Lolita between Adaptation and Interpretation

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From Nabokov's Novel and Screenplay to Kubrick's Film

By

Anna Pilińska

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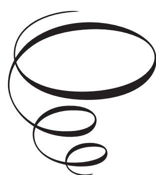

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From Nabokov's Novel and Screenplay to Kubrick's Film

By Anna Pilińska
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To my Mom

I saw my words made whispers, twelve made teen
Back roads made backlots, US made UK
And green made gold, and me an émigré
From Lo, whom I conceived but could not save

—Vladimir Nabokov, "Pale Film"
In *Lolita*. Richard Corliss. London: BFI, 1995. 9-11.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ix

Abbreviations xi

Introduction 1

Chapter One 5
The Plot on Paper: The Nabokovian Nymphet & Co.

Chapter Two 29
The Plot on Screen: The Kubrickian Kitten & Co.

Chapter Three 49
The Handling of the Characters

Chapter Four 91
The Postmodern Game: The Problem of Intertextuality

Conclusions 119

Notes 127

Bibliography 135

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ABBREVIATIONS

Lo – *Lolita*, the novel
LoMv – *Lolita*, the movie
LoSc – *Lolita: A Screenplay*

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the cinema became "the Tenth Muse," the influence it has been exerting on other art forms as well as on the very notion of "culture" has been indisputable. Since the entertainment industry relies heavily on the image, modern culture has become a culture of images rather than words. As with the invention of the cinema the concept of a "story" no longer solely belonged in the realm of the written word, literature instantly became an inexhaustible source of material for future films and consequently the two arts became interdependent.[1] This new relationship gradually began to be of interest to literary critics and theoreticians, providing foundations for the ever developing theory of film and its branch – the theory of adaptation. In the introduction to *Twórcza Zdrada. Filmowe Adaptacje Literatury* [Creative Betrayal. Film Adaptations of Literature], Alicja Helman outlines briefly the development of studies on adaptation in the twentieth century, and mentions certain theoreticians who have aimed at establishing hierarchical divisions of literary adaptations into types on the basis of their resemblance to the original work of literature (1998b, 8-10). Whereas some of the works in the field of film theory classify adaptations into types and subtypes (Andrew 1984, Klein and Parker 1981, McFarlane 1996, Wagner 1975), others offer detailed studies on the film-literature relationship, analyzing similarities and differences between the two art forms, and signaling potential interpretation problems, but give no categorizations (Hopfinger 1974, Kracauer 1975, Weseliński 1999, Wierzewski 1983).

Even though for the first film theorists the question of adaptation was not of major concern and would often be limited to their subjective evaluation of the quality of a given adaptation, the correlations between film and literature have been described from several points of view; literary and film critics provided a stimulus for the theoreticians to account for, define, and hierarchize different modes of adaptation (Helman 1998a, 8-9). Attitudes toward adaptation have varied greatly, from strictly pro-literary to those which saw literature and film as two separate and equal forms of artistic expression.[2]

As the motion picture made its way into the generally understood culture, in its beginnings it used original screenplays rather than adapted works of literature, thus manifesting its independence from other art

forms. Those who did decide to adapt literature, tended to give priority to fidelity over any creative attempts at the interpretation of original texts. Only when the postmodernist tendencies became prominent, did the cinema of the second half of the twentieth century begin to actually interpret, rearrange, and draw more freely from the impressive collection of literary plots and characters. This new tendency was further reinforced as the rapid development of the multimedia culture, characterized by the gradual domination of film and television over literature as primary sources of entertainment, has encouraged movie makers to invoke their "artistic licence" and create independent works only loosely based on literary compositions. Nevertheless, the belief that the adaptation's fidelity to the original work of literature is the principal indicator of a film's quality has persisted to a certain extent. Directors face the dilemma of choosing between being faithful and creative, ideally striving to reach an equilibrium between the two. A scriptwriter's choices and decisions while adapting a literary piece are supposed to combine the director's artistic vision with the contents of the work in question. On rare occasions, the very author of that work is the one to transform it into a movie script, thus – seemingly – preserving and presenting those elements of the book that he or she considers the most essential. As the script is later translated into frames, images and sounds, the third independent text emerges. One of the directors who had a chance to realize an author's vision on the silver screen was Stanley Kubrick, who asked Vladimir Nabokov to write a script for *Lolita*, a movie released in 1962 (with the script published in 1974 as *Lolita: A Screenplay*). The clash of two strong personalities resulted in Kubrick's interpretation rather than adaptation of the two original texts, Nabokov's novel and script, with Kubrick altering and adjusting the material to his own personal vision. The aim of the following book is to investigate to what extent *Lolita* the movie is an adaptation of *Lolita* the novel, and at what levels the film interprets the work of literature.

