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STRUCTURE AND VARIATION OF PROSE EFFECTS
IN FIRST PERSON NOVELS:

Lolita, The Catcher in the Rye and Naomi

This thesis describes in detail structure, paragraphic topography and aesthetics in the first 50~60 pages of each of the above novels, firstly looking at the structure of chapters, secondly at the topographical flow of paragraphs in chapters leading up to the first major conflict or climax appearing in each novel, and finally, at the aesthetics of the paragraph which introduces that conflict or climax.

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November 29, 2013
The following is a study of the way in which three writers, Vladimir Nabokov, J.D. Salinger and Junichiro Tanizaki, structure the opening sections (the first 50~60 pages) of their novels, *Lolita*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, and *Naomi*, respectively. The study begins with a brief description of the overarching structure of each work, and how that structure breaks down into components as chapters. For example, where Salinger’s chapters are scene based and Nabokov’s periodic and anecdotal, Tanizaki’s are more expansive and inclusive of both anecdotes, periods of time and scenes. Following this, my thesis looks at a more atomized level of structure—structure within chapters and then within paragraphs as a means of understanding how these three famous novelists engage a reader’s interest through variation of prose effects. At the intra-paragraph level, it will be observed how and to what extent each writer uses dialogue, action, reflection, and description, whether as separate narrative effects or in a manner that mingles these thought processes, and how this relates to content.

All three of these books make use of anti-heroes; Holden Caulfield and Humbert Humbert, the first-person narrators of *The Catcher In The Rye* and *Lolita* respectively, both tell their tales after having been placed in institutions—in Caulfield’s case, a sanatorium or hospital, and in Humbert’s, a prison. This would suggest that both are reluctant storytellers, only telling their story because they’ve been put in a position that obliges them to ‘explain’ their behaviour. The framing device for *Catcher* is therefore that of an adolescent recounting his tale from a hospital bed to an unnamed and invisible listener, a “you” which is the reader, though who might be thought of as a therapist, or perhaps a friend. Nabokov also uses a brief framing device to situate Humbert’s posthumously published tale within the confessionary mode and has the novel introduced by a fictitious editor. Similar to Caulfield, Humbert addresses the reader throughout the book as though the reader
were a member of some jury at his trial. In contrast to these, Joji, the narrator of Tanizaki’s *Naomi*, which like *Lolita*, is also about an older man forming a relationship with a teenage girl, feels no sense of obligation to explain his behaviour to anyone other than himself. However, he does acknowledge the public nature of his tale (what he calls “the facts of our relationship”) by addressing “my readers” while explaining that his aim is only to provide himself with “a precious record of something I never want to forget” (3). Thus all three narrators make us explicitly aware of a relationship between narrator and reader.

Within the sense of this dramatic monologue type of framework, unavoidably all three narrators must occasionally refer to their past, or a backstory, though it is only Humbert who provides the reader with an exposition up front, which, after a brief poetic introduction, takes up eight chapters before the main narrative begins. Holden and Joji both weave necessary backstory in with the present story, though Holden generally eschews any personal history further back than where the action of his story begins, which is the tenth paragraph of chapter one. Indeed, he opens his story with reluctance – “If you *really* want to hear about it…” – and then proceeds to refer to his backstory as “all that David Copperfield kind of crap” (1, my italics). By renouncing backstory in his first sentence Caulfield skips forward as quickly as possible to the beginning of the main action. Thus chapter one of *Catcher* is used to set the scene and provide at least some background for the story that is to follow, but it also sets the template for how Salinger plans to structure his novel—scene by scene, which for the most part corresponds closely to chapter divisions.

