

# Vladimir Nabokov’s Humbert Humbert and Alissa Nutting’s Celeste Price: A Study of Deviant Behaviours

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**Abstract**—*The occurrence of the acts of paedophilia these days are much more variable than had been thought earlier, sometimes it can be only a single event and not involve truly wicked behaviour and sometimes it may entail compulsions with the most detrimental consequences such as rape and child sexual abuse. In both the famous novels, Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita and Alissa Nutting’s Tampa, the protagonists try to present themselves as smart, well-groomed and innocent enough to harm the children they encounter with. Lolita is the story of a 37-38 year old, literature professor, Humbert Humbert’s devouring passion for a twelve-year-old girl, Dolores whom he names Lolita and abuses her sexually by taking advantage of her misery. Nutting’s novel Tampa combines erotica, satire and social criticism. It is about a female paedophile, Celeste Price who speaks about her evil desires towards the school children where she teaches, without any sense of shame or guilt. The present paper deals with the need of a shift in faith and practices, thereby encouraging the positive and challenging the detrimental. The study will tend to analyse the paedophilic predators and their deviant sexual behaviours through the psychological perspective and the injustice done to children because of them.*

**Keywords:** Paedophilia, compulsions, rape, child sexual abuse, injustice.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Any behaviour that goes against the already set norms of a society or a culture is referred to as Deviant. The word ‘Paedophilia’ derives its origin from two Greek words, *paido* meaning ‘child’ and *philia* which means ‘love’, thus meaning child love. An important point to mention here is that, it is actually not love but lust for children. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) defines Paedophilia, a subtype of “sexual deviation”, as a paraphilia which involves intense and recurrent sexual urges and fantasies about prepubescent children that either have been acted upon or which lead the person to attraction distress or interpersonal difficulty. The International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) defines it as sustained, focused and intense pattern of sexual arousal- as manifested by persistent sexual thoughts, fantasies, urges or behaviours – including prepubescent children.

The novel *Lolita* (1955) written by Vladimir Nabokov, a Russian-American novelist, starts with a fictional story by one John Ray Jr., PhD, who is an editor of psychology books. In it, Ray is presenting a memoir, *The Confession of a White Widowed Male* written by a fictitious scholar of mixed European background who died of heart disease in an American jail while awaiting his trial

for murder. The memoir's author adopted the pseudonym Humbert Humbert to refer to himself in the text. The whole story is told from Humbert's viewpoint. *Tampa* (2013) is the debut novel of Alissa Nutting in which a middle school teacher Celeste Price narrates her molestation of a fourteen year old Jack Patrick. The novel is actually inspired by a real incident of Debra Lafave, a teacher in Tampa who was charged with having molested her students. Both the paedophiles Humbert and Celeste Price justify their wickedness on the grounds of mutual consent and non-exploitation, that they are neither forcing anything upon the children nor abusing them.

## **Main Text**

*Lolita* is basically about the confession of the paedophile Prof. Humbert Humbert, who suffers from several disorders like paedophilia, schizophrenia, and other personality disorders. The probable roots of his pervert sexual behaviour can be studied by analyzing him psychoanalytically. Both his speech and thoughts he expressed should be taken into keen consideration as pondering over only one can be deceiving. In the novel, Lolita is basically an immature ordinary girl whose real name was Dolores Haze, daughter of Charlotte Haze while Humbert is a well educated, crafty and shrewd man, who loves to make fool of people (say, doctors for example) and who distorts the normal sexual development of Lolita and prove her a temptress in turn.

Humbert, from his early childhood had developed a fixation for minor girls, whom he referred to as nymphets in order to satisfy his sexual urges. Humbert had his own categorization of the young attractive girls as "nymphets", devilish and fallen angels, making them devoid of their human existence. He further elaborated while addressing his readers that maidens between the age group of nine and fourteen reveal to certain bewitched travelers their true nature which is essentially not human, but nymphic or to say demoniac and thus he designates them as "nymphets". The basis of his fixation and sexual deviation can be understood from certain incidents which took place in his life.

