

## **‘Lolita’: a journey with Nabokov and Kubrick from the page to the screen<sup>1</sup>**

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This paper could just as easily have been called ‘Lolita: or how I learned to stop worrying the film wasn’t like the book’. When watching a film based on a novel or play most people compare it to the original work but should we be considering the film in its own right as a creative output? After all the film does not change the book nor it’s creative nature. In ‘Lolita’ we have three creative elements: the novel, the script and the film. We have two main creative personas (or authors) Vladimir Nabokov and Stanley Kubrick. By understanding the creators and their contribution we can better understand the film as a work. In order to analyse the script it is impossible to look at the full screenplay. Therefore, I am going to concentrate on the presence of Clare Quilty and the characterisation of Lolita. I shall then look at Calder Willingham as a co-writer: Kubrick commissioned Willingham to write a full screenplay in 1959.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the best assessment of Kubrick’s creative vision for the film is in a letter to Peter Ustinov: *‘I think the most important thing...is that it is a love story. A sad, tender, eventually heartbreaking story of passion-love.’*<sup>3</sup> He explains that passion-love is *‘scandalous, masochistic and tortured’* as opposed to the *‘modern ideal’* which is based on creating a life together as a couple. Kubrick saw Humbert as a creature not of the modern world but of a chivalric past: pining away for his lover.<sup>4</sup> This helps to explain why the film, like the novel, is seen through Humbert’s eyes: he is the anti-hero of the piece. In the letter Kubrick also talks about preserving the *‘mood’* of the novel and he seems most concerned that this is done in regards to Humbert’s character:

*‘The surface of gaiety and humo[u]r....wit of Humbert.....The viewer must be allowed only an occasional glimpse of the more sombre tones and.....be taken up completely with the selflessness, the enduring quality of Humbert’s passion.’*<sup>5</sup>

In Kubrick’s own words he was aiming to make a *‘realistic comedy’*<sup>6</sup> and many Kubrick alterations concern adding a comedic element for example, on first seeing Lolita Charlotte asks why Humbert chose to rent with them, *‘Was my garden the decisive factor?’* to which Nabokov has him reply, *‘Yes, I am very fond of nature.’* But Kubrick altered to *‘No, I believe it was the cherry pies’* and adds a production note *‘Charlotte laughs a bit too intensely....’*<sup>7</sup> There is humour in Nabokov but Kubrick is more overt, one might say more popularist. He also added in sarcasm for example, in the screenplay when Charlotte tells Humbert of her club and of the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first given as a twenty minute analysis at Archives and Autuers; Film-makers Archives, Sep 2009 and as such is confined to that time limit here. All dialogue is quoted from scripts or annotations thus, cuts refers to un-filmed edited dialogue and not the film footage. All dialogue is thus fixed and does not take into account actors and actresses improvisations, it could possibly be argued that they represent another creative force and therefore authorship over the film.

<sup>2</sup> SK/10/1/1: Calder Willingham screenplay. Willingham was commissioned in 1959 to write the screenplay. He also worked on an unfinished project (The Burning Secret by Stefan Zweig) with Harris-Kubrick Productions and co-wrote Paths of Glory.

<sup>3</sup> SK/10/8/4: Kubrick to Ustinov, 20 May 1960.

<sup>4</sup> SK/10/8/4: Kubrick to Ustinov, 20 May 1960.

<sup>5</sup> SK/10/8/4: Kubrick to Ustinov, 20 May 1960.

<sup>6</sup> SK/10/8/4: Kubrick to Ustinov, 20 May 1960.

<sup>7</sup> SK/10/1/19: ‘Lolita script’.

Anglo-Dutch stock of Ramsdale and states '*we are very intellectual*' he responds '*Um*' but Kubrick altered this to '*That is immediately apparent*'.<sup>8</sup> Even names are played with to heighten the humour; Climax Lake Camp becomes Camp Climax. These amendments are relatively subtle but they give the film a lightness of tone that extends any such rendering in the novel or screenplays.

