

Gardens and Parks,” the final chapter of Nabokov’s autobiography, *Speak, Memory* (1951), ends rather abruptly in 1940. Nabokov recounts details of his child’s infancy in Hitler’s Germany and then reflects: “Now and then, a recognized patch of historical background aids local identification—and substitutes other bonds for those a personal vision suggests. Our child must have been almost three on that breezy day in Berlin (where, of course, no one could escape familiarity with the ubiquitous picture of the Führer) when we stood, he and I, before a bed of pallid pansies, each of their upturned faces showing a dark mustache-like smudge, and had great fun, at my rather silly prompting, commenting on their resemblance to a crowd of bobbing little Hitlers.”¹ Most obvious in this scene is the fact that Nabokov and his son are like everyone else, forcibly familiar with the “ubiquitous” Hitler, so much so that his face is everywhere they look, including the flower beds. But in another way, the two are special, for the inescapable pansy Hitlers also confirm the vulnerability of Nabokov’s Jewish son, whose racial identity, according to Nazi law, is determined by his Jewish mother. The family’s escape, through Paris to the United States, is imminent. In the previous chapter, Nabokov recalls the relief he feels as he passes the room of his sleeping wife and child, secure in the possession of the *visa de sortie*, issuing from what he calls “the emetic of a bribe . . . administered to the right rat at the right office,” ensuring permission to cross the Atlantic (S, 216). The “Gardens and Parks” scene is typically Nabokovian in its affinity for flora, fauna, and all manner of wild things, and for its ingenious means of transforming them into imaginative artifacts. Nabokov is alive to the

natural world in a way that makes his fictional landscapes always distinctive, always wondrous in a sense that is biological, psychological, and literary all at once.

However artfully or wittily reconceived, this natural scene is extraordinary precisely for its recourse to the real. The ubiquitous danger of the Führer is magically reinscribed as an image of natural profusion, a veritable bloom of “bobbing little Hitlers,” as Nabokov seeks to make child’s play of a familiar, indeed all too familiar, vulnerability. Yet the crowd of bobbing Hitlers, which relies on a historical rather than a natural principle of growth, is more botanical nightmare than triumph. For what makes Nabokov’s scene a true Eden is the presence of a snake: the Satanic smudge of history. The attitude toward history in the first sentence, where Nabokov adopts a Humbert-like notion of a force that ambles, now and then, seemingly at random and at will, into view is belied by the sentence’s end, where history is more like an unexpected guest. A recognized patch, or space in time, caught and made valuable as an aid to the willed record of spoken memory becomes an irrevocable fate. History steps in authoritatively to substitute “other bonds” for those a “personal vision” might more gently suggest. The involuntary bonds imposed by history that Nabokov undoubtedly has in mind here are the blood bonds that imperil the lives of his Jewish wife and son in Hitler’s Berlin.

What I will argue over the course of this essay is that two fundamental elements of this passage from *Speak, Memory* are vividly present in Nabokov’s great novel *Lolita* (1955): the sense of urgency stemming from the imminence of persecution and the salvation of exile, and the sense of history as a force to be confronted through the transformative powers of the imagination. My argument is the product of a realization I had when I first taught this complex and terrifying novel eight years ago: reading *Lolita* in history, at least for me, is necessary to its deepest appreciation, and consequently, necessary to my bringing it to life for contemporary students. To be sure, reading *Lolita* in history is a task that Nabokov himself seems to have opposed. Why else would he offer a parody of the “social worker mentality” in the form of the foreword by John Ray, Ph.D., who confuses the characters for real people and introduces the novel as a cautionary tale about moral lepers and the advisability of keeping close watch on our children. Why else would Nabokov affix an afterword to subsequent editions of the novel, a year after its publication, declaring that fiction exits only

insofar as it affords “aesthetic bliss.”² Aesthetic bliss, according to this Nabokovian voice, is its own value, immune to moral and political considerations. This view of the transcendence or immunity of great art is consistent with the judgment of decades of criticism on *Lolita*.³

Such criticism finds confirmation in Humbert Humbert’s narrative, which gives new meaning to the term *word play* and tends at once toward the all-time of literary allusion and the no-time of scientific classification. To read the novel as a narrative about sexual perversion and exploitation, to try to link it to any eventuation outside the text, Nabokov’s commentary implies, is to be as overserious and literal-minded as the dopey John Ray. The challenge for a reader of *Lolita* bent on historical understanding is to locate means for reading that are faithful to the novel’s aesthetic achievement. That requires noticing what is happening to history in the novel as much as attending to the twin time frames the novel invokes directly and, more often, indirectly: Europe in the 1930s and 1940s and the United States just after World War II (especially the years 1947 and 1948, which provide the setting for the novel’s plot) through the 1950s, the culture of consumption in which the novel is written.

History within the novel, like everything else—from Lolita’s heart and soul to the pedophilic villain of Humbert’s vengeful detective story, Clare Quilty—is submerged within the narrator’s claustrophobic drama of sexual obsession. Yet world events swirl around the narrative, leaving unmistakable traces, for the novel is as haunted by history as its narrator is haunted by his lost love, Annabelle. Among the major historical aspects of the novel’s narrative is what I will be calling its holocaust subtext, that is, a consistent pattern of references to Nazi persecution and genocide in Europe, a pattern that has been neglected, and which I believe provides a critical means of elucidating the novel’s moral center.⁴ Another is the novel’s fascination with American consumer culture, as well as the passion it depicts for tourism and collecting through the characterization of both Humbert and Lolita. In particular, the portrait of Lolita as a consumer (of candy, ice cream, and a variety of kitschy objects) serves as the means by which her own consumption by Humbert is rationalized and excused. Lolita, seen through the “inner eye” of Humbert Humbert, is the classic American female consumer—always already contaminated by her trashy taste.⁵

