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Extended Essay English B

Research question: Explore the notion of morality and love in Lolita by depicting Humbert's manipulative, uncanny nature with analyzing the relationships he has with other people.

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Abstract

Vladimir Nabokov's novel named "Lolita" has been always for ages a very controversial and complex piece of art. Many people have had difficulties with understanding the scope and the core of the novel; to get into the depth, analysis of the major characters has always been very difficult. It has always been very problematic and challenging to think out of the box and go beyond the limits. What Nabokov put out and created is an exceptional piece of work that has altered and influenced many ways of thinking.

The aim of this study is to investigate and analyze fully the eerie nature of Humbert Humbert in Nabokov's novel, Lolita. The research question goes like the following;

Explore the notion of morality and love in Lolita by depicting Humbert's manipulative, uncanny nature with analyzing the relationships he has with other people.

The essay has been aimed to define the notion of love and morality in many ways possible to get to a conclusion about Humbert's feelings. Since the novel is not exactly and necessarily very understandable, rather exceedingly debatable, some difficulties were faced like mentioned. Therefore, the fact that the narrator is not a reliable source to base the facts and the conclusion, the events and the affairs were used to have a clear judgment.

To get into a concise conclusion and have a clear understanding of the novel, many researches has been done. The method was to separate the two parts of the novel and investigate them independently and each of them consists of the relations Humbert Humbert has with the other characters. As for the conclusion, how Humbert's psychological development has been terminated was examined and analyzed.

Contents

Introduction	4
Part One	6
Humbert Humbert and Dolores Haze	6
Humbert Humbert and Charlotte Haze	13
Part Two	14
Humbert Humbert and Clare Quilty	16
Conclusion	16
Bibliography	18

“Lolita” tells the love story between a mature middle-aged man and a pre-adolescent girl. While this seems extremely inappropriate and unseemly enough, the both sides of the story remains manipulative and self seeking. Also the term love story is overly controversial and debatable. Humbert is a middle- aged man, preferably called in today’s terms as a “ pedophile”, has a lust for little young girls. This as some people might refer as “foul” “cloying” or “sickly” behavior is caused by his childhood love passing away at a very young and early state of her life. When his first love Annabel has died, he started searching for another long after he has left his childhood. *“I am convinced however, that in a certain magic and fateful way Lolita began with Annabel.” (Nabokov,12)*

His love for this young child has not been terminated properly, resulting in scarring him, being infatuated by young precocious little girls as Humbert likes to refer to them as “nymphets”. Still, it is overly controversial that if it is real and true love that Humbert has for Lolita since Humbert has a condition which is caused by a mental disorder named as “pedophilia”.

It is debatable that whether he truly and really cares for Lolita or is it just some product of a diseased mind. Not meaning to say that diseased minds are deprived of love and they cannot experience it in a particular way, however there are certain delusions of an unhealthy mind that certain biological elements have been corrupted and altered. For instance, he might just “perceive” Dolores as a nymphet rather than a normal child as a result of his special condition. Would he still have the same feelings for her if he had not been a pedophile? Dolores (Lolita, Lo, Lola) has certain habits that would be referred as annoying or abominable by Humbert if she was a middle-aged woman such as not washing her hair frequently and so on.

Humbert loathes most women's behavior as he hates Charlotte Haze (the big bitch, cow, obnoxious mama) (This makes him preferably unattainable by certain women like Charlotte Haze.) On the other hand, it is intriguing that if Dolores had these behaviors, it would not be probably a disgusting thing to do. To be exact, he would be charmed by them if it was a nymphet not a woman. This, as a matter of fact, creates uncertainty whether he loves Lolita or not. Also, their relationship was never the type where they shared emotional and personal traits, more of a bluntly sexual one. The reason that they could never have to chance of sharing something is because of the excess age gap and the fact that they have nothing in common.