Nabokov's first screenplay is essentially the novel in a different format. Kubrick asked for cuts and inserts but even after changes Nabokov's visualisation for the film was different to what we see. The major variation is the beginning: had it stayed as Nabokov had written it you would have had scenes depicting Humbert's European life and relationship with Dr Ray, his psychoanalyst. The murder of Quilty would have been the first scene. This structure was largely left unaltered in the final screenplay; the murder scene however was reduced to include no dialogue between Quilty and Humbert. Kubrick retained only the murder scene from this.

In Nabokov's *Lolita* Clare Quilty is a relatively minor character, after all the story is told from Humbert's point of view and for much of the book he is only vaguely aware of Quilty's existence. Kubrick gave Quilty a larger role and gives him speech that does not exist in the novel or screenplay as Kubrick intended Quilty to be a '*mysterious presence*'.<sup>9</sup> He is vital to the film as the arrangement of the novel was altered to start at the end of Quilty and Humbert's journey: meaning the film starts on a note of tragi-comedy and with a puzzle, why is he being shot? Kubrick firmly attached himself to this beginning by including a reference to his previous film *Spartacus*.<sup>10</sup>

However, is it possible to overstate Kubrick's role as an author when it comes to this change after all the first draft screenplay by Nabokov contains this beginning? We know Kubrick, James B Harris<sup>11</sup> and Nabokov agreed the story points prior to the writing of the first draft and thus this change had probably been discussed. Harris asserted that it was Kubrick who wanted the changes involving Quilty and the longest portion of Kubrickian dialogue and therefore authorship is the murder scene. In an annotated version of the first draft the entire sequence is re-written in Kubrick's hand except for the poem '*Because you took advantage....*' but even here Kubrick inserts a humorous line '*A little repetitious, what?*'<sup>12</sup> This level of re-writing is perhaps not surprising: being the only major story lineation change from the novel to the film it fits that it would deviate in other ways from its source. Other sections of Kubrickian dialogue are not so extensive: altering the tone of the piece rather than totally changing it. It seems then this portion of the film is almost totally Kubrick. The section does succeed in imbuing mystery, one can work out the subject of the dispute is a girl but not exactly what happened and it also succeeds in setting Quilty up as a

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<sup>8</sup> SK/10/1/19: 'Lolita script'.

<sup>9</sup> SK/10/8/4: Kubrick to Ustinov, 20 May 1960.

<sup>10</sup> This was a device Kubrick evidently enjoyed playing with for example, in a *Clockwork Orange* there is a scene where the soundtrack for 2001: A Space Odyssey is visible.

<sup>11</sup> Harris was Producer on the film and also business partner to Kubrick via Harris-Kubrick Productions, who made the film, Harris-Kubrick Productions made the film, existence 1955-1963. Harris' assertions in interviews that he and Kubrick worked together on a joint visualisation of the novel brings in the Producer as another potential creator of the film but further examination of this is not possible here.

<sup>12</sup> SK/10/1/3: Annotated screenplay. The Adrian Lyne version also seems to draw from Kubrick's re-writing and not from Nabokov.

underlying presence in the story. Nabokov's script notes however reveal that the visual look of Quilty's house is in-line with the screenplay.<sup>13</sup>

Quilty is also present as part of the teenagers bedroom (Lolita has a picture of him on the wall) and Charlotte knows him in the film. In this way Kubrick makes him an influence throughout the film on the female characters and the audience: only Humbert knows nothing. This is reinforced by some script cuts made by Kubrick, in the screenplay we know Lolita knows Quilty and asks her mother if she spoke to him at the dance. She comments her friend is '*crazy about him*' and Charlotte explains who he is to Humbert: had such scenes remained Kubrick wouldn't have succeeded in his aim of rendering Quilty a mysterious presence and the seed would have been sown in Humbert's and the audiences mind that he might be a desirable figure to a girl.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the cuts add suspense and ambiguity. This was Kubrick's vision for the character and the film: using devices that work well in live action to impact on the audience visually by playing with details on set and using Peter Sellers, who was normally associated with comedic films but not love films, to play the role.

