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WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO *LOLITA*?
The transposition of irony from Nabokov's novel to Stanley Kubrick's and Adrian Lyne's film versions

Por
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes how irony, such a strong feature of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, has been transposed to its two film versions. After facing problems with censorship, Stanley Kubrick delivered his comical *Lolita* in 1962. Due to the touchy topic of child abuse, Adrian Lyne also suffered to find a distributor for his 1997 version. His movie is a drama containing very little irony. By comparing how the unreliable narrator of the novel, Humbert Humbert, appears in each of the two films through voice-over narration, this study arrives at the conclusion that these Humberts vary. The narrator in the novel is different from his literary character, and the narration is less ironic in both film versions. So that the behavior of the character Humbert can be observed, this thesis dedicates a chapter to acting and characterization, delineating how the actors' portrayal and the directors' choices affect the irony not only in Humbert, but also in other crucial characters such as Lolita, Charlotte and Quilty. One of the findings of this comparison is that, in Kubrick's film, Humbert the character, as played by James Mason, comes across as rather unbalanced. In Lyne's movie, since there is no distinction between the character and the narrator – both being tormented souls – the irony is greatly reduced. Another chapter in this study deals with certain passages of dialogue in the novel and how they appear in the movies. Again, some distinctions between the speech of the narrator and the speech of the character can be observed, thus contributing to the analysis of irony in film adaptation.

No. de páginas: 107
No. de palavras: 36.585

RESUMO

O QUE FIZERAM COM *LOLITA*?
A transposição da ironia do romance de Nabokov para
as versões fílmicas de Stanley Kubrick e Adrian Lyne

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2005

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Esta dissertação analisa como a ironia, uma característica tão forte no romance *Lolita* de Nabokov, é transposta para suas duas versões cinematográficas. Após enfrentar problemas com a censura da época, Stanley Kubrick entregou o seu *Lolita* cômico em 1962. Devido à difícil abordagem de abuso sexual infantil, Adrian Lyne também sofreu para encontrar um distribuidor para a sua versão de 1997. Seu filme é um drama com muito pouca ironia. Comparando como o narrador nada confiável do romance, Humbert Humbert, aparece em cada um dos dois filmes através da narração em off, este estudo chega à conclusão que esses Humberts variam. O narrador do livro é diferente de seu personagem literário, e a narração é menos irônica nas duas versões fílmicas. Para que o comportamento do personagem Humbert seja observado, esta dissertação dedica um capítulo para interpretação e caracterização, delineando como a personificação dos atores e as escolhas dos diretores afetam a ironia não apenas de Humbert, mas também de outros personagens cruciais como Lolita, Charlotte e Quilty. Um dos resultados desta comparação é que, na versão de Kubrick, o personagem de Humbert, na interpretação de James Mason, aparece um tanto desequilibrado. Como não há distinção, no filme de Lyne, entre o personagem e o narrador – ambos são almas atormentadas –, a ironia se reduz. Outro capítulo deste estudo trata de certas passagens de diálogos no romance e como elas são reproduzidas nos filmes. Novamente, algumas distinções entre a fala do narrador e a fala do personagem podem ser observadas, contribuindo assim para a análise de ironia em adaptações cinematográficas.

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INTRODUCTION

Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, published in 1955, was first adapted to the cinema by Stanley Kubrick, in 1962, and in 1997 by Adrian Lyne. Though both films adopt the same source, they could not have been more different. Following the very ironic tone of the novel, Kubrick made his *Lolita* a black comedy[1] and a vehicle for social critique. Lyne, on the other hand, filmed a love story, a romance with little humor. If we were to talk in terms of fidelity to the source, it would appear that Lyne's version is more faithful to the plot of the novel, whereas Kubrick's is more faithful to its "spirit," that is, to the tone and rhythm of the book. I take it as a given that Nabokov's novel about a man entering middle age and his obsession with a nymphet is ironic. Even when the book deals with tragic episodes such as Charlotte's death, the murder of Quilty, and the subject of child abuse itself, Nabokov's prose remains ironic throughout. The two film adaptations, however, take distinct roads.

The novel is entirely narrated in first person by Humbert Humbert, and its main character, in spite of the book's title, is again Humbert. Gérard Genette, in his very influential work *Narrative Discourse*, creates the term *voice* to treat narration, and insists on distinguishing between narration and point of view, which he prefers calling focalization. Whereas *mood* answers the question *who sees?* (who is the character whose point of view orients the narrative perspective?), *voice* answers the question *who speaks?* (186) In *Lolita* the novel, the one who sees is Humbert, and the one who speaks is also Humbert, but these two are not necessarily the same individual. Humbert the narrator is witty and implacable with the people he describes; Humbert the protagonist is a bashful

[1] I do not mean comedy here, of course, in the strict Greek sense of the word – where comedy demands a happy ending, one which Kubrick's movie definitely lacks. I mean it as a film genre.

coward with facial tics, afraid of expressing his thoughts and of being discovered as the pervert he is. In Lyne's film, which extensively uses voice-over narration, Humbert the narrator is serious and fearful, just as his character. In Kubrick's movie, though the voice-over is limited, Humbert the narrator is restrained, but there are several indications that his character is not. Thus, one of the main reasons why Kubrick's film captures the irony from the book and Lyne's does not lies in this different treatment of narrator and character.

Defining irony is not a simple task. Even though *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* offers a brief history of the term – it was originally used by Plato, and it was mentioned for the first time in English in 1502 – the dictionary makes it clear that, to this day, there is no surefire definition. The dictionary tries to define the term when it says that irony is often interpreted as an occasion in which there is a discrepancy "between words and their meaning, or between actions and their results, or between appearance and reality" (460). In the powerful *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974), where Wayne Booth uses literature to explain irony, he defines irony as "saying one thing and meaning the opposite" (34). But this description is somewhat incomplete. We know, as Katharina Barbe points out in her *Irony in Context*, that irony is more than that (65). Linda Hutcheon, in *Irony's Edge* (1995), consents that "[i]t is possible to think of irony not as saying one thing and meaning another [. . .] but, instead, as a process of communication that entails two or more meanings being played off, one against the other" (105). For instance, when Quilty tells Humbert in *Lolita*, "I'm very fond of children myself" (296), he does not mean the contrary. He *is* fond of children, and so is Humbert. The problem is that both are pedophiles, and this phrase coming from them acquires a very distinct (and perverse) meaning, making it ironic. This is the edge Hutcheon talks about in her work when she states that irony can hurt. She defends we should not look at irony as *either/or*,

but rather as *both/and* (63). Also, she, who dislikes the term *victim* to describe the person who is the target (another pejorative term) of irony, and prefers *interpreter*, comes closer to defining irony when she says, "From the point of view of the *interpreter*, irony is an interpretive and intentional move: it is the making or inferring of **meaning** in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an **attitude** toward both the said and the unsaid." From the point of view of the ironist, "irony is the intentional transmission of both information and evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly presented" (11).

Booth's work on irony is interested in showing why and how some literary texts are ironic. Nearly all of his *A Rhetoric of Irony* is dedicated to analyzing instances of stable irony, that is, irony which is "finite in application" (6) and which can be interpreted as such. For him, in stable irony "the central meaning of the words is fixed and univocal, regardless of how many peripheral and even contradictory significances different readers may add" (91). He gives practical examples of how irony is construed from a simple phrase like "It's raining." If the speaker of such utterance looks out the window and says this, it might not be ironic. But if this same speaker, soaking wet from the pouring rain, enters a room and announces "It's raining," it is ironic, since the listener can infer the weather's condition just by looking at the speaker (8-9).

Instead of choosing literature to exemplify irony, like Booth does, Hutcheon uses cultural artifacts, such as museum exhibitions and songs, to interpret irony. But she disagrees with Booth because, for her, an ironic statement can have more than one interpretation, and irony is not irony, in the first place, "until it is interpreted as such" (6). What she succeeds in doing is to "[f]igure out how and why irony comes about (or doesn't), with a particular interest in the consequences of interpreting a text (in any medium) as 'ironic'" (2). A very important contribution from Hutcheon is to constantly remind us that

irony always depends on context (118). For instance, what Humbert wishes children not to do in the novel *Lolita* ("Never grow up") loses some of its fun if we do not know the basic context in which it is uttered – that he is a pedophile (21).

Hutcheon and Booth are very successful in their studies when they analyze moments in which irony occurs, though identifying irony can prove to be hard. Whereas in conversation we can signal irony by clearing our throat, winking an eye or nudging an elbow (Booth 53), these markers are absent from written texts. Sometimes detecting irony is so difficult that an author named Alcanter de Brahm, back in 1899, suggested an inverted question mark to be used as a punctuation sign to let the reader know when irony is being used (Booth 55). We do have a few markers, such as putting words in quotation marks and, as Hutcheon points out, *emoticons* like the smiley (✍) in the internet nowadays (149). But the fact remains that we need some kind of shared knowledge to understand irony, just as we need it to laugh at jokes (Hutcheon 195). Both Booth and Hutcheon defend that we must be part of a community of sorts to be in on the joke of irony. Booth calls this group of ironists "amiable communities" (28); Hutcheon calls it "discursive communities" (94). Their point of departure varies, though: for Hutcheon, in order to detect irony we have to belong to this community; for Booth, it is irony which forms a community of people with similar tastes. Hutcheon has this to say: "In a way, if you understand that irony can exist (that saying one thing and meaning something else is not necessarily a lie) and if you understand how it works, you already belong to one community: the one based on the knowledge of the possibility and nature of irony" (18). For this community, some sort of background knowledge (the idea of context again) is necessary, and, for Hutcheon such knowledge can be taught.

Hence, maybe there are no "irony blind," but there will always be people who do not share the knowledge needed to understand a specific irony. There certainly are people who read Nabokov's *Lolita* straightforwardly. Pauline Kael recalls, with her characteristic glee, that one man told her he was not going to watch Kubrick's version because he heard the film had transformed the book into a comedy (204). If all that Humbert narrates looks to us as "gems of wisdom," as Booth puts it, we may not detect irony (81). Likewise, if the irony mocks a touchy topic such as child abuse, it might be ignored. I will obviously read *Lolita* differently from a person who was abused as a child, or a pedophile, will read it. For me, even at the risk of diminishing Nabokov's work, *all* of what Humbert narrates is ironic. Even the novel's most dramatic moments are told ironically. For instance, the book's most poignant passage occurs when Humbert re-encounters Lolita, now no longer a nymphet and pregnant from another man, and he realizes that he truly loves her, that it is more than a sexual obsession. But how does Humbert narrate this romantic and emotionally-charged meeting? He says to Lolita: "'I want you to leave your incidental Dick, and this awful hole, and come to live with me, and die with me, and everything with me' (words to that effect)" (278). This is the closest Humbert gets to declaring his love for Lolita, and yet he calls attention to his language. When he says "incidental Dick," he is disrespectfully referring to Lolita's husband. "Everything with me" is already vague enough, especially for an articulate man like Humbert (an English Literature professor, no less), and even more if we remember what that *everything* might include. But he stresses his confusion and demolishes what he has said by writing that last piece in parentheses. If anybody missed the narrator's irony in the "everything with me" bit, "words to that effect" leaves no room for doubt. Worse still, this vagueness takes us back to the letter Charlotte wrote telling Humbert how much she loved him. Since Humbert flushed this letter "in the vortex of the toilet" (68), he

could only cite it from memory, so the phrase “words to that effect” is dangerously close to Charlotte’s corny love declaration.

Booth warns us that there are two mistakes concerning irony: one is not seeing it, and the other is seeing it too much (169). He gives an amusing example of how dangerous it can be to interpret irony in everything: “Readers of *Mein Kampf* who thought that Hitler must have meant something different from what he said were making a risky mistake” (47). Besides, both Booth and Hutcheon use the duck/rabbit diagram (see appendix) to show that we cannot mock and praise at the same time (127 in Booth’s, 59 in Hutcheon’s). We cannot see irony in a passage and not see it at the same moment. And once we see the rabbit as duck or vice-versa, we will never look at either the same way. Our brain cannot process both interpretations simultaneously.

Nabokov sets the tone of the novel since the foreword, a fictional account by a psychiatrist and his decision to publish the words of a “demented diarist.” Among other things, the doctor says about Humbert: “No doubt, he is horrible, he is abject, he is a shining example of moral leprosy, a mixture of ferocity and jocularity that betrays supreme misery perhaps” (5). Even if, within the diagetic realm, we do not know if this doctor is real, we have reasons to suspect that a verisimilar psychologist would rarely call his patient a moral leper. Booth points out that it is very difficult to “straighten” an ironic text. The other way around is possible, that is, starting with a straightforward statement and then introducing irony in the following sentence to wreck what was said, more or less what Humbert does by adding “words to that effect.” After the first suspicion of irony raised by the narrator’s words, we will probably suspect the presence of irony in every line (Booth 185). This is why, according to Booth, irony “often produces a much higher degree of confidence than literal statement” (51). No matter how unreliable a narrator Humbert is, we

trust him to be ironic till the end of the book, and he never disappoints us. It is no coincidence that Genilda Azerêdo, in her analysis of irony in film adaptations of Jane Austen's *Emma*, cites *Lolita* as an example of irony "found *throughout* a whole text, clearly denoting an ironic style, tone and attitude on the ironist's part" (14).

Indeed, all kinds of irony are present in *Lolita* the novel. The *Penguin Dictionary* points out two prevailing types of irony: verbal and situational, also called irony of behavior (460). Verbal ironies, in which puns and other cases of saying what is not meant are included, may be the most frequent in *Lolita*. For instance, Humbert copies an entry about the American dramatist (and pedophile) Clare Quilty. Among his plays are cited such titles as *The Little Nymph* and *Fatherly Love.* Humbert describes Lolita as "the loveliest nymphet green-red-blue Priap himself could think up" (42). Anybody familiar with priapism (permanent erections) can connect the colors with the preposition *up* and infer what Humbert means by *loveliest*. Even Lyne's movie version of *Lolita*, which avoids comic situations, contains an example of verbal irony when Lolita sits on Humbert's lap, and her mother expels her and asks Humbert, "Is she keeping you up?" He is so surprised that his immediate response is, "I beg your pardon? No! No, I'm… No."

In the second form of irony, that of situation or behavior, which in *Invisible Storytellers* Sarah Kozloff calls dramatic irony (109), we, readers and spectators, know something that the character does not, as when a character mocks another without being aware that the same is happening to him. The simple fact that Humbert is unaware of Quilty's omnipresence is an example of dramatic irony. In Kubrick's version, Quilty knows about Charlotte's death when he meets Humbert in the Enchanted Hunters Hotel. He questions Humbert, and his irony culminates after the narrator tells him Charlotte is coming, and Quilty quips, "What, in an ambulance?" Besides this form of dramatic irony,

the whole Humbert/Quilty relationship can be seen as structural irony, since Humbert's ignorance about Quilty affects the structure of the book and films. After all, both the novel and Lyne's movie have to hide the identity of a man who only becomes known to Humbert at the end, while at the same time hinting at who he is. Kubrick's film solves this dilemma by advanc ing Quilty's murder to the beginning of the story.

Tragic irony, or the irony that is more related to tragic events, also appears in *Lolita*. Charlotte's death is one such example. At the same time that Humbert is quite glad with her fatal accident, since this will give him freedom to openly pursue Lolita, it is still a terrible occurrence, and Lolita will later accuse him of murdering her mother. But equally tragic and ironic, under the circumstances, is Humbert's acceptance to marry Charlotte just so he can be close to Lolita, and then finding out that Charlotte plans to send her to a boarding school and rent her room. Yet another kind of irony happens in the novel, one that Kozloff labels romantic irony, "the deliberate calling into question or demolishing of a work's dramatic illusion" (112). Humbert is definitely self-conscious that his diary will be read by us. He tells us "You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style" (9), and hopes that "you can still stand my style (I am writing under observation)" (10), just to cite a few examples when he directly approaches us. Sometimes he sees his readers as members of a jury (9, 103, 135), sometimes as bald men (48). In one occasion he speaks straight to the printer and, very childishly, similarly to how a little girl in love dots her i's, asks him to repeat the name *Lolita* "until the page is full" (109). All of these instances are romantically ironic because the narrator is calling attention to his oeuvre.

It is true that Humbert occasionally experiences some pangs of guilt for the harm he is causing a 12-year-old girl, but we cannot take his comments at face value. In general, he seems to believe he is innocent. Charles Rolo wrote a review of the book for the *Atlantic*

Monthly in 1958, before any of the films came out, and before the novel became the canonical work it is today. His opinion is: "It is one of the funniest serious novels I have ever read; and the vision of its abominable hero, who never deludes or excuses himself, brings into grotesque relief the cant, the vulgarity, and the hypocritical conventions that pervade the human comedy" (78). Rolo saw no demonstrations of guilt from Humbert, but others see it differently (Nigel Nicolson in Paul Giles 60 thinks that the novel condemns what it describes). Lyne, for one, read *Lolita* as being ambivalent about pedophilia, and this ambiguity can be seen in his film. For me, the novel sustains its irony throughout because of what Genette labels *voice*, because it is a first-person narration that excludes all other voices. Humbert the narrator has the advantage of experience over Humbert the character, for he is telling his story in retrospect (Genette 252). Thus, even if the narrator ultimately repents for what he has done to Lolita, Humbert the character never does so. Everything is filtered by the pedophile, and we have no choice but to plunge into his world. Now, this is a man who could easily plead insanity were he truly being judged. Humbert's tale is a madman's universe. In a way the novel is relentlessly ironic because it fits into what Booth explains: "the pattern of ironic inference has been established on a base which *cannot be removed without removing the fun*" (131).

This fun that the novel causes even if it deals with such a disgusting subject can be disturbing. At the same time that irony has the power to distance the reader and the spectator from a shocking topic matter (Hutcheon 14, 36, 49), it also makes a serious issue be treated callously. Paul Giles points out that Nabokov's book offended some critics at the time of its release because of its lack of seriousness or, as Giles prefers it, its "exaltation of ludic form over ethical content" (52). So much so that the novel suffered to find a publisher, and was finally printed in 1955 by Olympia Press, which was noted for its

pornographic books. *Lolita* was banned in England and France in 1956, but it was never banned in the U.S. (57), though some libraries and bookstores refused to stock it.

When Kubrick set out to make the film, Nabokov's *Lolita* was more known as a *succes de scandale* than as a masterpiece (Gene D. Philips 100). And Kubrick was not the acclaimed director he got to be after delivering classics like *Dr. Strangelove, 2001, A Space Odyssey, A Clockwork Orange, Barry Lyndon, The Shining* and *Full Metal Jacket*. At that time, Kubrick had a good reputation for directing *Paths of Glory* and *Spartacus*, but he was still far from the image he came to acquire in later years. On top of it all, *Lolita* was the kind of movie prone to have problems with censorship (Vincent LoBrutto 200). The Production Code, which regulated the content of American films from 1934 to 1968 and forbid topics such as single mothers, homosexuality, prostitution, venereal diseases, sexual hygiene, foul language, nudity, close dancing, prolonged kissing, and any reference to drugs (Stuart Klawans 304-5), did not have the strength it had in the 40s and 50s, but it still had to be followed. Kubrick went ahead anyway and asked Nabokov himself to write a screenplay, which he did. But, being unaware of screenwriting procedures, Nabokov wrote a huge script that would amount to several hours of film, so Kubrick had to rewrite it. Philips calculates that Kubrick used only about 20% of Nabokov's screenplay (100). Early in 1960, Kubrick received a letter from the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) warning him that the script was not going to receive a Code Seal. This "warrant" prohibited any kind of sex perversion and, without this permission, the film would be surely condemned by the Legion of Decency. After long negotiations, Kubrick and MPAA reached an agreement. According to Kubrick's biographer LoBrutto, the decision of casting Sue Lyon as Lolita was crucial precisely because she did not look like a twelve-year-old (198). However, even with the film completed, problems with censorship continued.

Kubrick had to cut scenes and trim entire dialogues to get the Code's approval. Referring to the censorship restrictions, he told *Newsweek* in 1972, one decade after releasing *Lolita*, "Had I realized how severe the limitations were going to be, I probably wouldn't have made the film" (qtd. in LoBrutto 225).

The movie was generally not well received by critics. One example is Bosley Crowthers, the *New York Times* critic. The trailer for *Lolita* asked, "How did they ever make a movie of *Lolita*?" Crowthers, who loathed the film, said: "the answer to that question… they didn't" (qtd. in Elizabeth Kaye, par. 20). But *Lolita* had some fervent admirers, most importantly among them Pauline Kael, who not only attacked Crowther's review but stated: "*Lolita* is black slapstick and at times it's so far out that you gasp as you laugh" (203). I dare say *Lolita* is the only film by Kubrick Kael ever liked. And she liked it so much that she criticized reviewers who demanded fidelity to the novel ("they don't complain this much about Hollywood's changes in biblical stories") and who condemned Lyon for looking too old for the role ("Have the reviewers looked at the schoolgirls of America lately? The classmates of my fourteen-year-old daughter are not merely nubile: some of them look badly used"). As usual, Kael's review (203-209) is full of insights and a treat to read, and it is a pity that she retired before she could write about Lyne's *Lolita*.

The 1997 film is not a comedy at all. Even if it adopts first-person voice-over narration and uses numerous lines from the book, the tone is mainly solemn. One reason for this seriousness might be related to Lyne's reputation. The director of such commercial hits as *Flashdance, 9 ½ Weeks, Fatal Attraction* and *Indecent Proposal* attempted to make a film that, for the first time in his career, would be taken seriously (Rachel Abramowitz 97). It is ironic that he chose a rather comic novel to showcase him as a serious director. Nevertheless, in 1990, when the book was optioned by Nabokov's estate, Lyne began to

fiddle with the idea of adapting it. He first wrote a treatment that started with Humbert in prison because, as Lyne saw it, condemning the character would "help our case," as reported by Abramowitz (81). He then called Harold Pinter to write a screenplay, which began with "My name is Humbert, you won't like me. I suffer from moral leprosy. Don't come any further with me if you believe in moral values." Naturally, this sort of prologue would not do for a serious film, so Lyne tried David Mamet, and finally settled for Stephen Schiff, a well-known critic who had never written a screenplay before. Later, Schiff would point out that Lyne's main concern was to make the public not hate Humbert (Kaye, par. 36). When Lyne started to shoot *Lolita*, the novel had sold fourteen million copies, but the 1962 version was what it was remembered for.

