

Little, Big: Parliament of the Birds

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 04 May 2000

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William Ansley — 05 May 2000, 00:10

Thirty birds make it to the end of the quest. They look at each other and realize that they, collectively, are the Simurgh. (According to Borges, the word "Simurgh" also means "thirty," IIRC.)

So the Drinkwaters, once they have "crossed over," are indeed fairies.

Or perhaps *a* fairy?

William Ansley

Adam Stephanides — 04 May 2000, 23:34 · follows William Ansley

alga wrote:

From the Kind and Helpful Ratso (what a paradox!)

I second the "kind and helpful" part. Many thanks, Nutria, for quoting from so much of the foreword.

[Quoting Crowley] "I came upon a Persian parable called _The Parliament of the Birds_, which supplied me with a plot remarkably -- uncannily -- suited to what I had already thought up.

For heavens's sake! Chaucer wrote "The Parliament of Foules" (Fowls) which I read in somewhat cribbed Middle English back when I was an English major in college, but I don't remember (a) it (though if I had the energy I could leap from my seat and consult my old textbook); or (b) that there was a Persian original. Where would Chaucer have got it from? But I'm sure he did.

I don't know anything about the Chaucer text, so I don't know if it's an adaptation of the Persian one, which as Tom Urash points out is Sufi. (Crowley's reference to it as a "parable" is a bit misleading as regards its length; IIRC it's almost as long as a short novel.) My knowledge of the Sufi text comes from Borges, who has cropped up on this list many times before. I'm not sure exactly where he discusses it; it may have been "The Approach to al-Mutasim."

The gist of "The Parliament of the Birds," as derived from my memory of Borges' account, is that the birds all gather together (the "parliament") and decide to seek the Simurgh, which is a sort of mythic King of Birds. The journey is long and arduous, and many birds drop out along the way. Thirty birds make it to the end of the quest. They look at each other and realize that they, collectively, are the Simurgh. (According to Borges, the word "Simurgh" also means "thirty," IIRC.)

So the Drinkwaters, once they have "crossed over," are indeed fairies. But in my reading, it's

not due to genetics or geography. It's their living their lives so as to be able to eventually reach the fairies' country (I refuse to call it "fairyland") which turns them into fairies, although some of them (Smoky and Alice's daughters) get there quicker than other. (And there are a few exceptions, like George and Auberon, who receive special dispensations from the fairies.)

--Adam