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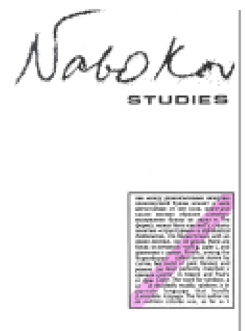

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LUDMILA SHLEYFER LAVINE (Bucknell University)

Ruslan and *Lolita*: Nabokov's Pursuit of Pushkin's Monsters, Maidens, and Morals

Introduction

"I have carefully kept Russians out of it," remarks Nabokov about Humbert's genealogy. Alfred Appel generalizes this comment to the author himself: "there are very few specific allusions to Russian writers in *Lolita*" (*Annotated Lolita* 440).[1] Since then, many scholars have documented *Lolita*'s debt to Russian literature in general and to Pushkin specifically.[2] In this study I argue that the fairy-tale motifs in *Lolita* originate in Pushkin as well, by way of Pekka Tammi's "polygenic links" or "subtext in a subtext," where one source is always a false bottom that leads to another (38).[3] Specifically, I identify the yet unexplored precursor of *Lolita* in Pushkin's *Ruslan and Liudmila* (hereafter *RL*). The narrator's persistent appeal to Edgar Allan Poe's "kingdom by the sea" is filtered through a tsardom more thoroughly disguised: Pushkin's *lukomor'e*, unnamed in the English original and beyond Humbert's Anglo/Francophone literary expertise. Furthermore, Pushkin's *poema* itself synthesizes various forms of Slavic, Eastern, and Western folklore, underscoring Nabokov's own transnational position as a writer. The basic question that this study hopes to address is why the "careful" disguise in the first place? On the thematic level, I argue that for his novel Nabokov borrows whole *RL*'s cluster of mermaids, sleeping beauties, dark magic, invisibility, pursuit and captivity, physical topography, and "brother"-rivals. In terms of genre, *Lolita* is informed by Pushkin's play with temporality; both works oscillate between the frozen fairy-tale moment and the novelistic, irretrievable passage of time. Finally, Nabokov's ruminations on the ethics-aesthetics relationship harks back to Pushkin in general, while *RL* helps focus this tension in *Lolita*. Pushkin's sexually scandalous debut with *RL* parallels Nabokov's introduction to the English-language audience through *Lolita*, foregrounding discussions of morality in art that the works engendered, both perceived as a type of pornography upon their appearance.[4]

The author of *Lolita* recognized the transnational nature of Pushkin's *RL*: "Its debt to French poetry and to French imitations of Italian romances is overwhelmingly greater than the influence

I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers and Zoran Kuzmanovich for their close reading of the initial manuscript and for their many useful suggestions.

[1] All subsequent references are to Appel's *Annotated Lolita*.

[2] See especially Priscilla Meyer's "Teaching *Lolita* through Pushkin's Lens," Alexander Dolinin's "The Russian Literary Canon," Julian W. Connolly's "Russian Cultural Contexts for *Lolita*," Sergej Davydov's "Nabokov and Pushkin" and "'Pushkinskie vesy' V. Nabokova," and Stephen H. Blackwell's "Calendar Anomalies, Pushkin and Aesthetic Love in Nabokov."

[3] Fairy-tale motifs in *Lolita* have received much scholarly attention. For instance, see Steven Swann Jones' "The Enchanted Hunters: Nabokov's Use of Folk Characterization in *Lolita*," Emily Collins' "Nabokov's *Lolita* and Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*," Appel's "Notes" (especially 345-347), and Connolly's "The Precursors of Lolita."

[4] For the scandal that *RL*'s publication caused and the *poema* as an erotic text in the context of pornographic literature of its time, see Joe Peschio's "*Ruslan and Liudmila*: Rudeness and Sexual Banter" and "Epilog: Pushkin the Pornographer Two Hundred Years Later" (94-124).

upon it of Russian folklore, but the purity of its diction and the verve of its colloquial modulations make of it, historically, the first Russian masterpiece in the narrative genre" (*Commentary* 36). It is reasonable that Nabokov should have this "first Russian masterpiece" in mind as he attempts to make a mark on the American literary scene. Humbert represents European high culture even as his "fancy prose style" (9) becomes a classic of American literature. Some critics argue that even Nabokov's study of American adolescent jargon, interspersed with Humbert's refined speech, goes back to the mixture of styles in *Eugene Onegin* (hereafter *EO*; Meyer 97, 2008; Irwin Weil 279). I would qualify this assertion by pointing out that Nabokov identifies *RL* as the earlier example of such intercultural positionality and "colloquial modulations."

As Nabokov's work on translating and annotating *EO* overlaps with his composition of *Lolita*, surely Pushkin's novel permeates Nabokov's. Meyer argues that the novel is in fact a "paraphrastic" translation of *EO* (2008). As did *EO* for Pushkin, *Lolita* became a monument in its own right and ensured for the author the status of a classic in his adopted culture.[5] Yet Nabokov's anxiety surrounding the novel—his attempts to burn the manuscript, difficulties with its publication, its reception as smut—parallels Pushkin's experience with *RL* more fully than with the less scandalous *EO*.

Fairy tales themselves often serve as subjects for psycho-sexual analyses of a particular culture's repressed wishes. Susan Elizabeth Sweeney discusses eroticism connected to fairy-tale subtexts in Nabokov's "A Nursery Tale," *The Enchanter*, and *Lolita*. Brian Boyd finds the "fairy-tale wish fulfillment" in *The Enchanter* and, more strongly, in *Lolita* (513), while Dmitri Nabokov leaves discussions of "fairy-tale sublimation" to the "studious" (120). The key difference between the fairy tales explored in these studies and *RL* is that eroticism in the latter is already on the surface rather than "sublimated," if by "sublimation" we mean expressing objectionable urges in socially acceptable terms. Judging by *RL*'s reception, Pushkin's risqué move to lay bare the fairy tales' sexual undertones rather than sublimate them is taken even further in Nabokov's *Lolita*.

Iuri Lotman claims that subsequent generations can no longer sense the "indecent" nature of Pushkin's *RL* (107). This is not true in the case of Nabokov, who was familiar with the criticism heaped on Pushkin by his contemporaries: "Dmitriev, in a letter to Vyazemski, soon after *Ruslan and Lyudmila* had appeared, remarked (in French) that mothers would surely forbid daughters to read it" (*Commentary* 240). Nabokov challenges precisely these narrowly didactic approaches to literature by placing them in the novel's Foreword written by the farcical John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.: "'*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*" (italics in the original, 6).

"Tam russkii dukh, tam Rus'iu pakhnet": *Where Does* Lolita *"smell of"* RL*?*

Dolinin observes that Russian roots in *Lolita* are hidden under a layer of explicit references to French Symbolism; Humbert's "confession" contains many Russian allusions for which he cannot be responsible (2018; 129). In the same spirit, the first scene that "smells" of *RL* cannot be accessible to its narrator. As the thirteen-year-old Humbert is about to possess his coeval Annabel Leigh, what is to be their first sexual experience is abruptly interrupted:

> …we escaped from the café to the beach, and found a desolate stretch of sand, and there, in the violet shadow of some red rocks forming a kind of cave, had a brief session of avid

[5] Mads Rosendahl Thomsen observes that *Lolita* secured Nabokov's popularity with the English-language readership; the author's Russian body of works was translated into English after *Lolita*'s success (83).

> caresses, with somebody's lost pair of sunglasses for only witness. I was on my knees, and on the point of possessing my darling, when two bearded bathers, the old man of the sea and his brother, came out of the sea with exclamations of ribald encouragement, and four months later she died of typhus in Corfu. (13)

Humbert presents his childhood romance with Annabel Leigh through overt allusions to Poe's "Annabel Lee." The setting for his loss is styled on Poe's "kingdom by the sea," or "princedom by the sea," as Humbert terms it (9). Echoes of the American classic are hard to miss for anyone educated in the American school system: Humbert presents himself for his English-language audience as a tragic hero of literary proportions, his passions for young girls bolstered and normalized by Poe's own biography.

While Humbert skillfully manipulates his allusions to Poe throughout his "confession," he does not command all the literary subtexts in the above paragraph. One wonders whose lost pair of sunglasses "witness" the scene.[6] Another set of allusions peaks through the above reminiscence that parallels the author's own equally irretrievable childhood. Even though the passage seems to present a quick fast-forward to Annabel's death, its curious exposition encourages the reader to slow down. The "two bearded bathers, the old man of the sea and his brother" interrupt the couple, making the reader pause as well to process the incongruity between the matter-of-fact narration and the strangeness of what is happening. On the human level, most would look away when detecting some illicit necking, let alone approach the couple and cheer it on. More importantly, these seemingly incidental men are elevated to mythic proportions. The narrator cannot be aware of the specific referent which the definite article in the phrase "*the* old man" marks; for Humbert these men are perfect strangers. The possessive "and his brother" deepens the disjuncture of randomness and specificity. The ordering of the possessive pronoun—one man is another's brother (and not vice-versa)—suggests the first brother's prominence, an unlikely observation to make (or to recall) for a stunned and embarrassed adolescent. While the narrator ascribes this unfortunate intrusion to "fate," there is a strong suggestion that some readers should recognize these brothers better.

