



TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

**« FROM MODERNISM TO POSTMODERNISM IN ENGLISH AND
AMERICAN LITERATURE: FAIRY TALE SEXUALITY AND GENDER IN
NABOKOV'S *LOLITA* AND CARTER'S WOLF STORIES »**

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PCEO EN LINGÜÍSTICA Y LENGUAS APLICADAS Y ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Curso Académico 2021- 2022

Fecha de presentación: junio 2022



FACULTAD DE FILOSOFÍA Y LETRAS

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ABSTRACT

Nabokov's *Lolita* can be considered, due to its general and specific characteristics, a transitional novel between Modernism and Postmodernism in American Literature. This paper will analyse these characteristics in order to highlight the influence of fairy tale references in the novel for the presentation of masculinity and sexuality, prior to the resurgence of fairy tale narrative with a feminist perspective in the 1970s. For this purpose, a contrastive study will also be carried out with two of Carter's stories from her collection *The Bloody Chamber*: "The Company of Wolves" and "Wolf-Alice".

Key words: Modernism, Postmodernism, masculinity studies, sexuality, fairy tale rewriting, Vladimir Nabokov, Angela Carter.

RESUMEN

Lolita de Nabokov puede ser considerada, por sus características generales y específicas, una novela puente entre el Modernismo y el Postmodernismo de la literatura norteamericana. En el presente trabajo se analizarán esas características con el objetivo de destacar la influencia de las referencias de los cuentos de hadas en la novela para la presentación de la masculinidad y la sexualidad, antes del resurgimiento de la narrativa de cuentos de hadas con perspectiva feminista de la década de los 70. Para ello, además, se realizará un estudio contrastivo con dos relatos de Carter de su colección *The Bloody Chamber*: "The Company of Wolves" y "Wolf-Alice".

Palabras claves: modernismo, postmodernismo, masculinidades, sexualidad, reescritura de los cuentos de hadas, Vladimir Nabokov, Angela Carter.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nabokov's novel *Lolita* (1955) continues to generate, almost seventy year after its first publication, numerous debates, and literary studies. In this “Trabajo de Fin de Grado” of bibliographical review and literary analysis this novel has been chosen as the central element for a study of 20th century Anglophone literature, focusing above all on the transition from Modernism to Postmodernism. *Lolita* presents many typical characteristics of Modernism, such as the author’s fascination with description, detail, and formal style, reminiscent of the works of Woolf and Joyce, but at the same time, his rejection of Freudian theories and Nabokov’s fascination with the emerging capitalist and consumer society and taste for vulgar and banal elements open the door to Postmodernist studies.

Conversely, Postmodernism was characterised, especially from the 1970s onwards, by the influence of feminist theories, with the rewriting of fairy tales by authors such as Angela Carter, with the main aim of breaking with the classical folkloric tradition and the strict gender roles proposed by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm in their works.

This paper will also present specific elements of the fairy tales that appear in Nabokov’s novel and will defend, as its main hypothesis, that this is not only an example of transition between eras, but a way in which Nabokov is transgressive, as he anchors himself in the creation of a fable, of a dream world with fairy tale characters such as the “nymphet” to deal with themes of masculinity and sexuality that broke with the classical models of the time, although still perpetuating gender roles and patriarchal society. In fact, the “nymphet”, a full definition of which is given in the specific analysis section, is a term created by Nabokov in *Lolita* to describe a literary character represented by a young woman in her pre-adolescent years who possesses a burgeoning sexuality and the magical power of fatal attraction to men older than herself, represented in the novel by the protagonist Dolores Haze, who the narrator calls Lolita. This term determines the order of events in the novel at the same time as the narrator mythologises and dehumanises pederasty.

The choice of the topic of this final dissertation has been produced due to several factors, mostly related to the interest that Nabokov’s novel caused in me when I first read it and the amount of criticism, many of which are still based on judgements about the subject matter, that the novel still presents today 1) why does the reader feel empathy for an

openly unreliable and paedophile narrator ?, 2) how does the author manage to create a magical scene around the sexual scenes, where rape is happening, and present it as a difficult love story? , 3) which is the real position of the girl?

With the main objective to solve the previous questions, the essence of this “Trabajo de Fin de Grado” will be the presence of fairy tale elements in the narrative of the novel: It will be argued that with them, the narrator will manage to create a world of enchantment that will mythologise the paedophilic based on rape relation father-daughter into a fairy tale love story, as well as it helps to dehumanise the girl while the narrator justifies his actions. Furthermore, we believe that focusing on how the text treats the situation, the choice of words and references and the narrator Humbert’s vision in the sexual scenes is not incompatible with condemnation of his actions of rape and kidnapping, which we completely reject, but which we believe should not influence in asserting totalities about the textuality of the novel.

For the correct explanation and exemplification of the different hypotheses, a study with a contrastive methodology has been carried out between *Lolita* and Angela Carter’s fairy tales “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf Alice” in terms of gender and sexuality, with special attention to the figure of the nymphet and her representation in the different periods. Both of Carter’s stories are part of the rewriting of the classic *Red Riding Hood* tales, the first having a similar structure to the classic tale but ending with Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf together, and the second dealing with the process of identity recognition as a woman of a girl raised among wolves, and her subsequent attraction to the Duke she serves.

For all these reasons, the work has been structured in four different parts, all joined under the ideas explained before: 1) a theoretical compilation on Modernism and Postmodernism and an attempt to define them under the conceptual difficulties that this entails, to end by situating Nabokov between the two periods; 2) a theoretical and methodological framework with the description of the key concepts on which this work is articulated: masculinities, gender and the importance of rewriting fairy tales in the 20th century; 3) a specific and contrastive analysis of Nabokov’s *Lolita* and Carter’s stories with the aim of exemplifying the concepts previously explained; and eventually 4) presenting the conclusions of the analysis.

2. MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

2.1. Concepts and comparison

Defining Modernism and Postmodernism in literature is not something easy, as it cannot be considered to exist just one single description of them. Nevertheless, trying to understand those concepts and periods is essential to maintain the main hypothesis of this final degree project: Nabokov's *Lolita* represents a moment of transition between Modernism and Postmodernism, therefore it is not adequate to study both as completely independent eras.

The main problem for their definition is to make clear what is conceived by the terminology "modernity" or "postmodernity", whose semantic content "not only depends on chance and individual idiosyncrasies, but also on ideological engagement" (Zima 3). These two terms have been understood, throughout all levels of art, to differ in chronological periods, ideologies, or stylistic systems, although none of these distinctions has provided a single definition.

In regards with the chronological localization, most authors identified Modernism as a current "with the expansion of modern literature and art since 1850 (Benjamin, Adorno) or since 1890 (Bradbury, McFarlane)" (Zima 4). Some historians consider that modernity arose from the European revolutions of 1848 and the work of Baudelaire while others define Nietzsche's literature and its impact on the 1905 revolution as the origin of the period (Zima 4). Similarly, the aforementioned historical elements cannot be considered as global realities, as in each culture and even country the movement was understood in a different way. Thus, while Adorno's and Benjamin's concepts adapt well to the Anglo-Germanic countries, in Spanish and South American debates modernism refers to "the literary innovations by authors such as Rubén Darío, José Martí or Juan Ramón Jiménez around 1900" (Zima 168). In Italian, for instance, it refers to the innovations produced in the Church within Catholicism in the same period, which proves the idea put forward by Zima of how "all constructions of the social and cultural sciences are co-determined by ideologies and cultures" (168).

