

Gripped by Humbert Humbert: A Literary Darwinist  
Reading of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955)

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## 1.0 Introduction

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a momentous discussion of the relevance of scientific inquiry in the study of literary arts has proliferated, having been shoved into being, perhaps most noteworthy, by Matthew Arnold's famous essay *Literature and Science* (1882). Although this discussion has been ongoing for an inordinate amount of time, it has never been more relevant to discuss these merits, since the very relevance of literary study is at peril. In modern times, this Arnoldian mantle has been taken up by the Literary Darwinists, among others, a movement birthed in the mid-1990s when Joseph Carroll published his seminal book *Evolution and Literary Theory* (1995). Adhering to such a framework can be perilous due to the recency, and changeability of its dogma, but by sticking to a few of its theoreticians it should be possible to keep the analysis homogenous.

As an avenue into this discussion, I have chosen to analyze and discuss the highly controversial, and critically acclaimed novel *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, since it offers up a considerable challenge for the Literary Darwinist, as its merits are highly related to the poetic and metaphysical qualities of its prose. In order to fully unfold and explicate the contents of Nabokov's controversial novel, whilst superimposing the Darwinist paradigm onto its pages, it is necessary to scrutinize and peruse several facets of its expression. The primary ambition of this thesis is to use the aforementioned paradigm to investigate the cultural fortitude that *Lolita* (1955) has shown despite its massively controversial subject material. This will be done by dissecting the numerous components that comprise the novel's unique expression, such as its main character and narrator Humbert Humbert, plot structure, thematic tendencies, and the style of its prose. An in-depth look at the reception history of *Lolita* will also greatly complement the questions posed in the thesis, while also distending the discussion to the current cultural status of the novel, and its eponymous heroine.

In order to properly integrate the principles of Literary Darwinism, the thesis will seek to examine and explore these structures from the aspect of various biological functions, subsequently querying whether they exhibit a certain allure to our biological psychology. This will be done by implementing terminology from the evolutionary social sciences and biology into the analyses undertaken in the thesis. To illustrate, these analyses will investigate, for example, the biological allure of the romantic narrative and the revenge narrative, and how it pertains to a highly unorthodox, and debauched love story such as this one. Furthermore, it is salient to investigate the evolutionary appeal of Nabokov's idiosyncratic style of prose, as in its alliterative and playful bravura, and how it is positioned, standing in stark contrast to the innate reprehension of Humbert Humbert's hebephilia and general antagonistic behavior. Examining

the character of Humbert will also give the possibility of opening up for some considerations into the morality and ethics of his actions, seen from the point of view of evolutionary sociology. Furthermore, there will be a general examination of the plot structure; the personal, passionate crusade towards a singular goal and the various actions that it takes to attain it, in order to gauge whether there is any valuable commentary that the Darwinist reading can give. Contemplating the novel on several levels, examining overarching morphology, as well as focusing on the particulars, offers a fuller scope of the novel's allure. Using *Lolita* as a spring board, the saliency of my analysis and the relevance it has within modern literature, potentially offers the possibility of an answer to the complex question of the place of science in literature, as well as the humanities as a whole.

## 2.0 The Application of Literary Darwinism & Consilience

Engaging in a Literary Darwinist discourse is inherently troublesome for a student of the humanities, due to the scientific nature of its discourse, as well as the esoteric features of its argumentation. By esoteric, it is meant that the sources that are often used within the framework, are often written by scientists. Thereby, some reductive conclusions on the scientific inquiry brought up in the thesis is possible, but it will be truthful and remain relevant, as well as informative. Nonetheless, the argumentations of this paper will be extensively based on scientific study, and therefore it will be relayed in as palatable a state as possible, due to the general unfamiliarity of said discourse in the English department.

As Literary Darwinism rose to prominence in the mid-1990s, it did so due to a general malaise amongst the few academics who saw the status quo of the humanities as severely problematic. This status quo, as they saw it, was entirely too ensconced within poststructuralism, both theoretically, ontologically and methodologically: "Poststructuralism swept through departments of literature and film in the late '70s and early '80s, but its once fresh questions have hardened into habit or dogma" (Boyd et al. 1). In fact, as Joseph Carroll launched the movement with his book *Evolution and Literary Theory*, he specifically mentioned post-structuralism as the key catalyst in the genesis of Literary Darwinism, as a reactionary movement: "I shall analyze the way in which poststructuralism breaks with traditional critical concepts, outline the rhetorical strategies that mediate poststructuralist theory, analyze the opposition between poststructuralism and evolutionary biology, [...] and describe an alternative critical ethos that affiliates itself with both the traditional explanatory paradigm and evolutionary theory" (Carroll 1995a, 50). Thus, it is supremely obvious that the *raison d'être* of Literary Darwinism is to supplant, or at least, to remove some of that hegemonic power from

post-structuralism's position within academia. So, what are the specific traits of post-structuralism that has been objected to?

## 2.1 Reaction to Post-structuralism

First of all, ontologically, there is the issue of social constructivism, which pervades academic thought in the humanities at the time of writing. This theory of 'tabula rasa', or 'blank slate', as posited by John Locke, claims that the human state of being and development is entirely composed of the accumulation of experiences and sensations: "How comes it [the mind] to be furnished? [...] Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from *experience*" (Locke 18). Thereby, Locke, and all others whom subscribe to this notion, abolish any natural interference in the creation of culture. Culture is seen as a creation of culture, a continual state of experience, that is ever-changing, and based on the cultures that precede it. Of course, there is a truth to this. For instance, there is no existing writer to this day that is not affected, or inspired, by his predecessors and the writings that they produced. The same goes for almost any other cultural production. So, which part of this notion does Literary Darwinism object to?

Fundamentally, the social constructivist view is critiqued for its disregard of the biological faculties of humanity, rejecting their impact upon our cultural production. Carroll puts forth his harsh critique by calling attention to the impossibility of the blank slate: "Why did humans, so far along the way in their descent from their "lowly origins," descend to folly like that of the culturalist circle? How could intelligent people ever have convinced themselves that humans hold themselves up in mid-air, creating cultures out of nothing?" (Carroll 2010, 1). The reason for Carroll's punitive rhetoric is the perceived ignorance he observes in this, as it defies all current empirical evidence on the subject and seems to do this with such a fervor, what Gottschall deems an "apparent contempt for reality" (Boyd et al. 458). An example to demonstrate this notion is Carroll's thought experiment that aims to debunk the famous Derridean utterance: "There is no outside the text." So, Derrida told us [...] We all wake up at some point and feel the massive, overwhelming reality of our own biological existence in a physical world [...] get brushed by two tons of metal moving at high speed, and you will have an instantaneous, spontaneous conviction that there is indeed a world outside the text." (Carroll 2010, 1). Of course, Carroll is, possibly intentionally, mis-quoting Derrida, as the correct translation is "there is no outside-text", but the crux of the argument stands as it is.

We are bound by our biological limitations, as well as our biological 'programming', it is not possible to reject the impulses and instincts that evolution has equipped us with, even though cultural experience has an enormous impact as well. Liken it to the form and functions

of the computer; A computer comes with a fixed set of limitations and possibilities through its various physical components, which determine the output that the computer is able to produce. In order to do this, it needs a large amount of software that allows the computer to function with various applications, but that software will always be limited and impacted by the hardware inside the computer. We can think about it in terms of a human brain, which comes with a certain physical quality, the hardware which has certain pre-disposed functions that are universal to that hardware, and is, over time, installed with experience and learning, the software. But one will not exist without the other, the software cannot reject the hardware, or vice versa. Thus, it is as impossible to separate the human being from its nature, as it is impossible to separate a computer's hardware from its software. Both are affected by the other.

According to the Literary Darwinists, the humanities must cast off such unempirical theories in order to garner the respect and reverence it surely needs from the other branches of academia, as well as the political body and the institutions and funding that comes with it, which will be discussed in further detail below. So, what do Literary Darwinists believe then? The majority of Literary Darwinists ascribe to the theory of dual inheritance theory, or gene-culture co-evolution: "It has become clear that the idiosyncratic properties of the human mind have a powerful effect on the evolution of culture. In some reciprocal manner as yet less easily grasped, culture has influenced the genetic evolution of the brain structures underlying the mind" (Lumsden 1). Thus, one cannot attribute culture, or human behavior, to either nature nor nurture, but an interacting whole which makes up our mental make-up.

Another issue, that is connected to the abovementioned problematic, is the unempirical approach that dominates the humanities, and renders the methodology entirely too abstract, as Carroll surmises: "By taking Derridean semiotics and Foucauldian discourse theory as a matrix within which to synthesize the obsolete linguistics of Saussure and Jakobson, the obsolete psychology of Freud [...], current literary theory has generated an ever-more-complex system of rhetoric altogether detached from empirical study." (Carroll 1995b, 121). Indeed, Carroll's rhetoric is swooping and rejective to a degree that seems to dilute a century of study, but there is a point to this, if you can overlook the reductive nature of this grand statement. By rejecting the post-Saussurean shift, Carroll rejects the outlook on literature, and the humanities in general, that has caused a severe lack of methodological constrictions in the field, thus creating a gigantic problem of validation. If an entire body of study has rejected the reality of an objective truth, constantly placing such on the endless chain of signification, then it is difficult for the populace to grasp the importance of such an enterprise, when they have not been privy to this esoteric outlook. Naturally, this Darwinist movement has been met with a great deal of resistance due to the perceived cataclysmic collateral damage it could cause the department. It

is also important to note that Carroll has shifted his stance greatly in the fifteen years since he wrote the statement above: “We need lose nothing of the best that has been thought and said. We need only add to it” (Boyd et al. 7). Of course, that demands a qualitative stance on what is the ‘best’, but it is positive that Carroll, along with his fellow Literary Darwinists Boyd and Gottschall, have downgraded the reach of their enterprise, possibly due to backlash from the academic community, or an understanding that aggressive rhetoric is not the way forward when seeking progressive change. Literary Darwinism should not be perceived as a field that seeks to equalize themselves with the other major branches of literary theory though, but instead as a catalyst for major changes in the methodological, ontological and theoretical approaches made within the entire body of literary study.

## 2.2 The second project

This brings us to the accompanying project that Carroll wants to implement alongside these methodological constraints and qualitative shifts in ontological thinking, that is, the return to a more traditional form of analysis, which is the second part of his grand statement made in *Evolution and Literary Theory*: “[...] and describe an alternative critical ethos that affiliates itself with both the traditional explanatory paradigm and evolutionary theory” (Carroll 1995a, 50). This ostensible traditional explanatory paradigm refers to the pre-Saussurean thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Matthew Arnold and Thomas Carlyle. Given the state of analytical theory at that time, it is difficult to precisely determine a standardized form of analysis and therefore it is not a unified methodology as such. While Literary Darwinism suffers from the same heterogeneity, it is severely less pronounced than this traditional explanatory paradigm. So, what does it refer to?

The traditional literary analysis refers to an avenue of reading that places a major focus on character, theme, and structure. There is also a major emphasis on the aesthetics of the work, and the involvement of several other branches of academia. It could almost be termed a sort of proto-consilience: “Most of the great Victorian essayists engage in cultural commentary that mingles social, political, psychological, philosophical, historical, and literary study; the Victorians have their own antecedents; and within academic literary scholarship” (Carroll 1995a, 50). This application of diverse academic commentaries was possible because this sort of reading accepts literary characters as real people – a sort of mimetic reality, thereby gaining the ability to apply the idiosyncratic possibilities of each field to the reading. This stands in stark contrast to the poststructuralist reading, which reduces the aspect of character into the mere signs and letters that communicate them, placing their names, actions, or dialogue upon the endless chain of signification, that always holds any true meaning beyond arm’s reach.

Additionally, that interpretation of said character cannot be applied any sort of general reasoning since the interpretation of that character is highly individual and dependent on the reader's own sense of self. As one ventures further and further into the all-encompassing strategy and proposal of Joseph Carroll's Literary Darwinism, it reveals more and more of the momentous nature of its ambition. Literary Darwinism proposes a gargantuan qualitative shift in every conceivable way in the study of literature, and possibly in the humanities as a whole. It is important to understand the grandeur of the Literary Darwinists' venture, which also explains the extreme headwind they have met as a movement. This can also be explained by the heterogeneity of said movement, being encumbered by the vast array of opinions within the doctrine's own followers.

### 2.3 The importance of consilience

Indeed, as a relative new-comer on the stage of literary theory and methodology, it is a difficult to define Literary Darwinism as a homogenous paradigm, agreed upon by most of the adherents of its notions and philosophies. Having a common ancestor in Joseph Carroll, most Literary Darwinists are affected by the literature of this 'grand old man', either in their agreement with him, or their disagreement. Thereby, the field remains highly debated, especially amongst its most popular proponents. For instance, Jonathan Gottschall and Joseph Carroll have remained in a major disagreement over the merits and applications of Darwinist notions: "In my own view, investigation in the humanities should be constrained, disciplined, and inspired by knowledge from the sciences, but I don't think literary Darwinism is the only responsibly consilient approach to literary study." (Gottschall 17). Thus, Gottschall stands in stark contrast to Carroll's judgement on the matter, since Gottschall warrants all relevant scientific commentary a place in the literary analysis, and not only the Darwinist.

These standpoints represent the majority of Literary Darwinist theoreticians, often conforming to either side. Even so, it is possible to denote a baseline conviction that is common in all of the adherents of Literary Darwinism, that is, the confidence in the relevance of consilience: "All literary Darwinists take inspiration from E. O. Wilson's concept of consilience - the idea that the disciplines are seamlessly interconnected" (Gottschall 17). This acceptance is encompassing all within the field, due to the inseparability of a consilient framework and Literary Darwinism's methodology - the degree of the consilience remains the supremely discussed topic, as mentioned above. Consilience, as spearheaded by Edward O. Wilson, denotes the theoretical and methodological understanding of the branches of academia as deficient due to their separation: "The greatest enterprise of the mind has always been and always will be the attempted linkage of the sciences and humanities. The ongoing fragmentation

of knowledge and resulting chaos in philosophy are not reflections of the real world but artifacts of scholarship” (Wilson 8). In its inception, the framework was highly criticized due to the extreme nature of its approach towards the humanities, which was highly irregular in academic institutions, and even irreverent to some. By attempting to merge science and art, it is deemed by many that this will serve to debase art, as it is perceived that a quantification and qualification of such, will destroy it. Liken it to the dissection of an animal; it is necessary to kill the animal, but the dissector will learn about the inner workings of such an animal and gain important knowledge for the betterment of humanity. Of course, this is massively reductive, but it is salient nonetheless as it showcases the two sides of this same coin. But how does this dissection work? How does a Literary Darwinist work?

