

Crowley, then ...

The Urth list — 22 messages, 11 voices, 27 Jul 2003

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 27 Jul 2003, 16:38

Okay. So, after years of seeing people on this list rave about John Crowley, I've read Little, Big over the last few weeks.

And I just.

Don't.

Get it.

I don't mean the story: I was able to follow that well enough, and more or less glom onto what it's about, but ... what's the point?

Can someone tell me what I've missed here?

Josh Geller — 27 Jul 2003, 17:15 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

On Sun, 2003-07-27 at 09:38, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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Can someone tell me what I've missed here?

Which part don't you get?

J.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 28 Jul 2003, 00:56 · follows Josh Geller

Josh G quoted me and wrote ...

Can someone tell me what I've missed here?

Which part don't you get?

Well, it isn't so much a matter of parts. I think I got most of the parts. It's the whole that is escaping me. Or, rather, as I asked: What's the point?

Perhaps my expectations were unreasonably high; I've been hearing the praises of this writer and this book for many years from people I respect highly, quite a few of them on this here particular list. And, often, in context (like a recent post of yours about the proposed Wolfe symposium

-- more about that below) that leads me to expect material of Lupine density and depth of meaning.

I guess that's what I just didn't see in *Little, Big*. I have nothing *bad* to say about it: on the level of the sentence, it's as well written as a lot of work by, say, Wolfe, Le Guin, and Delany -- which I regard as extremely high prose. Above that level, I thought it an interesting story -- or, I suppose, Tale -- that Somehow never *quite* caught on fire for me; never reached the "Oh my God, I have to read one more chapter before I go to bed" level of engagement. Now, I can reach that level of engagement in a number of ways; the writers above generally achieve that. So does JK Rowling. *Perdido Street Station* hit it about halfway through. Spinrad, for all his faults, manages to grab me from the beginning in most of his books (the others never do at all).

Somehow, Crowley never did. And I feel certain that the fault lies not in his stars but in me; that I simply missed the level of the book at which the real engagement was available. But, having missed it, I simply can't tell you what it was that I missed.

Which probably doesn't help at all.

So ... I guess the question is, what is it about *Little, Big* that earns it such high praise among you highly intelligent folks? I feel like I just flunked my IQ test.

Josh Geller — 28 Jul 2003, 01:33 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Sun, 2003-07-27 at 17:56, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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Hmm.

I find *'Little, Big'* to be deeply moving. I don't guess I can answer.

Maybe it's like jazz. Louis Armstrong was asked to explain jazz. He said 'If you have to ask, you'll never know'.

I'd hate to think that is the case.

'Little, Big' and two other Crowley books *'The Deep'* and *'Engine Summer'* are right up there in my favorite books along with *TBotNS* and *Dhalgren* and Bernal Diaz. The last time I compiled a top ten list, Crowley was the only writer who made it twice.

But there's no accounting for tastes. Maybe you are just not meant to get it. I sure hope not.

J.

Alice K. Turner — 27 Jul 2003, 22:51 · follows Josh Geller

Blattid,

It is partly a sort of mood thing. a state of mind that people who read Victorian children's literature, or loved the fairy paintings of the period, when they were young can slip into easily,

picking up on the many allusions that come along and the light literary parodies. It is partly a kind of 60s thing, especially among New Yorkers. I suppose, but catching a rural nostalgia as well. Some of us get caught by the romance aspects, the love affair between Sylvie and Auberon and how it comes out in the end with equal sadness and Shakespearian gaiety. Some of us, back when at least, may have been struck by the kinkier aspects of the Tale, of which there are a fair number. And some just like the writing, which can be hypnotic.

But he certainly is not for everyone. Our Nutria feels even more negatively than you do. And when I tried the book when it first came out, decades ago, I'm not sure I got through it. Our mantis persuaded me to try again--and I found that my feelings had changed a lot, and that I was seduced by the book. And then he and I started writing about Crowley and asking other people to do so, and the rest is history. Of a sort.

It would be interesting if you told us what you did not like. I can tell you that I did not like the Russell Eigenblick subplot, though I admit that he managed to fit it into the conclusion better than I expected.

-alga

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--Blattid

The new MSN 8: advanced junk mail protection and 2 months FREE*
<http://join.msn.com/?page=features/junkmail>

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Andy Robertson — 28 Jul 2003, 07:39 · follows Alice K. Turner

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Which part don't you get?

