

"Haunted Boardinghouse" & LITTLE, BIG

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 08 Mar 2000

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 08 Mar 2000, 10:11

Patera Nutria wrote:

"The Haunted Boardinghouse." Well, this is related to John Crowley's LITTLE, BIG: if you didn't know that the house-with-no-back [eek! what are you saying?!] is like the five-faced house in LB, then there is also Crowley's name as one of the 20th century literary giants given in the text. This story ends exactly like a John Crowley story almost always does.

Great link, but don't forget *The Name of the Rose* as a major player here. (labyrinth, library, latin).

I honestly can't see much of a link between "THB" and THE NAME OF THE ROSE.

THE NAME OF THE ROSE and LITTLE, BIG spoilers to follow:

In LITTLE, BIG the house that is central (axial?) to the novel (and its universe) has five faces. Each face is in a different architectural style; there is a strong suggestion throughout the text that each face is linked to a different season (granted that seasons normally number four to us modern mortals); we only see three of the faces in the text, through a few clever tricks that are meant to show us the "seam" of artifice; a fourth style is mentioned, and the fifth one can be deduced (pregnant with paradox).

In LB there is a big battle being waged on another plane, or a few planes at once: this battle draws together odd people from across time and space; some famous, some unknown. Part of the draw, for some, is a fervent belief in =fairyland=, in particular the matter written by Anglo-American fantasy authors (special emphasis on Victorian writers); fans are =recruited= for this vast enterprise. The other plane has many aspects that look like death, and it is ambiguous; however, there is no ambiguity in the fact that the hero dies a real death at the threshold so that others may go on.

In LB the hero is led into this situation by a lovely woman who, in the end, is willing to lie to him in order to get the whole project completed--it might seem a stretch to compare Daily Alice with Mrs. Seely, but just think of those sexy old airline commercials, put through a slight warp: "I'm Death--come fly me!"

The mystery of the hero being confused as to the love-object's identity (Mrs. Seely and Ms. Death) is important to the betrayal of the hero in LB, but plays a much larger role in John Crowley's AEGYPT series (which same-named woman did he dally with in the dark that night: the bright one or the dark one?).

I trust that all these points have clear relevance to "THB": each face leads to a different time; the big battle; the recruitment; the love triangle; the betrayal; the special person who is used to activate and complete the action, through his own death; etc.

Contrast with THE NAME OF THE ROSE. "THB" is, to me at least, in no sense a detective work ala Sherlock Holmes, let alone a negation of detective fiction; NOTR is both of these. "THB" is not a send up of academic life, nor is it much about campus infighting, nor the brutality lurking beneath the veneer of intellectual pursuits. The library in "THB" is not a central key that reveals all, or even very much, or even that it was all just a joke; the organization of the library is a non-event, rather than an exciting revelation. The Latin in "THB" is strictly classical/pagan, rather NOTR's medieval/theological; the timeframes are wildly different. The use of Latin in the text is all a part of the recruitment, the "fiction," if you will, that is the hook that draws the hero from his mundane world of consensual reality (neo-Victorian) into the world of consensual dream (ancient Rome as studied by post-Medieval students) where the hero feels he would rather be, and where the hero's talents will be put to concrete, immediate use. In NOTR, "fiction" leads to self-delusion for the investigators, such that one cannot see the real; one's special talents are misdirected, wasted. A "Don Quixote-downbeat," if you like.

But maybe I'm misremembering, or misunderstanding the reference points that are supposed to tie "THB" to NOTR.

=mantis=

Jim Jordan — 08 Mar 2000, 13:38 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Mantis,

Very happy to grant that THB has much more to do with Crowley than Eco. But it is typical of Wolfe to mix tales, as Mowgli and Romulus in the tales in TBNS. But maybe everything can be accounted for by Crowley, and the Eco allusions are only apparent. Still, the Latin....

Patera Nutria