Given Humbert's repeated appeal to both Greek mythology and *Arabian Nights*, "the old man of the sea" could belong to this sphere of allusions, ascribing another layer of mythic significance to himself. Humbert refers to these men in his diary as "ribald sea monsters" (53). Sea deities across cultures are represented with beards and would fit Humbert's description. However, the Russian imagination recalls another bearded old man coming out of the water, one who is closely paired with his brother. Furthermore, the rivalry between the two bearded brothers in *RL*, Chernomor and the huge talking head severed by him, echoes fully in *Lolita*. While the evil brother (Chernomor) abducts Liudmila, the good brother (the talking head) helps Ruslan get her back. The beard itself is an important plot element in *RL*: Chernomor's supernatural powers reside in it.[7] In

[6] Appel notes that the image of sunglasses connects Annabel and Lolita. Humbert first sees Dolores as his "Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses" (336). As is often the case with Nabokov's relationship to his characters, this confluence points to the work's ultimate mastermind; the purportedly "lost" sunglasses in the above scene can be attributed to the author himself.

[7] Beards proliferate in *Lolita*. Just to name a few: explicit and subtextual allusion to Bluebeard and Erlking (a bearded sexual predator of children, variously a giant or a goblin in folklore); the bearded doctor's brother who takes Humbert on an expedition to Canada; the bearded "six-footer" who shot his lover; the town of Beardsley (Beardsley College, Beardsley School for girls); finally, the key mention of Humbert's own beard when he realizes the true extent of his monstrosity ("Unless it can be proven to me—to me as I am now, today, with my heart and my beard, and my putrefaction—that in the infinite run it does not matter a jot that a North American girl-child named Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac…" 283).

Lolita, the fairy-tale categories of good and evil become deformed through its narrative perspective. The "good/bad" *doppelgängers*, i.e., the Humbert-Quilty rivalry, blur the line between the valiant knight who saves the beautiful princess and the depraved old man who holds her captive, even in Humbert's own imagination.

Just as Poe's Annabel serves as a precursor to Humbert's Lolita, Pushkin's *lukomor'e* serves as the "original" to Poe's "kingdom by the sea" for Nabokov. The conspicuous "brothers" send us to the opening of Pushkin's *poema*, many elements of which are recombined in the above passage, justifying the use of definite pronoun in "*the* old man of the sea":

> Там о заре прихлынут волны
> На брег песчаный и пустой,
> И тридцать витязей прекрасных
> Чредой из вод выходят ясных,
> И с ними дядька их морской. (9)

> [There at dawn the waves roll in / Onto a sandy, empty shore, / And thirty handsome knights / Come out of clear waters, one by one, / And with them their sea elder.]

Here the Russian "diad'ka" means "elder," both in age and in rank. More generally, "diad'ka" can simply mean an "old man." In fact, Nabokov translates it as "an old man" in his Russian *Lolita*, approximating Pushkin's word choice and acoustics: "morskoi ded" (4). Note that Humbert's "desolate stretch of sand" on the beach is a reshuffling of Pushkin's description ("breg peschanyi i pustoi"; a sandy and an empty shore). Humbert's prose, "the old man of the sea" coming "out of the sea" might read like a clumsy tautology, reflecting the equally clumsy exchange between the youngsters, unless we experience it through Pushkin's text: "the old man of the sea" "comes out of the waters." In fact, in Nabokov's Russian translation the word choice is again guided by *RL*: Pushkin's "*iz vod vy*khodiat" to Nabokov's "*vy*shli *iz vod*y" (4). In Pushkin's text the old man leads thirty knights out of the waters, and in Nabokov the old man is followed by his brother. In keeping with Humbert's profanation of the literary canon, the two bawdy drunks who disturb the romantic encounter are not the "beautiful knights" of Pushkin's *poema*, nor are they Poe's jealous "seraphs."

While in *RL* Chernomor is an evil sorcerer, a character by the same name appears as a positive hero in Pushkin's *The Fairy Tale about Tsar Saltan, about His Son the Renowned and Mighty Bogatyr Prince Gvidon Saltanovich, and about the Beautiful Princess-Swan*. As the "old man of the sea" in *RL*, in this later fairy tale "diad'ka Chernomor" (the elder/old man of the Black Sea) heads a retinue of thirty-three *bogatyrs* out of the sea waves. This paradoxical intertextual coupling often confounds readers. For Nabokov's purposes, such a dissolution of the good vs. evil polarity echoes Humbert's use of fairy-tale allusions in *Lolita*.

Though no causal connection is made explicitly, Annabel's death immediately follows the appearance of "the old man of the sea"; the two events occur in sequential clauses of the same sentence. Compare Annabel's abrupt disappearance from Humbert's life on the verge of consummation to Liudmila's disappearance from her conjugal bed:

> Вы слышите ль влюбленный шепот,
> И поцелуев сладкий звук,
> И прерывающийся ропот
> Последней робости?.. Супруг
> Восторги чувствует заране;

И вот они настали... Вдруг
…
О горе: нет подруги милой!
Хватает воздух он пустой;
Людмилы нет во тьме густой,
Похищена безвестной силой. (13)

[Do you hear the whispers of love, / And the sweet sound of kisses, / And intermittent murmur / Of final bashfulness? … The husband / Anticipates the raptures; / And now they arrived… / Suddenly / … / O grief: the dear friend is gone! / He grabs onto thin air; / There's no Liudmila in the dense darkness, / She's been abducted by some obscure force.]

In both texts, the beloved's vanishing is preceded by a meal (the wedding feast in *RL*, the two families' farewell dinner in a café at the end of their summer vacation in *Lolita*), then a "brief session of avid caresses" (*Lolita*) or "sweet sound of kisses" before the "final bashfulness" (*RL*) that is to culminate in intercourse, interrupted by the respective brides' sudden abductions.

These disappearances trigger a string of pursuits. Ruslan goes on a journey to free his Liudmila from Chernomor's palace, only to lose her again. Liudmila's initial captor turns out to be "the horrible enchanter Chernomor, / the longtime abductor of beautiful maidens" (17). In *Lolita*, first Humbert searches for his Annabel, then, upon finding her in Dolores Haze, loses her to the depraved "old man" Quilty, as Ruslan, after freeing Liudmila from Chernomor's palace, loses her on their ride home to his debaucherous competitor Farlaf. For the present discussion, I focus on the role that *RL* plays in Nabokov's tale of the aging man's passions for nymphets, rather than on the question of male rivalry.

Ruslan is assured that Chernomor is no threat to Liudmila's virginity because of his age:

…тебе ужасна
Любовь седого колдуна;
Спокойся, знай: она напрасна
И юной деве не страшна.
Он звезды сводит с небосклона,
Он свистнет — задрожит луна;
Но против времени закона
Его наука не сильна. (17)

[The love of the gray sorcerer / … horrifies you; / Calm down, know this: it is in vain / And not a threat to the young maiden. / He pulls down stars from the firmament, / He whistles and the moon starts shaking; / But against the law of time / His science is powerless.]

Nabokov's twist on this plotline is Humbert's transformation into the true sexual monster that even Chernomor has no power to become. Unlike Liudmila, who is protected by Chernomor's old age, Dolores is utterly defenseless against Humbert.

In addition to old age, Liudmila is protected from her "sorcerer's attacks" by the "magic cap" of invisibility (57). Sagit Faizov notices that the scene in which Liudmila discovers Chernomor's cap of invisibility and tries it on in front of the mirror is reminiscent of Dolores posing in front of the closet-door mirror in The Enchanted Hunters hotel room, trying on clothing that Humbert

buys for her.[8] At this intersection the two narratives of captivity diverge. While Liudmila has fun toying with Chernomor and his maiden-servants by appearing and disappearing, for Dolores that hotel room marks the beginning of sexual abuse. Humbert's ability to see Dolores is obscured by the "haze" (cf. her surname), filtered through memories, anticipations, anxieties, lust, and allusions to poetry and fiction. His gaze is often expressly obstructed by visual disturbances. As Humbert writes in his diary, he seems to see her "through the wrong end of a telescope" (54). When locking her in the hotel room to let the sleep potion work, he also "locked in" the "hermetic vision of her" (123), "stacking level upon level of translucent vision" (125). During one of Humbert's retrospective glances in which Dolores's separateness from his fictional construct comes into focus, he admits that he "simply did not know a thing about [his] darling's mind" (284). Both heroines contemplate death during their captivity. Dolores's invisibility behind Humbert's invented nymphet Lolita, unlike Liudmila's protective cap of invisibility against Chernomor, is at the center of the novel's tragedy.

The theme of blindness in *Lolita* has been observed by other critics. James Phelan argues that Humbert allows himself, in the act of telling, to look upon what he refuses to see as Humbert-the-character (140). Phelan suggests that the novel's struggle for vision is ethical in nature. Linda Kauffman observes that Humbert's unreliability as a *reader* of Dolores (not only as her narrator) is the kind of "blindness" to which many male critics of the novel would succumb for decades. Kauffman points to Humbert's own admission that his eyes are "hysterical unreliable organ[s]" (61). His invocation of these "unreliable organs" underscores his solipsism; instead of looking out at another, his viewpoint renders Dolores invisible, obstructed by his physical urges. According to Kauffman, the novel's "exercise in intertextuality" contributes to this omission of the girl in the text, drawing on literature that does the same: poetry in the courtly love tradition, poems and stories of Poe, Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, and Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (64-65). I would add that *RL* is the intertext that reveals the criminal consequence of such blindness. Humbert's explicit allusions to works of literature help him obstruct, at least initially, Dolores's physical and emotional violation.

