

# Comparative analysis of the literary essay



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Comparative Analysis of the Literary work, Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov and the Artistic Works of Balthasar Klossowski de Rola, Better Known as Balthus

Lolita is written as a memoir in the first person by its main character, Humbert Humbert. This is a story that could be viewed in two very different ways, two very different perspectives. One could look at it as a story of a middle age pedophile as evidenced by the quote “ Humbert Humbert is without question an honest-to-God, open-and-shut sexual deviant, displaying classic ruthlessness, guile and above all attention to detail. And the other, of a middle aged man in anguish over his love for a prepubescent girl, a forbidden love. “ Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul.

Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta. She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks.

She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita. “ I chose to view this work as the later.

To me it showed a middle aged man trapped in a moral dilemma. A statement from the first page of the book best says how I feel about the story. “ Lolita is not about sex, but about love. Almost every page sets forth some explicit, erotic emotion or some erotic action and still it is not about sex. It is love”.

Nabokov started writing Lolita in 1949 and finished in 1954. When he finished his work he had a hard time getting it published. Publishers were nervous about printing a book supposedly narrated by a pedophile. Four

American publishers turned him down before he was finally able to get it published by Olympia Press of Paris and in 1958 in America.

Controversy over the book only increased its readership and sales rose. To understand this controversy you need to understand the story and further understand why I considered it to be more of a tragic love interest rather than the perceived pornographic pedophile story thought of by others. The story starts out with a boyhood Humbert having his first taste of a love affair with the love of his young life, Annabel. They laugh, sneak around and display affection like young lovers do, but after three months Annabel dies of typhus and leaves a broken hearted Humbert.

Though Humbert experiences relationships throughout his adult life he always feels hollow, like something is missing. Though he grows in age he still yearns for his young love. Humbert takes to fantasizing about young girls and goes as far as sitting in parks just to view the girls to get a glance of a "nymphet". Humbert didn't just want any young girl; she had to have certain traits that made her a "nymphet", his "nymphet". His criterion was a girl between nine and fourteen but as he states in his memoirs "Between those ages, are all girls nymphets? Of course not. Otherwise we, who are in the know, we lone voyagers, we nympholepts, would long have gone insane.

Neither are good looks any criterion. A true nymphet is strikingly inferior to that of provisionally plain, just nice or "cute" or even "sweet" or attractive little girl. You have to be an artist, and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins in order to discern at once, by ineffable signs the little deadly demon that I deem a nymphet. "

Humbert marries and tries to suppress his desire; he becomes bored with his married life and in the same time frame discovers his wife is having an affair. This leads him to divorce her and leave Paris and move to America. Once there, while looking for a place to stay he visits a home with a room to rent, the Haze home.

While looking over the house Humbert is not impressed and is looking for a way to leave but during his tour of the house spots Dolores Haze, Lo, Lola, Lolita, the 12 year old daughter of the home owner, Charlotte Haze, Big Haze. He is struck; she is the nymphet that he has been searching for. Humbert agrees to rent the room, to be near his nymphet. Humbert proceeds to try to win Lo's affection while Lo's mother wishes to win Humberts' affection.

He ends up marrying " Big Haze", Lo's mother to get near her. Big Haze dies in a tragic accident soon after their wedding. This sets the stage for Humberts seduction of Lo. He ends up with his nymphet, losing her to a rival, killing the rival and dieing in jail. Ironically Lo dies soon afterward giving birth to a child. As you can see, this is more of a story of intense love rather than that of a pedophile.

The situation Nobokov faced after writing Lolita is very much similar to that faced by the polish painter Balthasar Klossowski de Rola, better known as Balthus. Balthus had a difficult time getting his paintings displayed in his early days. His paintings were viewed as pornographic, almost taboo. They often depicted pubescent young girls in erotic and voyeuristic poses.

He was best known for his disturbing and erotic works of girls on the verge of womanhood. One of the most notorious works from his first exhibition in Paris was *The Guitar Lesson* (1934), which caused controversy due to its depiction of a sexually explicit lesbian scene featuring a young girl and her teacher. As you can imagine the *Guitar Lesson* caused quite a controversy when it was first released. Balthus painted many pictures of young girls, most in provocative poses and situations. Balthus' obsession with young girls parallels that of the early Humbert Humberts with the exception that he seemed to desire multiple girls and Humbert only wanted his nymphet, his Lolita.

Other Balthus works that seem to parallel the plot of *Lolita* and the exploitation of young girls are *The Golden Days*, which seems to show a topless young girl sitting in a chair while her older lover seems to be building a fire in the fire place in preparation of a romantic night. One could almost envision this scene coming right out of the book. The other painting that puts you in mind of book and its controversial content is pictured here. I couldn't locate the name but you can clearly see the relationship of this Balthus painting to the character Quilty, Humberts rival for Lo's affection. This looks as though it were taken right out of the text, displaying Quilty and the semi nude Lo. Other samples of Balthus' works are shown on the following page.

Notice the young girls in various stages of undress, a reoccurring theme. The tie between the book and especially Humbert and the works of Balthus are very strong and if the book were in need of illustration, I'm sure Balthus would have did an excellent job as its illustrator and would have thoroughly enjoyed the job. So you would ask yourself, " Is Balthus the outstanding

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preserver of tradition or a mediocre painter who is only remarkable for sexual perversion and snobbery? Do his typical paintings of little girls testify to desires beyond the area of taboo or are they “untouchable archetypes of purity”? Balthus, who had staged his life, partly constructed his vita and surrounded himself with an aura of mystery, leaves art lovers and historians with a lot of riddles to solve. ”