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CHECKING IN / CHECKING OUT: HUMBERT'S SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY IN THE UBIQUITOUS AMERICAN MOTEL

— Why do you live in hotels?
— It simplifies postal matters, it eliminates the nuisance of private ownership. It confirms me in my favorite habit — the habit of freedom.
— Nabokov, Strong Opinions

In a 1964 interview with *Playboy*, Vladimir Nabokov explained that the main reason he eschewed home ownership during his twenty-year hiatus in America and chose instead impermanent residences in motels, cabins, apartments, and rented homes was because "nothing short of a replica of my childhood surroundings would have satisfied me. I would never match my memories correctly—so why trouble with hopeless approximations?" (27). Of course, to this question regarding his habit of travel and his lifelong self-imposed condition of exile accentuated by his extended stays in hotels—effectively intriguing many American interviewers—Nabokov's oft diverging confessions[1] exclusively nod to his transfixion upon the past and its relegation to some fixed notion of "home." For Nabokov, the signification of the "home" was not associated with a particular *place*, such as a brick building, but rather with a certain *space in time* that made the notion of "home" in the present tense unattainable by nature

[1] See various interviews in *Strong Opinions*. In one instance, Nabokov amusedly claims that his aversion to furniture ("tables and chairs and lamps and rugs and things") propels him from one impermanent place to the next, avoiding any settled establishment requiring his accumulation of and attachment to material wealth (27).

of its fixity in his past. "Home" conveys a sense of authenticity in Nabokovian considerations; indeed, "home" can only be regarded as antecedent to the "hopeless approximations" qualifying any and all attempts toward the establishment of a familiar domesticity within the irreverent present.

Yet while Nabokov remained leery of replication, his melancholic, nostalgic, and entirely homeless Humbert Humbert is consumed by the impossible past, which drives him from Europe to America as he pursues with an unperceiving eye his own hopeless approximations to be matched with his idealized past. However, the road back to his Riviera childhood is an impossible feat, and as Humbert merges on to the highways of America to recover Annabel in the image of Lolita, the advancing road awakens Humbert to the irrecoverability of his past. Turning off the highway and thus leaving behind his pursuit of Annabel and his idealized past, Humbert is prompted to deviate toward the motel—a distinctly American architecture in close coincidence with his newly acquired obsession for American Lolita.

The motel today is recognized as a landmark of twentieth century American culture. Built as an appendage of the growing highway system, the motel served as a container for rest—a place for pause—in the movement of American motorists and tourists. Itself arguably a hopeless approximation of the hotels centered in cities or resorts, these lobbyless, typically rural,[2] single-story structures accommodated a growing middle-class bent on travel, much like Humbert and Lolita's touristic romps from one roadside attraction to another; and yet, in their dehistoricized, unlocalized, relatively mirage-like standing, motels also appealed to a time-obsessed pursuer like Humbert seeking pause from a linear, rapidly advancing time putting more distance between him and his past. In their research on the origin and development of the motel in twentieth century America, John Jakle, Keith Sculle, and Jefferson Rogers make direct reference to Nabokov and his predilection for the motel, claiming "Vladimir Nabokov, comfortable in widely diverse languages and cultures, recognized early, as most Americans perhaps could not, the motel's significance in American life. Motels amplified individual prerogatives, providing privacy in relative anonymity—a complement to the restlessness of car travel" (16). While Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers are certainly correct to identify the anonymity and liberties that came to be regarded

[2] Rural here referring to points located outside city or town limits. Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers make mention of the fact that motels were located beyond municipal law, thus for my purposes further demonstrating not just the anonymity of motel use as the authors suggest, but also of the motel's isolated status that supplements its appearance as divorced from reality (17).

as alluring features of the motel with *Lolita*'s debasing narrator, I maintain that the motel's function within the novel is less for criminal purposes—despite its superficial use as such—and more for the artistic possibilities it purports to afford Humbert (282).

Humbert, as many critics are quick to acknowledge, spends much of his life moving around—crossing borders, crossing oceans, traversing space—in an attempt to retrieve time lost and surrender himself to his "retrospective imagination," convinced "that in a certain magic and fateful way Lolita began with Annabel" (13-14). It is Annabel, his lost love from the seaside Riviera of his childhood, who roots Humbert in his past, who fixes all possible routes "in the maddeningly complex prospect of [his] past" to one and signals an attempted temporal movement back to her via a variety of lifelong spatial wanderings that prompt him to initially cast Lolita as an imitation of his lost childhood love. Yet in taking to the roads of America and discovering "the horrible hopelessness" that accompanies his effort to retrieve time past, Humbert finally slows his transit and, pausing, turns his aesthetic eye to the present Lolita, disentangling her image from his memory of Annabel and seeking to immortalize his nymphetic passion—an effort that proved unfeasible with his Riviera beloved (166). Indeed, the true tragedy of Humbert's existence is the ephemerality of life and love; however, the motel and Humbert's perception of it as a permanent fixture located within an atmosphere permeated by transience embodied in the concept of the road offers our unfortunate wanderer an offshoot of hope in preserving the nymphecy of his Lolita. Consequently, Humbert strategically chooses the motel—a stationary one-room receptacle imitating the domesticity of the home,[3] sidelining the highways of the American countryside, looking out to the transitory road—as a vehicle for his artistic pursuit. And yet he misinterprets what he perceives to be the absolute fixity of the motel, denying any sense of transit and progress given its proximity to the road, and instead casting his narrow-minded attention to the motel's localized space as pause, hiatus, suspension from the mobility of the highway; it is thus here, in the slowed down, masquerading calm of the serial motel room with neatly made beds, standardized furniture, and commercial decor that Humbert enacts his aesthetic enterprise "to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (134). Humbert's non-utilitarian view allows for an interpretation of the motel as a convergence of time and space, echoing the Bahktinian notion of chronotope in which "spatial and temporal

[3] Home understood here both in its classic physical capacity and in its Nabokovian conceptualization as a space in time.

indicators are fused into one carefully, thought-out, concrete whole" in order to achieve artistic expression (Bahktin 84); conscious of its time-space synthesis, then, Humbert employs the motel in an aesthetic measure to render concrete his abstract notion of the nymphetic Lolita fused with the visual signposts of his memory. His pronounced aesthetic preference for the visual and his compulsion to reproduce the disembodied images he fondly retains in the nostalgia-lined contours of his memory dictate his pursuit of Lolita and appropriately signal the motel as a place of pause in which time and space are harmonized to afford him—in his delusions—the possibility of immortalizing Lolita and eternally retaining her in the grip of possession.

As more than just an inconsequential site to temporarily house his corrupt, illicit affair with Lolita, the motel fundamentally offers commentary on Humbert's self-proclaimed aestheticism—in his attempt to immortalize Lolita and in his inevitable participation in a kitschy, consumer culture standing in direct opposition to the authenticity he believes to qualify his aesthetic ambition. The motel's anchor within a thriving consumerist mentality—and the motel itself as a domain of replication and mass production—however, provides an intriguing backdrop to Humbert's enterprise. Indeed, while Humbert perceives the motel to be an ideal space for his aesthetic project to recover authenticity and immortalize Lolita through art, the motel, rather, in its endless and universally reproduced seriality and its standing as hollowed consumer product, must ultimately be read as undermining his ambition and consequently preserving Lolita as commodity suitable for the vulgarity of the commercial atmosphere.

AN APPETITE FOR IMAGES:
"MY WORLD WAS SPLIT"

Before exploring what the project of the commercial motel veritably offers Humbert, as opposed to what he perceives as its aesthetic potential, I turn first to Humbert's photographic consciousness and the consequential language of images monopolizing his deeply visual narrative. My argument in this capacity takes shape in two steps, just as *Lolita* is effectively divided into two sections. The previously unexplored route in criticism on the novel to an analysis of the motel and its intersection with Humbert's aesthetics[4] indeed depends heavily

[4] In referring to Humbert's aesthetics, I do so not as a direct acknowledgement of any artistic achievement on his part, but rather in a more general sense of his arguably misguided artistic sensibility.

upon an understanding of the procession of images drawn from Humbert's "photo/graphic memory"—as Karen Jacob's cleverly terms it—and his immersion in a culture of replication and imitation. Accordingly, the first step of this argument draws heavily from Part One of the novel, in which Humbert's accumulation of personal images from his past initially influences his impression of Lolita—photographically summed up as "that flash, that shiver, that impact of passionate recognition" in which "every detail of her bright beauty... [he] checked against the features of [his] dead bride"—so that Lolita, too, is cast as an image (re)produced by his Kodak eye (39). Likewise, the second step of this argument reads primarily from Part Two, in which the motel and its conceptual location within a landscape of advertising images immerses Humbert further into the commercial environment where replication as outlined by the populist project of mass production works its way into the fibers of Humbert's aestheticism and his perception of Lolita. Certainly a study of the motel must be approached in regards to its functionality for Humbert. And Humbert, whose entire confessional narrative can be reduced to a program of attempted aesthetics, rigorously pursues the motel and its unending presence as a space to make imperishable his nymphetic Lolita and retain her in the domain of art.