Notwithstanding the previous ideas, if it is possible to speak of a current it is because, for years, similar tendencies of thought and artistic creation that can be grouped together have been observed. Modernism implies a break with the previous order which can be

considered innovative, or, more specifically, “a curious mixture of abstraction and excess” (Connor 68). Negations and evasions with respect to the art of past eras create the concept of abstraction, such as the move away from round characters, happy endings or organised plots in literature (Connor 68). Excess is also produced because common, mundane subjects are also embraced. Topics, in truth, which were previously far removed from the spectrum of what was considered art (bear in mind Marcel Duchamp’s sculpture *Fountain* presented in 1917). Respecting literature, many more themes (boredom, chance, fantasy...) and new ways of representing them are accepted. As Connor notes, “for modernism, less is more” (68), which is why we find examples of novels written in the course of a single day or centred on the point of view of objects that are inert or considered insignificant (such as the moving focus of a snail in Virginia Woolf’s story *Kew Gardens*) and “yet containing more than the world in its accumulation of allusion and interconnection” (Connor 68).

Similarly, following the temporal representation, Postmodernism has historically been considered to evolve from the Sixties as an important category (Hoffman 33), although the term can be found sometimes before connected with the change in morals produced after the Second World War. Indeed, the Sixties in American society was a time of turmoil, hope and idealism, which gave birth to “radical political, social, and cultural movements whose watchword was liberation, liberation from intellectual, social, and sexual restraints” (Hoffman 33). Besides, Postmodernism as a period is understood also as a reaction against the Fifties and the late modernism, deconstructing “traditional loyalties, ties and associations” (Hoffman 34) while looking towards a new diversity and the “willingness to experiment, rethink, and redefine” (Hoffman 34). In addition to the previous decades, Postmodernism as an artistic period is also seen to evolve from the 1970s onwards by connecting with Marxist and feminist theories, and ethnic minority groups who had previously rejected the movement as too closely related to consumerism and media culture (Hoffman 37). These new approaches, which also define Postmodernism according to their theories, broaden critical views in relation to race, gender, or class.

These statements create chronological thinking, based on historical moments or specific decades in which the change from Modernism to Postmodernism would occur when one will progressively follow the other, breaking with the ideas of the previous years. Nevertheless, these historical-chronological definitions, although helpful in classifying

authors and works, tend to be too simplistic, as these periods are also understood through the ideology, thoughts and values that accompany the events to come. A shift in some of these paradigms could produce a transfer between “modernity” and “postmodernity”, but we must bear in mind, as McHale states, that “the referent of ‘Postmodernism’, the thing to which the term claims to refer, does not exist” (4). Neither would exist “postmodernity” “as a ‘thing in itself’ in the sense of Kant” (Zima 3).

Postmodernism does not exist, as these authors maintain, not because it should be considered an extension of Modernism but because there is no Postmodernism “out there” (McHale 4) just as there is no Renaissance or Romanticism, these are all “literary-historical fictions, discursive artefacts constructed either by contemporary readers and writers or retrospectively by literary historians” (McHale 4). In fact, postmodern literature already existed in the 1950s according to Hoffman, such as Hawke's *The Cannibal* (1949) considered by many to be the first postmodernist novel, or Gaddis's *The Recognitions* in 1955, which “break up traditional schemes of representation and evaluation” (44). In addition to this, Postmodern deconstructionism considers Joyce, Kafka, Faulkner or Poe as “‘proto postmodernist’ among the literary authors” (Hoffman 44).

It can be said, then, as McHale states, that these concepts are not objects in the traditional understanding of them but construction, symptomatic of the European and North American situation. For that reason, many sociologists, even those who do not consider themselves postmodern, such as Giddens or Touraine, “are inclined to believe that the social changes, which have been taking place since the Second World War, have yielded something qualitatively new” (Zima 1). Nabokov's *Lolita*, therefore, is not in the middle of these periods solely because of the year of its publication, 1955, but because it represents mixed values, ideologies and characteristics, the fruit of a transitional moment that goes beyond the historical periods subsequently created and classified.

In relation to the change in values and ideologies, a differentiation between Modernism and Postmodernism by analysing the moral change between the two literary periods, as well as the philosophy followed in each of them will be explained. This second way of presenting the concepts gives depth to the chronological order previously introduced. To do so, I will start from a compact dual classification proposed by McHale, who states that while modernist fiction is epistemological, postmodernist fiction is ontological (Connor 66). Modernist fiction would be epistemological because it is concerned “with problems of knowledge and understanding” (Connor 66) while postmodernist one involves “the

creation and interrelation of worlds of being” (Connor 66). This leads to the influential idea that works considered postmodernist are more concerned with the experience of humans in the contemporary world and consumer society while modernist fiction is interested in more abstract general concepts (also related to moral values like “good”, “true religion” or “politics”) and how they function within themselves.

Modernist fiction is full of ambiguities, where opposing values such as “good and evil, truth and lie appear as equally true or valid” (Zima 177), breaking the duality of the accepted and unaccepted of previous literary realism but always under the main intention of searching for precise and clear answers about authenticity, truth and subjectivity” (Zima 194). Moreover, modernist writers still take seriously the search for the “true religious, political or aesthetic value” (174 Hoffman) of his characters. Hence, it is not difficult to find that the bizarre and the carnivalesque in Modernism lead to a critique of ideology in order to search for the authentic and sometimes utopian set of values (Hoffman 174) in the work of authors such as Proust, Sartre or Brecht.

With this, it must be borne in mind that the preoccupation with these concepts in literature is also based on doubts, on seeking answers for definitions of “true”, “just” or “beautiful” that differ from the values of the traditional novel with its marked heroes and anti-heroes (Hoffman 184). There would already be, therefore, a certain scepticism towards “metanarratives” in Modernism, a scepticism that seeks distinct answers from those previously given by nineteenth-century religion and values.

The difference with respect to Postmodernism is that postmodern works no longer seek specific answers. These preoccupations about abstract concepts are silenced in Postmodernism, where the search for values moves towards indifference in a society that is already “torn by ideological strife” (Zima 195).

Another key feature that differentiates Modernism and Postmodernism is the influence on them of Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis. The modernist novel, as stated in Zima, “could be read as a text in which Nietzsche's and Freud's discoveries concerning the latent links between incompatible values and apparently irreconcilable emotions are dealt with ironically and projected into the fictional context” (173). Freud’s theories provide different answers to religious questions, the same literary writings seek, in which supposedly opposing values and concepts are reconciled, such as the idea that God and

the Devil form a whole in Catholicism or that money is capable of linking extremes (Zima 171).

Postmodernist works, on the contrary, believe that psychoanalysis generates a consciousness of guilt in literary characters, as many of them have something repressed or their actions are based on traumas hidden in the subconscious. Postmodernist writings react against this by showing actions that cannot be easily classifiable, values not easily definable out of the “burden of authenticity and subjectivity” (Zima 193).

Likewise, postmodernists leave these theories behind and allow themselves to be influenced by other stylistic and social theories, such as the voices of different minorities or feminist approaches. However, in terms of philosophical theory, the ideas of Foucault and Barthes that consider the death of the author as a subject stand out. The reader and the process of reader response becomes more prominent because the author “is no longer responsible for the constitution of meaning” (Zima 202). Thus, the reading is motivated not by the search for meaning and truth as in Modernism, but by the “pleasure of the text” (Zima 202), “the reflected pleasure of observing the reading process, the game of rising and vanishing expectations” (Zima 202).

The third and final procedure to describe the difference between Modernism and Postmodernism is through the different literary styles and the characteristics they present. Many critics argue that the shift from Modernism to Postmodernism is definable as “a shift from poetry to fiction” (Connor 62). Modernist poetry, with works such as Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Pound's *Cantos*, David Jones's *In Parenthesis* or William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*, focuses efforts on “condense the complexity of time and history, to make them apprehensible in a single frame” (Connor 62).

