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Solipsizing Martine in *Le Roi des Aulnes* by Michel Tournier: thematic, stylistic and intertextual similarities with Nabokov's *Lolita*

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Introduction

- ¹ In this paper we aim to show how Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) might have been a source of intertextuality for a specific storyline in *Le Roi des Aulnes* (1970), Michel Tournier's best-known novel. The first chapter of *Le Roi des Aulnes* contains a short but crucial episode featuring the car mechanic Abel Tiffauges and the schoolgirl Martine. We will first describe how the works of Nabokov and Tournier could be related intertextually. In the subsequent analysis we will describe several striking similarities between both novels, comparing the use of certain words, the physiognomy and psychology of the protagonists and their description of rape and sexual abuse. The reference of both writers to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* as an intertextual source is also relevant here.

The 1950s: *Lolita* and Martine

- ² In his extensive study *Vladimir Nabokov: the American Years*, Brian Boyd describes how by the end of 1953 Nabokov had finished the corrected typescript of *Lolita* (Boyd 1991, 227). In the following year, five prominent American publishers turned it down, not willing to risk publishing this *explosive* manuscript. By this time, Nabokov, even more confident about his new book, "could no longer rest until it was published," as Boyd puts it, and contacted his agent in Paris for further help (Boyd 1991, 255-256, 262). This is how eventually, in 1955, The Olympia Press in Paris accepted it for publication.

- 3 In his book *Nabokov ou la Tentation française*, Maurice Couturier describes how the worldwide success of *Lolita* started in France. Soon, both the distinguished publisher Gallimard and the *Nouvelle Revue Française* showed interest in a French translation. Couturier argues that French literary censors and law enforcers might never have taken action against this publication if the well-known English writer Graham Greene had not written a very positive review of *Lolita* in the *Sunday Times* (see also Boyd 1991, 293). The literary polemic that ensued alerted the British government, which confiscated copies of the novel that were imported. In 1956, upon British request, the French Home Office banned the novel for two years (Couturier 121-122). However, *Lolita* was “on the move,” as Boyd puts it, and by the end of 1956, Nabokov had already been contacted by four American publishers, before Putnam's Sons eventually published *Lolita* in 1958 (Boyd 1991, 296, 357).¹
- 4 Couturier points out how the Parisian literary scene only took notice of *Lolita* after the scandal and court rulings it caused and when news broke of its best-selling success in the United States (Couturier 197-201). To quote Boyd, “by the end of 1956, the French press had singled out *Lolita* from all the other books on the banned list, and by January 1957 the whole matter had become known in France as ‘l'affaire Lolita’.” (1991, 301)²
- 5 Eventually, after several legal proceedings featuring the active involvement of Nabokov's publisher Maurice Girodias, the French ban was lifted in 1958. “Il est vrai que cette affaire avait fait grand bruit,” Couturier states (131). Once the French translation of *Lolita* was published by Gallimard in 1959, the French literary press responded widely, by means of reviews and several interviews with the author (Couturier 201-211).
- 6 Although Nabokov (1899-1977) and Tournier (1924-2016) were partly contemporaries, they probably did not cross paths in the Parisian literary scene. In 1940, Nabokov and his young family left France and emigrated to the United States. He only returned in 1959 to promote the French translation of *Lolita* and in later years his visits to Paris were brief and infrequent.³ (Couturier 101-107) At the time of *Lolita*'s publication and subsequent succès de scandale, Tournier was a journalist and translator before joining publishing house Plon as an editor in 1958. During this period, he most certainly witnessed the publicity *Lolita* attracted, but was far from entering literary circles himself and publishing his literary debut, *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967).⁴
- 7 What is vital for analysing similarities between *Lolita* and *Le Roi des Aulnes* is that the origin of Tournier's second novel can be dated as early as 1958, when he wrote a first version of it. It is known that this early draft corresponds with the first chapter of the final version of *Le Roi des Aulnes*, which is set in pre-war France and contains the storyline of Martine.⁵ Tournier took up the manuscript again in 1968 after the success of his first novel (*Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie Française*) allowed him to dedicate himself full-time to his writing career. His second novel *Le Roi des Aulnes*, published in 1970, was awarded the *Prix Goncourt* shortly afterwards and met with international acclaim.

