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English 696

17 December 2024

Narrative Games and Ethical Dilemmas: Humbert’s Enchanted Reality in *Lolita*

Vladimir Nabokov played a reputationally risky game with the publication of his 1955 novel *Lolita;* a text so taboo it almost wasn’t published at all.[[1]](#footnote-1) However, the apprehension surrounding its publication speaks to a larger, yet more subtle concern than simply the theme of pedophilia itself. It highlights the uncomfortable position of the reader who is not forced into participating in the affair, but complicit in it as witnesses and even sympathizers of Lolita’s corruption. If we read past the blanket perversity of the protagonist, Humbert Humbert, and examine the novel’s narrative structure, Nabokov illustrates the tension between language, the fabrication of truth, and the subversion of preconditioned meanings. Through the unreliable narrator device, Nabokov bestows on Humbert the power to create a fantasy world of his own design that not only mystifies his pedophilic affair with Lolita but enchants the reader in the process. The purpose with this analysis is not to absolve the reader of any ethical anxieties about their participation in the text, but to reveal how, through manipulating narrative tropes and conventions, Humbert’s prose explores the space between language and interpretation, where the foundations of empathy and morality are both inherently blurred and unstable.

Why are the readers of *Lolita* simultaneously captivated and repulsed by itsprose? Is this dual reaction a side effect of the text itself, or is it dependent on reader interpretation? How might we make sense of Humbert’s ability to so effectively employ narrative techniques to create a morally deranged, yet aesthetic memoir that lures readers into his warped reality despite his fallacy? To address these questions, we must first examine the literary framework that Humbert’s narrative operates within: The concept of the unreliable narrator. Wayne C. Booth is widely regarded as the pioneer of unreliable narration, even coining the term, *unreliable narrator, [[2]](#footnote-2)* in his 1961 book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction.* He defines the unreliable narrator as such: “I have called a narrator reliable 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 does not.” (157) As Bruno Zerwick notes of Booth’s contribution to the literary sphere, this definition of the unreliable narrator “has survived in nearly all narratological textbooks” and has only been critically challenged a handful of times since its publication.[[3]](#footnote-3) Booth claims that a successful reading requires an alignment with the implied author’s intentions and values, removing any distance between their interpretation and what the author intended. The reader should grasp the principles and norms set by the implied author to understand the work.[[4]](#footnote-4) Yet, Booth’s assertion that an unreliable narrator deviates from the norms of the implied author is complicated by the existence of an implied author at all. James Phelan agrees that locating the source of unreliability is a tricky endeavor, since it could be located in the author, in the text, or in some combination of both. Moreover, he questions whether the concept of an implied author is more of a burden than a benefit since unreliability is often dynamic.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Consequently, Phelan’s observation challenges the significance of Booth’s concept of the implied author and its relation to reliability in *Lolita* for two reasons. The first is that his explanation doesn’t fully account for how *Lolita* makes the reader complicit in Humbert’s depravity even while recognizing his unreliability. Humbert himself writes, “You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style.” (9) By revealing his duplicity so early in his confession, he provides the illusion of a narrative scapegoat for the reader to withdraw themselves from his actions, a self-deprecative tactic used to evoke a martyr-esque sympathy.

Even so, the parameters of his unreliability are constantly fluctuating throughout the novel, and by the end of his memoir, a glimpse of authenticity is revealed when Humbert states, “I wish this memoir to be published only when Lolita is no longer alive.” (309) We must ask ourselves if this statement actually reveals a moment of Humbert’s sincerity. And I’d argue that the “publication” of Humbert’s memoir is textual evidence that it does. Through this moment of honesty, and the retelling of his interpretation of events, Humbert has the narrative ability to operate in the space between truth and fiction, diminishing the possibility of the text containing what Jaques Derrida would describe as a fixed-center.[[6]](#footnote-6) In his work on deconstruction*,* Derrida proposes there are “Two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretations as an exile.”[[7]](#footnote-7) This is essential to the examination of *Lolita,* as Humbert’s unreliable narration is constructed in a way that defies any fixed interpretation. He is continuously given the space to play with language and structure, preventing a narrowed understanding of his character. The reader, then, is drawn into Humbert’s verbose fantasy despite his unreliability, mirroring Derrida’s notion of a decentered structure. Thus, the reader is not merely complicit through an ignorance of Humbert’s unreliability, since his language does contain rare flashes of truth. However, this doesn’t exonerate the reader from their sympathies. Take this passage from Phelan, for example:

