Article

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SEMIOTIC MAPPING OF READING
AND *LOLITA*'S INTERPRETATIONS

SUMMARY: The paper explores the semiotic aspects of reading literature, focusing on the literary text as a unique artefact, differing from other verbal texts, the paradox of the literature's (non)transparency, and the role of sensual perception in its signification/interpretation. It questions how readers engage with literary texts and defines this engagement semiotically. The paper proposes the semiotic classification of reading/interpretation and exemplifies this classification by examining Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and its interpretations. This non-axiological classification originates from a dialogue with the representatives of the Peircean semiotic-pragmatic approach to literature, Harri Veivo and Jørgen Dines Johansen. It revises and modifies their concepts within the logic of Charles S. Peirce's sign concept and advances understanding of literary reading by integrating the question of textual materiality with Peircean semiotics, offering a nuanced framework to classify and interpret reading strategies. It treats reading as a sign-action, initiated by the reader who chooses the (conventional, contiguity-based, or analogy/resemblance-based) mode of interpretant to connect a representamen (addresser-text) with the dynamic object (semantic whole) and explores how these modes are manifested in reading. It seeks to uncover the differences in the modes and strategies of reading and the reasons/conditions for choosing one or another mode. *Lolita* is presented as a paradigmatic example of a non-transparent literary text that foregrounds its materiality and invites the reader to activate the sight. The paper analyses how *Lolita*'s textual structure prompts visual engagement and how the sight's activation or its lack thereof influences the choice of iconic, indexical, or symbolic mode of reading/interpretation.

KEYWORDS: reading, interpretation, semiotic-pragmatic approach, indexicality, iconicity, symbolicity, Charles S. Peirce.

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1. Introduction

> To see a thing, we must adjust our visual apparatus in a certain way. If the adjust-
> ment is inadequate the thing is seen indistinctly or not at all. Take a garden seen
> through the window. Looking at the garden we adjust our eyes in such a way that
> the ray of vision travels through the pane without delay and rests on the shrubs
> and flowers. Since we are focusing on the garden and our ray of vision is directed
> toward it, we do not see the window but look clear through it. The purer the glass,
> the less we see it. But we can also deliberately disregard the garden and, with-
> drawing the ray of visions, detain it at the window. We then lose sight of the gar-
> den; what we still behold of it is a confused mass of colour which appears pasted
> on the pane. Hence to see the garden and to see the window pane are two incom-
> patible operations which exclude one another because they require different ad-
> justments. (Ortega y Gasset, 2019, p. 10)

In discussing the (sociological) effect of a modern work of art, the Spanish
philosopher José Ortega y Gasset metaphorizes two approaches to reading using
an optical metaphor that differentiates two kinds of sight: "looking through the
window" versus "looking at the windowpane". Both frame the vision, but the
second one changes the shapes of what one sees and makes the pane nontrans-
parent, at least to some extent, especially in the case of modern art. Looking
through the window, we engage with the human perspective (live with the fig-
ures we see outside), while looking at the pane, we engage with an artistic one.
Ortega y Gasset reminds that a work of art is an artificial human-made fictional
object, and to perceive something as a work of art, to evoke artistic sensibility,
we ought to focus on the windowpane (2019, p. 11). His metaphor recalls Shake-
speare's argument on art holding a mirror up to nature, discussed by Oscar Wilde
(in *Intentions*), where the mirror opposes the veil. The metaphors introduce the
paradox of (non)transparency of the artwork, the twofold issue of sight (a per-
spective of reception and perception as sensual experience), and the issue of the
literary artwork as a specific form of verbal text.

Signification of a literary artwork has been discussed in different semiotic
theories that conceptualize the role of the reader in literary meaning-making
(Jury Lotman's, Umberto Eco's, Michael Riffaterre's, Harri Veivo's, and Jørgen
Dines Johansen's among them). They all keep the acknowledged or unacknowl-
edged trace of Charles S. Peirce's concept of sign, which grounds significa-
tion/semiosis on sensual perception. Nevertheless, the issue of sensual perception
and sight within literary studies (including that of literary semiotics) is highly
problematic, since habitually literature is considered as a medium in which mat-
ter does not matter. Literary writing is usually treated as invisible or transparent.
Literature uses arbitrary signs or (in Charles S. Peirce's terms) symbols that
relate a perceptible form with that for which (we think) the form stands by
a habit, a law, a convention (see CP 4.531; CP 2.249). The shape of the writ-
ten/printed words appears as a technical device, insignificant as such. Still, the
process of actual reading activates the sight: we see both the sequences of con-

ventional graphic figures and a unique object, divided into a variety of graphic shapes (such as typeface, paragraphs, stanzas, chapters, lines, etc.). Those figures and shapes configure the tangible, visually perceptible textual body. The arrangement of the words and letters on the page lets us recognize conventional forms of poetry or drama or their disruption, and to understand whether we are reading a novel or a short story, etc. This arrangement of graphic figures activates conventions other than those of language. It requires visual experience. Symbols turn to the visual icons that relate a perceptible form to that for which the form stands by resemblance or analogy. Graphical arrangement doubles the reader's gaze, and this doubling turns the tangible mode of representation into the object of representation, making it a potentially meaningful body. One can find the most apparent examples of literary text as a body in visual poetry (classical example—Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*). Such poetry reveals the general principle: the more the text disrupts the axiom of transparency of language, the more we see its body. Nevertheless, maybe to a lesser extent, every published literary text invites us to see the potential significance of its body/matter and the paradoxical asymmetrical tension between symbols and icons. Besides, the other meaning of "sight", manifested in Ortega y Gasset's metaphor—a perspective of reception—inevitably raises the question of indexicality, which relates a perceptible form with that for which the form stands by the real connection, effect, or contiguity.

Actual reading puts in motion all three modes of meaning-making (analogy, contiguity, convention) that outline Peirce's classification of signs based on the relationship between a representamen and a dynamic object (icon, index, symbol). Reading/interpretation practices show that some readers employ sight, reflect the doubling of sight as a meaningful strategy, and actualize the semantic potential of texture and physical configuration, while others ignore it. Actual reading practices and the readers' interaction with a text reveal a variety of reading modes, which raise a whole range of questions: What inspires the readers to choose one or another mode of reading? What are the specific features of a work's texture that influence the reader's choice? How does a text construe the reading mode it proposes to employ? How does a literary text's conception (ideation) depend on its sensual perception? Is it possible to conceive reading as a particular type of iconic, indexical, or symbolic sign, i.e., to identify different strategies and principles of meaning-making?

Those questions configure the field for the discussion proposed in the paper which has two main objectives. First, the paper aims to propose a semiotic classification of reading/interpretation. The classification originates from a dialogue with the representatives of the semiotics-pragmatic approach to literature, Veivo (2007; 2009) and Johansen (2002; 2009). It elaborates on, revises and modifies their concepts within the logic of Peirce's semiotics. The focus point of this classification is the issue of (non)transparency of literary text, which remains an almost unexplored issue even within the Peircean approach. The classification does not relate to any axiological assessment of reading. It does not seek to de-

fine "good" or "bad" readers/readings or distinguish readings from misreadings. It attempts to reveal the differences in the modes and strategies of reading/interpretation and the reasons/conditions for choosing one or another mode. The second aim of the paper is to exemplify the proposed classification in a discussion of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955)—examining how its textual structure triggers the reader's sight, what kind of reading its texture proposes, and outlining a semiotic viewpoint on how it was read/interpreted.

2. An Artwork as a Sign

The semiotic-pragmatic approach to literature, based on Peirce's semiotics, understands reading as meaning-making appearing in the semiosis or signification of literary text. The latter is regarded as a highly structured artefact, differing from other verbal utterances (Johansen, 2002, pp. xii–xiii; Veivo, 2007, p. 46). Johansen, who creates a comprehensive model of how literature produces meaning, extends the general frame of Peircean semiotics with ideas of Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Eco, etc., and accepts Jakobson's viewpoint on the difference between literary artwork and other verbal texts. As is known, in the article *Linguistics and Poetics*, Jakobson distinguishes six language functions (referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and self-referential) and states that all of them operate in any verbal message, but one or another becomes dominant. This dominance determines the type of the message. The dominance of the self-referential function is the characteristic feature of literary text (or *artifice*),[1] so it was labelled as poetic/aesthetic and defined as "the set (*Einstellung*) toward the message as such, focus on the message" (Jakobson, 1987, p. 69). Jakobson underlines that while the aesthetic function is not the only one operating in literary text, it is the main one. It projects the principle of equivalence (based on similarity/dissimilarity, synonymy/antonymy, and other possible correlations) "from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" (Jakobson, 1987, p. 71). This projection creates parallelism that relates different elements within the same textual space, and the parallelism promotes "the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects" (Jakobson, 1987, p. 69). The text becomes a self-defining configuration, a unique *non-transparent* system governed by the principles of its own. Those principles of various and unique inner correlations create the substance which Ortega y Gasset calls the windowpane.

