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The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts. The case of Pia Pera's *Diario di Lo*

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Abstract – This paper aims to discuss the phenomenon of *Lolita's* hypertexts in the light of the issues of trauma and the unspeakable, adopting the framework offered by psychiatry and psychoanalysis on pedophilia. In the first chapter I will be particularly concerned with three revisionary texts, namely Kim Morrissey's *Poems for Men Who Dream of Lolita*, Christophe Tison's *Le Journal de Lolita* and Emily Prager's *Roger Fishbite*, whereas the second one will provide a close analysis of another revisionary text, *Diario di Lo*, written by Pia Pera.

Keywords – *Lolita*; Hypertext; Trauma; Nabokov; Pera.

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1. *Lolita's* Hypertexts: A Controversial Affair

As Maurice Couturier rightly points out, the character of *Lolita* has by now attained a mythical *status*, analogous to that of Oedipus and Don Juan (194). Stage adaptations, movies, ballets, musicals and even fashion subcultures have spawned from Nabokov's masterpiece, which is also cited and alluded to by many contemporary and late-20th-century authors, such as W.G. Sebald, Alexander Sokolov and Javier Marías.

Indeed, the story of Humbert Humbert's pedophilic relationship with Dolores Haze continues to inspire writers, to such an extent that some even embark on what can be defined as rewritings, or, in Gérard Genette's more specific terms, hypertexts of the novel. "By hypertextuality" the French theorist explains, "I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (*Literature in the Second Degree*, 5). For instance, James Joyce's *Ulysses* could be regarded as one of the many hypertexts deriving from Homer's *Odyssey* (*ibid.*).

Although unknown to the layman, these are probably the most famous hypertexts of *Lolita*: Umberto Eco, *Nonita* (1959); Kim Morrissey, *Poems for Men Who Dream of Lolita* (1992); Pia Pera, *Diario di Lo* (1995); Javier Marías, *La novela más melancólica: Lolita recontada* (1999); Emily Prager, *Roger Fishbite* (1999); Sara Stridsberg, *Darling river* (2010).

It may sound surprising but, in spite of the last decades' academic focus on second-degree literary works, hypertexts based on Nabokov's classic have been virtually ignored by scholars, who seem reluctant to even mention their existence.¹

There are essentially two reasons for this lack of interest. The first one may be described as an indirect consequence of *Lolita's* material destiny, given the fact that the novel has become, using Paolo Caponi's metaphor, "una miniera d'oro inesauribile" (19). The book is still under copyright law and its past legitimate guardians, Nabokov and his son Dmitri, were constantly on the alert for unauthorized hypertexts, basically fearing plagiarism.² As a result, other

¹ My PhD thesis *Lolita in Italia. Le riscritture letterarie del romanzo di Vladimir Nabokov* [*Lolita in Italy. The Literary Rewritings of Vladimir Nabokov's Novel*] attempts to chart the phenomenon, providing close textual analysis of a dozen texts, with a focus on the Italian reinterpretations. From the very scarce bibliography I found Stefania Lucamante's and Ernst Machen's papers on *Diario di Lo* among others. Recently I have also come across Michelle Meek's "Lolita Speaks".

² As Yury Leving states, quoting Stephen Blackwell, Nabokov's main concern in his publishing career was not money but control of his image and works, which meant open hostility to any editorial action not previously agreed (111). Dmitri Nabokov supervised his father's economic and spiritual legacy until he too passed away, in 2009. Fourteen years before, he had threatened to take to court Italian journalist and slavist Pia Pera, whose English translation of *Diario di Lo* was going to be published. For a more detailed account of the affair, which was given great relevance on American press, see Roh's article "Two Copyright Case Studies".

The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts.

Valeria Invernizzi

'safer' practices were prioritized, as it is apparent, for instance, by the number of articles, reviews and books devoted to Kubrick's and Lyne's movies.

Another reason which contributes to the oblivion of those hypertexts is their general mediocre quality, a judgment generally shared by scholarship and reviewers. Michiko Kakutani, Mim Udovitch, Michael Greenberg and Graham Vickers criticized *Lo's Diary* for its "stylistic deficiencies" (Udovitch) and "unsurprising" content (Greenberg); *Roger Fishbite* received fairly positive reviews, while the other texts went largely unnoticed.

Of course, Nabokov's outstanding prose style inevitably overshadows even a talented author, but one must admit that few talented authors have ventured into the 'second-degree literary realm' of *Lolita*. Thus, the *vulgata* that the parody is always inferior to the parodied (Sangue 4) applies to every case. It is hardly worth mentioning that Nabokov, for whom the aesthetic criterion stood above all others when judging a work of art, would have labeled that fictional progeny as minor literature, if not literature at all.

From a comparativist's point of view, though, its study offers the opportunity to examine *Lolita's* vitality in contemporary fiction, especially as regards the interpretation of certain passages.

