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SONIC EXPERIENCES IN *LOLITA*, NABOKOV'S SENSORY TRAGEDY

EXPERIÊNCIAS SONORAS EM *LOLITA*, A TRAGÉDIA SENSORIAL DE NABOKOV

Lauro Iglesias Quadrado¹

RESUMO: O romance *Lolita*, de Vladimir Nabokov, foi escrito e publicado em meio a intensas experiências sociais junto às dimensões sonoras e midiáticas. O tempo histórico que dá o pano de fundo para o romance, as décadas da metade do século XX, apresenta transformadas paisagens sonoras, contando tanto com inovações urbanas quanto com a presença massiva de inauditos estilos musicais que passam a se popularizar a partir desse momento. Fundamentado nessa caracterização, este artigo analisa como as personagens do livro são compostas por Nabokov em vigoroso exercício de audiografia, culminando em cenas sonoramente dramáticas que se beneficiam da compartilhada experiência auditiva do leitor para atingir seu potencial.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Vladimir Nabokov; *Lolita*; audiografia; paisagem sonora.

ABSTRACT: Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita* was written and published amidst intense social experiences connected to social and medial dimensions. The historical time which sets the background for the novel, the decades of mid twentieth century, presents transformed soundscapes, which count both on urban innovations and on the massive presence of unheard-of musical styles that begin to become popular from this moment on. Founded on this characterization, this article analyzes how the characters of the book are composed by Nabokov in a vigorous exercise of audiograph, which climaxes in sonorously dramatic scenes benefited from readers' shared aural experience to reach its full potential.

KEYWORDS: Vladimir Nabokov; *Lolita*; audiograph; soundscape.

1. Introduction

*My funny valentine, sweet comic valentine / Is your figure less than Greek?
Is your mouth a little weak? / When you open it to speak, are you smart?*
"My Funny Valentine" (1937), Lorenz Hart

"*Lolita*, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta." (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 9) The opening lines of Vladimir Nabokov's (1899 - 1977) infamous novel call for an appeal to the senses. The reader is invited to experience the narrator's drives, from the feelings and sensations towards his girl of affection. This sensual call travels from the inside of one's body to the outside, from the basic condition of living to the will to live. Finally, it reaches the production of voice and its subsequent hearing. All in those three pizzicatoed syllables: Lo-lee-ta.

The esteemed Russian émigré, living and working in post-war United States was himself a synesthete, that is: his relation to objects and concepts would immediately trigger sensations in other senses; a number relates to a color, a feeling relates to a

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sound. The abundance of varied sensory experiences is demanding on the reader. And in *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov sets the tone of the novel right away with its famous first lines, providing his public with hints through the voice of the narrator: this will definitely be a text cobbled by sound. Readers are then guided through the novel as they follow the writings of Humbert Humbert, the first-person confessional narrator, who recalls his experiences and his unfortunate deeds throughout the book. He provides thorough descriptions of characters throughout the novel, and especially of Lolita, in the shape of very detailed audio-visual narratives.

Lolita was conceived by its author in the late 1940s and early 1950s. That era, the first half of the twentieth century, was bursting with controversy in relation to new media and new technological devices being absorbed into everyday life. Vladimir Nabokov finally published his novel in 1955, a time when the relation with what was then considered innovative media, such as domestic music players and cinema, had already, to some extent, become a natural presence in Americans' everyday life².

2. Twentieth century soundscapes in *Lolita*

It is possible to trace the origins of Nabokov's novel back to the first decades of the 20th century, and their complex relation with media, of euphoria and utopia - much developed in Modernism and its works in most fields of art, from literature to cinema, from the visual arts to music - but also of skepticism. The production of cultural and aesthetic objects in culture had been yielding mass phenomena since the years of the turn of the century, and recorded music had initiated its way into becoming an indeed profitable product for major record companies. The spreading of music as a commodity also generated a wide public, a consumerist audience which rose as it followed models of appreciation connected to a capitalist way of living. The desire for the new, typical of turn-of-the-century modernists, is a common feature of this public:

between 1900 and 1917 a great deal happened in American popular music, and glimpses of this great breakthrough can be gleaned on record. As the century changed, the romantic ballads and European dance tunes had to make way for new trends. In the place of the waltz and the polka came a wave of new dance crazes (GRONOW; SAUNIO, 1998, p. 27).

