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WHEN DID HAROLD HAZE DIE?

Harold Haze has been a neglected figure in *Lolita* scholarship. Dead before Humbert gazes upon Dolores Haze, Harold leaves little more than his shoes and his gun to account for his existence. We don't know what he did for a living, and we don't know when, where or even how he died. Since Nabokov utilized his characters' deaths in striking and often improbable ways to advance his plots, it's curious that Harold's death goes unaccounted for. A quick survey of deaths recorded in *Lolita* should make this aporia evident (page references in this note are to *The Annotated Lolita*):

Humbert: "[...] died in legal captivity, of coronary thrombosis, on November 19, 1952" (3);

Dolores Haze and her unborn daughter: "Mrs. 'Richard F. Schiller' died in childbed, giving birth to a stillborn girl, on Christmas Day 1952, in Gray Star" (4);

Humbert's mother: "My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three" (10);

Annabel: "[...] and four months later she died of typhus in Corfu" (13);

Humbert's father: "A little money that had come my way after my father's death" (24);

Valeria: "[...] Mrs. Maximovich nee Zborovski had died in childbirth around 1945" (30);

Harold and Charlotte Haze's son: "Lolita's brother who died at 2 when she was 4" (68);

Charlotte: "[...] the mangled remains of Charlotte Humbert" (98);

Jean Farlow: “[...] already nursing the cancer that was to kill her at thirty-three” (104);

Dolores’s relatives: “‘I understand she has several aunts and a maternal grandfather in California?—oh, *had!*—I’m sorry’” (195);

Charlie Holmes: “‘[...]for shame, Mr. Humbert! The poor boy has just been killed in Korea’” (290);

Clare Quilty: “Quilty of all people had managed to crawl out onto the landing, and there we could see him, flapping and heaving, and then subsiding, forever this time, in a purple heap” (305).

Why does Harold’s death matter? His absence is essential to the premise of the novel. Humbert says there “might have been no Lolita” (9) had there been no Annabel, but had there been no widow Charlotte nor fatherless daughter Dolores, there would have been no *Lolita*. In *The Gift*, written between 1935-37, Nabokov planted this plot contrivance into the imaginative musings of Boris Ivanovich Shchyogolev: “[...] an old dog—but still in his prime, fiery, thirsting for happiness—gets to know a widow, and she has a daughter, still quite a little girl [...] and [he] marries the widow” (*Gift*, 198). In 1939, Nabokov implemented the plot, with the additional subtraction of the mother, in *The Enchanter*. But did Nabokov credibly establish the preconditions for such a scheme—husband and father plausibly removed—in *Lolita*?

I want to answer by examining the details of Harold’s biography in the order in which Humbert imparts them.

I.

Diarist Humbert Humbert first alerts us to Harold Haze’s vital-record status in a parenthetical aside: “[...] (the late Mr. Harold E. Haze¹—God bless the good man—had

¹ As a parenthetical aside of my own, I want to ask how Humbert knows Harold’s middle initial. Charlotte was unlikely to mention her late husband’s middle initial to her boarder and, briefly,

engendered my darling at the siesta hour in a blue-washed room)” (57).

The next reference is to Harold’s shoetrees—or to one of them—which receive a mention from Humbert on a day Dolores rebuffs his attentions: “Desperate, dying Humbert patted her clumsily on her coccyx, and she struck him, quite painfully, with one of the late Mr. Haze’s shoetrees” (65).

In another parenthetical aside, new husband Humbert infers Harold had a shoe fetish, but the location of the shoes themselves is indeterminate: “I had my wife unearth from under a collection of shoes (Mr. Haze had a passion for them, it appears) a thirty-year-old album” (76).

