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LOLITA, FROM NOVEL TO SCREENPLAY, AN "INTER-SEMIOTIC" REWRITE?

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Self-translation is a major issue in Nabokovian studies. One of the most studied novels in the context of this question is obviously *Lolita*, a novel of exile in which language shifts, a novel written in English and for which Nabokov actively worked, whether on its French translation or its Russian translation. There is, however, another very special version of this novel, which is a screenplay, the screenplay for *Lolita* written for the cinema by Vladimir Nabokov himself.

As part of this publication on self-translation, it seems appropriate to take a small step to the side – to briefly shift our perspective – and consider another form of translation: what Roman Jakobson defines as intersemiotic translation, «the interpretation of linguistic signs by means of signs of non-linguistic sign systems» (Jakobson 1959). This sideways step is prompted by Lilian Louvel's definition of intersemiotic translation as «the action of moving from one place to another, from one language to another, from one semiological code to another» (Louvel 1997: 477, my translation – J.L.). Such definitions appear relevant when thinking about film adaptation – specifically in the case of *Lolita*, which was adapted twice for the screen, by Stanley Kubrick in 1962 and Adrian Lyne in 1998. However, when it comes to the screenplay, the situation becomes more complex: there is no change in sign system, no passage from one language to another. The screenplay remains a written text – albeit a hybrid one – conceived to be transformed into a new medium, that of cinema. For this reason, from a

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theoretical standpoint, this analysis will not approach the screenplay as an act of self-translation, but rather as a form of intermedial rewriting.

André Gaudreault defines intermediality as «a concept that designates the process of transferring and migrating forms and content between media» (Gaudreault 1999: 175, my translation – J.L.). What is particularly relevant in this definition is the notion of transfer, which can be applied to the form of the screenplay. As a "stage" text, the screenplay serves as a vehicle for conveying and transforming the meaning of a text from one medium to another.

In the case of the *Lolita*'s screenplay, the term *rewriting* is preferred, as Nabokov appears to have used the screenplay's composition to offer a renewed perspective on his novel and to reinforce the interpretive point he wished readers to grasp when engaging with the original text.

To shed some light on this, we'll start by briefly recounting the history of *Lolita* and what Nabokov had to say when asked about his novel, which caused a scandal at the time of its publication and is still the subject of persistent misunderstanding today. We will then look at the context in which the screenplay was written, recalling what a screenplay is, and finally we will see how Nabokov rethought his novel in order to rewrite it for the cinema and offer a new version.

Lolita is a novel written in the first person by Humbert Humbert, a fictional paedophile narrator who recounts how he tried to seduce a 12-year-old girl, Dolores Haze, nicknamed Lolita, but she never shared his desire. Humbert Humbert, who falls madly in love with the daughter of his landlady's named Charlotte Haze, decides to marry her to get closer to Lolita. Charlotte's accidental death finally allows him to dispose of his daughter-in-law as he wishes.

From then on, the story is told by an unreliable narrator who tries to seduce his readers into forgiving him for his crime against Lolita. In fact, this is not a love story but the violent story of an incestuous stepfather who repeatedly abuses his stepdaughter. Because of the taboos the novel exposes (paedophilia, incest), it was misunderstood. This misinterpretation is at the root of the lolita myth we know today, a myth that has been greatly fuelled by film adaptations featuring older actresses, which has already transformed the novel's purpose. However, this was not Nabokov's position, and in interview after interview he never ceased to defend *Lolita* (the novel as much as the character) while condemning its narrator, Humbert Humbert.

In 1961, when he had just finished writing his screenplay, Vladimir Nabokov explained, in an interview with Anne Guerin for the French newspaper "L'Express", that his novel had «a very moral tone», which was to «do no harm to children» (1961, my translation – J.L.).