What no one has recognized is the way in which consuming and col-

lecting are represented in *Lolita* as inseparable from two key facets of the narrative: its portrayal of memory as guilt inducing and of ethical responsibility as dependent on a clear recording of past actions. Consider, for instance, the moment when Humbert buys for Lolita, whom he has just described as looking like “the small ghost of somebody I had just killed . . . four books of comics, a box of candy, a box of sanitary pads, two cokes, a manicure set, a travel clock with a luminous dial, a ring with a real topaz, a tennis racket, roller skates with white high shoes, field glasses, a portable radio set, chewing gum, a transparent raincoat, sunglasses, some more garments—swooners, shorts, all kinds of summer frocks” (140–42). This absurd heap of objects, “every girl’s” Christmas wish list and more, is an attempt to compensate Lolita’s doubled state of mourning for herself (the lost innocent) and for her mother. Just as the scene classifies these gifts as Humbert’s method of absolution for a figurative if not literal murder, the narrative consistently links feelings of culpability with acts of consumption. Moreover, it links transgressive or incriminating behaviors with the perpetrator’s compulsive need to record them (whether through photography, film, or writing), thereby transforming those behaviors into (potentially pornographic) objects of consumption in their own right. It is precisely a perpetrator’s ability to reproduce transgressions or crimes as delectable commodities that provides potential vindication. Guilt and compulsion, the novel’s holocaust and consumption themes, offer two guides to the placement of *Lolita* in history. I will show how they can be reconciled, and thereby help to reveal the novel’s larger perspective on the moral questions it raises.



Humbert Humbert is a European refugee, arriving in the United States, he tells us, as “the gloom of yet another World War had settled upon the globe” (32). The novel’s main events—Humbert’s sordid affair with Lolita, who is twelve when it begins and just short of fourteen when it ends—take place in the immediate aftermath of World War II. In part because he is so anxious about the passing of time, Humbert is obsessed with dates. Throughout the narrative, with a clock-like regularity, he keeps us informed of the year, sometimes the date and weather, and even the seasonal peculiarities of the place he happens to be. In a few short paragraphs, for instance, he refers us to “the weather data in the Ramsdale *Journal* for 1947” and lets us

know that his diary has a gold inscription, in French staircase style, of the “year, 1947 . . . [and] that May 30 is a Fast day by Proclamation in New Hampshire” (40). Details about war, moreover, serve as comparative referents that confirm the Second World War’s traumatic proximity. Thus, Humbert’s struggle to pinpoint the sensitivity of “sex offenders” is capped by a key distinction: “we do not rape as good soldiers do” (88), a fruit of conquest that is recalled more than once. The new family of the pregnant Lolita is war-torn: the hearing of her husband, Dick Schiller, and the arm of his friend, Bill, are casualties of the recent European conflict. Other images, such as “the brown wigs of tragic old women who had just been gassed” (254), recall the most grisly moments of the Nazi era.

The war era also endures in Humbert’s multilingualism. Although Humbert’s constant use of foreign phrases is both involuntary and pretentious, a reminder of his European background as well as an assurance of his cosmopolitanism, he speaks, for a scholar of French, a great deal of German. If French in *Lolita* is the language of high culture, German is the language of supplication. Humbert lapses into German to plea or plead his case to his “Reader!, *Bruder!*” (262); to soft-pedal his love for his “little *Magdlein*” (111, 180), “*die Kleine*” (135); or to strike a pose (“*Herr Doktor Humbert*” [111]). More important, *Humbert* is frequently mistaken for a German surname (Hummer, Humberg, Homberg, Hamburg, Humbug), and he playfully exploits the misnomer (as in Lolita’s preference for Hamburgers over Humburgers). These historical associations, the product of temporal compulsion and verbal gamesmanship, of legal wrangling and sweet talk, which seem primarily decorative or ornamental, are signposts of deeper, more far-reaching novelistic ideas.

Like his creator, Humbert is a great classifier of people and other animate as well as inanimate things. The purported subtitle of Humbert’s narrative, “The Confession of a White Widowed Male,” recalls his creator’s love of insects in the potential choice it seems to proffer between a formerly married man and a spider. Yet Humbert’s particular scientific interests, in human ethnic and racial traits, are more in keeping with ethnology than with entymology. Understood in terms of the time period encompassed by the novel’s narrative, Humbert’s racialism looks downright sinister. Every character he describes, from the most significant (his childhood love) to the least (the elevator operator at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, who is identified as “Uncle

Tom" [122]), is cataloged as a recognizable human type. Humbert's typological habit is forecast on the novel's first page, where he introduces his father as "a salad of racial genes: a Swiss citizen of mixed French and Austrian descent with a dash of the Danube in his veins" (9). Humbert's mother is pure English; his beloved Annabelle, like himself, is "of mixed parentage." Humbert's first wife, Valeria, is "the daughter of a Polish doctor" (25) and commits adultery with "a stocky White Russian," who observes a "middle-class Russian courtesy" when he avoids flushing the toilet in Humbert's excruciatingly small apartment (28, 30).

En route to *Lolita*, we are introduced to a quasi-nymphet prostitute, with "the kind of dimpled round little face French girls so often have," and we learn, by way of "plump, glossy little Eskimo girls with their fish smell," that "nymphets do not occur in polar regions" (21, 33). Humbert's first physical approach to Lolita involves picking flint out of her eye with his tongue the way a "Swiss peasant would" (43). Throughout the narrative, African Americans appear in servant roles, among them "a cheerful Negro" chauffeuring a limousine and "the Negro maid" of Charlotte Haze, represented, in synecdoche, by her "large glossy black purse" (36, 38). Charlotte Haze herself, the maternal character immortalized by Shelly Winters in the Kubrick film, is "a type that may be defined as a weak solution of Marlene Dietrich" (37). Humbert's account of her "as one of those women whose polished words may reflect a book club or bridge club, or any other deadly conventionality, but never her soul" confirms the tie between his hostility toward grown women and his race consciousness. Charlotte Haze is signed, sealed, and delivered from her first appearance, even before, since Humbert has located her type in the living room furnishings. The fictional beneficiary of Nabokov's own famed predilection for house subtleties over mortgages during his tenure at Cornell University, Humbert is the ultimate metonymist. Furniture and furnishings come alive in his mind and mimic the racial traits of those who own them. Hence, the Haze "type of household" displays "a kind of horrible hybridization" between the "functional modern" and the "decrepit" traditional (37–38).

