

# VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S "LOLITA": A SATIRICAL TAKE ON FREUD'S PSYCHOANALYSIS

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VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S *LOLITA*  
A SATIRICAL TAKE ON FREUD'S PSYCHOANALYSIS

Undergraduate thesis

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SVEUČILIŠTE U SPLITU  
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*LOLITA* VLADIMIRA NABOKOVA:  
SATIRIČNI PRIKAZ FREUDOVE PSIHOANALIZE

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## 1. Summary

Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* became a worldwide phenomenon after its publication in 1955. It is a novel about loss, love and manipulation presented by a charming yet morally corrupted and cruel narrator whose flawed but carefully brought out recollection quickly captures the reader's attention. Lolita's painful journey intertwined with the protagonist reveals symbolism associated with psychoanalysis which effectively turns the novel into a satire of Freud and his theory. Nabokov's story attempts to ridicule aspects of the psychoanalytic doctrine yet his style also indicates a certain type of admiration for Freud's theory. The novel reflects Freud's discourse but also gives us a new perspective on the theory whose strong influence changed the course of history.

Key words: manipulation, love, symbolism, Freud, psychoanalysis, satire

## 1.Sažetak

Roman *Lolita* Vladimira Nabokova postao je svjetski fenomen nakon što je bio objavljen 1955. godine. To je roman o gubitku, ljubavi i manipulaciji kojeg prezentira šarmantni no i moralno iskvareni i okrutni pripovjedač čija nepotpuna no pažljivo iznesena sjećanja brzo privuku čitateljevu pažnju. Lolitin bolni životni put koji je isprepleten s protagonistom, odaje nam simbolizam koji asocira na psihoanalizu, što učinkovito čini roman satikom Freuda i njegove teorije. Nabokovova priča nastoji ismijavati aspekte psihoanalitičke doktrine no njegov stil također pokazuje određenu vrstu divljenja za Freudovu teoriju. Roman odražava Freudov diskurs no također nam daje novu perspektivu na teoriju čiji je snažan utjecaj promjenio tok povijesti.

Ključne riječi: manipulacija, ljubav, simbolizam, Freud, psihoanaliza, satira

## 1. Introduction

Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* has been regarded as one of the most significant novels of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that, due to its controversial subject, prompted outrage, strong disapproval and even shock among the publishers and the readers. Finally published in 1955 in Paris, *Lolita* becomes Nabokov's most famous novel, a timeless and unique classic that sheds light on human's revolting nature, examines the psychological burden and trauma regarding children's abuse, and effectively pushes the readers to question their own approach to such topics and their moral stance. *Lolita*, as a controversial novel, challenges its readers to delve deeper, and to understand the psychology and moral ambiguity of its characters. Moreover, the novel is filled with various symbols and metaphors. Arguably, Nabokov creates a novel that cannot be analyzed, and its parts adequately dissected, without taking the Freud's psychoanalytic theory into consideration. Interestingly, Nabokov's attempt to insert Freudian discourse, especially themes and symbols taken directly from Freud's psychoanalysis, makes the novel innovative for its criticism and new perspective that it offers. This thesis will focus on dissecting Freudian themes related to his psychoanalytic theory such as: the Oedipus complex analyzed both in Humbert Humbert as well as Dolores Haze, the effects of childhood trauma on both Humbert and Dolores, the battle of three subconscious forces, id, ego, and superego in Humbert. These concepts frequently occur in the novel. I believe that Freud's discourse is essential when interpreting Nabokov's *Lolita* as the novel accentuates themes and topics proposed by Freud in his works, and attempts to reformulate them in a new discourse, typically in a satirical setting. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to prove that Freudian themes are the basis of the novel and that the author revisits these themes and tries to propose a new perspective on the psychoanalytic theory that he sees as flawed. The analysis will rely on comparing the psychoanalytic discourse with the novel to find a direct link between themes and ideas proposed by the psychoanalytic theory and the events of the novel. In the following pages of this thesis, Nabokov's relationship with Freud will be explored, and Oedipus complex and its resolution will be analyzed both in the character of Humbert as well as Lolita. The analysis will include a review of Freud's approach to trauma in childhood and its direct relation to the events in the novel. It will also connect the concept of the three subconscious forces that Freud distinguishes in his theory with Humbert's subconscious conflicts.

