and reflects phenomena according to its own lights. Finally, let us distinguish between two levels of Fiction operating in Nabokov's texts. In addition to creating awareness of the way a character's perceptions–most particularly, those of a first-person narrator–shape or construct the "reality" registered by consciousness, Nabokov's narratives signal the presence of an author existing beyond the world of the characters, shaping and manipulating the ultimate design, the ultimate Fiction, that is the novel itself.

Reading *Lolita* begins, therefore, with examining Humbert's "fancy prose style" and the way it registers the "reality" he perceives, the private Fiction he inhabits. Crucial to that reading, of course, is a distinction that Humbert at times tries to finesse but ultimately cannot deny: the distinction between the "North American girl-child named Dolores Haze"–the offspring of Charlotte Haze and her dead husband, Harold–and the bewitching nymphet, Lolita (283). I say "of course," because I regard the distinction between the twelve-year-old American kid and the exotic nymphet as crucial to any viable reading of the novel. As Proffer himself points out, "we know from page one that Lolita, a little-used Spanish diminutive, is Humbert's name for" his nymphet (*Keys* 59). And yet, Proffer ignores this crucial distinction when he carelessly refers to the nymphet as "Lolita Haze," a misnomer as awkward as it is misleading (31). The nymphet's name and genealogy spring from the operations of Humbert's mind and imagination, which, as they register and reflect the world he perceives, permeate virtually every passage of the novel. This shaping influence

is nowhere more evident than in the passages to which I would now like to turn: the highly charged scene in which Humbert, after picking up the unwitting orphan at camp, arrives with Lolita at the Enchanted Hunters hotel. In referring to this hotel, by the way, Proffer commits a multitude of critical sins–not to speak of a moral blunder–by variously identifying it as "the hotel where Lo made Humbert her lover" (60); the hotel where "Lo deflowers [Humbert]" (72); or the hotel where "Humbert raped Lolita–or she him" (118).

Reducing the vexed question of Dolly Haze's innocence and Humbert's guilt to a toss-up–"Humbert raped Lolita–or she him"–the annotator blithely implies that he is leaving such knotty questions up to the reader. His purpose, after all, is not to interpret the text but to provide helpful information for those who must grapple with its meaning on their own. And yet, the extent to which Proffer has "bought" Humbert's line of rhetoric–his self-serving protestations concerning the nymphet's "demonic" powers, which prove irresistible to the "bewitched" nympholept–is revealed not only in these casual statements but in Proffer's most scholarly-sounding annotations (16, 34). Take, for example, the reference Proffer provides to a sentence embedded in Humbert's elaborate disquisition on the sexual practices of the ancients, an authoritative-sounding account that Humbert hopes will justify his own conduct in the eyes of the reader. "Hugh Broughton, a writer of controversy in the reign of James the First, " says Humbert in his best scholarly manner, "*proved* that Rahab was a harlot at ten years of age" (19, italics added). Where Appel confines himself to identifying Rahab as "the Canaanite prostitute of Joshua 2: 1-21" (*AnL* 341 n.19/4), Proffer is more expansive: "Rahab was the Biblical harlot of Jericho… In William Blake's The Four Zoas, Rahab is a Satanic female" who "seeks dominion by using sex. *This certainly fits Lolita*" (*Keys* 27, italics added). The leap of logic that Proffer takes in that last sentence is truly breathtaking. Of what, we ask, is the annotator so "certain" here? That the twelve-year-old Dolores, who has learned about sex from her furtive explorations at camp with other pre-adolescents, is an evil dominatrix seeking power through sex? Proffer does not pause to explain; his next sentence sprints to the end of the novel, where he proceeds to unearth another reference to Blake.

To return, however, to the aforementioned scene of the crime–Humbert's crime, that is, not the annotator's: Having picked up the

orphan from camp (she still doesn't know that her mother is dead), Humbert drives to the Enchanted Hunters hotel. Here he hopes to repeat that "honey of a spasm" he "stole," one unforgettable Sunday morning, from the child perched on his lap (62). With this purpose in mind, he has procured from a Ramsdale doctor what he believes to be a powerful sleeping pill, guaranteed to ensure a sleeping child's unwitting cooperation. After an agonizingly long drive, eager Humbert greets the discovery of the park in which the hotel is situated with joyful relief. At the same time, the landscape over which night has fallen mirrors his dark sense of guilt and foreboding. "The Park," he notes, "was as black as the sins it concealed." The phrase alerts us to the way that Humbert's heightened emotions charge his surroundings, both animate and inanimate, with specific meaning–meaning that is subjectively rather than objectively convincing. Once he and Lolita enter the hotel lobby and he approaches the front desk, Humbert's rapidly beating heart again charges the scene: "Lolita sank down on her haunches to caress a pale-faced, blue-freckled, black-eared cocker spaniel swooning on the floral carpet under her hand–as who would not, my heart" (117).

