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## Narrative Configurations

From the time of Vladimir Propp's morphology of the Russian folktale, which identified the thirty-one functions that form the "structure" of the tale, through the more formalized narrative grammars and logics of structuralist narratology in the 1960s and beyond, theories of story structure have by and large reasoned on the basis of stories with a single line of action. Roughly speaking, one or more actants are the passive or active agents of events whose elements are causally and temporally ordered, resulting in the passage through a disequilibrium from one state of affairs to another. In further elaborations, researchers have charted out the ways in which narrative sequences are combined through concatenation, embedding, interlacing, etc. to form larger units. It has also been argued, from transformational, text linguistic, semiotic and cognitive points of view, among others, that such structures underlie textual manifestations as various as mere anecdotes and fully-developed novels<sup>1</sup>.

In practice, however, the analysis of narratives on the basis of underlying formalizable structures has not always lived up to expectations, particularly in works where details may remain recalcitrant to formalization. This is not to say that methods of this type are inapplicable, however, for even in Vladimir Nabokov's extremely complex *Lolita* (1955), it is possible to identify formal story structures both for the larger framework of the novel (this could be summarized as Humbert Humbert's psychological deterioration brought about as the result of his erotic encounter with the nymphet Lolita, but from another perspective as how sexual obsessions with a minor can lead to imprisonment for homicide) and for its intermediate macrostructures as well as a multitude of local sequences. But such structures are inherently abstractive and reductive, aimed at forming "an autonomous layer of

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Peter Vernon for his careful reading of this text and his valuable suggestions.

meaning," as Claude Bremond put it, "endowed with a structure that can be isolated from the whole of the message: the *narrative* [*récit*]"<sup>2</sup>. It may be possible to extract from Nabokov's resonantly allusive work such "an autonomous layer of meaning" with its corresponding logic of actions, but this is only one dimension of the novel that seems all but overwhelmed by other layers of meaning.

*Lolita*, as Nabokov's work generally, has benefited from a considerable amount of literary detective work for tracking down sources, allusions, etc., and a serious reading of the novel can hardly bypass these contributions, even though they often suffer from the shortcomings encountered by source studies. More recent research reflects intertextual approaches<sup>3</sup>, shedding light on the textual functions of these sometimes troublesome features, and it is along these lines that the present study will proceed.

On the basis of an idea put forth by Umberto Eco that stories are the actualization by the (model) reader of preovercoded narrative functions or intertextual frames<sup>4</sup>, I shall argue that *Lolita*, through its allusiveness, is a particularly rich example of configuration of intertextual frames (or *topoi*). In this novel, numerous intertextual frames of varying scope and distinctness are enlisted, but three in particular appear to play a prominent role: the bereaved lover (activated by Poe's poem "Annabel Lee" [1849]); the *Doppelgänger* (activated by Poe's tale "William Wilson" [1845]); the triangle (activated by Mérimée's novella "Carmen" [1845]). These intertextual frames are concurrent with one another, and even though they do overlap at certain points, they cannot, either structurally or thematically, be meaningfully subsumed under an overarching model of the type described above. Nor can it be said that the narratives that trigger these intertextual frames are simply "retold" in the novel, since the allusive nature of Nabokov's writing seems to forestall any closure of this kind.

Before turning to these aspects of *Lolita*, it will be useful to clarify narrative configuration, a notion that brings together configuration and frames, on the one hand and, on the other, Eco's theory of abductions and how intertextuality involves abductive reasoning. The idea under-

<sup>2</sup> Bremond (1964: 4; my translation).

<sup>3</sup> See in particular Couturier (1993: 63–107) and Tammi (1999); for useful predecessors to the present approach, see Ben-Porat (1976); Perri (1978); Amossy (1980); Schmid (1983); Hebel (1991).

<sup>4</sup> Eco (1979: 35).

lying narrative configuration is that stories, through the structuring of narrative functions and frames, both possess a configuration and result from an act of configuration, that intertextuality is a condition of narrativity.

### 1. Configuration and Frames

In its narrative context, configuration was first put forth by Louis O. Mink. According to Mink, configuration is one of three distinct modes of comprehension, that is, "an individual act of seeing-things-together [...] by which elements of knowledge are converted into *understanding*"<sup>5</sup>. These modes include: (1) the theoretical or hypothetico-deductive mode of science; (2) the categorial mode of formal complexes and conceptual frameworks that allow us to determine what kind of thing an object is in relation to its category, as in systematic philosophy; (3) the configurational mode, characteristic of stories, which embraces "elements in a single and concrete complex of relationships"<sup>6</sup>. The latter type functions such that

in the configurational comprehension of a story which one *has followed*, the end is connected with the promise of the beginning as well as the beginning with the promise of the end, and the necessity of the backward references cancels out, so to speak, the contingency of the forward references. To comprehend temporal succession means to think of it in both directions at once [...]<sup>7</sup>.

The crucial distinction here is that between following a story by predicting or anticipating what will happen next, "pulled along" by interest, sympathy and curiosity"<sup>8</sup>, and having followed that same story, an act that connects events together retrospectively. Thus, for example, when Little Red Riding Hood (in Perrault's version of the tale) meets a wolf in the forest while going to her grandmother's, a number of conjectures can be made as to what will happen next; the possibilities are narrowed down once it is learned that the wolf runs quickly down one path to the grandmother's while the girl strolls leisurely down another, but with the outcome of the tale, the necessity of these two itineraries becomes apparent.

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<sup>5</sup> Mink (1969: 553).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: 551.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: 554.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.: 546.

Paul Ricœur adopted Mink's configuration, but with closer attention to the constraints of narrative form, characterizing configuration as an operation which, in narrative texts, produces "emplotment" (*mise en intrigue*) comprising a threefold mediating function: (1) mediation between events or incidents and the story as an intelligible whole; (2) mediation between heterogeneous elements (agents, goals, means, etc.) and story, corresponding in effect to the passage from the paradigmatic to the syntagmatic or, in another sense, from system to "arrangement" (*agencement*); (3) mediation as a "synthesis of the heterogeneous," the resolution through different types of temporal features of the physical discordance of linear successions of "nows" and the temporal concordance of human experience (a plural unity of past, present and future). Emplotment thus encompasses both a chronological or episodic dimension, causing the reader or listener to ask "and then?" (cf. Mink's "forward references"), and a non-chronological or configurational dimension, a properly configurational act of comprehension or "taking-together" (*prendre-ensemble*) (associated by Ricœur with the Kantian mode of reflective judgment) that transforms events into a meaningful whole, providing them with a "point" or "theme" and a sense of closure (a synthetic effect, rather than "backward references")<sup>9</sup>.

This configurational act is not part of time-bound phenomena *per se* or of the signs that represent them, but functions as a condition of their intelligibility "by confronting and combining both sequence and pattern in various ways," thus enabling a reader or listener to organize events into a totality<sup>10</sup>.

