

**Beauty's Plea:
Rape in Shakespeare and Nabokov**

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Abstract

(Preface)

I argue here that the dazzling display of poetic speech exhibited in Nabokov's *Lolita* and Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* serves the purpose of calling our attention to the role that speech plays in sexual violence. My point is not merely that the beauty of the poetic speech of the writers stands in such stark contrast to the ugliness of the literalist speech of the rapists, but rather that both forms of speech are surprisingly similar. This shocking similarity lies in the fact that both the writers and the rapists are subtle users of a strategy of seeming. While the writers are creators of seeming (fictional) *worlds*, the rapists create masks that allow them to carry out rapes by seeming *to be other than they appear*. The two texts appear to indicate that both writers are fascinated by this similarity and are asking us to think along with them about this sharing in how writers and rapists speak.

I take my title from a line in *The Rape of Lucrece*: "All orators are

dumb when beauty pleadeth" (268). [note: compare LLL 2.1.13–14, where the Princess says to her attendant, Boyet, after his overblown praise, "...my beauty, though but mean, /Needs not the painted flourish of your praise."] the surface it is a line of warning to naive characters like Collatine, Lucrece's husband, who unwittingly arouses the lust of others by giving an exaggerated description of the beauty of his chaste wife. But Shakespeare's use of the word "pleading" hints at a deeper idea: that beauty desires more than mere oratorical descriptions of itself, that such descriptions can be dangerous, and finally that beauty pleads for speech that is itself beautiful. This is the sort of speech we find in *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Lolita*. Sexual violence is tied to a failure of poetic speech. Beautiful speech, on the other hand, employs a strategy of seeming along the lines of Ovid's prescription "Ars est Celare Artem" ("It is true art to conceal art"). Blowhard oration is the opposite sort of speech and can result in literal sexual violence, whereas *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Lolita* embody what each says beauty demands. These provocative texts claim, *by being beautiful themselves*, that what beauty pleads for is beautiful speech. This expresses the radical idea that poetry is the most effective response to sexual violence because, unlike rape laws which come into play only as punishment *after* the fact,

such poetic works as *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Lolita* strike at the psychological core of rape by setting the ugly literalisms which characterize the speech of the rapists in the aesthetic space of elegant poetry. This can be summed up in the formula: where we find a breakdown of poetic understanding, we can expect literal rape. These writers are taken *by* beauty while the rapists seek to “take” (L. *rapere*) it. My strategy therefore is to read specific passages of *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Lolita* side-by-side, in an attempt to provoke a dialogue between the texts regarding the nature of the pleading of beauty.

I will do this by delineating 31 stages of the rapists’ thought processes, leading up to and just following the rape. It is not surprising that the two texts share twenty-seven of those thirty-one stages. What we find outlined in this narrative of stages serves as a “guidebook” to the rapists’ profound misunderstanding of the possibilities of the sort of speech that works as an aphrodisiac for Shakespeare and Nabokov. That is, the crucial difference between the rapists and the writers is that the rapists could not have written *Lolita* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. This is the difference between the Humbert Humbert before the rape and the Humbert Humbert who writes *Lolita* five years later. The rapists are the *cause* of beauty’s plea, while the writers are the effective response.

Will not my tongue be mute....

O what excuse can my invention make

When thou shalt charge me with so black a deed?

(The Rape of Lucrece, 225-6)-

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Introduction

Rapist Thoughts in Elegant Poetry

Let's begin with a jarring juxtaposition. First, in the middle of Shakespeare's early poem, *The Rape of Lucrece* (hereafter *RL*), Tarquinius, the Etruscan prince, looms menacingly over the sleeping Lucrece:

Her lily hand her rosy cheek lies under,

Coz'ning the pillow of a lawful kiss;

*Who, therefore angry, seems to part in sunder,
Swelling on either side to want his bliss;
Between whose hills her head entombed is,
Where like a virtuous monument she lies,
To be admired of lewd unhallowed eyes.*

(386-392)

Perhaps, like me, you are jarred by the stark contrast between Tarquinius' crude voyeurism as he contemplates the sexual violence he is about to perpetrate and Shakespeare's apparent delight in his own playful description of Tarquinius' thoughts. Dark rapist thoughts expressed in elegant Elizabethan poetry! But I don't believe this contrast is accidental, that we are expected to believe that rapists really think this way. Instead, I hold that Shakespeare is drawing our attention to something that has aroused his own curiosity: the shocking idea that he, Shakespeare, is in many ways like the rapist. Both are responding to beauty and both employ a tactic of seeming in response to the beauty they have seen. Shakespeare responds with poetry, with the creation of a seeming world. Tarquinius responds with lust and has appeared at Lucrece' palace under the guise of seeming to be her husband's friend. Poets and rapists are seemers, so what makes them different? Shakespeare, I believe, wants to show us that the difference concerns speech, that rapists lack poetry, and that a lack of poetry often results in violence.

In the poetry's language an odd image emerges. The pillow becomes an ally of the rapist. Robbed of a kiss by the hand which the sleeping Lucrece has placed under her cheek, the pillow becomes enraged, "swelling on either side" of her head so as to fix her

in a “tomb” for the rapist’s contemplation. He places us readers *as readers* in a position not unlike that of the rapist: we are asked to contemplate the beauty of his language just as Tarquinius contemplates the beauty of the sleeping Lucrece. For a moment, her beauty equals his poetry. We share with Shakespeare the euphoria of speaking poetically. The beauty of his imagery ‘seduces’ us: a hand turns into a lily and a thief, cheeks transform into roses, a pillow that can kiss “swells” into two hills, a monument, and a tomb encasing her head. Things seem to be what they are not. Shakespeare’s image of swelling is both phallic and elegant. This “swelling” fixes Lucrece in place like a “virtuous monument,” as if dead, held still for Tarquinius’ voyeuristic spying. The array of images pile on top of one another, almost drunk, in a crazy parade of shape-shifting that would make Ovid (one of Shakespeare’s sources) jealous.

A similar scene depicting a sleeping female about to be raped appears in Nabokov's *Lolita* (hereafter *L*). Humbert Humbert (hereafter “HH”), Lolita's stepfather, has drugged her. Like Tarquinius, he hopes to reduce her to a compliant “dead” body, but he has failed to give her enough of the drug and she is half-awake:

Slowly her head turned away and dropped onto her unfair amount of pillow. I lay quite still on the brink, peering at her ruffled hair, at the glimmer of nymphet flesh, where half a haunch and half a shoulder dimly showed, and trying to gauge the depth of her sleep by the rate of her respiration...(129)-

As in *RL*, what gets our attention is the sheer beauty of Nabokov's speech in the midst of a horrific scene. Nabokov's rhythm is lulling for us. Like Shakespeare, he places us in the aesthetic space of his poetry and we hear his the rhythmic sounds of his language like HH hearing the rhythm of Lolita's breathing. But while we are being hypnotized by the beauty of his language, we are meant to contemplate the difference between poet and rapist. We are meant to wake up to this difference!

As with Shakespeare, the graceful rhythm of the language purposely locates us in the same aesthetic space with the creepy thoughts of the child molester. *This is what Nabokov asks us to consider: poetry can hypnotize us with the beauty of the seeming world it creates...the poet can 'drug' us. The child molester can drug the child and she can be half-dreaming. The difference is that the poet is wide awake and asking us to wake up to something touching on justice, while the child molester is inside the reverie of a seeming world of his own making and a child is endangered.* The exuberance of artistic creation stands in direct opposition to the approaching literal violence *as an option*. Shakespeare and Nabokov are asking us, by the way their texts perform, by the jarring affect of horrific situations set in beautiful speech, to consider sexual violence through a lens of poetic ecstasy. These horrific situations are purposely set in aesthetic verbal spaces in

order to awaken us to how we respond to beauty.

What Were They Thinking?

Just prior to HH's announcement in his memoir that he has had sex with Lolita for the first time, he claims to have surprised himself with the speed of its arrival: "I had thought that months, perhaps years, would elapse before I dared to reveal myself to Delores Hayes (Lolita); but by six she was wide awake..." (132). In the next fifteen minutes the

rape is over, and given neither detailed nor general description. His announcement is made bluntly, in a mere seven words: "...by six fifteen we were technically lovers." As have maintained, it is the getting to this point in the rapist's thinking that interests Nabokov (and Shakespeare) since that is what appears to cause the violence.

Therefore, it is to this progression of thoughts that Nabokov draws our attention when he has HH beg us "not (to) skip these essential pages"; by "these essential pages" I take him to mean pages 128-34 that lead up to the rape. I take HH at his word regarding what is "essential" in his text and do so as well with Shakespeare's implied plea for our attention to the thoughts of Tarquinius (there are over six hundred lines devoted to this subject!); therefore, I have set these rapists' thoughts side-by-side in a roughly chronological sequence of thirty-one vignettes arranged under seven broad categories. Each vignette, with the exception of #s 16, 23, and 28, is devoted to a particular thought shared by both rapists leading up to and including the actual rape.

The seven broad categories of vignettes are:

1. The Profile of a Rapist
2. The Rapist Arrives at the Scene
3. Creeping Around
4. Paranoia at the Threshold
5. On the Verge
6. The Rape
7. The Aftermath

The thirty-one vignettes included in these categories are laid out more or less in the sequence in which they appear in the texts, with each taking its title and inspiration from the passage under consideration. Some of the titles are taken from *RL* and some from *L*. These passages are the ones which I feel best express the shared thinking of the rapists at that point in the progression. However, because the progression of thoughts is not *exactly* the same in both texts, I have chosen to give priority to the chronological sequence which Nabokov lays out for HH in *Lolita* and have adjusted the sequence presented in *RL* accordingly. Of the thirty-one vignettes I present, Tarquinius' thoughts directly parallel all but three of HH's, but I have used *L* as my guide *since* the precise chronology of Nabokov's text is much clearer.

Some brief backstory is called for. Shakespeare's description of Tarquinius' thoughts opens with his arrival at the home of Lucrece and her husband Collatinus. Collatinus has just been declared the winner of a crude mano-a-mano contest among his fellow soldiers waged to determine who's wife has been the most "chaste" while they have been off to war. Only Lucrece was found to be faithful. Tarquinius, the prince of the ruthless and cruel Etruscans, is enraged that a non-Etruscan Roman and a non-royal has the good fortune to possess a faithful wife. He secretly speeds on his horse to Lucrece' door to rape her and "steal" her chastity from Collatine. **HERE.** Under the pretext of reporting to Lucrece regarding her husband's welfare at the front, Tarquinius explains that Collatinus, "my kinsman, my dear friend," (337), has been fighting with exemplary heroism. By seeming to be her husband's friend, he gains her trust, entry to her home, and an open invitation to spend the night. Lucrece naively suspects nothing. In the bet among the drinking, bragging males, Collatinus had foolishly praised his wife's chastity in such an overwrought manner that he unwittingly aroused the envy and lust of

the Etruscan prince. In his pride, he shares some of the blame for the rape. Collatinus' *possesses* Lucrece's chastity, something seen by the other soldiers as a public shame for Tarquinius. Enraged by this shame, he aims to even the score with Collatinus by having sex with Lucrece, an act that will rob Collatine of her chaste body. Tarquinius' strategy is to win her confidence; if, however, she refuses his advances, he plans to use force and is armed with a knife. An important part of this Plan B is to make the rape seem to have been carried out by one of her servants; he will then claim to have slain this servant in a futile attempt to "save" her chastity. By this stratagem he will simultaneously destroy her chastity, evening the score with Collatinus, and satisfy his own lust. His envy of Collatinus' takes second place to his lust once he is standing in her physical presence.

The counterpart in *L* of Lucrece' chastity is Lolita's nymphetness, a more complex, but not an unrelated, quality. Though only twelve, Lolita is almost Lucrece' opposite, promiscuous and sexually curious, wise beyond her years, and according to HH's account has experienced "sex" at her summer camp. Nevertheless, there is plenty of talk in HH's memoir about Lolita's version of chastity, the "innocent childhood" that he took from her. Like Tarquinius, HH gains access to her home by a ruse, renting a room from her mother under the guise of being a studious academic who needs isolation and quiet. After a few months of playful flirting with Lolita, he decides to marry her widowed mother in order to be closer to his beloved "nymphet." When Lolita's mother is killed in a hit-and-run in front of the house, HH becomes Lolita's legal guardian and his dream opportunity for regular sex with her presents itself. Both Shakespeare and Nabokov address the role played by "opportunity" in making the rapes possible; it is a topic that emerges as a sub-theme in several vignettes.

The personalities of the rapists are different in ways that are obvious (6th Century BCE soldier vs. 20th Century French Literature professor, Etruscan Prince vs. French-American middle-class bourgeoisie), but despite these differences the two share many thoughts and attitudes. Except for three cases where their unshared thoughts are too important to leave out, I have omitted other passing thoughts which they do not share. In other words, my descriptions of their characters is not exhaustive. My interest is more in the shared thoughts since those are more likely to provide some understanding of the thoughts of rapists in general. I have employed a strategy of side-by-side analysis in order to suggest a Shakespearian/Nabokovian consensus on the thought progression that leads to rape.

PROFILE OF A RAPIST:

Self-destruction, Silent Wonder, and Agitated Syntax

I am considering together as one the three traits listed above in the title of this section because both texts seem to suggest their connection. That is, the traits are different, as the texts show, but they are connected in a way we need to consider.

Shakespeare and Nabokov ask us to measure their rapists' obsession by considering just exactly how much both men are willing to sacrifice in order to satisfy it. We are to think according to the equation: the greater the sacrifice, the greater the desire. Since both rapists destroy their lives, sacrificing everything, the desire they seek to satisfy is equally prodigious, even totalizing. The writers want us to imagine the extreme depths of the rapists' desire so they picture this speechlessness sometimes as silence and sometimes as garbled syntax. Tarquinius and HH not only are willing to lose the high place of respect which they occupy in their society, but both are even willing to reduce themselves to 'subhuman beasts' unable to speak, exiled from the daily communication of human society. That is, the loss of sensible speech, either in a sort of senselessness or a silent hypnotized wonder, is tied to a complete loss in social standing as conjoined signs of a totalizing sexual obsession. Both rapists end by destroying themselves socially, but an early sign of that end is a breakdown in their speech. This breakdown of syntax and meaning is a sign also that the sexual violence that will follow is connected to the speech they use in describing their victims. I believe this connection between totalizing lust and a breakdown in speech is due to the fact that the writers themselves place such a high value on words. They are doing their job and their job is words. The rapists' babbling literalisms stand *in direct opposition to* the poetry of their creators. Let us now look at the details of each of these three traits.

Self-destruction (1)

*His honour, his affairs, his friends, his state,
Neglected all, with swift intent he goes
To quench the coal which in his liver glows.*
(*RL*, 45-47)

Both writers call our attention first to the extreme pleasure the rapists hope to achieve in raping by showing us the extreme sacrifice they are willing to make in order to attain it. Willing to lose all, the rapists anticipate a pleasure worth more than the loss of their social standing; that is, they are both fully aware of the possible cost of their crime and are willing to pay that cost since it will be compensated for by a pleasure greater than any other they can imagine. Shakespeare's way of letting us know the extent of Tarquinius' obsession is typically Shakespearean: having feasted his eye on Lucrece' beauty, even more is desired: "too much wonder of his eye,/Which, having all, all could not satisfy" (95196). This is in the same vein as Sonnet 129 (the famous "lust sonnet"): "Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme" (129.10). This is the sort of pleasure that only multiplies. We will discuss the nature of insatiable appetite in more depth in Section 10 below, but for now we are told to take in the sheer *extremity* of the desire as measured by the rapists' willingness to give up everything. What has been lost by both rapists is what the political philosopher John Rawls calls one of the two "moral powers" necessary for citizenship, the ability to "pursue and revise their own view of what is valuable in human life" [*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Entry on John Rawls, 4.4]. In other words, they have lost the rational power to know how to shape a good life.

Tarquinius' rape of Lucrece ends the reign of his own royal line and The Etruscan Empire, itself, costing himself any chance at becoming the Emperor. In this apocryphal "history" the brutality of the rape of Lucrece marks for the Romans the last straw of Etruscan cruelty, giving them the final excuse for overthrowing the Etruscan Monarchy and founding the Roman Republic (507 BCE). HH does not lose an empire, but he too becomes an "exile" from his society, wandering for the remainder of his days in the creepy reaches that only child predators and murderers know, labeling himself a "monster" (96). He becomes an incarcerated madman...until, finally, only death and, what he dreaded the most, the 'loss of his soul' (308), await him.

Isolated in a world with its own way of speaking about desired females, these rapists have no ability to revise their misshapen view of the role a woman might play in their shaping of a good life. HH preposterously declares himself an "artist" and Tarquinius parades himself as the wronged prince of the Etruscan Royal House, a house he unwittingly is about to destroy by committing the rape. Shakespeare sums up Tarquinius' situation with characteristic verbal economy: "...and for himself himself he must forsake" (157). Both rapists are under a spell made obvious by the literalism of their descriptions of the women they assault, as in HH's description of the sleeping Lolita by "the glimmer of nymphet flesh, where half a haunch and half a shoulder dimly showed"). The literal induces a spell that leads the rapists to their own destruction. Both are warned of the danger, but the intensity of their obsession does not allow them to stop.