Contrary to this, Humbert's "lust", "love" whichever; does not terminate when Lolita's "nymphage" terminates. He continues to chase her, risk his life for her even though by his standards she is not a nymphet anymore. Moreover, the things Humbert had done for Dolores are not the things he would normally do such as touching her, killing Clare Quilty and so on. In fact, he could not approach to any of the nymphets he adored before; "..., *I was consumed by a hell furnace of localized poltroon I never dared to approach. The human females I was allowed to wield were but palliative agents.* (Nabokov, 18)

Besides, with detesting and abhorring all the qualities of Charlotte, he merely married her just to "have his way" with Dolores. It is undeniable that he would not do this just for any nymphet he adores. Dolores has a different value for Humbert, indeed. The fact that he can never fully attain Dolores makes her more desirable and starts to chase her more than ever. Dolores is promiscuous, she has had numerous lovers and relationships at the age of 14 to 16. Humbert was

not even the first one that laid hands on her. *“Sensitive gentlewomen of the jury, I was not even her first lover.”* (Nabokov, 153)

Hereby, he is filled with the ambiguousness whether Dolores was truly his toy or not.

So the question of whether Humbert genuinely loved Lolita remains in a conundrum. Yet, it is certain that whatever Humbert did to Dolores was by no standards moral or acceptable. The matter of course is not that Humbert touched her, kissed her, had intercourse with her; physical intimacy is the surface of the issue exposed that emotional intimacy, manipulation and destruction had reflected on. The thing Humbert did to Dolores was to take her childhood, make her get overwhelmed by his lust, manipulate and limit her behaviors; thus resulting in her to escape.

PART ONE

HUMBERT HUMBERT AND DOLORES HAZE

To get into the depth of the relationship between Humbert and Dolores, it is obvious that the relationship is evidently self-seeking and manipulative. It is a misconception that only Humbert is the chargeable and errant side as Dolores is the victim of a crime. They are both as guilty and scheming with each other. However it must be a reminder for the reader that Dolores is only a child and cannot decide on her own very well. Whatever decision she may make, should not be considered thoroughly as it may not be the most reasonable. As for Humbert, he is a fool

of his lust and his infirmity. Like most other pedophiles, Humbert is charming and impressive, being an European and well-educated man makes him desirable and easier to prey on females. ” *Let me repeat with quiet force: I was and still am, despite mes malheurs an exceptionally handsome male; slow moving, tall, with soft dark hair and a gloomy but all the more seductive cast of demeanor.*” (Nabokov, 25)

He is narcissistic and regularly refers to his good looks.

As a matter of fact, he only sees him self as an object, just like he perceives women as objects. He believes the reason behind Lolita accepting to be with him is just for his “good looks”. As a further matter, his strong and proper language, impresses the reader even when he converses about his sickly obsession about Lolita, rape, murder, incest relationships, pedophilia and so many sordid subjects. By this, the unnatural issues elevates into a material of art and this particular way of speaking, communicating Humbert Humbert seduces the person he is in contact with. His power is his language and his charm.

To be exact, he is a pedophile and a killer and him believing his control over words will save him from judgment is a forlorn act. Humbert Humbert employs the potency of language to portray an image of a sympathetic fool who is madly in love. He is often very intellectual, criticizes the pop culture in which Lolita takes an interest in, and alters the vile subjects to a literary piece. Not only, this is the reason to be torn between how to feel about the pedophile as a reader, but also Dolores and even Charlotte Haze is affected as well. Dolores may have fallen for

the charming, sophisticated European, however he is, at the end of the day, a rapist, a murderer and a pedophile.

Language, the vacancy of a father figure and the money dependence includes the many ways Humbert exerts to control Dolores. Let alone controlling Dolores for sexual and sentimental bonding, he uses Charlotte Haze to get to Lolita and meet with her in the first place. Hereby, it is prominent that the fool has a manipulative nature to multiple persons.

Also Humbert is usually overly superficial, regarding to only looks of women or behaviors of hygiene. He never really has an elaboration for the notion of inner beauty or else. This also makes the subject immoral or sick perhaps, because of the importance that beauty has on Humbert. Unfortunately, the power of language is not just enough to portray a love story.