Integral to the rendering of the film as a comedic love story is the personification of Lolita; if Kubrick's film is a comedy then Lolita couldn't risk being a tortured heroine of the Ophelia mould. She is set against a teenager's world in the film, her room is full of posters, she chews gum and has mood swings. In essence she is a typical teenager of middle America emerging in film at about the same time as the concept was emerging in society as an excepted and inevitable phenomenon. Teenagers can be hard to handle and Lolita becomes this for Humbert. Kubrick writes that people will have to admit Lolita is '*erotic and desirable*' and of course teenagers can be this without causing too many shockwaves.<sup>15</sup> However, Nabokov's Lolita is a child of twelve, a pre-teen, and although she still has wit and gumption she is more girl-like and the age gap is therefore a part of the story in a way that is avoided by making Lolita older. Nabokov has Lolita aware of her age in the screenplay: when discussing her friend, Mona, with Humbert she says that Mona has boyfriends because she is sixteen but '*I'm a little young*'.<sup>16</sup> No such pronouncements occur in the film. Kubrick fails to deal with one of the controversial elements of the novel and in so doing eradicates the nymphet from the story. This destroys one of the most interesting tenants of the novel: that a nymphet is a pre-teen demon who is culpable and not an ordinary sweet round-faced child of innocence who is a victim. The nymphet concept also alludes to a self-awareness in the child that is lost by removing the notion. The moral blurring of who is to blame for the relationship between Humbert and Lolita is thus un-blurred to a degree by Kubrick and audiences autonomy in assigning blame is therefore weakened.

Nabokov asserts that on being shown Sue Lyon he was told by Kubrick that she could '*easily be made to look younger and grubbier*' thereby implying a style closer to the Lolita of the novel: a pre-teen tomboy.<sup>17</sup> Attraction is also not looks based in the novel or screenplay, Lolita is described as being '*not above average looking*' but I would argue that it could reasonably be asserted that Sue Lyon is beyond average

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<sup>13</sup> SK/10/1/26: Lolita screenplay.

<sup>14</sup> SK/10/1/24: Lolita - second draft.

<sup>15</sup> SK/10/8/4: Kubrick to Ustinov, 20 May 1960.

<sup>16</sup> SK/10/1/19: 'Lolita script'.

<sup>17</sup> p xi Lolita: A Screenplay, 1973. It is likely given other assertions by Nabokov and other evidence throughout the Archive that this was a statement made to appease Nabokov rather than one of actual intent.

looking, as indeed she needed to be to fulfil Kubrick's desire to make Lolita *erotic and desirable*' and to this end Kubrick didn't grubby her up: she is elegant even in her casual clothes, which are not the gingham and scruffs described by Nabokov.<sup>18</sup>

There are many dialogues between Lolita and Humbert throughout the draft screenplays that were cut. Some of these regarded Lolita's relationship with boys and featured her boyfriend Kenny. For example, on the way to the school dance Kenny and Lolita and Humbert and Charlotte are in the car: Lolita makes Kenny sit with her mother and Humbert sit with her thereby subverting the order you would expect the couples to arrive in (at one point Charlotte even says to them '*No backseat driving, children*'). There is mutual handholding between Lolita and Humbert. Kubrick's deletion of these sort of scenes is curious on one level: as they build the relationship up and it is one example of many where the detail of their association is removed. Later at the dance Humbert follows Lolita, she has something in her eye, he offers to remove it:

*Lolita: You mean - lick it out?*

*Humbert: Yes. Shall I try?*

*Lolita: Sure.*

*Lolita: Goody-goody. Its gone.*

*Humbert: Now the other.*

*Lolita: You dope, there is noth--- (notices the pucker of his approaching lips) Okay (He brushkisses her fluttering eyelid. She laughs and runs away back to the ballroom)*<sup>19</sup>

