

Independence, Relationships and Transience: A Comparative Study of Truman Capote's "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and Vladimir Nabakov's "Spring in Fialta"

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Abstract

Story telling is a concoction of plot, character and themes, among other things. Short stories and novellas employ a limited numbers of pages to convey their message. Truman Capote's 1958 novella "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and Vladimir Nabakov's 1936 short story "Spring in Fialta" both portray the brevity of life tangled a web of impermanent desires and relationships. The female characters in both works try to make meaning out of the briefest encounters while determined to remain unchained to others amidst the perplexity of modern life. This study highlights the delicate similarities between Nina and Holly's desires of independence; moreover the idea of transience which is prevalent in both stories is evaluated. This comparative study of two iconic stories results in an innovative understanding of Capote and Nabakov's character as well as the concept of transience in their stories.

Keywords: Comparative Literature, Transience, Breakfast at Tiffany's, Spring in Fialta, Truman Capote, Vladimir Nabakov

1. Introduction

It is universally agreed the literature is a means of expression; an expression that transcends time. There exist various types of narratives which alter time, place and, at times, even the stream of consciousness. Two stories that utilize short telling in inventive ways are "Spring in Fialta" by Vladimir Nabakov and "Breakfast at Tiffany's" by Truman Capote. Both stories portray elusive, female characters in the subjective light of an unreliable narrator. The quick paced stories illustrate ephemeral meetings, failed dreams and ambitions of two oblivious young ladies.

This study reveals the similar personalities of Holly and Nina, the protagonists of "Spring in Fialta" and "Breakfast at Tiffany's", respectively. These behavioral and moral similarities will then lead to a deeper understanding of the concept of transience in both classical texts.

The 1936 short story "Spring in Fialta" written by Vladimir Nabakov recollects the memories of a narrator named Victor. Victor is looking back on the short, fleeting experiences he has had with a lady named Nina. The encounters are at times sexual and occasionally platonic. Following a quick pace, Victor reminisces his meetings with the unattainable Nina who is described as a woman who "had always either just arrived or was about to leave." (Nabakov, 1936). Adding to the clandestine nature of their relationship, Nina and Victor are both married for most of their meetings. Throughout the entire story, Nina desires to be unrestrained and elusive. When Victor proclaims his love to her, she looks at him with a "quick, queer, almost ugly expression" (Nabakov, 1936). Nina, the heroine of carefree nature, dies tragically at the end of the story, leaving us with the painful realization that "in spite of her long-standing, faithful imitation of them, had turned out to be moral after all." (Nabakov, 1936).

Twenty-two years after Nabakov, an American writer named Truman Capote created a heroine who bares striking similarities to the aloof Nina. Set in New York "Breakfast at Tiffany's" uses a first person point of view to reminisce about nineteen year old Holly Golightly. Holly is an eccentric character; nonconforming to the norms of society she attracts the attention of all the men she meets. The narrator who Holly names Fred reviews her odd, egocentric actions of stealing things for pleasure, staying up all night and toying with men. Similar to Nina, Holly acts as an elusive, carefree mistress; however the story reveals her humble past as a country and child-bride. Holly's ambiguous and daring behavior gets her prison and ultimately she flees under bail.

2. Analysis

Nina and Holly are classical literary females who represent an inner battle with time and relationships. Holly is determined to stay unattainable; it is described that "Every day she'd walk a little further: a mile, come home. Two miles, and come home. One day she just kept on going" (Capote, 1958). The easygoing, fun loving Holly Golightly is by no means perfect. She is forgetful, promiscuous and eventually becomes a fugitive. Zachary B. Wunrow writes that "She [Holly] has

window-shopped for a new self – for an identity that allows for upward social and class mobility.” (Wunrow, 2014).

Nina is not far different. Nabakov is in search of a lasting identity for her too. Some critics believe she was killed at the end in an act to preserve her and make her timeless. Within the text examples exist of Nina's desire for identity. "I call her Nina, but I could hardly have known her name yet, hardly could we have had time, she and I, for any preliminary. 'Who's that?' she asked with interest — and I was already kissing her neck, (Nabakov, 1936).

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Holly is faced with perplexing challenges and encounters, she doesn't know who she is. Damaris Englert quotes Truman Capote in his essay and writes "The main reason I wrote about Holly, outside of the fact that I liked her so much, was that she was such a symbol of all these girls who come to New York and spin in the sun for a moment like May flies and then disappear. I wanted to rescue one girl from that anonymity and preserve her for posterity" (as cited in Englert, 2013)

Nabakov's Nina is having an extramarital affair with Victor. Victor deals with her relationships and saying "I was apprehensive, because in the long run, I was accepting Nina's life, the lies, the futility, the gibberish of that life." (Nabakov, 1936). John Burt Foster writes how the images in the story "simply express Nina's inability to remember, apparent in her vague memories of her first kiss in Russia." (Foster, 1993). She is unable to remember for she has confused herself in messes of people. The same problem occurs for Holly. Holly is never successful in reaching her dream of living near Tiffany's and having a luxurious life. She makes a resilient effort to redefine herself from Lulamae, but ultimately she cannot alter herself enough and the truth comes out.

Ultimately, both stories result in the realization that life cannot be controlled and must just be lived. It will be brief like the "blurred Mount St George is more than ever remote" (Nabakov, 1936) and "I'll never get used to anything. Anybody that does, they might as well be dead." (Capote, 1958).

3. Method

Through a close reading of the text and by analyzing the actions, thoughts and behaviors of both characters, this study reveals the similarities between Holly and Nina.

Holly and Nina are the artistic creations of two different eras and artists. Nonetheless, their desires to possess stealthy, unattainable natures while leading lives of oblivious cheerfulness parallels. They both engage in multiple relationships and are determinate to be unattached. However, Nabakov and Truman did not allow their classic heroines to escape the impermanence essence of life. "Breakfast and Tiffany's" and "Spring at Fialta" both live true to the assertion that life with all its complexities is transient.

Holly Golightly possesses two main features; the same two traits that highlight the personality of Nina. Both ladies desire an elusive independent personality; however they both entangle themselves in a web of relationship.

4. Results and Conclusion

This comparative study results in two main findings. Firstly, the previously unknown similarities between Holly Golightly from Capote's "Breakfast at Tiffany's: and Nina from " Spring in Fialta" by Nabakov are established. It becomes evident that both characters are in search of independence and ironically trap themselves in meaningless relationships. Neither Holly or Nina ever become what they desired. Both just experience the brevity of life and prove that time cannot be contained . The transience of life is the overall message of both tales, creating yet another parallel between the two works. Holly Golightly and Nina have shattered senses of identity. Neither knows who they really are, what they really want or where they are ended.

An in-depth study of both stories in line with the work of several scholars reveals the unknowing similarities

between the two characters. Nina and Holly are only certain they want to be immortal and unique. Ironically, to leave their mark of liberation on the world they engage in fleeing relationships. Holly and Nina reflect one another in their own setting and remind readers that life is transience regardless of how hard you try to remain.

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