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Forum

Who's Who in the Sublimelight: "Suave John Ray" and Lolita's "Secret Points"

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Always mindful of Nabokov's advice that in reading "one should notice and fondle details" (*LL* 1), upon re-reading *Lolita*[1] recently my eye fell on a detail on the first page of John Ray's Foreword: the name of Humbert's lawyer, Clarence Choate Clark, Esq. With the middle name and a few superfluous letters removed, there, embedded in the name of Ray's "eminent cousin" was Clare, Clare Q., another double name for "quilted Quilty, Clare Obscure," and I began to consider the possible implications of Cue incarnate in Clark.[2] While the correspondence can hardly be mere coincidence in a book by Nabokov, the concord between Clare Obscure and Clark, Esquire, suggesting an identification between the two, defies both logic and commonsense. After all, Quilty is supposedly dead when Ray writes his Foreword. The clue could well be a booby-trap, a false scent for Kinbotean imaginations to seize upon only to be drawn into a cave of baroque fantasy. As Proffer was among the first to point out, "one should always be suspicious" of Nabokov (4). On the other hand, in "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" Nabokov insists on the supreme value of the detail over the general and asserts that it is through our "capacity to wonder at trifles" in a "childishly speculative frame of mind, so different from commonsense and its logic, that we know the world to be good"

1. All parenthetical page references to *Lolita* in appearing in the text and notes of this essay are to Appel's *The Annotated Lolita*. Unless otherwise noted, or in the case of proper nouns such as titles and the names of newspapers, bold letters and/or italics appearing in English words quoted from Nabokov's work mark my emphasis.

2. James McDonald, one of the few critics to give Ray serious attention, noted Quilty's embedded name some thirty years ago, but did not pursue its ramifications (357).

(*LL* 374). Recalling that after the shooting Humbert ponders the possibility some "surgeon of genius" might revive Quilty, I found it impossible not to follow, in a spirit of serious play, the threads connecting the "trifle" of Clark's name to other details.

I

The question of how to read *Lolita* continues to provoke lively debate, the focus of which has shifted from early concerns over its erotic elements to issues of Humbert's sincerity to speculation about how much of his story Humbert Humbert, whoever he may be, experiences, records, and imagines.[3] In 1995 Alexander Dolinin and Julian W. Connolly, building on the arguments of critics spanning almost two decades, brought to a head the premise that Humbert Humbert "imagined" the final scenes of the book.[4] The basis for this premise arises from a chronological inconsistency in *Lolita*: Humbert says on the novel's penultimate page that he began his memoir "fifty-six days ago [...] in the psychopathic ward" (presumably immediately following his arrest), but if one counts back fifty-six days from the date of Humbert's death, November 16, 1952, as given by John Ray in the Foreword, one arrives at September 22, 1952, the day Humbert receives Lolita's letter in Part II's Chapter 27. Since this fifty-six day period leaves no time for the three days Humbert spends traveling to Coalmont to see Lolita, stalking Quilty and shooting him at Pavor Manor, and getting arrested, the final scenes of the book, Dolinin and Connolly argue, must be products of Humbert's fancy.[5] To credit this startling thesis is to acknowledge the need for a major reinterpretation of *Lolita*. Brian Boyd counters the arguments of these "revisionist" critics, decrying what he sees as their lack of concrete evidence, and putting forward the passionately argued proposal that changing the date of Humbert's death in the Foreword from the

3. For a compact discussion of critical interpretations of *Lolita*, see Neil Cornwell's chapter "The *Lolita* Phenomenon" in his *Vladimir Nabokov*.

4. Dolinin, "Nabokov's Time Doubling"; Connolly, "'Nature's Reality' or Humbert's 'Fancy'."

5. Dolinin outlines the chronology of the main events of *Lolita*'s endgame as follows: September 22: Humbert receives letters from John Farlow and Lolita (now Mrs. Richard F. Schiller), and sets out on his journey; September 23: H.H. meets with Lolita in Coalmont; September 24: he visits Ramsdale and goes on to Parkington; September 25: he kills Clare Quilty and surrenders to the police, and on this day or soon afterwards is sent for evaluation to the psychiatric ward, where he starts writing *Lolita*; November 16: H.H., now in prison, completes his manuscript and dies of coronary thrombosis ("Nabokov's Time Doubling" 30).

16th to the 19th of November would resolve the problem, supposing Nabokov to have made a simple mistake.[6]

Boyd seems to have had the last word thus far, but there are problems with his proposed solution. I think Boyd is right to stress that Ray's Foreword establishes key points of reference, and I think he is right that the scenes in question are not merely products of Humbert's fancy, but altering the date as he does risks dangers equal in magnitude to the ones against which he warns the "revisers."[7] It is hardly surprising that so much is at stake in a single digit, considering how much value Nabokov placed on minute particulars,[8] and while exploring an alternative solution, I will provide detailed evidence from the text that supports at least part of the revisionist view: that Nabokov deliberately created the discrepancy in the dates as a gesture toward a solution of the riddle of *Lolita*. For beneath the triangular plot of the Humbert-Lolita-Quilty story there is evidence of a bizarre, covert conspiracy whose features are consistent with Nabokov's notions of chess strategy as he characterizes them in *Speak, Memory*: "Deceit, to the point of diabolism, and originality, verging on the grotesque."[9]

I would like to entertain the following possibility: the principal narrator of the concluding chapters of *Lolita* (and of other parts of it, too) may well be John Ray, Jr.[10] Boyd identifies common elements crucial to both the novel and

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6. "'Even Homais Nods': Nabokov's Fallibility, Or, How to Revise *Lolita*."

7. "[E]ven Homer nods," Boyd says, "and so does Nabokov, and to build wholesale interpretations on details that seem much more explicable as errors is fraught with danger" ("Homais" 64).

8. Boyd himself reminds us of Nabokov's cautionary remarks "in discussing the editing of *Eugene Onegin*: 'Even obvious misprints should be treated gingerly, after all, they may be supposed to have been left uncorrected by the author'" ("Homais" 64). It is worth reiterating, as Dolinin does, that Nabokov's revisions to his Russian translation of *Lolita* made "the key date—September 22, 1952— […] even more strongly marked" than in the American version ("Nabokov's Time Doubling" 31). Dolinin makes the same point elsewhere after reminding us that Nabokov authorized Alfred Appel, Jr., when "working on *The Annotated Lolita*," "to make corresponding corrections in the original" ("*Lolita* in Russian" 327).

9. Quoted by Alexandrov (38). See also note 71 below.

10. Connolly approaches this position when he suggests that in *Lolita* Nabokov may be using "a version of the strategy that some readers have identified in *Pale Fire* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. In each of these novels, one finds suggestive evidence indicating that a single consciousness lies behind the figure of a writer" (44). I view Ray as an agent who has appropriated and

Nabokov's *Lolita: A Screenplay*: "Quilty's shadowy presence," "the Edgar Allan Poe allusions," and "John Ray, Jr.'s position as frame to and external commentator on Humbert's confession. Dr. Ray [in the screenplay] becomes the sometimes comically obtrusive narrator of the whole film" ("Homais" 77–78). If Ray is "comically obtrusive" in the screenplay,[11] he may be seen as hilariously, *outrageously* so in the novel, all the while operating in diabolically effective camouflage. As I hope to show, Nabokov not only makes Ray responsible for such phenomena as Humbert's confused calendar and the curious disguise of Quilty in Clarence Clark, but also for contriving Humbert's "moral apotheosis" and making him repeatedly look and sound foolish. Taking over another's story is of course a familiar plot element in Nabokov's novels, *Pnin* and *Pale Fire* being two of the most prominent examples.

In rejecting the revisionist thesis, Boyd asserts that Humbert's unrelenting vanity would not permit him to depict himself as the insignificant lover Dolly sees at Coalmont or as the fool he appears "as Quilty coolly mocks him" at Pavor Manor ("Homais" 81), but Humbert's bumbling, incompetence, and blindness are apparent throughout the novel. For example, even before Quilty is in need of resurrection, there is ample preparation in *Lolita* for the possibility that Humbert may never succeed as a killer. Despite his claim that he could see himself shooting Valeria's lover, Humbert is too squeamish to kill Charlotte when the actual occasion arises ("I could not kill Charlotte" [87]; "Poets never kill" [88]). His ineffectuality with a gun is foreshadowed in his dreams where his bullets fail (47) and is demonstrated in his poor marksmanship when hunting with Farlow and Krestovski (216). His incompetence

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radically altered Humbert's account for his own ends, toying with H.H. in the process. See also note 20 below.

11. Ray's role in the screenplay is very active indeed. Not only does he repeat much of what he says in the novel's Foreword, he gets involved in the narration of the story's events, interrupts Humbert's voice, and even cues Humbert's lines at times (see 8–15, *passim*). After showing Ray "perusing a manuscript on his desk" (2), H.H. in a voiceover announces his intention "to place these pages [of his finished story] in the capable hands of my adviser and physician, Dr. John Ray" (8). This announcement is rather strikingly out of keeping with the antipathy he expresses toward Ray while he is under treatment (see note 14 below), a contradiction that suggests Ray may be putting words in Humbert's mouth in the voiceover. Granted that the novel and the screenplay are different works in different media, choices Nabokov made for the screen version of the story preserve Ray's glib suavity and his proprietary stance toward Humbert's life. Holding the typescript of Humbert's story, Ray exults, "And here they are, those precious pages" (8).

as assassin is further foreshadowed the night before he confronts Quilty, when he glimpses a movie screen on which "a thin phantom raised a gun, both he and his arm reduced to tremulous dishwater," and in his subsequent obsession with "bungling the execution" (293). Bathing little Chum excessively in "the wrong product" (295) and showing up drunk at Pavor Manor hardly help. His fogged perception ("I may have lost contact with reality for a second or two"), his reliance on appearance alone in judging Quilty's state ("I could not bring myself to touch him in order to make sure that he was really dead" [304]), the nonchalance and facetiousness with which Quilty's friends respond to Humbert's announcement that he has killed Quilty, and Quilty's crawling out to the landing after H.H. leaves him for dead all cast doubt on Humbert's claim to have finally accomplished the revenge he so passionately desired.

Telling himself that Quilty's ingenious play is over, heart-heavy Humbert leaves, and as he drives slowly away he tells us he

> wondered idly if some surgeon of genius might not alter his own career, and perhaps the whole destiny of mankind, by reviving quilted Quilty, Clare Obscure. Not that I cared; on the whole I wished to forget the whole mess—and when I did learn that he was dead, the only satisfaction it gave me, was the relief of knowing I need not mentally accompany for months a painful and disgusting convalescence interrupted with all kinds of unmentionable operations and relapses, and perhaps an actual visit from him, with trouble on my part to rationalize him as not being a ghost. Thomas had something. It is strange that the tactile sense, which is so infinitely less precious to men than sight, becomes at critical moments our main, if not only, handle to reality.[12] I was all covered with Quilty—with the feel of that tumble before the bleeding. (306)

I wonder if Humbert's seemingly idle worries are actually symptoms of defeat and failure; he may be "all covered with Quilty" in ways he never contemplates and in senses that go deeper than the oft remarked affinities linking him with what some call his double, his shadow and "evil twin."

I will take as a starting point the supposition that the correspondence between Clare Obscure and Clark, Esquire is not a false clue and that Nabokov has Ray, the "surgeon of genius," resurrect Quilty as Humbert's lawyer, *Clare*nce Choate *Clar*k, *Esq*., so that under the terms of Humbert's will Clark

12. Nabokov echoes Humbert in a 1966 interview with Appel: "Doubting Tom should have worn spectacles. It is true, however, that even with the best of visions one must touch things to be *quite* sure of 'reality'" (*SO* 79; Nabokov's italics). Another reminder that one should "fondle details."

may exercise "his discretion in all matters pertaining to the preparation of 'Lolita' for print" (3). Enhancing his career by attaching his name as editor to "a great work of art" destined to become "a classic in psychiatric circles" is an aim entirely consistent with Ray's interest in "bringing up a better generation in a safer world," as he says at the end of the Foreword, stating this ambition in language strikingly similar to Humbert's sarcastically hyperbolic suggestion that "the whole destiny of mankind" might be affected by Quilty's revival. At the same time, in a novel filled with parodic allusions to Poe, Nabokov may be dangling a clue reminiscent of the eponymous purloined letter under the nose of his readers, a clue boldly and prominently displayed at the very beginning of the book, so obvious it defies detection. The legal power Clark wields over Humbert's memoir could thus be seen as an extension of the uncanny power and influence Quilty exerts on Humbert in the novel,[13] while Ray himself acts as accomplice to "Vivian Darkbloom" by performing the services of a proto-Kinbotean intermediary for Nabokov. Ray affords Quilty advantages over Humbert that make the latter ridiculous not only in the book's final scenes, but throughout the novel, and his editor's role allows him to assume control of H.H.'s manuscript, revise his story, and act as a principal agent of fate in it. Ray's surgery not only revives Quilty; his primary patient is Humbert, on whom he repeatedly operates.[14] If this scenario is correct, Nabokov ironically establishes Ray's relationship to Humbert as analogous to that of the two

13. It should also be noted that Quilty's power is related to chronological discrepancies. As noted by Boyd, *The Enchanted Hunters* is anachronistic in the sense that Quilty writes it before he could logically know of the events that transpired in Room 342 of the Hotel, and similar incongruity marks a number of clues Quilty plants for Humbert to follow in the "paper chase." Boyd registers not only H.H.'s frustration but a reader's perplexity: "The play seems almost to suggest some strange control over the future on Quilty's part, yet logic screams out that that is impossible" (*American Years* 247). And again: "Something disconcerting and sinister is afoot: it seems almost as if Quilty has Humbert completely in control, as if Humbert were no more than a character in one of Quilty's plays, a figment of his imagination" (247–48).

14. Again, the screenplay sheds intriguing light on Nabokov's conception of the Ray/Humbert/Quilty relationship. As to the resurrection motif, Nabokov directs that in the struggle at Elphinstone Hospital a "mummylike patient" (186) is to rise "like Lazarus" and assist in the subduing of Humbert. The next cut is to Dr. Ray reporting on his treatment of H.H. in a sanatorium: "the patient […] insulted the therapist by calling him 'the rapist of Psyche the soul'" (187). Nevertheless, Ray implies, his treatment succeeded sufficiently for Humbert to check out and return to Beardsley where he resumes his search for Lolita and Quilty (188). See note 11 above.

central characters: Humbert's abduction and exploitation of Lolita, whose life he steals, is mirrored by Ray's appropriation and violation of Humbert's life, voice, and mind. This equation would be consistent with Nabokov's tantalizing declaration in a 1964 interview: "I shall never regret *Lolita*. She was like the composition of a beautiful puzzle—its composition and its solution at the same time, since one is a mirror view of the other, *depending on the way you look*" (*SO* 20).

Even without Nabokov's teasing hints proffered in interviews, the verbal playfulness of *Lolita* itself invites us to join in the game of looking, as witness, for instance, such anagrams as "Vivian Darkbloom" in the Foreword and "Ted Hunter, Cane NH"[15] in the "paper chase." And speaking of looking, which is something Nabokov has Humbert continually do throughout the book in comments referring to matters of perception (e.g., "It is a question of focal adjustment, of a certain distance that the inner eye thrills to surmount, and a certain contrast that the mind perceives with a gasp of perverse delight" [17]), let us look at that devil "Aubrey McFate." Humbert himself unwittingly dubs the forces of his destiny "Aubrey McFate" (56), never guessing the name itself is an anagram composed of references to four key players. At the end of Chapter 23, following Charlotte's fatal accident, Humbert has a meeting with Beale, whom he ecstatically identifies:

> *I had actually seen* the agent of fate. I had palpated the very flesh of fate—and its padded shoulder. A *brilliant and monstrous mutation* had suddenly taken place, and here was the instrument. *Within the intricacies of the pattern* [. . .] *I could dimly distinguish* my own vile contribution. Had I not been such a fool—or such an intuitive genius—to preserve that journal, fluids produced by vindictive anger and hot shame would not have *blinded* Charlotte in her dash to the mailbox. But even had they *blinded* her, still nothing might have happened, had not precise fate, that synchronizing phantom, mixed within its alembic the car and the dog and the sun and the shade and the wet and the weak and the strong and the stone. Adieu, Marlene! Fat fate's formal handshake (as *reproduced* by Beale before leaving the room) brought me out of my torpor; and I wept. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury—I wept. (103)

Beale's role is brief but crucial, as he furthers Humbert's project by running over Charlotte. But in the passage quoted above, Humbert is blissfully unaware of greater forces shaping his destiny. Beale is only a momentary partner of these greater forces, his initial "B" combining with "Ray," "Cue,"

15. As noted by Appel (323; 428).

and "fat me" to form the anagram "Aubrey McFate."[16] The auto-referential epithet "fat me," reminiscent of phrases like "fat Haze," "bad you," "poor me," and "Fat fate," is a fitting one for Nabokov's perverse fictional persona, for just as John Farlow "stopped smoking and gained thirty pounds" (266), the author too, not long before he began working on *Lolita*, quit tobacco and rapidly put on weight as he compulsively gobbled candy.[17] But interpretation of "an artist's book" should not rest on biographical detail; it is by looking closely "[w]ithin the intricacies of the pattern" that the reader can find evidence of the McFate cabal's conspiracy against Humbert, a conspiracy that Humbert with imperfect comprehension is repeatedly made to refer: "I greatly liked […] her trick of sighing 'oh dear!' in humorous wistful submission to fate, or emitting a long 'no-o' in a deep almost growling *undertone* when the blow of fate had actually fallen" (187–88); "In my youth I once read a French detective tale where the clues were actually in italics; but that is not McFate's way—even if one does *learn to recognize certain obscure indications*" (211); "I ascertained that Lo was still sound asleep (mouth open, in a kind of dull amazement at *the curiously inane life we all had rigged up for her*)" (215); "*all were in the plot*, the sordid plot" (243); "I felt suffocated as he rolled over me. I rolled over him. *We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us*" (299).

Throughout the long, lively debate concerning how to read *Lolita*, on one point critics seem generally to agree: Editor John Ray—so apparently the epitome of Nabokovian antipathies—is not to be taken seriously.[18] But Ray's

16. Beale's full surname hides in that of the original Aubrey: **BEA**rds**LE**y, a cryptogram I term a *shadowgraph* (discussed later in this essay).

17. Sometime after September 27, 1945, Nabokov wrote to Edmund Wilson: "I have given up smoking and have grown tremendously fat" (Karlinsky 173). Boyd notes: "Intermediate students who had had their last elementary class with a gaunt Mr. Nabokov in May were bewildered to encounter a far plumper Mr. Nabokov in September, but the mystery resolved itself when instead of his cigarettes Nabokov 'shamelessly inhaled' molasses candy cubes in front of his class, five or six in the course of the hour" (*American Years* 88). Stacy Schiff records that Nabokov's 124-pound émigré's weight soon soared to over 200 and quotes disapproving Vera: "Volodya is always bumping into the furniture because he cannot remember his new dimensions. He claims that 'his belly is all in bruises'" (138). In addition to the auto-referential "fat me" in the "Aubrey McFate" anagram, I further speculate that the ponderous author marks his presence in the text with a number of cameos, such as "fat, powdered Mrs. Leigh (born Vanessa van Ness)" (12), "an obese partly clad man reading the paper" (264), and "a fat man in an easy chair" (304) among others.