Unlike narratologists who seek to formalize underlying narrative structures, Mink and Ricœur focus on the comprehension of stories as an act of configuration. The argument, particularly in Ricœur's case, rests on a complex phenomenology of time (not the concern of the present article), but it also seems to be restricted to stories with a single line of action, as in the story of Little Red Riding Hood considered above. But what about the following example?

... The wolf asked her where she was going. "I'm going to see my grandmother and take her cakes my mother is sending her." "Well I want to go, too!" Two roads diverged in the wood. "Which shall I take?," wondered the wolf. One was grassy and

<sup>9</sup> Ricœur (1983: 102-106).

<sup>10</sup> Ricœur (1980: 1979); cf. Ryan (1991: 264).

wanted wear. After some hesitation, he told the girl to take it, thinking surely she would pick flowers and run after butterflies along the way. Little did he know that this would make all the difference, etc.

It is possible to read this passage (of my own invention) simply as part of a variant of the tale, a particular version of the *fabula* common to all stories about Little Red Riding Hood. However, many readers will notice a twist to this version: it contains three lines (slightly adapted) from Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" (1916). Although the wolf intends to eat the little girl up, he is not the cunning ravisher we know from the traditional tale, but takes on something of the indecisiveness of the persona of the Frost poem, an impression which is intensified in this passage by the use of free indirect speech. In the poem, the persona is ambivalent about his choice of the grassy and unworn road, half wishing he had taken the other road, but looking back on things he seems not dissatisfied; by contrast, the wolf has miscalculated by sending the girl down that pleasant way, as the road he takes turns out to be encumbered with obstacles that spoil his plans, giving the phrase "make all the difference," introduced here proleptically, a sense of regret and disappointment (on the part of the wolf) that is foreign to the poem.

This example, a fusion of two texts, calls for a type of configuration not taken into consideration by Mink or Ricœur. While the hybrid version of the tale does possess "a single and concrete complex of relationships," these relationships can be grasped only imperfectly if the presence of the Frost poem in the story remains unaccounted for. Confronted with this version of the tale, Ricœur's appropriation of the configurational act seems to enter into a poetics of closure which is less adapted to such cases of a plurality of texts than what Eco calls the "poetics of openness," characterized by works offering interpretative freedom, but only within the range of interpretations foreseen by the work itself: "Every work of art, even though it is produced by following an explicit or implicit poetics of necessity, is effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings"<sup>11</sup>.

Narrative configuration, as it functions in the invented example or in works such as *Lolita*, thus requires an approach more closely grounded both in textual and in intertextual properties than the theories elaborated by the two philosophers. From a textual point of view, it

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<sup>11</sup> Eco (1979: 63).

is possible to identify the configurational dimension with semantic macrostructures, each having a theme, so that cognitive processing takes place through operations of inference, thus relating these macrostructures to situations of discourse and pragmatic considerations<sup>12</sup>. An extension of such global textual patterns (although without reference to configurational acts) has been carried out by researchers working in text linguistics, the cognitive sciences and artificial intelligence in the form of frames (commonsense knowledge about concepts such as birthday parties), schemas (ordered sequences linked by time, proximity and causality), plans (global patterns of events and states leading to an intended goal) and scripts (pre-established routines resorted to in particular situations)<sup>13</sup>. These criteria have also been adopted by a number of narratologists. David Herman, for one, speaks of “experiential repertoires” that include static or schematic frames (states and situations) as opposed to dynamic scripts, the latter defined in the narrow sense as “stereotyped sequences of actions that form a crucial part of human beings’ knowledge of the world” and in a broader sense as “the links between prestored, dynamic representations bound up with everyday life.” When integrated into narratives, scripts define the *narrativehood* of stories, whereas the way narratives are oriented toward stereotyped sequences and actions characterizes the degree of *narrativity* a narrative possesses<sup>14</sup>. Conceived of in terms of frames and scripts, narrative sequences thus reflect cognitive processes, clarifying the insights gained from earlier formalized and schematic narrative models by adapting them to human cognition<sup>15</sup>.

For present purposes, frames will be viewed not in cognitive terms, but rather in accordance with what Eco calls “encyclopedia”: a semiotic postulate or a regulative hypothesis, that is, the text-oriented world knowledge or cultural competence that makes semantic interpretation possible by taking account of contextual and circumstantial factors. It is on this basis that the encyclopedia, unlike “dictionary,” allows us to amalgamate two or more frames so as to disambiguate a sequence such as the following:

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<sup>12</sup> Adam (1999 [1984]: 16–20).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Schank/Abelson (1977); for a useful summary, see Beaugrande/Dressler (1981: 90–91).

<sup>14</sup> Herman (2002: 89f.; quotation 382 n. 2); cf. Jahn (1999: 174).

<sup>15</sup> Jahn (1997) is among the first to call for a “cognitive narratology.”

John was sleeping when he was suddenly awakened. Someone was tearing up the pillow<sup>16</sup>.

The criteria necessary for one to infer that John is sleeping on this particular pillow cannot be derived from a dictionary, which contains purely categorial information, or from a hierarchically structured tree for analysis of the sememes /to sleep/ or /pillow/: to interpret this sequence, an encyclopedic representation is required including not only a componential analysis of its sememes, but also a semantics into which pragmatic features are incorporated<sup>17</sup>. It is on this basis that a fundamental principle of Eco's textual semiotics emerges: structurally speaking, a frame is identical to a sememe, and a sememe is "an inchoative text," just as a text can be regarded as "an expanded sememe"<sup>18</sup>.

At this point, a critical distinction must be drawn. Common frames are those frames that inform encyclopedic knowledge employed in the activities of everyday life (the standard sequences of actions involved in dining at a restaurant, taking a bath, etc.), while intertextual frames are *topoi*, including narrative schemes, actualized through signs ("texts" in a broad sense) whose reading cannot be dissociated from other texts and thus from a plurality of frames<sup>19</sup>. For this reason, intertextual competence is inherent in the encyclopedia<sup>20</sup>.

In its first sense, we can say that the configuration of intertextual frames is a "seeing-things-together" that pertains not so much to nar-

<sup>16</sup> Eco (1986: 76).

<sup>17</sup> Dictionary and encyclopedia were first studied by Eco (1976: 48–150) as a "theory of codes" and have since undergone a number of modifications. While his latest work approaches the subject from a "contractual" theory of meaning, the basic idea remains that "supporters of a dictionary representation maintain that such representations [the categorial organization of compositional semantics] take account of relations within the language, leaving aside elements of knowledge of the world, while knowledge in an encyclopedic format presupposes extralinguistic knowledge" (Eco 1999: 226).

<sup>18</sup> Eco (1979: 21, 175).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibid.*: 21.

<sup>20</sup> An "intertextual encyclopedia" is put into play when texts are quoted from other texts and knowledge of these quoted texts is presupposed (Eco 1990: 89); this point applies equally well with a writer such as Borges, who reminds us that such texts need not exist empirically. While theories of intertextuality have developed in widely divergent ways, Julia Kristeva's (1969: 146) statement that "all texts are constructed as a mosaic of texts, all texts are the absorption and transformation of another text" (my translation) has lost none of its allure.



