[Template:About](/wiki/Template:About" \o "Template:About) [Template:Redirect](/wiki/Template:Redirect) [Template:Plot](/wiki/Template:Plot) [Template:Use dmy dates](/wiki/Template:Use_dmy_dates) [Template:Infobox book](/wiki/Template:Infobox_book) ***Lolita*** is a novel by [Vladimir Nabokov](/wiki/Vladimir_Nabokov), written in English and published in 1955 in Paris, in 1958 in New York City, and in 1959 in London. Nabokov's own translation of the book into Russian was published by Phaedra Publishers in New York in 1967. The novel is notable for its controversial subject: the protagonist and [unreliable narrator](/wiki/Unreliable_narrator), a middle-aged literature professor called Humbert Humbert, is obsessed with the 12-year-old Dolores Haze, with whom he becomes sexually involved after he becomes her stepfather. "Lolita" is his private nickname for Dolores.

*Lolita* quickly attained a classic status; it is today regarded as one of the prime achievements in [20th century literature](/wiki/20th_century_in_literature), though also among the most controversial. The novel was adapted into [a film](/wiki/Lolita_(1962_film)) by [Stanley Kubrick](/wiki/Stanley_Kubrick) in 1962, and [again in 1997](/wiki/Lolita_(1997_film)) by [Adrian Lyne](/wiki/Adrian_Lyne). It has also been adapted several times for the stage and has been the subject of two operas, two ballets, and an acclaimed but commercially unsuccessful [Broadway musical](/wiki/Broadway_theater). Its assimilation into popular culture is such that the name "Lolita" has been used to imply that a young girl is sexually precocious.

*Lolita* is included on [*TIME* magazine's](/wiki/Time_Magazine) [list of the 100 best English-language novels](/wiki/Time's_List_of_the_100_Best_Novels) to have been published from 1923 to 2005. It is also fourth on the [Modern Library's](/wiki/Modern_Library) 1998 list of the [100 best novels](/wiki/Modern_Library_100_Best_Novels) of the 20th century, and holds a place in the [Bokklubben World Library](/wiki/Bokklubben_World_Library), a 2002 collection of the most celebrated books in history.

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## Plot summary[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

Humbert Humbert, a European literary scholar, describes the premature death of his childhood sweetheart, Annabel Leigh. He suggests his unconsummated love for her caused his [fixation](/wiki/Fixation_(psychology)) with [nymphets](/wiki/Lolita_(term)#Nymphet) (girls aged 9–14) and indulges in his sexual fantasies by pretending to read a book in a public park and being aroused by nymphets playing near him, as well as by visiting a prostitute who he believes is 16 or 17, and imagining her to be three years younger. After a misadventure when he requests a nymphet-aged girl from a [pimp](/wiki/Pimp), Humbert marries an adult woman with childish mannerisms, Valeria, to allay suspicion. His marriage with Valeria dissolves, after she admits to having an affair with a Russian taxi driver. Humbert wants to kill her, but Valeria and the taxi driver leave before he gets the chance. After another visit to a psychiatric ward after a mental breakdown, he moves to the small [New England](/wiki/New_England) town of Ramsdale to write.

Humbert fantasizes about meeting and eventually [molesting](/wiki/Child_molestation) the 12-year-old daughter of an impoverished family, the McCoos, from whom he agreed to rent an apartment. Upon his arrival in Ramsdale, however, he discovers that their house has burned down. A landlady named Mrs. Charlotte Haze offers to accommodate him instead, and Humbert visits her residence out of politeness. Humbert plans to decline Charlotte's offer until he sees her 12-year-old daughter, Dolores (born 1935[[1]](#cite_note-1)), known as "Lo," "Lola," or "Dolly". He becomes infatuated with her, in part because of her uncanny resemblance to Annabel, and agrees to stay at Charlotte's house only to be near her daughter, whom he privately nicknames "Lolita."

Humbert starts a diary in which he keeps detailed descriptions of Lolita's characteristics, along with moments that they spend together. The diary also contains hateful comments about Charlotte, along with a description of a picture in a magazine of a playwright (Clare Quilty[[2]](#cite_note-2)), who Lolita has a crush on and who Humbert resembles.

Charlotte, Lolita, her friend Mary, and Humbert plan to go to Hourglass Lake for a picnic one Sunday. However, Mary's mother phones to tell them that Mary is running a fever and that she can't go. Mrs. Haze postpones the picnic and, as a result, Lolita refuses to go to church with her. Mrs. Haze leaves for church and Humbert and Lolita are left alone. While the two sing a song, Humbert secretly ejaculates in his pants as Lolita sits on his lap. She does not notice and leaves for the movies. After returning from a lunch in town, Charlotte tells Humbert that Lolita is going to camp Thursday and she won't return until the next school year.

That Thursday, before getting in the car, Lolita runs back into the house and kisses Humbert goodbye. As Charlotte, who has fallen in love with Humbert, drives Lolita to [summer camp](/wiki/Summer_camp), the housemaid delivers a letter to Humbert from Charlotte telling him that he must either marry her or move out to avoid embarrassment. To continue living near Lolita, Humbert agrees to marry Charlotte. After finding Humbert's diary and learning his true feelings, Charlotte confronts him, calling him a "detestable, abominable, criminal fraud." As Humbert goes into the kitchen to get them drinks, Charlotte runs out of the house with the letters that she had just written, but is killed by a passing car before she can mail them. A little girl gives Humbert the letters, and he later examines them: one was to Lolita telling her they were moving, another to a boarding school in which Lolita was to be enlisted, and a third to Humbert that suggested a possible reuniting between him and Charlotte in the future.

Humbert retrieves Lolita from camp, lying that Charlotte has been hospitalized, and takes Lolita to a hotel, where he plans to use a [sleeping pill](/wiki/Sleeping_pill) on Lolita and [rape](/wiki/Rape) her while she is unconscious. As he waits for the pill to take effect, he wanders through the hotel and meets a man (Quilty[[3]](#cite_note-3)) who inquires about Lolita. Humbert excuses himself from the strange conversation and returns to the hotel room. There, he finds that the sedative was too mild after seeing Lolita drifting in and out of sleep. He lies next to her all night, fantasizing about him and her together. However, it is she who initiates sex in the morning, showing him what she had learned at summer camp. On their way to the fake hospital that Charlotte was supposed to be staying at, Humbert tells Lolita that her mother is dead. Thereafter Lolita and Humbert drive around the country, moving from state to state and motel to motel. To keep Lolita from going to the police, Humbert tells her that if he is arrested, she will become a [ward of the state](/wiki/Ward_(law)) and lose all her clothes and belongings. He also bribes her with food, money, or permission to attend fun events in return for sexual favors. After a year of touring North America, the two settle in another New England town, where Lolita is enrolled in a [girls' school](/wiki/Single-sex_education). Humbert becomes very possessive and strict, forbidding Lolita to take part in after-school activities or to associate with boys. The headmistress of the school see his strictness as the concern of a loving, though old-fashioned, parent. Humbert reluctantly grants Lolita permission to join the school play in exchange for more sexual favors. The play she joins is written by Mr. Clare Quilty, but Humbert doesn't know it. Just before opening night, Lolita and Humbert have a ferocious argument, and Lolita runs away. Humbert searches frantically until he finds her bike next to the phone booth she was using. She brushes the phone call off and reconciles with him, saying she wants to go on another road trip with him, only this time she gets to choose where they go.

As Lolita and Humbert drive westward again, Humbert becomes suspicious that someone is following them, first thinking it's a cop and then later one of Lolita's admirers from school. Lolita falls ill and must convalesce in a hospital, while Humbert stays in a nearby motel. The hospital staff tells Humbert in the morning that her uncle checked her out. Humbert embarks upon a frantic search to find Lolita and her abductor, retracing his steps to every hotel that they'd been to thus far, but fails to track them. During his search, Humbert has a two-year relationship (ending in 1952) with a woman named Rita, whom he describes as a "kind, good sport" who "solemnly approve[s]" of his search for Lolita, while knowing none of the details.

