“A few little lies never hurt anyone. Right?”

Unreliability and Power Relations in the novels *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov and *Notes on a Scandal* by Zoë Heller
Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study on the novels Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov and Notes on a Scandal by Zoë Heller. The main protagonists are examined, in pairs, in order to better understand the terms “victim” and “victimiser” and how one person can, according to their environment, be the one, the other or even both. The thesis provides an overview of the two novels and examines two main themes, the narrator’s unreliability, a literary device originally coined by Wayne Booth, and power relations, a theory introduced by Michel Foucault. In the first part of the thesis, with the help of the unreliable narrator’s literary device, it was examined how the narrators use their unreliability in order to hide their madness and obsessive behaviours from their readership and to legitimize the crime of pederasty. In the second part, with the help of the power relations theory, the relations between the main protagonists and the minors, as well as the rest of the characters, were examined and analyzed based on societal and gender based criteria, and this thesis proved that the power relations the victimisers form differ because of their place in the patriarchal society.

Keywords: Comparative Literature, Unreliable Narrator, Power Relations, Victim, Patriarchy

Σύνοψη

Η εργασία αυτή πρόκειται για μια συγκριτική μελέτη των μυθιστορημάτων Lolita του Vladimir Nabokov και Notes on a Scandal της Zoë Heller. Οι κύριοι πρωταγωνιστές των έργων θα αναλυθούν σε ζεύγη, έτσι ώστε να δοθεί ένας πιο διαρρηκτικός ορισμός στους όρους «θύμα» και «θύτης» και να γίνει κατανοητό πώς ένα άτομο, σύμφωνα με τις καταστάσεις που βιώνει, μπορεί να υπάρξει είτε το πρώτο, είτε το δεύτερο, είτε και τα δύο. Η εργασία παρουσιάζει μια γενικευμένη περίληψη των δύο έργων και εξετάζει δύο κεντρικές ιδέες, δηλαδή την αναξιοπιστία του αφηγητή, όρος που επινοήθηκε από τον Wayne Booth, και τις σχέσεις εξουσίας, μια θεωρία του Michel Foucault. Στο πρώτο κεφάλαιο της εργασίας, με την βοήθεια της λογοτεχνικής θεωρίας περί αναξιοπιστίας του αφηγητή, εξετάστηκε το πώς οι αφηγητές χρησιμοποιούν την αναξιοπιστία τους για να κρύψουν την τρέλα και τις εμμονικές τους συμπεριφορές από τους αναγνώστες, αλλά και για να δικαιολογήσουν το έγκλημα της παιδοφιλίας. Στο δεύτερο κεφάλαιο, με την βοήθεια της θεωρίας περί
σχέσεων εξουσίας, εξετάστηκαν και αναλύθηκαν οι σχέσεις που διαμορφώνουν οι
πρωταγωνιστές με τους ανήλικους, αλλά και με τους λοιπούς χαρακτήρες, βάσει
κοινωνικών και έμφυλων κριτηρίων, κι αποδείχτηκε ότι οι σχέσεις εξουσίας που
δημιουργούν οι θύτες θείας δεν είναι ίδιες λόγω της θέσης που κατέχουν οι ίδιοι στην
πατριαρχική κοινωνία.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Συγκριτική Λογοτεχνία, Αναξιόπιστος Αφηγητής, Σχέσεις Εξουσίας,
Θύμα, Πατριαρχία
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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, many authors, famous or less famous, have chosen to have their stories revolve around pedophiliac and ephebophiliac relationships. From Marquis de Sade and his novel Justine to Amy Homes and her work The End of Alice, a plethora of writers has decided to get a closer look and shed a little light on this subject, which is a taboo even for our modern society. One of the most famous novels ever written about pedophilia is Lolita by the Russian novelist Vladimir Nabokov, originally published in 1955. Lolita and the more modern perspective on this theme offered by Zoë Heller’s Notes on a Scandal, published in 2003, are to be examined and compared in this thesis, in order to prove two main points. The first point to be proven is that the literary device of the unreliable narrator is used in order to create sympathy for the acting pedophiles and to hide the narrators’ true personalities, while the second point is that the “predators” of both stories form different power relations with the victims and the characters around them, due to their societal place based on their gender.

Nabokov was gravely criticised about his work and scorned not only by readers, but mostly by critics and scholars. His ethics and whole life were put under the microscope as he was highly associated with the protagonist of his novel, a known pedophile, and was attributed his character’s perverse characteristics. Nabokov expressed his opinion on the matter with his postscript to Lolita, as mentioned in Booth’s Rhetoric of Fiction, and stated that his disagreement with his character lies not only in his preference for nymphets, but in his general lifestyle and way of thinking. Nevertheless, the morals and ethics of the time were not enough to keep the readers from devouring Lolita and admiring his literary style and prose writing.
For Lionel Trilling the most attractive assets of Nabokov’s book is “its ambiguity of tone... and its ambiguity of intention, its ability to arouse uneasiness, to throw the reader off balance” and, by urging “moral mobility,” to represent peculiarly well “certain aspects of American life.”, since he finds it difficult to decide whether the immoral urges by the main character are to be taken seriously or as a form of irony (qtd in Booth 371).

*Lolita* is the story of a young girl of twelve (12) who forms a relationship with a middle-aged European Literature professor living in the spare room of hers and her mother’s house, and the story of their journey after her mother’s death. The novel is written by the protagonist of the story Humbert Humbert in the form of a literary diary, when imprisoned for the murder of his rival for Lolita’s love and attention.

A modern perspective on *Lolita’s* central theme is Zoë Heller’s novel, *Notes on a Scandal*. Heller’s book managed to bring originality to the table since the roles are reversed. At the end of the 20th century, just before entering the new millennium, while the scent of advance and progress is in the air, a young married teacher comes closer to one of her students in the new school to which she’s assigned. Sheba, the protagonist, forms a sexual relationship with her 15-year-old pupil, disregarding her husband, children, school’s rules and above all the law about sexual relationships with minors.

Again, the book is in the form of a diary, written by her “close” friend and colleague, Barbara Covett, who, by being near Sheba, finds out many details about the affair and is the only one, besides the people directly involved, that is aware of their
relationship. Her “notes” on Sheba’s scandal are discovered after the uncovering of Sheba’s crime.

The main theme and story are quite similar but there are some interesting aspects we can examine and draw conclusions from. To start with, there’s the narrator: in Lolita we have Humbert, an older person seducing a minor, a molester of a little child, let alone his own stepdaughter, something that happens as the story evolves, while in Notes on a Scandal we have Barbara, who is a friend, colleague and confidant of the molester. These two narrators present a story not entirely true, but in the way they see it. The narrators of the two books are characterised as unreliable, and in this thesis we are going to examine, through excerpts of the texts, the signs that make them unreliable and what their purpose is. This thesis will explore the literary device of the unreliable narrator and its use in order to gain the affection of the audience for characters that are not that much liked, and its use in order to cloak the main crime of the novel and present the narrators as victims. The power the narrators hold over their victims is also going to be examined and analyzed. We will look into the idea of the “predator” and “prey” and we will examine how they are, in fact, the only villains of the story, though they manage to convince the audience of their innocence through manipulation.

In the second part of this thesis, the molesters in the novels are going to be compared. Through textual examples, we are going to get a closer look at their relations with the other characters of the novel, their behaviour and mostly the dynamics that are formed. Power relations, as introduced by Michel Foucault, are to be examined, not only between the protagonists and their victims, but also between them and the rest of their surroundings.
For the French philosopher, a key term in studying power relations is consent, and this is also at the heart of the two novels. As he says, “Power is not a function of consent. In itself it is not a renunciation of freedom, a transference of rights, the power of each and all delegated to a few ...; the relationship of power can be the result of a prior or permanent consent, but it is not by nature the manifestation of a consensus.” (Foucault 788) He, then, proceeds to explain that, even though consent, or the lack of, and violence can play a big role in power relations, they are not a requirement in order to form such a relation, nor are the basic nature of power. (Foucault 789)

The aforementioned statement by Foucault is an accurate explanation of power relations. Violence is not the only means by which people have control over other people’s lives. Not only the actions towards other people, but also the discourse used, can be considered a way of handling them.

In his article in reference to Foucault, Lyritzis argues that power goes hand in hand with discourse. Discourse practices and targeted verbal communication can become the means to control and subjugate any individual.

Discourse and “discourse practices” create desires, manufacture truths and are connected elaborately with power relations. Therefore, every effort to understand power relations requires and demands the study of Discourse and its verbal practices which express and simultaneously constitute systems of knowledge and power. (Λυριντζής 7-8)\(^1\)

\(^1\) Ο Λόγος και οι «πρακτικές λόγου» κατασκευάζουν επιθυμίες, παράγουν αλήθεια και είναι περίπλοκα συνδεδεμένες με σχέσεις εξουσίας. Κατά συνέπεια, κάθε προσπάθεια κατανόησης των σχέσεων εξουσίας προϋποθέτει και απαιτεί τη μελέτη του λόγου και των λεκτικών πρακτικών που εκφράζουν και ταυτόχρονα συγκροτούν συστήματα γνώσης και εξουσίας.

\(^2\) All Greek texts cited in English have been translated by the author of this thesis.
Concerning the two texts, what is going to be examined is how the main characters, the “predators”, meaning Humbert Humbert and Sheba Hart, interact with the other characters, practically and verbally, and whether they are after all victims or victimisers. Power, as stated above, is not only the physical power someone may act on another person, but also the power through speech, the verbal abuse someone might exert on another. Humbert and Sheba form abusive relationships, although they are not always the abusers.