18. Michael Wood, who sees Ray "as a figure of fun […] an obtuse and self-

all too apparent faults have as part of their function effective camouflage that masks his larger role in the novel.[19] Vain, self-regarding, didactic, and of the tribe of Freud, Ray seems so obviously ludicrous that readers readily dismiss his obtuse observations and pompous rhetoric, hastening on to the Byzantine beauties of Humbert's "fancy prose style." Though commentators as early as Proffer have noted similarities between the styles of Humbert and Ray, the implication being that Ray may be Humbert's invention, an alternate possibility—that Ray may have insinuated his own words into Humbert's memoirs—seems not to have been seriously explored.[20] Perhaps not coincidentally, in the

admiring psychologist," offers a typical view (106).

19. Boyd recalls "how fascinated [Nabokov] was by deception in nature, especially in mimicry, and how much he liked to find in his art equivalents for the sly playfulness he sensed behind things. He even wrote that 'in art, as in nature, a glaring disadvantage may turn out to be a subtle protective device'" ("Homais" 64).

20. Proffer describes Humbert's voice as "the product of a deft ventriloquistic trick, with [Nabokov's] modified voice still quite recognizable. In fact […] the style of Humbert Humbert strongly resembles the style of John Ray, Jr." (82). Richard H. Bullock accounts for the similarities between the styles of Ray and Humbert by supposing Ray to be a character invented by Humbert, and concludes that "Humbert, then, like Nabokov, sits like God, paring his fingernails, leaving only obscure clippings to indicate his presence" (101). Martin Green takes a rather similar view: "Whoever writes the foreword, signed John Ray, Jr., Ph.D., is obviously the same person who signs himself Humbert Humbert. We recognize the same flow of overelegant language, always shifting (swelling absurdly, halting abruptly, changing its brand of elegance) in response to an acute sense of (taste in) its own glossy falsity […]. This is the main voice of the novel, whatever it may sign itself, and to realize that this trick is being played on him arouses all a reader's distrust—of a gamesmanship kind." Then Green adds: "But John Ray we can forget" (17). Pekka Tammi, while noting authorial affinities with some of the language of Ray's Foreword, sees the "fictive prefacer" as "of course a patently absurd figure," but significantly adds in a note that as to "the alternation between parody and seriousness in the Foreword to *Lolita*," "the narratological implications of the question have not been discussed" (298–99). Citing Bullock, Connolly looks askance at the Foreword, "consider[s] the possibility that John Ray, Jr. himself may be a kind of fabrication," suggests that a "single consciousness" may be at work in *Lolita*, and opines that "the figure who previously had used the name Humbert Humbert" "stag[es] his own death and don[s] the new identity of John Ray, Jr." Recalling in a note that Elizabeth Bruss notices that "the word 'Ray' (short for 'hurray') is uttered by Dolly when she interrupts Humbert's discourse on the concept of a mental triumph over

opening sentences of his afterword to the novel, "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" (311–17), Nabokov himself, in playfully convoluted fashion, comments on the difficulty of straight talk:

> After doing my impersonation of suave John Ray, the character in *Lolita* who pens the Foreword, any comments coming straight from me may strike one—may strike me, in fact—as an impersonation of Vladimir Nabokov talking about his own book. A few points, however, have to be discussed; and the autobiographic device may induce mimic and model to blend. (311)

When Nabokov remarks a little farther on that he is "neither a reader nor a writer of didactic fiction, and, despite John Ray's assertion, *Lolita* has no moral in tow" (314), there is no reason to doubt him. Numerous critics have distinguished the explicit didacticism that Nabokov disavows ("I have no social purpose, no moral message; I've no general ideas to exploit, I just like composing riddles with elegant solutions" [*SO* 16]) from the ethical questions *Lolita* implicitly raises.[21]

It is "aesthetic bliss" (314) Nabokov says he is after, even if ethical concerns have made a major claim on the attention of readers and author alike from the beginning. Nabokov makes aesthetic bliss—"a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected to other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm"—available to his favorite characters and to his readers by

> a characteristic *formal* feature of his narratives, in which details that are in fact connected are hidden within contexts that conceal the true relations within them. This narrative tactic puts the burden on the reader either to accumulate the components of a given series, or to discover the one detail that acts as a "key" for it; when this is achieved, the signi-

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death," Connolly remarks that it "may be only a coincidence" (44–45). Bruss reads Dolly's 'Ray' as "a curious foreshadowing of editor John Ray's death notice" (142). See note 10 above.

21. Again, Wood's comment is representative: "[*Lolita*] has no moral John Ray would recognize, or that any of us could comfortably package. Humbert moralizes, we might say, Nabokov doesn't. But this is a book about a guilt that both glorifies itself and grovels in self-accusation, and can therefore scarcely avoid raising moral questions in the reader's mind—even if the once and still scandalous premise of the story didn't raise such questions. No simple lesson, then, and certainly no general lesson; but plenty of practice for the moral imagination, more than we can cope with, perhaps" (107).

> ficance of the entire preceding concealed chain or network is retroactively illuminated. (Alexandrov 7)

My reconsideration of John Ray's relationship to the rest of the novel has been prompted in part by anomalies in the text which, when scrutinized, reveal their hidden relationships. In addition, I take seriously the guidance Nabokov offers near the end of his afterword:

> Every serious writer, I dare say, is aware of this or that published book of his as of a constant comforting presence. Its pilot light is steadily burning somewhere in the basement and a mere touch applied to one's private thermostat instantly results in a quiet little explosion of familiar warmth. This presence, this glow of the book in an ever accessible remoteness is a most companionable feeling, and the better the book has conformed to its prefigured contour and color the ampler and smoother it glows. But even so, there are certain points, byroads, favorite hollows that one evokes more eagerly and enjoys more tenderly than the rest of one's book. I have not reread *Lolita* since I went through the proofs in the spring of 1955 but I find it to be a delightful presence now that it quietly hangs about the house like a summer day which one knows to be bright behind the haze. And when I thus think of *Lolita*, I seem always to pick out for special delectation such images as Mr. Taxovich, or that class list at Ramsdale school, or Charlotte saying "waterproof," or Lolita in slow motion advancing toward Humbert's gifts, or the pictures decorating the stylized garret of Gaston Godin, or the Kasbeam barber (who cost me a month of work), or Lolita playing tennis, or the hospital at Elphinstone, or pale, pregnant, beloved, irretrievable Dolly Schiller dying in Gray Star (the capital town of the book), or the tinkling sounds of the valley town coming up the mountain trail (on which I caught the first known female of *Lycaeides sublivens* Nabokov). These are the nerves of the novel. These are the secret points, the subliminal coordinates by means of which the book is plotted—although I realize very clearly that these and other scenes will be skimmed over and not noticed, or never even reached, by those who begin reading the book under the impression that it is something on the lines of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* or *Les Amours de Milord Grosvit*. That my novel does contain various allusions to the physiological urges of a pervert is quite true. But after all we are not children, not illiterate juvenile delinquents, not English public school boys who after a night of homosexual romps have to endure the paradox of reading the Ancients in expurgated editions. (315–16; Nabokov's italics)

Like the book as a whole which "bright behind the haze" "glow[s …] in an ever accessible remoteness," Nabokov's ten favorite images are invested with hidden power readers may discover. Nabokov implies his ideal reader will take these "subliminal coordinates by means of which the book is plotted" as synecdochic indicators of a plot that runs deeper than the competition between Quilty and Humbert for Lolita. Understanding that the book is not pornography is only a first step; apprehension of *Lolita* as an aesthetic and ethical whole requires that the reader notice and connect the details of the "secret points," "the nerves of the novel." As he concludes his afterword, Nabokov continues to gesture toward his conjuror's tools in a clearly disingenuous assessment of his language, calling it "second-rate" and "devoid of any of those apparatuses—the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions—which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way"—as if these gifts were not available and deftly wielded in what he calls "the purest of all, the most abstract and carefully contrived" (*SO* 47) of his books!

Since chronological anomalies have attracted the attention of many critics, not to be overlooked is an aberration in Nabokov's list of secret points. He presents the images in the order of their appearance in the book, with one exception: the ninth subliminal coordinate, "pale, pregnant, beloved, irretrievable Dolly Schiller dying in Gray Star (the capital town of the book)," is actually the first to appear, being supplied by Ray in his Foreword (4). By placing the ninth secret point out of order and designating Gray Star "the *capital town* of the book," Nabokov offers hints that it and its location, the Foreword, and by extension the author of the Foreword, have special significance. While Nabokov's quartet of adjectives stresses the pathos of his heroine's premature death and his own tender feelings for her, the aberrant placement of this secret point and its distinctive status attracts the reader's attention, marks it for particular scrutiny, and suggests a linkage with other temporal anomalies such as the date of Humbert's death as given by Ray. In order to chart the course of the devil in *Lolita*'s details, I will peruse Ray's Foreword for hints of the editor's project, document parallels between Ray's and Humbert's language, and present a brief catalogue of some of Nabokov's cryptic clues. I will then marshal evidence of Ray's operations in the "secret points" and other key passages of the novel, evidence that supports the view that Nabokov deliberately created the book's chronological discrepancies, among other pointers, to lead the reader to the unmasking of Ray and the exposure of Humbert as false artist and insincere penitent.

II

With evident conceit, John Ray in his Foreword offers teasing hints in ambiguous, multi-layered language not unlike Humbert's slippery prose. After he supplies the date and circumstances of Humbert's death, Ray's prideful posturing as he claims kinship with his "eminent cousin" and basks in the nepotistic glow of Clark's choosing him as editor is underscored rather than eclipsed by his characterization of his prize-winning book "Do the Senses Make Sense?" as "a modest work" (3). The title of the book is a clear hint to the reader to be on guard, not to trust appearances, a motif surfacing again and again in the book's ambiguous passages referring to clues and camouflage, perception and deceit, creation and interpretation. The "Poling Prize" Ray was awarded for his book is the center of a nexus of puns: "pol" is mid-twentieth-century American vernacular for "politician," linking Ray's abilities to Clark's Washington connection; Ray's citation in the Foreword of Dr. Blanche Schwarzmann's demographic statistics suggests familiarity with "polls"; Humbert accompanies an expedition to "polar regions"; "poling" as a verb means to push, poke, or pierce with a pole (obvious "Freudian" connotations need not be ruled out). The play on "pushing" is particularly germane to Ray's motives in the Foreword, in which Clark's editor "pushes" himself, his nepotistic relative, his own "Do the Senses Make Sense?" and the book under his editorship.[22] "Poling" also points obscurely to Quilty/Clark and to Nabokov's subliminal hints to the reader, since a "cue" is a pole in one sense as well as a hint, poke, or clue in another. One recalls Quilty's offer to help Humbert retrieve his dropped pistol: "There should be a poker somewhere, why don't I fetch it, and then we'll fish out your property" (298). If, as I suggest, Nabokov uses Ray throughout the book to provide hints, pokes, and clues to the reader, his prize is well deserved.

"[S]uave John Ray" (as Nabokov calls him in his afterword) gives us almost as many reasons to question his motives and reliability as does Humbert. Why should we take Ray at his word when he claims his task as editor was a simple matter of "the correction of obvious solecisms and the careful suppression of a few tenacious details"[23] motivated by "taste" and "compassion"? If anything,

22. Nabokov used similar wordplay for a similar subject in a letter to Edmund Wilson (April 19, 1952): "'Pushkin' himself is a good example of nepotism (to 'push' one's 'kin')" (Karlinsky 305).

23. Interestingly, in the screenplay Ray refers to Humbert's manuscript as "a bundle of notes, a rough autobiography, poorly typed" (2–3), the triple deprecation implying that heavy revision might have been in order.

the mention of "signposts and tombstones," "invention," and a "mask […] which […] had to remain unlifted" (3) imply artful deceit—on Ray's part as much as anyone else's. Since the last legal impediment to the publication of Humbert's memoir was removed by Lolita's death in December of 1952, the two years and seven months preceding the penning of Ray's Foreword (dated August 5, 1955) seem a long time for minor editorial corrections but ample time for Ray to amend, expand, and revise Humbert's story. Not only might we doubt Ray's assertion that the "remarkable memoir is presented intact" (the ribald pun on "intact" carries far-reaching irony coming from a therapist), but his claim to protect the anonymity of the principal characters is immediately undercut by his providing information calculated to help inquisitive readers trace identities: Lolita's real first name has been preserved; "Haze" only rhymes with her surname; references to Humbert's crime may be found in daily newspapers of a specified period. Again, Ray swells with self-importance, claiming prime credit for the elucidation of the mystery of Humbert's crime: "its cause and purpose would have continued to remain a complete mystery, had not this memoir been permitted to *come under my reading lamp*" (4), he tells us, while offering another early gesture toward intense perusal or inspection of the text in an image that marks his identification with light and its effects.[24]

More titillating, resonant details provide a context for the ninth secret point and Ray's subliminal signature. The pompously respectable Mr. "Windmuller" brings us up to date on the current status of "Louise,"[25] his daughter, "Mona Dahl," Lolita's high school confidante, and "Rita," Humbert's last consort. Vivian Darkbloom, Quilty's mistress and collaborator, gets a plug for her forthcoming "My Cue," called by (unnamed) "critics who have perused the manuscript […] her best book," this last phrase echoing Quilty's facetious appraisal of Humbert's poetic sentence: "Well, sir, this is certainly a fine poem. *Your best* as far as I am concerned" (300). Note as well that Clark, "now of the District of Columbia *bar*" (3), is punningly linked with bar man/car man Quilty, who according to *Who's Who in the Limelight* was educated at

24. Eric Hyman credits Jessie Thomas Lokrantz for suggesting that Ray's name suggests light (59).

25. Here again a temporal anomaly lurks. Windmuller tells Humbert in September 1952 that Louise has "just entered Beardsley College," presumably as a freshman (290). She is an exceptionally slow student if, as Ray says in 1955, she is "a college sophomore." One might attribute the "error" to the author; however, I see it as one of the "solecisms" Ray fails to correct. Note Humbert's remarks concerning "McFate's *inept secretary*" (116) in Nabokov's fourth secret point (discussed below).

Columbia University and "[s]tarted on a commercial career" before turning to playwriting (31) (and later, pornography). Ray's witty remark "The caretakers of the various cemeteries involved report that no ghosts walk" doubles as an authorial leg-pull and an early hint of the resurrection theme in a novel teeming with specters and survivors. Meanwhile Ray locates Mrs. Schiller's death "in Gray Star" (4), a phrase Nabokov repeats verbatim in his afterword when characterizing this remote principality as "the capital town of the book" (316), again, a particularly pointed hint. The peculiar nature of the name of this town bespeaks Ray's vanity (since he has stashed his own surname within it), his ingenuity (discarding the superfluous "n," the remaining letters unscramble to reveal the anagram "gratis Ray"), and his intrusive energy, for as I suggest farther on, throughout the book Nabokov embeds this anagram to signal subliminally Ray's "freely given" contributions to the text.

Gradually the outlines of Ray's project become clear: the "editor" is a writer and book promoter in the guise of a psychiatric authority offering expertise and moral uplift to the public. Sex sells, so Ray is at pains to mention and justify the inclusion of scenes of an "aphrodisiac" nature, while attesting that "not a single obscene term is to be found in the whole book." In other words, for the book to become a mainstream best-seller, it must have sex, a cloak of decency, and respectability. Respectability is provided by Clark's professional status, Ray's association with good citizen "Windmuller," the Poling Prize, the Foreword's emphasis on "ethical impact," and Ray's Ph.D. As a further counterbalance to the book's sensual content, Ray (in what I maintain is a self-fulfilling prophecy) promises that H.H., no matter his faults, undergoes "a moral apotheosis" (5), suggesting that Humbert emerges as a chastened and perhaps redeemed sinner, a figure useful for edification. Again, Ray's self-promotion and prideful aspirations are evident in his claims that the book is a triumph of artistic originality and that H.H.'s "case" is destined to become a scientific "classic in psychiatric circles." Furthermore, Ray concludes, the book's "ethical impact" should drive home a "general lesson" for the "serious reader":

> the wayward child, the egotistic mother, the panting maniac—these are not only vivid characters in a unique story: they warn us of dangerous trends; they point out potent evils. "Lolita" should make all of us—parents, social workers, educators—apply ourselves with still greater vigilance and vision to the task of bringing up a better generation in a safer world. (5-6)

Though Ray's melodramatic didacticism is not shared by Nabokov, the author slips in a wink here: *Lolita* does require that we read vigilantly and with vision

if we are not to be taken in by humbugs. At the same time that Ray endeavors to make H.H.'s sordid confession into a politer and more salable account, Nabokov presents Ray as the counterfeit, poshlost-pushing quack that he is, thus remaining consistent with positions he took with regard to Freud throughout his career.

While serving as an obvious object of Nabokov's ongoing ridicule of the psychoasinine, Ray's voice at times blends with the undertones of his creator. Some of what "suave John Ray" has to say of course also serves Nabokov's own need to highlight *Lolita*'s status as an artistic masterpiece as distinguished from second-rate or pornographic literature.[26] The mention of Judge Woolsey's 1933 decision regarding *Ulysses*, the functional necessity of sensuous scenes, and the "shocking surprise" of all great original art is complementary to Nabokov's concerns in "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*." Ray's Foreword thus establishes precedent for the author's voice to be heard as an undertone in frequent ambiguous reflections on games, clues, concealment and revision, and not least emphatically in the final sentences of the book. Just as marked, however, is the overlap between the voices of John Ray and H.H.

III

The fervency of the note on which Ray ends his Foreword, like his deceptive arguments, vanity, and tendencies toward the grandiose, betrays Humbertian qualities. What accounts for these similarities? It is possible the two men coincidentally share certain characteristics of personality and expression. It is also possible that in the time Ray has spent editing the book, his style has been infected by Humbert's. I will argue, however, that Nabokov makes Humbert parrot Ray as a broad clue to the "editor's" project. Shortly after losing Lolita to Quilty, Humbert says of Trapp's clues that they "had been tuned to my mind and manner," and goes on to note a number of similarities his nemesis shares with him: "his genre, his type of humor—at its best at least—the tone of his brain, had affinities with my own" (249). Humbert's acknowledgement of his affinities with Quilty unwittingly points to Ray's *modus operandi.* If my main premise is correct, that Ray has appropriated Humbert's story, how easily certain affinities of style, not to mention subject matter and turns of plot, might be explained. While I will not attempt to isolate Humbert's original voice as unmediated by Ray's, I hope to show that Ray at times tunes his language to H.H.'s, disguising his voice as Humbert's in order to mock and humiliate him, to portray Humbert as a classic "case," and to deliver the

26. See Tammi (299–300) for a discussion of "a number of curious linkages between [Ray's] statements and some unmistakably Nabokovian positions."

promised "moral apotheosis." As I have suggested, by thus absconding with and violating Humbert's text, Ray metaphorically conflates the roles of the "therapist" and "the rapist," abolishing the "nice spacing" that distinguishes them, to paraphrase H.H. (150).

