

Men vs. Women: Manipulation in Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita

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Bachelor Thesis
2015



Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně
Fakulta humanitních studií
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur
akademický rok: 2014/2015

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Kateřina Horáková**
Osobní číslo: **H12823**
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**
Forma studia: **prezenční**

Téma práce: **Muži versus ženy: Manipulace v románu Lolita
Vladimira Nabokova**

Zásady pro vypracování:

**Shromáždění odborných materiálů k feministické literární kritice, tématu feminizmu
a autorovi V. Nabokovovi**
Nastudování románu Lolita a odpovídajících sekundárních zdrojů k tomuto románu
Formulace cílů práce dle získaných informací z odborných sekundárních zdrojů
Analýza románu Lolita v kontextu s tématem bakalářské práce
Vyvození a formulace závěrů práce

Rozsah bakalářské práce:

Rozsah příloh:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Seznam odborné literatury:

Dicker, Rory, and Alison Piepmeier. *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003.

Herbold, Sarah. "Dolores Disparue: Reading Misogyny in Lolita." New York: MLA, 2008.

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Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita*. New York: Random House, 1997.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

Mgr. Vladimíra Fonfárová

Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Datum zadání bakalářské práce:

28. listopadu 2014

Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce:

7. května 2015

Ve Zlíně dne 6. ledna 2015


doc. Ing. Anežka Lengalová, Ph.D.
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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá románem Lolita od Vladimíra Nabokova z pohledu feministické kritiky. Cílem práce je zhodnotit, zda se postava Humberta Humberta v románu Lolita projevuje jako postava feministická nebo antifeministická. Z tohoto důvodu se první část bakalářské práce věnuje nastínění problematiky feminismu a feministické literární kritiky. Poslední, ale neméně důležitou kapitolou je samotná analýza Nabokovova románu Lolita, která díky analýze jazyka, jímž se Humbert Humbert projevuje, prokázala, že postava Humberta Humberta manipuluje s ženskými postavami, tudíž se odklání od feminismu.

Klíčová slova:

Nabokov, Lolita, Humbert Humbert, Manipulace, Feminismus, Literární kritika, Muži, Ženy.

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis focuses on Vladimir Nabokov's novel Lolita, which is examined from the perspective of feminist criticism. The main aim of this thesis is to valorize whether Humbert Humbert behaves as a feminist or anti-feminist character. To enable such valorization, the first part of the thesis concentrates on the problematic of feminism and feminist literary criticism. The last but not least, an analysis examining Humbert Humbert's language manners is contained. The analysis proved that Humbert Humbert as the main character manipulates with female characters, which means he is an anti-feminist character.

Keywords:

Nabokov, Lolita, Humbert Humbert, Manipulation, Feminism, Literary Criticism, Men, Women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I take this opportunity to express many thanks to my advisor Mgr. Vladimíra Fonfárová for providing me with incredible guidance, help and support. I also thank my mother for encouragement and attention. Lastly, I am grateful to my partner who made me stop writing when necessary, which was the most beneficial help in times Lolita was just too much.

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INTRODUCTION

This bachelor's thesis focuses on elements of feminism in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. As there are multiple themes in the book, which influence one another, an overall analysis is carried out. This thesis discusses semiotic meanings in connection to verbal expressions of the novel's characters. In the theoretical part of this thesis, a brief history of feminism is included and feminist literary criticism is mentioned. The beginning of feminism is mentioned and some of the most significant authors, who contributed to the boom of feminism, are pointed out.

After an introduction to the history of feminism, this thesis also discusses the topic of feminist literary criticism, which is crucial for the practical part of this thesis concerning the analysis of Nabokov's *Lolita*. This chapter also comprises several techniques examining literary works. The technique, which will later be used to analyze *Lolita*, will be chosen out of mentioned techniques.

Concerning the practical part of this bachelor's thesis, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* will be analysed in order to determine whether the character of Humbert Humbert is portrayed as a feminist or anti-feminist character. The third chapter will examine the relationship between Humbert Humbert and the women in his life and scrutinize his behavior towards them. Furthermore the analysis of selected male and female characters will be carried out. More precisely, the author of this thesis will examine, how both genders are portrayed in the book and what are their opinions on the other gender based on references they make and the way they treat each other. This bachelor's thesis as such should provide its readers with a brief overview of feminism, feminist literary criticism, and the evidence undermining or supporting Humbert Humbert's inclination to or deflection from feminism and feminist universal truths.

1 THE HISTORY OF FEMINISM

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary feminism is defined as a belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities.¹ This is just one of many definitions, although most of them are similar. This might be understood as a very simple definition, but the whole issue is very complex and complicated.

It is believed that the roots of feminism originated in eighteenth century: sometime when French revolution took place and American settlements fought for independence. It is said that thanks to people's preferences started to change, also their perception of men's and women's role started to alter. It is probably not hard to imagine what changes must have the people gone through in the war or in a revolution. People's traditional values shifted a lot, some of them faded away and also some new ones may have appeared. Subsequently, in eighteenth century letters, declarations and proposals regarding women's rights and possible equality between men and women were written. It was Olympe de Gouges in France or Mary Wollstonecraft in England who were suggesting that women are given social roles and their inferior position was created artificially. In those documents, women's freedom, importance and/or unimportance were discussed. Women were perceived as housewives and often simple creatures that are in this world to comfort men.²

Nevertheless the whole concept of feminism denies such division of roles. As Susan Moller Okin pointed out, Plato asserted that "the female sex was created from the souls of the most wicked and irrational men."³ According to Michal Peprník, the society of present day discusses and debates innumerable ideologies and approaches to the equality of men and women, but still it is believed that contemporary society is patriarchal, which means men remain the ones that are stronger, braver and more powerful.⁴ Lynda Lange is in agreement with Peprník's claim as she suggests that "the man controls or governs his own behavior with the use of reason; the woman merely restrains hers."⁵ Peprník also suggests

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Feminism," Merriam-Webster, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism> (accessed January 28, 2015).

² See Barbora Osvaldová, *Česká média a feminismus* (Praha: Libri/Slon, 2004), 17-18. The work is hereafter referred to as Osvaldová.

³ Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carol Pateman, *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 11. The work is hereafter referred to as Shanley.

⁴ See Michal Peprník, *Směry literární interpretace XX. století* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2004), 213. The work is here after referred to as Peprník.

⁵ Shanley, 97.

that concerning literature, three types are often distinguished: feminine, feminist and female.⁶

In the beginning of twentieth century, a Czech feminist and senator Františka Plamínková claimed that the main parts of emancipation movement are efforts for limitless education for women, unlimited access to each and every job position without stating which sex is perfectly suitable for the position, political freedom for men and women, which is also connected with the right to vote, and finally efforts to create family equality and the independence regarding parental power. Moving onto another continent, while the United States of America were still in the process of forming themselves, Thomas Jefferson was asked a question about women's right to vote and he replied in a way that did not give people the impression that he agrees with the equality between the two sexes. And it is said to be the American continent, where emancipation was the fastest and the strongest.⁷ Ann Rosalind Jones agrees with American feminists being activist in politics, too. As she argues in *Changing Subjects* (1993), most feminists "began with direct political experience in consciousness-raising groups and on-the-street activism."⁸

According to Renzetti, most American books and journals about feminism claimed that the only goal women tried to accomplish through feminist movements was to gain the right to vote. That was supposed to be the reason why most people in nineteenth century confused feminists with suffragettes. The difference is that suffragettes fought only for women's rights to vote, whereas feminists strived for equalizing women's and men's rights in every meaning.⁹

Renzetti also claims that women were often left out of creating history, because only men were able to decide what is important and what is not and all in all – how to perceive history itself. And those women, who resisted those opinions, were deprived of the right to know. This problematic is connected with above mentioned education. Even if those resisting women kept their protests secret and finished their education somehow, they would probably had trouble with getting a job, because women were still withheld from

⁶ See Peprník, 214.

⁷ See Osvaldová, 18-21.

⁸ Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn, *Changing Subjects: The Making of Feminist Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 64. The work is hereafter referred to as Greene.

