

DON QUIXOTE AND LOLITA



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Students of Vladimir Nabokov have often remarked on his fascination with *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, a novel to which he dedicated an entire course at Harvard during the period when he was writing *Lolita*. With the exception of obvious topical references, however, *Lolita*'s debt to Cervantes' masterpiece has gone unrecognized, in particular the striking similarities between Humbert Humbert and Don Quixote, protagonists that Robert Alter called "these literature-ridden lucid madmen". This essay examines the ways in which Nabokov followed Cervantes' lead in exploring the metafictional implications of erotic obsession and failure. Special attention is paid to the topics of paranoia, disillusionment and violence.

INTRODUCTION

Critics often name Cervantes as the first of Nabokov's literary antecedents, founder of a tradition that stretches from the publication of the first part of *Don Quixote* in 1605 to the self-referential metafiction of postmodernism. When it comes to identifying precisely *what* this tradition has gotten from Cervantes, however, specifics give way to vague generalities. Beyond passing references to the charismatic duo of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and a tip of the hat to Cervantes' narrative technique, contemporary criticism tends to pay little more than lip service to modern fiction's debt to early-modern Spain.

A notable exception to this rule is Robert Alter. I mention him because his comments on *Don Quixote* in the first chapter of *Partial Magic* alerted me to the subject of this essay. In addition to crediting Cervantes as the first writer to exploit the self-referential character of fiction, Alter makes a direct and very specific comparison between *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, and *Don Quixote* through the similarity of their protagonists. He writes: "The mental and sexual proclivities of Humbert Humbert and Charles Kinbote may make them among the most bizarre heirs to the Knight of La Mancha, but the lineage is clear, down to the assumption of a 'nom de combat' and the attachment to a Dulcinea by each of these literature-ridden lucid madmen" (Alter 1975, 184). My aim is to follow up on this suggestion, made twenty years ago, by reading Nabokov's 1955 novel *Lolita* as a consistent appropriation of themes and narrative strategies first used in *Don Quixote*.

There is no doubt about Nabokov's knowledge of Cervantes, which began when he was a child and his father read *Don Quixote* aloud to him. He tells us in *Speak, Memory* that his tutor Lenski gave a lantern-slide show called "Don Quixote" (Nabokov 1983b, 166). And we know that, when Nabokov was in his early forties (ca. 1940), he had the idea of writing a stage adaptation of Cervantes' novel along the lines of his own plays, *The Event* and *The Waltz Invention*. The fact that the play wasn't written has to do with lack of financial backing rather than a waning of interest on the author's part (Boyd 1991, 23). It was in this period (1939-41), too, that Nabokov felt what he called "the first little throb" of the idea that would become *Lolita* (Nabokov 1989, 311). At Wellesley, where he taught from 1941 to 1948, Nabokov lectured on topics related to Spain and Russia at the invitation of the poet Jorge Guillén, chairman of the Spanish department (Field 1986, 221 and 239). The most telling chronological coincidence of all, however, brings together the writing of

Lolita and the lectures on *Don Quixote* that Nabokov prepared in his notoriously meticulous fashion at Cornell in the fall of 1951 for delivery at Harvard in the spring 1952 semester and seems never to have repeated (he had gone to Cornell from Wellesley in 1948, and appears to have been at work there on *Lolita* in the early 1950s). When the invitation came from Harvard, Nabokov—who preferred to read his lectures—threw himself into course preparation with great enthusiasm, working from Samuel Putnam’s then recently published translation, which he called “magnificent” in a letter to Pascal Corici dated November 12, 1951 (Nabokov and Broccoli 1989, 128). The reader notes that John Ray, author of the prologue to *Lolita*, dates the closure of Humbert Humbert’s narrative to November, 1952, the semester following Nabokov’s stint at Harvard. Also curious is the clustering of events in those closing months of 1952: Humbert’s crime is reported in the newspapers in September and October 1952 (Ray tells us), then Humbert dies on November 16, and *Lolita* dies on Christmas Day (Nabokov 1989, 3-4). Since Nabokov loved to hide little jokes in his novels, how can we assume that the proximity of these dates is purely coincidental?

From all of this it seems reasonable to suppose that Nabokov had *Don Quixote* very much on his mind when writing *Lolita*, and that despite his dislike of the violence and cruelty that play such an important part in Cervantes’ masterpiece, his novels from 1955-1962 (*Lolita*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, and *Pale Fire*) all bear the imprint of the Cervantine model at the very deepest levels of narrative technique, as well as in Nabokov’s reworking of a surprising number of themes.

EROTOMANIA, PARANOIA, AND DISILLUSIONMENT IN LOLITA AND DON QUIXOTE

At first glance it seems monstrous to equate Cervantes’ mad and volatile but well-intentioned knight errant with the equally mad but pathologically self-serving narrator of *Lolita*. However similar Don Quixote and Humbert Humbert are in their obsessive devotion to their loves, their capacity for self-deception, and their calculating mastery of rhetoric, Cervantes’ hero is also a high-minded and principled individual, a defender of ideals of justice, honor, and decency. But where Don Quixote throws himself into the world of “normal” men and women with courage and energy, Humbert Humbert hangs back, weighs his chances, and cynically schemes: even when taking the greatest risks he keeps an eye glued to the exit sign, as when he researches statutes on rape and kidnapping with an eye to his eventual defense, should he be caught (*Lolita* Part II, ch 3). By his own account, Humbert is a dishonest, sneaky, and mentally unstable man capable of the greatest deception and cruelty in the pursuit of his own sexual gratification. What’s worse, he gloats over his corruption, takes delight in admitting that there lurks “a cesspool of rotting monsters behind his slow boyish smile” (Nabokov 1989, 44). He goes so far as to imagine siring a daughter on *Lolita*, when she has passed her nymphet prime. That daughter would then be his next pre-teen lover and give him a granddaughter who in turn would bear her successor and so on, in a multigenerational, dynastic proliferation of incest (Nabokov 1989, 174). He postpones to the end of his confession the harrowing description of the “world of total evil” (Nabokov 1989, 284) into which he dragged *Lolita*, and “the parody of incest” (Nabokov 1989, 287) in which she was made to service his lust while being deprived of her childhood. For this he is damned in the eyes of society, and he knows it, and makes no effort to change his ways (Nabokov 1989, 166). If we bear these traits in mind, it seems it would be as implausible to posit a family resemblance between Nabokov’s and Cervantes’ madman as it would be to equate incest with courtly love.

