Photographic Memory in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*

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Exhibit number two is a pocket diary bound in black imitation leather, with a golden year, 1947, *en escalier*, in its upper left-hand corner. I speak of this neat product of the Blank Blank Co., Blankton, Mass., as if it were really before me. Actually, it was destroyed five years ago and what we examine now (by courtesy of a photographic memory) is but its brief materialization, a puny unfledged phoenix.

Vladimir Nabokov (Humbert Humbert), *Lolita*, original emphasis, page 40

Humbert Humbert, the infamous and perverted (or infamously perverted, if you prefer) narrator of Vladimir Nabokov's 1955 novel *Lolita* is, on page forty, as he is on every page, in prison. But for a few pages at beginning and end, and sporadic moments in between where he addresses the jury reader, the reader might forget this important detail. Humbert's criminal status, not to mention his hopeless pedophilic lust, habitual dishonesty, and manipulative behavior, makes our sympathy impossible. However, Vladimir Nabokov's delicately orchestrated use of the English language complicates our relationship to the text, causing some to feel, as the fictional John Ray, Jr., Ph.D. puts it in *Lolita's* Foreword, "But 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!" (5).

See, I've already slipped. As many have done with this novel, I've mistaken Vladimir Nabokov for Humbert, the fictional author of *Lolita* writing from his prison cell. This slippage is so easy because Nabokov's style is so similar to Humbert's; they both have incredible powers of observation, play with their words, intimately care for each sentence however flippant seeming, and have an obsession with memory and visual recollection. It comes as no surprise, in some respects, that Humbert the criminal would claim a "photographic memory" in an effort to explain his case to the jury reader. Such ability would give credulity to his word and perhaps explain how he narrates with extraordinary visual detail, focused perspective, and claimed factual accuracy. It may seem too obvious to mention the usefulness of a photographic memory in the elucidation of the events that led to his arrest. It may also seem too obvious to mention his memory cannot be truly photographic. The reader might assume Humbert's passing phrase is a playful, yet eager attempt to credit his self-centered narrative focus and persuasive control of language with photography's apparent believability. But the reader might assume, too, that

Nabokov means to suggest something more by the phrase "photographic memory," perhaps the implication of an "immediate joke…on representation and its instabilities" (Jacobs 267).

Like in many of Nabokov's other novels, there is a concurrence in *Lolita* of seriousness and playfulness. Sometimes understood to be a stroke of genius, and taken by others as a sign of gross indulgence, Humbert's play with words has often been taken too seriously, or not seriously enough. The oscillation between seriousness and playfulness applies to the treatment of photography, as well. While "photographic memory" might be crucial to the legal explanation of Humbert's story, there are many moments in the novel when photographs are dismissed as vulgar, superfluous, or for children.[i] But for a notoriously unreliable narrator obsessed with visual recollection, and for an author notorious for his clever tricks, the reader cannot make the same assumptions of photography—whether too seriously intertwined with believability, or too jokingly undervalued—and must examine more carefully what "photographic memory" can really mean, both to "representation and its instabilities."

Memory, detached from photography, is popularly discussed in Nabokovian criticism. Critics commonly note the control and care with which Nabokov authors his and his characters' memories, leading many to believe that Nabokov lauds "the will's capacity to subject the past to its insistent call" (Reed 278). Nabokov's "active" (Reed 273) memory controls language similarly to how it controls the recollection and reanimation of the past. For Nabokov, as is true for Humbert in prison, the act of writing itself becomes a site of active memory. Brian Boyd, a celebrated and prolific Nabokov biographer and critic, comments about Nabokov:

> The very nature of language meant something special to him: an opportunity to revisit the impulse of a past instant from which time has forced us to march on, a sort of access to a more elastic time where one can loop back on an idea and develop it to maximum power and grace.[ii] (Green 92)

Boyd evokes photographic practices in his explanation of Nabokov's literary treatment of memory, positioning Nabokov as a sort of author/photographer of memory, who has the ability to "develop" memories through writing. Discussed in his *Strong Opinions*, Nabokov himself believed that he had the authorial power to recreate memories: "By writing, the creative perceiver is able to imaginatively fashion and 'refashion' memories 'retrospectively, by the very act of evoking them'" (Green 92).[iii] As a result of Nabokov's active and eloquent manipulation of memory and language, he is often contrasted to Marcel Proust and his insistence on inactive, involuntary, and often traumatic memory. For Proust, the past has the power to return without warning, rendering its "creative perceiver" "powerless to resist it" (Reed 276). In a few words, Nabokov has control over memory, and Proust's memory has control over him.

Though the reader can see his characteristic care and control of the literary evocation of memory in *Lolita*, Nabokov's insistence on a *photographic* memory complicates "the will's capacity to subject the past to its insistent call." If anything, "photographic memory" insists that the past has the power to call, *despite* human will, or perhaps *in conversation with* human will. Nabokov's memory, as understood by critics, does not talk back, but "photographic memory" might. "Photographic memory" is not, on the other hand, Proustian, in the sense that it haunts its victim traumatically. Some photographic theorists and historians, like Roland Barthes, do perceive a certain haunting quality particular to photographs, but I argue that photography's uncontrollability, ephemerality, and ghostliness don't reveal a traumatized "creative perceiver," but instead reveal the agency of the photographic subjects, in this case the characters of *Lolita,* in Nabokov's process of "literary image-making" (Foster xiv).[iv] By summoning photographic history and theory, primarily Kaja Silverman's 2015 *The Miracle of Analogy or The History of Photography, Part 1*, I seek to illuminate photography's evasion of controlled operation and its

essential "analogy" (Silverman 11) with the world, both of which I argue engender optimistic possibilities for *Lolita's* photographable subjects in the reproduction of their own remembered image. The reader comes to understand in the process that to be "a puny unfledged phoenix" is to be elusive, uncertain, and ephemeral precisely because one reproduces oneself in a flash of light.

In her innovative book, Silverman embarks on an ambitious documentation of conflicting philosophical debates related to technological advances in photography—beginning with the camera obscura, and working through photogenic drawing, heliographs, daguerreotypes, variations on the portable camera, stereoscopes, digital photography, and film—all the while maintaining an optimistic faith in the generative possibilities of photography to create positive relationships between people and the world.[v] She is motivated by the belief that photography is "the world's primary way of revealing itself to us—of demonstrating that it exists, and that it will forever exceed us" (10). This view contrasts to the egotistical one Silverman observes in the modern era, which transfers the industrialized camera's power of image reproduction to "our look" (1), interpreting photography as a tool instead of a reciprocal process. Silverman insists on "analogy" as a unique mode offered by photography by which humans interact with the world, and the world interacts with humanity. Silverman clarifies the term "analogy":

> Every analogy contains both similarity and difference. Similarity is the connector, what holds two things together, and difference is what prevents them from being collapsed into one. In some analogies these qualities are balanced, but in others similarity far outweighs difference, or difference, similarity. One of the most miraculous features of an analogy is its ability to operate in the face of these imbalances: to maintain the "two-in-one" principle even when there is only a narrow margin of difference, or a sliver of similarity. (11-12)

"Analogy," for Silverman, denotes a tension between registers of similarity and difference. Out of that tension arises the "miraculous" power to connect humans to each other, the world, and even memories. Photography models this kind of analogous relationship through "the inversion

and lateral reversal of the camera obscura's image stream, the positive print's reversal of the reversal through which its negative was made, the two-way street leading from the space of the viewer to that of the stereoscopic image, cinema's shot/reverse shot formation, and the cross-temporal practices of some contemporary artists" (12). Silverman's argument, though, goes beyond material photographic practices to claim that analogous relationships in and beyond photography invite reciprocal agency in the world's reproduction of its own image, whether in a photograph, a memory, or one's imagination. In conclusion, Silverman believes that by changing the way photography is seen—as essentially analogous and capable of generating relationships of reciprocal agency in image-making—people can change the way they see themselves, each other, and the world at large.

Thus in this essay I would like to argue that the power of analogy, provided by photography to memory, generates opportunities for characters in *Lolita* to slip in and out of the narration of Humbert's visual memory, challenging his singular control of his memory's recollection and his memoir's authorship. By these same analogic relationships in the novel, Nabokov opens an opportunity for the reader to reinterpret their place in it, including even that place of unreliable authority Humbert occupies. These opportunities for reciprocity in the development of Humbert's visual memory invite an alternate and reversed relationship of spectatorship in a book historically critiqued for its unapologetic presentation of the solipsistic and often voyeuristic perspective of a pedophilic murderer. Additionally, reciprocity in recollection challenges popular critical views that Nabokov exclusively treated memory subject to the author's will power, offering an alternate view of a famed author who instead welcomes textual instability and democratized control of memory and language as equally positive developments.

