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Lolita and the Genre of the Literary Double: Does Quilty Exist?

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***Lolita* and The Genre of Literary Doubles: Does Quilty Exist?**

“The good reader is my brother, my double”

--Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*

The novel *Lolita* is made up of layers of doublings, created by real author Nabokov and fictional author Humbert. It is Humbert who crafts the story of Quilty's abduction of Lolita using the genre of the literary double tale; both Humbert's and Nabokov's doublings parody that genre,¹ whose unresolvable ambiguity creates the instability of the novel's plot and of the narration itself.

Humbert and Nabokov

Humbert's confession is made up of the same words as Nabokov's novel (although the Foreword is problematic). Yet that same set of words conveys different worldviews: the literary character Humbert Humbert can be read as his author Vladimir Vladimirovich's parodic evil double, the first a deranged autobiographical solipsist and the second, his opposite, an artist who creates a fictional narrative that reaches ever outwards.²

¹ Robert Alter defines parody as “the literary mode that fuses creation with critique” (quoted by Frosch, 93).

² Bakhtin's term for this is heteroglossia, which can express authorial intentions in a refracted way: “It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intentions of the character... and the refracted intentions of the author” (324). Appel notes “There are...at least two plots in all of Nabokov's fiction: the characters in the book, and the consciousness of the creator above it” (Appel 1991, xxvi).

Like Nabokov, Humbert calls his reader brother (“Reader! *Bruder!*” [262]) as he attempts to justify his crime, but while Nabokov hopes his readers will be ideal critical interpreters, Humbert attempts to win his readers’ sympathy for his criminal treatment of Dolores Haze.³ In the process of writing his double tale, however, Humbert gains self-awareness and wants to atone for his sins. He writes his “confession” as the history of his discovery of his “evil double” in Quilty,⁴ employing the genre so precisely that it must be considered intentional. Humbert, the literary scholar and artist, is sophisticated enough to understand the implications of the genre for himself: the original of a set of doubles, called the “host,” shares at some level the despised qualities of his double. The reader may decide to what degree Humbert knows consciously that Quilty represents his own reprehensible nature, but as author of his own *Doppelgänger* tale, he must know and deplore his resemblance to him at some level. By writing his analysis, Humbert becomes more akin to his author, who, speaking of the sincerity of Humbert’s repentance, wrote, “there is a green lane in Paradise where Humbert is permitted to wander at dusk once a year” (*Despair* xiii).

Humbert and Humbert

Humbert also creates *himself* as double within his narrative, addressing himself in the third person, at times as a pair: “Humbert the Terrible deliberated with Humbert the Small whether Humbert Humbert should kill her” (*AL* 29; *Dolinin* 27); he is both the protagonist of the tale (as he experienced the events described) and its narrator,

³ Nomi Tamir-Ghez, 172-195.

⁴ Appel 1991, lx-lxii; Olsen 75-78; Bell calls Quilty “overtly contrived” (75).

enlightened by later knowledge, who attempts to immortalize his beloved in art (Bullock 187; Bell 75-7). Thus *Lolita* contains (at least) three interpenetrating levels of doubling by two artists, in a nesting doll series, HH/HH (narrator/narratee)--HH/Quilty (author/character)--Nabokov/HH (author/novel). The complexity of this three-fold doubling negates any static binary opposition, of ideal/real, or good/evil, to name the dualities most typical of the conventional double tale.⁵

Although Nabokov said that “the *Doppelgänger* subject is a frightful bore” (Appel 1967, 145), he played with it in many novels—before *Lolita*, conspicuously in *Despair* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. He disavows the genre in order to point to his parody of it: none of these doubles is a true example of the genre (described below). In *Despair*, Hermann designates someone as his double who has no relation or resemblance to him; in *RLSK V* merges with his half-brother by the end of his narrative to create a new composite authorship that reaches beyond this life into the next.

