

**Ákos I. Farkas**

## **As McFate Would Have It**

### **The Author's Joycean Cameo in *Lolita***

Establishing multiple instances of intertextuality between Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, this article seeks more significant analogies between the two works than some curious but easily demonstrated instances of gender and ethnic-related motivic echoing. Thus it is shown that Nabokov believed himself to be emulating Joyce's example of breaking the narrative frame of his novel to make room for his own authorial self. The essay asks, but declines to answer, whether the authorial hide-and-seek observed in the two novels provides evidence of Joyce and Nabokov having both been proto-postmodernists of sorts, or else the very ease with which their self-referential riddles can be solved locates them in an earlier tradition of the novel.

The claim made by Vladimir Nabokov in an interview, that he had found nothing to puzzle him in *Ulysses*, that “most lucid of novels,” is anything but puzzling.<sup>1</sup> Unless, of course, the great Russian-American puzzler's definition of a puzzle excludes all that he himself was able to solve as he solved, or believed to have solved, the riddle posed by the most special of all James Joyce's incidental characters: the Man in the Brown Macintosh. “Now who is that lankylooking galoot over there in the macintosh?” a nonplussed Leopold Bloom wonders in the “Hades” episode of *Ulysses*, catching a glimpse of an unaccounted-for stranger attending the funeral of Paddy Dignam (115).<sup>2</sup> The identity of the thirteenth mourner at the Prospect Cemetery of Glasnevin remains, as far as Bloom is concerned, an unsolvable “selfinvolved enigma” throughout his daylong citywide peregrinations. Not so for Professor Nabokov. As we learn from the edited version of his Cornell University lectures on *Ulysses*, the “chap in the macintosh” is none other than James Joyce himself. The clue, we are told, is given in the library episode known as “Scylla and Charybdis,”<sup>3</sup>

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1. Herbert Gold, “Interview with Vladimir Nabokov,” in *Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations and Tributes*, eds. Alfred Appel Jr. and Charles Newman (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 195–206, p. 203.

2. All parenthetical references are given to this edition: James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922, London: Minerva, 1992).

3. Although Nabokov, with Joyce himself as he believed, found the “pseudo-Homeric titles” applied to the episodes of *Ulysses* entirely inappropriate (cf. Vladimir Nabokov, “*Ulysses*,” *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980],

where Stephen Dedalus explains how the great Shakespeare “has hidden his own name, a fair name, William, in the plays, a super here, a clown there, as a painter of old Italy set his face in a dark corner of his canvas. . .” (*Ulysses*, 221). This, as Nabokov concludes from evidence hinted at earlier on in his lecture, “is exactly what Joyce has done – setting his face in a dark corner of his canvas. The Man in the Brown Macintosh who passes through the dream of the book is no other than the author himself. Bloom glimpses his maker!”<sup>4</sup>

Whether it is indeed his maker, James Joyce, whom Bloom glimpses whenever catching sight of Mr mysterious M’Intosh – at eleven points in the course of his Dublin wanderings – is something I prefer to leave undecided. Thus I will ignore, rather than try to substantiate or challenge, the noted Joyce scholar Julian Moynahan’s claim that “[t]here is no tradition in Joyce scholarship that says the man in the brown macintosh is James Joyce wearing an absurd disguise. The identification shows Nabokov at his most playful and arbitrary.”<sup>5</sup> This may or may not be so; however, for my purposes here it is more important to find out what Nabokov thinks and makes, in his own fiction, of the perceived identity between implied author and stray fictional character, than to decide whether any similar identification is in fact made by Joyce in *Ulysses*, as Nabokov would have us believe.<sup>6</sup> I propose that beyond his conviction of having correctly deciphered the riddle of the macintosh-man in *Ulysses*, Nabokov proceeded to do to the protagonist of his classic novel *Lolita* the very same thing that he believed Joyce to have done to Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*. As his Dublin predecessor and fellow-connoisseur of fine perfumes, pretty sights and adolescent girls is assumed by Nabokov to have been, so Humbert Humbert is also made to see, without recognizing, his own creator and the omnipotent ruler of his universe in the fictional world that he inhabits in Nabokov’s provincial America.

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285–370, p. 288), I will risk being classed with Nabokov’s “scholarly and pseudoscholarly bores” and refer to the episodes of *Ulysses* as “Hades,” “Scylla. . .” “Laestrygonians” or “Cyclops” as the case may be.

