

TRAUMATIC TESTIMONIES:
TRAUMA, TEMPORAL HYBRIDITY, AND LANGUAGE IN *THE GOD OF SMALL*
THINGS AND *LOLITA*

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Cristiane Regina de Oliveira, certify that

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ABSTRACT

Traumatic Testimonies:
Trauma, Temporal Hybridity, and Language
in *The God of Small Things* and *Lolita*

Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) narrate the traumatic effects of societal transgressions, namely pedophilia and incest. The authors distort literary notions of time and language by utilizing temporal hybridity and semiotic language in order to replicate the experience of abject trauma through fictional testimony. The novel's recurrence of certain words, events, and behaviors reinforce the repetitive nature and recall of trauma. The use of unusual and lyrical language, resulting in aesthetically beautiful novels, serve to ease both the characters and readers' confrontation of the abject and forces them to reconsider societal ethics. Chapter 1 is an introduction to theoretical arguments on trauma, temporal hybridity, semiotics and the abject posited by Julia Kristeva, Cathy Caruth, Elizabeth Outka, and L. Chris Fox. Chapter 2 considers trauma and time, namely the characters' traumatic experiences and their impact on their perception of time and the novels' structure, which simulate the disorienting nature of a traumatic experience for the reader. Chapter 3 analyzes how trauma alters the characters' language, forcing them into a dialogue with the semiotic and the abject, and manipulating the reader into a complicity that challenges their morals. Chapter 4 offers a conclusion to the analyses elaborated in this work and argues that the authors' non-native command of English creates another dimension to the semiotic styles employed in elucidating trauma through fiction.

ÖZET

Travmatik Kanıtlar:

Küçük Şeylerin Tanrısı ve Lolita'da

Travma, Temporal Hybridity ve Dil

Vladimir Nabokov'un *Lolita* (1955) ve Arundhati Roy'un *Küçük Şeylerin Tanrısı* (1997) adlı eserleri, pedofili ve ensest olarak adlandırılan toplumsal suçların travmatik etkilerini anlatıyor. Yazarlar, travma deneyimini kurgusal kanıtlarla çoğaltmak için temporal hybridity ve göstergebilim dili kullanarak edebi zaman ve dil kavramlarını çarpıtmaktadır. Romanın belirli sözleri, olayları, davranışları ve rüyaları tekrarlaması, travmanın tekrarlayan doğasını ve hatırlanmasını güçlendirir. Estetik olarak güzel romanlarla sonuçlanan sıra dışı ve lirik dil kullanımı, hem karakterlerin hem de okuyucuların abject (iğrençlik) ile yüzleşmesini kolaylaştırır hem de onları toplumsal etik kavramını yeniden düşünmeye zorlar. Birinci Bölüm travma, temporal hybridity, göstergebilim ve Julia Kristeva, Cathy Caruth, Elizabeth Outka ve L. Chris Fox tarafından belirlenen abject (iğrençlik) kavramları ile ilgili teorik tartışmalara giriş niteliğindedir. İkinci Bölüm travma ve zamanı, yani karakterlerin travmatik deneyimlerini, bu deneyimlerin karakterlerin zaman algıları üzerindeki etkilerini ve okur için travmatik bir deneyimin kafa karıştırıcı doğasını taklit eden roman yapısını ele alır. Üçüncü Bölüm, travmanın karakterlerin dilini nasıl değiştirdiğini analiz eder. Bunu göstergebilim ve karakterleri abject (iğrençlik) ile diyaloga zorlayarak ve okuyucuyu ahlak kavramını sorgulamasına neden olan bir manipülasyon ile yapar. Dördüncü Bölüm, bu çalışmada ele alınan analizlere bir sonuç sunar ve yazarların anadilinin

İngilizce olmamasının, kurgu yoluyla travmanın açıklığı kavuşturulmasında kullanılan göstergebilimsel stiller için başka bir boyut yarattığını savunur.

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DEDICATION

"And the rest is rust and stardust."
Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*

For Ömer, for always believing.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Lo-lee-ta, a trip of the tongue taking three steps, or is it toes tumbling down the thirteen slimy steps to the Ayemenem River? Through these memorable alliterations, repeated endlessly, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) converge on the plains of unconventional desire, traumatic experiences, the instability of time and the malleability of language, despite being separated by decades and continents. The novels present opposite testimonies of abject trauma through complex literary devices, such as subversions of language and time, as a means of intent to replicate the narrative experience of trauma. The occurrence of a traumatic event is unexpected and the victim is only able to recognize, assert, and survive the trauma long after the fact. Victims of trauma often disassociate from the experience and attempt to resolve or at least elucidate the traumatic experience, consciously or unconsciously, by a repetitive reworking of the semiotic language and temporal hybridity. The reworking of language and time in the narrations serve to address the viscerally painful and revolting, aesthetically challenging identity, agency, and the manner in which individuals confront and react to abject trauma.

This work considers how the literary representation of trauma alters the expected literary notions of time, language and morality. A reader expects a novel to be a linear narrative written in symbolic language, but Nabokov and Roy reorganize time, and by extension memory, and language in a manner that approximates the experience of trauma. In addition, this work poses the idea that the effectivity and consequences of the literary representation of trauma makes the reader complicit in the characters' actions,

thereby altering their perception of morality. The authors imply that something aesthetically beautiful can challenge the reader's perceived ethics; namely, they force the reader to confront abject trauma and reconsider their ideas about pedophilia and incest.

Often misconstrued as facets of post-structuralism or magical realism, the subversion of language and temporality are in fact features of traumatic experience and testimony. The authors utilize unusual chronologies, repetitive imagery and expressions, and lyrical diction and style to tell stories of trauma that force the reader to question societal mores, particularly pedophilia and incest. The stories, and the way the stories are told, seduce the reader into accepting abject societal transgressions they normally would not: Humbert Humbert's lush declarations of desire almost convince the reader that his abuse of Lolita was truly an act of love, and the reader comprehends that twins Estha and Rahel's sexual encounter is not merely incest. Abject trauma causes victims to contemplate the disturbing facets of humanity that individuals reject in order to construct and operate in society, as well as the boundaries between the self and the other and places in which one chooses to situate oneself. Abject trauma forces the victim, and in this context the character and reader, to consider and reassess the place where meaning, identity, and morals, as structured through language and time, collapse.

Lolita is organized in layers of dazzling prose, unreliable narration, and illusory time, common Nabokovian themes that tend to simulate the pattern of a game. After a telling foreword by a hammy “John Ray, Jr., PhD,” *Lolita* is primarily narrated by “Humbert,” a charismatic, ambiguously foreign French professor and pedophile who harbors a long-life penchant for what he calls “nymphets.” Humbert recounts his childhood and early adulthood, focusing on the event that altered the trajectory of his romantic life, the death of his prepubescent first love. In his late thirties, Humbert moves

to sleepy Ramsdale, a fictional town in New England and marries homely widow Charlotte Haze in order to become closer to her twelve year old daughter Dolores, nicknamed Lolita. After his marriage to the pathetic Charlotte ends in a happy twist of fate for our anti-hero - Charlotte is run over on the street as she is going to mail letters announcing her discovery of Humbert Humbert's pedophilic predilections - Humbert absconds with his step-daughter and embarks on a road trip throughout the United States. Humbert Humbert's grooming of Lolita results in a sexual relationship wherein he often drugs, manipulates, or bribes her into sexual acts. Lolita eventually runs away from Humbert with another pedophile and Humbert Humbert's nemesis, playwright Clare Quilty, who after submitting Lolita to increasingly degrading acts, throws her out on the street. Years later, Humbert tracks down Lolita, now a matronly seventeen years old and known as Mrs. Richard Schiller. Pregnant and poor, Lolita is a mere glimmer of the vivacious child she once was; though he no longer finds her attractive, Humbert believes he still loves her and attempts to seduce her back into his arms with promises of security and stability. Gently rebuffed, Humbert gifts Lolita and her husband his car and thousands of dollars, and proceeds to hunt down Quilty, whom Lolita has revealed to be the man who abducted her years ago. The two engage in a pitiful duel resulting in Quilty's death and Humbert Humbert's arrest following a disheartened police chase. In a further subversion of time, underscoring the circularity of time, *Lolita* has two endings, offering the reader an expected "correct ending" of the present, and the true ending, a realization of a tragic future. The novel closes on a beautifully written present in which Humbert is jailed and Lolita will move to Alaska with her husband and soon to be born daughter. But in fact, if the reader connects the facts of the foreword with the facts of the last chapters, *Lolita* ends in a Hamletesque turn: Humbert perishes in jail of heart disease

and Lolita and her baby die in childbirth.

The God of Small Things' narrative is dislocated across time, space, and memory. Set in December 1969 and June 1993 in Ayemenem, Kerala, southwest India, it tells the story of seven year old twins Rahel and Estha, their divorced mother Ammu, and their extended family: uncle Chacko, grandmother Mammachi, and great-aunt Baby Kochamma. From a high caste Syrian-Christian family, the twins' lives are upended when their half-British cousin Sophie Mol and her mother come to visit Sophie Mol's father, Chacko, for Christmas. Ammu keeps an explosive secret: a love affair with Velutha, an "Untouchable" from a lower caste who works for the family and often plays with her children. Estha is also the keeper of a disturbing secret which he represses through deep silence: he was molested by a middle aged refreshments counter man at a cinema. Sophie Mol and the twins decide to run away and explore the deep part of the Ayemenem River in an old canoe Velutha has fixed up for the children. When a violent storm hits, the canoe overturns and Sophie Mol drowns. The twins are rescued and the love affair between Ammu and Velutha is discovered, resulting in Baby Kochamma manipulating the children into telling the police that Velutha kidnapped and killed Sophie Mol. The police mercilessly beat Velutha to death, effectively destroying the family. Estha and Rahel are separated: Estha is sent away to his father and new step-mother, and Rahel remains with Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. Rahel becomes numb to everything around her, while Estha becomes mute and Ammu delusional, mentally stuck in 1969. Thirty-one year old Ammu dies alone of an asthma attack. The novel appears to end when Estha and Rahel meet again as adults in 1993, where they wordlessly have sex. But Roy, similar to Nabokov but in a different manner, subverts the ending, closing out the narrative in a past scene recounting Ammu and Velutha's love

and the fragile hope of a tomorrow that never comes.

Both texts make the reader complicit in experiencing their respective plot's abject traumas of separation, pedophilia, and murder, as well as other social transgressions that the novels treat as ambiguously acceptable within the context, such as incest and delusional love. The reader experiences these abject traumas as both perpetrator and victim, forcing them to confront the nature of trauma and what can be considered moral or amoral. This feat is accomplished partly because of the contextualization of the protagonists and the reader's involvement in and understanding of their actions. The protagonists act as both perpetrator and victim to varying degrees. *Lolita*'s honey-tongued protagonist Humbert inflicts the novel's central trauma, but he is also a victim of trauma, losing his mother and his first love all before he turns fourteen. *The God of Small Things*' fountain-haired and Elvis-poofed Rahel and Estha are victims, losing their mother and families when they are seven, but they do not *feel* as if they are wholly innocent, having been manipulated into causing Velutha's death. Yet both perpetrator and victims utilize the same language, implying that their experiences of trauma, albeit as perpetrator and victim, are inherently connected.

One of the effects of trauma, generally observed through traumatic testimony, alters the victim's language in an attempt to comprehend and elucidate the traumatic experience. The alteration of language resulting from trauma and the attempt to represent trauma result in novels that are written in lyrical, poetic, musical, and rhythmic styles, mimicking or releasing what French-Bulgarian theorist Julia Kristeva calls the semiotic. Language necessitates both the semiotic and symbolic for it to function in an understandable and communicable way, and the symbolic is at the forefront. Without the symbolic, there is no set standard of communication with which society abides; a text of

only semiotic language would prove inaccessible to nearly all but the writer. While the symbolic by nature suppresses the semiotic, the semiotic cannot be lost: it is always pulsing underneath the symbolic, attempting to disrupt or subvert the symbolic and all it represents, namely society, order, and patriarchal logic. The use of the semiotic creates an intimacy between the characters and the readers, one in which the characters invite the reader into their private world, their deepest, purest, boundaryless world. The novels beguile the reader to relate to particular opposite traumatic testimonies and their experiences: in one novel the perpetrator of trauma narrates his recollections, while in the other novel the victims of trauma have their experiences narrated. Nabokov and Roy's decisions to frame their narrations through the first person narration of the perpetrator and the omniscient third person narration of the victims underscore the effect of trauma on language and agency, namely the differences between the perpetrator and victims' ability to speak, to choose how and when to speak. Despite these differences, both perpetrator and victim utilize the same literary devices and styles to communicate their experiences.

In *Lolita*, Humbert utilizes language, specifically lyrical prose, hyphenated compounds, literary allusions, and rhymes to manipulate his victim and his reader alike. Nabokov gifts Humbert with sweet, pointed words, a multitude of literary allusions, and dreamlike poetry and song to tell his story. The use of this playful and cloying language is a return to the semiotic, which enchants Lolita, who is still a child and closer in age to the realm of the semiotic, and which reinforces Humbert's own arrested development in childhood, also caused by trauma. Like any effective form of music or poetry, Humbert's diction and style also captivates the reader. Unbeknownst to the reader, they are transformed by the text in two manners: they become a victim of

Humbert, something akin to Stockholm syndrome, and they become complicit in his crimes. The style and diction seduce the reader into believing and accepting not only Humbert Humbert's narrative but also his logic for perpetrating sexual and mental abuse, effectively making the reader feel closer to Humbert than Lolita. But besides style and diction, it is Nabokov's choice of having Humbert be the first person narrator, the one with the power and luxury of being able to *craft* and narrate his story well after the events have occurred, that makes the reader believe and relate to him. And what of Lolita, the victim? Save for a few fragments, snippets of speech and writings that Humbert can or chooses to recall about her trauma, the keen lack of a first person voice and the painful testimony of the very person who has suffered the abuse recounted as a love affair lends additional power to Humbert Humbert's voice and credibility, even if the reader recognizes him as an unreliable and unstable narrator. Lolita's lack of a voice forces the reader to imagine her trauma, to subject themselves to her experience and thereby making it their own, but it also distances them from her, placing them squarely in Humbert Humbert's corner. The experience of relating to another, either perpetrator or victim, is often unsettling and unexpected, for it attracts the reader closer into the semiotic and the abject, forcing them to confront their notions of morality and repressed instincts. In both instances, the relation compels the reader to place themselves in the position of the character and to contemplate their own principles and motivations, but associating with the unpleasant and immoral renders the reader vulnerable and uncomfortable, for it is essentially a questioning of their identity as self and their mortality. One could argue that relating to the perpetrator could cause the reader to feel both disgusted and powerful, appropriating the perpetrator's ability to exert dominance and agency in a manner impossible when relating to the victim; a feeling perhaps

preferable than to that of being victimized, submissive, and agentless.

The God of Small Things places the reader in this very position of victimhood and powerlessness. The twin protagonists utilize their childlike language to communicate with each other, reinforce their bond, and synthesize the world around them to comprehensible experiences, but trauma decimates their system of language, rendering both of them mute and impenetrable to communication. Roy relies on rhymes, Rushdie-like capitalization of repurposed words and terms, literary allusions, and an overwhelming use of adverbial description to render the twin's world. These stylistic choices, which are repetitive and constant in the texts, demonstrate the characters' descent into the repressed or disconcerting facets of their psyches, the semiotic slipping into the symbolic, as a result of and means of coping with trauma. The sense of the twins' powerlessness as victims and their comprehension of the events through language is amplified by the fact that they are children, lacking the agency adults possess, and that Roy chooses to utilize a third person omniscient narrator and alternating viewpoints. Unlike in *Lolita*, the novel's narration is alternated in chapters wherein the third person omniscient narrator explores each character's experiences and thoughts; the reader is privy to each character's deepest desires, inner turmoil, and the logic behind their actions. Unlike *Lolita*, the characters cannot press upon the reader an agenda in the manner that Humbert does; they are simply retelling and reliving their traumas. The form of narration creates an intimate distance between the reader and the character, one wherein the reader knows the character well but in which the character cannot craft or manipulate their telling of the experience, and cannot necessarily sully the pure traumatic experience. Like the lack of *Lolita*'s direct voice, this allows the reader to experience their traumas as one would while undergoing the trauma, as a constantly

occurring event that is distorted temporally and linguistically, and without the dimension of temporal distance, reflection, or subjectivity of a first person narration.

All of the traumas inflicted on the characters revolve around the body, the abject, and hierarchies of power. Humbert Humbert's inability to consummate his first sexual experience is forever linked with death. This trauma dictates his subsequent sexual predilection, and he engages in pedophilia, transposing the symbolic body of Annabel into other young girls. There is an additional element of reclaiming power: he was powerless when he was unable to have sex with Annabel, and powerless to stop her death; in order to overcome this inferiority, he forcibly exploits his power over another teenage girl in a situation where he *already* has dominance, as an adult and Lolita's legal guardian. In raping Lolita, Humbert also commits pedophilia, transgressing two of society's rules. He sexually abuses a young Lolita, often drugging and bribing her in order to have access to her body. Lolita's abuse results in her penchant for an older man, Quilty, who further abuses her with group sex and drugs. While her mind and soul appear to overcome her trauma, Lolita's abused body bears the brunt of her pain, and like everyone in her life, also betrays her: a teenaged Lolita dies giving birth to a girl. Similarly in *The God of Small Things*, Estha's young body is abused by a pedophiliac cinema concession man, causing significant trauma and a fixation on detachment from his body and voice. He becomes anxious about everything, learning that "(a) Anything can happen to Anyone. And (b) It's best to be prepared," (Roy, 1997, p. 96). An additional combination of three other significant bodily events unravels the characters' lives: Sophie Mol's death, Ammu and Velutha's affair, and Rahel and Estha's incest. Sophie Mol drowns on the shores of the History House, her very (half) white body taken almost as the Indian land's vengeance, her soft eyelids and fingers nibbled away by fish.

In rescuing the twins and Sophie Mol's body, Velutha and Ammu's affair is discovered, an unholy union of two different castes, of clean and light with dirty and dark. It is Velutha's perceived transgression of these whiter bodies, of Ammu and Sophie Mol that incites Baby Kochamma and the police to accuse chocolate colored Velutha of kidnapping and killing Sophie Mol. He is humiliated and killed by other lighter brown bodies and black boots, signifying the hierarchy of the caste system. The deaths of Sophie Mol and Velutha lead to the physical separation of the twins, the slow decay of Ammu's body from alcohol and illness, Estha's muteness and Rahel's numbness. The only manner in which the twins can compensate for these losses and attempt to return to themselves, is to simulate their once unbreakable union in the womb by engaging in incest.

In exploring the ideas posited in the preceding paragraphs, this work utilizes Julia Kristeva's theories of the abject from *Powers of Horror* and the semiotic from *Desire in Language* as the fundamental theoretical sources, as well as the trauma theories of Cathy Caruth's book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Elizabeth Outka's essay "Trauma and Temporal Hybridity in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" and L. Chris Fox's essay "Martyrology of the Abject: Witnessing and Trauma in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*."

Julia Kristeva elaborates and evolves on the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan to fashion her theory on semiotics. In his *Écrits*, Lacan famously postulated that the psyche has three parts: the Real, the Imaginary Order, and the Symbolic Order. Lacan argues that humans do not only use language to describe their understanding or experience of the world, but that language shapes the unconscious. In essence, language defines and confines an individual's world. Infants are unable to distinguish between

themselves and everything else, particularly their mothers. Once children learn to speak, they abandon the Real, thereby accepting the rules and orders of society at large. Picking up on this thread, Kristeva renames Lacan's earliest stage of development, the Real, as the semiotic chora, the pre-linguistic realm housing the semiotic and the bodily drives, which the Real represses and which sometimes return to the surface in often disturbing ways, primarily through the alteration of language. In this space, one is the closest to what Kristeva and Lacan denominate as the "purest" state of existence or materiality, and where one is solely governed by their death and life drives. The abject is the human reaction of horror to events or items that break the distinction between subject/object or self/other. The breakdown between these distinctions cause one to reflect on societal hierarchy and norms, but also one's own morality and mortality. What is abject is radically excluded from oneself and draws one "toward the place where meaning collapses," which is often the semiotic (Kristeva, 1982, p.2). Kristeva offers the example of the corpse as the primary abject item that induces horror, along with bodily excrements - urine, blood, semen, bile, saliva - and amoral actions (genocide and murder, and in the context of the novels, pedophilia and incest) that reiterate our materiality. For Kristeva, humans must acknowledge and experience abjection before being able to access meaning (language being one of these meanings) and create an identity by understanding and crafting a distinction or boundary between themselves and the other. The experience of confronting abjection is one that conjures terror, identification, and powerlessness for it "has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I," (Kristeva, 1982, p.1). The abject disrupts our systems of order, identity, and imaginary boundaries, placing the person confronting the abject in a transformational moment, one that due to its combination of thrill and terror, elicits the

feeling of *jouissance*, rendering the confronter into fascinated, willing victims. And the abject, Kristeva claims, is perverse “because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them,” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 15). The abject pushes forward, denying and protecting nothing; in literature, it perverts at a distance:

The writer, fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence perverts language—style and content. But on the other hand, as the sense of abjection is both the abject's judge and accomplice, this is also true of the literature that confronts it. One might thus say that with such a literature there takes place a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality. (Kristeva, 1982, p.16)

This is exactly what Nabokov and Roy’s projection into the abject yields: a perversion of language as style and content, allowing the texts to cross the boundaries of the dichotomies that form society, and to render the text and the reader “judge and accomplice”.

The abject pervades both novels, often drawing the protagonists to the semiotic, a pre-linguistic child-like space without meaning or social language. The first instance when humans create this boundary is when they realize there is a distinction between themselves and the maternal body. Following the ability to distinguish self from the maternal body, one enters Lacan’s mirror stage, wherein one identifies with their own image: it is a simplified, tightly bound space of the form of the self and establishes what Lacan calls the Imaginary Order. The acquisition of language propels one into a differential system of language that alters one’s perception of the self and the world. When one experiences the Real’s materiality after having left the Real, say in a confrontation of the abject, it can be a traumatic event because the distinction between the self and the other vanishes.

Sigmund Freud sees trauma akin to a wound to the psyche that does not heal but festers in the unconscious and can only be released through confrontation at a delayed or later point in time when *another* wound strikes. Often the second wound is related to the initial wound; the traumatized subconsciously seeks out the circumstance of the first wound, inciting repetition. Basing her own definition of trauma on Freud's ideas, Caruth states that "in its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena," (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). Paraphrasing Caruth's earlier definition of trauma, these intrusive phenomena include dreams, thoughts and behaviors associated with the event and can elicit a "numbing" as well as arousal and avoidance of certain stimuli recalling the event (Caruth, 1995, p. 4). Caruth posits trauma as the repetition of catastrophic events once experienced, but one that is outside of a person's control. The characters' unrestrained repetition of certain imagery, sounds, words, dreams, thoughts, acts, and events abound in both *Lolita* and *The God of Small Things*, and are utilized to depict the characters' rememory of and attempt to overcome trauma. For Caruth, literature is an apt tool for the description of the traumatic experience because it is similar to psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis considers how the subconscious or the unknown distresses a person and seeks release without understanding itself and without understanding its need for release. She postulates that the language of this distress and release is "always somehow literary," (Caruth, 1995, p. 5).

L. Chris Fox's essay "Martyrology of the Object: Witnessing and Trauma in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" argues that the novel's content, which utilizes general characteristics of trauma, are fortified by the use of repetition in the

novel. The repeated response to trauma is the recurrence of certain phrases, rhymes, smells, and imagery in the novels, and these repetitions circle at the edge of the trauma, proffering their fragments as a means of hooking onto each other and forming a whole; while these fragments are exposed in different stages by different people, they always remain "absolutely true to the event," (Fox, 2002, p. 35). Fox argues that the novels' traumatic structure forces the reader to experience the trauma of the abject to the extent possible. Fox utilizes Kristeva's notion of the abject as the foundation of his thesis, wherein the abject is everything the body expels to survive and flourish and includes the physical and the psychic. Fox defines the physical abject as "all that might endanger our lives should we touch or ingest it" and the psychic abject as "the things we must not do in order to be proper subjects in our societies," (Fox, 2002, p. 36). The abject reminds us of our imminent death and of our separation from the (m)other and subsequently, our forced inclusion into society. Contact with the abject can make us physically ill, but it always psychically disgusts us because it efficiently eliminates the separation between the other and us and reminds us that this separation is symbolic only; essentially, we are all the same. This is why the novels disturb the reader, because the reader realizes they are the same as Humbert who rapes Lolita and Baby Kochamma who effectively sentences Velutha to death, but they are also the same as Lolita and the twins who suffer a series of atrocities. The abject renders the reader both powerful and vulnerable, and its disturbance of their boundaries questions their mortality, identity and ethics.