The main narratives of both *Catcher* and *Lolita* are stories of a physical journey undertaken, the former over a course of three days, and the latter over a period of several years. In *Catcher*, eschewing any historical exposition, Holden’s journey
begins in chapter eight, once he hops on a train bound for New York. The seven chapters prior to this nevertheless work as a kind of backstory to the journey, whereby Holden describes those events that bring him to a crisis—a letter has been sent informing his parents of his problems at school, and he has fight with his roommate Stradlater. If we look at these chapters closely, we see that each chapter contains a single scene usually set in one location, though sometimes also including scene transitions, which simply move Holden from one location to another. The first eight chapters are entirely scene-based: (1) On top of a hill from where Holden surveys a football game; (2) The house of Spencer, Holden’s history teacher; (3) Holden’s dorm room at Pencey, his boarding school; (4) The dorm toilets; (5) Five brief scene transitions (6) Holden’s dorm room again; (7) Ackley’s dorm room; (8) The carriage of a train to New York. Much happens within these scenes of course; the scene merely provides a site in which the events are grounded, but it is these scenes that Salinger uses as the basic building blocks with which to structure his novel.

Unlike *Catcher*, *Lolita* can be thought of as having two major sections before the journey begins. One is those eight chapters (two through nine) of expository backstory which detail Humbert’s past, and the other is a longer section of setting and characterization which sets up and triggers the events of the journey, and thus plays a similar role to chapters one through seven in *Catcher*. Chapters ten through twenty-four of *Lolita* consist of the story of Humbert’s arrival in Ramsdale and his relationship with, and marriage to Charlotte Haze, Lolita’s mother, thus it is not until chapter twenty-five, precisely one third of the way through *Lolita*, that Humbert’s tale of his illicit relationship with Lolita, and hence the journey, finally begins.

The chapters in *Lolita* tend to correspond to a period of time or an anecdote rather than be grounded in a scene or setting. Being anecdotal, the stories Humbert
tells include reflection and philosophizing at a more involved level than the kind of reflections provided by Holden. The first eleven chapters of *Lolita* are divided thus: (1) Prose poem/introduction of Lolita; (2) Humbert’s family and his childhood; (3) Anecdote about his teenage relationship with Annabel; (4) Reflections on the anecdote; (5) Youth and student days, theory of nymphets, voyeurism as an adult; (6) Anecdote of Monique the prostitute; (7) Marriage; (8) Life with Valeria and divorce; (9) Moving to America, working in Canada, sanatorium; (10) Moving to Ramsdale; (11) Diary entries about Lolita. Thus we get a sense that a chapter in *Lolita* is grounded in a specific event or a period of reflective thought. These are anecdotal but include psychological information, personal theory and reflective modes that set up credibility for the main narrative. Unlike *Catcher*, physical location has little bearing on what constitutes a chapter in *Lolita*.

*Naomi*’s chaptered structure appears to have more in common with *Lolita* than *Catcher* in that the divisions are anecdotal and topical, though like *Catcher* there is little in the way of introduction or exposition. In fact, just as Holden dismisses telling his backstory, Joji announces early in chapter two, “There is no need to dwell too much on the past.” Thus, the total story *is* the main narrative, detailing as it does, eight years in the life of Joji and Naomi. The content of *Naomi*’s first eight chapters range over topics such as the characters’ backgrounds, how they met, and include various anecdotes from their lives, though Joji is less specific than Humbert. Writing at the age of 36 about a period of time eight to five years earlier, he tends to describe events in a more general way as illustrated by phrases such as “On these occasions…” and employing much use of “would” in the text; “Whenever I asked about her family, she’d look annoyed” (11). These eight chapters appear to be of a very uniform length loosely covering the following topics: (1) Introductions, meeting Naomi, rationalizing
his interest in a teenager; (2) Discussions, arranging to live together, finding a house; (3) Setting up house, separate holidays, falling in love; (4) Holidaying together, Naomi’s body; (5) Bathing, sex, marriage, clothes shopping; (6) English lessons, fighting; (7) Reflective chapter on the power shift in the relationship; (8) Dance lessons, hints of infidelity. We can see that these chapters are rangier than Nabokov’s, moving through several minor events or anecdotes with numerous reflective passages. Furthermore, both Salinger and Tanizaki fill their pages with dialogue, whereas we see very little dialogue as a percentage of the sum total of text in *Lolita*.

