

**CURSO DE LETRAS**

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**REREADING LOLITA – NEW INSIGHTS AND PERCEPTIONS**

Santa Cruz do Sul

2016

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**Monografia apresentada ao curso de Letras da  
Universidade de Santa Cruz do Sul, como atividade  
integrante da disciplina de Monografia II.**

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**Santa Cruz do Sul**

**2016**

*It was love at first sight, at last  
sight, at ever and ever sight.*

*(Nabokov, Lolita)*

## RESUMO

Este estudo foca brevemente *Lolita*, um romance escrito por Vladimir Nabokov, buscando novos modos de compreensão e percepções da releitura. Também trata do conhecimento pessoal dos leitores, que muda de acordo com as suas percepções interiores. Deste modo, o estudo salienta como o ato de reler o romance pode contribuir para novas compreensões do enredo e das personagens, como a capacidade de memória influencia o processo de leitura, e como a imaginação contribui para tais concepções.

**Palavras-chave:** Releitura. Processo de construção do significado. Imaginação. Percepção.

## ABSTRACT

This study briefly focuses on *Lolita* – the novel written by Vladimir Nabokov – seeking for new insights and perceptions when rereading it. It also presents that personal knowledge of readers modifies according to their inner perceptions. Therefore, the study stresses on how the act of rereading the novel may contribute to new views of the plot and characters, how memory capacity influences the reading process, and how imagination contributes for such insights.

**Keywords:** Rereading. Meaning-Making Process. Imagination. Perception.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>LOLITA: THE NOVEL.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.1</b>	<b>The plot.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Main characters .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.2.1</b>	<b>Humbert Humbert.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.2.2</b>	<b>Lolita.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>REREADING LOLITA .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Insights and perceptions .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.1.1</b>	<b>Memory capacity and reading process .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Imagination and the continuous meaning-making process .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>FINAL CONSIDERATIONS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
	<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>23</b>
	<b>APPENDIX 1 .....</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>APPENDIX 2 .....</b>	<b>28</b>
	<b>APPENDIX 3 .....</b>	<b>30</b>

## 1 INTRODUCTION

*Lolita* – the novel written by Vladimir Nabokov – caused a lot of controversy when released due to its content. The novel deals with emotions and provokes different feelings to each reader, since it may have many interpretations – some think it is sad, some that it is funny, and some that it is a love story. Humbert Humbert and Lolita are the main characters of the novel, and until the end it is not possible to affirm who is the villain and who is the good guy, as it also depends on readers' perceptions. A good reason to reread the book is to see if those perceptions and opinions will change, and it probably will happen.

Reading is a quite complex process; it involves some elements that might lead the readers to have different visions from the same story, and for that reason the research study was based on text, subjectivity, and memory in the fields of Human and Social Science Research. Memory capacity is an important element, since it changes reading perception – according to Tomitch (2003, p. 26) there are better and weaker readers, and what differs them is that one is more proficient and aware to use their knowledge to facilitate reading process, whilst the other struggles with text organization, thus perceives a story differently. The significance of imagination to get a meaning from a text will be debated here, as well as the cruciality of the meaning-making process to the reading development; this one is linked to all the others factors already pointed out, because it is a continuous and active process. Rochère (2013, p. 5) affirms that meaning is “not contained within the text but is produced in the act of reading” – this is why readers' perspectives alter according to their world knowledge, experiences, previous readings, environment, context, and personal changes.

Nabokov plays with words and leaves gaps; as a result, readers fill in with their understandings so everyone is able to create a different scenery and story according to the elements mentioned. Those elements will be briefly clarified throughout this study, while attempting to connect them to the rereading of *Lolita*.

## 2 LOLITA: THE NOVEL

The literary work that brought notoriety to the Russian author Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) was published for the first time in Paris, in 1955, by Olympia Press after several refusals from publishers due to being considered pornographic. According to Susy Elaine da Costa Freitas (2009, p. 236) “[...] Olympia Press finally published the book that would become one of the most acclaimed and controversial literary work from the twentieth century<sup>1</sup>” (our translation).

*Lolita* might be considered simply a novel, however Nabokov explains in the foreword of the novel signed by the fictional character John Ray Jr. that “[...] it deals with situations and emotions that would remain exasperatingly vague to the reader” (2003, p. 2). The plot focuses on a conflict of characters’ feelings besides the reader. As the novel may be considered a dramatic love story, it may also be a disturbing case of mental illness, which might be connected to the reader’s reading process; so the narrative is unique, full of dualisms, and it may surely make any reader reflect about it.

The English edition used here is the one published online in 2003, spellchecked by M. Avrekh. In addition, the present study resulted from the feelings and perceptions the author got since the first contact with the novel, as a result the plot and the two main characters are studied in order to comment on new insights and perceptions of it.

### 2.1 The plot

Even the novel *Lolita* owes its reputation to the nymphet, the way it presents the pervert’s profile is also remarkable. Moraes (2007) supports that the complexity the author formulates that profile is noticeable because Humbert Humbert does not fit the caricature of a deprave nor of a pedophile, and those stereotypes are put in check throughout the narrative.

The plot is written in form of memories and it is narrated by Humbert Humbert, also mentioned as “H. H.”, who is a Literature professor and one of the main characters of the story. He is featured as a white widowed male, shrewd and sensible, or leastways that is how he wants to be seen.

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<sup>1</sup> “[...] Olympia Press finalmente trouxe a público esse livro que viria a ser um dos mais aclamados e controversos exemplares da literatura do século XX”.

In the beginning of the story Humbert describes little Lolita as the one girl worth of what he calls love:

Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta. She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita. (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 3).

According to Moraes (2007), the dualism may be felt here as a “puerile act to spell a name while unveiling its latent eroticism”, but Nabokov always invites the readers to suspect the appearances then they can see the perverse under new lenses.

Professor Humbert blames Lolita for having seduced him; transposes to the child the image of a love he had during his youth but had died very young, the girl Annabel. By trying to diminish his guilt for loving a twelve years old girl, he aims tirelessly to find a justification for such act, revealing his past in order to manipulate the readers.

