

# Narrator, Intertextuality and Humor in Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita and Its Film Adaptations

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**Narrator, Intertextuality and Humor in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and Its Film Adaptations**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on postmodern concepts of the narrator unreliability, intertextuality and humor. It describes the postmodern unreliable narrator according to postmodern views of theory in general, and more specifically according to Asgar Nünning's list of textual signs of unreliability. It also explicates the inseparability of the postmodern intertextuality, or parody as described by Linda Hutcheon, and humor, precisely, irony in the service of creating a parody. Furthermore, the paper analyzes Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, concentrating on the novel's unreliable narrator, intertextuality and humor. It is explicated that *Lolita's* narrator shows signs of unreliability. In addition to that, it is discussed that the novel's intertextuality in combination with irony parodies different genres, making intertextuality and humor inseparable in the novel. *Lolita's* film adaptations by Stanley Kubrick and Adrian Lyne are also analyzed according to their narrator, intertextuality and humor. The elements of the narrator unreliability, intertextuality and humor in film adaptations are compared to those elements in the novel. The paper identifies Kubrick's *Lolita* as a postmodern film as it features these postmodern elements. It also shows that these elements cannot be found in Lyne's *Lolita*, concluding that Nabokov's and Kubrick's *Lolita* are examples of postmodern art, while Lyne's *Lolita* is not.

**KEY WORDS:** *Lolita*, Nabokov, Kubrick, Lyne, postmodernism

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## Introduction

Postmodernism is quite possibly the most debated literary era in literary criticism. The overpass between modernism and postmodernism has been widely disputed as well as the difference between these literary eras. Since 1930s had many active prolific writers, the switch from modernism to postmodernism had been gradual. Many critics debated whether Vladimir Nabokov was a postmodernist or modernist author. He had been writing and publishing stories and novels from 1920s to 1970s. His early literary works are considered modernist; however, his later works have both modernist and postmodernist traits. His most famous novel *Lolita* is labeled, by many critics, as postmodernist because of its distinct postmodernist features. The reliability of the narrator in *Lolita* has been debated a lot over the years, as have been the novel's abundant intertextuality and distinguishable dark humor.

Because of Nabokov's profusion of styles and manipulation techniques which seduce the reader into a witty game, it is still important to research his works. In this case, it is still important to research *Lolita*, since Nabokov's system of reliability of the narrator, intertextuality and humor is extremely complex and new conclusions can be recurrently made. It is compelling to compare *Lolita*'s film adaptations by Stanley Kubrick and Adrian Lyne to the novel and concentrate on the aforementioned aspects since the adaptations have not been researched as thoroughly as the novel. The objective of this paper is to theoretically explicate postmodern concepts of the unreliable narrator, intertextuality and humor, elucidate these elements in Nabokov's *Lolita* and its film adaptations. The unreliability of the narrator in *Lolita* will be explicated through Asgar Nünning's list of textual signs of unreliability described by Greta Olson. Intertextuality and humor in *Lolita* will be clarified in postmodern terms of inseparable parody and irony. Film adaptations of the novel will be explicated in the same manner. This paper will show that postmodern concepts of the unreliable narrator, intertextuality and humor appear in Nabokov's *Lolita*, making it a postmodern novel. It will also show that these concepts appear in Kubrick's film, making it a postmodern film. On the other hand, the postmodern concepts of unreliable narrator, intertextuality and humor are not to be found Lyne's film, which makes it an unfaithful adaption of the novel.

## 1. Narrator, Intertextuality and Humor: Postmodern Concepts

Postmodernism as an era in literature is not defined by exact dates. Most critics consider 1940s as the death of modernism and the beginning of postmodernism. Critics tend to debate on postmodernism a lot since many of them do not consider postmodernism an actual literary “movement”. Many critics consider postmodernism as a reaction to modernism and do not recognize postmodernism as a literary movement on its own. Milivoj Solar in *Povijest svjetske književnosti* notes that postmodernism does not have a literary “manifesto”. He claims that a lot of acclaimed authors used the same literary maneuvers quite often and by doing that, they created a new climate in literature. Solar notes that postmodernism is based on skepticism, relativism and new attitudes towards tradition. Postmodernism is also marked by deconstruction which is based on opposites which cannot be separated (322). Dino Felluga notes that modernism and postmodernism dwell on the same topics: self-reflexivity, irony and parody, a breakdown between high and low cultural forms and questioning of grand narratives. Martin Irvine differentiates postmodernism and modernism quite strictly. He notes that unlike modernism, postmodernism is marked by: ironic deconstruction of master narratives, sense of fragmentation and de-centered self, multiple, conflicting identities (characteristics that concern the narrator of a postmodern novel); hybridity, promiscuous genres, intertextuality, pastiche (characteristics that concern a postmodern novel’s relationship with other texts); play, irony and challenge to official seriousness (characteristics that concern the humor in a postmodern novel). Ihab Hassan in *Toward a Concept of Postmodernism* also gives a list of key terms which apply to modernism and postmodernism. He states that, modernism is marked by purpose, design, centering, genre/boundary, interpretation/reading, readerly, origin/cause; while postmodernism is marked by play, chance, dispersal and text/inter-text against interpretation/misreading (Hassan 152). Adolphe Haberer suggests that postmodernism did the same as modernism and notices that postmodernism “merely went further in the same direction, sometimes with an added dose of skepticism and irony” (54). Linda Hutcheon claims that the main difference between modernism and postmodernism is that postmodernism “takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement” (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 1). Although modernism uses similar techniques as postmodernism, most literary scholars believe there is one main difference between the two; namely, modernism focuses on asking questions and seeking answers and solutions, while postmodernism asks questions but does not seek answers. Modernism, like literary eras before it, is more based on purpose while postmodernism is based mainly on play. Since the focus of this paper is the analysis and comparison of the narrator, intertextuality and

humor as played out in Nabokov's novel and its two movie adaptations, in the further analysis of postmodern literature, emphasis will be put on these specific features.

The most prominent aspect of postmodern narrators is that they are usually unreliable. In *Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth coined the term "unreliable narrator": "I have called a narrator unreliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms), unreliable when he's not" (158-59). Alexa Van Brunt notes that "postmodernist narrative rejects the linear, the absolutes of cause and effect and the model of civilization, society, and time as inherently progressing and improving as time passes into the future". Dan Shen claims that "if a narrator misreports, -interprets or -evaluates, or if she/he underreports, -interprets or -evaluates, this narrator is unreliable or untrustworthy" (2). John Wasmuth adds that "if the implied author does not share the narrator's moral values then his morals are considered questionable" (2). Specific textual signs point to unreliable narrators and in her paper *Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators* Greta Olson gives Asgar Nünning's list of textual signs (as adapted from Nünning's *Unreliable Narration zur Einführung: Grundzüge einer kognitiv-narratologischen Theorie und Analyse unglaubwürdigen Erzählens*):

- (1) the narrator's explicit contradictions and other discrepancies in the narrative discourse;
- (2) discrepancies between the narrator's statements and actions, (3) divergences between the narrator's description of herself and other character's descriptions of her; (4) contradictions between the narrator's explicit comments on other characters and her implicit characterization of herself or the narrator's involuntary exposure of herself; (5) contradictions between the narrator's account of events and her explanations and interpretations of the same, as well as contradictions between the story and discourse; (6) other characters' corrective verbal remarks or body signals; (7) multiperspectival arrangements of events and contrasts between various versions of the same events; (8) an accumulation of remarks relating to the self as well as linguistic signals denoting expressiveness and subjectivity; (9) an accumulation of direct addresses to the reader and conscious attempts to direct the reader's sympathy; (10) syntactic signals denoting the narrator's high level of emotional involvement, including exclamations, ellipses, repetitions, etc.; (11) explicit, self-referential, metanarrative discussions of the narrator's believability; (12) an admitted lack of reliability, memory gaps, and comments on cognitive limitations; (13) a confessed or situation-related prejudice; (14) paratextual

signals such as titles, subtitles, and prefaces (adapted from *Unreliable* 27-28). (Olson 97-98)

In *Rhetoric of Fiction* Booth emphasizes the importance of irony in separating the implied author from the narrator:

Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do not get that point. Irony is always thus in part a device for excluding as well as for including, and those who are included, those who happen to have the necessary information to grasp the irony, cannot but derive at least a part of their pleasure from a sense that others are excluded. (304)

Unreliable narrators create uncertainty. Readers can never be certain about anything the narrators report. Van Brunt suggests that postmodern novels have a certain atmosphere which is based on disregarding grand narratives, linearity, the search for truth and personal growth. Because of the uncertainty they create, unreliable narrators cannot produce grand narratives (their point of view is personal and they do not possess general truths or facts), their questionable narratives can never be seen as linear with certainty, they do not search for truth (since it is hard to determine what is in accordance with reality when the narrator is unreliable) and they do not show personal development or social progress (a character who gives questionable statements all through the novel does not display personal growth). Unreliable narrator is, in a way, a postmodern device that stimulates postmodern atmosphere in literature created by postmodern characteristics described by Van Brunt.

