

Can Humbert be Trusted with the Telling of His Tale?

A Deconstructive Study of Binary Oppositions in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*

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Abstract

In *Lolita*, Humbert is obsessed with the 12-year-old Lolita. It is a vulgar and disturbing story which raises questions about morality and ethics. With a sophisticated and elegant narrative, Humbert manages to draw attention to language rather than to his actions. Through fancy prose style Humbert covers up and hides his horrible actions. His verbal game serves to manipulate his readers to accept Humbert's feelings and actions and sympathize with him. Humbert's narration is very persuasive and the reader is easily fooled to concentrate on what he says rather than what he does.

In this essay deconstructive method is used to analyse *Lolita*. The study shows how binary oppositions are used in *Lolita* and what effect they have on the reader's comprehension of the text. The study presents a number of incongruities in Humbert's telling of the story and therefore the essay argues that Humbert cannot be trusted with the telling of his tale.

Keywords

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, Humbert, Deconstruction, Binary opposition, Unreliable, Guilt, Innocence, Real, Imagined

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Theory of Deconstruction	3
Unreliable Narration	4
Binary Oppositions in <i>Lolita</i>	8
Lolita as Real and Imagined	9
Guilt and Innocence	12
Conclusion	16
Works Cited	18

Introduction

Vladimir Nabokov's provocative novel *Lolita* has been discussed and criticized for its controversial themes ever since its publication in 1955. Undeniably, *Lolita* is quite an obscene, vulgar and disturbing story, which has provoked and stirred up many feelings and reactions. Nomi Tamir-Ghez points out that after the initial shock the publication caused, "the attention of literary critics was drawn to the text itself" (65). Without a doubt, the text raises questions about morality and ethics. Even though *Lolita* involves a list of disturbing matters like incest, rape and pedophilia, the narrator Humbert manages to cover up and mask his horrible actions. With a charming and ingenious use of language Humbert forces the reader to concentrate on what he says rather than what he does. In fact, it is difficult to find any obscene word in the text. With beautiful words and poetic descriptions of his experiences with young Lolita, Humbert captivates his audience and the reader almost feels sympathetic towards Humbert. As a consequence, Tamir-Ghez claims that what enraged most readers and critics was "the fact that they found themselves unwittingly accepting, even sharing, and the feelings of Humbert Humbert" (65).

In this essay I will use deconstructive theory to investigate how binary oppositions are used in *Lolita* and how they affect the reader's comprehension of the text. Deconstruction provides a method for analysing texts in order to find hidden assumptions, gaps and inconsistencies, which serve to open up the text and challenge apparent truths and meanings. Language has an important function in deconstructive theory. It is built up by binary oppositions and it is through these oppositions we understand the world around us. For example, to be able to understand what is real, we must oppose this to what is only imagined. In this essay, special attention is given to the binary oppositions real versus imagined and guilt versus innocence as I believe these two pairs of oppositions are central concepts in *Lolita*. Humbert, who is the main character and also the narrator, uses a language and a type

of narration which justifies his actions. The way Humbert portrays Lolita as both real and imagined and the way he relates to himself as both guilty and innocent is an example of an incongruity which signals that Humbert should not be trusted. In order to determine if Humbert is unreliable, I use the definition of unreliable narrator given by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*.

Organisationally, this essay opens with an introduction to Derrida's theory of deconstruction and a brief clarification of the term 'binary opposition'. Additionally, I will describe Booth's definition of the term 'unreliable narration'. The essay then moves on to an analysis of the binary oppositions in *Lolita*. Then follows a discussion about the effect created by the use of the binary oppositions and how they affect the interpretation of the novel. In short, this essay will show why the reader should watch out for Humbert's narrative and not trust his telling of the tale.

The Theory of Deconstruction

Deconstruction is a term coined and introduced by Jacques Derrida in the mid-1960s. According to Jonathan Culler, Derrida sought to describe a method by which texts are analysed “for the range of inherently contradictory meanings they contain” (153). Derrida suggested that when deconstructing a text, one tries to understand it through its connections and relationships to different contexts. Furthermore, according to Culler, Derrida argued that all of the references the reader uses to interpret a text are themselves texts and therefore there is no definitive, objective truth. Hence, texts can be read in many different ways and there is no end product. The idea is that there might always be something more or else to discover.