Underscoring the traumatic, objects of the abject like excrement, urine, blood, vomit, and semen, permeate *The God of Small Things*, and the abject is intimately linked to the

problematic social hierarchy within Ayemenem.¹ The same is true for *Lolita*: urine in particular recurs throughout the novel and pedophilia involves all of the mentioned bodily responses, particularly blood and semen.

L. Chris Fox utilizes Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's idea of testimony as the action of being witness to trauma or traumatic experiences and as a “historical transmission...or the unsuspected medium of a healing,” (Fox, 2002, p. 57). The abject and the traumatic are both undefinable and it is difficult to pinpoint their causes; often, the experience of the abject could be determined as a source of trauma. Literature that centers on traumatic events caused by the abject is testimony; it transforms the author into a witness and the one who reveals the truth, and marks it as “a crucial mode of ... our relation to the traumas of contemporary history,” (Fox quoting Felman, 2002, p. 37). Testimony in literature also makes witnesses out of the characters and the readers, thereby asking them to consider their relationship to current historical trauma and to attempt to heal that trauma.

Testimony is an important aspect of trauma theory because it is often elusive and imperfect: trauma victims are unable to accurately represent or elucidate traumatic events, both because the recollection of trauma is difficult and because they may have disassociated themselves from the experience as it occurs, becoming a passive witness to the event. Of importance in the novels the question of who is able to bear witness: in both novels, the abused body - Lolita and Velutha - do not completely relay their testimony. Lolita's reaction to her trauma is to ignore and dismiss it, and Velutha cannot because he is dead – they are passive and unwilling witnesses. Their trauma is told

¹ Fox notes that Untouchables were tasked with the removal of bodily excrement, reinforcing the “aptness of the social application of abjection theory to *The God of Small Things*” (Fox, 2002, p. 36).

through the testimonies of their abusers and other victims, through other witnesses who are ostensibly undertaking the telling of the truth, the historical transmission, and possibly a version of healing or overcoming.

In her essay, "Trauma and Temporal Hybridity in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*," Elizabeth Outka notes the novel is constructed non-linearly, bounding through time and space with the easy opening of a new sentence. Often associated with post-colonialism, magical realism, and post-modernism, what Elizabeth Outka terms "temporal hybridity" is rather a fixture of traumatic narrative (Outka, 2011, p. 21). The boundaries of memories taint and constrict experience and the manner in which we perceive time, thereby ensuring there is no fixed truth. Outka claims the "present must be understood as a complex amalgamation and negotiation of past moments" (Outka, 2011, p. 21). Trauma often results in subjects experiencing a "disordering of time, when past events threaten to take over the present, returning repeatedly to haunt the current moment in the form of flashbacks, hallucinations, or dreams," (Outka, 2011, p. 22). Outka argues this temporal hybridity of the narrative and the characters' experiences creates the space for a third hybridity accessible only to the reader, a hybridity possible of inciting political and social change. Essentially, the past refuses to integrate itself into a linear timeline or narrative. The technique of disordered time that can only be cobbled together into logic by the reader mimics the manner in which characters experience their present, one in which time slips forward or backwards, or arrests itself.

Nabokov and Roy utilize temporal hybridity and semiotic language to construct fictional testimonies of abject trauma which serve to question the characters and readers' notions of aesthetics and ethics. Chapter 2 considers trauma and time, namely the characters' traumatic experiences and their impact on their perception of time and the

novels' structure, which simulate the disorienting nature of a traumatic experience for the reader. Chapter 3 analyzes how trauma alters the characters' language, forcing them into a dialogue with the semiotic and the abject, and manipulating the reader into a complicity that challenges their morals. Chapter 4 offers a conclusion to the analyses posited in this work.

CHAPTER 2

TIME (TEN TO TWO IN ROOM 342)

Lolita and *The God of Small Things* (*GOST*) distort time, refashioning chronology and narrative order to mimic the lack of temporality caused by trauma. The experience of trauma is not one that "ends," but rather exists across dimensions of time and consciousness: it haunts victims throughout their lives, beckoning them to return to that moment of trauma to relive the experience and refashioning their concepts of time accordingly. Victims often repeat the acts or conditions of their traumas in order to process and overcome the trauma, consciously and unconsciously. Both novels utilize their content and form to underscore trauma's distortion of time and obsessive repetitions.

Humbert is both traumatized and traumatizer, and as the sole narrator of the novel, his organization of time reflects both of these traumas. Nabokov plays with time and the metaliterary by opening *Lolita* with a foreword written in the present day of 1955, penned by an editor that reveals the novel's ending, although the reader does not fully realize this until they finish reading the text. The editor informs the reader that the manuscript's author, Humbert Humbert, died in captivity three years prior, and offers a slew of dates, places, and names that are thus meaningless to the reader but which are the "the destinies of the 'real' people beyond the 'true' story," (Nabokov, 2005, p. 3). The inclusion of these destinies and dates seeks to lend the text verisimilitude, to situate them in a believable story whose reality extends outside of the page. But how unusual to

place a type of epilogue, to summarize in the foreword the futures of characters the reader has not even come to know much and less care about yet. This inversion of expectation works to reinforce the fluidity of time in traumatic testimonies, as well as the idea that literary testimonies function similarly to a traumatic event's memory, able to be conjured and relived an infinite number of times. The events in the foreword have already occurred - otherwise they could not be witnessed nor written about - and have not yet occurred, because the reader hasn't read and experienced them yet. A reader does not *need* to read a text linearly, but rather can begin from the ending and work backwards or arbitrarily jump from chapter to chapter; this is how victims of trauma might also recall their own experiences and memories. This is further reinforced by that fact that from the first chapters of both *Lolita* and *GOST*, the reader knows exactly how the novels end. But this does not spoil the novels for them – rather, it engages them, compels the readers to discover exactly how the endings come about, and how the story is told. The main text of *Lolita* itself is Humbert Humbert's confession, a string of recollections written years after the death of his childhood sweetheart and his abuse of Lolita that relies on his particular memory and subjectivity. He slips into the past and present and muses about the future with ease and calculation, but the crucial moment when Annabel dies pervades the narrative. By his own admission, he attempts to reenact his unconsummated sexual experience with Annabel with other young girls, finally succeeding with Lolita. Humbert even attempts to condition Lolita to be like Annabel, forcing her to learn tennis, to wear particular clothing, and to speak in a certain way, so as to render the experience as “correct” as in his memory. By forcing this sexual relationship with Lolita, the reader is led to believe that Humbert Humbert has seemingly overcome his trauma of Annabel, because the memory of the dead girl's face

is overtaken by Lolita's own image. Arguably, the resolution of his trauma necessitates countless repetitions of the act, countless returns to the final day on the beach where he almost possessed Annabel, and one that makes him thirst for more disturbing sexual practices, namely a compulsion for incest: he dreams of impregnating Lolita and abusing his own daughters. When Humbert Humbert loses Lolita and his imaginary litter of Lolitas, this does not resolve his trauma because it generates a new trauma that he attempts to overcome by repeating he and Lolita's road trip together with Rita, a vulnerable, twenty-something alcoholic. Annabel's death is the skip of a stone across water, creating a series of intertwined ripples, of concentric traumas. The story of Annabel's death is the story of Lolita's life, a life of manipulation, abuse, and loss that to Humbert Humbert merits recounting; it is a story that he wants to relive again and again and which Lolita aches to forget.

The text ends with Humbert Humbert in jail, waxing poetic about Lolita and his wish that she have a long, happy life. If this gives the reader a sense of finality and a close to the story, they have not been reading closely. Rarely does Nabokov have his works end in anything else but a bittersweet tragedy, and he chooses to dismantle the expected chronology of the novel by ending the book in a hopeful present while revealing the true ending, a bleak future, in the foreword. The narrative of the characters' traumas is resolved only with their deaths, which the reader knows has occurred because Humbert Humbert says his confession can only be published after Lolita's death. While one would like to imagine an old lady Lolita dying warm and happy in her bed, recalling her life with Dick and their children in Alaska, the eagle-eyed reader will recall the foreword, where they learned that Mrs. Richard F. Schiller died in childbirth in the wanly named Gray Star. But while Humbert Humbert did not leave any human progeny, he has left a

book. The act of writing and leaving his memories for posterity, while Lolita's recollections remain as silent in death as in life, is powerful and abusive, a literary representation of the timeless, traumatic experience that can be returned to over and over, a stone forever skimming over the surface of water.

In order to understand the central traumas in both novels, the antecedent traumas that occur prior to the text's timeline and that cause the central traumas must be explored. In *Lolita*, Lolita's abuse is rooted in Humbert Humbert's loss of his first love. Repetitive literary allusions, behaviors, dreams, and manipulations color the pages of *Lolita*, disrupting the novel's perception of time as a means of representing the recurring nature of trauma. When Humbert is about to turn thirteen, he falls in love with a girl a few months younger than him whom he calls Annabel Leigh in honor of Edgar Allen Poe's 1849 poem, "Annabel Lee".

IT was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought 5
Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and she was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love,
I and my Annabel Lee; 10
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling 15
My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulcher
In this kingdom by the sea. 20

The angels, not half so happy in heaven,
 Went envying her and me;
 Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,
 In this kingdom by the sea)
 That the wind came out of the cloud by night, 25
 Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
 Of those who were older than we,
 Of many far wiser than we;
 And neither the angels in heaven above, 30
 Nor the demons down under the sea,
 Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
 Of the beautiful Annabel Lee:

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
 Of the beautiful Annabel Lee; 35
 And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
 Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
 And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
 Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
 In her sepulchre there by the sea, 40
 In her tomb by the sounding sea.²

Set in a "kingdom by the sea," the poem depicts the cursed love affair between two children that comes to an abrupt end when Annabel Lee dies due to a cold wind blown by the jealous angels (Poe, lines 21-26). Despite her death, the lovers' souls can never be separated, and the narrator dreams of Annabel Lee every night (Poe, lines 34-35). The poem is ostensibly about Poe's wife Virginia, Poe's first cousin and merely fourteen when she married twenty-seven year old Poe; their marriage would be cut short by Virginia's death at twenty-four of tuberculosis.³

Humbert introduces Poe's lovelorn affair as a means of normalizing his pedophilic pursuits, equating himself to literary geniuses, and as a means to master his repetition compulsion. Humbert Humbert is endlessly braggadocios, constantly

² Poe, E.A. (1849). *Annabel Lee*. Retrieved from www.bartleby.com/102/89.html

³ Booth, B. (1945). The identity of Annabel Lee. *College English*, 7(1), 17-19. doi:10.2307/371416

commenting on his movie-star good looks, fine manners and charm, intellect and wit, etcetera, but it is his artistic soul that he is most concerned with preserving and presenting to the audience ("You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style," he muses on page 7). From the outset of the novel, he describes his artistic soul and literary talent that, like so many others before him, enables him to recognize the beauty and delicacy of little girls. Most significantly, Humbert Humbert aligns himself with Poe, Virgil, Dante, and Petrarch by name-dropping them and their underage lovers on page 12, and underscoring this again on page 71: "Oh Lolita, you are my girl, as Vee was Poe's and Bea Dante's". He claims that the union of older men and little girls is something that abounds in history and art, littering an entire paragraph with legislative acts and examples from ancient Nile and modern day Lepcha to cement his argument. In this vein, he coins the term "nymphet," originating from the mythological nymphs, defining them as maidens (again the nod to Poe's poem) between the ages of nine and fourteen able to bewitch men twice their age. Humbert Humbert claims these maidens are inhuman, otherworldly beings that are "demoniac" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 10) and that not all girls are nymphets. In fact, it takes a certain kind of man an artist, *naturellement*, as Humbert Humbert might exclaim - to spot a nymphet:

You have to be an artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins and a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine (oh, how you have to cringe and hide!), in order to discern at once, by ineffable signs—the slightly feline outline of a cheekbone, the slenderness of a downy limb, and other indices which despair and shame and tears of tenderness forbid me to tabulate—the little deadly demon among the wholesome children; *she* stands unrecognized by them and unconscious herself of her fantastic power. (Nabokov, 2005, pp. 10-11).

Humbert Humbert expresses shame, certainly, a distinct desire and a flimsy attempt to control the desire ("hot poison," "oh, how you have to cringe and hide", "despair and

shame"), but the shame and despair is superficial: even if the pedophile is ashamed, still he looks at the girls, still he looks for the erotic and poetic "slightly feline outline of a cheekbone, the slenderness of a downy limb." The argument here is that while Humbert Humbert understands society believes pedophilia is immoral, he has convinced himself, and attempts to convince the reader throughout the novel, that it is acceptable, a custom of royalty and artists (and melancholic madmen). Humbert Humbert attempts to superficially eschew his agency in order to commit the immoral, shifting the blame from the adult to the child, as if they were the predator, a "little deadly demon...unconscious herself of her fantastic power," a trope he repeats again and again in relation to Lolita. Humbert Humbert often plays with dynamics of power and agency, clearly desirous of power but painting himself as a vulnerable victim in order to elicit the reader's compassion.

But it is the call of the artist he is interested in, a repetitive motif that underscores the literary in the novel but also reiterates the repetitive nature of Humbert Humbert's traumatic obsessions.⁴ Humbert Humbert's use of literature recalls Caruth's notion that literature is an appropriate vessel for the traumatic because the expression of the release of a subconscious disturbance tends to be literary or semiotic. Humbert is witnessing and responding to Poe's trauma – Annabel's death – and in turn telling *Lolita*'s readers about his own trauma, asking for the readers' attention and response. Humbert Humbert uses literature as example and a soothing mechanism: by comparing his own story to Poe's, he seeks guidance from Poe's actions in the art of pedophilia and its recounting, as well as a delusional means of reassurance that his actions are acceptable, or at the very least

⁴ Humbert believes he and Lolita's love is the stuff of high literature, which he (or rather Nabokov) has succeeded in achieving.

do not harm but rather aid Lolita. On page 28 he notes, "Virginia was not quite fourteen when Harry Edgar possessed her. He gave her lessons in algebra. *Je m' imagine cela*. They spent their honeymoon at Petersburg, Fla. 'Monsieur Poe-poe,' as that boy in one of Monsieur Humbert Humbert's classes in Paris called the poet-poet." ⁵ To Humbert Humbert, Poe is no monster or master manipulator: he is Virginia's husband and tutor, a worldly man teaching her both algebra and amour, as Humbert Humbert attempts to do for Lolita. Just as he believes Lolita is Annabel incarnate, Humbert will take on Poe's identity thrice more, beginning on his and Charlotte's wedding day, where the local newspaper prints an interview with Humbert Humbert where he calls himself "Mr. Edgar H. Humbert (I threw in the "Edgar" just for the heck of it)," (Nabokov, 2005, p. 50); when Humbert Humbert jots down on the Enchanted Hunters hotel' check-in ledger, with "the slow clear hand of crime...: Dr. Edgar H. Humbert and daughter, 342 Lawn Street, Ramsdale," (Nabokov, 2005, p. 79); and when he dines with Dolly in town as "Mr. Edgar H. Humbert was seen eating his steak in the continental knife-and-fork manner" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 126).

This desire to align himself with Poe - as pedophile and artist - explains Humbert Humbert's choice to base the story of his dead first love on one of Poe's most famous poems. Humbert and his juvenile Juliet meet in summer of 1923 his father's luxurious Riviera resort, the Hotel Mirana, not in a kingdom but "in a principedom by the sea" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 5). They fall in love immediately, bonding over the teenage thoughts du jour, such as "the plurality of inhabited worlds, competitive tennis, infinity, solipsism" and, naturally, baby animals (Nabokov, 2005, p.7). Like Poe's young lovers,

⁵ It would be remiss to ignore the semiotic in this kind of wordplay, which Humbert indulges in throughout the text and which will be considered at length in Chapter 3.

Humbert Humbert and Annabel share a connection of equals that Humbert believes cannot be matched:

The spiritual and the physical had been blended in us with a perfection that must remain incomprehensible to the matter-of-fact, crude, standard-brained youngsters of today. Long after her death I felt her thoughts floating through mine. Long before we met we had had the same dreams. We compared notes. We found strange affinities. The same June of the same year (1919) a stray canary had fluttered into her house and mine, in two widely separated countries. Oh Lolita, had you loved me thus! (Nabokov, 2005, p. 8)

There is no time in this passage: it is the present of 1952 when Humbert writes these lines, but his recollection is of a straight line in which Lolita and Annabel are the very same person: "Oh Lolita, had you loved me thus!" A poetic turn certainly, and hallucination, desire, dream the same. The passage denotes Humbert and Annabel's shared imagination and subconscious that transgresses even death.⁶ This keen, transcendental affinity Humbert lends his first love is one most people assign to their first experience of failing in love; it is the discovery of another person and of new emotions that enthralls the novice lover in such a manner that it undoubtedly marks their future tastes in and experiences of love. Their shared affinities, in particular the detail of the stray canaries fluttering into the young lovers' homes, smacks of literary contrivance, of Humbert Humbert's desire to express himself as an artist and in underscoring his imagined notion that their love is predetermined, the stuff of Shakespeare⁷. With these high-minded notions of love, the tragedy of Annabel's death - and therefore the tragedy

⁶ The allusion to their "strange affinities" evokes Freud's notion of the uncanny, possibly a deliberate taunt by Nabokov regarding his distaste for Freud or part of Humbert Humbert's quack psychiatry manipulation.

⁷ A magazine called *The lyceum magazine for the lyceum and Chatauqua* featured an article on its June 1919 cover page titled "But where is the canary?" While unverified if Nabokov knew of this particular magazine and issue, it would be in keeping with his sense of humor to have an *image* of a canary flutter into the two children's homes, which albeit unexpected in its form, would not contravene Humbert's credibility. McLeod, B. Lolita's "stray canary": A "secret handshake"? *Nabokov Online Journal*, Vol. XII (2018). http://www.nabokovonline.com/uploads/2/3/7/7/23779748/12_lolita_and_the_lyceum_mcleod.pdf

of their unfulfilled love affair - heightens the impact of Humbert Humbert's first love and creates a trauma that he cannot overcome, feeding a cycle of repetitive actions, compulsions, and fantasies that will plague him throughout his life. Adult Humbert truly believes he will never achieve this purported blissful connection with his subsequent loves, not even Lolita, but he desperately seeks to do so as a means of reincarnating Annabel and finally possessing her. Humbert Humbert's obsession with nymphets in general and Lolita in particular expresses his confrontation with the abject that he cannot surmount, and his desire to win at Freud's fort/da game, to gain agency and dominate the situation to master his repetitions.

The death drive is expressed through the instinctual repetition of a particular trauma or behavior, which is also the only manner in which one can master said trauma. Caruth argues that if repetition is the expression of the trauma of the death drive, then it is also an expression of the survival mode of the life drive. Humbert is traumatized by Annabel's death, but her death also marks his survival, for he continues to exist. Humbert Humbert's inability to master trauma by repetition is essentially his inability to overcome the death instinct, which is expressed as aggression towards another, be it his first wife Valeria or his nemesis Quilty, though its true directive is the self. Humbert Humbert's engagement in unwitting repetitive behavior or situations that recall or mimic a traumatic moment, such as Annabel's death, are a manner of dealing with pain and unfulfilled desire. Humbert attempts to master painful events by repeating them, namely by being in a romantic relationship with a little girl, and in that repetition taking control of the trauma, thereby avoiding neurosis. In Freud's fort/da example, the child can be both passive and active, and is able to transfer the experience of being passive to the toy or another playmate, thereby placing themselves in the more advantageous, superior, or

invulnerable position. Mentally sound adults also imitate this game, usually through different means of *art*: spectators to a tragic or traumatic play, novel, or painting pass from passivity to activity, experiencing the painful and the pleasurable, which can result in a cathartic experience of pity and fear. When Humbert reads a text, say Poe's poem, he is both spectator and actor, experiencing the text as something distinctive and outside himself, as well as something that is happening to him, but it is something happening that he can control.

But the control by proxy of literature is insufficient for Humbert, though he relies on it throughout the novel. If the repetition compulsion is the expression of the trauma of the death drive, which in this case is not merely a return to the harmony of inorganic existence, of his own death but also Annabel's death, then it is also the expression of the life drive, in sexually engaging with Lolita and the idea of having her birth “litters of Lolitas”.

Death and memory have arrested Annabel and Humbert in their teenage selves forever, impeding Annabel from being anything less than perfect and Humbert from sexually maturing into an adult man. Humbert Humbert acknowledges this arrested development, demonstrating self-awareness but also a form of manipulation of the reader:

I leaf again and again through these miserable memories, and keep asking myself, was it then, in the glitter of that remote summer, that the rift in my life began; or was my excessive desire for that child only the first evidence of an inherent singularity? When I try to analyze my own cravings, motives, actions and so forth, I surrender to a sort of retrospective imagination which feeds the analytic faculty with boundless alternatives and which causes each visualized route to fork and re-fork without end in the maddeningly complex prospect of my past. I am convinced, however, that in a certain magic and fateful way Lolita began with Annabel. I also know that the shock of Annabel's death consolidated the frustration of that nightmare summer, made of it a permanent obstacle to any

further romance throughout the cold years of my youth. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 8)

Humbert paints himself as a man made mad by the possibilities of his past and their impact on his future, an endless repetition of conjecture that results in “boundless alternatives.” While he claims to analyze the reasons behind his unnatural desire with logic and reason, he ultimately turns to magic and fate as the answers to his love for Lolita and Annabel. He is delusional, attempting once again to delegate his agency to something other than himself, to demon girls, fantastic powers, magic and fate.

Humbert’s pedophilia likely stems from a combination of trauma and biology. Certain scientific data shows that pedophiles’ brains are abnormally tuned to find sexually immature children more attractive; other data suggest that a percentage pedophiles were sexually abused as children, though Nabokov does not offer any indication that Humbert was sexually abused as a child⁸. The text argues that Humbert Humbert’s pedophilia is partially a result of his traumatic experience of Annabel’s premature death, which resulted in a neurotic trauma that Humbert is unable – and unwilling – to resolve. Notice his attempt to conciliate the imagination with the logical, the repetitive nature of his musings, wherein the alternatives “fork and re-fork without end in the maddeningly complex prospect of [his] past.”

While the reader considers Humbert as the inflictor of trauma, specifically on Lolita, this does not preclude him from also having been a victim of trauma⁹. Despite

⁸ Ogloff, J. RP; Cutajar, M. C; Mann, E.; Mullen, P.; Wei, F.; Hassan, H. and Yih, T. (2012). Child sexual abuse and subsequent offending and victimisation: A 45 year follow-up study [online]. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 440, Jun 2012: [1]-[6]. <https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=578804228398477;res=IELHSS> ISSN: 1836-2206.