Humbert receives a letter from Lolita, now 17, who tells him that she is married, pregnant, and in desperate need of money. Humbert tracks down the address and finds Lolita, but her husband is not the man that kidnapped her. He promises to give her money in exchange for the name of the man who abducted her. She reveals that Clare Quilty checked her out of the hospital and tried to make her star in one of his [pornographic films](/wiki/Pornographic_film); but expelled her upon refusal because she only wanted to be with Quilty. She worked odd jobs before meeting and marrying her husband, Dick, who knows nothing about her past. Although she looks much older now, Humbert realizes that he still loves Lolita and repeatedly asks her to leave Dick and go with him, which she refuses. He gives her $4,000, which is much more than what she asked for, and then leaves. As he leaves, she smiles and shouts goodbye as if he was her own father. Humbert tracks down the dentist who knows where to find Quilty, and later kills Quilty in his own mansion. Shortly afterwards, he is arrested for driving on the wrong side of the road and running a red light. The narrative closes with Humbert's final words to Lolita in which he wishes her well, and reveals the novel in its [metafiction](/wiki/Metafiction) to be the memoirs of his life, only to be published after he and Lolita have both died. The novel's fictional [foreword](/wiki/Foreword) states that Humbert dies of [coronary thrombosis](/wiki/Coronary_thrombosis) after completing the manuscript, just one or two months after getting arrested. It also states that "Mrs. Richard F. Schiller" (Lolita) died giving birth to a [stillborn](/wiki/Stillborn) girl on Christmas Day, 1952, at the age of 17, a month after Humbert's death on November 16, 1952.

## Character descriptions[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

* Clarence Choate Clark, Esq. - Humbert’s lawyer and cousin of John Ray, Jr., now working in the District of Columbia. He's mentioned in the Foreword.
* John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. - Narrator of the Foreword of *Lolita*. He's the cousin of Clarence Clark, who asked him to edit the memoir of Humbert Humbert. He was recently awarded the Poling Prize for the book, “Do the Senses make Sense?” Ray doesn't want to glorify HH, but believes that *Lolita* can be described by the word “offensive" which is "a synonym for ‘unusual’; and a great work of art is of course always original.”[[1]](#cite_note-1)\* Humbert Humbert (H.H.) - *Lolita*'s protagonist and narrator. He was born in Paris 1910 and died November 16, 1952 of heart failure, a few days before his trial. His father was French and Austrian, a Swiss citizen, and owner of a hotel on the Riviera. His mother was English and died at a picnic by lightning when he was three. He fell in love in his teens with a girl named Annabel and her death scarred, cursing him to always love girls in that age group. After many women, he finally finds the 12-year-old girl that he loves, Lolita. He doesn't become self-aware of his crimes until the end of the novel. He writes his memoir, *Lolita*, in a prison cell, while awaiting his trial for murdering Clare Quilty.
* Annabel Leigh - Humbert's first love when he was 13. She was half-English, half-Dutch. She stayed at Humbert's father's hotel during one summer with her strict parents. She and Humbert almost had intercourse on two separate occasions, but both were interrupted. At the end of the summer, she left with her family and four months later she died of Typhus in Corfu.
* Monique - H.H.’s 16 to 17-year-old prostitute that had intercourse with Humbert three times. Out of all the sexual events with prostitutes in his life, she brought him the most pleasure, due to her nymphic echo. He canceled their last encounter because she seemed to be getting older each time he saw her, and he wanted to preserve his memory of her in that state.
* Valeria - Daughter of a Polish doctor, who treats H.H. for dizziness and tachycardia. Valeria is in her late twenties to early thirties (Humbert's not particularly sure due to a bad passport). Humbert decides to marry her because he feels like a wife would flower within him morals that he lacks and keep his sex drive under control. She acts like a little girl, which Humbert likes, however, she is still a woman and he doesn't like having sex with her unless there is an extreme need. Their marriage lasts from 1935-1939. After Humbert tells Valeria they're moving to America, Valeria admits that she was having an affair with a taxi driver, who she runs off with. She dies in 1945 while giving childbirth.
* Maximovich - A taxi driver and Valeria’s fling. He's a "stocky White Russian ex-colonel with a bushy mustache and a crew cut," says Humbert, “short but broad-shouldered Maximovich seemed made of pig iron.” He is very courteous and polite to Humbert as he takes Valeria away. Much later in life, he and Valeria move to California and participate in a well-paid, year-long experiment conducted by an American ethnologist, where they, along with other participants, had to eat bananas and dates in a constant position on all fours. Humbert was pleased by this news.
* The McCoo Family - Humbert's cousins who were going to let Humbert live with them in America after he got out of rehab to relax. Humbert was also excited to get to know their nymphet daughter. When he arrived in their small town of Ramsdale, however, he found that the McCoo's house had been burned down and that he'd have to live with a neighbor, Mrs. Haze.
* Louise - The Haze's housemaid.
* Mrs. Haze or Charlotte Haze - Lolita's mom. A woman in her mid-thirties with simple but not unattractive features, who resembles [Marlene Dietrich](/wiki/Marlene_Dietrich) and also smokes like her. She and Lolita have only lived in Ramsdale for about two years. She's very strict with Lolita and doesn't seem to like her around the house, especially with Humbert there. She sends Lolita to summer camp and proposes boarding school. Charlotte falls in love with Humbert because of his European charm, and they get married after she gives him the ultimatum to either staying and getting married or leave and never come back. She also wants to know every woman that H.H. has ever been with because she is jealous. Even after finding out Humbert is a pedophile, Charlotte explains in one of three letters that she might consider reuniting with him one day. As she runs across the road to send these letters, she is killed by a car. Charlotte appears to have always wanted to be a sophisticated European, but she was stuck in an American body and mind.
* Frederick Beale, Jr. - The man that hit Charlotte with his car and killed her. He explains to Humbert that it was all her fault because she ran in front of him.
* Dolores Haze (Lolita) - The object of Humbert's obsession. She's a 12-year-old nymphet, daughter of Charlotte Haze, flirty, and playful. Humbert falls in love with her at first sight in the Haze's piazza, where she's half-naked wearing sunglasses. She initially has a crush on Humbert. However, she goes to summer camp and almost forgets about Humbert while fooling around with a boy named Charlie. She also has a huge crush on a playwright, Clare Quilty. After Humbert picks her up from camp, she seduces Humbert at a hotel called The Enchanted Hunters. When she finds out her mother has died, she realizes she's trapped with Humbert and goes on a road trip around the country with him. She can't tell the authorities about Humbert because Humbert says they'd put her in foster home. Humbert eventually enrolls her into an all girls school to give her an education. As time goes by, she gets to know girls her own age and starts to act out, asking for more money and more freedoms in exchange for sexual favors for Humbert. She eventually escapes Humbert with Quilty, and then later marries Dick Schiller, who she gets pregnant with at the age of 17. She dies on Christmas Day of 1952 during childbirth. Her child is a stillborn.
* Mona Dahl - Another girl that goes to Lolita's Beardsely School for Girls and is also in the play with Lolita. She appears to have a crush on Humbert whenever they interact and is said to have already been with a marine. She never gives away Lolita's secrets to Humbert. In the Foreword, it's revealed that many years later she is a student in Paris.
* Mrs. Pratt - The Beardsely School for Girls headmistress. She explains to Humbert that Lolita appears to not be sexually developing correctly and asks that he informs her and lets her join the school's play.
* Gaston Godin - He's a well-liked French professor at Beardsley College. He plays chess with Humbert in his room full of pictures of little boys. No one seems to notice the boys except for Humbert. Humbert doesn't think he's very smart.
* Clare Quilty - He's an American dramatist, born in Ocean City, New Jersey, 1911. Lolita has had a crush on him for a while. His family knows her family. He is also a pornographer and asks Lolita to participate after stealing her away from Humbert. He is murdered by Humbert in his own mansion. He is known to be H.H.'s doppelganger, sophisticated and a nymphet lover alike. His importance is not revealed until the end of the book.
* Rita - Humbert meets her after losing Lolita. She is a drinker and very self-conscious. She believe that one day Humbert will leave her like all men do, and after two years, he does. It says in the Foreword that she later married a proprietor of a hotel in Florida.
* Ivor Quilty - Clare Quilty’s uncle, and a dentist. He's always known the Haze family, which is how Clare Quilty got to know Lolita at such a young age. Humbert tricks Ivor by engaging him in small talk while appearing to be getting dental work done and immediately leaves after Ivor tells him where Clare lives.