Handwritten: *Doppelgänger p. 8 - complex relationships.*

rative “in a single and concrete complex of relationships” or to emplotment, which mediates between chronologically ordered elements for the comprehension of a meaningful whole, as it does to the actualizing or configuring of multiple frames in a narrative. At this level, the configuration of intertextual frames corresponds to a principle of composition—the parts, we might say, that do not add up to the whole: taken together, the intertextual frames of the bereaved lover, the *Doppelgänger* and the triangle along with their actualizations in *Lolita* correspond to either less than or more than such synthesizing themes as the protagonist’s psychological deterioration or the consequences of sexual obsessions.

## 2. Abduction

Now, it is evident that the processing of intertextual frames requires greater powers of discernment and more extensive recourse to relevant elements of the encyclopedia, explicit and implicit, than do common frames. To gain a better understanding of the mechanisms involved, it will be helpful to refer back to our experimental version of Little Red Riding Hood and briefly consider it in terms of Eco’s system of abductions, itself derived from Peirce’s inferential conception of the sign and the logical operations of deduction, abduction (hypothesis) and induction<sup>21</sup>.

“Overcoded abductions” occur (semi-)automatically when, in a given context of utterance and co-text, reasoning goes from general laws to particular cases in such a way that the conclusion of a hypothesis is taken more or less for granted. As already pointed out, a sememe is “an inchoative text” and a text an “expanded sememe.” On this basis, once a topic has been identified in a text, it is “deduced” as a matter of course that this topic will apply to the whole text, notwithstanding subsequent adjustments. It is in this sense that stories can be said to actualize pre-overcoded narrative functions, corresponding in effect to the passage from type to token. Thus, the words “Once upon a time, Little Red Riding Hood ...” initiate what for most people is a ready-made sequence of actions possessing a specific actantial struc-

<sup>21</sup> This summary is drawn essentially from Eco (1983); for a fuller exposition, see Pier (2003). A useful summary of Peircean abduction can be found in Eco (1994: 157–160).

ture, theme, generic properties and, according to historical, sociological and psychological conditions, a particular point or reason for being related.

Now, when no reliable predictable rule is at hand, it is necessary to seek out a plausible alternative. This is what takes place in “undercoded abductions” (abduction in a sense close to Peirce’s), characterized by a movement from inference to a probable rule. The process of identifying a topic or a theme takes place in this way, but undercoded abductions also occur in an “inferential walk” outside the text, the purpose of which is to select an appropriate previously actualized frame, as in verisimilitude, for instance. It is important to note that a *fabula* is constructed through circulation between the ready-made elements of overcoded abductions and the plausible alternatives adopted through the process of undercoded abduction<sup>22</sup>. A reader of Perrault’s version of Little Red Riding Hood will note not only that the girl takes the long path and the wolf the short path, but also that this choice results from a ploy by the wolf: “I’ll go by this road and you’ll go by that road—we’ll see who gets there first.” Is this race a child’s game? In the end, no, and as the result proves, confirmed by the morality, the unwary girl has been taken in by the duplicitous wolf with fatal consequences: “the gentlest wolves are the most dangerous of all.” Grimm’s version, by contrast, does not include a race, but rather the girl’s promise to her mother to go straight to her grandmother’s. Is this a true promise? No. However, eaten and then saved and after the wolf has been duly punished, the repentant girl vows never again to violate her mother’s interdictions.

Both tales are woven out of sequences of events that activate overcoded and undercoded abductions. Moreover, each includes a crucial frame—in one version a game, in the other a promise—whose own respective system of rules is at least provisionally entertained in the

<sup>22</sup> The back-and-forth movement between the two types of abduction results in a process akin to what Jonathan Culler (1975: 137) calls “naturalization” through which “the strange or deviant is brought within a discursive order and thus made to seem natural”; the concept has since been reformulated by Monika Fludernik (1996: 313) as “narrativization”: “the recognition of a text as narrative [which] characterizes a process of interpretation by means of which texts come to be perceived *as narratives*.” Related to this jockeying between the assumed and the unpredictable is Michael Toolan’s work on plot-based surprise and suspense; see his contribution to the present volume and Toolan (2001: 99–103).

reading process. The fact that the tales include these frames—frames constituting social phenomena in their own right independently of the tales themselves—supports the idea that the actualization of stories comes about through the assembly of frames and that this necessarily takes place intertextually.

What if, in proceeding through undercoded abduction, no suitable tried and tested alternative can be found to explain a problematic textual detail? In this case, like a detective attempting to solve a crime by hypothesizing other facts (puzzle solving) or a scientist hypothesizing a general law to explain new facts (surmising), it will be necessary to invent a rule. Eco calls this sort of conjecturing “creative abduction,” since no pre-existing and firmly established rules and explanations can be relied on, but only “fair guesses” nourished by previous experience. Creative abductions clearly involve greater abductive effort than overcoded or undercoded abductions and thus set in motion a more elaborate procedure for the inductive testing of hypotheses, dubbed “meta-abductions” by Eco: is “the possible universe (or state of things) outlined in the creative abduction [...] the same as the ‘real’ universe?”<sup>23</sup> From this perspective, lower-order abductions are the most “natural,” the ones that fit in most readily to the world of experience, while creative abductions, by seeking to accommodate the unknown or to explain the unaccounted for, may go so far as to bring about a paradigm shift. Unlike deduction, abduction and induction in logic, no sharp line can be drawn between Eco’s four types of abduction, particularly in actual communicative situations, but it does seem that overcoded abductions and undercoded abductions, which predominate in everyday communication and in the construction of *fabula*, are more stable than creative abductions and meta-abductions, which come into play in zones of conjecture, uncertainty and risk and are also prominent in aesthetic phenomena.

A case in point is the hybrid version of Little Red Riding Hood, where the four types of abduction can be observed. Overcoded and undercoded abductions cover the story known by all, but those readers who are not familiar with Frost’s poem are unlikely to grasp the significance for the tale of the three lines extracted from that poem. For those who have a hunch that something about the tale is awry, however, a number of questions will arise. Some (e.g. why does the wolf hesitate

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<sup>23</sup> Eco (1986: 42).

about which road to take?) will set off a search for plausible explanations (undercoded abductions) while others (e.g. what is the explanation for free indirect discourse in this fairy tale?) will involve the hypothesizing of creative abductions. The answers to such questions can be narrowed down through meta-abductive reasoning by determining that the problematic lines are from Frost's poem and that a new web of meanings results from the fusion between the tale and the poem.