We learn of Harold’s approximate age when Charlotte mentions her May-December marriage: “Mr. Haze was a splendid person, a sterling soul, but he happened to be twenty years my senior” (68). From this we can infer when Harold Haze was born. According to Humbert, in 1947, Charlotte—the “poor lady”—“was in her middle thirties” (37). If we take thirty-five as a fair midpoint, Charlotte was born about 1912, two years after Humbert, and Harold was born twenty years earlier, about 1892.

A clue to Harold’s presumptive birthplace—shared with Charlotte—we learn in a dependent clause: “A Midwesterner, as her late husband had also been” (78).

We hear of Harold’s sexual proclivities when Humbert and Charlotte share their past—and, in Hum’s case, fabricated—amours: “I was considerably amused by certain remarkable sexual habits that the good Harold Haze had had according to Charlotte” (80).

In yet a third parenthetical aside—this one speculative on Hum’s part—Harold is mentioned when Charlotte offers a fall getaway to The Enchanted Hunters: “(Probably Harold used to take a vacation at that time. Open season. Conditional reflex on her part)” (93).

Of Chum, Harold’s .32 caliber automatic, Humbert tells us that he had “inherited it from the late Harold Haze” (216).

second husband. Did Humbert stumble on a written document displaying Harold’s middle initial? Cancelled check? Monogrammed towels? Letterhead still in the house? Plaque or service award? The title of the house, perhaps untransferred after Harold’s death?

Humbert's last mention of Harold comes wrapped inside one of his mea culpas, in which he fantasizes a tête-à-tête between daughter Dolores and "a sublime, purified, analyzed, deified Harold Haze" (284).

This constitutes the entirety of Nabokov's direct references to Harold Haze.

II.

When did Harold die? From his biographical details, we learn nothing. So, let's try to establish the calendrical limits of Harold's death by consulting three *Lolita* chroniclers who claim the "Haze family" or "Hazes" relocated from Pisky to Ramsdale in 1945. According to Proffer, *Lolita's* early annotator: "November breathed with Autumn chill and the Hazes moved to Ramsdale from Pisky" (*Keys*, 126). Zimmer concurs on the year in his online *A Chronology of Lolita*, as does Connolly (*Reader's Guide*, xvi).

Proffer offers no page references in his calendar, but he alone identifies November as the month of the Haze move, presumably based on Humbert's calculation: "By engaging in church work as well as by getting to know the better mothers of Lo's schoolmates, Charlotte in the course of twenty months or so had managed to become if not a prominent, at least an acceptable citizen" (75). Here, I think, is where Proffer began his own calculation. Tracing back "20 months or so" from Humbert's stay in the town, we arrive at November 1945.

A wrinkle immediately presents itself, however. To which configuration of the "Haze family" do our chroniclers refer? Did Harold move his family to Ramsdale, where he died? Or did his widow and fatherless daughter move afterwards?

Humbert tells us in yet another parenthetical aside that "(Pisky was the Haze home town in the Middle West. The Ramsdale house was her late mother-in-law's. They had moved to Ramsdale less than two years ago)" (46). To whom does the pronoun "they" refer?

Of Charlotte, Humbert also tells us "the only couple with whom she had relations of real cordiality, devoid of any *arrière-pensée* or practical foresight, were the Farlows" (78), but the Farlows never speak of Harold from personal experience. "But after all I was Charlotte's friend

and adviser,” John Farlow tells Humbert after Charlotte’s death (101). Farlow doesn’t say: “I was the Hazes’ friend” or “we”—John and Jean—“were Harold and Charlotte’s friends.” During the same conversation, Jean refers to Harold as “Harold Haze” and not the familiar “Harold”: ““John,”” cried Jean, ‘she is his child, not Harold Haze’s’” (101). And John had “handled some of Charlotte’s affairs” (79), not the Hazes’ affairs. Had they ever met Charlotte’s husband?