## Erotic motifs and controversy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

*Lolita* is frequently described as an "erotic novel", both by some critics but also in a standard reference work on literature *Facts on File: Companion to the American Short Story*.[[4]](#cite_note-4) *The* [*Great Soviet Encyclopedia*](/wiki/Great_Soviet_Encyclopedia) called *Lolita* "an experiment in combining an erotic novel with an instructive [novel of manners](/wiki/Novel_of_manners)".[[5]](#cite_note-5) The same description of the novel is found in [Desmond Morris's](/wiki/Desmond_Morris) reference work *The Book of Ages*.[[6]](#cite_note-6) A survey of books for Women's Studies courses describes it as a "[tongue-in-cheek](/wiki/Tongue-in-cheek) erotic novel".[[7]](#cite_note-7) Books focused on the history of erotic literature such as Michael Perkins' *The Secret Record: Modern Erotic Literature* also so classify *Lolita*.[[8]](#cite_note-8) More cautious classifications have included a "novel with erotic motifs"[[9]](#cite_note-9) or one of "a number of works of classical erotic literature and art, and to novels that contain elements of eroticism, like ... [*Ulysses*](/wiki/Ulysses_(novel)) and [*Lady Chatterley's Lover*](/wiki/Lady_Chatterley's_Lover)".[[10]](#cite_note-10) However, this classification has been disputed. Malcolm Bradbury writes "at first famous as an erotic novel, *Lolita* soon won its way as a literary one—a late [modernist](/wiki/Modernism) distillation of the whole crucial mythology."[[11]](#cite_note-11) Samuel Schuman says that Nabokov "is a [surrealist](/wiki/Surrealism), linked to [Gogol](/wiki/Nikolai_Gogol), [Dostoyevsky](/wiki/Fyodor_Dostoyevsky), and [Kafka](/wiki/Franz_Kafka). *Lolita* is characterized by irony and sarcasm. It is not an erotic novel."[[12]](#cite_note-12) [Lance Olsen](/wiki/Lance_Olsen) writes: "The first 13 chapters of the text, culminating with the oft-cited scene of Lo unwittingly stretching her legs across Humbert's excited lap ... are the only chapters suggestive of the erotic."[[13]](#cite_note-13) Nabokov himself observes in the novel's afterword that a few readers were "misled. [by the opening of the book] ... into assuming this was going to be a lewd book ... [expecting] the rising succession of erotic scenes; when these stopped, the readers stopped, too, and felt bored."[[14]](#cite_note-14)

## Style and interpretation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

The novel is a [tragicomedy](/wiki/Tragicomedy) narrated by Humbert, who riddles the narrative with [word play](/wiki/Word_play) and his wry observations of [American culture](/wiki/American_culture). His humor provides an effective counterpoint to the [pathos](/wiki/Pathos) of the [tragic](/wiki/Tragedy) plot. The novel's flamboyant style is characterized by [double entendres](/wiki/Double_entendre), multilingual [puns](/wiki/Pun), [anagrams](/wiki/Anagram), and [coinages](/wiki/Neologism) such as *nymphet*, a word that has since had a life of its own and can be found in most dictionaries, and the lesser-used "faunlet". The name of one of the novel's characters, "Vivian Darkbloom", is an anagram of the author's name.

Several times, the narrator begs the reader to understand that he is not proud of his rape of Lolita and is filled with remorse. At one point he listens to the sounds of children playing outdoors and is stricken with guilt at the realization that he robbed Lolita of her childhood. When he is reunited with the 17-year-old Lolita, he realizes that he still desires her, even though she no longer is the nymphet of his dreams.

Most writers see Humbert as an [unreliable narrator](/wiki/Unreliable_narrator) and credit Nabokov's powers as an ironist. For [Richard Rorty](/wiki/Richard_Rorty), in his interpretation of *Lolita* in [*Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*](/wiki/Contingency,_Irony,_and_Solidarity), Humbert is a "monster of incuriosity." Nabokov himself described Humbert as "a vain and cruel wretch"[[15]](#cite_note-15)[[16]](#cite_note-16) and "a hateful person."[[17]](#cite_note-17) Critics have further noted that, since the novel is a first person narrative by Humbert, the novel gives very little information about what Lolita is personally like, that in effect she has been silenced by not being the book's narrator. Nomi Tamir-Ghez writes "Not only is Lolita's voice silenced, her point of view, the way she sees the situation and feels about it, is rarely mentioned and can be only surmised by the reader ... since it is Humbert who tells the story ... throughout most of the novel, the reader is absorbed in Humbert's feelings".[[18]](#cite_note-18) Similarly Mica Howe and Sarah Appleton Aguiar write that the novel silences and objectifies Lolita.[[19]](#cite_note-19) Christine Clegg notes that this is a recurring theme in criticism of the novel in the 1990s.[[20]](#cite_note-20) Actor [Brian Cox](/wiki/Brian_Cox_(actor)), who played Humbert in a 2009 one-man stage monologue based on the novel, stated that the novel is "not about Lolita as a flesh and blood entity. It's Lolita as a memory". He concluded that a stage monologue would be truer to the book than any film could possibly be.[[21]](#cite_note-21) Elizabeth Janeway writing in [*The New York Times Book Review*](/wiki/The_New_York_Times_Book_Review) holds "Humbert is every man who is driven by desire, wanting his Lolita so badly that it never occurs to him to consider her as a human being, or as anything but a dream-figment made flesh".[[22]](#cite_note-22) Clegg sees the novel's non-disclosure of Lolita's feelings as directly linked to the fact that her "real" name is Dolores and (in the novel but not the film) only Humbert refers to her as Lolita.[[23]](#cite_note-23) Humbert also states he has effectively "[solipsized](/wiki/Solipsism)" Lolita early in the novel.[[24]](#cite_note-24) Eric Lemay of Northwestern University writes: [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

In 2003, [Iranian](/wiki/Iranian_people) expatriate [Azar Nafisi](/wiki/Azar_Nafisi) published the memoir [*Reading Lolita in Tehran*](/wiki/Reading_Lolita_in_Tehran) about a covert women's reading group. In an [NPR](/wiki/NPR) interview Nafisi contrasts the sorrowful and seductive sides of Dolores/Lolita's character. She notes "Because her name is not Lolita, her real name is Dolores which as you know in Latin means dolour, so her real name is associated with sorrow and with anguish and with innocence, while Lolita becomes a sort of light-headed, seductive, and airy name. The Lolita of our novel is both of these at the same time and in our culture here today we only associate it with one aspect of that little girl and the crassest interpretation of her." Following Nafisi's comments, the NPR interviewer, Madeleine Brand, lists as embodiments of the latter side of Lolita, "the [Long Island Lolita](/wiki/Amy_Fisher), [Britney Spears](/wiki/Britney_Spears), the [Olsen twins](/wiki/Olsen_twins), and [Sue Lyon](/wiki/Sue_Lyon) in Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita*".[[25]](#cite_note-25) For Nafisi, the essence of the novel is Humbert's [solipsism](/wiki/Solipsism) and his erasure of Lolita's independent [identity](/wiki/Identity_(social_science)). She writes: "Lolita was given to us as Humbert's creature […] To reinvent her, Humbert must take from Lolita her own real history and replace it with his own ... Yet she does have a past. Despite Humbert's attempts to orphan Lolita by robbing her of her history, that past is still given to us in glimpses."[[26]](#cite_note-26) One of the novel's early champions, [Lionel Trilling](/wiki/Lionel_Trilling), warned in 1958 of the moral difficulty in interpreting a book with so eloquent and so self-deceived a narrator: "we find ourselves the more shocked when we realize that, in the course of reading the novel, we have come virtually to condone the violation it presents ... we have been seduced into conniving in the violation, because we have permitted our fantasies to accept what we know to be revolting."[[27]](#cite_note-27) A minority of critics have accepted Humbert's version of events at face value. In 1958, [Dorothy Parker](/wiki/Dorothy_Parker) described the novel as "the engrossing, anguished story of a man, a man of taste and culture, who can love only little girls" and Lolita as "a dreadful little creature, selfish, hard, vulgar, and foul-tempered".[[28]](#cite_note-28) In 1959, novelist [Robertson Davies](/wiki/Robertson_Davies) excused the narrator entirely, writing that the theme of *Lolita* is "not the corruption of an innocent child by a cunning adult, but the exploitation of a weak adult by a corrupt child. This is no pretty theme, but it is one with which social workers, magistrates and psychiatrists are familiar."[[29]](#cite_note-29) In his essay on [Stalinism](/wiki/Stalinism) [*Koba the Dread*](/wiki/Koba_the_Dread), [Martin Amis](/wiki/Martin_Amis) proposes that *Lolita* is an elaborate [metaphor](/wiki/Metaphor) for the [totalitarianism](/wiki/Totalitarianism) that destroyed the Russia of Nabokov's childhood (though Nabokov states in his afterword that he "[detests] symbols and [allegories](/wiki/Allegory)"). Amis interprets it as a story of [tyranny](/wiki/Tyranny) told from the point of view of the [tyrant](/wiki/Tyrant). "Nabokov, in all his fiction, writes with incomparable penetration about delusion and coercion, about cruelty and lies," he says. "Even *Lolita*, especially *Lolita*, is a study in tyranny."