Neither rapist sees this self-destruction. Instead they see *themselves* as victims. HH believes he has been bewitched by a "demoniac" "nymphet" (16) who he describes as a toxic mix of lethal beauty and childish innocence. In the same vein, Shakespeare

tells us that Tarquinius pictures his helpless condition as forced upon him by the beauty of Lucrece's face, a beauty which is at war with her virginal chastity. Even though neither Shakespeare nor Nabokov use the term "obsession," both describe the mental state for which we use the word. The etymology of "obsession" is instructive: Latin *obsidere* ("to sit opposite") and *obsess-* ("besieged") (*OED*), suggest that the obsessions of Tarquinius and HH fit the description of a "siege." But this is a siege that goes in two directions since the rapists not only lay siege to their victims' bodies but claim that they themselves are under a siege carried out by the physical beauty and innocence of the females they assault. Fire imagery figures in this siege. Thus, Tarquinius describes himself as the victim of Lucrece' chastity, which has ignited a fire in him that he will use to burn her (6-7). An interior fire will be used against the same beauty that set the fire. HH also describes his own mental state with fire imagery:

a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in (my) loins and a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in (my) subtle spine....

(17)

In both cases the rapists blame the initiating arson on the victim, but the writers tell us that the fire is first lit in the minds of the rapists. *RL* begins with the metaphor "the coal which in (Tarquinius') liver glows" (47). Each rapist is characterized as a panicked man running around inside the burning house of his own body, unable to escape, and each is shrieking that the fire that surrounds him was set by the female he intends to rape.

Silent Wonder (2)

Now thinks he that her husband's shallow tongue,
The niggard prodigal that praises her so,
In that high task hath done her beauty wrong,
Which far exceeds his barren skill to show.
Therefore that praise which Collatine doth owe
Enchanted Tarquinius answers with surmise,
In silent wonder of still-gazing eyes.

(RL, 78-84)

All I know is that while that Haze woman and I went down the steps into the breathless garden, my knees were like reflections of knees in rippling water, and my lips were like sand, and--

"That was my Lo," she said, "and these are my lilies."

"Yes," I said, "They are beautiful, beautiful, beautiful."

(L, 40)

Both rapists are caught in an 'enchantment' which renders them not exactly dumbstruck in the sense of literal silence, but rather in the sense of a syntactical and semantic breakdown. Both Shakespeare and Nabokov associate the mood of obsessive lust with a loss of 'the right words,' a loss we hear in the rapists' stumbling reaction to their lust-object's beauty. Both texts describe thoughts characterized more by a loss of *how to speak the right words* than by a strict loss of words, in general. These rapists talk a lot, but their talk is often hyperventilated and garbled. We are meant to notice the stark contrast between the poetic eloquence of the writers' poetry and the rapists' clumsy syntactic breakdowns. The two writers and the two rapists are all moved by beauty, but the writers respond to aesthetic arrest with beautiful speech while the rapists respond with clumsy mumbling. This difference really matters to the writers. Tarquinius' "silent

wonder of still-gazing eyes" is not far from HH's conflation of Lolita and the lilies: "beautiful, beautiful, beautiful." These rapists are men possessed who cannot speak in the poetic way of their creators. One more thought here: although the words are the same, there is significant difference between HH's hyperventilated "beautiful, beautiful, beautiful" and Nabokov's poetic "beautiful, beautiful, beautiful." Nabokov's intention, by his own description, is aesthetic bliss (314) and HH's intention, despite his denial, is harm. Nabokov exhibits the verbal control of a writer of sublime articulation, while HH is out of control, despite his claim to be an artist (17). *How* each speaks manifests this difference and it is to this *how* that both texts draw our attention.

HH writes an entire memoir, but the whole of it constitutes his "dumb" (dumb in both senses) response to Lolita's beauty. That is, the memoir is "dumb" (speech-impaired) even though its content is the same words as the novel, itself. HH's words are Nabokov's words and have the same meaning, but the literal *way* in which HH speaks Nabokov's poetry renders the words as dumbstruck and dangerous. Such danger is the opposite of Nabokov's intention of producing "aesthetic bliss" (314). The memoir is also "dumb" in the sense that it is unaware, unpoetic. Instead it is bad oratory, a clumsy attempt to justify his violence and an apology offered up to save his soul (308). HH's memoir embodies *RL's* dictum that "all oratory is dumb when beauty pleadeth." HH's memoir sometimes drifts in the direction of understanding, but always stops short and too late to make any difference in the outcome (he is writing five years after the rape). The novel, on the other hand, benefits by being a fictional account of a fictional rapist, a contemplation of a rapist's thoughts as opposed to a mere journal of an actual rapist's thoughts without the contemplation. It is a virtual "memoir," asking for our contemplation.

HH must console himself five years after the rape with the desperate plea "O my Lolita, I have only words to play with" (32). By this time HH is growing closer to, but still

falling short of, Nabokov's poetry. HH by this time is seeking only to save his soul; Lolita is dead. In the novel's final sentences he appears to acknowledge (although this is debatable) that words *are* enough, perhaps even to save his soul, *if they are artful*. The "world" such artful words and images produce serves as his final refuge and Nabokov's final message: "I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita." (309). We are at this point a long way from the dumbstruck silence of Tarquinius' and HH's first sight of their victims' beauty. Character appears to merge with author, particularly since Nabokov in his afterword, a mere five pages later, describes his reason for writing *Lolita* as "aesthetic bliss...a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm" (314-15). The cruelty of sexual violence, Nabokov wants us to know, is the opposite of artistic "tenderness."

Shakespeare writes in *Titus Andronicus* that if the rapist of Lavinia had

heard the heavenly harmony

Which that sweet tongue had made,

He would have dropped his knife, and fell asleep,

As Cerberus at the Thracian poet's feet.

(2.4.48-51)

The suggestion is not that art by itself prevents rape, but that if art can penetrate "the intangible island of entranced time" (17) that constitutes the obsessed psychological

space the rapist lives in, the urge to rape at least hesitates. His attention is drawn to ways of speaking, along with a request to think deeply. Just listening to "the heavenly harmony/Which that sweet tongue had made" causes the rapist's knife to drop. At least that's the hope. *L* and *RL* are such sweet tongues, offering different but related ecstasies as a possibility. "Sex is but the ancillary to art," HH finally realizes. A sudden poetic understanding like Nabokov's, had it occurred to him earlier, might have given him second thoughts, perhaps even the Nabokovian awareness that dumbness associated with a bedazzled obsession is lethal.

Alfred Appel says that HH's professed goal of "'fix(ing) once and for all the perilous magic of nymphets' (134) almost resists language altogether, carrying him close to non-language and a figurative silence"(379). At his worst moments HH has limited options: either a babbling mishmash of nonsense (which he calls his "parody of silence" (119) or complete silence. All of this indicates the difficulties of Nabokov's own project since, like HH, he too can be tempted by the possibility of literal assault. But Nabokov knows from the start he has "only words to play with." Both Nabokov and HH are faced with Shakespeare's question regarding how to speak non-oratorically "when beauty pleadeth." Oratory is for persuasion, and Nabokov's intention, as I said earlier, is aesthetic arrest. He is not about making arguments. But the added problem Nabokov sets for himself is how to play with words in such a way that he acknowledges, as HH does not, his words' *inability* "to fix the perilous magic of nymphets once an for all" and their ability to accommodate themselves to a way of speaking poetically that possesses its own perilous magic. Nabokov is *doing* the very thing he could otherwise be orating on. The force of this doing is far stronger than simply preaching about the evils of rape.

Agitated Syntax (3)

RL

Those that much covet are with gain so fond

That what they have not, that which they possess,

They scatter and unloose it from their bond....

(RL, 135-36)

"What's the katter with misses?" I muttered (word control gone) into her hair.

"If you must know,"she said,"you do it the wrong way."

"Show, wight ray."

"All in good time,"responded the spoonerette.

Seva, ascendes, pulsata, Beulah's, kitzelans, dementissima. Elevator clatterans, pausa, clatterans, populus in corridoro. Hanc nise mors mihi adimet nemo! Juncea puellula, jo pensavo fondissime, nobserva nihil quidquam....

(L, 120)

Both writers, in the mouths of their characters, depict (and play with) episodes of agitated syntax and breakdowns of linguistic clarity. Despite the many differences between their personalities and their historical contexts, a significant hindrance which these rapists share is a recurrent linguistic muddledness in the presence of the females they prey on. The depth of their obsessions can be measured in the garbled quality of their speech. HH jokes about his tongue-tied condition, referring to it as "the hideous hieroglyphics...of my fatal lust" (48). Tarquinius, on the other hand, remains unaware of his impairment and it is rendered with such subtlety by Shakespeare that we readers are likely to be unaware of it, as well. Tarquinius neglects his wiser, less verbose, self who knows that "All orators are dumb when beauty pleadeth," (268), only to find himself caught up in the mangled syntax quoted at the beginning of this section. His error may seem slight, but the Arden editors cite it as an example of Shakespeare's showing us Tarquinius' overexcitement. Shakespeare employs "anacoluthon," a rhetorical technique where the second part of a sentence fails to follow syntactically from the first part (as in "you really ought...well, do it your own way," *Merriam-Webster*). The Arden editors explain it this way:

Shakespeare begins as if about to say, "what they have not, they are so eager to obtain that they scatter what they possess", but hastens on to the final clause without expressing what comes between. (p. 250).

That is, the phrase "they are so eager to obtain" is omitted and the phrase "that which they possess" is substituted. The problem for Tarquinius is that his obsession causes him to talk nervously, faster than whatever neural networks govern his syntax. Readers interpret his speech more by its manic mood than by its semantics, as expressing the sort of anxiety characteristic of someone weighing a significant loss or gain. We sense that there is much at stake for him. What is important here is that Shakespeare connects the planning of a rape to a problem with speech.

Nabokov uses a similar strategy of twisted-up speech, but for him it is less syntactical and more semantic. He does this in order to express how HH's ecstasy leads him into an inability to think clearly on the possible gains and losses that will be incurred. At one point, his memoir breaks down entirely in a hopeless inability to write anything other than the word "Lolita" repeated on an entire page:

Don't think I can go on. Heart, head--everything. Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita. Repeat till the page is full, printer. (109)

The man who "has only words" is left with only one word, the same word with which he opens his memoir by teaching us the subtleties of its various pronunciations. It is the same word he uses to end his memoir.

HH also experiences speaking problems when he arrives at the scene of the crime. Checking into The Enchanted Hunters Hotel, where the rape occurs, he can't get his own name right: "The name,' I said coldly, 'is not Humberg, not Humbug, but Herbert, I mean Humbert....'"(118). Later, in the room with Lolita, his speech descends into a mishmash of confused references and woozy spoonerisms (quoted above). The misheard words in his conversation with the shadowy figure on the porch of the hotel, the figure he suspects, rightly, to be Clare Quilty, also serve as an effective device for Nabokov to communicate HH's anticipated ecstasy and present paranoia. Even the name "Clare Quilty" is a play on the mangled words "clearly guilty." All of this shows that the principal subject of these two texts is much more than their plots; this "deeper subject," I believe, is the juxtaposition/connection of their authors' speech to the speech of their sexually violent characters. The mood of planning a rape garbles speech and the mood of the art depicting such planning *plays with* that garbling.

In summary, this is the general profile of the rapist in each text: self-destructive, in silent wonder ("dumb" in both senses of the word), and, when speaking, often speech-compromised. From this point on, until the rape, the thoughts of Tarquinius and HH meander in and out of a thread of anxieties and desires which they share. Each text adds to the three general characteristics of its rapist's profile an account of his thoughts just prior to the actual rape, concluding with three thoughts just following the rape. The two texts do not share an exact chronology and wherever they differ I follow Nabokov's sequence. I employ that strategy because his storyline is more familiar. The list, following Nabokov's chronology, is as follows:

2. The Rapist Arrives at the Scene

Disguise, Opportunity, and Whoredom's Bawd (4)

Narcissistic, Hermetic Vision (5)

3. Creeping Around

Portals, Locks, and Keys (6)

Weighing Gain and Loss (7)

Staking Ones Honor (8)

The "Warfare in the Face" Between Beauty and Virtue (9)

Excuses Caught Up in Seeming (10)

The "Swallowing Gulf" (11)

Imagining Nothing Lethal (12)

Insomniac Conniving (13) (only in *L*)

4. Paranoia at the Threshold

Lust's "Gloomy Look" (14)

Night-wand'ring Weasels (15)

An Aching, Singing Violin (16) (only in *L*)

5. On the Verge

Dragging Time and the "Stuffing Up" of Lust (17)

Lust's Weapons (18)

An Unfair Pillow (19)

The Awakening Prey (20)

The Worst: A Scolding and no Sex (21)

The Lost Possibility of Articulate Enchantment (22)

A "Precise Science" (23)

Frightening Noises (24)

Smoking Hands (25)

Metonymical Clothing (26) (only in *RL*)

Hopes Without Foundation (27)

The "Breeze From Wonderland" and the " Patrimonies of Poets" (28) (only in *L*)

6. The Rape

Assault on a City (29) (only in *RL*)

Fixing Perilous Magic (30)

7. The Aftermath

Fear Greater Than Guilt (31)

THE RAPIST ARRIVES AT THE SCENE

We are confronted with more speech impairment when HH arrives at the scene of his crime. Pulling into the parking lot of The Enchanted Hunters Hotel, HH has pigs on his mind. He describes a line of parked cars as "pigs at a trough" (117) and the hotel's

patrons as pink pigs (118). On checking in, he "was served by Mr. Swine, who is assisted by Mr. Potts, who can't find any cots, because Swine has dispatched them to the Swoons" (377). Again, the formula seems to be "the more lust, the more language issues." Appel explains that at this point in his memoir HH is "trying not to lose control of the language" (377); we readers can't be sure if HH is giving us his own account of the checking in or someone else's. We are in the Homeric Circean space of lust-ridden men reduced to inarticulate swine. The Enchanted Hunters Hotel, whose name is borrowed from another Classical lust-warning story (Acteon, in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*), has become a modern Circe's island (Aeaea) in the American Midwest of the fifties. It is a place where men are enchanted by toxic females and lose speech. HH is no Odysseus and has no *moli* for protection. Failing to adequately sedate Lolita, *he* himself becomes the one drugged; he is drugged by the "perilous magic" of the nymphet and rendered helpless. Nabokov again ties this to speech impairment, but it is actually poetry that he lacks. His drug is the pleasure he gets from taking the nymphet metaphor literally. That is, he is drugged by his failure to grasp the "nymphet" metaphor's poetic possibilities; he thereby misses the aesthetic pleasure Nabokov experiences in the writing. That poetic pleasures could possibly compete with sexual pleasures...this missed opportunity is HH's swine-like speechlessness. Tarquinius arrival is portrayed in a similar vein, with the focus on words when he sees Lucrece' face. At first, he criticizes Collatine's description of that face:

When at Colatia this false Lord arrived,

Well was he welcom'd by the Romaine dame...(50-51)

Now thinks he that her husband's shallow tongue...

In that high task hath done her Beauty wrong. (78, 80)

But he can do not better, himself, than to stare at he face "in silent wonder." Both, arriving at the scene of the literal violence they are about to perpetrate, can only "do her Beauty wrong" by having no poetry.

Disguise, Opportunity, and Whoredom's Bawd (4)

Whose inward ill no outward harm expressed.

For that he coloured with his high estate,

Hiding base sin in pleats of majesty.

(*RL*, 91-93)

In the slow, clear hand of crime I wrote: Dr. Edgar H. Humbert and daughter."

(*L*, 118)

Tarquinius arrives at the home of Lucrece under the guise of informing her of Collatinus' exploits on the battlefield. She naively welcomes him without suspicion since he is her husband's friend. HH, registering at the hotel where he will rape Lolita for the first time, claims to be her father, even though he is legally only her stepfather. Later, he attempts to clarify the distinction for her:

"Look here, Lo. Let's settle this once for all. For all practical purposes I am your father. I have a feeling of great tenderness for you. In your mother's absence I am responsible for your welfare. We are not rich, and while we travel, we shall be obliged--we shall be thrown a good deal together. Two people sharing one room, inevitably enter into a kind--how shall I say--a kind--"

Lolita stops him. Unlike the more credulous Lucrece, she is not fooled and finishes his sentence for him,

"The word is incest," (119) she says.

The same HH, who will say five years later that "I have only words," cannot at the scene of the rape utter the word "incest." "Incest" is missing from his vocabulary of seeming to be a "caring and tender father," just as Tarquinius' "base sin" is concealed inside the "pleats of majesty" he is wearing. His evil is missing from his description of himself as

Collatinus' friend. Their seeming is what is hypocritically shown; the disguise is the rapist's necessary stratagem that makes the rape possible. The accurate descriptive word for what is taking place is hidden behind his "step-father" disguise until the blunt Lolita blurts it out. HH's explanation of his role as her "father" is spoken through the mask of the protective father. He is actually a "monster" bent on incest, but in his private thoughts he wavers between acknowledging and denying the monster. He must face her annunciation of "incest" but it is not enough to kill his "monstrous" desire. This desire will destroy him, but the desire is too great. A couplet from *RL* says it all:

And when great treasure is the need propos'd

Though death be adjunct, there is no death suppos'd.

(132-3)

In the end the disguise works even on the rapists, themselves. Their desire is so prodigious that they do not see their own destruction coming.

But both Shakespeare and Nabokov want us to think an additional thought the rapists' seeming. These disguises would not work without the unfolding of enabling opportunities. Both writers are extremely curious regarding the role played by opportunistic events which allow the rapist to get away with his disguise. These events are made to seem almost complicit in the rapes since without them the rapes could not have happened.

