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for all your help in the completion
of my thesis.

Many Thanks

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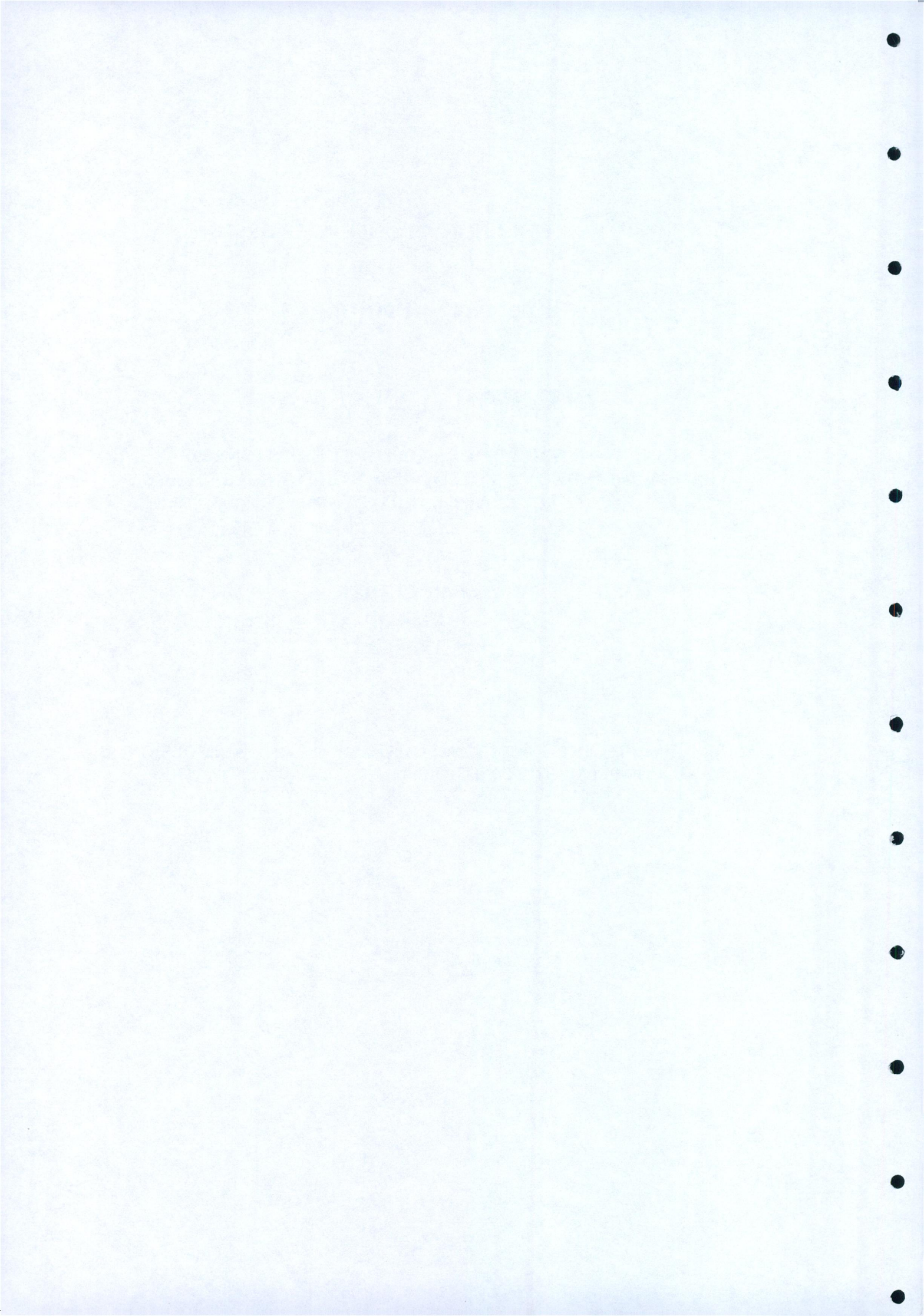
LITERARY CINEMA

**STANLEY KUBRICK'S CINEMATIC ADAPTATIONS OF
VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S LOLITA AND WILLIAM MAKEPEACE
THACKERAY'S BARRY LYNDON**

BY DECLAN CLARKE.

**SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN
AND COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF FINE ART PAINTING.**

1997.



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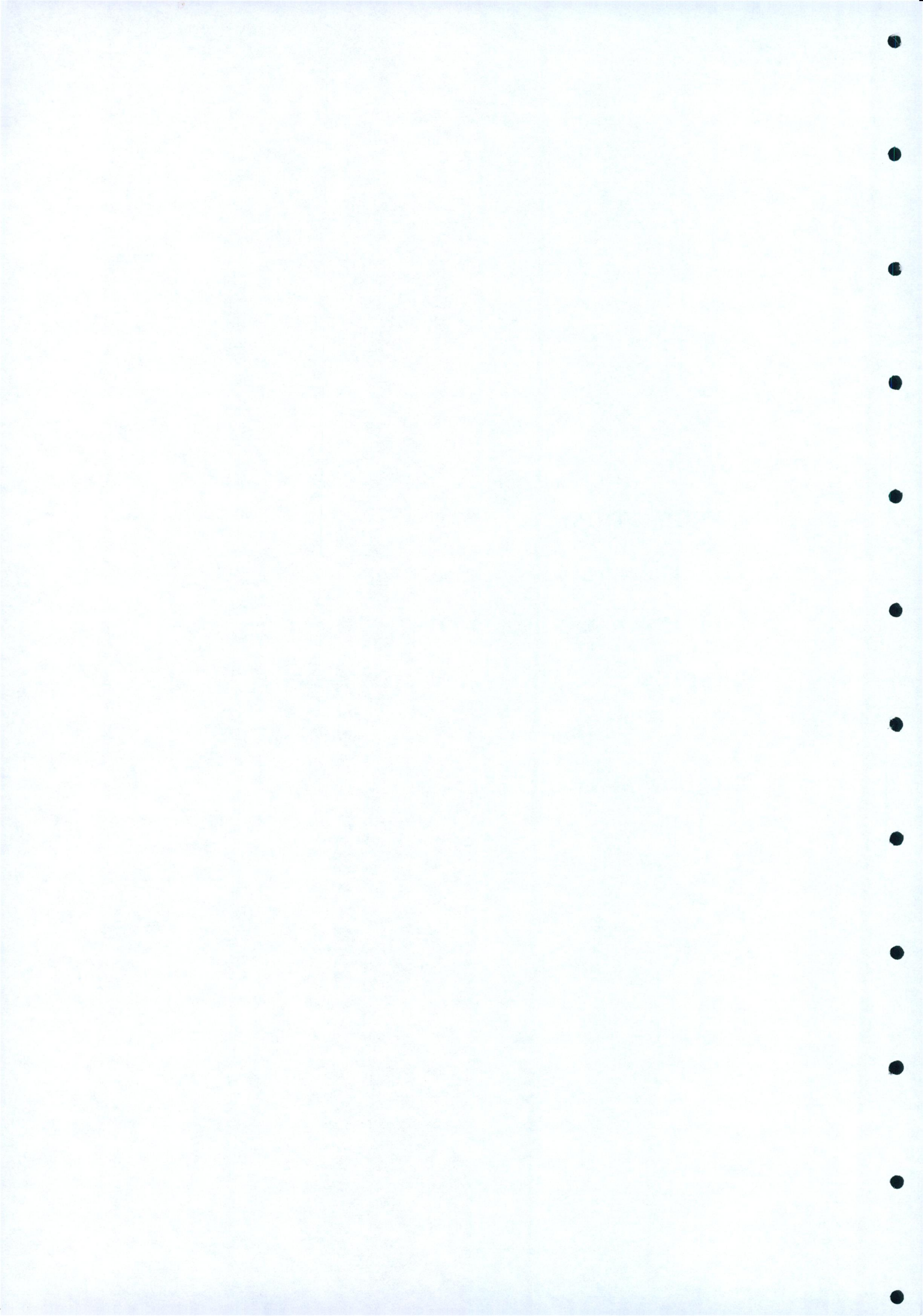
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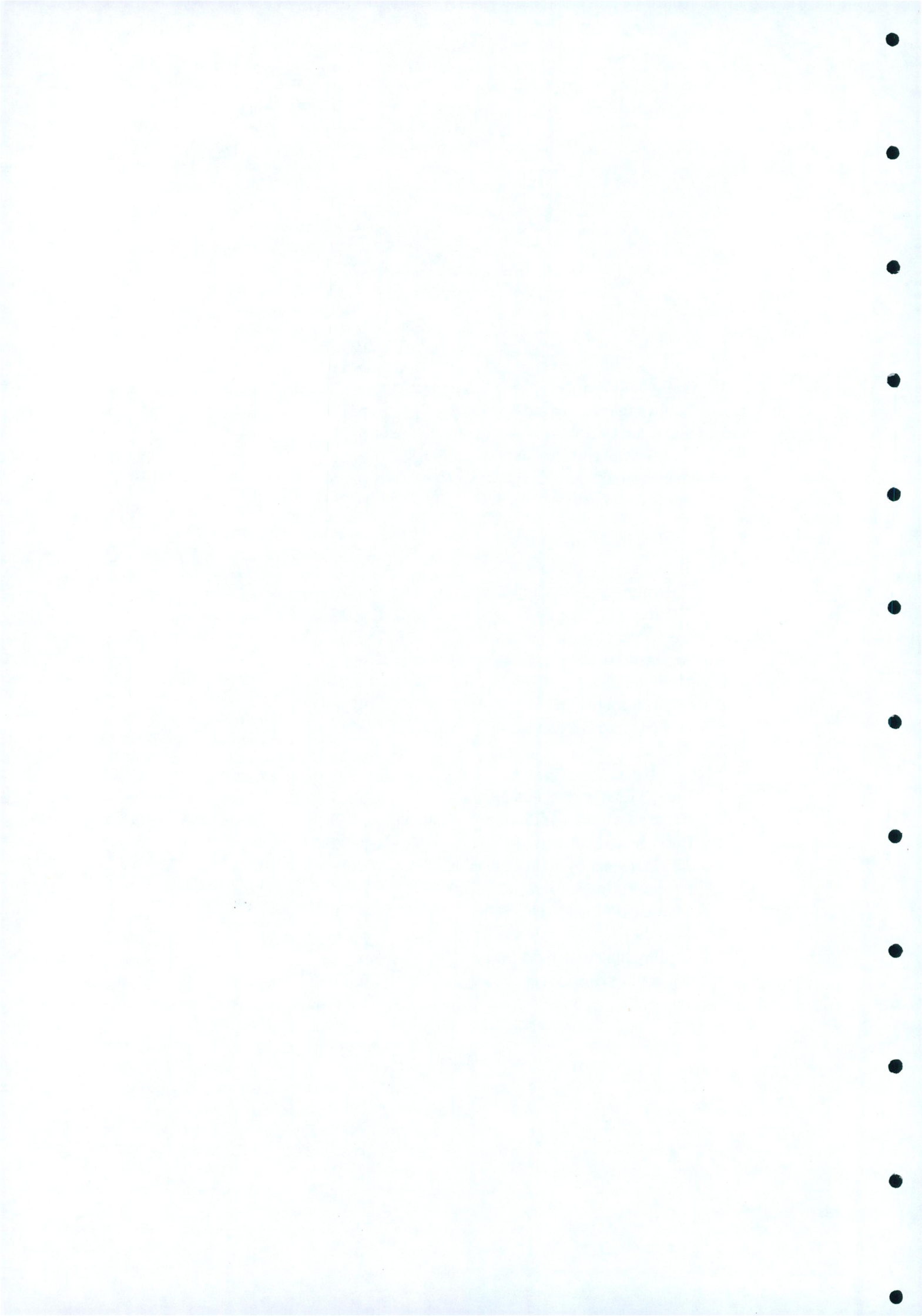
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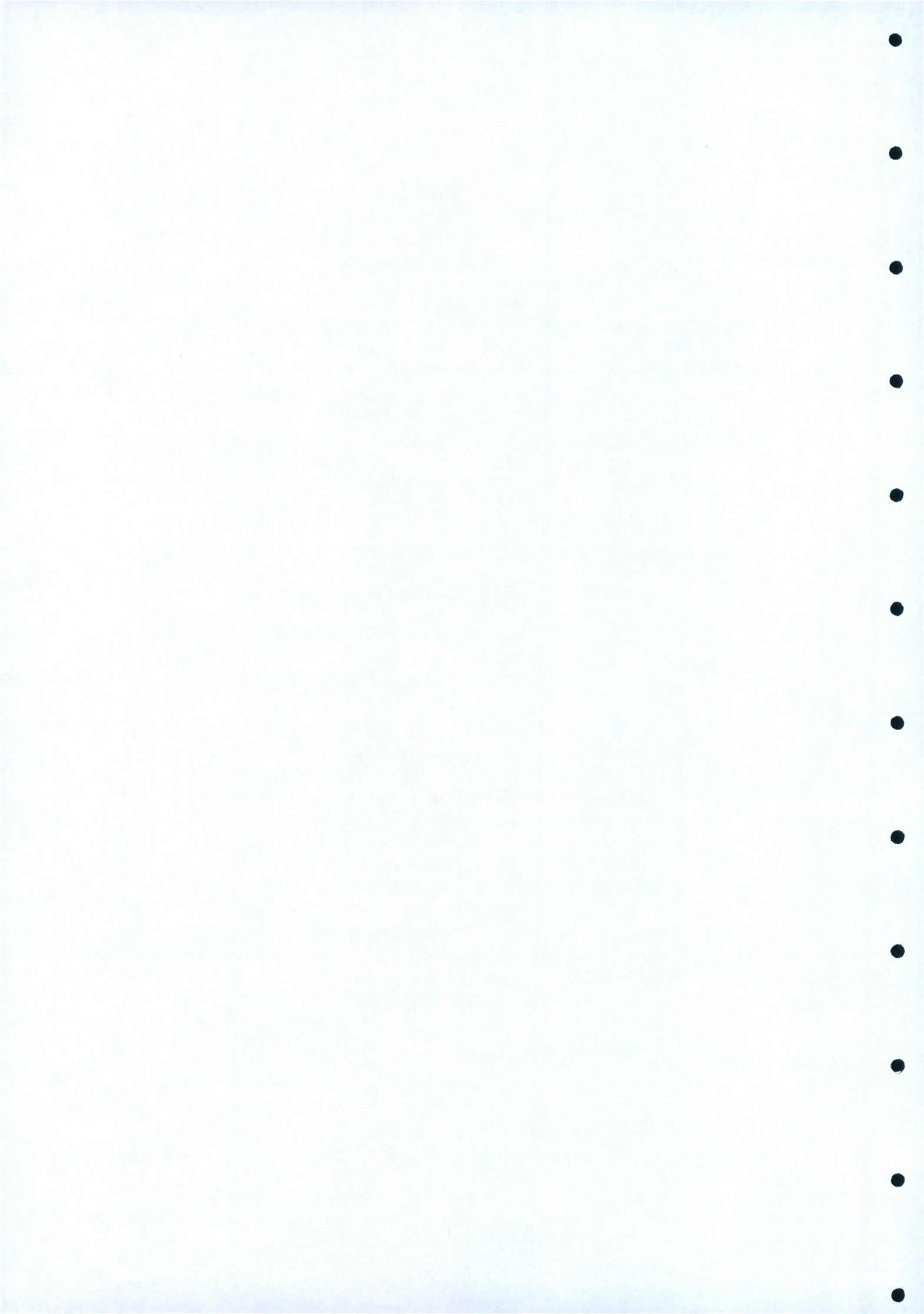


INTRODUCTION.

Cinema has always looked to other media, particularly literature, for source and reference material. As a result, a vast quantity of film scripts are based on, or adapted from, literature. Such translation of written word to moving image necessarily involves a re-interpretation and has fuelled many debates on whether the adaptation of literature to film is a successful practice.

Evidently, the first major problem with cinematic adaptation is a practical one. As many novels portray the inner world of their characters, the use of voice-over to illustrate this has often proved ineffectual. George Linden notes in *Screening the Novel* :

For a film for to be an adequate rendition of a novel, it must not only present the actions and events of the novel but also capture the attitudes and subjective tones toward those events. This the novelist can do quite freely by using description or point of view. It is much more difficult for the director, since he must either discover or recreate visual equivalents for the narrator's evaluations if the tone of a work is lost, the work is lost ; but the tone of a novel must be rendered in an aural / visual patterning instead of by the use of descriptive dialogue or other narrative device. The author's intellectual viewpoint must become the director's emotional stand-point of course, if the director succeeds in his effort, he will have produced not a copy of the novel, but a new object. (Miller, 1980, p. 14)

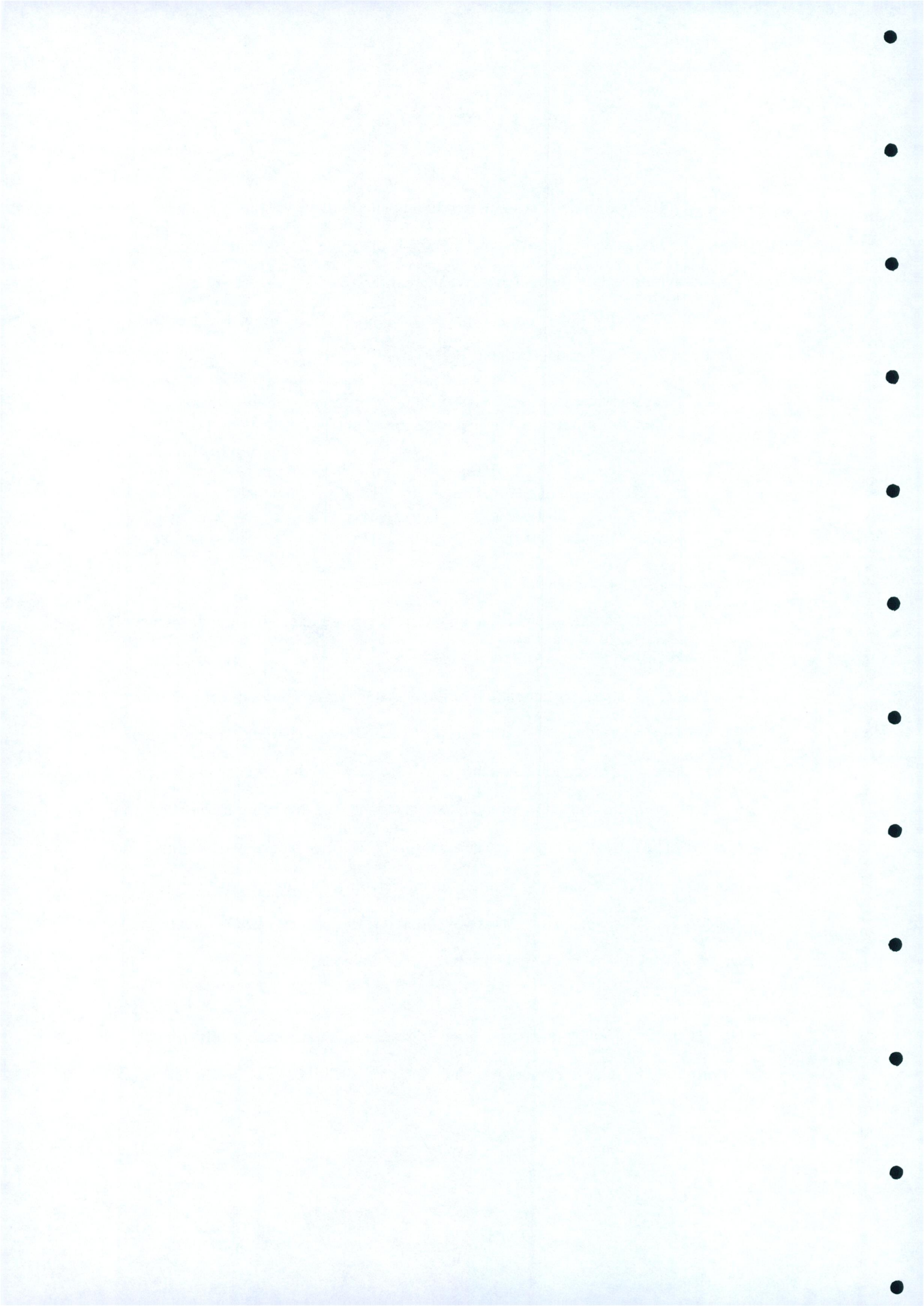


However, George Linden does not present any alternative solutions. The one major difference between novels and cinema is the camera. The camera occupies a position outside the film and can give the viewer a variety of different insights into, and perspectives on, what is happening within the film. Bruce Morissette, in *Screening the Novel*, suggests that :

The camera becomes 'an existence' that appropriates and becomes in the film a point of view outside any mental content within a character, or narrator, or neutral 'third observer. The point of view passes in a way to the spectator himself, who becomes with the aid of the aid of the camera, a new kind of fictional God : one who, if not omniscient, can nevertheless move about with seemingly magic powers (Miller, 1980, p. 15)

There are different ways in which a director may choose to adapt a novel. Michael Klein and Gillian Parker in *Screening the Novel* cite three different types of adaptation. The first, the adaptation of the classic novel, retains a direct link with the story line and remains as faithful as possible to the novel. An example of this is *Tom Jones*. The second retains the core of the narrative but extensively re-interprets or deconstructs the original text, an example of this being *Barry Lyndon*. The third uses the source as a base from which to work loosely - thus producing a film thematically similar, but entirely different, to the novel. *Apocalypse Now*, which was extensively altered from Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* is an example of this category of adaptation.

Novels are produced by one person for a relatively small audience, whilst films are produced by a large number of people for a mass audience. Most films have a



separate director, producer, and script writer, thus introducing three different, but very prominent viewpoints. Whereas a novel is always the sole product of the author, this is rarely so in the case of the film director.

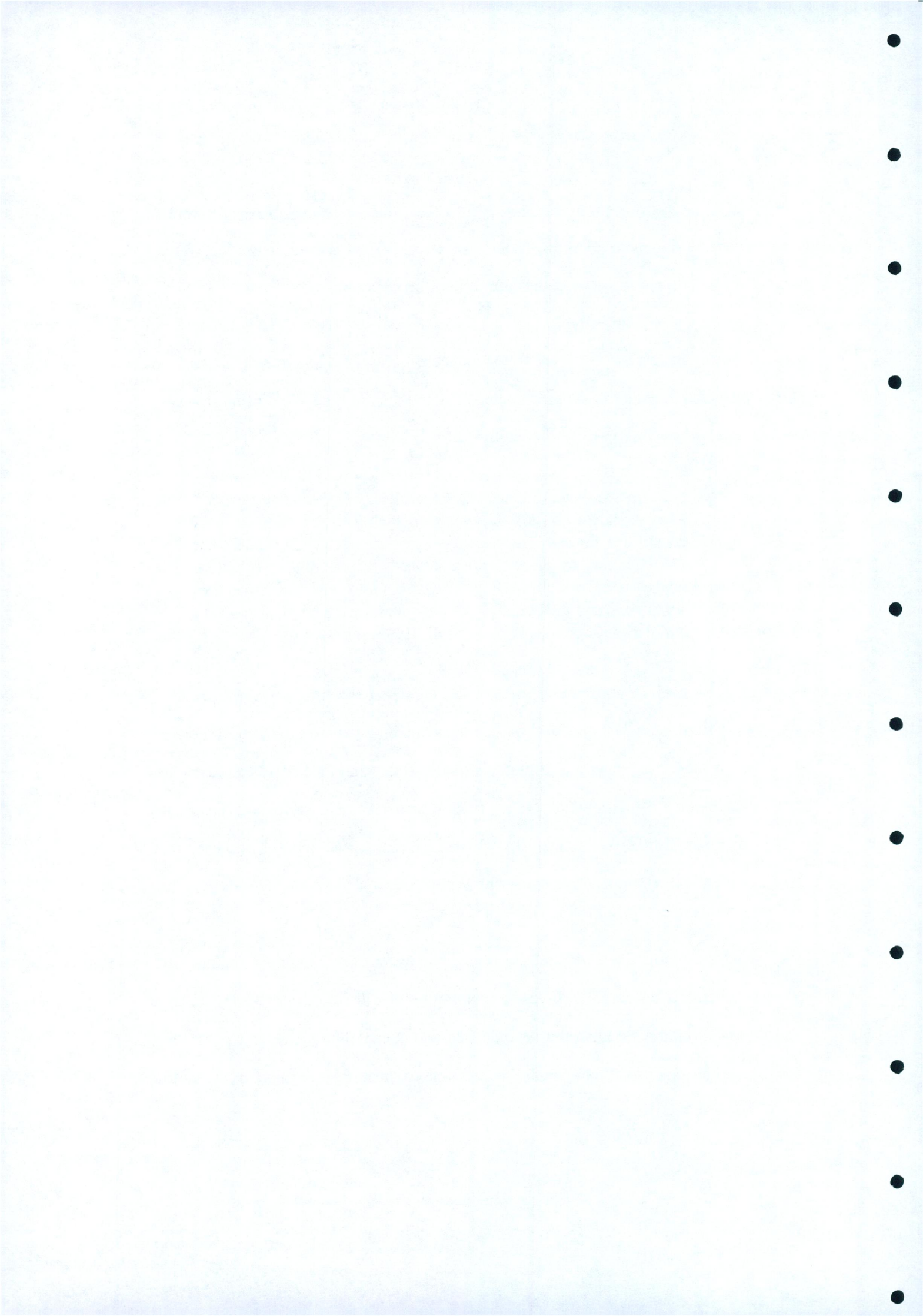
During the early 1950s, a newly launched film review *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1951) re-popularised a theory which dated back to the era of the silent film. It was claimed, according to John Caughie :

that cinema had obtained an equivalence to literature, or any other art form of 'profundity and meaning'. Second, that it is constituted through a new and unique language ; and third, that this situation affords directors a means of personal expression, that is, a form within which an artist may translate his (or her) obsessions and is not simply a mass art form which deals only in popular pleasures. (Caughie [Ed], 1995, p. 39)

By the methods chosen to depict the script a director could control the production of a film, making it his / her sole artistic product. One such director, or auteur, as it was termed, Francois Truffaut, claimed that through the use of *mise-en-scene* (methods of film making such as lighting, scenery, acting style), a director could make the film a work of art. He believed the real artists / auteurs of the cinema were the directors and not the script writers.

