

LOOKING THROUGH LOLITA'S GLASSES:**Intertextual Relations between Nabokov's *Lolita* and Coetzee's *Disgrace***

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Introduction

Many critics have suggested that J.M. Coetzee's novels contain various intertextual references to the likes of Beckett, Kafka, the Classics such as the *Aeneid*, etc¹. This thesis is mainly motivated by a gap of research in current literature, namely the intertextuality between J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955). In *Doubling the Point* (1992), Coetzee says that Nabokov no longer influences him (28). Immediately when reading the first page of *Disgrace*, however, the reader is struck by memories of *Lolita*. The more one reads, the more cross-references one notices, which lead up to numerous references per page. From quotes, subjects, diction, tone, mood, style to major themes; there seems to be an echo of *Lolita* throughout the book. As far as I know, no detailed research has been conducted in this field. This thesis attempts to analyze the intertextuality between *Disgrace* and *Lolita*, and to give an explanation for this striking intertextuality.

The term intertextuality may be used in several senses; in its broadest meaning the author's sub-consciousness plays an important role. This abstract sense of intertextuality can mean anything from cultural references, society's conventions, the public sphere, to spoken words in a café, everything that has been written and other language usage which subconsciously influences a novel or another piece of art. It is harder to trace this kind of intertextuality because all these sorts of texts might have influenced a work. This broader concept of intertextuality has been researched for instance by Kristeva, Bakhtin, Saussure, etc. By contrast, the concrete meaning of intertextuality is when it is consciously used. In this

¹ For instance in *J.M. Coetzee and the Novel*, Patrick Hayes makes a link between Coetzee and Beckett in the chapter: "Writing and Politics after Beckett". Moreover, in the chapter "'JOEY RULES': Telling the Truth in Life & Times of Michael K" Hayes makes a link between Coetzee and Kafka. David Attwell has also made a connection between Coetzee and Kafka in *J. M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* in the section called "The Kafka Connection". Paul Franssen has written articles on Coetzee's link with the Classics in: "Coetzee en de Klassieken" and "Pollux in Coetzee's *Disgrace*".

specific sense it refers to the deliberate borrowing of words, themes, plots, etc. or other textual material from one book to another. This could have been done for many reasons, for instance to speak on behalf of, to criticise or to complement a novel and other artworks (Abrams 317, Rigney 101, Jacobmeyer 1).

As I shall argue, Coetzee alludes to Nabokov because they seem to share a fascination with the topic of older, powerful men, who have affairs with girls who are far too young for them. Incorporated in this theme is particularly the abuse of power and the link between power and desire. Chapter One will demonstrate specific, conscious incidents of intertextuality between *Disgrace* and *Lolita*. Chapter Two will explain this theme, why there is this borrowing, and if it will reveal a more profound layer. Initially I wanted to write about a light subject, only the intertextual relationship between two novels; however, the content of both novels made it weightier, for instance dealing with subjects like paedophilia and student-professor romantic relationships. Although *Lolita* was written in 1955 and *Disgrace* in 1999 not much seems to have changed between these times. This theme mentioned above endures in our culture: for instance in the fashion industry it happens often that models as young as fourteen years old are being searched for and booked by agencies (Torrissi 1). When these agencies are run by older, powerful, heterosexual men who are attracted to these girls, there is a potential danger of sexual abuse of the often young models (Gross 312, 335). Apart from being able to present clothes, models (even if they are underage) also have to be desirable and seductive (Wissinger 292), which can as well create a climate for exploitation in the fashion industry. At the same time the *Lolita* phenomenon is well known in the media of the fashion and modelling industry. This means that aside from using very young models “often in very sexually suggestive contexts” (Durham 118), the clothes and facial expressions too are constructed to fit this image of a child-woman (McClear 1-3). There is also an unusual interest in thinness; recalling pre-pubescent bodies (Ziff). I am using this reference because

Nabokov has also written a poem which he published in the same year, 1955, when *Lolita* was published, called “Ode to a Model” (Appel 48-49)², in which he asks: “Can one marry a model?”. In this poem there is also the speaker’s desire for the model. The Lolita phenomenon is known in literature, music, art and film, for instance in Yasunari Kawabata’s *House of the Sleeping Beauties* (1961) on which Coetzee has written in his essay “Gabriel García Márquez, *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*” (2005). The Lolita theme is also referenced in *American Beauty* (1999), a film by Sam Mendes. What intrigues me is that the Lolita image is a recurring theme in culture and society because it is a timeless reality. I was even drawn to the novel at age fifteen, when seeing it on a bookshelf of the local library with the sultry image of Sue Lyon looking at me through heart-shaped sunglasses, photographed by Bert Stern. This was the 1980 Penguin version with the subtitle: “[t]he greatest novel of rapture in modern fiction”, which is reproduced on my title page and was initially a poster for Stanley Kubrick’s film *Lolita*. For these reasons I wanted to research this in a thesis based on the intertextual references to *Lolita* in Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*.

² All references to (Appel or) *Lolita* are to the 1991 edition of *The Annotated Lolita*, unless otherwise indicated.

Chapter One: Echoes of *Lolita* in *Disgrace*

In J.M Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* there are delicate similarities with Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, but no explicit references. However, in his other works after *Disgrace* Coetzee gives away clues that he makes a very explicit intertextual relation with *Lolita*. For example, in *Inner Workings* in his essay on Gabriel García Márquez (2005), Coetzee uses *Lolita* to illustrate how Márquez's novel *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* is intertextually related to Nabokov's novel. For instance "in the Sunday-afternoon scenes between Florentino and America we pick up arch echoes of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*..." (258). Furthermore: "Yet the goal of *Memories* is a brave one: to speak on behalf of the desire of older men for underage girls, that is, to speak on behalf of paedophilia..." (264), which forms the plot of *Lolita*. The first part of Coetzee's book *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) is called "Strong Opinions"; this is an allusion to a title of one of Nabokov's books. Additionally, in *Diary of a Bad Year*, the female main character "Anya, [...] begins as a Lolita figure" (Gee 1). Moreover, "she becomes his Segretaria, his Secret Aria, an echo of Humbert Humbert's string of endearing names for Lolita" (Begley 2). Anya becomes the protagonist's typist, typing a collection of essays titled *Strong Opinions*. Maggie Gee also notes that "Strong Opinions is another reference to Nabokov, whose collected interviews were published under that name" (1). Furthermore, in *Diary of a Bad Year*'s first part, in the chapter "On paedophilia" the protagonist says that Stanley Kubrick "'got around the taboo' ... of so-called 'child pornography'" (53) with his film *Lolita*. Also in this chapter he brings up the taboo of student-professor romantic relationships, which then again recalls *Disgrace*: "As for sex between teachers and students, so strong is the tide of disapproval nowadays that uttering even the mildest word in its defense becomes (exactly) like battling that tide, feeling your puny stroke quite overwhelmed by a great heft of water bearing you backward. What you face

when you open your lips to speak is not the silencing stroke of the censor but an edict of exile” (57).