In the initial chapters of the book, the reader encounters background information designed to explain the origins of Humbert's case and crime in language that echoes Ray's. In the "fancy prose style" of Chapter 1, Humbert reveals the source of his obsession with Lolita: "Did she have a precursor? She did, indeed she did. In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child" (9). Recall Ray's strikingly congruent comment in the Foreword: "had our demented diarist gone, in the fatal summer of 1947, to a competent psychopathologist, there would have been no disaster; but then, neither would there have been this book" (5). Also in the Foreword, Ray says he is "repeating what he has stressed in his own books and lectures," and it is not hard to imagine that the following passage in Chapter 3 of Part I reflects theories propounded in such books as "Do the Senses Make Sense?":

> Annabel was, like the writer, of *mixed parentage*: half-English, half-Dutch, in her *case*. I remember her features far less distinctly today than I did a few years ago, before I knew Lolita. There are two kinds of visual memory: one when you *skillfully recreate an image* in the laboratory of your mind, with your eyes open (and then I see Annabel in such *general* terms as "honey-colored skin," "thin arms," "brown bobbed hair," "long lashes," "big bright mouth"); and the other when you instantly evoke, with shut eyes, on *the dark innerside* of your eyelids, the objective, absolutely optical *replica* of a beloved face, a little *ghost* in natural colors (and this is how I see *Lolita*).
>
> Let me therefore primly limit myself, in describing Annabel, to saying she was a *lovely* child a few months my *junior*. (11–12)

There are subtle markers here, the *junior* John Ray's words "case" ("as a *case* history"), "general" ("a *general* lesson") and "ghost" ("no *ghosts* walk") pointing to the author of the Foreword, while the phrase "skillfully recreate an image" and "replica" covertly glance at the revision of Humbert's memoir, to which mention of the writer's "mixed parentage" also offers a sly hint, Ray being, in a sense, a less than benign kind of foster father to Humbert as he recreates his life and voice. The phrase "dark innerside" evokes the subliminal nature of a whole stratum of the novel's clues (discussed below). Finally, John Ray's connection to *John Lovely* of "*Who's Who in the Limelight*" in Chapter 8 receives an early mention here in the word "lovely." Humbert follows some

details of his boyhood and his lost treasure Annabel with a conclusive insight in Chapter 4 that parodies Freudian theory about the lasting impact of early trauma:

> I am convinced, however, that in a certain magic and fateful way Lolita began with Annabel.
>
> I also know that the shock of Annabel's death consolidated the frustration of that nightmare summer, made of it a permanent obstacle to any further romance throughout the cold years of my youth. (13–14)

H.H. clinches Annabel's connection to Lolita at the end of his account of his "unsuccessful first tryst" in which his "senses were [...] filled to the brim": "twenty-four years later, I broke her spell by incarnating her in another" (15). Here again we get several subtle authorial nudges: "certain" is a characteristic Ray locution ("certain morbid states" [3]; "a certain type of mind" [4]), "fateful" anticipates Aubrey McFate, "frustration" contains a phonetic echo of Ray's surname, "senses" echoes Ray's book title, and "incarnating her in another" resonates with Quilty's resurrection as Clarence Clark.

Echoes of Ray's vocabulary and phraseology are not rare in Humbert's story. In the first four chapters of Part I, Ray's "certain morbid states," "Save for the correction of obvious solecisms," "ponderously capricious," and "vigilance and vision" become, in Humbert's mouth, "a certain initial girl-child," "save for a pocket of warmth," "poetically superstitious," and "vicious vigilance." By informing us that H.H. "planned to take a degree in psychiatry" before switching to English literature, Nabokov allows us to account for Ray and Humbert's common familiarity with the faith of Freud. Even so, the sheer number of echoes of Ray's Foreword in the vocabulary and phrasing of Chapter 5 is striking.[27] Humbert even mentions Massachusetts, the state where Ray composes the Foreword, and cites British legislation from 1933, the year of Woolsey's decision cited by Ray. Similarly, Humbert's language resonates

27. Perfect matches between Humbert's words and Ray's in the Foreword include "social workers," "certain" (repeated), "nature," "the reader," "Of course," "community," "entranced," "great" (repeated), "normal" (repeated), "despair," "come under," "mind" (repeated), "child" (repeated), "fateful," "adult," "males," "world" (repeated), "poignant," "senses," "wayward child," "intact," and "development." Overlapping language with slight variation includes H.H.'s "mysterious," "attractive," "artist," and "madman" for Ray's "mystery," "attractiveness," "art," and "maniac" and H.H.'s "tenderness," "magic," "surprised," and "generally" for Ray's "tendresse," "magically," "surprised," and "general." Ray's "case," "perversions," "ferocity," and "gentleman" become in Chapter 5 "cases," "perverse," "fierceness," and "gentlemen."

with Ray's in the final paragraphs of the novel, with Humbert reproducing Ray's vocabulary in the use of "vivid," "poignant," "publication," "obvious," "decision," and "wish" (308–9). Ray's phrases "throbs through his confession," "demented diarist," and "better generation" become, in Humbert's mouth "throbs through my writing hand," "demented giant," and "later generations" (309). Note as well the distinctive repetition of the third person impersonal pronoun and the linking rhyme in the phrases "one would have to forego [...] one might ineptly accuse" (4–5) and "One had to choose [...] one wanted H.H. to exist [...]" (309). But most of the evidence presented thus far of Ray's conspiracy is hardly subliminal; Nabokov himself directs us to many more glowing secrets.

IV

As has already been suggested, Nabokov employs his cryptic clues at different levels—often at the level of the chapter, paragraph, or sentence, but also at the level of the phrase, the individual word, or even the letter. For example, one type of submerged clue that demonstrates just how much Humbert is "covered with Quilty" is Nabokov's almost ubiquitous use of words with the letters "q" and "cu." Like fingerprints or graffiti, these signs of Quilty's lurking presence appear most conspicuously on two of Quilty's fictitious license plates ("Q32888" and "CU88322" [251]) found among the puzzles and cryptograms Quilty leaves for Humbert in the "paper chase" trail, but they litter the entire novel.[28] Less common, but nevertheless persistent, are the triple c's of Clarence Choate Clark's initials that recur fairly regularly in the alliteration of which Nabokov is so fond. Like Humbert's name, which Nabokov chose not only for its nasty suggestive rumble but also for its potential to be used in various puns (*SO* 26), John Ray's name lends itself to a variety of uses in *Lolita*. Ray's last name resounds in the widespread occurrence of words with phonetic elements rhyming with "Ray"—words like "great," "strange," "operations," "rapist," and "radio." (Recall that Nabokov has Ray point to the rhyming device early in the Foreword: "'Haze' only rhymes with the heroine's real surname.") Also throughout *Lolita*, among the pointers Nabokov employs to repeatedly invoke Ray as a fateful agent are phonetic and visual puns on "Poling," "cross," and "x" (significantly, Nabokov renders "shadowgraphs" in his Russian translation of *Lolita* as "'rengenovskie snimki' – X Rays" [Salazkina]), as well as references

28. I would extend Tammi's comment that "virtually any combination with *Q* comes to suggest Quilty's presence in the margin of Humbert's narrative" (280) to include the "cu" combination as well.

to radios, light and its effects, and "graphs" of various sorts.[29] As to Ray's first name, the peculiar prevalence of variants of "John" in Humbert's memoir offers Nabokov many opportunities to covertly invoke the editor's vanity and his involvement in Humbert's life. Jean and John Farlow ("Jean" is "John" in French, of course), the Jacks, Jackies, Johns, and Johnnys, including the "jack" Humbert thinks of asking Quilty for at one point, albino Jack Humbertson, even (especially, since he hints that H.H. is a hybrid of sorts) Jean-Jacques Humbert—all may be seen as playful namesakes, the literary progeny, of John Ray.[30] Such subliminal clues as these in *Lolita* complement Nabokov's well known use of lepidoptera as markers of authorial presence and power operative at critical points in his character's lives.[31]

At the extreme end of obscurity lies the type of clue exemplified by the embedded "Clare, Clare Q" in Clark's name in the Foreword and the hidden "Beale" in "Beardsley," a kind of trace I call a "shadowgraph." It seems appropriate to call such cryptograms shadowgraphs; like the shadowgraphs Lolita reports in the chapter with Nabokov's fourth secret point ("We made shadow-

29. To take just a few examples: unwittingly invoking Ray's book on the senses once more, Humbert gets "*in touch* with a private detective, an *ex*-pugilist" who, after taking Humbert's money, checks "*nonsense* data" for two years; foreshadowing the ex-pugilist's sting is the extortion at the hands of an "*ex*-detective" in Paris who "had served in the *pol*ice"; in the middle of Hourglass Lake, Humbert (a puppet watching puppets) knows "*ex*actly" who the puppets working on the far shore are: one is a retired *pol*iceman of *Pol*ish descent"; during Humbert's last meeting with Dolly, "an afterwork *radio*" sings "of folly and fate"; at the Enchanted Hunters, Humbert says "*a skeleton glow* came through the Venetian blind from the outside *arclights*; these *intercrossed rays* penetrated the darkness of the bedroom and revealed the [...] situation."

30. A particularly nice example of Ray's "toying" with H.H. follows the "hitting the *jack*pot clatter" of coins returned to Humbert in a phone booth immediately after he learns that Lolita is in fact on a hike he had earlier fabricated for the Farlows (100), when Humbert is made to wonder "if this sudden discharge, this spasmodic refund, was not correlated somehow, *in the mind of McFate*, with my having invented that little expedition before ever learning of it as I did now" (107).

31. In addition to such lepidopteral references in *Lolita* noted by Appel (327), I would include more abstract images such as the "doors open like wings" on the Packard that kills Charlotte, the "millions of so-called 'millers'" Humbert sees as he returns alone to the motel in Elphinstone after leaving Lolita at the hospital, and the moths in H.H.'s headlights as he drives to and from Pavor Manor the night before he confronts Quilty. See also notes 43, 44, 74, and related discussion in the essay.

graphs. Gee, what fun" [114]), these puzzles reveal (to eyes that cannot unsee them) the letters of hidden names embedded in a matrix of surrounding text just as the radiograph or X-ray reveals the bones within the flesh.[32] Lolita's comment is pointedly recalled by H.H. at the close of Chapter 30 of Part II in wording and imagery that links Ray's scheme, Humbert's heart condition, tantalization, the resurrection theme, subliminal subtexts, Quilty's ingenious play, and a Proustian echo:

> Some way further *across* the street, neon *lights* flickered *twice slower than my heart*: the outline of a restaurant sign, a large coffee-pot, kept bursting, every full second or so, into emerald life, and every time it went out, pink *letters saying* Fine Foods *relayed* it, but the pot could still be made out as a *latent shadow teasing the eye* before its next emerald *resurrection*. We made *shadowgraphs*. This furtive burg was not far from *The Enchanted Hunters*. I was weeping again, drunk on the *impossible past*." (282)

Quilty's name hiding in the word "quietly" in one of the more famous passages of the novel[33] qualifies as a shadowgraph as I use the term, and there are also dozens of examples of the letters of John Ray's surname repeatedly occurring in clustered words or phrases which attract the eye of a reader searching for clues in response to Nabokov's persistent needling. For instance, in the passage above, Ray's name is embedded twice as a shadowgraph, the two cryptograms spaced, like the blinking light, at an interval of a "full second or so."[34] Here Nabokov literally puts Ray's double name up in lights while

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32. Dolinin comments on Nabokov's planting of Lear's name in a "lyrical passage" with a Shakespearean subtext in Part II's Chapter 32 where Humbert recalls rocking Lo/Cordelia in his "marb**LE AR**ms" ("*Lolita* in Russian" 325–26).

33. Proffer, discussing Humbert's near revelation of Quilty's name to the reader after Lolita reveals it to him ("Quietly the fusion took place" [272]) comments: "*Quietly*, of course, is a phonetic and visual imitation of Quilty" (75).

34. "pink lette**R**s s**AY**ing Fine Foods **R**el**AY**ed it"— Such a trace would seem to be a variant forerunner of Nabokov's use of an acrostic composed of the initial letters of words in the last paragraph of "The Vane Sisters" to reveal a spectral message, and, in the same story, the initial letters of words in a phrase of the narrator "to incorporate the signature of the first dead sister: S-y-b-i-l" as noted by Tammi (295). Not infrequently, as in the present case, Nabokov locates the shadowgraph in a related image. Another such subliminal reference to Ray (complete with degree) can be seen in the "agent of fate"

flashing accompanying hints: "twice," "letters saying," the alliterative pair of capital F's, and the phrase "teasing the eye."

It might be objected that some of the patterns to which I assign significance merely reflect the paroxysms of a fevered brain having contracted Humbert's paranoia. No doubt there are happy coincidences; I can only repeat that the book itself unremittingly encourages and rewards such scrutiny. Over and over we are bombarded with allusions to the acts of writing, altering, revising, changing, mimicking, arranging, parodying, disguising, deceiving, displacing, faking, replacing—literary creation and language play of all kinds—and the need to interpret such play. Humbert says of his diary: "I wrote it *really* twice […] with many *erasures* and corrections" (40); Pratt tells us that Lolita enjoys "private jokes of her own, transposing for instance the first letters of some of her teachers' names" (195); in an aside to Lolita, Humbert breathes, "I have camouflaged everything, my love" (267). On the day Humbert discovers Lolita's obliteration of Quilty's license number, a clear foreshadowing of the fanciful license plates in the "paper chase," his minute observations of her obfuscations contain a solid authorial poke to the reader:

> I have to go into those details (which in themselves can interest only a professional psychologue) because otherwise the reader (ah, if I could visualize him as a blond-bearded scholar with rosy lips sucking *la pomme de sa canne* as he quaffs my manuscript!) might not understand the quality of the shock I experienced upon noticing that the P had acquired the bustle of a B and that the 6 had been deleted altogether. The rest, with erasures revealing the hurried shuttle smear of a pencil's rubber end, and with parts of numbers obliterated or reconstructed in a child's hand, presented a tangle of barbed wire to any logical interpretation. (226)

The echoes of Ray's surname in "erasures" and "obliterated," the shadowgraph of Ray's name in a phrase that describes him,[35] and the suggestive "reconstructed" can all be read as pointing to Clark's editor of choice, just as "quaffs," "quality," and "acquired" evoke Quilty. The shock H.H. experiences

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passage quoted above, in which Humbert takes Beale for "p**R**ecise f**A**te, that s**Y**nchronizing **Ph**antom, mixe**D** […]." More compact examples, often suggestively placed, include words like "really," "crazy," and "already," words where the name appears in contiguous letters in order ("arrayed, "betrayed," and "gray" are favorites), words that pun on the name itself, ("'Ray,' said Lo for hurray"), and even anagrammatic words with the letters scrambled like the husbands in one of "Pym, Roland"'s stage credits (see below) as in "wary" "angry," and "diary."

35. "p**R**ofession**A**l ps**Y**chologue"

when he discovers Lolita's revisions (like his shock of realization in the barber's chair in Kasbeam [213]) is the inverse of the reader's pleasurable surprise when recognizing the artful beauties of the novel.

Overlooking such camouflage leads to Connolly's judgment that "'the cryptogrammic paper chase' [...] provides little more illumination for the reader than it does for Humbert" (56). But by performing manipulations rather similar to the transpositions Lolita practices on her teachers' names, the reader can be well ahead of Humbert by the time he observes, in the "paper chase" of Part II's Chapter 23, that among the "verbal phantoms turning, perhaps, into living vacationists" is one "Johnny Randall, Ramble, Ohio."[36] Even clearer is Ray's subliminal claim to have freely given us "Dr. Gratiano Forbeson, Mirandola, NY,"[37] "your brother," Mary Lore tells Humbert. As Nabokov has Ray tell us in the Foreword, "a great work of art [...] should come as a more or less shocking surprise." With these overt and covert pointers in mind, I turn now to an examination of the "nerves of the novel" themselves. For the most part, my examination focuses on the chapters containing Nabokov's "secret points," but I will also refer along the way to some other key passages "the subliminal co-ordinates" illuminate (the book's final chapters among them), in a somewhat detailed but by no means exhaustive analysis of Ray's involvement in the novel's plot.

V

Mr. Taxovich, Nabokov's first nerve of the novel, appears in Chapter 8 of Part I as the man who takes Valeria away from H.H. in an early skirmish with fate where Humbert's cruelty and vanity are on full view even if certain subliminal hints are more obscure. Declining to "beat her up in the street," Humbert contemplates "hurting her very horribly" in private, but never gets the chance, and tells us his "little revenge" is only realized with the news of Valeria's death in childbirth years later. When Valeria tells H.H. of the other man in her life, H.H. makes clear that it is not the loss of Valeria that bothers him so much as Valeria's audacity in challenging his prerogatives:

> here she was, Valeria, the comedy wife, brazenly preparing to dispose in her own way of my comfort and fate. I demanded her lover's name. I repeated my question; but she kept up a burlesque babble, discoursing on her unhappiness with me and announcing plans for an immediate divorce. "*Mais qui est-ce?*" I shouted at last, striking her on the knee with my fist; and she, without even wincing, stared at me as if the answer were

36. "**JOHN**n**Y Ra**ndall"
37. "**GRATI**ano Forbe**S**on, Mi**RA**ndola, N**Y**"

> too simple for words, then gave a quick shrug and pointed at the thick neck of the taxi driver. He pulled up at a small café and introduced himself. I do not remember his ridiculous name but after all those years I remember him clearly—a stocky White Russian ex-colonel with a bushy mustache and a crew cut; there were thousands of them plying that fool's trade in Paris. (28)

Besides portraying H.H.'s vanity and cruelty here, Nabokov establishes a major Humbertian failing—missing the obvious. Rather conspicuously, the Taxovich episode prefigures Humbert's loss of Lolita to Quilty: farther down the page, H.H. says Taxovich spoke of Valeria "as if she were a kind of little ward that was in the act of being transferred, for her own good, from one wise guardian to another even wiser one." Taxovich anticipates Quilty by following Humbert and Valeria in a car, by speaking bad French, by seeming "to be *all over* the place at once," by *not* flushing the toilet, by being "broad-shouldered," and by seeming to be made of "*pig* iron" ("Where is the hog now?" [276]). The "ingenious play staged for [Humbert] by Quilty" is foreshadowed by H.H.'s reference to the ex-colonel's manners "as a small sideshow in the theatricals I had been inveigled in"; the backhand slap Humbert fails to give Valeria "across the cheekbone" is the one he brutally administers to Lolita's "hot, hard little cheekbone" at the picnic ground just beyond Wace (227); more obviously, of course, Valeria's dying in childbirth points to Dolly Schiller's sad end.