After the emergence of auteurism the gap between the director and the novelist narrowed considerably. It was now possible for a director to not simply adapt a novel, but to blend literature and cinema and then, having reached a point of equilibrium, project this on the screen. One of the most prominent directors to

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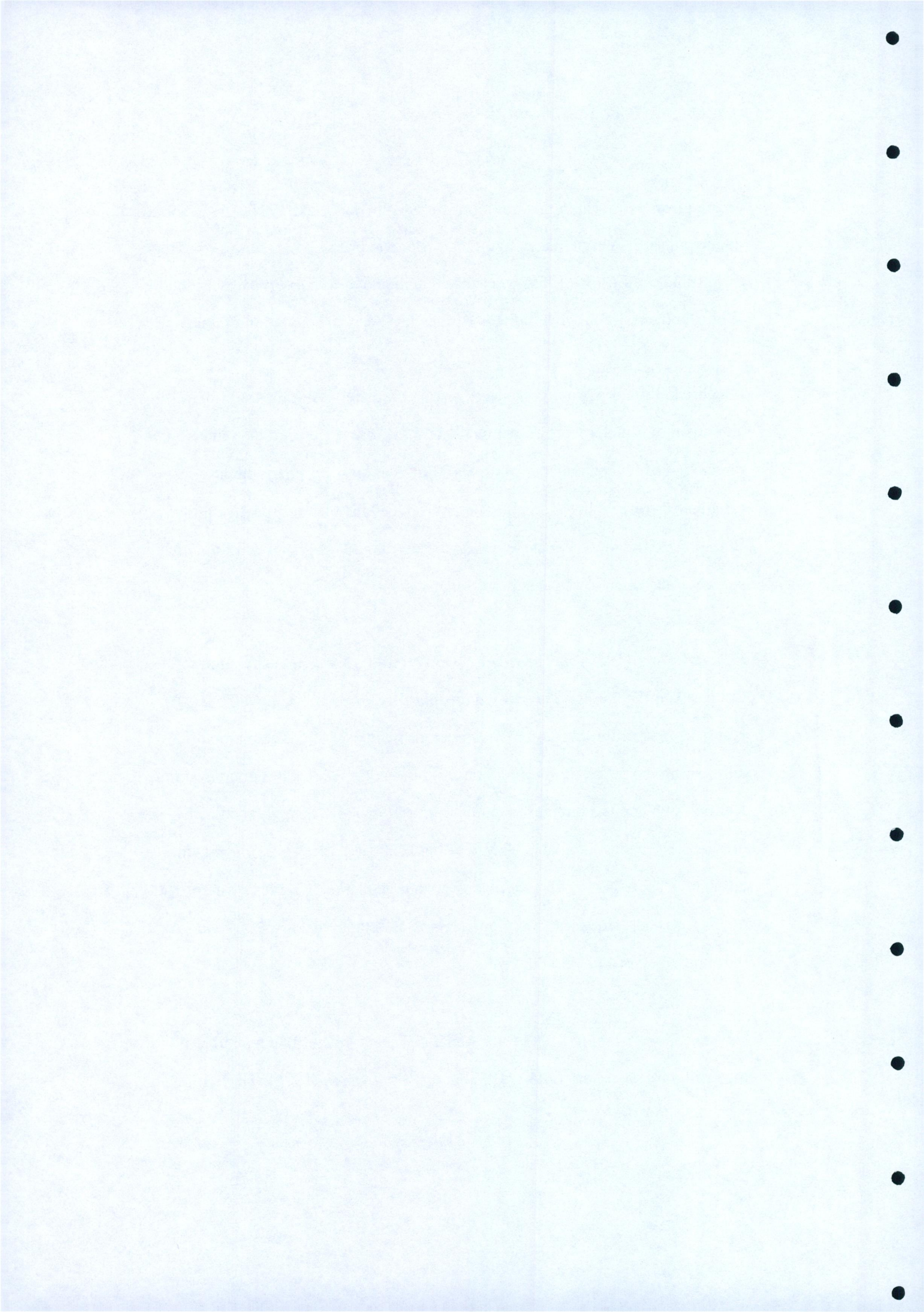


emerge from America in this tradition was Stanley Kubrick. After three short documentaries Kubrick began to direct, script and produce his own films. His third film, *The Killing* (1956), was based on the novel *Clean Break* by Lionel White, and every film he has directed since has been an adaptation of a novel.

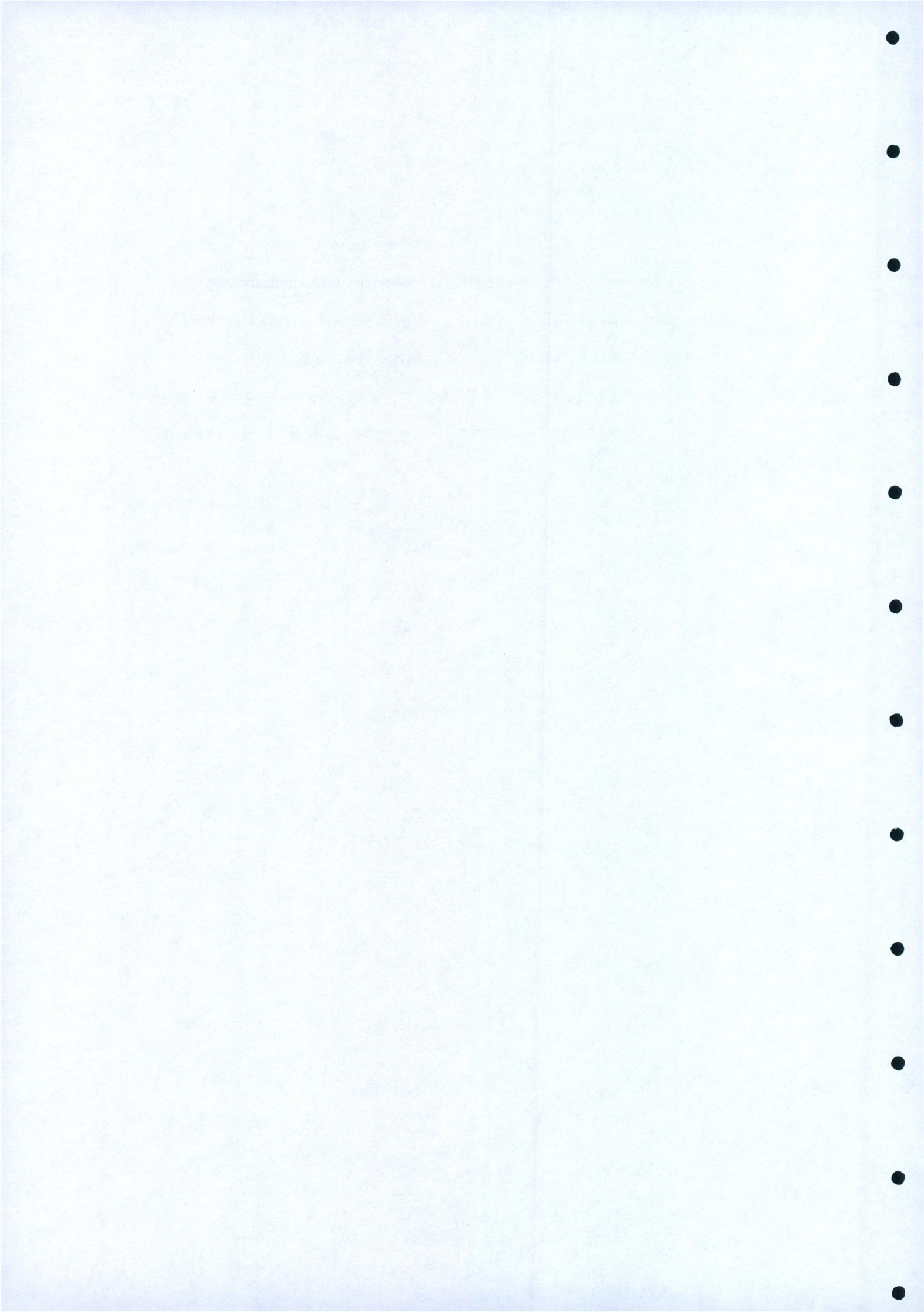
Kubrick, though always considered an auteur, differs from the traditional auteurism of directors like Jean-Luc Godard. Kubrick, more so than most other directors, introduced metaphor into his films. Though working with an established work of literature, he often introduced his own perspective into the film, producing, in many cases, a more powerful and insightful work than the source from which it was originally adapted.

Paths of Glory (1957) was based on the novel of the same name by Humphrey Cobb. Cobb's novel is a generally un insightful, unmetaphoric novel, but Kubrick's adaptation introduces the director's own powerful metaphors, often eliminating the necessity for dialogue at all in the film. This is a good example of Kubrick's power as a director to extract more from a text than was originally present. The same could also be said of his 1968 film, *2001 : A Space Odyssey*, based on a short story, *The Sentinel*, by Arthur C. Clarke. Kubrick's interpretation of Clarke's short story was so unique and inspired that it caused Clarke to re-write the short story as a novel with sequels.

Two excellent examples of Kubrick's auteurism and insightful adaptation of major literary works are *Lolita* (1962) and *Barry Lyndon* (1975). These films in



particular stand out, as the novels, unlike Cobb's *Paths of Glory* or Stephen King's *The Shining*, were renowned literary works by an accomplished contemporary writer, Vladimir Nabokov, in the case of *Lolita*, and by an established classical writer, William Makepeace Thackeray, in the case of *Barry Lyndon*. Not only were these films significant in his film making career, but both relate very closely to each other as their process and techniques of production greatly informed one another.



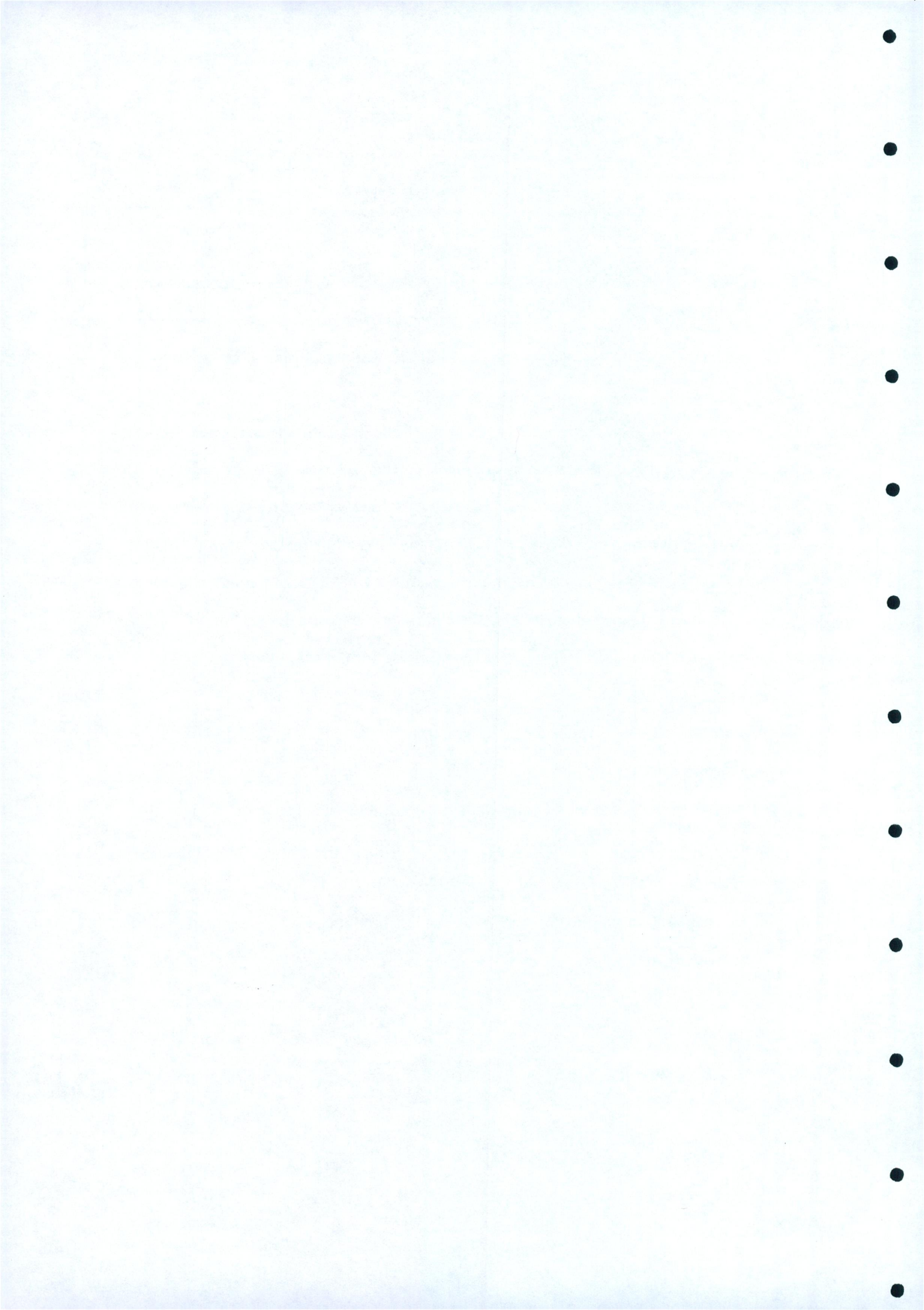
CHAPTER 1.

Vladimir Nabokov, born in Russia, made his name as an emigré writing in Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s. In the early 1940s he moved with his family to America where he became a university lecturer in literature and the Russian language.

Lolita's origins are as intricate as the novel itself. Whilst living in Paris in 1939, Nabokov penned the first vague notion of what would become *Lolita*. It was a short story, *The Enchanter*, about a forty year-old Parisian with a secret passion for pre-pubescent girls. While living with the girl's ailing mother, he plans to take advantage of the child after her mother's demise. Unable to go through with his plan in an old hotel, after realising the child's innocence, he throws himself in front of a moving car. This story is the basis for the plot of *Lolita*.

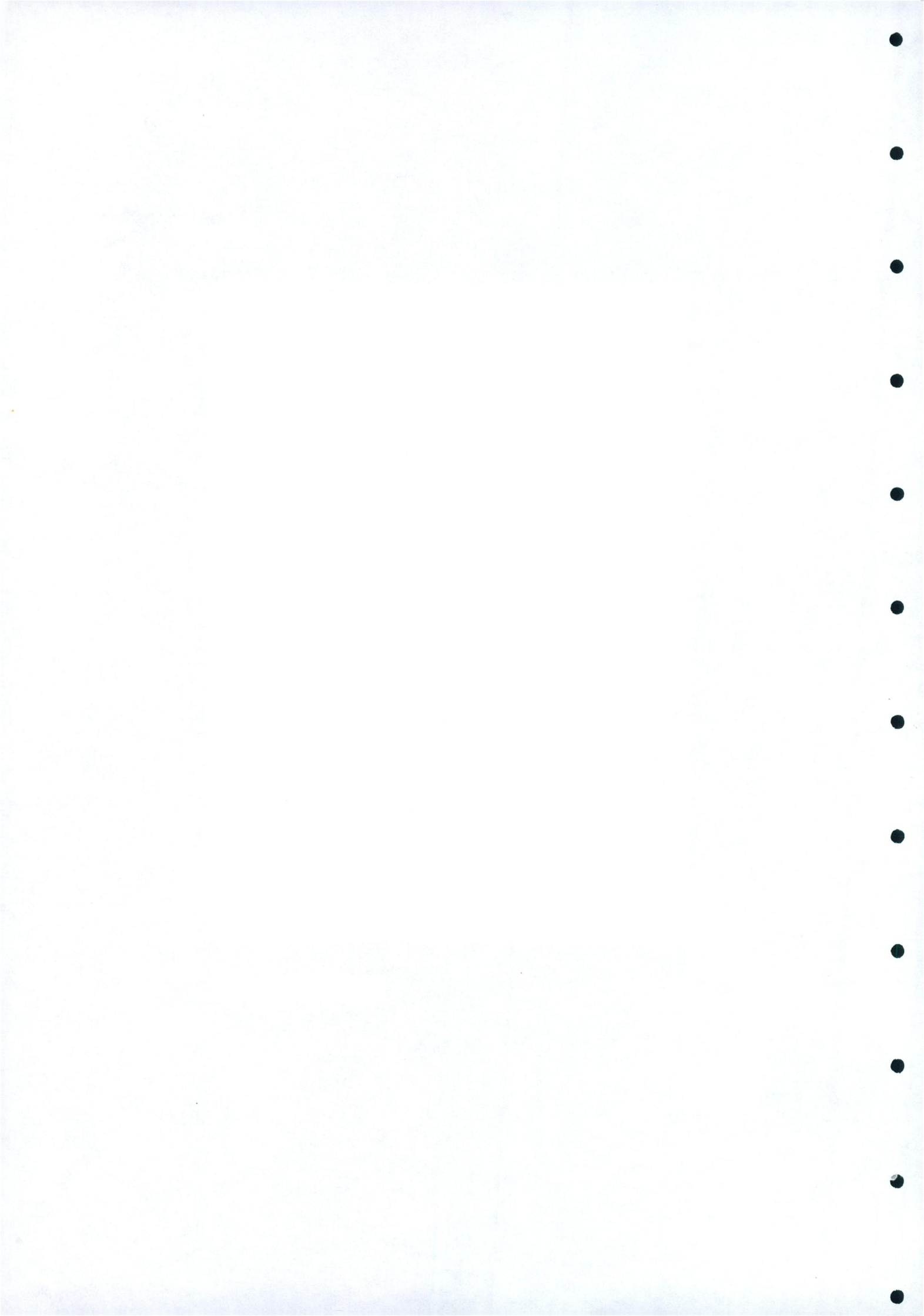
After toying with the idea for many years, Nabokov began working on *Lolita* during a summer vocation from Cornell University in 1951. Amidst other minor writing projects and frequent lepidoptery expeditions he began to develop the structure of *Lolita*. The extensive research which Nabokov undertook while restructuring the novel made *Lolita* a richly textured and intricately textured masterpiece. It was this intricacy which made the cinematic adaptation all the more difficult.

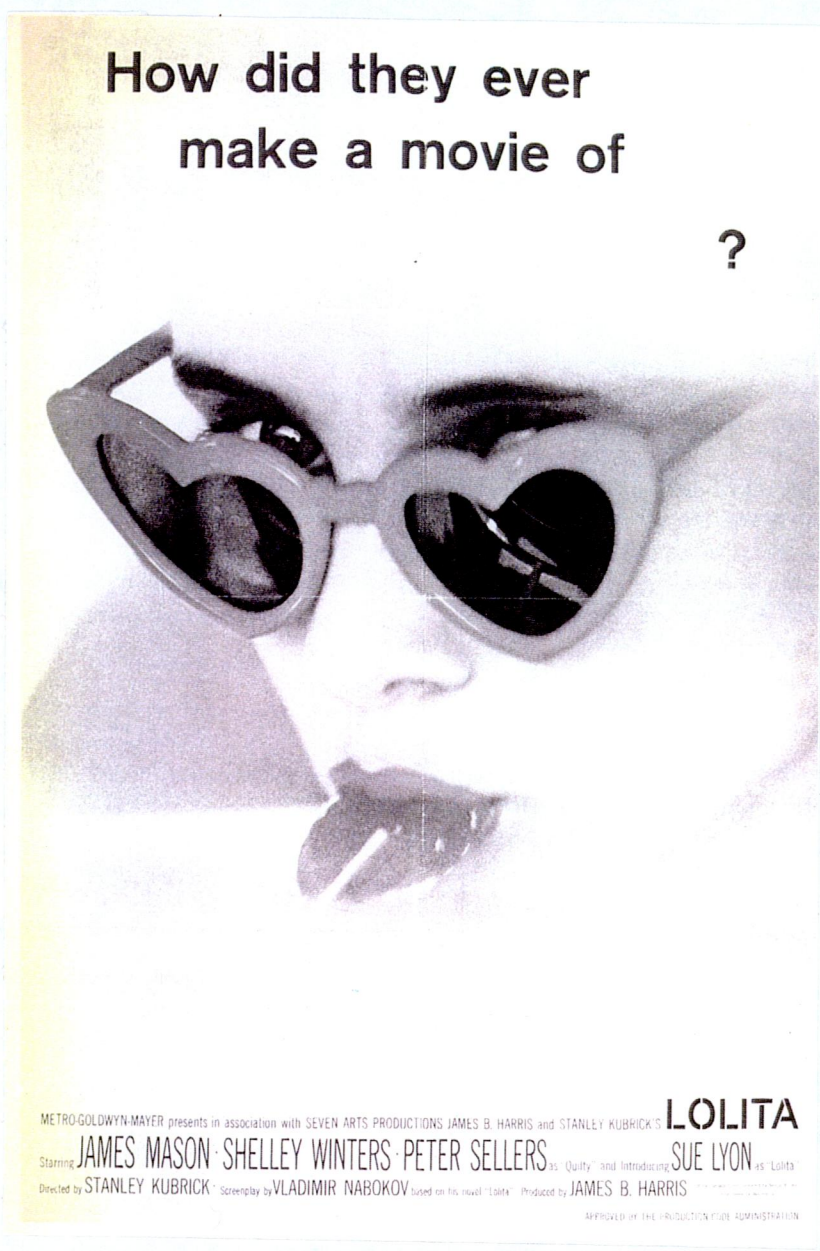
Commencing with books such as *Sexual Maturation and the Physical Growth of Girls Age Six to Nineteen*, Nabokov scoured newspapers for articles on sex



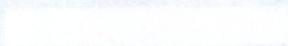


Vladimir Nabokov





Lolita : Film Poster



crimes and killings, studied the history of the Colt revolver (Humbert's eventual weapon), read reports on barbiturates and Italian comedy, read teenage magazines and noted jukebox song titles. He even took bus journeys to overhear the schoolgirl slang which would eventually issue so fluently from Lolita's mouth.

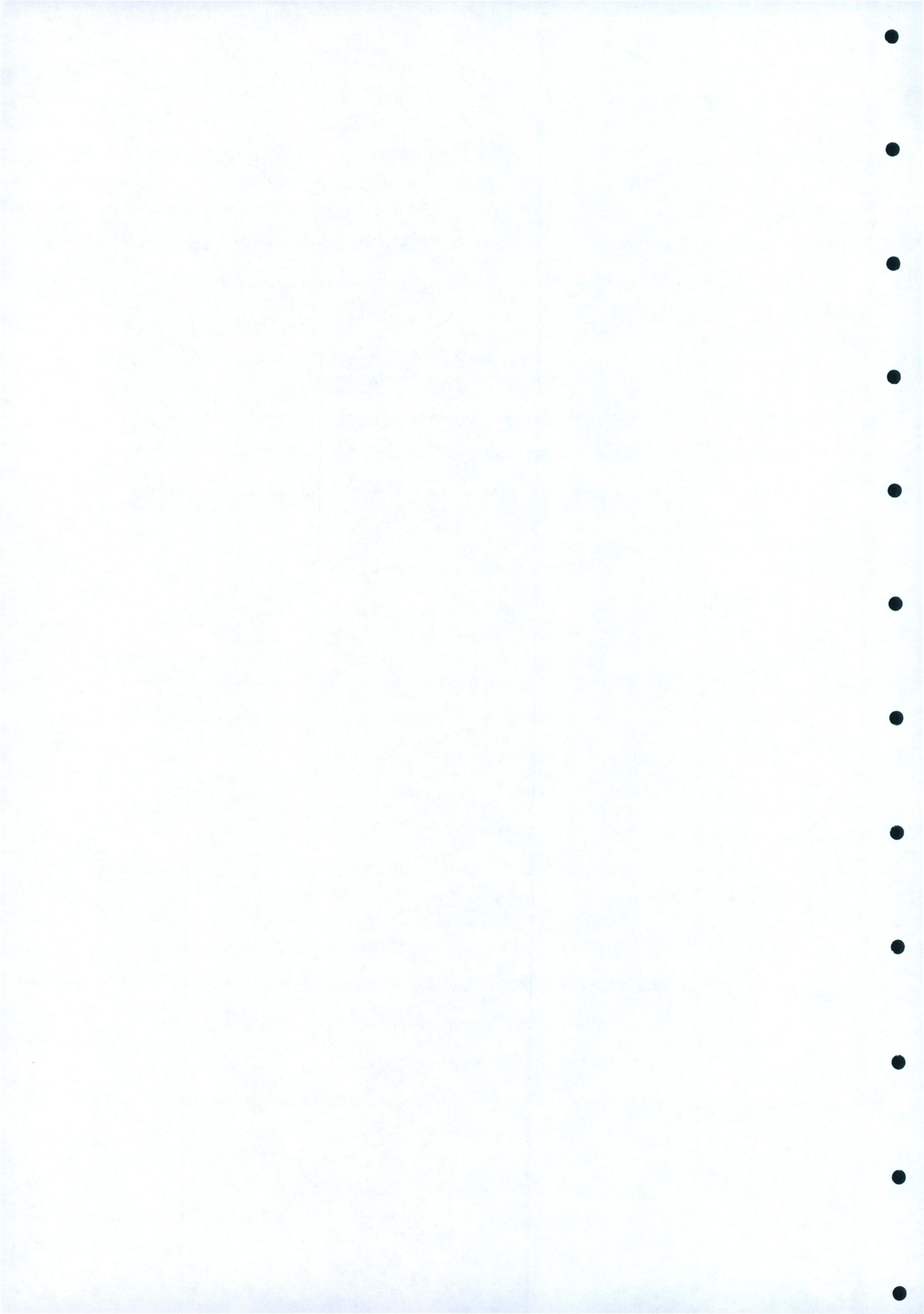
The portrayal of Lolita's character is interesting because it is the product of one of the earliest detailed studies into teenage culture, for at the time of writing, the early 1950s, the teenager and teenage culture had just been 'born' under the fall-out from the mushroom cloud. How ironic that this information was gathered for a character who is seduced and abused by her environment.

