

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of the reason *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov was chosen as the object of study, the background of study, identification of problem, scope of problem, research questions and objective of study. The chapter also talks about the significances of the study.

1.1 Background

In American culture, the road trip has long symbolized freedom, adventure, and self-discovery, emerging as a defining practice in the early 20th century. Citing Fiser in *Route 666: A Guided Tour Through American Road Trip Horror* (2023: 6) it states that: *There is a certain American nostalgic spirit attached to the phrase 'road trip' in American culture. It evokes a sense of manifest destiny, family vacations, and the American Dream, which make the horror set in this cultural space so interesting in what they subvert* (Fiser, 2023: 6). This statement underscores how the road trip is deeply ingrained as a cultural practice, embodying the ideals of exploration and the American Dream.

However, this phenomenon comes with significant environmental consequences. The heavy reliance on personal vehicles during road trips contributes to air pollution, climate change, and ecological degradation. Safdie in *Road Trip: American Ritual—How Can It Go Green?* (2023) argues that: *The most deleterious component of taking a road trip is certainly the environmental impact it entails; the biggest impact of a road trip is the amount of fuel being used* (Road Trip: American Ritual, 2023). This observation highlights how fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions become central environmental concerns in the practice of road trips.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides the latest information in 2021, transportation accounts for approximately 28.5% of total greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, with passenger vehicles being a major contributor. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) data in the article *Why We Need to Decarbonize Transportation* (2024) states that:

Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the U.S and, as such, any plan to achieve a net-zero GHG economy must reduce transportation GHG emissions to near zero. This process of reducing GHG emissions is also referred to as decarbonization since carbon dioxide makes up the majority (97%) of greenhouse gases emitted by transportation activities (Environmental Protection Agency, 2024).

This state shows that in light of the urgent need for decarbonization, it becomes evident that addressing the environmental impact of cultural practices, such as the American road trip, is crucial. Emissions not only accelerate climate change but also harm ecosystems through habitat loss and air pollution. Thus, the road trip, while celebrated as a cultural emblem, reflects a complex duality—freedom and exploration on one hand, and environmental exploitation on the other.

This duality has been captured in numerous literary works, particularly in American literature of the mid-20th century, where road trips are portrayed as a microcosm of societal values and struggles. The complete understanding of a literary work is only possible if the literary text is not separated from the socio-cultural factors surrounding it (Grebstein, 2015: 91). Literature highlights the interrelationship between society and literary works, portraying literature as a reflection of social structures, historical moments, and human experiences that shape and influence its content and form (Magfirah, 2015). This suggests that literary texts often serve as reflections of the broader social and ecological realities of their time. The environment significantly influences human life, and changes in it can reshape societal structures (Arafah et al., 2023; Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a; Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b; Yudith et al., 2023).

One such work is Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), which is widely regarded as one of the greatest literary masterpieces of the 20th century. According to Britannica in Vladimir Nabokov Summary (2024), Nabokov was born in St. Petersburg and raised in an aristocratic, multilingual family, mastering Russian, French, and English. Nabokov's linguistic skill and innovative style have earned him recognition as one of the greatest writers of the 20th century. In *Lolita*, Nabokov vividly narrates the cross-country road trip of Humbert Humbert, a middle-aged man, and his stepdaughter, *Lolita*. Through their stops at motels, diners, and highways, Nabokov intricately weaves a narrative that explores psychological and moral conflicts while also capturing the spirit of American road trip culture.

What makes *Lolita* particularly relevant for an ecocritical study is its implicit commentary on the ecological impact of road trips the novel portrays a society heavily dependent on private vehicles, a hallmark of consumerism and mobility culture in 20th-century America. Humbert's journey reflects not only personal and moral dilemmas but also the broader societal implications of environmental exploitation caused by excessive mobility. Through poetic descriptions of landscapes and recurring motifs of movement and consumption, Nabokov indirectly critiques the ecological costs of such cultural practices.