By doing a flashback to his childhood, Humbert describes Annabel and adds that they “[...] were madly, clumsily, shamelessly, agonizingly in love with each other” (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 5). Such remembrances are attempts to soothe the naked truth that was about to come as it is seen in the narrative:

I leaf again and again through these miserable memories, and keep asking myself, was it then, in the glitter of that remote summer, that the rift in my life began; or was my excessive desire for that child only the first evidence of an inherent singularity? When I try to analyze my own cravings, motives, actions and so forth, I surrender to a sort of retrospective imagination which feeds the analytic faculty with boundless alternatives and which causes each visualized route to fork and re-fork without end in the maddeningly complex prospect of my past. 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. (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 6-7).

The term nymphet – which is very used in the plot – is claimed to be defined by Nabokov not as human creatures “but nymphic (that is, demoniac)” (2003, p. 9), they were aged between nine and fourteen, but just a few girls with that age could be seen as nymphets, and it is considered an art to recognize one:

A normal man given a group photograph of school girls or Girl Scouts and asked to point out the comeliest one will not necessarily choose the nymphet



among them. You have to be an artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins and a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine (oh, how you have to cringe and hide!), in order to discern at once, by ineffable signs--the slightly feline outline of a cheekbone, the slenderness of a downy limb, and other indices which despair and shame and tears of tenderness forbid me to tabulate--the little deadly demon among the wholesome children; she stands unrecognized by them and unconscious herself of her fantastic power. (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 9).

Readers do not know yet if Humbert is mad or if he is an artist. More the story flows, more readers get hints that everything Humbert says is just an endeavor to justify his actions and the peculiarity of his thoughts. One of his attempts to show how good he may be is seen in the narrative:

He [Humbert] had the utmost respect for ordinary children, with their purity and vulnerability, and under no circumstances would he have interfered with the innocence of a child, if there was the least risk of a row. But how his heart beat when, among the innocent throng, he espied a demon child, "enfant charmante et fourbe," dim eyes, bright lips, ten years in jail if you only show her you are looking at her. (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 11).

Humbert states "[...] in my sanitary relations with women I was practical, ironical and brisk" (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 8) claiming, therefore, that his admiration and will were to have the nymphets even after trying to get in relationships with adult women.

According to the professor it is not his fault that he has such feelings for young girls, reinforcing that it was, actually, their own fault. Consequently, his acuity and accuracy attempts the readers to rethink about their own moral values, as he induces the reader to call it a love story by telling only his point of view.

In order to "spend a studious summer subsisting on a compact boxful of notes [...] accumulated and bathing in some nearby lake" (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 22), H. H. travels to a small town and stays in Charlotte Haze's house. He does not like the house nor its owner, however, he sees Dolores, who is Charlotte's daughter, and he immediately falls in love with the mademoiselle. In fact Humbert gets obsessed about the young girl, so, in order to keep in touch with her everyday, Humbert gets married to Charlotte.

Even though readers are aware that Humbert may be a sexual pervert and may develop hideous thoughts about the nymphet – since the author displays to the readers some of Humbert's notes about his routine observing and living with Lolita and her mother – readers may feel pity for him when he expresses how sad his life would be without her delightful

company: “[...] I knew already that I could not live without the child” (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 44). Such feature may granted Vladimir Nabokov to be considered a great writer.

In a particular day, being informed that Lolita was going to a summer camp for three weeks, Humbert gets heartbroken and ponders killing Charlotte. While Lolita is camping, Humbert makes his wife find out about his infamous diary, then she has an accident after reading it and, as a result, she passes out.

He describes his scheme to be:

[...] a marvel of primitive art: I would whizz over to Camp Q, tell Lolita her mother was about to undergo a major operation at an invented hospital, and then keep moving with my sleepy nymphet from inn to inn while her mother got better and better and finally died. (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 75).

Lolita and Humbert travel from motel to motel for over a year, meanwhile he threatens the young girl in case she mentions anybody about their relationship. Lolita gets somehow kidnapped by Clare Quilty in one of their motel stays so she leaves Humbert heartbroken and lonely. Humbert spends years trying to find them, but he fails in his attempt since he does not have any address. Humbert then meets Rita and they start a relationship. Humbert continuously tries to forget Dolores, until he gets an unexpected letter that states:

Dear Dad: How's everything? I'm married. I'm going to have a baby. I guess he's going to be a big one. I guess he'll come right for Christmas. This is a hard letter to write. I'm going nuts because we don't have enough to pay our debts and get out of here. Dick is promised a big job in Alaska in his very specialized corner of the mechanical field, that's all I know about it but it's really grand. Pardon me for withholding our home address but you may still be mad at me, and Dick must not know. This town is something. You can't see the morons for the smog. Please do send us a check, Dad. We could manage with three or four hundred or even less, anything is welcome, you might sell my old things, because once we go there the dough will just start rolling in. Write, please. I have gone through much sadness and hardship. Yours expecting, Dolly (Mrs. Richard F. Schiller). (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 192).

Humbert gets so thrilled to get news about Lolita that he tracks down the address and finds her house. He writes back to Lolita asking – in exchange for the money she needed – who was the person who took her away from him. She reveals it was Clare Quilty.

Then Humbert decides to visit Lolita and recognizes she has changed a lot. She is now a seventeen years old pregnant woman who is not a nymphet anymore. She is a “[...] couple of inches taller [...] her pale-freckled cheeks were hollowed, and her bare shins and arms had lost all their tan” (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 194-195).

During the visit Lolita is nervous and she introduces Dick Schiller as her husband to her stepfather: “‘Dick, this is my Dad!’ cried Dolly in a resounding violent voice that struck me as a totally strange, and new, and cheerful, and old, and sad, because the young fellow, veteran of a remote war, was hard of hearing” (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 197). She asks Humbert not to be dense and let the past in the past, however he can never forget the past:

[...] and there she was with her ruined looks and her adult, rope-veined narrow hands and her goose-flesh white arms, and her shallow ears, and her unkempt armpits, there she was (my Lolita!), hopelessly worn at seventeen, with that baby, dreaming already in her of becoming a big shot and retiring around 2020 A.D.--and I looked and looked at her, and knew [...] that I loved her more than anything I had ever seen or imagined on earth, or hoped for anywhere else. (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 200-201).