In the following pages, there will be a brief introduction of the literary theories, which will help in the analysis of the characters and eventually their comparison, and with the citation of examples from the books the arguments of this thesis will be reinforced by. Finally, since it is an interesting comparison of characters due to the year of writing and the alteration of the gender-based stereotypes, with a fifty-year gap between one book and the other and the feminist movement in turmoil, this thesis will conclude with the similarities and differences of the characters analyzed.
CHAPTER ONE: THE UNRELIABLE NARRATOR

The term “unreliable narrator” was coined by Wayne C. Booth in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, first published in 1961, and describes a narrator, aware of himself as a writer, whose words cannot be fully trusted by the reader. According to Booth, narrators differ from each other depending on the distance that separates them from the author, the reader and the rest of the characters of their story. (Booth 155) He then proceeds to give various examples of different narrators. For lack of a better term, he eventually introduces the “unreliable narrator” as the one who does not speak or act in accordance with the norms of the implied author (the persona the reader creates in his mind to personify the author). Unreliability is not always a matter of a narrator that deliberately lies but sometimes of the narrator’s unconscious urge to win over the reader and to gain his/her affection.

Even though Wayne Booth was the “father” of the unreliable narrator, many other researchers have criticised, read and worked on his theory. For example, James Phelan and Mary Patricia Martin (1999) in their article “The Lessons of Weymouth” expanded Booth’s theory, in order to better understand and categorize unreliability, and introduced three types of unreliability, later divided into six subcategories. Their classification includes the unreliable reading, misreading and underreading, the unreliable evaluating, misregarding and underregarding, and the unreliable reporting, misreporting and underreporting. (Phelan & Martin 94-95)

An even more extensive research was conducted by Ansgar Nünning in 1998, who managed to identify the most important signs that give away the unreliable narrator. Other studies have supplemented Nünning’s theory over the years, including Greta Olson’s (2003), who gathered the signals and created a list, and the final result
is fourteen signals within the text, that give away an unreliable narrator, and a brief explanation of how we comprehend them. These signals are found in the texts and they will be used in this thesis to analyze our two novels, Lolita and Notes on a Scandal, and more specifically the characters Humbert Humbert and Barbara Covett, in order to see what makes the narrators unreliable and finally prove the purpose of such unreliability.

In Booth’s theory, irony is said to be used by the author towards his narrator as a sign of unreliability, because the author seeks to distance himself from his “creature’s” morals and beliefs (Booth 159). Irony is detected in both novels, Lolita and Notes on a Scandal, by the authors concerning their narrators and to reinforce that irony they have named their characters after their biggest faults and mistakes. Humbert Humbert’s name is an eternal loop, a circle that does not break, and the character cannot change his behaviour and constantly makes the same mistakes and commits the same crimes. Claire Quilty’s name, Humbert’s main rival for the heart of Lolita, the man who manages to steal her from him, is an alteration of the word “guilty”, because according to Humbert, he is guilty of taking Lolita away from him, he is guilty that Lolita is unhappy, he is guilty of Humbert’s suffering and, finally, he is guilty of his own death because he is the only one to blame for this situation. As far as Notes on a Scandal is concerned, Sheba Hart is probably named after the matters of the heart in which she is involved throughout the novel, while Barbara Covett is named after her malignant character that covets what other people have, like love and attention, and most importantly, the object of her obsession, Sheba. This choice of names by the author is made to enhance the irony of the novel, a constituent of an unreliable narrator for Booth, and this is represented in the names of the two women which indicate their great weaknesses, which lead to their destruction.
As far as Lolita is concerned, Nabokov uses irony throughout his text. When Humbert writes about Lolita as if she is the most horrible child there is and that she tries to make his life hell, he ridicules himself. Nabokov uses irony to humiliate his deranged character, who partly believes he is a poor man, a victim of this “diabolical” girl that has her way with him. As Booth mentions in his book, Nabokov’s ironies fall through the cracks, because Humbert is the master of the text, has unlimited control over the rhetoric. (Booth 390) Booth immediately proceeds to prove his point by citing Humbert Humbert’s words: “I do not intend to convey the impression that I did not manage to be happy... Despite our tiffs, despite her nastiness, despite all the fuss and faces she made, and the vulgarity, and the danger, and the horrible hopelessness of it all, I still dwelled deep in my elected paradise whose skies were the colour of hell-flames but still a paradise” (Booth 390).

Nabokov keeps enhancing his irony in the novel by foreshadowing events. When Charlotte Haze, Lolita’s mother, realises that she cannot keep her love for Humbert Humbert a secret anymore, she writes him a love letter, in which she states: “But if, after reading my “confession”, you decided, in your dark romantic European way, that I am attractive enough for you to take advantage of my letter and make a pass at me, then you would be a criminal worse than a kidnaper who rapes a child” (Nabokov 54). With this sentence, Charlotte Haze foretells the future happenings by calling Humbert a kidnapers and a child molester, which, ironically, is exactly what he becomes after her accidental death, when he abducts Lolita, making her travel with him across the country and turning her into his child toy.

On the other hand, Barbara’s narration works in the same way as Humbert’s. She has full control over the narrative and so many of the author’s ironic remarks can
go unnoticed. At the point where Sheba’s affair has been made public and everyone is making fun of the teacher who seduced her student, Barbara thinks:

It is so much better, though, to be laughed at than to be feared? Being a public monster must be – well, monstrous. But becoming the punchline of a smutty joke is no pleasure, either. And evil at least has some heft. (Heller 86)

In this passage, Barbara talks about Sheba’s public image and how much better it is to be seen as evil than being the talk of the town and be treated as ridiculous. The reader can easily miss the author’s observation, due to Barbara’s control over the narrative. It is a statement that clearly refers to her too. She, instead of being laughed at, by colleagues, by her family, by her ex-friend, has chosen to be distant and to embrace the persona of a cold person, without feelings and without cares. The author becomes ironic towards her creation, indicating the narrator’s unreliability, and “makes” the character not only reveal that she prefers to be evil, and evil she is, but also that she does not accept to be laughed at, although Barbara is often mocked by her colleagues due to her frigidness.

Barbara, also, talks a lot about honesty and how it is perceived by people. Many are not used to say the truth, they are not wired this way. In the beginning of the narrative, she makes sure we know that honesty is a trait that makes people uncomfortable, but she values it the most.

For most people, honesty is such an unusual departure from their standard modus operandi – such an aberration in their workaday mendacity – that they feel obliged to alert you when a moment of sincerity is coming on. (Heller 2-3)
In the passage above, Barbara criticises other people’s attitude towards honesty, judging them, while the reader throughout the novel understands she is rarely honest during this whole situation and she does not just lie to Sheba and the rest of the world about Sheba’s actions, but she also lies to the reader about the actual course of events. It is ironic how she values honesty, while she is dishonest most of the time. This dishonesty indicates to the reader that she is not to be trusted or believed throughout her narrative, and this irony is what makes her an unreliable narrator.

Regarding Nünning’s signals, which suggest an unreliable narrator, the two novels contain many passages, which indicate the signals’ presence. Apart from the irony that is a main characteristic of the unreliable narrator, according to Booth, the first of Nünning’s signals is the narrator’s explicit contradictions and other discrepancies in the narrative discourse. When the narrator states something and later in the narrative negates his own self with his words. This signal can be traced in the titles of the books. The narrators name their “diaries” after the events or people that marked their lives. Humbert Humbert has named his book *Lolita* and dedicates the first paragraph of his diary to Lolita and her name, explaining what she means to him and how important she is in his life:

> 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. She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita. (Nabokov 4)

Humbert is clearly trying to persuade the readers that the whole narrative is about Lolita, while the reader later understands that the narrative is about him and his
relationship with Lolita. She doesn’t have a voice; the reader only sees her through Humbert’s eyes and learns only what he wants to be revealed. Lolita is the object of desire and not the protagonist, not even a character we can identify with, as Humbert chooses how he presents her. Čomić argues that “He is the Subject and the Absolute, while she is the Other. She, “Lolita”, does not even exist beyond his own discourse, since the narrator is a man and her feminine identity is introduced through the male signifier.” (Čomić 288-89) Lolita, the woman, the victim, is the Other, while Humbert, the man, the victimiser, is the norm. By dedicating his work to Lolita to make the reader believe she is the protagonist, he is, later on, seen as unreliable since he is, in fact, the main character, his thoughts and feelings are the ones the reader finds out about. This misdirection of the reader is used in order to show that he would never harm Lolita, he loves her, and she is the one that actually holds power over him. He tries to sugarcoat the fact that he is a pedophile that regularly exerts physical and verbal violence on Lolita.

Barbara, as well, presents the title of her diary as a distraction from the main theme of the narrative: Notes on a Scandal. The reader may suppose, at first, that the book is an accurate representation of the events since Barbara does not participate in the scandal, so she has nothing to gain from lying, but it is actually Barbara’s point of view and her subjective outlook on the scandal. Barbara says:

This is not a story about me. But, since the task of telling it has fallen into my hands, and since I play a minor role in the events I am going to describe, it is only right that I should offer a brief account of myself and my relationship to the protagonist. My name is Barbara Covett. (From time to time one of my colleagues will call me “Barb” or, even less desirably, “Babs”, but I discourage it.) (Heller, 4)
Barbara falsely reports that the story is not about her and she plays a minor role. In fact, as the reader later realises, she is the one that exposed the affair and made the story go public. Because of a fight she had with Sheba, she reveals Sheba’s affair to a colleague and he reports her to the principal and later on to the police. Barbara is the reason the scandal went public. By stating her name and details about herself, such as the nicknames her colleagues sometimes call her, she contradicts herself and her previous statement. Throughout the text, there are several times when she, in fact, talks about herself and her life and daily routine, which have nothing to do with the actual purpose of these “notes”. “While some of this self-exposure is deliberate, a significant part of it is involuntary and comes about as a result of her idiosyncrasies, delusions or biases, often in such a way that the statements and assessments she makes ironically reveal more about herself than her subject” (Folsberg and Nielsen 34). Barbara’s contradictions indicate her unreliability and the fact she is self-absorbed and that she pretends to be something other than who she really is. Barbara, just like Humbert above, tries to mislead the readers and make them disregard her slips throughout the novel, in order to cover her bad character. She is, therefore, a narrator that can’t be trusted by the readers, she is unreliable.