Ecocriticism, as an analytical approach, is particularly suited for examining these environmental dimensions. As a literary theory, ecocriticism explores the intricate relationship between literature and the environment, revealing how texts critique or reflect ecological issues (Cheryll, 1996:18). Further explanation is also provided by Garrard in *Ecocriticism* (2012: 3) who explains: *Ecocriticism investigates the ways in which literature portrays the environment, critiques environmental harm, and reflects on humanity's place within the natural world* (Garrard, 2012: 3). In the context of *Lolita*, this approach allows for a nuanced analysis that goes beyond the psychological and moral themes typically associated with the novel, opening new perspectives on the environmental implications of road trip culture.

This study, therefore, aims to analyse *Lolita* through an ecocritical lens, focusing on how the novel portrays environmental exploitation and cultural reflections inherent in the American road trip. By examining the intersections of literary narrative, mobility culture, and ecological impacts, this research contributes to a broader understanding of *Lolita* as not just a psychological and moral critique but also as a

commentary on the ecological costs of human mobility. Based on the preceding discussion, the researcher is particularly interested in conducting an in-depth examination of the topic encapsulated in the title “*The American Road Trip in Nabokov’s Lolita: An Analysis of Environmental Exploitation and Cultural Reflection.*”

1.2 Identification Problem

In the novel *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, the author identifies several issues that were taking place in America during the mid-20th century, reflecting psychology, social and environmental symptoms, and their broader effects on individual lives. The problems described in the story are:

- 1) Paedophilia and Moral Decline in Humbert and *Lolita*'s Relationship
- 2) Use of Language and Narrative Manipulation Used by the Main Characters in *Lolita*.
- 3) Humbert's Psychological Complexity in *Lolita*
- 4) Environmental exploitation in the Road Trip of Nabokov’s *Lolita*

1.3 Scope of the Problem

Based on some issues that have been mentioned in the identification of problems above, the author limits the problems and only focuses on the aspect of environmental exploitation in the road trip as the cultural reflection in Nabokov’s *Lolita*.

1.4 Research Question

Based on the background, identification of the problem, and scope of the problem above, the author proposes the problem into the following research question, those are:

- 1) What kinds of natural settings in *Lolita* contribute to an understanding of environmental issues?
- 2) How does the road trip in *Lolita* illustrate the conflict between individual freedom and the responsibility to protect the environment?

1.5 Objective Study

According to the research question above, the researcher formulates the objective of the study as follows:

- 1) To analyse the kinds of natural settings in *Lolita* and how they contribute to an understanding of environmental issues presented in the novel.
- 2) To know the road trip in *Lolita* illustrates the conflict between individual freedom and the responsibility to protect the environment.

1.6 Significance of Study

It is hoped that this study can enrich the knowledge of all readers, especially those who are interested in environmental issues in literary works. This includes both theoretical and practical aspects.

Theoretically, by applying ecocriticism, this research demonstrates how literature can reflect and critique environmental exploitation, even in works that do

not explicitly focus on nature (Mahayana, 2015). The study expands the scope of ecocritical theory by revealing the subtle but powerful ways in which Nabokov's depiction of the road trip narrative critiques mid-20th-century American culture's relationship with nature and mobility, positioning *Lolita* within a broader ecological discourse (Arafah et al., 2023). Analysing environmental themes in literature, we gain both theoretical insights and practical applications to address ecological issues (Arafah et al., 2021). This analysis also enriches our understanding of how literature can engage with societal issues like sustainability and environmental degradation, thus deepening the theoretical framework for ecocriticism in literary studies (Yudith et al., 2024).