#### 2.4 The Literary Darwinist reading

On a macro level, Literary Darwinists have worked with overarching questions of the proliferation of culture, and the massive intake of cultural products such as literature. These posit questions as to why we spend so much time within fictional realities and attempt to explain this story-telling habit through evolutionary biology and sociology, offering a framework wherein we can analyze, not only literature, but culture itself and its sentient producers.

Naturally, these are massively complex issues, and thus there still remains division on many points on the spectrum of this discussion. For instance, academics such as Steven Pinker believe that the ‘storytelling gene’ is piggy-backing on other evolutionary adaptations, that we have developed in the Pleistocene period, in order for it to have such a grip upon us. He likens it to the predilection for sweets, by calling it ‘cheesecake for the mind’: “Cheesecake packs a sensual wallop unlike anything in the natural world because it is a brew of megadoses of agreeable stimuli which we concocted for the express purpose of pressing our pleasure buttons. Pornography is another pleasure technology [...] I will suggest that the arts are a third” (Pinker 525). Thus, Pinker is deeming fictional worlds a form of supernormal stimuli. Supernormal stimuli are sensations that was not meant for us through the natural world, but through the development of the industrialized, modern world, we have gained access to highly concentrated doses of whatever types of pleasure we can receive. This goes for sweets, highly processed foods that contain inordinate amounts of fat and salt, and so forth, but it is not only the intake of modern foods that affects us thusly. Social networks like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram are another type of supernormal stimuli, as well as the entire media industry focused around the lives of others, be they celebrities or reality television contestants.

Thereby, Pinker disregards fictional worlds as anything salient in the survival of mankind, but merely regards it as another type of junk food. According to Geoffrey Miller, all artefacts

of cultural value were constructed as a means of sexual attraction: “[...] all manifestations of specifically human mental capacity, including the arts and literature, as a medium for sexual display” (Carroll 2006, 41). Other Darwinists, including John Lycett, Louise Barrett, Dennis Dutton, Robin Dunbar and Joseph Carroll have another theory; that the predilection for fiction is a multifunctioning adaptation that has helped propel mankind to the heights of development that we see today. As Dutton proposes, the major function that it has had, is the function of simulating certain realities in our minds, affording us “low-cost, low-risk surrogate experiences” (Dutton 187), which are highly adaptational in the environment we were developed in: “It allows for intellectual simulations and forecasting, the working out of solutions to problems without high-cost experimentation in actual practice“ (Dutton 184).

Lycett and Dunbar have also posited other functions to this multifunctioning adaptation, such as a social function. From the tribal environment, to the modern one, fictional worlds are experienced in unison with other members of our species, indicating that there is a sociality to it as well: “They help to bind the group. They do this partly on the intellectual level, by reminding us why we are a community but also on a more basic level, because our response is often one of pleasure, even laughter – and laughter [...] is very good at triggering the release of endorphins. Stories bind on several levels” (Dunbar et al. 169-170). Certainly, this is not a conscious decision taken by the individual, or the group, to perform in such a manner, in order to further develop our evolutionary adaptation, but merely driven by neurotransmitters such as endorphine, dopamine, oxytocin and serotonin regulations in the pituitary glands.

Thus, there are many differing opinions on the matter of fiction’s role in our evolution, and the evolving state of our society, thereby opening up to some highly relevant discussions that we would not be able to engage with otherwise. By enveloping and adapting these methods and ontological positions into the literary sphere, we are furthering our own understanding of ourselves and the reasons for our predisposition towards fiction, amongst others. This macro perspective offers up countless interesting applications of our knowledge of literature combined with decades of scientific discovery, transforming the discourse, as well as the discipline as a whole. Amongst these applications, it is possible that we will also discover a newfound respect and trust amongst our academic colleagues and the political body that governs the budget for this department, because it is dwindling at the moment: “Still, not more than 0.45 % of American federal research money and not more than 1.06 % of the EU research budget went to research in humanities, creating an enormous gap with other fields of inquiry” (Martinelli 3). This is not to say that the department of the humanities must only take actions that will please the bureaucratic body that governs it, but merely that it has to change in order to stay relevant in our society, because of the decision makers in the political body: “humanities lack economic

relevance; they are perceived as “impractical” and unemployable; they do not match with technological development.” (Martinelli 8).

As stated earlier, the methodology of Literary Darwinism is not homogenous, especially not within the literary analytical aspect. Even so, it is possible to approximate a standard approach from the general methods that have been observed in use by them. In its micro form, literary analysis, the methodology of the Literary Darwinist is a process where the literary work is approached by searching for, and identifying the major themes of the work, thereby classifying some of the major points of attraction for the reader. Thereafter, these themes are redescribed in terms adopted from evolutionary biology and sociology, or perhaps other fields of scientific commentary, based on the notions of the Literary Darwinist whom analyzes. Thus, if these themes have a biological salience, and attract our biological psychology, then conceivably that could be why the work is attractive to us in the first place.

For example, the most popularized view of this analysis is the Darwinist reading of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), which analyzes the novel thusly; the vicarious experience of perceiving this world through Elizabeth Bennett is likened to a mate-choice simulation for the reader. The major theme is romantic love and choosing the right person to engage in such a romance with, told through the experiences of a young woman. By observing, and engaging yourself in such a narrative, the reader is ‘learning the ropes’ of the rules of engagement in such a social situation. Of course, since it is a novel set in the British Regency period, it is not a one-to-one manual of the potential situations that can affect a modern human being. Nonetheless, the novel is tacitly describing the right and wrong choices of a mate. Do not choose the moral free-rider that is George Wickham, because he is deceitful, corrupted and indebted, and thus will lead you astray. Do choose Mr. Darcy because he is the right match, and to some degree, because of his wealth. The theory, from a reader-response critical point of view, is that we are attracted to such narratives, because we are hardwired to be engaged with stories that have a sublime, subtle didactic function for real-world application, even if this is not explicitly clear to the consumer: “Literature provides imaginary structures within which people can integrate the ancient, conserved elements of their nature[...] with the conceptual, thematic structures through which they make abstract, theoretical sense of the world in which they live” (Carroll 2006, 43).

I gather that this analysis of Austen is too general and superficial, but it hints at the method. In fact, this exact criticism is a staple of the opposition against Literary Darwinism, often citing that its readings often become oversimplified, reductive and, in general, too mired in scientism. Naturally, there is some truth to this critique, as well as other critiques, which shall be addressed here. As is inevitable when a new literary theory announces its arrival upon the

academic scene, Literary Darwinism has received criticism aplenty, especially due to Joseph Carroll's notion that Literary Darwinism should supplant post-structuralism. Perhaps most famously, is the article written by Jonathan Kramnick, *Against Literary Darwinism* (2011), wherein he synthesizes the critique against Literary Darwinism with a slightly sympathetic view – in a manner, bridging the gap: “Literary Darwinism is worth taking seriously not only because it has been so successful at marketing itself but also because it sharply poses the question of literary study's relation to the sciences of mind. Much turns on their combination of nativism and adaptation” (Kramnick 346).

Even so, he is also quite adamant in his objection to Literary Darwinism, citing the two main arguments against it; the abovementioned superficiality, which is driven by grand narratives of science which reduces literary texts to epiphenomena of DNA segments and evolutionary drives. It is a fair point, to an extension, showing off the faults of some of the readings that exist within the paradigm, although missing the target, when it comes to the writings of Tooby and Cosmides or Jonathan Gottschall whom employ a far wider myriad of readings. The second argument, which is especially championed by Kramnick, is the notion that the scientific side of Literary Darwinism is not that engaged in proper empirical science: “Yet value-laden ideas like complete humanity have no meaning in the terms of evolutionary or any other science and tell us very little about any cultural artifact. And this is precisely my point. With the turn to a kind of pabulum, Darwinian criticism seems not very scientific at all” (Kramnick 346). Again, regarding certain ideas or texts on Darwinian Literary Studies, Kramnick definitely has a point. When employing students of the humanities to start using scientific method, it is difficult for it to become purely scientific, but instead a hodgepodge of methodology and unempirical observations. This is a broad generalization though, and not applicable to every article or textbook.

Certainly, there are those Literary Darwinists whom aspire to have a far broader view of the science that they employ, such as Jonathan Gottschall who has specialized in evolution, alongside his English department accolades. Thereby, Kramnick hits home at a few key points, but fails to deliberate the nuance in the matter. His viewpoint is also one that concludes upon consilience as an impossibility, since a given academic in a certain area apparently will not be able to satisfactorily be able to move around in the academic branches. It is a discussion point that is difficult to conclude upon, but it is fair to say that both parties have merit in their argumentation.

Even though there are certain faults to the Literary Darwinist reading, there are many aspects that showcase this reading, none of which shall be delved too deeply into now, but the Austen example clearly exemplifies it. A reading which shall be fully employed in the following

pages, as I delve into the masterpiece *Lolita*, and attempt to conclude similarly upon the attraction to that novel, although it is not quite as clear cut as Jane Austen.

### 3.0 The Darwinist Allure and Repugnance of *Lolita*

Applying the Literary Darwinist framework upon the sublime prose of Nabokov's seminal novel could be perceived by some to be sacrilege; forcing the indelicate gauntlet of empirical study onto the eloquent and canonical pages of such a novel, but it is absolutely necessary. In order to showcase the absolute applicability of the Literary Darwinist paradigm, it must be tested against texts that are unusually averse to such a reading, since that reading will lend itself to disprove criticism of its narrow scope, or rather, too broad scope. Historically, the Literary Darwinist approach has had its field days analyzing 19<sup>th</sup> century literature, highly focusing on aspects of character and theme, as in Carroll's perusal of the storytelling paradox by way of Jane Austen in *Graphing Jane Austen: The Evolutionary Basis of Literary Meaning* (2012) or his perusal of Wilde in *Aestheticism, Homoeroticism and Christian Guilt in The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2005).

This focus is undoubtedly a product of the lack of scientific data available on the matter of poetics, and our allure to such, at least in contrast to the obtainable notions of theme and character. That does not mean that this analysis is cutting edge, by no means, but it deviates from the typical scheme of Literary Darwinist analysis and seeks to bridge the current gap between Literary Darwinists, or believers in consilience, with the remainder of humanist academia. As such, my methodological and theoretical position remains more on the side of Jonathan Gottschall than Joseph Carroll in that I will not limit myself to only include empirical evidence from evolutionary biology and sociology, but also borrow from other branches such as linguistic sciences, and the like. Even so, Carroll will still be an immensely important source on the exclusively evolutionary standpoint, as he is the foremost academic on that subject.

### 3.1 The Reception History of *Lolita*

Before engaging in the fictional world of *Lolita*, it is of utmost importance to discuss the climate it was received in, and the history of its reception thereafter. This importance relates a great deal to the first question of my thesis; why is this novel so popular, when it is so controversial? Therefore, it is quite salient to outline the history of this infatuation and objection, as well as pinpointing the cultural status of *Lolita* today, and how it is perceived by the general public. For the following pages, there will be several citations to Brian Boyd's *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (1991), as he is one of the foremost academic on the subject of Nabokov, while also being a Literary Darwinist, which makes his material eminent for this thesis.

As *Lolita* was published in the 1950s, an era of extreme censure, it is something to marvel at, that a novel surrounding the kidnapping and abuse of a pre-adolescent girl was published in that climate in the first place, especially from a Russian-American during and consequent to the Second Red Scare (1947-1957). Perhaps, it is important to note that it was published in the US in the tail end of that decade, in 1958, on the verge of the more liberal 1960s. The novel was first published in the United Kingdom in 1955, but a comprehensive ban was soon put into place after reviews, which left no doubt as to the moral decrepitude existing within the pages of *Lolita*. John Gordon of the *Sunday Express* called it: “the filthiest book I have ever read. Sheer, unrestrained pornography...Anyone who published it or sold it here would certainly go to prison. I am sure the *Sunday Times* would approve, even though it abhors censorship as much as I do” (Boyd 1991, 295). Disregarding the obvious cognitive dissonance, it is obvious the furor that this novel provoked. These backlashes came in response to a recommendation made by Graham Greene, wherein he deemed the novel among the top three novels of 1955 (Boyd, 1991, 295). There were also many other writers who identified the worth of the novel, criticizing these censorious allegations: “It shocks because it is great art, because it tells a terrible story in a wholly original way. It is wildly funny, coarse, subtle and tragic, all at once.” (Boyd, 1991, 295).

Nonetheless, after the scorn of Gordon, the novel was publicly denounced for its perceived obscene or lascivious contents, even though the novel does not contain a single ‘four-letter word’ or a single explicitly pornographic description: “The novel is much less detailed in its descriptions, and far more decorous in its vocabulary, than many novels on recent bestseller lists” (Boyd 1991, 295). As such outcries often do, it started a ripple effect. This British reaction soon generated a similar response in France, whom also banned the book. Of course, this response was greatly saddening for Vladimir Nabokov, whom felt that his work had been unfairly treated, and completely misinterpreted, and therefore decided to compose an afterword for the novel, which would allude to these accusations: “Witty and profound, this nimble, elusive, deceptive essay on the genesis of *Lolita* and the nature of its art defends the novel from any charge of pornography by its sheer certainty that a novel on *this* artistic level need not descend to self-defense” (Boyd 1991, 300 – italics original). For both of these influential European nations, the ban lasted for two years, and was then lifted due to a rise in general positivity surrounding the contents of the novel, as well as the extended pressures and lawsuits put into place by Nabokov’s French publisher, Maurice Girodias (Boyd 1991, 357).

In the meantime, the heated debate of the propriety of the novel had drawn attention in other countries, and in 1956, publishers from Sweden, Germany and Denmark inquired as to the rights of the novel (Boyd 1991, 300). In June of the same year, copies of *Lolita* were also

starting to circumvent the US Customs, which was also a sign of the softening perception of the novel, and finally, two years later the novel was permitted for national, official approval. As it was finally ready for the bookstores after years discussed as taboo, the surrounding excitement propelled the novel into a massive success; signified by Nabokov's publisher's wire messages to his employer on the first day: "Over 2600 reorders today – mostly all from New York but they are beginning to arrive from out of town, by wire, phone, etc." (Boyd 1991, 365). Mere four days later, the tally was up to 62,500 copies in print (Boyd 1991, 365). Thus, the explosive potential energy of *Lolita* was finally released, and the following response was proportionally volatile, eventually reaching the top of the bestseller list.