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It's

the whole that is escaping me. Or, rather, as I asked: What's the point?

I wonder if it is a book that, like LOTR, has been imitated so often that it now may seem quaint and derivative to those soaked in the literary tradition it started? There have been few direct ripoffs, but the themes - and LITTLE,BIG is a book of moods, themes, and images - have been imitated often. In my opinion the whole "Urban fairyland" motif, elves in New York, started with LITTLE, BIG.

hartshorn

--

Tom Foster — 28 Jul 2003, 07:55 · follows Andy Robertson

Strange; that's almost exactly how I felt when I read it a few months ago. I had read so many good things about Crowley that I thought I really should read some of his work. I enjoyed *Little, Big* a lot, but it certainly didn't grip me, nor did it fill me with the sort of wonder and awe that I feel every time I (re-)read one of Wolfe's novels. I recently bought *Otherwise*, a book containing Crowley's first three novels. *The Deep* I absolutely loved, *Beasts* seemed disjointed although it had some very good ideas, and *Engine Summer* (another book that seems to get a whole lot of praise in these parts) produced more or less the same reaction as *Little, Big*.

I would love to read *Aegypt* as I understand it has a strong alchemy theme to it (a subject that fascinates me), but I can't find it anywhere for anything resembling a reasonable price (ditto *Love & Sleep*). It would seem a shame to read *Daemonomania* before the preceding titles, but it's the only one of the three that can be bought easily.

Tom

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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Can someone tell me what I've missed here?

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Craig Brewer — 28 Jul 2003, 13:57 · follows Tom Foster

"Alice K. Turner" supposed:

It is partly a sort of mood thing. a state of mind that people who read Victorian children's literature, or loved the fairy paintings of the period, when they were young can slip into easily, picking up on the many allusions that come along and the light literary parodies. It is partly a kind of 60s thing, especially among New Yorkers.

I'd have to agree with most of this and add that LB is the kind of book that I could only enjoy now after having read a lot of other stuff that's become more of a literary memory than something fresh. I personally enjoyed it because of the strains of Renaissance philosophy (ie., Bruno and neoplatonism) that ran through it.

I read in an interview that Crowley began LB as a kind of a "concept book," intending to just write a book about a family with their own private religion. And the fairy stuff began as just a way to make that private religion more accessible to readers. But then the fairy motifs took over. In the same interview (I think), Crowley admitted that it was a book which didn't have the same universal scope as he tried to get in his Aegypt series - it was something that was more of a playing out of a minor personal obsession.

The real reason I so love that book, though, is that as a kid I was always hunting for fairy hills and circle dances...which I always felt were just around the corner. And if the end of that book is any indication, I may have been right...

Josh Geller — 28 Jul 2003, 15:28 · follows Craig Brewer

On Mon, 2003-07-28 at 06:57, Craig Brewer wrote:
I'd have to agree with most of this and add that LB is the kind of book that I could only enjoy now after having read a lot of other stuff that's become more of a literary memory than something fresh. I personally enjoyed it because of the strains of Renaissance philosophy (ie., Bruno and neoplatonism) that ran through it.

Well, yes.

If Wolfe is the Catholic writer, Crowley is the Brunian/Gnostic/Hermetic whatever-you-want-to-call-it Religion Mundi (that's the term!) writer (to draw a false exemplar).

I read in an interview that Crowley began LB as a kind of a "concept book," intending to just write a book about a family with their own private religion.

All religion is private religion. If you are a member of a particular sect, all that means is that you get together with other people whose religion incorporates some of the same stuff as yours.

You know, there are really a lot of people, when you add them all together, to whom fairies actually are part of their religion.

And
the fairy stuff began as just a way to make that private religion more accessible to readers.

Hmm.

I have an electronic copy of that enlightening book 'The Secret Commonwealth Of Elves, Fauns And Fairies', by the Rev. Robert Kirk. It dates from the seventeenth century. If anyone wants to learn more about this intensely interesting subject, I will be happy to email them a copy upon request.

I will have to think about that comment of Crowley's some more.

But then
the fairy motifs took over. In the same interview (I think), Crowley admitted that it was a book which didn't have the same universal scope as he tried to get in his Aegypt series - it was something that was more of a playing out of a minor personal obsession.