Pairing vs. doubling

Lolita is filled with mirrorings, e. g. the pseudonymous doubled initials Humbert bestows upon his characters (*AL* 361), which, among other things, pair Dolly’s real father Harold Haze with the parody of a father Humbert Humbert; the four sets of twins in Dolly’s class; the mirrors in room 342 of the Enchanted Hunters hotel, etc. (Olsen 77-8), but these are simple pairings, reflections. Even Gaston Godin is in Humbert’s eyes only his opposite, “a mediocre teacher, a worthless scholar, a glum repulsive fat old

⁵ Analogously, Appel writes: “Nabokov’s artifice and strategies of involution reveal the ‘second plot’ in his fiction, the ‘contiguous world’ of the author’s mind;...and what the effect of those strategies is upon the reader, whose illicit involvement with that fiction constitutes a ‘third plot’...to such an extent that he too can be said to become...another of Vladimir Nabokov’s creations” (lv).

invert...triumphantly ignorant of the English language” (183). While Humbert is fully aware of the parallel between GG and himself, who are both European pedophiles (on the principle of paired opposites—GG likes boys, HH likes girls), there is no tension between them beyond the chessboard (GG “always wore black” [181], casting HH as white), where HH has the advantage (bad player/good player). But the *Doppelgänger* involves more than a binary opposition; it entails a deep struggle of identity originating in the host’s ambivalence and suppressed desires. Only Humbert and Quilty fulfill the criteria of the well-defined nineteenth-century genre of the literary double in which the boundaries between host and double are blurred, dialectic, and the conflict between them unresolvable. Shaping the account of his loss of Lolita, Humbert refers to Stevenson’s “Dr. Jekyll and Hyde,” Poe’s “William Wilson,” and other classics of the genre. Nabokov called the over-simple interpretation of “Jekyll and Hyde” as an allegory of the struggle between Good and Evil “an absurd Punch and Judy show” (Nabokov 1980, 251). Humbert calls Quilty “Punch” in their showdown [298]); in the Pavor Manor scene, he acts out the over-simple opposition Nabokov deplores: motivated by the desire to renounce his “sterile and selfish vice; all that I canceled and cursed” (278), he constructs Quilty as his evil double in order to expunge his own sins by killing him.

Dating and Humbert’s inventions

The plots of Nabokov’s novels dissolve upon multiple readings. The first time through we take the events that Humbert recounts literally, as in any realist novel. But if not sooner, then by the novel’s end, the phantasmagoric rendering of Quilty’s murder makes us retrace his appearances, which become increasingly dubious, possibly a

product, as Humbert says himself, of hallucination. And if we take seriously the discrepancy in the dating of Humbert's account, we are forced to reconsider the reality of everything that happens after Humbert receives Lolita's letter on September 22. Editor John Ray, Jr. reports in the Foreword that Humbert died on November 16th, an interval of 53 days from the time of his arrest on September 25th, yet Humbert says it took him 56 days to write his account. If Humbert is accurate, then he had to have begun writing the manuscript on the day he received Lolita's letter, and finished on the day he died. This would mean that Humbert has invented his trip to Coalmont and reunion with Lolita there (including her revelation that it was Quilty who took her from the Elphinstone hospital), his last visit to Ramsdale, his murder of Clare Quilty, and the scene of his arrest (Tekiner 464); instead he starts writing on the 22nd, "first in the psychopathic ward for observation, and then in this well-heated, albeit tombal, seclusion" (308).