## Publication and reception[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

Nabokov finished *Lolita* on 6 December 1953, five years after starting it.[[30]](#cite_note-30) Because of its subject matter, Nabokov intended to publish it pseudonymously (although the anagrammatic character Vivian Darkbloom would tip off the alert reader).[[31]](#cite_note-31) The manuscript was turned down, with more or less regret, by [Viking](/wiki/Viking_Press), [Simon & Schuster](/wiki/Simon_&_Schuster), [New Directions](/wiki/New_Directions_Publishing), [Farrar, Straus](/wiki/Farrar,_Straus_and_Giroux), and [Doubleday](/wiki/Doubleday_(publisher)).[[32]](#cite_note-32) After these refusals and warnings, he finally resorted to publication in France. Via his translator Doussia Ergaz, it reached [Maurice Girodias](/wiki/Maurice_Girodias) of [Olympia Press](/wiki/Olympia_Press), "three-quarters of [whose] list was pornographic trash".[[33]](#cite_note-33) Underinformed about Olympia, overlooking hints of Girodias's approval of the conduct of a protagonist Girodias presumed was based on the author, and despite warnings from [Morris Bishop](/wiki/Morris_Bishop), his friend at [Cornell](/wiki/Cornell_University), Nabokov signed a contract with Olympia Press for publication of the book, to come out under his own name.[[34]](#cite_note-34) *Lolita* was published in September 1955, as a pair of green paperbacks "swarming with typographical errors".[[35]](#cite_note-35) Although the first printing of 5,000 copies sold out,[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) there were no substantial reviews. Eventually, at the very end of 1955, [Graham Greene](/wiki/Graham_Greene), in the London [*Sunday Times*](/wiki/The_Sunday_Times), called it one of the three best books of 1955.[[36]](#cite_note-36) This statement provoked a response from the London [*Sunday Express*](/wiki/Sunday_Express), whose editor [John Gordon](/wiki/John_Gordon_(journalist)) called it "the filthiest book I have ever read" and "sheer unrestrained pornography".[[37]](#cite_note-37) [British Customs](/wiki/Her_Majesty's_Customs_and_Excise) officers were then instructed by a panicked [Home Office](/wiki/Home_Office) to seize all copies entering the United Kingdom.[[38]](#cite_note-38) In December 1956, France followed suit, and the [Minister of the Interior](/wiki/Minister_of_the_Interior) banned *Lolita*;[[39]](#cite_note-39) the ban lasted for two years. Its eventual British publication by [Weidenfeld & Nicolson](/wiki/Weidenfeld_&_Nicolson) in London in 1959 was controversial enough to contribute to the end of the political career of the [Conservative](/wiki/Conservative_Party_(UK)) member of parliament [Nigel Nicolson](/wiki/Nigel_Nicolson), one of the company's partners.[[40]](#cite_note-40) The novel then appeared in [Danish](/wiki/Danish_(language)) and [Dutch](/wiki/Dutch_language) translations. Two editions of a [Swedish](/wiki/Swedish_language) translation were withdrawn at the author's request.[[41]](#cite_note-41)[[42]](#cite_note-42) Despite initial trepidation, there was no official response in the U.S., and the first American edition was issued by [G. P. Putnam's Sons](/wiki/G._P._Putnam's_Sons) in August 1958. The book was into a third printing within days and became the first since [*Gone with the Wind*](/wiki/Gone_with_the_Wind) to sell 100,000 copies in its first three weeks.[[43]](#cite_note-43) The novel continues to generate controversy today as modern society has become increasingly aware of the lasting damage created by [child sexual abuse](/wiki/Child_sexual_abuse). In 2008, an entire book was published on the best ways to teach the novel in a college classroom given that "its particular mix of narrative strategies, ornate allusive prose, and troublesome subject matter complicates its presentation to students".[[44]](#cite_note-44) In this book one author urges teachers to note that Lolita's suffering is noted in the book even if the main focus is on Humbert. Many critics describe Humbert as a [rapist](/wiki/Rape), notably [Azar Nafisi](/wiki/Azar_Nafisi) in her best-selling *Reading Lolita in Tehran*,[[45]](#cite_note-45) though in a survey of critics David Larmour notes that other interpreters of the novel have been reluctant to use that term.[[46]](#cite_note-46) Near the end of the novel, Humbert accuses himself of rape; however, after noting this, Nabokov biographer Brian Boyd tries to let Humbert off the hook on the grounds that Dolores was not a virgin and seduced Humbert in the morning of their hotel stay.[[47]](#cite_note-47) This perspective is vigorously disputed by Peter Rabinowitz in his essay "Lolita: Solipsized or Sodomized?".[[48]](#cite_note-48) In 1998, *Lolita* came fourth in [a list](/wiki/Modern_Library_100_Best_Novels) by the [Modern Library](/wiki/Modern_Library) of the greatest English-language novels of the 20th century.[[49]](#cite_note-49)

## Sources and links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

### Links in Nabokov's work[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

In 1928 Nabokov wrote a poem named *Lilith* (Лилит), depicting a sexually attractive underage girl who seduces the male protagonist just to leave him humiliated in public.[[50]](#cite_note-50) In 1939 he wrote a novella, *Volshebnik* (Волшебник), that was published only posthumously in 1986 in English translation as [*The Enchanter*](/wiki/The_Enchanter). It bears many similarities to *Lolita*, but also has significant differences: it takes place in Central Europe, and the protagonist is unable to consummate his passion with his stepdaughter, leading to his suicide. The theme of [hebophilia](/wiki/Hebophilia) was already touched on by Nabokov in his short story "[A Nursery Tale](/wiki/A_Nursery_Tale)", written in 1926. Also, in the 1932 [*Laughter in the Dark*](/wiki/Laughter_in_the_Dark_(novel)), Margot Peters is 16 and already had an affair when middle-aged Albinus becomes attracted to her.

In chapter three of the novel [*The Gift*](/wiki/The_Gift_(Nabokov_novel)) (written in Russian in 1935–37) the similar gist of *Lolita*[Template:'s](/wiki/Template:') first chapter is outlined to the protagonist, Fyodor Cherdyntsev, by his landlord Shchyogolev as an idea of a novel he would write "if I only had the time": a man marries a widow only to gain access to her young daughter, who resists all his passes. Shchyogolev says it happened "in reality" to a friend of his; it is made clear to the reader that it concerns himself and his stepdaughter Zina (15 at the time of Shchyogolev's marriage to her mother) who becomes the love of Fyodor's life.

In April 1947, Nabokov wrote to [Edmund Wilson](/wiki/Edmund_Wilson): "I am writing ... a short novel about a man who liked little girls—and it's going to be called *The Kingdom by the Sea*".[[51]](#cite_note-51) The work expanded into *Lolita* during the next eight years. Nabokov used the title *A Kingdom by the Sea* in his 1974 pseudo-autobiographical novel [*Look at the Harlequins!*](/wiki/Look_at_the_Harlequins!) for a *Lolita*-like book written by the narrator who, in addition, travels with his teenage daughter Bel from motel to motel after the death of her mother; later, his fourth wife is Bel's look-alike and shares her birthday.

In Nabokov's 1962 novel [*Pale Fire*](/wiki/Pale_Fire), the titular poem by fictional John Shade mentions Hurricane Lolita coming up the American east coast in 1958, and narrator Charles Kinbote (in the commentary later in the book) notes it, questioning why anyone would have chosen an obscure Spanish nickname for a hurricane. There were no hurricanes named Lolita [that year](/wiki/1958_Atlantic_hurricane_season), but that is the year that *Lolita* the novel was published in North America.

The unfinished novel [*The Original of Laura*](/wiki/The_Original_of_Laura), published posthumously, features the character Hubert H. Hubert, an older man preying upon then-child protagonist, Flora. Unlike those of Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*, Hubert's advances are unsuccessful.

### Literary pastiches, allusions and prototypes[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

The novel abounds in [allusions](/wiki/Allusion) to classical and modern literature. Virtually all of them have been noted in *The Annotated Lolita*, edited and annotated by [Alfred Appel, Jr.](/wiki/Alfred_Appel,_Jr.) Many are references to Humbert's own favorite poet, [Edgar Allan Poe](/wiki/Edgar_Allan_Poe).