## 2. Vladimir Nabokov; Biography

Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, (born April 22, 1899, St. Petersburg, Russia—died July 2, 1977, Montreux, Switzerland) is a Russian-American writer and critic whose most famous novel *Lolita*, published in France in 1955, sparked controversy and outrage yet also distinguished him as one of the most significant and influential authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Albert and Field). His work reveals the author's tendency to experiment. He frequently relies on psychological themes and criticizes certain political ideologies. He was born in St. Petersburg in a wealthy and liberal family that encouraged him to play with language, mathematics, and various games. At the height of the war, the family left Russia and moved to London and later to Berlin while Nabokov completed his studies at Trinity College in Cambridge. During the following years, in the period between 1922 and 1940, Nabokov wrote in both English and Russian. He established himself as one of the most notable émigré authors as he continued to publish short stories, plays, poems and translations. From 1948 to 1958 he was teaching Russian and European literature at Cornell University in Ithaca in New York. He published his first novel in English, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, in 1941. His most significant works include: *Poems* (1916), *Two Paths* (1918), *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (1969), *Mary* (1926), *King, Queen, Knave* (1928), *The Event* (1938), *The Gift* (1938), *Despair* (1934), *Pnin* (1957), *Pale Fire* (1962), *Bend Sinister* (1947), *Speak, Memory* (1951) and *Lolita* (1955) whose publication was followed by a movie adaptation by Stanley Kubrick in 1962. He also published a study of Gogol, and translations of Pushkin.

### 3. Vladimir Nabokov's feud with Freud

“All my books should be stamped Freudians, Keep Out” were the words found in Nabokov’s introduction to his book *Bend Sinister* written in 1963, sixteen years after the novel was published for the first time in 1947. (Nabokov, 11). This greatly indicates Nabokov’s openly shown antipathy towards Freud and his theories as the author was very vocal about his stance on psychoanalysis and Freud’s discoveries established in the first half of the twentieth century. Freud’s immense impact can be seen in contemporary literature, yet one of his most persistent and unwavering critics was the Russian-American author Vladimir Nabokov. The author continuously derided the “vulgar Freudanism” (qtd in Shute, 638) he perceived as distasteful, ridiculous, and wrong, and, rather humorously, depicted Freud as a fraud when commenting the famous psychoanalytic doctrine. Nabokov often ridiculed Freud by saying that his doctrine “limits freedom and individuality” ( qtd in Durantaye, 61).

Although Nabokov openly criticized Freud for his scientific approach that he deemed “crude” and “medieval”, and often described Freud as a “Viennese witch doctor” (qtd in Shute, 639) in his interviews, the influence of psychoanalysis in Nabokov’s work is undoubtedly present. Even if Nabokov never intended for his work to be dissected and thoroughly analyzed through the lens of psychoanalysis, his novels evoke the very ‘crude’ and ‘vulgar’ doctrine that he relentlessly tried to escape from and make inferior and insignificant. Moreover, the disdain he showed for Freud throughout his entire life prompts the question: Why did he detest Freud so much? And, moreover, why is his work always so undeniably intertwined with Freud even if he wanted to distance himself from psychoanalysis?

Significantly, his disdain for Freud does not come from him perceiving the psychoanalytic theory as “crude”, “ludicrous”, “drab”, or “middle-class” (qtd in Shute, 639). In fact, his disapproval stems from a more fundamental reason: “Nabokov rejects psychoanalysis as he does all totalitarianism of meaning, all systems that claim to have captured and colonized truth. Through their crude impositions, such systems perpetually threaten the delicate, intricate, multicolored tissue of individual experience - which is, for Nabokov, the only “truth” that counts.” (Shute, 640). The latter indicates that Nabokov’s resentment for Freud comes from his tendency to generalize human experiences that greatly differ from person to person. The vastness of human experiences related to the internal structure of the infinitely complex



human mind can't be forcibly put into a single category. Every person is an individual and can't be strictly contained into a singular frame and prescribed with a singular solution when every case needs a particular solution to a particular problem.

Furthermore, Nabokov sees the connection between Freudian psychoanalysis and totalitarianism which makes him doubt the validity of Freud's teaching and the subsequent effects it would have on his patients that are treated using his 'medieval' methods. Additionally, Nabokov, like many other artists, disagreed with psychoanalysis due to its rigorous imposition of the subconscious impulses ruling over the conscious ones when creating art: "It seems safe to assume that one of the reasons many artists have been less than eager to embrace psychoanalysis, and have even been motivated to oppose it, is that it doesn't depict them in a very favorable light. The psychoanalytic view of art removes the site of creativity from the conscious mind of the creator to his or her unconscious drives and depths; and for Nabokov, concerned as he was with controlling the work under his hand, this could not have been a pleasing idea." (Durantaye, 63). The problem Nabokov underlines about this is that it fails to capture the particularity that every artwork has, the richness of every detail it exhibits. Instead, psychoanalysis centers around the general, and within the general it erases the particularity and the detail that are necessary to fully comprehend and even validate the artistic structure. It aims to explain art "in terms of something else" (Durantaye, 64), that is, in terms of symbols which Nabokov vehemently disagrees with.

Moreover, in his book "*Speak Memory*" Nabokov suggests that it is a "great mistake on the part of dictators to ignore psychoanalysis" and that the "whole generation might easily be corrupted this way" (Nabokov, 156-157). Similarly, Nabokov insists that totalitarian corruption is reflected in the popular psychoanalytic teaching and that the whole generation at that time senselessly absorbed the doctrine that relied on false and invalid methods. On the other hand, Nabokov insists that imagination is the core that perpetuates the search of an individual, the core that stands behind these important human experiences that he sees as unique. It is the essence that guides us and that is inevitably immersed with desire and memory. He states that imagination is "recreated through memory infused with desire" (qtd in Shute, 640). This, however, makes Nabokov's vision fused with the main Freudian themes: "this very realm –the realm of imagination, of memory and desire –is precisely that of psychoanalytic discourse; the chosen domain of Nabokov's fiction overlaps, enormously, a region already colonized by Vienna." (Shute, 640).