By then Humbert realizes he still loves her, although Lolita is very changed and is not a child anymore. Humbert gives her the money she needed and asks her one last time: “You are sure you are not coming with me? Is there no hope of your coming? Tell me only this” (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 202), but she refuses. Then he leaves obstinated by the idea of finding Clare Quilty. When he afterwards finds Quilty, he kills him and shortly after is arrested ironically for driving on the wrong side of the road. Finally, some of Humbert’s last confessions are about how much he regrets taking Lolita’s childhood, and it happens a little before he dies in the prison:

I might find, whatever lithophanic eternities might be provided for me, nothing could make my Lolita forget the foul lust I had inflicted upon her. Unless it can be proven to me--to me as I am now, today, with my heart and by beard, and my putrefaction--that in the infinite run it does not matter a jot that a North American girl-child named Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac, unless this can be proven (and if it can then life is a joke), I see nothing for the treatment of my misery but the melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art. [...] I loved you. I was a pentapod monster, but I loved you. I was despicable and brutal, and turpid, and everything, mais je t'aimais, je t'aimais! And there were times when I knew how you felt, and it was hell to know it, my little one. Lolita girl, brave Dolly Schiller. (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 204-206).

It is a tricky strategy of Nabokov’s writing, as readers do not feel sorry only for Lolita, but also for Humbert that at least knows what he did was wrong. Although it is not possible to know if he really felt that way or if it was just a stirring of emotions from someone who might read his confessions. Such dual feelings may be build up by readers.

## 2.2 Main characters

This study is centered on Humbert Humbert and Lolita, who might be considered the main characters. However, the story is composed by other important characters – such as Annabel Leigh, who is Humbert’s first love and precursor of Lolita; Charlotte Haze, who is Lolita’s mother and a very peculiar woman and Clare Quilty, who is charming and shares Humbert’s enthusiasm for nymphets, he seduces Lolita to run away with him.

### 2.2.1 Humbert Humbert

Humbert Humbert, who is the narrator of the novel, was born in Paris in 1910. His father and mother’s elder sister, Sybil, raised him after his mother died when he was three years old. He is an European professor with an odd predilection for young girls, that he calls nymphets.

The narration is very subjective, as the story and the characters are presented based on his judgement. Humbert proves to be a complex character, that is, persuasive, sarcastic, seductive, intelligent, sensible and timid. There is an interesting dualism in his personality, whilst he may be considered a pedophile, he still tries to do things good men would do. In the fictional foreword, Nabokov writes a little more in depth about Humbert’s psyche:

[...] horrible, is an abject, he is a shining example of moral leprosy, a mixture of ferocity and jocularity that betrays supreme misery perhaps, but is not conducive to attractiveness. He is ponderously capricious. Many of his casual opinions on the people and scenery of this country are ludicrous. A desperate honesty that throbs through his confession does not absolve him from sins of diabolical cunning. He is abnormal. He is not a gentleman. But how magically his singing violin can conjure up a tendresse, a compassion for Lolita that makes us entranced with the book while abhorring its author! (2003, p. 2-3).

He addresses the discourse in his favor always attempting to justify his actions, stating there is always a reason behind every action. It is hard to tell if Humbert is a good or a bad person, as he is not a shallow character. In some way, he represents the dualism of being a human. Moraes (2007) introduces Humbert Humbert as a character “built up on paradoxes. If, on one hand, he is briefly defined as a pervert, on the other, he never corresponds to the caricatures of a sex maniac”. Readers may feel, consequently, some empathy for him. Moraes (2007) still affirms “[...] in fact, these stereotypes are deeply discussed along the whole

narrative. First, by the identification of the pervert to a child [...] Nabokov's witty plays on words end to create a peculiar language for perversion”.

H. H. seduces the jury – that is the readers – with well-chosen words. He is a very solitary man, so, when he moves to the United States and meets Lolita, suddenly she becomes the object of his desires and the only reason for him to be alive. He is even capable of killing Lolita's mother to live with the child.

As Humbert finally gets arrested and is accused of Quilty's murderer, he writes the manuscript in order to justify himself. He only becomes self-aware when he is finishing writing it, because he realizes he ruined Lolita's childhood and regrets it. Moraes (2007) remembers that “the prison where the narrator is recluse – the jail – offers a potent image of his inner prison, the perversion. In it [...] everything gets repeated; [...] the character is also [...] paralyzed<sup>2</sup>” (our translation). Eventually he dies in the prison alone.

### **2.2.2 Lolita**

Dolores “Lolita” Haze is a twelve years old typical American girl. Information about her is scarce and what is really known is given by Humbert, since he is the narrator. She may be considered as the object of his affection, so by his eyes, Lolita is beautiful, capricious, flirtatious, and she symbolizes the seductive qualities of a nymphet.

Humbert deeply describes her in the narrative stressing her features and attitudes: “Lolita of the strident voice and rich brown hair — of the bangs and the swirls and the sides and the curls at the back, and the sticky hot neck, and the vulgar vocabulary — ‘revolting’, ‘super’, ‘luscious’, ‘goon’, ‘drip’” (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 45). As Humbert describes her from his perspective, Lolita seems to be just a riotous preteen that seeks interest in him because she wants to compete with her mother to see who gets more attention; nevertheless, she is very affectionate to H. H.

Dolores seems to like Humbert Humbert at first, but after her mother's death they spend more time together, and things get more serious. However, she gets tired of him. Humbert tries to educate her, but she remains unimpressed with his European-ish cultural ideas and defies his authority what difficults their relationship.