4. Nabokov, “*Ulysses*,” p. 320.

5. Julian Moynahan, “Nabokov and Joyce,” in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. Vladimir Alexandrov (New York: Garland, 1995), 433–44, p. 441.

6. Without trying to settle the issue one way or another, I find one thing noteworthy about Nabokov’s insistence on the macintosh-man’s being a cryptic self-portrait of the author. The Nabokov argument that the figure of the “man in the brown macintosh who loves a lady who is dead” is given more emphasis than any other pair of lovers on Bloom’s long list of loving couples because of his Joyce-like grief as the motherless son does not sound particularly convincing (*Ulysses*, p. 352; Nabokov, “*Ulysses*” p. 318). The mournful lover of a dead mother, if a mother the lady in the quotation is, may just as well be Stephen Dedalus as James Joyce himself.

Where and in what guise then does his creator appear during Humbert's trans-American automobile trek? And what are the clues pointing to his own presence that Nabokov leaves lying about, half concealed, half-revealed, in the manner of that purloined letter in Poe's much-cited tale? Before answering these questions, it seems unavoidable to examine whether the figures of Leopold Bloom and Humbert Humbert themselves are worth comparing in the first place. Is there anything remarkable to connect Joyce's Irish advertisement canvasser of a Jewish-Hungarian background to Nabokov's newly nationalized American litterateur of a mixed French, Austrian and English descent?

At first sight there may appear nothing strikingly similar between the two, aside from their shared weakness for pretty young females, described as girlwomen in *Ulysses* and nymphets in *Lolita*. Different as their respective ages may be – at 21, Bloom's Gerty is safely over the age of consent, whereas “little Lo” is but 12 (note the inversion of digits here!) when Humbert first glimpses her – the similarity between the two girls is truly unmistakable. Indeed, what looks like mere analogy may have been a case of no less than homologous creation, as suggested by Neil Cornwell in an article tracing *Lolita* back to *Ulysses*. The functional parallelism between the two young female figures – both the objects of the illicit desire sparkling in the male gaze directed at them – is painstakingly demonstrated to be more of a genealogical than an accidental nature in the Irish academic's piece on *Lolita*'s Irish “precursors.”<sup>7</sup> However, locating one more of *Lolita*'s likely precursors in Dublin would not, in itself, establish between the two nymphets, or colleens, a link strong enough to legitimize a meaningful comparison between their respective admirers. And yet the careful reader of *Lolita* will find that there is much more to the Bloom vs. Humbert analogy than the circumstantial evidence of there having being a Celtic *Lolita* or two in the back of Nabokov's mind as a result of a youthful journey he apparently took to the Emerald Isle.

To begin with, Humbert himself is twice mistaken, on account of his name being misspelled as Humberg and then for his darkish Mediterranean looks, for what Leopold Bloom now distressfully, now defiantly, claims himself to be – a Jew. First it is the receptionist of a hotel advertising itself as an establishment “near churches” – a cryptic message known to have been used by certain mid-western landlords in the nineteen-fifties to discourage any Jewish patrons – who misjudges Humbert's ethnic background. Later on in the narrative it is the turn of the protagonist's counterpart to make the same mistake: Clare Quilty tries to expel the gun-toting intruder from his manor, a vengeance-driven Humbert darkened by violent anger as much as by his congenital pigmentation, with words

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7. Neil Cornwell, “*Ulysses* and *Lolita*,” *James Joyce Broadsheet* 71 (2005) 1.

redolent of anti-Semitic sentiments as odious as they are misdirected.<sup>8</sup> “This is a Gentile’s house, you know,” goes Clare’s high-handed gambit. “Maybe, you’d better run along” (*Lolita*, p. 297).<sup>9</sup>

It is worth noting that despite his lifelong scorn for all sorts of ethnic bigotries, Nabokov is not out to solicit our sympathy for Humbert as a possible victim of misplaced anti-Semitism. These instances of Humbert being mistaken for what he is not are meant to suggest, in the circuitous way not uncharacteristic of Nabokov, what the novel’s protagonist most certainly is: an alien in the setting that he moves about in. His own being a double, or indeed triple, alien in America is repeatedly emphasised by Humbert himself. At one point he refers to his father, and by implication himself, as “a salad of racial genes.” Replace French with English and Hungarian, and the description given in *Lolita* of Humbert père’s “mixed French and Austrian descent, with a dash of the Danube in his veins” can equally well be applied to “Rudolf Virag of Szombathely, Vienna, Budapest, Milan, London, and Dublin,” as Bloom’s father was introduced by Professor Nabokov to his undergraduate audience at Cornell.<sup>10</sup> It hardly needs pointing out that the “blonde Austrian soldier” in Bloom’s ancestry is duly noted in Nabokov’s Joyce lectures.<sup>11</sup>