For example, HH is suddenly thrust into his role as Lolita's 'seeming father' by the sudden death of her biological mother (struck by a car while getting the mail). What are the chances of that? Similarly, Tarquinius' opportunity is provided by his 'seeming

friendship' with Collatinus and by Collatinus' absence from home. An opportunity (chance? fate? enabler? pimp? go-between?) opens up for both rapists, and both seize it. Noticing and seizing such an opportunity forms an important transition in the description both writers give to the thought progression of their rapists. This is the notion of "opportunity" Erasmus characterizes in *Adagia* ("Opportunity is whoredom's bawd") and which Lucrece uses to pinpoint the cause of her rape, "O Opportunity thy guilt is great: Tis thou that executes the traitor's treason..."(876-7). She even goes as far as to almost acquit Tarquinus of the rape. She lays the greater blame on opportunity, because, in her thinking, opportunity allowed for the disguise and not the other way round. In this sort of logic, Collatinus' and Lolita's mother's absence opened the doors which allowed for the disguises to work and without those disguises the rapes would not have happened. Whether the opportunities were chance or fate in the end doesn't matter; the opportunities made the rapes inevitable. Lucrece shares this notion of blame with the rapists; Lolita does not.

HH sees his own crime as nothing more than a bit part in a larger picture, "my own vile contribution" to something already carried out by the "instrument" of fate:

I had actually been the agent of fate. I had palpated the very flesh of fate-- and its padded shoulder. A brilliant monstrous mutation had suddenly taken place, and here was the instrument. Within the intricacies of the pattern (hurrying housewife, slippery pavement, a pest of a dog, steep grade, big car, baboon at its wheel), I could dimly distinguish my own vile contribution.

In other words, fate had served as a sort of Hidden Hand providing the opportunity for subterfuge with HH's will as its instrument. The rape had been a conspiracy between HH and fate. Just before she was run over by the car, Lolita's mother had discovered HH's journal, hidden in his desk, in which he had logged the details of his nympholept desire for Lolita. After the accident, HH surmises that fate must have arranged for her rage at this discovery to coincide with her daily trip to the mailbox. Her anger distracted her sufficiently to cause her to miss the oncoming car.

He concludes by this bent logic that the bedazzling power of the nymphet is even connected to fate and that fate had decreed the mother's death. In other words, HE not Lolita is the helpless victim! Opportunity is whoredom's bawd. Fate thus gave him the opportunity for raping Lolita by providing him with the false cover of being her biological father. He is astonished at all the convenient "happenstance" of the driver's possible swerving to avoid hitting a dog and instead killing Lolita's mother: "Fat fate's formal handshake...brought me out of my torpor; and I wept"(103). An act of metaphysical grace! All the cards appear to have fallen in his favor. The "accident" does more than merely permit the rape, it even seems to *invite* it by making HH her sole guardian. He need only accept the invitation provided in this opportunity and take the action he desires.

But blaming opportunity does not appear to be the point of view of the writers. Rather they seem curious about the rapists' use of this excuse as a stage in the progression of their thoughts. Neither is the writers' curiosity regarding opportunity their principal focus. Their focus, instead, is on the rapists' "vile contribution" and neither text can be interpreted as holding fate responsible. To this end, they examine how the rapists turn

their thoughts to the idea that opportunity serves their ends. Consequently, both texts suggest that the rapists' claims of a possible co-conspiracy with opportunity (or fate) are merely one more way of fooling themselves into thinking that their violence amounts to more than an expression of their own Narcissist desires. These self-deceiving thoughts are merely another feature of *their own* actions.

For example, before the rape Lucrece warns Tarquinius to use good sense despite the chance to do otherwise, urging him

*By holy human law, and common troth,
By heaven and earth, and all the power of both,
That to his borrowed bed he make retire,
And stoop to honour, not to foul desire.*

(571-4)

Lolita is more accommodating than Lucrece, only asking HH whether they are to sleep in one room (119). But, as i mentioned above, this question leads to her blunt labeling of the whole business as "incest." Both rapists are forced by their victims to consider the gravity of their actions, but the rapists spend precious little time considering these warnings. Collatinus' "burning coal in the liver" and HH's "bubble of hot poison in the loins" do not allow for any genuine deliberation. This failure to take the warning is rendered easier for them by their thought that what they will carry out is part of the operations of fate and opportunity. The possibility of sharing the responsibility for the

rape with opportunity slides into becoming a justification for their actions.

Narcissistic, Hermetic Vision (5)

RL

Within his thought her heavenly image sits....

(288)

...she smiled with so sweet a cheer

That had Narcissus seen her as she stood

Self-love had never drowned him in the flood.

(263-66)

L

I had left my Lolita still sitting on the edge of the abysmal bed, drowsily raising her foot, fumbling at the shoelaces and showing as she did so the nether side of her thigh up to the crotch of her panties--she had always been singularly absentminded, or shameless, or both, in matters of legshow. This, then, was the hermetic vision of her which I had locked in....

(123)

Narcissus serves as a good image of the vision which holds Tarquinius since both are isolated in self-love. Hermes, a god of borders, serves as another good image for the "locked in" quality of the rapist's vision, of his "solipsizing," as he calls it. Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary founder of alchemy, was thought to have invented a glass tube into which nothing exterior could enter, alchemy's "hermetically-sealed" flask. Both of the raped females are sealed inside their rapist's visions. Tarquinius' invokes Narcissus to describe his bedazzlement, while HH summons Hermes, but the mood in both is of a sealed-off enclosure. Tarquinius claims that Narcissus would not have drowned in self-love if he had seen Lucrece face-to-face, but the irony of this claim is that *his own vision* of Lucrece prevents him from seeing her as she is *exterior to that vision*. He is enclosed of his *image* of her. Tarquinius is so imprisoned inside her

"heavenly image" that he can't see the danger to her or to himself. The possessing images that own these rapists respectively are only superficially different, chastity for Tarquinius instead of nymphetry for HH, since nymphetry is an eroticized chastity. In addition, Tarquinius' narcissism presents the same sort of danger to its possessor as HH's "hermetic vision," an enclosed psychological space from which there is no escape. The full extent of HH's confusion is shown by the fact that he thinks he has safely "locked" the vision inside his own mind, but we "juror-readers" (as HH addresses us) are aware that the reverse is true: *he* is the one locked in, hermetically sealed inside and shut off from any "objective" picture of Lolita that does not cohere with his image of her. We can see this clearly in the quote above when he spies her "leg-show" as she sits on the bed: "my nymphet, my beauty and my bride" (123). Everything else, he explains, has turned into a "superfluous blur" which he feels he has "gradually eliminated" (125) as a source of possible distraction from the leg-show. This superfluous blur, we juror-readers need to remember, includes his earlier cautionary thought "Remember she is only a child, remember she is only-- " (112). HH forgets that "only a child" warning just as he forgets how to say "incest," and just as Tarquinius forgets the family honor he is about to obliterate. The hermetic seal shuts out these distractions.

The drug which HH has secretly administered to Lolita under the guise of a vitamin plunges her into a deep sleep, giving him time to go downstairs to collect himself and have a drink. But as he leaves the room he turns back and sees the dazed Lolita sitting on the bed. Her lackadaisical, offhand beauty works like the image of Lucrece works on Tarquinius to enclose HH in the mist of his dream. Five years later HH blames (134) the hypnotizing power of nymphets which he had promised to "neutralize" by documenting its details. The fact that he cannot blame himself reveals how tight the hermetic seal is

that surrounds her image. It is so tight that the distinction between Lolita and his image of Lolita is gone from his awareness. HH's speechlessness, his failure to achieve a Nabokovian artist's way of speaking with kindness and tenderness, has become, once he is locked *hermetically* inside his vision, the half-awake Lolita's problem. In Homeric terms he has metamorphosed into one of Circe's swine, speechless. Nabokov's strategy is to let this hermetic vision speak to us in his art. In this way, we readers are confronted by beauty like HH, but we are in the Hermetic trance of the novel and not the girl. This makes *all* the difference. I believe this distinction is Nabokov's aesthetic and moral purpose.

While the speech of HH creeps us out, the very same speech rendered by Nabokov dazzles us. The memoir, in HH's terminology a "moral leprosy," is also, as John Ray, Jr. says in the Prologue, a "singing violin" (5). But it is clearer to say that the memoir *as memoir* is a moral leprosy due to its literalism, but that *Lolita as Lolita* is a "singing violin." HH cannot see his own artlessness as tied to a failure of speech. He never talks like Nabokov. He lacks art because of the Hermetic seal that encloses him in his literalizing of the "nymphet" metaphor. He has the right words, but speaks them in the wrong way.

HH leaves the drugged Lolita on the bed in Room 342, "drugged" himself by the hermetic vision of her, lolling on the bed. He heads downstairs to get a drink and to settle his thoughts. But before he leaves the room he hesitates briefly, looking back at Lolita. This is his pivotal moment! There remains one last possibility of his not following through with the rape. He has the unusual thought that since he has just experienced in his hermetic vision of Lolita on the bed an epiphanic happiness like none he ever had, perhaps that vision alone would be enough to satisfy him and he would not have to rape her: "If my happiness could have talked, it would have filled that genteel hotel with a

deafening roar" (123). And that is just the point! His happiness "can't talk"! It is hermetically sealed inside his psychological confusion, locked inside the literal way in which he takes his vision. This literalism owns him. It robs him of poetry and locks him in oratory: "All orators are dumb when beauty pleadeth." At this moment, he is the opposite of Nabokov.

Creeping Around the Threshold

Portals, Locks, and Keys (6)

RL

*The locks between her chamber and his will,
Each one by him enforced, retires his ward,
but as they open they all rate his ill,
Which drives the creeping thief to some regard...*

L

*...after satisfying myself that the door carried no inside bolt....the key, with it's numbered
dangler of carved wood, became forthwith the weighty sesame to a rapturous and
formidable future. It was mine....*

(123)

In both accounts, the lock on the door of the bedroom with its tumblers and bolts marks the border that must not be crossed. The lock is the metonym standing in for the threshold of the female body. Shakespeare develops the image by describing the various tumblers and interior workings of the lock. Nabokov sees the image as the door to Ali baba's cave, one that is penetrable because it has no bolt. This verbal play by the writers creates a dramatic delay; what feels like the pleasure-taking leisure of the writers contrasts sharply with the fear-driven manic mood of the rapists. Because Tarquinius sees the rape in terms of physical penetration, he fails to see the lock as anything more than a hindrance to his possession of the chastity he so wants. His anticipated pleasure is not Shakespeare's present pleasure. This competition between these two radically opposed pleasures, I want to maintain, is *RL*'s principal subject. One causes great harm and one great art; they reside on the polar opposite ends of any measure of good citizenship.

But Lucrece shares Tarquinius' view of her chastity as a bodily object to be possessed, as does her husband, and their contemporary Roman culture. Elizabethan culture may begin to question this view. [Note: Christine de Pizan in *City of Women* had already written in the second half of the 15th Century about women behaving differently if they had been educated differently...that is, they would act more thoughtfully and could be moral creatures. Elizabeth, the anointed Queen of England, was saying to her English subjects "I am anointed, I am Queen, but I am special and have been chosen by God *despite my woman's body.*" She did not support programs for women's education.]

Lucrece expresses this literalist belief following the rape when she views her own body as both the cause ("my pure beauty had purloined his eyes," 1651) and the physical effect of the rape ("my gross blood (is) stained with this abuse", 1655). Her only "refuge," she says, resides in the possibility that her mind might still be 'pure enough' to choose suicide. She tries to save her soul from the physical stain of the rape, just as HH seeks to "save my soul" by writing his memoir. Tarquinius seems to have no such "soul" to be saved. The "portal," "doorway," "lock," "bolts," "vents and crannies," are all metaphors employed by Shakespeare for drawing our attention to Tarquinius' literalism. Tarquinius enters Lucrece's room just as he enters her body...by force. Shakespeare and Nabokov write the way they do as the demonstration of different sort of pleasure, as a pleasure taken in words, an option never entertained by the literal-minded rapists. A way of speaking separates what Nabokov calls the "tenderness" of art from the cruelty of rape. The rapists never see this other door to aesthetic pleasure as an option.

This blindness which is shared by the rapists is caused by the *fixed* nature of their obsession (as discussed above in #2 and #5). Tarquinius, driven by "the burning coal in his liver," gains access to Lucrece's room by the mere lifting of a latch:

*Now is he come unto the chamber door
That shuts him from the heaven of his thought,
which with a yielding latch, and with no more,
hath barred him from the blessed thing he sought.*

(337-40)

HH is different; he hesitates at the door and reflects. The lock he will have to deal with

when he returns to the room is much more complicated than the simple lock with its “yielding latch” which Tarquinius confronts. Before he goes downstairs to gather himself for the rape, he makes sure that Lolita cannot lock him out from the inside. This is easy for him to do. The locks must seem amenable and enabling to the rapists. At the same time, however, the two writers enter a different “room,” one characterized by a verbal rush associated with “yielding latches” with “inside bolts” and female bodies. Some might find such pleasures harmful, but I do not. Words provide a related, but a qualitatively different sort of pleasure.

An interesting irony emerges in the fact that just as both rapists are “locked inside” their visions of the female, locked up against any outside interference that might impede their purpose, while the literal door that seals off their prey is very easily breached. The writers hover above both enclosures, trapped by neither, and find the right words that express the relationship between the prison room of the rapists’ vision and the bedroom of their victim. But because the rapists can’t escape one room (their visions) they can’t be kept out of the other (the literal bedrooms). For Tarquinius at this point the “heaven of his thought,” his narcissistic *fantasy* of the rape, is sealed off from all others. But the fantasy alone is not enough to give him satisfaction; it longs to be realized. So, thinking literally, avoiding the thought of the fantasy *as fantasy*, he forces himself to literal action. This transition from possible satisfaction with the “heaven of his thought” (as a poet would be satisfied) to his demand for literal rape must’ve been of deep interest to Shakespeare’s curious mind. The threshold of the door to the bedroom becomes for both poets a *moral* threshold; the rape will be carried out when “the eye of heaven [the sun] is out, and misty night/covers the shame...”(356-7).

HH’s rape of Lolita is fueled by his “hermetic vision” of Lolita, a private vision hidden from others, including the drugged Lolita. It’s not that the hermetic vision is locked up in

his thoughts, but the other way round. His thoughts are *all* directed by his vision. But Nabokov gives us more psychological details than Shakespeare does; HH thinks that an interior "rape" played out in his imagination is not a rape; if it is known only to himself, as far as he is concerned it is as if it has never happened. Because of the force of the vision, he cannot buy into any glimpse of his fantasy *as a fantasy*. He says, "The gentle and dreamy regions through which I crept were the patrimony of poets...not crime's prowling ground" (131). The "gentle and dream regions" are enough for the poet. He knows this moment is his last chance at innocence. Standing at the same moral threshold where Tarquinius stands, albeit with a bit more psychological understanding, the outcome is nevertheless the same. HH's actions confirm Tarquinius' self-comforting idea that "thoughts are but dreams till their effects be tried" (353). Both rapists hesitate, but thoughts and dreams are not in the end satisfying to either in the way that they *are* satisfying to the poets. When HH returns to his room after going downstairs he is relieved to find that Lolita has not locked him out from the inside; but he thinks once again that he might not follow through with the rape. "One could still--," he mutters to himself before making the abrupt decision "but the key was already in the lock, and then I was in the room" (127). *Fait accompli*. It must feel here also that fate is his accomplice. Tarquinius, like HH, also pauses. Before entering the bedroom, he considers for one last moment the "eye of heaven" watching him from above. Then suddenly, "This said, his guilty hand plucked up the latch..." (358). Crucial to this moment in both texts is the fact that both rapists *actively choose after pausing to reflect*. The writers do not let them off the hook with a plea of spontaneous insanity. This fact is emphasized by a telling of the story as a series of slow-motion vignettes of thoughts following one after another. Neither rapist is, despite their claims, *forced* to choose rape by the beauty or innocence of his victim. Nor are they, the writers would have us know,

forced to choose rape by being carried away by their "heavenly visions"...at the crucial moment, as we see in the following section, we are told they hesitate and reflect.

Weighing Gain and Loss (7)

RL

What win I if I gain the thing I seek?

A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy.

Who buys a minute's mirth to wail a week?

Or sells eternity to get a toy?

For one sweet grape who will the vine destroy?

(211-15)

L

(The key) was mine, it was part of my hot hairy fist. In a few minutes...I would let myself into that "342" and find my nymphet, my beauty and bride, my prisoner in her crystal sleep. Jurors! If my happiness could have talked, it would have filled that genteel hotel with a deafening roar. And my only regret today is that I did not deposit key "342" at the office, and leave the town, the country, the continent, the hemisphere--indeed, the globe--that very same night.

(123)

Shakespeare and Nabokov each direct a virtual "slow-mo movie," we might even say a "close reading," of rapist thoughts. The rapist in each text is certainly a particular individual, but the fact they share so many thoughts prior to the rapes must give us pause. Are these writers drawing a picture of a 'rapist type'? They each appear to slow down the action in order to get the details of 'rapist thinking' right. We have so far discussed only six vignettes of this slo-mo movie; we have another twenty-two to consider before we get to the rape, itself. This gradual pace is evidence of the deep curiosity which both writers hold toward the thoughts of their rapists *prior* to the rape and of their relative lack of curiosity regarding the details of the actual rape and its aftermath. Before the rape there are 28 vignettes, the rape itself has two, and the aftermath one. The progression towards the rape is slow but inexorable. We know the end is rape, but the writers force us to slowly investigate the rapists' turn-ons, anxieties, fears, second thoughts, ignorances, excuses, and interior debates. At this point we are already at the threshold of the crime, but before the rape itself there will be 22 more vignettes to consider.