The study will consist of four chapters, discussing how the changes made to the original story have influenced the plot, the characters, and the novel's rich intertextuality. In the first chapter I will focus on the plot as presented by Nabokov: the novel's original storyline and the alterations (both eliminations and additions) made by the novelist himself in the script. The second chapter will discuss Kubrick's version of the storyline, and the essential changes in the plot (including those enforced by censorship). In the the third chapter I will analyze the construction of the characters in all the three texts, comparing their psychological traits, the emphasis each of them receives, and also their potential reception by both

the reader and the viewer. The chapter will focus on selected characters: Humbert Humbert, Dolores Haze, Clare Quilty, and Charlotte Haze. The fourth chapter will be centered around the issue of intertextuality, a feature typical of Nabokov's work and relatively difficult to convey into the cinematic medium. I will examine how the novelist approached this particular issue in his version of the script, and how it was later presented in the film.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PLOT ON PAPER: THE NABOKOVIAN NYMPHET & CO.

The often large discrepancies between the literary work and its screen adaptation usually derive from the fact that what is originally expressed in words exclusively (literature) becomes represented by not only words, but also sounds and images. As Vladimir Nabokov was responsible for producing the script based on his own novel, he regretted not having the possibility of influencing every single stage of making the movie; however, he could only work with words. In the foreword to the published version of the screenplay he wrote:

> By nature I am no dramatist; I am not even a hack scenarist; but if I had given as much of myself to the stage or the screen as I have to the kind of writing which serves a triumphant life sentence between the covers of a book, I would have advocated and applied a system of total tyranny, directing the play or the picture myself, choosing settings and costumes, terrorizing the actors, mingling with them in the bit part of guest, or ghost, prompting them, and, in a word, pervading the entire show with the will and art of one individual – for there is nothing in the world that I loathe more than group activity, that communal bath where the hairy and slippery mix in a multiplication of mediocrity. (LoSc ix-x)

Unfortunately for Nabokov, even the most careful selection of words could not translate onto a faithful reflection of the novelist's vision. In *Film i Literatura* [Film and Literature], Wojciech Wierzewski clearly states that the content of literary "raw material" does not determine the final shape of a film version, although the original can often be traced in elements such as literary dialogues quoted verbatim, etc. (1983, 30). Even though a script may include much of the original content of a given book, this very script is nevertheless later distorted, having been sifted through the camera lens and shaped according to the director's vision. A comparison of these two media – literature and film – often seems impossible. Therefore, in order to analyze and assess any potentially

adaptable literary production and its film adaptation, a few basic elements of the work's construction – such as plot, the main characters, setting, or language – are taken into account. In the following analysis I will compare to what extent Nabokov's original script follows the plotline of his own novel and what alterations the writer himself considered necessary in order to make the story adaptable to the silver screen.

From the novel's foreword, the reader learns that Humbert Humbert, the narrator and protagonist of the novel, died in prison where he had been serving a sentence for murder, and that Lolita had died in childbirth. This information is provided by John Ray, Jr., Ph.D., who was responsible for publishing Humbert's notes after their author's (and Lolita's) death. Only after this introduction, accompanied by certain details about the problems with publication, does Humbert's biography begin: his family background and childhood are described, his first passionate love affair with a girl named Annabel, his unfortunate marriage to a woman named Valeria, and their divorce. The episode with Annabel, however, is the most essential of those details, as it explains the drive behind Humbert's future actions.

In the sequence of episodes up to the point where Humbert sees Lolita for the first time – a relatively short excerpt – there are already significant differences between Nabokov's two texts, concerned mostly with the order and manner of introducing the story's characters. From the novel's "Foreword" the reader learns that Humbert Humbert died in prison and left everything he had written to be published after his death; the mentioned foreword is written by a psychiatrist who signs as John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. This introductory part deals not only with explaining the context for the novel's origin, but also its potential literary merits, as well as the doctor's opinion on his late patient. Following the foreword, it is Humbert himself who gives an account of his life, beginning in 1910 – the year he was born – and describing his family background, and his first love: Annabel, but already signaling the appearance of Lolita in a much later future:

> Long before we met, we had the same dreams. We compared notes. We found strange affinities. The same June of the same year (1919) a stray canary had fluttered into her house and mine, in two widely separated countries. Oh, Lolita, had *you* loved me thus! (Lo, 14)[3]