It is perhaps even more monstrous to speak of the transcendent, unworldly perfection of Don Quixote's imaginary Dulcinea in the same breath with Dolores Haze, the fourteen year old who falls prey to Humbert Humbert (he tells us) after having first had sex with another pedophile (Clare Quilty) and a teenage boy (Charlie Holmes). Of course Humbert Humbert's account is always suspect: it bears roughly the same relationship to what "really" happened to him as the various narratives that make up *Don Quixote* bear to the knight errant's actual "historical" adventures. The Second Author, the anonymous chronicler of the first eight chapters of Part I, the Arabic translator in Toledo, Cide Hamete Benengeli, the unidentified commentators who pop up now and again in the margins of Cide Hamete's account--all of these are echoed in Clarence Choate Clark, John Ray, and the Nabokov whose afterword to *Lolita* has been an inseparable piece of the novel's paratext since its inclusion in the second edition. And to the inherent unreliability of such often-mediated reports we must add, in *Lolita*, the distortion of Humbert Humbert's erotomania. In other words, just as readers of *Don Quixote* must constantly bear in mind the subjective biases inherent to what they are reading, so readers of *Lolita* must remember that they "know" only what Humbert Humbert wants them to know.

But even bearing this in mind, I think it is clear that the often shrewdly manipulative and desperately unhappy girl whose experiments with sex have crossed the line from teenage play into the bondage of sleeping with her step-father bears little resemblance to the peasant girl into which Don Quixote's Dulcinea has been transformed, in his mind, by the wicked enchanter Frestón. Aldonza Lorenzo, though coarse, is physically healthy and strong-willed: she may be lewd, but there is nothing devious or feigned about her. The snide tone of Sancho's description of her only partially covers his feelings of attraction. I think. He reports to his master:

¡Vive el Dador, que es moza de chapa, hecha y derecha y de pelo en pecho, y que puede sacar la barba del lodo a cualquier caballero andante, o por andar, que la tuviere por señora! ¡Oh hidedeputa, qué rejoy que tiene, y qué voz! ... Y lo mejor que tiene es que no es nada melindrosa, porque tiene mucho de cortesana: con todos se burla y de todo hace mucca y donaire. (Cervantes 1983, 265-66)

Nabokov described Aldonza in positive and not too ironic terms, calling her "a brawny girl, tall and sturdy, with a strong voice and a mocking laugh" (Nabokov 1983a, 82). At least one critic has attempted to find her analogue in Nabokov's fiction, not in *Lolita* but in Prof. Timofey Pnin's ex-wife Liza (Boyd 1991, 273). This is part of Boyd's thesis that "*Pnin* is Nabokov's reply to Cervantes" (Boyd 1991, 272), an argument that only makes sense to me if we impute to Nabokov the intention of substituting humor, in his "reply", for Cervantes' cruelty. The problem with this view, as I see it, is that Pnin does not idealize Liza the way Humbert Humbert does *Lolita* and Don Quixote does Dulcinea (not Aldonza). In a word, Pnin is not a lover in the way the other two characters are: he does not share their erotomania or the hazardous consequences of their disillusionment. As eccentric as he is, Pnin is no madman, and his ex-wife does not belong in the same class with Humbert and Don Quixote's mental constructs. It may well be that *Pnin* is Nabokov's comic reply to the cruelty of Cervantes' novel, but if so it is also a reply to *Lolita*, which as I point out below is saturated with Cervantine violence.

Compare Sancho's description of Aldonza to Humbert's disparaging comments about *Lolita*, who chews gum and picks her nose and rarely washes her hair (Nabokov 1989, 104, 165 and 43), and who shows an "eerie vulgarity" (Nabokov 1989, 44) in her speech, which is studded with words like "revolting", "super", "luscious", "goon", and "drip" (Nabokov 1989, 65). This beloved is by her own admission "absolutely filthy in thought, word and deed" (Nabokov 1989, 114): in her two years with Humbert, she grows in even

her step-father's eyes into something quite different than an idealized object of lust. Even allowing for his exaggerations, there is something generically convincing about the portrait of a teenager whose complexion had become "that of any vulgar untidy highschool girl who applies shared cosmetics with grubby fingers to an unwashed face and does not mind what soiled texture, what pustulate epidermis comes in contact with her skin" (Nabokov 1989, 204).

My aim in citing Humbert's mean words is not to debate what Lolita's hygiene may or may not have been but to underscore the gulf that separates this love-object (or lust-object) in the mind of her admirer, from the Dulcinea who exists in the mind of her knight. But if we accept this difference, how can we explain what Alter means by calling Humbert an heir to Don Quixote? What "mental and sexual proclivities" could possibly secure the two famously mad protagonists membership in the same club? I propose three characteristics that are common and fundamental to both Cervantes' and Nabokov's madmen: 1) erotomania; 2) paranoia; 3) disillusionment. After discussing these topics, I will look at another feature that, in my opinion, Nabokov appropriated from Cervantes and wove into the narrative fabric of *Lolita*: namely, violence.