I am not the first to notice Humbert's use of this common phrase, "photographic memory." But Nabokovian critics, such as Michael Wood and Sarah Herbold, mention "photographic memory" to little effect beyond providing evidence of Humbert's untrustworthiness; for Wood, the phrase triggers linguistic suspicion and for Herbold, feminist suspicion.[vi] Another critic Karen Jacobs employs a visual and cultural studies approach to the phrase, interpreting it, again, to little effect besides providing evidence of visual culture in *Lolita*.[vii] Furthermore, photographic language and the incorporation of photographs in Nabokov's fictional worlds is not a phenomenon exclusive to *Lolita*. The reader can find photographs, cameras, film, and language evocative of photography in most other novels by Nabokov. Many scholars have picked up on the uncommonly pervasive photographic technologies in Nabokov's works, but none have explicitly examined the medium's relationship to memory, nor perceived it as more than simply a marker of unreliable narration or of a modern cultural moment.

Nabokovian critic John Burt Foster used the phrase, along with Nabokov's prevalent use of other photographic language, to argue that the modernist movement in the early and mid-twentieth century does not necessarily exclude Nabokov's active and optimistic attitude toward memory. In a modernist moment where faith in text and image are critically deconstructed and industrialized photographic practices are on the rise, Nabokov stands apart as a figure who maintains faith in the "affirmative" (Foster 59) possibilities of visual memory, while simultaneously performing modernist practices by insisting on returning to the past through memory. Foster argues, "For [Nabokov], accordingly, the word 'modern' retains a crucial comparative element: not total rupture, but that sense of break which includes a recognition of one's distance from a remembered past" (51). Similarly, as I argue, photography's indeterminacy, instability, and evasiveness do not render critical dead-ends or theoretical abysses

in a typically modernist fashion, but instead exemplify Foster's point: that Nabokov's "art of memory" can be simultaneously modern and optimistic.

Arguing for photography's role in modern fiction as a signifier for a moment of modern technological advancement, Jacobs presents a paradox between photography's significance to modernity and the rise of epistemological doubt in the early twentieth century (18). She believes that modernist authors and their texts attempted to depart from positivist faith in the objective text and image (9), yet often relied on that faith in the process (19). For Jacobs, photography changed the world, and the world relies on photography: "A second, equally striking paradox follows from this displacement: not only is the modernist era of epistemological doubt commensurable with an allegiance to images, it would seem in fact to be dependent on them as a means of knowing a world 'conceived and grasped,' as Heidegger put it in 1938, 'as a picture'" (18-9).[viii] As will become apparent, photography's technical development and the epistemological questions raised along the way reveal an insurmountable gap between seeing and knowing, and even between seeing and remembering. Jacobs argues that photography is hyper-present in so many modern texts, including *Lolita*, because of its assumed potential to mend the irreparable separation between seeing and knowing (18).[ix] The photographic image, while suspended between difference and similarity, cannot bridge that gap, yet I argue that its unique position between the two can open unique opportunities. In this way I follow Silverman in arguing that this gap is not a theoretical abyss, but an opening of reciprocal possibility, particularly for the subjects of Humbert's visual and epistemological "cataloguing imperative" (Reed 286).

Whether or not Nabokov is a modernist author, despite or because of his irreparable "allegiance" to the remembered image, he appears to know that to claim "photographic memory"

is to take claim to a longer history of photography—one that begins much earlier than the twentieth century. Thus in the following passage he establishes Humbert's reliance on "photographic memory" by making slyly contradicting distinctions between early photographic practices and modern ones.

> I remember [Annabel's] features far less distinctly today than I did a few years ago, before I knew Lolita. There are two kinds of visual memory: one when you skillfully recreate an image in the laboratory of your mind, with your eyes open (and then I see Annabel in such general terms as: "honey-colored skin," "thin arms," "brown bobbed hair," "long lashes," "big bright mouth"); and the other when you instantly evoke, with shut eyes, on the dark innerside of your eyelids, the objective, absolutely optical replica of a beloved face, a little ghost in natural colors (and this is how I see Lolita). (11)

When retrospectively comparing his first love and sexual partner, Annabel, with Lolita, Humbert characterizes "two kinds of visual memory." The first—"when you skillfully recreate an image in the laboratory of your mind"—evokes early chemical photographic practices that required laboratory skills. The second—"when you instantly evoke…the objective, absolutely optical replica"—seems to correspond more closely to how photography is understood today: as an immediate and accurate rendering of one's vision, typically with a camera. Yet, as Nabokov is aware, the transition from early photographic practices to modern and contemporary practices wasn't as sudden, nor the difference as distinct, as Humbert presents this dualism of reflective vision. Even in this passage, the distinctions are subtly fluid; what is instantly evoked with optical precision surprisingly occurs in a kind of mental dark room—"with shut eyes, on the dark innerside of your eyelids"—while what is recreated using chemical methods, despite skill and labor, does not always obey the human desire to replicate one's perceived world, as Heidegger contends.

Significantly, the functions of the modern camera, in analogy with the mind's eye, seem preferred by Humbert here. The ability to remember "the objective, absolutely optical replica of

a beloved face" surpasses Humbert's desire to remember the original nymphet's image. This is even so when, by Nabokov's blurring of the "two kinds," the modern camera loses its assumed power of complete operative control, and early chemical photography gains the mysterious power of photography, which persists despite and alongside skill and labor. Thus Nabokov's nuanced intervention undermines Humbert's preference and distinction, and leads the reader, as Silverman does as well, to look at a longer history of photographic development. This perspective reveals that photography has not always been immediate or easily reproduced, and that ephemerality and uncertainty were essential to every iteration of the camera and the photo. At the same time, these "two kinds" are in fact distinct from each other, even though the balance between similarity and difference in photography shifts in time toward the former. Early photographic technologies raised certain epistemological questions similar to but different from those people ask in our contemporary moment: people feared something inhuman encroaching on the deeply human capacity to see and perceive. At moments, Humbert's practices of remembering evoke early photographic practices distinct from modern ones, and the kind of technical and epistemological doubt that developed due to early photography raises doubt for the reader in Humbert's perspective-driven narration. By rediscovering Humbert's visual memory and narration as essentially unstable, according to early photographic practices, the reader can discover a more democratic distribution of control over the reproduction of characters' images in Nabokov's novel.

Early photographic practices were limited in their ability to capture and fix an external image. The earliest of photographic technologies, the camera obscura, was simple, yet made obtaining even the reflection of a clear, focused, undisturbed image exasperatingly difficult. Light entered a small hole in an otherwise dark tent, projecting a focused view of the outside

world onto a white screen. In order to focus the image, though, the viewer had to move the screen until the received image became clear, thus participating in the process of image reception. At this point in time, the phraseology used for photograph making was 'to receive' an image, not 'to take' one; though the viewer had some agency inside the darkened chamber, the world was in control of the image it reproduced through the pinhole of light.