As this craze rose to a crescendo, the mainstream awareness of the novel led to a superficial perception of its content, which in turn led to the deterioration and ridicule of its themes: "In America, *Lolita* was becoming a household word and a regular subject of jokes by television hosts like Steve Allen, Dean Martin, and Milton Berle. The process of vulgarization would ultimately lead to such horrors as the life-size Lolita doll with "French and Greek" apertures in the mid-1970s" (Boyd 1991, 373). This aspect of the novel's popularity will be discussed further in the second part of this delineation. In the years that followed, the popularity of *Lolita* among English Departments swelled, and the novel was accepted into the canon of American Literature, as well as the general body of English Literature. Of course, these canon inclusions are highly contextual and individual to the list-maker, but such a list-maker would be hard-pressed to defend the non-inclusion of *Lolita*. As such, *Lolita* remains a highly controversial novel to this day, leading to the publication of articles and books discussing the morality of the novel, such as Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Teheran* (2003), who strove to categorize Humbert Humbert as a rapist: "Those who tell us Lolita is a little vixen who deserved what she got should remember her nightly sobs in the arms of her rapist and jailer" (Nafisi 36), while others such as Brian Boyd disregards this notion, as he posits "we know that he did not rape Lolita in any ordinary sense. At twelve she had lost her virginity at summer camp, and when she and Humbert meet again after her mother's death it is she who suggests that they try out the naughty trick she has just learned at camp." (Boyd 1991, 230). Thus, much furor can still be made on account of this 60-year-old novel, which lends credence to the relevance of the novel's contents even today.

Despite having overcome the initial hurdles of censorship and public condemnation, and the resulting gain in status throughout the literary world, there is still the issue that the novel is still struggling with its public image for the general public. Problematically, in the eyes and minds of the wider community that early condemnation of obscenity and pornography persisted, and its low-brow connotations became ensconced in the name and reputation of the book.

Strangely, it has also mutated in various quite disturbing fashions, developing into sexual fetishism and commercialized sex toys, which bear the name of that eponymous heroine: “Here are tawdry gewgaws (dolls, cosmetics, clothes, sunglasses, toys, and scarcely believable novelty items) as well as numerous artistic and quasi-artistic attempts to reincarnate her in other media, for other audiences, and for other times” (Vickers 1-2). More often than not, the name *Lolita* has become a blanket-statement for lascivious, commercial projects, for them to defend their enterprise: “the Lolita name has been pressed into service to sell all kinds of objects, as well as justify a number of dubious artistic projects that seem to trade on the ambiguity of the blurred line between art and pornography.” (Vickers 151). Therefore, the novel has often been connotated with the approval or encouragement of the sexualization of pre-adolescent girls, or as a seal of approval for pornography to claim artful intentions: “Lolita was often brought into the Hamilton pornography debate not because of any actual link but because in the minds of critics Lolita’s name was by now pretty much established as shorthand for any debate about smut dressed as art.” (Vickers 152-53).

It is unclear how strongly the film *Lolita* (1962) affected this pop cultural image, or more apt, archetypal figure, but of course it helped commercialize and popularize the otherwise esoteric knowledge of the novel, alongside the televisual debate and degradation mentioned earlier. It is unclear due to the massive public debate that roared previous to the film’s release, making any isolation of the two distinguished works difficult. According to Vickers, this perverse imagery started with the adaptation: “It all began with that 1962 movie poster featuring a stylized Lolita sucking a scarlet lollipop and peeping over the lenses of sunglasses equipped with red heart-shaped frames” (Vickers 148). Of course, the illustrations and visual expressions of Lolita were created in the first place by the visual artists attached to the adaptation.

Thus, the film has helped mastermind the main marketing strategy for the novel in the years to come. The sexual imagery that came along with that adaptation of the novel, is a sexualization that has also been perpetuated by the publishing firms that have held the rights to the book over the years. Many a young, sexually taunting girl have borne the covers of this novel, peeping through a set of sun glasses, engorging herself playfully on a lollipop, even though Nabokov himself explicitly stated that he did not wish to see the novel published in such a manner: “Before the novel’s publication, he [Nabokov] had insisted that there be no little girl on the cover, and now, as a *Lolita* movie looked more and more possible, he warned Minton [publisher] that he ‘would veto the use of a real child. Let them find a dwarfess” (Boyd 1991, 374). Of course, Sue Lyon was sixteen at the time of filming *Lolita*, and therefore below the American age of consent, thus legally a child, at least within sexual legal discourse, making Nabokov’s protestations less than fruitful. Problematically, this type of imagery may be a key

element in the selling power of this novel, and continuously misdirects the unknowing individual from the true purpose, and cultural statement that the novel represents, instead of a tale made for the satisfaction of the flesh. The main issue remains that while Nabokov was explicitly and implicitly against the types of actions performed by Humbert, these types of imagery and commercialization seem to be encouraging such behavior, provoking a predilection towards a certain type of aesthetic, almost taunting the consumer, which aggravates the majority, but also fascinates the few.

Having delineated the popularity and controversy of *Lolita's* publishing history, as well as that of derivative works, the stage is set for the textual analysis of the novel from a Literary Darwinist perspective. Keeping in mind the popular opinion, it will be interesting to delve into the various aspects of the novel that has been deemed relevant with regards to allure, and to see whether there is a connection in-between.

### 3.2 The Darwinian Humbert Humbert

Characterizing Humbert is inherently a troublesome task, in that he is purposefully, confusingly dichotomous in his personality and in his address to us, the reader. As the novel, there seems to exist two separate creatures within, encompassing Humbert's whole state of being, and constantly forming a wavering, dualistic view of him as a character: "No wonder, then, that my adult life during the European period of my existence proved monstrously twofold" (Nabokov 11). On the one hand, Humbert is a distinguished member of the intelligentsia, who is calm, self-confident to an inordinate degree, and, according to himself, severely attractive: "Let me repeat with quiet force: I was, and still am, despite *mes malheurs*, an exceptionally handsome male; slow-moving, tall, with soft dark hair and a gloomy but all the more seductive cast of demeanor" (Nabokov 25 – italics original), but he is also filled with a considerate amount of self-loathing: "Every movement she made in the dappled sun plucked at the most secret and sensitive chord of my abject body" (Nabokov 41). That is also tied together with the theming of the novel; the plasticity of reality, and the reality scrambling effects of a subjective bias, which will be discussed in greater detail below. This dichotomous narration perfectly showcases the dualistic nature of the novel, and ultimately, the everchanging circumstances and state-of-mind that surround the existence of any individual with a modicum of self-consideration and self-awareness. Additionally, Humbert's name is an allusion to this divide within him, the repetition of the name highlights the nature of two people within him, encompassing two separate psychological states, and even two idiosyncratic identities. The first page of the novel is also a testament to the changeability of people - the plasticity of behavior and personality. We are not one person, but several people: "She was Lo, plain Lo, in the

morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita.” (Nabokov 9).

On top of that ambiguous portrayal, we are further distanced from the truth of Humbert’s story by the virtue that we are engaged with a narrative constructed by him. Since the narrative is propelled by him, through his first-person narration, there exists an enormous likelihood that events are being skewed by his own interpretation, or through willful manipulation. This is further made likely by the fact that the narrative is constructed as a court procedural: “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, exhibit number one is what the seraphs, the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs, envied. Look at this tangle of thorns” (Nabokov 9) – he is here to defend himself and his actions. Furthermore, Humbert Humbert has, by his own admission, a history of mental illness: “A dreadful breakdown sent me to a sanatorium for more than a year; I went back to my work – only to be hospitalized again” (Nabokov 32-33). Thus, the possibility that we are dealing with an unreliable narrator is impossible to omit. Now, what kind of issues follow along with that conclusion? And are there any Literary Darwinist commentaries upon the concept of the unreliable narrator or the dichotomous state of the character?

Firstly, the unreliable nature of Humbert is related to the uncertainty and dark vicissitudes of the unknown, which is known to be a powerful concept within the human mind, and thus also Darwinist theory. Of course, reading Humbert’s prose is not the same as venturing out into the night, not knowing who or what could be lying in wait, which in turn can trigger certain human defensive mechanisms such as adrenaline, but there is a sense of the unease that often comes hand-in-hand with the dark. We show an elicit response to the unknown, especially if we are aware that something is amiss, possibly due to an inherited reaction to this, since we, as a species, have dealt with many nighttime predators: “Our fear of monsters in the night probably has its origins far back in the evolution of our primate ancestors, whose tribes were pruned by horrors whose shadows continue to elicit our monkey screams in dark theaters” (Shepard 29).

An unreliable narrator can produce a similar, although far more vague response in the reader. Perhaps a more fitting evolutionary analogy to this literary phenomenon is the presence of the free-rider. In evolutionary sociology, this term is used to denote individuals within a society, which break the social contract for the purposes of personal gain, resulting in either an individual or a collective loss for the victim(s) of this free-rider: “In any social contract, there will always be a temptation to take advantage of the generosity of others. The benefit to the free-rider is often considerable, because they are able to steal a march on everyone else.” (Dunbar et al. 125). Since Humbert is not a direct free-riding threat towards our social sphere, we are less inclined to jump out of our chairs, but the same distrustful, critical mechanism is awakened and put on alert, which is the same way in which we guard ourselves against free-

riders in real society: “However, any such system is inevitably plagued by free-riders [...] and mechanisms are needed to keep them under control, in order to avoid the delicate balance of relationships in co-operative social systems from being destroyed” (Dunbar et al. 127). It is also true of this mechanism that it becomes intensified when it has been deceived by the same individual in the past, or if they know of the deceptive nature of said individual towards others: “Free-riding will eventually be held in check by our personal experiences of an individual free-rider’s behavior: once bitten, we will be reluctant to trust that particular person again” (Dunbar et al. 126).

Now, as Humbert Humbert is shown throughout the novel to be quite adept in subterfuge and duplicity towards others, as is shown when he convinces the Farlows that Dolores is the product of his affair with Charlotte Haze, years before they had really met: “In a moment of of superb inspiration I showed the kind and credulous Farlows [...] a little photograph of Charlotte I had found among her affairs. [...] While on a business visit to the States, I had had occasion to spend several months in Pisky. We met – and had a mad love affair” (Nabokov 99-100). Thus, the reader’s sense of distrust in Humbert’s narration grows, since we are aware of his ability to bend reality in order to make it fit to his liking.

The narrative is made further suspicious by a strong sense of happy accidents, and coincidences that seem like the product of ‘deus ex machina’. For example, the extremely fortuitous, for Humbert, and untimely death of Charlotte Haze, as it comes exactly when Charlotte finds out about the duplicitous nature of their relationship. Other examples include the room numbers of their motel/hotel rooms, which magically line up with the house number of Dolores’ and Charlotte’s house: “I wrote: Dr. Edgar H. Humbert and daughter, 342 Lawn Street, Ramsdale. A key (342!) was half-shown to me” (Nabokov 18). Additionally, it is curious that the name of Dolores’ school play matches the name of the hotel that they stayed in on their first night alone together: “The coincidence of the title with the name of an unforgettable inn was pleasant in a sad little way” (Nabokov 200). However, the latter example of happy accidents could be a ploy by Quilty to tease Humbert, though. It is also important to note that Nabokov also intensifies the experience of the reader by introducing this element of doubt or distrust in Humbert, which transforms the reader into their own detective sleuth, trying to catch Humbert off-guard, or to try to observe points in the novel that reveal a sense of inconsistency or deceit. We are naturally inclined to attempt to discover the truth behind the events that we are being narrated. However, there is also a course of argumentation that could argue certain faults in the ‘unreliable narrator’ interpretation.

Naturally, there is a point to be made about his candidness towards us in letting us in on these various duplicitous acts, perhaps turning the tables towards a more trustworthy

characteristic. For example, if he is being unreliable, why would he tell us that he planned to murder Charlotte just before she was accidentally killed: “The setting was really perfect for a brisk bubbling murder, and here was the subtle point: the man of law and the man of water were just near enough to witness an accident and just far enough not to observe a crime” (Nabokov 86). He is even giving away plans for getting away with murder, which also showcases his duplicitous nature, but he is being candid about it. He is not hiding the horrible intentions that he has had. Nevertheless, there are enough examples of Humbert’s deceitful nature that it is enough to skew the balance towards us deeming him untrustworthy. In that sense, Humbert is solidified by the reader as a free-rider in the meta-existence of the novel, that is, when perceiving Humbert as a first person narrator, telling the story of his past life. Thereby, Humbert shows himself as such in the non-diegetic sphere of the narrating world, but what about the diegetic sphere of the narrated world?

It comes to little surprise that Humbert is also conclusively a free-rider within the diegetic reality that Nabokov presents to us. There are many examples of Humbert breaking the social contract during several encounters with other characters in the novel, such as the abovementioned example with the Farlows, his lie to Dolores that her mother is in hospital and not dead (Nabokov 111), or his continuous lies to desk clerks at the various hotels and motels they inhabit, and adults in general whom come into contact with him and Dolores. Even so, his major transgression in this context is not his various lies that try to cover up his deviant motives, but him falsely assuming the role as a parent to Dolores and dragging her cross the American continent in order to be able to take advantage of her. At this point, it would be relevant to delve into the details of our moral evaluation of Humbert’s actions, by taking advantage of the evolutionary perceptions of evil, or amoral actions.

Now, since it is absolutely true that a negatively charged moral judgement such as ‘evil’ is inherently subjective and relative within a micro spectrum, for example, an individual convinced of his own moral high ground, while a majority of the populace would deem that individual otherwise. However, when we begin to work from a macro perspective, researching the behaviors of large social groups, we are able to define evil behavior from the point of human universals and through our knowledge of evolutionary psychology, social psychology and cognitive psychology. Even here, it is highly difficult to conclude definitively upon any definition or categorization, which is no wonder since this is an issue that has been discussed for millennia: “The concept of evil is ontologically problematic. It is so problematic that philosophers and theologians have offered different and often contradictory ideas about evil for thousands of years” (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 1). But how do we begin to characterize that which is evil?