As far as it concerns Nünning’s second signal, it is the discrepancies between the narrator’s statements and actions. The narrator in this case does not contradict himself with his words but rather with his actions. We trace the second signal in Humbert’s narrative when he states that he would never harm a child and would never rob this child of its innocence. On the one hand, his persuasive words are enough for the reader to think of him as a good person, who just suffers from an illness, a perversion he would never indulge in. On the other hand, he later on contradicts his words with his own actions, as he kidnaps Lolita and rapes her in the Enchanted
Hunters Inn. Humbert, at the beginning of the narrative where he has not revealed his true colours fully to the reader, states:

Humbert Humbert tried hard to be good. Really and truly, he did. He had the utmost respect for ordinary children, with their purity and vulnerability, and under no circumstances would he have interfered with the innocence of a child, if there was the least risk of a row. (Nabokov 13)

Humbert is clearly inconsistent with his words and his actions. He argues that he values children’s innocence but at the same time he becomes the rapist of little girls. The reader by the end of the book becomes fully aware of Humbert’s lies and realises that he is indeed an unreliable narrator, who cannot be trusted.

As for Barbara, she firmly believes she is the closest person to Sheba, her confidant, and that their relationship is truthful and they share everything. Even if the reader chooses to believe her statements, Barbara quickly admits that she is the one keeping secrets from Sheba.

We don’t have secrets, Sheba and I. (Heller 1)

With this bold statement, Barbara tries to prove to the reader that she and Sheba are totally honest with each other. Nevertheless, she later reveals that Sheba doesn’t know about this diary or the fact that Barbara is the one who told their colleague about Sheba’s and Steven’s affair.

Sheba and I have spent countless hours together over the last eighteen months, exchanging confidences of every kind. (Heller 8)
Barbara lies once more. She has never shared any true information or feelings with Sheba. On the contrary, she tends to hide her true thoughts, thus making Sheba the only one that shares things about her life.

Sheba doesn’t yet know about this project of mine. I fear it would only agitate her at the moment, so I’ve decided to keep it a secret until I’m a little further along. (Heller 8)

On the one hand, Barbara states she is honest and truthful to Sheba. On the other hand, she keeps her secrets and acts behind Sheba’s back. Barbara is trying to create a specific image about her relationship with Sheba, an image of happy and dear friends. “However, by the end of the narrative, when Sheba has discovered Barbara’s manuscript, the veracity of the account is severely undermined by Sheba’s denouncement of the information in it, accusing Barbara of lying and making things up” (Folsberg and Nielsen 36). Barbara wants the reader to believe she is a very important, trustworthy and loyal person in Sheba’s life, but she clearly destroys that image of her by lying in the narrative and proving once more her unreliability.

Both characters try to seem close and loving towards the objects of their affection and mislead their readers into believing they only want the best for them, while in reality they try to get the best out of every situation for themselves. They want to feel powerful and in control and by being unreliable, they justify their spiteful thoughts and actions.

Nünning’s third signal is the divergences between the narrator’s description of himself and other characters’ description of him. This is common when the narrator shows signs of megalomania and praises himself but later the narrative proves him wrong. This signal is found in various descriptions in Lolita from the beginning to the
end of the novel. Humbert often describes himself one way or makes assumptions of the way he is perceived by others but when he is actually quoting Lolita’s words, his description is quite the opposite of what he leads the reader to believe. At the beginning of the narrative, when he tries to make a good impression to his readers and by that seem more innocent, he argues:

I was, and still am, despite mes malheurs, an exceptionally handsome male; slow-moving, tall, with soft dark hair and a gloomy but all the more seductive cast of demeanour. Exceptional virility often reflects in the subject’s displayable features a sullen and congested something that pertains to what he has to conceal. And this was my case. Well did I know, alas, that I could obtain at the snap of my fingers any adult female I chose; in fact, it had become quite a habit with me of not being too attentive to women lest they come toppling, bloodripe, into my cold lap. (Nabokov 18)

As seen by the narrator, he is a real catch that every woman would be lucky to have. He is an alpha male that can have whatever he wants, just because he is attractive and no woman could ever question him. Although, when, by accident perhaps, the reader finds out about Lolita’s point of view, his image is destroyed. Lolita accuses him of rape and reveals what a monster he truly is. After he has taken advantage of her, Lolita says:

“’You chump,’” she said, sweetly smiling at me. “’You revolting creature. I was a daisy-fresh girl, and look what you’ve done to me. I ought to call the police and tell them you raped me. Oh, you dirty, dirty old man.” (Nabokov 117)

Humbert’s opinion and Lolita’s opinion differ completely. He sees himself as a mature, handsome and charming man, but Lolita sees him for what he really is.
Humbert is a middle-aged pervert man that has deviously seduced and abducted a little twelve year old girl and then by emotionally blackmailing her not to say a word to anyone, he proceeded in raping her. Humbert, by allowing Lolita to have a voice, even if it is for a few lines in his narrative, gives the reader the opportunity to see how much of a liar and an unreliable narrator he is.

Barbara, on the other hand, doesn’t comment on her appearance often, but she takes pride in her intellect. She considers herself to be above average and a person of high intelligence. She tries to convince the reader that she is a prestigious woman, but the way she is actually seen by others is as an ordinary woman at best or as a pitiful, lonely woman with the quirks of a “spinster”. In the narrative, Barbara describes the way she and Jennifer, her once dear friend, seem to the world. She states:

> Alone, each of us was safely unremarkable – invisible, actually – as plain women over the age of forty are to the world. Together, though, I always suspected that we were faintly comic: two screamingly unhusbanded ladies on a day out. A music-hall act of spinsterhood. (Heller 114-15)

The reader, after having read Barbara’s criticism on the rest of the characters and detected her sense of superiority, realises that Barbara does not describe herself or the events as they really are. Barbara is seen, again, as unreliable and a narrator that perpetually lies.

Both characters think too highly of themselves as intellectuals, but only Humbert has a big idea of himself as a man too, as a conqueror of women and as a most desirable suitor for any woman or nymphet, as he calls pre-pubescent girls with apparent to him sexuality, that might come in his way. The narrators describe
themselves in a way, but the characters around them tend to have a different opinion, which makes the reader consider the narrators unreliable.

Concerning the fourth of Nünning’s signals, it is the contradictions between the narrator’s explicit comments on other characters and his implicit characterization of himself or the narrator’s involuntary exposure of himself. The narrator can sometimes, by revealing other character’s negative characteristics, talk involuntarily about their own or even reveal them through their actions. In *Lolita* we spot the fourth signal almost every time Humbert talks about a woman he does not lust, meaning almost every adult person in the narrative. He speaks very low about Charlotte Haze, Lolita’s mother, who is in love with him and ultimately married to him. Humbert uses her to be near Lolita and in the pretext of being her stepfather he can caress her, have her close and control her life. Humbert is being obnoxious, looks down on Charlotte and often describes his feelings for her as disgust and repulsion. When Charlotte Haze finds Humbert’s diary, she sees everything he has written about her and how mean he really is towards her. She quotes his words:

“The Haze woman, the big bitch, the old cat, the obnoxious mamma, the old stupid Haze is no longer your dupe. She has she has...” (Nabokov 78)

Humbert is a vile person and that is evident every time he writes about a character he dislikes. Charlotte is nice to him, but he tends to diminish her and treat her as trash. In the undermentioned quote, Humbert unveils his deepest thoughts about the rest of the characters, and by that he really gives a hint to the reader about his own bad personality.

There is just a chance that “vortex of the toilet” (where the letter did go) is my own matter-of-fact contribution. She probably begged me to make a special
fire to consume it. My first movement was one of repulsion and retreat.

(Nabokov 55)

Humbert takes advantage of Charlotte’s affection for him, and constantly tries to diminish her. He calls her names, he thinks of her as inferior and not clever at all. These actions and thoughts reveal a great deal more for the protagonist than Charlotte. He is cruel, he is manipulative and he cannot eventually fool the reader that he is innocent or to be trusted.

In *Notes on a Scandal*, Barbara also comments on other characters and by that she reveals her true colours. Barbara constantly reminds the reader of her close relationship to Sheba and how she trusts her, how their relationship is true and important in both of their lives. Nonetheless, when it comes to her personal thoughts on Sheba, she tends to speak ill of her and as the reader sees, she bad-mouths almost every character of the book, highlighting the negative aspects of their personality and appearance. At the beginning of the narrative, when Barbara introduces the characters and their relations, she writes:

It’s not that Sheba is cleverer than me. Any objective comparison would have to rate me the more educated woman, I think. (Sheba knows a bit about art – I’ll give her that; but for all her class advantages, she is woefully ill-read.) No, Sheba talks because she is just naturally more loquacious and candid than I am. I am circumspect by nature and she... well, she isn’t. (Heller 2)

Barbara is harsh on Sheba and judges her, even though she constantly calls her a good friend and states that she is very dear to her. By downgrading Sheba, she seems to feel better about herself, to overlook her shortcomings. Barbara does not only undermine Sheba, but Sue, their colleague, as well. She mentions:
“Well, no, I was just thinking it would probably serve you best not to tell Sue. She’s not a bad person. But she’s not...” I chuckled. “She can be a bit of a goose, can’t she?” (Heller 112)

Barbara desperately tries to seem superior to the other characters, their positive traits are nothing to their negative ones and nobody can compare to her wits. She also reveals a malignant personality and tries to prove that only she deserves Sheba’s trust, which in her mind is linked with affection and, who knows, one day love. The reader can see through the facade she has and tell that her personality is not be believed, she is unreliable. Barbara’s unreliability also serves the purpose of hiding her obsession.