The aesthetic function turns the text into an autonomous sign-representamen, and the reading enables the process of Peircean semiosis or sign-action. At this stage, it is important to remember that Peirce's sign concept has a double meaning. Peirce distinguishes the sign-action (or semiosis) and the sign-representa-

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[1] Jakobson adopts the term "artifice" of Gerard Manley Hopkins to underline the artificialness of the text of art.

men (Deledalle, 2000, p. 18).[2] A sign-action or semiosis appears as an interaction of the three interconnected components—*representamen* (a mediated perceptible form), dynamic *object* (physical or mental, real or fictional phenomenon with which the mind relates the representamen, that for which the representamen stands) and *interpretant* (mental construct which establishes relationship between the representamen and the dynamical object and by which this relationship is established). However, the representamen cannot become a sign-action without a "somebody" from Peirce's sign definition:

> A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to **somebody** for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses **somebody**, that is, creates in the mind of **that person** an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen. (CP 2.228; bold for emphasis added)

In reading as signification, this "somebody" is an actual reader who turns out to be involved in semiosis. It is the actual reader who perceives something as a sign and chooses the interpretant to connect a representamen with an object, i.e., who enables signification. Furthermore, here comes the issue of the mode in which a reader connects a representamen with a dynamic object.

Peirce characterises literature as a medium operating with symbolic signs, relating representamens with objects by a habit, a law, a convention:[3] "Every word is a symbol. Every sentence is a symbol. Every book is a symbol. Every representamen depending upon conventions is a symbol" (CP 4.447). However, Peirce himself never addressed the issues of semiosis in/of the arts or artworks. After Jakobson introduced Peirce's classification of signs to icons, indices, and symbols in linguistics and literary studies, and launched the discussion of iconicity in language and arts, scholars started to discuss the relevance and applicability of

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[2] The usage of the term "sign" in Peirce's work is not constant. What meaning it conveys—that of semiosis or representamen—becomes clear from the context in which it is used. To avoid confusion between the *sign-action* (sign as triadic relationship) and the sign as one of the constitutive elements of the sign-action, i.e., *representamen* or *sign-vehicle*, I will use the term "representamen" when referring to the latter. In citing Peirce's writings, I employ usual abbreviations.

[3] He repeats the idea in different works:

> All words, sentences, books, and other conventional signs are Symbols. We speak of writing or pronouncing the word "man"; but it is only a replica, or embodiment of the word, that is pronounced or written. The word itself has no existence although it has a real being, consisting in the fact that existents will conform to it. It is a general mode of succession of three sounds or representamens of sounds, which becomes a sign only in the fact that a habit, or acquired law, will cause replicas of it to be interpreted as meaning a man or men. The word and its meaning are both general rules. (EP 2:274)

this classification.[4] Those discussions configure the core of the semiotic-pragmatic approach to literature (the main field of my research, connected to Jakobson's, Lotman's, and Eco's semiotics) and leave traces in Iser's theory of aesthetic response (which itself refers to Jakobson, Lotman, Eco, and many others). The general shape of the reading process and the terms those theories use may make an impression about their affinity. However, this impression is misleading. The rationale, the line of reasoning, and the precision in using terms make Peircean semiotics and Iser's theory essentially different.

3. The Act of Reading: Wolfgang Iser vs. the Semiotic-Pragmatic Approach

Iser's theory of aesthetic response describes the act of reading as a dynamic interaction between the text and the reader, giving primacy to the reader's imagination. Iser is interested in the effect of reading rather than in the meaning of the text (Iser, 1978, p. 54). He regards indeterminacies, blanks, and gaps as a condition for the structuring activity of the reader, which creates "something that did not exist before" (p. 22), an aesthetic object. His "blanks" are associated neither with perceptual quality nor literary texture or textual structure. Even though he argues that "central to the reading of every literary work is the interaction between its structure and its recipient" (p. 20) and refers to Jakobson's poetic function, he prefers the floating "structure" of the reading act rather than that of the text. He pays attention to the textual rhetoric by proposing the concept of repertoire and perspectives through which repertoire's pattern emerges (the narrator, the characters, the plot, etc.), the concepts of theme (the reader's involvement with a perspective at one moment) and horizon (other perspective segments, everything "visible" from one point; see Iser, 1978, pp. 96–97). All the concepts, in fact, are related to the mental imagination while "looking through the windowpane" rather than to the textual structure and its perception. He examines the reading act as producing mental images that refer to the systems of thought and other literary works, but relates them to the (changing) conventions.

In discussing the differences between literary and ordinary speech, Iser turns to the issue of sign in a highly specific manner. He argues[5] that symbols, like icons, constitute a non-given object, enabling one to perceive the world. They are

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[4] From 1999, John Bejamins Publishing House has published a book series that explores iconicity's manifestation across various contexts of verbal communication. The general observation of the main fields of iconicity studies in literature is presented in Nöth's paper (2015).

[5] To articulate the statement, he refers to Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Charles Morris' unresolved question of whether a work of art can be an iconic sign signifying values, and Umberto Eco's explanation of how iconic signs can fulfil the communicative function. In dispute with Morris, Eco finds the solution in the concept of the code. He concludes that iconic signs reproduce certain conditions of the object's perception only after selecting the code (which grounds recognition) and aligning with the existing repertoire of graphic conventions (Eco, 1968, pp. 109–121).

independent of the visible and "no longer denote something, but themselves create what is denoted" (1978, p. 65). They help to produce imaginary objects. Iser treats an iconic sign as a model of a conventional relationship that allows recognition and remembering of objects. He equates it to a symbol, without even noticing that such an explanation destroys not only the value and the point of Peircean classification, but also his concept of sign as such. Iser's theory of aesthetic response completely ignores both the role of the sensual perception of literary work and its semiotic instability that influence reception.

The semiotic-pragmatic approach makes a convincing attempt to explain how different types of relations/signs organize the acts of reading and systematize the vision of that process. The representatives of this approach—Veivo and Johansen—consider the literary texture; nevertheless, their attempt to explain the mechanism of the reading process also lacks attention to the issues of sensual perception and leaves the issues to be solved. Both Veivo and Johansen acknowledge the involvement of the individual receiver in the process of reading and the semiotic instability of literary text, yet focus on different aspects of the act of reading.

Veivo (2007) conceives literary work as a complex sign and a specifically organized set of signs. He explores indexicality as a necessary condition for reading, constituting text as a complex sign, and letting the reader perceive it as a semantic whole. He explains how symbols start to function as indices[6] that change the mode of meaning-making: symbolic representamen, which is connected to the object by a habit or a convention, appears connected to it by the real connection, effect, or contiguity. The real connection becomes crucial in textual indexicality, which covers all the relationships between the texture elements that belong to the same text. Veivo gives examples of personal pronouns and proper names that create continuity of characters, adverbs of time and space that participate in the organisation of the narrative structure of the text, etc. In the case of sensually perceptible elements of the text, which Veivo overlooks, textual indexicality also covers the various elements of its material embodiment, starting from the perceptible formal division into parts that create the inner tensions resulting in both the discontinuity and integrity of the textual body, and ending with the specificity of the typeface that also can become meaningful. In all the cases, "indexical signs are textual elements that direct attention to other textual elements" (Veivo, 2009, p. 167). In turn, contiguity becomes a ground for meaning-making in extratextual indexicality that invites one to find the representamen's object in a historic/real or literary context:

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[6] He considers the type of the sign (symbol, index, icon) as a function, but not of a class of signs, in line with Peirce himself (CP 2.276; CP 2.306; CP 2.302). In his semiotics, iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity are the functions of the sign that depend on the context of semiosis and on the receiving mind rather than the static qualities of a sign.

> This external context may be the historical context in which the text was produced, the reader's existential context of knowledge and emotion that conditions his or her reading, as well as the context of the preceding literary tradition that conditions the text's place in culture. (Veivo, 2009, p. 168)

Although the fields of historic context and literature, in which one can search for or find objects, are fundamentally different, Veivo does not address this distinction. Within the framework of Peircean semiotics, this difference is significant since the case of references to preceding literary tradition covers the issue of marked or unmarked (in Gérard Genette's terms) intertextual, architextual, or hypertextual references to other artworks. In such cases, the representamens of the text or a text as a representamen start functioning as icons, and precisely the iconic principle—one or another kind of resemblance or analogy—becomes the mode of meaning-making. Therefore, I would propose to distinguish extratextual and *intertextual* indexicality, having in mind that the latter becomes just a bridge to turn a symbol into an icon.