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[8] One of the three short mentions of the Liudmila-Lolita connection (https://sagitfaizov.livejournal.com/146234.html, accessed 6/2/23). Another observation is made by James Russell, who traces a complex progression from the name Liudmila to Lel', the Slavic deity of love and marriage, to "the homonymic and coincidentally also demonic/divine and erotic Lilith [that will become] Nabokov's Lolita" (366). Finally, A. P. Grachev briefly compares Humbert's heightened attention for his "Lo" to Pushkin's narrator's obsession with Liudmila (68). One might add that Humbert's innocent mention of Bürger's "Lenore" (207) evokes Zhukovsky's 1808 translation of the ballad as "Liudmila," held by Pushkin in high regard. Nabokov includes Zhukovsky's "Liudmila" in his discussion of various translations of the ballad in *Commentary*, wondering why Pushkin "chose to identify his Muse with that frightened girl" (153-54).

Meyer analyzes metrical parallels between the characters' names in *Lolita* and *EO* (1984, 185). It is worth noting that the names Liudmila and Lolita comprise the same anapestic foot, contain the same *l* alliteration and a very similar progression of the *u/o-i-a* vowel sounds (*u* and *o* being close back rounded vowels). Critics do note in passing some echoes of *RL* in other works by Nabokov: for instance, Nora Buhks (79), Julia Trubikhina (73), Dolinin (2018; 123), Blackwell (2009; 79), Davydov (1995; 486, 494), Charles Nicol (89-90), Thomas Karshan (20, f29), and T.N. Belova (95). Peter Lubin remarks that the pun *Quercus ruslan chat* in *Ada* combines Nabokov's past epigraphs—the oak from *The Gift*, the cat from *Pale Fire*, the author of *Mashenka* (one may add the novel that Cincinatus reads, *Quercus*, in *Invitation to a Beheading*)—into one *RL* source (204, f4). Eric Naiman also discusses the role of Pushkin's *RL* in the appearance of *Quercus ruslan chat* in *Ada* (253). Dolinin mentions (2004; 230) that Tammi's argument about Nabokov's allusive *tam* (there) or "the world on the other side" would make the opening lines of *RL* a more obvious referent than the theater scene in *EO* that Tammi proposes (51-52). Davydov argues that Nabokov's inclusion of jocular comments by his contemporaries in the Chernyshevsky chapter of *The Gift* (as a way of preempting the criticism Nabokov foresaw) was inspired by Pushkin's move to include verbatim the most inept reviews of *RL* in his second edition of the *poema* (1991; 46).

The work that remains unnamed and beyond Humbert's cultural reach, on the other hand, identifies him with the prototypical monster, while Chernomor's hat of invisibility that provides a defense for Liudmila is refashioned into Dolores's erasure.

As explored in several studies, the tale of Sleeping Beauty provides pivotal motifs for the novel.[9] Humbert's botched experimentation with different soporifics have the intention, as Humbert convinces himself, of "sparing her purity by operating only… upon a completely anesthetized little nude" (124). In all western versions of the fairy tale, it is a woman who forces the young princess into a prolonged sleep (either a wicked fairy or, in the case of another sleeping princess, Snow White, an evil queen). Nabokov weaves elements of Snow White into his allusions to Sleeping Beauty: "I would… find my nymphet, my beauty and bride, imprisoned in her *crystal* sleep" (emphasis added, 123).[10] Even though the prince takes advantage of the sleeping girl in some renditions, no fairy-tale version, other than Pushkin's, posits the male perpetrator himself as the agent of the princess's enchanted sleep, anticipating Humbert's unsuccessful attempts to induce it. When Chernomor manages to deceive Liudmila into losing the cap of invisibility, it is the shock of seeing the old bearded dwarf that sends her into a trance.

Yet Chernomor's desire to take advantage of the sleeping Liudmila is unrealizable:

> …Волшебник хилый
> Ласкает сморщенной рукой
> Младые прелести Людмилы;
> К ее пленительным устам
> Прильнув увядшими устами,
> Он, вопреки своим годам,
> Уж мыслит хладными трудами
> Сорвать сей нежный, тайный цвет,
> Хранимый Лелем для другого;
> Уже... но бремя поздних лет
> Тягчит бесстыдника седого —
> Стоная, дряхлый чародей,
> В бессильной дерзости своей,
> Пред сонной девой упадает.[11] (60)

> [The feeble conjurer / Caresses with his wrinkled hand / Liudmila's young charms; / To her captivating lips / Clinging with his withered lips, / He, despite his age, / Is already thinking, with his cold-headed labors / To pluck this gentle, secret flower, / Kept by Lel' for another; / Already… but the burden of old age / Weighs on the shameless gray-haired man — / Moaning, the decrepit sorcerer, / In his powerless daring, / Falls before the sleeping maiden.]

Chernomor's fantasies remain just that. What frustrates Humbert's fantasy world, on the other hand, is precisely its realization. Humbert describes himself as a "conjurer" only when he is able

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[9] See especially Sweeney's "*The Enchanter* and the Beauties of Sleep" and "'Ballet Attitudes': Nabokov's *Lolita* and Petipa's *The Sleeping Beauty*."

[10] Grachev examines the parallels between Dolores eating an apple on Humbert's lap and the princess biting into a poisoned apple in Pushkin's version of the Snow White story, *Skazka o mertvoi tsarevne i o semi bogatyriakh* (66-67).

[11] Pushkin had suspected that this passage evaded the censors for no other reason than dumb luck and excised it from the second edition so as not to tempt fate.

to steal the "honey of a spasm" without Dolores knowing it (62). When Humbert is not hiding behind fairy-tale language, his description of what happens to Dolores in the hotel room is painfully realistic: "This was a lone child, an absolute waif, with whom a heavy-limbed, foul smelling adult had had strenuous intercourse three times that very morning" (140). Humbert does not succeed in "anesthetizing" his bride to the pain. Afterwards, Dolores bleeds and cannot find a comfortable sitting position in the car. In the passage above she transforms from his "beauty and bride" to "an absolute waif," her cloak of invisibility falling away to reveal a "bruised child" (284) toward the end of the novel. As a twist on Liudmila's protective cap, Humbert's moments of clarity flicker only when he lets himself strip away the fairy tales that conceal the real girl behind them.

Quilty's manor and Chernomor's lavishly arranged chambers meant to seduce Liudmila share the source text in *Arabian Nights*. Humbert repeatedly alludes to *Arabian Nights*, both explicitly as a book that Dolores could theoretically enjoy (173), as well as a pun on the American consumer culture ("We had breakfast in the township of Soda, pop. 1001"; 220). Humbert's reappearing purple silk robe throughout the novel turns out to be "very like" the bathrobe Quilty is wearing (as Humbert himself notes, 294), a color of "royal purple" (304), when he finds "the master" of the Pavor Manor "castle" in his "Oriental parlor" (295). What is beyond Humbert's frame of reference is that the robe is also "very like" Chernomor's brocade-silk vestment ("v rize parchevoi," 41), in which he lounges in his castle. In illustrations and on stage Chernomor is usually represented in a purple robe, typical of sultanic vestments of the Orient and reminiscent of Humbert-Quilty's purple silk robes.

In addition to Chernomor serving as a blueprint for Humbert's tyrannical perversion, *RL* offers a prism through which fatherhood is distorted in the novel. One of Humbert's main masks is that of Dolores's father. In confronting Quilty, he emphatically melts into the role he plays earlier in the novel, while externalizing the character of child molester solely onto Quilty: "Quilty… do you recall a little girl called Dolores Haze? … You see, I am her father… She was my child, Quilty" (296). To Humbert's charges of kidnapping, Quilty replies "I did not… I saved her from a beastly pervert" (298), asserting he was no threat to her because of his impotence. The male figures from *RL* are tangled up in Humbert: a young groom, an aging abductor of young maidens, and Liudmila's mournful father. Ruslan sets out to recapture Liudmila from the claws of the beastly "enchanter" on her father's orders; the man who brings his daughter back would win her hand in marriage. Liudmila awakens only when returned to her father's house. Though Humbert desperately wants to externalize Dolores's abductor onto Quilty (note how often he uses the name Quilty in the above confrontation as an attempt at separation), he ultimately senses that he is no different, shrouded in the same purple robe. He is neither her father, nor her savior, nor her lover, all of which would require reciprocity. Neither is Dolores fooled into thinking that her violator represents a parental home or a lover: "It had become gradually clear to my conventional Lolita during our singular and bestial cohabitation that even the most miserable of family lives was better than the parody of incest, which… was the best I could offer the waif" (287). Fairy tales provide fruitful material for a "good little follower of the Viennese medicine man" (274), as Humbert sarcastically calls himself. Their relationship, on the other hand, does not even fit plotlines fertile for Freudian interpretations; since both of Freud's components of parent-lover are negated in Humbert—he is neither a real father nor a real lover—theirs can only be a "parody of incest." Ingredients from *RL*'s conclusion, marriage and the father-daughter reunion, are all there at the end of *Lolita*, though warped beyond their source text.