Deconstruction can be explained as a method or an activity of reading which allows a deep analysis of a text. Accordingly, it functions as a means to help the reader disclose possible clues and unspoken assumptions. Thus, it undermines the idea that there is one single, stable meaning. According to Steven Padley, deconstruction is “less a method of interpretation than a way of reading that anticipates and reveals the unreliable nature of language, the existence of textual uncertainty and undecideability, and the impossibility of ascribing final and unambiguous meaning” (153). Padley further explains that “the implication of deconstruction can be difficult to grasp in the abstract, and the term has become to some extent synonymous with the process of textual analysis in general” (155).

The term ‘binary opposition’ can be described as a pair of associated words or words which can be opposite in meaning. Moreover, the concept of binary opposition is based on antithetical pairings such as black and white, hot and cold and dark and light. These oppositions serve as a foundation for a dualistic world view. Language is built up by binary oppositions and it is through these oppositions we understand the world around us. For example, to be able to understand what is real, we must take into consideration what is imagined. Derrida believed that all forms of Western cultural production, including literature,

have always been based on binary oppositions (Padley 153). Moreover, when the reader is deconstructing a text, binary oppositions are exposed and destabilized. Since the deconstruction of a text serves to dig deeper into the meaning of the work and create new ideas and theories, one of the effects can be that the reader questions the nature of the narrator. If the binary opposition reveals an incongruity or marks an idea that is different from the set of values expressed by the implied author, the reader might question the narrator's reliability. In *Lolita*, Humbert refers to Lolita as both real and imagined. The way Humbert thus perceives her points to an incongruity and will probably affect the way the reader understands Humbert's status as a narrator. The reader is likely to see Humbert as a person who is trying to hide or cover up his actions. Moreover, the reader may lack confidence in Humbert's ability to tell the real story.

Unreliable Narration

The term 'unreliable narration' was created in 1961 by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Booth states that a narrator is reliable "when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not" (158-59). Thus, when the narrator expresses values and opinions that stand in conflict with those expressed by the implied author, the reader will suspect that the narrator is unreliable. According to Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, the main sources of unreliability are "the narrator's limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value-scheme" (100). Similarly to Booth's definition of unreliable narrator, Rimmon-Kenan claims that "a narrator's moral values are considered questionable if they do not tally with those of the implied author of the given work" (101). Furthermore, Rimmon-Kenan sees the values of the implied author as something which can be very difficult to arrive at as "many texts make it

difficult to decide whether the narrator is reliable or unreliable, and if unreliable – to what extent (101-103).

Booth describes aspects within the narrative that help the reader to recognize and determine unreliability. In his discussion about types of narration, Booth mentions the concept of distance:

In any reading experience there is an implied dialogue among author, narrator, other characters, and the reader. Each of the four can range, in relation to each of the others, from identification to complete opposition, on any axis of value, moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and even physical. (155)

This statement leads one to speculate as to how a paedophile might react to Humbert's actions. This person would most likely identify with Humbert as they share the same values and morals. Therefore, it is not unlikely that the paedophile would find the narrator reliable since he is able to accept Humbert's disturbing actions. By contrast, a person whose values or morals are in complete opposition with those expressed by Humbert would feel a huge distance and would therefore be unable to identify with the narrator. In this case, where Humbert's actions would on no condition be acceptable, the reader would most likely question the narrator's reliability.

Moreover, as Booth mentions, there are different types of distance. One type of distance is that which exists between the narrator and the implied author. Booth defines the implied author as the author's second self and the one who chooses what we read (151). The distance that exists between the narrator and the implied author may be moral, intellectual, physical or temporal (156). Booth claims that this type of distance is the most important one and that the moral and intellectual qualities of the narrator are essential aspects when it comes

to how the reader judges the narrator (158). In addition to distance, Booth points out the function of recognizing implicit messages. He states that when the author expresses an implicit message to the reader, he includes those readers who are capable of understanding the message he would like to convey and excludes those who do not:

Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do not get that point. Irony is always thus in part a device for excluding as well as for including, and those who are included, those who happen to have the necessary information to grasp the irony, cannot but derive at least part of their pleasure from a sense that others are excluded. In the irony with which we are concerned, the speaker is himself the butt of the ironic point. The author and reader are secretly in collusion, behind the speaker's back, agreeing upon the standard by which he is found wanting.
(304)

Consequently, according to Booth, an unreliable narrator is someone who does not act in accordance with the norms of the work and who expresses values and opinions different from those given by the implied author (158-159). This seems to suggest that to be able to identify a narrator's unreliability one must read between the lines. Greta Olson claims that identifying narrator unreliability presupposes "an interpretive strategy that involves reading against the grain of the text and assuming one understands the unspoken message beyond the literal one" (94). This way of reading makes strong demands on the reader. Thus, Booth's definition of how to identify an unreliable narrator involves and stresses a reception-oriented model of text interpretation (Olson 95).