Contrary to Kubrick, Lyne did not face censorship restrictions while he was shooting *Lolita*. But he also had to cut scenes to receive an R-rating (meaning restricted) instead of NC-17 (forbidden for viewers younger than 17), a rating which limits the commercial success of a picture. Moreover, after the film was ready to be released, Lyne found out that no one in America wanted to touch it. The reason was the almost hysterical climate surrounding the issue of child abuse at the time. President Clinton had just signed the Child Pornography Act, which prohibited movies to portray minors playing a sex scene, even with the use of body doubles (David Gates and Corie Brown 70). To make matters worse, a judge in Oklahoma had just collected all the video copies of the German *The Tin Drum*, 1979's Academy Award Picture for Best Foreign Film, alleging that it contained a (totally implicit) sex scene between two minors (Jill Bernstein 24). The result of this paranoia was that studio after studio turned down the offer to distribute *Lolita*. Lyne complained, quite accurately, that if he "were doing a movie about a 13-year-old getting chopped up by a cannibal, there'd be no problem" (Gates and Brown 70). The film played

in European theaters for eight months before being released in the U.S., and it was only given an American premiere more than two years after its completion. Most reviewers paid more attention to the censorship polemic and to the subject matter of child abuse than to Lyne's film *per se*. One example was *Time* critic Richard Schickel, who wrote a favorable review praising Lyne for his elegant tones and defending it against censorship (83). Another was Anthony Lane, a former colleague of Stephen Schifff and a firm supporter of the 1997 version, though he pointed out that "The film is seldom funny; the novel is seldom anything but" (88). Leonard Maltin, author of the popular *Movie & Video Guide*, to this day considers Lyne's picture superior to Kubrick's, giving it an almost perfect score, three and a half stars out of four (823). But the reception to Lyne's *Lolita* was far from being one of universal acclaim. *Suck* magazine had this to say:

> [. . .] Lyne has misunderstood Nabokov from page one. Ambivalent about pedophilia? The novel is never ambivalent about Humbert. It's enthusiastic about him, supports him, and cheers his every move – because it's told in first person, *by the molester*. Thus, every perversion, every abuse, every day that Humbert holds Lolita prisoner is seen as Keatsian poetry. Of course it never condemns Humbert; it champions him. It's what you call irony, as big as a barn, and Lyne has missed it so completely you wonder if a man with his eyesight should be allowed to drive. (par. 8)

This acid comment by *Suck* magazine pans Lyne's film for leaving out the strongest feature in Nabokov's book, irony. Whether Lyne "missed" the irony or simply decided to diminish it in his version is unimportant. But *Suck*'s criticism verges dangerously on the prejudice of labeling some people irony blind, being thus inferior. And it indirectly stresses the sacredness of the literary source.

Most newspaper critics and laypeople insist on the issue of fidelity when analyzing an adaptation. Comparing the film to its "original" (already a more prestigious term) is inevitable. But several scholars who write about film adaptation defend the end of this

approach. After all, ten different people reading the same novel might have ten different interpretations and ways of adapting it to the screen. Moreover, theorists such as André Bazin (25) and Robert B. Ray (45) say that, instead of ruining its literary source, adaptation democratizes it, since cinema is more public than literature. For Ray, studies about adaptation must stop asking "the same unproductive layman's question (How does the film compare with the book?), [and] getting the same unproductive answer (the book is better)" (44). Brian McFarlane believes this line of study stressing fidelity needs to be revaluated, and probably left behind (9). James Naremore cites Kubrick's *Lolita* as an example of how most adaptations fail to live up to the reputation of their literary source since, in Kubrick's case, his film is a version of a canonical novel, and so it appears "doomed from the start" in comparison (7). For all the aforementioned scholars, faithfulness is a démodé subject. Nevertheless, they all talk about it, stressing that they are doing so in a non-evaluative way. Greg Jenkins and Dudley Andrew, for instance, discuss fidelity, though they are fast in clarifying that they are not judging the film. But can we really mention fidelity without being evaluative? Right after explaining that his mentioning of faithfulness is not of a judgmental kind, Jenkins concludes by saying, about Kubrick's *Lolita*: "a great novel was turned into merely a good film" (68). This sounds pretty evaluative to me. McFarlane, one of the loudest defenders of the end of the fidelity approach, had this opinion to offer about *Clueless*, an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma* that takes the action to the 1990s: it "will more than do until *the real thing* comes along shortly" (my emphasis; qtd. in Azerêdo 181). The real thing, to him, was a more faithful adaptation of the novel, one that respected the period and the language of the book – and one that, in fact, Azerêdo showed to be *less* faithful to the ironic spirit of *Emma*.

A different approach to film adaptation is what Belén Vidal Villasur suggests in her article "Classic Adaptations, Modern Reinventions: Reading the Image in the Contemporary Literary Film" (2002). She claims that classic adaptations of literary pieces are sophisticated in their mise-en-scene (5), especially period dramas like Lyne's *Lolita*. These kinds of movies demonstrate nostalgia for a period gone (10). Lyne's film may even be nostalgic of a time in which a grownup man could approach a pubescent girl without raising a lot of suspicion, in which people ignored the existence of pedophilia. Screenwriter Schiff argues that Lyne's movie had to be a period piece, because in the 90s every little girl would have been instructed by parents and teachers to be aware of perverts (Schiff xiii). According to Villasur, these nostalgic films act as "time-travel experiences, which can provide safe hiding places from the ironic turns of postmodernism" (6). Lyne's story happens in the 40s and, in a way, seems safer without the irony to subvert it. Kubrick's film, however, does not show any specific period in time. It was made in the early 60s and reflects that epoch. There is no nostalgia, so it dares to be ironic.

My thesis wishes to show how, in the case of *Lolita*, irony is transposed from the novel to the screen. I am not too interested in defining which *Lolita* is better, Kubrick's or Lyne's, nor am I in praising Nabokov's novel, defending it against boorish filmmakers who dared change a line of his text. At least publicly, Nabokov never said anything unpleasant about Kubrick's version, and Nabokov's heirs only had praise for Lyne's adaptation. Surely both films have their flaws and their qualities, but my aim is not to display them. Rather, I wish to discuss the irony in these adaptations. The first chapter talks about the narration in the two *Lolita*'s, and how it prompts irony, always bearing in mind Genette's distinction between mood and voice, or between character and narrator. The second chapter aims at showing how casting and characterization affect irony in the films. The third chapter

focuses on dialogues and their ironic implications. Finally, the conclusion to this thesis will attempt to demonstrate how the same novel can generate two very different readings, since one film adaptation can be considered a comedy and the other a drama. Kubrick and Lyne managed to reach such diverse approaches by controlling the amount of irony that goes into each film. Humbert the narrator in the novel complains: “Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with!” (32). Well, so do we. In the book, all we have are Humbert’s words. But, in the films, we have images. And, if these images support the words, we may be left with no irony. It might just not be a madman’s universe any longer.

CHAPTER 1

"A SHINING EXAMPLE OF MORAL LEPROSY" NARRATES: HOW THE NARRATIVE CHOICES IN THE NOVEL AND FILMS LEAD (OR NOT) TO IRONY

It is difficult to disagree with Sarah Kozloff in her powerful work about voice-over narration, *Invisible Storytellers* (1988), when she claims that "Stories depend upon who tells them" (62). Indeed, *Lolita* the novel is narrated in first person by the pedophile Humbert Humbert, and that makes all the difference. It would have been another book had it been narrated by Lolita, or by Charlotte, or by Quilty, or by the fake psychologist who opens the novel. Even if it focused mainly on Humbert, the story would have been radically diverse if it were told in third person. By controlling the narrative, Humbert offers us his point of view and no one else's. And, though he may experience a few changes during the story, his tone is vibrant and egocentric throughout. He is surely what Wayne Booth defines as a self-conscious narrator, one who knows he is writing his memoirs (*A Rhetoric of Fiction* 155), and he is doing so only two months after killing Quilty and seeing Lolita for the last time. More than that – Humbert knows he is being judged, since he addresses us, "ladies and gentlemen of the jury," again and again. The Humberts in the two film adaptations also narrate, even though the 1962 film goes beyond a strict voice-over narration, and although the pervert in the 1997 version adopts a solemn tone. These contrasts will be discussed throughout this chapter.

In *Narrative Discourse*, Gérard Genette points out that there is a big difference between mood, that is, between who is the character whose point of view guides the narrative, and voice, that is, who the narrator is. In this chapter, I will approach what Genette calls voice, and, in the following chapter, which deals with characterization, what

he calls mood. Genette dislikes the terms first-person or third-person narrator because, for him, the choices are between having "the story told by one of its 'characters' or [having] it told by a narrator outside of the story" (243-4). The real question, for Genette, lies "whether or not the narrator can use the first person to designate *one of his characters"* (244). The novel *Lolita* constitutes what Genette labels a homodiegetic narrative. In other words, it is told by a narrator who is a character in the story (244-5). In fact, Humbert's case is one which Genette refers to as extradiegetic-homodiegetic, that is, "a narrator in the first degree who tells his own story" (248).

Thus, Humbert's unreliability as a narrator is a matter of voice, not mood. Humbert is unreliable because there are several instances in which he is dishonest with his readers. An example of his dishonesty appears when, in defending pedophilia, he mentions Dante, who fell in love with Beatrice when she was only nine (19). But he "forgets" to inform us that Dante was also nine, and children's love for other children does not constitute crime. After Humbert delineates this brief history of literary pedophilia to justify his obsession with nymphets, he concludes, "But let us be prim and civilized. Humbert Humbert tried hard to be good" (19). By distancing himself from the narration and writing this passage in third person, Humbert is already being ironic, and he is also distinguishing his role as narrator from his role as character. As a narrator, he is witty and self-assured. As a character, or at least what comes through the dialogues, he is a coward, constantly frightened of being disclosed. The effect is as if he were talking behind people's backs.

But even though Humbert comes through as unreliable, we have to trust him in some matters. For instance, we have to take his word on that Lolita seduced him, not the other way around. His narration is too lively and full of details for us to discharge it, and besides, it is the only account of the facts we have. We do not know Lolita's version. True,

after their first sexual relation she tells him, "'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'" (141). But Lolita says so smilingly, and he believes – and so do we – that she is kidding, especially because she was not a "daisy-fresh girl," since she had had some kind of sexual experience with Charlie, a boy at the camp. Of course, we cannot believe our ears when Humbert admonishes Lolita, "'I am not a criminal sexual psychopath taking indecent liberties with a child. The rapist was Charlie Holmes; I am the therapist [. . .]'" (150). Humbert seems psychotic to us, his effect on Lolita is far from a therapeutic one, and Charlie was no rapist. We certainly cannot trust him on this, and we are willing to bet Lolita does not either.

But can we trust Humbert to be as handsome as he believes? Here are just a few examples of his vanity: according to his modest self, he is "an exceptionally handsome male; slow-moving, tall, with soft dark hair and a gloomy but all the more seductive cast of demeanor" (25), and "a handsome, intensely virile grown-up friend" (49); and he has "all the characteristics which, according to writers on the sex interests of children, start the responses stirring in a little girl: clean-cut jaw, muscular hand, deep sonorous voice, broad shoulder" (43). Humbert just cannot get over himself. If anybody missed any of his numerous descriptions, he reminds us again on page 104: "I do not know if in these tragic notes I have sufficiently stressed the peculiar 'sending' effect that the writer's good looks – pseudo-Celtic, attractively simian, boyishly manly – had on women of every age and environment." His effect, on us at least, is not "sending" at all – it is rather ridiculous that a person can be so much in love with his looks. But there is nothing present in his narration to prove him wrong. Charlotte does find him attractive and Lolita does too, or so he claims, and he infers that Charlotte is jealous of Jean Farlow, their neighbor (88). The two film

versions vary in how they transmit this important trait of Humbert's personality. Stanley Kubrick does not show Humbert praising himself, but by having all the women characters in the film falling for him, the director is, in a way, conveying Humbert's vanity. Jean is flirtatious with him, and so is Miss Starch, Lolita's piano teacher, not to mention Charlotte. Adrian Lyne's Humbert, on the other hand, is too deadly serious to be vain. Moreover, the Farlows and Miss Starch do not exist, so his relation with Lolita is more of a private affair.

More than any other character in the novel, Lolita and Charlotte do not really exist outside Humbert's narration. Booth mentions a narrator's privilege, or his or her access to what other characters think and know, and he affirms that "Complete privilege is what we usually call omniscience" (*Fiction* 160). Humbert has almost no privilege as a narrator. He is by no means omniscient. He ignores Quilty's mere existence, he wants to know as little as possible about Charlotte, and, towards the end, he admits how unfamiliar he was with Lolita's ideas: "[. . .] I simply did not know a thing about my darling's mind [. . .]" (284). He, as a narrator, even disguises most insight about himself as a character. But he has the privilege – power would be a better word – to mold the other characters, manipulating information about them. Charlotte, for one, has no life at all far from his very unflattering descriptions of her. Everything she says and does is channeled through him (more on this in the following chapter, about characterization). Lolita exists mainly through him, though she does have a past of her own. In Kubrick's version she even tells Humbert in the end, "I don't suppose it ever occurred to you that when you moved into our house my whole world didn't revolve around you." In the novel, Humbert points out that Lolita cries every single night (176). Lolita is strong and independent enough to be able to escape Humbert, leave Quilty, and meet and marry Dick. Hence, almost all of her universe revolves around Humbert's narration, but not all.

It is Quilty, however, that most definitely proves Humbert's lack of privilege as a narrator. Quilty certainly has a life of his own. In the novel we know of his existence through Humbert's clues – Charlotte mentions a famous playwright, and Quilty's brother, a dentist, is also suggested. In Lyne's film these hints are also present, and whenever Quilty appears his face is covered in smoke, making him a foggy character until Humbert finally finds out about him. This is coherent with the film's voice-over narration, which ignores Quilty until the end. In Kubrick's version Quilty is an extremely important character, and to solve the problem of Humbert's ignoring a person who appears so much, the story moves his death to the beginning of the picture, and the rest is told in flashback. This anticipation may not seem so outrageous considering that, in the novel, Nabokov gives us glimpses of Quilty and his fate as early as page 31. But in Kubrick's film Quilty is shown in several scenes in which Humbert is not even present. This is possible because, after all, the movie's narration does not happen all through Humbert.

Although Kubrick's film contains instances of voice-over narration, it is not wholly narrated by Humbert. To explain this, first of all, we need to define what voice-over narration is. For Kozloff, it is "oral statements, conveying any portion of a narrative, spoken by an unseen speaker situated in a space and time other than that simultaneously being presented by the images on the screen" (5). To illustrate, it is better to cite Lyne's version, in which voice-over narration is in full force. The voice-over narration present in the film fulfills all the conditions in Kozloff's definition so that it can be considered voice-over: we hear Humbert speaking (*voice*) and we do not see him narrating (*over*) (2-3). We should notice that voice-over narration is distinct from interior monologue, in which we hear the character's thoughts, though s/he is not narrating anything. For example, in

Kubrick's film there is a moment of interior monologue when Humbert looks at a gun and thinks about using it to kill Charlotte. These are his words:

> No man can bring about the perfect murder. Chance, however, can do it. Just minutes ago she had said it wasn't loaded. What if I had playfully pulled the trigger then? "She said it wasn't loaded. It belonged to the late Mr. Haze. She was having her morning tub. We had just finished talking about our plans for the future. I decided to play a practical joke and pretend I was a burglar. We were newlyweds and still did things like that to each other. As soon as it happened I called an ambulance, but it was too late." Simple, isn't it? The perfect murder.

This constitutes interior monologue rather than voice-over narration, for Humbert is simply thinking out loud. In interior monologue, which Genette prefers calling *immediate speech* (173), and which to him relates to mood, not voice, there is no time gap between past and present. The character is thinking without a clear-cut distinction concerning time.

Kozloff also distinguishes between types of voice-over narrators. There are frame narrators, or narrators whose words open and close a film; there are micro-narrators, or narrators whose voice appears in less than 25% of a film (52). The narrators that dominate a film she calls embedded narrators, and this is clearly the case with Lyne's Humbert. But the truth is that it is complicated to place Kubrick's narrator in any of the above definitions. In spite of Kozloff's belief that Kubrick's *Lolita* has as much of an unreliable first-person narrator as *A Clockwork Orange* (117), this is not a consensus among other scholars. Mario Falsetto, in his essay "Narrational Gaps: Absence and Presence in *Lolita,*" divides the film into thirty-five narrative units. Of the thirty-five, according to him, only five involve Humbert's voice-over. He also mentions that Quilty is so important in the film that his presence can be detected, either implicitly or overtly, in sixteen of the film's thirty-five narrative units (17). For Greg Jenkins, Kubrick's version still privileges Humbert's point of view, although the story no longer channels through him (38). For Pauline Kael, the film goes beyond adopting a simple narrator, and Peter Seller's routines as Quilty also serve as a

kind of narration, commenting on the action (205-6). Brian Henderson's observation comes in handy: he observes that voice-over narration in cinema can and is usually dropped in the course of a film, while it is rare for a narrator to disappear in a literary work (15).

I counted seven, not five, moments of voice-over narration in Kubrick's adaptation. They are mostly informative, helping us to locate the characters in space, as the first one shows ("Having recently arrived in America, where so many Europeans have found a haven before, I decided to spend a peaceful summer in the attractive resort town of Ramsdale, New Hampshire"), and time, as the fifth voice-over illustrates ("Six months have passed and Lolita is attending an excellent school where it is my hope that she will be persuaded to read other things than comic books and movie romances"). In only one of them is Humbert writing in his journal. But none of these bits of narration open or close the film, so calling Humbert a frame narrator is wrong. Since he is by no means an embedded narrator, maybe the term that fits him better, if we follow Kozloff's terminology, is that of a micro-narrator. Falsetto points out that "Despite the film's subjective voice-over commentary, Humbert does not control the fictional presentation. He does not really tell the film's story. The controlling point of view is more properly supplied by the film's overall narrating function. The voice-over is just one more element in that overall function" (19). Aside from Humbert's function as a micro-narrator, Kubrick's version also uses narration from the camera, one title saying "Four Years Later," one epilogue telling us of Humbert's death, a sign indicating where we are ("Camp Climax for Girls – Drive Carefully"), and Charlotte's and Lolita's letters to Humbert.

For ways of comparison, I counted seventeen moments of voice-over narration in Lyne's film, but all of them are much longer and cover more images than the voice-over in Kubrick's. Whereas the number of sentences together in all the moments of voice-over in

the 1962 film only amount to nineteen, this number rises to seventy-six in Lyne's version, showing how much Humbert controls the narrative here, though this Humbert, unlike the narrator from the novel, lacks irony. The first voice-over in the 1997 film includes a reference to Humbert's past. Right after describing Lolita's name, he goes into "But there might not have been a Lolita at all had I first not met Annabel." Other narrative sentences follow, always accompanying romantic and soft-focus images of Humbert and Annabel, when both were pre-teens. These sentences are very similar to the ones in the book, but there are a few details. Whereas the novel's Humbert ponders about Annabel, "She wanted to be a nurse in some famished Asiatic country; I wanted to be a famous spy" (12), the Humbert in Lyne's movie prefers "She wanted to be a nurse. I wanted to become a spy," with a brief pause between sentences, while the camera depicts young Humbert looking lovingly at this Annabel. By leaving out the words *famished* and *famous*, Lyne drains the irony out of the lines. When Humbert as a boy hears his Annabel died of Typhus four months later, he cries hopelessly. The purpose of this passage in the novel is to show the roots of Humbert's obsession for nymphets, but in Lyne's film it serves to humanize the narrator, as well as to set the tone for Humbert's persona: a man who suffers for love. The main difference, however, is in the delivery. The novel's Humbert is diffusive and cheerful, while Lyne's Humbert, impersonated by Jeremy Irons, is a tormented soul speaking in a very solemn tone. And there is no distinction between his narration and his character, both being eternal sufferers.

Jenkins draws the following conclusion about Kubrick's Humbert, the micro-narrator voiced by James Mason: "If the novel's narrator is garrulous to a fault, this new voice is subdued, terse, and measured" (38). Yes, but it is also capable of calling attention to itself when it calls Humbert "poor Humbert," something that Lyne never does. Lyne's film,

however, also uses other forms of narration besides Humbert's voice, such as signs, titles indicating dates, and Charlotte's and Lolita's letters. Not to mention that, for Kozloff, every film contains a narrating agent, even if the film does not include voice-over at all. This is the image-maker (44).

Because both pictures are narrated in more ways than just by using first-person voice-over, it seems adequate to compare how the films start. In Kubrick's version, the image-maker shows a hand painting the nails of a small foot. It is probably Humbert doing Lolita's toenails, a scene which is repeated when the "couple" is in Beardsley, and from the start it denotes Humbert's subservience to his obsession. The movie then follows to Humbert's long and sarcastic confrontation with Quilty, until the narrator kills the molester. Gene D. Philips states that this prologue at Quilty's mansion "firmly establishes the air of black comedy that permeates the picture" (102). If the very first scenes already help to set the tone of the films, then Lyne's adaptation opens with Humbert driving mindlessly on a deserted, bucolic road, crying and nearly crashing against a truck. He has blood on his hands, and he carries a pistol and a hairpin. For someone unfamiliar with the plot, it is possible to imagine that Humbert has killed Lolita. The voice-over narration soon complements Enio Morricone's romantic soundtrack and the images by saying, in a serious voice, "She was Lo, plain Lo in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always… Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lolita." This is almost identical to the extract from page 9 on the book, but somehow the irony no longer exists. This is so because, in the novel, this opening comes right after the fake psychiatrist's foreword, and because before going into the many varieties of her name, Humbert the narrator teaches the reader to pronounce her nickname: "Lo-lee-ta: the tip of

the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta" (9). These mere instructions already let us know we are entering a madman's universe.

