

Still Intrigued with *Lolita*: Nabokov's Visionary Work on Child Sexual Abuse*

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The aim of this paper is to defend the revolutionary nature of *Lolita*, as it stands on firm ground in terms of current scientific knowledge on child sexual abuse. Nabokov's accurate insight on child sexual abuse has not received the attention it deserves in critical analysis.

The Author and his Notorious *Oeuvre*

Much is known about Vladimir Nabokov's life thanks to his extraordinary main biographer, Brian Boyd: from his childhood, born "into an old noble family and stupendous wealth" (3), according to Boyd's *Russian Years*, to the poverty-stricken life of an exiled political refugee. His rich, unique, culturally diverse and unlikely trajectory puzzled his audience, who had difficulty pigeonholing an author who only started writing novels in English when he was almost forty. In Nabokov's interview with Herbert Gold for *The Paris Review*, the author remarked with his characteristic humor: "Nobody can decide if I am a middle-aged American writer or an old Russian writer—or an ageless international freak" (Nabokov, "Interview" 18).

The fact that he was trilingual added complexity to his intellectual aura, and he described himself as having three mother tongues, a feat that relates to his aristocratic upbringing—it was not uncommon for noble Russian children to have governesses who would teach them to speak Russian, French, and English fluently. Finally, he was able to succeed in two very distinct domains—science and art. He became a literature professor, a poet, and world-renowned novelist, as well as a scientist who had a distinguished career as a lepidopterist, identifying butterflies at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology.

To English Professor Geoffrey Green, who wrote *Freud and Nabokov*, *Lolita* is a novel disguised as a case history. Such case

study is unveiled by the narrator, Humbert Humbert, who writes his memoirs supposedly from prison—a sentence not related to his abuse of Lolita, but for having killed another man, Clare Quilty. Humbert, a thirty-seven-year-old European literature professor falls instantly in love when he meets Lolita, who is twelve. He discovers a perfect solution to be near his child-love and marries Lolita’s mother, Charlotte, who is killed by a car after leaving the house in complete emotional turmoil upon discovery of Humbert’s diary, in which he has declared his love for Lolita and disparages her mother. He travels with his stepdaughter across several states, jumping from motel to motel so as to avoid raising suspicion. After one year on the run, Lolita convinces Humbert to settle down, and she is enrolled in school. She eventually runs away from Humbert to be with Clare Quilty, another man attracted to her and who has written her into the school play. After years of looking, Humbert finds Lolita—she is seventeen, married, and pregnant. Her husband, Dick, is an impoverished, working-class and partially deaf fellow who treats her well and is not much older than herself. Humbert’s impression: “there she was (my Lolita!) hopelessly worn at seventeen....” (Nabokov, *Lolita* 277).

The question remains: how was Nabokov able to get inside the brain and skin of a child molester, when there was hardly any information on such a problem? How did he pull it off? He stirred things up by creating a new terminology—*nymphet*: maidens “between the age limits of nine and fourteen who ... reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is demoniac)” (Nabokov, *Lolita* 16). When Herbert Gold tried to normalize the frequent relationship of “men of forty and girls very little older than Lolita” in Hollywood and New York (Nabokov, “Interview” 3), Nabokov snapped back: “Humbert was fond of ‘little girls’—not simply ‘young girls.’ Nymphets are girl-children, not starlets and ‘sex-kittens.’ Lolita was twelve, not eighteen, when Humbert met her. You may remember that by the time she is fourteen, he refers to her as his ‘aging mistress’” (3).

When asked why Nabokov chose a compound name for the infamous Humbert, Alfred Appel Jr. reproduces in *The Annotated*

“*Lolita*,” an excerpt from the author’s *Playboy* interview in 1964: “The double rumble is, I think, very nasty, very suggestive. It is a hateful name for a hateful person” (qtd. in Appel 319).