It is known that *Lolita's* reception has historically been not only huge but also decidedly conflicting, and often confrontational. As Julian Connolly notes, while many reviewers carelessly described Humbert's feelings for the twelve-year-old as 'love' or the little girl as genuinely depraved, feminist literary critics indignantly pointed out how Humbert's first-person narration and fancy style consistently elide Lolita.³

Literary responses to the novel also emerged in this sense, presenting Lolita's fictional diary (e.g. *Diario di Lo*; *Poems for Men Who Dream of Lolita*; *Le Journal de Lolita*) or setting her story in contemporary times (e.g. *Roger Fishbite*).

Here a reflection on these hypertexts' dates of publication is necessary. Tellingly, our fictions appeared from the 1990s to the 2000s, an era in which pedophilia ceased to be a taboo topic in Western countries and mass media raised awareness about the problem of child abuse. Nabokov's *Lolita* was per se a scandalous book in the 1950s, while our hypertexts, which include explicit sex references and Lolita's appalling confessions, are not considered so intolerably disturbing. The way Lolita's traumas are portrayed speaks both of the way society viewed pedophilia at the time of publication and of the authors' attitude towards mental suffering. Whereas Nabokov gives only few, but nonetheless striking, glimpses of Lolita's emotional pain, the authors of our revisionary texts choose a different path, trying to imagine the victim's inner world.

In these rewritings the nymphet is the narrator as well as the fixed internal focalizer (see Genette's categories in *Narrative Discourse* 189). Humbert's account in *Lolita* is often brought into question; a good number of episodes are revisited, usually foregrounding the man's cruelty. The following examples will briefly illustrate this procedure.

³ To know more about the matter, see Julian Connolly, *A Reader's Guide to Nabokov's Lolita*, in particular Chapter Four, "Who was Dolly Haze?" and Chapter Six, "*Lolita's* afterlife: critical and cultural responses". Nabokov's alleged complicity with Humbert's appetites – another idea brought forth by feminist critics – is widely refuted on the basis of Nabokov's own statements (see *Strong Opinions*, 13; 81) and of the novel's implicit warnings to be «better 'readers' than Humbert" (Connolly 56). Berys Gaut wrote about that issue: "Central to the working of the book is a deployment of the seduction strategy, and the success and power of Nabokov's use of it go some way to explaining why this has seemed to many a work complicit with Humbert's appetites" (196). Humbert's rhetoric of seduction – which is by the way typical of the pedophile's manipulative discourse (see Schinaia 190) – contributes to make *Lolita* an unsettling but illuminating reading. Note that sometimes the *émigré* actually fails to ignore his victim's emotional consistency, which unexpectedly strikes the reader; see Lolita's «expression of helplessness» or her dialog with Eva Rosen (323-4).

The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts.

Valeria Invernizzi

Let us consider Charlotte's unexpected death. When Humbert insists on knowing from Dolly why she did not attend Miss Lempereur's lessons, the girl, in a fit of rage, replies she is sure he murdered her mother (Nabokov 238). In Julia Voznesenskaya's *The Women's Decameron*, Albina tells her fellow patients that *Lolita* should be banned, though not for its erotic content but for Humbert's collection of lies. The stewardess is convinced that he has let Charlotte find his diary on purpose, so that she would take her life out of shame. Then Albina narrates her story in the novella *A Soviet Lolita*: she had been abused by her figure skating coach as a juvenile, after which her mother committed suicide. *Roger Fishbite* goes even further as Mrs Fishbite was actually killed by her child-molesting husband, who ran over her. In both cases *Lolita's* words become real, thus emphasizing Humbert's moral responsibility for Charlotte's passing.

Sometimes the pedophile's beliefs on his victim's reactions are reversed. In Nabokov's novel the French professor is persuaded that his image has already faded away from Dolly's mind, since she shows little interest in her mother's upcoming second marriage (80). Whereas in Pera's corresponding paragraph Dolores Maze is about to burst into tears out of anger, because she would childishly like to marry the man herself (162).

The most shocking *lacunae* that these "white ink revisions" (McCracken 134) intend to fill are those concerning the sexual abuse of the nymphet. This is a very delicate point that belongs to what we could define as 'the unspeakable' in Nabokov's novel, being pedophilia and sexual activity with children forbidden subjects in the Fifties.

Humbert in *Lolita* recalls some memorable intimate encounters with Dolores, yet no actual sex is portrayed. Our revisionary texts are not elusive on the pedophile's indecent behavior and frequently add particulars, as happens for instance in Tison's *Journal*, in which Dolores makes a crude account of Humbert's intimacy with her at the Enchanted Hunters (73-5).