Tournier and intertextuality

- 8 Thanks to his work in the publishing field and being an avid reader, Tournier was always extraordinarily well-read and well aware of the *status quo* of literature in general.⁶ As for his literary sources, Tournier always boasted: “La part proprement

inventée est minime dans mes romans.”(23 novembre 1970, 28) What's more, he was always the first to point out which writers had inspired his work.⁷ In his intellectual autobiography *Le Vent Paraclet* (1977) for example, Tournier generously indicates the *emprunts* he made for the three novels he had written by then. Furthermore, *Le Vol du Vampire* offers a collection of reviews of writers and their works and as such can be seen as a rather explicit invitation to use them as a frame of reference for the analysis of his own work.

- 9 Michael Worton has published extensively both on the theory of intertextuality in general and on the intertextuality of Tournier in particular, focusing on the writer's ideas on the subject as well as analyzing his process of writing and rewriting. In his article “Intertextuality: to inter textuality or to resurrect it?,” Worton provides an important observation when it comes to Tournier's view on his own intertextuality: “Tournier's own analyses of his novels are, however, not only descriptive, but also directive and even prescriptive; his comments may help the reader to decode his novels—but only in the way he desires,” and: “Tournier's explicit revelation of a source may help the reader to understand his intentional and pre-textual agonistic drives, but it also blocks a free intertextual reading of the text [...]” (1986, 15, 17).
- 10 So it would be wise not to ignore the extratextual and intertextual information Tournier so willingly provides, but to escape this control and to put the main focus on the content and structure of his literary writings instead. As such, although Tournier never acknowledged any influence by Nabokov in his essays and other writings, this is not to say that he didn't read *Lolita* or any other novels by Nabokov.

Comparing *Lolita* and *Martine*

- 11 Tiffauges's arrest over the alleged rape of Martine constitutes a turning point in Tournier's novel, as it leads to the protagonist leaving France for Germany to participate in the Second World War. The description of the interaction between Martine and Tiffauges comprises about six pages, implicit references included. Their contact starts with brief eye contact outside her school, after which he gives her several rides home.⁸ She usually descends at a deserted construction site of an apartment building that leads to her house. She takes the staircase of the unfinished *immeuble* that is referred to as the *cave*. It is there that Martine is assaulted, whereupon she accuses Tiffauges. Their last encounter is the confrontation at the police station (Tournier 1975, 197). The Martine storyline stretches from page 163 when they first meet, to page 205, which describes the judge's verdict.

Similarities on word level

- 12 To start with, some interesting similarities on word level can be found between *Lolita* and *Le Roi des Aulnes*, such as the word *faunelet*. The term “faunlet” is a coinage by Nabokov and is associated with Humbert's idea of a nymphet in the very first pages of *Lolita*.⁹ It is a term the French translator of *Lolita* cannot but translate as “*faunelet*” (Nabokov 1977, 29). Both the French and the English word are seldom used. Nevertheless, Tournier uses the French word in *Le Roi des Aulnes* (leading up to Tiffauges's first contact with Martine): “Je me dirige vers ma voiture où j'installe le faunelet à côté du faune qui va le surveiller.” (171-173, 182)¹⁰

- 13 Apart from this, in describing Martine's physical appearance, Tiffauges pays particular attention to her legs ("elle a tiré sa jupette sur ses jambes" [182]), her knees ("genoux écorchés" [163]) and her socks ("socquettes blanches" [161]). This is reminiscent of the way Humbert looks at Lolita, often describing her legs as well. An example in the French translation of *Lolita* can be found: "un mètre quarante-huit en chaussettes, debout sur un seul pied" (Nabokov 1977, 15). An early mention of a "genou écorché" can also be found (Nabokov 1977, 33).

