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## Characteristics of Humbert, the Hero of Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita Novel (Vladimir Nabokov'un Lolita romanının kahramanı Humbert'in özellikleri)

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**ABSTRACT:** *“Lolita” written by Vladimir Nabokov has been considered as an important occasion in the history of world literature for its theme and concept of its characters. The novel written in an original way with distinctive creativity has been subject to debates and various evaluations. Humbert is one of the main characters in the novel “Lolita” with literary mission, serving to demonstrate several psychological, moral and physiological problems, reflecting reasons and effects of various problems that were actual for the society during that time. Since “Lolita” was written during the period when postmodernism influence was observed in the works of Nabokov, it is very noticeable to find postmodern tendencies in the writer’s style and in his main character. Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and its interpretation have played a crucial role in revealing Humbert’s specificity. While assessing Humbert in this context, author’s original approach becomes apparent due to some occasions which are caused by psychological and physiological problems. For this purpose, research on interpretation of Humbert’s stance showed that Humbert’s attitude towards Lolita and his controversial traits are presented in comparison with Freud psychoanalytic theory. Comparative analysis has showed that Humbert is a character who directly affects interpretation of characters and evaluation of events. So, it involves tendencies of that time and takes upon a mission to analyze existing wishes of human that can’t be openly expressed and to reveal threats that are triggered by those traits.*

**KEYWORDS:** “Lolita”; Vladimir Nabokov; novel; postmodernism; Humbert; psychological; character.

**ÖZET:** Vladimir Nabokov'un Lolita romanı konusu, olay örgüsü, karakterleri bakımından Dünya edebiyatı tarihinde önemli romanlardan biridir. Nabokov'un kendine has üslubuyla kaleme aldığı eseri çeşitli yönleriyle tartışmalara neden olmuş ve farklı şekillerde değerlendirilmiştir. Yazar, Humbert karakterine özel bir edebi misyon yüklemiş; psikolojik, manevi, fizyolojik problemlerin gündeme getirilmesini, nedenleri ve sonuçları ile tartışılmasını sağlamıştır.

Nobakov'un eserlerinde sıklıkla postmodernizm yansımaları görüldüğü gibi, Lolita romanında da postmodern eğilimler sezilmektedir.

Z.Freud'un Psikanaliz Teorisi'nin Humbert'in roman kahramanı özelliklerinin belirlenmesinde etkili olduğunu düşünmemizi gerektirecek pek çok veri mevcuttur. Romanda bu teorinin temellerini oluşturan meseleler tartışılmaktadır.

Humbert karakterini Freud'un Psikanaliz Teorisi'ne göre değerlendirdiğimizde Nabokov'un kendine has yaklaşımıyla karakterin psikolojik, fizyolojik problemlerini, onların neden olduğu olayları nasıl ortaya çıkardığını incelemek mümkündür.

Bu makalede Lolita romanında Humbert'in misyonu yorumlanırken, Lolita ile ilişkisi, kimliğindeki çelişkili durumlar, Freud'un Psikanaliz Teorisi'ne göre karşılaştırılmıştır. Bu karşılaştırma sonrasında Humbert karakterinin Nobakov'un diğer kahramanlarının kişisel özelliklerinin incelenmesine olanak sağlayacağı anlaşılmıştır. Eserde, insanın açık şekilde yorumlanamayan hislerinin analizi ve onların neden olduğu tehlikeleri ortaya çıkarmak için Humbert karakterine özel misyon yüklenmiş olduğu anlaşılmıştır.

**ANAHTAR KELİMELER:** Lolita; Vladimir; Nabokov; roman; postmodernizm; Humbert, psikolojik; karakter.

## Introduction

"Lolita" (1955) takes an important place among other English works of Nabokov which were written in the USA. He writes in the foreword called "Laura and her original" that misunderstanding about "Lolita" is inevitable and in order to avoid being victim of this judgement, he tried to get rid of the draft version, but his wife Vera Nabokov's intervention could save the novel [Nabokov, 2010: 12]. Stacy Schiff noted in his book called "Vera (Mrs. Vladimir Na-bo-kov)" which is devoted to the wife of V.Nabokov: "Lolita" owes its advent to Nabokov, but its existence to Vera" [Schiff,

2010:249]. Schiff wrote that Vera prevented the writer from burning the draft of “Lolita” several times in 1950 and 1951 [Schiff, 2010: 249].

