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Readers in Pursuit of Popular Justice: Unraveling Conflicting Frameworks in *Lolita*

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Readers in Pursuit of Popular Justice: Unraveling Conflicting Frameworks in *Lolita*

A Thesis by

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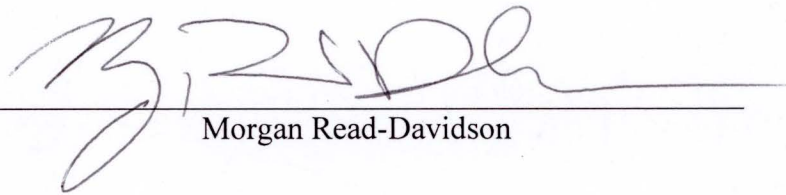
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Readers in Pursuit of Popular Justice: Unraveling Conflicting Frameworks in *Lolita*

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Mom, Dad, and Daniel... you enable me. This is for you.

ABSTRACT

Readers in Pursuit of Popular Justice: Unraveling Conflicting Frameworks in *Lolita*

by Innesa Ranchpar

This thesis examines the competing frameworks in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*—the fictional Foreword written by John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. and the manuscript written by Humbert Humbert—in order to understand to what extent the construction manipulates the rhetorical appeal. While previous scholarship isolates the two narrators or focuses on their unreliability, my examination concentrates on the interplay of the frameworks and how their conflicting objectives can be problematic for readers. By drawing upon various theories by Michel Foucault from *Power/Knowledge* and Louis Althusser's "On Ideology," I look into how John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. and Humbert Humbert use authoritative voices to directly address readers with a specific duty, as "parents, social workers, educators" and "ladies of the gentleman," and I question to what extent this can force readers to unwillingly forfeit their authority in order to adopt an alternative disciplinary gaze in pursuit of a premeditated idea of truth and justice. Using the concept of truth and justice, I explore how psychological discourse and the court are made up of ideologies that operate like the Panopticon, and I question where readers fit despite the strong influence exerted on to them by this structure.

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Introduction: The Interplay of Frameworks and the “Shimmering Go-Between”

“Literature was born not the day when a boy crying wolf, wolf came running out of the Neanderthal valley with a big gray wolf at his heels: literature was born on the day when a boy came crying wolf, wolf and there was no wolf behind him. That the poor little fellow because he lied too often was finally eaten up by a real beast is quite incidental. But here is what is important. Between the wolf in the tall grass and the wolf in the tall story there is a shimmering go-between. That go-between, that prism, is the art of literature. Literature is invention. Fiction is fiction. To call a story a true story is an insult to both art and truth.” -Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures in Literature*

The shimmering go-between. That is where readers are positioned, where meaning is created. In “Good Readers and Good Writers,” Vladimir Nabokov cautions against approaching a book with assumptions: “If one begins with a ready-made generalization, one begins at the wrong end and travels away from the book before one has started to understand it” (1). According to Nabokov, readers should be prepared to enter a conversation, which is ironic considering his novel, *Lolita*, challenges the notion he values.

In *Lolita*, 37-year old Humbert Humbert writes his manuscript in seclusion while he awaits his trial for the murder of Clare Quilty. In his manuscript, he recounts his life in detail in an attempt to justify, not the murder he is incarcerated for, but instead his taboo fetish for 12-year old Dolores Haze and other young girls he calls “nymphets.” Humbert’s explicit account of his desires and, more specifically, of his relationship with

Dolores has, inevitably, made Nabokov's novel notorious for its highly controversial subject matter as it has drawn attention from various discourses for its obscenities and its over-sexualization of a child's body. Although this standard reading holds great significance for understanding the novel, its popularity can also pollute the "go-between" with "ready-made generalizations" that preoccupy readers from examining other compelling aspects. *Lolita* is also unique for its engagement with readers through its two competing frameworks. The first framework is the fictional Foreword narrated by psychologist, John Ray, Jr., Ph.D., in which readers are directly addressed and held accountable for preventing similar future occurrences. This introduction is followed by the first chapter of Part 1 in which the novel's primary narrator, Humbert, acknowledges readers as members of his jury that are responsible for determining his fate.

There are a number of limitations in current scholarship on the novel's competing frameworks and readership. Those that have acknowledged one, or both, have concentrated on its unreliability. Trevor McNeely acknowledges Humbert as a masterful rhetorician who sets up his readers as members of his jury in an attempt to trap them: "It is perhaps the cleverest of Nabokov's devices so to have structured his book that the reader is forced into moral/aesthetic dilemma by it from which there is no escape" (McNeely 186). McNeely equates the novel with a riddle and claims readers should attempt to solve it, even suggesting that "such a key exists for *Lolita*, that the book was in fact written with this point in mind, and that Nabokov went to his grave enjoying the fact that almost a full generation of readers had failed to find him out" (McNeely 182).

