Less obvious, especially to the somewhat unsophisticated readers both novels have (to some extent deliberately) attracted, is the extent to which both are filled with allusions. Many of these are literary; many are topical or related to the popular culture of the early 18th or mid 20th centuries. Both Nabokov and Swift frequently parody literary conventions prevalent at the historical moment in which their satires were created.

Most obviously, Swift's entire work is a send-up of the popular travel narratives which had enjoyed a solid popularity from the Renaissance into the Augustan Age. In a way, Gulliver's Travels is a kind of grotesque distortion of exactly the process which Shakespeare, entirely unparodically, used in filling out the plot of "The Tempest." Shakespeare, of course, does not take entirely seriously tales of bizarre creatures inhabiting the Bermudas, but he is willing to suspend his, and our, disbelief to the extent of creating rounded and engaging characters in Caliban and Ariel. In a summary of "The Sources of Gulliver's Travels" Milton Voigt argues that Swift consciously made use of both authentic travel narratives (e.g., those of Captain William Dampier, whom Gulliver cites) and fraudulent ones which "were welcomed by the eighteenth-century public, which...was 'travel crazy'" (65). The utopian novel--including the utopian novel, Utopia--is also interwoven into the narrative structure of Gulliver's Travels. Indeed, at times it is evident that Gulliver himself thinks he is describing a utopian culture, which we, and Swift, find far more dubious, perhaps even distopian. And, Swift's work is filled with references to actual, easily identifiable persons, groups, movements and institutions from the popular English culture of his day. The clever exaggeration of abstract science on the floating island of Laputa is an unmistakable reference to the cerebral Royal Academy; the two contesting parties in Lilliput, distinguished by the high and low heels on their shoes mock the struggles between High Church Tories and the Whig/Low Church faction.

This same pattern of literary allusions, parody and popular culture is equally integral to Lolita. From John Ray, Jr.'s mock social treatise which begins the novel to the parody of the Western-movie-shoot-out near its end ("...both of us were panting as the cowman and the sheepman never do after their battle" [229]), Nabokov gives a near-anthology of literary forms. He parodies the criminal confessional novel ("exhibit number two is a pocket diary..." [40]), the murder mystery, high-class pornography, tour guides, encyclopedias, French poets, Russian novelists, Carmen, Edgar Allen Poe, and on and on. And, for many readers, Lolita is about popular culture, a romp through the trashy stores and motels and gas stations which so unselfconsciously were filling up the American landscape in the mid-twentieth century. Here, for example, is a sample of Journalistic popular culture, devastatingly described:

...an accumulation of teen-magazines. You know the sort. Stone age at heart; up to date, or
at least Mycenaean, as to hygiene. A handsome, very ripe actress with huge lashes and a pulpy red underlip endorsing a shampoo. Ads and fads. Young scholars dote on plenty of pleats—que c'était loin, tout cela! It is your hostess' duty to provide robes. Unattached details take all the sparkle out of your conversation. All of us have known 'pickers'-one who picks her cuticle at the office party....Invite Romance by wearing the Exciting New Tummy Flattener. Trims tums, nips hips. Tristram in Movielove. Yessir! The Joe-Roe marital enigma is making yaps flap. Glamourize yourself quickly and inexpensively. (254)

For both Nabokov and Swift (as for Chaucer before them), the literary conventions and cultural artifacts of their day were objects of parody and satire. In addition to the broad sketched exposure of folly which arises from the plots of the two novels, a satiric sub-text is to be found in their textual structure, and the world of images from which the authors draw. Beneath the satiric mask of Lolita and Gulliver's Travels is another satiric mask, and beneath that another...

The most important mask in both novels, though, is the narrative persona. Both works are, of course, first person narratives, stories told by befuddled travelers as is also the case, once again, with The Canterbury Tales. Just as the "Chaucer" who tells the story of the Canterbury pilgrims is not to be confused with the "Chaucer" who created the "Tales," narrator and all, Nabokov is not Humbert, Swift is not Gulliver. Curiously, the confusion of these two, quite mad, narrators with their creators is quite common, but all the more serious a misapprehension for that:

All of this Gulliver is; but let us notice carefully what he is NOT. He is NOT Jonathan Swift. The meaning of the book is wholly distorted if we identify the Gulliver of the last voyage with his creator, and lay Gulliver's misanthropy at Swift's door. He is a fully rendered, objective, dramatic character, no more to be identified with Swift than Shylock is to be identified with Shakespeare." (Monk, p. 72)

Quite similarly, there is no doubt that Vladimir Nabokov considered the central character of his novel to be a lunatic, a criminal and a pervert, and yet there has been a persistent belief that somehow it is Nabokov, not Humbert, who seeks to make the case for nympholepsy in Lolita. As early as the year of its publication, some readers—including some who should have known better—decried the work's morality, confusing the ethics of the protagonist with those of his creator (e.g., the equivalent of accusing Sophocles of sleeping with his mother). The editors of The New Republic found the novel an obscene chronicle which glorified child destruction; Harold Gardiner finds it "the most obscene lubrication to disgrace U.S. publishing in many a decade" (552-553).