This example, even though artificial, does nonetheless provide some indication of: (1) how irregularities or anomalies in an otherwise familiar text are perceived; (2) how intrusive elements prompt further scrutiny; and (3) how the search for explaining these features might proceed. Together, these three moves constitute the stages of creative abduction and meta-abduction involved in the perception of intertextuality. In Eco's writings, abduction has been studied in works by Voltaire, Conan Doyle and Borges<sup>24</sup>, but this is largely for the purpose of illustrating how abductive reasoning functions; and while the four types of abduction form part of Eco's theory of textual communication, brilliantly employed in his analysis of a story by Allais<sup>25</sup>, they are not applied to texts exhibiting the sort of allusive intertextuality we are concerned with here. Actually, the kind of meta-abductive reasoning involved can be found in Michael Riffaterre's theory of intertextuality in poetry, despite the fact that this author does not refer to his method in these terms. It is also true that Riffaterre's method is geared almost exclusively toward poetry with a particular focus on words or phrases that guarantee the unity of a poem, so that it cannot be transposed onto texts with pre-dominantly narrative functions, texts whose formal unity, when it exists, may not gravitate around a word or a phrase. In spite of these limitations and various other reservations, however, consideration of three aspects of Riffaterre's theory does shed light on the points borne out above.

The first point is the triggering of intertextual reading:

Intertextual connection takes place when the reader's attention is triggered by [...] intratextual anomalies—obscure wordings, phrasings that the context alone will not suffice to explain—in short, ungrammaticalities [...] which are traces left by the absent intertext, signs of an incompleteness to be completed elsewhere.

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<sup>24</sup> Eco (1983), (1994: 152–162).

<sup>25</sup> Eco (1979: 200–266).

These, in turn, are enough to set in train an intertextual reading, even if the intertext is not yet known or has been lost with the tradition it reflected<sup>26</sup>.

The specificity and object of Riffaterre's concerns notwithstanding, the term "traces" appears to me preferable, not only because the ungrammaticalities of free indirect speech, for example, are not necessarily bound up with intertexts, but also because the linguistic competence required for the detection of ungrammaticalities is by no means restricted to poetry and because linguistic competence is not co-extensive with narrative competence (this is the case of visual narratives, for instance). Traces bring with them "the presupposition of an intertext"<sup>27</sup> so that, when adequately analyzed, they prove to be variants of a same structural matrix. In this case, intertextuality is "obligatory" as opposed to "aleatory"<sup>28</sup>, the latter typified by quotations, allusions and "merely superficial similarities of wording or topic" that cannot be regarded as variants of a same structure<sup>29</sup>. Structural decoding is described as abduction in Peirce's sense, specified as the reader's "working his way back to the structures that generate the text"<sup>30</sup>. However, it can be objected that, from a meta-abductive perspective, a structure is not a given, so that should there prove to be no common generating structure between, say, "Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Road Not Taken," the process of intertextual reading initiated by the unmarked quotation in our hybrid example would not thereby be dissipated. On this basis, then, narrative configurations allow a signifying potential to aleatory intertextuality that Riffaterre seems to deny<sup>31</sup>.

Secondly, Riffaterre distinguishes between two levels of reading: (1) heuristic reading (linearly from beginning to end, focused on the meaning of words, phrases and sentences and the referential dimension

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<sup>26</sup> Riffaterre (1980a: 627).

<sup>27</sup> Riffaterre (1980b: 18; my translation).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.: 5.

<sup>29</sup> Riffaterre (1980a: 627).

<sup>30</sup> Riffaterre (1978: 168 n. 13).

<sup>31</sup> A similar observation can be made regarding Gérard Genette's intertextuality, which includes quotation, plagiarism and allusion: "a relation of co-presence between two or more texts, in other words, eidetically and usually, [...] the effective presence of one text in another" (1982: 8; my translation). In this system, intertextuality is the lowest of five degrees of abstraction, implication and globalizing nature (*globalité*) defining "transtextuality." The effects of the co-presence of texts may well be diffuse, spreading beyond the immediate context.

of language, but during which ungrammaticalities are encountered); (2) retroactive or hermeneutic reading (the stage of revising backwards, setting up equivalences in a structural decoding aimed at uncovering the matrix)<sup>32</sup>. This dual or, rather, two-stage reading can be likened to what Eco calls “a naïve [reading] and a critical reading, the latter being the interpretation of the former”<sup>33</sup>, which relates directly to the two types of Model Reader: the “semantic reader” and the “semiotic or critical reader”<sup>34</sup>. For present purposes, it will be appropriate to reformulate Riffaterre’s two readings as follows:

Heuristic (or naïve) reading engages lower-order abductions to the extent that, for example, “Once upon a time ...” triggers the assumption that the remainder of the text will be a fairy tale including all the conventional generic features. To such an overcoded abduction must be added undercoded abductions as when, in hindsight, it is realized that the wolf’s challenge to a race is not a game or that Red Riding Hood nearly dies because she breaks a promise. Undercoded abductions are further elicited by intertextual traces, the portions of “The Road Not Taken” introduced into “Little Red Riding Hood,” for example, initiating a movement backward and forward between the two texts.

Semiotic (or critical) reading, which involves higher-order abductions and, like heuristic reading, also incorporates Mink’s forward references and backward references, occurs most prominently with the attempt to account for the intertextual and to somehow accommodate any heterogeneous elements. Quotations (explicit or not), borrowings, allusions and the like invite both an inferential walk (undercoded abductions) and conjectures (creative abductions), but they also call for the “testing” procedures of meta-abductions<sup>35</sup>.

Thirdly, Riffaterre associates these two levels of reading with two semantic systems: (1) “*meaning* when words signify through their one-to-one relationship with non-verbal reality”; (2) “*significance* when

<sup>32</sup> Riffaterre (1978: 5–6).

<sup>33</sup> Eco (1979: 205; cf. 45–55).

<sup>34</sup> Eco (1994: 92).

<sup>35</sup> The meta-abductive character of Riffaterre’s retroactive reading appears clearly with the processing of dual signs (two texts existing simultaneously, as in puns): (1) in such cases, a sign refers to a paradigm that must be recognized; (2) if the paradigm is not recognized, it is necessary to refer back to the clue; (3) the correction backwards “creates the ghost or parallel text wherein the dual sign’s second (or syntactically unacceptable) semantic allegiance can be vindicated; [...] the ghost text may embody itself in potential but ready-made stereotypes within the range of any reader’s linguistic competence” (Riffaterre [1978: 91]). Note that in Ricœur’s system, there is no real equivalent to retroactive or “critical” reading, since comprehension culminates with a synthesis of sequence and pattern into a totality.

the same words signify through their relationship with structural invariants"<sup>36</sup>. In fact, significance breaks down into two interrelated semiotic concepts. First, it is not a sum total of meanings, but "a new segmentation of the text"<sup>37</sup>, "a bouncing from reference to reference that keeps on pushing the meaning over to a text not present in the linearity"<sup>38</sup>; in this sense, significance pertains to semiosis, the action of the sign resulting from the relations between representamen, object and interpretant. In its second sense, significance is defined as "what the poem is really about: it arises through retroactive reading when the discovery is made that representation (or mimesis) actually points to a content that would demand a different representation in non-literary language"<sup>39</sup>. This "different representation," also described as being "neither in the text nor in the intertext, but midway between them, in the interpretant"<sup>40</sup>, corresponds to the interpretant in a sense close to Eco's comment that "the interpretant [is] another representation which is referred to as the same 'object'"<sup>41</sup>, be it in another sign system (translations, synonyms), the same sign system (periphrasis, expansion), indexical pointing or connotation<sup>42</sup>.