It happens that Humbert Humbert is totally convincing as a pedophile: he asserts several times that it is normal to have sex with children; he quotes statistics and famous cases in history to illustrate his argument; he is intrigued by the fact that he is sexually aroused by children; and yet admits that his problem—or nature—is difficult to change. He employs subtle seduction techniques to gain Lolita’s confidence and controls her behavior, not only through sex, but by giving her money and letting her do whatever she pleases as long as it is in his presence and away from others. He showers her with gifts: comic books, chocolates, rings, a wrist watch, tennis racquet, skates, and binoculars, among other trinkets. And most importantly, Humbert uses emotional violence to threaten Lolita.

Confusing Author with Protagonist

Nabokov was indeed so successful that readers and critics often did not see his novel as a parody and got confused—who was saying all those perverse words, Humbert or Nabokov? The author himself had worried about this possibility. Rodney Phillips and Sarah Funke mention in their session at *The New York Public Library on Nabokov’s Life and Works* that: “Fearing that he’d be identified with his protagonist, he wrote in a December 23, 1953 note to (*New Yorker* fiction editor) Katharine White, ‘its subject is such that V., as a college teacher, cannot very well publish (*Lolita*) under his real name’” (qtd. in Library of America 1). The public often confused all of this. In a tribute book written for his father, Dmitri Nabokov writes that he was asked by a lady at a cocktail party: “How does it feel to have a dirty old man for a father?” (131). Biographer Andrew Field mentions one of the anonymous letters of complaint from Two Concerned Parents of Cornell available in the university’s files: “Frankly, we have forbidden our youngster to enroll in any course taught by Nabokov, and we would be in fear for any young girl who consulted him at a private conference or ran into him after dark on the campus!” (305).

To complicate things, Nabokov had many common characteristics with Humbert. They were both highly educated, both were Europeans who had immigrated to the United States, both taught literature, and both had a passion for language and words. Interestingly, when Nabokov contrasted himself to Humbert, he would focus on irrelevant points. In a TV interview with well-known literary critic Lionel Trilling in the fifties, Nabokov says: “I tried to separate myself from him. Humbert Humbert confuses a humming bird with a hawk moth. I would never do that.”

So was Nabokov a pedophile like Humbert? In his fascinating book *Chasing Lolita: How popular culture corrupted Nabokov's little girl all over again*, author Graham Vickers says that if Nabokov liked little girls his “diligent biographers have failed to uncover the evidence” (229). There is, however, ample evidence suggesting just the opposite. This quiet family man described in detail his happy childhood in his autobiography (*Speak, Memory*). In the *American Years*, Brian Boyd cites several sources describing Nabokov as a kind individual who was a devoted family man and unable to do harm—“Few families can have ever worked together as the Nabokovs did” (420)—who was very much in love with his wife Véra (471).

He did have his own memories of childhood sexual abuse. Nabokov mentions in his autobiography that when he was eight or nine his uncle would “invariably take me upon his knee after lunch and (while two young footmen were clearing the table in the empty dining room) fondle me, with crooning sounds and fancy endearments....” (Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* 68).

Nabokov reports “feeling embarrassed for my uncle in the presence of the servants and relieved” (Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* 68) when his father called from the veranda. The remark's brevity can only leave room for speculation about the impact of these events, but it may have helped him to attend to the phenomenon of child sexual abuse as an author and thereby empathize with children, as Brian Boyd suggests in *The Russian Years* (73). Nevertheless, Bruce Stone, in 2013, reminds us in *The Genesis and Genius of “Lolita”* that scholars often thought differently, mentioning Brandon Centerwall's *Texas Studies in Literature* from 1990, in

which this author says that Nabokov was a victim of molestation and, consequently, a “closet pedophile” (qtd. in Stone 3). Although Bruce Stone adamantly criticizes such claims, perhaps because he is not a specialist in child abuse, he does not raise the main argument: fortunately, not everyone who has been abused becomes an abuser. On the contrary, when I reviewed the research literature to write *What is Pedophilia?*, I found that only 30 to 50 percent of pedophiles have a known history of child abuse victimization.