THE STRUCTURE OF *LOLITA*.

A complexly structured novel, comparable to *Ulysses*, *Lolita* amalgamates a basic detective story, a vast description of the culture and countryside of America, a highly erotic storyline (particularly for 1955) and an in-depth study of human character and nature. It is tightly woven in an intricate yet fluid prose style.

Instead of the linearity of the conventional realist text, Nabokov layered his novel with hints and clues as to its eventual outcome and false leads for the reader to follow, but most importantly there is a constant confirmation of the character's eventual fate. (Humbert invokes his 'McFate' throughout, naming it Aubery McFate. He is actually referring to Quilty, who will eventually take Lolita away from him and whom he eventually murders, thus sealing his own, and Quilty's, fate). Though Humbert only informs us at the end of the novel that it is Quilty he

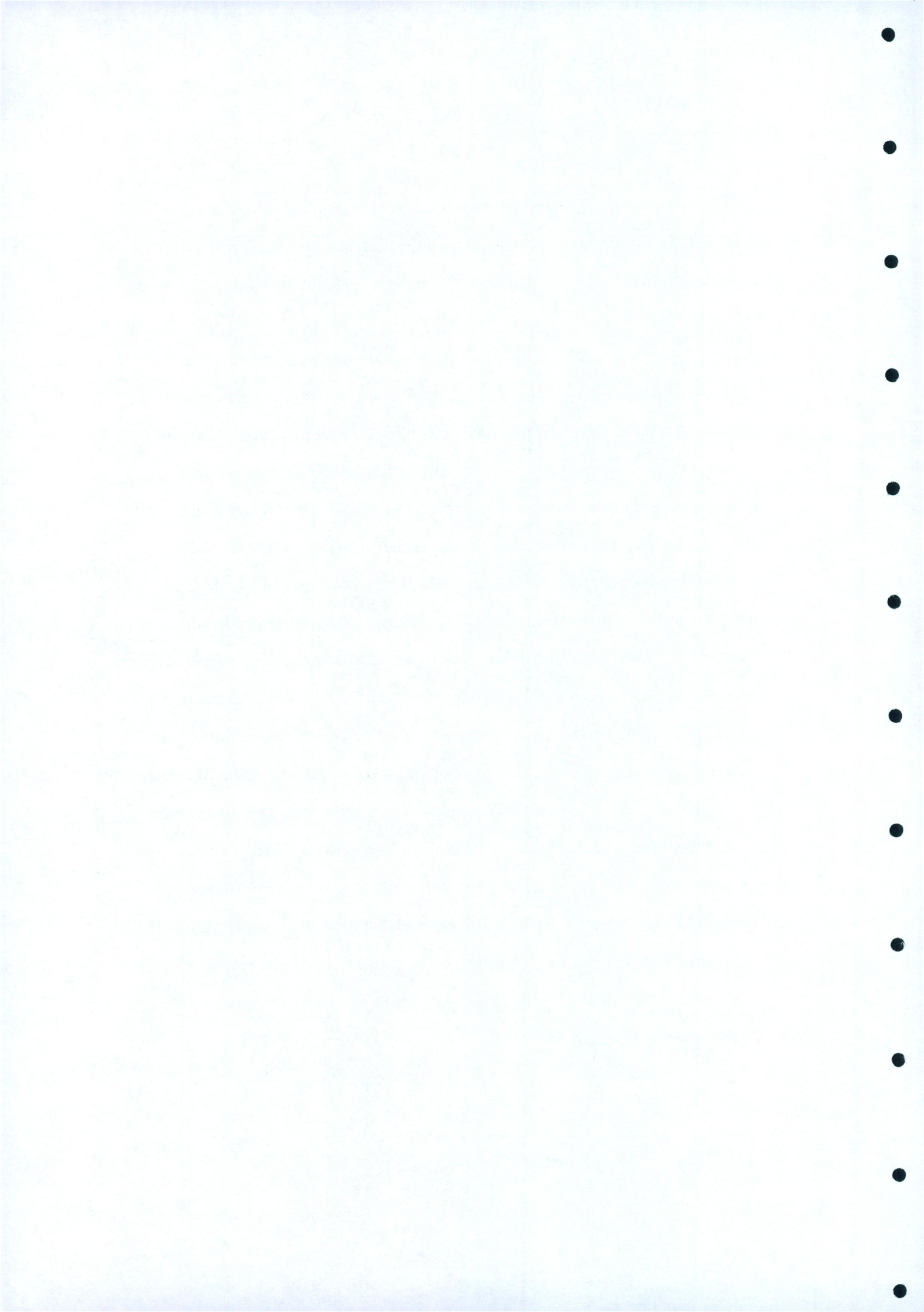
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has killed, it was a combined decision between Nabokov and Kubrick to have Quilty's killing moved to the beginning of the film, thereby replacing the question 'Whom did Humbert kill ?' with the question 'Why did Humbert kill ?'

Though Nabokov wished the novel to be published anonymously - while at the same time naming the peripheral character, Vivian Darkbloom, with an anagram of his own name - when he eventually did publish *Lolita* under his own name it was received rather calmly by both critics and public alike. It was not until Graham Greene listed it as one of the books of the year that 'L'affaire Lolita', as it became known, began. The book was consequently banned in France and England and it looked as if publication in America would be impossible. The main objection was its erotic passages, contained in the opening one hundred pages. However, it transpired that many of the detractors had not read any of it ; those who had read it concentrated only on those erotic passages. After many years in and out of court it was eventually passed. However, the censors of the screen were more restrictive than those of the page. As *Lolita* is so layered with metaphor, clue, twist, comedy and drama, Kubrick's film would ultimately have to be a more diluted translation, the extent of which would not be fully realised until he had dealt with the censors, who prohibited him from using any visually erotic scenes. Later he remarked that had he known what limitations would be placed upon him he would not have embarked on the project. Eroticism, or rather the lack of it, is the one major criticism against the film. When questioned on the subject, Kubrick remarked :

..... /



Naturally I regret that the film could not be more erotic. The eroticism of the story serves a very important purpose in the book, which was lacking in the film : it obscured any hint that Humbert loved Lolita. One was entirely satisfied to believe that he was erotically obsessed with her, and one believed his repeated comments that it would be necessary to get rid of her when she was no longer a nymphet. It was very important to delay an awareness of his love until the end of the story. I am afraid this was all too obvious in the film. (Walker, 1972, p 28)

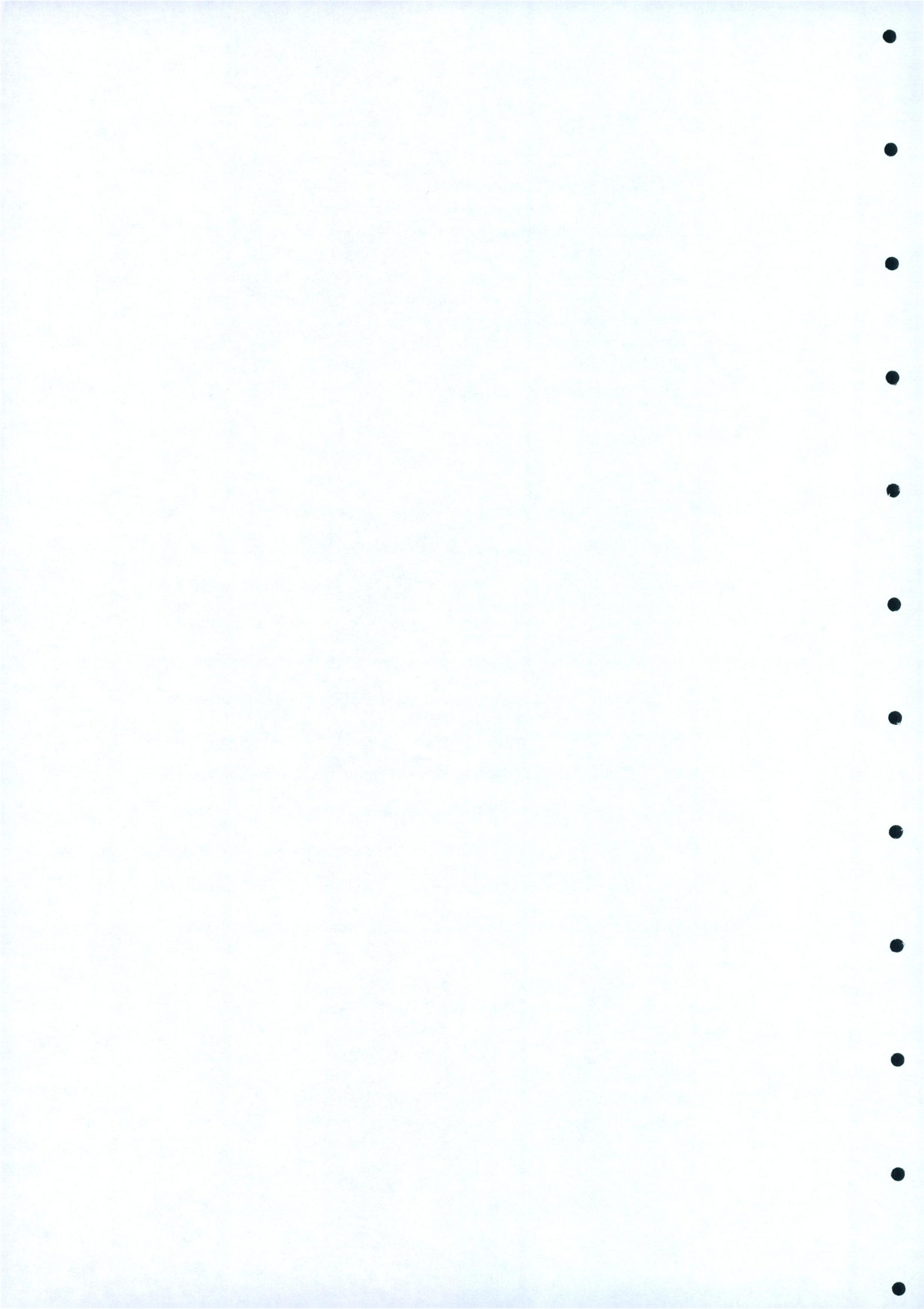
THE NYMPHET

Though often mistaken as Humbert's or Nabokov's creation, the 'Nymphet' has a long history. Classic romanticism has always contained elements of child pornography, or of the sexualised image of the child. Donatello's *David* (1430) would have been viewed in a manner similar to *Lolita*, had it been produced in the 1950s. The tradition of romanticism has always viewed the female as pure and untouched. Thus writers and painters often produced images of young women / girls, historically posed, revealing the naked flesh. It is known that Lewis Carroll photographed young girls. It is also known that paintings such as *The Young Sea Nymph* (1870) by Jourdan which shows a young girl lying naked on a beach, or *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* (1878) by Mary Cassatt, which depicts a girl reclining in an armchair, with one arm perched high behind her head, similar to the classic 'Reclining Nude' pose, suggest a definite sexual nature in the image of the child.

'The Nymphet', as Humbert postulates in the novel, finds that :

Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occurs 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, 1959, p. 16)

..... /



Notice how these nymphets 'reveal their true nature' rather than Humbert projecting such attributes upon them, thus exonerating himself entirely from any blame. Humbert's detailed description is similar to the manner in which a lepidopterist might describe a rare breed of butterfly, which he has discovered and is about to pin and mount. For this is all part of Humbert's game. Many readers have fallen for his trap and felt sorry for poor Hum, whom Nabokov saw as a monster who only managed to 'appear' touching. This charming demon even goes so far as to suggest a cycle of Nymphets, for when Lolita loses her 'Nymphetness' she can bear him another nymph.

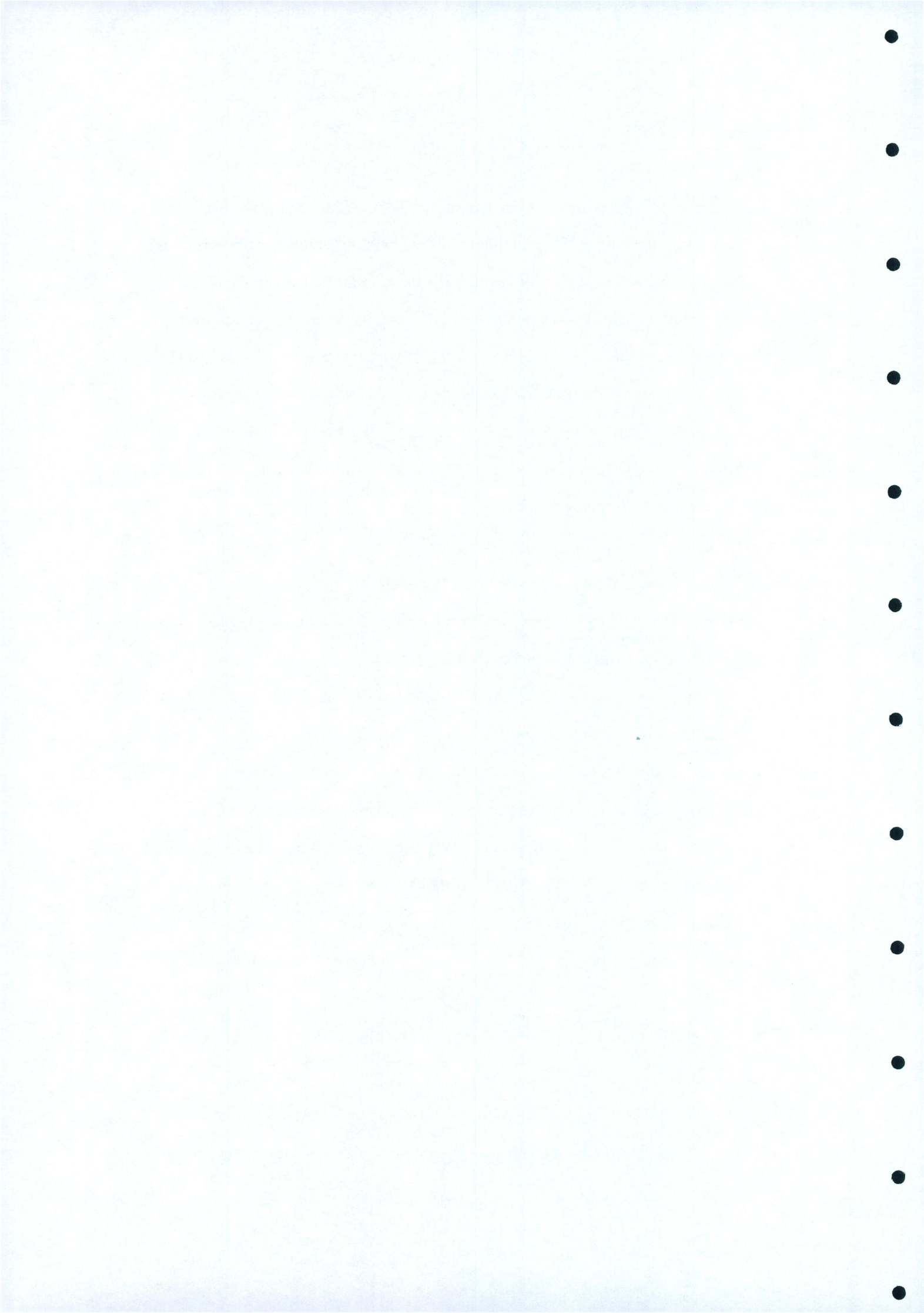
This cold, calculating and indifferent lust, which drives Humbert, proved difficult to film without being too explicit or direct. Kubrick originally planned Humbert's description as a voice-over, accompanied by images of ordinary schoolgirls modelling clothes in their natural environment, but the censors deemed this too suggestive, and, far from putting ideas in viewers' minds, they wanted any vague hints of nympholepsy to remain firm peculiarities of Humbert's condition. Kubrick had to compensate for the lack of eroticism with subtlety and visual metaphor. During the opening sequence a man's hand (Humbert's) holds a child's foot and paints the toe nails affectionately. This is to suggest the "pathetic fixation of the grown up man who is enslaved by the child he loves".

(Walker, 1968, p. 172)

THE METAPHOR OF 'THE GAME' IN *LOLITA*.

After an initial refusal Nabokov wrote the screen play. Quilty toys and teases with Humbert throughout the novel without Humbert's knowing it. As a result the

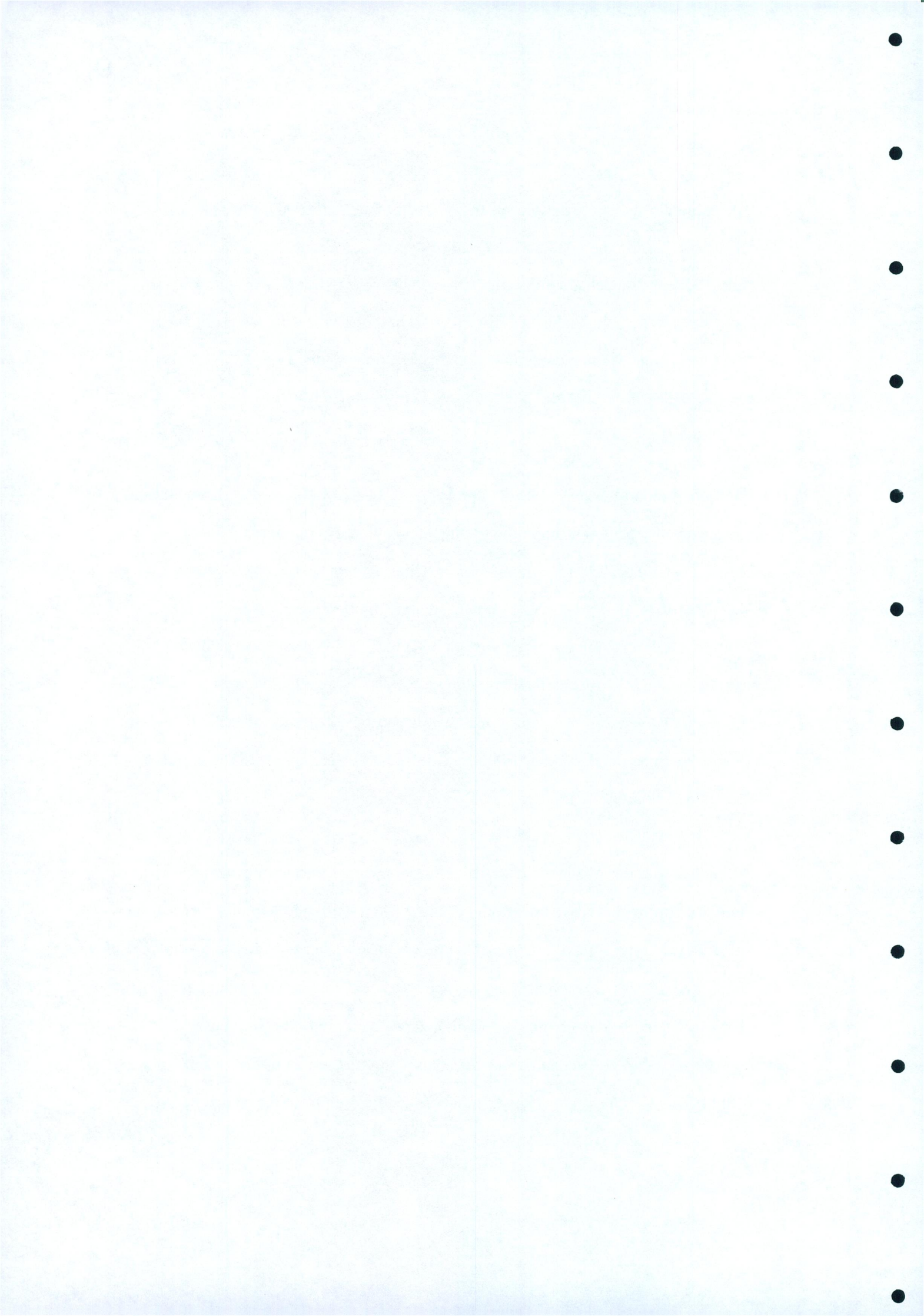
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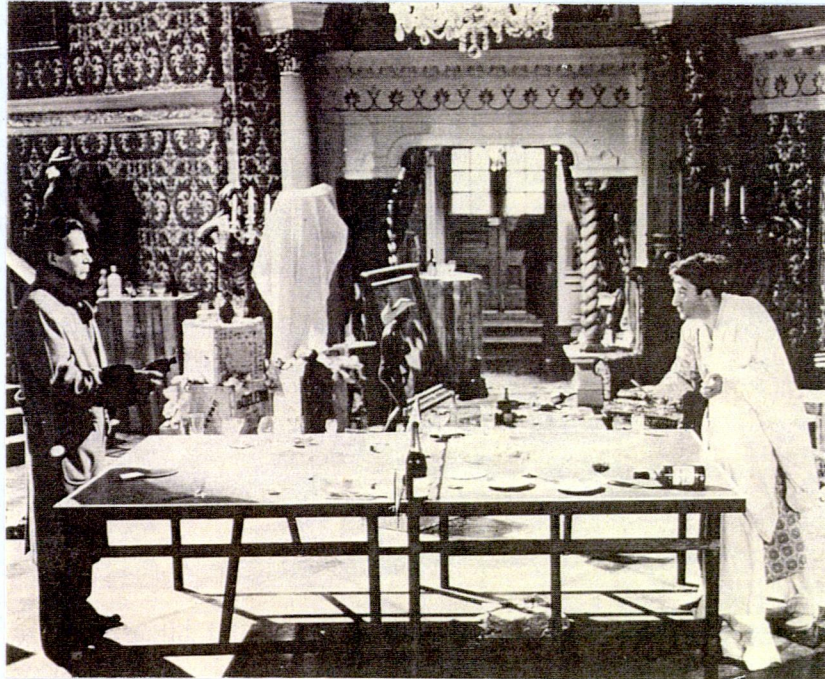


metaphor of 'the game' surfaces as the most dramatic tool used by Nabokov and Kubrick. During the opening sequence of the film, as Humbert discovers a drugged and debauched Quilty in his Xanaduesque mansion, their confrontation is bridged with a huge table-tennis table which, though it seems insignificant at the time, is one of the most poignant and loaded metaphors used in the film. It suggests the notion that all Humbert's and Quilty's encounters are, or resemble, to some degree, a game.

Before Humbert has the chance to confront Quilty about Lolita he is distracted and persuaded to play Roman ping-pong. Though this is not his real intention, by picking up the bat and attempting to play, Humbert signals his compliance with Quilty's plans. Quilty is used to game-playing, Humbert clearly is not. It is significant that the choice of game is table tennis. Tennis is an accurate metaphor for Lolita, so, how fitting that her two abductors should struggle over a miniaturised version of a tennis court, (similar to Jack Torrance over the model of the maze at the overlook), before both engage in the endgame scenario which concludes with Quilty's death.