The seventh vignette for our consideration is one in which the rapists weigh the gains and losses for themselves which are likely to follow the rape. Thus, Tarquinius and HH each carry out a quasi-utilitarian calculus of pleasurable and painful consequences, but each entertains a calculus heavily weighted in favor of the personal pleasure likely to result. The possibility of pain and suffering is acknowledged, but more or less glossed over. Neither, in the end, despite much fear and trepidation, decides to forego the violence. HH justifies his use of the drug on Lolita by comforting himself that it will "spar(e) her purity" by rendering her "completely anesthetized"(124). As he had said on an earlier occasion, after having an orgasm while she sat on his lap, "The child knew nothing. I had done nothing to her" (62) and "I intended, with the most fervent force and foresight, to protect the purity of that twelve-year-old child" (63). If she *knows* nothing, then, by this 'logic,' he has *done* nothing. But this claim of preserving the innocent twelve-year old child is betrayed by the fact that he is turned on by her "depravity," as one who possesses a "nymphean evil breathing through every pore" (125). This is how he can pick the nymphets out of a photograph. This is the deceit his own nymphetology plays on him: nymphets are not "pure." What turns him on is that there is no innocence to protect, not even in a twelve-year old, not as long as her pores breathe "nymphean evil." He only questions the formula of the possibility of a twelve-year old female's evil five years later. It is the acknowledging of his violating her innocence that costs him the most: "I broke her," he admits.

At the time of the rape in 1947, he conflates Lolita's childhood innocence and her Nymphean evil. This is what a genuine nymphet is. The Rousseauian part of HH's thinking (he even refers to himself once as "Jean-Jacques Humbert") still holds with the "old fashioned, old world" idea of a natural and unspoiled goodness in Lolita. But the

20th Century Freudian part of HH has little trouble in seeing the mix of sexual depravity breathing in the pores of a twelve-year old. These two parts of her wrestle with each other in his mind, both turning him on and tormenting him with guilt. In the end in 1952, he will experience the depths of his despair, feeling that he had "broken the child" by stealing her voice away from the shouting chorus of the children playing in the schoolyard. There is nothing approaching that level of awareness *before* the rape.

At this point, in the hotel, what he figures to lose has something to do with Lolita's "purity," but he does not yet know exactly what her loss will cost him. We learn later that what it costs him is having to acknowledge what it costs *her*. He thinks more of his own loss than of hers. It might be put this way: "If I don't violate her purity, society will not punish me, and I will experience no 'pain and horror'," (125). Social "pain and horror" (principally, his shame and exile) constitute the bulk of the "loss" side of his quasi-utilitarian calculus. But he has trouble focusing on this loss. What he has to gain from the rape, the sexual pleasure of possessing the nymphet, distracts him. At these moments in the hotel just prior to the rape there is no such talk about "fixing" her power because, as he later claims, he is transfixed by that very same power.

HH in the bedroom is about as much of a social reformer as is Tarquinius in the bedroom. By the time we see Tarquinius in Lucrece's bedroom he is thinking less about his 'abstract' envy of Collatinus as the fortunate possessor of her chastity and more about the 'concrete' physical pleasure associated with the assault. Her physical presence creates an immediacy for him. He would have done well to read the lines in Shakespeare's "lust sonnet" (129): "the expense of spirit in a waste of shame/is lust in

action...no sooner enjoyed, but despised straight...". The 'gain' of committing the rape once he is in the bedroom is momentary ("a froth of fleeting joy" in *RL*), but the loss will be the loss of "eternity" (*RL*). Tarquinius' concern about "eternity" sounds awfully Christian for an Etruscan prince, somewhat like HH's concern for his soul. The fact that both rapists choose rape over restraint shows the iron grip which their lust has on them. The brief pleasure they anticipate outweighs the pain associated with their social destruction; it outweighs even the eternal loss of their souls.

Staking One's Honor (8)

*The aim of all is but to nurse the life
With honor, wealth and ease in waning age;
And in this aim there is such thwarting strife
That one for all or all for one we gage:
As life for honor in fell battle's rage;
Honor for wealth; and oft that wealth doth cost
The death of all, and all together lost.*

*So that in vent'ring ill we leave to be
The things we are for that which we expect,
And this ambitious foul infirmity,
In having much, torments us with defect
Of that we have; so then we do neglect
The thing we have, all for want of wit
Make something nothing by augmenting it.*

(141-53)

And for himself himself he must forsake.

(157)

L

I am not, and never was, and never could have been, a brutal scoundrel.

(131)

No doubt, he is horrible, he is abject, he is a shining example of moral leprosy....

(John Ray, Jr. describing HH in the Foreward)

A large part of the weighing of gain and loss for both rapists is the cautionary tale warning against losing one's "public honor" in an attempt to gain something of much less value. Honor is a complicated concept since it is characterized by different cultural norms for different periods, but for our two rapists the term shares a reference to social standing and good reputation. HH's nympholepsy runs so deep that he seems to care little for his public reputation. However, we are missing a key to the puzzle that is Humbert Humbert if we view him this way. It helps us avoid this confusion if we remember he has addressed us readers as "jurors," or fellow citizens sitting in judgment on the trial of his soul (308). Reading *Lolita* is a jury duty and we are intended to deliberate on the worthiness of his soul. He cares so much about how he appears in our eyes that he has written the memoir of *Lolita* as Item #1 in his defense. The soul he seeks so hard to save stands in a very peculiar "dock," the dock where we citizens carry on a very public discussion on beauty, sexual violence, and personal responsibility. He and his soul are fictions, of course, but that fictional soul stands trial in the very public "court" constituted by our conversations about *Lolita*.

Having paid with his honor to satisfy his lust, HH now suffers by being regarded as the ultimate outcast, as a "monster." He wants back into the community, to exist alongside us as a fellow citizen, and uses legal terms to achieve that end. The measure of his possible restored humanity is how much we are able to believe him when he says he loves Lolita. In Homeric terms, Odysseus' sailors would be transformed from swine into men. But this did not happen in *The Odyssey* and the danger to HH is that it cannot happen here. What he demands of us is extreme; he will cease to exist if we don't find his plea credible ("Imagine me; I shall not exist unless you imagine me..." 129). He suffers the exile of "monsters" and asks us by some form of performative speech to pronounce him human again, one of us who is gentle, not cruel ("try to discern the doe in me, trembling in the forest of my own iniquity; let's even smile a little"129). For him to be one of us, though, he suggests that we must empathize to the extent that we can see ourselves in him. All of this is to occur in the public space of his trial/memoir. Even though he is fictional, we are thinking, as we decide his case, about actual rapists, that what moves them and might even move us. Even though HH is fictional, the "jury duty" we are called to in order to save his soul concerns how we ourselves feel about actual rape. But we are getting ahead of ourselves here; this vignette touching on the rapists' interior deliberations regarding his honor point us in the direction of each story's conclusion. The writers include these thoughts about honor in the rapist's mind prior to the rape so that the conclusion of each story makes sense. Honor is the principal cost which the rapist is willing to pay in exchange for his pleasure. In Homeric terms, honor is the moly which prevents his metamorphosis into a swine.

HH's anxiety over his animality reminds us of that other Classical metamorphosis

associated with lust, the transformation of the hunter Acteon into a stag. Acteon, like HH and Tarquinius, had a problem with speech; he was incapable of calling off his dogs as they attacked his "enchanted" stag body. HH struggles in *The Enchanted Hunters Hotel* to find the right way of speaking that will save him from his own animality. But his literalism never allows him to rise to the poetic heights of Nabokov's metaphorical flights. He continues to speak literally despite his claim to seek the public good. He insists that if we are determined to see him as a beast, he is so only because of the demoniac power of nymphets to enchant. He wants to fix this power and "save" us from future enchantment. He seeks to "fix once and for all" this dangerous "magic." But instead he only writes an excuse-filled memoir, not a work of art. In Shakespeare's terms he produces oratory "when beauty pleadeth" and, as we have heard, such speech is "dumb." His memoir is devoid of poetry, despite his pretenses of being an "artist" (17).

He pleads unconvincingly, "But let us be prim and civilized. Humbert Humbert tried hard to be good. Really and truly he did" (19). That he is an honorable man and not a monster is tied in his thinking to the aesthetic quality of his memoir, but this claim of a connection is betrayed by his literalism. His literal way of talking is not Nabokov's poetic way. To convince us that he is an artist HH cites Dante and Petrarch in an awkward attempt to situate his memoir within "the patrimonies of poets." This failure is the book's point: HH's aesthetic failure is tied to his literal violence. What he calls his art is mere "oratorical pleading" for his return from exile. But he is not an exiled Ovid, a genuine poet. He is more like the doomed Acteon, a victim of his own lust. Such a man could not write *Lolita* because he is the immoral character at its core; he cannot get outside of that fictional space. He is Nabokov's poem. Even though he wrote the very same words in his memoir, he does not write those words *in the same way* as Nabokov. It is a question

of two different employments of seeming: Nabokov creates a fictional seeming “world” for an aesthetic end and HH creates a seeming “fatherhood” for himself in order to rape Lolita.

HH comes closest to Nabokov’s sort of seeming when he has his hermetic vision of Lolita sitting on the bed. The weighing of gain and loss in his thoughts is a case of his choosing between a happiness fulfilled by that hermetic vision and a literal rape which will destroy his life. Like HH, Tarquinius chooses the latter, but with more bravado,

I know repentant tears ensue [must follow] the deed,

Reproach, disdain, and deadly enmity;

Yet strive I to embrace my infamy.

(502-4)

HH, on the other hand, is speechless in the sense I have laid out. He is resigned to the fact that even if his happiness cannot talk to his juror-readers, it *is* nonetheless roaring in his head. Something in him is poetic enough to be extremely happy with the mere vision of Lolita sitting on the edge of the bed. But that “ethical” happiness quickly evaporates, abandoning him. He chooses instead the “pain and horror” (125) of the infamy that that the actual rape will produce. He must have her literally. Nabokov and Shakespeare force their rapists to what I call their ‘fulcrum moment,’ the moment when they could go either way. This marks the moment of no turning back. The writers’ curiosity is focused

on the question of what leads some to go in the direction of poetry and others to go in the direction of violence.

Following this rejection of the satisfaction provided by his hermetic vision, HH goes downstairs for a drink. He launches into a lengthy interior debate regarding how he might have his cake and eat it too, as he had done earlier when he masturbated while she sat in ignorance on his lap; that is, he wonders if it might be possible to both rape Lolita and at the same time "spar(e) her purity," by making sure she is unconscious and doesn't know it is happening:

I was still firmly resolved to pursue my policy of sparing her purity by operating only in the stealth of night, only upon a completely anesthetized little nude. Restraint and reverence were still my motto....

(124)

This is a last ditch effort to save his honor by saving her innocence. In these thoughts, a warfare is waged between Lolita's beauty (which he desires to possess in the rape) and her innocence (which he sees her as losing if she remains conscious during the rape). Tarquinius' thoughts run in a similar direction, only for him it is played out in an elaborate heraldic War of the Roses between red and white armies, Lucrece's beauty and innocence respectively, waged on the 'battlefield' of her face.

The "Warfare in the Face" Between Beauty and Virtue (9)

RL

*Within whose face beauty and virtue strived
Which of them both should underprop her fame.
When virtue bragged, beauty would blush for shame;
 When beauty boasted blushes, in despite
 Virtue would stain that o'er with silver white.*

*But beauty, in that white intituled
From Venus' doves, doth challenge that fair field
Then virtue claims from beauty beauty's red,
Which virtue gave the golden age to gild
Their silver cheeks, and called it then their shield;
 Teaching them thus to use it in the fight,
 When shame assailed, the red should fence*

the white.

*This heraldry in Lucrece' face was seen,
Argued by beauty's red and virtue's white.*

(52-65)

L

What drives me insane is the twofold nature of this nymphet--of every nymphet, perhaps; this mixture in my Lolita of tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity, stemming from the snub nosed cuteness of ads and magazine pictures, from the blurry pinkness of adolescent maidservants in the Old Country (smelling of crushed daisies and sweat); and from very young harlots disguised as children in provincial brothels; and then again, all this gets mixed up with the exquisite stainless tenderness seeping through the musk and the mud, through the dirt and the dearth, oh God, oh God. And what is most singular is that she, this Lolita, has individualized the writer's ancient lust, so that above and over everything there is--Lolita.

(44-5)

The spell under which each rapist is held is characterized by their fixation on a contest *in the female's body* between beauty and virtue. This threshold where beauty and virtue meet is, according to HH's nympholept formula, **the most dangerous point**, the space and time where "the perilous magic of nymphets" enchants him into madness. Like Tarquinius, he is caught on a battlefield between two "armies." HH desires this meeting of the two armies, blind to the fact that it will destroy him. Despite his claim to prefer "a bit of depravity in his prey," he is equally turned on by Lolita's childlike innocence. This innocence works on him in much the same way that Lucrece's chastity works on Tarquinius. Both rapists are caught in the middle of a battlefield; beauty or innocence alone, either without the other, would not have situated either rapist in that very dangerous place.

Some might argue that Tarquinius seeks *only* to rob Collatinus of his good fortune in having a virtuous wife, that Tarquinius' desires were born more of envy than lust. But, once Tarquinius stands in Lucrece's physical presence, the lust inspired by her chastity becomes apparent. This transformation occurs when he describes the warfare for his attention between her beauty and her chastity. It is a warfare carried out on "that fair [battle] field" of her face. The fact that her 'innocence' moves him sexually renders him dumbstruck, even though a complicated extended metaphor of heraldic imagery is

employed by Shakespeare to explain the warfare. Lucrece is older than Lolita, but this difference between them does not erase the fact that they share a "warfare in the face" between beauty and virtue. It is a warfare that momentarily freezes their assailants. Shakespeare pictures this warfare as two vying armies capturing a helpless Tarquinius between them on the battlefield of Lucrece's face. The armies compete with each other in a back and forth that can be confusing. When Lucrece's virtue, which is white, boasts of its power, her beauty, which is red, responds by first blushing in shame and turning her cheeks red. But because red cheeks make her even more beautiful, this reddening is a "boasting" on beauty's part. But virtue counters by painting her red cheeks white. These white cheeks are to serve as a "shield" protecting Lucrece from the lust that the red in her cheeks is likely to arouse in Tarquinius. When the red is covered over with white the red becomes a shield that protects virtue from lust in the way that it did in the Golden Age. But Lucrece and Tarquinius are not living in the Golden Age and Tarquinius' lust meets with no such protection. Heraldry is used by Shakespeare to take apart the complexity of what leads a man to assault a woman. It concerns beauty and chastity, as in *Lolita*, but what more can be said? Shakespeare resorts to a poetic image when common sense provides no answer.

Nabokov does the same. Like Shakespeare, he is curious about the eroticism of innocence. HH wrestles with his desire to possess Lolita's nymphic "depravity,": to him, hers is a childishness that owns him and which he seeks to own back. Caught between the same two armies on the battlefield of her entire body (not just her face), he wavers back and forth between her beauty and her innocence. It goes beyond the mere dualism of her beauty intoxicating him while her innocence tries to protect her. He is turned on by her innocence. Nymphets appear only in the window of 9 - 14 years of age. As in *RL*, the beauty and the innocence merge on the "battlefield"

(which has become more his mental state, than her body) and he is caught between them as they trade places. As with Lucrece, we are not in the Golden Age and Lolita's virtue can not shield her innocence from his assault. It is HH's eye, his vision of Lolita on the hotel bed, which holds him captive in the warfare of her beauty and innocence.

Shakespeare, like Nabokov, places the female's innocence right up front in the opening of *RL* in order to prepare us for how it arouses male lust. Already by lines 8-9, we read

Haply (by chance) that name of 'chaste' unhapp'ly set

This bateless edge on his keen appetite....

That is, the word 'chaste' works on Tarquinius like the word 'Lolita' works on HH and both texts let us know this in their opening lines. Again, we are asked to consider the distinction between the way that words work for rapists and the way they work for poets. For these two writers, it is as if the violence happens because poetry does not. And again, it is helpful to paraphrase James Hillman, "Where we lack imaginal understanding we can expect literal rape."

Lolita is imagined as possessing a similar beautiful purity manifested on her body. HH has little problem conjuring the paradox of the Greek fertility god, Priapus, "thinking up" a creature like Lolita, one who looks to him like "the cheapest of cheap cuties"(120), but who nonetheless is "pure." Lolita "purity" of childhood parallels Lucrece' chastity in marriage, and like Lucrece' chastity Lolita's purity is a virtue which begs to be violated. As I said in the last section, HH even fantasizes on his "old world way" of seeing Lolita as an example of Rousseauian natural goodness, but also of Classical purity: "I...had

taken for granted, when I first met her, that she was as unravished as the stereotypical notion of 'normal child' had been since the lamented end of the Ancient World b.c." (124). While he confesses to enjoying "some depravity in my prey," he concedes that he should have paid more attention to an interior warning, that "somewhere behind [his] raging bliss, bewildered shadows conferred--and not to have heeded them, this is what I regret." (124). Just like Tarquinius' rapid dismissal of interior caution, HH ignores these "bewildered shadows."