Operating within a framework of aesthetics, then, the space of the motel in particular manifests a collision between the cultured Humbert who, as European scholar, regards himself as heir and faithful adherent to the Romantic artistic sensibility, and vulgar Lolita whom, as American child of products and pop culture, Humbert finds to be "a disgustingly conventional little girl" (147-48). Rather than reconciling these polarizing tensions, however, this collision by way of the motel serves to reveal a profound undercurrent of binaries systematically at play that define Humbert's worldview[5]—a worldview in which he perceives, affirms, and strives to maintain hierarchical distinctions and organizational dichotomies by nature of his pursuit of romantic love through his esteemed values of aesthetics and authenticity. Accordingly, from Humbert's perspective, the genteel Old World stands in opposition to the corrupted New World; high (elite) culture in opposition to low (popular) culture; pure aesthetics in opposition to obscene commercialism; and the authentic original in opposition to the imitative derivative. Indeed, some scholars do emphatically argue for the novel's postmodern erasure of binary

[5] "My world was split," Humbert reveals, implicitly demonstrating his tendency to establish order and perceive the world through a bisectional lens. In this instance he is specifically referring to his awareness of "not one but two sexes, neither of which was mine; both would be termed female by the anatomist," but the statement is applicable beyond his separating nymphets from "terrestrial women" (18).

thinking, through which the dominance of high culture is effectively disrupted and at once shows the previously discriminatory boundaries to be fluid and permeable with the potential of gaining a composite pop culture aesthetics. Both Rachel Bowlby and Jacobs present compelling arguments in this regard, establishing their analyses around the novel's many (mis)perceived disjunctions and encouraging readers to resist falling victim to Humbert's tempting authority. In "*Lolita* and the Poetry of Advertising," for instance, Bowlby explicitly identifies the presence of a series of polarities within the novel[6]—structural distinctions demarcating high culture from low culture, "which the narrator seems to want to maintain"—that ultimately draw to the fore the novel's most entrenched dichotomy between "true literature and trash" (56); however, Bowlby takes a step-by-step approach and, disentangling these "devious and diverse analogies and distinctions," shows the compatibility of Humbert's literariness with Lolita's consumerism through the bi-directional infiltration of the language of literature and the language of consumption, charmingly wrought together as the poetry of advertising (54). Jacobs as well contributes a key insight to this discussion of disjunctions in the novel, arguing that "Nabokov presumes from the start that Lolita *and* Humbert Humbert's subjective parameters equally must be counted among mass culture's effects, rather than depicting the envelopment of either of them as the tragic crisis point of the narrative" (279). Borders, Jacobs goes on to claim, are "slippery" and permeable, with both Lolita's and Humbert's multiple identities in flux across the high/low spectrum of aesthetics, and Lolita herself, as simulacrum, rendering the boundary separating the real and the representational undistinguishable (279).

These readings of *Lolita* are certainly compelling, for not only do they avoid a general oversimplification of antitheses and help steer interpretations away from the like of "Old Europe debauching young America" and "Young America debauching old Europe,"[7] but they also implicitly demonstrate Nabokov as omnipotent author weaving together and making indistinguishable the system of binaries under which Humbert believes himself to operate (314). However, my interpretation necessitates a unique alliance with Humbert's worldview; whereas some critics may find the need to overcompensate in displaying their caution against adhering to

[6] Polarities derived from the oft-cited "clash between the literary values of Humbert and the vulgar, consumerly values of Lolita," Bowlby explains, "which is reinforced through the familiar oppositions of the European visitor and the all-American girl" (52). This tension simulating a spectrum of aesthetics and one most immediately recognizable to readers is central to my argument.

[7] These interpretations are themselves reactions to his novel that Nabokov found most amusing, considering his aversion to symbols and allegories. See "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*."

the distinctions that Humbert, with great authority, asks his reader to make regarding lofty aesthetics and low, vulgar commercialism, my argument crucially follows his dichotomic rationalizations and explores the definitive boundaries as they shape, influence, and many times undermine his aesthetic enterprise—most effectively realized in the project of the motel. The borders between his named distinctions may show penetrable, yes,[8] but the boundaries nonetheless remain clear and defined, as aesthetics and authenticity are elevated as the esteemed beacons toward which this Romantic author strives.

CAPTURING IMAGES

Humbert models his early aesthetic sensibility from the photographic process, in which his initial aim is to produce a copy—seamless, whole, and a tangible delight in the present and thus definitive by its form—of the transitory past forever eluding his grasp. He reveals his mental apparatus to mimic the technology of a camera, describing its capacity to "instantly evoke, with shut eyes, on the dark innerside of your eyelids, the objective, absolutely optical replica of a beloved face, a little ghost in natural colors;"[9] this process, in which he admits is how he "sees" Lolita, effectively aligns his ocular consciousness with that moment of the camera click, the shutter window opening to expose the dark film to light and instantly producing a permanent image in exact replication (11). Accordingly, Humbert's photographic consciousness and his accumulation of images become the medium through which he perceives the world, affording

[8] While many critics read Humbert's transgression in a direction from high to low—as Jacobs's does in suggesting that his identities "dizzingly" cross from "scholar to fraud, cultivated European to 'handsome hunk of movieland manhood,' aesthete to criminal" (279)—Humbert from the beginning alludes to his aesthetic lack, with an implicit desire to ascend to the realm of aesthete. "I switched to English literature," Humbert informs his juristic readers when briefing them on his scholarly background, "where so many frustrated poets end as pipe-smoking teachers in tweed" (15). Humbert's career is one that studies aesthetic originals, producing scholarship derivative of art and familiarizing him with the qualities and principles of aesthetics and equipping him with an artistic sensibility; "But I am no poet," Humbert assures his readers (72). And yet his desire to recover Annabel which later shapes into a stronger desire to aestheticize Lolita sets him on his course to transcend the imitative and acquire the authentic. In this sense, Humbert and by his manipulative hand, Lolita, spend a larger part of the novel struggling to move in a direction regarded as "up" and cross the defined boundary separating low from high. While the course of my argument shows Humbert actually becoming more deeply entrenched in the commercial atmosphere—particularly through his (mis)use of the motel—despite his aesthetic ambitions and contrived actions, his struggle to elevate himself and Lolita is nonetheless present. Only does the end of his confession offer the *potential* for redemption and both his and Lolita's ascendance to that immortal realm of "aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art" (309).

[9] This description of Humbert's visual memory summoned within the inner darkness of the shut eyes can also be likened to a dark room, where the image captured on film is "instantly evoked" once submerged in a bath of chemicals.

him, as Jacobs demonstrates, an opportunity to construct "a self-reflexive narrative of the real" (267). Indeed, Humbert's photographic consciousness notably asserts itself linguistically in his narrative, rendering the convergence of the verbal with the visual the critical stylistic mark of his confession and further indicating not only the communicative potential that he perceives in the inks and oils of his collected images, but also his trust in their authority as the real: "I leaf again and again through these miserable memories, Humbert mournfully illustrates at the beginning of his narrative—memories that take a definitive shape through which he is able to command his audience, his readers, his jurors to *look* and *see* his evidence that is this "tangle of thorns" (9). Handling the concrete evidence for his narration, he informs his judicial readers, "I am going to pass around in a minute some lovely, glossy-blue picture-postcards," suggesting that the crime[10] he has committed reveals itself in a collection of images extracted from his past, images that he has stored in the album of his mind and represented as reality in the construction of his narrative (9).

Copies run rampant in Humbert's account, and he shows himself to be both an avid producer and voracious consumer of the images wrought from his photographic consciousness. In this regard, he depicts himself as already immersed in a world saturated by imitation and replication, long before he emigrates to America—land of the mimetic, producing images at large. And yet, once in America, Humbert finds himself assailed by a culture of derivatives and mass production that offends his aesthetic sensibility. If Humbert's Europe is "as much a place of images and consumerism as the America he will later discover," as Bowlby suggests here and Jacobs echoes,[11] then why does Humbert initially distance himself from mass-culture America in an act of aesthetic superiority? Dana Brand also makes note of Humbert's purposefully enacted disassociation from the American commercial environment, arguing that Humbert by nature of his foreignness is "able to resist the influence of these new and powerful forms of coercion" and preserve an "aesthetic morality" (14). However, Humbert, as we have seen, is not a "foreigner" to the culture of proliferated copies. Nevertheless, his self-relegation to the "outside" in American culture is readily apparent, particularly in his devaluation of all things American,

[10] While the end of the novel—and only after a series of Nabokovian plays that make the reader incorrectly suspect the wrong victim—Humbert reveals his murder of Quilty as the crime to which he is confessing (and simultaneously defending—see Thomas R. Frosch, "Parody and Authenticity in *Lolita*"), the real crime can be read as Humbert's imitative, aesthetic practices that obsessively strive to *copy* an original rather than *create* something original.