Not so obvious are subliminal pointers to the powers of McFate in the Taxovich episode. In addition to the covert allusion to Vivian Darkbloom's biography ("I repeated *my q* […]") and the play on "Clare" in "clearly," the quoted passage's fingerprints of Ray and Quilty visible or audible in "brazenly," "question," "*qui*," "quick," "ridiculous," "quite," "*ex*-colonel," "cut," and "trade" are just a sample of the chapter's more than sixty combined references to the two kinsmen. Also not to be overlooked is the lepidopteral metaphor used to express the deterioration of Humbert and Valeria's marriage: "moth holes had appeared in the plush of matrimonial comfort." But it is near the end of the chapter that pointers to the McFate conspiracy pile up—some starkly clear, others extremely obscure. The name "Percy Elphinstone" of course foreshadows another of the novel's "secret points," the fateful terminus where Humbert loses Lolita. The triple initials of Clarence Choate Clark nest comfortably among the Roman numerals of the publication year of the Dickens set where they are matched with three X's ("N.Y., G.W. Dillingham, Publisher, MDCCCLXXXVII"). Of the novel's three main characters, only Clare Quilty's name in *Who's Who in the Limelight* is free of disguise, Lolita and Humbert (ostensibly) being represented by "Dolores Quine" and "Roland Pym." Among the coded references in the dramatic credits radiating

light into many dark corners of the novel, Nabokov scatters several of Ray's fingerprints ("training," "Strange" (repeated), "collaboration," "Strangers") and provides a cluster of shadowgraphs of Ray's name,[38] the first visible in the transposed name of Roland Pym, thus overlapping his identity with Humbert's. The titles of *Who's Who*'s stage credits for Pym point to a number of "his many [subliminal] appearances" in the novel.[39] As Taxovich's chapter concludes, Humbert directly instructs Clarence Clark not to correct a "slip of [his] pen" in Dolores Quine's entry where he writes "disappeared" for "appeared." The instruction to Clark and the slip itself, "disappeared," at once remind us of Clark's authority over the manuscript and foreshadow both Lolita's vanishing and, in another sense, Humbert's own. Humbert may think

38. In addition to **R**ol**A**nd P**Y**m's name, shadowgraphs of Ray's surname occur in "Elsino**R**e Pl**AY**house," "D**R**e**A**ming of **Y**ou," "Bo**R**n in Oce**A**n Cit**Y**," "tu**R**ned to pl**AY**writing," "Mush**R**oom, F**A**therl**Y**," "othe**R**s. His m**A**n**Y**," "a**R**e not**A**ble. Little N**Y**mph," "photog**RA**ph**Y**," "Bo**R**n in 1882, in D**AY**ton," "Ame**R**ic**A**n Academ**Y**," "Fi**R**st pl**AY**ed," and "thi**R**ty pl**AY**s."

39. Ray's name in Pym's "debut," *Sunburst*, is easily spotted: "Then came two or three dim **RAY**s of hope—before the ultimate *sunburst*" (90); Ray's name resonates in a description of Jean Farlow's portrait of her niece, *The Girl in Green*: "I remember *praising* [...] little Rosaline Honeck, a rosy honey in a Girl Scout uniform, *beret* of green worsted, belt of green webbing" (79); *Scrambled Husbands* points to Humbert's replacement of Harold Haze, in a line where a sly reference to Ray's rewriting of Humbert's memoirs ("replica") is followed by a Ray shadowgraph: "I felt no special urge to supply the Humbert line with a replica of Harold's production (Lolita, with an incestuous thrill, I had grown to **R**eg**A**rd as *m***Y** child)" (80); at the end of Humbert's interview with Pratt, *The Strange Mushroom* (the adjective being a shadowgraph in "strangle") brackets shadowgraphs of Ray's double name tellingly combined with the suggestive "doctor" and an "x" pun: "Should I marry Pratt and *strang*le her? '...And perhaps you**R** f**A**mil**Y** *doctor* might like to *ex*amine he**R** physic**A**ll**Y**—just a routine check-up. She is in *Mushroom*'" (197); *John Lovely*'s appearance anticipates Mushroom: "'you should have you**R** f**A**mil**Y** *doctor* tell her the facts of life and [...] allow her to enjoy the company of her schoolmates' brothers at the *Junior* Club or in Dr. Rigger's organization, or in the *lovely* homes of our pa**R**ents.' 'She m**AY** meet boys in her own *lovely* home,' I said" (195); *I Was Dreaming of You* is echoed in a number of passages, but its funniest incarnation is Humbert's nightmare of "gratuitous and horribly exhausting congress with a small hairy hermaphrodite, a total *stranger*," an image discussed below in connection with secret point number four. See notes 60 and 61.

he has "only words to play with," but the novel is thronged with playmates with their hands in the game.

Nabokov follows the evocations of Ray and Quilty/Clark at the end of the Taxovich chapter with a tangle of innuendo in the digressive skaz of Chapter 9, in which seemingly gratuitous nonsense obliquely refers to the secret plot of *Lolita*. Out of Humbert's mouth come subtle allusions to the Poling Prize winner's inventiveness when he tells us a "soft job fate offered [...] consisted mainly of *thinking up and editing* perfume ads" (32) and when on his "*ex*pedition" into "*pol*ar regions" he says he "concocted a perfectly *spurious* and very *racy* report." (34). The initials of the eminent Clarence Choate Clark appear in close proximity to one of Humbert's "favorite *doctors*, a *c*harming *c*ynical *c*hap," a kinsman of the leader of the expedition, and the triple c's wink once more in a teasing reference to mysterious powers when Humbert tells us Bert, a minor double of H.H.'s, "maintained that the *big men* on our team, *the real leaders we never saw*, were mainly engaged in *c*hecking the influence of *c*limatic amelioration on the *c*oats of the artic fox" (33). The chapter contains many characteristic Nabokovian taunts and teases: Humbert sits "on a boulder under a completely *translucent sky* (*through which*, however, *nothing of importance showed*)";[40] the expedition "may have been tracking to its lair (somewhere on Prince of Wales' Island, I understand) the wandering and wobbly north magnetic *pole*," but "was not *really* concerned with Victoria Island copper or anything like that, as I learned later from *my genial doctor*; for the nature of its real purpose was what is termed 'hush-hush,'[41] and so let me add merely that whatever it was, that purpose was *admirably*[42] achieved" (34).

Oblivious to inimical forces, cockily confident Humbert prattles on, mocked by McFate. The repetition of "admirably" farther down the page prompts the reader not to miss the lepidopteral pun: the red admiral or admirable butterfly, as Appel reminds us in connection with Nabokov cameo "fat, powdered Mrs. Leigh (born Vanessa van Ness),"[43] "figures throughout

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40. By having Humbert deny significance, Nabokov invites us to look for ourselves: "t**RA**nslucent sk**Y**."

41. Near the novel's end, Nabokov nods in the direction of this chapter when Humbert tells Mrs. Chatfield that Lo "had just married a b**R**illi**A**n**t** **Y**oung mining engineer with a *hush-hush* job in the Northwest" (290), a pointer supporting Humbert's thrice-repeated "Canada" at the Schillers (274).

42. "admi**RA**bl**Y**"

43. The likelihood of Mrs. Leigh's impersonating Nabokov is reinforced by Humbert's attempt to escape the "**VI**cious **VI**gil**AN**ce of her family" (14). The admirable reappears on the tennis courts of the Champion Hotel, followed closely by yet another suspicious character in a bit part. See notes 31 and 74.

Nabokov" (335). Even the promiscuous "nutritionist […] a Dr. Anita Johnson," turns out to be a double agent.[44] Especially telling irony accompanies Humbert's reassurances to the reader following another "bout with insanity":

> I owe my *complete restoration* to a discovery I made *while being treated* at that particular very expensive sanatorium. 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 allowing them the slightest glimpse of one's *real* sexual *predicament* (34).

Echoing both Ray's Foreword ("classic") and Quilty's "I know all the ropes," Humbert's claims are a mirror image of the real situation: it is dream-extortionist Ray who trifles with Humbert in the fakery of his "completely restored" memoirs, invented for the consumption of the gullible reading public and for the delight of the perceptive. Given the clustering subliminal traces of both Cue and Ray in the above passage,[45] there is good reason to suspect that the "powerful newcomer, a displaced (and, surely, *deranged*) celebrity, known for his knack of making patients believe they had witnessed their own conception" (34–35) is both the "father" of Humbert and the arranger of Lolita and Valeria's deaths "in childbed."

Nabokov's second secret point, the Ramsdale School class list, appears in Chapter 11. Humbert's introduction of "[*e*]*x*hibit number two," his resurrected pocket diary, points to Ray and Quilty. Humbert's description of the diary is suggestive: "bound in black *imitation* leather," a product of Massachusetts (the home state of Roland Pym and Ray's Foreword), written "really twice." In addition to these veiled references to Ray's scheme, Nabokov embeds subliminal credit by the repetition of "really," a convenient word to contain Ray's name, and by having Humbert invoke the resurrection motif:

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44. The double name of Rita in the expedition's "nut**RIT**ionist […] **A** D**R**. An**ITA** Johnson" anticipates her lepidoptera-laced appearance in the skaz of Part II's Chapter 26, picked up by Humbert "one dep**RA**ved Ma**Y** evening" "under the sign of the Tiger*moth*," his "*senses* very slightly stirred." Rita's brother, a "*pol*itician, mayor and booster of his *grain*-handling home town" pays "his *great* little sister" to stay out of "*great* little *Grain*ball City," but Rita is drawn "*Grain*ball-ward" in a "*fatal* attraction," "'going round and round,' as she *phrased* it, 'like a God-damn mulberry *moth*'" (258–59).

45. In "parti*cu*lar," "*ex*pensive," "*cu*nningly," "trade," "dream-*ex*tortionists," and "s*ex*ual."

"what we *ex*amine now (by courtesy of a photographic memory) is but [the diary's] brief materialization, a puny unfledged phoeni*x*" (40). The reader with an eidetic memory will notice that Humbert's language in Chapter 11 parallels language in *Who's Who in the Limelight* and the Foreword: H.H. writes "on the leaves of what is *commercially* known as a 'typewriter tablet'" (Quilty "[s]tarted on a *commercial* career" [31]); Humbert says "[t]he reader may check the weather data in the Ramsdale *Journal* for 1947" (Nabokov's italics) just as Ray refers the inquisitive reader to "the daily papers for September–October 1952" (4); in the next sentence, Humbert's phrase "A few days before" echoes Ray's reference to the diarist's death "*a few days before* his trial was scheduled to start" (3). Like the Taxovich chapter with its prefiguring of Quilty's theft of Lolita, Humbert's dream in Chapter 11 offers a foreglimpse of Humbert as bungling assassin, with "one bullet after another feebly drop[ping] on the floor from the sheepish muzzle" of the gun he aims "at a bland, quietly interested enemy" (47). More explicitly, in Humbert's diary entry for a Monday, Nabokov has Humbert characterize himself as "Ray-like" (50), and supports the link with a chorus of words with either internal phonetic rhymes with "Ray" or the embedded name itself.[46] Nabokov intertwines the subliminal references to Ray with Humbert's notions of fate. Humbert wants to go to the lake. Tuesday's brief entry mentions adverse weather (Humbert has frequent need of a *rain*-coat in the novel) and poses the question, "Is it Fate scheming?" In the last sentence of the entry for Wednesday, Humbert says he "*prayed* we would never get to that store, but we did."

Thursday's diary entry contains the class list itself, which links Ray's name with that of Aubrey McFate. Ray's first name is reproduced in the Jack and John of young Beale and Cowan, his last name echoed in the first name on the list, Grace Angel. In Humbert's rhapsodically ambiguous paean to Lolita's name immediately following the class list, Nabokov's taunting voice blends with Humbert's while masking John Ray's:

> A poem, a poem, forsooth! So *strange* and sweet was it to discover this "Haze, Dolores" (she!) in its special bower of names, with its bodyguard of roses—a fairy princess between her two maids of honor. I am trying to analyze the spine-thrill of delight it gives me, this name among all those others. What is it that *ex*cites me almost to tears (hot, opalescent, thick tears that poets and lovers shed)? What is it? The tender anonymity of this name with its formal veil ("Dolores") and that abstract transposition

46. "Rainy," "traced," "prey," "refrigerator," "radio," "gray," and "tray." On the page following the class list there are five more: "Grace," "strangers," "demonstrations," "brave," and "rage."

> of first name and surname, which is like a pair of new pale gloves or a mask? Is "mask" the keyword? Is it because there is always delight in the *semitranslucent mystery*, the flowing charshaf, through which the flesh and the eye you alone are elected to know smile in passing at you alone? (52–53)

Humbert's paroxysm is brought on by "Haze, Dolores"; Nabokov (and perhaps we can also hear Ray chortling in the background) in a quieter undertone takes pleasure in other quite different names. "Mask" is the keyword, and not only because it applies to the masked author, as Appel notes (362). In the following chapter, Humbert assigns the name Aubrey McFate to the inventive devil arranging his fortunes, but it is Nabokov (via Ray) who places the name in the Ramsdale class list without Humbert's having seemed to notice. In the list itself, a nice bit of symmetry cozily flanks "McFate, Aubrey," like Dolores with her "bodyguard of roses," with two companions whose names contain, as the name itself does, the scrambled letters of Ray's surname (Vivian McCrystal and Anthony Miranda). Furthermore, close inspection of Humbert's attempt to analyze his spine-thrill reveals Ray's subliminal name itself flanking "Haze, Dolores" with the phonetic rhyme "strange" and the shadowgraph following "bodyguard"[47] followed by three others.[48] Finally, by having Humbert emphasize "that abstract transposition of first name and surname," Nabokov redirects the reader's eye to "McFate, Aubrey" and the chime Ray's name makes with its final syllable. It is perhaps worth noting that in the class list, in addition to one of the names of Lolita's "maids of honor" (Mary Rose Hamilton, the other being girl in green Rosaline Honeck) and Aubrey McFate and his "bodyguards," the only other names which contain all the letters of Ray's surname are associated with significant actors in the plot: Mary Beale's father runs over Charlotte; Marguerite Byron's father supplies Humbert's ineffectual drugs.

Nabokov strews the path to his third subliminal coordinate, Charlotte saying "waterproof," with coy phrases hinting at artistic camouflage,[49] puns, phonetic echoes and shadowgraphs of Ray's name intermixed with Quilty's

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47. "**R**oses—**A** fair**Y**"

48. "t**R**ying to **A**nal**Y**ze," "tende**R A**non**Y**mity," "semit**RA**nslucent m**Y**stery"

49. In addition to the ones discussed, phrases such as "fictional gesture," "notice the falsity," "distinguish at once a false intonation," "hear a false note," "merged with the light and shade," "could be distinguished," "near enough to witness," "just far enough not to observe," "too far to distinguish," "stark lucidity," "trying to see things," "examined," and "concealment, spying."

fingerprints,[50] and words resonating with the Foreword's vocabulary[51] and subject matter. *Jean* Farlow, "in *qu*est of rare *light effects* [. . .] had seen Leslie taking a dip 'in the ebony' (as *John* had *qu*ipped) at five o'clock in the morning last Sunday."[52] After Humbert remarks that the water "'must have been *qu*ite cold," Charlotte offers a rich cluster of compact references to Ray's scheme: "'That is not *the point*,' said the logical doomed dear. 'He is *subnormal*, *you see*. And,' she continued (in that *carefully phrased way* of hers that was beginning to tell on my health), 'I have a very definite feeling our *Louise* is in love with that moron'" (82). Charlotte's verbal gestures ("the point," "you see," "carefully phrased way"), her play on "subliminal" ("subnormal"), the phonetic echo of Ray's surname ("phrased"), and the chime with Windmuller's daughter's name from the Foreword ("Louise") provide a cozy niche for Ray's name and degree in shadowgraph form.[53] A little farther down the page Nabokov employs capital letters to draw the reader's eye to Ray's shadowgraph in Charlotte's tossed off sequel: "'Are you bothered by Romantic Associations?' queried my wife—in allusion to her first surrender." Three pages later, Charlotte literally throws herself into the effort: "Charlotte flung herself *forward* with a *great* splash" (85). As he rationalizes his inability to drown Charlotte, Humbert's reflections on the nature of sex offenders and social mores are strongly reminiscent of Ray's vocabulary and his remarks on similar subjects in the Foreword (4–5):

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50. Besides the ones cited, puns and echoes of "Ray" and "X-ray" include "trained," "raise," "exhalation," "straight," "training," "expression," "ingratiating," "Excuse," "operator" (repeated), "explosive," "except," "train" (repeated), "exactly," "gravely," "strangers," "rape," "integrated," "extended," "examined" (repeated), "trail," and "traitor." Shadowgraphs of Ray's name in single words alone include "mortally," "cranky," "certainly," "really," "rapidly," the delicious "coronary," "gravely," "practically," and "generally." Invocations of Quilty include "cut," "quizzical," "queried," "obscure," "qui," "Excuse," "accuracy," "concubine," "Lacour" (anticipating and punning on "*Laqueue*" (290), "miraculous," "curve," "curtain," "clearly," "quite" (repeated), "innocuous," "inadequate," "coquettishly," and "his nephew."

51. Puns on the "Poling Prize" include "policeman," "Polish," and "police"; "child," "taste," "crime," "certain," "surprise," "fatal," "star," "coronary," "1947," "nature," and "community" all appear in the Foreword; Humbert uses approximate words such as "male," "ghost," "classical," "scientist," "gentlemen," "throbbing," and "adults" for Ray's "males," "ghosts," "classic," "scientific," "gentleman," "throbs," and "adult."

