

Lovely, Lyrical, Liling: Kubrick's Translation of Lolita's Voice

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Abstract : "What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her and having no will, no consciousness indeed, no life of her own," Vladimir Nabokov writes in his seminal work, *Lolita*. Throughout Nabokov's novel, the eponymous character is rendered nonexistent through unreliable narrator Humbert Humbert's impenetrable narrative, infused with lyrical rationalization. Instead, Lolita is "safely solipsised," as Humbert muses, solidifying the potential for the erasure of Lolita's agency and identity. In this literary work, Lolita's voice is reduced to a nearly invisible presence, only seen through the eyes of her captor. However, in Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of *Lolita* (1962), the "nymphet," as Nabokov coins, reemerges with a voice of her own, fueled by a lyric impulse, that displaces Humbert's first-person narration. The lyric, as defined by Catherine Ing, is the voice of the invisible; it is also characterized by performance, the concentrated utterance of individual emotion, and the appearance of spontaneity. The novel's lyricism is largely in the service of Humbert's "seductive" voice, while the film reorients it more to Lolita's subjectivity. Through a close analysis of Kubrick's cinematic techniques, this paper examines the emergence and translation of Lolita's voice in contrast with Humbert's attempts to silence her in Nabokov's *Lolita*, hypothesizing that Kubrick translates Lolita's presence into a visual and aural voice with lyrical attributes, exemplified through the establishment of an altered power dynamic, Sue Lyon's transformative performance as the titular character, Nelson Riddle and Bob Harris' musical score, and the omission of Humbert's first-person point-of-view. In doing so, the film reclaims Lolita's agency by taking instances of Lolita's voice in the novel as depicted in the last half of the work and expanding upon them in a way only cinematic depictions could allow. The results of this study suggest that Lolita's voice in Kubrick's adaptation functions without disrupting the lyricism present in Nabokov's source text, materializing through the actions, expressions, and performance of Sue Lyon in the film. This voice, fueled by a lyric impulse of its own, refutes the silence bestowed upon the titular character and enables its ultimate reclamation upon the silver screen.

Keywords : cinema, adaptation, Lolita, lyric voice

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