Moreover, it becomes impossible to separate psychoanalytic discourse from Nabokov's work, as the two are embedded and form a whole in which Freud, ironically, plays a fundamental role: "Memory is Freud's master plot, too; his also the discourse of desire. Thus the ideal of individual imagination turns out to be almost immediately and most intimately threatened by psychoanalysis" (Shute, 640). What truly perplexes the readers is Nabokov's determined attempt to introduce Freud into his text which results, paradoxically, in elaborating a complex text of a story within which Freud is often one of the central themes. In his works, Nabokov references Freud directly or indirectly, in various and mostly critical ways and with various, usually humorous, pseudonyms: "I was always a good little follower of the Viennese medicine man." (Nabokov, 313), "Viennese bric-a-brac" (Nabokov, 289).

Therefore, Nabokov's antagonism produces a counter-effect: a text within which psychoanalytic footprint becomes immensely significant for the plot of the story, if not the key element propelling the plot forward. Interestingly, Nabokov sees in Freud a worthy opponent capable of constructing his own universe the elements of which are carefully chosen. Freud's perceptive, innovative, and imaginative discourse deserves a certain amount of respect and awe, according to Nabokov: "Freud's text compels both respect and resistance because of its power, priority, and proximity." (qtd in Shute, 641). The most important factor distinguishing Freud's text is its innovative perception and the power to successfully reach a wider audience as well as the power to pursue a subject of social significance.

Similarly, Nabokov's text is not invulnerable to Freud's influence and is thus constantly infiltrated with Freudian themes and elements. It is evident that Nabokov re-frames the psychoanalytic approach into a new, parody-like Nabokovian vision that embodies the fundamental concepts of Freud's theory while still trying to maintain a personal distance from the Freudian work he openly despised. However, Nabokov's aim is to highlight the flaws of Freud's theory, to emphasize, rather scrupulously, its inadequacy to accurately present every aspect of man's psyche that is too complex and too unique to be put into a single, generalized, and definite frame. Therefore, in his works, especially in the novel *Lolita*, Nabokov revisits the main ideas proposed by Freud's theory. The purpose of this is to challenge the foundations on which this theory lay. Arguably, the author wants to mimic, in a rigidly grotesque satire, the Freud's psychoanalytic theory by conveying its distorted image in such a way that it re-awakens the overall frame of Freud's vision yet that it simultaneously reforms and parodies the main concepts underlying the theory. Moreover, Nabokov accentuates the parody of his text with the use of archaic words: "He is keen on the archaic, for example. He says "okay,"

but also “anent,” “forsooth,” “in thrall,” “noon was nigh,” and “I would fain”. The effect is that of a parade of vaguely poetic fossils, as if Humbert were trying out on us the old-world charms we thought he had reserved for Charlotte Haze.” (Wood, 20). Nabokov’s use of archaic and sometimes refined language highlights the satire he wanted to express with such terms. For Nabokov, the novel aims to reveal how bizarre or ridiculous certain aspects of Freud’s theory are.

Ironically, this carefully disguised mockery of Freud stands as a unique vision, an alternative observation that fulfills the role of a pastiche, a grotesque and bizarre comedy that overly accentuates the flaws of the Freudian theory. It also gives the readers a completely fresh outlook, an authentic take on the psychoanalytic theory in which Nabokov’s interference is discernible yet innovative. His new approach dutifully consists of the main Freudian problems and attempts to resolve them either by following the already established examples Freud gave, or by proposing a different, Nabokovian solution that ultimately makes *Lolita*, a novel predominantly immersed in psychoanalytic symbols, an original and authentic Nabokovian observation.

#### 4. Oedipus complex in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*: Humbert's unresolved trauma

Nabokov, although deeming Freud's psychoanalytic theory as "mistaken and distasteful" (qtd in Hiatt 360) and rejecting the psychoanalytic approach based on uncovering the depths of the subconscious mind as well as finding symbols and associations, still deliberately used the concept of Oedipus complex as the fundamental theme that underlines the events of the novel. In fact, literary critics argue that the core of Nabokov's novel is Humbert's undeniable obsession with 'nymphets', that is, prepubescent girls which is seen as an "attempt to re-experience the fresh, unspoiled love of his mother during infancy" (Hiatt 361).

