

An Instance of the Fingerpost

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 05 Jan 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1315>

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Tony Ellis — 05 Jan 1999, 13:08

A (slightly belated) Happy New Year to everyone on the list. Since things are a little quiet right now, and since we sometimes recommend non-Wolfe books likely to be of interest, can I warmly recommend Iain Pears' "An Instance of the Fingerpost" to you all?

Set in and around Oxford in the year 1660, this is a novel composed of four first-person narratives. The narrator of each, in the course of telling his own story, purports to give the true account of a murder at the University and the events surrounding it. But here's the twist: as soon as you finish the first narrative and start the next, the first thing the new narrator tells you is that the last narrator not only omitted certain crucial events, but grossly lied about others! As the new account unfolds you find yourself thumbing back again and again to the previous narrative, suddenly seeing everything in a new light. And then you finish the second narrative, and the first thing the -next- narrator tells you is that -both- the previous narrators completely misrepresented the real events! And so on.

This is no mere historical whodunnit. The -real- twist comes in the fourth and final narrative, it's stunning, and wild horses won't drag it out of me. If you're still wondering why Wolfe fans should like this novel, I'm definitely not explaining it very well.

Enjoy.

Michael Straight — 05 Jan 1999, 09:21 · follows Tony Ellis

On Tue, 5 Jan 1999, Tony Ellis wrote:

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This sounds like it was inspired by a novel from the mid 1800's by Wilkie Collins called The Moonstone, which T.S. Eliot called "the first and greatest of English detective novels" (it introduced the idea of giving the reader all the clues necessary to solve the mystery and of having a "detective" to put it all together). It features chapters written by each of the witnesses

to the crime. I don't know if they contradict each other, as, alas, I haven't read it yet.

You can find it here, among other places on the net:

<http://www.bibliomania.com/Fiction/collins/Moonstone/index.html>

Stephen Witowski — 05 Jan 1999, 15:25 · follows Michael Straight

Michael Straight wrote :

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A quick recommendation of The Moonstone. I love Wilke Collins' fiction and perhaps this is the best of his novels, with a wonderful complex plot and great characters (the detective Sgt. Cuff is great) and a marvelous sense of place this is of interest to Wolfe fans. As far as I can recall the Chapters written by various characters do not contradict each other they move the plot on seamlessly and are only written by divers hands because some of the narrators are not on hand to describe all of the events.

Stephen

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