V.Nabokov’s distinctive style of writing, the way of expression, manner, outlook, metaphysical views must be completely considered in order to assess this novel. As in many works of Nabokov, “Lolita” has not got a vibrant plot, either, which can be explained with his writing style. As Rustam Kamal says, there is no need to tell the plot - it is a passionate love story of A White Widowed Humbert and Lolita, so that plot has no importance for Nabokov. [Kamal, 2010: 10] Certainly, the plot has been written in a simply way, but it is based on a very logically strong order. Each idea in the beginning of the novel becomes clarified until it comes to conclusion.

V.Nabokov is a writer who is not confined to standards. Since it is very peculiar to his writing style, he did not promote any idea, instead he has just introduced his thoughts to readers, leaving secrets and hidden matters behind. Nabokov doesn’t speak about aesthetic categories, doesn’t express them with words, tries not to show personal opinions about contradictions. He allows a reader to form opinion and view about different issues and makes readers think and decide themselves. Therefore, while studying and analysing his works, it is not always possible to apply norms of criticism and aesthetics. During analysis in order to avoid misjudgements regarding morality, Nabokov writes in his letter: “Once you decide to read “Lolita”, don’t forget the fact that it’s an indeed moral and noble book [Foster, 1993: 4]. The author sheds light on this issue in the foreword of the book as following: “I am neither a reader, nor a writer of didactic fiction, and... Lolita has no moral in tow. For me a work of fiction exists only so far as it affords me what I shall bluntly call aesthetic bliss, that is a sense of being somehow. Somewhere, connected with other states of being where art (curiosity, tenderness, kindness, ecstasy) is the norm” [Nabokov, 1996: 9].

In response to controversies and differences about the novel, Nikolay Anastasev evaluated it in a very interesting way: “Perhaps, “Lolita” is the darkest and the most cruel writing of Nabokov. Nevertheless, “Lolita” is also the brightest and certainly, the most merciful novel of his with combination of hope and sorrow as in the style of Pushkin -” [Анастасьев, 1992: 295].

We can't consider "Lolita" as a totally postmodern novel, but we may come across some points reflecting assumptions of aesthetic ideas in the context of V.Nabokov's approach to postmodern literature. "Majority of people complain of postmodern attempts aimed to vanish moral values. We suppose that we should not miss one point. In my view, postmodernists don't firmly label moral values as unnecessary or useless. They just create various alternatives for the stance as they make decisions regarding profound issues [Chagani, 2017: 25]

According to the author, this character gives a person freedom wishes by forming personal view, but freedom is a notion that is not restricted to wishes [Chagani, 2017: 25]. Consequently, individuals in literature appear in the foreground, relative ties are normally accepted, different approaches are formed and not strongly criticized about the same object. As mentioned "Lolita" by V.Nabokov includes these features a lot.

### **Different character by Nabokov– Humbert.**

#### ***The role of author's logic in the identification of character***

The novel "Lolita" is based on the interpretation of psychological, physiological, sociological problems in terms of two main characters of the novel such as Humbert and Lolita and their lives. The writer wrote in one of his letters: " I am writing a novel about a noble man who disgracefully fell in love with his 13 year-old stepdaughter" [Анастасьев, 1992: 265]. The novel is written based on Humbert's narration and it is interesting to discover his views about traits of young American girl.

"The novel has the theme about Dr.Humbert who has fallen in love with 13 -year-old girl called Dolores (Lolita) and it demonstrates crisis and emotional problems caused by this love contrasted with the tragedy of a little girl" [Foster, 1993: 4].

The first sentence of the novel clearly portrays Humbert and plays a key role to the novel:

"LOLITA, a light of my life, fire of my loins... My sin, my soul" [Nabokov, 1996: 7]. All the problems in the work develop out of Humbert's physiological diseases and psychological condition and one "nymphet" teenager girl Lolita. The novel constitutes from the diary of the murderer called Humbert. Chinara Ibrahimova assessed the work as written

confession made in the prison in order to revive all those moments of joy and to sense the feeling of inevitable loss [Ibragimova, 2013: 35]. And that murderer gives a promise to a reader to be honest from the first page of his novel: “You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style” [Nabokov, 1996: 7]. Therefore, unless you consider events and thoughts in a complex way, making instant decisions can lead to wrong assumptions about characters of the novel.

### ***Psychological condition of the character – influence of Freud's psychoanalytic analysis***

Who is Humbert? Firstly, the author answered this question: “In the foreword of the novel:

“Humbert - the character that I created is stranger and anarchist, I don't share his opinions not only about nymphet girls, but also about many subjects”, he had to note this” [Nabokov, 1996: 4]. Thoughts symbolizing the main figure of this novel aimed to reveal this character and its features. Humbert says: “Sufferings continuing for years taught me to be extremely cold-blooded” [Nabokov, 1996: 31]. This masterpiece is hidden reflection of that oppression which stands to Humbert's psychological condition and illness.