At this point, Nabokov focuses on the role of women in the life of Humbert, clearly implying that Lolita might have been the most significant, nonetheless certainly not the only woman who became a part of the character's biography. Humbert is presented as a disturbed man with an unusal predilection for young girls, but the author reveals also those parts of Humbert's life story which show that his protagonist does

try to overcome his weaknesses and lead a socially acceptable life, thus making the portrayal of Humbert more complete and objective. He reveals how he tried to replace Annabel and secretly approach young girls, describes his short affair with a young French prostitute named Monique, and finally his reasonable marriage to Valeria, who eventually cheats on him with a Russian ex-colonel. The marriage ends in a divorce, soon after which Humbert arrives in the USA and tries different jobs (creating perfume advertisements and writing an academic book), before he joins an expedition to Canada. Upon his return, he gets a treatment at a sanatorium (his favorite pastimes being fabricating dreams and tormenting psychiatrists), and finally leaves for New England, where he is to stay with the family McCoo. He ends up renting a room at Lawn Street 342 with Charlotte Haze and her daughter Dolores, as McCoos' house has burned down to the ground. Meeting Lolita is a turning point in the story: Humbert moves in.

Until this point there has only been one mention of Quilty, in a digression made right after the episode with Valeria: Humbert, now in his cell, is reading a book titled *Who's Who in the Limelight* and quotes a lengthy passage from it, without any additional explanation on the character of Quilty. The most significant part of the quote goes:

> Quilty, Clare. American dramatist. Born in Ocean City, N.J., 1911. Educated at Columbia University. Started on a commercial career but turned to playwriting. Author of *The Little Nymph*, *The Lady who Loved Lightning* (in collaboration with Vivian Darkbloom), *Dark Age*, *The Strange Mushroom*, *Fatherly Love*, and others. His many plays for children are notable. *Little Nymph* (1940) travelled 14,000 miles and played 280 performances on the road during the winter before ending in New York. Hobbies: fast cars, photography, pets. (Lo 31-32)

Nabokov leaves the reader with but a handful of allusions, purposely withdrawing Quilty's identity so that only after collecting all the pieces of the intricate puzzle together at the very end of the reading will the audience be able to comprehend all the clues embedded in the aforementioned fragment.

In *Lolita: A Screenplay* the order of introducing the characters is altered, and these alterations are pregnant with consequences for the overall reception of Humbert, and possibly for the interpretation of the story.[4] In a section titled "Prologue," the very first scene depicts drunk Humbert arriving at Quilty's mansion, entering the hall and closing the door behind him. As Quilty comes down the stairs, Humbert shoots him five times. As the novelist and the director met during the creation of the

script, it was Kubrick who suggested placing the murder scene at the very beginning of the movie. In this manner, Quilty automatically becomes a central figure of the plot, thus making the story "more a tale of the rivalry between the two men than, as in the book, of Lolita and Humbert's mutual seduction" (Baxter 1997, 157).

The question of narration needs to be raised at this point, since Nabokov decides to use the figure of John Ray, Jr. in both texts (the novel and the script), allowing him to narrate the film, while the novel is narrated by Humbert, with John Ray only providing the introductory part to set the context for the story. Boyd explains that Humbert's narration is justified by the fact that in the novel it is possible to introduce the character of Quilty, and at the same time to keep the reader (and Humbert, almost until the very end) oblivious to Quilty's significance for the plot. The movie, however, does not allow for this strategy:

> In the film, he could not be the narrator and allow Quilty to be seen on screen without repeatedly disclosing his present awareness of Quilty's role. By removing Humbert from the narration of the film and flashing forward right at the beginning to the murder, Nabokov alerts us to the identity of Humbert's foe from the start and therefore makes us vividly aware, whenever we later catch sight of Quilty, of Humbert's failure to recognize his rival until the very end. (2003, 71)

After this brief scene, there is a cut to doctor John Ray, delivering an explanatory monologue. Keeping John Ray, a seemingly insignificant go-between in the Humbert – audience relation, might have been intended to maintain the "authenticity" of the original novel, with the artificial distance created between Humbert and the reader through the figure of doctor Ray. As Pifer puts it, "John Ray, Jr.'s position as frame to and external commentator on Humbert's confession, places him as the sometimes comically obtrusive narrator of the whole film" (2003, 71).

Following the psychiatrist's sequence, Humbert is shown writing in his prison cell and narrating his biography, just as in the book. Interestingly enough, the episode with his mother's death is given a separate scene (the woman was killed by lightning), whereas in the novel the fact is described in an almost telegraphic manner: "My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three..." (Lo, 10). It is difficult to decipher the writer's intentions at this point. Nabokov repeatedly claimed to think in images rather than words (Nabokov 1990, 14), therefore the opportunity to transfer a particularly impressive scene onto the screen might have seemed too tempting to be left unused.