The mission of modernist poetry can also be presented as the search for “snapshots rather moving pictures” (Connor 63) within their works, with the idea of making concrete portraits, evoking perspectives, and colours like the painting of the time. In fact, the mission of modernist writing would be “to make its reader ‘see’” (Connor 63), with novels that focus on the temporal fracture, the multiplicity of points of view with moments of revelation, discovery, or transformation.

Instead, it seems that some postmodernist narratives appear “to depend on the voice rather than on the eye” (Connor 64), requiring for this a longer and less metaphorical format

such as the case of the novel. Literary Postmodernism has focused on stories, to which more and more diverse voices (women or racial minorities such as Afro-American or Jews) have been added, although not all narrative created after modernism is necessarily considered postmodern. The hegemony of narrative over poetics is seen in the cinema, advertising, video games and best-selling fiction that has been produced throughout the 20th century, which has had a much larger readership and scope than modernist poems. The taste for stories and fiction also represents the reaction against modernist models of writing such as the sermon, the letter, or the essay (Connor 65), which shows how Modernism has been fading in an increasingly globalised society.

2.1.1 Vladimir Nabokov's intermediate position

Vladimir Nabokov's work is considered mostly related to Modernism, although he himself "rarely used the term" (Foster 85) as the term came into use later, in English-language criticism from 1960 onwards.

Nabokov's Russian origin modulates his beginnings, when he signed his works as Sirin, which were based on poems and short stories with a clear influence of Soviet authors. Even so, during his studies in the United Kingdom between 1919 and 1922 he observed the impact of groups of American writers, who, guided by Pound's propagandistic success, proposed the creation of new works, changing the nineteenth-century literary canon, as they claimed, "making it new" (Foster 87). Nonetheless, Nabokov never showed himself to be a great follower of the modernists, and his English-language work, published from the 1930s onwards, although influenced by these authors, was notable for "diverge[ing] from the doctrines of poetic impersonality that were famously asserted by Eliot and Pound" (Foster 88). Thus, Nabokov argues that the author could draw on his circle to create more realistic portraits, without the need for searching the total impersonality advocated by these poets.

Moreover, Nabokov "rejected myth as a form-giving device for modern fiction" (Foster 91), since for him it was more important to capture individual specificities than the stereotypes sometimes promoted by the mythical background of modernist works. He also favoured parody, cultural and sexual multiplicity, and the creation of a virtuosic and marked style.

Joyce's style in *Ulysses* creates a considerable influence on Nabokov's writing in general, and especially in *Lolita*, with which he manages to bring "his affinity home to English-speaking readers" (Foster 90). He admires how Joyce is able to evoke sounds with words and believes that achieving something similar is the main purpose of *Lolita*. Indeed, in his 1956 annotations of the novel he states that the magic of the novel lies not in its supposed morality, or the subject matter chosen for it but in the beauty of the concrete images. Therefore, Nabokov express as examples "Lolita in slow motion advancing toward Humbert's gifts" (Nabokov, "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" 16) or "the tinkling sounds of the valley town coming up the mountain trail" (Nabokov, "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" 316). Nevertheless, we shall go into a more detailed discussion on these ideological and aesthetic questions in our section of specific analysis.

These are some of the characteristics that make Nabokov be considered "a pre-postmodernist alongside Borges and Beckett" (Foster 89), especially during his works produced in his American career: *Lolita* (1955), *Pale Fire* (1962) and *Ada* (1969). Indeed, as McHale (2004) states "the crossover from modernist to postmodernist writing also occurs during the middle years of Vladimir Nabokov's American career" (18).

3. CRITICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

After having located Nabokov's work as a literary bridge between the diffuse concepts of Modernism and Postmodernism, this section will theoretically present the key elements for the comparative analysis of the selected corpus: on the one hand, Connell's concept of "Hegemonic Masculinity" as well as masculinities in mid-century American culture and their literary representations; and on the other, key notions for the better understanding of the study of fairy tale theory, in addition to the emergence in the second half of the 20th century of fairy tales re-writings from a feminist perspective. Indeed, Angela Carter's importance in the feminist fairy tale genre will be pointed out, with special attention to her wolf-related stories.

These concepts will be later assembled to understand how Nabokov's novel *Lolita*, although it does not belong to the fairy tale genre, draws on elements of fairy tales, with which the author initiates studies and experiments in the gender relation of his main protagonists. Besides, Nabokov shows in *Lolita* a slightly different masculinity from the "Hegemonic Masculinity" proposed by Connell in favour of a sexually deviant one. It

will be argued, then, that this fact opens a path towards Angela Carter's postmodern revisions of the fairy tale genre, which will exploit the rewriting of the literary genre from a feminist perspective, focusing on the voice and sexuality of the female protagonists of her stories.

3.1. Methodology

Vladimir Nabokov and Angela Carter have been chosen to carry out a contrastive study of gender and sexuality within comparative methodology with the main mission of observing them in the context of the period, reflecting on Nabokov's position between Modernism and Postmodernism and Carter's work, which is considered postmodernist. In the same way, it seeks to highlight the similarities between works from different decades and genres.

The corpus selected for analysis is *Lolita* (1955) by Vladimir Nabokov and two stories belonging to the collection *The Bloody Chamber and other Stories* (1979) by Angela Carter, specifically those related to the presence of wolves: "The Company of Wolves" and "Wolf-Alice". These two works by Carter, although appearing independently in her collection, will sometimes be analysed as a single unit, as both present a response to the classic European tale of the *Red Riding Hood*.

For all these reasons, the methodological procedure will range from the most general to the most specific, and the specific analysis of the works will always be based on concepts and periods previously theoretically explained, serving on numerous occasions as an exemplification and extension of them.

3.2. Masculinity Studies

Masculinity Studies as a field inside literary studies does not acquire importance and attention until the 1990s, although, as Ferry states, "the study of men and masculinities in American fiction must surely start with Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960)" (150), so that we can previously find some studies that identified "masculinity and male sexuality" (Ferry 150) as one of the essential bases for the creation of American fiction. Nonetheless, it is Raewyn Connell, with his description of "hegemonic masculinity", who was the first "to recognise the existence of various, often competing, male groups representing diverse ideas of what it means to be masculine" (Ferry 149). In fact, it is defined as follows:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell 77)

This definition is produced within the study of the social theory of gender, that is, within the concept of gender as belonging to binary roles (masculine vs. feminine) combined with each other that gives rise to situations in which one can be above the other. “Hegemonic masculinity” would systematically place men above women and present specific traits such as heterosexuality or the importance of physical strength. Interestingly, this type of strong masculinity, defined by Attebery as an “intimidating model of manhood” (316), coincides with the most prevalent model of masculinity in the 1950s in the United States, the decade in which *Lolita* was published.

As Mitchell suggests compiling the words of Gabler, American male sexuality in the 50s was generally “a function of muscle, aggression and force associated with such things as manly labor, the outdoors, athleticism, ruggedness and risk” (21). A function that was required from all post-war male role models, which is reflected too in the fiction of the period. An example of it could be the characterisation of Stanley Kowalski's character in the play “A Streetcar Named Desire”, later portrayed on film by Marlon Brando. This model, similar to the one of Connell, is also included in Mitchell's work, who creates a differentiation between the two models of masculinities that would have significantly influenced the collective mentality of the time: a) the hyper-masculine and b) the domesticated (Mitchell 21).

The first one would be characterised, as previously mentioned, by a masculinity marked by toughness, as well as by the clichés of western films to highlight the virtues of the American personality to face conflicts (Mitchell 22). The second reference model, on the contrary, would be that of the white, heterosexual man who is the centre of marriage and family (Mitchell 23). This figure “supported conventional gender arrangements and sex norms, while also affirming the socioeconomic order” (Mitchell 22) and would reflect the primary anxiety of American society at the time, which was primarily articulated by the nuclear family, with marriage and children.