Nabokov employs the reciprocal image-making practices of the camera obscura when he authors certain scenes of Humbertian perception. The essential instability and continual shifting of the camera obscura image, too, Nabokov incorporates as visual evidence of Lolita's agency in Humbert's process of remembering and authoring his story. After having left Lolita in their hotel room at *The Enchanted Hunters* in what he calls a "hermetic vision" (123), Humbert narrates his re-entry into the room when he realizes that Lolita was not "still sitting on the edge of the abysmal bed…" (123):

> The door of the lighted bathroom stood ajar; in addition to that, a skeleton glow came through the Venetian blind from the outside arclights; these intercrossed rays penetrated the darkness of the bedroom and revealed the following situation. Clothed in one of her old nightgowns, my Lolita lay on her side with her back to me, in the middle of the bed. Her lightly veiled body and bare limbs formed a Z. She had put both pillows under her dark tousled head; a band of pale light crossed her top vertebrae. I seemed to have shed my clothes and slipped into pajamas with the kind of fantastic instantaneousness which is implied when in a cinematographic scene the process of changing is cut; and I had already placed my knee on the edge of the bed when Lolita turned her head and stared at me through the striped shadows. Now this was something the intruder had not expected. The whole pill-spiel (a rather sordid affair, *entre nous soit dit*) had had for object a fastness of sleep that a whole regiment would not have disturbed, and here she was staring at me, and thickly calling me "Barbara." (original emphasis) (128)

Light streams in "intercrossed rays" through the bathroom door and the Venetian blinds, lighting the dark bedroom to reveal Humbert's world. Far from "hermetic," Lolita's image has shifted since Humbert's departure, and even more surprisingly, the sleeping pills he obtained did not work to keep her and her image still and motionless for his pleasure. Silverman describes the

relationship between the camera obscura and temporality: “This continuous flow of mobile and evanescent images existed only in the ‘now’ in which it appeared, and since the viewer had to enter the camera obscura in order to see it, the two were spatially as well as temporally *co-present*” (original emphasis) (14). Unlike later photography, the visual representation of reality as expressed in the camera obscura was constantly shifting in relation to the world; timing was essential to see and trace a clear image, but the passing of time itself was understood to be uncontrollable and thus essential in the photographic process. As Humbert remembers the scene, he narrates the vision of Lolita passively, describing her limbs, her head, her clothing, and her vertebrae almost as a still life, ready to be seen, to be remembered, and (anticipated) to be raped. But the photographable world lives and moves in the present moment of desired capture; the analogy constantly shifts in relation to the world; to repeat an earlier point, through the camera obscura the world was in control of its reproduced image, and the operator was its receiver.

Unlike the camera obscura, in this scene, though, what is revealed by the light is not external to the room, but internal.[x] Yet as an object of Humbert’s memory, narrated through highly solipsistic narration, Lolita’s remembered image similarly resides in Humbert’s mind and memory as he writes from his prison cell, a similarly darkened chamber. Camera obscura, jail, mind, eye… Each of these can be read as a metaphor for the next, but this is not a new idea. In 1490 Leonardo da Vinci, among others, noticed that the human eye resembles a camera obscura—“rays of light enter its dark ‘chamber’ through a ‘small aperture,’ just as they do in the latter device, and that they also bear an inverted and laterally reversed stream of images” (Silverman 16).[xi] The camera obscura threatened the human eye’s assumed singular (and divinely authored) capability to see and perceive. Similarly, the analogic difference Nabokov authors between what Humbert mentally imagines and actually sees in that room opens

possibilities for Lolita to challenge Humbert's assumed control.[xii] In this instance, Lolita thwarted Humbert's advances and even stares back, challenging through movement and eye contact his authority as the visual receiver and literary narrator of her image. This would not be the first epistemological crisis in the history of photography, nor the first moment of challenged authority in *Lolita*, and the relationship of humans to photography and to each other would continue to shift over time. In this scene, Humbert and Lolita's relationship is photographic precisely because her shifting, unfixable body and lighted image cause Humbert to doubt if he can physically or "visually possess" (Nabokov 55) her. Photographic technology would advance in effort to more forcefully fix an image on a surface and to "transfer this power to [the operator's] look" (Silverman 1).

To give control back to the eye over the photograph and in attempt to satisfy "the fantasy of 'immediate action' and 'absolute fixation' (Silverman 44), inventors took to chemical processes of capturing a lighted image on silver or copper plates. Daguerre was one of the first, and definitely the most famous, to master this technique. He called the product of the chemical process a daguerreotype. These photographic methods of fixing the image were not nearly as developed as they are today, resulting in many uncertainties in the fixity, durability, and accuracy of the image. Silverman notes,

> Daguerre did not succeed in preserving any of his photographs until 1837, and those that survive are far from "fixed." The daguerreotype has to be angled to be seen, and it shifts in certain positions from a positive to a negative image. It is also extremely fragile, as was already apparent to Daguerre's contemporaries. Since it is produced through the impress of light on a silver-plated surface, rather than the copper beneath this plating, it can be easily rubbed away, and it must be framed behind sealed glass to keep the silver from oxidizing. An odd complaint also surfaces in some of the reviews. "Motion," as one commentator puts it, "escaped [Daguerre], or leaves only vague and uncertain traces." (45)

In a process with so many variables—lighting, plate material, oxidization, subject movement—time became a point of desired control for photographers. If a subject remained still over a long period of time, the photographer could produce a sharper, and more desirable, image. Walter Benjamin, in his “A Short History of Photography,” notes that, “The procedure itself taught the models to live inside rather than outside the moment” (17). As with the camera obscura, though, the world rarely “models.” The operator had more control over the image with the daguerreotype, but still the world of the camera obscura persevered; Daguerre, as did other photographic inventors and reviewers in the mid-nineteenth century, realized that “objects moving are not impressed” (Silverman 47) on their metal plates. The daguerreotype and other chemical photographic practices in the nineteenth century preserved a relic of worldly similitude for just a bit longer than the camera obscura would allow, but the power of analogy persevered; these metallic photographs were merely resemblances, similar to the visual world but vastly different and incomplete in both material fixity and in the capture of moving figures.

In *Lolita,* certain things evade ‘the moment’ of daguerreotypic capture in Humbert’s visual memory precisely because they are in motion, such as Lolita when described as a “small impetuous ghost” (206) as she runs away from Humbert, or Humbert’s “very photogenic mother” (10), whose death by lightening he only partially remembers.[xiii] Moments like these reveal the ephemerality of *photographic* memory and the agency of the world in eluding the deeply human desire to “fix” immediately the image as the reader sees and remembers it.[xiv]

In the retelling of his epic story, as a mode of expressing certain visually compelling memories, Humbert dwells or lingers on scenes, often with nostalgia and fondness. More often than not, Nabokov incorporates daguerreotypic language into Humbert’s narration, positioning the characters of Humbert’s memoir as if they were sitting for a daguerreotype. When picking up

Lolita from camp, before delving into a detailed description of the scene surrounding him, Humbert notes to the reader, "Let me retain for a moment that scene in all its trivial and fateful detail" (110). Again, in remembering the childlike body of a prostitute prior to meeting Lolita, Humbert claims, "This is the reason why I linger gratefully in that gauze-gray room of memory with little Monique" (22). As the reader understands it, this desire to remember and share a scene in all its extraordinary detail originates from his position as a convicted criminal on trial, though the reader may assume his motives are not purely legal.[xv] Some of these remembered scenes are dwelt upon in the past by the younger Humbert; he often confesses to staring at Lolita and other nymphets from afar. Many other remembered scenes are dwelt upon by Humbert the narrator in retrospection, which requires the sustained daguerreotypic return of visual memory and the ability to capture a single remembered vision in words. Ekphrasis in not a new or unique problem, though; it is a Greek term.[xvi] This distinction of Humberts' 'past' and 'present' selves—the 'character' and the 'narrator,' or the 'actor' and the 'author'—introduces another analogy, one that, similarly to the camera obscura and daguerreotype, establishes analogic difference through movement across time. In this way, Humbert the character and Humbert the narrator are both susceptible to Nabokov's implications of instability, ephemerality, and elusiveness that characterize "photographic memory," offering even Humbert the power, through analogy, to move in and fade out of his own narration.[xvii]

In other instances, not by slowing narration, but by connecting fateful events across time, Nabokov authors a broader kind of daguerreotypic practice, one that makes Humbert's process of remembering its own site of photographic development and discovery:

> By the time I reached Beardsley, in the course of the harrowing recapitulation I have now discussed at sufficient length, a complete image had formed in my mind; and through the—always risky—process of elimination I had reduced this image to the only concrete source that morbid cerebration and torpid memory could give it. (252)

Silverman suggests that "the human psyche is another of the places where the photographic image develops" (65), but metaphorizing pairs—recollection and photographic development, the mind and the dark room, memory and photography—each of which carries certain claim to the process of development, introduces a disturbing idea: even with one's own memory, a mental image can form apart from the catalyst of active human imagination.[xviii] Photographic inventor Henry Talbot, competitor of Daguerre, similarly noticed in the mid-nineteenth century that one of his chemically produced photographs, when accidentally left in the light, "unexpectedly developed itself by a spontaneous action" (Silverman 52).[xix] As the operator, or narrator, of this lengthy trial of visual memory, Humbert's use of the passive voice—"a complete image *had formed*"—reveals Nabokov's point—that Humbert's memory is not subject simply to the self-centered narrator's manipulative reasoning, but also to its own momentous power of analogy. Humbert seems to intuit the power Nabokov implies when Humbert attributes the photographic development of his long-term memory to fate; the familiarity of connections across time appears miraculous.[xx] Through this grammatical distinction of passivity and activity, Nabokov recognizes the agency of the world and invites Humbert's disparate memories to participate in the photographic process of retrospective image development and understanding, modeling a relationship of simultaneous active and receptive memory. Even though the remembered image cannot mend the gap between seeing and knowing, or between remembering and understanding, daguerreotypic dwelling opens possibilities for characters, including Humbert, to take ownership of their own image and memory.