Humbert Humbert vs Abel Tiffauges: protagonist similarities

- 14 In both *Lolita* and the first chapter of *Le Roi des Aulnes*, it is clear to the reader whose perspective is adopted: we read Humbert's and Tiffauges's own words in a stream of consciousness. Humbert Humbert writes his text retrospectively several years later to defend himself at his trial, whereas Tiffauges, a car mechanic and garage owner, writes his diary more or less simultaneously, giving his personal interpretation of his daily life. Here, it is up to the reader to judge the reliability of this narrator, which is key to the reading experience both of the depiction of the girl and of the crimes committed, as we will see further on.
- 15 Just like Humbert, who only feigns his love for Charlotte Haze, Tiffauges is not really interested in adult women.¹¹ In the first pages of *Le Roi des Aulnes*, his girlfriend Rachel breaks up with him, which marks his last intimate relationship with any adult person. And similar to Humbert, Tiffauges has no real friends and can be considered an *Einzelgänger*, a solitary eccentric. Both behave like predators when it comes to following, pursuing or chasing the young children of their liking. In *The Annotated Lolita* for example, Humbert compares himself to a "predator" when eagerly awaiting an opportunity with Lolita, whom he calls his "prey" (Nabokov 2000, 42). Similarly, in his diary entry dated March 15, 1939, Tiffauges relates how he has been taking pictures and recording sounds for weeks of girls near their school when he notices Martine for the first time. Thinking about the boys' school he himself attended, he writes that for him the female child is: "une *terra incognita* que je brûle d'explorer" (Tournier 1975, 163). And in a later entry dated June 10, 1939, Tiffauges uses the words "mes chasses" ("my hunts") and "gibier" ("prey") when thinking about Martine (184).
- 16 There is even some physical resemblance between the two protagonists as they are both tall, physically strong and dark haired. Humbert Humbert insists on describing his "hairy hands" (see for example Nabokov 2000, 123) and Abel Tiffauges does something similar in *Le Roi des Aulnes*: "cette main sinistre aux doigts velus et rectangulaires, à la paume large comme un plateau" (55).¹²
- 17 What's more, the Hotchkiss in which Tiffauges gives Martine several rides home reminds one of the rambling car journeys that Humbert embarks upon with Lolita, with the difference that Humbert never intends to take the girl home.
- 18 The city of Paris constitutes another link between the two novels. The first chapter of *Le Roi des Aulnes* takes place entirely in Paris, where Tiffauges lives and works. It is in Paris that Humbert Humbert, who has some French ancestry and also works as a teacher of French, has his first nymphet experience (Couturier 136-139). In *Nabokov ou la Tentation française*, Maurice Couturier notably explores the French background of Nabokov's novel and points out how Nabokov actually wrote the first draft of *Lolita* in Paris during his stay there in 1939 (Couturier 134-135).

Solipsizing Martine: the similar perspective of Humbert and Tiffauges

- 19 One of the most disturbing elements in *Lolita* is that Humbert Humbert fails (or refuses) to see Lolita as the person she really is. He only has his own, illusory image of the girl, making use of her as he pleases, which finds its conclusion in the infamous phrase: “Lolita had been safely solipsized.” (Nabokov 2000, 60) It seems that Nabokov, known for his predilection for word play and neologisms, derived this striking but rare verb from the philosophical term “solipsism,” a combination of the Latin words *solus* (“alone”) and *ipse* (“self”).¹³ Originally meant as a theory according to which no other worlds but one's own mind can be known, the term in a modern sense is also associated with “extreme egocentrism” (“Solipsism”).
- 20 In her article “A ‘Safely Solipsized’ Life: *Lolita* as Autobiography Revisited,” Anna Morlan describes the “solipsistic bubble” that Humbert creates around Lolita: “Humbert's representation of Lolita [...] is so intense that for quite some time he himself fails to recognize, or perhaps succeeds in ignoring, the real girl, Dolores Haze, that he ‘safely solipsizes’[...] into his Lolita.” (5)¹⁴ Humbert's perception of Lolita as an independent person with an identity of her own only comes when, at the end of the novel, he meets her again, two years after her “escape”.¹⁵
- 21 In *Le Roi des Aulnes*, Tiffauges creates a similar solipsistic world around his contacts with Martine. In accordance with his own moods and intentions, he uses various and often conflicting denominations to describe the girl, ranging from *madone* (166), to *elfe* (182), and *goguenard* (i.e. “mocking” [194]).¹⁶ He describes how she insisted on not being dropped off at her home and writes: “comme j'ai aimé la complicité un peu coupable qui se nouait entre nous!” (182) This can be seen as an ambiguous allusion to the potential inappropriateness of his contacts or intentions with her, perhaps foreshadowing future, more negative events. The complicity that is suggested here, is only expressed by Tiffauges and might not at all be shared or felt by Martine.
- 22 Besides, both novels are characterized by erotic projections of the young girls, putting great emphasis on their alleged femininity. One example can be found in *Lolita* when Humbert describes how he considers her irregular and childish way of walking as being very indecent:
- Why does the way she walks—a child, mind you, a mere child!—excite me so abominably? Analyze it. A faint suggestion of turned in toes. A kind of wiggly looseness below the knee prolonged to the end of each footfall. The ghost of a drag. Very infantile, infinitely meretricious. (Nabokov 2000, 41)¹⁷
- 23 In his descriptions of the schoolgirl Martine, Tiffauges does something quite similar. In her monography *Michel Tournier: Exploring Human Relations*, Mairi Maclean dedicates a section, “The Female Child Eclipsed” (180-182), to the interaction between Tiffauges and young girls.¹⁸ Maclean shows how Martine plays a key role in the image Tiffauges develops of little girls: “From the beginning he sees her as [...] a miniature *femme fatale*.” (180) Tiffauges describes Martine as “une fillette d'une étonnante beauté, très femme déjà, me semble-t-il, malgré son torse plat et ses genoux écorchés.” (Tournier 1975, 163) This feminising perspective is also evident when Tiffauges offers Martine a ride home: “Elle n'a rien répondu, mais elle m'a suivi, et en s'asseyant dans la voiture

