

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov or Vladimir Nabokov was a multilingual Russian-American novelist and short story writer who was a master of English prose stylist. Nabokov was born on April 22nd, 1899. He was born into a wealthy, aristocratic family in St. Petersburg. His father, Vladimir Dimitrievich Nabokov, was a liberal politician, lawyer, and journalist. Nabokov spoke Russian and English, and at the age of five, he learned French. Nabokov received his education at the Tenishev, St. Petersburg's most innovative school. At sixteen, he inherited a large estate from his father's brother, but he did not have much time to enjoy his wealth. During the Russian Revolution, his father was briefly arrested. The family immigrated to Berlin and Nabokov entered Trinity College, Cambridge, from where he graduated in 1923. A Russian monarchist murdered Nabokov's father in Berlin in 1922. Nabokov lived in Berlin for 15 years and worked as a translator, tutor, and tennis coach. He won acceptance as the leading young writer in the Berlin Russian community. Most of his readers were Russian and American (Nabokov, 1955, p. 1).

In 1952 while travelling on butterfly-collection trips in the western United States, Vladimir Nabokov created *Lolita*, a novel with two major characters: Humbert Humbert and Dolores Haze (Lolita). The novel becomes one of the best-known and most controversial examples of 20th century literature because it describes a young girl who has an early mature sexual life. In 1953, Nabokov was unable to find an American publisher for *Lolita*. After four refusals, in 1955 he finally resorted to Olympia Press in Paris. Graham Greene, in an interview with the (London) *Times*, called it one of the best novels of 1955. This statement provoked a response from the (London) *Sunday Express*, whose editor called it "the filthiest book I have ever read" and "sheer unrestrained pornography." In December 1956, the French followed suit and the Minister of the Interior banned *Lolita* because of the controversial issues it contains and the ban lasted for two years. The French people mainly obeyed to ban the novel because a major international incident, the Suez Crisis, had for once made Britain and France cooperative peacetime neighbors, so when the France's traditional cultural freedom was disturbed, they identified Nabokov's book as the true cause of the ban and, by January 1957, had made "l'affaire Lolita" not a book advised for them to read (2010, ¶ 17). This situation is in contrast with America, because many underground readers want to read that novel. So, American publisher were ready to publish the novel, *Lolita*. The first edition was a best seller because American people like the theme of freedom of doing what they want in the novel. The

situation is shown with Lolita as one of the characters that shows the meaning of the freedom.

Lolita, the novel was sold one hundred thousand copies in three weeks. In other words, *Lolita* was a popular novel in America. It is interesting that until this century *Lolita* is listed in the *TIME* 100 Best English-language Novels from 1923 to 2005. It is also fourth on the list of the Modern Library's 1998 of the 100 Best Novels of the 20th century (2010, ¶ 3). Because of the popularity, the thesis writer became interested to analyze it in her research.

In this novel, there are two important characters to be analyzed namely Humbert and Lolita. Humbert is the narrator of the story. Functioning as the narrator and main character, Humbert explains the complex story of a man and his obsession. To set this book special from other books, Nabokov gives Humbert possibly the most socially unacceptable obsession of middle-aged pedophilia for a sexually active 12-year-old girl. This obsession leads Humbert and Lolita to spend a year driving all over the United States and they have sex. However, later in the novel, Lolita leaves him for marrying someone else. Humbert, then, goes on a cross-country journey to find his precious Lolita. There are many ideas in the plot that supply the controversy of pornographic elements, so the writer wants to analyze Nabokov's novel, *Lolita*, by finding where the pornographic elements inside the story are represented.

In this thesis, samples such as the following quotation about a sexual scene will be analyzed:

"You mean," she persisted, now kneeling above me, "you never did it when you were a kid?"
"Never," I answered quite truthfully.
"Okay," said Lolita, "here is where we start." (Nabokov, 1955, p.133)

The conversation above explains when Lolita asks Humbert about an oral sex experience that he might have had as a kid. Since Humbert says, he never experiences it; Lolita starts and offers him to do an oral sex. The writer thinks that this conduct is not in accordance with Lolita's age, which is 12 years old. A girl of 12-year-old usually has less experience about any sexual activities. Therefore, it is surprising that she can do it as a mature woman.

In the novel, Lolita's misconduct is represented to have something to do with her social background. At school, Lolita's society with her friend was not fair, they do something not like a 12 year-old child. They know about sex and practice it quietly in the camp school area. They learn about each other is sex. It makes Lolita to know about sex and felt great because in her childhood she was able to become a woman. Teachers in schools also justified if the behavior of Lolita is not her age but more mature and plunge about sex behavior. The environment also supported Lolita's behavior. She is a free and uncontrolled girl, because her curiosity toward sex is very big.. Seen from the habit of collecting adult magazines and popular songs in that period, it can affect strange behavior of Lolita.

Therefore, the writer thinks, it becomes necessary to analyze how far the pornographic elements in the novel are described and what was sociologically happening in the novel's era that made *Lolita's* popularity. So, the writer uses *Lolita's* social background that influence her strange habit by using the sociological approach.

1.2 Field of the Study

The field of the study is literary work, especially novel as the major source.

1.3 Scope of the Study

In this study, American popular culture is used to understand why the novel became popular in America. Besides that, sociological approach is used to the study of the American society of the 1950s. Because the novel deals with pornography as a scope of the study it is used in a limited sense.

1.4 Problem Formulation

1. How does the 1950s American society condition influence the development of Humbert and *Lolita's* characters in the story?
2. How do the pornographic elements are shown in *Lolita*?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze what 1950s American society conditions have influenced the development of Humbert and Lolita's characters in the story.
2. To find out the pornographic elements in *Lolita*.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The result of this study, which makes an analysis of the novel of *Lolita*, could contribute and add something useful for both the lecturers and students in the Faculty of Letters, Soegijapranata Catholic University, especially, in using popular culture and sociological approaches. The popular culture that influences the development of the main character's freedom in behavior can be a significant contribution also.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Popular Culture : the totality of ideas, perspectives, attitudes, memes, images, and other phenomena that are deemed preferred per an informal consensus within the mainstream of a given culture (2011, ¶ 1)

Pornographic elements : the material that is predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal. It has a certain function or intention, to arouse

its audience sexually and also certain content (Hawkins, 1988, pp 27-28).

Pedophilia : sexual contact or activity with prepubescent children that is someone younger than thirteen years old. (Byer, 1985, p. 447).

Nymphet : the 9-14 year old girls who are sexually precocious and desirable (2010, ¶ 1)

Consumer behavior : consist of the psychological and social processes people undergo in the acquisition, use, and disposal of product (for example automobiles), services (for example professional laundry), ideas (for example spiritual beliefs) and practices (for example regular breast self-examination) (Bagozzi, 2002, p. 205)

Sociology : study the patterns and processes of human social relation in society (Rodney, 1987, p.7)