⁹ See Claire M. Renzetti and Daniel J. Curran, *Ženy, muži a společnost* (Praha: Karolinum, 2003), 36. The book is hereafter referred to as Renzetti.

many professions. As women were often refused at many factories, shops or offices, not many possibilities for work were left for them. As most of them did not want to do housework, they began participating in philanthropic activities. Those were represented by a large amount of charities, which were very popular mainly in the North of the United States, as a historian Lois Banner claimed. As those charities served mostly to help African-Americans, European immigrants, poor people and laborers, those supported requirements for women's equality to men thanks to the similarity of their inequality as for example those African-Americans were very often deprived of their rights, too.¹⁰

There were many differences between the requirements of women from higher classes that those of women from lower and working class. Higher classes women demanded their rights to be provided with the right to be able to acquire prestige jobs and equality to men, whereas women from working class rather fought for protection. Poor women were often forced to accept jobs that were very far from their homes so that they could help their husbands feed their children and contribute to management of their houses. It was common that those women worked for low wages in overcrowded, dirty and safety defective factories.¹¹

Throughout the history, there were many conferences that were held in order to accomplish sexual equality. The most significant ones took place in twentieth century. Many of them took place mainly to support women's right to receive adequate education and employment, but the requirement for women's right to vote was prime. During these conferences, feminists tried to prove that achieving equality between women and men can be done by being involved in political and economic decision making. Women were omitted not only from the right to vote; there were many other cases. Most of them were legal in nature, such as writing their last will or decision making concerning a woman's property or litigation. It is said that thanks to the Cold War there were tensions in worldwide politics, which gave an opportunity to women and their participation in politics. Thanks to that fact, women withdrew from their protests.¹²

The right to vote was not given to women immediately. It was rather a process, which was enriched by the states of America – one by one. This process took many years

¹⁰ See Renzetti, 37.

¹¹ See Renzetti, 37.

¹² See Renzetti, 38-39.

even after President Woodrow Wilson's decision that women can participate in politics by voting. Finally, in 1919 and thanks to the nineteenth amendment, women were enabled to vote by words:¹³ "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."¹⁴

Furthermore feminists were trying to be involved in economic decision making, which is closely connected with women participating in jobs in factories, shops, etc. According to Barbora Osvaldová, women were considered as human beings predestined to stay in households, take care of children and look after their husbands. As a result most women started to feel imprisoned in their homes, trapped inside and far away from society and events. Clearly women could not perceive technologies or devices, whereas most men could meet both technologies and machinery almost every day thanks to their work or simply because of being present in the social life. Not only women might have felt omitted and lonely - if their husband died, those women might never be able to lead a normal life, because they might be even forgotten by the society. Not only women perceived their position in the society as inferior. Some men also thought so - among others, John Stuart Mill, who fought for women's rights. Mill stated that he can compare women's position to the position of slaves and servants. Although feminists were promised to be discussed on many political programs, it did not happen. That was the reason for a great feminist demonstration in Great Britain in 1902. Although British feminists fought much longer for their rights than most of the other countries, women were stated equal to men in 1928 in Great Britain.¹⁵

Most people perceived feminism in a very different way after World War II. It is said that in countries anyhow influenced by this event, feminism was stopped for a moment. The whole world has been shocked by the sadness of such an event and it took decades to install previous passion for feminist movements and efforts. After the trauma faded away, feminist actions and events started to appear again. After World War II, there were many activists, but usually only two of them are considered essential – Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf. Virginia Woolf was an author of a great amount of writings, out of which few were aimed to support feminist opinions and ideas. Woolf discussed

¹³ See Osvaldová, 21.

¹⁴ U. S. Constitution, amend. 19.

¹⁵ See Osvaldová, 19-22.

feminism connected with literature, more precisely how one can become an author while being a woman with almost no chance to gain a job to pay for writing expenses. Moreover, if women earned some money, they were not allowed to own them, anyway. It is said that Virginia Woolf had such a passion for endeavoring equality between men and women thanks to an accident in a library, when a librarian did not let her enter to see some documents because of her sex. At that time, women were only let to the library accompanied by a professor. Woolf was paralyzed by such behavior and she is said to have become such a passionate activist thanks to the library incident. According to Osvaldová, another appalled author was Simone de Beauvoir. After World War II De Beauvoir published a book called *The Second Sex* (1949), which was not accepted very well by the society at that time. It was thanks to irritating and excitable characteristics, which did not fit to the society.¹⁶ De Beauvoir claims that the world has always been in the hands of men.¹⁷ Men decided about the lives of women and claimed that it is for women's good. Moreover men were believed to allege that a woman's success is in contradiction to her femininity and that women are required to be an object.¹⁸

Thanks to her researches, Osvaldová found out that women were almost tortured by constant housework, because they felt they do not contribute to the society's benefits. Women were believed to feel useless thanks to public sentiment that a woman's existence does not belong to her, but to her husband. And thanks to the fact women were supposed to stay at home and take care of the household and children; if any mistake or trouble occurred in the marriage, it was the woman's fault and she carried a burden of a failed marriage and/or motherhood.¹⁹

Another significant author to this problematic was Betty Friedan, a psychologist, journalist and Harvard and Yale lecturer, who founded National Organization for Women. Friedan had a peculiar name for the feminist troubles: 'problem without a name.'²⁰ It was probably because of the people's eyes, that would turn away from most women's internal sorrow of being classified and marked with certain social roles; and it was believed that

¹⁶ See Osvaldová, 33.

¹⁷ See Simone De Beauvoir, *Druhé pohlaví* (Praha: Orbis, 1966), 27. The work is hereafter referred to as De Beauvoir.

¹⁸ See Osvaldová, 33.

¹⁹ See Osvaldová, 33.

²⁰ See Osvaldová, 34-35.

mostly men did that: “Many party members, men especially, took culturally conservative positions on the role of women, seeing them as sentimental mothers rather than as people fully capable of intellectual and political activity.”²¹ Lisa Condé contemplates on this topic as she talks about certain roles for women created by the society as intention of “subduing and moulding women to suit their own and society’s purposes.”²² Gayle Green also contributed to this topic in *Changing Subjects*, as she commented on women as being “socialized to subservience – being dutiful daughters, dancing attendance on men, putting the needs of husbands, lovers, and children first.”²³

Betty Friedan is believed to be the founder of modern feminism, who based her researches on her own experience. Thanks to the fact she was a typical mother in 1950’s in America, she experienced exploitation besides a huge amount of other mothers and wives. Friedan began researches and investigation and after she quit postgraduate studies, she became a reporter for communist secret service.²⁴ She was a feminist author claiming that women were assigned with certain social roles and in case they refused to have children and instead decided to build up their career, they were seen as intelligent and ambitious women making almost the same amount of money as their husbands; nevertheless Friedan claimed that they were perceived as frustrated human beings thanks to their career. Moreover, those women were (according to Friedan) said to be too masculine and causing their husbands to seem impotent.²⁵

Friedan’s work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is believed to have changed not only the lives of women in 1950’s and 1960’s, but also the author’s herself. Peprník stated that Friedan’s book completely destroyed the fabricated routine that women are totally satisfied by raising children, taking care of a household and living in a harmonic environment.²⁶ Thanks to this book, the problematic of feminism has reached books and lectures of many American universities and has been broadly discussed.²⁷ The feminist topic also became an

²¹ Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 131.

²² Lisa P. Condé and Stephen M. Hart, *Feminist Readings on Spanish and Latin-American Literature* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 18. The work is hereafter referred to as Condé.

²³ Greene, 11.

²⁴ See Henry Makow, *Nemilosrdná lež: Feminismus a nový světový řád* (Žďár nad Sázavou: Bodyart Press, s. r. o., 2013), 27.

²⁵ Betty Friedan, *Feminine Mystique* (Praha: Pragma, 2002), 106.

²⁶ See Peprník, 215.

²⁷ See Osvaldová, 35.

interest of most of the public debate, which is also closely related to birth of many magazines that discussed feminism and the whole women-vs-men struggle, for instance *Female Studies*, *Women Studies Newsletter*, *Women Studies Quarterly* and *Feminist Studies*.²⁸ As a consequence of those facts, many reassessments of women motherhood came in 1980's. The debates were supported by Chodorow and Dinnerstein, who were trying to break the stereotypes concerning a social model in which women are responsible for raising children alone. Both of them claimed that neither women nor men are secondary or inferior to the other sex and that parenthood should be done by both sexes equally.²⁹

Speaking of destroying – Mary Ellmann's work *Thinking about Women* (1970) focuses on literary typology of women and expands on Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). Ellmann borrowed Fiedler's basis and revealed stereotyped mythology that was supposed to form women throughout the history. According to Ellmann, females were unknowingly shaped by mythological characteristics such as passivity, dullness, irrationality and tractability.³⁰ Lynda Lange conforms to Ellmann's claim: in *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* (1991) Lange takes account of the man being "thought to display his human potential for rationality,"³¹ which might give critics/readers an idea of women being thought of as the opposite: irrational.