Since Nabokov's experiment with unreliable narration sets up interpretive and ethical traps for readers, Nabokov must bear some responsibility for readers who fall into those traps. But his experiment also challenges readers to recognize those traps and avoid them, and they bear some responsibility if they are not up to the challenge. (236)

In other words, the text challenges readers to interpret unreliable narration not through an implied author’s fixed meaning, but through Humbert’s unstable narration which purposely disrupts what would otherwise be a straightforward interpretation of Humbert as a villainous figure.

Secondly, an implied author is nearly impossible to locate in the text. Humbert’s memoir is framed as a confession, but a self-serving one at best. In the last line of his confession, Humbert shares that his memoir was written for the purpose of immortalizing his relationship with Lolita since art is a space that operates beyond traditional values. (309) At the same time, this revelation forever strips Lolita of any form of agency or consent. Her story is forever cemented through the retelling of Humbert’s account which is inherently rooted in Humbert’s own skewed self-awareness. This meta-narrative, where Humbert is intentionally writing to shape reader perception, indicates a textual strategy where Humbert’s manipulation undergoes multiple transformations which obscure the presence of an implied author who might otherwise dictate the parameters or norms of morality. As previously established,[[8]](#footnote-8) the norms that frame the narrative are constantly shifting, demonstrating Humbert’s fractured sense of self. This enables his prose to flourish in the limbo between truth and reality. Given this examination of the role of implied author and its impact, or lack thereof, on Humbert’s unreliability, it’s discernable that reader complicity in the text is not based on Humbert’s unreliability alone, but from the multifaceted and unstable nature of his narrative which not only defies conventional storytelling but also subverts the traditional framework of unreliable narration itself.

We can now turn to a more thorough investigation of language and how Humbert uses it to construct his fantasy of Lolita while simultaneously enchanting his reader. The foreword by John Ray Jr. is perhaps the best, and only, textual example of a reader victimized by Humbert’s prose. Even he, an academic,[[9]](#footnote-9) who is presumably trained in recognizing or analyzing deception, admits to being glamoured by Humbert’s artistry:

I have no intention to glorify “H.H.” no doubt, he is horrible, he is object, he is a shining example of moral leprosy, a mixture of ferocity and a jocularity that betrays supreme misery perhaps, but is not conducive to attractiveness. He is ponderously capricious. Many of his casual opinions on the people and scenery of this country are ludicrous. A desperate honesty that throbs through his confession does not absolve him from his sins of diabolical cunning. He is abnormal. He is not a gentleman. But how magically his singing violin can conjure up a tendresse, a compassion for Lolita that makes us entranced with the book while abhorring its author! (5)

While John Ray’s admission denotes how Humbert’s narrative possesses a fantastical quality that unquestioningly entices its audience, the magicality of it only occurs when he’s speaking about Lolita, whereas his descriptions that are rooted in reality are not only flat but ridiculous. Those familiar with Derrida’s idea of instability can certainly apply a reading here. Jaqueline Hamrit argues it’s instances like this that showcase Derrida’s notion of undecidability, which describes the impossibility of choosing between two opposite or contradictory meanings.[[10]](#footnote-10) Humbert’s attempt, and ultimately, his success in blending these contradictory domains, further reflects Derrida’s theory that language and meaning are never fixed and are instead always shifting.[[11]](#footnote-11) Fantasy and actuality are the binary opposites here, and Humbert’s inability to decide which side of reality he wants his memoir to operate in, complicates reader interpretation. Lance Olsen argues, “The result of such a battle [fantasy and reality] on this field is a kind of parody of each mode by the other and a radical destabilization of the text so that in the end it is impossible to know how the reader is supposed to approach the whole.”[[12]](#footnote-12) His analysis of Humbert’s duality captures how Humbert’s reader is left to wrestle with the ethical implications of being subjected to a liminal space that is neither wholly real or completely fictional. However, as Hamrit concludes, “*Lolita* is neither purely moral or purely aesthetic, yet moral and aesthetic at the same time”[[13]](#footnote-13). Her analysis highlights, as Derrida would argue, that the revelation of the blurred binary between morality and aesthetics, and fiction and reality is in fact, not a revelation at all. Instead, Humbert’s narrative is simply a vehicle for these binaries to deconstruct themselves.

