

A comparison of two literary works that share the same theme literature review sa...

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Introduction

A literary review is any work that is designed to analyze or scrutinize some critical areas or points of knowledge, often subjectively, using certain theoretical and or methodological principles . In this case, what is being written is a literary review about two literary works that share the same theme. The theme or more specifically, themes, that will be focused on in this paper would be Race and Ethnicity. There are a lot of literary works that are centered on the themes race and ethnicity written between the early 20th century and the early 21st century, a gap of almost a hundred years. It would be important to take note of the fact that the early 20th century was marked as an era wherein gender, social status, race, and ethnic stratification was a form of mandate. The early 20th century was also an era wherein slavery (the act of buying and selling slaves where they are also treated as commodities) was still legal. This is, in fact, what made most literary works written during this period, the early 20th century, that are centered on race, gender, ethnicity, and social status, particularly interesting. Some of the best examples of which include but may not be limited to *Country Lovers* by Gordimer, *the Welcome Table* by Walker, *What it is like to be a Black Girl* by Smith, *Child of Americas* by Morales, *the Secret Life of Walter Mitty* by Thurber, and *The Story of an Hour* by Chopin. This paper will, however, focus only on a thematic discussion of two literary works, particularly *the Country Lovers* by Nadine Gordimer and *What it's Like to be a Black Girl (for those of you who aren't)* by Patricia Smith. To summarize the contents of the entire paper, the two literary works reviewed

basically have the same theme, race and ethnicity but have different points of view or use of characters, among other aspects.

Country Lovers by Nadine Gordimer

Novel and short story readers have always been fascinated and at the same time intrigued by the idea of forbidden love. This is, in fact, what fueled the popularity of the story of Country Lovers. Country Lovers is a book that was published in 1975 and was written by the famous literary author Nadine Gordimer. The story behind Country Lovers centered on the forbidden love story between a black woman, Thebedi, and one of the sons of her white masters, Paulus. The setting of the story was set at a time when slavery was still legal and when people were still allowed to treat their slaves as commodities, or in basically any way they like. Based on this, it would be safe to assume that the story happened somewhere during the early 20th century .

At this point, the author of this paper would like to emphasize that Thebedi was the protagonist in the story and that she was a black woman who was bought as a slave to serve her white masters. Her white masters had a son named Paulus. Thebedi and Paulus became very close friends during their childhood. In fact, based on the phrases used by the author of the book, it can be easily classified that there was something that was more than simple friendship and camaraderie that existed between the two.

Eventually, what started initially as friendship blossomed into a not so forbidden childhood romance. When the two finally grew up, this childhood romance easily turned into relatively harmless flirtation and when they were

already in their adolescent stages, into sexual curiosity. Despite knowing that what they were getting themselves involved in was forbidden, the two still continued entertaining their feelings and desires. Over the course of a short amount of time, Thebedi got pregnant with Paulus' child.

The unfortunate fact about this was that Paulus, the father of Thebedi's child did not have the chance to know what Thebedi was already conceiving. He remained ignorant of this fact until the child was finally delivered and Thebedi was practically forced to get married to another man named Njabulo. A lot of events that can easily be interpreted as tense happened between Njabulo and Paulus, especially after the latter finally came to know that Thebedi just gave birth to his child. The primary cause of the tension in the story was mainly caused by the issue whether who gains custody of the child, Paulus, the legitimate father, or Njabulo, the one who then acted as the father mainly because of Paulus' absence.

Fearing that he would eventually lose contact with his child, Paulus took matters to his own hand and started to move, perhaps to gain full custody of his child, even if that meant creating conflict or using force and or aggression. Unfortunately, the very next day, the child died of mysterious causes but the author tried, in a way, to express likely possibilities that the death of the child was perpetrated by Njabulo in order to keep Thebedi and Paulus from getting back together.

There are two factors that made the book *Country Lovers* so engaging and interesting to read. The first factor would be the intensity of the events, especially when situations and events became so tense that they led to the eventual death of a child. Surely, that was an event that rarely, if at all,

happens in real life. The second factor would be the scandalous quality of the story. During the period when slavery, often of black people, was still an acceptable practice, it was practically a taboo for white people, especially the nobles, to have an intimate relationship with, let alone start a family with a black man or woman. In this case, Paulus was a white guy who did not mind such taboos and just proceeded with what his feelings for Thebedi was telling him to do. In the end, their actions led to tragedies.

The root cause behind all the bad things that happened in Thebedi's life was caused by the social stigma that society, during her time, has placed on black people and slaves . During that period, interracial romance was considered a social taboo. The controversy only becomes heavier when we consider that Thebedi and Paulus' romantic relationship existed during the height of racial tension between White and African Americans. This story by Gordimer focused on the central themes that are racial and ethnicity issues but the plot was centered on forbidden romance.

What it's like to be a Black Girl (for Those of You Who Aren't) by Patricia Smith

What it's like to be a black girl (for those of you who aren't) is, in fact, a poem written by seasoned author, Patricia Smith in 1991 that unfolded the story of a black girl's journey towards womanhood. This poem was in a number of ways, similar to the first literary work discussed in this paper, the Country Lovers by Gordimer.

What it's like to be a black girl (for those of you who aren't), despite being a poem, in fact, tells its readers a story. This can be evidenced by the author's use of the phrase first of all in the first paragraph. This should already alert

the readers that the author is, in fact, preparing them to listen or read a story. What the poem is, in a nutshell, is a first person point of view or an insider's point of view of a black girl who is about to transition into womanhood in a society that condemns the very presence of black people (not just girls) and deprives them of human rights that are already available to black people today.

Given the context and scenarios drawn by the author through his choice of words and verbal illustrations, it would be safe to assume that the story of the nine year old girl was set at a time when there was a high level of tension between White and Black Americans in the Americas, or at a time when slavery was still considered a legal practice. If this is indeed the case, then this automatically confirms the author of this paper's initial assumption that Country Lovers has the same setting and theme with What it's like to be a black girl (for those of you who aren't). In the poem, it was shown how being a black person, either a boy or a girl, was not welcomed by society, mainly because of the existing social stigma that works against the favor of black people.

The story emphasized on one of the most important developmental stage in an individual's life, puberty. Puberty is often defined as a stage wherein a boy or a girl's body undertakes certain significant physical, emotional, and behavioral changes . Such changes, or pubertal changes, often occur between the age of 9 and 14. In the poem, the black girl was a nine year old one. The author wrote " it's being 9 years old and feeling like you're not finished; like your edges are wild, like there's something, everything, wrong" . In this case, what it's like to be a black girl (for those of you who aren't)

differs from *Country Lovers*. The former focused on the main character's transition from girlhood into womanhood whereas the latter focused on the main characters' relationship issues and some tragic events that happened as a result of stigmatization of black people.

Conclusion

In summary, we conclude that even though the two stories *What it's like to be a black girl* (for those of you who aren't) by Patricia Smith and *Country Lovers* by Nadine Gordimer have striking similarities in terms of the central themes that the author used, specifically race and ethnic issues, they are still unique in their own ways. For instance, the former focused on the story, including the issues and dilemmas, of a black girl who was about to transition from girlhood to womanhood in a society where black people, regardless of the gender are generally not accepted; while the latter focused on the forbidden love story of a white man and a black woman and the tragic events that happened mainly as a result of the social stigmatization against black people and the fact that society, during the time of the story, did not allow for the marital union of a white and black couple.

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