Either Eisler's work called *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1988) or Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) agree with the opinions and universal truths of anthropological and cultural feminism stage. Most feminists from this stage were focused on regaining consciousness of a woman essentially. They strived for specifying women's characteristics and strengthening women's facilities to be equal to men.³²

Besides others, Millett discussed religious aspects laid upon the division of social roles in patriarchal families. In her work *Sexual Politics* she stated that the stability of a patriarchal family relied on the ability of the family "to divide its members by hierarchical roles and maintain them in such through innumerable forms of coercion – social, religious,"³³ which might have strengthened and possibly also caused the role women were

²⁸ See Peprník, 215.

²⁹ See Osvaldová, 35-36.

³⁰ See Peprník, 215.

³¹ Shanley, 97.

³² See Osvaldová, 36-37.

³³ Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Illionois: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 124. The work is hereafter referred to as Millet.

assigned with in past. Millett believed that the most probable reason, why women were downgraded step by step during centuries, was that they were mostly omitted from patriarchal religion and religious education and men became worshipping God or Gods not taking into consideration female goddesses, who were demoted, discredited or eliminated completely. As a consequence, there came into origin a theology “whose basic postulates are male supremacists.”³⁴

Religious omission is believed to be just one of many according to Barbora Osvaldová. She agrees with Millett, expands on the topic and claims that women were also omitted from the fields of sociology, political sciences, philosophy, history, linguistics and literature. Thanks to the fact, women were trying to change the construction of these scientific fields and to show female presence. They tried to do so on the basis of a statement that those sciences were investigated by humans, but only a man was considered a human being.³⁵ Melveena McKendrick claims in *Feminist Readings on Spanish and Latin-American Literature* (1991) that renaissance theologians “felt it necessary to ask themselves whether women really were human beings and whether they too were created in the image of God.”³⁶ Jo Labanyi comments on consideration of women’s being on the basis of their resilience and after analysis of literary texts he points out that “regardless of whether she breaks free or succumbs to restraint, she is still ‘nothing.’”³⁷

Unfortunately World War II came and even though feminists were believed to try hard, their aims were perceived in a different way than they were meant. In socialist society feminism was perceived as just another try for emancipation and a fight against class differences. Furthermore, after the circumstances of February in 1948, many feminists and women’s movement activists were imprisoned, persecuted or executed. Not only these events did not prevent most feminists and activists from striving for their aims, it is believed to make them even stronger and more aggressive – torture of feminists gave rise to Czechoslovak Women’s Union.³⁸ In a few years, women were enabled to acquire proper education and employment, unfortunately social discrimination was still present. By the end of the twentieth century, women slowly accomplished equality to men, although it is

³⁴ Millett, 28.

³⁵ See Osvaldová, 37.

³⁶ Condé, 1.

³⁷ Condé, 37.

³⁸ See Osvaldová, 39.

probably still not unconditional,³⁹ as also Stephen M. Hart claims in *Feminist Readings on Spanish and Latin-American Literature*: “Even nowadays the work of women writers seems to be less worthy of academic scrutiny than the work of male writers.”⁴⁰ De Beauvoir also expressed a certain agreement with Hart’s claim. In *The Second Sex* De Beauvoir states that the situation of women remained without changes.⁴¹

³⁹ See Osvaldová, 39.

⁴⁰ Condé, 92.

⁴¹ See De Beauvoir, 319.

2 FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

As literature is believed to be a means of strong emotional effects, it may have heavy influence on an individual. Literary works may enrich people by a closer look into the past and therefore they can see how unequally and unfairly women were treated and how society disadvantages women. If containing positive feminine qualities, literature may be used as a means of support and motivation for women. On the other hand, negatively depicted women in literature may degrade women and ridicule them.⁴²

Such a passive depiction of women might be observed even in distant history. Switching to religion, according to Morris' interpretation of Simone de Beauvoir's words evaluating John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), Adam is depicted as a human being created for thinking and bravery, however Eve is presented as a passive person who is supposed to serve Adam's needs. Morris also claims that the references to Adam's big forehead and pride motivate readers to think of Adam as a spiritually and intellectually strong individual, whereas references about Eve's appearance reject both spiritual maturity and intellect.⁴³

Most of the main and important feminist literary criticism styles originated in 1970's. There are several ideological and methodological differences between those styles. The older ones are dealing with a woman's position in the society and her social role as a mother and a wife, which was mostly depicted as enslaving and binding, preventing the woman from social interaction and self-realization.⁴⁴

Those beliefs supported the idea of an ideal woman created by feminists: a woman, that is successful and equal to a man, also looks like a man and behaves like a man. This would be an idea of women dressed in pants and suits; adopting men's characteristics including those men are stereotypically labeled with: aggressiveness, rudeness, unreliability and thoughtlessness.⁴⁵ This was the then feminists' idea of an independent woman: a man in pants with a woman's body in it.

After a long time of praising and acknowledging mainly male literature, a slow turn came in 1980's, when Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar wrote *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). Thanks to its revelatory psychoanalytic attitude, the work acquired its readers

⁴² See Pam Morris, *Literatura a Feminismus* (Brno: Host, 2000), 17. The work is hereafter referred to as Morris.

⁴³ See Morris, 33-34.

⁴⁴ See Peprník, 218.

⁴⁵ See Peprník, 218.

quickly. The newer feminists had a more positive idea of women equal to men. They wanted to build on utopian thoughts and projects of older authors. Although they fought for the same – women’s equality to men – those newer feminists differ fully from the older ones. They abandoned the idea of women behaving and looking like men and had a whole new idea: they wanted to create differentness and their own feminineness, something idiosyncratic for women, something that would define them and distinguish women from men once and for all.⁴⁶

One of the most significant feminist literary critics is H el ene Cixous, a famous French feminist, philosopher, literary critic and writer. As Ann Rosalind Jones described, French feminists criticized masculine power and “focused on the centrality of the phallus in culture and language,”⁴⁷ and Cixous was one of them, although Cixous’ works on feminist literary criticism were more complex, as Stephen M. Hart describes Cixous’ work as turning “the knowledge of psychoanalysis on its head, starting from the basic supposition that a ‘feminine language’ of necessity exists.”⁴⁸ As Hart stated after examining Cixous’ works, she insists that women must write their own literature and must not subjugate themselves to the “language of the father.”⁴⁹

In her book focusing on (Afro-American) feminist literary criticism, Karla Kovalov a focused also on Elaine Showalter. According to what Kovalov a observed, Showalter claimed that most of theorists use the feminist language to compete with women⁵⁰ - in other words to demonstrate their supremacy - instead of examining their masculine bias.⁵¹ Kovalov a pointed out that this undercurrent is rather popular with male theorists according to Showalter; and that the undercurrent is connected with today’s trend of using female characters as heroines in literature, although those heroines tend to have male characteristics.⁵² This principle is considered to have been applied also on female feminists, as Gayle Greene mentioned that post feminists were “disaffected with

⁴⁶ See Peprn ik, 216.

⁴⁷ Greene, 73.

⁴⁸ Cond e, 94.

⁴⁹ Cond e, 95.

⁵⁰ See Karla Kovalov a, * erno sk a Feministick a Liter rn  Kritika: V bor z Teoretick ch Stat  Afroamerick ch Kriti ek* (Praha: SLON, 2014), 284. The work is hereafter referred to as Kovalov a.

⁵¹ See Kovalov a, 284.

⁵² See Kovalov a, 284.

feminism”⁵³ as they felt that feminists were seen “as man-hating, masculine, lesbian, militant and hairy-legged.”⁵⁴ Again it is seen that some of typical male characteristics were applied on females, or at least it was perceived by females that male characteristics were applied on them.