Both social models of masculinity represent Connell's concept of “hegemonic” because in them it is always the man who creates the central axis of society, with a clear superiority of power and responsibility over the woman. The man needs to be the one in charge of

maintaining American political order and power while he manages to live “the American dream”, as well as trying to be successful in business in order to maintain a happy marriage and family. The woman, in contrast, would remain passive in caring for the children and the home, which produces a clear differentiation of their roles and position within society.

3.3. Vladimir Nabokov and the models of masculinity

In general, Nabokov's work and the portrayal of his characters does not fit easily into the classic masculinity roles of the time, but rather shows the anxieties, the light-darkness, the failures of mid-century society through “deviant” sexualities. In this way, he conforms more closely to the model of masculinity promulgated by *Playboy*, a magazine to which he himself contributed, which creates a new image of the masculine. A heterosexual, educated, wealthy man, who has sexual freedom without being married, but who still fits in well with the post-war capitalist model.

Playboy's masculinity model modifies the hyper-masculine model because playboys preferred to stay indoors entertaining female guests, listening to jazz and reading Nietzsche, as opposed to thrashing outdoors with other men on hunting expeditions. It also revises the domesticated model because the playboy prefers bachelorhood in an urban setting over a nuclear family in the suburbs (Mitchell 26)

In *Lolita*, Nabokov shows precisely a difficult, pederast relationship between the narrator Humbert Humbert and his stepdaughter Dolores Haze. In it, a “deviant” masculinity is presented and the audience is made to reflect on what it is and it is not “normal”, with a narrator who victimises himself, prey to the seductive power of the nymphet, something that still particularly touches the nerve of American society. Moreover, as will be discussed in detail in the specific analysis section, the beloved is presented as far from being a “damsel in distress”, for she is a sexually experienced adolescent, capable of unsettling a man, with pseudo-mythical capabilities, typical of fairy tale stories. Even so, Nabokov presents an exclusively male vision in *Lolita*, where the power relationship is significant and where the reader is never aware of the female vision.

All these ideas gradually fractured the morality of the time, which is also influenced by the controversial publication of Alfred Kinsey's essays — in 1948 and 1953 respectively— on sexual behaviour between men and women, which “challenged myths about the presumed 'innocence', or sexual naiveté, of American women” (Goldman 87).

3.4. 20th Century Fairy tale feminist revision: Angela Carter

The genre of fairy tale in literature is considered one of the most influential, best known and accepted by the population. As a result of oral tradition, its origin is as old as the first human needs for expression (Kelly 3). In this way, the genre has been recycled up to the present day, adapting itself to the times and to the different needs of the speakers. Apart from its adaptability, fairy tales, as Zipes comments, provide guidance for coping with the world and also moral instruction, exploring our shortcomings as reflected in the characters' virtues and life processes since the end of the 18th century (*The Oxford Companion* xxiii). Thus, "the genre of the fairy tale assumed a new dimension which now included concerns about how to socialize children and indoctrinate them through literary products that were appropriate for their age, mentality and morals" (Zipes, *The Oxford Companion* xxiii).

All the above has led to "an artistic and scholarly rediscovery of fairy tales" (Attebery 314) since the 70s, alongside the various feminist movements, with scholars such as Kay Stone, Linda Dégh, and Marina Warner and writers such as Angela Carter. This rediscovery has "opened the form to the investigation of women's lives and identities" (Attebery 314), seeing the fairy tale "as a feminine and sometimes feminist counter-myth that evades patriarchal assumptions and displaces the male hero" (Attebery 314).

Especially influential for Angela Carter and other authors of this movement is Zipes' study of the paradigm shift in the 18th century, as he argues that there was, firstly, a transformation of the popular tales from folk to the "bourgeoisification" of it:

By bourgeoisification of the oral folk tale I meant the manner in which educated people appropriated the tales belonging to and disseminated by peasants, largely of the bourgeoisie, adapted the styles, motifs, topoi, and meanings of the tales to serve the interest and needs of the new and expanding reading audiences – particularly at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. (Zipes, *Brothers Grimm* 136)

At the same time, Zipes claimed that this change led to a modification in the social consciousness of young people and adults, as "a specific canon of tales" (Zipes, *Brothers Grimm* 137) is created among the character's relations of power, which erases the mission and sexuality existing in the women of previous folktales. This canon, therefore, "emphasizes male adventure and power and female domesticity and passivity" (Zipes, *Brothers Grimm* 37).

For this very reason, the main aim of the writers of the 1970s was to rewrite the nineteenth-century tradition of fairy tales by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, with the intention of placing “the question of gender to the fore” (Wu 54) as a response “to the male-centered ideologies of genres” (Wu 54).

To include gender-related problems is precisely the novelty of this kind of re-writing, as well as to create fairy tales where the previously established roles in society and literary canon are questioned and adapted to postmodern society. In fact, the focus on the question of gender is the main reason of the differentiation between modernist and postmodernist fairy tales.

Although Modernism is not particularly known for the production of fairy tales, it is the literary period where such significant works for Western culture as L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird* were written. In these works, “the concern with interiority, subjectivity, and self-discovery seen in each of these works fits well” (Taroff 326). Subjectivity and self-awareness join mythological references in modernist short stories, which will be taken up and changed by feminist theory in contemporary tales, as Wu argues:

By exposing the masculinist mechanism hidden in the literary categories, contemporary feminist rewriting of fairy tales is a prominent example of appropriating the dominant genres for feminist use. Feminist fairy-tale rewriting thereby is not only a writing practice but serves political aims as well, which criticizes the patriarchal representation and promotes feminist consciousness (55).

It is in this context of rewriting the genre of fairy-tale that the work of Angela Carter is framed. She is considered one of the most original contemporary British writers, whose imaginative and somewhat ground-breaking work is “tremendously influential in shaping contemporary British literary landscape” (Wu 55). Thus, her best-known work, *The Bloody Chamber and other Stories* (1979) presents stories anchored in the folkloric tradition of villages, such as the traditional *Red Riding Hood* or *Snow White*.

This “Trabajo de Fin de Grado” will focus specifically on Carter’s Wolf stories – “The Company of Wolves” and “Wolf-Alice” from her 1979 collection, in which Carter responds to Perrault's classic *Red Riding Hood*. Carter's stories should therefore not be understood simply as an attempt to equalise gender roles: in her wolf stories there is still the big bad wolf, the girl who confronts him and the sick grandmother, each with a clear

mission. The difference is that in them, the girl is not depicted as helpless but as highly erotic, increasingly aware of her own sensuality and ready to discover it.

3.5. Connection: *Lolita* as a fairy tale

After having presented in the previous sections some basic notions about the concepts of masculinities and fairy tales, the relevance of the union of these concepts for this dissertation will be briefly explained. To this end, the comments will be based on the recently published work of Susan Elizabeth Wood in 2021, who maintains that “*Lolita* is a fabulation, a new story scaffolded upon architextural features from the fairy tale, using much postmodern play to create the effect upon its reader” (69).

That is to say, the main idea on which this dissertation is based on recognizing *Lolita* as a novel with numerous references to fairy tales (they will be shown in detail in the analysis section of this work) with which Nabokov embellishes a story of “deviant” masculinity. Through “fabulation”, and thanks to the creation of a dream world and the mythical atmosphere typical of these stories, Nabokov manages to create a work that focuses on gender and male desires together with the eroticisation and sexuality of a young nymphet. This dream world and romantic fabulation is juxtaposed with the mundane reality of 1950s America, creating a transgression between right and wrong, the moral and the immoral, which highlights the shortcomings of a system where the masculine only took place within harsh schemes of representation. In fact, Nabokov “explores the flaws in contemporary masculinity” (Wood 85).