1. EROTOMANIA

For the purposes of this analysis I define erotomania quite literally as an individual's obsession with the object of his/her affections. My comments in this section are further based on the assumption that both *Don Quixote* and *Lolita* are concerned with love, its definition, possibilities, and limitations. This view has been challenged by critics like Linda Kaufman, who argue that *Lolita* is not about love but about sex, and more specifically about incest. According to this argument, Lolita is first and foremost a victim of sexual brutalization, an object not of affection but of Humbert Humbert's pathological need to sexually humiliate, debase, and control his adoptive daughter (Kaufman 1989, 133). There is no question that Humbert needs to do just this, but as an explanation of Lolita's personality and motivation it is complete, I think, only if we deny Lolita any identity beyond that of victim, and if we take the word "incest" in a strictly legal sense only. The problem with such an overly literal interpretation, as I see it, is that it strips away the black irony of Humbert's "unnatural" fatherhood (he only married Charlotte Haze in order to live close to her daughter) and removes one of the most plausible explanations for Lolita's failure to run screaming from him that first morning in *The Enchanted Hunters*. This might well have been her reaction, I think, had Humbert been her biological father: as it is, Lolita can be seen to shield herself behind the thought that Humbert is essentially another Quilty. This is why neither Lolita nor Humbert takes his "paternity" seriously, why she never calls him "Dad" except to mock him, underscoring the disparity between the appearance he works so hard to keep up ("father" and "daughter" on vacation) and the reality (pedophile and underage girl on the lam). I am not suggesting that Humbert's abuse of the power he has over Lolita is any less reprehensible than the same acts committed by a biological father, but it *is* different, and this difference helps to explain why Lolita can also be defined as a survivor--a strong-willed girl who had slept with men before she met Humbert Humbert, who finally escapes from him, and who can in their last face-to-face meeting speak quite frankly about sex and money, clearly un-intimidated by his uninvited presence in her house. It is my sense that, had Humbert Humbert been Lolita's biological father, this would have been a different novel--far less ambiguous and poignant, far more macabre--in all likelihood a novel Nabokov would not have written.

On the other hand, if we allow that *Don Quixote* and *Lolita* are concerned with love, we must account for their shared characteristics, since they look at very different kinds of

love. To my mind, these loves have two fundamental aspects in common: they are both obsessive, and they are both frustrated by a society which views them as unorthodox. Don Quixote is mocked and ridiculed because his contemporaries consider courtly love an extravagance best confined to books, and Humbert is reviled and prosecuted because his contemporaries consider pedophilia a crime.

Take Humbert Humbert. He knows perfectly well that the form taken by his erotic desire inspires revulsion and censure, and as his mobile idyll with Lolita stretches from days into weeks and months he becomes increasingly concerned to educate himself about the legal definition of his acts and their criminal weight. He feels no remorse for his predilection: on the contrary, he views himself (not Lolita!) as the outraged one, the persecuted victim of an insensitive world. He complains passionately about the difficulty of “maturing amid a civilization which allows a man of twenty-five to court a girl of sixteen but not a girl of twelve” (Nabokov 1989, 18). He often speaks of himself and Lolita as if they were a couple like any other, fully comparable to the conventional husbands and wives that populate the novel, including the Leighs--parents of his first love Annabel--, the Farlows, the McFates, the McCoos from whom he rents rooms, the Meads who play doubles tennis with him and Lolita in the Rockies, and even, eventually, the Schillers: Lolita and Dick. These comparisons imply a standard of identification, as if any pairing of male and female were equivalent to any other; and Humbert makes it clear that as far as he is concerned, in this competition he and Lolita are hands-down winners, since he is the most irresistibly masculine male, and Lolita the most sublimely feminine female. The terms are unfair, the comparison absurd: Humbert wants to have his cake and eat it too, and he does so by projecting his erotomania on society as a whole.

Like Humbert, Don Quixote finds society's erotic criteria inevitably lacking. Admittedly, it is hard to square his courtly ideal with twentieth-century notions of romantic love, but I think it is fair to say that he describes the obstacles he faces in terms not dissimilar to Humbert Humbert's. Consider for instance his nostalgic evocation of the Golden Age (Part I, ch 11), when “todo [era] amistad, todo concordia ... No había la fraude, el engaño ni la malicia mezclándose con la verdad y llaneza”. Of the women of that lost time, Don Quixote says, “Las doncellas y la honestidad andaban ... por dondequiera, sola y señora, sin temor que la ajena desenvoltura y lascivo intento le menoscabasen, y su perdición nacía de su gusto y propia voluntad. Y agora, en estos nuestros detestables siglos, no está segura ninguna, aunque la oculte y cierre otro nuevo laberinto, como el de Creta” (Cervantes 1983, 114). In other words, like Lolita and Humbert Humbert (in Humbert's mind), Dulcinea and Don Quixote make a “couple” (in Don Quixote's mind) that is at odds with the novel's other pairings. Sancho and Teresa Panza, the innkeeper Juan Palomeque and his wife, Maritornes and her boyfriend the mule driver, Cardenio and Luscinda, Fernando and Dorotea, the Captive and Zoraida, Don Diego de Miranda and Doña Cristina, Basilio and Qüeteria, the Duke and the Duchess, Tosilos and Doña Rodríguez's daughter--these and others provide a standard of heterosexual normality like their counterparts in *Lolita*.

But irregardless of Don Quixote's view, how can we speak of him and Dulcinea as a couple, when she does not exist in the flesh? Rationally, of course, we cannot, and that is the point of Cervantes' joke: if we speak of Dulcinea *at all*, then we have already gone halfway toward internalizing Don Quixote's madness. And of course the principal act by which we embrace Dulcinea is the act of reading the novel, i.e. by suspending the norms of our reality long enough to accept the premise of the reality described to us in the book, which is, as Cervantes spells out, progressively Don Quixote's reality. To this extent, Cervantes tells us that reading is an act of insanity, and that, for the duration of our reading (which includes critical discussion of *Don Quixote*) and we are all of us no more sane than the Knight of La Mancha. The critical view of Dulcinea as a parodic inversion of the ladies

of chivalric fiction--like Amadis of Gaul's Oriana, who is the hero's lover before she becomes his wife--is therefore correct with regard to literary history but says little about the Dulcinea that Don Quixote imagines. Redondo, for instance, picks up on the comic inversion that through paronomasia links the "membruda, vellosa y lúbrica" Aldonza, the girl with "pelo en pecho", with Dulcinea's bearish origins in Toboso. He is right to trace Aldonza's literary heritage to Juan Ruiz's *serranas* and to see Dulcinea as a parodic inversion of Rojas' Melibea, but I think he misses the point of Don Quixote's madness when he concludes that "la abstracta amada del caballero de la Triste Figura queda fuera de la tradición erótica de las damas que aparecen en los libros de caballería" (Redondo 1983, 22). Redondo claims that the Knight's concept of Dulcinea is anti-erotic ("su ideación de Dulcinea es negación del erotismo"), a function of his impotence in the face of "manly" women (Redondo 1983, 19-20). This argument would make more sense if Don Quixote's madness did not make him conflate all women, real and imagined. When he makes love to Maritornes, does he not believe she is a refined courtier, much like the object of his chivalric devotion? There are literary antecedents of Nabokov's nymphet, too, but they are of limited help in trying to understand the workings of Humbert Humbert's mind.