Jean Andrews was one of the people investigating Cixous’ work. He claims that Cixous stated that a “woman has always been identified with passivity,”⁵⁵ which “is true in phallo-logocentric philosophy and therefore in literature, which she [Cixous] believes is based on patriarchal philosophy.”⁵⁶ Peprník stated that Cixous was influenced by Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction and Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalysis. Cixous was supposed to focus on the language of literary works and to analyze strategies of discriminatory prejudice in language. According to Peprník, Cixous was also trying to discourage authors from phallogocentric⁵⁷ language.⁵⁸ Abigail Lee Six also focused on language in literature. Six claimed that feminist theorists seem “to accept that language is fundamentally male-oriented,”⁵⁹ and that this affects women somehow.⁶⁰

According to Cixous’ feminist literary criticism, men are defined by the forming of either their activity or passivity. It is said to be the men’s privilege, which is defined by the sexual differentiation given a long time ago by the philosophic discourses. These philosophic discourses are also believed to determine that women are given by passivity. According to Peprník, Cixous thought that when people are researching a family structure and trying to find an authority, it most probably leads them to a man – a father; and after stating the standard, stereotyped social roles, there is no position left for a woman.⁶¹

Jean Andrews was also continuing in this theory. In literature, he was trying to find out what typical features are usually assigned to men and which ones to women. He describes women as being desirable to men⁶² and being able to be breached.⁶³ On the other

⁵³ Greene, 12.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁵ Condé, 32.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 32.

⁵⁷ Phallogocentric originated in Latin “*phallus*”, penis. Phallogocentric means ‘*emphasizing the masculine viewpoint,*’ according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

⁵⁸ See Peprník, 216.

⁵⁹ Condé, 81.

⁶⁰ Condé, 81.

⁶¹ See Peprník, 221.

⁶² Condé, 28.

⁶³ Ibid, 28.

hand, Andrews found out that there are certain qualities needed for masculine survival: “virility, patriarchy, strength, pride, indomitability.”⁶⁴ Again, there is a certain patriarchal attitude, which means that for men’s survival, patriarchy is considered needed.

In compliance with Cixous, after a look into the history, men are luminary; men are the target of magnifying glass. When either authors or readers were looking for suffering or misery, men were the ones who were there to perform in most cases. And again, readers are led to phallogentrism – according to Peprník, literature has such strong phallogentric foundations as philosophic. Michal Peprník also claims that the need for revelation of relation or dissent between logocentric and phallogentric system is insistent in order to reveal the truth and the facts that women were destined to death accompanied with their social status. Phallogentrism is believed to provide a rational basis for masculine superiority and dominance.⁶⁵

Toril Moi was also an author doing research on Cixous’ works. In *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985), she states that Cixous refused the label ‘feminism’ as she was in disagreement with the idea of women demanding “to obtain power in the present patriarchal system.”⁶⁶ According to Moi, Cixous labeled some feminists as “caught up in the oppressive network of hierarchical binary oppositions propagated by patriarchal ideology.”⁶⁷

Cixous also created a patriarchal binary system. This system is based on Cixous’ perceptions and analyses of women and men in texts; and is developed into a list of opposites that are supposed to be assigned to either women or men. Moi was examining and evaluating Cixous’ binary system and found out that (according to her perception) the system “can be analyzed as a hierarchy where the ‘feminine’ side is always seen as the negative, powerless instance.”⁶⁸ As it was described in the previous chapter, also in Cixous’ binary system women are assigned with passivity, nature, emotions and being sensitive and having a typical role of a mother, whereas men are perceived as active, cultural, rational, and intelligible and having a role of a father.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Condé, 29.

⁶⁵ See Peprník, 221.

⁶⁶ Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1991), 103. The work is hereafter referred to as Moi.

⁶⁷ Moi, 103.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 104.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 104.

Equally important offset of feminist literary criticism is Marxist-feminist group, whose members performed an authorial experiment, when they gave up their credits for their own works and either adopted masculine name or remained anonymous while presenting their work as a team-work. Peprník claims that those authors represent American feminism, whose constituents strived for creation of a community based on solidarity and cooperation rather than competition and rivalry.⁷⁰

The Marxist-feminist offset is closely related to gender criticism. This field of science is focused on a different judgment that is performed on either women or men. Many authors preferred to adopt masculine names in order to receive criticism that would not be based on their sex; in order to accomplish a more rightful evaluation and appreciation. Such as Charlotte Bronte, who adopted the name of Currer Bell⁷¹ or Joanne Kathleen Rowling, who used pseudonym Robert Galbraith for many years.⁷²

According to bourgeois feminist literary criticism, women were perceived as creatures accompanied by simply romantic feminine naturalness. Thanks to women's monthly bleeding, society was convinced that women exist only to perform their carnal duties and that they are victims of their own instincts and desires of nature. Women were believed to be intuitive, which made them even more inferior thanks to the fact that intuition was an attribute of – besides women - children and fools.⁷³

In this bachelor's thesis Cixous' language analysis will be applied when exploring the character of Humbert Humbert. As his character's use of language has been analyzed and evaluated rather as worth investigation, it is probable that Humbert's character might be analyzed in terms of feminist/anti-feminist language on the basis of his use of language and linguistic perceptions. Moreover, typical female and male characteristics pointed out by Cixous will be taken into account when doing the research of characters in *Lolita*, and the afore-mentioned typical social roles women are/were assigned with will be assigned also to the female characters, if it is possible after the analysis of the text.

⁷⁰ Peprník, 226-227.

⁷¹ Ibid, 226.

⁷² J. K. Rowling. "Biography." J. K. Rowling. http://www.jkrowling.com/en_US/#/about-jk-rowling.

3 ANALYSIS OF LOLITA ACCORDING TO FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

According to the method of close reading, the writer of this thesis is going to examine whether the character of Humbert Humbert might be perceived as a feminist or anti-feminist character and whether he manipulated with selected female characters. Thanks to the analysis of Humbert Humbert's language the writer of this thesis is going to specify whether Humbert Humbert might be a character whose treatment of and references to female characters might signal an inclination to or deflection from feminist opinions and truths. In the end, this thesis will state whether Humbert Humbert is a feminist character or not.

Nabokov's *Lolita* has been studied by several authors, who are going to be mentioned in this thesis. One of those authors was Sarah Herbold, who discussed in her PhD. dissertation that novels played various roles in modern culture in a way that women's social roles could have been modified by literature. Herbold also argued that novels helped create "a complex modern subject by exploiting the duplicitous cultural discourse of feminine sexuality,"⁷⁴ which is also part of *Lolita*, a controversial novel written by Vladimir Nabokov.

Chauvinism is thought to be the opposite of feminism.⁷⁵ As it has already been mentioned in the theoretical part of this bachelor's thesis, the thought of a woman owned by a man might be a part of the whole problematic of chauvinism/anti-feminism. Thanks to various pieces of evidence from *Lolita*, e. g. "and she was mine, she was mine, the key was in my fist, my fist was in my pocket, she was mine,"⁷⁶ it is probable that Humbert can be perceived as a chauvinist or anti-feminist character. The writer of this thesis perceives afore-mentioned quote from *Lolita* as Humbert's constant pursuit of gaining Dolores for his own purpose and also as one of many Humbert's utterances showing his will and need to possess and manipulate with Dolores.

⁷³ Peprník, 226-227.

⁷⁴ Sarah Herbold, "Woman as Symptom of Modernity," abstract.

⁷⁵ Thesaurus, "Anti-Feminist," Thesaurus, <http://www.thesaurus.com/browse/anti-feminist> (accessed March 4, 2015).

⁷⁶ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 125. The work is hereafter referred to as *Lolita*.

As Sarah Herbold stated in another work of hers, feminist critics observed that *Lolita* stimulated people and their eyes towards the misogyny that might be observed from the novel. Herbold also stated that the misogyny “takes the form of anathematizing adult women and turning the sexual exploitation of pubescent girls into a joke – or a romance.”⁷⁷ It most probably depends on the readers themselves and also on the critics that are acquainted and in many cases also trained to find those ambiguous indications in the text and to work with them. And as *Lolita* is considered to be well-written in an ambiguous way by the critics and maybe also some parts of the wide public, it might indeed indicate that Humbert Humbert was a chauvinist character, whose manipulation with other characters can be observed from the text.

Although the main aim of this thesis is not to examine pornographic hints and facts about Vladimir Nabokov’s novel, this topic is closely related to the feminist and chauvinist problematic. In order to prove this claim, Herbold used known facts about the novel and found out that as pornography drags the attention of most men, it empowers them “through the medium of a victimized female body, so Humbert seeks to entrap and dominate a victimized Lolita.”⁷⁸ Humbert’s treatment of Dolores can be perceived as showing how meaningless and powerless female characters are and therefore Humbert Humbert can be interpreted as a chauvinist character. It might be also perceivable from the text that Humbert constantly commands women to do certain things and that he manipulates many characters, most often female ones.