Like the war waged on the female's body between innocence and beauty, a parallel war is waged in the rapist's mind between his belief that it is wrong to destroy innocence and his desire to destroy innocence. In HH's telling of this war waged in his mind, he concocts a scheme whereby the 'innocent' Lolita is so depraved that she seduces him (*...it was she who seduced me*). That is, his evil thoughts are they way they are because of a worse evil in her nymphet body. Similarly, Tarquinius says in response to Lucrece' pleading that he is laying siege to her body "under the colors" (that is, the battle flag or the command which he has a duty to obey) of the chaste beauty of her face:

But with vehement prayers urgeth still

Under what colour he commits this ill....

Thus he replies, "The colour in thy face."

(475-77)

In this distorted logic, her beauty and virtue, like the "perilous magic of nymphets" for

HH, *cause* the rape. The chaste beauty of the face that so preoccupies both rapists is converted into a literal cause, a move which reveals the rapist's literalism. The confusion of their thoughts is expressed in their literal way of speaking and in the literal way the words "chaste" and "Lolita" work on these rapists to "set this baseless edge" on their lust. It is to this distorted logic that we turn next.

Excuses Caught Up In Seeming (10)

RL

And with good thoughts makes dispensation

Urging the worser sense for vantage still...

That what is vile shows like a virtuous deed.

(248-9, 252)

L

All I would do--all I would dare to do--would amount to such a trifle.

(126)

We are not surrounded in our enlightened era by little slave flowers that can be casually plucked between business and bath as they used to be in the days of the Romans....the whole point is that the old link between adult world and the child world has been completely severed nowadays by new customs and new laws.

(124)

These new laws, according to HH, are grounded in the new science of child psychology ("regurgitated Freudian hash," 124) for which he, like Nabokov, has very little respect. HH longs for an ancient "Roman World" uncontaminated by modern customs and habits that have created a greater distance between children and adults. HH has done his research! He bemoans being born in our 'unenlightened' time, citing "the Roman law, according to which a girl may marry at twelve" (135). If only he had lived in that more "tolerant" Roman world he could have had his unimpeded way with the twelve-year old Lolita. As it is, he is forced to justify his actions to the ignorant. Therefore, he affects a protective "tenderness" towards Lolita. The modern world with its 'faux science,' child psychology, has forced HH to contrive excuses for a practice that he claims had been accepted in the Classical world. His logic betrays a contradiction: his pretense of being protective and tender towards Lolita even though *she* is the one whom he thinks is seducing him with her "perilous magic" (134). He must protect the very thing which is out to destroy him.

HH tells the clerk at The Enchanted Hunters Hotel that he is traveling with Lolita because he is her father. This is true legally, but not biologically or morally. He lies, saying she is ten and not twelve. And he tells us readers that he desires her because she has forced this feeling in him against his will; he is at the mercy of "the perilous magic of nymphets" (134), a power which he is striving "to fix" so as to protect other men like himself. In addition to saving his soul, this is why he is writing the memoir. "Unfixed," this "perilous magic" flies about the world like a butterfly, alighting on

whomever it will. He sees himself as providing a public service by writing a memoir that will serve as a warning to unwary men like himself. His 'fixing' fails, however, because it is couched in the literal beliefs associated with nymphetology and his lying excuses. He is like a drunk driver who is too drunk to know he is drunk, but who we "jurors" must hold responsible for the fatal accident he has caused. Unwittingly, he has provided us in his memoir with a guidebook of the stages of his descent, stages which make him morally responsible. The most telling of these stages which show his guilt are those which occur at The Enchanted Hunters Hotel (Vignettes #s 6, 7, and 8).

We are asked to consider Lolita's beauty pleading for a response other than assault. One of our first thoughts, then, is to see HH's desire to *fix* her perilous magic as a confused response born out of his wish to excuse his violent actions. Similarly, Tarquinius sees himself as a victim caught between two armies on the "battlefield" of Lucrece' face. We must begin by seeing that beauty is pleading *because of* the violence caused by their confusion. A second, and deeper, thought, however, is to see *RL* and *L* as alternative responses to beauty's plea. Because both are beautiful they share something with the beauty in the faces of the raped females. Nabokov's writing *Lolita* is not intended to fix the "perilous magic of the nymphet" any more than Shakespeare's writing *RL* is intended to neutralize the enchanting powers of chaste women.

We might add, any more than Nabokov's lepidopterology (Harvard, 1942-48) could *literally* fix the beauty of an Orange Margined Blue (his actual discovery) to a display board in a laboratory. Nabokov was fascinated by the contrast between the fleeting beauty of the butterfly and its dried corpse pinned to the board. This difference is connected directly to Nabokov's responding to Shakespeare's question with art. The

butterfly's beauty for him is something other than its dried corpse and its impressive Latin name. Nabokov's poem ("A Discovery") explains the failure of science to capture or 'fix' the beauty of butterflies; but these lines could just as easily describe HH's failure to possess literally what he calls "the velvety victim locked up in my dungeon" (125):

*Wide open on its pin (though fast asleep),
And safe from creeping relatives and rust,
In the secluded stronghold where we keep
Type specimens it will transcend its dust.*
(327)

The real failure of science, Nabokov suggests, is less projects like Freud's (projects which Nabokov detested), than it is the so-called "scientific" projects like HH's to fix literally the perilous magic of beauty once and for all. But Nabokov, himself, I feel, gets lost in the metaphysics of "another world" (his Afterword) where art resides, a world which is "kind" and "tender" and where the beauty of butterflies "will transcend its dust."

The next thought in considering a proper response to the pleading of beauty is to ask what it means to respond with art. Does *Lolita* the novel enchant in some alternate way that instead of producing assault draws our attention to the *causes* of assault? Beauty needs no orator to persuade others of its beauty, beauty speaks for itself simply by *being* beautiful. Our beholding is enough to persuade. This suggests that beauty pleads not

only that it not be physically assaulted, but that there be more beauty produced from the *beholding*. Artistic production stands in 180-degree opposition to physical violence. The beautiful “guidebooks” to rapists’ thought progression reveal the understanding that is lacking in the rapists. Collatinus' oration, in which he boasts about the beauty of his chaste wife, Lucrece, an object he possesses, “sets the “basteless edge” on the lust of Tarquinius. Assault is transitive violence enacted upon a beauty seen as passive, and its action is literal action excited by literal, non-poetic speech, whereas the beholding of beauty, whether in a face or in a poem, is intransitive and harmless (if you accept Kant’s dictum in *The Critique of Judgement* that “Beauty is something *which happens to you*”).

Shakespeare offers a hint in *RL* when he says,

Beauty itself doth of itself persuade

The eyes of men without an orator.

(30-1)

If oratory is a form of persuasion, as the Arden editors claim (30n), and if *Lolita* is not oratory, then *Lolita* is not an advertisement for beauty. It does need advertising.

Another of Tarquinius' tangled excuses concerns the superiority of his will over the worn-out morals of the past. Tarquinius demeans the trite and tired morality of the maxims of the elderly with which the Etruscans and Romans decorated their walls...usually in ornate chintzy embroidery:

My will is strong past reason's weak removing.

Who fears a sentence of an old man's saw

Shall by a painted cloth be kept in awe.

(243-5)

Similarly, HH plays down the influences on his thinking of the already worn out principles of the child psychologists. These charlatans, in his view, parade themselves as "science":

...the child therapist in me (a fake, as most of them are--but no matter) regurgitated Neo-Freudian hash and conjured up a dreaming and exaggerating Dolly in the "latency" period of girlhood.

In this put-down HH quickly dispenses with what might have proved to be good advice and gives full reign to his "unanalyzed" nymphet fantasy. The nympholept in him exiles the "scientific" psychologist:

Finally, the sensualist in me (a great and insane monster) had no objection to some depravity in his prey.

(124)

Excuses come easy when HH's multitude of inner voices are reduced to one, especially when that one is the sensualist "insane monster."

HH's Freudian "reason," the best that modern science could bring to bear on the adult understanding of children, only serves to increase his desire. Freud, after all, opened up the world to the sexuality of children. But this "faux science" has little grasp, according to HH, of the sort of "depravity" he detects in Lolita. He boasts that he is an "artist and a madman," not a scientist, and that is why he can see the depravity missed by the Freudians. In a similar fashion, Tarquinius is excited by the prospect of a chaste Lucrece stained by an awakened illicit sexuality. Like HH, he quickly dispenses with the ancient and tired moral reasoning against rape provided to him by his society, reducing his multitude of inner voices to one. And that voice, as with HH, is the voice of sexual appetite "which having all, all could not satisfy" (96). To arrive at this voice of insatiability, both rapists demean the morals of the past (Tarquinius' "old man's saw," 244, and HH's "conventional notions", 124). They use the past only when it serves their lust, as when the the time-honored images of the chaste wife and the virgin girl fans "the coal which in (their) liver glows" (47).

The "Swallowing Gulf" of Desire (11)

RL

...his vulture folly,

A swallowing gulf that even in plenty wanteth,

(556-7)

...(the) sometime wonder of his eye,

Which having all, all could not satisfy.

(95-96)

L

*There were forty of them (sleeping pills), all told--forty nights with a frail little sleeper at
my throbbing side....*

(109)

Mists of tenderness enfolded mountains of longing.

(131)

One of the characteristics of heroin addiction is the desire with each shooting-up to increase the dosage used in the previous injection. No single dosage, therefore, offers the possibility of a *final* satisfaction, merely a prescription for an endlessly descending spiral of desire. Like a heroin addict HH attempts to increase his pleasure with each encounter, all the while trying to be patient but always failing. He writes about trying to satisfy his longing for Lolita in some manner that doesn't actually violate her, but finds these attempts to amount to an unsatisfying half-ecstasy. Following the Sunday morning couch-wrestling episode, which I mentioned earlier, HH excuses his "hidden" orgasm to us juror-readers by saying, "Blessed be The Lord, she had noticed nothing!" He expresses amazement at his good fortune: "What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another fanciful Lolita--perhaps more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness--indeed, no life of her own. The child knew nothing. I had done nothing to her." (62). He had violated only the virtual "Lolita" of his fantasies! This is his have-his-cake-and-eat-it-too possibility which will later make a re-appearance at the Enchanted Hunters Hotel. Perhaps he can have his pleasure without breaking the law. The problem with this strategy is he demands more pleasure each time, until finally the pleasure he demands descends from virtual to actual and breaks the law. But for that brief moment on that

Sunday morning he entertained the thought that despite their physical proximity, he had done nothing but imagined a fantasy Lolita and masturbated. The scene is reminiscent of Leopold Bloom in the "Nausiccia" episode of *Ulysses* and his masturbatory gazing behind the wall while Gerty McDowell rocked backwards watching the fireworks. The difference is that Bloom and Gerty were not literally touching. But due to his junkie-type addiction, HH cannot stop with the half-ecstasy of hidden masturbation. The question for him, caught up as he is in his heroin-increasing need, is how close can he get to Lolita while still maintaining the distance necessary for not breaking the law and causing her harm. "HH tried to be good," he says. At what point does he cross the legal threshold where rape begins, the threshold from which there is no turning back? In other words, where is the point where his "increased dosage" arouses the interest of the law. Crossing this threshold was symbolized, as we said above in our discussion of Vignette #6, by the imagery of locks and keys. HH's longing is so deep that, like Tarquinius whose "having all, all could not satisfy," he will move closer and closer to that threshold and then cross it...a sort of sexual "event-horizon" from which nothing escapes.

HH's desire for more and more satisfaction ("more than just a glimmer," 132) is tied to his reasons for knocking her out with the drug...if she does not know the rape happened, then it did not happen at all. HH, like the junkie, once he is in bed with Lolita must move closer and closer, even though he knows the danger. Perhaps worrying about Shakespeare's warning in the Lust Sonnet (#129) ("...no sooner had, but despised straight"), HH laments, "Actual contact would do it in one second flat. An interspace of a millimeter would do it in ten. Let us wait," he advises himself. Stretch out the pleasure because the pain will come hard after. But, for him, the earlier Sunday morning on the couch routine is no longer enough. So he chooses a "delectation more lethal." There

must be actual penetration this time. By knocking her out, he reasons, he can have it both ways.

Imagining Nothing Lethal (12)

RL

*And when great treasure is the meed proposed,
Though death be adjunct, there's no death supposed.*

(132-33)

*Desire my pilot is, beauty my prize.
Then who fears sinking where such treasure lies?*

(279-80)

L

Human beings, attend! I should have understood...that the nymphaean evil breathing through every pore of the fey child that I had prepared for my secret delectation would make the secrecy impossible and the delectation lethal.

(124-5)

HH says this five years after the rape, and then in the next sentence, "I should have known...that nothing but pain and horror would result from the expected rapture"(125). Then, immediately following this common sense, he offers us "winged gentlemen of the jury"the excuse of his flights of fantasies that kept him awake in previous nights, encouraging him to strategize the details of the rape (see the next vignette). He would have us believe that his blindness to the consequences of raping Lolita was caused by the ecstatic power of his fantasies. These fantasies in turn were cause by the lethal toxicity of the nymphet, herself. Prior to the rape the pain and horror which are sure to follow are nothing compared to the "translucent vision (which) evolved into the final picture"(125). Unless we are nympholepts like himself, he says, we are unlikely to see in the way he sees. The beauty of Nabokov's art should allow us to see a bigger picture. In this bigger picture, Nabokov's metaphorical way of speaking (and its outcome, the novel) is being weighed against HH's literal way of speaking and its outcome (her rape). HH's reporting (the oratory which is intended to save his soul), since it is not ecstasy producing, occupies a different verbal space than does Nabokov's art. HH can write like Nabokov (the same words), but even that will not be enough. He is too much like

Tarquinius:

...poorly rich, so wanteth in his store

That, cloyed with much, he pineth still for more.

(97-8)

HH sought the literal possession of Lolita's body for his ecstasy; Nabokov found his ecstasy in *how he spoke*.

Insomniac Conniving (12)

RL

*Now leaden slumber with life's strength doth fight,
And every one to rest himself betakes,
Save thieves and cares and troubled minds that wakes (sic).*

*As one of which doth Tarquin lie resolving
The sundry dangers of his will's obtaining;
Yet ever to obtain his will resolving....*

(124-129)

*Now stole upon the time the dead of night,
When heavy sleep had closed no mortal eyes.
No comfortable star did lend his light,
No noise but owls' and wolves' death-boding cries;
Now serves the season that they may surprise
The silly lambs. Pure thoughts are dead and still,
While lust and murder wakes to stain and kill.*

(162-68)

L

In the course of the evocations and schemes to which I had dedicated so many insomnias,

I had gradually eliminated all the superfluous blur and by stacking level upon level of translucent vision, had evolved a final picture. Naked, except for one sock and her charm bracelet, spread -eagled on the bed where my philtre had felled her--so I foreglimpsed her....

(125)

HH has lain awake many nights conniving the details of how he will carry out the rape. Having described a complex debate being waged in his mind among three different selves (the moralist, the child therapist, and the sensualist) (124), he sides with the sensualist, whom he pictures as "a great and insane monster". Notice that he fails to include artist in his list. The sensualist that he identifies with uses the imaginings of his insomnias for strategic planning, attempting to anticipate how the rape is likely to play out. This visualizing (a "superfluous blur") is whittled away until nothing remains but the "necessary" images of his "translucent vision." These images are then superimposed one by one, on top each other, until the "final picture" comes into focus (124). This final picture thus constitutes a grouping of all the most erotic images of his many insomniac nights.

Paranoia at the Threshold

Lust's Paranoia (14)

RL

*If Collatinus dream of my intent,
Will he not wake, and in a desperate rage
Post hither, this vile purpose to prevent?
(218-20)*

*Love thrives not in the heart that shadows dreadeth.
(270)*

L

...the look of lust always is gloomy; lust is never quite sure--even when the velvety victim is locked up in one's dungeon--that some rival devil or influential god may still not abolish one's prepared triumph.

(125)

I left the loud lobby and stood outside on the white steps, looking at the hundreds of powdered bugs, wheeling around the lamps in the soggy black night, full of ripple and stir.

(126)

For all the talk of imagined erotic ecstasy, one would think these rapists would be happy with anticipation...the big moment come round at last! But shadows, both real and imagined, are stalking them. Tarquinius is worried about the possibility of Collatinus making a sudden and unannounced return. But he needn't have worried since no such surprise appearance is about to happen. HH also worries, about some unknown presence hiding in the shadows on the porch of The Enchanted Hunters. But his worries are well founded; another of Lolita's predators is following them on the road. The

looming presence is Claire Quilty, the mad playwright and director of the high school play that Lolita was in. Lolita played the nymph, Diana. Quilty, a true "Acteon," is pursuing Lolita and HH in their travels. HH will later murder Quilty in a fit of jealousy, but for now on the porch of *The Enchanted Hunters* he is merely paranoid and unsure. The paranoia increases for both rapists the closer they get to their prey. Their fear grows with their desire and their desire grows with the increasing proximity of the object of their desire. If we are to imagine HH as he asks us to do ("Imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me" 129), then we must imagine his fear increasing incrementally with his growing desire. His fear is one of the voices of his common sense: "...somewhere behind the raging bliss, bewildered shadows conferred--and not to have heeded them, this is what I regret"(124). That is, within the fearful shadows there lurks at least one of the things that could have prevented the rape. Neither rapist would have carried out his rape had his fear been greater than his desire. But his fear might have added to the excitement he felt. Fear in these circumstances is usually associated with a force (moral, physical, or legal) that might have prevented satisfying the desire. Tarquinius has a clear image of Collatinus arriving to save his wife's chastity, but he is also afraid of less definite things, like spooky figures in smoke and murky shadows and the possibility of Lolita awakening from her drugged stupor. Tarquinius imagines weasels spying on him in the dark.