In attempting a "gratification," a release "from the 'subconscious' obsession of an incomplete childhood romance," Humbert goes on a search to recreate that perfect original setting, "a Kingdom by the Sea, a Sublimated Riviera, or whatnot" (167). Humbert's mimicry of psychoanalytic

language speaks to his contemporary American audience. In his translation of the novel, Nabokov has to spell out for his Russian readers the literary associations that his American readership has. But in his Russian translation the author also reveals the Pushkinian lens through which these associations refract, not available to his anglophone audience:

> мечта о «Приморском Королевстве», о «Сублимированной Ривьере» и тому подобном давно перестала быть глубинным порывом и свелась к рассудочной погоне за чисто теоретическим переживанием. Эдгаровы ангелы это знали – и устроили дело соответствующим образом. Посещение вполне убедительного лукоморья на Атлантической стороне оказалось вконец испорченным скверной погодой… . (95)
>
> [the search for a Kingdom by the Sea, a Sublimated Riviera, or whatnot, far from being the impulse of the subconscious, had become the rational pursuit of a purely theoretical thrill. The angels knew it, and arranged things accordingly. A visit to a plausible cove on the Atlantic side was completely messed up by foul weather (167).]

In the Russian translation, not just "the angels" (English original), but the spelled-out "Edgar's angels" arrange a "visit to a rather convincing *lukomor'e*" (a "plausible cove" in the original). The word choice "ubeditel'noe" (convincing) emphasizes the hopelessness in Humbert's task of recapture: something that could only "convince" of its likeness rather than resurrect it.

The objects of Humbert's nostalgia-inspired settings are capitalized in both languages, as if referring to memories that have been codified as titles from literature in Humbert's mind. "Kingdom by the Sea" is the first line of Poe's "Annabel Lee," not its title, while "Sublimated Riviera" refers to the Riviera where the initial romance with Annabel unfolds, in this sentence "sublimated" into a work of art that the capitalization indicates. The stand-in "whatnot" in the list of specific pseudo-titles refers to a "similar" "kingdom by the sea" ("подобном") in the Russian version. In fact, "Edgar's" American "angels" lead the travelers of the Russian translation to the archaic and poetic "*lukomor'e*," infinitely more allusive in Russian than the "cove" of the English original. While Americans study Poe as part of their school curriculum, every Russian child memorizes the portion of *RL* that contains "*lukomor'e*." As Humbert attempts to recapture the base anatomical experience of his youth, his author alludes to the impossible recreation of a lost world of his own on the level of culture.[12] For Nabokov, this world is also left on the other "side of the Atlantic," beyond the common cultural references with his new reader. The loss of these shared "implied associations" is the author's "private tragedy" with which he concludes "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*": "my private tragedy… is that I had to abandon my natural idiom, my untrammeled and infinitely docile Russian tongue… the implied associations and traditions—which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way" (317).

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[12] George M. Cummins notes that "the Russian *Lolita* is squarely in the tradition of the autobiography," citing Nabokov's reminiscences on translating the novel: "re-Englishing of a Russian version of what had been an English re-telling of Russian memories in the first place" (355). Yet the Russian *Lolita* does also write itself into the lexicon of Russian folklore, or "re-tells Russian memories" in their mother tongue. The hotel room in which Humbert locks Dolores is rendered as "temnitsa" in Russian (71, 75; "emprisoned" and "fastness" in the original, 123, 128), while Dolores is described as "skazochnaia tsarevna" (31; "a fairy princess" in the original, 52). The word choice in the Russian translation echoes both the language of Russian fairy tales in general, but also a specific verse from *RL*: "в темнице там царевна тужит" (9; "in a dark dungeon there pines a tsarevna"). Humbert also refers to his prison cell as "temnitsa" in the Russian translation (63, 178), though the original "tombal jail" (109) and "tombal seclusion" (308) already ring with the associations of solitary dark confinement that the Russian "temnitsa" contains.

"But against the law of time / His science is powerless"

Nabokov once claimed in an interview: "I will never go back for the simple reason that all the Russia I need, after all, is always with me: literature, language, and my own Russian childhood" (*Conversations* 62). Characters in both *Lolita* and *RL* falter precisely when they try to go back, to trick time through some physical replica of the past. This dynamic takes place on the level of plot as well as genre. Mikhail Bakhtin's discourse on *chronotope* applies perfectly to Pushkin's play with time in his mock-epic. Bakhtin categorizes ancient novels in terms of "adventure-time, …not registered in the slightest way in the age of the heroes… adventures… are neither historical, quotidian, biographical, nor even biological and maturational" (90-91). In fact, Gary Saul Morson chooses *RL* to illustrate Bakhtin's focus on time as a defining category of the epic genre: "Here the wizard encounters not only time, but also his genre… . In *Ruslan and Lyudmila*… [Pushkin takes] the stylized *language* of his target genre as an emblem of [its] distance from biographical time and historical flux" (80). Ruslan is helped in his search for Liudmila by a wizard-Finn who relates his own tragic story of losing his beloved Naina, though not to space, as in Ruslan's case, but rather to time. After Naina's multiple rejections, he resigns to enchant her through magic. In the meantime, forty years pass, very much "differentiated" into a "maturational" period outside the epic genre. Naina finally falls in love with the wizard, but signs of her age now repulse him. It is as though Naina has to remind him of the workings of "real" time that points outside the epic *chronotope*:

> Сегодня семьдесят мне било.
> Что делать, — мне пищит она, —
> Толпою годы пролетели.
> Прошла моя, твоя весна —
> Мы оба постареть успели. (22)
>
> ["I turned seventy today. / What's to be done," she squeaks at me, / "The crowded years flew by, / My spring, your spring have passed — / We both managed to grow old."]

The verb "uspet'" layers various temporal nuances, especially when preceded by "postaret'." Not only does it define their aging process as complete, "uspet'" or "to have time" also suggests the idea of catching up to their biological age.

Though inversely, Humbert's mythically inspired world is just as out-of-place in the temporal dimension of the novelistic genre; "time moves ahead of our fancies!", he observes upon picking up Dolores from summer camp (111). In Bakhtin's "Epic and Novel," epic time represents the "absolute," "valorized past," closed off from the present and not in service of the future (3-40). This formulation applies to the central tension in Nabokov's *Lolita*.[13] In the context of the "stylized language" of fairy tales, mythology, and past works of literature, the narrator is a displaced person in the genre of a novel. Humbert's worst enemy is the ticking of time, which would inevitably mature Dolores out of her nymphet stage. Humbert's "enchanted island of time" (18), frozen through Annabel's death, is possible only by denying Dolores her own trajectory—past, present, and future—and fixing her as a suspended object of his still life.[14]

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[13] In "Freudian Time: Lolita, Psychoanalysis and the Holocaust," Will Norman argues that in turning psychoanalysis on itself, Humbert nevertheless uses its "backward oriented" time (110). Freudian temporality, focused on compulsive repetition and reliving of experiences until they are brought to the level of consciousness, positions the novel's characters in "futurelessness" (113). According to Norman, Nabokov critiques Freud's and Humbert's failure to imagine a future qualitatively different from the past (120).

[14] In "Ballet Attitudes," Sweeney points out that Humbert's "island" resists the passage of time, just as the castle where the sleeping beauty is kept in Marius Petipa's ballet does (125).

Humbert's analysis of Dolores's class list at Ramsdale reflects the generic *chronotope* within which he attempts to operate. He quotes the list verbatim, as if it is "a poem that [he knows] already by heart" (51). He discusses the list as a fairy tale: "'Haze, Dolores' (She!) in its special bower of names, with its bodyguard of roses—a fairy princess with its two maids of honor" (52). In addition to the multiple fairy princesses evoked in this section, Liudmila is one of them.[15] She is that "skazochnaia tsarevna" ("fairytale tsarina" in Nabokov's translation, 31) who, while in Chernomor's captivity, takes a walk through the magical rose garden and is dressed for the wedding by the maids of the palace. Parenthetically, the other side of the sheet of paper with the class list contains an "unfinished outline of Florida and the Gulf" (51), that curving contour reminiscent of Pushkin's *luk-omor'e*, a bowed sea shore. Humbert refers to the list as a "poem" three times. Interestingly, Nabokov uses "liricheskoe proizvedenie" (a work of lyric poetry, 30) in his Russian translation to introduce the list, but renders the exclamation that follows the list—"A poem, a poem, forsooth!" (52)—as "Poema, sushchaia poema!" (*Poema*, a veritable *poema*! 31). The precise meaning of *poema* is an epic or narrative poem. Aside from Nabokov making Pushkin's *poema* more present in the Russian translation, why would Humbert bookend the list with what is often understood as two opposing poetic genres in terms of *chronotope*? While a lyric poem typically presents a moment of suspended time, *poema* is a poem of action. What seems to be separated into specific generic terms in the Russian translation, though, is already suggested in the English original. The choice of the archaic "forsooth" elevates the seemingly non-distinct initial mention of a "poem" to the epic scale of olden days, ringing with "valorized" content. Yet if we are to consider its explicit designation as a work of narrative poetry in Russian, or its implicit epic qualities suggested by the archaism in English, then we arrive at a contradiction: a poem of action without verbs, only the list of names in alphabetical order. Whatever "real" lives these names represent, Humbert strips them to invent his own action for this cast of characters: Ralph "bullies and steals," Stella "has let strangers touch her," Dolores "gnawing a pencil," and so on (53).