The lucidity of Don Quixote's erotic imagination is never more apparent than when he addresses this exact issue. He explains the difference between Dulcinea and all other "real", contemporary women, by tracing her lineage to the great ladies of courtly love tradition, who *for him* are as historically real as Queen Isabel of Castille and must not be mistaken for the heroines of chivalric fiction. He explains to Sancho that, in his affections, Dulcinea is the equal of the greatest princess: "por lo que yo quiero a Dulcinea del Toboso, tanto vale como la más alta princesa de la tierra". He drives this point home in Part I, chapter 25, by disassociating her specifically from the princesses of poetry, theater, and fiction:

¿Piensas tú que que las Amariles, las Filis, las Silvias, las Dianas, las Galateas, las Alidas y otras tales de que los libros, los romances, las tiendas de los barberos, los teatros de las comedias, están llenos, fueron verdaderamente damas de carne y hueso, y de aquellos que las celebran y celebraron? No, por cierto, sino que las más se las fingen, por dar sujeto a sus versos, y porque los tengan por enamorados y por hombres que tienen valor para serlo. (Cervantes 1983, 267)

Don Quixote's madness here is as slippery as it is lucid: the gentleman who went mad reading books serves up Dulcinea as a flesh-and-blood woman to answer the skepticism of his critics. This is the learned reader who debates Horatian and Aristotelian ideas of mimesis with the Canon of Toledo, and who criticizes Cervantes' skills as a novelist at the beginning of the second part.

In the same way that Don Quixote extols the real virtues of a lady he firmly believes to be real, Nabokov's pedophile narrator waxes poetic over the figure of the nymphet. But Humbert Humbert is less lucid than Cervantes' hero: he includes Lolita--a creature of flesh and blood--in a roll-call of young girls drawn indifferently from history and literature. With the exception of Lolita, they have in common that they belong to a wistfully-evoked of the past, these "brides of ten compelled to seat themselves on the fascinum, the virile ivory in the temples of classical scholarship"; child-brides in East India (where, Humbert claims, "old men of eighty copulate with girls of eight, and nobody minds"); Dante's Beatrice; Petrarch's Laura; and Edgar Allan Poe's Virginia (Nabokov 1989, 19 and 43). Might Nabokov not have juxtaposed in his mind the "damas" of courtly love with the prepubescent girls in Humbert's speech on the Golden Age of pedophilia? In any event, it is telling that Humbert finds no need create a pedigree for his beloved that is based on her difference from all other comparable women. She is a *hapax*, existing by and through him alone.

But although Lolita and Dulcinea are real women in their lovers' minds, they exist most perfectly in their admirers' imaginations. As Humbert Humbert observes after his first "possession" of Lolita (when he masturbates furtively with her legs stretched across his lap):

What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita--perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness--indeed, no life of her own. (Nabokov 1989, 62)

What stands out in this rumination is the zombie-like character he assigns to the girl, as if she were a puppet controlled entirely by his supercharged will. At another point he remarks of his obsession: "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" (Nabokov 1989, 264). This passage delineates very clearly the coy, self-conscious preciosity that sets Humbert Humbert as twentieth-century veteran of psychotherapy apart from his Spanish ancestor. "The word 'forever' referred only to my own passion", he writes in a meditation on Lolita's inevitable aging, "to the eternal Lolita as reflected in my blood" (Nabokov 1989, 65).

Nabokov derives the novel's most cutting irony from the distance that separates Humbert's high-flying discourse, on the one hand, from the sexual intercourse he forces on his beloved, on the other--an act so brutal that Lolita later complains he has torn something inside her (Nabokov 1989, 141). In Cervantes' novel, the equivalent irony resides in the fact that, as far as the reader can ascertain, Don Quixote's beloved doesn't exist in the flesh at all. Unamuno expressed this common anxiety when he observed, "si Don Quijote no veía a Dulcinea, tampoco el pobre Alonso Quijano el Bueno, veía a su Aldonza" (Unamuno 1988, 353). It is proof of the knight's courage that he is willing to defend with his life the necessity of her existing in his imagination, while Humbert Humbert's arsenal of constancy consists of nothing more substantial than a madman's untrustworthy words.

Don Quixote speaks most memorably to this point in his encounter with the merchants of Toledo (Part I, chapter 4), one of whom claims he will praise Dulcinea if only he can see her. The knight replies:

Si os la mostrara ... ¿qué hiciéades vosotros en confesar una verdad tan notoria? La importancia está en que sin verla lo habéis de creer, confesar, afirmar, jurar y defender; donde no, conmigo sois en batalla, gente descomunal y soberbia. (Cervantes 1983, 61)

And later, in conversation with Sancho (Part I, chapter 25):

Y así, bástame a mí pensar y creer que la buena de Aldonza Lorenzo es hermosa y honesta; y en lo del linaje importa poco, que no han de ir a hacer la información dél para darle algún hábito, y yo me hago cuenta que es la más alta princesa del mundo ... Y para concluir con todo, yo imagino que todo lo que digo es así, sin que sobre ni falte nada, y píntola en mi imaginación como la deseo, así en la belleza como en la principalidad. (Cervantes 1983, 267-8)

Similar comments can be found elsewhere in the novel, for instance in Part II, chapter 10.