Nabokov also defended his point of view in numerous television interviews, where he emphasized that Lolita «is not a perverted child» and that at no point «were her senses awakened by the caresses of the abominable Humbert Humbert»[1] (my translation – J.L.). Rather, she was subjected to them. These quotations thus help to clarify Nabokov's often overlooked position on *Lolita*.

This is why it seems that we can approach Nabokov's screenplay as an opportunity for him to present his novel from a different angle, allowing him to offer a new version of his work through his own vision, his own interpretation, while retaining its purpose.

As we shall see from our study of Nabokov's screenplay for *Lolita*, the screenplay is not the story of *Lolita* for the cinema, but a new version of *Lolita*. The structure of the story has been rethought for the cinema (the screenplay consists of a prologue and three acts, as opposed to 33 chapters in the novel), and the characters have also been adapted: Humbert, the narrator, is sometimes shown from an external point of view, Lolita has a voice and expresses herself through it, scenes are transformed, new scenes are written and others are ignored. This explains why the nature of the screenplay in the film adaptation of *Lolita* can be approached from the concept of intermedial rewriting. In her book *Deconstructing Lolita*, Jacqueline Hamrit devotes a chapter to the question of self-translation in Vladimir Nabokov's work (Hamrit 2022: 69-82). She focuses specifically on the transformation of the short story *The Enchanter*, written in Russian in 1939 and considered by Nabokov to be «the first pulse of *Lolita*»[2], into a novel, and then on the author's rewriting of the novel as a screenplay. This double operation—translation and adaptation – raises, in her view, the question of the prefix "re-," which in English implies an idea of return or repetition. However, as Hamrit shows by drawing on a Derridian-inspired reading, this repetition

1 This example dates to 1975, when Vladimir Nabokov appeared on *Apostrophes*, the renowned French literary television program hosted by Bernard Pivot and took the opportunity to set the record straight regarding the character of Lolita.

2 Nabokov, in his note, describes *The Enchanter* as a «prototype» (p. 10) of *Lolita* and in a second note as «a kind of pre-*Lolita*» (p. 11) (Nabokov 1986).

cannot be understood as a simple rehashing. Rather, it is a differentiated return: a transformation, a new beginning where what returns is never identical but always altered. It is not a simple mechanical repetition, but a differentiated return, a new beginning where what returns is both similar and transformed. Nabokov himself, in the preface to *Speak, Memory* (1966), describes the work of rewriting his autobiography as a «diabolical task» (Nabokov 2011: 10) because of this complex movement of translation and retranslation between English and Russian (Hamrit 2022: 69).

For Hamrit, "revising" is therefore a process of transformation: it oscillates between fidelity to the original text and the production of a new version. This dynamic ties in with the philosophical notion of creative repetition, as developed by Søren Kierkegaard through the concept of *Gjentagelse*, often translated as 'repetition', which refers less to a mere repetition than to a new act of meaning rooted in past experience.

It is from this perspective that the screenplay of *Lolita* can be analyzed as a form of transmedia rewriting: Nabokov transposes his own novel into another language, that of cinema. In his own words, he «cinemizes» (Nabokov 2011: 7) his novel. It is therefore not an adaptation in the classical sense, but rather a self-translation between two semiotic systems – from textual language to filmic "language" – which will be at the heart of our analysis.

But before delving into the screenplay of *Lolita*, it seems relevant to identify the form of the screenplay, which is that of a particular text. It is neither a novel nor the exact transcription of a film, but rather a text-tool, the starting point for a film in the making. Marie-Thérèse Journot defines it as follows:

> From the Italian scénario, meaning set, the film script is the written outline of the film's episodes, which gives few or no technical indications (this will be the role of the cut). [...] The scriptwriter is a specialist in screenwriting, working on original scripts or adaptations. His or her work may be supplemented by a dialogue writer. Several scriptwriters may work on the same film, together, in parallel or successively (Journot 2015: 134, my translation – J.L.).