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<sup>2</sup> “a prisão onde o narrador está recluso – a cadeia – oferece uma imagem potente da sua prisão interior, a perversão. Nela [...] tudo se repete; [...] o personagem está igualmente [...] paralisado”.

Even realizing they would not be happy together, Humbert refuses the idea of giving up his beloved girl. Eventually she runs away to stay with Clare Quilty – Humbert’s foe – who is able to cast her out. She marries Dick Schiller but “Mrs. ‘Richard F. Schiller’ [Lolita] died in childbed, giving birth to a stillborn girl, on Christmas Day 1952” (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 2), a month after Humbert passes out while he was in prison.

### 3 REREADING LOLITA

*Lolita* is an uncanny story that might provoke unusual feelings on the reader due to its content. The rereading happened in order to see if maturation and other aspects would change how the story is interpreted, and it certainly did. Of course, the understanding will possibly not remain the same when rereading any story, as we are not the same as a person and the context might be different. In addition, reading is a complex process and it is necessary to immerse into the text to achieve a complete experience, thus allowing the reader to really comprehend the story not to only decode symbols.

When first reading it the sensation may be epitomized as uncomfortable. It is difficult to explain as the circumstances will be different for each reader, thus allowing different judgements. However, when rereading *Lolita* the sentiment about the story and the characters may change as the reader probably experienced new situations between the first and the second reading. The victim might become the criminal and a situation that was seen as odd might be a little more normal. It will depend on personal factors such as the conditions when the story was read, new happenings the reader had after first reading it, etc. Those factors that might change the readers' reading comprehension – and that will change their perception of the story – are probably connected to the meaning-making process, which is a continuous process, as readers construct meaning based on their knowledge with reading and what they have learned from the world until that moment. It will be discussed some of those elements more in depth in this work, relating them to the book by Vladimir Nabokov.

#### 3.1 Insights and perceptions

There are many studies trying to explain how the complex reading process happens. Some of the cognitive reading theories claims that reading is a product of two cognitive elements: language comprehension and decoding. These two elements do not happen separately, they complement each other on the process. That model states that a reader is not a passive participant but an active constructor of meaning, and exhibiting a “critical” attitude towards what is read will make the experience of reading richer. According to Walker (2016) “[readers] actively make, or construct, meaning; what [they] bring to the text is at least as important as the text itself”. Chandler (1995) states:

A text cannot speak for itself: it needs a reader as well as a writer. Research work in cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics has emphasized the creative activity of the reader. Cognitive psychologists explain the interpretative act of reading in terms of 'schema theory'. The notion of a 'schema' (plural 'schemata' or 'schemas') [is] defined as 'an active organization of past reactions, or of past experiences.' [...] memory [is] a creative process of reconstruction making use of such schemas. According to contemporary schema theory, perception, comprehension, interpretation and memory are mediated by mental schemata - hierarchical structures (or 'frames') for organizing knowledge.

The study will focus on the constructivist theory in which the meaning is “negotiated” between the text and the reader. There is a wide range of theories – other than the one that was chosen – about where meaning emerges, such as “objectivist: [which] meaning [is] entirely in text ('transmitted'); [...] subjectivist: [which] meaning [is] entirely in its interpretation by readers ('re-created’)” (CHANDLER, 1995).

Meaning-making might be considered a constructivist process since the reader interacts with the text and builds a meaning for it. According to Hein (p. 16) “constructivist theory argues that [...] personal meaning is inevitable”, so it is essential to keep in mind that, when reading, readers will carry their own involvements, prior knowledge and memories to a text, and that changes the overall perception, thus bringing different interpretations, as it was already mentioned.

Rereading also unleashes new perceptions that readers had not faced yet. Those new perceptions might be related to the time when the story is read. As Rosenblatt (2005, p. 7) remembers, “every reading act is an event, or a transaction involving a particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, a text, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context”. The relationship between individual differences in reading development and the use of inferences of perception during reading may affect the way the reader understands the text.

In *Lolita* there is no sex explicited, but the reader may deduce that it happened by some clues Humbert gives, as the discourse might be considered more erotic in some fragments. It is a sarcastic novel and depending on the readers' perception there are some parts that might be considered funny, as when little Lolita says that sleeping in the same bedroom as Humbert would be incest:

Look here, Lo. Let's settle this once for all. For all practical purposes I am your father. I have a feeling of great tenderness for you. In your mother's absence I am responsible for your welfare. We are not rich, and while we travel, we shall be obliged--we shall be thrown a good deal together. Two people sharing one room, inevitably enter into a kind--how shall I say--a kind--



The word is incest, said Lo--and walked into the closet, walked out again with a young golden giggle, opened the adjoining door, and after carefully peering inside with her strange smoky eyes lest she make another mistake, retired to the bathroom. (NABOKOV, 2003, p. 85-86).

According to Lied (2008, p. 69), apprehension of perceptions seem to be a technique of putting into words the captions the authors and readers make, and that contributes for insights and perceptions based on reading process. As Nabokov describes the scenes of his love setting, readers also build up captions and insights in their minds, and they seem to be essential for meaning-making process while reading the novel.

### 3.1.1 Memory capacity and reading process

The memory capacity plays an important part in human cognitive activities according to Tomitch (2003), and it varies from a reader to another as everyone has different storage capacity. The author also presents the idea of **better** and **weaker** readers. Better readers are more proficient and “use their knowledge of the overall organization of a text to facilitate encoding and subsequent retrieval of text information” (2003, p. 26), that means that proficient readers have a different strategy to read, they perceive important hints in the text “which signal a particular rhetorical pattern and they use their own knowledge of that pattern to organize the incoming information into hierarchical clusters and form a complete macrostructure” (2003, p. 26). On the other hand, Tomitch (2003, p. 26) also remembers that weaker readers are less aware of text organization and they tend to think all the ideas in a text have the same importance, “thus not being able to form a complete macrostructure”.