The next scenes show the hotel Mirana, Humbert's meetings with Annabel, her departure, and finally Humbert attending her funeral. Humbert, in voiceover, provides the viewer with a definition of nymphets and describes the marriage to Valeria; the latter episode is supposed to be accompanied by the scenes of their quarrel and Valeria leaving her husband. Quite a peculiar introduction is a scene where Humbert is delivering a lecture, talking about the phenomenon of nymphets and suddenly fainting in a room full of shocked listeners. As the Humbert from the novel could not have possibly witnessed the reactions of his readers to his detailed theories on what nymphets are and why their power is so overwhelming (the potential outrage of the book's audience can only be guessed at, since it is to be published after Humbert's death), Nabokov decided to use the visual aspect of the film in order to demonstrate more explicitly that society's reaction to this particular kind of deviation is absolutely negative and Humbert the lecturer is fully aware of the risk he is running by revealing his thoughts in public.

Doctor Ray appears once again, claiming that Humbert, his former patient, was an incurable case. This statement ends the prologue and Nabokov continues with Act One, beginning in Ramsdale on the last day of school. Three girls: Virginia McCoo, Phyllis Chatfield, and Lolita, discuss their plans for the summer; Virginia looks forward to taking French lessons with a guest that will be staying with her family. Lolita's mother picks her up and as they drive home, Lolita is reminded of her appointment with the dentist – doctor Quilty. After a stormy night, not much is left of McCoos' house and Mrs. Haze learns she will have to take the lodger intended for the McCoos. In the meantime, oblivious Humbert arrives at the address he had been given only to discover smouldering rubble. Mr. McCoo shows him around the ruins of his house and sends him to 342 Lawn Street. Not too impressed with the new location, Humbert discovers Lolita sunbathing in the garden and attempts an awkward conversation with her, while in the novel neither of them says a word to the other. This last scene seems very down-to-earth and almost painfully clumsy. The effect that Nabokov achieves in his script is dragging Lolita down from her pedestal, taking away from her the "Nymphet Goddess" status by having Humbert treat her as a regular child and not an underage seductress he desperately worships but does not dare to address.

The section of the plot which includes Humbert's moving in with Charlotte Haze, their marriage and later Charlotte's death is handled slightly differently in the three versions of the story – the novel, the screenplay, and the film – with quite a few elements omitted in the latter

medium. In the novel, it is explained that Humbert decides on a journey to the US, because he has been invited to rent a room with Mr. And Mrs. McCoo and their two daughters, one of them aged twelve. Upon his arrival, nevertheless, he learns that the house has burned down, and he is redirected to Mrs. Haze, at 342 Lawn Street. He is taken on a tour around the house, failing to deduce from the clues scattered all around the place that there must be a child living there (a white sock on the floor, a plum stone, an apple core, a tennis ball). The last stop of the tour is the piazza, where Humbert sees Lolita kneeling on a mat.[5] No mention is made of Humbert's accepting Mrs. Haze's offer and moving in; after his words "They are beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!" (not exactly referrring to Charlotte's lilies, although she is probably led to believe so) the narration swiftly shifts to his account of the diary he keeps while living at Lawn Street 342; he quotes the diary verbatim. Its content obviously focuses on Lolita – her friends, her favorite pastimes, the language she uses – and on Humbert's obsession with the girl; the theme of Annabel is not completely gone and forgotten, as Humbert often makes comparisons between his two loves. Written in first person, it describes in great detail the daily life of the three characters and even quotes their dialogues.[6] Among many innocent – or seemingly innocent – scenes we find a very erotic one, with Lolita sitting on the couch with Humbert, with her legs across his lap. The man is obviously aroused and tries to distract his oblivious object of desire so as to prolong the pleasure. Such a scene could never be shown on the screen, and it did not make it into Nabokov's script. In the following fragment, Humbert refers to that event saying: "I felt proud of myself. I had stolen the honey of a spasm without impairing the morals of a minor. Absolutely no harm done" (Lo, 61). Even already at the first reading, we can draw contradictory conclusions as far as the reception of Humbert and the interpretation of his actions are concerned. Lolita is an innocent victim, but she is not aware of what is happening and therefore the reader may not necessarily perceive her as hurt or abused. Humbert does take advantage of the child, but at the same time he emphasizes that he has made sure she is in no way affected, which perhaps alleviates the harsh judgement the reader would have made otherwise.[7]