When, in an effort to seduce Humbert, Charlotte Hayes sends Lo away, it is to a tennis camp, which Kubrick fittingly entitles 'Camp Climax'. 'Climax' has several meanings in this context. Firstly, at camp, Lolita loses her virginity to a young boy. This is her climax, both sexually and physically, as she now becomes the entirely sexualised that Humbert, Quilty, and the viewer, have previously perceived her to be. Secondly, this can be seen as the climax in Lolita and Humbert's relationship, as after Humbert collects Lolita from the camp she





Quilty and Humbert playing table tennis



Lolita suggests her new 'game'



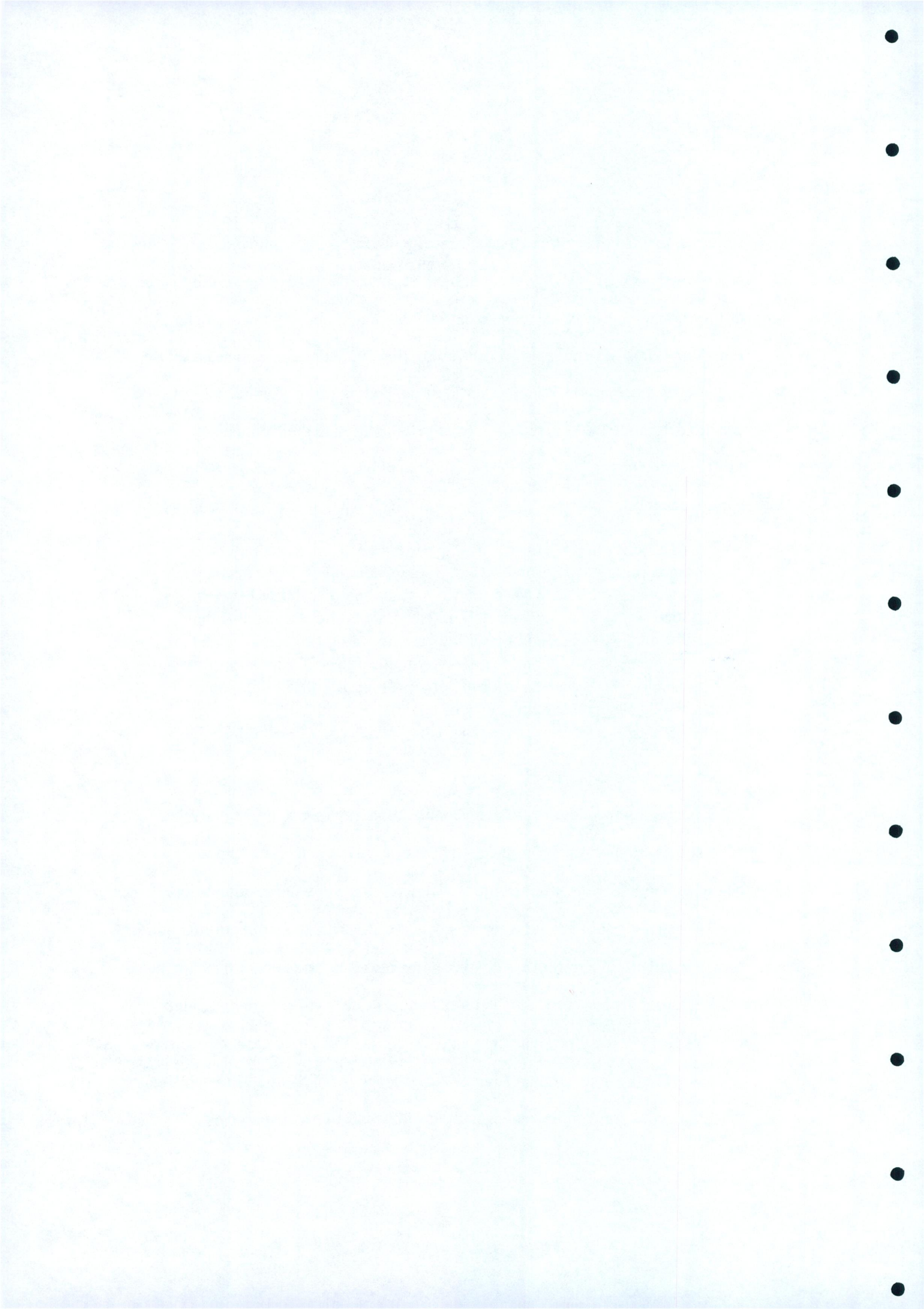
suggests, that to consummate their physical relationship, they play the new 'game' she learned at camp. Thirdly, it suggests the climax of Humbert and Quilty's fate, as they begin their last fatal game over the table-tennis set. By intentionally renaming Camp 'Q' (in the novel) as Camp 'Climax', Kubrick intimates a subtle, suggestive undercurrent, which will run throughout the film. 'Tennis' may also be used to determine the differences between Humbert's and Quilty's feelings for Lolita. In the novel, Humbert observes Lolita playing tennis. He describes the experience thus :

My Lolita had a way of raising her bent left knee at the ample and springy start of the service cycle when there would develop and hang in the sun for a second a vital web of balance between toed foot, pristine armpit, burnished arm and far back-flung racquet, as she smiled up with gleaming teeth at the small globe suspended so high in the zenith of the powerful and graceful cosmos she had created for the express purpose of falling upon it with a clean resounding crack of her golden whip.

(Nabokov, 1959, pp. 231-232)

After pondering the aforementioned action, Humbert laments not having filmed her. This is another pivotal connection between the novel and the film, for Quilty begins to abduct Lolita at this point. As Humbert is wallowing in admiration, Quilty is stealing Lolita, and when he does, he forces her to star in pornographic films. Humbert fails to film Lolita playing tennis as he looks on with desire, but Quilty frames his lust for Lolita and acts out his desire, whilst Humbert is left with his flowery recollections. Kubrick uses tennis to illustrate Quilty's decisive seizure of Lolita and Humbert's failure to compete. Both the tennis match and the table tennis game, in the novel and the film respectively, are used as

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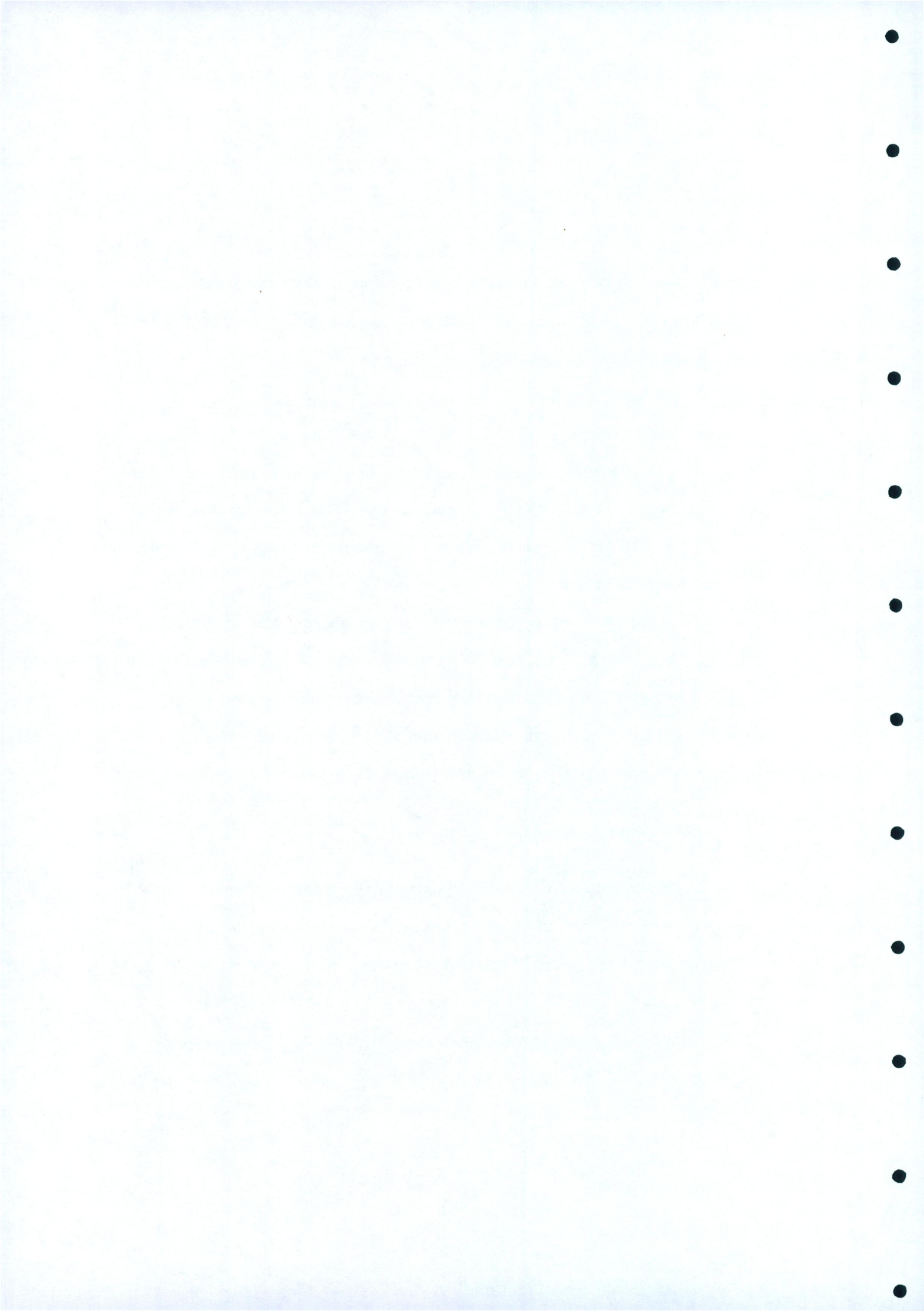


metaphors for Humbert's eventual love for Lolita and Quilty's eventual abduction and abuse of her. The table tennis scene was Kubrick's idea and after viewing the film Nabokov praised it highly.

The novel is Humbert's novel, in that the opinions proffered are his, accordingly the film is also Humbert's. He is the character with whom we sympathise. Just as he sees Charlotte as an awkward, crude and undesirable intrusion, so does the viewer ; her 'exit' is welcomed equally by both Humbert and the viewer. There is no doubt that Lolita is the sole sexualised character in the film. This is made apparent in her first scene, as she peers over her sun-glasses, stretched out in her bikini. The Farlow's suggestion of 'open minded' partner-swapping is deemed farcical by both Humbert and the viewer and is never seriously considered. However, we are treated to the same luxuries in the film as in the novel, for each time we are aware of Quilty's presence, (the picture in Lolita's bedroom, the dance, the enchanted hunters), Humbert is not.

One reason why Kubrick is so successful in adapting novels is because he thinks and approaches the work as a novelist, retaining total control over the project. The similarity of approach between Kubrick and Nabokov may be seen in the quotation below from Nabokov, which sounds to all intents and purposes exactly like the director Stanley Kubrick has become. When discussing how he would have approached film-making as a director, Nabokov stated that he would have :

..... /



advocated and applied a system of total tyranny, directing the play or the picture myself, choosing settings and costumes, terrorising the actors, mingling with them in the bit part of a guest, or ghost, prompting them, and, in a word, pervading the entire show with the will and art of one individual - for there is nothing in the world that I loath more than group activity, that communal bath where the hairy and the slippery mix in a multiplication of mediocrity.

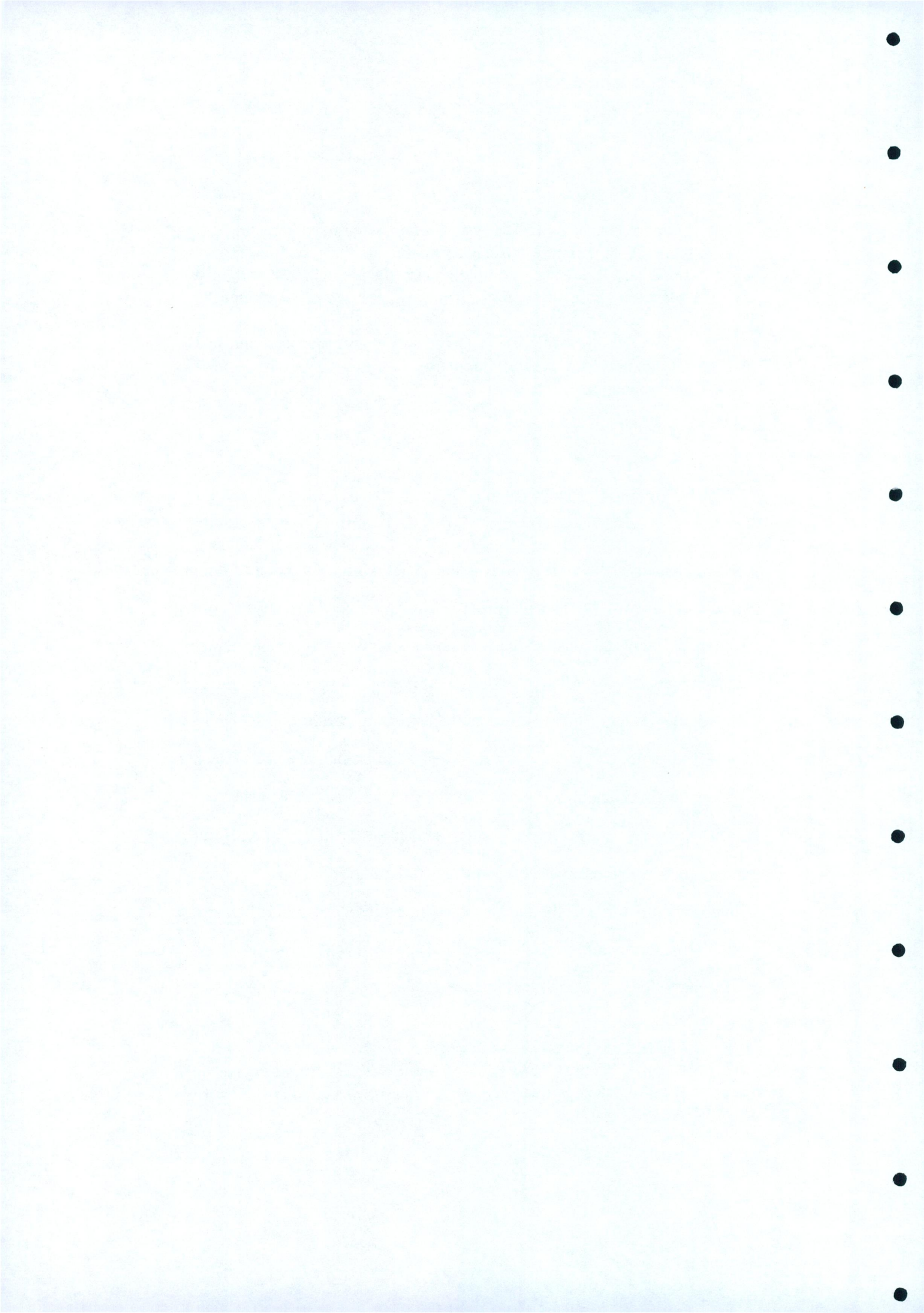
(Boyd, 1992, p. 409).

SUBVERTING THE NORMAL.

A key element of *Lolita* is its subversion of normality. By doing so it highlights the abnormality of the story which it places in what would be a very 'normal' setting. The unusual prose style of the novel is in itself 'abnormal'. The conventional novel is often preceded by a foreword. In *Lolita*, however, Nabokov incorporates a fictional foreword into the beginning of the novel. John Ray Jr, Ph.D, brings news of Humbert's death, thus announcing the death of the hero before the novel begins and subverting the conventional order of storytelling. Similarly, the opening sequence which depicts the death of Quilty, Humbert's alter-ego, is also the concluding sequence of the film - thus upsetting the typical linear structure expected by the viewer of the fifties. The novel's content, an adult's lust for a young girl, challenges the accepted codes of a love story. When referring to the central theme of the film, Kubrick stated :

The literary ground rules for a love story are such that it must end in either death or separation of the lovers and it must never be possible for the lovers to be permanently united. It is also essential that the

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Sue Lyon as Lolita



'Dr. Zemph' and Humbert

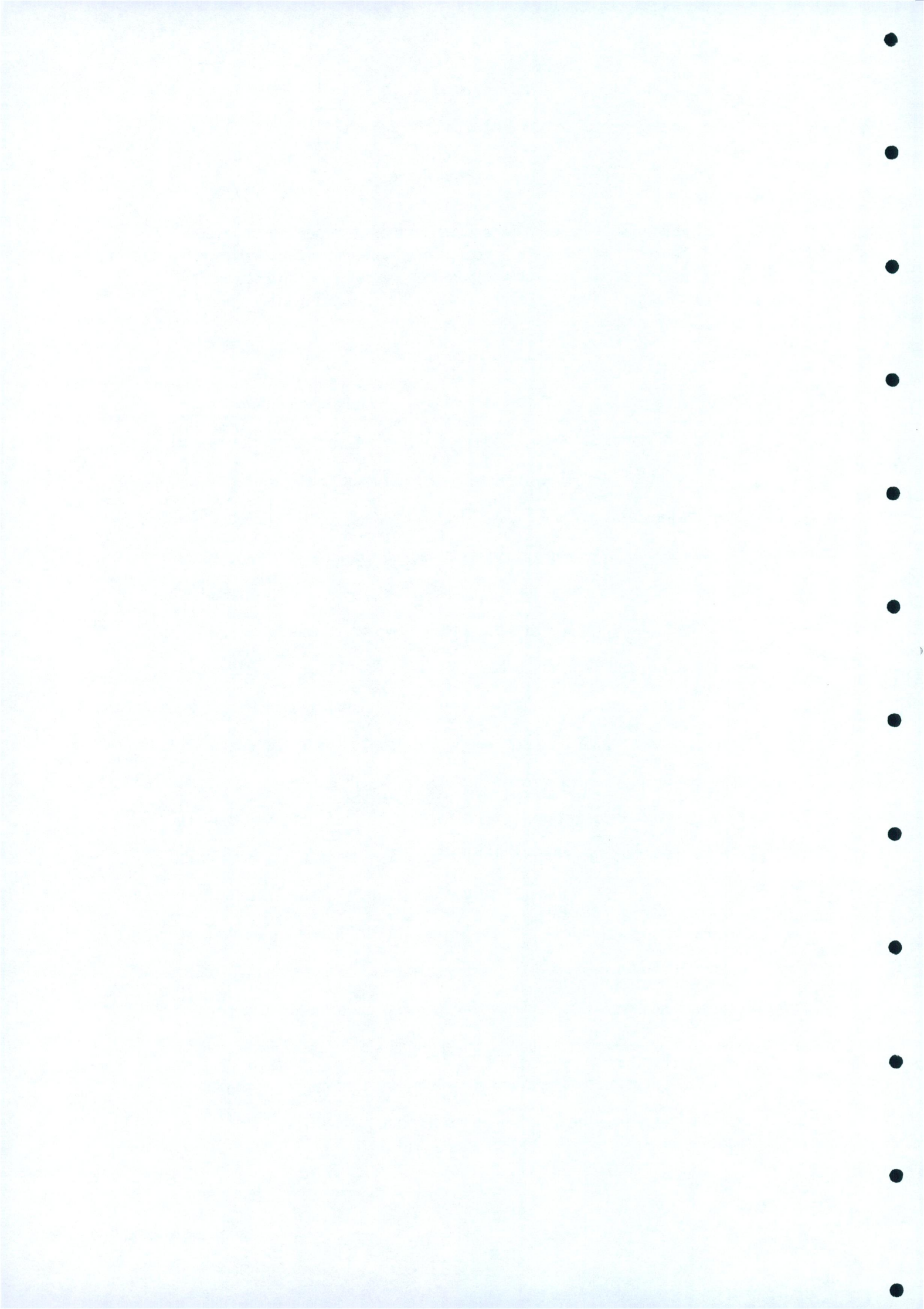


relationship must shock society or their families. The lovers must be ostracised. It is very difficult to contrast a modern story which would believably adhere to these rules. In this respect I think it is correct to say that *Lolita* may be one of the few modern love stories.

(Walker, 1972, p.28)

By using alternative approaches to filming and by relying on innuendo and metaphor, Kubrick created a unique type of film, which captures the essence of Nabokov. In the film's first scene, where Humbert and Quilty converse face to face, Quilty, disguised as the school doctor, Dr. Zeph, sits in the dark to discuss the sexual nature of young girls with her 'father', Humbert. Humbert, unaware of Quilty's identity, tries to be as 'normal' as possible. Dr.'Zeph' could easily be mistaken for Dr.'Nymph' ; thus the notion of two sex offenders and 'nymph' experts discussing the sexual behaviour of the absent Lolita becomes one of the most abnormal and blackly humorous moments in cinematic history. The whole purpose of Quilty's 'Dr Zeph / Nymph' visit is to persuade Humbert to let Lolita appear in his play *The Enchanted Hunter*. This recalls the original short story *The Enchanter* on which the novel was based. As Quilty is directing the play, Dr. Nymph, by persuading Humbert to allow Lolita to star in it, is giving himself ample opportunity to commence 'surgery' on Lolita. This sequence does not appear in the novel and was scripted by Kubrick. It illustrates how, with an extraordinary sense of vision, he managed to translate the novel on to the screen with such incisive effect. Kubrick's subtle approach in entirely in keeping with Nabokov's prose style, which is less blatantly erotic than its subject matter and story line might imply. The following clinical description of an ejaculation by Nabokov, or rather Humbert, illustrates this point perfectly :

..... /



What had begun as a delicious distension of my innermost roots became a glowing tingle which NOW had reached that state of absolute security, confidence and reliance not found elsewhere in conscious life.

(Nabokov, 1959, p. 60)

At the film's close Lolita dons a pair of horn-rimmed glasses, identical to the ones Quilty wore at the film's beginning, as she informs Humbert that Quilty was the only one she was ever 'crazy' about. Kubrick uses this image to imply that Lolita has assumed Quilty's identity, his mark. At the end of the film it is discovered that Lolita has been successfully cloned by Quilty and not, despite Humbert's big plans, by him. Once again Humbert fails where Quilty has succeeded.

Perhaps Kubrick's most poignant allusion to Nabokov's methods is in the opening sequence when Quilty dives behind a Gainsboroughesque painting of a young girl, takes aim and shoots Quilty through this painting, leaving it perforated with bullet holes. Thus, right from the opening sequence, the impending fate of Humbert, Quilty and Lolita is suggested. The last shot in the film is that of the same bullet-ridden painting, the sole reminder of the damage and suffering caused to an innocent child by two demonic men. Furthermore, it sows the seed for Kubrick's future films, in which women are frequently portrayed as abstract forms, (as in most classical Hollywood cinema). Kubrick's cinema is a male-dominated one and the female characters he represents usually suffer due to the male's inability to cope with the situations which they have chosen for themselves. Lolita is not the only girl or woman to suffer such a tragic fate in Kubrick's screen canvas.

CHAPTER 2.

Kubrick's decision to make a film of the William Makepeace Thackeray novel, *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844) was an interesting one. After *Lolita* he made three films - *Dr.Strangelove* (1964), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). All were adaptations of literary works, most notably *2001* from an Arthur C.Clarke short story and *A Clockwork Orange*, from the acclaimed novel by Anthony Burgess. Both films consolidated Kubrick's reputation as a renowned, if controversial director. *2001*, his most acclaimed and commercially successful film, became one of the landmarks of its era, whilst *A Clockwork Orange* continued in the tradition of *Lolita*, causing such a media storm that it led to Kubrick's withdrawing the film from distribution in Great Britain.

Thus after three films concentrating on the bleak, if not funny, future of mankind. Kubrick made the period drama *Barry Lyndon* (1975). The shift from well-known works by contemporary authors to a little-known novel by a long-deceased author marked a significant change. As Thackeray had died in 1863 he was unable to co-operate in the writing of the script as Kubrick's other collaborators had done. As a result we not only have Kubrick's screen interpretation of the novel but also his script interpretation of it. This makes a considerable difference as in the case of *Lolita* the film is an amalgamation of the efforts of both author and director, whereas in the case of *Barry Lyndon*, the book belongs to Thackeray, but the film most definitely belongs to Kubrick.