Moreover, Humbert's mother died when he was only three years old: "My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three, and, save for a pocket of warmth in the darkest past, nothing of her subsists within the hollows and dells of memory" (Nabokov, 8). Therefore, the absence of his mother from an early age and later his father, left a deep sense of emotional void Humbert desperately tried to fill: "...alas, in the summer of that year, he was touring Italy with Mme de R. and her daughter, and I had nobody to complain to, nobody to consult." (Nabokov, 9). Even from the first pages it is evident that Nabokov establishes the essential frame following the conventional Freudian pattern that would gradually reveal certain ambiguities regarding psychoanalysis and attempt to resolve them. Significantly, In the absence of a father figure Humbert turns the antagonist, Quilty, into a caricature, or rather a weak imitation of a father figure. During the last several months of Humbert's relationship to Lolita he feels threatened by the arrival of Quilty. Lolita's ultimate betrayal, when she chose to leave him and pursue Quilty instead, motivates Humbert to initiate revenge. The last pages of the novel reveal his vengeance taking place at Quilty's house and thus fulfilling his long-awaited desire for the "slow, dreamy, joyful patricide". (Hiatt 361)

Since the Freud's theory explains Oedipus complex as a "desire for union and contact with the opposite-sex parent, and a concomitant desire to displace the same-sex rival parent," (Lapsley, Stey 393) Quilty's murder can be interpreted as conquering the potential father figure, that is, a person symbolically embodying the paternal figure that vanished many years ago and never returned. The murder is foreshadowed and depicted almost exactly as it happens later in the novel: "Sometimes I attempt to kill in my dreams. But do you know what happens? For instance, I hold a gun. For instance I aim at a bland, quietly interested enemy. Oh, I press the trigger all right, but one bullet after another feebly drops on the floor from the sheepish

muzzle” (Nabokov, 51). This could be Nabokov’s reference to Freud’s book “*The Interpretation of Dreams*” (“psychoanalysis”).

Moreover, Humbert’s dream alludes to Freud’s theory of psychosexual development. This theory explains different stages of a child’s development and it touches upon both behavioral and psychological aspect of the formal development as well as the sexual development. Notably, Humbert’s dream relates to a certain phase that Freud distinguishes as the phallic stage that, upon overcoming it, gradually transitions into the latency stage: “The phallic stage can only be successfully surmounted if the Oedipus complex with its accompanying castration anxiety can be resolved. According to Freud, this resolution can occur if the boy finally suppresses his sexual desire for the mother, entering a period of so-called latency, and internalizes the reproachful prohibition of the father, making it his own with the construction of that part of the psyche Freud called the superego or the conscience.” (Jay). The latter correlates to Humbert’s final overcoming of the Oedipus complex, the final resolution when he, metaphorically, substitutes the father figure by killing him.

Significantly, these dreams Humbert has can be interpreted as the unconscious but vivid desire to resolve an internal conflict caused by the suppressed trauma and abandonment at an early age. Therefore, the fulfilling resolution of Oedipus complex that would otherwise lie in both destroying the illusionary structure and the false belief of an imposing, evil rival as well as replacing or identifying with the same paternal figure, in this case marks the climax of the novel as it happens at the very end. It is the final step Humbert takes in solving the Oedipus complex as well as accepting his past traumatic experiences that may reflect a sense of closure for the main character at that point in the novel.

## **5. The importance of Annabel as the initiating factor for Humbert's sexual disorder**

When exploring the root of Humbert's pedophilia and how it connects to the psychoanalytic theory it is necessary to analyze Humbert's childhood as a whole and distinguish the life-changing moments that undoubtedly shaped his character. Firstly, it is important to mention Annabel as one of the most important characters, a crucial figure in Humbert's early life and adolescence. Humbert meets Annabel as a teenager, and he considers her to be his first love with whom he shares a deep emotional and spiritual connection that he had not experienced before. However, later in the novel, Humbert realizes that with Annabel's abrupt tragic death came the definite and permanent obstacle in his life that signaled the beginning of Humbert's suppressed sexual tendencies: "I am convinced, however, that in a certain magic and fateful way Lolita began with Annabel" (Nabokov, 12). After her death, Humbert experiences a prolonged crisis that initiated an unremitting search for the same romantic experience: "-until at last, twenty-four years later, I broke her spell by incarnating her in another" (Nabokov, 14). Humbert longed for, and actively tried to find, the Annabel he lost as a teenager who, inevitably, could only be a child between the ages of nine and fourteen.

Similarly, Freud's psychoanalytic theory suggests that after a traumatic event people often seek comfort in familiar which he defined as "repetition compulsion" (Bulut). Through grief, Humbert unconsciously fixates on the period he sees as immensely joyful and carefree as well as the only point in which he felt love was truly reciprocated by another. Humbert desperately wants to re-experience that state of complete immersion he undeniably connects to genuine and rather sentimentally warm but naïve childhood innocence. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, presents this tendency as the powerful desire to control and go back to the previous state of things that would seemingly resolve the feeling of helplessness and internal passivity.

In order to do so, Humbert, as an adult man, attempts to search for "nymphets" that is, young adolescent girls between the ages of nine and fourteen in order to compensate for that loss and to gain a sense of closure after being abandoned on numerous occasions as a child. However, initially, he shows reluctance and even aversion that stems from socially acquired knowledge. The pressure to behave in a socially acceptable way led him to initially pursue women of his age which did not help him resolve his sexual impulses: "The human females I was allowed to wield were but palliative agents" (Nabokov, 17).