Here the allusion to a "work of lyric poetry" in the Russian translation inserts a moment of timelessness into the temporal narration and reflects the central tension that haunts Humbert. The story that Humbert chooses to tell is marked by traversed (East coast to West coast, and back) and transposed (Europe onto America) spaces. As much as Humbert attempts to substitute the physical for the temporal and resist the natural "maturational" period, this move is ultimately unrealizable either in life or in the genre of a novel. Both sets of characters struggle against their form: Chernomor is impotent sexually and figuratively in the face of aging, the wizard cannot freeze time on Naina or himself, while Humbert cannot keep Dolores within his invented temporal parameters for her. Ultimately, both the character and the eponymous work slip from under Humbert's control, reminding the reader of the difference between the author and his "galley slave."[16] Nabokov is Pushkin's student, while Humbert cannot see past Poe. Nabokov creates a tragic mockery of the genre in which his character finds himself in a rather Pushkinian meta-textual fashion; Humbert's attempts to spatialize time are pathetic, even if his attempts are shrouded in "fancy prose."

The wizard's reunion with the seventy-year-old Naina is rewritten into Humbert's final reunion with the seventeen-year-old Dolores in revealing ways. As the wizard-Naina pair break with fairy-tale time, so do Humbert and Dolores. The wizard, however, resists being expelled from the genre that endows him with superpowers, with Naina having to educate him on the workings of aging. In the analogous scene in *Lolita*, Humbert appears to accept the effects of time on his object of obsession. Their final meeting is very different from Humbert's initial "reunion" with his European Annabel, through Dolores, as he spots her on that suburban American lawn. That initial recogni-

[15] Gavriel Shapiro argues for other indirect references to Russian folktales in his analysis of the class list.

[16] As Nabokov quipped in an interview, "My characters are galley slaves" (*Strong Opinions* 95).

tion of one beloved in another, separated by 25 years, erroneously substitutes the physical for the temporal. As Humbert visits the pregnant Dolores, she escapes his imagination and becomes a character in her own chronology.[17]

In both Pushkin's and Nabokov's scenes of reunion, the male protagonists inventory the changed female bodies that once fueled their passions. As the wizard recognizes the "present" Naina before him, he reviews the "decrepit old lady's" "gray hair" (21), her "hollowed / languid eyes," "hunched back," "shaking head," "ugly mouth contorted by a smile" (22), and "emaciated arms" (23). Similarly, Humbert scans the changes in Dolores's appearance as she opens the door: "Couple of inches taller. Pink-rimmed glasses. New, heaped-up hairdo, new ears. … She was frankly and hugely pregnant. … her pale-freckled cheeks were hollowed, and her bare shins and arms had lost all their tan… " (269). Might we recognize Naina's hunch in Dolores's pregnant belly, both an unpleasant sign of age to their admirers? Humbert goes on to notice her "parched lips" (271), her "washed-out gray eyes, strangely spectacled" (272), her "ruined looks and her adult, rope-veined narrow hands and her goose-fleshed white arms, … hopelessly worn at seventeen" (277). Naina's "shaking head" ("triasuchei golovoi" 22) makes it into Nabokov's Russian translation, in the same instrumental case, as Dolores inclines her head while "shaking it" ("triasia eiu" 157). Naina's "sunken eyes" ("glazami vpalymi" 22) echoes Dolores's twice-mentioned "hollow-cheeked" (269) / "cheeks were hollowed" (270), rendered with "vpali shcheki" / "vpalymi shchekami" (156) in Nabokov's translation.

Naina, now a "horrifying ghost" ("strashnyi prizrak"), talks to the wizard as if from beyond the grave ("mogil'nym golosom" 22). Lolita has always been a resurrected ghost of Humbert's past, but in this scene her ghostliness acquires a new dimension. As Humbert observes Dolores smoking, it strikes him that "Charlotte Haze rose from her grave" (275). He notices that Dolores grows into the mannerisms of her mother, herself on the verge of motherhood with a "womanish… shadowy division between her pale breasts" (273). Dolores's earlier ghostliness reflects arrested time. As they get into the car after the fateful hotel encounter, Humbert imagines "sitting with the small ghost of somebody I had just killed" (140). In the final reunion scene, the haunting ghost of the pubescent Annabel is replaced with the ghost of a mature woman, Charlotte. Dolores escapes Annabel's fate and survives at least long enough to age into a wife and an expectant mother.

We can also understand this scene as a Freudian "parody" of the father-daughter reunion in *RL*. Dolores tries to put a lid on her past by telling Humbert: "You had been a good father" (272). As Liudmila awakens out of her sleep only after being brought back to her father, the "father-daughter" reunion in *Lolita* marks Dolores's life beyond the "enchanted sleep" that Humbert imposes on her earlier. The mother is missing in these reunions, both in *RL* and in *Lolita*, as is the case in many fairy tales. However, unlike the typical folktale stepmother who persuades the innocent father to mistreat his daughter, in *Lolita* the father figure doubles as the innocent victim, as one Humbert wants to believe that he is, and that evil force, which the other Humbert suspects that he is.

The male protagonists' physical contact with the aging body engages their generic contexts. The wizard flees, screaming in fear, the touches of Naina's "emaciated arms." Humbert recoils from inadvertent contact with Dolores, squeezing through the doorway while trying not to touch her "bulging babe" (270) and jerking his knee "out of the range of a sketchy tap—one of her acquired

[17] As Marijeta Bozovic notes, "Humbert's moral and philosophical failure arises from his desire to freeze time" (150). Cindy Weinstein points out that Veen's treatise on time in *Ada* warns us against recasting the abstract concept of time in spatial terms, "liquefying" it, understanding it as a flow or a river; Veen underscores our unfortunate inability to talk about time without talking of physical motion (263).

gestures" (272). As Humbert claims, however, he finds himself more in love than ever with this grownup Dolores. He cannot tolerate her touch ("I'll die if you touch me," 279) because she now has the power to reject him, and does decline his offer to run away. Pushkin's wizard flees the "historical flux" that is not supposed to intrude on his fairy-tale time. Humbert, on the other hand, as much as he wants to suspend his Lolita in a genre closer to that of a fairy tale than of a novel, ultimately appears to accept the effects of "biological" time on Dolores's body. He drives away because it is he who no longer fits into Dolores's story.

Humbert's delineation of nymphet parameters, just as his search for a beach or a Riviera that would best replicate the setting of his young love, operates on the same conflation of time and space: "I substitute time terms for spatial ones. In fact, I would have the reader see 'nine' and 'fourteen' as the boundaries—the mirrory beaches and rosy rocks—of an enchanted island haunted by those nymphets of mine" (16). Mirrors, water, beaches, and rosy tints pervade the novel, but the description of these physicalized temporal parameters for a nymphet are especially reflected in the scene of attempted recapture, in which Humbert searches for an analogous space in order to mirror his "princedom by the sea" on the other side of the Atlantic, "the rosy contingency of my Riviera romance" (167), or a profanation of the neverland of "*lukomor'e*" on the authorial level. Imagining his nymphet's temporal borders in terms of space makes them deceptively conquerable. Humbert goes on to explain that not all girls of this age range are nymphets: "insidious charm that separates the nymphet from such coevals of hers are incomparably more dependent on the spatial world of synchronous phenomena than the intangible island of entranced time where Lolita plays with her likes" (17). The time-space coordinates of non-nymphet girls are "synchronous" and cannot be unlinked.

"I substitute time terms for spatial ones"

Lolita intersects explicitly with *RL* when it comes to "chronotope of the road," "with "abduction, escape, search, pursuit, captivity" (98) as Bakhtin describes the ancient "adventure novel of ordeal" (105). As Humbert is not privy to Chernomor's and the wizard's lessons, he makes the mistake of thinking that the past can be re-experienced spatially. The America he traverses with Dolores includes caves, groves, lakes, springs, cliffs, hills, and valleys that Humbert self-consciously reproduces as fairy-tale spaces. The novel's terrain also replicates the specific settings of Pushkin's versified fairy tale, but with Humbert's faulty expectations from a genre in which he does not belong.

To turn to the space component of Bakhtin's *chronotope*, Humbert's and Dolores's adventures take them from shore to shore, from valley to valley, from cave to cave, with oaks lining their travels and reflecting on the car. At one point they miss the Ceremonial Dancing in the Magic Cave that Dolores so wants to catch (210). Though the Magic Cave refers to a real place, caves are associated with magic in literature and intersect with magical moments in Humbert's life specifically, e.g., the setting for the near consummation of Humbert's romance with Annabel. Ruslan finds his main helper, the wizard, living in the proverbial seclusion of his cave/cavern ("peshchera"). There Ruslan learns about the "long-time abductor of beauties" and about his destiny to take away Chernomor's dark powers. A cavern is also where Ruslan hears the story of the wizard's tragi-comic love for Naina.[18] Humbert's fairy-tale landscape, once transposed into the genre of a novel, loses its majesty. As he flippantly adopts road signs to his particular situation, "Our hundredth cavern, adults one dollar, Lolita fifty cents" (158), he brings the prophecy of cave-dwelling elders down to mercantilism; Dolores's entry fee comes at a reduced price, literally.