Intertextuality, or in simple words, one text's relationship with other texts, is a term coined in 1960s by Julia Kristeva. For Kristeva, intertextuality is "the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position" (37). Simply, intertextuality is a system of signs (a text) imbedded into another system of signs (another text). Michael Riffaterre describes intertext as "the corpus of texts the reader may legitimately connect with the one before his eyes" (626). Intertextuality is accomplished by using "direct reference, allusion, quotation, echo, plagiarism, collage, mosaics, palimpsest and others" (Pokrivčák 20). Linda Hutcheon employs another term when describing intertextuality in postmodern context. She notes: "parody—often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality—is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 93). Pastiche is an imitation of something already made. In art, it is an art work which imitates another art work. In



*Postmodernism in American and Australian Fiction*, Jaroslav Kušnir explains pastiche in postmodern context:

The artists referred to as pasticheurs were understood as the authors uncreatively and mechanically imitating other works of art, styles, or ways of writing. In postmodern literature and its interpretation, however, this term has rather positive meaning since the older works of art, styles and authors are first imitated but, at the same time, through the use of parody and irony further transformed, re-written and put in a different linguistic context and thus pastiche can be loosely called a blank parody. (38)

Graham Allen in *Intertextuality*, differs postmodernist intertextuality from modernist intertextuality. He claims that modernists were constantly under pressure to make something new, while postmodernists might not have anything new to make. Allen points to the fact that modern technology can make numerous copies of books, music and paintings. He claims that “new artistic media such as film, video and television, are indeed based on technological methods of reproduction” (182). Allen also adds that “the postmodern era can seem one in which reproduction takes over from authentic production” (183). However, postmodernists do not consider this a tragedy. In accordance with postmodern attitude, lack of originality is not something to dwell upon. Postmodernist embrace it and use the best of their “unoriginality”. By using old texts, postmodern authors make new works of art and emphasize the difference between their text and the text that they refer to. In a way, postmodern authors create parodies of existing texts. In addition to that, in postmodern era, intermediality is also extremely common. Intermediality is a term used for the relationship between a work of art and other works of art which are a part of another media, for example, newspaper headlines in poems, paintings in films, comics in novels, film quotes in songs, and so on. Since postmodern era is marked by extreme changes in technology and development of new media, intermediality is inevitable in postmodern works. Allen recognizes this: “it is possible to speak of the ‘languages’ of cinema, painting or architecture: languages which involve productions of complex patterns of encoding, re-encoding, allusion, echo, transposing of previous systems and codes” (Allen 174). Thus, it is impossible to talk about postmodern intertextuality and not include intermediality in the term. In further analysis, intertextuality, as well as intermediality (as an extension of intertextuality) will be referred to as intertextuality. Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody* conjoins terms pastiche and intertextuality (which are not usually considered synonyms) and names them parody. Postmodern parody, described by Hutcheon, differs from traditional parody. Kušnir notes: “this parody lacks mocking, ridiculing aspect and by using irony, it emphasizes a difference between

the past forms of art and sensibilities, a distance between the past and present” (36). Just like Hutcheon, Kušnir adds irony to parody. Both claim that it is impossible to create postmodern parody without irony. Kušnir states: “radical irony does not necessarily manifest itself on the verbal level, but also on the level of a text as a whole, in the juxtaposition of different styles, creating an ironic effect” (39). Kušnir notes that postmodern authors put already created works “in a different (often contemporary) context, postmodern authors transform and create a new meaning” (35). He adds: “art seems to have exhausted the new forms and materials and thus it tries to find an inspiration in existing, old, and popular rather than high forms, materials and objects” (53). He also notes that parody and irony are inseparable in postmodernism: “It is often difficult to identify irony within parody in postmodern literary texts since they are often closely connected and even inseparable” (36). He continues: “irony and parody thus also emphasized a critical distance of new forms of art from the past art forms” (52). Since irony is close to sarcasm and both of them are devices which are used to create dark humor (in which “a story can evoke amusement, shock, disgust, and even horror” (Morreall 54)), humor in postmodern novels tends to be dark. Even if a certain postmodern text does not use irony in service of postmodern parody, it may deal with a serious topic in a light and trivial way by using irony and sarcasm. In that way, irony is an inevitable part of almost every postmodern novel.

To sum it up, postmodern authors use intertextuality and put other art works in a new social, cultural and political context, because every text is a part of a context in which it was created. Often, by using irony, postmodern authors emphasize the difference between their contemporary context and the context in which the text that they refer to was created. Since postmodern authors use irony to create a (postmodern) parody, postmodern texts usually contain dark humor.

## 2. Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*

Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, a Russian-American writer, published his twelfth novel (his third novel written in English) in 1955 in Paris. As Alfred Appel Jr. notes, “after four American publishers refused it, Madame Ergaz of Bureau Littéraire, Clairouin, Paris, submitted *Lolita* to Maurice Girodias’ Olympia Press in Paris” (Appel 33). At the time of its publication, *Lolita* was a novel which was considered pornographic (its publisher was also a publisher of pornographic novels). Appel remembers his first encounter with *Lolita*: “and there between copies of *Until She Screams* and *The Sexual Life of Robinson Crusoe*, I found *Lolita*” (Appel 34). In 1956, when Graham Greene praised *Lolita* publicly, she gained attention and “underground” (Appel 34) fandom. *Lolita* was published in 1958 in the USA. Critics were not exactly fond of the novel. It was considered pornographic and “dull” (Appel 35). It gained attention merely because of its taboo topic and other (dominant or ultimate) features of the novel were not recognized until later on. Nabokov remembers his first glimpse of the idea for the novel which inspired him to write *The Enchanter* (a short story which bears a striking resemblance to *Lolita*, but Nabokov hated that the girl from *The Enchanter* was not “alive” so he decided to rewrite it) and later on *Lolita*. As Nabokov tells in “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*”(the afterword of the novel), he was inspired by an article about an ape which was the first animal to produce a drawing. The ape drew his cage after years of confinement. It is certain from Nabokov’s foreword to all editions of *Lolita* (except the first edition), as well as the story of his inspiration for the novel, that that novel is about anything but pedophilia and pornography: “certain techniques in the beginning of *Lolita* (Humbert’s Journal, for example) misled some of my first readers that this was going to be a lewd book. They expected the rising succession of erotic scenes, when these stopped, the readers stopped, too, and felt bored and let down” (Nabokov 356). As the years have gone by, not many people still think that *Lolita* is a “lewd” novel. Critics, as well as readers came to an agreement; the profoundness of the novel is indescribable. The fusion of genres, Nabokov’s masterful wordplay, numerous allusions, a tragic but humorous narrator and unique parody, make *Lolita* one of the finest novels ever written.

## 2.1. Unreliable narrator in Nabokov's *Lolita*

*Lolita* has three parts, the foreword (written by “the editor”), the main part (the narrative) and the afterword (“On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” written by Nabokov). The narrative is narrated by Humbert Humbert, a European professor in his late thirties, an intelligent and well-mannered pedophile who is in prison, awaiting trial for murder. The novel is a novel within a novel, Humbert’s memoir of his relationship with Dolores Haze, a pubescent girl and his involvement in the murder of Clare Quilty. Of course, since the novel is written from Humbert’s point of view, this information is not available to the readers at the beginning of the novel. The novel starts with a foreword. Supposedly, after Humbert’s death, his memoir (which the readers are about to read) was published, with a foreword by John Ray Jr. Ph.D. John Ray Jr. edited the memoir and wrote a short preface, calling the memoir a novel and informing the readers that they are about to read a memoir of a murderer on trial. In his foreword, John Ray Jr. claims that the novel is of great aesthetic value but that it also is an important case study for many psychiatrists as well as a warning for all parents, care-takers and pedagogues. Thus, the readers can see that the memoir is not exactly what John Ray Jr. claims it to be. Nabokov’s wordplay is obvious even in John Ray Junior’s name, which when read out loud sounds like “Junior Junior”. The duplicity of the word “junior” clearly points to someone who is young and inexperienced despite his doctoral title. Pifer adds: “the mirrored initials of Ray’s name (JR, Jr.) already hint at the fictitious nature of this important-sounding personage” (189). His doctoral title points to maturity and knowledge, but in combination with his initials (JR, Jr.) and his name (“Junior Junior”) it creates an ambiguity. Because of that, the readers might get a feeling that this is someone whose sense of judgment is not to be taken for granted. Nabokov begins the novel with a foreword which provokes a feeling of perplexity in readers because on one side they have a murderer’s memoir, and on the other they have a comment on the memoir by someone who might be incompetent to judge the value and the role of the text that they are about to read.

When talking about the narrator of *Lolita*, one must return to Nabokov’s “original” *Lolita*. Nabokov considered *The Enchanter* a failure because “the narrator (from *The Enchanter*) fails as both enchanter and lover, and soon afterwards dies in a manner which Nabokov will transfer to Charlotte Haze” (Appel 38). Appel continues:

Especially new in this treatment (*Lolita*) was the shift from the third person to the first person, which created – obviously – the always formidable narrative problem of having an obsessed and even mad character meaningfully relate his own experience, a problem

compounded in this specific instance by the understandable element of self-justification which his perversion would necessarily occasion, and by the fact that Humbert is a dying man. (38)

In changing the point of view to first person, Nabokov succeeded in bringing to life the girl and the story he once failed to make real. However, by making the novel from the “victim” as well as the “victimizer’s” (Appel 39) point of view, Nabokov introduced the readers to an unreliable narrator who is a victim and a victimizer at the same time. To confirm that Humbert Humbert is an unreliable narrator, *Lolita* will be analyzed in accordance with Asgar Nünning’s list of textual signs from *Unreliable Narration zur Einführung: Grundzüge einer kognitiv-narratologischen Theorie und Analyse unglaubwürdigen Erzählens* as adapted by Greta Olson.

Paratextual signs such as preface can be considered a textual sign of unreliability. As it was aforementioned, John Ray Jr. (“Junior Junior” or “J. R. Jr.”) is not a believable character who talks about another not believable character. John Ray Jr. describes Humbert: “had our demented diarist gone, in the fatal summer of 1947, to a competent psychopathologist, there would have been no disaster” (Nabokov 3). He continues: “he is ponderously capricious. Many of his casual opinions on the people and scenery of his country are ludicrous” (Nabokov 3). The readers are presented with a mentally ill and “capricious” murderer who begins his story in a very poetic tone “Lolita, light of my fire, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul” (Nabokov 7). However, soon after the beginning, Humbert points to his cunningness. “You can always count on a murderer for fancy prose style” (Nabokov 7). The readers are confused concerning what to feel about this Humbert Humbert, described as a murderer by “Junior Junior” and tagged as a murderer with a “fancy prose style” by himself.

From the beginning of the novel, readers know that they are reading a memoir. However, this memoir is somewhat interactive. Humbert Humbert addresses the reader twenty nine times, “not to mention Humbert’s several interjections to the jury, to mankind in general, and to his car” (Appel 58). On the first page, Humbert pleads to the jury: “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, exhibit number one is what the seraphs, the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs envied” (Nabokov 7). Therefore, from the very beginning, the readers see that this is a murderer who does not hesitate to plead. In addition to that, Humbert flatters the readers in order to gain their sympathies, for example “I cannot tell my learned reader (whose eyebrows, I suspect, have by now traveled all the way to the back of his bald head)” (Nabokov 52). Of course, Humbert does not fail to add a bit of his irresistible humor in describing his reader. The reader is here flattered (because Humbert called him “learned”) but also amused at a joke at his own expense.

