

THE „COLLECTOR“ AS EXPERIENCE OF EROS AND SEXUALITY IN VLADIMIR NABOKOV’S „LOLITA“ AND JOHN FOWLES’ „THE COLLECTOR“

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the role of Eros and sexuality in the creation of the literary figure and aesthetical type of the collector in the novels *The Collector* by John Fowles and *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov.

The syndrome of the collector is a literary entity that I consider a phenomenon connected to the experience of sexuality as a distorted sense of Eros. It creates an ephemeral reality, one which the collector tends to experience strongly, while the individual becomes — in two different ways — a collector of the inner and deformed sexual desires that never reach the complexity of Eros.

I shall focus mainly on a hermeneutic approach to prove that, especially in the postmodern literary product, and particularly in novels, Eros and sexuality are a basic key to understanding the complexity of the literary character. The two novels by Fowles and Nabokov to a great extent help to create this synthesized panorama.

Keywords: Eros, Sexuality, Thanatos, identity, novel, post-modernity, psychology

Introduction

The limited or distorted perception and experiencing of the psychological, spiritual and physical dimension of Eros has been an ever-present feature in the literary production throughout the history of literature. I believe that this feature could be studied more comprehensively and in a wider range — in relationship to other disciplines within Humanities and possibly Social Sciences as well— if one approaches it through a literary phenomenon that I believe represents the complexity of Eros in a quite persuasive way. That phenomenon is the artistic conception of the protagonist as *a collector*. I consider *the*

collector an aesthetic entity that includes dilemmas, self-ambiguity as well as a complex sexuality and erotic identity.

The collector, Eros, and Thanatos

The *collector* is both a production of a specific time and society as well as a person who shapes human understanding of society in general. In order to explain the way the concept of *the collector* can help to categorize the literary conceptions on sexuality I consider it appropriate to illustrate *the collector* as it appears in two representative novels of the 20th century, John Fowles' *The Collector* and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. I believe that the concept of *the collector* creates a synthesized model and a wide paradigm of the literary characters, especially in 20th century literature, and these two novels are a great help to understanding and interpreting it.

I have specifically chosen Fowles' and Nabokov's novels because I consider them crucial works that allow the reader to have a comprehensive view of the complex nature of the literary character that experiences various types of sexual distortions. As we put our emphasis on the role of Eros in these novels, the concept of *the collector* might become a possible interpretive tool when trying to make sense of the essential expression of human approach to the world and to self through literature.

If the world is seen as a set of relationships rather than as a gathering of events and given objects, we shall subsequently conclude that the concept of Eros is a continuum of the experiences of life and death as a reverted process and also an experience of the ephemeral nature of human existence and perception. I believe that this continuum is the cause of the existence of *the collector* not only as the protagonist of Fowles' novel but also as a prototype, as a literary psychological type that sets out to *collect* precisely due to his inability to *experience* and *grasp* the real nature of life's continuum and of relationships, which are the cornerstone of human life. The dramatic absence of such a vital component in the human psyche and in man's social experience leads to a distorted vision about the self, the world and the other. This is first and foremost observed in the sexual component. Therefore, the focus on the sexual element and the erotic experience of the characters — as a fundamental component of human understanding and as a way of being — may aid us in observing the way in which the human condition is seen and aestheticized in literary works. Seen from this perspective *the collector* reminds us that:

“Every conception of the world and each one of the ideologies which aim to construct new conceptions of the world imply a specific linguistic use

and the ‘stylistic signs’ that M. Bakhtin named - in the same perspective - ideologems.” Segre (2000, p. 31).

The collector is a product of a life history and of a social reality whose complex marks are to be found deep inside the troubled psychology of the characters and in their memories. That makes *the collector* an ideologeme that helps to understand – through this literary phenomenon – the way the individual tries to set a relationship between self and the other and, of course, between self and the world in any given epoch. If this concept is seen as an ideologeme, it will vitalize the connection between interpretation and reading as “a clear act of interiority” Gadamer (2002, p.142), whereby the readers make literature happen and observe their relationship with society, time and history.