[18] Mark Altshuller discusses folkloric traditions of caverns and grottoes as they are used in *RL* (e.g. spaces both for tragic motifs as well as "love's joys," 10-11).

While Liudmila is held captive in Chernomor's palace, she goes to the waterfall every morning, teasing her captor while invisible and appearing solely through distortions of the falling water. Waterfalls follow Dolores from one captivity to another, from the "veritable Niagara" of loud American waterfall-like hotel toilets ("waterfall nuisance" as Humbert calls them, 164) to the indoor waterfall of Quilty's Duk Duk ranch. As magical caves turn into tourist attractions, the waterfall that marks the luxury and exoticism of Liudmila's palace of captivity is degraded in *Lolita* to the functions of the lower bowels (flushing toilets). In Quilty's "Oriental parlor" it is a kitschy feature that witnesses other kinds of lower body functions of pornographic debauchery.

The "death valley" that Ruslan crosses reappears as the actual Death Valley, a tourist destination on the California-Nevada border, part of the countless unremarked attractions on Humbert's and Dolores's journey. In search of Liudmila, Ruslan encounters the "death valley" of strewn bones:

> Ничто безмолвной тишины
> Пустыни сей не возмущает,
> И солнце с ясной вышины
> Долину смерти озаряет. (43)
>
> [Nothing perturbs the speechless silence / Of this desert, / And the sun from its lucid height / Illuminates the valley of death.]

The desert valley holds secrets of ancient battles that trigger Ruslan to contemplate his own mortality, wondering what battle would take his life and whether his grave would be just as unmarked and unsung by Boyan, a medieval Slavic bard who famously appears in *Prince Igor's Campaign*. *RL* is known to have been inspired by this foundational epic poem of national identity. While the "death valley" of Pushkin's text is a place for silent contemplation, the Death Valley that Humbert and Dolores visit is a tourist attraction by the 1940s and established as a national park later in the century. Humbert describes the Valley in the following way: "A winery in California with a church built in the shape of a wine barrel. Death Valley. Scotty's Castle" (157). The list places Death Valley between spirituality (church) marketed in the shape of a spirits container (wine barrel) and a castle of the gold prospector and conman Death Valley Scotty, who never actually owned it. At this point Humbert contemplates only his physical urges, very different from Ruslan's meditations on death. For Humbert, these destinations are Dolores's rewards and deposits for sexual favors. The actual history of the Death Valley that he does not contemplate, however, contains foundational myths of his new country, from American Indians inhabiting the Valley as early as 10,000 years ago and the pioneers' death and cannibalism in their attempt to cross westward for a better life, to the "lost 49ers" who gave the Death Valley its name.

The green oak by Pushkin's sea shore in *RL* ("u lukomor'ia dub zelionyi" 9) reverberates as a series of mileposts for Humbert's obsessive lust. As Humbert plots his next conquest, he wonders if an oak grove might not be a safe place: "a lovely, lonely, supercilious grove (oaks, I thought; American trees at that stage were beyond me) started to echo greenly the rush of our car" (140). In Humbert's imagination, the oak grove stands in judgement of Humbert's perverse plans: the personified trees appear "supercilious," as if from another world, for his lasciviousness. These green oaks "echo" another realm of reference as they cast reflections on the car; the exact specification for these trees is "beyond" Humbert, but it is doubtful that their lofty symbolism is beyond his author.

In the next mention of green oaks Humbert juxtaposes his purportedly artistic sensibilities to Dolores's supposed triteness: "my unfastidious Lo would be charmed by toilet signs—Guys-Gals, John-Jane, Jack-Jill and even Buck's-Doe's; while lost in an artist's dream, I stare at the hon-

est brightness of the gasoline paraphernalia against the splendid green of oaks" (153). Noticing such contrasts—gas stations against the green oaks—marks Humbert as an artist in his own mind. According to Nabokov, however, "Criminals are usually people lacking imagination" (*Lectures on Literature* 376), and the world of "kindness" that defines "aesthetic bliss" for the author is beyond Humbert here, clouded by his myopic physical urges. He stares at what seems to be an outside vista, but in actuality these landscapes reflect his vision of himself and are used to communicate his pose of an artiste to his reader-jury. According to Humbert, while he ponders the sublime, Dolores is consumed by the profane of American roadside culture. If he were truly an artist who was endowed with the ability to see outward and from another's point of view, he would contemplate Dolores's interest in these bathroom signs instead, which is anything but "unfastidious." The gender coupling that occupies Dolores here counters her own situation that excludes the "parody" of the father-daughter "Hum" and "Lo" pairing.[19]

As they drive on, they pass "oatmeal hills, flecked with green round oaks" (156). Humbert recollects the secluded "rustic benches under the initialed oaks" of the Old World, so difficult to find in the American wilderness (168). Again, this recollection stands in sharp contrast to his current search for an open-air location where he could copulate, beyond the innocence that initials on oaks represent, and the world of similar associations that he steals from Dolores. The initialed oaks, in turn, project the innocence of Dolores's truncated childhood, where Humbert's initials (H.H.) indeed have a place above her bed earlier in the novel, as a sign of a school-girl crush without the foreknowledge of its tragic realization.

As is presented in the opening lines of *RL*, the storyteller is a cat that walks along the golden chain wrapped around the green oak—an image that is not easy to understand. Is the cat chained to the oak? Some illustrators of *RL* do portray the cat with a collar around its neck attached to a chain. Critics agree that Pushkin's "scientist/scholarly tomcat" ("kot uchenyi") comes from Russian wonder tales, where "kot-bajun" (literally "the narrating tomcat") has the power to put its listeners to sleep (cf. the verb "ubaiukat'") for evil purposes. Sometimes the cat devours its sleeping prey. However, if the cat is captured, its fairy tales have the power to heal all illnesses. Pushkin's cat represents this kind of a storytelling captive in *Lolita*. In the Foreword we are told that our narrator is writing his "confession" in prison and ultimately dies "in legal captivity" (3). While on the outside, Humbert initially attempts to entrap his prey with the help of modern "science": soporifics prescribed by his doctor. Once in prison, is Humbert still attempting to enchant his prey (us) by employing the popular science of psychoanalysis and the manipulative story-telling of a literary "scholar" or, now that he is captured, does his self-styled fairy tale have the power to heal? Or is it both, as with "kot-bajun"? Once we as readers are able to capture Humbert through the proper end of our telescope, does some sort of healing take place, for maidens and for monsters, as well as for the reader? If Nabokov's detested word "lesson" could apply to the purpose of Humbert's tale, it would be to listen actively and at a proper distance, even to those evil cats who try to entrap us. Nabokov's warning against identifying with characters in "Good Readers and Good Writers" is most urgent in this case, especially with those characters who lull us into suspending our better judgement with the fairy tales they weave.

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[19] For his Russian translation, Nabokov chooses such iconic mythological couples as Adam and Eve and the incestuous brother-sister "Ivan da Mar'ia" (Ivan and Mary, 87) from an East Slavic legend, a couple reflected in the names of two sibling pairs on Dolores's class list: Jack and Mary Beale, and John and Marion Cowan (51).

"Criminals are usually people lacking imagination"
Nabokov's famous definition of novels as "great fairy tales" puts the tale-spinning Humbert and his author into dangerous proximity. After all, narrative manipulation and deceit, something that all readers accuse Humbert of and only question the extent to which he takes it, goes to the origins of all storytelling for Nabokov. Recall Nabokov's claim that the tale of the boy who cried wolf marks the birth of literature (*Lectures on Literature* 5). Nabokov posits the boy's need to make up stories as the essence of literature and, significantly, not the tale's instructive message. He uses a story known for its moral lesson—"you lie, you die"—to illustrate the desire to tell tall tales regardless of the consequences. The impulse to invent is stronger than the fear of death. And yet, while both Humbert and his author write self-proclaimed "fairy tales," how does Nabokov distance his own fiction-making from that of his narrator?

Some propose that it is indeed Pushkin who provides that boundary, ethically and aesthetically. Both Pushkin and Nabokov reject the utilitarian didactic function of fairy tales in favor of appreciating their artistry. Nabokov's satirical attitude towards John Ray's focus on useful lessons for parents and educators echoes one of Pushkin's responses to the public-mindedness expected of a poet in the words of *RL*'s narrator:

> Печальной истины поэт,
> Зачем я должен для потомства
> Порок и злобу обнажать
> И тайны козни вероломства
> В правдивых песнях обличать?" (71)
>
> ["A poet of sad truth, / Why should I for posterity / Lay bare vice and evil / And the secrets of treacherous intrigue (and secret intrigues of treachery) / To expose in realistic (verisimilitudinous) cantos"].