Contrary to this, Humbert Humbert sometimes refers to himself as “lanky, big boned, woolly chested Humbert Humbert, with thick black eyebrows.” It contradicts with himself and with the relationship with Lolita. Moreover, Vladimir Nabokov sometimes conveys the pathetic pedophile as a sympathetic fool who is just in love and innocent as because his peculiar behaviors ensue from his unstable mental condition. “ *I heard my sweetheart running up the stairs. My heart expanded with such force that it almost blotted me out.* ” (Nabokov, 73)

These lines in particular seem like they belong to someone who is madly in love with his lover and just excited to hear her come to him. Nabokov’s this kind of portrayal of Humbert makes the reader doubt that he is the actual killer, rapist, pedophile and felon he really is. So in a

way, language camouflages the person Humbert truly is, making him seem innocent and not guilty. Thus, Humbert is not the typical reliable author, the story is one sided and biased. Humbert regularly names the nymphets as “demonic” or by other negative adjectives trying to hide his manipulation and mistakes. Like mentioned, Dolores is delinquent just like Humbert however a man of 50 years age should not be labeling a 14 year old as demonic by the standard rules of “morality”.

By various complexions, the notion of morality is often reversed and mocked. Even by depicting the sexual and emotional connection between a child and a 50 year old man, Nabokov goes beyond the conventional subjects. Additionally, the novel interrogates the term morality. “What is moral?” With Humbert’s terms, everything he did was indeed moral and he was guilt-free. Yet with a health mind’s terms, it is no way plausible.

It is an undeniable fact that Dolores is culpable at times as well. Using the weakness Humbert has for her and provoking him, makes the relationship go further and further. It makes Humbert think it is okay to be with her since she agrees to do so, yet even though a child of her age gives assent to be with him, he should have not pursue the relationship as the rules of morality and social circumstances does not allow him to. Moreover, she abuses Humbert’s lust for her in order to get acceptance for her desires such as giving him sexual favors to raise up her allowance a dollar more. Nonetheless, Dolores is only a child, not even a teenager who has a naive “crush” on Humbert who is a grown man. “*Lo had drawn a jocose arrow to the haggard lover’s face and had put, in block letters: H.H*” (Nabokov, 76)

This crush, fondness and adoration of hers does not necessarily mean, she wants something serious like a solemn relationship from him as Humbert asks from her; spending their lives together for the rest of their lives. It is a common and normal situation for someone her age having a crush on someone who is elderly. *“Well you haven’t kissed me yet, have you?”* (Nabokov, 127)

These lines from Dolores, illustrates she wants and craves attention from Humbert, anyone in particular as a matter of fact, since she does not receive much attention or caring from her mother. Also the fact that we only know very little about Mr. Haze creates a void in the book. Is it that Mr. Haze’s absence cause Dolores to take interest in Humbert? Or did she really have a young girl’s crush in him? Because of this ambiguousness, Humbert’s interest in her makes Dolores enjoys this kind of an involvement in the beginning.

Humbert misuses this hole inside of Dolores by taking advantage of her sexually and emotionally; thus ruining her childhood. Ruining her childhood may sound extreme but with enough empathy, it is not unexpected that Dolores has grand ups and downs. It is clear, Dolores does not like this type of an extreme attention and limitation from Humbert because in the end, she winds up escaping from her to Clare Quilty. Her being flirtatious and precocious does not make Humbert any less guilty. The changes that occur within Dolores begin when she starts to grow up. So, when her nympage fades, her adoration towards Humbert fades as well.

Humbert is in an endless searching and longing for innocence he has lost long ago, throughout the novel. It is explicit that innocence is inquired by the opposite; sinfulness. Dolores even though by the terms she is a child or a teen, does not show any glimpse of innocence because of the manipulation she has done and the precocious nature of hers. Moreover, Dolores does not share the feelings as Humbert feels for her back. The love or the lust, whichever, is not exactly mutual. Dolores is just trying to kill some time and have fun like any other teenager. A serious commitment is hard to digest for her as Humbert is expected to receive. Thus she leaves and breaks his heart.

The novel itself, has a lot of contradictions and paradoxes within itself, this creates an uncertainty about how to feel about Humbert as a reader. He is often a “ a monster, a spider, a maniac, and a hound” and often a sympathetic fool who is in love. This may be investigated parallel with his emotions for Lolita. He deludes himself with the thought that he is in love, but like mentioned before he may just be a victim of pedophilia. The contradictions with his behaviors against Lolita is in the same terms, he beats her, hits her, seconds later start to hug her and kiss her. The inconsistency is endless in the novel just like Humbert’s endless struggle within himself.