Humbert's fantasy of incest, his preferred model for his relationship with Lolita, is likewise racist at base. His passion foregrounds the interdependence between social prescriptions for mating with like kinds (as opposed to outsiders, foreigners, and other aliens) and social

prohibitions against incest. For incest, as Humbert conceives it, is a perverse drama of blood purity, a means of preserving unadulterated kinship lines. Humbert's desire to have Lolita all to himself is rationalized as a desire to protect her from the hordes of male non-kin (young, middling, and old, lustful, intrigued, and indifferent) who populate the various refueling stops on their cross-country trek. The hint that we are trapped in the orbit of a truly deranged mind is the relative rarity of women on their travels, as if Humbert, set as he is on competitors, and on an occasional additional nymphet, cannot apprehend women. The world according to Humbert is invariably male and invariably aching for Lolita. In the face of threats such as these, it is no wonder that Humbert's measures supersede ordinary vigilance. To keep Lolita, to guard her properly, he needs to incorporate her. He desires to ingest her, whole. "My only grudge against nature," he confesses at one point, "was that I could not turn my Lolita inside out and apply voracious lips to her young matrix, her unknown heart, her nacreous liver, the sea-grapes of her lungs, her comely twin kidneys" (165). The fact that he gets as far as humanly possible is confirmed by the subsequent figurations of his loss of Lolita: in the visceral terms of retching his guts out "on the grass . . . a torrent of brown and greens that I had never remembered eating," in part because the consumption has gone on so long (238, 307).

To consume incestuously, as Humbert sees it, is to keep separate and pure. Incest also provides an ideal form of production. This is exemplified by Humbert's dream of a future life with Lolita, who produces "eventually a nymphet with my blood in her exquisite veins, a Lolita the Second," a bloodline that even yields "in the remoteness of time" a "Lolita the Third" (174). The issue of his incest with Lolita would survive to produce yet another generation of Humbert-infused nymphets. Seen through the dispassionate logic of Nabokov's text, incest is the perversion of accepted notions of descent and reproduction of attributes, as confirmed by the double deaths of Lolita and her stillborn child. It's no accident that Lolita's stillbirth yields a girl, for this not only denies Humbert his grandnymphet but also suggests that this cycle of brutality—the damage done to females through incest—extends to successive generations of (potential) women.⁶

Indeed, the special sensitivity Humbert evinces toward Jews may be inspired by an attraction to the group's renowned ritualized incestuousness. In delineating the attributes of Lolita's school friend,

the European refugee Eva Rosen, he is attentive to the distinctive “foxy[ness]” of “the great clan of intra-racial redheads” (190). Pity is not one of Humbert’s strong suits (as noted by Richard Rorty),⁷ which makes his rare display of empathy for Irving Flashman, the lone Jewish boy in Lolita’s Ramsdale class, significant. Humbert seems acutely aware of the unique plight of Jews at this historical moment. Some of his recognitions merely echo prevailing stereotypes, as in his reference to “Rubinov’s Jewelry Company” with its “display of artificial diamonds reflected in a red mirror” (282). Here the customary Jewish profession of diamond dealing is made to stand for *Jewry* as a whole, and diamonds sparkle red, in a gaudy and potentially ghoulish image.

Of all Humbert’s accounts of Jews, however, none is more revealing than his description of Eva Rosen, who serves as a double for Lolita. Characterized as “a displaced little person from France” with “basic elements of nymphet charm,” she has reached the United States through the generosity of “a millionaire” *oncle d’Amerique*. Possessed of “a perfect pubescent figure,” her “tonalities were still admirably pure,” though she resorts at times to American slang, spoken with “a slight Brooklyn accent.” “Her glossy copper hair had Lolita’s silkiness,” and her preference for clothes that are “black or cherry dark . . . and garnet-red fingernail polish” reinforces her “claims to nymphetry” (190). Arrayed in delectable cherry colors and touched up in mineral red paint, she is, like Lolita herself, made for the Humbert-type nympholept. But as with Lolita, it is her displacement, her singular vulnerability, a young girl alone in the world, that makes her susceptible to violation. Humbert’s report that Lolita “dropped Eva for some reason” is telling, for it suggests that Eva’s situation is too close for comfort, supplying a mirror on her own circumstances that Lolita needs to avoid.

To understand Eva Rosen’s role in this light is to insist that Lolita is far more mindful of her plight than Humbert and some of the novel’s critics are prepared to recognize. Significantly, Humbert’s own confirmation of this fact arises from eavesdropping on a conversation between Lolita and Eva, which he counts among his “smothered memories . . . limbless monsters of pain.” “Once, in a sunset-ending street of Beardsley . . . in answer to something [Eva] had said about its being better to die than hear Milton Pinski, some local schoolboy she knew, talk about music, my Lolita remarked, ‘You know what’s so dreadful about dying is that you are completely on your own’” (284). Lolita’s

imagination of death as a state of utter abandonment and loneliness is critical because it highlights the extent to which she has come to know death through life with Humbert. Humbert has forced Lolita, in a manner similar to Eva's implied experience, to "know" things that children, morally speaking, should never be forced to know. This is what makes one of the most notorious moments in the narrative—the description of their first intercourse—one of the saddest as well. "While eager to impress me with the world of tough kids, she was not quite prepared for certain discrepancies between a kid's life and mine" (134).



Humbert's self-lacerations after scenes like these would be primarily irritating, even outrageous (since they serve as yet another means for his erotic satisfaction, through masochistic exhibitionism) were they not also extremely suggestive in a historical sense. On the heels of Lolita's dialogue with Eva Rosen, Humbert confesses to the "world of total evil" he has inhabited with Lolita and dubs himself "a pentapod monster" (284). Humbert's overt embrace of the monster label is habitual. He reports dutifully that Charlotte, in the harangue inspired by her discovery of his diary, calls him "a monster . . . a detestable . . . criminal" (96); anticipates his debauchery of Lolita with the image of "Humbert, the popular butcher" (108); and refers repeatedly to the monstrosity of his sexual appetite. These hyperbolic self-incriminations are not only means of purging his crimes by owning up to them but also efforts to control the range of his criminality. What I want to suggest is that the attempt to control its range is an indication of how truly far-reaching Humbert's criminality may be. Indeed, the furthest extent of what I have called the Holocaust subtext of *Lolita* may be the parallel between Humbert's "case" and "trial" and one of the most prominent contemporary trials of the era: the ongoing trial of Nazi war criminals in Nuremberg, Germany, from 1946 to 1949.