Another thing that is supposed to differ a better reader from a weaker one is prediction: “once the better reader spots a predictive signal, he/she knows what kind of incoming information he/she should look for to fulfill the tacit commitment of the writer, thus putting less burden on working memory” (TOMITCH, 2003, p. 26-27). The capacity to infer ideas that have not been explicitly stated in the text is an essential characteristic good readers have, without that, the reader will not see what is within the text, consequently having an inferior understanding of what is being read. If the reader, when reading the novel *Lolita*, do not infer any thoughts while doing it the comprehension will be more literal, it will be based on what is actually written. Tomitch adds: “the ability to exploit the contextual cues and draw appropriate inferences depends in part on the reader’s working memory” (2003, p. 38).

The reader has to keep previously read information in mind in order to comprehend a text, and for that, it is necessary to be aware of text organizational patterns to use them to organize the course of information processing so the working memory will not be overwhelmed with the storage of text information. That is why readers with different memory storage capacity have different awareness of a same story, because their process of reading comprehension takes differently.

Taking into account the complex process of reading comprehension and the limited capacity of working memory, one is tempted to ask how a reader manages to construct a meaningful representation of the text considering the great storage and processing demands required in the process of reading. The demands for storage include pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic information, which is necessary for computing relationships within and between clauses and sentences [...]. Propositions which are of central importance to the theme of the text also have to be maintained in working memory, so the relations between larger portions of the text can be established. [...] The demands for processing include decoding, lexical accessing, parsing, inferencing and integration [...] all the processes involved in reading comprehension. (TOMITCH, 2003, p. 15).

Some mechanisms may be used in order to facilitate reading and reduce the demands of memory storage. Rosenblatt suggests “we can turn our selective attention toward a broader or narrower area of the field” (2005, p. 6), consequently we will organize meaning depending on where our selective attention is emphasized. Not focusing equally in every sentence will make the process easier and readers will not overburden their memory capacity storage with details that might be not so important. Just and Carpenter (apud TOMITCH, 2003, p. 25) propose three mechanisms:

First, the reader tries to interpret each word of a phrase as soon as it is encountered, which they call immediacy of processing. Second, lower level representations are deactivated as higher level structures are built (e.g. surface representations of words and syntactic structures may be deactivated after referential representations have been created). Third, the context provided in the text facilitates processing, hence reducing the demands for storage.

When doing a better use of memory capacity and some other elements that might facilitate reading, the process will be more valuable, therefore the reader will have an improved and enriching experience.

### 3.2 Imagination and the continuous meaning-making process

As seen, reading is an active, constructive, meaning-making process. Rosenblatt (2005, p. 7) states that “[...] meaning can be constructed only by drawing on the reader’s own personal linguistic and life experiences”, that is why what a text means can differ from reader to reader since the process of lecture is continuous.

Meaning-making construction is “defined as the ability to integrate challenging or ambiguous situations into a framework of personal meaning using conscious, value-based reflection” (DEMEROUDI et al., 2009, p. 508). It is based on the visual text itself – the words – and on non-visual information such as previous knowledge the reader already has; that kind of non-visual information is even more potent than the actual words written on the page.

To read is not to decipher every single word for its individual meaning, but to bring that prior knowledge to everything that is read, so it is possible to make predictions about what is coming next in the text: “making predictions about where a text is headed is an important part of the comprehension equation. It is alright to make wrong guesses about what a text will do [...] [it is] a part of the meaning-making process of reading” (WALKER et al., 2016). It is also stressed by Lied (2008, p. 72) that “instant captions are characterized by an awareness of the present”, thus Nabokov is capable of apprehending the predictions of the reader by capturing the best of the process, which is represented in the novel he wrote.

The process of reading is also hypothesis based and, as a result, imagination has a strong impact on the interpretation of a text. Tomitch (2003, p. 43) points out that:

Text organization may be signaled in the surface structure and that signaling in turn may lead readers/listeners to perceive how texts are organized. [...] two aspects of text organization [problem/solution and prediction] have a very important characteristic in common: they create certain expectations in the reader in relation to what is going to come next. This way the flow of input can be organized by the reader and chunking may be facilitated.

It is difficult to avoid guessing what might happen on the next pages and chapters of a narrative and that is what makes the process interesting: what will come next may be the opposite we imagined, making reading a surprising and unpredictable trip. It is not different concerning the novel *Lolita*: Moraes (2007) asserts that, since the narrative is constantly playing with language ambiguity,

the writer expands its limits and broadens its boarders to finally reveal its phantasmagorical dimensions. The fact that the hero is called Humbert

Humbert only corroborates with that idea, since the name is liable of phonetic developments, evoking the spanish *hombre* as well as the french *ombre* – to compose a character that is a man and a shadow at the same time. [...] Nabokov creates an erotic language that leaves sex on pendent, according to the pervert's convictions<sup>3</sup>.

Nabokov plays with reader's imagination as there are many details that are not completely explicit in the plot. However, when rereading, the process might be slightly different as we know what is going to happen, but the story interpretation will probably be very different: “[...] imagination can only come into full play when ‘the light of sense goes out’ and when thought reaches a point at which it is ‘its own perfection and reward’” (MAN, 1984, p. 16).

The meaning-making process results from a combination of words, which constructs visions and images of a word that might be different from reader to reader. In such case, a certain scene in the plot may not be captured as an erotic scene, depending on the reader's perception and imagination. Such idea is reinforced by the author Paul de Man (1984, p. 16): “We know very little about the kind of images that such an imagination would produce, except that they would have little in common with what we have come to expect from familiar metaphorical figures”.

