

Unreliable narrator in Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Ada*

or

Why does Ivan Van Veen tell his story?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the role of unreliable narrator in Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Ada*, as well as motivation igniting the story, worlds and realities that Van creates in his multilayered storytelling. It tries to see beyond what Veen claims his motifs are and discover what great need gives birth to Veen's timeless story. The main focus is placed on the story itself narrated/dreamt/made up by Ivan Van Veen in the work which is "ninety seven percent real and three percent possible" as well as on the path the story undergoes from an ode to a great love to an apology of the very same love and finally to a vindication.

Key words: unreliable narrator, story, multilayered storytelling, motivation, truths, real reality.

METHODOLOGY

When unreliable narration is concerned, we will start from the very beginning – Wayne Booth's definition of the term, over various subsequent theories on unreliability in narration, to Ansgar Nunning's view that the "whole notion of unreliable narration only makes sense when we bear in mind that ascriptions of unreliability involve a tripartite structure that consists of an authorial agency, textual phenomena (including personalized narrator and signals of unreliability), and reader response" which perfectly fits the world of Nabokov's unreliable narrators where readers definitely play a significant, if not the most important role since they are the ones who justify, redeem and defend morally questionable Nabokovian heroes.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Following the story of Ivan Van Veen - a gentleman, an artist, a philosopher, an acrobat who uses his art to create worlds, truths and realities of his own, and thus possibly the master of all Nabokov's unreliable narrators – the work unfolds the intricate story behind Veen's story using different views on unreliable narration and narrators, some of which are Wayne Booth's and Ansgar Nunning's, as well as all the subtle elements that make the story multilayered such as intertextuality, various genres, multiple narrations and narrators, stream of consciousness, magic realism and many others. Being readers worthy of Vladimir Nabokov, we have followed, detected and "peeled off" all the layers of the story and eventually found out that there is no story to be told, but story to be hidden. Once more it has been proven that all the great stories are told not to tell, but to conceal. Ivan Van Veen isn't telling his story to celebrate the great love, nor to write an apology of the same, but to conceal the tragic love story and the remorse behind it.

CONCLUSION

Veen's motivation is not the only puzzle that Nabokov leaves to his readers. We could say that out of all Nabokov's novels, *Ada* is the most puzzling and according to Stephen J. Parker "the most lavishly and intricately detailed of Nabokov's novels". Veen thus remains the narrator who goes the furthest in the quest for the real reality, the one that in Zoran Paunović's words "equates beauty and truth, love and beauty, love and truth". In his attempt to tame the story that threatens to destroy him, Veen transforms himself into a master of storytelling, shifting through genres, styles and perspectives. Unfortunately for him, a dedicated reader will easily see through his acrobations and discover the motifs behind his great effort.