Let me emphasize that I am talking about gradations, implications, and analogies, the stuff out of which novels are made. The analogy between Nazi crimes and those of Humbert is usefully illuminated by Max Weber's notion of "ideal types." The type, according to Weber, allows the social scientist to grasp "the real action, influenced as it is by all sorts of irrational facts (emotional impulses, errors), as a deviation from what might be expected if those performing it had behaved

in a fully rational way.”⁸ Weber uses *ideal* not in the sense of a preferred or improved state but of a fully predictable one. Humbert makes a similar point in describing the expectations human beings have for the reliability of others. We are inclined, he suggests, “to endow our friends with the stability of type that literary characters acquire in the reader’s mind.” Any “deviation” from that norm, Humbert suggests, would strike us “as not only anomalous but unethical” (265). This is one of those moments when Humbert evinces true insight into his own habits of mind and provides an avenue for a valuable distinction between the scientific and the literary. The purpose of Weberian types is to lift things out of the unfiltered realm of the ordinary into the more rarefied air of scientific understanding. Readers sometimes impose such constraints on fiction too. But to do so is to sell it short. For the purpose of literature, according to Nabokov, is precisely the opposite of science: to attend to that region of ordinariness, emotion, and error. Literature aims to complicate types: to highlight differences between extremes and semblances, to identify points on a continuum of act and belief, to accentuate motivations and consequences, all for the sake of fuller exploration and sometimes illumination of cultural pressure points and historical traumas. Thus, Nabokov’s portrait of Humbert Humbert provides a thick description of a figure who in certain respects approaches a Nazi type. To label him a Nazi would be inappropriate; but he recalls aspects of Nazi methodology and doctrine.

And while I am not claiming a direct analogy between Humbert’s predation and Nazi War crimes, I am suggesting that on some level Humbert takes these contemporary historical events as the ultimate register of his “crime” against Lolita. If I am correct in posing this analogy as Humbert’s frame of reference, then I see at least two repercussions for the moral and political meanings of the novel: one helps to excuse Humbert’s actions, and the other serves to elucidate them in a way that is even more damaging than critics have realized. One way of understanding the analogy discourages strong condemnation of Humbert’s offenses, which appear, in light of it, as mere garden-variety crimes of passion. Put simply, Humbert’s behavior looks benign by comparison with these horrific “crimes against humanity.” The same historical perspective, however, might actually magnify Humbert’s offense by highlighting what the crime itself, and his attempt to mediate and obscure its presentation, has in common with these horrific collectivized crimes. The first way of taking the analogy, which

serves to mitigate Humbert's actions, represents Humbert's method of analogy. By implication, it provides a means of humanizing him, for it confirms the extent of his remorse. Humbert's belief that his guilt is comparable to that of the Nazis is the sign of its authenticity. The second way is consistent with the narrative's deepest logic.

In drawing a broad comparison between the Medieval era and his own, Humbert remarks: "Nowadays you have to be a scientist if you want to be a killer" (87). While his obvious purpose is to distinguish his own actions from the more notorious objective kinds of murderousness he expects are on everyone's minds, the man he is about to murder is not sure the distinction is possible. Indeed, Quilty's first step, in attempting to save himself from the gun-toting Humbert, is to make sure Humbert knows he is not a Jew. Mistaking Humbert for a "German refugee," Quilty confirms that "this is a Gentile's house" (297). Humbert, of course, doesn't care about that. In fact, he presents himself throughout the narrative as a victim of discrimination and persecution in his own right. He refers to the obscurity of his origins, which appear to trouble Charlotte on the point of their marriage, when she inquires if he has not "a certain strange strain" in his family, and she promises to commit suicide if she ever discovers he is not a Christian (74-75). And he is, due to his German-Jewish sounding name, subjected to anti-Semitic slurs, most frequently through hotel discrimination policies. Moreover, he confesses repeatedly to feelings of persecution. But it is characteristic of Humbert to play both sides of a moral boundary. He continually blurs the line between perpetrator and victim, between culprit and innocent, so as to obviate the task of judgment. He is the moralizing moralist whose aim is to obscure the question of morality so completely that no moral judgments can be made.

Humbert's attention to American anti-Semitism (the novel's chief annotator calls this "the anti-Semitism theme") can be read as an effort to widen the arc of potential incrimination.⁹ If Americans are racists too, how can Europeans be isolated and censured on this score? Substitute Germans for Europeans in the previous sentence, and we have an argument made by German defendants at the Nuremberg Trials. Consider, for instance, Hermann Goering, Hitler's second in command, who during his cross-examination compared Nazi atrocities to U.S. treatment of Indians.¹⁰ My point, then, is that there are fundamental methodological affinities between charges laid and defenses made at Humbert's "trial" and at those of Nazi war criminals in

Nuremberg. While the crimes themselves are of an altogether different dimension and magnitude, there are crucial continuities between some of Humbert's most cherished beliefs and Nazi ideology, as well as even more striking continuities between Nazi and Humbertian methods of defense. I have already established Humbert's preoccupation with race traits, which sometimes crosses the border into full-fledged racism. Now I want to focus on three additional points along this continuum: Humbert's fascination with scientific experiments, his obsession with recording his actions, and his ongoing effort to transform the transgressive into the conventional.

Humbert's "revenge" on his adulterous wife, Valeria, and her Russian lover, Maximovich, comes through "a man from Pasadena" who reports Valeria's 1945 death in childbirth, possibly the consequence of her earlier participation in a "year-long experiment conducted by a distinguished American ethnologist" that "dealt with human and racial reactions to a diet of bananas and dates in a constant position on all fours." Humbert's "informant, a doctor," had seen the pair "crawling about the well-swept floors of a brightly lit set of rooms . . . in the company of several other hired quadrupeds, selected from indigent and helpless groups." Hoping for a photograph or two, Humbert is disappointed that his search for the published "results" ("in the *Review of Anthropology*") proves fruitless (30–31). This story would stand as a relatively harmless and amusing example of questionable (so far as human subjects are concerned) social scientific research from the forties, were it not echoed by other examples. Two pages later, Humbert describes an expedition into arctic Canada, which he joins as "a recorder of psychic reactions." Here too the tone is playful and mocking, as Humbert details the various "misguided" efforts of the research team, variously engaged in collecting plankton, studying tuberculosis in the tundra, and "checking the influence of climatic amelioration on the coats of the arctic fox." Humbert's particular report—on "nostalgia," "food-fantasies," and "nocturnal emissions"—while largely "concocted," is nevertheless published by two major journals in 1946 (33–34).