As this study presented, the process of re-exploring a narrative is always enriching, it will never be a waste of time. The story re-interpretation will be established on various elements such as the ones mentioned before; so it will be somehow re-written by the reader, since the he/she will make new conclusions, the story's final concept will be different when compared to the first reading and, also, when compared to some other reader's conception. According to Newman:

To comprehend fully a narrative text the events shown must be chained so the reader can form a coherent representation. Many times the links between the narrative's events are not explicitly expressed and the reader needs to relate them through the production and integration of inferences. Almost every text requires the reader to be capable of using a rich reserv of shared knowledge about the world. There is a strong correlation between inference production and text integration. The inference production is necessary many times to the construction of precise text representations [...]. Inferences can be done to provide absent informations, resolve discrepancies or predict

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<sup>3</sup> “O escritor expande seus limites e amplia suas fronteiras para enfim revelar suas dimensões mais fantasmáticas. O fato de seu herói chamar-se Humbert Humbert só vem corroborar essa ideia, já que o próprio nome é passível de desdobramentos fonéticos, evocando tanto o *hombre* espanhol quanto a *ombre* francesa – para compor um personagem que é a um só tempo o homem e sua sombra. [...] Nabokov consegue criar uma linguagem erótica que deixa o sexo em suspenso, bem de acordo com as convicções de seu pervertido”.

consequences. There are many inferences types, such as the ones of coherence, the predictives, the perfecting and the causal.<sup>4</sup> (2004, p. 77-78).

Considering that imagination and meaning-making process are different for each person, there might – and will – have diversified interpretation of a same story. Perhaps it occurs because the prior knowledge of one reader differs from the other, or it may be because of personal values, moral libertation and pre-concepts the reader carries, or it even can be because the author is not very clear in some parts - sometimes on purpose. What is known is that there will always have interpretative duality – the impossible might be possible at the same time, the good might be the bad, the hero might be the villain – our personal reasons will influence it.

To show how divergent opinions and interpretations might be about *Lolita*, it will displayed different critics analyzing the novel, so it is possible to see that there is no such thing as right or wrong understanding of a text. The first critic is by Elizabeth Janeway (1958), titled as “The Tragedy of Man Driven by Desire” (APPENDIX 1). She affirms the first time reading it the impression was completely different from when she reread the book – at first, she thought it was a funny plot, but when the rereading happened, she says it was the opposite, that it was the saddest narrative she had ever read. That is a feeling that many readers might have when having contact with such an unusual novel. The critic’s author searches for answers for questions that almost every readers ask themselves while reading *Lolita*, such as if it immoral, pornographic, and if it we should take the story so seriously or take it as a well-written fictional masterpiece. Janeway concludes her critic by suggesting that we should read without such a moral vision over it and enjoy it for the incredible way Nabokov presents the characters, who are human beings – not good nor bad, not a hero nor a villain, but both things – they are real, even having some exaggerated peculiar features.

The second is by Bret Anthony Johnston (2006), called “Why 'Lolita' remains shocking, and a favorite” (APPENDIX 2), in which he investigates important elements that make *Lolita* an important masterpiece in Literature. He calls the novel immaculate, disturbing, and says the dual is presented throughout the whole story – it is “passionate and playful, while

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<sup>4</sup> “Para compreender plenamente um texto narrativo, os eventos apresentados devem ser encadeados para que o leitor possa formar uma representação coerente. Muitas vezes, os elos entre os acontecimentos de uma narrativa não estão explicitamente expressados e o leitor precisa relacioná-los através da produção e integração de inferências. Quase todo texto exige que o leitor seja capaz de utilizar uma rica reserva de conhecimento compartilhado sobre o mundo. Existe uma forte correlação entre a produção de inferência e a integração de texto. A produção de inferência muitas vezes é necessária à construção de representações de texto [...]. Inferências podem ser feitas para fornecer informações ausentes, solucionar discrepâncias ou prever consequências. Existem vários tipos de inferências, incluindo as de coerência, preditivas, aperfeiçoadoras e causais.”

[...] simultaneously lyrical and unsettling and erotic and violent” (2006). Johnston points out how beautifully Nabokov makes readers feel empathy for a man who might be considered a monster. The author of that critic mentions that the novel is certainly a love story, even though a disturbing one, as readers’ may find themselves in Humbert’s soul and emotions – perhaps this is one of the main reasons why *Lolita* is still so shocking as well as a favorite.

The last one chosen that is interesting to notice is by Charles Rolo (1958): “*Lolita*, by Vladimir Nabokov” (APPENDIX 3). Rolo sums up what almost everyone thinks when first having contact or listening about the book: they expect pornography, which is definitely not found in *Lolita*. The author remarks Nabokov’s writing characteristics and how they make the novel incomparable. In his opinion, it is sophisticated yet comic:

It is one of the funniest serious novels I have ever read; and the vision of its abominable hero, who never deludes or excuses himself, brings into grotesque relief the cant, the vulgarity, and the hypocritical conventions that pervade the human comedy.

The duality present in *Lolita* is what might have made the story criticized, but at the same time, that is what might turned it into a masterpiece. The ambiguity, which provokes so many interpretations and comments on the novel as well as the main characters, is probably what makes it special. Nabokov allows readers to create their own captions of the novel, making it personal, authentic – this is why the process of reading it is so valuable.

#### 4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Vladimir Nabokov knew that *Lolita* would be criticized and that the novel would generate divergent opinions – its ambiguity is the main reason why this study happened. The story deserves to be read and reread, because it will possibly improve readers' knowledge and – as Nabokov plays with the dual of the language, creating a peerless novel that still divide readers' opinions – it will make them reflect about society and even about themselves. Oscar Wilde (2008) puts that “the books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame”, so the novel might just present things that some readers would not like to see.

In 2014, the author of this study was certain that rereading *Lolita* would occur, so in 2015 it was decided that the study theme would be about the novel and how a second reading can influence perception and perspective. Rereading was as intense as the first time reading the book; the circumstances were different and some personal opinions had changed between the readings, so it was expected that the understanding would be altered. When first having contact with some researches about how reading process happens things were not so clear, but after more study and discussion on the topic, it got easier and more interesting. The theme is very dense and complex, however understanding it better makes reading even more thought provoking.

This study aims to contribute to improving readers' reading process, attempting to make them more aware of abilities they can use in their favor to do it – such as memory capacity, imagination, and perception. It also purposes to readers to reread *Lolita* or any other book to see how they will perceive it and how they changed not just as people but also as readers. The author of this study intends to learn more on the subject to publish something in the near future.