dont je tenais la portière ouverte, elle a tiré sa jupette sur ses jambes dans un geste délicieusement féminin.” (182)

- 24 Van Peteghem argues that Nabokov's narrative theme of solipsization permits him to construct the modern literary myth of the “nymphet” (132). Early in the novel, Humbert Humbert describes his concept of the “nymphet”:

Now I wish to introduce the following idea. Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who [...] reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as ‘nymphets’. (Nabokov 2000, 16)¹⁹

- 25 This word and this concept keep returning in the following pages and chapters, where Humbert Humbert's qualifications of Lolita as a devilish, fatal nymphet are multiple. As part of his definition of the “nymphet” he also writes: “You have to be an artist and a madman [...] in order to discern at once, by ineffable signs [...] the little deadly demon among the wholesome children” (7).

- 26 Although in *Le Roi des Aulnes* the word *nymphette* is not used, the way Tiffauges describes young girls strongly resembles Humbert's thinking:

[C]e sont des femmes naines. Elles trottaient sur leurs courtes jambes en balançant les corolles de leurs jupettes que rien ne distingue—sinon la taille—des vêtements des femmes adultes. C'est vrai aussi de leur comportement. J'ai souvent vu des fillettes très jeunes—trois ou quatre ans—avoir à l'égard des hommes une attitude très typiquement et comiquement féminine [...]. (Tournier 1975, 204)²⁰

- 27 In wordings echoing Humbert's description of the fatal, demoniac nymphet, Tiffauges insists it is Martine who spots him before he actually discovers her: “Je l'ai remarquée, mais il serait plus juste de dire que c'est elle qui m'a remarqué. C'était fatal.” (163) Maclean points out how Tiffauges concludes after his arrest “that Martine herself has directed these accusations against him. [...] She thus becomes a ‘diablesse’ in his eyes.” (Maclean 180) In his diary, Tiffauges suggests she has deliberately and maliciously testified against him: “Ma plume se refuse à coucher sur le papier la centième partie des mensonges—faufilés de menus faits vrais—qu'elle a accumulés pour me perdre.” (Tournier 1975, 198) In this way, both Humbert and Tiffauges convince themselves (and perhaps their readers) that the female child is the only one to blame for their devilish wrongdoings.

- 28 As another example of how Martine's real identity is displaced by an illusion, one can cite how Tiffauges is enchanted by the fact that Martine actually has three sisters. In his diary he writes: “Comme je voudrais connaître ces autres versions de Martine—à quatre ans, à neuf ans, à seize ans—comme un thème musical repris par des instruments et à des octaves différents!” The phrase that follows, shows Tiffauges's egocentrism: “Je retrouve là mon étrange incapacité à m'enfermer dans une individualité” (182-183).

- 29 Lastly, Tiffauges's conclusion, after his arrest, that girls, as miniature adult women, do not deserve an existence of their own, can be considered as another strong attempt at solipsizing young girls in general.²¹ “Et d'abord, qu'est-ce qu'une petite fille? Tantôt petit garçon ‘manqué’, comme on dit, plus souvent encore petite femme, la petite fille proprement dite n'est nulle part. [...] Je crois que la petite fille n'existe pas en effet.” (204) He even concludes: “la fillette n'est qu'une fausse fenêtre,” and: “J'ai été victime d'un mirage.” (205) Paraphrasing Humbert Humbert, one could say that in this way Martine has been safely solipsized.

