

Saltimbanque vs. counterfeit

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Cristina López — 01 Nov 1997, 16:07

Nutria, Tony

Saltimbanque comes from the Italian Saltimbanqui and it means a kind of smooth-tongued travelling salesman who climbs (salta) on top of a bench (banqui) in the street and begins to describe the wonders of his stuff. Obviously, most often these wonders are counterfeit so, in a sense, yes it could be, but

a much more popular meaning of saltimbanqui (at least in Spanish, as far as I can tell) is "itinerant acrobat" and this one has nothing to do with counterfeit.

However, knowing the careful choice of words typical in Wolfe, I'd bet he was aware of both meanings, so anything is possible. Anyway, my impression is that Saltimbanque Street is just a colourist name (Street of the Strolling Performers) for a street in a lively quarter.

Jim Jordan — 03 Nov 1997, 21:15 · follows Cristina López

Okay, I went back and looked it up, instead of relying on memory.

Italian, Spanish, and English are not New Orleans, and this is definitely New Orleans.

In French, saltimbanque means "charlatan." Sorry for saying "counterfeiter," though that's close. Given the hell associations, the 666, the whorehouse, and the generally evil experiments of Mr. Million, I'd say "Satan as charlatan" was clearly in Wolfe's mind. Not that the story is an allegory, or something. But the last line of the original novella is a chiller if this line of clones is really an "antichrist"!

Nutria