

Reading "signs and symbols" by vladimir nabokov essay sample



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Reading “ Signs and Symbols” by Vladimir Nabokov Essay Sample

“ Signs and Symbols” by Vladimir Nabokov, has been read in many different ways by many different readers. The story depicts a day in the life of Russian immigrants on the birthday of their mentally ill son. Critics may say it is a simple short story, a collage of signs and symbols or just a good author playing tricks on the reader. But in actuality this story is purposely filled with signs and symbols that the author randomly places to toy with those who overanalyze the text.

Early in the text Nabokov already starts placing events that seemingly foreshadow the story but should not be associated with the son. For example, while the couple travels to their son’s mental institution, the underground train “ loses its life”. In this world of technology it is not very rare that something mechanical breaks down. The authors’ choice of words, “ loses its life” is deliberately used to ploy the reader into thinking that someone will sooner or later lose its life. Moreover, during the journey back home, the mother sees, “...a girl with dark hair and grubby red toenails, was weeping on the shoulder of an older woman.” First of all a subway is not the happiest place but Nabokov knows that readers will see this as a sign worthy of analyzing. But the author is simply setting a depressed mood to create suspense because he knows that the reader will be waiting for the mothers’ tears. Nabokov places events that may be falsely thought of as precedents for future events.

Nabokov use symbols to create the suspense of death which ruminates in the readers throughout the reading.. For example, the day that the family was supposed to meet their son, it began raining. In most movies and literature, critics have seen the rain as a symbol of both death and renewal. Those critics wait for that suspense through the whole text but end up with no death or renewal. Also, after the couple gets to the bus stop, Nabokov adds the sentence, "...under a swaying and dripping tree, a tiny half-dead unfledged bird was helplessly twitching in a puddle." This had absolutely no relation to the story and randomly depicts a symbolic death to the freedom of a bird. This symbol is very distinct and carefully placed in the ending of a paragraph because Nabokov wants analysts to see this as the most apparent symbol. These symbols that he purposely places in the story are there to throw the reader off the plot and expect the death of a character.

Nabokov places these signs and symbols to give us a first hand experience into the sons " referential mania." For years critics have analyzed this story and even books like *Studies in Nabokov's Short Fiction* and *A Skeleton in Nabokov's Closet* have been written to decipher the story. The way to read the text has become very controversial and that's due to the beauty of his work. He puzzles the readers to such an extreme extent that people start going off wild tangents to relate symbols to the story. Sources such as www.libraries.psu.edu relate every sign that they find to the future of the son. Its like Nabokov has given every reader who to likes to overanalyze the text, the sons " referential mania." He got so many people to hunt for every sign and symbol that should relate to the son, just as the son sees everything in the world in relation to him. The patchwork of symbols that most readers will

analyze is placed there so the reader can analyze to a point of "referential mania."

In conclusion, Nabokov writes a simple plot driven story filled with random signs and symbols, which are put there to confuse the critics and analysts. He uses events and symbols that can be analyzed to a point where the reader develops a type of referential mania. It has become so controversial that analysts, critics, readers and even students are trying to figure the correct way of reading it. Nabokov uses his exceptional writing talent to instill a mental illness not only a character in the story, but to all who read it.