Again, this scene highlights the mutuality of the relationship but still shows Lolita as childish and self-consciously gawkish, Kubrick's Lolita acts childishly at times but in having teenage tantrums rather than as a giggling girl. It also shows a physical involvement missing in the film; Kubrick's Lolita is not so overtly physical. In some ways Nabokov's Lolita is therefore more mature in that she appears to understand the power of sexuality, this is part of her nymphet qualities and Kubrick wouldn't have been able to show such physicality without explaining it as part of Lolita's character and therefore weakening his own characterisation of Lolita. The aforementioned car scene was retained in Nabokov's second draft but the licking scene had been removed. Overt sexual contact was therefore being edited and it can reasonably be assumed this was in response to Kubrick's requests as we know that Kubrick extensively fed amendments to Nabokov.<sup>20</sup>

Another cut scene involves dialogue between Humbert and Lolita concerning Annabelle. In a previous scene Nabokov has Annabelle and Humbert in a hay loft. Kubrick noted that this should be replaced with them with a music box. In the Humbert and Lolita scene Kubrick adds in a reference to this music box: she wants it, he wont yield it. Here Kubrick is therefore not leaving Nabokov but diverting from him, tweaking Nabokov to better enhance visual impact and there are many other examples of this. In the same scene Humbert is drawing a girl, Lolita asks if its her and he replies "*Or perhaps it is more like a little girl I knew when I was your age*". *He shows her a photograph of his first love, Annabelle.....'*<sup>21</sup> The scene also means

<sup>18</sup> SK/10/8/4: Kubrick to Ustinov, 20 May 1960.

<sup>19</sup> SK/10/1/14: First-draft screenplay with shooting divisions.

<sup>20</sup> SK/10/1/24: Lolita - second draft.

<sup>21</sup> SK/10/1/14: First-draft screenplay with shooting divisions.

that Lolita was aware of Humbert and Annabelle's relationship and implies to the viewer some of the attraction he holds in Lolita comes from her resemblance to his first love, however within the confines of this paper no further examination of this is possible. Kubrick then is changing nuances but not majorly changing Nabokov's story. A later version of has none of these scenes but an even later version does.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that Kubrick was trying to establish how and if to deal with Humbert's past and development. In editing and then deleting Humbert's early life from the film he is left as a creature created in middle age, there is no explanation of him. Kubrick therefore lessens the character development of Humbert but without changing the main facets of his outward personality thereby fulfilling his aim that Humbert would reflect the novel. His rendering of the person of Lolita however represents a fundamental shift from Nabokov.

Nabokov released his screenplay in 1973: putting back extensive edits and alterations made by Kubrick. What is intriguing is that Nabokov saw his screenplay as entirely separate from the novel: *'I am sure you will agree that as a play it represented a work of art, in a way almost independent from its source, the book'*.<sup>23</sup> But the implication here is that Nabokov recognised it as a different medium not a different story. It introduces though an unexpected dichotomy of intertwining relationships; we have Kubrick's film in relation to Nabokov's novel, Kubrick's film in relation to Nabokov's screenplays and also Nabokov in relation to his novel and his screenplays.

As referred to Kubrick initially hired Calder Willingham to write the screenplay and although time does not allow a full examination of this when discussing authorship of the film he cannot be ignored. Previously it has been assumed that nothing of Willingham remained but in Nabokov's draft screenplays there are notes by Kubrick to insert pages of Willingham's writing. If one follows through and looks at the corresponding Willingham passage you find something much closer to the final film in many instances. For example, in Nabokov's screenplay Charlotte is killed and someone knocks on the door to inform Humbert but in Willingham's someone phones Humbert, he shouts for Charlotte and then runs out.<sup>24</sup> This is very similar to the scene in the film. Other inserted pieces from Willingham's screenplay are in the final film, Lolita puts her hands over Humbert's eyes and states *'Guess who?'*. This raises the spectre of a third creative source and yet another relationship feeding into the creative development of the novel as a film.