What is crucial in *Lolita's* victimization is obviously its psychological consequences. Maurice Couturier observes that we ultimately cannot say that the nymphet's first intimate encounter with Humbert has not been disturbing for her, since she is still in her latency period (184). During their two years together, Dolores unwillingly tolerates the man's sexual requests and his controlling behavior. Gradually, Humbert resorts more and more to threats and blackmail, with the result that *Lolita's* suffering increases. Sadness and rage become her intimate friends to the point that Humbert, though disinterested in his little slave's state of mind, reports her nocturnal sobbing (199) and swinging mood (191). She experiences only manipulation, thus betrayal, from the adult who should take care of her.⁴

How do revisionary texts elaborate on this matter? Dolores Maze finally takes her revenge by torturing him with a pen during his sleep (Pera, *Lo's Diary* 74). Lucky Linderhof is constantly in need of real affection from her stepfather and becomes depressed when he mysteriously disappears (Prager 150-2; 172). Morrissey's Dolly is upset and sick with the squalor of sex in motels and with her monotonous existence (23; 21). This Dolores is also sure that Humbert will leave her after she ceases to be his fetish (22). Remember that Nabokov's Humbert was likely tempted to get rid of a fourteen-year-old *Lolita* (236).⁵

Morrissey's and Prager's characters finally realize that their stepfathers were incapable of really loving them. Lucky, however, states that this truth is still so dreadful that she has not yet entirely accepted it (Prager 103). We are left uncertain whether Nabokov's *Lolita* was coping

⁴ "A major traumagenic impact of CSA [child sexual abuse] is betrayal, whereby the child's trust and vulnerability are manipulated by the abuser. This is particularly the case when the abuser is a trusted family member, friend or adult in whom the child has invested trust and on whom the child depends for basic needs. [...] In essence CSA violates the child's expectation that others will provide care and protection. The child's wellbeing and need for support, care, love and affection are disregarded" (Sanderson 168).

⁵ In a pedophile's mind, "adult bodies simply no longer exist either as desiring machines or as objects of desire" (Schinaia 191).

The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts.

Valeria Invernizzi

as well with that. Mrs Schiller, referring to the past, tells Humbert that she guesses he “had been a good father” (310), which is a disconcerting statement, unless be interpreted as a flattery aimed at receiving the money she had asked him. In any case, her words enclose her tragic dependency to Humbert.

Our revisionary texts add disquieting details to the man’s psychological harm to his step-daughter. These second-degree Lolitas display symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which may affect victims of pedophilia.⁶ Pera’s Dolly develops uncontrolled rage leading to insomnia (256) and self-harming thoughts (289), not to mention cynicism and insensitiveness at great length, which are evident for example when she watches a man’s suicide (246). Prager’s Lucky has rage attacks as well and secretly cuts herself (151; 133), while Tison’s heroine experiences extreme loneliness and feelings of emptiness (85; 87). Morrissey’s Dolores is tormented by nightmares (23).

Is Nabokov’s nymphet traumatized by Humbert’s exploitation? There is indeed a clear indicator in *Lolita* that the nymphet initially succumbs to the negative forces of repetition which are typical of trauma. Lolita’s fleeing with Quilty, the sadistic playwright, indicates she has potentially trapped herself in a downward spiral of revictimization. Lolita clearly idealizes Quilty, seeing in him the person who will fulfill her artistic dreams and save her from Humbert’s dictatorship.⁷ Although she knows that Quilty belongs to the same category as Humbert, she enjoys his company (314), possibly hoping to be really loved by him. Like many victims of pedophilia, who demand love, she is in the best position to be exploited again.⁸ Nonetheless, her refusal to submit to the playwright’s directions (315) also suggests that her capacity to react positively to trauma was enough to impede such possibility. Indeed, she finds a job as a waitress and marries a fellow peer, Richard Schiller, who provides her with a safe and peaceful setting.⁹ These facts show that the girl possesses what in psychology is called “resilience” (Hamrit 144).¹⁰ Only death gets the better of Humbert’s “brave Dolly” (324).

How do *Lolita's* revisionary texts depict the heroine’s disrupting relationship with Quilty? Let us begin by commenting on *Poems for Men*.

⁶ Psychological trauma, which was described by Sigmund Freud by analogy to physical injury, occurs when «an event overwhelms or exceeds a person’s capacity to protect his or her psychic wellbeing and integrity» (Cloitre et al. 3). A child who has been subjected to sexual abuse – which is defined as trauma in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* – is likely to develop PTSD (“Post-traumatic stress disorder”). Among the symptoms of PTSD are “hyperactivity or dysregulation, with increased irritability, proneness to aggression [...], elevated startle response, insomnia [...], nightmares, numbing, reduced emotions (frozenness), withdrawal, hypervigilance, aloneness” (Sanderson 163). Prolonged child sexual abuse may dramatically result in what the International Classification of Diseases identifies as C-PTSD, or “Complex post-traumatic stress disorder”.

⁷ Lolita’s confession to Humbert “I would sooner go back to Cue. I mean –“ (Nabokov, *Lolita* 318) is evidence of that.

⁸ “It is interesting to note that abusers generally choose the most forlorn, the most subdued children, not only because such children are easy to deceive but also because those are the very qualities they find attractive” (Schinaia 196). Lolita has no loving adult figures around her. Humbert’s remark on the «abnormally chill relations» between Charlotte Haze and her daughter (327) accounts for the nymphet’s behavior with him and Quilty.

⁹ Lolita’s happy ending with Dick calls to mind a well-known fairy tale of incest, *Donkeyskin*, in which a princess, after refusing her father’s pretenses and working hard to survive, finally marries her beloved prince.

¹⁰ Jacqueline Hamrit aptly observes that Lolita manages to survive her trauma thanks to this ability: “Resilience is characterized by the fact that the subject not only copes with the unfavourable circumstances he or she meets but he or she also knows how to benefit from them. It is therefore mostly a capacity and a process, a way to resist and react to a psychic traumatism” (144).

