

a note on allusions in In Looking Glass Castle and Cherry Jubilee

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 21 Aug 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6636>

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Marc Aramini — 21 Aug 2014, 15:58

Going to finish up a write up on Cherry Jubilee in a few days, and of course I find that the majority of commentary on the story is by Borski. His technique for finding allusions always raises my blood pressure, but after "In Looking glass Castle" I am actually sympathetic with him for probably the first time in years.

"In Looking Glass Castle" is the first Wolfe story that I felt was pretty unfair with it allusion to Maupassant - the man wrote 300 or so short stories. The chance that Wolfe was actually thinking of The Horla or Mademoiselle Pearl is astronomically low. Wolfe even avoided mentioning the last name of the author who wrote Cradle of the Sea and misquoted Kipling on purpose. Without a search engine or the most erudite reader on the planet, I don't know if those allusions would have been "gettable" at the time they were written. However, Borski's transformation of Edith Berg to Alban Berg and bringing in "The Wozzack" seems like the step into nonsensical forced relationships that is the worst part of his scholarship. He says Edith and Alda both mean rich and then proceeds to transform Alda into Alban. It's magic.

He does a similar thing with Cherry Jubilee in this kind of reaching:

The next paragraph is Borski's.

"As for Captain Bogdanoff, I wonder if he's not based on film director Peter Bogdanovich--another Peter with a Russian name. Bogdanovich, for what it's worth, was romantically involved with 1980 Playmate of the Year Dorothy Stratton (whom Cherry and Merry physically resemble). Stratton was eventually killed by her estranged husband (which recapitulates the Jubilee aspect of the story: i.e., the husband is taking back his "property"). Captain Bogdanoff has been sleeping with Merry in the story, and soon (if he can get the Party to clear him of murder charges) may do so with Cherry, since she's masquerading as Merry. Meanwhile, back here in the real world, Peter Bogdanovich soon began dating the late Dorothy Stratton's younger sister, who I'm sure bore at least a sororal resemblance (Bogdanovich may have even married her--I'm not sure). So there are extended parallels." The above paragraph was Borski's.

For the love of God, Montessor.

Back in the early days of the internet, information was scarce, but even by the late 90s I had read Red Star by Bogdanov, which I posted on way back in 2001 on the Urth list, as the ship's name in Wolfe's story was Red Star. Luckily that has made its way to the wolfe wiki rather than something like the above, and I ascribe the blame for over-reaching to readers who aren't rigorous in their approach to what the text actually implies ...

Yet I feel that probably for the first time in "In Looking Glass Castle", the allusions were so

expansive and vague that we pretty much have to employ Borski tactics or admit that they don't mean anything. In pre-internet days I could still have found much of the extra material or relied on my own reading and tried to order supplemental research or find it on microfiche - this project would still be possible, but definitely less convenient - it would have probably turned a two year project into a four year one.

To do my due diligence in researching In Looking Glass Castle, I had to read Sylvie and Bruno, look up which stories where in The Metamorphosis and other stories and re-read or skim them, trust my memory of Maupassant and read perhaps a dozen random stories before coming back to the impression that indeed "The Horla" was being referenced, (I did not feel I had to read Cradle of the Sea with a synopsis available, however - the scandal of its fabrication seemed the point).

So often, after contemplating misprision after misprision, I blame the reader, but every great once in a while I wonder if some of Borski's excessive over-reaching might not indeed stem from allusions that are just a bit too expansive and huge.

Mo Holkar — 21 Aug 2014, 16:53 · in reply to Marc Aramini

At 16:58 21/08/2014, Marc wrote:

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This is a great spot, Marc, thanks! It sheds a lot of light.

It is perhaps notable that the best translation of the invented word 'Horla' is 'Outsider'. Maupassant's tale was surely an influence on Lovecraft's story of that name, which could be seen as an inversion of it -- and he cites it approvingly in his famous essay on supernatural horror in literature -- but it would be surprising if it didn't also resonate with Wolfe.

best,

Mo

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WolfeWiki -- a wiki about Gene Wolfe
<http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/>