Lewis Carroll: intertextual similarities²²

- 30 At an intertextual level, both *Lolita* and *Le Roi des Aulnes* contain connotations that could be linked to the same source: *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. As Alfred Appel points out in *The Annotated Lolita*, Nabokov always expressed his fondness for the work of Lewis Carroll, and even called him “the first Humbert Humbert” (381).²³ In his annotations, Appel includes several allusions to *Alice in Wonderland* in Nabokov's works and in *Lolita* especially, mentioning Nabokov's predilection for “auditory wordplay” as a possible intertextual source.²⁴
- 31 Tournier, for his part, explicitly stated from an early stage how the work of Lewis Carroll inspired his writing. In a 1971 interview, “Comment j'ai construit le *Roi des Aulnes*,” Tournier quotes a phrasing by Carroll on young girls that even reminds one of Nabokov's concept of the nymphet:²⁵
- Bien entendu j'ai relu le Petit Poucet, et j'ai vu que l'ogre mangeait des enfants, de préférence des petits garçons. C'était le contraire de Lewis Carroll qui avait une grande passion pour les petites filles, il les photographiait passionnément (c'est d'ailleurs aussi mon héros), et un jour il eut cette phrase absolument admirable que je me suis dépêché de reprendre en la retournant : ‘J'adore les enfants, à l'exception des petits garçons’. (84)²⁶
- 32 Here, Tournier thus states that, for his own fiction, he turned around Carroll's predilection for young girls into just the opposite. This is exactly what Tiffauges writes in his diary when he is incarcerated after his contacts with Martine have led to his arrest: “J'adore toujours les enfants, mais à l'exception désormais des petites filles.” (204)
- 33 In *Le Roi des Aulnes*, the word “Mabel” might account for another intertextual link with Lewis Carroll. In his diary, Tiffauges uses this name several times.²⁷ According to Mairi Maclean, the word is an abbreviation of “Mon Abel”, once invented by Tiffauges's school friend Nestor.²⁸ However, this name is also used in *Alice in Wonderland*, for example when Alice wonders whether she might have become one of her girlfriends: “I must have been changed for Mabel! [...] I must be Mabel after all [...]. No, I've made up my mind about it: if I'm Mabel, I'll stay down here! [...] I shall only look up and say ‘Who am I, then?’” (23-24). At this point, Alice is very puzzled about who she is (“Who in the world am I?” [22]), which again reminds one of a girl whose identity is being obliterated. In *Le Roi des Aulnes*, the word “Mabel” occurs in the first encounter with the school class Martine is part of: “Nous reverrons bientôt, Mabel, les chemisettes et les socquettes blanches, les robes d'été et les culottes courtes !” (161) If considered that “Mabel” does not refer to a nickname for Abel Tiffauges but to a particular type of girl, the text could be read very differently. The last time Tiffauges uses the name “Mabel” is in the page leading up to the cave incident: “Du calme, Mabel, retiens ta colère, fais taire tes imprécations. Tu sais bien maintenant que la grande tribulation se prépare, et que ton modeste destin est pris en charge par le Destin!” (194) Within the interpretation suggested here, this statement sounds much more like a menace (of sexual initiation) directed towards a young girl.