The screenplay as a "canvas", to use Journot's term, spells out the story of the film and the dialogue. However, the final result, the film, can deviate from the script: the director can remove scenes that were initially planned, or add new ones; the actors can improvise, etc. All these possibilities make the script a guide, or even a suggestion, because the film is rarely perfectly faithful to the script.

It should also be pointed out that screenwriting in the context of film adaptation, and therefore in the case of *Lolita*, differs from that of an original screenplay. In an adaptation, the screenplay has to be written from an original text, but for a different medium (in this case, the cinema). The screenwriter must therefore transform the original text to make it compatible with the constraints of film, which is a complex task.

And that was the main problem facing Nabokov: transforming and re-transforming his novel to meet the expectations of Stanley Kubrick, the director, and James B. Harris, the producer of the first film adaptation of *Lolita*. Kubrick contacted Nabokov in July 1959 with the idea of writing a scripted version of *Lolita* while he was butterfly-hunting in Arizona. However, the production had certain requirements regarding the propriety of the film in the making and asked Nabokov to write a version in which Humbert and Lolita were married, which meant moving the story to American states where such marriages were legal in the 1940s and 1950s. Of course, Nabokov did not want to comply with his suggested changes and refused to write the film. Then, just as he was beginning to regret his choice, while residing in Europe and traveling between France, England, and Italy, Nabokov saw an opportunity to explain his novel. At that moment, Kubrick and James B. Harris, who had nevertheless acquired the rights to *Lolita*, came back to him promising much greater creative freedom. Nabokov agreed and traveled back to the USA to meet Kubrick.

Usually, when a director writes a commissioned screenplay, the writer and director first have to agree on their vision of the planned film. Even before Nabokov set about writing the screenplay for *Lolita*, he had a meeting with Kubrick at which they discussed and more or less agreed on certain points, as our author recounts in his preface to the screenplay:

> On March 1, Kubrick and I, at his Universal City studio, debated in an amiable battle of suggestion and countersuggestion how to cinemize the novel. He accepted all my vital points, I accepted some of his less significant ones (Nabokov 2011: 7).

As we can see from this quotation, Nabokov is already making his presence felt. The collaboration between the author and the director seems to have been more of a one-man show for Vladimir Nabokov, who did not really agree with Kubrick's take on his novel. But Nabokov could not completely escape Kubrick's comments, which multiplied as the script progressed. In fact, a screenplay is often the product of a demanding process

involving many readings and re-readings by the various parties involved in the film[3], as Isabelle Raynauld explains in a book devoted to the form of the screenplay:

> It is important to stress here that from the initial idea to the making of the film, the screenplay will be shaped by numerous readings (of all kinds), obviously leading the scriptwriter to carry out multiple rewrites, often over several years and sometimes with different collaborators. Borrowing from Roland Barthes a gastronomic (or sartorial, as the case may be) metaphor that he himself used to talk about reading, we like to say that the screenplay is a text written in 'onion skins' made up of layers of writing and successive readings (Raynauld 2019: 12, my translation – J.L.).

Isabelle Raynauld's comments are confirmed when we look at the genesis of Nabokov's screenplay: as explained above, its writing was punctuated by numerous interventions from Kubrick, who was not really satisfied with the form Nabokov's screenplay was taking, which according to the director would make a film of over 7 hours in its current state. The discussions surrounding the screenplay for *Lolita* were nonetheless numerous and led the author to rework his script over and over again. In June 1960, Stanley Kubrick paid Nabokov a visit to explain why his script was unsuitable, whether for its length or for other reasons:

> Upon our return to Mandeville Canyon, Kubrick visited us to say that my screenplay was much too unwieldy, contained too many unnecessary episodes, and would take about seven hours to run. He wanted several deletions and other changes, and some of these I did make, besides devising new sequences and situations, when preparing a shorter script which he got in September and said was fine (Nabokov 2011: 7).