As far as I could find, only a few other critics have made this comparison of *Disgrace* with *Lolita*, and even they have covered it minimally. In a Russian newspaper review called “Thirtieth Love of Coetzee” (2001) by Gleb Shuliakov a subtle allusion is made because Professor Lurie is once referred to as Humbert Humbert, which might be the earliest comparison with *Lolita*. Also in this review there is the picture of the cover of a Russian edition of *Disgrace*, which recalls *Lolita-esque* imagery. This picture is *Lulu* by Gottfried Helnwein and depicts an old man standing in front of a young girl’s half naked body.



Gottfried Helnwein’s *Lulu* seems to portray a sensual young girl, and her name signals childishness. She exposes her genitals, has slim hips and is dressed in an innocent white dress with stockings juxtaposed to a much older man standing in front of her. The man is depicted as small towards his desire for the gigantic girl, which signifies his lust. This was originally a 1988 poster for Peter Zadek’s theatre adaptation of *Lulu*, by Frank Wedekind, and was re-used as a cover for a Russian edition of *Disgrace* (Helnwein 1).

On the other hand, in “The reception of J.M. Coetzee in Russia” (2005), Agata Krzychylkiewicz says that Shuliakov has not supported the comparison of Lurie with Humbert Humbert with evidence. However, Krzychylkiewicz’s comparison of the two novels, or rather how she deconstructs the comparison is very limited as she is only looking at it from two points, namely that *Lolita* covers paedophilia and that “*Disgrace* does not and Lurie's affair with his female student is not the central plot-binding event in Coetzee's novel (but is its point of departure) whereas Humbert Humbert's pursuit of Lolita is.” However, one might object to this since both affairs are the major metaphors of the entire novels, and also Lurie does pursue Melanie even after he loses her and falls into disgrace. Furthermore, in “The Politics of Shame and Redemption in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*” (2003) by Sue Kossew an intertextual link is made between both novels. Kossew’s allusion is more thought-out than the other comparisons. She writes for instance that David Lurie is:

a smooth talker of the [...] Humbert Humbert school, those who in the act of confession, are seen to be justifying themselves. Like Byron and his Therese (about whose love affair David is attempting to write a chamber opera), David sees himself as an older man unable to deny his desire for a younger woman. Like [...] Nabokov’s Humbert Humbert, though, he is all too aware of his own guilt and in this confessional mode, there is some sense of repentance that could disarm the reader’s moral outrage.

Yet the “double thought” is always transparent. (158)

Moreover, “[t]he text, [...] relentlessly emphasizes Melanie’s helpless and naïve youth against his age and experience: she has ‘hips as slim as a twelve-year-old’s’ (19)”. Kossew concludes that: “[T]he moral ambiguity of [...] Nabokov’s texts is echoed in this text, too: with David as a repulsive/attractive “serpent” corrupting innocence while excusing his actions via confession” (Kossew 158-159).

Yet there are more small and bigger details in Coetzee's novel that remind one of *Lolita*. There is the usage of the word "butterfly" in *Lolita* and also in *Disgrace*: "It surprises him that ninety minutes a week of a woman's company are enough to make him happy, who used to think he needed a wife, a home, a marriage. His needs turn out to be quite light, after all, light and fleeting, like those of a butterfly" (5). The word "butterfly" in *Disgrace* is perhaps an allusion to Nabokov the lepidopterist and the novel *Lolita* in which the word butterfly and references to butterflies are used very often. On Nabokov's use of butterflies, Alfred Appel, Jr. has said in *The Annotated Lolita*: "There are many references to butterflies in *Lolita*, but it must be remembered that it is Nabokov, and not H.H., who is the expert. As Nabokov said, 'H.H. knows nothing about Lepidoptera'"(327). *Lolita* is even known for its butterfly image, since there are Nabokov drawings of butterflies on title pages of his own copies of specifically *Lolita* (Nabokov Museum 1). Additionally, in the novel the butterfly is a symbol for Lolita's transformation from child to adulthood (Gradesaver 2-3). The 2000 edition of the *Annotated Lolita* also has a butterfly on its cover.



A butterfly drawing by Nabokov on a title page's copy of *Lolita* in Japanese.

Both novels remarkably often refer to the same other works of literature. Apart from the butterfly pattern occurring in *Lolita*, also the name “Emma” and references to *Madame Bovary* by Flaubert are made in *Lolita*. The name “Emma Bovary” and the word “butterfly” also occur together in *Disgrace*, both on page five: after the butterfly metaphor quoted above, it says that Lurie “thinks of Emma Bovary, coming home sated, glazed-eyed, from an afternoon of reckless fucking. *So this is bliss!*, says Emma, marvelling at herself in the mirror. *So this is the bliss the poets speak of!* Well, if poor ghostly Emma were ever to find her way to Cape Town, he would bring her along one Thursday afternoon to show her what bliss can be: a moderate bliss, a moderated bliss” (5-6). Another instance in *Disgrace*: “His thoughts go to Emma Bovary strutting before the mirror after her first big afternoon. *I have a lover! I have a lover!* sings Emma to herself” (150). For instance in *Lolita*: “Never will Emma rally, revived by the sympathetic salts in Flaubert's father's timely tear. Whatever evolution this or that popular character has gone through between the book covers, his fate is fixed in our minds...” (191). Furthermore, as said by Carl R. Proffer in *Keys to Lolita*: “[There is an Emma-parallel in *Lolita*]”[,] “*Lolita* uses taking piano lessons from Miss Emperor as an excuse for cheating on Humbert Humbert with Clare Quilty.” This is like Emma who uses taking piano lessons as an excuse for cheating on her husband in *Madame Bovary* (24-26).

There are also some allusions to *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll in *Lolita* and one in *Disgrace*. In *Lolita* for instance the line: “[a] breeze from wonderland” (131) refers to Carroll's book. Also, in “Executing Sentences in *Lolita* and the Law” according to Elizabeth Susan Sweeney the “[si]milarities between Humbert's mock trial and the one in *Alice* [...] are probably deliberate” (4). Moreover, *Alice in Wonderland* has been translated by Nabokov into Russian. Here he suggests that this novel is about paedophilia like *Lolita* is: “‘I always call him Lewis Carroll Carroll,’ said Nabokov, ‘because he was the first Humbert Humbert’”(Appel 381). Nabokov is quoted further about this in *The Annotated Lolita*:

“‘[Carroll] has a pathetic affinity with H.H. but some odd scruple prevented me from alluding in *Lolita* to his wretched perversion and to those ambiguous photographs he took in dim rooms. He got away with it, as so many other Victorians got away with pederasty and nympholepsy’” (382). *Disgrace* has one reference to Carroll’s book. Lurie perceives the moral punishment he obtains at the university, for his affair with Melanie as “first the sentence, then the trial” (42). This line points at “[s]entence first—verdict afterwards” (Henson 1) uttered to Alice by The Queen at the mock trial in *Alice in Wonderland*. Moreover, In *Disgrace* there is a university trial, whereas in *Lolita* the readers are the jury at Humbert’s mock trial (Appel 334), where both Lurie and Humbert plead guilty. Thus both male characters appear in a kind of Wonderland, where they attempt to make their fantasies about the female main character come true and they are rebuked for their actions.