Martine and Lolita: describing crime

- 34 The ambiguous way in which sexual abuse and rape are described in both novels is known to have unsettled many a reader. The novel *Lolita* builds up to the end of the first part, which can be seen as the most poignant yet controversial and highly ambiguous passage of the novel, describing both Humbert's excitement, his abuse of Lolita, a "wincing child" (Nabokov 2000, 135), and Humbert going on errands and buying her treats and sweets as well as "a box of sanitary pads" (141).
- 35 If Nabokov's description of the way Humbert oversteps his final boundary with *Lolita* is explicit, the description of the rape in *Le Roi des Aulnes* is itself quite implicit. One could say that in *Lolita*, crime and criminal are obvious and that in *Le Roi des Aulnes* only crime is obvious: "les conclusions de l'expertise médicale qui ne laissent aucun doute sur la réalité du viol." (197) The only source that the reader can turn to for an account of Tiffauges's most dramatic encounter with Martine, the cave incident, is Tiffauges's own diary entry, which is vague and ambiguous. Tiffauges relates how he drops Martine off at the usual spot and then writes he doesn't remember how long he stays in his car: "Je ne saurais dire combien de temps s'écoula" (195). When from his car he hears a "painful cry coming from the building" ("un hurlement déchirant provenant de l'immeuble" [195]), one can wonder whether it is even possible to hear a cry at such a distance from within a car. Tiffauges goes into the cave and finds her crying and bleeding. He then states she cries for help in the direction of the door "where I saw the figure of a man appear" ("où je vis se profiler une silhouette d'homme" [195]). It is not clear whether this man is her attacker leaving or somebody else coming for the rescue. Until then, one might still believe Tiffauges has nothing to do with the crime. Then Martine starts pointing at him as her attacker ("Lui, lui, lui!") and in his diary Tiffauges admits: "Là j'ai perdu la tête." (196) He tries to flee. It is now up to the reader to decide, based upon this ambiguous account, whether Tiffauges is guilty or not.
- 36 At the end of the first part of *Lolita*, when Humbert has finally had his way with the girl and then told her that her mother has died, he is the only person she can turn to for consolation. The concluding sentence is ominous, scandalous and ambiguous at the same time: "You see, she had absolutely nowhere else to go." (Nabokov 2000, 142)
- 37 Tiffauges's description of the scene after the cave incident is equally ambiguous. He writes how he takes Martine's pulse "with authority" ("avec autorité" [195]) and makes her sit up, expressing how he tries to do this "[...] with all the gentleness I was capable of" ("[...] avec toute la douceur dont j'étais capable" [195]). Again, the text is unclear as to how capable he actually is of treating her gently. On his arrest, Tiffauges is interrogated for six hours but keeps denying any guilt. In view of the evidence gathered on him, Tiffauges's appointed lawyer considers pleading a "mental disability" ("débilité mentale" [201]) but the examining magistrate ("juge d'instruction") decides otherwise. The judge is very clear in his statement towards Tiffauges: "votre dossier est lourd, très lourd" (205). He explains that Tiffauges would most likely have been charged with rape and brought to trial had not the war and his enlistment been imminent. He thus orders a nonsuit and allows Tiffauges to walk free. However, some of the judge's words counterbalance his earlier statement: "cette petite Martine est peut-être une mythomane, comme souvent les fillettes de son âge" (205). The overall ambiguity surrounding the cave incident thus remains intact.

Conclusions

- 38 In the above we have described the similarities that can be found between Nabokov's *Lolita* and the storyline of Martine in Tournier's *Le Roi des Aulnes*. The comparison shows the use of similar words and main characters that share many features. We have analyzed how Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* has been a source of intertextuality for both novels. On a psychological level, however, fundamental resemblances have shown how Tournier must have incorporated Nabokov's concepts of "solipsizing" and the "nymphet" in the episode with Martine. The identity of both Lolita and Martine is obliterated by the illusionary image the protagonists create of them. Their perspective is essential for the way in which sexual crime is described and perceived in both novels.

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NOTES

1. See also Elisabeth Ladensen's book *Dirt for Art's Sake. Books on Trial from Madame Bovary to Lolita*, which contains a chapter on the publication history of *Lolita* (187-220). As Ladensen observes *Lolita* "is the only English-language work to have been banned for obscenity in France but not in America" (188).

2. In her comparison of the work of Georges Perec and Vladimir Nabokov, Jane Grayson provides a description of the attention Nabokov received by the French reading public during that period: "If Nabokov was not exactly a household word in the 1960s and 1970s he had very definitely a place in the French intellectual scene" (1).

3. See Grayson's article again: she points out how collaborators of the French literary working group *OuLiPo* came up with the idea of inviting Nabokov to join their group at the end of the 1960s. On Nabokov's (unknown) response, she speculates: "And even in the relatively mellow period when he was flushed with the success of *Lolita* and showing a certain amount of interest in left-wing French intellectuals and younger writers, it is hard to conceive of him having consented to make the journey from Montreux to Paris to monthly group meetings." (2)

4. Couturier nevertheless describes a meeting in 1959 at Gallimard where Nabokov crossed paths with a good friend of Tournier's, Roger Nimier (212).