Practically, this study offers new insights for readers, scholars, and educators interested in exploring *Lolita* through an interdisciplinary lens. Highlighting the environmental dimensions of the novel encourages a more holistic interpretation that connects literary analysis to contemporary concerns about climate change and environmental impact. Ecocriticism in literature bridges literature and environmental discourse, reflecting human life, cultural values, and local wisdom while promoting environmental preservation (Manugeren et al., 2015; Hasyim & Arafah, 2023). The research also emphasizes the relevance of literary works in discussing sustainability, making it a valuable resource for courses on American literature, ecocriticism, and environmental humanities. Additionally, by linking literature to real-world issues like air pollution and fossil fuel consumption, this study encourages a broader cultural reflection on the consequences of consumerist practices and the importance of ecological awareness, providing a meaningful perspective on both historical and modern-day environmental challenges.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the writer discusses previous research related to the ecocriticism approach or study related to *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov and the theoretical background for the analysis.

2.1 Previous Related Studies

This research presents a comparison with earlier studies to showcase its originality and the relevance of novelty to the same issue, focusing on the similarities and differences concerning issues in Nabokov's *Lolita* and in various novels, including:

The first researcher is **Ivana Plevíková** (2016) who wrote *Lolita: A Cultural Analysis*. This research uses the contemporary approach and A Theory of Adaptation by Linda Hutcheon. The author found that the thesis reveals how *Lolita* by Nabokov has been reinterpreted by contemporary artists, particularly in the U.S., reflecting diverse viewpoints through appropriation of its themes and visuals. These reimaginings, often viewed as "low culture," nonetheless reach broad audiences and influence perceptions. By focusing on *Lolita*'s personal struggles, many adaptations now present her as an empowered figure, challenging patriarchal narratives. This highlights the powerful cultural impact of *Lolita* in popular media, emphasizing its potential to shape and inspire new perspectives.

The second analysis is from **Jalal Sokhanvar, and Sohab Tavousi** (2019) with their journal called *The Ecofeminist Reading of Vladimir Nabokov's Laughter in the Dark*. The researchers used ecofeminism as a theory and an approach to analysing the ecology in the female aspect depicted in Vladimir Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark*. As a result of this research, researchers found that Nabokov constructs a symbolism of nature by placing the protagonist, Albinus, in relationships with two female characters, each representing different aspects of nature: the nurturing side (like a butterfly) and the destructive side (like a moth). Through this story, Nabokov questions the culture and hierarchical concepts of Western society, using the chaotic state of the environment as a symbol to challenge these social structures.

The third researcher is **Sohrab Tavousi, and Shohreh Chavoshian** (2019) in their research about *An Ecocritical Reading of Vladimir Nabokov's Pnin*. The analysis primarily employs ecocritical theory to explore the ecological issue through the character in the novel. The writer found that despite Nabokov's claim that in *Pnin*, Nabokov portrays the equality between humans and animals as a form of respect for nature, aligning with the principles of deep ecology that emerged during Nabokov's time when he wrote it.

The fourth research is from **Caleb Monday Jonah** (2020) entitled *Anthropocentrism and The Exploitation of Nature: An Ecocritical Analysis of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. The researcher uses Geological Postulations of Ecocriticism in analysing anthropocentricity in the novel *Heart of Darkness* which influences nature and other living creatures. Researchers found that *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad provides a real reflection of human greed from time to

time. This research concludes that the author finds that Joseph Conrad as a novel writer offers a view of humans in the universe which can have a bad impact, so that it can provide a teaching reflection so that humans can appreciate and protect nature for the sake of a better environmental future.

The fifth research, **Shanyu Lin** (2020) wrote *The Comparison Between the "Moby Dick" and "The Old Man and the Sea" From the Perspective of Ecocriticism*. This research uses the Ecocriticism theory and structural approach. In the novel *The Old Man and The Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, Shanyu Lin finds that the action of the character Santiago who ultimately kills the shark is a contrasting attitude towards nature. Furthermore, in the novel *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, the researcher discovered that the character Captain Ahab exploits nature by hunting whales and white whales for revenge. In his conclusion, the author sees that these two novels depict ecocriticism through the ideology and behaviour of characters that have an impact on nature, namely the extinction of animals.