We have evidence to affirm that Humbert is being ironic throughout his tale. In *A Rhetoric of Irony* Booth claims that the first steps a reader should take when suspecting irony are rejecting the literal meaning, trying a new meaning for the new utterance, and finally deciding on a new meaning (10-12). But Booth is being too reductionistic when he makes irony simply mean something else than what is written. The narrator in *Lolita* is ironic not because he means something else from what he is describing, but because of his tone. He sustains his ironic temperament throughout. For Linda Hutcheon, there are "five generally agreed-upon categories of signals that function structurally" in telling us that irony might be present in a text: changes of register, exaggeration or understatement, contradiction, simplification and repetition (156). In Nabokov's novel, the first and only change of register appears after the foreword. We move from a psychiatrist's erudite language to a narrator writing in first person, telling us how much he loves himself and nymphets. Occasionally, especially towards the end of the novel, Humbert attempts a few other changes of register when he tries to sound repentant for all he has done. But these are very short, inconsistent and unconvincing. We must keep in mind that the whole book praises what Humbert calls *nympholepsy.* Once or twice Humbert mentions guilt, but confesses that desire takes over and erases the shame (285). There are many examples showing that Humbert does not regret what he has done, but I will mention just one: "I would be a knave to say, and the reader a fool to believe, that the shock of losing Lolita cured me of pederosis. My accursed nature could not change, no matter how my love for her did" (257). He remains a pedophile, and his "accursed nature" includes not only his passion for nymphets, but also his passion for irony. After all, would someone who really

repents make such a brilliant defense of child abuse (and abusers) when he is writing this only fifty-six days after he has last seen Lolita?

> Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the majority of sex offenders that hanker for some throbbing, sweet-moaning, physical but not necessarily coital, relation with a girl-child, are innocuous, inadequate, passive, timid strangers who merely ask the community to allow them to pursue their practically harmless, so-called aberrant behavior, their little hot wet private acts of sexual deviation without the police and society cracking down upon them. We are not sex fiends! We do not rape as good soldiers do. (87-8)

For someone wishing to sound so repentant, Humbert surely seems to be enjoying the ride.

In the above quote from the book *Lolita* we can find other signals that indicate irony. The most flagrant one is in the last sentence, "We do not rape as good soldiers do," demonstrating contradiction. It is dubious whether good soldiers rape, or whether soldiers can be good at all. The whole passage points to a simplification and generalization of how sex offenders act and how unperilous they really are. Calling what child molesters do "practically harmless" is indeed an understatement that could only be made by a molester. The word *strangers* in the third sentence also calls attention to itself because we know Humbert is no stranger to his prey, as much as we know that most abused children are victims of relatives and friends, not strangers. Repetition occurs in this passage because of the echoes between the adjectives in the second sentence and the phrase "their little hot wet private acts of sexual deviation." The phrase "Ladies and gentleman of the jury" is in itself a repetition of a term Humbert uses throughout the book to approach us.

Then again, we have to take into account what Genette refers to as time of the narrating, which is an element of voice (215). Humbert, who adopts subsequent narration because he uses the past tense (Genette 217), is writing his memoirs from a psychiatric prison, awaiting trial for having murdered Quilty. This fact already foreshadows what is going to happen in the end. For Genette, "[s]ubsequent narrating exists through this

paradox: it possesses at the same time a temporal situation (with respect to the past story) and an atemporal essence (since it has no duration proper). [. . .] "The narrator's present [. . .] is a single moment without progression" (223). Before meeting Lolita in the novel, Humbert's past is narrated in very broad terms, retelling only a few experiences (in Kubrick's film, none). When they meet, it is as if time freezes. First there is a day-by-day account of his adventures trying to touch Lolita without her noticing, all of which are narrated through journal entries. When Lolita goes off to camp and he marries Charlotte, the narration becomes less detailed. After Humbert's first night with Lolita, his narrative includes only highlights of their days together. But overall, Humbert writes from prison, three years after he lost Lolita to Quilty. And still, he goes on narrating as if he is in heaven, long after he has been to hell. He narrates the pleasures in all details, and his remorse in passing. Humbert could have chosen to emphasize grief, as Lyne does, but his regretting moments in the novel are not much more than "[. . .] I held her quite hard and in fact hurt her rather badly for which I hope my heart may rot [. . .]" (205). Genette explains that the narrator can sound ironically superior to the character because they are distinct in age and experience (252). Hence, Humbert the narrator can be more ironic in the novel than his character. By the same token, the narrator can look back at his sordid affair with Lolita and attempt repentance, but the character does not.

Certainly the ironic signal that appears the most in the novel is exaggeration. Humbert's whole style is exaggerated, as if he were hysterical and too overcome with joy. For instance, right after citing some laws about the age limits for girls, he adds: "This is all very interesting, and I daresay you see me already frothing at the mouth in a fit [. . .]" (19). When Humbert refers to himself as a "pentapod monster" he is not only exaggerating – he is also echoing what Charlotte calls him after she reads his journal. That is, he does not go

very far in his condemnation of himself. But there may be yet another reason for Humbert's exertion of irony. According to Katharina Barbe, people use irony when they wish to criticize someone or something, but they still do not want the criticism to seem too harsh. Irony, thus, is a face-saving mechanism (97). So Humbert, by being ironic, in a way is also trying to save *his* face. Not taking himself too seriously is his method for not punishing himself for his deeds. For Booth, "All truths are dissolved in an ironic mist" (151). That is to say, Humbert's topic of choice is such a taboo that he cannot deal with it straightforwardly. He needs to recur to irony.

We can find some of the signals of irony that Hutcheon mentions (156) in both films, but the voice-over narration in none of them is very ironic. Kozloff consents that the image-maker can employ irony in pictures that do not use voice-over by manipulating the editing, lighting, camera angles and soundtrack. She cites the example of the camera focusing on the word *Rosebud* on the sled just as the fire consumes it in *Citizen Kane* (110). However, she explains, when a movie does use voice-over narration, two types of storytelling become visible (109). She claims that when voice-over is included there happens "a doubling of the source of the narrative, an image-maker and an imitation storyteller; thus, should the filmmaker wish, he or she can create an ironic distance between these two sources" (110). Within these two structures, the filmmaker may force some ironic disparities (110). Kozloff still reminds us that, if there is a discrepancy between the narrator's words and the film's images, we always tend to believe the images, not the narrator, based on the common misconception that the camera cannot lie (114).

The two film versions of *Lolita* take little advantage of giving the narrator an ironic voice. In both, the attempt is to make the voice-over more reliable and less ironic. Even in Kubrick's picture, in which Humbert acts as a micro-narrator, he is not necessarily

compromised, that is, he is not discredited in what he says by the images showing something contrary to his words. For Kozloff, micro-narrators can be easily put into question simply because they appear less (49). Granted, Humbert as a character may be compromised (more on this in the chapter about characterization), but not as a narrator. Though the voice-over becomes a bit more ironic as the film progresses, Humbert is still very timid if compared to the narrator of the novel. Kubrick's first voice-over has no trace of irony at all; its function is to tell us where Humbert is going. But the image-maker has some opinions about Humbert (the character, not the narrator), and he shares them with us. For instance, after Humbert sees Lolita for the first time, sitting under the sun, the editing cuts from a full-frame close-up of the nymphet to a clip from *Frankenstein*. This may suggest that Humbert is indeed a monster. Likewise, in the second moment of voice-over, when Humbert narrates "I know it is madness to keep this journal but it gives me a strange thrill to do so, and only a loving wife could decipher my microscopic script," the camera first exhibits Charlotte in a bad mood, serving breakfast to Lolita. After the narrator mentions the "loving wife," Lolita too gets into the frame, together with Charlotte. In a way, this shot is really asking who the loving wife is. It is denoting competition between the two women in the house. This narration, also present in the novel (42), is ironic because it foreshadows what is about to happen: Humbert will soon be marrying Charlotte, the loving wife who *will* decipher his microscopic script, and who will naturally be very upset by what she reads.

Humbert's third moment of voice-over in Kubrick's film, taken verbatim from the novel (75), is probably his most ironic in the movie:

> VOICE-OVER. The wedding was a quiet affair, and when called upon to enjoy my promotion from lodger to lover, did I experience only bitterness and distaste? No. Mr. Humbert confesses to a certain titillation of his vanity, to some faint tenderness,

> even to a pattern of remorse, daintily running along the steel of his conspiratorial dagger.

This is accompanied by images of Humbert locking himself up in the bathroom with his journal so he can have some privacy, with Charlotte after him. The sentences are already ironic enough – just by shifting from first to third person Humbert distances himself, making them ironic, while again telling us how vain he is – but the image-maker emphasizes the irony by starting the scene that precedes this voice-over with Charlotte waking up in a double bed, looking for "Hum" with her hand. But, before we see Charlotte, we are invited to look at Lolita's portrait on the bed table. This shot of Lolita's photo not only reinforces the competition between the two, but also creates the possibility, for a few milliseconds, that the woman in bed is Lolita, not Charlotte.

The sixth voice-over from Kubrick's film is also very similar to the lines in the novel (208): "We had promised Beardsley School that we would be back as soon as my [ironic pause] Hollywood engagement came to an end. Inventive Humbert was to be, I hinted, chief consultant in the production of a film dealing with existentialism, still a hot thing at the time." Again, Humbert speaks of himself in third person, always in a praising tone. We know Humbert is not going to Hollywood. As a matter of fact, in the novel, he plans to take Lolita across the Mexican border and then decide if he will marry her or dismiss her, now that she is getting older and his predilection is for pre-pubescent girls, not teens. In the book his cruel thoughts are also ironic because we suspect that Lolita has ideas of her own, and she will run away from him before he reaches a decision.

I have said in my introduction that the moment in which Humbert reencounters Lolita is the most touching in the novel, since it is then that he realizes, as a character, that he truly loves her and wants to live with her long after she has ceased to be a nymphet. This

is the point when the character meets the narrator, something that, according to Genette, usually occurs at the end (226). But even this poignant instant is contaminated by Humbert's crude remarks as a narrator, and also made considerably lighter by the introduction of Lolita's husband, Dick, who is a bit deaf. To demonstrate how much Humbert controls the narrative of the novel, it is even up to him to decide what and when Dick will speak. When Dick and Humbert are shortly left together, the latter narrates:

> I was sure that when finally [Dick] would open his mouth, he would say (slightly shaking his head): "Aw, she's a swell kid, Mr. Haze. She sure is. And she's going to make a swell mother." He opened his mouth – and took a sip of beer. [. . .] But presently I became sorry for poor Dick whom, in some hypnotoid way, I was horribly preventing from making the only remark he could think up ("She's a swell kid…"). (274)

All of Dick's presence serves as comic relief. Lolita has to shout when she is near him, and Dick reveals to have nothing to say to his father-in-law.

In Kubrick's version, Dick's presence and the comic relief he offers are maintained. But it is clever how the irony from the pages is transposed to the screen. Here, Dick spills a bit of beer on Humbert. And, when it is his turn to speak, he does say what in the book Humbert prevents him from saying: 'She's sure a swell kid, Professor Haze. She sure is. She's just nuts about dogs and kids. She's gonna make a swell mother too. Alaska's a great place for kids, you know. Lots of room for them to run around." Not only does Dick call Humbert Professor Haze, a name the narrator despises because it reminds him of his late wife, he also calls him "Dad." Lyne's version, adequately enough, ignores Dick. Humbert decides he does not want to meet him, and, as a result, neither does the viewer. There is little room for comic relief in this serious adaptation.

Lyne's movie is perfect for those viewers who judge quality in terms of fidelity to the source, and fidelity in terms of details. Lyne is very faithful to details: the "Old invalid

Miss Opposite" from the novel (50) comes to life in the film and waves from her veranda as Lolita leaves to camp; the dog that belongs to Quilty in the Enchanted Hunters Hotel is indeed a cocker spaniel (117); the nymphet has an ice-cream soda, cherry and all, before leaving Beardsley (207). The image-maker lingers on these shots, and the film is heavily edited. The slapstick sequence that appears in Lyne's version (Humbert testing Charlotte to see if she is asleep after he has given her sleeping pills) comes straight from the novel:

> The last dose I had given her [. . .] had knocked her out for four solid hours. I had put the radio at full blast. I had blazed in her face an olisbos-like flashlight. I had pushed her, pinched her, prodded her – and nothing had disturbed the rhythm of her calm and powerful breathing. However, when I had done such a simple thing as kiss her, she had awakened at once, as fresh and strong as an octopus (I barely escaped). (94)

There is even a nice touch of homage to the novel when Humbert closes the bathroom door in the hotel and in the next second he opens it, already in his pajamas, revealing how anxious he is. In the book, it goes like this: "I seemed to have shed my clothes and slipped into pajamas with the kind of fantastic instantaneousness which is implied when in a cinematographic scene the process of changing is cut [. . .]" (128). The film gives Humbert this "kind of fantastic instantaneousness" due to its editing. Everything in the movie seems carefully studied to match the novel – except that the tone is so different.

Lyne's *Lolita* can be considered to contain complementary narration, that is, a voice-over narration that does not go against the images and vice-versa. For Kozloff, "One of the hallmarks of complementary narration is a general harmony between the words, the tone of voice, the attitude of the narrator, the style of the images, and the mood of the music" (108). All those techniques in the film point to one direction only: making the movie as serious as possible. It is not that the voice-over is obvious and that it simply mimes the images, but the film offers no contrast between what is being shown and what is being said, or between Humbert as a narrator and as a character. Jeremy Irons' voice carries

absolutely no irony in his narration, though he borrows several lines from the lunatic narrator from the book. Irons is not as psychologically fragile or pathetic as are the Humberts in both the novel and in Kubrick's film.

The first images we see of Lolita in Lyne's picture come with no voice-over narration, just the image-maker as narrator. While Charlotte is showing Humbert her garden, he stares passionately at Lolita, who is lying down on the grass reading a movie magazine. Her transparent dress is wet from a sprinkler nearby, but then she looks up and smiles at him, revealing her braces. The film cuts from a full-frame close-up of Lolita to a smiling Humbert who then goes after Charlotte, asking her the price of the rent. As Anthony Lane muses in his positive review of the film, "Thankfully, the dreary erotic gag of [Lolita's] first appearance on the lawn – sprinklers spurting behind her behind – makes way for a more sober style" (89). This scene is bound to get laughs when compared to the prudish sequence introducing the nymphet in the 1962 version. However, it is unrealistic mainly because Humbert is left looking at Lolita while Charlotte goes on talking to herself. In the novel, the description of Humbert's first glimpse of Lolita is also an emotionally-charged moment for both the narrator and the character, though the former never lets go of his ironic verve, which culminates when he adds, "My judges will regard all this as a piece of mummery on the part of a madman with a gross liking for the *fruit vert*" (40). The only irony that survives in Lyne's scene is a brief reference to one more of Humbert's vanities in the novel, when he refers to himself and his "adult disguise" as "a great big handsome hunk of movieland manhood" (39). This is probably why Lolita is reading a movie magazine in the film, but the reference only works for those who remember the line from the novel.

Another example of how some very ironic comments in the novel are delivered straightforwardly in Lyne's version occurs when Humbert fantasizes about Charlotte's

death. In Humbert's narration from the novel, he says, "I long for some terrific disaster. Earthquake. Spectacular explosion. [Lolita's] mother is messily but instantly and permanently eliminated, along with everybody else for miles around. Lolita whimpers in my arms" (53). In the 1997 adaptation, while the camera shows shots of Lolita's legs, and of Charlotte bossing her to make her bed, Jeremy Irons gives Humbert a solemn voice that rants: "I longed for some terrific disaster. Earthquake. Spectacular explosion. Her mother instantly eliminated, along with everybody else miles around. Lolita in my arms." His tone does the trick to mark the distinction between the two narrations, but we can also notice the omission of certain words that make one passage ironic, and the other, serious. The Humbert from the novel imagines Charlotte "messily but instantly and permanently eliminated," and the word *messily* makes all the difference. It shows that Humbert not only dreams of Charlotte's death, but of her suffering as well. This detail gives Humbert a darker, more sadistic side. The Humbert in the movie simply wants her eliminated. Also, the disappearance of the verb *whimpers* is remarkable. First, because it gives another hint of Humbert's sadism. He longs to console Lolita for some tragedy he himself perpetuates. Second, the verb has a double meaning: "Lolita in my arms" is much less erotic than "Lolita whimpers in my arms," for *whimpers* connotes of sounds produced during sex. In this sense, the line from the novel is much more ironic, since wanting one's wife terribly killed in an explosion, consoling her child and having sexual fantasies hardly go together.

There *are* a few ironic touches in Lyne's film concerning narration. For instance, in the fourth voice-over Humbert expresses, "During the six weeks we've been married, I successfully avoided most of my husbandly duties." While this is being said, the camera shows shots of him mowing the lawn and washing dishes, which could be considered husbandly duties. But we know what duties he means, and that is the reason he gives

Charlotte sleeping pills. The eleventh voice-over, a line taken from the novel, is ironic because it for once refers to Humbert in third person: "Did Humbert hum his assent? Oh yes. I sealed my fate gratefully." The pun with the character's name and the verb *hum*, and the word *gratefully*, contribute to the irony, since at this stage in the plot the narrator is paranoid enough not to be humming or grateful.

Also, there are two instances in which the use of music in Lyne's film is ironic. The first happens when Humbert checks if Charlotte is asleep. A song coming from the radio plays "I'm in the mood for love," which cleverly contrasts with Humbert's lack of desire for his wife. The second occurs after Humbert and Lolita are being followed by Quilty, and their car has a flat tire. The song from the radio snaps "Open the door and let me in," a refrain that is soon repeated when Lolita is left alone in a hotel.

But for every one of those bits of irony there is a dramatic scene, and the image-maker focuses on several nasty pieces of narration that do not really connect to the story. Rather, they relate to the advertising school of filmmaking where Lyne comes from, and to the image publicity has built of nymphets. John Marks observes that the media has iconized nymphets, transforming them in "a child-slut making love to the camera, so to speak" (71). Some of the shots in Lyne's film are reminiscent of this icon. For example, the ways his Lolita (Dominique Swain) eats a banana or a cherry seem like a male sex fantasy. And, it looks, to go with these shots there are some scenes that focus on phallic symbols, such as a pencil being sharpened or a dog's leash being held by a middle finger. These are some annoying details that do not add anything to the plot, though they remind us of the director's style. But it is no less ironic that Stephen Schiff, the screenwriter of the 1997 film, has declared in an interview that Sue Lyon's Lolita looks like a porn star (Suellen Stringer-Hye, par. 16).

There are few scenes that occur in both films, but, in those that do, it is possible to see that Kubrick stresses the ironic, and Lyne, the romantic. In either case, both are less ironic than how it appears narrated in the novel. For instance, the moment in which Lolita runs upstairs to bid Humbert farewell, before leaving to camp, is only a paragraph long in the novel, but it gains importance in the films. In the book, Humbert narrates:

> A moment later I heard my sweetheart running up the stairs. My heart expanded with such force that it almost blotted me out. I hitched the pants of my pajamas, flung the door open: and simultaneously Lolita arrived, in her Sunday frock, stamping, panting, and then she was in my arms, her innocent mouth melting under the ferocious pressure of dark male jaws, my palpitating darling! The next instant I heard her – alive, unraped – clatter downstairs. The motion of fate was resumed. The blond leg was pulled in, the car door was slammed – was re-slammed – and driver Haze at the violent wheel, rubber-red lips writhing in angry, inaudible speech, swung my darling away [. . .]. (66)

This scene in Lyne's film captures all the details mentioned by Humbert's narration: Lolita is seen running in slow-motion, and then shots of her legs appear. Lyne uses no dialogue or voice-over in this scene, only romantic music – thus, we are left with Humbert the character only, not the narrator. Lolita jumps on top of Humbert, puts her legs and arms around him, and kisses him on the mouth. As she leaves, she gives him a sly look. This is much more erotic and explicit than in the novel. In Kubrick's film the romantic piano score prevails. Lolita gives Humbert a very brief kiss on the cheek and pleads "Don't forget me." Though the scene is dramatic, Lolita's line is ironic, for we know Humbert will never forget her, so her wish is quite superfluous.

In Kubrick's film, this sequence proceeds as Humbert, almost crying, goes to Lolita's room and throws himself at her bed. The maid appears and gives him a letter, remarking that Charlotte has ordered her to hand it to him. Therefore, Humbert does not suffer the initial suspense (and hope) he does in the novel, when he thinks the handwriting might be Lolita's. In the book Charlotte's confession is much longer (67-8), but Kubrick's

version seizes the gist of it, though the most ironic sentence – "Your old-world reticence, your sense of decorum may be shocked by the boldness of an American girl!" (68) – is left out. But the most interesting point in the picture is not necessarily Charlotte's letter, but James Mason's reading of her letter. It is he whose voice appears, not Charlotte's. As he reads, he comments on her ideas by using his facial expressions and tone of voice, while the romantic music remains low and unobtrusive. At first Humbert is perplexed, but his attitude gradually changes to a hysterical mocking of poor Charlotte:

> This is a confession: I love you. Last Sunday in church, my dear one, when I asked the Lord what to do about it, I was told to act as I am acting now. You see, there is no alternative. I have loved you from the minute I saw you. I am a [Humbert chuckles] passionate and lonely woman. And you are the love of my life. Now you know. So you will please at once pack and leave. This is a landlady's order. I am dismissing the lodger. I am kicking you out. Go! Scram! [Humbert ridicules her French] *Departez!* I shall be back by dinnertime. I do not wish to find you in the house. You see [Humbert sniffs], *chéri*, if you decided to stay, if I found you at home, which I know I won't [Humbert gives a knowing look], and that's why I'm able to go on like this, the fact of your remaining would only mean one thing. That you… [Humbert laughs hysterically; his laughter continues throughout], that you want me as much as I do you, as a life-long mate. And that you are ready to link up your life with mine forever and ever and be a father to my little girl. Goodbye, dear one, pray for me, if you ever pray.

Humbert goes on laughing. As he lies in bed, the camera moves from him to Quilty's ad on Lolita's wall. It is as if the film were tired of making Charlotte the victim of Humbert's disdain – now the trick is on *him*, who does not recognize his potential rival.