Humbert's amateur scientific ambitions are likewise nourished by the parade of human subjects encountered in his travels with Lolita. While limited to one gender, for the incestuous reasons I have mentioned, Humbert's inquiries into the nature of "Hitchhiking Man" feature the same positivistic inclinations as the Pasadena and Arctic

experiments. This “curious roadside species . . . *Homo pollex* of science” comes in assorted shapes and sizes: “the modest soldier . . . quietly conscious of khaki’s viatic appeal; the schoolboy wishing to go two blocks; the killer wishing to go two thousand miles . . . a trio of optimistic Mexicans . . . the clean-cut, glossy-haired, shifty-eyed, white-faced young beasts in loud shirts and coats” (159). Quilty intuitively Humbert’s penchant for pseudoscience in offering to show him, in exchange for his life, the *Bagratiön Island* studies by explorer and psychoanalyst Melanie Weiss—“photographs of eight hundred and something male organs she examined and measured in 1932.” If this is not tempting, Quilty offers to “arrange for [Humbert] to attend executions, not everybody knows that the chair is painted yellow” (302). The idea of watching executions as a treat, or even a pastime, recalls “the most vivid figure” in Nabokov’s autobiographical memory of the interwar years: “a young German university student, well-bred, quiet, bespectacled, whose hobby was capital punishment.” At their second meeting, “Dietrich” shows Nabokov a collection of photographs he has taken at the executions he has attended, which includes detailed images of a bloody beheading with sword in China; hangings in the Balkans; and an execution by guillotine in Paris. Dietrich’s highest ambition is a trip to the United States to witness “a couple of electrocutions.” The Nazi era cuts short the prospect while obviating the need, given the “never-expected profusion of treasures” now available to Dietrich and his “co-veterans.” Nabokov can only imagine, in conclusion, “the absolutely *wunderbar* pictures he took during Hitler’s reign” (S, 205–6).

An avid consumer of photographs, postcards, and films, Humbert shares Dietrich’s passion for visual technology. These technologies, which include forms of writing like his diary, allow audiences a certain kind of “visual memory,” the opportunity to “skillfully recreate an image in the laboratory of your mind” (11). They are, as Humbert represents them, machineries of nostalgia, which serve not only to freeze time but also to objectify the self. The scene of Humbert masturbating discreetly with a supposedly unknowing Lolita beside him is replayed imaginatively in filmic fashion, in an overt attempt to supply borders around his erotic treachery (57–62). Humbert’s camera manipulations, cross-cutting, and scene splicings—which provide aesthetic enhancement and a cloak of humor—don’t deny the violation taking place but help to defuse and contain it. Still, as exempli-

fied by the Nuremberg example, film's recording capacity also makes it a means for recrimination and retribution. This was made plain by chief prosecutor Robert Jackson in leading arguments at the Trials. "We will not ask you to convict these men on the testimony of their foes," Jackson proclaimed. "There is no count in the Indictment that cannot be proved by books and records. The defendants were always meticulous record keepers, and had their share of the Teutonic passion for thoroughness in putting things on paper. Nor were they without vanity. They arranged frequently to be photographed in action. We will show you their own films. You will see their own conduct and hear their own voices as these defendants re-enact for you from the screen, some of the events." This was corroborated by Nuremberg defendant Hans Frank, who remarked, in a memorable line that could have been written by Humbert: "[M]y own diary bears witness against me."¹¹ Casting himself as "a very conscientious recorder" (72), Humbert refers repeatedly to scenes that might have been caught on film but weren't. Even more telling is advice he gives for how to shoot a scene "if you want to make a movie out of my book" (222).

This final detail suggests Humbert's awareness of the pornographic value of guilty records such as his, a value that was not overlooked by the filmmakers who deftly exploited the erotic power of holocaust horror in Liliana Cavani's film, *The Night Porter*, starring Dirk Bogarde and Charlotte Rampling. The film is instructive for my analysis of *Lolita*. It features a relationship between a Nazi concentration camp officer with a passion for filming his prey and a Jewish, female, pre-adolescent inmate, whose first erotic experience is with him. It raises similar questions about the prospect for reciprocity, when one side of the exchange has all the power; and like *Lolita*, it seems to sully all sexuality through its presentation of one highly extreme form of it. What *The Night Porter* confirms, above all, and this explains its ambivalent reception, is the consciousness on the part of the Nazis themselves of the pornographic afterlife of their crimes. This marks yet another affinity between Humbert and the Nazi record keepers indicted at Nuremberg: their sense of the potential culpability of their censors, which led them to exploit the pornographic potency of their crimes as a critical avenue of absolution.



Humbert Humbert's complicated relationship to his past in particular and to history in general is partly a consequence of his guilty pas-

sion for nymphets, as critics have long pointed out. But it is also a direct product of his other much-noticed habit of characterizing his readers as a jury sitting in judgment upon his crime of pedophilia, and the frequent reminder that his provision of such an account is at his lawyer's prompting. Humbert's self-incrimination and self-defense proceed along two lines that are mutually constituting and mutually illuminating. Throughout the narrative, Humbert defends his general appetite for young girls and his particular sexual affair with Lolita by blurring the boundary between normal sexual behavior and his own. It is simply not possible, he tells us repeatedly, to isolate his passion from that of other men. While Humbert and Lolita seem decidedly estranged from normal social life as they traverse the United States on their peripatetic island of taboo, like any form of exotic estrangement, their relation might be said to highlight certain latent truths about the real world. Thus when we are shown a picture, late in the novel, of Lolita's friend Avis Byrd, "perched plumply" on her father's knee, while he "with a casual arm . . . enveloped his lumpy and large offspring" (285–86), we are disposed toward a momentary suspicion of *this* father. Everything Humbert touches upon becomes tainted, even diabolical, as he builds his case for the difficulty of drawing secure borders around his crime, borders essential to an ethical reading of the novel.