So why was only Nabokov credited with the writing the screenplay? It is likely that Nabokov's contract named him sole author, Nabokov received 7.5% of all profits on the picture, implying Harris-Kubrick were keen to have Nabokov's name on the project at any cost as other archival documents in the Archive show this to be an unusual arrangement.<sup>25</sup> That money may have led to his involvement is further suggested by Vera Nabokov (his wife and secretary), in 1959 she wrote to Harris following a meeting between Nabokov, Harris and Kubrick to explain why he didn't want to write the screenplay yet a later letter in 1959 from Vera to Kubrick says since

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<sup>22</sup> SK/10/1/20: Lolita screenplay and SK/10/1/26: Lolita screenplay

<sup>23</sup> Vladimir Nabokov to Kubrick, 5 Dec 1965 from SK/10/8/2: 'SK-Nabokov' and SK/10/8/3: 'Nabokov rights'.

<sup>24</sup> SK/10/1/19: Nabokov screenplay with an instruction to insert pages 92-8 from SK/10/1/1: Willingham screenplay.

<sup>25</sup> SK/10/8/3: Metro Goldwyn Mayer to Jack Schwartzman, 4 Feb 1963. It is more common for writers to be paid a salary for example, Peter George was paid for the rights [SK/11/9/95 'Red Alert purchase'] and then a wage [see: SK/11/3/3/3 Production cost summaries].

their meeting Nabokov has come to see the '*cinematic possibilities*' of *Lolita* and she lays out his considerations: money; and creativity and freedom to write a first draft with suggestions only being made after this.<sup>26</sup> Kubrick's reply makes it clear he and Harris expect involvement and agreement on the scene outline prior to the writing the screenplay, hence the changes to the beginning probably having been discussed. There is evidence that Nabokov was sending Kubrick pages throughout the writing process with the knowledge that Kubrick may not be satisfied: '*Please let me know whether you know consider that the screenplay is completed or if there is any more work on it that you would like.*'<sup>27</sup> Nabokov's involvement was therefore not a given and as Harris-Kubrick Productions owned the rights they could have made the film without any referral to him and they were clear from the beginning that they intended to put their stamp on it.

Nabokov wrote to Kubrick in 1965 to tell him of his intention to release his screenplay and commenting he would give '*full credit*' to Kubrick for his additions ('*some of them admirable*'), praising those he considers an improvement and not passing comment on the rest.<sup>28</sup> Kubrick responds that he is concerned that the publishing of this may infer that '*the Director of the film spoiled a work of art*', the letter that Nabokov received ceases here but a draft goes on to explain that '*screenplays are never shot in the way they are written*' relying as they do on improvisation, although he admits his apprehension comes from fear of comparison of himself with Nabokov by '*literary people*'.<sup>29</sup> Here both Kubrick and Nabokov are acknowledging that Kubrick changed the screenplay and that Kubrick was a creative force on the project. Kubrick is also acknowledging that some scenes realisation is down to the actors and actresses input and therefore implies they are also a creative force.

The novel is set in Europe and America. Europe (as a destination) does not appear in the film, only America. Yet the film was mainly shot in Hertfordshire. The landscape over which the novels action takes place is intrinsic to the story: Humbert and Lolita's driving journey is made possible by it and the locations they find themselves in are integral to the American landscape of long distance driving and referenced in Nabokov's script almost as a character. Interiors were built sets and therefore not affected but the exteriors were real life locations: Lolita's shack Oxhey, Hertfordshire; and Humbert's house Elstree, Hertfordshire to name but two.<sup>30</sup> The film was shot in middle England rather than middle America. This means we do not get panoramas of countryside or motels accompanying Lolita and Humbert. These wide landscapes act as a barrier to the outside world; one can get lost and be anonymous. This is harder to achieve in the domestic scale of Hertfordshire. It also means Lolita is an American teenager dressed in British clothes and fashions, contact sheets show Sue Lyon out shopping in England.<sup>31</sup> However, from *Lolita* onwards Kubrick only filmed in England and often near his home.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the landscape of the film is probably less a

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<sup>26</sup> SK/10/8/2: Vera Nabokov to James Harris 12 Aug 1959.

<sup>27</sup> SK/10/1/29: Letter and sequences, two typed script portions, 24 Aug 1959 and a cover letter from Vladimir Nabokov to Kubrick, 11 Aug 1960 about the scenes.