It appears there is little correlation in the ways these three first person narrators organize their tales into chapters. Narrators generally organize tales by scene, anecdote and/or chronology among other guiding principles, but one senses that “chapter” is an organizing principle used by the author rather than the narrator. Salinger ends a chapter when a scene change occurs, Tanizaki seems to end a chapter when a certain word count has been reached or a series of topics have been covered, and Nabokov ends his when Humbert is finished with a single topic. If we therefore ignore chapter divisions as an organizing principle and instead focus on a ‘topographical map’ of the flow of the paragraphs across chapters we can more easily compare the way in which each writer varies the flow of his prose.

For comparison purposes, it is best to look at how prose flows in *Lolita* from chapter ten where the main narrative begins, seeing as neither *Naomi* nor *Catcher* bother with the kind of chunky exposition that fills *Lolita*’s first nine chapters. In chapter ten, when Humbert arrives in Ramsdale and meets Lolita, we find a slow, heavily descriptive pace of narration with mostly intransitive verbs and much reflection. In this chapter Humbert makes inquiries about moving to a town in New England and gives his reasons. Something suitable is found, which is described; he
then arrives in Ramsdale to find the house burnt down and is offered an alternative. He reflects on his new problem, describes his journey to the Haze house, is let in, then describes Mrs. Haze, and reflects on being a lodger. They inspect the house, which is described in detail. Haze talks before they head outside. The chapter finishes with poetic descriptions of Lolita, Humbert’s feelings, his self-consciousness and a finalizing two-line dialogue with Haze. These slow paced passages, informed by a repeating pattern of move-describe-reflect, serve the purpose of building tension as we wait to meet Lolita.

As a means of bringing us quickly through the first month of living at the Haze’s house in the most interesting way possible, in the following chapter Humbert switches to a different mode of narration—the use of diary entries, which he introduces as an “exhibit” for the jury, though it now exists only in memory. Daily diary entries are presented in an abbreviated note form enabling Humbert to cover a whole day in one or two paragraphs that are by haphazard turns, poetic, descriptive, active and anecdotal: Lolita pinging pebbles at a can, her body poeticised; Lolita’s gait and voice described; Humbert observes the somatic effects of Lolita; describes Lolita’s smell and sunbathing body; lake trip cancelled; reflects on the age of pubescence; reflects on Lolita’s attraction to his looks; descriptive anecdote about removing speck from Lolita’s eye; describes his night fantasies of Lolita; describes and reflects on Lolita-as-nymphet; descriptive anecdote about bumping into Lolita on the front porch; an active anecdote about watching a movie with Lolita and Haze; succumbs to despair; active passage in which Haze talks about Lolita’s past; poetic scattered thoughts; reflects on his inability to commit murder; brief dinner scene followed by quarrel; describes Lolita sitting on his lap, desire frustrated again; describes Lolita dressed for a party; describes himself as a spider sensitive to all
movements in the house; lake trip thwarted again; anecdote about going into town in
the car with Lolita and Haze; list of all students in Lolita’s class; reflects on these
names; free thoughts, fantasies, hopes; description of a fantasy followed by a dream
parody of the fantasy; active sequence where Humbert and Lolita play teasing games
with one another. Of course, threaded through all this bumpy and often comical prose
is the common theme—an intense focus on Lolita. By employing a diary entry
approach, Nabokov engages numerous modes of narration in this chapter to move
through time while holding the reader’s interest at an intense level of scrutiny.

In the very short chapter twelve Humbert transitions us back into a kind of
meta-present as he reflects on the contents of the diary, observing a pattern of
temptation and temptation thwarted over the twenty days described therein. He also
reflects on fate, addressing the reader’s curiosity about the thwarted lake trips and
provides another short anecdote related to the topic of fate.