Soon afterwards, Humbert is informed that Lolita will be sent to a summer camp and on the morning of her departure the girl kisses him as she runs upstairs to say goodbye. Devastated by the thought that he may never see her again (or even worse: that she might no longer be a nymphet when she comes back), Humbert goes to Lolita's room, where he is found by the maid. She gives him a letter from Charlotte, in which the woman confesses her love and asks him to leave unless he intends to include her

in his plans for the future. The letter is pretentious and exalted. Quoting a large fragment of the letter and summarizing whatever has been omitted, Humbert finds out that Lolita had a little brother who died at the age of two. "My first movement was one of repulsion and retreat," admits Humbert (Lo, 68), having disposed of the letter. His overall reaction is rather disgust than amusement, although the tone may be heavily mocking at times. Eventually he decides to use this opportunity and stay with Charlotte because of Lolita; he calls the camp right away to talk to Charlotte, but she has already left and he has a brief conversation with Lolita instead. Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Haze becomes Mrs. Humbert and her character receives more attention as far as descriptions are concerned, because until that moment she was merely a hateful woman who interrupted Humbert whenever he attempted to spend some time alone with Lolita. She is now presented as "a woman of principle" (Lo, 74) with deep religious faith, and as a dutiful, meal-serving housewife. In an interview for Ramsdale *Journal*, Humbert suggests that he and Charlotte had an affair around the time when Lolita was conceived. At this point, Nabokov's (and Humbert's) treatment of Charlotte changes, as now her husband tries to do her justice and describe some of the features he admires or appreciates in her – and since it is the same Humbert who many a time in his diary would refer to Charlotte as "the phocine mamma," "the Haze woman," "big Haze," or "the obnoxious lady" (to quote but a few of the epithets he used), the reader may be tempted to see the more positive, honest side of Humbert. The impression that the man wants to eliminate Charlotte from his vision of the future seems more distant now that he devotes more attention to her and attempts at making her a more complete and complex character.

Humbert and Charlotte's trip to the Hourglass Lake is an important scene, as variations on it will appear in both the screenplay and the film. Charlotte reveals her plan to send little Lo to a boarding school thus getting rid of her from the house; her desperate husband contemplates murder. As they are swimming in the lake, he imagines drowning Charlotte and feigning an unfortunate accident. He cannot, however, bring himself to commit the crime, and a few moments later he finds out that had he actually attempted to drown Charlotte, there would have been a witness in the person of Charlotte's friend, Jean Farlow, who was painting a landscape nearby and observed them the whole time; she actually had such a clear view of the couple that she even spotted a watch on Humbert's wrist. This short episode presents Humbert as capable of planning a murder on the one hand, but incapable of performing it on the other. It also emphasizes his lust for his stepdaughter, since the very

thought of having her sent away triggers the worst instincts in him. After that event Humbert begins to voice his opinions and to object to some of his wife's ideas. Whereas his first wife, Valeria, would most often be confused and frightened by his taciturnity, Charlotte has never been moved by it, which eventually prompts Humbert to introduce certain changes to his treatment of her. The reader also learns that Humbert uses prescription pills to put his wife to sleep, so that she does not bother him at nights. The specific Nabokovian sense of humor in these descriptions is missing in the film version of the story.[8]

One afternoon, Humbert comes home to find his wife reading his secret diary, which she found in the locked drawer whose contents he once refused to reveal to her. Shocked by her discovery, the woman calls him a monster and tells him he will never see Lolita again. Humbert goes to the kitchen to make her a drink and plans to say that the excerpts from the diary are supposed to be random notes for the book he is working on. On his way back he answers the phone only to find out Charlotte has just been run over by a car while heading for the mailbox to post some letters. Before he reaches Lolita, he has to deal with the Farlows (once again he clearly implies Lolita is his biological daughter) and Mr. Beale, the driver of the car that killed Charlotte; he presents Humbert with a diagram illustrating the whole accident to prove that it was Charlotte's fault and offers to cover the funeral expenses – an offer which Humbert gladly accepts, to Beale's confusion and dismay.

In the whole section of the novel described above there are three mentions of Quilty, who nonetheless never appears in person. First, when Humbert simulates a toothache and Charlotte recommends to him their local dentist, Ivor Quilty: "'We have,' said Haze, 'an excellent dentist. Our neighbour, in fact. Dr Quilty. Uncle or cousin, I think of the playwright...." (Lo, 63). Second, when right after having read Charlotte's letter Humbert is in Lolita's room and spots a poster on the wall; here, however, no names are given, so the reference to Quilty is not that obvious: "Under this was another picture, also a coloured ad. A distinguished playwright was solemnly smoking a Drome. He always smoked Dromes" (Lo, 68). Finally, the name of Quilty is mentioned by Jean Farlow, when she talks to the Humberts at Hourglass Lake. She is, so far, the closest to reveal something intriguing about Quilty, but she is interrupted by John Farlow:

> Jean sighed, 'I once saw,' she said, 'two children, male and female, at sunset, right here, making love. Their shadows were giants.[9] And I told you about Mr Tomson at daybreak. Next time I expect to see fat old Ivor in the ivory. He is really a freak, that man. Last time he told me a completely indecent story about his nephew. It appears –'

'Hullo there,' said John's voice. (Lo, 89)

From these scattered references to the character of Quilty, the reader learns that Quilty is a playwright and a smoker; Nabokov has not granted him a single cameo appearance except for an advertisement poster on Lolita's wall. Meanwhile, both the screenplay and the film rearrange the pieces of the puzzle, and do not hesitate to move Quilty to the forefront of the story.