Assuming that Nabokov intended this discrepancy, as indicated by his having retained it in his own Russian translation of *Lolita* (Dolinin 31), these three missing days underscore Humbert's literary crafting of Quilty as his "exorcised demon" (Bullock, 197).⁶ Humbert has already reported other narrative fabrications, the report on the Arctic expedition for his employers, his psychiatric symptoms for his doctors, his love life for Charlotte's benefit, etc. (Bell, 77-8; Dolinin 26). These post-September 22nd inventions would serve two purposes: Humbert could both depict his own repentance and immortalize Lolita in art. The scenes, in distinction from Humbert's account of the "foul lust" he confesses inflicting on Dolly Haze, work to expiate his crime: he has come to see her as a distinct person separate from himself and his fantasy of her, to love her when she

⁶ Appel calls Quilty "both a projection of Humbert's guilt, and a parody of the psychological Double" (*AL* lx).

is no longer a nymphet, and therefore to murder Quilty as an exorcism of his own sexual exploitation of her (Connolly 46-51).

Whether or not we accept the time discrepancy as intentional (Brian Boyd argues against reinterpreting the whole novel on the basis of one possibly accidental digit [76]), by the end of a first reading we have to reconsider everything, particularly the nature of Clare Quilty. Humbert calls him Clare Obscure (306), an English translation of the Italian *chiaroscuro*, light and dark, a technique in art that creates a sense of form, of reality, out of light and shade. The scene of Quilty's murder is fantastical, and parodic of multiple genres from American Westerns to Grimm's fairy tales, quite out of keeping with the apparently realist novel we thought we just read. Quilty emerges from the shadows gradually throughout the first reading of the novel (Nabokov's hand is tipped by Appel's spoiler note in *The Annotated Lolita* [31/9]); on later readings, with Humbert's authority undermined by our increased awareness of his physical and psychological frailty, on the realistic plane, and his shaping role as (unreliable) narrator on the artistic one, the hallucinatory aspect of Quilty's appearances intensifies.

This ambiguity has led to debate over Quilty's status: does he exist at all on the fictional plane of reality? If Humbert is not fabricating absolutely everything in his narrative, which would collapse the carefully structured ambiguities essential to the novel, Quilty's existence is attested by Charlotte Haze and Jean Farlow, who know him as Ivor Quilty's nephew (63, 89), by his portrait in the Dromes ad (69), the entry about him in *Who's Who in the Limelight* (31), his appearance in Beardsley as the author of *The Enchanted Hunters*, as well as in Wace with Vivian Darkbloom, and in John Ray, Jr's

Foreword. It is only Humbert the author who casts him as a possible hallucination, as Quilty begins to take on the characteristics of a Doppelgänger..

Humbert and Quilty as literary doubles

Humbert establishes Quilty as his double gradually, the way William Wilson learns of the features he shares with his double. First Humbert mentions that he is “said to resemble some crooner or actor chap on whom Lo has a crush” (43); describing the ad on the wall above Lolita’s bed featuring a “distinguished playwright...solemnly smoking a Drome,” Humbert comments that “the resemblance was slight” (69). Much later, pursuing Lolita’s abductor, Humbert notes that the entries in the motel registries reveal “his [at the time unrecognized, later understood to be Quilty’s] type of humor—at its best, at least—the tone of his brain, had affinities with my own” (249). Finally, in the Pavor Manor scene, Humbert notes, “he swept by me in a purple bathrobe, very like the one I had” (294), and their two wrestling figures merge as “he rolled over me. I rolled over him. We rolled over me. They rolled over him. We rolled over us” (299). Humbert’s narrative moves from denying his resemblance to Quilty to recognizing it to merging with him.

Humbert’s depiction of Quilty deploys all the features of the double genre. The double represents the essence of what the host wants to repress, related to his psychopathology, especially involving sexuality (Webber 1996, 3-5), and thus the two are inextricably bound to each other, yet cannot coexist. The plot involves the pursuit both of and by the elusive double, and a final confrontation in which one destroys the other, a scene always as ambiguous as the existence of the double itself. In “William Wilson,”

for example, it is unclear whether the first Wilson has killed his double: “A large mirror—so at first it seemed to me in my confusion—now stood where none had been perceptible before; and as I stepped up to it in an extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait” (323). In *Lolita* too the murder is ambiguous.