⁹ Dominick LaCapra famously contended that perpetrators of trauma can also be traumatized by their violent acts, but Humbert does not demonstrate trauma due to his actions as a child abuser; rather, he argues that the trauma he suffered as a child results in his acts as an adult (which he does not wholly accept as being violent).

several thwarted attempts, Annabel and Humbert are unable to consummate their prepubescent love, which becomes inextricably linked to his arrested sexual development and obsession with young girls. Annabel dies of typhus mere months after their quasi-affair, but her face is one that Humbert dreams of and recalls for decades to come until Lolita eclipses the vividness of Annabel:

I remember her features far less distinctly today than I did a few years ago, before I knew Lolita. There are two kinds of visual memory: one when you skillfully recreate an image in the laboratory of your mind, with your eyes open (and then I see Annabel in such general terms as: “honey-colored skin,” “thin arms,” “brown bobbed hair,” “long lashes,” “big bright mouth”); and the other when you instantly evoke, with shut eyes, on the dark 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, 2005, pp. 7-8)

The tragedy of Annabel's death is one that haunts Humbert throughout time, a contemporary, constantly occurring event. It isn't until much later, perhaps until the writing of his confessional text, that Humbert realizes the magnitude of the wound Annabel's death caused in him. It is only until the repetition of the tragedy, that crying wound echoing in the loss of another love, which allows Humbert to replace the image of Annabel - and thus the transference of his love and obsession - with the little ghost of Lolita. And Lolita is a ghost, haunting Humbert dreams and thoughts for years to come, but not as an optical replica of a beloved face but rather masked in grotesque disguises:

Singularly enough, I seldom if ever dreamed of Lolita as I remembered her—as I saw her constantly and obsessively in my conscious mind during my daymares and insomnias. More precisely: she did haunt my sleep but she appeared there in strange and ludicrous disguises as Valeria or Charlotte, or a cross between them. That complex ghost would come to me, shedding shift after shift, in an atmosphere of great melancholy and disgust. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 168)

Dreams are one of the manners in which trauma haunts a victim's present, although the terror that haunts Humbert's dreams of Lolita are not his guilt or remorse for having

abused her, but seeing Lolita transformed into womanhood, a full-hipped and heaving boosomed thing of disgust that Annabel would never become. Notice Humbert's choice of words relating to sleep in that description: "daymares and insomnias." They are negative connotations of sleep, references to the traumatic obsession that invades his waking thoughts and prevent him from sleeping. When sleep evades him and he is lost in his daymares, he still has a degree of autonomy, for he can control Lolita's appearance and actions. But it is when he succumbs to slumber that Humbert's lack of control over his subconscious demonstrates a delayed response to trauma and a mode of wish-fulfilment. In his nightmares, Lolita is alive (and by extension Annabel) and is his, but the reality of time intrudes on the dream, and she has aged, become not only a woman but taken the form of his previous wives, once flesh and blood women with desires and demands that caused him so much inconvenience. It is not merely the awfulness of the dream itself, but the awakening from the dream, the slip back into consciousness that forces Humbert to relive the trauma of loss of not one woman, but multiple women represented by a single woman: the loss of Annabel, of Lolita, of Valeria, of Charlotte, and of his mother. Humbert is surprised by the dream occurring and by waking up from it, as surprised as he was by the sudden loss of these women. And in the dreaming and awakening, Humbert is confronted with the fact that while the women are gone – Annabel, Charlotte and his mother dead; Valeria and Lolita escaped from him and into the arms of other men – he is alive, and he has in fact survived. He survived not only their losses but literally survived his skirmish with Quilty, whom he murdered as revenge for stealing away Lolita. Humbert is traumatized and while he has not accepted his confrontations with death or his survival, he has fashioned a story about these confrontations.

These dreams function as a metaphor of Humbert Humbert's own Freudian wish-fulfillment and delayed reaction: he revels in the reality of his affair with Lolita, a dream in which Annabel has reincarnated, but the flickering candle of his abuse and the reality of Annabel's death threatens to burn the dream and awaken him. These dreams are offsets of Humbert Humbert's own trauma - the loss of his mother, Annabel, and Lolita; his inadequacy as a lover, man, academic; and the discovery of and crucifixion (in this case a vivisection) for his crimes - which appear again and again. Humbert is also traumatized; in fact, it is his traumas that partially incite the traumatic events he inflicts on young Lolita. Humbert's own chronology of events is unreliable and disordered, possibly for two reasons: as a means to distort the narrative in his favor or as a result of his own trauma, incarceration and illness.

But could he not also be traumatized? If the reader chooses to accept his autobiography as truth, is his obsession with Lolita not rooted in the deaths of Annabel and his mother? Is Lolita not the dream re-dreamed, the wound crying? Nearly every subsequent instance of the word "dream" refers to one of Humbert's erotic, possessive, and violent impulses, or the realization of one of his fears, forming a constant subconscious return to the obsession that marks him while awake.

Outka affirms that trauma's disordering of time can incite temporal transgressions wherein the traumatic past intrudes in the present through several manners, such as dreams and hallucinations. Humbert uses the word "dream" or its derivative seventy-four times in his confessional text, the first instance appearing when he recounts how his first love's "dreamy and eerie expression, half-pleasure, half-pain, came over those childish features" during one of their attempted sexual encounters (Nabokov, 2005, p. 9). Later, the word "dreams" appears again in connection with

Annabel: "Long before we met we had had the same dreams" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 8). A slew of other dreams, some manipulatively Freudian, abound:

Sometimes I attempt to kill in my dreams. But do you know what happens? For instance I hold a gun. For instance I aim at a bland, quietly interested enemy. Oh, I press the trigger all right, but one bullet after another feebly drops on the floor from the sheepish muzzle. In those dreams, my only thought is to conceal the fiasco from my foe, who is slowly growing annoyed. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 33).

The image of a gun that cannot kill, whose bullets seem to plop out of a soft muzzle are a clear nod to Freud and erectile dysfunction. Humbert's dreams demonstrate his inability and disinterest in engaging in sexual relationships with women his own age, whom he views as enemies, "bland, quietly interested" enemies who begin to become annoyed at his disinterest and inability to consummate the sexual act. There is an element of embarrassment in his inability to kill his foe, wherein the gun's muzzle is "sheepish" and where his only desire is to conceal the "fiasco". This dream serves both as an example of trauma and of Humbert's manipulation of the reader, for it argues that the trauma of Annabel's death and Humbert's inability to overcome it arrested his sexual development and left him no other option but pedophilia. Humbert's various stints in asylums and institutions have earned him an education in psychology and psychoanalysis, an education he puts to use in this passage, lending him an air of authority and credibility. He indirectly fashions an argument based on widely accepted Freudian theories, thereby forging the reader to instill confidence in him, even though *he himself does not believe in it*, as discussed in Chapter 3.

One evening, Humbert "erotically muses" about planning an attack on Lolita, and these thoughts eventually feed a dream. Humbert first plans to take Charlotte and Lolita to the lake and charm Charlotte; at one point he would exclaim that he lost his watch or

sunglasses and "plunge with my nymphet into the wood." He continues:

Reality at this juncture withdrew, and the Quest for the Glasses turned into a quiet little orgy with a singularly knowing, cheerful, corrupt and compliant Lolita behaving as reason knew she could not possibly behave. At 3 a.m. I swallowed a sleeping pill, and presently, a dream that was not a sequel but a parody revealed to me, with a kind of meaningful clarity, the lake I had never yet visited: it was glazed over with a sheet of emerald ice, and a pockmarked Eskimo was trying in vain to break it with a pickax, although imported mimosas and oleanders flowered on its gravelly banks. I am sure Dr. Blanche Schwarzmann would have paid me a sack of schillings for adding such a libidream to her files. Unfortunately, the rest of it was frankly eclectic. Big Haze and little Haze rode on horseback around the lake, and I rode too, dutifully bobbing up and down, bowlegs astraddle although there was no horse between them, only elastic air—one of those little omissions due to the absentmindedness of the dream agent. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 37).

Again Humbert invokes the psychiatrists of his past, calling this particular dream a "libidream" that his psychologist, and ostensibly the reader, would have a field day with. The lake functions as a stand-in for the sea on whose shores he and Annabel almost consummated their affair, an idea reinforced by the smell of the mimosas and oleanders much like those in the midnight grove where they first fondled each other. The Eskimo, an incongruous subject that has no place on this lake near Ramsdale, represents Humbert attempting to have sex with Annabel and later with Lolita - he uses a pickaxe, another phallic symbol, to break through solid ice, representing the societal boundaries against pedophilia. Charlotte and Lolita ride horses around the lake, and Humbert dutifully follows them around but notices that he straddles merely "elastic air" and no horse: again he attempts to integrate himself with society and the situation at hand, here as Charlotte's companion and Lolita's father figure, but his true desire gives him away, demarcates him as a phony, riding an imaginary horse. This attention to the imaginary horse echoes Freud's Little Hans case in 1905, wherein Little Hans is suddenly afraid of horses, who

come to symbolize his father.

Humbert confesses two transgressions, one a societal transgression and the other a personal transgression, framing them through the language of dreams. When he first molests Lolita, she is unaware. She lays her limbs across his lap and he begins to masturbate, rocking her gently while singing one of her favorite songs, and ejaculates.

The conjurer had poured milk, molasses, foaming champagne into a young lady's new white purse; and lo, the purse was intact. Thus had I delicately constructed my ignoble, ardent, sinful dream; and still Lolita was safe—and I was safe. What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 41).

The language utilizes is that of nature, of sweetness, of celebration - milk, molasses, and foaming champagne - but the act itself is heinous and deviant, no matter the trappings of its telling. He believes he has "constructed ... his dream," one in which both he and Lolita are ultimately safe, safe from actual vaginal rape and safe from incarceration. This demonstrates both his comfort with the abject, exalting it with language reserved for poetry, as well as his desire to make the reader complicit in his actions through the same language. The word "possession" will appear again and again in relation to Humbert's relationships with women, but here he muses that his act has made Lolita an object, something not alive, something he created - the reincarnation of Annabel, an excuse for the luridness of his actions. In fact, despite his immaturity and obsessive need to possess Lolita, formed from his inability to possess Annabel, adult Humbert does not view Lolita as a person or subject, she is merely object and extension of his desires, her *body* the site of his abject desire and her trauma. Humbert cannot even begin to phantom what goes through teenaged Lolita's mind, which he realizes when overhearing a conversation between schoolmate Eva and Lolita, where Lolita remarks:

“You know, what’s so dreadful about dying is that you are completely on your own”; and it struck me, as my automaton knees went up and down, that I simply did not know a thing about my darling’s mind and that quite possibly, behind the awful juvenile clichés, there was in her a garden and a twilight, and a palace gate—dim and adorable regions which happened to be lucidly and absolutely forbidden to me, in my polluted rags and miserable convulsions; for I often noticed that living as we did, she and I, in a world of total evil, we would become strangely embarrassed whenever I tried to discuss something she and an older friend, she and a parent, she and a real healthy sweetheart, I and Annabel, Lolita and a sublime, purified, analyzed, deified Harold Haze, might have discussed—an abstract idea, a painting, stippled Hopkins or shorn Baudelaire, God or Shakespeare, anything of genuine kind. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 189).

Humbert and Lolita do not share the same dreams, strange experiences or floating thoughts from the afterlife that he and Annabel shared; Humbert finally comprehends that they lack the ability to hold an abstract conversation because they are not equals in any form, as lovers, parent and child, or friend. Notice his use of the phrase "a real healthy sweetheart," an acknowledgement of their coerced, unnatural and noxious relationship.

The second transgression elucidated through dreams is one that Humbert deigns horrendous, an affront to his particular set of ethics. On page 45 he has "idle, dry dreams" and eventually turns, or forces himself to turn, his erotic imagination towards Charlotte:

I am even prepared to tell my tormentors that perhaps once or twice I had cast an appraiser’s cold eye at Charlotte’s coral lips and bronze hair and dangerously low neckline, and had vaguely tried to fit her into a plausible daydream. This I confess under torture. Imaginary torture, perhaps, but all the more horrible. I wish I might digress and tell you more of the pavor nocturnus that would rack me at night hideously after a chance term had struck me in the random readings of my boyhood, such as *peine forte et dure* (what a Genius of Pain must have invented that!) or the dreadful, mysterious, insidious words “trauma,” “traumatic event,” and “transom.” (Nabokov, 2005, p. 46).

Humbert's erotic glance towards Charlotte, a grown woman, causes him nighttime terrors reminiscent of school punishments and psychoanalysis. He underscores the

horror of these memories for him by including the language of these terrible events, the French "peine forte et dure" (strong and harsh punishment) and "trauma," "traumatic event," and "transom." Humbert is haunted by his trauma, one that causes him to see women as repulsive and which reappear in his daydreams; he also demonstrates his distaste for psychoanalysis and his understanding of it, his ability to employ it as a means of manipulating the reader.

Humbert the Traumatized also has a history of hallucinations: "As happens with me at periods of electrical disturbance and crepitating lightnings, I had hallucinations" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 143). There is a question in the text as to whether the hallucination he mentions here, that of a macabre man with a Jutting Chin that "guffaws" at him, is actually a drug-laced recall, one wherein Lolita and Quilty have drugged him and laughed in his face as they plan Lolita's escape, but the fact that he has experienced hallucinations in general serve to underscore Caruth and Outka's ideas of hallucinations and other temporal distortions as a result of trauma. Humbert's temporal instability questions his credibility as a narrator, particularly because he is a self-admitted "murderer with a sensational but incomplete and unorthodox memory" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 143). And this memory is tainted by an initial trauma, that of his Annabel.

From the outset Humbert concedes that his abuse of Lolita – couched in his mind as a great love affair – was only possible because of Annabel and her death:

Did she have a precursor? She did, indeed she did. In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. In a principedom by the sea. Oh when? About as many years before Lolita was born as my age was that summer. You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 5)

Humbert's inability to consummate his affair with Annabel plunges him into a desperate search for control and mastery of a situation in which he had none. In particular, the idea

of possession is obsessively repeated throughout the novel. The phrase "possessing my darling" in *Lolita* echoes the male protagonist in "Annabel Lee" dominating the female love interest, not merely sexually but in every aspect, reducing the female into a beautiful being who "lived with no other thought/Than to love and be loved by me," (Poe, lines 5-6). It is a dominance that Humbert will seek to yield over his love interests throughout his life and to different degrees of success - a repetitive pattern of trauma, wherein Humbert undertakes the same actions over and over. He talks about watching little girls in public, where he "visually possessed dappled nymphets in parks" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 36); about masturbating himself by rocking Lolita on his lap, "What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 41); and about how his wild adventure with Lolita is pure joy, despite the roadbumps by assuring the reader that "in the possession and thralldom of a nymphet the enchanted traveler stands, as it were, *beyond happiness*" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 109). His possession of Lolita, for example, is a totally encompassing one: Humbert drugs, bribes and cajoles Lolita into sexual encounters, but he is also fastidious about what she should eat, how she should dress, and what sports she should play (tennis, of course: "I would drill Lo, and try to relive the days when in a hot gale, a daze of dust, and queer lassitude, I fed ball after ball to gay, innocent, elegant Annabel (gleam of bracelet, pleated white skirt, black velvet hair band)", (Nabokov, 2005, p.106)).

Humbert's inability to possess Annabel, coupled with their young age and her premature death, is one of the two traumas that will cause Humbert to engage in his own "disappear and return" game with girls, a traumatic repetition wherein he seeks to assert dominance over his erotic subject, or in the parlance of the brute himself, by possession.

After his mother dies, Humbert lives under the tutelage of his aunt Sybil at the Hotel Mirana. Humbert's desire to take Lolita from hotel to hotel reaffirms his traumatic repetition of attempting to recreate his childhood and first love at the Hotel Mirana. The memories of his childhood spill into his adult life constantly: he aches for the "cool rich linens of Mirana Hotel!" while wiping his soup slick lips on pink paper napkins at the Haze household (Nabokov, 2005, p.59); feels a "hot wave of pride" at finding a colorized postcard in a small Mississippi museum, to which Lolita retorts "So what?" (Nabokov, 2005, p.102);¹⁰ and full of poetic remorse after slapping Lolita on their never-ending road trip, he attempts to engage in "sensual reconciliation" in "the velvet night, at Mirana Motel (Mirana!)" (Nabokov, 2005, p.150). The novel constantly returns to the themes of water, hotels, and Poe, as a means of expressing Humbert's obsession and trauma. Poe in particular reoccurs often throughout the novel, and it is no surprise given that Nabokov initially wanted to title the novel "The Kingdom by the Sea."¹¹

Humbert claims to completely dominate his first wife Valeria and his second wife Charlotte Haze, but the truth is that both women, though at first enamored of Humbert, are much more powerful and full of agency than they seem. Valeria reveals to Humbert that she will not be joining Humbert in America because she wants a divorce to stay in Paris with the Russian taxi driver she has been having an affair with. While Humbert first strikes Valeria on the face, he is powerless against her lover, allowing the two to come to their apartment so Valeria can pack and ride away into the sunset with Mr. Taxovich. In the married couple's apartment, Humbert perches himself on the

¹⁰ Perhaps the very same postcards he passes around to the reader in page 5: "I am going to pass around in a minute some lovely, glossy- blue picture-postcards."

¹¹ Boyd, B. (1991). *Vladimir Nabokov: The American years*. p. 624. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

windowsill and watches as the Russian

seemed to be all over the place at once, *le gredin*, agreeing his frame with the anatomy of the flat, reading in my chair my newspaper, untying a knotted string, rolling a cigarette, counting the teaspoons, visiting the bathroom, helping his moll to wrap up the electric fan her father had given her, and carrying streetward her luggage. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 18).

Humbert the Small, as he calls himself, is completely stunned into inaction, scared of Valeria's lover. Similarly, he is powerless against Charlotte Haze about the subjects that matter to him, namely, how to raise Lolita. Despite her obsession with Humbert, he cannot order Charlotte to unenroll Lolita from the private boarding school she plans to send her, or to demand she quietly submit to his fantasy of abusing Lolita without Charlotte not only refusing, but cutting off his contact with Lolita, divorcing him, and exposing him to society at large.

While he yields a certain amount of power over Valeria and Charlotte, having charmed them into marriage, Humbert lacks true dominance over the women in their marriage. This is ostensibly one of the reasons why he prefers his nymphets, young girls who are pliant and primed for manipulation, or at the very least, subordination. Humbert relies on psychological tricks, drugs, and outright bribery to maintain the power structure in his relationship with Lolita. However, even Lolita becomes the dominant party in their relationship: she escapes Humbert to willingly (so she claims) be with Quilty. What woman in Humbert's life has not left him? His mother and Annabel die; Charlotte will certainly leave him but is cut short by her own death; and Valeria and Lolita use their agency to abandon Humbert. Granted they abandon him for other, perhaps worse men, but they enact their own will. As much as he would dislike the armchair analysis, Humbert's trauma over his mother's abandonment and Annabel's

death has shaped his life.

As a victim and perpetrator of trauma, Humbert is enchanted by patterns and repetitions. In particular, he is enchanted by the idea of returning to the place where he first raped Lolita, as if a return to that space, or even a space that evokes the original space, could return him in time. That place is a magic number, "342." Charlotte and Lolita live at 342 Lawn Street, Ramsdale, as non-descript and generic as a quaint American town could get. It is at 342 that he first sees Lolita and falls in lust with her, and in fact first molests her by rocking her on his lap. Once Charlotte dies and Humbert decides on his amorous fugue with Lolita, he takes her away from Camp Q and takes her to The Enchanted Hunters hotel, the place where he successfully drugs and rapes her for the first time. He recounts how "In the slow clear hand of crime I wrote: Dr. Edgar H. Humbert and daughter, 342 Lawn Street, Ramsdale. A key (342!) was half-shown to me" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 79). Humbert delights in seeking out 342, and in having universe, fate or kismet, gift it to him in any form during in his dalliances with Lolita. Humbert's delight grows as he waits for the drugs' effects to take place, when he would

let myself into that "342" and find my nymphet, my beauty and bride, imprisoned in her crystal sleep. Jurors! If my happiness could have talked, it would have filled that genteel hotel with a deafening roar. And my only regret today is that I did not quietly deposit key "342" at the office, and leave the town, the country, the continent, the hemisphere,—indeed, the globe—that very same night. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 82).

Despite Humbert's assertion that he should have left the premises, it is difficult to believe that Humbert truly regrets his decision to rape Lolita, particularly after his exalted, deafening, roaring happiness at seeing his Snow White child bride. His decision to drug Lolita is both kind and cowardly: he believes that in doing so he will preserve her purity, will not sully her psyche or morals, but it will also ensure that she does not react violently, does not scream and attack him or run to the authorities to incarcerate

him. It is also another layer of control that Humbert seeks to harness, an unnecessary magnification of the power he already has over Lolita as an adult to quell his trauma of losing agency.

A few pages later, Humbert's regret has evaporated as he remembers that "342 was near the fire escape. One could still—but the key was already in the lock, and then I was in the room," (85). Nabokov offers a literal emergency escape next to the room, a chance for Humbert to simply leave Lolita and run off into the darkness, but Humbert's desire is too deep and his descent into the abject is too far gone. Notice how as he approaches the moment of enacting the abject, the moment that cannot be turned back, Humbert decides to relieve himself of agency, writing in the passive tense that "the key was already in the lock" and as if by magic, he finds himself in the room.

After an ill Lolita takes advantage of her overnight stay at a hospital to escape with Quilty, Humbert scours the crevices of every hotel and motel along the route they once traveled to find Lolita and Quilty. He produces a memo in which he "registered, if not actually stayed, at 342 hotels, motels and tourist homes" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 164). The obsession with finding 342 reiterates his loss of Lolita and his desire to return to the space and time in which he possessed her, in which he finally possessed Annabel reincarnate.

The desire to return to the time and place where he almost possessed Annabel, that seaside in 1923, informs another repetitive motif in *Lolita*, that of water. When Humbert is unable to possess Annabel, it is on the shores of a sea in the Riviera, and it comes to embody the purity of their young love and his desire, a desire that turns abject. Trauma transforms what was once pure - his love for Annabel - into something sinful, a love for nymphets. It is an element necessary for the continuance of life and capable of

killing, the limit of where the socially acceptable and the abject meet, and something Humbert hungers for throughout the text.

The symbolism of Annabel's sea, the scene and time of the initial trauma, is made physical throughout the novel. Humbert admits that in his memory and speech, he substitutes "time terms for spatial ones," and water is one of those spatial terms that replaces time: "In fact, I would have the reader see [the ages of] 'nine' and 'fourteen' as the boundaries — the mirrory beaches and rosy rocks — of an enchanted island haunted by those nymphets of mine and surrounded by a vast, misty sea," (Nabokov, 2005, p. 10). This initial vast, misty sea is Annabel, which over time, turns into Lolita. The name "Lolita" in itself is evocative of the French word for water, "l'eau," and a nymph, the term he coins for his young victims and the objects of his desire, is a water goddess. The novel floods with seaside resorts, lakes, rain, washrooms, and bodily liquids, but it is most apparent in his physical descriptions of Annabel and Lolita. When he first lays eyes on Lolita, "a blue sea-wave swelled under my heart and, from a mat in a pool of sun, half-naked, kneeling, turning about on her knees, there was my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 25). Humbert drowns in that Riviera sea, his knees sinking as he sees Lolita, like "reflections of knees in rippling water, and my lips were like sand" (p. 26). The tides of the sea have returned what Humbert has lost, have brought the "seaside limbs" (p. 9) of Annabel back into his arms as Lolita. Lolita and "the seaside of her schoolgirl thighs" (p. 27), thighs that make him delirious with desire and "seasick" and conjures up the "ribald sea monsters" of his abject craving (p. 35).

When Charlotte, she of the "very wide-set sea-green eyes" (p. 24), takes Humbert swimming at the lake nearby their house, the lake he dreams about raping Lolita near, he fantasizes about it being the perfect setting "for a brisk bubbling murder, and here was

the subtle point: the man of law and the man of water were just near enough to witness an accident and just far enough not to observe a crime" (pp. 57-58). Notice his emphasis on it being the subtle point of where the man of law and the man of water meet, where the identity he fashions for the world threads the boundary of the abject transgressions he craves and enacts. The name of the lake itself reflects on Humbert's obsessive relationship between time and water: Hourglass Lake. A neighbor who is painting the lake while he and Charlotte swim remarks that she almost included them both in her scene, but that she noticed something Humbert overlooked: that he wore his watch while swimming. The neighbor then tells a story about an acquaintance's nephew, Clare Quilty, who will become Humbert's nemesis. Humbert's overlooking of taking the watch, a gift from Charlotte, into the water represents relationship with time: he wants to return to the time and space of his trauma, to discard the constraints of time and society in the liminality of water and so be able to possess Annabel and his other nymphets. But Charlotte attempts to goad him into the present, into adulthood and societal order by gifting the watch; Nabokov makes sure to have Charlotte remark to the neighbor that the watch - and by extension their relationship - is waterproof (p. 59).

Alas, Charlotte herself is not immune to water. After she discovers Humbert's journal chronicling his disgust for Charlotte and lust for Lolita, she runs to the street to mail letters that would end their marriage and Humbert's career and freedom. However, she slips on "freshly watered asphalt" and flings herself onto the path of a driver, killing her instantly (p. 68). A few pages before, Humbert foreshadows the manner of her death, somewhat comically asking Charlotte to "not hate me in your eternal heaven among an eternal alchemy of asphalt and rubber and metal and stone — but thank God, not water, not water!" (p. 58).