I thought that was 'The Deep', which I actually prefer slightly to 'Engine Summer' and 'Little, Big'. But all three of them rank very high in my esteem. Or perhaps it was my minor personal obsession that Crowley was writing about in 'The Deep'. How he might have managed that I have no idea, as he and I have never met.

The real reason I so love that book, though, is that as a kid I was always hunting for fairy hills and circle dances...which I always felt were just around the corner.

They are not?

.

Craig Brewer — 28 Jul 2003, 15:13 · follows Josh Geller

Not to get too far off of Crowley, but...

Josh Geller <brunians at brunians.org> pontificated:

All religion is private religion. If you are a member of a particular sect, all that means is that you get together with other people whose religion incorporates some of the same stuff as yours.

I'm not sure it's quite so categorical as that. By "private" I would assume that Crowley meant highly idiosyncratic and a kind of belief that really wasn't open to someone's "choosing" -- just as Smoky can never really "choose" to believe (although the people who settled in the area a few generations before Smoky could be said to have "converted"). But I don't think it makes sense to call all religion "private," especially since institutionalized religion enters the "public sphere" in a way that my own quirky beliefs don't. Maybe it's more a matter of degree, but to call all religion "private" blurs an important distinction between a public, "official" and even political use of religion that, for example, private Theosophists might not quite be capable of experiencing.

Besides, Severian's New Sun was going to redeem an entire world, not just himself.

You know, there are really a lot of people, when you add them all together, to whom fairies actually are part of their religion.

I certainly hope so, but who are you thinking of in particular?

Adam Stephanides — 28 Jul 2003, 14:54 · follows Craig Brewer

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

From: Josh Geller <brunians at brunians.org>
Sent: 07/27/03 07:33 PM
To: urth at urth.net
Subject: Re: (urth) Crowley, then ...

On Sun, 2003-07-27 at 17:56, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Well, it isn't so much a matter of parts. I think I got most of the parts.
It's the whole that is escaping me. Or, rather, as I asked: What's the point?

Hmm.

I find 'Little, Big' to be deeply moving. I don't guess I can answer.

I would go along with this. I too find Little, Big deeply moving; but if you don't, I don't think that there's any "key" which will make you like it better.

But there's no accounting for tastes. Maybe you are just not meant to get it. I sure hope not.

Tastes do differ. There are a number of highly regarded writers (LeGuin and Delany, to name only two, in the SF field) whom I don't "get" and probably never will.

--Adam

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 28 Jul 2003, 16:11 · follows Adam Stephanides

Alga,

Thanks -- this is probably the single most helpful response of the many this (as always) generous group has provided. As it happens, I'm not up on Victorian faery-lore; my attitude towards such has always run in the general direction of Tolkien's, who generally loathed it: though I don't go as far as he does in thinking Shakespeare made a travesty of Faerie. The books of "fairy" stories (as opposed to fairy-stories) I was given as a child either annoyed or terrified me. I preferred the latter, and still do. My taste wrt Faerie is for the pre-Victorian, even pre-Elizabethan, style, a twilit and parlous place, the Faerie of "Tam Lin" and "Thomas the Rhymer."

It would be interesting if you told us what you did not like. I can tell you that I did not like the Russell Eigenblick subplot, though I admit that he managed to fit it into the conclusion better than I expected.

Well, to tell the truth, there was nothing I did not like, or at least nothing I disliked. It was just that I was disappointed; after all the commendations of Crowley in general and Little, Big in particular by -- well, especially by yourself and Mantis, both of whose tastes I have come to respect very highly -- I was expecting something blindingly revelatory, rather like the first time I read tBotNS,

The Silmarillion, _The Moon is Down_, or _Carrion Comfort_. Instead I got something ... pleasant but un compelling.

The obvious point of comparison to Wolfe, I suppose, is that the writing is quite dense in places -- _Little, Big_ took me quite a while to get through, which was only compounded by its failing to grab me by the throat and make me read it.

Shrug.

Certainly not enough to put me off Crowley, but enough to decide me not to tackle the copy of _Aegypt_ that's been sitting on the shelves for I don't know how long. (Who was it that wanted a copy? We can talk.) _Especially_ if it's heavily dependent upon alchemy, a subject to which my general reaction has been "Life's just too short for this."

I think I'll try the collection, though. _Novelty_ I think.