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## APPENDIX 1

*The Tragedy of Man Driven by Desire*

By Elizabeth Janeway<sup>5</sup>

August, 1958.

The first time I read *Lolita* I thought it was one of the funniest books I'd ever come on. (This was the abbreviated version published in the *Anchor Review* last year.) The second time I read it, uncut, I thought it was one of the saddest. I mention this personal reaction only because *Lolita* is one of those occasional books which arrive swishing behind them a long tail of opinion and reputation which can knock the unwary reader off his feet. Is it shocking, is it pornographic, is it immoral? Is its reading to be undertaken not as a simple experience but as a conscious action which will place one on this, or that, side of a critical dividing line? What does the Watch and Ward Society say of it? What does Sartre, Graham Greene or *Partisan Review*?

This is hard on any book. "*Lolita*" stands up to it wonderfully well, though even its author has felt it necessary to contribute an epilogue on his intentions. This, by the way, seems to me quite as misleading as the purposely absurd (and very funny) prologue by "John Ray Jr., Ph. D.," who is a beautifully constructed caricature of American Academic Bumbledom. But in providing a series of *trompe-l'oeil* frames for the action of his book, Vladimir Nabokov has undoubtedly been acting with intent: they are screens as well as frames. He is not writing for the ardent and simple-minded civil-libertarian any more than he is writing for the private libertine; he is writing for readers, and those who can read him simply will be well rewarded.

He is fond of frames and their effects. A final one is provided within the book itself by the personality of the narrator Humbert Humbert ("an assumed name"). Humbert is a close-to-40 European, a spoiled poet turned dilettante critic, the possessor of a small but adequate private income and an enormous and agonizing private problem: he is aroused to erotic desire only by girls on the edge of puberty, 9-to-14- year-old "nymphets." Juliet, Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura all fell within this age range, but to poor panting Humbert Humbert, the twentieth century denies the only female things he really desires.

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<sup>5</sup> Janeway is both a critic of fiction and a book writer.

Then, as in a fairy tale, his wish comes true. Lolita is its fulfillment. She is the quintessence of the nymphet, discovered by total accident in an Eastern American small town. To get her, Humbert puts himself through a pattern of erotic choreography that would shame a bower-bird. He is grotesque and horrible and unbearably funny, and he knows it. He will settle for anything, and does. The “anything” involves marrying Lolita’s widowed mother, Charlotte, with all the lies and swallowing of distaste that this implies. Charlotte promptly arranges to send the child away so that the two “lovers” can be alone together, and Humbert begins to consider the distasteful lies necessitated by murder.

Fate, however, intervenes. (McFate, Humbert calls him, envisioning him as an old, lavish and absent-minded friend addicted to making ambiguous gifts, a sort of deified Bernard Goldfine). Charlotte is killed in an accident. Dream come true! With his little stepdaughter (he drops the “step” to strangers), Humbert sets out on an odyssey of lechery that approaches the flights and “fugues” of schizophrenia.

It turns into a nightmare. Through two years and two lengthy circuits of the American scene, Humbert spirals down the levels of his inferno. Possessed, insatiable, he can never stop wanting Lolita because he never really has her, he has only her body. In the end, his punishment matches his crime. Lolita runs off with a monster; Humbert attempts to track them (giving a hilarious impersonation of a Thurber bloodhound as he does), bounces into a sanitarium, bounces out and lives in despair, until Dolly, who used to be Lolita, finds him. She is now an entirely different person, a triumph for the vital force that has managed to make a life out of the rubble that Humbert’s passion created, and the monster’s mindless activity merely confirmed. For a moment Humbert stands revealed to himself as her destroyer. But this confrontation does him no good. He sheers off into action again and rushes away to find and murder the monster in a long tragi-farcical shambles that somehow combines the chase scene from “Charley’s Aunt” with the dénouement of “Titus Andronicus.”

In his epilogue, Mr. Nabokov informs us that “Lolita” has no moral. I can only say that Humbert’s fate seems to me classically tragic, a most perfectly realized expression of the moral truth that Shakespeare summed up in the sonnet that begins, “The expense of spirit in a waste of shame/ Is lust in action”: right down to the detailed working out of Shakespeare’s adjectives, “perjur’d, murderous, bloody, full of blame.” Humbert is the hero with the tragic flaw. Humbert is every man who is driven by desire, wanting his Lolita so badly that it never occurs to him to consider her as a human being, or as anything but a dream-figment made flesh 3/4 which is the eternal and universal nature of passion.

The author, that is, is writing about all lust. He has afflicted poor Humbert with a special and taboo variety for a couple of contradictory reasons. In the first place, its illicit nature will both shock the reader into paying attention and prevent sentimentally false sympathy from distorting his judgment. Contrariwise, I believe, Mr. Nabokov is slyly exploiting the American emphasis on the attraction of youth and the importance devoted to the “teen-ager” in order to promote an unconscious identification with Humbert’s agonies. Both techniques are entirely valid. But neither, I hope, will obscure the purpose of the device: namely, to underline the essential, inefficient, painstaking and pain-giving selfishness of all passion, all greed—of all urges, whatever they may be, that insist on being satisfied without regard to the effect their satisfaction has upon the outside world. Humbert is all of us.

So much for the moral of this book, which is not supposed to have one. Technically it is brilliant, Peter-De-Vries humor in a major key, combined with an eye for the revealing, clinching detail of social behavior. If there is one fault to find, it is that in making his hero his narrator, Mr. Nabokov has given him a task that is almost too big for a fictional character. Humbert tends to run over into a figure of allegory, of Everyman. When this happens it unbalances the book, for every other character belongs in a novel and is real as real can be. Humbert alone runs over at the edges, as if in painting him Mr. Nabokov had just a little too much color on his brush; which color is, I suppose, the moral that poor Humbert is carrying for his creator.

Never mind. This is still one of the funniest and one of the saddest books that will be published this year. As for its pornographic content, I can think of few volumes more likely to quench the flames of lust than this exact and immediate description of its consequences.