Using Humbert Humbert as a prism within which to compartmentalize and organize this concept, it shall become far clearer to the reader as we move further along in the explication. First of all, the concept of evil is tricky since it denominates an action or being that is pervasively malevolent, leading one to ponder whether or not that concept is a mere metaphysical, conjectural perception of others' actions, whom are likely not driven by pure malevolence. It is a trite truism that no one perceives themselves as evil, likely not even Josef Stalin or Adolf Hitler, and that is true of Humbert as well. He does not see his pursuit of nymphettes as a malevolent act, but merely something he knows to be perceived as evil by others. Interestingly, he chooses to perceive something evil in the girls whom he covets, instead of attributing it to his own perception: "You have to be an artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy [...] in order to discern at once [...] the little deadly demon among the wholesome children; *she* stands unrecognized by them and unconscious herself of her fantastic power" (Nabokov 17 – italics original). Here, he describes the plight of the 'nympholept' as he terms it and gives it an enormous amount of pathos in order to create some sort of sympathy with the man who has such a predilection or affliction, whichever is the most fitting. He describes himself as a creature of infinite melancholy, which would ordinarily denote a horribly sad person, while concurrently dehumanizing the victim of such a 'nymphette' categorization to a point where Humbert wants us to shift the blame to the pre-adolescent girl, although he is aware of his failure in this venture. Bearing this complex subjectivity of the perception of evil in mind, how does evolutionary psychology complement this notion?

Ultimately, by placing the human being within evolution, as well as embracing the ontological notions of the Literary Darwinist: "All organisms are the products of blind probabilistic processes played out over geological time. This basic idea explains Earth's entire biosphere, including, of course, the phyletic expanse of *Homo sapiens*" (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 2), it is possible to identify certain aspects of human behavior that can be denoted as 'evil', as they relate to the process of evolution, survival and procreation. First of all, though, in order to denote behavior that can be qualified as evil, it is necessary to delve into the qualities of actions that can be perceived as good, such as altruism (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 3). Altruism is difficult to explain from an evolutionary standpoint, but it is definitely doable, and it is even possible to quantify degrees of altruism, or its opposing concept of selfish gratification, through Tooby and Cosmides' notion of the Welfare Tradeoff Ratio: "For a given individual *i*, the WTR regulates the weight that the actor *i* places on the welfare of a specific individual *j* compared to the weight the actor places on the self (*i*), when making decisions that have impacts on the welfare of *i* and *j*" (Tooby and Cosmides 4). Thus, if you are willing to commit a large amount of your resources to another person without a direct reciprocal action on the part of the other,

you are exhibiting a high Welfare Tradeoff Ratio. On the other hand, if you are more likely to only look out for yourself, and perhaps show a disregard for the well-being of others, you are exhibiting a low Welfare Tradeoff Ratio. Low WTR is highly connected to our perception of evil, probably due to the major social ramifications that would follow if this behavior was not made taboo by us as a society, by denoting it as evil: “As members of a social species, humans should preferentially court high-WTR conspecifics, which is why they are programmed to assess the prospective fitness returns of current and potential liaisons.” (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 4). Thereby, we are hardwired to assess the perceived Welfare Tradeoff Ratio that we can observe in the individuals existing in the social spheres that we move around in.

This means that the potential moral or amoral realm of actions is based upon the impact that these actions have upon our common society, thereby condemning acts that have a negative impact upon the trust and altruistic behavior that our society heavily relies on: “what makes human societies possible is the fact that that the members implicitly agree to honour their social obligations” (Dunbar et al. 123). However, Humbert is able to escape reprisals due to his uncommonly good deceptive skills, but also due to the geographical make-up of the US. Humbert is able to move around almost freely as he engages in these problematic behaviors, due to the sheer size and unknown properties of a modern civilization such as the US: “Computer simulations have shown that the free-rider problem becomes increasingly intrusive under two general conditions: when social groups are large and dispersed and when the costs of cooperation are low” (Dunbar et al. 126). Even so, how do Humbert’s actions square up against this notion of the Welfare Tradeoff Ratio?

In the usual assessment and treatment of Humbert Humbert, the main point of critique is often his relationship with Dolores and the traumatizing acts he subjects her to, but it is often glossed over that he is an actual murderer. This could be due to the extreme amount of murders and murderers that are present in the entire body of fiction, which could have a desensitizing effect on the reader, thus highlighting the decrepit nature of his relationship with Dolores. Of course, this relationship is the key concept of the novel, not murder, so it is far more relevant to discuss that connection. Nevertheless, both of these courses of actions are highlighting a clear tendency in Humbert’s WTR, which is tremendously low. We are first keyed into this amoral behavior as Humbert hints at the reason for this court room procedural, that we are indirect witnesses to: “You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style” (Nabokov 9). This sets the tone for the remainder of the novel, preparing us for the horrid actions that are to come. As for tangible actions, it is first brought to light that Humbert has murderous tendencies, as he reflects upon the idea of killing Charlotte Haze: “I knew that all I had to do was to drop back, take a deep breath, then grab her by the ankle and rapidly dive with my captive corpse”

(Nabokov 86). Of course, he does not follow up on this train of thought, but it showcases his selfish nature – the wish to kill violently in order to get what he wants. As mentioned earlier though, we cannot be entirely certain that Humbert does not have a hand in her eventual death, as it comes at a very fortuitous time for him.

As for his behavior towards Dolores, the number of low WTR actions that Humbert commits is immense and are varied in degree and intensity. In the beginning, their relationship does not necessarily come off as completely detestable, since Dolores is an important actor in these encounters. Of course, they are detestable just the same due to her age, but it would be a great deal more horrific if she was not forthcoming at the beginning, although she is tricked into thinking that intercourse is something only kids engage in: “I answered I did not know what game she and Charlie had played. [...] ‘You mean’ she persisted, now kneeling above me, ‘you never did it when you were a kid?’. ‘Never’ I answered quite truthfully. ‘Okay’ said Lolita, ‘here is where we start’. (Nabokov 133). However, the ‘game’ is swiftly darkened by the continuing rapidity that its played in – transforming the playful Dolores into a traumatized, troublesome child: “Our long journey had only defiled with a sinuous trail of slime the lovely, trustful, dreamy, enormous country [...] and her sobs in the night, every night, every night – the moment I feigned sleep” (Nabokov 176). Humbert has completely lost the flirtatious, amorous relationship he used to have with Dolores, and it has been replaced by pure animalistic, sexual atrocities wherein he is actively blackmailing her to engage in such: “Only very listlessly did she earn her three pennies – or three nickels – per day; and she proved to be a cruel negotiator whenever it was in her power to deny me” (Nabokov 184). It is therefore, not difficult to conclude that Humbert is an evil person, when taking the perspective of the Welfare Tradeoff Ratio, due to selfish nature of his actions. As in the definition of the WTR, Humbert is not complacent at any moment to disregard his own needs to be altruistic towards others. Although, what makes him interesting is that, that is not all he is. But what drives these horrible actions? As with the animalistic approach to Dolores, as mentioned above, Humbert struggles with these urges throughout the novel, which is often the impetus for his amoral actions.

The dichotomy of the man and the animal, directly characterized through Humbert Humbert is presented by Nabokov as such in interviews: “My baboon Humbert Humbert, for after all, Humbert Humbert is a baboon, a baboon of genius but a baboon” (Boyd 1991, 375). This statement, apart from the obvious repetitional alliteration, alludes to the stupidity of Humbert Humbert’s actions, but also the animalistic nature that is involved in these irrational actions. By characterizing Humbert as a virtuosic primate, he solidifies him as a rational person caught in the throes and woes of his evolutionarily developed mind and body, launching him onto an extended peregrination of compromises, surrendered morals, and blasted hopes, which

end up destroying him. Of course, this is not singularly due to his natural being, but actually due to the schism between his natural being and his rational, civilized self. He is continuously caught in the motives and pathways of both this rational and animalistic side. As with the example above, there are many instances in which Humbert relates to himself, and others, as animals: “I am like one of those inflated pale spiders you see in old gardens. Sitting in the middle of a luminous web and giving little jerks to this or that strand” (Nabokov 49). He often describes Dolores as a monkey, as well: “and with the monkeyish nimbleness that was so typical of that American nymphet, she snatched out of my abstract grip the magazine I had opened” (Nabokov 58). Even more curious, is the fact that Nabokov ascribes an experience with a monkey as the muse whom gave him the inspiration for the novel: “The first little throb of *Lolita* went through me late in 1939 [...], the initial shiver of inspiration was somehow prompted by a newspaper story about an ape in the Jardin des Plantes, who, after months of coaxing by a scientist, produced the first drawing ever charcoaled by an animal” (Nabokov 311).

On top of that, there is an alternative level to this dichotomous position of Man versus Animal, in that Humbert’s predilection towards girls in the age group “between the age limits of nine and fourteen” (Nabokov 16) is predicated as harmful and obscene within civilized society, since we have evolved a moral conscience whose aim is to shield our young from trauma. So, how do we characterize Humbert’s predilection? The closest we can come to his fetishistic tendencies, is the term hebephilia, which is “generally from 11 to 14 years, as opposed to those for pedophilia (under 11 – i.e. prepubescent)” (Rind & Yuill 1), which is, two years over the minimum that Humbert specifies, but still within the confines of the girls we experience him interacting with, the key one being Dolores whom is twelve at the point of the relationship’s inception. Certainly, Humbert is not attracted to every girl within that span of years: “Between those age limits, are all girl-children nymphets? Of course not. Otherwise, we who are in the know, we lone voyagers, we nympholepts, would have long gone insane.” (Nabokov 17), so it is difficult to characterize, but for the purposes of this analysis the term hebephilia will do. Looking at the scientific data, specifically targeting the hebephiliac sexual proclivities, it is actually shown how there is no biological proof to show how hebephiliac predilections are not biologically, and evolutionarily sound: “The broad-based scientific evidence indicates that hebephilia is not a dysfunction, and therefore cannot justifiably be declared a mental disorder in the DSM.” (Rind & Yuill 28). This is due to the age of sexual maturity in young girls from a biological point of view, making it a salient procreational strategy from the point of view of the uncivilized man. Of course, the maturity is not evolved from a

cognitive point of view, making it dysfunctional in a civilized society, and therein lies the rub for Humbert Humbert.

Of course, as civilized individuals operating in a society such as ours, creates a group dynamic wherein we have developed certain morals, due to our knowledge of the radical, momentous trauma that such a relationship provokes. Thus again, Humbert is struggling with the dichotomy between the biological, animalistic parts of himself and society, and the civilized notions that rejects such actions. Humbert has internalized this notion of the traumatic consequences, as he is keenly aware of the morally problematic aspects of his predilection, and the actions he takes based on that, as well as the consequences of it. This is something that Rind and Yuill also remarks upon in relation to hebephilia: “Yet it remains that hebephilia misfits contemporary Western socio-economic structures and egalitarian ideals, often eliciting hyperbolic social reaction. In this context, such behavior is problematic for all concerned: the hebephilic actor, his or her junior partner or target, and significant others connected to them.” (28). Interestingly, Nabokov does not himself allude to Humbert’s hebephilia having a natural or biological cause, but rather that Humbert is suffering from his internalization of the perfection of his childhood love: “In point of fact, there might have been no *Lolita* at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child [Annabel Leigh]” (Nabokov 9). Thus Nabokov, ascribes the reason for his protagonist’s sexuality, a high degree of nurture and rejects nature. In that way, Nabokov describes a social constructivist world-view, and ontologically lays all the blame on Humbert’s repressed sexuality, in that he never consummated the relationship with Annabel: “I was on my knees, and on the point of possessing my darling, when two bearded bathers, the old man of the sea and his brother, came out of the sea with exclamation of ribald encouragement, and four months later she died of typhus in Corfu” (Nabokov 13). Thereby, the scientific data actually states that Humbert is a prisoner of his sexual predilections, and not a chooser of sexuality, which is an important distinction, when shifting around ethical considerations.

Naturally, it is much too reductive to reduce the human motivational factors into two distinguishable categories; the animalistic/biological and the rationalized/civilized. The spectrum is infinitely wider, but there are certain motivations that stem from biologically salient modes for survival, and others that stem from a more civilized, critical, and cultural affect. For example, the search for a mate or sexual partner is a primal, natural urge that is meant to motivate the individual to procreate, and further their genetic material to the next generation. Of course, that is an unconscious motive that is not necessarily shared by the individual. Thusly, certain evolutionary motivations can be perceived through the ‘Gene-centered view of evolution’ or, in layman’s terms; the ‘Gene’s eye view’, which was partly conceptualized by

several academics such as Maynard Smith, George C. Williams and Richard Dawkins. Even so, Dawkins remains the figurehead for this theory, since he was a key proponent in the popularization of its notions. The Gene's Eye View conceptualizes the gene as a conscious driver of evolution, that is, it is an explanatory paradigm that can help us understand certain human motivations, such as altruism, which is quite irregular if the individual is merely out for the survival of the self: "So although altruism may seem anomalous from the organism's point of view, it makes perfect sense from the gene's point of view. Inducing its host organism to behave altruistically towards relatives is a 'strategy' that a gene can use to boost its representation in future generations." (Okasha 146). Of course, it is not meant that there is conscious body in the gene that is directly affecting the impulses and actions of the individual, but rather it is framework that can help us understand the motivations of actions that do not necessarily seem salient for survival. In this same way, we can try to understand the actions of Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*, because he is not necessarily acting in a way that is conducive to his survival or to the well-being of others, in that he has a procreational drive that sends him wildly astray when clashing with society, and especially, little girls.

Even though Humbert is perceptibly 'evil' throughout his actions, it is impossible for most to completely detest him due to the beauty of his art and prose. Humbert is almost a prototype of the popularized amoral protagonist that thrived after the 20<sup>th</sup> century, propelling several TV shows such as *Breaking Bad* (2008), *Dexter* (2006) and *House of Cards* (2013) into massive acclaim. These narratives share a concept wherein the audience attachment to the character is not necessarily based on moral conformity of one's own sense of morality, but on the charm, intelligence, and conscientiousness of the character, which is something that Humbert has in spades. This type of character is often called an anti-hero or an anti-villain, but it is patently obvious that Humbert is neither. He is neither a hero without heroic traits, nor a villain with moral goals, but a hodgepodge of various motivations and traits with dissimilar moral attachments.