Not all scholars are as extreme as McNeely, though some have been as determined to measure Humbert's unreliability and to uncover the novel's discrepancies.

Mathew Winston addresses how Humbert “continually forces [readers] to maintain a double perspective by calling on us to pass moral and legal judgment upon him as a man and aesthetic judgment upon him as an artist” (Winston 421), while “John Ray’s condescending foreword . . . treats the book as a case history, as a work of art, and as an ethical treatise” (Winston 426). He raises an issue with this structure because it “makes its readers question the possibility of valid judgment and the ambiguity of value” (Winston 426), although his focus lies mostly with the effect this has on Humbert’s case, and not the effect it has on the readers. Anthony R. Moore is even more limited because he concentrates on the various structures *within* Humbert’s memoir, calling for the necessity for readers to understand his many styles. Moore’s claims that readers, also “wary from the series of elaborate traps and false assumptions which they have been lured into” (Moore 78), can fall under a trap because of the manuscript’s complexities. He proposes that if readers reread, they will be able to unravel these mysteries and realize that Humbert is not unreliable after all. Moore shares this perspective with Harriet Hustis, who regards the manuscript’s temporality as the reason for the unreliability. She states that as Humbert “attempts to erase or rewrite moments” (Hustis), it leads to an impossibility of truth for the reader. James Phelan claims that this uncertainty can trigger current readers to read the novel “determined not to be taken in by Humbert and . . . all his rhetorical appeals” (223). Although these scholars each address aspects of the two frameworks and readership, none of them thoroughly examine or even consider the interplay of the two frameworks set up by Nabokov and its effect on reader engagement.

The primary interest I share most with is one argument by James L. McDonald. He examines John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. “as a character performing a task in an integral part of

the novel” (McDonald 353), comparing his attempt to deceive characters with Humbert’s. I respect McDonald’s account of the Foreword, but I do believe it would be more helpful to focus on how both frameworks impact one another, as opposed to how each framework exists as an independent contribution. My examination concentrates on this interplay and how the appeal of the double frame set up is that it seemingly grants readers agency; in both circumstances, the frameworks encourage participation and feedback by engaging readers with recognizable ideologies and predispositions held as members of society. Brian Boyd discusses how a “writer can capture our attention before . . . we reach what academic critics would accept as the ‘meaning’ or ‘meanings’ of works. The high density of multiple patterns holds our attention and elicits our response” (Boyd 127). However, *Lolita* is a complex work because “our storyteller wishes to toy with storytelling expectations” (Boyd 124) by including foreign elements, such as the two frameworks. Because Nabokov incorporates additional voices in the form of psychological and judicial ideologies, each calling for a controlled analysis of the manuscript, a conflict of interest arises regarding moral obligation, purpose, and objective. According to John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. and Humbert Humbert, the reader’s duty is to judge. Yet, *how* the reader chooses to do so depends on which narrator s/he responds to and which duty s/he associates with. In both situations, a reader’s inquiry is born out of and calls for a conditioned idea of normalcy determined by either of the established ideologies, and this results in dissatisfaction with certain behavior deemed “deviant.” Regardless of the type of judgment, this resisting attitude draws its strength from a communal effort and shared belief of what deviancy entails, and it is motivated by the want for justice, both for Dolores and future generations.

One theorist who consistently engages with the difficulty of assigning justice within the framework of modernity is Michel Foucault. A lesser-known essay in which he invokes ideological structures is, “On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists.” Foucault and Maoist militants discuss how the court functions as an instrument towards achieving popular justice. Their discussion concentrates on two historical examples with the first being the people’s court during the French Revolution when “the court functioned as a mediator” between the dominant class and the common enemy (“On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists” 3). This is contrasted with the more contemporary example, the cultural revolution in China, when two litigants appear before a judge whose “position indicates firstly that they are neutral with respect to each litigant ... on the basis of a certain conception of truth and a certain number of ideas concerning what is just and unjust” (“On Popular Justice” 8). While both systems work towards exercising popular justice, Foucault disagrees with the Maoists and rejects the idea that “there can be people who are neutral in relationship to the two parties” (“On Popular Justice” 8). He declares his skepticism as a result of the inevitability of being confronted with various ideas of justice:

In the case of popular justice you do not have three elements, you have the masses and their enemies. Furthermore, the masses, when they perceive somebody to be an enemy, when they decide to punish this enemy—or to re-educate him—do not rely on an abstract universal idea of justice ... their decision is not an authoritative one, that is, they are not backed up by a state apparatus which has the power to enforce their decisions, they purely and simply carry them out. (“On Popular Justice” 8-9)