Craig Brewer — 28 Jul 2003, 16:15 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Speaking of old Faerie epics, I keep reading references to the Huon of Bordeaux cycle. Does anyone know of a good edition/translation of these stories?

Terry Lago — 28 Jul 2003, 16:31 · follows Craig Brewer

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

From: Dan'l Danehy-Oakes [mailto:katbarx at hotmail.com] Sent: Monday, July 28, 2003 12:12 PM To: urth at urth.net Subject: Re: (urth) Crowley, then ...

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I think I'll try the collection, though. _Novelty_ I think.

It's been awhile since I read _Little, Big_ and I was relatively unimpressed by it myself. (Though I do plan on re-reading it one of these days and see how it fares.) I think in many ways you had (more or less) the 'right' reaction to it though...at least in as much as it seems to me that Crowley was more trying to do a novelistic equivalent to a tone-poem. I think he was more trying to convey a mood, along with certain artistic ideas in the 'story' or a family and their tangled supernatural dealings.

As to _Aegypt_: I just finished reading it a few weeks back and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I'm now wishing I could track down a copy of _Love and Sleep_ so I can keep on going. It is once again a fairly plot-lite book, centring on the lives of a few characters and their inter-relations (with the main character being a disillusioned professor of history who finds that some of the make-believe stories of his childhood may in fact have a firmer basis in reality than he had at first thought.) Basically it follows the main character, Pierce Moffet, as he searches out the secret history of the world. In does indeed have a lot to do with Renaissance alchemy and has a subplot centring around the mystic philosopher Doctor John Dee and his attempts to communicate with Angels as well as the Giordano Bruno and his own discoveries which seem to mirror the ones being made centuries later my Moffet.

All in all a good story I thought.

T.

William Ansley — 28 Jul 2003, 16:51 · follows Terry Lago

I have no idea what you think a reasonable price might be. If you want a physical edition of the book, then you might try Bookfinder. I looked up Crowley on Bookfinder recently and they had copies of both the books you want starting at about \$30. Of course, those books may be sold by now and this doesn't include tax or shipping.

<<http://www.bookfinder.com>>

I don't consider eBay a good place to find books, but if you check it periodically, you can occasionally get a great bargain.

<<http://ebay.com>>

If you are willing to read the books on a computer screen and you have a Microsoft Windows PC (not Macintosh or Linux) or a Pocket PC (not a Palm), then you can order electronic editions for \$8 each. (Actually AEgypt seems to be available in a Palm compatible edition as well.)

<http://www.electricstory.com/authors/john_crowley.asp>

IHTIOSSUTY*.

William Ansley

*I hope this information is of some slight use to you.
(I just felt like coining my own 'net acronym.)

At 08:55 AM 7/28/2003 +0100, you wrote:

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James Jordan — 29 Jul 2003, 01:33 · follows William Ansley

If'n you wanna search the Archives, you'll find a loooooong discussion of LB a few years back. Since alga brought me up, I'll confess to starting the whole thing.

I loved *Engine Summer* and *Great Work of Time.* I wanted to like LB, but the ending horrified me. Instead of being glorified in any kind of way that I MYSELF would like to see, they were gradually and to me horrifyingly reduced to mere archetypes, flat 2-dimensional playing cards, stripped of all human depth, fated to eternal repetition.

When I finished the book, I ripped it in half and threw it across the room. Yes, I found it very effective.

But what was Crowley doing? Was my response his intention? I thought at the time that it was. For me, it was an anti-gospel novel. And initially I took it that Crowley deliberately set out to do just that, to horrify the reader and point him/her back to the Christianity that the characters leave behind a generation before the novel begins. I read it as revealing the appalling consequences of turning back to the pagan world.

alga and others persuaded me that there was more to LB than that, and that if I did not like the book, it was not Crowley's intention to leave the reader appalled.

I remain unsure of what Crowley's intention was, however. Was it just to write an interesting novel? Or does he see something good and wonderful in what happens to his characters? Is he arguing that a collapse back into an infantile and pagan world is what we all really need, and that the depth of character into which human beings have grown during the last several millennia is something to be rejected? Or is LB basically an experiment?

He says he wanted to write a novel presenting a "fairy religion." He has done so, and very effectively. I continue to think LB is a brilliant and effective novel. But for me, it is a very effective horror novel.