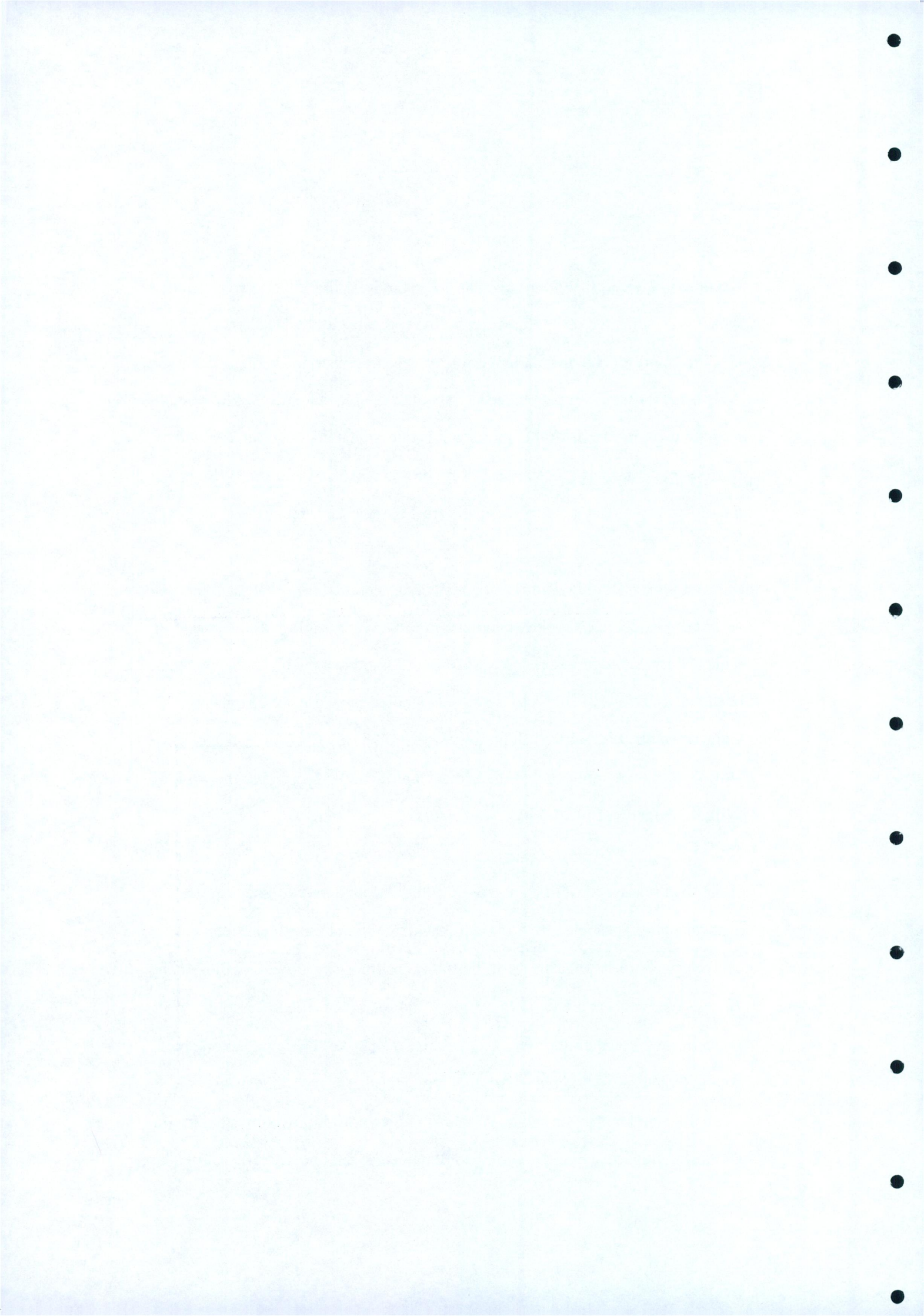
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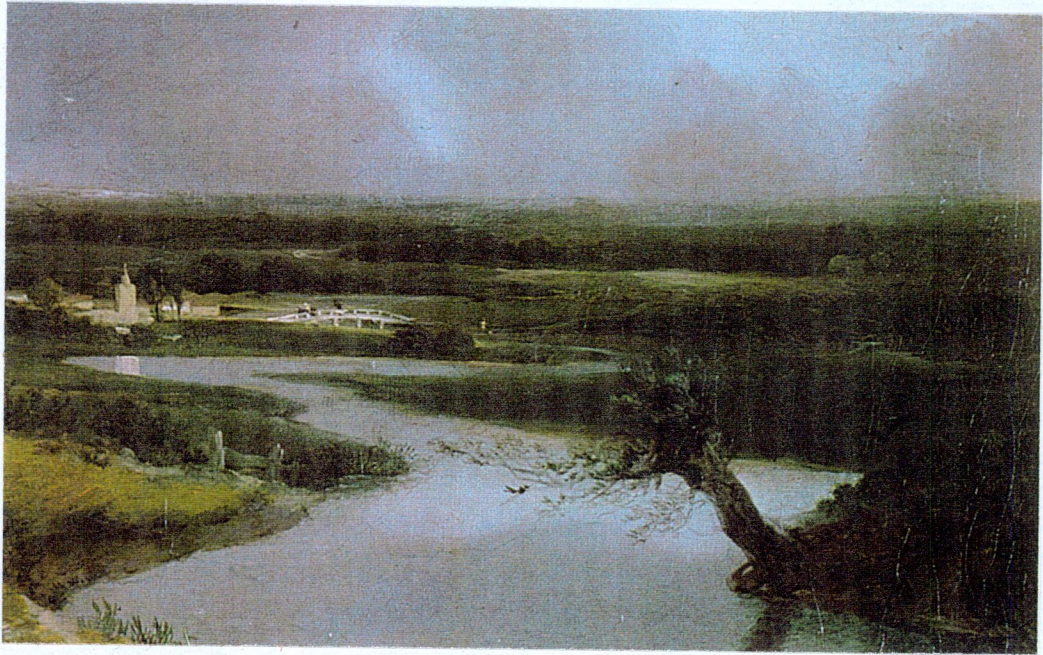


The novel, *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, takes the form of a first person narrative, which is commented on sporadically by the cynical 'editor' (Thackeray) G.S.FitzBoodle. This format makes the novel somewhat different, as from a very early stage in the novel the reader learns not to trust its author, the 'Honourable' Redmond Barry of Barryville. Perhaps it is due to this that Kubrick decided to film *Barry Lyndon* as it is similar in structure to Nabokov's *Lolita*. With both these novels the reader can never really trust the word of the narrator.

As ever, before filming, Kubrick extensively researched his subject and undertook an intense study, (as Nabokov had done in researching *Lolita*), of the period in which *Barry Lyndon* is set. He wanted the film to have the physical appearance of the oil paintings of the day. He closely studied the works of Thomas Gainsborough (1727- 1788), John Constable (1776-1837), Adolf Menzel (1815-1905) but most notably, and perhaps most significantly, he studied the work of William Hogarth (1697-1764).

Hogarth, a renowned satirist and comic author, second only to Shakespeare, produce paintings and engravings loaded with deliberate satirical references, characterising different aspects of the social sphere. *The Harlot's Progress* and *The Rake's Progress* are two of his most famous works. The interesting aspect of Hogarth's work is that it is 'read' in a similar manner to that in which one reads a novel. Hogarth constructed a narrative within each picture frame using symbolism and metaphor, which enabled the viewer to follow a linear story line whilst viewing the work. Hogarth had remained in relative obscurity until a huge

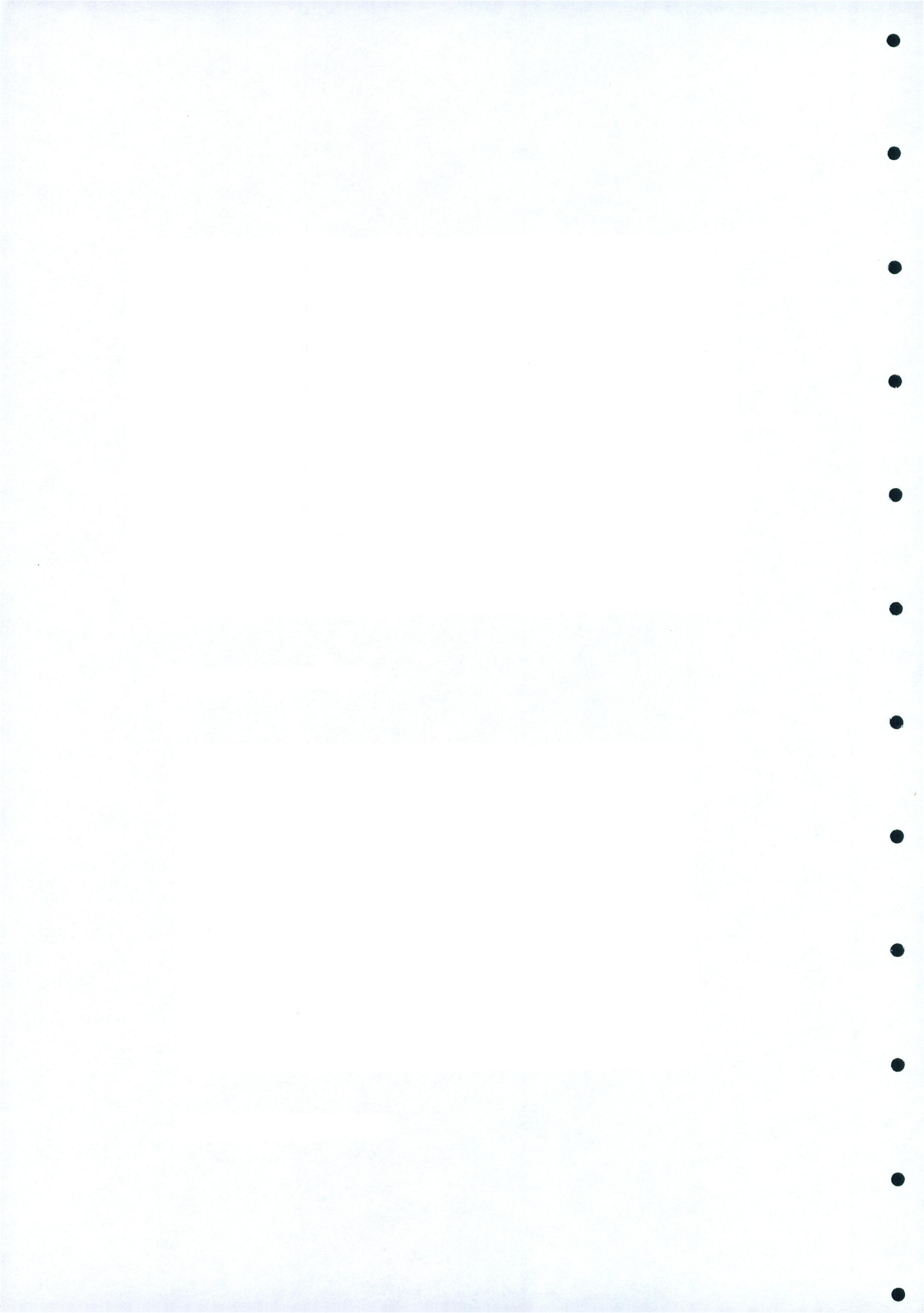




Gainsborough Landscape



Barry en route to Dublin

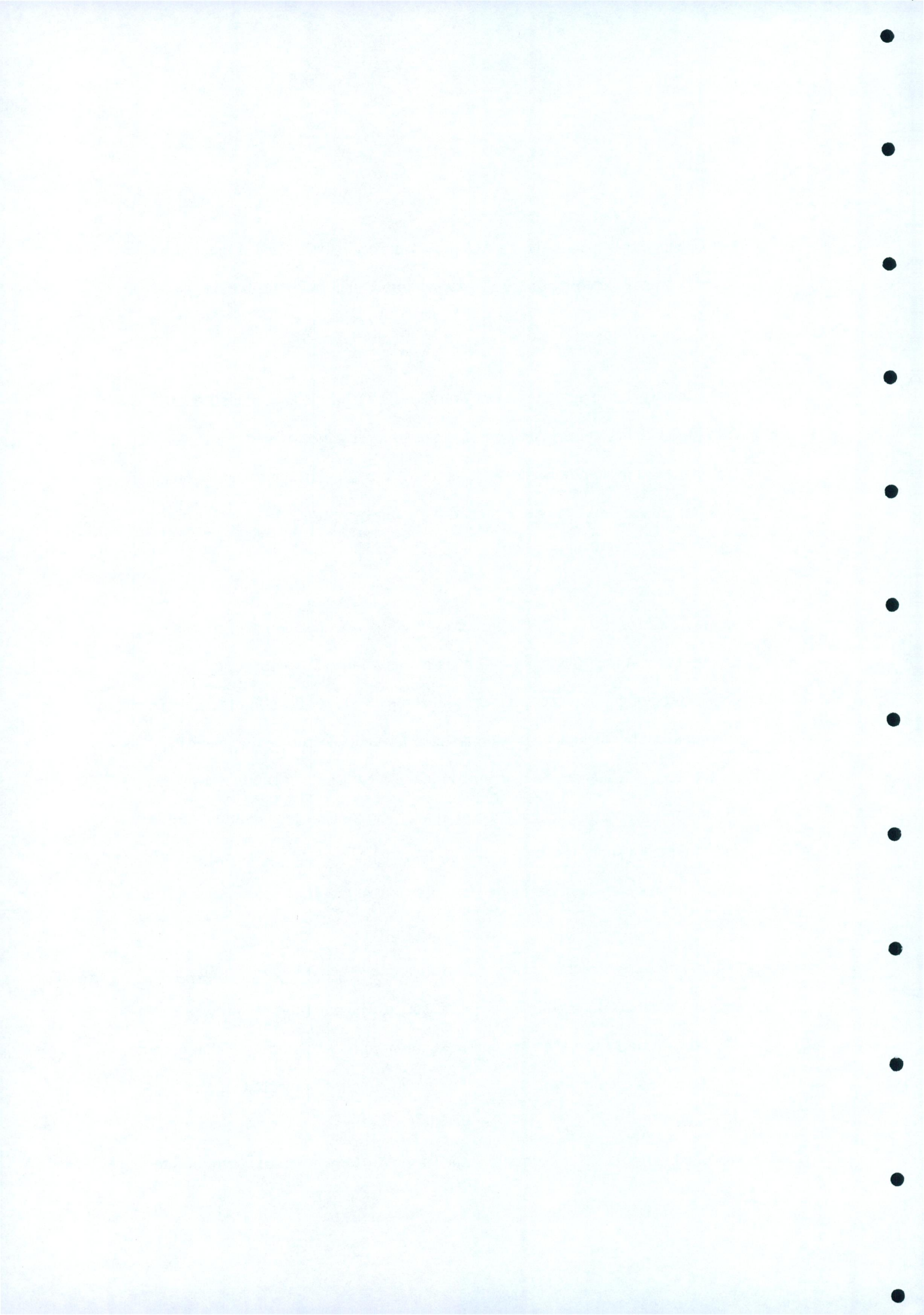


retrospective was held in the Tate Gallery, London in 1971-72. At this time Kubrick was researching *Barry Lyndon* and more than likely visited the exhibition.

Hogarth's work had a huge influence on *Barry Lyndon* ; many scenes from the film look like his social paintings. The scene, for instance, where Lord Bullingdon is beaten by Barry, with its frantic crowding of the screen, a technique also used in Kubrick's tavern scenes, is particularly reminiscent of Hogarth's series, *The Rake's Progress*.

The Rake's Progress(1733-34) is a series of eight paintings which chart the progress of a young man who, following an inheritance of some money, goes on a lavish spree of gaming and drinking with an unsavoury collection of accomplices. Having spent his fortune he is soon arrested for debts accrued but manages to escape the consequences by marrying a rich widow. He then gambles away her fortune and is sent to a debtor's prison, finally ending his life in depravity, misery and sadness. In short, the eight paintings that make up *The Rake's Progress* are essentially a synopsis of *Barry Lyndon* - the perfect link between novel and film.

With his rich translucent colours and his theatrically active figures, Hogarth creates a cinema-like motion between the series. The paintings themselves are so littered with references which accumulate into a full, direct narrative, that we not only have a satirical portrait of 'high' society in Hogarth's time, but an eerie foreshadowing of what would become Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*. As the series was produced in the 1930s it is possible that Thackeray may have seen them before