However, this script was not Nabokov's first attempt at writing for the cinema and, according to Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris, he began writing screenplays as early as 1924, mainly for financial reasons. However, as the

3 This process can be seen as a form of self-translation, in which the author rewrites their own work not only in response to the change in medium (from novel to screenplay), but also under the influence of exchanges and negotiations with the director. It is therefore not a simple transposition, but a dialogical rewriting, shaped by a dual dynamic: that of the author facing his own work, and that of intersubjective collaboration with a third-party creator.

researcher writes, Nabokov considered the exercise to be very difficult: «I have understood that one must really create for the cinema, and that's not so easy» (Paquet-Deyris 2009: 112). In fact, his initial attempts at scriptwriting were unsuccessful, and as we shall see, the rewrite he did of *Lolita* was ultimately not used by Kubrick, who created a very different film – a topic we will revisit in the conclusion of this reflection.

Even if Nabokov did take Kubrick's suggestions into account, he ultimately remained faithful to his own conception of the screenplay. One could even argue that writing this script was, for Nabokov, a real struggle – a struggle against the misunderstanding of his novel. He evokes this tension in his preface:

> All I could do in the present case was to grant words primacy over action, thus limiting as much as possible the intrusion of management and cast. I persevered in the task until I could tolerate the rhythm of the dialogue and properly control the flow of the film from motel to motel, mirage to mirage, nightmare to nightmare (Nabokov 2011: 8).

In this commentary, we can read Nabokov's desire to show, through the film in the making, the duality of the novel that we often glimpse through the metaphors, employed as a rhetorical tool of deception by the narrator. But through their ambivalence, metaphors also show the reality of the narrator's story, which is much darker than what the unreliable narrator tells us. In this quotation from Nabokov, the use of double words «motel to motel, mirage to mirage, nightmare to nightmare» expresses the duality that is so important to Nabokov. With this twin use, the author illustrates verbally and typographically the duality that runs through *Lolita*'s story, which on the one hand uses metaphors to describe mirages (those that Humbert would like the reader to imagine), while on the other Lolita is experiencing a real nightmare (revealed by these same metaphors).

In the novel, metaphors help to represent these mirages, while allowing the nightmare to exist as an indelible trace despite Humbert's efforts to erase it. Humbert Humbert is the writer of the mirage, the conjurer of illusions, while Nabokov is the writer of the nightmare, the one who denounces the fantasy of paedophilia through his novel. And that's exactly what Nabokov is pointing out here, hoping that this duality will be respected in Kubrick's film. He even refers to the director's work as an «intrusion», which is not an insignificant term, and which was confirmed when Nabokov attended a screening of the film. It's easy to see why: Nabokov, through

his screenplay, wanted to be faithful to his novel, which ultimately reveals the nightmare into which Humbert plunges Lolita.

Nabokov's new version of *Lolita* is obviously faithful to his novel, which defends the character of Lolita against Humbert Humbert. Of course, the notion of fidelity here is debatable. Firstly, because in a film adaptation the medium changes, which inevitably transforms the structure of the story, and secondly, because the notion of fidelity is of little relevance when analyzing an adaptation, since the film is considered to be a new creation. However, even if the form of the screenplay differs from that of the novel, if scenes are added to the screenplay and others are omitted, if certain characters are also missing, and so on, it cannot be denied that the screenplay is faithful to the original intention, which is to denounce Humbert's behaviour. This bias is present in the script, as we will demonstrate in our analysis.