Nutria

Josh Geller — 29 Jul 2003, 03:11 · follows James Jordan

On Mon, 2003-07-28 at 18:33, James Jordan wrote:

I loved *Engine Summer* and *Great Work of Time.*

Did you like 'The Deep'?

I wanted to like

LB, but the ending horrified me. Instead of being glorified in any kind of way that I MYSELF would like to see, they were gradually and to me horrifyingly reduced to mere archetypes, flat 2-dimensional playing cards, stripped of all human depth, fated to eternal repetition.

I do not agree that this is an accurate description of what happens to the characters.

When I finished the book, I ripped it in half and threw it across the room. Yes, I found it very effective.

But what was Crowley doing? Was my response his intention? I thought at the time that it was.

Are you seriously stating that this book horrified you because its ending did not agree with your religious ideas? I find that hard to believe coming from one of your demonstrated perspicacity. Also, although I understand that you are a practicing Calvinist religious (and thus deeply embedded in error from my point of view), I have been struck before by the depth of your tolerance of foreign religious ideas, something that I have not always met with among the Protestant clergy.

The religious viewpoint represented by John Crowley is not by any means that of an orthodox Christian. I can say this with some confidence, as the religious views he represents are tolerably close to my own. Now, you must understand, that from my point of view, you and Dan'l are both heretics: the Roman Catholic Church has been in error since they condemned Bruno and burned him at the stake. They are scheduled to come around at some point in the future, possibly before Hell freezes over, though were I a gambling man I'd want long odds on that last point. You Calvinists have been in grave error since long before that, both from the RC point of view and from ours, and from our point of view, your errors are far more serious than theirs. But everything is relative, and I have no problem flatly stating that from the point of view of an orthodox or even a protestant Christian I represent an heretical point of view.

Now where in the North or the South was I?

Oh yes:

Why in the four Worlds would John Crowley represent a Christian glorification? What possible motivation would he have for doing so?

For me, it was an anti-gospel novel. And initially I took it that Crowley deliberately set out to do just that, to horrify the reader and point him/her back to the Christianity that the characters leave behind a generation before the novel begins. I read it as revealing the appalling consequences of turning back to the pagan world.

I don't know what you mean by paganism, but the viewpoint represented by Crowley is that of the *religio mundi*, which is not exactly at all quite the same thing as any of the definitions that I think of for pagan. So I must ask, here, what you mean by 'pagan', and how you feel JC represents this 'pagan' viewpoint.

What do

alga and others persuaded me that there was more to LB than that, and that if I did not like the book, it was not Crowley's intention to leave the reader appalled.

Decidedly not.

I remain unsure of what Crowley's intention was, however. Was it just to write an interesting novel? Or does he see something good and

wonderful in what happens to his characters? Is he arguing that a collapse back into an infantile and pagan world is what we all really need, and that the depth of character into which human beings have grown during the last several millennia is something to be rejected? Or is LB basically an experiment?

James, what are you talking about? What is this 'infantile and pagan world'? What do you mean exactly?

The people who got transformed into playing cards were the Emperor's men. The family moved on, they went to repopulate the other World.

Except for Smoky. He died. Perhaps he got your Christian glorification. It's hard to say, like it always is.

Aside of all this, and unrelated to anything else that we might be talking about, were you aware that the doctrine of metempsychosis was condemned accidentally? The council (I forget which it was, but it was a fairly late council) condemned Origen's opinions as heretical, because they did not like his Platonic doctrine that the glorified body is spherical. Metempsychosis was not really an issue, but once Origen was condemned, all of his opinions became suspect, although as everyone knows he still had a tremendous influence on early Christian thought.

It happened at about this same time, that the doctrine of once-for-all death and resurrection became very popular because of the whole of its usefulness in social control.

He says he wanted to write a novel presenting a "fairy religion."
He has done so, and very effectively. I continue to think LB is a brilliant and effective novel. But for me, it is a very effective horror novel.

What's horrible about it?

You spend a greater or lesser amount of time under Hill, you have a life, you go back under Hill for a while, you have a life. It's just the doctrine of metempsychosis, sometimes (inaccurately) called the doctrine of reincarnation.

The beautiful thing that JC did is that he made it so that the other World was dying, the Gentry were dying out, and they needed some new people to come in, so the whole thing could go on. And the family went to the other World, and now it goes on. Perhaps this kind of thing needs to happen every so often. It's not horrible. It's very beautiful.