Moreover, after meeting Dolores Haze, Humbert becomes determined to pursue her because of the idealized, metaphorically immortalized essence of Annabel in her. He is adamant to possess even a mere mirage, an illusion or simply a mirror image of his lost love: “What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another fanciful Lolita-perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness – indeed, no life of her own.” (Nabokov, 68)

Lolita was the unaware participant in this forged illusion Humbert unwillingly forces upon her. The child, in fact, was like a tool for Humbert that would enable him to revive the old spark, to experience the childlike, pure, and genuine love, to imitate the same romantic connection which he deeply yearns for. In addition, Humbert is fully aware of the burden he carries throughout his life and the effects that his childhood romance left. He accepts this fate, the loathsome and abhorrent lifestyle that he acknowledges and accepts as the remnant of his troubled and traumatizing past: “The able psychiatrist who studies my case –and whom by now Dr. Humbert has plunged, I trust, into a state of leporine fascination –is no doubt anxious to have me take my Lolita to the seaside and have me find there, at last, the “gratification” of a lifetime urge, and release from the “subconscious” obsession of an incomplete childhood romance with the initial Little Miss Lee.” (Nabokov, 188).

However, Humbert’s idealized image of Lolita is abruptly shattered when he realizes the child cannot be used as Annabel’s double, and who, instead, has an already established, formed character. Lolita’s personality, Humbert realizes, even clashes with the false, deceptive image he has of her and she cannot be the same as Annabel but perhaps a different but still equally as desired reflection of Annabel, a suitable substitution who seemingly embodies the core, the spirit of the lost love: “I should have understood that Lolita had *already* proved to be something quite different from innocent Annabel, and that the nymphean evil breathing through every pore of the fey child that I had prepared for my secret delectation, would make the secrecy impossible, and the delectation lethal.” (Nabokov, 141).

Moreover, Annabel was the key factor for Humbert, not only because she was his first romantic experience in childhood, but also because she was the first to truly love Humbert, openly and without doubt, the first person with whom Humbert shared a deep connection as he lacked the experience of parental love. Lolita for Humbert is Annabel’s successor and the person with whom Humbert feels a similar, and overwhelmingly profound type of love: “and I looked and looked at her, and knew as clearly as I know I am to die, that I loved her more

than anything I had ever seen or imagined on earth, or hoped for anything else. She was only the faint violet whiff and dead leaf echo of the nymphet I had rolled myself upon with such cries in the past” (Nabokov, 316). Additionally, his delusional attachment to Lolita stems from his trauma and continuous abandonment. The essence of such trauma, according to Freud, “is the “experience of helplessness on the part of the ego which is suddenly overwhelmed.”(Bulut). The traumatic event constitutes an integral part of one’s psychological formation and if it is constantly repressed and not adequately resolved, its final resolution becomes complicated and difficult.



## 6. The battle of the three subconscious forces in Humbert

As Humbert gradually uncovers the suppressed sexual tendency later in life that formed due to an unsolved grieving process and the lack of parental guidance, he is met with the obstacle of having to either attain to his true desired goals or suppress them altogether given the potential reprimand and even punishment. This leads the character to suppress his trauma, and, therefore, his desires even further than before. He feels the lack of resolution and his impulses become much stronger and more definite with time: “While my body knew what it craved for, my mind rejected my body’s every plea. One moment I was ashamed and frightened, another recklessly optimistic. Taboos strangulated me. Psychoanalysts wooed me with pseudoliberations and pseudolibidoes.”(Nabokov,18). Arguably, the latter indicates the battle between his three subconscious forces that Freud distinguishes as id, ego, and superego.

The id, in this case, is the primitive instinctual sexual drive that stands behind every Humbert’s innate motive to seek pleasure. The ego, on the other hand, is shaped by direct exposure to the external world. Lapsey and Stey in their essay “*Id, Ego, and Superego*” define ego as: “center of reason, reality-testing, and commonsense, and has at its command a range of defensive stratagems that can deflect, repress, or transform the expression of unrealistic or forbidden drive energies.” (Lapsey, Stey 395) Ego seeks to find a compromise solution that would appease the impulsive natural needs of id in a way that is socially acceptable as it is attentive to social norms, the law and other rules.

In Humbert’s case, the battle between id and ego is always present in the novel, as he seeks to diminish the impulses of id which means that the ego initially wins. Yet, with time, it is evident that the ego is no longer capable of restraining the powerful and overwhelming desire of id and therefore id is the one that overpowers the ego which leads to, initially, feelings of guilt and shame. However, as Humbert’s disturbing downfall progresses, he seeks to find justifications for his behavior. This is the intervention of the superego whose intention is to subject the outward behavior to moral censorship. In Humbert’s case, the ongoing struggle between the three forces undeniably opens a cognitive dissonance: the moral nature of superego instills a feeling of discomfort and disgust in Humbert because he eventually gives in to the impulses of id.