[11] Jacobs makes the argument that "the European imagination has been colonized . . . by images made in USA," thus pointing to the fact that "*both* worlds are imaginary constructions, produced apparently from the same source" (268).

which, through the lens of his aesthetic prejudices, he finds commercial, vulgar, tawdry, unrefined. One reason for this, perhaps, is that while still in Europe—"the Old and rotting World," he later remembers it—Humbert controlled the (re)production of images for his consumption (91); the images created by his photographic consciousness are artifacts of his attempted aesthetics in which he seeks to retrieve time lost and replicate the past for means of retention and pleasure in the present. Once in America, however, Humbert's photographic consciousness is matched against the imagistic consciousness of a culture capable of reproducing copies en mass; the first Humbert regards as aesthetic in its personally refined sense of beauty and encompassed nostalgia, the latter he perceives as trash in its conventional common attraction.[12]

Despite his aversion to the American landscape of advertising and mass consumption, Brand argues that Humbert does eventually succumb to its coercion. He transgresses against the "aesthetic morality" he assumed upon arrival in the States by ultimately "permitting his aestheticism to degenerate into a version of consumerism" (14-15). Brand suggests that Humbert believes he can have Lolita outside of his imagination in the physical world, and yet it is this belief in the possession of an image, Brand argues, that consequently reduces him to "thralldom" and causes him to lose "his 'aesthetic' independence when he starts to treat [Lolita] as a commodity promised by the 'advertisement' of his imaginative image" (19). Brand's characterization of Humbert as enslaved to the power of images not only affirms his photographic consciousness and desire for the authentic original by means of a copy, but it also demonstrates a growing division between the way Humbert perceives his own aesthetic sensibility (conforming to the standards of high art) and the way he shows to enact his aesthetic project (conforming to the standards of the consumer marketplace).

CHASING IMAGES

To effectively trace the progression of Humbert's appetite for images as they define his artistic sensibility, it is necessary to consider the conditions that allow for his shifting enthrallment from Annabel to Lolita-as-reincarnated-as-Annabel and finally to Lolita herself; this trajectory finds its correspondence in Humbert's evolving aesthetic project—an endeavor

[12] As Bowlby appropriately observes, "Humbert always situates himself as having the overview of high and low, of culture and its debased forms" (57).

transforming from an effort to retrieve lost time and replicate the past into a project with an eye to the future that seeks to immortalize Lolita and recover a sense of authenticity amidst a culture steeped in imitation. Indeed, Humbert's imagistic aestheticism bent on imitation and copy as a false means to recover authenticity operates within a consumer culture that had evolved—or, perhaps, de-evolved—to separate "form from substance," assigning more value to the representation of reality by means of a surface image than reality itself (Ewen 33). Media and consumer culture historian Stuart Ewen addresses this progression of aesthetics in his book, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, analyzing how style and the power of images have pervaded mainstream society in the twentieth century, after having been relegated to the limited realm of European aristocratic wealth the century prior. Ewen's book further explores how the very definition of aesthetics was changing in the early twentieth century; once the study of beauty, it increasingly grew into the study of art as it related to consumerism: "At a time when the idea of 'art for art's sake' was taking hold as a dominant faith among art critics," Ewen explains, "*art for control's sake* was becoming the dominant practice in the marketplace" (50). Certainly Humbert can be seen struggling to navigate between these opposing aesthetic forces, with his "old-world reticence," his "sense of decorum," in the words of Charlotte, casting incredulous glances upon the always lewd, always vulgar mass-produced middle class American lifestyle (68).[13]

Having stepped forth into the Haze household and likewise into a degraded culture of consumerism, Humbert finds himself manipulated by the first image with which he is confronted. Perceiving the suburban home in a state of debasement and thus unable to persuade him to stay, it is instead his recognition of Annabel reincarnated—that "sun-shot moment" lasting an

[13] Humbert's hypercritical view of America as degraded and obscene was not always so. While in Europe, Humbert catches a glimpse of a "splendid, flamboyant, green, red, golden and inky blue ancient American estampe—a locomotive with a gigantic smokestack, great baroque lamps and a tremendous cowcatcher, hauling its mauve coaches through the stormy prairie night and mixing a lot of spark-studded black smoke with the fury of thunder clouds" (26-27). Fed by this "ancient" image of America, a picture conforming to the aesthetics of the nineteenth century, Humbert envisions not the America of consumerism in which motels populate the landscape, but an America free and untamed with the beauty of nature punctuated by the subliminal beast of the locomotive. However, this hope-filled image of America, much like the "thunder clouds" hanging heavily in the print, "burst" upon his arrival in the States, and the natural landscape that he intends to experience firsthand in its originality and purity is replaced by the mediated reality of a landscape of style and pop culture. Thus, for Humbert, America proves not "the country of rosy children and great trees, where life would be such an improvement on dull, dingy Paris," as he hopefully anticipates; instead, it "all boiled down to a measly suburban lawn and a smoking garbage incinerator" where middle class vulgarity and the mass production of identical images envelops Humbert in a project of tainted aesthetics.

eternity—that lures him to accept Charlotte's offer and take up residence in Ramsdale.[14] Humbert narrates: "There came a sudden burst of greenery—'the piazza,' sang out my leader, and then, without the least warning, a blue-sea wave swelled under my heart and, from a mat in a pool of sun, half-naked, kneeling, turning about on her knees, there was my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses" (39). Of course, Lolita's association with Annabel in this moment is obvious, for Humbert purposefully conflates the images of his last encounter with Annabel on the seaside of the Riviera (water, knees, sunglasses) and his first encounter with Lolita in order to show that "everything they shared made one of them" (40); thus, while Humbert creates a singular, composite image of both specimens, when dissected, Lolita is shown to be nothing more than a manufactured copy overlaid upon her prototype. In Ewen's discussion of commercial photography and the creation of advertisements, he explains that photographs are always retouched to incorporate a number of models pieced together into one synthesized image: "In order to depict the 'dream of wholeness,' fragmentation is often necessary. In the profusion of photographic modeling, a model is often selected for the *perfection* of a particular part of the body. [...] These parts become the building blocks of a complete image" (87). Indeed, Humbert creates an advertisement of Lolita, assembling disembodied parts from both Annabel and her American counterpart in order to construct a semblance of wholeness in which his desired past is approximated in the present. Lolita, however, proves to be a false advertisement, for while Humbert sees in her the promise of recovering his lost Annabel and thus buys into this substituted image, he later realizes at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel that "this *nouvelle*, this Lolita, *my* Lolita, was to completely eclipse her prototype" (39-40).

With Humbert having reduced Lolita not only to an image, but an image duplicated from an original, it makes sense that he pursues her with an eye like that of a camera lens—"If I close my eyes I see but an immobilized fraction of her, a cinematographic still"—desiring to render her immortal so that he can possess her forever (44). He certainly laments numerous lost moments not captured on film, such as their intermingling joints on the couch while he finds himself in the process of "solipsizing" his nymphet—"pity no film had recorded the curious pattern of the monogrammic linkage of our simultaneous or overlapping moves"— and her youthful, clumsy, and yet strikingly beautiful tennis strokes as he sits on the sidelines

[14] This photographic "sun-shot moment" in the domesticity of the Haze home is arguably the exact aesthetic moment that Humbert seeks to replicate in the imitative domesticity of the motel.

watching—"that I could have had all her strokes, all her enchantments immortalized in segments of celluloid makes me moan today with frustration" (60, 232). Yet while Lolita may not have for Humbert's pleasure a trail of tangible photographs upon which he can cast his possessive, nostalgic gaze, there is certainly the assortment of photographs from his past that are consequential to his pursuit of Lolita. Brand suggests that the abundance of photographic images in Humbert's retrospective imaginings is indicative of his aesthetic inclination to appropriate people, things, and events (17).[15] For Humbert, photography is the medium by which his nostalgic memory speaks, the medium that enables him to possess the substance of a person, place, or object outside the temporal and spatial realm from which the image is extracted. And indeed, he regards his "safely solipsized" Lolita as "if she were a photographic image rippling upon a screen" and himself at once both creator and voyeur, "a humble hunchback abusing myself in the dark" (60, 62). In viewing Lolita as constructed image rather than in her corporeal and soul-bearing reality, Humbert empties—and subsequently *flattens*—his object of possession and fills her with his own imagination as a means of exerting creative license and signaling his control.[16] Thus Lolita—soul-less, hollow, disembodied Lolita,[17] as she appears to Humbert in her photographic resemblance—is now nothing more than an imitation of herself in this endless substitution of signs in which, having already been made a copy of Annabel and even a crude copy of Botticelli's Venus,[18] is far removed from the reality that was once Dolores Haze.