The collector is a concept that I regard as especially connected to a basic feature of the postmodern fiction, and which has been anticipated in modernism, where it was shown as a quest for a lost Eden, and for a point of gravity for mankind and the individual. Its essential characteristic is the condition of experiencing the ephemeral as a search for fulfillment. Therefore Eros — even though in a distorted way — constitutes the very basis of the concept that the main characters of the two novels we focus on have about life. On the other hand Eros is perceived through the paradox between the search for long-lasting pleasure and the inevitable ephemeral and depraved nature of the erotic experience these characters have. Thus Eros can be seen as a phenomenon that not only helps us understand the real nature of the main characters in these two novels but is also part of a relationship that describes the doom of these characters; Eros passes into the realm of Thanatos as the last stage of an erroneous and unhealthful relationship between the individual and the other.

Thanatos is closely connected to the destructive desires. It becomes dominant in the ultimate phases of the experience of Eros in Nabokov’s novel with the deaths of Humbert and Lolita. “Nabokov's reputation as one of the major, most original prose writers of the 20th century, a stylist with extraordinary narrative and descriptive skill...” (see Oxford, 2000) comes as a result of his achievement in several novels, *Lolita* being one of them, a novel which represents a unique rendering of the destructive desire in action.

Similarly, Thanatos reaches its climax in Fowles’ novel not only with Miranda’s death but being perpetuated with the line of death that would follow afterward, as Clegg seems to be clearer about how to plan and fulfill his distorted erotic desires through his future victims, who are no more to him than new samples to his collection of dead butterflies.

The concept of *the collector* is configured in these two novels in two different but complementary ways. These two ways – each one represented by Humbert and Clegg – enable us to understand the existential condition of the individual in a continuous quest for meaning and emotional fulfillment, and to also understand the constant tendency to escape from the condition of being unfulfilled and estranged. This is achieved through the erotic and sexual component, which can be seen as a basic parameter to understand the relationship of the individual with self and the other. As the characters express either willingly or involuntarily their erotic perceptions, they develop a sociopathic behavior. Herein lies the essence of the collector as the paradigm of uncertainty and paranoia that leads to an ephemeral dimension of existence while they are subdued to the Eros-Thanatos experience.

A comparative approach and basic lines of interpretation

Comparative studies can be seen as meta-theories as long as they are constructed as a continuous and necessary reinterpretation of the literary works and of the accumulated literary knowledge. I therefore believe that an appropriate method of comparison includes a hermeneutic approach, through which we can achieve a methodological variety that leads to new meanings and to dynamic ways of understanding and interpreting these two novels and literary texts in general. The relevance of this approach lies in the analysis of the complimentary models of the syndrome of *the collector* and in the way this literary figure has been conceptualized by Nabokov and Fowles. The analysis of this phenomenon can be revealing when as regards the quest for self-understanding as well as the role of Eros in stabilizing the relationship of the individual with himself and the world. As I have stated earlier there are reasons to believe that through such an approach a synthesis can be achieved, one which describes a fundamental postmodern literary reality, that of the self-ambivalence which is connected to the distorted erotic and sexual experience. Hence an approach having a triple outlook – psychological, philosophical and social – can be implemented when analyzing this topic. Also, by focusing on the hermeneutical perspective significant features of ‘psychiatric’ literature can be revealed.

The aesthetic conception of *the collector* seems to be charged with social, cultural and psychological connotations. However, I will not focus on the gender interpretations, neither in the class conflict present in these novels, but on particular details that form the ephemeral reality of Eros, seen by the perspective of the two protagonists of these novels, Humbert and Clegg. This ephemeral reality degenerates into perverted sexual desires and pornography.