Humbert desires the daguerrotypic illusion of paused time in order to attempt to fully describe specific visual moments or to discover analogic connections between significant memories, but his fictional memoir can even be read as an extended exploration of paused time

in narration. Many critics have obsessed over the apparent discrepancy between the length of Humbert's fictionally authored memoir (which comprises the majority of *Lolita*) and the amount of time he spends in jail. Important here is how Nabokov's authorship of Humbert's retrospective narration itself mimics a kind of literary daguerreotype, the success of which would 'ideally' immortalize Lolita and Humbert's story in the reader's memory long after its publication. Humbert professes to Lolita dramatically and, I'll admit, heart-wrenchingly at the novel's close:

> One wanted H. H. to exist at least a couple of months longer, so as to have him make you live in the minds of later generations. 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)

For Nabokov, in a novel exploring the implications of "photographic memory," this kind of immortalization might not be what Humbert intends; "photographic memory," whether singularly Humbert's, the reader's, or culturally collective, does not render its subject exactly as the author-photographer intends, but opens up opportunities for the subject to recreate and reinterpret its own image in our collective consciousness. In this case, one might infer that Nabokov was more complicit than he grumpily protests in Lolita's reinterpretations in popular culture.[xxi] Whether exploitative or not, these diverse adaptations support the case for Lolita's analogic power. The adapting parties, by asserting that their respective interpretations are original, whether literarily accurate or not, multiply what is considered to be '*Lolita*' or 'Lolita.' The multiplication of images only multiplies the range of difference in similitude, and multiplies the gaps between seeing and knowing already implicit in Humbert's own interpretation of Lolita within the novel. With each adaption, it becomes even more difficult to pinpoint exactly who Lolita is and what she even looks like.[xxii] It is suggested that immortality is ephemerally captured in a daguerreotype, so for Lolita to ghostly haunt our modern and even contemporary cultural

consciousness is not to traumatize—Lolita is the victim of trauma, here—but to escape the confines of a metal sheet or even a novel and take the opportunity to reinvent herself in a similarly elusive way.

These photographic relationships of reciprocal image development do not exist only between Humbert and Lolita, but indeed are reproduced between many characters within the text. Besides Lolita, Clare Quilty is arguably the character Humbert most maddens himself trying to 'fix.' The critic David Packman argues the "cryptogrammic paper chase" (23) between Humbert and Quilty is the central plot of visual possession in the novel, and that Humbert's search for Quilty is the most difficult and most important investigation of memory in *Lolita*. I believe that is a drastic overstatement, but Packman does put pressure on the relationship between Humbert and Quilty, one which might be considered photographic, or even more specifically daguerreotypic, in the sense that Quilty's constant motion throughout the narrative allows him to evade Humbert's eye, comprehension, and gun. In the extended chase of Quilty, lasting years, no scene more precisely nor expressively portrays Humbert's difficulty in fixing Quilty and his image than the final one, in which after excessive attempts, Humbert succeeds in killing the elusive man. The joke on the term "shoot" (298) is not lost on the reader. When trying to perform the murder scene that he has visually anticipated in his imagination for years, Humbert demands:

> "Quilty," I said. "I want you to concentrate. You are going to die in a moment. The hereafter for all we know may be an eternal state of excruciating insanity. You smoked your last cigarette yesterday. Concentrate. Try to understand what is happening to you." (297)

In an egotistical move, Humbert demands Quilty be still, both physically and mentally, in order to remember and to understand why his actions toward Lolita—specifically taking her away from him—deserve this fatal punishment. Nabokov elevates the conflation of physical capture and mental conviction with further photographic language in the physical chase scene that

follows, in which Humbert repeatedly shoots Quilty without killing him. Quilty "flash[es]" (302) in and out of rooms with "abrupt movement" (302); Humbert's "slow, clumsy, blind" (303) bullets "caught" (302) Quilty, "wounding him at every blaze" (303); and finally, Humbert "took aim at his head" (303), though Quilty evaded even that shot by "retir[ing] to the master bedroom with a burst of royal purple where his ear had been" (303-4).

When the scene finally ends, Humbert sighs, "The whole sad business had taken more than an hour. He was quiet at last" (304). Far from a feeling of finality or relief, the culmination of shots missed and hit gives Humbert the impression of "a burden even weightier than the one [he] had hoped to get rid of" (304). Like the daguerreotype, the extended period of photographic capture and difficult fixibility of the final product render the photographic operator—in this case, Humbert the shooter—unsatisfied. With repeated shots of a moving subject over a long period of time, Nabokov stages a scene in which memory, specifically guilt and conscience in memory, or Quilty's lack thereof, are indicators of daguerreotypic photographic aptitude. In evading accusation and gunfire, Quilty creates alternate analogic possibilities for himself with each shot. What changes with each take is his recognition of Humbert's serious intentions and the physical bullet marks on his body, but what remains the same with each successive iteration of his shot image is his affirmation of forgotten or flippantly-dismissed memory.

This more violent interpretation of photographic 'shooting' relies on the interpretation of photographic technology as a tool for 'taking' instead of a process of 'receiving,' and as such, resembles more modern conceptions of the camera. Silverman notes about our contemporary moment:

> We have grown accustomed to thinking of the camera as an aggressive device: an instrument for shooting, capturing, and representing the world. Since most cameras require an operator, and it is usually a human hand that picks up the apparatus, points it in a particular direction,

> makes the necessary technical adjustments, and clicks the camera button, we often transfer the power to our look. (1)

Much chemical troubleshooting and many portable iterations were necessary to reach this kind of camera, and for epistemological concerns about similitude, image 'receiving' and 'taking,' and operative control to shift accordingly. When chemical photographers finally found ways to fix the image, they sought to make photography more easily controllable and accessible for the 'every man' (Silverman 83). Early iterations of the camera—including the daguerreotype camera, pistolgraph, and revolver camera—tried to remove visible complexity from devices' operations in attempt to reduce required skill for users.[xxiii] This in turn flattened the distance between the camera and the human eye, rendering the gap between seeing and knowing, however present, practically invisible. To view through a lens the scene of imminent capture gave the impression that one can see "what the camera is 'seeing'" (Silverman 72). In many cases, the language used to explain the mechanics that make the camera function, "instead of humanizing the camera, it mechanizes the human look" (Silverman 81).

In *Lolita,* such a mechanized look practically credits Humbert's detailed but humanly flawed process of remembering with the assumed mechanical accuracy of the modern camera. However, the device's democratization would have a two-fold effect on the relationship between humans and the visible world: people would assume images are for taking and making, not receiving; but also without much skill or time, they would have the ability to participate more accessibly in the photographic process, as Nabokov's characters do. Though the similarity that keeps photographic analogy cohered would appear to collapse in modern photography, there always remains a sliver of difference, which keeps the analogic power of the image, and of Nabokov's characters, alive as subjects in the modern image.

While at Ramsdale with both Hazes, before things really got out of hand, Humbert scribes a secret journal entry in which Nabokov coopts modern photographic mechanical language to communicate Humbert's assumed and desired control over his eye and mind—manipulated and operated, at this point in time, at a 'safe' distance. This is the same book Humbert earlier claims to remember with "photographic memory."

