

Will Norman, “Reading *Lolita*’s Futures.” Key Quotes.

1.

I was standing with my back to the open door, and then I felt the rush of blood to my head as I heard her respiration and voice behind me. She arrived dragging and bumping her heavy suitcase. ‘Hi!’ she said, and stood still, looking at me with sly, glad eyes, her soft lips parted in a slightly foolish but wonderfully endearing smile.

She was thinner and taller, and for a second it seemed to me her face was less pretty than the mental imprint I had cherished for more than a month: her cheeks looked hollowed and too much lentigo camouflaged her rosy rustic features; and that first impression (a very narrow human interval between two tiger heartbeats) carried the clear implication that all widower Humbert had to do, wanted to do, or would do, was to give this wan-looking but sun-colored little orphan *aux yeux battus* (and even those plumbaceous umbrae under her eyes bore freckles) a sound education, a healthy and happy girlhood, a clean home, nice girl-friends of her age among whom (if the fates deigned to repay me), I might find, perhaps, a pretty little *Magdlein* for Herr Doktor Humbert alone. But ‘in a wink,’ as the Germans say, the angelic line of conduct was erased, and I overtook my prey (time moves ahead of our fancies!), and she was my Lolita again – in fact, more of my Lolita than ever. I let my hand rest on her warm auburn head and took up her bag.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)

2.

It would be truer to say instead that they [dreams] give us knowledge of the past. For dreams are derived from the past in every sense. Nevertheless the ancient belief that dreams can foretell the future is not wholly devoid of truth. By picturing our wishes as fulfilled, dreams are after all leading us into the future. But this future, which the dreamer pictures as the present, has been moulded by his indestructible wish into the perfect likeness of the past.

Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* [*The Interpretation of Dreams*] (1899)

3.

The able psychiatrist who studies my case – and whom by now Dr. Humbert has plunged, I trust, into a state of leporine fascination – is no doubt anxious to have me take my Lolita to the seaside and have me find there, at last, the “gratification” of a lifetime urge, and release from the “subconscious” obsession of an incomplete childhood romance with the initial little Miss Lee.

Well, comrade, let me tell you that I *did* look for a beach, though I also have to confess that by the time we reached its mirage of grey water, so many delights had already been granted me by my traveling companion that the search for a Kingdom by the Sea, a Sublimated Riviera, or whatnot, for from being the impulse of the subconscious, had become the rational pursuit of as purely theoretical thrill.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)

4.

... the thought that with patience and luck I might have her produce eventually a nymphet with my blood in her exquisite veins, a Lolita the Second, who would be eight or nine around 1960, when I would still be *dans la force de l’âge*; indeed the telescoping of my mind, or un-mind, was strong enough to distinguish in the remoteness of time a *vieillard encore vert* – or was it green rot? – bizarre, tender, salivating Dr. Humbert, practicing on a supremely lovely Lolita the Third the art of being a granddad.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)

5.

I would find Lolita, *les yeux perdus*, dipping and kicking her long-toed feet in the water on the stone edge of which she lolled, while, on either side of her, there crouched a *brun adolescent* whom her russet beauty and the quicksilver in the baby folds of her stomach were sure to cause to *se tordre* – oh Baudelaire! – in recurrent dreams for months to come.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)

6.

La diane chantait dans les cours des casernes,  
Et le vent du matin soufflait sur les lanternes.

C'était l'heure où l'essaim des rêves malfaisants  
Tord sur leurs oreillers les bruns adolescents;  
Où, comme un oeil sanglant qui palpite et qui bouge,  
La lampe sur le jour fait une tache rouge;  
Où l'âme, sous le poids du corps revêché et lourd,  
Imite les combats de la lampe et du jour.  
Comme un visage en pleurs que les brises essuient,  
L'air est plein du frisson des choses qui s'enfuient,  
Et l'homme est las d'écrire et la femme d'aimer.

Les maisons çà et là commençaient à fumer.  
Les femmes de plaisir, la paupière livide,  
Bouche ouverte, dormaient de leur sommeil stupide;  
Les pauvresses, traînant leurs seins maigres et froids,  
Soufflaient sur leurs tisons et soufflaient sur leurs doigts.  
C'était l'heure où parmi le froid et la lésine  
S'aggravent les douleurs des femmes en gésine;  
Comme un sanglot coupé par un sang écumeux  
Le chant du coq au loin déchirait l'air brumeux  
Une mer de brouillards baignait les édifices,  
Et les agonisants dans le fond des hospices  
Poussaient leur dernier rôle en hoquets inégaux.  
Les débauchés rentraient, brisés par leurs travaux.

L'aurore grelottante en robe rose et verte  
S'avavançait lentement sur la Seine déserte,  
Et le sombre Paris, en se frottant les yeux  
Empoignait ses outils, vieillard laborieux.

Charles Baudelaire, "Le Crépuscule du matin" (1857)

7.

Le beau est fait d'un élément éternel, invariable, dont la quantité est excessivement difficile à déterminer, et d'un élément relatif, circonstanciel, qui sera, si l'on veut, tour à tour ou tout ensemble, l'époque, la mode, la morale, la passion.

Charles Baudelaire, "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" (1864)

8.

It is perhaps necessary to free the value of the future from the value of "horizon" that traditionally has been attached to it - a horizon being, as the Greek word indicates, a limit from which I pre-comprehend the future. I wait for it, I predetermine it, and thus I annul it. Teleology is, at bottom, the negation of the future, a way of knowing beforehand the form that will have to be taken by what is still to come.

Jacques Derrida, *El Gusto del Segreto [A Taste for the Secret]* (1997)

9.

I have often noticed that we are inclined to endow our friends with the stability of type that literary characters acquire in the reader's mind. No matter how many times we reopen "King Lear," never shall we find the good king banging his tankard in high revelry, all woes forgotten, at a jolly reunion with all three daughters and their lapdogs. Never will Emma rally, revived by the sympathetic salts in Flaubert's father's timely tear. Whatever evolution this or that popular character has gone through between the book covers, his fate is fixed in our minds, and, similarly we expect our friends to follow this or that logical and conventional pattern we have fixed for them. Thus X will never compose the immortal music that would class with the second-rate symphonies he has accustomed us to. Y will never commit murder. Under no circumstances can Z ever betray us. We have it all arranged in our minds, and the less often we see a particular person the more satisfying it is to check how obediently he conforms to our notion of him every time we hear of him. Any deviation in the fates we have ordained for them would strike us as not

only anomalous but unethical. We would prefer not to have known at all our neighbour, the retired hot-dog stand operator, if it turns out that he has just produced the greatest book of poetry his age has seen.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)