In Nabokov’s *Lolita* Eros is most perceived through the medium of *touch* and *words*, which means that Eros is expressed verbally in long meditations and descriptions that are

used by Humbert as a medium of justification of his perversion. On the other hand, Fowles chooses the *visual element* and *complete silence*, since he perceives Clegg as an almost mute character, who lacks almost any form of expressing his emotions and any real relationship. Both Nabokov and Fowles, however, create an ephemeral dimension of Eros that represents the main – and paranoiac – fear of the characters as they suffer the impossibility of communication with themselves and with others. In Humbert this is less obvious because of his keen ability to hide his real person and his constant attempt to aestheticize his distorted erotic desires but in Clegg that is quite obvious and it shows in many aspects of his behavior — the way he dresses, his inability to communicate, his constant self-awareness of inferiority — and in his emblematic silence. Nevertheless, I see both Humbert and Clegg as two individuals that are stuck in a permanent inability to go beyond the distortions resulting from their way of perceiving love and sex, stemming precisely from their incapacity to communicate with the others, to grasp and accept reality for what it is.

In Nabokov both characters, Humbert and Lolita, develop through a process that has a backward orientation and that dissolves their identity and creates self-illusion. They are estranged from one another and also from Eros, while Humbert seems to satisfy his unclear and vague perspective on sexuality. He tries hard to sugarcoat his self-ambivalence, even the tragedy caused to Lolita, by presenting them as an artistic act but he eventually fails to achieve this goal.

In Fowles' novel there is instead the complete distancing from the object of sexual desire, which doesn't allow Clegg to approach Miranda. In the concept of the collector, embodied by Clegg, Eros is presented as a distorted reality, where the tragic lack of communication is figuratively expressed by the dominance of the visual element over the tactile and by silence over words. Visual elements as part of the sexual pleasure are found in both novels and, although in different ways, they lead to the idea of voyeurism which "is an integral part of the pornographic" Toulalan (2007, p. 162) because:

"Pornography naturalizes the desire to look and to watch, and works upon the assumption that looking at, or reading about, not only the body, but more particularly the body's sexual parts and the body in sexual motion, is inherently sexually arousing for the viewer..." Toulalan (2007, p. 171-172).

While exercising a particular type of voyeurism Humbert looks at Lolita in an unnatural way: he constructs a Lolita of his own and thus creates an erotic subject that is easier for his conscience to accept and that justifies his deplorable actions toward her. This

mental Lolita is created due to the abnormal communication that Humbert has with a fictional Lolita, a creature of his mind and memories rather than with the real Lolita. He says:

What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita – perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness – indeed, no life of her own. (Nabokov p. 62)

In order to construct out of Lolita a new and amplified version of his Annabel Leigh, he needs Lolita's body, her age and physical features. As a consequence Eros in this novel is constructed mainly through touch and verbal signs since Humbert has a perception of his own about love, and has created a half ephemeral and half justifying type of communication for his aberrant sexual behavior.

On the other hand Clegg prefers not a person, not even the image of a past lover embodied in another person; he prefers a specimen, one that does not move but is fixed on a picture just like a dead butterfly. What unites the two – Humbert and Clegg – in the syndrome of the *collector* is their pervert imagination about gathering fragments of the image of their victims' body and then elaborate in their minds the new creature that answers to their own unnatural perceptions of erotic and sexual desires. Clegg is the collector of a naturalistic and troubled kind that doesn't touch his specimen being totally alienated from himself and from the other. Any form of contact is impossible to him. Humbert, on the other hand, has reached a sophisticated level of his perverted conception of sexuality and Eros that turns him into a collector of fantasies, of half artistic and half-psychotic mental figures and memories about his erotic subject. In both novels the characters fail to see the self and the other through another perspective but their own and Eros is the element that openly shows their inner failure and lack of perspective. These characters live with the fear of losing their sexual subjects and create an ephemeral reality that veils a malicious and unnatural sexuality. Therefore they do not experience Eros but the very experience of Thanatos and the unavoidable materialization of the instinct of destruction. They become trapped in this continuum and the climax is reached as Humbert murders Quilty and Clegg prepares to add another specimen to his collection only this time he "... would made it clear who's boss and what [he] expects." (see Fowles, 1998)