Nabokov had a long and happy marriage to Véra, to whom he dedicated most of his books. Véra’s biographer, Stacy Schiff, describes the couple as inseparable and that “Nabokov’s struck many as one of the great love stories” (xii). In addition to recognizing Mrs. Nabokov’s intellectual skills and talent for languages, Schiff emphasizes her beauty: “She was radiant, regal, elegance personified, a head-turner....” (175). Véra’s influence on the man and his art was impressive: she typed his material and proofread it. Without Véra, there would have been no *Lolita*—literally. Nabokov told Herbert Gold in *The Paris Review* interview how: “One day in 1950, at Ithaca, New York, she was responsible for stopping me and urging delay and second thoughts as, beset with technical difficulties and doubts, I was carrying the first chapter of *Lolita* to the garden incinerator” (17). Finally, he was described very affectionately by his son Dmitri, who emphasizes “his trusting, gentle nature” (128) on “Revisiting Father’s Room.”

If these arguments are not enough, there is Nabokov’s modest and candid account. In *Strong Opinions*, he says that *Lolita* was the most difficult book he wrote: “I lacked the necessary information—that was the initial difficulty. I did not know any American twelve-year-old girls....” (26). And in the introduction of *The Annotated Lolita*, Alfred Appel Jr. reproduces Nabokov’s response to a *Vogue* interviewer regarding the difficulties he faced while writing *Lolita*: “What was most difficult was putting myself ... I am a normal man, you see” (qtd. in Appel xl).

How did Nabokov allow us to take a plunge inside the brain of a sexual offender, sharing his thoughts and most intimate desires? I believe his training as a scientist helped him with the methodology.

Much like an anthropologist, Nabokov did his ethnographic field work. Brian Boyd recounts that the author read newspaper clippings of child abuse cases, such as the abduction of “fifteen year old Sally Horner” (*American Years* 211), that he “searched out studies of the physical and psychological development of American school girls,” also taking “phrases from teen magazines” (211). Alfred Appel Jr. reproduces more of Nabokov’s explanations to *Vogue*: “I traveled in school buses to listen to the talk of schoolgirls. I went to school on the pretext of placing our daughter. We have no daughter. For Lolita, I took one arm of a little girl who used to come to see Dmitri (his son), one kneecap of another” (qtd. in Appel xl). In the same line, Stacy Schiff reproduces interviews from Véra explaining that “her husband had sat on the Ithaca buses with a notepad and listened carefully. He has also haunted playgrounds, until his doing so had become awkward” (214).

Although never revealing names, Nabokov also had his share of inspiration for Humbert from real life. Nabokov admits in the CBC-TV interview that he read case histories and “became quite an expert in these matters.” Cynthia Haven identifies, in *Stanford Alumni Magazine*, a potential source of inspiration for Humbert, mentioning that biographers Andrew Field and Brian Boyd describe Nabokov’s interaction with Henry Lanz, “a good-looking, charming, dislocated intellectual” (3) who taught in Stanford’s Slavic department and married the fourteen-year-old daughter of a friend. Andrew Field also implies another source of influence: Nabokov’s extended family, which was full of uncharacteristic affairs, and the fact that, in Russia, incest was a theme more commonly discussed than in the US. Finally, literature professor Eric Goldman calls attention, in *Nabokov Studies*, to the influence that the controversial *Kinsey Report* may have had on the writing of *Lolita*, helping the author to understand human sexuality in general and, specifically, Humbert’s deviance, as well as Lolita’s pre-adolescent sexual behavior. In fact, Goldman states that Humbert’s ruminations about the frequent prevalence of his pedophilia were a direct parody of Alfred Kinsey’s research.

Nevertheless, there is something insulting and narrow-minded in raising the possibility that Nabokov himself shared Humbert's sexual interest for children. It denies the ability of artistic expression to transcend our life history and experience. If that were the case, a man such as Flaubert would never have been able to penetrate the female soul of Emma Bovary, to cite just one example. In other words, although there is something elusive called *talent*, when this special skill, as Harold Bloom says, makes you recognize powers greater than your own, there is "greatness," which is transcendental, or *genius* (4). As Dmitri Nabokov asks in his essay "Revisiting Father's Room," "...a creative genius does not have to experience the madness of his various characters to give them life?" (131).

