

Butter-fingered Annese Under Every Bed? Or Just 17 Big Brothers?

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Mitchell A. Bailey — 02 Apr 1999, 21:18

In Reference to Robert Borski's "Ascians" of 3/29/99

I made much the same objections to the first draft of Mr. Borski's hypothesis when he published it on his Web site. Since Dan Rabin has stated them more elegantly, I'll try not to be redundant. I raised a point about manual dexterity, to which I guess the remarks on that issue are addressed. I could also bear down on the drastic difference in circumstances: the dwarves ride allies, the Shadow Children ride prisoners. In fact, there are several passages in 5HC which are strikingly parallel to B/UNS, but I don't necessarily think the relationship is one of identity of milieu.

I would venture to say that a hypothesis like "Ascian = Annese Immigrant" needs some firmer support, indeed a reason to exist. I believe in an Occam's Razor/KISS approach to these matters. What is explained by this hypothesis which could not otherwise be explained? Does the hypothesis simplify understanding or introduce an unwarranted complication? That is my basic objection.

Perhaps, as Mr. Rabin hinted, the two occurrences of this image indicate not an identity, but possibly parallel allusions to some sort of symbol or common cultural motif (e.g. "Oz" references). Is something relevant symbolized or evoked by the image of men riding the shoulders of other men? Maybe that's what needs to be explored.

I had also pointed out that the alzado may not have any relationship with the Annese ghoul-bear, but they were probably both manifestations of a big ugly stinking carrion beast which lurks in the back of beyond of Mr. Wolfe's imagination. The alzado is important to the story in BNS, but the ghoul-bear seems to be merely background to provide texture for 5HC.

I think that Wolfe conceived of Ascians as Orwell's Oceania from 1984 carried to the ultimate degree. The Ascians do not merely speak Newspeak, but are limited to quotes from "The Group of Seventeen's Little Red Book". Yet the boot stamping on the human face has failed after millenia to totally stamp out the humanity. Wolfe is much more optimistic than Orwell was. In my view, to postulate that Ascians are from another planet detracts from that idea.

As an aside: I've always found the manual dexterity attribute of the Annese kind of troubling. For one thing, it isn't consistently applied. How can a race which can allegedly craft fishing nets be inherently incapable of using a shovel? How can a race too clumsy to use tools even survive? Even chimpanzees use simple tools. I suspect that the Annese Manual Dexterity Issue is one of those Wolfian Smoking Chekov's Guns which has deep implications going to the very theme of the story (in this case 5HC). It says something fundamental about the nature of the Annese and deserves closer study.