Humbert lives dual life consisting of his inner world and his position in the society. “I would say in a silent, but in an impressive way that I looked very handsome with my considerate actions, soft black hair, attractive posture, despite all my misfortunes” [Nabokov, 1996: 27] by expressing this opinion of himself he elicited some features which he wanted to keep secretly: “... subjects with this type of features try to hide things which can be often obscure and vivid” [Nabokov, 1996: 27].

There were some hidden factors in the whole novel, but diary written in jail after killing Quilty and being imprisoned explains that spiritual world, psychological condition, and physiological illness caused all those secret issues. Some points developing out of freudism are also noticeable: “This information refers to intimate trait of patient's state of mind and as a socially independent personality, he doesn't want to admit it even to himself” [Freud, 2010: 35]. S.Freud divided structural theory of personality into 3 parts such as “id”, “ego” and “superego”. “Id” operates unconsciously and is comprised of affections, emotions and the hidden

traits of person which are ready to arise at first chance, in other words, all the existing, but unrealized phenomena of human" [Freud, 2010: 24]. "Id" was "complete chaos and boiling pot" according to S.Freud. The figure created by V.Nabokov can not be totally evaluated in terms of Freudism, but it obviously possesses some traits of Freudism.

Indeed, in a large scale Humbert represents violence, harm, victims. As Rustam Kamal said: "Basis of V.Nabokov's ethics lies in his approach to the violence" [Kamal, 2010: 24]. This opinion has been confirmed by other researchers, too. "Love between Dolores and Humbert is a little bit violent. Humbert has already been affected by Lolita and he turned to be a person who is unable to live without her. Dolores is occasionally declining his offers to have relations with him, but Humbert had to force her by threatening and using her weaknesses" [Rutledge, 2011: 3]. At the same time, Humbert symbolizes unhappy person with hidden sufferings, weaknesses and his inseparable devil as he says. As the story is narrated by main character of the novel, Nabokov makes a reader trust that figure-the murderer. So his honest confessions, useless but real combat with his inner world make a reader believe, analyse his situation, features, morality, psychological condition and contemplate about Humbert rather than judging him as wicked and murderer.

According to the novel, it appears that Humbert meets Lolita in his landlady's house and in order to be close to Lolita Haze, he reluctantly agrees to marry Lolita's mother, Charlotte Haze. When Charlotte decides to leave her daughter in the camp, Humbert flies into rage. So, he starts to plan killing and getting rid of Charlotte by drowning her in the sea. At that time, it is quite obvious that Humbert is struggling with devil and he is unfortunate thanks to his weaknesses: "Devil is going on to repeat his advice, but me, I still can not make this miserable, smooth, overweight creature to drown" [Nabokov, 2013: 108]. Humbert, representing different and limited group of people in society is always engaged in finding new plans for following murder while fighting with his humane and evil feelings. Because his feelings are unacceptable for community and he finds ways out to overcome barriers on his way only by killing people. From this point of view, Humbert can be analyzed in comparison with "Ego" of Freud which is reflection of biological and social instincts [Ismayılov, 1994: 26; Ismailov, 1994: 26].

V.Nabokov gives interesting clues about his characters fate as a killer in the beginning of the novel, he secretly warns a reader about a murder in the course of events before Humbert meets Lolita. Humbert says: “If to speak honestly, I am in the edge of the disaster and the essence of my plan about perfect murder is getting known” [Nabokov, 2013: 108]. The whole novel goes around the inevitable disaster.

How does he differ from other criminals? Why does he kill Quilty, but not his first wife Valeria, not Charlotte, not the husband of Lolita? All these questions are answered in his own words: “ We are not sexual predators! We don't force anybody as courageous soldiers. We are misfortunate, quiet, well-behaved persons, we can manage our passion in front of elderly people, but we would sacrifice a lot or half of our lives for touching a nymphet girl once. I repeat again we are not murderers, poets don't kill” [Nabokov, 2013: 109].

“I have grown up healthily and happily in the seaside with clean sand, orange trees and among bright books, lovely dogs and friendly faces” [Nabokov, 1996: 8] - says Humbert. Although he had lost his mother very early, he was brought up by caring people and his well-off father.