The only thing elevating Humbert's moral position is the presence of Clare Quilty, as there are certain aspects of him that are more amoral than Humbert, for example, the fact that he wanted Dolores to star in his orgy-film: "I mean, he had two girls and two boys, and three or four men, and the idea was for all of us to tangle in the nude while an old woman took movie pictures" (Nabokov 276). Quilty shows a purely sexual interest in Dolores, which is far more amoral and decrepit, than Humbert, whom is also detestable, but at least he feels deeply amorous towards her throughout periods of the novel. Especially, the final time he meets Dolores, wherein he professes his truest form of affection, since she is neither attractive to him anymore, nor of the right age: "I want you to leave your incidental Dick, and this awful hole,

and come to live with me, and die with me, and everything with me” (Nabokov 278). Of course, at other times, he ignores her clear human needs for his own personal gain, which it could be argued that he also does that in the scene mentioned above, since he wants her to leave the only life where she has been truly happy. After all, she subtly confesses to Humbert: “She groped for words. I supplied them mentally (*‘He broke my heart. You merely broke my life’*) (Nabokov 279). Nevertheless, the moral compass of our experience is highly susceptible to be relativized, as in the popular TV-shows mentioned above, and apparently also with Humbert. Ultimately, it is difficult to completely write off any notion that Humbert is not a consummate villain. One could even liken him to the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century composer Carlo Gesualdo, who was both lauded for his musical body of work, but also became infamous for the murder of his wife and her lover, so as to denote a sense of cognitive dissonance. You can appreciate the art, while simultaneously holding the same position that the person responsible for said art is reprehensible and amoral. Of course, we as readers, understand that Nabokov is the true writer of the words on the page, perhaps making us detest Humbert and appreciate Nabokov, although the dividing line is blurry at times.

Now, is it possible to conclude upon Humbert as a main drawing point in the issue of the popularity of this novel? Certainly, Humbert is an extremely interesting and humorous character, while simultaneously being a horrendous human being, proven by his exceptionally low WTR – a cocktail of human traits that is immensely stimulating to the reader. Thematically, Humbert stands at the center of the novel, eclipsing Dolores, although she is also enormously influential. The schism between reality and subjectivity, the schism between man and animal, and the beauty of existence is all encompassed within him, and serves to draw and lure the reader in, like a spider draws in his prey. Even so, there are many other factors that come into play when answering this question, which shall be further investigated below.

### 3.3 The evolutionary in the literary

It is difficult to deny that a large part of the allure of *Lolita* is owed to the prose style that Nabokov composed, creating an idiosyncratic, unique style to Humbert Humbert, allowing us to gather additional information on Humbert without Nabokov explicitly verbalizing it. It is also used to further support certain notions that we gather as we experience the novel. Even so, it would be very far from the truth, if one were to only characterize this prose from a narrative standpoint, gathering notions between the lines, instead of directly addressing the style that Nabokov employs for this narrative.

From the very first page of *Lolita*, that is, the part that is supposedly written by Humbert and not the intra-diegetic foreword by the fictional psychologist John Ray, Jr., it becomes

patently obvious that we are dealing with prose that puts a strong emphasis on literary playfulness, assonance, anaphora and alliteration, in combination with a literary wit and a number of intertextual references: “Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lolee-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. [...] exhibit number one is what the seraphs, the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs, envied. Look at this tangle of thorns” (Nabokov 9). Even though it is a paragraph that has been endlessly quoted to the point of artistic self-flagellation, it is nevertheless extremely important to unwrap, because it is a locus, or keystone, for the remainder of the novel, encompassing many of the stylistic choices that are made throughout. Notice also, the use of the name Lolita as an anaphoric repetition, always guiding our attention back to her, emphasizing her as the unparalleled focus in the paragraph, with an almost saccadic shift in attention. Of course, the reference that was mentioned is alluding to *Annabel Lee* by Edgar Allan Poe, which is made clear by the allusions to winged seraphs: “I and my Annabel Lee — With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven - Coveted her and me.” (Poe 1). However, in order to properly gain insight into the evolutionary aspects of these choices, it is necessary to discuss it from the point of view of biology, evolutionary sociology and psychology, and not usual literary critical approaches.

Now, an extremely important part of this style comes from Nabokov’s use of alliteration, which comes across in very effective manner, almost causing the reader to flow from one syllable to the next, even without them reading the text aloud, which would otherwise serve to heighten the sense of alliteration. But how can we explain this predilection towards alliteration by using Literary Darwinism? It is important to state up front, that there is no definitive conclusion upon this question, although there has been some severely interesting research into the topic in recent years, that may help shed some light upon this specific predilection and aid us in gaining some insight. One of the more recent journal articles that discusses this phenomenon, posits the possibility of a mnemonic practicality, which could explain why this stylistic choice has embedded itself in human culture for centuries: “In our experiments, concepts presented early in a poem (or prose passage) were more available [for recollection] when alliterative sounds overlapped between lines than when there was no overlap” (Association for Psychological Science 1). Naturally, we are aware of the oral tradition that precedes the written one, where alliteration was an important tool, along with other forms of repetition, for example the one that existed in England: “Old and late Middle English verse texts were simply the most natural ways for poets of the two periods to facilitate the real-time scansion of the alliterative long line for their audiences. Alliteration, therefore, can be said to generate the meter” (Pascual 258). This highlights these mnemonic practicalities, that allows

for a greater memory recall, as well as a possible greater understanding for the participating audience. On top of that, it also transforms the work since the alliteration helps dictate the meter. Even so, this is not anything groundbreaking, as this has been the general understanding of the phenomenon, but are there any other reasons for its proliferation?

If we take a deeper look at the structural form of alliteration and assonance, it is quite apparent that we are talking about a recursive pattern in the form of front-letters in alliteration and the phonetic similarity of syllables in closely spaced words in assonance. Now, patterns, and the recognition of patterns, have an enormous place within the history of the evolution of *homo sapiens*, some are even convinced that it is the foundational skill that drove our evolution: “This article considers superior pattern processing (SPP) as the fundamental basis of most, if not all, unique features of the human brain including intelligence, language, imagination, invention, and the belief in imaginary entities such as ghosts and gods.” (Mattson 1). Being able to navigate and categorize the external world, and the creatures that cohabit it through patterning has thus shown to be highly useful for the individual that can master it.

Curiously, the mastery of language is the evolutionary peak of pattern recognition:

“Language is the quintessential example of the evolved SPP capabilities of the human brain as it involves (once learned) the instantaneous conversion of sounds to visual symbols, and viceversa. Language is a complex behavior in which auditory and/or visual patterns learned from other individuals or perceived in the environment are encoded, processed and modified for the purpose of transfer of information to other individuals” (Mattson 7).

That means that our processing of language is *the* crescendo of our pattern processing, meaning that decoding patterns within it seems to be quite natural and inevitable. Thus, the decoding of language itself is a taxing task, along with the pattern processing that is employed every single day for the average *homo sapiens* but it has been shown that successfully interpreting a pattern has a great influence upon our emotional state, which in turn heightens our effective recall of certain patterns: “Emotions evolved to reinforce memories of patterns of particular significance vis-à-vis survival and reproduction. Remembering the details of the events of an attack by a predator or intra-species rival will increase the probability of avoidance of such potentially deadly encounters in the future” (Mattson 6). This means that there is an innate trigger response involved with the recognition of a pattern, generating positive feedback in the brain of the recipient, especially if it is seen as an efficient survival strategy. From an evolutionary standpoint, we can conclude that the ability for this predilection to survive in the mammalian is

likely due to the heightened survival and procreational abilities of the individual that can perform this task. Another way of looking at it is that it could also be a trait that has survived due to piggy-backing upon other evolved traits, but it seems unlikely due to the massive evidence to speak against such a notion: “The SPP theory predicts that populations that more rapidly develop SPP capabilities will experience accelerated accrual of resources and prosperity” (Mattson 12), which highlights it as an ability that allows mammals to survive and procreate in a much more effective manner. Thus, we can infer that pattern recognition has shown itself as an effective tool in observing the natural, or unnatural, world and thereby connotes a sense of positivity in the individual that employs it. As with the ‘gene’s eye view’ discussed earlier, this is not a conscious decision imparted by the individual, but more of an evolutionary baggage that promotes this type of behavior through the release of various chemicals such as dopamine. Thereby, the alliteration in *Lolita* directly intersects with our evolutionarily developed minds in a manner that was intended for our survival or social success, not the absorption of literature. In that sense, that could be an argument for Pinker’s theory of ‘cheesecake for the mind’. That does not mean that one’s reaction to it should elicit a response of disregard, since pattern recognition can mean everything from walking home or puzzle solving, even though we can approximate the uses that have led to its proliferation. Of course, it is inherently problematic to try to determine the purpose of our genetic traits from a teleological perspective, often landing one in the mire of bias.

When discussing this first page of the novel, it is also highly relevant to bring up the fact that Nabokov himself makes the reader conscious of their biological being, in describing the physical action that the tongue and jaw commits as one pronounces the name Lolita. I highly doubt that any first-time reader of the novel did not playfully position their tongue in the various mouth positions, in order to confirm Nabokov’s sensuous description. This helps explicate the alliterative qualities of the text, highlighting the recursive movements that the mouth employs when speaking in such terms. Could there be any connection between the physical sensations of uttering alliterative sentences and the enjoyment of non-verbal reading of the same sentences? It is unclear at this point, although it is quite likely that the recursive pattern registers as alliterative due to symbolic qualities of language, and thus engages some of the same pattern recognition responses as the verbal one. Thus far, this poetic patterning has been shown from the most famous quote from the novel, but is this patterning at all present in the remainder of the novel, or is it unique only to this paragraph?

Although the alliterative qualities of the work becomes decreasing in intensity as the novel progresses, it is still positively there throughout: “There would have been those luminous globules of gonadal glow that travel up the opalescent sides of juke boxes. There would have

been all kinds of camp activities on the part of the intermediate group, Caneoing, Coranting, Combing Curls [sic] in the lakeside sun” (Nabokov 134), often rearing its head at times when Humbert is especially pensive or emotionally struck, as in the quote above, wherein Humbert’s post-coital ruminations falls upon the decorations of the Enchanted Hunters, not because of the décor itself, but because the imagination of this place allows him an avenue into the joyous moments he experienced with Dolores, allowing the reader an insight into these emotions by summoning the poetic qualities of alliteration: “I am trying to describe these things not to relive them in my present boundless misery, but to sort out the portion of hell and the portion of heaven in that strange, awful, maddening world – nymphet love” (Nabokov 135). Of course, this combination or pairing of emotional highpoints in the novel with alliteration is far from coincidental. This is large part of the highly structured, and highly stylized prose in the novel, it keys us into Humbert’s state of mind at the time of writing said passage, and thereby keys us into how he feels about it. The higher the stylistic values of the prose are, the more Humbert is in this emotional state.

The patterning inherent in Nabokov’s work is also something that Brian Boyd has observed when analyzing the contents of his novels, highlighting the fact that patterning itself is highly likely to convince the reader of the quality of what they are reading: “No other novel that I can recall starts with more patterned prose than *Lolita*. And its initial patterns themselves form parts of other patterns, like Humbert’s self-projection as an artist, a poet, an adoring lover, or his aestheticizing Lolita. But pattern and tantalizing hints of pattern saturate the text.” (Boyd 2008, 1). These patterns are also what helps create the effect of the sublime in the text, as concepts, events, places and people begin to echo what has come before, betraying the simultaneous plasticity and solidity of life. These incessant patterns that seem to appear could also be an allusion to the possibility of a faultiness in Humbert’s recollection of events. Throughout the novel it seems that he is able to perform these recollections to a supernatural degree, quoting conversations and letters verbatim, and perhaps these recurring patterns are an allusion to the fact that Humbert could be mixing up different events and conversations, meshing them together into something altogether new. Nevertheless, the patterning of *Lolita* is a key element in creating this allure to the novel, directing attention towards our biological being, and giving us an intended positive jolt through evolutionarily evolved penchants for patterning, and the joy of experiencing them. Naturally, the possibility of other types of reading still exists, and this is by no means a conclusive study, but an approximation of the joy inherent in this style of writing has been found.

### 3.4 Structural allure

Delving into the structural aspect of the novel, and its allure, one finds many similarities to the pattern recognition that was mentioned as context to the poetic qualities of Nabokov's prose, but whereas alliteration, assonance and anaphora showcases this phenomenon in the micro aspect; words, sentences and paragraphs, the structural aspect showcases it in the macro aspect; longer reaching narrative arcs, metanarratives, intertextuality and knowledge of other narratives. These longer reaching narrative arcs are often built upon a foundation of different patterns: "The most powerful patterns in fiction tend to be those associated with plot: with goals, obstacles, and outcomes, with expectations and surprises. Humbert's goal of obtaining *Lolita* powerfully shapes expectations and ironies" (Boyd 2008, 1). As it happens, there are a number of these typical arcs that appear in the novel, but they are always bent out of their usual shape due to the heinous nature of Humbert or the nature of the narrative itself, opening up for a simultaneous recognition and reprehension of the narrative arc. But what are these arcs within *Lolita* and how are they defined throughout?

As a human universal, romantic love has a very important place within human cognition: "While some universals are or seem to be relatively simple, others are complexes or syndromes (no implication of illness intended). Ethnocentrism and romantic love are examples: both are best understood as complexes or syndromes rather than simple traits or behaviors" (HBES Japan 2 - citation). This complexity is also what makes it hard to establish a human universal within romantic fiction, which has not been observed. Even so, it is massively widespread, and an enormous body of work, over centuries has not seen its end, which attests to its significance: "Precisely because who will partner whom matters so much to us, love stories have always flooded the story pool" (Boyd, 2008, 1).

In *Lolita* we are faced with several of these narrative archetypes; vengeance narrative, mystery narrative, tragic narrative, and romantic love narrative. Perhaps, this latter mention is chief within the execution of these structural arcs, which is the schema of romantic love narratives, even though it has been twisted and skewed from the traditional: "Events can be unique and unprecedented in trivial details, but we understand them because they are similar enough in pattern to other situations we experience directly or indirectly: we recognize romantic love, for instance, as clearly in Humbert's first lines as we hear the pattern of his words." (Boyd 2008, 1). So, there is the overarching structure of the romance novel, that is, the pursuit of an individual towards a stable romantic relationship with another individual – of course, in the traditional sense this relates to male-female relations, although that binarism has since been deconstructed by the pronounced development of male-male narratives or other relationships that defy the norm.