When Humbert and Lolita arrive at The Enchanted Hunters hotel, they see a "diamond glow through the mist, then a gleam of lakewater" (p. 78). It is by this lakewater and its "seasick murals" that his deranged mind leads him to what he feels is the "inevitable" raping of Lolita (p. 81). Lolita and Humbert "watertread" out of the hotel's dining room (p. 81) and into room 342, a room where the neighboring rooms' "manly, energetic, deep-throated toilets...gurgles and gush," engulfing their room in a Niagara like flow of water. Humbert runs to his own bathroom for some water, "the best medicine I know in my case," and Lolita awakens, asking for her own cup of water. Humbert acquiesces and upon returning to their bedroom notices how her clothes, flung every which way in the room, seem to float as if underwater. Lolita "took the resilient and cold paper cup in her shadowy hand and gulped down its contents gratefully, her long eyelashes pointing upward, and then, with an infantile gesture that carried more charm than any carnal caress, little Lolita wiped her lips against my shoulder," (pp. 86-87). Lolita is innocent and infantile, asking to quell her thirst but unaware that the water she requests is polluted, tainted with Humbert's sickness. It is here, in a dark timeless place, drowned in a water that is abject - amidst the flow of toilets, of human wastes, of Humbert's unnatural cravings - and unlike that of the Riviera, that Humbert first rapes Lolita.

But this toilet water scene is not sufficient for Humbert the Romantic; he is on the active lookout for the perfect, waterfull place to consummate Annabel through Lolita.

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 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 gray 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, far from being the impulse of the subconscious, had become the rational pursuit of a purely theoretical thrill. The angels knew it, and arranged things accordingly...Perhaps, my learned readers may perk up if I tell them that even had we discovered a piece of sympathetic seaside somewhere, it would have come too late, since my real liberation had occurred much earlier: at the moment, in point of fact, when Annabel Haze, alias Dolores Lee, alias Loleeta, had appeared to me, golden and brown, kneeling, looking up, on that shoddy veranda, in a kind of fictitious, dishonest, but eminently satisfactory seaside arrangement (although there was nothing but a second-rate lake in the neighborhood.) (Nabokov, 2005, pp. 109-110)

Humbert utilizes psychoanalytic terms like searching for a "Sublimated Riviera" wherein he could realize the "gratification of a lifetime urge" and the "release from a subconscious obsession" to demonstrate his disdain for psychoanalysis and demonstrate his deep knowledge of the subject, both necessary to make the reader complicit in his acts - how can such a learned man be so terrible? - and to propose and fend against a psychoanalytic reading of his acts. Humbert relies on psychoanalysis when it is convenient for him, when the theory of trauma and repetition suits the necessary argument and sympathy he poses to and elicits from the reader.

During their two years on the run, Lolita complains that she can never swim in the local mineral pool attractions (pp. 96- 97) but Humbert finally allows her to swim with "other girl-children" since she adores "brilliant water" and is a "remarkably smart diver", perhaps alluding to her dive into his own polluted waters, waters that undo her of innocence and teach her a sexual submission or capability that pleases him (p. 106). And it is these very polluted waters that undo him: years later, when he confronts Lolita about the man she ran away with, the revelation of the man's identity is mired in water. Lolita whispers the name to him, and Humbert's memory immediately returns to the

word "waterproof" being uttered at Hourglass Lake. It is Quilty, the dastardly nephew Charlotte's neighbor gossiped after stating she noticed something Humbert had not, that he had entered the water with his watch. The realization came like "a relaxed flow," (pp. 180-181), the edges of this water running tidily into another day, a rainy day where Humbert ventures to Quilty's ranch with its indoor waterfall to kill him (pp. 183-187). While contemplating murdering Quilty and his own eventual death as a result of this murder, Humbert remarks, both for Quilty and himself, that "one mercifully hopes there are water nymphs in the Styx" (p. 165). And on this meditation is where Humbert's story ends, in a poetic confession penned in jail, in a slow sink into the waters that made him a pedophile and a murderer, waters of love turned sour. He felt his "slippery self eluding me, gliding into deeper and darker waters than I care to probe" (p. 205).

It is on the bank of another body of water, one far away in India, in another time, where another young girl's death sets in motion a domino effect of trauma in *The God of Small Things*. The trauma of Sophie Mol's death arrests Ammu in the past, erases Estha's memories, and forces Rahel to repeatedly relive the trauma. Incapacitated by the repercussions of Sophie Mol and Velutha's deaths, Ammu becomes static, a pathetic drunk that believes her children are forever seven years old; Estha lapses into a mute, lonely existence where an inky blackness expunges his traumatic memories; and Rahel becomes the keeper of time, the one whose ability to remember renders her frigid and disassociated from life. The novel navigates time like the slickness of memory, bouncing around from different characters' pasts, presents, and futures. Memories and dreams return at unexpected moments, and history stubbornly clings to its physical space, like in the family's home and pickle factory, and the History House. Time has names, and events that happen before or after the "Terror," before the unspooling of the twins' lives

with Sophie Mol and Velutha's deaths. The novel has two endings, one before and one after the Terror, both of which are cautiously optimistic. There is Estha and Rahel in the present, Quietness and Emptiness huddled in a post-coital embrace, the future remaining a blank space for them to fill in like their old school books: perhaps their unity will help them overcome their traumas and begin to live again, or perhaps it will trigger a fatal alarm, for they have broken the Love Laws in a place where breaches do not go unpunished. And there is the memory of Velutha and Ammu making love by the river, their hearts full of desire, affection, and most importantly hope, one of the four things Chacko tells Rahel that humans are capable of. The two lovers look forward to an unknowable future, uttering the only word they promise each other, the only possession of time they believe they have: "tomorrow." Yet the reader knows what will occur, that there will be no tomorrow.

The text's central events are built on a solid layer of history, namely that of colonization, caste, and familial lore. These histories bubble, boil, and erode the soil of the text, inciting new layers of trauma. Roy posits one cannot escape history, neither physically nor psychologically. The reader is warned from the outset the narrative is disjointed and unwieldy, an attempt at order in a "hopelessly impractical world:"

In a purely practical sense it would probably be correct to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem. Perhaps it's true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes. And that when they do, those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house – the charred clock, the singed photograph, the scorched furniture – must be resurrected from the ruins and examined. Preserved. Accounted for. Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story. Still, to say that it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem is only one way of looking at it. Equally, it could be argued that it actually began thousands of years ago. Long before the Marxists came. Before the British took Malabar, before the Dutch Ascendancy before Vasco da Gama arrived, before the Zamorin's conquest of Calicut. Before three purple-robed Syrian bishops murdered by the Portuguese were found

floating in the sea, with coiled sea serpents riding on their chests and oysters knotted in their tangled beards. It could be argued that it began long before Christianity arrived in a boat and seeped into Kerala like tea from a teabag. That it really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much. (Roy, 1997, pp. 16-7)

Roy notes that while Sophie Mol's death is one of the events that "begin" the story, the novel is precipitated on several, more ancient traumas, specifically those of the Love Laws. Like the symbolic, the Love Laws establish order and inclusion. The Love Laws do not discriminate in regulating who can love, as they apply to everyone: how mothers love their children; how twins love each other; how uncles love nephews and nieces; how Baby Aunts love white priests; and how Syrian Christians love Untouchables. Some types of breaking the Love Laws result in transgressions that can be traumas, traumas that defy time and history. As Caruth notes, "history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas." Laden with the weight of religion and politics, the text surveys the history of dominance. Roy's characters resurrect and examine the ruins of their lives, reshaping them into the "bones of a story" as a means of obtaining control over themselves, not in the sense of one caste over another, or British over Indian, but as a means of personal power.

Certain trauma theorists conjecture trauma victims experience temporal paradoxes. The first contradiction is where the subject both forgets the trauma and returns to it repeatedly, as amnesia and flashbacks. The second contradiction postures the subject is frozen in a moment, but they simultaneously experience "a false sense of movement or unfreezing, as the memory returns again and again to haunt the present," (Outka, 2011, p. 26). Roy's stitching of time assents to the paradoxes of time, but also considers each can be hybrid: in amnesia, there are pockets of memories, and in flashbacks there is selective forgetting. Traumatic experiences can blend into one

another in a way that each fragment may be undistinguishable from one another or identifiable on its own. Outka also argues that like paradoxes are hybrid, moments of time are symbiotic: "one moment in the present may trigger the memory of many events in the past, and the past can return to distort the present" (Outka, 2011, 27). Time and memories are fragmented, distorted, and shared by several characters, meaning the complete story eschews the characters. To complicate matters, Roy allows her characters to have access to memories that are not their own: Rahel can taste the tomato sandwich Estha eats when he is Returned, wakes up giggling to his dreams, and is privy to the knowledge of Estha's molestation. Although Rahel possesses this unenviable omnipotence, she is unable to construct a clear narrative of her own life or of the traumatic events as a whole. The characters are unable to assemble their story together; only the reader has this privilege.

Estha, Rahel, and Ammu symbolize the three manners the traumatized perceive time: Rahel has recurring memories; Estha has amnesia; and Ammu is frozen in time. The trio's individual trauma springs from several events - Sophie Mol's death, the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's abuse, Velutha's death - but become collective, uniting the three of them like the seven silver stretch marks on Ammu's belly. Of the three, the most "functional" is Rahel, whose misfortune is to remember. In particular, Sophie Mol's death clings to Rahel like a second skin, an absence made heavy presence:

The Loss of Sophie Mol stepped softly around the Ayemenem House like a quiet thing in socks. It hid in books and food. In Mammachi's violin case. In the scabs of the sores on Chacko's shins that he constantly worried. In his slack, womanish legs. It is curious how sometimes the memory of death lives on for so much longer than the memory of the life that it purloined. Over the years, as the memory of Sophie Mol...slowly faded, the Loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. It was always there. Like a fruit in season. Every season. As permanent as a government job. It ushered Rahel through childhood (from school to school to

school) into womanhood (Roy, 1997, p. 17).

Sophie Mol's death is a single moment arrested that trails behind Rahel, a pause in motion that merits its own capitalization and definition, "The Loss of Sophie Mol."

Sophie Mol's death is natural and unnatural: it is a fruit always in season, a ripe memory grown from a decayed body, but also a government job, its position fabricated and likely useless but permanent. It is trauma personified, a physical embodiment of the Terror; the actual memory of Sophie Mol is replaced by her Loss, creating a new presence to fulfill her absence. The event ingrained in Rahel, and the other characters, as the beginning of the Terror, the inciting incident for the unraveling of their lives. Roy underscores Rahel's role as memory keeper through the disposal of Rahel's toy watch, whose plastic face forever announces it is ten to two. Outka points out the watch is forgotten and buried by the river and the Memory House, the space where Sophie Mol drowns and Velutha is beaten: "recording permanently the moment and the place when time stopped altogether - and simultaneously suggesting that the moment will always be present," (Outka, 2011, p. 28). Rahel's burden is not only to be the memory keeper but the memory retriever, including of memories that are not her own. Rahel's notion of time is that of moments refusing to either separate or integrate, but rather exist as a jumble that cannot fit squarely into the past.

Rahel recollects and lives Estha's experiences, whose means of survival is to forget. Rahel remembers and Estha forgets, representing the contradictions of traumatic time. Estha is the character whose trauma is most profound: Estha is molested, feels culpable for Sophie Mol's death, sees Velutha being beaten, condemns Velutha to death by saying "yes," and is Returned to his father, separated from the two people he loves

the most. It is understandable Estha chooses to hide in a place where there are no memories and no words - he has chosen to be re-Returned to the womb, or as fair a mimesis of the womb he can fashion. He attempts to disengage from time as a whole as a means of forgetting, and he does this by allowing quietness to consume him. In this silent space, there is no time: no past, but no present and certainly no future. Outka argues that what Estha keeps as unspeakable "gains agency, engaging in violent or even desperate attempts to vacuum or strip or pare or hide or numb or entomb or tranquilize the persistent memory," (p. 29). Outka utilizes the words "vacuum," "strip," and "pare" to point out the other manner Estha quiets time is by devoting himself to housework, particularly to cleaning, washing clothes, and showering. Estha's obsession with cleanliness is addressed further in Chapter 3. While Rahel recalls and Estha repels time, Ammu is frozen. Ammu's self-defense mechanism is to arrest herself in the moment before her life unravels, attempting to retain control over her narrative. When Ammu returns to Ayemenem four years after Sophie Mol and Velutha's deaths, she brings eleven-year-old Rahel gifts fit for a seven-year-old:

It was as though Ammu believed that if she refused to acknowledge the passage of time, if she willed it to stand still in the lives of her twins, it would. As though sheer willpower was enough to suspend her children's childhoods until she could afford to have them living with her. Then they could take up from where they left off. Start again from seven. Ammu seemed terrified of what adult thing her daughter might say and thaw Frozen Time. Fear made her garrulous. She kept it at bay with her babble. (Roy, 1997, pp. 76-77)

Ammu speaks constantly and fantastically, telling Rahel she applied for a job at the UN that would relocate them to the Hague, or that she could start a school in Kerala, as she always planned - there were too many possibilities, she yammered on. Ammu's constant talking, the opposite of Estha's silence, serves as reassurance, as if she could speak her

way into stillness, find a wormhole in time in which to "start again from seven." Ammu seeing eleven-year-old Rahel triggers the past's trauma while the frozen time in her mind, pre-trauma, is at odds with her pre-adolescent daughter, efficiently creating a "temporal feedback loop" wherein time is experienced all at once (Outka, 2011, p. 28). Outka notes time forces Ammu to recognize her inability to pause time while she simultaneously attempts to disregard the passing of time, further forcing her into stillness. Left without alternative, engulfed by her guilt and trauma, Ammu can only efficiently freeze time by dying. But Ammu already lived in a frozen state prior to the trauma, between two shadow worlds with nothing left to lose, walking the line between mother and suicide bomber.

The present eludes meaning for Ammu and her twins, and they must overcome their particular survival tactics - recollection, stasis, amnesia - to "get the present back, to have something happen, not just to have something that happened," (Outka, 2011, p. 30). Alas, the past permeates the present, bombarding their attempts, both individual and collective, and arresting the wholeness of their narrative. Not only is the present unavailable to the trio, but so is their complete history, and ostensibly, the ability to overcome their trauma. They are characters in a history book, confined to their particular page; only its reader can assemble their stories into an ordered account: "the traumatic production of temporal hybridity extends to collective memory, exposing the difficulty of ever untangling the temporal sequence, and hinting what little possibility there is that recovering a memory could ever morph to a more therapeutic sense of recovery" (Outka, 2011, p.30).

The reader experiences the trauma and post-trauma stress of temporal hybridity in the characterization and the text itself: they are being told and shown simultaneously.

The experience can be overwhelming, the reader suffocating in the same manner the characters suffocate, going through each stage of trauma and post-traumatic stress. Outka notices Roy's use of recurrent "images, phrases, and sensory experiences – the sickly sweet smell of blood, the watch, a recurring image of a rose" and claims they serve to demonstrate the character's arrestedness in their experience and as a flashback for the reader (Outka, 2011, p. 30). The nature of the recurrent imagery and phrases also supports the other theories presented in this thesis, namely that they are abject in type (blood, urine, saliva, vomit, corpses) and repeated in a semiotic manner (childlike or poetic manner), and which will be explored in the following chapter. *GOST*, like *Lolita*, gives the reader the answer to the riddle, but not the riddle itself. The reader knows the novels' outcomes – Velutha and Sophie Mol die; Humbert is jailed – but not how these things occurred, the actions and secrets that led to the inevitable conclusions. The reader, like the characters, is offered shards of the narrative (and in *Lolita*, clues in the form of little winks), the context of which is only revealed at the very end. Roy's circling over the out of context trauma, buzzard-like, before revealing the entire story serves to "bewilder and unsettle," (Outka, 2011, p. 30).

Trauma literature poses two questions to its readers and theorists: how does the reader experience the characters' traumas and how can authors represent the unrepresentable of tragedy? These questions have branches: can the reader come close to experiencing trauma through literature, and a novel's structure in particular? Is the reader traumatized by this exposition? How can an author convey the experience of trauma, and more so if the experience is not immediately and faithfully recorded? Outka claims - supporting her claim on ideas from theorist Greg Forter, Dominick LaCapra and Geoffrey Hartman - the best and only way to convey the ineffable experience of trauma

is through literature's "attempt to give readers the very experience of post-traumatic stress disorder," (Outka, 2011, p. 31). Forter posits the key is in the attempt to transmit the experience and not represent the experience, as this could "betray" the traumatic memory and incite "political apathy" (Outka, 2011, p. 31). Outka claims Roy allows readers to identify with the trauma but provides a different traumatic experience, namely by injecting post-traumatic stress into the novel's very construction and disrupting time. At the outset of the novel, reader and character alike cannot recall the trauma, the former because they have not experienced it and the latter because their recall of it has been disrupted by amnesia, flashback, hybridity, or repetition. The author has the power to recreate the symptoms of trauma as hybrid temporality, but this does not mean the reader has actually undergone a traumatic experience. The trauma the reader experiences is direct but not first-hand; it does not haunt the reader forever, no matter how well transcribed. Outka notes traumatic experience has no "outside frame of reference, no way to imagine a witness observing and recording it," (Outka, 2011, p. 32). Roy duplicates trauma's lack of frame of reference in the novel by thrusting us into the action with little in the way of introduction. Unlike in traumatic experience, however, the reader is privy to a witness observing and recording the trauma; in fact, to a multitude of witnesses with differing perspectives, voices, and ages - Rahel at seven and Rahel at twenty-seven are the same and not the same - which guide the reader to fashion a more complete understanding of the story. Roy also employs a third person omniscient narrator, which Outka postulates she utilizes as a means of disassociation from the narrative, mimicking the "dissociative neutrality" trauma victims may experience wherein they feel themselves removed from the trauma as it occurs, their body or consciousness floating above the moment and witnessing the event as something

unrelated to themselves. Unfortunately, the victim does not seem able to utilize this dissociative witnessing, while necessary for immediate survival, as a means of later beneficial recall.

Roy's time hybridity attempts to address the malleability of memory in the face of trauma and like any worthy venture, there is a peril in engaging in these literary attempts. Outka cites LaCapra and Forter to demonstrate that readers may "aestheticize" others' traumas and so fail to recognize the forces that incited the trauma, instead viewing the aggressor as something more natural and aleatory which cannot be cured. In particular, Outka believes the reader may fail to identify the real-life (whether existing or allegorical) social and political aggressors within a text. While in *Lolita* the aggressor is embodied in a single man and his particular transgressive acts of the abject against society as a whole, it is more complicated in *GOST*. In *GOST*, these are the Althusser trifecta of ideological and repressive state apparatuses: the Indian government, society, and religion. Enmeshed within these three apparatuses is the conceit of history and temporal hybridity within the novel, as personified by the History House and Kari Saibu. Collective trauma tends to be more drawn out and incites the community to come undone, questioning their collective identity and as a "connected pair" in the larger community body. *GOST* is set in a place and time whose communal body has already been ravished by trauma: colonialism, British rule, the caste system, and the continuous upheaval of political and social orders. The Ayemenem communal body's frailty easily lends itself to temporal hybridity like a woman with dementia, easily slipping from her life as a twenty-year-old ballerina to her rocking chair prison at seventy-five.

Within the space of 1969, one sees the expression of temporal hybridity in the very formation of the family, where modernity pushes itself against the door of tradition:

old school Pappachi beats Mammachi because he envies her successes, but it is her management of the pickle factory that keeps the family afloat; Oxford-read Chacko marries white British Margaret Kochamma and has a mixed race child, whose life is taken by the river, the conclusion of a long standing historical revenge; Ammu is a secondary being, whose only value is to marry well, but she fails even at that and becomes a single mother embroiled in a mixed caste affair. Systemic trauma occurs daily, not as a single blow, and as such become naturalized, adapted into government, society, and religion. Trauma then becomes enmeshed in the community's daily life, a ritual acceptance of the unacceptable liable to engender further trauma, as evidenced in *GOST*. The communal trauma previously mentioned - colonialism, British rule, the caste system, political and social upheavals - set the foundation and the stage for the traumatic events in *GOST*. Every trauma is built on a prior trauma, constructing a shaky house ready to collapse. Roy's metaphor for the layering of trauma is the History House. The History House is where Kari Saibu likely sexually abused young men and committed suicide; near where Sophie Mol drowned and Velutha is beaten; and where the Terror was buried in a shallow grave.

Chacko delivers a wistful monologue to the twins about Kari Saibu's house in which certain aspects of trauma are recognizable:

The History House.

With cool stone floors and dim walls and billowing ship-shaped shadows. Plump, translucent lizards lived behind old pictures, and waxy, crumbling ancestors with tough toe-nails and breath that smelled of yellow maps gossiped in sibilant, papery whispers. "But we can't go in," Chacko explained, "because we've been locked out. And when we look in through the windows, all we see are shadows. And when we try and listen, all we hear is a whispering. And we cannot understand the whispering, because our minds have been invaded by a war. A war that we have won and lost. The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them. A war that has made us adore our conquerors and

despise ourselves.”...“We’re Prisoners of War,” Chacko said. “Our dreams have been doctored. We belong nowhere. We sail unanchored on troubled seas. We may never be allowed ashore. Our sorrows will never be sad enough. Our joys never happy enough. Our dreams never big enough. Our lives never important enough. To matter.” (Roy, 1997, p. 26)

Chacko's description of India's colonization and its effects on its people is that of a traumatic experience, one in which the victim can hear and smell the trauma, but cannot quite elucidate the event, cannot "understand the whispering" that likely affects their very actions and thoughts. The memory of the trauma is in a house that they have been locked out of – a victim's conscious mind – but through whose windows shadows of the past are visible and whose whispers slip through the cracks, namely the victim's behaviors. Chacko even mentions how trauma captures its victims' dreams and re-dreams them, insists they relive their traumatic experience but changes them slightly, changes them into something they want instead of despise. Victims' dreams and desires are changed into something that returns to a place that is not theirs, that makes them insufficient in all manners. These are exactly the symptoms of trauma that Estha and Rahel espouse: they belong nowhere, sailing unanchored and aimlessly on troubled seas, unable to return to the shore of their homes or to the time before the Terror.

Chacko's meditation on India's trauma and haunting also applies to the family's own traumatic haunting, specifically in the form of a repetitive pattern. The twins' grandfather, a surly, violent ex-Government official, spent the latter part of his life in a black cloud of anger and resentment over a moth. An Imperial Entomologist turned Joint Director, Entomology after the British occupation, Pappachi discovered a new species of moth after it fell into his drink one evening. He studied the moth's "unusually dense dorsal tufts" and submitted the specimen for review, certain of his impending

"taxonomic attention and, he hoped, fame" (Roy, 1997, p. 24). The authorities informed him the moth was merely a rare form of a known species, but twelve years later, well after Pappachi's retirement from the field, they decided the moth was indeed a new species and genus, and named the little dense dorsal tufted fellow after the Acting Director of the Department of Entomology¹². Pappachi never recovered from this blow:

Pappachi's Moth was held responsible for his black moods and sudden bouts of temper. Its pernicious ghost — gray, furry and with unusually dense dorsal tufts — haunted every house that he ever lived in. It tormented him and his children and his children's children. (Roy, 1997, p. 24)

Pappachi's trauma becomes his descendant's trauma, a repetitive trope underscoring the atemporality and repetitive nature of trauma. Throughout the novel Rahel feels the hairy, cold legs of Pappachi's Moth flutter over her heart, especially when she displeases Ammu, Sophie Mol drowns, and Baby Kochamma manipulates the twins into sentencing Velutha.

While memory alone is a slick animal, with the propensity for mutability, *GOST* is further complicated by not only the temporal hybridity of trauma, but the distinctive manners children and adults perceive time. While the novel interweaves through several times and places, the factual and grounding setting is December 1969 (Before) and June 1993 (Now) in Ayemenem, Kerala, southwest India. In *GOST*, time is messily divided into the Before, the Now, the Lay Ter, and the Tomorrow. The word "now" appears over 100 times in the novel, reinforcing the significance of each moment as it occurs and firmly situating the character in the moment, whether presently occurring or as recall.

¹² Coincidentally, or not perhaps not so coincidentally depending on Roy's intentions, Nabokov was an ardent amateur lepidopterist who wrote several papers on moths and butterflies. Nabokov's Butterflies 360. <https://www.amnh.org/shelf-life/nabokov-s-butterflies-360>

The word "then" appears 184 times, often linking present action with recollection, as something "Before the Terror" (Roy, 1997, p. 19). "Before" appears 85 times, and "ago" appears 27 times. The word "later" appears 45 times, each instance precluding a recollection of realization, shame, or pain. "Tomorrow" appears eight times and "naaley" ("tomorrow" in Malayalam) appears once, as the novel's closing words. The prevalence of "time words" for the past and present significant of the characters' perception of time as grounded in the present and the past, with little desire or ability to look forward.