In both novels the main female character becomes a sort of Red Riding Hood figure and the male protagonist a wolf that desires and hounds her: both novels appear to make a reference to this story. For *Lolita*, this was first pointed out by critic F. W. Dupee: “*Lolita* is [...] an unsubdued wilderness where the wolf howls – a real wolf howling for a real Red Riding Hood” (91). Furthermore, this is also said by John M. Ingram: “Readers have noticed allusions to “Little Red Riding Hood” in *Lolita* [...] If Quilty/Humbert is a wolf, then Lolita represents Little Red Riding Hood. [...] Since, w]olves are also hunters [...] in Nabokov’s retelling of the fairy tale, the hunter and wolf desire the girl sexually” (36-38).

For instance explicitly expressed in chapter thirteen of Part Two, there is a play written by Quilty; “The Enchanted Hunters” in which Lolita participates as the wood-witch Diana, who is also a Roman hunting goddess (Appel 404). Lolita is in the woods and plays a reversed version of “Little Red Riding Hood”, where the roles of prey and hunter become turned around. She has the magic powers to hypnotise her hunters who have the red caps on now, until she falls in love with a vagabond poet, which foreshadows Lolita’s liberation from her

hunter Humbert to fall prey to another hunter, Quilty. At the end of this chapter she even asks Humbert if he remembers that the name the hotel where he raped her was The Enchanted Hunters, which suggests that she becomes more aware of and outspoken about her entrapment. That she is cast as Diana with magic spells signifies that Lolita herself also becomes empowered to run away with Quilty. In *Disgrace* Lurie thinks back on how he tried to seduce Melanie with alcohol. Here Lurie is the wolf, where Melanie is the desired Red Riding Hood: “Her trim little body; her sexy clothes; her eyes gleaming with excitement. Stepping out in the forest where the wild wolf prowls” (168). This is also concluded by Andrew van der Vlies, who furthermore comments that Melanie appears in a play in a theatre that used to be a refrigerated warehouse, where: “the inference is that Melanie has herself served as meat for a predatory Lurie”(van der Vlies 38-39). Moreover, in both novels the main female characters are described as a piece of meat with vivid descriptions of their bodies, whereas they are mainly voiceless and there is little information given about their personalities.

There are also similarities between the novels in the details. Lolita and Melanie have names associated with emotions of pain and suffering especially for their male lover, who see them as femme fatales. In *Keys to Lolita* Proffer points out that:

Lo has some actual namesakes among the demonic ladies of literature too. The most important literary echo of her real name, Dolores Haze, is from Algernon Swinburne’s ‘Dolores’—subtitled *Notre-Dame des Sept Douleurs*: thereby paralleling Humbert’s various puns on Dolores (dolorous darling, dumps and dolours, adolori, etc.). Dolores is ‘Our Lady of Pain’. (28-29)

Thus, the word dolor is hidden in Dolores and haze means the unclearness of perception. Melanie, in which the word melanin is conveyed, is “the dark one” (164) associated with a dark skin colour but also with dark, deep emotions or desire for the forbidden fruit. Also Lurie

believes that Melanie is a femme fatale. For instance, Lurie states that Melanie has made him so passionate and caused him to worship her as a goddess, that he plays with fire and gets burned up because of her: “She struck up a fire in me... in the olden days people worshipped fire. They thought twice before letting a flame die, a flame-god. It was that kind of flame [Melanie] kindled in me. Not hot enough to burn me up, but real: real fire. Burned – burnt – burnt up” (166). Pamela Cooper, too, calls both Soraya and Melanie “femme fatales”(36). Nevertheless, they are seen that way from Lurie’s perspective only. They both do not do much to attract Lurie; the initiative is largely his. Therefore, Humbert and Lurie project this image of a seductive femme fatale onto these girls. Moreover, Lolita and Melanie are first noticed by the male protagonists in a garden; which recalls the Garden of Eden. Here, too, they project the image of a seductive Eve onto the female protagonists.

In both novels there is the play on names: “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.” (9) and “Melanie – melodious: a meretricious rhyme. Not a good name for her. Shift the accent. Meláni: the dark one” (18). Nabokov’s opening sentence plays on Lolita’s name phonetically, its rhythm and accent is described in a poetic way to convey Humbert’s obsession with the girl whose name is Lolita, who is also the titular heroine. This is visibly used by Coetzee to convey Lurie’s obsessions with the heroine of his novel. Furthermore, Carol Clarkson notes that this play on names in reference to *Lolita* is also made by Coetzee in *Slow Man* (2005); “‘Marianna’, he says, testing the name on his tongue, tasting the two *ns*: ‘I know that is your name, but is it what people call you?’” (*Slow Man* 109).

There is the usage of the phrase “her honey-brown body” in *Lolita* (125), which is literally echoed in *Disgrace* while describing Soraya (1).

Lolita and Melanie are both theatre enthusiasts. Melanie is a theatre major and takes Lurie’s Romantics course only to fulfil her required credits. She is not passionate about his

course and skips classes, and is not actively involved with his course because she performs in a play which takes up a lot of her time, she says (19). Furthermore, she seems to enjoy performing on stage and taking the lead role. Lolita also takes acting classes voraciously; “Lolita was irrevocably stage-struck” (200) and participates in a play. Humbert, who is also a literature teacher, does not like her taking acting lessons. Lolita finally falls in love with her theatre teacher Quilty, with whom she cheats on Humbert. Both Melanie and Lolita seem to escape literature while avoiding the literature teacher through theatre.

The male protagonist in both novels tries to tranquilize the leading female character in order to sleep with her. Lolita is drugged except the pills do not work. Melanie is given alcohol at Lurie’s house which apparently also does not work because she does not stay with him that night: “He remembers Melanie, on the first evening of their closer acquaintance, sitting beside him on the sofa drinking the coffee with the shot-glass of whisky in it that was intended to- the word comes up reluctantly – *lubricate* her” (168).

The male protagonists in both novels go into isolation at the end of the plot. Humbert goes to prison and Lurie retreats to his daughter’s home on the countryside.

Furthermore, the way Lolita and Melanie are described is often similar. In *Lolita*, Humbert says about Lolita: “Why does the way she walks—a child, mind you, a mere child!—excite me so abominably?” (41) and: “Remember she is only a child, remember she is only—”(112). In *Disgrace*, Lurie about Melanie: “*A child!* he thinks: *No more than a child! What am I doing?* Yet his heart lurches with desire”(20). Both Lolita, who is still pre-pubescent and Melanie, a young adult, have small breasts. In *Lolita*: “The frank soft shape of her small breasts was brought out rather than blurred by the limpness of her thin shirt” (214). In *Disgrace*: “He reaches out, enfolds her. For a moment he can feel her little breasts against him.” (17) and “A memory floods back: the moment on the floor when he forced the sweater up and exposed her neat, perfect little breasts” (23). This could have been chosen to indicate

that Lurie sees her as a little girl like Lolita is. Their hips are both described in adolescent terms; In *Lolita* about Lolita: “and those puerile hips on which I had kissed...”(39). About Melanie in *Disgrace*; it says that “[h]er hips are as slim as a twelve-year-old’s”(19). The age of twelve is important, for that is the exact age when Lolita meets and begins her relationship with Humbert. The word “twelve” appears four times in chapter three of *Disgrace*, out of which one has to do with age. This is perhaps to emphasise the age difference between Lurie and his younger lovers. The age twelve is also used often in Nabokov’s “A Nursery Tale” (1926) (which is also about paedophilia), to signify a young girl’s age and the wish to transcend the continuing of time according to Sweeney in “Fantasy, Folklore, and Finite Numbers in Nabokov's ‘A Nursery Tale’” (514).