Nightwand'ring Weasels (15)

RL

Night-wand'ring weasels shrink to see him there:

They fright him, yet he still pursues his fear.

(307-8)

L

Suddenly I was aware that in the darkness next to me there was somebody sitting in a chair on the pillared porch. I could not really see him....

(126)

That somebody "on the pillared porch" of The Enchanted Hunters Hotel is Claire Quilty, *Lolita's* most weasel-like character. The image of the potential "night-wand'ring weasel" that so frightens Tarquinius as he approaches Lucrece is an apt image for the actual Quilty lurking in the dark of The Enchanted Hunters Hotel's shadowy, bug-filled porch. The Arden edition of *RL* suggests that Shakespeare uses the image of a weasel "because, like Tarquin, they are sly and ruthless" (p. 265), and because they have a reputation for attacking the nests of birds and sucking the eggs. In other words, these two rapists are afraid of figures that are "weasels" like themselves, lurking in the shadows and ready to steal. They are afraid of themselves.

We cannot pass over this vignette without noticing that Nabokov again makes use of HH's garbled speech and possible mishearing of Quilty's comments, to make the connection between his anxious desires and his linguistic breakdowns. HH repeatedly mishears Quilty's sentences in ways that leave him unsure whether he's hallucinating or whether Quilty has actually appeared and might prevent the rape. In his conversation on the porch with the Quilty-figure he reinterprets the accusatory speech as mere idle questioning. He concludes that he doesn't need to worry, translating the heard query "Where the devil did you get her" into "The weather is getting better"(127). Then, this exchange:

"Who's the lassie?"

"My daughter."

"You lie--she's not."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said: July was hot...."

In this fashion, HH's desire once again proves stronger than his fear, disguising Quilty's speech so as to keep the rape possible. This marks yet another way that HH is similar to Tarquinius, who despite the troubling thought of the possible sudden appearance of Collatinus "By reprobate desire thus madly led....still pursues his fear" (300). Each rapist fears what he desires, but his desire is greater than his fear. So each continues moving toward his object. Like night-wand'ring weasels, these two rapists creep inexorably toward their prey.

An Aching, Singing Violin (16)

L

A desperate honesty that throbs through his confession does not absolve him from sins of diabolical cunning. He is abnormal. He is not a gentleman. Note how magically his singing violin can conjure up a tendresse, a compassion for Lolita that makes us entranced with the book while abhorring its author.

(John Ray, Jr. In the "Foreword" to L, 5)

If a violin string can ache, then I was that string.

(127)

There is nothing comparable to this line in *RL*. The notion of the soldier, Tarquinius, as an HH-like "singing violin" is ludicrous; he is too brutish and short on 19th Century French Literature. In the rape scene, Shakespeare describes Tarquinius as an Etruscan army "assaulting a city." Unlike HH, he makes no pretenses of being either a poet or a philosopher ("sad pause, and deep regard become the sage./My part is youth, and beats these from the stage," 279-80). However, he shares with HH the good fortune of having a master poet writing his thoughts. We readers are constantly bombarded with the sheer beauty of the poetry with which the rapists' brutish thoughts are expressed, and as

a consequence, as we discussed above, are forced to contemplate the distinction between the cruelty of the assault and what Nabokov calls the "tenderness" and "kindness" of poetry (315). In his Afterword Nabokov claims that art exists in "another state of being," one characterized by "curiosity, tenderness, kindness, and ecstasy" (315). If we assume that for Nabokov tenderness and kindness are two necessary qualities of an artist's being able to produce or occupy that "other state of being," then two conclusions follow: 1) Nabokov, who is tender and kind, was able to produce *Lolita*, a genuine work of art, a true "singing violin," and 2) HH, who is cruel and brutish, produced the confession of a rape, definitely *not* a "singing violin," despite what John Ray says. Ray is a Nabokov creation, himself, for whom Nabokov doesn't exist, and therefore does not see the distinction. Because the words of the artist and the rapist are the same words and convey the same meanings, we must conclude that the difference for us reader/jurors as interpreters lies in the *way* the words are spoken. Nabokov is more direct than Shakespeare in wanting us to think about his art. The "singing violin" that is *L* was written by an actual artist, not by a fictional rapist who imagined himself as an artist. HH is right that he *is* an aching violin string, but he is not the violinist. That would, of course, be Nabokov. The closest we get to an urging to contemplate the relationship between art and violence in *RL* is the moment when Lucrece, following the rape, discovers a "new way of mourning" as she contemplates the sad face of Hecuba in the tapestry on her palace wall.

On the Verge

Dragging Time and the 'Stuffing Up' of Lust (17)

RL

Or as those bars which stop the hourly dial,

Who within a ling'ring stay his course doth let [prevent]

Till every minute pays the hour his debt.

'So,so,' quoth he, 'these lets [hindrances] attend the time,

Like little frosts that sometime threat the spring

To add a more rejoicing to the prime....

(327-32)

Stuff up his lust as minutes fill up hours....

(297)

'Have done,' quoth he. 'My uncontrolled tide

Turns not, but swells the higher by this let.

Small lights are soon blown out; huge fires abide,

And with the wind in greater fury fret....

(645-8)

L

*For at least two minutes I waited and strained on the brink, like the tailor with his
homemade parachute forty years ago when about to jump from the Eiffel Tower.*

(128)

Both rapists are sensitive to time. For HH, lying next to Lolita in the hotel bed, the slow passage of time during which he must wait for satisfaction is aligned with the precise physical distance between his body and hers. "The science of nympholepsy is a precise science," he says (129). This "science" tells him that touching her body too soon might awaken her because he has not given her enough of the drug. This would result in a botched assault and his only getting a "glimmer" (132) of the Promised Land he seeks. A genuine nympholept would be more skilled. The only Plan-B he has is to wait another day and "stuff her with those earlier pills that had so thoroughly numbed her mummy"(129). Only by waiting for her to be *completely* unconscious will he be able to seize the "more than a glimmer" which his desire demands. He is trying to be patient, but his desire is growing with each second he has to wait.

Shakespeare is also curious about the accumulating of desire as the time passes. This allows him an opportunity for a different sort of verbal display. Similar to his playing with the image of tumblers *inside the lock* (see Section 5), in this case he goes *inside a clock*. He imagines the interior bars that prevent the dial on the clock's face from turning (until the correct increment of time has passed) as the various hindrances that force Tarquinius to postpone his assault until the time is ripe. These "lets" (little things) getting in the way of his gratification are pictured as enhancing the pleasure, which is soon to be released, by causing his desire to rise. What frustrates will increase the pleasure, so like HH he must "wait and strain on the brink" (128).

Lust's Weapons (18)

RL

His falchion [curved sword] on a flint he softly smiteth,

That from the cold stone sparks of fire do fly

Whereat a waxen torch forthwith he lighteth...

As from this cold flint I enforced this fire,

... Lucrece must I force to my desire.

(176-78, 181-82)

This said! he shakes aloft his Roman blade,

Which like a falcon tow'ring in the skies

Coucheth the fowl below with his wings' shade,

Whose crooked beak threats if he mount he dies:

So under his insulting falchion lies

Harmless Lucretia.....

(505-10)

L

--I produced a small vial containing Papa's Purple Pills.

(122)

O miserly Hamburg! Was he not a very Enchanted Hunter as he deliberated with himself over his boxful of magic ammunition? To rout the monster of insomnia should he try himself one of those amethyst capsules? There were forty of them, all told--forty nights with a frail little sleeper at my throbbing side....

(109)

As I learned later from a helpful pharmacist, the purple pill did not even belong to the big and noble family of barbiturates ...it was too mild a sedative to affect for any length of time a wary, albeit weary, nymphet.

(128)

I had not dared to offer her a second helping of the drug, and had not abandoned hope that the first might still consolidate her sleep.

(131)

A good chunk of each text is devoted to a description of the rapist's weapon (Tarquinius' sword and the HH's drug). A weapon is necessary in sexual assault when the rapist knows he must use force ("This night I must enjoy thee:/If thou deny, then force must work my way," *RL* 512-13). The use of the literal weapon, both authors want us to know, points to a failure of words. Only *after* the rape, when he is writing the words of his memoir to save his soul, does HH concede "I have only words, my Lolita" (38). The word "only" is significant since it reduces the value of words, as if *mere* words were

all that is left once the rape has been carried out. HH has been forced by his arrest to satisfy himself in a "reduced" way. He has "lost his soul" because in 1947 he never felt that words were 'good enough' to give him the satisfaction he sought (writing a novel never occurred to him as an option to rape); his obsession limited itself to literal sexual assault enabled by literal pills. I believe both writers want us to measure the pleasure of the violence against the pleasure of the art.

What we have at this point, in the gradual unfolding progression of thoughts leading up to the actual rape, is a contest between literal weapons and poetry. Weapons win out in the rapists' inner debate because the rapists are without poetry, deaf to the ecstasies available in metaphorical speech. This deafness is echoed in the decree of the Japanese novelist, Yukio Mishima, that "stage blood is not enough" and "Perfect purity is possible if you turn your life into a line of poetry written with a splash of blood" (*Runaway Horses*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1973, trans. E. Dale Saunders and Cecilia Segawa Seigle), a sentiment that led to his literal suicide. HH describes lying next to Lolita on the night before the rape and and boasts that his spontaneous fantasies while he is drifting in and out of sleep were the "the patrimonies of poets." His claim, however, is betrayed by the fact that the fantasies lead in his case to real violence. But the truth is he is as "speechless" as Odysseus' men transformed into pigs on Circe's island or as Acteon transformed into a buck and devoured by his own hunting dogs. Unlike Nabokov, he doesn't read his fantasies as poetic opportunities. That is, he lacks Nabokov's way of speaking that is *Lolita*; he possesses only the literalizing that leads to rape in 1947 or the oratory that leads to apology and confession intended to 'save his soul' in 1952. He doesn't lack meaning, he lacks a way of conveying meaning *poetically*. Not that he isn't able to quote poets. He even quotes Catullus (120-4) but there is no

poetry in how he *uses* the quotation, only verbal confusion. Nabokov, on the other hand, employs the Catullus reference to show HH's contrast with Catullus, his 'speechlessness.' Nabokov and Catullus make sense, but HH doesn't...*even though their words have the same meaning*. The same words appear in different language games. The use by HH and Tarquinius of literal weapons is a sign of their verbal failure...not of concepts, but of their failure to see how to *use* words poetically. Wittgenstein's idea works here: the meaning lies in the use. Shakespeare's use (see Section 1) of a syntax breakdown works in the same way for a description of Tarquin's "speechlessness." Because rapists are poetically speechless, they need literal weapons.

Shakespeare employs an apt poetic image to elaborate on the rapist's breakdown of rational speech:

*The wind wars with his torch to make him stay
And blows the smoke of it into his face,
Extinguishing his conduct in this case,
But his hot heart, which fond desire doth scorch,
Puffs forth another wind that fires his torch....*

(311-15)

The Arden editors interpret this passage as Shakespeare's convoluted attempt to say

that Tarquinius' "windy" rhetorical excuses for the rape blow a "smoke" in his face that temporarily blinds him and extinguishes his torch. All is dark. He progresses towards Lucrece's bed unimpeded. In Elizabethan times the heart was thought to be the site of reason; in this case Tarquinius' heart's reason has been usurped by his lust which has provided him with feeble excuses. His lust-filled heart, while continuing to blow the smoke of bad logic, re-ignites his torch and lights the way for him to Lucrece's bed. "My will is strong, past reason's weak removing," he says (243). His lust borrows the light of reason, twisting it for its own ends.

We can see this same dynamic expressed in *L* when HH excuses his own behavior by giving examples of the ancient practice of marrying child brides in "more enlightened" times. He lays out a debate waged in his mind among an inner "moralist", a "child psychologist", and a "sensualist". It is a sham debate in which the arguments of the first two are quickly dismissed and the sensualist easily wins out. Traditional morals and what he calls the fake "science" of Freudians, with their puny "reason," have no chance against a full-blooded sensualist. The facile "logic" of the sensualist leads him relentlessly toward the rape. As with Tarquinius, the possibility of any genuine interior debate in HH's mind becomes nothing more than a mere puff of smoke in his eyes, a temporarily snuffed-out torch in his psychological darkness which is quickly reignited by the fire already burning in his loins.

An Unfair Pillow (19)

RL

*Her lily hand her rosy cheek lies under,
Coz'ning (cheating) the pillow of a lawful kiss;
Who, therefore angry, seems to part in sunder,
Swelling on either side to want his bliss;
Between whose hills her head entombed is,
Where like a virtuous monument she lies,
To be admired of lewd unhallowed eyes.*

(386-92)

L

*Slowly her head turned away and dropped onto her unfair amount of pillow. I lay quite
still on the brink, peering at her ruffled hair, at the glimmer of nymphet flesh.*

(129)

In the mists of such paranoid desire, even the pillow under the head of the prey becomes a rival! The rapist envies the pillow's touching his prey, the way with which it is

able to satisfy its desire without any sudden awakening. The pillow is an invasive presence able to satisfy itself before the rapist has taken his own pleasure. This is an unwanted addition to the earlier "hermetic vision," something dangerously close to disturbing the continued sleep of the prey. Any disturbance might rip the rapist from the safety of the sealed-off enclosure of his fantasy. But the rapist envies the pillow and desires the proximity to the prey which the pillow has managed ("I decided I might risk getting a little closer to that lovely and maddening glimmer" (129), HH says after considering the pillow's "unfair" advantage. Similarly turned on and paranoid while watching Lucrece sleep, Tarquinius is subjected to a "new ambition bred" (411) and "...like a foul usurper went about/from this fair throne (her bed) to heave the owner (Collatinus) out" (412-13). What is again so interesting in this vignette in both texts is the contrast between the *anticipated* ecstasy which the rapists entertain regarding the rape of a literal body and what we feel as the *experienced* verbal ecstasy of the writers.

The Awakening Prey (20)

RL

First, like a trumpet doth his tongue begin

To sound a parley to his heartless (disheartened) foe,

Who o'er the white sheet peers her whiter chin,

*The reason of this rash alarm to know,
Which he by dumb demeanor seeks to show.*

L

Lolita turned her head and stared at me through the striped shadows. The whole pill-spiel...had had for object a fastness of sleep that a whole regiment would not have disturbed, and here she was staring at me...

(128)

Both rapists are dumbstruck at the sudden wakening awareness of their victims. In the case of Lolita, she only *appears* to be fully awake and is still in a drug-induced stupor with half-opened eyes. The awakening of the prey produces the double-take "dumb demeanor" of the rapist. Her consciousness is the major impediment to the rape. This is a perfect sign of the *literalism* associated with rape: the rapist communes with a body, not with a consciousness. The scene of rape, for him, does not want the distraction of discourse. Nabokov and Shakespeare are not "distracted" by the very thing the rapists most desire, the literal details of the rape. Their interest lies in the interior debates and exterior conversations. The actual rapes are left pretty much without description in both texts. The rapists' interior thoughts, on the other hand, get meticulously detailed descriptions even when those thoughts are "dumbstruck." Unlike the rapists with their prey, these writers want to wake us up.

The Worst: A Scolding and No Sex (21)

RL

I'll beg her love; but she is not her own.

The worst is but denial and reproving.

(241-2)

L

I had the odious feeling that little Delores was wide awake and would explode in screams if I touched her with any part of my wretchedness.

Tarquinius tells us that the worst outcome would be that the waking Lucrece would deny him sex and scold him for even thinking about it. But it's this sort of chastity that turns him on and that he wants to steal from Collatinus. He wants to possess something that angers him because it belongs to another man. The thought of being so close to this chastity only to have it denied him is bad enough; but the shame of being scolded for his bad intentions is too much. He is the Prince! HH suffers a similar but different terror; he fears that Lolita's screams might awaken guests in the hotel who would come to her rescue. It is exactly at this very point in his narrative that HH turns directly to us juror-readers, as if face-to-face, pleading that we "not skip these essential pages" no matter how repulsed and disgusted we might be. Being so close to what he desires, the possibility of being both denied his pleasure and being publicly shamed for having had the desire is too much. Their shame is at war with their desire, but the pain of the shame grows exponentially if the desire goes unsatisfied. The shame is a price worth paying, so they reason, for a pleasure anticipated as being so deep. Shame me if you will, just don't deny me the pleasure. This point really matters to HH. If we skip over or gloss too carelessly his next three pages, so he informs us, he "will not exist." He would have us believe that we are close to his core, to finding what he did to be immoral, perhaps, but understandable. He is not off-the-wall insane like Clare Quilty, but understandable...at least that's what he wants us to believe, that his 'humanity' is still present in 1952. Five years after the rape, he admits that he has *only words* and that his very life and soul depend upon our interpretation of these words. "Do not skip these

essential pages!" His non-existence is a prospect he knows we probably prefer, "monster" that he is, but he is fighting for us to give him recognition as a fellow human being. We must listen! And it is here especially, in what he calls the novel's "le grand moment," that we juror-readers are assigned the most difficult of our tasks: we must keep this "wretched" creature conjured in our minds and somehow find him to be one of us. Why? What good will this conjuring do? In his Postscript, Nabokov makes this question absolutely clear, both for himself and for us: "Why should I read about maniacs?" (315). The implication is that Tarquinius and HH are not 'sub-humans,' but are 'humans' in the full sense.