In reference to the fifth signal, it is the contradictions between the narrator’s account of events and his explanations and interpretations of the same, as well as contradictions between the story and discourse. That happens when the narrator describes or explains events and behavioural patterns based on their own opinion and their personal view of the matter. This signal is mainly spotted in the conversation Humbert is having with a stranger, whom the reader later identifies as Claire Quilty. The conversation is based on Humbert’s weak memory and his internal fears of someone discovering his crimes against Lolita, meaning her kidnapping and rape.

“Where the devil did you get her?”
“I beg your pardon?”
“I said: the weather is getting better.” “Seems so.”
“Who’s the lassie?”
“My daughter.”
“You lie she’s not.”
“I beg your pardon?”
“I said: July was hot. Where’s her mother?” “Dead.” (Nabokov 105)
Humbert’s fear is creating contradiction between the actual events and the discourse. He mishears the stranger because he is terrified that someone is actually onto him and that his plan to abduct Lolita is not working and soon the police will get involved and will arrest him and take his precious Lo away. Humbert gives us a glimpse of his inner dreads and not an accurate narration of his encounter with the man. The reader cannot trust Humbert anymore, because he gives us the information that seem important to him and not the actual description of the events. His unreliability is clear and it is used in order to solicit the reader’s pity for him.

Barbara also projects her personal feelings in her discourse and her idea of the events, which are contradicted by the reaction of the protagonist. She reveals her unreliability to the reader by writing her point of view, rather than the truth. Barbara thinks her relationship with Sheba, after finding her manuscript, is reinstated because they are friends and because Sheba needs her and realises that Barbara takes care of her. The truth is that Sheba is in no condition to fight anymore and she just gives in and slowly sinks into the abyss. She no longer cares for herself; she has given up even on simple things, like cleaning herself and eating. Barbara has assumed the position of her caretaker, as if Sheba is a baby or an impotent person. Sheba is so distracted by what happened and how her life has changed that she no longer acts like a functioning adult. Barbara believes that their bond is mended, that is why she states: “The crisis is over. Sheba and I have reconciled” (Heller 241). Little does she know or understand that Sheba does not forgive her or accept her back as a close person. She simply has nowhere else to go. Barbara is her only refuge and the only person by her side, whether she wants her or not. The “not” part is especially stressed when Barbara quit
her job and moved in with Sheba on her own initiative and without being asked to do such a thing.

Nünning’s sixth signal argues about the other characters’ corrective verbal remarks or body signals. This happens when another character reveals the narrator’s lies or questions their statements and actions. When a character contradicts the narrator by revealing the objective truth, then the narrator automatically seems unreliable. This signal is spotted in both novels in the words of the narrators’ objects of love and obsessions, their victims. In Lolita, Humbert states that Lolita seduced him, that she wanted to form a relationship with him, that her comments about rape were just a joke and something she didn’t mean. According to Humbert, Lolita agreed and stayed with him because she loved him, because she realised he would do anything for her. And he surely would, but to his benefit. Humbert was ready to beg, to threaten and to force Lolita to stay with him. He wants to persuade the reader that he was her prey, when it is so obvious and so clear that he was the predator. In the few times Lolita is given a voice in the narrative, her reaction towards him is negative, she is like an animal in a cage, from where she is in no position to escape, but only to endure her suffering. Every time Humbert is indecent, Lolita cries: “Oh no, not again” (incredulity, exasperation); … “Please, leave me alone, will you,” you would say, “for Christ’s sake leave me alone” (Nabokov 158). Humbert is not the gentle lover, the caring protector he wants the reader to believe he is. He is in fact a monster, a pedophile, whose only agenda is to manipulate and take advantage of Lolita. When she is granted a few lines in the narrative, she desperately addresses the reader and calls out Humbert’s perversion and tortures, which his unreliability so carefully strives to hide.
Barbara is admittedly more lenient with giving Sheba a voice. She often recites her, in order to fill in the blanks about the scandal. But she, the same as Humbert, clearly lies about many of the events and that’s revealed to the readers when Sheba reads her manuscript and confronts her about it. She is not the impartial narrator, a third person with a minor role in the story. She is actually the reason the story went public. She created a mess, which ultimately was to her benefit. When Sheba reads Barbara’s diary, she feels not only betrayed, but also confused because Barbara has created her own version of the story. She states:

“What a wicked, wicked person you are! You betrayed me! You told Bangs.”… Sheba stared at me. “What an idiot I’ve been to trust you. All that filth and lies you’ve been writing…”…“You’re mad! How did I never see it before? You’re mad! You really believe this stuff is the truth. You write about things you never saw, people you don’t know.” (Heller 236)

Sheba reveals to the reader that Barbara has been lying all along the narrative. We are no longer able to tell which parts of the story are true and which are false. Even if Barbara has described accurately many of the events, it does not change the fact that the protagonist is turning against her because of the way she reported the scandal. Barbara is a liar and a mad woman filled with delusions. Her unreliability is not only used in order to justify Sheba’s actions, but also to hide her insanity and obsession from the reader.

According to Nünning’s eighth signal, the unreliable narrator is spotted by the accumulation of remarks relating to the self as well as linguistic signals denoting expressiveness and subjectivity. When the narrator states their subjectivity, with phrases such as “in my opinion”, then the reader can understand that the narrative is
compromised and no longer safe to be believed. This signal is found when the narrators express their subjective points of view, rather than a simple description of what really happened. The narrator tries to present their side and to make the reader think they are absolutely truthful and impartial and that the audience must take their word for it.

In *Lolita*, Humbert often gives his personal opinion on various matters and people but in the following passage, we see a desperate attempt to convince the readers to believe he is good, humble and caring by professing his undying love for Lolita. Once more, he does not speak the absolute truth but his personal truth, as mentioned above:

> You may jeer at me, and threaten to clear the count, but until I am gagged and half throttled, I will shout my poor truth. I insist the world know how much I loved my Lolita, this Lolita. (Nabokov 234)

Barbara, while stating that she does not understand people who use words or phrases such as “honestly” and “to tell you the truth”, because they are not used to being honest as she is, uses the word “truthful” in her narrative to describe her behavior. She contradicts what she says and maybe gives a hint to the readers that previously she might not have been that truthful in her diary. It is a way of admitting that the real events are sometimes omitted or changed. When Barbara starts narrating the events that led to her revealing the truth about Sheba’s affair, she warns the readers that she is going to be honest, as if opposing her previous attitude towards the truth. Barbara subtly outs her own unreliability as a narrator. She says:
For me this period constitutes the most painful part of my narrative – not least because, if I am to be entirely truthful, I must confess some very reprehensible behavior of my own. (Heller 171)

Nünning’s ninth signal is an accumulation of direct addresses to the reader and conscious attempts to direct the reader’s sympathy. The narrator through his addresses to the reader is trying to be more liked and to link himself with his “audience” He breaks the narrative to gain the reader’s attention and affection. This signal is found everywhere in Lolita and almost nowhere in Notes on a Scandal. The instances where Humbert addresses the audience are a common trick he uses to connect with his readers, to make them feel sympathy for him and his tortured life. On the other hand, Barbara is writing a diary, a manuscript she is thinking of giving to the public, to tell her side of the story, even though she has presented herself as impartial. This diary will have a reading audience, but she rarely addresses that audience.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the majority of sex offenders that hanker for some throbbing, sweet-moaning, physical but not necessarily coital, ... without the police and society cracking down upon them. We are not sex fiends! We do not rape as good soldiers do. (Nabokov 71)

I should have known (by signs made to me by something in Lolita the real child Lolita or some haggard angel behind her back) that nothing but pain and horror would result from the expected rapture. Oh, winged gentlemen of the jury! (Nabokov 103)

Frigid gentlewomen of the jury! I had thought that months, perhaps years, would elapse before I dared to reveal myself to Dolores Haze; but by six she was wide awake, and by six fifteen we were technically lovers. I am going to
tell you something very strange: it was she who seduced me. (Nabokov 109-10)

These are some of the many examples of cases where Humbert addresses to the audience. Humbert addresses not only the simple reader [However, I shall not bore my learned readers with a detailed account of Lolita’s presumption. (Nabokov, 110)], whose sympathy tries to earn, but also the juries at his trial. Let us not forget that Humbert is on trial for Quilty’s murder and writes his novel when in prison. He attempts to turn the members of the jury into his allies.

The reason there were many examples given above is that Humbert himself divides his readers into groups. By dividing his readers into categories he tries to find the correct words for them to feel pity and sympathy for him. Humbert “invents” new lies for every group of readers, in order to make every single one of them to believe him and justify his actions. His unreliability is the only way he can hide his crimes of pedophilia and his true personality from his reader – judges. As far as the groups are concerned, there is the simple reader, who is supposed to be intelligent and “learned”, who will understand Humbert and probably will excuse him as they, along with their intellect, share the same opinions. Humbert tries to flatter his readers by addressing them as superior beings, in order to gain their liking.