Both Lolita and Melanie are described as otherworldly figures. Lolita is portrayed often as a fairy with magic spells or even as uncanny, she is a “nymphet”. According to Humbert, a nymphet is “not human, but nymphic” (16). Melanie is depicted as an exotic girl who can be seen as an Other in the novel. She is coloured, treated unequally and mainly voiceless in the novel.

In the novel, Lolita is often described as a schoolgirl, for instance: “the swelling of her tense narrow nates clothed in black, and the seaside of her schoolgirl thighs” (42). According to M. G. Durham: “the schoolgirl uniform is [...] the classic ‘Lolita’ garment” (114). Also Melanie’s sister Desiree is described as a schoolgirl with a complete uniform:

A buzz; the latch clicks; he pushes the gate open. The path leads to the front door, where a slim girl stands watching him. She is dressed in school uniform: marine-blue tunic, white knee-length stockings, open-necked shirt. She has Melanie's eyes, Melanie's wide cheekbones, Melanie's dark hair; she is, if anything, more beautiful. The younger sister Melanie spoke of, whose name he cannot for the moment recollect. (163)

Before the end of the chapter, David finds himself lusting after Desiree as well (164).

In *Lolita*, when Humbert marries Lolita's mother Charlotte she becomes his stepdaughter, so Lolita is "mine" as in being his daughter but also "mine" since after her mother dies Humbert captures her physically: "...mine, mine, mine, Lolita would be in my arms" (101) and "She was mine, she was mine, the key was in my fist, my fist was in my pocket, she was mine"(125) and "How smugly would I marvel that she was mine, mine, mine..."(161). In *Disgrace*, Lurie thinks about Melanie when she is acting on stage: "*Mine!* he would like to say, turning to them, as if she were his daughter"(191). The lines of father-daughter and sexually oriented relationships here become blurred by the way the term "mine" is used in both novels. "Mine" being an endearing and/or possessive name for a lover, and "mine" as a father's own daughter belongs to him.

Moreover, there is the sexually suggestive usage of the words "father" and "daughter" in *Lolita* since Lolita becomes Humbert's stepdaughter and lover. The usage of these words also has a sexual connotation in *Disgrace*, in reference to girls Lurie finds attractive but also with his own daughter: "[H]e is a father, that is his fate, and as a father grows older he turns more and more - it cannot be helped - toward his daughter. She becomes his second salvation, the bride of his youth reborn. No wonder, in fairy-stories, queens try to hound their daughters to their death! He sighs. Poor Lucy! Poor daughters! What a destiny, what a burden to bear!" (86-87). About Soraya he says: "Technically he is old enough to be her father" (1). About Melanie: "He strokes her hair, kisses her forehead. Mistress? Daughter? What, in her heart, is she trying to be? What is she offering him?" (27). He even brings Melanie to his daughter's room: "He makes up a bed for her in his daughter's old room, kisses her good night, leaves her to herself" (26) and: "He makes love to her one more time, on the bed in his daughter's room" (29). In *Disgrace*, it could be used to indicate the great age difference between Lurie and his lovers. This can be seen as a similarity with *Lolita*, since it has a young versus much older

lover contrast. There is also similarity because of the use of the words “daughter” and “father” in an erotic way and because like Humbert, Lurie can be seen as a father figure.

To conclude, as shown in this chapter there is a deliberate use of intertextuality in *Disgrace* with Nabokov's *Lolita*. The next chapter will investigate why Coetzee is referencing *Lolita*, whether he is criticising it or speaking on its behalf and for what reasons. This intertextuality appears to signify that both *Disgrace* and *Lolita* deal with the notion of transgressive desire. In the next chapter I will show that both Coetzee and Nabokov use this metaphor of improper sexual relations to talk about abuse of power in a more general sense, including a possible political layer.

Chapter Two: Transgressive Desire as Metaphor

This chapter will analyse the abuse of power in *Lolita* and *Disgrace*. This will be done by comparing the way both novels use relationships between older men and younger girls. Moreover, this chapter will show that in *Lolita* sexual desire (and the injustice resulting from it) has sometimes been read as a metaphor for political issues, such as a Communist takeover and its crimes in former Russia, while in *Disgrace* sexual desire is a metaphor for colonial desire and Apartheid. Possibly in *Lolita*, and clearly in *Disgrace*, private injustice stemming from desire serves as a metaphor for injustice on a larger, political scale. As for *Lolita*, firstly private desire is depicted as sinful (as it is paedophilic) through the occurrence of apples in the novel. Furthermore, Martin Amis' view that the novel is about tyranny will be taken account of. Finally, the reading of Nabokov's novel in terms of a political metaphor will be illustrated with Dana Dragunoiu's argument that *Lolita* is a manifesto giving voice to Liberalism while being conscious of its limitations and that it speaks out against Communism. For *Disgrace*, the political metaphor will be shown through textual analysis, with reference to articles about this subject by various critics.

The novel *Lolita* is about desire. There is an all-consuming sexual desire for Lolita by the protagonist Humbert Humbert and to a lesser extent by his doppelganger Clare Quilty. Elizabeth Janeway writes about this in "The Tragedy of Man Driven by Desire":

[Humbert] is aroused to erotic desire only by girls on the edge of puberty, 9-to-14-year-old 'nymphets.' [...] Humbert is every man who is driven by desire, wanting his Lolita so badly that it never occurs to him to consider her as a human being, or as anything but a dream-figment made flesh [...]. (1-2)

This desire is portrayed as having negative effects in the novel, for it is illicit; since it is paedophilic, it leads to Lolita's rape, abuse and victimisation by Humbert and his doppelganger Quilty. There is a constant danger above Lolita's head from the start of the

novel because of her being around someone who desires her madly. This impending doom stops after Humbert's "ascent from 'ape-like' lust to a love" (Trilling 19) at the end of the novel: he does not harm her then anymore. Humbert's desire for Lolita is expressed at key moments narrated by him with a motif of apples. Therefore, often when something dangerous or a threat towards Lolita, caused by Humbert's desire, is foreshadowed, apples appear in *Lolita*. Additionally, there is a 2011 version of the book's cover on which she is about to take a bite of a red apple. The apples in *Lolita* stand for the forbidden fruit, which signals (sexual) danger and moral downfall. Humbert desires the forbidden fruit, which is represented by Lolita. The apples connect the novel to Adam and Eve in *Genesis*. Moreover, this apple trail in connection with Eden, is also mentioned by Eric Goldman in "Knowing' Lolita" (89-93). Lolita is associated with the forbidden fruit by having her hold and eats apples in the text. Humbert's desire for Lolita generates his immorality: "Lolita[...]. My sin, my soul" (*Lolita* 9). From the beginning to the end, Humbert's desires drive the plot of the novel. The novel shows how a man has been blinded by desire by the Edenic symbol of the apple. Humbert himself, however, sees Lolita as Eve, a fille fatale who seduces a "helpless [...] Adam" (71) and gets away with things; but in fact Humbert is the serpent who seduces Lolita/Eve. However, there also seem to be power dynamics in the novel: there is the question about who has the power, since Lolita is described as a highly sexually attractive and desired girl, which could make her powerful. Nevertheless, Humbert should have known better, Lolita is by far his inferior in age, wisdom, financial status, etc., which enables him to "go too far" (113); to abuse his powers. In *The War Against Cliché*, Martin Amis also says this while quoting Humbert:

We know that "limits and rules" apply in the matter of parental caresses, that "girlish games are fluid, or at least too childishly fluid for the senior partner to grasp"; but the

ambitious molester had better learn the ropes, and quick, if his charge is not “to start back in revulsion and terror”. (479)

The apple connects *Lolita* firstly to *Genesis*. Secondly and more precisely, it also links the novel to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* by Walt Disney (1937), which Nabokov probably had seen around the time. Even the influential Soviet filmmaker Sergey Eisenstein then called *Snow White*: “[The] greatest movie ever made” (Screen Saviour 1). In fact, like its predecessors “A Nursery Tale” (1926) and *The Enchanter* (1939), *Lolita* is full of references to fairy tales, such as “Snow White”, “Little Red Riding Hood”, “Sleeping Beauty”, “Cinderella”, etc. Furthermore, these earlier works by Nabokov also deal with paedophilia (Sweeney, “Fantasy,” 511). “Snow White” (film and tale), like *Lolita* has a narrative in which a child is the victim of an adult. John Patrick Pazdziora writes about Jack Zipes suggesting that the (step) mother, who is the Queen is jealous of Snow White’s beauty and thus of her “erotic appeal,” and therefore the Queen tries to kill her (Pazdziora 1). Since it has such erotic elements “Snow White” is also an adult fairy tale. This is also reflected in *Lolita*; Lolita’s mother Charlotte is jealous of Lolita since she considers her as competition to gain Humbert. Moreover, with the apple scene Nabokov most likely had Disney’s film version in mind, which was based on the Brothers Grimm’s fairy tale “Little Snow-White”. For instance it is stated in *Lolita*; “[she] was holding in her hollowed hands a beautiful, banal, Eden-red apple” (57-58). Here a “banal” apple is depicted, not one that recalls high art but rather an ordinary thing like in a cartoon. Additionally, the film graphically shows how Snow White bites into the poisonous, specifically red apple. This reappears in *Lolita*, while in the Grimm story this is a red and white coloured apple. Furthermore, in the film like in *Lolita* only the prey (Snow White and Lolita) bites into the apple, not the villains (Humbert and the Queen) whereas in the Grimm story the villain (Queen) also has a bite . Moreover, in the film when the apple is presented to Snow White she says: “delicious”. This is literally echoed in *Lolita* before she

has a bite, while this word does not appear in Grimm's tale: "I produced Delicious. She grasped it and bit into it, and my heart was like snow under thin crimson skin" (58). Also here the word "snow" is an echo of "Snow White". Moreover, according to Couturier, the apple foreshadows their first sexual contact: "'Delicious' does not only designate a species of apples but also, metaphorically, the penis" (Couturier 5-6). During their first sexual contact Lolita sits on Humbert's lap, which leads to his climax. All the way during chapter thirteen of Part One, the apple is present. In the following chapters appearances of apples continue leading to their first sexual intercourse. For instance when Humbert picks up Lolita from summer camp, while her mother has already died in a car accident and she is all "mine mine mine" (101). She is then: "dressed in her brightest gingham, with a pattern of little red apples" (111). She is now Humbert's legal stepdaughter while Lolita's mother has died; she is now vulnerable to rape. This sentence indicates the upcoming rape scene in chapter twenty-nine of Part One. To conclude, the apples imagery illustrates how Nabokov expresses sinful sexuality, linking it to the Fall of Man in Eden. This of course also suggests that Nabokov does not identify with Humbert where it comes to his paedophilia. He says: "[M]y creature Humbert is [...] an anarchist, and there are many things, besides nymphets, in which I disagree with him" (315). Since Nabokov is an indirect writer sexual interaction is not graphically narrated but left as a gap in the text: the apples signify that it is a transgressive affair.

Some critics, such as Richard Rorty, have argued that *Lolita* is about a purely private matter, the cruelty arising from an older man's desire for a much younger girl. In the following sections, however, I shall attempt to show that *Lolita* has also been read as addressing cruelty and injustice on a massive scale, instead of private cruelty alone. I shall demonstrate in the following sections that in *Lolita*, the author uses the image of sex to speak

about the real issues such as abuse of power relations, which some critics have seen as a metaphor for political repression specifically.

In his book on Stalinism, *Koba the Dread*, Martin Amis says that Nabokov experienced the totalitarian states of Lenin and Hitler and that his father was assassinated by Communists. Therefore, in his fiction “there would be a political pulse” (37). Furthermore, he says that: “Nabokov, in all his fiction, writes with incomparable penetration about delusion and coercion, about cruelty and lies. Even *Lolita*, especially *Lolita*, is a study in tyranny” (37). Humbert’s tyranny is the manipulation and abuse of young Lolita. Additionally, Amis suggests that Nabokov was inspired through his personal trauma to write *Lolita*. Moreover, since he experienced political tyranny he always has to write about tyranny, whether this is about personal issues, as in *Lolita*, or about political ones such as in his novels *Bend Sinister* and *Invitation to a Beheading*, which are about totalitarian states (36-37).

On the other hand, Dana Dragunoiu goes even further, in arguing that *Lolita* has a political theme. In her *Vladimir Nabokov and the Poetics of Liberalism* (2011), in the chapter “*Lolita* and the Communists”, Dragunoiu argues that, in *Lolita*, Nabokov examines the potential and the limitations of Liberalism (85), while speaking out against the crimes of Communism. Dragunoiu gives few arguments based on specific textual evidence for such a reading. However, Nabokov is an oblique writer, who gives away more with clues and puns, which makes it complex for a critic to illustrate the presence of this political layer in the text as also is shown through Dragunoiu’s argumentation. Besides, Dragunoiu is also inconsistent in her argument; she claims that the novel supports Liberalism while at the same time it criticises Liberalism.

Dragunoiu’s starting point is the novel’s afterword, “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” (1956), in which Nabokov describes Humbert as “a foreigner and an anarchist” (*Lolita* 315) and sets *Lolita* in the late 40s, early 50s America (Dragunoiu 86). However, according to

Dragunoiu: “*Lolita* studies two different, but ultimately related, political contexts”. These are: “the turbulent events surrounding Russia’s second revolutionary period, [when] the term ‘anarchy’ was consistently applied to the chaos, violence and lawlessness unleashed by the Bolsheviks” (86). Furthermore, “anarchy had also become linked in [Nabokov’s] mind with Stalin’s concentration camps and ruthless imperialism. Communism’s rejection of law as an autonomous and binding mechanism of social order justifies these associations” (86).

Humbert is an anarchist as he too rejects the law with crimes such paedophilia and the murder of Quilty in the United States (94). Thus, “Nabokov [forces] seemingly apolitical issues into political contexts. Nabokov’s apparent insistence that pedophilia is somehow to be understood as the calling card of a foreign anarchist achieves the same effect”(91). Therefore, according to Dragunoiu, “Humbert’s ‘anarchism’ ought to be understood as a brand of Communism”(96).