> *Thursday*. Very warm day. From a vantage point (bathroom window) saw Dolores taking things off a clothesline in the apple-green light behind the house. Strolled out. She wore a plaid shirt, blue jeans and sneakers. Every movement she made in the dappled sun plucked at the most secret and sensitive chord of my abject body…God, what agony, that silky shimmer above her temple grading into bright brown hair. And the little bone twitching at the side of her dust-powdered ankle…The glistening tracery of down on her forearm. When she got up to take in the wash, I had a chance of adoring from afar the faded seat of her rolled up jeans. Out on the lawn, bland Mrs. Haze, complete with camera grew up like a fakir's fake tree and after some heliotropic fussing—sad eyes, glad eyes down—had the cheek of taking my picture as I sat blinking on the steps, Humbert le Bel. (original emphasis) (41)

On a very warm Thursday, Humbert spots Lolita "from a vantage point" through another kind of glass lens—a window. His description of her body, clothing, and the details of her movement mimic a camera lens focusing in and out to get a clear image, while also referencing daguerreotypic practices of dwelling on the photographic subject. Early chemical photography is modernized in this passage, though. Art, literature, and cultural studies scholar Mieke Bal discusses a similar effect of modern photographic mechanization in the narration of, unsurprisingly, Proust. Describing what she calls the "focalization" of the author's "mental vision," Bal notes that the literary appropriation of photographic technology "can be seen at work in the cutting-out of details, in the conflictual dialectic between the near and the far, and in certain 'zoom' effects… It appears in the focusing, when the image oscillates between clarity and indistinction" (Silverman 119).[xxiv] Proust's use of modern photographic practices in his narration works toward a different end than Nabokov's, though; for Proust, these mechanical shifts are, like dreams, "only multitudinous 'becomings'" (Silverman 120) without authorial

agency, but for Nabokov, the mechanism of the camera allows for an active, yet reciprocal development of his narrator's mental vision. The photographable image is summoned by Humbert's gaze, while simultaneously 'becoming' itself in that stare: "Every movement she made in the dappled sun plucked at the most secret and sensitive chord of my abject body." There is also a tension between similarity and difference in the "oscillat[ion] between clarity and indistinction," which characterizes this mechanical narration. It is this uncertainty, key in analogy, which keeps Nabokov's characters, namely Lolita and Charlotte, alive in this mechanized mental vision. Reciprocity in image development would not be possible in the same ways were it not for the democratization of the newly portable, hand-held, modern camera.

Amidst Humbert's unreliable narration of this scene and the novel at large, which gives the reader a one-sided, perspective-driven account of his story, Charlotte takes the opportunity to capture her world using a modern camera. In contrast to Lolita's flickering "clarity and indistinction," Humbert observes Charlotte photographing himself. She emerges "like a fakir's fake tree," which I assume connotes a demystified, possibly superfluous appearance in the periphery of Humbert's visual frame.[xxv] Humbert is obviously annoyed by Charlotte's intrusion in his scene of visual pleasure, but "having the cheek," she insists on a photographic memento, specifically one where Humbert, the object of her romantic affection, is captured in the light of the sun.[xxvi] After Humbert recounts his multiple lines of 'zooming' vision—from the window, from the lawn, from far, from near, in the sun, in the shade—Charlotte's camera interrupts his photographic vision and introduces another line of sight, for herself and for the reader—an "alternate vision" (163).[xxvii] The focus shifts from Humbert's gaze on Lolita to other possibilities, namely Charlotte's gaze on Humbert. Assuming the narrator-given role as jury, the

reader, like Charlotte, wants also to put Humbert behind the lens to investigate his story and own image.

The similar medium but different object of focus chosen by Humbert and Charlotte introduces an analogic tension between the flirting lines of photographic possibility and the multiplicity of narrative perspectives in *Lolita*. When the reader asks, “What does Charlotte really see?” he or she also means, “What does Charlotte really think?” In this scene, Charlotte’s possession and positioning of her camera shifts the reader’s relationship to Humbert’s narration; to pursue the metaphor between the mind and the camera with intent, I propose her aimed camera offers alternate perspectives in a narrative overwhelmed by Humberts.’ In a text narrated as *Lolita* is, the suggestion of multiple perspectives is only that. Like the ephemerality of early photographic technologies, the modern camera enables characters to evade not only Humbert, but also the reader. These possibilities expose doubt in a singular remembered narrative, and enable certain agency for Charlotte in her visual representation, and for the reader in visual interpretation.

The democratization of the camera broadened the number and kinds of people who could connect with the world through photographic relationships of reciprocity, even as it presented photography as a simple tool lacking a complex process of dual agency. Another illusion developed simultaneously because of the modern camera’s invisible and immediate mechanization of the process of image capture and reproduction: “That the photographs that arrived in the mail were the exact positive equivalents of the negatives that were in the camera when it was shipped off—that the governing principle of photography is ‘sameness’” (Silverman 83). With the rise of modern industrialized photography came the decline of the medium’s popular claim to originality. Some theorists, like Benjamin, believed that the quick and relatively

reliable means of modern photographic reproduction killed the uniqueness of a photograph, thus rendering an image that "doesn't originate in the world; it is, rather, a reproduction, generated by a machine" (Silverman 135).[xxviii] If an image doesn't come from the world, then, according to Benjamin, it loses its 'aura' and its ability to haunt (Silverman 135), which the subjects of early photographs, especially daguerreotypes, maintain. For Benjamin, the ease and accessibility of camera use had the unintended effect of un-animating the photograph, rendering its subjects immortalized and mortified. In response to this modernist deadening of the mass-produced image, Silverman summons a passage from Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* from which she titles her book and with which she ultimately claims, "only 'the miracle of analogy' can lift this spell, and reanimate what the psyche has mortified" (118).[xxix] According to her argument, photographic analogy has the power to rediscover difference between images, people, and the world and to challenge the modern, and even contemporary conception that to reproduce is to copy the *same* image. Instead, that reproduction has the potential, even, to surmount the original; there is always some element of difference that propels photographic analogy forward, and sometimes beyond.

Humbert narrates this phenomenon in *Lolita* when he first sees Lolita. Her image immediately strikes him because she reminds him of his first love from years before—Annabel. However, Humbert the narrator reflects on his later discovery that this 'copied' reproduction would soon "eclipse her prototype."

> I was still walking behind Mrs. Haze through the dining room when, beyond it, there came a sudden burst of greenery—"the piazza," sang out my leader, and then, without the least warning, a blue sea-wave swelled under my heart and, from a mat in a pool of sun, half-naked, kneeling, turning about on her knees, there was my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses. It was the same child—the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair. A polka-dotted black kerchief tied around her chest hid from my aging ape eyes, but not from the gaze of young memory, the juvenile breasts I had fondled one immortal day. And, as if I were the

> fairy-tale nurse of some little princess (lost, kidnaped, discovered in gypsy rags through which her nakedness smiled at the king and his hounds), I recognized the tiny dark-brown mole on her side. With awe and delight (the king crying for joy, the trumpets blaring, the nurse drunk) I saw again her lovely indrawn abdomen where my southbound mouth had briefly paused; and those puerile hips on which I had kissed the crenulated imprint left by the band of her shorts—that last mad immortal day behind the "Roches Roses." The twenty-five years I had lived since then tapered to a palpitating point, and vanished. I find it most difficult to express with adequate force that flash, that shiver, that impact of passionate recognition. In the course of the sun-shot moment that my glance slithered over the kneeling child (her eyes blinking over those stern dark spectacles—the little Herr Doktor who was to cure me of all my aches) while I passed by her in my adult disguise (a great big handsome hunk of movieland manhood), the vacuum of my soul managed to suck in every detail of her bright beauty, and these I checked against the features of my dead bride. A little later, of course, she, this *nouvelle*, this Lolita, *my* Lolita, was to eclipse completely her prototype. (original emphasis) (39-40)

With "the gaze of young memory," Humbert "saw again" Annabel in the resemblance of similar visual details on Lolita's body, even visually "check[ing]" the latter against his memory of the former. This moment of "passionate recognition" surprises Humbert: "without the least bit of warning," the "sun-shot moment" of unmistakable similarity reveals itself to Humbert, and he is subject to the power of analogy harbored by Lolita and Annabel's overlapping images. He describes the scene as if it were a single visual moment suspended, and instantaneously collapsed, in time. In this process of remembered return, the years between Annabel and Lolita seem to fold over themselves into a dwindling memory of time past: "The twenty-five years I had lived since then tapered to a palpitating point, and vanished." The element of temporality that was understood to be intrinsic to early photographic practices, and which imbued undisputed difference and uniqueness to the image, seems to have collapsed in Humbert's narration of this moment. He seems to suggest that a period of time can shrink in one's memory to such extent that similarities across time appear to be the same in an undistinguishable moment. However, Lolita's mole is not the 'same' as Annabel's; Nabokov cleverly distinguishes between Humbert's insistence on 'sameness,' and photography's insistence on 'similarity' with the term

“recognition.” Lolita and Annabel are not the same, and Lolita, even, would soon “eclipse” Annabel”—outshining (or overshadowing) the girl who Humbert assumes is the negative from which Lolita was copied.[xxx] Only photographic similarity could allow for such a relationship between assumed mechanical reproductions.