Moreover, **Jaelani, A.** (2024) wrote *Relationship Between The Main Character and Nature as Reflected in The Revenant Novel by Michael Punke "An Ecocriticism Study"*. The research uses an Ecocriticism approach to study the relationship of character and nature in Punke's *The Revenant*. Researchers found an imbalance between humans and the environment that impacts environmental damage, such as tree felling and hunting wild animals. Researchers concluded that the novel *The Revenant* highlights human exploitation of nature that needs to be reflected deeply for environmental preservation.

Based on these previous studies, the writer assumes that there are similarities and differences with this research. In this case, similarities can be seen through the use of theory, such as ecocriticism theory, and the others use the same object or the same author. Apart from that, the differences can be identified from the environmental issues taken or the theory analysis. The difference also can be seen in the use of approaches and literary works as the object.

2.2 Theoretical Background

This sub-chapter explores the theoretical foundations relevant to the analysis of *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, focusing on the intersections of environmental exploitation and cultural reflection within the context of the American road trip. This analysis draws upon ecocriticism and new historicism as theory and approach.

2.2.1 Ecocriticism

Linguistically, ecocriticism is formed from two words: ecology, which refers to the science that studies the relationship between living organisms and their environment, and criticism, which refers to the evaluation of something as good or bad (Garrad, 2023: 5). As the name suggests, this theory is an interdisciplinary approach between the fields of ecology and literary theory, aimed at using literary works as objects for studying nature through depictions of society and the environment within literary works (Howarth, 1996: 69). The application of ecocriticism in analysing *The Revenant* highlights how literature reflects human interactions with nature, illustrating the environmental consequences of

human activities (Jaelani et al., 2024). In short, ecocriticism can be defined as the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment. Glotfelty, in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996: xviii), states that: *Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment*. She adds on the following page that ecocriticism *takes as its subject the interconnection between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifact, the language, and literature* (Glotfelty, 1996: xix). Therefore, using this approach, environmental issues that are depicted clearly or explicitly in literary works can be explored in greater depth (Siwi et al., 2022). This approach emerged as a response to the increasing environmental crises at the end of the 20th century, such as ecosystem destruction and the impacts of industrialization, which were then frequently represented in various literary works since the postmodern era. The theory has since gained recognition among literary and ecological scholars as an approach to studying literature and the environment. Ecocriticism is a relatively new theory because it essentially traces the impacts of modernism on the environment, and thus, these ecocritical analyses are expected to become a tool for raising awareness about environmental issues.

The term "ecocriticism" became widely known with the publication of the fundamental book by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996: xviii) states that:

What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies (Glotfelty, 1996: xviii).

From the quotation above, Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as the relationship between writing and the physical environment reflected in literary works. She sees literary texts as reflecting, critiquing, or shaping human attitudes toward nature. Glotfelty also emphasizes that ecocriticism aims to analyse literature with an environmental perspective, which can inspire awareness or prompt action toward environmental destruction. Another well-known scholar in ecocriticism is Greg Gerrard in *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* (2004: 5), defines that: *The widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself* (Gerrard, 2004: 5). Both these perspectives are similar in their view of ecocriticism, but Gerrard adds a political element that is also connected

to the development of philosophy and politics. Gerrard in his book *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* (2004: 5) defines that:

Ecocritics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a 'green' moral and political agenda. In this respect, ecocriticism is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory. Developing the insights of earlier critical movements, ecofeminists, social ecologists, and environmental justice advocates seek a synthesis of environmental and social concerns (Gerrard, 2004: 5).

The statements above show that the new perspective and development of the theory of ecocriticism became widely known from Glotfelty and Howarth in 1996, who viewed ecocriticism as the relationship between literature and the physical environment, while Gaard views ecocriticism as the relationship between literary narratives and the development of environmental thought throughout history.

