

“Lolita” by Vladimir Nabokov [B2]

Il più noto romanzo del maestro russo scritto in inglese fu vietato nel Regno Unito e oggetto di polemiche in mezzo mondo. Ancora oggi è argomento di dibattito sulla proverbiale distinzione tra autore e opera.

A tragicomic masterpiece by the Russian-born US writer and poet Vladimir Nabokov. Lolita was described by the author as his “most difficult book” but also (ironically) his “special favourite.” The book takes the form of a memoir produced by an anonymous literature professor who writes from prison under the pseudonym Humbert Humbert.

CHALLENGING

Humbert is a self-pitying and predatory paedophile who narrates a creepy tale of articulate self-delusion. As a young boy, his beloved girlfriend dies, leaving him heartbroken. This apparently explains his adult ‘devotion’ to children and adolescent girls, aged from nine to fourteen, who he refers to as his “nymphets”. “My world was split [...] While my body knew what it craved for, my mind rejected my body’s every plea. One moment I was ashamed and frightened, another recklessly optimistic. Taboos strangled me. Psychoanalysts wooed me [...] But let us be prim and civilised. Humbert Humbert tried hard to be good. Really and truly, he did.” “Il mio mondo era spaccato in due. [...]. Mentre il mio corpo sapeva per che cosa spasimava, la mia mente respingeva ogni suo appello. Ero a tratti spaventato e pieno di vergogna, a tratti pervaso da un temerario ottimismo. I tabù mi strangolavano. Gli psicoanalisti mi corteggiavano [...] Ma basta; comportiamoci con decoro e civiltà. Humbert Humbert si è sforzato in tutti i modi di fare il bravo, dico sul serio.”

NOT GOOD

Humbert, however, is anything but good. After his marriage ends in divorce, he travels from France to the US, spending time in psychiatric hospitals. He

ends up lodging with Mrs. Charlotte Haze in New England. There he meets Dolores, Mrs. Haze's twelve-year-old daughter. Also called Dolly, Lo or Lola, Humbert becomes **infatuated** with the girl, who he calls Lolita. "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta." "Lolita, luce della mia vita, fuoco dei miei lombi. Mio peccato, anima mia. Lo-li-ta: la punta della lingua compie un percorso di tre passi sul palato per battere, al terzo, contro i denti. Lo. Li. Ta."

MORAL TRICKERY

Humbert marries Mrs. Haze, and continues with his 'seduction' of Lolita. Mrs. Haze discovers his plan, but is killed in a road accident before she can tell anyone. Humbert takes Lolita on a trip. The narrator **tricks** the reader, trying to make him or her complicit in his version of the story. He continually implies that Lolita is in charge, and that he merely wants the best for her. At times, however, he becomes impatient, and we are shocked into a **reminder** that Lolita is just a kid. "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." "E lei, la bambina tipo, leggeva i fumetti di un quotidiano mettendosi le dita nel naso, indifferente alla mia estasi come a un oggetto su cui si fosse seduta per sbaglio - una scarpa, una bambola, il manico di una racchetta - e che per pigrizia non avesse voglia di spostare."

CONTROLLING

Humbert is jealous and controlling. If Lolita does not do as he **commands**, he threatens to send her to an orphanage. She has little option but to stay with him. When she gets sick, Humbert is forced to take Lolita to the hospital. However, she escapes. Humbert searches everywhere and after years finally finds her. However, Lolita is now seventeen, married and pregnant. Humbert makes one last **plea**: "'I want you to leave [...] this awful hole, and come to live with me, and die with me, and everything with me [...]' 'You're crazy,'

she said, her features working [...] 'Is there no hope of you coming? Tell me only this [...]' 'No,' she said, 'it is quite out of the question.'” “«Voglio che tu lasci [...] questa topaia orrenda, e che venga a vivere con me, e a morire con me, e tutto con me» [...] «Sei pazzo» disse, il viso contratto[...] «Non c'è speranza che tu venga? Dimmi soltanto questo [...]» «No,» disse «neanche a parlarne.»

TRAGEDY

Humbert destroys Lolita's childhood to **fuel** his fantasy. When he leaves her, he finds and murders the man who helped Lolita escape from the hospital — the reason that he **ends up** in prison. Nabokov completed Lolita in 1953, but **struggled** to find a publisher. It was finally published in France in 1955, but later **banned** in France and in Britain. This only added to its **notoriety**. Published in the US in 1958 and republished in France and Britain the following year, Lolita became a literary sensation. Brilliantly **crafted**, funny and deeply disturbing, it retains its power dynamic, revealing uncomfortable truths about exploitation that takes the **guise** of love.

Glossary

- **tricks** = ingannare
- **commands** = ordinare
- **fuel** = alimentare
- **banned** = vietare
- **self-pitying** = autocommiserativo
- **lodging** = alloggiare
- **reminder** = promemoria
- **notoriety** = cattiva fama
- **crafted** = creare
- **guise** = sembianza
- **predatory** = predatore
- **creepy** = raccapricciante
- **self-delusion** = l'illudersi
- **nymphets** = ninfette
- **infatuated** = infatuato, infervorato
- **plea** = supplica
- **ends up** = finire
- **struggled** = avere difficoltà