Along with the proto jazz music played and consumed in the beginning of the century in the United States - one of these so-called 'new dance crazes' -, the cabarets in France played an important role in the entertainment of this era. The music played in these places was an initial form of what was to become known as *chanson française*, a form of popular entertainment opposed to the then spreading Viennese operettas – in spite of the name, these musical events were usually held and set in Paris, not in Vienna, and so were their initial recordings and marketing. Operettas were “based on a combination of romantic plots, sentimental melodies and waltz rhythms” (GRONOW; SAUNIO, 1998, p. 25), and appealed to a large audience in more traditional topics. The new and challenging cabaret music which appears in France represents a change, and

² It is interesting to bear in mind that the novel has such an intense dialogue with other media that it served as hypotext for two major films, also named *Lolita*, eventually made by commercially and critically recognized movie authors: in 1962, by director Stanley Kubrick; and in 1997, by director Adrian Lyne.

helps establish connections between contemporary situations both in America and in Europe:

whereas operetta represented escapism, the world-view of the chanson was anarchical and satirical, akin to Dadaism [...]. The First World War revolutionized popular music. In its search for modernity, Europe needed something other than Viennese operettas and music-hall comedians to complement its cult of nudity and its neon-lit realism (GRONOW; SAUNIO, 1998, p. 26-9).

Even if cabaret acts never became as popular as music-hall acts, they did build bridges to connect music with other forms of modern art of the time. Dada poetic performances, for instance, drew a lot from music and musical perspectives, and also fed cabarets with themes for songs – no wonder the first Dadaist group was consolidated in a cabaret, *the Voltaire*, in Zurich –, mostly related to marginal life of the Paris of the streets, in a similar fashion to the anti-war message held by the members of the aforementioned artistic movement, critical of what they referred to as the bourgeois capitalist interests behind World War I. Cabaret songs eventually appeared more frequently on records in the 1920s, following the immense sales of American popular dance records based on jazz and ragtime - another favorite syncopated style. The mix of these genres, along with a boost in American economical situation and the flows of optimism paved a way for the consolidation of swing, the novelty in music which made a huge impact on interpersonal relations and social mediations in early twentieth century.

Dance and social gatherings around this provocative and exciting music were one of the foundations for the years that preceded the Great Depression in the United States which exploded in 1929, as *Jazz*, a series of documentaries made by Ken Burns (JAZZ, 2001), tells and shows. At that time, some records even sold over a million copies (as in GRONOW; SAUNIO, 1998), an impressive number for a young industry. A new sonic panorama emerged, and these new music forms contributed to generating changes in society as a whole. Canadian musicologist, Murray Schafer (2001, p. 23-6) laid a cornerstone in sound studies with his studies about soundscapes - a term he coined, a pouncept including the mixture of the words "sound" and "landscape". For him, the study of a soundscape takes place when the interaction of people is considered along with the sonorous experience they go through in their everyday lives, in the city or in the countryside. Aural experience of each place is what determines each soundscape, which can be produced either by human or non-human hands. In the early 1920s, major cities in Western world were evident showcases for soundscape studies, since new inventions appeared on a daily basis - gadgets and their specific noises - along with the continuous growth of metropolises and the sounds of construction sites. Particularly interesting for this study is the presence of the phonograph, which was a novelty that made possible for people to listen to recorded music and have musical records at home.