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[15] Brand cites a number of examples in which photographs weigh heavily in Humbert's actions. In addition to comparing Lolita to a photographic image in order to absolve his immoral behavior after climaxing with her in his lap, Brand reminds readers that "Humbert's first sexual responses are to photographs in Pichon's *La Beauty Humaine*. His only souvenir of Annabel is a photograph of her eating an ice cream cone. Humbert asks to see a photograph of Charlotte as a child so he can have a greater sense of her resemblance to Lolita. Humbert compares his own visual impressions and memories to photographs" (17).

[16] While Humbert perceives Lolita as having no consciousness outside his manipulation, in a telling moment immediately preceding his arousal and self-pleasure with Lolita sprawled in his lap, she persistently attempts to show her distracted creator a picture uniquely representative of her own condition: "Rapidly . . . Lo flipped violently through the pages in search of something she wished Humbert to see. Found it at last . . . a surrealist painter relaxing, supine, on a beach, and near him, likewise supine, a plaster replica of the Venus de Milo, half-buried in sand. Picture of the Week, said the legend. I whisked the whole obscene thing away" (58). In a rare instance we are provided a glimpse of Lolita's mind independent from Humbert, and we see her desperately illustrating to her captor her own awareness of his appropriation of her body and image as art in a visual medium that is typically comprehensible to him, yet he dismisses her show of acknowledgement. Humbert consequently presents himself as unconscious of his participation in the kitschy, cheap consumer culture he finds vulgar and degrading.

[17] In a telling moment near the end of his cohabitation with Lolita, Humbert admits, "I felt all hollowed out by the infection that by then was at work on me too," subtly alluding to his own envelopment by the commercial culture that has ravenously deprived him of his aesthetic sensibility (242).

[18] See Nabokov 58, 270.

In his book, Ewen cites Oliver Wendell Holmes, who in 1859 suggested that photography "has fixed the most fleeting of our illusions" (24). This sentiment speaks directly to Humbert, who desires to lift his nymphet from her particular place and time in order to give permanent substance to the illusion that is Lolita. Indeed Lolita, whom Humbert constantly fears he has lost or will certainly lose over the course of their two years of feigned domesticity and travel, is forever a fleeting image. While still in residence at Ramsdale, he recognizes the ephemerality of his nymphet and prematurely mourns her aging:

> I knew I had fallen in love with Lolita forever, but I also knew she would not be forever Lolita. She would be thirteen on January 1. In two years or so she would cease being a nymphet and would turn into a 'young girl,' and then, into a 'college girl'—that horror of horrors. The word 'forever' referred only to my own passion, to the eternal Lolita as reflected in my blood. (65)

Humbert has fallen in love not with Lolita, and certainly not with Dolores Haze, but rather with an idea, an image as constructed from the workings of his enthralldom. Of course, this instinct to fix permanently his illusion of Lolita's nymphetry is driven by his initial desire to reincarnate Annabel in Lolita—Annabel with whom fate thwarted not only his attempt at possessing her in that kingdom by the sea, but also his immortalization of her by means of a photograph. Ironically, it is Annabel, not Lolita, who appears in a picture from Humbert's past, who has been frozen in time "caught as she was in the act of bending over her *chocolat glacé*" (13). However, in this isolated frame, Annabel is fragmented and obscured, with only her "bare shoulders and the parting in her hair" visible to the viewer (13). Humbert's parenthetical addendum to his description of the image—"as I remember that picture"—is indicative of his own attempts to replicate that photograph by means of his memory, allowing that perhaps it was not the angle of the camera that caused her face to be obscured, but rather the failure of his own recognition (13). Humbert's retrospective imagination maintains a vision of Lolita in prominence that has caused him to neglect certain features of his Annabel in his recollections. He is unable to complete the photograph in his imagination simply because Lolita has replaced rather than reincarnated Annabel in his obsession. As such, Humbert's pursuit of Lolita can be considered in revisionistic terms, in his desire to aesthetically fix his nymphet in a manner and method that could not be had with Annabel. Towards this end, a photograph or image has proven insufficient; rather, Humbert

wishes for Lolita's nymphetic corporeality to remain suspended in time—an aesthetic image appropriately immortalized—so that he may continue to pleasurably relish in the present and his future the object created by his gazing eye.

PAUSING AT THE MOTEL
CULTURAL THEORIES OF MOTEL-TIME AND THE UNSETTLING OF DOMESTICITY

It is at this point, then, that we can turn our attention back to the motel and assess the contrast between Humbert's aesthetic ambition[19] to immortalize Lolita and elevate her to the realm of art—an ambition that finds its origins in Humbert's appetite for images—and the debased motel's undermining of this hopeless pursuit in its infinite procession of universally reproduced conditions disguised behind the mask of names claiming originality and diversification. For my study of the motel in *Lolita*, I draw primarily from the cultural studies work done by Meaghan Morris and Sarah Treadwell, both of whom rely on the stories of specific motels to evaluate a broader theoretical argument (Morris) and to illustrate the unstable domestic conditions that grew out of past colonial enterprises (Treadwell).[20] Morris's essay "At Henry Parkes Motel" uses the titular motel as a site of analysis from which the actions of traveling, visiting, touring, and the like are employed to critique the conventional binaries of home/voyage and placement/mobility; unlike the theorists of travel before her, Morris applies a populist approach to theorizing tourism and uses this to re-view the Henry Parkes Motel and renew theoretical approaches with an eye to feminist criticism. While her argument makes a compelling and noteworthy contribution to the field of cultural studies, more important for my purpose is her extended, in-depth study of this particular memorial Motel and her analysis of its kind as spaces of transit, as both a site of tourism and a home—"a transit form of the domestic"—mediating

[19] Keep in mind that ambition is in no way indicative of the reality of Humbert's actions or even an outcome of success, so that while he may act in a way that degrades Lolita to an advertisement or an object of consumerism, in his deluded consciousness his enterprise is one that assumes an aestheticism associated with high art.

[20] The origins of Morris's and Treadwell's study of the motel—Morris in particular—can be located in James Clifford's published speech, "Traveling Cultures," in which he reimagines cultures as sites of dwelling and travel, working towards a comparative scope of these terms. In doing so he evokes the image of the hotel, claiming "the hotel epitomizes a specific way into complex histories of traveling cultures (and cultures of travel) in the late twentieth century" (31). And yet, one of the problems Clifford identifies with the hotel is its nostalgic inclination, suggesting that, "in those *parts* of society that we can legitimately call postmodern . . . the *motel* would surely offer a better chronotope. The motel has no real lobby, and it's tied into a highway network—a relay or node rather than a site of encounter between coherent cultural subjects" (32).

between vagrancy and a fixed address (216). With her attention focused more on conceptualizing the motel as space and the postmodern implications of its status as one of the "pseudo-places" defining the tourist world, Morris views the motel in its abstract form, removing concept from body so that the interior of the motel—particularly the motel room—as physical construct is of little significance compared to the sign that is the motel.

Treadwell, however, contributes to the conversation what Morris leaves absent, including a montaged analysis of motel representations (mainly Edward Hopper's *Western Motel* and Laurie Anderson's *Puppet Motel*, but also referencing *Lolita* as well as Morris's *Henry Parkes*) that work together to construct a new image of the motel as the "repressed yet operative vision of architectural domesticity in New England" (218).[21] While Morris looks to the exterior of the Henry Parkes Motel and the very concept of *motelness*, Treadwell moves to the interior and explores the idea of the motel as a home away from home, as a secondary or temporary *homeliness* in which the deviant and complex social relationships that remain secret in the standard home are manifest in the anonymity afforded by the motel. She emphasizes the motel's association with a longing for distance and freedom—both of which are complementary desires that have positioned the motel as an "architectural remnant" of a colonial history—and, in doing so, draws from Morris her reading of the motel as a "transit form of the domestic" in which the fixed and the mobile merge, accentuating, more than Morris does, the persistent efforts of the motel to reconstruct a sense of domesticity, however perverted or incomplete (215, 216). Necessary for this reconstruction are inevitably the images of the motel representing the transit home in a heightened form, layering past and present and exhibiting the "social and spatial extremities" that have come to define its condition (Treadwell 217). Likewise, necessary for my understanding of the motel as depicted in *Lolita* is her analysis of Hopper's and Anderson's constructions of the motel and their varying thematic displays of "motel time" and "motel effect" that ultimately exhibit the motel as a space occupied by movement and a "compulsive" interiority undermining the "settled ground of home and place" (Treadwell 218, 224).