Furthermore, in the afterword Nabokov establishes himself as a patriotic American (thus someone who writes with liberal views) by saying that he wants “the same rights that other American writers enjoy” (*Lolita* 315) and by distancing himself from Humbert by labelling him during those times with negative words linked with Communism (89). Aside from what is written in the text, Nabokov’s own political beliefs were anti-communist but also against the anti-liberal attitude of McCarthyism (90). In a 1963 interview he said about his political views that he favoured: “Freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of art” (95). Moreover, just before he started writing and during the development of *Lolita*, in a 1948 letter to his friend Edmund Wilson, Nabokov writes about his concern about Russia and the rule of law there: “Under the Tsar (despite the inept and barbarous character of their rule) a freedom-loving Russian had incomparably more possibility and means of expressing himself than at any time during Lenin’s and Stalin’s regime. He was protected by the law” (97).

Dragunoiu therefore claims that in *Lolita*, too, Nabokov criticises Communism strongly. He appeals for a liberal alternative, yet not without boundaries. Ellen Pifer, too, argues that Humbert commits not only a sexual crime but also a political one, as his crimes are against the Declaration of Independence. Lolita's liberation is on the Fourth of July, which is America's Independence Day (Pifer, as quoted by Dragunoiu 126-127). This shows that Nabokov had respect for America's commitment to personal freedoms (Dragunoiu 127).

However, *Lolita* speaks out against the limitations of Liberalism too (Dragunoiu 127). Dragunoiu argues that it also emphasises America's indifference to the weakest in society. For instance, at the end of the novel Lolita is married, pregnant at age seventeen and in poverty, doing restaurant work, and she has to ask Humbert for money. Through abusing her, he is directly responsible for Lolita's tragic fate. "You merely broke my life" (*Lolita* 279) is the accusation Humbert imagines hearing from Lolita at their last meeting. Nabokov suggests the need for more "communal bonds and social networks," since the lack of them contributes to Lolita's tragic fate. Moreover, although Nabokov "was no Marxist,--he was not insensitive to the plight of the world's most vulnerable members" (Dragunoiu 128). Additionally, Humbert is constantly afraid that "some busybody, some Humane Society" (*Lolita* 173) might end his affair with Lolita. Humbert certainly exploits the insufficiency of America's welfare system to further entrap Lolita. He terrorises her with "the reformatory threat" (*Lolita* 149) into a voiceless obedience, by telling her that she will become "the ward of the Department of Public Welfare". He continues: "you, happy neglected child, will be given a choice of various dwelling places, [...] the correctional school, the reformatory, the juvenile detention home, or one of those admirable girls' protectories..." (Dragunoiu 129), (*Lolita* 151). Thus, *Lolita* has an ambivalence toward liberal values and criticises America's commitment to personal privacy which can create opportunities for exploitation and violence (Dragunoiu 130). There are important passages in *Lolita*, which show that the state's ability to protect Lolita from

Humbert is undermined by legal measures intended to protect individuals from state interference. For instance, Humbert finds a social service monograph, which states: “there is no principle that every minor must have a guardian; the court is passive and enters the fray only when the child's situation becomes conspicuously perilous” (*Lolita* 172). Such rules prevent the state from intervening on Lolita’s behalf and let Humbert get away with ruthless crimes towards her. Thus, a commitment to privacy helps paedophiles such as Humbert and Quilty have their way, as their crimes can go undetected: “There he was [...] having a grand time and fooling everybody; and here was I” (Dragunoiu 130), (*Lolita* 183). Moreover, in the United States, a liberal state, Humbert has “the odd sense of living in a brand new, mad new dream world, where everything was permissible” (*Lolita* 133).

According to Dragunoiu, Nabokov was faced with a paradox, which appears in all liberal states: a commitment to personal freedom leaves a state defenceless to people who want to destroy it. This is also the irony in Nabokov’s novel, which celebrates Liberalism yet at the same time criticises its limitations because a commitment to liberal values also brings an enormous cost. Humbert can exploit and abuse a minor because his privacy is protected. Even though these are not the same as communist crimes, according to Dragunoiu, Nabokov considers them as equivalent when he says Humbert is “a foreigner and an anarchist” (*Lolita* 315). According to Dragunoiu, to see them as the same threats is not to allegorise the novel. Thus, Nabokov’s history and anti-Communism makes this comparison suitable (Dragunoiu 131). Moreover, Dragunoiu writes that *Lolita* shows how too much personal freedom can give way to tyranny suggestive of a communist takeover:

[T]he freedom-loving, tolerant Americans who do not interfere in Humbert and Dolly’s domestic relations, [...] recall the principled ministers of the Provisional Government who allowed Lenin free passage into Russia because they had no formally legitimate grounds for keeping him out, and the ministers of the Crimean

Regional Government whose commitment to civil freedoms allowed the Bolsheviks to flourish in their midst. In *Lolita* Nabokov distils the lesson learned by his father into a narrative that highlights the ways in which liberal freedoms can nurture their own demise. (131)

Dragunoiu concludes her chapter by stating that: “*Lolita* tests liberal values [...] at the level of a theme” (140).

Dragunoiu argued about this similarly in an earlier article “*Lolita*: Law, Ethics, Politics,” suggesting that the novel does not encourage the abandonment of liberal values since *Lolita* portrays that Liberalism has enormous costs, but that the book is ambiguous about its ideals. It is a pro-liberal text, it: “suggests that liberalism is the only form of political organization that can protect us from tyranny”. Likewise, *Lolita*’s liberation occurs on the Fourth of July, when she runs away from Humbert’s tyranny (126). Thus,

if we are unwilling to sacrifice our civil rights for the sake of “bringing up a better generation in a safer world” (*Lolita* 6), we are indirectly delivering Dolly into Humbert’s clutches. If we are willing, however to accept an erosion of our rights for the sake of Dolly and others like her, we are taking the first steps down a road that may lead to dystopias imagined by Zamyatin and Orwell or experienced firsthand by the victims of Nazism, Stalinism, and other dictatorships that claimed to subordinate the rights of the individual for the sake of public profit. (127)

In this section I have shown that in *Lolita*, the theme of private desire leading to injustice has occasionally been read as a metaphor for a political layer: the crimes perpetrated by Communism if Liberalism fails.

To conclude, *Lolita* is a novel about transgressive desire, culminating in an abuse of power. Furthermore, possibly *Lolita* is about cruelty on a larger, political scale instead of private injustice alone. The sexual relationship between a teenager and a middle-aged man is

an instance of abusive power relations. According to Dragunoiu, it is also a trope for the political theme of the communist repression of the citizens of the Soviet Union. Whereas Martin Amis only suggests a thematic connection between the tyranny in *Lolita* and Nabokov's experience of state tyranny in Russia, Dragunoiu describes *Lolita* as a liberal manifesto, criticising the communist cruelties in the Soviet Union. If the political implications of Nabokov's novel remain somewhat vague and ambiguous, Coetzee does give *Disgrace* an unambiguous political twist; the power dynamics and the idea of transgressive desire are like in *Lolita*, but in *Disgrace* they evidently signify a political content.