The importance of this different soundscape, marked by musical occupation, was such that the decade from the end of World War I to the Wall Street Crash of 1929 became known as "Jazz Age"³. Even if the term itself “had very little to do with real jazz, [people were] eager to dance to the rhythms of new kinds of dance bands”

³ American writer, F. Scott Fitzgerald popularized the term. He wrote about it in observational texts, and also in chronicles (as in FITZGERALD, 1931). Above all, his book of short stories entitled *Tales of the Jazz Age* is an important reference in the literature of this time.

(GRONOW; SAUNIO, 1998, p. 29). The jazz label, which remains up to these days as a trademark of the 1920s, had in fact more to do with diversified experiences associated to musical fun - such as tango or cabaret music and dances like the foxtrot, and the Charleston - and social appearance: to perform these dance steps, girls would wear short skirts and provocative dresses, for instance. As a whole, it was closely linked with the feeling of excitement and optimism that succeeded the end of World War I, in 1918.

Nevertheless, despite having been consumed by a significant number of people and having established and consolidated a new sort of industry, it did not take long for these new types of music to be deemed minor, unsubstantial, and even profane:

During the Jazz Age, jazz became a metaphor for an unfathomable variety of cultural signifiers implying both positive and negative aspects of modernity. Cultural theorists and writers often inserted the term to elicit a sense of spontaneity and innovation – or conversely to connote something corrupt and contaminated (McGEE, 2009, p. 27).

Although this paradox would become a label associated to jazz and its related genres in their early years, these eventually, along with music for movies, transformed music into a solid business in the beginning of the 20th century. “In the US, [...] radio stations proliferated, records and gramophone players became commonplace, and Hollywood became a talking medium and quickly a key platform for music” (WARNER, 2014, p. 5). The 1920s and the 1930s gave the cultural and the sonic panoramas that would eventually be expanded and consolidated after another time of massive conflicts, as World War II approached. They were of ultimate importance as they set new heights for media discussions along with the development of different materialities. “The Second World War would disrupt (...) processes in many ways, assist them in others – for example, the appearance of vinyl records, which would boost the phonographic business massively at the end of the 1940s” (WARNER, 2014, p. 5).

As inventions and new experiences were galloping, generation gaps would then become more evident, as media references and lifestyles were genuinely altering for those involved⁴. In *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov captures the ambivalent tension of many battles between the girl who names the novel and the narrator, Humbert Humbert. The characters' media references are attached to each one's cultural background, making it only natural for them to be related to their generations' distinct tastes. These distinct points of reference and cultural standards are presented as a key factor of the book's reading experience. Nabokov explores discomfort and challenges proposed by the main characters when their disconnected imaginaries become manifest.

Monsieur Humbert is depicted as a man who claims for himself the position of a classical European intellectual, a Frenchman who immigrated to the United States, having with him an academic experience as a literature scholar in his home continent. His French aristocratic upbringing is often juxtaposed to highbrowed references to what the character relates to be the basis of his erudite education. This is the man who looks for a new place to live and work in a small Midwestern American town, and finally stays at Charlotte Haze's place. There he is enchanted by Mrs. Haze's daughter, Dolores - Charlotte loved Mexican soap operas, thus the daughter's Hispanic name and

⁴ Another interesting label for this era in history is "Roaring Twenties". Interestingly, it bears a relation to the vibrancy soundscape of the period, just like the Jazz Age. This "roar" is a powerful acoustic symbol for all the social transformations going on at the time.

nickname, Lolita. Narration in the novel, always filtered by Humbert's focalization, succeeds in creating Charlotte Haze as a distasteful character, following Humbert's locus of experience. The narrator's voice does so through the description of her taste for cheap poetry, soap operas, and kitsch ornaments hanging everywhere in her home. Alluding to sound, Humbert oftentimes refers to her awful attempts to communicate with him in French, in ironical descriptions that would indeed sound painful to one's ears.