The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts.

Valeria Invernizzi

Twelve-year-old Dolores dreams about the Hollywood star (Morrissey 7) and a couple of years later, while on her second travel with Humbert, is exultant at the prospect of a new life in Quilty's company (27). But once in Mexico Dolores realizes that for the playwright she is merely a means of brutal entertainment to offer his guests (33). Quilty acts out his sadism on the girl, as when he pushes silver pins through her flesh (*ibid.*) or compels her to engage in painful sex practices (40; 47). Frustrated, she promises herself she will teach him love and, if she does not succeed, to talk with him (47). Then the series of poems devoted to Cue suddenly interrupts, and the subsequent composition is dated 1952. Nothing is known about the circumstances of *Lolita's* departure from the ranch. Morrissey's treatment of the Cue theme, so to speak, is accurate, as the stages of *Lolita's* infatuation, disappointment and bitterness are well visible. Note that despite Quilty's degrading orders, meant to perversely reduce her to an anonymous toy, she never completely loses her self-esteem ("I am Dolores/write that *love*" 43).

In the last section of the *Poems* the author imagines Dolly's happiness found with Richard. The bride's serenity is however compromised by their financial hardships and especially by her pregnancy, which is so troubling for her that she feels disgust for the future baby (62; 66). This idea is introduced by Morrissey, as there is no hint in the hypotext that *Lolita* dislikes her condition. According to Sanderson, however, female survivors of child sexual abuse may experience physical and emotional vulnerability during pregnancy (77). She writes:

Furthermore, the fetus may feel like an incubus that has invaded the survivor's body, just as her body was invaded in childhood, or a succubus feeding off her and draining her energy, which may also mirror her abuse experience. Concerns surrounding miscarriage may emerge, representing the survivor's fears that she is so damaged that she cannot carry a baby to term or a sense that the fetus knows that she is bad and does not wish to be born to such a damaged mother. (77-8)

Morrissey depicts the unpleasant consequences of a precocious marriage and parenthood, the latter being possibly complicated by Dolores' child abuse.

Another significant version of the relation between *Lolita* and Quilty is found in Tison's *Journal*. During his visit to Beardsley the playwright sexually assaults the nymphet, but she comments on the event with sarcasm, for she has cynically resigned herself to arouse men (88). The reader is shocked by such desperate self-mortification, which demonstrates the scope of Humbert's damage to her psyche. We are made aware of what presumably lies beneath *Lolita's* revictimization by a grown man. The girl's enthusiasm for the playwright is thus shown in all its contradictions, which we could only infer in Nabokov's text. *Lolita's* fragility, of which we had a glimpse in Nabokov's novel, is at the heart of this hypertext.

The following chapter will be devoted to a close analysis of the representation of trauma and the unspeakable in Pia Pera's *Diario di Lo*, which is probably the most famous – and, as many would say, infamous – revisionary text on *Lolita*. Pera's novel has been taken here as the main case study because of "the precision with which she "gets" the original" (Machen 201), so that it is perhaps the most accurate attempt to represent *Lolita's* trauma.

2. Deconstructing Dolly: *Diario di Lo*

In the 1990s Italian author Pia Pera decided to retell Nabokov's book from the nymphet's perspective, presenting it in the form of a fictional diary. Dismissing *Lolita's* deathly ending, Pera has an adult Dolores – whose real surname would be Maze – go to Mr Ray's office and offer him her juvenile notes for publication. The woman is resentful of Humbert's supposedly mystifying account in *Lolita*.

The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts.

Valeria Invernizzi

Lo's diary starts in June 1946, after her translocation to a Northeastern town. This part of her tale reinvents the Hazes' life before Humbert's arrival the following year, with some flash-backs into Lo's early childhood.

In Nabokov's novel very little is said about Dolly's brother and father, the departed male members of the family. Humbert makes only casual comments on their figures, such as observing that Charlotte kept a photograph of her dead son in her bedroom and spoke more of him than of Lolita (90), or that the woman was uncomfortable with the age gap between her and Mr Haze (75).

Dolores Maze writes on the tragic circumstances of both losses. Dolly's brother, called Nelson in Pera's novel, dies of electrocution after a tornado, in front of his horrified family (Pera, *Diario di Lo* 39-40). Dolly Maze believes that his death is the most important event that ever occurred to her, though for a very curious reason: "Io penso che continuerò a scrivere che è più importante la morte di Nelson, perché eravamo in tre a pensarlo, il mio papà la mamma e io, mentre a pensare che è più importante la morte di mio papà siamo rimaste solo in due, e in un sistema democratico questo fa tre a due" (41). Her decision to name her hamster Nelson II and her subsequent execution of the animal clearly demonstrate the trauma her brother's accident brought to her life.