Likewise, Humbert further explores the gap between aesthetics and morality by taking real words and applying his own context to expand their meaning. He states, for example:

Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as “nymphets.” (16)

Humbert’s meticulous manipulation of language here not only reveals his subversion of the preconditioned meaning of terms like maidens, travelers, and nymphets, but it also illustrates how he reshapes vocabulary to guide the reader toward a nuanced understand of his text. The implications of this being that Humbert invites the reader to view his text as not something forbidden, but permissible according to the framework his unreliable narration has enabled him to construct. Labeling young girls as nymphets fractures the idea that a “girl” is a singular identity, allowing Humbert to expand it to create multiple meanings. This isn’t the only instance of Humbert’s rhetorical manipulation either. He also describes non-nymphets as “human females,” (18) and believes he is concerned with the well-being of human girls by claiming, “Under no circumstances would he have interfered with the innocence of a child if there was the least risk of the row.” (19-20) Now, of course, there is no “real” difference between a human girl and a nymphet outside of *Lolita*, and he is, in fact, corrupting the virtue of children, but his exploration of the layered space between language and interpretation, effectively grooms the reader into question if such a divide between corruption and innocence, and nymphet and girl even exists. Considering this, we must ask if it’s really a surprise that both John Ray Jr. and Humbert’s audience, who approach his text through an ostensibly unbiased lens,[[14]](#footnote-14) are ensnared by the fantasy world of his own creation.

Coupled with his freedom as an unreliable narrator, the subversion of language that appears early in *Lolita,* serves as an elaborate form of world-building, allowing Humbert to manufacture a fairytale of his own design. He assigns folkloristic tropes to his characters to not only veil the truth, but also as a way to his narrative in the most innocent light as possible. John Ray even points out, “True, not a single obscene term is to be found in the whole work.” (4) Although paradoxical in nature, considering the obvious obscenity of the subject matter, Ray’s attention to the lack of “foul” language demonstrates the effectiveness of Humbert’s plot decision to mirror common folktales as a method for camouflaging vulgarity and meaning. [[15]](#footnote-15)

Humbert capitalizes on the canonical nature of familiar fantasy characters to exploit our emotional attachments to them. His arsenal of archetypes includes that of the jealous mother, the princess, the prince, and of course, the hunter. We see the first archetype with Dolores’ mother, Charlotte, whose disposition echoes the envious stepmothers of both, “Cinderella” and “Sleeping Beauty”. Humbert often describes her as, “poor Charlotte,” (71) “big cold Haze,” (57) simply, “Haze”, (65) and not to mention, “The haze woman, the big bitch, the old cat, the obnoxious mamma, the—the old stupid Haze.” (95) And each time Humbert renames Charlotte, he reinforces the notion that she is someone who is not only grotesque, but someone who *should* be hated. In addition, Humbert intentionally paints Charlotte as resentful of her daughter. He makes passing claims like, “I had the feeling that Charlotte, moved by obscure motives of envy and dislike, had added an inch here, a pound there.” (107), “She had been annoyed by Lo’s liking me; but my feelings she could not divine.”, (83) “Oh, she simply hated her daughter!”, (80) and “I’d always been aware of the possessive streak in her, but I never thought she would be so crazy jealous of anything in my life that had not been she.” (79) Each of these statements, points to an innate wickedness that exists within Charlotte, serving to deflect away from Humbert’s own evil. This is to say that every fairy tale has a villain, and Humbert can’t possibly be the antagonist of his. Moreover, these assertions manage to achieve the perception that Charlotte is as an obstacle as well as a threat to his Lolita.

