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# The Exploration Into The Psyche Of Two Male Protagonists Using David Lurie And Humbert

“External conditions mirror internal conditions” asserts authors Meg Lundstrom and Charlene Belk in their book titled *Power of flow*. This internal development I’d defined as one’s thinking and their way of looking at the world. This essay will investigate the internal development of male protagonists compared to their actions. By looking at J.M Coetzee’s characterization of David Lurie in *Disgrace* and Humbert Humbert from Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*. By looking at power, desire and psychological development.

David Lurie’s position in post-Apartheid South Africa and at the Cape Town University as an English lecturer allows him to see himself as a person in power to a certain extent. In his sexual relations with both Soraya and Melanie, there is a power imbalance. Lurie is technically “old enough to be [Soraya’s] father” which proves that he is aware that using her for sex is wrong yet it doesn’t stop him. Similar to when Lurie follows Melanie and asks himself “No more than a child! What am I doing?” This proves that his knowledge of right and wrong is meaningless because it won’t stop him. The girls don’t stop him either because they are conscious of the power he has over them. Even when Melanie tries to stop him from coming into her house by saying “no, not now!” Lurie’s knowledge that sex was “undesirable to the core” from her side doesn’t stop him from sleeping with her. He knows the power he has over her. Therefore proving that he is internally mindful of her feelings but his actions completely disregard them.

Likewise, Humbert has power over Lolita. The death of Lolita’s mother meant Lolita was stuck with Humbert. Humbert knows Lolita has nowhere else to go. He makes sure that Lolita knows it too. Humbert tries to convince Lolita that he is all she will ever have. Therefore it took her a long time to run away although he “broke [her] life.” Furthermore, he threatens her with what he calls “The reformatory threat.” These are orphanages or hostile institutions such as reform schools. He uses this threat to keep her under control and to keep her satisfying his sexual needs. This proves how Humbert exploits her even though he says “I looked at her and knew as clearly as I know I am going to die, that I loved her more than anything else.” Humbert’s strong love and passion for Lolita are not expressed through his overwhelming power over her.

Similar to Humbert’s feelings for Lolita. Lurie’s attraction towards Melanie and Soraya has a sense of desire. Both women are dark skin, black women. “Soraya is tall and slim with long black hair and dark, liquid eyes” just like Melanie who is “small and thin, with close-cropped black hair...dark eyes.” The quotes prove the similarities between these two women. “A woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone,” Lurie said this to Melanie. This shows how Lurie views women as objects which need to fulfil their “duty” based on his desire for them. His idea of desire is based on his selfish needs only. “From fairest creature we desire increase,” Lurie says this to Melanie. Although he notices that “her smile loses it’s playful, mobile quality” in response to what he said, he still refuses to empathise. He says “Very well. Good night,” coldly. This proves the detachment of his inner thoughts to his outer action even in regards to someone he desires.

Corresponding to how Lurie’s desire is toward women who look physically similar. Humbert’s desire is towards nymphets who remind him of his first love Annabel. “I knew I had fallen with

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Lolita forever but I also knew she wouldn't be Lolita forever." This quote shows how Humbert expresses his love for Lolita specifically. But his desire for nymphets will eventually overcome his love for Lolita as she grows. This is also proven as the novel thickens. As Lolita grows older Humbert becomes less considerate of her. Humbert has always been aware of Lolita's inner thoughts. Humbert understands Lolita's pain after the loss of her mother. He also hears her sobs every night and although he may empathise with her, his desire for her is predominant. Therefore he pretends he is sleeping as she cries. "There were times when I knew how you felt," Humbert said to Lolita. But he also says "The sensualist in me had no objection to some depravity in his prey." These quotes verify how Humbert's internal empathy for Lolita is not manifested in his actions because of the power of his desire.

Humbert's view of females is similar to Lurie's. Both protagonists believe that women have a "duty" to fulfil based on their male desires. "The moral sense in mortals is the duty we have to pay on mortal sense of beauty." Humbert is basically saying it is his mortal obligation to show admiration to beauty. Humbert also uses this to excuse his perverted behaviour. "After all Lolita was experienced and seduced me." Humbert says this as he tries to convince the reader that Lolita was somewhat responsible for his sexual response. A picture is painted as if while Lolita was seducing him, he was trying to have self control. "Humbert Humbert tried hard to be good. Really and truly, he did." He has convinced himself that he has no control over his actions. He even refers to himself as an "enchanted hunter." This implies that although he had planned to control his sexual actions towards Lolita, it was by his nature to act on his desire. This proves how his actions don't align with his initial intentions.

Moreover the disconnect of Humbert's inner desires and outer actions is the same as Lurie's disconnect. But Lurie's leaves room for improvement as the plot thickens. "Life merely provides confirmation of your thoughts as the user and experiencer," states author Tony Fakhry on his 2018 blog. In the same sense, Lurie's experience with his daughter Lucy causes psychological growth. Lucy's rape forced him to have some sort of introspection. Lurie felt remorse for Melanie during their scandal at the university but he was still cold and harsh towards her. He has always acted on instinct and didn't care about the consequences. "Good or bad, he doesn't act in principle but impulse." This quote shows that he is aware of principles but chooses to ignore them. But when he experiences the turn of events with Lucy it causes him to show a sense of empathy and consideration. He opens up to Lucy about his experience with Melanie at the university. "Yes, like a dog," Lurie says this in response to Lucy as he discusses his shameful ness at the university. Lurie compares himself to a dog that has been beaten for acting on instinct. This proves his psychological growth as he owns his actions and feelings. Working at the pet store also helps him understand the similarities between him and the dogs. This causes him to have some of sensitivity to Lucy, Melanie and the dogs which he didn't have in the beginning of the novel.

In contrast Humbert's growth is still limited by the end of the novel. He understands his inappropriate behaviour towards Lolita and empathises but doesn't empathise with other people who his actions have affected. He admits his wrong doings by saying "the hopelessly poignant This was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord." He recognises the pain his actions have caused Lolita but fears admitting the pain it has caused him. "I thought I would use these notes in Toto at my trial, to save not my head, of course, but my soul." This quote proves his need for self acceptance. "Nothing could make my Lolita forget the foul list I had inflicted upon her." He finally reaches a place intellectually where he considers how his actions have had terrible consequences on Lolita, even though it was not

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his internal intention. In the early stages of the novel Humbert would create ways to try and convince himself of his innocence by saying things like “ I felt proud of myself. I had stolen the honey of a spasm without impairing the morals of a minor. Absolutely no harm done.” Humbert was aware of his obsession with Annabel which manifested through Lolita. “When I try to analyze my own cravings, motives, actions and so forth, I surrender to a sport of retrospective imagination.” This quote confirms that Humbert was aware that his initial line of thought about Lolita was inappropriate. But as his psychological obsession with Lolita grows, he disregards her feelings. Humbert begins to control all aspects of her life. However, as the novel proceeds the consequences of his actions unravel. These consequences cause psychological development as he realize how his actions have affected Lolita. He writes “I with memoir to be published only when Lolita is no longer alive,” showing a sense of empathy for what he put her through. Therefore Humberts internal good intentions for Lolita finally manifest in his external actions.

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