The motif of Humbert's diary is preserved in the screenplay, as it is the story's crucial prop through which Charlotte discovers Humbert's true intentions. Instead of having Humbert's voice read fragments of the diary, Nabokov chooses to simply show the man taking notes. One of the scenes he includes is the reenactment of Humbert's dream about knights and nymphets in an Enchanted Forest (LoSc, 45-46). As virtually all of Nabokov's additional scenes which enhanced the overall mood and added a somewhat literary quality to the motion picture of which a part they were to become, the dream did not make it into the movie, possibly because it would have required extra props and scenery. Moreover, those scenes might also change the overall quality of the film, as it is suggested in *Twientieth-century American Fiction on Screen*. Referring to the dream sequence, and also to the already mentioned scene depicting the death of Humbert's mother, Palmer writes: "Had these vignettes been filmed, they would have formed a part of a completely different film, featuring an anti-illusionistic aesthetic, more reminiscent of Federico Fellini or Woody Allen than of the early Kubrick" (2007, 113). Since the original novel lacks such oneiric insertions, Nabokov may have wished to see some of his more "poetic" ideas and visions realized on screen; certain passages in the novel prove that the author was very much aware of the possibilities the film medium offered, since in *Lolita* he made quite a few references to the movie industry.[10]

Next, Nabokov creates short scenes in which Humbert is always found near Lolita observing her, while Charlotte gets in the way.[11] In one of the scenes included in the screenplay, the mother and the daughter are sunbathing in the garden; Charlotte clearly wants to catch Humbert's attention and tries to strike up a conversation about some bestseller titled "When The Lilacs Last" (a melodious alliteration typical of Nabokov). Lolita mocks her and is sent to her room. Even though such a conversation does not take place in the course of the novel, it is an echo of the book's Freudian references:

CHARLOTTE Have you read that? *When the Lilacs Last*.
HUMBERT (Clears his throat negatively.)

> CHARLOTTE Oh, you should. It was given a rave review by Adam Scott. It's about a man from the North and a girl from the South who build up a beautiful relationship – he is her father image and she is his mother image, but later she discovers that as a child she had rejected her father, and of course then he begins to identify her with his possessive mother. You see, it works out this way: he symbolizes the industrial North, and she symbolizes the old-fashioned South, and –
> LOLITA (casually) and it's all silly nonsense. (LoSc, 47)

Not only does Charlotte's monologue play on stock Freudian concepts (parent-child relations), but it is also one of the rare occasions for this particular character to develop, and to display more features which make it easier to define Charlotte Haze as someone more than just "Lolita's mother." She wants to be perceived as cultured and erudite by demonstrating knowledge of the latest acclaimed publications, but at the same time she is imposing herself on Humbert, who does not seem interested in the matter, and she practically reveals all the details of the plot, so that in the end he does not need to read the book himself. While the novel's Charlotte seems irritating more to Humbert than to the reader, it seems that in his screenplay Nabokov makes sure everyone is equally irritated by her.

A new element that Nabokov decided to introduce into the screenplay is a school dance Lolita is to attend. Humbert is also invited, as parents supervise the event and he is asked to accompany Charlotte. Before the dance Lolita coquettishly prances in front of Humbert in her new dress, clearly flirting with him.[12] What is more, the novelist decides to introduce the character of Kenny – a boy who is to be Lolita's date for the evening, which adds to the overall impression that Lolita is older than twelve. Kenny is picked up on the way to the dance, but it is professor Humbert whose hand the girl squeezes in the backseat. This little scene of holding hands is a variation on a very similar one from the novel, in which Charlotte intends to take her lodger shopping, but Lolita joins them uninvited and holds Humbert's hand in the car without Charlotte seeing it.

Nabokov brings Quilty into the plot in the next scene of his screenplay – the school dance. In a polite conversation with a friend Charlotte brings up Quilty's television play titled *The Nymphet*. Humbert discreetly moves away from the chatting women and follows Lolita, watching her on the dancefloor. Two excited schoolgirls talk about Quilty; he almost becomes the centerpiece of the scene with everyone's attention gravitating toward him. Nabokov clearly expresses his own reception of the character; the description in between the dialogues reads: "Quilty is a tremendously successful phony, fortyish, roguish, baldish, with an obscene little