Veivo suggests examining a "windowpane", organising the vision, and configuring the meaning of what one sees by connecting indexical axes that a reader can draw. The reader here appears as an unstable figure that determines the variability of reading. Veivo argues that the meaning we produce in reading depends on the reader's cognitive faculties, linguistic and textual structures, and cultural conventions or habits (2007, p. 49). One of those factors—the linguistic and textual structures—appears as an arbitrary stable, and two others as variable. The cognitive faculties of actual readers differ, and these differences determine the variability of the cultural conventions/habits (conventions may be known or unknown to the reader):

> [O]ne material thing—a word, a phrase, a book—can function as a sign according to several conventions and habits, representing different objects and giving rise to different interpretants, all anchored in the experience of the addresser and the addressee and in their dialogical relationship. (Veivo, 2007, p. 44)

These cultural habits also include a habit Veivo does not consider—the habit to (dis)acknowledge the sensually perceivable matter of the text, determining the changes in interpretation. He confines the discussion of the reading to examining aspects of its indexicality, revealing the artifice as a structured "veil".

Johansen is going down a different path. He turns from indexicality/contiguity to iconicity/analogy and reinterprets indexicality in terms of iconicity. He argues that reading presupposes two sets of references—the universe of the text and that of the lifeworld, encompassing the reader's memories (i.e., textual and extratextual indexicality in Veivo's terms), yet focuses on their iconic aspects. Regarding literary representation, he proposes distinguishing the external iconic relationship between representamen and object and the internal iconic relationship between the different parts of the sign, i.e., the similarity of patterning on different levels (Johansen, 2002, pp. 146–147). Regarding reading as the recep-

tion of literary representation, he adopts Jakobson's idea of intersemiotic translation or "transmutation" (Jakobson, 1987a, p. 429) and describes reading as transforming words-symbols into icons. The process of iconization of literary work includes three possible variants that work on different levels and stages of reading and correlate with Peircean differentiation between distinct kinds of icons that create different grounds for analogy, namely *images*, *diagrams*, and *metaphors*. According to Peirce, icon-image relates representamen with object by analogy in "simple qualities", icon-diagram by analogous structural relations between their parts, and finally, icon-metaphor by other possible kinds of parallelism between the representamen and the object (CP 2.277). Consequently, Johansen differentiates the following variants of iconization (2002, pp. 327–341):

– *imaginization* is the subjective and personal production of pictorial and sound images, triggered by symbols,
– *diagrammatization* is the structuring of what is represented by symbols and by the network of inner relationships; it is concerned with the totality of the text,
– *allegorization* relates the sum of imaginization and diagrammatization to other conceptual structures, creating the second meaning or "culturally shared patterns of interpretation" (2002, p. 338).

The reading experience switches between these three levels, capturing distinct aspects of analogy/similarity (which includes resemblance and contrast). If imaginization (which, in other terms, was discussed by Iser) just adds an imaginative pictorial and sound dimension to the text, diagrammatization reveals the iconicity presented in and by the text and organizes its understanding. Johansen acknowledges diagrammatization as the dominant way of meaning-making since it structures all kinds of parallelism on distinct levels (rhythm, syntactical and narrative patterning, etc.), but notes that depending on genre, period, and movement, literary texts may give priority to imaginization, diagrammatization, or allegorization. For example, a realist novel favours imaginization, and concrete poetry requires diagrammatization.

Although Johansen examines the artifice as a self-referential unit and underlines the role of diagrammatization in its reception, he is not interested in the visual aspects of writing. He treats literature as a sound medium, operating with symbols, and analyzes iconic effects as inherent possibilities of linguistic patterning (2002, p. 147). Still, diagrammatization first works at the perceptual level. It is exactly diagrammatization that structures the "physical" arrangement of the artifice and directs literary semiosis.

Johansen considers literary semiosis as the interaction of five components: *sign* [*representamen*], *object*, *interpretant*, *interpreter*, and *utterer*. He builds a controversial semiotic pyramid (Johansen, 2002, p. 55; 2009, p. 17) that maps reading as communication by extending and intensifying the basic model of communication (*sender—message—receiver*) with Peircean dichotomy between *immediate*

(internal, presented) and *dynamic* (external, re-presented) aspects of the sign's elements. In the case of sender-receiver, he distinguishes the utterer (dynamic) ↔ addresser (immediate) and interpreter (dynamic) ↔ addressee (immediate):

– the *interpreter* and *utterer* are the external figures in flesh and blood (2002, p. 57),
– the figures of the *addressee* and *addresser* are the textual figures:
   • the addressee is "the utterer's representation of the interpreter" (2002, p. 57), a position within the text created by the utterer (2009, p. 18),
   • the addresser is a representation of the producer of the text that is determined by the utterer (2002, p. 56).

As regards the "message", he addresses the Peircean dichotomy of *token* (*text-sign, sinsign*)[7] ↔ *type* (*legisign*). As Peirce puts it, a legisign is

> a general type which, it has been agreed, shall be significant. Every legisign signi-fies through an instance of its application, which may be termed a *Replica* of it. Thus, the word "the" will usually occur from fifteen to twenty-five times on a page. It is in all these occurrences one and the same word, the same legisign. Each single instance of it is a replica. The replica is a sinsign. (EP 2:291)

Perhaps, in the case of a literary text as a sign, we could consider the *type* as a loose analogue of Barthesian "work" in his dichotomy of *work* vs. *text*. In Barthes's words, "the work itself functions as a general sign, and it is natural that it should represent an institutional category of the civilization of the Sign" (Barthes, 1989, p. 59), and the text "is experienced only in an activity, in a pro-duction […], its constitutive moment is traversal" (Barthes, 1989, p. 58). This rough analogy inspires us to relate the token to the book-text-sign we read, to the actual occurrence of the work-type.

Johnasen's semiotic pyramid covers all the possible lines of interaction—the actual reader and that which Iser would call "implied reader", the actual author and that which Wayne C. Booth would call an "implied author", the artwork as an actualized Barthesian "text" and a non-actualized "work". Oriented towards mutual understanding, his model binds the utterer and interpreter in a shared space, thus erroneously bringing together two distinct semiotic acts—the crea-tion of literary work and its reception. It misjudges the utterer's figure in the act of reading and underestimates the sensory input of a text-sign in signification. Actual reading excludes the utterer as a figure in flesh and substitutes it with the text. Reading relates the actual interpreter to the addresser as the text, rather than

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[7] In a trichotomy relating representamen to itself: *tone—token—type* (or qualisign—sinsign—legisign), *token* is related to the concrete, individual, actual occurrences of a sign, and *type* is explained as a general rule for the articulation of such occurrences (for detailed discussion, see Stjernfelt, 2022, p. 51).

a textual figure. Johansen's definition of the addresser presupposes not only the "imagining" of the external producer's (in literature—author's) figure in a place from which it is absent in reading, but also a ghost of intentional fallacy. He overlooks the central communicative paradox of reading literary artifice—*the coincidence of the addresser with the text-representamen* that has an organized physical shape, influencing signification. This coincidence encourages defining the communicating figures and the communication process in a mode different from Johansen's.

4. Reading as Communication and Interpretation as a Sign

Although the immediate and dynamic aspects of the sign remain an important issue, the general scheme of the actual act of reading should be shaped as a triangular pyramid, rather than Johansen's octagonal model. Peirce's triadic concept of sign (representamen-dynamic object-dynamic interpretant) forms the bottom of the pyramid, and the interpreter—the reader who initiates semiosis (the sign-action;[1] see Figure 1)—constitutes its top. The *representamen* of this sign-action is rather obvious: it is a system of symbolic figures arranged in a certain order. It is the texture of artifice in its embodied specificity, with all its peculiarities. To understand how we could define a dynamic object and an interpretant, we need to define the immediate ones. An immediate/dynamic object can be described in accordance with Johansen's reasoning:

– the *immediate object* (that which is presented by the representamen) is a set of visual images appearing in the imaginization of symbols,
– the *dynamic object* (that which is re-presented) is a semantic unit—a whole as a result of imaginization, diagrammatization, and allegorization, in Johansen's words, "that which the utterance is about" (2002, p. 355).