It would be worth tracing the topography of chapter thirteen also because it
leads to a climactic moment in this early part of the novel—the release of Humbert’s
frustrations. Here Humbert begins by introducing us to a “bright” Sunday, the
beginning of a new anecdote in which he contrasts the diary section in three ways—
this anecdote of the event of a single day will take up a whole chapter; the weather
has changed for the better; the anecdote is filled with activity. Humbert first describes
a fight between Haze and Lolita; actively moves through the house; addresses the
reader – “I want the reader to participate in the scene I am about to replay”; uses a
play script introduction announcing characters, time, place and props, and describes
Lolita clothes; describes Lolita’s actions; active verbs detailing a busy scene of
Humbert and Lolita fighting over a magazine; two long, intensely descriptive and
active paragraphs describe Humbert using Lolita’s body against which to masturbate;
actively describes Lolita jumping up to answer the phone; actively moves through house; recites words to a song. The activity of this scene clearly emerges out of a pattern seen in chapters ten to thirteen deliberately structured by Nabokov to mimic something of Humbert’s sexual anxiety leading to his sexual fulfilment. The variety of techniques used in these four chapters are manifold—poetry, a list, diary entries, anecdotes, a song, direct addresses to the reader, description, a dream, reflection, action, philosophy, open comedy, play script, variations in speed—the one thing Humbert does not vary so regularly, is the length of paragraphs, but certainly the reader is jolted through a cornucopia of story-telling modes against which nobody could claim fail to arrest us with their mingling of aesthetics and plot.

Tanizaki covers an equivalent area of story in chapters one to six of *Naomi* ranging from the time Joji and Naomi first meet through to sexual consummation of the relationship and their first major conflict, though the material is fraught with less anxiety than Humbert’s tale. The first chapter is composed mostly of reflections on the past interposed with elements of background. Joji, then 28, begins with an opening address; introduces Naomi at 15 years of age; reflects on why he chose “a child like that”, her name, her resemblance to an American actress; describes Naomi; introduces himself, his family and career, self-description and private life; reflects on his initial interest in Naomi, why he’s not married yet; explains his choosing Naomi; general anecdote about meeting and talking to Naomi in a café; reflection on these meetings and their date to the movies; passage of dialogue with descriptive and reflective observation. This describe-and-reflect style is similar to chapter ten in *Lolita* though more generalized and therefore lacks the same kind of mounting tension. Joji is less focused on Naomi than Humbert was on Lolita, which hints that the obsession is less
illicit; he prefers to bring out the relationship and this is illustrated through greater use of dialogue as we see in chapters two through five.

The pattern of prose thereafter uses slight variations on the following patterns: dialogue-reflection, dialogue-action. For example, chapter two opens with a scene of Joji and Naomi in a restaurant talking about her resemblance to Mary Pickford, which serves to illustrate Naomi’s annoyance when Joji mentions her family. He reflects on this and their meetings in general. A dialogue in the café where Naomi works results in Joji asking her to live with him but once again, the family topic eludes him. This results in more reflections about her family and their agreeing to his plan to have Naomi move in with him. Naomi and Joji find a house together, go on walks and talk; Joji reflects on Naomi’s love of flowers. He describes the house, Naomi’s reaction, and reflects on his own feeling about the house. Chapter two ends thus. Chapter three continues in much the same way; Joji reflects on the area they live in, dialogue illustrates the general nature of their conversation at this time, and Joji describes setting up house together. The pattern repeats: dialogue among action followed by a generalized reflection of their new life together—Naomi injures herself, the couple take separate holidays, they discuss their holidays, Joji reflects on the changes he sees in Naomi.

This slow play of dialogue and generalization about their life together are not entirely dissimilar to the longish chapter eleven of Lolita where Nabokov uses diary entries to describe the ‘early days’ of his new life, while building towards an inevitable climax with sexual overtones. Tanizaki’s method however—scene, activity, dialogue, reflection—is scripted like a play. In chapter four we see where this is all heading when Joji and Naomi take a trip to Kamakura. There is less dialogue and more action in this chapter, mixed with descriptions of the hotel, the holiday in
general, of Naomi’s body, her legs, her shoulders and torso, of Naomi at the beach, and finally, of Joji bathing Naomi. After each description Joji reflects on his feelings about each of these things. The focus on Naomi’s body is very similar to Humbert’s focus on Lolita in the diary chapter—it serves to build erotic tension towards the first major climax of the novel. While Tanizaki’s methods of holding the reader’s interest may be less playful and varied than Nabokov’s, there is still a subtle and complex interplay between his modes of presenting—the mix of dialogue, action, description and reflection—which tease the reader in the manner of an erotic dance.