mustache and a breezy manner which some find insulting and others just love" (LoSc, 56).[13] Quilty and Charlotte get into a conversation – something which never actually takes place in the course of the novel – what is more, they have met before in person. Charlotte compliments him and obviously strives to win his favor, but he does not take any interest in her until he remembers her daughter. Their dialogue ends with Quilty saying "I want to watch Dolores dance" – an ominous suggestion that he has the same intentions as Humbert, the lustful voyeur. The latter is soon captured by Mrs. Haze, who wants to spend a nice evening with him while Lolita is supposed to be having a good time elsewhere with a couple of friends. The next scene shows them at home, finishing their dinner. Charlotte is bent on teaching Humbert how to dance. The man is clearly stressed and embarrassed, awkwardly trying to keep up with Charlotte's steps. Her shameless flirting is interrupted by Lolita's early arrival. Before she is finally sent to bed, the girl mentions Quilty – "the famous author" (LoSc, 63) and enrages her mother by unceremoniously calling Humbert "sweetheart" and "Hum." Humbert uses the opportunity and also goes to bed, escaping Charlotte's romantic endeavors. The dance lesson scene is an interesting deviation from the novel's strategy, according to which Nabokov does not portray Humbert in embarassing situations – and if he does, then the event is either casually reported without going into much detail, or filtered through Humbert's self-irony and turned into a humorous scene which does not affect the man's overall profile. Here, however, Nabokov shows the awkward, uneasy Humbert, dominated by Mrs. Haze and no longer in control. It makes Charlotte look more powerful, but also shakes Humbert's image of the serious, staid scholar.

A few days later Humbert has another chance to be alone with Lolita, as she walks into his room when he is in the middle of recording a lecture about Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe. Nabokov puts these very words in his mouth: "Before discussing Baudelaire's methods of translating Poe, let me turn for a moment to the romantic lines in which the great American neurotic commemorates his marriage to a thirteen-year-old girl, his beautiful Annabel Lee" (LoSc, 64-65). Clearly the novelist attempted to retain the presence of Poe and his work in the screenplay, both by introducing the Humbert-Annabel episode (thus alluding to Poe), as well as by mentioning him directly as a subject of Humbert's study. It is interesting to observe that while in the novel the reader is not given the explicit connection between Annabel Leigh and the poem by Poe, and they have to rely on their erudition and knowledge to link those two elements together, in the screenplay we have both Annabel – the girl Humbert once loved, and Annabel – the subject of a poem by

Edgar Allan Poe; the reference is made clear and no effort is required on the part of the viewer. This strategy demonstrates that the figure of Poe and the symbolism connected with him was of great importance to Nabokov, as he wanted to make sure the intertextual allusions were preserved and made comprehensible. The motif of Annabel in this scene is still present after Lolita enters Humbert's room: in one of the drawers she finds a photograph of Humbert and Annabel. Nabokov's instruction reads: "Actually it is the same actress as the one that plays Lolita but wearing her hair differently, etc.," but Lo says: "She doesn't look like me at all" (LoSc, 66). She sits on Humbert's lap, but is quickly called by her mother and leaves. The next short scene shows Humbert writing in his diary, once again emphasizing the fact that Lolita had a predecessor in the person of Annabel, and signaling that his infatuation with a little girl is not unprecedented: "For thirty years I mourned Annabel, and watched nymphets playing in parks, and never once dared—. And now Annabel is dead, and Lolita is alive—my darling—'my darling—my life and my bride'" (LoSc, 67). The author insists on creating a clear background for the main plot, and one of the ways in which he can do so (without resorting to flashbacks) is by selecting fragments of Humbert's diary and having the character read them out loud.

At dinner, Humbert is informed that Lolita will be going away to a summer camp, and that he has been involved in the scheme: Charlotte told her daughter that professor Humbert had approved of the idea. Soon after Lolita furiously snaps at Humbert and refuses to talk to him, he goes back to recording his "Baudelaire and Poe" lecture. This time he talks about "the Freudian nursery-school of thought," and Poe's marriage to Virginia Clemm. The next morning he wakes up to witness Lolita's departure – the girl runs upstairs to say goodbye to Humbert and he kisses her on the brow; possibly Nabokov foresaw the censorship issues and knew that a kiss on the lips between Humbert and Lolita would never be accepted. As in the novel, Humbert goes to Lolita's room (he sees a picture of Quilty on the wall), but then leaves and starts packing his things; the maid brings Charlotte's letter. Here again, Nabokov thought of special effects for the scene:

> The neat handwriting of the address turns momentarily into a schoolgirl's scribble, then reverts to the ladylike hand. He opens the letter.
>
> Humbert, in a classical pattern of comments, ironical asides, and well-mouthed readings, scans the letter. In one SHOT, he is dressed as a gowned professor, in another as a routine Hamlet, in a third, as a dilapidated Poe. He also appears as himself. (LoSc, 73)