## APPENDIX 2

*Why 'Lolita' Remains Shocking, And A Favorite*

By Bret Anthony Johnston<sup>6</sup>

July, 2006.

Asking a fiction writer to recommend his favorite book is a little like asking a father to pick his favorite child, like asking an adulterer to name his favorite lover. The writer will hem and haw, the father will equivocate, the adulterer will say he loves them all the same, just in different ways. Of course, we're lying. We all have a favorite: She stood "four foot ten in one sock." "She was Lola in slacks. She was Lo, plain Lo in the morning." But in our arms she will always be Lolita.

Lolita, Vladimir Nabokov's immaculate and disturbing masterpiece, is the story of middle-aged Humbert Humbert and his tragic love affair with his 12-year-old, bubble-gum popping stepdaughter Dolores "Lolita" Haze. It's a post-war road novel, the odyssey of a venerable European man and a prepubescent American girl bouncing across the United States, trying to outrun the past and find a future that doesn't exist. The prose is by turns passionate and playful, while the narrative is simultaneously lyrical and unsettling and erotic and violent — did I mention that, in addition to being a child molester, Humbert is also a murderer? It's a kind of inverted detective story: You immediately know someone's been killed, but have to wait to find out who. The book, which can be viewed as an allegory for Europe's relationship with America, offers a depiction of love that is as patently original as it is brutally shocking.

More shocking, though, is the reaction the author somehow manages to elicit from his readers: empathy. Readers always read, I think, out of a tremendous curiosity about other human beings, we're looking for another soul on the page, and that's what Nabokov has so fearlessly, so complexly, so gorgeously given us. In a lesser writer's hands, we could easily dismiss Mr. Humbert as a monster, but Nabokov denies us that all-too comfortable option. Even if we would never condone his vain and deadly infatuation, we understand it. We're complicit in his sins, and our complicity is seductive and terrifying. "Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury... look at this tangle of thorns."

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<sup>6</sup> Until now professor of creative writing at Harvard, received the Southern Review's annual short fiction award and a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship.

To be sure, this novel isn't for the faint of heart, but neither should prospective readers retreat to any kind of moral high ground. Nabokov, in fact, threads an unexpected and affirming emotional serenity through his portrait of obsession. His enigmatic narrator leaves us in spellbound rapture. Because for all of its linguistic pyrotechnics — as Humbert confesses, "you can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style" — and for all its controversial subject matter, *Lolita* is one of the most beautiful love stories you'll ever read. It may be one of the only love stories you'll ever read. This is the most thrilling and beautiful and most deeply disturbing aspect of the novel — and it's what most persuasively recommends the book — that in addition to finding Humbert's soul on the page, we also find, like it or not, a little of our own.

### APPENDIX 3

*Lolita, by Vladimir Nabokov*

By Charles Rolo

September, 1958.

Here it is at last, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (Putnam, \$5.00)--first issued in 1955 by an unorthodox Paris press after being rejected by a string of American publishers; banned by the French government, presumably out of solicitude for immature English-speaking readers (the ban was later quashed by the French High Court); pronounced unobjectionable by that blue-nosed body, the U. S. Customs office; and heralded by ovations from writers, professors, and critics on both sides of the Atlantic.

The novel's scandal-tinted history and its subject--the affair between a middle-aged sexual pervert and a twelve-year-old girl--inevitably conjure up expectations of pornography. But there is not a single obscene term in *Lolita*, and aficionados of erotica are likely to find it a dud. *Lolita* blazes, however, with a perversity of a most original kind. For Mr. Nabokov has distilled from his shocking material hundred-proof intellectual farce. His book is slightly reminiscent of Thomas Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull*; but *Lolita* has a stronger charge of comic genius and is more brilliantly written. Mr. Nabokov, a Russian émigré now working in his second tongue, has few living equals as a virtuoso in the handling of the English language.

A mock sententious foreword explains that the manuscript which follows is the confession of one Humbert Humbert, who died in captivity in 1952 just before his trial was due to start. Humbert introduces himself as a European of mixed stock who, at the age of twelve, "in a principedom by the sea," loved and lost a petite fille fatale named Annabel Leigh, and has thereafter remained in sexual bondage to "the perilous magic" of subteen sirens--he calls them "nymphets." There follows a sketch of his tortured career up to the time when, in his late thirties, he settles in a quiet New England town (an American uncle has left him a legacy, and he dabbles in scholarship) under the same roof as a fatally seductive nymphet, Dolores Haze--a mixture of "tender dreamy childishness and eerie vulgarity." This "*Lolita*" is the daughter of his landlady, whom he marries with murderous intent. But an accident eliminates Mrs. Haze, and Humbert the Nympholept finds himself the guardian of his darling, who, on their first night together, turns out to be utterly depraved and plays the role of seducer. Their weird affair--which carries them on a frenzied motel-hopping trek across the

American continent--is climaxed by Lolita's escape with a playwright and Humbert's eventual revenge on his rival.

What is one to make of Lolita? In a prickly postscript to the novel, Mr. Nabokov dismisses this question as a problem dreamed up by "Teachers of Literature": he rejects the satiric interpretations which critics have put upon Lolita and asserts, in effect, that it is simply a story he had to get off his chest. That all of this is too ingenuous by half is evident from the parodic style in which Lolita is written: a combination of pastiches of well-known styles, spoofing pedantry, analysis of passion à la français, Joycean word games, puns, and all kinds of verbal play. Wild, fantastic, wonderfully imaginative, it is a style which parodies everything it touches. It surely justifies, at least in part, those critics who have seen in Lolita a satire of the romantic novel, of "Old Europe" in contact with "Young America," or of "chronic American adolescence and shabby materialism." But above all Lolita seems to me an assertion of the power of the comic spirit to wrest delight and truth from the most outlandish materials. It is one of the funniest serious novels I have ever read; and the vision of its abominable hero, who never deludes or excuses himself, brings into grotesque relief the cant, the vulgarity, and the hypocritical conventions that pervade the human comedy.