Just as Humbert identifies with the lucky dog, which he empathetically identifies as "swooning" under Lolita's "caress," he will shortly describe "the surprised and pleased closet-door mirror" that greets the nymphet's "rosy" image in their hotel room. Crossing the threshold of that room, he will suffer another bout of mental vertigo as he contemplates, as in a hall of mirrors or from the deepest recesses of his fixated consciousness, a dizzying number of reflections, all beckoning him with the promise he has so ardently awaited: "There was a double bed, a mirror, a double bed in the mirror, a closet door with mirror, a bathroom door ditto, a blue-dark window, a reflected bed there, the same in the closet mirror, two chairs, a glass-topped table, two bedtables, a double bed: a big panel bed, to be exact" (119). And when, the next morning, Lolita, eager to show Humbert what she has learned at camp, propositions him with an air of childish bravado, he will feel that he has passed, like Alice, through the looking-glass into a "brand new, mad new dream world, where everything was permissible" (133).

Still, gaining entry to that coveted hotel room and its beckoning mirrors by no means proves easy for Humbert. At the front desk "a

bald porcine old man" informs him that his reservation for a "room with twin beds" has lapsed, having been held until "half past six" and then canceled. Due to "a religious convention" and a "flower show in [nearby] Briceland," the hotel is fully booked and the desk clerk dubious about finding Humbert and his "little daughter" a room for the night. Alarmed by this fresh obstacle to his scheme, Humbert instantly envisions this "pink old fellow" as decidedly more nasty; he is now "the obscene fellow" standing between Humbert and his dream. Like the Big Bad Wolf in the popular fairy tale, eager to blow the little pigs' house down, Humbert becomes increasingly hostile to the "bald porcine" clerk and his associate, "Mr. Potts," whom he now labels "the two pink pigs." The sing-song rhyme and rhythm of the sentence in which the name of the second clerk is couched–"Mr. Potts, do we have any cots left?" (118)–signals the dubious nature of that appelation, for which Humbert's agitated emotions appear responsible. As Appel notes, Humbert appears to be losing "control over the language" here, as he does at other points in his narrative (*AnL* 377; n. 118/3). The sing-song cadence aptly suggests the mental vertigo that Humbert suffers as his attention fixes on the need to find a cot. Since the only available room in the hotel has but one bed, finding a cot is of vital importance: only by locating a cot will these porcine guardians of social respectability grant Humbert entry to his secret paradise.

Ambiguity quickly shades into blatant Fiction as a desperate Humbert registers the following exchange between the two clerks: "Would there be a spare cot in 49, Mr. Swine?" asks so-called Mr. Potts, to whom Swine replies with a touch of Humbert's own delirium, "I think it went to the Swoons." The fairytale atmosphere then darkens as Mr. Potts assures Humbert, "Our double beds are really triple… One crowded night we had three ladies and a child like yours sleep together. I believe one of the ladies was a disguised man [my static]" (118, brackets Nabokov's). Unreliable as Humbert the narrator can be, at this point he openly acknowledges the interference, or "static," that his wild emotions have introduced into the record. It is Humbert's construction, and reconstruction, of events–his Fiction–that, the text makes clear, provides the "reality" he conveys to his readers.

As Humbert's feverish imagination registers the events recapitulated in his narrative, readers are in a position to observe its transforming

power. Innocuous enough at first, the two "pink pigs" loom ever more despicable as they appear to stand between Humbert and his heart's desire. Mentally transforming the first "pink old fellow" into "Mr. Swine," Humbert's frustrated imagination performs a more grotesque operation on the second clerk, "Mr. Potts," who is "also pink and bald, with white hairs growing out of his ears and other holes" (118). With that seemingly casual addendum, "and other holes," Humbert projects his own sense of monstrosity onto those who would stand in his way; by doing so, he reverses the respective roles of predator (bad wolf) and prey (pink pig) that he initially established. Later, in a similar psychic maneuver, he will invest his rival, Clare Quilty, the man who helps Lolita escape Humbert's clutches, with his own self-loathing and disgust. (Identifying Quilty as Lolita's "kidnaper," Appel unwittingly adopts Humbert's projections [*AnL* n. 266/2]). When Humbert finally confronts Quilty and charges him with having "kidnaped" Lolita, there is more than a little truth in Quilty's protestation, "I did not!... I saved her from a beastly pervert" (297). Having invented a ruse, that of taking the child to see her ailing mother, in order to spirit twelve-year-old Dolly away from camp, Humbert is the more obvious kidnaper. The escape from Humbert that, as a teenager, she stages with Quilty constitutes, in her mind at least, a romantic elopement.