This is not the first or only time Humbert mistakes similarity for sameness. He, too, believes that he, as the author of his memoir, has the power, through visual memory, to reproduce Lolita’s image. His assets of visual observation and memory he falsely assumes absent him of consequences that might result from any possessive relationship not exclusively visual. However, Humbert’s relationship with Lolita would become inappropriately physical, and the implications of even a visual encounter do not necessarily divert blame.[xxxi] As already depicted, the modern camera can act as another kind of weapon, albeit not physically harmful. Important to note, though, is that one’s image and memory are not as separate from the body as one might assume. As a result, when Humbert claims visual possession over his imaginative vision of Lolita, as Nabokov suggests, Lolita herself maintains difference in similarity, thus gaining agency in the ephemerality of her images’ multiplication.

> 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. And nothing prevented me from repeating a performance that affected her as little as if she were a photographic image, rippling upon a screen and I a humble hunchback abusing myself in the dark. (62)

By Nabokov’s expert craftsmanship, Humbert, though claiming operative ownership over Lolita’s reproduced image, subtly admits the elusiveness of Lolita’s image. “His creation” is not an exact replica, secured in time and on paper, but fluidly inconstant, “overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her…” A recurring question is, “What ownership *does* Humbert have over his visual memory?” Compared to Humbert’s later physical manipulation and molestation,

his possession of Lolita's image in his memory appears, as Humbert asserts, to be inconsequential. Compared to the image's prototype, the image, in fact, has "no will, no consciousness—indeed no life of her own." Biologically, this may be the case, but as Silverman argues, there is another kind of life imbued into photography, which occurs by a tension between similarity and difference, and which opens possibilities for its subjects to take some sort of ownership of their own image. In this sense, Humbert's assertion unravels; the multiplication of Lolita's image, however "madly possessed" is not completed detached from the 'original' image of Lolita herself, and it is not exactly the same. Analogy extends the reach of Lolita's image and influence, and it keeps herself and her multiple re-interpretations inextricably connected.[xxxii] Thus, visual reproductions of her, indeed having "li[ves] of [their] own," insist that visual possession is not "nothing"—that there are consequences to "abusing [oneself] in the dark."

To return to Humbert's parallel of Annabel and Lolita earlier, Annabel, in her ghostly, revisited memory asserts her difference in similarity and her agency in the reproduction of her own image, despite the modern age's obsession with immediate photographic capture, and Humbert's obsession with her and her replica, Lolita. When remembering with nostalgia a "snapshot" taken during his summer with Annabel, both the girl and photograph of which are now lost, Humbert narrates:

> Annabel did not come out well, caught as she was in the act of bending over her *chocolat glacé,* and her thin bare shoulders and the parting in her hair were about all that could be identified (as I remember that picture) amid the sunny blur into which her lost loveliness graded… (original emphasis) (13)

Motion did not only stump Daguerre, but even evades the quick, sharp, and sometimes dangerous aim of the modern camera. Immortalized as a "sunny blur," Annabel, unlike Lolita, resists identification and recognition. Only by "her thin bare shoulders and the parting in her hair" can Humbert visually locate and catalog Annabel's place in that photograph and in his

memory. Annabel's blurred image remains as such in both the lost photograph and in Humbert's memory of that photograph. The distinction between photographed and visually remembered past is hazy, as well, but what remains clear in Nabokov's composition, with "dramatic conspicuousness" (13), is actually Humbert, whose perception of time past and time "lost" is similar, but registered as indistinguishably the same.

Lolita, though identified as Annabel's visual duplicate, also stumps Humbert's visual and physical possession, evading his memory using the very element of modern industrialized photography that critics claim collapses similarity into sameness: the ceaseless and immediate capability to reproduce one's image. Essential to Humbert's definition and classification of the nymphet is age. As he explains, "Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic" (16). Humbert believes such relationships across age have precedence in other historical and literary relationships, but suggests that for him, his sexual obsession with nymphets may have begun with Annabel, herself. He further suggests that the thrill of inappropriate (and illegal) sexual activity is because, "It is a question of focal adjustment, of a certain distance that the inner eye thrills to surmount, and a certain contrast that the mind perceives with a gasp of perverse delight" (17). This thrilling gap lies between the age of the girl and the age of the man, as well as between Annabel's loss long ago and Lolita's sudden return in the piazza. But Nabokov challenges Humbert's claim to 'sameness'; these temporal distances, whether between Humbert and Lolita's ages, or between Annabel's and Lolita's sightings, do not collapse into sameness, nor dissolve the time that has passed in between. Lolita defies Humbert's expectations for a copy, a second, or a returned Annabel, and

instead grows to become practically unrecognizable—creating for herself iterations of her own image, which resist classification or capture in Humbert's memory.

As an aging female body, changing incrementally and continuously over time, Lolita maintains agency in the reproduction of her own image as it grows and as it sexually matures. Humbert fears the day Lolita will become a teenager, and this fear fuels his desperately possessive road trip with her.[xxxiii] But no matter how carefully Humbert the road tripper watches, and no matter how vividly Humbert the author remembers, Lolita cannot remain fixed as a nymphet. Nabokov photographically authors the moment Humbert realizes this horror—photographic in the sense that despite Humbert's "mechanical" gaze, Lolita in her aging body stares back.

> As she sprawled there, biting at a hangnail and mocking me with her heartless vaporous eyes, and all the time rocking a stool upon which she had placed the heel of an outstretched shoeless foot, I perceived all at once with a sickening qualm how much she had changed since I first met her two years ago. Or had this happened during those last two weeks? *Tendresse?* Surely that was an exploded myth. She sat right in the focus of my incandescent anger. The fog of all lust had been swept away leaving nothing but this dreadful lucidity. Oh, she had changed! … As in terror I lowered my gaze, it mechanically slid along the underside of her tensely stretched bare thigh—how polished and muscular her legs had grown! She kept her wide-set eyes, clouded-glass gray and slightly bloodshot, fixed upon me, and I saw the stealthy thought showing through them that perhaps after all Mona was right, and she, orphan Lo, could expose me without getting penalized herself. How wrong I was. How mad I was! Everything about her was of the same exasperating impenetrable order.... I was struck by a ghastly recollection—the evoked image not of Monique, but of another young prostitute in a bell-house, ages ago, who had been snapped up by somebody else before I had time to decide whether her mere youth warranted my risking some appalling disease… (original emphasis) (203-4)

"The focus of…incandescent anger" on Lolita, Humbert realizes in a flash, with "dreadful lucidity," that Lolita had changed; "Oh, she had changed!" This sudden change, unlike Humbert's sudden recognition in the scene on the piazza, renders Lolita unrecognizable as herself. Humbert instead perceives an analogy between Lolita's aging body and the body of a prostitute from years before—a teenager and a stranger. Silverman summons Henri Bergson to

discuss the phenomenon of perceived change over time, the lesson of which applies to photography and to people:

> Everything "changes at every moment," he writes in *Creative Evolution*. It also does so "*without ceasing*." There is, consequently, no such thing as a form; there is only *formation*. These infinitesimal metamorphoses are, however, imperceptible to the human eye. When "successive images" differ slightly, we consider them all as "the waxing and waning of a single *mean* image," and when a body alters enough to "overcome the inertia of our perception," we say that it has "changed form."[xxxiv] (original emphasis) (47-8)

With this understanding of 'form' and 'formation,' age becomes a means by which characters like Lolita, and even Annabel and Charlotte, can become agents in the reproduction of their own images.[xxxv] Sly and gradual, like Nabokov in his evocation of photography in this novel, Lolita's image changes ever so slightly with each passing day, until, when she "overcomes the inertia of [Humbert's] perception"—or when the difference between her body yesterday and her body today becomes large enough to notice—Humbert and the reader alike are reminded of the power that photographic analogy offers. Humbert would be reminded again of Lolita's kinetic growth and of the impossibility of nymphetic immobility or immortality when he visits Lolita three years after her disappearance, and finds her older, married, and pregnant—"only the faint violet whiff and dead leaf echo of the nymphet I had rolled myself upon with such cries in the past" (277).