Steven Swann Jones similarly contends that Humbert’s archetypal characterization of Charlotte serves two functions: To clearly make his story parody a traditional fairy tale and to provide a framework for the novel’s ending that demonstrates a subversion of the classic fairy tale ending.[[16]](#footnote-16) While I agree with the former part of Jones’ hypothesis, it is worth challenging whether Humbert’s intentional subversion of the “happily ever after” trope is ultimately successful. In other words, it is up to the reader to decide whether or not Humbert’s fairy tale works, and considering John Ray’s foreword categorizing Charlotte as “the egotistic mother,” (5) suggests that, at the very least, Humbert is successful in his attempt blur the boundaries between fiction and reality where he can manipulate the reader into tarnishing Charlotte’s character. In addition, I’d like to propose a third function to add to Jones’ list, which is: To evoke some form of reader sympathy, Humbert needs his fable to be as convincing as possible. Humbert realizes his narrative simply cannot exist on a 20th century timeline with 20th century norms. His story requires a revival of not just the literal past, but a fictional one. To quote Olsen, “One of the dark strengths of fantasy is that it presents a culture with that which it cannot stand, possibilities of alternative universes, possibilities of taboo.”[[17]](#footnote-17) The manipulation and usage of a folktale architecture with Charlotte as a jealous and wicked mother, further reflect Humbert’s success as a narrator who uses his inventory of language and rhetoric to complicate reader perception which should make for a gentler reader judgement of his actions.

With the obstacle of Charlotte removed from his fantasy, Humbert has the freedom to make Lolita the princess of his tale. She is described as “little princess, (lost, kidnapped, discovered in gypsy rags through which her nakedness smiled at the king and his hounds).” (39) and makes many other allusions Lolita having an enchanting quality to her beauty.[[18]](#footnote-18) Just like a nymphet transcends beyond the threshold of reality, Lolita’s characterization as a princess functions to remove her from anything that is real. And similar to the nicknames he gives Charlotte, Humbert, throughout the novel, names and renames Lolita. He calls her “my little mistress”, (139) “My frigid princess”, and the most obvious nickname being “Lolita”. Humbert draws even more overt parallels between her and princess Snow White when he observes, “She had painted her lips and was holding in her hallowed hands a beautiful, Eden-red apple.” (57-58). And claims a few lines down, “She grasped and bit into it, and my heart was like snow under thin crimson skin.” (58). Again, these descriptions mirroring the princess tropes found in works like “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty”, work to fabricate a Lolita that only exists within Humbert’s prose. Moreover, Humbert’s deconstruction and reconstruction of Lolita’s identity essentially convolutes the function of her character. At times, she’s a nymphet, at other times, she’s a princess, and at others, Humbert even considers her a seductress of him. It is through this fluidity that Humbert exerts control over both Lolita’s identity and the reader’s perception of Lolita herself. When discussing the role of Lolita’s transformability, Jones writes:

The character Lolita borrows the magical power of the fairy princess to enchant our imaginations by her desirability. And the novel Lolita borrows the philosophical perspective of the fairy tale that allows us to see an enjoy the romantic fantasy in our own lives. (273)

While this may seem like a fairly bold claim to make given the dark subject matter of the novel, Jones’ statement does articulate how the complex sheen of fantasy is responsible for Humbert’s metamorphosis of Lolita. Her character, by Humbert’s account is written to enchant him, so in return, he aims to manipulate Lolita’s identity to enchant the reader.

If we read *Lolita* as a novel that exists in the space between fairy tale and reality, then the episode at the Enchanted Hunters Inn represents the reality of Humbert’s depravity, masked by the illusion of consent. In this scene, Humbert becomes part the list of archetypes he’s bestowed onto his other characters: That of not only the hero and the hunter, but also the hunted.[[19]](#footnote-19) We see this in a sheer alliterative sense as “Enchanted Hunters” is eerily similar to “Enchanted Humbert.” And again, when Humbert describes, “Very slowly between her silent hands as if she were a bemused bird-hunter”, alluding to Lolita being a Humbert Hunter. To bring back our initial discussion of Humbert’s use of language,[[20]](#footnote-20) this wordplay suggests he is intentionally creating double-meanings to manipulate the reader into finding some romance in the affair, and even to some extent to manipulate himself. Still, Humbert carries on with his romanticization of rape. As he recalls lying in bed with her at the Enchanted Hunters Inn he writes:

Now and then it seemed to me that the enchanted prey was about to meet halfway the enchanted hunter, that her haunch was working its way toward me under the soft sand of a remote and fabulous beach; then her dimpled dimness would stir, and I would know she was farther away from me than ever. (131)

In this scene, Humbert plays a coy game that serves two distinct purposes. First, by subtly suggesting Lolita is meeting him “halfway,” Humbert insinuates that she harbors some level of complicity or desire, even if it’s only when she’s in an unconscious or dreamlike state. However, what is perhaps more revealing is Humbert’s acknowledgement of the gap between Lolita’s lucidity and his desires. Her waking movements described as “dimpled dimness,” suggest that there is a distance between Humbert’s nymphetic version of her, and her reality. This ultimately captures Humbert’s broader strategy when describing the most morally delicate scene in his confession: To romanticize his predation under the mask of mutual enchantment, while simultaneously appearing to respect her boundaries by keeping his fantasy separate from his desires.