As part of their delusional personalities, both Don Quixote and Humbert Humbert create a self-image rooted in what they perceive to be their prowess as lovers, an image that does not correspond to their actions in the world. Humbert Humbert fancies himself irresistibly virile, a lady-killer *malgré lui*, "a great big handsome hunk of movieland manhood", "handsome, intensely virile", possessing "gloomy good looks" and resembling "some

crooner or actor chap on whom Lo has a crush" (Nabokov 1989, 39, 49, 104 and 43). Reminiscing about his days as an exile in Paris, he writes:

Let me repeat with quiet force: I was, and still am, despite *mes malheurs*, an exceptionally handsome male; slow-moving, tall, with soft dark hair and a gloomy but all the more seductive cast of demeanor ... Well did I know, alas, that I could obtain at the snap of my fingers any adult female I chose; in fact, it had become quite a habit with me of not being too attentive to women lest they come toppling, bloodripe, into my cold lap. (Nabokov 1989, 25)

The joke is that this comes from a man who has been abandoned by both of his wives and by his lover Rita, and who ultimately fails in the one conquest he values: the seduction of young girls. I say this because Annabel dies before Humbert can possess her, and the only way he can "have" Lolita is by abduction--not seduction. It is also significant that, like the others, Lolita abandons him in the end. It is true that Humbert allows us occasionally to see him in a less flattering light. There is an example early in the novel, when he contrasts himself with Lolita: "oh, that I were a lady writer who could have her pose naked in a naked light! But instead I am lanky, big-boned, woolly-chested Humbert Humbert, with thick black eyebrows and a queer accent, and a cesspool of rotting monsters behind his slow boyish smile" (Nabokov 1989, 44). Later, sitting in Dick Schiller's living room, he compares his hands with Lolita's husband's: "I have hurt too much too many bodies with my twisted poor hands to be proud of them" (Nabokov 1989, 274). The contradictory nature of Humbert's self-descriptions underscores their relativizing function, as if to say: self-image is as much a projection of our imagination as the image we hold of those we love. Cervantes, who arguably explored the latter phenomenon more thoroughly than anyone before or since, was barred from extending the process into the realm of a first-person narrative by the limitations of the genre he created; Lawrence Sterne should probably be credited with pointing the novel in that direction, and Machado de Assis with taking it all the way. What Sterne pioneered and Machado perfected became even more useful after the discovery of the subconscious mind: in the twentieth century, how better to cast a madman's story than in the first-person?

Don Quixote plays a tutelary role in this regard, as in so many others. He, too, has a high regard for his prowess, except that his is not principally sexual but martial and moral. Don Quixote is not vain of his appearance, but his self-esteem rests on his duty as knight-errant, as member of an order founded "para defender las doncellas, amparar las viudas y socorrer a los huérfanos y a los menesterosos" (Part I, ch 11; Cervantes 1983, 115). The fact is, of course, that he ends up battling his own illusions (windmills, herds of sheep, and a procession of clerics, for example, instead of giants, clashing armies, and evil kidnappers). Humbert Humbert's life is punctuated by emotional loss, his failures with women (and girls) being perhaps Nabokov's ironic twentieth-century inversion of Don Quixote's failure as a knight errant--not just his misadventures with the shepherd boy Andrés and the galley slaves but the failure to achieve his primary goal of disenchanting Dulcinea.

As numerous critics have pointed out, Don Quixote also has problems with women like Maritornes and the innkeeper's daughter, who hang him from a window by his wrists, and with the ladies of the Duke's household--e.g. cruel Altisidora--, who make a conscious mockery of his courtly idealism. And it is as a direct result of defeat in a knightly joust that Don Quixote fails to disenchant Dulcinea: the punishment exacted by the victorious Knight of the White Moon (i.e. Sansón Carrasco) is that Don Quixote spend a year without leaving his village, to which he returns in the very bitter knowledge of his failure. The people of the village corroborate this, ascribing the knight's final illness to "la pesadumbre de verse

vencido y de no ver cumplido su deseo en la libertad y desencanto de Dulcinea" (Part II, ch 74; Cervantes 1983, 1132).

The melancholic nature of the madmen's symptoms is relevant to the topic of erotomania. Humbert Humbert uses the old-fashioned term "melancholia" to designate his condition ("melancholia and a sense of insufferable oppression"; Nabokov 1989, 34). I cannot avoid the suspicion that Nabokov had Don Quixote in mind at this point, since--as has been recognized by critics as diverse as Green, Avallé-Arce, and Johnson--the lanky, dried-up knight who is probably the most famous melancholic in all literature corresponds perfectly to early-modern psychological theory as epitomized by Juan Huarte de San Juan's *Examen de ingenios* (1575). In Cervantes' time, as Teresa Soufas has shown, in sanity and mania were believed to be symptoms of melancholia, and the Spanish (i.e. Castilian) climate was considered to be especially well suited to the nurturing of melancholics (Soufas 1990, 19).

What's new in *Lolita*--i.e. what has happened in psychology between Cervantes and Nabokov--is the rise of psychotherapy, and with it the self-analyzing character in fiction. Nabokov takes aim at the therapists by having Humbert, a veteran of a mental hospital, self-diagnose himself as melancholic. An even more flagrant example of this is when Humbert discovers, in his medical file, that his doctors have labelled him "potentially homosexual" and "totally impotent" (Nabokov 1989, 34). It seems more than coincidental that similar claims have been made for both Cervantes and his knightly creation: for the author, as an explanation of the apparently preferential treatment he received during his captivity in Algiers, and for Don Quixote in the opinion that his relationship with Sancho Panza has what Carroll Johnson calls "homoerotic elements" (Johnson 1983, 141 and 204). Johnson advances the thesis that Don Quixote's invention of Dulcinea is a sublimation of a "powerful incestuous desire for his niece", which is mirrored in his later attraction to the innkeeper Juan Palomeque's daughter (Johnson 1983, 82).

Similarly for Agustín Redondo, who claims that when Don Quixote has to deal with "mujeres fálicas" he finds himself "desvirilizado" (Redondo 1983, 20). From this perspective, Humbert Humbert's relationship with grown women could be interpreted as a sublimation of his pedophilia--and *his* neurosis as an inversion of Don Quixote's. Might not such a reading take the quaternity of Don Quixote/Sancho/Dulcinea/Aldonza Lorenzo (identified by Ruth El Saffar) as a model for Humbert Humbert/Quilty/Charlotte Haze/Lolita?