Another obligatory part of this genre of narrative, is the inherent obstacles our hero/heroine will meet, and overcome, as they pursue a happy life with the one they covet. This pursuit of Dolores saturates the narrative structure of the first part of the novel, wherein many trials and tribulations are thrown at Humbert so as to keep him distanced from Lolita, creating a schema of longing or loneliness, which is a severely universal human emotion, and thus we can empathize. Even so, this schema is interrupted by the fact that Humbert is coveting a pre-adolescent girl, and this empathetic projection is lost, more or less, but we still understand the structure from a traditional point of view. The troubling aspect is that, due to the amount of romantic narratives we have been exposed to, we inherently attach ourselves to this schema and understand it, even though it is horribly skewed through the Humbertian prism.

Naturally, the other narrative arcs exist as a subset of the romantic love narrative, in that, there would be no vengeance, mystery or tragedy if there was no love for Dolores. In the second part of the novel, we are exposed to that other classical narrative arc, that is, a revenge narrative. Even more powerful in that revenge narrative, is that it is revenge over a romantic rival, whom stole away our protagonist's romantic interest, and even though it is a dispute over an innocent pre-adolescent girl, we are engaged in this struggle and are hoping for an eventual successful outcome for Humbert. This relates to the graduated moral structure that was mentioned earlier. The mystery narrative is also prevalent in this second part, as a part of the hidden identity of Humbert's rival, which we ultimately learn is Quilty. The tragic structure is more of an overarching structure, which pervades many parts of the novel. Certainly, all of these points relate to plot, since that is the overarching structure that is being discussed, along with the thematical structure. But where does Literary Darwinism come into play? As genre fluidity is not exactly a science, there must be something else to it?

According to Boyd, when we read narratives concerning such narrative arcs, we are engaging with certain patterns that are closely related to our existence, and the human experience: "These intensely human, albeit in Humbert's case perverse, goal patterns shape the narrative impetus of the novel. But Nabokov builds in other patterns, like those of Lolita's relationship to the stranger pursuing Humbert and Lolita out west" (Boyd 2008, 1). These narrative arcs, and our relation to them, are of course highly culturally affected, since these types of stories are typically told to us through others, but even so, they respond to some very innate problematics in us; the mate-choice problem, male-male dominance hierarchies and jealousy. It is not difficult for us to attach our own empathetic reactions to the narrative therefore, although the execution of that romantic narrative, or other, is highly contingent upon the culture one hails from.

Once again, the reception of these narratives have a high impact upon our pattern recognition, which is engaged as we recognize that the story we are paying attention to, is adhering to certain structures that we know and engage with in a more powerful way, since we have an emotional past with such structures: “Specific patterns, real or imagined, are reinforced by emotional experiences” (Mattson 1). This makes it seem further perverted then, when we are faced with a pattern that adheres to these basic formulas, but at the same time diverts with a momentous force. Perhaps, this is one of the elements of the novel that has caused so many people to take a hard stance on the novel, since they feel manipulated into feeling certain things about our main character due to his archetypal role as the romancer but feel entirely otherwise due to the nature of his actions towards the romanced. One could even say that Humbert is a perversion of the monomyth described by Joseph Campbell in his seminal book *The Hero of a Thousand Faces* (1949). Due to its proliferation, as described by Campbell: “For the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source.” (Campbell 3), it is difficult to argue that the monomyth is not also included in this narrative patterning, which is so prolific as to have been existing in the span of thousands of years, all over the globe from Asia to America. But how does Humbert fit into this prolific pattern?

Naturally, Campbell’s work is relatively outdated at the time of writing, and one could offer up many criticisms against its general conclusions, such as Foley’s comprehensive criticism, which rejects the wide-ranging search for similarities between the works: “It is just as important to stress differences as similarities, to avoid creating a Campbell soup of myths that loses all local flavor” (Foley 183). There is a truth to this, that an innate confirmation bias will begin to crop up, as one is looking for similarities between the myths, ignoring their differences. Hopefully, that is not the end-result of my own monomythic comparison, since I found a number of clear similarities. There is also a rather large array of critics, such as Robert A. Segal, whom criticized the scientific validity of Campbell’s approach: “Rather than arguments, Campbell offers examples, but, subject as all of them are to alternative interpretations, they do not suffice. Finally, Campbell at times contradicts or qualifies his own otherwise dogmatic interpretation?” (Segal 67). Although this is true, the scientific nature of mine own usage of Campbell is based upon the scientific nature of pattern recognition, and not the universalist notions of a pervasive, human myth. Nevertheless, through the macro scope, and in general patterns, the pattern recognition is undeniable, even though Nabokov is able to turn the screw quite a few more times than one is used to.

Without going into excruciating detail, the monomyth is mainly composed of 17 stages, although not every monomyth is composed of every single stage, and the same goes for Humbert's journey. Of course, the categories in the monomyth, at least the one described by Campbell, have a certain vagueness in the expression of these stages, and thus I shall do my best not to force a square peg into a round hole. It can be argued that the 'call to adventure' comes in the form of Annabel Leigh, as Humbert's entire *raison d'être* is revealed through his romantic connection with her in his early teens, and since then, dictates his every passionate thought. It also fits with Campbell's description: "A blunder—apparently the merest chance—reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood" (Campbell 46). According to Campbell, this should lead into the refusal of said call, but as Humbert grows up, he never really experiences a refusal towards this 'call to adventure', as he actively rejects normal heterosexual relationships: "Overtly, I had so-called normal relationships with a number of terrestrial women having pumpkins or pears for breasts; inly, I was consumed by a hell furnace of localized lust for every passing nymphet whom as a law-abiding poltroon I never dared approach" (Nabokov 18).

As with the other narrative patterns mentioned, Humbert distances himself from it in a number of areas within this typical hero's journey. Subsequently, as Humbert separates himself from his European life, he crosses over the 'First Threshold', "Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger; just as beyond the parental watch is danger to the infant and beyond the protection of his society danger to the member of the tribe" (Campbell 71). Subsequently, Humbert's story begins to diverge from the monomyth; as he is faced with 'the meeting with the goddess': "commonly represented as a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World. This is the crisis at the nadir [...] at the central point of the cosmos, in the tabernacle of the temple, or within the darkness of the deepest chamber of the heart." (Campbell 101). Now, the only marriage that Humbert is committed to, is that with Charlotte Haze, whom is hardly described as a goddess, although Humbert experiences the following step, which is 'the woman as temptress', although Dolores can hardly be described as a woman.

This section was not meant to be an in-depth comparative reading of *Lolita* from the point of view of the monomyth, so I shall not attempt to fully categorize the various steps of the monomyth. The greatest divergence that *Lolita* has though, is the ending of it, since there is no 'freedom to live', nor any 'master of two worlds' – Humbert does not ultimately overcome his challenge, and does not live happily ever after with Dolores, but succumbs to death in jail due to him failing to suppress his anger towards Quilty. Nevertheless, the patterns of this type of narrative showcase perfectly how alike our narratives can seem, while still remaining quite

heterogeneous. It seems as though Nabokov wished to follow a traditional narrative structure, at least to a certain point, but all the while, he resists that structure with such vehemence. He twists it and turns it, in order to transform it completely, refusing to comply completely. Where one is used to a momentous climax that fulfills the reader with a sense of joy at the happy state of the denouement, Nabokov denies. The climax to the vengeance narrative is ultimately dissatisfying when comparing to other such tales like Alexandre Dumas' magnum opus *The Count of Monte Cristo* wherein the protagonist is able to gain a complete revenge against all the parties that wronged him. As Humbert proceeds to murder Quilty, an atypical sense of anti-climax envelops the scene, since Quilty is completely unfazed by the threat of violence: "He saw the little dark weapon lying in my palm as if I were offering it to him. 'Say' he drawled (now imitating the underworld numbskull of movies) 'that's a swell little gun you've got there. What do you want for her?'" (Nabokov 297). Even the moment of the lethal blow, is further made less dramatic, and almost ridiculous by the two parties rolling around on the floor pathetically: "We rolled all over the floor, in each other's arms, like two huge helpless children" (Nabokov 299). Thereby, Nabokov subverts our expectations in order to convey a scene that truly shows the pathetic nature of murder, instead of the crescendo of a sword duel or any other climactic fight. Thus, the reader is given the effect of something recognizable, but with unrecognizable execution. This struggle with realism also betrays this sentiment of patterning, and the unpleasantness that follows when a pattern does not follow the expected course.

Alternatively, there is a semblance of realism in the tragic structure of *Lolita*, wherein our protagonist dies at the end with his goals unachieved, but this has also been altered, since we do not experience Humbert's last moments, as he gives us his final words. Instead, our protagonist dies 'off-screen', which we are told at the very inception of the novel, in the foreword by the fictional John Ray, Jr: "'Humbert Humbert,' their author, had died in legal captivity, of coronary thrombosis, on November 16, 1952, a few days before his trial was scheduled to start" (Nabokov 3). We are given this information four lines into the novel, which subverts usual narrative flow. Looking at the Shakespearean tragedy, comparing with *Hamlet* (1599-1602) or *Macbeth* (1606) where our protagonists die as a climax to the story, it seems quite asynchronous to have a character who has been the locus of the novel, die without us even experiencing it. However, that structure lends itself to the realism, because we are not given an ultimate climax where we experience Humbert on his deathbed, but instead he shuffles off the coil in the unknown.

In the thematic structure, we observe a constant rope pulling contest between the ideal, the beautiful and the expected fictionality versus the beastly, the sordid and the depressingly realistic: "The beastly and beautiful merged at one point, and it is that borderline I would like

to fix, and I feel I fail to do so utterly. Why?" (Nabokov 135). Exactly this dissonance in the patterning creates a certain allure, since we are being treated with a plasticity and an ambiguity, with which we are not wont: "Lolita is neither a saint nor a slut. Like everything else in the novel, she is a complex mixture – an uncrazy mixed-up kid. If she has lost her virginity to Charlie Holmes behind a bush at summer camp, this hardly constitutes Experience if Experience arrives polarized with Innocence" (Raine 327). Nabokov is expertly working to constantly keeping us distanced from any semblance of a final conclusion upon most events in the novel, and even more importantly, the inner emotional lives that are being affected by such events. Is Humbert a villain, or does he finally register the horrendous things that he has done by the end, making him deserving of some redemption? Several questions such as that arises as one reads the novel, constantly questioning one's own conclusions, but ultimately discovering that such a conclusion is impossible, which was the point all along. This must mean that there is also a certain type of pleasure connected with the sudden breakage of a pattern, as long as it does it in an acceptable manner, which makes a lot of sense. What is a joke, but a calculated break in a narrative pattern that surprises, and humors the listener?

### 3.5 Can Literary Darwinism explain the popularity of *Lolita*?

Breaking down the various selected components that comprise a novel such as *Lolita*, at least within the confines that were constructed for this thesis, has proven relatively fruitful in revealing various Darwinist tendencies, or rather Darwinist explanatory saliences. It has been shown how the character Humbert Humbert intrigues and delights the reader with his prose, while simultaneously earning the discontentment and distrust that is given in equal dosage to the individual whom engages in actions and thoughts which society deem to be harmful towards it. It has been shown how certain patterning, and divergences from patterns, in micro and macro explications can create an innate human allure through our evolutionarily developed minds, due to our predisposition towards pattern recognition as an important element in our survival, and further procreation as a species. But do any of these elements, or explanations, give us a final reckoning towards the partial goal of this thesis: Does any of this explain the popularity, the controversies and the canonicity of *Lolita*?

To be perfectly clear, from the beginning of argumentation, naturally this paper was not able to undeniably conclude upon the certain and unverifiable truth that *Lolita*'s success is due to these, or those elements within it, or exterior to the novel for that matter. However, it is possible to discuss the merits of the findings of this thesis, and certainly, also the faults whilst approximating some of the elements that helped propel it towards the status that it firmly holds today. From the offset of academic ponderance over this novel, it has become clear that *Lolita*'s

status has been immensely aided by the massive, public controversy that surrounded its publishing back in the 1950s. Of course, that cannot help us in describing the alluring contents of the novel, but it can help in revealing some of the context that can explain its prolific status today. Due to the amount of pushback from various governments, *Lolita* gained a certain status, in that, the powers that be had deemed it worthy of censorship, making the novel a symbol of free speech and the right to publish, creating a general underdog narrative for the sympathizers. Furthermore, the perceived lascivious nature of the novel sparked a massive media campaign, as mentioned earlier, which helped propel it into the mainstream consciousness, not the least through sexual fetish dolls and other lascivious derivative products. But how do we explain the continued interest and popularity of it?

It would be quite erroneous to claim a uniquely biological reasoning behind this question, while also massively reductive when considering the complexities and intricacies that come into play when discussing something so illusory as a proclivity towards a book. Motives, interpretation, cultural affect; all of these drives are highly individualized from person to person to a certain point, so it seems quite impossible to give a stamp of approval to any individual putting forth any conclusive evidence towards something alike to this thesis question without hard data.

In broad strokes though, it would not be entirely without merit to claim that some of the points made in my analysis can be part of an explanatory framework that could be put into the context of readings made by other academics. The pattern recognition aspect, the moral evaluation from a sociobiological point of view, and others could be used to assist points made in other articles to support the overall argumentation. That would be a consilient course of action, that could showcase the collaborative potentialities hidden within the scope of a cross-academic branching out. Therefore, instead of deriving an answer only from my own observations, I will try to demonstrate how a consilient form of collaboration could work, and through that, improve upon the overall answer to the question of *Lolita's* popularity. In order to showcase as such, it would be pertinent to attempt a consilient reading, wherein I synthesize my own findings with those of other readings of *Lolita*, and attempt to sort out the various salient points in each, and hopefully discover a common ground. Actually, the word consilience has a double meaning, the first delineating the idea of a connection between the academic branches, as discussed earlier, but it is also a scientific term describing the increased strength of a conclusion based on several, independent sources, whom 'converge' to create stronger evidence for a claim. Naturally, the two are related. My objective with attempting this, is to carry out the principles of the former, while perhaps there will be some mutual conclusions within the texts I compare with. As an example, James Phelan's article *Dual Focalization*,

*Retrospective Fictional Autobiography and the Ethics of Lolita* (2003), will do perfectly, since Phelan is a narratologist, whom also discusses the ethical interpretation of the plot in *Lolita* as I have.