In Lyne's version, after Lolita leaves, a desolate Humbert sits in his studio. After a fade-out, Humbert reappears already in Lolita's room. He throws himself inside Lolita's wardrobe, but is interrupted by the maid with Charlotte's letter. The maid eyes him suspiciously and mumbles to herself as she leaves, "What the hell you doing in there?" Humbert sits down on the bed, with the letter in one hand and a doll in the other. Unlike

Kubrick's version, there is no laughter or music as the camera shows Jeremy Irons reading the letter, now with Charlotte's (played by Melanie Griffith) voice:

> This is a confession: I love you. I'm a passionate and lonely woman, and you are the love of my life. Now you know. So please, destroy this letter and go. I shall return by dinnertime and you must be gone by then [Humbert pauses, confused]. You see, *chéri*, if I found you at home [image dissolves to montage of photos from the 40s on Lolita's wall] the fact of your remaining would mean only one thing: that you want me as much as I do you [one of the photos shows a little girl with her father, mimicking Lolita's previous embrace with Humbert, and a housewife waving on the back. There is a red heart between father and child, and inside is scribbled "H.H."] as a life-long mate [the camera goes back to Humbert] and that you are ready to link up your life with mine forever and ever, and be a father to my little girl.

This scene ends with a close-up of Humbert, who resigns, sadly. The inclusion of the photograph, which also comes from the novel (69), is highly ironic, since it echoes Charlotte's request that Humbert should be a father to Lolita – and there is nothing Humbert wants more. But here his character does not really mock Chalotte, as the narrator does in the novel and as the character does even more in Kubrick's adaptation. The decision to have Griffith voicing the words of the confession already empowers Charlotte, making her considerably less ludicrous. I see it as a flaw in Lyne's narrative that his Humbert quickly accepts to marry Charlotte *after* she has exposed her plans of sending Lolita to a boarding school. Both in the novel and in Kubrick's adaptation, Charlotte only tells Humbert after he marries her, which makes sense. After all, he would not spouse a woman he despises if he knew he would seldom see Lolita.

Another moment that is present in both films is Lolita's letter to Humbert, after he has not seen her for three years, towards the end of the story. In the novel, the letter (266) is at least three times longer than in any of the films, and it is ironic because it includes Lolita's slang ("I'm going nuts," "really grand," "the dough will just start rolling in"). Lolita exposes her wit by writing "This town is something. You can't see the morons for

the smog," but this part disappears from the letter in the films. In Kubrick's version, this is rather an anti-climatic moment, for it comes right after Humbert leaves the hospital. The image shows us a sheet in a typewriter and the letter being typed into the paper. There is no voice, no music score, no reaction shots, just the sound of the typing as the letter writes itself: "Dear Dad, How's everything? I have gone through much sadness and hardship. I'm married. I'm going to have a baby. I'm going nuts because we don't have enough to pay our debts and get out of here. Please send us a check." The image then cuts to a car driving in a poor section of some city, with suspense music in the background letting us know of Humbert's state of mind.

In Lyne's film Humbert receives a manuscript letter. As he reads it, with his voice, romantic music plays. Humbert is seen smoking and seems quite composed. Although the letter is a bit longer in Lyne's version, informing us of how much money Lolita needs and that Dick has been offered a job in Alaska, there is no irony in it whatsoever. But the image cuts to Humbert drinking and practicing shooting on a shirt, which also reveals his intentions.

Lyne's film ends with Humbert looking down at a town as he awaits the police to arrest him. His voice-over says in a melancholy tone, "What I heard then was the melody of children at play, nothing but that. And I knew that the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that chorus." The words are accompanied by a close-up of his face, and then of Lolita in close-up looking at him, lying in bed, facing the camera. Thus, it ends with Humbert's serious self-condemnation, and then an informative title instructing that "Humbert died in prison of a coronary trombosis on November 16, 1950. Lolita died in childbirth on Christmas day, 1950." Curiously, it sets the date of their deaths back two years. The epilogue in Kubrick's film, on

the other hand, strangely "saves" Lolita, for the title card informs, "Humbert Humbert died of coronary trombosis in prison awaiting trial for the murder of Clare Quilty. The End." The letters cover the smiling portrait of a lady that appears in the beginning of the picture, symbolizing Quilty's death and, maybe, Lolita's loss of innocence. Though this last image is ironic, it is not nearly as ironic as the final pages of Nabokov's novel.

Yes, Humbert the narrator does point out, in the book, that he regrets the absence of Lolita's voice from the concord of children playing (308). But the paragraph that comes immediately after demolishes any sentimentality, for it describes Humbert's choice of a pseudonym for himself: "There are in my notes 'Otto Otto' and 'Mesmer Mesmer' and 'Lambert Lambert,' but for some reason I think my choice expresses the nastiness best" (308). Then he alleges he is against the death penalty. Humbert's very last words in the novel are directed to Lolita:

> One had to choose between C. Q. [Clare Quilty] and H. H., and one wanted H. H. to exist at least a couple of months longer, so as to have him make you live in the minds of later generations. I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita. (309)

Does this sound like a very regretful man? For Lyne, Schiff and Irons, he sure does, and they chose to make Humbert ashamed of his tale from the start. Kubrick and Mason evade the issue of guilt, though Humbert is punished for his deeds. Clearly neither of the Humberts that narrate the films is as ironic as the Humbert narrating the novel, who decides to express, after a hundred pages of cynicism, "Oh, let me be mawkish for the nonce! I am so tired of being cynical" (109). And then, of course, he succeeds in being cynical for the next two hundred pages.

CHAPTER 2

THE LOVELY LITTLE GIRL, THE OBNOXIOUS MAMA AND THE MONSTERS: IRONIC IMPLICATIONS IN THE FILMS' CASTING AND CHARACTERIZATION

In this second chapter, each of the four main characters in the novel *Lolita* will be compared and contrasted to their portrayal in Stanley Kubrick's and Adrian Lyne's films. After all, the "lovely little girl" is suddenly not so little in Kubrick's movie, and Charlotte, whom Humbert describes as "the obnoxious mama" in the novel, might not seem so obnoxious in Lyne's adaptation. Furthermore, Humbert is much less monstrous in either of the films than he appears in the novel. And Quilty's monstrosity is highlighted in the movies so the protagonist, Humbert, may come out not so horrible in comparison. All of these choices in the casting and characterization of the adaptations affect irony. In the films, the four characters are much more clear-cut to us, since now we have a flesh-and-bone image (that of the actor who personifies him) before us. They become less dependable on Humbert's biased narration to exist.

For Edgar V. Roberts, a writer indicates a character to the reader in four ways: by what the character says and, in the case of the omniscient point of view, thinks; by what he does; by what others comment about him; and by what the narrator has to say about him (56-7). The Humbert in the novel dominates the narration to the point that he is the author of other characters' dialogues and actions, so we have to trust what he tells us the characters say to and about each other. In the films, on the other hand, these characters can stand on their own, without Humbert's interference.

In his book *Stars*, Richard Dyer points out that characters might experience change throughout the plot and that, if possible, we should be able to glimpse at their inner life

(94). In a film, this inner life can be demonstrated through voice-over, but also through reaction shots, close-ups, and point-of-view shots (Dyer 118-121). For example, in Kubrick's picture there are quite a few point-of-view shots when Humbert is in bed with Charlotte. The camera shows him looking at Lolita's portrait, thus telling us who he is really thinking about. Lyne's picture ends with a close-up of Humbert, followed by one of Lolita, to reveal the narrator's state of mind. Tics also make us more familiar with a character's inner life. An example is Mason's nervous laugh and his habit of repeating what another character has said, or Irons' bewildered stare.

Dyer calls attention to how even a character's name in a film or novel will be used to individualize him and to disclose some of his personality (109). Humbert Humbert is quite a ridiculous name by itself – admittedly a pseudonym to hide the narrator's "real" identity – and it reminds us of both humming and humping. The repetition of the name as surname is already ironic. Lolita is reminiscent of Poe and his Annabel Lee, and today it has become synonymous with nymphets, a term coined by Nabokov. But Lolita is also a diminutive of Lola, which means "strong woman," according to *babynamesworld.com*, a dictionary of baby names. Lola itself is a nickname for Dolores, which means *pains* in Spanish and refers to the Virgin Mary, Lady of Sorrows. Humbert also calls her Lo and Dolly, hinting at how multifaceted Lolita is. Charlotte is a rather heavy first name, and the surname Haze certainly has implications, as it means mist and fog. It can be related to Humbert's treatment of Charlotte, since he wants to describe her as least as possible. Another definition of *haze* is confusion, a mental state in which one cannot think clearly. But Haze is also Lolita's last name, and when applied to her it may recall the misty characteristics of dreams. As a verb, *haze* has yet another meaning, and by this we can observe how carefully Nabokov named his characters: *to haze* is to make someone,

particularly a student, uncomfortable by having him or her do unpleasant things (*Webster*). The irony here is that, since it is Lolita's last name, and since Humbert created it when writing his journal, it may well imply that Lo is hazing poor pupil Hum. Another ambiguous name is Clare Quilty, for Clare can be used for both sexes. And Clare is anything but clear or transparent, so its use is ironic. His last name makes us think of a puzzle, of a quilt, of parts put together, which is pretty much what the narrator presents us with before he himself deciphers who is the person following him. Not to mention that Quilty rhymes with *guilty*, which is certainly not how he feels but it can be how Humbert feels, or so he says.

I. HUMBERT

In the novel, though Humbert is hilarious and a lot of fun to read, he is a monster. His plea to us – "[. . .] I insist upon proving that I am not, and never was, and never could have been, a brutal scoundrel" (131) – is pretty useless, given the circumstances, and towards the end he changes his mind about his innocence and decides to call himself a "pentapod monster" (284). But examples of his monstrosity include: before bedding Lolita, thinking about giving her sleeping pills so he can abuse her without her noticing, and, if anybody suspects anything, blaming one of her classmates (71); and actually giving her pills after Charlotte's death (122). He is the author of such phrases as "How sweet it was to bring that coffee to [Lolita], and then deny it until she had done her morning duty" [meaning sex] (164-5). He threatens to send her to a reformatory if she spills out about their affair to anybody (149). He daydreams about producing a "Lolita the Second," that is, Lolita's daughter, so he can have sex with her after Lolita ceases being a child. He would then dump the original nymphet (174). He starts paying her for sex, and *then* steals all her

money so she will not have enough to run away (185). He gives her 65 cents so she will fondle him while he contemplates one of her classmates. He hurts her physically (205). When Lolita complains of pains, he thinks it might be polio, and his remark is "Giving up all hope of intercourse, I wrapped her up in a laprobe and carried her into the car." (240). Do the film versions soften his character? You can say that again.

It is no coincidence that Harold Pinter's *rejected* screenplay for Lyne began with "My name is Humbert, you won't like me. I suffer from moral leprosy. Don't come any further with me if you believe in moral values" (Kaye, par. 35). Stephen Schiff chose to condemn his deeds and create a sympathetic Humbert (xvi), and for that his screenplay was accepted. In Lyne's movie, Humbert is seen giving sleeping pills to Charlotte (though not to Lolita), he pays the nymphet in exchange for sexual favors, and he slaps her twice. But he does so with a it-hurts-me-more-than-it-does-you face, and he desperately apologizes afterwards. In the most polemic scene in the film, it is suggested that he is having intercourse with Lolita as she reads the comics page in the newspaper. But since she starts enjoying it, it makes it okay, less shocking. Humbert suffers more than his victim throughout the picture. He is simply a man in love; Quilty is the evil figure, and Lolita is not such an innocent girl herself. And, if these points are not sufficient to absolve him, he is deeply sorry for everything and will never forgive himself.

In the 1997 adaptation, he appears to be doomed from the start. Although the episode involving Annabel is taken from the novel (11-3), it is used in Lyne's film as a justification for Humbert's obsession. Director Sidney Lumet calls this resource of going back to a character's childhood to justify what he has become the "rubber-ducky school of drama." In other words, because someone took a character's rubber ducky away from him in infancy explains why he is now a child molester or a "deranged killer" (qtd. in Kozloff

Dialogue 45). In the novel, the narrator's glee in describing his adventures with Lolita eliminates any trace of romanticism concerning Annabel, and he still has eyes for other nymphets. But Lyne's film is so devoid of irony that this incident with the narrator's first love takes epic proportions.

In Kubrick's movie, Humbert does not perform any of the monstrous acts that the narrator does in the book. In fact, it is Lolita who comes up with the menace of being sent to a reformatory. In the novel, Humbert tells Lolita what will happen if she informs anyone about them:

> "While I stand gripping the bars, you, happy neglected child, will be given a choice of various dwelling places, all more or less the same, the correctional school, the reformatory, the juvenile detention home, or one of those admirable girls' protectories where you knit things, and sing hymns, and have rancid pancakes on Sundays. [. . .] Don't you think that under the circumstances Dolores Haze had better stick to her old man?" (151)

The discrepancy is flagrant, for in Kubrick's film the dialogue goes like this:

> LOLITA. Promise me you'll never leave me. I don't ever want to be in one of those horrible places for juvenile delinquents.
> HUMBERT. Whatever makes you think that that would happen to you?
> LOLITA. I know it would. And anyway, I'd rather be with you. You're a lot better than one of those places. You will promise, won't you?

Humbert even consoles her. His line "Whatever makes you think…?" is ironic for those familiar with the novel, since we know he is the one who threatened her in the first place.

Most probably one of the reasons Kubrick avoided portraying Humbert as depraved was because any kind of sex perversion was forbidden by the Production Code. Kubrick even considered changing the story to that of a middle-aged man married to a fifteen-year-old girl that destroys his life (LoBrutto 215). Nevertheless, in the finished product, Humbert appears to be less of a monster than in the book. For Mario Falsetto, he is "the real victim in the film" (20). Throughout his analysis, Greg Jenkins repeats that Humbert has

been sanitized. He points out that the other characters around Humbert, such as the Farlows, are so immoral that, in comparison, "Humbert ironically (but deliberately) seems a paragon of dignity and restraint – he even declines to dance" (42). No, he does not slap Lolita nor gives her pills nor pays for sex. And yet, there is something about his face that makes us realize that he is a very edgy character, much more so than in the 1997 version. His twisted look and his fidgety smile tell us he is not to be trusted.

Although the Humbert in the book is committed to a sanatorium before (34) and after (255) meeting Lolita, and both films omit that, in Kubrick's picture Humbert does not look altogether sane. There are several allusions to his state of mind. Lolita calls him "creep," "jerk," "kinda slimy," and "crazy." He sort of admits his insanity at the end by replying to her, "I've never been less crazy in my life." In a phone call, Quilty implies that Humbert should see a psychiatrist. Humbert tries to strangle the nurse who let his Lolita leave the hospital, and the doctor threatens to put him in a straightjacket. By this episode, we can see that Humbert is not okay. The nurse cries, "Doctor, this man must be psychotic," and we believe her. After a male nurse guesses that he is drunk, Humbert acquiesces, "Yeah, that's right. I've been drinking much too much. I have personal problems, you understand?" In a film like Kubrick's, which puts so much emphasis on the word *normal*, Humbert is clearly anything but. He is much more psychotic than in Lyne's version.

Moreover, Humbert's sadistic side also comes through more strongly in Kubrick's than in Lyne's film. In Lyne's picture, Humbert never thinks of killing Charlotte. But in Kubrick's, not only does he fantasize about her death, he celebrates it in the bathtub scene as well. In the novel, the moments following Charlotte's tragic accident are very funny, narrated with extra irony. Humbert gets drunk, receives the Farlows, who are afraid he

might kill himself, and convinces them that he is Lo's real father. The narrator's irony culminates in the sentence "The distraught father went on to say he would go and fetch his delicate daughter immediately after the funeral, and would do his best to give her a good time in totally different surroundings [. . .] – granted, of course, he lived" (101). There are so many ironies in this single sentence that we better follow an order: first, Humbert is not distraught. He is exhilarated that Charlotte died. Second, he is not Lolita's father. Just because he persuades the Farlows to believe so does not make him her father. Third, is Lolita delicate? Fourth, we have an idea of what he means by doing "his best to give her a good time." Last, this bit of a phrase, "granted, of course, he lived," is even more ironic by the addition of "of course." We know he has absolutely no intention of committing suicide.

But he continues with "Speaking of busybodies, I had another visitor – friend Beale, the fellow who eliminated my wife" (102). Humbert might see Beale as a fellow and friend, but this is ironic, for a person who runs over one's wife would not be considered a friend. Wayne Booth alerts that we might suspect irony when an "incredible passage" appears "in the midst of straightforward writing" (*Irony* 73). The problem is that, in the novel, there is almost no straightforward writing. The "incredible passage," thus, would be the ones in which Humbert seems repentant, one second of straightforward writing in the middle of a vast ironic account. This is also a clash of style, another indication of irony. So the novel is structurally ironic even when the narrator tries to escape being ironic for a few seconds. But there are some passages that are more incredible than others. Mr. Beale uses a diagram to show Humbert how the accident happened. This is Humbert's narration:

> [. . .] my grotesque visitor unrolled a large diagram he had made of the accident [. . .], with all kinds of impressive arrows and dotted lines in varicolored inks. Mrs. H. H.'s trajectory was illustrated at several points by a series of those little outline figures [. . .] used in statistics as visual aids. Very clearly and conclusively, this route came into contact with a boldly traced sinuous line representing two consecutive swerves – one

> which the Beale car made to avoid the Junk dog (dog not shown), and the second, a kind of exaggerated continuation of the first, meant to avert the tragedy. A very black cross indicated the spot where the trim little outline figure had at last come to rest on the sidewalk. (102)

This is in itself an incredibly ridiculous passage. It is inconceivable that a man would really depict a horrible event with a diagram to a widower.

In Lyne's film, this whole episode is ignored: a melancholy Humbert simply burns Charlotte's letters in the fireplace, which is ironic, in a way, for those who know the book, for in it Charlotte had earlier asked Humbert to romantically burn her love confession letter. He is indirectly fulfilling her wish. But this is only ironic for those familiar with the novel. In Kubrick's version, however, the aftermath following Charlotte's death is undoubtedly the most incredible scene in the film. Humbert is drinking in the bathtub, quite drunk and happy. The Farlows enter, Jean is ashamed of seeing him naked, and he pushes the curtain. The couple sees the late Mr. Haze's gun, concludes that Humbert is contemplating killing himself, and John pleads, "Try to think of your poor little Lolita, all alone in the world. You must live for her sake." John is unaware that this is all Humbert thinks about, and that makes his comment ironic. Then, still in the bathroom, the threesome receives a fourth visitor, the father of the driver who ran over Charlotte. He brings no diagram, but his all-teeth smile, and Humbert's replies, stating that he does not blame him for anything, and the fact that, of course, this social gathering takes place in a bathroom, makes this passage incredible and very ironic. The film itself cruelly disrespects Charlotte's memory.

In the novel, Humbert the narrator mentions having a nervous tic in which his face twists (161) and describes himself as possessing "a cesspoolful of rotting monsters behind his slow boyish smile" (44). James Mason, who personifies Humbert in the 1962 version, captures this tic and this overstrung smile perfectly, making his character in the film always

seem on edge. As Pauline Kael admits, the actor "is in command of a comic style: the handsome face gloats in a rotting smile"(207). For critic Anthony Lane, Mason characterizes Humbert so well that it becomes "a Mason-shaped role" impossible for another actor to repeat (88).

Mason (1909-1984) may have been too old to play Humbert, who in the novel is not exactly a middle-aged man, but merely 39. But since Sue Lyon, who plays Lolita, does not look like twelve either, Mason escapes. He was 52 when he made the film, and had been in 62 pictures before Kubrick's. After he had a stable career in England, he moved to Hollywood in 1947, where he became a star. He was nominated for an Oscar for *A Star is Born* (1954), the first of three nominations in his career. In the same year he played Captain Nemo in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. But he was also famous for playing villains, such as in *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1952) and in Hicthcock's *North by Northwest* (1959). In *Julius Caesar* (1953), for instance, he was not a hero, but Brutus (David Quinlan 286).

Coincidently, Jeremy Irons, who was 48 when he played Humbert in the 1997 version, has also made a career of playing villains. Although he first called attention for the TV series *Brideshead Revisited* (1979), Irons soon moved to edgy roles (*The Mission*, for example) and was labeled "the thinking woman's sex symbol" (*www.jeremy-irons.com*). He won an Oscar in 1991 for his murderer in *The Reversal of Fortune*, a prize he should have won for his portrayal of deranged twins in *Dead Ringers* (1988). After his Oscar he chose even riskier and more ambiguous roles in *Kafka*, *Damage*, and *M. Butterfly*. In 1996 he interpreted a writer interested in a young woman in *Stealing Beauty*. But undoubtedly Irons is more known to the mainstream public for his villain in *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995) and for dubbing Scar, the scheming uncle, in *The Lion King* (1994).

In almost any review of *Lolita,* critics make a case of stressing the beauty of both Mason's and Irons' voices. For Lane, who only has praise for the two actors, they have "two of the most beautiful voices in the history of cinema. [Mason] gave us his Americanized Yorkshire with a faint serpentine hiss; [Irons], a lonely drawl" (88). It is important for us to focus on their voices because, as Kozloff reminds us, stars' voices can be recognized right away, and they already say something about the character portrayed (*Dialogue* 91). Mason's and Irons' voices are manly and seductive, giving more credibility to the Humberts they play.

Hitchcock often said that "casting is characterization," that is, when a role is taken by a star, the character he plays becomes influenced by the star's persona, or public image (qtd. in Gianetti 256). Casting such charming men as Mason and Irons to portray Humbert already gives away how the directors wish us to see Humbert, and this is part of the scheme to soften his character. Casting, in this case, is used to make the character more likable. Moreover, the casting choices for Humbert validate the narrator's opinion of himself as an attractive man.

If the Humberts vary from novel to films and from film to film, they also show differences within the same vehicle. Humbert as a narrator is one kind of man who contrasts to how he behaves as a character. To use Gérard Genette's distinction between mood, related to characterization, and voice, related to narration, Humbert is more of a *Narrator = Character* ("the narrator says only what a given character knows") than a *Narrator > Character* ("the narrator [. . .] *says* more than any of the characters know") or a *Narrator < Character* ("the narrator says less than the character knows") (189). Humbert the narrator knows more than Humbert the character (for instance, about Quilty) because he is telling the story in retrospective, but he does not let us know more than his character

knows. *Lolita* constitutes, in Genette's terms, a narrative with internal focalization (the point of view is only Humbert's), and it is fixed, for everything passes through Humbert, and the story does not change focus to other characters (189).