Humbert Humbert and Lemuel Gulliver are both "men of the world," and yet both are finally quite naive. Both characters have certainly traveled much, and yet there is so much they don't know—indeed, both novels are ironic as
well as satiric, because there are gulfs of ignorance in the consciousnesses of the main characters. Gulliver earnestly seeks to explain and defend the most irrational and corrupt practices of his society to those he meets, only very slowly realizing that his England is imperfect: then he is persuaded that it is, as it were, perfectly imperfect, the very model of imperfection and corruption. Likewise, Humbert never realizes, until it is much too late, that his adolescent sweetheart has, like all adolescents, a mind and a will of her own, and that much of what he thought was cleverly covert behavior has been noticed and remarked by others.

One interesting source of this shared naiveté is that both these narrator/protagonists are unredeemed egotists. Gulliver and Humbert think first, and most, about themselves, and accordingly, they miss much of what others are seeing and understanding. And, of course, this gap between their perceptions, and that of other, less self-absorbed observers of the world, is also one of the most fertile sources of the novels' satire. Because the characters are so self-absorbed, the readers get a clearer, not a more ambiguous, view of the frailties Swift and Nabokov are attacking. One thinks of Humbert's comments upon the relationship between prose style and murder ("you can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style" [9]) and Gulliver's observations, already cited, on his unhappy reunion with his wife and children. Most of us do not connect the taking of human life with compositional aesthetics, nor would we likely be overwhelmed with pity for a long-lost sailor who has to suffer the embrace of his lonely spouse.

Finally, of course, both Gulliver and Humbert are quite mad. When we last see the novels' narrators, neither is remotely functional in anything like normal society. Gulliver is happiest in the stable: "My horses understand me tolerably well; I converse with them at least four Hours each Day" (290). He finds all human company repulsive; his own species, on the last page of his narrative, is described as "a Lump of Deformity, and Diseases both in Body and Mind, smitten with Pride " (296).

Humbert penned Lolita "first in the psychopathic ward for observation, and then in this well-heated, albeit tombal, seclusion" (308). Humbert has, for all his sophisticated sophistry, despoiled his child stepdaughter and murdered another man for duplicating his crime. In his last gesture as a free man, just after killing Quilty, he is cheerfully and purposefully driving, at 20 miles per hour, down the wrong side of a highway.

The normative voice for satire is that of an Olympian, reasoning, moderate observer of humankind and the world: Pope comes to mind. Often, even when the actual biographical facts of the writer's life are confused, painful and difficult, the voice is calm, thoughtful, above the storm: Catholic and crippled, Pope still comes to mind. The speaker and the listener see eye to eye, from atop peaks of reason and good sense, as both gently chuckle at the depths of folly upon which they look down. It is difficult to imagine a more "deconstructed" version of this norm than that created by Nabokov and Swift. Humbert and Gulliver, far from Olympian oversight, seem in many ways to have sunk below the level of sensibility their creators are exposing. In many ways, they look UP at a society the follies of which satire leads us to look down upon. It is a rather remarkable achievement, for both authors, that the
narrations of insane protagonists manage to posit for the audience a model of a sane and reasonable culture.

VI

There can sometimes be a web of links which tie together works of the imagination separated by chronological centuries and cultural gulfs. Such interweavings point to constants in literature and society, and highlight, too, ways in which important changes have taken place. *Gulliver's Travels* and *Lolita* have in common a particularly uncompromising, and frequently unsympathetic, stance. In neither do we find important characters who win our understanding and sympathy, nor much in the way of positive constructive suggestions for civic improvement. Both seem to achieve their ends by creating as narrators and protagonists strange travelers who discover, investigate and report on strange societies.

It seems improbable that, in the 1950’s, Nabokov consciously set out to write a twentieth-century version of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, just as it is unlikely that Swift was purposefully imitating Chaucer. But it is impossible that the earlier works were not part of the artistic genetic makeup of the later writers: Gulliver was in Nabokov's bloodstream as he penned *Lolita*; Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales* loomed behind both. This always-enlarging, shared literary heritage is exactly what T. S. Eliot meant by "tradition." If we do not heed the ways in which this ongoing heritage continues to shape the creative process, we miss an essential skeletal element in modern works. Conversely, if we do note, trace, and respect the unbroken lineage of literature, we open a door to the timelessness of art, what Nabokov called "the only immortality you and I may share" (*Lolita*, 309: the novel's very last words).

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**Works Cited**