The characters in both novels also try to experience Eros through the attempt to reshape space. This is a particular aspect of creating the ephemeral. Reformatting space would help them to better control their erotic subjects. That is seen in Humbert's journey with

Lolita through the States; on the contrary, Clegg's claustrophobic nature — and the diminishing space within his world that automatically excludes the other — is manifested by countryside house he buys for Miranda. *Sight* and *image* in Fowles have been widely studied in terms of voyeurism (see Lenz, 2008) and, in my opinion, they lead to a proper understanding of the limitation of space and landscape and to the objectification (reification) of character. The element of sight and the image are crucial in the perception of the *collector*, particularly regarding the female character. Generally, “as Fowles' works remain saturated with all forms of visual art, women are treated similarly” (Belz-Kaczmarek 2010, p.92), therefore a woman is seen as a specimen, as an abstract creature divided from her real self.

The landscape, which is an element very much related to sight and image, as well as the reformatting of space become basic conditions for the ephemeral reality to exist. This is shown in Humbert's reminiscences of Annabel and in his images of the evoked islands of nymphets, and also in the places he chooses to stay with Lolita; the same can be said of the countryside that Clegg chooses for Miranda's kidnapping. In general, in literature “the concept of landscape has an authentic interpretative value” (see Wagner, 2009). Understanding *the collector's* landscape is one of the basic features that help to comprehend the concept of space and how people relate to it. Humbert Humbert's journey in the west “is presented as a bizarrely dissociated narrative in which landscape is meant to distract us from his contemptible efforts...” (see Mitchell, 2007). What he ostensibly sees as an amazing love is in fact a perverted and unfortunate feeling. He is in a very tragic stage of his life, which will lead himself and Lolita to destruction.

Indeed, Nabokov intuitively grasps a central truth about the West, that it is a landscape of transit, of passage, invariably pitched between disappointment in the just-experienced and hope invested in the nearest horizon. If that rhythm informs Humbert's relations with Lolita, it is given emblematic shape in the West through which they travel as he tries to be descriptively adequate to a multiplicity and exorbitance...” Mitchell (2007).

Humbert continuously replaces the elements that compose the concept of time with those which form the concept of space. This can be seen as an attempt that he makes to control and arrest the ephemeral nature of his deformed Eros. He cannot bear the changing shapes of a nymphet. He admits that “(he) substitute(s) time terms for special ones” (Nabokov, p.16). And in all his concepts there is the symbol of the mirror that duplicates the reality. His twisted and ambivalent self becomes more concrete by means of this figure

through which Humbert finds a way to arrest time, to multiply the reality that he vehemently tries to create and keep alive. He alienates Lolita to such a degree that it seems as if he sees her reflection in his mind rather than the real Lolita. His failure to have a full sexual experience with Annabel Leigh during childhood creates in him a stronger will to evoke that unfulfilled desire in a different time, and he tries to make it last as much as possible when he experiences it through Lolita. The experience with Annabel caused a strong feeling of loneliness. He has chosen a camouflaged way of communicating with the world and when he starts to live at the Hazes' he writes his diary where he collects his feelings, his ideas and images of Lolita's body that he sees every day living in the same house with her. Everything starts with death and unfulfilled desires — failure to have a full sexual experience with Annabel and her — and ends with death (the killing of Quilty and both deaths of Humbert and Lolita). As in the case with Lilith, Humbert has created a person that corresponds to his idea of that person, an image that conforms with his own unfulfilled and warped desires while he ends up by being more alienated from himself and, more importantly, by alienating Lolita. He associates Lolita with Lilith and with lilies. This gives the impression of timelessness and eternal distance from the objective reality. He concocts an abstraction of Lolita when he says he is not concerned merely with sex but “with the perilous mystery of the nymphet.” (Nabokov p. 134). This is both ironic and perverse because, in following his “quest”, he delights in sexual relationships with a child. However, Humbert is not a simple pervert. He is a tragically ambivalent person whose fate is unavoidable. The very concept of the mirror present even in his own name reveals the dramatically inescapable, and double self that he is doomed with. He is ambivalent, for he is both a sexually romantic, inspired, person, and a pervert, a psychopathic individual. He experiences this sexual aporia that never ends until he meets Lolita, an encounter that completes his circle of self-destruction.