In the novel Humbert the character is a coward, and Humbert the narrator even condemns him for his lack of courage regarding Charlotte. The narrator comments that the character's reaction to Charlotte's decision of sending Lolita to summer camp is "lame, lamentably lame!" (64). Later on, the narrator confesses to be scared of his wife: "Bland American Charlotte frightened me. My lighthearted dream of controlling her through her passion for me was all wrong. I dared not do anything to spoil the image of me she had set up to adore" (83). Even when he as a character finally speaks up to Charlotte to let her know she cannot decide everything alone, he is not as firm as he wishes: "I love being bossed by you, but every game has its rules. I am not cross. I am not cross at all. Don't do that. But I am one half of this household, and have a small but distinct voice" (91). Nevertheless, it works: Charlotte's reaction is to fall on her knees and beg his forgiveness.

Thus, in the novel, Humbert is ironic, but much more as narrator than as character. In fact, in his interaction with Lolita, he is usually the victim of her ironies. Lolita is ironic, and so is Quilty, while Charlotte certainly is not. According to Linda Hutcheon, irony involves hierarchy and takes into account the social status of the participants (99). It seems that the highest in rank in the hierarchy of the book would be Humbert the narrator, then Lolita, then Quilty, then Humbert as a character, and finally Charlotte. In Lyne's picture, all irony is toned down, so we are left with a kind of hierarchy based on authority, not irony, and Humbert the character comes through as first in rank. In Kubrick's film, the hierarchy of the novel is inverted. Quilty clearly becomes the most ironic character, and Humbert's force as a narrator disappears, since he has very few voice-overs.

Strangely, in Kubrick's movie Humbert the character seems a bit more courageous than the character in the novel. He sometimes uses irony to respond to Charlotte. When she proudly rants "I have a glorious surprise for you," Humbert interrupts her twice, first with "One of your dramatic sweets?", then with "The Farlows have been arrested?" Using irony when speaking to Charlotte is something Humbert never dares do in the novel. His remarks in the film can be seen as verbal irony, which is used as a politeness mechanism to criticize friends and enemies without being too harsh and without losing face (Katharina Barbe 118). Indirectly, Humbert *is* criticizing Charlotte's desserts and friends, but he is employing irony to save his face and Charlotte's. However, is he really being polite when he knows she cannot understand irony? We also have to consider his tone in these interruptions, whether it is "gently teasing or devastatingly harsh", and his motive, whether it is "benign playfulness or corrosive critique" (Hutcheon 12). Neither his tone nor motive would look too harsh – except that we are aware of what Humbert really thinks of Charlotte.

In Lyne's film, Humbert never confronts Charlotte. But he does in Kubrick's version, and his speech and tone seem firmer than in the novel. This is how he responds:

> Even in the most harmonious households such as ours, not all the decisions are taken by the female. Especially when the male partner has fulfilled his obligations beyond the line of duty. When you wanted me to spend one afternoon sun-bathing by the lake, I was glad to become the bronze, glamour boy for your sake, instead of remaining the scholar. Even there, I'd scoot along after you like an obliging little lap dog – oh yes, I'm happy, I'm delighted to be bossed by you, but – every game has its rules.

Charlotte's reaction is also entirely different: instead of apologizing, she leaves the room, infuriated. In her next scene, she will already have Humbert's journal in her hands.

On the other hand, even if Humbert is braver in Kubrick's movie, Mason's acting makes him appear constantly insecure. Kael pins it down: 'Humbert has it coming – *not* because he's having 'relations' with a minor, but because, in order to conceal his sexual

predilections, he has put on the most obsequious and mealy-minded of masks" (206). Humbert uses a disguise as a conservative hypocrite to hide the fact he is a pedophile. As Kael prefers it, "Humbert is a worm and Quilty knows it" (207). Yes, and a lot of the irony in Kubrick's picture comes from Quilty's realization. Never is Humbert more of a coward than when he is with Quilty or with his impersonation, Dr. Zempf. Humbert endlessly stammers in Quilty's presence. But, though Quilty (and us) is sure that Humbert is a worm, Charlotte does not see him as such, and nor does Lolita, at least in the beginning. In Lyne's film Humbert is so serious that this worm-like quality is totally lost.

II. LOLITA

In the films, especially in Kubrick's, Humbert is much less in control of the narrative, so we are able to observe Lolita in situations where Humbert is absent. There are three such moments: in the scene where Lolita and Charlotte discuss Quilty (I will talk more about this further in this chapter, when dealing with Charlotte); in the brief scene when Lolita is waiting to go on stage, and she and Quilty look at each other; and when she types the letter to Humbert. Actually, in this scene we do not see Lolita, not even her fingers, but we understand that it is she, alone, without Humbert's supervision, writing that letter. In Lyne's movie, Lolita is never out of Humbert's sight.

Not much is said *about* Lolita in either film because we see her constantly. In Kubrick's movie, Humbert calls her a "horrid little psychopath" during a fight, and Charlotte frequently disapproves of her acts, but that is about it. In Lyne's film, Charlotte also shows her disdain for Lolita, but much less than in Kubrick's, where the tension between mother and daughter is amplified. In the novel, Charlotte describes Lolita to Humbert as a "regular pest;" moody, and "[s]ullen and evasive. Rude and defiant" (46). In

the beginning, Humbert is so infatuated with the physical side of Lolita that he disagrees with anything Charlotte says about her. But after he starts living alone with the child, he labels her his "vile-tempered companion" (141) and adds, "Mentally, I found her to be a disgustingly conventional little girl [. . .] She it was to whom ads were dedicated: the ideal consumer, the subject and object of every foul poster" (148), and he has to confess to us, "Charlotte, I began to understand you!" (149)[2]. Later on in the book, Humbert admits that the trips around the country were also meant to improve Lolita's mood, "to keep my companion in passable humor from kiss to kiss" (154). Lolita does appear to match these descriptions, so there is not much irony in how the other characters define her.

The irony concerning Lolita really occurs, in the book and in both films, firstly when we find out (or are led to believe) that her first sexual relation with Humbert is not her first. She has had experience with Charlie in the camp. This is totally new to Humbert and to us. Making the prey look like the predator is, of course, a cliché in discourses of rape and sexual abuse, but the irony of Humbert's "discovery" almost makes him the victim, for he was ignorant of Lolita's past. The second irony comes when the school dean (Miss Pratt in the novel and in Lyne's film; Dr. Zempf in Kubrick's), summons Humbert to talk about Lolita. This is the first time an outside member of the family depicts her, and this description could not have been more inaccurate. In the novel, Pratt's conversation with a very nervous Humbert runs five pages (193-198), and what the dean says is pretty much summarized in Lyne's film: "She's a lovely child, Mr. Haze, but the onset of sexual maturing seems to be giving her trouble. [. . .] So you see, it is the general impression that fourteen-year-old Dolores is morbidly disinterested in sexual matters." Not only that, Pratt

[2] Lolita represents American consumerism, as opposed to Humbert's aestheticism. By thinking of her as disgusting, Humbert exempts himself from any guilt. It works for him along the same lines of "blaming the victim" in stereotype discourses about rape.

believes someone should instruct Lolita on sex. The irony resides in Pratt's sheer ignorance that Lolita has had plenty of sexual "instruction." As a matter of fact, it represents dramatic irony at its best.

In Kubrick's film this whole part is even wittier, because these sentences are no longer emitted by Pratt, but by Quilty, disguised as Dr. Zempf, a psychologist with a thick German accent. This is what he pretends to read from a report about Lolita:

> "She is defiant and rude. Sighs a good deal in the class." She sighs, makes the sounds of uh-ah. "Chews gum vehemently," all the time she is chewing this gum. "Handles books gracefully," that's all right, doesn't really matter. "Voice is pleasant. Giggles rather often and is excitable." She giggles at things. "A little dreamy. Concentration is poor." She looks at the book for a while and then she gets fed up with it. "Has private jokes of her own," which no one understands so they can't enjoy them with her. "She either has exceptional control or she has no control at all." We cannot decide which. Added to that, just yesterday, Dr. Hombarts, she wrote a most obscene word with the lipstick, if you please, on the health pamphlet. And so, in our opinion, she is suffering from acute repression of the libido of the natural instincts [hits the table for emphasis].

These lines delivered by Quilty become more ironic for we know he is not a psychologist, and is probably improvising the whole report as he goes along.

Not only Quilty, but also Lolita often mocks Humbert. She is wistful and ironic, and examples of such can be observed in the novel and the films. For instance, in Lyne's version, as in the book, after Charlotte orders her to wash her hair, she answers that she has done so already, but a "couple [of] months ago." This is in tandem with the novel, in which the narrator himself concedes that Lolita's only sanitary act is brushing her teeth (49). But more often than not it is not Charlotte but Humbert whom she scoffs, as we can see in this dialogue from Lyne's picture:

> HUMBERT. Lo, listen to me. You're very young and you never realize that people can take advantage of you.
> LOLITA. Very hard to imagine.

This is similar to a scene in Kubrick's movie, in which Humbert prohibits Lolita from interacting with boys:

> HUMBERT. I don't want you around them. They're nasty-minded boys.
> LOLITA [chuckling]. Oh! You're a fine one to talk about someone else's mind!

Both excerpts reveal Lolita's irony and also Humbert's paranoia about losing his nymphet to other men. And Lolita is wholly conscious of Humbert's fear.

However strange it may seem, though there is a lot more drama in Lyne's version than in the novel or in Kubrick's film, the character Lolita in the 1997 adaptation is *less* dramatic. She is seen crying, and she gets slapped by Humbert twice, but the lasting effect is that she is not an unhappy child. First of all, she smiles quite a lot, much more than in the novel or in Kubrick's movie. And she seems to enjoy sex. There is no evidence of this whatsoever in the book. On the contrary, Humbert describes her as "indifferent to [his] ecstasy" (166) and states, "Never did she vibrate under my touch, and a strident 'what d'you think you are doing?' was all I got for my pains" (166). In Lyne's movie Lolita is definitely not the "Frigid Princess" that Humbert dubs her in the novel (166).

Moreover, in the book and in Kubrick's film we can sometimes feel some of Lolita's despair. When the novel's Humbert tells her that they shall move on after she is cured of her cold, because, after all, "there is no point in staying here," Lolita replies, "There is no point in staying anywhere" (244). In Kubrick's a similar dialogue occurs much earlier, when Lolita is crying after she finds out her mother is dead.

> LOLITA. [. . .] everything's changed all of a sudden. Everything was so, oh, I don't know, *normal*.
> HUMBERT. Lolita, please, please don't cry. We'll do things. We'll go places.
> LOLITA. But there's no place to go back to.

Even in this dramatic bit there is irony, for Lolita stresses the word *normal*, a trademark in Kubrick's film. Quilty has just used the term several times in his conversation with Humbert. And how normal were things really when mother and daughter competed for the same man?

Both Sue Lyon and Dominique Swain, who played the title character in the 1962 and 1997 adaptations, respectively, were newcomers to the film industry when they started filming *Lolita.* Since they were not stars then, their personas did not influence the character. But audiences still had expectations about the character Lolita. Kubrick directed his movie only seven years after the novel was released, so we would suppose that the character was not so well known yet. But we would be mistaken. So much controversy surrounded the casting of Sue Lyon, who did not look twelve, that we can guess the public already had preconceptions about the character as early as 1962. According to LoBrutto, Lyon was 14.4 when she was cast, and 14.9 when the film wrapped. In the novel, Lolita is 12.8 when Humbert, 39, moves to their house, and more than 17 when the novel ends (204). As Kael ironizes in her defense of the film, "wasn't the girl who played Lolita practically a *matron*?" (204). Kael cherishes Lyon's looks because, for her, prepubescent girls in the 60s did not dress like children. She praises Kubrick for not having depicted Lolita in schoolgirl attire (208). In fact, in the novel, Lolita does not wear childish apparel either. Rather, Humbert mentions "her boy's shirt" (46) and her "rough tomboy clothes" (48).

In Lyne's movie, Swain's Lolita is a bundle of energy. She dances, jumps, jokes with the policeman on the road, kids around while dining in the restaurant, and flushes the toilet while Humbert is in the shower. She even drives the car a bit. In the novel, Humbert would never teach Lolita to drive for she would then be able to escape (229). But all this action contributes to making the 1997 Lolita less dramatic. Lane points out that Swain's

"untrammelled vitality" causes the Lolita in Kubrick's film to appear comatose by contrast (88). But giving Lolita more energy has a purpose: by creating a less-victimized nymphet, Lyne's film can portray Humbert as the real victim.

Ironically, Lyon's age was still an issue for reviewers decades after Kubrick's movie was released, perhaps even more so when compared to Swain. Jack Garner has this to say about the 1997 adaptation: "Dominique Swain, who was 15 when the movie was filmed, is a major find as Lolita, bringing the exact balance of seductive sexuality and childishness (Sue Lyon in the '62 film seemed to be 12, going on 30)" (par. 10). Hence, though Swain was about the same age as Lyon, her portrayal of Lolita seems more adequate to most reviewers – mainly male reviewers – than Lyon's. After all, she wears braces and braids during the entire picture, plus girls' clothes and lipstick. But this is the standard male sex fantasy of what a nymphet should look like in the 90s, exactly this mix of "sexuality and childishness." Schiff the screenwriter finds this a *good* thing: "our Lolita has magic, but it is not the rather porny allure that Sue Lyon had in the Kubrick film. Dominique Swain [. . .] lives very much along the line between childhood and womanhood that Lolita lives along, and she slips back onto the childish side at least as often as she surprises us by her womanliness" (Suellen Stringer-Hye, page 2, par. 4). It is ironic that a man who wrote the script of a wet Lolita in a transparent dress would call attention to Lyon's "porny allure." The truth is that, as professor Ellen Pifer observes, today's Lolita has become an icon who bears little resemblance to the character in the novel (qtd. in John Marks 71). This is the "child-slut making love to the camera" that Marks points out (71), and what Lyne does is match the male audience's expectations of Lolita. The problem is that, as Rick Groen notes, though the film is set in the late 40s, Swain "looks and sounds exactly like the modern Malibu teenie she is" (par. 6).

Not to mention that both actresses seem too *young* to play Lolita at the end. More than three years have passed for the character, and Lyon and Swain look precisely the same, except for the fake belly to simulate pregnancy. It is at this point in the novel that Humbert makes his most honest love declaration: "I insist the world know how much I loved my Lolita, *this* Lolita, pale and polluted, and big with another's child, but still gray-eyed, still sooty-lashed, still auburn and almond, still Carmencita, still mine" (278). Only that she is not his at all now, since she is married to deaf Dick. Humbert breaks down after he asks Lo if there is any chance of her going back to him, and she answers, in Lyne's movie, "No, honey, no. I'd almost rather go back with Clare." Jenkins claims that Kubrick's movie, by ignoring this line, makes Lolita and Humbert more wholesome (67). That may be so, but Lolita's attitude towards the whole encounter is so carefree that her last lines in the movie are "Hey listen! Let's keep in touch, huh? I'll write to you when we get to Alaska!" These are delivered to a desperate Humbert who leaves, crying, without looking back. Lolita sounds as repentant in the film as Humbert does in the novel.

III. CHARLOTTE

When analyzing Charlotte Haze, the most important point to bear in mind is how excluded she is from the narrative of the novel and films. It is not only that she dies before the middle of the story and is quickly forgotten afterwards – even before her tragic death she is constantly left out. One of the reasons for that is that the novel's narrator loathes her, and everything she does and says is filtered through him. But another motive seems to be related to irony. Since irony has the power to exclude, and Charlotte does not understand irony, she remains the target of Humbert's wit while she is alive. But the same irony that excludes may also include (Hutcheon 54). By excluding Charlotte, Humbert is including us,

readers and spectators, in a sort of bond against her. We become part of a community, what Booth calls "amiable communities" (28) and Hutcheon "discursive communities" (94), because we get the joke on Charlotte. Throughout her analysis, Hutcheon points out that irony has a sting, an edge, so it can hurt. The irony used in the novel and in Kubrick's film certainly hurts Charlotte. In Lyne's picture, where irony is kept to a minimum, Charlotte comes out pretty unscratched.

The Humbert in the book hates her at first sight, and he continues to be biased against her throughout. He never offends her directly, but against her back – that is, to us, his readers – Humbert the narrator calls her "bland" (41), "phocine mama" (42), "the Haze woman" (45), "indefatigable landlady" (47), "the old cat" (47), "detested mamma" (49), "big Haze" (51), "obnoxious lady" (55), to pinpoint just some of his insults. He also describes her as fat (43), but we should take this with a grain of salt. For Humbert, any woman who does not have a nymphet's skinny arms is fat. Strangely enough, he calls Charlotte fewer names after he marries her – *then* he only thinks about killing her and giving her sleeping pills to avoid sex. Nevertheless, he offers several descriptions of her. His first depiction already shows all his contempt:

> [. . .] there came from the upper landing the contralto voice of Mrs. Haze, who leaning over the banisters inquired melodiously, "Is that Monsieur Humbert?" A bit of cigarette ash dropped from there in addition. Presently, the lady herself – sandals, maroon slacks, yellow silk blouse, squarish face, in that order – came down the steps, her index fingers tapping upon her cigarette. (37)

His next sentence, "I think I had better describe her right away, to get it over with," is even unnecessary. We know by now he disapproves and does not want to talk about her. But he does, without ever hiding his dislike: "The poor lady was in her middle thirties, she had a shiny forehead, plucked eyebrows and quite simple but not unattractive features of a type that may be defined as a weak solution of Marlene Dietrich." And then, to add insult to

injury: “She was, obviously, one of those women whose polished words may reflect a book club or bridge club, or any other deadly conventionality, but never her soul; women who are completely devoid of humor [. . .]” (37). She is also completely incapable of understanding irony, the narrator could add. Later, Humbert does his best to visualize her as a sexual partner: “[. . .] with all possible caution, on mental tiptoe so to speak, I conjured up Charlotte as a possible mate” (70). Of course, Humbert being Humbert is not prone to easy compliments: “I am even prepared to tell my tormentors that perhaps once or twice I had cast an appraiser’s cold eye at Charlotte’s coral lips and bronze hair and dangerously low neckline, and had vaguely tried to fit her into a plausible daydream. This I confess under torture” (70). Finally, he concedes that she has some charm, kind of, and defines her as a “handsome woman” (72). But Humbert does not like women. He likes girls.

Humbert is in such control of the narrative that we only know what he wants us to know about Charlotte. His descriptions of her actions are more or less like this: “Charlotte went up to a little table of imitation mahogany with a drawer. She put her hand upon it. The little table was ugly, no doubt, but it had done nothing to her” (92). Every time he talks about her he finds room for criticism. His interpretation of her is that she pretends to know French, puts on airs, and hates her child. Through him – that is, through a narrator who claims that “her autobiography was as devoid of interests as her autopsy would have been” (80) – we learn that Charlotte is jealous, possessive, authoritarian, melodramatic and religious. But is she really? We cannot know for certain. The passionate letter she writes Humbert is the best example of how much she is presented through his lenses. Even this letter is really Humbert’s recollection of it, for he admits ha ving torn it to pieces.

Naturally, Charlotte appears more in both film versions of *Lolita* than in the novel itself, because the images cannot be filtered through Humbert. We see Charlotte talking and

behaving instead of just hearing Humbert's critical account of how she talks and behaves. But before even seeing Charlotte we see Shelley Winters and Melanie Griffith. Both actresses are stars, and, as Gianetti explains, "[w]hen a star rather than a conventional actor plays a role, much of the characterization is automatically fixed by the casting [. . .]" (243). We already expect Winters and Griffith to act a certain way. And, since these actresses influence how we react to their characters, it seems relevant to dwell on their personae.

In the case of Winters, it is hard to determine whether she was an actor star (a star who impersonates a different character from her persona) or a personality star (a star who rejects roles against her type) (Gianetti 237). Though today Winters is more remembered as the obese hero in *The Poseidon Adventure*, in 1962, when *Lolita* was released, she was still seen as the girl next door. As Quinlan renders, her common touch "could make her characters at once comic and moving" (452). In her prime, she played several working-class victims, as indicated by her roles in *A Place in the Sun* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*, for which she won an Oscar. But she was also a pretty successful comedian, and her persona was closer to that of a wise-cracking and outspoken woman than to that of a victim. She was constantly on the cover of fan magazines, she dated Marlon Brando, and she was married to two actors, among them Italian star Vittorio Gassman. Hence, her life was rather public. When she personified Charlotte in *Lolita*, she was forty years old and had been in over fifty movies. She definitely became a personality star in the 60s, but in the time of Kubrick's picture her status was still undefined. Thus, we cannot affirm that her role constitutes what Dyer labels a "perfect fit" between star and character (129). In other words, that her persona came close to the character she played. This is certainly the case of Sellers playing Quilty, but we must bear in mind that Winters was not only a comic actress. However, her role as Charlotte was enlarged to give her more star exposition, so much so

that she felt insulted when the studio campaigned for an Oscar nomination in a supporting role, since she believed that she, and not Sue Lyon, was the female lead.

Then again, it is no easy task to determine what Melanie Griffith's persona is about. The daughter of Tippi Hedren, Hitchcock's star in *The Birds*, Griffith's adolescence was public domain, her bouts with alcohol and drugs being tabloid's favorites. When she was only 14, she moved in with her mother's costar, actor Ben Johnson, then 22, whom she married and soon divorced. In 1980 Griffith was ran over by a car when she left a restaurant drunk, an accident that almost cost her life. After another failed marriage, with actor Steven Bauer, Griffith remarried Johnson in 1989. They were still together when Griffith left him for Spanish star Antonio Banderas, also married at the time. Griffith is famous for spelling out her sex life in interviews (*www.askmen.com*). As an actress, she acted in her first movie still in her teens, and had participated in 24 films before *Lolita.* Like Winters, she was also 40 when she played Charlotte in Lyne's version. Her roles in *Body Double* and *Something Wild* gained her respect, but she only got critical appraisal for *Working Girl*, for which she was nominated for an Oscar.