However, the definition of immediate and/or dynamic interpretant (the core of interpretation, determining the identification of a sign as of icon, index, or symbol), differs from that proposed by Johansen. Johansen defines the immediate interpretant in reading as "the sign's potential meaning, […] an indefinite range of possible translations, indicated by the sign" (2002, p. 355). Nonetheless, the (potential) meaning has already been related to the dynamic object. The meaning cannot be associated with both the object and the interpretant. Besides, Peirce associates, yet does not equate, the interpretant with meaning. In several definitions, he clearly differentiates them (CP 1.339, EP 2:493–494) and invites us to conceive the interpretant as a mental construct that connects the representamen with the object in a sign-action, which is determined by the specificity of the representamen. A relevant definition of the *immediate interpretant* in the case of reading literature could be derived from Peircean explanation: "My Immediate Interpretant is implied in the fact that each Sign [representamen] must have its peculiar Interpretability before it gets any Interpreter" (SS 110–111). Peirce out-

lines it as "the total unanalysed effect that the Sign [representamen] is calculated to produce, […] an abstraction, consisting in Possibility" (SS 110–111). Therefore, we can associate the immediate interpretant with a set of linguistic rules and traits (a language), necessary to relate a set of representamens with "that which the text is about", i.e., with the dynamic object. The reader must see the representamens as interpretable ones. If the readers do not know the language (rules, traits), they cannot configure a tripartite sign-action, start the process of imaginization, and signify the text.

Subsequently, the *dynamic interpretant* which was controversially defined by Johansen as "a conscious or unconscious choice between the possible translations of the text in question […] the actual individual interpretation of a sign, whether standard or innovative, plausible or implausible" (2002, p. 356), encompasses the modes and models of literary discourse, the traits that relate representamen with the dynamic object (with the result of iconization, diagrammatization, and allegorization).
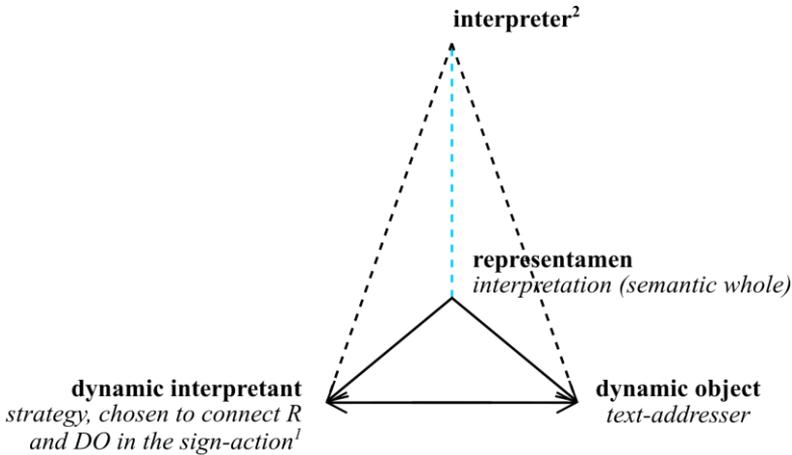
Figure 1

Sign-action[1]. The act of reading
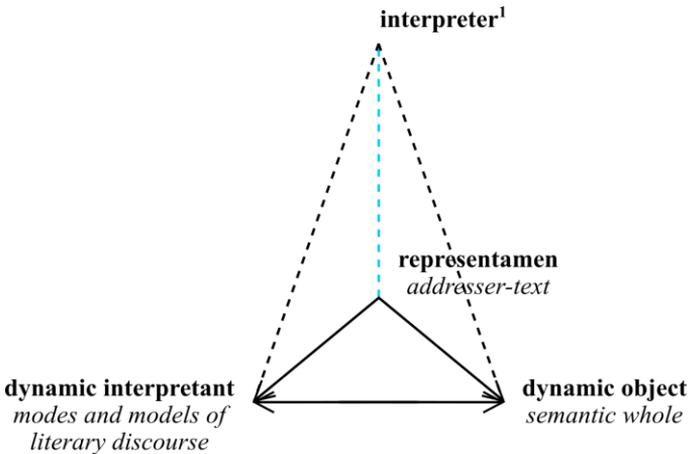
Note. Source: author's own elaboration.

Such reading as a sign-action produces an interpretation which could be classified as performing a function of an icon, index, or symbol. However, identification of this function needs another reader/interpreter[2], who would proceed with semiosis and form the sing-action[2], i.e., who would classify the type of reading/interpretation produced in reading as sign-action[1] (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Sign-action². Interpretation as a sign

interpreter[2]

representamen
interpretation (semantic whole)

dynamic interpretant
strategy, chosen to connect R
and DO in the sign-action[1]

dynamic object
text-addresser

Note. Source: author's own elaboration.

The representamen of this second sign is the *interpretation as a semantic whole, an articulated mental or material* configuration as an outcome of reading (e.g., in the form of a paper/article on the literary text). Its dynamic object is the *text-addresser* of the first sign, a literary text interpreted to form a semantic whole. Finally, the *dynamic interpretant* of the second sign is the strategy chosen by the interpreter[1] to connect the *text-addresser* (object) with *interpretation as a semantic whole* (representamen). This strategy helps identify the type of a sign (the function it performs). The *implemented interpretation* can be defined as iconic, indexical, or iconic, depending on how the readers (interpreter[1]) perceive the artifice–addresser, what they pay attention to, and what modes they choose to connect textual representamen with a semantic whole in the reading process.

Once the semantic whole, created by the interpreter[1] in the sign-action[1], reveals the recognition of the figures of the fictional story-world as representing those of the natural one, the perception of those figures as if it would be a connection with the real world, interpretation (*the representamen*) and the text-addresser (*the object*) turn out to be linked up by contiguity, and interpretation gains the traits of index. Such a strategy completely eliminates the difference between the artifice and other verbal discourses and becomes an analogue to Ortega y Gasset's "looking through" the window.

Once the semantic whole exposes the focus on a story-world as an exemplification of various norms, laws, and habits of real human society, and relates the fictional universe to other habitual conceptual structures, the interpretation attains the traits of a symbol. In this case, interpretation is connected to the text-addresser by interpretational habit. It becomes a Peircean "Representamen whose

Representative character consists precisely in its being a rule that will determine its Interpretant" (EP 2:274). Such an interpretation first presupposes the indexical move of connecting the story-world with the real/natural one, then applying (scholarly) analytical tools to assess it from one or another ideological perspective. In this case, interpretation is connected to the object due to a scholarly (e.g., feminist, psychoanalytic, postcolonial) habit. It represents the object (text) "because dispositions or factitious habits of their interpreter ensure their being so understood" (EP 2:460–461). This strategy often reveals attention to the narrative strategies and rhetorical devices, yet usually ignores the textural fibre of the artifice.

Finally, once the semantic whole manifests the attention to the textual whole, to all the aspects of its embodiment, regularities and inner traits of its texture, to the matter which matters, interpretation appears iconic. Such interpretation discloses regard for the distinctive feature of literary discourse—Jakobsonian aesthetic function, which posits the second-degree iconicity[8] as the constitutive device of textual sequences, creating the specific mode of interaction between immediate and dynamic aspects of the sign. In this case, the interpretation (representamen) and the text-addresser (object) are connected by the principle of analogy/similarity.[9] Interpretation "partakes in the characters" of the object-addresser.

An attempt to semiotically classify different interpretations obliges one to remember that Peirce himself underlined the mixed character of the signs:

> Just as a photograph is an index having an icon incorporated into it, that is, excited in the mind by its force, so a symbol may have an icon or an index incorporated into it, that is, the active law that it is may require its interpretation to involve the calling up of an image, or a composite photograph of many images of past experiences, as ordinary common nouns and verbs do; or it may require its interpretation to refer to the actual surrounding circumstances of the occasion of its embodiment. (CP 4.447)

Each mode of sign interpretation includes the admixtures of others. Symbolic interpretation is grounded in the indexical one since it starts from relating the imaginary figures to the figures of the natural world. The iconic one opts for textual and intertextual indexicality rather than an extratextual one. The indexical dimension exists in all the modes of interpretation in distinct forms and proportions. However, as in the case of Jakobson's language functions, it is always the issue of dominance rather than unambiguous definiteness. Each literary text shapes the invitation for iconic interpretation, mirroring it as an artifice, yet each

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[8] First-degree iconicity refers to the iconic relationship between the representamen and the dynamic object outside the text (e.g., in onomatopoeia). Second-degree iconicity refers to the relationship of resemblance/analogy between the representamen and the dynamic object within the text (on the difference, see Johansen, 2002, pp. 179–180).