In this context, Humbert’s remark on his own manly good looks of a “pseudo-Celtic” character (*Lolita*, p. 104; my italics), or his playful self-description as a “Franco-Irish gentleman” (122; my italics), will strike the attentive reader as more than coincidental. The “semblance of an Irish sub-theme,” as the phenomenon has been dubbed by Neil Cornwell in his above-cited article, is reinforced by more than Humbert’s references to Lo as a “little colleen” here and a half-Irish daughter there (*Lolita*, pp. 113 and 239). The Irish scholar wonders whether Nabokov was aware that Leopold Bloom’s prototype might well have been a man called Hunter. Examined in the neon light of *The Enchanted Hunter*, the hotel where Lolita falls prey to her stepfather’s wolfish lust, the significance of Humbert’s name suggests a very definite yes to Cornwell’s query. Drop an “m” from Humbert and what you get is *Hubert*, patron saint of hunters, himself an enchanted one.

It is of further interest in this connection that a consonant added here or taken away there often results in a name transparent to one essential quality or another

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8. Highlighting such “hints of anti-Semitism” aimed more or less openly at the figure of Humbert at various points of the novel, Brian Boyd nevertheless cautions readers of *Lolita* against being snared by a self-pitying narrator’s stratagems into seeing him as some kind of victim (cf. Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* [Princeton: PUP, 1991], p. 253).

9. All parenthetical references are made to this edition: Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. (London: Penguin, 1995).

10. Nabokov, “*Ulysses*,” p. 319.

11. Nabokov, “*Ulysses*,” p. 316.

exhibited by the characters peopling Nabokov's novels, *Lolita* being no exception. A marginal figure mentioned by Humbert during a visit he pays to the office of the dentist Dr Ivor Quilty in Lolita's native Ramsdale is a man referred to as "charming Dr Molnar" (*Lolita*, p. 291). The good Hungarian-born doctor's competence in practical odontology is held up by Humbert to Ramsdale's Dr Quilty as an example the latter could never possibly emulate. But then this is nothing to wonder at: aside from the intrusion of an "n" in the middle, the name Molnar reads as *molar*, a one-word advertisement of its bearer's medical profession. Remarkable as yet another indicator of Nabokov's ingenuity may be the fact that the Hungarian "dentist's name aptly contains a molar," as Alfred Appel Jr. astutely observes, is of lesser significance to my purposes here than the name's ethno-geographical provenance. Even if one were to accept Appel's somewhat dubious proviso that no allusion was intended on Nabokov's part to the Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnár, the writer's name would probably have been familiar enough to Nabokov, and possibly to his potential readers, too, to clearly suggest the bearer's national background.<sup>12</sup> The association of Humbert with yet another Central European immigrant, and a Hungarian at that, seems to add one more stroke to Humbert's Joyce-Bloom-like portrait, which then further reinforces the legitimacy of looking for other, more pertinent, parallelisms between *Ulysses* and *Lolita*.

Dr Ivor's Christian name adds another touch to the ethnically rich texture of the broader picture in which Humbert's likeness is set. What first meets the eye on the Ramsdale dentist's name-plate – identifying a man whom Humbert looks up on the thin pretext of some hazy dental complaint to elicit information on Dr Quilty's nephew Clare – is that it is another name speaking to the same professional brotherhood that Dr Molnar belongs to. The name Ivor is, after all, a cognate of ivory, the

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12. See Alfred Appel, Jr., "Notes," in *The Annotated Lolita*, ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 291. I find Appel's caveat less than fully convincing in light of Molnár's once phenomenal popularity in America on the one hand, and Nabokov's familiarity with things Hungarian, as suggested by at least another communication recorded by Appel in his annotations to *Lolita* ("Notes," 407–8, n207/3). The latter quotes Nabokov's recollections of how he had once seen James Joyce in the audience gathered for a lecture on Pushkin that the young Russian émigré writer was asked to give as a replacement for a then immensely famous Hungarian lady novelist. Interestingly, Nabokov could recall the French title of the bestselling Hungarian novel (*Le Rue du Chat qui Pêche*) but not its writer, whom he stood in for on the occasion (Jolán Földes, as identified by Peter Lax back in the late 1980s). The mnemonic lapse, together with what might after all be a subconscious allusion to Ferenc Molnár, can be taken as another, minor, symptom of the "cryptomnesia" attributed to Nabokov by the German scholar Michael Marr on account of the writer's having suppressed whatever memories he might have had of the German short story "Lolita," another candidate for being Dolores Haze's precursor (cf. Michael Marr, *The Two Lolitas*, trans. Perry Anderson [London: Verso, 2004]).