Provocatively paraphrasing Benjamin, Silverman notes, "As the frame around the photographic image also compels the reader to see, every disclosure is a partial disclosure—the world vastly exceeds our capacity to see it, even with the assistance of the camera" (140). As Silverman argues, photography, no matter how easily or accurately reproduced, can never be the same as either its negative or the world's image. By the end of the novel, Humbert admits the realization that he does not know everything about Lolita, and that she will forever be mysterious to him.[xxxvi] The notion that the world, including the characters of *Lolita*, evades even the mechanized eye and continues to exceed the human one is a twentieth- and twenty-first century

epistemological concern that reveals, with even dry technology, there remains room for agency in the image. This models one of Silverman's main points: that "[the world] exceeds our optical capacities, but also…nature "speaks" a different language to the camera than it does to the human eye: one based on analogy" (141).

In one of the final scenes of the novel, Humbert searches deep in the *Gazette* archive for a photograph taken years earlier at The Enchanted Hunters, where he and Lolita had their first *soirée* together, in which he suspects his candid figure was caught in "a blinding flash" (127) from a stray newsman's camera. Upon returning to the photograph, Humbert finds his figure lost, unpreserved, and ephemeral—"nothing of myself could I make out" (262-3). Humbert tries to get as close as he can to a photographic record of a treasured memory—a moment now unattainable except through memory, or, he thinks, photography. In *Lolita*, Nabokov's invocation of "photographic memory" is not a means of exact record or possessed visual preservation, but instead a mode of memory that invites reciprocity and participation in image-making. The reader, too, has invitation to reinterpret their place among characters and narrator alike, as shown in this scene, who have agency through the analogic power of photography, both to capture their own image and to evade the photograph. To what extent Nabokov extends or distributes his authorship is up for question. But by seeing the world differently, through Silverman's account of photography, the reader can see Nabokov differently—as an author who welcomes instability and lack of single-minded authorial control, without sacrificing care, cleverness, or optimism. In that newspaper photograph, what is reanimated is not Humbert as he remembers himself, per se, but the desire of characters, including Humbert, to perceive and preserve their own image in a flash of light.

Notes:

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[i] There are many examples in *Lolita* in which photographs are dismissed by characters as extraneous bits of ephemera. See pages 19, 23, 58, and 69 for "some more pictures," over which Humbert is "just winking happy thoughts into a little tiddle cup"; for "an advertisement in a lewd magazine" and "a collection of rather formal photographs in a rather soiled album"; for a magazine from which Lolita shows Humbert the inappropriate "Picture of the Week," swiftly after which Humbert "whisked the whole obscene thing away"; and "a full-page ad ripped out of a slick magazine," on which "Lo had drawn a jocose arrow to the haggard lover's face and had put, in block letter: H.H." Of more significant moments, there is one where Lolita squints, "So what?" over Humbert's nostalgia for familiar postcards (155-6). There is also the time when Lolita describes her camp activities: "'Oh yes, last but not least, as Mother says—Now let me see—what was it? I know: We made shadowgraphs. Gee what fun.' '*C'est bien tout?'"* (115). The translation of the French phrase is, "Is that all?"

[ii] Green cites Brian Boyd from his 1990 *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years,* which was the first volume of the first major critical biography of Nabokov.

[iii] Green cites Vladimir Nabokov from his 1973 *Strong Opinions*, a collection of interviews, articles, and editorials of Nabokov, in which he discusses life and literature, among other things.

[iv] For his own eloquent elucidation of haunting, trauma, and surprise in the photograph, see Roland Barthes' 1981 *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography.*

[v] Alfred Appel, a leading scholar and previous student of Nabokov, in his 1974 *Nabokov's Dark Cinema*, famously authored a discursive account of the role of film in Nabokov's work and its connection to film adaptations of his work, including *Lolita*'s 1962 cinematic debut by Stanley Kubrick. After Appel's publication, *Lolita* would be reinterpreted much differently in Adrian Lyne's 1997 adaptation. Though cinema is not of interest to me in this project, due primarily to Humbert's insistence on a *photographic* memory, the historical, thematic, and epistemological connections between film and photography cannot be ignored, especially the latter's constitution of the former. Certain critics, such as David Packman, privilege film over photography, arguing for film's more dynamic capabilities in representing Lolita's image (49). I, along with Jacobs, am not convinced by Packman's line of argument, and prefer to follow a line of inquiry that doesn't posit film against photography. Instead, I view the two as siblings in image representation and reproduction.

[vi] See Wood's 1994 *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction,* in which he argues that despite Nabokov's controlled, and possibly contrived, public appearance and literary style, that doubt endures from the author's difficult biographical past, specifically the loss of his family and his exiled status as a Russian speaking and writing in English in the United States. The instability Wood sees in Nabokov's writing, I see as well, but Wood locates that instability in Nabokov's biography, not in his invocation of "photographic memory." See Herbold's 1998/1999 essay "'(I have camouflaged everything, my love)': *Lolita* and the Woman Reader" for her passionate critical reinterpretation and defense of Lolita and *Lolita* from the perspective

of a female reader. She argues that Nabokov “covertly acknowledge[s]” (75) a female readership, which “activates and legitimizes” (75) the female reader through the tension between pleasure and a gendered morality.

[vii] Jacobs provides an excellent catalog of many of the numerous instances of photography in *Lolita* in the Postscript to her 2001 book *The Eye’s Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture.*

[viii] Jacobs cites Heidegger from his 1977 essay “The Age of the World Picture.”

[ix] Jacobs points to a particular scene in *Lolita* on page 20*,* in which she argues Nabokov reveals the kind of gap between seeing and knowing Humbert repeatedly falls for and falls into. In this scene, Humbert recalls his horror at having “gratif[ied]” himself at the image of a nymphet changing in the window across the street, only to realize too late that his eye was mistaken—the “tender pattern of nudity” was instead “the disgusting lamp-lit bare arm of a man in his underclothes reading his paper by the open window.” Humbert is attracted to the mystery and allure of this photographic relationship, but Nabokov ensures his trust in the image is unsure, and the subject of his exploitative gaze is not as it appears.

[x] At a later moment, Nabokov metaphorizes Humbert’s guilt in a similar “lighted house of glass” (180). Like the camera obscura, the architecture of a room or a house in Humbert’s world is a site of photographic participation. The activities Humbert participates in inside his home, though, are ones that should be brought to light.

[xi] Silverman cites Leonardo da Vinci from James S. Ackerman’s 1978 essay “Leonardo’s Eye,” published in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes.*

[xii] Lolita challenges Humbert’s physical and visual control throughout the novel by moving from one point to another across time. Such movement is often secretive and suspicious, which increases the gap between seeing and knowing that Humbert experiences. A pun of Nabokov’s worth mentioning appears after a period of time elapsed when Humbert had lost Lolita; after he finds her suspiciously different than last he saw her, he cries, “Lo and Behold” (162). Lo beheld maintains the same properties as Lo lost, except her image is ghostly not because it is invisible, but because it carries traces of time past unknown by Humbert. Humbert recognizes these moments with despair: “…No matter how closely I controlled her leisure, there would constantly occur unaccounted-for time leaks with over-elaborate explanations to stop them up in retrospect” (187).

[xiii] Humbert’s memory (or lack thereof) of his mother’s death is worth quoting in full for its suggestion of remembered past as lighted and forgotten memories as lost in the darkness: “My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three, and, save for a pocket of warmth in the darkest past, nothing of her subsists within the hollows and dells of memory, over which, if you can still stand my style (I am writing under observation), the sun of my infancy had set: surely, you all know those redolent remnants of day suspended, with the

midges, about some hedge in bloom or suddenly entered and traversed by the rambler, at the bottom of a hill, in the summer dusk; a furry warmth, golden midges" (10).

[xiv] Nabokov employs the term "fixed" often in Humbert's phraseology, knowingly affecting the opposite—Lolita's unfixability. A poignant example of this term in use comes from Humbert: "A greater endeavor lures me on: to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (134).

[xv] Humbert claims that he "dwell[s]" for this very reason. He notes, "If I dwell at some length on the tremors and gropings of that distant night, it is because I insist upon proving that I am not, and never was, and never could have been, a brutal scoundrel" (131). At another moment, he invites the jury reader to join him in the process of legally restorative recollection: "I want my learned readers to participate in the scene I am about to replay; I want them to examine its every detail and see for themselves how careful, how chaste, the whole wine-sweet event is if viewed with what my lawyer has called, in a private talk we have had, 'impartial sympathy'" (57).