Humbert Humbert's first love, Annabel Leigh, is named after the "maiden" in the poem "[Annabel Lee](/wiki/Annabel_Lee)" by Poe; this poem is alluded to many times in the novel, and its lines are borrowed to describe Humbert's love. A passage in chapter 11 [reuses](/wiki/Assemblage_(composition)) [verbatim](/wiki/Wiktionary:verbatim) Poe's phrase *...by the side of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride*.[[52]](#cite_note-52) In the opening of the novel, the phrase *Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, exhibit number one is what the seraphs, the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs, envied,* is a [pastiche](/wiki/Pastiche) of two passages of the poem, the *winged seraphs of heaven* (line 11), and *The angels, not half so happy in heaven, went envying her and me* (lines 21–2).[[53]](#cite_note-53) Nabokov originally intended Lolita to be called *The Kingdom by the Sea*,[[54]](#cite_note-54) drawing on the rhyme with Annabel Lee that was used in the first verse of Poe's work. A variant of this line is [reprised](/wiki/Reprise) in the opening of chapter one, which reads *...had I not loved, one summer, an initial girl-child. In a princedom by the sea*.[[53]](#cite_note-53) Humbert Humbert's double name recalls Poe's "[William Wilson](/wiki/William_Wilson_(short_story))", a tale in which the main character is haunted by his [doppelgänger](/wiki/Doppelgänger), paralleling to the presence of Humbert's own doppelgänger, Clare Quilty. Humbert is not, however, his real name, but a chosen pseudonym. The theme of the doppelgänger also occurs in Nabokov's earlier novel, [*Despair*](/wiki/Despair_(novel)).

Chapter 26 of Part One contains a [parody](/wiki/Parody) of [Joyce's](/wiki/James_Joyce) [stream of consciousness](/wiki/Stream_of_consciousness_(narrative_mode)).[[55]](#cite_note-55) Humbert Humbert's field of expertise is [French literature](/wiki/French_literature) (one of his jobs is writing a series of educational works that compare [French writers](/wiki/List_of_French_writers) to [English writers](/wiki/List_of_English_writers)), and as such there are several references to [French literature](/wiki/French_literature), including the authors [Gustave Flaubert](/wiki/Gustave_Flaubert), [Marcel Proust](/wiki/Marcel_Proust), [François Rabelais](/wiki/François_Rabelais), [Charles Baudelaire](/wiki/Charles_Baudelaire), [Prosper Mérimée](/wiki/Prosper_Mérimée), [Remy Belleau](/wiki/Remy_Belleau), [Honoré de Balzac](/wiki/Honoré_de_Balzac), and [Pierre de Ronsard](/wiki/Pierre_de_Ronsard).

Vladimir Nabokov was fond of [Lewis Carroll](/wiki/Lewis_Carroll) and had translated [*Alice in Wonderland*](/wiki/Alice_in_Wonderland) into Russian. He even called Carroll the "first Humbert Humbert".[[56]](#cite_note-56) *Lolita* contains a few brief allusions in the text to the *Alice* books, though overall Nabokov avoided direct allusions to Carroll. In her book, *Tramp: The Life of Charlie Chaplin*, Joyce Milton claims that a major inspiration for the novel was [Charlie Chaplin's](/wiki/Charlie_Chaplin) relationship with his second wife, [Lita Grey](/wiki/Lita_Grey), whose real name was Lillita and is often misstated as Lolita. Graham Vickers in his book *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov's Little Girl All Over Again* argues that the two major real-world predecessors of Humbert are Lewis Carroll and Charlie Chaplin. Although Appel's comprehensive *Annotated Lolita* contains no references to Charlie Chaplin, others have picked up several oblique references to Chaplin's life in Nabokov's book. Bill Delaney notes that at the end Lolita and her husband move to the [Alaskan](/wiki/Alaska) town of [Grey Star](/wiki/Grey_Star,_Alaska) while Chaplin's [*The Gold Rush*](/wiki/The_Gold_Rush), set in Alaska, was originally set to star Lita Grey. Lolita's first sexual encounter was with a boy named Charlie Holmes, whom Humbert describes as "the silent...but indefatigable Charlie." Chaplin had an artist paint Lita Grey in imitation of [Joshua Reynolds's](/wiki/Joshua_Reynolds) painting *The Age of Innocence*. When Humbert visits Lolita in a class at her school, he notes a print of the same painting in the classroom. Delaney's article notes many other parallels as well.[[57]](#cite_note-57) The foreword refers to "the monumental decision rendered December 6, 1933 by Hon. [John M. Woolsey](/wiki/John_M._Woolsey) in regard to another, considerably more outspoken book"—that is, the decision in the case [*United States v. One Book Called Ulysses*](/wiki/United_States_v._One_Book_Called_Ulysses), in which Woolsey ruled that [James Joyce's](/wiki/James_Joyce) [*Ulysses*](/wiki/Ulysses_(novel)) was not obscene and could be sold in the United States.

In chapter 29 of Part Two, Humbert comments that Lolita looks "like Botticelli's russet Venus—the same soft nose, the same blurred beauty", referencing [Sandro Botticelli's](/wiki/Sandro_Botticelli) depiction of [Venus](/wiki/Venus_(mythology)) in, perhaps, [*The Birth of Venus*](/wiki/The_Birth_of_Venus_(Botticelli)) or [*Venus and Mars*](/wiki/Venus_and_Mars_(Botticelli)).

In chapter 35 of Part Two, Humbert's "[death sentence](/wiki/Death_sentence)" on Quilty parodies the rhythm and use of [anaphora](/wiki/Anaphora_(rhetoric)) in [T. S. Eliot's](/wiki/T._S._Eliot) poem [*Ash Wednesday*](/wiki/Ash_Wednesday_(poem))*.*

Many other references to classical and [Romantic literature](/wiki/Romantic_literature) abound, including references to [Lord Byron's](/wiki/Lord_Byron) [*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*](/wiki/Childe_Harold's_Pilgrimage) and to the poetry of [Laurence Sterne](/wiki/Laurence_Sterne).

### Other possible real-life prototypes[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

In addition to the possible prototypes of Lewis Carroll and Charlie Chaplin mentioned above in [Allusions](/wiki/#Literary_pastiches.2C_allusions_and_prototypes), Alexander Dolinin suggests[[58]](#cite_note-58) that the prototype of Lolita was 11-year-old [Florence Horner](/wiki/Florence_Sally_Horner), kidnapped in 1948 by 50-year-old mechanic Frank La Salle, who had caught her stealing a five-cent notebook. La Salle traveled with her over various states for 21 months and is believed to have raped her. He claimed that he was an [FBI](/wiki/Federal_Bureau_of_Investigation) agent and threatened to "turn her in" for the theft and to send her to "a place for girls like you." The Horner case was not widely reported, but Dolinin notes various similarities in events and descriptions.

While Nabokov had already used the same basic idea — that of a [child molester](/wiki/Child_molestation) and his victim booking into a hotel as father and daughter—in his then-unpublished 1939 work [*The Enchanter*](/wiki/The_Enchanter) (*Волшебник*), he mentions the Horner case explicitly in Chapter 33 of Part II of *Lolita*: [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

### Heinz von Lichberg's "Lolita"[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

German academic [Michael Maar's](/wiki/Michael_Maar) book [*The Two Lolitas*](/wiki/The_Two_Lolitas)[[59]](#cite_note-59) describes his recent discovery of a 1916 German short story titled "Lolita" whose middle-aged narrator describes travelling abroad as a student. He takes a room as a lodger and instantly becomes obsessed with the preteen girl (also named Lolita) who lives in the same house. Maar has speculated that Nabokov may have had [cryptomnesia](/wiki/Cryptomnesia) (a "hidden memory" of the story that Nabokov was unaware of) while he was composing *Lolita* during the 1950s. Maar says that until 1937 Nabokov lived in the same section of Berlin as the author, Heinz von Eschwege (pen name: [Heinz von Lichberg](/wiki/Heinz_von_Lichberg)), and was most likely familiar with his work, which was widely available in Germany during Nabokov's time there.[[60]](#cite_note-60)[[61]](#cite_note-61) [*The Philadelphia Inquirer*](/wiki/The_Philadelphia_Inquirer), in the article "*Lolita* at 50: Did Nabokov take literary liberties?" says that, according to Maar, accusations of [plagiarism](/wiki/Plagiarism) should not apply and quotes him as saying: "Literature has always been a huge crucible in which familiar themes are continually recast... Nothing of what we admire in *Lolita* is already to be found in the tale; the former is in no way deducible from the latter." See also [Jonathan Lethem's](/wiki/Jonathan_Lethem) essay "The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism" in [*Harper's Magazine*](/wiki/Harper's_Magazine) on this story.[[62]](#cite_note-62)

## Nabokov on ''Lolita''[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

### Afterword[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

In 1956, Nabokov wrote an [afterword](/wiki/Afterword) to *Lolita* ("On a Book Entitled *Lolita*"), that first appeared in the first U.S. edition and has appeared thereafter.[[63]](#cite_note-63) One of the first things Nabokov makes a point of saying is that, despite John Ray Jr.'s claim in the Foreword, there is no moral to the story.[[64]](#cite_note-64) Nabokov adds that "the initial shiver of inspiration" for *Lolita* "was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the [Jardin des Plantes](/wiki/Jardin_des_Plantes) who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal: this sketch showed the bars of the poor creature's cage".[[65]](#cite_note-65) Neither the article nor the drawing has been recovered.