More troublesome is Humbert’s memory of a conversation with Dolores:

“Where is she buried anyway?” “Who?” “Oh, you know, my murdered mummy.”
“And *you* know where her grave is,” I said controlling myself, whereupon I named the cemetery—just outside Ramsdale, between the railway tracks and Lakeview Hill. (286)

Why does Dolores ask this question? She knows where her mother is buried, and Humbert knows she knows, and she knows Humbert knows she knows. A psychotherapist might propose Dolores pops such a rhetorical question to accuse Humbert of murdering her mother, but maybe another motive lurks, this one assigned to Nabokov himself, who may be setting up the scene a page later when Humbert returns to Ramsdale to interrogate Ivor Quilty: “I turned into the cemetery and walked among the long and short stone monuments. Bonzhur, Charlotte” (287).

Beyond this bit of narrative bread crumbing, the question now arises (not quite from the grave): where was Harold Haze buried? If Harold died in Ramsdale, why wasn’t Charlotte buried by her first husband’s side? For that matter, why wasn’t Harold buried by his mother’s side before Charlotte was buried on the other side? Which leads to another question: when and where did Harold’s mother die? This matters. If Harold and his mother were alive when the Hazes moved to Ramsdale, Dolores’s father and grandmother died within 20 months of each other, possibly very close to May 1947. Humbert then spent 50 days with Charlotte and Dolores, yet mother and daughter never visited the graves of Harold and his mother, Dolores never spoke of the loss of her father and grandmother, Charlotte never spoke of Dolores’s feelings about her “miserable brat’s”

losses, and none of her neighbors or acquaintances ever mention Harold to Humbert before their wedding. No one in Ramsdale seems to have known Harold.

More pressing even than the lack of evidence for Harold's presence in Ramsdale is this: *why* would Harold move his family to Ramsdale? And, specifically, why in November 1945? Harold was 53 years old, the family breadwinner at the height of his earnings potential, and his daughter was in the middle of her fall school term. Did he get an offer for a better job in Ramsdale? Unlikely. Did he move because his mother was ill and needed care? No, in that scenario, his mother would probably have moved in with him. There doesn't seem to be any plausible scenario in which Harold Haze moves his family to his mother's home.

III.

An alternative possibility, that Harold died in Pisky, either suddenly or slowly of an illness, is no more plausible. Yes, Miss Phelan supervised Dolores in the summer of 1944, and maybe Charlotte sent her daughter away to spare her from the travails of her father's terminal illness, but did Nabokov mean for his readers to believe that freshly widowed Charlotte, after living in Pisky—"little Lo's birthplace" (158)—for at least a decade, had no stable and supportive community or extended family and defaulted instead to moving in with her mother-in-law in New England? And then Mother Haze conveniently died some months later?

Humbert claims Charlotte was a "Midwesterner, as her late husband had also been" (80), and that "Pisky was the Haze home town in the Middle West" (46). If they were Midwesterners, both should have had family there. Yet Harold's mother lived in New England. Why? More curious, Humbert tells us of a "dilapidated Appalachian farmhouse that had belonged to some gnarled Haze or other in the dead past" (148). Did Nabokov invent this merely so Humbert could threaten Dolores? And why doesn't Harold have any relatives? An only child of only children? No cousins? No aunts or uncles?

And what about the Beckers? After Charlotte has read his diary, Humbert speculates that she may have intended to flee "with Lo to Parkington, or even back to Pisky" (99). Charlotte's

parents were probably in their mid-sixties and might well be alive. Why else go back to Pisky, unless she had family there? But Dolores tells Miss Pratt she has maternal relatives living in California. If Dolores's grandfather and aunts are alive, none were invited to Charlotte's wedding or to her funeral. (And if Dolores lied, Miss Pratt could have caught her.)