Dolly recalls a depressing atmosphere at home, with an equally traumatized Mr Maze drinking heavily and frying lizards in the basement (50). The man's fatal heart-attack suddenly leaves wife and daughter alone. Regretting his departure, Dolly addresses him both sadly and ironically in her diary as "caro papà che sei nei cieli" (114). Dolly's mother falls into complete apathy (31) and her child would have been abandoned to herself if it were not for the good heart of their black maid Céleste, Louise in *Lolita*. In Nabokov's novel Humbert's reference to the shabbiness and decrepitude of the Hazes' house (Nabokov, *Lolita* 86) testifies to a situation that was likely influenced by the widow's dispirited mood.

The relationship between Lolita and her surviving parent is certainly at the center of Pera's novel. Indeed, in an interview, the Italian writer comments on Dolly Maze: "Per lei la conquista del vecchio Humbert è il campo di battaglia su cui affrontare la rivalità con la madre, molto più importante per lei, per la sua crescita, che non una passione più capricciosa che matura" (Cinotti 2015). In *Lolita* we have a sufficiently clear picture of the reciprocal dislike the two have against each other. Dolly Maze does not feel loved by Isabel (Charlotte), who neglects her and treats her in a condescending way. Growing up, Lo thinks of her as a rival: "Un giorno io sarò una donna stupenda, e lei può ridere quanto le pare e piace tanto non lo sarà mai e poi mai" (Pera, *Diario di Lo* 47). Here Pera adds an element which the reader of *Lolita* can only speculate on. In the end, Lo maintains she is hated: "Da come imperversa si direbbe che quando mi ammalo lei è semplicemente felice" (80).

The mother-daughter relationship reaches its worst moment during the stay of the French *émigré*, Humbert Guibert. Isabel is annoyed by Lo's eagerness to please the guest and, during a quarrel, Lo candidly confesses she has been trying to seduce him (120). Using a manual for adults, Lo has put into practice a series of seductive strategies in order to keep Guibert as long as possible in her house (*ibid.*). Although she has noticed that he seeks her company more than her mother's, she childishly hopes he will fall in love with the latter and settle down with them definitively (116). The reader cannot but smile at such ingenuity. All the while the little girl does not seem worried by the man's strange attentions to her; on the contrary, she is evidently satisfied. This is something we also find in *Lolita* and that puzzles many readers. However, in pedophilia case studies it is common knowledge that a child who has been neglected, emotionally abused or psychologically mistreated is bound to become the pedophile's easiest prey (see note 8). Both Nabokov's and Pera's girls are fatherless and live with immature bullying mothers, who fail to detect danger in time.

The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts.

Valeria Invernizzi

After the above-mentioned quarrel, Lo changes her plan, resolving not to share the *émigré* with her parent (121). Dolly's inner phantasy is thus revealed, for the reader already guesses the extent of the jealousy between mother and daughter. In Lo's eyes, Monsieur Guibert's potential paternal figure is mixed up with that of a potential lover. Such a confusion obviously helps the pedophile achieve his goals. According to Schinaia, "[t]hrough [a] perverse seducing game the pedophile catches and distorts the child's temptation to make his phantasies of a magic replacement for his parent come true, burning his developmental stages and making him accede without conflicts to the adult condition" (195).

Despite Lo being flirtatious with Guibert, it is the man who actually lures her from the beginning, exactly as in *Lolita*: "*The pedophilic relationship is an asymmetrical one*. It is the adult who induces or compels the child to become an accomplice. The capacity to create the emotional atmosphere to solicit the child's voluntary participation is considered a real talent of the pedophile" (Schinaia 194). In either case, the *émigré* astutely pretends to be oblivious to what is going on all the time. Dolly Maze is conscious of the sexual implications of the man's attentions, whereas Nabokov's reader is left uncertain as to Dolores Haze's awareness (but note that in Beardsley the latter accuses Humbert of having tried to rape her when Mrs Haze was still alive; Nabokov, *Lolita* 233).

Lo appreciates Guibert's physical appearance and stresses the fact that he bears a curious resemblance to her favorite playwright (Pera, *Diario di Lo* 114-6). She greatly enjoys their furtive contacts, during which she is sexually aroused, as we are told, for instance, in the sofa episode (155). Whether Nabokov's nymphet was equally galvanized is not clear, as Humbert simply reports that Lolita considered sex good for the skin (Nabokov, *Lolita* 155).

Dolly Maze's sexual agency has raised many eyebrows. Michelle Meek states: "As readers or viewers, we may be reluctant to imbue Lolita with sexual agency because we view her agency, and our own pleasure in it, as perverse" (162). Indeed, we are repelled by her aggressive self-confidence in that respect, though it is apparent that Guibert is just waiting to take advantage of her. She herself speaks of Guibert as a coward who, however, cannot fully conceal his excitement whenever she is around (Pera, *Diario di Lo* 138-9).

As in Nabokov's novel, Pera's nymphet is forcefully sent to a summer camp (157-8). Guibert's telephone call announcing his upcoming marriage to Isabel makes a newly arrived Lo furious; the girl is now convinced that they have used her to seduce each other but Guibert's objective was nonetheless to marry Isabel (163). She, Lo, was to be kept away from home (164).