By page fifty two, the reader is already seduced by the sly Humbert. In addition to direct addresses to the reader's intelligence, he also makes the reader feel well-read and knowledgeable by using numerous French words and sentences, for example, he asks his wife: "Mais qui est-ce?" (Nabokov 28). During Humbert's description of his marriage as well as his affairs with other nymphs, the reader is bound to have a French dictionary by his side.

Humbert's addresses to the jury as well as the reader, point to a text sign of narrator unreliability. Unreliable narrators often address the readers, appealing to their emotions. Humbert takes this a step further by flattering the narrator, both directly and indirectly. In addition to that, by using numerous allusions, Humbert deceives the narrator by forcing him or her to focus on recognizing the text Humbert alludes to, instead of focusing on Humbert's intentions. He also makes the reader amazed at Humbert's intelligence as well as makes him or her feel satisfied with his own level of knowledge (since the reader recognized the allusion that the well-read Humbert made). In each case, Humbert manipulates the reader into liking him, even admiring him. The novel is teeming with intertextuality and it will be analyzed later on separately.

Another textual sign of Humbert's unreliability is his memory. Narrators who admit memory gaps as well as cognitive malfunctions are considered unreliable. Humbert on one occasion brags about his "photographic memory" (Nabokov 43) and on another occasion, he states "Being a murderer with a sensational but incomplete and unorthodox memory, I cannot tell you, ladies and gentlemen, the exact day when I first knew with utter certainty that the red convertible was following us" (Nabokov 247). The reader can see that Humbert is a liar (who claims to have photographic and incomplete memory at the same time), a person whose accounts of events cannot be completely honest (since he has incomplete memory) and of course, as Humbert likes to remind the reader, a murderer. In another occasion, Humbert calls his memory "torpid" (Nabokov 287), as well as "clouded" (Nabokov 331). It is clear that Humbert is not a trustworthy character since his memory does not serve him well. But can the readers trust his judgment of his memory? He might as well lie about the story in order to distance himself from the events that took place and describe them briefly or wrongly on account of his "cloudy" memory.

An additional textual sign of Humbert's unreliability is his "insanity". Unreliable narrators often have self-referential hints of their (un)believability. Having read the novel, the reader cannot be certain whether Humbert is insane or not. Humbert confesses to the readers that he had been in a sanatorium more than once: "timid claws would have certainly landed me again in a sanatorium" (Nabokov 61); "a stupid lapse on my part made me mention my last

sanatorium” (Nabokov 106). He talks about his adventures in a psychiatric institution directly as well:

The reader will regret to learn that soon after my return to civilization I had another bout with insanity (if to melancholia and a sense of insufferable oppression that cruel term must be applied). I owe my complete restoration to a discovery I made while being treated at that particular very expensive sanatorium. I discovered there was an endless source of robust enjoyment in trifling with psychiatrists: cunningly leading them on; never letting them see that you know all the tricks of the trade; inventing for them elaborate dreams, pure classics in style (which make *them*, the dream-extortionists, dream and wake up shrieking); teasing them with fake ‘primal scenes’; and never allowing them the slightest glimpse of one’s real sexual predicament. By bribing a nurse I won access to some files and discovered, with glee, cards calling me “potentially homosexual” and “totally impotent”. (36)

Humbert tells the readers that he was considered mentally unstable, but was he really? He says he played with psychiatrists and faked symptoms for his own amusement. However, something clearly got him into the sanatorium; he could not have been a healthy individual put into a sanatorium without any reason. The fact that he was proclaimed “potentially homosexual” and “totally impotent” points to the conclusion that the psychiatrists were not able to figure out his pedophilia. However, they were certain that his sexual appetites were not of a typical heterosexual. The readers can only be perplexed by his claims of insanity and again uncertain of what the truth is. They cannot be certain whether his “insanity” is real or is it just a lie to make the readers justify his actions. In the shortest chapter, Chapter 26, Humbert reveals what is inside his head:

This daily headache in the opaque air of this tombal jail is disturbing, but I must persevere. Have written more than a hundred pages and not got anywhere yet. My calendar is getting confused. That must have been around August 15, 1947. Don’t think I can go on. Heart, head everything. Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita. Repeat till the page is full, printer. (Nabokov 123)

Appel notes: “as his narrative approaches the first conjugal night with Lolita, H.H. is overcome by anguish, and in the bare six lines of Chapter Twenty-six – the shortest “chapter” in the book – he loses control, and for a moment the mask drops” (375). After that chapter, the novel is back to Humbert the Manipulator’s voice which continues to make the readers question everything.

In addition to addressing the readers and claiming to be (in)sane, Humbert is prone to lying to other characters as well. He makes up a story about his and Charlotte’s alleged long

romance which he tells to John and Jean Farlow (Charlotte's friends) without any hesitation: "While on a business visit to the States, I had had occasion to spend several months in Pisky. We met and had a mad love affair. I was married, alas, and she was engaged to Haze, but after I returned to Europe, we corresponded through a friend, now dead" (Nabokov 112). He even goes as far as to lie that he is Lolita's father in several occasions: "'John', cried Jean, 'she is his child, not Harold Haze's. Don't you understand? Humbert is Dolly's real father.'" (Nabokov 113). Humbert continues his lies about Lolita being his daughter when he rents a room at *Enchanted Hunters*: "...just put in a cot for my little daughter. She is ten and very a tired" (Nabokov 132). Since Humbert has no problem lying to other characters, he has no problem lying to Lolita as well: "Without going into details, I said that her mother was hospitalized, that the situation was grave, that the child should not be told it was grave and that she should be ready to leave with me tomorrow afternoon" (Nabokov 120). This lie he tells to Lolita several times, until he cannot lie anymore and confesses to Lolita that her mother is dead. Amit Marcus poses a question: "If Humber deceived others on some occasions in which deception served his interests, why should he not try to deceive us as well in order to prove his innocence?" (Marcus 195). Readers cannot be certain whether Humbert is insane or not, but the readers surely can be certain that Humbert is a liar since he lies to other characters all the time. Like Amit Marcus said, if Humbert lies to other characters, he probably lies to the readers as well. However, Humbert tries to seem extremely truthful to the readers. On several occasions, he tells the readers where they can check and find a solid proof of his description of events. For example, he assures the readers that they can find a proof of his arctic adventures: "the reader will find published (the study) in the *Annals of Adult Psychophysics* for 1945 or 1946, as well as in the issue of *Arctic Explorations* devoted to that particular expedition" (Nabokov 36). He even gives the reader a chance to check weather reports for a day he describes in his journal: "May 30 is a Fast Day by Proclamation in New Hampshire but not in the Carolinas. That day an epidemic of "abdominal flu" (whatever that is) forced Ramsdale to close its schools for the summer. The reader may check the weather data in the *Ramsdale Journal* for 1947" (Nabokov 43). The name of the study (as well as the name of the magazine in which the study can be found) and the weather report for May 30 are not important for the plot or for the reader's feelings about Humbert at all. By making these facts "true" Humbert tries to seem sincere but by giving solid proof that will corroborate his statements, Humber only emphasizes the parts of his story which cannot be checked and in that way just makes himself more unreliable. Since the reader knows that he is a liar, a few facts that can be corroborated by solid evidence do not actually make a difference.



In brief, there are clear textual signs of narrator unreliability in *Lolita*. Humbert Humbert addresses the readers as well as the jury, lies to other characters, makes self-referential statements about his (in)sanity and believability, and confirms that he has memory gaps. The unreliability of the narrator in *Lolita* does create the postmodern atmosphere that Alexa Van Brunt writes about. The narrative in *Lolita* is not grand; it is a personal narrative, narrated by a “smug” character who is a liar, a murderer and a pedophile; the narrative seems linear but since it is from the narrator’s point of view (and the narrator is unreliable), the readers cannot be certain of the plot’s linearity. The narrator does not search for truth, does not question or dwell upon himself and, being on trial for murder, does not show any indicators of progress in terms of more socially acceptable behavior. In *Lolita*, like in many other postmodern works, the unreliable narrator is a device (among others) which creates the aforementioned postmodern atmosphere and along with other postmodern characteristics (intertextuality and humor which will be analyzed later on in the text) makes *Lolita* a postmodern novel.

## 2.2. Humor and Intertextuality in Nabokov's *Lolita*

When it comes to intertextuality, *Lolita* is one of the finest novels ever written. Critics' opinions may differ when it comes to the moral aspects of the story, such as the question of who is the real victim: Lolita or Humbert, or concerning the decision whether Humbert is sane or not. However, they all agree that *Lolita* is a novel abundant with allusions, pastiches, references as well as direct quotations from other works. Whether one uses the term "parody" (which Linda Hutcheon prefers) or intertextuality, it is certain that this term is probably the greatest aspect of *Lolita*. Since irony creates parody in the postmodern sense of the term, humor and intertextuality cannot be separated in *Lolita* and they will be explicated jointly.

Firstly, it is important to mention that Nabokov uses parody as well as allusion in most of his works. Alfred Appel notes this:

As willful artifice, parody provides the main basis for Nabokov's involution, the "springboard for leaping into the highest region of serious emotion" (...) Because its referents are either other works of art or itself, parody denies the possibility of a naturalistic fiction. (...) *Lolita* (...) is seemingly his most realistic (novel), the involution is sustained by the parody and verbal patterning. (...) ALLUSION: Humbert's references to art and literature are consistent with his mind and education, but in other novels and stories such cultural allusions point to Nabokov. (27-29)

He is also a genre breaker, so *Lolita* is for Appel "a burlesque for the confessional mode, the literary diary, the Romantic novel that chronicles the effects of a debilitating love, the Doppelgänger tale, and in parts, a Duncan Hines tour of America by a guide with a black imagination, a parodic case study, and (...) 'a wicked imitation of many other...literary habit[s]'" (52). Since intertextuality is abundant in the novel, it will be analyzed in two parts: first as genre parody and then the allusions to other works or media and their meaning. Both will be connected with irony, thus confirming that it is impossible to detach humor from intertextuality in the novel.