However, Ansgar Nünning takes issue with Booth's definition of narrator unreliability and the fact that it rests on the distance between the implied author and the narrator (Olson 96). Olson states that according to Nünning, ascribing unreliability is a strategy for reading; "attributing unreliability results from text reception and is not a text-immanent phenomenon" (97). Further, Olson claims that Nünning's argument is paradoxical due to his list of textual signals which, in his opinion, exemplifies the narrator's unreliability. This list of textual signs includes, for example, the narrator's explicit contradictions and other discrepancies in the narrative discourse, discrepancies between the narrator's statements and actions, divergences between the narrator's description of herself and other characters' description of her etc. (97-98). Olson claims that if stable textual signals help to typify the phenomenon of unreliability, then individual reader response as the conception of detecting unreliability fails.

Olson's analysis of Booth's and Nünning's models of unreliable narration shows that in both cases a narrator can only be identified as unreliable "if the reader perceives divergences of value, opinion, perception, and forms of expression between the narrator and the implied author or the totality of textual signals" (99). The difference between Booth's and Nünning's models depends on who is authorized to judge a narrator to be unreliable:

Booth's model gives authority to an implied author whose norms form the basis from which questions of reliability can be addressed whereas Nünning's model assumes the limited validity of subject reader response. Another structural difference is that Nünning's model allows for a potentially limitless number of textual wholes based on individual readers' response to the text. Conversely, Booth's model envisions a singular textual whole that is created from clearly detectable textual signs supplied by the implied author. (99)

Thus, if the reader recognizes differences of value and opinion between the narrator and the implied author, the narrator should not be trusted.

Binary Oppositions in *Lolita*

I have used a deconstructive method for examining and exploring binary oppositions in *Lolita* in order to find out why Humbert is considered an unreliable narrator. According to Olson, “one reads literally until textual markers and indications force one to revise one’s interpretation” (95). One such textual signal includes direct warnings that the narrator should not be trusted. For example, in the foreword to *Lolita*, the fictional John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. informs the readers about Humbert, the author of the manuscript, and that he died in prison while waiting for a trial. Ray also makes it clear that before publishing the book, he did very little editing of the text. Therefore the memoir should be considered more or less intact (5). Additionally, Ray calls Humbert a “demented diarist” and that we should not be fooled by his singing violin. He also calls him horrible, abnormal and miserable and says that Humbert is “a shining example of moral leprosy, a mixture of ferocity and jocularity” (7). Consequently, when Ray distances himself from Humbert like this, the reader becomes aware that Humbert is about to seduce his readers with beautiful language and that it is necessary to look critically at his narrative.

Early in the novel, when Humbert introduces the reader to the object of his affection, the young girl Lolita, he calls her “the light of my life, fire of my loins” (9). When Humbert portrays Lolita in this manner, the reader easily has the impression that Humbert feels strongly for her and is truly enchanted by her. The reader realizes that Humbert is deeply in love with Lolita despite the fact that he is much older than her. However, in the very same passage, Humbert also says that “you can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style” (9). I would like to argue that this is a sign which proves that Humbert is indeed aware of his

use of language and what effect it might have on the reader. The statement shows that Humbert seeks to conceal the truth of his relationship with Lolita and that the reader should watch out. From this point on, the reader is even more aware of Humbert's deceiving nature and will probably stay on his guard and be observant as regards what he is telling his audience.

Furthermore, Humbert shows early in the novel that he is very conscious about the effect his way of addressing his readers has. It seems as if it is part of his game to cover up the truth about his relationship with Lolita by using a language which fools the reader to sympathize with him. Humbert's exquisite language and poetic descriptions of his feelings for Lolita serve to defend and explain his actions and the reader may easily be swept away in his verbal game. Stephen Schiff argues that "we've barely begun, and already Humbert has indicated his membership in that famously slippery literary coterie, the Unreliable Narrators" (867). Thus, the observant and insightful readers will dig deeper into Humbert's words and what they actually mean. Consequently, they will understand that Humbert is deliberately confusing his readers and hiding the horrible truth of his actions.