Dyer claims that, if a star's persona is similar to the character she portrays, it is less difficult to believe in that character (125). Somehow it seems more natural to see Winters as the over-the-top, histrionic Charlotte than Griffith. Either because of the tone of Lyne's film or because that, as a star, Griffith had restraints about impersonating a character who looks ridiculous, her Charlotte is certainly played down if compared to Winters'. True, this character in Lyne's picture, like in the novel, has no scenes alone, distant from Humbert's vision. But, distinct from the book and from Kubrick's version, Griffith's Charlotte is quite respected by both the voice-over and the camera-eye narrations. After all, Irons' Humbert does not laugh out loud, as does Mason's, when reading Charlotte's letter. And this

Humbert has no drunk scenes in the bathtub to celebrate her death. On the contrary, he looks at her corpse and is very distraught, muttering "Oh God. Oh God." Just as he feels guilty for what he has done to Lolita, he blames himself for Charlotte's death.

The moment in Lyne's film that Humbert is disrespectful of Charlotte occurs when he goes to the doctor to order sleeping pills for her (he indirectly compares her to a cow), and in the beginning of the movie, when she tells him, "Harold and I, the late Mr. Haze, we simply adored Mexico [. . .], a culture that sophisticated and we think of *them* as primitive. I mean, look at us!", and Humbert avows: "Indeed, yes." Charlotte has no clue that Humbert is being ironic and calling her primitive, for she is irony-blind. Still in the initial scenes of the picture, Griffith's Charlotte can be seen flirting with Humbert when she purrs, seductively, "I myself just cherish the French tongue" and "This is not a neat household, I confess, but I assure you, you would be very comfortable here, very comfortable indeed." But she lacks the hysterical passion and energy that Winters' acting conveys.

Humbert's voice-over narration in Kubrick's film does not ridicule Charlotte, for it cannot, unlike the Humbert in the novel, quip that her face when reading his journal "was not a pretty sight" (95). But the film itself, beginning with Winters' exaggerated (and efficient) characterization, takes care of gibing poor Charlotte. For instance, right after she prides herself in being president of the book club, she adds: "Oh, [Quilty]'s a very stimulating type of man. He gave us a talk on, hmm, uh, Dr. Schweitzer and Doctor Zhivago." Charlotte is making an effort to appear intellectual, something she is not. We know, and so does Humbert, that the people she mentioned are both physicians, not writers. By placing a gross mistake in a character's mouth, the author – in this case, Kubrick – is hinting at irony (Booth *Irony* 57). He is also attesting that this character is not very clever.

In the 1962 version, Charlotte has some scenes unwatched by Humbert, as when she dances with Quilty and when we see her crying, after Humbert ignores her attempt to seduce him. She also has the following dialogue with Lolita while Humbert is far away in the kitchen fixing the child a sandwich:

> LOLITA. Did you have a good time dancing with Clare Quilty?
> CHARLOTTE. Of course. He's a very erudite gentleman.
> LOLITA. Yeah, I know. All the girls are crazy about him, too.
> CHARLOTTE. That's neither here nor there.
> LOLITA. Since when?

This passage is ironic for more than one reason. First, because it takes place behind Humbert's back. This time he might be the victim of irony, since he is oblivious to what is going on around him. As Booth says, "Dramatic irony always depends strictly on the reader's or spectator's knowing something about a character's situation that the character does not know" (*Irony* 255). Thus the dialogue is dramatically ironic because we are acquainted with something that Humbert is not. Naturally, the same standard makes Charlotte the eternal victim of irony, for she knows nothing about Humbert's real intentions with her daughter. But, by the same token, Charlotte's observation that Quilty is "a very erudite gentleman" is ironic, and again, the joke is on her. We have seen her flirting with him, so we know she is not interested in his erudition or in his being a gentleman.

Charlotte is so oblivious to Humbert's feelings for her that, by delivering lines such as "You do arouse the pagan in me" and "Oh, you man!", she becomes even more ludicrous. But at the same time she is made ridiculous, we can experience the passion Humbert mocks her for in the novel, when he writes "[. . .] she [would] stare at me with intolerable tenderness as I consumed my ham and eggs. [My] face might twitch with neuralgia, but in her eyes it vied in beauty and animation [. . .]. My solemn exasperation was to her the silence of love" (77). We have these highly ironic moments of "intolerable

tenderness" in Kubrick's picture, as when Charlotte stands outside the bathroom door complaining that she is lonesome, but they are missing from Lyne's film. We see Griffith's Charlotte sitting on Humbert's lap while he is trying to read, but that is about it.

Another moment in Kubrick's film in which Charlotte is alone, without Humbert's supervision, occurs after she discovers his journal. She directs her monologue to her late husband's ashes:

> Harold, look what happened, I was disloyal to you. I couldn't help it, though. Seven years is a very long time. Why did you go and die on me? I didn't know anything about life, I was very young. If you hadn't died, all this wouldn't have happened! [she hugs the urn] Oh darling, forgive me. You were the soul of integrity. How did we produce such a little beast? I promise, I promise, I promise you that I'll know better next time. Next time it's going to be somebody you'll be very proud of, Harold [she throws herself on the floor].

This is the last time we see Charlotte alive in the 1962 film, and her final words seem less pathetic than the rest of her dialogues. What makes them ridiculous is that she is talking to an urn. But it should be pointed out that she is much angrier at Lolita, whom she calls "a little beast," than at Humbert. This stresses the competition between Charlotte and Lolita while also validating Humbert's argument that the nymphet is the seducer.

Kael was among the first to praise Winters for her portrayal of Charlotte. She claims that, in spite of the Charlottes in the book and in the film being different, the actress's exaggerated characterization ends up being a success. "Winters' Charlotte is a triumphant caricature," advocates Kael, "so overdone it recalls Blake's 'You never know what is enough until you know what is more than enough'"(208). The reviews about Griffith were more mixed. Although her role in *Lolita* is considered by many a highlight in her career (*www.askmen.com*), Michael Atkinson calls her "monstrously awkward" (par. 2), and James Berardinelli concludes that she is so "stiff and unconvincing" that the film improves after her character dies (par. 7). But the truth is we cannot expect Griffith to repeat Winters'

acting. After all, Griffith has to follow a dramatic tone, whereas Winters can act as farcically as she wishes because she is in a comedy. The tone of the films contrasts so much that it would look very strange indeed if both Charlottes behaved the same way. However, it is possible that Winters contributes more to making the 1962 version a comedy than Griffith does to making Lyne's film dramatic. But that happens because of her character, who remains pitiful even when acted straight.

IV. QUILTY

Quilty, of course, is another matter entirely. He is in no way a pitiful character. In fact, he can be seen as Humbert's alter-ego, as if Quilty were just the id, without the superego to restrain him. Humbert himself admits that "[. . .] his genre, his type of humor – at its best at least – the tone of his brain, had affinities with my own" (249). Indeed, *tone* is an important term here, for it is Quilty who, when freed, can dictate the tone of the oeuvre. In the novel, we already have a pretty mad narrator, so Quilty's absence until the last part is not necessarily felt. But in Kubrick's film, in which the narrator is controlled, Peter Sellers as Quilty sets the tone. Screenwriter Schiff jealously complained that Kubrick used Sellers so ostensibly much that his film should have been called *Quilty* instead of *Lolita* (xvii).

More than any other actor in any of the two films, Sellers is crucial in determining the character's temperament, since he is the personality star par excellence. Sellers (1925-1980) was already quite famous in 1962, especially in England, where he had starred in movies like *The Ladykillers* (1955) and in radio shows for several years. In those shows, and also in the film *The Mouse that Roared* (1959), Sellers interpreted various roles. But in the U.S. he was not even close to the celebrity he would become after starring in Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), and he was still years behind his popular acclaim as Inspector

Clouseau in the *Pink Panther* series. Part of *Lolita*'s success is due to Sellers, who was allowed to ad-lib at will, contributing many lines that were not in the script (*www.petersellers.com*). He is the reason why Kubrick's version is so much of a wild, black comedy.

In Lyne's version, Quilty barely appears until the end, a fact that obviously makes him less important a character than in Kubrick's movie. Before the end, whenever Quilty is present in Lyne's film, he is covered in smoke, following the structure of the novel, in which Humbert is unaware of his existence. But here Quilty, as played by Frank Langella, appears sleazier than in the novel or in Kubrick's movie. It is not only that he tells Humbert to enjoy his first night with Lolita – he is made to appear more evil so the contrast between him and the tormented Humbert can be more striking. Garner thinks that "Langella's Quilty is more clearly deviant" than Seller's character (par. 11). Surely Langella makes his Quilty deviant: he tries to buy Humbert into letting him live in exchange for his erotica collection, his house, his cleaning lady's granddaughters, and watching executions. Though this is also in the novel (301-2), there we do not see Humbert shaking his head in horror. On top of it all, Langella's Quilty insinuatingly tells Humbert that he loves children *and* fathers, and when he says so he exposes a naked thigh, suggesting that he is more than a pedophile – as if making him bisexual would label him a greater pervert.

A few words about Langella: born in 1940, he is a celebrity on Broadway, much more than on the screen. Though *Lolita* was his twenty-second film, he is more famous for his turn in *Dracula* (1979), where he became "visually the best vampire since Christopher Lee" (Quinlan 254). Mostly a character actor, Langella has played villains and supporting comic roles, as in *Dave* (1993) and *Junior* (1994). His acting in *Lolita* is audacious mainly for appearing naked. Langella trespasses one of the taboos in Hollywood, that of male

frontal nudity. When his Quilty runs around the house, his robe opens. This is a detail in the novel that is respected in the 1997 version. My guess is that Lyne put it there to make his film seem more of an art movie, since frontal nudity is not part of mainstream cinema.

It is not that Quilty is not a pervert in Kubrick's film. It is just that Humbert in the 1962 version is quite twisted himself, so his contrast with Quilty is not so huge. Nevertheless, Lolita still likes Quilty after he has left her, as she reveals in her description to Humbert: "He wasn't like you and me. He wasn't a normal person. He was a genius. He had a kind of, um, beautiful, Japanese, Oriental philosophy of life." This is ironic because we do not see a trace of this Oriental philosophy in Seller's characterization. Lolita proceeds in telling Humbert what happened next, when she ran away with Quilty: "The only problem with it was, he had such a bunch of weird friends staying [in his ranch]… Painters, nudists, writers, weight lifters. [. . .] He wanted me to cooperate with the others making some kind of a…You know, an art movie." We know what kind of "art movie" she means, even if Kubrick, for censorship matters, could not mention it. In Lyne's film, Lolita can be much more direct: "Everybody knew he liked little girls. [. . .] But I wasn't going to do all those things. Two girls and two boys… Three or four men. And Vivian was filming the whole thing. I said, 'I'm not gonna blow all those beastly boys. I want you.' So he threw me out."

The bit of farce used in Quilty's death at the end of Lyne's *Lolita* goes against the overall tone of the film. Sure, it is very faithful to the novel, including the pink bubble of blood escaping Quilty's mouth as he dies, but it seems to belong to another movie. In Kubrick's, the long exchange between the two pedophiles opens the picture, and its black comedy helps setting the tone of the entire film. In the novel this episode is also long and frequently hilarious, running more than ten pages (294-304). It ends after Humbert shoots

Quilty, washes his hands, and, when finding people in the house, announces: "I have just killed Clare Quilty," to which one of the guests responds "Good for you" (305). Since this is told by the witty narrator with his usual verve, neither Humbert nor Quilty seems repentant. Quilty is not a monster, and Humbert is not shocked nor despaired as he hears his indecent offers. In Lyne's film, however, since everything has been so serious up to that point, Quilty's irony clashes with the style of the rest of the movie. Only now are we hearing dialogue such as:

> HUMBERT. I want you to concentrate. [. . .] You're about to die. You want to be executed standing up or sitting down?
> QUILTY. Let me think, let me think. That's not an easy question. [. . .] Look, I made a mistake, which I regret, sincerely. I couldn't have any fun with your Dolly. I'm practically impotent, to tell you the melancholy truth.

This clash in style happens mainly because Quilty is ironic to the point of no return. Lyne's film succeeds in domesticizing Humbert, but it fails in doing so with Quilty. If, as Hutcheon points out, irony is used to emphasize (48), Quilty's ironic spirit most probably emphasizes sexual perversion in Lyne's movie. His wit just stresses his perversity, contrasting with Humbert's solemness. It is as if the movie were stating: Humbert is a pedophile, but at least he is a serious pedophile who suffers for his sins.

As much as *Lolita* the novel would have been radically different if it had not privileged Humbert's point of view, its two film versions would indeed be distinct had other actors been used. Not only that, if these same actors had chosen to portray their characters in a diverse way, the two adaptations would also change. Thus, the actors and their characterization affect the tone of the films, and the tone of the films also determines the acting style. Charlotte, for one, can be over the top in Kubrick's picture because his film is a comedy, but Melanie Griffith has to tune down her performance in Lyne's movie because it is such a dramatic piece. The obnoxious mama is then made more or less

obnoxious depending on the film; the lovely little girl may not be so little, or else the censors would not even have allowed Kubrick to go ahead with his picture; and the two monsters in the book will have distinctive degrees of monstrosity – Quilty will become more evil than leading man Humbert, and Humbert shall be more monstrous in Kubrick's film than in Lyne's.

CHAPTER 3

"I'M VERY FOND OF CHILDREN MYSELF": IRONY IN THE NOVEL AND FILMS' DIALOGUES

This third chapter presents an analysis of dialogues in *Lolita* the novel and in the two film versions by Kubrick and Lyne, and shows how irony was lost or gained in the process of adaptation. Just as narration and characterization can contribute to the ironic flavor of a work of art, dialogue helps to define the genre of a novel and film. A dramatic work will rarely contain a lot of sarcastic dialogue, nor will a funny piece be filled with melodramatic speech between its characters. But, incredibly enough, there is very little written about film dialogue in the academic world. And yet, dialogue is an essential part of film. If it were not so crucial, Quentin Tarantino would not have become the most influential name in the cinema in the 90s, nor would critics call attention to the wordless half hour of *Cast Away.*

In spite of its importance, dialogue has faced plenty of prejudice over the decades, as Sarah Kozloff reveals in *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (2000). In her introduction she discusses how dialogue has been neglected by scholars (though there is plenty of theory on theater dialogue), and how even the commonplace assertion that film is a visual medium already excludes sound (4). The reason why there are so few books on dialogue may be because of the prejudice that speech "contaminates" a visual art like cinema, bringing to a new medium a theater's trademark (6-7). This prejudice is similar to the one against voice-over narration, which states that voice-over in movies should be banned because it is just a sample of how cinema copies literature. Kozloff claims that even the fact that we call moviegoers *viewers*, instead of *listeners*, is biased (14). Filmgoers are considered to be

voyeurs, for they are spying actions and relations between other people (the films' characters), but filmgoers are also eavesdroppers, for they hear speech that apparently is not directed at them (14).

Kozloff notes that film dialogue is by no means natural speech, since it is usually much more straightforward than our everyday language (16). Dialogue is rather an imitation of speech (18). Kozloff concludes that "[t]he defining characteristic of film dialogue is that *it is never realistic; it is always designed 'for us'"* (121). That is why, according to her, dialogue that attempts to preach to the audience may be so irritating – not only because it is usually badly written, but also because it breaks the illusion that we are eavesdroppers. In those moments, we know the characters are speaking to us (56-7). This "preaching session," so common in mainstream movies that try to convey a message, happens much more in Lyne's movie than in Kubrick's. To reinforce that child abuse is wrong, Lyne makes his Humbert express his regret for having caused Lolita harm, as when he asks her, "Lo, can you ever forget what I've done to you?", and when he accuses Quilty of, by running away with her, impending his salvation ("You cheated me of my redemption"). In truth, Humbert is neither talking to Lolita nor Quilty here – rather, he is addressing us to claim how miserable he feels for his sins.

However, conveying messages is just one of the many functions of dialogue, albeit the most criticized one (57). For Kozloff, another function is the anchorage of the diagesis, that is, letting us know where we are, creating the time and place (34-7). In both Kubrick's and Lyne's adaptations, this function is taken care of by the voice-over narration, much more than by the dialogues, and by informative titles. But this anchorage of the diagesis includes letting us know more about the characters, which is also connected with another function of dialogue, that of character revelation (Kozloff 43-7). Although a line like the

one uttered by Charlotte to Humbert in Lyne's film, "Just slap [Lolita] hard if she interferes with your meditations," tells us more about Charlotte than about Humbert, it also hints at his sadistic tendencies. But above all this piece of dialogue reveals how ignorant Charlotte is of the whole situation. She is unaware of the fact that all of Humbert's "meditations" involve Lolita. In the novel this line is even more ironic, for Charlotte mentions "scholarly meditations" (55). We know that the scholarly type is just a disguise for Humbert to dedicate his full attention to his favorite topic, nymphets. He is not much of an intellectual, though he is a huge fan of Edgar Allan Poe in the novel and in Kubrick's movie.[3]

For Kozloff, another function of dialogue is that of narrative causality, that is, letting us know what came before and what is coming next in a film (37-41). This is frequently used to clarify points to the audience. For example, in Kubrick's movie, the following dialogue between Lolita and Humbert, at the end, serves as a kind of summary of Quilty's omnipresence in the story. Humbert insists on knowing who was the man who stole Lolita from him.

> LOLITA. Do you remember Dr. Zempf? [. . .] That German psychologist who came to see you at Beardsley?

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[3] Nabokov's constant references to Poe indicate that *Lolita* is an example of metaliterature. Humbert, who considers himself a writer, often cites other writers, from Emerson to Lewis Carroll. *The Annotated Lolita* provides an extensive guide to these intertextual plays. We can see the mentioning of Poe as Humbert's parody of the poet's relationship with Annabel Lee, because, as Linda Hutcheon points out in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, parody is a form of ironic representation which "is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies" (101). By citing Poe, Humbert is both legitimizing his own story and subverting Poe's. There is, however, some polemic concerning whether Nabokov's reflexivity makes him a postmodernist or not. In *Lolita: A Janus Text*, Lance Olsen defends that the novel may be read as modernist because of its existential traits, and as postmodernist because of its ironic tone. Indeed, Alan Wilde claims that, in postmodernism, "a world in need of mending is superseded by one beyond repair" (qtd. in Steven Connors 122). If we read Humbert's narration as one beyond repair, if we do not believe his remorse to be sincere, we might see the novel as postmodern. In "Nabokov in Postmodernist Land," Maurice Couturier calls attention to the fact that Nabokov's American period coincides with the rise of postmodernism. He considers Nabokov's works during this period (*Lolita*, *Pale Fire* and *Ada*) the "archetypal postmodernist novels" (259), but Brian McHale sees *Lolita* as modernist, not postmodernist, since Humbert is an unreliable narrator (Couturier 254). For Paul Giles, though *Lolita* mixes high and low culture (57), a postmodernist trait, the novel is a metafiction of American Studies (41).

HUMBERT. Was it him?
LOLITA. Not exactly.
HUMBERT. I didn't come here to play guessing games. Tell me who it was.
LOLITA. Well, give me a chance to explain... Do you remember that car that used to follow us around? Do you remember mother's old flame at the school dance? No, you probably wouldn't remember him. Do you remember the guy that you talked to at that hotel on the way back from camp? He pretended that he was part of that police convention that was there... And do you remember that guy that called you at the hotel?
HUMBERT. The night you disappeared? Yes, I remember him very well.
LOLITA. And yet you still haven't guessed.
HUMBERT. I told you that I'm not playing games with you. Tell me who it was.
LOLITA. It was *Clare Quilty.*
HUMBERT. Who was Clare Quilty?
LOLITA. All of them, of course.

Even if this summary seems a bit heavy-handed to the spectators who recognized Peter Sellers all along, Lolita's irony saves the dialogue. Her use of "not exactly" and "of course" makes her seem impatient with Humbert's ignorance, and this irony is a stab at his vanity. After all, if Humbert were half as clever as he thought he was, he would have identified Quilty long ago. Thus, the function of this dialogue is not only linked to narrative causality, but also to character revelation.

Kozloff reminds us that dialogue is also action: "When one talks, one is *doing something* – promising, informing, questioning, threatening, apologizing" (41). Therefore, another function of dialogue is communicating verbal events. For instance, in Kubrick's adaptation, Lolita takes the breakfast tray to Humbert's room. Once she is there, she is aware of her power over him. When she feeds him an egg, she only uses imperatives: "Put your head back. Open your mouth. You can have one little bite." Since her tone matches Charlotte's bossy behavior, this little piece of dialogue helps character revelation.

Another function of dialogue, according to Kozloff, is related to "adherence to expectations concerning realism," that is, some dialogue has to perform a realistic function and try to imitate real speech, though what is considered realistic today may not be so in ten

years (47-9). When we speak, we rarely go straight to the point. But movies, because of economy, must produce dialogue that is very objective, unlike the one in real life. Kozloff claims that most films adopt verbal wallpaper, or dialogue that does not advance the plot in any way, to sound more realistic. Lyne's *Lolita*, to be sure, has several moments of such dialogue. When Lolita goes to Humbert's room and sits on his lap, they do not talk about Poe's poetry, as occurs in Kubrick's film. Rather, Lolita asks Humbert, "Am I getting a zit?" and "Do you wanna see my chin wobble?" This is not supposed to be a relevant conversation, for the physical action going on between them is much more crucial than the dialogue. The same happens in the scene right after Humbert has taken Lolita away from the camp, where a cop stops to ask them information. Lolita, again sitting on top of Humbert, jokingly tells the cop, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!", which might be close to how a twelve- or thirteen-year-old girl would behave in the fifties. Even though the appearance of a policeman echoes Humbert's worries of being discovered, nothing essential is revealed by the dialogue. Naturally, the verb *to shoot* has more than one meaning, including an ironic sexual connotation, but Lolita does not seem to be using double-entendre. The following excerpt from Lyne's movie is a bit more than verbal wallpaper, but not much. Humbert and Lolita are sitting in the restaurant of the Enchanted Hunters hotel, before their first night together:

> LOLITA. I feel we're grownups.
> HUMBERT. Me too.
> LOLITA. We can do whatever we want, right?
> HUMBERT. Whatever we want.