Many of the allusions or techniques Nabokov employs, actually create a parody of traditional genres. For example, in the foreword, John Ray Jr. states that the other title of the novel is "Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male" (Nabokov 1). Appel notes the "term 'white widowed male'" parodies psychiatric case studies because it is a term used in psychiatry, while the rest of the title parodies the "titillating confessional novel, such as John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman Pleasure* (1749)" (Appel 319). But he does not only parody psychiatric studies and erotic novels. With the fact that Humbert's memoir is one part diary,

Nabokov also parodies pornographic novels which are often written as diaries and confessions. The irony is in the fact that while being confessional, *Lolita* is anything but honest and true, as he manipulates his readers by distorting the truth, and it also not at all erotic. There are no “lewd” descriptions of sex and Humbert’s sexual encounters are always followed by his ironic humorous comments, for example:

“The bleached curl revealed its melanic root; the down turned to prickles on a shaved shin; the mobile moist mouth (...) disclosed ignominiously its resemblance to the corresponding part in a treasured portrait of her toadlike dead mama (...) Humbert Humbert had on his hands a large, puffy, short-legged, big breasted and practically brainless baba. (Nabokov 26)

His first intercourse with Lolita is actually a quite humorous episode. Anticipated by his all night anxiety and trips to the bathroom, he gives the readers no explicit description of the intercourse stating that “Anybody can imagine those elements of animality” (Nabokov 151). After the deed has been done, Humbert says, “I was forced to devote a dangerous amount of time (was she up to something downstairs?) to arranging the bed in such a way as to suggest the abandoned nest of a restless father and his tomboy daughter, instead of an ex-convict’s saturnalia with a couple of fat old whores” (Nabokov 156). By making Humbert’s sexual escapades humorous (usually at his own expense), Nabokov creates a parody of confessional stories, as well as erotic stories.

Nabokov parodies doppelgänger stories, as well. The duplicity of the name “Humbert” points to duality which in turn points to doppelgängers and, of course, Humbert’s doppelgänger is Clare Quilty. In addition to that, Humbert Humbert sounds similar to William Wilson, the protagonist of the story of the same name by Edgar Allan Poe. The story is about a doppelgänger, who is not really a doppelgänger but a part of one person’s conscience. In *Lolita*, Quilty, a pervert, can also be seen as Humbert’s conscience. However, since Quilty “refuses” to die, Appel states that this refers to Gogol’s double story *The Nose* (in which “a nose would not at first stick to its owner’s face”(Appel 62)) more than Poe’s *William Wilson* or Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (Kurtz as Marlowe’s doppelgänger). Appel also notes that Humbert sounds like “ombre” which means shadow, and that he is in fact Quilty’s shadow. In that way, Nabokov successfully creates a parody by making the shadow (Humbert) chase the real entity (Quilty), instead of the real entity chasing the shadow as it usually is in doppelgänger stories. Their encounter at the Pavor Manor, unlike the encounters in doppelgänger stories, is an endless source of laughter. Matthew Brilinger notes this:

Humbert—having “overdone the alcoholic stimulation business” (293)—arrives at Pavor Manor enfeebled by drink. Moreover, unfamiliar with firearms, he makes a decidedly unconvincing assassin. His weapon is coated with oil (“the wrong product, it was black and awfully messy” [295]); his gun-play is inept (“I pointed Chum at his slippered foot and crushed the trigger. It clicked” [297]); and his marksmanship is less than stellar (“*Feu*. This time I hit something hard. I hit the back of a black rocking chair” [302]). (93-94)

As the Humbert-Quilty meeting goes on, Nabokov creates a parody of Hollywood Western films. Appel tells a story of the origin of Nabokov’s idea for Humbert vs. Quilty scene: “Nabokov came into a living room where a faculty child was absorbed in a television western (...) Nabokov was soon quaking with laughter over the furiously climactic fight scene” (63). The scene in the novel is quite similar to the one that Nabokov saw in a western: “We fell to wrestling again. We rolled all over the floor, in each other’s arms, like two huge helpless children. He was naked and goatish under his robe, and I felt suffocated as he rolled over me. I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us” (Nabokov 340). Here Nabokov creates a parody of Western films as well as doppelgänger stories (“We rolled over us” – Humbert and Quilty being the same person) at the same time, creating an ironic situation (a confrontation of two men, one trying to kill the other) which is in doppelgänger stories the climax of the story, as well as an important aspect of Western films.

Nabokov makes *Lolita* a detective story too. At the beginning of the novel, the readers know that Humbert Humbert is a murderer but they do not know who the victim is. Nabokov parodies a detective novel since he makes a reversal of a classic “whodunit” by letting the readers know who done it, but withholding who is the victim. He also parodies the detective story by giving numerous clues. In his memoir, Humbert gives the readers numerous clues about the victim. Appel notes one occasion on which a clue is given:

When Humbert finds Lolita and presses her for her abductor’s name (...) even here Humbert withholds Quilty’s identity, though the “astute reader” may recognize that “waterproof” is a clue which leads back to an early scene at the lake, in which Charlotte had said that Humbert’s watch was waterproof and Jean Farlow had alluded to Quilty’s Uncle Ivor, and then had almost mentioned Clare Quilty by name. (63)

Another clue is detective Trapp (who is actually Quilty, but Humbert thinks he is his cousin Trapp). By making the clues obvious, Nabokov ironically parodies detective stories which are pattern stories and the least suspected is always the guilty one. In *Lolita*, the most suspected is the guilty-Quilty one. Humorous references to Quilty are given all throughout the novel, for example:

Quilty, Clare, American dramatist. Born in Ocean City, N.J., 1911. Educated at Columbia University. Started on a commercial career but turned to playwriting. Author of *The Little Nymph*, *The Lady Who Loved Lightning* (in collaboration with Vivian Darkbloom), *Dark Age*, *The strange Mushroom*, *Fatherly Love*, and others. His many plays for children are notable. (Nabokov 33)

Quilty wrote *The Little Nymph* and many notable plays for children. Brillinger notes: “Conspicuously informing us that Clare Quilty has written many dramatic works for young audiences, the sentence ‘His many plays for children are notable’ more subtly reveals that Quilty is notorious for his many attempts to seduce children” (Brillinger 89). Also, on the same page, Nabokov ironically gives the readers a “smoking gun”, a clear sign that Quilty will be killed: “Quine the Swine. Guilty of killing Quilty. Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with” (Nabokov 33). This would never happen in a detective novel which builds suspense up to the end, revealing the mystery as a climax. Although Nabokov wants the readers to believe that there is a mystery in *Lolita*, ironically there is none because Humbert gives the readers clues all the time. Appel notes up to thirty references of Quilty up to the point when Humbert gives the readers his identity. This is in complete opposition to detective novels.

Nabokov also twists the typical simplistic fairy tale plot in *Lolita*. Allusions to fairy tales are common in *Lolita*; Quilty’s Pavor Manor is on Grimm Road, Humbert uses the term “elf” several times (“elfish chance offered me the sight of a delightful child of Lolita’s age” (Nabokov 142), “the initial fateful elf in my life” (Nabokov 17)), he calls himself “Prince Charming” (Nabokov 122). Appel states that there is more to just allusions to fairy tales in *Lolita*. He claims that:

The simplicity of Lolita’s “story”, such as it is – “plot”, in the conventional sense, may be paraphrased in three sentences – and the themes of deception, enchantment, and metamorphosis are akin to the fairy tale, while the recurrence of places and motifs and presence of three principal characters recall the formalistic design and symmetry of those archetypal tales. But the fate of Nabokov’s “fairy princess” (p. 52) and the novel’s denouement reverses the fairy-tale ending: “we shall live happily ever after. (346)

Nabokov thus parodies the fairy tale genre. There are three main characters and Lolita is certainly the fairy princess most of the time, but Humbert is more of a big bad wolf than Prince Charming, while Quilty is also both, since he freed Lolita from Humbert but had sinister intentions. The ending is also an ironic reversal of a fairy tale because everyone dies.

The most common allusions in Nabokov’s novel, as Appel states, are to works of Edgar Allan Poe and Prosper Mérimée. Further allusions are to Marlene Dietrich (her character in *The*

*Blue Angel* is named Dolores and Humbert compares Charlotte Haze to Marlene Dietrich), the Bible (“noble winged seraphs”), Petrarch and Dante (because of their relationships with Laura and Beatrice who were young like Lolita when they met them), Agatha Christie (Humbert mentions *A Murder is Announced* by Christie and on the next page, Quilty’s murder is announced), Jean Jacques Rousseau (Humbert calls himself “Jean Jacques Humbert”, Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote *Confessions*), Marquis de Sade (author of *Justine*, confessions of a young girl, her sexual escapades), Baudelaire (French phrases which Humbert uses “brun adolescent” and “se torde” which mean “dark adolescent” and “to undergo contortions” are taken from Baudelaire’s *Morning Twilight*), Lewis Carroll (Humbert watches a girl brushing her “*Alice in Wonderland* hair”, Appel states that Nabokov calls him “Lewis Carroll Carroll because he was the first Humbert Humbert” (381), implying that Lewis Carroll was a nympholept like Humbert)

It is not a coincidence that there are more than twenty Edgar Allan Poe allusions in *Lolita*. When Poe was

exiled from Richmond, Poe settled in Baltimore with his indigent, widowed aunt, Maria Clemm (David Poe’s sister), and her nine-year-old daughter, Virginia... A dependable income now greatly mattered to Poe, for he had fallen in love with his cousin Virginia and wished to marry her, although she was barely past the age of thirteen... On 22 September, Poe and Virginia took out a marriage license and perhaps were privately married. (Silverman)