Foucault's examination of cultural revolutions is notable because of its critical analysis of systems, like the court, potentially being tainted by authoritative voices, and thus, moving away from practicing popular justice. His argument suggests that although the masses may attempt to punish their enemy, it may be challenging to arrive at a universal idea of justice because absolute consensus is unachievable. In *Lolita*, both frameworks position readers as the masses, and this elicits a conflict of interest concerning what would be the most efficient way to re-educate Humbert, the enemy. In line with this discussion between Foucault and Maoist militants, a mediator would be essential considering John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. and Humbert's neutrality is questionable. Their authoritative voices implement standard procedures that reject the value of subjective readership, which is essentially the issue at hand. In the following sections, I will reference the mentioned discussion between Foucault and Maoist militants in "On Popular Justice," as well additional works by Foucault in order to measure these authoritative voices within *Lolita*. More specifically, this discussion might help us understand the central tension Nabokov constructs through the competing frameworks in the novel.

Chapter 1: John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. and “Parents, Social Workers, Educators”

Conventionally, a Foreword is written by a knowledgeable scholar whose task lies in familiarizing the reader by providing information about the work or its author. *Lolita*'s fictional Foreword subverts this convention because its writer uses the short space not to guide readers but for self-promotion. For John Ray, Jr., Ph.D., providing the reader with supplementary details about Humbert, the other characters, or the trial is less important when compared to his personal expertise and supposed credibility. He writes that his contribution as an editor occurs as a result of Humbert's lawyer, Clarence Choate, Clark, Esq., hand-selecting him solely based on academic merits: “Mr. Clark's decision may have been influenced by the fact that the editor of his choice had just been awarded the Poling Prize for a modest work (‘Do the Senses make Sense?’) wherein certain morbid states and perversions had been discussed” (Nabokov 3). This self-proclaimed expert uses self-promotion to demonstrate his value as a psychologist in order to validate why his Foreword has the authority to provide readers with direction on how to read the manuscript and why his instruction should be held in high esteem.

Nabokov's use of the Foreword echoes Foucault's rejection of the idea that a litigant can remain neutral in relationship with two opposing parties. In this instance, John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. poses as a neutral mediator looking to exercise a universal idea of justice through encouraging readers to learn of “dangerous trends” and “potent evils” (Nabokov 5). In spite of its objective, the issue with the Foreword is that it mirrors the very behavior it criticizes; it indicates the necessity for studying the manuscript beyond Humbert's eloquent prose because it may distract from apparent manipulative tendencies.

Yet, in the same nature, John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. represents himself as a valued and trustworthy figure with the intellectual capacity to offer his expertise. When he warns readers of that which he believes to be deviant and unconventional—Humbert and “at least 12 percent of American adult males” (Nabokov 5)—he is able to convey it as an absolute truth as opposed to a perception of truth. This is due to the association that comes with writing a Foreword. To put it simply, John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. appears as a scholarly, all-knowing figure only because readers give him that authority.

By using a specific discourse, like psychology, that automatically invokes power based on its ideological value, John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. is able to align readers with what he believes is the purpose of reading the manuscript. His concluding proposition in the Foreword affiliates readers with his perspective:

As a case history, ‘Lolita’ will become, no doubt a classic in psychiatric circles. As a work of art, it transcends its expiatory aspects; and still more important to us than scientific significance and literary worth, is *the ethical impact the book should have on the reader*; for in the poignant personal study, there lurks a general lesson; the wayward egotistical mother, the panting maniac—these are not only vivid characters in a unique story: they warn us of dangerous trends; they point out potent evils. ‘Lolita’ should make *all of us—parents, social workers, educators—apply ourselves with still greater vigilance and vision to the task of bringing up a better generation in a safer world.* (Nabokov 5, emphasis added)

Because of its potential influence over the reader, the Foreword’s function extends beyond a framing device. The use of the phrase “all of us” is critical because of its

suggestive nature. By addressing all readers as a single unified body and including himself as part of that community, he aligns *all* readers with a shared idea and incentive. This intensive sense of community creates urgency that stems from a collective moral obligation for reader participation. John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. and Humbert Humbert both have an unyielding influence on how one reads the manuscript; however, even though Humbert is the primary narrator, his impact is mediated by John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.'s brief contribution because a Foreword is often given authority based on a fixed idea of its status. While supposedly neutral, John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. is rather rigidly condemnatory and actually leaves little room for the reader to think independently. By addressing readers as “parents, social workers, educators,” he appeals to one primary concern with one universal idea of justice—protecting children and future generations. While this is certainly a legitimate concern, there is a danger in prioritizing this perspective because it is governed by fear, and as such its disciplinary gaze can be oppressive.