To investigate the notion of morality by Dolores’ terms, it is seen that Dolores shows immoral behaviours as well as Humbert. Dolores may have problems or issues with herself or with her mother, or primarily with Humbert however she does not have a psychological disorder from what is known, that prevents her from escaping the reality and perceiving reality differently. Whatever decision she may make can and should only be investigated as to the

considerations of she is only a child, eventually, and should not be expected to make the best of decisions and choices. In contrast both a mother and a daughter being in a relationship with the same man is in many aspects is demented.

While she is not the main focus of the novel, it is known that she is indeed independent and does as she will likes so. Does not really ponder about the consequences or any else of a result. Consequently, her type of demeanor will not be the idealistic way in respect to morality as well. For instance, her abandonning Humbert (choice of word is significant since Humbert is emotionally attached to her) and going away with Clare Quilty, then leaving Clare Quilty as well and getting pregnant from another man. The repetition of leaving Humbert whether it was from Annabel, Valerie or Dolores; has a quite stature. Humbert as experienced being left by three females in total. It is known that he also left Europe for job oppurtunities.

In conclusion, it is not typically easy to be left alone by the people he cherishes and loves or even somebody he has spent a long time with. Of course, the void of psychiatry and therapy at the time worsened the case of Humbert. The premise is that Humbert's troubles may be an inducement of fears of abondonment. Secondly, the manipulation may be a defence mechanism to prevent Dolores from leaving him just like anybody else in the first place. Humbert's paranoia and insecurities illustrates the low self-worth he has. "*Humbert and Lolita, are both exiles.*"¹¹

¹ <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/lolita/themes.html>

² <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/lolita/themes.html>

Formerly, mentioned about leaving, the exile word in particular depicts the drama and the pain, the suffering. The leaving is the surface of the case as a matter of fact, leaving results in alienation and detachment. They are both morally and psychologically alienated and outcasted from their environment. They keep searching for places to go to but the journey would not just terminate. Humbert Humbert is detached and has no correlation to the outside world. What he perceives is corrupted, he is delusional, paranoid and a pedophile. *“Humbert cannot see his own monstrosity, and Lolita shows only occasional awareness of herself as a victim.”*²

None of the two can make the most reasonable decisions about each other. The subject of distorted sense perception has an occurrence as well.

HUMBERT HUMBERT AND CHARLOTTE HAZE

The correlation between what Charlotte feels for Humbert and what Humbert feels for Lolita is prominent. Charlotte has a middle-age middle-class adoration and lust for Humbert because he is ravishing, European and sophisticated, with keeping in mind that Charlotte is not. So, it is understandable that she would have a fondness for him. Yet, Humbert does not return these preferably strong feelings to Charlotte but rhapsodizes for Lolita instead. The letter Charlotte has written for Humbert where she confesses her feelings is quite important. Firstly, Nabokov foreshadows the inevitable end of Charlotte, her accident of being run over by a car.

“I shall be back by dinnertime, if I do eighty both ways and don’t have an accident (but what would it matter?), and I do not wish to find you in the house.” (Nabokov, 74)

Secondly, Charlotte Haze simply indicated her love for Humbert with her best trial of emulating the language in artistic sense. Humbert's reaction of repulsion and retreat queries and mock ridicules the sincerity of Charlotte.

The fact that Humbert is an unreliable narrator, knowing his history with lying and deceiving the public; even doctors in the sanitarium, creates an equivocal and vague response and analysis.

PART TWO

As the two lovers(!) start to move places from Dolores' home in which she was brought in, their relationship begins to fall apart more and more. The constant travelling and not settling in one place indicates that the two, both Dolores and Humbert cannot keep up with the monotonous lifestyle. They both long and search for an excitement and occurrence. Of course, it is possible for a teenager like Lolita to have these desires, but a man of Humbert's age wanting to do reckless and inconsiderate behavior is not. For example, the fact that they engage in sexual acts in public places like the beach and even the classroom is a sign that Humbert has completely deteriorated from the acts of morality.