This could be an important piece of dialogue, since Lolita's wish to do "whatever we want" suggests sex. Also, it is awkward that Humbert answers "Me too." After all, he is an adult, and the last thing he does is regard Lolita as one. Besides, he cares a great deal about the

English language to use an incorrect form like "Me too." But this dialogue is not treated seriously enough by the movie as to invite several interpretations. It is treated as part of verbal wallpaper, something Lolita says while laughing and using napkins to produce large breasts. Once again in Lyne's picture, the images have priority over the dialogue.

For Kozloff, dialogue also serves to control our emotions. Among other things, it directs pacing, creates suspense, prepares for the climax, makes us pay attention to something seemingly trivial, and heightens tension (49-51). For instance, in Kubrick's film, in the brief conversation Charlotte has with Lolita over the phone, while the girl is at camp, Charlotte asks, "Lost your new sweater? In the woods?" The movie draws our attention to this insignificant detail that, later on, proves to be an example of foreshadowing. After all, Lolita probably forgot her sweater in the woods while having sex with Charlie.

Another function of dialogue that cannot be disregarded is that it provides opportunities for stars (Kozloff 60). There are plenty of chances in Kubrick's movie for Peter Sellers to shine. Some of his lines seem to have no other purpose than to let Sellers show his comic genius. For instance, in his exchange with a hotel clerk, Mr. Swine, the dialogue has no connection to the rest of the story:

> QUILTY. [Vivian']s a yellow belt. I'm a green belt. That's the way nature made it. What happens is, she throws me all over the place.
> SWINE. She throws you all over the place?
> QUILTY. Yes. What she does, she gets me in a, sort of thing called a sweeping ankle throw. She sweeps my ankles away from under me. I go down with one helluva bang.
> SWINE. Doesn't it hurt?
> QUILTY. Well, I sort of lay there in pain, but I love it. I really love it. I lay there hovering between consciousness and unconsciousness. It's really the greatest.

True, this dialogue may be useful in making Humbert a model of virtue if compared to his nemesis, Quilty. But even so it is unlikely it would ever be in the film were it not delivered by Sellers.

Finally, Kozloff points out that yet another function of dialogue is to exploit the resources of the language. Thus, dialogue can be used poetically, humorously, in telling stories, and, as the function that mostly interests us, ironically (52-6). This short exchange between Humbert and Lolita from Lyne's film, also present in the novel (112), begins as a pun. They are in the car, heading to the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, talking about Charlotte's condition.

> HUMBERT. It's something abdominal.
> LOLITA. Abominable?
> HUMBERT. Abdominal.

Actually, it is a bit more than a mere play on words, for we know that Charlotte is dead, so the way Humbert refers to her is even disrespectful. And *abominable* may well be what Humbert intends to do with Lolita once they get to the hotel.

For Kozloff, "[i]rony is created by the divergence between two levels of knowledge, between, for instance, what the characters know and what the audience knows" (54). This is why most of the dialogue that comes from Charlotte, especially in Kubrick's film, is ironic: Charlotte does not have a clue about Humbert's feelings for her or for her daughter. Wayne Booth labels this dramatic irony, for this is how he calls irony based on readers' or spectators' having knowledge about a character that the character himself does not (*Irony* 255). The following dialogue from Kubrick's picture is very dramatically ironic because of Charlotte's ignorance.

> CHARLOTTE. You do arouse the pagan in me. Hum, you just touch me, and I – I go as limp as a noodle. It scares me.
> HUMBERT. Yes, I know the feeling.

If Charlotte knew how much Humbert despises her, she would never use lines that allow her to become such an easy prey for Humbert's ironies. It should be noted, though, that in the screenplay of Kubrick's *Lolita*, after Charlotte says, "Oh, Humbert, when I get near

you, I'm as limp as a noodle," Humbert replies, "The same thing happens to me." The Production Code censored such an obvious sexual reference, and Humbert's response had to be changed to "I know the feeling." But the Code Seal members were still not satisfied and Kubrick had to add the "it scares me" bit (Vincent LoBrutto 220). Regardless of the lost sexual connotation, all of these lines are ironic, and Charlotte is always the victim of Humbert's ironies.

There are several lines in the novel that appear intact in the film adaptations. However, Stephen Schiff, screenwriter of Lyne's *Lolita*, claims that the novel does not contain a lot of dialogue, and that most of it is suggested by Humbert, rather than written in detail (xv). Schiff cites Humbert's description in the novel, "I launched upon a hilarious account of my Arctic adventures" (45), as an example of how much he had to expand dialogue. In the movie, the voice-over narration could, if it wanted, just use that phrase, and not have any of the dialogue. But Lyne chooses to use dialogue that is not much more than what Kozloff labels verbal wallpaper (47). Humbert, Lolita and Charlotte sit on the porch, while Lo says she wants to be a dancer, fidgeting with a doll. The many shots of her legs touching Humbert's and the glances they exchange are much more relevant here than the dialogue. When Humbert tells his story of his Arctic follies, Lolita and Charlotte laugh hysterically. One of the problems is that the dialogue is not funny, but by having the women laugh, the film is validating Humbert's point of view that what he is saying is hilarious. Schiff also affirms that in his screenplay there is a lot of dialogue that cannot be found anywhere in the book. This is true of the screenplay, where there is more verbal interaction (most of it dealing with food) than in the final cut of Lyne's film, but, in the movie, most of the dialogue comes from Nabokov's pages. Kubrick's picture, on the other hand, is less faithful to the dialogues in the novel.

Because Humbert is such a powerful narrator, he controls everything in the novel, including dialogue. For instance, we do not hear Charlotte describing her maid's room (actually Lolita's); instead, we hear Humbert's criticism, "And she called that servant maid's room a semi-studio!" (83). In another account, Humbert reproduces Charlotte's dialogue, focusing on her intonation: "How I love this garden [no exclamation mark in her tone]. Isn't it divine in the sun [no question mark either]" (55). According to Booth, narrators in novels have this choice of including "stage directions" and commentary to the dialogue they reproduce from other characters (*Fiction* 154). Humbert, in particular, is so strong that he stops Dick from speaking the only sentence he could think up, "[Lolita]'s a swell kid" (274). He is even capable of finishing Lolita's sentences, as this example demonstrates. Towards the end of the novel, Humbert asks her if there is any hope she will stay with him.

> "No," she said, "it is quite out of the question. I would sooner go back to Cue [how Lolita refers to Quilty in the novel]. I mean –"
>
> She groped for words. I supplied them mentally ("*He* broke my heart. *You* merely broke my life") (279).

In the film versions, however, this mental supply of words could only be provided by the voice-over narration, and, if the films choose not to do so, Humbert as a narrator loses force. In Lyne's *Lolita*, one line which can be found nowhere in the book is added to show Humbert's guilt. Seeing Lolita for the last time, he asks, "Lo, can you ever forget what I've done to you?" The film is clever enough, at least, to deny the girl an answer. She merely looks at her dog and orders, "Say goodbye, Molly. Say goodbye to my dad." Thus, the movie makes it clear how Humbert feels about having abused Lolita, but her attitude is more ambiguous. A second line which is somewhat hidden in the novel (it is part of a poem Humbert wrote which represents Quilty's death sentence) is given the spotlight in Lyne's

movie. Humbert tells Quilty that, by stealing Lolita from him, "You cheated me of my redemption." As a matter of fact, these lines lack subtlety. We know right away, just by looking at Jeremy Irons' face throughout the movie, how much he repents. Moreover, in the novel, it can be said that, even if the narrator feels a pang or two of regret, Humbert the character never comes close to this realization.

Jean Genette's argues that, when reading a novel, we should pay attention to any "marked differentiation between the narrator's" and the character's speech. He suggests that, since the narrator and the character can be very distinct people – even if they have the same name – sometimes they will speak divergent words (183). This can be observed in the two Humberts in the novel *Lolita,* though Humbert the narrator dominates the narrative to such an extent that most of the dialogues seem to be said by his witty self, not by his cowardly character. In the following dialogue where Humbert threatens to send Lolita to a reformatory if she ever opens her mouth about their affair, most language seems to belong to Humbert the narrator, but the words in parentheses appear to be said by Humbert the character: "'You will dwell, my Lolita will dwell (come here, my brown flower) with thirty-nine other dopes in a dirty dormitory (no, allow me, please) under the supervision of hideous matrons.'" (151). The clue here to determine who is speaking, whether it is the narrator or the character, lies in the desperate, subservient tone Humbert uses in phrases such as "no, allow me, please," and also in the two treatments of Lolita as "you" and "my Lolita" in the same sentence. Humbert the character would not refer to her as "my Lolita" when speaking directly to her.

But the following dialogue between Humbert and Lolita seems to be uttered by Humbert the narrator, not his character.

> "Come and kiss your old man," I would say, "and drop that moody nonsense. In former times, when I was still your dream male [the reader will notice what pains I took to speak Lo's tongue], you swooned to records of the number one throb-and-sob idol of your coevals [Lo: "Of my what? Speak English"]. That idol of your pals sounded, you thought, like friend Humbert. But now, I am just your *old man*, a dream dad protecting his dream daughter." (149)

Granted, maybe the dialogue looks more like the narrator's words than the character's because it is intertwined with the narrator's ironic observations. Even then Lolita's wit is at post, as when she orders him to speak English. But let us compare the previous dialogue with the following passage where Miss Pratt convinces Humbert the character to allow Lolita to be in the school play:

> "All right," I said, my hassock exhaling a weary sigh. "You win. [Lolita] can take part in that play. Provided male parts are taken by female parts."
> "I am always fascinated," said Pratt, "by the admirable way foreigners – or at least naturalized Americans – use our rich language." (196-7)

Humbert, the witty narrator, would not fall into the trap of using dangerous double-entendres ("male parts taken by female parts") that can be used to mock him. After all, he is the creator of most ironies in the novel, not the target. Nabokov permits these small variations in the narrator's and the character's speech to show that vain Humbert is not as intelligent as he thinks he is. As a character, especially, Humbert seems to be much more vulnerable to other people's ironies. And it is also ironic that the pervert can be such a prude, forbidding a teenage girl to have any contact with the opposite sex.

Very few passages of dialogue are present in all three sources, the novel and its two film adaptations. But those which appear in both movies are faithful to the novel. Let us take, as an example, Lolita's and Humbert's first night together, at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel. Lolita is quite surprised that Humbert plans for them to share the same bed, although he ordered a cot as a disguise. In the novel that Schiff claims to be lacking in dialogue, the passage is like this:

> "You are crazy," said Lo.
> "Why, my darling?"
> "Because, my dahrling, when dahrling Mother finds out she'll divorce you and strangle me."
> Just dynamic. Not really taking the matter too seriously. [. . .]
> "Now look here, Lo. Let's settle this once for all. For all practical purposes I am your father. I have a feeling of great tenderness for you. In your mother's absence I am responsible for your welfare. We are not rich, and while we travel, we shall be obliged – we shall be thrown a good deal together. Two people sharing one room, inevitably enter into a kind – how shall I say – a kind –"
> "The word is incest," said Lo – and walked into the closet, walked out again with a young golden giggle [. . .]. (119)

This excerpt seems so ripe to be brought to the screen that it even has bits of stage directions, as when the narrator explains that Lolita is not "really taking the matter too seriously." The first three lines are similar in both films. In Lyne's adaptation, the dialogue continues as follows:

> HUMBERT. Two people sharing the same hotel room… are bound to enter into… into a… How can I put it, into a kind of, uh…
> LOLITA. The word is incest. [as she looks at him and giggles]

The irony which occurs in the novel also happens in this passage from Lyne's film. In Kubrick's movie this dialogue is even more similar to the one in the novel than Lyne's, but with one killer distinction at the end.

> LOLITA. You're crazy.
> HUMBERT. Why, my darling?
> LOLITA. Because, my darling, when my darling mother finds out, she's going to divorce you and strangle me.
> HUMBERT. Yes, now look, now. I have a great feeling of, um, tenderness for you. While your mother is ill, I'm responsible for your welfare. We're not rich, but while we travel, we should be obliged – we should be thrown a good deal together – two people sharing one room inevitably enter into a kind of, um, how should I say? A kind of, hmm…
> LOLITA. Aren't you going to go down and see about the cot?

Here, Lolita's last line about incest was obviously eliminated by censors, since even the slightest citation of taboo subjects such as incest, adultery, and abortion was forbidden by the Production Code. Lolita's interruption of Humbert's line mirrors the forced intervention

that the film suffered. But it is funny that, when Lolita expresses how Charlotte would kill them if she found out (were she not dead, of course), Humbert's immediate reply is "Yes." This short, even unconscious agreement, which almost constitutes a Freudian slip of the tongue (Freud 103), demonstrates that Humbert is familiar with Charlotte's temper and that he fears her. For a second, it is as if he had forgotten his wife's death. This "Yes" is also ironic because it reveals that, no matter how much Humbert is struggling to seem in control of the situation, underneath he is afraid. His "Yes" does not go with the patronizing "now look." This detail seems, to me, as one more of James Mason's attempts to subvert his character. His pauses and throat clearings before he decides that his feeling for Lolita is one of tenderness indicate that his Humbert is lying.

In the novel, Humbert's first encounter with Miss Pratt, the school's dean, runs four pages, and is often hilarious. It is more of a monologue delivered by the headmistress than an actual dialogue. She confuses Humbert's name and goes on and on rambling about how teenage girls should have a purposeful education: "[. . .] with due respect to Shakespeare and others, we want our girls to *communicate* freely with the live world around them rather than plunge into musty old books" (177) and "Mr. Humberson, let us put it this way: the position of a star is important, but the most practical spot for an icebox in the kitchen may be even more important to the budding housewife" (178). Humbert the narrator affirms to be appalled by the school's curriculum, but, in truth, he does not care about Lolita's education. Of course, his disdain for Lolita's future does not stop him from making fun of the school: Beardsley is an institution where girls are taught, as a friend of his puts it, "'not to spell very well, but to smell very well.' I don't think they achieved even that" (177).

However, in Lyne's film, Humbert actually worries about Lolita's learning. He quizzes her about capitals, sees that she knows nothing, and concludes Beardsley is not a

good school. His first meeting with Miss Pratt contains most of what is in the novel but it is much shorter, so the effect is not the hysterical absurdity we get from reading the pages in the book.

> PRATT. I know you have accepted a post at Beardsley College and I know that there our academics are first and last and always. Well, that's not us, Mr. Himmler. Uh, here, at Beardsley Prep, what we stress are the three D's: Dramatic, Dancing, and Dating. I know that the Reverend Rigger is right behind us on this, aren't you, Reverend?
> REVEREND. I'm with you all the way, Miss Pratt, every inch.
> PRATT. So you see, Mr. Humper, for the modern pre-adolescent, medieval dates are less vital than weekend ones.
> HUMBERT. What, weekend what?
> PRATT. Dates, Mr. Humpling... Boys.

This is one of the very few *polylogues*, a term Kozloff uses to refer to dialogues where three or more characters speak (70), in Lyne's film. Lyne adds the presence of the reverend for the sake of the double-entendre ("I'm with you all the way, every inch"), which will allow Humbert to look shocked as he hears it. This aims at irony, because Humbert, being a pervert, should not be easily shocked. This, in fact, is the running joke on Humbert's encounters with Pratt in the novel and in Lyne's picture: she thinks he is too conservative, a European intellectual troubled by American freer customs. Irony occurs, thus, because Pratt does not know what we know. The way she innocently mistakes his name, approximating it with the verb *to hump*, is also mildly amusing, since this is slang for having sex, precisely what Humbert has been doing with Lolita.

In Kubrick's film the Pratt character is replaced by Dr. Zempf, who is really Quilty using one of his disguises to torment Humbert. Well, not only to torment him – Quilty actually wants Humbert to allow Lolita to participate in his play. But the pleasure he gets out of impersonating Dr. Zempf gives him away. Quoting Pauline Kael, "Humbert is a

worm and Quilty knows it" (207). Quilty has lots of fun with this realization. His monologue with Humbert is twisted to include references to both pedophiles:

> ZEMPF. Well, to you, Dr. Hombarts, [Lolita] is still the little girl that is cradled in the arms, but to those boys over there at the Beardsley High, uhm? [growls and rolls his eyes] She is a lovely girl [enthusiastic, making gestures of breasts with his hands], you know, with the swing, you know, and the jazz, and she has got the curvature which they take a lot of notice of. You and I, what are we? We are the symbols of power, sitting at our offices, there we are making the signatures, writing the contracts, and the decisions all the time. But if we cast our minds back, just think, what were we, only yesterday? Yesterday, Dr. Hombarts, you and I were little high school Jim, and we were carrying little high school Jane's school books. You remember those days? [nostalgically] Ah! [. . .] We Americans, we are progressively modern. We believe that it is equally important to prepare the pupils for the mutually satisfactory mating and the successful child rearing [hitting the table for emphasis], that's what we believe!

Quilty cannot hide his enthusiasm when talking about Lolita. But probably the most ironic line in his monologue is "You and I, what are we?", because we (and Quilty) know who and what they are. At this point in the story, Humbert is unaware of Quilty's existence. In a way, Quilty is defending their condition as pedophiles when he points out that they are just doing now what they did in the past, when they were boys. The girls remain the same, it is just that the boys became men. This echoes Humbert's narration in the novel, where he tells us of his first love, Annabel. Quilty's line beginning with "We Americans" is quite similar to what is uttered by Pratt in the novel and in Lyne's movie. In the novel, Pratt says, "You see, Mr. Haze, Beardsley School does not believe in bees and blossoms, and storks and love birds, but it does believe very strongly in preparing its students for mutually satisfactory mating and successful child rearing" (195). However, there is a shift in the irony as a consequence of Kubrick's making Pratt Quilty. Now it is not Pratt who does not know about Humbert – now it is Humbert who is ignorant of Quilty. This shift certainly contributes to making Humbert more "worm-like" in Kubrick's picture.

The second encounter between Pratt and Humbert happens to be the most audaciously ironic part in Lyne's film. In a movie with little humor, here is a passage that tries to prompt some laughter – at Humbert's expense. Again, this is a polylogue, with the Reverend present, where Humbert, as in the novel, is at the peak of his fear of being discovered.

> HUMBERT. Does [Lolita] ever speak about these… [sexual] matters?
> PRATT. Well, that's just it. [she pauses. Humbert, who is eating, freezes. Suspense]
> HUMBERT. What's just it?
> PRATT. That's just it: she hasn't said anything.
> REVEREND. She hasn't breathed a word.
> HUMBERT. But who – who has? I mean… Are you saying that I…
> PRATT. Exactly. This is a very serious matter. What we're trying to say to you is that someone in the family, maybe you – this is very difficult for me – well, let me put it this way: someone in the family ought to instruct that dear child in the process of human reproduction.
> HUMBERT. [gasps, relieved, spits his food]. I'm so sorry.
> PRATT. I see that I have embarrassed you. Yet you, as her father, ought to take the matter well in hand [gestures].
> HUMBERT. Worry not, Miss Pratt. I – I have this matter in hand.
> PRATT. [chuckles] Oh well, that's all I needed to say.

Pratt's saying "exactly" as a reply to Humbert's suspicion nearly kills him. All of Pratt's sentences lead to the assumption that she knows that someone in Lolita's family is sexually abusing her. But, thankfully for Humbert, the "very serious matter" Pratt mentions, about Lolita's lack of interest in sexuality, demonstrates that the dean knows nothing about the home situation. Humbert does, indeed, have this matter well in hand.

In Kubrick's film there is little room for ambiguity. Most lines, especially the ones between Humbert and Charlotte, are ironic, rather than ambiguous. Linda Hutcheon points out that ambiguity and irony are not the same, since irony has an edge (33). "Irony's edge, then, would seem to ingratiate and to intimidate, to underline and to undermine", according to Hutcheon (56). At the same time, one of the functions of irony is to complicate things, creating ambiguity (48-9). For instance, the following dialogue between Charlotte and

Humbert is not necessarily ironic. Charlotte has been jealous about Humbert's past love affairs, and now she pretends not to be upset by them.

> CHARLOTTE. Darling, I don't care about any other woman. I know that our love is sacred. The others were profane.
> HUMBERT. Yeah, sacred. That's right. That's what it is, hmmm.

Obviously, Charlotte and Humbert do not share the same meaning of the word *sacred*. For Charlotte, who is a pious woman, the word has a religious connotation, the opposite of *profane*. This is somewhat hypocritical from her, who holds very earthly, lusty desires for men. For Humbert, however, *sacred* might mean that their relationship should not need to involve sex, since he has no desire for his wife. But I would say his line is more ambiguous than ironic. The same can be said about this exchange, where Charlotte wants to teach Humbert how to dance:

> CHARLOTTE. I have a proposal. What say you I, uh, teach you some of the new steps, huh?
> HUMBERT. Oh Charlotte, I don't even know the old ones.

In context, we can see there is a double-entendre here where dancing means sex, because this dialogue takes place in Charlotte's seduction scene, when she is alone with Humbert. But considering Charlotte's total inability to understand, much less use, irony, the dialogue ends up being more ambiguous than ironic.

However, this exchange is clearly ironic.

> CHARLOTTE. I have the most ambitious fantasy.
> HUMBERT [his head points to Lolita's portrait]. What's yours?

This is dramatically ironic because Charlotte is clueless about Humbert's thoughts. His fantasy, of course, involves Lolita. Charlotte's fantasy, on the other hand, involves getting rid of her.

Another instance of dramatic irony occurs when Charlotte shows Humbert her garden. Humbert is unimpressed with the house and is about to leave, until he sees Lolita.

> CHARLOTTE. Oh, you must see the garden before you go, you must… My flowers win prizes around here. They're the talk of the neighborhood. Voilá! My yellow roses, my, oh, my daughter [close-up of Lolita. Close-up of Humbert]. Darling, turn that down, please. I can offer you a comfortable home, a sunny garden, a congenial atmosphere, my cherry pies… [Lolita takes off her sunglasses].
> [. . .]
> CHARLOTTE. [. . .]What was the decisive factor? My garden?
> HUMBERT [looking at Lolita]. I think it was your… cherry pies [close-up of Lolita].