The presentation of *Lolita* as a nymphet, “the site of the magical and the ordinary, the desired and the forbidden” (Wood 81) further emphasises the gender difference between the protagonists and implies the realisation of a “male-centred narrative before the 1970s fairy-tale renaissance with its focus on female-centered narratives” (Wood 77). Indeed, “it is through the creation of this dreamlike fantasy world that the narrator’s transgressive behaviour is made to seem normal” (Wood 69) as the use of this environment allows the reader to empathise with paedophilic attitudes, dehumanising the young girl while they question their own concepts of morality.

In other words, understanding how Nabokov explores the concept of gender with the support of folklore imagery is essential to see Carter’s fairy-tale rewriting work firstly as

a continuation of the trend and secondly as a response to the exclusively male view where *Lolita* is never the “equal romantic protagonist” (Wood 98).

4. SPECIFIC ANALYSIS

4.1. Specific modernist & postmodernist elements in *Lolita*

In the first section of this dissertation, we presented the not so easily definable concepts of Modernism and Postmodernism, and how the passage from one to the other occurs within English and American literature. Vladimir Nabokov was situated as an apprentice of Modernism, but some of his main reactions to the Modernists were also introduced. In this section we will present specific elements of the novel *Lolita* that would place it at a point of transition towards Postmodernism. To do so, we will use the words Nabokov himself wrote about his work under the title “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” in 1956 and quotations from the novel in question.

First of all, the importance of details for Nabokov in his work, of the specific style, of the ability to describe concrete images through words, has already been emphasised. These are what he considers “the nerves of the novel” (Nabokov, “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” 316), “these are the secret points, the subliminal co-ordinates by which the book is plotted” (Nabokov, “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” 316). According to Durantaye, this taste for detail, which has value in itself, and the importance of particularity is closely linked to the author's opposition to symbolism and allegory (116).

Nabokov affirms this rejection in the annotations in the novel, which he relates directly “to my old feud of with Freudian voodooism” (Nabokov, “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” 314). Freud considered mythology to be an essential key to understanding the mysteries of the mind, for he saw in them encrypted messages and signs that would connect us to our psychological past (Durantaye 123). This hatred of Psychoanalysis is mainly due to the fact that, for Nabokov, an approach that seeks to understand reality through myths risks committing “the worst sin in his aesthetic canon: the failure to pay close attention to the particularity of the work of art” (Durantaye 124). At the same time, this rejection also implies opposition to one of the key pillars of Modernism: the importance of symbolism and Freudian theory, which situates the author's work in a shift, an evolution towards the sceptical works typical of Postmodernism.

This mockery of Psychoanalysis is seen in specific quotes from the novel, such as when Humbert Humbert analyses the very morality of his actions and his desires for the young teenage girl, before deciding whether it is right to start travelling with her aimlessly through the USA after her mother's death. At this point, he pronounces:

Therefore (to retrieve the thread of his explanation) the moralist in me by-passed the issue by clinging to conventional notions of what twelve-years-old girls should be. The child therapist in me (a fake, as most of them are- but no matter) regurgitated Neo-Freudian hash and conjured up a dreaming and exaggerating Dolly in the “latency” period of girlhood. Finally, the sensualist in me (a great and insane monster) had no objection to some depravity in his prey (Nabokov 124)

In this fragment, Humbert Humbert hints that his behaviour could be analysed from a Freudian perspective, but this would be “a fake”, like most scholars of the subject. Later on in the novel, when the fear of being persecuted on his travels takes hold of him, and he decides to buy a gun to protect himself, he says, ironically: “we must remember that a pistol is the Freudian symbol of the Ur-father's central forelimb” (Nabokov 216).

Humbert Humbert thus anticipates and mocks a possible Freudian analysis of his behaviour. Like this, Nabokov would reject the study of *Lolita* as a simple work patterned on Psychoanalysis, since the novel is relevant for its particularity, for the presence of unique elements that are difficult to classify, and that it exists and has value in itself, without the need for general studies that statically frame it.

Nabokov's *Lolita* would, then, have a writing style akin to that promoted by the modernists (in terms of its fixation and detailed description and its elevated character) even though “Nabokov did not disparage plot” (Boyd 32), differentiating himself from other great modernist novelists. Indeed, for all his originality, “he relies on the salient events of story that arise out of the biological necessities of reproduction and survival: love or death, or both: intense, consuming, sometimes perverse passion” (Boyd 32), which makes *Lolita* present and unusual subject matter in the Modernist period. For this very reason, as Mitchell states, *Lolita* “first shocked the post-war generation because of their sophisticated construction and vulgar subject matter” (143).

Nabokov's taste for the vulgar shows in *Lolita* an attraction to the boorish, with special attention to the new consumer society emerging in American society. This taste for the new mass society and its references in the novel also makes *Lolita* present a hybrid genre, in which representations of postmodern society can already be seen.

Both Lolita and her mother construct their identities “according to the images that advertising and popular culture provide” (Mitchell 125). In *Lolita*, Nabokov in this way creates an America he had not previously known nor ever written about: “It had taken me some forty years to invent Russia and Western Europe, and now I was faced with the task of inventing America” (Nabokov, “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” 312). Hence, he chooses to tell the story equally through the outsider Humbert Humbert, with whom the reader learns about America through his eyes and actions. That is why Humbert “has nothing but ‘contempt’ for the sign systems, and his critique offers insight into the post-war American economic system” (Mitchell 127).

References to this kind of suburban, vulgar society are especially found in the second half of the novel, when Humbert and Dolly begin their journey through the United States. Nabokov states in his notes that “nothing is more exhilarating than philistine vulgarity” (Nabokov, “On a Book Entitled *Lolita*” 315), and this is visible in his descriptions of the motels where they stay. Something so ordinary, and somehow mundane, manages to create the dreamlike atmosphere in which the love affair takes place:

By and by, the very possibilities that such honest promiscuity suggested (two young couples merrily swapping mates or a child shamming sleep to earwitness primal sonorities) made me bolder, and every now and then I would take a bed-and-cot or twin-bed cabin, a prison cell of paradise, with yellow window shades pulled down to create a morning illusion of Venice and sunshine when actually it was Pennsylvania and rain (Nabokov 145)

Moreover, this part of the novel explains how shopping is sometimes the only way for Humbert to satisfy and comfort Lolita. Humbert wishes to have her always by his side, “just as consumerism instils a desire to have, hold and control an object, Humbert wishes the same in his relationship to Lolita” (Kovacevic 282). Lolita is thus the “ideal consumer” and Humbert “buys clothes, magazines and food for his ‘little nymphet’” (Kovacevic 282). This is visible in the chapter right after Humbert announces Lolita the death of her mother, when he narrates how many things he bought her with the main mission of comforting her:

In the gay town of Lepingville I brought her four books of comics, a box of candy, a box of sanitary pads, two cokes, a manicure set, a travel clock with a luminous dial, a ring with a real topaz, a tennis racket, roller skates with white high shoes, field glasses, a portable radio set, chewing gum, a transparent raincoat, sunglasses, some more garments – swooners, shorts, all kinds of summer frocks (Nabokov 142)

In this way, Nabokov shows the reality of an emerging consumer society, the importance of the material for the population as a formula to escape as well as to define their identity. He bought her all those things to make her forget that she “had absolutely nowhere else to go” (Nabokov 142). Consuming is, in short, a necessity in capitalist society, which will be the object of study in most of the works framed within the framework of Postmodernism.