Lolita as Real and Imagined

In most parts of the text Humbert presents to the reader an imagined Lolita. Humbert objectifies her; he turns her into an erotic construction, calls her a nymphet and sees her as a demoniac creature. After having sex with Lolita for the first time, for instance, Humbert describes her as "the body of some immortal daemon disguised as a child" (141). Humbert does not describe the actual act of sex in detail and the way he objectifies her may be a way to keep the reader from being too shocked or disgusted. In this way Humbert succeeds in keeping Lolita as an erotic construction and as something beyond a physical human being. As

a result, the readers may realise that Humbert tries to describe Lolita in the way he sees her, as an imagined and irresistible nymphet rather than a real, human child.

Not seeing Lolita as real, he finds an excuse for acting in the way he does. He seems to tell both himself and the readers that he cannot do any harm to the imagined Lolita. One example of this is when he first masturbates against her. He writes that he feels proud of himself and for having stolen “the honey of a spasm without impairing the morals of a minor. Absolutely no harm done” (61). The fact that he says that he feels proud of himself shows that he is aware that his actions are wrong. If Humbert had seen Lolita as real, the situation would have been different. Instead he feels proud that he has been able to enjoy the imagined version of Lolita. He would not have praised himself like this if he had been truly unaware that what he is doing is actually wrong. In fact, Humbert explains that what he had “madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita – perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness – indeed, no life of her own” (62). He seems to think that Lolita is safe claiming that “the child knew nothing. I had done nothing to her” (62). Consequently, as Humbert thinks about Lolita as imagined he probably believes, or wants to believe, that he has not harmed her. Maybe he denies that she is real since he believes that an imagined Lolita cannot be hurt.

In addition, Humbert lets us know that he wants Lolita to stay as she is. He wishes that she will never change and that she will stay young and always be his. He wishes to stop the passing of time as it threatens to change and transform Lolita into an ordinary woman:

Oh, she had changed! Her complexion was now that of any vulgar untidy highschool girl who applies shared cosmetic with grubby fingers to an unwashed face and does not mind what soiled texture, what postulate epidermis comes in contact with her skin. Its smooth tender bloom had been so lovely in former days, so bright with tears,

when I used to roll, in play, her tousled head on my knee. A coarse flush now had replaced that innocent fluorescence. (202)

In fact, Humbert succeeds very well in fixing Lolita into nymphet-hood. Despite her change of age, he declares that he can see her nymphic and irresistible features. One example of this is when he describes Lolita playing tennis;

Despite her advanced age, she was more of a nymphet than ever, with her apricot-coloured limbs, in her sub-teen tennis togs! Winged gentlemen! No hereafter is acceptable if it does not produce her as she was then, in that Colorado resort between Snow and Elphinstone, with everything right: the white wide little-boy shorts, the slender waits, the apricot midriff, the white breast-kerchief whose ribbons went up and encircled her neck to end behind a dangling knot leaving bare her gaspingly young and apricot shoulder and the smooth, downward-tapering back. (229)

In the same paragraph Humbert calls himself an idiot. "I could have filmed her! I would have had her now with me, before my eyes, in the projection room of my pain and despair" (229). Here it becomes clear to the reader that when Humbert revisits her and is thinking about her, he tries to fix her as she once was. Even though Lolita is older, Humbert says she is more of a nymphet than ever. This illustrates that he desperately holds on to her as an imagined nymphic creature.

However, even though Humbert to a large extent describes Lolita as imagined there are situations in the text which imply that Humbert also perceives her as a real person. He makes, for instance, a few comments which suggest that he in fact knows about her true

feelings; “it was always my habit and method to ignore Lolita’s states of mind while comforting my own base self” (285). Even though such passages are rare, the reader can see that Humbert is aware of the real Lolita. He is trying hard to fixate her as she once was and this indicates that Humbert realizes that Lolita is indeed a real person who changes throughout the story. Since he sees how she grows older and how she changes, he also realizes that it is impossible to keep her young and nymphic forever. The imagined Lolita disappears and Humbert fails to fixate her.