Humbert’s account initially tries to deflect attention from the lust involved in his pursuit of young girls, describing his obsession with Dolly Haze as a quest for a Romantic ideal; he gives the name taken from Poe’s tragic poem, “Annabel Lee,” to his lost love, thereby casting himself as poet who later transforms American Dolly into nymphet Lolita by reincarnating his lost love in her. Quilty, whom Humbert depicts as a shameless pornographer and second-rate playwright, embodies the pedophilic lust Humbert tries to deny, while travestyng Humbert’s vision of himself as artist. But his very account shows that Humbert is well aware of what he has been repressing. When Dolly reveals Quilty’s identity in Coalmont (whether or not it is Humbert’s fiction makes no difference for this point), Humbert writes, “I, too, had known it, without knowing it, all along” (272). Precisely at this moment of recognition, Humbert the character yields to Humbert the artist, who reveals how he has shaped his account of his pursuit by and of his double: “Quietly the fusion took place, and everything fell into order, into the pattern of branches that I have woven throughout this memoir with the express purpose of having the ripe fruit fall at the right moment” (272). In the context of the double tale, Humbert’s very recognition of Quilty’s identity itself constitutes Humbert’s recognition of himself as pornographic exploiter of Lolita and false artist who superimposes art on reality.

The Doppelganger genre

Humbert's crafting of his own (as both author and protagonist) Doppelganger tale adheres to Webber's description of the genre meticulously.

1. Both a "vicarious agent and a frustrating usurper of the subject's pleasures," the double performs its host's identity, which is invariably bound up with sexuality, involving a continuing power play between the two selves. Humbert the nympholept competes for possession of Lolita with Quilty the pornographer.
2. The double returns compulsively both within its host text and intertextually from one text to the other: Quilty appears thirty-six times in Humbert's account (Appel 349); besides "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" and "William Wilson" (Appel lx-lxiii), Humbert indirectly refers to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*—Dr. Frankenstein repeatedly calls his creature "the fiend" as he pursues him to the Arctic; Humbert refers to Quilty as "the fiend" eight times.
3. The double tale "represents the abiding interdependence of real and fantasy worlds, impossibly co-present at the site of the Doppelganger encounter," and "suspends conventions of genre, creating scenes which may be parodic play or deadly earnest." Humbert's final confrontation with his double in the Pavor Manor scene (on Grimm road) combines the fairy tale, the American Western film, and the Gothic novel (e. g. Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"), and the shooting of Quilty is comic-fantastic. In mid-chase Quilty sits down at the piano to play "several atrociously vigorous, fundamentally hysterical, plangent chords" (302) before Humbert takes a "double, triple, kangaroo jump" following him into the hall (303), and Quilty improbably withstands multiple gunshot wounds.

4. “A slippery double agent, the double eludes the pursuit of criminal or psychological cases against it. Even as it is disavowed, it demands to be recognized as a projection of the profound anxiety of the subject”: Quilty turns Humbert’s accusations back on him (“I saved her from a beastly pervert” [298]), and mocks the poetry Humbert reads him (“Oh, grand stuff!” “A little repetitious, what?” “Getting smutty, eh?” [300]).
5. The double typically “echoes, reiterates, distorts, parodies, dictates, impedes and dumbfounds the speech of its host”: Quilty suddenly adopts a “phony British accent” (303) and first speaks mock-French (“Woolly-woo-boo-are?” [296]), shifting later to excellent idiomatic French (“Vous voilà dans de beaux draps, mon vieux” [298]). In the cryptogrammatic paper chase, he had appropriated and parodied Humbert’s literary frame of reference in his hilarious entries in the motel registers.
6. “The double troubles the temporal schemes of narrative development, suspends social conventions.”

