Lolita?: A Psychological Fairy Tale

Lolita? is a novel published in 1955 and written by Russian-American author and poet Vladimir Nabokov. After immigrating to the United States from Europe, Humbert Humbert becomes sexually obsessed with a twelve-year old, Dolores Haze, who tends to go by the name Lolita. He marries the mother to be with Lolita. His obsession ultimately ruins the lives of every main character in the novel. Charlotte is killed by a passing car when she tries to expose Humbert's fixation with Lolita. This left Lolita in Humbert's custody. However, their tumultuous relationship leads Lolita to run away with another hebephile, Clare Quilty. Out of anger and with a thirst for vengeance, Humbert finds Quilty and kills him. Afterward, Humbert is arrested for the murder of Quilty. It is in his jail cell that he writes his memoirs. It is revealed that soon after Quilty's murder and Humbert Humbert's arrest, Lolita died in childbirth and Humbert died in his cell of heart failure while awaiting trial. The dark and depressing (yet darkly comical) novel serves as a sort of cautionary tale, as it tells the story of the mentally unstable hebephile.

Lolita? is similar in some aspects to traditional fairy tales, as it teaches a lesson to the audience by telling the tale of a man who often acts as if he is in a fairy tale. The man, Humbert Humbert, will often say things to the reader such as him being "on an enchanted island" and being "under a nymphet's spell." Nymphets are, as described by Humbert, attractive yet underage girls usually between the ages of nine and fourteen who are charming, mischievous, and tender yet vulgar. Humbert often uses imagery from classical mythology and folklore when imagining nymphets. Similarities and references to folklore and fairy tales, such as "Cinderella" and "Beauty and the Beast," can often be found throughout ?Lolita. ?It is fitting that Nabokov would reference "Beauty and the Beast" while writing ?Lolita? as the novel is a sort of "Beauty and the Beast" tale. The innocent "Beauty," Lolita, develops a crush and is taken into the control of the "Beast", the psychotic sexual deviant Humbert Humbert, who tries to maintain control over Lolita for as long as he can.

The cautionary tale aspect of ?Lolita? is another feature of the novel that makes it similar to traditional fairy tales. Many traditional fairy tales teach their readers' lessons of caution, such as the story "Hansel and Gretel", a story which sought to teach children not to wander far from home. ?Lolita? teaches the reader an important lesson: Always know and be careful of who you let into your life, family, and home. Lolita's mother, Charlotte Haze, only knew Humbert Humbert for several weeks before asking him to marry her and she had never met him before allowing him to move in with her and Lolita. If Charlotte had been more careful about letting strangers into her and her daughter's lives, family, and home, the insane and narcissistic Humbert Humbert would not have destroyed her and Lolita's lives. Her life would not have been cut short and her daughter, Lolita, would not have been taken advantage of and, most likely, would not have died at such a young age and orphaning her newborn child.

One of the features of ?Lolita? that sets it apart from many other novels is how unreliable the narrator, Humbert Humbert, is. Due to his psychosis and narcissism, the audience can not be sure whether or not he is telling the absolute truth or whether or not he is talking about real life or fantasy. Humbert Humbert's disconnect with reality can cause the reader to also disconnect with reality as they become disoriented and not able to tell what is true and what is not. It is apparent that not only is Humbert Humbert a hebephile (An adult attracted to early adolescent

children), but he is suffering from psychosis and narcissism. The reason he checks into the psychiatric center in Quebec is that he feels he is “losing touch with reality”, meaning that he knows he experiences psychosis. He often displays symptoms of psychosis, such as delusions, insomnia, discontent, and social isolation. Humbert Humbert is so full of self-delusion that he actually believes Lolita seduced him and was in complete control of the relationship, which is obviously untrue. She only had some control due to her ability to manipulate him by using his obsession over her to influence his decisions. His narcissism is displayed by his belief of superiority and his constant selfish actions he takes throughout the novel that often causes suffering for others. He put every woman he was romantically involved with through toxic relationships by controlling and at times degrading them. He took Lolita from her home and did everything in his power to keep and control her. He excuses drugging Lolita to put her to sleep so he can take advantage of her by saying he wants to keep his conscience clean by not letting Lolita know it happened, but that is obviously an excuse he uses to justify doing something terribly wrong so he can fulfill his hebephilic sexual desires. His hebephilia is his most apparent mental condition. Hebephilia is the sexual and/or romantic attraction to early pubescent children, typically between the ages of eleven and fourteen, by adults. The age may very as puberty may begin at different times for different people. The cause of hebephilia is still a mystery as science often has problems finding the causes for sexual orientations, but Humbert’s hebephilia has been blamed on his love affair with his childhood best friend and crush, Annabel Leigh. He loved her so and had such strong sexual urges for her when he was thirteen, but they were never able to act on their sexual urges as Annabel Leigh’s parents thwarted their relationship.

Lolita? has been hailed as one of the best books of the twentieth century. Through its darkness and complexity, it serves as a great cautionary tale and a great read. It involves culture, philosophy, psychology, and numerous other subjects that ensures anyone who can tolerate the immorality and unreliability of the narrator will enjoy reading this excellent piece of literature.

Works Cited

1. Nabokov, Vladimir. ?Lolita?. Random House, 1955.