

Humbert humbert and cue



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“... in the destructive element immerse...”(from Lord Jim, by Joseph Conrad)Through the lens of Humbert Humbert’s obsession with la nymphette Lolita, (“ Lo-lee-ta... light of my life, fire of my loins...”(9)), Nabokov explores and illuminates the cyclical and ever deepening spiral of human desire. Humbert Humbert, thrown back and forth between “... desire and decision, the two things that create a live world...”(71), crosses countless times the slim and shadowy line between purest ecstasy and most wretched despair. In Lolita, Nabokov blurs the defining lines between love and perversion, right and wrong, presenting them, in uncomfortably close juxtaposition, as essentially dependent upon each other. Humbert Humbert is a tortured man, deeply divided between a sensitive rationality, and his undeniable lust for a forbidden and unripened fruit. United in him are the impulses of a romantic European gentleman, and the obsessions of a lascivious and lecherous old man silently lusting after the tantalizingly ephemeral nymphet — he is a volatile, fatal juxtaposition of opposite extremes. After years of this silent lust, of “... abusing himself in the dark...”(88), Humbert Humbert finds Lolita. An ultimate nymphet, Dolly Haze gives herself up to H. H.’s desire, going with him on a perverse holiday across the American landscape. This “... satisfaction of [Humbert Humbert’s] passion...”(175) is the seed of his own destruction. It is at this point in the novel that the reader discerns in its entirety the complex tragedy of Humbert Humbert. In his capacity, he loves Lolita with all the tenderness in his heart, (“... I loved her hopelessly... it was love at first sight, at last sight, at ever and ever sight...”(270)); his love transcends his lust for her as a nymphet and he is painfully aware of the harm he inflicts upon her, but he cannot ignore his desires and carnal passions: “ The moral sense in mortals is the duty we have to pay on mortal

sense of duty.”(283) As his tortured pleasure spree continues (“... a paradise whose skies were the color of hell flames...”(166)), Humbert Humbert’s guilt and self-loathing heighten, manifesting themselves in Quilty, the phantom follower, “... that red ghost swimming and shivering with lust in my mirror...”(217). Cue enters the novel as a representation of Humbert Humbert’s ‘destructive element’; a decadent and salacious paedophile, Quilty is a personification of the depravity that is H. H.’s downfall — he is the demon, and with every paranoid glimpse of Cue, Humbert Humbert is confronted with his transgressions against Lolita’s soul. The full impact of Humbert Humbert’s guilt doesn’t strike until he visits Mrs. Richard F. Schiller, and sees with brutal and overwhelming clarity the destruction he has brought upon her. Imploring her to come away with him, to “... live happily ever after...”(278) with him, Humbert Humbert pleads for his life, knowing that unless he has the chance to love Lolita the no-longer-nymphet, he can never forgive himself his sins against her; when she refuses him, he understands the ultimate and irrevocable nature of his transgressions. . At this realization, his anger toward Quilty the demon-shadow who has ‘cheated [him] of [his] redemption’(300), overwhelms him. In a fantastical, comical, and surreal sequence, Nabokov pits Humbert the Moral against his inhabiting devil. It is a grueling exorcism; Humbert Humbert, flounders ineptly with ‘Chum’, the devil bargains for survival, but finally, Humbert Humbert kills the demon. In the only conceivable penance, Humbert Humbert kills Cue, committing a symbolic suicide. In routing out the demon, H. H. destroys so great a part of himself that he is left a withered shell, containing nothing but his dark and tragic story. ‘One ha[s] to choose between [Quilty] and H. H.’(309), but H. H. does not exist as an entity separate from his ‘destructive

element'. He remains only a witness; once he has told his story he submits to his inevitable and necessary death. Nabokov asserts that between 'desire and decision'(71), Humbert Humbert cannot win. He 'give[s] years and years of life for one chance to touch a nymphet'(88), but that touch kills him. The 'satisfaction of [his] pleasure'(175) becomes to him a 'monstrous indulgence'(257) — he is mortified by the fulfillment of his fantasy. Humbert Humbert's tragic conflict deems this 'live world'(71) uninhabitable for him. "He thought that in the beauty of the world were hid a secret. He thought the world's heart beat at some terrible cost and that the world's pain and its beauty moved in a relationship of diverging equity..." (from *All the Pretty Horses*, by Cormac McCarthy). The paradox of Humbert Humbert's spiritual but depraved love for Lolita, (who is herself a paradox of innocence and seduction), is a tragic testament to this 'diverging equity'. The world's opposites abide close beside each other, and exist only at a mutual cost — light and darkness, good and evil, love and lust. Near the beginning of the novel, Humbert Humbert states that he and Annabel 'were madly, clumsily, shamelessly, agonizingly in love with each other; hopelessly... because that frenzy of mutual possession might have been assuaged only by our actually imbibing and assimilating every particle of each other's soul and flesh'(12). Similarly, Humbert Humbert and Lolita are casualties consumed by and lost to the greater 'immortal'(309) love that only exists at a supreme cost.