The Murder Scene

If the Pavor Manor scene is Humbert’s fantasy written in the tradition of the Doppelganger tale, as the 53- versus 56-day ambiguity of timing suggests, then Humbert never encounters Quilty, and hence is not a murderer, something he is contradictory about. On the one hand, he declares “you can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style” (9), refers to himself as “a murderer with a sensational but incomplete and unorthodox memory” (217), and “[g]uilty of killing Quilty” (32), while on the other

declares “Nowadays you have to be a scientist if you want to be a killer. No, no, I was neither” (87), “Emphatically, no killers are we. Poets never kill” (88), and “if I ever commit a serious murder—mark the if.” What might be a *not* serious murder? Humbert continues, “Sometimes I attempt to kill in my dreams,” and describes a scene very like the Pavor Manor murder: “For instance I hold a gun. For instance I aim at a bland, quietly interested enemy. Oh, I press the trigger all right, but one bullet after another feebly drops on the floor from the sheepish muzzle. In those dreams, my only thought is to conceal my fiasco from my foe, who is slowly growing annoyed” (47). Compare Humbert’s first firing at Quilty:

I pointed Chum at his slippers and crushed the trigger. It clicked. He looked at his foot, at the pistol, again at his foot. I made another awful effort, and, with a ridiculously feeble and juvenile sound, it went off. The bullet entered the thick pink rug, and I had the paralyzing impression that it had merely trickled in and might come out again (297).

John Ray, Jr. never mentions Humbert’s destruction of Quilty, and Humbert’s reference to his captivity (“well-heated, albeit tombal, seclusion” [308]) are ambiguous. He has, after all, been in sanatoria with “bouts of insanity” several times. Quilty’s reality/unreality is the crux of the detective novel parody of Nabokov’s novel: was there a murder? We know who committed it, and who the victim is, we just don’t know if it happened.

The doubles tale insists on the unresolvability of the existence of the double: is it a supernatural being? or produced by the host’s psyche? William Wilson’s double is a realistically impossible replica of his host (same name, birthday, appearance, date of

entering school), but nonetheless leaves a realistically described fur cape behind in his host's rooms at Oxford. In Dostoevsky's *The Double* Golyadkin Jr. may or may not have eaten ten *pirogi* in the tavern where Golyadkin Sr. spies him in the mirror, but we know that this ambiguity is caused by the hero's insanity. In *Lolita* this unresolvability is not supernatural, or merely psychological, either for HH or VV, but artistic, a product of Humbert's literary sophistication and narrative craft, with which he parodies the psychological double tale. Humbert himself shows Quilty to be a possible hallucination associated both with the supernatural (he calls him "a heterosexual ErIkønig") and with the psychological disorders that generate doubles tales (William Wilson is pursued by his conscience). The ambiguity created by Humbert's use of the *Doppelgänger* genre requires distinguishing the realist plane of the plot line from Humbert's interpretation of it in his narrative, so that the doubling shifts from the characters to the narrated vs. the narrator, as well as to the reader vs. the author (Bell 75).

The layers of reality

It is not enough to say that because "the entire book, an artistic construct, is fantastic and realistic at once" (true), the question of the reality or non-reality of events "cannot be answered because, Humbert being an artist, it is irrelevant" (Bullock 201). A simple solution, one in which everything in *Lolita* is accepted as real, also fails to account for all the contradictions involved. Nabokov has said that "reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable" (SO 11), and he produces the experience of this in his novel. In *Lolita* we

can distinguish among some of the levels, although there are wormholes⁷ that lead from one to the other, some of which may be mutually exclusive, making it impossible to define where some things belong.