The fairytale allusions and sing-song rhythms of the scene in the hotel lobby richly convey the drama–the registered shifts of tone, expression, response–emanating from Humbert's consciousness and shaping his private world, or Fiction. To Proffer, however, the Potts-cots-Swine-Swoon passage merely constitutes an example of what he calls the "sound determination" governing Nabokov's style: "some names," Proffer says, "appear to have been chosen just as balls for verbal ping-pong" (97). Throughout his discussion of Nabokov's style Proffer maintains the stance of detached analyst; at one point he even laments the fact that he lacks the scientific apparatus to "analyze every line and compile statistics" proving that Nabokov's prose is more rhythmical than another writer's (102). And yet, more often than not, what appears in the guise of systematic analysis turns out not to be free of interpretation but rather a reductive form of interpretation.

To be fair, Proffer does, on occasion, express his awareness of the reductive tendencies of his method. In the opening of his second

chapter, he explicitly reminds his readers that "by cutting away most of the book and quoting just the clues, I make the pattern Nabokov has woven seem far less complex and delicate than it is within the whole context of *Lolita*" (58). The extent of this statement becomes obvious when he turns his attention to a subsequent scene in the lobby of the Enchanted Hunters hotel. Here Proffer, bent on "following Quilty's trail through the novel," can only connect what he calls "the clue of the pigs" to Quilty's identity (58, 73). Citing several instances in which Humbert identifies Quilty–or Humbert's Swiss uncle, Gustave Trapp, whom Quilty appears to resemble–as a "swine," Proffer notes Humbert's buried reference to his rival in the second exchange he has with the desk clerks, this time when he is checking out of the hotel: "Was pink pig Mr. Swoon absolutely sure my wife had not telephoned? He was. If she did, would he tell her we had gone on to Aunt Clare's place?" (*AnL* 139). Proffer comments, "Aunt Clare indeed! Humbert is mocking himself (in retrospect)" (73).

The reference to Quilty in this passage is obvious. Humbert, having just noted the resemblance to his "uncle Gustave" of a "lecherous fellow" seated in the lobby and "staring" at Lolita, hints at the identity of his future rival (138-39). But Proffer's subsequent annotation is misleading: here he glosses the identity of "Mr. Swoon" by telling the reader, "Earlier his name was Mr. Swine" (146, n.15). Ignoring the role that Humbert's self-pronounced "static" plays in the earlier "pink pig" scene, Proffer overlooks the drama staged in Humbert's imagination. He assumes that "Swine" is the name by which the second clerk, "Mr. Potts," actually addresses the first. But as I have pointed out, "Mr. Swine," like "Mr. Potts," acquired that appellation in Humbert's overwrought mind, as he faced the awful prospect of being denied entry into the hotel's only available room. The Humbert who now stands before the clerk is, to put it mildly, a changed man. To his own astonishment, he has enjoyed "strenuous intercourse" with his nymphet "three times that very morning" (140). Thus Humbert, "every nerve" still alive with "the feel of her body," no longer has occasion to envy the cocker spaniel that was, the night before, "swooning" under her caress. Now "Humbert the Hound," the "sad-eyed" cur, is the lucky dog–or, to shift metaphors, the triumphant Wolf. Not only has he blown down the house; he has broken every law pertaining to the child's welfare. No longer posing a threat to

Humbert's happiness, the porcine hotel clerk is transformed, in Humbert's private world or Fiction, from reprehensible "Mr. Swine" into empathetic "Mr. Swoon" (60, 139).

Proffer's oversights notwithstanding, his basic point–that Quilty's shadow hovers over these passages–can hardly be disputed. Even before Humbert narrates his encounter with the two "pink pigs" in the hotel lobby, he hints at Quilty's ominous presence–a presence of which he was, at the time, oblivious. All that Humbert notes as he drives into the hotel parking lot is the following:

> A row of parked cars, like pigs at a trough, seemed at first sight to forbid access; but then, by magic, a formidable convertible, resplendent, rubious in the lighted rain, came into motion–was energetically backed out by a broad-shouldered driver–and we gratefully slipped into the gap it had left. I immediately regretted my haste for I noticed that my predecessor had now taken advantage of a garage-like shelter nearby where there was ample space for another car; but I was too impatient to follow his example. (117)

Only re-readers of the novel will recognize the "rubious" convertible and its "broad-shouldered driver" as Clare Quilty at the wheel of his "resplendent" automobile–the same "Aztec Red Convertible" in which he shadows Humbert and Lolita in Part II of the novel (217). Only careful readers, moreover, will detect in this passage other embedded clues to Quilty's role in the story.