In “Body/Power,” an interview conducted by *Quel Corps?*, Foucault examines mechanisms of power between the eighteenth to the early twentieth century and considers the effect discipline has over the body. Foucault states, “I think it was believed that the investment of the body by power had to be heavy, ponderous meticulous and constant. Hence those formidable disciplinary régimes in the schools, hospitals, barracks, factories, cities, lodgings, families” (“Body/Power” 58). According to his theory, the effect of the body becoming “an object of analysis and concern, surveillance and control, engenders at the same time an intensification of each individual’s desire, for, in and over his body” (“Body/Power” 56-57). As an example, he points to the control and objectification of sexuality, explaining that the intense conditioning the body endures to repress natural

sexual desires consequently urges the need to express these desires. This produces a “response on the side of power” in the form of “economic (and perhaps also ideological) exploitation of eroticisation [*sic*], from sun-tan products to pornographic films” (“Body/Power” 57). As evidenced by this example, Foucault attempts to convey that power arises not from a premeditated objective to discipline the body but instead as a consequence of the body’s reaction to being conditioned.

Foucault’s theory paints a portrait of the quintessential twentieth-century disciplinary régimes, the same that are portrayed in *Lolita* during the years 1910 to 1955—Humbert’s birthdate to the Foreword’s publication date. What is compelling about John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.’s perspective is though it intends to establish order, the negative effect his disciplinary gaze can have on society is present throughout the manuscript. Rather than studying the manuscript to bring up “a better generation in a safer world” (Nabokov 5), readers can instead take notice of disciplinary régimes and the potential danger of their coercion and rigidity. In order to do so, it is important to examine the contrasting effects power and discipline can have over the body.

Other disciplinary institutions in the novel that have an *ideal* effect on the body can be more apparently demonstrated through examples, such as Beardsley School for girls and Charlotte Haze. Consider Humbert’s interview with headmistress Pratt from Beardsley School for girls, during which she stresses “the four D’s: Dramatics, Dance, Debating and Dating. ... Your delightful Dolly will presently enter any age group where dates, dating, date dress, date book, date etiquette, mean as much to her as, say, business, business connections, business success, mean to you” (Nabokov 187). “[More] interested in communication than in composition” (Nabokov 188), Beardsley School’s mission and

philosophy emphasizes a value and belief system centered on marriage, appearance, and status. The school's achievement in conditioning the next generation of women is measured by how well the female students conduct themselves in response to these principles. As a result, the successful indoctrination impacts society by instilling in other women a desire to become well versed in these accepted ideologies. This need to be a specific kind of woman also leads to the production of more accessible methods that can also help those women not enrolled in reformatory schools condition themselves in order to achieve these conventions. This is exemplified in the way Beardsley depends on books about dating and etiquette to nurture women.

It may be useful to remember that Dolores's mother, Charlotte Haze, also exemplifies the kind of individual who habitually conforms to accepted social standards and even projects these ideologies on to others. Charlotte both becomes representative of the type of readers John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. targets—individuals that are confined to one perspective forced onto them by a dominant universal idea of justice. Humbert criticizes the extent at which Charlotte is consumed by appearance by pointing out her dependency on disciplinary products. Charlotte's interest in, "*Your Home is You*" (Nabokov 82), a guide for interior design and decoration, is born out of her desire to impress others with her good taste, while the Bible, a representation of one's faith and principles, even has the power to alter Charlotte's longing for Humbert's affection—she states that "if she ever found out [Humbert] did not believe in Our Christian God, she would commit suicide" (Nabokov 79). Charlotte becomes so fixated on her status and political correctness that it even dictates her behavior when she marries Humbert, after which her primary concern revolves around announcing the news in the local society column. Humbert writes how

Charlotte uses the column to give others a glimpse into her life: “By engaging in church work as well as by getting to know the better mother of Lo’s schoolmates, Charlotte in the course of twenty months or so had managed to become if not a prominent, or at least an acceptable citizen, but never before had she come under that thrilling *rubrique*, and it was I who put her there” (Nabokov 79). By using the society column as an instrument for demonstrating normalcy, Charlotte is able to transform from being the single mother to a woman who has achieved the ideal family unit—a model wife and mother married to a successful, educated man of “old world endearments” (Nabokov 78). Journalism becomes a variable in the formula for power because it creates an opportunity to improve status in the community and makes evident the ability to discipline oneself according to acceptable standards.