In response to an American critic who characterized *Lolita* as the record of Nabokov's "love affair with the romantic novel", Nabokov writes that "the substitution of 'English language' for 'romantic novel' would make this elegant formula more correct".[[66]](#cite_note-66) Nabokov concludes the afterword with a reference to his beloved first language, which he abandoned as a writer once he moved to the United States in 1940: "My private tragedy, which cannot, and indeed should not, be anybody's concern, is that I had to abandon my natural idiom, my untrammeled, rich, and infinitely docile Russian language for a second-rate brand of English".[[67]](#cite_note-67)

### Estimation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

Nabokov rated the book highly. In an interview for [BBC Television](/wiki/BBC_Television) in 1962, he said: [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

Over a year later, in an interview for [*Playboy*](/wiki/Playboy_(magazine)), he said: [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

In the same year, in an interview with [*Life*](/wiki/Life_(magazine)), Nabokov was asked which of his writings had most pleased him. He answered: [Template:Quote](/wiki/Template:Quote)

### Russian translation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

The Russian translation includes a "Postscriptum"[[68]](#cite_note-68) in which Nabokov reconsiders his relationship with his native language. Referring to the afterword to the English edition, Nabokov states that only "the scientific scrupulousness led me to preserve the last paragraph of the American afterword in the Russian text..." He further explains that the "story of this translation is the story of a disappointment. Alas, that 'wonderful Russian language' which, I imagined, still awaits me somewhere, which blooms like a faithful spring behind the locked gate to which I, after so many years, still possess the key, turned out to be non-existent, and there is nothing beyond that gate, except for some burned out stumps and hopeless autumnal emptiness, and the key in my hand looks rather like a lock pick."

## Adaptations[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

*Lolita* has been filmed twice, been a musical, four stage-plays, one completed opera, and two ballets. There is also Nabokov's unfilmed (and re-edited) screenplay, an uncompleted opera based on the work, and an "imagined opera" which combines elements of opera and dance.

* [*Lolita*](/wiki/Lolita_(1962_film)) was made in 1962 by [Stanley Kubrick](/wiki/Stanley_Kubrick), and starred [James Mason](/wiki/James_Mason), [Shelley Winters](/wiki/Shelley_Winters), [Peter Sellers](/wiki/Peter_Sellers) and [Sue Lyon](/wiki/Sue_Lyon) as Lolita; Nabokov was nominated for an [Academy Award](/wiki/Academy_Awards) for his work on this film's adapted screenplay, although little of this work reached the screen; Stanley Kubrick and James Harris substantially rewrote Nabokov's script, though neither took credit. The film greatly expanded the character of Clare Quilty, and removed all references to Humbert's obsession with young girls before meeting Dolores. Veteran arranger [Nelson Riddle](/wiki/Nelson_Riddle) composed the music for the film, whose soundtrack includes the hit single, "Lolita Ya Ya."[[69]](#cite_note-69)\* The book was adapted into a musical in 1971 by [Alan Jay Lerner](/wiki/Alan_Jay_Lerner) and [John Barry](/wiki/John_Barry_(composer)) under the title [*Lolita, My Love*](/wiki/Lolita,_My_Love). Critics praised the play for sensitively translating the story to the stage, but it nonetheless closed before it opened in New York.[[70]](#cite_note-70)\* Nabokov's own re-edited and condensed version of the screenplay (revised December 1973) he originally submitted for Kubrick's film (before its extensive rewrite by Kubrick and Harris) was published by [McGraw-Hill](/wiki/McGraw-Hill) in 1974. One new element is that Quilty's play *The Hunted Enchanter*, staged at Dolores' high school, contains a scene that is an exact duplicate of a painting in the front lobby of the hotel, The Enchanted Hunter, at which Humbert allows Lolita to seduce him.[[71]](#cite_note-71)\* In 1982 [Edward Albee](/wiki/Edward_Albee) adapted the book into a play, *Lolita*. It was savaged by critics, [Frank Rich](/wiki/Frank_Rich) notably predicting fatal damage to Albee's career.[[72]](#cite_note-72) Rich noted that the play's reading of the character of Quilty seemed to be taken from the Kubrick film.
* In 1992 Russian composer [Rodion Shchedrin](/wiki/Rodion_Shchedrin) adapted *Lolita* into a Russian-language opera [*Lolita*](/wiki/Lolita_(opera)), which premiered in [Swedish](/wiki/Swedish_language) in 1994 at the [Royal Swedish Opera](/wiki/Royal_Swedish_Opera). The first performance in Russian was in Moscow in 2004. The opera was nominated for Russia's [Golden Mask](/wiki/Golden_Mask) award.[[73]](#cite_note-73) Its first performance in German was on 30 April at the [Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden](/wiki/Hessisches_Staatstheater_Wiesbaden) as the opening night of the [Internationale Maifestspiele Wiesbaden](/wiki/Internationale_Maifestspiele_Wiesbaden) in 2011. The German version was shortened from four hours to three, but noted Lolita's death at the conclusion, which had been omitted from the earlier longer version. It was considered well-staged but musically monotonous.[[74]](#cite_note-74) In 2001, Shchedrin extracted "symphonic fragments" for orchestra from the opera score, which were published as *Lolita-Serenade*.
* The 1997 film [*Lolita*](/wiki/Lolita_(1997_film)) was directed by [Adrian Lyne](/wiki/Adrian_Lyne), starring [Jeremy Irons](/wiki/Jeremy_Irons), [Dominique Swain](/wiki/Dominique_Swain), and [Melanie Griffith](/wiki/Melanie_Griffith). It received mixed reviews. It was delayed for more than a year because of its controversial subject matter, and was not released in Australia until 1999. Multiple critics noted that this film removed all elements of [dark comedy](/wiki/Dark_comedy) from the story. In [*Salon*](/wiki/Salon_(website)), Charles Taylor wrote that it "replaces the book's cruelty and comedy with manufactured lyricism and mopey romanticism."[[75]](#cite_note-75)\* In 1999, the [Boston](/wiki/Boston)-based composer [John Harbison](/wiki/John_Harbison) began an opera of *Lolita*, which he abandoned in the wake of the [clergy child abuse scandal in Boston](/wiki/Sexual_abuse_scandal_in_the_Catholic_archdiocese_of_Boston). He abandoned it by 2005, but fragments were woven into a seven-minute piece, "Darkbloom: Overture for an Imagined Opera". Vivian Darkbloom, an anagram of Vladimir Nabokov, is a character in *Lolita*.[[76]](#cite_note-76)\* In 2003, Russian director [Victor Sobchak](/wiki/Victor_Sobchak) wrote a second non-musical stage adaptation, which played at the Lion and Unicorn fringe theater in London. It drops the character of Quilty and updates the story to modern England, and includes long passages of Nabokov's prose in voiceover.<ref name=vnc26>Suellen Stringer-Hye, ["VN collation #26"](http://www.libraries.psu.edu/nabokov/vncol26.htm), *Zembla*, 2003. Retrieved 13 March 2008.</ref>
* Also in 2003, a stage adaptation of Nabokov's unused screenplay was performed in [Dublin](/wiki/Dublin) adapted by Michael West. It was described by Karina Buckley (in the [*Sunday Times*](/wiki/The_Sunday_Times) of London) as playing more like Italian [commedia dell'arte](/wiki/Commedia_dell'arte) than a dark drama about [paedophilia](/wiki/Paedophilia).[[77]](#cite_note-77) Hiroko Mikami notes that the initial sexual encounter between Lolita and Humbert was staged in a way that left this adaptation particularly open to the charge of placing the blame for initiating the relationship on Lolita and normalizing child sexual abuse; however, Mikami challenged this reading of the production,[[78]](#cite_note-78) noting that the ultimate devastation of events on Lolita's life is duly noted in the play.
* In 2003, Italian choreographer Davide Bombana created a ballet based on *Lolita* that ran 70 minutes. It used music by [Dmitri Shostakovich](/wiki/Dmitri_Shostakovich), [György Ligeti](/wiki/György_Ligeti), [Alfred Schnittke](/wiki/Alfred_Schnittke) and [Salvatore Sciarrino](/wiki/Salvatore_Sciarrino). It was performed by the Grand Ballet de Génève in Switzerland in November 2003. It earned him the award Premio Danza E Danza in 2004 as "Best Italian Choreographer Abroad".[[79]](#cite_note-79)\* American composer [Joshua Fineberg](/wiki/Joshua_Fineberg) and choreographer Johanne Saunier created an "imagined opera" of *Lolita*. Running 70 minutes, it premiered in [Montclair, New Jersey](/wiki/Montclair,_New_Jersey) in April 2009. While other characters silently dance, Humbert narrates, often with his back to the audience as his image is projected onto video screens. Writing in [*The New York Times*](/wiki/The_New_York_Times)*,* Steve Smith noted that it stressed Humbert as a moral monster and madman, rather than as a suave seducer, and that it does nothing to "suggest sympathy" on any level of Humbert.[[80]](#cite_note-80) Smith also described it as "less an opera in any conventional sense than a multimedia monodrama". The composer described Humbert as "deeply seductive but deeply evil". He expressed his desire to ignore the plot and the novel's elements of parody, and instead to put the audience "in the mind of a madman". He regarded himself as duplicating Nabokov's effect of putting something on the surface and undermining it, an effect for which he thought music was especially suited.[[81]](#cite_note-81)\* In 2009 Richard Nelson created a one-man drama, the only character onstage being Humbert speaking from his jail cell. It premiered in London with [Brian Cox](/wiki/Brian_Cox_(actor)) as Humbert. Cox believes that this is truer to the spirit of the book than other stage or film adaptations, since the story is not about Lolita herself but about Humbert's flawed memories of her.[[82]](#cite_note-82)\* Four Humors created and staged a Minnesota Fringe Festival version called "Four Humors Lolita: a Three-Man Show," August 2013. The show was billed as "A one hour stage play, based on the two and a half hour movie by Stanley Kubrick, based on the 5 hour screenplay by Vladimir Nabokov, based on the 300 page novel by Vladimir Nabokov, as told by 3 idiots."[[83]](#cite_note-83)