As the plot of the novel moves on, Mr. Humbert finally gets to be Lolita's stepfather, following his marriage to Charlotte Haze. Mrs. Haze's - now Mrs. Humbert - subsequent death gives the professor the opportunity to place the teenage girl inside a car as an excuse for her not having to see her mother die. The capture and the kidnap are revealed soon, and the abusive relationship mounted by the man is physically sealed. They become a couple of runaways, living secretly as their dysfunctional liaison persists.

However, perverse feelings aside, the daughter, following the steps of the mother, is not precisely depicted as a bright girl either, as far as her tastes for cultural goods are considered: "she it was to whom ads were dedicated: the ideal consumer, the subject and object of every foul poster" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 148). For Humbert, this consumerist side of the girl of his fancy is a turn-off, and representative of what he judges as shallow and uninteresting popular mass culture. The professor says: "mentally, I found her to be a disgustingly conventional little girl. Sweet hot jazz, square dancing, gooey fudge sundaes, musicals, movie magazines and so forth – these were the obvious items in her list of beloved things" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 148).

Of all the elements mentioned by the narrator, dance and music are necessarily highlighted, for the sweet hot fiery jazz loved by Lolita appears as an extra character traveling along with them; it is the music of choice for her in the car, as they drive across the United States - and she always picks the songs. The aforementioned shopping impulses that accompany the girl are usually channeled to entertainment goods, like the portable radio set she obliges Stepdad to buy her, and also entertainment activities, such as jukeboxes and dance shows. Professor Humbert allows himself to slip into moralistic judgment when he considers Dolores to be just one more participant in the spectacle of aberrations he considers as dear possessions of the industry of entertainment; he assumes quite an Adorno-esque attitude in this matter. For him, the girl was a victim, a result of a Hollywood-mediated upbringing: her mother Charlotte, a widow who clearly raised Dolores by herself and had very little patience with her child, shows no attempt in understanding her tastes - being somehow a simplistic parent - thus allowing her daughter to soak in all the television and movies she watched as her primary form of education. The rebel offspring thus replicates patterns from what she observed in the glamorous motion pictures, and works her body into dancing to the popular appealing tunes of the time.

It is interesting to relate Lolita's behavior to some predictions and ideas that had been published and presented before regarding popular music. The historical period presented in the novel comes after the initial boom of music forms such as swing, and recorded music would gradually become present in regular people's homes as part of an everyday soundscape. The paradox of jazz presented some pages above – which here could be extended to Hollywood as well, as an ambivalent love-hate relationship – is also the paradox of the relationship between the nymphet and Humbert Humbert. Lolita seems to be also a part of the dual liberation triggered by mass media products.

Although the man is presented clearly as the perpetrator of a crime against a child of only twelve years of age, the girl is not depicted as a plain, innocent and virginal creature – she was not a virgin, as the narrator reminds us occasionally throughout the narration, as a lousy excuse for his criminal attitude. The fact that she somewhat already knew what she was doing with her stepfather, who, according to her, was a movie star lookalike, is both innovative and contaminated. It is an action permeated by media-amazement and lack of maturity. Humbert took advantage of having the star look, and the girl had no idea of what she was doing, since she was falling for a model of desire and consumption that was currently being sold to her at all times.

McGee's description of popular music in the 20th century as spontaneous and innovative, but corrupt and contaminated, could not be any closer to the analysis of Humbert and Lolita's connection. They embody worries and concerns of pessimistic and skeptical critics. Following the idea of contamination, one of the greatest disapprovers of jazz in the United States was Billy Sunday, prominent former professional baseball player who eventually became a well-known evangelist, who “declared that jazz had already caused the fall of half a million girls and would soon bring about the downfall of the nation” (GRONOW; SAUNIO, 1998, p. 29). For most conservative portions of society, this new state of affairs, favoring the focus on the body – most disturbingly, the female body – could indeed disrupt the basis of the so-called decent and family-oriented households. Controversy had then taken over:

what is intimated but not directly articulated in mass-culture criticisms of these two decades are the offhand and seemingly incidental assertions of women's role within mass-culture contexts. Jazz was alleged to unleash base sexual urges, urges that ultimately compromised (and even emasculated) the male subject as artist, composer, or writer and further destabilized prescribed gender roles. Jazz became the rallying cry for moralists, clergymen, and female traditionalists who detested the corruption of the 'modern woman' as she became easy prey to the contagion of jazz music and jazz culture (McGEE, 2009, p. 28).