material of an elephant's tusks, something Dr Quilty might be better qualified to deal with than Humbert's precious molars. Also, the word ivory has accumulated a wide range of connotations by the time Humbert's fake visit to "Uncle Ivory's" surgery takes place. The colour and feel of the off-white dentine have by now come to be closely associated with Lolita's tantalizingly smooth skin and the maddeningly pale legs of a fellow-nymphet (*Lolita*, pp. 66 and 126). However, it is only in retrospect that Humbert's Ramsdale acquaintance Jean Farlow's description of "fat old Ivor in the ivory" will be fully understood as the double entendre it is intended to be. Highlighting the visual contrast between a black bather she has seen plunge into the ebony waters of Hourglass Lake, and the old quack's sallow body imagined to be splashing about in the early morning whiteness of the pond, the amateur painter unknowingly establishes an associative link between Humbert's and the Quilty nephew's shared passion for curvatures of an ivory surface. What Jean almost blurts out a moment later could serve Humbert with a timely clue to the identity of his future enemy. But as Jean is prevented by her husband's arrival from retelling Uncle Ivory's "completely indecent story" about his nephew's shameful – because presumably paedophilic – liaisons, Humbert is doomed to a prolonged and frustrating hunt for Clare Quilty, his sinister rival for Lolita's immature favours.

If Ivor thematically relates his nephew Clare to Humbert, the younger Quilty himself establishes a threefold link between his relative Ivor, his own nemesis Humbert, and – intertextually as it were – the distant Joyce prototype of the latter in the figure of Leopold Bloom. An anecdote in Cornwell's above-cited article sends a young Nabokov on "a small field trip to Ireland," where the tyro lepidopterist had supposedly spent "a week or so in the early 1920's"<sup>13</sup> – in *Quilty*, County Clare. In itself, the possibly apocryphal story might not amount to very much. What makes the story truly remarkable, however, is a bit of hard textual evidence to be found in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Repeatedly mentioned in the novel is one Mr Bloom, emphatically introduced by Nabokov to his students as a man who is "no relation to Leopold."<sup>14</sup> A dental surgeon whose real-life model is believed to have been one Marcus J. Bloom, this mysterious namesake of Poldy's not only shares Ivor Quilty's profession but has his Dublin residence on Clare Street, an address echoed in the first name of Ivor's nephew. In the light of this, the location of a young Vladimir Nabokov's putative field-trip to the town of Quilty in County Clare, Ireland will appear to have more than cursory relevance to the Russian-American writer's name-giving practices. The question, raised by Cornwell, of Nabokov's possible awareness of all this onomastic echoing can be confidently answered in the affirmative. For what other reason

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13. Cornwell, p. 1.

14. Nabokov, "*Ulysses*," p. 326.

should Nabokov have involved, in the dentistry-episode, an extra dentist with that incongruous Hungarian name? That *Lolita's* writer must have been fully aware of Dr Bloom's address in Dublin, and the importance of that address, is revealed by the fact that Professor Nabokov inserts a parenthetical correction into a passage he quotes from the eighth episode of *Ulysses* in his Cornell lectures. In the quotation from "Laestrygonians" highlighted by Nabokov for his students, Leopold Bloom offers to help a blind youngster – the sightless piano-tuner – in the street: "– Do you want to go to Molesworth street? Bloom asks: –Yes, the stripling answered. South Frederick street. [*Actually he heads for Clare Street*]," notes Nabokov's amendment.<sup>15</sup> Professor Nabokov also provides the Joyce reader of his own *Lolita* with strong evidence of his awareness of where his character's name came from. Needless to say, the identity, or at least medical profession, of that other, shadowy, Bloom, Dr Marcus J., is also indicated in the Cornell lectures.<sup>16</sup>