There is a clear parallel between Riffaterre's "meaning" and Eco's "dictionary," on the one hand, and between "significance" and "encyclopedia," on the other, although this parallel should not be exaggerated: meaning, for example, is to be taken in a denotative sense, while dictionary pertains to the categorial information contained in sememes. More important for intertextual reading, however, is the fact that although both significance and encyclopedia include the principles of interpretant and semiosis, encyclopedia is a broader notion in that it comprises a network of interpretants structured by the constraints of a universe of discourse in the process of unlimited semiosis, the potentially infinite chain of interpretants, each with an antecedent sign and a consequent sign<sup>43</sup>. As such, encyclopedia, a regulating semiotic princi-

<sup>36</sup> Riffaterre (1980a: 625–626).

<sup>37</sup> Riffaterre (1985: 43).

<sup>38</sup> Riffaterre (1978: 12).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.: 167 n. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Riffaterre (1980b: 14–15; my translation).

<sup>41</sup> Eco (1976: 68).

<sup>42</sup> Riffaterre (1978: 182 n. 2).

<sup>43</sup> "[A]n encyclopedia-like representation assumes that the representation of the content takes place only by means of *interpretants*, in a process of unlimited semiosis" (Eco 1986: 68).

ple, is too general to be operative in actual texts, and for this reason it is preferable, when speaking of narrative configurations, to adopt significance in a sense not unlike Riffaterre's: an interpretant produced by the intersection of two or more texts, but which is contained in neither of those texts *per se*. Example: the sense of regret and disappointment resulting from the fusion of "Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Road Not Taken."

The configuration of intertextual frames in its first sense, as seen above, is a "seeing-things-together," the actualizing or configuring of multiple frames in a narrative. In its second sense, the configuration of intertextual frames corresponds to significance, resulting from a series of abductive operations and the processing of intertextual traces through a heuristic reading and a semiotic reading. In the following discussion of *Lolita*, we shall see how configuration in the first sense emerges largely from the convergences and divergences of the intertextual frames of the bereaved lover, the *Doppelgänger* and the triangle, while configuration in the second sense results from other forms of overcoding.

### 3. Intertextual framing

A full demonstration of these two aspects of configuration in *Lolita* would extend well beyond the possibilities of this article, and I shall thus follow up on only a few of the lines of reflection set out above. Among the three intertextual frames (or *topoi*) singled out, the most prominent is that of the bereaved lover. As with the other frames, however, the works through which this frame is activated are not faithfully reproduced, but tend to drift off in apparently unrelated ways, intertwining and merging with other features of the novel, and yet diverging from any fixed pattern to form still other coincidental and multifaceted designs. While "Annabel Lee" comes closer perhaps than any other work to qualifying as the "hypertext" of *Lolita*<sup>44</sup>, its effects are scat-

<sup>44</sup> Though bound to its antecedent text by a relation of "hypertextuality," the novel does not fit neatly into either of the main two modes of this relation. Through a process of diegetic transposition, the poem undergoes a "serious" (as opposed to a "ludic" or "satirical") transformation in Humbert's account (11-13); at the same time, the novel must be regarded as an "allographic epilogue," i.e. a subtype of imitation, as it is the continuation of the protagonist's story in his postbereavement phase, but by another author (Genette 1982: 231ff.). This typological ambiguity



tered throughout the novel, intersecting with numerous other works to such a degree that any centralizing text, however useful it may prove to be for guiding the reader through various portions of the novel, can be entertained only provisionally. Given the theoretical framework outlined in the present article, it seems most appropriate to proceed by examining how manifestations of lower-order abductions—the three intertextual frames, but also two critical *mises en abyme* and certain generic features that also serve to overcode the novel—are absorbed into and transformed by higher-order abductions.

### 3.1. Seeing-things-together

Numerous indices can be identified creating an explicit link between *Lolita* and “Annabel Lee”: not only the Annabel Leigh of Humbert’s youth on the Riviera which sets the stage for the protagonist’s encounter twenty-three years later with Lolita (“the ‘gratification’ of a lifetime urge, and release from the ‘subconscious’ obsession of an incomplete childhood romance with the initial little Miss Lee”<sup>45</sup>), but also through evocations such as calling out her name as for a stray child (“Lo.Lee.Ta.” [9]) and the telescoping of Dolores Haze’s name into Annabel Lee (“Annabel Haze, alias Dolores Lee, alias Loleeta” [167]) as well as nearly verbatim recontextualized borrowings from the poem (“my darling—my darling—my life and my bride” [167; cf. “Annabel Lee,” l. 39]; “the search [accompanied by Lolita] for a Kingdom by the Sea, a Sublimated Riviera” [167]), etc. More generally, the elements of the bereaved lover, as extrapolated informally from the poem (poet’s memory of a childhood love in a fairytale-like past, coveted by heavenly forces; cruelly separated from the beloved by death, his soul cannot be severed from hers, and he continues to commune with his bride even in her tomb), appear at various moments in the novel and serve as an important source of overcoding.

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serves to underscore the dynamics of configuration in *Lolita*. From another perspective, the intricate relations between text and paratext contribute to the “intra-textual” complexity of *Pale Fire* (cf. Pier 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Nabokov (1991 [1955]: 166–167). Further references to *Lolita* will be given in the text by page number. These references also bear on the relevant annotations by Appel, to which I am sincerely indebted (as well as to Appel [1967a], [1967b], [1968] and Proffer [1968]), although I have found it necessary to complement some of these findings with investigations of my own.

Despite such points of convergence, the works diverge noticeably on other details. For example, *Lolita* dies not as a child from catching a chill (Annabel Lee) or from typhus (Annabel Leigh), but as a married seventeen-year-old during childbirth, having “died” for Humbert after being kidnapped by Claire Quilty three years earlier (4). No less importantly, elements extraneous to the frame of the bereaved lover also enter the picture, as when it is mentioned that “powdered Mrs. Leigh” (Annabel’s mother) was “born Vanessa van Ness” (12). This resonant name is not a mere phonetic curiosity, for just as other onomastic features in Nabokov’s writing generally, it reverberates in various parts of the novel and even in other works by the author, while it also evokes works by other writers.