Guilt and Innocence

When Humbert refers to Lolita as imagined, he simultaneously indicates that he is innocent of any disturbing and offensive actions. This means that, if Lolita is not real, she does not really exist and therefore she cannot be affected by his behaviour. However, when she is portrayed as a real person, Humbert becomes guilty of hurting her since real persons exist and have real feelings. Throughout the novel, the reader is confronted with Humbert’s frequent attacks against himself, which show that he is indeed aware of his actions. Consequently, when he shows an awareness of his actions, he is also conscious that he is hurting Lolita and that he is guilty of an atrocious crime. Yet, the reader sees how he tries to defend himself and how he claims that he is innocent or at least “as naive as only a pervert can be” (26). The fact that Humbert is defending himself serves as proof that he knows that he is responsible of actions that are not acceptable. If not, he would not take pains to justify his actions. Moreover, Humbert portrays and presents himself in different ways: as a pervert, as a father and a lover, as a poet and a maniac. According to Tamir-Ghez, Humbert’s story can be seen as a combination of self-accusation and self-justification (66). On the one hand, it seems as if Humbert is trying hard to justify and explain himself, which is an indication that he is aware of his reprehensible actions. On the other hand, he claims that he is not really guilty of any

crime. As the passage below suggests, for example, he had good intentions initially and was determined to protect Lolita:

My chère Dolorès! I want to protect you, dear, from all the horrors that happen to little girls in coal sheds and alley ways, and, alas, comme vous le savez trop bien, ma gentile, in the blueberry woods during the bluest of summers. Through thick and thin I will stay your guardian, and if you are good, I hope a court may legalize that guardianship before long. (147)

Humbert tries to convince us that he only wanted to protect Lolita and take care of her. It is ironic; however, that he says that he wants to protect her from all the horrors that happen to little girls as he himself is such a horror.

Throughout the novel there are more signs of Humbert considering himself innocent. It is evident that he wants to show how seductive Lolita is and that it is impossible not to be hypnotized by her. He tries to justify his actions by blaming her for being so alluring. For Humbert, Lolita is a creature with “nymphean evil breathing through every pore of the fey child” (124). He wants the reader to think that no one can resist Lolita. Instead, he wants the reader to believe that it is Lolita who forces Humbert to act the way he acts. He wants, for instance, his readers to believe that it is Lolita’s fault that he is so attracted to her. According to Humbert, Lolita is imagined; she is a nymphet, a daemon and a bewitching creature, and, therefore, he should not be blamed for or considered guilty of any criminal actions. A sign of innocence is when Humbert explains that it was Lolita who came into his arms and that it was he who actually broke their embrace (112-13). He works hard to convince the reader that Lolita is at fault. He goes so far that he accuses Lolita to be the one who seduces him (132). Moreover, Humbert says that he is not concerned with so-called sex at all (133). By doing so,

we see how he tries to prove to us that he is a victim and that he is defenceless when exposed to the seductive nature of Lolita and her power as a bewitching nymphet: “Anybody can imagine those elements of animality. A great endeavour lures me on: to fix once and for all the perilous magic of nymphets” (133).

Furthermore, Humbert manages to distract the reader when blaming Lolita for being vulgar and seductive. He portrays her as someone who knows no shame and he also claims that he was not even her first lover (135). Humbert almost succeeds in convincing the readers about his innocence. He displaces his disturbing actions and the reader can therefore be deceived into sympathizing with him. However, if the reader is attentive enough and keeps in mind that Humbert is putting on a show, he or she will not be fooled. Still, there are passages in the text in which Humbert admits his guilt. He shows early in the novel that he is actually aware of his degrading and dangerous desires and that he is as naïve as only a pervert can be (25-26). He also tells the reader that he is a “lanky, bigboned, woolly-chested Humbert Humbert, with thick black eyebrows and a queer accent, and a cesspoolful of rotting monsters behind his slow boyish smile” (44) and that he has a monstrous appetite for miserable nymphets (140). The way Humbert pictures himself shows that he is aware that he is a quite repulsive person. He is not as innocent after all.