Like Beardsley School for girls, Charlotte also values an arbitrary model for the ideal, and her attempt to force these conventions onto others is rather oppressive. For example, Charlotte expresses a desire for Dolores to conform in accordance with what she regards as acceptable and just, such as “strict discipline and some sound religious training” (Nabokov 87). Additionally, Humbert discovers that in a text called, “*A Guide to Your Child’s Development*,” Charlotte “had underlined the following epithets ... under ‘Your Child’s Personality’: aggressive, boisterous, critical, distrustful, impatient, irritable, inquisitive, listless, negativistic (underlined twice) and obstinate. She had ignored the thirty remaining adjectives among which were cheerful, co-operative, energetic, and so forth. It was really maddening” (Nabokov 85).¹ This commitment to

¹ Humbert also notices Charlotte’s copy of “*Girls’ Encyclopedia*” (Nabokov 97), further demonstrating her dependency on similar texts.

measure others according to already established standards mirrors the Foreword and its insistence on reading Humbert's manuscript in order to control human behavior.

John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. describes Charlotte Haze as a "wayward egotistical mother" (Nabokov 5), which ironically occupies a similar position as Humbert who is repulsed by Charlotte's "contemptuous attitude toward an adorable, downy-armed child of twelve" (Nabokov 80). Although the Foreword encourages looking at the manuscript to prevent future generations from being affected by comparable situations, it works more like the disciplinary gaze forced onto others by psychological discourse. Despite the underlying goal to exercise justice by bringing to light deviant behavior, John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.'s suggestion does not serve future generations, but instead, subjugates them to answering to those already in power. Disciplinary régimes and power can also have an *opposite* effect on the body, one that is far from the ideal, because repressing behavior can also create a desire or need to express it. This is primarily indicated through Humbert's behavior. Humbert is repulsed by political correctness and conformity, yet his attitude is only made explicit to the reader; in his manuscript, he reveals the many ways he secretly revolts against what he believes are oppressive systems. Like Charlotte, he is also concerned with presentation of oneself, but Humbert's desire to appear normal is merely a ploy intended to lessen the disciplinary gaze over him. For example, he writes of his intention to marry, "It occurred to me that regular hours, home-cooked meals, all the conventions of marriage, the prophylactic routine of its bedroom activities and, who knows, the eventual flowering of certain moral values, of certain spiritual substitutes, might help me, if not to purge myself of my degrading and dangerous desires, at least to keep them under pacific control," yet he fakes it by marrying Valeria because of "the imitation she gave of

a little girl” (Nabokov 26-27). Even his second marriage to Charlotte is motivated by his desire to reach Dolores.

In order to reveal the shortcoming of John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.’s gaze, there must be a thorough understanding of what discipline entails. Foucault suggests that when a body is under analysis, it is consequently affected or disciplined by the gaze. So I raise the following question: what happens to the same body if it is *not* under analysis? Consider how often Humbert reveals he is conscious of psychology’s disciplinary gaze over his body, admitting his “love to fool doctors,” (Nabokov 100), and even briefly recounting one experience in a sanitarium:

I discovered there was an endless source of robust enjoyment in trifling with psychiatrists: cunningly leading them on; never letting them see that you know all the tricks of the trade; inventing for them elaborate dreams, pure classics in style (which make *them*, the dream-extortionists, dream and wake up shrieking); teasing them with fake ‘primal scenes’: and never allows them the slightest glimpse of one’s real sexual predicament.

(Nabokov 36)

Psychology, a system rather influential because of its attempt to understand the social body, is unsuccessfully against Humbert as he actively shields his body from being disciplined by it. Because Humbert disassociates himself and seeks refuge in “dark” spaces, his desire for nymphets is not made explicit, and therefore, cannot be “cured.” Though, when he is in these dark spaces, his desires are unfiltered. For example, initially, Charlotte’s maternal gaze forces Humbert to repress his desire for Dolores. His first gesture towards her deliberately occurs at a time when Charlotte is not home to interrupt.

As he cradles his victim in his lap, Humbert's intentions remain unknown even to her. He intentionally distracts Dolores to be able to satisfy himself, even revealing the following to the writer: "I managed to attune, by a series of stealthy movements, my masked lust to her guileless limbs. It was no easy matter to divert the little maiden's attention while I performed the obscure adjustments necessary for the success of the trick" (Nabokov 61-62).