"Ah, gentle drivers gliding through summer's black nights, what frolics, what twists of lust, you might see from your impeccable highways if Kumfy Kabins were suddenly drained of their pigments and became as transparent as boxes of glass!" (116–17). Here, as always, Humbert banks on the kinkiness of readers' imaginations. The sensually conceived "gentle," "gliding" minds of his audience, he suggests, hold the keys to the permanent radicalizing of normalcy. Were readers prepared to be honest with themselves, their "impeccable highway" perches would be exposed for the seats of denial they are. Humbert insists on complicity. The novel as he presents it is coproduced by his own voice and memory, and the minds of readers. He supplies the evidence—"Ladies and gentleman of the jury, exhibit number one"—while readers assist in the reshaping of this evidence into story. Hence the import of his continual refrain: "I want my learned readers to participate in the scene I am about to replay" (57); "Let readers imagine" (65); "imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me" (129); "neither of us [Humbert or Lolita] is alive when the reader opens this book" (309). The sexual appetites of readers, lib-

erally delineated as an array of possibilities—"frigid gentlewomen," "veteran crime reporter," "grave old usher," "once popular policeman, now in solitary confinement," "wretched emeritus read to by a boy!" (132, 134)—are ever on his mind, as he lures his projected "jurors" along in his firsthand testimony. Whenever possible, erotic behavior is left vague so as to require speculation and participatory invention.

The strongest case Humbert mounts in self-defense is one that never would have worked for the Nazis, given their paper trail confirming the innocence (and devastation) of their victims. For readers of the novel are led to believe (and many critics follow suit) that *Lolita* is far from innocent. Yet to read *Lolita* as always already tainted is to accept an interpretation of her character that Humbert is desperately invested in making, and that he manages despite himself to refute. Humbert's case for *Lolita*'s impurity is based on a reading of *Lolita* as a consumer, a status that is as much a maternal as a cultural legacy. *Lolita*'s consumptive habits are both feminized and Americanized, and from either perspective, they are a means to her degradation by Humbert.

Humbert's case against the consumptive habits of American women is launched in his description of Charlotte Haze's living room: "The front hall was graced with door chimes, a white-eyed wooden thingamabob of commercial Mexican origin, and that banal darling of the arty middle class, van Gogh's 'Arlesienne.' A door ajar to the right afforded a glimpse of a living room, with some more Mexican trash in a corner cabinet" (36). Humbert's aim, in keeping with his typification of *Lolita*'s mother as "a weak solution of Marlene Dietrich," is the feminization of a kind of low-level kitsch consumption or bad taste. Women both embody the vulgar reproduction (as impersonators of film stars) and consume it in their appetites for "Mexican trash" and reprints of high art. In this book where you are what you eat, women are junky, and femininity is itself an act of impersonation. Where males are associated with need, generativity, writing, and authority (of a narrative kind at least), women are objectified and imitative. Humbert's first wife is described in terms of "the stock character she was supposed to impersonate" (27). Women are poor imitations, parodies of the highest potential of the eternal feminine as they exist in male minds. *Lolita* may be more desirable than her mother, but this has nothing to do with better taste:

[Lolita] believed, with a kind of celestial trust, any advertisement or advice that appeared in *Movie Love* or *Screen Land*—Starasil Starves Pimples, or “You better watch out if you’re wearing your shirttails outside your jeans, gals, because Jill says you shouldn’t.” If a roadside sign said: VISIT OUR GIFT SHOP—we *had* to visit it, *had* to buy its Indian curios, dolls, copper jewelry, cactus candy. The words “novelties and souvenirs” simply entranced her by their trochaic lilt. If some cafe sign proclaimed Icecold Drinks, she was automatically stirred, although all drinks everywhere were ice-cold. She it was to whom ads were dedicated: the ideal consumer, the subject and object of every foul poster. And she attempted—unsuccessfully—to patronize only those restaurants where the holy spirit of Huncan Dines had descended upon the cute paper napkins and cottage-cheese-crested salads. (148)

In this passage the issue of authenticity remains central, but it is specifically spelled out in terms of a modern society of consumer goods and Lolita’s susceptibility to it. The appeal of mass culture is a staple of American adolescence. Adolescence, the point of the most intense socialization, is also the point of the most intense attraction to the contemporary context, to what is currently in vogue, to trends such as wearing your shirt inside or out. Adolescents, this passage implies, are contextual in the extreme, veritable vessels of present history. They have no resistance to the lure of advertisements, which contain a quasi-religious potency.

This is a scene of tourist sights and souvenirs, a view of the world as commodified and collectible. Souvenirs, as Susan Stewart has helped us to understand, register the condition of an increasingly lost set of referents; they stand inevitably at a loss in relation to the experience they are supposed to represent.¹² Incapable of capturing the power of the real object, they expose the increasing inauthenticity of modern life. This is partly a consequence of the fact that they are mass produced, found all over the country in a spectrum of homes. Yet souvenirs are also associated with the fullness of narrative, as devices of memory that elicit story, a narrative recounting or nostalgic recollection of the original experience. In this way, through story, souvenirs serve to transform the exterior into the interior: to translate or reduce the public, collective, monumental (the Washington Monument, Mt. Rushmore) into the privately meaningful and possessed. Souvenirs

turn history into private time: a transformation that depends on purchase and ownership. In a store as a heap of commodities, they are publicly accessible and collectable. Bought by an individual who will weave them into her personal history (“My cross-country travels with Humbert H.”), they enter the private realm.

In the same way, objects can move in the other direction, from private to public status. Thus, in one scene Humbert and Lolita “silently stared, with other motorists and their children, at some smashed, blood-bespattered car with a young woman’s shoe in the ditch (Lo, as we drove on: ‘That was the exact type of moccasin I was trying to describe to that jerk in the store’)” (174). Humbert mentions this scene for humor’s sake and also to reinforce the case he is making for Lolita’s callousness. It is crucial here especially, because he will soon confess that their trip is marked for him by Lolita’s “sobs in the night—every night, every night—the moment I feigned sleep” (176). The scene is also critical to the role of objects in the novel, for it highlights the ease with which familiar things become abstract and uniform, once they are separated from their owners. Without the identification conferred by use and need, apart from narrative, they become literal emblems of what death is: the translation of individuals into anonymous masses, from people with names to bodies with numbers, reducible to ashes. I offer this Holocaust analogy with a mind to its consequences. The image of the Indian moccasin, detached from the dead woman with whom it was identified in life, becomes (through its nineteenth-century associations) a signifier for genocide, illuminated by the series of object images that became familiar to Americans during the Nuremberg trials: the mounds of suitcases, shoes, photographs, and gold fillings, all possessions of Jews, Gypsies, and other peoples sent up in smoke during the Nazi era.