Morris and Treadwell prove essential to my analysis provided their arguments for the image of the motel as a condition of mobility operating within a flexible field supporting varying conditions of space, time, and speed, as well as its close association with the domestic, even if as

[21] New England referring here to New Zealand.

a distortion or parody.[22] Yet absent from their criticism is a discussion or even acknowledgement of the motel's stereotypically depraved aesthetics, seen most profoundly within its pervasive atmosphere of kitsch and its calculation toward popular appeal.[23] Given the motel's location within a growing consumer culture fixated upon commercial vulgarity and an appropriation of mass-produced images with little to no variability, it provides an intriguing backdrop to Humbert pursuing Lolita across the roads of America in an attempt to immortalize her through art. My argument is thus concerned with the aesthetic opportunities—or perhaps more appropriately, mis-opportunities—the motel seems to offer Humbert as he transitions in his rather hopeless enterprise from a struggle to recover his European past by means of extracting copied Lolita from original Annabel to a desire to immortalize Lolita and elevate her to the domain of art.

THE ROAD AND THE MOTEL: THE MOTEL TAKES CENTER STAGE

If the motel, as Morris and Treadwell both emphatically suggest, is a space of transit and mobility in which time operates along a spectrum of duration rather than in historical linearity, then Humbert's obsessively dedicated use of the motel—and the highway system, for that matter—is strategic and simultaneously irrational. Inclined toward a nostalgic consciousness that roots him in his past, Humbert's present is marked by spatial wanderings in which borders dictated by the laws of space and the principles of time serve as little deterrence for his hopeless efforts to retrieve the past. Humbert opens "Part Two" of his memoir with a simple transition nodding toward the incessant movement that is to characterize the greater part of his love affair with Lolita: "It was then that we began our extensive travels all over the States" (145). Certainly *Lolita* can be read as a travelogue, and many critics choose this route in their analysis of the

[22] Interestingly, while the motel is typically seen as a consequence of the home in which the domestic spills over into these privately-public spaces, Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers prove the inverse also true, explaining that habits such as placing the television in the bedroom grew out of the motel. Staying in motel rooms was thus reminiscent of department store bedroom displays, leading the motel to become "a new mainspring" for American consumer culture (239). Accordingly, "[as] motel room accoutrements increasingly have been adopted in home bedroom configurations, the differences between home and away-from-home blurred" (231).

[23] In this section's exploration of the motel, I deliberately attach descriptors such as "kitschy," "vulgar," and "tawdry" as modifiers of the motel in order to explicitly delimit the motel's conceptualization within a culture of mass production operating under an assumption of popular appeal. Given my larger discussion tracing Humbert's aesthetic sensibility, it is necessary that I not only acknowledge, but also emphasize, the cultural stereotype of the motel as debased, narratively affirmed by Humbert's 'cultured' eye. Indeed, profoundly implicit in his narrative is the motel's perceived inherent lack of esteemed taste and individuality, with the common, gaudy, and unrefined replicated and celebrated without end.

novel. Jennifer L. Jenkins perceives Humbert to be on a heroic quest of sorts, a pilgrimage in which he sets out to find the grail personified by his nymphetic lost ladylove, while John Haegert focuses his attention on Humbert's status as émigré artist navigating between two conflicting cultural values—Old World and New—in order to write *the* American novel. Other critics turn their attention more broadly to the America through which Humbert is traveling. Susan Elizabeth Sweeney argues that Nabokov's America as portrayed in his English texts compensates for his own exile "by some sleight of *land*," transposing one country with another (i.e. Russia with the United States), while David Castronovo reads *Lolita* didactically as Nabokov's "complex tribute" to Americanism in which his judgment is brought to bear on the comically kitschy, culturally debased New World that ultimately triumphs over its Old World antithesis and teaches us to appreciate the American spectacle that is one part sublime and the other part vulgar (Sweeney 66; Castronovo 36). While these critical approaches vary both in scope and argument, they all indeed share in expressing a sense of the novel's momentum as they consider Humbert and Lolita's transAmerican movement across the greater forty-eight states and through pop culture U.S.A. This paper, however, turns down a different route, moving away from the fast-paced transit of the highway system speeding through intervals of landscape and kitschy Americana and instead decelerating to a slow speed in which the motel as subject of time-obsessed Humbert's preference and fascination comes into view.

Certainly critics like Jenkins and Haegert who read *Lolita* as a novel of the road are deceived by Humbert's references to movement and travel, succumbing to his pretense of using the motion of the car and highway to disguise his relentless patronage of the motel. In his description of his first cross country tour with Lolita Humbert explains, "By putting the geography of the United States into motion, I did my best for hours on end to give her the impression of 'going places,' of rolling on to some definite destination. […] Voraciously we consumed those long highways, in rapt silence we glided over their glossy black dance floors" (152). However, Humbert's nod toward progress and the idea of "going places" masks the slowness with which he perceives himself to be moving. In fact, time slows down to such a degree that rather than this traveling duo actively hastening through all forty-eight states, it is the "geography of the United States" that is set in an accelerated orbiting motion around the slow-moving Humbert desiring to suspend the movement of time so that he might carry out his aesthetic project. Of course the concept of "going places" is charged by a forward-progressing

notion of time, and it is precisely this illusion that he desperately creates for Lolita in the 'stop and go' pattern of their highway transit. Where American Lolita finds comfort on the road, hurrying toward the next roadside attraction and putting more distance between her nightly dues with Humbert and the immediate present, Humbert expects to find consolation in the motel room, where time grows thick and slows to a heavy idle, vibrating with a sense of restlessness as the past that he once hoped to capture comes to be more readily perceived outside the door of the motel in the condition of the road—a space of transit where the cars and the tourists flow within a steady linear stream, one side apparently advancing, the other seemingly regressing. In recognizing that the past is more appropriately relegated to the movement of the road, Humbert finds himself unburdened from his nostalgia and free to use the space of the motel for his aesthetic enterprise of immortalizing Lolita.

It is precisely this oppositional relationship between mobile road and stationary motel that Treadwell seeks to resolve. Using Hopper's *Western Motel* and Anderson's *Puppet Motel* as examples, Treadwell shows that the road is situated *within* the frame of the motel, making the journey dependent on the motel (rather than the obverse) for its existence. Hopper's motel is "nothing more than an amalgam of road, car, and bed," with the road appearing in the window as a picture and its lines visibly inscribed into the room that connect it with the bed; likewise, in *Puppet Motel*, the road is the corridor of the motel, indicating that the motel functions as a form of navigation in which there is "no desired endpoint, just an enveloping spatial exploration" (218, 221). If, as Treadwell argues, "the road, passage, is not context or approach or even strategy but rather an internal condition of the motel," then Humbert's travels across the American roadside function as a condition of his need for the motel and what it purports to offer him in his aesthetic endeavors, thus elevating the motel to a level of primacy that critics too often overlook in favor of a study of the road (221). The strategic organization of "Part Two" of *Lolita* certainly supports the idea of the mobile road existing within the framework of the motel, for it is the motel—"the Functional Motel"—that opens this section of the novel and out of which Humbert and Lolita's travels on the road grow (145). Indeed, if it were not for Lolita for whom "I had to devise some expectations, some special point in space and time for her to look forward to, for her to survive until bedtime," then there would be no mobility to complement the slowed-down space of the motel room, however restless, within which Humbert would be content to remain stationary: "Our tour was a hard, twisted, teleological growth, whose sole *raison d'être*… was to keep my

companion in passable humor from kiss to kiss" (151, 154). Rather than serving as an addendum to the travel upon which Humbert and Lolita embark, the motel is instead positioned as a centrally visible space out of which grows Hum and Lo's journey, with Lolita pulling Humbert away from its criminal confinement every morning and on the road to some tourist destination and Humbert dragging her back at night, so that ultimately the road for Humbert and Lolita becomes an extension of the motel, linking one "brick unit" to another "adobe unit" and breaking off nowhere in between (146).

Humbert's persistent use of the motel can thus be understood as a device to slow down time and superficially relish in his sexual possession of Lolita with all the anonymity and liberties the motel has to offer. He views his time on the road as a hasty interlude to the long nights in the fixed space of the motel room, and he consequently reduces his and Lolita's travels on the road across the States to generic indicators that border on almost silly—"our route began with a series of wiggles and whorls"—and orders their touristic enterprises in one continuous list whose pacing is a quick succession of infinitely identical places the pair "inspected," such as "the various items of a scenic drive. Hundreds of scenic drives, thousands of Bear Creeks, Soda Springs, Painted Canyons. […] Our twentieth Hell's Canyon. Our fiftieth Gateway to something or other *fide* that tour book, the cover of which had been lost by that time" (154, 157). In fact, Humbert admits that it is only by request of his lawyer that he provides "a clear, frank account of the itinerary we followed," indicating that it is not the roadside attractions that he consumed with pleasure nor even the transit of the road that appealed to his time-obsessed consciousness (17); rather, it is the lull of the motel room that he passionately seeks, disguised by his transit on the road in the habit of touristic romps and "going places."[24] Consider the difference with which Humbert describes his time spent in the motel to the race and whirl characterizing life on the road:

> On especially tropical afternoons, in the sticky closeness of the siesta, I liked the cool feel of armchair leather against my massive nakedness as I held her in my lap.