Firstly, it echoes names such as “John Ray, Jr.,” the moralizing author of the Foreword and editor of Humbert’s memoir whose historical counterpart, a seventeenth-century naturalist known for his system of classification of insects, announces some of Nabokov’s work as a lepidopterist. In his typical way, Nabokov disclaims any authorial connection with this marginal but multiform figure, stating in “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” (appended to the 1958 edition) that “After doing my impersonation of suave John Ray, the character in *Lolita* who pens the Foreword, any comments coming straight from me may strike one—may strike me, in fact—as an impersonation of Vladimir Nabokov talking about his own book” (311). But Vanessa van Ness is further evocative of Humbert Humbert<sup>46</sup>, himself a descendant of William Wilson, and, by way of the French *ombre ombre* (shade, shadow, darkness) of John Shade, author of the poem “Pale Fire,” and of other “shadow” characters—notably, “Vivian Darkbloom,” anagram for Vladimir Nabokov, but also the author of “My Cue,” a yet-to-be published biography referred to in the Foreword (4), and the mistress of the playwright Claire Quilty, Humbert’s double; unspecified at this point, the subject of this biography becomes clear much later when *Lolita*, during her last meeting with Humbert, declares “I would sooner go back to Cue” (279): “Cue” is Quilty’s nickname, and he does in fact provide many “cues” to his identity which fail to be deciphered by Humbert until this late moment in the novel. Vivian Darkbloom also appears elsewhere in the Nabokov corpus, being the author of “Notes to Ada” (appended to *Ada*) and the alphabetical descendant of

<sup>46</sup> Which, in turn, “doubles” John Ray, Jr., initialed J.R., Jr.

"Vivian Calmbrood," the alleged author of an uncompleted Russian play by Nabokov, all of which attests Couturier's claim of Nabokov's "tyranny" as an author<sup>47</sup> and Appel's suggestion that *Lolita* is a "puppet show"<sup>48</sup>.

In yet another sense, Vanessa van Ness refers back, in a roundabout way, to Jonathan Swift's "Cadenus and Vanessa" (1713)<sup>49</sup>. In a commentary on a portion of Shade's "Pale Fire" ("My dark Vanessa, crimson-barred, my blest / My Admirable butterfly" [l. 271f.]), Kinbote quotes from Swift's poem ("When, lo! Vanessa in her bloom / Advanced, like Atalanta's star" [l. 307f.]). Through concatenation of the quotes, "Dark-bloom" is invoked once again, but Kinbote also explicitly points out "the inevitable allusion to *Vanhomrigh, Esther*"<sup>50</sup>: in fact, this is Hester Vanhomrigh, a passionate admirer of Swift who died at an early age and a rival of Esther Johnson, herself Swift's child lover and the Stella whose literary existence is consecrated by *The Journal of Stella* (1710/13). In Swift's poem, Venus deceives Pallas into endowing the nymph Vanessa with manly attributes, rendering her undesirable for both sexes (cf. ll. 441-444), and the nympholeptic Humbert's intense dislike for Annabel's mother, Vanessa, is to some degree motivated by her partial onomastic identity with Swift's Vanessa. As for Stella, she forms part of a long lineage of poets' child lovers including Dante's Beatrice and Petrarch's Laura (cf. 19), but also Poe's Virginia and Humbert's fictitious Lolita ("Oh Lolita, you are my girl, as Vee was Poe's and Bea Dante's" [107]). The dominant connection remains Poe, however, as both he and Humbert are be-reaved lovers, the latter going so far at one point as to register at The Enchanted Hunters hotel as "Dr. Edgar H. Humbert and daughter" (118).

And finally, although it was not written and published until after *Lolita*, Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, in a "coincidence" typical of this author, opens up yet another perspective on Vanessa van Ness. The quote from Swift contains the words "Vanessa Atalanta," the scientific name for the Red Admirable<sup>51</sup>, a member of the *Nymphalidæ* family of butterflies, and it is not by chance that Vanessa Leigh, like butterflies, is

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<sup>47</sup> Couturier (1993).

<sup>48</sup> Appel (1967b).

<sup>49</sup> Swift (1984: 334-356).

<sup>50</sup> Nabokov (1973: 138).

<sup>51</sup> "[L]ater degraded to The Red Admiral" (ibid.).

“powdered.” From this detail, it can be inferred that, figuratively (and notwithstanding the Classical allusions), Mrs. Leigh is the mature form of a “nymph” (from the Greek, *numphá*: bride)—that is, the larva (or pupa) of an insect at an incomplete stage of metamorphosis. This subtle analogy points toward an important structural metaphor which, it can be reasonably surmised, is borne out by numerous textual details: just as the “nymphet” Lolita undergoes metamorphosis (as a character and as an intertextual construct), so the novel *Lolita* results from a series of metamorphoses, suggesting an isomorphic relation between character and novel.

The intrusion of “Vanessa van Ness” into the overcoding frame of the bereaved lover illustrates our theoretical reflections on narrative configurations to the extent that a “naïve” reading is forced to give way to a “critical” reading in order to account for new and, apparently, refractory elements. Through creative and meta-abductive reasoning, it is possible to determine how the processing of these parasitical words brings about a “seeing-things-together” that both accommodates them to their immediate context, adjoining new meanings and significances, and radiates outwards, linking these details up with other portions of the novel and contributing to its extraordinary compositional complexity.

Poe, of course, is the author most visible in *Lolita*, and the presence of “Annabel Lee” early on tends to project the Poe corpus onto other parts of the work. These expectations, however, are frequently deflected. At one crucial point, Humbert says to Lolita: “‘Now hop-hop-hop, Lenore, or you’ll get soaked.’ (A storm of sobs was filling my chest.)” (207). Is this the Lenore of “The Raven” (1849), the somewhat older counterpart of Annabel Lee, or possibly that of “Lenore” (1849)? Here again, an easily overlooked clue requires a critical second look, for “hop-hop-hop, Lenore,” as Nabokov himself explained in his commentary on Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*<sup>52</sup>, is drawn from a popular and widely-translated ballad by the Romantic poet Gottfried August Bürger entitled “Lenore” (1773)<sup>53</sup>: “Und hurre, hurre, hopp hopp hopp!” (l. 149). This line appears as the ghostly figure of the dead Wilhelm urges his beloved Lenore to join him on horseback in order to carry her away to her deathly bridal bed—a bereavement

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<sup>52</sup> Pushkin (1975: III, 152–154).

<sup>53</sup> Bürger (1987: 178–182).

which all but inverts that of the bereaved lover in the Poe corpus. Once identified, Bürger's poem sets off a process of undercoded abduction, shedding light on other details such as the "storm of sobs" filling Humbert's chest (*Sturm und Drang*), Lolita's "Carry me upstairs, please. I feel sort of romantic tonight" (207), and in particular her request, as she rides a bike, to go away: "Leave at once. Go for a long trip again. But *this* time we'll go where *I* want, won't we?" (207). This trip, which has no equivalent in Poe's version of the bereaved lover but is central to the Bürger poem, announces the long car journey through America that will end when Lolita is checked into Elphinstone Hospital with an "ague" (240), although it is not in her hospital bed that she dies (as she would if Bürger were more closely adhered to), but "in childbed" three years later (4). This departure from both Poe's and Bürger's versions of the bereaved lover suggests that Lolita's itinerary follows a logic of its own.