On the first page of the novel, Humbert pronounces Lolita’s name “Lo.Lee.Ta.” (Nabokov 7), emphasizing the middle syllable which “alludes to *Annabel Lee*” (Appel 328), a poem by Poe. Humbert’s long lost adolescent love is also named Annabel. Humbert makes a clear connection between him and Poe “‘Monsieur Poe-poe’, as that boy in one of Monsieur Humbert humbert’s classes in Paris called the poet-poet” (Nabokov 46). In doubling Poe’s name, Humbert gives the readers a hint that Poe’s sexual interests were close to his, making it clear that Poe was a nympholept, just like Lewis “Carroll Carroll”. Furthermore, Humbert makes connections to other Poe’s works. For example: “Edgar H. Humbert (I threw in the ‘Edgar’ just for the heck of it), ‘writer and explorer’ ” (Nabokov 83), a reference to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, about Pym’s adventures, one of them being on the South Pole. Humbert’s adventures during the expedition in arctic Canada are a parody on Pym’s adventures on South Pole. Humbert mentions Pym once more: “Pym, Roland. Born in Lundy, Mass., 1922. Received stage training at Elsinore Playhouse, Derby, N.Y. Made debut in *Sunburst*” (Nabokov 32). Humbert refers to Lolita one time as Lenore, “‘Now hop-hop-hop, Lenore, or you’ll get soaked’ ”

(Nabokov 235). *Lenore* is a poem by Poe about mourning a dead young woman, just like *Annabel Lee*. Ellen Pifer in *The Lolita Phenomenon From Paris to Teheran* comments:

Addressed to the speaker's dead bride, "Annabel Lee" celebrates the romantic lover's transcendent desire, his faith in "a love that [is] more than love" (stanza 2, l. 3). Parodying the language and imagery of Poe's poem throughout his narration, Humbert identifies his own childhood sweetheart, who died of typhus at the age of twelve, as "Annabel Leigh," even calling her his "dead bride". (193)

There is a reference to *The Fall of the House of Usher*, a horror story by Poe. Nabokov used the house of Usher as an inspiration for Pavor Manor, Quilty's mansion. Appel notes: "Pavor: Latin; panic, terror. The Manor on Grimm Road burlesques the Gothic castles of fairy tales, Poe's mouldering House of Usher, and the medieval settings in Maeterlinck" (Appel 446). In that way, Pavor Manor is a parody of the house of Usher, a gruesome haunted house from Poe's story. Humbert kills Quilty in Pavor Manor but the events in the house leading to the murder are anything but scary or even remotely serious. There are allusions to *The Murders in Rue Morgue*, a story in which the killer is an orangutan. Nabokov's idea for the novel is derived from a story about an ape and Humbert compares himself to an ape: "she insisted we had gone to school together and he placed her trembling little hand on my ape paw" (Nabokov 294); "A polka-dotted black kerchief tied around her chest hid from my aging ape eyes, but not from the gaze of young memory" (Nabokov 42). Except for creating a humorous situation in comparing himself to an ape, Humbert is a primate before his nymphs, his desire is much like an uncontrollable killer in *The Murders in Rue Morgue*.

In short, allusions to Poe are numerous and they serve as a connection between two nympholepts, but also a parody of Poe's works. Nabokov illustrates the difference between Poe's gothic stories and Humbert's ironic memoir which tries to feign seriousness.

When it comes to Prosper Mérimée, Pifer notes that the allusions to his novella *Carmen* also serve as a parody:

Peppered with allusions to Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen*— the melodramatic tale of jealous love that inspired Bizet's famous opera — Humbert's account provokes the reader's conventional expectations only to overturn them. As he toys with the gun which he will use to kill Quilty, he mentally addresses Lolita as his "Carmen" or "Carmencita," begging her to come away with him. Playing upon the reader's fear that, when she refuses, Humbert — like the jealous lover, José, in Mérimée's novella — will kill her, he adds, "Then I pulled out my automatic — I mean, this is the kind of fool thing a reader might suppose I did. It never even occurred to me to do it" (*Lo*, 278–80 [pt. 2, ch. 29]). (190)

Just like using Poe's works (*William Wilson*, *Lenore*, *Annabel Lee*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Murders in Rue Morgue*, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*), Nabokov uses *Carmen* as a bait for readers to expect the same that happened in the alluded work. However, by using irony, he twists the expected events into a parody of these events and in that way, he illustrates the difference between a serious story (such as *Carmen*) and Humbert's memoir which is not to be taken seriously.

In summation, *Lolita* is filled with intertextuality. However, all allusions in *Lolita* have its purpose. Most of them are connected to other authors, literary works or other literary styles. By using intertextuality as a parody of other literary works, Nabokov employs irony and in that way creates ironic humor. By creating a humorous novel about a seemingly serious issue, Nabokov makes *Lolita* a postmodern novel. In different literary eras or in different literary styles, pedophilia, murder and insanity would not be wrapped in an ironic atmosphere. In that way, humor and intertextuality are inseparable in *Lolita*. Nabokov uses different styles and by creating a parody of these styles, he creates a new approach to old styles. The main thing that differentiates postmodernism from modernism is a new approach to the same matter. Nabokov, by giving the novel an ironic overtone and using irony to reverse the expected (according to the alluded work or genre), creates the exact postmodern parody that literary critics talk about and at the same time creates a postmodern as well as a darkly humorous novel.



### 3. Film Adaptations of Nabokov's *Lolita*

*Lolita*, the first film adaptation of Nabokov's novel of the same name, was released in 1962. Along with fifteen other films released in 1962, *Lolita* is listed in *1001 Movies You Have To See Before You Die*. In the book, Kim Newman concisely describes *Lolita*, covering all of the trademarks of the first adaptation of the novel:

Working from a Nabokov script, Kubrick slightly raised the age of Dolores "Lolita" Haze... with James Mason giving a remarkable performance as the middle-aged academic Humbert Humbert, as ridiculously lusted after by Lo's leopard-print-clad mama (Shelley Winters) as he is ridiculously smitten with the underage temptress herself. Opening with the aftermath of an orgy and Humbert's murder of his pedophile rival, "genius" Clare Quilty (Petter Sellers), the film stretches from slapstick (struggling with a folding bed in a motel room) to tragedy (Humbert's affecting sobs as he realizes how incidental he has been to the girl's life). (403)

The second adaptation of Nabokov's *Lolita* was released in 1997. It was directed by Adrian Lyne, who prior to filming *Lolita*, filmed mostly erotic drama movies such as *Fatal Attraction* and *Indecent Proposal*. As Christopher C. Hudgins states in *Lolita 1995. The Four Filmscripts*, Lyne went through four scripts before settling for the one written by Stephen Schiff. In Lyne's *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert is played by the esteemed British actor Jeremy Irons, Lolita is played by a fifteen year old debutante Dominique Swain, Lolita's mother Charlotte Haze is played by Melanie Griffith and Clare Quilty is played by Frank Langella. Music was composed by an established Italian composer Ennio Morricone.

Upon its release, the film was met with far more controversy than Kubrick's adaptation. Namely, the 1990s were a period of major child-abuse hysteria. As Graham Vickers states in *Chasing Lolita*, the 1990s followed the McMartin preschool abuse trial as well as school girl Amy Fisher's romance with twice as old Joseph Buttafuoco which ended in murder. These two scandals were all over the news for a long period of time in the USA. In addition to that, "the Child Pornography Prevention Act of 1996 was enacted in the United States" (Vickers 195) so Lyne's adaptation was released only in European cinemas. The film made it to only few American cinemas in July of 1998. The film was released in, as Vickers states, a deeply hostile climate, which affected the viewers as well as critics (who were also influenced by Lyne's previous films). Because of that, the film received many negative critiques. On the other hand, it received some extremely positive critiques and reviews as well. In further analysis of these two

film adaptations of Nabokov's *Lolita*, emphasis will be put on narrator, intertextuality and humor.

### 3.1. (Unreliable) Narrator in Kubrick's and Lyne's *Lolita*

Kubrick's *Lolita* is narrated by the protagonist, Humbert Humbert. However, Humbert's voice-over narrations are brief, they occur in very few occasions and with large spans of time between them. This gives an impression that the narrator does not know the whole plot. The film starts with Humbert encountering Clare Quilty and ends with the same event creating a frame story. Humbert narrates the part of the film which makes up the frame, namely the events that take place before his arrival to Quilty's mansion. After Humbert's confrontation with Quilty at the beginning of the film, the plot returns to the past, to Humbert's arrival to Ramsdale, four years before his encounter with Quilty. Humbert refers to his visit to America as a "peaceful summer" and claims that many Europeans before him found their haven in America. He does not state whether he wants to find his haven in America as well. Humbert does not give any information about his past life in this narrative. After Humbert's brief narration about his reasons for coming to America, the film continues without a narrator. Later on, Humbert's narration starts again as he is writing about nymphets in his diary. He does not give reason as to why he is infatuated with nymphets or what nymphets are. He just claims that it is mad to keep his journal but he finds it thrilling to do so. Confession of his "madness" is the first clear signal (out of fourteen Nünning's signals) of unreliable narrators. Narrator in a self-referential manner gives a proof of his (un)believability. Briefly after that, Humbert again writes in his journal and describes his experience concerning his wedding to Charlotte. He refers to himself in the third person and admits that besides "bitterness and distaste" Humbert also felt "faint tenderness" and a "pattern of remorse". This is also a self-reference which as well as the previous one, points to Humbert's emotional state. By using the third person, Humbert distances himself from the statements that he gives. This is also a signal of unreliability. The sequence of narration that comes after that is characterized by Humbert's cunning plot to kill Charlotte. His idea of a perfect murder is to tell the authorities that it was a newlyweds' role-play that had gone terribly wrong. He even goes to the bathroom to kill her but explains that he cannot do it. In this sequence it is clear for the first time that Humbert is telling the story to someone, referring to them as "folks". Because of that, this sequence of narration differs from those which are written in his journal. This continues in Humbert's next narration, in which he describes his new life with Lolita in a new town. Humbert's direct addresses to the viewers are also a signal of unreliability because they are in service of persuasion. In the following narration sequence, Humbert refers to himself in the third person, again, telling about his plans in Hollywood. Soon

after that, the last narration of Humbert's occurs in which he notices that a strange car has been following them.