Child Sexual Abuse Myths Dealt by Nabokov

If a genius is a visionary who is ahead of his or her age, Vladimir Nabokov was way beyond his time in terms of intuitive knowledge on child sexual abuse. One myth he elegantly dispels in *Lolita* was that of the sexual offender as a disgusting character who may be easily identified by society. Brian Boyd sums it well in *The American Years*: "For all Humbert's vices, Nabokov refuses to make him a subhuman ogre..." (234). Indeed, Humbert is so bright, his sense of humor is so sharp, he is so knowledgeable—albeit vulnerable—that he confuses the audience and even critics. When Herbert Gold said in *The Paris Review* that "Humbert, while comic, retains a touching and insistent quality—that of the spoiled artist" (Nabokov, "Interview" 4), Nabokov answered back: "I would put it differently: Humbert Humbert is a vain and cruel wretch who manages to appear 'touching.' That epithet, in its true, tear-iridized sense, can only apply to my poor little girl" (4). This appearance of *normality* of sexual abusers unfortunately still confuses society, particularly the legal system that—unequipped to deal with child victims and lacking sufficient knowledge of sexual abuse—questions the validity of the child's testimony simply on the basis that presumably decent and successful adults could never do such despicable things.

A second myth suggested by the author is the claim that the sexual offender feels love for the child. In his effort to defend that

Lolita was not pornographic, Lionel Trilling states in *The Last Lover* that “*Lolita* is about love ... *Lolita* is not about sex, but about love....” (334). The critic reiterates this point in the aforementioned TV interview: *Lolita* “is not a book so much about an aberration, as much as an actual love ... very full of tenderness and very full of passion as well...” (Trilling & Nabokov). Nabokov seems slightly amused as he listens. Trilling grasps for words, mentions passionate love in normal marriage, and notes that people think in clichés, indicating that perhaps they don’t know what love is.

The fact is that, more than fifty years later, we have a pretty good idea about what romantic love is—scientists have been mapping human brains when people are in love, and psychologists have also been doing much research on this topic. Take Robert Sternberg’s triangular theory of love, encompassed by three different components: intimacy (feelings of closeness and connectedness), passion (physical attraction and sex), and commitment (the decision to remain with one another and, in the long term, share achievements and plans with that other).

There was plenty of passion and sex in Humbert’s relationship with *Lolita*, but he realizes only at the end that there was no intimacy or mutual commitment. Humbert never cared much about what *Lolita* wished for, and according to Ellen Pifer in the introduction of *Vladimir Nabokov’s “Lolita”: A Casebook*, he “rarely pays attention to the child he holds captive” (12), realizing only when he last sees her that he has broken her life (279). Thus, Humbert was not moved by love; instead, according to Nabokov in *Strong Opinions*, he was a man “with an obsession” (16).

Surprisingly Lionel Trilling’s opinion is still prevalent today. *Lolita* was reprinted in 2003 by *Folha de São Paulo*, Brazil’s largest newspaper. This is how the novel is described in Portuguese on the book jacket: “As seen today, filtered by the years and by a true library of commentators and critics, *Lolita* appears mostly as a passionate love story, written with elegant despair.”

Why is it again that we cannot use the term *love* when child sexual abuse is concerned? It is not excessive morality as pedophiles criticize, but what is at stake is the inequality of power: an adult

who is in a relationship of responsibility or trust (a stepfather in Humbert's case) ultimately takes advantage of a child who is still developing—solely to gratify or satisfy the adult's needs.

Third myth: the seductress child. When Humbert is about to describe the first time he has intercourse with Lolita, he writes in his diary as if in a mock-trial; “Frigid gentlewomen of the jury!... I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she [Lolita] who seduced me” (Nabokov, *Lolita* 132). Nabokov was ahead of his time by not allowing a picture of a girl-child on the first cover of the book *Lolita*. His imagined Lolita was twelve years of age, four-foot-nine, and weighed seventy-eight pounds. In contrast, the film industry reinforced the idea of an overtly seductive Lolita in both *Lolita* movies, and popular culture will describe her as “no saint” (for more on this analysis, see *Chasing Lolita* by Graham Vickers). As Dmitri Nabokov wrote in *Vladimir Nabokov: A Tribute*: “How misunderstood was poor Lolita! What a pornocopia of pubescent and post-pubescent prostitutes has traveled through the media under her name!” (131).