Another sign of Humbert’s guilt is when Lolita confronts Humbert: “I was a daisy-fresh girl, and look what you’ve done to me. I ought to call the police and tell them you raped me. Oh, you dirty, dirty old man” (140). This quote reveals that Humbert has hurt Lolita and that she has real feelings. Still, such direct accusations from Lolita are rare and the reader might question why Humbert allows Lolita to raise her voice like that. It might be a sign of remorse and guilt, even though it is not until the end that Humbert seems to realize the tragedy of Lolita’s destroyed childhood. However, one of the most evident signs of guilt appears in the end of the novel when Humbert has lost Lolita. “I would be a knave to say, and

the reader a fool to believe, that the shock of losing Lolita cured me of pederosis. My accursed nature could not change..." (255). In addition, he confesses that he has "hurt too much too many bodies with my twisted poor hands to be proud of them" (272). Nevertheless, even though he admits his guilt, he also wants to assure us about his love for Lolita: "I loved you. I was a pentapod monster, but I loved you. I was despicable and brutal, and turpid and everything, *mais je t'aimais, je t'aimais!* And there were times when I knew how you felt, and it was hell to know it, my little one. Lolita girl, brave Dolly Schiller" (283). It seems as if Humbert finally admits what he has done to Lolita and that he is indeed guilty of doing her harm. Yet, he does not stop justifying himself:

You may jeer at me and threaten to clear the court, but until I am gagged and half-throttled, I will shout my poor truth. I insist the world know how much I loved my Lolita, this Lolita, pale and polluted, and big with another's child, but still grey-eyed, still sooty-lashed, still auburn and almond, still Carmencita, still mine. (276)

Humbert admits his guilt but at the same time he is trying to justify his actions by assuring us that he loved her. He almost makes a case for himself. However, the passage also reveals his disturbing feelings for her, as he describes her features and that she is still his, "still Carmencita." Therefore, Humbert's self-revelation and self-accusation should not be taken too seriously. On the one hand, he admits his guilt by calling himself a despicable and brutal monster. On the other hand, he is trying to convince the reader that he is innocent by justifying himself and placing the blame on Lolita. The way Humbert portrays himself as both guilty and innocent is very confusing for the reader. However, his disturbing actions can never be accepted. Therefore, the reader will probably be able to take a distance from Humbert's seductive self-justification and never be fooled to think that Humbert's self-

castigation is genuine. His self-accusation seems like a show for his readers, an attempt to deceive us that he is innocent of any disturbing actions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was to use deconstructive theory to investigate how the use of binary oppositions in *Lolita* affects the comprehension of the text. I sought to find an answer to why Humbert is considered to be a deceiving and unreliable narrator that should not be trusted. My study shows that Humbert's unreliability as a narrator lies in his questionable morals. The way he sees Lolita as real and imagined and the way he sees himself as both guilty and innocent reveals incongruities. This testifies to Humbert's unreliable nature. Humbert is constantly trying to glorify his attraction to Lolita. He wants his reader to believe that no one can reject her nymphic features and that he cannot be blamed for his disturbing actions. By seeing Lolita as imagined, as an object, as a creation and as a daemon, he tries to justify his actions. He thinks that an imagined Lolita cannot be hurt and therefore he is allowed to do horrible things to her without feeling guilty. Humbert is very persistent when it comes to gaining the reader's sympathy. With beautiful language and seductive self-justification, he almost manages to make a case for himself in winning the reader over. However, Humbert's unreliability as a narrator is hinted at already in the beginning of the text and therefore the reader is aware that Humbert is trying to deceive his audience with every means possible. Thus, the self-castigation shown in the end of the novel cannot be taken seriously. Even though he shows guilt for hurting Lolita, he still cannot resist trying to justify what he has done to her.

In conclusion, the binary oppositions real versus imagined and guilt versus innocence serve to unmask Humbert's unreliable narration. Horrible actions are covered when he describes Lolita as imagined. However, when she is portrayed as a real person Humbert

becomes guilty of his actions. The way he is constantly switching from describing Lolita as real and imagined and the way he is changing from self-castigation to self-justification reveals Humbert's ambiguousness. Humbert's sophisticated verbal game creates a gap between the elegant and the horrible worlds. The reader is almost fooled to become trapped in this gap and Humbert almost succeeds in convincing his readers to sympathize with him. Therefore, the binary oppositions function as an implicit message from the implied author to the reader that the reader should watch out. If the reader is attentive enough, he or she will understand that they signal Humbert's questionable morals. The reader will not be able to identify himself or herself with Humbert as his values are in complete opposition with the general norms. Consequently, the effect of the binary opposition is that they signal morals and values that stand in conflict with those expressed by the implied author and therefore Humbert cannot be trusted with the telling of his tale.

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