4.2. Nabokov as a short story writer: fairy tale elements in *Lolita*

As we have discussed above, what characterises Nabokov, apart from his style as we have analysed in the previous section, is his ability to evoke scenes. In fact, as Boyd states, “his scenes are tightly consistent, exact, literal, specific, surprising, economical, evocative, quickly set up and quickly dismissed” (Boyd 33). He is innovative and his capacity for evocation is considered by many to be superior to that of other authors, always taking risks and questioning every aspect of narrative (Boyd 33).

Not so common, however, is to study what he does maintain in his writings with respect to the literary tradition. During his writing life, we find not only novels, but also numerous short stories and histories, influenced by Russian and European tradition. Dmitri Nabokov, his son, compiled the thirteen stories into four collections that were published post-mortem in 1995: *Nabokov's Dozen, A Russian Beauty and Other Stories, Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories, and Details of a Sunset and Other Stories* (Meyer 119). These were written over a period of thirty years, beginning with “The Wood-Sprite” in 1921 and ending with “Lance” in 1951, before his greatest period as a writer of novels in American literature arrived.

In them, in addition, the classical order of events is maintained, in which “the *siuzhet* (the events in the order in which they are recounted) largely follows the sequence of the *fabula* (the events in the order in which they occur)” (Boyd 34), avoiding cut-up or flashback-based narration. Moreover, although the stories differ from one another, “the key structure is the obsession of the hero” (Boyd 35) and in this fact “lies the source of much of the humour, poignancy and irony of Nabokov's fiction, and the emotional charge of his unreliable narrators” (Boyd 35).

All of this influences the writing of *Lolita*, as Nabokov uses elements of short stories in his novel, such as references to fairy tales to make his descriptions more evocative, as

well as Humbert Humbert belongs to the kind of unreliable narrator to which Boyd refers. Furthermore, Appel suggests that the simplicity of *Lolita's* story in terms of plot, as well as the themes of “deception, enchantment, and metamorphosis” (346) are common to the fairy tale genre, as are “the recurrence of places and motifs and the presence of three principal characters recall the formalistic design and symmetry of those archetypal tales” (Appel 346).

In the critical framework it was mentioned that Nabokov uses elements of fairy tales in *Lolita* to reaffirm the gender roles of the work and to create a fabulation through which the reader falls under the spell of the narrator's words. Nonetheless, this connection between *Lolita* and fairy tales goes beyond mere references, as Nabokov himself acknowledged in one of his seminars as the importance of the novel-fairy tale connection:

At Cornell (where the annotator was his student in 1953-1954), Nabokov would begin his first class by saying, “Great novels are above all great fairy tales.... Literature does not tell the truth but makes it up. It is said that literature was born with the fable of the boy crying, ‘Wolf!’ and the treicked hunters saw no wolf...the magic of art is manifested in the dream about the wolf, in the shadow of the invented wolf (Appel 347)

Is *Lolita*, then, “a great fairy tale”? To try to answer so, we will analyse the specific references in the novel to the different fairy tales, which appear in a heightened form during the scenes of “heightened sexual import” (Wood 67). We will first focus on the references that appear in two main scenes: the first intimate moment between them, in which Humbert claims that there was “absolutely no harm done” (Nabokov 62) as the character manages to satiate his desires without having a “normative” sexual encounter, and the description of the first night at The Enchanted Hunters Hotel, where Humbert Humbert first rapes Lolita.

At the beginning of this first scene, Humbert asks the reader to participate in the narrative, to examine in detail to “see for themselves how careful, how chaste, the whole wine-sweet event is” (Nabokov 57). In it, curiously enough, numerous references to fairy tales can be found, with which the narrator would fulfil his main mission: to convince the reader that the action he is performing is harmless.

In the first place, there is a reference to *Snow White*, as Lolita is presented like as pseudo-mythical being who plays while she bites an apple: “she had painted her lips and was holding in her hollowed hands a beautiful, banal, Eden-red apple” (Nabokov 57-58). This reference could also refer to the woman’s sin, to the temptation to which Eve succumbed

in Eden. Nevertheless, the quote “she grasped it and bit into it, and my heart was snow under thin crimson skin” evokes the famous fairy tale, not only because it explicitly mentions “snow” but also because the relation “apple-bite” and “snow” occur in the same line. In this way, Humbert expresses his feelings towards the girl, since, as Wood states, he draws a parallel with how Lolita consumes the frozen flesh of the apple “just as his heart is consumed by her” (Wood 90).

Afterwards, during the flirtation of frictions and movements that Nabokov describes with the accuracy of a butterfly study, he expresses: “every movement she made, every suffle and ripple, helped me to conceal and to improve the secret system of tactile correspondence between beast and beauty” (Nabokov 59). This quote represents a clear reference to *The Beauty and the Beast*, where the narrator places himself as the beast in love with the young lady, recognising, perhaps, some of the brutality of his actions.

Also on this page it is mentioned how the erotic act takes place while Humbert, assisted by Lolita, hums a popular song called “Carmen”. Thanks to his singing, Humbert “kept holding her under its special spell” (Nabokov 59). A spell like the ones in fairy tales, which allows the scene to take place while Lolita is bewitched, enchanted. This spell, we consider, crosses the boundaries of the novel-reader relationship, and somehow allows the reader to be drawn into Humbert’s eloquence, like a fabled charm.

Secondly, it will be now highlighted the fairy-tales references used in the part of the novel where the first sexual encounter between them takes place: their stay at The Enchanted Hunters Hotel. Apart from the fact that the name of the hotel itself is not at all coincidental and also evokes the world of the unreal, in these chapters there is once again a repetition of references with similar themes to the one mentioned above. It is noteworthy that this time Humbert Humbert does not use all his resources in the description of the sexual encounter but in the preparation for it and the effects it causes, being comparable, as Fawver maintains, to a narration of a Vampire Tale (113).

In preparation for the sexual encounter, Humbert admits to having bought pills to induce sleep in Lolita, so that he can rape her without her being aware: “the whole pill-spiel, (a rather sordid affair, *entre nous soit dit*) had for object a fastness of sleep that a whole regiment would not have disturbed” (Nabokov 128). This way of bewitching Lolita by inducing sleep may be a modern way of evoking the story of *Sleeping Beauty*, “with the spell conveyed through a modern narcotic rather than an enchanted spinning wheel

spindle” (Wood 96). The “spell” does not work, and Lolita remains awake, represented as if she were a non-human being, able to survive any narcotic. This fact fascinates Humbert, who decides to divert his narrative and not to tell anything about the sexual encounter since he is not concerned with “so-called ‘sex’ at all” (Nabokov 134) but to guess “to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets” (Nabokov 134). In this way, by diverting attention to a mythical and magical theme, and obviating the rough details of the sexual act itself, he manages to distance himself from the idea that Dolores Haze is a girl visibly forced by her stepfather, to analyse how a mythical being like the nymphet can cause so much turmoil in his own persona.

After these specific references, and not having presented the specific details of the sexual intercourse, Humbert describes the consequences of it by evoking an image in which Lolita has a mark on her neck: “Nothing could have been more childish than her snubbed nose, freckled face or the purplish spot on her naked neck where a fairy tale vampire had feasted” (Nabokov 138-139). In this way, Humbert would be setting himself up as the vampire who, the night before, seized his victim. This is why Fawver suggests that the novel *Lolita* should be understood “as less as the narrative of a murderous paedophile than as a vampire tale detailing the struggle between a psychic monster and his prey” (133). This mark on her neck is but the beginning of a decadence, in which Humbert “feasts not on Lolita's blood but on her innocence and vitality” (Fawver 135) to leave her at the end “as spiritually and psychically hollowed as himself” (Fawver 135) as if he was a “psychic vampire”.