Dolores's rebel approach to life and her quest for fun and vivid experiences can indeed be linked to a jazz-mediated life. That is an ideal that can be confirmed when one searches for popular songs of the time, or when one looks at footage of jazz parties in the 1940s and 1950s (as in JAZZ, 2001). What is most disturbing here is to see this so-called downfall happen as a criminal act. Humbert holds a contradictory posture, since he is a conservative when it comes to art appreciation, and at the same time, takes advantage of this degenerate youth. It is interesting to see how Nabokov composes some ways for the girl to escape her kidnapper's domain, as the novel is developed. After the stepfather and stepdaughter had traveled a long time, they finally settled in an academic American town, so he could get some work and Lolita, get back to school. In yet another of Humbert's attempts to force Lolita into a proper formal music education, he enrolls her in piano lessons. The narrator's indoctrination turns out to be a perfect alibi for the little girl: just an appointment she could miss so she could be around people her own age, and escape the lurking shadow of her stepfather's monumental culture. She would just claim to be in classes while she spends time with classmates and other teenagers. Ultimately the highbrowed life Professor Humbert tried to impose on Dolores backfired. European intellectuality could not compete with twentieth-century American popular culture.

Approaching the end of the novel, Humbert expresses his guilt for what he had done to Lolita: “a North American girl-child named Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac” (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 283). It does seem to be a plain confessional line. The criminal at last recognizes the damage inflicted on the victim. However, in the following sentence, the maniac professor subtly agrees to the idea of falling from grace – his and/or Lolita’s -, as Billy Sunday prophesized and McGee observed: “I see nothing for the treatment of my misery but the melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art” (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 283). And then he quotes two lines from an “old poet: The moral sense in mortals is the duty / We have to pay on mortal sense of beauty” (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 283). The unnamed bard is, in the end, Humbert Humbert himself; this poem is not historical, it is a pure fictional device worked out by Nabokov. His statement strengthens the classicist aesthetic taste held by the old professor: one must pay the price to appreciate beauty, even if it is a toll that destroys one's moral beliefs.

Professor Humbert again ironically expresses his despise towards what he considers to be poor, inarticulate, inefficient art. Good classical art elevates. Poor ugly art knocks everyone down and offers no redemption. He takes his prejudices to the grave and ultimately finds misery in his posture as he faces a tragic fate, which will be discussed further on in this article.

3. Puns: wordplays as construction of characters, or Humbert's own kind of music

Another remarkable resource mastered by Vladimir Nabokov is the frequent use of wordplays. The witty language tricks performed by the narrator come as an indissociable bright presence to the text and their employment stands for the constant sardonic humor present in *Lolita*. But not only are they entertaining, they also carry subtle meanings and can extend as much as helping on the creation of characters' development in the novel, which can be perceived in their names and nicknames, for instance. Humbert applies nicknames created by him to connect Charlotte, the mother, and Dolores, the child. The first becomes Lotte and the latter becomes Lolita. The alliteration in the nicknames is clearly audible, and enriches their family relation, be it on the construction of character, with linking features between the two in similarity, or in opposition, dealing with parenthood and rivalry.

Nabokov develops a state of incompatible doppelgangers: for Lolita to exist, Lotte has to die. They are actual rivals, mother and child, in a dispute which involves someone else's desire. This relation moves on ultimately for Lolita's very own maternal experience. Later in the novel, as she gets pregnant and married to a man other than Humbert, the nymphet in her could no longer survive, and she died in delivery to a stillborn baby, thus confirming the narrator's predominance on the story and the soleness of his voice as the only one to be heard in the novel. Mother and child cannot coexist.