The probability of Humbert being perceived as an anti-feminist character might be visible. As it has been mentioned in the previous chapters, feminist were, besides others, striving for men’s treating of women and not judging them according to their appearance. Throughout the book, Humbert proves himself an anti-feminist thanks to his constant judging and evaluating of women’s looks. The evaluations could be seen in many parts of the text, as Humbert’s character was measuring and describing women’s appearance very often. There are probably not many women in *Lolita*, whose appearance Humbert has not mentioned – the author of this thesis might find a full abundance of attributes and women’s characteristics evaluating most of the women who were somehow captioned by Humbert’s

⁷⁷ Sarah Herbold, "DolorésDisparue: Reading Misogyny in Lolita" (New York: MLA, 2008), 1. The work is hereafter referred to as Disparue.

⁷⁸ Disparue, 1.

eye. As an example in the beginning there is a thorough description of Annabel's external appearance. Not only he commented on her hair, skin, body, hands etc., he also pointed out some details of Annabel's looks most people's eyes probably would not even recognize – “her hand, half-hidden in the sand,”⁷⁹ “its slender brown fingers sleepwalking nearer and nearer,”⁸⁰ or “then, her opalescent knee.”⁸¹ Those words are examples of evaluating and measuring women's looks the author of this thesis might probably consider as anti-feminist.

Although Annabel was dead for a few years, Humbert kept mentioning her in the development of the book. He refers to her as “my dead bride”⁸², which might be considered as an attempt to create a vision he possesses Annabel and that even though she is not alive anymore, she is still his love and property. It is possible to interpret the phrase ‘my dead bride’ as an expression of long-lasting love; some might agree with the writer of this thesis that it may give an impression of Humbert trying to persuade himself that Annabel belonged to him and that he is still superior to her as she appertains to him.

Another female character that has been ostentatiously measured according to her appearance was Monique. Monique was a prostitute, whom Humbert found attractive because of her young looks, and who occasionally served for Humbert's sexual needs. As Humbert considered her as a possible sex partner, the evaluation of her looks might be understandable. Monique was Humbert's getaway from the reality in which he was not allowed to have sex with such young ladies. For a certain period, Monique served Humbert as satisfaction, and although he treated her with respect, one would say, still he was using her and was also aware of the fact she was providing men with her body for money. Furthermore, Humbert did not converse with Monique in an intellectual sense; their conversation might be considered a small talk. Humbert did not treat her like a human being; he used only her body, which supports the claim he is an anti-feminist character.

Monique's (as well as others') so-called profession has been commented by Georg Simmel, whose work “On Prostitution” Herbold commented: “Simmel argues that

⁷⁹ Lolita, 12.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 12.

⁸¹ Ibid, 12.

⁸² Ibid, 39.

prostitution represents the ultimate capitalist degradation of humanity.”⁸³ Although Humbert did not mention any innuendoes about Monique’s job, the writer of this thesis might take into consideration the additional allowance Humbert gave her after she has done her job. This Humbert’s behavior could be perceived either as a matter of satisfaction, but in the author of this thesis’s eyes it might more likely appear as a sign of chauvinism in the sense of providing Monique with money, because she needs it and he, as a man, can afford it – that means the writer of this thesis might perceive such a behavior as a manifestation of mercy upon a poor little girl.

As Humbert decided to settle down in order to look as a decent gentleman, he married a lady called Valeria. When Humbert met Valeria, he remarked: “What really attracted me to Valeria was the imitation she gave of a little girl.”⁸⁴ As the reason of such a statement, Humbert continues: “She looked fluffy and frolicsome, dressed *à la gamine*, showed a generous amount of smooth leg,”⁸⁵ and finishes with “and shook her short curly blond hair in the cutest and tritest fashion imaginable.”⁸⁶ As many other evaluations and descriptions of Valeria – either positive or negative - continue in the book, Humbert might be interpreted a chauvinist character. Concerning the reason he married Valeria: most likely she was supposed to provide Humbert with an image of a decent man and husband, and also, she was potentially a subject of his unfulfilled sexual needs that longed for young girls.

Not only being aware of such a misuse of a woman, Humbert continued to traduce Valeria in the course of their marriage. In a few cases, he stressed Valeria was corpulent and he even called her “my fat Valeria.”⁸⁷ Humbert also confirmed premonitions made by the writer of this thesis that Humbert indeed married Valeria in order to somehow simulate she is a much younger woman: “I had kept noticing that my fat Valeria was not her usual self; had acquired a queer restlessness; even showed something like irritation at times, which was quite out of keeping with the stock character she was supposed to impersonate.”⁸⁸ And this quote also gives the author an idea of Valeria serving Humbert’s

⁸³ Sarah Herbold, "Woman as Symptom of Modernity" (PhD diss., Berkeley University, 1998), 4. The work is hereafter referred to as Symptom.

⁸⁴ Lolita, 25.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 25-26.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 26.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 27.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 27.

purposes. Logically, as Humbert uses the phrase ‘she was supposed to impersonate,’ it gives the author the impression of Humbert’s longing or need of having a submissive and docile woman - Valeria in this case. Furthermore, Humbert mentions ‘irritation,’ which he does not like, almost like he desired a flawless woman rather than a human being.

Moreover, after Valeria informed Humbert she has been seeing another man, Humbert was strongly annoyed. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Humbert is perceived as a character with the need of having a submissive woman. As soon as he found out about Valeria not being a submissive woman, Humbert became angry and therefore violent words and hints can be observed in the text. He mentioned the desire “to beat her up in the streets,”⁸⁹ which appears to serve as a longing to regain the power by emphasizing his physical abilities and moderation or deletion of Valeria’s existence. Thanks to this quote, the author perceives Humbert as a violent chauvinist. Moreover, a few sentences later, Humbert comments on Valeria’s announcement of another man she is in love with as “her wild talk”⁹⁰ and the words might also be understood as another attempt to ridicule Valeria, as far as the term ‘wild talk’ may be perceived as if talking about someone foolish and unreasonable.

Later, Humbert did not stop mocking Valeria and addressing her with indiscreet attributes. He comments on her as a “figure of fun”⁹¹ and “comedy wife”⁹² and in the following few sentences he also confesses that he has hit her into her knee, which would be most definitely noticed as a means of expressing Humbert’s domination over Valeria thanks to violent characteristics of the situation. Although for the author of this thesis Humbert’s behavior might be understandable due to the consequences of his wife’s unfaithfulness and one might say most people would behave the same way; therefore this thesis assumes this behavior was not an example of anti-feminism.

Not only Humbert ridiculed Valeria, he mocked also Valeria’s partner. His name cannot be found in the book for Humbert insists he does not remember “his ridiculous name.”⁹³ Humbert mocks Valeria’s new lover because of his job as he was a taxi driver, which can be considered meaningless job according to Humbert’s judgment. Moreover, not

⁸⁹ Lolita, 27.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 27.

⁹¹ Ibid, 28.

⁹² Ibid, 28.

⁹³ Ibid, 28.

only Humbert measured and evaluated women's looks, he also hideously commented on the taxi driver's – Valeria's new lover's – looks, e. g. "thick neck."⁹⁴ Besides, Humbert did not evaluate only Valeria's "stolid lover's"⁹⁵ looks, he also made remarks about the imperfection of his French ("with an atrocious accent to his careful French"⁹⁶), as he was most definitely not born in France, but rather in a Slavic country for Humbert mentioned Valeria spoke Slavic to her new lover and also, on the basis of the man calling Valeria Valechka.⁹⁷

As far as most Humbert's treating of Valeria might be considered anti-feminist or chauvinist, he treated Valeria's lover in the same way. Taking into consideration Humbert's treating of those two, it is hard to tell whether Humbert considered himself a superior individual and was used to treating people in that way. The other possibility is that this kind of behavior might be caused by the betrayal Humbert might possibly perceive from Valeria and her lover's relationship. One way or another, thanks to the fact Humbert treated them both equally, he might have somehow negated possible negative feminist perceptions of parts of *Lolita*, where Valeria appears, because Humbert treated Valeria's lover with almost no difference. Furthermore, it is perceivable that thanks to Humbert's objectification of Valeria he was so astonished by her finding a new man, because he could not own her anymore and could not do anything about it.

Despite the fact Humbert treated the two equally; another theory might be involved by the author of this thesis. Taking into account Humbert's behavior towards Valeria before she confided her relationship with the taxi driver to Humbert, it probably was not different anyhow. According to Humbert's words in *Lolita* he mocked her and ridiculed her even before her announcement of her new relationship. In other words, thanks to this fact, Humbert might be perceived as an anti-feminist character by the author of this thesis.