The use of "later" always comes when a character has the luxury of recalling an event in solitude and quiet, that they can only recognize as unpleasant after the fact and which they ascribe to it life-changing importance. In particular, Ammu's reflections on the past evolve from mere recognitions to deeper meditations. One of the first appearances of "later" is when Ammu's hope for wedded bliss are dashed: "later, looking back on the day, Ammu realized that the slightly feverish glitter in her bridegroom's eyes had not been love, or even excitement at the prospect of carnal bliss, but approximately eight large pegs of whiskey. Straight. Neat." (Roy, 1997, p. 19). This later proves prescient, for their marriage would be an abusive, drunken match that would end in a scandalous divorce. That divorce would create indelible memories in the twins.

They remembered

being pushed around a room once, from Ammu to Baba to Ammu to Baba like billiard balls. Ammu pushing Estha away. Here, you keep one of them. I can't look after them both. Later, when Estha asked Ammu about that, she hugged him and said he mustn't imagine things. (Roy, 1997, p. 40)

What the twins remember are memories that Ammu challenges because, she logically rationalizes, they are children and susceptible to wanderings of the imagination; in reality, it is because she cannot bear to remember the pain she inflicted on them, to be

told about something she placed neatly away in the recesses of her mind to never look at again but that the twins still carry in the very forefront of their minds. Ammu pushing Estha away in this passage also foreshadows what will in fact occur after the Terror, when Estha is Re-Returned to his father.

After Ammu and Velutha's love affair is discovered, Ammu is forced to confront other careless words she uttered to her children, which set off the second half of the Terror:

It was only later, when the world collapsed around them, after Sophie Mol's body was brought to Ayemenem, and Baby Kochamma unlocked her, that Ammu sifted through her rage to try to make sense of what had happened. Fear and apprehension forced her to think clearly, and it was only then that she remembered what she had said to her twins when they came to her bedroom door and asked her why she had been locked up. The careless words she hadn't meant. (Roy, 1997, p. 120)

Ammu does not want to unpack the ugly memories she has neatly stowed away, the screaming at her children, blaming them for her being locked away and for her affair being discovered. But "fear and apprehension force" her to do so, to think logically, to sift through her rage and separate it from reality. Only then can she understand – but not accept, this she will never do, as evidenced by her freezing in time – her responsibility for her role in the Terror. And it is the careless words she did not mean but did scream, along with Estha's fear of the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man that propels the twins and Sophie Mol into the waters of the Ayenemen and death.

The responsibility that Ammu does not wish to take is readily, erroneously accepted by the twins. It is only after the Terror that the twins understand that

What they had done would return to empty them. But that would be Later. Lay Ter. A deep-sounding bell in a mossy well. Shivery and furred like moth's feet. At the time, there would only be incoherence. As though meaning had slunk out

of things and left them fragmented. Disconnected. The glint of Ammu's needle. The color of a ribbon. The weave of the cross-stitch counterpane. A door slowly breaking. Isolated things that didn't mean anything. As though the intelligence that decodes life's hidden patterns—that connects reflections to images, glints to light, weaves to fabrics, needles to thread, walls to rooms, love to fear to anger to remorse—was suddenly lost. (Roy, 1997 p. 108)

The twins are unable to come to terms that their acts as children were exactly that, were the actions of seven year olds, done without malice or thought of terrible consequences. They could not imagine that their running away from home to “teach the grown-ups a lesson” as Sophie Mol phrased it, would result in Sophie Mol's drowning, an *accident*. They understand later that Estha's single “yes” to the police, goaded by Baby Kochamma, will lead to Velutha's beating and death, but they will not ever seem to realize that they were merely objects of manipulation, little millstones who could finally serve a utile purpose. The twins take on the responsibilities that the adults discard or erroneously choose in order to “continue” with their lives: Ammu and Velutha are responsible for their affair, for being responsible to their desires and the suicide bombers inside of them instead of their families; Velutha's father is responsible for telling Mammachi about their affair, choosing his social responsibility instead of his familial one, wherein he could warn his son and save him; and Baby Kochamma is the mastermind behind framing Velutha for abducting the children, killing Sophie Mol and essentially raping Ammu, as well as forcing Estha to say the “yes” that murders Velutha – she is responsible to society, her caste, to the image of her family but not her actual family, choosing to destroy the twins' psyches.

The trauma of the Terror leads the twins to incoherence, an incomprehension where meaning had “slunk out of things and left them fragmented. Disconnected.” The twins underwent horrific traumatic experiences that would affect any adult for the

remainder of their lives, but because they are children, this affects their development in every way. Trauma completely altered their personalities, their dreams, their ambitions, their sense of time and language and purpose. Their trauma causes them to see no meaning to anything, to lose the intelligence to decode life's patterns – and the only patterns that they can distinguish after, later, are those of their traumas.

One of the only patterns the twins recognize and ascribe meaning to is time. Even before the Terror, the twins question the definitions of time the adults force upon them, but it is after the Terror that these definitions become pronounced, heavy; they become the designations of time and language in which they live and relive their traumas. The "Terror" is Ammu and Velutha's affair, the events that coupled with Sophie Mol's death, results in Velutha's death. Velutha's father first feels it when he sees a little boat being rowed across the river and back at dawn, the boat carrying Velutha and Ammu, but it will be felt throughout the novel, usually accompanied by a temporal description: "Before the terror;" three days before the Terror;" "after the Terror;" "the Terror was past," and "the Terror (still-to-come)". The Terror informs the other notions of time, such as "Too Briefly [which] meant For Too Short a While," (Roy, 1997, p. 5) and later, which "became a horrible, menacing, goose-bumpy word. Lay. Ter. Like a deep-sounding bell in a mossy well. Shivery, and furred. Like moth's feet," (pp. 69-70). The twins' lives are decimated into fragments of time that are nearly impossible to stitch back together, fragments of an existence that they learn while very young are small and pitiful in the larger picture of time. Chacko tells Rahel "their existence [...is the] twinkle in the eyes of the Earth Woman, who was forty-six years old in their time. Rahel listens to Chacko intently, but latches on just to the nice sound of the word "humbling," and it is only Lay-ter, "in the light of all that happened, [that] twinkle seemed completely the

wrong word to describe the expression in the Earth Woman's eye. Twinkle was a word with crinkled, happy edges," (Roy, 1997, p. 26). The Terror makes the twins realize that their existence in the Earth Woman's eye was a sustained sneer, not a brief, happy twinkle.

The twin's untwinkling existence include dreams and "mares," both of the day and night variety. Dreams are a repetitive occurrence and motif in *GOST* and Rahel and Ammu are the most frequent dreamers. The novel opens with Rahel recalling how as a child she woke up giggling from Estha's comic dream, demonstrating that their connection goes beyond that of siblings and even twins - they are one and the same.

She has other memories too that she has no right to have.
She remembers, for instance (though she hadn't been there), what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha in Abhilash Talkies. She remembers the taste of the tomato sandwiches – Estha's sandwiches, that Estha ate – on the Madras Mail to Madras.
And these are only the small things. (Roy, 1997, p. 2)

But it isn't only the silly recall of a tomato sandwich that Rahel has - she experiences Estha's abuse, remembers the way the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man forced Estha's small hand on his penis and masturbated it. Estha's trauma has seeped into Rahel, becoming her own re-dreamed trauma, a thing to live through that she had not lived in addition to the Terror they both endured. Rahel's traumatic memories after the Terror include when Chacko tore down Ammu's door, screaming and beating and threatening her. It is a memory she refashions into nightmare, the recurring voice of the trauma begging to be heard again and again:

After that for years Rahel would dream this dream: a fat man, faceless, kneeling beside a woman's corpse. Hacking its hair off. Breaking every bone in its body. Snapping even the little ones. The fingers. The ear bones cracked like twigs. Snapsnap the soft sound of breaking bones. A pianist killing the piano keys. Even the black ones. And Rahel (though years later, in the Electric Crematorium, she

would use the slipperiness of sweat to slither out of Chacko's grasp) loved them both. The player and the piano.
The killer and the corpse. (Roy, 1997, pp. 111-112)

Rahel's dream is a confrontation of reality and a symbolic interpretation of reality: although Chacko never physically beat Ammu to the point of murdering her, he did want to, blaming her and her alone for Sophie Mol's death. Chacko did not physically murder Ammu, but he psychically did so by separating her from her twins and the twins from each other, softly snapsnapping every bone in her body, every muscle in her heart. And Rahel must confront the very abject image of a killer and a corpse, her uncle and her mother, and conciliate the transgressions they both committed against their very own family, fueled by rage and desire.

There are prophetic dreams, dreams that seem fated and dreams that incite the events that lead to the Terror. When the family spends the night at the Hotel Sea Queen on their way to pick up Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma at the airport, the twins dream of *their* river, prophetic dreams of the "hint of doom and all that waited in the wings for them," (Roy, 1997, p. 60). The same night, Ammu smile-dreams of dolphins and a deep barred blue, a dream whose direct meaning we are unaware of but which Roy believes bear repeating, as it appears twice in ten pages, on pages 58 and 67. Vellya Paapen, Velutha's father, as he passes the History House, is unaware "that Kari Saibu it was who captured dreams and re-dreamed them. That he plucked them from the minds of passersby the way children pick currants from a cake. That the ones he craved most of all, the dreams he loved re-dreaming, were the tender dreams of two-egg, twins." (p. 99). There is a sense of impending and unstoppable fate in the form of history that chooses the twins, sniffs in them what is to come, and delights in re-dreaming their tender dreams, dreams that will turn tough and terrible after the Terror.

Before she embarks on her affair with Velutha, she dreams about him, but also dreams about her family and history, history that has happened and is to come. This is a dream she will dream one afternoon and then a dream she willingly retreats into again later, a dream she re-dreams while the entire family fawns over Sophie Mol. The dream takes up several pages, and she imagines being held by a cheerful one-armed man in a dark space illuminated only by an oil lamp. He can only do one thing at a time: kiss her, hold her, see her, or feel her, but none simultaneously. But he can see the shadows around him, although he cannot fight them for he had no other arm. Ammu and the man yearn to touch each other but do not, because Ammu realizes that in the shadows Ammu there are spectators, their swarthy behinds filling metal folding chairs: “with slanting rhinestone sunglasses, watching. They all held polished violins under their chins, the bows poised at identical angles. They all had their legs crossed, left over right, and all their left legs were shivering. Some of them had newspapers. Some didn’t. Some of them blew spit bubbles,” (Roy, 1997, pp. 107-108). These are her family and her society; Mammachi wears rhinestone glasses and plays violins; Ammu’s ex-husband would cross and shiver his legs; Chacko reads newspapers; the twins blow spit bubbles. Ammu sees that beyond the spectators there is a black, dirty sea, littered with shattered glass. She and the man swim, but his body leaves no trace of itself: “no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors.” This line, along with the fact that they do not touch in the dream, clearly indicates Velutha, an Untouchable who must wipe away his footprints in the presence of Ammu and her family. Ammu eventually senses that her children are hovering over her, gazing at her sleeping face like two dark, worried moons, waiting to be let in.

“D’you think she’s dying?” she heard Rahel whisper to Estha...

"It's an afternoon-mare," Estha-the-Accurate replied. "She dreams a lot."

Ammu opened her eyes.

It was a long journey that she made, from the embrace of the one-armed man to her unidentical two-egg twins.

"You were having an afternoon-mare," her daughter informed her.

"It wasn't a mare," Ammu said. "It was a dream."

"Estha thought you were dying."

"You looked so sad," Estha said.

"I was happy," Ammu said, and realized that she had been.

"If you're happy in a dream, Ammu, does that count?" Estha asked.

"Does what count?"

"The happiness—does it count?"

(Roy, 1997, p. 108)

Ammu's dreams seem to foretell the future but are also an echo of the past, of things that already happened and which is only becoming aware of them now, in the later. The dreams are circular time, are the breaking of the Love Laws in the past and in the future; are the pleasure and pain Velutha and Ammu's affair brings. The fact that Rahel and Estha mistake her dark but pleasant dream for death and then an "afternoon-mare" reflects the intimate relationship between pain and pleasure, the subconscious and the conscious. Ammu looks like she is sad and in pain, dying – but she affirms she was happy, was feeling a sense of completeness with an incomplete man. And then there is Estha's question: if you are happy in a dream does it count? But what if that is the wrong question? What if you are sad in dreams, Estha, does it count? The sadness of the traumatic dreams and recollections he, Rahel and Ammu will feel are real, are the remembrances of the Terror, of all the terrors before and after it.

Roy seems to insist that Ammu's dream bridges the gap between the subconscious the conscious, the semiotic and the symbolic:

By not mentioning his [the one-armed man's] name, she sensed that a pact had been forged between her Dream and the World. And that the midwives of that pact were, or would be, her sawdust-coated two-egg twins. She knew who he was—the God of Loss, the God of Small Things. Of course she

did. (Roy, 1997, p. 109)

In fact, though Ammu wants to delegate her responsibility for the affair to the Dream, to an unspoken, abject (by Indian society's standards) desire residing in the depth of her thoughts, and to her own children, the "midwives of [...the] pact." Her dream, and her desires, served as an impetus to the affair; they are an expression of both her death and life drive, wherein the erotic, her desire to engage in the act of sex with Velutha confronts her suicide-bomber like desire to die, for their affair is a death-sentence.

And while Velutha's death-sentence comes quickly, Ammu's is a protracted affair, enacted by Chacko. Chacko shuns Ammu from her family, and because of that separation she becomes ill, distanced from temporal reality, and a binge drinker before dying. The night she dies, Ammu is startled awake by a recurring dream, her last dream to be dreamed:

She had woken up at night to escape from a familiar, recurrent dream in which policemen approached her with snicking scissors, wanting to hack off her hair. They did that in Kottayam to prostitutes whom they'd caught in the bazaar – branded them so that everybody would know them for what they were. (Roy, 1997, p. 80).

Ammu dreaming that she has been branded a prostitute is intimately related to her transgressions of the Love Laws, of the trauma her transgressions caused and were caused by, which continue to haunt her until her deathbed. Ammu dreams a dream and dies, reminiscent of how Rahel believed she was dying when dreaming. It is a shorning of both her maternity and her sexuality. Ammu's luscious hair a source of beauty and pride to her and her children; they stroke it and drape it around themselves like a mink stole, like the warmth of love. It is hair that Velutha also find a beautiful, that he caresses and drowns himself in.

Roy insists on the idea of dreams being dreamed and re-dreamed, as if the reader themselves has dreamt the narrative and the text's repetition is their re-dreaming of the narrative: "It was four in the morning, still dark, when the twins, exhausted, distraught and covered in mud, made their way through the swamp and approached the History House. Hansel and Gretel in a ghastly fairy tale in which their dreams would be captured and re-dreamed," (p.142). The repetition of dreams and re-dreaming reinforce the traumatic experience Roy has fashioned out of her narrative, along with another repetitive image that, much like in *Lolita*, drowns the text. The Meenachal river is as much presence, as much of a character, as the twins, its slick soul permeating every turn of the story. The river is the stage for seduction, susurrating promises of love, both erotic and familial, to the twins, Sophie Mol, Ammu, and Velutha; but it is also the place where history takes what is his, where dreams are captured and plastic toys forgotten. The Meenachal is the only river in Kerala, and at given points in time, the river served as a source of irrigation, hydration, water transportation, and eventually, tourism. Water is essential for the region's survival: the river and rain sustain life and commerce in Ayemenem, for two-thirds of the village consists of eleven paddy fields. Water in fact, is crucial to the Ipe family's wealth: the river provides the fuel for the family's rubber trees, paddy fields, and Mammachi's pickle factory. Even their house, whose back verandah used to open out into the air, afforded Aleyooti Ammachi's portrait a full view of the river.

Roy opens the novel with a description of the summer water - rain, monsoon, river - in Ayemenem:

May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the

fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun. The nights are clear, but suffused with sloth and sullen expectation. But by early June the southwest monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water with short spells of sharp, glittering sunshine that thrilled children snatch to play with. The countryside turns an immodest green. (Roy, 1997, p.1)

The imagery is lush and vibrant, perching on the very moment in which nature is ready to burst: the dark black of hungry crows "gorging" against the bright yellow mangoes, the ripening and bursting fruits, the "dustgreen" trees which turn immodest. This idyllic portrait of Ayemenem is reinforced by a later description of the river by the two dreaming twins, where they recount

...the coconut trees that bent into it and watched, with coconut eyes, the boats slide by. Upstream in the mornings. Downstream in the evenings. And the dull, sullen sound of the boatmen's bamboo poles as they thudded against the dark, oiled boatwood. It was warm, the water. Graygreen. Like rippled silk. With fish in it. With the sky and trees in it. And at night, the broken yellow moon in it. (pp. 122-123)

The river slips easily into the twins' unconsciousness, lulling them with the soothing images of coconut trees, of rowing bamboo fisherman poles, of warm water like rippled silk, of the river mirror echoing the sky, trees, and moon in its belly. However, the imagery is tinged with darkness: the coconut trees have coconut eyes that never look away from the boats going upstream and downstream; the bamboo poles thud against dark, oiled wood; and the moon is broken, splintered in the undulating reflection. The river is menacing in its vigilance of humans' comings and goings, dark, brooding, and broken. The juxtaposition of the soothing and the dark indicate the duplicitous nature of the river, foreshadowing the tragedies that will unfold at the river's mouth. The twins, so much the same that they share a single dream, know that they were "somehow, not wholly unaware of the hint of doom and all that waited in the wings for them" (p. 122). The juxtaposition as foreshadowing is further evidenced by the repeated use of the

chorus "Graygreen," "rippled silk," and "the broken yellow moon in it " in Chapter 10, Chapter 16, and Chapter 21 as foreshadowing for the first time the twins test the boat, Sophie Mol's drowning, and Ammu and Velutha's transgression of the Love Laws.

Even as children, the twins are aware of the graygreen river's power, well-versed in the limit of its gentleness. They know the first third of the river well, for there they learned the practical things - like how many steps there are to enter the "slimy mud" (thirteen); the name of the fish (*pallathi, paral, koori, karimeen*); the delight of underwater farting; and how to swim and fish. But the remaining two-thirds of the river, where the Really Deep begins, is a mystery to them:

Where the current was swift and certain (downstream when the tide was out, upstream, pushing up from the backwaters when the tide was in). The third was shallow again. The water brown and murky. Full of weeds and darting eels and slow mud that oozed through toes like toothpaste. The twins could swim like seals and, supervised by Chacko, had crossed the river several times, returning panting and cross-eyed from the effort, with a stone, a twig or a leaf from the Other Side as testimony to their feat. But the middle of a respectable river, or the Other Side, was no place for children to Linger, Loll or Learn Things. Estha and Rahel accorded the second third and the third of the Meenachal the deference it deserved.

The first third of the river is where children can "Linger, Loll or Learn Things," things beyond the practical; it is where the twins studied Silence (like the children of the Fisher People), and learned the bright language of dragonflies. Here they learned to Wait. To Watch. To think thoughts and not voice them. To move like lightning when the bendy yellow bamboo arced downwards. But it is the rest of the river where children should not linger; they could swim across it, but they must not dally. The river is much like time: the twins can easily linger in the past, in history, but they must not dwell too much or wander too far into the present and the future, the second third and third third of the

river. These parts of the time and the river are unknown, and as such dangerous, slippery.

After the Terror, after the river consumes Sophie Mol and Velutha, the river has changed. When Rahel returns to her childhood home in 1993, she contemplates the waning of the great river from powerful god, indiscriminative in his cruelty, to a bed-ridden ghoul:

Years later, when Rahel returned to the river, it greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed. Both things had happened. It had shrunk. And she had grown. (p. 124)

The river is inundated with a saltwater barrage to placate the paddy farmers, the attempt to generate more rice slowly killing the river, which becomes a "swollen drain" with dead fish, weeds, trash, and bodily wastes. It stinks, and while locals bathe in it, tourists are advised to not swim. The History House becomes a five star hotel where tourists enter through the backwaters, eschewing the river. What power the river once held, the fear it could instill and the change it could wring, was now all gone. The present and the future made past, a sad history no one wants to contemplate anymore – except for Estha and Rahel, for they have been marked by the river. Besides symbolizing history and trauma, the river is also a divine, female space. While Roy does not explicitly assign the river a sex, she indicates that the river possesses a divine feminine essence, beyond the intuitive metaphor of water as womb. The river is named after the goddess Meenakshi, the "fish-eyed" one, born in the cradle of Tamil culture as the only child of Pandyan royal parents¹³. Some myths claim her birth name was Tadaatagai; other myths claim her

¹³ From the Tamil word *meenatchi*; other variants of her name include Minakshi, Minaksi Devi, Minatci, and Minachchi. She is an iteration of Parvati, Shiva's royal consort, considered his equal. The story of Meenakshi is told in "Shiva's Sacred Games," a seventeenth century text written by Paranjyoti Munivar.

parents were barren and prayed to the gods for a son but were instead granted a three-year daughter that sprung out of a holy fire¹⁴. The young princess was born with three breasts, one of which would disappear when she met her true love. Tadaatagai succeeded her father and proved to be a skillful and clever leader, launching a bloody campaign for power across the globe. During one of these battles, her army cornered Shiva's army. When Tadaatagai first laid eyes on Shiva on the battlefield, her third breast disappeared, fulfilling the ancient prophecy. Their union was kinetic and highly erotic, ensuring a devotion and fidelity from Shiva never seen before¹⁵. After her marriage to Shiva, she becomes the goddess Meenakshi, an avatar or incarnation of the deity Parvati. Her large, dark, unblinking and almond-shaped eyes, like those of a fish, were symbols of great beauty and indicative of the care a protective mother fish lavishes on her children. Indeed, she was addressed as *amman*, "mother," denoting qualities contrasting to those of Shiva: mercy, compassion, nurture, and accessibility to her children and devotees.

A wild, ruthless warrior queen that becomes a gentle protector and lambent vessel of eroticism - Roy has made of both the river and Ammu modern iterations of Meenakshi. The river is unpredictable and mercurial, a thunderstorm trapped in the confines of a river, a fisherman-swallower and Sophie-Mol-drowner. Yet the river is also generous and serene, grandmother-handed as it feeds the people of Ayemenem fish and coconuts, Velutha-smiled as it delights in the swimmers and bathers rolling it the folds of its skirts or making love by its shore. Like Meenakshi, like the coconut tree eyes, Ammu is always watching her children with her blurred jewel eyes: "Ammu watched over them fiercely. Her watchfulness stretched her, made her taut and tense.

¹⁴ Harman, 1992, pp. 23-25; Dehejia, 1999, p. 31.

¹⁵ Dehejia, 1999, p. 34.

She was quick to reprimand her children, but even quicker to take offense on their behalf," (Roy, 1997, p. 43). The river symbolizes not only a woman, but a powerful woman, a deity that controls lives, that can destroy it as easily as nourish it. Throughout the novel, the children come to realize that they know the river as well as they know their Ammu - that is, only the first third, the shallow, scratchable surface, and not the unmixable mix.

Ammu, the little mother with the Unsafe Edge, with a cocktail brewing in her made of "an unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber" (Roy, 1997, p. 44). She oscillates between following the unrest in her young heart - she is only twenty-seven - and her fierce love and duty for her small children. Ammu is smart, courageous, and headstrong, but her life is tainted with the unspoken truth that it has already been lived. Divorced and relegated to her childhood bedroom, a place she married in order to escape, Ammu has no hope of a fulfilling career or relationship. While she is still beautiful and bright, with her bottom still able to hold a pencil in its curves and her mind still capable of reading Keats, the purpose of her life has been relegated to care for her children, and after her mother dies, caring for Chacko. But there is something still "restless and untamed" about her, something dangerous. After the Terror, the one purpose society has given her, to care for her children and Chacko, is gone, and she was complicit in eliminating her own purpose. Ammu's desire, strong and fearful like the river, drowned Sophie Mol, Velutha, and her children. Without motherhood anchoring her to the world, there was no reason for her not to implode; the weight of her trauma and the reality of her situation make Ammu as stagnant as the river, a stilted, dirty and overused body that can only think of the past, that is arrested into a catatonic state.