The narrator also frequently calls attention to his own name, and to the variety of names or nicknames other characters call him in rather quirky or seemingly uninteresting situations. This humorous yet deep feature is present from the beginning. His whole account - the novel itself - starts with him creating a pen name for himself in his text, and he comes up with a silly repetitive name; to protect his identity, he says. Humbert Humbert, a suggestive name for sound puns: there are uncountable plays

throughout the novel playing with predicates the likes of Humbert the Hummer, Humbert the Humble. What follows is a constant disorder of what last name he should answer to and be recognized. Nabokov plays with the construction of this inconstant character, a phony man that would represent and play parts anywhere he went, ultimately leading to the lack of importance of being actually called by any proper actual family name.

Finally, across the car trips taken by the couple of fugitives, puns are extended to places they stay, be them hotels, towns, or cities. Many keep the alliteration scheme, like that of Humbert Humbert's name, with the intended repetition of their initial consonants, in places suggestively named like Hazy Hills and Kumfy Kabins - what names! -, for instance. An interesting example is the town of Kawtagain, a name that has its signifying potential achieved only if read out loud. This is one of the towns Humbert stays as he is looking for Lolita, after she ran away from him. The abductor, who we eventually find out to be Clare Quilty, plays with him and gives false tips with playful witty names, somehow like the professor himself usually does. Humbert's own double is then created, and the professor gets fooled once again, now in the small town of Kawtagain. Caught again.

It is interesting to bear in mind that the pun is a language device with a history of debates among comparative researchers of music and literature, since it can be closely related to a musical contrapuntal simultaneity. According to Steven Paul Scher (1982, p. 234), "in a pun, only one idea can actually be told, which, during its telling, simultaneously implies another idea; that idea, if the pun is understood, can be simultaneously perceived but has not actually been told". This idea develops on the perception of the pun in a double layered manner, one which would reach the effect of counterpoint when the listener relates to the two meanings and experiences them as one (as in SCHER, 1982).

Contrapuntal motion in music is usually associated to canonical erudite music, so it is no wonder that these puns are composed by Professor Humbert. Humbert the Maestro. There is another return caused by this character's features and how he is built in the novel, again as opposed to Lolita's apparent simplicity of language, filtered by Humbert's linguistically prejudiced narration. Never was she capable of any wordplay, she simply could not be that bright. His dominance over her is evident, and plot events, along with the language Nabokov employs on Quilty presents readers with the professor's real rival: Clare Quilty.

4. Literary soundtracks: the use of readers' aural appeal to generate drama

One of the final diegetic sequences of the novel is the awaited and tense encounter of the narrator with his opponent. The buffoon character of Quilty is highlighted through his challenging and provocative behavior, and the tone of the narration maintains the irony that is so characteristic of H.H. The sequence is narrated as one of the climaxes in the novel's plot, leading to the adding of another line to Humbert's lengthy criminal record: murder. The scene itself – as every murder scene – is one we cannot ignore, since it introduces new facts about the narrator and also works as closure for his story – after all, it is the triggering reason for which he is convicted and sent to prison, following the death of Quilty. But there is even more to it, and it is highly representative of Humbert's mindset: the whole scene is a sonic torment.

It starts with him leaving Insomnia Lodge - who would sleep in this place? -, and checking whether his gun would work or not. He takes his car and reaches Quilty's place, in a completely drunken state. This is how the whole scene starts: "A guardedly ironic silence answered my bell" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 293), says the narrator. After breaking into the house and taking time for his usual bashing of other people's tastes for home decoration - the terrible tacky taste of Quilty's house adds to Humbert's anger -, the two finally start their arguments with the owner of the house's first yell. From then on, the volume of their interactions always takes shape in loud, aggressive utterances.