### Derivative literary works[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

* The Italian novelist and scholar[[84]](#cite_note-84) [Umberto Eco](/wiki/Umberto_Eco) published a short parody of Nabokov's novel called "Granita" in 1959.[[85]](#cite_note-85) It presents the story of Umberto Umberto (Umberto being both the author's first name and the Italian form of "Humbert") and his illicit obsession with the elderly "Granita".[[86]](#cite_note-86)\* Published in 1992, *Poems for Men who Dream of Lolita* by [Kim Morrissey](/wiki/Kim_Morrissey) contains poems which purport to be written by Lolita herself, reflecting on the events in the story, a sort of diary in poetry form. Morrissey portrays Lolita as an innocent, wounded soul. In *Lolita Unclothed,* a documentary by [Camille Paglia](/wiki/Camille_Paglia), Morrisey complains that in the novel Lolita has "no voice".[[87]](#cite_note-87) Morrisey's retelling was adapted into an opera by composer Sid Rabinovitch, and performed at the New Music Festival in Winnipeg in 1993.[[88]](#cite_note-88)\* The 1995 novel *Diario di Lo* by Pia Pera retells the story from Lolita's point of view, making a few modifications to the story and names. (For example, Lolita does not die, and her last name is now "Maze".) The estate of Nabokov attempted to stop publication of the English translation ([*Lo's Diary*](/wiki/Lo's_Diary)), but it was protected by the court as "parody".[[89]](#cite_note-89) "There are only two reasons for such a book: gossip and style", writes [Richard Corliss](/wiki/Richard_Corliss), adding that *Lo's Diary* "fails both ways".[[90]](#cite_note-90)\* [Steve Martin](/wiki/Steve_Martin) wrote the short story "Lolita at Fifty," included in his collection [*Pure Drivel*](/wiki/Pure_Drivel) of 1999, which is a gently humorous look at how Dolores Haze's life might have turned out. She has gone through many husbands. [Richard Corliss](/wiki/Richard_Corliss) writes that: "In six pages Martin deftly sketches a woman who has known and used her allure for so long—ever since she was 11 and met Humbert Humbert—that it has become her career."[[90]](#cite_note-90)\* [Emily Prager](/wiki/Emily_Prager) states in the foreword to her novel [*Roger Fishbite*](/wiki/Roger_Fishbite) that she wrote it mainly as a literary parody of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, partly as a "reply both to the book and to the icon that the character Lolita has become".[[91]](#cite_note-91) Prager's novel, set in the 1990s, is narrated by the Lolita character, thirteen-year-old Lucky Lady Linderhoff.

## References in media[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

### Literary memoir[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

* [*Reading Lolita in Tehran*](/wiki/Reading_Lolita_in_Tehran) is a memoir about teaching government-banned Western literary classics to women in the world of an Islamic Iran, which author [Azar Nafisi](/wiki/Azar_Nafisi) describes as dominated in the 1980s by fundamentalist "morality squads".[[92]](#cite_note-92) Stories about the lives of her book club members are interspersed with critical commentary on *Lolita* and three other Western novels. *Lolita* in particular is dubbed the ultimate "forbidden" novel and becomes a metaphor for life in Iran. Although Nafasi states that the metaphor is not allegorical (p. 35), she does want to draw parallels between "victim and jailer" (p. 37). She implies that, like the principal character in *Lolita*, the regime in Iran imposes their "dream upon our reality, turning us into his figments of imagination." In both cases, the protagonist commits the "crime of solipsizing another person's life." February 2011 saw the premiere of a concert performance of an opera based on *Reading Lolita in Tehran* at the University of Maryland School of Music with music by doctoral student Elisabeth Mehl Greene and a libretto co-written by Iranian-American poet Mitra Motlagh. Azar Nafasi was closely involved in the development of the project and participated in an audience Q&A session after the premiere.[[93]](#cite_note-93)

### Film[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

* In "The Missing Page", one of the most popular episodes (from 1960) of the British sitcom [*Hancock's Half Hour*](/wiki/Hancock's_Half_Hour), [Tony Hancock](/wiki/Tony_Hancock) has read virtually every book in the library except *Lolita*, which is always out on loan. He repeatedly asks if it has been returned. When it is eventually returned, there is a commotion amongst the library users who all want the book. This specific incident in the episode is discussed in a 2003 article on the decline of the use of public libraries in Britain by G. K. Peatling.[[94]](#cite_note-94)\* In the movie [*Irma la Douce*](/wiki/Irma_la_Douce) (1963), perky Parisian streetwalker Irma has a co-worker named Lolita, who is middle-aged. A throwaway gag has Lolita running down the street wearing the heart-shaped sunglasses worn by her film counterpart.
* In the movie [*The Last of Sheila*](/wiki/The_Last_of_Sheila) (1973), James Mason (who played Humbert Humbert in [*Lolita* (1962)](/wiki/Lolita_(1962_film))) plays washed-up director Philip Dexter. There is a scene in the beginning of the film where he is shown on set for a commercial surrounded by little blonde girls in white frock dresses. There is also a party game later in which the host Clinton Greene ([James Coburn](/wiki/James_Coburn)) has written the secrets of his six guests on typewritten cards - one of which reads "Little Child Molester".
* In the [Woody Allen](/wiki/Woody_Allen) film [*Manhattan*](/wiki/Manhattan_(film)) (1979), when Mary ([Diane Keaton](/wiki/Diane_Keaton)) discovers Isaac Davis (Allen) is dating a 17-year-old ([Mariel Hemingway](/wiki/Mariel_Hemingway)), she says, "Somewhere Nabokov is smiling". Alan A. Stone speculates that *Lolita* had inspired *Manhattan*.[[95]](#cite_note-95) Graham Vickers describes the female lead in Allen's movie as "a Lolita that is allowed to express her own point of view" and emerges from the relationship "graceful, generous, and optimistic".[[96]](#cite_note-96)\* In the 1999 film [*American Beauty*](/wiki/American_Beauty_(1999_film)), the name of protagonist Lester Burnham—a middle-age man with a crush on his daughter's best friend—is an anagram of "Humbert learns". The girl's surname is Hays, which recalls Haze. Tracy Lemaster sees many parallels between the two stories including their references to rose petals and sports, arguing that *Beauty****s cheerleading scene is directly derived from the tennis scene in Lolita.***[***[97]***](#cite_note-97)***\* In the Jim Jarmusch film*** [***Broken Flowers***](/wiki/Broken_Flowers)***,*** [***Bill Murray's***](/wiki/Bill_Murray) ***character comes across an overtly sexualized girl named Lolita. Although Murray's character says it's an "interesting choice of name", Roger Ebert notes that "Neither daughter nor mother seems to know that the name Lolita has literary associations."***[***[98]***](#cite_note-98)