To mention the Holocaust in a discussion of consumption and commodities is, for some, to invoke the Marxist critique of mass culture in the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, both contemporaries of Nabokov who, as European refugees in the United States, shared his plight. Like Nabokov, this pair of exiles from fascism were highly sensitive to the ways in which cultural artifacts, including language itself, might be used to degrade rather than to ennoble humankind. In a 1940 letter to Leo Lowenthal, Horkheimer described his experience driving from Kansas to Colorado and listening to one of Hitler’s speeches on the radio: “His word reaches over the plains and

seas of the world, it penetrates into the most distant mountain valley. But I have never felt so strongly that it is not a word, but rather a force of nature. The word is concerned with truth, but this is a means of war, it belongs to the glistening armaments of the inhabitants of Mars.”¹³ Horkheimer seems caught between acknowledging the familiarity of a ubiquitous fascism (“a force of nature”) and consigning it to the martial reaches of outerspace (“Mars”). Yet he is convinced of at least one way in which the American landscape is made hospitable to Hitler: through the leveling offices of the radio, that miraculous technological device, which, in the name of entertainment, nullifies the distinctions among Caruso’s voice, Hitler’s speeches, and Toscanini’s conducting. By rendering uniform and passive the anonymous audiences tuned in to its message, by making “the speaker’s word, the false commandment, absolute,” the radio stands as the ultimate example of the fascist uses of the culture industry. Both fascist and capitalist systems, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, exploit the vacuum created by the “historical neutralization of religion.” Their essential violence includes “the violence done to words.” “When the German Fascists decide one day to launch a word—say, ‘intolerable’—over the loudspeakers the next day the whole nation is saying ‘intolerable.’ . . . The blind and rapidly spreading repetition of words with special designations links advertising with the totalitarian watchword.”¹⁴

In the straight continuum from reified commodity speech to the fascist speech that is “confirmed by its own fist,” language and thought become detached from the vitality of experience. While the critique of Horkheimer and Adorno is relentlessly pessimistic, their dialectical method affords the conception of a recuperative possibility within language. “Speech,” Horkheimer wrote to Adorno, “establishes a shared relation to truth, and is therefore the innermost affirmation of another existence, indeed of all that exists, according to its capacities.”¹⁵ And this is where we might locate a common cause between Nabokov’s novel and the concerns of his émigré counterparts. For *Lolita* shares their view of the grim and damning emptiness of the culture industry, and by placing its narrative in the hands of Humbert, foils the prospect that language might ever transcend it. Things in the world of *Lolita* are as meager as any Donald Duck cartoon lamented in the pages of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. But speech, the speaking voice of Humbert Humbert, seems yet a further drain on the already depleted character of the novel’s object world. Still, it is Nabokov’s ability to affirm

through Humbert's narrative another order of value, a highly complex and complicit truth of sorts, that grants his novel a dialectical dimension of its own.

Lolita is very much about the meaning and power attributed to objects—from tourist items to things lost, which include sunglasses as well as lovers. It is about the objects and people that become lost, detached from those who own or know them, and thereby lose their meaning or human fullness. The moccasin is one such object; *Lolita* is another, an object of affections that are unexpected and unwanted. *Lolita*'s experiences as an object serve to highlight one of the main spurs to consumption in the novel: the need to compensate loss or ravage, to recuperate an idealized past or prospect. *Lolita*'s consumptive habits, obsessive for even a preteen, are a response to the loss of her sexuality: of that which is, as Catharine MacKinnon has famously put it, "most one's own, yet most taken away."¹⁶ Her consumption is part of her quest for authenticity, her attempt to have a real childhood. Her hunger for "cottage-cheese crested salads" and "Huncan Dines," and even for "Indian curios" and "cactus candy," is more than a sign of growth or greed. It is a sign of desire, for the desires of children who live in homes with other children and parents. She consumes, to put it plainly, to be normal—the most pathetic kind of consumption in the world.

Humbert's consumptive habits are no less pathetic, though he is the cause of *Lolita*'s woe. Nor is it a defense of Humbert to suggest that his frenzied pursuit of nymphets is the consequence of his own early losses—of his mother and first love, Annabelle. Humbert's ever hopeless, ever dissatisfied consumption of *Lolita* highlights what he can never recuperate: the authentic power of originary relations. Consumption is the only means of comfort he knows, as in the scene where he showers *Lolita* with gifts as recompense for what he has consumed of her. As portrayed through both Humbert and *Lolita*, consumption is both a response to loss, and a means of repeating and reclaiming it. To consume is to act out in heightened form the feeling of emptiness and the recognition that it can never be overcome. An exchange occurs—something is taken, something is given—whose ultimate end is the confirmation of lack, thus requiring the repetition of the cycle. This portrayal of consumption highlights the demand made by the novel as a whole that we manage to honor two seemingly contradictory emotions: empathy for a young girl's destruction at the hands of a

predatory, obsessive-compulsive egomaniac, and empathy for the sufferings of the egomaniac himself. What is notably peculiar about this seemingly simple demand is how few critics have been able to fulfill it. Criticism of the novel tends to divide between those who favor Humbert, celebrating his wit and passion, and noting, if they notice her at all, Lolita's various deficiencies, moral, cultural, personal; and those who favor Lolita, marveling at her resilience and vilifying the narcissism and pornographic indulgences of Humbert. Yet most wondrous, perhaps, of the many wonders of this novel, and it is a historical wonder, in my view, is the substantial affinity between Lolita and Humbert as consumers. Humbert, of course, is the source of this affinity; in this way, he has fashioned Lolita as kin. It could be argued that this is the furthest extension of desire as Nabokov sees it: the incorporation of the consumer and consumed other as oneself. Humbert and Lolita are in the novel's boat together, despite the chasm (of age, culture, gender, comprehension), as vast as the Grand Canyon they visit, that separates them. This is made clear in one of those moments of astonishing eloquence that reminds us that one of Nabokov's models is the realist voice of Huckleberry Finn: "At night," Humbert recalls, "tall trucks studded with colored lights, like dreadful giant Christmas trees, loomed in the darkness and thundered by the belated little sedan" (153). This simile has everything to do with consumption as I have been discussing it, and everything to do with the historical context I have attempted to bring to bear in analyzing *Lolita*. To begin with, the image takes two of the most familiar and childlike things in the world, trucks and Christmas trees, and by conjoining them, makes them strange, even terrible. Most simply, the truck done up in colored lights pays homage to a holiday or home the driver is missing by being out on the dark highway at night. This is of course only a small measure of what Lolita is missing in being out on the highway night after night with Humbert. The Christmas tree, as the ultimate ritual symbol of familial giving, a luminary emblem of domestic harmony, is made threatening through its displacement and mobilization. This is defamiliarization with a vengeance: take the ultimate symbol of fixity, make it ambulatory, and put it in the least homelike space available (a dark highway) and you have the outlines of an episode from "Monster Movie Matinee."