[9] It is important to keep in mind that "Peircean iconicity is not restricted to visual nor perceptual similarity, nor to easily recognizable resemblance" (Stjernfelt, 2022, p. 163).

can be interpreted indexically or symbolically. In other words, actual interpreters—whether naïve readers or scholars—choose the mode for connecting the representamen with the object, depending on whether they acknowledge literature as a specific form of verbal discourse, and once acknowledged, how they conceive the specificity of this form.

To exemplify the tension between the artifice's invitation for iconic reading and the implemented readers' choices, I propose to look at Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*[10] since it is an extremely non-transparent text which triggers the reader's eye in the direct and figurative sense. It thematises the reading issue and continues to provoke interpretations that contradict one another. It allows for a plain showing of the theoretically discussed issues and helps to reveal how an actual reader's "aesthetic choice" influences meaning-making.

5. Nabokov's *Lolita*: Specificity of the Representamen

My letterbox in the entrance hall belonged to the type that allows one to glimpse something of its contents through a glassed slit. Several times already, a trick of harlequin light that fell through the glass upon an alien handwriting had twisted it into a semblance of Lolita's script, causing me almost to collapse […]. (Nabokov, 1997, p. 261)

Lolita presents a confusing—multiplied and split, fragmented and assembled—vision. It opens with the foreword by the fictional editor John Ray, Jr. and continues with Humbert Humbert's confession—the provocative and verisimilar story wrapped up in the games with language and literary conventions. The foreword articulates three possible ways of its reception—"a novel", "a case history", and "a work of art" (Nabokov, 1997, pp. 6–7)—and comments on their differences. The editor briefly notes on the latter two and goes into more detail on it as a *novel*:

– As a work of art, *Lolita* "transcends its explanatory aspects" (p. 7).
– As a case history, *Lolita* "will become, no doubt, a classic in psychiatric circles" (p. 7).
– "Viewed simply as a novel, *Lolita* deals with situations and emotions that would remain exasperatingly vague to the reader had their expression been etiolated by means of platitudinous evasions" (p. 6).

The description of viewing *Lolita* as a *novel*, quite vague itself, is supplemented with differentiation of the several types of its readers (namely, robust philistine/prude, cynic, and learned) and their viewpoints:

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[10] The issue of *Lolita*'s visuality in both English and Russian versions of the novel was partially discussed in my earlier paper (Melnikova, 2021).

– The prude will be shocked by the absence of "a single obscene term" and by the presence of scenes "that a certain type of mind might call 'aphrodisiac'"; here the editor uses the word "aphrodisiac" with a reference to Judge John M. Woolsey's 1933 decision on *Ulysses*, from which the word comes (1997, p. 6; see also Appel, 1991, p. 491).

– The cynic will compare it to commercial pornography that "makes the same claim" (1997, p. 6).

– The learned will assert that it is "a tempest in a test tube" since a lot of American adult males enjoy "the special experience 'H. H.' describes with such despair" (1997, p. 6–7).

All the viewpoints associate the novel with reality, revealing the indexical relationship between the representamens and "natural" objects, however, they presuppose different focus of attention: the prude's viewpoint is oriented towards the language and the details of the storyline (in which they will not find that which they expect), the cynic's viewpoint is oriented towards the theme of tabooed love, and that of the learned towards the character (with a reference to American males). This distinction is commented on by John Ray, Jr. who does not omit certain scenes to comfort the prude and does not accept the possibility of the diarist's ("H. H.") healing by a "competent psycho-pathologist" to save the learned from the disaster, since those actions "would forego the publication of *Lolita* altogether" (1997, p. 6) and would not let the book appear. The editor opposes *Lolita* as *a work of art* vs. *a novel*, articulates the opposition of the *book* vs. *storyline-theme-character*, and distinguishes the appraisal of the *book* and of the *character*. He glorifies the offensiveness of the book ("a great work of art […] by its very nature should come as a more or less shocking surprise"; 1997, p. 7) and condemns the offensiveness of the character (he is "horrible", "capricious", "abnormal"):

> A desperate honesty that throbs through his confession does not absolve him from sins of diabolical cunning. He is abnormal. He is not a gentleman. But how magically his singing violin can conjure up a tendresse, a compassion for Lolita that makes us entranced with the book while abhorring its author! (1997, p. 7)

To grasp the irony of the quoted description, which opposes the character ("not a gentleman") and his "singing violin" and relates his offensiveness to the "diabolical cunning", to conceive the further "interplay between reading and misreading" (Richardson, 2024, p. 136) in the confession of Humbert Humbert, which shows the characters (Charlotte, Dolores, Humbert Humbert and others) as readers, we need to understand what strategy of perception is proposed by the book, to perform diagrammatization.

Diagrammatizing sight reveals that *Lolita*'s representamen appears as a mirror-like heterogeneous structure with the dual title—*Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male*—resembling the dual structure of the text. The latter

consists of two visually opposed parts/narratives—the foreword and the "remarkable memoir" ("strange pages", "manuscript", "confession") that differ in font style and create visual opposition: italic in the foreword, regular in the manuscript. The foreword by a fictional John Ray Jr., Ph.D., tells the story of the appearance of *"Lolita"* and of its possible reception, and the memoir by Humbert Humbert tells the story of his love for Lolita—her appearance, disappearance, search, and reappearance in the form of Mrs "Richard F. Schiller". In turn, the foreword and the memoir are split into two parts. In the manuscript, the parts are marked by numbers (Part I and Part II), in the foreword, the split is structural: the first three paragraphs describe the circumstances of the manuscript's appearance, explain and/or mention the names of some characters, and announce the death of the two—"Humbert Humbert" and Mrs "Richard. F. Schiller"; the last three paragraphs articulate possible ways of reading the manuscript.

The duality of the novel's title and the doubled duality of textual structure iconically resemble the playful duality/doubleness of anthropomorphic characters (personages) and graphic characters (the elements of written language—letters, numerals, punctuation marks) that (have to) activate the reader's sight. This ingenious game opens and closes both the foreword and the "manuscript". The foreword's author John Ray, Jr., whose style of expression is very similar to that of Humbert Humbert and makes him Humbert's double (Narins, 2002, pp. 913–914), guesses that the decision to entrust him with editing the manuscript is related to his previous awarded work *Do the Senses make Sense?* (p. 5). This title reveals the polysemy—"Are sensations/feelings/meanings meaningful?"—which connects sensory and sensual perception with meaning and inspires the reader to see how the graphic characters configure the fictional world.

The foreword encloses in inverted commas the doubled name of the author, narrator, and protagonist of the manuscript ("Humbert Humbert", "H. H.") and all the names of the characters of his confession. However, the name of the fictional scholar Dr Blanche Schwarzmann and the names of the fictional and real representatives of the law, lawyer Clarence Choate Clark and Judge John M. Woolsey, are free from inverted commas. The foreword visually detaches those who act in the world created by "H. H." from those who exist in the space of creating and defending books. The sneer quotes of the foreword imply irony in establishing a visual boundary between the "reality" of the foreword and the imaginative fiction of the manuscript, the reality of creation and defence, and the fiction of the crime. The irony is shown to the reader in a quite short "epilogue" presented before H. H.'s story starts: John Ray, Jr. addresses those who see in a literary text a mirror of reality and mentions a few details about the further fate of the characters "for the benefit of old-fashioned readers who wish to follow the destinies of the 'real' people beyond the 'true' story" (p. 6). The foreword challenges the creation of the "illusion of reality" in the manuscript by putting in quotation marks not only the names of the characters of "H. H."'s story but also the words "real" and "true" as such.

Then, the foreword invites the reader to see not only the quotation marks but also the (graphic) specificity of the names. First, the name of the author of the foreword, who proposes to see the sense in the senses, is "*John Ray, Jr.*". His name outlines the mode of naming characters in the text titled by the name (*Lolita*). John Ray, Jr.'s name is doubled graphically and semiotically. It functions as

(1)   a symbol since graphic characters form the word "ray", which means a beam of light or heat;

(2)   an icon as a consequence of intertextual index since the name refers to and mirrors a name of a historical figure—a 17th-century naturalist John Ray, who is famous for creating classification systems in nature (Appel, 1991, p. 493); in the cases of intertextuality the text indexically connects and iconically resembles (the parts of) that to which it refers;

(3)   an icon of itself, mirroring itself in repetition of initials J[ohn] R[ay] ↔ Jr.