Later in the novel he seeks comfort in finding an excuse in order to defend and even rationalize his behavior: “Marriage and cohabitation before the age of puberty are still not

uncommon in certain East Indian provinces. Lepcha old men of eighty copulate with girls of eight, and nobody minds. After all, Dante fell madly in love with his Beatrice when she was nine, a sparkling girlie, painted and lovely, and bejeweled, in a crimson frock, and this was in 1274 in Florence, at a private feast in the merry month of May. And when Petrarch fell madly in love with his Laureen, she was a fair-haired nymph of twelve running in the wind, in the pollen and dust, a flower in flight, in the beautiful plain as described from the hills of Vaucluse.” (Nabokov, 19).

Among Humbert’s vain attempts to find solutions to the horrifying fixation on underage girls he decides to get married to Valeria which, he initially believes, would “purge” him of his “degrading and dangerous desires, at least to keep them under pacific control”. (Nabokov, 25). Significantly, even though Valeria reminds him of a young girl despite being in her twenties, Humbert still feels the need to fulfill his moral obligations governed by the superego. It is an attempt to tackle the ever-present insidious thoughts and abate the raging desires seeping from the depths of his subconscious. Arguably, before Humbert meets Lolita he is succumbed to the internal passivity along with deep longing, as he is more aware that his desired actions would be considered criminal and morally wrong even though he yearns for something that he should not have been yearning for. The superego in this case rules over id, it refrains id from taking any actions by restricting it, criticizing any attempt, and prohibiting Humbert from doing anything unethical and unjust.

After Humbert meets Lolita, the battle between the three forces starts to shift. Significantly, As Humbert feels a compelling urge to be closer to Lolita his initial attempts are very vague and rather mild. For example, we see him trying to get Lolita to come to his room while he is writing on his desk. Instead of asking her to come, he leaves the door open and patiently waits. On one of such occasions, Lolita comes to his room inspecting his “scribbles” on the papers. The brief interaction they exchanged was interrupted by the voice of Louise “telling Mrs. Haze who had just come home about a dead something she and Leslie Tomson had found in the basement, and little Lolita was not one to miss such a tale.” (Nabokov, 53).

The latter can be explained through the lens of Freud’s psychoanalysis that would interpret the basement as the symbol of the subconscious impulses, and the “dead something” as the superego whose influence starts to rapidly diminish once Humbert meets Lolita. The moral and ethical part of his subconscious that would lead him to act accordingly slowly loses its strength as the desires and tendencies of id that are dominated by passion and sexual impulses

increasingly become much stronger. Humbert's initial passive behavior and reluctance slowly dissipate and he actively follows the desires that he tried to hide for a long time. It is evident that the character initially ignores and even tries to change his distorted erotic perceptions related to the suppressed sexual self. The moment he decides to willingly express his sexual desires it radically changes what the reader knows and perceives the character to be.

Significantly, upon the gradual but inevitable distancing from the superego's moral guide, Humbert reaches a pivotal stage in which he chooses to embrace the suppressed desires and cease to be "Humbert the Hound, the sad-eyed degenerate cur clasping the boot that would presently kick him away." (Nabokov, 66). He insists that the person he was before, who lives by following blindly the rules and surrendering to the strict moral censorship, was in fact a "ridicule", a person "beyond the possibilities of retribution. In my self-made seraglio, I was a radiant and robust Turk, deliberately, in the full consciousness of his freedom, postponing the moment of actually enjoying the youngest and frailest of his slaves." (Nabokov, 66) The latter indicates the character's realization and final, concluding separation from the individual that obeys the rules and ignores his personal desires in the favor of an individual that readily accepts and fulfills personal wants and needs.

He maintains that in the past he was delusional and living a lie, as he was metaphorically imprisoned by his state of mind and by the society's pressure to adapt to the standards, rules and to succumb to moral censorship. He feels the long-awaited release and freedom upon deciding to abandon the past. This signifies the beginning of the 'new' Humbert who is free from the reign of the superego's insisting prohibitions which means that the id eventually wins the battle.

## 7. Dolores Haze as the true target and victim of Oedipus complex

When analyzing the novel through the lens of psychoanalysis it is inevitable to mention Lolita, that is, Dolores Haze, as the main subject that fulfills the defining role of a child with Oedipus complex and whose physical and psychosexual development was irreversibly damaged because of the novel's protagonist. Lolita is the doomed victim and the primal figure exhibiting key elements of the Oedipus complex and whose childhood has been irrevocably stolen by the protagonist: "*He* broke my heart. *You* merely broke my life." (Nabokov 318). Since Lolita's story is told by Humbert, the objective reality is significantly altered by the unreliable narrator. Therefore, Lolita's real experience, that is represented as a willingly imposed relationship, is in fact much more disturbing. Nabokov claims that "Humbert Humbert is a vain and cruel wretch who manages to appear "touching". That epithet, in its true, tear-iridized sense, can only apply to my poor little girl." (Wood, 18) The story Humbert reveals is subjective and filled with flawed perceptions of real events: "This book is not about Lolita, or only about Lolita in a peculiarly displaced or refracted way. It is about "Lolita," about the obsessive dream of Lolita, which captured the actual child and took her away." (Wood 23) Therefore, Lolita is in fact the primal target of Oedipus complex, a victim whose trauma is used against her, and who is continuously being manipulated and controlled until she finally breaks free.