The other group of readership is the juries in his trial to come. Humbert is being clever and supposes that not all juries can identify with him, so he chooses his battles. When he addresses both the men and the women of the jury, he merely states facts. He either introduces a subject or he tries to convince them that he is not a rapist and neither are the rest of the sex offenders of little children. They are just desperate but harmless, they only seek the proximity to children but not necessarily a coital
relationship. They are not to be feared, they are not molesters and the police should not hunt them as such.

When addressing only the men of the jury, he asks them to identify with him, walk a mile in his shoes, and wonder what they would have done if they had a young nymphet always being close to them. Humbert does not only seek the sympathy, but also the empathy of these men. He thinks that anyone in his place would have done the same, because Lolita was the one provoking and seducing him. He even calls the gentlemen of the jury “winged”. As celestial beings, they might not sin but they fully understand the sins of humans and forgive their weakness of heart.

When addressing the women of the jury, on the other hand, he thinks that they have no patience with him, they are just frigid. Some people believed, in the late 1940s when the story takes place, that women were frigid when it came to sexual matters. His patriarchal ideas on women’s sexuality and mentality drive him to confront the women of the jury as cold and soulless creatures. He believes that they cannot identify with him, because they do not care about their sexuality, and not because of his behaviour towards a child. He is not accepting that his crimes are the ones preventing the reader from being fond of him and not their puritanism.

Humbert addresses his audience in order to provoke their sympathy. The passages quoted above clearly indicate the narrator’s unreliability and the true purpose of this literary device, which is to hide Humbert’s crimes and to present him as a better character with good intentions, though he is the exact opposite.

Barbara, on the contrary, does not wish to address her readers. When she finally does, when ready to reveal them the role she played in the scandal, she is afraid she will be judged. Barbara doesn’t want to be judged by her readers. If she
presents her true feelings and actions, she will be questioned about her motives in the narrative. Her purpose, by being unreliable, is to hide her mean personality and to mask Sheba’s crime. If Sheba’s crime is not even considered a crime, then Barbara is just an innocent who happened to blurt out the wrong thing at the wrong time. She doesn’t want to seem as vindictive, because then her whole narrative is questioned by her readers and her credibility is gone. She states:

Having read the following account some will be inclined to judge me harshly. To them, I say: no judgement you conceive could be possibly harsher than that I have passed on myself. (Heller 171)

Even though she writes this manuscript to publish it, Barbara does not address her readers often, or at all. She seems like she doesn’t realise that she will have an audience someday. One of the few instances she addresses an audience is the aforementioned example, where she is certain that she is being judged. Her worst fears of being laughed at and seen as the wicked character of the story are expressed here, when she rushes to tell her readers that whatever their judgement is, she has already judged herself too hard. Unlike Humbert, she does not seek their empathy, only their understanding and she assures them that she “punished” herself after her foul behaviour. Once more, she lies in order to sound just and honest, because she fears her true intentions will be discovered.

As far as Nünning’s tenth signal is concerned, it is the syntactic signals denoting the narrator’s high level of emotional involvement, including exclamations, ellipses, repetitions, etc. When the narrator tries through discourse to transfer his emotions to the reader, he wants the reader to feel sympathy for him and possibly forgive his faults, lies and misdemeanours. The tenth signal is about the syntactic
signs in the text that give away the narrator’s unreliability and in these cases, the narrators’ madness, obsession and deep emotional involvement:


Humbert uses repetition, probably unconsciously, because his mind is full of his thoughts of Lolita. He cannot continue the narrative; he is not in his right mind. That does show a great obsession over Lolita and also a narrator who suffers from insanity. When the reader realises that, they place the whole narration and Humbert’s credibility into question. “The concluding repetition of “Lolita”, up to the point of filling a whole page, is presumably meant to signify a mental breakdown.” (Wasmuth 7)

Damn her. Damn her. Lady Muck. Skinny bloody cow. She always made the big point of downplaying her advantages, behaving as if we were just two middle aged ladies confronting life from equal position. Oh Barbara don’t put yourself down like that! And the moment I take her at her word, presume on our equality, rather than waiting for her to magnanimously assure me of it, she is beside herself. Outraged. Ha! Her, who can’t boil a bloody egg without me. Ungrateful bitch. (Heller 238)

This crossed out text is a sign that Barbara, on the other hand, tries to hide her true self and feelings from the reader by posing as an impartial narrator. The reader, however, realises that if she crossed out that text, she might have changed or omitted many more. Barbara, who does not usually write in the heat of the moment, has the time to doll up the text and let the reader know what she wants them to know. This
outburst is also a sign of madness. She cannot accept or handle the rejection she got
from Sheba and her first impulse is to speak ill of her, to degrade her and reveal what
she truly believes about her.

Nünning’s eleventh signal is the explicit, self-referential, metanarrative
discussions of the narrator’s trustworthiness. When the narrator understands that the
reader sees through the words and questions the narration’s believability but continues
acting and narrating as though his reliability is intact and his description is true.
Humbert’s unreliability, according to Nünning’s eleventh signal, is also traced in his
epilogue of the novel when he knows that the reader has seen through his words and
no longer believes his lies, but he continues to make efforts in persuading the reader
for his honest intentions. He argues:

For reasons that may appear more obvious than they really are, I am opposed
to capital punishment; this attitude will be, I trust, shared by the sentencing
judge. Had I come before myself, I would have given Humbert at least thirty –
five years for rape, and dismissed the rest of the charges. (Nabokov 262)

He still tries to disorientate the readers, who by now believe that Humbert is a liar, a
rapist and a murderer. Even now, he is attempting to discard the charges for Quilty’s
murder. As Phelan argued, the fact that he doesn’t believe he is guilty of murder
indicates he is still not truthful with his audience. He remains unreliable. On the other
hand, the fact that he believes himself guilty of rape and wants to be punished could
be a sign that he has accepted the truth about his perverse nature. (236). On the
contrary, Humbert does not have a clear mind all of the sudden. He merely accepts his
fate and tries to convince the readers he knows what he has done, therefore he is not
worthy of punishment but of atonement.
Barbara puts her reliability in doubt at the beginning of the novel, when she is clearly stating that her narration of the events may contain errors and omissions: “I am not so foolhardy as to claim for myself an infallible version of the story” (Heller 8). But later in the novel, she acts as if her credibility is intact, as if the reader had not begun to understand that she lies and that she presents her own version of what happened.

I had no intention of going through Sheba’s stuff, but when I caught a glimpse of the chaos inside the bag, I couldn’t resist giving it a little spring-clean. ... Naturally, I hesitated to look at them. I take no pleasure in violating Sheba’s privacy. But as Sheba’s unofficial guardian, I have certain obligations that I cannot shirk. (Heller 168)

Barbara shows her obsession by appointing herself Sheba’s guardian. “Naturally’ she has to control every aspect of Sheba’s life for her own good. The reader is not persuaded by her explanations but Barbara keeps pretending that her side of the story is absolutely truthful. She rationalises her obsessive behaviour towards Sheba, as she had done with her previous obsession, Jennifer.

Nünning’s twelfth signal is the admitted lack of reliability, memory gaps, and comments on cognitive limitations. When the narrator admits they are not to be trusted for one reason or the other, then the whole narrative is under question. This signal is spotted every time the narrator admits their lack of reliability by alleging memory gaps and cognitive limitations. In Lolita, Humbert, when realising someone follows them by car, he argues:
Being a murderer with a sensational but incomplete and unorthodox memory, I cannot tell you, ladies and gentlemen, the exact day when I first knew with utter certainty that the red convertible was following us. (Nabokov 179)

Humbert frequently uses his weak memory to refuse to share with the reader of details of certain events and he admits that sometimes he is not to be trusted because of his inadequacy. However, as we realise, he is a liar because he later contradicts himself on this matter:

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. (Nabokov 31)

How can Humbert state that his memory is weak and not to be trusted while he also stated that he has a photographic memory? He either lies about the one or about the other. But it is of no importance to the reader. This proves that Humbert has definitely lied in his narrative and automatically he becomes unreliable and untrustworthy.

In Notes on a Scandal, Barbara also informs her readers that her memory is weak. Before attempting to unravel the events that took place, she states: “You never appreciate what a compost your memory is until you start trying to smooth past events into a rational sequence” (Heller 24). She, like Humbert above, admits that her memory sometimes fails her and that the events described might not be totally accurate or that she may forget to mention something or that her memories are tangled because too much time has gone by. Barbara, by writing her diary months after the
original occurrence of the events, can blame it on her memory and conceal the truth from the reader while she claims it is not her intention or her fault. She presents her unreliability as a natural result of the time that had passed between the events and their account.

Nünning’s thirteenth signal is the confessed or a situation-rel relation prejudice. It is present in the text when the narrator is emotionally charged and admits he is biased against someone and for that reason exaggerates when describing events involving said character. Nünning’s thirteenth signal might be the most important one for these two novels, because it does not only reveal the unreliability of the two narrators, but it also enhances the fact that they are obsessed over the objects of their attention, their lust. At the beginning of the narrative, Humbert introduces Annabel, the love of his childhood, to the audience. He remembers every little detail of her and the way he felt around her:

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,” “think arms,” “brown bobbed hair,” “long lashes,” “big bright mouth”); and the other when you instantly evoke, with shut eyes, on the dark inner side 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). (Nabokov 6-7)

Humbert compares Lolita to Annabel in several parts in the novel. Annabel, the girl who sexually awoke him, a little girl who died so soon, was, according to Humbert, the reason he is attracted to nymphets.
In Lolita, John Ray Jr., refers with more sarcasm and black humour, to the need for psychiatric intervention by saying that “…had our demented diarist gone, in the fatal summer of 1947, to a competent psycho-pathologist, there would have been no disaster; but then, neither would there have been this book.” (Orozco 10)

Humbert lived a “love affair” before with Annabel and he now tries to recreate that affair. He thinks that nymphets are a mix of paradise and hell and their only purpose is to seduce men. He is biased against Lolita, because in his mind she is in the same category as Annabel and all other nymphets. He already knows what Lolita wants of him. As Phelan argued, the concept of nymphets is not real, not even to Humbert. It is a way of justifying his lust, rationalizing the fact that he is a pederast and legitimizing his crimes against children (235).