The abbreviation Jr. graphically repeats John Ray's initials J. R., thus creating a second-degree icon that shows the "face" of a character as merely an assemblage of letters—and, in reverse order, the phenomenon of letters acquiring a "face". The doubled name of the "author-editor-publisher" maps the ways in which *Lolita*'s words create meaning, establishing the pattern of second-degree iconicity in the novel's texture. The text overshadows symbolicity with iconicity arising from textual and intertextual indexicality.

The foreword presents the names of two fictional writers—"Humbert Humbert" and "Vivian Darkbloom". The cognomen "Humbert Humbert" (which, in the confession, changes to Edgar H. Humbert, Humbert the Humble, Humbert the Terrible, Humberg, Homberg, Homburg, Humburg, Otto Otto, Mesmer Mesmer, Lambert Lambert, Jack Humbertson, etc.) is described as a mask "through which two hypnotic *eyes* seem to glow" (1997, p. 5; emphasis added). Pronouncing the word, the reader can hear and then see both "eye" and "I" (Narins, 2002, p. 922), connecting the same sound representamen with two different objects. Thus, the doubling of the name ("Humbert Humbert", "H. H.") creates an icon of seeing while simultaneously mirroring two different "I's"—that of Humbert the narrator and that of Humbert the character.

In the case of "Vivian Darkbloom", the reader also encounters a name that performs several semiotic functions. As an anagram of Vladimir Nabokov's name, it becomes an index and a visual icon, mirroring his name. The object of this icon is not the writer as a human but the name that marks and covers the works. John Ray, Jr. notes that "'Vivian Darkbloom' has written a biography, *My Cue*, to be published shortly", and "critics who have perused the manuscript call it her best book" (1997, p. 6). Meanwhile, Humbert-narrator reveals that "Cue" is a cognomen of Quilty (1997, pp. 273, 274, 277, 303). Thus, the reader is again invited to relate the graphic character/figure—the word "Cue"—to two different objects:

(1)   the anthropomorphic character Quilty (Cue is Quilty's cognomen at the dude's "ranch about a day's drive from Elephant [Elphinstone]. Named? Oh, some silly name—Duk Duk Ranch"; 1997, p. 274);

(2)   The graphic character Q: pronouncing "cue" encourages the perception of it as a Nabokovian homophone, linking "Cue" with "Q".

The second relationship discloses the ironic ambiguity of the title—*My Cue* = "My Q(uilty)" and not only makes Darkbloom's *Cue* an analogue of Nabokov's *Lolita*, but also puts on equal footing the book, the letter, and the character. *Lolita* ironically demonstrates that those who wish to equate the character with the author should associate Humbert not with Nabokov but with Vivian Darkbloom, the co-author of the playwright Quilty—though even then, they should associate him not with the author's person but with the "signature"—names and letters.

The names of those who defend (the publication and distribution of) the book(s)—Clarence Choate Clark and John M. Woolsey—also work like inverted commas: the first one indexically refers to and iconically resembles the name of the fictional figure Clare Quilty (Clarence Choate Clark—C. C. C. → Clare Quilty—C. Q.), and the second one marks an analogy in situation (with *Ulysses*), becomes its mirror-image.

Finally, the name that opens the foreword and the confession also closes the novel and becomes its title—Lolita. In the manuscript, the object of H. H.'s passion is named Dolores, shifting to Lo, Lola, Lolita, Dolly, Lottelita, Lolitchen, Carmen, Carmecita, etc. However, in the foreword, she is called Mrs "Richard F. Schiller". This surname, which H. H. first encounters in a letter requesting money when he moves to "Readsburg", where he "was to be entertained by some friends and admirers" (1997, p. 271), once more ironically points to literature (the German poet Friedrich Schiller), becoming an indexically appearing icon. The irony lies not only in linking Lolita with the German romantic poet, playwright and philosopher, who created the treatise on the role of art in society, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man,* with its conception of aesthetic freedom,[11] but also in questioning the gender. Just as the female "writer's" name (Vivian Darkbloom) mirrors the male writer's name (Vladimir Nabokov), the female character's name mirrors the male one. Those playful references erase gender—that which is social, personal, human, etc., reinforcing instead the literariness and textuality of names. The text has no gender, and, in the foreword, "Lolita" appears exclusively as a text. John Ray Jr. uses the proper noun "Lolita" only as the title of the "strange pages" enclosed in quotation marks—*"Lolita"*. The only instance where the name is mentioned not as the book's title and without quotation marks refers to a creature of Humbert-narrator's "singing violin" (1997, p. 7), thus, in fact, still referring to the book.

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[11] Schiller does not place a moral burden on art, argues that "beauty calls us to play", and formulates an idea of aesthetic experience as a whole in itself. An overview is presented in Kimball's (2001).

The foreword presents "Lolita" not as a "human" figure but as a text—a work of art being created, read, and defended through publication. The opening of the confession continues and explains the game. It begins with an introduction and explanation of the name: "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta." (1997, p. 9). The opening repeats graphemes that provoke alliteration and clearly defines what Lolita is: a word composed of three syllables, pronounced as the tongue takes a three-step journey. The syllable "-lee-"/"Lee" links this word to the backstory of the literary female figure, referring to Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee" and becoming its icon. In the same first chapter, Humbert quotes a line from Poe's poem, and, later, iconizes all the components of his story (events, characters, specific naming, motivations for their actions, causes of events, numerals, etc.) through intertextuality. All these elements become icons representing or imitating not living beings but literary figures, events, and other objects of culture that configure a new texture of/on passion and desire. The physical, sensual passion for a humanized character is replaced by the sensual passion for an embodied, configured, constructed, visualized *literary word* drawn from other literary texts. As Adam Piette argues, "[w]hat comes out of *Lolita*, finally, is the portrait of an intelligence whose only joy is to treat language as a kind of incarnate girl-child with whom he can play" (1996, p. 48). Thomas Karshan similarly observes:

> "Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with!" (32). In saying this, he [Humbert] is uttering a tautology in which Nabokov is guilty by association: Lolita's name suggests letters, *litterae* in Latin. She is the English language which Humbert, speaking for Nabokov, desires so perversely, and Humbert's play with, and love for, Lolita is an allegory for his, and Nabokov's, play with and love for the English language; Nabokov suggested as much when he called Lolita the record of his love affair with the English language. (Karshan, 2011, p. 170)

Karshan claims that "the main movement of Nabokov's American writing is towards free play" without rules (2011, p. 22). However, the configuration of *Lolita*'s representamen insistently shows that it is a game with rules exposed in the foreword and applied in the "confession". The foreword emphasizes the issue of senses and vision, modelling a chiastic-type structure (publication ⋝ reading) grounded in structural splitting and a deliberate arrangement of mirrored figures. It employs a mode of naming the characters and objects, inviting a reader to connect the different perspectives of vision to create a "three-dimensional" figure. It creates a stream of quotation marks that serve not only as markers of detachment from reality but also as signs delineating another level of textual iconicity—its mirror-like intertextuality. It establishes other chiastic-type structures of *Lolita*'s whole: *foreword ⋝ "strange pages"*, "real author-publisher" ⋝ fictional author-narrator. Humbert Humbert's part of the text continues the game: it recruits letters, numbers, typeface, and inclusions-quotations in French that make the words opaque, at least to those who do not know French. It proposes to

see the "faces" in letters and numbers (as it happens, e.g., in the case of the playwright Quilty's car numbers "WS 1564" and "SH 1616" that "mirror" Shakespeare's figure).[12] It invites one to perceive the relationship between the numbers and signify them.

Lolita configures the text as a highly dense artifice, a body one must see. Its visual configuration creates a stained-glass pane from the pieces of the older windowpanes to create a picture of its own. The whole crumbles once one takes out (ignores) a piece (a device). The text shapes an insistent invitation for an iconic reading strategy—one that forms the representamen of a reading-sign as mirroring the text-object, which itself mirrors the others.