As interesting as I find these views, I hesitate to apply them literally to *Don Quixote* and *Lolita*. Nabokov's aversion to modern psychology is well known: to analyze Humbert Humbert as if he were an actual person, or even to reconstruct his personality on the basis of what he tells us, would I think betray the power of Nabokov's irony. It was enough for Nabokov, I think, to have sown the seeds of our perception of Humbert by creating a narrator who is unreliable by virtue of his melancholia and, as we shall see, paranoia. The same can be said of Cervantes' hero, whose principal characteristic is an insanity that bends the definitions of reality and fiction, not gender.

2. PARANOIA

Both Don Quixote and Humbert Humbert are subject to fears of persecution which blur the boundary between imagination and reality. Each believes that his desires and plans are being thwarted by hidden forces, that he is somehow enchanted or bewitched--Don Quixote by the evil magus Frestón and Humbert Humbert by the Man in the Sports Car who shadows him and Lolita in their peregrination from motel to motel. For each, the fear turns out to be partially justified: as we shall see, Humbert has good reason to suspect the intentions of his pursuer, and Don Quixote's niece early on literally *does* make his library

disappear (Part I, ch 7). Other deceptions that occur later in Cervantes' novel include the priest and the barber dressing up as damsels in distress (Part I, ch 27) until they are supplanted by Dorotea playing the part of the beleaguered Princess Micomicoma (Part I, ch 29), and Sancho Panza transforming Dulcinea into a peasant girl riding an ass (Part II, ch 10). In the second part of *Don Quixote*, in fact, the mirroring of fiction in reality is present at every turn, from the appearance of Avellaneda's spurious text through the elaborate enactment of Don Quixote's fantasies at the house of the Duke and Duchess, to the doubling of fiction and reality in Ginés de Pasamonte's autobiography and the appearance of characters from Avellaneda's novel, like Don Juan de Tarfe.

In each novel the agency of the protagonist's downfall emerges from this doubling, in the form of a powerful doppelgänger who is a clever manipulator of his victim's fiction. For Don Quixote, it is Sansón Carrasco in the guise of the Knight of the White Moon (Part II, ch 64). The secret of Carrasco's victory over Don Quixote is his complete assimilation of the mad knight's chivalric metamorphoses, which he projects back on their source, so that Don Quixote is obliged to play by the rules he has vowed to defend. Humbert Humbert's doppelgänger is Clare Quilty, the man from Lolita's past who has in fact been shadowing them as they travel from motel to motel. Quilty can be said to embrace Humbert's fantasy/fiction to the extent that he lived out the pedophile's dream by seducing Lolita in the past (he has also beaten Humbert Humbert to the punch literarily, as author of plays that indulge in thinly-disguised erotic fantasy). The motel clerk who reports that Quilty could pass for Humbert's brother (Nabokov 1989, 227) is speaking of a resemblance that goes far beyond the physical. Humbert Humbert picks up on this when speculating about the identity of his nemesis:

The clues he left did not establish his identity but they reflected his personality, or at least a certain homogenous and striking personality; his genre, his type of humor--at its best at least--the tone of his brain, had affinities with my own. He mimed and mocked me. His allusions were definitely highbrow. He was well-read. He knew French. He was versed in logodaedaly and logomancy. He was an amateur of sex lore. He had a feminine handwriting ... (Nabokov 1989, 249-50)

Humbert's narcissism gladly bows before this mirror image of his own "finer" qualities while simultaneously sentencing Quilty to death: the world isn't big enough for two Humbert Humberts, when it contains only one Lolita.

3. DISILLUSIONMENT

It is one thing to fail at love, quite another to admit it. The second parts of *Don Quixote* and *Lolita* chronicle their protagonists' recognition of their failure as lovers and the concomitant slide into disillusionment and death. Cervantes and Nabokov assign an exemplary place, a *locus horribilis*, to the crucial moment when their characters come face to face with the evidence of their defeat: from this place they emerge with their fantasies permanently damaged, and their erotomania in retreat. For Don Quixote, it is the netherworld of the Cave of Montesinos; for Humbert Humbert, the wilderness of Mrs. Richard Schiller's (the married Lolita's) living room. These are venues of crushing dreariness, places in all ways opposed to the open landscapes, full of possibility, through which the knights errant pursue their noble ideals. Montesinos and Coalmont are dark, oppressive prisons of the spirit that destroy all dreamers who stop in them, places from which everyone wants to escape, Lolita as well as the lady Belerma.

We read the effects of their torment on the faces of these women. In the Cave of Montesinos, the formerly beautiful Belerma is transformed by enchantment into a sallow-

faced, grief-stricken hag. Cervantes has the magus Montesinos give the remarkably unchivalric, or unidealizing, explanation that this ugliness is a consequence of grief, not the effect of menstruation, because Belerma has already passed menopause (Part II, ch 23). Don Quixote has scarcely had time to adjust to this vision when Dulcinea hits him up for a loan of six *reales*, and he only has four (Part II, ch 23). As Ruth El Saffar observed, "The journey into the cave represents an extension of the continued attraction of the feminine that motivates Don Quixote's actions in Part II" (El Saffar 1984, 103). It marks a decisive stage in the knight's realization that he is failing to disenchant Dulcinea.

The similarities with Humbert Humbert's trials in *Coalmont* are too remarkable to be coincidental. Like Dulcinea, Lolita has "drawn" Humbert to her with a request for money (forwarded by John Farlow, Lolita's letter reads in part: "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 ...") (Nabokov 1989, 266). Lolita needs the money to escape from *Coalmont*, to make her way with her husband out of their rust-belt enchantment to Alaska, where Dick has been promised work (Nabokov works an ironic reversal on Don Quixote's penury, having Humbert give Lolita far more than she requests). The gritty fact of Lolita's life in this unromantic place is summed up in Humbert's description of her neighborhood, a "dismal district, all dump and ditch, and wormy vegetable garden, and shack, and gray drizzle, and red mud, and several smoking stacks in the distance" (Nabokov 1989, 269).