CHAPTER 3

LANGUAGE (“LIGHT OF MY LIFE” AND “INFINNATE JOY”)

Both Roy and Nabokov employ sensuous language lush with double-barreled words and toy with nonsense poetry and rhyme in the texts to illustrate the characters’ experience with abject trauma. These uses of language also serve to demonstrate Humbert Humbert’s manipulative and predatory nature towards both Lolita and the reader and to allow the reader to inhabit Estha and Rahel’s experience of trauma as both children and adults.

Rahel and Estha are dizygotic twins, two little separate eggs fertilized at the same time. They are often referred to as "two-egg" twins or persons, and although they are both "thin-armed children, flat-chested, wormridden and Elvis Presley-puffed," they are not identical: they are two separate people with two separate faces. Notice Roy's penchant for double-words, calling them not "children with flat chests and puffed hair" but "flat-chested ... Elvis-Presley puffed." She will employ these poetic and descriptive double words throughout the narrative, using them to emphasize the semiotic language that trauma begets, but also indicating the childishness of the twins' language, a special child-like and twin-like language that will not completely evolve or change as they grow into adults because of their traumas. The double-words are also a refashioning of the English language at Roy's hand, the result of her use of a non-native language that mimics the mixture of the setting's history, the Indian and the British, the touchable and the Untouchable, the English and the Malayalam. The fragments of Malayalam throughout the novel, much like the several phrases in French in *Lolita*, though not

discussed here at length, serve to reinforce the boundaries the characters straddle between the semiotic and the symbolic, the abject and their identities. Like the usage of semiotic/lyrical languages, the use of foreign languages demonstrates both the limits of expression in general and in trauma in particular; one language is insufficient for the characters to communicate their emotions in general and the transformations their identities undergo as a result of trauma. The reader that does not understand the novels' foreign languages, which are the great majority, are also exposed to a form of foreignness, an element that cannot be quite understood, which mimics the experience of trauma. The single distinction between the use of foreign languages between the two novels is that Humbert uses French to confound Lolita and seduce the reader, to espouse poetic turns of phrase whose foreignness reinforces his self-fashioned identity as an intellectual, crucial to his credibility.

As the twins learn more of language and life, they employ rhymes and non-sense or combined words to understand difficult concepts. Roy contrasts their innocent, childish language with the abject and the disturbing, elucidating the link between the semiotic and the abject as well as demonstrating how trauma rips away their innocence. In addition, the twins cannot quite distinguish between what is acceptable and what isn't, specifically in relation to the abject or the Love Laws: they blow spit-bubbles throughout the narrative; Rahel delights in hearing the "Ssss" sound of the urine streams of her mother, Baby Aunt and herself (p. 45); and they adore their friendship with Velutha, painting his nails red and climbing all over his dark body.

The twins allow the phonetic sounds of English, a language they are learning, to inform their definitions and context. They use their "Prer NUN sea ayshun" to link the word viable to "die-able," making something that can be possible into something that

can die; they break down the word "divorce" into "die-vorce," a break that evoking the death of the family unit and a death from society, for it is one that is seen as a shame in their community; and "later" into "Lay Ter," the break in between demonstrating their fear of what is to come, a reluctance to confront the unknown. Lastly, there is the way that Rahel internalizes and interprets Chacko's assertion that there are four things possible in human nature: "Love. Madness. Chaos. Infinite joy." To Rahel,

Infinite joy sounded the saddest. Perhaps because of the way Chacko said it. *Infinite Joy*. With a church sound to it. Like a sad fish with fins all over. A cold moth lifted a cold leg. (Roy, 1997, p. 58).

That Rahel sees the idea of endless happiness as the saddest sounding thing possible in human nature foreshadows the fate that will befall them. The next lines, the comparison to its sound being like "a church sound ... a sad fish with fins all over" allude to Sophie Mol's death and funeral, where the church resonates with sad songs, bells, and crying and the multi-finned fish are the river fish that eat her small body, nibbling away at her eyelids.

It is the madness in the Kathakali performance Rahel watches in the Heart of Darkness, where the dancer's despair is so deep that he is dangerous that the only thing keeping him together is the story he is performing:

It's all he has to keep him from crashing through the world like a falling stone. It is his color and his light. It is the vessel into which he pours himself. It gives him shape. Structure. It harnesses him. It contains him. His Love. His Madness. His Hope. His Infinite joy. Ironically, his struggle is the reverse of an actor's struggle— he strives not to enter a part but to escape it. But this is what he cannot do. In his abject defeat lies his supreme triumph. (Roy, 1997, p. 271).

This performance rings true for Rahel, who sees herself and Estha in the dangerous, despairing performer, which she evokes earlier in the text by calling themselves actors in a play they cannot escape, a role they cannot change. The story they are bound to is the

story of their trauma, structuring, harnessing, containing everything their human nature is possible of, never letting them be more than Quietness and Emptiness. Yet, if they could not escape their story, it appears that their Quietness and Emptiness is what has allowed them to survive, is the supreme triumph of their abject defeat – their Ininnate Joy.

Ininnate joy is also the hopeless promise that Velutha and Ammu gift each other in the History House's verandah, they see a tiny spider who wears bits and pieces of trash to camouflage and protect himself. Velutha names him Chappa Thamburan, Lord Rubbish, and the two lovers cannot help but connect their fate to that of the spiders, specifically "their fates, their futures (their Love, their Madness, their Hope, their Ininnate joy)...They chose him because they knew they had to put their faith in fragility. Stick to smallness," (Roy, 1997, p. 321). This is the God of Small Things, the God of Loss – the placing of hope in fragility, the knowledge no future is guaranteed.

The twins use song to wrestle with the abject by refashioning it into rhymes in order to both understand and disassociate from the events they are experiencing, and the semiotic nature of song and the abject is reinforced by Roy's conscious use of line breaks. On their way to the movies, Rahel sings the Popeye the Sailor Man theme:

I'm Popeye the sailor man dum dum
I live in a cara-van dum dum I op-en the door
And fall-on the floor
I'm Popeye the sailor man dum dum (p. 94)

This rhyme, and the "dum dum" in particular are reworked into two disturbing experiences: Estha's violation and Velutha's death. The door that Popeye opens is the door of language, the door of trauma and death that the twins barge through and fall on the floor. The song first turns into a rhyme about Estha, the keeper of the tickets for their

viewing of *The Sound of Music*: "Little Man. He lived in a caravan. Dum dum" (p. 47). Estha's smallness and vulnerability is recalled after he is violated, a contrast to the largeness and power of the Orangedrink Lemondrink man, when the rhyme transforms itself into something sinister, into a voicing of his trauma: "the acrid after-taste of a Little Man's first encounter with Fear. Dum Dum" (p. 57). Poor Estha, for it is his love of language and song that causes him to fall prey to the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. Estha cannot help but sing along to the bright notes of *The Sound of Music*, his clear, pure voice almost like that of the singing nun's. His singing causes a disturbance, but he so much wants to sing about how to solve a problem like Maria that he begs Ammu to allow him to go out into the lobby and finish singing the song. When he does, he encounters the fetid Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, all chest hair and teeth like "yellow piano keys," the decay of his soul pulsing to the surface of his body. The man offers him a drink in exchange for doing one small thing, for holding his penis. Naively, Estha accepts and finds himself holding

a bottle in one hand and a penis in the other. Hard, hot, veiny. Not a moonbeam. The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man's hand closed over Estha's. His thumbnail was long like a woman's. He moved Estha's hand up and down. First slowly. Then fastly. The lemondrink was cold and sweet. The penis hot and hard... His hand closed tighter over Estha's. Tight and sweaty. And faster still.

Fast foster flies: –
Never let it rest
Until the fast is faster;
And the faster's fest.

Through the soggy paper straw (almost flattened with spit and fear), the liquid lemon sweetness rose. Blowing through the straw (while his other hand moved), Estha blew bubbles into the bottle. Stickysweet lemon bubbles of the drink he couldn't drink.

Then the gristly-bristly face contorted, and Estha's hand was wet and hot and sticky. It had egg white on it. White egg white. Quarterboiled. The lemondrink was cold and sweet. The penis was soft and shriveled like an empty leather change purse. With his dirtcolored rag, the man wiped Estha's

other hand...Esthappen Yako finished his free bottle of fizzed, lemon-flavored fear. (pp. 47-48)

Roy juxtaposes the language of abuse against Estha's childish language. The words of abuse are factual, clipped, disgusting: the man's penis is hot, hard and veiny; his long-nailed hands tight and sweaty, fast and faster; the semen and Estha's hand is wet, hot, sticky, and covered with "white egg white." By the end, the penis turns "shriveled like an empty leather change purse," and the item he uses to clean Estha's hand is also dirty and disgusting, a "dirtcolored rag." But Estha attempts to escape these sensations, his mind dissociating from the fast and faster movement of the masturbation and into the semiotic, into a poem, into rhyme. He focuses on the abject made undrinkable: the sensation of the soggy paper straw, slick with spit and fear, the stickysweet of the drink and the awfulness of the molestation nauseating him, prohibiting him from drinking any more. The white egg white of the semen, so unlike the eggs of he and his twin, the stickysweetness of the drink, and the fizz of fear will remain with Estha, will be what he recalls when he sees Velutha's dying body in the jail. The unique language of his trauma haunts him throughout the novel, an uncontrolled repetition and recall. It will manifest itself as an imaginary orange in his Other Hand that Estha will hold away from his body, must never allow to touch anything or it will sully everything, will transgress the boundaries of what is good and clean and what is *Estha*.

How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand? Is it the same way you hold an imaginary orange in your hand, a child's hand sullied by the violation of a piano-toothed man?¹⁶ Although he scrubs and washes his hands, the trauma of this experience and

¹⁶ Or is it the way Ammu holds her own orange, a tangerine radio, in hers, close to her ear and heart? The tangerine radio that transmits a song that will lead Ammu to consider her dreams, to remember the one armed man of her daymare, and to engage in an affair with Velutha?

Velutha's death is one that will create an obsession with cleanliness and will forever silence his song, muting that clear, high nun's voice. And then there is the fear: Ammu and the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man strike up a conversation when she takes Estha to the bathroom, and when he learns they are from Ayemenem, he says he goes there often, that he knows her people. Estha takes this as a threat, a warning that he could find him anywhere. This experience and the man's threat lead Estha to think two thoughts:

- (a) Anything can happen to Anyone.
- And (b) It's best to be prepared. (Roy, 1997, p. 96).

These two thoughts reflect the way that trauma has altered Estha's thinking, has instilled a deep anxiety and fear that he will never overcome. They are also the two thoughts that lead him to convince Rahel that they must escape and hide by the History House, the one place where the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man cannot find him. But it is also the place where the Terror unfolds, where he will think two new thoughts, two lessons.

When the twins see their beloved Velutha beaten and bloodied at the edge of the river and the History House, the only way they can process what is happening without having it hurt them in the immediate future is to make a rhyming lesson out of it:

Lesson Number One:
Blood barely shows on a Black Man. (Dum dum)
And
Lesson Number Two:
It smells though.
Sicklysweet.
Like old roses on a breeze. (Dum dum) (p. 311).

The word "sicklysweet" recalls Estha's abuse at the hand of the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, where his lemon drink turns nauseatingly stickysweet in his mouth. The rhyming lesson is innocent and poetic in comparison to the violent event unfolding before them, one which Roy recounts with simple, direct language, the language of a

witness striving to tell the unvarnished truth:

They heard the thud of wood on flesh. Boot on bone. On teeth. The muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked in. The muted crunch of skull on cement. The gurgle of blood on a man's breath when his lung is torn by the jagged end of a broken rib... His skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth, three of which were embedded in his lower lip, hideously inverting his beautiful smile. Four of his ribs were splintered, one had pierced his left lung, which was what made him bleed from his mouth. The blood on his breath bright red. Fresh. Frothy. His lower intestine was ruptured and hemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity. His spine was damaged in two places, the concussion had paralyzed his right arm and resulted in a loss of control over his bladder and rectum. (pp. 306-307)

Velutha is made into nothing but disassembled parts: he is pulpy, tooth-mouthed, and paralyzed, anointed with his own blood, urine, and shit. The God of Loss. The twins' unadulterated view of the abject, of senseless violence and death, is incomprehensible to the twins as reality. They need to turn it into something else, something digestible and not so dangerous, scary: Rahel whispers to Estha it is not Velutha, it is his imaginary twin Urumbam; but Estha refuses to engage in fiction and focuses instead on the blood being like the smell of old roses rotting on a breeze and not Velutha's body.

As a final blow, the police notice Velutha's nails, painted by the twins, and mock him; they flick his penis with their batons and step on it, a soft thud instead of a crush. They emasculate Velutha, assert their utter dominance over his body and his sexuality. Velutha's body, once so powerful and a source of fear and love, will turn into an object, a receptacle of violence, a corpse.

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 6)

The twins cannot conciliate Velutha's death as existing within the realm of their lives,

for it is pure shock, terror, unviability (viable, die-able). It is something they experience as object and subject, for they will also die; it is something they attempt to protect themselves from in the moment they witness, but which they accept as inevitable and as part of themselves as they become adults. But Velutha's live body is also a source of the abject within the context of the Love Laws, something unclean and not meant to be touched, an idea the twins also cannot conciliate with their love. The abject does not only function to distinguish what is acceptable – even beyond religion, morals, and ideologies – but its acknowledgement and subsequent exclusion from order is necessary to create and institute that same order. The abject tramples upon boundaries without second thought, for it is the very transgression of the Love Laws. *GOST* and *Lolita* render societal exclusion as cultural hierarchy and sexual predilections. The caste system separates the untouchable Paravans and the Caste Hindus and Caste Christians. In Mammachi's girlhood, "Paravans were expected to crawl backwards with a broom, sweeping away their footprints so that Brahmins or Syrian Christians would not defile themselves by accidentally stepping into a Paravan's footprint," (Roy, 1997, p. 35). Velutha's Untouchable and abused body is the plane in which abject and trauma coincide, and the witnessing of this body in both the acts of dying and making love incites horror. Literature, and in this case the twins' witnessing of Velutha's trauma, substitutes the sacred and unveils the abject: "[it] decks itself out in the sacred power of horror...may also involve not an ultimate resistance to but an unveiling of the abject," (Kristeva, 2008). Velutha's beating is horrifying for its brutal violence, for its expelling of the things one strives to ignore to preserve the illusion of immortality: blood, shit, teeth, and urine. It is also, however, an example of society (Baby Kochamma) and state apparatuses (the police) abusing the lower classes/castes (Untouchables).

So dark his parents named him “White,” Velutha’s body is a high-voltage entity, it is simultaneously desire and offense. To Comrade Pillai, it is an inconvenience in his Communist association; to society at large it is disgusting, something to be distanced from, hidden; to Ammu it is beautiful, a refuge; and to the twins it is security. Even to Vellya Paapen, Velutha’s father, his body is something of outrage even before Sophie Mol dies, something that frightens him. But Velutha's body is also a thing of slick beauty, of chocolate darkness and erotic desire that elicits a response from Ammu and sets the Terror in motion. By the novel's close in 1993, Velutha's body is nothing; its memory lingers only in his wood shavings, in Estha and Rahel, in the river.

In the novel, water serves as a tool to both represent and dispel the abject and the traumatic. When Rahel returns to Ayemenem in June of 1993, “the south-west monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water ...Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom” (p. 1). Like the abject, the water itself allows the boundaries of things, of time, space, and reality to blur. When the twins return to their hometown, they find the river reduced to a shrunken sliver of water, poisoned with the power of money and politics: “...The banks of the river that smelled of shit, and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils,” (p. 13). It has become stagnant water, dirty with trash, death, urine, shit, and pollution; it is the very definition of abject. Confronting the river is like confronting their traumas, like swimming in the abject and searching for a way back to the shore of themselves.

The water and rain continue as Rahel reaches the family house, where “slanting silver ropes slammed into loose earth, ploughing it up like gunfire” (p. 1). Estha, walking quietly under the same rain, will realize his sister has arrived. He will return to

the house in a similar state, wet and cold from the rain. He will rush to his bedroom, Chacko's old bedroom, and wash his strawberry pink t-shirt carefully in a bucket with crumbling blue soap. Rahel's arrival stirs in Estha the recollection of his abuse and Velutha's death, the dirt of his guilt tainting everything in his body and necessitating immediate attention.

After Estha is returned to his father, he takes over the household duties of grocery shopping, cooking, and cleaning. He retreated into silence, gradually ceasing to speak, occupying "very little space in the world," (p. 11). After his beloved, blind, bald dog Khubchand dies, Estha begins walking - wandering for hours and hours, expanding his exploring. As he walked, "he began to look wiser than he really was. Like a fisherman in a city. With sea-secrets in him," (p. 13). Water floods Estha's body, making it quiet and still, full of an inky nothingness that spreads its tendrils around his heart and mouth.

Realizing Rahel has returned, Estha copes as he knows best, through walking and water. He walks on the riverbank, drenched with cold and rain, unaware of the wetness or the shuddering of a puppy following him. "He squatted on his haunches and rocked himself in the rain," reverting to childhood, consoling himself by mimic the rhythms of the warm, wet womb or of an emery-river (p. 15). For Estha, Rahel's return unleashes the river of trauma; it is a reminder of the things he cannot escape, the dirt and ugliness he struggles to wash off and the absolution he desperately seeks. Perhaps it is because he recalls Ammu telling him, after he is molested, that "water always helps," or perhaps it is an expression of his subconscious, unrepentant desire to return to the site of his trauma, the river, in order to resolve the trauma.

Estha's desire for water could also represent a desire to return to his pre-organic existence, to the harmony of being nothing and being one with Rahel. They are not identical twins, and as such other people never expressed confusion about who is who and which is which; the confusion actually "lay in a deeper, more secret place" (p. 2). It lay somewhere deep in their joint identities, because they are unable to separate themselves from one another:

In those early amorphous years when memory had only just begun, when life was full of Beginnings and no Ends, and Everything was Forever, Estha and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities... Anyway, now she thinks of Estha and Rahel as Them, because, separately, the two of them are no longer what They were or ever thought They would be. Ever. Their lives have a size and a shape now. Estha has his and Rahel hers. Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons. Short creatures with long shadows, patrolling the Blurry End. Gentle half-moons have gathered under their eyes and they are as old as Ammu was when she died. Thirty-one. Not old. Not young. But a viable die-able age. (Roy, 1997, pp. 2-3)

Before humans acquire language, they exist in a semiotic state where language is poetic, songlike; meaningful to the particular individual and meaningless to everyone else. In this state, everything is the same and everything is one. As they enter the symbolic, children learn to speak and abide by the language of society and order, and to erect and distinguish boundaries between themselves and everything else, everything other. Perhaps because they are twins and bilingual, at seven years old, Estha and Rahel exist on the border of the semiotic and the symbolic, in a space they are at first unwilling unable to vacate. They utilize symbolic language, but they mix it with semiotic language, and as such they simultaneously perceive the two of them together as Me, a single unit and single identity and individually as We or Us.

Had the twins' trauma been properly addressed, they would likely grow and

eventually see themselves as two distinct persons, each as their own Me operating in the symbolic. Instead, they become something else, not Me, We, Us or their own individual Mes, but "Them." Adult Estha and Rahel are disjointed and individual people the child twins seem to observe from afar, two "actors trapped in a recondite play" (p. 94). Their bodies move Quietly and Emptily through time and a narrative, through the "Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits" that usher them to death, the "Blurry End." Their unresolved trauma results in a rejection of the symbolic, an embrace of the semiotic and a cold acceptance of the abject. The pedophilia, separation, death, and murder they witness and experience makes them cognizant of mortality in general and theirs in particular, thereby disrupting their identities. But because they are children and because their trauma is not directly addressed through psychiatry or another meaningful way, they are arrested in a space of nothingness.

The twins feel guilt, a deep guilt for their actions that they believe spurned on the Terror, a guilt that they believe they must carry within them forever, as a tragic means of testimony for those who cannot testify to their own pain. As adults, they realize that everything could have been different if they could

purchased, for a fee, some cheap brand of exorcism from a counselor with a fancy degree, who would sit them down and say, in one of many ways: "You're not the Sinners. You're the Sinned Against. You were only children. You had no control. You are the victims, not the perpetrators." It would have helped if they could have made that crossing. If only they could have worn, even temporarily, the tragic hood of victimhood. Then they would have been able to put a face on it and conjure up fury at what had happened. Or seek redress. And eventually, perhaps, exorcize the memories that haunted them. But anger wasn't available to them and there was no face to put on this Other Thing that they held in their sticky Other Hands, like an imaginary orange. There was nowhere to lay it down. It wasn't theirs to give away. It would have to be held. Carefully and forever. (pp. 95)

These are the facts: the guilt, Quietness and Emptiness they carry in them is not their

own. They are the victims and not the perpetrators of the Terror; mere children who witnessed suffering and who suffered, who were not equipped to deal with the events and so have carried a guilt and pain not wholly their own. But that purchase of an exorcism, the wearing of the "tragic hood of victimhood" is unavailable to them; they are endlessly, continuously traumatized, always peering at the face of the abject: they know they will die, that they are in fact, a "viable, die-able age," and living in a world where Worse Things happened and kept happening, and therefore nothing else matters.

Nothing matters but the story of their trauma, the play they cannot escape and which fashions their adult identities. Estha becomes mute, devoid of *any* language, as if atoning for the damning "yes" Baby Kochamma coerced out of him, the "yes" that condemned Velutha. Rahel becomes empty and cold, unable to feel or find meaning in anything; her ex-husband notes that her eyes are those of another, of someone watching a boat sail by or the sea turn tides. Estha's Quietness and Rahel's Emptiness are equal but differently expressed effects of their trauma: "the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other. That the two things fitted together. Like stacked spoons. Like familiar lovers' bodies" (Roy, 1997, p. 21). The imagery of stacked spoons and familiar lovers' bodies foreshadows Estha and Rahel's union.

The only manner in which they can ostensibly leave this arrested space of Quietness and Emptiness is to completely surrender to the abject and the semiotic, to break one more Love Law, a Love Law that allows them to express both their death and life drives: incest. Freud theorized that civilization, and in turn religion and morality, began when primal hordes were ruled by a single male who possessed all the women in the primal horde. The single male, or "the father's" resentful sons murdered and cannibalized the father, and then possessed all of the women in the horde, regardless if

they were related to each other or not (incest). This primal crime incited the horror of incest. The sons eventually felt guilt and constructed totems to symbolize the authority within the horde, the father figures. The sons would pray to and sacrifice the totems as a means of allaying their guilt over murdering the father, and they eventually developed a social contract to prevent the occurrence of the murder of the father. They prohibited violence and incest within their horde. From this, Freud postulated that humans have incestuous urges that require conscious and social suppression, and that incest, along with other taboos, propagates and pushes forward civilization. Rahel and Estha's act of incest is problematic because it undoes the organization of society, be it an undoing of civilization or a breaking of the Love Laws, they are the same. They go against the carefully structured laws and taboos that keeps a civilization from devolving into a primal horde besieged by murder, violence, and incest, and this is terrifying. It is terrifying for them and for their community if they discover it, because it threatens the communal and individual order and identities.

When Rahel returns and Estha is Re-Returned to Ayemenem twenty-three years after the Terror, they are thirty one years old, the age Ammu died. Rahel enters Estha's darkly lit room and calls out to him, calling him "Esthapappychachen Kuttappen Peter Mon," a nickname Velutha bestowed upon him. Upon hearing this, it is as if Estha's memory jumps back to the night of the Terror, when Rahel asked Estha what would happen to them if Sophie Mol was dead and he simply replied they will go to jail (he Jolly Well Knew). This fear in place, Baby Kochamma cruelly manipulates them at the police station, telling them they murdered Sophie Mol because of their jealousy and so they and Ammu would have to go to jail. But luckily, she says, the police made a mistake and thought Velutha had killed Sophie Mol. And they could keep the mistake as

being made, to save themselves and save Ammu, by saying just one word: “yes.” And they made that choice, they decided to save Ammu, not knowing Ammu could not be saved. But adult Estha was now ready to go to jail, to save not Ammu or Velutha, both long dead, but himself and Rahel. When Rahel calls out his nickname, with “their beautiful mother’s mouth,” Estha is “sitting very straight, waiting to be arrested.”

The twins put their arms each other, pressing their coldness and wetness against each other, Quietness and Emptiness lying next to each other on Estha’s bed. They find each other, and they have sex.

They were strangers who had met in a chance encounter. They had known each other before Life began.