[24] The mileage covered by Humbert and Lolita on their first "trip" is certainly telling in how little they actually moved around. Humbert reveals that within the first year (1947-1948) they spent on the road—or more appropriately, veiled behind the walls of the motel room—they covered about 27,000 miles in the span of 150 days, which averages out to 180 miles of leisurely driving per day. The other 200 plus days were "interpolated standstills," revealing that Hum and Lo saw more of the standard interior of the motel room than they did the roadscape and tourist attractions (175).

> There she would be, a typical kid picking her nose while engrossed in the lighter sections of a newspaper, as indifferent to my ecstasy as if it were something she had sat upon, a shoe, a doll, the handle of a tennis racket, and was too indolent to remove. Her eyes would follow the adventures of her favorite strip characters. (165)

Time crawls in the thick humidity of the afternoon, where juvenile actions such as "picking her nose" become an elongated act stretched out over miles of time and the quality of doing nothing reverberates in the stillness of the room save for Lolita's childish twitches. The afternoon becomes not just a segment out of a day structured into hours but instead itself a quality of time following the principles of motel temporality, which is drastically decelerated from the fast speed of the highway and of "normal" life. It is thus in the slowed down masquerading calm of the motel room, with Lolita engrossed in the images of her comics and celebrities and Humbert likewise engrossed in the image of Lolita which his photographic consciousness has constructed, that Humbert perceives in his surroundings more potential than the sexual misconduct motels typically house; with his preference for the visual and the imagistic guiding his actions, Humbert strategically seeks to utilize the motel, a site in which time and space are seemingly harmonized, to aestheticize and thus immortalize his Lolita so that he can possess her—unlike his beloved Annabel—forever.

FROM THE 'SWANK' HOTEL TO THE 'FUNCTIONAL' MOTEL

Of course, it must be acknowledged that Humbert's predilection for the "Functional Motel—clean, neat, safe nooks, ideal places for sleep, argument, reconciliation, insatiable love" springs from his failure to recapture the impossible past within the inauthentic American hotel (145). And while the road grows to be increasingly futile and vapid save for its connecting power amongst motels, when Humbert starts his journey he views himself as an "enchanted traveler" setting out on the back roads of America to reclaim Annabel and his past. Consequently, he allows his nostalgic recollections to dictate his pursuit of Lolita so that he might finally fulfill the sexual act that was thwarted by fate many a year ago in that "princedom by the sea" (9). By this logic, the Enchanted Hunters Hotel, a "swank" place, in the words of Lolita, a "pale palace" with "enlarged replicas of chestnut leaves plung[ing] and play[ing] on white pillars," looms large in

its imitative glory as a site to recall, replicate, and subsequently consummate his childhood experience with Annabel at the Hotel Mirana, appropriately remembered as "a kind of private universe, a whitewashed cosmos within the blue greater one that blazed outside" (10). However, Lolita is not Annabel, and the domestic American interior of Room 342 is not the beach on the Riviera. In fact, very much unlike the refined European cosmopolitan hotel home of his childhood, the Enchanted Hunters sports the degraded conventionality that has proven endlessly common in suburban America. Transposed from its European history, the sign of the hotel on American soil is emptied of its implicated historicity and original grandeur; indeed, disembodied of an authentic European heritage and filled with the kitsch of the American middle class, the hotel in America becomes a parody of itself—"parody of a hotel corridor," Humbert observes, "Parody of silence and death"—in which any semblance of originality is undermined by its condition as cheap, mass-produced imitation of European high culture (119). Taking its cue also from many of the theme motels that Humbert and Lolita later encounter as they retreat from the East,[25] the Enchanted Hunters is reduced to that "Postmodern Particularity" that Morris evokes to describe the Henry Parkes Motel: "bricolage, individuality-effect, pluralist pastiche, coding, localization by simulated aura" (35). Like Henry Parkes, the Enchanted Hunters Hotel advertises personality rather than conformity; it stands in direct opposition to the motels later frequented by Humbert and Lolita, promoting seriality within a self-referential chain and alluding to a "myth of the Modern Universal" (Morris 35). Of course, the name of Humbert's choice hotel appeals to him, for the theme of enchanted hunting characterizes his dedicated pursuit of the illusion of retrievable time and thus the restoration of his lost Riviera love, and the Enchanted Hunters recalls the Hotel Mirana simply by its status as hotel. "In later months I could laugh at my inexperience when recalling the obstinate boyish way in which I had concentrated upon that particular inn with its fancy name," Humbert recalls, recognizing that the name is but a sign that, in this American culture of signs endlessly substituted one for another, has no bearing on the substance to which it is intended to refer (116). An American hotel, Humbert perceives, is

[25] The location of the Enchanted Hunters Hotel in the Eastern United States is fitting, for it is this region more than any other in the States that finds itself mediating between Old World and New, between elite European decorum and gaudy mass produced objects of the democratized American middle class. Haegert supports this point, explaining America's New England was a place "where Europe still exerted an irresistible hold on America life" (146). As Humbert and Lolita travel out of the East, their trip becomes more American in nature, as seen in Humbert's persistent use of motels, and less consumed with his European past.

invariably different from its European counterpart, precisely by virtue of its inauthenticity as it attempts to replicate historical connotations in a dehistoricized location.

Humbert's recognition of his juvenile foolishness in chasing after the Enchanted Hunters Hotel in all its particularity, however, does not come until years later when he is composing his confession. Prior to this realization is Humbert's delusory perception of the hotel's superficial and idealized semblance to the Hotel Mirana of his past, similar to the resemblance Humbert's nostalgic consciousness sees between Lolita and Annabel. Humbert could have stopped for the night at one of the "countless motor courts [that] proclaimed their vacancy in neon lights, ready to accommodate salesmen, escaped convicts, impotents, family groups, as well as the most corrupt and vigorous couples," and yet the Enchanted Hunters lures him with its fairy-tale like magic, the very parody of which initially eludes his recognition as he assumes it to be an approximation of circumstances similar to his European childhood (116). Of course, by morning he finds himself in an obverse situation, with Lolita kneeling over him,[26] himself supine in the position that Annabel took right as he was on the verge of "possessing" her. Certainly many critics indicate this point as transformative in the novel, whether in Lolita's supposed assertion of agency or in the eventual deterioration of their relationship as perceived by Humbert; however, in believing that it was Lolita who seduced him, Humbert indicates a revelation that prompts him to distinguish his relationships with Lolita and Annabel precisely by means of their national affiliations. The consummation of his relationship with Lolita occurs within a hotel that, by nature of its classification as such, asserts a faux cosmopolitan (European) atmosphere, and yet the domesticity of its interior is suggestive of its vulgar American-ness and its association with the kitschy middle class. Similar to the hotel, American Lolita, whom Humbert constructs as replica of European Annabel by her superficial form, sheds the signature of her predecessor and becomes more real to Humbert than the reality of his past, which increasingly fades as Lolita assumes a more individualistic role in Humbert's aesthetic eye. Thus, while Haegert maintains that American life (a condition which encompasses Lolita) is portrayed by Humbert to always be "a ghostly and degenerate version of his European past," the experience at the Enchanted Hunters proves otherwise, for both the hotel and Lolita assert themselves in their distinctive "Americanism" so that in retrospect, Humbert regretfully bemoans, "I should have understood that Lolita had *already* proved to be something quite different from innocent Annabel" (124).

[26] Humbert's first sight of Lolita is of her kneeling in the garden. See Nabokov, 39.

