

Cartography in the Short Fiction of W.S. Porter and Vladimir Nabokov

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Abstract

The paper provides an overview of the multiple ways of looking the relationships between maps and narrative techniques of two world renowned fiction writers William Sydney Porter, famously known by his pen name O Henry, and Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov. This is approached from cartographic view. The Oxford dictionary defines cartography as “the science or practice of drawing maps.” It’s in this view that the present research paper attempts to explore the different ways of drawing and analyzing the emotions amid relations portrayed.

Introduction

There has been a specific study of multilayered structures amid stories including the time and space concept along, with multifaceted relationships among people being beautifully portrayed by the stories which are off course perfect blend of fact and fiction. Nevertheless, maps play an indispensable part in portrayal of relationship among individuals, places, time flavored with emotions and feelings. Stories of maps rather maps of stories raise some common cartographic challenges, such as improving the spatial expression of time, emotions, ambiguity, connotation, as well as the mixing of personal and global scales, real and fictional places, dream and reality, joy and pain. Secondly, the potential of maps as narratives and the importance of connecting the map with the complete mapping process through narratives are addressed. Although the potential of maps to tell stories has already been widely acknowledged, yet emphasis on the increasing recognition of the importance of developing narratives that critically describe the cartographic process and context in which maps unfold – lies, the core idea of post-representational cartography.

In the book, *Maps of the Imagination: the Writer as Cartographer*, Peter Turchi compares all writing to mapmaking, but he is especially interested in the ways that creative writers “map” their world. “To ask for a map is to say, ‘Tell me a story’ (11). Storytelling is indeed a way of mapping, of orienting oneself and one’s readers in space, in an intelligible array. The figural use of the verb “orient,” which once meant “to turn

towards the east,” is itself a sign of the interplay between writing and mapping. The storyteller, like the mapmaker, determines the space to be represented, selects the elements to be included, and draws, the scale, and so on. In producing the narrative, the writer also produces a map of the space, connecting the reader to a totality formed by the narrative itself. In a sense, all storytelling is a kind of mapping. To understand the same, a small understanding of the concerned writers has to be attempted.

Born in 1862 *William Sydney Porter alias O. Henry* in North Carolina in 1862 is one of the greatest story writers. He has a rich oeuvre and his short stories are well known throughout the world; noted for **their** witticism, clever wordplay, and unexpected twist endings. Likewise, known for his complex plots, clever word play, complex metaphors, and prose style capable of both parody and intense lyricism, Vladimir Nabokov was born on April 22, 1899 at St.Petersburg in Russia but later became an American citizen. Nabokov's fiction is characterized by linguistic playfulness. For example, his short stories "*The Vane Sisters*" is famous in part for its acrostic final paragraph, in which the first letters of each word spell out a message from beyond the grave. In another of his short stories, "Signs and Symbols" (1958), Nabokov creates a character suffering from an imaginary illness called "Referential Mania," in which the afflicted is faced with a world of environmental objects exchanging coded messages.

Both writers excelled in their own supreme and unparallel fiction techniques that remain unsurpassed by any contemporary writer of both eras. Though both O Henry and Nabokov are very distinct in many ways yet many commonalities are observed by a serious pursuer. To study the same, parallels few well known examples are cited that prove that how these two great literature canons differed and were also alike in their respective fiction. While O Henry for short story was of the view "A good story is like a bitter pill, with the sugar coating inside of it" . Similarly Nabokov emphasized the art of fiction writing as a seriously tedious task in his works as "I have rewritten — often several times — every word I have ever published. "My pencils outlast their erasers" (147). (Speak Memory a surprise ending to the story remained always the hall mark for both the writers.

In "The Gift of the Magi," a short story by O Henry, Jim and Della, the protagonists prove their amazing love one for the other. Della desires to buy Jim a platinum chain for his golden watch. Jim's watch is an

heirloom, passed down to him by his grandfather. Della decides to sell her long, beautiful hair to buy Jim a chain for his watch.

Believing she has the perfect gift, she pays the ultimate price for the chain. She has her long, beautiful hair cut in order to sell it for the money she needs to buy the chain. While Della is selling her hair, Jim is out selling his watch in order to buy Della beautiful combs for her long, beautiful hair. Jim has no idea that Della has just sold her beautiful hair. He comes home with the gift of beautiful, jeweled combs.

When Jim walks in, he can only stare. He realizes that her hair is gone and she will not be able to use the jeweled combs that he purchased for Della. No doubt, he does feel foolish. He realizes she will not need the combs. Likewise, Della realizes that Jim will not need the chain for he no longer has a watch. Truly, both Jim and Della realize how foolish their gifts are. They sacrificed their most prized possessions to buy a gift that each would cherish. No doubt, they are considered the magi because of their sacrificial giving. The story serves as a classic example of sacrifices for each other and surprise ending because never till the last line of the story a reader expects this climax rather anti climax.

In the most famous story of Nabokov "Signs and symbols" too the reader has no cue at to what end the story is heading. In the story, an elderly couple tries to visit their deranged son in a sanatorium on his birthday but they are informed that he attempted to take his life and they cannot see him now. After their return home, the husband announces his decision to take him out of the sanatorium. The story concludes with mysterious telephone calls. The first two apparently misdialed calls are from a girl asking for "Charlie"; the story ends when the phone rings for the third time.

In the course of the story, the reader learns many details of the unnamed couple's life: they are Russian Jews who went into exile after the revolution; depend financially upon the husband's brother, Isaac; had a German maid when they lived in Germany; had an aunt, Rosa, and many other relatives who died in the Holocaust; and have a nephew who is a famous chess player. The elderly man is in bad health. , The son suffers from "referential mania", where "the patient imagines that everything happening around him is a veiled reference to his personality and existence". "Everything is a cipher and of everything he is the

theme". Real people are excluded from this paranoia, and the condition is worse the further he is away from familiar surroundings. The son's condition is based on a real condition. Here too, the reader has not the remotest idea of the inevitable tragic ending but that does happen.

Conclusion

Both O Henry and Vladimir Nabokov stand second to none in the art of storytelling where both giants of the oeuvre had different channels to arrive at the same destination which is art at its best. The stories of both have many similarities like surprise endings, portrayal of the city as an imagination of life giving local color in their stories. Nevertheless, there stands a sharp contrast as well which finds expression in the depiction of love in respective stories. While love in the writings of O Henry is that of purest form and sacrificial nature in case of Vladimir Nabokov the same passion acquires nuptial rather carnal with implicit sexual undertones in all his fiction.

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