One more complicated answer to the question of why we should read about maniacs is offered on *L*'s final page where HH claims that art is a "refuge." But what might it mean for art, in this case a verbal art, to constitute a refuge from the cruelty of sexual violence? If the violence is associated with a dumbstruck brutishness, maybe there is consolation to be found in an ecstasy of words. The idea here is not that the art reconciles the violence or "evens the score." Only that verbal art is a "refuge" in a different verbal space (Nabokov says "world," but I'm uncomfortable with the metaphysical implications of 'another world'), a verbal space that is "kind, tender, ecstatic, and curious." The category 'human' includes cruelty and tenderness. We are as readers of *L* and *RL* participating in a way of talking (metaphorically) that is not too far removed, according to these last sentences of *L*, from the images of the earliest human art we know, those exquisite 70,000-year old lines on the stones found in South Africa (I am writing in 2018). Or consider the animal drawing of Lascaux that Nabokov was thinking about: *depicting* the beast rather than *being* the beast is what *RL* and *L* are. HH, forgetting that he is more Acteon-stag than Bambi-doe, implores us: "Try to discern

the doe in me, trembling in the forest of my iniquity; let's even smile a little." There is the hunt for prey in the literal world and there is the art in the cave depicting the hunt. For Shakespeare the choice is between two ways of talking, one aesthetic and the other dumbstruck, Ovid's verbal beauty telling of Acteon's transgression and Acteon's transgression. The former is a refuge from the latter, but we are not asked to believe that the art 'fixes' the violence. The rapist's worst case scenario is the scolding and the prevention of the rape because it means a reconciliation with the thought "I have only words." And the rapist is trapped inside Mishima's decree that "stage blood is not enough."

The Lost Possibility of Articulate Enchantment (22)

RL

Will not my tongue be mute...

(225)

L

She was again fast asleep, my nymphet, but still I did not dare to launch upon my enchanted voyage. La Petite Dormeuse ou l'Amant Ridicule (The Sleeping Maiden and the Ridiculous Lover)

(129)

It makes sense to imagine that Nabokov is probably as bedazzled by nymphets as is his "hero" but that he has chosen, instead of rape, to bedazzle his readers with a different Lolita...the novel. "For me," he claims, "a work of fiction exists only insofar as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow, somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm" (314-15). *L* bedazzles us not with the glimmer of nymphet flesh, but with the *words* "the glimmer of nymphet flesh." If we readers are knocked across the room by such verbal flourishes we have an experience of an aesthetic bedazzlement that is tender and kind, unlike the cruel ecstasy that drives HH to cause real suffering. Actaeon "creeping" into the bushes to leer at the bathing Artemis/Diana and her maidens is creepy. A bad sort of guy, unkind and without tenderness, goes with the bad sort of enchantment. It is interesting that in Callimachus' telling Artemis/Diana punishes Actaeon by taking away his ability to speak. As soon as

he tries to speak he is transformed into a stag and his dogs, not recognizing him, attack and kill him. Similarly, HH and Tarquinius rendered 'speechless' (losing their grasp of poetic possibilities and possessed either of garbled syntax or dumbstruck silence) are destroyed. Enchantment that can speak poetically does not kill females and does not destroy the enchanted speaker. It is, instead, the "refuge" HH sought, but could not find.

A "Precise Science" (23)

L

Should I wait a solid hour and then creep up again? The science of nympholepsy is a precise science. Actual contact would do it in one second flat. An interspace of a millimeter would do it in ten. Let us wait.

(129)

By nympholepsy being a "precise science" HH means that he knows when to move without waking her, when to wait to touch her, when to creep up a little closer on her, and when to wait again. Shakespeare says something similar of Tarquinius (although casting it in martial terms since Tarquinius is a soldier) when he claims that

1. Tarquinius' heart, the commander of an "army,"
2. gives an order to its subordinate, his eye,
3. who then relays that order to the eye's subordinate, his hand,
4. which then reaches out and touches Lucrece's breast.

Tarquinius' heart, normally the seat of reason in Elizabethan symbolism, has been taken over by his lust. This entails that his knowing when to make a move toward touching Lucrece is ruled in a very Humbertian sort of way by his lust (as we described above) and not by his reason. In these matters, we are told, lust is more clever than reason. Both texts stress the exactness of this 'science' associated with timing and touch.

Frightening Noises (24)

RL

The threshold grates the door to have him heard....

(306)

As each unwilling portal yields him way,

Through little vents and crannies of the place....

(309-310)

L

There is nothing louder than an American hotel....the clatter of the elevator's gate--some twenty yards northeast of my head but as cleverly perceived as if it were inside my left temple....east of my left ear...the corridor would brim with...a volley of good nights. When that stopped, a toilet immediately north of my cerebellum would take over....then someone in a southerly direction was extravagantly sick, almost coughing out his life....

(129-30)

When the murderous Macbeth approaches the bedroom of Duncan to murder him in the middle of the night, his biggest fear is the creaking of the floor. Shakespeare remembered how he had described Tarquinius' approach when he was writing of Macbeth's stalking: Macbeth refers in his thoughts to Tarquin's creeping into the bedroom of Lucrece. HH also shares a stalker's fear of noises in the night since the awakenings they might cause would bring his purpose to an abrupt end. Nabokov spends a half-page describing the noises of The Enchanted Hotel and the anxieties they cause in HH. This fear, shared by Tarquinius and HH, is connected to the enclosed world of their solipsism, the world where they are locked inside their hermetically sealed fantasies. These noises are intrusions from the "outside" which threaten to penetrate the enclosed bubble of their reverie. This fear of bothersome noises is one of the principal signs of their "solipsizing" (Nabokov's neologism for the way HH reduces Lolita to fit his fantasy of her). At this point both rapists are so afraid they momentarily forget the harm they are about to perpetrate.

For HH, the bubble of his hermetic vision of Lolita bursts only *after* the rape. For example, he confesses in 1952:

What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another fanciful Lolita-- perhaps more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her,

and having no will, no consciousness--indeed, no life of her own.

(62)

He shows here a clear understanding of his psychological confusion, but it is too late. The frightening noises he worries about cause a fear in him that is so great it blocks the possibility of any psychological insight. If he had had the insight expressed in this passage he would have run from the scene. What we are meant to understand as juror-readers is that the rapist's fear of the noises is so great because his desire to rape is so great: the noises threaten the satisfying of the desire. Only five years later is HH able to see this connection expressed in the way that his fears and desires are hermetically sealed inside his own solipsizing vision.

Smoking Hands (25)

RL

His hand, as proud of such a dignity,

Smoking with pride, marched on to make his stand

On her bare breast, the heart of all her land....

(437-39)

L

*And less than six inches from me and my burning life, was nebulous Lolita! After a
stirless vigil, my tentacles moved toward her again....*

(130)

Shakespeare's image of smoking hands is curious. It is perhaps unique to Shakespeare, but it makes an appearance in a contemporary popular song ("Smoky Hands") by the singer/songwriter Kristin Hersh. When I asked her she said she was unaware of the "smoky hand" in *RL*. Nevertheless, she places the image in a scene that might work for this vignette and the moment just prior to the rape:

*Waiting for an angle of the light, some sound, a certain level of humanity, when
memories pile up like snow. If you trip and don't fall on the carnal rug, melting with
humility, when evil people might succumb.*

Kristin Hersh, "Smoky Hands," in *Purgatory/Paradise* (2013, Throwing Music)

When your hands are smoking you might easily fall into evil. For Tarquinius, Shakespeare associates the smoking hands with his martial pride; in contrast, the character in Hersh's song does *not* fall carnally because he/she is "melting with humility." Such "humility" is expressed in the passage from *L* we looked at in Vignette 24, the passage in which HH expresses an awareness of his solipsism. For both Hersh's character and Tarquinius, the temptation itself is enough to cause their hands to smoke. Tarquinius' lust usurps what little reason remains in his heart and blows into his face the smoke of bad excuses. Now, when he touches Lucrece' breast, smoke pours from his hands like it does in the heat of battle when he is about to kill. Indeed, holding his sword over her as she lies in bed he threatens to murder her after the rape and to blame the murder on her slave. There is obviously no "certain level of humanity" or "humility" in an Etruscan soldier prince who is prepared to rape and kill. When the hands are smoking "evil people might succumb."

Nabokov never says that HH's hands are smoking, but he tells us that his "tentacles moved toward her" (130). But the smoke image makes an appearance in the same scene that night at The Enchanted Hunters Hotel. The smoke is blown in HH's direction by the mysterious figure in the rocking chair on the hotel porch (discussed briefly in Vignette 3). This figure turns out to be Claire Quilty, although HH doesn't know it at the time. Later, when he is awake in the night (we are told that it is after his "long stirless vigil"), HH begins his slow slide in the bed toward Lolita's sleeping body. She is a mere six inches "from my burning life." Not his hands exactly, but his whole "life" is on fire and we readers can imagine the smoke. The rape could easily have happened at this crucial

moment (he could have “fallen on the carnal rug”) except for the fact that Lolita awakens abruptly in the mists of the half-effective drug, demanding a glass of water. Her arm suddenly swings out involuntarily and strikes his face. His hand (“tentacles”) reach toward and embrace her, but she pushes him away. The pushing is not in outrage, but “with the neutral plaintive murmur of a child demanding its natural rest.” She then collapses again into a sleep with her spine pressing against his stomach. HH lays his own head on his hand, forced to wait until she is more unconscious. In the meantime, he is “burning with desire.” At this point we feel his desire building in the same way we encountered it earlier in Vignette 17 (“Dragging Time and the Stuffing Up of Lust”). This is as close as we get to HH having smoking hands: Clare Quilty blowing smoke in his face on the porch, HH’s mentioning his “burning life,” and his “burning desire” commanding his “tentacles [to] move towards her again.” No smoking hands like Tarquinius, but close enough for us to feel in the illogical crazy space of rape.

These are the “essential moments” we have been instructed to give our full attention to in order that HH might “exist.” In this Vignette 25, we are told that we are close to the core of HH because we are in the atmosphere of his “burning life.” If we pay close enough attention he will “exist” for us. The imagery of smoking hands and moving tentacles under the commands of his burning desire indicate the power of his lust to move his body. We are in the atmosphere of how his desire works its way from his fiery heart into his fingers and onto her skin.

Metonymical Clothing (26)

RL

...by the light he spies

Lucretia's glove, wherein her needle sticks.

He takes it from the rushes where it lies,

And griping [gripping] it, the needle his finger pricks,

As who should say, 'This glove to wanton tricks

Is not inured, Return again in haste;

Thou seest our mistress' ornaments are chaste.'

(316-22)

L

...when I re-entered the strange pale-striped fastness where Lolita's old and new clothes reclined in various attitudes of enchantment on pieces of furniture that seemed vaguely afloat....

(131)

Something odd happens in *L*...Nabokov tells us that at this moment in the night, HH looks around the room at Lolita's clothes. Shakespeare also has Tarquinius notice Lucrece's clothing, but it comes earlier in his thought process. There is not much to say on this, except for the fact that Tarquinius and HH share a similar obsession with the clothing of the females they are about to rape. The clothing metonymically takes on the magic of their bodies. Earlier in the story, when Lolita leaves the house to go off to her summer camp, HH, in the desperation of his panicky loneliness, goes to her closet and buries his face in her clothes: "I marched into her tumbled room, threw open the door of the closet and plunged into a heap of crumpled things that had touched her. There was particularly one pink texture, sleazy, torn, with a faintly acrid odor in the seam. I wrapped in it Humbert's huge engorged heart"(67). Like Tarquinius' desire to be inside Lucrece' glove, HH "plunged into" the clothing. Tarquinius' is "prick(ed)" by the needle in the glove, which the narration suggests is a warning to him to return to his room "in haste/Thou seest that our mistress' ornaments are chaste" (321-2). But he fails to heed

that warning. It is the same with HH, his loneliness doesn't drive him away in warning, but only increases his desire. The female's clothing turns out to be no protection at all, merely a spur to more desire. For Shakespeare and for Nabokov, however, the clothing serves as yet another opportunity for verbal display; I believe we juror-readers are supposed to weigh the pleasure the writers take in their metonymy against the disastrous "pleasure" the rapists take in their victims' literal clothing.

HERE

Hopes Without Foundation (27)

RL

...doth Tarquin lie revolving

The sundry dangers of his will's obtaining;

Yet ever to obtain his will resolving

Though weak-built hopes persuade him to abstaining.

Despair to gain doth traffic oft for gaining....

(129-31)

L

...her haunch was working its way toward me under the soft sand of a remote and fabulous beach; and then her dimpled dimness would stir, and I would know that she was farther away from me than ever.

(131)

Tarquinius and HH possess "troubled minds that wake"(RL, 126). Tarquinius' is turning over in his mind the "sundry dangers" associated with a decision to rape Lucrece ("his will's obtaining"). The odds against his success are high, but he considers that he can increase his chances by making many attempts ("despair to gain doth traffic off for gaining"). Similarly, when leaving Room 342 to go downstairs, HH had expressed his own doubts regarding the possibility of achieving his goal:

I should have known (by the signs made to me by something in Lolita--the real child Lolita or some haggard angel at her back) that nothing but pain and horror would result from the expected rapture.

(125)

And, more to the point:

..lust is never quite sure--even when the velvety victim is locked up in one's dungeon....

(125)

But HH's lack of certainty, just as with Tarquinius, seems to spur the longing. There seems to be, for both, an erotic excitement in this lack. What at first appears to be an active tension between the rapist's intense desire for stolen sex and his equally intense despair at the possibility of failure might instead be a conspiracy of emotions that operate to increase his passion. His lack of a sure foundation becomes part of a "sexy" gamble that increases his desire. Lolita's proximity ("her haunch...working its way toward me under the soft sand" and his "expected rapture") hangs together with his knowledge that each movement she makes means that he is more removed from that "fabulous beach" ("she was further away from me than ever"). Ovid's Acteon, creeping into the bushes to feast his eyes on the naked Diana, has similarly gambled that he will not be caught. This tension is a key ingredient in the ecstasy of the voyeur. The gain of seeing the naked Diana is weighed by Acteon against the risk of being caught. But as in *L* and *RL*, his despair of finding satisfaction leads to taking greater risks since. Like Tarquinius, "Despair to gain doth traffic oft for gaining." Try many times. Get closer. This is the thinking of a heart, to borrow the imagery of *RL*, whose reason has been usurped by lust. In the vocabulary of *L*, this becomes the titillated anxiety of the mind of HH "wrinkled by the phantasm of that breeze (from wonderland)" (131). Lewis Carroll seems to have been moved by the gamble, or at least Nabokov appears to have imagined so. Though in his case there appears not to have been a rape and we readers

of the Alice books are the beneficiaries. The "Wonderland" mentioned by Nabokov is perhaps, then, that other "world" of art that he says is ecstatic, kind, tender, and curious.

A "Breeze from Wonderland" and "the Patrimonies of Poets" (28)

L

A breeze from wonderland had begun to affect my thoughts, and now they seemed couched in italics, as if the surface reflecting them were wrinkled by the phantasm of that breeze. Time and again my consciousness folded the wrong way, my shuffling body entered the sphere of sleep, shuffled out again, and once or twice I caught myself drifting into a melancholy snore.

(131)

Sometimes in 1952 when he is writing his memoir, he is self-critical to the point of recognizing his own solipsism (something we discussed in Vignette 24, p. 62 of *L*). But just as often he collapses back into his ignorant self-righteousness. The passage in the present vignette (#28) belongs to this latter category. These driftings in and out of sleep serve as 'proof,' at least to HH, that he is not a Quilty-esque mad monster. To the contrary, he assures us, "The gentle and dreamy regions through which I crept were the patrimonies of poets--*not crime's prowling ground*" (131). He knows that most people view sexual violence and art as contraries, but he intends to straighten us out on this false assumption. He is not one of the ignorant mob, he assures us, but who sees into the truth that nympholepsy is an art. He is a criminal prowler who calls his sort of criminal prowling art. Missing the fact that he conflates crime and art, he "reasons" even in 1952 that his actions in 1947 constituted a performance on the side of art. He makes this claim because at the time he first "reached (his) goal" by having sex with Lolita, she was unconscious. His intention, he says, was to preserve her "chastity" (55) and her "purity" (63 and 124) even as his own ecstasy would have remained within his own private world. This private "ecstasy would have been all softness, a case of internal combustion of which she would hardly have felt the heat, even if she were wide awake" (131). Nabokov's understanding of art-as-a-refuge, on the other hand, has nothing to do with actual rape. Instead, it is the refuge of "another world," a non-literal world, a world that is "kind" and "tender."

Looking back on this is 1952, HH recalls that his thoughts were disturbed by "a breeze from wonderland"(131). This Carrollian breeze, he explains, turns his own thoughts into italicized sentences! This italicizing is crucial and gets to the heart of his confusion. His confusion concerns art: he is a monster who claims he is an artist-writer!