<sup>28</sup> SK/10/8/3: Vladimir Nabokov to Kubrick, 5 Dec 1965.

<sup>29</sup> SK/10/8/2: Kubrick to Nabokov [sent letter] 17 Jan 1966 and [draft] 15 Dec 1965.

<sup>30</sup> Information from: SK/10/3/1: 'Lolita call sheets'.

<sup>31</sup> SK/10/2/13: Costume shopping – Lolita.

<sup>32</sup> Where other locations are used a second unit filmed it, or stock footage was edited in. In some cases these techniques were considered rather than done, Kubrick instead favouring total filming in the UK for example, Full Metal Jacket.

creative decision than a pragmatic one: on Nabokov's first draft, which contains scenes in Paris Kubrick crossed this out and put 'London'.<sup>33</sup>

Nabokov was involved in the advertising of the film; he was part of Harris-Kubrick's publicity scheme and gave interviews on it.<sup>34</sup> However, the thrust of the advertising campaign centred on the person of Lolita. Curiously she is more self-aware here than in the film and thus more nymphet like. Even if people have not seen the film most will know the image of Lolita in heart-shaped sunglasses with a lollypop in her mouth and so the most enduring and iconic element of Kubrick's Lolita is the advertising images.<sup>35</sup> It is at once playful and sexy and tells you that this girl knows of her own allure whilst still having the veneer of coyness, not characteristics that she really has on screen but does have in the book. The rejected photographs are even more sensual and self-aware, giving out a message that this is a sexualised person. This Lolita has a different feel to the film, she is colourful (though the film being black and white was probably a financial rather than a creative decision), playful, flirty, sexualised and coy. Possibly Kubrick felt he was freer to explore these characteristics in print than in film and no doubt some movie goers were expecting quite a different film to what was delivered.

Kubrick wrote '*The censorship thing does not concern me very much*'.<sup>36</sup> However, the American censors objected to any scenes which implied sexual arousal between Lolita and Humbert. This resulted in two main shortenings of shot, when Lolita leans down to Humbert on the camp bed in the Enchanted Huntress so as not to imply she was to land in his crotch and when Humbert is making love to his wife Charlotte but looking at the picture of Lolita so as not to imply he was arousing himself with it.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting that Kubrick, and in general, the official censors were so calm. In 1959 Laurence Olivier was to be playing Humbert and co-producing the script but he pulled out because he was concerned that '*the subject would be reduced to the level of pornography*' and when pulling out he suggested that Kubrick get Nabokov to do the screenplay himself.<sup>38</sup> Indeed we know from Vera Nabokov's letters that it was around this time that Harris-Kubrick approached Nabokov. That the film was largely unchanged by the censors is testament to Kubrick's subtlety. I would even argue that the editing cuts do not detract from the meaning. There were those of course who objected, Christian Action and the League of Decency's objections are recorded in the Archive: correspondence between Canon L John Collins (Chair, Christian Action) and Kubrick make it clear discussions were had.<sup>39</sup> However, the tone is reasoned argument on both sides although Collins did present his case to the British Board of Film Censors (on the basis any film of the book would be objectionable); in turn they forwarded this to Kubrick '*privately*' and assured him it wouldn't effect their decision.<sup>40</sup> It has long been asserted that this is due to contact between the censors and Harris-Kubrick begun before filming and thus potential issues were discussed.

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<sup>33</sup> SK/10/1/14, Humbert's married life sequences.

<sup>34</sup> Various letters refer to this such as, SK/10/8/2.

<sup>35</sup> This image and others were taken by Bert Stern. SK/10/9/7: Bert Stern images.

<sup>36</sup> SK/10/8/4: Kubrick to Ustinov, 20 May 1960.

<sup>37</sup> For Kubrick's early editing notes see SK/10/3/5: Production notes; SK/10/3/11: Properties [props], Sue Lyon photographic headshot which appears in the bedroom scene between Charlotte and Humbert. Black and white; Harris, quoted/paraphrased from *Story of Lolita*, Channel 4, aired 16 May 1998.