In order to illustrate this point, a brief analysis of Nabokov's rewriting of the scene in which Humbert Humbert first encounters Dolores Haze – the "meeting scene" – is presented here. This passage is particularly relevant in the context of this study, as it undergoes several significant transformations in the screenplay, notably the shift from the novel's internal focalization to a more external perspective. Such a change is far from incidental, and a comparative analysis will help shed light on its implications. The examination will begin with the version found in the novel, followed by an analysis of the corresponding sequence in the screenplay. In this scene from the novel, Humbert recounts how he felt when he first laid eyes on Lolita. It is a scene that, like the novel, takes place from the internal point of view. Lolita exists only through the eyes of the narrator:

> I was still walking behind Mrs Haze through the dining room when, beyond it, there came a sudden burst of greenery – 'the piazza,' sang out my leader, and then, without the least warning, a blue sea-wave swelled under my heart and, from a mat in a pool of sun, half-naked, kneeling, turning about on her knees, there was my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses. It was the same child – the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair. A polka-dotted black kerchief tied around her chest hid from my aging ape eyes, but not from the gaze of young memory, the juvenile breasts I had fondled one immortal day. And, as if I were the fairy-tale nurse of some little princess (lost, kidnaped, discovered in gypsy rags through which her nakedness smiled at the king and his hounds), I recognized the tiny dark-brown mole on her side. With awe and delight (the king crying for joy, the trumpets blaring, the nurse drunk) I saw again her lovely indrawn abdomen where my southbound mouth had briefly paused; and those puerile hips on which I had kissed the crenulated imprint left by

> the band of her shorts – that last mad immortal day behind the 'Roches Roses' (Nabokov 2012: 39).

Humbert Humbert uses metaphors to describe the scene, turning it into a fairytale in which he presents himself almost as Lolita's saviour. In fact, it's common in the novel for Humbert to use metaphors to present himself as a character in a position of superiority, whereas Lolita is presented as a little girl in «gypsy rags», for example, or as a «slave»[4]. The expression "gypsy rags" often conveys an "exotic", sexualized, and marginalized image of the so-called "gypsy" figure, as perceived through a stereotypical Western lens. This is precisely what Edward Saïd (Saïd 1995) defined as Orientalism: a system of representation produced by the West, which constructs the Other (Oriental) as exotic, sensual, and inferior, in order to better dominate them symbolically[5].

Also, in this scene, as in the rest of the novel, Lolita has no voice: you can't read or hear her at all, even in reported speech. She is relegated to the status of a character-object. In the script, this is completely different, as Lolita is transformed into a speaking character who is written to be portrayed in front of a camera. She becomes a character in her own right who emerges from Humbert Humbert's gaze and takes on her independence, as we can see in this extract which depicts the meeting between Lolita and Humbert Humbert, whereas in the novel it is more the story of a fantasised encounter. To situate this scene within the broader narrative structure of the script, it is worth noting that it is preceded by a storm sequence which, through what can be interpreted as a metaphorical montage, visually anticipates Lolita's vulnerability, as the frightened girl withdraws to her room:

> DISSOLVE TO:
>
> A Ragged Sunset. The plashing lake. A thunderhead looming. Details of approaching electric storm: an empty milk bottle overturned by a gust. The wind brutally turns the pages of the mangled magazine forgotten on the fold-

4 I am referring here to the sofa scene (chap. xiii) that describes the first sexual assault that Humbert Humbert inflicts on Lolita. In this scene, he metaphorically describes himself as a «robust Turk» who abuses «the youngest and the frailest of his slaves» (Nabokov 2012: 60).

5 For a detailed exploration of the Orientalist motifs in *Lolita*, Monica Manolescu's insightful article offers a valuable analysis of the symbolic role played by visual and narrative elements linked to the Oriental imagination in the novel (full reference available in the bibliography). For further discussion, see also Chapter IV of my thesis.

ing chair. It is suddenly whisked away in rotating mad flight. Nightfall. Lolita barefooted hastens to close a bedroom window. Lightning. Charlotte folds and drags in the garden chair. The thunder claps and rolls. Another flash.

CUT TO:

LOLITA (undressed, on landing, to her mother downstairs) I'm going to bed. I'm scared! Big Thunderclap.