At the same time, Humbert’s recollection of the moment he corrupts Lolita is not an episode of drugged coercion. Rather, it is one as he claims, of mutual desire. While most readers can discern the falsity of this claim simply due to the skewed power dynamic Humbert has over Lolita, his perception of their relationship exemplifies Derrida’s critique of stability. Humbert frames their sexual encounter as an asymmetry of desire, claiming to his reader, “I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she who seduced me.” (132) This assertion inverts the conventional binary of victim and assailant which as Humbert’s hopes, will cause the readers to perceive him as the one in a vulnerable position. Also, unlike the nights he spent drugging Lolita, Humbert is the one who now “feigned handsome profiled sleep.” (132) Through this subversion of gender and power dynamics, he destabilizes the traditional fairy tale trope of the savior prince and the princess as a passive recipient of love and servitude, to instead, create a narrative where the princess is the one dominating the intimacy—or at least, the illusion of it. Yet Derrida would argue that Lolita’s agency at the Enchanted Hunter’s Inn in far from authentic but deposed through Humbert’s manipulation of language and narrative.

Moreover, Humbert’s statement, “The odd sense of living in a brand new, mad new dream world where everything is permissible, came over me as I realized what she was suggesting.”, (133) reflects again the deconstructed binary between reality and fiction. Humbert’s fantasy does not exist in a sphere separate from the real world but is truly laced within it, destabilizing any evident demarcation that could exist between the two. That being said, Humbert’s appropriation of folklore essential in that it preys on the reader’s pre-existing knowledge of fairy tale tropes to both justify his actions and guide the reader to understand that his enchantments are indeed enough to conceal his perversity.

Still, is Humbert’s manipulation of narrative and language enough to convince the reader to feel sympathetic towards his cause? Is there truly any room for understanding after elucidating Humbert’s deliberately deceitful tactics? Or does the reader’s subtle awareness of Humbert’s manipulation ultimately implicate them in his corruption of Lolita? Consider, for instance, the modern definition of the word “Lolita” as supplied by the *Merriam Webster Dictionary:*

*A precociously seductive girl.*

Notably absent from this definition is any mention of grooming, rape, coercion, or an acknowledgement of Lolita’s underage-ness. If I had to guess, the omission of this fact about Lolita’s age would make Humbert himself reject its definition. It’s important to also note that the use of “Lolita” wasn’t used until 1959, four years after the publication of the novel, meaning its etymology is inextricably linked to the novel itself.[[21]](#footnote-21) The omission of these facts from the common definition demonstrates how society’s perception of Lolita has transformed into an object of desire, rather than a victim of Humbert’s exploitation.

Elizabeth Patnoe rhetorically asks all the right questions regarding this dissonance, “Why didn’t the Lolita myth evolve in a way that more accurately reflects Nabokov’s Lolita? Why isn’t the definition of “Lolita” “a molested adolescent girl instead of a “seductive” one?”[[22]](#footnote-22) Although Patnoe takes a distinctly feminist approach to answering her questions, her conclusion doesn’t stray far from my own concern with Humbert’s narrative ability to encourage the reader to be empathetic towards him despite knowing better. She states:

But if we can understand the part of the extratextual realm that influences the personal part of the extratextual, then perhaps we will better access and understand the interplay of our culture, ourselves, and the texts that become our texts.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

Simply put, the absence of crucial details from society’s misreading of Lolita reveals how deeply narratives are shaped by culture and reader perception. The very perception of modern-day references to the novel shift over time, such as in the music of popular artist, Lana Del Rey, whose famous songs, “Off to the Races”[[24]](#footnote-24) and “Lolita”[[25]](#footnote-25) romanticize Lolita the situation of Lolita the girl. Similarly, popular films like, *American Beauty,* also romanticize and apply new layers of meaning to the pedophilic romance between an older man and an underage girl.These reinterpretations serve as evidence that meaning is always deferred, continuously evolving with each new rendition or retelling.

