

crowley

The Urth list — 5 messages, 3 voices, 28 Jul 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4120>

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.

maa32 — 28 Jul 2003, 05:20

Blattid implies that "Little, Big" never captured his imagination. I have to say I agree. If you look at the cards and the characters and follow the path of the stork, then there are some interesting things going on in the book, but it isn't my favorite Crowley. I like the Aegypt series much more, but in my mind "Little, Big" doesn't have the intense weirdness that makes Book of the New Sun so much more fun to read over and over again (but then again, neither does The Book of the Long Sun, and that's a fine series as well).

However, I did think that portions of the book were amazingly effective, especially toward the end when Smoky (that was his name, right?) is left all alone to die a mortal death and his faerie family has moved on. I haven't read the book in some years, so I can't help you too much, Blattid. But I must say for the most part I agree ... Crowley can't touch Wolfe in my mind, but it is well worth your time reading Engine Summer and The Deep and even his collection of tales that includes Great Work of Time and that one about the birds of the forest (Was it called Novelty?) Maybe Alga could help you more.

Don't feel bad, Blattid. As far as my literary taste goes, after Wolfe, I love Zelazny, Mishima, Faulkner, Dostoevsky, Jonathan Carrol, Borges, and Nabokov and "merely" like Delany, Simmons, Crowley, and M John Harrison (which means I've still read almost everything by them). Tolstoy bored me out of my mind, so maybe I'm a plebe. And I always thought the original Dragonlance Chronicles were just as good as Lord of the Rings. As long as you like Wolfe, you are plenty sophisticated and discerning in my mind.:)

Marc Aramini

Joshua A. Solomon — 31 Jul 2003, 14:32 · follows maa32

I recently talked with other Wolfe-fans who didn't enjoy Little, Big (including Nigel, who is swamped with work at the moment; he'll be back soon). I did. Thanks to Alga and Mantis etc. for turning me on. I started with The Deep, read Beasts, Engine Summer, Little Big, Novelty, Ægypt, Love & Sleep and I'm now halfway through Dæmonomania. At one point, I noted that

Little, Big can be especially bewildering if
you are not familiar with the symbolic devices
he develops in his earlier novels.

Decoding (or at least, attempting to decode) this symbolic language is half the fun for me.

Going back through our correspondence, the only other (possibly) relevant thing I said was

Although Crowley is certainly intrigued,
if not obsessed, with occult matters

(you urthlings have convinced me that Gnostic
themes in particular are explored in his novels),

I find it hard to pinpoint where his actual sympathies lie. Smoky, like the protagonist of the *Ægypt* series, frequently encounters strange goings-on--even falls in love with a semi-fantastic creature or two--but never really buys into the whole supernatural mindset. I suspect that one of the reasons Crowley mines the occult so heavily is because it is such a convenient metaphor for fiction in general. If there is a single dominant theme in Crowley's work it is the creation and perpetuation of stories. Crowley may believe in certain things that others consider fiction; he may not. I dunno.

bee

Alice K. Turner — 01 Aug 2003, 07:07 · follows Joshua A. Solomon

bee,

Little, Big can be especially bewildering if you are not familiar with the symbolic devices he develops in his earlier novels.

Hmm. By this time I suppose I'm pretty conversant with Crowley but I don't know what you mean by this. LB does not seem to me to pick up on themes from his three earlier books, other than details like cards and games. Not do they seem to have a lot in common. What am I missing here?

Going back through our correspondence, the only other (possibly) relevant thing I said was

Although Crowley is certainly intrigued, if not obsessed, with occult matters

(you urthlings have convinced me that Gnostic themes in particular are explored in his novels),

I find it hard to pinpoint where his actual sympathies lie. Smoky, like the protagonist of the *Ægypt* series, frequently encounters strange goings-on--even falls in love with a semi-fantastic creature or two--but never really buys into the whole supernatural mindset. I suspect that one of the reasons Crowley mines the occult so heavily is because it is such a convenient metaphor for fiction in general. If there is a single dominant theme in Crowley's work it is the creation and perpetuation of stories. Crowley may believe in certain things that others consider fiction; he may not. I dunno.

Crowley emphatically does not. So he says with considerable vigor in the interview printed both in mantis's chapbook and in the booklength *-Snake's-hands-* and also, slightly differently, in *Locus* of 2001 or so. But you are correct that he finds it a useful and even beautiful metaphor.