(Nabokov 2011: 25-26)

The storm may be interpreted as a metaphor foreshadowing Humbert's arrival – an event that, like a natural cataclysm, is poised to descend upon Lolita's life and potentially obliterate the fragile constructs of her childhood. His presence, much like a tempest, threatens to destroy her life. We mention this storm to show that, in the script, Humbert is portrayed by Vladimir Nabokov as a veritable predator. He is represented as a threat through the metaphor of the storm. In the novel, the reader also has to unmask the narrator through metaphor in order to understand him as such. The posture of the reader of the novel is not so different from that of the reader of the screenplay, as these extracts from the encounter in both the novel and the screenplay demonstrate. However, the screenplay does not rely solely on metaphors and shows an oppressive Humbert, as in his first exchange with Lolita:

HUMBERT So you are Lolita.

LOLITA Yes, that's me. (Turns from sea-star supine to seal prone. There is a pause).

HUMBERT It's a beautiful day.

LOLITA Very.

HUMBERT (sitting down on the steps) Nice here. Oh, the floor is hot.

LOLITA (Pushes a cushion toward him.) Make yourself comfortable. (She is now in a half-sitting position).

LOLITA Did you see the fire?

HUMBERT No, it was all over when I came. Poor Mr. McCoo looked badly shaken.

LOLITA You look badly shaken yourself.

HUMBERT Why, no. I'm all right. I suppose I should change into lighter clothes. There's a ladybird on your leg.

LOLITA It's a ladybug, not a ladybird. (She transfers it to her finger and attempts to coax it into flight).

HUMBERT You should blow. Like this. There she goes.

LOLITA Ginny McCoo – she's in my class, you know. And she said you were going to be her tutor.

HUMBERT Oh, that's greatly exaggerated. The idea was I might help her with her French.

LOLITA She's grim, Ginny.

HUMBERT Is she – well, attractive?

LOLITA She's a fright. And mean. And lame.

HUMBERT Really? That's curious. Lame?

LOLITA Yah. She had polio or something. Are you going to help me with my homework?

HUMBERT Mais oui, Lolita. Aujourd'hui?[6]

(Nabokov 2011: 41-43)

In this extract from the screenplay, the scene is rewritten and distances itself from the novel. The scene also ridicules Humbert Humbert: it shows an awkward man who cannot settle down, who burns himself on the floor and who awkwardly tries to engage in a discussion with a child. Also, the cultural gap between Lolita and Humbert is marked by the use of «Ladybird», while Lolita corrects it with «Ladybug». Both terms are correct, of course, but the first comes from the "old continent" and already marks a distance between the two protagonists. This scene is told in external focus. This means that we do not adopt Humbert's point of view: it is not he who is narrating, unlike in the novel. Nabokov has no qualms about portraying Humbert as a perverse, inappropriate man who takes the liberty of asking Lolita if her young friend, the McCoo's little girl, is attractive.

This very quick comparative analysis between the text of the novel and that of the screenplay confirms Nabokov's position: he used his screenplay to try to retell *Lolita* in a different way, while retaining the very moral of not harming children.

Nabokov's intention may have been to make the message of his novel more explicit, in order to avoid any possible misinterpretation. However,

6 In French in the text.

the screenplay was ultimately not used for the final film: although Kubrick credits the author, very little of Nabokov's original narrative remains on screen.

In this scene, which is the meeting, what stands out is the way in which Kubrick uses cinematic language to impose a totally different point of view.

The shots in this sequence impose themselves as Lolita's point of view, and in this sequence, it is Lolita's gaze that dominates. The film shows her in the position of seductress, while Humbert seems disturbed and embarrassed by the desire aroused in him by the young girl. This sequence in Kubrick's film is therefore the opposite of the one in the screenplay and the one in Nabokov's novel, which Nabokov expresses when he talks about the film:

> A few days before, at a private screening, I had discovered that Kubrick was a great director, that his Lolita was a first-rate film with magnificent actors, and that only ragged odds and ends of my script had been used. The modifications, the garbling of my best little finds, the omission of entire scenes, the addition of new ones, and all sorts of other changes may not have been sufficient to erase my name from the credit titles but they certainly made the picture as unfaithful to the original script as an American poet's translation from Rimbaud or Pasternak (Nabokov 2011: 10).