The eponymous character of Naomi is 15 years of age and so the promise of an illicit and immoral form of erotica is much weaker than that of Lolita which accounts for Naomi’s more straightforward style of narration; Joji does not suffer any of the kind of criminal self-consciousness experienced by Humbert, and while he is very excited at the prospect of sleeping with Naomi, when this scene arrives in chapter five it is much less passionate and less poetic than Nabokov’s partly owing to the fact that Joji has no need to justify his desires, but also arising out of the Japanese aesthetic convention that downplays climaxes. The sixteenth century monk Kenko who wrote the first treatises on Japanese aesthetics considered that, “the climax was less interesting than the beginnings and ends, for it left nothing to be imagined” (299, Keene). Ironically, what Joji does share with Humbert here is the use of diary entries to record the events leading up to sexual consummation of his relationship. Chapter five begins with a reflection of his interest in Naomi, and proceeds to reflect on when the interest became sexual. From here we receive four diary entries, the first three in which Joji describes bathing Naomi, and the fourth containing a subtle suggestion that their relationship has become sexual: “Neither of us had taken the initiative, and we hardly exchanged a word” (34). Joji then moves quickly to a dialogue to illustrate
their feelings for one another and their intention to marry; thereafter the earlier play script pattern of scenes with dialogue-reflection and dialogue-action resumes.

The \textit{real} first crisis of \textit{Naomi} in fact appears in chapter six after Joji and Naomi are married. This chapter begins, again, with very generalized commentary about evenings at home with Naomi. Joji reflects on his plan to make her a society woman, which he hopes to achieve by having Naomi learn English. We learn that two years have passed; Tanizaki uses dialogue here to illustrate the nature of the couple’s marriage; this time there is a wobble in the balance of power, which leads to the first major conflict. Joji’s switches to long periods of reflection on Naomi’s English abilities and Miss Harrison, the English teacher. He is dissatisfied with Naomi’s progress and begins scolding her. However, rather than use passages of dialogue which involve a lot of white space on the page, Tanizaki writes this section with more descriptive intensity and more reflection; the dialogue is thus contained with the boundaries of a lengthy paragraph rather than entered into the text in the usual line-by-line manner. The scene ends with Joji threatening to send Naomi back to her parents’ house, thereby forcing an apology from her for what he perceives as her insolence, but we also sense that Naomi is playing Joji in a slyer way than he realizes. The long reflective paragraphs are indicative of the fact that the conflict mostly takes place inside Joji’s head, thus introducing an element of dramatic irony and comedy. The reader becomes more aware of Joji’s foibles than he is himself, despite his best attempts at occasional self-deprecation.

The bustling interaction between dialogue, reflection, description and action employed by Tanizaki is very similar to Salinger’s style in \textit{The Catcher In The Rye}. After visiting the house of Spencer the history teacher, Holden returns to the school dormitory and interacts with fellow student Ackley and roommate Stradlater.
three opens with a short paragraph of self-description, an anecdote about Pencey – the
namesake of his dorm wing, a description of a hat and chair, a descriptive and
reflective paragraph about reading, two active paragraphs describing Ackley, and here
the dialogue with Ackley begins and fills up the remainder of the chapter. At first
there is brief reflection after every line of dialogue, but once we have received enough
necessary information to picture the scene and understand Ackley through Holden’s
eyes, slowly the reflections and descriptive sentences evaporate and the pages are
filled with dialogue. The topic leads to Ackley’s hatred of Stradlater whom Holden
defends, which turns out to be ironic, as Holden will eventually fight Stradlater in
chapter six. This tension building, along with a certain homoeroticism, becomes more
apparent in chapter four when Holden spends time hanging out in the bathroom with
Stradlater while the latter prepares for a date. This chapter begins with paragraphs of
passive action and a description of Stradlater. A dialogue starts up in which Stradlater
asks Holden to write an essay for him. Holden reflects on this, and then reacts with a
dance. An active scene develops between the pair, Holden “horsing around” while
Stradlater shaves. Thereafter a second major dialogue begins, taking up several pages,
where the pair discuss Jane Gallagher, Stradlater’s date for the evening. Holden knew
this girl from childhood, so there are intermittent moments of reflection on Jane and
Stradlater. Holden is clearly jealous, so once again, we sense a tension building here,
revealed to us through Stradlater’s arrogance and Holden’s nervousness. Similar to
Tanizaki’s style of setting and dialogue, Salinger also writes his scenes as though they
could be set pieces for a play.