In the context of *RL*'s numerous images of "bare"/"denuded" breasts and sexual insinuations, shocking to readers at the time, "baring" or "exposing" vice is itself loaded with the poet's sly laughter at the social imperative placed on him. Similarly, the plea in the Foreword to read Humbert's "confession" in edifying ways clashes with its unbridled lasciviousness, prompting readers to question the superficial approaches encouraged by voices of respectability with Ph.D.s next to their names. Moreover, Nabokov's assertions that the world of imagination contains so much more freedom, potential, and access to deeper truths than the fact-confined histories also harks back to the above verses from *RL*, in which the poet's "istina" (truth) confronts the "pravdivykh" (the appearance of truth) that the reader demands from literature.

However, neither Pushkin nor Nabokov would dismiss ethics in the artistic process; for both authors, art calls for active participation, i.e., responsibility to one another. Nabokov's alternate titles for his article on reading – "How to Be a Good Reader" or "Kindness to Authors" – equates a "good reader" with a "kind reader." I will touch on what Nabokov means by reading with "kindness" below; it is sufficient at this point to note the association of "kindness to *others*" in "Kindness to *Authors*." In fact, participating in the process of imagination itself is ethical. As Michael Wood observes, *Lolita* offers "no simple lesson [...] but plenty of practice for the moral imagination" (18). Davydov observes that Nabokov's navigation of this ethics-aesthetics dyad is informed by Pushkin: that "Genius and villainy are incompatible" (words of Pushkin's Mozart) is lost on another one of Nabokov's murderers, Hermann in *Despair* (487; 1995). V.V. Shadunsky observes that Hermann uses Pushkin's poem "Pora, moi drug, pora!" to draw Lida into his criminal plot (148), but not

because art is amoral. In fact, as Shadunsky argues, the way protagonists use Pushkin in Nabokov's Russian-language works determines where they fall on the "true artist vs. fake artist" continuum. Furthermore, the test for genuine artist is the measure of their "integrity" and "humanity" (118). Though allusions to Pushkin become less explicit in Nabokov's American period, they continue to play an axiological, evaluating role (123). Whether one agrees with Shadunsky's claim that Humbert's transition from a "cynical villain" to a "repentent human being" follows his trajectory from a "fake artist (lzhe-khudozhnik)" to a "true artist" (120), the fact that for Nabokov "true" art engages ethics is illuminated in important ways specifically through *RL*.

Leona Toker notes that Nabokov's "aesthetic bliss" is less about pure art and more in line with Schopenhauer's belief that aesthetic enjoyment puts to sleep urgings of the malevolent will (198). Timothy Aubry adds that Nabokov would identify with Shelley in *A Defence of Poetry*, namely that the greatest instrument of moral good is the imagination (155). Steven Belletto argues that Humbert-the-artist is more in line with Charlotte's kitschy aesthetic than he cares to admit, while Nabokov's "aesthetic bliss" requires an ethical relationship to one's fellow human beings.[20] Viewing the ethics-aesthetics fusion in *Lolita* through the lens of *RL* furthers these arguments.

Allusions to Pushkin's works remind the reader that beyond Humbert's fanciful constructions there is a "real" author whose world of references is infinitely richer than the one his "galley slave" uses to manipulate. For instance, Humbert's repeated allusions to Merimée's *Carmen* present one of these Pushkinian subtexts hidden from Nabokov's narrator: *The Gypsies*.[21] In turn, it is important to note here that *The Gypsies* concludes on Zemfira's father excommunicating Aleko on moral grounds: "We do not torture, we do not execute — / We have no need for blood and groaning — / But we don't want to live with a murderer / […] You only want freedom for yourself" (178). Suzanne Fraysse engages the ethical dimension in her discussion of the *Carmen* subtext in *Lolita*, arguing that Nabokov exposes the dark side of poetry, where the lyricist's own poetic sensitivity makes him deaf to the woman he supposedly loves. Similarly, Dana Dragunoiu argues that in *Lolita* the author creates an artist who is an "accessory to darkness" and brutality (158). I would qualify this artist of darkness with Shadunsky's "lze-khudozhnik" (false artist). The final word on the murderous lover plot, and on the true artist more generally, rests with the old father in *The Gypsies*, traveling into *Lolita* through Tammi's "polygenic link" (55) from *Carmen* to Pushkin's text. The father pronounces his ultimate sentence on the murderer of his daughter in beautiful verse. Recall that Humbert indeed "tortures" and "executes," delivering Quilty's death sentence in that parody of verse while making comedy of his moral father-protector stance in the process.

The mermaid leitmotif as temptation is another covertly embedded allusion to *RL*. Connolly traces the proliferation of mermaids in the novel, and specifically Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* that Humbert buys for Dolores, to Pushkin's *Rusalka* (2009, 20-21). However, note that the "original" appearance of mermaids in Pushkin goes back to *RL*. The opening verses ("Rusalka na vetviakh sidit," 9) foreshadow the death of one of Ruslan's competitors, Rogdai, who is taken to the bottom of the Dnieper by a young *rusalka* (38). Ruslan, on the other hand, is tempted by *rusalki* in vain on his journey to Liudmila (57), a plotline that is inconvenient for Humbert in his desire to shift blame to Dolores's seductive nymphetic charms.

Unlike his author, Humbert cannot see past the justifying dimension of Poe's "kingdom by the sea"; he has no access to Pushkin's *lukomor'e*. After Ruslan frees Liudmila from captivity

[20] Meyer points out that Humbert engages madness to write himself into the canon of a romantic artist, while Nabokov understands artists as profoundly sane (1988; 32).

[21] See Tammi's discussion of the causal chain that leads from *Lolita* through Merimee's *Carmen* to Pushkin's *The Gypsies* (55).

in Chernomor's palace, she now becomes defenseless against Ruslan's advances, as her enchanted sleep can only be dispelled upon returning to her father. As Liudmila lies in Ruslan's arms on their long journey home, he hears her "gentle moaning" ("nezhnyi ston"), feels her "magical breathing" ("volshebnoe dykhan'e") as her chest rises ("kak chasto grud' ee vzdykhaet" 66). Although in one fairy tale version the prince takes advantage of the maiden in her sleep, the reader is assured that in this case Ruslan does not succumb to her seductive proximity:

> А дева спит. Но юный князь,
> Бесплодным пламенем томясь,
> Ужель, страдалец постоянный,
> Супругу только сторожил
> И в целомудренном мечтанье,
> Смирив нескромное желанье,
> Свое блаженство находил? (66)
>
> [And the maiden sleeps. But the young prince, / Languishing with a barren flame /, Could it really be that the faithful martyr / Merely guarded his spouse / And in chaste daydreaming, / Having curbed his immodest desire, / Would find his bliss?]

Note that the choice of the word "bes-*plod*-nyi"— *plod* signifying both fruit and a fetus in Russian, and hence "without" the non-consensual intercourse that would result in conception —contrasts to the original medieval romance *Perceforest* in which the prince impregnates the sleeping beauty.

Humbert uses the word bliss throughout his confession, and almost always sexually. Granted, as in the case of Ruslan's bliss, which is found in "chaste daydreaming" in the above passage, Humbert's bliss is restricted to his fantasy world until the fateful hotel scene turns it into a "daymare." The first time Humbert invokes "bliss" is long before finding his Lolita. While comparing his desire for young girls to that of "normal big males," he contemplates: "those gentlemen had not, and I *had*, caught glimpses of an incomparably more poignant bliss. The dimmest of my pollutive dreams was a thousand times more dazzling than all the adultery the most virile writer of genius or the most talented impotent might imagine" (18). Humbert's diction evokes *RL* on several levels. At first, Ruslan's and Humbert's lust for their Liudmila/Lolita is unrealized, if "indecent" or "pollutive." Humbert claims that works of literature by a "talented impotent" cannot compare to his desires. Recall that early in the novel he tricks his psychiatrist into giving him a diagnosis of being "totally impotent" (34), while Quilty provides the same alibi when Humbert confronts him at the end: "I had no fun with your Dolly. I am practically impotent" (298). The geriatric impotence of Chernomor turns into one of Humbert's deceptive masks out of which the sexual predator peers. Humbert, unlike Ruslan, is incapable of "curbing" his libido for the sake of another and, unfortunately, is not impotent if we are to believe his account.

Pushkin himself, of course, is known for his deceptive, slippery surfaces. The story of *RL* is relayed through several personages. There is the story-telling tomcat, there is a monk, and finally, there is the very present narrator who constantly reminds us of the act of narrating while weaving elements of other fairy tales into his own. In addition to Humbert's equally meta-textual narration that explicitly draws on works of fiction, his "confession" is passed down to the reader through various filters as well (a psychiatrist and a lawyer).[22] In the verses below, Pushkin's narrator assures his readers that they can trust Ruslan's chaste behavior because the tale comes down to us from a monk:

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[22] For a discussion of how *Lolita* inscribes itself into the tradition of fictitious forewords, with particular focus on Pushkin's *Belkin Tales*, see Blackwell (2018). *RL* offers another striking example of this tradition: what can be more fictitious that a fairy-tale-spinning cat?