In Phelan's interpretation of the ethical reader-response towards the narrative as they experience it, he deliberates a notion that the reader is constantly performing ethical evaluations, as they read: "the very act of reading has an ethical dimension: reading involves doing things such as judging, desiring, emoting, actions that are linked to our values. More generally, the audience's response to the narrative will indicate their commitments to and attitudes towards the author, the narrator, the narrative situation, and the values expressed in the narrative" (Phelan 132). Naturally, this could be pointed out as a truism, but it is a salient point, which could be further improved via some of the methods employed in Literary Darwinism such as the one performed here. It could be supported by the various statements made earlier about the ethical judgement of Humbert Humbert, such as our division of individuals into trustworthy or free-rider as an innate, continuous process that happens subconsciously. That would help to further prove Phelan's point, as it can move away from a mere hypothetical, to an actual empirically sound observation.

Phelan has a model, wherein he presents the ethical evaluation that takes place when we read, where we judge through four various levels of the narrative: "(1) the ethics of the told; (2) the ethics of the telling; (3) the ethics of writing/producing; and (4) the ethics of reading/reception" (Phelan 135-36), which could be aided by the sociobiological observations. It would also be fruitful to connect this article with the nature of our perception of evil, in order to fully gauge the moral implications involved with the novel. Whereas Phelan's point is highly dependent upon the individual judgment of each reader: "reading involves doing things such as judging, desiring, emoting, actions that are linked to *our* values" (Phelan 132 – my italics), this thesis sought a universalist answer to the ethical judgement of *Lolita*, of course with certain divergences within various populations or individuals. Depending on the salience of that latter point, Phelan could certainly benefit from such commentary. It could also be beneficial for my own theory to adapt some of Phelan's narratological models and general analytical tools, that can go in and supply some of the literary depth that the scientific outlook of Darwinist commentary often shies away from. His consideration of multilevel ethical evaluations, that is, considering the level of "the narrator in relation to the telling", as well as that of "the implied author in relation to the authorial audience" (Phelan 133) are also highly relevant points that can yield impressive results in congregation with the narrative role of Humbert. Of course, this was not an in-depth portrayal of a consilient cooperation, especially since it was quite one-sided in action, but it was meant as a brief introduction to the potential fruitful relationship that it

could sustain. How could that help answer the question of *Lolita*'s popularity? As Phelan discusses the ethical implications of *Lolita*, he also highlights the importance of such a reading, while maintaining that it is an innate reaction for the reader to judge accordingly. By imprinting such importance on the ethical evaluation, Phelan supports my argument for our allure through our judging of Humbert.

Now, in order to really challenge this thesis, it is important to choose a theoretical reading which is radically different from my own critical framework, thus discovering the areas of conflict between the parts. To showcase this, the feminist analysis *Lolita Speaks: Disrupting Nabokov's "Aesthetic Bliss"* (2017) by Michele Meek will do perfectly, as it attempts to divert attention away from Humbert Humbert, whereas I sought to place him directly in the spotlight to gather more analytical material for the most significant character in the novel. The principle behind the article is to turn the tables, so to speak, and allow a "voice" for Dolores to speak through, in order to explicate the trauma that she underwent in Humbert's care: "many feminist scholars have urged readers to reconsider the text from the perspective of Lolita, as a child incest victim" (Meek 152). By attempting to switch the alignment that we experience in the novel, it could be possible to have an effect upon the sympathies that we develop. Of course, it is rather problematic to attempt such a reading, since the novel is constructed the way it is, thereby constantly keeping the reader contained within the world of Humbert. Nevertheless, this reading attempts that by combining the work of Nabokov with the derivative works such as Roger Fishbite (1999), *Lo's Diary* (1999), and *Poems for Men Who Dream of Lolita* (1992).

Certainly, that is a typical feminist approach in giving a voice to the subaltern, as Jean Rhys' exploration of Bertha/Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), although that is postcolonial as well. So, there is a rather large divide between my own reading and Meek's, but where do we agree or come close to an agreement? Primarily, there are certain aspects of the text's prose style which we agree upon. According to Meek, and others of her persuasion, Humbert's stylish prose is what directly influences us to empathize with him, which is also echoed by Ellen Pifer: "Feminist criticism of *Lolita* in the 1980s and 1990s initially argued that Nabokov's "declared dedication to 'aesthetic bliss' proved that the novel's design encourages readers to sympathize with the protagonist and artist-figure, Humbert Humbert, to the detriment of the child" (Pifer 186). Thus, although our theoretical jumping off-point is severely different, we have made similar points as to the effect of Humbert's prose, as this thesis was also adamant about the drawing power of the pattern. Even so, our points have differing aspects to them, as Meek attribute male dominance and power to the style of Humbert, and that one can only enjoy *Lolita* if one prioritizes 'aesthetic bliss' over trauma: "this evocation also includes Nabokov and all male readers who derive aesthetic bliss from the story of *Lolita*" (Meek 157-58).

There is also the matter of the unreliable narrator, which is difficult to disregard for any analysis of the novel, which also brings up the matter of Dolores' sexual agency. According to Meek and Linda Kauffman, it is out of the question, whether or not Humbert is a reliable narrator: "Kauffman argues that critics and readers "fail to notice that Humbert is not only a notoriously unreliable narrator but that he is an unreliable reader too [...] She [Kauffman] insists that a feminist reading of *Lolita* must acknowledge that the novel is "not about love, but about incest" (131) and that *Lolita* is not a seductress or even a willing participant in Humbert's executed fantasy." (Meek 153-54). Now, Kauffman thus claim that Dolores has no part in the sexual acts depicted in the novel, which is a salient argument considering the likely unreliability of Humbert. What is problematic, is the inherent certainty involved with her argument; she does not leave it up to discussion, Humbert is merely monstrous. It is certainly true that he is monstrous, but if one chooses to focus merely on that, then you have sorely missed the point of the novel, according to my reading. It is understandable to dehumanize the character so, since that is essentially what he does to Dolores, making a critic distance themselves as much as possible, if one sees the narrative exclusively from the point of view of Dolores. On the other hand, Meek is a little more nuanced in her conclusions upon the novel's contents, and the moral that lies therein. Meek focuses on the aspect of consent, and the troubling characteristics that follow along such a discourse: "I would argue that the novel suggests how consent can be distressingly unclear, remaining in this novel, as in its many iterations, a puzzle, even, as Guy Hocquenghem has called it, a 'trap'" (Meek 165)

In order to further the merits of my own thesis, it would be efficient to adapt some of the approaches that Meek employs, as for example, the insight into the human experience through law process and the discourse of consent, a consideration that is highly psychological in its explication: "We may design laws that protect girls from statutory rape but the lines we draw remain unstable (demonstrated in, among other ways, the constantly shifting age of legal consent). *Lolita's* moral may be simply to point out how flawed our over-simplified dichotomies of lust and love, seduction and rape, child and adult, child and girl are" (Meek 165). By introducing such concepts to challenge the biological considerations made in this thesis, we can strengthen the argumentation, since we can supply various points of entry to explain various parts of the novel's ethical structure to gain a broader picture.

While consilience sounds very promising, how possible is it to actually carry it out? Unfortunately, this consilient method is highly predicated on being a case-by-case methodology, wherein the analyst has to take the certain text into consideration with certain other texts or theories. At this point in time, I am unable to deliberate a proposition for a general or standardized method of combining certain elements within texts, in fear of generalizing far

too broadly. At this point, one could only generalize certain aspects between the theoretical frameworks, as in, arguing for the adaptation of scientific methodology into, for example, feminist and narratological texts, or vice versa, as that has shown to be rather fruitful in various ways. If one was to attempt such a delineation within consilience, it would demand a far more comprehensive study of the consilient connection between theories, and that would probably still only yield ambiguous results due to the complexities inherent in the frameworks.

I gather that there is a rather large issue in this thesis' process with regards to this section regarding my selection of the texts and the implications therein, which could imply a certain correlation between my choices of texts with texts that have commonalities with my own analytical points. For my own part, I have chosen texts that share the analytical material, *Lolita*, while differing in theory and approach, but of course, that is not a position I am able to defend, due to the inability to provide salient proof, since the chronology of my writing is not apparent from the format it is delivered in. It is apparent, however, how these various theories are able to complement each other through their various theoretical offsets. Thus, we have not finally concluded that Literary Darwinism can explain the popularity of *Lolita*, although it does have the potential to aid in that quest, by supplying its own idiosyncratic, empirical viewpoint to those of others. I have successfully identified various points of convergence between the theories, in order to emphasize various elements in the texts that could have had an effect on the popularity, but without a quantitative study, a conclusive answer is out of reach.

#### 4.0 The Relevance of Literary Darwinism

Through a careful deliberation of Literary Darwinist principles, and an analysis wherein these same principles were applied, I have striven to facilitate the relevance, advantage and practicality of those principles, in order to discuss the merits of consilience and Literary Darwinism as a whole. Setting the stage through a meticulous drawing up of combative lines; the Darwinists versus the Poststructuralists, or, the blank slaters versus dual inheritance theorists, while simultaneously using these theories in practice to clarify, allows for the following argumentation surrounding the problematic circumstances of the current state of academia. Using that as a crucible, within which to synthesize the ideas and knowledges gathered through this project, will aid in guiding the conversation towards a meritorious congregation between these two, or perhaps more, opposing fronts.

First of all, I wish to divulge the tendencies, or sympathies, of the sender of this thesis, as it can be quite valuable to be transparent with one's proclivities. If it was not glaringly obvious from the preceding pages, I do sympathize with the Literary Darwinists, even if I do not necessarily identify myself as such in academic terms. However, there is an inherent objective

with this thesis, and that, to my knowledge, is not to further the cause of Literary Darwinism, but to further our understanding of *Lolita*, and through that, attempt to find an inkling of a broader perspective on the English department, and its potential. But what did *Lolita* ultimately reveal throughout this thesis that can explain the relevance of Literary Darwinism in the current academic climate?

As the nature of this thesis came into being, it suddenly became more and more obvious that an ethical discussion of the actions of Humbert Humbert was inevitable due to his status within the story. Earlier readings of ethical analyses with regard to that character did only reveal a dichotomous academic community, standing on each side of the (un)reliable narrator conundrum that the novel presents. Either we can or cannot trust the narration given to us by Humbert, and so, we cannot finally predicate the nature of his ethical circumstance, when we are not aware of the true events. Certainly, I was not able to dispel that divide, because there is an innate impossibility involved with that. You might as well try to discover the true events of *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. On the other hand, the scientific approach to ethical judgment made by Tooby and Cosmides provided ample material to qualify our judgement of Humbert, that is, if one believes his narrative. That type of academic commentary certainly has a place within academia, since it has the potential to reveal various hidden aspects to the humanities. Ponder the abovementioned macro Literary Darwinist reading, which has revealed many hidden elements about the social and cultural role that literature and story-telling has had. This has helped enormously in giving us an understanding of our development as a species, while also impacting our view of literature. Sure, there are also some rather considerable faults to the reading, primarily focused around the micro aspect, but that should not make us recoil, but rather seek to rectify it or mend it. By adding a completely new avenue of thinking to the spectrum of literary readings, we are furthering our own understanding of ourselves and others. Introducing scientific commentary into the available methods of reading means that we will experience a far more varied tradition of analysis that can be applied in many ways.

This is also echoed in the section that discusses the pattern recognition involved with enjoying a piece of fiction, which also provides an avenue into discussing literature from an anatomical and biological standpoint, which has the potential to alter the perception of literature as a whole. Of course, this section is not only about the saliency of this thesis, which would be quite too navel-gazing, but also about how we can use Literary Darwinism to develop the English department, while avoiding the perceived debasing effects. Taking the position of Jonathan Gottschall, accepting a myriad of discourses and branches of academia, it is clearly revealed how this literary framework can provide a wider spectrum of readings.

The only issue that is inherently involved is that of the qualitative selection that some of the Literary Darwinist assume has to happen: “We need lose nothing of the best that has been thought and said. We need only add to it” (Boyd et al. 7). That is problematic due to the qualitative shift in appreciation that exists between Literary Darwinists and, say, Poststructuralists. How does one implement a gargantuan shift in an academic institution that is so firmly situated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the thinking that followed that period, while also being able to serve the purpose of modern scientific thinking? Indeed, it has to be a gradual changeover, since an academic revolution is not an option in civilized walks of life. Nonetheless, it shall be enormously interesting to follow the fate of the English departments, and the humanities themselves, over the next decades to see whether it will alter itself to satiate their academic peers, or perhaps their own self-interest. The decreasing funding into the department seems to demand a change of some sort, in order to make itself relevant once again. The question remains whether that change ought to be Darwinist in nature, or something else entirely – perhaps a direction which is concomitantly involving a meshing of all parties, without infringing upon either’s objective. That would require a methodological, relative common ground, but that is difficult to imagine without turning one or several theoretical schools on its head.

The biggest problem facing the Literary Darwinists at this point of time, is the lack of a standardized methodology that makes it easier to convey on a massive scale. At the moment of writing, Literary Darwinism is still relatively early in its tracks, having been formulated in the 1990s. In the twenty-three years since, its ideas have been widespread and have also been a severely interesting point of discussion, but it has not gained a considerable retinue. As mentioned earlier, the various members of that retinue are not aligned along a homogenous axis, where they have a fixed, agreeable approach to literature. Thereby, the methodology of Literary Darwinism has been massively different in nature, ranging from hypothetical reader-response theory all the way to evolutionarily historical grand narratives. If one were able to standardize an approach, as in New Criticism or Marxism, where you are keenly aware, if you have read the material, of the approach you should use. Within the tradition of New Criticism you have such seminal texts such as *An Approach to Literature* (1936), and its successors *Understanding Poetry* (1938), and *Understanding Fiction* (1943) by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, who boils down the various points of entry within New Criticism, for example for poetry, wherein the objective to focus upon the poem itself is key, and the contextual surroundings, such as author, are inconsequential: “First, criticism and analysis, as modestly practiced in this book and more grandly elsewhere and by other hands, is ultimately of value *only insofar as it can return readers to the poem itself*” (Brooks & Warren 16 – italics

original). Naturally, this is greatly reductive of the theory of New Criticism, but it showcases the main methodological thesis.