Barbara expresses bias too, when she happens to encounter Sheba along with their colleague, Sue, out for lunch. This had a serious impact to Barbara, remembering the traumatic events she had already experienced with her previous obsession:

In order to fully convey the effect that this episode had upon my spirits, I should explain that some years ago, I was dealt a very severe blow when my friend Jennifer Dodd announced that she wanted no further contact with me. … Beyond some mysterious references to my being “too intense”, she refused to furnish any explanation for her decision. (Heller 34-35)

Barbara compares Sheba with her previous “friend” and obsession, Jennifer. She cannot understand why friends would treat her this way and why they suddenly avoid her and don’t want her company. Her “intensity” is actually her obsession manifesting and making her assume a dominant attitude over other people’s lives. In her mind,
Sheba, just as Jennifer before her, rejects her friendship, when in fact they only reject her obsessive and overcontrolling behavior. She is biased against Sheba, because she remembers how her other object of affection treated her and now sees the same signs from Sheba, therefore she is untrustworthy.

Her dominance and control over others is often manifested in extreme ways. She assumes the role of the caretaker, the mother, the guardian. Through this behavior we realize that her obsession is probably a result of her homosexual tendencies. To support this argument, Allen states in his paper:

Barbara employs absurd imagery that almost borders on the grotesque, describe her sleeping “like a giantess” on a pink and white princess bed (Heller, 3), or shuffling downstairs in her nightdress and socks (Heller, 8). When Sheba returns from a walk in the rain in distress after arguing with her daughter, Barbara moves to help undress Sheba and attempts to remove Sheba’s shoes (Heller, 214). This conjures an image of Barbara, a woman twenty-years Sheba’s senior, in a maternal role, caring for the vulnerable younger woman, and equally one that reveals a homoerotic desire for Sheba’s nudity. (Allen 191-92)

Nünning’s fourteenth signal is the paratextual signals such as titles, subtitles, and prefaces. The last of Nünning’s signals is found only in *Lolita*. It is the presence of a foreword, which predisposes for the unreliability of the narrator. We don’t come across something like that in *Notes on a Scandal.*
COMPARISON OF HUMBERT HUMBERT AND BARBARA COVETT

With the aid of various passages from the two novels, we were able to identify which signs give away Humbert’s and Barbara’s unreliability and how these signs are used. They are characters, narrators, which have many things in common and use their discourse power in order to mask their obsession over their victims and disorient the reader from the crime of pederasty.

We are dealing with character-bound narrators given that they can be identified with a character in the story. This homodiegetic narrator appears, as Mieke Bal points out, “if the “I” is to be identified with a character, hence, also an actor in the fabula”. (Llorente 11)

We know that they are unreliable and there is evidence of mental problems that the two narrators suffer from. Their only difference is that Humbert admits his madness and uses it as an excuse for not being charged with his crimes, while Barbara, a sociopath that lacks empathy and sympathy towards others, does not realize her absurd behavior. Humbert becomes an unreliable narrator in order to justify his crimes, whilst Barbara becomes an unreliable narrator in order to protect her subject of obsession, and not because she wants to mask her own madness and misdemeanours, at least consciously.

Through the text we can find similarities as well. They both try to mask and extenuate the crime of pederasty. Humbert accuses Lolita of seducing him, while Barbara indirectly says that Steven was capable of making up his own mind and taking his decisions and that their affair with Sheba was not harmful to him. The literary device of the unreliable narrator is used in order to disorientate the reader from the offences, presenting the “predators” as victims of their “preys’ ” whims.
Both of them think that they are better than the others, that they are more sophisticated and often underestimate their objects of desire. They are loners and think it is better this way. They desire the person that gets the most attention around them. Lolita has every male’s eyes on her and Sheba is the talk of the school when she arrives and every woman wants to befriend her and every man wants to court her. The narrators try to hide their infatuation by lying in the narrative about the characters around them and their relationships. Humbert lies about his actual relationship with Lolita by presenting himself as a loving and caring protector to the readers, whereas Barbara lies about the close relationship she has with Sheba and about the importance she has in Sheba’s life and decisions. They are unreliable, because they need the audience to think of them as innocent and genuinely good personalities, instead of the true villains of their stories.

They are both very jealous characters and want their “loved” ones only for themselves. Their behavior is extreme and they get really frustrated when they don’t get what they want. When Lolita mingles with the boys at her school, Humbert keeps imposing more and more rules to keep her away from them, to keep her under control. When Sheba befriends Sue, Barbara is discreetly badmouthing her in order to keep her away from Sheba. When the scandal is out, she moves in with Sheba and takes over the role of her caretaker, or mockingly we could say her “nanny”. She feeds her, organizes her schedule and keeps her as close as can be. Though both narrators try, they do not succeed in winning the love of their obsessions. Lolita does not love Humbert, she is rather repulsed by him and she, in the end, escapes from him, while Sheba considers Barbara a friend and does not love her in a sexual way and by the end of the novel, after discovering her treason, rejects their friendship too.
They both determined the course of events that led to the “captivity” of their desired ones. Humbert’s diary was read by Charlotte, who got furious, mad and utterly devastated, which led to her running out of the house and getting hit by a car, which in its turn led to her death. After her death, Humbert illegally abducted Lolita and kept her by his side, ultimately with the threat that an orphan girl cannot survive on her own. Barbara’s vengeful attitude towards Sheba’s ungratefulness and lack of empathy led to her telling Bangs about Sheba’s affair, who later told the principal and the police. It was Barbara’s fault that the affair went public, but this event, though it caused pain and sorrow to everyone implicated, was a blessing for Barbara, who took the opportunity and became Sheba’s shadow, by being with her all the time. Again, they both lie to get their way. They are untrustworthy. Humbert lies about Lolita’s mother and manages to get her away from everyone and become her personal warden, and Barbara lies about the part she played in the scandal and poses as Sheba’s only support.

They both use French words in the novel just to point out their superiority and their knowledge and intellect compared to the other characters. They both had previous experiences with obsessions, Annabel and Jennifer. They also believe that they hold a special place in the lives of the protagonists, Lolita and Sheba.

Humbert and Barbara are both unreliable because they both need to hide their megalomania, egocentrism and insanity from the reader. Moreover, they have a need to mask the crime of pederasty. Humbert doesn’t want to be accused of mistreating Lolita and Barbara doesn’t want the audience to blame Sheba, because she hopes that Sheba might return that kindness by loving her. They also need the audience to focus on their version of love and how they express it towards their victims and not their obsessive behavior.
CHAPTER TWO: WEAK PEOPLE AND POWER RELATIONS

In this second part of the thesis, we are going to get a closer look at the protagonists’ relationships with the minors and the power relations they have formed not only with them but also with the rest of the characters in the novels. The way the sovereign family has influenced the protagonists’ life and their later behavior is also going to be examined. As Michel Foucault states, a person, over whom power is exercised, is seen as a person that acts. They have choices, they react, something that differentiates them from the victims of violent power (qtd in Foucault 789). In the novels, the minors are victims of the adults’ power, a non violent power, but still seem as they can make their own decisions. Nevertheless, this is the illusion the narrators create for their readership, since minors are not in a place where they can be hold responsible for their illicit affairs.

The two novels deal with the subject of pedophilia. Both Humbert and Sheba are considered pedophiles, because they had recurrent sexual intercourse with minors. Many health experts and psychoanalysts have argued over the age limit when a child stops being a child and becomes a teenager. For this thesis, we are going to quote the national law that renders the intercourse with a person less than 16 years old as illegal, as children of that age cannot give liable consent to any sexual relationship.

According to the World Health Organization and the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, sexual abuse is defined as the involvement with a child that is not fully developed and does not comprehend what they’re doing, and they cannot grant consent (qtd in Mulya 2). To clarify this, Teguh Wijaya Mulya mentions:
“All sexual acts between an adult and under-age child (even with child assent) are, by definition, CSA\(^3\). In this definition, CSA may or may not involve violence (e.g., force, coercion, or threat) because the main concern is the age of consent or maturity of the persons involved. (Mulya 2)

In the following pages, the relations between the protagonists of the novels, the “predators”, and the characters around them are going to be examined. This thesis will shed light into the dynamics that are formed between said characters and in the end compare the two victimizers.

**POWER RELATIONS IN LOLITA**

Undoubtedly, Humbert clearly has the power in his relationship with Lolita. He, for starters, as the writer of the novel, is scorning women, looks down on them and believes in his masculine superiority. He, as an adult, chooses to get involved with a twelve-year-old young girl to satisfy his perversion. As seen earlier in this thesis, Humbert is clearly obsessed with Lolita, which leads him to act like an insane person.

Humbert deprives Lolita of her voice and presents the events as he wants and in a way that they justify his actions. He has all the discourse power, and uses it to impose himself on others and to impose his own rules on the relationships he forms. As Feijie Zhen (26) argues in his paper on discourse power, based on Foucault’s theory, in modern patriarchal society, women’s voices are suppressed. Discourse power is held by men and gives them the opportunity to express their beliefs and point

\(^3\) Child Sexual Abuse
of views, while women are presented like they are in a trance. By allowing men to have all the discourse power, women are downgraded and are not treated as equal members of the society.