So, with or without Harold, why did Nabokov move the Hazes' to Ramsdale? I think I have an answer. In Coalmont, Dolores tells Humbert of her first glimpse of Quilty:

Well, did I know that he had known her mother? That he was practically an old friend? That he had visited with his uncle in Ramsdale?—oh, years ago—and spoken at Mother's club, and had tugged and pulled her, Dolly, by her bare arm onto his lap in front of everybody, and kissed her face, she was ten and furious with him? (272)

Since Dolores lived in Ramsdale as a ten-year-old only between November and December 31, 1945,² Charlotte only had a few months to begin her book club and to invite Clare Quilty. How did she manage this, when, according to Humbert, nearly two years of living on Lawn Street was

² There are a few temporal and logistical aporia in *Lolita* that have gone unexamined, Dolores's age being the most glaring inconsistency. In his diary entry of Sunday, June 8, 1947, Humbert describes how "the seventh-grader enjoyed her green-red-blue comics" (42). This seems consistent, as Humbert claims Dolores "had entered the sixth grade at eleven, soon after moving to Ramsdale from the Middle West" (136). But children in American public schools begin first grade at six, so Dolly would have started first grade in 1941 and would have continued fifth grade in November of 1945. (Nabokov, an émigré, may be excused for this error. Dmitri turned six when the Nabokovs arrived in the United States but attended private school.) However, Dolores was born on January 1, 1935, and she could not have moved to Ramsdale in November of 1945 at the age of eleven because she was ten.

Humbert's dating of his tryst with Annabel also suffers an inconsistency: "...that little girl with her seaside limbs and ardent tongue haunted me ever since—until at last, twenty-four years later, I broke her spell by incarnating her in another" (15), compared to: "The twenty-five years I had lived since then, tapered to a palpitating point, and vanished" (39).

I offer these errata to Stone (2010), who has catalogued an entire range of *Lolita* slips (Freudian and Nabokovian), from missing commas to his own contribution to the debate on the "fifty-six days."

“not long enough to know all the nice people”? Charlotte alludes to Clare Quilty early in the novel: ““We have,”” said Haze, ““an excellent dentist. Our neighbor, in fact. Dr. Quilty. Uncle or cousin, I think, of the playwright”” (63). Why does she prevaricate on “uncle or cousin”? Charlotte knows very well the relationship between Ivor and Clare. Even Dolores, 10 at the time, knew definitively that Ivor was Clare’s uncle. Yet Humbert insists the relationship between Charlotte and Ivor was distant: “She knew slightly the jovial dentist who lived in a kind of ramshackle wooden chateau behind our lawn” (78).

One wonders whether Nabokov is playing with the reader, or Charlotte with Humbert—or if Nabokov’s plot machinations can be seen here behind both Humbert and Charlotte. After all, our puppeteer, “creator of [...] sham worlds” (Ivi), could not have dragged Dolores onto Quilty’s lap and put his plot in motion unless the Hazes had moved to Ramsdale next to Ivor Quilty. No move to Ramsdale, no *Lolita*.

IV.

So, did Nabokov credibly establish the preconditions for *Lolita*’s widow-and-daughter scheme—husband and father plausibly removed—or did he neglect adequately to think about them? To put it another way, was Harold’s death McFate or MisCue, one of those fantastical, compulsory plot turns—“those dazzling coincidences that logicians hate and poets love” (31)—or an unaccountable and irreconcilable element of Harold’s biography that cannot be attributed to Humbert’s unreliability?

In his screenplay of *Lolita*, Nabokov offered an improbable alternate and definitive time frame for Harold’s death. “As a matter of fact,” Charlotte tells Humbert, “we were planning a trip to Europe just before Mr. Haze died, after three years of great happiness” (*Screenplay*, 37-38). This implies that Harold died in 1937 at the age of 45, three years after their April 1934 wedding—in the novel, the same year their dead son was born—and that the Hazes were considering distant

travel with or without their three-year-old daughter. Nabokov also had Charlotte answer the question of where Harold lived when she refers to a painted screen that topples out of a closet onto Humbert: “We bought it at a store here to match our Mexican stuff” (*Screenplay*, 38). Since there is no mention of Pisky or of Harold’s mother, I think we should assume Nabokov dropped all that in favor of a simplified connubial Ramsdale home. Nabokov even manufactured an alibi for the presence of Chum—“Mr. Haze acquired it when he thought he had cancer” (*Screenplay*, 78)—which only further contorts Harold’s liminal character.