Perceiving Thanatos

Thanatos is perceived in various ways in these two novels starting with the lack of communication. In the case of Miranda and Clegg the most important association is distance, difference, emptiness and the continuous lack of communication, gradually paves the way to destruction. It is no coincidence that Miranda's journal occupies a great part of this book. Clegg reads her journal. And that is the only contact he ever has with the real Miranda. There is no contact between them throughout the time that Miranda lived in Clegg's home. They communicate only through silence and sight. Therefore sexuality in this novel is a more direct presentation of Thanatos from the outset. Beauty, sexuality, and, generally, Eros appear

as fragments of a frozen mental image in Clegg's mind and create an ephemeral reality doomed to be destroyed with the subject of that perception, Miranda.

On the other hand, harking back to Nabokov, touch and verbal expression reveal a close contact between the individual and his own distorted model of the other. Other than physical contact nothing else seems to have any significance. Even the name of Lolita holds in a symbolic way the devilry of the contact with what is forbidden, and the memory of a lost Eden. Humbert has created himself this variant of the name of Dolores after Lilith, which is the opposite mythical figure of Eve. The demonic instinct and desire that he has grown within himself is now transformed into something quite unusual, where pain, loneliness, suffering, perversion and crime are bundled together. Eros is somehow distorted and transformed into the Thanatos impulse as a result of the inner consciousness of the loss of Eden as a mental, spiritual and physical origin of harmony which is culturally constructed but also metaphysically perceived – as a reminiscence by Humbert and, in the case of Clegg, as an inner, even though pale, awareness of having failed to experience any form of love in the past. Humbert and Clegg both serve as an illustration of this. Through the concept of Eros as it is configured in these characters, both Nabokov and Fowles shape artistically the impulse of death exercised through Eros and sexuality toward self and the other as an ultimate result:

Bataille's philosophical writing on pornography holds that sexuality is inevitably equated with death in the human imaginary. This is because sex affects the psychological transgression and dissolution of the boundaries between self and other, doing violence to our sense of integrity and separateness. This phenomenon is referred to by psychoanalysts as "ego annihilation." In light of Bataille's philosophy of sexuality, erotic asphyxiation (alongside vampirism, bloodletting, and sadomasochistic torture) becomes a privileged trope with which to express literally the liminal nature of sexual experience, the collusion of Eros and Thanatos. Downing (428, p. 2006).

Besides, the Thanatos instinct grows in different but complementary ways in each of the characters. Nevertheless, both cases represent highly synthesized models of the way Eros and sexuality lead to an understanding of the relationship people have with the others and with their own self. These models unavoidably include murder and other forms of perverted desires as well.

Some poets have been less squeamish regarding their mapping of murder onto sex. Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* [*The Flowers of Evil*] (1855) contains many explorations of this idea. One of the most striking, “A celle qui est trop gaie” [Against Her Levity], describes a fantasy of murderous wounding. The poet recounts his desire to create a new hole in his mistress's abdomen, more beautiful than her original sexual opening, into which he can inject his “venin” [venom]. This poetic fantasy of wounding suggests a metaphorical means of transforming sex into murder. This is particularly visible in the climactic image of ejaculation, in which the substance ejected is not life-giving sperm, but fatal poison. Drowning (1286, p. 2006)

This passage reminds us of Humbert's longing to kiss Lolita's uterus and liver and Clegg's decision about Miranda's health condition which leads to her death. Both characters try to justify their cravings and Humbert even aestheticizes his madness. While Clegg simply stands on the safe side and reasons about Miranda's life as if it were a case of preserving one of the many specimens of his dead butterflies collection.