We should note, for example, that Quilty at the wheel of his convertible has already outsmarted Humbert. After taking the parking space rejected by his "predecessor" (that is, Quilty), Humbert belatedly realizes that he too could have parked out of the rain, in the "garage-like shelter." By his own admission, he is "too impatient" (too impatient, that is, to get to the hotel room with Lolita) "to follow his [predecessor's] example." This is hardly the first or last time that Humbert's erotic "impatience" serves to seal his fate, in this case preventing him from getting a closer look at the man who will shortly turn up on the hotel porch, drunk but already alert to Humbert's designs on the little girl (126-27). Nor does Humbert pay sufficient attention to Lo's remarks later that evening, when she recognizes the man sitting across from them in the hotel dining room as "the writer fellow in the Dromes ad" tacked to the wall of her bedroom (121, 69). Nor, as already mentioned, does Humbert recognize, as he checks out

of the hotel, the "fellow of my age [who] was staring at my Lolita over his… newspaper" as both the man on the porch and in the Dromes ad (138). As these myriad clues suggest, the apparent "coincidence" that brings Quilty to the Enchanted Hunters on this crucial day is part of a pattern announcing Humbert's fate long before the playwright arrives at Beardsley, where he helps Dolly to plot her escape from Humbert. Only gradually does Humbert come to recognize the mysterious agency, already at work in the hotel parking lot, that interweaves his destiny with that of his future rival and nemesis.

Humbert's intermittent awareness of some unknown agent arranging his fate hints at the presence of the author in charge of the Fiction we are reading. Here it is important to recall the distinction I made earlier between the individual's private construction of reality, his Fiction, and the author's ultimate construct, or Fiction, that comprises the novel. Readers of Nabokov's fiction are familiar with the devices by which the author shows his hand, alerting us to his designing presence. Still, it is not always easy to distinguish between a character's subjective impressions–the way, in this case, that Humbert construes perceived actions, entities, and events–and the way those actions, entities, and events are rendered from the vantage of the (implied) author. Assigning Humbert's perceptions or values to his author has proved one of the more common pitfalls for *Lolita*'s critics. Like Proffer, for example, they have been too ready to adopt Humbert's description of the "demonic" nymphet as something more than the product of his own imaginative Fiction. But, as I have said, to distinguish between these two levels of Fiction, a character's and the author's, is not always easy. It requires scrupulous attention to the text and its context–by which I mean not only the allusions, embedded clues, and labyrinthine patterns but, even more crucial, the dramatic context arising from a character's psychological and emotional states. Such subtle shifts may well go undetected by the annotator eager to connect the dots between one reference and another.

In the above-mentioned passage, for example, the simile describing the "row of parked cars, like pigs at a trough" in the hotel parking lot looks innocent enough. (Appel notes the introduction of "the pig image" here [*AnL* n. 117/4], while Proffer includes the simile among those he finds least appealing [*Keys* 113].) More careful perusal

reveals the simile as the opening note in a prelude to the fairytale atmospherics of the "pink pig" scene in the hotel lobby. Let us note, to begin with, the way that the problem of finding a parking space already introduces the theme and prospect of forbidden access that dominates Humbert's subsequent account of the scene in the lobby. Already, as Humbert puts it, the "row of parked cars" appears "at first sight to forbid access." Although this initial obstacle is soon overcome, the animating simile of "pigs at a trough" captures his personal, if fleeting, hostility to the inanimate machines standing between him and the fulfillment of his desire. In the parking lot, unlike the lobby, however, Humbert does not suffer a tortuous delay before, as if by "magic," the ruby-red convertible backs out of the parking spot that he "gratefully" enters.