52. "mo**R**ning l**A**st Sunda**Y**"

53. "He is subno**R**m**A**l, **Y**ou see [. . .] **Ph**rase**D**"

> were I still to go through with the ordeal, her *ghost* would haunt me all my life. Perhaps if the year were 1447 instead of *1947* I might have hoodwinked my gentle *nature* by administering her some *classical* poison from a hollow agate, some *tender* philter of death. But in our middle-class nosy era it would not have come off [...]. Nowadays you have to be a *scientist* if you want to be a killer. [...] Ladies and *gentlemen* of the jury, the majority of sex offenders that hanker for some *throbbing*, sweet-moaning, physical but not necessarily coital, relation with a *girl-child*, are innocuous, inadequate, passive, timid strangers who merely ask the *community* to allow them to pursue their practically harmless, so-called aberrant behavior [...] without the *pol*ice and society cracking down upon them. (87–88)

As the chapter concludes, the "waterproof" passage itself pointedly teases the reader, offers portents of Humbert's future, and indicates other passages which Nabokov playfully marks as "key" in more ways than one. Jean's examination of Charlotte's gift and her placement of Humbert's hand "palm up" juxtaposed with Nabokov's nudge in Charlotte's "You could see anything that way" suggest reading H.H.'s palm for his future and scanning the text for surprising discoveries. Bracketing Charlotte's fish-mouthed word, Jean Farlow's "I even noticed something you *overlooked* [...] your *wrist watch*" and "He is *really* a *freak*, that man" (89) anticipate the showdown at Pavor Manor where Humbert discovers a key he "had overlooked," Quilty tries to bribe Humbert with an "exciting little freak," and H.H. "consult[s] [his] wrist watch" with its missing crystal, itself a suggestion of lost time.[54] As to the authorship of the book's concluding chapters, Quilty offers the most pointed indication as he tries to make a deal with Humbert. Quilty says he is "ready

54. By the time Humbert's watch loses its crystal (in which Ray's scrambled surname hides) both the watch and Humbert have ceased to be "waterproof." As the agent of McFate, Ray repeatedly plagues Humbert with bad weather, metaphorically enveloping him in "a number of *great* thunderstorms—or perhaps, there was but one single storm which progressed *across* country in *ponderous* frogleaps and which we could not shake off just as we could not shake off detective Trapp"; Humbert drives away from the Schillers' "through the drizzle of the dying day, with the windshield wipers in full action but unable to cope with [his] tears" and gets bogged down in mud taking a short cut; walking for help he gets soaked by rain, not having "the strength to go back for a macintosh"; on the morning of Quilty's execution, a "thunderstorm accompanie[s him] most of the way," and in an image that parallels his feeling "all covered with Quilty," he stands ignored on Quilty's stairs, "a *raincoated* phantasm," thoroughly "covered" by Ray.

to make unusual *amends*" (301), echoing Humbert's wonderful "*all this amended*, perhaps" in the chapter with Nabokov's second "secret point" (47). He goes on to offer Humbert Pavor Manor, "gratis," and "also gratis, as house pet, a rather exciting little freak, a young lady with three breasts, one a dandy [...] a rare and delightful marvel of nature."[55] Perhaps Quilty deserves resurrection as a reward for his sly puns pointing to the subliminal subplot: "*soyons rai*[...]" and "to borrow and to borrow and to borrow [...]."[56] Quilty follows up the offer of the little freak and his wardrobe with his erotica collection:

> Just to mention one item: the in folio de-lu*x*e *Bagration Island* by the *ex*plorer and *psychoanalyst* Melanie Weiss, a remarkable lady, a remarkable work—drop that gun—with photographs of eight hundred and something male organs she *ex*amined and measured in 1932 on *Bagration*, in the Barda Sea, *very illuminating graphs*, *plotted* with love under pleasant skies—drop that gun—and moreover I can *arrange* for you to attend *execu*tions, not everybody knows that the chair is painted yellow— [57] (302)

Between his next two bullets on the same page Humbert is inconvenienced by the "key [he] had overlooked."[58] Gesturing toward the mixed influences of Ray and Quilty, the "waterproof" passage subliminally links these agents of McFate

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55. "**GRATIS**, as house pet, a rather exciting little f**R**e**A**k, a **Y**oung lady with three b**R**easts, one **A** dand**Y**"

56. Appel notes "for this pun Quilty deserves to die" (448).

57. "*Ba***GRATI***on I***S***land* [...] *ex*plore**R A**nd ps**Y**choanalyst [...] **R**em**A**rkable lad**Y** [...] with **Ph**otographs of eight hundre**D** [...] Ba**GRATI**on, in the Barda **S**ea [...] gra**PH**s, plotte**D** **[**...] moreove**R** I c**A**n arrange for **Y**ou [...] chai**R** is p**A**inted **Y**ellow"

58. Proffer notes a clue parallel to "*Bagration Island*" in the "paper chase" hiding Quilty: "*Quel*quepar*t I*sland = Quilty" (16). Often when speaking of keys and keywords, Nabokov prompts us to look for Ray's subliminal signature in the text; e.g.: "When, throu**G**h deco**RATI**on**S** of *light and shade*, we d**R**ove up to 14 Th**AY**er Street, a *grave* little lad met us with the *keys* and a note from Gaston who had rented the house for us. My Lo, without **GRA**n**TI**ng her new **S**ur**R**oundings *one gl**A**nce*, *unseeingl**Y*** turned on the *radio* to which instinct led he**R A**nd la**Y** down on the livin**G R**oom sof**A** wi**T**h a batch of old magaz**I**ne**S** which in the same precise and *blind* manne**R** she l**A**nded b**Y** dipping her hand into the nethe**R A**natom**Y** of a *lamp* table" (176). This game is replayed on pages 53 ("Is 'mask' the *keyword*?"), 68 ("Do not forget to leave the *key* [...]. P**RAY** for me—if you ever p**RAY**.") and others.

by dropping hints to them in close proximity. Jean Farlow almost names Quilty ("Last time he told me a completely indecent story about his nephew. It appears—"), and Nabokov twice cryptically alludes to John Ray, first just before the "waterproof" passage ("Charlotte […] wanted to know if John was coming. He was") and again in the last line of Chapter 20 ("'Hullo there,' said John's voice").[59] Nabokov's "most inimical reader" (272) is subjected to some of the book's most strenuous taunting when Humbert, in his account of his final meeting with Lolita, simultaneously recalls Charlotte's "waterproof" and claims full artistic status and consciousness, a claim belied by Ray's manipulations.

Chapter 27 contains the scene in which Lolita walks in slow motion toward Humbert's gifts in the open suitcase, the author's fourth "secret point." This crucial chapter opens with one of the book's weirder and more perplexing

59. The arrival of "John's voice" at the end of Chapter 20 leads to a pattern of puns, allusions, echoes, and fingerprints pointing to McFate as ventriloquist in Chapter 21. Nabokov follows up the aforementioned "rays of hope" and "sunburst" (90) with echoes of Ray's name in "brain," "portrayed," "admiration," "depraved," and "razor," and throughout Chapter 21 pointedly makes Humbert repeat memorable words from the Foreword: "Mr. Clark's *decision*," "this *remarkable* memoir," "*shocking surprise*," "a *general* lesson," "*dangerous* trends." H.H. seeks "some *general* means to assert [himself] in a *general* way" and, while echoing Ray, at the same time opposes Nabokov's well-known preference for the specific when he says "I am concerned with a *general* trend" and "I can ignore the particular. I cannot ignore the *general*." "Surprise" is thrice repeated, as is "decide" following "decisions." Humbert's "educator" echoes Ray's "parents, social workers, *educators*" and Ray's "No doubt, he is horrible" and "As a case history, 'Lolita' will become, no doubt, a classic" resonates in Humbert's "the little table was ugly, *no doubt*." "Case" makes two appearances in tandem with the twice-repeated "razor" followed by the sly authorial taunt at the chapter's end: "*Remarkable* how difficult it is to conceal things." Between the closing reference to "John's voice" (89) in Chapter 20 and the reflection that "in near relatives the faintest gastric gurgle has the same 'voice'" (92) (Ray and Clark are cousins; Humbert calls Quilty his brother a couple of pages before Mary Lore reveals H.H.'s brotherly tie with Gratiano), Humbert makes the amusing claim to "have a small but distinct voice" (91). Quilty's fingerprints appear in "quality," "qui," "que," "quoi," "quand" (that serviceable French!), "laquered," "particular" (repeated), "quite," "inquired," "coquettish," and "quaint," and the catalogue of capitalized terms beginning with "C" (Camping, Campus, Canada, etc.) recalls once again the triple c's of Clarence Choate Clark's initials on the novel's opening page.

images,[60] the "gratuitous" nature of which becomes clear upon close inspection. In addition to shaping Humbert's conscious thoughts, Ray is giving him nightmares: "Still in Parkington. Finally, I did achieve an hour's slumber—from which I was aroused by gratuitous and horribly *ex*hausting congress with a small hairy hermaphrodite, a total *stranger*."[61] The icing on the subliminal cake of Ray's shadowgraph signature and the echo of his name in "stranger" is the subtle and witty use of "congress" to allude to the Washington location of Clarence Clark's bar, while "horribly" echoes the Foreword ("he is horrible") and the first syllable of "exhausting" puns on "X-ray." We hear the triple initials of Quilty's lawyerly incarnation when hag Holmes asks Humbert if he would "care to meet the camp counselors" and the c's pop up repeatedly in room 342 of The Enchanted Hunters in the phrases "changed, checked the pill vial in my coat," "Copper-colored, charming," and "cheapest of cheap cuties." In a typical nudge, Nabokov prompts our scrutiny of the secret point with Lo's "peering" at the "treasure box" and Humbert's wondering if there was "something wrong" with her vision. In the immediate context of Lolita's slow-motion walk, one finds the fingerprints of Ray and Quilty in "embrace," "cut," "great," "gray," "raised," "quite," "radiant," and "*quidquam*,"[62] and on the same page, in the flourish of a minor climax, we have this teasing dialogue:

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60. This passage has been the object of extensive debate on NABOKV-L. For a sampling, consult the Table of Contents in the archives for November, 1999, *passim*.

61. "**GRAT**u**I**tou**S** and horribly *ex*hausting cong**R**ess with **A** small hair**Y** herma**Ph**ro**D**ite"—See note 39 above.

62. The concentration of Ray and Cue's fingerprints in this chapter is remarkable. In addition to those already cited in the slow-motion scene (and if one catches yet another of Nabokov's hints, slowing one's pronunciation *in time with* Lolita's walk, Ray's name reverberates insistently in their stressed syllables), one hears Ray's name in "stranger," "respiration," "erased," "prey," "deliberation," "rapist," "afraid," "embrace," "rain," "deliberation" (again), "raised," "saturate," "brakes," "strangers," "exasperating," "concentrated," "drained," "graded," "gratefully," "raindrop," "grave," "crayfish," "crazy," "great," "strange" (repeated), "restraint," "frame," "deranged," "deliberation," "grape-blood," and "frail." Subliminal references to Quilty in the letters "q" and "cu" include "occurred," "quite" (repeated several times), "curiosity," "queue," "accursed," "miraculously," "particular," "curve," "squinting," "quote," "squatting," and "curls." There are also of course direct allusions to Quilty in "Camp Q, merry Camp Q," "a broad-shouldered driver," "Quilty," "lone diner," and "writer fellow in the Dromes ad."

"What's the katter with misses?" I muttered (word-control gone) into her hair.

"If you must know," she said, "you do it the wrong way."

"Show, wight ray."

"All in good time," responded the spoonerette. (120)

Since "wight" means "creature," the subliminal message of "Show, wight ray" is that eventually John Ray's presence in *Lolita* will become evident. Lo's "in good time" is heavily ironic given the confused calendar, however. Word-control gone, indeed![63]

Suggestive allusions to time cluster around the fourth secret point and implicate Ray as their source. These allusions build on the "Proust" motif introduced explicitly by Humbert in Chapter 5 in the context of his scholarly work on French literature, "the last volume of which was almost ready for press by the time of my arrest" (16). Those readers who recall that the French title of Proust's masterpiece includes "*temps perdu*" will most keenly appreciate the motif's relevance to the three "lost days" of *Lolita*'s endgame. Humbert alludes to the issue of temporal difficulties in brief Chapter 26 of Part I when he mentions that his "calendar is getting confused" (109), anticipating a similar observation at the end of Chapter 26 in Part II: "I notice I have somehow mixed up two events" (263) (discussed later in this essay). Meanwhile Humbert's increasing impatience and preoccupation with time is a marked feature of Chapter 27. He decides to arrive at Camp Q "earlier than [he] had said," seeks to avoid "delay," tries to leave at 9:30 A.M. but is thwarted "by a

63. The spooneristic dialogue of Room 342 is prepared for a few pages earlier in a conversation during the drive from Camp Q in which Humbert tells Lo he has "missed" her; she says it "does not matter" and points out he hasn't "kissed [her] yet" (112). The re-reader noticing that "missed," "matter," and "kissed" anticipate the spoonerisms may also feel a tickle in the ear when Humbert, pumping Lo for camp news, says, "Talk Lo—don't grunt, " and she asks him, "When did you fall for my mummy?" Humbert offers a vacuous platitude: "Some day, Lo, you will understand many emotions and situations, such as for example the harmony, the beauty of spiritual relationship." Lolita will have none of it: "'Bah!' said the cynical nymphet" (112). This dialogue anticipates a similar exchange containing other subliminal references to Ray in Part II's Chapter 32 (discussed below) where Lolita, "with a grunt," asks Humbert where her "murdered mummy" is buried, and rebuffs his platitudinous response: "'Ray,'" said Lo for hurray" (286). The connection is tenuous enough for Nabokov to be pretty sure most of us will miss it, so meanwhile we get a shadowgraph of Ray's name and an authorial taunt for not seeing it: "I slowed down f**R**om **A** *blind* sevent**Y** to a *purblind* fifty" (112).

dead battery," has to "endure for several minutes" hag Holmes' inquisitiveness, comments that "time moves ahead of our fancies," speeds in an effort to reach Briceland, and when Lolita says she is penniless, tells her, "This is a matter that will be mended *in due time*," anticipating her response to his "Show, wight ray": "All *in good time*." Nabokov draws our attention to the connection between Ray's power and lost time most pointedly immediately after Humbert hits the brakes behind an "a*ccu*rsed truck" "stopped at a *crossing*," sending Lo "*forward*" (116). The pun on "Foreword" is almost immediately repeated in company with a shadowgraph of Ray's name (in "already") and yet another veiled allusion to Roland Pym: "Lo, whose *lovely* prismatic entrails had already digested the sweetmeat, was looking forward[64] to a big meal." Failing to get directions from "*strangers*," Humbert gets "complicated *ex*planations, with geometrical gestures, geographical generalities and strictly *local clues* (… then bear south after you hit the courthouse …)"[65] that cause him to lose time, while Nabokov's conspicuous alliteration and the pointed reference to "local clues" offer signposts to the reader.

Nabokov combines subliminal subtlety and convoluted irony with great finesse when he has Humbert allude (with characteristic incomprehension) to Ray's role: "As to me, although I had long become used to a kind of secondary fate (McFate's inept secretary, so to speak) pettily interfering with the boss's generous magnificent plan—to grind and grope through the avenues of Briceland was perhaps the most exasperating ordeal I had yet faced" (116). "Editor" Ray, boss Nabokov's "inept secretary," not only causes Humbert to lose time getting to the Enchanted Hunters, but also fails to correct "obvious solecisms" in Humbert's memoirs such as the confusion of the calendar in Chapter 26, Part I (109), the mixed up events of Chapter 26, Part II (263), and the three days Nabokov purposely "loses" in the temporal anomaly of the novel's endgame. The shadowgraph anagram "sercret Ray" in "secretary" and the pun on "X-ray" in "exasperating" deftly undercut Humbert's self-serving illusion that boss Fate favors him. Other secrets beckon, but I cannot leave this chapter without suggesting the possibility that the mistress of the cocker "swooning on the floral carpet under [Lo's] hand" is also Quilty's mistress in disguise in

64. This play on "Foreword" is a repeat of a clue supplied by Beale as "agent of fate" when he tells Humbert that Charlotte "had slipped on the freshly watered asphalt and plunged *forward* whereas she should have flung herself not *forward* but backward" (102). These puns and Charlotte's death are anticipated by the already noted plunge and echo at Hourglass Lake: "Charlotte flung herself *forward* with a *great* splash" (85).

65. "**G**ene**RA**li**TI**e**S** and strictly *local clues* (… then bea**R** south **A**fter **Y**ou hit the courthouse …)"

subliminal company with other members of the McFate cabal.[66]

Lolita is firmly in Humbert's clutches, "with absolutely nowhere else to go," as Part I of the novel concludes. Her captor has achieved his wildest wish, and he sets out with Lolita on their "extensive travels all over the States," reveling in his good fortune. Meanwhile Humbert, seeming to enjoy an interval of relative peace courtesy of McFate, gloats at others' expense in Nabokov's fifth nerve center, Gaston Godin's garret, while reviser Ray pulls the strings. In Part II's Chapter 6, Humbert ridicules Gaston in terms that reflect some of his own failings and future entanglements with McFate and even presents Godin as a grotesque travesty of the plump author, the supreme *god in* the book. Gaston is "too self-centered and abstract to notice or suspect anything," Humbert says, picturing his enormous body in black (Humbert will wear black for Quilty's "execution") and seating him staring at the chess board "as if it were a corpse" (Quilty is not *quite* a corpse when H.H. sits by his bed at Pavor Manor). Meanwhile, Nabokov plants subliminal references to Quilty and Ray throughout the chapter.[67] Among the portraits in the garret hangs "Harold D. Doublename" and Nijinsky, the former pointing to the novel's many doubles, pairs, and impersonators, not least among them Humbert Humbert, quilted Quilty, Clarence Clark, Esq., and John Ray, Jr. Nijinsky's portrait points again to the page with the aforementioned overlooked key at Pavor Manor, where wounded Quilty is compared to "old, *gray*, mad Nijinski" (302), and Gaston's "Mississe Taille Lore" with its waggish pun affords an early view of Elphinstone Hospital's Mary Lore in fateful Chapter 22: a "very cheeky nurse with overdeveloped gluteal parts and blazing black eyes—of Basque descent" (241).

Leaving Lolita at Chestnut Court, H.H. walks into town for a haircut and into the heart of the sixth nerve of the novel where sly McFate foreshadows inattentive Humbert's future:

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66. "The pink old fellow pee**R**ed good-n**A**turedl**Y** at Lo—still s**Q**uatting, listening in profile, lips parted, to what the dog's mistress, an ancient lady swathed in **VI**olet **Ve**i**l**s, w**A**s telli**N**g her from the depths of a cretonne easy chair." For more on the "easy chair," see note 93 below.

67. Quilty's traces include "security," "question," "curious," "burlesque," "liqueurs," "*que*," "circumflex," "techniques," "Queen," "unique," the flagrant "quilted," and "queer." Ray's fingerprints are scattered throughout the chapter in words like "tolerated," "strain," "decorated," and "straight"; several shadowgraphs of Ray's name cluster near the "nerve center" proper, Gaston's garret. Gaston, Humbert says, would feed the boys chocolates "in the p**R**iv**A**c**Y** of an o**R**ient**A**ll**Y** furnished den in his basement, with amusing daggers and pistols ar**RAY**ed on the moldy, rug-adorned walls among the *camouflaged* hot-water pipes" (181).

> In Kasbeam a very old barber gave me a very mediocre haircut: he babbled of a baseball-playing son of his, and at every explodent, spat into my neck, and every now and then wiped his glasses on my sheet-wrap, or interrupted his tremulous scissor work to produce faded newspaper clippings, and so inattentive was I that it came as a shock to realize as he pointed to an easeled photograph among the ancient gray lotions, that the mustached young ball player had been dead for the last thirty years. (213)

In company with the fingerprints in "haircut" and "gray," the "easeled photograph" looks forward to the "easeled photograph of [Quilty]" H.H. finds on Ivor's desk in Ramsdale when he goes to the dentist's office to pump him on his nephew's whereabouts (291). Further, "babbled" is a play on "bubble" ("a big pink bubble") and "explodent," "spat," and "sheet-wrap" are all echoed in the language and action attendant on what H.H. later takes to be Quilty's final minutes as, blasting away with Chum, he watches Quilty "coughing and spitting" and "blood-spattered [...] wrap himself up in the chaotic bedclothes" (304). As to his failing senses, H.H.'s delayed realization that "the mustached young ball-player had been dead for the last thirty years" is a reversal of his later assumption that mustached Quilty is *not* alive in his bedroom at Pavor Manor.