When, weeks later, Guibert informs her that Isabel is ill, the girl decides she will definitely try to have intercourse with him (188). During the act, which is consumed at the hotel they are staying in, Lo is disappointed by Guibert's hypocrisy as he lies down in silence pretending that nothing is happening (190). Later, she is bored by his orders as she would like to be treated as an equal, eventually disgusted by the stepfather-stepdaughter farce (194).

Lo's motives for the intercourse are linked to the desire for revenge on her mother and to her irritation at Guibert's false *pruderie*, which prompts her to show him she is not a tender girl (193). In Nabokov's novel there is no explicit suggestion that Lolita finally carries out sexual acts with Humbert because she feels in competition with Charlotte, though the reader suspects it.

The day after the fateful morning Lo has already lost interest in Guibert and, because of the physical pain he has caused her, decides to give her mother an idea of how he behaved (199). The news of the woman's death is a surprise, but she does not seem afflicted, quite the opposite: "*gallina morta via libera*" (200). The girl is convinced she will start a life of freedom with Guibert.

Despite her adult-like manners, Lo is very naïve. She believes she can completely manipulate Guibert through his passion for her but after her mother's death understands that the *émigré* has the whip hand over her. Guibert's apparent pliability reveals what it really was: a

The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts.

Valeria Invernizzi

strategy to win her complicity. That Guibert carelessly requires more than one sexual encounter from such a young girl on the same day is the first evidence that he essentially considers her an object of his pleasure.

Tellingly, Dolly Maze affirms that the man is not the same one she had known before his marriage: “[...] lui di sicuro non è più lo stesso che avevo lasciato a Goateescreek prima di partire per Maple Camp, lui dello Humbert di prima ha solo l’aspetto, ma dentro ci si è ficcata l’anima di mamma plastica” (223). She does not fully realize that, as a matter of fact, the man was simply very careful not to reveal his true nature. Her dream of living with Guibert as real lovers is obviously a childish one, though she maintains that it is all Guibert’s fault (219). She seems not to see that he is no longer a preadolescent like her but a man in his thirties and, what is worst, a pedophile skilled in manipulation. Pera indirectly suggests that in Nabokov’s book Dolores may have experienced the *émigré’s* shift from an apparently friendly figure to an authoritative and sexually exploiting one.

At this point the reader has already guessed that her self-confident tone in the diary probably masks her real feelings and perhaps she even distorts facts. As many diarists, she uses words as a means of control over her own image; she wants to appear as a tough, unbreakable girl. If we compare *Lolita* and *Diario di Lo* more closely, we find some probing elements. Let us take just an example. At the conclusion of Humbert Humbert’s chapter on his travel through the United States with his nymphet, he mentions the latter’s silent cry when they go to bed (199). On the contrary, Dolly Maze never reports this habit of hers.

The nymphet, however, does not completely hide her suffering in her diary. In the hypertext, Humbert narrates that Lolita, the morning they leave the Enchanted Hunters, “started complaining of pains, said she could not sit, said I had torn something inside her” (Nabokov, *Lolita* 159). Dolly Maze simply tells her stepfather that she needs to go to the toilet: “Mi scappa, gli urlo, portami fino alla stazione di benzina” (Pera, *Diario di Lo* 199). However, she had complained shortly before in her diary of the number of sexual encounters the *émigré* imposed on her, explaining that she pleased him only because she wanted to demonstrate to be “infrangibile” (199).

As callous as Lo thinks to be, she soon manifests symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, as we anticipated in the previous chapter. During the one-year travel with Guibert, she starts to suffer from insomnia:

L'altra sera ho avuto un attacco orribile, sono uscita e ho passeggiato un poco lì fuori sotto gli alberi sbavati di muschio, che sotto la luna piena fa effetto di tante barbe lunghe. A un tratto mi accorgo di non essere sola. Qualcuno mi chiama. Mi volto. Non vedo nulla. Poi sento raspate da dietro una macchina. Sono scappata, è tutto così spaventoso. (256)

Guibert’s jealousy drives her crazy as she has not enough privacy (256). She develops great rage against him: “[...] mi sento dentro una strana bestia uggiolante che sgraffia, una furia” (226).

Despite the wonderful landscape around her, she feels emotionally detached from everything: “Sì, accumulo impressioni, in teoria. Ma il fatto è che io non riesco più a provare nulla” (289). Then she cynically corrects her words: “No, non è che non senta più niente: la Dolores Maze di adesso ha un certo dolorino ai polsi. Un dolorino molto strano. Qualcosa che avrei voglia di grattare via a colpi di rasoio” (*ibid.*). However, she has a reason not to resort to that temptation: “Ma non devo non devo non devo tagliarmi col rasoio: non voglio perdere il mio diritto di sopravvivere a Humbert” (293). As far as we know, Lo keeps her promise, and does

The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts.

Valeria Invernizzi

not hurt herself. As we have seen, insomnia, rage, self-harm or suicidal thoughts are associated with child sexual abuse (see note 6).¹¹

Lo's relationships with people are compromised in many respects by Guibert's violence. For instance, the girl is frustrated at other people's happiness. Humbert Humbert was right when he sensed that Lolita possibly envied her classmate Avis Byrd. Dolly Maze depicts the members of Audrey Hawks' (Avis Byrd's) family as "schifosamente buoni e allegri" (339). In addition to that, she writes on the school toilet mirror obscene wedding wishes addressed to her teacher and her fiancé (347). Lo cannot stand the sight of people living a simple and happy life as they involuntarily support the hypocrisy of her relationship with Guibert. She is deprived of real love and care, which is turned into a parody by her stepfather.