Wormholes

One of these wormholes is the Introduction. Who is John Ray, Jr.? Some stylistics seem to identify him with Humbert--the double names and crafted oddities (John Ray, jr=JR jr; Clarence Choate Clark; Dr. Blanche Schwarzmänn =White Blackman); the lampooning of the straight-faced didactic moralistic tone and faith in psychiatry. But unless we take everything as fictional, how can Humbert record the date and cause of his own death? And why would Humbert, having experienced, in John Ray's words, a "moral apotheosis," have Dolly Schiller die in childbirth in Grey Star (to a stillborn girl, while Humbert hopes she will have a boy)? That Dolly Schiller is married to Dick Schiller, pregnant and moving to Alaska is contained in her letter; that she does indeed move and die in childbirth is confirmed in the introduction. Lolita's letter, then, must be real. To write off Ray's introduction as Humbert's fiction removes Nabokov's careful structuring of the layering of reality. It can be said, at least, that this wormhole connects Humbert to Nabokov, who signals his presence in his anagrammed relationship to Quilty as Vivian Darkbloom, itself another wormhole that connects Nabokov to Humbert's fictional construction of his nemesis in Quilty. Instead of a Moebius strip (Dolinin 40),

⁷ In physics, a wormhole is a hypothetical topological feature of spacetime that is a bridge through space and time. Spacetime can be viewed as a multi-dimensional surface that, when 'folded' over, allows the formation of a wormhole bridge that connects both space and time. It has at least two mouths that are connected to a single throat or tube. The term was coined by the American theoretical physicist John Archibald Wheeler in 1957.

then, the novel can be imagined as a four-dimensional Klein bottle. And there is no way out—even Nabokov’s extra-textual afterword points to the bars of the cage.

Vivian Darkbloom, "My Cue" and “Who’s Who”

Humbert’s editor John Ray, Jr. says "Vivian Darkbloom" (his quotation marks) has written a biography of Quilty entitled "My Cue" (4). The many permutations of Quilty’s name speak to his differing roles from layer to layer. Vivian Darkbloom’s role as Quilty’s collaborator on the play, "The Lady Who Loved Lightning," attested by *Who’s Who in the Limelight* (31), is matched by Humbert’s collaboration in scripting the "the ingenious play staged for me by Quilty" (305); both are in turn scripted by Nabokov. Humbert creates his double in Quilty, and Nabokov creates his stand-in out of the letters of his name (not his psyche) in playwright/biographer Vivian Darkbloom; that is, Nabokov, unlike the conflicted mad double, is in serene control of *his* narrative and conjures a mock Doppelgänger out of the alphabet, rather than out of a deep psychological conflict.

If we accept John Ray’s independence, Humbert cannot know about Darkbloom’s "My Cue." Yet in Humbert’s post-September 22nd scenes, Lolita reports that Quilty’s friends call him "Cue," as Humbert later has them do at Pavor Manor. The possible explanations are, at least, 1. The friends and Humbert independently arrive at the logical nickname, 2. Humbert has invented John Ray and his introduction, so has invented the biography’s title himself, 3. The scene at Pavor Manor is not Humbert’s invention, and he records what he has actually heard, which is in keeping with, indeed motivates, Vivian Darkbloom’s title.

Evidence that applies to this dilemma is once again inconclusive, because the 1946 edition of *Who's Who in the Limelight* (31) is another wormhole. The high density of meaningful names and titles in the entries Humbert records makes the coincidence of his coming upon it beyond realistic, but even if we allow for Humbert having crafted it with hindsight as he has done with so much else in his account, he has indirectly named his own creator in Vivian Darkbloom, which is beyond the standard two possibilities offered by any unreliable narrator, the fictional reality and his distortion of it. It appears impossible to establish how much is to be taken as real and how much emanates from Humbert, but no matter how the reader decides, the *Limelight* entries link character (Quilty) to narrator (Humbert) to author (Nabokov) through Nabokov's anagrammatic stand-in.