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Alex David Groce — 29 Jul 2003, 04:19 · follows Josh Geller

Well, for what it's worth, Dan'I and James seem to me to have pretty unusual reactions to LB. My experience with the novel is that when I introduce it to someone, they either say:

(1) Eh, well written but I was just bored out of my skull by page 100. What's the fuss?

or

(2) WOW! Fantastic! Where can I get more?

It's one of my very favorite novels, and while I can see James' point (I certainly didn't finish it wishing it were true, or thinking 'what a lovely religion, if true'), it seems "beside the point" of

the novel to me. Whatever that point is. I'm pretty sure it's not the 60's New York aspect, or the hippy aspect, or Victorian children's literature (all I've read except Lewis Carroll was post-first-LB-read), or wanting to find fairies... And I'm not sure it's just a taste for the writing, since some of those who've disliked it have fine taste in prose. I think Alice is right, in the end, pointing to a `_mood_`. If you are caught up in that mood, you'll love it. If you aren't, which seems pretty independent of religious or even "aesthetic" opinion, you won't care for it much.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32

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Alex David Groce (agroce+ at cs.cmu.edu)
Ph.D. Student, Carnegie Mellon University - Computer Science Department
8112 Wean Hall (412)-268-3066
<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~agroce>

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Andy Robertson — 29 Jul 2003, 05:55 · follows Alex David Groce

On Mon, 2003-07-28 at 18:33, James Jordan wrote:

I wanted to like
LB, but the ending horrified me. Instead of being glorified in any kind
of
way that I MYSELF would like to see, they were gradually and to me
horrifyingly reduced to mere archetypes, flat 2-dimensional playing
cards,
stript of all human depth, fated to eternal repetition.

This is, to me, an astonishing reaction, yet on reflection I can understand it. One of the noteworthy things about LITTLE,BIG is that ultimately it does not conceal or soften the traditional cruelty of Fairyland.

hartshorn

James Jordan — 29 Jul 2003, 16:08 · follows Andy Robertson

Josh,
Thou hast queried:

Did you like 'The Deep'?

Yes, I did.

Then, thou hast responded to severall things I wrote. Let me say that I was giving my PERSONAL reaction to LB. And my initial one. alga and others set me straight about some things.

Sure, I'm an evangelical Christian. So, I would not "like" a novel that ended in a homosexual marriage. At the same time, I might wonder what the author intended me to feel. Did he/she want me to be happy at the homosexual marriage, or were there clews in the novel that indicated I was not supposed to be happy about it.

I really was not sure about LB, and that's what initiated the long discussion that can be read in the archives, and what I was getting at in my post. I sure don't want to open up another discussion of LB. I think it was pretty thoroughly gone over a few years ago.

I wanted to like
LB, but the ending horrified me. Instead of being glorified in any kind of
way that I MYSELF would like to see, they were gradually and to me
horrifyingly reduced to mere archetypes, flat 2-dimensional playing cards,
stript of all human depth, fated to eternal repetition.

I do not agree that this is an accurate description of what happens to the characters.

Maybe not. It's how it seemed to me, and still does to a large extent. But that's fine. You're probably right and I'm probably wrong!

When I finished the book, I ripped it in half and threw it across the room. Yes, I found it very effective.

But what was Crowley doing? Was my response his intention? I thought at the time that it was.

Are you seriously stating that this book horrified you because its ending did not agree with your religious ideas?

No, in fact the reverse. I suspected, wrongly, that Crowley was writing a cautionary tale, showing the gradual corruption and lessening (shrinkage) of human beings who turn "back" from "Western civilization" into an occult world.

I find that hard to believe coming from one of your demonstrated perspicacity. Also, although I understand that you are a practicing Calvinist religious (and thus deeply embedded in error from my point of view), I have been struck before by the depth of your tolerance of foreign religious ideas, something that I have not always met with among the Protestant clergy.

Thanks. I'm tolerant in some ways, not in others. But I did not dislike LB because of intolerance, but because it horrified me personally. It was a personal reaction.