He is like Lewis Carroll! He is disturbed by the same "breeze." He belongs to the same ancestral estate as the poets of the past. But this thought is merely that Carroll got away with assault by doubling as an artist. HH possesses a different understanding of art-as-a-refuge than does Nabokov. HH's understanding ends in the cruelty of serial rape; this sort of understanding views art as a refuge only in the sense that being an artist might protect him from having to pay a price for his pleasure: "a case of internal combustion from which she would have hardly felt the heat." He feels protected by the fact that Lolita is unconscious of what has transpired. Carrying this off is part of the "art" of nympholepsy. Nabokov's understanding might argue that Carroll never harmed Alice but instead found "refuge" in his art. HH's thoughts are certainly "wrinkled," as even he himself admits. The possibility of his being like Lewis Carroll, the great Christ Church logician, clouded his thoughts by "rippling" their surface, leading him to think he could get away with the rape by being a nympholept-artist like Carroll. What he is missing here and what prevents him from being an artist is the literalism of his own way of talking. HH conflates the literal and the poetic, while Nabokov separates them. As with Tarquinius, HH's confused thoughts are associated with wind (see Section 17 and *RL* 311-17). Because of the "breeze from wonderland" HH does not accept his guilt and will even argue, writing in 1952 after the rape, that "it was she who seduced me"(132).

The border between HH's waking and sleep is connected in his thoughts with the border between crime and poetry. He sees the border between both sets to be fuzzy. He "shuffles" between sleep and waking, just as Lolita drifts between drugged unconsciousness and waking awareness. His deepest wish is for a similar border separating rape and poetry, a border fuzzy enough to be non-existent. Why else would one want "to give years and years of life for one chance to touch a nymphet" (88)? This

sort of non-existent border would allow him to possess and protect Lolita at the same time. Tenderness, according to Nabokov, is one the four properties of "the state of being where art is the norm," 315). If HH can meet Lolita at a certain "halfway" point, so he reasons in his half-way point of drifting in and out of sleep, then he will qualify as a poet instead of a monster: "...no killers are we. Poets never kill" (88). The point where literal touching meets metaphoric poetry is where the surface of her body meets his "hermetic vision"; it is this very point which he wishes to blur. In his "gentle and dreamy regions"(131), he moralizes about this "halfway" where he might have his cake and eat it too. The saving of his soul depends upon his meeting her "there" because it preserves his innocence. To achieve this, he records in 1952, in a moment of relative clarity, that in 1947 he had minimized his crime by confessing that his goal had been but a mere "trifle" all along: "Now and then it seemed to me that the enchanted prey was about to meet halfway the enchanted hunter..." 131). This is the breeze from wonderland which continues to ripple any possible clarity in his thoughts. He is half-conscious lurking around this blurred half-way border where he hopes to get away with everything. But Lolita's half-consciousness (every so often "her dimpled dimness would stir" [131]) denies him this possibility. We juror-readers know the blurred borders he claims exist do not absolve him of the crime. In fact, those claims were its cause.

But for HH to achieve complete satisfaction he claims that he must "taste more than a glimmer of her" (132). He must touch her. Touching, at this point, matters to him more than his "hermetic vision" does. His longing to touch her is connected directly to the literalism of his speech and to his claim earlier in the novel that nymphets are actually in this world and are not phantasms (16-17). His problem becomes how to touch her without crossing his halfway point and awakening her. There is a long drawn-out period

of "tentative approximations with a confusion of perception metamorphosing her into eyespots of moonlight" (132). He dreams he is awake and when awakened thinks he is still asleep. The blurred threshold between the imagined and the real is the psychological space where literal rape occurs.

The Rape

Assault on a City (29)

RL

Anon his beating heart, alarum striking,

Gives the hot charge, and bids them do their liking.

His drumming heart cheers up his burning eye,

*His eye commends the leading to his hand;
His hand, as [if] proud of such a dignity,
Smoking with pride, marched on to make his stand
On her bare breast, the heart of all her land,
Whose ranks of blue veins, as his hand did scale,
Left their round turrets destitute and pale.*

...his hand shakes withal.

*This moves in him more rage and lesser pity,
To make the breach and enter this sweet city.*

(433-41, 467-9)

...By heaven, I will not hear thee!

Yield to my love. If not, enforced hate shall tear thee.

(667-9)

L

*Frigid gentlewomen of the jury! I had thought that months, perhaps years, would
elapse before I dared to reveal myself to Delores Haze; but by six she was wide awake,*

and by six fifteen we were technically lovers.

(132)

Both texts want to impress upon us a sense of the immediate force characterizing the instant of rape. Following the lengthy siege of the “city” which is Lucrece’s body, the sacking of the city is swift. Of the 31 vignettes in the entire account, the rape itself first appears in # 29. HH's account of his thoughts, of the events, and of the hotel, from the time of their arrival in the afternoon until midnight includes many details and takes up a full sixteen pages of text (117-32). The “essential” part he implores us to pay attention to appears *before* the rape. At midnight, prior to the rape which will take place from 6:00 - 6:15 a.m., he collapses into four hours of deep sleep (“In the first antemeridian hours there was a lull in the restless hotel night. Then around four the corridor toilet cascaded....”, 132). From four to six the hotel slowly awakens while HH “stumbles” in and out of sleep and Lolita remains in her stupor. When the birds begin singing at six, she is suddenly alert. And by six fifteen, as HH tells us rather matter of factly, “we were technically lovers” (132). The term “technically” is the whole of the description of the rape, itself. And, yet, the rape itself was exactly what HH demanded in order to get more than a “glimmer” of his imagined paradise. Why do we not get a more detailed description of the paradise? Possibly, as in Shakespeare’s Lust Sonnet, HH was experiencing that state of mind described in the line “Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight.” We guess also, judging by the number of lines devoted to its description, that none of the three writers, neither Nabokov nor Shakespeare, is very interested in the “technical” rape, itself, and that HH is interested in the rape only in the lead-up to the rape. HH describes the conversation that precedes it, but only to justify what he did by

explaining that "it was she who seduced me" (132). As the sonnet says, "Lust is perjured...not to trust." Tarquinius says to Lucrece after the rape, "...the fault was thine" (482). HH protests that "not a trace of modesty did I perceive in this beautiful, hardly formed young girl" (133). Nymphets are not known for their chastity. His passion is for the blend of the "beautiful, hardly formed" body with the absence of modesty. He explains, "She saw the stark act merely as part of a youngster's furtive world, unknown to adults" (133). In other words, he was the initiate and *she* initiated him into that strange world. As for the "stark act," itself, he complains, "I am not concerned with so-called 'sex' at all. Anybody can imagine those elements of animality. A greater endeavor lures me on: to fix once and for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (134). This "fix," in his confused thoughts, " is also a blend: it is both the fix of a self-absorbed addict and a selfless repair for a world in grave danger from magical creatures who wish to do it harm. His thinking on so many levels conflates contraries which the novel itself seeks to distinguish. The rape, one could argue, is *caused by* these confluations.

This compression of text (the mere four words "stark act" and "technically lovers") echoes in its minimalism the compression of time expressed by HH when he says he had "thought that months, perhaps years, would elapse before I dared to reveal myself to Delores Haze"(132). The "technical" instant happens so fast he hardly realizes it. Something of this same 'over-before-you-know-it' aspect is expressed in the Lust Sonnet (129) when Shakespeare juxtaposes in comic half-line phrasing the before and after of the "stark act":

Past reason hunted, and no sooner had

Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait

On purpose laid to make the taker mad;

Mad in pursuit and in possession so...

A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe;

Before, a joy proposed; behind a dream.

This compression is so tight that it elides the "technical" rape, itself. The same elision happens in *RL*, in the open space between two stanzas, so subtle that it must be presumed by the reader. This timelessness of the open space evokes a brutality similar to the "sudden blow!" in the opening of Yeats' "Leda and the Swan." The fact that Nabokov has HH describe the literal rape as "technical" adds to this atmosphere of brutality. His use of "technically" suggests objects and not subjects, an extension of HH's solipsizing Lolita as an object (a nymphet) into the sphere of his own subjectivity. "Literally" would have worked as well as "technically" to describe these "lovers." It is more in the buildup to the "stark act" that we are able to see how rape happens. The how gets lost in the spare description of the rape. This is owing to the fact that rape is caused by the literal way of thinking that characterizes the thoughts of the rapists. In the rape itself, this literal way of thinking is silent; instead, we are occupying the horror of the verbal void which constitutes the unspeakable act itself. We are in the space of Circe's pigs.

Fixing Perilous Magic (30)

RL

But she with vehement prayers urgeth still

Under what colour he commits this ill.

Thus he replies: 'The colour in thy face...

Under that colour am I come to scale

Thy never conquered fort. The fault is thine,

For those thine eyes betray thee unto mine.

(470-6, 477, 481-3)

L

I am going to tell you something very strange: she seduced me.

(132).

Let's focus briefly on the interesting way these rapist's shift the blame in the middle of the rape scene. Lolita is pictured as HH's teacher, instructing him how to "do it." He says that she "handled (his) life...in an energetic, matter-of-fact manner as if it were an insensate gadget" (133-4). In his thinking *he* is the object captured in the web of *her* sex obsession. It was *her* "perilous magic" which overpowered *him*, not his lust which overpowered her:

Her cheekbones were flushed, her full [?] glistened, my dissolution was near. All at once, with a burst of rough glee (the sign of the nymphet!) she put her mouth to my ear-- but for quite a while my mind could not separate into words the hot thunder of her whisper, and she laughed, and brushed the hair off her face, and tried again, and gradually the odd sense of living in a brand new, mad new dream world, where everything was permissible, came over me as I realized what she was suggesting. (133)

The writing is so eroticized that the verbal ecstasy a sensitive reader experiences feels dangerously close to the sexual ecstasy of HH. Nabokov whispers in our ear. But these ecstasies could not be more opposed and the passage is intended to have us contemplate the distinction. We are not really contrasting two different "worlds", as Nabokov would have us believe, but two different ways of talking. Nabokov whispers differently to us here than does HH. Beauty is pleading at the instant of rape. HH and Nabokov are both ecstatic, but one tender, kind, and curious while the other is self-

righteous and cruel.

By the end of *L*, HH's bravado completely evaporates. He spirals downward into the emotional morass described in the conclusion to Shakespeare's sonnet:

...a very woe;

Before a joy proposed; behind, a dream.

All this the world well knows; yet none knows well

To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

Why, do Shakespeare and Nabokov expend so much curiosity and care to something that "none knows well" how to avoid, to something so "inevitable"? Are these texts, so rich in warm verbal play, merely a chorus to the cold statistics of sexual assault?

Fear Greater Than Guilt (31)

RL

Will not my tongue be mute, my frail joints shake,

Mine eyes forego their light, my false heart bleed?

The guilt being great, the fear doth still exceed....

(225-27)

L

*I have but followed nature. I am nature's favorite hound. Why then this horror that I
can't shake off?*

(135)

My Introduction to this essay opened with Tarquinius' response of speechlessness response to the pleading of Lucrece' beauty. His thought at that point is that "beauty itself doth of itself persuade/The eyes of men without an orator," 29-30). In similar fashion, as we have just observed, Tarquinius returns to speechlessness at the poem's conclusion. But his speechless this time, he confesses, is not a reaction to Lucrece's beauty or to the realization of his guilt; it is a speechless response to his overwhelming fear: "Will not my tongue be mute, my frail joints shake...," 225). Immediately after the rape, both rapists dismiss their guilt, but neither is able to rid himself of fear. For HH, the fear concerns his recent subjection to the "perilous magic of nymphets." He blames

"nature":

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. Mother beastly and beautiful merged at one point, and it is that borderline I would like to fix, and I feel I failed utterly. Why?

(135)

This is a different border than the border mentioned earlier in Section 27 where he had hoped to meet Lolita "halfway," touching her without her knowing, thereby absolving himself of guilt but not at the cost of his pleasure. That border was a halfway point conceived as *between* them. This new borderline is contained within Lolita, one that separates her beauty from her beastliness. He says these two components "merged at one point" and we can imagine that he refers to the instant of the rape. But it is more likely that he means that they converged in her being or her body. He reasons that if were able to "fix" this point he could "fix" with his mythical cure "the perilous magic of nymphets." By "fixing" the ways in which Lolita's beauty bedazzles by being beastly, he hopes that her beauty will lose its power over nympholepts like himself. "Nature," he claims, is responsible here and does not want us to be able draw the distinctions that could save us. In the lead-up to the rape he has been reduced to "nature's hound"; therefore, this same Nature must be nailed like a butterfly to his lepidopterist's board and studied. The "precise science of nympholepsy" mentioned earlier has been changed from knowing how close he can get to her without awakening her to knowing the

distinction in her between her beauty and her beastliness. His earlier fear was that he would get scolded before he achieved orgasm, but his present fear concerns how this new project of borderline-fixing has failed and a horror remains, he says, which is greater than his guilt. It is the horror of it happening again. Which it does many times as they explore America.

A Final Thought

A thought suggested by a passage in the opening of Nietzsche's early work, *The Birth of Tragedy* (hereafter *BT*), is helpful in drawing the most significant borderline which needs thinking through. HH's borderline (separating the beautiful from the beastly in certain girls) is not Nietzsche's, nor is it Nabokov's or Shakespeare's. Where he looks for a borderline is a sign of his problem. He seeks to determine where the beautiful merges with the beastly "in" little girls, and he does not see this confusion as a failure on his own part. Because he misses this, he himself becomes a beast. The borderline most in need of determining is the borderline that, according to Nietzsche, separates madness from art. *This is the borderline that separates HH from Nabokov and Tarquinius from Shakespeare.* The passage in *BT* is:

But we must also include in our picture of Apollo that delicate boundary, which the dream picture must not overstep lest it act pathologically (in which case appearance upon us as pure reality). (Trans. Walter Kauffmann, New York: Random House, 1967,

p. 35)

Nietzsche calls this borderline a "delicate boundary" because it is so easily crossed, explaining that it is the dangerous edge where the dream world (the Apollonian "art instinct"), if not checked, will impose itself on reality with an erotic primal energy (the Dionysian "art instinct"). It is the border unwittingly crossed by HH and Tarquinius. In Nietzsche's formula, art happens when the Apollonian (the form-making function we experience in our dream-life) and the Dionysian (the form-shattering function we experience when intoxicated) are reconciled, when neither "art instinct" drowns out the other. This reconciliation, Nietzsche claims, was achieved by the Greeks in their tragedies. For Nietzsche, later in his career, art became a way of looking at life without going mad ("Art protects us from the truth," *The Will to Power*). Crossing this border is where Nietzsche claims "pathology" begins since we see our spontaneous images as facts in the world. One abandons the precincts of art. One can no longer see that her religion is "a marching army of metaphors." Nietzsche's gives us a 19th Century description of HH's nympholepsy and of the psychological cause behind the rape, of a dream's crossing over a "delicate boundary" and imposing itself pathologically on the world. HH's fear is surprising to him because he is so assured of his guiltlessness. Nature is to blame, so why should he be afraid? But we don't fall for this. It doesn't make sense to us that his madness ("Mad in pursuit and mad in possession so," Sonnet 129) is caused by his fear. His real concern, his reason for writing the book in fact, is the saving of his soul and his soul is lost because he is responsible for the rape. He stole Lolita's childhood and floats in and out of acknowledging that crime. He never mentions Nietzsche. Nevertheless, we can say that he's afraid of his guilt because he feels he crossed a Nietzschean-type "delicate boundary" and inscribed his nymphet

fantasy on the life of a child. "I broke her life," (309) he says, at a moment when he is not blaming Nature.

It is similar in *RL*. Tarquinius feels great guilt, but his fear is greater. It is the fear, like HH's fear, that comes from the invading awareness *after* the rape: what have I done? There are no less than eight lines in *RL* in which the word "trembling" appears, more than in anything else Shakespeare wrote. *RL*, one might say, is as much about fear as it is about lust. Tarquinius' fear after the rape leaves him dumbfounded, but this speechlessness is caused by his fear of his own beastliness and not, as he had claimed in the opening, by the beauty of Lucrece's face. Problems with the rapist's speech torment both the beginning and the end of the rape narrative, but for different reasons. At the end of both texts we are left with the lasting impression of gape-mouthed rapists frozen in the expression of Michaelangelo's archetypal condemned sinner in his "Last Judgement."

HH's attempt at speech, his "singing violin" memoir, is itself one long excuse offered for the saving of his soul...because he is afraid. He has not lost the hope of somehow proving himself to be, if not exactly a good man, then at least a man who "tried hard to be good. Really and truly, he did."(19). In the end he reconciles himself with the thought that if his attempt at goodness has not succeeded, he might find the saving of his soul in "the refuge of art." He excuses his murder of Quilty in this way: he had to choose between Quilty's life and his own and he chose his own only in order to have time to write his memoir. These words, he hopes, will save his soul. The memoir will allow others to hear about Lolita and her life which he felt he had "broken" will "live in the

minds of later generations" (309). But he intends to leave more than a mere catalogue of facts; his thoughts at the end are about art, on "aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets..."(309). In other words, his final excuse is 'I have made a work of art' which aches like a violin and returns the life I have broken in immortality. He is attempting to convince himself and us that he is an artist. But he fails. His memoir is not *L*; it is the reason for *L*. Dumbstruck would-be poets without poetry are pathological and dangerous. This difference is "delicate," a boundary easily crossed, but it is not insignificant since an awareness of it can result in poetry instead of rape.

END OF PAPER