Or does it? Humbert drives the feverish Lolita to the hospital "[w]ith a heterosexual Erlkönig in pursuit," and it is from this hospital that the girl will be kidnapped several days later by Quilty: "While I was not looking, my child was taken away from me!" (240). This is a critical moment in the novel, not only because the pair will be separated for the first time in two years, to meet again briefly only once (three years later), but also because with the unveiled reference to Goethe's "Erlkönig" (1782)<sup>54</sup>, a new factor is introduced into the web of circumstances. Goethe's poem relates how a father carries his son home by horseback during a stormy night, but that on arrival the son who, unlike the father, hears the voice of the king of the elves, has died of a chill<sup>55</sup>. Thus contextualized, the kidnapping of Lolita by the "heterosexual" Quilty represents an important departure from the frame of the bereaved lover, for with the appearance of this third protagonist, Humbert's rival, one of the consequences is that a transition to the frame of the triangle as well as to that of the *Doppelgänger*, both amply foreshadowed in earlier parts of the novel, is now locked into place.

A fully-developed study of the novel would investigate this transformation in closer detail than we can afford here, but for present purposes I wish only to draw a few conclusions. While it is true, from the

<sup>54</sup> Goethe (1984: 154–155).

<sup>55</sup> See Meyer (1988: 26–31 and 215–217) for valuable comments on the repercussions of the Bürger and the Goethe poems in Pushkin's work.

perspective of source study, that “the context of the work quoted (misquoted, or parodied) has no direct relevance for the characters or situations in *Lolita*”<sup>56</sup>, it is the very “irrelevance” of certain textual details that triggers a process by which these anomalies are resolved into what has been noted as one of the dominant features of Nabokov’s writing generally: designs, congruencies, coincidences<sup>57</sup>. The choice of terms notwithstanding, the operations at issue here are strikingly similar to those of the various degrees of abductive reasoning that result in narrative configurations.

### 3.2. Significance

With emphasis on the frame of the bereaved lover, we have seen that one of the principal functions of the three intertextual frames is to overcode the narrative, that the intrusiveness of certain allusions has a significant impact on how these frames are actualized and also that these frames tend to intersect at certain critical points. Frames, however, are but one kind of overcoding that occurs in *Lolita*, the other types most relevant for present purposes being the *mise en abyme* and genre.

One key *mise en abyme* appears early on in the form of three entries drawn by Humbert while in his prison cell from *Who’s Who in the Limelight*: the actor Roland Pym (cf. Poe’s Arthur Gordon Pym); Claire Quilty; Dolores Quine (Lolita is the Spanish diminutive of Dolores) (31–32). Thus, although the bereaved lover dominates in the first part of the novel, the triangle discreetly enters the picture at this point, setting the pattern for Humbert, Quilty, Lolita in the primary diegesis. The members of the *Who’s Who* trio, however, do not belong to a common diegesis, and as they are bound together by no “story,” the relations between them remain largely unspecified. This potential and somewhat formal triangle, assembled by Humbert for reasons that can be construed through the use of Mink’s forward and backward references, is marked by the fact that the obscure and elusive Quilty, whose identity is known by Humbert at the time he writes his memoir, but in the chronology of events is discovered by him only at the time of his last meeting with Lolita<sup>58</sup>, participates in both triangles. A more

<sup>56</sup> Proffer (1968: 19).

<sup>57</sup> Tammi (1985: 19).

<sup>58</sup> “[S]he emitted, a little mockingly, somewhat fastidiously, not untenderly, in a kind of muted whistle, the name that the astute reader has guessed long ago” (271–272).

straightforward overcoding would appear to be provided by José, Lucas, Carmen<sup>59</sup> and, less explicitly, by Onegin, Lensky, Tatiana<sup>60</sup>, for Humbert makes a connection between Lolita and Carmen on more than one occasion, and the situation of the jealous lover forms an obvious link between “Carmen” and *Lolita*. Here again, however, the actualization of frames is belied by textual detail, setting into motion the inferential walks and conjectures of higher-order abductions. Lolita, generally associated with Annabel Lee up to the time she is whisked away by Quilty, at which point she is assimilated partly with Poe’s and partly with Bürger’s Lenore, but also with the boy carried off to his death by the Erlkönig, has by this time already begun to metamorphose into Carmen-Zemfira. But will Lolita share the same fate as the two gypsy girls? This expectation, resulting from an undercoded abduction drawing on knowledge from the “encyclopedia,” is thwarted, for in fact it is Quilty that Humbert will kill, the latter “doubled” by the playwright-abductor nearly from the time he first meets Lolita. It turns out, then, that the “deception” which drives José to kill Carmen or Aleko to kill Zemfira takes on a wholly different form in Nabokov’s novel, the reader having been misled by a false inference and forced to entertain either another alternative (to be confirmed or not) or, more radically, a conjecture: e.g. the deception of the reader. Whatever the conclusion, a progressive reconfiguring of the text and of the overcoding intertextual frames is brought about, not so much at the level of local detail (as is the case with the “seeing-things-together” examined in the previous section), as it is over a wider stretch of discourse.

Another important *mise en abyme* that also tends to suffuse with various elements of the diegesis but, unlike the triangle fashioned by Humbert out of extracts from the *Who’s Who* biographies, coincides with none of the three intertextual frames that inform the novel, results from the summary of a vaguely Symbolist play authored by Quilty: *The Enchanted Hunters* (200-202). Briefly stated, it is the story of Diana<sup>61</sup>, the enchantress of seven hunters (cf. “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves”), one of whom is a Young Poet (Quilty). Now, both

<sup>59</sup> See Proffer (1968: 45-53), which also comments on the Aleko, gypsy lover, Zemfira triangle in Pushkin’s poem “The Gypsies” (1827), a work well known by Mérimée; cf. Tammi (1999: 54-55).

<sup>60</sup> See Meyer (1988: 16ff.) for structural parallels between *Lolita* and *Eugene Onegin*.

<sup>61</sup> In classical mythology, goddess of the hunt and of chastity.

the play and its *mise en abyme* intersect with other aspects of the novel in a number of ways. Firstly, the play, erroneously but appropriately misnamed at one point *The Hunted Enchanters* (196), mirrors The Enchanted Hunters hotel where Humbert had earlier been “enchanted” by Lolita (117ff.), and it seems more than coincidental that Lolita should be cast in the role of Diana for a school performance of the play or that, several days after a rehearsal in the presence of the author, she should leave town precipitously with Humbert for a car journey across America—a journey which, we have already seen, also reflects Bürger’s “Lenore” and Goethe’s “Erlkönig.” The play further ties up with the theatrical context of the earlier *mise en abyme*: Quilty, for instance, is noted for *The Little Nymph*, which “traveled 14,000 miles and played 280 performances on the road [...]” (31)—a foreshadowing of Lolita’s road trip with Humbert in impressive detail; he is also the author of *The Lady Who Loved Lightning*, written in collaboration with Vivian Darkbloom—an anagram (as already noted) for Vladimir Nabokov and yet another example of how, in *Lolita*, the *Doppelgänger* is resolved through authorial control into multiple series of verbal doublings and mirrorings, rather than the traditional psychoanalytical theme. The two *misés en abyme*, one coinciding with one of the principal intertextual frames of the novel, the other not, cast their effects both forward and backward, and they thus contribute to the setting up of textual patterns that can be ascertained only through a critical or semiotic reading. It is these and other forms of mirroring that best illustrate the process of semiosis in *Lolita*.

