

pale fire/short sun research paper

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 17 Apr 2003

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maa32 — 17 Apr 2003, 06:27

Since Pale Fire came up, I thought I would share with you that for the final project in graduate school last year I wrote a paper which dealt in part with metafictional narratives and how they actually instantiated faith in an ultimate author no matter how hard they tried to avow a descent into nihilism.

I used unreliable narrators, and the two biggest primary sources were Nabokov's Pale Fire and The Book of the Short Sun.

I agree with Boyd's comments on Pale Fire entirely. (I will briefly summarize them - skip if you don't want to know)

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He believes that the suicidal daughter of John Shade actually comes back in the ubiquitous butterfly of the text to inspire Kinbote to finish the poem and the commentary, and that his reveries of his mythic homeland actually DID inspire Shade, even though he wasn't aware of it, because the inspiration for the poem (his dead daughter) and the inspiration for Kinbote's analysis (his dead daughter) were the same, and that she reached out to Kinbote beyond death in a butterfly because they were kindred spirits (he was going to kill himself after finishing the commentary). There are other messages from beyond the grave. In it, I asserted that the crazy interpretation of Kinbote was actually correct - Pale Fire shows how even the most absurd commentary on a text can actually show us something profound about reality. The statement "I am the shadow of the waxwing slain" is the daughter speaking from beyond the grave - it is the final statement that Kinbote must complete - so that he can become the shadow of the waxwing slain.

I argued that the same thing was going on in The Book of the Short Sun - that while the narrator believed that he was writing about searching for his idol (silk) and his home, he was actually the idol trying to find the man who worshipped him (Horn), who existed beyond death in a brute creature who aided Silk(Babbie). (so I made a link between the roles of animals as a return of things lost) I talked about how the quest to find Silk became the reader's quest to find Horn. Silk was never hidden. Horn was. The paper is great, but very complicated. If anybody is interested, I might be able to get a copy. Remember that I had to present it in front of an audience that had never read Short Sun, so some things are of course simplified. In any case, I was able to tie the two texts together very nicely (somehow).

Oh well. (Writing my own book now - 23,000 words finished in the last week. Writing is sure

hard. I don't think I can add any criticism of Wolfe's short fiction - I think often they operate like roman a clefs - you just need the key to unlock them - I think he is a great, great short story writer, and Endangered Species is my favorite of his collections. Heartily second "In the House of Gingerbread" - I love that story - but I don't necessarily like happy stories. I think he is the greatest at both short and long fiction - I don't think anyone can touch him - but his willful obscurity can certainly frustrate if you don't hit on the right detail in the text.)

Marc Aramini