There is very little that anyone could say to clarify what happened next. Nothing that (in Mammachi’s book) would separate Sex from Love. Or Needs from Feelings.

Except perhaps that no Watcher watched through Rahel’s eyes. No one stared out of a window at the sea. Or a boat in the river. Or a passerby in the mist in a hat. Except perhaps that it was a little cold. A little wet. But very quiet. The Air. But what was there to say?

Only that there were tears. Only that Quietness and Emptiness fitted together like stacked spoons. Only that there was a snuffling in the hollows at the base of a lovely throat. Only that a hard honeycolored shoulder had a semicircle of teethmarks on it. Only that they held each other close, long after it was over. Only that what they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief. Only that once again they broke the Love Laws. That lay down who should be loved. And how. And how much. (Roy, 1997, p. 301).

The scene is sparse when compared to the text’s usual lush style, but this is done to reassert that there was little to say about their attempt to share their trauma and their new transgression of the Love Laws: “it was a little cold. A little wet. But very quiet. The Air. But what was there to say?” Roy writes the scene with a poetic vagueness, with delicate words that symbolize the act’s frailty and significance, and how their bodies are meant to fit into one another. There is a possession, a desperate seeking out of a body that is Me, We, Us, Them: the “snuffling in the hollows at the base of a lovely throat,”

the “honeycolored shoulder” with teethmarks. It also shows the “rightfulness” of the act, the natural necessity of it: they fit like stacked spoons, these adult strangers who met by chance, these twin children who have known each other since before Life. These images and diction, along with the novel’s broader context, make the act of incest, of Sex and Love and Needs and Feelings, between twins palatable to the audience. The audience believes incest is amoral, but when they witness Rahel and Estha’s trauma, the way it has sucked their lives and identities dry like the river, they do not only understand and allow the transgression, they come to view it as the only possible action. They are expressing their trauma, articulating that they touched death but survived, enacting their death and sex drives. This is reinforced by the assertion that their union is not something that is necessarily erotic, vulgar, or even happy – it is the sharing of “hideous grief”, the wordless expression of their traumas and losses, and the attempt at absolution for a guilt they should not have had to carry. But because this wrongful guilt is so strong within them, because their traumas are not resolved or even wholly expressed, and because they still live in Ayemenem, they are aware that they have committed a new transgression of the Love Laws. They have a new guilt to carry around, a new, unnecessary frailty to drape over their bodies like Lord Rubbish’s camouflage. But they had nothing left to lose.

By placing Rahel and Estha’s sex scene close to Ammu and Velutha’s encounter and repeating the phrase “It was a little cold. A little wet. A little quiet. The Air” she creates a vinculum between them, arguing that these unions were necessary expressions of the Big Things that lurked inside. In contrast to the scarcity of Estha and Rahel’s union, Velutha and Ammu’s is rife with the erotic, with long descriptions of their biology-designed and Terror-timed dance:

Ammu, naked now, crouched over Velutha, her mouth on his. He drew her hair around them like a tent. Like her children did when they wanted to exclude the outside world. She slid further down, introducing herself to the rest of him. His neck. His nipples. His chocolate stomach. She sipped the last of the river from the hollow of his navel. She pressed the heat of his erection against her eyelids. She tasted him, salty in her mouth. He sat up and drew her back to him. She felt his belly tighten under her, hard as a board. She felt her wetness slipping on his skin. He took her nipple in his mouth and cradled her other breast in his callused palm. Velvet gloved in sandpaper. (Roy, 1997, p. 320).

Everything that is glossed over in Estha and Rahel's union is explicit here, is still poetic but direct. There are no vague images of bitten shoulders or neck bases being fitted into each other; here there is heat, taste, wetness, touch and nipples, erections, breasts, and bellies all fumbling and feverish. Estha and Rahel's union is one of shared grief and a desire to return to their life before Life, it is a desire to "not be" expressed through the act of making life. Divorced, scandalous Ammu and Untouchable Velutha's union is pure desire, a desire to be able to live and not merely exist on the margins of society or edges of life. It is a desire to live and a willingness to die. The reader readily accepts both of these unions because of the manner in which Roy presents the story, a confusing, tragic story transformed by moonbeams of beauty and delight, by her touch of time and language.

Although the narrator and audience understand that the unions are transgressions of the Love Laws and there are prices to pay for these transgressions, they do not view them as something wrong, abject, or worthy of castigation¹⁷. The Love Laws change depending on the time, the place, and the culture – one could argue that incest is more shocking and abject than an intercaste affair – but breaking the law always comes at a

¹⁷ Like *Lolita*, *GOST* met criticism from a wide audience - Christians, Communists, and Indians - for its criticism of communism and consumerism, and more controversially, for its "sexual anarchy." Interestingly enough, the sexual anarchy in question is not the incest between twins Estha and Rahel, but the interclass and intercaste affair between their mother Ammu and the Untouchable Velutha.

price, and it is the *cost of living*. For Estha and Rahel, that cost, while undetermined and left hanging in the Air and the Quiet, is bearable and necessary. For Ammu and Velutha, the cost of living “climbed to unaffordable heights; though later Baby Kochamma would say it was a Small Price to Pay. Was it? Two lives. Two children’s childhoods. And a history lesson for future offenders.” (Roy, 1997, p. 320). The cost they paid was very dear for a living so brief: for a few illicit nights, for the feeling of being alive, they paid in death, tragedy, and trauma. While Roy argues that their union was not amoral, as reinforced by her use of language to describe their affair, she reminds the reader that in this world and this lifetime, those who break the Love Laws must pay with blood, time, Quietness, and Emptiness. With the inability to say the Big Things that lurk inside.

What is unspoken carries as much weight as what is explicit. The reader is privy only to Humbert Humbert's experiences, never Lolita, the actual subject of the trauma. They do not even know Lolita outside of what Humbert chooses to tell them, whether deliberately or unconsciously. Lolita is merely body and sass, a tiny seductress according to Humbert. By refusing to allow Lolita to speak, Humbert forces the reader to conjure up their own Lolita, but also makes them unable to inhabit her body and thoughts, to feel her trauma. This is because trauma is ineffable: even the traumatized in *GOST* do not directly voice their emotions and reflections about their trauma; the reader can only experience it through an omniscient third person narrator. Crucially, Humbert Humbert's silencing of Lolita allows him to deflect a great deal of judgment and elicit sympathy from the reader, for the reader cannot help but identify with Humbert.

Lolita's greatest strength is Nabokov's use of language. From the outset, Nabokov's creation charms the reader with lyricism, sentimentality, and exquisite style:

Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the

tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth.
Lo. Lee. Ta. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 5)

The semiotic use of language, in particular the alliteration and focus on sound, invokes an earnestness and beauty that lulls the reader into an immediate, helpless connection with Humbert. The reader is assaulted and delighted by these poetic first lines after first having read the novel's dry and academic foreword. The novel constantly upturns expectations, further intriguing the reader and enhancing their complicity with the narrator. The foreword posits the novel to be the tawdry sexual confessions of a "moral lep[er]", but the particulars of the confessions are left vague. One expects confessions of this kind to be written in depraved and crude terms, but Humbert eschews the pornographic and obscene for the verses of a love-worn artist. The reader is immediately seduced by the story they will be told, ready to fall in love along with the narrator, but the narrator will take his time in weaving his tale. This slow, aesthetically pleasing unfolding of the novel is necessary for Humbert to secure the reader's sympathy and approval; he needs to lay out a line of logic and argumentation, to build upon his heinous acts little by little and not unleash them all at once so as to scare away the reader. Will the story be a Marquis de Sade tale of titillating and shocking depravity? Or will it be a crime of passion, since Humbert first identifies himself as a murderer with a "fancy prose style"? The reader is immediately called to be complicit, first as an admirer of his style, and then as jury. But this is no normal jury and no normal defendant, as he calls out for the reader to consider "exhibit number one ... what the seraphs, the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs, envied. Look at this tangle of thorns." These seraphs signify Poe's angels that envied Annabel Lee and her young suitor's love, dooming her to death, but also the novel's closing angels, the aurochs of art that live forever like he

and Lolita will, thanks to his book. The mixture of courtroom lingo and poetry's angels is delightful and unanticipated, a taste of the fascinating art and argument to come. This, combined with Humbert's constant appeals to the reader - he calls them out by name over 78 times in the text - places the reader firmly ensconced in Humbert's corner. On page 86, he implores:

Please, reader: no matter your exasperation with the tenderhearted, morbidly sensitive, infinitely circumspect hero of my book, do not skip these essential pages! Imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me; try to discern the doe in me, trembling in the forest of my own iniquity; let's even smile a little. After all, there is no harm in smiling.

"Imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me!" This is both a desperate plea to and ingratiation with the reader. Humbert believes that he and Lolita can only live on in posterity, can only relive this story again and again, if their book is not just read but believed. If the reader cannot engage with the text, is not moved by it in one way or another, they will not believe that the characters, story or arguments are real, that they *could* be possible out in the real world. This would mean that Humbert failed in manipulating the reader into believing his, if not "doe" innocence and iniquity, then at least in sympathizing with him, in cavorting with him through his exercise in vanity. Even more terrible for Humbert, it would mean that his ability to exert power, a necessity sprung from trauma, has waned. It is a power he wants to hold on to even in jail or death, even from the page; he commands the reader, "let's even smile a little ... there is no harm in smiling."

The reader's initial intrigue turns to shock as they begin to realize that there is yet another unexpected turn; the love affair they will witness is actually the obsession of a

middle aged man with a pre-adolescent girl¹⁸. And Humbert believes she is not just any girl; this importance is underscored by the choice of names, which are evocative of poetry, of beauty and disgust.

The narrator and the publisher choose not to use a pseudonym for Lolita, because her name is so integral to the story and the story's poetry. The book's foreword notes that all names have been changed save for Lolita's, because "her first name is too closely interwound with the inmost fiber of the book to allow one to alter it; nor (as the reader will perceive for himself) is there any practical necessity to do so" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 3). Comparatively, notice how Humbert does not utilize Annabel's real name but assigns her the identity of Poe's eponymous love, quite unlike the name Lolita. From the outset, Lolita has not only embodied Annabel Leigh but supplanted her in Humbert Humbert's memory and language. Lolita does not need to carry a literary name for she *is* a literary name – she is far more tragic and rememberable than Poe's Annabel. Alternatively, the reader could discern that Humbert Humbert's argument that Annabel's death was the catalyst for his pedophilia is utter nonsense, a clever ruse tied in a literarily allusive bow to manipulate the reader into sympathizing with him.

¹⁸ And readers were both readily shocked and eager to defend *Lolita*. Nabokov completed his MS in December of 1953. After a string of rejections from New Directions, Farrar, Strauss, Doubleday, Viking, and Simon & Schuster, *Lolita* found a home in Olympia Press, a French publisher that released the novel in 1955. Olympia Press' initial typo-riddled 5,000 copies print was sold out, but garnered little attention or reviews until Graham Greene of the London Sunday Times declared it one of the best books of 1955. Greene's rave review prompted John Gordon, editor of the Sunday Express, to call the book one of "filthiest" he had ever read, reducing it to "sheer unrestrained pornography." *Lolita* was censored and banned in the UK and its country of birth, France. The text scandalized several agents, editors, and publishers who read it, finding a home in the United States only in 1958 by G.P. Putnam's Sons, selling over 100,000 copies in its first three weeks of publication. Boyd, 1991, p. 196.

Humbert's reminiscence of Annabel is at first poetic and sentimental, with lyrical descriptions of the night they kissed and groped in a mimosa grove: "the haze of stars, the tingle, the flame, the honey dew, and the ache remained with me, and that little girl with her seaside limbs and ardent tongue haunted me ever since" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 9).¹⁹ But this description turns cold and matter of fact, mingled with erotic regrets, when he reveals Annabel's death: "I was on my knees, and on the point of possessing my darling, when two bearded bathers, the old man of the sea ²⁰and his brother, came out of the sea with exclamations of ribald encouragement, and four months later she died of typhus in Corfu" (Nabokov, 2005, p.8). The manner in which he states Annabel died - "and four months later she died of typhus in Corfu" – is almost an afterthought, the secondary idea and phrase in a sentence that is mostly concerned with the fact that he was unable to take her maidenhead. Humbert's response to this premature death harkens back to an even more premature and impacting death, that of his young mother. Left nameless in a text where names carry so much weight, the only information Humbert provides about his mother is her lineage: "an English girl, daughter of Jerome Dunn, the alpinist, and granddaughter of two Dorset parsons, experts in obscure subjects—paleopedology and Aeolian harps, respectively" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 5). The reader knows nothing else about her save for the unusual manner in which he chooses to recount her death, as parentheses in a short paragraph: "My very photogenic mother died in a freak accident (picnic, lightning) when I was three, and, save for a pocket of warmth in the darkest past, nothing of her subsists within the hollows and dells of memory"

¹⁹ Notice the use of the word "haze," Dolores' last name. Humbert cannot tear himself away from his obsession with Lolita; it pervades his thoughts and spills over into his language.

²⁰ As a literature professor and pretty pose writer, Humbert cannot help but make an allusion to and slight pun of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*.

(Nabokov, 2005, pp. 5-6). The only adjective Humbert has for his nameless mother is "photogenic," as he cannot recall anything else about her, but neither does he show curiosity about the woman who birthed him, although this could be a coping mechanism. The manner in which she died and his phrasing also have a whiff of the comic and absurd, a shrug of the shoulders elicited not by resignation but disinterest. But this lack of seeming affection or consideration does not mean that Humbert was not affected by his mother's death. According to Freud's Oedipus complex theory, during the phallic stage of a child's life (three to six years old), boys begin to desire to possess their mothers and replace their fathers. This desire is repressed from consciousness but evident in the child's behavior, which eventually changes to an identification with the father and a vicarious possession of the mother. Freud further considers the absence of a mother in the child's game of hide and appear, wherein the child works through the mother's absence by reenacting the scenario with his toys and thus overcoming the trauma of her departure. Lacan also borrows from Freud's Oedipus complex, but attaches the phallic stage to the acquisition of language, wherein a child learns to understand the concept of self in relation to others, beginning with his mother, whom he once thought to be part of himself. The child moves from the Imaginary to the Symbolic by realizing several things: he and his mother are separate beings; he wants to be the mother's object of desire but cannot because he lacks a phallus, which his father does possess; and finally he becomes subject to the father's phallus (the Law, and therefore language).

Because Humbert Humbert's mother died when he was three years old, he ostensibly did not reach or overcome the phallic stage, posing a problem to his relationship with women and language. The impulse to possess (again that word) his

mother did not emerge when Humbert was a child, and so that impulse could not be resolved, arresting him in the pre-phallic stage. However, that impulse reappears with his first foray into the erotic with Annabel, but he cannot quell it because again he is unable to possess the object of his desire. Humbert is doomed to arrested sexual development and repressed trauma, resulting in a recurring neurosis about agency and an obsession with young girls. It is only when he masters his agency to possess Lolita, and to varying degrees other nymphets along the way, and has an encounter with his mortality that he is able to confront the absence and loss of his mother and Annabel. One could argue that this confrontation – a carefully orchestrated and by no means objective one – is his confessional, the book he writes while in prison. Humbert Humbert's pedophilia and need to assert dominance could then be traced back to these two traumatic events, the loss of his mother and of Annabel. Humbert appears to have entered the Symbolic – he is a professor of literature, speaks several languages, and is an author – but his standing in the Law is a farce. Humbert understands the rules of the game, but he manipulates language to serve his desires, to appear as an upright citizen, husband, and step-father.

This manipulation is most apparent when Humbert muses about Lolita's many names, which change depending on the time and place:

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, 2005, p. 6).

Indicative of the traumas she will endure, Dolores means "sorrows" or "pain" in Spanish. Humbert chooses the Spanish diminutive of her name, the longest smallest version of Dolores to claim for himself. He subjects an identity on Lolita that she has not chosen to claim; as a twelve year old girl, she has not claimed anything yet, is still working

through the many identities she has, the many aspects of her life that make her into a single person. The combination of Dolores and the pseudonym "Haze," which rhymes with her real name, presents the reader with a sorrowful haze, a blur of pain. But it is the fulgent Lo-lee-ta that the reader comes to know, for the reader has also taken her in their arms, has come to feel the bird-bone fragility of her body, pliable and vulnerable for hurt.

The narrator contemplates several pseudonyms (Otto Otto and Lambert Lambert) but chooses to call himself Humbert Humbert, a double name, a double "hum" that "expresses the nastiness best," (Nabokov, 2005, p. 205). The other name of great significance is the dastardly Clare "Cue" Quilty, whose name is effeminate and ambiguous, the "Quilty" reminiscent of the word "guilty," of a patchwork quilt, a zig-zag of confusion and dichotomy. Even places have names that are unusual and repetitive, nods to a game that Humbert and Quilty play and a demonstration of Humbert's obsessive trauma. Charlotte Haze first mentions The Enchanted Hunters hotel, and this is where Humbert, recalling this mention, absconds with Lolita after retrieving her from Camp Q ("q" for Quilty?). It is there that Humbert compares himself to an enchanted hunter, charmed by Lolita, who will drug his enchanted prey. Later, Lolita will star in a school play called *The Enchanted Hunters*, written by none other than Quilty. It is this name that Lolita will invoke when she struggles to verbalize what Humbert did to her, at first embarrassed and blushing, and then matter-of-factly, with no apparent revulsion or disturbance:

"Can you remember," she said, "what was the name of that hotel, you know [nose puckered], come on, you know — with those white columns and the marble swan in the lobby? Oh, you know [noisy exhalation of breath] — the hotel where you raped me. Okay, skip it. I mean, was it [almost in a whisper] The Enchanted Hunters? Oh, it was? [musingly] Was it?" — and with a yelp of

amorous vernal laughter she slapped the glossy bole and tore uphill, to the end of the street, and then rode back, feet at rest on stopped pedals, posture relaxed, one hand dreaming in her print-flowered lap. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 133).

It is the contrast between the description of the hotel, its marble swans and white columns, Lolita's vocal and physical perturbation of puckered nose, noisy breath exhales, and whispers, and the staunch word "rape" that makes the reader pause. Lolita appropriates the word, clearly demonstrating that she has been paying attention to everything Humbert says and does. The word whispered from her mouth shows the stark reality of what Humbert did, laid bare from flowery language and literary allusions, a blow to the face. Lolita is a victim who has normalized her trauma, internalized it almost as something normal but "gross" that all adults and children do – she is embarrassed by it, reticent to name it because Humbert has conditioned her to believe that while it is something fathers and daughters do (particularly the Sicilians, he claims), it is not something to be publicized. While her delivery of the word evidences her youth, her reaction to Humbert Humbert's confirmation of the hotel's name also shows her a desire of retribution towards him. She says "Oh, it was? [musingly] Was it?" slaps the trunk of a tree (notice Nabokov's choice to use the uncommon word "bole") and races off, laughing. What the reader and Humbert do not yet know is that Lolita is entertaining an affair with Quilty, the very writer of *The Enchanted Hunters* who will steal away Lolita. The coincidence is trademark Nabokov but also indicative of trauma: it is a repetitive allusion to the place where Humbert first raped Lolita and a taunt to Humbert about losing Lolita.

Following Lolita's declaration, Humbert chooses to ignore the word "rape," instead focusing longingly on her "amorous vernal laughter," dismissing it in the same breezy way Lolita appears to, lending her the air of a lover. Despite his dismissal of the

word, Humbert himself employs the word “rape” early on in the narrative. In manipulating Lolita into keeping their relationship secret, Humbert offers a series of arguments that hinge on language.

“In former times, when I was still your dream male [the reader will notice what pains I took to speak Lo’s tongue], you swooned to records of the number one throb-and-sob idol of your coevals [Lo: “Of my what? Speak English”].” (Nabokov, 2005, p. 98).

Humbert Humbert’s attempt to “speak Lo’s tongue” is a manipulation of Lolita to secure her trust, but it also demonstrates the scope and breadth of power he wants to have over her; their differences in age and intellect, so incompatible with the relationship he had with Annabel; and the fact that while Humbert knows English, it is the wrong kind of English for this time, place, and person.

Humbert Humbert’s rape of Lolita is a double transgression, for it is a sexual violence committed on a young child. The only other significant instance when the word “rape” appears in the novel is when Humbert convicts himself, saying “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, 2005, p. 206). This declaration serves to convince the reader that his transgressions were not so vile, that they were merely rape and not rape and pedophilia, the stealing away of a young girl's childhood and life.

Death arrests Humbert’s Annabel in the eternal state of unattainable perfection and childhood, though an erotic childhood, and incites a sexual preoccupation with young girls in the narrators. Humbert admits - or seems to admit in order to manipulate the reader - from the outset that Annabel's death is the event that sets in motion his pedophilia: "In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child," (Nabokov, 2005, p. 5). Annabel's dead body incites

a trauma that Humbert aches to resolve. But what of Lolita's living body? Lolita is merely an object of desire viewed through Humbert Humbert's gaze. Nabokov's power in making the reader sympathize, almost root for Humbert, is an unmatched prowess. Humbert is a horrendous narcissist, "a vain and cruel wretch who manages to appear 'touching,'" as Nabokov himself readily admits. Part of the reason we so sympathize with Humbert is because we do not really know Lolita: we see her only through him. We can conjure Lolita the way we like, someone beyond or limited to the flick of her gray eyes (are they mischievous, as we are led to believe? are they tired? the eyes of someone decades and decades older than her lithe nymphet body?). Lolita is a mystery to us, remains a memory guiding and haunting us. Besides desire, Lolita's body is utilitarian: Humbert describes his plan to impregnate Lolita and produce a new nymphet, which in turn would produce another nymphet: a self-sustaining incest factory, a Paradise Pickles and Preserves of the vilest kind.

The vile and vulgar is framed at times with the language of psychoanalysis. Nabokov has explicitly included a criticism of psychoanalysis and trauma into the novel, and the malleability of psychological theory, along with that of language, allows Humbert to manipulate and dominate not only those around him but the reader themselves. Humbert muses:

When I was a child and she was a child, my little Annabel was no nymphet to me; I was her equal, a faunlet in my own right, on that same enchanted island of time; but today, in September 1952, after twenty-nine years have elapsed, I think I can distinguish in her the initial fateful elf in my life. We loved each other with a premature love, marked by a fierceness that so often destroys adult lives. I was a strong lad and survived; but the poison was in the wound, and the wound remained ever open, and soon I found myself maturing amid a civilization which allows a man of twenty-five to court a girl of sixteen but not a girl of twelve. (Nabokov, 2005, p.11).

Notice the particular use of that Freudian word, the *wound*, and the fact that the wound "remain[s] ever open." Whether it is Humbert or Nabokov manipulating the reader with their knowledge of Freud, the utilization of the word strikes a chord of recognition and pity. Humbert's lyricism and so easily proffered self-psychoanalysis can be argued as two-fold: they are the vestiges of trauma and the artful conceit of manipulation. Humbert's prose is charming, witty, melancholic, and beautiful, the style of a cultured literature professor deeply enamored. But it is also the style of a pedophile and murderer armed with powerful tools to seduce the reader, as he readily admits in the novel's very first paragraph. Humbert's disdain for psychoanalysis is one that he shares with his creator: Nabokov was openly and vehemently against psychoanalysis and Freud in particular, though his works are infused, whether satiric or not, with fundamental theories of psychoanalysis. Humbert allows that he is well-versed in psychoanalysis due to over a year in a sanatorium following a mental breakdown and two hospitalizations, and forging acquaintances with various psychotherapists. Hospitalized for insanity ("if to melancholia and a sense of insufferable oppression that cruel term must be applied"), he develops a penchant for "trifling" with psychotherapists:

I discovered there was an endless source of robust enjoyment in trifling with psychiatrists: cunningly leading them on; never letting them see that you know all the tricks of the trade; inventing for them elaborate dreams, pure classics in style (which make *them*, the dream-extortionists, dream and wake up shrieking); teasing them with fake "primal scenes"; and never allowing them the slightest glimpse of one's real sexual predicament. By bribing a nurse I won access to some files and discovered, with glee, cards calling me "potentially homosexual" and "totally impotent." The sport was so excellent, its results—in *my* case—so ruddy that I stayed on for a whole month after I was quite well (sleeping admirably and eating like a schoolgirl). (Nabokov, 2005, p. 22).