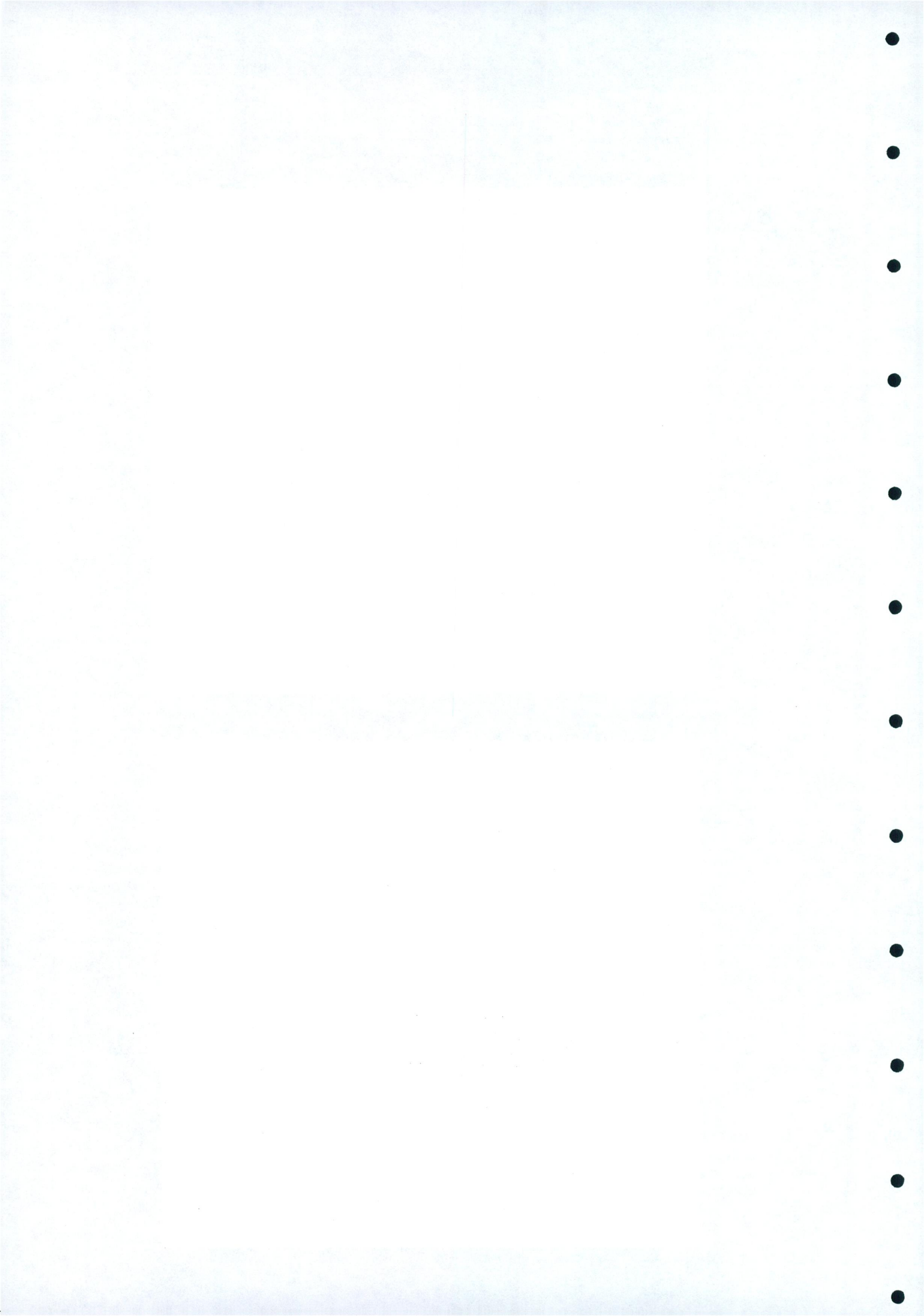




49 *The Rake's Progress*, 1: the Young Heir taking possession, 1733-34



50 *The Rake's Progress*, 2: the Rake's Levée, 1733-34



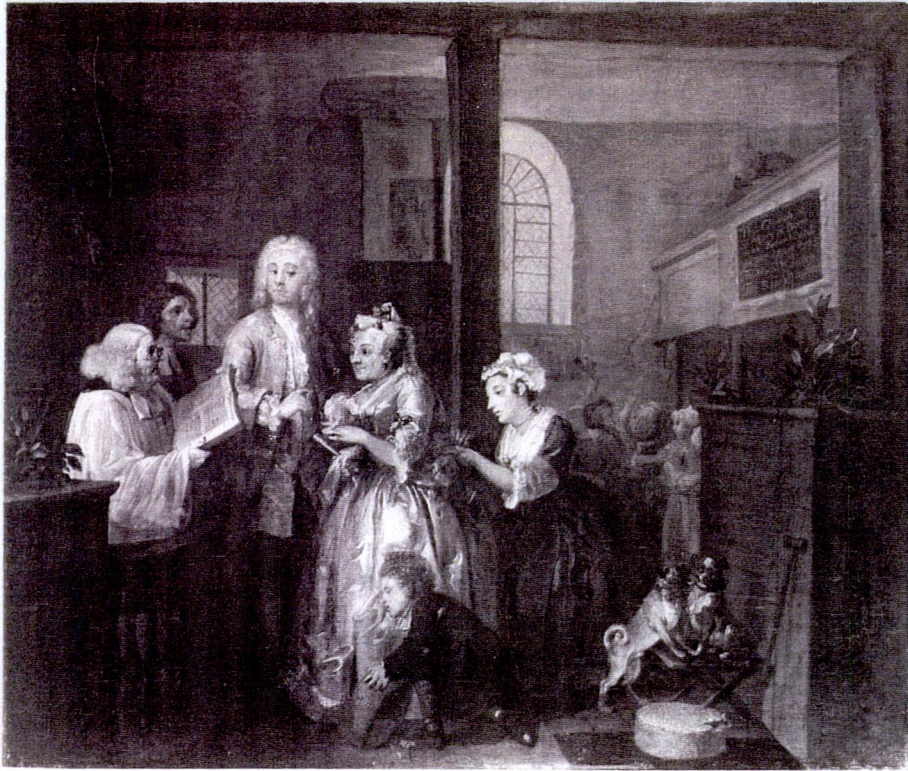


51 *The Rake's Progress*, 3: the Tavern Scene, 1733-34



52 *The Rake's Progress*, 4: Arrested for Debt, 1733-34

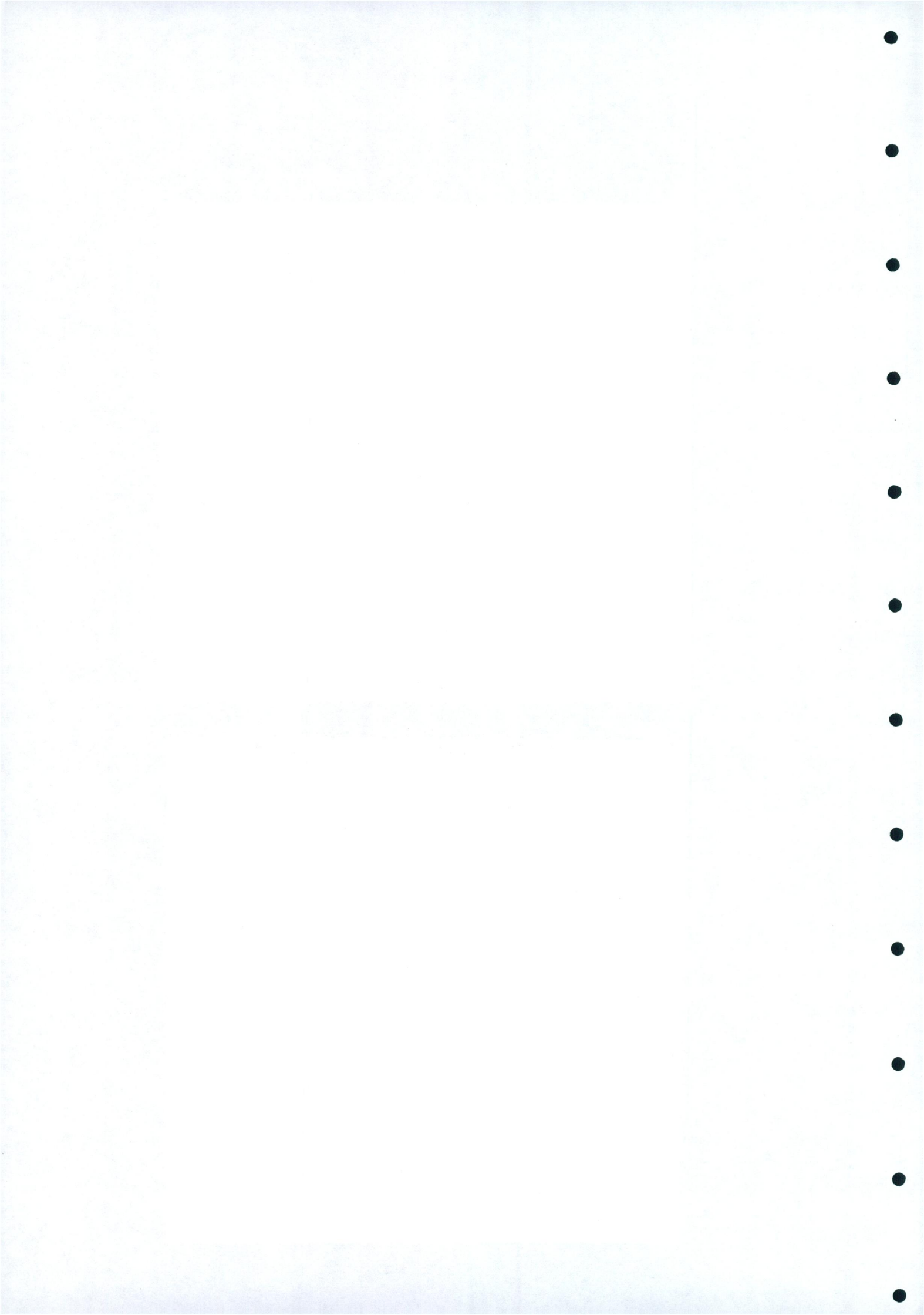




53 *The Rake's Progress*, 5: Marriage, 1733-34



54 *The Rake's Progress*, 6: in a Gaming House, 1733-34

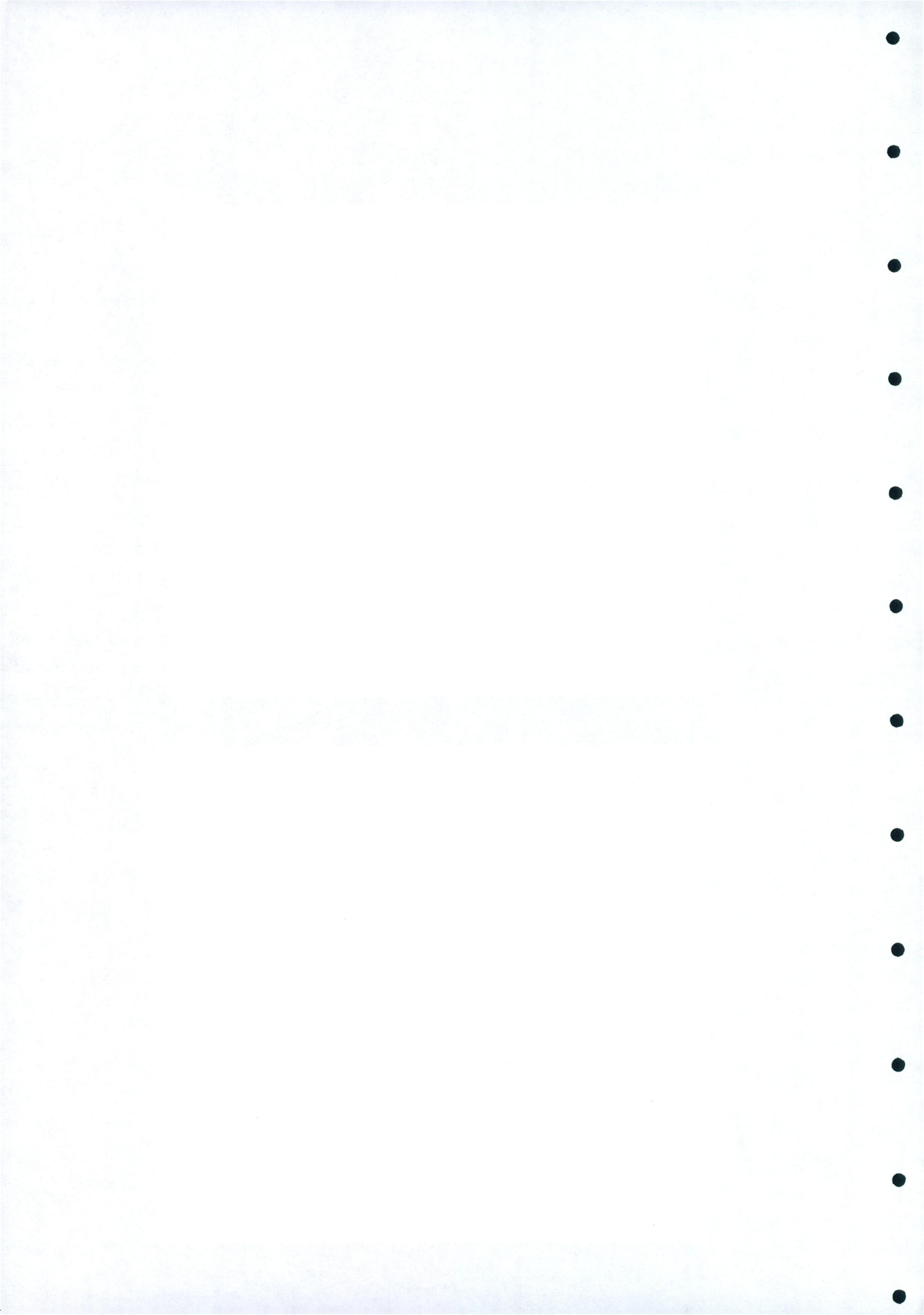




55 *The Rake's Progress*, 7: in the Debtors' Prison, 1733-34



56 *The Rake's Progress*, 8: Bedlam, 1733-34



commencing *Barry Lyndon*, but no evidence exists to support this.

The similarities between *The Rake's Progress* and both Thackeray's and Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* are remarkably close. This is not to suggest that both Thackeray and Kubrick copied Hogarth's work, but rather that the society which Barry Lyndon lived in and strove for, was a very real part of history, as opposed to an exaggerated tale produced for moralistic purposes.

THE METHODS USED BY KUBRICK IN FILMING *BARRY LYNDON*.

When filming *Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick had decided to make the film as authentic as possible. To achieve this he used no artificial light. For this to be possible he had to construct purpose-built lenses which would provide the amount of natural light required for filming. Most of the costumes used were genuine antiques and the houses used for filming the vast expansive interiors were all manors of the era. As opposed to restaging events to make them appear as if from a bygone era, Kubrick attempted to recreate the era and give the viewer a key to the past.

The *Barry Lyndon* of the novel is a far less likeable character than that of the film. Similar to Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* Thackeray created a character who, though unlikeable, would constantly appeal to the reader for sympathy and support. In scripting the novel himself, Kubrick created a much more human character and the classic Kubrick hero. Unlike Hogarth's 'Rake', Kubrick's hero

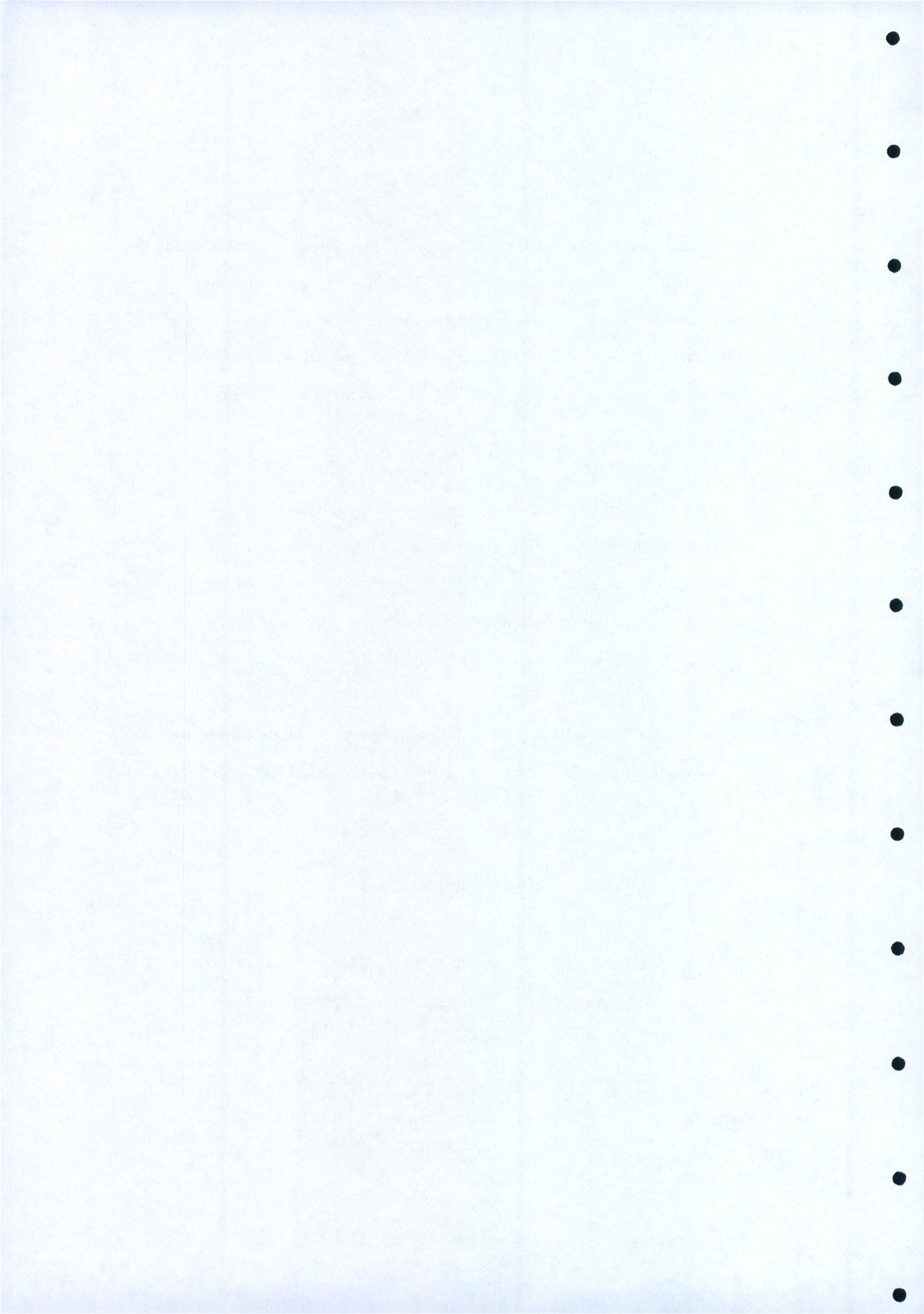


doesn't set out to be the cold, calculating, selfish individual he becomes, and this transformation, from wide-eyed romantic to calculating devil, forms the backbone of the film. Like the novel Kubrick divides the film into two halves. The first shows Barry's rise and ultimate formation as a character and a man of fortune, the second the consequences he reaps from his ruthless pursuit of his goal.

The overall structure of the film is very similar to that of *Lolita*. Significant events occur throughout the film, and significant roles which the players re-enact always lead to the same conclusion. This is, essentially, that history repeats itself and that mankind fails to learn from its mistakes. Just as *2001, A Clockwork Orange* and *Lolita* end with what they began with (the monolith, Alex's return to violence, Humbert driving to the castle) so too does *Barry Lyndon*; the film begins and ends with a duel. This circular structure is constantly used by Kubrick throughout his films. It illustrates the unity of his vision and how each film works as a complete whole.

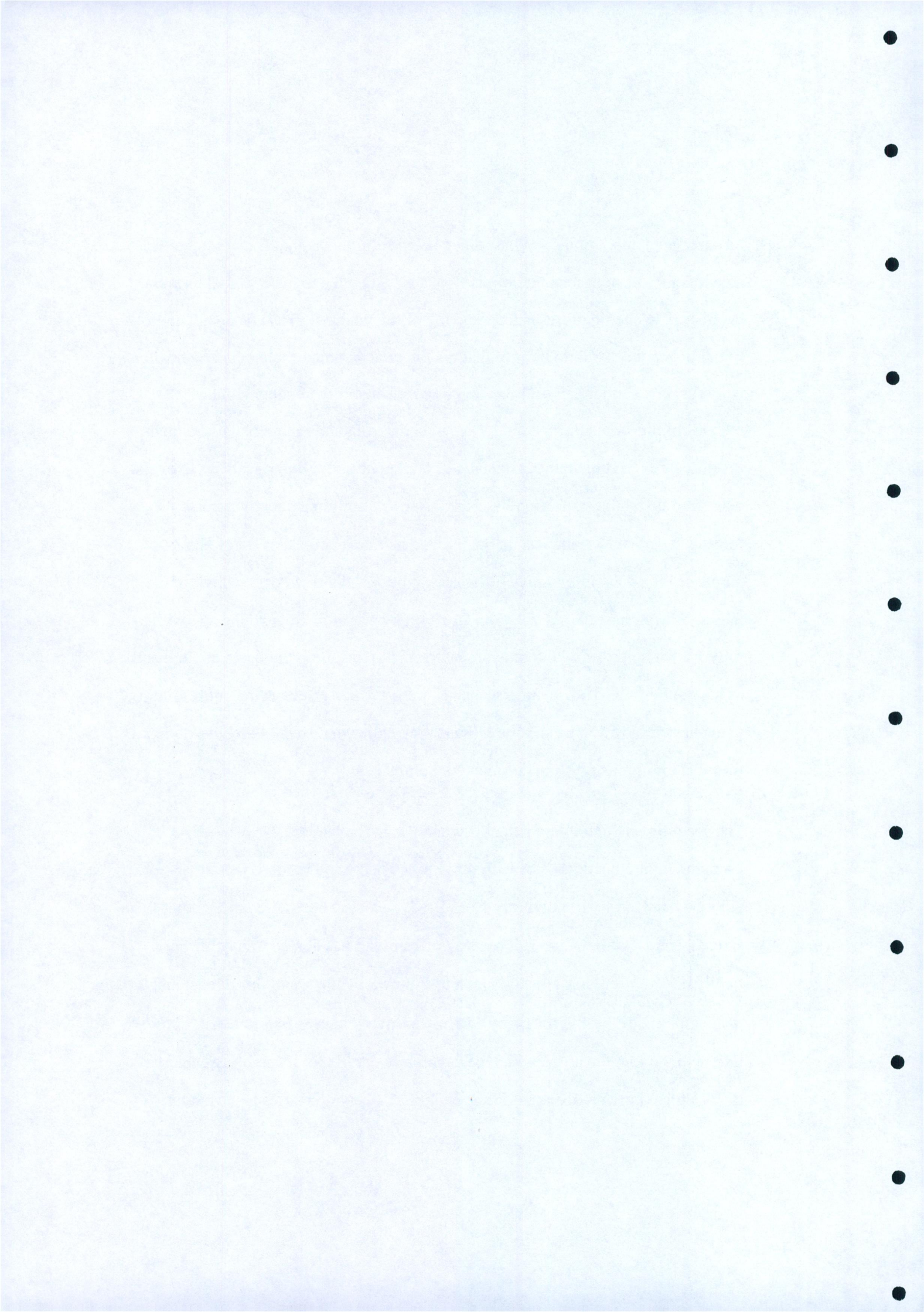
THE USE OF DUELLING AS A METAPHOR.

The opening shot of the film shows a duel taking place from a great distance. The figures are overpowered by their picturesque surroundings. The narrator tells us that Barry's father, roaring Harry Barry, was killed in a duel and that he could have succeeded in the legal profession had he not chosen a path in the 'higher sphere'. We are also informed that the duel was fought as a result of a



disagreement about horses. What can be taken from this is that Barry's father was a gambler and a poor manager of his finances, which led to his eventual terminal decline. The opening foreshadows the life of the young Barry. His denial and romanticism leads him to believe that his father is an honourable man and he thus embarks on a similar path in life. Harry Barry's inability to cope with his responsibilities seals Barry's fate. Barry, rendered fatherless by his father's own misdeeds, re-enact his father's mistakes, correspondingly, Barry seals his own and his son's fate by the same process. Harry Barry's death in a duel over horses foreshadows that of Barry's son Brian, killed astride a horse that Barry has purchased in an attempt to give his son what he was deprived of - a loving father. Barry's haste in showing his affection by presenting his young son with a fully-grown horse, of wild temperament, results in his untimely death and the end of his family line. The opening scene, as in *Lolita*, encapsulates the entire film metaphorically within its structure. Kubrick implies that Barry's inability to learn from his family history is his ultimate undoing.

The second scene involving a duel is when Barry challenges a British officer, Captain Quinn, to a duel for the right to his cousin's hand in marriage. It is obvious that Barry will not marry Nora Brady, because he is a penniless boy of sixteen, and Captain Quinn is a wealthy officer who has agreed to pay off the family debts. Barry has already begun to follow his father, and this duel signals the beginning of the end for Barry and his family. It causes him to leave Barryville to join the army, which he eventually deserts for a gambling career. Barry's premature involvement in the end- game scenario causes his eventual





Barry's duel with Captain Quinn



Barry's fatal duel with Lord Bullingdon



downfall. After achieving his desired success and systematically wasting his fortune, he is challenged to a duel by his stepson, Lord Bullingdon. Though Barry constantly boasts of his duelling prowess, he is cheated and loses out in every duel. His 'McFate' (as Humbert would say) controls him. In the first duel he loses his father, the second duel is rigged, so he is cheated of his honour, satisfaction, and first love, and in the third duel he loses his leg and fortune to Lord Bullingdon. By choosing as early as he does to live his life by duelling, which he believes will afford him an honourable status, he consigns his life to the ultimate failure it will become and which was foretold by his father's death. Barry loses considerably by each duel and he is completely isolated by the final confrontation with Bullingdon. As Robert Phillip Kolker states : -

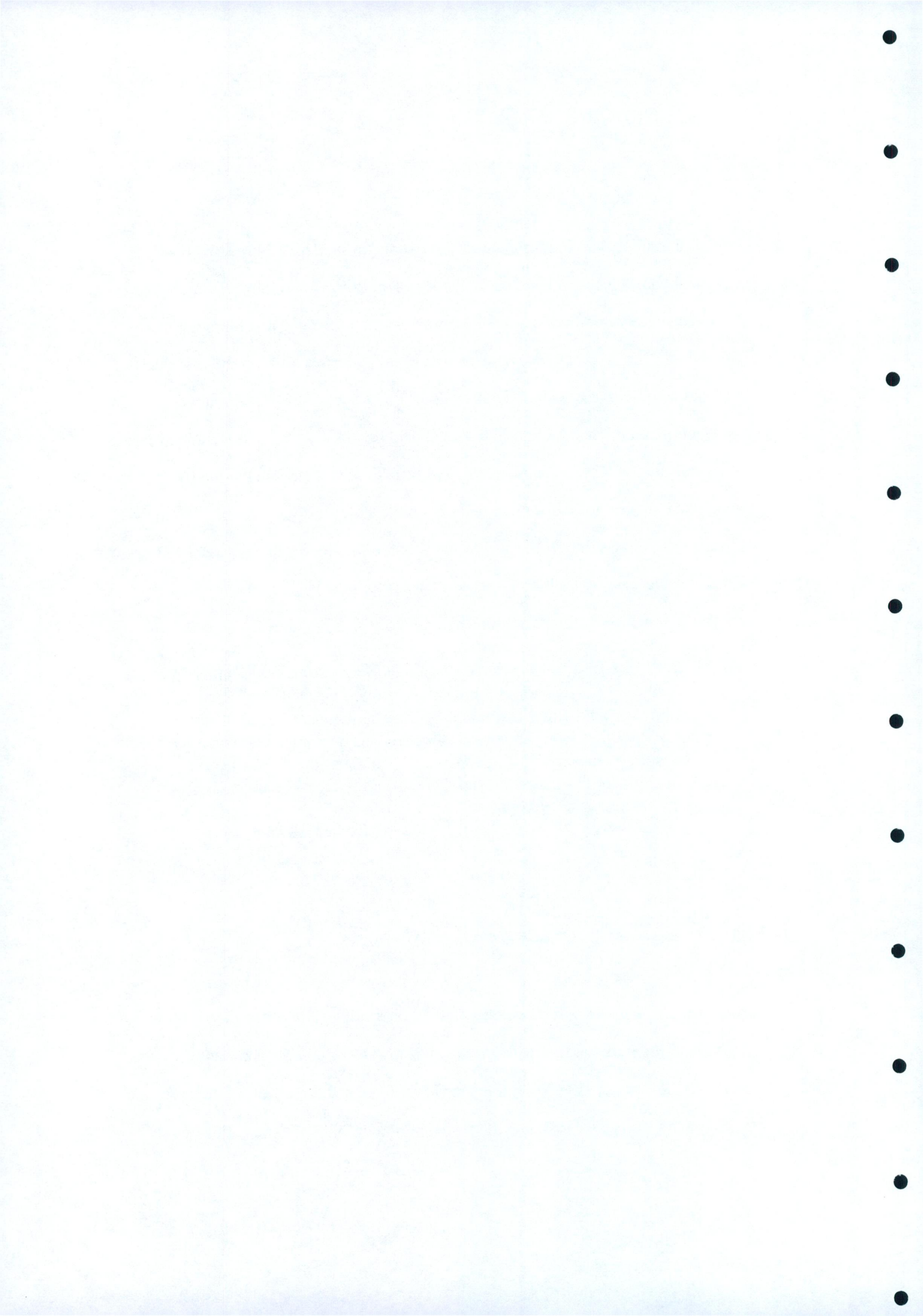
The sequence emphasises Barry's aloneness more than any other in the film, trapping him in a final perfectly ordered, unimpassioned ritual of proper, murderous conduct but, as in every other instance where Barry tries to humanise his world, he suffers for it. Bullingdon may be a revolting coward, but when given his chance, he shoots his stepfather, takes advantage of weakness, and triumphs.

(Kolker, 1988, p. 149)

THE USE OF MOTION IN *BARRY LYNDON*.

As *Barry Lyndon* was visually based on the oil painting style of the day, motion is kept to a minimum and figures are frequently lost in wide-angle panoramic views. Many of the exterior shots resemble the work of Constable ; for example, the scene where Barry leaves Barryville for Dublin after 'killing' Quinn, closely

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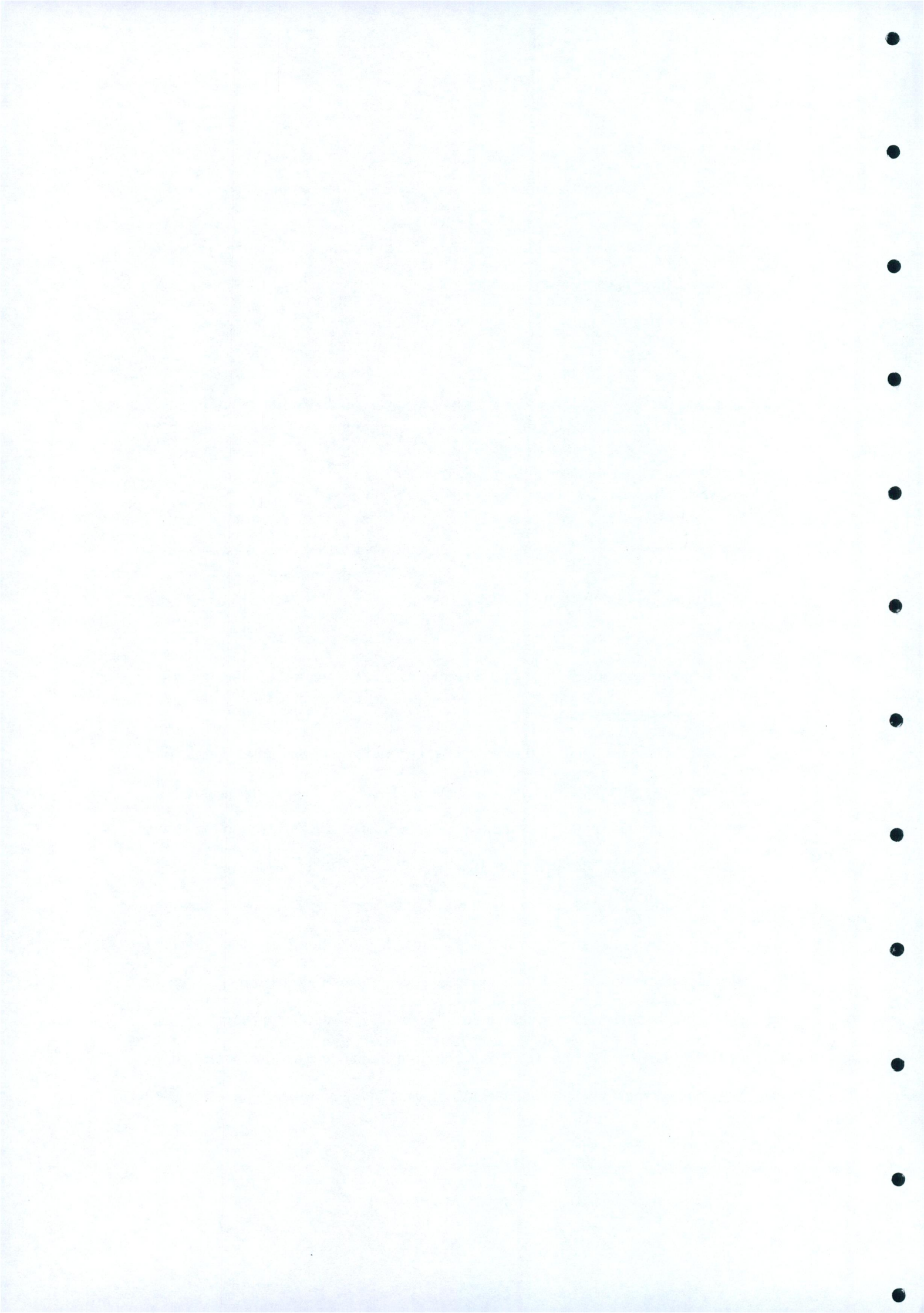


resembles *The Haywain*, a lone figure isolated in the centre of a huge landscape. Many of the shots are constructed in this manner ; from a close-up shot, drawing slowly backwards to have the figures engulfed in their surroundings.

The repetition of the slow reverse zoom creates a steady, sombre rhythm. Visually, it tends to reduce the importance of individuals by placing them within a greater natural design. By doing this within the boundaries of a single shot, rather than by cutting, Kubrick achieves an effect of continual change of perspective, of point of view, and of subjectivity.