Firstly, in Lolita's childhood the father figure was absent, and she was brought up by her egotistical, somewhat narcissistic, and overly critical mother with whom she never formed a particularly strong emotional bond. This inevitably leads to certain changes and even disruptions in such a family dynamic. Lolita, who is merely a curious and lonely child and who wants to explore the world within her reach, never gets the chance to fully experience her childhood years. The most important but dreadful event, aside from meeting Humbert, is when Dolores loses her mother in an accident. This traumatic event for the twelve-year-old child, becomes a crucial turning point for her later development. Moreover, Humbert is found in similar circumstances as a child. The two characters form a peculiar bond through trauma. They also start to degrade and find themselves lost and isolated from the external world which makes them susceptible to pain, grief and suffering. They both experience a life-changing crisis that significantly alters their path. However, Dolores' trauma doesn't exclusively start at that specific point. The seemingly cold and uninvolved parenting of Charlotte, Lolita's mother, leads the child to experience a lack of a true emotional bond with a parent. Moreover,

Lolita's upbringing under the watchful eye of a cold, emotionally distant mother and seemingly without a father figure, makes the child crave affection and love which she actively tries to find by entering in relationships with older men. The latter connects to Oedipus complex: the need to, in Dolores' case, find and experience paternal-like love and connection and the hostility she redirects towards her mother who is uninvolved in Dolores' life.

Humbert sees Dolores as a person who does not actively shy away from older men and their apparent affection. She is seen as somebody who willingly accepts romantic gestures as she is slowly involved into a strange romantic relationship with them. Therefore, her readiness to emotionally attach to older men makes her the prime target of Humbert, and after the accident Dolores immediately falls into his cruel, manipulative hands. She then legally becomes Humbert's daughter: "John," cried Jean, "she is his child, not Harold Haze's. Don't you understand? Humbert is Dolly's real father" (Nabokov, 113). Although Humbert, rather jokingly and somewhat fascinatedly, remarks this unexpected legal obligation he now has towards Dolores Haze, he is also aware of the emotional and psychological burden that Lolita deals with.

She turns to Humbert, the only person she has left, seeking comfort and emotional support after her mother dies: "At the hotel we had separate rooms, but in the middle of the night she came sobbing into mine, and we made it up very gently. You see, she had absolutely nowhere else to go". (Nabokov, 160). Humbert remarks the fact that he becomes Dolly's father as a rather bizarre but satirically abnormal event as he starts to refer himself, rather humorously, as "the distraught father", and as a "dream dad protecting his dream daughter" (Nabokov, 168) Humbert eventually recalls this relationship as a "parody of incest" (Nabokov, 327), which is undoubtedly a comical and slightly grotesque allusion to Freud.

While Humbert diligently tries to financially support Dolly, he is still taking advantage of her isolation, loneliness, and grief. With the occasional jab of guilt and slight remorse that occur to Humbert: "This was an orphan. This was a lone child, an absolute waif..." (Nabokov, 158), he still selfishly prioritizes his own detestable but unwaveringly strong desires, over the child's well-being and prosperity. Lolita is then helpless and trapped. She resorts to accepting the sexual relationship that was initiated with Humbert but gradually plans her escape.

Moreover, Humbert is well-aware of the mental scarring and psychological distress that Lolita endures, and accepts that even if he repented for all the trauma he had caused, it could never truly erase the effects that Lolita always carried with herself: "Alas, I was unable to

transcend the simple human fact that whatever spiritual solace I might find, whatever lithophanic eternities might be provided for me, nothing could make my Lolita forget the foul lust had inflicted upon her.” (Nabokov, 322). The protagonist concludes that he in fact deprived Dolores of her youth, and that it is because of him that she grew up too quickly and never healed from the traumatic experiences: “... in the infinite run it does not matter a jot that a North American girl-child named Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac” (Nabokov, 322). This observation proves that Humbert’s self-reflection prompts feelings of guilt, yet without a single motivation or desire to truly change Lolita’s situation or his behavior.

Significantly, what makes Dolores Haze a truly tragic example of a victim of psychological and sexual abuse is the fact that she is ultimately nothing more and nothing less than an object of Humbert’s desire: “And what is most singular is that she, *this* Lolita, *my* Lolita, has individualized the writer’s ancient lust, so that above and over everything there is Lolita.” (Nabokov, 48). Humbert greatly idealizes Lolita, almost to a point that she becomes an ethereal-like vision, an untouchable, a symbolically non-human participant who is seen not for her individual qualities and flaws she exhibits, but for her physical beauty and for the aura and faultless reminiscence to the original, most important love for Humbert, Annabel. She is the primary tool for Humbert to fulfill his ‘nymphean’ lusts, and the innocent target of his sexual advances.