It is obvious that both Humbert and Clegg fear loneliness, and the lack of the objects of their desire. In Folwles' *The Collector* the unnatural and unbearable desire of the characters to experience the sexual dimension of existence starts as a desire to avoid extreme loneliness as well as an acute necessity to regain the lost paradise – some kind of inner purity and wholeness. They are both in search of fulfillment, which, in a deficient and relativistic world, is distorted into monstrous realities of violence where Eros is no longer Eros but the essence of Thanatos and destruction. Not only is their erotic impulse unnatural it transforms into a desire to possess and misshape reality, and that is what further accentuates ambivalence of the self as well as the perverse and tragic deformation of the experience of Eros. There is created this ephemeral reality of perverted sexual desires that the protagonists of the two novels, Humbert and Clegg, hopelessly try to keep alive which unavoidably leads to death. Therefore their erotic experience becomes an ironically tragic quest for self-fulfillment. Clegg collects butterflies and the English word butterfly directly evokes the expression “flutter by”. I believe there is an immediate association between Clegg's ephemeral experience of Eros and femininity and the fluttering nature of the butterflies, Miranda and his future victims being part of his collection. The same can be said of Humbert. He dreams about the island and the sea where the nymphets dance but the sea — among many other things — is a symbol of timelessness, and immeasurable distance from the *now* and *here*.

Referring to Nabokov's descriptions in the second half of *Lolita* (p.153):

“... the cadences of that indefatigable butterfly collector and Colorado tourist are beyond mistaking. Hardly an authentic westerner — not even an authentic American — he achieves in the second half of *Lolita* one of the most brilliant evocations of the West in the past half-century” Mitchell (2007).

It is possible to see the perception of space in the vast area where Humbert aims to hide in the desperate hope that time will stop, Lolita will not grow up and everything that he knows that is wrong will fade away. Even though a wasted effort, the ephemeral referred to in all its complexity, including sex, time, past, space, and fears, requires much energy to remain in existence:

“The allusion to part 6 of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time, The Captive (Albertine disparue, 1925)*, operates for the reader in several ways. As well as participating in the ongoing theme of Humbert's erudition, it also creates a thematic parallel which positions Nabokov's narrator alongside Proust's, in his failed efforts to remove his child-like love from time, and in the slippage between sexual and textual desire. Finally though, this passage invites us to understand the intrusion of time and the intrusion of literary history as functioning in similar ways, as unwanted but unavoidable constituents of those sexual and textual desires.” Norman (2009)

The concept of time has been widely studied (see Hasty 2004, Hustis 2007) but the ephemeral in these novels is a dimension, an artistic reality that includes both concepts of time and space.

In both novels is created an ethical-aesthetical polarization by the two main characters in their attempt to justify their actions. While Humbert aestheticizes evil and sexual perversion, Clegg is a collector and thus embodies the anti-beauty, anti-life, anti-art and he does not have any sensitivity beauty. He even tries to justify his deeds and purposes in ethical terms. He believes he is behaving decently and that no other man has the ability and politeness to respect a woman as he does. Clegg's emotional expressions are very few and cautious. Also, his lack of imagination and his being sexless – as Miranda writes in her journal – is definitely a good description of Clegg but also seals Miranda's tragic fate. Miranda has a character of her own while Clegg seems to have only a set of habits and self-made ethical terms.

On the other hand, Lolita and the artistic procedure of aestheticism that Humbert tries to establish in one way or another has created a paradigm of its own in several respects (see Van Der Bent, 2004: 215), since “(i)n his first-person narrative, he does not, so much try to defend himself as to turn the chronicle of his perversion into a genuine love story and to gain the aesthetic approval of the literary connoisseur.” Couturier (941, p. 2006). This is quite obvious also because there is a relation between emotions, cognition and behavior that can be explained in the characters therefore it is possible to speak about alchemy of the emotions (see Elster 1999:137) but the very blending of these elements leads to the fatal result the creation of Thanatos. Lolita and Miranda exist as creations of Humbert’s and Clegg’s minds:

“Pictures, caricatures, impersonations, spots on the walls, entopic lights: all these *representatives* have as common trait that they are objects for consciousness. The purely mental *content* of the mental image cannot escape this law.