Humbert's narration in the film is in the service of plot. His voice-overs are used only to contextualize a sequence which seems disconnected from the previous one, usually because sequences are divided by some period of time which is not a part of the film. However, instead of using the narrator, Kubrick achieves dramatic compression through the use of objective correlatives which take on symbolic significance, replacing words" (Burns 248). Even though Kubrick's Humbert does not state his reasons and desires very clearly, Kubrick uses objects to illustrate them. For example, "when landlady Charlotte asks her new lodger, 'What made you decide to stay?', he (Humbert) replies 'Your cherry pies.' A close-up of Lolita inserted at this point makes it clear what kind of cherry pies Humbert has in mind" (Burns 248). "When Humbert and Lolita go to the drive-in horror film, Kubrick furnishes a shock cut to the face of the monster. This shot, in juxtaposition with a close-up of Humbert supplies an objective correlative for the lustful demon within" (Burns 248). These techniques used by Kubrick go perfectly with Humbert's sparse narration creating a character who is more than he tells he is, making him unreliable since facts about him are not told in his words but are rather shown as objects (metaphors). These metaphors show his true desires and reasons which he does not reveal in his narration. Humbert, in his own words does not seem as a person with desires which are morally wrong. Kubrick's humorous objective correlation techniques show how 'dirty' Humbert's mind really is. Kubrick's Humbert is a sympathetic character (based on his narration), but his actions, "through objective correlations and character dynamics" (Skinner) reveal him as, as Skinner states, a pedophile and a murderer. Although Humbert does not tell much about his repulsion towards Charlotte, his facial expressions of discomfort and even disgust show his true feelings. Additionally, his lust for Lolita is also mostly expressed in his lustful, uncontrollable facial expressions: "Humbert's eyes often wander to Lolita, most notably at the dance early on, a cornucopia of complex eye-line matches, the many scenes in which Humbert gazes longingly at Lolita and also so effectively in the sequence that finds the elder Miss Haze's plans to seduce Humbert interrupted by the playfully omniscient Lolita" (Skinner). Thomas Allen Nelson also notices this stating:

Mason develops a series of facial and gestural mannerisms to express Humbert's European archness and his terrible vulnerability. When Humbert experiences moments of emotional exposure, for example, Mason's face twitches uncontrollably as his hands move frantically to restore order to his facial landscape; and by the film's end, the character's formal mask

cracks under the internal pressure from a growing despair that releases an almost unbearable poignancy.

Viewers can learn a lot from facial expressions and “perhaps even more significantly the eye-lines, an oft overlooked but crucial aspect of any character based scene” (Skinner). By using metaphors and objects for Humbert’s words or thoughts as well as by using eye-shots as well as close-ups of facial expressions, Kubrick gives the viewers a combination of two signals of narrator unreliability. Aforementioned examples of objects and metaphors as well as eye-shots and close-ups point to discrepancies between Humbert’s actions and words. In addition to that, Humbert’s facial expressions show a high level of emotional involvement, even in scenes in which he does not seem to be that much emotionally involved.

To sum it all up, Humbert’s narration in Kubrick’s *Lolita* is sparse and makes him a sympathetic character. However, Humbert’s actions, facial expressions, lack of knowledge about some elements of the story as well as Kubrick’s objective correlations and eye shots, point to Humbert being an unreliable narrator. These signals reveal Humbert to be a lustful hebephile, but in combination with his sympathetic pleas, they make him a tragic as well as humorous character, a character that is quite similar to Humbert from Nabokov’s novel. In addition to that, because of many signals of unreliability, Kubrick’s Humbert is just like Nabokov’s Humbert, a typical postmodern unreliable narrator which creates a personal narrative, does not show any sign of social progress and whose story cannot be considered linear or true.

Adrian Lyne's *Lolita* is narrated by Humbert Humbert. The film is based on his point of view. Although viewers can relate Humbert's point of view to the unreliability of the narrator, the (un)reliability is much more emphasized in Kubrick's adaptation. Indications of unreliability are quite sparse in this film and the overall feeling of Lyne’s Humbert is the feeling of reliability.

Since the film is based on Humbert's point of view, it is full of Humbert's voice-overs from the beginning to the end. The voice-overs are mostly taken straight from the novel and Graham Vickers notes that the script is “of great literacy and imagination commendably blurs the line between dialog adapted from the novel and lines newly written” (Vickers 199). “The narration is heavily restricted to Humbert's point of view – in terms of plot, but also sometimes in terms of the stylistic choices (POV shots, audial clues, etc.)” (Da Silva). It is certain that the script, especially parts of Humbert’s narration, follow the novel very closely. At the same time, the lines in the script, used in voice-overs and taken from the novel do not show that the narrator is unreliable. However, the beginning of the movie successfully binds the novel and the film.

The film opens with Humbert's narration taken from the beginning of the novel: "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. In my arms, she was always Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul". These lines evoke a familiar feeling in viewers who have read the novel and certainly give the film a sense of credibility. This continues as in the manner of the novel, the film goes on with Humbert's reminiscence of his adolescent love Annabel Leigh. The absence of the origin of Humbert's fascination with nymphets is what many considered a flaw in Kubrick's adaptation. However, although in Lyne's adaptation the Annabel Leigh sequence is well depicted, it is wrapped in a melodramatic atmosphere. Richard Philips attributes this to "Lyne's propensity for the atmospheric visual cliché— a tendency noticeable in his portrayal of Humbert's childhood romance". Indeed, these scenes are filmed in sepia tones with wonderful landscapes and melodramatic (but magnificently composed) music by Ennio Morricone. This is what makes Lyne's Humbert a sympathetic character. From the beginning of the film, his feelings towards Lolita are marked by love. The atmosphere which includes melodramatic music and retrospective in sepia tones of pretty landscapes creates a feeling that Humbert is a poor man who is stuck in a spiral of grief for a long lost love. The viewers feel sorry for Humbert at the beginning of the film, which is completely different from the feelings that the readers get at the beginning of the novel. In *Reinventing Nabokov – Lyne and Kubrick Parse Lolita* Ellen Pifer explains how this whole sequence, although faithful to the novel, "ruins" what the novel emphasizes:

Lyne mines this material but ignores the comedy these scenes generate in the novel – as thirteen-year-old Humbert and his adorable Annabel furtively and futilely, attempt to consummate their love. Sustaining the dominant chord of nostalgic melancholy, Lyne conveys Humbert's adolescent love for Annabel in sepia-tinted images. Stripped of irony, the sequence which ends with young Humbert's sobbing at the news of Annabel's death, offers Lyne's audience an easy explanation for the adult's lifelong obsession. Translating parody into sentiment, Lyne winds up championing what the novel spoofs: a pop psychologist's account of Humbert's irrepressible desire for nymphets. By clinically "solving" the mystery at the heart of Humbert's longing, Lyne simplifies and renders less sinister, its dark power. (75)

From the beginning of the movie, viewers see a sullen, romantic Humbert whose voice-overs are "the voice of sad-eyed Humbert" (Pifer 69). The viewers see a Humbert who is obsessed with his

long lost adolescent love and who sees her (Annabel Leigh) in Lolita. Although Humbert, played by Jeremy Irons, states that he is fascinated by nymphets:

A normal man, given a group photograph of schoolgirls, and asked to point out the loveliest one will not necessarily choose the nymphet among them. You have to be an artist, a madman, full of shame and melancholy and despair in order to recognize the little deadly demon among the others

from the beginning of the film, the viewers have a feeling that he is not fascinated by nymphets at all (in other words, he is not a hebephile, a pedophile). It actually seems that he is fascinated by the image of his long lost love which he sees in Lolita. This sympathetic Humbert, who does not really seem as a pedophile, cannot be seen as unreliable.

Richard Phillips, in his review of the film, states that the “potential for the much-discussed unreliable narrator of *Lolita* remains in Lyne’s film” (Phillips), however it is quite hard to find the potential Phillips mentions. The only instance in which the viewers could view Humbert as unreliable is Humbert’s madness. His insanity is the only signal of an unreliable narrator. As the plot progresses, Humbert becomes more and more unstable and paranoid. For example, he fears that Lolita is going to leave him: “As she grew cooler towards my advances, I became accustomed to purchasing her favors. Where she hid the money, I never knew. I was convinced she was storing it away in order to finance her escape.” Lyne corroborates Humbert’s madness (of which he is aware) “by using jarring jump cuts and uncomfortable close-ups, creating a dizzying effect” (Safon) which is especially emphasized in the Humbert-Lolita chase scene. After that scene and their departure from Beardsley, Humbert’s madness grows while they are being (or maybe not being followed, as Humbert doubts) followed. Because he is aware of his insanity and even doubts his paranoia, this self-reflexivity is a signal of unreliability. His insanity culminates prior to Lolita’s escape. Lyne successfully creates a nauseating effect with blinking lights and distorted images. This effect is a replica of Humbert’s mind at that moment.

Although Lyne based the film on Humbert’s point of view, his words and his actions as well as his gestures and facial expressions (unlike words and actions of Kubrick’s Humbert) concur. His paranoia is well accompanied by point of view shots of a sly Lolita who lies to him quite often. For example, when Humbert finds Lolita with dirty feet, Lolita denies having gone out. This fight ends in a passionate and violent sexual episode which reminds the viewers of a grown up couple caught in a fit of jealousy. Humbert is clearly mentally unstable from his obsession with a long lost love but the viewers get the feeling that his paranoia is based on solid grounds since Lolita is shown as manipulating and cunning in quite a few occasions. Even

though Lyne does a great job at making Lolita immature (for example her fingers are shown as colored with felt pens while she is giving Humbert a “rub”), her slyness is much more emphasized than the slyness of Kubrick’s *Lolita*. However, Kubrick’s *Lolita* is made to look older which also destroys the image of Lolita as a child that she really is, the image which is strongly emphasized in the novel.

To sum it all up, Lyne did a good job at imitating the narrative of the novel by making the film from Humbert’s point of view. This is a great way to introduce an unreliable narrator, because novels with unreliable narrators are usually based solely on their point of view. However, Lyne, by making Humbert a sympathetic character whose obsession with a long lost love, an obsession which made Humbert a victim of a pubescent vixen, did not create an unreliable narrator. The absence of signals of unreliability is not a solid ground for an unreliable narrator. Lyne’s Humbert is rather a man lost in grief over a girl from his adolescence. Humbert’s love for Lolita seems genuine and mature. Humbert’s actions and words are corroborated by the scenes (which are not shot from Humbert’s point of view) in which the audience sees Lolita as a liar and a manipulator. In addition to that, Jeremy Irons is perhaps a little too stern and profound in comparison to the Humbert in the novel and James Mason in Kubrick’s film. All of that unfortunately creates an unsuitable ground for the postmodern unreliable narrator.