Indeed, Humbert recognizes that the hotel was insufficient to reclaim his European past precisely because of its inauthentic standing as original site; likewise, Lolita proves to be an inauthentic version of Annabel and at this crucial moment eclipses her prototype entirely so that it is not the illusion of Annabel whom Humbert pursues in American motels, but rather his idealized, solipsized version of Lolita.[27]

As the unofficial gateway mediating between the East with its voracious eye to the Old World and the West with its embrace of a culturally degraded, mass-produced Americana, the hotel stands as a crucial turning point as it redefines Humbert's movement across the States and prompts him to seek out the motel as an alternative: "Treasured recollections of my father's palatial hotel," remembers Humbert, "sometimes led me to seek for its like in the strange country we traveled through. I was soon discouraged" (147). This discouragement prompts Humbert to recognize that his childhood on the Riviera can never be recovered in an authentic, original sense, especially within an environment constructed as cheap copy and boasting images without bottom. Humbert thus abandons the hotel and in doing so renounces his nostalgic desire to retrieve his past by means of manufacturing its copy in the present. However, the consummation of his relationship with Lolita, whose image consequently becomes disassociated from Annabel, baptizes Humbert as "a brand-new American citizen of obscure European origin" and qualifies him to pursue the ubiquitous, commercial motel—itself a vulgar and cheap, mass-produced derivative of the hotel—and participate in the consumerist behavior of the middle class of which he makes Lolita a product (105). Consequently, with Lolita having transcended her predecessor entirely, Humbert's aesthetic ambition is no longer concentrated upon his past but rather redirected to his future as he hopes to immortalize Lolita. His aesthetic project can thus be understood as both revisionistic and preventive in nature, for he seeks to improve upon the outcome of his affair with Annabel and retain Lolita as he was unable to able to do with her prototype; indeed, instead of recreating the past, Humbert seeks to redeem the present by making it permanent rather than transient.

[27] In the events that follow, while Lolita is no longer considered a "ghostly and degenerate" version of Annabel—a point with which Haegert would disagree—her immediate presence in Humbert's life as a "most exasperating brat" and a "disgustingly conventional little girl" is considered by Humbert to be a "ghostly and degenerate" version of his idealized, solipsized Lolita (Haegert 143; Nabokov 148).

IN PURSUIT OF AESTHETICS IN THE KITSCHY MOTEL

This shift in Humbert's aesthetic aim proves significant for my argument. Now seeking to immortalize Lolita through art, Humbert demonstrates his desire for redemption in having initially constructed Lolita as copy of Annabel. However, the process of creating Lolita as aesthetic object is undermined by his immersion in a culture in which authenticity is abandoned in favor of signs endlessly reproduced. Thus while Humbert's intentions may be aesthetic in nature, his actions prove otherwise, for not only does he maintain his solipsistic hold on Lolita and preserve her as the image he created in Ramsdale, disembodied of her original self, but he also situates her as product in this culture of mass-produced goods capable of being purchased and consumed. Consequently, the motel offers itself as an appropriate site to house this tension in Humbert's aestheticism. First, as a distinctly American structure self-referential in the fact that it nods less toward a European prototype than to its own recursive existence spread out across the States, the motel suits Humbert's efforts to aestheticize the "all-American" Lo. And while it further compels him by what he perceives to be the aesthetic opportunities it offers as a location in which time and space are fused into a concrete whole, in actuality it comes to be the ideal site to engage with Lolita as commodity rather than art simply by virtue of its essence as a culturally debased and kitschy architecture.

Seduced by the heavy calm and markedly slow pace of time promoted by the motel's location along the highway of high-speed transit, Humbert views these spaces as ideal sites to exercise his artistic intent to permanently capture Lolita's nymphetry in time and space. Indeed, Humbert admits, "I am not concerned with so-called 'sex' at all […] a greater endeavor lures me on: to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (134). He views Lolita's impermanence as elusive and yet just within reach, prompting him to jump from motel to motel, eager that the next Hillcrest Court, Pine View Court, Mountain View Court would serve as the site of success for his artistic enterprise. With intonations of a 'lunge and miss' much like the butterfly hunts so familiar to Nabokov,[28] Humbert seeks to catch and 'pin down' his nymphet and possess her as

[28] In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov narrates his process of aestheticizing the butterflies he catches, the tender cruelty of which echoes Humbert's own approach towards immortalizing Lolita in art. Both processes are laden with sexual imagery, with Nabokov, for example, describing his "mounting a freshly emerged European moth," only later to "guide the pin penetrating the hard crust of its thorax; the careful insert of the point of the pin in the cork-bottomed groove of the spreading board" (121). Once pinned, the butterfly becomes an aesthetic object—albeit one emptied of life and spirit.

immortal aesthetic object for his individual pleasure. Yet, despite his persistent efforts, Lolita remains out of reach—"I would see her floating away from me, celestial and solitary, in an ethereal chairlift, up and up, to a glittering summit"—until at last she is only an echo of the image of the girl who seduced him in Briceland: "She had entered my world, umber and black Humberland with rash curiosity," Humbert mourns, "and it seemed to me now she was ready to turn away from it with something akin to plain repulsion" (160, 166). Certainly Humbert's delusional pursuit finds precedence in his having reduced Lolita to nothing more than an image—an image that lifts his nymphet from ephemeral reality, threatening to rid this hopeless artist "dwell[ing] deep in my elected paradise" of the source of his passion and aesthetic ambition. As discussed in the previous section, while Humbert had frozen Annabel by means of a photograph, both her bodily self and represented image have receded from his possession so that with Lolita, having already created her as image by the workings of his solipsistic mind, Humbert is mobilized to suspend her corporeality in time so that he can possess her in his illusion of "forever." As such, in his aesthetic endeavor, Humbert considers the carnality of sex to be the appropriate means by which corporeal Lolita can be permanently possessed. "Sex is but the ancilla of art," Humbert reasons, and so it is by virtue of this accessory performance permitted by the anonymity and concealment of the motel room that Humbert persistently abuses Lolita in hopes of aestheticizing her for his lasting enjoyment (259).

THE SUBVERSIVE MOTEL

With Humbert in clear pursuit of an illusion, his intended use of the motel appears questionable. First and foremost, Humbert misperceives the nature of time as it functions within the fluid motel setting. While certainly accurate in his recognition of the motel as a strategically situated space that allows for a slowing of pace, he neglects to acknowledge the quality of transit still reverberating in the quiet restlessness of the motel interior. If we turn again to Morris and consider her classification of the motel as a transit place, as "a type of installation that mediates… between a fixed address, or a domicile, and, in the legal sense, with 'vagrancy'," then Humbert's efforts to fix Lolita as an aesthetic object are undermined by the mobility he overlooks as inherently characteristic of the motel (37). The motel, firmly rooted in a specific locale and operating under the pretense of a home away from home, is sustained only by the

promise of transient time and a continual sense of arriving and departing, not by a temporality that becomes static upon transgressing the threshold of highway into motel interior; put simply, the motel could not be considered a motel without the pervasive sense of mobility—a unique characteristic shared not even by its antecedent, the hotel. Morris continues her argument for the motel as a site of perpetual (albeit slowed down) motion, emphasizing the "strategic installation" of this temporary residence as "a conative effort at stopping the traffic over days as well as moments, to slow transients into tourists and divert energy into places" (37). Certainly this is true of Humbert, who falls prey to the "ploy" of the motel and, as struggling artist turned tourist, comes to know "the stone cottages under enormous Chateaubriandesque trees, the brick unit, the adobe unit, the stucco court, on what the Tour Book of the Automobile Association describes as 'shaded' or 'spacious' or 'landscaped' grounds" in which he begins to pursue the *place* of the motel more aggressively than he does time itself (Morris 37; Nabokov 145). For Humbert, place becomes the means by which decelerated time might finally be appropriated so that Lolita remains immortalized within the romanticized realm of nymphetry. However, the strategic ploy of the motel assumes, as Morris argues, "the transience and plasticity, not the fixity, of meanings constructed in space" (37). With the world of motels that surround Humbert promoting a message of instability rather than fixity, ephemerality rather than perpetuality, Humbert's aesthetic project to secure Lolita's image in time and space ultimately finds itself unraveling by the strategy of the motel.

The second reason that Humbert's use of the motel reveals itself to be questionable lies within the contrast between the aesthetic sensibility brandished by Humbert and the mass-produced, kitschy sentiment of the middle class American motel. In looking to the motel as a site to house his artistic enterprise, Humbert naively overlooks how the tawdriness typically associated with the American motel would interfere with any authenticity that might be achieved, or perhaps even regained, with his aesthetic pursuit. He indulges in the decelerated time of the motel while effectively disregarding the vulgarity that appeals to conventional Lo—the electric fan she would always set "a-whirr," the radio requiring a quarter administered by Humbert, "the local pool of warm mineral water" toward which she would "inquire with a whine why she could not go […] swimming in"—so that, despite his ignorance, the cheap, degraded quality of the motel actually infects and pollutes his aesthetic project (147). Naïve, unperceptive Humbert is

thus not only deceived by the scheme of the motel, but is also consequently named tourist in the most depraved sense, sustaining his participation in the vulgar, commercial environment.

