

In Looking-Glass Castle: Queening the Pawn

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 19 Aug 2008

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Dave Tallman — 19 Aug 2008, 17:52

The main character of "In Looking-Glass Castle" is named Daisy. In "Through the Looking-Glass," Lewis Carroll gave a diagram that related characters to chess pieces. The name "Daisy" appears four times, for the four rook's pawns.

White Side

Tweedledee.....Daisy
Unicorn.....Haigha
Sheep.....Oyster
W. Queen.....'Lily' (Alice)
W. King.....Fawn
Aged man.....Oyster
W. Knight.....Hatta
Tweedledum.....Daisy

Red Side

Humpty Dumpty..Daisy
Carpenter.....Messenger
Walrus.....Oyster
R. Queen.....Tiger-lily
R. King.....Rose
Crow.....Oyster
R. Knight.....Frog
Lion.....Daisy

Daisy herself may be a clone. She mishears "the cistern got her" for "her sisters got her," which may indicate her fear of her fellow clones, or of her extreme feminist society in general. The "Oyster" also appears four times, for the bishop's pawns. Oysters relate to pearls, and the fat woman mentions the clone "Pearl IV." Oysters are related to the fat walrus in the poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter."

In "Through the Looking Glass," Alice was the White Queen's Pawn, 'Lily'. Which of the four pawns is the Daisy of this story? I suggest the most interesting possibility is the Red King Rook's pawn, which starts in front of the Lion. The fugitive man has long black hair and a beard, giving him a lion's mane. The lion is a symbol of Christ, as in the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah." He offers to stay out of her way if she chooses to believe he isn't there.

The nursery rhyme "The Lion and the Unicorn" relates to the joining of the English and Scottish coats of arms when James I became joint king of England and Scotland. Lions are a masculine symbol and unicorns are feminine. In Wolfe's ideal world, we need both sides. The women-only country has a declining population, replaced only by clones. It is highly totalitarian, like the

country in Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" with its hideous torture machine that kills by inscribing words into its victims over and over. (That story appears in "Metamorphoses and Other Stories", and it's probably no coincidence that Wolfe began his own title with the word "in".)

Like Alice, Daisy the pawn is given the opportunity to reach the castle (the 8th rank) and become a queen, the companion of the king. Her fear and social conditioning make it impossible for her to accept the man. The former inhabitant, Jane, may have fallen in love with him (she has hidden well-read books by male authors) and committed suicide in the cistern because her society could never accept this. That is why the man says he is indirectly and unintentionally responsible for her death.

Pearl, the neighbor's clone, may be connected with the man also. In the stories of Guy de Maupassant there is one called "Mademoiselle Pearl" about a woman who is chosen as Queen for Twelfth Night. The narrator finds out her story, that she was a foundling and that there was an undeclared love between her and her host for many years. The Pearl in that story didn't kill herself, but she buried her appearance with an unattractive hairstyle and clothing.

The man woos Daisy with gifts, but she runs away to sea. But like the Red Queen, she runs as fast as she can to stay in the same place. The man (or a hallucination of him) follows her. It seems likely that she will drown herself at sea, because she cannot escape any other way.