The sonorous rivalry keeps going as Quilty makes fun of Humbert's accent, deliberately mocking his Gaulish intonation. On the other side, the narrator describes his antagonist's voice in an ironical way – at times it is hoarse, at times it is strangely feminine – and then taunting him with his poor attempts at speaking French. As they battle on, there is evolution. "His French was improving" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 298). Crescendo; we see Humbert the Maestro at work again. Quilty is then forced to read out loud a poem as part of their fight, obviously written by Humbert. After he finishes this effort, he says he needs quiet, and starts a monologue that fills one entire page of the book, up to the moment the narrator shoots. "*Feu*" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 302)! Onomatopoeic. The next step? From all the rooms in the mansion, they go precisely to the music room. And now comes the horror for old Professor Humbert: "Clare the Impredictable sat down before the piano and played several atrociously vigorous, fundamentally hysterical, plangent chords, ... his nostrils emitting the soundtrack snorts" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 302). Now the narrator is intensely disturbed, and exactly at this moment Quilty is finally hit by a bullet.

Clare picaresquely jumps up and down, attempting to flee his chaser. He exaggerates it as if he is in one of those Hollywood flicks Humbert truly hates. Every extra bullet provides extra lamentations – he played even with a phony British slur for his pain cries –, causing obvious extra irritation on the narrator. "He was quiet at last" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 304). Silence, finally. But not for long. He goes downstairs only to hear a medley of voices, songs, and music coming from a number of people at Quilty's place. Humbert claims to have killed his rival. The narrative moves on along with the music played and the other characters talking and looking for records. When the music pauses, suddenly there comes a noise from the stairs. It is Clare's apparent resurrection, he crawls out of the music room only to reach the drawing room and have his and everyone else's sayings drowned by the music, in a wall of sound (as in SCHAEFER, 2001), an external sound that encompasses any form of sonic interaction between conversationalists.

It all becomes intensely noisy again, so it is time for Monsieur Humbert to step out and interrupt it. He needs fresh air and clean off his mind. Hear nothing. He managed to eliminate his rival, but he would never have his beloved Lolita again.

5. Audiograph of characters

Swiss professor and theorist Philipp Schweighauser presents the term audiograph as a way to mediate this carefully constructed sonorous relation of a character and its impression on the reader:

I define an audiograph as a characterization technique that endows fictional bodies with a set of distinctive acoustic properties designed to position

characters with regard to the ensemble of social facts and practices that constitute the fictional world they inhabit (SCHWEIGHAUSER, 2002, p. 94).

Lolita's fictional world is filled with detailed scenes in which characters are composed in an audiographical manner, and also placed in sonically relevant spaces for the course of what is being narrated. They are a collection of how Nabokov builds his own fictional characters and establishes a lively and profitable connection with historical social facts.

Throughout the novel there are uncountable mentions to sounds made by Lolita. They express differences in what the narrator sees as features and characteristics of the girl's personality, and they also describe Humbert's state of mind at the time of each one of his accounts. At times, Dolores is presented as a screaming person, having the traces of an impolite teenage brat, reaching screeching high tones of insufferableness. These are moments of distance between her and the narrator: "Humbert Humbert is infinitely moved by the little one's slangy speech, by her harsh high voice" (NABOKOV, 2000, p.41). On the other hand, Lo can as well be "musical and apple-sweet" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 59). The disturbing relationship between the two main characters of the novel gains yet another layer in this paradoxical association.

One key scene, representative of most aspects discussed so far in this article, happens while Humbert is still married to Charlotte, and had not yet physically sexually harassed the twelve-year-old girl. The scene starts with H. H. complaining about a foolish and annoying popular song of the time that got stuck in his head - an earworm -, called 'O Carmen' – it is a fictional song inside the novel, just like the quoted lines that belonged to an 'old poet'. In spite of the relative and even guilty enjoyment he appears to have from his humming of that particular *chanson*, the stepfather keeps putting his own self down, affirming he is a terrible singer. What happens next, when Lolita enters the room and starts singing, is a moment of total enchantment for him: "the stars had sparkled, and the cars that parkled, and the bars, and the barmen, were presently taken over by her; her voice stole and corrected the tune I had been mutilating" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 59). This is a unique moment, a rare instance when the narrator acknowledges beauty in Lolita for something she does other than purely mentioning her nymph-like body or typical nymphet behavior. It is also the recognition of the charming influence she holds over her stepfather, which slowly develops in the novel as arguments and growing abuse on H. H.'s part, up to the moment when she abandons him.