[xvi] There are many times when Humbert addresses the difficulty of communicating a visual scene, especially a visually compelling one, in words. See pages 39, 44, 97, and 269 for "difficult[y] to express with adequate force that flask, that shiver, that impact of passionate recognition"; for difficulty "describ[ing] her face, her ways…If I close my eyes I see but an immobilized fraction of her, a cinematographic still…"; for a burden, "I have to put the impact of an instantaneous vision into a sequence of words; their physical accumulation in the page impairs the actual flash, the sharp unity of impression…"; and for the admission, "Only two seconds had passed really, but let me give them as much wooden duration as life can stand."

[xvii] A literal example of Humbert fading in and out of his own narration occurs when his memory blacks in and out in a maddening haze after finding out that someone else, the mystery man Clare Quilty, had already picked up Lolita from the hospital: "After some lapses and losses common to dream sequences, I found myself in the reception room, trying to beat up the doctor…" (246).

[xviii] Nabokov, an author who "imaginatively fashion[s] and 'refashion[s]' memories 'retrospectively,'" admits Humbert's lack of control over his imaginative memory: "When I try to analyze my own cravings, motives, actions and so forth, I surrender to a sort of retrospective imagination which feeds the analytic faculty with boundless alternatives and which causes each visualized route to fork and re-fork without end in the maddeningly complex prospect of my past" (13). This kind of "retrospective imagination" seems less a tool and more a "maddeningly" expansive web of remembered possibilities. Daguerreotypically dwelling on this web of memory would not lead to a clear image, lending retrospective clarity to Humbert's narrative; instead, Humbert's mind and memory become a messy laboratory with more than one photographer.

[xix] Silverman cites William Henry Fox Talbot from his "Letter to the Editor" in issue number 1258, dated February 19, 1841, of *The Literary Gazette; and Journal of the Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, etc.*

[xx] See Humbert's description of the scene on page 103, where he attributes to "precise fate"—also called "that synchronizing phantom"—the perfect "mix…within its alembic the car and the

dog and the sun and the shade and the wet and the weak and the strong and the stone…" This phraseology, too, evokes chemical processes both of the development of the accident that felled Charlotte, and of the development of Humbert's retrospective understanding of the incident in the "alembic" of his visual memory.

[xxi] Graham Vickers argues in his 2008 *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov's Little Girl All Over Again*, that there is a particular susceptibility of Lolita, the character and the book, to misinterpretation and misunderstanding by popular culture. Turning to publication and reception history, Vickers attempts to explain what he considers to be cultural exploitation of the deceased child character and of Nabokov's declared intent—that *Lolita* is not pornographic, nor dismissive. I might suggest, based on my exploration of photographic memory in this essay, that Lolita's status as an image causes her to be especially susceptible to cultural misinterpretation and adaptation.

[xxii] See Alfred Appel's book in endnote *v* for more discussion on *Lolita*'s many adaptations.

[xxiii] A pistolgraph reveals odd technological priorities and psychological desires in the mid-to-late nineteenth century moment; maybe Humbert's linguistic fusion of gun and camera with the term term "shoot" exhibits a larger human desire to control or fix the world.

[xxiv] Silverman cites Mieke Bal from her 1997 *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually.*

[xxv] According to Oxford English Dictionaries, a *fakir* is, "A Muslim (or, loosely, a Hindu) religious ascetic who lives solely on alms." Though I could not find any specific reference to "fake trees," fakirs are thought to have divinely ordained powers and the ability to perform miracles. Some skeptics have taken it upon themselves to prove the fakirs' magic as mere tricks, perhaps revealing a magic tree to be fake.

[xxvi] Oxford English Dictionaries defines *heliotropism* as, "The directional growth of a plant in response to sunlight."

[xxvii] Besides Charlotte, there are also moments when Humbert himself sees multiple lines of possible vision, both in the past and in his memory of the past. These almost hallucinatory experiences open up more "alternate vision[s]", which cause the reader to distrust Humbert's confidently conveyed narrative. For an example: "I glanced around, and noticed Lo in white shorts receding through the speckled shadow of a garden path in the company of a tall man who carried two tennis rackets. I sprang after them, but as I was crashing through the shrubbery, I saw, in an alternate vision, as if life's course constantly branched, Lo, in slacks, and her companion, in shorts, trudging up and down a small weedy area, and beating bushes with their rackets in listless search for their last lost ball. I itemize these sunny nothings mainly to prove to my judges that I did everything in my power to give my Lolita a really good time" (163). See endnote *xviii* for another example in which "each visualized route…fork[s] and re-fork[s]."

[xxviii] Silverman cites Benjamin from his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproduction."

[xxix] Silverman cites Proust's 1913 seven-volume novel *In Search of Lost Time.*

[xxx] It is worth noting that this is not the only time Humbert explicitly recognizes his mistake in conflating Lolita and Annabel: "I should have understood that Lolita had *already* proved to be something quite different from innocent Annabel" (125).

[xxxi] Humbert, indeed, claims to be able to "visualize Lolita with hallucinational lucidity," particularly her "measurements," by remembering their intimate, physical interactions, including "her warm weight in my lap" (107). The physical and the visual are intimately linked, and the one is as inseparable from the other as a photographic negative is from its print. Similarly, the one has risk to bleed into the next; for example, Humbert confesses, "But I still hoped she might gradually be engulfed in a completeness of stupor that would allow me to taste more than a glimmer of her" (131). As depicted in the hotel scene, staged like a camera obscura, fixity of body and image are sometimes indistinguishable, and desire for one is not mutually exclusive from desire for the other.

[xxxii] There are many scenes in which characters see multiple Lolitas, due to joyous spontaneity, mistaken identity, or maddening desperation. See pages 108, 183, and 224 for "phantom little Lolitas"; for a mistaken neighbor who "had multiplied my unique Lolita by the number of sartorial categories his downcast moody eye had glimpsed during a whole series of her appearances: blue jeans, a skirt, shorts, a quilted robe"; and for "panting, scrambling, laughing, panting Lolitas who dissolved in their haze."

[xxxiii] Humbert fears, "I knew I had fallen in love with Lolita forever; but I also knew she would not be forever Lolita. She would be thirteen on January 1. In two years or so she would cease being a nymphet and would turn into a "young girl," and then, into a "college girl"—that horror of horrors" (68).

[xxxiv] Silverman cites Henri Bergson from his 1907 *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell in 1998.

[xxxv] Age as a mode of photographic reproduction also applies to generational aging. Genealogical iterations posit the female body as a producer of life and reproducer of one's own genes. The balance of similarity and difference is vital to gene function biologically, and engenders similarly multiplicative growth photographically. Nabokov draws attention to the generationally photographic possibilities of the female reproductive body when Humbert requires old photographs of nymphet-age Charlotte in order to perform his "nightly duty" (76); when Lolita's mannerisms Humberts recognizes with fascination and hesitant attraction in Charlotte's behavior (76); and when Humbert secretly wishes Lolita to "produce eventually a nymphet with [his] blood in her exquisite veins, a Lolita the Second, who would be eight or nine around 1960, when [he] would still be *dans la force de l'âge…*" (174). The translation of the French phrase is, "At the height of his life." Another point of interest: Humbert crosses metaphors of womanhood, foliage, and time in his description of seeking the young girl in Charlotte: "So I tom-peeped across the hedges of years, into wan little windows. And when, by means of pitifully ardent, naively lascivious caresses, she of the noble nipple and massive thigh prepared me for the

performance of my nightly duty, it was still a nymphet's scent that in despair I tried to pick up, as I bayed through the undergrowth of dark decaying forests." (76-7)

[xxxvi] Nearing the end of the novel, Humbert reflects on a time when Lolita made a passing comment about death and loneliness, and he realized that he "simply did not know a thing about [his] darling's mind…" (284). There are many other memories Humbert stirs up at the novel's close, many of which he regrets he had "smothered" (284) or "ignore[d]" (283) for the sake of "enjoy[ing] my phantasms in peace" (283). Memories may be suppressed, but the characters and the memories themselves obviously talked back in the developing room of Humbert's mind. They cannot be forgotten.

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