If we can find any similarity between the topography of Catcher and that of
Lolita it is chapter five, which is a sort of lull before the storm, a series of short action
scenes, anecdotes and reflections that correspond to Nabokov’s chapter full of diary
Holden reflects on school dinners; he plays in the snow; he reflects on asking Ackley into town with his friends; an active passage about throwing snowballs and reflecting on that; active paragraph about eating hamburgers; return to dorm, describes Ackley’s story; writes descriptive composition about a baseball mitt and reflects on his brother Allie who died; reflects on the writing of the composition; describes waiting around and Ackley snoring. In the same way that Humbert’s diary brings us forward a month in time in the most interesting way possible, chapter five of Catcher also exists to illustrate the passing of time by providing a variety of topics that switch from mode to mode. We know by the end of the chapter that Holden is waiting for Stradlater to come home and that a major scene is going to develop.

Chapter six brings the first crisis of the novel, a minor one at first glance, but acting as the event that spurs Holden into action. At first Holden reflects on his worry about Jane, then describes Stradlater’s arrival, Stradlater’s actions, and Stradlater reading the composition on the baseball mitt Holden had written. From here the familiar play script pattern completes the chapter—nine sections of dialogue followed by brief reflection and/or action. In each dialogue the conflict becomes more intense; Stradlater is unhappy with the composition, Holden acts stroppy and sulks; Holden teases Stradlater about being back so early, describes Stradlater cutting his toenails; Holden inquires after Jane, Stradlater responds with play-fighting; Holden asks about the evening, reflects on the owner of the car Stradlater had borrowed; Holden asks if there was any sex, then attacks Stradlater; they argue, Holden tries to remember the fight clearly; they continue arguing, Stradlater attacks Holden; more arguing, Holden describes his bloody condition and goes to see Ackley. Given that Holden had talked
about Stradlater’s good looks back in chapter four, there are also homoerotic undertones to this fight, which ends with one character bleeding.

What we see in each of the three novels discussed above is a crisis or climax appearing quite early on in the main narrative, and we see each writer employing a variety of techniques in which to present and withhold information so as to encourage the reader’s interest towards these climactic moments. Nabokov’s paragraphic topography is the most varied of the three and yet he uses almost no dialogue to create his scenes. Salinger and Tanizaki both write as if they are very conscious of how their scenes might play out in a live theatre, and while they have fewer tricks up their sleeves, they are nonetheless both adept at varying dialogue among the other modes of narrative. What Nabokov excels at beyond his topographical flow is his style at the sentence level. If we look more closely at a reflective paragraph from each of the climactic scenes discussed above we might compare each writer’s ability to compose a paragraph in order to ascertain what constitutes an aesthetically pleasing style during a heightened period of drama.