What is the point of admitting to this manipulation? Is it to create an affinity with the reader, to show them that only with them he can be truthful, he can confide his "real

sexual predicament'? Lulling the reader into a sense of complicity by creating an "us/other" relationship - we're in this together, we're the ones tricking the dream-extortionists – Nabokov establishes a base of trust and apparent unfettered honesty that renders the reader charmed by and involved in Humbert Humbert's tale. The reader knows the narrator has done terrible things - lying, cheating, domestic abuse, manipulation, gaslighting, pedophilia, and murder - but the reader cannot help but feel pity or at least a bit of sympathy for Humbert as they witness his life unravel.

Humbert Humbert's stint in mental institutions allows him to not only glean insight into psychoanalysis but also take advantage of visiting their institutions "such as orphanages and reform schools, where pale pubescent girls with matted eyelashes could be stared at in perfect impunity remindful of that granted one in dreams," (Nabokov, 2005, p. 10). He confesses that "psychoanalysts wooed me with pseudoliberations of pseudolibidoes," and it is this language he uses to woo the reader, to use them as he used the psychiatrists, using every trick of the trade as a literature professor, inventing elaborate dreams and primal scenes, to lead the reader to make incorrect diagnoses about Humbert. Humbert wavers between the pretty and the cruel, and his greatest delight is to trick others and exert power.

Humbert utilizes song and poetry to enchant Lolita so deftly that the first time Humbert assaults Lolita, she is not even aware of it. Sitting in the living room, Lolita casually lays her legs over Humbert's lap, and he wastes no time in seizing what could be his only opportunity. He begins masturbating when

Having, in the course of my patter, hit upon something nicely mechanical, I recited, garbling them slightly, the words of a foolish song that was then popular—O my Carmen, my little Carmen, something, something, those something nights, and the stars, and the cars, and the bars, and the barmen; I kept repeating this automatic stuff and holding her under its special spell (spell

because of the garbling), and all the while I was mortally afraid that some act of God might interrupt me, might remove the golden load in the sensation of which all my being seemed concentrated, and this anxiety forced me to work, for the first minute or so, more hastily than was consensual with deliberately modulated enjoyment. The stars that sparkled, and the cars that parkled, and the bars, and the barmen, were presently taken over by her; her voice stole and corrected the tune I had been mutilating. She was musical and apple-sweet. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 39)

The image of Humbert setting his masturbation to a popular song that Lolita loves, and that she then joins in singing, is strikingly disturbing. Humbert is attempting to speak in Lolita's tongue in order to abuse her and to make sure she does not realize what is happening. He has distorted an innocent thing a child loves into a tool to achieve his pleasure, a pleasure that he derives from the nearness of the oblivious Lolita. In his committing an abject act, Humbert can only utilize the language available to the abject, the semiotic. It is a language that enthralls Lolita not just because of the rhyme and repetition but, he claims, his garbling. The garbling of the song renders it quasi-meaningless: "O my Carmen, my little Carmen, something, something, those something nights, and the stars, and the cars, and the bars, and the barmen." But Lolita, under its spell, is rapt with attention, eventually singing the correct words: "The stars that sparkled, and the cars that parkled, and the bars, and the barmen." This is in stark contrast to the oblique, vaguely automatic language he reserves for his masturbation the "course of my patter," "nicely mechanical," and "deliberately modulated." In first reading the passage, the reader might struggle with understanding its meaning, confused by the repetitive rhythm of the song and mechanical modulations; this highlights trauma's confusing nature, something that occurs rapidly and alters everything in a single instant. Though he deems it a foolish song, Humbert will later obsess over it, this moment and its spell, when he begins his descent into madness after Lolita leaves him.

Much later, Humbert comes across some of Lolita's things and recalls a "rather charming nonsense verse I used to write her when she was a child":

The Squirl and his Squirrel, the Rabs and their Rabbits
Have certain obscure and peculiar habits.
Male hummingbirds make the most exquisite rockets.
The snake when he walks holds his hands in his pockets... (Nabokov, 2005, p. 168).

Of these nonsense verses, Lolita would mockingly, merely, say "nonsense is correct." This scene shows Humbert's attempt to arrest Lolita in time as a child, an always nymphet. He yearns to return to that moment when silliness and rhyme could still enchant and immobilize her, when he could still speak her tongue and garble her rhythm, the same as his. But even Humbert's nonsense, cutesy rhymes also give way to sinister meanings, one where animals engage in "obscure and peculiar habits" perhaps similar to incest and male hummingbirds and snakes are bedecked in phallic symbols. Humbert likely used these rhymes to charm Lolita but also to teach her that their relationship was not immoral or abnormal, and did not merit her talking about it to others. Humbert's rhymes in exchange for her enchantment and complicity, a similar transaction to the one he desires between him and the reader.

After Lolita leaves him, Humbert becomes despondent and desperate, eventually checking into a mental sanatorium in Quebec where he writes several poems about Lolita and revenge. A short extract from the poem he offers the reader asks

Where are you hiding, Dolores Haze? *Why* are you hiding, darling?
(I talk in a daze, I walk in a maze,
I cannot get out, said the starling).
Where are you riding, Dolores Haze? What make is the magic carpet?
Is a Cream Cougar the present craze? And where are you parked, my car pet?
Who is your hero, Dolores Haze?
Still one of those blue-caped star-men? Oh the balmy days and the palmy bays,

And the cars, and the bars, my Carmen! (pp. 169-171)

Despite his despise of psychoanalysis, Humbert decides to psychoanalyze the poem, wherein he “notice[s] it is really a maniac’s masterpiece. The stark, stiff, lurid rhymes correspond very exactly to certain perspectiveless and terrible landscapes and figures, and magnified parts of landscapes and figures, as drawn by psychopaths in tests devised by their astute trainers. ”Lolita’s departure opens the dam of repressed trauma and desire in Humbert, one he can only express by engaging in the semiotic, by writing rhyming nonsense that harkens back to the “Carmen” song he utilized to first molest Lolita and his animal nonsense verses. The poem itself is a maze of memory and a daze of language, surveys of the moments between him and Lolita that held meaning to him. And the questions he asks have obvious answers, except to him: Lolita has left because she does not want to be abused any longer; her hero now wears no cape, only the same perversions as Humbert.

As Humbert realizes that Lolita will not return to him, that their days of spellbinding rhymes are over, he contemplates his love for her. The novel's ending is heart-wrenchingly beautiful and bitter.

and I looked and looked at her, and knew as clearly as I know I am to die, that I loved her more than anything I had ever seen or imagined on earth, or hoped for anywhere else. She was only the faint violet whiff and dead leaf echo of the nymphet I had rolled myself upon with such cries in the past; an echo on the brink of a russet ravine, with a far wood under a white sky, and brown leaves choking the brook, and one last cricket in the crisp weeds... but thank God it was not that echo alone that I worshipped. What I used to pamper among the tangled vines of my heart, mon grand pêché radieux, had dwindled to its essence: sterile and selfish vice, all that I canceled and cursed. You may jeer at me, and threaten to clear the court, 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, pale and polluted, and big with another’s child, but still gray-eyed, still sootylashed, still auburn and almond, still Carmencita, still mine ... No matter, even if those eyes of hers would fade to myopic fish, and her nipples swell and crack, and her

lovely young velvety delicate delta be tainted and torn — even then I would go mad with tenderness at the mere sight of your dear wan face, at the mere sound of your raucous young voice, my Lolita. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 184-5)

How can these lines be so achingly beautiful and yet so problematic? A poet gazing upon his lover, her body completely altered by time and trauma and pregnancy, a different landscape than the one he once worshipped but one he continues to adore without restraint... This is a reflection of the emotions the reader has certainly felt for another being at some point, yet utterly repulsive when one considers they are coming from the mouth of a pedophile to his victim. The juxtaposition of the lyrical love and desire for another, and the reality of the forced relationship between Lolita and Humbert are an astounding feat of Nabokov's sheer skill in manipulation of his reader. One cannot help but relate to the emotions being revealed, but neither can one disassociate from the unspeakable abject trauma the speaker has inflicted on the object of his desire.

Equally haunting is Lolita's response to Humbert Humbert's question of whether she would run away with him:

“I’ll die if you touch me,” I said. “You are sure you are not coming with me? Is there no hope of your coming? Tell me only this.”

“No,” she said. “No, honey, no.”

She had never called me honey before. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 185)

Lolita's gentle, almost sweet refusal is tragic in its tenderness, for it breaks Humbert Humbert's heart, but it also demonstrates her ability to empathize despite the circumstances, her willingness to soften the blow by using the word "honey." Moreover, it is not a child's word: it is an adult word, a word a woman uses for endearment to her husband or child or as a dismissal to a nosy neighbor. Lolita has aged tremendously in the five years since her mother's death, hardened by the life she has not lived but *survived*. Importantly, it is also a word Nabokov has employed throughout the narrative

to describe both Annabel and Lolita, and which underscores the repetitive nature of Humbert Humbert's trauma of Annabel's death and his desire for purity and sweetness in the objects of his affection. On page 7 he sees "Annabel in such general terms as 'honey-colored skin,' 'thin arms,' 'brown bobbed hair,' 'long lashes,' 'big bright mouth,'" and this word is repeated in the smell of the honey-dew in the mimosa grove where they first grope each other on page 9. Humbert notes that when he first gazes upon Lolita, he knows she is Annabel: "It was the same child — the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 25). When Humbert masturbates with Lolita's legs on his lap, he exclaims "I had stolen the honey of a spasm without impairing the morals of a minor," on page 41; and this thread of honey continues running through page 74 when Lolita is "all rose and honey," and finally with her "honey-brown body" spread-eagled on a bed the night he forces himself on her on page 84.

Lolita's use of the word "honey" and the explanation for her refusal indicate the manner in which she has dealt with her trauma.

"No," she said, "it is quite out of the question. I would sooner go back to Cue. I mean —" She groped for words. I supplied them mentally ("He broke my heart. You merely broke my life"). "I think," she went on — "oops" — the envelope skidded to the floor—she picked it up — "I think it's oh utterly grand of you to give us all that dough. It settles everything, we can start next week. Stop crying, please. You should understand. Let me get you some more beer. Oh, don't cry, I'm so sorry I cheated so much, but that's the way things are. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 186)

Lolita has ostensibly chosen to not reflect on her trauma; she chooses to continue with her life as best she can. She has not forgotten the trauma, but neither does she wish to consciously revisit it ad nauseam. She may not realize that she has engaged in repetitive behaviors that reflect her trauma - positioning herself to suffer pedophilia at Quilty's

hand - but she is attempting to "claim [her] survival," in Caruth's terms. She has chosen to take a pragmatic view of life, believing trauma to be something everyone has to endure at some point, as demonstrated by her statement of "that's the way things are." Lolita has survived thanks to her notions of endurance and dismissal, namely her desire to not speak or dwell upon her traumas. This is evident in her groping around for words that will not come, choosing to skip over to his gift and the idea that it "settles everything." Her response to Humbert crying is also telling: she asks him to stop crying, says she will fetch him a beer, and that she is "so sorry I cheated so much, but that's the way things are." She wants to distract him from his feelings, from continuing this conversation, and from dwelling on their past relationship. She even takes an odd stance in apologizing for "cheating so much," one in which she takes on a responsibility that is not hers, treating their relationship as if it had been an amorous relationship between consenting adults. This is a residual feeling of her trauma, an attempt to dismiss the past and to rewrite it in a way as if she had any agency in the matter, almost as if she had not been abused.

But there is a conflict in Lolita's choice to reassess the relationship as one between equals, specifically in when she writes to Humbert after years of radio silence to ask for money. Her letter is matter of fact and glosses over everything that happened between them, but it is also oddly phrased: she calls him "Dear Dad" and signs off "Dolly (Mrs. Richard F. Schiller)" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 177). By calling Humbert "dad" she feigns a sense of normalcy, so as to not alert Dick of her and Humbert's true relationship and as means of dealing with her trauma by disengaging from it. Additionally, this choice of word in conjunction with her sign-off sets a sexual boundary between her and Humbert; she is no longer his Lolita, she chooses to be Dolly, to be

Mrs. Richard F. Schiller.

But this is one of very few choices Lolita is able to make, because her trauma has inflicted in her a disturbed sense of agency. Young Lolita is cunning enough to fool Humbert and run away, but she runs into another pedophile's arms. Her agency is stunted, easily manipulated by another older man with promises to love and adore her, but she discovers he only wants her to be a part of his harem, to do "weird, filthy, fancy things" with (Nabokov, 2005, p. 84). Lolita proclaims she does not want to engage in sexual acts with other people, that she only wants to be in a monogamous loving relationship with Quilty; instead of leaving him, she waits for him to "kick [her] out" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 84)²¹. She wanders aimlessly through life, picking up waitressing jobs here and there, and finally fashions a rustic life with young Dick, someone who *she* is able to manipulate and dominate. Lolita's only demonstration of agency and reassertion of her own power is in choosing this relationship with someone closer to her own age, someone less intelligent, soft-spoken and submissive, and in firmly denying Humbert Humbert's request to be together, that it is "quite out of the question."

Humbert knows the weight and horror of his actions, knowing he was "despicable and brutal, and turpid, and everything," but he believes that because he loved her, because his desire was so overwhelming, that it excused or obfuscated Lolita's pain: "And there were times when I knew how you felt, and it was hell to know it, my little one. Lolita girl, brave Dolly Schiller" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 189). Humbert only fully addresses his abuse on Lolita in the novel's closing pages, noting that "nothing

²¹ One could argue that Lolita's relationship with Quilty is a result of a second trauma, separate from Humbert Humbert's abuse, namely the death of her father. Harold Haze died when Lolita was younger, and the lack of a paternal figure in her life could have altered her romantic predilections.

could make my Lolita forget the foul lust I had inflicted upon her," (Nabokov, 2005, p. 188). But his diction betrays the full weight of his actions, for it obscures and obfuscates reality: he does accept that he has "inflicted" something on her that she did not desire, but he names the infliction a "foul lust." While the word "foul" certainly applies to his abuse, the word "lust" detracts from its strength and obscenity, an idea further underscored by the abrupt switch from Lolita's lost childhood to an immediate consideration of his own misery:

I see nothing for the treatment of my misery but the melancholy and very local
palliative of articulate art. To quote an old poet:
The moral sense in mortals is the duty
We have to pay on mortal sense of beauty. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 188)

Again Humbert turns to literature and language to confuse the reader and to seek their empathy. Humbert Humber quotes a non-existent old poet - likely himself - and imparts his ideas of the relationship between ethics and aesthetics. He plays with rhyme by coupling "duty" and "beauty," two notions that seem opposites, and by employing substitution neighbors, words that differ by a single letter, in this case "mortal" and "moral." It is the same thing he asks of the reader: this work is beautiful, but it is amoral. The reader must pay duty for receiving such beauty, and that duty is being confused and conflicted by the morals Humbert eschews and society abides by.

The duplicity of the abject, its expression's capability to be beautiful and mortal, is also present in the fact that the novel itself has a body, a decaying one at that:

This then is my story. I have reread it. It has bits of marrow sticking to it, and blood, and beautiful bright-green flies. At this or that twist of it I feel my slippery self eluding me, gliding into deeper and darker waters than I care to probe. I have camouflaged what I could so as not to hurt people. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 205)

The novel's content is abject, but its form is pure beauty, its relation of the disgusting is made beautiful like the "bright-green flies." In this same vein, novel's closing lines end

with a lyrical contemplation of the power art as a means of expressing and reaffirming the life drive, but also as a reason to excuse Humbert for his crimes:

And do not pity C.Q. One had to choose between him and H.H., and one wanted H.H. to exist at least a couple of months longer, so as to have him make you live in the minds of later generations. I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita. (Nabokov, 2005, p. 206)

Humbert argues that he had to live, at least a little longer, in order to be able to compose his confession, and in this manner to ensure that Lolita lives forever, undisturbed by the threat of time. While his crimes might have been heinous, they served the purpose of creating art and lending Lolita - and himself - immortality. The novel's traumas are endlessly repeating, living forever, "as much part of blessed matter" as he and Lolita ever were.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Although academic scholarship exists on both the relationship and depiction of trauma in both *Lolita* and *GOST*, they have never been compared to each other in the context of their form, content, and intention. It is vital for these texts to be in a conversation because they are written by non-native English speakers utilizing the same literary devices, reworking the expected forms of time and language in similar manners, and addressing uncomfortable subjects in order to engage the reader in a discussion about trauma, morality, and artistic beauty.

Crucially, these novels about trauma and confronting the other/abject, were written in English by non-native English speakers. Nabokov and Roy choose to write the texts in English to furnish readers with accessibility, to ensure their messages reach the widest possible audience, and to engage in a love affair with an alien language. Writing in English, Nabokov and Roy are others, strangers in a semi-strange land. It is perhaps their otherness that grants them the power to handle the language in such an unusual and aesthetically pleasing manner, allowing them to transgress the laws of writing that a native speaker would unabashedly never forsake. Writing in another language is a foray into the unknown, into the otherness, a sometimes uncomfortable confrontation with the boundaries of language but also the boundaries of the themes they choose to write about, the abject.

Both novels harness the unwieldy energy and slickness of the English language into a strikingly beautiful narrative that questions the strikingly disturbing facets of human nature. Were these works written in vulgar language, with shocking and overtly visceral imagery, the reader would be unable to question the boundaries of their morality; it is the tragic and at times oblique beauty of the novel's form and style that allows the reader to inhabit a space where they must question everything that matters, namely their identity (and thus their relationship to the other), their morals, and the meaning and purpose of language. In *Lolita's* afterword, "Vladimir Nabokov On a book entitled *Lolita*," Nabokov argued that *Lolita* does not contain a moral, but is rather the depiction of his love affair with the English language, an acquired language that when compared to his native Russian is "a second-rate brand of English, devoid of any of those apparatuses—the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions—which the native illusionist, fractails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way" (Nabokov, 2005, p. 211).

Roy has positioned herself, however briefly, in conversation with Nabokov. In a lecture about translation, Roy recounts a book reading in India after the publication of *GOST* where an audience member angrily asked her about writing in English:

"Has any writer ever written a masterpiece in an alien language? In a language other than his mother tongue?" I hadn't claimed to have written a masterpiece (nor to be a "he"), but nevertheless I understood his anger toward a *me*, a writer who lived in India, wrote in English, and who had attracted an absurd amount of attention. My answer to his question made him even angrier. "Nabokov," I said. And he stormed out of the hall.²²

²² Roy, A. (2019). What is the morally appropriate language in which to think and write? Retrieved from <https://lithub.com/what-is-the-morally-appropriate-language-in-which-to-think-and-write/>

In the same lecture, Roy concedes that “The whole novel [*GOST*] is constructed around people, young and old, English-knowing and Malayalam-knowing, all grappling, wrestling, dancing, and rejoicing in language.” She moved from writing sparse screenplays to indulging in the languor language can provide, the wrestling and rejoicing in it. Equally important, she notes that the language of her novel is a private language, “a slow-cooked ...secret, novel-writing language,” unlike her later political, non-fiction works which are “quick, urgent, and public. And ...straight-up English.” The motivations behind her writing changed her style, changed even her kind of English, but it is the initial secret language of the novel employed that best evokes and elucidates the relationships between language, the semiotic, the symbolic, the abject, and trauma.

Like their choice to write their novels in a language not wholly their own, Nabokov's Humbert and Roy's cast of characters are foreigners searching for refuge and identification in foreign lands. Roy investigates the forbidden social aspects of love in several threads of the novel: Chacko's love for Margaret Kochamma transcends race and culture; Ammu and Velutha's dalliance breaks caste and race; Estha and Rahel's union smashes the conventions of familial sexual relations; the Orangedrink Lemondrink man's assault on Estha berates homosexuality and pedophilia; Mammachi's displacement of love from husband to Chacko; and Baby Kochamma's pining for Father Mulligan goes against the propriety of religion, race, and culture. There is an imbalance of power and will in all of these relationships.

Humbert Humbert's obsession with Lolita transgresses the norms of age, agency, and culture. The character's unconventional desires are in actuality a desire for recognition of the self and what we believe the other desires. Each character seeks to discover themselves by uniting with those unlike them, those representing their complete

otherness as a means of self-fulfillment. This search for fulfillment through unconventional sexual/love relationships is marked by lyrical language and chronology, a disruption that manipulates the narratives and questions the establishments of the love laws.

Despite the four decades between them and the decades since each of their publications, the novels continue to awe and shock readers. This is due to three elements: the novels' themes, the manner in which the narratives are constructed, and the choices of language and style. Humbert commits three transgressions: rape, pedophilia, and incest. These transgressions are a result of an earlier trauma – Annabel's death – and inflict trauma on the recipient of his transgressions, Lolita. Because his actions stem from an earlier trauma, they are an expression of *both* the death and life drives: by transgressing society's ethics and engaging in repetitive behavior, he is yearning for death in the form of the electric chair, for a return to the harmony of inorganic existence where he may find Annabel; simultaneously, he is expressing his survival of that trauma and his desire to live and continue living, engaging in the expression of procreation. Caruth argues that trauma is both the expression of the death and life drive – if the death drive is the instinctual repetition of a trauma or behavior, then the life drive is also an expression of that survival. Humbert traumatized by Annabel's death, but her death also marks his survival, for he continues to exist; his rape of Lolita affirms that existence and yearns for his continuation through the possibility of Lolita having his babies. However, Humbert Humbert's desire of “a little of Lolitas” to continue abusing demonstrates his abnormal psychology, the deviation into the abject that he cannot restrain or return from. Humbert has not mastered his trauma, and unlikely ever will, except through death. Lolita, on the other hand, has attempted to

recover her from her trauma by normalizing it, refusing to reflect on it, repeating her trauma by engaging in an affair with Quilty, and finally by choosing Dick as her husband and falling pregnant. Lolita has gone through the repetitive cycle of trauma, yielded to her death drive, and finally, desperately clung to her life drive. It is this last act of attempting to continue her life, to become a wife and more importantly a mother, that makes her death so tragic. Her desire to survive, and the continuation of her survival through her child, is the desire that ultimately kills her.

Estha and Rahel also engage in an act that reflect both of their life and death drives: incest. They are transgressing the Love Laws, committing an act that could potentially result in their deaths if discovered, and an act which demonstrates their absolute desire to return to their inorganic existence in the womb, an existence where they were not just together but *one*. And it is an act that proves their desire to live, that reinforces their survival but also their need for a life that does not merely rest on survival, one where they can overcome their “Quietness and Emptiness.” Their making love also echoes Velutha and Ammu’s relationship, which leaves the reader wondering if their love will end in the same manner. The reader hopes that their transgression of the Love Laws will ensure that the twins overcome their traumas, that they do not just survive but thrive. But the reality of what has already happened, the insistence of history repeating in a novel where their ancestors’ nails clack through the wooden planks of the History House and Black Saibu’s cigar wafts through the air, leads the reader to the conclusion that despite their hope, despite the promise of *Naaley*, the twins’ transgressions will end in tragedy.

Trauma narrative allows the reader to experience - as much as the unrepresentable can be experienced - and to attempt to recover from the experience of

trauma. Here one must differentiate between real life trauma, psychology, literature, and theory: the conjectures about trauma, the abject, and "recovery" are limited to literature and its theory, which although perhaps derived from real life psychology examples and trauma studies, are not sanctioned tools for real life recovery processes outside of the text. Literature is cathartic (not necessarily therapeutic) because it allows the reader to reflect on similar experiences they may have had or imagine experiences they cannot or did not have.

Memory, as Caruth and other theorists claim, cannot fully register the events of trauma as it occurs; instead, it ensnares memory in a cruel cycle of forgetting, flashback, or both, a lightning bolt bouncing within its confines. If trauma cannot be fully witnessed or registered, then "writers cannot represent trauma; they can only convey the effects of trauma in their work," (Outka, 2011, p. 33). Roy and Nabokov's works are not psychological or theoretical studies of trauma, but rather literary and artistic endeavors to convey, if not trauma itself, the effects and symptoms of trauma; as such, literature cannot be utilized to prove or disprove the psychology of trauma. While literary depiction cannot represent real trauma, it offers insight otherwise not available to the reader, and perhaps, to readers who have experienced real life trauma. Wherein the trauma victim in the novel cannot function as a witness - because of the inability to sort, recall, or articulate the trauma - the reader bears testimony and constructs a story. Humans inherently need to construct stories to instill logic and therefore meaning to their experiences, and the novels allows readers to construct logic and meaning from foreign experiences.

After all, "It was a little cold. A little wet. A little quiet. The Air. But what was there to say?" (Roy, 1997, p. 320). Everything, nothing.

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