He reads the letter aloud, mocking ruthlessly Charlotte's mistakes. His comment upon finishing the letter is: "My dear Mrs. Haze, or rather Mrs. Clemm, I am passionately devoted to your daughter" (LoSc, 74). Another clear allusion to Edgar Allan Poe, so uncommon in the course of the novel, seems to serve to reassure the author that the viewer of the future film **will** notice and appreciate the peculiar connection between Poe and Humbert.[14] Humbert's final reaction to the letter is smiling, unpacking his things and dancing down the stairs. This scene is definitely a contrast to the Humbert the viewer has seen so far, and Nabokov introduces this contrast on purpose, stating: "Then he goes into an awkward and grotesque jig (in striking contrast to his usual mournful and dignified demeanor)" (LoSc, 74). On the one hand, he presents a different, "lighter" side of Humbert by having him smile and dance (this is the second time we see him dance, but the first time he dances out of his own free will); on the other hand, there is something ominous and unsettling behind this behavior, as the viewer is aware of Humbert's intentions and may not share his joy of the moment. Humbert calls Lolita at the camp, informing her that he intends to marry her mother; Lo sounds very excited. Her excitement, however, is caused much more by the new surroundings than by the surprising news. Their conversation dissolves into the picture of the Humberts eating breakfast in their kitchen and reading *Ramsdale Journal*, as they are featured in one of the columns.[15] Later Charlotte shows Humbert some of the things she has stacked in a drawer and a small gun which used to belong to Charlotte's first husband catches his interest along with a photograph of a 25-year-old Charlotte – he keeps the picture. In the novel, he also tries to find similarities between Charlotte and Lolita; he compares their gestures and facial expressions, the way that Charlotte looks in a certain light reminds him of little Lo. In the simple gesture of Humbert keeping the mentioned photograph Nabokov contains the protagonist's attempt to change his negative attitude toward Charlotte, suggesting that Humbert is actually looking for reasons to be attracted to his new wife.

The next scene, however, somewhat erases that impression. The couple goes to the lake and on their way there Humbert learns about yet another plan of Charlotte's concerning Lolita, namely: she wants to send her daughter to a boarding school. The novel's Humbert imagined and reimagined murdering his wife at that point, but was never able to carry out the tragic plan. The screenplay's Humbert talks Charlotte into swimming to a "moored raft some forty yards off the lake shore" (LoSc, 79) and then leaves her there knowing that she will follow him and hoping she will not make it back to the shore. Charlotte gets a cramp and starts drowning; Humbert watches her from a distance, but eventually swims

back and helps her out of the water. This scene exposes Humbert's cruelty and cold calculation:

> A neat little diagram shows the relative positions of a drowning person (one arm sticking out of the water), a stationary raft, and the shoreline at equal distance from the sufferer.
> For a few seconds, Humbert floats motionless in a vertical position, his chin just above the surface, his eyes fixed on floundering Charlotte. There should be something reptilian and spine-chilling in his expectant stare. Then, as she gasps, and sinks, and splashes, and screams, he dashes toward her, reaching her in a few strokes.
> He helps her out onto the beach.
> CHARLOTTE (still panting) You know – you know – for one moment – I thought you – would not come to save me – your eyes – you looked at me with dreadful, dreadful eyes —. (LoSc, 82-83)

Humbert's reaction to the news about Lolita going to a boarding school, the hatred he suddenly feels for Charlotte, and the criminal thoughts may all constitute the common denominator for the novel and the screenplay. The crucial difference consists in the fact that in the latter text Humbert actually attempts at carrying out his sinister plans. Nabokov does not imply whether it was Humbert's guilty conscience or perhaps fear of the consequences that made him change his mind and save Charlotte from drowning; the screenplay makes this particular character far less sympathetic by showing him proceed from thoughts to actions. The couple returns home and while Humbert drives back to the beach to retrieve his sunglasses, Charlotte finds a key to the secret drawer and, consequently, the diary, which she reads through a magnifying glass. When Humbert enters his room only to find his wife reading, the sequence of events follows closely the pattern from the novel until the moment of Charlotte's death. The moment when Humbert is taken away from the scene of the accident by the Farlows ends Act One of the screenplay.

The remaining part of the storyline – from Humbert's reunion with Lolita to the protagonists' sad end – takes up approximately two thirds of the novel, and slightly less when it comes to the screenplay and the film. Nevertheless, only in the novel will the reader find extensive and detailed descriptions of Humbert and Lolita's journey across the US, comments on the differences in customs and tastes, and a catalogue of American motels, small towns, gas stations, and milk bars. Humbert explains the motive behind their journey: traveling across the country is supposed to make Lo feel entertained and to keep her attention off the fact that she is basically held captive by her guardian. "By putting the geography of the United States into motion, I did my best for hours on end to give her the