The roots of ecocriticism can be traced back to earlier philosophical movements, such as the works of Romanticism, which often celebrated the beauty and grandeur of nature and emphasized the spiritual relationship between humans and nature. However, modern ecocriticism distinguishes itself by explicitly discussing the ecological consequences of industrialization, consumerism, and natural resource exploitation. This field is greatly influenced by the environmental movements of the mid-20th century when industrialization was on the rise and modernism was evident, which then brought issues such as pollution, climate change, and deforestation into public and academic discussions.

Based on the above explanation, ecocriticism can be used as an approach to analyse the relationship between literature and the environment by highlighting representations of environmental issues, such as the impact of industrialization, ecosystem destruction, and the spiritual relationship between humans and nature (Abbas et al., 2024). This approach allows researchers to explore how literary works depict or critique human attitudes toward nature, both explicitly and implicitly. Ecocriticism is also relevant for understanding the influence of modernism and consumerism on the environment. Thus, ecocriticism as an approach not only examines literary texts but also encourages awareness and action toward environmental issues.

2.2.2 Intrinsic Elements

In literary analysis, intrinsic elements refer to the components that form the structure and content of a literary work, including various aspects such as theme, plot, character, and setting. These elements not only serve to build the narrative but also play a role in reflecting the author's worldview and conveying specific messages or ideologies.

1. Character and Characterization

Characters in literature often reflect the social and cultural conditions prevalent during a certain period. The characters in literary works serve as “social constructs” that reflect the values and norms in the society at the time the work was written (Herman, 1999: 56). According to Phelan in *Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction*, notes: *The character is an instrument through which the author conveys ideological content, embodying societal roles or reflecting individual struggles* (Phelan, 2005: 149). In this context, the character is not only a subject of the narrative but also a symbol of a larger social or cultural framework.

Characterization is the way an author builds the characters in a story, providing descriptions of their traits, behaviours, and motivations. These characters do not merely function as individuals in the narrative but also serve as representations of ideologies, social norms, or historical conditions of the time. Characterization can involve physical, psychological, and moral depictions of characters through their interactions with the world around them (Abrams, 1953: 142; Arafah et al., 2024). Thus, characters in a literary work can be seen as more than just individuals but also as part of a larger social and ideological network. Characters often become a channel for the author to convey themes and social messages because they are not just subjects of the narrative but also symbols of broader social or cultural conflicts (Phelan, 2005: 149).

2. Setting

Setting in a literary work not only includes the physical location but also the time and atmosphere that create the framework for events in the story. The setting serves to provide context that enriches the story and allows the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the social and cultural background of the characters (Bertens, 2001: 95). In certain works, the setting can act as an extension of the character itself, reflecting the emotional or psychological state of the main characters, playing an important role in building interactions between the characters and their world (Gerrig & Rudd, 2011: 78). Setting is often considered a representation of the relationship between humans and nature, as Glotfelty in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996: 35) argues that: *Setting, particularly nature, can embody the tension between human civilization and the natural world, offering insights into ecological concerns of the time* (Glotfelty, 1996: 35). Therefore, in many literary works, the natural setting not only depicts the physical place but also reveals the relationship between humans and the natural world around them.

Setting in literary works consists of three main components: place, time, and atmosphere. Each of these components interacts

to create a deeper context, allowing the reader to better understand the characters, themes, and messages conveyed by the author.

1) Place

Place refers to the physical location where the events in the story occur. It can include geographical spaces such as cities, villages, houses, or fictional worlds. Not only does place serve as a backdrop, but it also functions to create profound symbolism, reflecting the character or the social conditions of the surrounding community. The setting of a place plays a role in providing context that enriches the story, allowing the reader to gain deeper insights into the social and cultural backgrounds of the characters in the story (Bertens, 2001: 95). In many literary works, place is often used to show the relationship between humans and their environment or to depict the tension between nature and society.

2) Time

Time refers to the specific period or era in which the story takes place. Time greatly influences the course of the narrative, as it can determine the atmosphere, character development, and themes within it. Time in the narrative functions as the structure that organizes the events and helps build the overall framework of the narrative (Todorov, 1969: 112). Time in literature not only provides a temporal framework but also creates psychological effects, such as tension or relief, depending on how time is presented within the story.