When describing child sexual abuse it is, thus, inappropriate to say that the victim has seduced the adult or to defend the idea, as Nomi Tamir-Ghez does in *The Art of Persuasion in Nabokov's "Lolita"* that it was not rape because Lolita complies (36). As Brian Boyd unequivocally summarizes the events at the Enchanted Hunters in *The American Years*—“Legally, technically, morally, this would have been rape” (233).

Nevertheless, if the seductress-child myth is to be believed, as a consequence, a fourth myth emerges: that the child is responsible for the abuse. Brian Boyd quotes, in *The American Years*, Robertson Davies' view of the book's theme: “not the corruption of an innocent child by a cunning adult, but the exploitation of a weak adult by a corrupt child” (230). In this regard, Eric Goldman mentions Todd Bayma and Gary Fine's survey of reviews of *Lolita* shortly after its publication, explaining that the majority of critics shared Humbert's misogynistic interpretation of Lolita, in which reviewers adopted, rather than condemned, Humbert's view of the child. Goldman claims that Nabokov, instead of viewing Lolita as a nymph-like girl

already perverted before Humbert exploits her, sees her rather like an ordinary, juvenile girl whose “normal” sexual development is warped by a pedophile: “Rather than being a nymphomaniac who seduces Humbert Humbert, from this perspective she becomes a normally developing young woman who is exploited by an imaginative man who ironically sees her as deviant” (88).

It is understandable that in the 1950s, before feminism and the sexual revolution, critics would be somewhat misogynistic. But the sad thing is that *Lolita*—the novel as well as the character—continues to be misunderstood in the twenty-first century. Take this comment on *Lolita* written recently by the young writer Lila Azam Zabganah: “Yet mind the twist, it was not he who seduced her, but she who seduced him ... She had learned a thing or two at camp ... And in a glancing moment, they were ‘technically lovers’” (58).

In other words, the readers see *Lolita* only through Humbert’s biased lens, and it is convenient for him to see her as sexually precocious. However, even if that had been the case—let us imagine that before meeting Humbert, *Lolita* had been previously sexually abused by Quilty and, as a consequence, had developed sexualized behaviors as so many abused children do. Due to the unequal balance of power between an adult and a child, such sexualized precocity would represent a warning sign for help, rather than typical seduction. Véra Nabokov understood this quite well, as quoted by Stacy Schiff:

I wish, though, somebody would notice the tender description of the child’s helplessness, her pathetic dependence on monstrous HH, and her heartrending courage all along, culminating in that squalid but essentially pure and healthy marriage.... *Lolita* is essentially very good indeed. (236)

The fifth myth relates to minimizing the impact of the abuse for the child. In the words of Humbert:

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the majority of sex offenders ... are innocuous, inadequate, passive, timid strangers who merely ask

the community to allow them to pursue their practically harmless, so-called aberrant behavior ... without the police and society cracking down upon them. We are not sex fiends! We do not rape as good soldiers do. We are unhappy, mild, dog-eyed gentlemen, sufficiently well integrated to control our urge in the presence of adults, but ready to give years and years of life for one chance to touch a nymphet. Emphatically no killers are we. Poets never kill. (Nabokov, *Lolita* 87–88)

Another myth on this list is of the sexual offense as an impulsive act rather than a carefully planned one. Like many pedophiles, Humbert first assesses Lolita's family dynamics. He even marries Charlotte to gain access to the child. The mother in question is more concerned with herself than with the safety of her own daughter. Lolita spends a lot of time in Humbert's room, and Charlotte never raises this issue or talks to her daughter about it. Lolita is often in conflict with her mother, who describes her daughter in less-than-favorable ways. This scenario helps the offender, in the sense that he plans the ideal situation to avoid being caught. Conveniently, Lolita has no living father or any siblings. She is truly alone.