> Монах, который сохранил
> Потомству верное преданье
> О славном витязе моем,
> Нас уверяет смело в том. (66)
>
> [A monk, who preserved / The faithful story for posterity / About my glorious prince / Bravely assures us of it.]

Given Pushkin's first narrative poem about a skirt-chasing monk (*Monakh*, 1813), this monk's assertion of chastity is less than trustworthy. Similarly, Humbert's confession is passed down to us through several hands of dubious authority: from Humbert to his lawyer to the author of the Foreword, a psychiatrist who is asked "to edit the manuscript" (3). Readers are continuously led to question Humbert's grasp on the boundary between fact and fiction. Pushkin's conscious exposition of the writing process, his focus on the artifice behind the telling, in part to elicit his readers' suspicion in the reliability of the purported sources of authority, is perhaps Nabokov's biggest affinity with his predecessor. But more specifically, the main object of truth questioning in *Lolita* and in the above passage from *RL* lies precisely in the physical violation of the texts' female title protagonists.

RL's narrator claims that he trusts the monk's version, though not necessarily as a voice of moral authority:

> И верю я! Без разделенья
> Унылы, грубы наслажденья:
> Мы прямо счастливы вдвоем. (67)
>
> [And I believe (him)! When not shared / Cheerless, crude are the pleasures: / Our happiness is most immediate when both are involved.]

At first glance, citing a monk is uncharacteristically moralizing for Pushkin's narrator, unless we keep in mind that he "believes" the monk's story on sensual, rather than moral, grounds; the narrator concludes that the "pleasures" are diminished unless they are reciprocated. Humbert-the-solipsist is incapable of reciprocity on any level, and would be content to reach his pinnacle of pleasure without Dolores's knowledge (recall the first time he climaxes with the purportedly unsuspecting Dolores on his lap, 60). Humbert remains beyond Pushkin's allusions and hence deaf to considerations of the mutuality expressed by *RL*'s narrator. Moreover, given the nymphic objects of his desire, Humbert is effectively locked into pursuing unreciprocated "bliss."

In his postscript to the novel, "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*," Nabokov states that "*Lolita* has no moral in tow" to counter the fictional John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.'s proclamations of "a lesson" for "parents, social workers, educators" (5-6). This does not at all conflict with Nabokov's claim that *Lolita* "is a highly moral affair" (*The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* 289). As Pushkin's monks and priests cannot be trusted to preach morality, neither can Nabokov's psychiatrists be trusted to teach life lessons; literature in general cannot be measured against such authoritarian, singular sources of truth. Instead, Nabokov finds the ethical center of art somewhere else: "For me a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm" (315).

As Nabokov once noted, because both he and Humbert were Europeans and men of letters, he had to distances himself from his narrator by dropping hints throughout the novel: "For instance, the good reader notices that Humbert Humbert confuses […] hummingbirds with hawk moths. Now, I would never do that, being an entomologist" (*Conversations* 12). Distinctions be-

tween Nabokov's "aesthetic bliss" and Humbert's physical "bliss" is one way in which Nabokov insulates himself from his protagonist ethically. Both physical and artistic bliss engage the senses, but, as Leland de la Durantaye argues, Nabokov presupposes a palpable boundary between the *sensual* (sexual) and the *sensuous* (tender, innocent) in discussions of art (64-65). Most importantly, Humbert's bliss is always unidirectional; his allusions to art serve to either mask or justify his selfish carnality. Nabokov's "aesthetic bliss," on the other hand, refers to a connection with another by means of art. The first three of the four terms that Nabokov uses to define art—curiosity, tenderness, kindness—by their very nature rely on the existence of another and communicate generosity toward this other, perhaps even towards a monster like Humbert. Without approaching too closely the "general lesson" that the comical John Ray, Jr. suggests that we extract, is it the kind of compassion in art that would, in some way, grant a reprieve even for a moral monster, "a green lane in Paradise where Humbert is permitted to wander at dusk once a year" (Foreword to the English translation of *Despair*, xiii)? After all, Ruslan forgives his murderous competitor Farlaf, while Chernomor, once stripped of his evil powers, is invited to live in the palace.

In contrast to some interpretations of Nabokov's "aesthetic bliss" as excluding ethical concerns in the name of pure art, Blackwell proposes a reading of the phrase through Pushkin's lens, which positions the existence of the other at the center. He uses Bakhtin's "loving contemplation," which does not schematize but instead sees the other in all of their detailed manifoldness, to delineate Nabokov's "aesthetic love" for Pushkin. The critic suggests that Pushkin, Nabokov, and Bakhtin meet at this pivotal point: "if we do not love as we perceive another human being (whether fictitious or real), we will barely see them at all" (2018; 429). In turn, concentrated attention on another defines Nabokov's approach toward Pushkin, but also Humbert's inability to do the same: "such lingering… must be what Nabokov has in mind when he proposes imagining Pushkin with love, and it is precisely this that Humbert fails to do in his aesthetic portrayal of Dolly Haze" (429). Applying Shelley's considerations on art, I dwell on the idea of "imagining." Shelley defends poetry on ethical grounds, identifying love as the "great secret of morals"; a person, "to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively" (34). Humbert's plea to the reader—"Imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me" (129)—is often interpreted as the appeal of a pure aesthete to the reader's own purely artistic reception. While in fact Humbert's plea can also call upon imagination as an ethical act in its generosity and attention toward this ultimate other. Given the monstrosity of Humbert's crime—fueled by his own suspension of imagining Dolores's pain and hence suspension of his *aesthetic* function—only artistic perception would allow the reader to exercise kindness towards him. The penal system, defense lawyers, and John Ray's "parents, social workers, educators," have another role to play altogether; exercising "moral imagination" is outside their purview.

In Conclusion

Though *EO* absorbs Nabokov as he writes *Lolita*, childhood memories are connected to fairy tales, especially for a Russian child who grows up on Pushkin's versifications and their intermedial adaptations.[23] In *RL*, mermaids, Bluebeard, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, and Erlking (just to name a few) point to or create their Slavic counterparts and, ultimately, come together in that foundational text of Russianness. *Lolita*, while weaving these intercultural tales into its quilt of Americana, assumes a place in the canon of American literature. Pushkin's reshuffling of *chronotope* in the epic

[23] In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov recalls attending the opera *Ruslan and Liudmila* "at least a dozen times in the course of half as many years" as a child (22), his father not being able to play anything "except very majestically the first chords of the 'Ruslan' overture" (138).

genre anticipates Nabokov's all-consuming interest in writing on the workings of time, though distorted through Humbert's substitutions of space for time as he works against the novelistic genre in which he finds himself.

Finally, Nabokov engages Pushkin's *RL* to address the ethical in the aesthetic experience; Humbert is a warped refraction of his source. Meyer posits *EO* in Nabokov's novel as the subtext that underscores "the debasement of the world of imagination" (2008, 97). I suggest that the profanation in Humbert's illicit experience of recapturing the "enchanted time" is sharpened by considering *RL* as another central subtext. In his commentary on *EO*, Nabokov suggests that the lines "*his* [Lenski's] verse a mother would, of course, / tell her daughter to read" express a "grudge that [Pushkin] bore against those who three years earlier had criticized *Ruslan and Lyudmila* from the point of view of its morals" (*Commentary* 238-39). Almost two decades after *Lolita* appears, Nabokov expresses a similar grudge against those who diametrically oppose morality and art when reading him: "One day a reappraiser will come and declare that, far from having been a frivolous firebird, I was a rigid moralist kicking sin, cuffing stupidity, ridiculing the vulgar and cruel – and assigning sovereign power to tenderness, talent, and pride" (*Strong Opinions* 193). Stupidity goes hand-in-hand with subservience and cruelty, while talent sides with tenderness and independence of spirit. On the level of plot, *RL* provides plenty of outright "lessons" to consider in Nabokov's own work: sexual restraint vs. criminal indulgence, dubious monks that anticipate Nabokov's questionable authority figures in teachers and headmistresses, parents, lawyers, psychiatrists and, yes, self-proclaimed artists—all contrasted to something more pure and restorative that creativity and imagination offers. The fact that the body of literature on Pushkin's works in *Lolita*, to which this article contributes, has been slower to come out than discussions of subtexts from the Western canon is, possibly, because of that boundary that the author "carefully" guards between the world of child-like openness where Pushkin resides, on the one side, and Humbert's deceit, posturing, and criminality, on the other.

Speak, Memory ends on Vladimir and Vera leading their six-year-old Dmitri to the last ship that is to take them to safety in America. The parents wait for the child to see for himself the ship's funnel and the flickering harbor behind a row of houses so as not to ruin the "blissful shock, the enchantment and glee he would experience" (309). Sergei Nabokov would soon perish in the camps, yet a parental lesson on the workings of good and evil would be utterly trite and inconceivable here. Against this darkest moment for humanity, Nabokov chooses to conclude his memoir on protecting his child's fresh reception of a scene about to open before him, to not impose on the child's freedom to arrive at this "blissful shock" for himself. The child would intuit something more valuable through this "aesthetic" experience than any talk his parents could offer at this moment. Similarly, the first-hand engagement that we bring to a work of art is the kind of bliss that Nabokov, schooled by Pushkin in not trading in tired dichotomies, would find at once sensuous, aesthetic, and moral.

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