But the clearest parallel to *Don Quixote* in these pivotal scenes, in my view, is the close attention to the beloved's uniquely female physical condition: in the same way that Nabokov has made Humbert wealthy where Don Quixote is poor, he has made Lolita pregnant where Belerma is menopausal. The formerly idealized object of Humbert's lust here takes on the characteristics of her dystopian surroundings: she is "frankly and hugely pregnant", he tells us: "her pale-freckled cheeks were hollowed, and her bare shins and arms had lost all their tan" (Nabokov 1989, 269). She looks at him through "washed-out gray eyes" (Nabokov 1989, 272), like those of a cave-dweller. If the enchanted Belerma's condition is an affront to Don Quixote's self-image as a rescuer of orphans and glamorous widows, then Lolita's pregnancy is final proof of the failure of Humbert's deranged ideal of siring successive generation of nymphets. One might guess that, had *Lolita* been written in the days of amniocentesis and ultrasound, the child would be known to be male, the better to underscore Humbert's failure.

First the madman's disillusionment, then public disgrace as prelude to death. Despite his noble deeds and extraordinary adventures, by the end of Cervantes' novel everyone around Don Quixote--except, perhaps, Sancho Panza--believes him to be hopelessly mad (believes to the extent that they refuse to recognize the depths of their own mad ness, defined as unconscious complicity in the projection of chivalric fiction onto everyday life). The turn of public opinion against him is chronicled from the beginning of Part II. When Don Quixote learns that he has become famous as the protagonist of the two stories about him now in print (i.e. the 1605 *Don Quixote* and Avellaneda's spurious continuation), he asks Sancho what he has heard around town: "¿En qué opinión me tiene el vulgo, en qué los hidalgos y en qué los caballeros?" (Part II, chapter 2). Sancho replies:

el vulgo tiene a vuestra merced por grandísimo loco, y a mí por no menos mentecato. Los hidalgos dicen que no conteniéndose vuestra merced en los límites de la hidalguía, se ha puesto *don* y se ha arremetido a caballero con cuatro cepas y dos yugadas de tierra y con un trapo atrás y otro adelante. Dicen los caballeros que no querrían que los hidalgos se opusiesen a ellos ... (Cervantes 1983, 593-594)

Later, Sancho's wife confirms this verdict, complaining to her husband: "yo no sé, por cierto, quién le puso a él *don*, que no tuvieron sus padres ni sus agüelos" (Part II, ch 5;

Cervantes 1983, 615). In other words, Don Quixote was neither a nobleman (*hidalgo*) by birth nor, in the opinion of the other gentlemen of his village, by virtue of his accomplishments.

What can we say about Humbert Humbert in this respect, to the limited extent that we see him through the eyes of others? Nabokov makes sure the reader is prejudiced against Humbert from the start. One of the first things we learn, from Humbert's editor John Ray, is that he died in prison on November 16, 1952, "a few days before his trial was scheduled to start" (Nabokov 1989, 3). Ray, a "reader" of the chronicle of Humbert Humbert's feats like Cervantes' Second Author, echoes Teresa Panza when he quips, with Victorian snobbery: "He is abnormal. He is not a gentleman" (Nabokov 1989, 5).

4. VIOLENCE

The legal definition of Humbert Humbert's sexual encounters with Lolita is statutory rape, as Lolita herself reminds him from time to time. Humbert makes no bones about this: although he claims that his candor in reporting exactly what he did is a legal stratagem undertaken at his lawyer's insistence, Humbert takes evident pleasure in telling us about the pain, both physical and psychological, that he has inflicted on Lolita while acting out his erotic fantasies. Why else would he include such details as the girl's discomfort in sitting, or her dread of his erections? Why else mention that, as soon as he pretended to be asleep, he heard her sobbing in the dark, "every night, every night" (Nabokov 1989, 176)?

It might seem that my argument fails on this point, that Humbert's taste for inflicting pain sets him apart definitively from the Knight of La Mancha, whose spirit of sacrifice is as notorious as Humbert's selfishness. But here, too, I see a precursor in Cervantes' hero. The point is that Nabokov was more sensitive to the role of violence in *Don Quixote* than any commentator before or since: it is not surprising that the author of *Lolita* also wrote what to my mind the best treatment of the subject to date, in the chapter of his *Lectures on Don Quixote* titled "Cruelty and Mystification". Differentiating between the physical cruelty of Part I and the psychological cruelty of Part II, Nabokov writes:

Both parts of *Don Quixote* form a veritable encyclopedia of cruelty. From that viewpoint it is one of the most bitter and barbarous books ever penned. And its cruelty is artistic. (Nabokov 1983a, 52)

--words that could well apply to *Lolita*, which can also be read as a "veritable encyclopedia" of one very specialized kind of cruelty, compiled by Nabokov with his own extraordinary artistic touch.

To appreciate how this aspect of Humbert Humbert could have been modeled on Don Quixote, it is crucial to differentiate between two kinds of violence in Cervantes' novel, and the different ways in which they are described. When speaking of Don Quixote's sufferings at the hand of others, Cervantes generally uses slapstick to comic effect: the reader knows that Don Quixote's injuries are not real, because if they were he would never get back on his feet, and the novel would come to an end. We need think only of the shepherds who break his ribs and knock his teeth out (Part I, ch 180), or Maritornes hanging him from a window by his wrists. As has been often pointed out, this pantomime of real violence releases our laughter precisely because it is so absurd and because it encourages us to both pity and identify with the beleaguered hero.

I have no intention of denying that Don Quixote is a comic figure, and I take it as a given that much of the cruelty and violence in the novel falls under the category of *burlas* or slapstick. As P.E. Russell pointed out in a 1969 article, there is ample evidence that

Cervantes' contemporaries laughed mightily when they read the novel, and we have been laughing ever since. But it is also true, though much less frequently acknowledged, that when Don Quixote's erotomania leads him to commit excesses, he is capable of attacking swiftly and without warning, with nearly fatal consequences for innocent bystanders. This brings us to the second, less manifestly hyperbolic and therefore less laughable kind of violence. In Part I, chapter 8, for example, he draws his sword against a Benedictine monk, and "si el fraile no se dejara caer de la mula, él le hiciera venir al suelo mal de su grado, y aun mal ferido, si no cayera muerto" (Cervantes 1983, 93). In the same episode, he leaves another opponent with blood spurting from his mouth, nose, and ears (Part I, ch 9). When he runs into a group of white-shirted mourners he takes to be ghosts (Part I, ch 19), he beats them all up, and breaks one of their legs. In Part II, ch 14, he knocks the Knight of the Mirrors unconscious. And so forth. It is on the grounds of these episodes that Humbert Humbert can be seen as his Spanish ancestor's "semblable".