(Kolker, 1988, p. 140)

As the film lacks movement to such an extent, any movement that does take place becomes of more charged significance. To make a scene effective, Kubrick uses two strategies, a sudden burst of movement to achieve a surprising lasting effect, or to prolong the movement in the scene so a more subtle lasting effect is achieved. This is apparent in the scene where Barry seduces Lady Lyndon. This is a relentless slow scene instigated when Barry 'catches Lady Lyndon's eye' across the gaming table, the camera holds their glance, thus involving the viewer in their steadfast gaze (throughout two 'hands' of cards). Kubrick uses a decisive lack of motion to reveal Barry's method of seduction, and shows how Barry traps his prey by feigning genuine emotions. This has a profound effect on the viewer as one is being drawn into Barry's game. This is the method used by Kubrick to substitute the novel's manipulative descriptions of his actions by Barry. Instead of being persuaded to believe Barry's charm through a lengthy description of his 'powers', we must visually watch Barry at work - which produces the same effect.

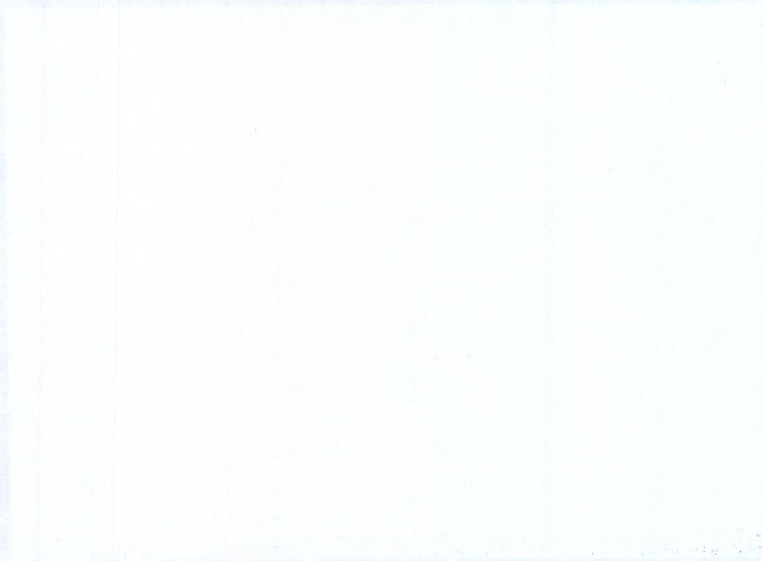
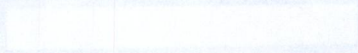




Barry leaving Barryville

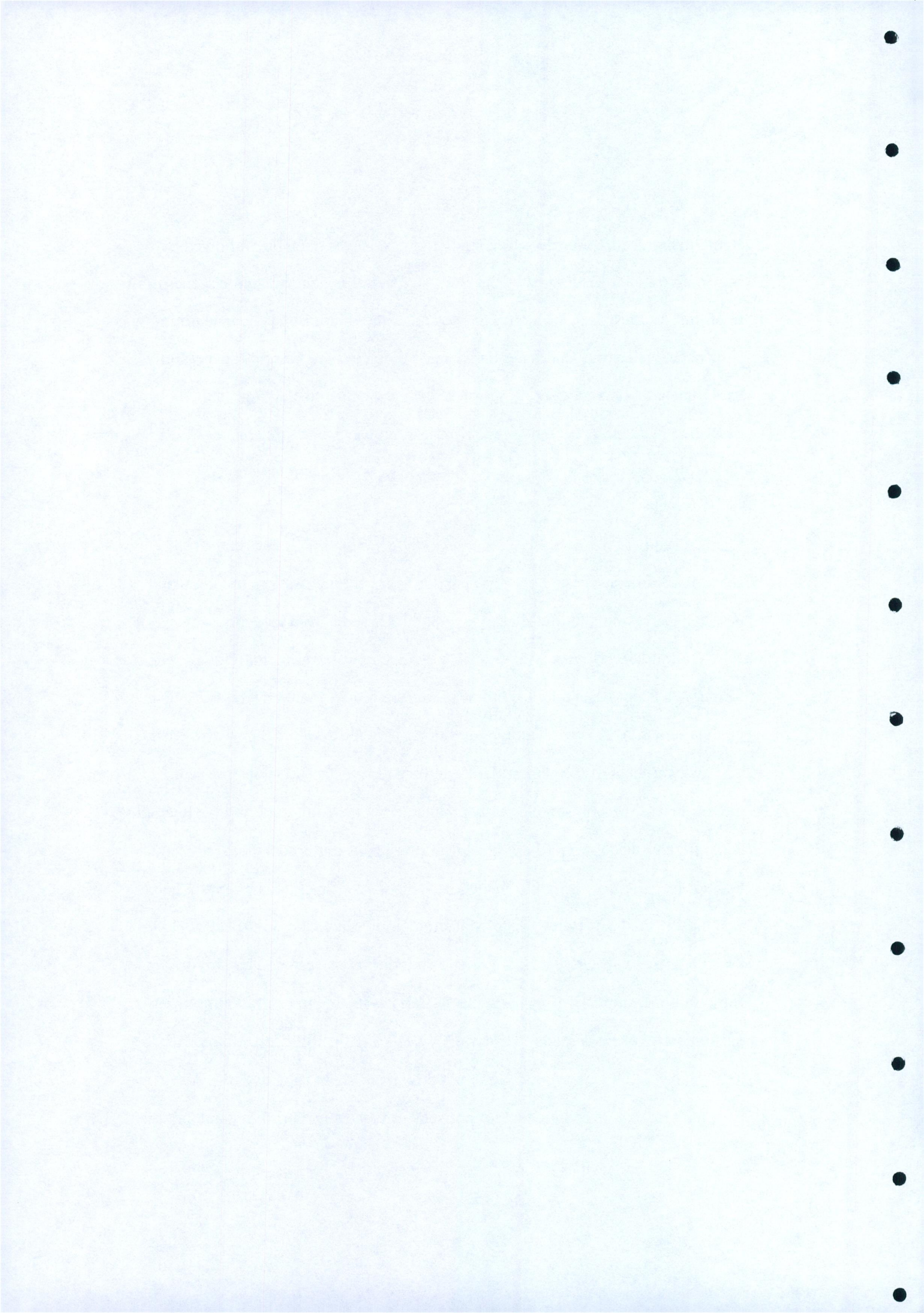


The Haywain by John Constable

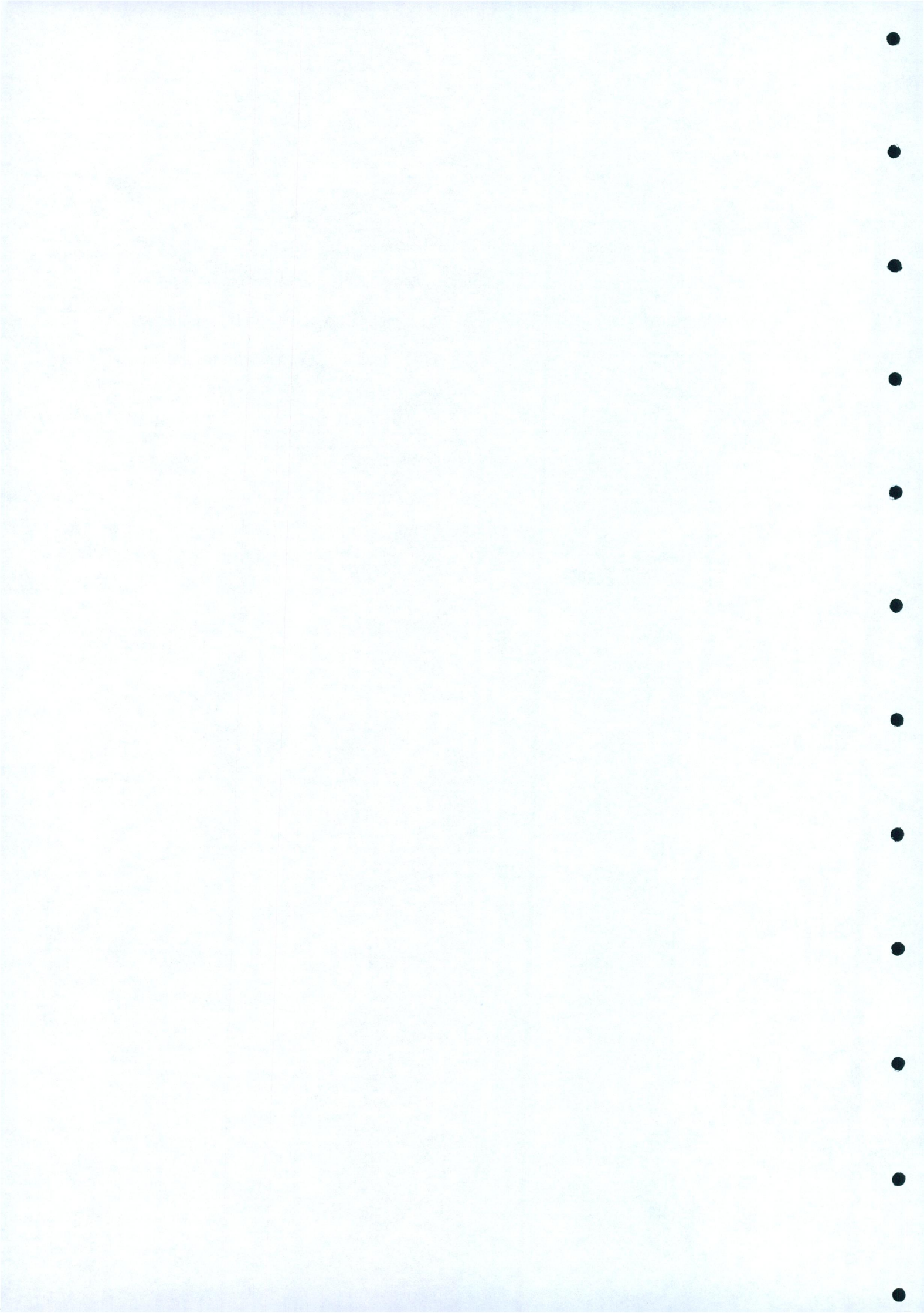


Being distressed by her encounter, Lady Lyndon leaves the table, followed by Barry. There then ensues one of the slowest, most dramatic and subtle scenes of the film. As Lady Lyndon stands at one end of the room, Barry, at an alarmingly slow pace, walks over, takes her hand, and embraces her. Kubrick successfully uses this method to enact Barry's prolonged and calculated stalking / seduction, described in the novel. In one scene Kubrick compacts an entire chapter of turmoil by subverting the traditional approach to on-screen interaction.

There are only two scenes in *Barry Lyndon* which break with the steady controlled camera shot and opt for a hand-held shot. The first is a boxing match between Barry and a fellow soldier, while the second is Barry's vicious attack on Lord Bullingdon. Both set out to mark a change in Barry as an individual. The former has Barry defending his honour against a fellow footman who has engaged in an argument with him. Though the soldier is twice his size, Barry wins easily. The awkwardness of the camera shots, and the frantic pace at which the scene moves, upsets the status quo already maintained in the film, implying the uncouth company into which Barry has slipped. We watch as our hero battles out his honour, proving his worth of noble class. This, in the first half of the film, helps to build the image of Barry to that of a strong individual who will succeed alone. This contrasts with the second hand-held shot during the concluding half of the film. Publicly humiliated by his stepson, Barry is unable to restrain himself, as his company would demand. He savagely beats Lord Bullingdon, almost killing him. Barry, like Humbert, has come full circle, unable to cope with the environment that he had created for himself. He reacts in a primitive manner by



trying to destroy what he conceives to be the cause of his upset. Kubrick's use of hand-held camera in this scene dramatically derails the continuity which has been building slowly since the beginning of the second part of the film. It is suddenly evident that Barry will not succeed, and that he is unable to cope with his present situation.

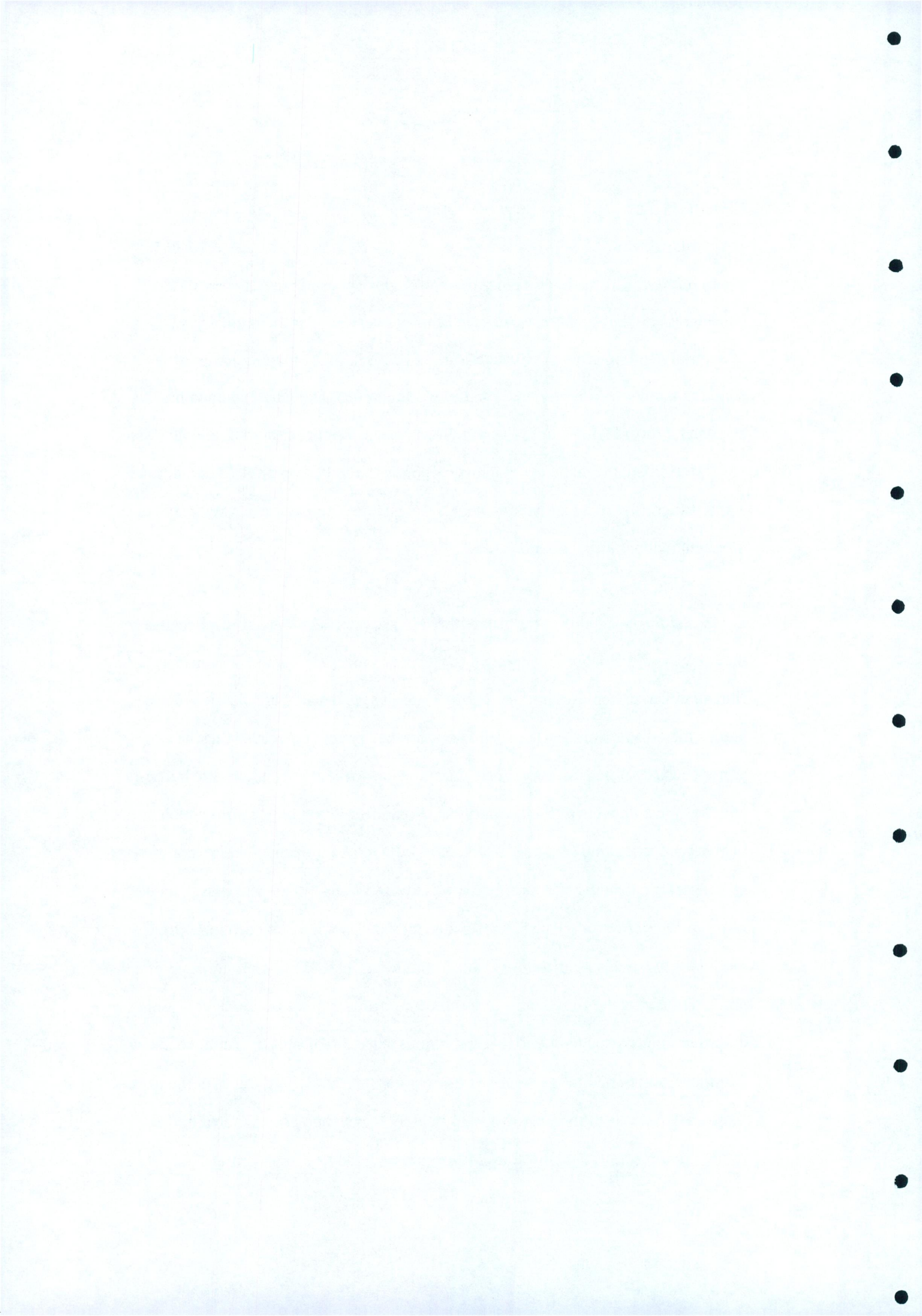


CHAPTER 3.

Though *Lolita* was made thirteen years before *Barry Lyndon* and differs considerably in a visual sense, the two films are very similar thematically, structurally and in terms of characterisation. Kubrick's first major attempt at adapting a novel was with *Lolita*, and it was this process which developed into and can be linked with *Barry Lyndon*, his most successful adaptation to date. It is not just the visual stylistic development Kubrick embarked on after *Lolita*, but the actual structuring of a text, which when translated to a cinematic canvas, reads in the same manner as the novel.

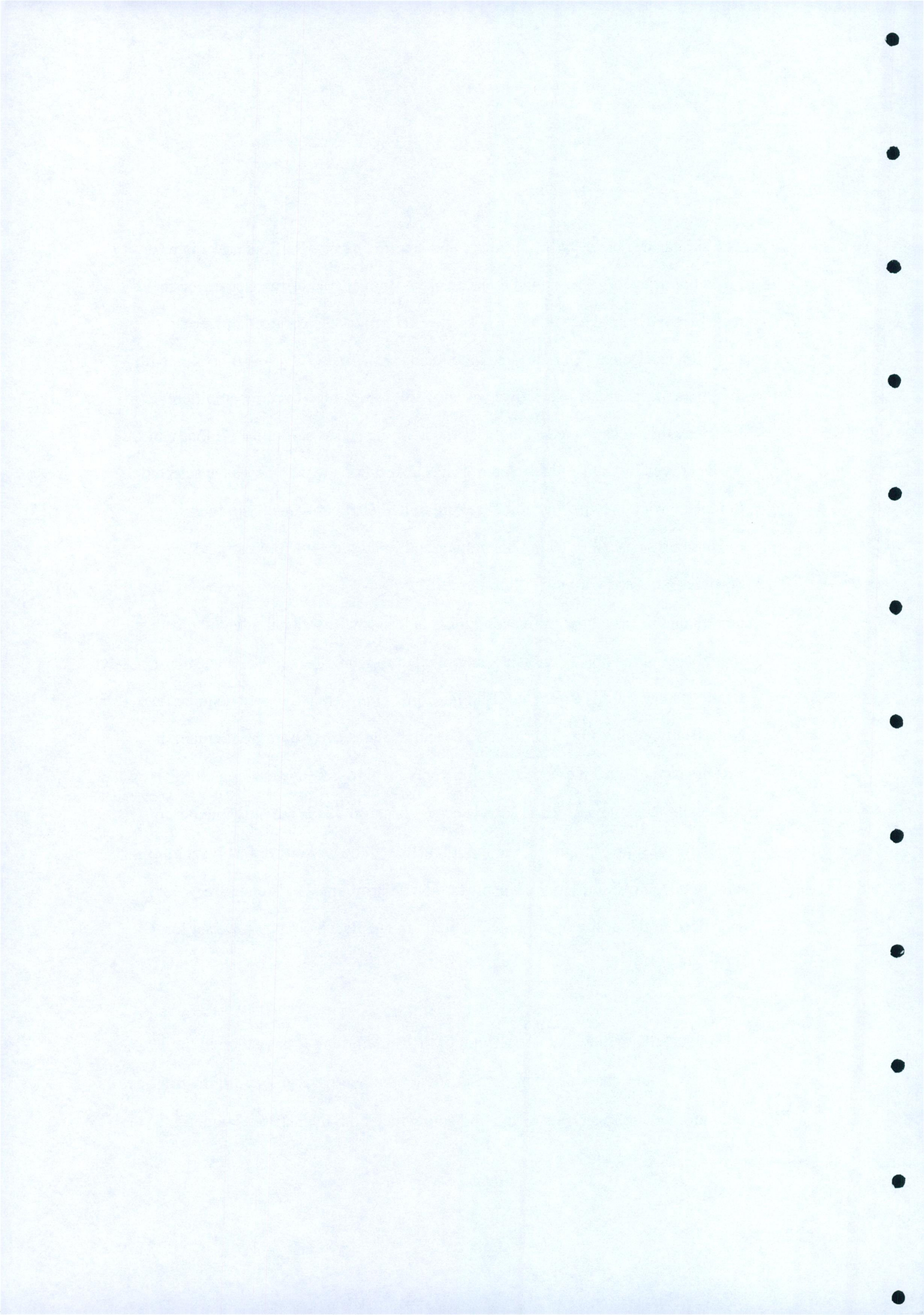
Lolita and *Barry Lyndon* differ from other Kubrick productions not just because they represent the beginning and end of a cycle of practice, but also because as films they are extremely similar. Though Humbert and Barry are classic Kubrick heroes they differ from HAL, Alex, Jack Torrence or Joker, because they do not suffer because of their surroundings but rather cause their surroundings to suffer and thus are architects of their own destruction. The structure of *Lolita* which begins with its ending (Humbert arriving to kill Quilty), remained an integral part of Kubrick's cinematic structuring and was utilised in its richest and most subtle sense in *Barry Lyndon*. Kubrick refined the structural approach used in *Lolita* to give *Barry Lyndon* a much more fluid continuity. Instead of chopping from one scene to the next the film gently flows through with the on-screen imagery. This is further emphasised by Kubrick's meticulous selection of music. To make *Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick had first to make *Lolita*. It was through struggling with the near impossible task of filming a novel as intricately woven and as dependent on the written word as *Lolita*, that informed Kubrick with the key to his craft.

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The similarities between the structure and central characters of the novel is what gives *Lolita* and *Barry Lyndon* their affinity. Both characters are sentenced to their personal moral decay by early tragic circumstances. By losing paternal affection and guidance as children, and losing their first loving relationships with members of the opposite sex during their adolescence they become embittered, firstly by their losses and secondly by the seeming success of others. Finally they are destroyed by their ruthless lust for the substitutions which they have selected to replace what they believe to be lacking or depleted permanently in their lives. In Humbert's case after losing his mother and first love, Anabel Leigh, he becomes obsessed with the notion of replacing her with another 12 year-old. As he was unable, as a boy, to live out all his fantasies with Anabel, it is the physical, sexual side of his obsession he is compelled to relive with Lolita. The death of Barry's father and his expulsion from his home after losing his only genuine love, Nora Brady, makes him determined to become a wealthy, noble, gentleman. It was his lack of wealth essentially which prevented him from marrying Nora. He frantically lusts monetary and social success because this is the only manner in which he must prove himself. Without this he will never believe that he is a wholly developed individual. Happiness and a harmonious existence are sacrificed to the desire of both men to attain the goals which they have set for themselves.

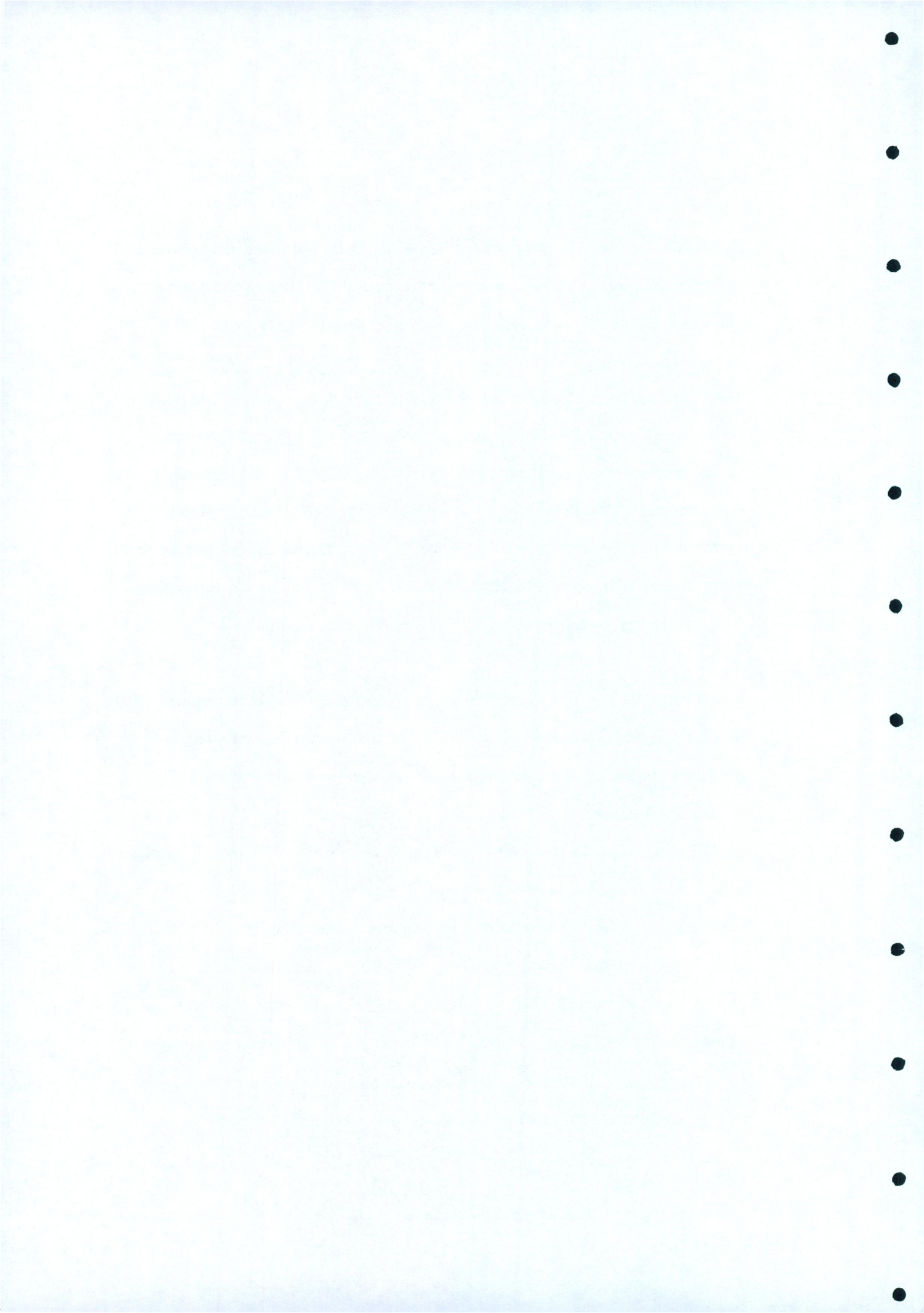
So consumed are they that a repetition of their misfortune is passed on in the pursuit of goals. The two men sacrifice loving women who wish to fill the roles of both mother and lover, thus filling the void which both men share. Humbert



sacrifices Charlotte to get his hands on Lolita, and Barry sacrifices Lady Lyndon to get his hands on her money. Both are inhumanely untouched by the despairing fate which results in both women, and are even amused by the proceedings.