Shadows play an important part in *Lolita*, too. Cognate with *umber*, *penumbra* or *umbrella*, Humbert's name translates as *shadow*, provided one does not, as I have done, tamper with that "m" in the middle. And indeed his simian body casts a long shadow over Humbert's victim, little Lolita, whose girlhood he monstrously despoils. Guilty Humbert is himself shadowed later – by that other molester of girl children, his spiritual doppelganger, Clare Quilty, until the two of them swap roles and Humbert the Terrible embarks on his vengeance-driven pursuit of his counterpart to become his shadow's shadow.<sup>17</sup> The shadowy doubling in *Lolita* does not stop here. Fairly early on in his narrative, Humbert comes to suspect the presence of a force beyond his control, an awesome power directing the course of events that he and his victims are all caught up in. This superhuman power Humbert names McFate, after one of his worshipped Lolita's classmates, the list of whose names, a poem-like catalogue not unlike Joyce's lengthy enumerations, he fondly commits to memory. Right before destiny receives its name and sex as Aubrey McFate, Humbert visualizes his doom as a devil – a *he-devil* at that. This is how he explains his narrow escape from being exposed as a paedophile in Ramsdale: "The passion I had developed for that nymphet . . . would have certainly landed me again in the sanatorium, had not the *devil* realized that I was to be granted some relief if *he* wanted to have me as a plaything for some time longer." Remarkably, this passage is immediately followed by the first invocation of the same devilish fate as a woman: "It would have been logical on the part of Aubrey McFate (as I would like to dub that *devil* of mine) to arrange a small treat for me" (*Lolita*, p. 56, my italics).

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15. Nabokov, "*Ulysses*," p. 324 (italics and square brackets in the original).

16. Nabokov, "*Ulysses*," p. 326.

17. I was made aware of this by my doctoral student Rudolf Sárdi.

Another Joyce-like touch reminiscent of the sexually ambiguous characters of the Bella/Bello Cohen type, or the occasionally feminized Bloom himself in *Ulysses*, is the fact that Fate is not the only gender-bender in *Lolita*. The celebrated dramatist and scriptwriter Clare Quilty is always accompanied by his secretary, one Vivian Darkbloom. Despite the Oscar Wilde-like ambiguity of the first name Vivian, Darkbloom's sex is clearly given as female in an early reference to "her best book" by John Ray, Jr., Ph. D., putative editor of Humbert's memoir (*Lolita*, p. 4).<sup>18</sup> But then, in an argument flaring up between a jealous Humbert and a rebellious Lolita, the latter responds to Humbert's lame remark about the glamorous celebrity Clare Quilty's secretary as "quite a woman" with the bizarre proposition that "Vivian is the male author, the gal author is Clare" (*Lolita*, p. 221). True, the seriousness of Lolita's "correction" is called into question by the absurdity of her next claim, that the "woman" Quilty is forty, married and has "Negro blood" (*Lolita*, p. 221). The deliberate absurdity of Lolita's remark does not, however, quite cover the pert quip's relevance to the novel's anti-racist subtext. This subtext is reinforced, among other things, by hints scattered throughout the first, Ramsdale, episodes of *Lolita* of certain qualities of a minor character called Leslie Thomson, endearing this black gardener and chauffeur not only to the narrator but very likely to the implied author, too. With his fondness for early morning dips in the ebony waters of Hourglass Lake mentioned above, the figure of this "very amiable and athletic Negro" provides a cheerful counterpoint to "Uncle Ivory" and his similar but far less appealing habits of plunging (*Lolita*, p. 73). More importantly, the likable and sympathetic young man who favours a dip at dawn is turned, at one of the narrative's most dramatic points, into the fatal, or authorial, messenger who reports on the gruesome death of Humbert's wife, "the Haze woman," to the incredulous husband (*Lolita*, p. 97).

Returning to doubts concerning the sexual, as opposed to the ethnic, identities of Darkbloom and Quilty, once aroused, that uncertain feeling stirred up by little Lo's misconstruing Clare as Claire and her reading Vivian as Vivian and not Vivienne - as it should be if the name's bearer was undoubtedly female - is not so easily laid to rest either. The reader's suspicions are certainly not dispelled by Humbert's own description of Ms Darkbloom as "a hawk-like, black-haired, strikingly tall woman" (*Lolita*, p. 221). This confusion is further darkened, or clarified,

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18. Wilde famously gave the names of his sons Vivian and Cyril to the two interlocutors of "The Decay of Lying." In the dramatic essay Vivian, as opposed to his nature-loving brother Cyril, is used by Wilde as a mouthpiece for his own aesthetic hedonism. According to Ferenc Takács, it is this etiolated philosophy of art that relates Nabokov to Wilde and the Hungarian poet Dezső Kosztolányi to Nabokov.