Of course, by resorting to motel culture as a means to both advance his aesthetization of Lolita and veil his criminal carnal pleasure with the child, Humbert is forced to contend with multiple shades of these cheap tourist courts that serve to undermine his artistic project. For one, motels appeared along the growing highways of America as a response to a booming consumer culture,[29] and thus they promoted a commercial agenda to which all temporary lodgers were subjected. In such a monetarily-charged environment in which Humbert pays for the motel services of anonymity and temporary domesticity, he likewise adopts these commercial habits in his relationship with Lolita, "emitting dimes and quarters, and great big silver dollars like some sonorous, jingly and wholly demented machine vomiting riches" (184). Lolita, whose image has previously been reduced to an advertisement in Humbert's consciousness, as we have already seen, has now degenerated to a commodified object in her corporeal self, capable of being replicated[30] and sold as product. Humbert "has left the patrimonies of poets and entered the marketplace," Brand aptly declares, and henceforth in Humbert's mind, Lolita, "a combination of . . . charm and vulgarity," is appropriately shelved among the souvenirs and mass-produced merchandise with which she surrounds herself and which she grows to imitate (Brand 19; Nabokov 148):

> Sweet hot jazz, square dancing, gooey fudge sundaes, musicals, movie magazines, and so forth—these were the obvious items in her list of beloved things. […] She believed, with a kind of celestial trust, any advertisement or advice. […] If a roadside sign said: VISIT OUR GIFT SHOP—we *had* to visit it, *had* to buy its Indian curios, dolls, copper jewelry, cactus candy. The words 'novelties and souvenirs' simply entranced her by their trochaic lilt. If some café sign proclaimed Icecold Drinks, she was automatically stirred, although all drinks everywhere were icecold.

[29] See Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers for more on the rise and evolution of the motel. Having its roots in downtown and resort hotels, motels popped up across America to accommodate an increasingly automobile-centric culture; they progressed from the auto-camps appearing prior to World War I to tourist homes to cabin camps to cottage courts to motor courts to motor inns and then eventually to highway hotels by the 1960s.

[30] Humbert envisions himself as being able to reproduce the image of nymphetic Lolita by his own accord. "With patience and luck," he muses, "I might have her produce eventually a nymphet with my blood in her veins, a Lolita the Second" (174). The procession of images does not end here, however, because in "the telescopy of my mind," Humbert is able to perceive a "salivating Dr. Humbert, practicing on supremely lovely Lolita the Third the art of being a granddad" (174).

> She it was to whom ads were dedicated: the ideal consumer, the subject and object of every foul poster. (148)

As always, Humbert's language reads as ambiguous. He intends to portray Lolita as the average teenage consumer, "a disgustingly conventional little girl" wallowing in junk culture who has been cast not only as the subject of advertisements (because it is toward her that magazine ads and road signs are geared), but also as the object, since that which is advertised is not the literal product of, say the "Icecold Drinks," but rather Lolita's internalized *enjoyment* of said drinks (148). However, Humbert instead suggests that Lolita herself is an advertisement, disembodied and separated from her original form, modeled and molded by Humbert's possessive consciousness, so that what becomes advertised is, again, not the "Icecold Drinks," but instead, to Humbert's insatiable eye, the reality that is Lolita's outward display of enjoyment of the now irrelevant drink.[31] Lolita consequently occupies a dual plane in the vulgar commercial world that infiltrates Humbert's aesthetic perspective, posing as consumer in the very straightforward sense of American youth awash in pop culture and yet simultaneously appearing as commodified object in Humbert's depraving solipsism. Of course, Humbert finds himself similarly mediating between two conflicting impulses, so that his Old World value as European aesthete operating under the assumption "art for art's sake" is appropriately matched against his adopted New World persona as consumer of American goods operating under the marketplace practice of "art for control's sake," which gradually negates any remnant authenticity carried over from his now-obscured Continental past (Ewen 50).

The vulgar composition of the motel situated within a commercial environment based upon seriality and mass-production similarly undermines Humbert's aesthetic project. In close quarters with an America of novelties and souvenirs, the motel, stranded at intervals and nodes in the highway network, is itself an embodiment of postmodern kitsch with its names, signs, and advertisements that face the road expressing particularity and individuality and yet its interiority

[31] In light of Ewen's study on the politics of style in mainstream society, Humbert's appropriation and construction of Lolita into advertisement makes sense. Ewen explains, "in a society where the skinning of the visible world has become commonplace, any skin, any visual connotation, may be drawn into service" (247). Considering Humbert's imagistic, omnivorous eye focused only on his beloved nymphet, Lolita is a suitable subject from which to extract an image for an ad. Ewen continues: "The only requirements for appropriation into the style market are these: 1) The image must be able to be *disembodied, separated from its source*. 2) The image must be capable of being *'economically' mass produced*. 3) The image must be able to *become merchandise*, to be promoted and sold" (247). These stages nod towards Baudrillard's ordering of the successive phases of the image. See Baudrillard, "The Evil Demon of Images and the Precession of Simulacra."

showcasing a mass-produced concept with rooms and accompanying accoutrements of nearly identical layout and style. According to Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers's research, a 1950 article published in the *Architectural Record* found the ideal motel room to be sized between fourteen by fourteen and sixteen by eighteen, to have metal windows, furniture of "standard flush-metal type," tall bureaus with multipurpose vanity-desks with drawers, wooden surfaces covered with plate glass, floors covered with asphalt tile or wall-to-wall carpeting, and so forth (244). While claiming diversity by means of the room geography, the difference of which gradually disappeared, and the superficial decorating based on the theme of the motel or the region in which it was to be found, the motel room was in actuality a very controlled and standardized space angled on replication. With a keen and discriminatory eye to American consumer culture and its lack of authenticity, Humbert certainly recognizes the motel's failure to match an advertised idea with reality, commenting on the subtle diversification in the names that ironically left much to be wanted: "*Nous connûmes* […] the would-be enticements of their repetitious names—all those Sunset Motels, U-Beam Cottages, Hillcrest Courts, Pine View Courts, Mountain View Courts, Skyline Courts, Park Plaze Courts, Green Acres, Mac Courts" (146). Indeed, in infinite seriality with only slight superficial variations, the motels frequented by Humbert and Lolita are nothing more than copies of one another—copies to which there no longer exists an original. This lack of authenticity is likewise projected onto Humbert's aesthetic enterprise, demonstrating that despite his ambition to elevate Lolita to the realm of art and consequently immortalize her for his pleasure, his reduction of Lolita to an advertisement is validated by the standardized motel and subsumes her in its infinitely replicated vulgarity.

Humbert regards the motel as an ideal space to pursue his aesthetic project to immortalize Lolita, and for me as well it proves to be a site of interest—one that scholars have bypassed in favor of misguided readings centered on the theme of travel; yet, as Humbert recalls, "we had been everywhere. We had really seen nothing," pointing to the fact that, despite their "extensive travels all over the States," all Hum and Lo managed to see was the interior of the motel bedroom, itself standard at every location and offering no semblance of originality or authenticity (176, 145). Scholarly neglect of the motel is curious, because it disregards what is perhaps the most significant accessory to Humbert's criminality, in a moral as well as aesthetic capacity; it also disregards a key insight into Humbert's progressive commercialism that overwhelms and eclipses his aestheticism nearly entirely by journey's end. Of course, while

Humbert is certainly strategic in the manner and method with which he pursues the motel as the site of his aesthetic endeavor despite its operation within a highly commercialized tourist environment, the motel ultimately *upends* Humbert's pursuit of Lolita and his misguided project toward her aesthetic immortalization. Indeed, the motel entirely subsumes Humbert within the consumer atmosphere and seemingly solidifies Lolita in the realm of vulgar commercialism where her image struggles to be rebranded with her soul.

It is not until Humbert physically divorces himself from the landscape of proliferated copies and mass-culture, heroically retreating from the motel and into a space of the American wilds, free from commercial adulteration and reminiscent of the American pastoral ethos, that he is able to regain aesthetic composure. Whereas authenticity could not be located within the program of the American motel, Humbert finally retrieves it in the virtuous landscape where, perched high on his "lofty slope" and "hearing the melody of children at play," he experiences a conclusively epiphanic moment in which he comes to know that "the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord" (307-308). Transcending here his moral depravation inextricably bound to his artistic failings, Humbert releases Lolita's image from his solipsistic holding in order to reunite form to substance and elevate her beyond the two-dimensional and spiritless rendering he sought to impose upon her in his now realized aesthetic transgressions. Lolita, "pale and polluted, and big with another man's child," is thus imbued with a soul that re-shapes her into a three-dimensional individual existing outside the realm of Humbert's cognizance (278). Perceiving her now as assembled whole, definitively more than his photographic consciousness allowed him to previously capture, Humbert triumphantly delivers Lolita to that immortal realm of "aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art," thus effectively retracting her as commodity of motel culture and insisting upon her preservation as authentic original more appropriately housed within the poetically-penned pages of a redeemed literary aesthete (309).

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