Following the Kasbeam barber passage, another foreshadowing comes at the bottom of the same page when H.H. sees "a strong and handsome young man with a shock of black hair and blue eyes [... and] a sheepish grin" with "a portable refrigerator" (a chiller), a preview of Dick Schiller ("Oh, Dick was a lamb" [272]; "blue eyes, black hair" [273]). Then Humbert sees a young woman, "far gone in the family way," a stand-in for Dolly Schiller, the rapt baby on the swing an image of naïve Dick, the jealous older child crying on the grass a miniature of weeping H.H. (213). It is important to note that H.H. seems unaware of the significance of these passages, which are calculated by McFate to covertly presage Humbert's future while simultaneously depicting Humbert as infantile buffoon, a role he struggles to reserve for his competitors. Meanwhile, the portable refrigerator not only carries an echo of Ray's name; it recalls for the reader an item in the list of sights visited a year earlier: "ART: American Refrigerator Transit Company," a witty Nabokovian reference to the author's labors in creating the novel and, since "ART" is both acronym and shadowgraph, to the author's letterplay.[68]

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68. Nabokov's favorite novel, he says, was also his most difficult to write. "I lacked the necessary information—that was the initial difficulty. I did not know any American 12-year-old girls, and I did not know America; I had to

In transitional Chapters 17–19 between the barbering in Kasbeam and tennis at Champion, Nabokov's next subliminal coordinate, Humbert seems to sense more and more palpably McFate's grip. Struggling but failing "to break some pattern of fate […] obscurely […] enmesh[ing]" him (215), Humbert finds himself engulfed by "torrents of rain" and dogged by the unshakable Trapp in his "Aztec Red Convertible" (217). As is so often the case, fate travels with the weather, whether in rain or another "sunburst" like the one that prompts H.H. to stop for new sunglasses (shades of Roland Pym?). At the same time Quilty "in his converted state" (the pun glossing his incarnation as Clark) as both car man and bar man stops behind Humbert "at a café or bar bearing the idiotic sign: The Bustle: A Deceitful Seatful" (218). Just as "sunburst" points back once more to Ray's submerged identity as Roland Pym in *Who's Who*, The Bustle again anticipates the "bustling […] rumpy young nurse" Mary Lore and her complicity in Lolita's escape at Elphinstone Hospital. At the theatrical performance in Wace, H.H. again unwittingly makes a veiled allusion to McFate's theft of his story when he comments on the supposed plagiarism of the play's co-authors: "I remember thinking that this idea of children-colors had been lifted by authors Clare Quilty and Vivian Darkbloom from a passage in James Joyce" (221). When the triple c's show up again in "Campus Cream convertible" (227), we should not be surprised to learn that "*grays* […] remained [Trapp/Quilty's] favorite cryptochromism," given the nepotistic privilege accorded Ray by Clark.[69] Hence, the "pale dull *rain*bow of paint shades" gives way to "such ghosts as Chrysler's Shell Gray, Chevrolet's Thistle Gray, Dodge's French Gray…" (228). John Ray's jocular "no ghosts walk" is thus true at this stage in a technical sense: these specters have wheels.

Humbert is made patently ridiculous in his desperate attempt to cover his humiliation in the flat tire episode (a comic scene in Quilty's play) in which Lolita gloriously closes ranks with McFate:

> I pulled up—near a precipice. She folded her arms and put her foot on the dashboard. I got out and examined the right rear wheel. The base of its tire was sheepishly and hideously square. Trapp had stopped some

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invent America and Lolita. […] The obtaining of such local ingredients as would allow me to inject average 'reality' into the brew of individual fancy proved […] difficult […]" (*SO* 26). He also had to make shadowgraphs. Gee, what fun.

69. Quilty's preference for gray cars as he stalks Humbert and John Ray's name itself suggest these cousins are antecedents of a third relative: Jakob Gradus/Jack Gray of *Pale Fire*.

> fifty yards behind us. His distant face formed a grease spot of mirth. This was my chance. I started to walk towards him—with the brilliant idea of asking him for a jack though I had one. He backed a little. I stubbed my toe against a stone—and there was a sense of general laughter. Then a tremendous truck loomed from behind Trapp and thundered by me—and immediately after, I heard it utter a convulsive honk. Instinctively I looked back—and saw my own car gently creeping away. I could make out Lo ludicrously at the wheel, and the engine was certainly running—though I remembered I had cut it but had not applied the emergency brake; and during the brief space of throb-time that it took me to reach the croaking machine which came to a standstill at last, it dawned upon me that during the last two years little Lo had had ample time to pick up the rudiments of driving. As I wrenched the door open, I was goddam sure she had started the car to prevent me from walking up to Trapp. Her trick proved useless, however, for even while I was pursuing her he had made an energetic U-turn and was gone. (228–29)

That must have been an elf's stone that H.H. stubbed his toe against, and there is quite a group contributing to that "sense of general laughter."[70] In this scene, McFate pointedly casts Humbert as an oaf, mocking his vanity and his inept effort at control by making him first describe and then absurdly deny with breathtaking illogicality the efficacy of Lolita's stratagem. It is also possible that the lapse in logic itself performs the intentional function of drawing our attention to the passage's references to time: "the brief space of throb-time"; "Lo had had ample time."

Nabokov believes that art, far from being "simple" and "sincere," is instead "at its greatest [...] fantastically deceitful and complex" (*SO* 32–33), and his seventh "subliminal coordinate" with Lolita playing tennis combines images of mimicry with the familiar markings of McFate's game to illustrate the "splendid insincerity"[71] of art. The opening passage of Part II's Chapter 20

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70. In addition to Lolita and Quilty, Ray lurks in the shadowgraphs "creeping away" and "certainly" as well as in Humbert's "brilliant idea of asking [...] for *a jack though I had one*." Humbert meanwhile again echoes Ray's Foreword by repeating "sense" and "general" while dropping fingerprints of Cue and Ray in "square," "cut," and "brake."

71. Nabokov linked game strategy to literary strategy in a comment on *Poems and Problems*. When Appel asked why he included chess problems in a book with poems, he replied, "Because problems are the poetry of chess. They demand the same virtues that characterize all worthwhile art: originality, invention, harmony, conciseness, complexity, and splendid insincerity" (*SO*

epitomizes the ease with which Nabokov disguises flagrant hints:

> By permitting Lolita to study acting I had, fond fool, suffered her to cultivate deceit. It now appeared that it had not been merely a matter of learning the answers to such questions as what is the basic conflict in "Hedda Gabler," or where are the climaxes in "Love Under the Lindens," or to analyze the prevailing mood of "Cherry Orchard"; it was really a matter of learning to betray me. How I deplored now the exercises in sensual simulation that I had so often seen her go through in our Beardsley parlor when I would observe her from some strategic point while she, like a hypnotic subject or a performer in a mystic rite, produced sophisticated versions of infantile make-believe by going through […] mimetic actions […]. (229–30)

While Lolita's "exercises in sensual simulation" serve as practice for deceiving Humbert, at the same time they function as metaphor for John Ray's audacious hoax ("sophisticated versions of infantile make believe") and Nabokov's artistic challenge to the reader. Here the subtle allusions to Ray's book "Do the Senses Make Sense?" ("exercises in sensual simulation") and profession ("analyze," "hypnotic subject") combine with subliminal pointers to Ray in shadowgraphs.[72] Indeed, Humbert's reflections on how Lolita wove "delicate spells […] in the dreamy performance of her enchantments" resonate with Nabokov's own views of the art of fiction: "great novels are great fairy tales" (*LL* 2) and "a great writer is always a great enchanter" (*LL* 5). Immediately following his smug reflections on his superiority to Gaston, his "confused adversary" in chess, Humbert's gushingly emotional reading of Lolita playing tennis illustrates Nabokov's characterization of the "minor" reader's reliance on the heart, rather than the brain and the spine:[73] "on that *particular* day […] on that *admirable* court[74] […] I felt I could rest from the nightmare of unknown *betrayals* within the innocence of her style, of her soul, of her essential *grace*" (233).

Just as Lolita disguises her will to win in order to be free of Humbert, *Lolita* gracefully conceals its deceitfulness from any reader taken in by an assumed

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160–61). See note 9 above.

72. "o**R** to **A**nal**Y**ze," "**RA**ll**Y**," "bet**RAY**," "ou**R** Be**A**rdsle**Y**," and "perform-e**R** in **A** m**Y**stic rite."

73. It is these organs Nabokov insisted the good reader is to rely on when reading "an artist's book," adding that "the heart is a remarkably stupid reader" (*SO* 41).

74. The admirable quality of the court makes the identification of the "inquisitive butterfly" (234) fairly certain. See notes 43 and 44 above.

"innocence of […] style." If the "inquisitive butterfly" that passes between Humbert and his fair partner is an airy stand-in for the heaviest of the McFate cabal, so too does the Roman-nosed gentleman behind the desk of the Champion Hotel "with a very obscure past *that might reward investigation*" seem a likely Nabokov cameo. "A fake call" diverts H.H. while Lolita plays doubles with Bill, Fay, and Quilty (235). Then as Quilty disappears, McFate mercilessly mocks H.H. in the following lines that simultaneously evoke Ray's surname in the forced repetition of "really" and Ray's fingerprint ("fragrant"), recall Ray's Foreword ("he is abject"), point up Clare Quilty's adroit ascension in a pun ("clarification"), and foreshadow the manner in which H.H. is greeted by lawyer Windmuller in Chapter 33 ("with a very slow, very enveloping, strong, searching grip" [290]):

> Before returning to the hotel, I ushered her into a little alley half-smothered with fragrant shrubs, with flowers like smoke, and was about to burst into ripe sobs and plead with her in the most abject manner for clarification, no matter how meretricious, of the slow awfulness enveloping me, when we found ourselves behind the convulsed Mead twosome […] we had come at the end of their private joke. It really did not matter.
>
> Speaking as if it really did not really matter […] Lolita said she would like to change into her bathing things […]. It was a gorgeous day. Lolita! (236)

With Bill and Fay's laughter ringing in his ears, it is "ad out" for Humbert, who, with many more defeats to come, will soon have occasion to reflect ruefully on another "double game" Lolita plays at Elphinstone on Independence Day.

In Nabokov's eighth secret point, the hospital at Elphinstone, subliminal references to John Ray cluster as thickly about the characters as do the "millers" swarming around the motel's "No Vacancy" sign.[75] In a general way, Nabokov prolongs the private joke shared by "the convulsed Mead twosome" after the tennis game at Champion as Humbert attempts to rationalize McFate's patterns:

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75. "M**R**s. H**AY**s" runs the motel; Lo's whimpering is "d**R**e**A**r**Y**"; H.H. takes her temperature "o**RA**ll**Y**" and looks up a formula he "fo**R**tun**A**tel**Y**" had "afte**R** l**A**borious**Y**" converting the scale to centi*grade*. Humbert gives Lo's age as "p**RA**ctical**Y** sixteen" to "an unsmiling blond bitch of a sec**R**et**A**r**Y**" before being "d**R**e**A**dfull**Y**" rude to Mary Lore. Mary drops a "t**RAY**" (and Clark's initials) with "a quick crash on a chair in the corridor," nods "di**R**ection**A**ll**Y**," and quips, reminding the reader of Ray's facility in French (one recalls his use of "tendresse" in the Foreword): "my pappy can pa**R**l**AY**-voo as well as yours."

> After all—well *really* … After all, gentlemen, it was becoming abundantly *clear* that all those identical detectives in *prismatically* changing cars were figments of my perse*cu*tion mania, re*cu*rrent images based on coincidence and chance resemblance. *Soyons logiques*, crowed the cocky Gallic part of my *brain*—and proceeded to rout the notion of a Lolita-maddened salesman or comedy gangster, with stooges, perse*cu*ting me, and hoaxing me, and otherwise taking riotous advantage of my *strange* relations with the law. (238)

Even as Humbert tries to hum his panic away, Quilty's fingerprints and echoes and shadowgraphs of Ray's name lurk in his language, along with teasing hints of hidden clues ("it was becoming abundantly clear," "recurrent images based on coincidence and chance resemblance," "hoaxing," "my strange relations with the law"). Humbert's antipathy toward Mary Lore is well-justified: with the "M" discarded, her name is an anagram for "Ray role," and her Basque father sports a Ph.D. as a shadowgraph in his profession ("imported she*ph*er*d*, a *trainer* of sheep dogs"). Reinforcing Ray's fingerprints are artful echoes of Ray's Foreword, as witness H.H.'s twice repeated "*no doubt*," the phrases "*made sense*," "as any American *parent* would," and his apology to the hospital "in *general*." "Ponderosa Lodge" echoes the Foreword's "*ponderously* capricious," and Ray's Ph.D. again glows as a shadowgraph in the "*ph*ony armorial *d*esign" on the crumpled envelope Humbert inspects.

In a passage particularly rich with dramatic irony and pointers to the McFate conspiracy, Humbert muses bitterly:

> Poor Bluebeard. Those brutal brothers. *Es-ce que tu ne m'aimes plus, ma Carmen?* She never had. At the moment I knew my love was as hopeless as ever—and I also knew the two girls were conspirators, plotting in Basque, or Zemfirian, against my hopeless love. I shall go further and say that Lo was playing a double game since she was also fooling sentimental Mary whom she had told, I suppose, that she wanted to dwell with her fun-loving young uncle and not with cruel melancholy me. And another nurse whom I never identified, and the village idiot who carted cots and coffins into the elevator, and the idiotic green love birds in a cage in the waiting room—all were in the plot, the sordid plot. I suppose Mary thought comedy father Professor Humbertoldi was interfering with the romance between Dolores and her father-substitute, roly-poly Romeo (for you *were* rather lardy, you know, Rom, despite all that "snow" and "joy juice"). (243–44; Nabokov's italics)

As "Bluebeard" stands in for Humbert, so the "brutal brothers" point to another family alliance, that between Quilty/Clark and John Ray. In addition to

Quilty's fingerprints and several shadowgraphs of Ray's name, Clarence Choate Clark's triple c's click like casters under the cart with the cots and coffins being loaded into the elevator, and the phrase "sordid plot" echoes Windmuller's "sordid business" as quoted by Ray in the Foreword. Besides the betrayal Humbert sees in Lolita's "double game," her kinship with Mary Lore is evident not only in their sisterly conspiracy against Humbert/Bluebeard but in name as well, since "Lore" is embedded in "Dolores," the name itself an anagram of the Spanish for "two" ("dos") plus "role." Humbert's sneering nickname of the moment for Quilty, "roly-poly Romeo," carries a chain of puns: "roly" alludes to Roland (Pym) and the "rolled over"s of H.H.'s wrestling with Quilty; "poly" points to Poling (Prize); "Romeo" (and in the line above it, "romance") evokes the Roman nose behind the desk at the Champion Hotel. Finally, the epithet "cruel melancholy me" parallels Nabokov's auto-referential "fat me" in the Aubrey McFate anagram, an epithet also evoked by "lardy." About one thing Humbert is correct: "all [are] in the plot."

We come now to a further consideration of the ninth "secret point": "pale, pregnant, beloved, irretrievable Dolly Schiller dying in Gray Star (the capital town of the book)." Gray Star is by far the most complex of the ten subliminal coordinates. I have already suggested that Nabokov's out-of-phase placement of Gray Star is a deliberate and complementary gesture toward other temporal anomalies in the book. In his Foreword, Ray would have us take it as the geographical location of Mrs. Schiller's death, and Nabokov, as I have argued, identifies it with Ray ("in Gray Star" = "gratis Ray") and the Foreword's importance by calling it the book's "capital town." Again, because of the wide distribution in the novel of the subliminal anagram "gratis Ray," Gray Star is not only a "point" in the Foreword but also a recurring motif and sign of Ray's active part in Humbert's story. With Lolita's successful escape with Quilty, the stage is set for Ray to deliver the "moral apotheosis" he promises the reader in the Foreword. Hence becomes evident a further hidden logic in the placement of Gray Star ninth in Nabokov's list: it is mainly between Elphinstone and H.H.'s mountainside epiphany (secret points eight and ten) that Ray treats Humbert as a mental case, steals, dissects, and reassembles his identity, and contrives to bring about his ethical conversion. "Gray Star" is thus also a playful allusion to gray eminence Ray's being the hidden star of the show.[76]

Meanwhile Nabokov uses mock-Proustian echoes of lost time to subtly reinforce the anomalies of Humbert's calendar while piling up allusions to

76. Ray's overshadowing of Humbert is ironically alluded to when Nabokov has Humbert refer to Miss Opposite's porch "*as if* it were a stage and *I* the *star* performer" (289).

Ray's operations in the text. Sitting with his gun in his *rain*coat pocket, Humbert senses the absurdity of his targeting Riggs, and tells us, "I was losing my time and my wits" (253). When a door different from the one Humbert "had been *star*ing at" opens "briskly, and amid a bevy of women students" "a total *stranger*" appears who turns out to be Rigger instead of Riggs, Nabokov subtly cements the link between Ray and temporal difficulties in *Lolita*. The forgotten occasion on which Rigger bored Humbert "with his impressions of Switzerland at a tea party for *parents*" H.H. is "unable to place correctly in terms of time" (191). Finally, Rigger's parting with Humbert ("He would be seeing me" [253]) has the ring of a portent.[77]

Nabokov links Ray's operations, the time motif, and the book as a whole in Chapter 25 in connection with another of Humbert's breakdowns. The Proustian echo noted by Appel (430), "*Dolorès Disparue*," usefully recalls Humbert's slip in *Who's Who* ("disappeared" [32]), and applies here not only to Dolores but to Humbert and the three "lost days":

> This book is about Lolita; and now that I have reached the part which (had I not been forestalled by another internal combustion martyr) might be called "*Dolorès Disparue*," there would be little sense in analyzing the three empty years that followed. While a few pertinent points have to be marked, the general impression I desire to convey is of a side door crashing open in life's full flight, and a rush of roaring black time drowning with its whipping wind the cry of lone disaster. (253–54)

Nabokov cues us in this passage to Ray's presence by the use of two of the editor's key words, "sense" and "general," by his scrambled surname in "martyr," by the allusion to his profession in "analyzing," and by the pun on "star" in "dis*aster*." It is Humbert's life and identity that will be drowned out, replaced by memories "doctored" by psychoanalyst Ray, the three lost days being alluded to in the "three empty years." The overlapping of Ray's identity with Humbert's, the conflation of their voices, and the shifting roles of Humbert's antagonists are covertly suggested in Humbert's nightmares, in which Lolita's image appears "*in strange and ludicrous disguises* as Valeria or

77. The assemblage of Quilty's friends at what appears to be a cast party at Pavor Manor near the end of the novel includes figures that may have played multiple roles in the plot against Humbert. If Rigger is Ray in disguise, he may well be the "unidentified" record inspector in that group. Both "Rigger" and "Riggs" rather obviously suggest deceptive manipulation such as Ray practices, and one also recalls Humbert's comment on Lo's collectively "rigged up" life (215). Like Rigger, Jean Farlow also takes her leave of Humbert hinting at a reunion (104). See note 94 below and related discussion.