Note that Miss Bluedick teaches sex education using metaphors, which has spurred Lo to truffle her leaflets with vulgarities (311).

Lo's cynical and contemptuous attitude shocks the reader from the beginning. She has no words of sorrow to her dead mother; when Guibert condoleances to her, she wonders: "Crepa il nemico e uno piange? Da quando in qua?" (204). On the Empire State Building in New York she mocks the guards by pretending to climb over the railing; unfortunately, someone in the meantime jumps off (246). The incident does not upset her; on the contrary, she believes it to be a good thing as she has helped a desperate person die (247). Except for Miss Blumeneau (Edusa Gold) and Liza Webster (Mona Dahl) she despises her new classmates and teachers, and also the majority of people around her. It is not easy to empathize with Dolores Maze though she is a victim of pedophilia.

What about Dolores Haze? Humbert recalls her distasteful comment on a moccasin lost by a woman in a car accident (Nabokov, *Lolita* 197), an episode which also occurs in Pera's book (218). However, we have no proof that Nabokov's *Lolita* was also such a cynical girl.

Lo's callousness needs further explanation. On the one hand the reader should keep in mind that her diary, as we have noted before, probably conceals part of her real thoughts and feelings. On the other, her adverse experiences as a neglected and sexually abused child undeniably have a negative impact on her character. Research has confirmed that victims of pedophilia are highly at risk of developing mental health problems, such as borderline, antisocial and narcissistic personality disorders (Sanderson 55; 63).

Both Dolores Haze and Lo are bored by the sexual routine their stepfathers force upon them. Remember Lolita's exclamation: "'Oh no, not again' (incredulity, exasperation)" (Nabokov, *Lolita* 218), as Humbert approaches her with ostensible tenderness. Similarly, Dolly Maze says: "Mi sembra di essere una grande attrice a starmene al fianco di Humbert. Sa nulla, lui, di quello che provo. Sente la voglia che gli viene, soddisfa la voglia, si riposa dalla voglia, gli torna la voglia" (Pera, *Diario di Lo* 284). The nymphet feels only monotony: "The repetitiveness, in the absence of substantial symmetry, seems to guarantee the truthfulness of a relationship which would otherwise have no substance, but the pedophile, being blinded by his compulsion, is not able to feel it" (Schinaia 207).

As time goes by, Lo hates Guibert more and more. After the Academy ball, the man wants to have sex with her and she bitterly comments that she feels like a "lecca lecca all'arancio", as she is dressed in orange chiffon (Pera, *Diario di Lo* 336). She is excited but dislikes to be so, having only hate for her stepfather (*ibid.*). Paradoxically, when the following morning he requests sex again, the girl is almost glad because that helps her not to think at all (337). Lo suspects that he steals the money he gives her as a reward and, in any case, the truth is that she completely depends on Guibert, as she never has enough money.

¹¹ In particular, self-harm, self-mutilation, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts are long-term behavioral effects of child sexual abuse (Sanderson 58).

The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts.

Valeria Invernizzi

One might wonder why Nabokov's heroine apparently never denounces her stepfather, nor tries to leave him before Quilty's visit to Beardsley. On the one hand, the reader knows that the fear of the reformatory Humbert has instilled in her (170) certainly prevents her from having the idea of escaping at the beginning. On the other, it is surprising that only a couple of years after the night at the Enchanted Hunters she seems to decide to put a stop to their relationship.

How does Pera's novel talk about this further? Just as her Nabokovian sister, Dolly Maze believes that she risks to be sent to a reformatory (234). She especially holds a grudge on those "puritani scontrosi che con tutti i loro principi non hanno mosso un dito" to save her (301). Her distrust involves the very force of Law: "[...] una che è orfana e minorenne è un essere che la legge ha deciso di non difendere. Si direbbe che per potere venire difesi dalla legge bisogna essere già molto forti, molto autonomi, e sapere esattamente a chi rivolgersi" (285). Dolly Maze becomes skeptical about Justice and its representatives. When the school psychoanalyst, Dr. Sharp, insists they have a chat about her obscene writings, she comments:

Ci penserò, le dico per levarmela di torno, perché bella roba davvero farsi esaminare da una buffona di psicoanalista e doverle raccontare tutto per filo e per segno e stare a sentire il suo illuminato parere, poi tanto finisce lo so bene come, chiusa in riformatorio, e uno stronzo di medico che viene a controllare cosa mi passa per la testa, col risultato che la mia commedia con Filthy me la posso bella e scordare e la mia vita andrà a farsi friggere una volta per tutte grazie agli sforzi congiunti di questa massa di stronzi. (347)

Lo's belief is not surprising. Since victims of child sexual abuse do not expect to be protected by others (see note 5), they have trust neither in social agencies nor in social justice (Kirmayer et al. 234).