when we come to realize, with or without benefit of Alfred Appel's annotations to the text of *Lolita*, that Vivian Darkbloom is an anagram for Vladimir Nabokov.<sup>19</sup>

As an anagram requires reading now this way now that, the pages of *Lolita* too are to be turned back as well as forwards. Leafing back in the novel to the episode where little Lo's classmates are listed, the reader will find that the name "McFate, Aubrey" is preceded by "McCrystal, Vivian." Encouraged by such further instances of easily misinterpreted "enjambment" in the list of classmates as "Duncan, *Walter / Falter*, Ted . . . Miranda, *Viola / Rosato*, Emil" (*Lolita*, p. 52; my italics) one easily falls into the customary pattern of reading where first names do in fact come first. Errors can indeed be portals of discovery: making the same sort of revelatory mistake repeatedly, one will soon arrive at the highly suggestive, albeit doubly fictitious, name of *Vivian McFate*. Can it be then that Vivian Darkbloom, writer of "My Cue," her "best book" and possibly Clare Quilty's biography, is one and the same as Vivian, rather than Aubrey, McFate, author of Humbert Humbert's destiny? At one point in his narrative Humbert recalls reading, once in his youth, a French detective tale where the clues were actually in italics. That, however, "is not McFate's way" Humbert ruefully adds. No it isn't. Neither is it the way of Vivian Darkbloom Vladimir Nabokov (*Lolita*, p. 211).

How then is all this related to James Joyce and his *Ulysses*? Portentous as it is, the dark presence of that Bloom-bit in the Nabokov anagram may after all be wholly coincidental. But is it? Not if examined in the light of another literary recollection of Humbert's, made apropos of a forgettable theatrical performance seen in the "kurortish" place called Wace. The only detail meriting Humbert's acknowledgement is based on the idea of children-colours "lifted by authors Clare Quilty and Vivian Darkbloom from a passage in James Joyce" (*Lolita*, p. 221). Together with some thirteen more unmistakable allusions to Joyce listed by Alfred Appel, Jr. and belaboured variously by Neil Cornwell, Joseph Frank, Julian Moynahan and others, the incident does seem to establish the missing link. If the man in the brown waterproof is a disguise for Joyce, the merging of those fateful Vivians – a Darkbloom and a McFate – provides Nabokov with his persona. Bloom's mysterious M'Intosh then indeed appears to play much the same part in *Ulysses* as the role given in *Lolita* to Humbert's Vivian Darkbloom McFate. When it comes to Joyce or Nabokov, we had better believe Humbert: "a destiny in the making is . . . not one of those honest mystery stories where all you have to do is keep an eye on the clues." It does help, though, if we "learn to recognize certain obscure indications" (*Lolita*, pp. 210-11). If we do, we will gladly accept, with Julian Moynahan, that "creative artists, with an assist from McFate, a. k. a. Macin-

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19. Appel, p. 322.

tosh, call the tune.”<sup>20</sup> And yet, this particular commentator prefers to enunciate the name of Humbert’s authorial nemesis with his own thick accent as McFate, thus making it sound like the word *megfejt*, which means, in his native Hungarian, ‘solve.’

Whether James Joyce had deliberately hidden his cameo-style self-portrait in *Ulysses*, as Nabokov insists in his Joyce studies or not, there can be little doubt that the writer of *Lolita* did but little to veil his own, quasi-authorial presence in his best-known novel. We have seen how a distinctly Nabokovian figure keeps reappearing throughout *Lolita*, now in the shape of Clare Quilty’s amanuensis and biographer Vivian Darkbloom, now in the figure of a mysterious Aubrey-Vivian McFate, a near-namesake of Joyce’s equally shady “M’Intosh.” The assumption that Nabokov believed himself to emulate the Irish master’s example in breaking the narrative frame of his novel to make room for his own, authorial, self is supported by further analogies and homologies that hold between various characters of the two novels examined. It is another matter whether such instances of narrative metalepsis in either or both works in question are to be taken as further proof of Joyce and Nabokov being both classifiable as postmodernists of sorts; or else the relative ease with which the riddles devised by each of our writers locates them in an earlier, modernist tradition of the novel. Such involved questions of period-based classification are perhaps better left open for the time being. At a later point the issue might be worth addressing with more scholarly rigour than the original, oral, medium of this light-hearted piece called for. The question is very likely to prove rather harder to answer than puzzling out the identities of the various nymphets, nymph-hunters and their McMakers met here has been.

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20. Moynahan, p. 444.