This paragraph is remarkable in that Nabokov first compares film adaptation to translation, and here compares Kubrick's adaptation of his novel to the translation of Russian (Boris Pasternak) and French (Arthur Rimbaud) poets by an American poet. However, no names are mentioned, which means that it could be any American poet. Nabokov evokes one of the major problems of his life as an exile, as well as one of the problems of translation and film adaptation, which is that of the cultural and societal differences that can exist between different languages. Finally, this screenplay should be read – in Nabokov's words – as «a vivacious variant of an old novel» (Nabokov 2011: 10). A variation that will remain a screenplay because it will never be brought to the screen. It should not be forgotten that the cinematographic adaptation of a literary work is obviously based initially on the director's interpretation of the text that he or she reads as a reader. An adaptation should therefore be seen as a new work created from a literary medium, and not as the perfect (and impossible) projection of the novel onto the screen. This is how Vladimir Nabokov saw Kubrick's work based on his novel:

> When adapting *Lolita* to the speaking screen he saw my novel in one way, I saw it in another – that's all, nor can one deny that infinite fidelity may be an author's ideal but can prove a producer's ruin (Nabokov 2011: 10).

This gesture may be interpreted as a tactful – and likely contractually constrained – way for Nabokov to signal that the film diverged significantly from his novel, particularly in regard to its underlying moral message, which, as previously discussed, is the imperative «not to harm children». Although the screenplay was originally written for the screen, it remained unpublished for many years due to an embargo imposed by Kubrick and the production team. Today, it stands as a literary work in its own right – one that may yet inspire future adaptations.

In conclusion, the question of intersemiotic self-translation emerges forcefully here. Vladimir Nabokov's adaptation of *Lolita* into a screenplay allows him to remain faithful to a central theme of his work: the denunciation of rape and sexual violence perpetrated by a pedophile against a young girl. While Kubrick's film, as Julia Trubikhina rightly points out, is «loyal» (Trubikhina 2020: 23) by its form, it remains distant in the sense that at least two pivotal narrative points are not transferred: Humbert's history of pedophilia and its centrality to the story, and Lolita's death (Trubikhina 2020: 177). Henri Meschonnic's book *Éthique et politique du traduire* emphasizes the urgency of translating ethics. He writes: «Why urgency? We could continue as we are. But that's precisely because we fail to recognize the harm we inflict on others and ourselves through our linguistic practices» (Meschonnic 2007: chapter III) (my translation – J.L.). Therefore, by neglecting the significance of this aspect of the novel *Lolita*, and more broadly, by overlooking the impact of the cinematic images it generated, Kubrick may not have realized the harm he caused not only to Nabokov and his novel, but also to all those who suffered the fate of Dolores Haze, transformed into Lolita, and then into the myth of the nymphet, the myth of pop culture lolita.

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Abstract

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Lolita, from Novel to Screenplay, an "Inter-semiotic" Rewrite?

This paper analyzes Vladimir Nabokov's screenplay for *Lolita* as a case of intermedial rewriting rather than self-translation. Although remaining a written text, the screenplay operates as a transitional form between literature and film, reshaping the novel's narrative for a new medium. In doing so, it reinforces Nabokov's authorial control and clarifies his often misunderstood position regarding the story's moral stance and the complexity of its characters. The study examines how the screenplay reinterprets key narrative elements, offering an alternative lens on issues of adaptation, authorship, and interpretation. It highlights the screenplay as a significant and creative intervention in the ongoing reception of *Lolita*.

Keywords: Nabokov, *Lolita*, self-translation, screenplay, intermedial rewriting, film and literature, narrative transformation, adaptation.