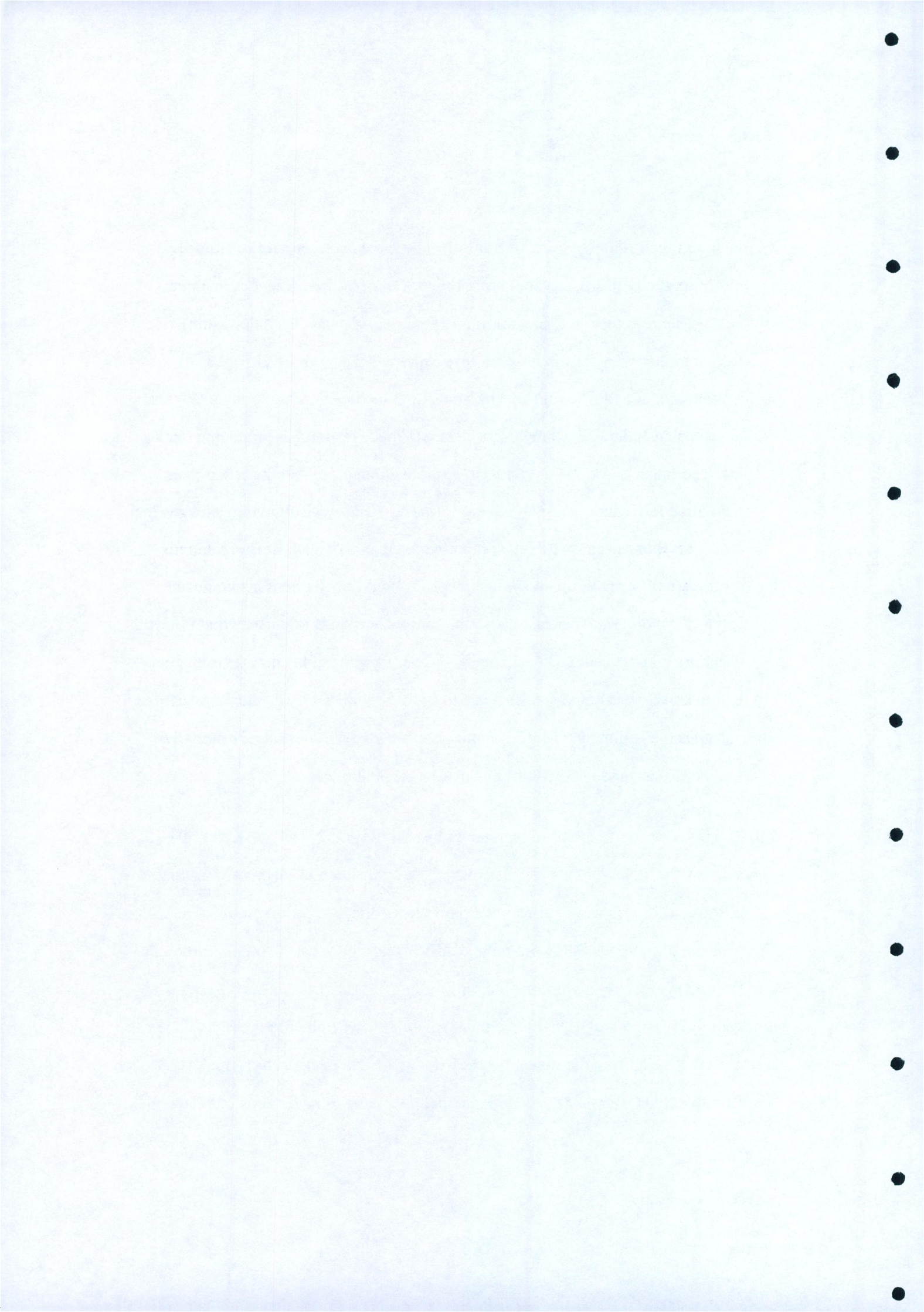
The Doppelganger theme is one which prevails throughout both films and is constantly unfolding as the films develop. Kubrick uses the Doppelganger as a metaphor to show that the character is fighting against himself, and to maintain the notion of the duality of man. The harder Humbert and Barry attempt to ascertain their goal the more difficult it becomes for them to achieve it. Through the presence of the Doppelganger Humbert and Barry have an external struggle with their enemy, by having themselves projected within the enemy.

Kubrick uses the structure of the film to display the methodical metamorphosis of the character into that of his enemy. During the transition from the first part of the film to the second, the character and the film transgress from Humbert / Barry to their Dopplegangers Quilty / Bullingdon. For instance, *Lolita* begins with a confident, witty, idolised (by Lolita / Charlotte) Humbert, slowly, pathologically seducing the young Lolita and having a strict father's and obsessive lover's control over her ; whilst during the second half of the film, a weak despairing humble man has the nucleus of his life taken from him by a confident, witty, idolised Quilty. The only pain Humbert feels is the pain Quilty / he himself subjects himself to. He feels no pain or apathy with the victims who have littered his path in reaching his conquest, or with the victim of his conquest, the young Lolita, whom he subjects to considerable mental and physical pain. Consequently



Humbert feels remorse only for himself. The same could be said of Humbert's metaphorical twin Barry who, during part of *Barry Lyndon*, engages in a duel because he refuses to accept a marriage (between Nora and Captain Quinn). He feels humiliated by the circumstances (being treated as a child and not a gentleman), a loss of wealth (the money Quinn intends to bring to the Bradys) and develops an oedipal attachment (the desire to make his mother proud and replace his dead father). All of this results in a ruthless pursuit of fortune rather than emotional fulfilment. During part two of *Barry Lyndon*, Bullingdon engages in a duel with Barry because **he** refuses to accept a marriage (that of Barry and his mother), has been humiliated (beaten by Barry publicly he flees his home and leaves his mother), a loss of wealth (the fortune he stands to inherit which Barry is wasting), and his oedipal attachment (his desire to protect his mother from Barry). Kubrick uses the Doppelganger motif to show how the Barry of the first part becomes the Bullingdon of the second. Barry evolves into what he originally fought against, and is destroyed by what he originally was.

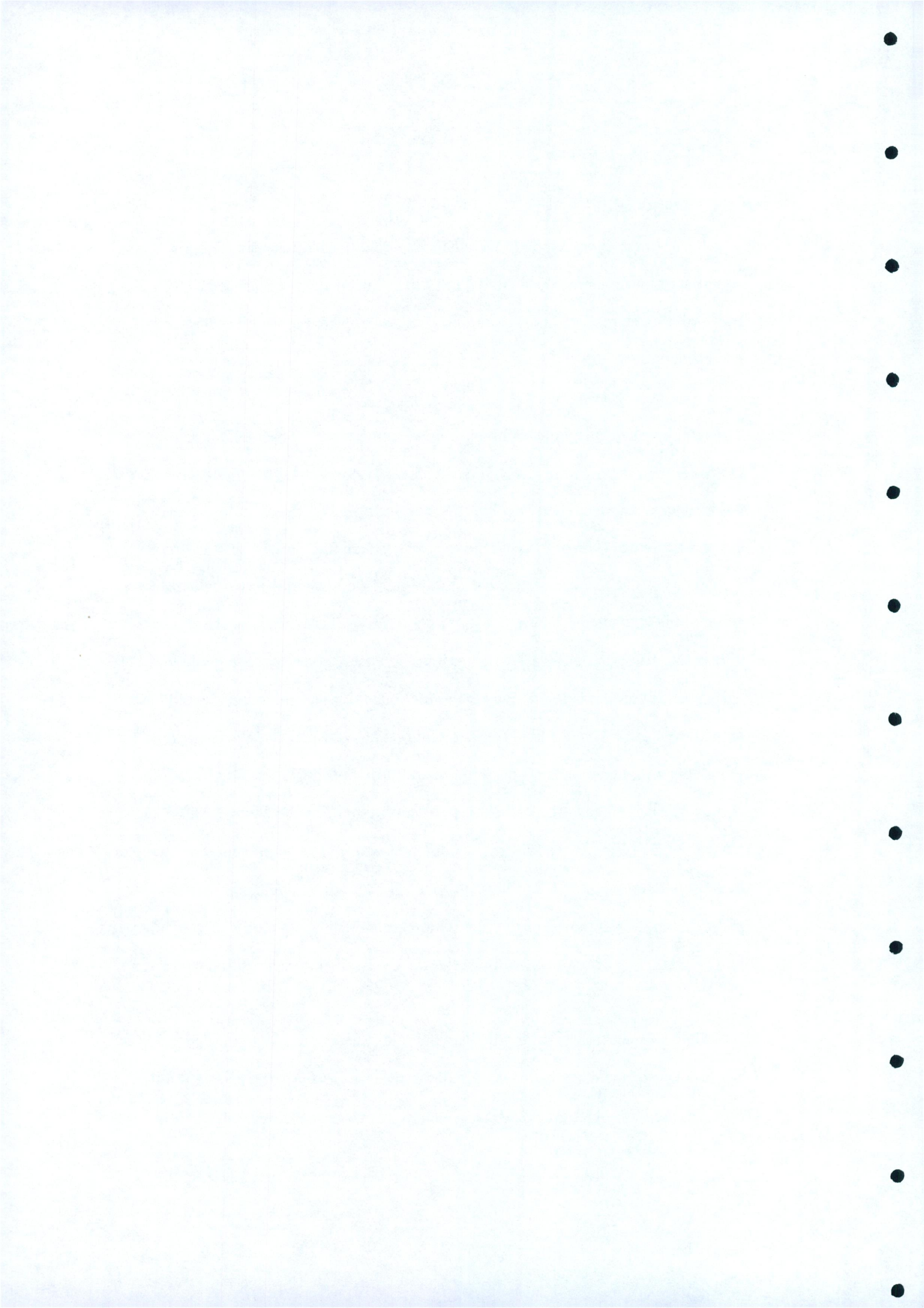
The division of the film into two halves by Kubrick can be seen as a simple rise and fall, but it also shows the pessimistic and cynical outlook on society which informs Kubrick's work. Humbert's rise (success) is the corruption of a twelve-year-old girl and his fall, when someone steals her for the same purpose, though Humbert is essentially responsible for this also. Barry's 'rise' is his cheating and gambling people out of their wealth and his fall is when he has the same done to him by his stepson after his one noble act, that of refusing to return fire on Bullingdon during their duel. Both are undone by the same devious methods



which they themselves used to reach their position. If Humbert is a "shining example of moral leprosy", as stated in *Lolita's* introduction, so too is Barry, and it is with this leprosy that they eventually become infected themselves and decay accordingly.

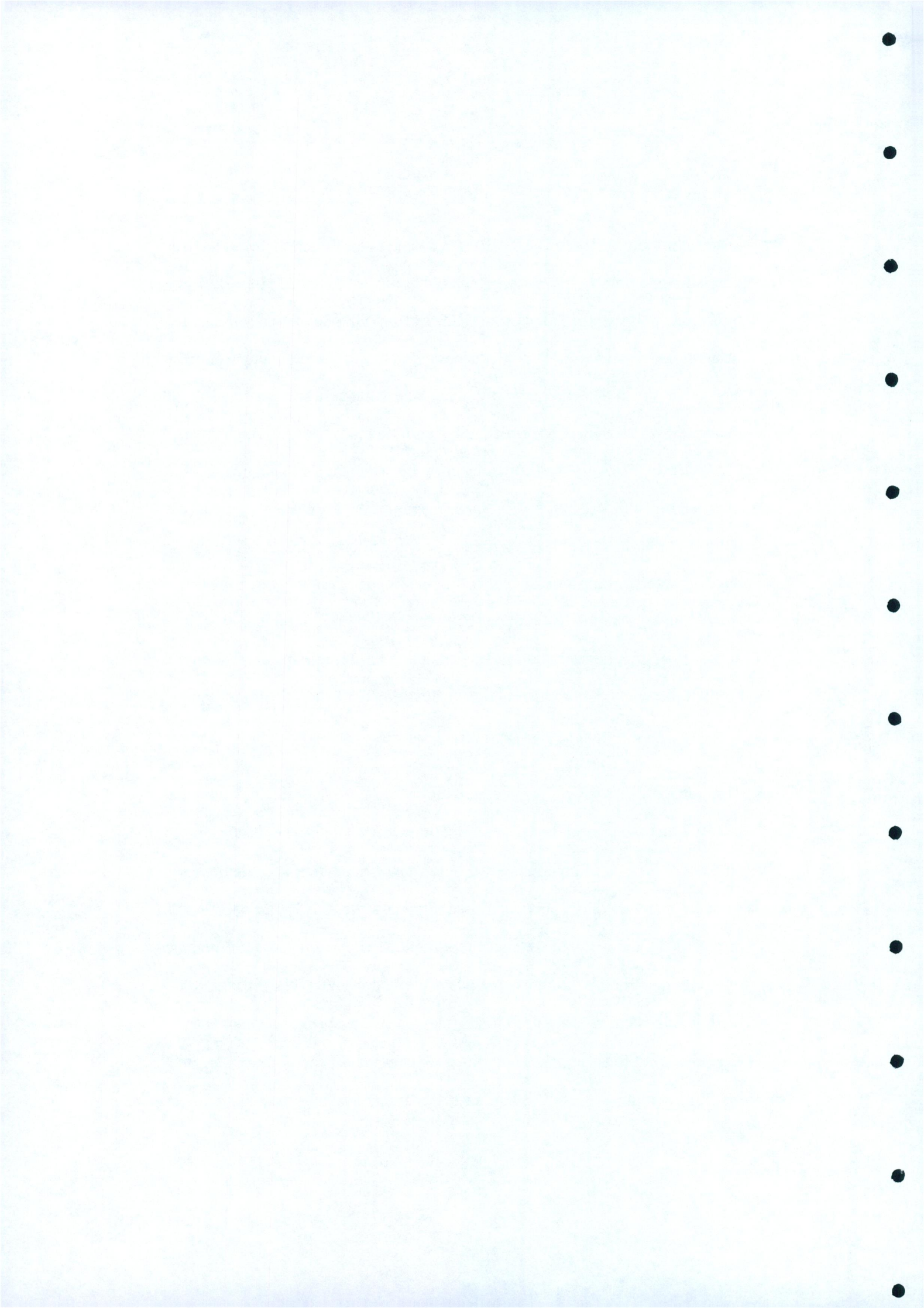
The Humbert and Barry of the novels appear significantly more malicious in character than those of the screen. There are two reasons for this - firstly there is a difficulty in condensing a novel to the length dictated by the attention span of a cinema audience. The time available to a writer to attend to detail and to structure a character is not accorded to the director. Therefore Kubrick had to condense some of the character formation. More importantly, where the films are concerned, Kubrick deliberately makes his characters appear more likeable in the early part of the films. In this way their subsequent disastrous actions would have an additional shock value as a viewer found that he / she had already identified with, behaving in a malicious fashion. In addition this enables him to infuse a certain sense of tragedy into the characters, for both *Lolita* and *Barry Lyndon* have a pervasive tragedy aura which is inherent in the films right from the beginning to the very end. Unlike Alex or HAL, for whom one has an eerie dislike from the beginning of the film, Humbert and Barry embody a certain human charm, a seductive charm, which effectively adds to their ultimate terror.

A further element of Kubrick's films are the roles the actors play in the construction of the narrative. Though all the films are entirely the creation of the director, the interpretation of the characters by the actors can sometimes subtly



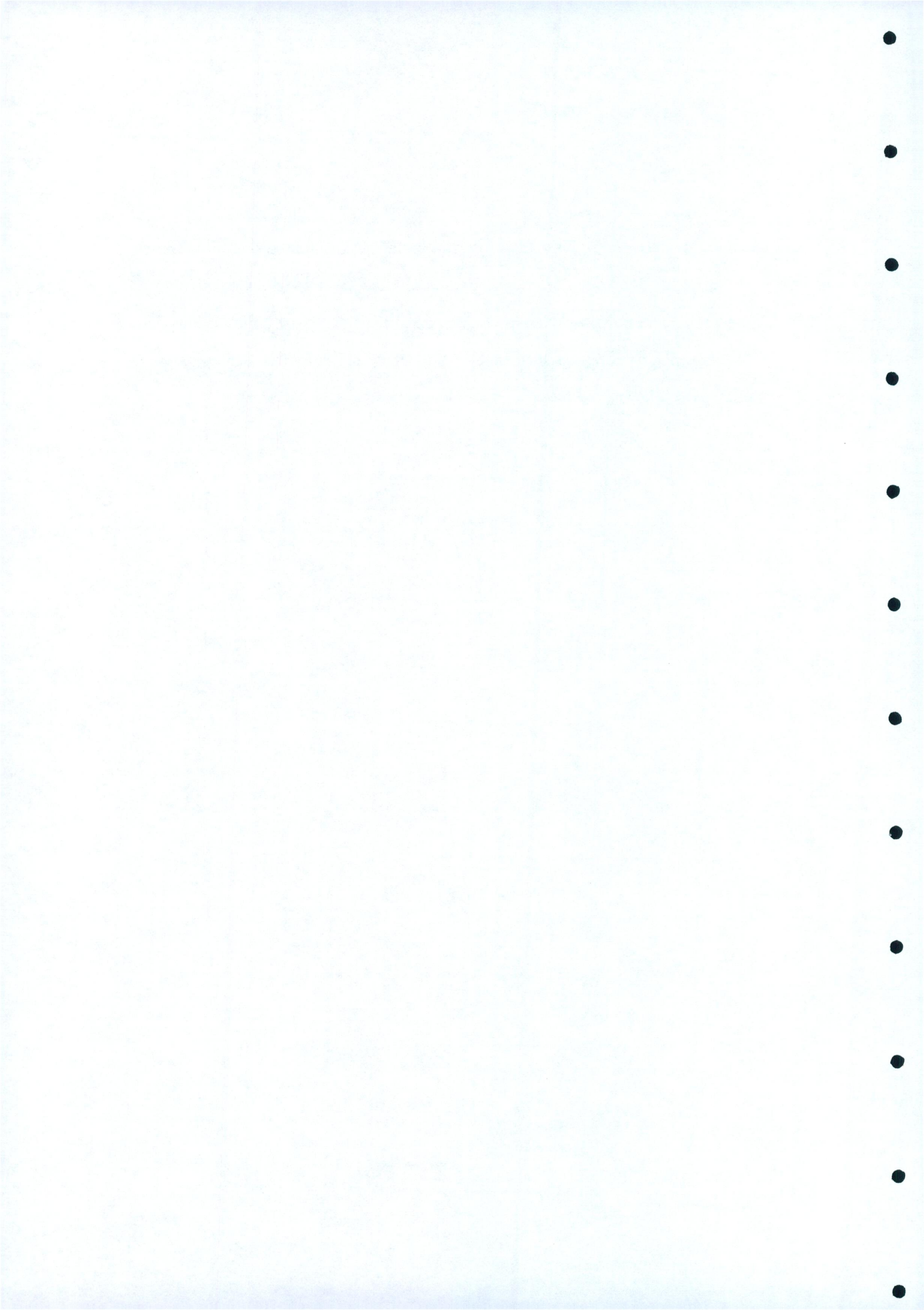
enhance the film. James Mason (Humbert) and Peter Sellers (Quilty) have a dramatic input into *Lolita*. Mason stated that his performance in *Lolita* was his finest ; he portrays the Humbert of Kubrick's moving novel perfectly, and fittingly conveys Humbert's cold stiffness. In contrast to this, Peter Sellers, who amazed Kubrick, is the perfect Quilty. Nabokov himself was impressed by the manner in which Sellers captured Quilty's erratic madness. Although Ryan O'Neill (Barry Lyndon) has come under much criticism for his portrayal of Barry Lyndon, much of it is unfair. As *Barry Lyndon* is a period drama, a relic of a bygone era, Ryan O'Neill seems to resonate an earnest staidness which informs the cold empty rooms and rich sprawling landscapes through which the actors slowly move. Though Kubrick has been accused of constant miscasting, it would appear more that he uses certain types of actors for definite reasons. It would seem unlikely that Kubrick would leave anything to chance when producing a film.

Through a process which began essentially with *Lolita*, Kubrick developed an intricate, detailed method of film production which is unlikely to be practised in cinema. A Kubrick film could never be mistaken for that of another director. Though many directors have their own inimical style, this is particularly so of him. His definitive characteristics mark him out as a unique director making unique films. Firstly his films are always derived from novels. Secondly his method of direction - with deep focus, intricately constructed shots and an overwhelming sense of space combined with their slow methodical pace, make his films incomparable to those of any other director. Kubrick is alone in his



field. The intensity of his films derives from the fact that they reside somewhere between literature and cinema. In essence Kubrick has produced a unique form of literary cinema which like many original art forms and all of Kubrick's films, are never appreciated fully at their time of production, but only after a certain lapse of time when they are no longer viewed alongside mainstream cinema.

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Studio portrait of James Mason





Studio portrait of Peter Sellers





Stanley Kubrick with Sue Lyon





Bullington challenges Barry

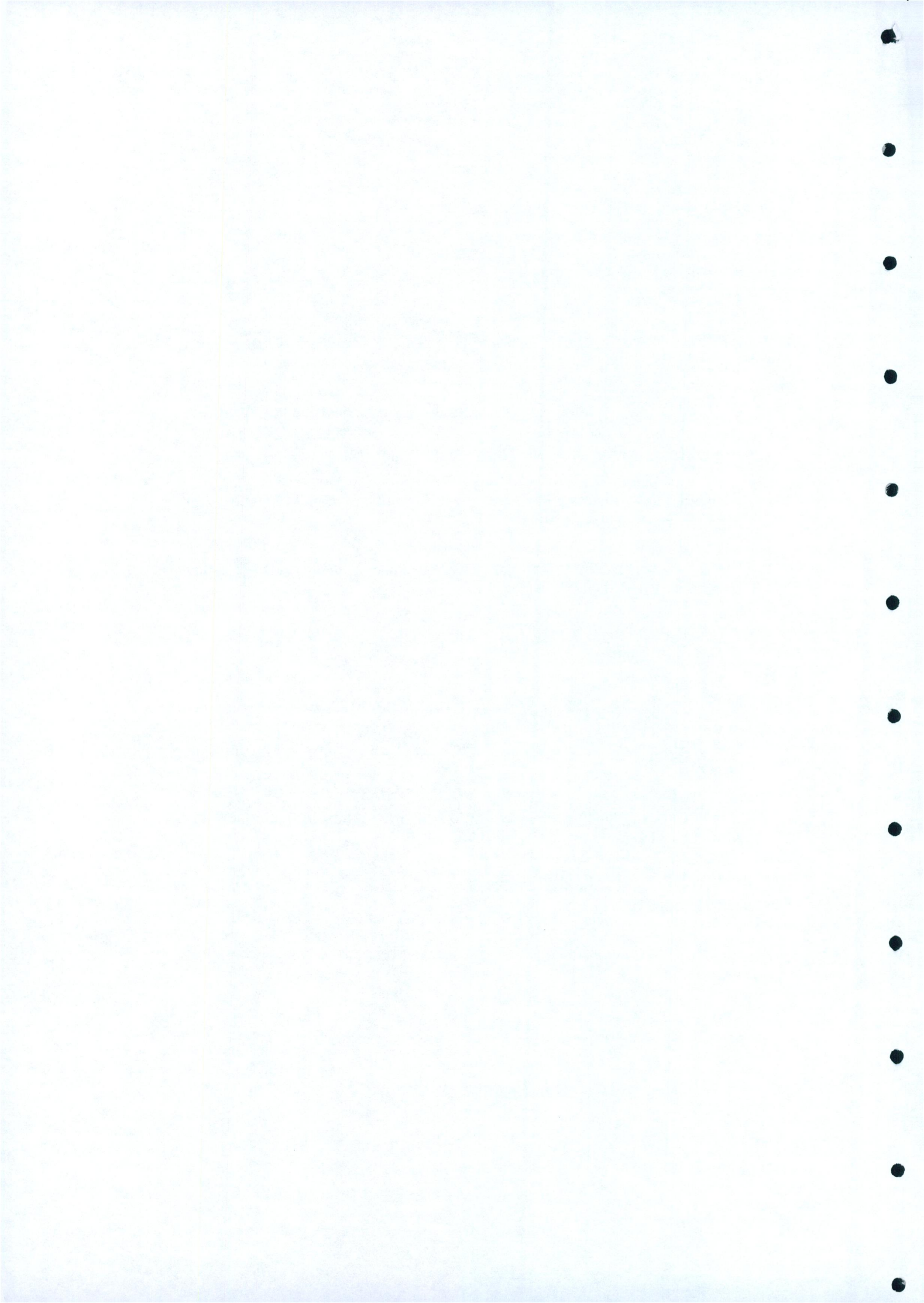


A Gaming House scene



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