I think it is fair to say that the critical literature on *Don Quixote* has tended to pass over lightly this second kind of violence, which Don Quixote inflicts on innocent victims. By viewing this violence as an uncontrollable projection of Don Quixote's madness, the classic studies of Menéndez y Pelayo, Ortega y Gasset, Unamuno, Américo Castro, Joaquín Casaldueiro, Leo Spitzer, Helmut Hatzfeld, Martín de Riquer, Manuel Durán, Juan Bautista Avallé Arce, and Alban Forcione, among others, have in effect relativized or even excused it. Carroll Johnson's Freudian interpretation and Ruth El-Saffar's Jungian readings have helped to reverse this trend by suggesting that there is much to learn from viewing the mad Knight's affliction as a truly pathological state. Johnson notes, for instance, that Don Quixote's "psychosexual difficulties" result in a:

defensive retreat into psychosis [which] allows him to do many positive things that were impossible in his state of pre-quixotic sanity. He is free at last to attempt to act out and put into practice the noble ideals of chivalry. (Johnson 1983, 202)

This is true, but I believe it is an error to overlook the negative things that go along with the freedom that the Knight buys at the price of psychosis, including both inflicting and suffering physical pain. Is it not a "bitter and barbarous" irony (to paraphrase Nabokov) that self-expression should be bought at the price of another's pain?

It should be noted that those currents of Cervantes criticism that stress the narratological and metafictional aspects of his fiction show little interest in the role of violence per se. Cesáreo Bandera, for example, makes the claim that the self-critical or self-referential nature of *Don Quixote* underscores what for the reader is "el carácter profundamente ilusorio de todo afán de objetividad, de todo distanciamiento intelectual". As I understand it, Bandera's argument is that there is no use singling out this or that action of Don Quixote, because it can only be understood as the product of Cervantes' narrative technique. In a broader sense, the Knight's violence is a metaphor of the violence Cervantes does to the mimetic tradition of prose fiction. Bandera writes: "es imposible explicar, encubrir la violencia sin ser al mismo tiempo víctima de ella. La novela no explica la discordia, es la discordia que explica la novela" (Bandera 1975, 170). In his lively analysis of narrative technique James A. Parr treats the text as a map of self-conscious and subversive narrative strategies. Parr suggests that violence plays an exemplary role in the "transgression of narrational norms" (Parr 1988, 165) which is based on the four-part foundation of carnival, irony, paradox and parody (158), but for that very reason it need not or cannot be singled out in Nabokovian fashion as a primary motivating factor in itself. Of the many recent studies in this vein, Anthony Cascardi's intriguing essay on Cervantes' manifestly anti-Cartesian stand with respect to the mind-body problem is probably the most open to Nabokov's views, since his argument could provide a philosophical framework for the

discussion of violence in *Don Quixote*. At the opposite end of the scale is Stephen Gilman's puzzling dismissal of Nabokov's Harvard lectures, which he calls "no more than an academic spoof [which] have been deservedly remaindered" (Gilman 1989, 14). I would argue on the contrary, that the importance of Nabokov's lectures lies in the fact that they are the first interpretation of *Don Quixote* to credit fully the disruptive effects of Don Quixote's violence on the world around him. Despite his barbed criticisms of Cervantes' novel, Nabokov intuited brilliantly that this dark side of *Don Quixote* was an important part of what enables the Knight of La Mancha to "speak" to the late twentieth century, just as Don Quixote the rationalist defender of a pagan Golden Age spoke to the Enlightenment, Don Quixote the idealistic lover spoke to the Romantics, and Don Quixote the passionate defender of the oppressed spoke to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He found in this savagely comic confluence of erotomania, paranoia, and violence a perfect analogue to the novel in which he would explore the boundaries of private obsession and public act and exemplify his view of literature as a game that brings reality into focus, rather than the other way around.

CONCLUSION

If we take the novels of Nabokov's "third period" together, we can see how Humbert Humbert belongs in the same category as Dr. Charles Kinbote (alias Charles Xavier, King of Zembla) and the anonymous narrator of *Pnin*: all stand in a similar relation to their texts as Don Quixote stands in relation to those that were written about him. Humbert begins with an apparently real adventure (his adolescent love on the Riviera); this documentary (or pseudo-documentary) event then becomes the starting point of a chronicle similar to the fragmentary autobiography that Don Quixote composes in his head as he imagines what an anonymous future "wise man" (*sabio*) will write about him. The readers of *Pale Fire* are left with doubts about who wrote what and the task of deciphering the chain of mediations from Shade (Shade/ Kinbote?) to Kinbote/Xavier. *Pnin*, whose eccentricities are not of the same order as Humbert's or Kinbote's more clearly clinical madness, is nevertheless a pawn in the game of cat and mouse that the shadowy narrator plays with the readers.

Ann-Marie Gill noted in an article on Machado de Assis's 1899 novel *Dom Casmurro*--the culmination of a metafictional trend that begins with his *Epitaph of a Small Winner* (1890)--that like Machado, Nabokov invented a number of character-narrators who are doubly unreliable, simultaneously creators of their own documentary record and interpreters of the same. They are that much more independent of their creator, instantly and by their very own nature, than Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, who only gain ascendancy over Cervantes with the passage of time. As Unamuno explained in *Cómo se hace una novela*: "Don Quijote es para nosotros tan real y efectivo como Cervantes o más bien éste tanto como aquél" (Unamuno 1977, 63). I hope to have shown here that this precursor of the modern self-conscious narrator served as a model for Nabokov, and that Don Quixote stands behind *Lolita*'s lucid madman, in one sense at least the exemplar of obsession and failure.

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