Through his affiliation with psychological discourse, John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. attempts to situate readers in a position to condemn Humbert's behavior. However, his perspective becomes problematic because of Humbert's countless successful attempts at hiding his true form from psychologists. One of the more sinister examples occurs when he lies to one psychologist in order to gain possession of sleeping pills. These pills—which he believes provide him with "the means of putting two creatures to sleep so thoroughly that neither sound nor touch should rouse them" (Nabokov 99)—eventually become the same "purple vitamins" he tricks Dolores into taking during their visit to the Enchanted Hunters hotel. The dark space he voluntarily constructs to ensure his candid performance is enhanced when he lures Dolores away from surveillance into the *dark* hotel room and "[spares] her purity by only operating in the stealth of the *night*, only upon a completely *anesthetized* little nude" (Nabokov 130, emphasis added), prompting the first rape scene. Other examples of character's seeking dark spaces to avoid becoming objects of analysis and concern include, but are not limited to the following: Humbert and Dolores's relationship during their migration across the country, Dolores sneaking off at Camp Q to explore her sexuality, and Gaston Godin's house where he molests the young boys in Beardsley. These calculated performances that occur in the dark lessen

surveillance from all angles, and in consequence, it absolves bodies from potential control and objectification, even if it is temporarily.

In order to better understand ideological practices and their potential power, it is important to recognize the necessity for reciprocity. In “On Ideology,” Louis Althusser explains that a “mirror duplication is constitutive of ideology and ensures its functioning,” and this mirror duplication occurs when “the Subject needs the subjects” and the subjects need the Subject” (Althusser 248). In other words, if either Subject or subjects fail to coexist, then the ideological practice fails to exist. Based on this notion, Humbert and Dolores’s relationship mirrors that of Subject and subject, respectively, which suggests that Humbert’s power is only measured by Dolores’s consent and obedience. It is interesting to note that Humbert is able to successfully control Dolores only when she is unaware of his intentions. Once she becomes aware of Humbert’s gaze, she is able to control her performance for him by conforming to his expectations of her, doing so in the same manner he performs for society. Humbert describes how Dolores’s behavior drastically shifts once she learns Humbert needs her body in order to satisfy his desires: “[She] proved to be a cruel negotiator whenever it was in her power to deny me certain life-wrecking, stranger, slow paradisaal philters without which I could not live more than a few days in a row” (Nabokov 194-195).² This exchange becomes a model for Althusser’s idea that subjects have as much power in a relationship because their participation is necessary for the relationship to exist in the first place. Therefore, if subjects, like Humbert, are able to use performance to successfully free themselves from

² Interestingly, Dolores becomes the Subject and Humbert becomes the subject the moment Humbert’s behavior is dictated by his desperation for her body: “I would shed all my pedagogic restraint, dismiss all our quarrels, forget all my masculine pride – and literally crawl on my knees to your chair, my Lolita!” (Nabokov 204).

surveillance and, consequently, become unrestrained by discipline, repression, and exploitation, then I raise another question: what power would John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. have anyway, especially as a psychologist, if individuals are able to be liberated from control?

Case in point: John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.'s contribution has a purpose and function only when readers acknowledge him, regardless of their choice to consent to or reject his idea of justice. If readers disregard the Foreword for whatever reason, then this in turn makes his authority nonexistent. Considering how oppressive his invitation for readers to participate out of moral obligation is, this may be better for "society" in the long run. By stressing "the task of bringing up a better generation in a safer world," John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. inexplicitly suggests that people like Humbert are not born that way, but with the proper nurturing, readers can prevent this from affecting future generations. However, as made apparent in Humbert's manuscript, individuals can find various ways around this type of intensive gaze. And for this, there are alternative approaches that attempt to expose bodies that can (and will) exist regardless of how they are conditioned, one method being that of the jury.

Chapter 2: Humbert Humbert and “Ladies and Gentleman of the Jury”

In contrast with the Foreword, it may be interesting to look at the notion of the jury and its attempt to practice popular justice. In the same fashion as John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.’s Foreword, which urges readers to engage with a perspective that does not condone deviant behavior, Humbert Humbert’s manuscript also demands for reader participation, but it does so while imposing an alternative method for passing judgment in comparison with the “parents, social workers, educators” addressed in the Foreword. Humbert’s earliest utterance of the phrase “ladies and gentleman of the jury” occurs in the very first chapter of his manuscript (Nabokov 9), and this direct address becomes an invitation for readers to situate themselves as active participants in Humbert’s trial. In addition to Humbert’s dictatorial nature, this phrase is also able to influence readers through its association with a familiar ideological duty—the concept of the “jury,” especially for an American audience, is loaded with moral obligation concentrated on exercising popular justice in an organized fashion. By frequently repeating “ladies and gentleman of the jury” throughout the narrative, Humbert constantly reminds readers that a verdict cannot be reached without their contribution, and that this contribution is greatly dependent on the information they gather from reading his manuscript.