And the uneasiness of most disturbed moments is represented by noise, unwanted noise. Humbert and Dolores hold boisterous attitudes towards one another, and are disturbed every time they are in loud, noisy places. This tension is depicted as something which is bigger than the characters themselves; they are part of an acoustic world which engulfs them along with their problems. The following episode happens while the narrator and Lo are running away from Quilty, as he chases the pair in a tense moment of the novel: "we spent a night in a very foul cabin, under a sonorous amplitude of rain, and with a kind of prehistorically loud thunder incessantly rolling above us" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 220). The hearing turmoil is incessantly a presence for them. It works as a reminder, as the thunder resonating moral guilt. It is the traditional disapproval of society screaming at H. H.: Criminal! Pedophile! Rapist! The echoes live on: the banging of doors, the thuds on the floor, the sobbing cries, the dimes and quarters tinkling. No escaping: "there is nothing louder than an American hotel" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 129).

It is all pure sonic discomfort: produced by nature, by other people's conversations, by electric gadgets, by the invading and undesirable music being played by other people, by the overhearing of other rooms' television sets, by the creaking of other people's beds. It is sonic discomfort that foretells Humbert's misery that is about to come. It inserts another body there, a spectral presence of sound inside the hotel room which is about to steal Lolita away from him.

6. The novel's tragic outcome and Humbert's utter disappointment

Humbert Humbert's very own appreciation of music, always opposed to Lolita's terrible taste in hot jazz or Clare Quilty's horrible piano playing, appears as a defining issue as the narrator gets further and further away from other characters. His sonic torment, which clearly confronts his refined contrapuntal style of expression, matches current worries of literature produced at Nabokov's time.

Literature professor and musicologist Austin Graham, in a study on the importance of popular music and songs in the literature produced and read in the twentieth century, claims that

[a]uthors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sometimes took music up as subject matter, whether in discussing its effects on listeners, in using musicians as characters, or in demonstrating the[ir] social function of [...] ultimate art in their world and time. On other occasions they used music as a formal model for literature, attempting something like singing, record-playing, and soundtracking in their pages (GRAHAM, 2013, p. 2).

Nabokov is providing Monsieur Humbert with plenty of what is being above brought and described as common literary practices. What is even more interesting and relevant for this article is to connect Graham's thoughts on turn-of-the-century authors, heavily driven by modernistic efforts, with the aforementioned quotes by McGee, Warner, and Gronow and Saunio. If music was indeed the 'ultimate art in their world and time', and was present in homes and public places, shops, hotels, as was said, Humbert's final misery could not arrive in any other way. The narrator, writing in seclusion and awaiting his trial at court - which will probably charge him with capital punishment after rape and murder accusations -, is concluding his final accounts as he remembers what happened right after he had killed Quilty: a symphony of children was singing as they played in a playground nearby, and he initially admired it as a beautiful melody. However, he could not treasure that completely, no matter how wonderfully they sang. He says: "I knew that the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord" (NABOKOV, 2000, p. 308).

The novel's tragic outcome, which involves all main characters, is ultimately expressed through audiograph. And Lolita's voice as its symbol represents all the contradictions in the novel, since it stands for the songs she used to sing, closely linked to her behavior as a character as a victim, and as a tool for liberation and freedom. Simultaneously, it is the same annoying voice that was capable of repelling the narrator and probably caused disapproval in many of the readers as well. It is a product of its time.

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