While it is possible to regard all the details connected with the "pig theme" as embedded in the text by a narrator shaping his story from hindsight, the fact–that is, the Fiction–that Humbert's memoir was composed in a mere fifty-six days suggestively hints at the presence of an ultimate creator in charge of the design. Humbert himself is openly perplexed by some of the more blatant patterns and "coincidences" that arrest his attention. Obvious, if minor, examples include the number of the hotel room, "342!", which merits an exclamation point from the startled narrator because it mirrors the street number of the Haze home; and the name of Lolita's camp, "Camp Q," which, like so many other "cues" and clues in the novel, already foreshadows Quilty's identity (118, 64-65). Oblivious to the name when he first hears it, Humbert has a different reaction when, in his final meeting with Lolita, she at long last discloses Quilty's identity and his nickname, "Cue." Evidently recollecting the name of Camp Q, Humbert comments, "Her camp five years ago. Curious coincidence…" (276).

A coincidence far more crucial to Humbert's fate is the "conflagration" that conveniently burns down the McCoo house on the day he arrives in Ramsdale. A "distraught" and now homeless Mr. McCoo informs Humbert that a "Mrs. Haze of 342 Lawn Street" has generously "offered to accommodate [him]." To what extent he will be "accommodated" Humbert, at this point, has no idea. Rather, he is "angry, disappointed, and bored"–having been lured by the prospect of rooming at the McCoos' by a colleague's account of their "two

little daughters, one a baby, the other a girl of twelve." Indeed, Humbert has just spent a "fantastic night on the train, imagining in all possible detail the enigmatic nymphet I would coach in French and fondle in Humbertish." News that the McCoos' "house had just burned down" makes him wonder whether the fateful fire was ignited by "the synchronous conflagration that had been raging all night in my veins" (35). As the novel's readers quickly surmise, however, the "agent of fate" guiding Humbert to the Haze household operates on a higher plane of authority (103). Only through the author's synchronizing agency, signaled by the precise timing of these twin "conflagrations," does Nabokov's protagonist arrive on the doorstep of 342 Lawn Street.

Later in the novel, when Charlotte Haze is run over by a car and all obstacles to her daughter conveniently removed, Humbert is stunned by the fortuitousness of this "accident." Yet he soon recognizes in the "intricacies of the pattern" of Charlotte's death–"hurrying housewife, slippery pavement, a pest of a dog, steep grade, big car" –that "synchronizing phantom" apparently presiding over his fate (103). Trapped in a Fiction constructed by his author, Humbert can only glean the ghost of a superior power controlling his destiny. To this unknown but pervasive presence he ascribes the name and persona of "McFate." Nabokov's readers enjoy a superior vantage, from which they can discern both the character's private world of perception, his Fiction, and the more capacious outlines of the Fiction that contains him. Cognizant of this distinction, if not the full reach of its implications, Humbert notes, as earlier discussed, John Farlow's surprising departure, in the novel's plot, from the script Humbert had fashioned for him. The fact that Humbert himself is a character whose "fate is fixed" between "book covers" only makes the analogy more resonant: the world that Humbert shares with his fellow-creatures, those images of human beings reflected in *Lolita*'s text, is one over which his private perceptions and expectations, his personal Fiction, do not hold sway. Imposing his private Fiction of the nymphet–a mythical creature who must "never grow up" –on an immature "girl-child" who has every right to do so, Humbert has, by his own confession, criminally stunted the child's growth and freedom (19, 21).

According to Martin Amis, Humbert belongs to that "dangerous" and rare breed of individuals, amply reflected in Nabokov's fiction, who, "because they cannot make art out of life, make their lives into art. Humbert is the artist *manqué*" ("*Lolita* Reconsidered" 117). More precisely, Humbert fails as both artist and individual because, unlike his author, he conflates his private universe of Fiction–subject to the dictates of will and imagination–with that larger world of shared "fictions," the collective or "average 'reality'" of social contracts and legal constructs, that both he and Dolores Haze mutually inhabit. The richly textured patterns and puzzles embedded in Nabokov's texts signal the ways in which the various levels of fiction--with both a lower-case and a capital "f"–function and relate. They require of his readers vigilant attention and a kind of double vision. At the same time that we enter the private world or Fiction of a character such as Humbert, we must remain alert to the differences between that character's *modus operandi* and his author's. Our tracing of patterns, clues, and allusions can vitally contribute to this process, but it can never replace it. Just as a Nabokov novel invites us to contemplate the relationship of fiction, and Fiction, to reality in a new way, it reminds us that reading is itself a form of Fiction-making. What moves or delights us in *Lolita* may strike us as profoundly meaningful and "true to life," but these effects are registered by, as they are created through, the imagination. Our active engagement with the text is an ongoing act of interpretation. If our interpretive strategy is glancing or slipshod, casual or inadvertent, the "keys" we discover will fail to unlock its true mysteries.

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