Finally, as a way to conclude this section, other elements will be highlighted which, although they are not references to specific fairy tales, serve to create a magical frame. Wood suggests that, although the novel *Lolita* is set in a specific time and place in history (1950s America), at times Nabokov plays with “creating the illusion of timelessness, furthering the creation of a fabulation” (80), the reader is absorbed by a world of motels and towns in the United States with no correlation between them and no real geographical reference, chosen randomly as the setting for this fantasy. Humbert states so when he talks about one of his destinations “that destination was in itself a perfectly arbitrary one (as, alas, so many were to be)” (Nabokov 139).

Nabokov also plays with the world of fantasy at the end of the novel. When Dolores Haze contacts Humbert after years of being unreachable and he goes to see her, he proposes that they run away together for a happy ending, as in the fairy tales. “We shall live happily

ever after” (Nabokov 278) pronounces Humbert on seeing his pregnant adult nymphet, but she replies “you mean you will give us that money only if I go with you to a motel. Is that what you mean?” (Nabokov 278). With this sentence, Dolores breaks the spell, the magic of the lovers, and Humbert is aware that she is not his nymphet anymore, since she does not share his fantastic vision but only sees their possible intimacy as a way of earning some economic livelihood. Humbert is aware that it has all been, in the end, a dream, a fantasy in which Lolita has never participated, which emphasises his position of power over her and defines part of his masculinity.

4.3. Sexuality: the figure of the “Nymphet” in *Lolita* vs Carter’s Wolf tales

Sexuality in *Lolita*, as in Carter’s fairy tales, is inherent to the concept of gender and essential for the understanding of the works selected for this “Trabajo de Fin de Grado”. Both authors understand sexuality as an important part of artistic creation and, in many cases, the eroticism of their works has been related to pornography. This section will specifically discuss the vision of eroticism in the different works, while at the same time explaining the sexuality of the characters under the concept of nymphet, created by Nabokov in the work *Lolita* and which is already a widely accepted and used term in literature and vocabulary in the English language.

Nabokov explains what a nymphet is very early in the novel *Lolita*, in the fifth chapter through his eloquent and unreliable narrator Humbert. H. Humbert proposes that “between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travellers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature, which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac)” (Nabokov 16). Such girls, Humbert states, “I propose to designate as ‘nymphets’” (Nabokov 16), who differ from other types of girls of their age because they present an earlier sexual development, capable of attracting in a demonic way men older than herself.

In this way, according to Kao, Nabokov reinvents a definition he draws from mythology and biology, for a nymph in mythology is “one of a numerous class of semi-divine beings, imagined as beautiful maidens inhabiting the sea, rivers, fountains, hills, woods, or trees, and frequently introduced by the poets attendants on a superior deity” (3). Furthermore, in biology, it is a term indicating the process of metamorphosis by which a being is in the process of changing towards perfection, “a nymph is ‘pupa’, an insect in that stage of development which intervenes between the larva and the imago” (Kao 3).

In other words, a nymphet could be defined as a pre-adolescent girl, in the process of metamorphosis towards maturity but with divine and mythical characteristics and a flourishing sexuality. Although the term has enriched current vocabulary, Nabokov did not want it to enter the public domain to define real girls (Mitchell 104) because he considered it to be a term of art, understandable only within the framework of the fantastic and magical, as in fairy tales.

Taking as a starting point the concept of the nymphet, it will be described how the sexuality of the main characters of *Lolita* (Humbert Humbert and Dolores Haze) and that of the protagonists of “Wolf-Alice” and “The company of the Wolves” is conceived within the framework of the concept itself.

Humbert Humbert describes his sexuality, and partly his identity, due to his fatal desire for nymphets. The type of man who has this different and fatal attraction is far from the classical masculine conceptions of the time explained in the theoretical framework (the hyper-masculine and the domesticated). Humbert himself describes this male model as “an artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins and a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine” (Nabokov 17). A man able to see among many girls those who have the characteristics of nymphets because he possesses an “artistic vision”, so creates Nabokov a new definition of the masculine. Humbert is a cultured, European man, who presents a complicated sexuality which breaks “the lines that separate normal sexual behaviour from deviant behaviour” (Mitchel 140) in the eyes of social taboos. Thus, Nabokov presents an embarrassing model of masculinity and sexuality, because at the same time as Humbert invents the concept of nymphet the man “cancels — or solipsizes — the reality of the Little girl who give rise to her” (Durantaye 70), the young Dolores Haze in this case.

It is noteworthy that Nabokov never mentions through his narrator that he behaves shamefully because of the unacceptability of his behaviour, nor does he mention regret for the constant mythologising of the girl. Rather, Humbert is presented as the victim of a system that does not understand him nor his love for his little nymphet while it underestimates her seductive power. Moreover, as Goldman states, there is no difference for the narrator between “the images of the fallen woman, the prostitute and Lolita” (92) as “all of them, to him, are equally deviant, corruptible, and corrupting” (Goldman 92). This idea locates Humbert on a higher level of knowledge and morality with respect to

his nymphet in the novel, a matter that Angela Carter modifies in her rewriting of the fairy tales, giving her nymphets the power of self-determination.

In the same way, we can affirm that the sexuality of the young Lolita is also defined through the concept of the nymphet as a reflection of Humbert's sexual desire, being difficult to discern between the mythical figure and that of the girl herself. For Humbert's perspective, the girl is "an archetypal temptress, a modern-day femme fatale" (Goldman 87). The narrator presents her in this way to exculpate himself and excuse his actions by pointing out, for example, that the girl was not a virgin "Did I deprive her of her flower? Sensitive gentlewomen of the jury, I was not even her first flower" (Nabokov 135). Rarely does the narrative shift from the first person to other narratives, except for the account of the doctoral candidate John Ray, which creates the necessary framework at the beginning of the novel to present Humbert's narrative after he has died. However, when Lolita does take the word, it is often confusing to discern whether she is not sometimes the one who takes the initiative for their relationship to take place, as when she pronounces before the first intercourse "okay, here is where we start" (Nabokov 133), the young woman being the potential initiator of the first sexual encounter.

This fact has continually led critics, especially contemporary ones, to "have sometimes conflated Humbert's view of Lolita with Nabokov's" (Goldman 87) and have argued that Lolita's sexuality is the same as that of the nymphet described by the narrator, a "nymph-like girl already perverted before Humbert exploits her" (Goldman 88).

Nonetheless, this paper will argue that the fact that the sexual development of adolescent girls is discussed in the book is transgressive, since Nabokov breaks with conceptions of sexuality at the time. Humbert treats Dolores Haze's behaviour as a reflection of a deviant sexuality, which Carter later addresses as the common personal development of the young woman.

That is, as Goldman states, Nabokov would use the sexology that was so controversial at the time (the Alfred Kinsey's studies mentioned in the critical framework) to show an "ordinary, juvenile girl whose 'normal' sexual development is warped by a maniacal, myth-making paedophile" (Goldman 88). Lolita's sexuality, therefore, would be like that of any other girl of her age with a burgeoning sexuality and discovering her own eroticism, she is not a diabolical or mythical being. Readers are, instead, the ones that

need to bear in mind that she is presented to them through the lens of mythology, fabulation and fairy tale language, through the narrator's use of language.

In order to talk about Carter's work and compare her characters with the concept of the nymphet, it must be considered that *Lolita* had a profound impact on the society of the time, becoming a best-seller. This produced a certain "cultural fascination with Lolita-like girls and the related sexualization of adult women through tropes and markers of this fantasy" (Kimberly 80). Furthermore, these ideas were expressed in pornography or mainstream media, mostly reflecting "heterosexual male fantasies" (Kimberly 80), despite the fact that Nabokov stated in the novel's annotations that the term "pornography" "connotes mediocrity, commercialism, and certain strict rules of narration" (Nabokov 313), something that the author totally rejected.