Verbal exuberance in the novel takes on many dimensions other as well, but it is all neatly summarized by Humbert himself when, imprisoned for murdering Quilty, he declares in his memoir: “Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with!” (32). This “play with words,” occurring in forms reminiscent of certain techniques developed by Lewis Carroll and James Joyce, reaches one of its high points with the “cryptogrammic paper chase” (250) that takes place during the car journey across America when Quilty, a “fiend” in hot pursuit of the couple, registers at nearby hotels under a dazzling variety of “insulting pseudonyms for my [Humbert’s] special benefit” (248). Many parts of the novel and indeed the entire work could be construed as a cryptogrammic paper chase, but it is also interesting, from the perspective of the interpretant, to see how Humbert, who fails to identify the author of the “derisive hints” (248) when inspecting the hotel registers until



three years later when he is informed by Lolita (just before the murder), both misinterprets the "clues" and provides hints, wittingly or not, for connecting them with other parts of the text.

To take but one example, in which somewhat divergent inferences are triggered in the reader and in the memoirist, Quilty registers at Chestnut Lodge under the name "Ted Hunter, Cane, NH" (251). Being the same lodge at which the couple is registered, Quilty, it seems, profits from certain liberties during Humbert's visit to the barbershop. It will further be noticed that this pseudonym is an anagram for the Enchanted Hunter (Quilty is the author of the play in which he is figuratively also the seventh hunter) as well as for the Hunted Enchanter (implying that Quilty is "hunted" by Diana/Lolita), while at the same time it is an oblique (and for Humbert offensive) reference to The Enchanted Hunters hotel. No less important is the fact that the anagram contains the name "Cane," for indeed Humbert, who claims after the kidnapping of Lolita to be "free to trace the fugitive, free to destroy my brother" (247), will later play the role of "Abel." Of relatively unspecified semantic content, then, the proper names and place names that appear in the cryptogrammic paper chase are not overcoded in the same way that, say, the frame of the bereaved lover is, and for this reason it is through the conjecturing of creative abductions that these names are transformed into interpretants within a textually-determined web of antecedent and consequent signs, thus generating meanings that cannot be inferred in a heuristic reading.

We have seen, starting with Eco's suggestion that stories are the actualization by the (model) reader of pre-overcoded narrative functions or intertextual frames, how actualization takes place through the configuration of multiple frames into a complex of relationships and that at the same time this configuration results from higher-order abductions in the processing of intertextual traces. Another important factor in textual overcoding which contributes to narrative configuration is genre. In the case of *Lolita*, numerous features and details tend to connect the work with the fairy tale, and in fact some of the principal characteristics of this genre have already been encountered in the present commentary: metamorphosis, to the extent that both character and text are multiform, perpetually transformed by the inflections of allusive detail; deception, not only in the actions of the characters, but also through the introduction of the frame of the triangle and the false leads to which Humbert and the reader are prey; enchantment, by dint

of various “bewitchments” and evocations of enchanted or enchanting characters, *Lolita* herself being a “nymphet.” This is not to say, however, that these elements add up to make *Lolita* a fairy tale, for even though Nabokov was known to say that “Great novels are above all great fairy tales”<sup>62</sup>, it is clear that, not unlike the Carrollian Wonderland, it ventures into areas that stretch the specificities of this genre to the extreme, if not beyond. In the traditional fairy tale, metamorphosis, deception and enchantment act as themes, but in light of the present analysis, it would be inaccurate to conclude that *Lolita* is a story based on these themes<sup>63</sup>. To the extent that the novel can be regarded as a fairy tale, it elicits the overcoded abductions associated with “Once upon a time...”. But how can these generic expectations be reconciled with the overcoding provided by the intertextual frames of the be-reaved lover, the *Doppelgänger* and the triangle (none of which qualify as fairy tales), not to speak of the innumerable intertextual traces the work is bristling with? Here lies the crux of the problem of narrative configuration, for the attempt to reconcile these various incommensurate elements with one another takes place, as we have seen, through abductive reasoning, rather than through the postulating of a unifying structure. This is true in particular of the processing of intertextual traces, which allows us to determine the relevance of the Bürger and the Goethe poems, for instance, or of the abductions making it possible to establish links between the principal intertextual frames. This being the case, metamorphosis, deception and enchantment no longer function as they do in fairy tales but, thanks to the rearticulation resulting from the intersections peculiar to *Lolita*, are displaced toward meanings which are not the direct expression of pre-determined themes or of the “story” told by the novel, but lie between their pre-overcoded acceptances and their intertextually-determined actualizations.

Narrative configurations underscore the necessary circulation between theory and textual detail, however untidy, bewildering or vexing this exchange might sometimes be. Rather than an abstractive or reductive set of procedures for determining the core structure of a given

<sup>62</sup> As reported by Appel in Nabokov (1991: 347).

<sup>63</sup> It is thus with a mixture of approbation and serious reservation that I read: “The simplicity of *Lolita*’s ‘story’, such as it is—‘plot’, in the conventional sense, may be paraphrased in three sentences—and the themes of deception, enchantment, and metamorphosis are akin to the fairy tale” (Appel in *ibid.*: 346).

narrative, much less the formal characteristics of all narratives or of particular classes of narratives, narrative configurations result from the interpretive acts elicited by the textual signs of individual narratives—the abductive reasoning which allows both for actualizing intertextual frames and for determining the relevance and functions of intertextual traces. It is of course perilous to draw broad conclusions from a partial examination of a single work<sup>64</sup>, but nonetheless it does seem that narrative configurations, whose theorization stems from a reflection on textual semiotics and intertextuality, offers a compelling set of criteria for a narratological analysis capable of bridging the gap between theory and the workings of individual narratives. Indeed, where the broad spectrum of narratological theories that have been flourishing in recent years ranges from the older “text-centered” to the newer “context-oriented” approaches and from an “over-theorized” to an “undertheorized” pole<sup>65</sup>, it would appear that narrative configurations share some of the concerns focused on by either end of these two axes. And while narrative configurations do not constitute a theory of interpretation, they do come within the purview of a “heuristic” conception of narratology for the discovery and description of textual features relevant for the understanding of narratives<sup>66</sup>. This article began with a presentation of Mink’s distinction between three ways that knowledge is transformed into understanding: the theoretical or hypothetico-deductive mode of science; the categorial mode of systematic philosophy; the configurational mode of storytelling. Narrative configurations, as our analysis of *Lolita* has shown, come about through the abductive processing of intertextual frames and traces and thus open the way to an *intertextual narratology*.

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<sup>64</sup> Even though this has been a recurrent practice since the time of Aristotle’s *Poetics*.

<sup>65</sup> See Nünning (2003).

<sup>66</sup> See Kindt/Müller (2003) for a discussion of narratology as a “heuristic tool.”

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