One reason which is likely to have influenced him, we get to know from the novel was the untimely death of his mother, who died in an accident when he was just three and save for a little warmth and affection in the darkest past, he remembered nothing regarding her. According to Freud's Psychosexual Development theory, from the third to the fifth year of early childhood period, a child is supposed to undergo Oedipus complex wherein at the same time he steps into phallic stage. The act of Oedipus complex has some important functions in the process of shaping one's behaviours and sexual development. Freud elucidated that while in the Oedipus complex the child begins to correlate his sexual or libidinal urge with the mother; the mother is being cathected or she is the first love for a child. He suggested that in case the child went through sexual frustration in context of any of the psychosexual developmental stage, he or she would go through nervousness disorder that would carry on into adulthood as a form of neurosis which is a functional mental disorder.

Another childhood incident which might have influenced his deviance even more than the previous event was his unaccomplished sexual intercourse with a girl of his age, Annabel, when he was nearly thirteen year old. He was very close to her but she died of typhus within a short period of time. Considering Freud's psychosexual development theory here, Humbert got fixated with the image of Annabel who acted a blockage in his normal development. Freud's statement fits very aptly that unexpressed emotions never die, that they are buried alive and come forth in uglier ways.

In this manner his repressed memories directed him to find the outlet for his repression in small girls having resemblance with Annabel.

Humbert took advantage of the acquaintances he had formed among social workers and psychotherapists to visit in their company various orphanages, reform schools and places like that where he could stare at young little girls with matted eyelashes. Loitering near such places makes his intentions very clear. In this context, Auguste Forel, a Swiss neuroanatomist prefers calling Paedophilia as "Pederosis", that is, the Sexual Appetite for Children while Krafft-Ebing calls it "Paedophilia Erotica." Krafft-Ebing understood sexuality as a psychological phenomenon rather than just physiological. In order to study paedophiles like Humbert who is a very cunning man, focusing only on the way he expresses his feelings and love cannot be adequate but his conduct must also be taken very seriously which shows clearly how he fantasizes in his day-to-day life.

After many years, Humbert married an adult woman, Valeria, daughter of a Polish doctor, in order to avoid being suspected in the society. He had an unsuccessful marriage with her. When she opened up that there was another man in her life, Humbert hardly reacted on hearing this. He knew very well that those were quite unbearable words for any husband but to react wasn't viable for him as he confessed, "Years of secret suffering had taught me superhuman self-control." (*Lolita* 27) After getting divorced from Valeria, he went on to a sanatorium for treatment of his aberrant desires but of no use to him. He enjoyed in tricking upon psychiatrists by misleading them with false details and thus never allowing them to know his real sexual dilemma. Humbert married another woman Charlotte Haze, because he wanted to get in close association with her young daughter Dolores, whom he called Lolita. He planned many times to murder Charlotte whenever she decided to send Dolores away to boarding yet he could not execute his plans. The moment Charlotte got Humbert's diary, she got furiously mad to know that she was just used as a wife and thus his evil intentions were exposed. She ran out of her house in a rage and was hit by a car and she died there. After that incident, he exercised full control over Lolita and fulfilled his yearnings.

Humbert considered Lolita his concubine. He played with her life for a long time setting her along with him on long tours. With the passage of time he grew braver as he had planned very artfully to avoid getting caught by police and had decided what he wanted to do with the little girl. He convinced her that it was not beneficial in any way for her to inform police about their incestuous relationship as she would be sent under police custody where she would live her entire life like a burden while with him she could enjoy her freedom completely. He taught her to be a little nicer to him and also try to impress him like a good daughter would do for his father. He instructed her to be careful about her diet as well in order to maintain her figure.