At the moment, the only approximate example of a standardized method behind the Literary Darwinist literary critique, as I have observed, wherein one initially identifies the overarching thematic structures, combining with a characterization of the various main characters – thereby identifying some of the main elements of allure for the receiver of the text. Consequently, these characters and themes are redescribed through terms that have been implemented from the scientific areas of evolutionary biology and sociology, although not limited to these fields depending on the scholar. If the analyst is able to find that these themes have a biological relevance, in our attraction to it, then we can approximate a thesis that concludes upon the relevance having a large part in our allure to the cultural object. Although that only covers the micro aspect deliberated in my theoretical section, it is a viable course of action when the analyst is working on the explicitly literary aspect of Literary Darwinism. However, it is very vague in comparison to other theoretical schools and does not lend itself to repetition in a purely executional manner. Taking my own thesis as an example, what kinds of method have I been employing, and are they alike to others writing within the same paradigm, and if not, why?

Initially, I attempt a characterization of Humbert Humbert, and the qualitative stance on ‘evil’ through the use of Tooby and Cosmides’ notion of the Welfare Tradeoff Ratio deliberated in *Groups in mind: the coalitional roots of war and morality* (2010), in order to conclude upon this subject. But is that a method that has been used by others? And could it be molded into a standardizing element in a typical Literary Darwinist analysis? Certainly, it is used by Kjeldgaard-Christiansen in his article on the nature of evil: *Evil origins: A Darwinian genealogy of the popcultural villain* (2016), where I also got the inspiration to include Tooby and Cosmides’ theories on the Welfare Tradeoff Ratio. Having scoured the articles that cite their text, it is apparent that this discourse is not a typical avenue of analysis within Literary Darwinists, but instead is cited highly among sociological, political, and biological texts due its empirical nature. It has been used in relation to cultural objects such as media in Jeff Lewis’ book *Media, culture and human violence: From savage lovers to violent complexity*, but as a phenomenon within society, not as a direct analysis of the objects themselves. Thus, I have delved into uncommon, and relatively undiscovered territory, which could either imply a perceived lack of relevance from the usage of Welfare Tradeoff Ratio, or a lack of knowledge of the work. In order to compare my method with another, I will relate my own usage with that of Kjeldgaard-Christiansen. As Kjeldgaard-Christiansen uses his article to delve into the nature of evil, we are quite similar in our general objective, while the scope of his text is far broader,

in that he is seeking an evolutionary psychological reasoning for our perception of evil, while I have limited my own focus to our perception of Humbert Humbert as evil. Alternatively, I explained the perception of altruism through Dawkins' concept of the Gene's eye view, which is also quite unlike the usual Literary Darwinist analysis.

Methodologically, I also employ the pattern recognition scientific article by Mattson *Superior Pattern Processing Is the Essence of the Evolved Human Brain* (2014) in order to tie together the various structures of the novel, which is not as wholly original as the use of the Welfare Tradeoff Ratio. In the Boyd article cited earlier, *The Art of Literature and the Science of Literature* (2008), he also approaches the subject of patterns in order to explicate the functions that exists in the novel to elicit a certain response: "Because the world swarms with patterns, animal minds evolved as pattern extractors, able to detect the information meaningful to their kind of organism in their kind of environment and therefore to predict and act accordingly" (Boyd, 2008, 1). We differ, however, on the use of empirical articles to support our arguments, where Boyd employs his own internalized knowledge of the subject, and I do not. This is evident through the lack of any citations in the texts, except the primary texts for analysis. The lack of any citations is probably due to the nature of the text, in that, it is not a journal article per se, but merely a more mainstream web article, wherein Boyd is promoting some Literary Darwinist notions.

Additionally, Boyd employs other avenues of cognitive comprehension, in that he describes the saccadic qualities of the text: "That combination of Humbert's obsessive focus on Lolita and his capacity to shift attention so rapidly in the opening paragraphs of the novel arouses our interest in his lively, highly self-conscious mind—even if we soon find ourselves uneasy about what that mind intends." (Boyd, 2008, 1), which argues that the non-centrality of the text's focus has an additional appeal to us. To clarify, a saccade is a swift, concurrent animation of both eyes between two or more objects in swift succession, which is an innate phenomenon in our existence and other species': "To focus on various objects of interest within the visual environment, primates employ rapid eye movements called saccades" (Hopp & Fuchs 538). Even so, this same term is used to delineate parts of the human cognitive experience, as when one's thoughts are scattered among two or more thoughts. Saccadic attention is therefore a biologically salient avenue of argumentation due to our knowledge of human cognition in that regard, which I will deliberate.

Certainly, saccadic attention is apparent in our observations of human visual attention in regard to eye movement: "Saccadic eye movements and perceptual attention work in a coordinated fashion to allow selection of the objects, features or regions with the greatest momentary need for limited visual processing resources." (Zhao et al. 1), but it is also highly

relevant when it comes to our attention spans. Cognitive thought has the same instantaneous jumps from thought to thought, which is an innate form of comprehension, since our saccadic eye movements have a massive impact upon our thought process: “Evidence [...] indicates that attention will shift to the goal of a saccade while saccadic planning is underway” (Zhao et al 2).

This is one of the explanatory theories that can tell us why people are easily distracted when they are engaging with any task that does not interest them as much, which could be in class rooms, at work and so forth, because attention is diverted away from the object of attention, thus making your thoughts wander. One could argue then, as Boyd hints at, but does not follow through with, that Nabokov stimulates our minds in a more effective manner, since he caters to our inability to hold focus on a single thing for longer periods of time when a monotonous pattern presents itself. Of course, it is also a part of the first person narration, that Nabokov tries to showcase a novelized form of stream-of-consciousness at certain points in the novel. Surely, this effect was intended from Nabokov’s point of view, since he was attempting to insert the reader as much as possible into the head of Humbert. By presenting the novel in this form, we feel as though we are privy to his immediate thought process.

Again, looking at the first paragraph of *Lolita*, excluding the foreword, it is quite apparent: “In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain girl-child. I a pryncedom by the sea. Oh when? About as many years before Lolita was born as my age was that summer. You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style” (Nabokov 9). Here, Humbert switches attention instantaneously towards something far more sinister than his loving address, and that makes the reader jump at the non-sequitur, catching their attention. Nabokov also employs this sudden shift in order to cause a humorous effect: “My father was a gentle, easy-going person, a salad of racial genes: a Swiss citizen, of mixed French and Austrian descent, with a dash of Danube in his veins. I am going to pass around in a minute some lovely, glossy-blue picture-postcards” (Nabokov 9). Thereby, by employing empirical texts to support Boyd’s argument, I have managed to strengthen his argumentation, and could have employed some of the same key points into my own analysis, if I were to start from scratch. Nonetheless, we differ slightly in our methodological approach, but not a lot.

The issue with standardizing a Literary Darwinist method, is the problematic issue of scientific relevance. For instance, my own use of the Welfare Tradeoff Ratio would probably not lend itself to any novel or analysis, since every literary analysis does not necessarily include the ethical considerations that I have made in my own. It could be a staple of any Literary Darwinist who wishes to take such a course of action, though. Thus, one could probably establish several analytical traditions, whom are appropriate for various types of texts, while

that is not entirely homogenous. Ultimately, the measuring rod for the success of my own methodological reasoning is based around the ability of others to integrate my method with their own, or if they are able to repeat the same method successfully with other objects of analysis. As this thesis was successfully able to relate these Literary Darwinist terms to a text such as *Lolita*, which is highly irregular within usual Literary Darwinist practice, it should be possible for others to replicate with other texts in a similar vein. Certainly, this work is not directly groundbreaking, but it is sufficiently dissimilar to other Darwinist works that it has the potential to further de-establish some of the underlying criticisms that placate the framework at the time of writing. Although it is much too complex to definitively conclude upon the relevance of Literary Darwinism, due to the massive body of work that is involved with it and the theories that it would destabilize, it is possible to conclude that it is not irrelevant, and that it has the potential to be a catalyst in forming an evolution of the English Department, and perhaps, the humanities as a whole. Whether that would be entirely beneficial, is still unclear at this time.

## 5.0 Conclusion

As an avenue into a discussion about the merits of Literary Darwinism and consilience, *Lolita* showed itself highly relevant to gain a vantage point from which it could be debated. As a framework wherein literary analysis is often done from the position of the traditional literary analysis: “an alternative critical ethos that affiliates itself with both the traditional explanatory paradigm and evolutionary theory” (Carroll 1995a, 50), thus making the selected texts ignore large parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, disregarding modernism and postmodernism among others. In order to challenge the norms of such an approach, it was deemed appropriate to engage with a text such as *Lolita*, which defies traditional notions of character, theme, structure and plot to see if it was possible to redescribe its contents through the theories of modern evolutionary sociology, biology and cognition. Gaining partial success in redescribing various salient areas of analysis, such as characterization, narratology, prose style, thematic and plot structure, has showcased that there are a lot of possibilities for the Literary Darwinist to discuss more modern types of literature. By categorizing Humbert Humbert through the Welfare Tradeoff Ratio, and general evolutionary sociological articles, I was able to present him from an approximately empirical frame of mind, showcasing the social mechanisms that make us recoil from the actions that Humbert initiates in. Of course, character analysis, along with thematic analysis, is a staple of Literary Darwinist discourse, so it did not transgress any preestablished norms of the framework, apart from the idiosyncratic methodology that was employed. Thus, it was necessary to delve into the style of prose that Nabokov presents to the reader in *Lolita*. Examining the alliterative, anaphoric and assonant qualities of the text revealed certain human

proclivities in terms of pattern processing, in that we are more strongly engaged with texts and phrases that take advantage of a certain predisposed areas of the brain that exudes a positive reaction towards the recognition of patterns. Interestingly, this theory of pattern recognition was also appropriate to superimpose upon the larger structural arcs within the novel, which revealed a similar tendency, although also betraying a sort of pleasure inherent in the divergence from a pattern. By redescribing *Lolita* in these terms, it was possible to reveal certain analytically salient points in the novel that would not have been revealed through the means of the textual analyses that are more often employed within the English Department, such as Poststructuralism, New Criticism, Feminist Literary Criticism and so forth.

Certainly, the reading was also fallible in that it has certain gaps, where the Literary Darwinist reading was insufficient. For example, the underlying thesis question of whether Literary Darwinism can explain the immense popularity that *Lolita* has enjoyed since its publishing in the 1950s, was not satisfactorily answered through a solitary Darwinist analysis. However, by engaging in a consilient method, including texts that represent different theoretical schools, it was possible to further my own thesis, and perhaps theirs as well, and approximate the reasoning behind *Lolita*'s popularity. Even so, I concluded that a definitive answer on such a question is impossible from a theoretical standpoint, but perhaps possible through means of a quantitative study, that could present the allure that individuals felt as they processed the contents of the novel. But was any of this a salient argumentation for the usage of Literary Darwinism within the English Department?

By delving into my own methodology, as well as that of Boyd, in order to discuss the problematics surrounding such, it was possible to unearth various problems with a standardization of Literary Darwinism. At the moment of writing, it seems impossible to implement a totally homogenous standardization that is as specific as that of other theoretical schools, although by employing a case-by-case basis of consideration it could be possible. Having different methods for different texts, or when trying to gauge different aspects of the texts, could be a fruitful venture. Ultimately, it is impossible to disregard the notions of Literary Darwinism due to the idiosyncratic perspective it is able to give, while also lending more credence to the English Department through empirical analysis. There are many flaws in its reading, but that fallibility is not only applicable to Literary Darwinism, but most theoretical schools. Excluding Literary Darwinism due to its unorthodox discourse would be problematic and could bereave massive potential from future projects that could benefit from such analysis. Therefore, it would be to a detriment to the English Department, if it were to be snuffed out due to its perceived arrogance and unorthodoxy.

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## Summary

Delving into the theoretical framework of Literary Darwinism, this thesis sought to answer the question of its relevance at the current time in academia by exploring the intricacies of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), and attempting to answer the question: why is *Lolita* so popular? And can it be explained from a Literary Darwinist perspective? By enveloping and adapting terms from evolutionary biology, sociology and cognition it is possible to form an analysis that can present previously unknown avenues within literary understanding. Deliberating the various qualities that are most emphatic in expression, such as, its consilient objective, its wish for a return to a traditional literary analysis, and the general ontology and methodology behind it, while providing a historical background, gave way for an analysis based in the modern perspective of Literary Darwinism. Analyzing aspects of character, narration, plot structure, thematic structure, and style of prose, lent itself very well to the analytical framework of Literary Darwinism, since it was possible to relate various scientific journal articles to the novel's unique expression. In relation to the character and narrator Humbert Humbert, it was possible to combine evolutionary sociological terms such as the Welfare Tradeoff Ratio in order to categorize the ethical evaluation of him, deeming him untrustworthy and unreliable, while also categorizing him as a free-rider. This is also connected to the usual debate on Humbert's reliability as a narrator, where the ambiguity of his narration comes into play. Without decisively concluding upon it, it was deemed likely that he is an unreliable narrator due to the weight of arguments on the side of unreliability.

In terms of structures, whether macro or micro, the dominant perspective came to be the ontological inevitability of pattern recognition, which has an enormous impact upon our perception of the novel's contents. On the micro level, the assonant, alliterative and anaphoric qualities of the text was shown to harness an allure from the innate human appreciation of pattern recognition, while on the macro level, plot structures and thematic structures were shown to tap into some of the same alluring qualities. As we engage with these structures often, as for instance the plot structure of the romance plot or the revenge plot, we can appreciate Nabokov's simultaneous conformity to such structures, while also appreciating the divergences. So where does that leave the question of the popularity of *Lolita*?

A task such as this, has certain Sisyphean qualities, making an ultimate conclusion ostensibly out of reach without a quantitative study, that can approach the question from an empirical point of view. Even so, it was possible to approximate a reasonable amount of innate allures from the novel to, at least, argue that they have an impact on the sustained popularity of *Lolita* on a global scale. Subsequently, the adoption of other theoretical perspectives, as a

consilient argument, aided in supporting various arguments made earlier in the thesis. But why is all of this even relevant?

In the current state of literary academia, there is a general problem in that funding from political institutions is decreasing on a global scale, enrollment has fallen, which betrays a public notion of the inapplicability of the work done in such departments. By introducing an empirical element such as Literary Darwinism, flawed though it is, could help improve cross-branch relations, while perhaps satiating the political institutions that have disregarded it. Naturally, Literary Darwinism is not the end-all theory, but it introduces some interesting notions that could be detrimental to disregard completely. By enveloping such a framework in a more comprehensive manner, could help create a more heterogenous view of literature, while introducing fresh perspectives for further inspiration.