Diagrammatization, which brings into evidence the qualities of *Lolita*'s representamen (*what one sees as presented whole, a totality of textual representamens*), reveals what kind of interpretant (*what strategies of reading*—symbolic, indexical, or iconic) is proposed to relate representamen to the dynamic object (*semantic whole*). This proposition could be described in terms of Umberto Eco's semiotics (grounded in the Peircean approach), using his concepts of Model Author and Model Reader. Eco defines the Model Author as a set of instructions in its totality, a unit of objective textual (linguistic, discursive) strategies. This unit coincides with the intention of the text to produce a Model Reader, defined as "a possible reader *whose profile is designed by and within the text*", able to make conjectures about the intention of the Model Author (1990, pp. 52, 58–59, 128).[13] He explains that a "Model Reader entitled to try infinite conjectures" (1990, p. 59). In addition, Eco argues that a text tends to construct two Model Readers, or rather two levels/stages of reading—semantic and semiotic/aesthetic. The semantic one is related to the linear first reading, and the semiotic/aesthetic one to the re-reading in search of what kind of reader that particular text asks

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[12] In the "interrelated combinations" "WS 1564" and "SH 1616" referenced by Humbert, Shakespeare's (WS/SH) birth and death dates are apparent, and the combinations "Q32888" or "CU88322" reveal the asymmetric identity of Q(uilty) and Cu(e):

References—incompletely or incorrectly indicated—to the cars the fiend had hired for short laps between Wace and Elphinstone were of course useless; the license of the initial Aztec was a shimmer of shifting numerals, some transposed, others altered or omitted, but somehow forming interrelated combinations (such as "WS 1564" and "SH 1616", and "Q32888" or "CU88322") which however were so cunningly contrived as to never reveal a common denominator. (Nabokov, 1997, pp. 249–250)

[13] Eco's theoretical construct of the Model Reader may seem similar to Iser's concept of the implied reader. However, this similarity is misleading. The difference between the concepts, first, lies in the way they consider the text. For Iser, a text is a sum of narratively organized rhetorical devices—"perspectives" (the narrator, the characters, the plot, and the fictitious reader) that help the reader to produce the "ultimate meaning of the text—or the aesthetic object" (p. 98). For Eco, a text is a device, an existing physical and aesthetic object. Its discursive strategies in their totality potentially include the visual layer of written discourse and configure the profile of the Model Reader.

to become, and what "instructions" the Model Author inscribes to "explain" the request (Eco, 2005). The peculiarities of *Lolita*'s representamen as an artifice strongly invite a reader to connect the representamen and the object iconically and to explore distinct kinds of textural configurations and patterns to form a total sign-action.

6. *Lolita*'s Interpretations as Signs

In Eco's terms, the Model Author of *Lolita* has an intention to create a model reader who would completely accept the practice of iconic reading. However, despite any text construes "the type of reader who is supposed to cooperate in order to actualize the text such as the Model Author (that is, the objective textual strategy) wants it to be", as Eco notes, an actual reader can refuse to play the role of the Model one (1990, p. 128). *Lolita*'s interpretations reveal different interpretative strategies, depending on how one con-/per-ceives the text—an iconic representamen or a collection of symbolic signs. These strategies loosely correspond to those described by John Ray, Jr. (reading *Lolita* as a novel—a case history—a work of art). Two of them (a novel vs. a work of art) configure an opposition of conception vs. perception of the text, and the third one (a case history) becomes a consequence of conception. They are related to the following questions:

– how does one perceive the graphic body and/or the texture of Lolita? (John Ray, Jr.'s "work of art"—iconic reading);
– how does one conceive anthropomorphic bodies (Lolita, Humbert, etc.)? (John Ray, Jr.'s "novel"—indexical reading);
– how does one conceive the models of the relationship between anthropomorphic figures, and what can those models exemplify? (John Ray, Jr.'s "case history"—symbolic reading).

A general look at *Lolita*'s interpretations reveals the issue of the ethical dimension as a bone of contention in Nabokoviana. It may seem that this contention is related to the opposition of (discussing ethics) indexical vs. (discussing aesthetics) iconic reading, but it is not. One can find iconic interpretations in which the demonstrative aestheticism and ornateness of the text are associated with ethics; similarly, many indexical interpretations link ethics with aesthetics.

The iconic interpretations of *Lolita* represent re-reading in a search for a textural whole. They traverse all levels of iconization. On the first reading stage, they perform imaginization, revealing the symbolicity of representamens as deceit, and focus on the patterns that invite diagrammatization. Diagrammatization allows for seeing the logic of textual and intertextual indexicality in the structure of the whole, and results in the creation/understanding of iconic relationships. Only then does the phase of allegorization come: the reader chooses

the relevant interpretant and creates a semantic whole, an interpretation which resembles/mirrors the text-addresser in its totality.

Introduced by Alfred Appel, the iconic interpretations are presented, e.g., in the work of David Packman and Priscilla Meyer.[14] Packman (1982) acknowledges the extratextual indexicality (the "elements of realism") as a misleading trap, "false leads or snares" (p. 42), Nabokovian "cryptogrammic paper chase". He focuses on the textual "surface and structure" and shows how the textural games distract the reader from involvement with the characters, as well as how the text interrelates seriousness and playfulness/irony. He explains how the text moves from snapshots to filmic pieces to reveal the transformation of love, "for love demands not the fetish object, the fragmented, frozen image, but rather the narrative of the body, the classical trajectory Humbert evokes" (p. 50). The analysis allows him to interpret Lolita's body as only a literary text and Humbert's desire for Lolita as an image of the desire for (reading) literature, "desire represented in the text and the reader's desire for the text double each other" (p. 47). Meyer (2007) also grounds interpretation in the fabric of the perceptive whole. She analyzes various kinds of textual symmetry, functions of numbers, different representations of the metaphor of translation, principles of metamorphosis, intertextual strategies, and irony, permeating all the levels of the text. She evaluates the logic of iconic arrangement of different figures of discourse and then comes to allegorization—interprets *Lolita* as an Americanized paraphrase of *Eugene Onegin* (pp. 16–48). In both cases, the interpretative moves appear after identifying the logic of textural patterns. Despite the differences, both Packman's and Meyer's allegorization is rooted in the text as an artifice and mirrors the textural representamen.

Brian Ricardson (2024) iconically examines the modes in which *Lolita* embodies the tension between reading and misreading. He marks the foreword's role and reveals the effect of saturating intertextuality and the "oddly phrasing" of Humbert's manuscript. He shows how, while "brilliantly reproducing numerous realistic traits", the text persistently invites the reader to make an interpretative choice (p. 141). For example, in the case of a rhetorical question, "Did she have a precursor?"—the text requires determining "whether the word is used in the unusual, though expected sense of forerunner or predecessor, or in the strictly literary meaning of textual antecedent" (p. 139). He reveals how the text chooses the aesthetic reader and explains how the realistic scenario created on the level of imaginization, the excessive plausibility and verisimilitude of *Lolita*'s figures, determine the contradiction in the ethical/moral stance and the failure of an attempt to create a self-referential totality. Richardson's conclusion is based on Nabokov's afterword *On a Book Entitled Lolita*. With a reference to the afterword, which, in contrast to the foreword, is not a part of *Lolita*'s textural body,

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[14] I do not intend to present a comprehensive overview of interpretations of the novel or even a comprehensive overview of those that interpret the inscription of the issue of reading into the novel. Instead, I limit examples to several works I consider representative to exemplify the semiotic models of reading.

he points to the contradiction in the "aesthetic stance"—in the ethical definition of art by ethical ("tenderness", "kindness") and human ("curiosity", "ecstasy") qualities. This interpretational move is irrelevant from the point of view of iconic reading and the reading model as such, since it underrates not only textual corporeality and the irony that saturates the whole but also the completeness of the text. However, it is precisely this move beyond the limits of the text that allows Richardson to conclude that, despite *Lolita* pretending to reduce "everything else to artifice", it is "immune to real-world ethical judgements" (p. 141). In this case, interpretation takes a step aside from iconic reading.

Indexical interpretations of *Lolita* are limited to imaginization, focusing on extratextual indexicality. Even when commenting on the aesthetics of language, they do not consider the text as differing from the other types of verbal discourse. They examine the text as a transparent rhetorical whole, which does not require any diagrammatization. For example, Robert Merrill (1979) reads the book as a novel of character. Trying to disprove Appel's claim on Nabokov's art as "artifice or nothing" and *Lolita* as parodying realistic tradition and its devotees (p. 447), he argues that the reading depends on how we respond to Humbert. Merrill attributes all the events in the fictional world to Humbert-narrator's experience or whimsy and reasons that "the nature of our involvement with Humbert, as well as with the other characters, will not support the conclusion that Lolita is 'about' literary originality, creative language, art in general, or any similar abstraction" (p. 454). Both Leland de la Durantaye and Marilyn Edelstein also look at Humbert Humbert as the character and consider the novel as representing "human" relationships. Such sight allows to interpret *Lolita* as "a moral book in the simple sense that from its first page to its last explicitly treats moral questions […]. Morality, moral choices, moral falterings, faults, failings, and failures make up the matter of the work" (Durantaye, 2007, p. 190). It provides a possibility to argue that *Lolita* inspires an ethical response from the reader and an analysis of the relation of the text to reality (Edelstein, 2008, p. 47). It lets Richard Rorty, who also "looks through the windowpane" and sees Humbert suffering, to state that the moral of the novel is "not to keep one's hands off little girls, but […] to notice what people are saying. For it might turn out, it very often does turn out, that people are trying to tell you that they are suffering" (1989, p. 164).