5. See the dossier by Jean-Bernard Vray for the 1996 edition of *Le Roi des Aulnes* (511-554). Vray states: "Mais il avait rédigé d'abord une première ébauche de ce livre, en 1958. Le titre était *Les Plaisirs et les pleurs d'Olivier Cromorne*. Il correspondait à la première partie du *Roi des Aulnes*. Il s'agissait d'un récit à la première personne du singulier qui constituait le journal d'un garagiste. Ce récit prenait fin en 1939 avec l'entrée de la France dans la guerre." (Vray 517) See also Tournier's own words in *Le Vent Paralet* on this first version (1977, 193-194). The structure of this first chapter, which solely consists of the protagonist's diary with its short entries and fragmented text, would lend itself very well to reuse. What's more, the next chapter (II, "Les pigeons du Rhin") presents a clear break with the first one as the diary structure (called "Les Ecrits sinistres") is abandoned and does not return until the fifth chapter of the novel, whereas chapter two starts with Tiffauges being relocated from Paris to Alsace and then to Germany in 1940.
6. In a recent collection of interviews with journalist and writer Michel Martin-Roland, Tournier comments upon how he started as a writer: "ce qui me manquait c'était l'approche des choses. [...] Entrer dans la description d'un visage, d'une personne, d'une maison, d'un meuble, c'est difficile, mais c'est indispensable. Alors j'ai lu. [...] J'ai tout lu!" (Martin-Roland 62) He later adds: "Je n'arrêtais pas de lire et je continue." (Martin-Roland 65)
7. In the case of *Le Roi des Aulnes* for example, Tournier provides his own guidelines in newspaper articles, such as "Treize clés pour un ogre", (30 novembre 1970, 21). And in his interview with *Le Monde*, he mentions the sources he used for *Le Roi des Aulnes*: "Ce livre est en outre si inspiré de Flaubert qu'il constitue une véritable anthologie de cet auteur..." (23 novembre 1970, 28) See also his long interview for the magazine *Les Cahiers de l'Oronte* from 1971.
8. It remains unclear as to how many rides Tiffauges gives her. The text suggests some kind of habit: "Elle se fait toujours déposer devant l'immeuble en construction" (183) and "J'étais allé chercher Martine à la sortie de l'école, comme à l'accoutumée" (194).
9. "When I was a child and she was a child, my little Annabel was no nymphet to me: I was her equal, a faunlet in my own right..." (Nabokov 2000, 17). See also Alfred Appel's note on "faunlet" in *The Annotated Lolita* (340). The theme of the nymphet will be discussed in the next pages.
10. In *Lolita*, there is even a reference to the Erl King when Humbert Humbert describes the pursuant Clare Quilty as a "heterosexual Erbkönig" (Nabokov 2000, 240).
11. See Boyd: "Marrying Charlotte only for access to *Lolita*, Humbert is calculatingly dishonest from the start." (1991, 233)
12. In the French translation of *Lolita* "my hot hairy fist" (Nabokov 2000, 123) becomes "mon poing fébrile et velu" (Nabokov 1977, 197).
13. See Van Peteghem's article "Le Solipsisme littéraire ou la mytho-poétique de la nymphette dans *Lolita*".
14. Likewise, for Rabinowitz, solipsizing *Lolita* comes down to erasing her subjecthood and agency, silencing her own voice and thinking (335).
15. See also Boyd: "She is no longer a nymphet, no longer a projection of his fancy, but a real person whom he loves just as she is." (1991, 249)
16. The word "elfe" reminds one of Nabokov's "fateful elf" (Nabokov 2000, 18).
17. Referring to the *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, the rare adjective "meretricious" means either "related to prostitution" or "tawdry and falsely attractive" ("Meretricious"). In the French translation that Tournier most probably read, the word becomes "impudique" (Nabokov 1977, 68).
18. Maclean's book provides an interesting cross-section of Tournier's work, focussing purely on the various human relationships in his fictions, such as those of twins, homosexual or heterosexual couples, and man and child (both boys and girls). As far as we know, Maclean is the only academic to compare Tiffauges's perceptions of young girls with those of Humbert Humbert,

protagonist of *Lolita*, without, however, going so far as to indicate *Lolita* could have been a source of intertextuality for *Le Roi des Aulnes* (180, 205).

19. See also the remarks Couturier makes on the word “nymphette” (144-148).

20. *Lolita*'s initial age (twelve) is mentioned on several occasions (Nabokov 2000, 107, 124). Although Martine's age is not mentioned explicitly, one can conclude from the descriptions that she is about the same age. The age gap between her sister of nine and her sister of sixteen also suggests this (Tournier 1975, 182-183).