While Nabokov is welcome to adapt his material for the screen however he wants, I wonder at how he cavalierly determined and contextualized, retrospectively, Harold’s end, when he had not marked—or had not bothered to mark—this event in his novel. Harold exists as an indispensable yet indeterminate character who remains wet clay on the archly calibrated wheel of Nabokovian misfortune. As for Humbert, Harold was Dolores’s progenitor, occasional comic relief, a convenient death—and not much else.

Nevertheless, in the novel, the Haze family move to Ramsdale plays its part: Charlotte needed to be more than just a widow with a young daughter, she needed to be a woman who had no family of her own and who was not well-integrated into her community (“not long enough to know all the nice people”). This made Charlotte and Dolores unusually and precipitously vulnerable to Humbert’s predation and offered the deluded (and deluding) self-professed nympholept an opportunity to live in a “brand new, mad new dream world” of Nabokov’s making, “where everything was permissible” (133).

V.

But wait... What about Harold’s shoes? A single shoetree of his was in a trunk—what was it doing there by itself and not in a shoe?—and his shoes were in a heap atop Charlotte’s album. (Where? In a closet? In the trunk?) Whether Harold died in Ramsdale or Pisky, why are his shoes *still* in the house? Charlotte had evidently given away her late husband’s clothes and other effects—where are his suits? his silk ties? his pens?—and she had no reason to keep his shoes. (To

put it another way, she wasn't the one with a shoe fetish.) But if she didn't leave Harold's shoes in the Ramsdale house (or bring them with her from Pisky), who did?

In his annotation on shoes, Gerard de Vries offers a possible interpretation: "In Nabokov's novels the changing of shoes often coincides with the entering of a new stage of the protagonists' lives, while slippers may mark the transition to the final stage, the afterlife" ("Shoes," 43). De Vries then mentions "the 'sloppy' slippers worn by a slipshod Lolita in Hunter Lane [*sic*] some three months before her death in Gray Star," and concludes: "So shoes seem to transport Nabokov's main theme, the belief in an afterlife" ("Shoes," 45). In his brief survey, de Vries misses Harold's shoe collection, whose afterlife is no less transportable than any other Nabokov character, as well as other transportive shoe references that support his thesis.

During their first cross country road trip, Humbert describes a scene of rubbernecking: "[we] silently stared, with other motorists and their children, at some smashed, blood-bespattered car with a young woman's shoe in the ditch (174); and, at the Waco Post Office, on their second road trip, this: "And moreover there was a smudgy snapshot of a Missing Girl, age fourteen, wearing brown shoes when last seen" (222). When Humbert visits pregnant Dolores in Coalmont, he notes her footwear a second time: "She wore a brown, sleeveless cotton dress and sloppy felt slippers" (269). Soon after, Quilty is subjected to a most direct "transition": "I pointed Chum at his slippered foot and crushed the trigger" (297) and then, after further discharges hit the mark: "Quilty was a very sick man. I held one of his slippers instead of the pistol—I was sitting on the pistol" (304). (Freudians note here that Nabokov's substitution of a pistol for a slipper—a pistol Humbert is sitting on—may refer back to an earlier lap scene in which Dolores, perched on him, remained "as indifferent to my ecstasy as if it were something she had sat upon, a shoe..." (165).)

So, with de Vries, if we can say here that Humbert, slipper in hand, possesses Quilty's soul in transition, and we can say that Charlotte piled Harold's shoes on her family album to conceal and to consecrate her husband's memory, maybe—just maybe—we can say, finally, that Nabokov, though he neglected the details of Harold's life and death, provided Harold with an afterlife, a trace of the father whose shoes Humbert couldn't fill.

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