### Television[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

* A January 2012 episode of the television series [*Pretty Little Liars*](/wiki/Pretty_Little_Liars_(TV_series)) revealed that the character of Alison (who has read *Lolita*) has an alter-ego named Vivian Darkbloom (slightly older and with different hair), named after a character in *Lolita* (and also Nabokov's *Ada*). *TV Fanatic* reviewer suggests this casts an eerie light on several of the pairings of older men and younger women in the series, in particular Ali's relationship with Ian.[[99]](#cite_note-99) *Huffington Post* has described the show as generally having a strong *Lolita* theme, noting that the novel became a plot point in one major episode.[[100]](#cite_note-100)

### Popular music about the novel[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

* "[Moi... Lolita](/wiki/Moi..._Lolita)" (English: "*Me... Lolita*") is the debut single of the famous French singer [Alizée](/wiki/Alizée), which was released on her debut album [*Gourmandises*](/wiki/Gourmandises) (2000) when she was 15. It was popular in France, Spain, Belgium, Georgia, Austria, the Netherlands, Lebanon, Ukraine, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Russia, Greece, Italy, Germany, Poland, Denmark, the United Kingdom and many other countries, in the media the singer is called the most famous of the Lolitas.[[101]](#cite_note-101)\*In [The Police](/wiki/The_Police) song "[Don't Stand So Close to Me](/wiki/Don't_Stand_So_Close_to_Me)" about a schoolgirl's crush on her teacher in the final verse, the teacher "starts to shake and cough/just like that old man in that book by Nabokov", a direct reference to the male protagonist in *Lolita*.[[102]](#cite_note-102)\*In the title song of her mainstream debut album, [*One of the Boys*](/wiki/One_of_the_Boys_(Katy_Perry_album)), [Katy Perry](/wiki/Katy_Perry) says that she "studied Lolita religiously", and the cover-shot of the album references Lolita's appearance in the earlier Stanley Kubrick film. Perry has admitted on multiple occasions to a fascination and identification with the Lolita character and concept.[[103]](#cite_note-103)\*[Marilyn Manson's](/wiki/Marilyn_Manson) song "[Heart-Shaped Glasses (When the Heart Guides the Hand)](/wiki/Heart-Shaped_Glasses_(When_the_Heart_Guides_the_Hand))" was indirectly inspired by the novel and the heart-shaped glasses worn by Lolita in the poster for Stanley Kubrick's film. In a BBC Radio One interview, Manson said he had been reading the novel as a consequence of now having a much younger girlfriend, [Evan Rachel Wood](/wiki/Evan_Rachel_Wood). She consequently showed up to meet him one day wearing heart-shaped glasses (which she also wears in the music video of the song).[[104]](#cite_note-104)\*Mexican singer [Belinda](/wiki/Belinda_(entertainer)) released in 2010 a homonymous song, extracted from [*Carpe Diem*](/wiki/Carpe_Diem_(Belinda_album)). The song refers to the novel in the line "Sin duda Nabokov fue el que me escribió", which literally translates as "Without a doubt, Nabokov was the one who wrote me." It became a moderate hit at Venezuelan charts.[[105]](#cite_note-105)\*IAMX – Lolita
* *Rolling Stone* has noted that [Lana Del Rey's](/wiki/Lana_Del_Rey) 2012 album [*Born to Die*](/wiki/Born_to_Die_(Lana_Del_Rey_album)) has "loads of Lolita references",[[106]](#cite_note-106) and it has a bonus track entitled "Lolita". She has herself described the album's persona to a reviewer from *The New Yorker* as a combination of a "gangster Nancy Sinatra" and "Lolita lost in the hood." Their reviewer notes that "Her invocations of Sinatra and Lolita are entirely appropriate to the sumptuous backing tracks" and that one of the album's singles, "[Off to the Races](/wiki/Off_to_the_Races_(song))", repeatedly quotes from the novel's opening sentence: "light of my life, fire of my loins."[[107]](#cite_note-107) Many of Del Rey's unreleased demos also refer to the novel, such as "Put Me in a Movie" and "1949".

## See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

[Template:Portal](/wiki/Template:Portal)

* [*Le Monde'*s 100 Books of the Century](/wiki/Le_Monde's_100_Books_of_the_Century)

[Template:Clear](/wiki/Template:Clear)

## Notes[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

[Template:Reflist](/wiki/Template:Reflist)

## Further reading[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) One of the best guides to the complexities of *Lolita*. First published by [McGraw-Hill](/wiki/McGraw-Hill) in 1970. (Nabokov was able to comment on Appel's earliest annotations, creating a situation that Appel described as being like [John Shade](/wiki/John_Shade) revising [Charles Kinbote's](/wiki/Charles_Kinbote) comments on Shade's poem *Pale Fire*. Oddly enough, this is exactly the situation Nabokov scholar [Brian Boyd](/wiki/Brian_Boyd) proposed to resolve the literary complexities of Nabokov's [*Pale Fire*](/wiki/Pale_Fire).)
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) A pioneering study of Nabokov's interest in and literary uses of film imagery.
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) A survey of the novel's reception, organized by decade.
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) Essays on the life and novels.
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) The major study of Nabokov's lepidoptery, frequently mentioning Lolita.
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) An introduction and study-guide in PDF format.
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) The original novel.
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) Essays on the novel, mostly from the 1980s–90s.
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) A widely praised monograph dealing extensively with Lolita

## External links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]

[Template:Wikiquote](/wiki/Template:Wikiquote)

* [Photos of the first edition of *Lolita*](http://www.mansionbooks.com/BookDetail.php?bk=283)
* [Cover images of various editions](http://www.dezimmer.net/Covering%20Lolita/LoCov.html)
* [*Lolita* USA](http://www.dezimmer.net/LolitaUSA/LoUSpre.htm) – The itineraries of Humbert's and Lolita's two voyages across the U.S.A. 1947–1949, with maps and pictures.
* [*Lolita* Calendar](http://www.dezimmer.net/LolitaUSA/LoChrono.htm) – A detailed and referenced inner chronology of [Nabokov's](/wiki/Nabokov) novel.

[Template:Vladimir Nabokov](/wiki/Template:Vladimir_Nabokov) [Template:Lolita](/wiki/Template:Lolita)

[Category:1955 novels](/wiki/Category:1955_novels) [Category:Black comedy books](/wiki/Category:Black_comedy_books) [Category:American erotic novels](/wiki/Category:American_erotic_novels) [Category:20th-century American novels](/wiki/Category:20th-century_American_novels) [Category:Fiction with unreliable narrators](/wiki/Category:Fiction_with_unreliable_narrators) [Category:Metafictional novels](/wiki/Category:Metafictional_novels) [Category:Obscenity controversies in literature](/wiki/Category:Obscenity_controversies_in_literature) [Category:American novels adapted into films](/wiki/Category:American_novels_adapted_into_films) [Category:Russian novels adapted into films](/wiki/Category:Russian_novels_adapted_into_films) [Category:Novels by Vladimir Nabokov](/wiki/Category:Novels_by_Vladimir_Nabokov) [Category:Postmodern novels](/wiki/Category:Postmodern_novels) [Category:Sexuality and age](/wiki/Category:Sexuality_and_age) [Category:Novels about writers](/wiki/Category:Novels_about_writers) [Category:Novels about orphans](/wiki/Category:Novels_about_orphans) [Category:Incest in fiction](/wiki/Category:Incest_in_fiction) [Category:Pedophilia in literature](/wiki/Category:Pedophilia_in_literature) [Category:Olympia Press books](/wiki/Category:Olympia_Press_books) [Category:Novels adapted into plays](/wiki/Category:Novels_adapted_into_plays) [Category:Russian magic realism novels](/wiki/Category:Russian_magic_realism_novels)