Second of all, Valeria was not the last woman Humbert described unsightly. After Humbert's arrival to Ramsdale – when he first met Mrs. Haze, he almost immediately began to evaluate her appearance, too. At first, one might say Humbert evaluated her appearance objectively, however in the very next paragraph he stated that he "had better

⁹⁴ *Lolita*, 28.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 28.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 28.

⁹⁷ The suffix –chka is most common in Slavic countries, e. g. Russia.

describe her right away, to get it over with.”⁹⁸ The author of this thesis might consider this claim of Humbert’s offensive to Charlotte, because it may encourage the author to think of Charlotte as unattractive, ugly and unworthy person and most of all, it might encourage the author to think Charlotte was not worth describing thanks to the impudence that may be perceived from the introductory sentence of Humbert’s preface of *Charlotte Haze*.

Moreover Humbert continued describing her in a way that might lead the author to thinking Humbert was a discriminating character. As he continued describing Charlotte, he marked her “the poor lady,”⁹⁹ which might be considered another sign of discrimination as far as the writer of this thesis pointed out in previous chapters that men gained their position in the society by considering themselves superior to women, therefore calling Charlotte ‘poor lady’ might be an indication of degrading Charlotte and giving her an immediate inferior position. According to the perception of the author of this thesis, the words Humbert used may be most probably discerned as an attempt to classify Charlotte as an inferior character or individual.

On the other hand, in the next few sentences Humbert evaluated Charlotte ambiguously. He mentioned that Charlotte had a “quite simple but not unattractive features of a type that may be defined as a weak solution of Marlene Dietrich,”¹⁰⁰ which might be perceived with various difficulties as it offers many impressions in hardly one sentence. First of all, Humbert assesses Charlotte as ‘not unattractive’ which depends on the reader’s perception, whereas it is a positive or negative remark. The author of this thesis will take both into consideration: first, Humbert evaluates Charlotte’s looks; and second, he admits that she a good looking woman, which might be also understood as an admittance of Charlotte being a rightful individual. Then Humbert mentions the word ‘weak’, which is a synonym for ‘poor’ in the previous paragraph. It means this might be another try for pointing out that Charlotte was an inferior character and was – as a woman – dependent on men. Subsequently, Humbert mentions there was some resemblance of Charlotte to Marlene Dietrich, who was appraised extraordinarily beautiful, which would mean Charlotte was beautiful for Humbert somehow, although he proposed Charlotte was ‘a weak solution of Marlene Dietrich,’ which gives the author of this thesis an idea of a poor

⁹⁸ Lolita, 37.

⁹⁹ Lolita, 37.

¹⁰⁰ Lolita, 37.

resemblance to Marlene Dietrich. In the end, although a certain effort to praise Charlotte from Humbert's side can be felt from this part of the sentence, he produces the words in such a combination they may connote a negative feeling of Charlotte's appearance for the writer of this thesis.

All in all, in most cases Humbert's references to Charlotte's character he is rather atrocious and negative. He keeps referring to her by many phrases, which is probably not anything unusual, but most of them have a negative connotation: "fat Haze,"¹⁰¹ "the Haze woman,"¹⁰² "the old girl,"¹⁰³ "the woman,"¹⁰⁴ "the old cat,"¹⁰⁵ "that big Haze,"¹⁰⁶ "the obnoxious lady,"¹⁰⁷ "big cold Haze,"¹⁰⁸ etc.¹⁰⁹ An online journal article studying nicknames, their meaning and possible reasons and consequences for giving or receiving a nickname mentioned that "bestowing nicknames is a way of exercising power."¹¹⁰ In this way, the article confirms author of this thesis' suggestions that by referring to Charlotte by many nicknames Humbert can be considered manipulative or trying to seize Charlotte as one of representatives of female characters.

This way or another, there are also some examples of nicknames or references to Charlotte, which have neutral or positive connotation. Although in the previous paragraph a study verifying that using nicknames might be a sign of manipulation has been attached, the writer of this thesis decided to mention also nicknames Humbert uses nicely or at least neutral when speaking about Charlotte: "my landlady,"¹¹¹ "mother Haze,"¹¹² "my good landlady,"¹¹³ "her mother,"¹¹⁴ or simply "Haze."¹¹⁵ Although the last mentioned might be

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 43.

¹⁰² Ibid, 45.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 45.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 45.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 47.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 51.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 55.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 57.

¹⁰⁹ As the reader of this bachelor's thesis might have already noticed, the author of this thesis has mentioned references to Charlotte from only a few pages of the book as Humbert's character is inventive in creating new nicknames for Charlotte and continues to do that. The writer of this thesis did not want to include all of them.

¹¹⁰ Sharon Black, Brad Wilcox and Brad Platt, "Nicknames in Prison: Meaning and Manipulation in Inmate Monikers," *Names: A Journal of Onomastics* 62, no. 3 (September 2014),

<http://www.maneyonline.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1179/0027773814Z.00000000077> (accessed February 16, 2015).

¹¹¹ *Lolita*, 50.

¹¹² Ibid, 54.

¹¹³ Ibid, 57.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 44.

debatable, because some people might classify ‘Haze’ or referring to anybody by his surname as rather distant or aloof. Furthermore, as the author of this thesis observed, Humbert’s references to Charlotte as the mother might be a sign of assigning her with the typical role of a mother. In the theoretical part of this bachelor’s thesis, it has been already mentioned that humans, especially men, have been assigning women with social roles of mothers for many centuries (see chapters I and II).

Dolores might be considered the greatest and probably the most important character and object of Humbert’s comments and evaluations. Dolores Haze is a great part of Humbert’s narration. Throughout the book, Humbert dedicated many pages to her description and evaluation of her appearance; he also tried to describe the struggles they have gone through together, from which the author of this thesis may contemplate, whether Humbert Humbert might be a feminist or anti-feminist character.

Many pages have been dedicated to Humbert’s attempts to depict Dolores in the most accurate way for the possible audience of his memoirs. From the time he has met Dolores for the first time, he addresses her with nicknames such as “this Lolita, my Lolita,”¹¹⁶ “my darling, my sweetheart.”¹¹⁷ From those examples, it is easily noticeable that he repeatedly addresses her with nicknames in connection to possessive pronouns, almost like he would be trying to express possible possession of and therefore manipulation with Dolores.

Sarah Herbold was also engaging in this problematic. She has mentioned it several times in her work “Dolorés Disparue,” where she claims that Nabokov’s *Lolita* “is a tantamount to reading pornography,”¹¹⁸ which Herbold justified by comparing “victimized female body”¹¹⁹ to Humbert’s seeking “to entrap and dominate a victimized Lolita.”¹²⁰ This claim of Herbold’s should be a support to the claim, that by often usage of possessive pronouns when addressing Dolores, Humbert might have implied a certain suggestion of possessing, dominating and manipulating with Dolores.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 46.

¹¹⁶ *Lolita*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 42.

¹¹⁸ *Disparue*, 1.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 1.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 1

Tristan Gans' essay "Gender and Power in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*" might also lend credence to the claim of trying to dominate female characters by addressing them by using possessive pronouns. In his essay, Gans mentions that Humbert has a "psychological need to win, to possess, and to control"¹²¹ and he also claims that Humbert is constantly trying to prove his superiority¹²². This problematic is again connected with many parts of the book – when applied on individual characters: first of all, Humbert's agitation and anger when he found out about Valeria having an intimate relationship with another man while Humbert was of strong persuasion that Valeria belongs to him and is his property, where the author of this thesis may also find many possessive pronouns when addressing Valeria; later when Charlotte found out about Humbert's fondness of Dolores – Humbert was trying to persuade Charlotte not to tell anybody about his little blunder so hard that he was patently happy when he discovered that she has been killed by a car. Humbert's joy proves that his own avocation and secret meant incomparably more to him than Charlotte's/a woman's life. Plus, even after her death, Humbert addresses Charlotte as "the vulture,"¹²³ which would most probably make the writer of this thesis think Humbert is disrespectful and disdainful towards Charlotte; and also Humbert suggests by his comments after Charlotte's death that she was not of any importance to him, but more likely a means to an end to get closer to Dolores.