I find this mirror duplication to be reminiscent of the Panopticon. In “The Eye of Power,” Foucault contributes to Jeremy Bentham’s theory behind the Panopticon by examining notions of visibility. Foucault draws out the arrangement: “These cells have two windows, one opening on to the inside, facing the windows of the central tower, the other, outer one allowing daylight to pass through the whole cell” (“The Eye of Power”

147). The significance of the back lighting is to enable surveillance to take place from the central tower, setting up the observed for the possibility of being under surveillance at any given time. Panopticism draws its power from fueling a mutual exchange between the single overseer in the central watchtower and those under its surveillance located in the outer layer of the building. If the outcome of this practice transpires as it does in theory, then those under observation will develop a conscious awareness of the gaze over their body and will behave as a reaction to this knowledge. Additionally, this “inspecting gaze” transforms or rehabilitates the individual because “each individual under its weight will end by interiorising [*sic*] to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself” (“The Eye of Power” 155). To recall Althusser’s theory regarding a reciprocal exchange, in order for Panopticism to exist in the first place, both the overseer and the prisoner must play their assigned roles. This dynamic is as much necessary in a courtroom as it is in a prison.

While a prison layout differs from a court layout, they are still comparable in view that they both rely on regulated surveillance to execute an objective—to answer injustice with justice. Because the phrase “ladies and gentleman of the jury” is culturally and ideologically associated with a standard duty, it has the power to elicit an intuitive reaction in readers. Much like how the Panopticon’s central tower impacts the prisoners located in the outer layer, readers that identify as members of a jury position themselves in an imaginary central tower to observe those deemed deviant by society. Therefore, when Humbert explicitly acknowledges the presence of the jury, like the prisoner, he has demonstrated a conscious awareness of being under a spotlight. As discussed in the first section, an awareness of surveillance over one’s body can lead to a performance.

Although many readers may buy into Humbert's "fancy prose style" (Nabokov 3), being associated with a jury should come with the responsibility of remaining skeptical of intentional dramatizations and being aware of the potential danger in taking his account as the truth. After all, as members of a jury, readers should be ideologically conditioned to question the any information that is provided to them. At its core, Humbert's manuscript is born out of the need for self-justification; therefore, his manuscript undeniably doubles as another performance, this time for the readers.

Humbert regularly attempts to manipulate his readers in order to gain their sympathy and lure them into forgiveness. For example, in order to demonstrate his alleged innocence and sincerity, he directly addresses only the women on his jury when giving his account of the first rape scene: "Bear with me gentlewomen of the jury" (Nabokov 130). This moment is one of the first instances where Humbert distinguishes between members of his jury, which makes apparent that it is motivated by intent.³ Humbert's reason for doing so is uncertain, and other readers should evaluate it as they wish, though I believe Humbert may be attempting to direct the attention towards only the women—especially mothers—who would be emotionally invested regarding the safety of children, and therefore, would be most disturbed by the taboo. Interestingly, Humbert and John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. both target a specific audience, but they do so for a different purpose. Humbert's manuscript is also technically a collection of fragments; statements like, "I want my learned readers to participate in the scene I am about to replay" (Nabokov 60), cannot be taken at face value because he admits to omitting details or retelling situations, all in effort to show himself in a good light. Even beginning his

³ Humbert even addresses them as, "Frigid gentlewomen of the jury!" (Nabokov 140), further demonstrating that this is a conscious decision.

narrative from his birth—"I was born in 1910" (Nabokov 9)—is in pursuit of validating his behavior; by drawing attention to his upbringing, he is able to portray his behavior as being a result of nurture and not nature, which is an apparent mockery of psychological discourse rationalizing the effects childhood trauma. In this case, a psychological perspective, such as John Ray, Jr., Ph.D's, would relieve him of blame.

Humbert's central intent is motivated by his knowledge of various ideological discourses and the effect they can have on the social body. When Humbert writes for a jury, his manuscript is shaped by his knowledge that this perspective is committed in determining whether or not he has been rehabilitated. Readers have and should feel skepticism towards his manuscript, but even more so regarding his supposed rehabilitation. At the very end of his manuscript, he hears "the melody of children at play," and reflects over the consequences of his actions: "I stood listening to that musical vibration from my lofty slope, to those flashes of separate cries with a kind of demure murmur for background, and then I knew that the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord" (Nabokov 326). His regret over robbing Dolores of her childhood may or may not be genuine, though what relevance does his rehabilitation have if there is no one to recognize it? In correspondence with the mentioned theories, Humbert's alleged rehabilitation through writing his manuscript is actualized only if the members of the jury situated in the central tower agree on the meaning of justice. Yet, when it is suddenly made evident that Humbert writes neither in the physical presence of a jury nor in a courtroom, practicing popular justice appears to be less attainable. At the very end of his manuscript, Humbert admits he has deviated from his initial intent:

I thought I would use these notes in toto at my trial, to save not my head, of course, but my soul. In mid composition, however, I realized that I could not parade living Lolita. ...The following decision I make with all the legal impact and support of a signed testament: I wish this memoir to be published only when Lolita is no longer alive. Thus, neither of us is alive when the reader opens this book. (Nabokov 327)

By eliminating the jury's gaze, Humbert interrupts the reciprocal dynamic and absolves readers from conducting surveillance in an attempt to exercise popular justice. With this unforeseen alteration, now what purpose does the reader serve?