In this way, Humbert has achieved a lasting linguistic triumph, one that demonstrates how language can be used to manipulate and obscure the line between aesthetics and morality. However, as Phelan suggests earlier, it’s readers who ultimately bear the responsibility of navigating Humbert’s narrative traps and must face the consequences if they aren’t up to the challenge. [[26]](#footnote-26) Even so, our modern definition and interpretations of *Lolita* may be proof that no reader is prolific enough to weave through the novel’s moral complexities. As the definition and perception of both Lolita the girl and *Lolita* the novel morph over time, Humbert’s unreliable confession is a testimony to the power of *Lolita* to compel us to confront the idea that meaning, truth, and fiction are never absolute, but are always fused together in a cycle of reinterpretation, reflection, and reassessment.

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1. A thorough account of the publication history of *Lolita* can be found in Connolly, Julian W. “The Creation of Lolita.” *A Reader’s Guide to Nabokov’s “Lolita.”* pp. 3-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Booth, Wayne C., *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2nd ed. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago press, 1983. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Zerweck, Bruno. “Historicizing Unreliable Narration: Unreliability and Cultural Discourse in Narrative Fiction.” pp. 151. It’s important to note, however, that Zerweck does tribute the scholars who do have recently started challenging Booth’s definition of the unreliable narrator, including James Phelan, Kathleen Wall, Mary Patricia Martin, and Tamar Yacobi. He claims they are in favor of an ethical approach to unreliable narration that focuses on the relationship between various text and reader centered elements in the reading process. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Booth, pp. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Phelan, James. “Estranging Unreliability, Bonding Unreliability, and the Ethics of ‘Lolita.’”, pp. 224. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Here, I mean to employ Jaques Derrida’s idea of a “fixed-origin” found in his essay, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”. In it, he critiques the traditional concept of narrative structure, suggesting that it relies on a contradiction between immobility and how it limits the *freeplay* of the structure. For further reading see, Derrida pp. 1-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Derrida, pp. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This episode recalls the earlier discussion of Humbert’s self-deprecation and moments of truth as evidence of the shifting norms in the text. See pp. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The text never specifically states what John Ray’s P. hD.is in. I presume this is meant to mock the relevance of academia as a sign of intelligence, but for the sake of reading within the text, I will assume he is genuinely enamored by Humbert’s prose. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hamrit, Jacqueline, “‘Play! Invent the World! Invent Reality!’: Nabokov/Derrida.” *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 25, 2003, pp. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Derrida, Jaques, “The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing”, pp. 97-114 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Olsen, Lance, “A Janus-text: Realism, Fantasy, and Nabokov’s ‘Lolita.’” *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1986, pp. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Hamrit, Jacqueline, pp. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Here, I am referencing Humbert’s own call to the reader found on pp. 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Steven Swann Jones provides an excellent and thorough examination of the various fantasy tropes found in Humbert’ memoir, most heavily focused on proving it’s essentially a retelling of “Snow White”. For additional reading see, “The Enchanted Hunters: Nabokov’s Use of Folk Characterization in ‘Lolita.’” *Western Folklore*, vol. 39, no. 4, 1980, pp. 269–283. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Jones, pp. 272-273. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Olsen, pp.116. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. There are far too many instances of Humbert using fairy-tale like language in relation to Lolita’s beauty. Some of these include “perilous magic”, “potions”, “spells”, “hunchbacks”, “enchanted”, “harpies”, etc., all of which are used in to give a magicality to his description of her. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Jones offers some important context to the archetypal role of the enchanted hunter. For in-depth insights, see pp.278-279 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Refer back to the conversation of Humbert’s manipulation of language found on pp. 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This fact accompanies the definition of “Lolita” in the online Merriam Webster Dictionary. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Patnoe, Elizabeth. “Lolita Misrepresented, Lolita Reclaimed: Disclosing the Doubles.” *College Literature*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1995, pp. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Patnoe, pp. 85 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Del Rey, Lana. “Off to the Races*.*” *Born to Die*, Interscope Records, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Del Rey, Lana. “Lolita.” *Born to Die*, Interscope Records, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See pp. 3-4 of this essay for a complete analysis of Phelan’s claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)