It is in this environment of clear domination of male fantasies where Carter's work emerges, as Kimberly states, "women writing erotic tales call attention to the dominant cultural fetishization of young girls and the sexualization of women" (80) with the main intention of "rewriting desire such that it prioritizes women's sexual agency as they see it" (80).

The two main characters of "The Company of Wolf" and "Wolf Alice", two stories with which Carter does a revision of the famous fairy tale *Red Riding Hood* can be equally characterized under the definition of nymphet previously explained because they are also girls in the throes of puberty. Their characterisation and development will be analysed with the main intention of comparing it with Nabokov's earlier work.

Firstly, the Little Red Riding Hood in "The Company of Wolves" is described as a nymphet in terms of age and sexual development, as "her breasts have just begun to swell" (Carter 138) at the same time "she has just started her woman's bleeding, the clock inside her that will strike, henceforward, once a month" (Carter 138). Her sexuality begins to blossom, and Carter attaches particular importance to menstruation, to the power of bleeding for the transition from girl to woman. Furthermore, the fact of virginity, so important in the characterisation of the nymphets and their process of transition to maturity, is specifically pointed out: "she stands and moves within the invisible pentacle of her own virginity. She is an unbroken egg; she is a sealed vessel" (Carter 138).

Even so, there is one main difference from Humbert Humbert's first description of Lolita: the corporeal reality of what female sexuality entails (such as bleeding or breast

development) in Carter's description compared to the mythicization and fabulation of Nabokov's first description of Lolita:

It was the same child – the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair [...] And, as if I were the fairy tale nurse of some little princess (lost, kidnaped, discovered in gypsy rags through which her nakedness smiled at the king and his hounds), I recognized the tiny dark-brown mole on her side. With awe and delight [...] I saw again her lovely indrawn abdomen where my southbound mouth had briefly paused; and those puerile hips on which I had kissed the crenulated imprint left by the band of her shorts (Nabokov 39).

This difference is mainly based on the fact that Carter describes the protagonist as any other human girl of her age within a fairy tale, while Nabokov achieves the opposite effect, mythologising and endowing a mundane girl from 1950s America with fairy tale characteristics.

Moreover, the helplessness shown by Lolita in describing herself merely as the reflection of Humbert's sexual desire contrasts with the part of Carter's description of Little Red Riding Hood in which he states, "she has her knife and she is afraid of nothing" (Carter 138).

It was previously noted that we considered Nabokov transgressive for showing a twelve-year-old girl with some hints and determination to enter the game of sexuality, although this idea was conveyed by an unreliable narrator, who always chooses to diabolise and dehumanise the young girl. This fact contrasts with Carter's "The Company of Wolves", where the nymphet directly expresses her intention to have intimation with the wolf. When the wolf threatens the girl with the possibility of eating her, Carter mentions: "the girl burst out laughing; she knew she was nobody's meat. She laughed at him full in the face, she ripped off his shirt for him and flung it into the fire, in the fiery wake of her own discarded clothing" (Carter 144). The girl agrees, accepts the sexual desire she feels for the beast and throws herself into his arms.

Finally, it will be pointed out the sentence with which Carter ends her tale, describing the moment after the intimate act: "See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny's bed, between the paws of the tender wolf" (Carter 145). This idea differs from Dolores Haze's reaction the morning after their first sexual encounter, in which she tells Humbert "you revolting creature. I was a Daisy-fresh girl, and look what you've done to me, I ought to call the police and tell them you raped me. Oh, you dirty, dirty old man" (Nabokov 141). It could

therefore be concluded that the difference between these two nymphets is not their sexual development or their eroticism, but the fact that one of them, Lolita, has not expressed her consent.

Carter follows the same path in “Wolf Alice”, where she depicts a wolf-girl who discovers her identity as a human and as a woman at the same time her female sexuality is being formed. In fact, menstruation makes her aware of her gender identity and distances her further from her wolf upbringing “her first blood bewildered her. She did not know what it meant and the first stirrings of surmise that she ever felt were directed towards its possible cause” (Carter 150). Furthermore, the process of repetition of the menstrual cycle helps her to create a sense of time, past and present “she learned to expect these bleedings, to prepare her rags against them, and afterwards, nearly to bury the dirtied things” (Carter 151). As a result of her cycle, the girl discovers noticeable changes in her body, the same changes that nymphets undergo in their transition period:

She examined her new breasts with curiosity; the white growths reminded her of nothing so much as the night-sprung puffballs she had found, sometimes, on evening rambles in the woods, a natural if disconcerting apparition, but then, to her astonishment, she found a little diadem of fresh hairs tufting between her thighs (Carter 152)

As in the previous story, female sexuality in “Wolf-Alice” is related to corporeality, and self-knowledge leads to the correct conception of the self. When the Duke, the werewolf the girl serves, is wounded, Wolf-Alice does not hesitate to help him heal: “he leapt upon his bed to lick, without hesitation, without disgust, with a quick, tender gravity, the blood and dirt from his cheeks and forehead” (Carter 154).

This act, as Jennings states, is not simply the representation of “the phallic heroine who saves the powerless Duke in the end” (91) but rather the display of a relationship of “reciprocity, and they might be read as projections of each other” (Jennings 91), which we never find in Nabokov's work.

All this would lead, by way of conclusion, to Kimberly's reflection that “the virginal, sexually precocious nymphet is not so much desired object of patriarchal projection but, rather, autonomous desiring subject, as bestial as the stranger-wolf” (88). Carter thus shows that another version of the nymphet is possible, far from male sexuality.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this work, specific elements have been presented with the main argument that Nabokov's novel presents characteristics identifiable with a flowering of postmodern society, representing a bridge between Modernism and Postmodernism, in which Carter stands out as one of the protagonists. Nevertheless, it has been in the aspect of sexuality, in connection with the references to fairy tales, where the most innovative idea has been shed with respect to previous work. Wood's hypothesis has been maintained, based on Appel's annotations in the annotated edition used for this work, which argues that references to fairy tales are important for the definition of gender and masculinity. References to fairy tales in relation to sexual scenes have been expanded and analysed to conclude that it is through the language of fairy tales that Humbert Humbert mythologises the girl Dolores Haze and emphasises patriarchal gender roles.

Similarly, it has been argued that Nabokov is transgressive in presenting already different issues of sexuality and gender than those of 1950s America, presenting a main character who cannot be classified within the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" which opens a path to postmodernist studies and feminist rewritings of fairy tales. However, he differs from Carter primarily in his treatment of the nymphet. We consider that Nabokov includes mythical and fantastic elements in his novel in a renewed way, in a real and mundane setting, in order to deal, among other aspects, with the sexuality of his protagonists. Through the figure of the nymphet, Humbert's male sexuality can be explained, as can Lolita's and Carter's Red Riding Hood. The main difference between them lies in how they are treated by the text, Carter's text provides her female characters with agency while Nabokov's one is in hands of a non-reliable paedophile narrator who is constantly trying to justify his cruel actions of kidnapping and raping.

It is too banal and superficial to identify Nabokov as sexist, and his work as misogynist, while Carter would represent the feminist and new side of Postmodernism, when Nabokov has already dealt with innovative themes such as the emerging sexuality of pre-adolescent girls or Humbert's non-hegemonic masculinity. We consider it more appropriate to state that the narrator's voice, Humbert, uses specific techniques, persuading the reader and the girl herself to believe in the justification of his actions by mythologising her.

Therefore, the difference between Nabokov and Carter, as has been maintained, is more concrete and specific, and occurs primarily through language: the way in which the female characters are described and presented. Carter, in the chosen stories, undertakes a

process of demystification, presenting more realistic descriptions of his protagonists, more reminiscent of animals (with bodily bleedings and sexual interest) than of fantastical beings. She not only gives voice to her “nymphets” but also gives them reality, corporeality, and desire.

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