3) Atmosphere

The atmosphere is the mood or feeling created by the setting of place and time, channeled through the characters. Atmosphere can include feelings of tension, excitement, sadness, or warmth, adding depth to the reader's experience. According to Gerrig & Rudd in *The Psychology of Fiction* (2011: 78), they: *Atmosphere plays a significant role in shaping a reader's emotional response to events and characters, providing a sense of tension, mood, or relief that deepens the emotional experience of the narrative.* Atmosphere plays an important role in the emotional impact on the reader and the themes of the story. The atmosphere can also depict conflict or tension within the story, reinforcing the message the author wishes to convey (Gerrig & Rudd, 2011: 78).

3. Plot

The plot refers to the organized sequence of events and actions that structure a story and drive its progression. Definition from Freytag in *Freytag's Pyramid* (1863: 45), wrote that: *The plot is the deliberate arrangement of incidents and actions to form a cohesive and meaningful narrative* (Freytag,

1863). This structured framework, often illustrated through Freytag's Pyramid, consists of five key components: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.

Freytag explains the exposition is the part of the story where the setting, characters, and important background information are introduced, providing the foundation for the plot. It helps the audience understand the situation before the main events unfold. The rising action follows, gradually building tension as conflicts arise and develop, creating anticipation for what will happen next. The climax is the high point of the story, the moment of greatest intensity, where the main conflict reaches its peak and the outcome becomes uncertain. After this, the falling action begins, showing the consequences of the climax and the fallout from the earlier events. Finally, the resolution wraps up the narrative, resolving the conflicts and providing closure to the story.

Each stage plays a crucial role in shaping the story, from introducing characters and settings to building conflicts, reaching a turning point, and resolving the narrative. The plot not only provides a logical progression of events but also serves as a medium for exploring deeper themes and developing characters. Another expert definition from Phelen in *Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge University Press (2005: 149), highlights that: *The deeper social, psychological, or ideological struggles embedded in the story often become evident through the plot's progression* (Cambridge University Press, 2005: 149) The development and resolution of conflicts in the narrative offer a window into the social, emotional, or philosophical themes the author seeks to explore. This multifaceted structure transforms the plot from a mere series of events into a powerful tool for conveying deeper meaning, allowing readers to connect with the story on a more profound understanding.

4. Theme

Theme is a central concept in literary analysis, often regarded as the core message or idea around which a narrative revolves. According to Jonathan Culler in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (1997: 58), said:

The overarching idea or message in a literary work, but it is not simply a moral lesson or central concept. Instead, it can involve complex, sometimes conflicting perspectives that authors develop through characters, situations, and conflicts (Culler, 1997: 58).

From the definition, it is clear that the theme serves as a vehicle for the author to communicate deeper philosophical or ideological viewpoints, reflecting broader issues such as identity, societal norms, and power structures.

In a similar vein, Glotfelty in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996: 35) elaborates on the theme within the context of ecocritical literature, stating that: literature often engages with ecological issues by depicting the tension between human endeavours and the natural world. Glotfelty emphasizes that themes related to nature and the environment not only highlight the immediate consequences of human actions but also provoke reflection on the long-term ecological impacts. This perspective underscores the importance of literature as a tool for engaging with environmental concerns and encouraging readers to reconsider humanity's relationship with the natural world. These definitions contribute to the understanding of theme as a multifaceted tool for expressing deeper moral, philosophical, and ecological concerns, demonstrating its significant role in literature's capacity to engage readers on multiple levels.

Intrinsic elements in a literary work do not only function as narrative elements that shape the whole story of a literary work but also as a way to depict the relationship between humans, society, and nature. Through the analysis of these intrinsic elements, we can see how literature reflects social values, ideologies, and perspectives on nature and the environment at the time. Therefore, these elements become essential in literary analysis to do research deeper into the hidden meanings behind the narrative and the portrayal within a story.