

". . . Under an American veranda . . ." Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*

If it were only a question of forms here, the task of translating them into words would be a particular pleasure; it would even be a pure pleasure, for there is beauty here. That said, this pleasure, if there were any, would undoubtedly be anything but pure. The nature of a sly seduction that slowly propagates in space these beings which are similar in all ways to human bodies, composed, morphologically speaking, of the same nominal groups, with the proper syntax, is far from being "pure." And as for the syntax itself, certain details constantly ring false. This head, with this neck and this nape (above all the nape!), may still possibly go with these legs, but must one absolutely - I mean, in a definitive way - join precisely these arms to it, for example? That is the question that arises, and, even more than a simple question, that is the problem - not an impression - that arises and imposes itself in a metaphysical way, after the manner of Kubrick, one might say.

Then, if our intuition is right, one might immediately suggest a "reading formula," without unnecessary rhetorical turns of phrase. Jumping to conclusions (which is what we want), one might say that "they" are there in the process of taunting us.

Even when they offer themselves to our view in all apparent confidence, yielding themselves up like heavy, lifeless objects.

Of course, I'm forcing things by opposing them to us, by artificially setting up the category of "them." I believe, however, that the approach is methodologically valid, and even positively vital. I immediately make it known that I refuse to get mixed up with them and play their games of slow and sly seduction. I choose to resist. Sensibility has nothing to do with it. So, say what you will about me, at least you owe me respect for the effort. The moreso as resistance does not mean coldness. On the contrary, this resistance is (still) quite flexible, penetrable, almost ardent. The proof is that I am (still) talking about myself, as if I were afraid to launch into the interpretation of the subject and thus in some way inevitably get mixed up with "them," to participate in their strange rituals.

Another proof: (as Lise would say) I hate old people.

I said "strange" in order to lend more clarity to my resolve to maintain the status quo. That said, given both science and literary tradition, we know a great deal, notably, about the nature of these rituals which, profiting maliciously from their "real" absence (as Françoise Dalto would say), "they" are (or, rather, each of "them" is) in the process of staging.

The first rule of the game "they" play is: don't yield to matter. By that I mean to material and objective existence as a proof of anything at all. At the risk of breaking everything or of breaking their own necks. European metaphysics and German romanticism, if they weren't regally unaware of them, would be of great help here.

But in the opposite sense.

To begin from the body which is never definitively "theirs," even when everything is already in place. The ambition of the indefinite (as Gombrowicz would say) which is born, at the very heart of contradiction, of the fact of being at once like others and desperately unique. How, then, resolve to inhabit this body definitively as the one possible variant, while the surrounding space is inexhaustibly rich in forms or "formulas" that one can try on at liberty, the way one tries on dresses? I'm speaking of the cultural strata into which "they" have parachuted like extraterrestrials - pagan spirits (as Nabokov would say, he who asked

himself why, in the end, "they" always imitate prostitutes) - and who are made more of images than of material things. So they try on bodies - a hallucinogenic process (for "them" as for us). For, in appearing, disappearing, and reappearing, they seek as much to lose themselves, to deceive themselves, to make themselves other, as to remind (themselves) of their own existence, which is never certain or definitive. Experiments which are all too ambiguous. What they succeed at, in any case, is at making "us" uneasy, we who are capable of accepting a priori something as absurd as toes.

Unless we're saints.

In any case, no banality, nor complacency . . . The nice "Rimbaud - Lolita" couple I noticed yesterday in the subway was exactly like everyone else and bored to death. Whereas I, nourished by Salinger (whom I could not read today without linking him to Dostoevsky's *Adolescent*), felt, in a fit of real vascular pain, the shame of the extreme ugliness of the environment we have concocted for "them," if only with our faces and bodies.

But no complacency towards ourselves either.

By the way, as for faces, "they" don't have any. They are, in fact (I'm speaking of their faces), only commonplaces, but staggering ones. For, while serving them as an alibi, they are in fact only signs of absence. "They" are not there: there is no one either in the house, or in the garden, or in the town. There is only the chaos they have left behind, while trying, as far as possible, to arrange something out of the elements they found when they came - something which, whatever one does, brings us back to the coffin or the lumber-room.

Deprived of faces, they have what angels have - hair. Let us note, in passing, that Beatrice also had no face. On the other hand, she had a certain movement of the body, an inclination (you imagine a neck, a nape, shoulders), wrapped in a red robe which she offered to Dante's view between her appearance at the age of nine and her disappearance at the age of nineteen. It was by that inclination that Dante recognized the angel.

Nabokov explicitly cites Dante, but in a mocking tone. However, another more secret dantean citation is hidden in a phrase in which Lolita is called NOVA. Besides, like Beatrice, Lolita has no face. Instead, she has shoulders the color of honey, a back (she turns on her knees), and a mane of light chestnut hair. By these signs, the moment she makes herself seen, she is immediately detected by Humbert in her quality as a demon.

It is time to give up simulacra nostra, the angel says to Dante. It is a question of simulacra that are born, according to medieval opticians, between the material object and the eye. However, one must not confuse these immaterial presences with simili, which are images as well, but disposed over the sphere and thus equally distant from the center (I suggest that we pass quickly over these places which Dante himself qualifies as obscure). As for the simulacra, one would think it was a question of photography: the image, instead of being reproduced at the back of the brain box, is made between the one who looks and those who are seen at the back of the box. Dante would undoubtedly have called the camera the "angel of sight."

If Beatrice, without a face, composed uniquely of words (and that is the secret of Dante's lingua), is one of the simili, the movement of inclination which she offers to Dante, or deprives him of, is doubtless that of the category of simulacra (here Dante the photographer comes into the picture). Besides, like Beatrice, Lolita is first of all a matter of style. The impossible exploit (Nabokov puts it in these terms) would be to define once and for all the fatal nature of "their" charm.

I suggest recognizing, in certain of Lise's photographs, the black-rimmed glasses of Lolita and the red dress of Beatrice.

Though without attaching too much importance to such details.

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