“He has read books including “Don-Quixote” and “The Miserables” since his childhood. Until his first date with Annabel and realizing his physical weakness the writer allows us to imagine setting in which he has grown up. It becomes clear in the course the novel: “I loved and appreciated my father, I was proud when servants were talking and discussing his countless lovers” [Nabokov, 1996: 8]. “So, as S.Freud assumes some wishes about “golden century” starts to emerge in Humbert's heart which can be noticed from his ideas about father. S.Freud writes in his work called “The Future of an Illusion”: “People can completely surrender for gaining pleasure that can be obtained without labour or difficulty. This can be named as golden century” [Freud, 2004: 5]. He admits his physical weakness and calls himself “ill-fated Humbert” while speaking about his first wife – Valeria: “And I have been very naïve, only people with sexual shortages can act like me” [Nabokov, 2013: 28]. For Humbert his attitude towards Annabel when he was 13 was the sign of “innate immorality” [Nabokov, 2013: 12]. He refers to his illness while expressing his feelings for Lolita which can be the continuation of “mysterious and innocent Annabel” [Nabokov, 2013: 13].

“Humbert, a French linguist living in America has lost his beloved Annabel because of disease. This loss causes long-lasting barriers and disorders in his life, and led to the emergence of enduring desire for teenager girls” [S.Rutledge, 2011: 7]. Actually, Humbert himself confesses his “innate disorder”. Perhaps, because of this deficiency he tends to be “unsociable”. S.Freud explains “introvert” people: “Some people with tendency to have disorders or intense desire with no limits will stay unsociable forever” [Freud, 2004: 7].

### ***Subject of “murderer” in the novel***

Main and final subject line of V.Nabokov’s “Lolita” is a murderer and factors leading to the murder. Humbert kills Clare Quilty who rescued his beloved Lolita and ends up in jail. His tendency to kill a person appeared once, when he realized that his wife Valeria betrayed him.

He gets furious, depleted and tries to decide whether to kill “his wife, her lover, both of them”. Humbert has intense feelings, and to reach the level of a murderer his happiness with Lolita had to be threatened. Again V.Nabokov gives clues concerning criminal case in the beginning of the novel and introduces short chronicle to readers by using main motive. Humbert says: “I sometimes dream murdering somebody. You know, what happened? For example, I held a pistol in my hand and point it to a patient person who acts indifferently. Yes, it is right, I directed the pistol precisely to the right point, but all bullets fell down one by one. I had only one wish in my dreams: to conceal my failures from my enemy who gets angry time by time” [Nabokov, 2013: 57]. According to him, nobody is able to commit perfect murder alone, it is possible if to happen coincidentally. His detailed preparation and killing episode includes motives of coincidences which he believes. And eventually, Humbert’s feeling make him go down to the level of a murderer. “I can destroy everything rather than giving her up” [Nabokov, 2013: 301] – by saying these words determined main character Humbert committed murder. “Killing scene of Clare Quilty who takes Lolita apart from Humbert is impressive like a play added by Nabokov to the novel. It feels like Nabokov wishes his readers and himself enjoy this episode. Quilty’s murder episode is introduced in a humorous, amusing way as if it is a comedy scene” [Rutledge, 2011: 9].



## **Conclusion**

The novel “Lolita” is extremely crucial in terms of interpretation of critical problems and psychologically strained issues. The novel causing a lot of disputes and debates is highly appreciated because of its theme regarding essential points of inner world of human or society and detailed explanation and interpretation of each issue. Logical relations among opinions and occasions, principle of precision in choosing appropriate phrase or words is strongly maintained.

This piece of work encourages person to enter those occasions and realize the characters rather than criticizing or praising them. Each character has his or her own mission in this novel describing categories of time and place, reality, dream and imagination factors. Neither Humbert, nor Lolita can be interpreted because of their individual features, wishes, behaviours. It is possible to evaluate it reasonably by perceiving the novel in the framework of moral, psychological, physiological and even public problems. It is very precious masterpiece as it involves highly important assumptions and lessons gained in the course of events.

V.Nabokov didn't prioritize serious or striking social problems, instead, all the occasions are based on Humbert's obsession. However, issues caused by those social problems directly influence lives of the characters. It is possible to understand him only if to approach Humbert as a final product of social problems and the attitude towards such a society, as a character created with irony and as a hero reflecting realities of life.

V.Nabokov has been exposed to criticism for a long time because of “Lolita”, particularly, because of the character Humbert. Readers and critics have always been contemplating about the question- “Is it reasonable to bring immoral character with violently passionate feelings for teenager girl to the novel, especially, in the role of narrator?” But it is worth to note that generation represented by Lolita, problems of that society, people's psychology at that time, physiological condition of people can be clarified and revealed thanks to Humbert, this was Humbert's main mission. As a medical pattern “Lolita” can obviously gain common usage in clinical circles. But as a piece of work, it has plentiful traits to justify its “drawback”. In terms of science, the most essential and meaningful point for us is its moral impact on readers. Because description

of this extremely critical individual phenomenon stands to social lesson” [Rutledge, 2011: 12].