Humbert writes that this manuscript now exists in order to make Dolores "live in the minds of later generations. I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita" (Nabokov 327). Ironically, Humbert's new objective for readers is still comprised of similar ideologies. Though a jury's purpose is to reach a verdict, its power comes from the process and not the perspective it takes. A jury does not submit to one absolute way of looking at the case at hand; members of a jury have agency to collectively determine a conclusion based on what it is that is being examined. John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. takes Humbert's manuscript and generalizes it for all readers, while a jury takes Humbert's manuscript and looks at it *only* for Humbert's case. For a jury, even though there is a desire for justice, it is their motivation and not their goal.

While readers are no longer associated with being Humbert's jury, their new perspective is still as inconclusive. When Humbert reveals his new purpose, he does not impose one absolute way of accomplishing it; a reader has agency to determine how they

wish to immortalize the narrative, whether it is to mythicize the relationship or to raise issue regarding the subject matter. The appeal of mentioning the “ladies and gentleman of the jury” is that it acknowledges its readers have a widespread idea of truth and popular justice, and it ensures a multitude of perspectives and preconceived notions of truth. It does not set in stone only one way of looking at the text, and readers are still entitled to their own interest in the data and their own idea of how they wish to immortalize the events. However, what the reader is essentially robbed of is the power to reject the reciprocal dynamic necessary for the relationship to function. On the subject of immortalization, Humbert writes, “Please, reader: no matter your exasperation with the tenderhearted, morbidly sensitive, infinitely circumspect hero of my book, do not skip these essential pages! Imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me” (Nabokov 137). Because Humbert blindsides his readers, their participation becomes involuntary. Once readers read the text, they have, unbeknownst to them, submitted to Humbert, further demonstrating that a common goal and consensus can fuel power relations.

Conclusion: Readers Reclaiming Agency

As Nabokov emphasizes in “Good Readers and Good Writers,” a key component in making a just decision lies in readers having agency without outside influence towards any one direction. The interplay of the two frameworks in *Lolita* is crucial because John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. and Humbert Humbert both disclose information from a specific vantage point and use their authority to pressure readers into committing to the text for their respective motives—to save the world or to save themselves. However, John Ray, Jr., Ph.D., a supposed middleman, assigns his views on to the readers and leaves little room for their perspective, while Humbert delivers information in such a way that expects his readers to reach a verdict based on their own definitions of truth.

Foucault points to the danger of limiting power in the hands of one person “who can exercise it alone and totally over others” (“The Eye of Power” 156), coincidentally warning against individuals like John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. who wish to guide all of society with one perception of truth and justice. Humbert, who is often warned against as being cunning and self-serving, uses his knowledge of ideological power for his personal advantage by calling for the manuscript to be judged by a panel of individuals that work *collectively* towards a common goal regardless of their conflicting perspectives. The difference between the two frameworks is that while John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. typically holds more authority because of his association with psychological discourse, Humbert binds the readers to participate against their will, yet the authority still lies with the readers receiving the information. Ultimately, Humbert’s strategy honors the go-between, where readers enter conversations and create meanings.

I must remind that my examination of *Lolita* does not wish to distinguish between which of the two frameworks is better, or safer, than the other, especially considering they are both very much alike at their core—one sets a tone and perspective without consensus, and the other puts you in a position and then pulls the rug from under you at the very end. Rather, I mention the similarities and differences to highlight the necessity for readers to understand that they must approach the text unaffected by any predispositions, whether it is their own or those projected onto them. *Lolita* has become such a popular novel that it has developed a reputation of being loaded with authoritative and oppressive voices. When readers begin to read this novel, they are often already prepared to shield themselves from external influences. This uneasiness is possibly developed from a desire to defend individuality and reclaim authority. Yet the uncertainty is unwarranted because a reader's perspective is always open-ended. Despite John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. and Humbert's manipulative tricks, readers can still reclaim agency, guaranteeing their neutrality towards the practice of popular justice.

“Going back for a moment to our wolf-crying woodland little woolly fellow, we may put it this way: the magic of art was in the shadow of the wolf that he deliberately invented, his dream of the wolf; then the story of his tricks made a good story. When he perished at least, the story told about him acquired a good lesson in the dark around the camp fire. But he was the little magician. He was the inventor” (“Good Readers and Good Writers” 5). Readers have the power to make of it what they will. That is literature. That is *Lolita*.

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