The indexical interpretation of Nomi Tamir-Ghez (1979) focuses on the complex linguistic structure of *Lolita* as a multi-level embedding of speech events and sophisticated rhetorical devices. Tamir-Chez explores how *Lolita* designs the incongruity of the speech situations, which receives an explanation at the end of the novel. *Lolita*'s linguistic structure here is seen as a sum of rhetorical devices, filtered through the character-narrator's voice. Humbert is treated as a character-narrator who uses direct arguments (e.g., psychological explanation) and indirect strategies (manipulating speech situations, addressing several audiences, etc.) and has complete control over discourse. Without any irony, almost repeating John Ray, Jr.'s words, Tamir-Chez argues that Nabokov uses Humbert's self-castigation and eventual realization of his guilt to evoke sympathy for him as

a human being, while ensuring the reader condemns his actions (p. 82). Humbert is seen as a character and a pawn in the author's game to achieve a balance between the reader's sympathy and moral condemnation and win: "Humbert at last wins us over, as the author intends him to" (p. 82). The interpretative sight of Tamir-Chez sees Humbert as a talking person and the author's figure with his intention, thus, reminds us of the intentional fallacy.

Leona Toker introduces the aspect that, on the one hand, reveals her reading as indexical, but on the other, explains the condition of such reading. She argues that *Lolita* provokes a cathartic effect; however, this effect is limited to the first reading since the re-reading yields to the aesthetic enjoyments. The cathartic effect (possible in what Eco calls "semantic reading") "derives from its promotion of our temporary sympathy for Humbert and inattentiveness to Dolly Haze and then in its making us modify our attitudes" (Toker, 1989, p. 202). She discusses the character and the rhetoric of the reader's entrapment, describes the metaphysical ethical background of the novel, and concludes that his self-conscious art has an intrinsic ethical dimension.

It is important to note that it does not matter what interpretive or axiological position readers take when they allegorize resting on imaginization only, equating Humbert Humbert with real human(s)—whether condemning Humbert's actions or explaining his "artistic aspirations" (Pifer, 1980, p. 166) and Humbert's passion for unattainable beauty (Josipovici, 1964), etc. Such reading remains indexical, tethered to extratextual indexicality.

Once a reader moves from indexical to symbolic interpretation, considers textual and extratextual indexicality, conceives the text as an exemplification of a system of ideas, and applies external ideological systems or models, we also see allegorization that omits diagrammatization. Symbolic interpretations appear in different *Lolita* criticism fields that examine literature through ideological lenses. E.g., the representative of the feminist approach, Linda Kauffman, explores Humbert-narrator's angle of vision (male gaze)—the ways the narrator objectifies and sexualizes Lolita while she is deprived of the right to have a voice, therefore, personality, feelings, and experiences. Kauffman argues that Nabokov's attempt to create an exclusively aesthetic, self-referential totality fails since he configures a world and characters that refer to reality, that are representational. She invites readers to set Lolita free of the shadows of Humbert's blinding rhetoric and dismantle "the misogyny of traditional critical assessments of Lolita's wantonness […]. Lolita is not a photographic image, or a still life, or a freeze frame preserved on film, but a damaged child" (p. 148). Likewise, Sarah Herbold (1998/1999) argues that Nabokov's novel manipulates its readers, but its "manipulativeness, sexiness, and difficulty are as complimentary to women as they are insulting"; Nabokov "challenges women not to remain victims and acknowledges his dependence on their considerable power" (p. 75). They both propose looking through the "windowpane" and judging the relationship between the figures using the conventions of the feminist approach.

Keith Wilhite's (2014/2015) interpretation represents an example of a different kind of ideological approach. Wilhite argues that the assessment of the contention between moralistic and aesthetic responses "depends upon how we interpret our role as readers—whether we feel we have been conscripted to condemn or absolve Humbert, to resist or embrace the pleasure of *his* text" (p. 3; emphasis added). He acknowledges Humbert as a "person", and *Lolita* as Humbert's text, and inscribes this text—Humbert's confession—into the postwar discourses on politics, aesthetics, and sexuality. Wilhite extends the field of discussion, reads both Humbert and events within a context of Cold War-era urge to classify sexual, parental, and marriage identities, and develops the examination within the context of "advice literature".

In turn, the approach of narrative ethics reveals another aspect of the ideological treatment of literature. This approach considers literature as a space for ethical engagement of the reader through rhetorical devices and shows how a narrative introduces ethics. However, not without a reason Alexander Spektor (2020), who analyzes narrative ethics in Nabokov (and Dostojevsky), does not examine *Lolita*, which extremely complicates the communicating figures and makes it almost impossible to identify the distribution of power between rhetorical devices and other (first—visual) elements of the text that are incongruous with any "human-like" figure of discourse (e.g., that of naming). To sum up, symbolic interpretations see *Lolita*'s representamen as a net of relationships between the characters, as a set of rhetorical devices that distribute power, and connect it to the object (semantic whole) using the interpretant representing precepts of one or another ideology.

7. Conclusion

The transformation of the text-representamen into a sign-action—icon, index, or symbol—in interpretation depends on the dynamic interpretant chosen to connect the representamen with the dynamic object. In literary works, this choice hinges on whether the readers (dis)acknowledge the text's self-referential (aesthetic) function and, if acknowledged, how they understand it. *Lolita* excessively emphasizes its artificiality and corporeality and, at the same time, combines it with a verisimilar plot. The former suppresses the latter to such an extent that the invitation to read iconically is almost impossible not to notice, and the sequences of its acknowledgement or dis-acknowledgement are crucial for meaning-making. In an artifice that minimizes the role of perceptible texture, the iconic and indexical interpretations may look similar: the choice of the mode does not produce such interpretational conflict as in *Lolita*'s case. Even so, they do not coincide since one considers diagrammatization, which can change the direction and principles of meaning-making, and the other does not.

Readers who acknowledge literature as a specific type of discourse and understand that aesthetic function covers the textural fibre in its totality, move from imaginization to diagrammatization that allows understanding of how the text

structures meaning-making, how it creates intertextual patterns, what actions from the part of the reader it presupposes and how these actions influence the shifts in signification—read *iconically*. Their allegorization process is grounded in the gradual *perception* and conceptualization of the self-referential whole. In this case, the choice of an interpretant is determined by how a text structures relations that initiate and verify iconic signification. Furthermore, the actual reader's figure determines the flexibility of interpretation since different readers may focus on different regularities and patterns and have different memory capacities. The meaning-making process proceeds iconically but alters the direction and lets one outline allegorization in a different manner. Such interpretations complement rather than oppose one another.

Readers who disacknowledge literary text as a specific type of discourse or understand it as covering a sum of narratively organized rhetorical devices, read *indexically* or *symbolically*. Both move to symbolic allegorization, omitting the level of diagrammatization. Both are based on extratextual indexicality (usually omitting the intertextual one), unless indexical reading explores how it works inside the text, and the symbolic one applies the systems of scholarly ideas to explain this work.

However, the indexical frame for interpretation paradoxically connects vastly different approaches, including the "naïve" reading, various rhetorical methods, and the classical narrative semiotics of Algirdas J. Greimas, which is fundamentally rooted in Saussurean theory. All of these approaches examine literature as verbal texts that do not differ fundamentally from other forms of verbal communication. The difference lies in the awareness of the structured nature of these messages; while a naïve reader may not recognize the text as a structured message, those employing rhetorical methods, as demonstrated in the interpretation examples, are conscious of this structure. Similarly to rhetorical approaches, narrative semiotics examines not only the relationships among the characters and events in the plot but also how the text organizes its content, though in a more rigorous manner. The classical Greimasian narrative semiotics methodically separates the text from the actual reader and the wider cultural context. The object of such reading becomes the meaning of the text that emerges as a dense "filter" characterized by an isomorphism of content and expression (for which the matter does not matter), allowing for the search and reconstruction of values and deep axiology. The meaning here is shaped by the reader's predefined competencies and the assumption of symmetry between the addresser and the addressee as actants engaged in the content. Such symmetry as the basis for seeking values is crucial in analysing discourses with a dominant referential (denotative) function. Yet the artifice establishes their asymmetry, at least to some extent, even in realistic prose. This asymmetry can play a crucial role in the process of meaning-making, much like the nature of the artifice itself.

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