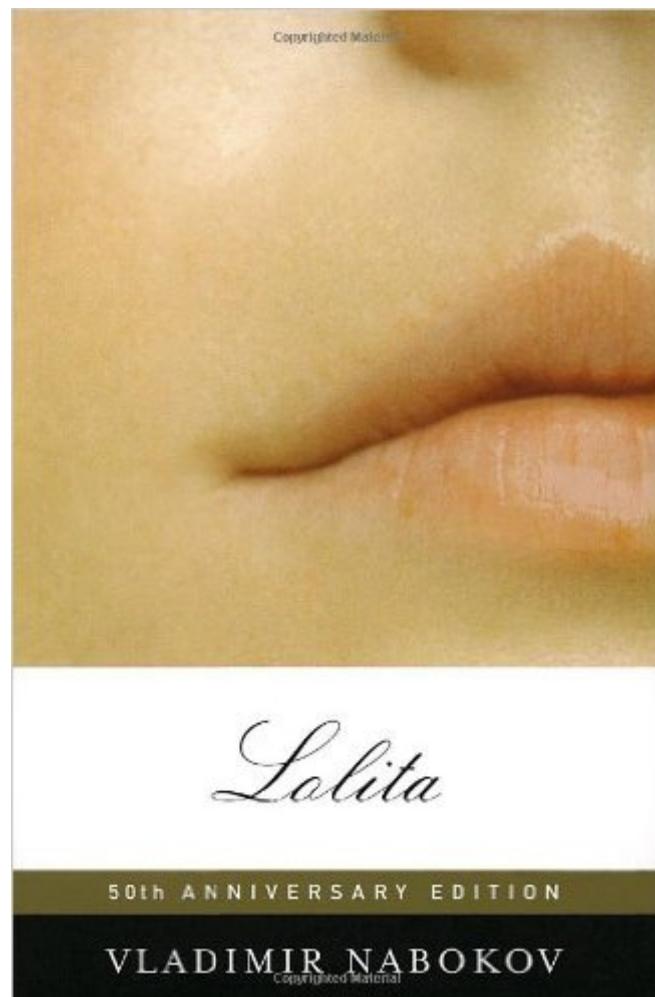


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Lolita



Synopsis

Awe and exhilaration--along with heartbreak and mordant wit--abound in *Lolita*, Nabokov's most famous and controversial novel, which tells the story of the aging Humbert Humbert's obsessive, devouring, and doomed passion for the nymphet Dolores Haze. *Lolita* is also the story of a hypercivilized European colliding with the cheerful barbarism of postwar America. Most of all, it is a meditation on love--love as outrage and hallucination, madness and transformation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you've only heard of "Lolita" from its reputation as being "pornographic", you are in for a surprise when you read it. Yes, it involves a lecherous, middle aged man chasing after a 12 year old "nymphet". Yes, it is deeply disturbing and makes one queasy at times. It is also a brilliant, funny, witty, literary rollercoaster which will delight you and dazzle you with the beauty of language. Nabakov can make words jump through hoops you never even knew existed, while he explores the dark realms of obsession and longing. The narrator, Humbert Humbert, is a fascinating construction. As readers, we find ourselves simultaneously repelled by his actions and sympathetic to his yearning. We are utterly charmed by his wit, intelligence and verbal acrobatics, sometimes to the point where we lost sight of what he's doing to his object of desire, Lolita. I would suggest that all readers reacquaint themselves with the concept of the "unreliable narrator" before they sink into Humbert's hypnotic web of logic. When you find yourself sympathizing with Hum about Lolita's "cruelties", try to remember that you are seeing everything through his twisted and self-serving lens. Humbert has rationalized his behavior so deeply and reports it to us so entertainingly, that we find ourselves accepting his interpretations of people and events at face value. However, we must

remember that Humbert is capable of the most monstrous of deceptions (note how long it takes him to inform Lolita of her mother's demise), and of self deceptions. Read between the lines. Question his reading of events. Pay attention when his reporting is at odds with his interpretations of them.

LOLITA is difficult to approach in part because of its reputation. Upon beginning to read the novel, some find it so highly styled that it is difficult to grasp. Throughout the novel, many wonder if the art involved can justify the nature of the story and the point of view it offers. This is not and never has been a novel for a quick Sunday afternoon read; so many issues swirl around it and through it that the book requires critical thought even as one reads it. As a result many people actively dislike it. Even so, LOLITA has seemed entirely secure in its status as a landmark of western literature since its first publication, an almost inevitable creation that pushes the boundaries of what literature can effectively do in terms of subject, style, and technique. The story is infamous. Humbert Humbert is of European origin and in his early teenage years developed a passionate attachment to a girl of his own age, an attachment that was never entirely satisfied and over which he has obsessed for many years. Now residing in a small New England town, he becomes equally obsessed with a twelve year old girl named Lolita Haze who recreates for him the magic he felt in that first relationship. In order to be near her, Humbert rents a room from and ultimately marries Lolita's mother Charlotte--but Charlotte uncovers Humbert's motives and in a twist of fate is killed in the street as she runs from the house to expose him. The circumstance places Lolita entirely in Humbert's power. They travel extensively, partly in order that he might continue his molestation undetected, partly in order that he might prevent Lolita from forming other relationships that might offer a means of escape. But Lolita is not a simple victim, and in spite of her years already has a certain sexual expertise.

I have no real excuse for not reading "Lolita" before this late date. It's certainly a book that crops up in conversation a great deal. I watched the James Mason film version of the book years ago--perhaps that's what put me off. I recently watched the Jeremy Irons version and loved it. I suppose part of me asked why myself why I'd want to read a book that is essentially the ramblings of a middle-aged pervert. Anyway, I decided that I'd procrastinated long enough, and it was time to get serious and find out what all the fuss is about. The story is narrated by middle-aged Humbert Humbert. He's a pedophile--although he's tried denying it, tried disguising it, and tried channeling his baser instincts, but as luck would have it, Humbert finds himself as the lodger at the home of a buxom, lonely widow, Charlotte Haze and 12-year-old daughter, Lolita. Humbert doesn't particularly even like Lolita--he actually finds her rather dull, but she becomes a vessel for the fantasies left by

Humbert's unfulfilled first love affair. Due to the subject matter, the book was, at times, rather difficult to read, and it is a tribute to Nabokov's skill as a writer that I was gripped by this story. Humbert Humbert is at his most 'human' (introspective) during his pre- and post-Lolita phases. Once Humbert crosses the boundaries of ethical behaviour and begins a physical relationship with Lolita, there is no going back. At times, Humbert congratulates himself for his cleverness and calls himself a "magician," and then at other times, Humbert seems to realize how despicable he truly is. Unfortunately, the occasional flash of insight is too pale and fleeting to release Humbert from his obsession with his "nymphet" and so Humbert accepts his enslavement and ultimate fate.

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