Nabokov's Factual Insight about Child Sexual Abuse

Nabokov's case study is full of factual information about the severity of the sexual abuse experienced by Lolita. In addition to the incestuous betrayal of confidence by her stepfather, the abuse involves penetration and lasts over two years—all conditions that make recovery more difficult, just to cite a classical review regarding the impact of child sexual abuse by Angela Browne and David Finkelhor, the latter one of the area's main researchers (66). Humbert isolates Lolita, and, in his typical jealous manner, forbids her from having friends and interacting with peers, which is characteristic of abusive relationships. At least on one occasion, he resorts to physical violence by pressing her arm with force and ripping her shirt. He uses emotional violence frequently by threatening her with a reformatory or jail if anyone learns their secret. He threatens to harm her and even threatens to kill her at one point. Humbert describes in detail his tactics "to establish a background of shared secrecy and shared

guilt” (Nabokov, *Lolita* 151), so typical of sexual offenders: “let us see ... what happens if you, a minor ... complain to the police of my having kidnaped and raped you? Let us suppose they believe you You become the ward of the Department of Public Welfare—which I am afraid sounds a little bleak ... I don’t know if you have ever heard of the laws relating to dependent, neglected incorrigible and delinquent children.... By rubbing all this in I succeeded in terrorizing Lo....” (Nabokov, *Lolita* 150–151).

The short and long-term impact of Humbert’s sexual abuse on Lolita is also quite realistic. She cries herself to sleep every night and is probably depressed, as are many victimized children as documented in a thirty-year longitudinal study conducted in New Zealand by David Fergusson and his colleagues (664–674). Her school performance deteriorates, she becomes inattentive, and her grades decline. She becomes angry and rebellious with her abuser, yelling at one point: “I despise you” (Nabokov, *Lolita* 171), and Humbert is almost surprised to see that his nymphet becomes obsessed with sexualized thoughts. According to Gail Hornor, one of the most studied symptoms in a child who has been sexually abused is, for example, over-sexualized behavior (358–364).

It is indeed no coincidence that Nabokov chose Dolores, the Spanish word for *pain*, to name his poor nymphet. The writer Azar Nafisi summarizes Lolita’s ordeal by saying: “the desperate truth about Lolita’s story is *not* the rape of a twelve-year-old by a dirty old man, but the confiscation of one individual by another” (47).

In these almost six decades that separate us from *Lolita*’s first publication, we no longer need a fictional character like Humbert to teach us about child molestation. Mental health professionals have conducted numerous interviews with real life Humberts. Previous adolescent child abusers, now assimilated into society, have published in scientific journals describing their ordeal and suggesting what needs to be done to prevent child abuse (see Brian Oliver’s report in *Child Abuse & Neglect*).

We now know that sexual offenders comprise a very heterogeneous group and that pedophilia is not such a rare phenomenon. A well-known survey conducted in 1989 by John

Briere and Marsha Runtz asked 139 male undergraduate students about their sexual interest in children and found that 21 percent of the students reported sexual attraction to small children, 9 percent described sexual fantasies involving children, 5 percent admitted to having masturbated to such fantasies, and 7 percent indicated some likelihood of having sex with a child if they could avoid being caught (65).

Nabokov was intuitively right even in his antipathy towards Sigmund Freud, who could have advanced knowledge on the negative consequences of child sexual abuse to human development and did not. Freud returned from his internship in Paris shocked by the maltreated children he saw examined by child abuse pioneer Ambroise Tardieu—a French pathologist and expert in forensic medicine. In his *Assault on Truth*, Jeffrey M. Masson describes how Freud was forced by Viennese society to abandon his proposed *Seduction Theory*, in which hysteria occurred as a result of premature sexual experiences, as no one could believe that so many respectable gentlemen could indeed sexually abuse their own daughters. As a result, Freud abandoned his theory and started defending one in which the patient’s report was a mere fabrication based on underlying, repressed sexual urges.