This simile succeeds not only in defamiliarizing the holiday's central symbol but also in defamiliarizing Christmas itself. For one way

to look at the Humbert-Lolita relationship, which makes it so horrible, is as Christmas made permanent. The daily experiences of Humbert and Lolita on the road partake of the conventional holiday prominence of gifts and family, of raised expectations and their foiling. What Humbert has wrought in his relationship with Lolita is the routinization of Christmas: the indulgence of desire (the emphasis on consumption and gifts), the ritualized violation of ordinary habit, the excesses of pleasure and disappointment. Life with Humbert means Christmas all year round, but a Christmas distorted into the most elementary and brutal form imaginable. Thus, gift-giving becomes a raw exchange of payment for sex, family becomes the paternal right of ownership in female kin, appetite becomes a spur to ravage. In serving commentary on the human desire for powerful, authentic experience, the simile also confirms a cliché writ large in the Humbert-Lolita relationship: the desire that empowers one person may utterly destroy the other. Yet at its deepest level, the simile conveys the comparative smallness of Humbert and Lolita in the larger scheme of things. Moving along at moderate speed in their “belated little sedan,” they might literally be blown away by the nearest light-studded truck. This is not to belie the magnitude of the suffering in their relationship. Rather it is to pinpoint one of the novel’s most important messages: that much human suffering can be packed into a very small space.

In keeping with this insight, my aim has been to expand the narrow parameters around what appears to be a private and perverse affair, by dwelling on the novel’s preoccupation with one of the twentieth century’s most disturbing collective episodes. I have been fortified in this purpose by Nabokov’s expatriate’s passion for social detail, which makes all his writings extraordinarily rich in historical implications, as well as by aspects of his life, and autobiographical account of it, that relate directly to anti-Semitism and World War II. There are also the legendary struggles of Nabokov’s father against anti-Semitic outrages in early-twentieth-century Russia, including “The Blood-Bath of Kishinev,” as he dubbed the notorious pogrom, and the Mendel Beilis blood accusation trial.¹⁷ What the father sought to address through journalism and politics, the son pursued through the work of the imagination and close attention to intimate human connections.

In *Lolita*, Nabokov created a world where the category of love is inseparable from the category of power and the will to exercise it, risking destruction in the process. Yet possibly the greatest casualty in

Lolita, on the order of abstractions, is not love but testimony. *Lolita* is a disturbing book not only for its relentless demystification of passion but also for its undermining of faith in bearing witness. Humbert Humbert does everything anyone could ask of an evildoer: he confesses over and over; he documents his most culpable behavior; he stages Lolita's pain from many different angles. But in the end, he proves himself incapable of repentance, and confirms our need for his narrative. *Lolita* soils its readers while convincing us of its own beauty. It drowns us in the sadness of its perpetrator, while denying us the satisfaction of condemning him. This is the chief difference between Humbert and the Nazis: that he cannot be condemned. But if testimony is limited, history is not. And it is the historical framework of the novel, the context conceived for the pressing narrator who would deny us access to it if he could, that is the source of its ultimate power as art.

Boston University

Notes

- 1 Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1966), 225–26; further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically as *S*.
- 2 Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 314; further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- 3 David Andrews provides an overview of these arguments in *Aestheticism, Nabokov and Lolita* (Lewiston, Pa.: Edwin Mellen, 1999).
- 4 Douglas Anderson provides a preliminary account of this subject in "Nabokov's Genocidal and Nuclear Holocausts in *Lolita*," *Mosaic* 29 (June 1996): 73–90, but he doesn't link these themes to ethical considerations raised by the novel, nor does he pursue connections between the novel's holocaust and consumption themes. Another work that addresses the novel's holocaust themes in terms different from my own is Leona Toker, *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989).
- 5 For two analyses of the consumption theme in *Lolita*, see Rachel Bowlby, *Shopping with Freud* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 46–71; and Dana Brand, "The Interaction of Aestheticism and American Consumer Culture in Nabokov's *Lolita*," *Modern Language Studies* 17 (spring 1987): 14–21.
- 6 For an account of the incest theme in *Lolita*, see Jan Shelton, "The Word Is 'Incest': Sexual and Linguistic Coercion in *Lolita*," *Textual Practice* 13.2 (1999): 273–94.

- 7 Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 141–68.
- 8 Max Weber, “The Nature of Social Action,” in *Weber: Selections in Translation*, ed. W. G. Runciman, trans. Eric Matthews (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), 9.
- 9 Alfred Appel, *The Annotated Lolita* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 448.
- 10 An anecdote from Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on The Banality of Evil* proves ironically suggestive along these lines. In her analysis of Eichmann’s speech patterns, his preference for stock phrases and clichés, and his overall eagerness to appear in a “normal,” “positive” light, Arendt relates how a “young police officer in charge of his mental and psychological well-being handed him *Lolita* for relaxation. After two days Eichmann returned it, visibly indignant; ‘Quite an unwholesome book’;—‘*Das ist aber ein sehr unerfreuliches Buch*’” (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 43–44.
- 11 Hans Frank, quoted in Joseph E. Persico, *Nuremberg: Infamy on Trial* (New York: Viking, 1994), 323.
- 12 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1984).
- 13 Max Horkheimer, quoted in James Schmidt, “Language, Mythology, and Enlightenment: Historical Notes on Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,” *Social Research* (winter 1998–99): 6.
- 14 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972), 159, 165–66.
- 15 Max Horkheimer to Theodor Adorno, 14 September 1941; quoted in Schmidt, “Language, Mythology, and Enlightenment,” 13.
- 16 Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989), 3.
- 17 See Appel, *The Annotated Lolita*, 435–36; and Brian Boyd’s two-volume biography, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*, and *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990, 1991).