

Delage and Henry James

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 09 May 1998

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adam louis stephanides — 09 May 1998, 20:48

On Sat, 9 May 1998 Peter Stephenson wrote:

the way it is. I continue to read the story the way I first did: that there is some `non-obvious' supernatural explanation, that the narrator's reality is warped in some way that he simply doesn't ever see Suzanne. The whole universe is conspiring that they don't meet --- even by bending the laws a bit. That's what I find chilling. I think (please contradict) this is the naturally Borgesian explanation.

I don't know how Borgesian it is, but there's a story by Henry James whose title I forget based on that very premise: that (as best I can recall) there are two people who somehow never meet, despite their moving in the same social circles and having numerous opportunities to do so. The kicker is that after one of them dies, the deceased one's ghost frequently visits the other, and they more or less fall in love. I don't know if this is relevant to Wolfe's story or not; I suspect not (and I certainly don't believe that Suzanne Delage is dead and the girl the narrator meets is her ghost!).

After I wrote that last sentence, I suddenly realized that there was indeed "evidence" for this. We are told that Suzanne could not be photographed because of an epidemic of Spanish influenza. I don't have the story with me, but it seems possible that this could well have been the 1918 epidemic, which did kill a lot of people. And the narrator certainly seems to be in love with the "daughter." But I still don't believe it.

--Adam