Lastly, Nabokov was correct in adding details of *Lolita*’s involvement with Quilty—how likely it is that once abused, the victim will be victimized again. Just to cite one of many research examples, in a study led by Fergusson with 520 young women in New Zealand, those who had reported severe child sexual abuse (involving intercourse) had significantly higher rates of early onset consensual sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, multiple sexual partners, and sexual assault at the age of sixteen, among other consequences.

Inspiration for *Lolita*

How did Nabokov ever conceive of such a complex and revolutionary book? *Lolita* was such an explosive book that the author included a final chapter (“On a book entitled *Lolita*”), in which he writes as himself and tries to explain some facts to the audience about his

novel. In this chapter, he narrates how the idea was conceived: “The first throb of *Lolita* went through me late in 1939 or early in 1940, in Paris ... the initial shiver of inspiration was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the *Jardin des Plantes*, who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced his first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: this sketch showed the bars of the poor creature’s cage” (Nabokov, *Lolita* 311).

I initially thought that the ape had inspired Nabokov to think of Lolita—the girl victim whose life was imprisoned by Humbert Humbert. It was only when I watched Nabokov being interviewed on TV that I noticed how wrong I was. Nabokov describes his *Jardin des Plantes* ape story and then says: “My baboon is Humbert Humbert. His cage is his obsession ... and his passion. And for thinking of the suffering of the child offender, I admire this writer even more—for only when child abusers are treated, and the intergenerational cycle interrupted, shall we be able to prevent child sexual abuse.

Yet it is ironic that *Lolita* even today is not associated with child sexual abuse prevention. In “Nabokov’s Novel Offspring: Lolita and her Kin,” Ellen Pifer says the book is associated with “sexual precocity” (83). To make things worse, *Lolita* is still, at times, associated with pornography. An internet search for “Lolita image” generates questionable pictures of sexualized children. Interestingly, a butterfly is one of the FBI-identified symbols for *child-lover* and purportedly a pedophile’s favorite creature. *Slate Magazine* mentions the 2007 FBI Report, titled “The Pedophile Secret Code,” published on December 3, 2007, which notes that “non-preferential gender child abusers indicate their enthusiasms with a butterfly logo made up of two large hearts and two smaller hearts” (1). Fortunately, a butterfly may also have other positive connotations, symbolizing hope, transformation, and life, but it is ironic that Nabokov’s entomological passion is also a symbol for pedophiles.

Conclusion

Lolita is considered one of the most important novels of the twentieth century due to its richness of style, frequent puns, literary

references, technical virtuosity, complex plot structure (much like a chess game, another of Nabokov's personal passions), deep psychological character analysis, and perfect prose. Critics have compared Nabokov to Conrad, Proust, Kafka, Gogol, and Flaubert.

In addition, I would add that he was, unknowingly, a pioneer in the prevention of child sexual abuse. According to Sokhna Fall, vice president of the French Association of Traumatic Memory and Victimology, in a paper published on the association's website, *Lolita's* story is exemplary of the child victims of sexual aggression (1). Brian Boyd is correct in describing him as a "shrewd intuitive psychologist" (334) in *Stalking Nabokov*. As Dr. John Ray Jr. (who, as some scholars suggest, may represent Nabokov himself) says when introducing Humbert's case study in the foreword to *Lolita*:

...for in its poignant personal study there lurks a general lesson; the wayward child, the egotistic mother, the panting maniac—these are not only vivid characters in a unique story: they warn us of dangerous trends; they point out potent evils. "Lolita" should make all of us parents, social workers, educators—apply ourselves with still greater vigilance and vision to the task of bringing up a better generation in a safer world. (6)

Analyzing Nabokov as a storyteller in the *Cambridge Companion to Nabokov*, Brian Boyd writes: "Nabokov famously declared that 'There are three points of view from which a writer can be considered ... as a storyteller, as a teacher, and as an enchanter'" (31). It is consensus that he combined all three points. While enchanting us with *Lolita's* story, the novel also teaches us about the complexity of sexual abuse dynamics, the obsession of the sexual offender, and the suffering of the child.

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