According to what the author of this thesis understood, Humbert treats *Lolita* in a strange way. On one hand, he praises her as a man in love usually praises the woman/girl he loves, on the other hand many parts of the book support the other way round. When Humbert has seen Dolores for the first time, he observed her body and appearance and commented on and evaluated both. He mentioned her "honey-hued shoulders,"¹²⁴ "chestnut head of hair"¹²⁵ and "juvenile breasts."¹²⁶ As mentioned earlier in this bachelor's thesis, evaluating women's appearance is typical for anti-feminism or chauvinism, more precisely evaluating body parts representing the female gender.

¹²¹ Tristan Gans, "Gender and Power in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*," *Student Pulse* 3 (2011). <http://www.studentpulse.com/articles/529/gender-and-power-in-vladimir-nabokovs-lolita> (accessed March 17, 2015). This work is hereafter referred to as Gans.

¹²² Gans.

¹²³ *Lolita*, 99.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 39.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 39.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 39.

A study done by Petr Weiss also covers a part mentioning female breasts. Weiss remarks that the primary role in the process of searching for an appropriate sexual partner is eyesight.¹²⁷ Thanks to using this sense it is expectable men would observe and evaluate appearance of their possible sexual partners. Weiss also argues that men are preferably attracted by female breasts and also pubic hair¹²⁸ (which Humbert also mentioned). In this way, it is natural and most probably inevitable that men tend to evaluate or assess women's appearance, exactly breasts and probably more intimate body parts.

Sarah Herbold was another author discussing appearance and aestheticism. In "Dolorés Disparue," Herbold pointed out that Nabokov's *Lolita* uses unusual combination of relation of "male artistic subject"¹²⁹ and "female aestheticized object."¹³⁰ There are several pieces of evidence of Humbert's artistic skills. First of all, there is his masterful use of English language. Considering his language skills, he performs in a way that might lead the author of this thesis to opinion on Humbert that he was fully aware of his consummate language skills. This thought is the consequence of the writer of this thesis' perception of Humbert's remarks on Charlotte's French, e. g. "her mother who thinks she knows French"¹³¹ or "what I remember of the letter I remember verbatim (including that awful French)."¹³² This problematic is again connected with aforementioned mocking Valeria's new lover's language skills, which might lead the author to assess Humbert is a manipulative character.

Humbert also mentions he is good looking: "my manly looks,"¹³³ which might be understood as an attempt to classify himself as an artistic character, or a character having a sense of art. Considering the quotation "my manly looks."¹³⁴ in this case the classification of typical female and male characteristics is rather visible, which might be identified as a possible attempt to generate typical male appearance, which is rather stereotypical. Later Humbert also uses a few adjectives or phrases thanks to which he might be considered an

¹²⁷ See Petr Weiss, "Ženská a Mužská Sexuální Atraktivita z Pohledu Sociobiologie," *Postgraduální Medicína*, (2004): 156-159.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 156-169.

¹²⁹ *Disparue*, 5.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*.

¹³¹ *Lolita*, 44.

¹³² *Ibid*, 68.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 53.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 53.

artistic character fully realizing his artistic qualities: “my romantic soul”¹³⁵ and “what a crafty Humbert.”¹³⁶

Furthermore, Yuval Eylon corroborates with the claim of Humbert as an artistic character, who considers himself an attractive man. Eylon works with the idea in sense of Humbert’s pride and overestimating his own qualities thanks to his pride. Eylon also claims that “the pride of Humbert Humbert ... is the pride of an aesthete: intellectually superior, and determined to pursue his appetites.”¹³⁷ Considering Eylon’s claim of Humbert’s intellectual superiority, it is beneficial to match it again with Humbert’s feeling of being superior thanks to his language skills. Humbert’s feeling can be also perceived as superiority over Charlotte or Valeria’s lover or possibly with Humbert’s mocking of Dolores’ literature, when he commented on it as “her ridiculous books.”¹³⁸ Although Humbert’s love and affection for Dolores is visible in the book, still he mocks her in connection with intellectuality not taking into consideration her young age. This might be perceived as anti-feminist thanks to Humbert’s lack of respect when speaking about Dolores’ intelligence.

A contrast idea to the previous paragraph might be Humbert’s plans for Dolores’ education when they left Ramsdale and settled down in Beardsley after a journey throughout the United States. Humbert’s consideration of Dolores’ education is most probably related to the previous paragraph, although it has a reverse meaning. Taking into consideration Humbert’s plans for Dolores, it might be observed that he cared about her brains, intelligence and future overall. This might be another reason for the writer of this thesis to think that Humbert was not a chauvinist character.

On the other hand, Humbert’s desire of a school for Dolores might have been untrue. After Humbert and Dolores’ arrival to Beardsley, as Humbert was to meet the headmistress of Beardsley School for girls, he mentioned that he has not minded where to dwell provided he could lock his Lolita up somewhere.¹³⁹ This is probably to destroy the whole idea of Humbert considering Dolores’ education, as the perception of Humbert’s

¹³⁵ Lolita, 53.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 100.

¹³⁷ Yuval Eylon, “Understand All, Forgive Nothing: The Self-indictment of Humbert Humbert,” *Philosophy and Literature* 30.1 (2006): 158-173. This work is hereafter referred to as Eylon.

¹³⁸ Lolita, 65.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 176.

statement might most probably lead the author of this thesis to think that he misuses the pretence of providing Dolores with appropriate education and rather thinks of ways how to have her stay at home and prevent her from being anywhere else as Humbert stated many times that he wants Dolores in his vicinity, e. g. “how could I afford not to see her.”¹⁴⁰

For one thing, Humbert noted “how could I afford not to see her,”¹⁴¹ which might be an impulse for the author of this thesis to consider his evident craving and maybe also a certain need of Dolores being close to him. There are two possibilities of perception of this Humbert’s statement: feminist and anti-feminist. The feminist point of view is based on viewing of this statement in a way that might lead the author of this thesis to thinking that Humbert expresses a certain need to be close to Dolores, without whom he would not be complete, because he values her as a human being, whereas the anti-feminist perception makes the writer of this thesis think that Humbert’s intention when providing readers with this clue, was rather to illustrate indirectly that he feels the need to possess and manipulate with Dolores, because she, as an object of his desire, belongs to him.

There are also other contrasts in the book concerning Humbert’s equivocal behavior. While living in Beardsley, Humbert provided Dolores with a certain amount of money when she agreed to have sex with him. It is rather misleading that although he agreed to give money to her, he did not want Dolores to have it or to save the money, almost like he would have been afraid that she could escape from him, which worried him so much that he tried to persuade her (violently) to give the money back to him.

Another contrast might be observed in Humbert’s behavior. In most parts of the book, he addresses Dolores as “my Lolita,”¹⁴² which is also endorsed by Gans, who pictured Humbert’s opinion on women as people who “are to be possessed.”¹⁴³ Gans’ claim agrees with Herbold, who claims that “Humbert still insists that she [Dolores] belongs to him.”¹⁴⁴ Both Gans and Herbold support Ferger’s summary of “Humbert’s theft of Lolita’s body,”¹⁴⁵ which Ferger included in his book called “Who’s Who in the Sublimelight: “Suave John Ray” and Lolita’s “Secret Points.”” All those claims might be lent support by

¹⁴⁰ Lolita, 66.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 66.

¹⁴² Ibid, 40.

¹⁴³ Gans.

¹⁴⁴ Disparue, 4.

¹⁴⁵ George Ferger, “Who’s Who in the Sublimelight: “Suave John Ray” a Lolita’s “Secret Points,”” abstract.

Moore's mention of "Dolores as his [Humbert's] subject,"¹⁴⁶ which might resemble Moore's perception of Humbert's behavior as usurping Dolores.

On the other hand, there were also a few parts of the text which may support Humbert's inclination to feminism. First of all, as it has already been mentioned, Humbert contemplated proper education for Dolores. It may be understood that he as a scholar and a writer of a book was contingent on appropriate education and knowledge for her. Also, when Humbert and Dolores decided to continue on their trip throughout the United States, Humbert agreed that Dolores can pick any place she would like to visit. He let her outline the map of their track and was not adamant at all; he gave her freedom of choice. However this can also be considered as his way of manipulation with Dolores. Seemingly he was giving her the power to choose the destination, but as her decision is still contingent on Humbert's decision whether they will go anywhere, she actually possesses no power whatsoever.

