

OT: R.A. Lafferty GA links

The Urth list — 7 messages, 7 voices, 18 Aug 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6627>

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Gwern Branwen — 18 Aug 2014, 01:39

- <http://antsofgodarequeerfish.blogspot.com/2014/08/lafferty-news-thats-right-news.html>
- <http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/aug/13/ra-lafferty-secret-sci-fi-genius-pois-ed-for-comeback>

"RA Lafferty — the secret sci-fi genius more than ready for a comeback: A reissue of the US science fiction writer RA Lafferty's stories sold out rapidly this year, and his fans, including Neil Gaiman, hope to see his novels reprinted"

There's something of the Irish comic tradition in there, the absurdity and surreality of Flann O'Brien, author of *The Third Policeman*. "I agree," says the author Neil Gaiman. "And there's kinship with the American tall tale tradition, and with GK Chesterton.

But they are all only cousins. There's nothing close to Lafferty — nobody with the gravitas about things that were light, and the antigravitas about important heavy things."...Gaiman has been a Lafferty enthusiast since he was nine, and discovered the writers' work in various anthologies. He attempted a story in Lafferty style — *Sunbird*, in his collection *Fragile Things* — which he said proved to him "mostly how much harder" the style was than it looked. "What drew me to his work? The narrative voice, I think," says Gaiman. "The way he'd construct a story — unlike the way anyone else did it. The peculiar rightness of his worldview, and the topsy-turvy nature of it. The sentences." A few years after his initial discovery, Gaiman struck up a correspondence with Lafferty. He remembers: "I sent him a Lafferty pastiche I had written, and he was not rude about it. But he was encouraging, and informative, and took me very seriously, which is good, because I was about 20 and took myself very seriously as well."

..."Lafferty himself said his short stories were better, but his novels had more to say," says Andrew Ferguson. "The stories are always worth going back to, but it's the novels on which his long-term literary reputation will rest." Ferguson is a PhD candidate at the University of Virginia, and along with Gaiman's championing he's one of the reasons Lafferty is perhaps being pulled back from the brink of total obscurity — he's writing a biography of the author for the University of Illinois Modern Masters of Science Fiction series, and will chair a panel on Lafferty on 14 August at Loncon, the World Science Fiction Convention, being held at London's Docklands. Ferguson says: "It may be a bit of a cliché, but there's really nothing else out there comparable to him. He's one of the distinctive prose stylists in the genre: you can tell a Lafferty story within a sentence. He's a very funny writer, in a field that has often taken itself way too seriously." Curiously, though largely out of print in the west, the writer is big in Japan, says Ferguson, where "Lafferty has remained popular for decades".

[This surprises me; I read a lot of Japanese stuff but I've never seen R.A. Lafferty come up.]

...Ferguson says: "I'm hoping the Centipede Press editions get licensed for a more affordable edition eventually. I think there'd definitely be readers for a big best of Lafferty retrospective."

That's something Gaiman would like to see, too : "I'd love to see a Complete Lafferty in print. I used to give people his short story collection *Nine Hundred Grandmothers*, until one day it was out of print and gone."

It's hard to say why, if Lafferty was so brilliant — which he was — he's virtually unknown. David Langford, the noted science-fiction commentator, wrote in his regular SF news bulletin *Ansible*, after Lafferty's death in March 2002: "The World Fantasy Convention belatedly did the decent thing and honoured RA Lafferty with its lifetime achievement award in 1990. But the SF world never honoured him enough. Major publishers abandoned him in the mid-80s:

Lafferty was just too dementedly brilliant for them."

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Auspex Rex — 14 Sep 2014, 07:03 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

I'd never heard of Flann O'Brien or *The Third Policeman*, but reading the synopsis on wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Third_Policeman) made me think again about *The Land Across*. Someone else pointed out the connection to *The Third Man* already: Grafton mentions Hotel Sacher. Lots of missing, presumed-dead, actually dead, ghost third persons? and TLA's third border-guard who is sometimes invisible, sometimes not, and looks like the leader of the country, and also looks like Grafton's father...

Anyone familiar with *The Third Policeman* and *The Land Across* have thoughts on how the former might help us interpret the latter?

-Jeff

On Aug 17, 2014, at 9:39 PM, Gwern Branwen <gwern at gwern.net> wrote:
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Antonin Scriabin — 14 Sep 2014, 13:17 · in reply to Auspex Rex

I haven't read *The Third Policeman*, but have read *At Swim-Two-Birds* and can vouch for the fact that O'Brien is a genius. Lots of meta fictional hijinks.

On Sep 14, 2014 3:04 AM, "Auspex Rex" <auspexrex at icloud.com> wrote:
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antonio at gmail.com — 14 Sep 2014, 14:59 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

Anyone who hasn't read Flann O' Brien / Brian O' Nolan / Myles, then do. Besides great, it's hysterical.

No dia 14/09/2014, ?s 14:17, Antonin Scriabin <kierkegaurdian at gmail.com> escreveu:

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Marc Aramini — 14 Sep 2014, 16:34 · in reply to Auspex Rex

I read it years and years ago ... didn't really remind me of Wolfe at all. Definitely reminded me of a bit of Beckett's *Molloy* trilogy/*Waiting for Godot* and RA Lafferty (though much closer is *At Swim Two Birds*, with its very similar parallels to the Lafferty canon in *The Devil is Dead*, but it could just be the "Irishness" of it all.) Maybe I will read it again some day. I am thinking there are parts of *Lanark* that resonate with *The Third Policeman* as well. There is this sense of phantasmagoric mistaken identity and a blurring between the living and the dead held forever in a holding pattern that all those works seem to have in common.

I think Wolfe and Lafferty are actually very different, with Wolfe being more rigorously logical in structure and Lafferty's stuff often not adhering to strict ordering - more like dream logic.

On Sun, Sep 14, 2014 at 12:03 AM, Auspex Rex <auspexrex at icloud.com> wrote:

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Gerry Quinn — 14 Sep 2014, 17:48 · in reply to Marc Aramini

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I always reckoned Martin Amis's *_Other People_* was to some degree derivative of *_The Third Policeman_*.

- Gerry Quinn

David Stockhoff — 14 Sep 2014, 18:00 · in reply to Auspex Rex

Haven't read *Land Across* yet (I know, I know), but IIRC, T3P has a (spoiler alert) ghost narrator. And the dead behave in a Beckett-like manner, unable to perceive their condition or do anything about it.

I can very easily see Wolfe doing something with that.

On 9/14/2014 3:03 AM, Auspex Rex wrote:

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