“..., and I sat beside Dolly, and just behind that neck and that hair, and unbuttoned my overcoat and for sixty-five cents plus the permission to participate in the school play, had Dolly put her inky, chalky, red-knuckled hand under the desk.” (Nabokov, 224)

“You know what’s so dreadful about dying is that you are completely on your own”; and it struck me, as my automaton knees went up and down, that I simply did not know a thing about my darling’s mind...” (Nabokov, 324)

Humbert suddenly comes to the realization that they did not share a sentimental bonding, more of a sexual one, as mentioned previously. He, suddenly comes to the realization that he took away her childhood and her life, that he is a monster, a despicable criminal, a rapist, a murderer. He, at last, admits and acknowledged that he manipulated Lolita.

“I loved you. I was a pentapod monster, but I loved you. I was despicable and brutal, and turpid and everthing main je t’aimais, je t’aimais! And there were times when I knew how you felt, and it was hell to know it, my little one. Lolita girl, brave Dolly Schiller.” (Nabokov, 324)

Calling her as “Dolly Schiller”, he apperceives that he lost her forever and she belongs to someone else now.

Perhaps, the reader would not necessarily bond nor empathize with Humbert until Part Two, because in the final chapters, it is seen that he is remorseful for the horrid things he had

done and that he misses her. Leastways, he has lost someone and at the same time he is abandoned by someone he truly cared for.

HUMBERT HUMBERT AND CLARE QUILTY

Clare Quilty is Humbert's double. They show resemblance in many ways such as their adoration for young little girls. They are both sophisticated and charming. However their self-portrait is different. Clare Quilty, is a subtle, careless and manipulative, typical pedophile who takes advantage of little girls. On the other hand, Humbert conveys himself as a lover, a fool and a victim. Throughout the novel, physically, Quilty is rarely seen but his shadow and presence that makes Humbert suspicious and paranoid is always there. At last, when Quilty dies, Humbert dies as well. Not in a literal sense, but the self-awareness of Humbert in the terminal chapters indicate that Humbert has completed his self-developement. Then again, the murder shows that Humbert is a villian and cannot keep social relations to a level. Whatever type of relation he had with multiple persons, he failed to pursue.

Altogether, it is still an enigma whether what Humbert and Dolores shared was a two sided or even a one sided love story. Humbert's unconscious and senseless behaviors is indeed a product of a psychological disorder that may have caused him an image of amour, still it is uncertain that it would last for a very long period of time as Humbert had struggled for. The insufficiency of psychiatry at the time, defies the possible psychoanalysis that could have concluded a define end for the dilemmas. It is, in earnest, that Humbert lacks empathy and the

ability to comprehend the difficulty he puts other people in a situation. The uncanny of Humbert's nature is paradoxical and puzzling. He may be or is a pathological liar, he is unquestionably not a consistent and reliable narrator. In addition, he, simply, never get along with people for a long time.

Nabokov mocks the notion of morality in many ways. Dolores, at a very young age, is sexually active. Considering the time in which the novel was written, this is vastly unsuitable and comical. Like a middle-age woman; she betrays, leaves and manipulates Humbert both sexually and psychologically. The fact that a mother and a daughter had sexual intercourse with the same man is exceedingly revolting. For Humbert, he controls, manipulates and lies to Dolores. Even he pays her for sexual favors. Moreover, as if Humbert is ingenuous and immaculate, he continuously, blames and refers to the young girl as "demonic" or whichever. Yet, there are times when Lolita shows signs of delinquency by accepting to enroll in Humbert's unmannerly demenaours, even though knowing they are wrong by canonical rites. The constant paradoxes and contradictions makes it even hard to comprehend fully the nature of the characters.

The reader might sympathize with Humbert in Part Two since he undergoes a tragedy of losing a loved one, perhaps when he admits he is a monster, he becomes less of a criminal because he is remorseful. Humbert was never the typical type of a pedophile like Quilty, he cared and looked after Lolita and kept on searching for her. Nonetheless, he provided a roof above her head but of course, the tragedies that lived under there is more important. To sum up, it is overly difficult to get into the deepest places of Humbert's mind since there are lots of contradictions and obscurity.

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