The variants of Quilty's name point to this narrative layering and doubling; each name has a distinct meaning for a particular character. "My Cue" implies the French "*mon cul*" ("my ass,") to the French-speaking doubles; Humbert-the-character hears it as a vulgar taunt by his rival. Humbert as actor in his own drama finds *his* "Cue" in the play Quilty stages for him. Humbert-the-character identifies the phrase "qu'il t'y mène" (223) in Mona Dahl's letter only as "mysterious nastiness," but Humbert the author subsequently recognizes it, when, trying to atone for his guilt, he writes after the murder that he was "all covered in Quilty" (306). The presence of collaborator Vivian Darkbloom makes Quilty at once Humbert's rival (as character), Humbert's "evil double" (as author), and Nabokov's agent. There is no way to untangle this elaborate conflation of authorial levels, in part because John Ray's identity is elusive. If Humbert cannot have invented him, who is he, and who is his author? Nabokov presides over all of them

through his anagrammatic proxy. The reader, like Humbert rereading events, will move on multiple readings from finding his double in Humbert to finding it in Quilty and finally in Nabokov; Quilty is Humbert's brother; the "good reader," falling from one false (but increasingly comprehensive) bottom to the next, becomes Nabokov's.

Quilty and the unknowable

Humbert the character wonders if his pursuer might be entirely his own hallucination (217, 241), if "[w]hat was happening was a sickness" (218), if "I was losing my mind" (229). "It was becoming abundantly clear that all those identical detectives in prismatically changing cars were figments of my persecution mania, recurrent images based on coincidence and chance resemblance" (238). Humbert the writer recognizes these fears as symptoms of being the protagonist of a double tale, and in the writing of his own, has Quilty play doubles with Lolita using HH's racket (235), commenting "[t]hat absurd intruder has butted in to make up a double" (236). Because Humbert characterizes himself as a solipsist, unaware of Dolly Haze's separate, independent existence, critics have concluded that the illusion of Doppelgangers collapses into Humbert's system of egocentric self-delusion masking painful reality. But the memoir does partially redeem Humbert through his "moral apotheosis" (as Ray calls it [5]), and it also redeems him as self-aware artist, who can come to understand himself through the application of a literary genre to his life and psyche. At the same time, he parodies that genre's potential oversimplification of the division of good and

evil: Humbert is by his own admission evil, yet has an “evil double”—the binary becomes a unity. Humbert transposes the doubles’ essential confrontation scene from the Gothic tone of the Romantic *Doppelgänger* tale into an admixture of popular American genres and takes the genre’s emphasis on ambiguity to the vastly more complex level of authorship itself. Whether or not Humbert invents everything after September 22nd, levels of reality are so interrelated that assigning one to the realm of fiction may have consequences for the others; calling on authorial intervention here, or Humbert’s unreliability there, affects the whole interpretation of the novel. Whatever else can be said, the fantastic murder of Quilty, in keeping with the double genre, remains ambiguous.

Conclusion

Dolinin writes that Humbert “ascribes the role of his main adversary, the mastermind of the plot to kidnap Lolita, to one of her idols...But...Humbert fails to notice that in portraying him, he only creates a caricature of himself” (38). The evidence of Humbert’s highly conscious use of the *Doppelgänger* genre suggests that, on the contrary, Humbert is aware of precisely this incriminating resemblance and seeks expiation through the conventional culmination of the double tale—the destruction of the “evil” double by his host. Not just Nabokov, but Humbert too parodies this convention, suggesting that at least on the subconscious level, but more likely consciously, Humbert knows he has behaved like Quilty and is not the Romantic poet in quest of his ideal, as he initially claimed. His narrative itself makes possible a growth of self-awareness.

While Humbert uses the doubles tale as part of his repentance, Nabokov renovates the convention by creating multiple layers of doubles, and it is the layerings that are unresolvable, not the psychological conflict within the protagonist. Nabokov allows Humbert partial redemption through his growth of self-awareness, not only of what he has done to Lolita, but of his confusion of art and life to the detriment of both. He had imposed one Romantic myth on Dolly Haze. When he recognizes this, he imposes another Romantic genre on himself. Humbert concludes by affirming a third Romantic idea, that the refuge of art is “the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita” (309). Thus Nabokov shifts the duality of “mind and body, creation and creature” (Bullock 202) dominating Humbert’s narrative to the eternal doubling of life and art, and of this life and the next.

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