Humbert very frankly admitted at several places, his desires as "monstrous" and Lolita as a "miserable" nymphet. Being a child suffering from strange pains, she made a sizzling sound and said that she could not sit because the monstrous Humbert had broken something inside her. She once mourned in front of him, "You chump... You revolting creature. I was a daisy-fresh girl, and look what you've done to me. I ought to call the police and tell them you raped me. Oh, you dirty, dirty old man." (*Lolita* 141) Humbert is eventually revealed as a cunning paedophile as he could not maintain his image of a debonair stepfather.

Krafft-Ebing observed from Mangan's *Lectures on Psychiatry*, "Paedophilia erotica occurs also in women." (*Psychopathia Sexualis* 557) This is the case in the second novel under study, *Tampa*, where Celeste Price, a good-looking, 26-year old middle school teacher takes advantage of her profession and hunts her prey just to gratify her sexual desires. She was furtively a paedophile and continuously in pursuit of young boys, only fourteen year old. She kept her eyes on a shy student of her class named Jack Patrick. She considered him as a "specimen" and not as a human being who would be affected by her approaches. The reason behind why she selected a shy was just to make sure that her prey never open his mouth in front of anyone and keep the relationship a secret. She had an eternal risk of getting exposed. She finally approved him, groomed him and continually tried to seduce him in uncountable ways till he got himself involved with her emotionally.

Often she involved her students in discussions regarding sexual encounters. She tried to convince them to talk about mature subjects by asking them to pretend like grown-ups and eventually she was successful in her attempts. One day she asked her students if there were any social roles in society where it was okay for adults to have sex with minors. She tried to open up in front of them and observe their reactions before selecting one of them as her prey. One of the students, Gash answered in positive that there might be some redneck states where it was possible to marry with minors but with parents' consent. Celeste, however, was never interested in marrying as she just wanted to have her sexual desires fulfilled from fourteen year old minors and she worried least about the cost she might have to pay. She herself confessed, "Never had I imagined my later years unfolding in a holler of West Virginia, paying the families of young men reverse dowries to marry me for their fourteenth year of life and then divorce on their next birthday." (*Tampa* 79) The plight of the young boy, Jack came to surface when he got emotionally attached to her and planned to marry her later on in his life while Celeste never gave any thought to it.

Celeste very shamelessly confronted all the situations threatening her affair with Jack. She betrayed her husband, every time he came home late in the evening and longed for spending some time with her she managed to take some drugs before his arrival which would let her unconscious in his presence. She derived pleasure in spying on Jack. She watched him undress and doing certain other acts through the window of his room and this is known as Voyeurism, which is, sexual interest in spying on people engaged in intimate activities like undressing, sexual acts or some other related private actions. This voyeuristic disorder is also a form of psychiatric sexual disorder which she was suffering from.

No deviant desire can ever be fulfilled through socially acceptable means. Celeste acted upon her desires, that is, Id and suppressed her Super-ego. Freud illustrated the personality as having three components, Id, Ego and Super-Ego. According to him, "Id operates on the pleasure principle seeking immediate satisfaction... regardless of society's rules or the rights and feelings of others. Super-Ego tells us what should and should not do... becomes our moral guide." (Bernstein 458) When Celeste started getting bored from Jack's emotional bound with her, she selected another student as her prey, Boyd for gratifying her immoral ambitions. "Id" was completely dominant in her personality. She played with the lives of both the boys until the day when Jack caught her red-handed. He started a fight with Boyd, attacked on his head, rebuked Celeste and ran off from there. Celeste in a state of rage grabbed a knife in her hand and rushed behind him, naked. At that very

moment the cops arrived and she was jailed. But even there she had no repentance for what she had been doing all along.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said that there is a need to pay more attention to the nurturing of children so that they can be saved from getting harmed from certain monsters dwelling in any society or community. Paedophiles whether male or female who are determined on abusing children are ultimately very devious and deceitful. These conclusions can be drawn from the psychological study of deviant behaviors of Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* and Celeste Price in *Tampa*. They are not at all ashamed or guilty or repentant of their deeds. They can go to any extent to accomplish their wishes and thus are a threat to the welfare of the society and as such should be kept under strict surveillance.

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