### 3.2. Intertextuality and Intermediality in Kubrick's and Lyne's *Lolita*

Intertextuality is an important aspect of Nabokov's *Lolita* and it can be found in Kubrick's film adaptation as well. At the beginning of the film, during Humbert's encounter with Quilty, Quilty plays the piano and makes up lyrics: "The moon was blue, and so are you, and I tonight/she's mine, yours/she's yours tonight/and the moon is..." In this case, intertextuality is in service of humor, the general overtone of the whole Humbert vs. Quilty sequence at the beginning of the film. In one sequence, Humbert quotes Edgar Allan Poe's *Ulalume*, a poem by his 'favorite poet' to Lolita: "It was..." - Who's the poet? The divine Edgar. Who's the divine Edgar. Edgar who? Edgar Allan Poe, of course. "It was night in the lonesome October/ Of my most immemorial year..." This scene in the film is important because in the novel, Humbert refers to Edgar Allan Poe in quite a few occasions. However, there is no reference to the poem *Ulalume* in the novel. Because of that, this example of intertextuality in the film connects the novel, Edgar Allan Poe's poetry and the film as an individual piece of art. The film refers to Edgar Allan Poe, just like the novel (since the film is the adaptation of the novel). However it refers to a poem which the novel does not refer to. It is, however, similar to *Annabel Lee* and *Lenore* from the novel. All three poems are about the loss of a loved woman. The reference to Edgar Allan Poe is not coincidental because Poe's love life was similar to Humbert's. Poe, just like Humbert, fell in love with a prepubescent girl who was also his cousin. He married her when she was thirteen. Kubrick used this reference to Poe to indirectly emphasize Humbert's pedophilia. In addition to that, this scene illustrates the major age and cultural difference between Humbert and Lolita. Humbert is shocked to find out that Lolita does not know about "the divine Edgar". However, he does not find this repulsive, as any adult who defines a romantic relationship as a relationship of two intellectual equals would. In a way, Kubrick creates a parody of a romantic setting typical for films. Humbert reads a poem to Lolita, who being a child, has no sense of romance and breaks the emotional scene by being clueless about Poe and poetry in general.

Other examples of intertextuality in the film refer to other forms of text that appear in the film: letter and diary. On one occasion, Humbert reads Charlotte's letter addressed to him and on another occasion, Lolita's letter to Humbert is being typed on a typewriter. In contrast to Charlotte's romantic letter being written by hand and read out loud by Humbert, this letter is written in formal manner and it is not clear who is typing the letter. This is done on purpose to emphasize the emotional distance and how, at this moment in the film, Lolita does not care about

Humbert at all and she just needs him to give her money. When it comes to text in the form of a diary, on one occasion, Charlotte reads Humbert's diary out loud. On other occasions, Humbert writes in his diary while the voice-over reads his notes for the viewers.

Although there is intertextuality in the film, intermediality is even more emphasized. Intermediality refers to other media present in the film. The first occurrence of another media in the film is Quilty playing Chopin's *Polonaise in A major, Op. 40, No. 1* on the piano. Quilty uses Chopin's music to make up a silly song. This kind of combination between high art (Chopin) and low art (a simple song) is a typical postmodernist maneuver because in postmodernism there is no barrier between high and low art. "Humbert shoots Quilty through a painting, a portrait which is an imitation" (Burns 248) and a combination of Gainsborough's *Portrait of a Lady in Blue* and *Mrs. Sarah Siddons*, an action which serves as "a metaphor for Humbert's and Quilty's abuse of Lolita" (Burns 248-249). Nelson also states:

the portrait introduces a metaphor of Humbert's tragic obsession with Lolita—a neoclassical serenity masking the grin of death—one that will serve as a backdrop to the film's titled epilogue: "Humbert Humbert died in prison of coronary thrombosis while awaiting trial for the murder of Clare Quilty" This demure image twice seen, and the repetition of the call for "Quilty" that immediately precedes it, provide the film with an aural and visual Rosebud which, like a recurring dream-nightmare, frames Humbert's loss of vision in the dark obstacle course of the self.

While the metaphor for the abuse of Lolita is certainly a legitimate explanation of the portrait scene, it is also important to note that by shooting the portrait, Humbert, in a postmodern manner, gives a new approach to the old. Since postmodernism takes the old and makes a parody of it, Humbert by shooting a portrait makes the portrait into something new, ironically it is now a portrait with a bullet hole in it.

At the drive-in cinema, Lolita, Humbert and Charlotte are watching *The Curse of Frankenstein*, a 1957 horror film. There is only one scene on screen, in which the disfigured Frankenstein's monster is ready to attack its creator. This scary scene makes both Lolita and Charlotte grab Humbert's hand, but Humbert releases Charlotte's hand while firmly gripping Lolita's. Frankenstein's monster is similar to Humbert's monster, his abomination, his desire for Lolita, which also comes to destroy its creator later in the film, Humbert's mind. Robert Stam notices references to other films and claims that "the film is intermittently parodic—the homage

to Chaplin's tussle with a bed in *One A.M.*, the allusion to Kubrick's own *Spartacus* in the Humbert vs. Quilty scene at the beginning in which at one point Quilty impersonates *Spartacus*). In that way, Kubrick creates a parody of old films and old styles just like Nabokov does in the novel. It is important to note another allusion to Poe which connects together two films, Kubrick's *Lolita* and *House of Usher*, a 1960's adaptation of Poe's story *The Fall of the House of Usher*. It has already been said that in the novel, Pavor Manor was inspired by Poe's house of Usher and Kubrick does the same by using a house for Pavor Manor (see fig. 1) which bears striking resemblance to the house that Roger Corman uses in *House of Usher* (see fig. 2).



(Fig. 1. Pavor Manor screenshot from *Lolita*. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM). 1962. Film)



(Fig. 2. House of Usher screenshot from House of usher. Dir. Roger Corman. American International Pictures. 1960. Film)

Both houses have columns on chimneys, as well as similar gothic exterior, which includes old age, remoteness and dead nature.

The media of theater also plays a part in the film. When Lolita and Humbert are living alone in a new town, Lolita takes part in a school play which begins with: “I stand before you, a rearsomebucky goat no more. Tremble not, little nymph. You see before you a weary goat.” This can be referred to Lolita’s and Humbert’s relationship at the time of the play. Lolita is still a nymph but Humbert is a weary, paranoid, insecure old man tired of the relationship in which he becomes the victim of both himself and Lolita. Kubrick here creates a humorous situation by comparing Humbert to a “weary goat”.

To conclude, Kubrick’s adaptation contains both intertextuality and intermediality. Intermediality is much more emphasized which is not unusual because it is easy for directors to include other media in a film which is already multimedia on its own. The usage of intertextuality and intermediality, which serves both as a means of parody and a means to establish a connection, and often creating an ironic setting, with previously created works of art relative for the topic of Kubrick’s movie, decidedly confirms its postmodern nature.

In Lyne’s film adaptation of Nabokov’s novel there are also a lot of examples of intertextuality and intermediality. Intermediality in the film is in service of the setting and in that way, Lyne successfully transferred the setting of the novel to the screen. However, since

intertextuality and intermediality are not put in an ironic context, like they are in Kubrick's film, it is hard to talk about postmodern intertextuality when it comes to Lyne's *Lolita*.

Other forms of text can be found in the script of Lyne's *Lolita*. For example, Humbert reads Charlotte's letter addressed to him. The viewers hear the text of the letter in Charlotte's voice-over. The voice-over is accompanied by shots of brides and 1940s couples posted on the wall of Lolita's room. In this letter, Charlotte confesses her love to Humbert. Later on in the film, Humbert receives Lolita's letter, three years after her departure. The audience sees the content while the text is read in Humbert's voice-over. Unlike Lolita's letter in Kubrick's film, this letter is written by hand, it is much longer and contains much more emotion. It is signed "Dolly (Mrs. Richard F. Schiller)". While Humbert reads the letter, melodramatic music plays in the background, and it again emphasizes the romantic aspect of their relationship. The first letter, Charlotte's letter to Humbert, is mocked by shots of perfect couples and Lolita's drawing of H.H. in a heart, while the second letter, Lolita's letter to Humbert is accompanied by melodramatic music and shots of Humbert's sad watery eyes.

Just like in Kubrick's *Lolita*, in Lyne's *Lolita*, intermediality is much more emphasized than intertextuality. Again, this is not unusual since film is multimedia. The time setting of the novel is 1940s/early 1950s and this is well depicted in Lyne's *Lolita*. In addition to that, in the novel, Lolita is a typical American consumerist teenager. "She it was, to whom ads were dedicated: the ideal consumer, the subject and object of every foul poster" (Nabokov 167). Lyne depicted this as well. "Hypnotized by the media, with its 'adamant visions' and celluloid versions of romance, Lolita has absolute faith – what Humbert calls 'celestial trust' – in their false promises" (Pifer 73). Just like other children of her age, she likes contemporary popular music. Soundtrack of Lyne's film is full of late 1940s music. In addition to that, there are many scenes in which Lolita dances or sings to music on the radio. She sings to Louis Prima's *Civilization*, Andy Russell's *Amour*, *Tim-Tayshun* by Red Ingle and the Natural Seven with *Cinderella G Stump* and she dances to Ella Fitzgerald's *T'aint What You Do*. Lolita reads *Brenda Breeze* comic while Humbert reads newspapers. By using other media, Lyne successfully depicted the time setting of the novel, unlike Kubrick who discarded all the indications of time setting and made it unclear. Time setting is an important aspect of the novel since Nabokov includes many references to popular culture of that period and describes 1940s America in great detail. Lyne captured Nabokov's ideas of time setting very well.