21. Or, as Maclean puts it: “Tiffauges argues the female child entirely out of existence.” (181).

22. Both novels share similarities with another text: Raymond Queneau's *Zazie dans le Métro* (1959). Boyd points out how Queneau was inspired by Nabokov's novel (1991, 299). The streetwise and precocious Zazie who roams the streets of Paris independently reminds one of both Martine and *Lolita*. (See also Couturier 159-160)

23. Here, Appel also remarks that Nabokov translated *Alice* into Russian in 1923.

24. See, for example, his comments in note 131 (382).

25. His words (and the article in general) strongly prefigure his wordings in his intellectual autobiography *Le Vent Paraclet*, especially the chapter on *Le Roi des Aulnes* (Tournier 1977, 69-147). In his collection of essays *Des Clefs et des serrures*, dedicated to art and photography, Tournier uses a large part of his chapter on “L'image érotique” to describe his view of Lewis Carroll's life and works (1979, 103-108). Pages 104 and 105 actually feature a large photograph of a sleeping girl, taken by Carroll himself. Tournier repeats his words from 1971 stating: “L'un des premiers à avoir découvert les ressources érotiques de la photographie fut le surnommé Lewis Carroll.” (1979, 107). He further states that: “Son jardin secret, sa passion brûlante close sur elle-même, c'était la petite fille impubère (âge idéal: dix ans).” (107). Almost the exact wordings can be found in Tournier's essay collection *Petites Proses* (1986, 151-154) and his collection *Les Vertes lectures* (2007, 105-109).

26. As to photography, Tiffauges's passion to take pictures of children (see for example Tournier 1975, 161) plays an important role during his trial, when these photographs are found in his apartment and used as evidence against him. Alfred Appel suggests the photography theme in *Lolita*, featured both as a preference of Humbert and as a hobby of Quilty, might also be linked to Lewis Carroll (Nabokov 2000, 382).

27. See *Le Roi des Aulnes* (60, 62, 65, 161, 194).

28. See Maclean (180) and note 8, where she also points out “Mabel” can be interpreted as “Ma Belle” (216).

ABSTRACTS

When *Lolita* was published in France in 1955, the then aspiring writer Michel Tournier most certainly witnessed the *succès de scandale* that Nabokov's novel soon became. What is vital for analyzing similarities between *Lolita* and *Le Roi des Aulnes*, Tournier's best-known novel (Prix Goncourt, 1970), is that Tournier wrote a first version of its first chapter in 1958.

Several striking similarities can be shown between Nabokov's *Lolita* and a specific storyline in the first chapter of *Le Roi des Aulnes* that features the interactions between the male protagonist Abel Tiffauges and the schoolgirl Martine. Comparison shows the use of identical words like *faunelet* and many physical and psychological features that both protagonists share. Most resemblance

can be found, however, in the way Humbert and Tiffauges perceive Lolita and Martine respectively. The identity of these girls is obliterated by the erotic and illusory images the male protagonists project upon them (“solipsizing”). This perspective is essential for the way in which rape and sexual abuse are described and perceived in both novels. The reference of both Nabokov and Tournier to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* as an intertextual source for their novels is also relevant here.

Lorsque *Lolita* fut publié en France en 1955, le futur écrivain Michel Tournier a sans doute été témoin du succès de scandale que le roman de Nabokov a vite connu. Ce qui est essentiel pour l'analyse comparative entre *Lolita* et *Le Roi des Aulnes*, le roman le plus célèbre de Michel Tournier (Prix Goncourt 1970), est qu'en 1958 déjà, Tournier écrivait une première version du premier chapitre.

Plusieurs ressemblances remarquables se laissent apercevoir entre *Lolita* et ce premier chapitre du *Roi des Aulnes*, où sont décrites les interactions entre le protagoniste Abel Tiffauges et l'écolière Martine. La comparaison montre l'usage de mots identiques comme “faunelet” et plusieurs traits physiques et psychologiques que les deux protagonistes ont en commun. Une forte analogie se trouve également dans la manière dont Humbert et Tiffauges perçoivent Lolita et Martine respectivement. L'identité de ces deux jeunes filles est balayée par les images illusoires et érotiques que projettent les protagonistes sur elles (“solipsiser”). Cette perspective est essentielle pour la façon dont le viol et l'abus sexuel sont décrits et vécus dans les deux romans. Dans ce cadre, il faudra aussi indiquer la référence que font les deux auteurs à *Alice au Pays des Merveilles* de Lewis Carroll comme source intertextuelle pour leur roman.

INDEX

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