The illusion of immanence consists in transferring externality, space and all the sensible qualities of the thing to the transcendent psychic content. It does not possess these qualities – it represents them, but *in its own way*. Sartre (76, p. 1948)

That is how Lolita is perceived by Humbert and, in a certain way, that is how Miranda too is perceived by Clegg. They no longer exist as they really are; rather they exist the way Humbert and Clegg desire them to be while they fulfill their distorted sexual desires. That is why Humbert and Clegg’s conception of Eros constitutes a key to understand the dynamics of the distortion of this crucial aspect of human life, a distortion which has severe consequences. It represents an important element in modern literature and can especially be seen in erotic literature but which has also a bearing beyond that literature.

“The best examples of Western erotic literature explore the tension between the psychosomatic and the metaphysical modes of desire and tend to engage in the centuries-long dialogue on the ambivalent, paradoxical nature of Eros. For example, Thomas Mann’s novella *Death in Venice* (1912) epitomizes the Platonic chase of Eros’s meaning: its protagonist frantically pursues a beautiful young boy, described as the god Eros himself. In *Ulysses* (1922), through Molly Bloom’s character, James Joyce gives voice to what may be heard as repressed sexual desire in Homer’s Penelope. Vladimir Nabokov, in *Lolita* (1955), creates the concept of the nymphet, symbolic of the immediacy

and transience of Eros. The namesake character of the novel is both realistic and, through numerous literary allusions (from Plato and Ovid to Proust and Poe), symbolic of the writer's enchantment with Eros. Mitova (426, p. 2006)

The double nature of Eros as both a psychic and a physical event has its origin in the myth of Psyche and Eros and it has been defined since ancient Greece, thereby producing a permanently open debate about the relationship of mind and body and the way they can both disfigure the concept of Eros or love.

“In the ancient Greek tradition, the word *éros* expressed and paradoxically unified the psychosomatic and metaphysical modes of human desire. The former can be satisfied, though temporarily; the latter is insatiable. (ibid. 424, p. 2006)

I believe Humbert and Clegg are two representative characters in the literature of the second half of the 20th century that allow a wide understanding about the way Eros and sexuality can be so thoroughly deformed as to lead to the most obscene crimes and suffering for both victims and the perpetrators. Through their distorted perception of Eros one can discern one of most complex conditions of ambivalence in the modern individual and also the dramatic inner crossroads that may lead to (self)destruction.

Conclusion

Eros and sexuality can be seen as key instruments for interpretation, especially in the literature written from the mid-20th century onwards. The ambivalent self as a syndrome of the postmodern individual is always present in the literature – especially prose – written during this time. This syndrome is connected to lack of communication, loneliness, early sentimental and psychological trauma, and the like. This leads to perverted sexual desires and warped erotic desires that ruin the dramatic equilibrium in the Eros–Thanatos relationship by tragically and unavoidably tipping the scales in favor of the second element.

There are reasons to believe that through a comparative approach and hermeneutical proceedings a synthesis can be reached at, one which describes a fundamental postmodern literary reality– that of the self-ambivalence which is linked to the distorted erotic and sexual perceptions. In this respect, Humbert and Clegg in Nabokov's *Lolita* and in Fowles' *The Collector*; may be seen as very useful literary specimens that help to understand the paradigm of the (literary) characters that experience sexual disorientations. Both of the novels' protagonists fail to see reality for what it is, cause harm to their so-called object of love,

commit murder, and try to cover the reality of their actions by aestheticizing perversion (Humbert) and by ethically justifying themselves in absurd and irrational reasoning (Clegg).

None of them really feels or understands their intimate experiences; they merely collect extracts of twisted image in their lives referring to previous models. In order to sustain this delusive reality as much as they can, they reformat the concepts of space and time in their minds and in their surroundings, which is linked to their self-awareness about the transient nature of time. While they attempt to do so they create an ephemeral reality that is destined to end and that leads to death.

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