When it comes to Humbert's probability of being a feminist character, it might be also his openness when describing his love for both Annabel and Lolita. It is not probable that if Humbert thought less of both of them or women generally, he would express love for both of them. Browsing many parts of the book, Humbert states that Dolores "was to cure me all my aches,"¹⁴⁷ which might be considered as an expression to show a certain amount of Dolores' superiority over Humbert as if he was implying that Dolores is so important to him that he is inferior to her.

Another example leading the same direction might be found when Humbert tries to describe Dolores' appearance. He declares: "I would like to describe her face, her ways – and I cannot, because my own desire for her blinds me when she is near."¹⁴⁸ This also might be understood as an attempt to express certain control Dolores has over Humbert. Also, Humbert remarks that Dolores drives him insane¹⁴⁹ which should support the claim Dolores has control over Humbert.

¹⁴⁶ Anthony R. Moore, "How Unreliable Is Humbert in Lolita?" *Journal of Modern Literature* 25.1 (2001): 71-80.

¹⁴⁷ Lolita, 39.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 44.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 44.

The control might be also observed from Dolores' manner of speech when talking to Humbert. When sitting on the porch, Dolores says "Move your bottom, you."¹⁵⁰ This Dolores' statement might bring the idea of Dolores' power over Humbert to the author's mind. A supporting claim is offered by the book a few pages later, when Dolores throws a ball towards her mother and states: "I was not aiming at you."¹⁵¹ Again, this may be understood as playing a game with Humbert Humbert and also as an expression of Dolores' consciousness of having certain amount of power over him as she was playing games with Humbert Humbert.

Again, the power struggle between Dolores and Humbert was not done only from Dolores' point of view. Humbert placed many statements resembling his unconcern towards Dolores' playing with him. He states that he "would hold her against me three times a day, every day. All my troubles would be expelled; I would be a healthy man."¹⁵² In this case, the power Dolores might have over Humbert is visible. The fact that he does not mind his inferior position might be an impulse the author of this thesis to consider Humbert a feminist character. The reason might be that thanks to the fact Humbert does not mind being played with by Dolores; he is willing to accept a woman being superior to him; or willing to admit that Dolores is important to him so much that she might have impact on his health and happiness. On the other hand, Dolores might be perceived as an object used to Humbert's recovery; a means to an end.

Generally Humbert is a changeable character. After all his worries about appropriate Dolores' education, letting her decide about their journey and allowing her – whether consciously or not – to play with him, he is willing to point out that "she [Dolores] had absolutely nowhere else to go."¹⁵³ This might be rather confusing for the author of this thesis, although still it might be contributing towards Humbert's pleasure caused by his consciousness of his own power and control over Dolores. This might be pleasing for Humbert (as it may be perceived from the text), which would be connected with Herbold's mention of Freud's theory which claims that "woman undermines social and familiar order because she lacks a strong superego."¹⁵⁴ This might be considered true in case Humbert's

¹⁵⁰ Lolita, 50.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 55.

¹⁵² Ibid, 70.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 142.

¹⁵⁴ Symptom, 5.

behavior is understood as being happy of having control over Dolores – as it is perceivable from the text included and all in all, it would be believable because of Humbert's attempts to own a manipulate with Dolores.

Dicker and Piepmeier mentioned Humbert's possible joy of having control over Dolores, too. To be more precise, they stated in their book *Catching a Wave* (2003), that as "Lolita was lonely and penniless,"¹⁵⁵ Humbert reviled "every woman who might have helped Lolita."¹⁵⁶ Taking into consideration Dicker and Piepmeier's observation, it might be the reason for the author of this thesis to think that Humbert might have been happy and relieved to know that Lolita was dependent on him, while being satisfied with someone else being dependent on him may be considered anti-feminist when taking into consideration that the dependent one is a woman.

Leland De La Durantaye claims in his work that Humbert is considered a negative character abusing women. De La Durantaye stated in one of his works that Humbert acts "so brutally and insensitively in his dealings with others,"¹⁵⁷ which supports the claim that Humbert is a character who enjoys having control over other characters. Moreover De La Durantaye notes that Humbert was brutal and insensitive "in his dealings with others - and above all, with she whom he professes to love above everyone and everything in the world – his Lolita."¹⁵⁸ This is to support the aforementioned Humbert's power over Dolores.

To continue, most of Humbert's expressions throughout the book resemble a certain amount of being aware of his control of many woman characters in the text. As Humbert uses nicknames for most of women who appear in the text, describes them with a considerable demonstration of either disgust, arrogance or knowledge of his own dominance, and expresses his power by both verbal and physical (appearance) language, he might be considered an anti-feminist character. Although several anti-feminist examples from the text were included above in this thesis, there are also several examples of pro-feminist phrases and also Humbert's sorrow because of the ways he treated Dolores. As Herbold mentioned, at the end of the novel, Humbert states that he deserves to be

¹⁵⁵ Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier, *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 89. The work is hereafter referred to as Dicker.

¹⁵⁶ Dicker, 89.

¹⁵⁷ Leland De La Durantaye, "Eichmann, Empathy, And Lolita," *Philosophy And Literature* 30.2 (2006): 311-328. The work is hereafter referred to as Durantaye.

¹⁵⁸ Durantaye, 311-328.

sentenced to several years in prison,¹⁵⁹ which might be also taken as a pro-feminist statement (taking into consideration taking away Humbert's pride and expressing guilt for his treatment of Dolores as a female character) and he also mentions that the fact that Lolita lost her childhood because of him is "more hopelessly poignant than his own sorrow at having lost her."¹⁶⁰ Herbold also stated that at the end of the novel Humbert seemed transformed from the character he used to be earlier and that he was also actually in love with her rather than simply feeling lust for and the need to have her physically.¹⁶¹ This is a possible reason for the writer of this thesis to think that in the end, Humbert transformed into a feminist character offering Dolores his sorrow for his deeds – either good or bad. As Eylon mentioned, [Humbert's] "pride is the tendency to overestimate himself, or underestimate others."¹⁶² This way or another, Yuval might be considered to be right and Humbert to be proud throughout the book, but in the end, realizing his mistakes and losing his pride by confessing them.

¹⁵⁹ Disparue, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 3.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 4.

¹⁶² Eylon, 158-173.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this bachelor's thesis was to include an introduction to the history of feminism. This aim has been successfully accomplished, as the first chapter focuses on feminism from its beginnings, continues through the consequences caused by World War II, which was an unfortunate event that influenced many aspects of people's lives, including feminism as such. The first chapter also mentions several authors, who helped to create feminist history and its universal truths and concepts: Simone De Beauvoir, Kate Millet, and Betty Friedan from earlier periods, who made a pedestal for later authors, e. g. Michal Peprník, Gayle Greene, Claire M. Renzetti, Daniel Horowitz, Lisa P. Condé, Henry Makow, and others.

The aim of the second chapter was to list significant feminist literary critics and their concepts of feminist criticism of literary works. Out of many, Cixous' analysis of language was decided to be used when analyzing Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita*. As the main character called Humbert Humbert masters English language, the author of this thesis considered Cixous' analysis as the most appropriate. Throughout the practical part of this thesis (Chapter III), Humbert Humbert has been analyzed from various points of view. Namely, his behavior towards female characters has been proved anti-feminist, as he has been discovered a character who uses/misuses other characters to achieve his desires and goals and above all – manipulates them in order to achieve what he longs for. Moreover, Humbert Humbert examines, evaluates and comments on women's appearance, which has been considered anti-feminist and/or chauvinist. Furthermore, Humbert Humbert has been proved an anti-feminist character thanks to constant referring to female characters with possessive pronouns and/or sobriquets.

The fourth chapter helped to form the author's view of male and female characters' representation in social life. Thanks to the analysis of *Lolita*, male characters (represented by Humbert Humbert) are depicted as superior, whereas female characters conform to the subordinate roles, which were also mentioned in Chapter I, more specifically in the part focusing on the aims of feminists. Furthermore, the topic of education and professional life of female characters is examined in Chapter IV.

This bachelor's thesis should be helpful for feminist literary analysis thanks to the history of feminism and list of feminist literary critics and their approaches. Also, it might be also useful for readers of *Lolita* when looking for a further interpretation of this Vladimir Nabokov's novel. There was also counter-evidence suggesting that Humbert

Humbert might be a pro-feminist character, as he unconsciously goes through changes in his character, which are most likely to be perceived at the end of the novel, when he expresses sorrow upon losing Dolores. In spite of Humbert's pro-feminist hints, the thesis has proven that Humbert Humbert's character inclines to anti-feminist approach thanks to multiple pieces of evidence.

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