In conclusion, Lyne's film contains a lot of intermediality. However, since it is used only to emphasize the time setting, it cannot be considered postmodern intertextuality like it is in the novel and in Kubrick's film because postmodern intermediality is used to create a parody of the text or media it alludes to.

### 3.4. Humor in Kubrick's and Lyne's *Lolita*

Although Kubrick's *Lolita* has received both negative early reviews and positive late reviews, critics never denied *Lolita*'s humor. Irony and dark humor is what many claim to be Nabokov's novel's most important trait as well as the essence of the novel. This is not surprising, as postmodernist art often relies on humor to achieve the desired effect. Moreover, irony is closely connected to parody in postmodernism so by making the film a parody (to some extent) of certain styles, Kubrick made a postmodern film.

The film starts with a farce-like sequence. Humbert angrily shouts "Quilty!" entering the Pavor Manor. The viewers are bound to expect a violent confrontation. However, Kubrick does the opposite. On one side there is overly comedic, even silly Quilty and on the other, worn out, overly serious, both roles are intentionally overacted. Quilty takes part in their conversation with jokes and humorous sarcastic remarks to Humbert's questioning while Humbert continues with serious questions and accusations. Humbert is threatening Quilty with a gun while Quilty continues to make fun of both himself as well as Humbert. Nelson states that:

This highly stylized encounter continues as Sellers improvises, in masterly fashion, a series of perverse impersonations that anticipate and parody the movement of the film into the "normal" social and psychological landscape of Ramsdale. He sprinkles his language with clichés like the Boy Scout motto, as he pulls from a robe pocket beneath his toga an endless supply of ping-pong balls. (Nelson)

Like in a vaudeville show " he goes through a repertoire of B-film character parts (an old Western codger who reads Humbert's painfully precious poem as if it were the "deed to the ranch"; a boxing champion who wants to settle differences "like two civilized people") that indirectly mock Humbert's fatuous assumption of moral outrage" (Nelson). It is important to note that Quilty's impersonations can be also considered as examples of intermediality because he takes different forms of speech and manner from different types of characters from different types of movies. Quilty also includes some dark jokes and does not spare Humbert of sarcasm and irony. For example, he replies to Humbert after Humbert fires a gun, damaging Quilty's boxing glove. Quilty responds: "Right in the boxing glove. You ought to be more careful with that thing." Also, when Humbert shoots him, Quilty adds: "I could fix for you to attend executions. How would you like that? Just you there, and nobody else, just watching, watch." From this Humbert vs. Quilty sequence, it is clear that the overtone of the film is certainly going

to be comedic. It is very simple to understand why Kubrick decided to give the film a humorous overtone. The overtone of the novel is similar. In the novel, most of the time humor is created by irony which is a technique of creating a parody of certain genres or literary works. In the film, Kubrick does the same. Quilty creates a parody of different movie styles and inseparably conjoins intermediality and humor. The film starts with Humbert looking for Quilty with a gun and the viewers expect the film to develop into a thriller but instead it develops into a comedy. Nabokov does the same in the novel, employing different genres but twisting them into something new.

In addition to the farce-like sequence at the beginning of the film, comedic tone continues in Humbert's relationship with Charlotte Haze, *Lolita's* mother. From Humbert's arrival to Ramsdale and to Charlotte's house, it is clear how inferior and repulsive he considers her. His replies to her are filled with irony and sarcasm:

... and we're very progressive intellectually. - That is immediately apparent. (...) It's very difficult for a woman...an attractive woman alone, you know. - Yes, I'm sure it is. (...) Do you think I'm just a foolish, romantic American girl? - No... no. - Hum, you just touch me and I go as limp as a noodle. It scares me. - Yes, I know the feeling.

Similar comedic situations occur when Charlotte dies in an accident. "Humbert relaxes in the very bathwater that Charlotte had been drawing for herself just before reading his diary and fleeing to her rain-soaked death" (Nelson). Friends come over to comfort Humbert and mistakenly think that he is about to commit suicide. The viewers know more than the characters, and they understand that Humbert is relieved by Charlotte's death, whereas the characters mistakenly believe that he is grieving. Humbert is drunk, completely cold and continues his replies in a sarcastic way the same way he replied to Charlotte. The same continues when the father of the car driver who ran over Charlotte arrives to convince Humbert not to press charges. Humbert is clearly uninterested.

Also, humorous situations are created by word play, just like in the novel. For example, the summer camp which Lolita goes to is called Camp Climax. Since, Humbert meets a boy who works there and is instantly suspicious of Lolita's actions during her stay. This sexual implication is relevant because Humbert is sexually obsessed by Lolita. Also, when Humbert and Lolita arrive at the Enchanted Hunters, Humbert asks for a room and the concierge says the room is free because Captain Love cancelled. This clearly implies to Humbert and Lolita as two people



who are not in love. They will get a room that was cancelled by Captain Love. Another example of humorous word play is when Humbert asks Lolita about her whereabouts and admits of seeing her at the Frigid Queen. Thomas Allen Nelson describes their relationship: “He pathetically rubs his hands on his pants leg and kneels in a gesture of total submission before his now frigid princess...” (Nelson). At this time in the film, Lolita is avoiding Humbert and their relationship is falling apart.

Humor (especially irony, sarcasm and parody) combined with serious themes (such as pedophilia or hebephilia, death, loss, tragedy, paranoia) is a major characteristic of postmodernism. Postmodernism is based on deconstruction and new perspectives. Therefore, it is not unusual to encounter humoristic approach to serious themes in postmodern art. Before postmodernism, humor in literature existed but it was not common to find dark humor, or in other words, humoristic approach to serious themes was rare. Since postmodernism relies on deconstruction, two opposites such as humor and seriousness are intertwined and inseparable. In addition to that, Kubrick combines intermediality and humor in the Quilty vs. Humbert encounter by twisting different movie genres. In the novel, intertextuality and humor are inseparable because Nabokov uses irony to twist different literary genres. In that way, Kubrick’s *Lolita* is a postmodern film because it is, in a way, a parody of different styles and closely connects intermediality with humor.

Many critics think that Lyne’s *Lolita* is humorless and that it is a movie dealing with a serious theme in an overly-serious manner. Ellen Pifer states that “if Kubrick’s film can be faulted for its near-obsession with the novel’s high-flown comedy, Lyne’s is devoid of humor to a remarkable degree” (Pifer 68). However, there are comedic situations in Lyne’s adaptation as well but they are more of a comic relief than a postmodern parody. The only postmodern aspect of Lyne’s humor is that he sometimes combines humor with a serious topic but it cannot be enough to consider the humor in Lyne’s *Lolita* postmodern.

Most of the comedic situations in the film are created during Humbert’s interactions with Charlotte, Lolita’s mother. For example, at their visit to the lake, Charlotte runs behind Humbert very clumsily and she almost falls. Another example of a comedic situation involving Humbert and Charlotte happens when he drugs her and says: “throughout July, I’d been offering Charlotte various sleeping tablets, which she gobbled down happily” and he adds: “She was a great taker of pills”. When the pills stop working, he visits the doctor and asks for pills “to knock out, say, a cow”.

However, there are some situations which remind the audience of the novel's humor and wordplay. For example, the concierge at the hotel in which Humbert and Lolita stay in, mistakenly calls Humbert "Mr. Humbug". Humbug is a synonym for false talk or hypocrisy. Humbert's name is also mistakenly pronounced when he is talking to a teacher and a priest from Lolita's school. The teacher calls him "Mr. Himmler" (like Heinrich Himmler, the commander of Hitler's SS) and the priest calls Humbert "Mr. Humper". At the time of their arrival at the hotel, there is a Glory of Christ convention. This is similar to Kubrick's *Lolita* in which there is a police convention. When Humbert leaves sleeping Lolita in the hotel room, he passes next to a group of priests in the middle of prayer. At the time of his arrival, one priest prays and says: "The Lord knows all, the Lord sees all, the Lord forgives all". On their drive to Beardsley, Humbert and Lolita arrive to a motel which has a sign on which it says "Children UNDER 14 FREE". This is a clear reference to Humbert's pedophilia.

Because of these comedic situations in which Lyne uses intelligent references or wordplay and by combining a serious theme with humor, it is safe to say that Lyne's film is to some extent, although not as much as Kubrick's, a slight dark comedy. However, it does not have the postmodern technique of parody which is a major part of the novel and an important aspect of Kubrick's film. Therefore, it cannot be said that, when it comes to humor, Lyne's *Lolita* is a postmodern film.

## Conclusion

Postmodern concepts of the unreliable narrator are connected to the postmodern atmosphere. Postmodern atmosphere is achieved through disregarding grand narratives, linearity, the search for truth and personal growth. Unreliable narrators are unable to create grand narratives; they cannot produce linear plots and they do not exhibit personal growth. Postmodern intertextuality (or parody) is inseparable from humor, or to be more precise, from irony, since postmodern intertextuality uses old texts to create a parody which is achieved through irony.

Nabokov's *Lolita* certainly does fit into the postmodern concepts of the unreliable narrator, intertextuality and humor. Humbert Humbert is an unreliable narrator since he exhibits most of the textual signs of unreliability. Intertextuality and humor are inseparable since Nabokov parodies many genres including detective stories, erotic novels, doppelgänger tales and fairytales. He twists the expected form of the genre into a new form by using irony. He also makes allusions to other authors or literary works and his allusions are always accompanied by irony. The novel does not lack dark humor at any time since Nabokov gives any potentially serious situation an ironic overtone. Because of *Lolita's* unreliable narrator, intertextuality intertwined with irony, *Lolita* is certainly a postmodern novel.

Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* features an unreliable narrator since Kubrick's Humbert shows signals of unreliability present in the novel as well. Just like the novel, it also inseparably combines intertextuality with humor. On the other hand, Adrian Lyne's *Lolita* does not have an unreliable narrator (his Humbert is a sympathetic character grieving over a long lost love), intermediality is in the service of creating the right setting and humor is used as a comic relief between melodramatic scenes. Therefore, Kubrick's *Lolita* can be considered a postmodern film, while Lyne's *Lolita* cannot. Consequently, by capturing the true essence of Nabokov's novel, its unreliable narrator and distinguishable intertextuality combined with irony, Kubrick's film adaptation is more faithful to the novel.

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