In contrast to *Lolita* in *Disgrace* the novel's political layer is clearer. Many articles have been written about this political content but there are also clear indications in the novel itself. Furthermore, the novel's setting is in post-apartheid South Africa. This section will show how sexual desire serves as a metaphor for a political theme, namely the theme of colonialism, the neocolonialism of Apartheid and subsequently the fall of this old rule in *Disgrace*. Moreover, in *Disgrace* (and possibly in *Lolita*) I would like to argue that private desire leading to injustice expresses figuratively injustice done on a larger scale. *Disgrace* is a critique mainly of abuse of power during colonialism and Apartheid but also during the post-Apartheid state.

David Lurie is a middle-aged white man guided by his sexual desires for young, exotic women who are a forbidden fruit to him. He is a person readers tend to empathize with just like Humbert. Lurie appears to have no bad conscience, he says that he has the "rights of desire" (89) and describes his desire as "a fire" (166) and claims that he is "a servant of Eros" (52), suggesting that he has no control over it. The novel starts by Lurie regularly visiting a non-white prostitute named Soraya to whom "he is old enough to be her father" (1). Later on he has a brief affair with one of his students, a young coloured girl named Melanie, who is less than half his age. Soraya and Melanie are not only unequal to him in age but also because

Melanie is his student, so that he has power over her; however he also has power over Soraya as long as he employs her. In addition, during South Africa's white reign coloured women were seen and treated as inferior, and in the novel they are represented as Other. In both *Lolita* and *Disgrace* there is this overpowering desire for an unequal or a forbidden fruit and an Other. In *Lolita* this is expressed through paedophilia, in *Disgrace* through the main relationship, which is a racially mixed affair with Lurie's much younger student.

The term colonial desire as derived from Robert Young deals with sexual desire that equals desire for (political) territory; when land is colonised and its people are subjected to colonization. This is figuratively one of the issues in *Disgrace* with Lurie's desire for young girls of colour. Young says that:

Colonialism was a machine of war, of bureaucracy and administration, and above all, of power [...]. But as [Thomas] De Quincey's dream suggests, it was also a machine of fantasy, and of desire – desire that was constituted socially, collectively, as the many analyses of Western cultural representations of colonialism have shown us.

Colonialism, in short was not only a machine of war and administration, it was also a desiring machine, with its unlimited appetite for territorial expansion, for 'endless growth and self-reproduction', for making connections and disjunctions, continuously forced disparate territories, histories and people to be thrust together like foreign bodies in the night. In that sense it was itself the instrument that produced its own darkest fantasy – unlimited and ungovernable fertility of 'unnatural' unions. (98)

Moreover, according to Young economic and sexual trade were from the beginning of colonialism tied together. Even the word "commerce" has its original meaning of trade between goods and bodies in sexual intercourse. Young concludes that the sexual power relations would become the model for how economic and political colonialism was considered (181-182).

Taking into account South Africa's historical context, where there was the rule of white supremacy over black and coloured people, Lurie's sexual encounters especially with Soraya and Melanie are representative of colonial desire and (neo-)colonialism even though the novel is set in post-Apartheid South Africa. In a broader sense, the way Lurie conquers and mistreats these young women of colour implies thirst for (political) territory and its exploitations with (neo-)colonialism. That Lurie is symbolic for a larger group of white people during (neo-)colonial times is also said by Pamela Cooper: "At fifty-two, Lurie is broadly representative of an older social order: the officially defunct South Africa of Afrikaner dominance, statutory racial oppression, and the uneasy pleasures of white privilege" (22). The first part of the novel could have been set in old South African times. We can speak of (neo-)colonialism here because, as during those times, Lurie as a white man, of an older generation treats women of colour unjustly sexually. He makes use of a non-white woman as a prostitute, which is a form of sexual commerce, power and illegality. Later on he seduces, some would even say rapes his coloured student, Melanie. Cooper says about this: "Lurie's seduction of Melanie is an attempt not only to reclaim sexual privilege, but to emphasize the traditional patriarchal procedures of the European culture in which such privilege, like Lurie himself, is embedded" (25). At the same time he wants to be a father figure to these women, take dominance over, and educate them. Lurie even teaches English Romantic literature. The European colonialists also wanted to control and civilize South Africa because they wanted to obtain its land and saw its people as culturally inferior. The colonizers saw themselves as parents who were civilized and the colonized Others as infantile. Thus, also in *Disgrace* there is a Lolita image: Lurie has racially mixed relations with much too young girls, which suggests the dominance and misuse of the old world (neo-) colonizer. About this colonial aspect in *Disgrace* in connection with fathering, Thomas Bonnici says that Lurie sleeps with girls who could be his daughters, since they are so young.

According to Bonnici, this is a way to show how the relations between the colonizer and the colonized have failed. This is illustrated in the text as for instance: “There, there,’ he whispers, trying to comfort her. ‘Tell me what is wrong.’ Almost he says, ‘Tell Daddy what is wrong’” (*Disgrace* 26). Moreover, Soraya is black and Melanie dark; this is a concealed way to show the exploitation of colonialism (Bonnici 88-89). Furthermore, Lucy Valerie Graham argues that the setting of the private injustice towards Melanie signals injustice done on a larger scale: the unjust treatment of Melanie by Lurie is a reflection of power in relation to sex, but also within the white establishment during Apartheid days. Thus, when Farodia Rassool, who is a member of the university committee investigating Lurie’s case, comments on “the long history of exploitation of which [his treatment of Melanie] is a part,” this seems to point at the sexual abuse of black women throughout history. This comment is a direct political statement about (neo-)colonialism in *Disgrace*. Moreover, Graham notes that Coetzee obviously shows that “Lurie is blind to the history of his own actions” (437-438). Additionally, the women in *Disgrace* are to a certain extent voiceless and passive. We do not read their thoughts or outspoken opinion about their sexual affair with Lurie. This is also observed by Bonnici; who finds Melanie’s silence symbolic. Moreover, we see nothing from Melanie’s perspective. Both Melanie and Soraya are presented as silent objects, while Lurie is in the midst of his lust (89). This then with its (neo-)colonial subtext of the novel can be read as the silencing of women with sexual oppression and consequently of the colonized country during those times.

The second part of the novel starts when the university finds out about Lurie’s affair with Melanie and sets up a hearing, which is reminiscent of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. The second part depicts the turn of tables; there is a mirror-plot where now black people have the governmental power. Linda Seidel says: “*Disgrace* presents the grim spectacle of one patriarchal regime being replaced by another, equally coercive, the violent

appropriation of women a strategic move in the consolidation of power". Furthermore, Bonnici argues about this reversal of power that a sign of the colonizers' defeat is the collapse of their sexual dominance. At the beginning of the novel Lurie finds the black prostitute Soraya very pleasing; a silent and unquestioning body he could have regularly. However, then the object turns into a subject by shouting at him: "You are harassing me in my own house. I demand you will never phone me here again, never" (*Disgrace* 10). Lurie's student Melanie's reaction is more refined for she devastates and disorders him. *Disgrace* shows the effort and guilt of a once dominant population trying to survive in South Africa's new world order. Lurie's grave sexual frustration is obviously symbolic for the diminishing of patriarchalism, which represented the cruelty of colonialism for years (Bonnici 90-91). In the second half of the novel, Lurie's own daughter Lucy is raped by black men. This incident seems to serve as an epiphany to Lurie, showing what rape and injustice is when power is abused. We do not gather information about Lurie's *enlightenment*, however he does go to Melanie's family to apologize. In an essay called "The Harms of Pornography" (1996), Coetzee reflects his dissatisfaction with the present way women are treated in South Africa. He writes that there are still traces of colonialism and Apartheid in current South African society:

In pursuing the causes of the quite egregious incidence of sexual violence against women in South Africa, for instance, one must surely start with the trauma of colonial conquest, which fractured the social and customary basis of legality, yet allowed some of the worst features of patriarchalism to survive, including the treatment of unattached women as fair game, huntable creatures. (81-82)

This is also the case in *Disgrace* with Melanie and Lucy. Even though Lucy is white, Meg Samuelson writes about this sexual oppression as follows: "Lucy's voluntary silence reminds us of the historical silences imposed by coercion, and of the (re)production of slave bodies as property of white men" (143). Samuelson then quotes Carby as saying: "lynching and the rape

of black women were attempts to regain control” (143). Bonnici also writes about this issue that even Lurie’s own daughter does not want to be embraced by her father after the violent attack upon her. According to Bonnici, this is representative of the silencing of the colonized and the profound rupture between blacks and whites, which is a frequent theme in Coetzee’s work (89). Thus, Lucy’s rape and silencing is a mirror image of (neo-)colonialism’s crimes to women of colour. It also signifies the downfall of the white people after Apartheid and the abuse of power by those who have it now. Especially the second part of the novel depicts this downfall of white people and the way people who are now in charge abuse their power in post-Apartheid South Africa. Cooper, too, has pointed out that this is depicted through individual injustice and expressed through the metaphor of sex: “[S]exuality becomes a trope in the novel for wider historical changes” (22). She says furthermore that: “Coetzee’s *Disgrace* draws an anxious, comfortless picture of post-Apartheid South Africa” (22). Thus, *Disgrace* is making a critique of this new situation. That sex is a metaphor for a wider political theme is again stated by Cooper, who says that *Disgrace* stresses that things are over. Moreover, that this change is presented as an agony through the means of desire. For Lurie change is revealed through sexuality with unfavourable swings in his love life. Coetzee depicts change through sexuality, which is a metaphor for the broader historical transitions he notices (23). She sums up that: “Coetzee engages the complex social relations of the “new” South Africa through sexuality as a code for or vocabulary of change” (23). Moreover, as suggested by Cooper, this turn of power is one of the critiques the novel seems to make. She argues that Coetzee expresses change as distressful because Lurie, who used to be a university professor, becomes a dog caretaker. It is a punishment for the privileged white man in South Africa. Moreover, according to Cooper, on a larger scale this change censures the masculine power which encouraged Western cultural traditions and imperialism (25). Cooper writes that with this change of power: “South Africa is shedding the skins of both colonialism and the

hybrid neo-colonialism of the apartheid era,” and that: “The abusive message pushed under his door during his harassment hearing—‘YOUR DAYS ARE OVER, CASANOVA’ (43, emphasis in original)—becomes a prophecy” (26).

To conclude, most critics agree that *Disgrace* has a political level and that this is expressed through the vehicle of sexual desire. However, with *Lolita* this is not so clear even though some critics have tried to build a bridge between politics and sex in this novel. Nonetheless, the novels are still comparable in a metaphorical sense. This section has illustrated the apparent political metaphor in *Disgrace*, which is described through the medium of a private desire leading to injustice. In *Disgrace* this political trope portrays the theme of injustice with colonialism, Apartheid and post-Apartheid in South Africa. According to some critics Humbert’s affair with Lolita is a metaphor for Communism and its crimes in *Lolita*, where this is also conveyed with a vehicle of private lust. Both novels contain a desire for and a seduction of an unequal who is a forbidden fruit. In *Disgrace* this is an unusual attraction towards one’s young coloured student and in *Lolita* towards an underage girl. There is the issue of abuse of power in these situations where in *Disgrace* this expresses a larger, political theme. Furthermore, an explanation has been given for the term colonial desire by Robert Young and how this applies to *Disgrace* in a political sense, where coveting a young person of a different race conveys thirst for territory and its exploitation during (neo-) colonialist times. Subsequently, it is shown how the novel depicts this change of power individually and on a larger scale. Moreover it can be stated that, if *Lolita* really has a political subject, then both novels make a strong critique towards the political situations they depict.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to investigate echoes of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. There appears to be a gap in literary research in this area. I have tried to answer the question: is Coetzee paying homage to Nabokov's *Lolita* in his key novel *Disgrace*, or are these resemblances merely coincidences? In Chapter One of this thesis I have demonstrated that there are intertextual echoes of *Lolita* in *Disgrace*. I have shown that there are genuinely deliberate allusions to *Lolita* in *Disgrace* through my own observations and a few thin links made by critics. This was done by close-reading the novels, but also by putting the allusions next to each other and analysing them one by one. Furthermore, I have shown that Coetzee made more explicit references to *Lolita* in some of his work after *Disgrace*. Why did Coetzee echo *Lolita* so subtly throughout *Disgrace* and not more vividly as in his works after *Disgrace*? Why is it a more visibly recurring pattern in his literature after *Disgrace*? Was Coetzee giving away clues about his novel *Disgrace* in his following works? These and similar questions might form the basis for further research.

Secondly, I questioned what Coetzee's aim was in making an intertextual link with *Lolita* in *Disgrace* and have tried to answer it in this thesis. Moreover, these intertextual references point at the common theme of transgressive desire. Furthermore, in Chapter Two of this thesis, I have examined whether sexual desire in both novels gives voice to a possible political point of view. This political point of view is not very noticeable in *Lolita*, although Dana Dragunoiu has attempted to prove this. Dragunoiu has claimed that, in *Lolita*, Humbert's sexual desire and lust for a teenager is a metaphor of a Communist takeover and cruelty done to the citizens of the former Soviet Union. In *Disgrace* on the other hand, there is a more profound political layer which has been commented on by various critics. Here Lurie's desire for his coloured student Melanie and his actions because of this give voice to the unspeakable operations of colonialism and Apartheid. This is mirrored to Lurie by the violent

sexual acts of black people, which are representative of the post-Apartheid political state in the novel. This use of allusions to *Lolita* and the desire of an older man for a much younger girl which leads to injustice, are done purposely by Coetzee in order to make a point. This private inequality has a political dimension on a larger scale in Coetzee's novel. *Disgrace* reminds us of the cruelties of state violence such as Apartheid, which can have serious consequences for individuals. Both novels were written in politically troubled times; the 50s with an anti-communist public atmosphere and the late 90s with an anti-Apartheid *air du temps*. Additionally, the novels set ethics to the test of human boundaries. Moreover, when the books are compared with each other they assess individual and civil values throughout the history of the 20th century. Exploitation, oppression, paedophilia, state cruelty, and abuse of power still appear to be issues of concern. Human emotions and reactions or passivity in the face of these issues have remained the same through time as shown in these novels. Yet the conflicts and solutions of the oppressed main female characters offer opportunities for a change. Thus, Coetzee pays tribute to *Lolita*, because with its controversial content he wants to make a critical point on South African politics, and perhaps because he, like me, becomes a little infatuated with its undeniable beauty. As Nabokov writes: "It was love at first sight, at last sight, at ever and ever sight" (*Lolita* 270).

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