Charlotte, or *a cross between them*." Humbert's nightmares also contain imagery that stands for the mutilation of his memoirs under Ray's reading lamp: "I would be entertained at tedious vivisecting parties." Later, at the Schillers', Humbert is made to connect Ray's operations to the book as a whole: "I had merely dropped in on my way to *Readsburg* where *I was to be entertained* by some friends and admirers." Readsburg is of course the novel itself, in which McFate "entertains" H.H.[78] McFate's insidious insinuations into the text are both implied and illustrated by a telling parallel: again one recalls that in his Foreword, Ray opines that "had [H.H.] gone [...] to a competent psychopathologist, there would have been no dis*aster*; but then, neither would there have been this book." Here is Humbert's variation on the theme:

> It is just possible that had I gone to a strong hypnotist he might have extracted from me and arrayed in a logical pattern certain chance memories that I have threaded through my book with considerably more ostentation than they present themselves with to my mind even now when I know what to seek in the past. (255)

In another of the book's delightful little gems of dramatic irony, Humbert follows up his Proustian allusion by remarking that he felt he "was merely losing contact with *reality*," and alludes to his retreat to a Quebec sanatorium where he composed the poem that begins "Wanted, wanted: Dolores Haze," whose stanzas abound with covert allusions to Ray.[79]

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78. Dolinin points out that "Readsburg is the only toponym in the novel whose lexical meaning Nabokov brings out in the Russian translation, where he renames it "Lektoburg" ("*Lolita* in Russian" 329).

79. The poem would seem actually to have been authored by Ray. In addition to his familiar fingerprints in "craze," "vair" (French for "gray"), "raise," "rain," and "dream-gray," "Gray Star" is echoed in "starlet," "starling," "starmen," and "stardust." Even more obscurely, all thirteen stanzas of the poem contain shadowgraphs and/or anagrams of Ray's surname, apparent once the reader makes a variety of transpositions or elisions in proximate words: In stanza 1: "hund**R**ed d**AY**s"; stanza 2: "Wh**Y** **AR**e"; stanza 3: "m**Y** c**AR**"; stanza 4: "m**Y** c**AR**men"; stanza 5: "**AR**e **Y**ou"; stanza 6: "happ**Y** is gn**AR**led"; stanza 7: "**AR**e **Y**ou"; stanza 8: "ope**RA**/s'**Y**"; stanza 9: "h**A**i**RY**"; stanza 10: "the**Y** go—/In the **RA**in"; stanza 11: "the**Y** **AR**e"; stanza 12: "d**R**e**A**m gra**Y**"; stanza 13: "whe**R**e the weed dec**AY**s." Lines 3 and 4 of the second stanza are particularly telling clues to Ray's power over Humbert: "(I talk in a daze, I walk in a maze, / I cannot get out, said the starling)." Alfred Appel's gloss (432) on line 4 explains its connection to a caged bird in Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* and to Nabokov's account of the inspiration for *Lolita* in his afterword, the story of an

Ray's eclipsing of Humbert is encapsulated in two episodes of Chapter 26: the mysterious case of Jack Humbertson's appearance in Humbert's hotel room and Humbert's search in the Briceland library archives for an old *Gazette* photograph of himself. With unflagging dramatic irony, Humbert introduces the Humbertson episode: "One rather mysterious spree that had interesting repercussions I must notice. I had abandoned the search: the fiend was either in Tartary or burning away in my cerebellum"[80] (excellent guesses, though the possibilities are simultaneous, not exclusive). At a loss to explain Humbertson, "whom neither Rita nor [he] recalled having ever seen" before, Humbert quips: "Five glasses had been used, which, in the way of clues, was an embarrassment of riches." Has young Humbertson been drinking with McFate? Permanently amnesic, his "(worthless) identity" "purloined" (such a poetic verb!), "isolated from his personal past," Humbertson, as his "tastelessly dubbed" name implies, is a bizarre embodiment of Humbert's stolen memoirs, his first name, Jack, pointing to his "second father," John Ray. Humbert's awakening to find Jack Humbertson in his hotel room parallels his Parkington experience in Chapter 27 of Part I, when he was awakened by an encounter with that other "total stranger," the "small hairy hermaphrodite."

Also in Briceland, Humbert seeks "retrievable time" in the form of an old photograph taken of him at The Enchanted Hunters, and as he does so, Ray infects Humbert's thoughts and language, subliminally altering both his "expression" and the object of his quest:[81]

> Passionately I hoped to find preserved the portrait of the artist as a younger brute. An innocent camera catching me on my dark way to Lolita's bed—what a magnet for Mnemosyne! I cannot well *ex*plain the *true nature of that urge* of mine. It was allied, I suppose, to that swooning *cu*riosity which impels one to *ex*amine with a magnifying glass *bleak little*

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ape coaxed by a scientist to produce a sketch depicting "the bars of the poor creature's cage." More is at work here, however. The "maze" of line 3 juxtaposed with the anagram of "rats" in "starling" suggests Ray's power over Humbert is analogous to the absolute dominance the researcher holds over his subject animals. This connection is reinforced in stanza 5 where the line "And I, in my corner, snarlin'" echoes the Beardsley interview in which Ray impersonates Pratt and Humbert offers the self-characterization "a cornered old rat" (196).

80. "either in Ta**R**t**A**r**Y** or bu**R**ning **A**wa**Y** in my cerebellum"

81. "I hoped to find the portrait of […] a**R**tist **A**s a **Y**[…]"; "An innocent camera catching […] da**R**k w**AY**" ; "curiosity which impels one to examine with a magnifying glass bleak little figures— […] p**R**actic**A**ll**Y**."

> *figures*—still life practically, and everybody about to throw up—at an early morning *execu*tion, and *the patient's expression impossible to make out in the print*. (262)

While searching in the library archives for the photograph, H.H. comes across a quotation of a line of Quilty's with a subliminal toast to Ray's cleverness: "Wine, wine, wine, quipped the author of *Dark Age* who refused to be photographed, may suit a Persian bubble bird, but I say give me *rain, rain, rain* on the shingle roof for roses and *inspiration* every time" (262). Thanks to Ray's treatment of his patient, Humbert's passionate search for his image yields only disappointment: "nothing of myself could I *make out*," he remarks. The photograph, with its "spectral shoulder" displacing H.H.'s "portrait," serves as another metaphor of McFate's appropriation of H.H.'s story, a comically Proustian image of lost time. As already noted, Chapter 26 concludes with Humbert noticing he has "mixed up two events," a confusion that recalls his "calendar […] getting confused" in Chapter 26 of Part I. Pointed references to lost time in the concluding chapters of the book blaze a trail to the crucial mention of "fifty-six days" on its penultimate page: John Farlow writes that "he would have no time henceforth" for Humbert's affairs (266); on his way to Coalmont, Humbert has "no time to spare" (267); Humbert says he leaves Lawn Street "[f]eeling I was losing my time" (289); and on his way to Ivor Quilty's office he declines discussion of "the mnemonics of physiognomization," having "no time right now" (290).

Chapter 27, in which Humbert receives the letter from Lolita on September 22, 1952, is notably heavy with veiled allusions to McFate's project. Speaking of his letterbox, Humbert makes an observation that encapsulates McFate's scheme: "Several times already, a trick of harlequin light that fell through the glass upon an alien handwriting had twisted it into a semblance of Lolita's script causing me to almost collapse as I leant against an adjacent urn, almost my own" (263). The shadowgraph of Ray's name in "already," the evocation of Quilty in "harlequin" and of Ray's "reading lamp" in "light," the "alien handwriting […] twisted into a semblance of *Lolita*'s script," "collapse" prefiguring Humbert's limp capitulation at the novel's end, and the foretaste of death in the "urn, almost my own" all carry heavy dramatic irony. Similar irony marks Humbert's reflections a few lines farther on when he remarks that

> indeed, it may well be that the very attraction immaturity has for me lies not so much in the limpidity of pure young forbidden fairy child beauty as in the security of a situation where infinite perfections fill the gap between the little given and the great promised—the great rosegray never-to-be-had.

Humbert cannot possibly divine, as the reader can, that his "security" is in fact imprisonment in Ray's text, and that Nabokov's "infinite perfections" (the jewels of the text) fill the "gap" between the "little given" (H.H.'s memoirs as Ray's raw material) and "the great promised" (the finished novel, complete with "moral apotheosis"). That Ray is the instrument, Nabokov once more signals with a key shadowgraph.[82] Spying on what he imagines are "half-naked nymphet[s]," pressing himself against "the *railing* of a throbbing balcony," Humbert says his desire would be "*ready* to take off [. . .] did take off," and he "sometimes won the *race* between [his] fancy and nature's *reality*," except when the "*lighted image*" would change, his fantasy displaced by "an obese partly clad man[83] reading the paper." There can be little doubt that H.H.'s pain which "began when chance entered the *fray*" stems from the same source as the vivisections in his nightmares described in Chapter 25. Reference to Ray's Foreword with its ethical emphasis is all but explicit when Humbert cites "the *radiant fore*glimpse, the promise of *reality*, a promise not only to be *simulated seductively* but also to be *nobly* held." In another sense entirely from the one he intends, Humbert's fancy has indeed been "both Proustianized and Procrusteanized":

> for that particular morning, late in September 1952, as I had come down to grope for my mail, the dapper and bilious janitor with whom I was on *ex*ecrable terms started to complain that a man who had seen Rita home recently had been "sick like a dog" on the front steps. In the process of listening to him and tipping him, and then listening to a revised and politer version of the incident, I had the impression that one of the two letters which that blessed mail brought was from Rita's mother, a crazy little woman [. . .]. (264–65)

The similarity of "janitor" to "junior," the familiar pun on "X" in "execrable," and the telltale "pol" in "polite" all point to Ray, as does the parallel between

82. "the **GR**e**AT** prom**IS**ed—the great roseg**RAY** never-to-be had"

83. One cannot help but wonder: could this be yet another glimpse of the portly author operating in tandem with Ray? A similar race is lost in Part I's Chapter 5 in company with the explicit introduction of the "Proustian theme" (16), the statement that "the idea of time plays such a magic part in the matter" (17), and insistent echoes of Ray's Foreword (see note 27 above): "the vision acquired an especially keen charm that made me *race* with all speed toward my lone **GRATI**fication. But abruptly, fiendi**S**hly, the tende**R** p**A**ttern of nudit**Y** I had adored would be *transformed* into the disgusting *lamp-lit* bare arm of a man in his underclothes reading his paper [. . .]" (20).

the janitor's "revised and politer version" and Humbert's heavily edited memoirs, stretched to fit the rack of Ray's scheme.

Nabokov gives subliminal credit to Ray for the authorship of much of Humbert's last scene with Lolita. Not only does Chapter 29 echo Ray's name throughout,[84] but multiple allusions to his prize-winning book "Do the Senses Make Sense?" serve as covert plugs for it.[85] After Lo softly tells Humbert Quilty's name, Nabokov reminds us of his third secret point ("Waterproof"), registers Ray's control of Humbert's thoughts ("*cross* my consciousness"), ("I too, had known it, without knowing it, all along"), echoes Ray's Foreword ("shock […] surprise"), evokes Quilty's name ("Quietly"), [86] and allows Humbert to invite the reader to share his delusional self-satisfaction:

> Waterproof. Why did a flash from Hourglass Lake cross my consciousness? I, too, had known it, without knowing it, all along. There was no shock, no surprise. Quietly the fusion took place, and everything fell into order, into the pattern of branches that I have woven throughout this memoir with the express purpose of having the ripe fruit fall at the right moment; yes, with the express and perverse purpose of rendering—she was talking but I sat melting in my golden peace—of rendering that golden and monstrous peace through the satisfaction of logical recognition, which my most inimical reader should experience now.

As "an afterwork radio" sings "of folly and fate," Nabokov mocks Humbert's most fervent protestations of true love by crediting Ray with their composition. In a novel twist, he adds to Ray's subliminal signature and the triple c's of Clarence Choate Clark's initials an auditory pun in the last syllable of a line from Mérimée[87] and has Humbert propose the home states of Dolores Quine and Roland Pym as potential hideaways:

> I insist the world know how much I loved my Lolita, *this* [Nabokov's italics] Lolita, pale and polluted, and big with another's child, but still

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84. The echoes include "vibrated," "duration," "stranger," "strangely" (repeated), "raking," "great" (repeated four times), "raise," "crazy" (repeated three times), "gray" (repeated), "rainy," "range," "strange" (repeated three times), "unrestrained," "betrayed" (repeated three times), "gracefully," "grave," "disintegrated," "arrange," "radio," "raising," and "radiant."

85. These references include "re-nonsense," "sensible" (repeated), "sensational" (repeated), and the very pointed "That made sense."

86. See note 33 above for Proffer's remark.

87. Appel's gloss points out the connection between "quelque part" here and "Quelquepart Island" from the "paper chase" (442). See also note 58.

> *gray*-eyed, still sooty-lashed, still auburn and almond, still Carmencita, still mine; *Changeons de vie, ma Carmen, allons vivre quelque part où nous ne serons jamais séparés*; Ohio? The wilds of Massachusetts? (278)

As the chapter concludes, Humbert invokes Clark, Windmuller, and Ray in his assurance to Lo that "a *lawyer* would send *a full account* of the financial situation later; it was rosy"[88] and in his reference to "the formal agreement with the authorities," bearing further witness to Ray's scheme.

Though short, Chapters 31 and 32 hold marked and concentrated evidence of Ray's voice blending with Humbert's as Ray continues to develop Humbert's "moral apotheosis." In Chapter 31, H.H. reviews his "case" and says he now sees himself and his love "with the utmost simplicity and *clarity*." Having failed to find a spiritual remedy when consulting a priest, H.H. concludes the misery he feels for having deprived Lolita of her childhood can only be "treated" through the "melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art," again recalling Ray's suggestion that H.H.'s failure to seek treatment "in the fatal summer of 1947" resulted in disaster and its aftermath, H.H.'s great book. The couplet with which H.H. ends the chapter with its allusion to "moral sense" echoes Ray's ethical emphasis at the end of his Foreword, and in addition to the parallel in subject matter, Humbert's vocabulary closely mimics Ray's.[89] In Chapter 32, Humbert continues to parrot Ray in both language and subject matter, while lacerating himself with guilt and reinforcing earlier indicators of Ray's role in the narrative. [90] The blatant reference to Ray disguised as slang which Lolita throws at H.H. after his platitudinous advice about "triumphing in [her] mind over the idea of death" ("'Ray,' said Lo for hurray" [286]) harmonizes with the earlier description of H.H. as "Ray-like" in Part I's Chapter 11 and the "wight ray" of H.H.'s spooneristic dialogue in Lolita's slow-motion passage. Finally, the mention of the cemetery where

88. "late**R**; it w**A**s ros**Y**"

89. Echoes include "confession," "sense," "simple," "old-fashioned," "nothing," "great," "art," "misery," "sin," "tenderness," "case," "transcend," "girl-child," and "maniac."

90. Whereas Ray spoke of "two hypnotic eyes," "dangerous trends," "potent evils," and "a safer world," Humbert uses the phrases "two eyes," "dangerous children in an outside world," and "a world of total evil." Ray's "a cynic may say" becomes Humbert's "the coarse reader may say," and Ray's "functional," "child," "despair," "parents," "desperate," "tendresse," "attractiveness," and "magic" are all repeated exactly or with only minor variations by Humbert. Ray's familiar fingerprints in Chapter 32 include "grade," "frustration," "raised," "gray," "operation," "radiance," "stranger," "railway," "Ray," "hurray," and "great."

Charlotte is buried points yet again to Ray's quip on page 4: "The caretakers of the various cemeteries involved report that no ghosts walk," a connection reinforced on the next page by an uncorrected solecism when Humbert notes that "G. Edward Grammar [...] had just been *arrayed* on a charge of murdering his [...] wife [...]."[91] Humbert also provides us with helpful details: the "*case came to light*" after "two *po*licemen" observed Mrs. Grammar's car speeding "*crazily*" before sideswiping a "*pole*."

Meanwhile Nabokov has developed a context for Quilty's resurrection and Dolly's death in Gray Star. Throughout *Lolita* one finds many instances of survival and recovery, from Beale's seventy-nine-year-old father recovering from a heart attack on Miss Opposite's lawn to "game Colonel Lacour," *et al.*, to big Frank who "had been blown through a wall overseas" to veterans one-armed Bill and deaf Dick at the Schillers. Annabel is in a sense resurrected or reincarnated in Lolita, H.H.'s burned diary briefly materializes as a "puny, unfledged phoenix," Charlotte "rises from her grave" as Dolly smokes, Humbert (thanks to Ray) undergoes a "moral apotheosis," Clare Quilty is reincarnated as Clarence Clark, Esq., and "pale, pregnant, beloved, irretrievable Dolly Schiller" who dies in Gray Star rises to immortality in the "refuge of art." Foreshadowings of Quilty's reincarnation appear in the neon coffee pot already mentioned ("emerald resurrection" [282]), and again when, accompanied by an "*aster*-like flower" sprouting from a crack in the sidewalk, he piggybacks on Miss Opposite's revival on Lawn Street: "*Quietly resurrected*" (289). In the same paragraph, H.H. dismembers a red parking ticket, a stand-in for Quilty, before driving in a Proustian rush ("I was losing my time") to a downtown hotel in the next. At the hotel where H.H. meets Mrs. Chatfield, "pearl-gray" and "gray" and "curiosity" appear as additional knots linking Ray and Cue to the resurrection motif. As has been the case throughout the novel, Humbert's wretched gains evaporate under Ray's controlling hand.

Both on the eve and the day of his supposed victory over Quilty, Nabokov ensures the principal humiliation is Humbert's. Despite Quilty's "strange feminine manner," admission of impotence, and protracted sufferings, a steady stream of mock-Freudian *double entendres* ridicules Humbert's role and image as executioner. A "curiously hooded bridge sheath[s]" Humbert (292), and Chum's first discharge makes a "feeble and juvenile sound," the bullet seeming merely to trickle into the rug (297). "Hood" and "sheath" are vernacular for "condom," implying that Humbert is really, well, just a "prick," a

91. Appel glosses the pun but misses its import: "By saying that Ed had been *arrayed*, instead of *arraigned*, H.H. punningly describes the imposing display" (445).

backfire of the earlier "*Réveillez-vous, Laqueue, il est temps de mourir!*" thrown mentally at Quilty as H.H. walks to Ivor's office (290).[92] The weapon "felt limp and clumsy in my hand," Humbert says, prompting our recollection of his earlier facetious reminder that "a pistol is the Freudian symbol of the Urfather's central forelimb" (216) and his fantasy at the Schillers': "I […] pulled the pistol's foreskin back, and then enjoyed the orgasm of the crushed trigger: I was always a good little follower of the Viennese medicine man" (274). Once the shooting is over, Humbert emerges from a dazed sense that Charlotte is "sick in bed." He becomes aware that he is holding a slipper (an image that evokes Harold Haze's foot fetish and, again, the Pym credit *Scrambled Husbands*) and sitting on the symbolic pistol, a less than heroic pose for one taking vengeance on the "subhuman trickster who had sodomized [his] darling" (295).