-alga

Joshua A. Solomon — 04 Aug 2003, 10:58 · follows Alice K. Turner

From: "Alice K. Turner" <aturner6 at nyc.rr.com>

Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 03:07:35 -0400

Subject: Re: (urth) Crowley

Little, Big can be especially bewildering if you are not familiar with the symbolic devices he develops in his earlier novels.

Hmm. By this time I suppose I'm pretty conversant with Crowley but I don't know what you mean by this. LB does not seem to me to pick up on themes from his three earlier books, other than details like cards and games. Not do they seem to have a lot in common. What am I missing here?

I don't actually have any of the books here with me, but off the top of my head...

The colours, particularly Red and Black, but also Gray/White and Gold. Fire and Smoke (particularly cigarette smoke). And Water. I know he elucidates the elements in Little, Big, but they're there in The Deep & Engine Summer too. Not certain about Beasts. Bridges, Rings, waterstairs. The list goes on and on. If I can remember, I'll bring my copy of Little, Big (over a bridge to the island/hub) to my computer tomorrow, and see what they can produce. :-)

Although Crowley is certainly intrigued, if not obsessed, with occult matters (you urthlings have convinced me that Gnostic themes in particular are explored in his novels), I find it hard to pinpoint where his actual sympathies lie. Smoky, like the protagonist of the Ægypt series, frequently encounters strange goings-on--even falls in love with a semi-fantastic creature or two--but never really buys into the whole supernatural mindset. I suspect that one of the reasons Crowley mines the occult so heavily is because it is such a convenient metaphor for fiction in general. If there is a single dominant theme in Crowley's work it is the creation and perpetuation of stories. Crowley may believe in certain things that others consider fiction; he may not. I dunno.

Crowley emphatically does not. So he says with considerable vigor in the interview printed both in mantis's chapbook and in the booklength -Snake's-hands- and also, slightly differently, in Locus of 2001 or so. But you are correct that he finds it a useful and even beautiful metaphor.

Yeah, well I thought I would actually read the books before I got to the criticism. Which, I must say, I am looking forward to almost as much as The Translator (having awoken at 5.30 so as to finish Dæmonomania before work).

Joshua A. Solomon — 05 Aug 2003, 09:56 · follows Joshua A. Solomon

Right. Let's see. Here's one (p. 35 of the Fantasy Masterworks edition of Little, Big). "If all the plates were on glass, he could hold them all up at once..." This is exactly what Painted Red does in Engine Summer (ES). It's a device (I call it superposition) Crowley uses repeatedly in all his books, starting with ES. Note that it's impossible to 'get the big picture' in this way. Interpretations of the picture always seem to come from within the character's own head.

Just reviewing what I've already written, note that Painting, the colour red (not to mention its homophone Read, its homograph Read and its homophone Reed), Engines (NB: red indian) and the seasons all have special meanings in Crowley's books. There was one passage, somewhere

in Little, Big (LB), where he 'explains' that (IIRC), although Novembry in Edgewood, it was November in the Tale. The difference between those who know which month it is and those who don't was first explored in ES. In LB the seasonal differences are sometimes expressed with a suit, eg. a DIAMOND in bevelled glass or the noisy bridge rod and gun CLUB. Don't get me started on bridges and guns. See for yourself in The Deep.

Oh hell, I really could spend all day on this, but I need to do some science. Check out

Letters/Envelopes

Voices

Pointy things like thorns

Pipes

Eggs/Balls

etc., etc. All of these things crop up in his first 3 novels.

One of my favourite passages in LB is on p. 417:

"That ain't the worst of it," George said.... He put the coffee before Auberon. "Milk? Sugar?"
"Black."

(Discussion of fireworks, the colour of love and nightingales ensues.)

On 5/8/03 4:59 am, "urth at urth.net" <urth at urth.net> wrote:

From: "Joshua A. Solomon" <J.A.Solomon at city.ac.uk>

Date: Mon, 04 Aug 2003 11:58:22 +0100

From: "Alice K. Turner" <aturner6 at nyc.rr.com>

Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 03:07:35 -0400

Little, Big can be especially bewildering if
you are not familiar with the symbolic devices
he develops in his earlier novels.

Hmm. By this time I suppose I'm pretty conversant with Crowley but I don't
know what you mean by this. LB does not seem to me to pick up on themes from
his three earlier books, other than details like cards and games. Not do
they seem to have a lot in common. What am I missing here?

I'll bring my copy of Little, Big (over a bridge to the island/hub) to my
computer tomorrow, and see what they can produce. :-)