Joji introduces the first major conflict/climax of Naomi with one paragraph employing the language of generalized reflection – “Normally,” “I’d lose my temper and she’d sulk,” “I was always shouting” (44-5). In the following paragraph he then switches to an active and present style of narration but uses the first sentence to introduce the anecdote: “Then, one day, the following happened” (45). Joji proceeds to scold Naomi for continually making mistakes with her English homework. Of the seventeen sentences in this paragraph, five are sentences of dialogue contained within the paragraph, all spoken by Joji, none by Naomi, which emphasize the former’s anger. Six times he quotes her grammar errors. A variety of punctuation also convolutes the nature of the conflict; here we find a clause in parentheses, one em
dash, many quotation marks, one question mark, one exclamation mark, and a threefold repetition of the word “idiot.” In the heated middle section of the paragraph the sentences become noticeably shorter. What makes the passage particularly dramatic is the alternation of active verb sentences (for Joji) and passive verb sentences (for Naomi) until the final two sentences where Naomi “grabs,” “tears” and “fixes,” all transitive verbs, thus ending the paragraph with a powerful sense of drama, but also signalling a subtle shift in sentence patterning which indicates the turning point of the whole novel—Naomi is now taking the power from Joji.

The fight between Stradlater and Holden in Catcher is built up over a far greater volume of writing than the more anecdotal introduction of the fight between Joji and Naomi. The two boys have been bickering at each other since Stradlater’s return but finally the tension between the unstated fact of Stradlater’s date having gone badly and Holden’s suspicions that Stradlater has mistreated Jane boils over. Holden thus begins, “This next part I don’t remember so hot” (43). He recalls the first series of movements, a sentence of six clauses of violent swinging action, followed by two punchy short sentences: “Only I missed. I didn’t connect” (43). The next two sentences begin with “It probably…” to confirm what Holden had said at paragraph opening about him not remembering the specifics. He finishes this paragraph with an aside reminding the reader about his injured right hand, as if to explain why he’d used his weaker left hand to strike his opponent, but the tone is dejected and the paragraph ends in bathos. The fight continues for two more pages via abusive dialogue and more violence but we already sense the outcome of the fight from this opening paragraph, which is of course, in some way, microcosmically indicative of the outcome of the entire novel—society’s phoney will ultimately beat Holden down; they will win.
One of the first major climactic moments of *Lolita* arrives in chapter thirteen where Humbert, wearing only a bathrobe, finds himself seated on a divan beneath Lolita’s sprawled out legs. While this is not a scene of conflict of the kind we saw in *Naomi* and *Catcher*, the paragraph that begins the scene introduces it with fighting language: “‘Give it back,’ she pleaded” (63). A few sentences later Lolita is holding a “disfigured” apple, “snatch[ing]” from Humbert a magazine, and “rapidly” and “violently” flipping through its pages (63). Humbert observes “her bare knees rubb[ing] and knock[ing] impatiently against each other,” he catches her by “her thin knobbly wrist,” and the magazine escapes to the floor “like a flustered fowl” (63). Thus the scene that follows, of Humbert using Lolita’s legs to massage his “hidden tumor,” is introduced with the language of physical conflict. In order to emphasize the contrast between the fight/struggle and the passion/sexual conduct, which itself is representative of the conflict in Humbert’s mind (that of his attempts to achieve orgasm in secret), Humbert balances the actively rough language shown above with an equal number of passive and sexual images: His grab on the magazine is “abstract,” “her arm brushed my cheek,” he peers at the magazine through a “burnished mist,” and when he finally sees the picture she’s been trying to show him it mirrors the exact same image of the pair as they will end up on the divan: “a surrealist painter relaxing, supine, on a beach, and near him, likewise supine, a plaster replica of the Venus di Milo, half buried in sand” (64). In the final sentence, after wriggling free of Humbert’s grip, Lolita extends her legs across his lap “with perfect simplicity” (64). As with most every paragraph in *Lolita*, the writing here achieves a masterful balance of aesthetics.

Famous novels become famous for a reason beyond their topical material or their shift in ideological thinking; they become famous when they are as aesthetically
interesting and as aesthetically challenging as they are readable. There are a great number of modes, techniques, tricks and styles that may be employed in the writing of a novel, which leads me to draw the following conclusion from the above study: It is not just that the greater variety of modes a writer uses makes a story more interesting, but also that these modes must be employed to the advantage of the content. That is, the more a technique or style can thicken the theme and support the content of a story in an oblique, though not immediately observable way, to the reader, the higher that novel will be regarded not only in its own time but also for posterity.