The gap between Humbert's limited awareness and the confidence of the McFate conspirators is accented in the final scene at Pavor Manor as gloomy Humbert encounters several of the novel's cast "cheerfully drinking Quilty's liquor" (304). Burdened with McFate's oppression, Humbert follows the sound of "a medley of voices" and "radio music" down the stairs, and solemnly declares, "I have just killed Clare Quilty." Among the characters he fails to impress is "a fat man in an easy chair" (who might well be the author[93] filling another cameo in a prophetic image) and a cheerful group he earlier imagines as Quilty's "henchmen and whores" (292). The gathering rather resembles an informal cast party, the participants suggestively possessing characteristics that fit them for supporting roles in the "ingenious play" staged by Quilty for Humbert. The "two dark-haired pale young beauties, sisters no doubt, big one and small one (almost a child)" on the davenport might have played Charlotte and young Lolita, the younger one's "bright something about her white neck" recalling H.H.'s "spring rain gift" to Lolita "which gemmed her throat" as they set out on their second trip west (208); Tony's "sapphire-blue eyes" and florid face resemble Dick Schiller's "arctic-blue eyes" and "ruddy cheeks" (273); the "faded blonde" in the bar may well have played both

92. Proffer glosses H.H.'s line: "A well-intentioned *double entendre* which in not very polite Parisian circles translates as: 'Get up, prick, it's time to die.' —Of course, "to die" means to have an orgasm" (145).

93. Nabokov told Robert Hughes in 1965: "One of the reasons I live in Montreux is because I find the view from my easy chair wonderfully soothing […]." In response to Hughes' "Where is the easy chair?" Nabokov replied: "The easy chair is in the other room, in my study. It was a metaphor, after all: the easy chair is the entire hotel, the garden, everything" (*SO* 56). See also note 66 above.

the "unsmiling blonde bitch of a secretary" at Elphinstone Hospital (240) and Ivor Quilty's nurse, "a skeleton-thin, faded girl, with the tragic eyes of unsuccessful blondes" (292). Might the "woman in slacks" who offers Humbert a beer "from *afar*" have played Jean Farlow who "wore either slacks […] or […] skirts"?[94] Eeriest of all, the "unidentified man rising in a corner where he had been crouching to *inspect some records*"[95] seems a spectral prevision of John Ray, soon to have Humbert's memoir under his reading lamp, especially since his ambiguous response to Tony's "he has killed Cue" has the ring of a collective threat: "I guess we all should do it to *him* [meaning Quilty or H.H.?] *some day*." If that is Ray talking, his indeterminate "some day" might well betoken the less than meticulous handling of time in the novel, especially since the phrase is juxtaposed with Tony's "We can't wait for him much longer if we want to go to that game"—a game to be played in Readsburg, no doubt, where Humbert earlier told the Schillers he "was to be entertained by some friends and admirers." Again, if Readsburg is the novel itself, the "game" recommences whenever one opens the book.

Nabokov calls the last nerve of the novel "the tinkling sounds of the valley town coming up the mountain trail (on which I caught the first known female of *Lycaeides sublivens* Nabokov)," thus indicating the real-life source of the scene of Humbert's epiphany, the emotional climax of the book, and the novel's most deceitful and splendidly insincere passage.[96] H.H. evokes "a last mirage of wonder and hopelessness"—his memory, he says, of his experience some three years before on a "lofty slope" overlooking a valley. Humbert remembers an attack of nausea on a mountain road. After retching violently,

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94. Jean's characteristic attire is mentioned just before Humbert records her final words to him, words that seem prophetic in retrospect: "Perhaps somewhere, *some day*, at a less miserable *time*, we may see each other again." Humbert's parenthesis picks up and stresses the time motif: "(Jean, whatever, wherever you are, in minus time-space or plus soul-time, forgive me all this, parenthesis included)" (104–5).

95. Compare Quilty's remarks during an anonymous telephone call to Humbert in Nabokov's screenplay: "You are classified *in our files* as a white widowed male. Are you prepared to give our investigator a report on your present sex life, if any?" (167).

96. Appel avers that "[u]ntil almost the end of *Lolita*, Humbert's fullest expressions of 'guilt' and 'grief' are qualified, if not undercut completely" (lix), but that the passage in which Humbert expresses the "realization of the loss suffered not by him but by Lolita (pp. 307–8) […] is in no way undercut by parody or qualified by irony" (lxiv). This is to see the splendor but overlook the insincerity.

in the "detached warmth of a pale-blue afternoon in late summer," Humbert says he "rested a while" near some "withered roadside weeds" while in the sky a "very light cloud was opening its arms and moving toward a slightly more substantial one." Approaching "the friendly abyss," he says, he "grew aware of a melodious unity of sounds rising like vapor from a small mining town" and saw "red and gray roofs, […] a serpentine stream, […] the rich, ore-like glitter of the city dump, and behind it all, great timbered mountains." As he stood there, what struck H.H. as even more compelling than the scene was the "vapory vibration of accumulated sounds that never ceased for a moment, as it rose to the lip of granite where [he] stood wiping [his] foul mouth," sounds coming from "the streets of the transparent town, with the women at home and the men away." Unlike the reader, whom Humbert addresses, Humbert can hear only

> the melody of children at play, nothing but that, and so limpid was the air that within this vapor of *blended voices*, *majestic and minute*, *remote and magically near, frank and divinely enigmatic—one could hear* now and then, as if released, an almost articulate spurt of vivid laughter, or the crack of a bat, or the clatter of a toy wagon, but it was all *really too far for the eye to distinguish* any movement in the lightly etched streets. 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. (307–8)

Here, in what is surely one of the great prose passages in English, H.H. unfolds his apparently profound and moving epiphany, but the teasing hints about voices blending in the magical paradox of remote nearness, minute majesty, and enigmatic frankness, the appeals to the ear[97] and the eye, the shadowgraphs of Ray's name, the fingerprint of Cue in "articulate," and the echo of

97. Not least among the beauties of Nabokov's prose in this magnificent passage insisting on its "melodious unity of sounds" and its "vapory vibration of accumulated sounds" "of one nature" are echoes not only of Ray's name but the rumbling "r," the dental "t," the short "i" vowel, and/or the sibilant of "gratis" in words like "limpness," "disappearance," "precipice," "withered," "its," "rich," "glitter," "city," "crisscrossing," "quilt," "timbered," "lip," "granite," "limpid," "within," "this," "articulate," "vivid," "distinguish," "listening," and so forth. One's delight in this delicious effect is enhanced, of course, when recalling Humbert's opening description of what happens when Lolita's name is pronounced: "the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth" (9).

Ray's name in "vibration" are only a few of the signals to the reader of the deceitful artistic presence at work here.

Beneath the surface of Humbert's touching prose, the epiphany paragraph literally seethes with allusions to the McFate conspiracy, implicitly taunting the reader with Ray's book title: "Do the Senses Make Sense?" Waiting for the "*pol*ice and the ambulance people," Humbert looks "*forward* to surrender [...] without doing anything to *cooperate* [...] surrendering [...] *like a patient*." In his reverie, the "*ghost* of an old mountain road" crosses "a brand new highway" bordered by "*asters*," and in the distance he sees "roads *crisscrossing* the *crazy quilt* of dark and pale fields." Finally, to the reader's eyes only, appears Nabokov's attribution of proxy power embedded in topographical grandeur.[98]

Despite the eloquence of Humbert's lofty revelation, he is not, I submit, recalling an epiphanic experience of three years before. In creating the epiphany passage, Nabokov has Ray rewrite a far less majestic episode from Chapter 28. The "great timbered mountains" forming the backdrop for the valley scene are derived from a passage in which H.H. says that, after reading Lolita's letter, he fought "the mountains of agony it *raised*," abandoned the sleeping Rita and, on his way to Coalmont, used "a very old and very dirty *gray* sweater" for target practice "in a speechless glade [...] reached by a wood road from the now remote highway," filling it with "*perforations*" (267). Before reaching the "small industrial community" of Coalmont, H.H. "rested for a couple of hours" before rising and losing his breakfast, after which he "wiped [his] mouth," and then "with a blue block of ice for heart" made a call from a phone booth with a talking door to hoarse Paul Schiller who directed H.H. to Dick's old address. There H.H. tells us he "interviewed a number of dejected old people and two [...] grubby nymphets [...] thin-armed, barefoot little girls," meanwhile imagining "some lightly clad child" he might hold against himself after the killing. He recalls other voices, not unfriendly, the last a woman's from a "wooden abyss in the floor," directing him to Hunter Road. The scene on Hunter Road, "miles away, in an even more dismal district," is "all dump and ditch, and wormy vegetable garden, and shack, and *gray* drizzle, and red mud, and several smoking stacks in the distance." Outside the Schillers' house, with "withered weeds" and "[s]ounds of hammering," H.H. says, "I sat quite still in my old car, old and *frail*, at the end of my journey, at my *gray* goal, *finis*, my friends, *finis*, my fiends. The time was around two" (269).

The quiet moment in the car (a preview of his last limp moments in Melmoth), the bleak scenery with its roads and dump, its red and gray colors and

98. "*behind it all*, **GR**e**AT** t**I**mbered mountain**S**. But even b**R**ighter th**A**n those quietl**Y** rejoicing colors [...]"

withered weeds, the nausea, the sounds of hammering and the various voices —all of these dismal images from Coalmont Ray works into and romantically transforms in the rhapsodic phrasing of the dream-like prose of the epiphany paragraph. The "blue block of ice" of H.H.'s heart becomes a warm, "pale-blue afternoon," the "lightly clad child" and the "thin-armed" little girls become the "very light cloud […] opening its arms," the "wooden abyss" becomes a "friendly abyss," the "dump and ditch and wormy vegetable garden" become "a serpentine stream, and the rich, ore-like glitter of the city dump," and the disparate voices and sounds of hammering are all merged and transformed into the "concord" of "separate cries with a kind of demure murmur for background." Nabokov even uses "two," the time H.H. arrives at the Schillers', to link the Coalmont passage and the epiphany passage. Humbert, just before he leaves the road in the final chapter, sees "two cars," bounces "two or three" times, and offers us the "Hegelian synthesis linking up two dead women." Another pointer to artful revision in Chapter 28 is Humbert's attempt to compensate for his inability to banish the image of Trapp/Schiller in "the executed sweater." He resolves to make himself "especially handsome and smart" the next morning, dressing "with the stern romantic care of a gentleman about to fight a duel" and covertly alluding to Ray's editing project and its patron:

> I checked the *arrangement of my papers*, bathed and perfumed my delicate body, shaved my face and chest, selected a silk shirt and clean drawers, pulled on transparent taupe socks, and congratulated myself for having with me in my trunk some very *exquisite* clothes—a waistcoat with nacreous buttons, for instance, a pale cashmere tie and so on. (268)

This conspicuous metamorphosis functions as a metaphor for the transformation of the squalid details of Chapter 28 into the magical vision on the mountainside in the final chapter.

Nabokov further undercuts the elevated thoughts and lofty style of Humbert's "last mirage of wonder and hopelessness" with the ambiguity of the novel's concluding four paragraphs where, not surprisingly, Ray's subliminally staked claim persists in Humbert's final words. In reflections echoing Humbert's feeling "curiously aloof from my own self" (33) on his polar expedition, H.H. concludes: "This then is my story. I have reread it. It has bits of marrow sticking to it, and blood, and beautiful bright-green flies. At this or that twist of it I feel my slippery self eluding me, gliding into deeper and darker waters than I care to probe" (308). Nabokov then follows Humbert's psychological bewilderment with "inept secretary" Ray's uncorrected solecism—the mention of the "fifty-six days" during which Humbert has written his memoir. As if to emphasize the problematic nature of Humbert's "redemption," Nabokov tells

us H.H. plans to "use parts of this memoir in hermetic sessions." Does H.H. have in mind closed court sessions or onanistic reveries in his cell? Humbert continues with another intriguing observation: "For reasons that may appear more obvious than they really are, I am opposed to capital punishment; this attitude will be, I trust, shared by the sentencing judge." If "the sentencing judge" is Nabokov (the ultimate judge of the text's "sentences"), Humbert is spared "capital punishment" in one sense by dying before his trial can start; on the other hand, since "capital" also alludes to the location of Clarence Clark's District of Columbia bar and Ray's town, "Gray Star," the powers opposed to Humbert inflict ongoing punishment culminating in his "coronary thrombosis." Nabokov gives yet another twist to the dramatic irony: "Had I come before myself, I would have given Humbert at least thirty-five years for rape, and dismissed the rest of the charges." Since Ray's Foreword precedes Humbert's adulterated memoir, Ray's voice "comes before" Humbert's, which is (at least in part) Ray's. Meanwhile, Humbert's "foul mouth" doesn't permit him to finish the book without another crude pun: "Be true to your Dick." In the novel's final sentences, Nabokov's audible undertone blends with Humbert's fading voice in an envoy subliminally signed by Ray:[99]

> And do not pity C.Q. One had to choose between him and H.H., and one wanted H.H. to exist at least a couple of months longer, so as to have him make you 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. (309)

99. "the refu**G**e of a**R**t. **A**nd **ThIS** is the only immo**RtA**lit**Y** you and I may share, my Lolita." When Appel asked Nabokov whether one was "supposed to 'hear' a different voice" in the novel's final sentences, the author responded: "No, I did not mean to introduce a different voice. I did want, however, to convey a constriction of the narrator's sick heart, a warning spasm causing him to abridge names and hasten to conclude his tale before it was too late. I am glad I managed to achieve this remoteness of tone at the end" (452). I think this is technically accurate but a little cagey. There was no need to "introduce" a different voice; the voices of John Ray and Nabokov himself get plenty of exercise throughout the novel. And again Nabokov's screenplay offers an intriguing parallel: on its penultimate page "A NARRATIONAL VOICE (Dr. Ray's)" breaks in to announce Lolita's death "in Gray Star" and to herald Humbert's final words (212–13).

VI

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that however fallible Nabokov may have been, the meticulous attention he pays to detail and the pointers he offers yield handsome rewards to readers who tread carefully while following his guidance, bearing him out as a rather more generous, if demanding, antagonist in the struggle with the reader than is sometimes supposed. Nabokov's subliminal clues, once noticed, make possible an additional spine-thrill for the re-reader whose eye travels over such resonant phrases as "all this amended perhaps," "I wrote it really twice," "I am ready to make unusual amends," "I propose to borrow […] to borrow and to borrow and to borrow," and "the whole arrangement was a masterpiece." Also on the lighter side, certain puzzling, seemingly gratuitous details turn out to be "closely interwound with the inmost fiber of the book": we learn the "real purpose" of Humbert's expedition to "polar regions," the identity of the "small hairy hermaphrodite," and why "the chair is painted yellow."

How does the recognition of Nabokov's subliminal plot affect the reading of *Lolita* and the assessment of Nabokov's achievement in a larger sense? The widespread evidence of John Ray's covert influence over Humbert's story sheds considerable light on issues raised by the contending views of Dolinin, Connolly, and Boyd at the beginning of this essay. The chronological inconsistency of the "three lost days" need not be seen as leading inevitably to the supposition that the book's final scenes are mere products of Humbert's fancy, nor is it necessary to attribute the problem to an error on the part of Nabokov. Given Ray's active involvement in the text, it is hardly a leap to suppose that Nabokov deliberately created the discrepancy in the dates and other "solecisms" to attract the careful reader's attention and provoke investigation. If the lost days of Humbert's confused calendar have been misplaced by fate's "inept secretary," so too might Ray's manipulations easily account for other temporal anomalies such as the anachronistic aspects of Quilty's play and the "logically impossible" references of the "paper chase." As to why H.H.'s vanity should be so frequently sacrificed, Ray's alliance with Clark/Quilty readily accounts for the depiction of Humbert as bumbling, obtuse, and insignificant, especially in the final scenes of the book.

Further, Ray's subliminal signature mimics Nabokov's device of implanting the anagram "Vivian Darkbloom" as a clue to the authorship of the book he once contemplated publishing anonymously. Ray's covert claims dotting the text thus effectively call into question any view of Humbert as an artist in his own right.[100] And herein lies the most significant effect of my subliminal

100. Seeing Humbert as "assuming the role of an authentic writer" and

reading. The unmasking of John Ray as an agent of McFate allows the reader to see Humbert's confession as a travesty of truth and fatally undermines the supposed morality and sincerity of his conversion. Far from rendering the book pointless, such a reading allows the enchanted reader to savor the comedy and pathos of scenes "rich in independent life" ("Homais" 81) while at the same time marveling at Nabokov's sublimely artistic deceit. By having Ray provide Humbert's "local palliative of articulate art" and "moral apotheosis," Nabokov firmly establishes the distance between himself and his creature that affords "aesthetic bliss" to author and reader alike.

Maintaining as he did that in great fiction the principal contest is "between the author and the reader" (*SO* 183), Nabokov sets our assessment of Humbert's character as a crucial test of our success in the game. Repeatedly referring to his readers as members of the jury, Humbert invites judgment in powerfully affecting language, a heady mix of wit, humor, sharp social observation, and brilliant parody. Indeed it is partly delight in the magnificent language of *Lolita* and the tendency to credit Humbert with that language that complicate the reader's sympathies. The major campaign to seduce us that Humbert launches in the latter half of the novel, his impassioned avowals of love ("I insist the world know how much I loved my Lolita"), his expressions of remorse ("oh my poor, bruised child"), and his epiphany near the end of the book are part and parcel of Ray's contrivance. The dramatic irony that so frequently marks the gap between Humbert's awareness and that of the close reader underscores the importance of avoiding the trap of identifying with the "hero."[101] Since Ray has added his string to Humbert's bow, the whole issue of Humbert's "sincerity" is moot. Thus the text bears out Nabokov's blunt and unequivocal judgment: "Humbert Humbert is a vain and cruel wretch who manages to appear 'touching.' That epithet, in its true, tear-iridized sense, can only apply to my poor little girl" (*SO* 94).

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assigning him "the status of a fully conscious 'author,'" Tammi, for example, concludes that, as Nabokov said of Don Quixote, H.H. is transformed from "'parody' into 'paragon'" (283–84; 286).

101. A fault Nabokov identifies with less than good readers (*LL* 3).

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