According to the author, foolish children, pessimistic mothers, maniacs should not only remain as characters in the novels, they should warn people to be alert against dangers and threats: “Lolita” should encourage all of us to work with pleasure and with bright mind for better world, meanwhile it should direct parents, teachers, considerate people to strive for decent society by fostering healthy and strong generations for safer world” [Rutledge, 2011: 12]. Therefore, it is worth to recall a precious saying that “an enlightened reader associates himself with mind of an author rather than with male or female character from a book” [Rutledge, 2011: 15].

## **Sonuç**

Lolita romanı mühim problemler ve gergin psikolojik meselelerin yorumu açısından önemli bir yapıttır. Nobakov’un insanların çoğu kere dile getirmekten çekindiği veya dile getirmediği duyguları işlediği Lolita adlı romanı şiddetli tartışmalara neden olmuştur. Nobakov, toplumun geniş kesimlerince açık bir şekilde tartışılmayan ergen kız ve yetişkin erkek arasında yaşanan bedeni arzular konusunu etraflı bir şekilde incelemesi takdire şayandır. Nabukov, eserinde olaylar arasındaki ilişkiyi mantıklı temellere oturtmak için kelimeleri özenle seçmiştir.

Roman, okuyucusunu betimlenen olaylara müdahil ederek kahramanları methetmek ve yermekten ziyade, onları anlamayı telkin etmektedir. Eserde, zaman ve mekân ayırımı yapılmadan realite, rüya ve hayal illüzyonları oluşturularak, her kahramana bir misyon yüklenmiştir.

Eserdeki Humbert ve Lolita karakterleri sadece kişisel özellikleri, istekleri, arzuları ve davranışlarıyla yorumlanamazlar. Romanın kahramanları, eserde işlenen manevi, psikolojik, fizyolojik ve sosyal problemler bir yana bırakılarak daha doğru değerlendirilebilir.

İlk bakışta Humbert’in şehvet ifadesi üzerinden yola çıkıldığı söylenebileceğinden Nabokov’un sosyal meseleleri işlediğini kavramak zordur. Sosyal problemlerin ortaya çıkardığı sonuçlar kahramanların hayatlarını doğrudan etkilemektedir. Humbert karakteri yazarın ironisinin yansıdığı, örtülmüş toplumsal gerçekleri yaşayan bir karakter olarak ele aldığımızda anlamak mümkün olacaktır.

Nobakov'un Lolita adlı romanı özellikle Humbert karakteri nedeniyle sert eleştirilere maruz kalmıştır. Okuyucular gibi eleştirmenler de "Ahlaksız, düşkün, ergenlik çağındaki kız çocuğuna karşı vahşi duyguları olan bir kahramanın kaleme alınması, hatta romanın ana karakteri olarak sunulması doğru bir tercih mi?" sorusunu sormuşlardır.

Eserde Lolita'nın ergenlik dönemindeki bir genç kızın, Humbert ise orta yaş yetişkin erkeklerin yaşadığı çeşitli duygusal, bedeni ve ruhsal boşluklarının açıklıklarının, arzularının kesişme noktasını ele almaktadır.

"Klinik bir vaka olarak Lolita kuşkusuz psikiyatri çevrelerinde bir klasiğe dönüşecektir. Sanat eseri olarak ise ayıbını kapatacak, kendisini yükseltilere taşıyacak özelliklere sahiptir. Bizim için roman, bilimsel açıdan önemli ve edebi değerinden ziyade akıllı okurlara yapacağı ahlaki etki bakımından önemlidir. Çünkü bu bireysel görünen olayın betimlemesinde sosyal bir mesaj yer almaktadır." [Rutledge, 2011: 12]. Yazara göre akılsız çocuklar, bencil anneler, manyaklar sadece eserlerde okuduğumuz karakterlerle kısıtlı kalmamalı, mevcut kötülükler, tehlikeli olaylara karşı dikkatli olmak yetisi kazandırma özelliği taşınmalıdır. Lolita karakteri aileleri, toplumun iyiliği için çalışanları, öğretmenleri daha büyük bir şevkle daha güvenli bir dünya ve daha sağlıklı nesiller yetiştirmeye yöneltebilir." [Rutledge, 2011: 12]. Bu görüşü "Başarılı okur okuduğu kitaptaki erkek veya kadınla değil, o kitabı yaratan, kurmacayı ortaya çıkaran akılla empati kurmaya çalışır" [Rutledge, 2011: 15] şeklinde tamamlamak mümkündür.

Roman olayların gelişiminden çıkarılabilecek dersler ve sonuçları bakımından önemli bir eserdir.

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