

switching hands in Sorcerer's House and horses

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Marc Aramini — 05 Jan 2018, 20:38

I have been trying to work on all six remaining writeups at the same time but each of them has special problems. I haven't used some of the resources available but I trust my judgment.

In Sorcerer's House, Bax switches hands while writing three times (and one more in the text where its metatextual value becomes clear: at the reading of the will where he "proves" he is Skotos's heir by being ambidextrous, and he says quite clearly that he can write two different things at once, and that it is a "parlor trick". Each time he switches hands it involves one of Bax's tricks.) One is when he visits Martha Murrey, and IMMEDIATELY afterwards he asks if she ever bets on horse races. (when he hears Alexander Skotos is his benefactor, he thinks of Sandy Scott from Churchill Downs, where the Kentucky Derby horse races are held.) The first time he goes to Lakeshore restaurant with Doris he orders the "Lakeshore Hat Trick" (one of the fish is smothered in Oriental sauces) - this is not a trick, but is a triple feat in sports, in which three goals or three victories are attained (then, an impressed audience might donate money into a hat passed around).

The second time Bax switches hands is when he goes up to the attic and finds the fox - another trick. The third time is the most mysterious moment in the text, at a point when the letters are shown out of optimal order. This is after George is arrested, and his trip out with Doris in the car to Lakeshore is not related the same to all of his penpals. He tells Sheldon he had to shoot something, but before he even relates the trip out to Lakeshore he asks if Sheldon knows who Alexander Skotos and Mary King are, though both are dead. He won't get to picking up the ghostly hitchhiker who disappears, Mary King, until 50 pages later in a letter to Orizia, but he tells Millie a different story of a hitchhiker with no mention of Mary King, on pages 180-182. Bax is telling Doris how after college but before prison he couldn't stand the jobs he had and was about broke and when she asks, "What did you do, Bax?" he sees a spectral white horse running away. This might be a water horse or kelpie (who are sometimes personified as brutish humans like the rivermen that help him crush the werewolves in the final battle), but it might also be a call back to the accumulation of his wealth through horse betting or something illegal there. When he leaves the car, the letter shifts to Ieuan visiting him, and Bax says, "I recognized myself at once." Though Ieuan pretends to be Emlyn and says he wants to talk about the werewolf, Bax refuses to shake his hand because of his own treachery and asks why he truly came, though no truth seems forthcoming. Right after this, Bax changes hands and goes back to his situation with Doris, as they pick up an older woman named Kiki. She repeats everything she says (Hope you ain't hoping to be paid. Not hoping to be paid, are you? ... Way home's never long. never a long way home.") During this scene, which represents Bax's third (or fourth) trick, he sees himself and Doris by the "absurd" car from an external point of view. Kiki also says she sees someone: "T'other one, he back there with you? You have t'other one in back there, setting' with you in the dark? ... T'other's back there, setting' in the dark, thinking' I can't see him. I kin see him back there, dark or no." (183).

The vampiric thing in the trunk might very well be referenced here as one of Bax's tricks, but the doubling of situations is strange. While there is a Mary King's Close, far more interesting

given the removal of context to the introduction of Mary King 50 pages before she appears involves a Mary King google search without context. The first person who appears is a six time olympian equestrian. (try it).

However, while his switching hands definitely tips us off to a trick that he is about to pull off, there are still three things in the text that bother me (assuming he has the capital to hire actors to set his brother George up or to embezzle money through the name Skotos before he is arrested (Skotos died three years ago when Bax went to jail). One is "the Greek" and his torpedo assistant who plays with clotheslines in Shell's letter looking for Baxter Dunn. Another involves the scene when Bax first encounters the lycanthropic Lupine: she hands him Doris Griffin's keys with a pink rabbit on them, then disappears. He meets up with a nameless passenger and offers the keys to her, but she says he has to drive. Then, he picks up Doris Griffin on the side of the road - but supposedly his passenger, who must be Lupine (?) looked enough like her to offer the keys to her, at which point this character disappears. So three women picked up with Doris, and two of them disappear. Any scene without George can be fabrication, but what is the significance of Lupine looking like Doris Griffin, seemingly? The ghost of Ted appears three times as well; once when Bax fights off one of the (what I say are fictional) twins (that is merely a reflection of Bax getting kicked by his brother, as Winkle is named after a cat whose kittens George killed - he really has set this up to get even with his brother), once when Doris leaves and decides to come back, and once when Bax is walking hand in hand with someone right before the scene with Lupine who can dismiss him.

So ... what is the hound of horror if not a werewolf? Orizia disbelieves Millie's version of the werewolf story and then charges Bax her maximum fee (for "travel") after telling him she won't charge him anything (i.e. - she is working for Bax at the end), so her mention of the dwarf can be dismissed as Bax's plan, but what of Doris' mention of Kiki in her letter? So the things to explain: Kiki - Doris and the reflective properties of that scene - whether the plain ring she gives Bax has powers of possession or lycanthropy - what is killing the women in the town (ghoul bear?) ... the dwarf is based off of the Old Curiosity shop, as Bax himself says, in which Quilp's young attractive wife gets a better husband at the end - what Bax hopes to do (for him, George is like the dwarf).