Although she was far too young and far too inexperienced to fully capture the weight of that situation, she is still aware of Humbert’s strange perversion, and makes logical deductions about Humbert, and about her mother’s death: “You revolting creature. I was a daisy-fresh girl, and look what you’ve done to me. I ought to call the police and tell them you raped me. Oh, you dirty, dirty old man.” (Nabokov, 159). Lolita’s trauma feels like an echo, a reflection of Humbert’s childhood trauma that both characters seldom mention and never truly resolve with themselves. Therefore, Dolores’ experience corresponds to Humbert’s. It is the reason why the protagonist feels a weirdly familiar connection with Dolores. Similarly, Lolita’s trauma is like an extension of Humbert’s: the two characters find themselves lost, isolated, alone, unloved, and betrayed. The two of them experience the hardship of love, that is, the lack of an actual meaningful love at such a young age. Consequently, they never become immersed in their childhood experience that ends, in their case, abruptly, and with mental scars. While Humbert’s trauma leads to depression and a sexual disorder, Lolita’s trauma leads to a void she tries to fill with older romantic partners who take advantage of her

youthful innocence. Her pursuit for happiness, security, safety, and comfort is fulfilled at the end, right before she dies with a peaceful resolution and final acceptance.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* is a story about deep seated psychological issues related to trauma, the burden of abandonment, the powerful subconscious conflicts, repressed sexual tendencies and the effects that remain when these issues are left unresolved. This thesis proposes an analysis of the mentioned issues that are directly related to Freud's psychoanalytic theory that observes and explains them. The thesis focuses on comparing psychoanalysis to Nabokov's *Lolita*. The goal is to find a direct correlation between psychoanalytic themes and the novel that attempts to reformulate said issues and establish a different view on them. The focus of the thesis is proving that Nabokov uses psychoanalysis as a basis of the story which is seen in recurring themes and motifs of Freud's psychoanalysis such as the Oedipus complex in both Humbert and Dolores, the subconscious conflicts between id, ego and superego, and the unresolved trauma that eventually destroys the characters. When comparing psychoanalysis to the novel it becomes evident that the author wanted to accentuate the flaws of psychoanalysis. The author attempts to ridicule psychoanalysis and, simultaneously, to propose an alternative solution to its flawed perspective on the human psyche. On the other hand, what makes Nabokov's *Lolita* so interesting and so alluring is Nabokov's portrayal of an anti-hero whose past, shaped according to an ordinary Freudian scheme of Oedipus complex, clearly defines the psychological background of the protagonist. Humbert's use of language that often relies on irony and unexpected witty comments lures the reader to explore the characters, especially regarding their moral standpoint. While doing so, the reader simultaneously questions their own morality, as the protagonist deceives young Dolores as well as the reader. The symbolism in the novel is revealed through interpersonal relationships the characters make and through descriptions of the characters' past, especially when referencing abandonment at a young age or traumatic experiences. The latter alludes to Freud's psychoanalysis that becomes the foundation of Nabokov's story that attempts to redefine the psychoanalytic discourse. This redefinition occurs through parody and satire that reflect the author's view on psychoanalysis but also establishes a new vision of psychoanalytic theory that is reformulated. While the story accentuates flaws of the theory, it also proposes a unique take on Freud's doctrine. It covers the basis of trauma and psychosexual development in childhood and then continues to follow the pattern of mental issues that remain in adulthood. The characters' trauma helps establish them as victims or as anti-heroes as that same opposition is seen in the relationship



between Humbert and Lolita. Nabokov's vision offers insight into the characters' development, their moral degradation, and the effects of emotional manipulation on Lolita who is deeply scarred. The effects that remain after the protagonist is no longer present in Lolita's life are long-lasting and Lolita is left dealing with the burden of emotional manipulation and sexual assault. Humbert's psychological struggles can be interpreted as a constant battle of three subconscious forces as superego gradually loses its dominant position in governing the character's moral views and decisions. Therefore, the final resolution of the battle of id, ego and superego is the moral degradation of the character who then openly and unashamedly manipulates and uses young Lolita for his selfish gains and lust. Nabokov's story is ultimately a parody of an incestuous and almost grotesquely idealized relationship that Humbert envisions as a perfect reflection of his lost love Annabel. At the end, Humbert desperately hopes for a union with Lolita in death, a final echo of his undying love for Lolita: "And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita." (Nabokov, 352). For Humbert, Lolita, or rather an idealized dream-like version of Lolita, is eternal, and remains with him until he dies. This novel is therefore a re-imagined and almost fairytale-like vision of Freud's Oedipus complex in which the idea, originally depicted as tragic and morbid in Greek mythology, is seen through a different lens that purposefully obscures the horrid and disturbing parts of Oedipus complex and turns it into a satirical, comedic, and idealized story of two lovers who fail to establish a healthy connection. They are ultimately separated and die alone, with the echo of their strange and unconventional relationship left solely fragmented on a piece of paper.

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