

Nabokov: Pale Fire

The Urth list — 5 messages, 5 voices, 16 Apr 2003

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Michael Straight — 16 Apr 2003, 15:46

I just finished "Pale Fire" by Nabokov. I read it because someone said "If you like Wolfe you'll like this," and it was mentioned a while back when we tried to put together a reading list of books that would help you appreciate Wolfe (search the archives for "Wolfe Library").

I think this book hit the Gene-Wolfe-Pleasure-Centers in my brain more than any other book not written by Wolfe. It's got the ultimate unreliable narrator, ambiguous plot puzzles left for the reader to put together, fun games with the text (the index is great -- I loved the bit about the crown jewels, ghosts, and absolutely beautiful writing. I was also surprised that it was not a hard book to read, certainly not as hard as some of Wolfe's.

The only drawback is it might make you more self-conscious about spinning theories about Wolfe's stories.

Are there any other Nabokov books you would recommend for Wolfe fans (or just for me)?

-- Rostrum

Terry Lago — 16 Apr 2003, 15:56 · follows Michael Straight

I *love* _Pale Fire_...definitely Nabokov's best...at least of what I've read so far. I'd say the other must-read is the infamous _Lolita_. It's a beautifully written book (even though the subject matter is rather ugly) though it certainly has fewer puzzles than _Pale Fire_.

T.

-----Original Message-----

From: Michael Straight [mailto:straight at email.unc.edu] Sent: Wednesday, April 16, 2003 11:46 AM To: urth at urth.net Subject: (urth) Nabokov: Pale Fire

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 16 Apr 2003, 16:10 · follows Terry Lago

Rostrum writes (excerpt, excerpt):

I was also surprised that [Pale Fire] was not a hard book to read, certainly not as hard as some of Wolfe's.

Alternative view: I tried three times to read PALE FIRE and never once succeeded in getting more than 20 pages into it. It is, to me, one of the most opaque pieces of writing in the world. Which was a damn shame, as I could see that there's a lot of stuff in there that I would enjoy -- would "tickle the Wolfe pleasure centers" -- but Nabokov's writing lies in a range that I can't process for some reason.

(I'll try again in a few years, I'm sure. Sometimes things like this suddenly clear up. The first few times I tried to read Charles Harness's THE ROSE -- which, by the way, I recommend very, very highly -- I had the same experience; when I turned 30 it suddenly became a transcendent reading experience. Some things I just have to grow into, I guess.)

The only drawback is it might make you more self-conscious about spinning theories about Wolfe's stories.

I suppose that some people might consider this a drawback. 8*)

Hey, has anyone mentioned THE NAME OF THE ROSE as a rather Lupine book in many ways?

gordon meuse — 16 Apr 2003, 18:29 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

For those who have either read "Pale Fire" or have attempted it and put it down, I highly recommend "Nabokov's Pale Fire", by D. Boyd. I admit that I read it before I read Pale Fire, but it is such a good read itself and quotes extensively from Pale Fire itself. It attempts to solve one of the most complicated literary puzzles ever. His solution is complex and almost unbelievable, but very well-documented. You will never read Nabokov the same ever again.

From: "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <katbarx at hotmail.com>
Reply-To: urth at urth.net
To: urth at urth.net
Subject: Re: (urth) Nabokov: Pale Fire
Date: Wed, 16 Apr 2003 09:10:10 -0700

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Gareth Jelley — 16 Apr 2003, 21:31 · follows gordon meuse

From: "Michael Straight" <straight@email.unc.edu>

Are there any other Nabokov books you would recommend for Wolfe fans (or just for me)?

Not sure about Nabokov, but another author who does the unreliable narrator very well and plays games with the reader is Kazuo Ishiguro. I'd recommend 'The Unconsolable', 'Remains of the Day', and 'When We Were Orphans' particularly highly - they might hit the Wolfe-pleasure-centres you refer to :o)

Best,

G.