
Ivan Turgenev 'First Love': The Analysis of the Romantic Line

Love in Turgenev's novella *First Love* is treated like some brief summer whirlwind or storm that sweeps through his people and transforms them. Vladimir's love for Zinaida triggers such a transformation, changing him from a naïve, idealistic young boy to a man. The story of his first love is one that haunts Vladimir into his old age and telling his story acts as a reconciliation with his past and the pain he felt when his first love betrayed him.

Turgenev uses this novella to tell readers his feelings about love in general, but especially first love and love at first sight. He treats the subject of love with somewhat of a condescending manner. Presented only with the evidence from this book, it may be correct to say that Turgenev believes that first love is not only paltry but that it is not true love. Turgenev's hero Vladimir is so young and idealistic and naïve that from the beginning the reader is able to see through him and in the same way see through his love. In portraying such a flighty and coquette heroine, Turgenev is also suggesting the falseness of this love affair. Even more so than Vladimir, Zinaida is a transparent character with only one aspect that is mentioned at all in depth: her looks. It is incredible that Vladimir has such passionate feelings for a woman that he barely knows. This exaggeration of Vladimir's emotions as well as the transparency of his characters blatantly states Turgenev's disregard for first love.

Young Vladimir's character is comparable to that of Lensky in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. Both are naïve, young boys who are very idealistic and full of romantic ideology. Both have led a sheltered life and have had the freedom to let their ideals run wild and coalesce into the idyllic, illusory picture of humanity and of the world that they inhabit. Both are dreamers and are hopeless romantics whose books are filled with poetry and hearts are filled with passion. Most importantly, both believe that they have experienced true love and ironically, the objects of their affection are strikingly similar.

Both Zinaida and Olga have a strong resemblance to each other, and are in fact almost identical in many ways. Both are described as exquisite, beautiful, graceful and enchanting yet that is where their descriptions stop. There is not much reference to their inner feelings and they both lack the characterisation that their male counterparts have. Olga especially is described only physically and then fades into the background of the story. Zinaida has a domineering and mocking personality, which makes her a little bit more of a rounded character than Olga, but still description is kept mainly to the exterior.

Because of the nature of both Zinaida and Vladimir's characters, Vladimir is ultimately in love with the idealised image he has of Zinaida. Her overwhelmingly beautiful exterior impairs Vladimir's judgement of her as a shallow, empty person and instead her aesthetically pleasing exterior captivates him. She may also be the picture of perfection in his poetry books, making her all the more attractive. Zinaida is meant to be looked at and meant to be admired. Vladimir fell in the trap of loving her image and thinking that in fact he was falling in love with Zinaida as a person.

For Vladimir his first love was love at first sight; one of the most exciting yet probably frivolous

kinds of love there is. It is exciting because love is exciting; It has Vladimir, dancing around his room and has plastered a mischievous half-smile on his face causing his father (who just barely notices him) to ask, Whats the matter with you? Shot a crow? (pg.27). Love at first sight is trivial and in many a case fleeting because usually (as is in Vladimirs case) it is based solely on a persons physical appearance.

Vladimir is transformed by this newly found image of love, which he is only just beginning to grasp. Vladimirs transformation grows out of his love for Zinaida. He experiences the joy and anguish that love brings and because of it is a new person whose old nonsense seems to have left his eyes. Love has opened Vladimirs eyes to a new, less capricious and more exciting world. He has abandoned his old, youthful romanticism and embraced the wisdom that comes with his first love. He has in the short space of a month, gone from being a boy to being a man. Many years later he looks back on his experience and says, And now when the shades of evening are beginning to close in upon my life what have I left that is fresher, dearer to me than the memories of that brief storm that came and went so swiftly one morning in the spring? He has then ultimately reconciled himself with the pain of this past and has come to regard the story of his first love as one regards some very happy moment in ones life; with thankfulness and joy that it happened, and sorrow that it has passed.

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