

never the Twain shall meet Lafferty nor Davies

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 08 Jul 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4069>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Michael Andre-Driussi — 08 Jul 2003, 20:32

Alga, she wrote:

The miracle of Apu-Punchau was an eclipse. Or a supposed eclipse; actually, as Wolfe makes (almost) clear in his afterword, it was the very large starship Sanru passing across the sun. This "miracle" echoes the one in Mark Twain's A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court--which was a genuine eclipse. Wolfe is not so crass as to copy.

(She means "Tzadkiel," not "Samru.")

What ho! And Twain echoed, iirc, none other than Christopher Columbus -- who might not have gotten such great reviews, but most likely had the greater historical impact. <g>

I would like to point out that after Severian benefits from the "eclipse trick," he has to pay -- they believe he is a solar god and they do not want him to leave them, ever. When he tries to walk away, they follow and bring him back. Finally they strangle him. Now there is a logical consequence that Columbus and Twain never had to deal with!

Well hey, I recently read Lafferty's novel ALARIC (aka THE FALL OF ROME [1971]), and I must say it puts me in a mind about Severian's narrative! (I had some difficulty in getting started, getting used to the form, but once in, I found it quite compelling.) In Alaric we have a strapping fellow bred, groomed, and gimmicked into being a national hero/holy emperor type, a man bent on saving the Roman Empire yet known to (bitchy?) history as its destroyer. Third person, with lots of faction-action, so it is something like Herbert's DUNE, in that way, and chock full of all sorts of wild details about the ancient world. Plus Alaric, in addition to having a mother/sister/wife (who is a chief architect of the hero), has all these powerful "brothers." Lafferty says that the ruling class of the blond goths was a group that was red-headed and brunette, and very tall in stature; that this ruler group was a relatively recent refugee party from the Mediterranean; that this group was creating Norse mythology from Gothic tales blended with international fairy tales; and most cryptically, that their original homeland was in the area of Sicily/North Africa (i.e., they must be Carthaginians, but he is very careful not to say that).

Before that I read fiction by Robertson Davies for the first time, his novel FIFTH BUSINESS. Many years ago, in another country, I'd lent a friend a copy of PEACE and after he read it he said it reminded him of FIFTH BUSINESS. And there is a certain amount of congruence: if we factor out the SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE aspects of PEACE, the similarities are even more clear. The village life; the childhood rivalries; the historical events of early 20th century; seductive circus women; mysterious magic. It is almost as if PEACE is a case where the hero never leaves the village, as opposed to FIFTH BUSINESS where the hero leaves but is still bound in strange ways.

=mantis=

Jeff Prucher — 08 Jul 2003, 22:32 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Mantis writes:

Before that I read fiction by Robertson Davies for the first time, his novel FIFTH BUSINESS. Many years ago, in another country, I'd lent a friend a copy of PEACE and after he read it he said it reminded him of FIFTH BUSINESS. And there is a certain amount of congruence: if we factor out the SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE aspects of PEACE, the similarities are even more clear. The village life; the childhood rivalries; the historical events of early 20th century; seductive circus women; mysterious magic. It is almost as if PEACE is a case where the hero never leaves the village, as opposed to FIFTH BUSINESS where the hero leaves but is still bound in strange ways.

This reminds me of another Davies-Wolfe confluence that I don't think has been mentioned here. In WHAT'S BRED IN THE BONE (I'm pretty sure I have the right title: I'm thinking of the middle book of the Cornish Trilogy), Davies invokes an angel named the Lesser Tzadkiel, who is the angel in charge of biography. The Lesser Tzadkiel has the ability to record all the events of a person's life (the book, if I recall correctly, consists largely of the angel playing back the entirety of one man's life), which is what Severian's memory does. It's probably no more than a coincidence, but it always struck me as being appropriate that Severian should be associated with the angel of biography.

-Jeff