FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Reference

Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer
Peter Turchi
Trinity University Press
978-1-59534-005-4
(September 21, 2004)

Theres an elegant simplicity in the authors idea of “map as metaphor for writing,” one that belies the extensive arguments Turchi mounts in its defense. Bolstering his case by quoting authors as dissimilar as Hemingway and Wolfe, analyzing cartographers from Mercator to Galileo, and even citing cultural icons such as Wile E. Coyote and Monopoly, Turchi demonstrates the complexity inherent in both writing and cartography.

Maps, of course, illustrate graphically the way to get from here to there. Turchis premise is that stories do the same thing, minus the visual aids. And therein lies the rub. Authors fully intent on writing precisely what they want the reader to “see” would do well to study the cartographers craft.

Hearkening back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a time when cartographers were known as “world describers,” the author claims that “a story or novel is a kind of map, because, like a map, it is not a world, but it evokes one (or at least one) for each reader.” Although the metaphor may be obvious, Turchis precise examination of it delves into its various permutations with an illuminating sense of originality.

Take, for example, the intricate geometry of longitudes and latitudes, and the mapmakers challenge of interpreting the reality of a three-dimensional, spherical world into a representative, two-dimensional plane. Just as the cartographer relies on devices such as projections, distortions, and invisible guideposts, so, too, must writers employ corresponding tools of inclusion, omission, and selection to take an imaginary world that exists only in the authors mind and convincingly translate it into yet another imaginary landscape within the mind of the reader.

Whether or not they succeed depends on how cognizant authors are of the fact that they serve as guides, leading readers through these fictitious worlds the same way road maps delineate actual highways, borders, and towns. Ones approach, cautions Turchi, can be as

straightforward as a line from point to point, which will certainly get the reader/traveler where he needs to go; or, one can turn the trip into a more stimulating expedition, making the journey itself as enjoyable as the destination.

Turchi is a professor at the Warren Wilson College MFA Program for Writers, a novelist (*The Girls Next Door* and *Magician*), and an editor who brings both a scholarly attention to detail and an authors sensitivity to presentation that writers at any stage of their career can appreciate. Unlike a map, ironically, this is not a basic step-by-step, how-to guide. Instead, Turchi presents a cogent analysis of the deliberate methodology employed by successful writers, an exhortation to recognize their responsibility to their audience. Readers, after all, love to get lost in a good book. It is a wise writer who will not only deposit them there, but lead them out again, whole and thoroughly satisfied.

Carol Haggas