Jewish people don't like the great comedy "The Merchant of Venice," because they don't accept Paul's statement in Romans chapter 11 that was taken (at the time) as a prediction that the conversion of the Jews would usher in the Millennium. Shakespeare wants his audience to be happy about the conversion of Shylock's daughter, and the "spoiling of Egypt" of Shylock's goods. Jewish people, however, are not going to view the play as a religious comedy, but as a tragedy.

So, for me, LB was a tragedy, not a comedy. My initial question way back when was what Crowley intended.

The religious viewpoint represented by John Crowley is not by any means that of an orthodox Christian. I can say this with some confidence, as the religious views he represents are tolerably close to my own.

Yes, that became clear to me in the discussion we had here. I'm 30 years away from reading through all of Francis Yates, and the materials from her circle, so I was a bit slow to pick up on Crowley's perspective. And I had not read AEgypt at the time I read LB.

I don't know what you mean by paganism, but the viewpoint represented by Crowley is that of the religio mundi, which is not exactly at all quite the same thing as any of the definitions that I think of for pagan. So I must ask, here, what you mean by 'pagan', and how you feel JC represents this 'pagan' viewpoint.

By "pagan" I meant a world in which people are strictly governed by archetypes and cycles. I should think hermeticism (religion mundi) to be a kind of sophisticated paganism. I did not mean an "insult" by calling it pagan.

James, what are you talking about? What is this 'infantile and pagan world'? What do you mean exactly?

It seemed to me that the family were "reduced" to a kind of timeless and cyclical existence, like children. Timeless cycles are what Eliade has analyzed in contrast to Judeo-Christianity's eschatological linear time. That's the kind of thing I had in mind.

The people who got transformed into playing cards were the Emperor's men. The family moved on, they went to repopulate the other World.

It looked like "both" to me, that these were two complementary portrayals of what became of the family. As I say, that's how it looked to me when I read LB. On reflection, I think you are right.

Except for Smoky. He died. Perhaps he got your Christian glorification.
It's hard to say, like it always is.

alga argued that Smokey's death is essential to opening the door to the move of the rest of the family into fairyland, so that Smokey is a kind of hermetic version of Christ. Makes sense to me.

He says he wanted to write a novel presenting a "fairy religion."
He has done so, and very effectively. I continue to think LB is a brilliant
and effective novel. But for me, it is a very effective horror novel.

What's horrible about it?

You spend a greater or lesser amount of time under Hill, you have a life, you go back under Hill for a while, you have a life. It's just the doctrine of metempsychosis, sometimes (inaccurately) called the doctrine of reincarnation.

The beautiful thing that JC did is that he made it so that the other World was dying, the Gentry were dying out, and they needed some new people to come in, so the whole thing could go on. And the family went to the other World, and now it goes on. Perhaps this kind of thing needs to happen every so often. It's not horrible. It's very beautiful.

Okay. Just think of me as a Jew watching *The Merchant of Venice*!

Josh, I have no axe to grind here. I initially wondered what Crowley intended in LB. I shared that to show how the discussion began a few years back.

I hope this clarifies things.

Nutria

Josh Geller — 29 Jul 2003, 16:47 · follows James Jordan

On Tue, 2003-07-29 at 09:08, James Jordan wrote:
Josh wrote:

Did you like 'The Deep'?

Yes, I did.

It's about my favorite J Crowley, mostly.

Then, thou hast responded to severall things I wrote. Let me say that I was giving my PERSONAL reaction to LB. And my initial one. alga and others set me straight about some things.

Very good.

I really was not sure about LB, and that's what initiated the long discussion that can be read in the archives, and what I was getting at in my post. I sure don't want to open up another discussion of LB. I think it was pretty thoroughly gone over a few years ago.

I will check out the archives.

Meanwhile, I would like to respect your desire not to open another discussion about 'Little, Big', and so I will not respond to your points below. Perhaps after I have read the archives I will have something to ask you or someone else, but not now.

Thank you for being so gracious.

J.

James Jordan — 30 Jul 2003, 16:53 · follows Josh Geller

At 11:47 AM 7/29/2003, you wrote:

Meanwhile, I would like to respect your desire not to open another discussion about 'Little, Big', and so I will not respond to your points below. Perhaps after I have read the archives I will have something to ask you or someone else, but not now.

Thank you for being so gracious.

Josh,

alga and mantis are two resident experts, and there are others. If all of you folks want another round on Crowley, that's fine with me. I just don't have much to contribute.

Jim