<sup>38</sup> SK/10/8/4: Laurence Olivier to Kubrick, 15 Dec 1959. See also SK/10/8/2: Kubrick to Vera Nabokov 7 Jan 1959 which refers to Olivier and David Niven being interested.

<sup>39</sup> SK/10/8/5: 'Lolita correspondence 1961'; SK/10/3/8/2: National Legion of Decency; SK/10/3/8: Censorship.

<sup>40</sup> SK/10/8/5: John Trevelyan to Kubrick 11 May 1961.

However, there is only one piece of evidence in the Archive which supports this and even then the support is implied and not overt.<sup>41</sup>

James B Harris stated that in the film titles when possessive grammar is used in the titles which proclaim '**James B Harris**' and **Stanley Kubrick's Lolita**' this was to state the fact that the movie was theirs and not anyone else's, but that the book remains Nabokov's. Indeed he goes further and asserts that they had no allegiance to the book. Harris is unequivocal: they were making an original piece of cinema and the aim was to achieve a filmed masterpiece, based on the story points of a written masterpiece, but not a live action version of the novel. Harris gives this as the reason for Kubrick treating the story points in a '*light, frothy and fun*' way.<sup>42</sup>

Had Kubrick done enough to become the driving creative force of the film and therefore it's primary author? The film does stand up in its own right but it is so linked to the novel in its story points that it cannot claim to be an original piece of work if this is taken to imply an original story. Rather it is a version of the plot: with an identity of its own through its cinematography, personas and publicity. Things are omitted or altered but major story points are not added in. True Kubrick added in dialogue that differed from the book but so did Nabokov in his draft screenplays. Although both Kubrick and Willingham significantly contributed to the screenplay and thus their vision is in the film the story is still Nabokov's. Perhaps this implies that an auteur film can never be an adaptation. I think it can but the problem with *Lolita* is that not only are the story points are from the novel but so too are many characterisations. The adults are almost entirely from the page. However, it is not an adaptation as this would suggest little creative input beyond the source novel. It is a version of the story as opposed to a re-telling.

Nabokov wrote it was a '*first rate film with magnificent actors...only ragged odds and ends of my script had been used...as unfaithful to the original...as an American poets translation from...Pasternak*'.<sup>43</sup> Nabokov assumes Kubrick's creative renderings are pragmatic to the screen writing, that fidelity may be an author's ideal but a producer's ruin. Both Nabokov and Kubrick had the same story and saw it different ways: an author is always limited by the fact they cannot control audience reaction and thus cannot own this reaction. Kubrick can be credited as being a major creative force, but not the only one, in the films realisation: bringing his and Harris' vision for the story alive and succeeding in making a comedic film. Whether he succeeded in making a love story I shall leave to the individual to decide.

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<sup>41</sup> Other archive collections should be referred to if one wishes to explore this further, in particular the British Board of Film Classification and the Motion Picture Association of America.

<sup>42</sup> Harris, quoted/paraphrased from *Story of Lolita*, Channel 4, aired 16 May 1998.

<sup>43</sup> p xii-xiii *Lolita: A Screenplay*, 1973.



Vladimir Nabokov on a Book Entitled Lolita. Foreword. "Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male," such were the two titles under which the writer of the present note received the strange pages it preambulates. Viewed simply as a novel, "Lolita" deals with situations and emotions that would remain exasperatingly vague to the reader had their expression been etiolated by means of platitudinous evasions. True, not a single obscene term is to be found in the whole work; indeed, the robust philistine who is conditioned by modern conventions into accepting without qualms a lavish array of four-letter words in a banal novel, will be quite shocked by their absence here. Lolita is a 1955 novel written by Russian-American novelist Vladimir Nabokov. The novel is notable for its controversial subject: the protagonist and unreliable narrator, a middle-aged literature professor under the pseudonym Humbert Humbert, is obsessed with a 12-year-old girl, Dolores Haze, with whom he becomes sexually involved after he becomes her stepfather. "Lolita" is his private nickname for Dolores. The novel was originally written in English and first published in Paris in 1955 by Olympia