Humbert is in control of the narration. As proven earlier in this thesis, he is an unreliable narrator and uses that trait of his because he wants to convince his audience of his innocence of the crimes he committed, such as pederasty, kidnapping and murder. His unreliability is the means by which he presents events and characters as he wants, without allowing his readership to learn the truth. His luck at being the only one with the voice is what gives him the opportunity to present a little child as a “nymphet”, as a demonic child that only seeks to seduce him and other men. As Ivana Plevíková states in her work, in the novel, the term “nymphet” exists only because there is a matching male part, the “hunter”. The hunter is both the man who creates the nymphet by attributing her a magical and sexual substance, and the man who is the victim of the nymphet’s charm. “The designation of roles within this paradigm then directly influences the distribution of power within the two participants.” (Plevíková 42-43)

Furthermore, Humbert eloquently mentions more than once in the novel that Lolita had other lovers before him. If Lolita had other lovers, then, according to Humbert’s thinking, she couldn’t be his victim. Lolita is a woman that wants attention and love from men, and he just complies with her sexual wishes. He rationalizes pederasty and rape. “Scholars have written extensively about the seductive, playful quality of Humbert’s voice. …These games showcase Humbert’s at times playful attitudes towards his pedophilic actions and the seductive nature of his voice allows him to paint the girls he desires as “demoniac… nymphaets”, rather than children” (DuChene 17).
Humbert seeks to dominate Lolita not only with his discourse but also through his actions in the novel. When he realized that Lolita could try to get away from him, he decided to threaten that little child into staying with him, because what would a little orphan do by herself? “Humbert seeks to entrap and dominate a victimized Lolita… He does so by entrapping her in a sadistic interpretive rite in which his purpose is to show her how powerless she is to do anything but meekly follow his lordly textual commands” (Herbold 1).

Humbert poses as a protective father, a role assumed by him many times in the novel. In the sovereign patriarchal family, the father is the one holding all the power. A father’s love and affection comes attached to his demand of obedience from the rest of the members of the family. Humbert urges Lolita to see him as a loving father, whose sexual needs must be satisfied in return for his gracious and magnanimous behavior of taking care of her. He tries to convince Lolita that he only cares about her and her well being and that away from him she would be miserably cramped, mistreated and alone in an orphanage:

“What happens if you complain to the police of my having kidnapped and raped you? … So, I go to jail. But what happens to you, my orphan? Well, you are luckier. You become the ward of the Department of Public Welfare which I am afraid sounds a little bleak. … Don’t you think that under the circumstances Dolores Haze had better stick to her old man?” (Nabokov 122-23)

Humbert, as a predator, knows well how to make Lolita stay by his side. Violence here would have the opposite result of what Humbert wants, which is Lolita to love
him. He is cleverer than that. He uses his discourse power in order to make Lolita afraid to leave him, as if she does, she will be alone and neglected.

Lolita can never claim her innocence back. She makes efforts of distancing herself from Humbert but every time she does, he is there, keeping her on a leash, grounding her and laying more rules down, like keeping her away from friends and other boys. Lolita is a little girl, who never had the chance to properly live her childhood, grow up and form a steady character. She was always victimized and sexualized by men, so she learned to act like as a sexual object. All men, with the power given to them by the patriarchal society, have treated Lolita as a pretty face and a beautiful body, without caring about her innocence and her childhood. Men have the power and women are subordinate to them, objects to their eyes. Humbert has mentioned her sexuality and her experiences to justify their sexual encounter. But children, as Teguh Wijaya Mulya (5) mentions, often show interest in sexual activities. They express themselves and engage in sexually related actions with other children before reaching adolescence. As Freud (88) stated, children are not indifferent to their sexuality and indulge in sexual acts, like masturbation. That does not mean that a full grown adult can impose oneself on a child or assume they have consent from this child, like Humbert does with Lolita.

In order to break the chain and escape Humbert’s desires, she runs away with Quilty, another paternal figure, who, in the end, proves to be even worse than Humbert. After Lolita gets mistreated again, she decides to leave Quilty too and find someone else, someone kind that will be a real protector to her. In the end of the novel, Lolita marries a poor but kind man that can give her the stability and support all people deserve to have, without being abusive: “And finally, she finds marriage
the only proper way, and it is at this point that she seems to find solace and tranquility
and inexorably, in her own idea, the ultimate meaning” (Niazi and Honarjou 66).

Humbert, as the one and only narrator, has discourse power in the whole
novel. That means that he is using his power over other characters too. He constantly
judges not only the other protagonists, like Charlotte, but even women that happen to
be mentioned, who are of no particular significance to the plot of the story. Examining
the novel from a feminist point of view, Horáková writes about Humbert’s
relationship with the rest of the female characters:

Throughout the book, Humbert proves himself an anti-feminist thanks to his
constant judging and evaluating of women’s looks. The evaluations could be
seen in many parts of the text, as Humbert’s character was measuring and
describing women’s appearance very often. There are probably not many
women in Lolita, whose appearance Humbert has not mentioned. (Horáková
25)

He, firstly, comments on his ex-wife, a young woman he married in order to
avoid any suspicion towards his unconventional needs, with unflattering adjectives,
which shows his low opinion of her. “I had kept noticing that my fat Valeria was not
her usual self;” (Nabokov 19). He later comments on Mrs. Haze and his first
impression of her, which he expresses unwillingly as Charlotte was a repulsive
woman for him. “The poor lady was in her middle thirties, she had a skinny forehead,
plucked eyebrows and quite simple but not unattractive features of a type that may be
defined as a weak solution of Marlene Dietrich” (Nabokov 28). He then describes
Jean, a friend of Charlotte’s, to whom later in the story insinuates that Lolita is in fact
his offspring. “Jean … was a long-limbed girl in harlequin glasses with two boxer dogs, two pointed breasts and a big red mouth” (Nabokov 64).

Society, when Lolita was written, was conservative and functioned based on the nuclear family model. Men were the head of the family, the only ones with a say and their commands had to be followed. Men had all the power, either physical or discourse, and their opinions over any matter had to be respected. Women were in charge of the household and the children, and took any decision after having received their husband’s approval. Humbert’s remarks on the female characters of the novel show the idea he has of women, as objects to be noticed, judged and eventually used by men, and also enhance the argument that he is egocentric, as he generously offers his opinion, his thoughts on other people’s bodies. He is also cruel about their intelligence, or the interest they may present most of the times, as he scorns their habits, such as reading magazines of popular culture.

… creatures far more fascinating that Valeria. (Nabokov 18)

…but fat Haze suddenly spoiled everything by turning to me and asking me for a light, and starting a make-believe conversation about a fake book by some popular fraud. (Nabokov 33)

No matter what Humbert does, the way he describes his relationship with the other characters shows that he has power over them, he enchants them and in the end he has the upper hand. We see that in the way he lies to the readers, he also lies to the other characters and that’s why he keeps their sympathy.

As for his relationship with Quilty, we can discern a rivalry between two toxic men. Their encounters are the bare minimum, because Quilty is trying to stay
unnoticed to achieve his goal, and Humbert learns only at the very end who Quilty really is and what he has done to him, how he has deprived him of his love, Lolita. The two men have all the power over the people around them, especially on Lolita. Both of them acted as paternal figures, meaning figures of authority in the patriarchal society, and promised her protection and love, but only wanted her for her body. The novel is called Lolita, but only the male characters have any power over the course of events. She was nothing but an object to them, which is the reason she eventually rejected both and chose a simple, quiet life. Humbert kills Quilty because he blames him for Lolita leaving, while the reason Lolita left was his obsessive behavior, his dominance over her and that he forced her into having an affair with him.

To conclude, we see that Humbert has power only when it comes to women and narration. Patriarchy is giving him this privilege. Women should stay silent, obey and satisfy a man’s every need. When it comes to a rival man, he no longer holds power, he cannot exercise his male privilege, and has to reclaim it by killing him and eliminating the threat.

**POWER RELATIONS IN NOTES ON A SCANDAL**

Sheba, the “silent” protagonist of the novel, is the one holding power over the minor she seduces. We call her silent as she holds no discourse power and everything we learn about her case is presented to us by the unreliable narrator, Barbara. Sheba forms a relationship with a 15-year-old boy, who happens to give her a different type of attention. She has the power in their relationship, not only because she is the adult, but because she is an authority figure due to her profession as his teacher. When Sheba has her first encounters with the boy, that gradually become more intimidate,
she starts to question her actions, but later on she dismisses them as totally normal. Sheba tries to convince herself that the relationship between her and Steven is strictly familial:

She kept going over what had just happened in her studio and telling herself that there was nothing to fuss about. She had ruffled the boy’s hair for goodness’ sake. Just as an auntie might. But why, then, she wondered, was she feeling so shifty? (Heller 49)

Sheba uses her maternal instincts to get closer to Steven. She, while feeling like what she’s doing is wrong, keeps telling herself that she has done no harm and her thoughts are pure and that the relationship is innocent. But, even if she truly treated the boy as a “mother”, she would still be in a position to exercise power on him. A mother, or a person of authority, has power over a minor. While men, even in a modern society like the one Notes on a Scandal takes place, hold power over women in many cases, women are above children. And that’s what Steven is, a child. Sheba takes advantage of his age and exercises power to the young boy through her sexuality.

Sheba has become obsessed with Steven and after the affair starts, she becomes careless and raises suspicion with her behavior. She often states that she doesn’t care about others’ opinions and becomes needier and needier in her relationship with the boy. She even confessed to Barbara that she managed to sneak him into her house, while her husband and son were asleep.