We know very well what the decisive factor for Humbert's decision to stay was: Lolita. We are also aware of the double-entendre with cherry pies, since *cherry* is synonymous with virginity. But Charlotte has no idea. When she meets Quilty at the dance, however, and has a brief chat with him, her line "And afterwards, I showed you my garden" reveals that Quilty probably had the same reaction to Charlotte's Eden-like garden as Humbert.

None of the dialogues above are in the novel nor in Lyne's movie. But here is an important, and very ironic, exchange between Charlotte and Humbert present in the novel:

> "Shall we go in [the water]?" she asked.
> "We shall in a minute. Let me follow a train of thought."
> I thought. More than one minute passed.
> "All right. Come on."
> "Was I on that train?"
> "You certainly were."
> "I hope so," said Charlotte entering the water. (85)

This is relevant because it happens right after Charlotte tells Humbert of her plans of sending Lolita to a boarding school as soon as the girl returns from camp. It means Humbert will seldom see Lolita, and being near her was the only reason he had to accept marrying Charlotte, so his frustration is evident. His "train of thought" certainly involves killing Charlotte.

In Kubrick's adaptation Humbert and Charlotte do not go to the lake together, so this scene takes place in their bedroom, and his plans of murdering Charlotte involve a gun, not water. The couple is hugging and about to make love, but Charlotte tells him of her idea of sending Lolita to boarding school, and naturally enough, he loses his concentration. The dialogue goes like this:

> CHARLOTTE. Darling, you've gone away.
> HUMBERT. Just a minute, darling, I'm following a train of thought.
> [looks at Lolita's picture, turns around, faces the gun].
> CHARLOTTE. It doesn't matter. C'est la vie. Hey, am I on that train?
> HUMBERT. Yes.
> CHARLOTTE. I should hope so.

Humbert's answering her with "darling," when he is thinking about her murder, is ironic. And her annexation of comprehensive remarks to deal with his impotence, "It doesn't matter. C'est la vie," are also part of dramatic irony. After all, she does not know that his "going away," that is, his sudden loss of interest in having sex with her, is related to Lolita. If Charlotte were aware of what is going on in Humbert's train of thought, she would not want to be on that train.

The first meeting between Humbert and Quilty occurs at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel. Humbert is anxious to get back to his room, where Lolita, hopefully, will be asleep. In the novel, he gives her sleeping pills so this will happen, but, in both films, the girl just happens to be very tired. The last thing Humbert wants is talking to anybody. However, he meets Quilty at the porch, though it is dark and he cannot really see his face. The dialogue in the novel and in Lyne's adaptation is almost identical. Quilty starts with a question that immediately grabs Humbert's attention:

> "Where the devil did you get her?"
> "I beg your pardon?"
> "I said: the weather is getting better."

"Seems so."
"Who's the lassie?"
"My daughter."
"You lie – she's not."
"I beg your pardon?"
"I said: July was hot. Where's her mother?"
"Dead."
"I see. Sorry. By the way, why don't you two lunch with me tomorrow. That dreadful crowd will be gone by then."
"We'll be gone too. Good night."
"Sorry. I'm pretty drunk. Good night. That child of yours needs a lot of sleep. Sleep is a rose, as the Persians say. Smoke?"
"Not now." (127)

In Lyne's movie, the sleazy Quilty adds the word "Enjoy" at the end. Otherwise, there are no differences. Irony is present here in the contrast between Quilty's direct questions and Humbert's polite confusion. No matter how aghast Humbert feels at being asked those indiscretions, he still replies with "I beg your pardon?" Quilty knows much more than Humbert. He is aware that Humbert is not Lolita's father, and he suspects what Humbert plans to do with her. He does not condemn him, for he would like to do the same. Quilty knows they are both pedophiles, whereas Humbert has no idea about Quilty's nature.

In Kubrick's film this conversation is completely distinct. First, we have seen Quilty before, since the movie opens with Humbert's shooting Quilty. But we have also observed Quilty talking to Charlotte, and mother and daughter talking about him. The passage that follows is an opportunity for Peter Seller's star turn. It is more of a monologue than a dialogue: "I noticed when you was checking in, you had a lovely, pretty little girl with you. She was really lovely. As a matter of fact, she wasn't so little, come to think of it. She was fairly tall, what I mean, taller than little, you know what I mean. But, uh, she was really lovely. I wish I had a lovely, pretty tall, lovely little girl like that." This excerpt, with its

emphasis on "little girl," seems to be mocking Sue Lyons' casting for the role. She was widely criticized for not looking like a little girl.[4]

Quilty, pretending to be a policeman in order to intimidate Humbert, progresses with a long monologue in which the word *normal* is repeated over and over:

> QUILTY. I sort of get the impression that you want to leave but you don't like to leave because maybe you think I'd think it'd look suspicious, me being a policeman...You don't have to think that, because, uh, I haven't really got a suspicious mind at all. I look suspicious myself. A lot of people think I'm suspicious, especially when I stand around on street corners. One of our own boys picked me up the other week – he thought I was too suspicious standing on a street corner and everything. Tell me something, uhm, I couldn't help noticing when you checked in tonight. It's part of my job – I notice human individuals – and I noticed your face. I said to myself when I saw you – I said, "That's a guy with the most normal-looking face I ever saw in my life." It's great to see a normal face, because I'm a normal guy. It would be great for two normal guys like us to get together and talk about world events – you know, in a normal sort of way...

In the first part of this monologue, Quilty stresses the adjective *suspicious*. He is right: he looks suspicious himself. His whole account of standing on street corners and being picked up by a boy, supposedly another policeman, has an obvious double meaning. The boy picked him up because he looked suspicious, that is, the boy knew Quilty was one of them. The monologue creates a sense of community for pedophiles, and Quilty subtly moves from *suspicious* to *normal.* Now he is stating that both of them are perfectly normal, that it is okay for them to be perverts. Or is he really? This monologue is surely making Humbert nervous. It is also dripping in irony because we know these guys are not normal. And we suspect that, if they got together, they would seldom talk about "world events."

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[4] Another sign of metalanguage in Kubrick's film involves whispering. Kozloff claims that both shouting and whispering in dialogues are used for emphasis (94). In the 1962 movie three women whisper: Quilty's companion, Vivian Darkbloom (a scrambled-letter joke with Vladimir Nabokov's name), who has no voice at all, Charlotte (to Quilty), and Lolita (to Humbert). This seems like metalanguage to hint at censorship, a threat that deeply affected the final cut of the film. But it is still strange that only women are seen whispering.

Kubrick probably got the idea of stressing normality from a dialogue in the novel, where Humbert preaches Lolita about how girls should behave: “Look, I’ve a learned book here about young girls. Look, darling, what it says. I quote: the normal girl – normal, mark you – the normal girl is usually extremely anxious to please her father [. . .]” (150). It is interesting how Kubrick turns this detail into the leit-motif of his picture. According to Kozloff, “[f]ilms more commonly include scattered but persistent references to a key word” (84). No doubt, the key word in Kubrick’s movie is *normal.* Not only is this word hammered in Quilty’s monologue, but it is also repeated by Lolita shortly after, when she learns about her mother’s death and complains, “But everything’s changed all of a sudden. Everything was so, oh, I don't know, *normal*.” Even a nurse later on says about Lolita, “Her temperature is normal.” And, for Lolita, Quilty is not normal, as she proclaims at the end – and the opposite of *normal,* for her, is not weird or pervert or suspicious, but *genius*. By making *normal* the refrain of the film (it appears a total of twelve times), Kubrick adds an ironic flavor to the story. After all, there is nothing normal about a middle-aged man’s sexual obsession with a pre-teen.

In Lyne’s film no word is repeated more than others. If there is a leit-motif in his movie, it is Humbert’s repentance, expressed by the two lines of dialogue that are emphasized (Humbert to Lolita: “Lo, can you forget what I’ve done to you?” and Humbert to Quilty: “You cheated me of my redemption”), and also by Irons’ tormented face and his solemn voice-over. Therefore, while in Kubrick’s film the leit-motif is the word *normal,* which is very ironic, since it is always related to two pedophiles who cannot be considered normal by any standards, in Lyne’s picture the persistence is not on a word, but on a state of mind – regret – that is just the opposite of the enthusiastic spirit permeating the novel.

This vital difference helps to explain why Kubrick's film, like the novel, is so ironic, whereas Lyne's is not.

Much of the dialogue that comes at the end of Lyne's picture, when Quilty and Humbert finally meet, is similar to the novel's. Quilty does not want to die, so he tries to persuade Humbert not to kill him. The whole dialogue is very ironic, especially because Quilty shows little respect for Humbert, even though he is mildly afraid of his fate. In fact, these dialogues in Lyne's film (all taken from the novel) are so ironic that they radically diverge from the rest of the film. They seem to belong to another movie. This is the result of only showing the wildest character in Lyne's picture, Quilty, at the end. But there are some details that differ. For instance, in the novel Quilty says to Humbert, after Humbert tells him he is Lolita's father, "I'm very fond of children myself, and fathers are among my best friends" (296). In Lyne's movie, Quilty replies, "Oh, I adore children myself. And fathers. I love fathers." When he mentions "fathers," he exposes a naked thigh, apparently trying to seduce Humbert, who looks appalled. Somehow the *fond of* that appears in the book has more of an edge than the *adore* in the film, because it seems more neutral. Besides, the sound of the word reminds us of *fondle*.

Kubrick's film sets the tone by placing Humbert's confrontation with Quilty at the beginning. Many of the lines are taken from the novel, but some are clearly Peter Seller's comic routines and improvisations, like the ping-pong match. The death sentence Humbert writes for him to read, which is omitted in Lyne's movie, appears summarized in Kubrick's picture. In the novel, it is much longer (299-300), and it loses some of its comic effect. Sellers' summary renders it full force. He reads his death sentence, actually a poem, using an uneducated American accent:

HUMBERT. It's your death sentence. Read it.
QUILTY. I can't read, ah, mister. I never did none of that there book learnin', ya know.
HUMBERT. Read, Quilty!
QUILTY. Mmm? "Because you took advantage of a sinner. Because you took advantage... Because you took... Because you took advantage of my disadvantage." Gee, that's a dad-blasted darn good poem you done there. "When I stood Adam-naked..." Oh! Adam-naked, you should be ashamed of yourself, Captain. "...before a Federal Law and all its stinging stars." Tarnation, you old horned toad, that's a mighty pretty... that's a pretty poem. "Because you took advantage" – gee, it's getting a bit repetitious, isn't it – "Because" – there's another one – "Because you cheated me. Because you took her at an age, when young lads..."
HUMBERT [angrily snapping the sheet from him]. That's enough!
QUILTY. Say, what you take it away for, mister? That was getting kind of smutty there! [laughs]

It was indeed getting "kind of smutty," for in the novel the line continues with "play with erector sets." The poem ends with "Because of all you did / because of all I did not / you have to die," to which newly-appointed literary critic Quilty concludes, "Well, sir, this is certainly a fine poem. Your best as far as I am concerned" (300). In Kubrick's scene, there is a lot of irony in Seller's make-believe shock at reading "Adam-naked" – as if this pervert could be shocked.

Dialogue is an extremely important part of film because it not only identifies the place, time, and participants, but it establishes causal relationships as well. It also enacts major events, creates and reveals character, shapes viewers' reactions, and shows how relationships change, among other functions (Kozloff 61-2). Even more than that, dialogue helps to set and maintain the tone of a movie. Kubrick's *Lolita* begins ironically, with Humbert murdering Quilty, and it continues being ironic throughout. Part of this is due to its dialogue. The 1962 film is talky, with long turns by stars, especially Sellers and Winters. The words in this picture are crucial to expose much of what censorship forbid. Lyne's film, on the other hand, relies more heavily on its images than on its dialogue. The general tone of the movie is not ironic, nor are its images, and as a consequence most of its

dialogue follows the same pattern. In this picture Humbert tells Lolita towards the end, “I’ll die if you touch me,” a line that is also present in the novel (279). But only in Lyne’s film does Humbert sound like he really means it.

CONCLUSION

One of the elements considered in determining whether a film is or not a remake of a previous movie is in its references. If the second picture echoes the first in some sequences, it might be considered a remake (Linda Hutcheon 81-3). Under this light, the 1997 *Lolita* cannot be seen as a remake of the 1962 version, for Adrian Lyne ignores Stanley Kubrick's version and concentrates solely on the novel. The only echo that can be noticed is when, in Lyne's picture, Humbert takes Lolita's sock off and stares at her painted fingernails. This resembles the opening of Kubrick's *Lolita*, and serves to show Humbert's subservience. But, other than that, there is no dialogue between the two films, unlike there is between so many remakes. In interviews, Lyne has said again and again that his adaptation is not a remake, but a film truer in form and spirit to the novel (Rachel Abramowitz 83). By *truer*, Lyne means more faithful, and his film is indeed much more faithful than Kubrick's to the plot of the novel. It dutifully follows its storyline with an emphasis on the details. But it is definitely not faithful in terms of the novel's spirit, for it is not ironic. Kubrick, on the other hand, ended up with a movie that takes a lot of liberties with the novel's plot, but maintains its ironic flavor.

Because the films adopt the same source, they are bound to share some similarities. For instance, as we have seen in the first and second chapters of this study, Lolita is less important than Humbert in the novel and the films, though she does manage to have a life of her own outside the narrator's surveillance. Another similarity is that Charlotte is the main victim of Humbert's ironies. Even in Lyne's movie, which shows more respect for Charlotte than the novel and Kubrick's version, she remains the target of dramatic irony because she does not know what goes on around her. And Quilty is painted as more

depraved than Humbert, especially in the films, but also in the novel, for we receive a biased account of Quilty's ideas and actions from the narrator. Lyne's movie in particular, by making Quilty more of a pervert than Humbert, opts for a moralistic attitude. After all, Quilty's driving force is sex; Humbert's is love. In the adaptations, Humbert tries to justify his obsession by using love as an excuse. Quilty is more honest – he does not need nor wish to be excused.

The main similarity between the films and the novel is that Humbert, rather than the title-character, Lolita, is the character around whom the narrative is focused. As this thesis demonstrated in its introduction, Genette distinguishes between voice, connected to narration, and mood, connected to character, and these distinctions can be observed in the novel. In the case of the movies as well as the book, Humbert remains the narrator and the protagonist of his story. Whereas in Lyne's film Humbert is an embedded narrator, one whose voice-over appears throughout, and in Kubrick's he is no more than a micro-narrator, even as a frequent presence in Lyne's picture Humbert does not possess the same ironic force which can be found in narrator Humbert in the novel, as shown by chapter one of this study. On the contrary, in the 1997 adaptation there is no contrast between Humbert as a character and as a narrator. Both are solemn men suffering for love, men who take their acts seriously and will never forgive themselves for the harm they have caused their prey.

In the novel, Humbert the character is a coward, not nearly half as witty as Humbert the narrator, and constantly afraid that his crimes might be revealed. The discussion on acting, as presented in chapter two of this analysis, foregrounds the idea that, in Kubrick's film, even if Humbert the narrator is incomparably more restrained than the narrator of the novel, Humbert the character has some psychotic touches, highlighted by James Mason's characterization. Mason's tics and smiles inform us that his Humbert is mentally ill, or, in

Pauline Kael's words, that he is a worm (207). As much as a lot of the irony in the 1962 version comes from this realization – especially by other characters like Quilty – of this worm-like quality in Humbert, most of the irony in the novel comes from the clash of personality between character and narrator. We have room to suspect that the character is not as handsome and clever as the narrator wishes us to believe. But, since in Lyne's adaptation character and narrator are pretty much the same person, the result is no clash; hence, no irony.

One important item related to filmic language that adds to the irony of at least one of the movies is the music score. In Lyne's film, the score was composed by Ennio Morricone, and the melody resembles one of Morricone's most acclaimed creations, the score of *Once Upon a Time in America*. The composer's score for *Lolita* is a beautiful, sad and romantic soundtrack, very much in tandem with the movie. Kubrick's film also uses a romantic score, by composer Nelson Riddle. According to Vincent LoBrutto, when the producers heard the score, first recorded in a minor key, they asked Riddle to record it again, since "they wanted a straightforward romantic sound and not any form of dissonance, which might disparage Humbert in the audience's eyes" (214). Kubrick's insistence on having a romantic score resulted in more irony, because the score goes against the film's ironic tone. Unlike Lyne's movie, in which the score simply echoes the melancholy atmosphere, in Kubrick's picture the tone is ironic and its score is dramatically romantic, and this clash of styles indicates irony. Riddle's score hints at how seriously Humbert takes himself, and at how ridiculous this behavior makes him.

Even when Lyne's and Kubrick's versions contain references that are not in the novel, they do so in diverse forms. Early on in the film, Kubrick's adaptation includes a scene of Quilty wrapping a blanket around himself and claiming, "I am Spartacus. Have

you come to free the slaves or something?" This is an obvious reference to Kubrick's previous movie, *Spartacus*, though the line is not totally gratuitous. After all, Humbert could be seen (and maybe sees himself as) an avenger who is – like Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* – freeing Quilty's sexual slave, Lolita. True, she has been freed from both pedophiles for some time when this happens, but Humbert is trying, by killing Quilty, to eliminate the past. Although Lyne is not considered an auteur, he also looks back on three of his films, in scenes that cannot be found in the novel. When Lolita massages Humbert's groins with her foot, Lyne is referring to his second movie, *Flashdance.* When she gorges on ice cream in front of the refrigerator, *9 ½ Weeks* comes to mind. And when she and Humbert appear naked on a bed covered with coins, Lyne is echoing *Indecent Proposal.* Whereas Kubrick's auteur touch is comic and ironic, Lyne's is erotic.

Following the pattern that whenever the same instant in the novel is reproduced in the films, Lyne will choose to make his scene romantic or erotic, and Kubrick will make it ironic, it is no coincidence that the word that is repeated over and over again in Kubrick's picture is *normal,* a word which is blatantly against any standard of behavior shown in the film. After all, Humbert and Quilty are pedophiles, so definitely abnormal, and their relation with Lolita is clearly deviant. As chapter three of this study demonstrated, in Lyne's version it is not a word, but a feeling, which is emphasized: regret. This insistence on a certain word or sentiment already expresses the different routes the films take, one more comic, the other more melodramatic.

The main difference between the novel and its film versions lies in how and if Humbert experiences regret, for his repentance (or lack of) directly interferes in the irony of each work. In the beginning of the novel, Humbert is a character who steals underwear from an orphanage and forces his wife to use it during their honeymoon. The films never

come close to portraying a Humbert *this* lunatic. Even if, in the novel, Humbert does change – he falls in love with Lolita and wants to be with her, though she is no longer a nymphet – it is unlikely that this change comes accompanied by regret. Wayne Booth wrote about the novel shortly after it was published, and he mentioned critic Lionel Triling's incapacity to choose "whether the narrator's final indictment of his own immorality is to be taken seriously or ironically" (*A Rhetoric of Fiction* 371). Booth continues, commenting on how Humbert narrates "a paradise whose skies were the color of hell-flames" (166), meaning his relation with the nymphet:

> Can we really be surprised that readers have overlooked Nabokov's ironies in *Lolita*, when Humbert Humbert is given full and unlimited control of the rhetorical resources? [. . .] We have already seen that Lionel Trilling cannot accept Humbert's later self-castigation as genuine after all this lively self-defense. And who is to blame him? The "paradise" is dramatized and described and praised at length; the repentance is merely expounded – though it *is* expounded powerfully. [. . .] Nabokov means what he makes Humbert say here [. . .]. But the laws of art are against him. His most skillful and mature readers, it is true, will have repudiated Humbert's blandishments from the beginning; the clues are numerous, the style is a dead giveaway throughout – *if* one happens to see it as such. One of the major delights of this delightful, profound book is that of watching Humbert *almost* make a case for himself. [. . .] [For those mature readers] no amount of final recantation will cancel out the vividness of the earlier scenes. (390-1)

No doubt Lyne chose to emphasize the part of regret in Nabokov's novel, diminishing the impact of hundreds of pages of "child-abuse-as-bliss" that Humbert narrates so well. As Michael Atkinson points out, "[. . .] you can't say you're surprised that the astonishingly humorless Lyne hadn't noticed or cared that the Nabokov original is a droll comedy of errors first and a self-pitying romantic tragedy second" (par. 1). In Kubrick's film, Humbert is not really the monster he is in the novel, but at least the "self-pitying romantic tragedy" comes second, after the "droll comedy of errors," approximating the 1962 movie to the spirit of the novel.

As Booth says, we can state that a work is ironic when, if we try to remove the irony from it, we end up removing the fun (*Irony* 131). Hence, removing the irony of *Lolita* is like removing the reason for Nabokov's novel to exist. This is neither a novel about the pleasures of molesting children nor is it about how horrible and damaging child abuse can be. It is rather a novel about a madman and his journey. Todd Solondz, writer and director of *Happiness* (1998), arguably the most disturbing film ever made about pedophilia, declared in interviews that his objective was never to condemn child abuse. For him, making a movie about pedophilia just to state that it is abominable would be a waste of time, since most viewers already know that child abuse is a heinous crime, and he respects his public's intelligence (Trish Deitch Rohrer 63). I am not saying that Lyne's goal in *Lolita* is merely to promote an attack on pedophilia, but, by overstating Humbert's regret and by withdrawing the irony from his narration, the director certainly eliminates the fun of its source, its *raison d'etre*.

Since this study concentrates on the irony found in the novel and films, it also suggests that it would be interesting to investigate other forms of humor, such as parody and even slapstick, which are present in both movies and in the novel. Other fascinating lines of research involving these oeuvres include a more explicitly political approach, such as the theme of Europe versus America, or the shock of the Old World when confronted with the New World, or how the novel can be seen as a critique of America, or even Nabokov's declaration that *Lolita* represents his love affair with the English language.

Of course, we need to bear in mind that an ironic book or film is not necessarily better or more intelligent than a non-ironic one. But to drain a novel of its driving force, irony, which is what Lyne does with Nabokov's *Lolita*, leaves us with a very faithful plot and no spirit. To put it another way: *Lolita* without irony is like *Titanic* without a ship.

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