The nymphet's relationship with her beloved playwright differs in its consequences from the one in Nabokov's novel. Filthy does not try to involve her in pornographic films; he just plays to be her "zio Gustave" (Pera, *Diario di Lo* 393). By the way, Pera has the playwright's assistant, Vivian Darkbloom – renamed Joe in her novel – become a drag queen (389), suggesting the two have an affair. In the last pages of *Diario*, Filthy's guests discuss Lo's destiny as he has promised her a career in Hollywood. The girl overhears their conversation, during which her idol confesses: "A me è già venuta a noia [...] ormai la conosco a memoria" (399). The following morning Lo decides to leave the ranch even though she has obtained an audition (403). The girl takes a train to Los Angeles where Nora Elon, her mother's best friend, lives (405-6).

Pera's reinvention of *Lolita's* ending is meant to highlight the so-called implausibility of the original – that is to say, Quilty's murder. In any case, Lo's infatuation for Filthy seems to be almost identical to that of Dolores Haze for Quilty. Pera's character is in seventh heaven because of Filthy's hugs and kisses (395) – which is an element of novelty introduced by Pera – but the man nonetheless does not love her. When she realizes this, Lo simply leaves him.

Before concluding my paper, I wish to discuss the merits and limits of Pera's book.

To her dismay, *Diario di Lo* – or, I should say, *Lo's Diary* – was attacked by critics in many respects. Although their judgments might have been sharpened by non-literary issues, that is to say Dmitri Nabokov's legal battle against the book, their critical assessments were, largely, fair. Pera's novel is an explosive combination of unhappy literary choices, which I will summarize here.

As many reviewers have noted, her imitation of the diary of a preadolescent is somewhat unconvincing. Pera once wrote about her effort: "*Diario di Lo* pretende di riprodurre la situazione dell'infanzia e dell'età minore, quando ancora si cerca la propria voce e per essa si lotta in un ambiente preesistente" (*Diario di Lo* 418). However, as Graham Vickers sarcastically observes, the author's adult and late-twentieth-century perspective tends to juxtapose with the

The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts.

Valeria Invernizzi

one of her character (208), with the result that Lo frequently becomes “Pera’s puppet” (211). Dolores Maze has, in fact, little autonomy as a character for *Diario di Lo* is too overtly an ideologic reading of *Lolita*.¹² Plus, to make things worse, Lo’s vocabulary and narratological devices are often excessively sophisticated to be genuinely attributed to a preadolescent (Capozzi 430).

As things stand, there is no doubt that Tison’s, Morrissey’s and Prager’s fictions appear more convincing. Symptomatically, they are less concerned with ideology and are written in a style far from the one that could be found in the diary or *mémoire* of a child or adolescent. Pera’s attempt to reproduce the language of a ten or fourteen-year-old girl was probably an enterprise too full of technical difficulties, so to speak, to be artistically successful.¹³

Diario di Lo has the undeniable merit of suggesting interpretive keys to the character of Lolita that a good number of Nabokov’s readers probably overlook. Pera skillfully elaborates on marginal elements in the hypotext that were possibly meaningful for Dolores Haze or unknown to Humbert. As we have previously discussed, the Italian author highlights the negative consequences on Dolly’s temper and mental health which stemmed from her adverse childhood experiences. Unfortunately, though, the novel is seriously flawed by inadequate style and invasive ideological schemes, so that Lo’s drama loses its powerful force on the reader.

In this paper we have carried out a psychoanalytic and psychiatric analysis of various second-degree Lolitas, putting them into dialog with Nabokov’s character; in particular, we have focused on Dolores Maze in Pera’s *Diario di Lo*. The hypertexts chosen, narrated from the victim’s point of view, depict the effects of child abuse on the psyche, thus clarifying what remained mostly unsaid in *Lolita*.

In addition, our comparative study has shed light on the fact that the way Lolita’s traumas are displayed is indirectly revealing of the socio-historical change occurred as regards pedophilia. Nabokov’s reticence, which is nonetheless also an aesthetic choice, has been replaced by an unfiltered and more detailed representation, as nowadays pedophilia has become an important theme in public debate as well as a serious concern for the medical community.

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¹² On the ideological function acting upon Pera’s text see Stefania Lucamante’s analysis.

¹³ The genesis of Henry James’ novel *What Maisie Knew* (1897) is telling. Genette recalls an interesting anecdote on *Maisie’s* composition, an anecdote hinted at by James himself in his 1908 *Preface* to the book. It appears that, in James’ intentions, Maisie was not only the viewpoint character, but also the first-person narrator. However, adopting a childlike style and a limited vocabulary throughout the novel was too demanding for him: “Small children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them; their vision is at any moment much richer, their apprehension even constantly stronger, than their prompt, their at all producible, vocabulary. Amusing therefore as it might at the first blush have seemed to restrict myself in this case to the terms as well as to the experience, it became at once plain that such an attempt would fail” (145-6). His decision signals that there are literary missions that even great writers cannot accomplish.

The Representation of Trauma in *Lolita's* hypertexts.

Valeria Invernizzi

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Valeria Invernizzi

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