Her obsession is becoming more apparent when she leaves her home, without telling anyone, in search for Steven, and when he doesn’t answer his pager, she decides to visit his home. A grown woman reaches the point where she stalks a
teenage boy and calls his home number, in risk of exposure, just to satisfy her lust for him. Slowly, the character, that holds the power in her affair, becomes a victim of her desires. When she manages to talk to him, he acts cold and does not care about Sheba’s problems. The size of her obsession over him is becoming clearer when her only fear is that he is in love with somebody else, while her family is dealing with much more important problems.

“Oh Jesus, oh Jesus,” she remembers moaning to herself, as she broke into a trot. “Please God, don’t let him be in love with someone else.” (Heller 220)

Her obsession over Steven rises when, after her family is torn into pieces, her concern is him, rather than her loved ones. She makes a sculpture, which represents him and her as mother and child and this helps us realise that she gets her power from her maternal instincts towards him. The father, as mentioned above, is not the only one that holds power in a patriarchal society. On the contrary, the mother is the one closest to the children and the power she holds over them is more intense than the father’s:

The cross-legged ‘mother’ figure had been fashioned in Sheba’s image. She had long, skinny limbs, heavy, romantic eyelashes, a slightly crooked nose. Even her hair replicated Sheba’s messy bun. As for the hideous, pink boy-man spilling fatly across her lap – he was a crude, but unmistakable likeness of Connolly. (Heller 241)

Sheba is presented through the eyes of Barbara as a nice but weak woman, who by accident, even by persistence of the other part, forms an illicit affair with a minor. The way she is described makes the reader second guess her nature and spot extenuating clues in the novel. But the reader cannot be so easily fooled and, in the
end, remembers that she seduced an underage child and engaged in a sexual relationship with him, which led to his emotional break down and the collapse of his reality.

As for Sheba’s relationship with Barbara, as seen earlier in this thesis, Barbara holds all the discourse power, by being an unreliable narrator, and generally holds power over Sheba, by being manipulative. The signs of obsession are clear and her intrusiveness becomes more and more apparent as the plot unravels. Barbara is a mad woman, with “forbidden” homoerotic desires. Her desires are “forbidden”, because most of society is very judgemental towards homosexuals and often insulting. Barbara is a person that needs to be accepted and admired, that’s why she cannot confess her true feelings; she can only seek love on the pretence of friendship. She is a person that goes to extremes to get what she wants. And in that case, she wants Sheba.

I let her go alone. I dare say she’ll be all right by herself. She seems quite steady and calm after her rest. And she knows, by now, not to go too far without me. (Heller 244)

The novel ends with these lines, where Barbara is making clear that she is Sheba’s warden, because their relationship is like a prison. Sheba does not decide anything anymore for her life. She is utterly devastated and surrendered to whatever Barbara says. Without even realising how well that was orchestrated and how it happened, Sheba was found Barbara’s hostage and a victim of her desires.

But Barbara is not the first person that had power over Sheba. Sheba holds no power in any relationship she forms. She acts as a good wife, mother and daughter but she is often frowned upon and treated as a lesser person. When the affair goes public and her family finds out, everyone starts treating her with hostility: “I wasn’t aware
that Polly hated me” (Heller 207). Her daughter sees her as the enemy, her husband sees her as a trophy wife and a happy housewife and her mother has shown obvious preference to her brother rather than her. Sheba never had any power, only when she was with Connolly. That’s why she kept seeing him and that’s why she got so obsessed with him, because it was the only case where she called the shots and made decisions.

**COMPARISON OF HUMBERT HUMBERT AND SHEBA HART**

Humbert and Sheba present various similarities and differences about the way they treat others and the way they are treated by society. For example, both of them are acting as “parental” figures to the minors they are having affairs with. Humbert acts as the father of Lolita, even spreads a rumour that he is her biological father, and Sheba acts as Steven’s mother and manifests these maternal instincts even after the scandal is spread, by making a mother-son sculpture of her and Connolly. As Choë Taylor (212) observes about Foucault’s theories on the family and the power relations formed between its members, Foucault originally believed that power was quality of men. Mothers played only the role of the caretaker and had not other part in the patriarchal society. Later on, Foucault believes that the father has lost the absolute power, and he now shares it with the mother, who, because she is a caregiver, forms a different bond, a more powerful bond, with their children.

Both Humbert and Sheba use the familial authority figure to exercise control over their objects of desire, as both were controlled by their families which led to their behaviour later on. Humbert was neglected by his father, who was often absent, and his mother died before he could even form memories of her, and Sheba was criticised
by her mother, felt lesser than her brother and her father, the only one supporting her, died.

Both protagonists describe how the minors seduced them. However, as we saw above, a child cannot be held responsible for this kind of decisions and is definitely not to blame. Eventually, after not being able to handle the power imposed on them, Lolita leaves Humbert for Quilty, who proves to be the same old pervert but until then it’s her ticket out of this suffocating relationship, and Steven breaks up with Sheba and never wants to see her again.

Finally, they are both members of the bourgeoisie and that’s apparent from their behaviour and way of talking, but because of their gender they are not always treated in the same way. The upper class is more powerful than the rest of society and respected, because its members hold the wealth of the society. Humbert, by being a bourgeois man, is not only prestigious, but he has also a strong voice in society and in his family. Sheba, although seen as superior than other women, less educated or poorer, like Barbara, is still inferior to men. Gender defines whether or not a person has power over other people:

Humbert Humbert is the ultimate representation of the privileged bourgeoisie.
... He is white, and of the privileged sex. His background is purely upper-class: his father owned a resort hotel on the Riviera, and he was constantly surrounded by its rich patrons. (Summers 1)

Sheba, as described by Barbara in the beginning of the narrative, radiates confidence and respect due to her social status. Her wealth is what gives her a sense of superiority and eventually power:
It’s a class characteristic, I think – this insouciant frankness. If I had had more contact with posh people in my life I would probably be familiar with the style and think nothing of it. But Sheba is the only genuine upper-class person I’ve ever known. (Heller 3)

Moving on to their differences, Humbert constantly comments on women’s appearances and intelligence and criticises them, while Sheba is the one being criticised by her husband and objectified by her colleagues. Even though society has changed and is more accepting since the time Lolita was written and the time Notes on a Scandal was published, we still see the deeply rooted signs of patriarchy in the novels. As Andrea Westlund (1045) insightfully comments, women in modern society have more liberties, especially sexual ones, than in the past, but they are still objected to criticism. Society has rules in order to control every aspect of their lives, from the way they dress to the way they are, from their appearance to their whole personality.

Ultimately, Humbert is not questioned when seen in public with a little girl, because of his male privilege, but Sheba seems suspicious when seen with Steven even in a random encounter. The great difference though, is in society’s opinion. In the eyes of the law, Humbert and Sheba are both guilty and should be sentenced for their illegal and inappropriate sexual affair with minors, who cannot give liable consent. In the eyes of the society, Humbert is a pervert and a monster but Sheba is just seen as a “naughty” teacher who “made him a man” rather than a pedophile. As Barbara comments when Steven’s mother cried for justice for her son:

I might as well admit here and now that any notional damage done to Connolly’s psyche by his affair with Sheba has never been of much concern to me. ... I certainly don’t subscribe to any sentimental notion about the
innocence of everyone under the arbitrarily imposed age bar of sixteen years.

(Heller 83)

This mistaken idea that a man, or in this case a young boy, cannot be a sexual victim of a woman is a consequence of the patriarchy. The male sex holds the power in the society, and by accepting his violation by a female equals the handoff of power.
CONCLUSION

To conclude this thesis, we must make mention of the themes we dealt with, with the help of some literary theories, and our observations about them. At first, the thesis introduced the literary device of the unreliable narrator, according to Wayne Booth’s theory, in order to familiarise the reader with this concept for the purpose of understanding better the analysis and compare of the novels’ central characters and narrators. By the exhibition of passages of the texts, which match with the signs of unreliability, introduced by Ansgar Nünning, this thesis initially proved that indeed the two narrators of Lolita and Notes on a Scandal are deeply unreliable. The most important point that this thesis wanted to highlight was that the use of the unreliable narrator’s literary device was on the one hand to disorientate the audience from the narrators’ madness and obsession with their objects of desire, and on the other hand to help them present the predators as victims, in order to justify, or even discard, the crime of pederasty.

Moving on to the second part of this thesis, we dealt with power relations, a term introduced by Michel Foucault. At this point, we no longer compare the narrators of the novel, rather than the protagonists, the acting pedophiles. By introducing the theory of the power relations, the thesis also explains the way these relations are achieved, which is the power of discourse. The protagonists have power over their victims, not necessarily by acting violently, but by the place they hold in society. From this moment on, power relations obtain a social and gender based foundation. The relations the main characters form with their victims and the rest of the characters are examined based on society’s attitude towards the institution of family and the role of the woman in patriarchy. This way of analyzing the novels, lets
us realize that even though both protagonists are, in fact, pedophiles, they do not hold the same power over other characters. The main character of *Notes on a Scandal* is a woman, who by being objectified and downgraded for the most of her life, attempts to break this vicious circle of being the victim and ends up being the victimiser. On the contrary, the main character of *Lolita* is a man, who takes advantage of his privilege granted by the patriarchal society, and acts solely for his pleasure and satisfaction.

Finally, the comparison of these novels would be an interesting case for a feminist study considering the swapping of genders and the time of publication. The novels are written in different centuries and the stereotypes on female and male behaviour and sexuality have changed rather radically.
WORKS CITED


